

F.C.F. Sievert

By Douglas Shepard, 2012

Ferdinand Christopher Frederick **Sievert** was born in Ankershagen, Mecklenburg, Germany in 1859 to Johann and Dorothea **Sievert**. According to the New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, a Johann **Sievert**, 22, arrived in the United States on 3 June 1856. That may well have been Ferdinand's father-to-be, looking the United States over while still a young, unmarried man. If so, he later returned to Germany and married Dorothea. By the time of the Mecklenburg-Schwerin Census of 1867, the family consisted of Johann and Dorothea, both 33; Ferdinand, 8; Mine, 6; Wilhelm, 2; another Wilhelm, 26 (Johann's brother?); and Marie Roll, 15, probably a servant.

An extensive article about Ferdinand **Sievert** in *The Fredonia Censor* of 28 September 1934 and his front-page obituary in the issue of 12 April 1935 give some detailed information about those early years. The family emigrated "after the Franco-Prussian war" which ended on 10 May 1871. They arrived here in 1872. "They took the present **Cave** place on Temple street [315 Temple Street], later moving to a farm in Arkwright, but Ferdinand at first was sent to Buffalo for two years. He lived with the **Mattsons**, friends who had induced the **Sieverts** to come to Fredonia."

According to this chronology, Ferdinand was in Buffalo from 1872 to 1874. From 1874 to 1875 he worked as a part-time clerk in John **Armstrong's** drug store at today's 22 West Main Street, while he attended the Barker Street School. He was about 15 years old. One account has him sleeping at the back of the store. However, the 1875 New York State Census shows him living in the household of David J. **Matteson**, gentleman farmer, on Temple Street, working as a hired hand ("farm laborer"). (Those entries were done on 9 June 1875.) His parents and the other children were living close by, probably in a house owned by **Matteson**, on the opposite side of Temple Street from the **Matteson** home. The family consisted of John **Sievert**, 40; Dora, 40; Minnie, 13; William, 11; (all born in Germany) Albert, 8; and Emma, 1 year and three months old, both born in Chautauqua County.

"After a year in this village [Fredonia]" Ferdinand "studied pharmacy in Cleveland and was employed until he was 24 at W. H. **Hartness & Co.** in that city." He then returned to Fredonia and, on 1 October 1884, purchased the drug stock of **Armstrong's** successor, Dr. W. L. **Wilbur**, beginning **Sievert's** career as a Fredonia pharmacist and innovator. His first action was to have his new store "thoroughly renovated, painted, and refitted." Among his other improvements were the addition of "Gilded Chandeliers, Show Globes and Linoleum floor." At the rear of the Prescription Department and Laboratory was a large store room "fitted up exclusively for Paints, Oils, Varnishes and Glass." In addition he was soon advertising that he also had the "Portuondo's Cuban Hand Made 5-cent Cigar, Finest in Town."

That was in 1884. In 1885 he installed a water motor in the basement, a water-powered generator which took advantage of the abundant water supply made possible by the recently built Fredonia reservoir. The result was that he then had the first building west of Buffalo to be equipped with electricity. To this, several months later, he added electric fans, another first. When he bought the building, it had what was then a standard piece of equipment, a zinc-lined counter with a marble top on which soda water was doctored with the addition of one or another syrup from the "syrup-squirters" mounted on the counter.

One of the printed accounts says that **Sievert** slept at the back of his store to be available "for after-midnight patrons. Physicians were not so well supplied with medicines then, and the

young man got up to answer many an emergency call.” The 1887 Directory notes that he boarded at the Park House (*1 Park Place*), but by 1889 he was boarding on Garden (now **Risley**) street. On 7 August 1889 the **Sieverts** had purchased today’s *54 Risley Street* from A. C. **Putnam**. The house had been built for William H. **Chaddock**, a local jeweler, in 1858/59. By 1891 **Sievert** was living in the house, which the directory described as on **Risley** at the corner of Center. However, his father, John, is listed as living in a house on Center at the corner of **Risley**. That odd listing is repeated in the 1894 Directory but in 1896 a new numbering system has been added. Ferdinand has a house at “20 Risley Street” (today’s *54 Risley Street*), while his father is at “130 Center Street.” By comparing occupants’ names with the modern addresses, it appears that Ferdinand’s parents were probably living in a separate apartment in *54 Risley Street*, on the Center Street side.

In 1894 **Sievert** moved his drugstore from the old *22 West Main Street* location to *18 West Main Street*. It was probably there that he added another innovation. **Sievert** had heard of the ice cream sodas being introduced in New York City, so he installed a gasoline motor in the basement which ran a newly acquired “ice-cream plant.” It was immediately a popular addition, “Linen dusters flying, mustachioed swains and beveled ladies chugged up to the store in one-lunger horseless carriages after an arduous expedition clear from Westfield or Silver Creek.”

That delightful word picture should not be taken too literally, however. Most accounts agree that the ice cream soda was invented in Philadelphia in 1874 by Robert M. **Green**, with other contenders claiming it was introduced first in Detroit in 1880 by Fred **Sanders**, or in New York City at **Kline’s** drug store in 1872. In addition, there could not have been horseless carriages at the drug store, since the first automobile here appeared in 1899 driven by the young owner, Charles **Hamilton** of Ripley.

The article in *The Fredonia Censor* of 28 September 1934 refers to **Hamilton** going to the Fredonia Normal School. While at the Normal he boarded with F. C. F. **Sievert** on **Risley** Street. For **Hamilton’s** benefit, **Sievert** stocked gasoline in 60-gallon containers at the back of his drug store. He carried the gasoline to the car in a sprinkling can with the nozzle off. The article goes on to give 1890 as the approximate date when **Sievert** put in a regular tank in a red metal “house.” However, **Hamilton** only attended the Normal School for one year, 1889 or 1890, when he was 15. No doubt **Sievert** stocked gasoline for the motor that ran his ice cream making machine, so it would have been available some years later when automobiles began appearing in Fredonia.

Mrs. John **Sievert** died at the **Risley** Street home on 6 June 1898. On 8 August 1898 F.C.F. **Sievert** married Isabella, the 19-year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Oston P. **Irvine** of Fredonia. At the time the **Irvine** family was living at today’s *156 East Main Street*. They had moved here from Duke Center, Pennsylvania, in July 1897, but **Irvine** had earlier worked for the **Brooks** Motor Works in Dunkirk. The **Sievert’s** first child, a son, Irvine, was born 26 February 1900, followed by Ferdinand, Jr. 18 December 1901.

Sievert seems to have done well in his business. He was able to travel. In July 1903 he and William L. **Hart**, who had also been born in Germany, sailed on the S. S. Fuerst Bismarck to Hamburg, visited their old home, then toured in Germany, Switzerland, France and Great Britain, returning home at the beginning of September. The **Sievert’s** unmarried son, Irvine, died in 1931. Perhaps that was part of the reason for his mother to go, apparently alone, on a European Cruise. On the S. S. California, Isabella **Sievert** left New York harbor on 1 July 1833 and returned on 2 August. On 14 July 1933, their remaining son, Ferdinand, Jr. married Dorothy **Van Tine** of Buffalo and, perhaps in belated celebration, the pair sailed with Ferdinand, Sr. to visit

Germany, arriving back in New York on the S. S. New York on 14 September 1934. On October 1934 **Sievert** celebrated his 50th year as a Fredonia druggist. However, on 5 April 1935 he died, and the long era of the **Sievert** Drug Store ended with him.