

STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 8 Number 2

Newsletter

February 2007

Straus Family History Tour September 13-19, 2006

After working with the Straus family for 16 years, I was anxious to actually see the places in southwestern Germany where they lived, worshiped, worked and were buried. Alan F. Hockstader, a family member with vast experience planning international trips, agreed to help organize the trip. Roland Paul and Dr. Hans Steinebrei in Germany guided us with our itinerary and led us to Dr. Wolfgang Grams whose company, Routes to the Roots, provided us with a bus and guide.

Twenty people, family members and friends, signed up for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Since people were coming from all over the United States and Canada, and each had different travel requirements, it was decided that the group would meet in Wiesbaden on September 13th. Jack and Betty Schafer flew to Munich a few days early and drove to Wiesbaden. Barney, Nancy and Graham Straus visited Legoland Germany before meeting the group in Wiesbaden. The rest of the group flew to Frankfurt. Penelope More, Brett Gladstone, Eric Marty and I opted to arrive a day early so that we would have time to adjust to the time difference before the rest of the group's arrival.



Bright and early on Wednesday, September 13th, Oscar S. Straus III, Joan de Graaff, and Alan and Birgitta Hockstader arrived at the Hotel Fuerstenhof in Wiesbaden. Throughout the day the remainder of the group arrived: Michael H. and Debbie Buckner, Tom and Billie Straus, JoAnn Jaffe and her daughter Jardena Gertler-Jaffe. Ann Straus Gertler was to meet her daughter-in-law and granddaughter in the Frankfurt airport but missed her flight. Unfortunately a series of misadventures kept her from joining the group until two days later.

There was time on Wednesday for napping, touring the city, lunch and even a massage at one of the many local bathhouses. Brett and Penelope chose that option. The first official event

of the trip was a cocktail party at the Cafe Havana adjoining the hotel. Here we met, learned about each other, exchanged our thoughts and expectations for the trip and enjoyed the delicious Cuban food and drinks. From there we walked back to the hotel for a welcome dinner. Our guide, Gerd Behrens met us and spoke about the travel plans.



Brett Gladstone, Billie and Tom Straus and Penelope More at our

Gerd explained to me that each village held its own fair and that local food was served at that time. He asked if I thought the group might enjoy sampling some of these dishes. At the time it seemed like a great idea, one that would really show us something of the local customs and culture. This turned out to be one of the worst ideas of the trip - perhaps the only really bad idea. But more about that later.

Alan gave us all a pep talk about how important it was to be on time for the bus' departure each morning. Although everyone agreed they would be responsible for their own wake-up call, somehow a mysterious caller made certain we were all up and finished with breakfast on time.

It was an excited group that boarded the bus on Thursday morning for our trip to Worms, our first stop. There we were met by Traudel Mattes, an English-speaking guide who led us through the city's wall to the Judengasse (Jewish Lane) and through the Jewish Quarter of Worms. She explained that Emperor Henry IV invited the Jews to Worms in 1034 because of their money handling and mercantile skills. They were rich merchants with worldwide connections. About 600-800 Jews came from Italy, Spain and France. They lived in a walled community with houses two stories high. Later, when the population grew and laws became

*"We are not makers of history.
We are made by history."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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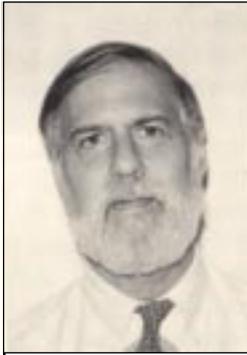
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The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Lazarus Straus family and the historical context in which they lived through research and education. You are invited to submit articles or ideas for articles, calendar events, and material relating to the Straus family and to their history.

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is a tax exempt organization as described under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Contributions to the Society are deductible to the extent provided by law. A copy of the annual report of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. may be obtained from the Society or from the New York State Attorney General, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.



**A Message from the Outgoing Chair:
Oscar S. Straus III**

The Straus Historical Society has come a long way since its was first envisioned. I was asked to enlist in 1996, became its treasurer in 1998 and followed Paul Kurzman as chairperson in 2003. I feel comfortable and pleased that David Kurzman has agreed to become the next chairperson. I know he will continue to strengthen the organization.

The Society has moved from a loose confederation of interested family members to an organization with tax exempt status that will be able to continue the research into our family's history and to provide access to that history as it continues to study where we came from and where we are going.

The next step for the Society is to ensure the continuation of its existence, to continue the excellent research and reporting of the past activities of this family and then to collect information and to write about the present generation. The third generation of family in the United States is leaving us. We have to finish the collection of their oral history. When that is accomplished, the oral history of the next generation must be recorded. It is only by this work that we can build a complete story.

I have been thrilled with the support that members of the Straus family and their friends have shown. I know that the future is in strong hands.



**A Message from the Incoming Chair:
David H. Kurzman**

I've been asked to perform a daunting task: following Oscar S. Straus III as chair of the Straus Historical Society. Oscar has been at the helm, guiding us toward our destination for four years. Under his auspices, the board has grown in membership, we have begun work toward seeking outside foundation support, and SHS had hosted numerous family-related trips to local and international destinations.

