

Biographical Note

Marcus Stern (Born Frankfurt, Germany, 1823 - died San Jose September 1905). According to his obituary (SJ Daily Merc September 23, 1905), he apprenticed in Frankfurt in the harness and leather trade. He left Germany for New York when he was about 23, arriving late 1846. He moved to Poughkeepsie and worked there until about 1851, when he left for California via the Panama Isthmus, arriving San Francisco in early 1852. After working in SF for about a year, he went to Santa Clara and entered in business as a harness-maker for tanning firm owned by a Mr. Kline. In 1854 he purchased the stock and good-will of the Ellinghouse Saddlery, located on Santa Clara Street (where Mercury-Herald building was located at time of his death, 1905). Soon afterwards he removed his harness store to Market Street, but in 1855 sold out and returned to Germany.

Gained U.S. citizenship 19 January 1855 in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. [see notes & copy of citizenship document], then U.S. passport dated February 2, 1855 [see family notes]. Marcus returned to Germany to marry Regina Oppenheimer (Fredricka Rickchen Regina Oppenheimer, born Bergen, Germany circa 1836-1839). According to family notes in the Stern papers, they were married on April 18, 1855 in Frankfurt am Main. According to Stephen Kinsey's "They Called It Home...", the Sterns were married at the U.S. consulate. [Kinsey also notes the marriage license is in the possession of Mrs. Bruce Stern, Los Gatos].

Marcus & Regina had two children: Albert (1857-1866) and Frederick Markus, or Marcus (1856-1937).

According to his obituary, after they married, they returned to Poughkeepsie, N.Y., with the intention of living there, but ended up returning to California. By the time of the 1860 census, the Sterns were back in San Jose Township. Marcus was listed as a saddler, age 35, living with Regina (age 22), Frederick (age 4), and Albert (age 2). He had \$2000 in personal assets, and \$2000 in real estate, according to the census. There he started another business in the Balbach building on Santa Clara Street.

During this time, Marcus was one of the founding members of the Bickur Cholim Congregation in San Jose (now Temple Emanu-El), serving as Trustee, Vice President and Treasurer over the years. He was also a member of the Torrents volunteer fire department in San Jose in 1863 [Mrs. Bruce Stern also has this exempt fireman certificate according to Kinsey].

In the 1870 census, Marcus is listed as a harness maker, age 45, living with Regina (age 34), Frederick (age 14), and a "servant" named Sarah Stern, 16, born in Germany (possibly a relative). Assets are listed as \$3000 in personal, and \$5000 in real estate. Their address is within the Alviso Post Office, in San Jose's First Ward.

The 1880 census lists the Stern family of three at 197 Third Street, San Jose, in the Second Ward. Both Marcus and Frederick (age 24) are listed as harness makers. The 1891 Voters Registration lists Marcus as a saddler, 5' 4" tall, with brown eyes, grey hair and a dark complexion, with a "sear on right cheek." [The registration also gives his date of naturalization as June 1855 in Dutchess County, N.Y., a slight discrepancy with the documents in the family papers]. Son Frederick is identified as a "merchant," height 5' 5 ¼."

The 1900 San Jose City Directory gives their address as 275 North Third Street, which might have been a street renumbering rather than a physical move. The census notes that he owns his house, without a mortgage. He is listed as a "peddler," but this may have been a mishearing of "saddler."

Marcus died in September 1905. His death was reported locally in the San Jose Daily Mercury and the Evening News, as well as in the Los Angeles Times and Los Angeles Herald, all in 23rd September issues. Both Marcus and Regina are buried in the Home of Peace section of the Oak Hill Cemetery in San Jose.

Frederick Marcus Stern (28 February 1856 - October 25, 1937). According to a profile in the San Jose Mercury, "Fred" Stern was born in an adobe house near Market and St. John Streets. By the time of the 1880 census, he was working as a harness maker with his father, and according to Marcus Stern's obituary, Fred took over the family business in 1886.

Fred married **Hattie Morris** (b. Stockton, Calif. circa 1870 - d. San Jose, Calif. July 21, 1942) in San Francisco in June, 1891, at Temple Emanuel. The wedding was covered in the San Francisco Call (June 19, 1891) and SF Chronicle (June 22, 1891). Dr. Jacob Voorsanger officiated. Fred and Hattie had three sons: Walter F. Stern, Bruce M. Stern, and Harold K. Stern.

Fred Stern was a member of the Palo Alto Parlor, Native Sons of the Golden West, according to their marriage announcement. According to a profile in San Jose Metroactive (March 1998) he was more interested in politics and the Bickur Cholim temple, which he joined on April 1, 1879, than the family business. Fred served on the San Jose City Council (1887-1889) and Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors (1896-1905). He was also a volunteer fireman with the Alerts; a Shriner and Scottish Rites 32nd degree, according to his obituary.

