



Portrait of Francis Newman, the subject of this article.

The portrait shows Francis dressed in US Army Infantry officer uniform from the War of 1812 (1812-1815), painted by Charles Bird King between 1816 and 1818 (when Francis died). The original is held by the Fredericksburg, Maryland (USA) historical society.

Mysteries surrounding Francis Newman who “disappeared” across the Atlantic around 1795, leaving a wife and family behind.

My Newman ancestors were a pretty wealthy lot who enjoyed the income and privileges of land ownership for almost two hundred years. The estates that they accumulated during the early 17th century included Evercreech Park, Sparkford Manor and the estates of North and South Cadbury (all located in South Somerset). Finally, shortly after the Restoration, Col. Richard Newman (who had been an active supporter of the Monarchy during and after the Civil War) purchased the estate of Fifehead Manor (North Dorset) which the family had held under lease since 1408.

Col. Richard passed ownership of Fifehead and Evercreech Park to his eldest son Richard who seems to have carried the title “Richard Newman of Evercreech Park” even though he predeceased his father by more than 10 years. At any rate the Fifehead and Evercreech estates passed into the ownership of this Richard's descendents being the then senior branch of the family, while (unusually in those days of primogeniture) the estates of Cadbury and Sparkford were inherited by Col Richard's youngest son Francis Holles Newman.

The senior branch of the family expired in 1775 with the death Frances Newman, the eldest of three spinster daughters of Sir Richard Newman, grandson of Col Richard Newman, after which the estates of Fifehead and Evercreech passed out of the family, leaving only Sparkford and Cadbury in the hands of Col Richard Newman's

great grandson, Francis Newman of North Cadbury. And it is with Francis Newman of North Cadbury that this story begins.

It will be as well for the reader to keep a track of the various Francis Newmans that appear in the story, not to mention their female counterparts, the Frances Newmans. They may be summarised as follows: Francis Newman of North Cadbury (great grandson of Sir Richard) had three daughters, the eldest being Frances. Frances married her cousin Francis Newman, nephew of the aforesaid Francis Newman of North Cadbury, and they had a daughter called Frances Newman (as well as a son Francis who died young). There are, of course, more Francis's and Frances's than this, but these are the main characters in the story that follows.

The basic facts of the story are:

- The younger Francis married his first cousin Frances around 1778 when both were in their late teens. They begat four children, only one of whom (Frances) survived childhood.
- Francis left his wife in May 1785, most probably going to France with another woman. However he met up with his wife again briefly in London in October of the same year, a month before the birth of her last child to him.
- In August 1786, a lady called Lydia (alias Naomi) Ferguson produced a child by Francis. The child was baptized Jean Elisabeth Francois Georges Newman on 7th Feb 1787 in Moulins Cathedral in France, where the *Moulins Archives Registered No.489 (Baptisms-Marriages, 1785/1788)* states that his parents were "*High Lord FRANCIS NEWMAN, Knight, Baron and Lord Cadbury, Sparkford and Lord and Sovereign of Fullen, besides his other lands. and My Lady Nioman Furgusson his wife*"!
- Meanwhile in Nov 1786, the first of several Bills of Complaint was lodged in the Chancery Court by Francis's wife and daughter (both Frances Newmans) seeking payment of money that they claimed Francis owed them. In this instance the claim was for payments of £100 a year from the Cadbury and Sparkford estates.
- Sometime around 1789 - the year of the French Revolution - Francis set sail to the USA with his new "wife" Lydia (alias Naomi), and established himself as a tobacco estate owner at La Grange near Port Tobacco in Maryland.
- There is evidence that 1792 Lydia was back in England and gave birth to a daughter Elizabeth, though this daughter may have been born later to Francis's second wife Elizabeth Hannah Friers.
- In August 1796, Lydia died and was buried at Baltimore in Maryland. Francis went on to marry Elizabeth Hannah Friers who produced several more offspring, from whom has descended a large tribe of American Newmans who venerate Francis as their patriarch.
- A portrait exists (as attached to this article) showing Francis dressed in the uniform of an American infantry officer. The portrait dates from between 1816 (when the artist began working in the Maryland area) and 1818 when Francis died.
- Lydia's son, Jean Elisabeth Francois Newman, grew up to become a captain in the American army that fought against the British in the War of 1812.
- Meanwhile, back in England, old Francis Newman of North Cadbury had by then sold all of his property and moved, with his daughters Frances, Jane and

Catherine, to a small house or cottage in the village of Piddletrenthide in Dorset where he died in 1796.

- Francis's uncle and father-in-law, Francis Newman of North Cadbury, carried with him to Piddletrenthide the family portraits and several heirlooms which he left to his youngest daughter's son, Francis Rogers, on condition that he changed his name to Francis Newman-Rogers. This he did, and these family artifacts are now in the possession of his descendent, Jonathan Newman-Rogers.

