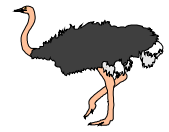


STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 13 Number 1

Newsletter

August 2011

Publication News:

The Autobiography of Isidor Straus

To be re-published by the Straus Historical Society
Order your copy today

Isidor Straus wrote his autobiography in June 1911 at the encouragement of his son Jesse Isidor. On its 100th anniversary SHS is pleased to announce the re-publication of The Autobiography of Isidor Straus in an enhanced version. All of the original text will be completely preserved in its original format including the letters presented in the appendix and also articles from various news publications that appear in this section.

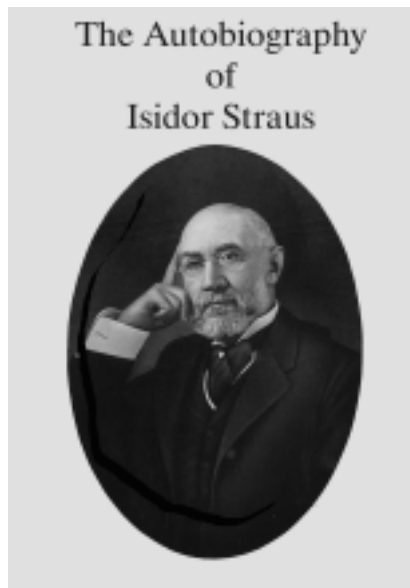
Isidor's oldest daughter, Sara Straus Hess privately published Isidor's autobiography for the Straus family in 1955. Since that time SHS has added it to our book list. It is one of our most popular items.

What makes this re-publication so special is that a completely new section has been added. It includes many photographs, articles that appeared in the SHS's newsletters about Isidor and his family, and completes the story of Isidor's life, the parts that he did not have the time or the inclination to write.

Isidor and his beloved wife Ida Blun Straus lost their lives together in the Titanic disaster. An article about their activities during the months leading up April 1912 and what we know about their last moments aboard Titanic is included in the new section.

Isidor wrote this book to tell his children the story of his life. But it seems to be almost an instruction manual of

how his actions and sense of morality, what he learned from his father and grandfather before him, served him well in his business life. He did not tell his children about his public service or his philanthropic endeavors. The new section will include information about this as well.



Even if you previously purchased The Autobiography of Isidor Straus, this new, enhanced volume will be an exceptional addition to your personal library. Given the perspective of an outside point of view, and the passage of time, the life and accomplishments of Isidor Straus are all the more impressive.

The jacketed, hard cover 2011 anniversary edition of The Autobiography of Isidor Straus will soon be available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

Reserve your copy now. Send a check for \$40 made payable to Straus Historical Society, Inc. to Post Office Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416.

Note in the memo section that your

check is to reserve a copy of The Autobiography of Isidor Straus.

"All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveller is unaware."

*Martin Buber
German philosopher*

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is dedicated to advancing the
knowledge, understanding and ap-
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family and the historical context
in which they lived through re-
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material relating to the Straus fam-
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**A Message from the
Executive Director:
Joan Adler**

In February 2011 I sent the SHS newsletter in PDF format to everyone on our mailing who had previously supplied us with an e.mail address. I recently sent an e.mail to family members on the Straus Historical Society's e.mail list. In each of these mailings, several were returned to me as 'undeliverable as addressed.'

In compiling the list of who would received these e.mails, I realized how many people have not updated their contact information or have not supplied their e.mail address to SHS.

The newsletter is now being sent out as soon as it is published in PDF format with the paper version following, sometimes several weeks later. There are announcements of a timely nature that could reach you if your e.mail address was available to us.

If you have not received an e.mail from SHS within the past few months, it means we have no way to send it to you. If you change your e.mail address, please put us on your notification list. SHS wants to send you information and to keep you informed of our various activities. Your ability to take advantage of this information increases dramatically if we can send it to you by e.mail.

Please contact SHS at:

info@straushistory.org

or

info@strausfamily.org

with your e.mail address. If your street address has changed since the mailing of the last newsletter in February 2011, send that as well. We want to keep you informed as we plan exciting new projects and disseminate information of a timely nature. Help us do this by keeping your contact information current.

SHS is interested in hearing from you. We want to honor the memory of the Straus family's ancestors and serve the needs of the current generation. Please let us know what information you'd like to see in future newsletter articles and what kinds of activities would be of interest.

Thank you to all who have supported SHS with your generous donations, your contributions of materials and with your participation in past events. It is appreciated.

A FAMILY FOUND

HOW I FOUND MY KNOLLER RELATIVES

I first met Manfred (Fred) Moses, when he came to the Straus Historical Society's walking tour at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, NY in June 2006. Fred, his wife Selma, granddaughter Barbara and family friend Roberta Morse joined the group as we visited the Straus mausoleum and the last resting place of other family members.

