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Chenstochover Neighbourhood¹ Educational Society in Chicago



We remember our city, with its trees and lawns, cobbled streets and muddy streets. We remember the Synagogue and the study-hall, where our fathers attended prayers, held conversations and studied [Torah]. Like all other cities, we also had poor people and givers of charity - and even a town madman. And here is the doctor, the barber-surgeon, the chemist and the aristocratic *shayne Yidn*². And here is the marketplace, with the peasants and peasant women, who brought all good things to sell, and Reb Chaim, who haggled over a calf and purchased it for a *złoty* more or a *złoty* less, striking the peasant's palm.

And here is the "*sala*" (hall) where the youngsters would go dance, and we also remember the *Aleje*, where we promenaded and romanced. And here is the church and Jasna Góra. And here is the *Jatka* [Meat-market] Street [viz. ul. Targowa], with lads and girls, revelries, fisticuffs - that was a life!

And how beautiful the city looked on *Shabbes* after the *chulent*³! How idyllic a Friday evening looked after the lighting of the candles, when our mothers donned their "*kipkes*"⁴ and shone as bright as the sun.

We also had an intelligentsia, which turned its nose up and did not wish to associate with the common workman. It was a multi-coloured life with rains and storms, sunlight and darkness, opulence and poverty, and yet interesting and unique – that is how it has remained forever in our memory.

Life in our hometown of Częstochowa has now been trampled, burned and eradicated by the Nazi dogs. They desecrated all that was holy, robbed and destroyed, murdered our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, comrades and friends and turned the entire Jewish Częstochowa into one huge cemetery. Our tragedy is wider than the ocean⁵. The agony and pain in our hearts cannot be put into words. No living man has yet created the terms by which to express them. Nevertheless, we already stand, as always, once more prepared to fulfil our obligation towards the city in which we were born, which will remain in our hearts evermore.

We shall never forget the city where our parents were born and where we spent our childhood years and youth. And even if, Heaven forbid, no more Jewish life was left on the soil of Częstochowa, we shall hallow the stones upon which we and our own have trodden.

The first Częstochowa immigrants settled in Chicago in 1898. [But] it was only in 1905 that a large group of *landsleit* first settled in Chicago, when the Tsarist persecutions against the workers in Częstochowa intensified due to their revolutionary activity, and many were forced to leave the old hometown. In 1913, our *landsleit* began thinking about organising aid - primarily for our *landsleit*

¹ [TN: "And Vicinity" in the Yiddish original; we have used the organisation's official name in English wherever it is mentioned.]

² [TN: Lit. "beautiful Jews," Yid. expression used (sometimes sarcastically) in ref. to fine people respected by the community.]

³ [TN: Heavy traditional meat stew which constitutes the main course of the Saturday midday meal, after which most people take a nap, while some go for a leisurely stroll.]

⁴ [TN: Ornamental headband, usually white and bejewelled, worn by a married woman over her usual head covering (wig or headscarf) in honour of *Shabbes* or holidays.]

⁵ [TN: Expression derived from Lamentations 2:13: "...what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?"]

within Chicago itself, in event of illness or necessity. An unofficial society was founded for this purpose, which later also engaged in sending aid to Częstochowa. That is how things went until 1919. It was during this period that the *Częstochower* Arbeiter-Ring Branch 459 was founded. The branch only existed for a short period - the General Office dissolved it due to the fact that it was too leftist. We were once more an unofficial organisation until 1927, and continued doing relief work.

The branch also engaged in cultural work, and very frequently arranged talks and lectures on Yiddish literature.

In 1924, during Comrade A. Chrobolovsky's stay in Chicago, a *Częstochower* aid society was founded here for the support of the [I.L. Peretz] kindergartens and primary schools in Częstochowa. The society's most active members were the Myski and Malarski families, Flws Wajs, Gotajner, Max Kopinski, Warszawski, and a whole series of activists of the current Educational Society. The aid society's meetings were held at Flw Mojsze Cieszynski's "store"⁶ (bookshop). Several large functions were held that year, and great sums were sent to Częstochowa.

In 1927, a group of *landsleit* converged on Flw Max Wajs' house on 3261 Armitage Avenue 3261, to celebrate Laja and Louis Solomon's fifteenth wedding anniversary. Among the forty *landsleit* present were Albert Astor, Morris Solomon and his wife, Myski and his family, the Federman family, Hymie Wołkow and many others.

It was a Sunday and, after wishing *mazel tov*, we had a conversation about the city where we had been born. It was then that we decided to lay the cornerstone for our current society. At the founding, it was adopted that the main work would be to support the Icchok-Lajbisz Peretz Primary School, which had a name in Częstochowa and among the *landsleit* in America. Understandably, the newly-arrived "green" ones had great influence on the support for the primary school being undertaken.

The first organised meeting was held at the Parkview Hall on 23rd January 1927. At this gathering, Abe Myski was elected as the first Secretary and A. Wołkow as Chairman. And thus, our society gradually began to occupy an important position amongst *Częstochower landsleit* in Chicago.

