

# "wholedamfam"

Volume 1 Number 1

STRAUS FAMILY NEWSLETTER

January 1993



LAZARUS STRAUS



SARA STRAUS

## ROBERT K. STRAUS WRITES...

In 1911 Isidor Straus wrote a brief autobiography. Sara Straus Hess, his oldest daughter, printed it in 1955. She then invited the "wholedamfam" to dinner at her apartment and gave everyone a copy. An appendix contains miscellaneous clippings and a pocket holds a family tree which Aunt Sara commissioned in 1954. The first Straus on the tree was Lazarus, born circa 1725, and the last, all born in 1955, were Anne Shelton Toohey, Laurie Moore McKean and Caroline Straus Selden.

This dinner party stimulated my interest in the history of our family. Then, the death of my mother Irma in 1970 turned up a lot of material she had collected. This material included a biography of my father, Jesse Isidor Straus, written by Reginald Kauffman, a newspaperman who Sara knew and who had known my father while he served as Ambassador in Paris from 1933 to 1936. My mother did

not like this book very much and had filed the manuscript away. It seemed to me that it should at least be made available to the family because of the information it contained, and so I had it published. In 1973 I put together the *Straus Genealogical Miscellany*, a booklet that made some of the other material from mother's closet available to members of the family.

A business trip took me to Germany in 1977 where I visited Otterberg, the family's last home in Germany before immigrating to the United States. The visit was very brief but most interesting and enabled me to revise and add to the first edition of the *Miscellany* in 1980.

A few years ago Thomas Randolph Selden spent several weeks in Otterberg and its environs. He was able to do a much more thorough investigation of the roots of the family. He has written a chronicle of this journey. Then one day, Howard Matson, a young stock broker who was interested in the Titanic, called and asked whether he could take a look at the Macy's archives. After some difficulty this was arranged. As far as I know no one had looked at this material in years. Matson turned up some interesting information. His suggestion made it obvious that the material in the archives should be copied, stored

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

It has been suggested that a newsletter be written to inform family members about the many aspects of the Straus Family Project. It is my intention to produce such a newsletter semiannually. I hope you will feel free to comment and to send material. This is, after all, a newsletter intended to disseminate information to and about your family. If you want to write an article, seek information, or contact others, I will be happy to include your material in a future newsletter. Write to: Joan Adler, P O Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416, Phone 516-265-3340.

## INSIDE

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- Biographical Sketch of Flora Stieglitz Straus
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- And Much More...



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and read thoroughly by a professional researcher. Barbara Levy and I started looking for such a person and, *mirabile dictu*, Joan Adler appeared out of the blue and did the job, working in concert with an informal committee that first met at John and Ann Straus' apartment in October 1990. Those who attended were Paul Kurzman, Randolph Selden, John and Ann Straus, William H. Straus, Robert B. Straus, Katherine Toohey, Edward K. Straus, Barbara Levy, Joan Adler and Robert K. Straus. A fund was established to meet expenses. Robert B. Straus volunteered to open an account, named The Straus Historical Fund, and act as its administrator.

Edward K. Straus suggested that a repository for The Straus Family Collection be found. This past May Joan received an invitation from Mary Bowling, Curator of Manuscripts, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, at The New York Public Library to visit their facility and to discuss the possibility of storing the original material together with the Nathan Straus archives. Ms Bowling learned of Joan's work from Joseph Nathan Straus, who toured the library's manuscript division several weeks earlier and saw how the materials donated by the Nathan Strauses had been archived. Flora Stieglitz Straus, the daughter-in-law of Nathan Straus, has donated her collection of Nathan and Lina Straus' photographs, books and albums to the library. Flora has written an autobiography for her family which contains a wealth of information

about her long life among the Strauses. She has shared some of these stories with Joan and has encouraged and aided her enormously.

It was Edward who suggested that, as two years had elapsed since the meeting in October 1990, a newsletter be published so that any member of the family who is interested could keep in touch. This is the result.

