

Alfred Baber Fonds

Chemistry and Art
More Adventures of a Chemist Collector

Chapter 16 -
The Lieben Award

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Chapter 16

The Lieben Award

Isabel and I have visited Vienna many times, usually to visit our chemist friends at Loba Chemie and at the University of Vienna. One of the happiest occasions was the Loschmidt symposium in 1995, when many eminent chemists from around the world honored Josef Loschmidt on the one-hundredth anniversary of his death.

Another important visit was early in June 2003 when Isabel and I attended a very interesting two-day symposium at the university at which scientists and historians discussed how the Nazis dealt with Jews at Austrian universities and how this affected intellectual life in Austria after the war. Among the speakers were two Nobel Laureates, Eric Kandel and Walter Kohn, and two old friends, Edward Timms and Ruth Sime. Many of the talks showed us how positively Austria has changed in the last fifty years.

That week, two old friends, Dr Robert Rosner and Professor Christian Noe, told me about a most interesting prize, the Ignaz Lieben Prize, which had been the most important scientific award in the Austro-Hungarian Empire until its collapse, and then just in Austria. Begun thirty-five years before the establishment of the Nobel Prize, it honored fifty-five eminent scientists, including four who later received the Nobel, and Lise Meitner, who was the first female recipient of the Lieben Prize, which has sometimes been called the Austrian Nobel Prize.

Our friend Robert Rosner was the sales manager of Loba Chemie, Aldrich's valued supplier in Vienna. When he retired, he took a history degree from the University of Vienna, specializing in the history of chemistry in Austria. During his studies, he



learned about the Lieben Prize. An Austrian banker, Ignaz Lieben (1805-1862), left 10,000 Gulden in his will "for the general good", and his son, Adolf Lieben, an eminent organic chemist and the first Jew to hold chairs in chemistry in Prague and Vienna, persuaded the family to use 6,000 Gulden to fund the Prize, which was administered by the Academy of Sciences and first given in 1865. The family increased the award substantially in 1898 and in 1908. During the terrible inflation of 1923, the capital was lost, but the Lieben family continued to pay 1,000 Austrian Schillings until 1938, when the Nazis discontinued it. The last donor, Heinrich Lieben, Adolf Lieben's son, died in Buchenwald in 1945.

Dr Rosner had shared the information about this virtually forgotten prize with our mutual friend, Professor Christian Noe, with whom I had collaborated so well on the chemical work of Josef Loschmidt. Rosner and Noe explained that the Academy was eager to reinstate the Lieben Award and asked Isabel and me whether we might be interested. What an opportunity: a prize for young scientists that had been started by a Jewish chemist to be reinstated by another Jewish chemist. Of course our answer was yes, provided the Lieben family did not object in any way. That very week, Professor Noe invited Dr Wolfgang Lieben-Seutter, a grandson of Adolf Lieben, to discuss our plans. Dr Lieben-Seutter assured us that he had no objections.

We decided quickly that the prize should again be administered by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, that it should be open to young scientists from all countries formerly in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that it should be US \$18,000 annually, and that it should be guaranteed by us for thirty years.^(fig.)



I was asked a number of times by the Academy to give my reasons for reinstating the award, and this is given in the Appendix. The first Lieben Prize award was to be given on Tuesday, 9 November 2004, sixty-six years after Kristallnacht, and we flew to Vienna on 7 November to enjoy the next four days.

We were welcomed on Monday night beginning with a press conference, where once again the emphasis of the questions was on our reasons for funding this award.

The public festivities began with a welcoming speech by Georg Winkler, the rector of the University of Vienna, followed by a reading of a duologue written by Professor Carl Djerassi entitled "Sex in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and read by Carl Djerassi, the father of "the pill", and Maria Hartmann. This heated discussion deals with the possibility and the ethics of the fertilization of a human egg with a single sperm by direct injection under the microscope, followed by reinsertion of the egg into the woman's uterus. An interesting question period was followed by a pleasant, semi-formal dinner.

