

FRANK Z. NEWMAN ON FAMILY HISTORY

From an Interview Conducted in 1976

By His Grandson David Forrest

My father was born in small town in Poland called Mariampol.¹ At that time, an aunt of his, his father's sister, was coming to America to live. They also lived in the same town of Mariampol.

My father's father² had been married at the age of twenty, or twenty-one. About two years after my father's birth, he passed away suddenly. His wife was then a widow and was unable to properly provide for her two sons — Philip Newman³ and my father, Samuel Newman.⁴

At that time, his aunt, his father's sister, Mrs. Kaplan,⁵ went to Chicago to live. My father was then several years of age. She took my father with her and raised him for six or seven years in her home.⁶

Later, his mother⁷ remarried and came to live in America in Cincinnati, Ohio.⁸ At 14 years of age, my father was forced to go to work to help contribute to the family's keepings.

His mother and her sister, Mrs. Charles Stein,⁹ both came to Pittsburgh. The sisters' maiden name was Rosenthal and apparently, while in Europe, were fairly well educated. They were taught French and English, which was helpful to them when they came to America. Both were born in this small town in Poland.

My father was forced to work at the age of 14. He and an elderly man went out peddling merchandise in the surrounding towns of Cincinnati and later Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He would be away from home as much as two weeks at a time. During this period that he was away, he studied as best as he could. When he returned to the big cities, he would go to the local YMCA and get the daily newspapers dating back to the date of his departure. He was well posted on all current events and had a particular desire to know all about politics. He was really

¹ Samuel J. Newman (1859-1918) was born Shumel Naman in September 1859 in Mariampol (also known as Marijampolė). Located in south-central Lithuania, Mariampol is about 50 miles west of the capital Vilnius. At the time, the town was part of Poland. More about Mariampol [here](#).

² Nachum (or Nochim) Naman (1835-1859).

³ Philip Edward Newman (1856-1919) was born Ezra Naman.

⁴ Samuel and Philip also had an older sister, Mnucha Leja, who died shortly after birth.

⁵ Itte (or Yetta) Naman (1848-1931) was Nachum's youngest sister. She married Hyman Kaplan and settled in Chicago.

⁶ Philip stayed behind to finish his schooling.

⁷ Samuel and Philip's mother was Rachael Naman (1835-1916). She was born Rocha Rosenthal in (or near) Mariampol, Poland. She remarried Moses Margolis and changed her name to Rachael Margolis.

⁸ While the family lived briefly in Youngstown, Ohio (not Cincinnati), they eventually settled in nearby Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Frank Newman corrects this mistake later in the interview.)

⁹ Rachael's younger sister, Esther, along with their brother George, arrived in America before her. Esther married Charles Stein and they had three sons. The two sisters remained very close all their lives.

conversant about election trends and how they would go.

At the age of 20 or 21, he left his home and went to Fort Wayne, Indiana. With a very small amount of money, he opened a shoe store. It didn't work out too well. He later joined his brother Philip, who was then married to a Redlick girl.¹⁰ They went to Grand Rapids, Michigan.¹¹

Later, he alone went to a small town called Devils Lake, North Dakota.¹² It took a hearty type of person to stand up to the various seasons of the year in that area. But while in a small department store of his own in this town, a prairie fire—it was great wheat country—enveloped the whole town and burned everything in the town to the ground.

He left the town and followed his brother, who had previously gone to Long Beach, California. He again joined his brother, and his wife and her family, there in Long Beach. He started selling life insurance with the New York Life Insurance Co.

A little later, he bought out a small department store in Hanford, California, and continued his life insurance work at night. It was customary for him to get merchandise from the wholesalers in San Francisco. Periodically, he would come to the city and visit the wholesalers.

In about 1889 or 1890, one of the department store owners, Mr. Scheyer, on 16 Sansome Street,¹³ invited my father to come to his home, where two of his wife's single sisters were living. My father met my mother, Julia Caro. After a period of time, they were married in 1890. My mother at that point was about 21 or 22 years of age.

My mother moved to Hanford to be with my father. But the unusual and extreme heat in the summertime in the Valley became unbearable to her. My father sold his business, moved to San Francisco, and couldn't find anything worthwhile in the business world there. Again, he moved and opened a store in Stockton, California, and lived there for three or four years. The same thing occurred—the extreme heat of the summertime was unbearable to my mother and so he had to give up the store. My mother, again, wanted to be with her two sisters in San Francisco, and he agreed.

Again, he couldn't locate a business that was worthwhile. He opened a store in Napa, California, in about the year 1900.

In 1906, the big earthquake and fire took place. My father's business was burned to the ground. He was able to save \$300 or \$400 that was in the safe and ultimately got about ten percent of the value of the store from German insurance companies.