The two years have not been wasted. Joan not only has copied all of the pertinent material in Macy's archives but has, with Barbara Levy, obtained what must be a pretty complete list of some 320 individuals who are related in some way to the descendants of Lazarus and Sara Straus. Last month, after six years of effort, the personal papers of the Strauses which had been housed in the Macy's archives were turned over to The New York Public Library.

Lazarus first came to the United States in 1852 and settled in Talbotton, Georgia. In 1854 he sent for his wife Sara and their four children. But while their descendants are the most numerous on our list, there are many others with whom we have had contact who are descendants of Jeanette Grunebaum, Fanny and Mathilda Straus and other early Straus relatives. In subsequent newsletters we hope to begin to tell the story of the Straus family using information gleaned from many sources .



The Peddler's Wagon, about 1850: Newly arrived German Jewish immigrants began their lives in the United States as peddlers, moving from town to town with a wagon load of merchandise. As time went on, some established small stores while others created wholesale firms and merchandising networks. *The American Jewish Album*

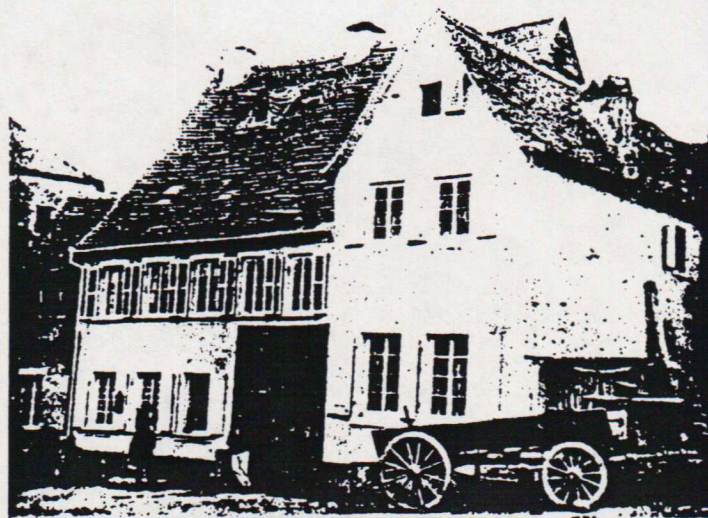


## ABOUT THE EDITOR

By now most of you are familiar with my name, Joan Adler. My profession is literary researcher, a title I came up with approximately seven years ago to describe the rather abstract nature of my job. Generally I offer my services to locate information for people, but this often leads to other projects. I am married and the mother of two college students. I live in Smithtown, NY a rural community about fifty miles from New York City. I have a bachelors degree in elementary education and a masters degree in special education, both from New York University. I taught special education for several years before having children and then stayed home to raise them. As my children needed me less, I found I needed something creative to do and placed an ad in The New York Times Book Revue Section offering my services as a literary researcher. That is how Robert K. Straus (Bob) learned about me. We have been working together on this ever expanding project for three years. I am not, unfortunately, a Straus.

Bob has, for some years, been the unofficial family historian. In October 1990, encouraged by Bob, a group of family members met in New York City. We found there was considerable interest in updating the family tree, publishing a family address book, documenting and preserving historical material about the family, finding a repository for this material, recording an oral history from family members who remember the previous generation and researching the early (pre-1800) history of the family in Europe.

Since then I have been working to fulfill the directives of the committee. A questionnaire has been distributed. We now have information about 320 living Straus relatives. The address book is based on this information. An updated family tree will follow. I am entering data into an excellent genealogical software package and hope to publish an in-depth genealogical history of the Straus family at a later date. Donations to The Straus Family Collection have been received. In addition, Donald Blun Straus donated fourteen file boxes containing records from his professional life. Flora Stieglitz Straus has contributed many photographs and books to our collection. She has also given more than 20 cartons of newspaper clippings, photographs, albums and books to The New York Public Library, which has expressed interest in obtaining our collection. Previously unavailable material about Lazarus Straus and the early years has been obtained. The Straus Historical Fund has been established with Robert B. (Rob) Straus acting as treasurer. A great deal has happened since our October 1990 meeting but there is still much we hope to accomplish.



