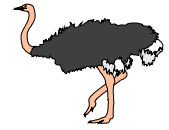


STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



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Newsletter

August 2010

Grand Opening Titanic Museum Attraction Pigeon Forge, TN

Where, you may ask, is Pigeon Forge, TN? And why would a group for Straus family members and Joan Adler, the executive director of the Straus Historical Society, find the events there so compelling that they made the trip to Pigeon Forge in April of 2010?

We need to go back to December 2009 to explain. When I received an e.mail from Colleen Douglas last December I had no idea where this correspondence would lead. Certainly I never expected that I would be attending the grand opening of a Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge, TN. That's one of the reasons why my work is so interesting. Something as seemingly simple as a note from a Straus family member asking if I would be interested in talking with a representative of the Titanic Museum in Branson, MO, could not have prepared me for the events to come.

Colleen explained that she'd met Mary Kellogg in Branson. Mary is an owner of the Titanic Museum Attraction there. Colleen was on vacation in Branson with her husband Geoff and their daughter Katherine when they visited the museum. When they identified themselves as descendants of Isidor and Ida Straus, Mary was excited to meet them. Mary later told them in an e.mail about her plans to open a second Titanic Museum Attraction, this one in Pigeon Forge, TN. The Pigeon Forge Museum would be twice as large as the one in MO and would have a reproduction of Isidor and Ida's sitting room cabin. Mary asked for photographs of the couple that could be put on display. Colleen put her in touch with SHS.

Pigeon Forge is 40 miles east of Knoxville, TN and very near North Carolina's western border. It is very close to Smoky Mountain National Park. Before the opening of

the Titanic Museum, its biggest attraction (that I am aware of) was Dollywood, the amusement park build by Dolly Pardon. The town is a huge family tourist destination with many other attractions like arcades, restaurants and souvenir shops.

In our first communication I told Mary that SHS had a large archive with many items that might be of interest to her. I attached an article which I'd written for the newsletter many years ago about the Strauses and their last trip aboard Titanic. You can find this article on the Archives page of our website: www.straushistoricalsociety.org/archives.php As you scroll down the page you will find the article: "Many Waters Cannot Quench Love."



Mary immediately put me in touch with Paul Burns, curator for their museum. He was genuinely excited to learn of a new source of Titanic related materials, especially since the

plan was to reconstruct Isidor and Ida's sitting room for their Pigeon Forge museum. Before long we agreed that SHS, with the approval of our board, would lend some of our artifacts to the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge.

Just before this period of time family member, and great grandson of Isidor and Ida, Bradford P. Straus of Boston, MA and Carefree, AZ, donated Isidor's wedding band to SHS. Inside this band one can find Isidor and Ida's wed-

"If you will it, it is no dream."

Theodor Herzl

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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.

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Straus Historical Society Steering Committee Report

By Manfred Moses, Richard Gerstman and Al Berr

Edited by Joan Adler

A group of dedicated directors and Straus family friends has been meeting as a subcommittee of the SHS board to sort out various ideas and details to create a successful future SHS and community event - all of which will celebrate the many and notable achievements of the Straus family who left us such a wonderful legacy. That legacy continues to inspire us today. As with all important work in process, there are many questions and reservations, all of which require careful and thoughtful consideration, research and evaluation. We are pleased to report that an encouraging general consensus is beginning to take shape.

One of the things we amateurs realized is that the guidance of an experienced professional could help us in our planning. Richard and Al contacted a consultant organization called Cause Effective. We gave Greg Cohen, the organization's representative, background information on the Society and some of our thoughts on the future event. Cohen told us that we needed first to ask where the Society should be in five years and what its goals for the future would be. The answers to these important questions would impact what we do for raising funds, and for delivering a successful event compatible with the Society's future goals. We've learned that sometimes we want the answers to our questions before we've asked the appropriate questions.

Our initial conversation with him led to our committee, whose chairman is Fred Moses, outlining these goals for the Society: 1. The achievements of the Straus family are sufficiently significant to warrant wider recognition than they currently receive. 2. Educational activities are central to the mission of the Society. 3. The establishment of a continuing scholarship fund and a continuing awards fund in the name of the Straus family could be instrumental in serving both the mission and the wider recognition factor. 4. The implementation of these goals requires the full commitment of the Society, both board members and non-board members. 5. Full commitment can be achieved by an organizational structure that will include working committees, such as programming, promotion, and advertising. 6. Fund-raising strategies will be developed in order to ensure the success of these goals. 7. One of the strategies could be an event, perhaps a fund-raiser dinner, at which the Straus scholarships and the Straus Medallion awards would be presented. These goals were presented at a board meeting by our committee and were unanimously approved by the board members.

