

## 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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been a struggle to care for, feed, and clothe so many children. My grandfather, L.N., did not talk about his childhood, and L.N.'s wife would write that: "The story of his early life was a subject he disliked to discuss, unlike most so-called self-made men who revel in talking about their past, particularly if they had to overcome seemingly unsurmountable [sic] obstacles such as foreign background, hunger, poverty and crowded tenements. With my husband, his early life had been particularly difficult and was a period to be forgotten."

At some point, David Rosenbaum abandoned his family, and it is not known where he went, how he lived, or where he died. Perhaps his son, L.N., continued to hope that his father would reappear one day because Fani is buried in a double plot in Herzl Memorial Park. However, that space beside Fani remains vacant to this date.



Photo by Don Silverman

First it was her older children and later L.N. who provided for their mother. According to L.N.'s wife: "L.N. was devoted to his mother who seemingly was the only one in the family with any intellectual or artistic tastes; she was able to read and write in an age when most foreign women were illiterate. Also she spoke several languages and was fond of reading. She was a good woman who tried to keep her brood together but, when her husband disappeared and left for parts unknown, she had no alternative but to send her children to work as soon as they were able to earn money."

### **The Next Generation**

Of Fani and David's children, we know the following: Edward became a salesman who married and raised his family in New York City. Benjamin began his working career in a cigar factory. Harry at some point worked in real estate. James lost an arm in a factory accident. Charles ran off and joined the Army to serve in the Philippine Insurrection, lying about his age in order to enlist. He later moved to Hollywood and changed his name to

Harvey Howard. (Nonetheless, when he died in 1928, he was buried as Charles A. Rosenbaum with full military honors. His grave is in what is today called the Los Angeles National Cemetery.) As for "Willie," his occupational listing in the 1900 U.S. Federal Census is, unfortunately, illegible.

Of the daughters, we know that Gussie was married twice. Her first husband was an Italian contractor named Christopher Martini who died in an accident. Apparently, Gussie was a terrific Italian cook, and with the encouragement of Martini, she opened up a small but popular restaurant. Gussie's second husband was a Jewish cook named "Jake," but their attempt to run a restaurant in New Jersey failed. And finally there was Dora, who married Morton Lynn; I was told that Lynn worked for Dunn and Bradstreet. Dora (who died in 1955) and Morton (who died in 1965) are buried in Beth Israel Cemetery in Fresno, CA.

### **The Most Successful Son**

L.N. was the most ambitious of Fani's "brood" and in time, the most successful. He dropped out of public school in New York City at age thirteen and made his way to Nashville, Tennessee, where he was admitted to the bar shortly before his twentieth birthday. Sometime between 1902 and early 1903, L.N. relocated to Seattle, and on February 9, 1903, he was admitted to the Washington State Bar. Shortly thereafter, his mother and several siblings also moved to Seattle.

In the 1905 Seattle City Directory, Mrs. Fannie [sic] Rosenbaum is listed as living at 2011 Yesler Way along with her children Dora, a clerk at Bon Marche; James, a clerk at Pacific Mercantile Law Co; and William, a stripper for the Puget Sound Cigar Company. Fannie [sic] appears again in the 1909 Seattle City Directory as "widow of David," living at 10-119 18th Avenue along with William and Dora. Another of Fani's sons, Edward Rosenbaum, also moved to Seattle. In 1905 he is listed as a traveling salesman, boarding at 105 12th Avenue South, and in 1909, his career is given as "real estate," and he is living at 163 22nd Avenue.

By 1905, L.N.'s law career was beginning to expand into finance and real estate. He was helping to support his mother and several siblings, and some of his brothers would eventually work for him. On March 19, 1905, L. N. wed Bella Weretnikow, a young Russian-Jewish immigrant who graduated in 1901 as a member of the first class of the University of Washington's Law School. Bella and L.N. had five children, Adrian, Joseph, Fran-

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ces, Ruth (my mother), and Doris. Their marriage lasted fifty years, ending with L.N.'s death in 1955.

### Fani's Death

When Fani died on April 21, 1910, she had lived in Seattle only five years. She was not yet sixty years old. According to her death certificate, her home was at 768 Bellevue Avenue North; she was a widow and housewife, and the cause of death was heart failure complicated by Bright's disease. As reported in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, funeral services were held at the chapel at Butterworth and Sons, 1921 First Avenue, at 11 a.m. on April 22, 1910, prior to her burial at Herzl Memorial Park.

By 1914, L.N., Bella, and their children had moved east, with L.N. going into business on Wall Street. He became an extremely wealthy man who helped finance business and real estate transactions across the United States. Unlike so many others, L.N. did not invest in the stock market and came out of the Depression even richer than he was before the market crashed. His family resided in a spacious Park Avenue apartment, and all of his children attended university.

### The Memorial Chapel

The seven thousand dollar donation for the construction and furnishing of the Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel was apparently the result of a special visit made to L.N. in 1936 (presumably in New York City) by Rabbi Philip A. Langh of Herzl Congregation.

The architect of the Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel was B. Marcus Priteca, a Scottish Jew famous for the many theatres he designed for the Pantages chain. Although he was not the primary architect, Priteca also was involved in the design of the Paramount Theater apartments and commercial building which was one of L.N. Rosenbaum's many real estate ventures in Seattle. When Priteca was hired to design the Memorial Chapel, he was known throughout Seattle's Jewish community as the architect of Congregation Bikur Cholim (1912-1915) and of the Jewish Settlement House Educational Center (1914-1916).

Although The Jewish Transcript reported that the design of the chapel was "modeled on Hebrew University" in Jerusalem, my mother told me that the domed structure was based on Rachel's Tomb. Rachel -- wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph - went into labor and died on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem while giving

birth to Benjamin. Jacob buried his wife by the side of the road, marking her grave with a stone monument. Some doubt whether the structure known as Rachel's Tomb (now a building constructed by Sir Moses Montefiore in 1841 and more recently fortified as a result of on-going political instability in that part of the world) shelters her actual grave. I cannot tell you whether there were any domed buildings on the campus of the Hebrew University in 1936; the University had opened its doors only in April of 1925.



Photo by Don Silverman

The Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel was dedicated on Sunday, September 12, 1937, and a dinner in L.N.'s honor was held in the Herzl Synagogue vestry at 6 p.m. As reported in the Transcript, dedication of the Memorial Chapel was the result of "20 years of activity by Peter Thomas, auto body builder and longtime Herzl congregational worker, as president of the synagogue's Chevra Kadisha, burial society." Apparently, completion of the interior of the chapel, its furnishing and the installation of seats, took place several years later.

And so we remember Fani Rosenbaum -- immigrant, wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother - a humble homemaker who devoted herself to her family and who died before the age of sixty. We can only imagine how many other women - nameless and faceless -- lived similar lives, offering their children the American dream. Fani, however, in one way was privileged, by having a chapel built in her honor and named after her by a successful and devoted son. So, the next time you enter or pass the Fani Rosenbaum Memorial Chapel, I hope that you will think of Fani and all those other anonymous women, who did not make it into the history books, but whose descendents today live comfortably and prosperously across the United States.

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