I have many goals for the board to reach in the next few years. I have no doubt, given our vast intellectual capital and work ethic, that we will be successful. It is a personal goal of mine to establish longer-term projects that raise the profile of SHS through education, research, and social outreach that is in keeping with our charter to increase the knowledge base of the Straus family's tremendous history and accomplishments. Such efforts have been impossible given our current budgetary constraints. But, as our financial resources grow, our ability to present seminars, provide documentation to authors and researchers, and expand our sphere of influence will develop.

To reach that point we need your help. Please give an annual, tax-deductible gift to the Straus Historical Society. Please bequest us in your estate. And get involved in our efforts to preserve the Straus family's history of amazing business, philanthropic and socio-political accomplishments.

With warm wishes,
David H. Kurzman
Chair



Walls leading to Judengasse (Jewish Lane) in Worms

more restrictive, this area became a ghetto. The walls prevented outward expansion. Residents added stories to their houses to accommodate the growing population. Today many of these houses are four and five stories high.

The first synagogue was built when the Jews arrived in Worms but was destroyed in 1096. Only a small part of the foundation wall remains today. A second synagogue, the center for Jewish life, was built in 1174-75. The same craftsmen who built the Worms Cathedral built the synagogue. A mikvah (ritual bath) was built in 1212-13. We descended a steep flight of stone steps to see the remains of this mikvah. We also visited the restored synagogue and the cheder, the school, where Jewish men and boys studied.



Guide Traudel Mattes outside synagogue in Worms

For several centuries there was a progressive period of prosperity in Worms. But in the 1400's the plague arrived. Jews were blamed for this scourge and many were expelled. When there was prosperity the Jewish community thrived. But in 1615 the Jews were once again expelled due to the poor financial conditions. In the 1800's Napoleon opened the ghettos and the community once again thrived until World War II when 90% of Worms was destroyed and the Jewish population was killed. In 1938 the synagogue was burned down. What remained of the ruins was destroyed completely over the following years. In 1961 the city of Worms rebuilt the synagogue using as many of the remaining materials as could be found. Today a small congregation of mostly Russian Jews worship there.



Stairway leading to mikvah

Then we visited Rashi House, a small museum filled with Jewish artifacts. Rashi was the Rabbi Salomon ben Isaak of Troyes (France) who studied in Worms in 1060 AD. He became famous as one of the most important Jewish scholars of eastern Judaism. After the museum we had lunch at a local restaurant. There we were served soup with noodles and dumplings, salad, beef and pork, both with gravy, noodles and potatoes. We would later come to appreciate the comparative lightness of this fare

as dumpling upon dumpling was served in subsequent meals; some with sauerkraut, others with meat and bread filling, and many with gravy.

After lunch we met Traudel Mattes again for a tour of the Worms Cathedral (Wormser Dom). The earliest part of this imposing building was constructed between 1000 and 1025. There was construction and addition to the building for several centuries. The cathedral is dedicated to St. Peter and is one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in Europe. Balthasar Neumann created the ornate 100-foot gilt altar. Traudel Mattes explained the history of the cathedral and showed us the elaborate models of it.

Then we visited the oldest Jewish cemetery in Europe. Here the first recorded burial was in 1076 and the most recent occurred in 1938. We saw tombstones of rabbis with scraps of paper on top of them. Our guide explained that people came to pray and left prayers on the paper scraps on top of the tombstones. We saw tombstones with the Cohen symbol (two hands with pinky and ring finger together and then middle and index finger together - like the "Live long and prosper" sign of Dr. Spock in Star Trek). This signifies that a descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses, the priestly line, is buried here. We saw the cemetery wall with cutouts where the Cohenim could stand outside the walls to look in since they are not allowed in the cemetery. We also saw tombstones with pitchers and ewers on them symbolizing that a Levite was buried there. The Levites are descendants of the tribe of Levi, served in the Sanctuary and did service to the Cohenim. It was interesting to learn that, although the Straus family was originally Jewish, not all of the family members on our trip are Jewish nor had their parents been Jewish. Many knew nothing about Jewish ritual or custom. And so the trip became an education of more than family history per se.



Old tombstone of rabbis with prayers on scraps of paper

We also learned that Traudel Mattes, although not Jewish herself, has studied Jewish history and has learned to read and speak Hebrew. She is part of a growing movement in southwestern Germany to learn about Jewish history and culture and to commemorate the memory of this once thriving population.

After the cemetery we were all exhausted and drained. So much to take in in one day and the trip was only beginning. We boarded the bus for the ride to Dirmstein, the small village where Jakob (Jacques Loeser) Straus was born in 1754. He lived there with his wife Kendel (Karoline or Sara) Meyer. Oldest son Lazarus Straus Sr. was born there. Most of the people on this trip are descended from some of their other children: Zerle, Isaac, Ester, Seligmann (Salomon) and Philippine (Vele).

