

Sussman, Cecil and Natalie (nee Kroll)

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My Time as Mayor of Kimberley 1964 – 1965

Election to the City Council

Cecil wrote in February 2018: Kimberley had been very good to the Sussman families, (see the family story p 11) so when, despite my youth, I was approached by several civic organisations to contest a municipal by-election, I agreed. With the support of Natalie, I allowed my name to go forward for the election to the City Council.

We were completely inexperienced in civic matters, but with Natalie taking charge of our campaign, I set about working towards the goal of winning the election.

My opponent was a well-known hotelier, and it was assumed he would do very well. However, under the leadership of Natalie, the voters supported us, and I won the election. I must mention that this was before politics in council affairs. Today councillors are paid very handsomely, whereas we gave our services completely voluntarily.

On being welcomed into Council, I was allotted several portfolios, among which were the Kimberley School Board and the William Humphreys Art Gallery. Together with several other donors, Sussman Bros contributed to a new wing to house their additional works of art. Of all the many portfolios that I was connected with – these two were my favourites. I felt I could contribute something meaningful to them, as art and music played a big part in my life. **Cecil Jack Sussman - Mayor of Kimberley 1964 – 1965**



I had spent ten happy years as a Councillor, Deputy Mayor and Mayor, with my gracious wife Natalie by my side. Our three lovely children, Sandra, Jeff and Laura shared these years, young as they were. We included them where possible – they joined us at inaugurations, and as part of the welcoming civic reception applauding Kimberley super **backstroke swimmer Karen Muir**, (right in her springbok blazer) on her return home, after becoming the world swimming champion, at the age of 12. (she was to go on to smash 17 world records in her short career before becoming a doctor). (It is said she trained some of the time in Mendel Apter's pool in Memorial Road)



My rise in the Council was rather rapid, and in April 1964 I was chosen as Mayor, although only 39 years old. Coincidentally my first civic function was to welcome Mr Harry Oppenheimer (opening the Kimberley Show) who's illustrious father Sir Ernest, had been a former Mayor.



As it was the Mayor's prerogative to invite guests to civic functions, I included many of the younger community members. On being elected Mayor, a Mayoral Sunday is held to mark the occasion, and in my case, it was naturally in our beautiful Shul, with Rabbi Werner (the Mayor's Chaplain) officiating. Above, left to right, the Town Clerk Mr Bebbington (with wig) Mayor Cecil, Rabbi Werner, Mayoress Natalie and the Deputy mayor and Mayoress Peggy and Edgar Davis

During my term I tried very valiantly to get tertiary education for Kimberley, and often flew to Pretoria to interview several Ministers in this matter. However, my pleas fell on deaf ears. I am pleased to know that to-day Kimberley has a university. I was also very outspoken on the subject of a new station for Kimberley and a new market.



Kimberley was enjoying post war boom years, when new suburbs were established, a **Technical College** and a beautiful theatre were inaugurated, and we were indeed privileged to host many international dignitaries. I was Mayor when the first electric train arrived in Kimberley. My personal venue preference for civic functions was the **William Humphreys Art Gallery** (left).

Vera Lynn, the sweetheart of the armed forces of world war 2, was entertained by us in the Mayor's Parlour in the new civic centre. Rawicz and Landauer, world renown duo pianists performed at the Theatre and we had the pleasure of entertaining them. We hosted a civic reception for the Cape Town Orchestra celebrating their 75th anniversary year. Marion Friedman a talented pianist and child prodigy, also performed in the city at this time. We had a visit by a Colonel Laing, who was the sole survivor of the battle of Magersfontein, during the Anglo Boer war. I also had the honour and pleasure of conferring the Freedom of the City on Russel Elliot.

Russel Elliot was a practicing attorney in the city, who used his influence and drive for years, to get the Technical College for Kimberley. He also very cleverly persuaded the Public Works Department to erect our beautiful **Kimberley Theatre** in the guise of an "Assembly hall" for the college. He was an ardent supporter of the Kimberley Show, and it was due to his enthusiasm that this event went on for very many years. Russel was also a very keen Rotarian and contributed to many of the club's achievements. The only other "Freeman" of the city of Kimberley was William Humphreys.

