



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Anesthesia History

journal homepage: www.anesthesiahistoryjournal.org

Charles Burstein, MD: First Director of Anesthesiology at Hospital for Special Surgery

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 September 2017

Received in revised form 5 February 2018

Accepted 19 April 2018

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Hospital for Special Surgery

New York Society for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled

History of anesthesia

Charles Burstein

World War II anesthesia

ABSTRACT

Charles L. Burstein was the first departmental Director and Chief of Anesthesiology at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. He joined the staff in 1937, when the hospital was still known by its original name of the Hospital for the Ruptured and Crippled. In 1940, it was renamed The Hospital for Special Surgery. Burstein, an early disciple of Emery Rovenstine, accomplished much to advance the Department of Anesthesiology through academic collaborations, education, clinical specialization, and research. He laid the groundwork for the future success of a department that continues to thrive to this day in clinical and academic orthopedic anesthesia.

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The Early Years

Charles Burstein was born in Paris, France, on April 22, 1906, to Jacob and Pearl (Gersik) Burstein.¹ His parents were natives of Russia, and his father was a tailor by trade. Dr. Burstein's parents immigrated to the United States in 1916 under the name *Bourstein* (Figure 1) on the SS Rochambeau, sailing from Bordeaux, France.² Charles had two younger siblings, Henry, born in France in 1913, and a sister, Mary, born in 1919 in New York, after the family's arrival to the United States.¹

Charles attended DeWitt Clinton High School and was a graduate of the class of 1924. DeWitt Clinton High, which had occupied three different sites over the course of its existence, was one of the largest high schools in the country.³ During Burstein's time as a student, DeWitt Clinton High was located on 10th Ave between 58th and 59th Sts, across the street from Roosevelt Hospital. It boasts an impressive collection of alumni, many of whom went on to become physicians⁴; contemporaries of Burstein included philanthropist Avery Fisher (class of 1924) and medical illustrator Frank Netter, MD (class of 1923).

Upon graduation from DeWitt Clinton, Burstein enrolled in Washington Square College, an undergraduate school of New York University (NYU). Washington Square College opened in downtown

Manhattan in 1903 and was known as the Collegiate Division of NYU. In 1913, it was renamed Washington Square College and was noted for having a diverse student body including women and recent immigrants.⁵ Burstein was active in college, serving as president of the French Club in 1926 as well as a member of the Caducean Society, an honorary premedical society.⁶ He received his Bachelor of Science degree from NYU in 1928.⁷

During his undergraduate studies, it appears that Burstein was also enrolled as a student at the Long Island College Hospital (LICH).⁸ LICH has an important history in both the NYC medical community as well as in the development of anesthesiology as a medical specialty. LICH, located in Brooklyn, which at the time was the third largest city in the United States, was established in 1858. It was founded by two physicians of German heritage with the intent of providing medical care to the indigent local German community. Within a few years, LICH attracted a group of distinguished physicians who chartered the institution as both a medical school and a teaching hospital, a unique arrangement at the time, modeled after European medical training programs.⁹

Adolph Frederick Erdmann (1867–1953), a graduate of LICH in 1897, was appointed as an anesthetist at LICH in 1900 and Instructor of Anesthesia in 1905.¹⁰ Later that year, the Long Island Society of Anesthetists, the precursor of the New York Society of Anesthetists and, later, the current American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA), was founded at LICH. In 1914, LICH established an anesthesia nursing

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LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

ALL ALIENS, in whatsoever class they travel, MUST be fully listed and the master or commanding officer of each vessel carrying such passengers.

S. S. **ROCHAMBEAU** sailing from **BORDEAUX** FEB. 20 1916

1 No. of Passengers	2 NAME IN FULL	3 Age	4 Sex	5 Calling or Occupation	6 Yrs. Res.	7 Maid or Single	8 Able to Read & Write	9 Nationality (Country of which citizen or subject)	10 Last Permanent Residence (Country, City or Town)	11 The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came.	
											12 U.S. Class
	Osaro	25	m	stevedore	yes	yes		Italy, Italian	Italy	Nicasio father Osaro cousin of grand	
	Aciano	21	m	stevedore						Casale father cousin of grand	
	Badolo	25	m	stevedore						Nicasio father cousin of grand	
	Bianko	25	m	stevedore						Nicasio father cousin of grand	
	Bhomkjfeld	25	m	stevedore				Russia, Polish	France	Paris	
	Bowstein	25	m	stevedore				Russia, Polish	France	Paris	
	Passa	35	f	housewife							
	Charles	25	m	stevedore							
	Boni	35	m	stevedore							
	Campuzano	25	m	stevedore							
	Callawaert	27	f	housewife				Belgium, French	France	Domme	
	Barthe	25	f	housewife							
	Rachel	25	f	housewife							
	Morris	10	m	stevedore							
	Rondeleg	25	m	stevedore				Spain	Spain	Sarratorra	
	Erozeguy	25	m	stevedore							
	Osquedo	25	m	stevedore				Italy, Italian	Italy	Naples	
	Eline	25	f	housewife				Russia, Polish	France	Paris	
	Freimovik	25	f	housewife							
	Anna	25	f	housewife							
	Bernard	25	m	stevedore							
	Gelman	30	m	stevedore				Russia			
	Lea	25	f	housewife							
	Jacques	25	m	stevedore							
	Georges	25	m	stevedore							
	Agostino	25	m	stevedore				Spain	Spain	Santander	
	Pomenca	25	f	housewife							
	Aguilera	25	f	housewife							
	Penelrios	25	f	housewife							
	Francisco	25	m	stevedore							
	Elena	25	f	housewife							

Fig. 1. S.S. Rochambeau Passenger Manifest dated February 20, 1916.

training program, only the fourth of its kind in the United States.⁸ By the time Burstein was a student in 1927, the specialty of anesthesia was an important aspect of the medical care at LICH; it is unclear, however, if Burstein was exposed to the specialty of anesthesia during his time at LICH.

Charles Burstein married Loretta Ethel Lipschitz on September 14, 1930, in the Bronx, New York. Loretta's (or Ethel, as Charles called her) family owned a small hotel in upstate New York. Charles worked there during summers in college.¹¹ After their marriage, "Charles Burstein" became "Charles L. Burstein" as he adopted Loretta's initial as his own middle initial.¹¹ The financial collapse on October 29, 1929, ushered in the Great Depression in the United States. This event may have played a role in where Burstein decided to pursue his medical training, as his family was of very modest means. The couple moved back to Paris where Burstein attended medical school at Université de Paris Faculté de Médecine. As a citizen of France, this education was free. He graduated in 1934.⁷ Charles and Loretta then

moved back to the United States. Their daughter, Joan, was born on November 26, 1941.

Burstein originally wanted to become a pediatrician because of his love for children. Loretta, however, encouraged him to consider the "up and coming" specialty of anesthesia because she knew her husband could "make a difference" in this new and exciting field of medicine.¹¹ Burstein joined the staff of Bellevue Hospital in 1935.⁷ Bellevue Hospital, founded in 1736, is one of the oldest public hospitals in the country. In 1898, Bellevue merged with NYU to become University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College. In 1935, the combined institutions became the NYU College of Medicine.¹² The year 1935 was also when Emory Andrew Rovenstine was recruited to Bellevue Hospital by Dr. Arthur Wright, Chairman of Surgery.¹³

Burstein served as a "Fellow in Anesthesia" from 1936 to 1937 at the NYU College of Medicine.⁷ Therefore, through Loretta's inspiration, his experiences at LICH, Rovenstine's influence, or some combination of the three, Burstein decided to pursue a career in anesthesia.

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