

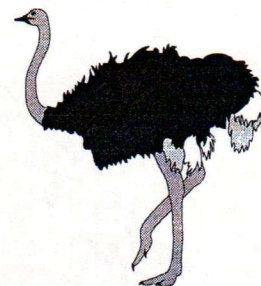
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Volume 4 Number 2

STRAUS FAMILY NEWSLETTER

August 1996

The Straus Historical Society



On March 16, 1996, a group of family members met at the White Plains, NY home of Alan and Birgitta Hockstader. The purpose of this meeting was to decide if there was sufficient interest within the family to warrant the continuation of the many projects initiated by Joan Adler under the direction of Robert K. Straus. Members of each branch of the family were represented. It was unanimously decided that the Straus Historical Society would be established in order to provide a vehicle for continuing the projects relating to the past and current history of the family. Although all of you have received a flyer announcing the formation of this society, there is more room in the newsletter to tell you about this organization and the exciting events and projects planned for the future.

When I asked for committee volunteers, Paul A. Kurzman called. His call was followed by one from Alan F. Hockstader. Their enthusiasm gave me the courage to call other family members. Committee members were chosen, by me, in an effort to include representation from each branch of the family by people who had previously exhibited interest and support for the project. The first committee meeting brought together members of the family, most of whom had never met. In a few cases, people had attended family functions as children or young adults but had not seen each other in years. It was interesting to listen as relatives renewed their acquaintance and shared memories. Those present were: Paul A. Kurzman, Alan F. Hockstader, Thomas P. Straus, Robert B. Straus, Gail Nutku, Daniel Kohns, Barnard Sachs Straus Sr., William Sachs Straus, Melissa K. Straus, Birgitta S. Hockstader, Carol H. Straus, Stephen Day Straus and me, Joan Adler. In addition, Jack Schafer and Sara Byruck, both from California, and Oscar S. Straus III from New York, agreed to serve on the committee but were unable to attend.

At the meeting, everyone introduced themselves and gave a brief biography. Fortunately, Alan and Birgitta had had their 1960's family tree framed. It was hanging on the wall of their

living room. Everyone was able to show their place on the tree and each was able to see how he/she was related to everyone else. I presented a description of the work I had been doing since the inception of the project, where this work was heading, how I hoped to achieve these goals, and what would be necessary to do this. A vote was taken and it was unanimously decided that the project should be continued. A new organization would be formed, the Straus Historical Society. The stated purpose of this organization is "to provide a forum for communication among its members concerning the past history and the current lives of the Straus family and relatives, to serve as a central location for collecting and preserving documents and information about the family and relatives, to aid those interested in research about the family and relatives, and for such related functions as may be appropriate."

A committee of family members, assembled by Bob Straus in 1990, gave support to his proposal to begin family research. Rob Straus' commitment to this work has been steadfast. Rob has served as unofficial treasurer of the Straus Historical Fund since its inception. He came to the committee meeting prepared to see the project continue. Rob read a copy of proposed by-

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laws he had adapted from other organizations. They were amended by the group to suit the needs of our new organization and approved on the spot. Tom Straus was elected chair; Alan Hockstader, vice chair; Gail Nutku, secretary; and Rob Straus, treasurer. I have been named executive director. Those family members present became the board of directors.

Fund raising is paramount. Without your contribution, there will be no Straus Historical Society. Toward this end, a fund raising letter was sent to each member of the family over 18 years of age and to individuals and organizations with whom we have had contact.

An immediate goal of the organization is to have the by-laws reviewed by an attorney. It was deemed important that we investigate whether the society could be designated 501c(3). If so, contributions would be tax deductible. We are in the process of researching this.

One project approved at this meeting was the commissioning of an artist to draw a new, artistic family tree. This was accomplished in time for presentation at the May 5th family reunion. Look for an article about this tree and an offering on the next page.

Two special events followed the committee meeting. Virginia Bersohn hosted a family reunion at her home in Riverdale on May 5th. About 80 people attended. The reunion was a resounding success. At Ginny's request, an article about the reunion will be included in this mailing but not in "wholedamfam." Two photographers took photographs of the family in various groupings, including informal shots and by family branch. I will be making an album of these color photographs from the reunion. It will be available shortly. Please contact me if you would like a copy.

On May 23rd, Commissioner Henry Stern of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation hosted an official ground breaking ceremony at Straus Park. Family members, members of the community and many politicians were invited. The weather could not have been more spectacular. Speeches were made by, among others, Commissioner Stern, Leon Auerbach of the West 106th Street Block Association, Ruth Messinger, the Manhattan Borough President and Paul A. Kurzman representing the Straus family. Although this was the official ground breaking, reconstruction of the park had actually begun several months earlier. Several people were asked to pose with shovels poised for the requisite ground breaking photos. A copy of one photograph may be found on page ten of this newsletter. Pink carnations were given to all those attending, which included a class of children from an area school. The carnations are significant because Isidor always wore one in his lapel.

I visited Straus Park on June 19th and can report that the work is progressing beautifully. The statue, Memory, has been removed to a foundry in Queens where it will be restored before being returned to the park. It has been decided that an annual informal family event should be held in the park. All members of the family will be included. Although the park will not be ready for us this year, the board of directors of the Straus Historical So-

ciety has designated Saturday, October 5th, rain date Saturday October 12th, as Straus Day in the Park. This year we hope you will all come to Riverside Park, the exact place to be announced, for a picnic, music, and games. Details will follow. This is an opportunity for the children of the family to get to know their relatives and for the younger, and young in spirit, members of the family to have some fun in an informal setting. Please set aside these dates.

