The second of the three founding meetings of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) was held in the director’s drawing-room at the Harvard College Observatory in 1898. Today’s AAS meetings can attract more than 1,000 participants, with the venue a large hotel with auditoria for plenary and multiple sessions. This transformation is well documented in The American Astronomical Society’s First Century, which is edited by the Smithsonian historian of science David DeVorkin, and has contributions from 28 contemporary astronomers, historians of science and science administrators.

The book is replete with fascinating anecdotes: from the evolution of the society in those early meetings, the cautious welcome accorded to amateurs and the early controversy between the roles of astronomy and astrophysics (which, in 1914, finally resulted
in the present name of the society), to its spread across the northern border to include Canadian members. It is particularly sobering to read the account by Susan Simkin of Margaret Burbidge's rejection of the society's Cannon prize (for women astronomers) on the grounds that it was discriminatory. It highlights how difficult it was (and still is) for women to sustain careers in astronomy.

Predictably, the Second World War was a watershed, after which organized scientific research was to take charge of astronomy. The society provided an excellent platform for astronomers to hold dialogue with the government, particularly with the Office of Naval Research for supporting astronomy projects. This office, and later the National Science Foundation, had a strong influence on the development of astronomy research in the United States. One article, by Joel Stebbins, written in 1947 around the 50-year landmark of the society, has been reproduced.

The demographic account of the society shows the steep rise in AAS membership, which started in 1960 and continues today. The society grew as astronomy itself expanded, and the structure of the AAS meetings had to change. The moment of truth arrived with the society's 91st meeting in 1953, when parallel sessions became essential. Whereas an earlier decision had stressed that simultaneous sessions would be allowed "only if absolutely necessary, and as a last resort," today's meetings have multiple sessions and poster sessions, and large crowds that make old-timers like Bill Baum lament: "I don't know any of these people". Indeed, in today's world of 'Write proposals or perish', one may wistfully look back to the early days of relaxed informality. This development is a pity, because the vastly increased cost of frontier research encourages organized science, with very little scope for individual geniuses and mavericks.

The inexorable march towards organized professionalism continued, with the society needing an executive office which it later moved to Washington. The society's research mouthpieces, the *Astronomical Journal* and the *Astrophysical Journal*, grew in stature and size. In 1971, S. Chandrasekhar, as editor, ran the *Astrophysical Journal* with one associate editor, one assistant, a production person and a copy-editor, a far cry from the army of manpower needed today.

The book itself shows professionalism in its planning, and for the reader interested in archival statistics and in how a group of scientists with a common interest organized and reorganized themselves to best deal with rapidly changing conditions, there is much useful material. On two counts, however, I was disappointed. The book could have contained some account of how astronomers evolved their view of the cosmos through
debates and discoveries. How did the society receive the Shapley–Curtis debate? What was its attitude when new observations placed the Galactic Centre away from the Solar System? How did it react to the discovery of quasars, or to the COBE satellite? Those must have been exciting times, when astronomical history was being made, and readers in the twenty-first century would have enjoyed glimpses of it. Similarly, a century of interactions involving famous personalities and famous observing instruments must have generated many memorable anecdotes, like the Yerkes disaster of 29 May 1897 described early in the book by Donald Osterbrock, when the floor of the newly built Yerkes telescope collapsed, fortunately without injuring anyone. However, not many such anecdotes follow.

**Jayant V. Narlikar is at the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics, Ganeshkhind, Post Bag 4, Pune 411 007, India.**