



# "wholedamfam"



Volume 4 Number 1

STRAUS FAMILY NEWSLETTER

February 1996

## NEWS FLASH

### FAMILY REUNION PLANNED

MAY 5TH, 1996

AT THE HOME OF VIRGINIA BERSOHN

RIVERDALE NEW YORK

About ten years ago Virginia Straus Bersohn hosted a family reunion in Riverdale New York with the help of Gail Nutku. In 1988 Bob Straus hosted a Jesse and Irma Nathan Straus descendant's reunion in Santa Barbara California. In March 1993 Sara Byruck and Liza Loop hosted "CALDAMFAM," a California Straus family reunion in Palo Alto. Obviously, people are interested in meeting one another. Comments about each of these reunions have been enthusiastic. Sara and Liza told us that finding out where one "fit" on the family tree and the relationship between people was an easy way to get everyone involved. It broke the ice. People were surprised to notice recurring speech patterns as well as similarities in accent and vocabulary from individuals who had never met, had been brought up in different parts of the country and had only one ancestor in common in four generations. People found it fun exchanging reminiscences and anecdotes about their branch of the family. There was lots to tell and lots to learn.

Since the inception of the Straus Family Project, 373 family members have been located. People seem to be curious about each other. The opportunity to meet has now been presented.

Virginia Bersohn, with the help of Gail Nutku, has graciously offered to host a family reunion at her home in Riverdale New York on May 5th. Although Virginia's house is large, the

number of people in the family has forced her to decide that only those over 18 years of age will be invited. This still leaves 290 relatives to invite. Details and time will be decided soon. In the meantime, keep the weekend of May 5th open. Invitations will follow.

This might be a good time to plan other family oriented events. Does a stop at Straus Park interest anyone? Would you like to see the Straus mausoleum in Greenlawn Cemetery, the plaque dedicated to Isidor and Ida at Macy's, the Nathan Straus Public Library or the Jesse Isidor Straus School? There are many artists, photographers and musicians in the family. Should we plan an exhibit or concert? Please let me know your thoughts.

#### Inside this issue:

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## The Bibliography of the Straus Family Collection - A Progress Report

The Straus Family Collection is a detailed, item by item listing of all the material in the family collection. Compiling the collection and writing the bibliography has been an enormous, time consuming task. The source of the material in this collection has been Macy's Archives, many family members, friends of the family and periodical literature such as newspapers and magazines. Although the material found in Macy's Archives has been donated to The New York Public Library, that part of the collection was photocopied in its entirety before donation. Many items donated by family members were photocopied as well and the originals either returned to the owner or donated to the library, as per the wishes of the owner. In some cases the originals are in our collection.

The Leo Baeck Institute, a research institute in New York City, has expressed interest in obtaining our collection. It is unclear at this time whether we will be able to donate the collection to them. The New York Public Library has proprietary ownership of some of the original material and will have to grant permission before our photocopied material can be donated elsewhere. Other institutions may also want the family's papers. No decision has been made regarding who will be given the collection. If you have suggestions, please make your thoughts known to me, to Bob Straus or to any member of the family committee.

The Straus Family Collection is stored in 13" X 15 1/2" X 10" storage boxes in a separate facility away from my home for safety and security. The material has been divided into units, each relating to a different historical era or event, or family branch. I have tried to be faithful to chronology wherever possible.

<u>Storage Box</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Bibliographic Pages</u>
Box One:	Early Macy History	16 pages
Box Two:	Early Macy History	33 pages
Box Three:	Early Macy History	11 pages
Box Four:	Early Family History, Lazarus and Sara, Isidor and Ida	46 pages
Box Five:	Isidor and Ida	124 pages
Box Six:	Isidor and Ida	74 pages
Box Seven:	The Titanic Disaster	88 pages
Box Eight:	Hermine and Family, Nathan and Family	37 pages
Box Nine:	Oscar and Family	67 pages
Box Ten:	Jesse and Irma	49 pages
Box Eleven:	Herbert and Family, Percy and Family, Donald and Family, Gus Kaufman and Family	71 pages
Box Twelve:	Beatrice and Family, Jack and Family	94 pages
Box Thirteen:	Kenneth and Family	45 pages
Box Z:	Oversized and Odd Sized Originals	3 pages

There are fourteen boxes in all. The bibliography is 758 pages long. I will be writing a preface and introductions to each chapter (box). It is not inconceivable that the bibliography will exceed 800 pages.

I have almost completed the bibliographic inventory of the Jack I. Straus material and have not entered any information from the Ralph Isidor Straus Collection. I hope to begin that phase soon.

As you know, our hope is to put this material on CD-ROM as well as to make it available to family members in paper form. Once the bibliography is edited, it will be published in book form. Due to the enormous number of pages, I expect it will be published in more than one volume. In this manner we will have flexibility of distribution to those only interested in their own branch of the family or in one aspect of the time line. This plan has not been approved and is open for discussion. With the advent of the Internet it is possible to download files directly onto the computer for transmission. This avenue will also be explored.

Bob Straus has been anxious to have the bibliography placed on CD. It is a means of storing large amounts of information in a small space. Of course, it will take a computer to access the material once this is done. Those without computers will have to be satisfied with the paper copy for now. Before the bibliography is committed to CD, each document will be scanned and attached to its data record. In this manner, if a person is interested in a particular letter, photograph, or document, it can be called up and the actual item viewed. This work will take quite a long time to accomplish but will be well worth the effort.

