

EIGHTY YEARS IN A SEARS MAIL-ORDER HOUSE: THE NEWMANS OF CHERRYDALE

By

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Among the many Arlington homes built with plans and materials from Sears, Roebuck and Co., one of the oldest is the Newman residence at 1823 North Nelson Street. The house is notable for other reasons, too. Only the Newmans have lived there since it was built in 1910. Cherrydale Baptist Church began in its living room. One of its sons, Irving Newman, was among the five Cherrydale boys who died in the First World War.

The House

Sears kit houses were first marketed in 1908,¹ just a year before the Newmans purchased the tract on which the house stands.² Construction began shortly thereafter, with G.R.J. Newman and relatives, apparently all amateurs,³ doing the work. The house was completed in 1910.⁴

The do-it-yourself kit, which the 1908 catalog labels "Modern Home No. 52," yields a two and one-half story cement-block structure with hip roof, a single shed-roofed dormer, a full-width front porch, large living and dining rooms, and four upstairs bedrooms. The original blueprints (which survive in somewhat damaged condition) were modified by deleting the kitchen which jutted out from the basically square floor plan and converting the downstairs bedroom into a kitchen. A stairway was installed for easier access to the attic, and the dormer was given a hip roof. The attic later became a fifth bedroom.

Most of the woodwork still remains, including large pillars on the front porch and sliding doors between living and dining rooms. The original chandeliers are still in use, in the living and dining rooms, taking the form of three chains diverging from a fixture in the ceiling and supporting a glass bowl about sixteen inches in diameter containing three bulbs. In the bedrooms and downstairs hall, each chandelier has a single chain supporting a brass discus, from which are suspended two bulbs with glass shades. Most of these lamps are still controlled directly at the fixture rather than remotely from wall switches. The well from which water was originally drawn is still under the back porch but now filled in.

Later modifications to the house included digging out the basement, installing indoor plumbing, adding a full-width porch and a dormer to the rear, giving the front porch a concrete floor, adding cement-block pedestals to the front porch pillars, and modernizing the kitchen and bathroom. Even so, the place looks pretty much as it did in 1910.



The G. R. J. Newman family beside their Sears mail-order house, probably 1917 or 1918. Front row (left to right): Allan and James. Rear: Eugene, Irving, mother Mary Ann Elizabeth and father G. R. J.

The Builder

George Robert Jackson Newman built the house and lived there until shortly before his death in 1947. He was born near Arcola, Loudoun County, Virginia, September 2, 1865, the sixth of seven sons of James Thomas and Amelia Elizabeth (Lanham) Newman. His father, James Thomas Newman (1830-1883), was reportedly drafted into the Union Army while prospecting for gold in the Pike's Peak gold rush. Wounded in the leg at the Battle of Valverde, New Mexico (February 21, 1862), he was discharged and returned home.⁵ James' father, Theron Wesley Newman (c1784-1852), owner of Ellenvale in Catharpin, Prince William County, Virginia, was a farmer, partner in a store, and a lay preacher active with Sudley Methodist Church. Theron's father, James Newman (before 1765-1826), appears to be a son of Thomas Newman (c1730-1777) and Elizabeth Vawter,⁶ whose marriage is recorded in Rose's Diary.⁷ If this is so, G.R.J. Newman is a descendant of the immigrant Thomas Newman (c1620-1700), who came from England on the ship "Plaine Joan" in 1635.⁸

Let us return to the builder of the house. As a young man G.R.J. Newman moved into Washington, D.C. and eventually found employment as a stationary engineer, i.e., an operator of immobile steam or gasoline engines used to power factories at the turn of the century. Here he met a young widow, Mary Ann Elizabeth (Godfrey) Mandley, whose husband Julian and three year old son Lloyd had died just a few weeks apart in 1890, Julian in a railroad accident and Lloyd of spinal meningitis. On February 20, 1895, G.R.J. and Lizzie were married, with G.R.J.'s uncle, the Rev. Theron Wallace Newman, a Baptist minister, performing the ceremony.

