



Riddarhuset today

With the new Instrument of Government (constitution) in 1975, the King's right to grant noble rank ceased to exist. The last person ennobled was the eminent explorer Sven Hedin in 1902. Today the Swedish nobility comprises 698 living families, of whom 49 are of count's rank while 136 are baronial and 513 aristocratic, with a total of some 27,000 members residing in Sweden and elsewhere.

The name "Riddarhuset" not only stands for the building itself but also denotes an institution with statutes based on the Riddarhus Decree of 1866. As mentioned above, since the abolition of the Estates Riksdag the Swedish nobility has lacked all political significance. The nobility has its own type of taxation right, the "capitation charge" or poll tax that every male member of the nobility who has reached the age of majority (18) must pay once a year. This charge goes in full to pay for the maintenance of the Riddarhuset building, which receives no state or municipal grant whatsoever.

Every three years, representatives of the nobility assemble at Riddarhuset to engage in discussions and a review of Riddarhuset's business transactions and activities. Each family has one vote, which is exercised by its head. At this meeting, directors are elected for the forthcoming three-year period to be responsible for administering Riddarhuset's activities. These are highly variable in nature. One of the directors' foremost tasks concerns the 300 funds managed by Riddarhuset, which generate a substantial yield that is used for the award of scholarships and allowances. Riddarhuset also manages several large landed estates with substantial tracts of forest and farmland, of which the largest are those belonging to Löfstad Castle and the "Kinda block" including Föllingsö Manor, both in the county of Östergötland, and also Kronovall Castle in Skåne.

The Riddarhuset directors decisions are implemented by the Riddarhuset secretary-general, who heads the Chancery and is in charge of day-to-day activities. One important part of Riddarhuset is the genealogical department, headed by the in-house genealogist. Here, work includes keeping the aristocratic families' genealogical tables up to date. Work on these tables has been in progress at Riddarhuset for more than 200 years, and is of considerable value in terms of personal history. The genealogical department also includes Riddarhuset's extensive and valuable library. This is visited annually by numerous historians, genealogists and other interested parties. Another urgent task for the genealogical department is to reply to the inquiries received daily from all over the world concerning Swedish noble families, their members and origin. Every three years, the "Swedish Peerage Book" is issued this is a catalogue listing all the members of the nobility.

Riddarhuset also engages in some letting business. Members of the nobility can hire part of the premises for weddings, dinners and other festivities. Several of the Royal Academies hold their formal meetings in the Great Hall of Riddarhuset. In this hall, too, during the summer months, highly popular and well-attended concerts take place. The concert tradition is one dating back to the early 18th century, when the "father of Swedish music", Johan Helmich Roman, received the directors permission to arrange the first public concerts in Sweden there. The Great Hall was considered, thanks to its acoustics and beauty, to be the best venue for music in Stockholm. Particularly appreciated were the "cavalier concerts" performed by aristocratic amateurs, which are said to have prompted Gustavus III to establish the Royal Academy of Music in 1771.