There is a long way to go on this project but it is my hope that the newly formed family committee will want to see it through to completion. Once the paper copy is complete, everyone in the family will have access to one of the most comprehensive collections of Straus family information available anywhere.

### The David A. Morse Papers Seeley G. Mudd Library Princeton University

Princeton University, owner of the David A. Morse Collection, recently hosted an exhibit, "Labor of Love, Selections of David A. Morse Papers." Ben Primer, the University Archivist has sent me a copy of the exhibition catalog and the finding aid. Please let me know if you would like to see a copy. It can also be accessed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.princeton.edu>. The full address for Morse is: <http://infoshare1.princeton.edu:2003/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids/morse.html>

David was the husband of Mildred Hockstader Morse, granddaughter of Oscar Solomon Straus. He served under Truman and was the Director-General of the ILO.



## The Straus Family Hits the Information Super-Highway

by Jim Straus [jim@straus.org](mailto:jim@straus.org)

I expect that most of us have seen articles about the Internet over the course of the last year. The Internet is not run by any single company or authority. It is really nothing more than a collection of independent computer networks which communicate through an agreed upon protocol. Originally, the U.S. government funded research that went into the design of the Internet. Recently, most of that funding has disappeared and most of the work is now being handled by private businesses and voluntary efforts. Many schools and companies are connected as part of this collection of networks, as well as most of the on-line services such as CompuServe, America On-Line and Prodigy.

One of the most frequently used parts of the Internet is the sending of electronic mail (or e-mail). This is the easiest way to communicate through the Internet and the most common connection available to people. E-mail is similar to normal postal mail, in that you write your message (in this case, on the computer), address it to the intended recipient, and send it on its way. Like a normal letter, the message will wait in the recipient's mailbox to be picked up at a later time. Unlike a normal letter, e-mail normally will make its ways to that mailbox in a matter of seconds to minutes.

E-mail is addressed in a somewhat different manner than postal mail. For the post office to be able to deliver your mail, they need to know your name, and where to find your physical mailbox. E-mail is similar. An e-mail address consists of your name (or account name), and where to find your electronic mailbox. An example is: [jim\\_straus@globalvillage.com](mailto:jim_straus@globalvillage.com). The part before the "@" (often pronounced "at") is my account name. This says that my name is jim\_straus (spaces aren't allowed so underscores are often used to mark spaces.) The part after the "@" says where to find my mailbox and goes from the most specific to most general with the parts separated by periods (called dot). The parts are called "domains" as they specify smaller and smaller domains in which to find the recipient. In this case, the address isn't too long. It is the name of the company "GlobalVillage" and "com" indicating it is a commercial entity.

A more complicated address might be:

[Lisa\\_Straus@castilleja.pvt.k12.ca.us](mailto:Lisa_Straus@castilleja.pvt.k12.ca.us)

The part before the "@" is similar, but lets dissect the part after. It ends with "us" indicating that the address is in the United States, preceded by "ca" indicating California. The part before that is "k12", which is used by K through 12 schools. The "pvt" is for private schools, and finally the name of the school is Castilleja. This is probably one of the more complicated addresses that you would see.

You will often find addresses of people at "aol.com", as they have an account on America On-Line, one of the largest ser-

vices. Another aspect of the Internet is the World Wide Web. The Web is a collection of documents consisting of text, pictures, animations, and sounds that are inter-connected. For example, a document on art history may be connected to another document on the Louvre in Paris. Of interest to the family; there are documents that someone has put together about the Titanic, including a list of passengers.

<http://iccu6.ipswich.gil.com.au/~dalgarry/passengers/pl.html>

If you start at: <http://iccu6.ipswich.gil.com.au/~dalgarry>

you will find a bunch of Titanic information.

As for the Straus family archives, I have already registered the name "straus.org", so you can send me mail at: [jim@straus.org](mailto:jim@straus.org)

I have also set up a World Wide Web server that at the moment contains information about my immediate family (me, my wife, and my son). <http://www.straus.org/>

Joan Adler and I are working on how to get the "wholedam-fam" into an appropriate format to be added as documents to the Web. If you would like to be kept apprised of developments on this effort or would like to contribute, send a note with your e-mail address to: [family-archive@straus.org](mailto:family-archive@straus.org). I've also set up Joan Adler with an e-mail address at [straus.org](mailto:straus.org). You can reach her at: [Family-Archivist@straus.org](mailto:Family-Archivist@straus.org). And if you don't have an e-mail address, you might check with your employer or school. Or, you might consider signing up with one of the on-line providers, such as America On-Line at (800) 827-6364.