¹⁰ Philip Newman married Pauline Redlick (1858-1929) in 1879. Pauline was the eldest daughter of Ludwig and Bertha Redlich. The Newman and Redlick families later went into business together in California.

¹¹ The year was 1880.

¹² There was a large community of Jewish homesteaders in and around Devils Lake in the early 1880s. More at <http://www.sojnorthdakota.org/>.

¹³ Sallusch Scheyer (1849-1937) and his brother operated a number of dry goods stores in San Francisco.

Then the thought came to him and others with the Redlick family that with the city destroyed, homes needed to be furnished. They went into the furniture business at 18th and Mission Streets.¹⁴ They stayed in that location from 1906 to 1917, and moved to the big large quarters and 17th and Mission Streets, which still stands to this day, the ownership in the hands of the Redlick family.¹⁵

I failed to state that my sister, Violet, and I were born in Hanford, California.¹⁶ My sister Genevieve was born in Stockton, California.¹⁷ And my brother Leslie in San Francisco.¹⁸ I'm the oldest.

Speaking of the earthquake and fire, I recall vividly the entire thing. I saw and heard everything. I was then about 12 years of age. I recall being awakened on April the 18th, 1906 at 5:15 a.m. The house shook laterally, and in an up-and-down motion as well, for approximately a minute and thirty seconds—and that's a long, long time with a severe earthquake. I saw my father, who had an adjoining room to the children's room, walk through a hallway staggering, like being drunk, and could hardly navigate to hold his feet on the ground.

We were then living at Scott and Fulton Streets, near Alamo Square Park. From that hill in the park was quite a vantage point overlooking the city. You could see the downtown area in flames and smoke both to the north, to the south, and on the eastern end of the city.

I personally didn't comprehend the seriousness of the thing at the time. I set out on foot to see my father later in the morning, at his place of business on Stockton Street. He in the meantime had left the business to go home, because the fire was approaching his business district. I walked both ways, a matter of several miles each way. We crossed each other undoubtedly. Later, my folks were terribly concerned about welfare. But I again showed up at the home. Shortly afterwards, that night or the following morning, that entire business was burned to the ground.

The actual losses from the earthquake itself, both deaths and the values, were not too great, as I recall and subsequently read. But the great fire was the main thing that destroyed the city, from the Embarcadero clear out to Polk Street, from the North Beach district to the South of Market district. It was all destroyed. Because of the lack of water, the only way that the firemen could combat the spread of the fire, the flames, was by the use of dynamite. They dynamite blocks in advance of the oncoming fire and were able to block the spread of the fire at Van Ness Avenue.

¹⁴ Samuel Newman served as the company's first president from 1906 until his death in 1918, after which his brother Philip became president. Frank worked for his father and went on to become manager of the business until 1935, when he sold his interest in the company and opened his own store.

¹⁵ An article in the *San Francisco Examiner* tells the story of the Redlick-Newman Co. and its famous "17 Reasons" sign. Photos and text [here](#).

¹⁶ Violet Newman (1895-1971) married Mel Schwartz and had one son, Richard.

¹⁷ Genevieve Newman (1900-1991) married Seth Klinger. They had three children: Robert, Jeanne, and William (Bill).

¹⁸ Leslie Newman (1904-1989) never married.

With the termination of the fire, the devastation was terrible to see. All buildings in the eastern part of the city, from Polk Street east, were destroyed. The fire department and the civil authorities warned us not to cook anything in the homes. We took our cold stove and, like everybody else, had put the stove out on the sidewalk and cooked our meals from there. At one point, with the oncoming fire, we left the house, with a Japanese boy that we had hired as a houseboy, and went out to Golden Gate Park and pitched a tent out of sheets and slept there for two or three nights until the fire had subsided in the downtown area.

Everybody was very helpful to each other. It was really an all-out community interest project. All the neighbors and friends tried to be helpful to each other. They had a slogan later in San Francisco: "The city that knows how." It is still used occasionally in print. After all, this was a beautiful community to live in. Everybody had faith in the city, from a commercial standpoint and from a living standpoint. Soon progress in rebuilding the city was quickly noticeable. Today, as we all know, we have probably one of the newest building areas of any large city.

Realizing how necessary it was to my mother, my sisters and my young brother, I started to take a real interest in the business. I was given that opportunity by the Redlick family. I stayed with the Redlick-Newman Co. until 1935. Later, because of business disagreements, I opened up the Frank Newman Co. several doors away from the old firm.

I recall the Great Depression. After the financial debacle of 1929, a great many people were thrown out of work. Thousands were standing on street corners selling apples and things just to make a livelihood. However, fortunately for us at the Redlick-Newman Co., it didn't affect our interests too badly. That period was of short duration, although it lasted four or five years—until Franklin Roosevelt was able to cope with the situation and instill confidence again in the public's mind that everything would work out alright. A similar depression period happened again during the Korean War.