We were met in Dirmstein by a local historian who, unfortunately, spoke no English. Our guide, Gerd, did yeoman's work

trying to keep up with his rapid fire German. This gentleman was substituting for the man who was supposed to meet us and was called away. We did not get information about the Straus relatives who lived here but spent considerable time trying to convince this man that we were



Birgitta Hockstader, JoAnn Jaffe, Jardena Gertler-Jaffe and Betty Schafer in Dirmstein

not interested in a different family that once lived there. We were happy to see the village and walk on the same streets the Strauses had walked 250 years ago. Although the village houses have been reconstructed since that time, and the Straus house no longer exists, we did see a house next door to where the



Oscar S. Straus III on a Dirmstein street

Straus house once stood. As we were walking we noticed an open archway through which a horse and carriage might have been driven. Once inside we found a charming courtyard with a profusion of colorful flowers covering two garden walls. A local winery was located here.

Mike Buckner was fascinated with the winemaking equipment. A small wine shop was also here. Brett Gladstone and Jack Schafer bought a few bottles of their excellent Rhine wine for a group celebration after dinner. We were amazed that this very good white wine was only \$2.50 per bottle. Penelope More and Betty Schafer found a small village bakery where they bought delicious pastries to compliment the wine.

After Dirmstein we once again boarded the bus for the ride to Kaiserslautern to the Hotel Dorint. There we were met by Dr. Hans Steinebrei and his wife Helma, Roland Paul, Prof. Dr. Andreas Froelich and his wife, and historian Karen S. Franklin. After checking in and unpacking, we met in the hotel lounge for a brief orientation talk by Roland Paul and Dr. Steinebrei. Dr. Steinebrei surprised the group by inviting us to dinner at his home on Saturday evening, an invitation we enthusiastically accepted.



Roland Paul, welcoming Brett Gladstone, Eric Marty and Karen Franklin to Kaiserslautern

Roland Paul invited us to join him at a local restaurant. Some of the group declined but a large group took taxis to the town center where we met Roland at the Spinnradl Restaurant. We

were provided with a private upstairs room where we could visit and introduce ourselves to Roland, an historian, our guide and interpreter for the next several days. We dined on excellent local fish and meat dinners and many tasted the wonderful Rhine wines prevalent in the area. It was a very tired but happy group that finally fell into bed Thursday night. So much had happened already; we had seen and learned so much and we were only just beginning our trip.

Friday we would finally be visiting Otterberg, the town we associated most with the Straus family. And this is where a ceremony would be held to dedicate a plaque to honor the Straus family.

The bus first stopped at the Mehlingen Cemetery where former town mayor Hans Buch met us. He spoke excellent English which was probably a relief for Roland Paul. Hans Buch showed us a book published locally that told the history of the area and contained photographs of all the tombstones in this cemetery.



Roland Paul and Hans Buch at Mehlingen Cemetery

He spoke of the good feelings of all the people here and about their lives before the war. As we looked out over the large cemetery we were surprised to see that, unlike the manicured expanse of

the old Jewish cemetery in Worms, here the graves were interspersed in a more natural space. Ivy and trees grew throughout. Only a thin wire fence defined the cemetery's borders. Herr Buch explained that there was a conscious decision to leave the cemetery in its natural state. Once we understood that, we found the cemetery to be welcoming and interesting. We walked among the graves as Hans Buch and Roland Paul described the people who were buried there. We found a tall tombstone with an ewer on its face. This stone was for Salomon Oscar Straus, brother of Isaak, father of Sara Straus and Barbara Straus. Sara was the wife of Lazarus and Barbara married Abraham Maas. Family members were fascinated to learn more about the Straus Levite connection. We also saw the grave of Johanette Grunebaum Straus, wife of Isaak Straus, mother of Lazarus Straus. As we left the cemetery Hans Buch gave us copies of his book. I promised to have the text translated and to publish an English language version. Once we returned to the US, I received a DVD with all of the photos in this book from Herr Buch. The text is already translated and I am in the process of formatting the book. I will be offering it for sale through the Society as soon as it is published.



Billie & Tom Straus next to Salomon Straus' tombstone

From Mehlingen we rode through the lovely rolling hills and farmland to Winnweiler, another town where family members lived including those in the Tuteur family. There we visited a small Jewish museum that opened in 2004. The owner explained that he wanted to memorialize the Jewish people who lived here and to show non-Jews something of Jewish tradition and culture. His goal was to educate people and to teach tolerance. This small museum divided its space between Jewish artifacts and exhibits about the Holocaust. Once again, the



Roland Paul with the group at Winnweiler Museum

group was held spellbound, even with the necessity for translation by Roland Paul, as the director showed us his museum. There were photographs of Isidor and Ida, Oscar Straus and other family members such as the Grunebaum family and Levi family. Afterward

we briefly walked through Winnweiler village. Jack Schafer and Jardena Gertler-Jaffe stopped at a small outdoor market stall to buy fruit.

From Winnweiler we drove, once again, through the countryside to Otterberg. We rounded a turn as Otterberg village came into view. The bus driver stopped so we could take photographs of the village with its



charming red roofed houses. This was as picturesque a site as one could imagine. For many of us this was the most important aspect of our trip; seeing Otterberg.