The following day, we were again interviewed by some journalists and photographers. After this we went to the beautiful Austrian Academy of Sciences for the first presentation of the new Lieben Prize. The ceremony began with greetings from Herbert Mang, the president of the Academy, a lecture by a Hungarian academic, and music by the Mozart Ensemble of the Vienna Volksoper. This was followed by the presentation of the Lieben Prize to Dr Zoltan Nusser, a thirty-six-year-old Hungarian neurophysiologist, who had studied in Oxford, at University College London, and at UCLA before returning to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2000. The Austrian Academy of Sciences award committee had chosen him from over fifty applicants.



After a further Haydn trio by the Mozart ensemble, the academy president presented Isabel and me with the "Bene merito" gold medal and certificate. I had been asked to present a few minutes' acceptance speech in German. I stressed the Liebens' and my Jewish and Austrian backgrounds, and explained that my view of Vienna had changed during the last fifty years (Appendix).

More music was followed by another brief talk by the academy president and buffet lunch.

The symposium at the university lasted for a day and a half, the lecturers dealing with the Lieben family, the fifty-five Lieben prize winners, Jewish culture and anti-Semitism, and the migration from Austria after 1938. This was accompanied by two exhibitions at the university, one depicting the lives and works of the fifty-five prizewinners, the other "1924 - A Good Year" illustrating the lives of six scientists, myself included, born in Austria in 1924.

We had never been to the Konzerthaus in Vienna, and really enjoyed a fundraising concert there that evening. Two young female musicians, a violinist and a pianist, were playing modern music with a great deal of spirit. I had heard music by Maurice Ravel and Bela Bartok before, but not of the other three composers, Otto Zykan (whose work had its first performance ever), Manuel de Falla, and George Enescu. Nor had I ever watched a young violinist play with such vigor.

One of the Liebens, Dr Wolfgang Lieben-Seutter (who had told us a year earlier that the family had no objection to our reinstating the prize), invited us for supper with his family. Isabel had bought a special dress for this occasion and, as usual, was the most beautiful woman around.



Some of the lectures at the university were hard to understand, but several were brilliant and informative. Early on Wednesday afternoon, Yechiel Bar-Chaim of the Joint (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) joined us on his way from Paris to the Balkans. He gave me the "Via Bona" award which he had accepted for me in Prague in September for "... support of civil and human rights and ... of baroque art history and chemistry in the Czech Republic". And of course we discussed our help for the following year, mainly for the neediest in the Balkans.

Wednesday evening we went to the opening of a Lieben exhibition in the Jewish Museum, which as most interesting, showing the rise and fall of this family, with many documents, photographs, and paintings. What I found most surprising was that the family continued to pay for the Lieben Prize, even after the bankruptcy of the Lieben Bank in 1932.

A young historian, Georg Gaugusch, specializing in genealogy, told me that he had found out a good deal about the family of my grandmother, Hermine Freund. He eventually helped me identify the four Freund family portraits we have at home!

Wednesday evening ended with supper in the Augustinerkeller nearby - lots of talk with Paul Löw Beer's daughter Kitty, her former husband Professor Arnold Schmidt, and Christian Noe.

Thursday morning began with an hour's breakfast with Dr Vladan Antonovic, who had come from Innsbruck, a very able young Czech art historian whom I am trying to help - not an easy task. My high school in Vienna had invited me to speak on Monday morning, and to return on Thursday morning, to answer more questions from the students. Thursday afternoon, we met for tea with an Austrian historian, Professor



Gerhard Botz, who would like to publish an abridged German translation of my autobiography. Why not?

Thursday evening was most difficult for Isabel. The Jewish Museum had invited me to present "The Bible Through Dutch Eyes", and I had requested two projectors and two carousels to show two slides side by side. This was impossible in the set-up provided, and Isabel had to rearrange everything and stand on a ladder - for fifty minutes! - to move the slides. Isabel and I have worked together quite often presenting this talk - but never like this. The museum gave me many Austrian stamps commemorating the revival of the Ignaz Lieben prize; I wished that the museum had rather spent that money on facilitating showing slides.