Some family members who already communicate via e-mail:

Tom and Carol Straus: [tomstraus@aol.com](mailto:tomstraus@aol.com)

Jim and Lisa Straus: [straus@aol.com](mailto:straus@aol.com)

Jim Straus: [jims@class.com](mailto:jims@class.com)

Phebe and James Brecher: [pbandjb@aol.com](mailto:pbandjb@aol.com)

Stephen Day Straus: [sstraus@aol.com](mailto:sstraus@aol.com)

Douglas Straus: [dougstraus@aol.com](mailto:dougstraus@aol.com)

Donald and Beth Straus: [straus@tmm.com](mailto:straus@tmm.com)

Liza Loop: [loopcntr@rahul.net](mailto:loopcntr@rahul.net)

Billy Straus: [Bstraus@aol.com](mailto:Bstraus@aol.com)

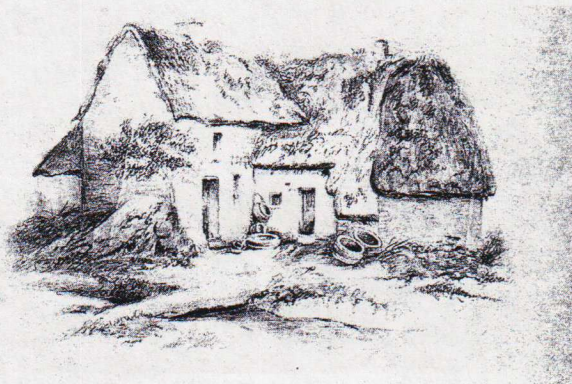
Eric Peter Straus: [epsradio@aol.com](mailto:epsradio@aol.com)

Alan Hockstader: [abbih@aol.com](mailto:abbih@aol.com)

Joan Adler: [FAMJAD@aol.com](mailto:FAMJAD@aol.com)

Has anyone else come on-line? Please let the rest of us know.

### A Drawing by Ida Blun





## The Women of the Straus Family

On July 31, 1995 I spent a delightful day with Peggy de Graaff. She graciously invited me to lunch and allowed me to tape an informal history of her life. At that time Peggy suggested that some issue of the newsletter be devoted to the women of the family. This seemed, to me, to be an excellent idea. We know quite a bit about the men; all high achievers, socially responsible members of society, devoted family men, loving husbands. But, although it was the women who were, and are, the driving force behind these men, the link that keeps families close and functioning, we know far less about them. I have elected to devote the feature article in this newsletter to the women in the family. Thanks Peggy.

Fannie Levi was the first wife of Lazarus Straus. She was the daughter of Catherine Boris and Ischen Levi. We don't know her date of birth. She died January 31, 1843 leaving a daughter Karoline, born May 25, 1838. Karoline married a man named Weis. They had two children, Ferdinand and Louise. Ferdinand lived in Mannheim. Louise had a daughter, born in 1921, who wished to emigrate to the U.S. During the war Sissie Straus Lehman tried to locate and sponsor family members. This information comes from her notes.

I don't know what became of Louise's daughter or this line of the family. It appears that Fannie and Lazarus' daughter must have been raised by the Levi family rather than Lazarus or the Straus family. Karoline remained in Germany when Lazarus, and then Sara and their children, emigrated to the U.S. When Lazarus died he left \$10,000 in United States currency to Ferdinand Weis residing in Mannheim, son of Lazarus' deceased daughter Lina. We don't know of any other daughter and I assume Karoline and Lina are the same person. What is clear is that Lazarus remained in contact with, and provided for, his first family.

Fannie Levi was related to Lina Guthertz, Nathan's wife, through her father and Lina's grandfather. Lazarus wrote a letter to his in-laws after a trip with Fannie. The translator is unknown. I believe the letter was written before Katherine's birth, sometime before 1838. What is striking about this letter is that, although written by Lazarus who describes his journey and his impressions, Fannie is mentioned frequently. "My dear wife spent five weeks in going and return trip and, thank God, all agreed with her." Fannie wrote only a brief New Year's greeting to family at the end of the letter. This practice, of husband writing the letters with frequent mention, with obvious devotion, of wife and family, persists throughout the nearly one hundred years of letters in the family's collection. The largest single exception is the bulk of letters written by Ida Straus during the summers between 1890 and 1893 from Villa Plaisance, Lower Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks. But, more about these later.

After Fannie's death in 1843, Lazarus married his first cousin Sara Straus who was born January 21, 1823, daughter of Lazarus' brother Solomon. Their children were Isidor, Hermine, Nathan, Jacob Otto, and Salomon Oscar (Oscar Solomon).

Jacob died when he was about two years old. Sara suffered a stroke in 1851 leaving her arm partially paralyzed. After Lazarus left Germany and became an established merchant in Talbotton Georgia he sent for his family. Sara left Otterberg on August 24, 1854. Her month long journey is described in the July 1993 newsletter. To me this seems an extraordinary journey for any women with four young children. Considering Sara's handicap, it is all the more courageous.

Sara was a frugal housewife. In two years she saved enough from her household allowance of \$20 to buy a piano for Hermine's lessons. Isidor was in Europe during the Civil War.



Sara in Talbotton - 1861

His letters home have been described in earlier newsletters. His mother was a prominent and loving influence in his life. Although he wrote to his father about business, his letters home included lengthy passages to his mother. When Lazarus wrote to the family in Germany in 1871 to announce Isidor's engagement to Ida, he described his wife as "so beside herself with joy that she is not even capable of writing her own name." In another letter, written in 1872, Lazarus wrote about Sara's difficulties with her arm. Her hand "had improved so very much last summer in the spa that she was able to write fluently" but that it had returned to its old condition in the winter. "so that she now can again not write and goes this summer again to the spa."