Natalie, was often called upon to perform civic duties, which she carried out with obvious enjoyment and dignity as she is a quintessential people person and enjoyed meeting people and entertaining official guests. I worked with dedicated Municipal officials, from the Town Clerk to Willie, the driver of CC1, (a Daimler purchased during my term, costing R11,000 - the price of a bicycle to-day.)

Jewish Mayors of Kimberley

Many Jews served as City Councillors over the years. During the period I served on the Council, we had two living Jewish ex-Mayors, **Gustave Haberfeld** (1953-1955) and **Lionel Jawno** (1959-1961). Previously **William Sagar** (1906-1908) **Ernest Oppenheimer** (1913-1915) and **Bernard Cohen** 1931-1932) had also occupied the Mayoral Chair. Gus became Mayor again after me, in 1965-1967.

After 10 years of service to the City Council, I felt it was time to devote more attention to my family and business. It was with reluctance that I retired, after having enjoyed the challenges and rewards of serving my city. I was honoured by having a street in Kimberley named after me.

Written by Cecil Sussman, Cape Town, February 2018

Sussman Family: Farming and Meat Supply (wholesale and retail)

Philip Sussman arrives from Taverig in 1900 and starts farming

The Sussman family in Kimberley were involved both with farming and meat supply from the early 1900s, until the business was sold to Roelcor Meats around 1973. The account below is from Cecil himself and also the pictures and the childhood memories come from Cecil and Natalie's son Jeff Sussman (now in Melbourne) – memories from his trips to the farms on Sunday mornings and visits to the butcher shop mainly to stock up on biltong!



Cecil's father Kollen (Kalman) Sussman was born in Taverig, Lithuania (in the south west of the Kovno Guberniya). He arrived in Kimberley in 1912 to join his elder brother **Philip**, who had come out in 1900. The family had a background in dairy farming, so it was natural for Philip to turn to what he knew best – farming. He acquired farms in the Kimberley area, farming with cattle and sheep. By 1912, his business had expanded so much that Philip was able to send for his brothers, Isaac (who became a diamond buyer) and Guttel, **Kollen**, and George who joined him in the business.

Cecil's mother, Gertrude (Hoffman) was born in Johannesburg in 1895. She arrived in Kimberley in 1918 and worked as a nursing sister. She died in 1960

aged 65 and is buried Kimberley. Her parents were Israel and Zelda Hoffman (who lived till aged 98) of Johannesburg. (Above, picture of **Kollen and Gertie Sussman**)

Cecil was born in Kimberley in 1924. His siblings were a brother Leonard and sister Cynthia (Hesselson), both now deceased and a Sister Daphne (Furman) b 1933 now living in Auckland, New Zealand.



Cecil says growing up in Kimberley was 'The very best'. He matriculated from **Christian Brothers College (CBC)**. When I asked why many of the Jewish boys were sent to the catholic school Natalie said that perhaps the parents' decision was influenced by the fact of it being a private school, not influenced by Government policy. Also, they wrote the Joint Matriculation Board exam and not Government Senior Certificate. She says that the boys were very happy at CBC. Brother McManus was a legend in his lifetime and set a high standard in moral values as well as academic studies, sport and other cultural

pursuits. Cecil and his brother Len, were in both the Pipe Band (see above). They were known as the 'MacSussmans'. Cecil's son Jeff when he went there, preferred the Bugle Band.

Cecil joined the South African 6th Division and served in Italy for 2 years, after which he went into the family business. Cecil says: I Joined Sussman Bros in 1946, in all its activities. In 1966, two years before my father died, I took over the management and running of the farming enterprises, attending monthly livestock sales in Griquatown, which I continued doing until I left Kimberley in 1973, to make a new home for my family, who were at university in Cape Town.