SHS sponsored a subsequent walking tour in 2007, this time to Beth El and Salem Fields Cemeteries in Brooklyn, NY, the place where Lazarus and Sara, many of their children, grandchildren and other family members are buried. Fred and Selma joined us again.

Fred was especially anxious to pay his respects at the graves of Sissie and Irving Lehman in Salem Fields Cemetery and to say his special Kaddish in their memory. Kaddish is the Jewish prayer of mourning.

Fred explained that Sissie and Irving Lehman sponsored his family when they came to the USA from Hitler's Germany in 1938, thereby surely saving their lives from almost certain death at the hands of the Nazis. The Lehmans also invited Fred and his brother Edgar to spend several summers at Camp Lehman on their estate in Purchase, NY. He feels this assisted them in making a smooth transition to American boyhood, for which Fred has been especially grateful to the Lehmans.

Sissie Straus Lehman was the daughter of Nathan and Lina Straus of New York. Sissie's husband, Irving Lehman, Chief Justice of New York State's Court of Appeals, was the brother of Herbert H. Lehman, New York State Governor.

At Salem Field Cemetery Fred was saddened by the condition of Sissie and Irving's graves and double tombstone, which had been neglected for years. He asked me if he could pay to have their stone reset. After consulting with the manager of the cemeteries, I learned that neither the

Lehman nor Straus family claimed responsibility for its care. I asked several Lehman family members and Straus relatives of Sissie but no one cared if Fred wanted to take responsibility for resetting the stone. Fred and Selma then donated the funds to have the stone reset and cleaned.

While all of this was going on, Fred and I began to talk about his Straus family connections and family history.

Fred is descended from Babette Straus and Abraham Maas. Babette was the sister of Sara Straus, the wife of Lazarus.

He was born in Mannheim in 1924 where he lived with his parents Isak and Trudel Burger Moses and his brother Edgar. He talks fondly of an early childhood that was idyllic but which grew more difficult and restrictive after Hitler came to power in 1933 until his family made a miraculous escape to Switzerland in February 1938.

On January 31, 1938 a dear Christian neighbor came to their door and whispered a warning to Fred's parents that "bad things were going to happen the next day to us and our apartment and that we had to be gone before daybreak."

The Moses family left their apartment in Mannheim in the middle of the night in a blinding snow storm. They could each take only one small suitcase. The family trudged five miles via back roads, under cover of darkness to a train station that was heavily guarded by numerous black-shirted Nazi SS Storm Troopers. After several passport inspections the Moses family was able to board a train for a harrowing ride to Basel, Switzerland where relatives took them in, provided them with food, clothing and time to recuperate from their ordeal. They also gave them the funds needed to continue their journey to a new life in the US.

After resting up and recovering, they took a train from Basel to Paris and then to Le Havre where they boarded



Fred Moses
and cousin Irene Pastarnack
behind the Lehman's tombstone

the French ocean liner "SS Lafayette." Fred and his family crossed the stormy midwinter north Atlantic and arrived in New York by boat, passing the Statue of Liberty on a brilliant, cold February 22, 1938, Washington's birthday. Fred says that his life really began on that day. He celebrates that day as his birthday.

Very recently Fred told me a story about his 70 year search for his first cousin, Julius Knoller, who had apparently escaped the Nazi Blitzkrieg but then vanished in southern France in August 1940. Repeatedly over the years Fred contacted the International Red Cross (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, Germany. Their website states, ITS, "serves victims of Nazi persecutions and their families by documenting their fate through the archives it manages." ITS has 50 million reference cards on more than 17.5 million people. The information in these records is made available to family members who are trying to learn the fate of their relatives.

Fred was hoping to learn if his cousin Julius survived the war. On December 15, 2008 ITS finally sent him some good news about Julius, 60 years after the fact. Julius survived the war and was last reported to be in Antwerp, Belgium in 1948 with his baby daughter, Esther Rachel. From there the Knoller family's trail disappeared again.

I offered to try to help Fred find his family.

During our conversation I asked Fred for as much information as he could supply about this family. I am a member of Jewishgen, a very large Jewish genealogical community that is the most generous group of people I know. Each day I read a "digest" where people post questions: about methodology, requests for translations, information about missing relatives, help getting records from foreign archives, for photographs of tombstones and their translation and other related topics. This community of people lends their expertise without compensation.

I wrote a note to the digest. It was posted the following day. I asked for help finding what happened to Julius Knoller and his baby daughter Esther Rachel who were last reported to be in Antwerp in 1948. I included Julius' date and place of birth.

Did you ever try to find a needle in a haystack? Well this search was the ultimate example of such.

