

EARLY LEBANESE BEGINNINGS

Though they were one of the smallest ethnic groups in British Columbia, the Lebanese, by their enterprise, their high level of education and by the strength of their extended family and clan system, were spectacularly successful in the life of British Columbia. The family bonds ensured first, an organized and well managed chain migration into British Columbia, then a strong element of mutual support in the years of struggle, and eventually a high reputation in business and public affairs, based upon living up to the pride in the family.

The first Lebanese in the province were two brothers, Abraham and Farris Ray, who began their careers in Victoria as itinerant peddlers in 1888. Their success, due to their enterprise and business honesty, led them to invite their brother Richard to join them in 1889, then Solomon Ray and other members of the family, who operated a dry goods store in Victoria in 1891. Meanwhile Sied Hassem had settled in Nanaimo, and was soon joined by Mike and Alec Saba. Together the brothers peddled dry goods from door to door in the Courtenay District for some years until they had earned enough to open their own store in Vancouver in 1903, the beginning of one of the most successful family businesses in British Columbia, Saba Brothers, which sold the most exclusive silks and wools from the Far East and Paris. By 1940 Saba's was the largest retail house in Western Canada. Although hit by shortages in WWII, the business survived. In 1942 there was a riot when 500 women stampeded the store to buy 300 pairs of nylon stockings (no one was hurt). In 1947 the company built a new five storey \$250,000.00 store at 622 Granville Street. In 1954 they opened Victoria outlet, Alec's sons Edgar, Clarence and Arnold later managed the business.

The call of the Klondike brought some Lebanese to the Province who, after the excitement of the Gold Rush had passed, settled and opened businesses. Among these were the confectioners Karl E. Ray and Karl A. Ray. In the same years George Sedaway and his brother, after working as peddlers in the Fernie district for some years, established the Sedaway Brothers firm in Vancouver in 1920. At Fernie, too, settled Abdelnour Haddad, whose descendant, George Haddad, was to become the Mayor of Cranbrook. In the Fraser Valley, Solomon Mussallem who, with his brother Jack, had established retail businesses in Prince Rupert and Vancouver, moved to Haney in 1920 where Solomon Mussallem opened an automobile agency, Mussallem Motors. He was Reeve of Haney for 22 years, and became the patriarch of a family that included Dr. Helen Mussallem, Executive Director of the Canadian Nurses' Association; George Mussallem, Member of the Legislature, and Nicholas Mussallem, prominent lawyer who later became Supreme Court Judge.

Before the Lions Gate Bridge was built in 1936, there were two ferries that ran from the wharf at the foot of Columbia Street, the North Vancouver Ferry which carried automobiles and passengers, and the West Vancouver Ferry that carried passengers only. In 1927, Mr. Karl A. Ray had two confectionery stores, one large store at the North Vancouver Ferry entrance and a smaller one at the West Vancouver Ferry dock across the street. At these stores he employed many relatives and friends who had immigrated to

Canada. His sister, Effie White, managed the stores; also employed here were Nick Hassey, Nick Bacash and Wally Kelloff. Mr. Ray opened Candyland which had a tearoom upstairs and on the main floor served ice cream and sweets on old fashioned tables and chairs. This was at 80 West Hastings Street, later Ray Brothers Tailoring opened in the same building; Elias Ray did hand sewing, wife Victoria Ray did hand sewn buttonholes, cousin Lila Ray also did hand sewing, Karl F. Ray was the designer, Richard Ray was salesman, Abraham Brady was presser. It was one big happy family.

In the 30's Adele (Ray) Bogas opened Adele's Coffee Shop on Granville Street near Davie, later in 1942 the Blue and Gold Café in North Vancouver, and in 1940 the Golden Pheasant Restaurant at Park Royal. 1950

In 1938, Lulu Ray, K.A.'s daughter, opened Ray's Style Shop at 146 West Hastings Street, where ladies fashions were sold. May joined her sister in the shop. Anne Shumas, May's future mother-in-law was seamstress-alterationist, and would alter a dress or coat to fit one or two sizes larger or smaller. Her work was fantastic and unbelievable.

Mr. Karl E. Ray opened a confectionery store at the south-east corner of Hastings and Columbia Streets in 1931, and opened another confectionery store on Main Street near Hastings in 1934; his daughters and son worked in these stores

Mr. Elias Gillette came to Vancouver in 1888 with his mother Nistas, and his sister Effie. He was only two years old at the time. In 1933 he opened the Green Parrot Coffee Shop in the 800 block Granville Street, in 1936 he opened Ideal Lunch at the corner of Granville and Smithe Street, which later became the Silk Hat. In 1940 he opened Coffee Shop in 800 Block Hornby Street next door to the all-night liquor store; Archie and Carl made the best hamburgers, Fred Shumas worked there while he was going to UBC. In 1944 he opened the Picadilly Restaurant in the 800 block Granville Street. In 1950 he opened Gillette Bros. Garage at Robson and Richard Street, his three sons Carl, Archie and Fred worked with him in the garage. Mr. Gillette's daughter, Josephine, was later married to Fred Kalley who was one of the founders of the Lebanese Canadian Society of British Columbia, formed in 1965.

Mr. Nicholas Neery came to Vancouver in 1907; he had stores at Broadway and Yew, Broadway and Commercial, Broadway and Kingsway. Mr. Najeeb Fadool Zahar and Ramza Sabbagh, from Sidon, Lebanon, were married in Buenos Aires in 1918, came to Vancouver in 1932. Mr. Zahar was in Property Investments.

Realtor Wilf Ray started radio broadcasting in 1944 and he is still on radio Station 600AM every Sunday evening from 10 til midnight.

This account illustrates several characteristics of the Lebanese British Columbians: their adaptability to a variety of new conditions in British Columbia, their acute business sense, and, most important, the virtues of their close family ties, which supported them in adversity, and allowed them to share their success widely. Few had much capital on arrival, but most of them were relatively well educated and, knowing the value of education, saw to it that their children also moved up this ladder of success.

Violet (Shumas) Smith