The bus stopped at an AVIA gas station. We were confused when we were asked to leave the bus. We thought this was only a stop to refuel. It soon became apparent that we were to enter the gas station office. There, Karl Albert Thines was waiting for us with the Straus cradle. He apologized for not bringing us to his home but explained that his wife was ill and did not want visitors. We were delighted to see the cradle and enjoyed the unusual venue. Dr. Hans Steinebrei met us at the gas station. He and Mr. Thines told us the cradle was constructed between 1840 and 1850. The Thines family bought it about 80 years ago from the Straus family. Now it is an important part of their own family. Mr. Thines and his siblings were all rocked in this cradle as infants as were his children and grandchildren. Although Straus family members



Owner Karl Albert Thines with cradle

offered to buy the cradle, Mr. Thines will keep it in his family for their future generations.

We once again boarded the bus for the short drive through Otterberg. We stopped at a town plaza in front of a large church. From there Dr. Steinebrei escorted us down a cobble stoned street. We enjoyed looking at the old houses that are so different from any we knew at home. We stopped at a brick building with a plaque on its face. This building, now a private home, was built in 1835 and was originally used as a Jewish bathhouse. It was converted to a synagogue and surely must have seen the entire Straus family worship there. Today a young couple owns it and is restoring the building. They showed us the back of the house where the women's entrance is still standing. They



The group outside the former Otterberg synagogue

also showed us the lintel over a back door with a Hebrew inscription on it. Karen Franklin and JoAnn Jaffe both read Hebrew and would later tell us it read: "These are the gates of the Lord where the righteous enter." The side of the building revealed what must have been stained glass windows that are now cemented in. There was some suggestion that the couple would have appreciated a donation to help them complete the work on their house.

We continued walking the streets of Otterberg, soaking up the local charm. We came upon the former house of Salomon Straus. It had been in Straus hands until the 1880's. Here the homeowner's son took us to the inner courtyard where he showed us the Tudoresque wood planking on the facade. Below one window we saw a white painted marking seeming to indicate that this portion of the house was built in 1738. Dr. Steinebrei and Roland Paul spoke to the group about the Straus family and the times they lived here. We were then treated to a tour of the house and the attic. I think this may have been the highlight of the trip for many. As we ascended the curved stairway we entered another world in another



Group in courtyard of Salomon Straus house

time. The brick floor and all of the contents were covered with a thick layer of dust. This seemed to enhance the aura of days gone by. We saw huge glass brandy carafes sitting in raffia baskets, sleds, a spinning wheel, metal milk containers, ledger books and blue and white doors that appeared to be covered with wallpaper but were, in fact, painted. We all imagined that some of the items actually belonged to the Straus family at one time. Holger Zerger, the owner's son, promised to ask his mother if any of these items could be sold to us. Unfortunately, she



Brandy carafes in the attic of Salomon Straus' house

arus and Sara Straus. He was the oldest of fourteen, nine of whom survived. We could imagine him living in this house with his widowed mother, several siblings and his own family. Further down the same block we saw the house of Barbara Straus Maas and her husband Abraham Maas. Barbara was the daughter of Salomon Straus and the sister of Sara Straus. Today this house has a beauty shop on the ground floor.

was away on vacation at the time of our visit. We got the impression that the house, itself was for sale.

We reluctantly left the Salomon Straus house and proceed down the street to another Straus house. This one was the former home of Laz-



Lazarus Straus house

If the trip ended here I think we all would have been satisfied. We'd seen the town, the houses where the Strauses lived and the cemetery where they were buried. We were filled with emotion, almost overwhelmed by our experiences so far. And there was still quite a lot of ground to cover and so much more to see.

We were directed to a plaza in front of a modern brick building that is used as the town hall/city center. There a crowd of local people and press were getting ready for the dedication ceremony. A fine drizzle began falling as the ceremony started. No one seemed to mind. We all stood outside and listened to speeches delivered in German and then translated for us by Roland Paul. Buergermeister (Mayor) Ulrich Wasser and several other dignitaries spoke, welcoming the group and explaining the importance of the Straus family to Otterberg. SHS chair Oscar S. Straus III spoke briefly about the history of the family,



Dedication ceremony: Roland Paul and Oscar S. Straus III

how we in America and Canada have not forgotten the roots of the Straus family in Germany and how happy we were to return to the home of their ancestors. Dr. Steinebrei then spoke about the history of the family and mentioned that he had been inviting me to come to Germany for many years and asked me to bring the Straus family. Debbie Buckner, state representative from Georgia and wife of Historic Talbotton Foundation co-president Michael H. Buckner, presented the Germans with a replica of

the flag of Georgia from the time when Lazarus arrived there in 1852. Historian and genealogist Karen Franklin brought greetings from the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City, the premier German Jewish research institute. Then we announced the donation of \$1,000 USD to the Otterberg Museum on behalf of the Straus family and the Straus Historical Society.



Debbie Buckner presenting the former flag of Georgia

It was now time for the dedication. We were surprised when the actual plaque was unveiled. The dedication was to Oscar Solomon Straus, Ambassador to Turkey and first Jewish US cabinet member. We expected the dedication to be for the Straus family and not to one individual. The excitement and pride of the Otterberg residents quickly overshadowed any disappointment



Buergermeister Wasser and Oscar S. Straus III with Oscar Salomon Straus memorial

felt by those family members whose direct ancestor had not been honored. The plaque is set into a large red sandstone boulder embedded in a hill outside the town hall. Red sandstone, which is found locally, was used to symbolize the long tradition of connection: the thousands of years until today for the sandstone to be formed, just as the family has a long tradition of connection to Otterberg that continues today.