I was in San Francisco in April. Because Jack Schafer and Sara Byruck couldn't come to the March 16th meeting, I brought the details to them. Jack and his lovely wife Betty arranged a dinner party on April 22nd. Beside Jack and Betty, Sara and her husband Marcus, Jim Straus, Liza Loop and her husband Stephen Smith and Penelope More attended. Pam Haber had to leave early but I did stop at her home earlier to meet her husband Bob who was allergic to Jack's cat and couldn't come to dinner. It was a wonderful evening filled with personal stories and shared laughter. I think everyone was surprised they had so much in common, even down linguistic phrasing and physical attributes. I hope the California Strauses will try to attend some of the New York events or become active in their own state. After the wonderful success of the 1993 "CALDAMFAM," it appears there would be support for other events.

On May 23rd, a second board meeting was held, this time at the home of Jennifer and Daniel Kohns. Many issues raised at the first board meeting were clarified or decided upon at this meeting. Terms of office for board members were determined. I reported that many copies of the artistic family tree has been sold at the family reunion. Investigation is continuing into how we might achieve 501c(3) status. Other matters discussed were: donation of the family collection to a repository, the need for a "family health tree", the possibility of sponsoring trips to Talbotton, Georgia, to Otterberg Germany and the New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division to tour the facility and see how the Straus Family Papers are stored, and the decision to hold a family day in Riverside Park on October 5th.

Kalen H. Holliday and R. Peter Straus have volunteered to serve on the board of directors. They have been accepted on an interim basis pending approval at the next board of directors meeting. Anyone interested in becoming more involved in any of our exciting projects or in becoming a member of the board of directors should make his/her wishes known to me or to a member of the board of directors. The next board meeting will be held on September 25th at 7 PM at the home of Paul A. Kurzman.

In 1955, Sara Straus Hess privately published Isidor Straus' autobiography. Her dedication reads: "Dedicated to the present and future generations of our family, in the hope that the integrity, initiative and industry of their forebears will serve as a continuing inspiration in maintaining the good name which is their proud heritage." I propose that this dedication become the guiding beacon of our organization, the Straus Historical Society.



The Straus Family Tree

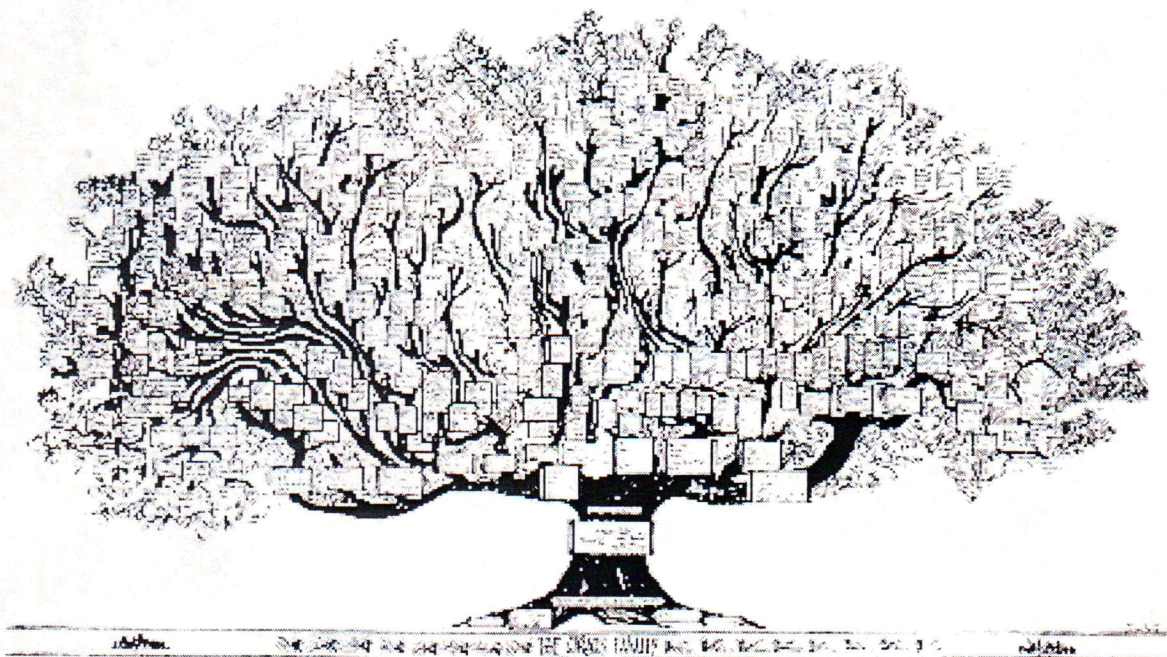
At the March 16th meeting of the Straus Historical Society, it was decided that an artist would be commissioned to execute a new, artistic Straus Family Tree. Jean Cipriano, a noted designer, was hired.

Although the previous family trees were beautiful and easy to read, Jean was given a free hand to utilize her own style. She did, however, work closely with me to make sure all my requirements were met. We both felt that, because the family was familiar with the style of the previous trees, it would be advisable to base the new tree on that style. Lazarus and Sara Straus are prominently displayed on the trunk with their ancestors depicted as roots and their descendants as the branches. Generations are designated by stylized boxes. The new tree is current through April, 1996. It corrects errors on the previous trees and adds all the new information we have gathered since the inception of this project. It is designed to be periodically updated while still maintaining the balance and grace of its form.