THE STRAUS HOME IN OTTERBERG

## EARLY STRAUS HISTORY - PRE-1800

Thomas Randolph Selden visited the city of Otterberg, Germany, the home of the Straus family in the early 1800's. He located the houses where various family members lived and the cemeteries where Strauses are buried. He has written a chronicle of his journey. Randy is interested in researching the pre-1800 Straus family. If any of you have information, expertise, or want to work with Randy, you can contact him at 151 Plain Road, Wayland, MA 01778. Phone 508-358-2158. Randy has agreed to make copies of his manuscript available. Contact him directly if you want to receive one.

## NEWS FLASH

In December 1992 Macy's released the personal papers of the Straus family which had been stored in their archives for years. The New York Public Library has accepted this material and is now in the process of completing an inventory. This long sought after feat could not have been accomplished without the intervention and support of Mark Handler, Co-Chairman of Macy's, G. G. Michaelson, Senior Advisor and Jack Damlos, Director of Special Productions. These papers include excerpts from business documents between Isaac Straus, Jeanette Grunebaum and others dating from 1806, personal letters written by Lazarus, letters written by Isidor while in Europe throughout the Civil War and by Oscar during his terms as Minister to Constantinople. In future issues of this newsletter I will give you an overview of this material as I write about the history of the Straus family.



## FLORA STIEGLITZ STRAUS

When I first contacted Flora Babette Stieglitz Straus, who is 98 years old, Flora found it difficult to work me into her busy schedule. Flora is honorary chairman of The Children's Book Committee at The Bank Street College of Education and has worked on this committee for over fifty years. She is historian for her branch of the family, actively corresponds with family members and friends, entertains visitors and is supervising the donation of her collection of books, photographs and albums to The New York Public Library. Until recently she often visited the museums and art galleries of New York City.

Born in New York City on February 5, 1895, Flora is the daughter of Elizabeth Stieffel ("Geggie") and Leopold Stieglitz ("Lee"). Flora's father studied medicine in Heidelberg, Germany and became a prominent New York physician. He was personal physician to Nathan and Lina Straus, among others.

Flora describes her mother as an independent and forward-looking woman who participated in the Second Suffragette Parade in New York City. Her parents were "not strict in bringing up their two daughters and were very modern in their attitudes." Although the household included nurses, Flora's mother took an active roll in raising the girls. Family discussions included the children and their opinions were listened to and respected. Geggie had trained as a professional pianist but was never taught how to perform before an audience. She became a piano teacher. Once in New York she studied music, took courses in language and even took swimming lessons when she was past sixty. She proved an inspiration for Flora who has continued to take courses, attend lectures, music, dance and theatrical performances, and strive for improvement, a phrase she used to characterize her mother but which suits Flora perfectly.

After a winter of severe illness when Flora was eight, she and her sister remained at home to be educated rather than be exposed to the illnesses of the other children at school. They travelled to Egypt the winter of 1904-1905 with their mother to avoid the cold of New York. There Flora contracted chicken pox, tonsillitis, infected kidneys, and lost her molars. A tonsillectomy in 1906, when she was 11, seems to have cured her. "I have rejoiced in excellent health ever since."

In 1912, shortly after Ida and Isidore Straus went down on the Titanic, Flora and her family visited the Nathan

Strauses at their summer cottage *Villa Olympia* in the Thousand Islands, near Alexandria Bay, New York. She remembers going out for a ride on their steam yacht *Sissilina* while Nathan and Lina's son Grant rode circles around them in his new Garwood speedboat *Ostrich*. The *Sissilina* was later donated to the Coast Guard when the United States became involved in World War I. In the summer of 1913 Flora and Grant met in the Thousand Islands again, fell in love and decided to marry. When Grant (who was actually named Hugh Grant Straus) and Flora Stieglitz were married on October 22, 1913, Flora became part of a large, close family. She writes warmly of her mother-in-law and father-in-law, Lina and Nathan



