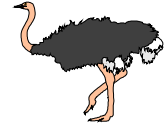


STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 9 Number 1

Newsletter

August 2007

Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr.

Their Letters Discovered at New York's YIVO

The New York Times and *Time Magazine* articles during January and early February 2007 had already revealed the discovery of a file containing letters written in 1941 between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr. when New York-based YIVO Institute for Jewish Research held their declassification ceremony on February 14, 2007. These letters document Frank's desperate effort to save his family and Nathan Straus, Jr.'s desire to help. But the tightening restrictions of the U.S. State Department, along with deteriorating conditions in Europe, prevented even those with powerful connections and money from securing the necessary documents that would allow the Frank family to immigrate. We have long known of the relationship between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr. These newly discovered letters expand our knowledge about that relationship and give us a greater insight into this tragic historical era.

Between 1948 and 1974 the files from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) were transferred to New York based YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which is part of the Center for Jewish History. A file of unindexed letters, notes and telegrams were discovered in HIAS's archives by Jewish Genealogical Society past president Estelle Guzik. She noticed that the name and date was missing from the file. When she opened it she realized she was looking at the Frank family's records. The documents consist of personal correspondence between Otto Frank, Nathan Straus, Jr., Julius and Walter Hollander (Edith Hollander Frank's brothers) and governmental agencies. They date from April through December 1941 and shed new light on Otto Frank's attempts to rescue his family. As these letters reveal, Otto Frank turned to his good friend Nathan Straus, Jr. when desperation forced his hand. It wasn't until these additional letters were discovered that we realized just how close the families were and how desperately Otto Frank tried to save his family.

An article in the Society's February 2002 newsletter describes Nathan and Lina Straus' efforts to bring pasteurization to the

world. In 1908 Nathan and Lina were in Heidelberg Germany where the Nathan Straus Pasteurization Laboratory was located at Grabengasse No. 8 across the plaza from the university. At that time Nathan was giving talks all over Europe in an effort to interest other municipalities in the health benefits of this process. When they left for Europe their son Charles Webster Straus, later known as Nathan Straus, Jr., was enrolled in Princeton University in NJ. In his oral history Nathan, Jr. described his dissatisfaction with the university program. He decided to spend the year at the Heidelberg University where Otto Frank became his

college roommate. Carol Ann Lee, in her book *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank*, quoted from a letter written by Nathan, Jr. to Eleanor Roosevelt in 1957. Nathan described meeting Otto Frank through members of his mother's family (Helen Sachs Straus) from Mannheim who "knew the Frank family intimately." Nathan and Otto attended classes together and spent many evenings with Nathan's parents. Nathan, Jr. said Otto was his closest friend during his three semesters in Heidelberg and that his parents liked Otto the best of all his friends.



Otto Frank - 1936

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Anne Frank Stichting, Amsterdam

Otto, whose family lived in Frankfurt, was studying economics but found the courses contained too much theory. He returned to Frankfurt where

he began working at his father's bank. After three semesters at Heidelberg University Nathan, Jr. returned to Princeton. In 1909 Nathan Straus, Sr. invited Otto to New York to work at Macy's, the family owned department store. He told his son that if Otto decided to stay at Macy's after a year's experience, a good future awaited him there. Otto wrote to his younger sister Helene (Leni) from New York on December 29, 1909. He explained that

We live with a heritage from earlier generations and must seek to create positive legacies for those who follow us. When the old are not allowed to tell their story, the young grow up without history.

Dr. Gunhild O. Hagstad

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

I continue to be amazed by the breadth of talent and philanthropy of our family, as well as the consistency of our actions throughout the years. For instance, your Board of Directors was recently visited by guests who escaped Nazi Germany as children and were sponsored by Irving and Sissie Straus Lehman when they immigrated to America. Our guests lived a fruitful life in their adopted country and expressed their deepest gratification toward the Straus family. They repeatedly thanked the Board members. I want to pass their thanks on to you.

The heritage of the Straus family is so much more than stories of the Titanic or of successful businessmen who gave considerably of their acquired wealth. We are a family of exceptional humanity.

To continue recording our heritage and pass these valuable lessons to future generations, the Straus Historical Society requires your help. Please share through annual tax-deductible donations and be sure to include a bequest in your estate planning. Our wonderful family legacy continues in ourselves and in our children through the development and preservation of a sustainable non-profit.

Warmest wishes.



**A Message from the
Executive Director:
Joan Adler**

There have been several exciting developments for the Society since our last newsletter. We have been awarded a grant by the Stu Cooney Memorial Fund and administered by the Tides Foundation of San Francisco, CA. This general purpose grant will be used to enhance and expand our research and education programs.

The SHS was invited to give a presentation at the Center for Jewish History by the American Jewish Historical Society. Cocktails, a presentation and dinner are being planned for an evening in November. We will send out announcements once the date is set. We hope to see many of you there.

Two of the books presented to the Society when we were in Germany are almost ready for printing. We are waiting for the final approval of our translations from the people in Germany and then they will be ready for publication. A third book, a compilation of the vignettes written by Edith Maas Mendel, is in the works. Several of her charming stories have been presented in past issues of the newsletter. They will now be published, along with photographs, in one volume.

None of this would have happened without your active participation and support. Thank you. Let me hear from you with suggestions for new projects. And please support your Society with a generous donation.

he had a "good relationship with Charly" and that he was meeting young women, including Eugenie Blum whom he described as pretty. His letter of August 29, 1910 describes his search for a new apartment and his happiness at finding "an adequate room" on West 71st Street, which was much closer to the Strauses and near the elevated subway, Broadway and Central Park. Throughout his life Otto continued to call his friend Charly, even though almost everyone else called him Nathan, Jr.

