

M. Cieszyński

## Chenstochover Independent Verein<sup>1</sup> in Chicago

The Chenstochover Independent Verein [Society] in Chicago was founded on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1938. Our new society's founding meeting was held at the house of the well-known *landsleit*, the Cwern sister and brother, on 3336 Potomac Avenue.

The new society was established during a period when the stream of immigration from the other side of the ocean had almost come to a stop, and no new emigrating *landsleit* were arriving. Many *landsleit* were already united in a *Częstochower* organisation, which we ourselves had earlier helped found and build.

Our first deliberation was attended by the *landsleit* Flws Leser, Hartsky, Warszawski, Aron Ajzensztajn, Mojsze Cieszynski and the Cwern family. At this consultation, it was decided to found the new Chenstochover Independent Verein in Chicago, in order to have the possibility of carrying out various communal and cultural work in our own way. The name "Independent" was [chosen] to emphasise the independence from other organisations.

Already at the first meeting, a certain sum was raised for the work to be conducted. It was agreed unanimously that the new organisation needed to distinguish itself with good cultural work and with a comradely, friendly atmosphere. Mojsze Cieszynski was elected then as Secretary and Treasurer.

The newly-established society's second meeting was held on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1938 at the home of the well-known *landsleit* Lajb Leser and Mrs Leser, at 1924 South Harding Avenue. Several members joined at this meeting. It was also decided to send a call out to acquaintances and *landsleit* to join our society and, besides that, to put notices in the Chicago Jewish newspapers. The third deliberation was already attended by the renowned *landsmann* and Left-Wing *Poalei Zion* activist, Flw Mojsze Oderberg, and he joined the Society as a member.

We gradually began to gain more members and we became ever more popular in Chicago.

The Chenstochover Independent Verein's first literary-musical function was held on Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1938. In the programme included the beloved cantor, Abram Kuper - a member of the Society - and the well-known pianist, Miss Prowolski. This first public appearance already made a good impression and was very well accepted by the assembled guests and members.

The much-loved Cwern family also participated in the evening. The entire family together embellished the festive occasion with their special singing of old Yiddish folksongs - duets and couplets<sup>2</sup>, interwoven with joy and sadness.

Many new members enlisted at the literary evening. Among them [were] Mrs Rose and Dave Hofman, Mrs Chaja Zevin, the Gotajners, Mrs Dancyger, Isrulke and Ewa Warszawski, Dave Richtiger, Hymie Szternberg and Dr Peter Owiecki. Later, Berta Warszawska and an array of others also joined. Those who particularly distinguished themselves as tireless activists of the Society were the Leser and Cwern families, Rose and Dave Hofman, Chaja Zevin *née* Oderberg and, later, also the newly-arrived, well-

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: We have adhered to the organisation's official name in English in various sources: "Chenstochover Independent Verein."]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: In German and Yiddish, the term "couplet" denotes a humorous song, usually with refrains, habitually sung in music-hall settings.]

liked members, Mrs Fannie and Adolph Willinger. To this day, all of them stand at [their posts in] the work of the Society.

By 1940, the Chenstochover Independent Verein already had a fine organisational apparatus with responsible officials: M. Oderberg - President; Mrs Rose Hofman - Vice-President; M. Cieszynski Minutes Secretary; S. Cwern - Financel Secretary, and Flw Lajb Leser - Treasurer, in addition to Executive [Board] members.

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1940, we held our first Purim Ball at the Humboldt Boulevard Temple. On this occasion, we published our first souvenir book<sup>3</sup> - which differed from other publications of this type by the fact that, besides the English section, it also contained several pages in Yiddish.

The funds, which our society began to receive, would immediately be allocated to various communal causes. In this manner, with significant sums, we supported the Chicago Polish Union<sup>4</sup> and the trade union campaign for the workers of the Land of Israel. Our members were in the Executive [Boards] of both institutions. Support was also given to *Volksschulen*<sup>5</sup>, members and non-members suffering poverty, *matzos* for the poor, orphanages and cultural organisations.

The Chenstochover Independent Verein was - and is - in contact with *landsleit* from various countries. In contrast with other *landsmanschaften*, our meetings are held openly, with free access to members of other organisations.