Incredibly, within hours, I began receiving information. Some people offered ideas about how to research this problem. Others suggested that we consult ITS again to

find out if they had any further information. Two people wrote to say that Julius Knoller actually was their relative.

David Blank in Jerusalem sent me his own family tree. I immediately saw that some of the information on his tree was submitted by an Albert (Bob) Knoller, who turned out to be Julius' son through a second marriage. He was born in Frankfurt in 1958 but Fred never knew of his existence and had not received any information about Bob when ITS provided the information about Julius and Esther Rachel. Esther Rachel is Julius' daughter from a first marriage. She was born in 1948.

I asked David if he knew how to contact Bob. He did. We learned through David's family tree that Julius heroically survived an incredible story of travail and built a fine new family of children and grandchildren out of the ashes of the Holocaust. He died of natural causes in 2002 in Strasbourg, France at the age of 82.

Incredibly, Fred and Selma and the California part of their family toured that city in 1997 while Julius was still alive and living there with his family. Had they known, they would have had a wonderful reunion. Fred was sorry for the lost opportunity.

Fred enthusiastically requested that we try to get in touch with Bob. I asked David to do this, telling Bob who Fred was, how he was related, and that Fred was anxious to hear from him. Fred had no idea if the Knollers knew anything about him and his USA Moses family. Nor did he know if his attempt to make contact with them would be welcomed by the Knollers. Fred had considerable concerns about that, for one never knows.

We also "Googled" Esther Rachel Knoller and learned that she was living in Paris and owned a language school there. Although we were able to get contact information for her, Fred opted to wait until hearing from Bob before trying to contact Esther Rachel. Once again, we had no way to know if Esther Rachel knew about the Moses family nor did we know if she would welcome the contact. He didn't want to intrude in their lives if the contact was not welcome.

By now Fred was both thrilled and sad. Learning that Julius survived the war was wonderful. But he was sorry he hadn't found him before his death. We have no way of knowing if Julius ever knew that other family members survived the war for 69 long years. Fred's family always thought they were the only ones on his father's side to

survive World War II and the Holocaust.

Incredible as it may seem, only after a few days, Bob Knoller contacted Fred by e.mail. Although Bob had no knowledge of Fred's existence until he learned of it from David Blank, Bob immediately warmly embraced his newfound USA Moses relatives. Fred was overjoyed. A lively correspondence has ensued.

As an aside, all of this took place just before the Jewish New Year in September 2009. I can think of no better way to end the year than to help another person find his lost family.

Fred and Selma were able to hold a wonderful happy telephone conversation with the Knoller family in Paris in which they exchanged New Year greetings.

In October Fred's oldest granddaughter Barbara announced that she and her friend Mitchell were going on vacation. They hadn't decided where they would go. Fred suggested they go to Paris and meet the Knollers. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by the young couple. And off they went.

Once they arrived, Barbara and Mitchell immediately sent back a glowing telephone report directly from their historic Moses-Knoller family reunion in Paris. The Knollers are Orthodox Jews who were in the midst of celebrating Sukkot. During this holiday a temporary booth or hut (sukkah) is built outside the house. The family eats their meals in it for the seven days of the holiday. The sukkah is reminiscent of the type of fragile dwellings in which the ancient Israelites lived during their 40 years of wandering in the desert after their exodus from Egypt.

Barbara and Mitchell brought back photographs from their dinner in the sukkah. Fred immediately recognized Bob and said his appearance was reminiscent of Fred's father's family. In fact, Bob looks very much like Fred's brother Edgar, who is deceased.

Both Fred and Bob and their families are thrilled to have found each other.

Barbara reported that she and Mitchell were immediately accepted and welcomed, "like family." Fred is particularly excited to find his cousin Julius' family, all of whom have embraced their New York cousins. But the story doesn't end here.

Shortly after Barbara and Mitchell's visit Bob wrote to say that his wife's father, M. Paul Blum, had passed away. And on the same day, a few hours later, Bob's daughter-in-law gave birth to a beautiful new baby girl, Noa-Myriam Knoller.



The Knoller Family
Twins Malvina and Deborah with
mother Myriam second from left,
father Albert (Bob), son Netanel in front of Bob
Barbara Moses and friend Mitchell on the right

This death-birth coincidence reminded Fred that a similar thing happened when his grandmother Rosel (Rosa) Mayer Burger – the Maas-Straus family connection - died in 1929. On the very same day – 82 years ago - a granddaughter, Inge Rosenberg, was born. Coincidentally, Inge Rosenberg (now Epstein) was just celebrating her 80th birthday in Efrat, Israel, having emigrated there from Melbourne, Australia a few years before. This

reminiscence prompted Fred to write about the Knoller death-birth coincidence to his cousin David Epstein, son of Inge Rosenberg Epstein, who is also living in Efrat.