At the June 28th board meeting, Greg Cohen described the development cycle required to fund-raise for a special event. The cycle consists of four major steps: 1. Identification - who do we approach 2. Cultivation - information about the cause to those who are identified 3. Solicitation - asking for funds from those who have been cultivated 4. Recognition - of the community of people who have been supportive of the cause.

During Cohen's two-hour presentation, the board discussed identifying prospects that we might contact to assist us in our mission and to achieve our goals. It was a lively and productive session. Paul Kurzman was eloquent in identifying the unique qualities of public service and ethical responsibility shown by the early Straus family, which distinguished them from other families in their time. It is a distinction that naturally applies to the Society.

We are more certain now of where we want the Society to be in the future. We believe that a continuing scholarship fund and an awards fund in the name of the Straus family will be instrumental in serving both the mission and the recognition that should be accorded to the family's notable achievements.

ding date, July 12, 1871. This is a real treasure. We are grateful to Brad for thinking of us when it came time to donate this wedding ring. It has not previously been on display.

As my phone conversations and e.mailed correspondence with Paul Burns and Mary Kellogg continued, I became more and more at ease with the prospect of lending them SHS's materials. Their professionalism and attention to detail, as well as their eagerness to cooperate in any way that made the board of SHS comfortable, was reassuring. Paul Burns followed through on all of my requests for amendments to the loan agreement and insurance policy. We had invaluable assistance in the formulation of this loan agreement from SHS board member Brett Gladstone in San Francisco, CA and from Erica Blumenfeld, registrar of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in NYC.

As the time of the grand opening drew closer, Paul Burns and Mary Kellogg asked if descendants of Isidor and Ida would attend their grand opening ceremony. Paul Kurzman of NYC, chair of SHS and great grandson of Isidor and Ida agreed to attend as did Barbie and George Gurgan from Austin, TX. Barbie is the Straus' great, great granddaughter. My husband Frank and I also planned to attend. Frank is an accomplished amateur photographer. He would photograph the event for SHS.

We all arrived in Pigeon Forge on Wednesday, April 7, 2010 in anticipation of the early morning grand opening ceremony the following day. Although most of SHS's artifacts had already been shipped to Pigeon Forge, and the photographs had been e.mailed, I was carrying Isidor's wedding band which I didn't trust to the delivery services. Paul Burns and I agreed to meet Wednesday evening so I could hand deliver the ring. Due to his last minute adjustments to the displays, he didn't find the time. And so, on Thursday morning, at 8 AM, Frank and I boarded a special bus with some of the museum's collectors who had also lent their materials for display. Paul was thrilled to receive the ring. And I have

to admit that I was happy to be done with the responsibility of delivering it.

We were amazed when the bus pulled up to a half scale, front end model of the ship, complete with iceberg at its side. The group of collectors, Frank and I, were then given a private pre-opening tour of the museum by curator Paul Burns. We saw the thoughtful manner in which each item was grouped and got to experience the many interactive displays as we walked along the reconstruction of this famous ship. Of course, it was especially moving to enter the first class sitting room of Isidor and Ida and see how

SHS's materials were arranged. We had two hours to walk through the many rooms of this exhibit before it was time for the grand opening ceremonies. We met many people dressed in "period" costumes who would greet the expected visitors and tell them bits of history about their character or about the ship. We met Captain Smith, several of the officers and the two people who portray Isidor and Ida Straus in a touring company of the musical play, Titanic. They, of course, were thrilled to meet the actual descendants of Isidor and Ida. Barbie, George and Paul spent quite a lot of time speaking with them and posing for photographs.

When we entered the museum at 8 AM the sun was shining. It was a perfect day for the planned outdoor ceremony. But, when it was time to congregate before the platform where the dignitaries would sit,

we realized that we were in danger of sinking, like the Titanic. It was pouring. Only the dignitaries on the stage would be covered by a large overhanging awning. Quickly the staff raided the museum's store, bring each of us an umbrella with the Titanic logo printed on it. We sat in soaking wet seats while Mary Kellogg, her husband and co-owner John, various local politicians and businessmen and then Regis Philbin spoke to the assembled crowd about this historic ship and how the museum in Pigeon Forge came to be. Then a local quartet sang the national anthem and the actor who was portraying Captain Smith christened the ship with a bottle of champagne. We were



Reproduction of Isidor and Ida Straus' first class sitting room



all soggy and relieved when it was time for the actual opening of the museum. We could finally return to the inside of this sinking ship. The first visitors were invited guests, mostly from the media. Paul Kurzman and Barbie Gurgan were interviewed by people from the local newspaper and TV affiliates. When Paul headed to the airport the following day he found no less than five newspapers carrying front page articles about the grand opening.