According to the family papers, his estate left property and the leather firm of Fred M. Stern, Ltd. to widow Hattie, and upon her death, to his three sons. [When Hattie died in 1942, her estate was only valued at \$5k].

Fred Stern residences (based on city directories):
St. John nw corner 8th Street, San Jose (1900)
349 East St. John (1907-8, 1911)
Hotel St. James (1915)
60 South 16th Street (1920, 1922)
29 Randol (1924, 1925)

Harold K. Stern (born San Jose 1899 (?) - died San Jose July 21, 1967) took over the Stern business between 1932 -1937 [see Mercury News April 3, 1932; Hattie's obituary indicates he took over after Fred died in 1937] and was focused on the business, not interested in religion or politics. Harold married Elizabeth E. Stern (born Wisconsin, died San Jose November 13, 1958) in San Diego in 1924; they separated on November 9, 1947 and were divorced in November 1947.

Harold and Elizabeth had two children. Suzanne Marion Bloom (born San Jose January 12, 1926, died Santa Rosa May 19, 2004), and Howard Morris Stern (born circa 1930).

Stern married his second wife, Eleanor R. Guerra of San Jose, on January 17, 1951. Their two children were Judy Stern and Janet Heffernan.

Harold had an apartment building constructed at 530 North First Street circa 1948. He sold a commercial building at 66 West San Antonio to Joseph Gulla in October 1950. According to his obituary, he was a member of San Jose Rotary (1942-1965) and Masonic Friendship Lodge No. 210. He attended San Jose High School and College of the Pacific, where he was in the Army ROTC program. He was a veteran of World War I.

Howard Morris Stern (born circa 1930, died 1986) took over the Stern business between 1962-1967 after father Harold died [Harold's obit says that Howard had been running it for the last 5 years due to Harold's poor health]. Howard ran the business but also got involved in politics and community service. Howard attended San Jose High School and Stanford University, where he was a member of Alpha Tau Omega.

Howard married **Gloria Louise Dillon** (born San Francisco May 14, 1931 - died San Jose October 8, 2021) in 1954 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Burlingame. They had two sons: Clay (d. 2004) and Brad (d. 2011).

Howard's personal papers provide the following information:

- Served with U.S. Army in Korea (referred to in 1951 ad as presently serving in armed forces)
- President of re-formed San Jose Republican Assembly in 1962, acted as delegate to the California Republican Assembly
- Member Republican State Central Committee, 1962
- San Jose area chairman for re-election campaign of Rep. Charles S. Gubser (R-Gilroy), 1962 (he directed five successive political campaigns for Gubser, who retired in 1974)
- Santa Clara County Republican Central Committee resolution chairman, 1966
- In 1966, he and private investigator Sam Alvid accused Economic Opportunity Commission directors and staff members of violating personnel regulations and conflict of interest. They were subsequently sued \$16m for libel by Jose L. Lopez, Victor H. Camacho, and Monica Amador.

- In 1970-71 he lost contest for Republican County Central Committee chairmanship against Frank Verlot of Sunnyvale after incumbent John F. Foley did not seek reelection.
- In 1971 he ran for vacant council seat held by Norm Mineta
- In 1974 he was appointed campaign chairman for Bart Collins, candidate for San Jose mayor (Collins lost to Janet Gray Hayes)
- Director, San Jose Chamber of Commerce (1974)
- In July 1984, he was elected president of Pacific Neighbors

Stern's business history:

There is some discrepancy about the year the business was established. It has been described in various San Jose newspapers as "San Jose's oldest retail shop," "California's oldest leather goods store," "oldest family business in Silicon Valley" and "San Jose's longest continuously operated business in one family and longest with one management and policy."

According to Stern catalogs, the business was established by Marcus Stern circa 1852 as a harness shop and saddlery; however, a Metroactive article dated March 12, 1998, says that Stern moved to San Jose in 1852, and established the business two years later. A Mercury News article on April 3, 1932, celebrating the business's 80th birthday, says it was founded in 1852. However, Stern's obituary suggests that the business wasn't founded until after 1855, when he returned to San Jose after returning to Germany to get married. He had started a business in 1854, but sold up before going to Germany, reestablishing a business once he returned to San Jose.

Fred M. Stern Incorporated, Ltd. was formed in August 1930, with directors Fred M. Stern, Hattie M. Stern and Harold K. Stern. The first board meeting was October 10, 1930. Stock was transferred from Fred M. Stern and Hattie M. Stern to Harold K. Stern in 1938.