It is indeed with pride that we wish to hereby note that, in the first years of our existence, we sent five or six hundred dollars a year to the I.L. Peretz Primary School. We conducted the aid work in this manner, until the Nazi scum destroyed our hometown, along with the entire Jewish mass-community in Poland.

Over the course of one year since the foundation, we introduced sickness benefits - and the membership in the *Chenstochover* Society grew to around two hundred. Both the gatherings and the work were always conducted in a homely and familial manner. We also made a serious attempt to draw our children into the Society. They were actually with us for a short time and did good work, but it would seem that the youth could not acclimatise itself and they gradually left.

Besides the benefits for the members, we also created an aid fund. This is a special fund [which was] founded in Saul [or Sol] Baum's name, at his house in 1928. With this fund, we support any member who is in need. Thanks to our contact with the members and *landsleit*, very few of them have left the Society since its existence.

We also wish to note that we have paid out \$9,000 for a cemetery plot⁷. May our members indeed live to a hundred and twenty, but it is sometimes good to think about what will be later.

⁶ [TN: In English in the original.]

⁷ [TN: This plot is at gate 242 W in the Waldheim Jewish Cemetery in Chicago.]

Needless to say, we participate in the operations of Jewish communal life. We support all important national organisations. We are part of the Jewish Congress, support the “Trades Campaign” for the Land of Israel, the Russian War Relief, the Red Cross and also many other institutions.

We may proudly note that, during the current⁸ War, we have participated in all undertakings to help vanquish the sanguinary foe of the Jewish People and of all the freedom-loving humanity. Although our organisation is not among the very big, we have - collectively and together with a few individual members - purchased \$25,000 worth of war bonds.

It is with pride that we recount that thirty-five members’ children are serving in the American army. The Chenstochover Society, as a whole, has remained in contact with these offspring [serving as] soldiers through letters and gifts that we have sent them. We have received numerous thank-you letters, which were read at our meetings.

Here, we wish to mention all the presidents for their dedicated work, who loyally served our Society with heart, soul and devotion: Emil Wołkow, Izzie Myski, Dr P. Owiecki⁹, Abe Myski, Morris Solomon, Rubin Warszawski, Zelig Gotajner, Jack Lewant, Saul Baum, Louis Gross, Louis Winer, Dr Leo Gotajner, and the current president, Max Wajs. We express special acknowledgement of the former Secretary, George Fiszer, who stood at his post for over a decade and carried out his work with great responsibility and worth.

It is self-evident that every member, who has worked together with us from the first day onwards, deserves to be mentioned with recognition. However, it is already the custom to note only those who occupy the highest positions at different opportunities - and we do not wish to break with tradition. But let us [just] say, that this does not diminish, in the least, the contribution of our members to the Chenstochover Neighbourhood Educational Society and their merit. The Chenstochover Society shall never forget such devoted *landsleit*.

The Chenstochover Neighbourhood Educational Society in Chicago participated with a large number of delegates in the conference of all the [Częstochower] *landsmannschaften* in America and Canada which was held in the summer¹⁰ of 1945 in New York. The Society’s delegates took an active part in the conference and distinguished themselves in editing the regulations. The Society was made part of the Central Executive [Board] of all the [Częstochower] *landsmannschaften* in America and supported the undertaking of publishing the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, which is to immortalise the bygone life of our hometown - and along with all the *Częstochower landsleit*, it is ready to stretch its fraternal hand out to the surviving brethren on the other side [of the ocean] and to help them build their lives up and set them in order.

In conclusion, we wish to convey, on behalf of all our members, friends, *landsleit* and comrades in Chicago, a fraternal greeting to all the surviving brothers and sisters in our hometown, and to all the Jews who were saved from the bloodied claws of the Nazi cannibals. Our great agony and sorrow over all our dearest ones who perished in such a tragic manner is also permeated with pride for our heroes, who fell in the unequal, titanic fight against the Nazi hangmen.

⁸ [TN: Although the summer of 1945 is subsequently mentioned in this article, it is possible that it was written before the Second World War officially ended in September 1945 – or not long afterwards.]

⁹ [TN: Spelt Ovitsky in the US.]

¹⁰ [TN: 23rd-24th June; see above, p.275.]

Blessed be the Jewish champions in the Warsaw Ghetto, who sanctified the name of the Jewish People in the same manner as the Hasmoneans had done¹¹. Blessed be those who waged war upon the Jewish People's bloodied hangmen in the Polish forests.

The courage of our heroes will invigorate us and give us new strength to continue working and fighting for the future and fortune of our Jewish People upon the earth.

¹¹ [TN: Ref. to the Maccabean Revolt, which was the Jewish rebellion led by the Maccabees against the Seleucid Empire and the Hellenistic influence on Jewish life that gave rise to the rule of the Hasmonean dynasty, and which is celebrated on Hanukkah.]