

Dalberg Period and Free City 1806 - 1866

In the Rhine Confederation Treaty of 1806 Frankfurt, together with Aschaffenburg, Regensburg, Wetzlar and a number of other areas, was assigned as a principality to the last Archbishop of Mainz, Karl von Dalberg. In 1810, it was promoted to the level of a grand duchy.

Dalberg proved to be an enlightened and progressive ruler who reigned over the city with the help of a royal authority, the General Commission. Ultimately, however, the newly created citizens' committees and the 28 citizens' representatives, elected in a secret ballot by all the citizens in 1807, had no influence whatsoever. Neither did the senate that had been appointed instead of the council for the right bank of the Rhine, nor indeed the two permanent mayors.

In 1811/12, Dalberg introduced not only the Code Napoléon, but also the French Penal Code. Following the proclamation of equal rights for all subjects, Frankfurt's Jews were granted citizen's rights against a redemption fee of 440,000 guilders.

In 1808, following proposals from the management of the stock exchange, a French-style Chamber of Commerce was set up for the promotion of trade and industry. This was followed by reforms of Frankfurt's city administration and its system of schools and education. Dalberg set up state schools and, in 1812, he founded a university, though the latter was closed down again a year later. He also abolished serfdom and forced labour and declared the equality of Christian denominations.

In October 1813, after his defeat at the Battle of the Nations near Leipzig, Napoleon spent a night at the country house of the Bethmann family. Baron vom Stein moved the central administrative department for the former French-occupied areas to Frankfurt. The Grand Duchy of Frankfurt was dissolved, and its old constitution - as a city of the empire - was provisionally re-introduced.

In 1815, thanks to the Congress of Vienna, Frankfurt was declared a "free city" and the venue of the Diet of the German Confederation. A year later, Frankfurt's citizens inaugurated their new constitution as a "free city", known as the Constitutional Amendment Act. It was largely a modified version of Frankfurt's original constitution as an imperial city, revoking most of Dalberg's reforms. Although the privileges of the ancient families were abolished, in reality the patrician oligarchy was merely replaced by a plutocratic one. Citizen's rights were now dependent on producing evidence of 5,000 guilders worth of assets, which barely half the city's population of 40,000 was able to do. Jews, too, were excluded from citizen's rights.

Yet socially, despite this political step backwards, Frankfurt was to go through a veritable heyday in the decades to come. The continuous presence of the Diet of the German Confederation not only added a touch of glamour to the city, it also affected its social organism. Diet diplomatic circles and the urban upper classes merged into a homogeneous society with the need for lavish displays of power. Together with a generous system of patronage, this led to the creation of numerous important cultural and social facilities.

1816 saw the foundation of the Polytechnic Society. The merchant banker Johann Friedrich Städel specified in his will that his art collection should be made available to the public and that an Institute of Art should be founded. A year later a Museum of Nature Study was opened and a nature research society set up, named after its physician founder, Johann Christian Senckenberg.

Around 1840, following suggestions by Friedrich Fröbel, a number Frankfurt bankers' families donated sufficient funds for the first kindergartens (nursery schools), to promote pre-school education. In 1845 Dr. Theobald Christ left 150,000 guilders in his will, for a children's hospital. In 1859 the Freie Deutsche Hochstift (Free German Institute) was founded as an independent institution for the cultivation of science and art, at the imitative of Otto Volger, lecturer in geology and mineralogy at the Senckenberg Nature Research Society.

The intellectual life of the time was also influenced by important scholars such as Johann Friedrich Böhmer, city archivist from 1825 and city librarian from 1830, whose Book of Documents of the City of Frankfurt was published in 1836. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who had fled from a cholera epidemic in Berlin, decided to move to Frankfurt in 1831. He lived here until his death in 1860 and was buried at the Hauptfriedhof (Main Cemetery). In 1844 the physician Dr. Heinrich Hofmann wrote and illustrated a children's book, Struwwelpeter, which he dedicated to his son.

The economic development of Frankfurt was considerably affected by its geographic isolation. The foundation of the Prussian-German Customs Union did a significant amount of harm to the city's trade. In 1836, after much hesitation and to avoid being cut off completely by Prussia, the city finally decided to join the Customs Union. Because of its restrictive trade policy, the city was largely bypassed by the commercial and industrial development which was gradually beginning to emerge in the rest of Germany. In 1841, after objections from Frankfurt's soap boilers, Otto Naumann moved his soap factory to Offenbach. It was not until 1864 that the senate introduced not only equal citizen's rights for Jews, but also freedom of trade.

However, the role of trade and commerce was not as prominent as that of banking. During its time as a free city, Frankfurt became a leading European financial centre. The sons of Meyer Amschel Rothschild (who had died in 1812) founded branch offices in London, Paris, Vienna and Naples. In Frankfurt, their leading position as bankers was contested by Bankhaus Bethmann. In 1854, the Frankfurter Bank was founded as the first corporate bank, followed by Frankfurter Hypothekenbank (Frankfurt Mortgage Bank) in 1862, the Bank für Handel und Industrie (Bank for Trade and Industry) in 1863 and the Frankfurter Vereinskasse (Frankfurt Society Treasury) in 1864.

New technical developments in Frankfurt - particularly the construction of a railway system - were sponsored and promoted by influential bankers. The first railway line in the Rhine Main area was opened in 1839 - the Taunusbahn section between Frankfurt and Höchst. It was followed by the Main-Neckar line in 1846, the Hanau-Würzburg line in 1848 and the Main-Weser line in 1850. The railway stations were located near the Taunusanlage and Gallusanlage areas.

In 1861, in the lecture theatre of the Physikalischer Verein (Physics Society) a telephone was presented for the first time by a school teacher from Friedrichsdorf, Philipp Reis.

In 1856 Leopold Sonnemann started *Geschäftsberichte* (Business Reports), a paper which later became the *Frankfurter Handelszeitung* (Frankfurt Trade Paper) and, in 1859, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (The Frankfurt Newspaper), an important liberal daily paper.

Discrimination against large parts of the population, enshrined in the Constitutional Amendment Act, was a continuous cause of tension and recurring unrest. In 1833 a number of liberally minded students together with some Poles who had fled from the Russians stormed several police constabularies and tried to unleash a general revolt against the existing system. However, local tension was overshadowed by the developments and tensions at the national level.

From March 31 to April 3, 1848, a provisional parliament convened in Frankfurt, to discuss the basic principles of a parliamentary constitution for Germany. On May 18 delegates from the whole of Germany moved into the Paulskirche (St. Paul's Church) to join the National Assembly, the first pan-German elected parliament, seeking to govern the country in a spirit of free democracy and for the good of the nation. However, the National Assembly failed, and eighteen years later a different solution was found to the German question.

In 1866 Prussia defeated Austria in the Battle of Königgrätz, whereupon Austria agreed to the dissolution of the German Confederation. Prussian forces marched into Frankfurt on July 18, as Frankfurt had been on Austria's side during the conflict. Frankfurt became part of Prussia and had to pay a vast amount of money to its new rulers. Karl Konstanz Viktor Fellner, the last mayor of the free city, committed suicide.

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