

# Brothers- in-Law

## Dr. Siegbert Samuel Stein

September 3, 1892, Berlin – March 6, 1973, Jerusalem

"Further, I want to point out that my ancestors both on my father's and my mother's side lived in Prussia for at least 150 years and were Prussian citizens."

Dr. Siegbert Stein in his application to keep his license as a lawyer, which the Nazis wanted to strip from all Jewish lawyers, April 1933

In 1914, when World War I broke out, Siegbert Stein had just completed the first stage of his legal studies. He immediately volunteered to fight in the German Army and served all four years, until the end of the war. He was injured twice: once, very severely, as both his legs were shot on the Eastern Front against Russia; and the second time, on the Western Front in 1918. He was decorated with the Iron Cross and the Medal for Injuries in Black.



Siegbert Stein as a young infantryman

Returning to Berlin, Dr. Stein continued his legal studies, finishing the second stage in 1922. In 1926, he became a judge for one year. In 1927, he settled as a lawyer in private practice in the center of Berlin. He and his brother-in-law and friend, Dr. Harry Cohn, worked for the same client, a large company. For most of his career, Dr. Stein represented the interests of a prominent bank, handling real estate and mortgage issues.



Siegbert Stein with wife Lotte and daughter Ruth in Berlin

Dr. Stein's life in Charlottenburg, with his wife Lotte née Cohn, and their daughter, Ruth, was very comfortable. Enthusiastic fans of classical music, they not only frequented the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and the Opera, but also had a large record collection. Berlin offered a huge variety of entertainment, and Dr. Stein enjoyed it to the fullest. He would often entertain out-of-town clients at cabaret shows, where he enjoyed smoking a "good cigar". Embedded in a large circle of friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, Dr. Stein was also a devoted Zionist. In 1925, he visited Palestine. During the same trip he traveled to see the Great Pyramids in Egypt.

In 1933, when the National Socialists came to power, Siegbert Stein was able to retain his law license because of his status as a veteran of WW I, while other Jewish lawyers were forced out of their jobs. But, in 1936, the situation in Berlin became more threatening, the anti-Jewish laws more draconian, the streets less safe and Dr. Stein lost his main client. Because of his strong ties to Zionist organizations, Dr. Stein and his family were granted a coveted spot on the list of individuals eligible to emigrate to Palestine. Passing through Switzerland and Italy, the family arrived in Haifa on July 15, 1937.

Life in Palestine was not easy. Dr. Stein's language, training and culture were German. Because of his relatively poor Hebrew, and the differences between the German and Israeli legal systems, he resisted studying to become a lawyer in Palestine/Israel. Ultimately, he became a bookkeeper in a small municipality near Tel Aviv. In 1960, at the age of 68, Dr. Stein retired and moved to Jerusalem. He had been proud to be a lawyer, but he had lost all of the social and the cultural security that being an attorney and judge in Germany had brought him. It was the defining blow of his life, from which he never truly recovered.

## Dr. Harry Cohn

February 12, 1896, Berlin – March 17, 1981, Buenos Aires



Harry Cohn

Harry Cohn became a lawyer in 1924. Dr. Cohn and Dr. Stein were brothers-in-law. Siegbert Stein had married Harry's younger sister, Lotte. In 1933, after the Nazis took power, Dr. Cohn was stripped of his license to practice law. His extensive efforts on behalf of the Patriotic Emergency Service between June 1917 and November 1918 were not considered and did not preserve Dr. Cohn's right to practice as a lawyer. He considered moving to Palestine, but because he had a deformed shoulder and arm, the Zionist authority advised him that it would be difficult for him to cope there. So, together with his wife, Lilly, and their two children, he left Germany in September 1933, traveling by ship from Hamburg to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In Argentina, Dr. Cohn had a tough start. He had to learn Spanish, and although already 37 years old, he was required to obtain the equivalent of a high school GED in Argentina. Later, he went to law school in Buenos Aires and became an attorney. His life seemed successful and he was financially secure. Nevertheless, he often stated that he felt like an outsider in Argentina, not unlike his brother-in-law, Siegbert Stein, in Israel.

Both Dr. Stein and Dr. Cohn and their immediate families, through luck and foresight, survived. Many other family members perished in the Shoa. But these two Berlin lawyers, like hundreds of others, suffered the tragedy of being outsiders in their adopted countries until the ends of their lives.



Siegbert Stein (middle) and Harry Cohn (right), 1967 in Israel – even in the hot Israeli summer both of them wear neckties and stiff white shirts.