

ORENSTEIN Benjamin (1914-1974), sociologist, historian journalist, book editor. He was born on 23rd November 1914 in Warsaw, the son of Rabbi Eliezer Lajzer Orenstein and Cypora née Szpiro.

From the end of 1918, he attended the primary school of the “Tarbut” Jewish Educational and Cultural Association, which operated under the auspices of the Zionist Organisation. The school promoted modern Hebrew culture and educated the youth in a nationalist spirit. He continued his education in a secular high school.

In 1930, he made his debut in the Warsaw newspaper “Naje Fołks-Cajtung” [the “New People’s Newspaper”], which was an organ of the Bund, the Jewish socialist party, which fought against Zionism and which promoted Yiddish culture. However, he began working at “Unzer Ekspres” [“Our Express”], a magazine modelled on the Polish “red press”. There and in provincial magazines, he published historical articles.

Following the German invasion of Poland, he left Warsaw. From 26th September 1939 until 27th April 1942, he worked in Otwock, in the sanitary service of the “Zofiówka” Institute for Nervously Mentally Ill Jews. In 1941 and in the first months of 1942, he travelled to Częstochowa with his patients. From 28th April 1942 until 22nd January 1943, he was in a camp in Karczew. Shortly before the camp was liquidated, he escaped and headed for Częstochowa. He stayed in the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto” and, initially, worked in the HASAG-Raków steelworks. He then worked in HASAG-Pelcery. Following the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, he was barracked in HASAG-Pelcery. On 15th January 1945, he was transported to the Buchenwald concentration camp and, shortly after, to the Dora labour camp near Nordhausen in Thuringia. On 2nd April 1945, he was sent to Bergen-Belsen and was liberated on 15th April 1945.

He lived in Bamberg in Upper Franconia (Bavaria). He undertook tertiary studies. Orenstein was the director of the regional historical commission in Franconia, a lector in the Central Department of Culture and Education and worked together with the press. He was a member of the editorial board of “Unzer Wort” [“Our Word”]. He also published articles in several other magazines for former Jewish concentration camp prisoners, who were then in Displaced Persons camps in western Germany. He was elected chairman of the cultural committee of the Central Committee of the Częstochowa *landsmannschaft* in the American zone in Germany.

In 1946, the historian Dr Filip Friedman handed over to Orenstein some documents regarding the Council of Elders (*Judenrat*) in Częstochowa. He probably encouraged him to work on the history of the Jews of Częstochowa. (He also helped Orenstein in his initial work.) The book *Churban Czenstochow* (*The Destruction of Częstochowa*) was already finished in 1947, but difficulties in obtaining printing paper resulted in it being published in 1948. Orenstein was also editor of the single issue "Unzer Yortzait" ("Our Yahrzeit" ["Anniversary"]) and a number of other publications. Also in 1948, in Bamberg, he also published the book *Churban Otwock, Falenic, Karczew* (*The Destruction of Otwock, Falenica and Karczew*).

He soon left Germany and, on 28th October 1948, he came to Canada and settled in Montreal, where there were many Częstochowa Jews in a very active community. He was soon elected as the chairman of the local Częstochowa *landsmanshaft*, later also serving as its general secretary.

He continued his studies in Canada which resulted in him obtaining his doctorate in the 1950s. In 1952, the World Jewish Congress gave him an award for his study *Sociale problemn bai Yidn in der naziepoche* (*The Social Problems of Jews in the Nazi Era*). When, in 1956, work began on the book *Czenstochov* (Częstochowa), Orenstein was invited to take part. He was the author of the articles: *Częstochowa Jews in the Nazi Epoch (1939–1945)*, *Częstochowa Landsleit in DP Camps in Germany*, *Częstochowa Folklore in the Nazi Period* and *Dr Jakob Szacki's Contribution to the History of Jews in Częstochowa*.

In Montreal, in 1962, he published the book *The Life and Work of Dr Filip Fridman. A Brief Bio-Bibliographic Review*) and, in 1966, he edited the book *Czenstochower Landsmanshaft in Montreal*.

He died on 2nd December 1974 in Montreal.

Orenstein, *Churban Czenstochow*, passim; C. Rozenwajn, *Dr Beniamin Orenstein*, in: *Czenstochower Landsmanshaft in Montreal*, pp. 91–96; internet *Yiddish Lexikon* on <http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2014/09/binyamin-orenshteyn-benjamin-orenstein.html>.

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