Exactly one year later, their first child, Irving, was born, followed in succession by three more sons, Eugene (1898), Allan (1900), and James (1905), making a total of twelve sons in a row born to that particular line of the Newmans! The young family lived first in southwest Washington, then in the Del Ray section of Alexandria. Finally they moved to Cherrydale to have more space, living at 1917 North Nelson Street while the Sears house was being built.

Founding of Cherrydale Baptist Church

Members of the Newman family had been active in evangelical churches for several generations before they became involved in the founding of Cherrydale Baptist Church in 1913. Thomas and Elizabeth (Vawter) Newman were possibly no more than nominal Anglicans when they were married by the Rev. Robert Rose in 1747, but within a generation the family had been influenced by the Great Awakening. Thomas' son, James, gave his son, Theron, (born c1784) the middle name "Wesley," and the latter was active as a lay preacher among the Methodists at Sudley Church and donated an acre for the site of St. John's Episcopal Church at Catharpin, Virginia.⁹ Theron Wesley's second son, Theron Wallace Newman (1832-1903), was an ordained Baptist minister who served as pastor of the Grove Baptist Church of Goldvein, Fauquier County, Virginia, from 1875 to 1891, before founding the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church of Morrisville, Fauquier County, Virginia, where he is buried. It was he who married G.R.J. and Mary Ann Elizabeth (Godfrey) Newman.

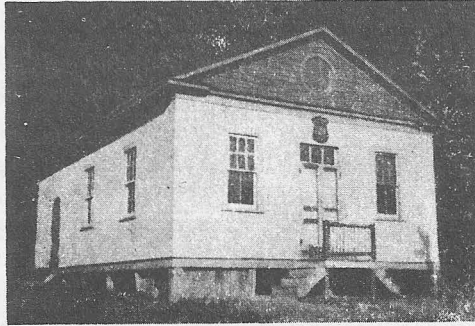
When the Newman family moved to the newly developing Cherrydale area, they found no Baptist church in the neighborhood. Anxious to have one, they contacted a Mr. Wilkes of the Vaughn Class of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Their request was passed on to Gerald H. Payne, a lay preacher from Metropolitan Baptist Church, who came to Cherrydale in May of 1913, surveyed the area, contacted numerous Baptist families and began a series of prayer meetings. The first of these prayer services, in the latter part of May, was held at the home of G.R.J. Newman.

1913

1916

Third Anniversary

Sunday, October 1, 1916



.. Cherrydale ..

Baptist Church

Cherrydale

Virginia

The original Cherrydale Baptist Church building, taken sometime prior to the congregation's third anniversary service, October 1, 1916.

Just a few weeks later, on June 15, a Sunday School was organized in the old Schutt Hall, with thirty-eight people present. A Mr. Poole, of Metropolitan Baptist Church, was superintendent and G.R.J. Newman was his associate. Preaching services were held after Sunday School, both on Sunday afternoon. The church was formally organized on September 30, with thirty-two members, and officers were elected October 8. Gerald Payne was called as first pastor and G.R.J. Newman was elected both to the trustee and deacon boards.

In the winter Schutt Hall was found to be unsuitable, so the trustees rented a storeroom on what is now Lee Highway for services. The next spring, services were moved to a tent on property just north of Cherrydale Station. Soon the congregation had purchased property of their own (now the 2100 block of North Quebec Street) and the tent was moved there. Work began immediately on a Sunday School house, with volunteer labor under the direction of Frank Horner. Services were held in the new building for the

first time on May 1, 1915.

Rev. Payne continued as pastor until early in 1915. He was succeeded by Rev. M. Ray Japhet in June of 1915, when the membership stood at sixty-two. By the third anniversary service, October 1, 1916, the membership had grown to one-hundred nine, including all six Newmans. Some of the other families belonging to Cherrydale Baptist at this time included the Abells, Bauckmans, Ensors, Fosters, Frenches, Grubbs, Horners, Millers, Pattons, Potters, Ryans, Wills, Williams, Woods and Yates.¹⁰

In later years the congregation split, and the Newmans went with the faction that formed the United (now Trinity) Baptist Church on North Quincy Street. The family subsequently affiliated with the First Baptist of Clarendon. Yet the Newmans are grateful to have had a part in founding a church which has done so much and which continues to be active in the spread of God's good news of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Lt. Irving T.C. Newman (1896-1918)

Irving Thomas Chapman Newman, oldest son of G.R.J., was one of five Cherrydale boys who died in service during the First World War and whose names are commemorated on a memorial stone erected by the D.A.R. on the Cherrydale School grounds in 1926.¹¹ Irving did not die in combat, but in an airplane accident here in the United States.