Then Fred wrote about this familial coincidence to Bob Knoller in Paris. Bob wrote back that his own brother-in-law, Shrage Blum and family, the son of Paul Blum who had just died, lives in Efrat. Incredibly, it turns out that the Efrat Epsteins and the Efrat Blums actually know each other and are planning a meeting to exchange this unbelievably fantastic story.

It's a one in a billion story of one coincidence after another. Fred says, "It's a small strange world which still has a few miracles left."

Manfred and Selma Moses and their USA family have

now reconnected with the family of his first cousin Julius Knoller: with Albert (Bob) Knoller, Julius' son, and his wife Myrian and their large family in Paris; with Ruth Knoller, Julius' widow, Bob's mother in Strasbourg; with Esther Rachel Knoller, Julius' daughter, Bob's sister in Paris. And he's found a new cousin, David Blank and his extended family in Jerusalem.

I recently spent the day in New York City at The Center for Jewish History. Leo Baeck Institute, a German Jewish historical organization shares space there with four other Jewish historical societies. Leo Baeck is the repository for the Joint Distribution Committee's archived papers. One of these files contains information about visa requests from German Jews who were trying to leave war torn Europe in the late 1930's and early 1940"s. Since so many Straus family members were in Europe, and many were trying to get out, I thought I might be able to find information about immigration requests from family members. I brought a list of more than thirty people who I hoped would be represented in these files. Some of these people were survivors but the vast majority were people who were killed in the Holocaust. As we'd already learned, many of them were trying to obtain visas but a variety of factors made that impossible.

I found a large file for Julius Knoller and his brother Heinz. Approval was granted for a visa for both brothers but for reasons unknown at this time, neither made it out of Europe. Heinz died at Auschwitz in May 1942. And, as we've learned, although Julius survived the war, he, too spent time at Auschwitz. The file on the Knoller brothers contained letters of support from people in the US but none from Fred's parents. Fred was a teenager when they arrived in the US. He has no knowledge of his parent's awareness of the effort to bring Julius and Heinz to America. He was saddened to learn that they were so close to leaving and still unable to do so. After much contemplation, these papers have been sent to Paris to share with Bob and Esther Rachel.

Fred has asked if Vice Consul Hiram Bingham, who was in Marseilles issuing visas, was involved in the Knoller's attempts to gain admission to the US. This is an area we are still researching.

Quoted From Wikipedia: "Hiram "Harry" Bingham IV (July 17, 1903 – January 12, 1988) was an American diplomat. He served as a Vice-Consul in Marseilles, France, during World War II, and helped over 2,500 Jews to flee from France as Nazi forces advanced. In 1939, Bingham was posted to the US Consulate in Marseilles, where he,

together with another vice-consul named Myles Standish, was in charge of issuing entry visas to the USA. On June 10, 1940, Adolf Hitler's forces invaded France and the French government fell. The French signed an armistice with Germany. In Article 19 of the document, the French agreed to "surrender on demand all Germans named by the German government in France." Civil and military police began to round up German and Jewish refugees who were marked for death by the Nazis. Several influential Europeans tried to lobby the American government to issue visas so that German and Jewish refugees could freely leave France to escape persecution. Anxious to limit immigration to the United States and to maintain good relations with the Vichy government, the State Department actively discouraged diplomats from helping refugees. However, Bingham cooperated with Varian Fry in issuing visas and helping refugees escape France. Varian Fry had come to Marseilles to give 200 grants to "some of the best scientists and European scholars" and help them settle in the US. Hiram Bingham worked with him, and instead of 200, gave about 2,000 visas, most of them to well-known personalities, speaking English, not too left-wing and not looking too Jewish, among whom Max Ernst, André Breton, Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, Lion Feuchtwanger and Nobel prize winner Otto Meyerhof. All the other anonymous ones, waiting night and day in front of the American consulate, were not lucky enough. Varian Fry explains in his book *Surrender on Demand*, "we refuse to help anyone who is not recommended by a confident person." He also sheltered Jews in his Marseilles home, and obtained forged identity papers to help Jews in their dangerous journeys across Europe. He worked with the French underground to smuggle Jews out of France into Franco's Spain or across the Mediterranean and even contributed to their expenses out of his own pocket."

A chance comment over coffee by Fred Moses – while discussing the Straus Historical Society's possible future plans for honoring the three brothers, Isidor, Nathan and Oscar and sister Hermine - turned into such a wonderful, happy adventure with an even more wonderful result. Fred reports that it is even more exciting than finding a needle in a haystack. And the story continues.