After the Civil War the family moved to Philadelphia and then to New York. Isidor bought his mother a high stoop, three story house at 220 West 49th Street with the \$10,000 in gold he earned selling Confederate Bonds from Europe. Sara died July 21, 1876 in New York. She left a daughter and three sons.



Sara Straus

Little is known about Hermine's life. She married Lazarus Kohns in Columbus GA. They had two children, a son Lee, born in 1863 in Columbus and Irene, born in 1871, probably in New York. It appears the Straus family knew the Kohns family in Germany. Hermine moved to New York after the Civil War and Lazarus Kohns became a partner in the firm of L. Straus and Sons. Hermine and Lazarus Kohns lived in the city and summered in Long Branch NJ. Isidor often



dined at their house while his family was in the Adirondacks during the summers between 1890 and 1893. Isidor and Ida's older children stayed with Hermine in the city to begin school while the family remained in Saranac Lake in the fall. Hermine was particularly close with her father after Sara's death. Hermine and Lazarus' daughter Irene married Edmund Wise. Lee married Clara Elfelt. Family letters indicate that Hermine and Lazarus Kohns remained close to the Straus family, hosting dinners and going out with various combinations of relatives. Hermine died in 1922.



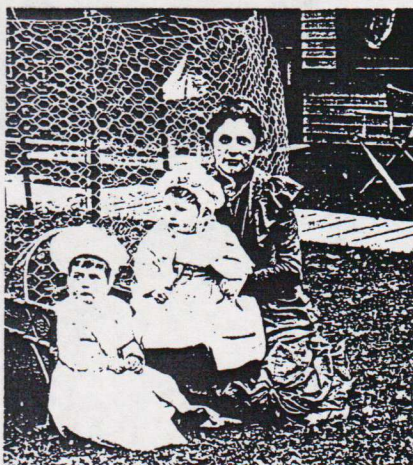
A young Lina Guthertz Straus  
perhaps 1880's

ried Lina he felt he could not support a horse and a wife. He sold half interest in his horse. Lina saved from her household money to buy back his half horse, much to Nathan's joy.

Lina was the mother of six children; Jerome, Sara, Sissie, Roland, Nathan Jr and Hugh Grant. Sara and Roland died in infancy. It was their deaths which caused Nathan and Lina to become interested in the pasteurization of milk. In 1917 Disease in Milk, The Remedy Pasteurization, The Life Work of Nathan Straus, by Lina Guthertz Straus was published by E.P. Dutton & Co. Her dedication reads, "Compiled for my husband at whose side it has been my privilege to labor for many years for the saving of lives."

Lina's life could not have been an easy one. Beside losing two children during infancy, her son Jerome died at 18. Nathan suffered bouts

Lina was the daughter of Dr. Simpson Guthertz and Jeanette Levi, and the granddaughter of Ischen Levi. She was born in 1854. Nathan met Lina while on a china buying trip to Germany. After a courtship of five weeks, most of which time was spent with Nathan away buying china and other goods for the store, they married in 1875. Nathan was an avid horse-



Lina with her sons  
Saranac Lake  
September 1891

of manic-depression, causing him to withdraw from society for extended periods and requiring lengthy retreats in European spas during recuperation. Flora Stieglitz Straus, Lina's daughter-in-law wrote in her informal memoirs, Bits and Pieces, "Isidor and Nathan were a fabulous team -- the latter



Lina Guthertz Straus

bursting with innovative ideas, some good and some bad, and the former sorting these out and making them work." Isidor's family was close to Nathan's ... "and Isidor would watch over his sister-in-law, Lina, at times when his more casual brother was preoccupied with difficulties." When Nathan became interested in Zionism, long before the Balfour Declaration, Lina was at his side, even when his family did not support him. She was always at his side.

In the 1890's the Isidor and Nathan Straus families summered in the Adirondacks at Lower Saranac Lake. Ida wrote to Isidor almost daily during that period. Her letters reveal a close, loving relationship with Lina and Nathan and a vivid picture of the life-style of that era. Lina is portrayed by Ida as loving, giving. Her house was perfectly decorated and her household help were treated with great kindness.

Nathan and Lina's 56 year marriage ended in 1931 with Nathan's death. Photographs of Lina reveal a diminutive woman with a kind and gentle face. One can easily see the love she had for Nathan, even through the grain of ancient photographs. Lina was called Oma, grandmother in German, by the family.

Sarah was the daughter of Hannah and Louis Lavanburg. She was born in 1861 and married Oscar Solomon Straus in New York on April 19, 1882. They had three children, Mildred, Aline and Roger Williams. When Oscar became the



Sarah Lavanburg Straus





**Sarah Lavanburg Straus**

Minister to Constantinople, Sarah went with him, set up house and entertained in a manner befitting a diplomat's wife. Oscar's letters reveal that theirs was a close relationship. They traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East and enjoyed the few moments when they could relax together at home.

Oscar was one of the founders of the Megantic Fish and Game Club in Big Island Maine. A trip to the club required hiking uphill the final six miles through rugged country. Sarah accompanied her husband on his regular September outings. She is described as adventurous. Sometime after Oscar's death in 1926, Sarah went to Africa for the American Museum of Natural History where she collected 300 bird specimens and took more than 5,000 feet of film. In Africa Sarah faced an elephant charge, was almost trampled by a rhinoceros and encountered a big lion at very close quarters. She traveled about 15,000 miles by land and sea in four months. In 1933, at the age of 73, Sarah traveled to South America. At 75 she was still horseback riding. Sarah died in 1945.



