Adolph Klopfer

(7)

1856 - 1861

Adolph Klopfer (sometimes spelled “Klopper”) was the seventh President of Keneseth Israel. Although much of the work of transitioning the congregation to Reform Judaism occurred under Julius Stern, it was during Klopfer’s term, on April 23, 1856, that Keneseth Israel merged with an organization known as the Reform Society, which existed for the purpose of promoting Reform Judaism. The congregation officially became known as Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel and adopted a statement of principles that declared that the synagogue would be “a thoroughly enlightened congregation” and would purchase a new organ, hire an organist, and organize a mixed-voice choir, marking yet another departure from Orthodox tradition. Under Klopfer’s leadership the congregation also hired its first rabbi, Dr. Solomon Deutsch, a Reformer from Posen, Germany. Deutsch initiated several additional reforms at Keneseth Israel, eliminating gender-segregated seating, the observance of the second day of Holy Days, except Rosh Hashanah, and several mourning practices. He also organized a girls’ choir.

Klopfer was born in Bavaria around 1820. It is not known when he arrived in United States, but the records of his life confirm that he was ensconced in Philadelphia at least by the 1850s. He was married to a fellow Bavarian, Esther, with whom he had several children: Sylvester, Charles, William Penn, Simon, Sophia, and Louisa. In 1860, Adolph and Esther also lived with several other Klopfers, although the exact relation is unknown, and two servants. Klopfer worked as a dry goods merchant, selling clothing on the south side of Market Street between Tenth and Eleventh Streets. In addition to serving as President of Keneseth Israel, Klopfer was a founding member and secretary of the Mercantile Club, a Philadelphia social club composed of Jewish businessmen that was founded on November 10th, 1853 and incorporated in 1869. The Mercantile Club soon became one of the most prominent clubs in Philadelphia. At the time of his death, Klopfer lived at 1710 North Eighth Street, Philadelphia. He died on November 26, 1883 and is buried at Mt. Sinai Cemetery in Philadelphia.