The new tree contains 539 family members. Completed in time for the May 5th family reunion, the family tree was prominently displayed at two locations in Ginny Bersohn's Riverdale home. It provided the focal point through which people were able to find where they fit into the larger family picture. Throughout the day, family members drifted to the tree where they traced their relationship to their newly acquainted relatives. It was unanimously agreed that the artistic tree is an extraordinary piece of work. I was sorry the artist was not present to hear the praise. The tree was displayed at the Straus Park Ground Breaking Ceremony on May 23rd where it also received accolades.

The artistic Straus Family Tree was made available for sale at the family reunion. Family members bought copies for themselves and as gifts for their children and grandchildren. If you were unable to attend the reunion and would like to purchase the tree, the cost is \$50.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling. All proceeds from the sale of this tree go to the Straus Historical Society. The tree is 3' X 4' and is suitable for framing. It will arrive scrolled in a heavy cardboard mailing tube which may be used for storage. If you wish to order multiple copies sent to the same address, send only \$5.00 for shipping and handling. You will receive all of your copies of the tree scrolled together. I do suggest, however, that you order separate copies of the tree, shipped in their own heavy cardboard mailing tube, if they are to be given to your children and grandchildren as a gift. In this way, the tree will have its own protective storage container if it is not framed for display. Since the reunion, I have been hearing about some of the creative ways the tree has been framed. Everyone seems delighted with his/her piece of family history.

Please send your check made out to the **Straus Historical Fund** to Joan Adler, Post Office Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. If you have ordered multiple copies of the tree, please be specific. Do you want them sent directly to your children and/or grandchildren or other family members or to you? Remember, send \$50.00 per tree plus only \$5.00 for shipping and handling for all trees sent in one box to one address. Please send \$50.00 per tree plus \$5.00 each for shipping and handling for every tree sent in its own storage box to each individual address. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to write, phone 516-265-3340, fax 516-724-4487 or send e.mail to me at FAMJAD@aol.com.



The Women in The Family - Part Two

Isidor and Ida's Daughters Sara, Minnie and Vivian

We have followed the professional lives of Isidor and Ida's sons, Jesse, Percy and Herbert. Very little has been written about their daughters, Sara, Minnie and Vivian. As was the custom of the time, women of their station were not encouraged to pursue a profession. They managed the house and staff, had children and did good works. Sara, Minnie and Vivian followed this tradition. However, each is reported to have been a strong woman and each raised her children to be independent thinkers.

The three Straus sisters married doctors. Sara married Alfred Fabian Hess, a distinguished pediatrician and scientist. He discovered vitamin C and vitamin D. Alfred died suddenly in 1933 at the age of 56. Minnie married Dr. Richard Weil. Richard died in 1917 during the influenza epidemic. He was 41. Vivian married Herbert A. Scheftel. He died in 1914 of a heart ailment at 39, leaving Vivian to raise two young sons, Stuart and Herbert Jr.

The three sisters were widowed early, but each was a survivor. Sara was considered the most intellectual and the strongest. She was a suffragette who marched down Broadway and Fifth Avenue in New York City. Minnie, the second daughter, devoted herself to the raising of her children. She is said to have had a good sense of humor. Minnie maintained an apartment at 1000 Park Avenue. Vivian is described as lively, funny and breathtakingly beautiful. Even in her later years, she is remembered for her dark hair combed into a pageboy.

But I am getting ahead of myself. During the 1890's the Isidor and Nathan Straus families summered at Lower Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks. Ida wrote daily letters to Isidor, who alternated visits with Nathan, each remaining in the city to manage the store while the other was in the country with his family. From these letters, we have a glimpse of the lives of the two families and can get a picture of the sisters, Sara, Minnie and Vivian, when they were children.

In the summer of 1890, Sara was twelve, Minnie was ten and Vivian turned four. Although obviously very busy with their summertime activities, all three girls were induced to write to Isidor. Their letters contained news of their day and both Sara and Minnie made certain Isidor would not forget to bring Vivian a gift for her August 29th birthday.

On July 26, 1890 Sara wrote to her father, "We are having a very nice time up here as usual and we all hope that you will come very soon. Yesterday we ate lunch on the sand beach which the guides cooked and we all enjoyed it very much. ... We have only been out rowing once so far but mama says that now we must begin doing so regularly. We are all very comfortable in the guide house and even have one spare room for Eddie Blun (Ida's brother) who is coming on the twenty eighth. ... Good-

bye for today with much love & many kisses I am your loving daughter." In the same letter Ida wrote, "Your reprimand has at least had one good result as you can see and can also judge whose sense of duty is strongest among all our children. Sara immediately took your words to heart." Referring to the mayor, "Baby (Vivian) acts very sweetly with him. This morning she plucked a bouquet and wanted to bring it to him while he was at breakfast."

August 1890: Minnie wrote that she had gone fishing with Jerome and had caught only one fish but was going out practicing so that she might catch a whole string like Jerome. Sara, the oldest daughter, promised to write every day, asked Isidor not to forget to send Vivy something for her birthday, and sent love and many kisses to Jesse "and an extra hug for yourself." Sara signed her letter Daughy. "Vivy sends her love to dear papa and brother Jesse and to cousin Lee. (Hermine's son)"

August 27, 1890: Sara wrote about Jesse's arrival at Villa Plaisance, their home in Lower Saranac Lake, and about the presents he brought from Europe for everyone. "I have just finished reading Jane Eyre by C. Bronte and now mama wants me to write what I remember of it. I have already written five pages of pad." This letter is signed Daughy.