In 1941, our society issued a charter. This charter was signed by Flws Lajb Leser, Sam Cwern, Mojsze Cieszynski, Mrs Rose Hofman, Mojsze Oderberg, Aron Ajzensztajn and Mrs Ida Zevin. In honour of the charter, we held a banquet, which was attended by a large number of members, friends and guests. The toastmaster of the banquet was our friend Dr Peter Owiecki, whom everyone knows.

The horrific catastrophe in Europe caused the members of our society to respond with even more warmth to the calls for aid from the various Chicago relief organisations.

In 1943, our society purchased its own cemetery [plot<sup>6</sup>]. The acquisition was carried out by Flw Dave Shelvin<sup>7</sup>, now manager of the cemetery, and the secretary of the cemetery department at the time, Flw Lajb Leser.

Regarding our contribution towards winning the War, it is worth mentioning that the Society bought several hundred dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds and supported the Red Cross with \$150.

In 1944, the Society supported the following institutions: HIAS - \$150; American Federation for Polish Jews, for parcels for Jews from Poland - \$250; Jewish charities - \$75; for the Underground Movement in Europe - \$50; for the construction fund to create a home for the Jewish blind - \$40, and the Trade Union Campaign for the workers in the Land of Israel - \$100. We also supported other institutions with smaller sums.

We joyfully welcomed Flw Raphael Federman, the envoy from New York for the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, and he received our cooperation in his important work. The Society donated \$50 for the book. A meeting of our society's active members, with Raphael Federman, was held in the home of the

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Viz. booklet to mark the occasion.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Presumably ref. to the Chicago branch of the subsequently mentioned American Federation for Polish Jews.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: Lit. "Folks' Schools," i.e. secular Yiddish primary schools, such as the I.L. Peretz School in Częstochowa. We habitually render this term simply as "primary school."]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: This plot is at gate 244 W in the Waldheim Jewish Cemetery in Chicago.]

<sup>7</sup> [TN: We have as yet been unable to find any mention of this individual; the spelling of his surname is unsure (it may have been Selwyn).]

*landsleit* Mr and Mrs Leser. At a laden table, in a festive atmosphere, Flw Raphael Federman told us about the book's purposes and tasks and also conveyed greetings of the New Yorkers and other *landsleit*. Through our small organisation, over \$200 were raised for the book. Before Flw Federman travelled away, a banquet was held in his honour. Flw Mojsze Oderberg was the Chairman at this evening. Among others, the Society's Secretary, Mojsze Cieszynski, bade the guest farewell.



***A group of founders of the Chenstochover Independent Verein in Chicago  
Seated (R-L): Mojsze Oderberg (President), Chaja Zevin (Hospitality), Mojsze Cieszynski (Secretary);  
Standing (R-L): Gucia Cwern, Sam Cwern (Treasurer) and Adolph & Fannie Willinger***

Among the founders of the Chenstochover Independent Verein in Chicago, the following individuals should [also] be mentioned: Bessie and Louis Leser, and Dave and Rose Hofman (she is the current Vice-President).