Otto made several trips back to Germany but returned to New York where he continued working at Macy's and then at a New York bank. His social life revolved around the Straus family. In mid 1911 he returned to Germany, took a job with a Dusseldorf firm, and remained in Europe thereafter. The death of his father in 1909, the outbreak of World War I and his feeling of responsibility toward his family in Frankfurt kept him there.

In June 1928 Otto and Edith enjoyed a vacation with Nathan, Jr. and his family at a villa in Sils-Maria, Switzerland. Second daughter Annelies Marie was born the following year on June 12, 1929.

As conditions for Jews in Germany worsened, Otto and his family; wife Edith Hollander, and daughters Margot and Annelies Marie, moved further from the center of Frankfurt and into smaller accommodations in non-Jewish neighborhoods.

Otto was continually urged to leave Germany but, like many others, he felt he was a German, had fought for Germany in World War I, and would not face discrimination. Then, the Frank family lost the bank. Otto moved his family to Amsterdam in 1933. There he opened the Amsterdam branch of Opetka, a spice and pectin firm. And the laws continued to become more restrictive for Jews.

It is easy to wonder from the prospective of 2007 why Otto Frank and his family didn't leave Germany sooner. Or why they remained in the Netherlands while conditions there were deteriorating. David Engel, the Greenberg Professor of Holocaust Studies at New York University compared the correspondence to a blind chess game where the rules kept changing. He states, "Understanding the situation of the Jews in the Netherlands under Nazi occupation, like understanding any aspect of the Holocaust, requires suspension of hindsight." Even the Nazi regime did not know until mid 1941 that it would embark on a systematic program to exterminate the Jewish populations in their occupied territories. While Jews were being deprived of their property and livelihood and becoming more socially isolated, they continued to live in relative security. Dutch Jews, in particular, were able to carry on their business throughout mid 1940 before increased restrictions were forced upon them. Professor Engel wrote, "Raids on Amsterdam's Jewish quarter, initiated in February 1941, were quickly suspended in the wake of

vigorous protests from Dutch organized labor: and in any event the Franks did not live in the Jewish quarter and were under no pressure to move there. In other words, in Otto Frank's case, neither the push nor the pull factors were as strong in 1940-41 as they had been in 1933. Hence he preferred what seemed to him like the nuisances that encumbered an otherwise comfortable life under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands to the insecurity of life as a double refugee in a new country, even if a new country could be found. ... There is little point in asking why Otto Frank did not wake up to the mortal danger facing his family sooner than he did: neither he nor anyone else could reasonably have predicted what would befall the Jews in the Netherlands beginning in 1942. His actions become intelligible only when viewed within the context of his individual experience, without benefit of hindsight."



Nathan Straus, Jr. - 1907

In 1937 Otto began investigating business opportunities in Great Britain where he had cousins. Unfortunately nothing came of this. His cousin Millie Stanfield in London urged Otto to send the children to her. He responded, "Edith and I discussed your letter. We both feel we simply can't do it. We couldn't bear to part with the girls." In 1938 he applied for immigration visas in Rotterdam for himself and his family. He wanted to immigrate to the United States. But the waiting list by 1939 contained more than 300,000 names. As Germans living in the Netherlands, Otto fell under the American quota for Germans. The family felt somewhat protected since Germany had not yet invaded the Netherlands. Otto and his wife Edith tried to protect their daughters from as much discrimination as possible. But "anti-Jewish regulations narrowed their world," wrote Carol Ann Lee

By 1940 immigrants were flooding the United States and the Latin American countries. Fears of spies and subversives began to surface. By June tightening visa control closed the options for would-be immigrants. They had to show they were unlikely to engage in radical activities and have sufficient means to support themselves in their new country. It was not enough to show they had good reason to leave Europe. They also had to show that they had a good reason to enter the United States. People could be sponsored by relatives who had to guarantee their successful assimilation with a large sum put in the bank in their name.

Otto Frank employed many people at his pectin and spice company. He made a careless remark to the husband of one of them about the inability of Germany to win the war. This man was a Nazi sympathizer and Gestapo courier who then reported Otto's remark to the Gestapo. On April 18th the man made his first blackmail payment demand. Realizing the severity of this new situation, Otto Frank wrote to Nathan Straus, Jr. on April 30, 1941 asking for assistance leaving in the Netherlands. "I would not ask if conditions here would not force me to do all I can in

time to be able to avoid worse. ... It is for the sake of the children mainly that we have to care for. Our own fate is of less importance." The blackmail incident seems to have awakened Otto Frank to the danger of staying in Europe.

Otto's college friend was the director of the U. S. Housing Authority in Washington, DC at the time. His wife, Helen Sachs Straus wrote to Augusta Mayerson, Acting Director of the Migration Department of the National Refugee Service on May 28th, "After all the letters - requests for help we've had from people we hardly know, the enclosed one from Mr. Frank, - from my husband's best friend during their university years - an extraordinarily fine man - as you can tell from the letter." She asked what could be done to help the Frank family.

