

Emergence of professional social science - the American Social Science Association and the nineteenth-century crisis of authority.

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The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth

For a quarter of a century, between 1876 and 1899, the ASSA general conference was held almost invariably in Saratoga, a small resort town in upstate New York.

American social science association

A good part of this mission was focused on education - not only educating the poor to improve their habits and integrate them in mainstream American society, but also educating those who minister to the poor, and educating legislators. The association held its last annual meeting in 1907.

American social science association

Through a letter circulated by the Massachusetts Board of Charities, prominent social reformers and intellectuals were asked to form an American organization, similar to the British Social Science Association, to understand and improve a rapidly changing society. The ASSA spawned numerous social reform organizations, such as the National Prison Association 1870 , the National Conference of Charities 1874 and the American Health Association 1874 , which often met in parallel sessions at Saratoga or other venues.

American Social Science Association

In the 1880s, as social scientists were finally setting themselves up in universities as professional academics, it quickly dawned that this was a unique opportunity for holding parallel conferences on more exclusively academic topics they were researching. The American Historical Association was formed in 1884; they met with the ASSA but refused to organize as a subordinate department in the ASSA. Curtis was made president, and former abolitionist Franklin Sanborn took over the reigns of permanent secretary.

The Emergence of Professional Social Science

The delegates to the NCCC were interested in practical solutions to the problems of the poor, the insane, and the criminal classes. Rather, they were designed as networks of social reformers, usually educated upper and middle classes, of various backgrounds teachers, charity workers, ministers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, businessmen, government officials, etc.

From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884

But starting in the early 1870s, electives in the social sciences began being introduced in university curriculums and professorships in political economy started being established. . All members annually elected the General Committee, which in turn appointed the Department Committees.

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The ASSA had tremendous growing pains. It is right and proper that the current meetings still evoke the memory of the great Saratoga meetings of the American Social Science Association, the mother of them all.

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