FLORA STIEGLITZ STRAUS

Straus, and her sister-in-law Sissie Lehman. "Becoming part of this family of Strauses and Gutherses (with branches in France and England) introduced me to worlds I had not known -- business, wealth, political activities, philanthropy, 'our crowd', and much more." Her autobiography tells of travel and adventures in Europe. We learn of the family's involvement with sports such as skiing, golf, tennis, and riding. On a trip throughout Europe in 1930, Grant and Flora's sons Jerome and Hugh shared the excitement of a Zeppelin ride from Lake Constance to Neustadt in the Rhineland. Grant joined his sister and brother to sponsor members of the Guthersz-Straus family in Europe at the beginning of the Nazi persecution and then subsidized them until they were safely established in this country.

After living in apartments for many years, Grant and Flora were able to buy Four Wind Acres in Harrison New York. They renovated the old farmhouse, where they lived from 1920 to 1950. At first Four Wind Acres was used as a summer house but, after 1925, they began spending more time there each year. By 1950, when it was sold, they were living there year-round. Flora and Grant then bought Westwood in Armonk where Flora lived until 1975. At the age of 80 she decided that the upkeep on a house and swimming pool was too much for her and she moved to Lyon Farm, a condominium complex in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Describing herself as politically slightly left of center, Flora became involved in the peace movement early on and has continued her commitment to this cause. In addition to volunteer work in the political campaign of Nathan Jr in 1919, when he successfully ran for State Senator, she worked for the Social Service Committee of Mount Sinai Hospital, the Lincoln School PTA, the Child Study Asso-

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ciation and its Children's Book Committee which she chaired, Play Schools Association and Neighborhood Playhouse School. She was Commissioner of the Blind for ten years under Governor Herbert Lehman. She served as treasurer of the New York Unit of the Herb Society of America. Flora says, looking back on her life, that she is amazed how, without planning, she was able to embark on two careers; raising a family and community service.

Blessed with an unusually vivid memory, Flora tells stories which give us a glimpse of life in an earlier age. She remembers seeing buildings draped in black from the train window on her way home from Lake George in 1901 when President McKinley was shot. She has shared with me stories of Lazarus and Sara and Nathan, Isidor and Oscar as children, some of which I have written elsewhere in this newsletter.

Flora's uncle, her father's brother, was the photographer Alfred Stieglitz. She writes in her autobiography *Bits and Pieces* that many members of the family are photographers. It became a natural way of expression. Her home is filled with examples of their work, along with paintings and sculpture executed by family and friends.

Flora is the mother of Anne Gertler, Virginia Bersohn, the late Jerome Nathan Straus and the late Hugh Grant Straus II. She is the happy grandmother of eight grandsons and one granddaughter, and is the great grandmother of five.

## FAMILY STORIES

Jacob Lazare, Lazarus' father, participated in the Assembly of Notables, convened in Paris in 1806 by Napoleon to aid in the making of laws to determine the status of Jews. One of the decrees resulting from this council in 1808 was that all Jews must take last names. Until that time a Jew might be named Jacob ben Lazare: Jacob, son of Lazarus. It has been suggested that the name Straus, which means ostrich in German, was adopted because of the ostrich depicted on a plaque outside the Straus' house. A picture of this house appears on page three of this newsletter. Straus also translates to "a bunch of flowers". Bob Straus thinks this particularly fitting since his wife was married first to a man named Flower. She says she changed one Flower for a bunch. Some of the Straus owners of yachts have used *Ostrich* as the name of their boat.

Lazarus sailed to New York with the Schoenbergs, whose name was later changed to Belmont. Lazarus was going to Georgia and Schoenberg stayed in New York. He told Lazarus, "If you are successful let me hear from you."

Lazarus settled in Talbotton, Georgia in 1852 and brought his wife and children to this country two years later. They arrived in New York Harbor aboard the *SS St Louis* Tuesday, September 12, 1854. Flora Stieglitz Straus tells me that while living in Talbotton, Nathan and Isidor were commissioned to buy a slave. They bought a pregnant woman, thinking they were getting two for the price of one, but were reprimanded because they hadn't considered that buying a pregnant woman meant less work and more noise when the baby came. Isidor, Nathan and Oscar used to pick up twine from cotton bales to sell in Talbotton. Entrepreneurs, even then!



