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# The Minnesota Academy of Science: Its Opportunities

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In his speech as retiring president of the Academy Conference, Dr. Karlem Riess reviewed the history of the conference and of its affiliates, the various state and local Academies of Science that it represents in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He especially emphasized the relation between the Academies and what might be called senior scientists. In

earlier years the leaders in the various fields of science found the Academies and their publications an important medium through which to make known their findings. This was especially true in the period when one still could have at least some familiarity with what was going on in many fields. As specialization inevitably occurred, however, professional societies developed in which the specialist found it easier to communicate with colleagues whose knowledge and interests were similar to his and who were directly concerned with his findings. As a result, there was a withdrawal of some specialists from the general scientific community.

Although I became active in the Minnesota Academy through my work in secondary and elementary science, I feel very strongly that it is important that the Academy continue to serve the entire community of scientists. Through the activities of the Junior Academy we discover and encourage some of our youth who must in time assume the rank of senior scientist; and those activities also aid in increasing the scientific literacy of other young persons who will thereby become citizens who are better prepared to understand and evaluate the implications of scientific progress. The Academy provides a channel through which mature scientists can contribute to such important educational activities by judging science fair projects and research papers, and by participating in the Visiting Scientist Program.

Yet, activities for youth are only one function of the Academy's dedication to the "... advancement of pure and applied science through the fostering of research, education, and understanding." A great many other of its activities are more directly concerned with serving the adult scientific community. I wish to discuss briefly three of those that seem particularly important to me at this time.

First of all, through its efforts for the preservation of natural areas within the state, the Academy focuses the efforts of all scientists to set aside as many as possible of the remaining significant natural areas for research, education, and scenic appreciation. No matter whether one's

field of science is as closely connected to such interests as ecology or as remote as nuclear physics, as scientists we must realize that natural resources can never be restored once they have lost their unique natural characteristics. A few such regions have already been preserved through the activities of the Academy (Cedar Creek Natural History Area and part of Itasca State Park) and of other organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy (notably the prairie, dune, forest, and savannah holdings). These two organizations are now urging the recently appointed advisory committee for the state planning agency to work for the passage of a *Nature Preserves Bill* that would provide for the establishment of a Minnesota System of Nature Preserves and a Minnesota Natural Preserves Commission to ensure the orderly inventory, acquisition, dedication, and protection of a representative series of examples of the natural landscape of each county of Minnesota. Through support of such activities the scientific community can contribute to the future of the state.

Another area in which the Academy's activities serve the scientific community is that of the public understanding of science. Certainly all scientists are deeply aware of the importance of making their aims, efforts, and achievements more comprehensible, not only to the general public but also to scientists in other areas of interest. Only through an organization that bridges all scientific disciplines as the Academy does can such an activity be carried on effectively.

The work of a great many Minnesota scientists is, because of its nature, of national or international significance within their fields. The work of other scientists is of especial concern to the scientific community within the region or state. Nevertheless, as humans, no matter how far we penetrate into space or probe matter with atom smashers, we still must be deeply concerned with our immediate environment. Ecological, geological, and similar investigations of our environment will always be of interest and significance to us. The Academy is the logical agency for the dissemination of such information on our environment.

I suspect that to many even well informed scientists the Academy means simply a group that holds an annual meeting, which always conflicts with a dozen other activities, and a fall meeting somewhere in the field, which is of interest to only a limited group. The Academy, however, is more: it is an organization of scientists within the state of Minnesota that is dedicated to the advancement of science in the present and future; to the furtherance of scientific education and the encouragement of young persons to become scientists; to the maintenance of channels of communication to permit the interchange of ideas among all scientists; and to the deepening of the public's understanding of scientists and science.