Irving enlisted in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps at Fort Myer, Virginia in November 1917. He received his ground school training at the U.S. School of Military Aeronautics at Princeton, New Jersey (finishing his course in March, 1918) and began flight training at Rich Field, Waco, Texas in April. Passing his flight tests in September, he was immediately assigned to duty as a flight instructor at Rich Field. According to his commander, Lt. Allen Clark, Newman "was considered one of the best pilots turned out by this field, and at the time of his death had few, if any, superiors at this post."¹²

On October 17, Irving was notified that his mother had just passed away in the flu epidemic then sweeping the nation, and he immediately came home to Cherrydale for her funeral. Back in Texas only two weeks later, Irving and 2nd Lt. Ralph Claggett were flying cross-country between Waco and San Antonio when the fatal accident occurred. Taking off after a refueling stop at Austin, the plane either side-slipped or nose-dived from about 100 feet, killing Newman but only slightly injuring Claggett.¹³

Later History of the Newmans

Back in Cherrydale, life went on at the Newman house in spite of the double tragedy. G.R.J. found strength in his God. The next spring, Eugene

married Kathleen Riley of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, and the couple moved in to keep house for the rest of the family. The two had one son, Richard,(1920) before Eugene died of pneumonia in 1928. Kathleen and her son stayed on at Nelson Street until Richard finished high school and Kathleen remarried in the late 1930s.

Meanwhile, Allan had dropped out of high school to join the Army just a few months before the end of the War. Chafing under his father's discipline, he eventually left home to seek his fortune in the West. After working a year or so in Texas and Arizona, he returned to Cherrydale in 1924. Thereafter he completed high school and law school at night while working for the federal government. Graduating from National University School of Law in 1929, he became a Death Claims Examiner for the Veterans Administration. In November, 1935, when he was nearly thirty-six years old, he married Lois May Gardner of Louisburg, Kansas. After several years living in Falls Church and the birth of two children, Perry (1936) and Beth (1938), the family returned to Cherrydale to keep house for Allan's father, G.R.J., for a couple of years until other arrangements could be made. No such arrangements were ever made, and Lois Newman is still keeping house there almost fifty years later!

Another double tragedy struck in 1947. G.R.J. Newman died full of years (age eighty-one) in a nursing home in Dunn Loring, Virginia on February 9. Sixteen days later, his youngest son, James, died suddenly from an aneurism at age forty-one. Mother and oldest son had also died just sixteen days apart almost thirty years earlier.

After the estate was settled, Allan bought out the shares of the Newman house which fell to his nephew, Richard, and James' widow, Eva. After some remodeling, the Sears house continued to serve as home for Allan and Lois and their children, eventually numbering five with the addition of Robert (1941), James (1947), and Ellen (1952).

All the Newman children attended Cherrydale School,¹⁴ Stratford Junior High and Washington-Lee High School and were active in the First Baptist Church of Clarendon. In 1956, Allan sold about 100 acres of undeveloped land in Fairfax County at Braddock and Shirley Gate Roads, providing sufficient funds to put all the children through college.¹⁵ Perry is now a physicist with NASA in Hampton, Virginia. Beth (Frohme) is a homemaker and technical editor in Houston, Texas. Robert is a seminary professor near Philadelphia. James is a commercial artist with the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., and lives next door to the old Newman house in Cherrydale. Ellen (Stempler) is a homemaker and C.P.A. in private practice in Vienna, Virginia.

Counting a few residents of only a month or so, at least twenty-two people and four generations of Newmans have lived in the Sears mail-order house

at 1823 North Nelson Street, and a fifth generation has visited it. Though the plans and materials for the house cost only about \$1,000, the place is still in pretty good shape nearly eighty years later. Not a bad bargain for a poor young family, even if money went a lot farther in 1908!