At the time one needed an affidavit from someone in the States willing to sponsor him as well as a trust fund placed in his name. Recognizing that a relative would have more influence than a family friend, Nathan suggested that Edith Frank's two brothers, Julius and Walter Hollander, who were living in Massachusetts, would more likely meet with a favorable result if they sponsored the Franks. The Boston Committee for Refugees was contacted. They located both brothers, investigated their living conditions, income and business prospects. Since both brothers had only recently immigrated, and did not have sufficient income to show they could support the Frank family, Nathan offered to put up the necessary money. There was concern that too many people wanted to be sponsored at the same time. Julius and Walter's two employers submitted affidavits of support for Margot and Anne. Julius and Walter would sponsor their mother, Rosa Hollander, who was living with the Franks. On June 11th Nathan sponsored Otto and Edith.

It took more than a week for each letter to reach its recipient. Then, every suggestion of assistance had to be researched and acted upon. Then the return letter would be sent. In many cases, in this short time the political situation changed and a new set of requirements was in effect. Nathan Jr. turned to the National Refugee Service for assistance. It was their role to cut through the many layers of red tape and to sort through all of the requirements in order to get the Frank family to America.

On June 16th Ms. Mayerson wrote to the Strauses that a new regulation would go into effect after July 1st. All documents would have to go to the Department of State in Washington DC for review before being sent to Europe. It was likely that a new form of affidavit would be required, Since the Frank's documents were prepared and ready to leave, Ms. Mayerson suggested that they be retained in the US until the new regulations were enacted.

On June 30th Otto wrote to Charley, "I received your kind letter of June 14th and have to thank you again and again for all you are doing. You already did more than I thought could be done. I know that you are not a friend of long talks, but you certainly know quite well how I feel about it. It is a pity that for the present all efforts will be useless as the AMERICA CONSULATE at ROTTERDAM is leaving and nobody knows as yet if things will be handled further or not. So we have to wait. Bad luck, but cannot be helped. Let us hope that conditions will get more normal again. As soon as I hear that there are chances still I shall let you know and you certainly will be informed still better than I am about the possibilities which remain."

The American Consulate General suspended action on these visas on June 30th. On July 1st Nathan wrote to Otto, " I have taken up the matter of your immigration to this country with the National Refugee Service. I have also discussed it with the State Department officials as I would very much like to help you. I am afraid, the news is not good news."



Nathan Straus, Jr. and his four sons in 1928 from a postcard sent to Otto Frank's sister Leni

People were not being issued visas unless they could show that they already had their ship's tickets to the US. Because of this new requirement, new visa applications had to be made and each new application form was sent to Washington for screening. By mid July 1941 the German consulates in America were ordered

closed. Germany retaliated by closing all American consulates in their country and in all their occupied territories. Otto Frank and his family would now have to reach a consulate in a neutral country before being able to leave for America. Spain or Portugal had the closest open consulate. But the Franks were unable to travel there without exit visas from the Netherlands and transit visas to travel through the countries on their route to Portugal. Nathan wrote to Otto on September 11th, "I am prepared to submit the necessary affidavits of support just as soon as you are able to assure me that you can leave Holland and get permission to go to a country where there is an American Consul." Under the new America visa regulations, Otto did not qualify for an American visa because he had relatives remaining in the German territories.

Back in the United States, Nathan, Jr. was working diligently to accumulate the information necessary to apply for sponsorship for Otto Frank and his family. Otto had already concluded that the Franks would not be permitted to go to the United States directly. At the time Cuba was allowing people to enter on tourist visas. On September 8, 1941 Otto wrote to Nathan, "The only way to get to a neutral country are visas of other states such as Cuba ... and many of my acquaintances got visas for Cuba." The fee was steep; \$250 per person in direct payment and \$2,500 per person for the visa and bonds. The \$2,500 was to be refunded when the person left Cuba. The

letters in the newly discovered Otto Frank file show that Nathan Straus, Jr., Julius and Walter Hollander and the National Refugee Service were investigating this option. On September 17th Julius Hollander wrote to Nathan, Jr., "I have information that transit visas for Cuba are available again. I would appreciate it if you would assist me in obtaining a visa for Mr. Otto Frank as soon as possible. My brother and I will share expenses with you." On October 6th Julius wrote, "Referring to your last letter, I suggest that you get in touch with the German-Jewish Children Aid, Inc. in regards to bringing over the Frank children from Amsterdam. ... My brother and I will pay for the boat ticket and Cuban visas for Mr. Frank. If you give the necessary deposit to the Cuban Government for Mr. Frank, I promise you that it will be returned to you untouched..." On September 17th Ms. Mayerson of the National Refugee Service wrote to Julius and Walter Hollander, "We are informed by the German Jewish Childrens Aid Incorporated, that it is almost impossible for them to bring out children at this time from Amsterdam. ... In view of the ultimate plan which is, as we understand it, to bring the family to the United States, there is a real question as to the wisdom of helping Mr. Frank to immigrate to Cuba alone. The fact that his wife and two children remain in occupied area abroad would militate against his application for the United States visa from Cuba."

Letters and cables continued to be sent between the National Refugee Service, the Boston Committee for Refugees, Joodsche Raad Voor Amsterdam (Jewish Council for Amsterdam), Nathan Straus, Jr., Julius Hollander and Otto Frank. In each case there was agreement. Everyone wanted to help the Frank family reach America. And yet, nothing could be done to expedite their departure.