**Sarah Lavanburg Straus**

Rosalie Ida Blun was born in Worms on February 9, 1849. She was the daughter of Wilhelmine Freudenberger and Nathan Blun. We don't know when she came to this country or where she arrived. Isidor visited with Nathan Blun in New York during the Civil War. He brought a letter of introduction from Mrs. Frank Rothschild, Ida's sister Amanda. Perhaps this is when he met Ida. Isidor and Ida became engaged in April of 1871 and married July 12, 1871 in New York. They had seven children, Jesse Isidor, Clarence, Percy Solomon, Sara, Minnie, Herbert Nathan and Vivian. Clarence died in early childhood.

We know quite a bit about Isidor and Ida's relationship from their letters. It is clear that their's was a loving relationship. Isidor ran the family business and Ida ran the household. Ida asked for Isidor's advice because she valued his opinion. She was not dependent. She managed her own money, paid household bills, paid for the children's lessons and made purchases from the store out of her household account. She was very much a full partner in their marriage, discussing politics, questioning business decisions, commenting on the news and keeping Isidor informed of the comings and going of politicians, relatives and friends. During the early 1890's the family spent their summers in the Adirondacks while Isidor and Nathan

alternated remaining in town to run the business. Lina and Ida and children spent a great deal of time together. The women helped each other with problems and relied on each other for companionship. The children seemed to have lived out of both houses. Ida described the extreme hospitality and graciousness she experienced at the hands of her sister-in-law.

When Isidor was not there Ida wrote to him daily. Each letter begins, "My darling papa," or, "my dearest papa," and is signed, "Yours devotedly," or "Your own devoted mama." It is clear she means it. Even with the reticence of the times, Ida wrote about her anticipation of their intimacy when she expected his arrival.

In 1890: "Now my dear papa, I am sure you need not feel any compunctions about feeling so well in every way. It would be too bad if it were not so. I hope you will experience the same happy state with the next change you make" (coming to Saranac Lake). The following day: "I am going to the village now marketing so will just add my usual compliment of imaginary embraces which I hope soon to have realized."

July 17th, 1890: "Until now Lina has taken care of us, and you know what she is for attention. ... Do you know that I am glad now that you are not in the midst of the confusion of settling here. You have enough upset at home. But I do wish you would arrange your affairs so that you can be with us by the 1st."

July 18th, 1890: "Enjoy your freedom while it lasts, the days of bondage are looming up on your horizon."

July 21st, 1890: "I was no little pleased at fraulein's account of my darling's state of feeling and am fully reconciled to the fact of your being so well able to do without me. ... Shall I pay Beck's bill as it stands? It is all itemized and seems perfectly correct although somewhat more than I had figured. ... bill is trifling but I will not pay it as the man came up to see about work which had been imperfectly done, without really accomplishing anything. ... I cannot get our chicks to write at all they are enjoying themselves so well that they find no time at all for anything serious. ... Puss (Percy) is the boss fisherman. ... I do not like to trouble you with orders perhaps writing to Acker Merrall direct will be just as good." Lina is pregnant with Hugh. Ida asked Isidor to bring a box of charcoal tablets for dyspepsia for Nathan. "Lina may try them. You know what trials she has in that line at certain times like the present, but she keeps up wonderfully well.



**Ida Blun Straus**



I must really admire her." Lina is pregnant with Hugh who was born in the fall.

July 24th, 1890: "Nathan intends taking us all picnicking to-day ... it is very nice indeed now but it will be ever so much pleasanter with you here."

July 25th, 1890: This letter has a circle drawn near the top. In the circle is written, "The kiss." Ida wrote, "Here is a good kiss for my dear papa. ... You know we have two guides in the place now, also Mr. Eppe and a general helper. Every one of them are as much at my service as at Lina's and I think I ought to bear my share of the expense." Ida received word from Lazarus that she was overdrawn in her bank account. "A fine financier don't tell anyone about it I am so ashamed."

August 1890: "Just a few lines to tell you that we are all in first-class order. ... Sara has gone out fishing with Puss (Percy) and Perly today, they will be home at 3:30 and have their lunch out. Jerome is out with Warren (a guide). It rained here very hard yesterday and they expect a big catch. You no doubt enjoyed your brief stay in Saratoga and Pa and the rest were delighted to have you. ... I have sent an order to the store for different things which can be sent by freight, but I hope they arrive more promptly than those which Lucie sent Lina and which have not arrived yet. I wrote Patrick (a servant from home) yesterday what to take out of the cedar closet. Jesse need not wait to take the things if he does not care to go up town to unpack and repack his trunk but they can be sent with the goods from the store, or better yet they will do when you come again. Give Jesse and Lee (Kohns) both a good kiss for me. Yours devotedly, Mama."

Jesse was 18 and had gone to Europe with Lee. Ida was anxiously awaiting his return. As was often the case when she only had time to send a brief letter before the mail was taken, Ida wrote again later in the day, giving Isidor a broader picture and included notes from the children.

August 25th, 1890: "Our help all had a great time last evening at a ball in the boat house. I furnished the refreshments and paid for the fiddler and they are all in ecstasies."