We spent the entire day walking through the exhibits, being interviewed, speaking about the Strauses to the invited guests and feeling quite amazed at the number of people who felt they just "had" to attend



Captain Smith
Below: A first class passenger

tanic attractions. News reports stated that 50,000 attended the opening weekend. Tickets for the general public went on sale at 3 PM on opening day, April 8th, and were immediately sold out for the entire weekend. The museum, which sold its last tickets at 9 PM, was open well past midnight to accommodate the crowds.

It seems the public doesn't tire of anything relating to the Titanic disaster.

As an addendum, Barbie and George Gurgan spent a long time speaking with the actors who portray Isidor and Ida Straus in the touring company of the play Titanic. When the play opened in Nashville, they were invited to attend. It was the weekend when there was serious flooding in Nashville and almost everything was shut down. Barbie wrote, "The play was awesome and they showered the

greatest honors upon George and me. They had a pre-show preview and catered event at the downtown library in our honor. ... did a few of their songs for us and George



One of the displays - a cut-away section of Titanic's passenger areas

announced this, that I was now an honorary member of the Tennessee House of Representatives! ... They were so thankful and grateful that we came all the way from Austin (TX) to see their show. ... After the show they had a wine and cheese reception for us so that everyone could shake our hands, meet us and get photographed with us. One of the actors handed me a painting of Isidor and Ida and the ship that he had painted upon hearing that we were coming. ... their hospitality and reception of George and me was above and beyond any expectations."

and I were asked to say a few things. Then, in the middle of all that rain, we went to the theater and, believe it or not, everyone showed up. The house was full. They seated us at a table (it was dinner theater) with a city councilman and his wife and the owner of the theater. They honored us again by bringing us up on stage, gave me a bunch of roses and a certificate with the state of Tennessee seal, which said, as they announced this, that I was now an honorary member of the Tennessee House of Representatives! ... They were so thankful and grateful that we came all the way from Austin (TX) to see their show. ... After the show they had a wine and cheese reception for us so that everyone could shake our hands, meet us and get photographed with us. One of the actors handed me a painting of Isidor and Ida and the ship that he had painted upon hearing that we were coming. ... their hospitality and reception of George and me was above and beyond any expectations."

Paul, Barbie and I came away from our experience in Pigeon Forge with a new appreciation of how important the history of the Titanic disaster is to many, many people. And we were pleased that SHS's artifacts could contribute to the authentic historical displays at the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, TN.

Copies of the entire set of photographs taken at the Titanic Museum's grand opening event may be found in a Facebook album on the Straus Family Group page. A radio interview with Paul Kurzman may be found at: <http://www.sabrams.com/onAir/channels/twsa/showNotes/sn2010/06/20/index.php>



Paul Kurzman, actors portraying Ida and Isidor Straus, Barbie Gurgan

Middletown Farm - Middletown, Monmouth County, NJ

The Country Home of Herbert Nathan Straus and Therese Kuhn Straus

Ned Brown contacted me in October 2009. He explained that he lives in the butler's house on the former estate of Herbert Nathan and Therese Kuhn Straus in Middletown, NJ. He was interested in learning about the history of the estate and about the Strauses. He asked for stories and photographs. Unfortunately, at the time, the SHS archives had little to offer him. We had few photographs of either Herbert or Therese and even fewer of the estate.

Middletown Township is located in Monmouth County, NJ. It was established as a European settlement beginning in 1664-65 after the English conquest of New Amsterdam. Its proximity to the shore and the Navesink River made it ideal for local farmers and merchants who could load their produce and merchandise onto ships, thereby giving them easy access to the city's markets. The railroad junction, completed in 1875, enabled city dwellers to get to Middletown in a reasonable period of time. This began rapid expansion of the area and contributed, by the turn of the century, to the change from agricultural and fishing villages to suburban estates of the wealthy.