If you have a similar story, or want to learn about the fate of family members during or after the war, please contact me. I can't promise the same spectacular result, but I would be happy to try. More and more information is being released from Europe. And many more databases are appearing on-line with information about those involved in the Holocaust, either survivors or those who perished. Perhaps I can help you learn the fate of a loved one or solve another decades old mystery. Let me hear from you.

Dr. Hans Steinebrei

I was hired by Robert K. (Bob) Straus in October of 1990. He'd been working on his family's genealogy for many years. He was in touch with researchers in Germany, among other places, who were finding documents relating to the family. One of the people Bob was corresponding with was Dr. Hans Steinebrei of Kaiserslautern. Dr. Steinebrei's family came from Otterberg, the town where the Straus family lived in the 1800's. The Steinebreis were residents of this town for many generations. I later found documents for his family dating back to the 1600's.

When I was first working under Bob's direction, he put me in touch with Dr. Steinebrei who was writing a book about the Jewish families of Otterberg. Dr. Steinebrei was very knowledgeable about the Straus family. And he was very willing to respond to my questions. We corresponded frequently. I asked him questions about the family during the time they were living in Otterberg and the nearby towns and he asked me questions about their activities in the US. Dr. Steinebrei worked closely with Roland Paul, an historian based in nearby Kaiserslautern. Between them there was never a time when my questions were left unanswered.

Over the years Dr. Steinebrei wrote three books about the Jews of Otterberg, their history and the story of their immigration to the US. He kindly gave SHS permission to

translate and publish an English language version of *The History of the Jews of Otterberg* which is available for purchase from the Society.

In 2006 SHS sponsored a heritage tour of southwestern Germany. We visited the places where the Strauses lived and worked and learned even more about how they conducted their lives. There were so many high points to this trip that it would be impossible to mention them all here. An article about this trip was published in the February 2007 issue of the newsletter. It can be found on the Society's website: www.straushistoricalsociety.org on the Archives page.

Roland Paul wrote to inform me that Dr. Hans Steinebrei passed away on July 29, 2011 at the age of 88. A funeral service for him was held August 4th at which time Roland Paul delivered a eulogy. I asked that he include some memories, comments and condolences from SHS.

We look back at the many years of collegial correspondence and are grateful for Dr. Steinebrei's excellent scholarship, his interest in the Straus family, his willingness to research information on our behalf, his hospitality when we were in Germany, and most of all his friendship. He will be missed by a great many people. I am proud to be among them.



Catherine McIlvaine

Catherine McIlvaine first called me in April 2010, explaining that she was an honors history student at Iona College in Westchester County, NY. She wanted to explore her areas of interest and thought that working at an historical society might help her better identify her career goals. Our wonderful volunteer has been working with SHS for more than a year.

Having worked alone for many years, I was concerned about how I would handle having another person in my office. And, frankly, I wasn't sure what I could contribute to her quest.

I should not have worried. It has turned out to be a most fortunate association. Catherine is a self starter who also is a meticulous worker. She's taken on projects that I was not getting to for lack of time. One of the largest of these is indexing the backlog of material for our archives. There is a huge backlog of materials. This material needed to be inventoried and then added to our database. Catherine is working her way through it with amazing clarity of purpose and accuracy.

We've also worked together to get the more than 100 letters of the Roos family translated and then organized chronologically. Based on the information in these letters, we've documented the Roos' attempt to get out of Germany (and then France) during 1938-1940. And we've begun to find other documents to supplement this collection. We currently are working on a major article for the newsletter, based on the information in this collection.

Catherine will start working on a masters degree in history beginning in January 2012. She is planning to marry in December 2012 and must now begin to think about funding for school and for her wedding.

I would very much like to keep her.

Perhaps there is someone reading this newsletter who knows of a foundation giving special purpose grants. Or, who would like to fund Catherine's work for the next year in part or in full. Please get in touch with me if you have any ideas about how we can keep Catherine at SHS. Her contribution really is invaluable.

THE STEERING COMMITTEE'S SURVEY RESULTS

The Steering Committee was originated by former board member Fred Moses with the intent of creating an event that would celebrate the achievements of the Straus family. Subsequently, our plan for awards and scholarships in the fields of philanthropy, business, social welfare, and public service – honoring the fields in which the Strauses excelled – was detailed in recent Society newsletters.

Although approved by the board, the lack of enthusiasm for the plan among a small sample of family members convinced us that we needed to know more about the Society's supporters before we could ask them to participate in any future programs. We decided to conduct a survey to inquire about their interests in the Society and their interest in the Straus family connections.

We are extremely grateful to Mischa Byruck, a member of our Steering Committee, for designing, implementing, and analyzing the results of the survey. His contributions have been invaluable. The survey asked what services, programs, and activities would be of interest, and which might earn support and participation. Following is a summary of Mischa's analysis.