August 29, 1890: "I congratulate you for ... (not forgetting my) birthday. I got many fineries. I got a sister of Charity doll from ... and a baby from Sissy. Dear papa I send you my love. Yours from your old Daughy Vivy"

September 2, 1890: "I was over at Limburgers. I played croquet and they were playing tennis when I came and Elsie Nathan is a most darling little girl. for papa from Vivy."

September 8, 1890: From Sara, "The weather is very nice and quite warm up here for the past few days and everybody has been feeling very languid and lazy." "They all went on a picnic to-day to Limburgers and our crowd and Uncle Oscar went fishing as I have nothing more to say I am your loving daughter M.D." (Minnie)

September 10, 1890: "I thank you very much for going to give me a singing doll. Here is your kiss. From your own Vivy." From Sara, "Vivy was overjoyed to hear that you are going to bring her a doll that can sing. Is it one of Edison's talking dolls?"

September 15, 1890: From Daughy (Sara), "Everybody has until now tried their utmost to persuade mama to move to the large house (Nathan and Lina's house) and at last they have succeeded. She has at last come to the conclusion that it would be a great deal more convenient. Yesterday Mr. Nelson, Uncle Oscar, Percy and Jesse went to see the president at upper Saranac Lake. They seem to have enjoyed themselves very much but on the way home Percy became sea-sick. Jesse drove both ways."

September 16, 1890: "I thank you for sending the candy & the doll. I send you a hug & a kiss. Yours Vivienne." From Minnie, "We are all very glad that we don't have to practise any more as the parlor is going to be closed up. ... Vivie did not like the doll

you sent her she says she will give it to Charley (Nathan Jr.) when she gets to the City as she thinks herself to old to play with it. ... M.D." Ida refers to Vivian as Daughty Daisy.

The following summer, 1891, Sara was thirteen, Minnie was eleven and Vivian turned five at the end of August.

June 25, 1891: From Minnie, "As you always say that I never write you when you are away from home I thought I would not give you any chance to say so this time. Sara & myself & Sissie walked down to the village yesterday morning. ... Sissie & I went out rowing this morning before breakfast with Warren (a guide) to Eagle Island & got some birchbark. ... I will close for to-day your sweet little darling of a daughter." From Sara, "Really Papa you ought to come up soon because we are being sadly neglected, Aunt Lina and Mama together making a very good match in thinking that everything is too good to be used or eaten until you come."

June 27, 1891: From Daughty (Sara), "Mama weighed in the village yesterday and found that she weighed one hundred and twenty four pounds, Minnie weighs eighty two and I weigh seventy seven and Herby sixty, but we will soon gain if we keep on eating as much as we are at present. ... So far I have not done much of anything except that I practiced yesterday but I read about twenty five pages a day. I think that this was what you said. I could read more but I read principally in the evening and we go to bed so very early."

July 1, 1891: "We manage to have quite a nice time here and the boys are doing a great deal of fishing and bring home quite large strings although Jerome had to walk ten miles for his yesterday. We are out in the air a great deal and we practice; and I read quite some. We drink on an average of six glasses of milk a day and if we don't gain by that, I would like to know when we will. ... Today I was fishing all day with Jerome and we were caught in an awful rain & wind storm. We went up Fish Creek and had lots of fun. Every few minutes guide had to get



Summer 1891 - Saranac Lake - Adirondacks

In Front Row, Seated: Oscar with Vivian, Herbert, Percy with dog, Jerome

Middle Row: Lucie Mammelsdorf with baby Charlie Webster (Nathan Jr.) on her lap, Sissie (seated), Minnie (standing)

Upper Row: Mrs. Charles Webster, Philip Kuppenheimer, Sara, a nursemaid in background standing on the porch directly behind Sara, Charles Webster, Ida, Isidor

out and drag the boat over a log and we had to do a little walking at the rapids. I did not catch any fish but Jerome caught eighteen. The reason I did not get any was that there were very few places where I could fish. As you know lunch is always the best part and I did it full justice. The Mosquitoes are very bad just now and the only way I manage to keep rid of them was by bathing my face in tar oil. ... With much love I am your loving daughter Sara."

July 2, 1891: From Minnie, "As I have not written you for several days I thought I would take this opportunity as it is raining. ... Sissie Sara & I Herby walk down to the village every Wednesday & get weighed. Sissie weighs 72 1/2 Sara 77 1/2 Herby 60 1/2 & I 82 1/2. Are you going to send Vivy something for her birthday which is on the 29 of August."

July 26, 1891: From Minnie, "While you & Mama were at Saratoga I went out driving once with Aunt Lena on a chicken hunt & as we saw a great many ripe raspberries we thought we would get out & pick them. We had picked a little while & were going home when all at once I missed my watch & chain & gold pencil. We all got right out again & looked for it but it was all in

vain. As it was getting quite late & Aunt Lena wanted to go home we had to leave. Aunt Lena told a man around there that whoever found it would get 5 dollars reward. As I had heard nothing more about it mama thought it would be good if somebody would go up and look for it. So Sissie, Sara, Fraulein & myself & the coachman drove up there this morning in the double waggon. When you come up will you please bring me up another watch chain & a little silver pencil? A gentleman up here lost a 300 dollar watch between Limbergers & Rices point in the water & offers a 50 dollar reward for who ever finds it. When you come up don't forget Vivian's birthday."

July 28, 1891: From Ida, "Minnie has taken to practicing again; she is in splendid condition. - Sara is regarded here as the prize girl, she is the champion of everything."