On October 12th the Joodsche Raad Voor Amsterdam wrote to the National Refugee Service, "As Mr. Straus has written himself that the State Department will accept his affidavit, Mr. Otto Frank is of the opinion that he perhaps need not at all go to Cuba, so that the money deposited for the irrevocable credit as well as for the landing deposit, may be returned unused after Mr. Frank and his family have received their U.S.A. visas to be secured by Mr. Nathan Straus and the members of the Frank-Hollander family." Otto wrote to Nathan on October 19th, "Only after having received a cable of this sort one can apply for the permit to leave Holland and after having received this one gets the Transitvisum Spain. It is all much more difficult as one can imagine and is getting more complicated every day."

Letters throughout November work out the details of how Otto Frank could obtain the Cuban visa. The Strauses agreed to arrange the bond and pay for transportation costs. The Hollander brothers would pay the attorney fees, visa fees and outgoing passage fees from Cuba. Ms. Mayerson wrote to Julius Hollander on November 12th, "It takes from ten to twenty-one days to obtain a legal Cuban visa. We have recently been informed that persons in occupied areas are being denied exit

permits. It may be therefore that even after the Franks have obtained Cuban visas they may fail to obtain the necessary exit permits from Holland." On November 18th Julius Hollander wrote to the Strauses, "The National Refugee Service, Inc. informed me on November 12 of your decision to contribute in a generous way to the immigration of Mr. Otto Frank and family. ... The most important issue for the time being is the providing of the exit permits. Because I was advised not to pay for the Cuban Visa before I would be informed by my brother-in-law that exit permits would be granted, I sent a cable to Amsterdam asking him to make sure that the permits are available." He then wrote to the National Refugee Service on the 22nd, "Whereupon I cabled again to make positively sure, that exit permits would be given, before I would be able to deposit amount for visas and tickets." Otto Frank's travel agent in Amsterdam cabled, "Exit permit can only be given after Cuban visa is sent over. Please care only for Otto Frank for the time being to confine financial risk." On the 28th Julius Hollander ordered the Cuban exit permit.



Nathan Straus, Jr.
Courtesy FDR Presidential Library

Conditions around the world were deteriorating. The doors to immigration were closing. Americans began to fear that anyone with family left behind would be coerced into acting as a spy or saboteur. Otto thought that he could get to Cuba and then send for his family. Although his single visa was finally issued on December 1st, no one knows if it ever reached him. When Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, Cuba cancelled its visa program and the Frank's had no other options. The story of what happened to the Frank family is well known and will not be retold here.

On June 22, 1945 a letter by G. V. Saxl of the Migration Department describes Julius Hollander's efforts to contact his family. He had been advised that they were in Paris. Apparently he did not know at that time that only Otto Frank survived. On June 26, 1945 a letter by Ann S. Petluck, director of the Migration Service states, "We have been advised that the above mentioned family reached France recently and are supposedly residing at the above address." By January 31, 1946 Ms. Potluck wrote, "... we are in receipt of a report advising us that Otto Frank is reputed to be living at 263 Prinsengroocat, Amsterdam. They mentioned that Mrs. Edith Hollander is deceased and that the daughters are still missing."

On September 24, 1945 Otto Frank wrote to Nathan Straus, Jr. who was president of WMCA radio, a New York based radio station, "Dear Charley, you told me once that I am the only one who calls you by this name, but I feel more like the old relations between us if I still call you by that name."

On October 25, 1945 Nathan Straus, Jr. wrote to Otto at Prinsengracht 263 in Amsterdam, "Both Helen and I were glad to receive your letter and thus have direct personal news of you. Of course, ... we have heard indirectly of the tragic events

that have befallen your family. Words are quite useless in such a situation as this. In fact, the huge scale of the tragedy which has befallen innocent people is almost beyond the human mind to encompass."

Otto's response is dated November 14, 1945. "I am delighted having received your kind letter of Oct. 25 and to get personal news from you and Helen. It always does good if one feels that there are old friends who still care for you. I must not complain. In the meantime the bank called up and handed me the amount you spoke of. Well, I do not know how to thank you even if you wrote; forget it! I know you don't like me to speak about it but nevertheless I thank you with all my heart. Even if I am not really in need, I don't own much and the amount will help me and others along, as I always use part of what I earn for others, especially orphans at the moment, who want to join their families abroad or to go to Palestine. Apart from business I am very busy copying the diary of my youngest daughter (which was found by chance) and to find an editor for it. I am going to let you know more about it later. ... I don't give up and try to build up again. Let us hope that it will be possible to meet again one day. I never forget you and I never forget your parents."

Otto Frank worked with several translators and editors until he was satisfied with the manuscript. It was first published in book form in 1947 under the title, "Het Achterhuis" (The Out House). After several unsuccessful releases and more editing the diary was rereleased. It quickly became one of the world's best selling books. By the time of Otto's death in 1980, more than 14 million copies had been sold in 50 languages. Meyer Levin drafted a play from the manuscript. Unfortunately a series of misunderstandings led to Levin suing the producers of the play and also Otto Frank. Otto wrote to his friend Nathan asking if he could find him a good lawyer. YIVO director Carl J. Rheins wrote, "... it was Nathan Straus III who introduced Otto in 1952 to his attorneys at Paul, Weiss. Frank was eager to obtain counsel in order to proceed with the English language translation of the diary of Anne Frank. Paul, Weiss has represented Frank family interests in the U. S. to this day (i.e., publication contracts with Doubleday/Random House. the Meyer Levin law suits, rights to Otto Frank's unpublished correspondence).