Online Survey

Of the approximately 250 surveys that were sent, we received 75 completed replies. That is a very gratifying response – 30 percent - and beyond our expectations. Most respondents had no major critiques of the Society and were overwhelmingly supportive of the work, dedication, and responsiveness of Executive Director Joan Adler. While some might like to see a few improvements, the survey provided no evidence of a demand for a major directional shift in either mission or activities.

Straus Family Connection

Overall, respondents reported a desire to feel more connected to the Straus family, indicating both the enduring relevance of the Society and the potential for creating a more active membership. However, respondents were significantly less interested in the present activities of family members than in celebrating past achievements. A fourth of the respondents did not think of themselves as Straus family members and only a third were interested in the reputation of the Straus name.

Activities and Involvement

The most popular current Society activities were:

- Maintenance of the family archives
- Organizing historical visits
- Publication of the Society's newsletter, which a majority of respondents read and keep.

Yet, the Society falls low on their list of candidates for donations of either time or money, and fewer than 10 percent of respondents showed an active interest in getting more involved.

The most popular proposed activities, although a wide selection was presented, were:

- Increased access to the archives for family members
- Publication and dissemination of a family directory
- Local family gatherings
- A computerized and updatable family tree
- An upgraded web presence.

There was tentative support for:

- A peer mentoring service among Straus family members
- Publication of a Straus family book
- Creation of a Straus family documentary
- Distribution of scholarly research grants.

There was little to no support for scholarships, awards, workshops, seminars, or conferences.

From his experience with surveys, Mischa comments that results, even when they are statistically significant, should be considered carefully. Conclusions cannot always be drawn based on data. For example, a large percentage reported reading the newsletter for years and contributing to the archives, activities that are unlikely to have been engaged in by the younger generation. Also, even though a tenth of the respondents indicated that they were interested in joining the board, this cannot be extrapolated to mean that ten percent of those on the mailing list are potential board members.

Gatherings

We are encouraged by the results of the survey and the opinions that were expressed. We take special note of the interest indicated in the meeting of family members.

To capitalize on that interest we are starting to research the events that are being planned for the centenary celebration of the Titanic next year. We would like to be able to partner with another organization having such an event which our supporters may attend, which will give the Society a way to participate actively, and which may lead to

a strong footprint for the future. We would also like to hear from you about the activities you want to help plan or attend.

Our Steering Committee will be looking for directions that will contribute to the future health and vitality of the Society. We want to thank Mischa again for all his work, and we want to thank all the respondents for the time and interest that they took in completing the survey.

Steering Committee: Richard Gerstman, Al Berr, Mischa Byruck



Comments from Joan Adler, Executive Director Straus Historical Society, Inc.

First I want to thank all of you who took the time to complete the survey. It's gratifying to learn that so many people were interested enough to let us know how they feel about the work of the Society. And of course, I was delighted to learn how many people feel the work I am doing is valuable and that I am doing a good job at it. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Al Berr, Richard Gerstman and Mischa Byruck for their willingness to take on this project, for the time they put into it, and for their respect for my time constraints. Al, Richard and Mischa have been diligent in their effort to enhance my effectiveness without creating more work for me. And, for this, I am grateful. I am also grateful to them for the wonderful job they are doing.

I know this survey was not sent to everyone on our mailing list, only to family members. But I feel it is appropriate to respond here to some of the comments we received.

Based on your overall response it seems that many people would like access to our archives. For the past 21 years I have been documenting the history of the Straus family and the lives of its individual members. We have a large collection of letters, photographs, books, newspaper and magazine articles, ephemera and memorabilia in the archives. All of this material is available to the general public upon request. Since the archives is constantly being added to, it is located near my office in Smithtown, NY in Suffolk County on Long Island. It may be impossible for some people to visit. But you are welcome if that is your desire. Or I will make copies of materials for you as time permits upon your request.

In the past we've worked with authors of books, people writing doctoral theses, movie producers, screenwriters, people who were portraying family members in theatrical

productions (especially Isidor and Ida Straus), school children with educational projects ,etc. I provided them with photographs and photocopies or scans of original documents. Your request for information will be treated with the same respect. The more specific the request, the more likely I will be able to fulfill it.

It seems that people are also interested in regional events. If you are not New York based and would like to plan, host or attend an event in your area, please let me know. It came as a complete surprise to me that this was something people wanted to do. SHS cannot begin planning events unless we know there is interest in them. Please communicate with me.

People are also asking for an updated and enhanced web presence. This is an area where I have neither the skill nor the time to add this to the list of activities that fill my work day. I would like to hear from a volunteer who can help with this very important project.

One of my many jobs is to protect the privacy of family members. For this reason, and because there seems to be no good solution right now, I have not posted the family tree on-line. I am exploring every option as I feel this is a very worthwhile endeavor.