July 29, 1891: From Ida, "Please inform me exactly what I should pay the teacher. His month expires on the fourth. I am sorry to say that as a teacher of botany he is not a success in so far that he divests the study of all poetry and imagination; he does not know much of it himself, is obliged to look up references all the time, and so much of the interest is lacking with which a teacher

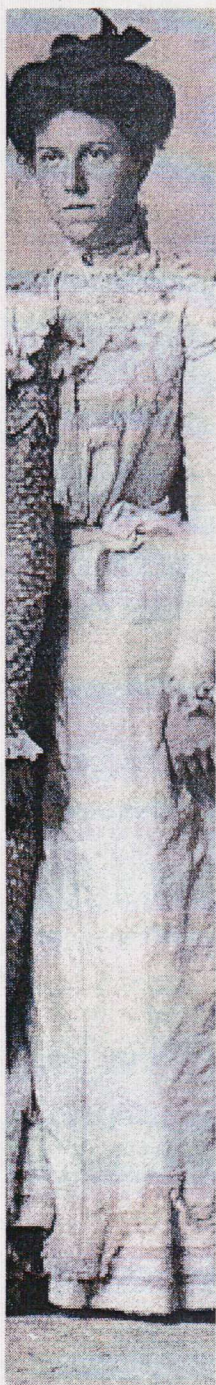
who would be at home on the subject would inspire. But he has succeeded in awakening in the children a desire to know something of flowers, they regard them with a different interest and another year we will try to find a thorough botanist as teacher. On the other hand, as a teacher of algebra, and I dare say of the kindred sciences he is all that can be desired so the children tell me, and he is a very pleasant young man. I have been corresponding with music teachers ..."

August 5, 1891: From Sara: She asked Isidor to bring her a catalogue from Barnard College. "Aunt Lucy's (Mammelsdorf) greatest delight is to tease Jesse about Belle Nathan and just as soon as Jesse speaks Aunt Lucy makes reference to her as she is called. (Jesse married Irma Nathan, Belle's sister.)

Sara and her family lived in a brownstone on West 72nd Street in NYC. Her physician husband's office was on the ground floor with the family living above. After the death of her son Alfred, Sara hoped for another son. In 1919 she gave birth to a premature baby boy who died. She was devastated by her loss and suffered a nervous breakdown. She refused to enter her house again. The family moved to Red Bank, NJ where they lived for several years. Sara always wore black. She eventually moved to a house on West 86th Street in New York City. After the death of her husband, Sara sold their house on West 86th Street and moved into an apartment at 875 Park Avenue. It was a large apartment with room for her recently married daughter Peggy and her husband Jan. It was the same building that housed Percy Straus and his wife Edith, who was afflicted with multiple sclerosis. Peggy thinks Sara moved into that build-



April 30, 1889
Seated in front: Sara
Left to Right: Minnie, Vivian, Sissie



Sara

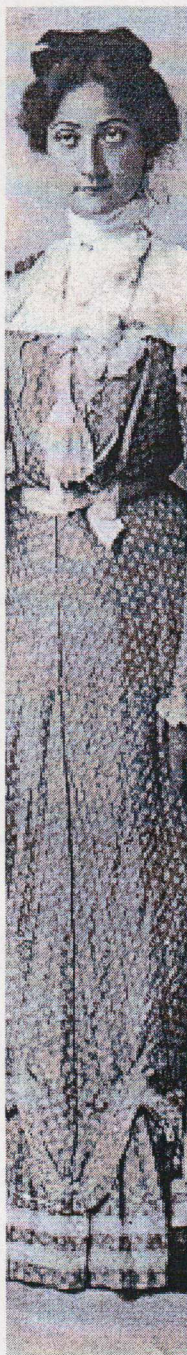
ing in order to be close to them and to help care for Edith. Letters from the thirties indicate that Sara had to deal with health issues of her own. She was operated on for a sinus problem, a problem which had been treated unsuccessfully for many years by other methods. In fact, she was in Johns Hopkins Hospital at the time of her husband's death. She had previously had surgery for water on the knee.

Sara was a feminist and a suffragette. She attended Columbia University and was a trustee of Barnard College, the women's arm of Columbia, for many years. Peggy de Graaff reports that women of that era and class didn't pay much attention to their children. They did, "more or less, good works." Sara spoke French, German, Italian and Spanish. She had an Italian woman come to lunch every Saturday so that she could practice the language. Sara was a long-time board member of Greenwich House, a community house in New York, serving with her sister Vivian's son, Buzzie Scheffel.

Sara enjoyed being the Grand Dame. She maintained a chauffeur driven limousine in which she would escort people to concerts. She continued to be the center of family activities for years. It was at her apartment that the family gathered regularly for Sunday lunch. To this day, a smile usually erupts on the face of the person talking

about these family gatherings. She seems to have been a strong influence to many family members.

Sara was interested in family history and sponsored a family reunion on the occasion of her 80th birthday. She privately published The Autobiography of Isidor Straus with a forward by Sara Straus Hess in 1955. Eleven year old Rob Straus remembers making a speech at dinner on the night Sara gave out the autobiography. It is this volume that sparked Bob Straus' interest in family history, an interest that has grown into the Straus Family Project and now the Straus Historical Society. The dedication she wrote for this book appears on page two of this newsletter.



Minnie

Minnie was two years younger than Sara. She married Richard Weil, a man described as attractive. He was a physician who died in 1917 during the flu epidemic. They had two sons, Richard and Frederick and a daughter, Evelyn. Richard is often described as brilliant. He wrote The Art of Practical Thinking and was President of Macy's New York. Frederick, known as Peter, was a businessman. Minnie doted on Evelyn who Peggy remembers as very sophisticated. Even when Peggy was not allowed to wear silk stockings, Evelyn wore silk stockings.