After receiving red and white Otterberg medals on ribbons, and posing for photographs, we were marshaled into the town hall for a buffet luncheon. This was a lovely informal lunch where we could mingle with Otterberg residents, talk about the ceremony and our trip and learn more about the locale. We learned that the medals we received were designed in the 1500's. The artist didn't know what otters looked like so he drew squirrels instead. The townspeople liked them so much they kept the squirrels on their medals even though the town is named Otterberg.



After lunch we were once again on the move. We met Dr. Steinebrei at the central plaza where we originally disembarked from the bus. From there it is a short walk to the imposing Cistercian Church (Zisterzienserkerche) where Dr. Steinebrei explained that the building is now being used by both the Protestants and Catholics of the town. He spoke of the church's his-

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tory and told us that many of the older buildings were made with local red sandstone. Although it was getting late and we



Roland Paul in the Cistercian Church

were exhausted, we made one more stop before boarding the bus. We walked to the Otterberg Museum and saw their interesting exhibits on the history of the town. One room contained information and artifacts from the Straus family including an old family tree. We promised to send them the updated artistic family tree. We also promised to send materials to enhance their collection along with the donation.

We boarded the bus for a drive through the countryside. We saw rolling hills, forests, small villages and farms. It was not difficult to imagine the Straus family riding horse drawn carts or tending to their business on this land. Very little has changed, especially in the countryside. Before too long we pulled up to a very small village and were asked to walk toward the one tall building in town. This is the newly restored Wasserschloss (Water Castle), the site of our dinner. Roland explained that the restaurant had only opened three months ago but that reservations were becoming impossible to secure. We were given one large room with tables set in a long row on the diagonal. White cloths and flowers gave us a clue that we were about to have a very special experience. The turret of the castle is accessible through a series of steep stairways. Many of us challenged ourselves to the climb and were rewarded with a spectacular view of the idyllic countryside.



View from the Wasserschloss

Karen Franklin, fellow historian and the wife of a rabbi, suggested that, since this was Friday night at sundown, and since we had just celebrated such an emotional and memorable day dedicated to the Jewish past, the traditional Sabbath candle lighting, blessing over the bread and Sabbath prayer seemed appropriate. JoAnn Jaffe lit the candles, her daughter Jardena said the prayer over the bread and Barney Straus Jr. said the prayer over the wine. For many in the group this was their first



Sabbath dinner in the Water Castle

experience with a traditional Jewish Sabbath blessing. We could not have been in a more picturesque setting nor eaten a better meal. It was a very tired and happy group that returned to the hotel Friday night.

Saturday, September 16th Roland Paul took us on a tour of Kaiserslautern which is 8 kilometers south of Otterberg. He explained that there was a Jewish presence in Kaiserslautern from the 12th century on. The centers of Jewish life in this area were in Speyer, Worms and Cologne, quite possibly due to the proximity to the Rhine River and its ready source of water.

First we met Bernhard Geller, representative of the Society of Christian and Jewish Relations. We visited the site of an old mikvah (ritual bath) that was discovered ten years ago during an excavation for a new office building. It was on the site of an old synagogue that was torn down in 1838. Herr Geller explained that the mikvah was preserved after the destruction of the synagogue and it is now a monument. There was no ghetto in Kaiserslautern as there had been in Worms. Today, the mikvah is the only Jewish artifact left in Kaiserslautern. There is no synagogue and there are no Jewish houses.

Then we walked through a shopping street and stopped briefly at the town's market. We were amazed at the profusion of beautiful flowers, fruits and vegetables on display for purchase. Many of us wished we had time to wander among the vendor's stalls. But Roland had other ideas. He herded us through the market and on to a grass covered plaza, the site of the original synagogue of Kaiserslautern. Ludwig Levy built this synagogue from 1883 to 1887. It was destroyed in 1938, two months before Kristallnacht. Here Roland Paul worked with a commission to memorialize the building and the residents of Kaiserslautern who were murdered during the Holocaust. There is a low hedge planted in the shape of the former synagogue, following its footprint exactly. At each corner of the hedge there is a viewing device. We were all amazed to see the old synagogue in 3D virtual reality; from the perspective it would have been if it was still there.



Memorial on the site of the former Kaiserslautern synagogue

Each corner held one of these viewing devices and each view was in perspective. At the center of one long side of the hedge there were several more viewers with images of other interior aspects. Once again we saw the inscription in Hebrew that we'd seen on the former synagogue in Otterberg, "These are the gates of the Lord where the righteous enter." Two very large pillars were engraved with the names of Kaiserslautern residents who were killed in the Holocaust. We were moved to see that, rather than just individuals, many of those memorialized here were whole families. I recognized the names Heilbron, Herz, Kahn, Kamm, Lazarus, Lehmann, Levy, Loeb, Loew, Maas, Meyer, Sonnheim, Stern, Strauss and Tuteur; possible family members. Roland explained that there were 350 Jews living there in 1938. There were several deportations of the residents of Kaiserslautern beginning in 1940. The last were deported to Theresienstadt in 1945 and only two or three survived. One of them was Dr. Andreas Froelich's grandfather.

