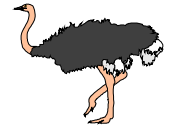




# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 8 Number 1

Newsletter

August 2006

## Sara Straus Hess

1878 - 1960

Sara Straus was born Thursday, May 16, 1878 at about one AM at 26 West 55th Street, New York City. She was the fourth child, the first daughter of Isidor and Ida Blun Straus. Sara's birth was recorded in the Straus family Hymnal for "Divine Service in The Temple Emanu-El" along with that of her siblings: Jesse Isidor, Clarence Elias, Percy Selden, Minnie, Herbert Nathan and Vivian.

Isidor and Ida bought a house for the family at the northern tip of Manhattan in the early 1880's. But Ida thought it was too isolated. So in 1883 they bought the house at 2745 Broadway at West 105<sup>th</sup> Street. There the children had access to fresh air and country living year-round. In the 1890's brothers Isidor and Nathan bought side-by-side cottages on Lower Saranac Lake in Franklin County, upstate NY. Isidor and Ida's cottage was called Villa Plaisance. The brothers would take turns: one would be "minding the store" while the other was at their summer home. We are fortunate to have many letters written by Ida to Isidor during this period. Sara was a frequent contributor. On July 26, 1890 twelve year old Sara wrote, "My dear papa -, ... When your letter came to-day and mama told me that you were not pleased that none of us had written I thought I would do so directly and I hope that hereafter you will not have to complain. The Mayor arrived here this morning & a little while afterward he fished in the pond & caught a three & a half pound lake trout. 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. Uncle Nathan wanted to have a picnic at Cohen Bay but he felt too nervous about letting so many go and so he substituted that. We have only been out rowing once so far but mama says that now we must begin doing so regularly. ... The weather here is quite nice but one cannot depend on it as all of a sudden it commences to rain very hard. There has been no bathing yet and the prospects are not very good. Good-bye for to-day with much love & many kisses. I am your loving daughter Sara."

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> she wrote, "My dear Papa, ... please don't forget to send Vivy something for her birthday." August 27, 1890: "My dear Papa, - ... I have 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." September 10, 1890: "My dear papa,- ... Vivy is 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: "My dear Papa,- ... 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 seasick. Jesse drove both ways. Mr. Nelson has been here for the last two days. We all have had a good laugh at him already. Yesterday morning he ate such a hearty breakfast that we all made fun of him last evening when he came home. They did not have a very good dinner and so Uncle Oscar said that Mr. Nelson had been smart and laid in a good breakfast to last him until evening. ... We were all so disappointed when we heard that you were not coming yet awhile. Please come as soon as possible."

Wednesday evening, September 17, 1890: "My dear Papa,- ... I wrote to Miss Ward the other day to ask her whether it made any difference if I missed the first few weeks of school and she replied immediately saying that it would take that long to get into running order and so I would not lose much. ... The only thing we wish is for you to come up here. As I am very tired and it will soon be bed-time I will say good-night."



April 30, 1889

Seated in front: Sara Straus  
Left to right: Sara's sisters  
Minnie and Vivian, and their  
cousin Sissie Straus

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**The past is always with us.  
It behooves those who were part of it  
or remember  
to pass the experience and memories  
on to those who follow.**

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Joan Adler

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Lazarus Straus family and the historical context in which they lived through research and education. You are invited to submit articles or ideas for articles, calendar events, and material relating to the Straus family and to their history.

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is a tax exempt organization as described under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Contributions to the Society are deductible to the extent provided by law. A copy of the annual report of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. may be obtained from the Society or from the New York State Attorney General, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

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

The Straus Historical Society would not have become the premier organization for the research and dissemination of information about the Straus family without the active support and assistance of many people. I would be remiss if I did not, from time to time, say thank you to some of those people who have been there from the beginning and who have made extraordinary contributions to the Society.

