Moritz Lenel (1811-1876)

Moritz Lenel (*20.3.1811 Ladenburg †02.02.1876 Mannheim); parents: Herz Löwenthal (1784-1814); Sara-Gense Simon (1783-1850); siblings: Simon (1809-1809), Lazarus (1814-1814); married to: Carolina Scheuer (1814-1857); children: Pauline (1837-1895), Viktor (1838-1917, industrialist), Antonie (1839-1912), Alfred (1841-1918), Thekla (1845-1911), Otto (1849-1935, historian of Roman law)

Moritz Loewenthal was born on March 20th, 1811 as second Child of the merchant Herz Loewenthal and his wife Sara Simon. Around 1820, his father changed the family name to Lenel, to avoid confusion with relatives of the same name. Moritz Loewenthal became like his father a merchant. In 1833, he settled, together with his older brother Simon, in Mannheim's sector O3, where he ran a spice mill connected with a saffron and vanilla trade. 1836, he married in Dusseldorf Caroline Scheuer, who was three years younger than him. From the times of the Baden revolution is only known, that on December 15th, 1848 he signed the "invocation of the New Patriotic Association to all friends of the German unity and the legal freedom". In the same year he was admitted to the chamber of commerce and in 1852 elected to the Great Citizens Committee. In 1854 he resigned from the chamber of commerce in protest of their rejection of a foreign jewish company as a member. On his resignation, the board of directors wrote him a letter urging him to reverse his decision. But Moritz Lenel was not apt to do so. In 1855, he became a member of the Synagogue Council. In 1857, his wife Caroline passed away. Only in 1860, Moritz Lenel accepted his re-election to the Chamber of Commerce. In the following year, he was one of the initiators of the German Handelstag in Heidelberg, the parent organization of the German chambers of commerce. In these years, he was participating in the formation of many important companies such as the Baden Insurance Company, the Mannheim Warehouse Company, the new Mannheim Steam Towing Company, the Rheinische Credit Bank and the Bank of Baden, where he became a member of the board of directors. Together with Edward Moll, he he pushed for the establishment of a girls' school which opened up on May 18th, 1863 and already had 100 students in the first year. On March 18th, 1866 Moritz Lenel was elected vice-chairman of the chamber of commerce. In 1868 he co-founded an interdenominational organization for health care, chaired by Mayor Ludwig Achenbach (1812-1879), which donated the house D4,12 to the Niederbronner nuns. In the same year, Moritz Lenel was elected commercial judge. On March 28th, 1871 he was elected the first jewish chairman of the Mannheim Chamber of Commerce. This highest honor of the Mannheim office of merchants, he held until his death. On February 2nd, 1876 he died unexpectedly.

In an obituary, we read: *Despite the serious side of life, he was not want from cultivating the arts at his home and in clubs, and his gracious speeches during celebrations of the music club are not forgotten. He was a tireless benefactor of the poor of every creed and his generous hand was always ready when it was necessary to alleviate undeserved misfortune.*

His remains were buried next to his wife at the Mannheim Jewish cemetery. From his estate, 25'000 Mark (then an enormous amount of money) were bequeathed to the "Moritz and Caroline Lenel Foundation" for the support of capable but needy students without regard to denomination.

Source: Watzinger, Karl Otto, Geschichte der Juden in Mannheim 1650-1945, Stuttgart, 1984, p. 116f.; Lenel family archive

Thal, November 22, 2010, B. Lenel (beat@lenel.ch)