Minnie's daughter-in-law Susan described her as tall, thin. She is reported to have had a good sense of humor. Minnie lived at 1000 Park Avenue. She always had two Pekinese dogs.

Vivian was born in 1886. She was the youngest of Isidor and Ida's children. She is described as an incredibly beautiful, sophisticated woman. She married Herbert A. Scheffel, a physician who died in 1914 at the age of 39 leaving her with two young sons, Stuart (Boy) and Herbert Jr. (Buzzie). Buzzie remembers Vivian taking them to Straus Park where they would throw pink carnations into the reflecting pool. Vivian married George Dixon Jr. in 1916. They had a daughter, also named Vivian. George was a banker with City Bank. Shortly after their marriage he was posted in France. They maintained a home outside Paris. There's was an opulent life-style. Although they lived in France for many years, Vivian never learned to speak French. In her later years, she lived in England.

Most of the Straus women are strong. The three daughters of Isidor and Ida Straus grew up in an era when most women did not have professional options. Sara, Minnie and Vivian, all young widows, each found a way to put meaning and purpose in her life. They devoted themselves to their family, philanthropy and social activities, all of which benefitted from their "good works." If the Straus sisters had been born in a different era and into a different class of society,

there's no telling what they might have accomplished professionally. Sara, Minnie and Vivian each found their own way to fulfillment and meaning in life.



Vivian

Some Recollections of a Great Lady

Sara Straus Hess

As recalled by Donald and Beth Straus

Aunt Sara was, to both of us, a wonderful mixture of a strong and dominant woman and a loving aunt. My (Don's) early recollections of her are among my earliest recollections of any relative outside of my immediate family.

We, the Percy Straus branch, lived on the ninth floor of 875 Park Avenue. One floor below was my grandmother, Rose Abraham. Aunt Sara lived on the sixth floor. She was already a widow and had moved from her large home on the West Side after the death of her husband, Dr. Alfred Hess, a prominent pediatrician. She was a prominent and active leader in many New York charities, and hosted memorable parties from a long list of friends and admirers in the worlds of politics, business, education and the arts.

While I was still a child, I would pay rather formal visits to Aunt Sara, usually with my Dad, who adored her. She was his favorite sister. But, through all the formality, I could detect a warm and intelligent human being. I once called her "my favorite aunt" -- which indeed she was. I promised to name my first daughter Sara, if ever I was to have one. She always reminded me of this promise and I was happy to keep it when the opportunity arose.

It was after my marriage to Beth that Aunt Sara really became an important and close relative. We were married shortly before World War II. While I was away in the service, our home was 876 Park Avenue, directly across the street from 875. Aunt Sara began paying weekly visits, at first motivated by a sense of duty to the young bride of her nephew, almost alone in a strange city, with her husband away on military duty. By that time, both my parents were quite ill. Sara's sense of duty soon blossomed into something much stronger as both Aunt Sara and Beth recognized qualities in one another that they admired and came to love. At this point, I will ask Beth to pick up on the story.

I met Aunt Sara on my first trip to 875 Park Avenue as a young bride. After a decorous half hour on the ninth floor, I was sent down the elevator to the sixth, to introduce myself to Don's "favorite aunt." Aunt Sara was dressing to go out. I was ushered into a small blue sitting room, the door was ajar, and immediately, Aunt Sara, clad in a black satin corset swathed in black lace, put her gray head around the corner and announced, "Hello. I'm the favorite aunt and before you say anything you must promised to name your daughter after me." Astounded, but docile, I promised and was adopted forthwith. Aunt Sara became my mentor; a stern, but kindly one, instructing me on how to behave, what servants to hire, and what was expected of me as a new member of the Straus family. I would have a dustless house and a life dedicated to community service, new positions for a girl from sunny, laid-back California.

When I celebrated our first wedding anniversary in Doctor's Hospital with a face like a balloon after the extraction of four wisdom teeth, it was Aunt Sara who brought me a wedding

bouquet. She was so kind, so terrifying and, really, our favorite aunt.

After the war, Aunt Sara took us into her own family circle which, at Sunday lunches, always included, in addition to her own immediate family, a few favorites from her wide list of interesting doers and shakers in the community. These were memorable events. At lunch there was a long and formal table of from twelve to eighteen people, usually with general and interesting conversation, followed by a leisurely hour or two in her living room. These events were always an important part of each week. Our children were always included, as soon as they could wield a fork and knife. And even they, in spite of the formality, including my youngest, Sara, looked forward to them and recall Aunt Sara with respect and affection.

There was another side of Aunt Sara that only a few of us were privileged to see: in her own words, Aunt Sara, the dirt farmer. In her later years, she responded to what apparently was a lifelong dream, to own a real "dirt-farm", with things to plant, chickens to feed, and a small and very ordinary house in which she could do her own cooking. The "farm" was located in the middle of middle class New Jersey, far away from any of her many fancy friends. She would often go out to the farm Friday evening and, when lucky, our family would be invited for the weekend. We spent it digging in the garden, harvesting the eggs from the hen-house (a great treat for the children), and eating Aunt Sara's cooking.

Many of the older members of the family may recall a memorable family reunion in Aunt Sara's apartment. It was the only one, back then, that I recall. About one hundred invited members of the family came together one winter evening in 1955 for a buffet dinner in Sara's apartment. There were many toasts. Large numbers of guests, who had never seen one another before, departed that evening surprised at how many relatives they had met and liked.