Entrepreneurs in the Meat Industry

The family prospered as farmers, livestock dealers and entrepreneurs in the Meat industry. They established Kimberley Ranching Co and the **Premier Meat Supply**, the most significant butcher shop in Kimberley in De Beers Road, (see the building right) which dealt in wholesale and retail. They pioneered cold storage facilities.

Cecil wrote in 2018: I often accompanied my father (who had many farms in the surrounding area) to the stock fairs at Griquatown. Our first stop (6am) was at the Day and Night café, where we bought "rockbuns" (favourite with both my dad and myself) and then Bloom's Bakery to buy a dozen



loaves of bread for the herders of any livestock that we might buy at the Stock Fair. Then on to Griquatown and across the very pont across the Vaal at Schmidtsdrift that you describe Geraldine in your Bergman family article. I crossed many times and was always excited when doing so'.

There was a **Kosher section** and a wholesale section managed by different members of the extended family - **Mr Katz and Mr Cvi**. There were also many smaller butcher shops and **an icemaking facility** as refrigeration was still many decades away.



In this photo inside the Premier Meat Supply - probably taken around 1950, we can see left to right Cecil, Kollen, Guttel Sussman, Chaim Katz (?), unknown, Mr Cvi

Kollen was regarded by his peers as an expert judge on the weight of livestock and was seldom out by even a kilo. Kollen died in 1968 aged 77 and is buried in Kimberley.

Cecil mentioned – when I asked about him - that Jack Sussman – married to Sadie and father of Leon, was a cousin of his father Kollen. Jack was also in the meat trade in Kimberley with Newton Meat Market in Jones Street – but this was not part of Sussman Bros – rather in opposition though the remained friends. You can see Leon Chonin’s table of Kimberley businesses here <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Kimberley/bus.html>.

Pioneer of butcher shops within supermarkets

Jeff also understands that Kimberley pioneered butcher shops within Supermarkets when one of the licences was converted to be used within Woolworths. He remembers many trips Cecil took to Pretoria to negotiate with the authorities to comply with the Health Regulations associated with this then unique concept.

Farming and De Beers

From 1912 when Philip’s brothers arrived, Sussman Brothers acquired several more farms in the Kimberley district. Philip Sussman became a good friend of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer – the Head of De Beers and leased farms (minus the mineral rights) from De Beers. (De Beers had bought up many farms in the Griqualand West area, securing the mineral rights, in case new diamond pipes were found)

Natalie says, I think you are correct in assuming that some of the farms were bought or leased from De Beers. Philip Sussman did lease farms from De Beers and I know of one Farm that was still leased during Kollen's life. It is interesting that most of the farmers were Jews they were called 'Boere Jode' who had a very happy relationship with the Afrikaans speaking population. Natalie asks: 'Has the story of the Boere Jode of South Africa been recorded?'

Two main farms Jeff remembers that there two main farms, stocked with cattle and sheep.

Platfontein was located about 15 kilometres outside of Kimberley on the road to Barkly West. The size of the farm was 17,000 morgen and was home to large herds of Springbok, Blesbok and other wildlife. Another feature of the farm was Bushman's Koppie with 2000-year-old rock engravings. (see page 7)



Grassrand – a smaller farm located in the direction of Schmidtsdrift which was mainly cattle grazing and, being more bushy, was also frequented by Kudu. In the late 1960's a neighbouring farm, **Perdeberg** was also acquired.



There were also other farms that were leased. One called **Mia Mia** was located near Petrusberg on the Bloemfontein road as well as some farms owned by De Beers.

The agreement, Jeff understands, was a handshake deal between Sir Ernest Oppenheimer (left) and Kollen Sussman and was honoured until the farms were sold in mid-1970's.

The De Beer's connection surfaced annually during the June / July Springbok hunting season with many De Beers officials invited to Kimberley to participate.

Keeping Game

It also seems that one possible proviso of a helpful deal to immigrant Jews who may not have been wealthy enough at the time to buy their own farms, might have been not only that De Beers had the mineral rights, but that the farmers should nurture plentiful herds of native game (springbok, steenbok, blesbok, and kudu) to keep up stocks for the De Beers shooting parties – so that the company officials and visitors could be invited on shooting parties.