August 29th, 1890: "Our dolly's birthday (Vivian's) opened with the brightest sunshine and the clearest sky, may its brightness be an emblem of her life, may she always be the sunny disposition that she has been since her birth. Amen."

September 2nd, 1890: "How I blessed yesterday's mail for bringing me the sweetest letters. I have studied the definition of the Alien and Sedition laws and will not forget it again in a hurry. ... This afternoon we will have the whole house from across the lake, Jesse has the younger members this morning, two daughters of Nathans ... I think Patrick will meet Lina at the Grand Central Depot Monday morning at 7 o'clock with the brougham. She will be worn out with the trip and that is an easier riding carriage than any she could hire. ... we might have our coal bins filled up while the house is closed and wood put in. I found myself obliged to ask Lee for a deposit

again ... I also mailed Patrick and Jerry's money and told them to let me know what Jerry has laid out for board. Do you walk up to the New York Club from the store at lunch time? That is a luxury to be indulged in on Saturday only. I heard of an engagement that will interest you ... Another piece of news, pretty late by this time, Simon Rothschild is another grandfather

... When does pa go home? I will now write to Sarah (Oscar's wife) and try to induce her to come up from Saratoga."



Ida Blun Straus

September 2nd, 1890: "Your telegram ..... took the place of a letter today, it was perfectly satisfactory as it told me what interests me most that you are all right. ... Nathan was looking over the ... advertisements this evening and observed that they had marked two items of bedding two cents below yours, he says they must have seen yours before it went to print and that to punish them it would be well to give the advertising agent much higher figures at first and then correct them just before it goes to press. ... I suppose business is in full blast again ... Did you do anything toward having a bracket put in the reception room on the new gas outlet? If not, I will write Muller to take the chandelier off to have Harry clean it up and if you say so to make the bracket match."

September 4th, 1890: "Yesterday brought me two letters, the one of Monday in which you write me about your anxiety caused by being without news from us for several days and your Tuesdays letter. We must make up our mind that the postal facilities are of the poorest kind at such a place as this, and not allow ourselves to be disturbed by a failure to receive each others mail for several days. ... Oscar telegraphed that they are both coming, so the place will be gay for a few days. ... When you come up bring me three bottles of rum and quinine and a pound of very fine tea for yourself which can go in your trunk. Jesse would like some fine flannel shirts. Silk like yours suit him better. I think flannel are warmer. In regard to his room at Harvard I would buy a brass bed three quarter size so that any time Percy goes he can sleep with him, everything else except perhaps a washstand he can spare until I go myself and harmonize things a little to make it look cozy."

September 5th, 1890: "Sarah looked really badly on her arrival yesterday but has already regained some of her normal hilarity."



September 9th, 1890: "Your two letters written on Saturday reached me yesterday and the pleasure they gave me was tinged with an alloy of regret at your inability to carry out your design of coming up this week, and also at your having to stand the great heat of the city while we are all here. ... Jesse had the two Misses Nathan in his boat so you can imagine he was happy. ... Today Nathan, Oscar, Sarah and Jesse go to Lake Placid. Nathan asked me but I preferred to wait and go with you."

September 13th, 1890: "To say that I am disappointed at your not coming tomorrow as your dispatch indicates hardly expresses my feelings. Still I know that you would not remain away if it were not necessary so I resign myself. ... You will receive this on Rosh Hashonah. Don't forget to congratulate pa ... We might as well take advantage of every occasion for good wishes and you can therefore imagine what is in my heart at present for you."

September 15th, 1890: "Jesse came home in high glee yesterday after having sat with Mrs. Cleveland for several hours. She showed him her gun and entertained him very well while the gentlemen were engaged. Cleveland told Oscar among other things that your speech on the tariff question was the best effort that had been made on the subject calling you by your first name while speaking of you so you see it did make an impression on him."

September 17, 1890: "Jesse regrets so much his not being able to have any time with you; it is the ideal of his life to be a companion to you to be able to gain your confidence. ... Mr. Abraham does not seem to have derived much benefit from his trip ... That is the result of travelling with a family, if he had been alone he could have consulted his own welfare, as it was they all wanted to see Paris ... Do not pay for the flooring and cabinet work in our house until I have seen it."

September 18, 1890: "The newspaper of Tuesday gave me a gleam of hope that I might at last expect you; I read that the financial troubles were being lifted by the postponement to Feb. 1st instead of Oct. 1st of the proposed measures which caused all the difficulty. When you come prepare to remain for some time; I will stay for the whole of October if you are satisfied. Percy can go down to stop with Hermina and attend school form there and I will try and keep the others from growing too rusty."