Those are the "facts" as I know them. Now for the rumours and the mysteries:

- The story passed down through my branch of the family (and which I believed until I was contacted by one of his American descendents in 2002) was that Francis Newman was "committed for crime to the High Court, found guilty and migrated to America where he died in 1817 without recorded male issue" and that "the Cadbury estate had been sold in 1799 to the Bennett family to pay off Francis's debts." Furthermore, it was said that "the Bennetts caused all Newman memorials in North Cadbury church to be expunged". [The latter claim may be true because there is just one Newman memorial extant in the church – a small plaque in memory of baby Francis, firstborn son of Francis and Frances.]
- Investigations by the late Cliff Ranson, a descendent of one of Francis Newman's US offspring, suggest that Francis's problems arose when he tried to pre-empt his future inheritance in order to borrow money which eventually ended with his incarceration for debt. Furthermore, Cliff believed that Francis's wife Frances raised a mortgage on her father's estate in order to rescue her husband from debtors' prison, and that the estates were sold to when she and/or her husband were unable to repay the loans. Unfortunately, Cliff provided me with no supporting evidence of these stories, and my attempts to find evidence of Francis's incarceration have so far failed to elicit results.
- A completely different story was given to me by Campbell Newman, a distant cousin, who suggests that it was not the younger Francis Newman who lost the family fortune, but his uncle Francis Newman of North Cadbury. The older Francis, believing that the French Revolution would spread to England and that he would lose his property if not his life, he gambled away his fortune. According to this account, the elder Francis "... lived a life of extravagant pleasure. He had three daughters, the eldest, Frances, fought with her father, eloped and married her cousin Francis at Piddletrenthide in 1778. On May Day 1788, the two younger daughters were married in a lavish double wedding at North Cadbury, probably in the fashionable rococo style, to Rev. James Rogers of Newnton, Wiltshire, Vicar of South Cadbury, and to Sir William Yea, baronet of St. James, Taunton. Fond of gambling, alone in a large house (his wife having predeceased him in 1784), and with mounting debts, Francis lost everything he owned in an all-or-nothing gaming bet one evening in 1789/90. Disowned by his two flamboyant younger daughters, he was taken in by and reconciled to his elder daughter Frances and nephew Francis [the one who went off to America!] at Piddletrenthide on the Piddle River. He died there on Christmas Day 1796. His only surviving grandchild was Frances Charlotte, who married Robert Cox, an alderman of the City of London and Justice of the Peace." [Note; There are several inconsistencies in this story – for instance, old Francis had a grandson Francis Newman-Rogers, whose descendants survive. Also, it seems probable that it wasn't until 1796 that Francis surrendered possession of Cadbury to the Bennetts, and the information has been given to me suggests that his two younger daughters were married in 1783 and 1793, though Catherine may have married in 1788.]

- There are some interesting speculations as to who Lydia Ferguson might have been. One suggestion that has been raised by Jerry Gandolfo, another American descendent of Francis, is that Ferguson was Lydia's married name, and that "she may have been born Lydia Jennings of a very rich family in the colony of Virginia (immediately across the Potomac River from Port Tobacco, Maryland). One of the Jennings was an English colonial governor of Virginia." Jerry further notes that Sir Edwin Sandys (d.1629) controlled the Virginia Company and promoted the self-government of the colony in 1619." Sandys happened to have been the maiden name of Francis's grandmother Hanna. Was there another Virginian connection that Francis might have exploited?
- There is also an interesting speculation about the family's connection with France, which might have had something to do with Francis and Lydia's decision to have their baby in that country. Jerry Gandolfo offers the following: "The godfather of baby Jean Elisabeth Francois Georges Newman's French baptismal certificate was Jean-Antoine de Charry, marquis des Gouttes. Des Gouttes was a French Admiral who was defeated by the British Admiral Edwin Boscawen in 1758 at the Battle of Louisburg in Canada during the Seven Year War. Boscawen would have, as was the custom at the time, have taken des Gouttes as prisoner and put him under house arrest with a family of suitable and equal status in England. Earlier, Boscawen had been sent to India with a Major John Mompesson. Also, Francis Newman's mother died early, I've learned that he was raised by his grandmother, the former Miss Eleanor Mompesson. Francis was born in 1759, about the exact time des Gouttes would have been under "gentleman's" arrest in England."

Conclusions:

Many interesting questions remain unanswered. For instance:

- What really happened to cause the family to lose its wealth and its estates? Was it Francis the uncle's or his nephew Francis's actions that forced the sale of the Newman properties? And what exactly were those actions?
- Did the young Francis spend time in debtors' prison, and was he rescued by his wife, only to subsequently desert her for another woman? If so, what were his debts, when was he imprisoned and in which prison?
- Where did Francis disappear to after deserting his wife in May 1785 and his brief meeting with her in Oct of the same year?
- Who was Lydia Ferguson, and was it she who took Francis to America and established a new life for him there?
- How did Francis come up with the cash to purchase the La Grange estate so soon after he arrived in Maryland and so soon after he was supposedly penniless in England? Did Lydia provide the money?
- Was there any family connection between Sir Edwin Sandys and Francis's grandmother Hanna Sandys, and if so, did this have any relevance to Francis's story?
- Does the portrait of Francis Newman dressed in the uniform of an American infantry officer mean that he, like his son Jean Elisabeth Francois Newman, joined the American army and fought against his homeland in the War of 1812?

Anyone who has visited my website (www.newman-family-tree.com) and attempted to read through the page covering the life of the "young" Francis Newman will have

discovered it to be a jumble of anecdotes and speculations which are not easy to find a path through. As this article demonstrates, somewhere underneath the speculation and anecdotes is a fascinating story of love and passion, incarceration and desertion, fortunes lost and found, adventures and travel, birth and death – quite enough to fill a book or a movie.

In fact, one of Francis's American descendents Norita Newman became a family historian and wrote a book titled "The Beast, The Sheep, and The Chariots" based on the life and times of her great grandfather Francis Newman.