The family's contact information is also within the realm of privacy issues. Individual family members who wish access to this database can contact me. The contact information of family members will not be made available to anyone outside of the family.

For those of you, family and non-family alike, who think we are doing a valuable job, please find a way to support this work financially. A donation of any amount can make a difference. And please let me hear from you. Thank you for your interest and support.

Friends of Straus Park

Article and Photographs by Margaret G. Kavanau
Editorial Assistance: Ted Kavanau

Upper West Side Manhattan of cars, taxis, buses, bike-laned bicycles, Broadway, busy streets, buildings. Straus Park is an oasis of ginkgo trees, flowers, bushes, birds in the fountain, people on benches sit, read, talk, and eat though strongly discouraged to keep the place free of rodents. There is a rumor that pigeons were eating the plant buds. As we are always looking for ways to enhance the carefully cultivated plantings, we expect the park's central area will be reviewed for soil quality.

Due to inclement weather our June 21st concert was cancelled. **Our next scheduled event is Art in the Park on Sunday October 2nd 10am to 5pm.** *Inclement weather cancels. Any questions, call 212 866 9038.*

The environs of Straus Park has an interesting history. The area near Straus Park was a valley or dale ("dael") covered in flowers ("bloemen"). The Dutch called this area "Bloemendael," or Bloomingdale. Broadway used to be called Bloomingdale Road. After the British forces captured Manhattan on September 15, 1776, during the Revolutionary War, Straus Park was the western end of the British fortification. At the north end of Straus Park there used to be a decorative bronze trough installed by the ASPCA from 1907 until shortly before WW II.

Isidor and Ida Straus, for whom the park was named, once lived in a frame house at 2745 Broadway near 105th Street. The Straus family, one of New York's most prominent during 'The Gilded Age,' owned R.H. Macy & Co. In 1902 they opened the still existing Macy's at Herald Square. The family's philanthropic work included special concerns for health, education and other public services. Isidor and Ida were passengers on the tragic maiden voyage of the S. S. Titanic from England to America. On April 15, 1912, the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank three hours later. Ida Straus chose to stay on board the sinking ship with her husband rather than get into a lifeboat with other women and children and be saved. To honor and remember them, Straus Park and statue "Memory" by sculptor Augustus Lukeman and architect Evarts Tracy were dedicated on April 15, 1915. Golden letters behind the statue of a beautiful contemplative reclining woman read:

IN MEMORY OF ISIDOR AND IDA STRAUS
WHO WERE LOST AT SEA IN THE TITANIC DISASTER
APRIL 15 1912
LOVELY AND PLEASANT WERE THEY IN THEIR LIVES
AND IN
THEIR DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED

11 Samuel 1 23

NYC acquired this land in 1895. From 1995 to 1997 an \$800,000 major renovation project was originated by local citizens involved in the West 106th Street Block Association. Eric Mattes designed the new plan, with improvements comprised of benches, lighting, shrubs, fencing, pavement, and 15 feet westward expansion of Straus Park. A plaque was placed on the ground. The Straus family provided an endowment fund for the restoration of the monument and transformation of the reflecting pool into a central planting bed. Friends of Straus Park was formed to preserve the park's beauty and tranquility and presence in the neighborhood.

Of well-known neighbors, Alice Neel lived adjacent to Straus Park. Duke Ellington resided at 333 Riverside Drive with his son Mercer and sister Ruth and her family. Saul Bellow, winner of Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes, had also lived here. George Gershwin and his family resided at 316 West 103rd Street after the hit, *Lady Be Good*. George composed in the fifth floor study. Humphrey Bogart lived with his family at 245 West 103rd Street. Marion Davies, mistress of William Randolph Hearst, shared her residence at 331 Riverside Drive with her mother, two sisters and servants.

The Nicholas Roerich Museum in an 1898 townhouse at 319 West 107th Street houses some of Roerich's life's work of thousands of paintings. As a theatre designer, Roerich collaborated with Diaghilev, Stravinsky and Nijinsky. Roerich's wife, Helena, niece of Mussorgsky, was a pianist and author of books about Buddhism. In 1920 they founded the Agni Yoga Society. Known for His beliefs and promotion of synthesis and cross-fertilization of the arts, Roerich was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his Roerich Peace Pact of 1935. He and his family settled in the Kullu Valley at an elevation of 6,500 feet in the Himalayan foothills.

The equestrian statue at 106th Street overlooking Riverside Drive portrays Franz Sigel, a graduate of the German Military Academy, forced to flee due to his radical politics. Sigel emigrated to the US where he opposed slavery and joined the Union Army. He eventually rose to the rank of Major General. Sigel fought in Union battles against Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. After the war Sigel worked in journalism, publishing, and lecturing in New York City.

