

Eric Otto Sonneman was born as Erich Otto Sonnemann, December 1, 1910, at Neustadt/Haardt/Pfaltz, Germany, and lived in Mannheim, Germany from 1915 until February 27, 1939, when he left to emigrate to the U.S. His brother, Max, was born Dec. 15, 1915 and emigrated to the U.S. in fall of 1939.

His father, Kurt Sonnemann, was a music and theater critic of the *Mannheimer Theaterblatt* and other newspapers and published two volumes of poetry. Kurt Sonnemann was a nephew of Leopold Sonnemann, founder and owner-editor of the liberal newspaper, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, founder of the German People's party and member of the Reichstag, ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold Sonnemann](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_Sonnemann))

Eric's mother, Berta nee Herrmann, came from the village of Freudental in Wuerttemberg, and her brother kept the family farm where Eric visited and worked in the summer (also young people planning to emigrate to Palestine received training on the farm).

Eric Sonneman was the Mannheim chairman of the Jewish youth group *Bund Deutsch-Jüdischer Jugend* and led youths on visits around Germany, even after Hitler came to power. He received an affidavit from a wealthy and distant relative, Emma Loveman, in Nashville, Tennessee, after his mother remembered her in a dream. He then applied for a U.S. visa in 1937, and had an appointment at the U.S. Consulate in Stuttgart on November 10, 1938, the day after Kristallnacht. Nazis did not discover his family on Kristallnacht because they had recently moved and had not yet registered.

Eric Sonneman left Germany in February of 1939 and took a boat from Holland to America, arriving in New York on March 17, 1939 (St. Patrick's Day). He could not find employment in New York, lived with the Loveman family of Nashville for a couple months. The Loveman family helped provide affidavits for his brother, Max, and for his parents, who traveled through Siberia, China and Japan in the summer of 1940. Eric Warburg, of the Warburg banking family, also provided affidavits and financial help.

In Eric Sonneman moved to Chicago in the summer of 1939 and lived there, on the South Side until his death in July, 2004.

After brief employment at a photography store, he decided to start his own business with photo chemicals that he invented. His first big orders were from Montgomery Ward and Sears & Roebuck. His business, Merix Chemical Company, on the south side of Chicago, expanded its line to include a variety of anti-static products, including one that was used on Apollo 11. He had patents in the U.S., U.K. and Canada, and worked at Merix until was 91, when he closed the business.

He married Edith Arshack in August, 1941. Her parents had emigrated from Russia (in 1906 and 1913) and settled in Rock Island, Illinois. On July 13, 1943, Eric

Sonneman became a naturalized citizen. Eric and Edith Sonneman had four children: Joseph, Eve, Toby and Milly.

Eric Sonneman, interviews. With Edith Sonneman (wife). These were recorded on cassette tapes in 1986, but parts of the interview were inadvertently partly erased, and recorded again over the same tapes a few years later.

#### 1. Interview 1: Life in Germany:

- Sonnemann family in Munich, Germany
- Herrmann family in Freudental, Germany
- Visits to Herrmann family farm in Freudental, Germany
- Schooling
- Seeing Jewish immigrants from Poland
- Meeting with Rabbi Max Grünwald
- Role as Mannheim leader of *Bund Deutsch-Jüdischer Jugend* (organization of German-Jewish youth, and experiences, 1934-1935)
- Employment:
  - Andreae-Noris Zahn, Mannheim
  - Lippman and Bernstein, Ludwigshafen
  - Gamber, Diehl and Co., Heidelberg (color photography, lab assistant)
- Kristallnacht, November 1938
- Appointment with U.S. Consulate for visa application
- Turning down Jewish community offer for technical people to emigrate to South Africa

#### 2. Interview 2: From Germany to America

- Background on family, father's occupation; friends
- Developments in Germany after World War I, inflation
- Perceptions of Nazi government
- Immigration, hiding and capture of relatives
- Eric's immigration: train to Holland, ship to U.S.
- Leo Sonnemann (uncle), Eric Warburg
- Stay with Loveman family in Nashville, Tennessee (April to June, 1939)
  - Learning English
  - Affidavits for brother, parents
- Move to Chicago
- Job at Central Camera, Chicago

- Beginning of Merix Chemical Company (1940); (Lowenthal's Restaurant); Order from Montgomery Ward; Sears Roebuck
- Isaiah Israel Synagogue; meeting and marrying Edith Arshack
- Hearing at State Department about visa for Frieda Berger (aunt)