Natalie Sussman just sent me this picture of 'One day's De Beers shoot, May 20, 1897'

In this picture, we see Rhodes 4th from the left, with officials from De Beers and the results of the days shoot, May 20 1897.

The challenges of farming in the Northern Cape

Natalie Sussman, (widow of Cecil who sadly passed away in 2019) remembers that farming was a great challenge around Kimberley due to frequent droughts and when the clouds gathered with thunder and lightning and not a drop of rain our friend and family driver used to remark 'Don't worry Sir, it is practicing, the rain will come'. It took many calls to obtain feed for the cattle and a great worry was finding borehole water, Cecil was a successful breeder and very proud of his pedigree bulls. He attended all the cattle and sheep sales with his dad Kollen Sussman, so he learned from the best.

Platfontein Farm with Rock engravings

Cecil has sent these photographs of engravings that were on his farm. He says: 'Whilst farming at Platfontein, I came across beautiful rock engravings and after a while realised that they were important and that they were being vandalised and that some form of protection was necessary. I contacted the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, (established in 1907, and now housed in the Old Sanatorium where Rhodes spent the Siege of Kimberley and which later became a hotel and then the convent girls school <https://www.museumsnc.co.za>). After discussions with the museum directors, I decided to fence off the koppie where the engravings were. The site is only 15 Km from the border of Galeshewe village, on the road to Barkly West. The koppie was very near the road and people would climb through the fence to see the engravings, and often deface them. It is believed that the engravings are many thousands of years old. I would presume that they are still preserved.





The Fate of Platfontein

It is interesting to note is that one of the Sussman farms "Platfontein" bought from De Beers, was sold and later bought by the South African Government.to resettle the Khoi San or Bushman of Namibia, who had been used by the South African army in the war with Angola because of their superb tracking skills.

And then, when South Africa lost the war they pulled them out of Namibia where most were born (as they might suffer revenge) and resettled (imprisoned?) these ancient independent and nomadic people in a tent city near Schmidtsdrift overseen by the army.

This is an ongoing story with frustrations and delays in getting land of their own and has resonances for the Jewish community of migration and displacement and how the children are becoming assimilated etc.

Dan Jacobson writes about this in 'The Electronic Elephant' and there are references on the net including here <http://www.lac.org.na/projects/lead/Pdf/sansazz.pdf> and <http://www.southafrica.info/travel/cultural/wildebeestkuil.htm> -- this last one also tells of the fantastic rock engraving right on the doorstep of Kimberley. Did you know about that? I did not in my time from 1940 – 1957. Now there are tours and trails to see all this. But Cecil Sussman did.

Family Life

Cecil Sussman went to school at CBC. He enlisted in 1940 and joined the South African 6th Army in North Africa and Italy. In 1946, after the war he joined the family business,

On 12 March 1949, Cecil married Kimberley girl, Natalie (Kroll). (See their wedding picture right and on the gallery of [Kimberley weddings](#)). The marriage was solemnised by Rev Chaim Goldberg who was the assistant to the Rabbi from 1925 – 1955. (see the tribute to Rev Goldberg by Leon Chonin here

<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Goldberg.html>.

Cecil and Natalie gave a lot of time and energy to Kimberley Jewish, business and civic life until 1973 when the family left Kimberley.

Cecil wrote to me in March 2017, 'Dear Geraldine, Thank you for your eagerly-awaited and very interesting newsletters, and especially for including Natalie and myself. I really enjoy "revisiting" my old roots, as I have such pleasant memories of my stay in Kimberley, and you have made it possible'.

He mentioned that 'Natalie and I had been closely associated with the Bergman /Kretzmar families throughout the Kimberley years. Natalie remembers fondly how your mother introduced her, as a young bride of 20, to the **Union of Jewish Women**, and took her under her wing. I spent many a day in the home of your cousins the **Hendlers** in Milner street, being very friendly with Owen, and Natalie and I were very friendly with your aunt Eileen and uncle Archie. Moreover, Solly Frank (your uncle Jack's brother) was Natalie's uncle. I also had the pleasure of presenting Brenda Frank (now Danilowitz in Connecticut) with the Council Gold Medal for her outstanding school results. Your cousin Philip Kretzmar and our son Jeff were very friendly and were together throughout their school days.'

