

Who Was Fani Rosenbaum?

by Judith W. Rosenthal

The Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel in Herzl Memorial Park is a familiar landmark to Seattle's Jewish community, yet how many of us have ever asked, who was Fani Rosenbaum?



The Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel as it looks today.

Photo by Don Silverman

The scarce historical information about Fani describes her only in relationship to her husband and children. But wasn't that typical for women in her day? We know nothing of her upbringing and childhood, and there are no records of her opinions, beliefs, and thoughts. Not even a photo remains. Her life in the tenements of New York City must have been no different from that of the millions of immigrants pouring into the United States. With too many children to care for, too little money, and even less support from a husband who eventually disappeared, we can only suppose that she must have been a strong woman to keep her family together.

But if the dream of so many immigrants was to see their children rise above their humble origins, then Fani must have been proud of many of her children, particularly her son, Lewis Newman ("L.N.") Rosenbaum. And in return, Fani Rosenbaum will always be remembered by the chapel in Herzl Memorial Park which her devoted son, L.N., built and named in her honor.

The story I am about to tell evolved out of my on-going family history research. Fani was my maternal great-grandmother, and L.N. was my grandfather. Although I remember L.N., distinctly, I never knew Fani; she died long before I was born. However, from her death certificate, a number of other documents handed down to me, and from considerable "digging," I can tell you the little we know about her. What is absolutely certain is that Fani Rosenbaum died on April 21, 1910, while re-

siding in Seattle. She was buried in Herzl Memorial Park, and her grave is thought to be among the oldest in that cemetery.

Early Life in Europe and America

Fani was probably born in Hungary, possibly in October of 1851 or 1852, and I suspect that Newman was her maiden name, since several of her sons used "Newman" as their middle name. The man she would marry, David Rosenbaum, allegedly was born in May of 1850 in either Austria or Hungary. How David and Fani met and when and where they married remains a mystery. Census data suggests that they wed in 1870. As far as I can tell, the family lived in the area of Uzhhorod (Ungvar) which until 1920 was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Like millions of other immigrants, the Rosenbaums presumably journeyed to the United States hoping for a better life. Their point of departure would have been Bremen or Hamburg, Germany; after ten or more days at sea, they would have arrived at Castle Garden, the immigrant processing center (pre-Ellis Island) at the southern tip of Manhattan. Whether or not there were any friends or family members to meet and greet them there is not known.

After years of investigation, I have come to the conclusion that I may never find the name of the ship which brought the Rosenbaums to New York. It appears that David, Fani's husband, arrived in early October of 1886 or 1887. From existing records, it is not possible to tell if Fani and the children traveled with David or if they followed him. When David Rosenbaum became a U.S. citizen on January 19, 1892, in the United States Supreme Court, New York City, his citizenship would have encompassed his entire family (wife and children). In 1892 David Rosenbaum's address was 145 Ridge Street, in New York City; by 1900, David, Fani, six of their children, and a niece were residing at Sixth Street in Manhattan.

Fani seems to have given birth to nine children, five in Hungary and four in New York City. Precisely what David did for a living--first in Hungary and later in New York City--is unclear. When he became a citizen in 1892, his profession is listed as "peddler," but in the 1900 Federal Census his occupation is listed as "Dry Goods Store." Whatever his work entailed, it must have

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