Nearby the Sigel statue between 105th and 106th Street on Riverside Drive annex is The New York Buddhist Church. Outside the building is a 15-foot 13th-century bronze statue of a Buddhist teacher. A castle-like building between 105th and 106th Streets on Central Park West was once The New York Cancer Hospital, founded in

1884, the year that Ulysses S. Grant developed throat cancer. It was the first hospital in the USA dedicated specifically for the treatment of cancer. John Jacob Astor III and other prominent New Yorkers laid the cornerstone for the hospital. If you have time, walk to 112th Street and Amsterdam Avenue where you will arrive at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine built on land where an orphanage once stood. Further north to 116th Street is the entrance to Columbia University. This site once held an Asylum for the Insane.

Come visit Straus Park and our historical neighborhood!
Please support our efforts to maintain Straus Park. Contributions to Friends of Straus Park, Inc. can be sent to: Cathedral Station, P.O. Box 2021, New York, NY 10025



Art in the Park

Sunday October 2nd 10am to 5pm.

*Inclement weather cancels.
Any questions, call 212 866 9038*



National Historic Landmark The Woodlawn Cemetery - Bronx, NY

In the February 2011 issue of the SHS newsletter I wrote to inform you that the National Historic Landmarks Committee had voted unanimously to recommend The Woodlawn Cemetery for National Landmark status.

A news release dated June 30, 2011 announced: "AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: Secretary Salazar Designated 14 New National Historic Landmarks. The Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, NY is on this list of newly designated historic landmarks. 'Each of these landmarks represents a chapter in the story of America, from archeological sites dating back more than two millennia to historic train depots, homes of famous artists, and buildings designed by some of our greatest architects,' said secretary Salazar. 'By designating these sites as national landmarks, we help meet the goals of President Obama's American Great Outdoors Initiative to establish a conservation ethic for the 21st century and reconnect people, especially young people, to our nation's historic, cultural, and national heritage.' Secretary Salazar is the Secretary of the Interior.

Now that the cemetery has received this honor, it will be eligible for grants and federal funds that were previously unavailable to it.

The reason why this is of interest to the Straus family is because several family members are buried or interred there including: Isidor, Jesse, Percy and Herbert and their families, the Hess family (Sara Straus Hess), the Levy family (Beatrice Straus Levy), the Scheftel family (Vivian Straus Scheftel's husband and his family, and the Kuhn family (Therese Kuhn Straus, Herbert's wife's family).

The Woodlawn Cemetery is planning to host an unveiling event on Sunday, October 16th. Information about this event will be posted on their website toward the end of the summer. Please check there for more specifics about time and place as well as what the event will entail. www.thewoodlawncemetery.org



Correction

In the last issue of the newsletter I published an article about the last letter written by Ida Straus. In this article I stated that the letter was to Mrs. Burbidge, the wife of the owner of Selfridge's Department Store in London. Mrs. Burbidge was actually Lilian, the wife of the general manager of Harrod's Department Store. Thank you to June McCash for pointing out this error.

Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

DVD Slide Show of the Straus Family History Tour in Germany September 13-19, 2006 - \$20.00

DVD Video of the Straus Family History Tour in Germany September 13-19, 2006 - \$20.00

"The Autobiography of Isidor Straus" privately published by Sara Straus Hess, in softcover - \$40.00

"Genealogical Miscellany" a family genealogy compiled by Robert K. Straus with addenda - \$40.00

Large black & white photograph of the Isidor and Ida Straus family taken at Elberon NJ in 1905 - \$40.00

A Reminder: Witnesses to the Past by Lothar Horter and Michael Tilly, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn. This book is about the history of the Jews in several small towns in the Rheinpfalz area of Germany. A large section contains complete information and photographs of the Mehlingen Cemetery where many Straus family members are buried. - \$25.00

The History of the Jews of Otterberg by Dr. Hans Steinebrei, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn and Dr. Andreas J. Schwab. This excellent publication contains a large section dedicated to the Straus family. Many photographs compliment the text. This book is published in English by the Straus Historical Society, Inc. - \$35.00.

My Family: I Could Write a Book by Edith Maas Mendel. This charming volume of stories about the members of Edith Mendel's family is a must read for all those interested in family history. Even if the people in this book are not your direct relatives, their appeal is universal. *My Family* is amply enriched with photographs of the people and places mentioned. - \$25.00

Shipping and handling is included for all items. Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistoricalsociety.org

You Are Invited

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board. Attendance can be in person or by conference call.

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, October 12, 2011 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman in New York City at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board nor to contribute to the Society. This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in the SHS may have an opportunity to participate and to share his/her views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul A. Kurzman 212-396-7537 for further information.