He noted that: 'It has been mentioned that Anita (Frank - wife of Masel) daughter of widower Bernard Cohen was his Mayoress. In fact, it was his other daughter, Francis who was Mayoress during the term of Bernard Cohen. There was also another sister Ruth Cohen, who was married to Issie Brodie, a dentist. During the war years Ruth, together with Bertie Sperber became traffic officers in order to release the incumbents so that they could join the army.' (see the complex history of the frank family here <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Grant.html>)

In 1973 when Cecil was 49 years old, the family left Kimberley to set up a new home in Cape Town where their children were at University. Cecil and Natalie have three children, Sandra now Mallach, who lives in Johannesburg (sadly passed away in February 2019), Jeffrey, who is a Cyber Risk Management Consultant living in Melbourne with his wife Diana, and his children and grandchildren, and Laura and her husband Michael Radomsky, a retired attorney, who live in the same block of flats in Sea Point as Cecil and Natalie, much to their mutual pleasure. They have 6 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren, living in Australia and London.



The Kroll Family



Natalie writes: Our Kroll family story dates back to 1890 when **Grandpa Gershon** (Jankel) Kroll left his home in Ponovez and joined his fellow Litvaks in seeking a better life for his family in the new world. He left his wife, **Nechama** Kissen, also from Ponovez, six sons and one daughter to await the time when they could join him. I marvel at their courage.

On arrival in Cape Town, Jacob was told to travel on to Oudtshoorn where this pious man could

observe Shabbat in the Little Jerusalem of South Africa, as the feather industry did not trade on Saturdays and Sundays.

Oudtshoorn was also known as a Litvak shtetl. He did find work there and sent for his family. It is a fascinating story of fortunes made from Ostrich feathers which were in great demand in the fashion industry in Europe in the early 20th century. It was the must-have on hats for royals and the aristocracy. The Jewish settlers were very prominent in the trade, but alas, Grandpa Jacob, was content to practice his beloved religion. However, he did also manage to support his family. We do know they were a very happy family. All the sons were happy outgoing men who remained close all their lives. I loved seeing them together and their children were all outgoing and the cousins were close.

This lovely painting of our Kroll grandparents, Jacob and Nechama, was painted by a very talented cousin, Rhoda Hodes. She was the daughter of Uncle Max Kroll, who remained in Oudtshoorn. There is a very strong artistic gene in the Kroll clan. My sister Stella is talented, and her grandson Mark is an exceptionally talented artist. Laura paints, and her daughter Debbi is producing very exciting pottery. In fact, all the family are artistic except for me. Lindi and her girls have inherited this Gene too.



My dad, **Barney Kroll**, met my mom **Johanna Shiffman** in Cape Town. Her dad, Grandpa Morris Shiffman was a very Orthodox Jew, but an ambitious man. He invested in property and prospered. He bought several houses in Muizenberg and so we spent summers in the wonderful shtetl that this holiday resort was then. My sister Stella says we were lucky to have grandparents living in Cape Town where we spent Summer holidays.



(the pictures below are of Muizenberg in the early 20th century. The panorama above shows the Alexandra hotel near the centre with the long black roof. The picture on the left shows typical Muizenberg houses).

Our parents Barney and Johanna Kroll, married in 1923 and after several years settled in Kimberley. Our Mom was a remarkable woman. She strongly believed that women should be treated as equal to men in all spheres of life, long before this became mainstream conversation.

She was a clever businesswoman, and a true partner to our Dad in his business ventures. My dad adored us all and thought their three daughters me (Natalie) b 1928, Stella 1932 and Maureen 1938 were the very best and we grew up confident and happy.