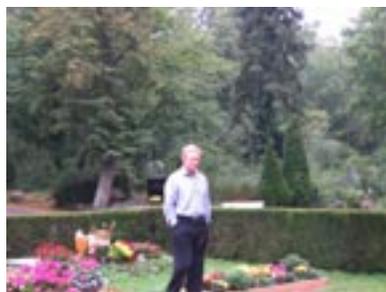
From this site we were driven to the large cemetery in Kaiserslautern. It is unusual because the Jewish section is within the Christian cemetery and divided only by a low hedge. We walked through the Christian section, stopping to admire some of the very ornate tombstones complete with landscaping and floral displays. One small section contained several rows of identical stones with ornate metallic crosses on their top. These are the stones of soldiers from Kaiserslautern who died in the Franco-Prussian War.

Once inside the Jewish section Roland pointed out tombstones for many family members. We saw stones for Maas and Straus ancestors. Jewish tradition prohibits the use of flowers in cemeteries because they die. All observance is toward life. So we were surprised to find two



Michael H. Buckner, Penelope More and Jardena Gertler-Jaffe in Kaiserslautern Jewish Cemetery

long rows of black granite stones with very elaborate floral displays, some of them plastic, at the far end of the Jewish



Michael H. Buckner in the Russian section

section. We were also surprised to find that some of these stones had the faces of those interred there engraved on them. Jewish art permits no "graven images." Upon closer inspection we found these stone to be for recent Russian Jewish immigrants who, after

having been denied their right to religious observance for so long, probably did not know these prohibitions.

Outside the cemetery there was an unusual cafe where we stopped for coffee. The front lawn of the cafe was planted with tombstones. It might have been macabre had the building itself not been so pleasant, with large windows and lots of light. They served delicious pastries and excellent coffee. Most of the group seems relieved to have the break.

There are many statues with fishes on them throughout Kaiserslautern. We asked Roland about this and he explained that, because of the proximity to many lakes and the Rhine River, many people fish. There is a legend that an emperor once caught a fish several meters long. This was extremely long, even for those medieval times. To commemorate this the fish became the symbol of Kaiserslautern just as the otter is the symbol of Otterberg.

From there we drove to Oberalben where the Auswanderer (Immigrant) Museum is located. Here, once again, we were treated to large dumplings in a bowl of white gravy. These were filled with sauerkraut and bits of meat. By now most of the group had

their fill of dumplings. But they were gracious and did not complain. The host gave a talk about the museum, the only museum in Germany dedicated to the immigrant experience until the recent opening of a similar but larger museum in Bremerhaven. Roland Paul spoke about the history of immigration and I spoke about



Above: Auswanderer Museum Below: Our hostess and Roland Paul



the Lazarus Straus family, Lazarus' involvement in the Revolution of 1848, (referred to as the "Forty-Eighters") his immigration to the US, his relocation to rural Georgia and his family's joining him there in 1854.

From Oberalben we drove to Lichtenberg Castle. It was built in 1200 for Count Valdenza. Roland Paul took us on a tour of the

buildings and the Museum of the Wandering Musicians that is housed within this castle. He was instrumental in the museum's creation and proudly explained the importance of the traveling musicians. Roland explained that, after the French Revolution, the people west of the Rhine were given freedom to choose their own professions. Many invented a new profession, traveling musician. Groups of men banded together, moved from town to town and played together to earn a living. The displays in the museum were fascinating. We were enchanted by Roland's enthusiastic descriptions. We hoped we adequately showed our appreciation. After a coffee stop at the cafe within the castle grounds, we were on the road again. This time we had only enough time to return to the hotel for a brief shower and change of clothes



At the gate of Lichtenberg Castle

before returning to the bus for the ride to the Steinebrei home.



Penelope More, Dr. Hans Steinebrei and Birgitta Hockstader at the Steinebrei home

Dr. Steinebrei is a retired dentist whose family has lived in the area for centuries. I found records for Steinebrei ancestors living in Otterberg in the late 1700's. He is dedicated to docu-

menting the history of the Jews of Otterberg. When I first began working on this family project, one of the first people I corresponded with was Dr. Steinebrei. We have kept up a lively exchange of research and questions for 16 years. I was delighted to finally meet this wonderful historian. Helma Steinebrei, his wife, is a warm woman who told us she regularly entertains the American soldiers stationed at the nearby base. Her English is excellent. Their home is beautifully decorated with antiques and artwork. We were treated to a champagne toast, a delicious buffet dinner and lively conversation. Many of us could have spoken with the Steinebreis all night. Dr. Steinebrei's sister Elisabeth and their charming daughter were also present. Its clear they both share their family's interest and warmth.

Sunday morning we checked out of the Hotel Dorint and boarded the bus once again. Our first stop was in Eichtersheim, the town where Fegele (Vogele), the wife of the first Lazarus (1715-1776) died, probably in the late 1700's. Roland explained that this was also the birth place of Friedrich Hecker, born 1811, who was one of the most famous "Forty-Eighters." Hecker was a representative to the first national assembly in German history in Frankfurt. He later immigrated to America and carried the ideals and goals of the revolutionaries with him. We stood outside the yellow Baroque building where Hecker was born while



Friedrich Hecker house in Eichtersheim



Roland spoke about Hecker's life. We couldn't help but notice the unusual sculptures nearby. We then walked through the grounds of a lovely park and saw huge sculptures undoubtedly done by the same artist. Some could only be described as bizarre. It certainly was the focal point of some lively conversation. We lunched at a nearby castle surrounded by a moat and spewing fountain. And then it was time for the drive to Heidelberg.