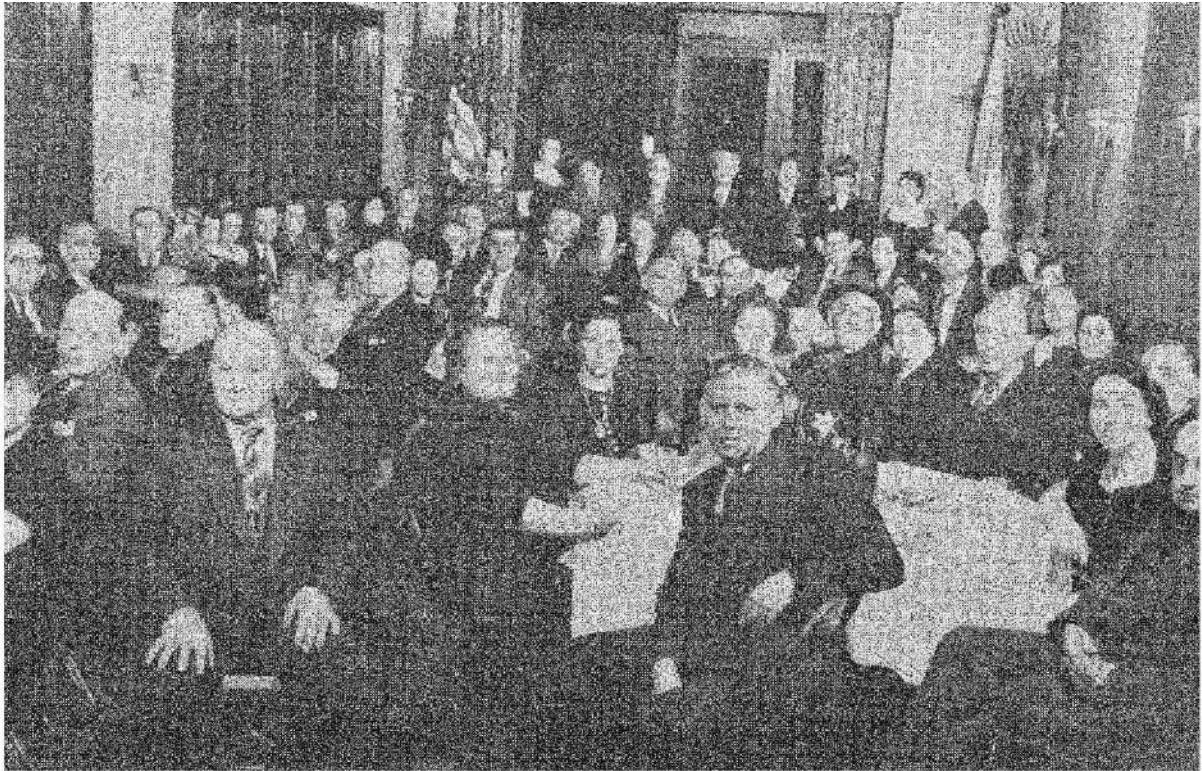
In 1944, once again, many new members joined, mostly thanks to the efforts of [our] fellows the Shelvins.

The Chenstochover Independent Verein's fifth banquet was held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1944. To mark that occasion, the Society published a sixty-page printed souvenir book. Today, our Society numbers sixty-five male members, together with their wives.

In the elections for officials, which were held in the Organisation at the end of 1945, this time the Chenstochover Independent Verein chose an almost overwhelming majority of *Częstochowers*: President - once again, Mojsze Oderberg; Treasurer - Sam Cwern; Vice-President - Rose Hofman; Minutes Secretary - Mojsze Cieszynski; Hospitality - Chaja Zevin; in the Executive [Board] - Adolph and Fannie Willinger; Finance Secretary - Ben Arkin and Cemetery Manager - Dave Shelvin.

With a particular closeness and familiarity, the newly-elected officials have begun to take on and carry out the different works - both communal and cultural - and, with special interest, pay attention to anything that has a connection to the old hometown of *Częstochowa*.

At the first conference of the United Czenstochover Relief, which was held in New York on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1945, the Society was represented by the especially sent delegate, Mojsze Cieszynski.



*A banquet of the Chenstochover Independent Verein in Chicago*

In 1946, the Society supported various communal institutions in Chicago, plus in Częstochowa and the Land of Israel, with the following sums: \$100 for the Working Land of Israel; \$100 to the United Czenstochover Relief in New York; \$25 for the HIAS; \$25 for the Jewish Labour Committee; \$25 for a convalescent home for poor people; \$10 for congratulations<sup>8</sup> on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sholem Aleichem [Folk] Institute in Chicago; \$10 for the [Aid] Association for Incurable [Orthodox] Jews and \$10 to the Rescue Fund for Jewish Refugee Writers.

The Society contributed a certain sum to the Chenstochover Ladies Aid Society sister [organisation], purchased several dollars' worth of tickets to a fish dinner in Chicago for the benefit of the Czenstochover Relief, donated a few dollars for congratulations [to be placed] in the Chenstochover Neighbourhood Educational Society's souvenir book and [gave] many more contributions to other organisations and committees that came to the Society's gatherings asking for aid.

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<sup>8</sup> [TN: This felicitation would presumably have been printed in a publication issued for the occasion.]