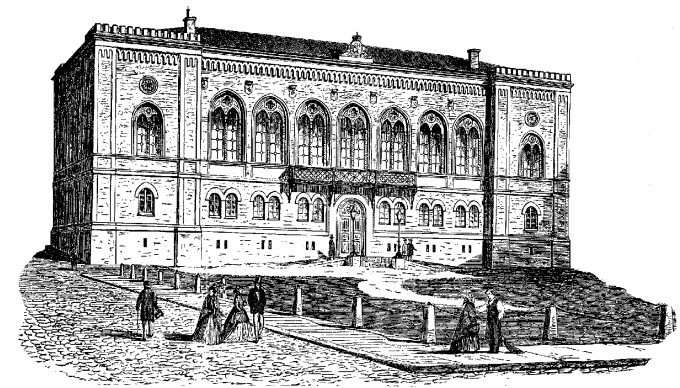


PALACE OF THE NOBILITY IN HELSINKI

In the town plan of the early 19th century a place had been reserved for a palace of the nobility. Many plans of various styles were presented. The neo-gothic plan drawn by the architect G. T. Chiewitz won the competition and the palace was completed in 1862, in time to house all four estates during the Diet of 1863.

The inside decoration of the palace is largely contemporary with the palace itself. The east wing is in the use of the House of the Nobility, while the west wing is rented to use of other than the nobility's own. The assembly hall of 464 square metres provides a magnificent setting for concerts, conferences and banquets.



THE HOUSE OF NOBILITY

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THE NOBILITY TODAY

The privileges of the nobility granted in 1723 mainly regulated the issues of tax exemption. This act lost its significance when the Income and Property Tax Act was passed in 1920.

The activities of the House of Nobility today are founded on an act of 1918. In accordance with this act the General Assembly of the nobility takes place every three years. In the ensuing years the Board of Directors, consisting of seven members and five deputy members, holds the executive authority. The Secretary General acts as secretary for the General Assembly as well as for the Board.

The main task of the House today is taking care of the palace of the nobility and its collections. The Treasurer is in charge of the finances and manages the Palace. The Chief Genealogist manages the research, the publication activities, the library and the archives.

A large collection of illuminated letters patent, the oldest of which dates from the 16th century is kept in the archives. The House of Nobility keeps personal data of all Finnish noblemen from the Middle Ages onwards. These pedigrees are continuously completed. A complete pedigree was published by Tor Carpelan in his work *Ättartavlor I-V* 1942-66.

The Pedigree Book was first published in 1858. It comprises data of all living members of the nobility, and is published every three years. In all 357 noble families are registered. Of these 148 families, (4 Greve, 25 Friherre and 119 Herr) with are represented today.

ARMS AND NAMES

Every noble family has been granted armorial bearings. A complete roll of arms was published by George Granfelt in 1889. The arms have been scanned and can easily be reproduced. In the Pedigree Book 2001, the arms of all the living families are, for the first time, in colour.

On being granted nobility the person was often given a new family name. Up until the 18th century family names were rare outside the nobility. The names of the noblemen are often connected with the charge of the coat of arms or the family seat. In the 19th century the noblemen kept his name almost unchanged. Thus the same name may be used by noble as well as by common branches of the same family.

Names do not necessarily denote nobility. Three families have Finnish surnames, but some members of other families have taken Finnish names.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NOBILITY

During the Middle Ages the King of Sweden consolidated his power at the expense of the counties and the local chieftains. Centralization called for a standing army. Taxpaying farmers were entitled to furnish a trooper with horse and arms to do military service. In return the farmer was granted exemption from land dues to the Crown and thus became member of the nobility. The system of tax exemption was ratified through the Alsnö Act 1279.

The tax exemption was at first personal. The system of providing horse and arms was checked yearly through an arms inspection. In the 16th century the privilege of tax exemption was considered hereditary.

From having been a class of farmers providing troopers for military service, the nobility became a class of military men and civil officers. During the 17th century nobility became a form of reward for services rendered. In the 18th and 19th centuries the nobility became a leading social upper class. Prominent scientists and industrial leaders were also raised to nobility.

THE NOBILITY IN POLITICS

During the Diet (Swedish parliament) of Arboga in 1435 the nobility was one of the four estates. The Diet consisted of the Nobility, the Clergy, the Burgers and the Peasants. Each estate had one vote and to carry through a decision the votes of three estates were required. The four-estate Diet was replaced in 1906 by a single-chamber Parliament. One of the most old fashioned assemblies in Europe now became one of the most democratic ones. The nobility lost its political significance.

Gustav II Adolf had founded the Swedish House of Nobility in 1626. Here all the noble families were registered in order of seniority. Nobility could be granted only by the King. In Stockholm a stately palace was built as a meeting place for the nobility during parliamentary sessions. The war of 1809 split Sweden into two states. The Grand Duchy of Finland received its own House of Nobility in 1818. Here the Swedish noble families who had chosen to remain in Finland were registered. The Czar – Grand Duke continued to raise deserving Finnish citizens to the nobility. The last one to be raised to nobility was the Finnish High-Commissioner in St Petersburg General August Langhoff, who was granted the title of Friherre in 1912.