Roland Paul who had been with us since our arrival in Kaiserslautern, left us here. He was a wonderful guide and historian. We are so grateful to him. He made us feel comfortable, was more knowledgeable than we could ever have hoped, and treated us to a truly rare experience in Germany.

Throughout the trip we had been hearing Alan Hockstader talk about his search for a Magnum double chocolate ice cream bar. I think he asked about them in every town when we stopped. His search was finally rewarded in Heidelberg. The moment is recorded for all time in the Straus slide show. Alan was a happy man. Later others sampled the excellent ice cream and chocolate bar, me included. He was right. It was wonderful.

Heidelberg is an old university town on the Rhine River. We could see the ruins of an enormous castle through the mist-shrouded hills. The Hotel Ritter, where we stayed, is an old and famous establishment. It is located on the main walk street across from the city's cathedral. We were charmed to hear an organ concert there but many people in the group were kept awake during the night by the half hour chiming of the cathedral's bells. Our guide, Dr. Elisabeth Suedkamp met us on the plaza in front of the hotel. Elisabeth took us on a walk through town to the site of the Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory. We stood in front of the building and were amazed at the many places we'd seen where the Straus presence is felt. Penelope More's father, Robert K. Straus studied at Heidelberg University, as did Barney Straus Jr.'s grandfather, Nathan Straus Jr. In fact, Nathan Jr. and Otto Frank, Anne Frank's father, were roommates here. Some members of the group accompanied Elisabeth to the university library while others backtracked to the cathedral to hear an organ concert. Afterward we were on our own for dinner. Those of us who opted to eat at the hotel restaurant were not disappointed.



Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory

In the morning we had free time to explore Heidelberg. I climbed to the castle ruins with Jack and Betty Schafer. I imagine that jokester Jack could have said that the light drizzle didn't dampen our enthusiasm. We then walked to the town's bridge and rubbed their brass mascot, a small mouse. If one does this legend says you will return to Heidelberg. We were enchanted to see that someone had placed a few sunflower seeds under the paw of this adorable figure. We walked on the far side of the river until it was time to return to the hotel, pick up our luggage and board the bus once again. Other trip participants explored Heidelberg University and did some shopping.



The mist shrouded castle in Heidelberg

Our guide, Gerd Behrens, returned to escort us for the remainder of the trip. We were headed to our last stop, Frankfurt. We made a side trip to a small town for the promised town fair and local food. By now we knew it would be dumplings. And we were, as a group, ready to never eat another dumpling - ever. We asked Gerd to request that some other food be prepared for us. After a wait of two and a half hours, we were finally served a delicious lunch. But, by then, no one seemed to care that the food was delicious, We were beyond hungry - but still grateful we didn't have to eat dumplings.

After spending so much time in the countryside, it was a shock

to return to the tall buildings and commercialism of Frankfurt. I think it wasn't until we reached Frankfurt that we realized the trip was almost over. We had time to check in at our hotel, clean up and walk around the area for a short time before meeting in the hotel lobby for our farewell cocktail party and dinner.



Alan & Birgitta Hockstader



Graham, Barney & Nancy Straus



Brett Gladstone & Eric Marty



Joan de Graaff & Ann Straus Gertler



Jack & Betty Schafer

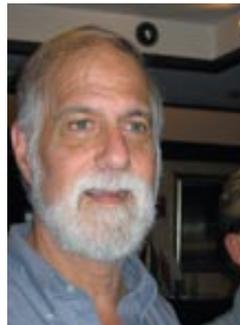


JoAnn Jaffe & Jardena Gertler-Jaffe



Debbie & Michael H. Buckner

By now



Oscar S. Straus III



Billie & Tom Straus



Penelope More

everyone felt they were traveling with good friends. We were amazed at how wonderfully nine-year-old Graham and thirteen-year-old Jardena bonded. The two were inseparable - and delightful. Mornings they could be found at the various hotel breakfast rooms, each with an ear bud stuck in an ear, sharing

the one iPod between them. They did puzzles, shared stories and formed a bond that will most likely endure long after the trip is completed. We were all so pleased to have these two very well behaved, bright, interesting young people along.

And we were also very pleased that Ann Straus Gertler, at age almost 84, finally arrived to meet the group. After several false starts, she traveled alone from Montreal Canada to Frankfurt and then took a taxi to Kaiserslautern and another taxi to Otterberg, arriving just in time for the dedication ceremony. Ann told us that there is a saying in her family about how a Straus, even on her deathbed, would get up and go on a trip if a ticket is waved before her eyes. Ann is a wonderful traveling companion who still remembers her grandfather Nathan Straus. She told us fascinating stories about the older generations on our bus rides between towns.