HELP !

Does anyone have a photograph of Hermine Straus or Lazarus Kohns? We have no idea what they looked like and, so far, we have been unable to locate a photograph of either.

More E.mail Addresses

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David's company web page: <http://www.iasf.com/>
Joseph N. Straus: jstraus@email.gc.cuny.edu
Robert K. Straus: BPVB54A@prodigy.com

**Photograph taken at the Straus Family Reunion
May 5th, 1996**



Left to Right, Top Row: Marjorie A. Hyman, Ingrid Vignette, Peter Straus, Tracy Straus, Virginia Bersohn, Leonard A. Hockstader II, Alan F. Hockstader, Marjorie Auerbach, Leon Auerbach, Thomas P. Straus, Harold P. Kurzman Jr., Margaret F. Kurzman, Paul A. Kurzman

Descending the Stairs: Nancy White Kurzman, Peter H. Kurzman, William H. Straus, Phyllis K. Gladstone, Joan de Graaff, Udine B. Kurzman, John W. Straus
(Photograph by Joe Arbo)

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**Photograph taken at the Straus Park Ground Breaking Ceremony
May 23rd, 1996**



Wielding Shovels, From Right to Left: Edward K. Straus, Hugh Grant Straus III, Buzzie Scheftel, Adam Clayton Powell III, Ruth Messinger, Unknown man behind Ruth Messinger, Leon Auerbach, Paul A. Kurzman, Commissioner Henry Stern. Chairperson Diane Bratcher, Community Board # 7 and Manhattan Borough Commissioner Adrian Benepe, look on.
(Photograph by Joe Arbo)

Did You Know?

Thanks to Dr. Hans Steinebrei of Kaiserslautern Germany, we now have copies of passports issued to Jacques (Jakob) and Isaac Straus, Lazarus' grandfather and father, in which they are described as retail merchants. Both passports, issued 22 January 1810 by the Department of Mont Tonnerre, are written in French. These are passports for travel in the interior, both going to Neustadt. Each passport is signed by the passportee. It is interesting to me that the profession of retail merchant goes back so far in the family.

Jacques was described as a native of Dirmstein living in Otterberg. The photocopy is a poor one but it appears that Jacques was 86 years old at the time this passport was issued. Either I am reading the age incorrectly, or this Jacques is not the father of Isaac. I believe the former to be true. He was sixty seven centimeters tall with grayish hair, brown eyebrows, a small nose, oval face, an ordinary forehead, brown eyes, medium (average) mouth, a pointed chin and a pale complexion.

Isaac is described as a native of Niederkirchen, now living in Otterberg. He was 22 years old in 1810. He was sixty six centimeters tall with brown hair, brown eyebrows, a "good turned" nose, round face, round chin, medium (average) mouth and pale complexion.

Dr. Steinebrei has also sent us a photocopy of a passport issued to Lazarus Straus on 26 May 1852, also in French. A native of Otterberg, his home is listed as Sarreguemines in the Department of Moselle, today part of France. Although this photocopy is of poor quality and difficult to read, I believe the passport was issued for travel to Paris. Family lore has it that Lazarus emigrated to America in 1852 as a result of his involvement in the Revolution of 1848. We do not know the month of his departure nor the port he left from or arrived at. We did not know that Lazarus was living in Sarreguemines. Perhaps this was because of his participation in the revolution. Perhaps he used this passport to travel within France on his way to his departure city, presumably Le Havre. This is an area where more research will be required.

Lazarus' profession is listed as proprietor. Lazarus was 43 years old in 1852. He was seventy one centimeters tall with blonde (ish) hair, blue eyes, a pointed nose, blonde eyebrows, oval face, high forehead, round chin and pale complexion. The passport is signed by Lazarus.

Dr. Steinebrei wrote about Lazarus' involvement in the Revolution of 1848. In the Spring of 1849 Lazarus and others founded a defense committee. He was regarded as an anxious Jew, not a radical, but one who wanted a correction in the position of religious groups like the Jews. He was one of twenty members of the town council and was designated to collect money for the revolution. So as not to be regarded as an aid to the revolution, Lazarus only collected in one town, Niederkirchen. After the failure of the revolution, Lazarus was interrogated, along with others, about why they were doing something only the government was permitted to do, collect taxes. He explained

that he was only collecting donations. He was not punished. Although we have read that Lazarus left Germany because he was facing a trial or, at the very least, a court hearing, this appears not to be the case.

On 26 March 1996, Dr. Steinebrei wrote that the name Straus came about when Jews had to select last name. The list of 1808 shows Jakob Straus was Jacob Loeser, which is Lazarus in Latin and Lazaire in French. Lazaire is only listed in the French papers during the occupation. Dr. Steinebrei feels that any research into the early family should be directed toward the name Loeser, not Straus. We have not looked at documents with this name before. Additionally, it has been noted that the Straus name was written with the "szed" character (one that has been described as looking like a script lower case f or capital B) which denoted a double "s". There may be family members, particularly those remaining in Germany, who now spell their name with the double "s". An additional question has been raised about other Strauses who may have emigrated to America. These areas of research must not be overlooked.

Lazarus Straus married Fannie Levi sometime before 1838. They had one daughter, Karoline. Fannie died in 1843 and Lazarus became Karoline's guardian. Lazarus then married his first cousin, Sara Straus, daughter of his brother Solomon. When Lazarus emigrated to America, a family council was convened. Karoline's uncle, Abraham Levi III, became her guardian on 14 July 1852. Abraham was from Bleikastel and it is presumed she went to live there with his family. We don't know why Karoline didn't stay with Sara Straus nor why she remained in Germany when Sara and her four children came to America to join Lazarus. This is another area for investigation.