In 1957 Otto came to New York with his second wife Fritzi, a Holocaust survivor, to attend the trial. Nathan served as a character witness for Otto. During that visit Fritzi wrote to their family in Europe, "At noon we went to the countryside, we had been invited by Nathan Straus for the weekend. ... Helen Straus and her eldest son picked us up in their car. We drove to her estate, everything there is like a fairytale or a Hollywood film. ... Helen and Nathan are very amiable. We also got to know their

eldest son, his wife and his three children ... Later their second son came along with his wife and child. ... I have to add that all four Straus children were brought up well and did not behave as one would expect from American children."

Nathan and Helen Straus attended a performance of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1955 in which Joseph Schildkraut portrayed Otto Frank. After the play Nathan wrote to Schildkraut explaining that he had just witnessed what he considered "one of the highlights of the American theatre in the last half century." "Congratulations on a magnificent portrayal! You have the voice, the manner & the very personality of Otto - who is and was one of my most cherished friends. I am deeply moved ..."

Otto Frank spent the rest of his days celebrating the life of his daughter Anne through her diary. He wanted her words to bring tolerance and compassion to a world that had seen so much hatred and war. And he wanted it to show that the human spirit could not be destroyed. In 1957 he established the ANNE

FRANK-Fonds, whose aim is to foster "as many contacts as possible between young people of different nationalities, races and religions."

In 1957 Nathan Straus, Jr. donated \$10,000 to the Dutch student housing foundation. He is quoted in a *New York Times* article of July 21st, "The kindness shown by the people of the Netherlands to the victims of the Nazi terror has touched me personally ... Otto Frank, the father of Anne Frank, is one of the oldest friends I have in the world, our friendship dating back to the time when we were both students at Heidelberg University in 1908 and 1909."

Carl J. Rheins, director of New York's YIVO wrote, "Nathan and Helen were true heroes. They fought hard but were defeated by the State Department and a corrupt Cuban regime."

We are saddened by Nathan and Helen Straus' inability to save the Frank family and inspired by their willingness to try, under insurmountable obstacles. The discovery and declassification of the Otto Frank/Nathan Straus, Jr. letters at YIVO reminds us of the efforts of family members to save their loved ones. And it gives us an opportunity to tell their story.

YIVO's newly declassified correspondence between Otto Frank, Nathan and Helen Straus, Julius Hollander, and the various agencies that tried to help the Frank family, can be viewed and copied in the Reading Room of the Center for Jewish History at 15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10001 Monday through Thursday, 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM.

Thank you to Carl J. Rheins and Cathy Callegari of YIVO, to Buddy Elias, nephew of Otto Frank, and to Christoph Knoch of ANNE FRANK-Fonds for their assistance in the preparation of this article.



Margot, Otto, Anne and Edith Frank
Copyright: ANNE FRANK-Fonds, Basel/
Anne Frank Stichting, Amsterdam

Friends of Straus Park

By Joan Adler

Photographs by Margie Kavanau

Undaunted by last year's rained out events Friends of Straus Park planned a full schedule for the 2007 season.

An evening concert in the Park was held on June 20th. Suzy Schwartz and her group, Boto Fogo, performed the enchanting sounds of Brazilian jazz. Suzy and her group have entertained in Straus Park many times before. Their concerts are always one of the most enjoyable and well-attended events.

The Book Fair/Photography Fair went off without a hitch on Bastille Day, July 14th. Generous contributions of books from neighbors and friends helped to make this not only a successful event, but also a profitable one. Good weather, good turnout and ample merchandise provided the perfect combination for our Book Fair/Photography Fair. Based on the comments of the participants, you can look forward to future fairs of this kind.

Our premier event of the season, the 10th Annual Art in the Park: a daylong celebration of art, music, dance and food is 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 celebrations of the year. All we need is for the weather to cooperate and for you to participate.

Please join your neighbors and friends at this lovely vest pocket Park at West 106th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue in New York City.

Saturday, October 13th
(Rain date: October 14th)
10th Annual Art in the Park
A daylong celebration of
art, music, dance & food
11:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Below: Suzy Schwartz & Boto Fogo



Above: Kate Ford and Joe Arbo at the Friends of Straus Park evening concert
Below: Vendors at the Photography and Book Fair



Beth El and Salem Fields Cemeteries

Walking tour

Sunday, June 3, 2007

In June 2006 the Straus Historical Society sponsored a walking tour of Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, NY. Family members and friends who attended the tour found it interesting and informative. One of the participants of the walking tour was Manfred (Fred) Moses of Eastchester, NY. After the tour he e.mailed to ask where Irving and Sissie Straus Lehman were buried. Fred told me that Irving and Sissie Lehman saved his family and that he would like to pay his respects at their gravesite. Sissie was the daughter of Nathan and Lina Straus.

I learned that Irving and Sissie were buried in a Lehman family plot at Salem Fields Cemetery in Brooklyn. Members of the Kurzman, Schafer and Hockstader families are also buried there. Since the Straus-Kohns Mausoleum is located at nearby Beth El Cemetery, it was decided that a walking tour of both cemeteries would be conducted on Sunday, June 3, 2007.

Beth El Synagogue in New York City owned Beth El Cemetery until that synagogue merged with Temple Emanu-El of New York City. Lazarus Straus was a member of Beth El. That is why the Straus-Kohns Mausoleum is located there. Salem Fields Cemetery is owned by Temple Emanu-El. Cemetery manager Robert (Bob) J. Ilasi and office manager Jean Villacci located the resting places of family members. Bob has taken excellent care of the various structures and the grounds. He explained that the records pertaining to the purchase and design of these family monuments were destroyed several years ago. We have only family lore and our informed imagination to help us understand why these monuments are in these cemeteries and why they were constructed as they were.