On our last evening together we met in the hotel lobby for champagne cocktails and to relive the wonderful experiences we'd shared. Now that everyone knew each other, looking at the family tree to find the connections was more meaningful. We were all relieved to learn that dinner in the hotel's restaurant blissfully contained no dumplings. Each participant spoke of his or her own feelings about the trip. Tom and Billie Straus and Mike and Debbie Buckner were going on the Rhine river cruise. Everyone else was leaving Germany, sorry the trip was over but anxious to get home and to share their stories with family and friends. We all had so much to think about. Many said they needed time to process it all.

After the trip Alan Hockstader sent me a copy of his video. Participants who took photographs sent them to me as well. The Society has created two DVDs of the trip. They are available to you for \$20 each.

If you wanted to go on the trip but could not, this is an opportunity to see the places they visited. Or if you are curious about the places we saw and the experiences we shared, both DVDs can enlighten you. The slide show DVD contains more than 540 images and is accompanied by musical selections. The video DVD contains Alan Hockstader's minute by minute narration. It runs about one and a half hours. Both, along with this newsletter article, will give you as complete an experience as you can have without actually traveling to Germany. And you won't have to eat any dumplings!



Friends of Straus Park

By Joan Adler

Photographs by Margie Kavanau

We are looking forward to our premier event, the 10th Annual Art in the Park: a day-long celebration of art, music, dance and food scheduled for Saturday, October 13th, rain date Sunday, October 14th. We hope you will join us at this wonderful neighborhood festival. If past years are any indication, this should be one of the best events of the year. All we need is for the weather to cooperate and for you to participate.

The board of directors of Friends of Straus Park have planned several exciting events in the Park. Please join your neighbors and friends at this lovely vest pocket Park.

Wednesday, April 25th

(Rain date: April 26th)

10th Annual Straus Park Commemorative Celebration

5:30 to 7:00 PM

Wednesday, June 20th

(Rain date: June 21st)

Evening Concert in the Park

5:30 to 7:30 PM

Saturday, July 14th

(Rain date: July 15th)

Book and Photography Fair

11:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Saturday, October 13th

(Rain date: October 14th)

10th Annual Art in the Park

**A day-long celebration of
art, music, dance & food**

11:00 AM to 5:00 PM



"Memory" watching over a beautiful bed of spring tulips.

Friends of Straus Park is a neighborhood organization dedicated to the preservation and enhanced utilization of Straus Park. We welcome your ideas about events we can sponsor in the Park and we welcome your participation.



Gay Mamula grew up near Straus Park. As a child her mother brought her here to play. She recently sent me photographs of her family that were taken in the 1960's at Straus Park. Thanks, Gay, for sharing these interesting photos with us.



Landscaper and Straus Park gardener John Oland in the Park. What a difference he's made. Thanks, John, for your hard work and for the beautiful plantings you've done. You've created a wonderful environment that all of us enjoy.



Neighborhood children climbing on "Memory," the commemorative sculpture in Straus Park.



The Book Fair in Straus Park

Straus Historical Society's Newsletters Are Available On-line

Past issues of the Straus Historical Society's newsletters are posted on our website on the Archives page.
www.straushistoricalsociety.org/archives.php

Each newsletter is in pdf format and requires Adobe Acrobat to view. If you do not have it, you can download Acrobat without charge.
www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html

Several additional articles, and many photographs are also posted on the Archives page. Check back frequently as newsletters, articles and photographs will be added on a continuing basis. If you would like a paper copy of past issues of the newsletter, they are also available for purchase at \$5.00 per issue.

Salem Field Cemetery Walking Tour - June 3, 2007 (rain date June 10)

Based on the positive feedback to the walking tour at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx last June, the SHS has decided to sponsor a walking tour of Salem Field Cemetery on the Brooklyn/Queens border.

At this cemetery we will find the Straus-Kohns Mausoleum where Lazarus, Sara, Hermine and Lazarus Kohns, Lee and Clara Kohns, Nathan and Lina Straus and their son Jerome, Oscar and Sarah Straus, Roger Williams and Gladys Guggenheim Straus and others are buried. Also in this cemetery are the graves of Sissie Straus Lehman and Irving Lehman, the Kurzman Mausoleum and many others. If there is sufficient interest, a lunch will be arranged after the walking tour.

Further details will be sent to you in the Spring. For now, please reserve the dates of June 3rd with a rain date of June 10th for the walking tour.

New Information - Contributions to the Society

The board of directors has decided to make a payment plan available to anyone wishing to contribute to the Society but feels that quarterly or monthly contributions would be better for them than one annual contribution.

If you wish to donate in this manner, please contact me and we will work out the details of your own particular requirements. Contact information may be found on the side-bar of page two and in the right hand column of page twelve.

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

"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

Masters Thesis of Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus." West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1947 - \$25.00

Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. A receipt will be issued for your purchase. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistoricalsociety.org

Available soon

The History of the Jews of Otterberg by Dr. Hans Steinebrei, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn. This excellent publication contains a large section dedicated to the Straus family. Many photographs compliment the text.

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 of the area. A large section contains complete information and photographs of the Mehlingen Cemetery where many Straus family members are buried.

Both books will be published in English by the Straus Historical Society, Inc. Announcement of their availability will follow.

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 Tuesday, May 22, 2007 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman, 129 East 79th Street, New York at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board or 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 212-452-7035 for further information.