Nathan Straus opened a series of milk stations throughout the city where safe, pasteurized milk was made available in poor neighborhoods. By 1905 there had already been 2.5 million bottles of milk dispensed. The Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory was erected at 350 East 32nd Street in New York City in 1906 to replace an older laboratory on Avenue C which couldn't keep up with the demand. The laboratory was demolished in 1960.

Daniel Kohns has sent a wonderful anecdote taken from Peter Grose's book, Israel in the Mind of America. At a testimonial dinner sponsored by Jacob Schiff to announce the appointment of Oscar Straus to the Cabinet, Teddy Roosevelt lauded Straus' "devotion to high ideals" and stated, "I did not name him because he was a Jew. I would despise myself if I considered the race or religion of a man named for high political office. .. Merit and merit alone dictated his appointment." Schiff, who learned to applaud at all the right moments of a speech despite his total deafness, clapped and proceeded to say, "Before making up the Cabinet, President Roosevelt sent for me and informed me that he wished to appoint a Jew as a member of his Cabinet, and asked me to recommend the ablest Jew who would be most acceptable to my race. I recommended Oscar Straus. He was appointed and he has more than justified the recommendation." Grose recounts that as the crowd "applauded nervously... Theodore Roosevelt stared into space."

Kenneth Hollister Straus 1925 - 1996

It is with great sadness that I note the passing of Kenneth Hollister Straus. I had been working with Ken for the past two years on a personal project. When I learned of his death, I felt compelled to write about this man who spend the later years of his life helping people and, in doing so, found fulfillment.

Ken was a man who never knew how truly good he was. He spent much of his life in the shadow of his illustrious ancestors. And, he spent much of his life believing he could not possibly live up to their legacy. He was wrong.

I first met Ken through my involvement with the Straus family. He called me one day to ask if I would help him with a book he was writing. He explained that he had only recently learned he was dyslexic. He was writing his memoirs but wasn't confident he could do it alone. I readily agreed to help. We had been working together to complete this project when Ken was taken ill.

Because of the intimate nature of our involvement, I came to know Ken quite well. I admired and respected him. He was a man who loved people. He was amazed with every new discovery. He felt wonderment and delight at the world and people around him. He truly never knew how much goodness lay within him. I can still hear his voice in my head, his ready laugh, his quick wit, his marvelous anecdotes, his continual surprise, disbelief and delight when I told him what a great job he was doing with his book. My encouragement always seemed to baffle him. How could he be doing such a good job when writing had previously been such a chore? Would he really be able to pull it off? Ken's book, Recollections will be published posthumously. I hope you will all have the interest and take the time to read it. To me, it is a monumental achievement and a thoroughly delightful book.

Ken Straus died on Wednesday, July 24th, 1996 at the age of 71. His funeral was Friday, July 26th at the St. James Episcopal Church on 71st Street and Madison Avenue in New York City. Several hundred people attended. It was a funeral Ken would have liked, although he would not have understood that all these people, all this pageantry, all this fuss was for him. Madison Avenue was filled with firemen, policemen, Boy Scouts, sanitation workers, the Pipe Band of the NYC Police and Fire Department, several fire trucks, police cars and helicopters and hundreds of mourners. The funeral procession wound its way through the city, past Ken's apartment where an additional contingent of police officers were waiting and where a fire boat was

positioned nearby in the East River. All roads were closed to vehicular traffic from the church to Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx where Ken was interred beside his first wife, Chou.

Mayor Giuliani, Police Commissioner Howard Safir, Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen and the Reverend Brenda G. Husson eulogized Ken. Ken was a humble man who gave more than he knew. After an illustrious career at Macy's, he filled his retirement with pro bono work. His many activities are mentioned in his July 26th *New York Times* obituary.

Ken's earliest memory was of walking past a fire training station and seeing the firemen practicing their drills. His only memory of the cornerstone laying ceremony at 34th Street, in which the five year old Ken took part, was of fire engines streaking past with their sirens blaring. He was a fire buff, a man in love with every aspect of fire fighting. He volunteered to work with the

fire department on their Honor Emergency Fund, serving as a trustee. He became Honorary Fire Commissioner in 1993. He loved to show off his personal car with its flashing lights, sirens and fire badge. I'm not certain which he was more proud of, the honors or the car. His study at home was filled with fire memorabilia he had collected over the years and with fire related awards he richly deserved. His most prized possessions were the certificates naming him Honorary Fire Commissioner and Honorary Police Commissioner. He commonly wore three beepers, responding to many calls for help around the city. He truly cared about people.

Ken's recent work with Crime Stoppers including bringing a specially designed puppet show to schools in the cities of the North East. He was deeply involved in seeing their production come to fruition and was proud to quote figures illustrating the success the program was achieving. When his doctors told him he had to slow down, Ken couldn't figure out how. Everything was so important to him. He agonized over the decisions he had to make and in this one area, he failed. He could not stop helping people.

Ken will be missed by many more people than he could have realized. He touched the lives of the citizens of New York even though most never knew him. His sense of decency and responsibility, in a world whose moral fiber was decaying, exemplified my hope for the future. We have lost a hero, Kenneth Hollister Straus.

Thank you Ken, for allowing me to share in your enthusiasm, your unfailing optimism, your humor and your concern for the human condition. My life has been made richer for having known you.



Kenneth Hollister Straus
May 5, 1996