In 1952 Harold Stern accepted a certificate of membership in the Century Club from Governor Earl Warren in Sacramento, celebrating the 100th birthday of the business. According to a San Jose Mercury News article circa 1941, by this point saddles were only available by special order; in 1952, Harold discontinued saddle business altogether (see Mercury News, 1968). He was responsible for opening branch stores, including stores in Fresno (1339 Fulton Street, later 1246 Fulton Street) and Modesto in the 1930s and 1940s.

Howard Stern opened the first store in a shopping center at Town & Country Village in 1960.

According to an article in 1998, Clayton Stern was slated to take over after his mother Gloria Stern retired. (Clay died in 2004)

Store dates/addresses:

1852: Unknown; no record

- 1854: Marcus Stern purchases Ellinghouse Saddlery stock on Santa Clara Street, then moves it to Market Street
- 1855: Marcus sells up and returns to Germany
- [1855?]: Balbach building, 40 East Santa Clara Street
- 1870: 294 First Street (per directory - this is the earliest listing)
- 1874: 332 Santa Clara Street (per directory; under H. Stern; Fred listed as bookkeeper)
- 1875: 332 Santa Clara Street (per directory; under H. Stern; Fred listed as bookkeeper)
- 1876: 330 Santa Clara Street (per directory; Fred listed as bookkeeper with M. Stern)
- 1881-82: 330 Santa Clara Street (per directory)
- 1884-5: Kirk Building (per directory; under Marcus; Fred also listed as saddle and harnessmaker)
- 1887-88: 40 East Santa Clara (per directory; F. M. Stern and Marcus both listed as saddle and harness makers)
- 1886: Fred takes over (per Marcus obit)
- 1889: 40 East Santa Clara (F. M. Stern listed as harness and saddlery; M. Stern only listed under residence)
- 1890: 40 East Santa Clara (Fred M. Stern harness, saddles, bridles, etc.; Marcus listed as "capitalist" at residential address)
- 1892: 40 East Santa Clara (Frederick M. Stern saddlery warehouse, stockmen's outfits a specialty; Marcus listed as "capitalist" at residential address)
- 1893: 40 East Santa Clara (same listings as in 1892)
- 1894: 40 East Santa Clara (Fredk M. Stern harness; Marcus only listed as residential address)
- 1895-96: 40 East Santa Clara (same listings as 1894)
- 1897-98: 40 East Santa Clara (Frederick M. Stern harness and saddlery, stockmen's outfits a specialty; also listed as Supervisor, Third District; Marcus listed as capitalist at residential address)
- 1899: 40 East Santa Clara Street (Frederick M. Stern harness and saddlery; also Supervisor, Third District; Marcus only listed as "with F. M. Stern" at residential address)
- 1900 40 East Santa Clara
- 1905 40 East Santa Clara
- 1906: 77 North First Street - temporarily moved after 1906 earthquake to 140 East Santa Clara while 77 was being rebuilt)
- 1906-7: 77 North First Street
- 1907-8: 77 North First Street
- 1911: 77 North First Street
- 1915: 77 North First Street
- 1916: 75 West St. John (rented for harness repair); main shop on 77 North Market
- 1918: 77 North Market Street
- 1917: 77 North Market Street
- 1920: 77 North Market Street
- 1922: 77 North Market Street
- 1924: 161 West Santa Clara (ads: Fred M. Stern "The Trunk Man"; Fred M. Stern "The Leather House", Fred M. Stern "Leather Goods and Trunks")

Stern Family Papers Biographical Note (History San Jose, Catalog No. 2022-11)

1925: 161 West Santa Clara
1927: 161 West Santa Clara
1928: 161 West Santa Clara (ads: Fred M. Stern "The Leather House")

As Stern's Leather Store

1929: 235 South First Street (ads: "Stern's Leather Store")

As Stern's Leather Goods

1930: 235 South First Street

As Fred M. Stern Ltd.

1935: 235 South First Street (ad simply reads "Sterns 'Since 1852'")
1938: 235 South First Street (Harold takes over)
1940: 235 South First Street
1945: 235 South First Street
1947: 66 West San Antonio (Harold in charge, as Stern's Luggage and Leather Goods Store; moved to W. San Antonio in April 1947)
1949-50: 66 West San Antonio (building sold to Joseph Gulla in 1950)
1951: 155 South First Street (as "Stern's Leather Goods", Harold in charge with Howard)
1952: 155 South First ("Stern's")
1955: 155 South First
1960: 155 South First (opened Town & Country Village store)
1965: 155 South First AND 412 Town & Country Village (as Stern's Luggage and Leather Goods)
1968: Grand opening ad October 2, 1968 for 23 Almaden Fashion Plaza; close downtown store, which was sold to redevelopment agency & torn down
1977: Advertised as 125th year in business

Sources: U.S. Census records, voter registration, California death records, gravesite information, Newspapers.com, San Jose City Directories, San Jose Mercury News, family papers