The original house in which Lazarus Straus lived with his family when he first moved to Talbotton.

Lazarus wrote to his mother-in-law in Otterberg, Germany on July 17, 1865. He wanted to inform his relatives of his family's move from Columbus, Georgia to Philadelphia due to the "fire, killings and robbing which practically destroyed everything..." He wrote about their happiness at the marriage of his daughter Hermine to Lazarus Kohns and the birth of her son Lee. He wrote that Isidor is an able young man who must have given his grandparents much pleasure during his two year stay in Europe. "Nathan and Oscar are also two great ones; Nathan is very valuable to me in business, ... but I want Oscar to go through all schools since he enjoys learning."

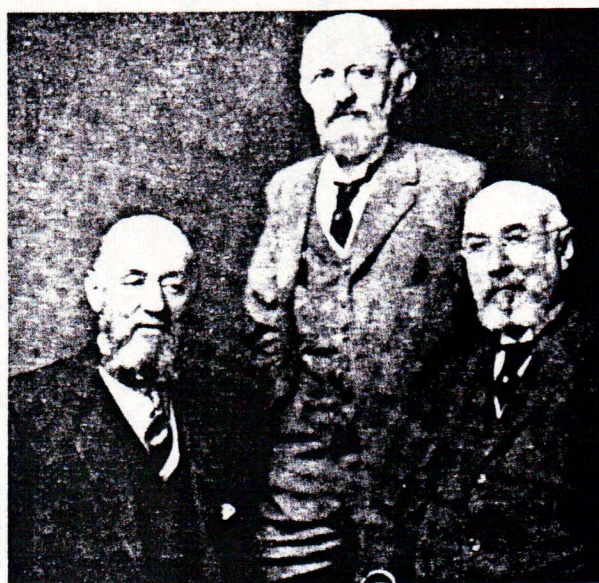
On April 28, 1871 Lazarus wrote to his in-laws on L. Straus & Son stationery. The letterhead reads: Importers of Crockery, China & Glassware, and Manufacturers of Lamps, 44 Warren Street, New York. His purpose was to announcing the engagement of Isidor to Ida Blun. He

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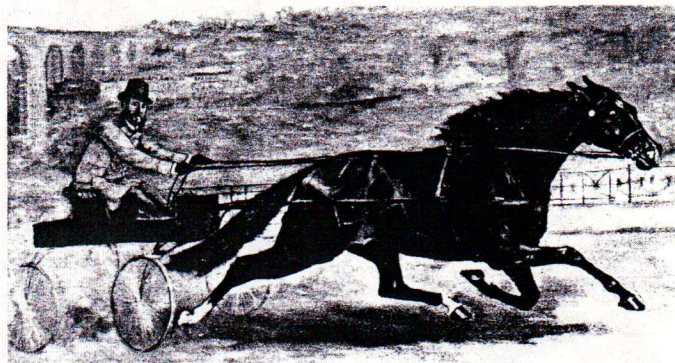
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explained that they are "very pleased indeed with this match-up since it is in every respect an outstanding one." He continues, "My wife is so beside herself with joy that she is not even capable of writing her own name."



NATHAN, OSCAR AND ISIDOR STRAUS

Nathan bought a horse and carriage shortly after his marriage in 1875. He found he couldn't afford both a horse and a wife, so he sold half his share in the horse when his bride, Lina Guthertz, came to America. She saved from her household allowance and bought the half horse back. He drove it on The Speedway, which is now Harlem River Drive in New York City.