Although Isidor was initially buried in the family mausoleum in Beth El Cemetery, his body was moved when the Straus Mausoleum was built in Woodlawn Cemetery. One question that comes to mind is why Isidor's sons built a family mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery when the rest of the immediate family is buried in the Straus-Kohns mausoleum. My best guess is that there would not have been enough room for the families of the three sons of Isidor and Ida in the Straus-Kohn Mausoleum. And so they purchased a new family plot in Woodlawn, a non-sectarian cemetery.



Straus-Kohns Mausoleum
at Beth El Cemetery

Sunday, June 3rd was a lovely day even though the remnants of a tropical storm promised to bring heavy rain later in the day. We were lucky. The rain held off until we completed our tour and luncheon.

Tour participants were: family members Paul A. Kurzman, his wife Margaret, SHS chair David Kurzman, SHS treasurer Hugh Grant Straus III, Fred and Selma Moses, Irene Pastarnack, Otto and Helene Altschuler, Mark Altschuler and fiancée Maria Jones Quijano. Also joining us were YIVO Director of Family Services Karen S. Franklin, Howard Matson and my husband Frank.

We started at Beth El Cemetery, Machpelah Section, where the Straus-Kohns mausoleum is located. Outside of the building there are four graves of Straus children: Clarence Otto, son of Isidor and Ida (1874-1876), Sara Guthertz, daughter of Nathan and Lina (1877-1878), Clara Louisa, daughter of Hermine and Lazarus Kohns (1866-1869) and Flora Caroline, daughter of Hermine and Lazarus Kohns (1868-1868). Each stone has a resting lamb on its top indicating that a young child is buried there. In keeping with Jewish custom, no flowers are in evidence. The concrete walkway to the mausoleum is planted with a bed of ivy on either side and two large urns in front of the building are currently without any flora.

The mausoleum's two large bronze and glass doors swing inward to reveal the granite crypts. The side walls contain beautiful stained glass windows purported to have been made by Tiffany. Both windows are currently intact. Family members recently made targeted donations so that clear Lexan coverings can be purchased and affixed to the outside of the windows to protect them from vandalism.

Inside the mausoleum there is a rattan table and two chairs and there is also a bronze bust of Lazarus Straus on the table. Howard Matson, who visited the mausoleum many years ago, remembers a Persian rug on the floor. When I visited about ten years ago the rug was no longer there.





Stained glass window
(possibly by Tiffany)

The mausoleum is the final resting place for: Lazarus (1809-1898) and Sara (1823-1876) Straus; Hermine (1846-1922) Straus and her husband Lazarus (1824-1910) Kohns; their son Lee (1864-1927) and his wife Claire Elfelt (1871-1952) Kohns; Hermine and Lazarus' daughter Irene Kohns (1871-1961) Wise; Nathan (1848-1931) and Lina Gutherz (1854-1930) Straus and their son Jerome Nathan (1876-1893); Oscar Solomon (1850-1926) and Sarah

Lavanburg (1861-1945) Straus; their son Roger Williams (1891-1957) and his wife Gladys Guggenheim (1895-1980) Straus; and their son Roger Williams Straus, Jr. (1917-2004). The individual crypts are all on the opposite wall as one enters the mausoleum with the exception of Sara's, which is in the floor. Each crypt is faced with a bronze plaque giving the person's name, date of birth and death. Some include a brief memorial statement. Several of the plaques contain the signature of the person, something I have not seen elsewhere. Beneath the windows on the side walls there are individual granite tablets with wording that resembles tombstone inscriptions for Lazarus and for Sara. Their crypts only say "Our Father" and "Our Mother."

Otto Altschuler was moved to see the crypts of Claire and Lee Kohns. Claire sponsored his family in 1939, bringing them to the United States and, thereby, saving their lives. Otto told the story of arriving with no money. But he and his brother Herbert had custom-made tuxedos because they expected to be invited to have dinner with this "rich" woman in New York City.

Our visit to this lovely site was concluded with the recitation of the mourner's Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for the dead. Several in our group recited this solemn prayer in Hebrew.

We then drove to Salem Fields Cemetery where the tour continued. We met near their entryway and most of the group proceeded on foot. Fred Moses and Irene Pastarnack asked that we visit the resting place for Sissie and Irving Lehman. Fred told us how they rescued his family. He feels he would not be alive today if it were not for Sissie and Irving. This made our stop here quite emotional. He also told us about Camp Lehman on Irving and Sissie's 100 acre property in Port Chester, NY where he spent a summer. His gratitude to them is boundless. Fred and Irene posed for photographs at the Lehman's tombstone and we also took this opportunity to have a group photograph taken. Once again we recited the mourner's kaddish before proceeding to the Kurzman Mausoleum and the Schafer family plots.

Paul Kurzman's paternal grandparents and many aunts and uncles are buried in their family's mausoleum. This lovely building also contains a stained glass window that was repaired recently and protected from further damage by a clear Lexan covering. Paul explained who is entombed in the various crypts and told stories about his family. After reciting the mourner's Kaddish, we slowly walked past the Schafer family's grave site and then we were ready to leave the cemetery. We proceeded to



Fred Moses and Irene Pastarnack at Irving and Sissie Lehman's graves

our cars for the drive to David Kurzman's apartment for lunch.