My Dad owned the Crescent Hotel but we did not live in the hotel. After the war he sold it and my parents decided to go into the Fashion Business. They set up **Barney Kroll and Company**. This was an ideal choice as my Mom was always well-dressed and was a clever buyer. She knew what colours and styles people would want to wear. Dad looked after the financial side and they. They were highly successful.



left: Barney and Johanna Kroll.

He was such a loving. Dad but sadly, we lost him too soon.

One day I was expecting my parents to come over for tea – but instead their neighbour arrived with the shocking news that my dad had passed away in his afternoon snooze.

We were in shock for a long time. Maureen was just 15, Stella 21 and I was a mother of three at the age of 25.

Our mom lived to be 90. We all married fine men and our children were a great source of joy to my mother. Cecil was a rock to her, so caring and loving.

The family story continues in lands far from Ponovez.

My sister Stella Clingman and her late husband Norman, and family migrated to Sydney Australia. The most recent

member of their family is great grandson Levi Salvador Swartz

Read Stella's family story here [Clingman \(nee Kroll\), Estella \(Stella\)](#) (Stella's was the very first story on this Kimberley Jewish Community website in 2014.

Our late baby sister Maureen, husband Dr Ron van der Horst and their family settled in Chicago. **Our son Jeff** married Diana with children Kollen and Leigh live in Melbourne Kollen is married to Hayley and they have three little girls Camilla Luna and Aria. **Our daughter Laura** and husband Mike's daughter Lindi and her husband Anthony Jaff and their two little girls Gabriella and. Alex, live in London as do our **daughter Sandy's** son Grant, wife Debbi and children Erin and. Ryan. (see the Sussman family pictures at the end)

The pandemic has resulted in families having to connect on Zoom. We pray for the world to heal and to enable international travel again.



Cecil and Natalie celebrated their 70th Anniversary – March 2019

Natalie and Cecil Sussman celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on 12 March 2019. (see the picture left) Their family came to Cape Town from Johannesburg, Melbourne and London to be with them.

Sadly, just two weeks before the special date, their daughter Sandra died in Johannesburg. Cecil said that it was a great shock that after only 2 weeks of feeling ill, Sandy passed away. There had previously been no sign of anything untoward – and she was not yet 68. It was comforting for them to have their entire family around them to give them, and each other, strength at this sad – but also happy time.

Cecil wrote that the celebrations were cancelled, but 'the little ones who had come all the way, were disappointed at not having a party, so they gathered as a family for tea.

They have some wonderful family photos of 4 generations, to remind them of their 70th.

Cecil said "It was wonderful seeing the little ones, who had not previously met their cousins, getting to know and love one another (ages 6 months to 15 years)"

Cecil Sussman sadly passed away in September 2019 in Cape Town. Natalie says: Cecil successfully juggled his business interests, his public life and his family life. His family was his life and we were indeed a loving happy family and our three lovely children were and are a great source of joy together with their loving partners lovely talented grandchildren and of course beautiful clever and talented great grandchildren. If I can't say this it would not be natural!





In this picture above, Cecil is seated in the middle with Natalie behind him.

Back row: Michael (Laura's husband, Peter+Ros (their machatonim, Anthony's parents)
Anthony+Lindi (Laura's daughter) Laura, Debbi (Laura's daughter) Natalie, Grant (Sandy's son)
Erin +Ryan (Grant's children) Debbi (Grant's wife) Hayley (Kollen's wife) and baby, Jeff (our son)
Kollen (Jeff's son) Diana (Jeff's wife).

Front row: Alexandra (Lindi's daughter) Cecil, Gabriella (Lindi's daughter) Camilla and Luna
(Kollen's daughters)

Sussman, Cecil and Natalie (née Kroll) story Edited and Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE

Pictures and text from Cecil, Natalie Sussman (Cape Town) and Jeff Sussman Melbourne
Read Philip and Gussie Sussman's story [Sussman, Philip and Augusta \(nee Cohen\)](#)
Read [Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#)
Read Newsletter #34. De Beers and Jewish farmers around Kimberley.
<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/News.html>

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