The following summer, June 24, 1891: "Thanks to your grand thoughtfulness we were grandly comfortable on our trip, in fact, we were as much as in our own beds. I allowed the children to group themselves as they chose after Lina had made her choice for herself and babies; and I by your orders had to have a room all by myself and slept very well. They all told me of a great noise they had heard from a cattle train during

the night, but I was not in it, I must have slept all through it. Charley Webster (Nathan Jr.) does not like the tchootchoo cars at all, it took him all the way to get used to them, whereas Hughey took it all very coolly, all he wanted was a frequent dip at the bucket. We arrived at Villa Plaisance at about 12:15 having found Ebbe with Fowler teams at the depot and the buggy to take us up there. It took three wagons besides the buggy to take up all our caravan. We found both houses in the very best order and the grounds look beautiful. Lina was regretting that you could not see the lawns now as she fears the trampling on them will not permit them to be as fine by the time you come up. I have given orders however to the children to be careful. It is very cool and wraps indoors as well as out are in order. Lina insisted on my taking a room in the house. She said you wished it. I am occupying the blue room with the baby. The girlyies have the large room on the third floor with Sissie, Puss and Herby are in our room in the guide house, fraulein in the girlyies room next door, and our three

servants in their last year's room so the guide house is quite empty only three rooms being occupied. We take our meals with Lina also, the two cooks working together in perfect harmony. ... The ice house seems to be excellent; it has of course not yet been put to the test having been filled only a few days ago that is the storage rooms for meats milks and fruit, each separate; I was just in the meat room and find the thermometer there 38 degrees and it will get much lower. Ebbe says it takes a hundred weight of ice to fill the box for storage rooms, I forgot how many tons he has stored in the ice house. The whole is a house about 18 feet square and higher than the guide house. Now my darling how are you getting on without your encumbrances.

I felt the last days as though you needed more quiet than you had at home and hope that the rest from family cares you are having now will prove most beneficial to you."

June 26, 1891: "I read an extract of President Lowe's speech in the Post of yesterday, in which he dwelt particularly upon the advantages of a college education for young men, a beautifully worded oration, full of sentiment as well as good sense. ... As for my having Vivy in the room you must not deprive me of that pleasure. You know I have not had the baby with me since she was born, and I can assure you that she is no trouble whatever; she sleeps all night and does not disturb me in the least. When you come of course I will give her to fraulein again. This is the most wonderful place. ... Herby enjoys the place. You ought to see that boy, he is as brown as a berry already. I was out fishing all day yesterday if you please as a birthday gift to Percy ... He is very much pleased with his telegrams and feels very proud that he is so well thought of as to deserve them."

Sunday afternoon, 1891: "Here it is simply gorgeous today. It cannot be more beautiful in paradise. When are you going down to the Oriental again? (steam baths at Coney Island) I



Ida Blun Straus



think you ought to buy half a dozen pair of socks, yours are not very good any more."

June 30, 1891: "It was lovely again here today. Lina, Jerome, Percy and I just finished a game of lawn-tennis ... Yesterday I rowed all the way around Eagle Island in a boat with Percy, so you see I must be feeling well to indulge in all these sports."

July 3, 1891: "Lina sends love in every letter so if I neglect to mention it you should know it is intended. Jesse arrived about an hour ago and brought me very encouraging reports of your state of health in so far that Loomis assured you there is nothing the matter with your heart thank Goodness. But you still have the pains intermittent he says and the doctor believes it to be malaria. I believe I mentioned to you already that I was afraid the building so near your office might be injurious. How easily we might have guarded against malaria by your taking something every morning and moving your office to another part of the building. Jesse tells me you intend doing that now. I hope you will, and take every other precaution to prevent malarial trouble from increasing."

July 20, 1891: "Jesse left for camp yesterday morning and took with him two guides ... and provisions for two weeks. While making his preparations he could not get over the idea that the expense was so great for one, that the other boys ought to share the pleasure with him and that was just enough to fire those two boys brimful with longing to go. Neither Lina nor I wanted to take the responsibility of allowing them without consulting you."

July 21, 1891: "This place is so beautiful today one might easily stretch the imagination and dream that the whole world were a paradise like this. After all each individual makes his own paradise and helps to prepare it for his surroundings, and no one does that more effectively than my darling. I am in a very home-sick mood as you perceive, the recollection of our late honeymoon always awakens such a feeling of home-sickness for my darling. We are all, mamas and babies so well and happy up here, and I only want you to make my paradise complete."

July 28, 1891: "Dear papa please deposit our joint account allowance on the first. We have managed to get through pretty well, but hope to do still better the coming month, and leave no unpaid bills. ... I began telling you yesterday that I had corresponded with music teachers with a view to engaging them for the children next fall. Minnie has taken to practicing again; she is in splendid condition. Sara is regarded as the prize girl, she is the champion in everything."

July 29, 1891: "I was out fishing yesterday with Percy and just think of it I with my own hands landed six trout. I am very proud of my achievement as I have to the best of my knowledge and belief broken all former records of ladies fish-

ing. We remained all day and of course lunched out. That is one of the best parts of the fishing or of the excursion."

July 31, 1891: "In no respect is my imagination so fertile as when it wanders in the direction of my darling, fertile in the picturing of the happy days in store for me. The time is drawing near and I hope you are making your preparations accordingly."

August 4, 1891: "I am so glad that our imaginary lovemaking will soon be at an end and that we will not require writing paper as our intermediary any more."

During the summer of 1893 Nathan and Lina's son Jerome died. October 13, 1893: "The place is as beautiful as ever, but how sad it makes me feel to be around and think..."

October 14, 1893: "Yesterday I brought myself to the point of going through the big house (Nathan and Lina's house) ... It breaks one's heart to think that all the care, and forethought and heart-love which every portion of the house bespeaks on Lina's part, should now go to strangers. There are so many delicate little arrangements which her kind heart alone dictated, which it is such a pity that she should lose all benefit of. ... Please do go out driving (in horse and buggy) every afternoon, I believe your headache comes from too close application after having been accustomed to shorter days. You will always find some one only too happy to accompany you, but Lina would be the one to whom it would be the most benefit. ... Tell her she is doing me a favor in going out with you, besides giving you pleasure. Yours with one thousand hugs and kisses."