Everyone welcomed the opportunity to rest, have a light lunch and to talk about the morning's experience. Fred, Irene and Otto, whose families survived the war because of the sponsorship of Straus family members, had interesting and emotional stories to tell. This experience was very special for all of us, but certainly more so

for them. The break gave us a chance to digest the stories and emotion as well as lunch. Paul's chocolate chip cake could not have been a more delicious conclusion to the luncheon and the day. It is a day we will not soon forget.

The Society will continue to research the role various family members played in sponsoring relatives in an effort to get them out of Europe before and during World War II. And we will continue to document the final resting places of others. If you have a story to tell, information to share, or want to know more about your part of the family, please contact me.



Back Row: Margaret Kurzman, Otto Altschuler, Fred Moses, Helene Altschuler, Paul A. Kurzman, Irene Pastarnack, David H. Kurzman

Front Row: Karen S. Franklin, Mark Altschuler, Maria Jones Quijano, Hugh Grant Straus III, Howard Matson, Joan Adler

Debunking "The Story"

Several times a year, usually around the Jewish New Year, Chanukah and at Passover, a story is circulated describing the activities and character of Isidor and of Nathan Straus. The gist of the story is that Isidor was not as philanthropic as Nathan and that somehow, because of this he died in the Titanic disaster while Nathan was saved. Various versions of the story, to a great or lesser extent, describe Isidor's life-style as opulent, his character as mercenary, and his interests decidedly unphilanthropic. Nathan, in contrast, is described as interested in Zionism, the wellbeing of his fellow man, and as one who contributed enormously to great humanitarian goals.

I have carefully written back to the people who sent these stories, trying to show the fallacy of each supposed fact. Here, in this article, I hope to set the record straight. The current story, as it was sent to me, is in italics. My comments follow them in bold type.

At the turn of the twentieth century, two of the wealthiest and most famous men in America were a pair of Jewish brothers named Nathan and Isidor Straus. Owners of R.H. Macy's Department Store and founders of the A&S (Abraham & Straus) chain. The brothers were multimillionaires, renowned for their philanthropy and social activism.

Isidor and Nathan, although wealthy and philanthropic, were not two of the wealthiest and most famous men in America. In fact, the family kept a low profile, preferring to socialize with other family members than to attend the large and well-publicized social affairs of the day. The store was founded by Abraham and Wechsler before it became Abraham & Straus. The Strauses bought out Joseph Wechsler to become partners with Abraham Abraham. It did not become a chain until many decades later under the able leadership of Nathan's sons, and others

In 1912, the brothers and their wives were touring Europe,

Isidor and Nathan and their wives were not touring Europe. Isidor and Ida were in Menton and Cap Martin for most of the winter, beginning in January. Isidor was recovering there from an illness. They also visited family in Germany, went shopping in Paris and stopped in London where Isidor tried to help resolve a coal strike. Nathan and Lina went to Palestine in February with Dr. J. L. Magnes and then he attended the International Tuberculosis Congress in Rome in April. He was a delegate from the United States.

When Nathan, the more ardent Zionist of the two, impulsively said one day, "Hey, why don't we hop over to Palestine?"

And, of course, in those days nobody "hopped" over to Palestine. Nathan and Lina went to Palestine in February, not in

January with Isidor and Ida. They did not travel together either onboard a ship or in Europe.

Israel wasn't the tourist hotspot then that it is today. Its population was ravaged by disease, famine, and poverty; but the two had a strong sense of solidarity with their less fortunate brethren,

Nathan was known for his Zionism. Isidor was not. He contributed to the welfare of mankind in many other ways. Their interests and causes were different but both were concerned with the welfare of man.

and they also wanted to see the health and welfare centers they had endowed with their millions.

It was on their trip in 1912 that Nathan and Lina opened a soup kitchen that provided 300 free meals to the destitute. He also founded the Health Department in Palestine. He did build the Jerusalem Health Center but it did not cost millions. And the health and welfare centers were not built yet. Isidor was not involved in this project.

However, after a week spent touring, Isidor Straus had had enough. "How many camels, hovels, and yeshivas can you see? It's time to go," Isidor decreed with edgy impatience in his voice.

Since they were not there at this time, or together, it is obvious that this conversation could not have taken place.



Isidor Straus

But Nathan refused to heed his brother's imperious command. It wasn't that he was oblivious to the hardships around him; it was precisely because of them that he wanted to stay. As he absorbed firsthand the vastness of the challenges his fellow Jews were coping with, he felt the burden of responsibility. "We can't leave now," he protested. "Look how much work has to be done here. We have to help. We have the means to help. We can't turn our backs on our people."

"So we'll send more money," his brother snapped back. "I just want to get out of here."

This statement is so out of character for Isidor that it defies comment.

But Nathan felt that money simply wasn't enough. He felt that the Jews who lived under such dire circumstances in Palestine needed the brothers' very presence among them: their initiative, their leadership, and their ideas.

Nathan wanted to help people by giving them access to better health care options and to pasteurized milk. Although he re-

turned to Palestine many times, his contributions enabled others to do the important work he envisioned. He did not feel his presence was important, or required.

Isidor disagreed. The two argued back and forth, and finally Isidor said, "If you insist, stay here. Ida and I are going back to America. . . where we belong."

Isidor and Ida felt very much at home in Europe and could not have suggested that America was "where they belonged." Their roots, and much of their family, were in Germany, the place where they were both born and returned often. In the many hundreds of letters in the Society's archives there is no evidence of an argument between Isidor and Nathan, ever, for any reason. They were devoted brothers who were respectful of their differences and supportive of each other.