After the talk, we invited our old friend Bobby Rosner for supper. He was really the guiding spirit to the revival of the prize. He was happy about all the happenings and about the publication of his book *Chemistry in Austria 1740-1914*, which had appeared that week.

There was a lot of publicity about the new Lieben award. *Profil*, an Austrian *Time*-like magazine, had a two-page article with photographs of Isabel, Bobby Rosner, and myself in its 29 October 2004 issue. Most Viennese dailies published reports on 10 November 2004, the most detailed in *The Kurier*, headlined "Help for the Ablest and the Poorest" and showing a photograph of Isabel and myself with Dr Nusser and the president of the academy.

We left Vienna for London on Friday morning, happy about the week, but Isabel weary after having to stand on a ladder for so long.



APPENDIX

The Lieben Prize

Our reasons for funding the Ignaz Lieben Prize are varied and complex.

We first learned of this award in 2003 from two friends in Vienna, Dr. Robert Rosner and Professor Christian Noe. The Lieben Prize was the first privately funded award in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Others, such as the Baumgartner Award followed.

Established in 1862 by the wealthy Viennese banker Ignaz Lieben, a Jew, the Prize was to be given to an able young scientist. Until the Nobel Prize some thirty years later, it was the most prestigious award in the Monarchy. The element Meitnerium was named after the first woman awardee, Lise Meitner, and four other awardees later won Nobel Prizes.

The original sum of 6,000 Gulden given to the Academy was increased by the Lieben family in 1898 by 36,000 Kronen and again in 1908 by an additional 18,000 Kronen. We wonder whether they chose these sums because in Hebrew 18 stands for Chai, life, and 36 twice Chai. This is certainly the reason why we chose \$18,000.

The capital for this Award and all others administered by the Academy was lost in the great inflation of 1923. However, the Lieben family gave 1,000 Austrian Schilling annually to continue the Lieben Prize until 1938, when it was stopped by the Nazis. Heinrich Lieben, who made the last donation to the Academy, died in Buchenwald in 1945.



We know almost nothing about Ignaz Lieben, but his son Adolf Lieben was a brilliant organic chemist. After studies in Heidelberg and Paris, he was invited by Stanislao Cannizzaro to the chair of Chemistry in Palermo, then moved to Turin and eventually was the first Jew to hold chairs in Prague and Vienna.

When I first returned to Vienna occasionally after the war, the idea of establishing an award for Austrians was unthinkable. Whenever I met an Austrian older than myself, born in 1924, I wondered what that person had done in 1938. Yet most old Nazis have died, and I sense that the younger generations are better people.

Now that the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary are joining the European Union, Vienna will again be the true center of Europe, so an award to a scientist in a country of the old monarchy, again with 18, Chai connection, seems really fitting.

There are also strong personal reasons for our re-establishing the Lieben Prize. "Muttli", my father's sister who was my loving mother-by-adoption, often spoke of the 'Guten alten Zeiten', before World War I. She was inordinately proud of her father, my grandfather, Moritz Ritter von Bader, who was knighted by Emperor Franz Josef. She was proud to be an Austrian, refused to leave Vienna and died in Theresienstadt. And my mother, born a Hungarian countess, spoke of our direct ancestor Count Franz Gabriel and his brother Johann Karl Serenyi, one of the defenders of Vienna against the Turks in 1683. He held the imposing title of Generalfeldwachtmeister und Vize-Oberbefehlshaber der Streitkräfte in Wien. Mama took me several times to St. Stephen's Cathedral to show me the plaque thanking Count Serenyi for his efforts against the Turks, and to listen to the second mass on Good Friday, praying for the infidel Jews. This always troubled me, brought up a Jew by my caring Muttli.



Under Hitler, many Austrians treated Jews worse than Germans did and have made restitution more slowly and less generously. There were decent Austrians, some of whom I knew well – just not enough. But the past is behind us, my roots are in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Lieben Award will go to able young scientists, the very people we want to help.