Herbert Nathan Straus, son of Isidor and Ida Straus, and Therese Kuhn, daughter of Edward and Millie Kuhn, were married on July 15, 1907. On August 23, 1908 *The New York Times* reported that "Percy S. Straus and Herbert M. Straus of the firm of R. H. Macy & Co. have purchased large tracts on the Middletown side of the Shrewsbury River and will shortly begin erection of country seats. ... Herbert's tract embraces the Permly property of thirty acres." Percy's property was on the southwest corner and Herbert's was on the northwest corner. It was reported elsewhere that Herbert Nathan Straus and his wife Therese Kuhn Straus made an initial purchase of 70 acres. Later they must have bought additional acreage because Middletown Farm had 100 acres when it was sold in 1949. Although both brothers had apartments in New York City, their New Jersey farms were pivotal in their lives. Both men had polo ponies that were housed in the stables on Percy's property.

On May 15, 1924 Percy and Edith's brick home burned during renovation. Their loss was expected to reach several hundred thousand dollars as many valuable paintings, rugs and art objects that were recently brought from Eu-

rope were consumed by the fire. They were disgusted with the manner in which the "firewatchers" destroyed their property, ripping up the plantings as they gathered to watch the fire. Rather than rebuild Percy and Edith decided to relocate to Port Chester in Westchester County, NY. Herbert and Therese stayed in Middletown. He continued to stable his horses on Percy's property until 1929 when the estate was sold to J. Wright Brown who built a big Georgian brick house to replace Percy and Edith's house.

In 1929 architect Alfred Hopkins was the country's foremost architect of farm groups, banks and prisons. He was hired by Herbert and Therese to build the new stable, garage, butler's, stableman's and gardener's houses and the dairy complex at Middletown Farm. It is also believed that he would build a French Norman chateau to replace the wooden frame main house that came with the property when Herbert and Therese bought it. Construction of the chateau was scheduled to begin following completion of the other farm groups. In preparation for this particular construction, the lawn was terraced and stone pillars lead up to what appears to be the site of the planned chateau. Sometime between 1908 and 1929 the Strauses had renovated the white wooden frame house. They continued to live in it while their other reconstruction projects were underway.



We have a photograph of Jesse, Percy and Herbert on the lawn of one of their estates. I was told this photo was taken in Red Bank in 1920. Although only a small part of a house is shown, it appears that the photograph was taken in front of Herbert's house at Middletown Farm. Middletown and Red Bank seem to be used interchangeably when speaking of the farm. Executive Director of the Monmouth County Historical Commission, Randall Gabriellan called Middletown Farm among of the county's "most artistic landmarks."

When the Strauses began their ambitious building projects, Herbert was vice president of Macy's. He was also president of the recently purchased Bambergers Department Store in New Jersey. He planned his signature home at a time when there was increasing profitability in the family's business ventures. In 1929 Macy's alone had a profit of

\$100 million. Once the stock market crashed late in the year, the plans for their building projects on their country estate were well under way. Therese justified continuing with them in the face of criticism by explaining that she was providing employment to many workers who would otherwise be on the bread lines. During this same period they were also completely renovating a New York City townhouse at 9 East 71st Street that was designed by Horace Trombauer.

Sally Strong Straus, the widow of Herbert and Therese's son Oliver, recently allowed me to copy Oliver's papers and photographs. Among these photographs are images of the construction projects at Middletown Farm. The photographs were taken January 2, 1930.

Herbert died in 1933. Therese kept Middletown Farm until 1949 when it was sold at auction for a total of \$116,150. Since there was no buyer for the entire estate intact, it was broken into five separate parcels which were bought by four individuals, one person buying two parcels. Therese insisted on a clause in the offering stating that she would have a 90 day cancellation provision. She wanted to be certain she approved of the new buyers. The caretaker's house on a 2.9 acre lot brought in more than any other parcel, even though all the others were much larger.

Ned Brown also began corresponding with Jessica Straus, Herbert and Therese's great granddaughter. She is the daughter of John Herbert Straus of Watertown, MA and Beverly Bell Straus of Baltimore, MD and the granddaughter of the late John Wendell and Anne Helburn Straus of New York City and Pound Ridge, NY. Jessica was interested in helping Ned with information and was helpful to me as the liaison between her part of the family and SHS.

Ned proposed that he would host a picnic on the former Straus estate if I would invite descendants of Herbert and Therese. He felt he could only accommodate up to twelve individuals. Jessica provided me with contact information for some of her relatives. Ned asked that the participants bring photographs, memorabilia and stories about their ancestors. My husband Frank agreed to photograph the estate and the people who attended the picnic.