Notes and References

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¹Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1986), pp. 19-20.

²Arlington County Deed 121, pages 144-145, dated August 16, 1909.

³When storm windows were constructed for the house in the 1940s, all the windows were found to be of different sizes!

⁴According to Allan L.C. Newman (1900-1976), who lived in the place almost continuously from its completion to his death, and who helped dig out the basement.

⁵Union records have him enlisting in Company B, 2nd Colorado Volunteers (commanded by Capt. Theodore H. Dodd) on December 14, 1861. President Lincoln's first conscription order was August 4, 1862, according to Bruce Catton, *Terrible Swift Sword* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 404. It is not known what his Virginia neighbors thought of his story when he returned disabled late in 1862.

⁶See William B. Newman, "The Newman Family of Virginia" in William Fletcher Boogher, *Gleanings of Virginia History* (Washington, D.C. 1903; reprint ed., Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 237-282. W.B. Newman records that Thomas Newman (c1730-1777) had at least two sons, Thomas and Richard (p. 249). Deeds in Prince William County (Y-267) and Essex County (D32-355) suggest that James is also a son, and D.A.R. records from Jefferson County, Kentucky, would add sons Edmund and Obadiah. Thomas' will appears to have been recorded in one of the Prince William County will books lost during the Civil War.

⁷Diary of the Rev. Robert Rose (Colonial Williamsburg Research Library), December 27, 1747.

⁸"Newman Family of Virginia," p. 246. This assumes that W.B. Newman's identification of the Thomas Newman who died in 1700 as the 1635 immigrant is correct.

⁹The ruins of St. John's Church, mostly stone foundations measuring 30 by 45 feet, may still be seen about 50 yards back from the intersection of Virginia routes 234 and 701 (northwest corner), about 3/4 mile west of Catharpin. See references to the church property in Prince William Deed 23, pp. 169ff.

¹⁰Details on the formation of Cherrydale Baptist Church come from a twelve-page pamphlet published for its Third Anniversary Service on October 1, 1916. The booklet contains a three-page history of the church to date and a complete list of officers and members. A picture of the pastor, M. Ray Japhet, is included, as is the program for the anniversary service. The cover has a picture of the original church building, which I believe is the small building north of the old sanctuary that still stands on North Quebec Street. The buildings are presently owned by the United Pentecostal Church.

¹¹For a picture of the stone, see Kathryn Holt, *Cherrydale: Cherries, Characters, Characteristics* (Sterling Press, 1986), fig. 107. When Cherrydale School was torn down in 1973, the stone was moved to Lyon Park where it still stands.

¹²Allen Clark, "Irving T.C. Newman: An Appreciation," *Rich Field Flyer* (November 7, 1918), p. 3.

¹³Ibid.; *Austin Statesman* (November 4, 1918), p. 2. The two accounts seem to disagree on the altitude of the plane just before it crashed.

¹⁴Their father Allan, uncle James and cousin Richard also attended Cherrydale, and Richard attended Washington-Lee. In the 1910 picture of students at Cherrydale School published as fig. 49 in Holt, *Cherrydale*, Allan is 2nd from the right in the 2nd row.

¹⁵This land has figured in the news twice since. It was purchased by a Vietnamese couple in 1984 for about double its assessed valuation but turned out to be unsuitable for development. Recently George Mason University purchased the tract from the couple for almost three times what they paid for it. See *Arlington Journal* (January 12, 1987), pp. A1, A14; *Washington Post* January 13, 1987), p. B3.



SCHOOL FACILITIES IN CLARENDON

The public school is an up-to-date eight-room brick building, splendidly lighted and equipped with modern hygienic school furniture and sanitary appliances. It is presided over by a principal and teachers holding normal training certificates, who come directly under the supervision of the Division Superintendent of Schools. There is also a specially trained teacher in domestic arts and sciences, a trained school nurse, and a medical and dental inspection clinic for pupils. The total enrollment for the ten-month school term ending June 20, 1920, was three hundred and seventy-four.

From *Clarendon, Virginia*, published by The Clarendon Citizens' Association, 1920.