NATHAN DRIVING HIS HORSE COB WEBS  
ON THE SPEEDWAY --- ABOUT 1900

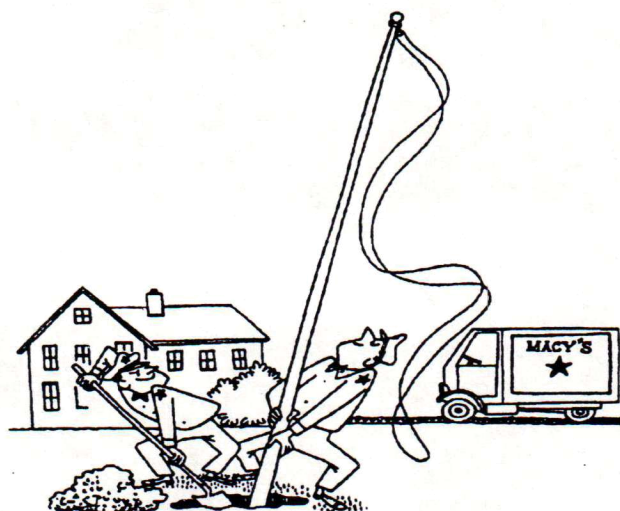
Gail Nutku tells me that her father, Paul Lazarus Kohns, was once in an elevator at Macy's with Jack Straus. A man entered the elevator smoking a cigar. Jack told the man that smoking was not permitted in Macy's. The man said, "Yes, but I just bought this cigar in your store." Jack said, "We sell piss pots in the basement but we don't think you would use one here either."

Percy was awakened in the middle of the night by a phone call from a woman who thanked him for the delivery of her hat. When he asked her why she was calling in the middle of the night she replied, "Because they just delivered it, Mr Straus."

In her book *And The Price Is Right* Margaret Case Harriman writes:

Another true story is the one about the D.A. customer who ordered a flagpole to be delivered in time for the Fourth of July so that he could fly Old Glory from the lawn of his new house in Connecticut. His letter specified the required dimensions and the flagpole was forthwith delivered, but when he had installed it on the lawn it turned out to be too short. After a spirited telephone message from the customer, Macy's rushed a truck to Connecticut to deliver a second flagpole and take the first one away. Alas! The second flagpole, laboriously imbedded, proved to be too long. Disgusted, the patriotic customer dug it up and threw it into a corner of the garage. Then he went into the village, bought a local flagpole to his liking, and planted it finally on the lawn with a great sweating. Exhausted, he tottered into his house, called up Macy's and gave them a piece of his mind; they could take back their lousy flagpole, he told them, and never mind sending another either. The next day was July third. In the householder's absence, possibly for a cooling swim, a Macy truck drove up, two truck drivers descended and, with a mighty effort, uprooted the flagpole from the lawn and carted it back to Macy's. "We was sent to pick up a flagpole, and that was the only flagpole we seen!" they both declared truthfully, later.

The patriotic customer flew the flag from his housetop that year, but he dined out on the story for some time and he is still a happy Macy customer. (page 15-16)



AND THE PRICE IS RIGHT



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The traditional Christmas stamp of the Postal Service for the 1991 Christmas season features the Madonna and Child from the painting "Madonna and Child with Donor". The original painting, by Italian Renaissance artist Antoniazio Romano, is on display at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. It came from the collection of Percy Selden.



## THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ms Mary B. Bowling, Curator of Manuscripts at The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, contacted me about the possibility of the library acquiring The Straus Family collection. We met in May 1992. I was given a tour of the library's state of the art facility. The library's collections are organized in acid-free storage folders and boxes, and are stored in a climate controlled, secure area. After inventory and finders aids are established materials are available to scholars on demand. If the family decides to donate the collection to The New York Public Library, and if the library decides to accept it, all members of the family would have access to this collection. Among those members of the family who have expressed an opinion, it is the general feeling that The New York Public Library is the best choice for the repository of The Straus Family Collection. Please let me know how you feel about this. If you have a suggestion for another facility as the possible repository for this collection we would like to hear from you.

Ms Bowling cautions that the library does not accept photocopies. If original materials are sent to me I will photocopy them before the collection is donated to The New York Public Library. The photocopies can then be included in an auxiliary collection we are considering

establishing for the private use of the Straus family. If this concept meets with your approval, we would investigate how this collection can be made available to those who are interested. One suggestion is to have the collection micro-filmed or converted to laser disc. In this way individual copies of the entire collection could be mailed to anyone requesting a copy.