We arrived in Middletown mid morning on Saturday, May 8th. It was a perfect day with low humidity, scattered clouds, a light breeze and comfortable temperatures. Ned described his plan for our tour of the estate. "All 4 parcels of the original farm

will be available for viewing. We will start at the top with the stable, gardener's, chauffeur's, butler's houses. Move a few hundred yards to the main house. Down the long drive and over the original stone bridge to the superintendent's house. Then across the road to the cow barn complex and the formal garden's behind."

We were amazed that, although many of the neighboring estates, including the adjoining former 100 acre estate of Percy and Edith Straus were sold off, this one, although now privately owned in parcels by different owners, still looks at it must have when the Strauses lived there. We drove

through stone pillars to get to the butler's house, former stables and the garage complex. It was like being transported to another time. The French Norman style buildings are largely intact and the landscaping seems to have been well preserved.

In 1949 James McConnell bought the upper level which includes the stable/garage/caretaker/gardener/butler complex. Bud, James' son, and his wife Kathy lived in the



Herbert, Jesse, Percy Straus
Red Bank, NJ 1920



Clock Tower under construction January 1930 and today



gardener's house until about 15 years ago. When the Strauses owned it, it was the responsibility of the gardener to house the visiting chauffeurs so his house has five bedrooms. Today Bud and his wife Kathy, active preservationists, live in the former 13 stall stable that they've converted into their living quarters. The charm and character of the building was preserved during this reconstruction. The stone floor is the original as is the wood ceiling and beams. Bud and Kathy tongue oiled the ceiling and mounted modern high hat lighting without taking away any of the original feel of the room. The former tack room is Bud's dressing room with a room above it where the hay was stored for the horses. The original stables had two guest bedrooms for visiting grooms. Bud and Kathy have made creative use of all the space in their lovely home without destroying any of the building's original features or charm.

The nine car garage with its clock tower adjoins the stable at right angles. When Bud's family first came to see the place, there was a Deusenburg in the garage that once belonged to the Strauses. He said the garage was meticulously clean. This garage is where Bud houses his 1938 Cadillac, the car he used when he learned to drive. He told us that all of his daughters were married in this garage so you can imagine how wonderful the space was, and remains.

By way of strange coincidence, Jessica Straus told us that her grandfather, John Wendell Straus, Herbert and Therese's son, had a 1938 Bugatti that he drove from his home in Pound Ridge, NY to the train station every day on his way to work at R. H. Macy & Co. Once he stopped driving the car he kept it in the garage on his property. The car sold for \$852,000 in 2007 at an antique car auction. Bud is not ready to part with his 1938 Cadillac.

Bud's tour of his property included showing us the impressive garage doors with their bas relief sculptures.

There are carvings of Herbert and his Irish setter, Therese and the architect, workmen building the complex and many other scenes. Bud believes the wood is French oak and that the doors were carved in England. Ned Brown lives in one of the "dependencies," the butler's cottage. He commented that it contains three bedrooms, a small

former dining room, study and a china closet. "Just as a proper butler should require." Ken Gersten, who joined us for the tour and lunch, lives in the former stableman's house in this complex. The caretaker's house is also located in this upper complex as is a round, vine covered building with a conical roof that was designed to be Therese's personal study. She never used it. She told Bud's father that this was the "only lemon on the place because it has a couple of cracks and the flooring was bad. ... The ground floor was used as a tool room for gardening equipment." Bud and Kathy converted it into a kitchen and dressing rooms for the pool.



The gardener's house
January 1930 and today



The wooden frame house of Herbert and Therese was the next stop on our tour. This house was bought in 2003 by a private individual as an investment and then put on the market shortly thereafter. The house and property have not sold. Today it is kept occupied by renters. We could not enter the house but were able to tour the grounds. We saw the terraced gardens leading up to what is believed to have been the proposed location of the Straus' French Norman style chateau. Martha Brookes Hutcheson, one of the first female landscape architects, designed the gardens. From the front lawn one gets a

spectacular panoramic view of the rolling hills of this lovely estate. This house is said to be on the second highest point on the East Coast before the Palisades.



Herbert and Therese's house
at Middletown Farm

After Herbert died Therese decided not to build her Norman chateau. She gave rooms full of furniture to the Metropolitan Museum. She also gave them furniture from her East 71st Street house.