Ida Blun Straus

It is my hope that, in this very brief glimpse at the lives of the Straus women, you have been able to see their warmth, intelligence, strength and humor. Each was able to maintain the fine line between independence and dependence. Lina had to take charge during the many instances when Nathan was not well, unable to carry on in business or socially. Ida assumed control over the household finances, the decisions about their children's education and lessons, the social calendar and the details of everyday living. Sarah juggled her political obligations with family life. The commitment each woman made and honored should be held as an example for today's youth.

Next month the story continues. I plan to write about the lives of Sara Hess, Minnie Weil, Vivian Scheftel Dixon, Irene Kohns, Sissie Lehman, Mildred Schafer and Aline Hockstader, the next generation. Surprisingly, I know less about many of these women than I do about the women in the previous generation. Between now and the summer I will make it my business to learn more. Anyone who remembers these women, or has family stories, photographs or letters by or about them is encouraged to contact me.



## Straus Park Renovation A Progress Report

Since the last newsletter there has been some positive movement in the status of the Straus Park Renovation project. On October 25th Henry J. Stern, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, wrote to Ruth Messinger, Manhattan Borough President, "Our Capital Projects staff has had their progress delayed by concern for public safety. A traffic study had shown that the planned 19 foot expansion of the park could have resulted in an increase in traffic congestion and a potential safety hazard to members of the community. Knowing that a loss of parking would not be appropriate, our design staff, in conjunction with engineers from the Department of Transportation, came up with a compromise plan to expand the park by 14 feet. This plan will increase greenspace without increased traffic congestion or a loss of parking. I am certain that when the project has been completed, everyone involved will agree that the newly reconstructed and expanded park has been well worth the wait."

The completed design was submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on October 11th and to the Law Department on October 27th. Both departments approved the proposal. The bidding process culminated December 12th at a public opening of the bids at the Park Department's Olmsted Center in Flushing. Eight estimates were presented. The lowest, \$788,771.20, was given by Vardo Construction Company. What followed was a two week process in which the bidder is checked for honesty, proficiency, past history and mathematics to make certain his numbers check. John Natoli, Chief Engineer and Chief of Construction, is the top man responsible for capital projects. Elliot Regenstein of Commissioner Stern's office tells us that the contract is being reviewed by Controller Hevesi. Pending final approval, the Park Department expects to begin construction in March, weather permitting. Completion of the renovation is expected by the Fall of 1996.

Leon Auerbach has been busy keeping up with all these developments; writing letters, making those all important phone calls, acting as a liaison between the Park Department and the Straus family and giving talks about the project. He recently made a presentation about the historical background of Straus Park before the local Democratic Club. John Natoli and Eric Mattes, Park's Department Designer, came with drawings of the proposed reconstruction. Leon reports that they were all well received. The West 106th Street Block Association has hosted a Fall planting and cleanup in the Spring. We all hope that this year's Fall Block Party will celebrate the dedication of a renovated Straus Park.

In the newsletter of the West 106th Street Block Association Leon wrote, "John Natoli assured us of his and Commissioner Stern's personal interest in a smooth, prompt completion of the renovation. Having been involved with Straus Park for the last fifteen years, we join them in that desire."

## Family Stories

Written by Lina Gutherz Straus, Nathan's wife. My brother, Edgar Gutherz, married Linchen Straus of Kaiserslautern, Palatinate, Rhenish Bavaria. Her father was Maurice Straus, brother of Sara Straus. Maurice Straus had been living in San Francisco, California where he made a nice fortune. On a visit home to Kaiserslautern, he met his future wife. After their marriage they were returning to the United States. They suffered shipwreck and both were saved. Being submerged and in the water for a considerable time so unnerved his wife that he promised he would never ask her to come across again. They returned to Kaiserslautern where they remained to the end of their days.

Sara Straus and her four children arrived in New York harbor on the S.S. "St. Louis", making the crossing on her maiden voyage. When Isidor and Ida were in Europe in 1912 they decided to return to New York on the Titanic. They chose this ship because then they, too, would be returning to New York on the maiden voyage of a great ship.

When Anna and Irving Lehman Straus were courting they took a trip to Italy. They made a side trip to Capri by hydrofoil. The day was bright and sunny. All of a sudden a terrible storm blew up. The hydrofoil began shaking and bouncing and many people, including Anna, became sick. She was reminded of the Titanic. She told Irving she would not go down with him if the boat sank. He had a terrible time getting her back on board for the return trip. Since that time they seem to encounter water disasters wherever they go. He keeps asking if she will go down with him and she keeps telling him, "No!"

Miranda Cox and Ned Foley planned a honeymoon trip on the QE2 to England. Shortly before departure their travel agent called to inform them that the crossing would take an additional day. It was necessary to take a more Southerly route due to the unusual number of icebergs in the Atlantic for the time of year.

Does anyone else have a shipboard story in this vein they would like to share? Perhaps there is a ghoulish trend here.

## A Drawing by Ida Blun

