

# FROM MAINZ LAWYER TO CHILLIWACK FARMER

## SAMUEL SUSSEL (NÉ SIGWART SÜSSEL) 1894-1979

After serving in the German army during World War I and completing his Doctorate of Laws at the University of Heidelberg, Samuel Sussel was called to the bar of Mainz in 1923. In 1928 he married Anne, a physician with a specialty in paediatrics. They had a son, Walter, in 1931 and a daughter, Hannah, in 1933.

Samuel Sussel with parents Heinrich and Bertha, circa 1910.



When the Nazi party came to power, Sussel was one of 18 Jewish lawyers in Mainz. Because of his service during the First World War, he was not disbarred but was nonetheless prohibited from appearing in court. Because of Nazi racial policies, Anne was no longer allowed to treat patients in hospitals, marking the end to her career.

As the situation for German Jews worsened, the Sussels visited the Netherlands and Palestine to find a temporary home, with the thought of eventually returning to Germany. This changed when Samuel learned from a local judge that his name appeared on a deportation list. The family's goal shifted to seeking permanent refuge.

In 1935 Samuel and Anne, avid hikers, began walking regularly near the French border so as not to arouse suspicion of their planned escape. At a predetermined time, they walked across the border without looking back, leaving their two children behind in the care of a governess, Fraulein Erna. This was an agonizing decision but a necessary one; Samuel and Anne risked being detected by Nazi surveillance and shot.

After arriving safely in France, Samuel sent a coded message to the governess who took Walter, aged four, and Hannah, aged two, to the border. The children were pointed down a path and simply told to keep walking. They were met by their uncle, Paul Wertheimer, and reunited with their parents in Strasbourg.

The family left France after several weeks and temporarily lived with Anne's parents, who had by this time moved to Holland. The Sussels left their home and professions behind in Germany. They were eventually permitted to ship their furniture out of Germany after negotiating the surrender of their bank accounts to the Reich.

Anne's sister and brother-in-law had settled in Canada and encouraged the Sussels to join them. In 1937, at a time when Canada was not welcoming to Jewish refugees, an Edmonton law firm sponsored Samuel as a fellow lawyer. The firm, Friedman Lieberman & Newson, asked Samuel to join them, however he would have had to article for three years before being able to practice law. With a family to support, which by this time also included Samuel's mother and Anne's parents, he decided instead to start a business importing tools from Europe.

Following the outbreak of hostilities with Germany during World War II, all Germans living in Canada were classified as "enemy aliens". Samuel had to report periodically to police to confirm his address and occupation. The war also halted trade and the Sussels had to search for a new livelihood. On a road trip through British Columbia in 1940, Samuel and Anne were struck by the beauty of Chilliwack. They purchased a 25-acre farm in the Fraser Valley. With no experience in agriculture, the family reinvented themselves as farmers.

The farm had 14 cows and 500 chickens. All work was initially done by hand, 12-14 hours a day, seven days a week. Although strenuous, the work was rewarding. Samuel Sussel maintained his good humour through good times and bad.

Due to the political influence of Friedman Lieberman & Newson, the Sussels received their naturalization papers several months prior to the end of the war in 1945. It was a very emotional and proud moment for the family. Samuel's neighbours soon began to rely on Sussel's legal and accounting background for assistance with their taxes. He gave up farming and set up a full-time accounting and tax consultancy in 1950.

The family observed the Sabbath rituals at home and commuted to celebrate the High Holidays with the Jewish community in Vancouver. Samuel Sussel passed away at age 85. His son Walter lives in Chilliwack with his wife Beryl. One of Samuel's granddaughters currently practices law in Vancouver.

*With thanks to Walter and Beryl Sussel, and Sharon Meen.  
All images courtesy of Walter Sussel.*



Samuel Sussel in his German army uniform during World War I, circa 1916.



Samuel Sussel at age 30.

Iron Cross certificate awarded to Samuel Sussel for service during WWI.



Samuel Sussel at his Chilliwack farm, circa 1944.