The two separated. Isidor and his wife returned to Europe, while Nathan and his spouse stayed in Palestine, traveling the country and contributing huge sums of money to the establishment of education, health, and social welfare programs to benefit the needy.

Nathan never threw huge sums of money around as this statement implies.

Nathan also financed the creation of a brand-new city on the shores of the Mediterranean. And since his name in Hebrew was Natan, and he was the city's chief donor, the founders named it after him and called it...Natanya.

Natanya was named for Nathan Straus in the hope that he would be so flattered that he would contribute huge sums of money to it. He did not finance its creation. He told them he had already given away 3/4's of his fortune and had no more to give. The mayor of Natanya was later sent to New York to encourage Nathan to contribute to them. He returned home empty handed. But the city already bore the name of this great philanthropist and still does today.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, Isidor Straus was preparing to sail home to America aboard an ocean liner for which he had also made reservations for his brother, Nathan, and his wife.

There were never reservations for Nathan and Lina nor was there any expectation that they would accompany Isidor and Ida home.

"You must leave Palestine NOW!" he cabled his brother in an urgent telegram. "I have made reservations for you and if you don't get here soon, you'll miss the boat."

There was no such telegram.

But Nathan delayed. There was so much work to be done that he waited until the last possible moment to make the connec-

tion. By the time he reached London, it was April 12 and the liner had already left port in Southampton with Isidor and Ida Straus aboard.

Nathan and Lina went from Palestine to Rome where they attended the International Tuberculosis Congress. He was a representative of the United States. They were there on April 12th. They'd planned to be there. There was never an expectation that they would be in London or traveling aboard Titanic.

Nathan felt disconsolate that he had, as his brother had warned, "missed the boat." For this was no ordinary expedition, no common, everyday cruise that he had forfeited, but the much ballyhooed maiden voyage of the most famous ship of the century. This was the Titanic.

There is no evidence that Isidor felt the need to be on Titanic because of its much "ballyhooed" fame. It was simply time to go home. There was coal strike at the time and coal was being diverted from other ships so that Titanic could sail. It was one of the only ships sailing at that time. It was the right ship leaving at the right time for Isidor and Ida. So they took it.



Nathan Straus

Nathan Straus, grief-stricken and deeply mourning his brother and sister-in-law could not shake off his sense that he had had a rendezvous with history. The knowledge that he had avoided death permeated his consciousness for the rest of his life, and until his death in 1931, he pursued his philanthropic activities with an intensity that was unrivaled in his time.

Although Nathan was devastated by the loss of his beloved brother and sister-in-law, he never said he felt "he had a rendezvous with history." He did withdraw from busi-

ness after the Titanic disaster. He devoted the rest of his life to philanthropic causes. But he was already doing this work before his brother and sister-in-law died. One can only say that he lost his heart for business. He was in his 60's at the time. And he felt the loss of his loved ones very deeply.

Today, Natanya is a scenic resort city of 200,000 and headquarters to Israel's thriving diamond trade - one of the most important industries in the country. And in almost every part of the city, there is some small reminder of Nathan Straus's largesse, his humanity, and love for his people. His legacy lives on.

There are memorials around the world to Isidor and to Ida Straus, whose courage and philanthropy have inspired people. Edward Lauterbach described Isidor on May 27, 1912 as "calm, modest, unassuming, self-obliterative, always actuated by love for the people and interested in every scheme of altruism." Both brothers and their families contributed greatly. Both deserve our respect and admiration.

S. W. Straus Family Cabinet Cards

Raymond K. Wedmore recently wrote to the Society, "In the 1960's I purchase some steamer trunks at a storage facility. Inside one of the trunks was a quantity of cabinet cards. These are photographs mounted on cardboard and are approximately 4" X 7" high. They all date from the 1880's. I was able to track down two of the families, the Ritterbands and the Bensingers who were represented in some of the cards and was able to reunite the families with the photographs of their ancestors. I am now left with 8 cards all depicting a family member of the Straus family. They include: Jacob Straus, who, with his brothers Mathias and Frederick (William) founded the Citizens Bank of Legonier (Indiana); Mrs. Jacob Straus; Simon Straus, son of William; Simon Straus' engagement photo; Hattie Klee Straus (Mrs. Simon Straus) engagement photo; Annie Straus, only daughter of Herman Straus, brother of Jacob; Bella Straus, daughter of William, sister of Simon. Married Henry (Sam) Regenberg; Sam Regenberg, husband of Bella (Their two daughters died in a tragic fire at the Iroquois Theatre in Chicago in 1903....

Cabinet cards are in great demand to collectors and if I am unable to locate a Straus family member who is interested in purchasing the cards, I will have to sell them on ebay."

Mr. Wedmore would like to sell the entire lot, all 8 cards. He can be reached by e.mail: rkwesq@rkwlaw.com or by phone: 775-424-3190, Fax: 775-424-3697. His street address is: 370 Tina Circle, Sparks, NV 89436. He will be happy to e.mail or fax copies for review.



Photograph of Simon Straus, from the Raymond K. Wedmore collection. Simon was the son of Frederick William Straus, the husband of Hattie Klee and the father of Madelon, Lousie and Harriet Straus.

Tides Foundation Grant

The Straus Historical Society, Inc., is pleased to announce that we have received a \$3,000 grant from the Tides Foundation of San Francisco, CA on the recommendation of the Stu Cooney Memorial Fund.

This general support grant will be used to further enhance our educational and research programs.

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, September 11, 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.