After enjoying the grounds and the view from the lawn in front of the main house, we proceeded down the driveway toward Meadow Cottage. This long sloping road used to be lined with rhododendrons, azaleas and pine trees. Mr. Clemens was the head gardener when the Strauses lived there. During the summer they employed nine full time gardeners. Although it is still lovely, the rhododendrons and azaleas are mostly gone as are most of the pine trees.

Throughout the day family members spoke of Meadow Cottage, a place that stands out because Therese gave away the flatware, tablecloths and linens from Meadow Cottage. Each piece of flatware bears their monogram as well as Meadow Cottage on the obverse. Each set of linens was embroidered with their monogram and came tied with ribbon, color coded for the person receiving it. None of the people living on the former estate today seem to know where Meadow Cottage was located. It's possible that was the superintendent's cottage.

This cottage is located at the middle level of the estate. It was built in 1937, the last house built in this complex. When Percy's house burned T. W. Head was the superintendent of the estate. Thomas Head was later reported to be the superintendent of Herbert's estate and living in this cottage. The current owners, Angela and Hendrick Bennink, have lovingly restored it and renamed it Griffin House. When we visited, Angela carefully explained the pains they took to faithfully restore their home including keeping the fleur de lis and rose motif on the ceiling and the fireplace's mantle. She's also preserved a thistle design found throughout the cottage. She told us that the architect lived in France for a year and brought stone workers back with him when he began the building projects. The huge weeping birch and sycamore trees surrounding the house were certainly

all there when Herbert and Therese lived at Middletown Farm.

Herbert and Therese's son, John Wendell Straus and his new bride, spent time at this cottage after their marriage. They also spent a summer at East Cottage, the butler's

house where Ned Brown now lives. Ned said that John painted the natural woodwork trim around the windows of East Cottage. TKS was horrified. Ned wrote that he now stores his grandmother's china in the same china closet where John once stored his Meadow Cottage china.



Buildings under construction in the upper complex January 1930

The cow barn complex, complete with a few cows, is located on the lower level. It was a working farm with a pasteurizer, farm equipment building and a twelve bedroom servants' quarter. It was described as a French Norman farm village. Herbert and Therese's son Edward remembered the cow barns before the reconstruction project of 1929/30. He spoke of it as old, decrepit and smelly. The old barns were torn down when the new dairy complex was built.



Clock tower and turret for Therese's office - January 1930

Everyone, when speaking about this complex, described it

as spectacular. I was told Therese put more effort into the cow barns than she did into the other buildings on the estate. They were built in the southern French style and included a pond. A dam on one end of the pond sits below an arcade. Today this complex is known a Cobble Close because of the series of buildings that form a square and surround a sizeable courtyard, containing a "close."

In 1949, Judge John Warren bought the cow complex. He loved living there but his wife hated it. At that time he tried to get permits to turn part of the complex into condos but was unable to accomplish it. Woodrow "Woody" Browne was looking for property in the area and fell in

love with the farm complex. Woody eventually saw an obituary for Judge Warren in the newspapers and came down the next day to ask Warren's widow if she would sell the property to him. She did.

Cobble Close was beautifully restored by Fred Century and his late partner Woody Browne. It has been converted into condo units and a home for Fred. Fred's tour included an explanation of how he converted the former Orangery, where the trees and shrubs, in huge tubs from around the estate, were stored during the winter months. This Orangery is now his sunken living room. We walked on the covered arcade and saw the lovely sculptures Therese installed in the pond and around this cow complex. Lucky cows!



Caretaker's House - Meadow Cottage

Ned arranged for the people living in all of these homes to open their doors to us. I truly don't know who was more thrilled, Herbert and Therese Straus' descendants or the residents of these lovely homes. Each saw the visit from a completely different perspective. The Strauses, especially those who remembered Therese, began to imagine her living there. For the current residents, it was fun to meet the descendants of Herbert and Therese and to show off the loving reconstruction of their home. And for me, it was wonderful to be part of the amazing coming together of the past and the present. Hearing the comments of the participants as we walked around the estate was very special. Something would trigger a memory that led to a story. Several people brought with them pieces of flatware with Meadow Cottage engraved into the stems. Others told of receiving linens with the Straus' monogram embroidered on them.

Once we'd completely toured the estate and visited each of the homes, we returned to the upper level and were welcomed at the home of Bud and Kathy McConnell for a lovely catered luncheon. Once again we were treated to stories about their reconstruction project as they graciously shared their home with us.

