

# From the Archives

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Darwin, the British naturalist whose work on natural selection and the origin of species sparked intense debate. In 1860, Louis Agassiz, a zoologist and geologist, and Asa Gray, a botanist, participated in a series of meetings at the American Academy on Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Agassiz presented arguments in favor of divine creation and Gray defended the variability of species as proof of adaptation.

Darwin was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the Academy in January 1874. His letter accepting his election is among the Academy's archival treasures.

Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 1874

Down,  
Beckenham, Kent.

Sir

I beg leave to acknowledge your  
letter of Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> in which  
you announce to me that the  
American Academy of Arts  
& Sciences has conferred on me  
the distinguished honor of electing  
me a Foreign Honorary Member.

I request that you will return to  
the Academy my most sincere thanks  
for this honor, & I remain  
Sir

Your obedient & obliged servant  
Ch. Darwin

To the Secretary Am. Acad. of Arts & Sciences.

Letter to the Secretary of the American Academy from Charles Darwin, February 20, 1874, acknowledging his election as a Foreign Honorary Member.

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