If you have original albums, letters, photographs, books and memorabilia, you might consider donating them to The New York Public Library as part of The Straus Family Collection. If you wish to retain these items during your lifetime they can be willed to the library.

Ms Bowling asks that, if possible, donations be made to the collection I am compiling and then donated to The New York Public Library as part of the larger Straus Family Collection. This facilitates their acceptance of material, as they can deal more easily with a larger collection than with smaller individual donations. If you prefer to make a donation directly to the library you can contact Mary Bowling, Curator of Manuscripts, at The New York Public Library, The Research Libraries, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY 10018, 212-930-0801. Ms Bowling cautions that no formal agreement has been made with the library to accept all or part of The Straus Family Collection and that the library reserves the right to refuse material it deems unacceptable or incompatible with The New York Public Library's collection criteria.

## ADDRESS BOOK - FAMILY TREE

Your response to our questionnaire has been gratifying. We now have information about 320 living Straus relatives. We plan to update the address book annually but we will issue a revision in six months if there are many initial corrections. If you know of anyone who may not have been included or who has moved, married, divorced, died or had a child, please contact me so that I can include these changes. The updated family tree will follow. Please review the information in the address book to make sure it is correct. Some of this information will be used for the new family tree.

## SPECIAL THANKS

- To Edward Kuhn Straus for the idea to write this newsletter and for his insightful suggestions.
- To Robert Kenneth Straus (Bob) for his continued encouragement and support. Without him there would be no Straus Family Project

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- To Barbara Levy for her thoughtful ideas, active participation in The Straus Family Project and especially for her many kindnesses, including the delicious lunches.
- To Flora Stieglitz Straus, who donated more than twenty boxes of albums, newspaper clippings, books and photographs to The New York Public Library. She has generously given me several hours time, in which she contributed stories and anecdotes which will be included in future newsletters and an eventual genealogical update.
- To Donald Blun Straus, who donated fourteen file boxes of material relating to his professional career. This material has been inventoried and will be donated as part of The Straus Family Collection. Thanks to Don for his generous contribution to this project.
- To William Helburn Straus (Bill) for his help with the questionnaires and database management.
- To Thomas Randolph Selden (Randy) for his assistance formatting the questionnaire and for his keen perspective.
- To Robert B. Straus (Rob) for volunteering to act as Straus Family Treasurer and for his insightful comments and suggestions.
- To Mark Handler, G. G. Michaelson and Jack Damlos for their support of our effort to obtain the personal papers of the early Strauses for The New York Public Library collection.

**Send address book updates to:**  
**Joan Adler, P O Box 416**  
**Smithtown, NY 11787-0416**  
**Or Phone: 516-265-3340**

- And to all of you who have taken the time to fill out our questionnaire, make a donation or who have offered your support and assistance.

## FOR FUTURE ISSUES

There is a growing feeling that it is time to get to know one another and to learn about the history of the family. This is not a project about or for the Macy's Strauses but about and for all Strauses. This newsletter is one vehicle we can use to accomplish that goal. If you agree, please support this effort.

Would you like to see more articles about what people do? Are you interested in a family reunion? Would you like to see a column devoted to birth, marriage, obituary, graduation and new business announcements?

Several family members have asked for assistance in their search for others with medical problems which may be hereditary. Is this newsletter an appropriate vehicle for this search?

Do you have questions about family history? Do you know a story or anecdote others might find interesting?

Let's make the newsletter FOR, ABOUT and BY family members.

**If you enjoyed reading this newsletter and would like to see this kind of effort continued, it is up to you to support The Straus Family Project. We hope to publish a newsletter semiannually but we need your help to make this possible. It's not too late to make a donation to The Straus Historical Fund.**

_____ Last Name	_____ First Name	_____ Nickname ( & Middle Name or Initial)	_____ Home Phone
_____ Street Address			_____ Office Phone
_____ Apartment Number or Box Number			_____ Date of Birth
_____ City	_____ State	_____ Zip Code	
_____ Profession			
_____ Closest Relationship to a Straus			