Bruce and Marti Huber joined us for refreshments on the patio of the butler's cottage and then later for lunch at the McConnell's home. Bruce's father owned a large amount of land adjacent to the Straus property in the 1930's. His family donated much of this land in the 1970's so that it could be preserved as county parkland. Ken Gersten, who lives in the stableman's house, also joined us on the tour and for lunch along with his sister Joan Paley. Ned's "special friend" Christina Baxter also spent the day with us. She was a charming hostess at the butler's house. At lunch we had an opportunity to speak with Carol Stall. Her aunt was Therese's personal maid and her father was the head carpenter/maintenance person for the Strauses. Carol had many photographs and stories to share.

In preparation for the article Ned planned to write about the Strauses and their time at Middletown Farm, he quoted something Bud McConnell said. "The Strauses lived here for 20 years and the McConnells have been stewards for 50 years. Yet the place is still known as the Straus estate. I've been blessed to live here most of my life, and the way I view it, I never would have had the opportunity without the vision and dedication to excellence of the Strauses."



Pond and arcade at Cobble Close
January 1930

Ned wrote two articles about Middletown Farm for the *New York Social Diary*. One was published during the winter and the second was published after our visit in May. Both stories contain wonderful photographs of the farm. Ned was able to include many more photographs in his

article that I have been able to show here. You can find the articles at: <http://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/node/1498238> and <http://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/node/1902831>

Please contact me if you have stories or photographs to share or if you own some of the many artifacts distributed to family members by Therese Kuhn Straus. I would also be interested in viewing the items at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. If you have a contact there, please advise me so we can arrange a visit.

My Summer with the Straus Historical Society

By Catherine McIlvaine

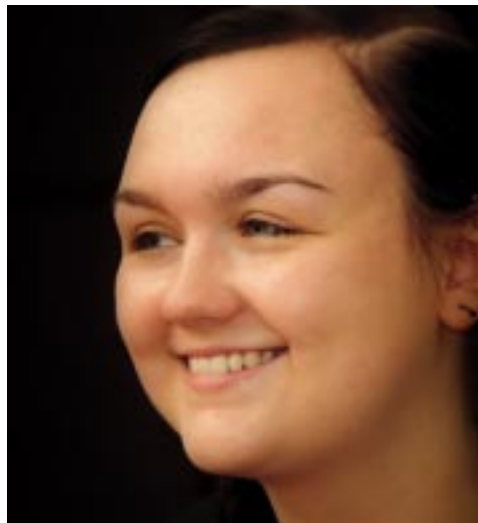
After sitting for hours in front of my computer trying to figure out how to start this article, I thought of some advice that someone gave me recently. The Executive Director of the Straus Historical Society, Joan Adler, told me that whenever you do research or learn something new, the best thing to do is just start writing about it, and you never know where you'll end up. So that is what I plan on doing. I don't know where I'll end up, but I do know that what I've learned this summer is important to me, and that I need to share my experience in this article and who knows where it will take me.

I have been working with Joan and the Straus Historical Society since late May and it has been an invaluable experience. Not only has Joan taught me about working with an historical society and how to archive and use a bibliography, she has also helped me learn more about my own family genealogy through the Straus' example. Over the past few months, I have worked with original documents of the Straus' and have learned how to put them into an archive. This process has also helped me learn more about the original members of the Straus family and their contributions to American society. In addition, Joan has taught me how to work with the various people involved in the society and has shown me everything that is involved in her important job.

While much of the time is taken up by trying to get the countless papers in order, which I love to do anyway since I'm a very organized person, we have had time to take little "field trips" around New York. Joan has taken me to the Municipal Archives in downtown Manhattan as well as Mamaroneck in upstate New York where Driftwood and many other properties that the Straus's owned are located. The most exciting of these trips was by far the SHS board meeting, which I attended at the end of June.

I was finally able to meet members of the family about whom I had learned so much. Everyone was welcoming and kind, qualities which I have found to be common among the Straus family.

In addition to everything she has taught me about the Straus family, Joan has given me many tools to help me in my own research of my family genealogy. I have been working on my family tree with my father for about a year and, while we have learned a lot, we still have much more to learn about our ancestors. Joan has shown me her research on the Straus' as well as on her own family and



has given me ideas as to where to look and what to look for. Before I met Joan, I had never thought of looking at the *New York Times* for articles about my family, as my family never seemed to be newsworthy. Yet once we looked, we discovered an article about my mother's aunt who had been in a near fatal bus accident in upstate New York. This article alone answered many of my mother's questions about her aunt, but also raised several more. It was because of Joan's suggestion to check the *New York Times* that we found this article and were able to

learn much more about my family's history.

Everything I've mentioned thus far only skims the surface of what I've learned this summer with Joan Adler and the Straus Historical Society. I could probably fill this newsletter with all the things we've done and what I have learned. Before this summer began, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my passion for history and I was hoping that a volunteer job would help me figure it all out. I could have never imagined how amazing this experience would be and how much I would truly get out of it. I can only hope that I have been able to give something back with my own time and effort to a family that has done so much to help others.

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A Note from Joan

Catherine McIlvaine contacted me out of the blue. When she suggested that she would like to volunteer at SHS for the summer, I was very skeptical. What would I do with her? What could I teach her and what did she have to offer SHS? It turns out that Catherine is a true asset. She has been working on the backlog of material that needs

to be archived. She seems to "get it" without much explanation. She is a self starter who has been a pleasure to have in my office all summer. I am delighted she called and even more delighted that she will be continuing to work with me during the school year as her class schedule permits.

Friends of Straus Park

Our first event of the spring season was held June 17th. A steel band called Jah-Pan performed before a very large crowd who came to the Park to enjoy the lovely flowers, the delightful evening and the music, (not necessarily in that order). The band was very good and much appreciated. Several people commented that they had no idea a steel band could make such interesting and enjoyable music.

We are looking forward to our fall events, the Book and Photography Fair and our 14th Annual Art in the Park events. If you've missed either of them in previous years, you've really missed two great days. Books of all description are for sale at the Book and Photography Fair. You still have time to donate your unwanted books to FSP. There will be ample opportunity to refill your shelves with the offerings at the fair. Several excellent photographers will be showing their artistic efforts as well. Most of the photographs will be for sale.

We hope you will join us at these two annual neighborhood events. And we also hope you will consider joining FSP. Your active participation helps to keep our neighborhood vibrant and our park used in the most appropriate manner.

Information about FSP can be obtained from president Kate Ford OTCSings@aol.com or 212-666-1439.

2010 Calendar of Events

Saturday, September 11
Book and Photography Fair
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Saturday, October 2
(Rain date: October 3)
14th Annual Art in the Park
A day-long celebration of
art, music and food
10:00 am to 4:00 pm



August 2010



Sketch of *Memory* and the reflecting pool turned flower garden at Straus Park by SHS board member Richard Gerstman (drawn on his iPad). A color version of this lovely sketch can be seen on our website in the online copy of the newsletter.



Left: Straus Park Dedication Ceremony April 16, 1915
Above: Early Straus Park photograph
Both photographs courtesy of the Library of Congress

Straus Historical Society's Newsletter Offered in Electronic Version - You Choose Your Format

Beginning with the February 2011 issue of SHS's newsletter, you can opt to receive your copy of the newsletter in a on-line version and no longer receive the print version. The choice will be entirely up to you. If you want to continue receiving the print version, you need do nothing. The print version will continue to be mailed to you at the end of February and August.

If you prefer to receive the on-line version only, it will be necessary to let me know. I will send it to you as soon as it is published in a PDF file that can be downloaded and read on-line or printed from your home printer. The newsletter will still be added to the official SHS website and archived there as is customary.

We are taking this important step for several reasons. Many of you are already receiving other professional and financial material on-line and are familiar with this form of delivery. The cost savings to SHS could be substantial if enough people opt to receive the on-line version of the newsletter. We are also mindful of the environmental toll of printing the newsletter. We will minimize the environment impact of the inks, paper and transportation factors by offering the newsletter on-line.

What are the advantages to you of receiving the newsletter on-line? First: you will receive your copy as soon as it is published. Many people tell me their newsletters are extremely slow in arriving. This is because they are mailed using our bulk mail permit. The postman is under no obligation to deliver these when he/she has a full load of other mail. That has priority. The newsletter is delivered only on a very light mail day. Another advantage is knowing that you are doing your part to help save the environment. And, you will be saving SHS money which will then be available for other worthy projects.

For now, please let me know if you want to receive your copy of the newsletter in an electronic format. Your decision is not irrevocable. If you go this route, and then decide you'd prefer to receive a print copy after all, you need only contact me to let me know that you've changed your mind. The same is true in reverse. If you receive the print copy and then decide to try the on-line version, that can also be arranged.

For now, please give this some thought and let me know whenever you've made your decision - paper or on-line. The choice is yours.

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, September 22, 2010 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 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 212-452-7035 for further information.