When I first began work with Robert K. Straus of Santa Barbara, CA, he told me about Gus B. Kaufman from Georgia "who was somehow related to the Lazarus Straus family." Their correspondence had been going on for years. In a short time Gus and I were corresponding too, looking for the common link between the families. Gus invited me to speak at the Southern Jewish Historical Society's annual conference in Atlanta in 1993. Later I visited Gus and his wife Marian at their home in Macon, GA. They took me to Talbotton and Columbus, GA and to many places in the area where the Straus and Kaufman families had stores, homes or connections. Gus campaigned to bring the Straus family to GA, finally achieving this goal in 1997. A second SHS sponsored trip to GA occurred in 2001. Gus became a member of the board of directors of the Straus Historical Society in 2001. I don't know who was more thrilled when we were able to prove the connection of the two families through DNA testing. Gus has stepped down from the board. We thank him for his many years of friendship, support and service. His encouragement, guidance, enthusiasm and intelligent suggestions have been welcome and invaluable.

Oscar S. Straus III has served on the board of directors of the SHS for many years. For the past three years he has served on the executive board as chair and treasurer. I can assure you that the efficient and timely manner in which SHS accomplishes many of its goals, especially in fund raising and book-keeping, derives from Oscar's enthusiastic work on behalf of the Society. Somehow, with his busy professional life and family demands, he still finds the time to remind me of pending work and to make me look good. At the January 5, 2006 meeting of the board, Oscar stepped down from the position of treasurer. I am pleased to announce that Hugh Grant Straus III was elected to fill that position and Barbie Douglas Gurgan was elected vice-chair.

I welcome new board member Lawrence A. Kahn and thank board members Al Berr, Michael H. Buckner, Barbie Douglas Gurgan, M. Brett Gladstone, David H. Kurzman, Paul A. Kurzman, Jack Grier Schafer, Barnard Sachs Straus, Sr., and Thomas P. Straus for their continued support. It is truly an honor and a pleasure to work with these people. The excellent guidance and suggestions of the board has given direction to our effort.

As I begin my sixteenth year of work with the Straus family, I reflect back on how fortunate I have been to meet so many interesting people and to have become involved in a project that I love. I hope you will continue to contact me with suggestions for the newsletter, ideas about projects we might undertake and donations of your family's materials to the SHS archives. Please become involved. Join the board. Volunteer to interview a family member. Organize a reunion or event in your area. And let me know what kinds of activities the SHS can undertake that would be meaningful to you.

**Let Me Hear From You**

The following summer thirteen year old Sara continued writing. June 25, 1891: "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: "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 eating as much as we are at present. Mama is feeling much better and does not cough nearly as much any more. If she comes home in the same state as Herby did yesterday she will look pretty bad as he was so sun burnt that his face was as red as a lobster. The new boats are very nice but they have not been used yet as it seems that the boys can bring home trout without them and for deer they have not yet tried. 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 is what you said. I could read more but I read principally in the evening and we go to bed so very early. Try and come up here as soon as possible. With much love and many kisses from yourself and Jesse. I remain your loving Daughter."

July 1, 1891: "We are out in the air a great deal and we practice, and I read quite some. We drink 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. Both Mama's and my cough are almost entirely gone and Mama is feeling perfectly well. .. Today I was fishing all day with Jermie (Jerome, Nathan and Lina's son) 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 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 Jermie caught eighteen. Nevertheless it was fun to watch Jermie catch them. The reason I did not get any was that there were very few places where I could fish. As you know the lunch is the best part and I did full justice to it. The Mosquitos are very bad just now and the only way I managed to keep rid of them was by bathing my face in tar oil." On July 28, 1891 Ida wrote to Isidor: "Sara is regarded here as the prize girl, she is the champion in everything."

August 5, 1891 thirteen year old Sara wrote: "My dear Papa,- ... Sometime ago I wrote to Barnard College for a circular, but I have not received one, and I think the address I wrote was not sufficient, so will you please try and find it out and send it to me? You may think it queer that I want to begin preparing already but if I wish to go there, I must start in the fall. When you come bring something along for Vivy as her birthday is on the twenty ninth of this month."

Percy was attending Harvard in October 1896 and Sara began college at Bryn Mawr. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Percy wrote: "In each letter you rejoice that Sara is so satisfied at college. I certainly think she has every right to be, and as far as I can judge from her

letters she has not even been purple since the first few days, and as purple is the stop before blue you may feel satisfied that she has not come near home-sickness or other similar maladies for the past three weeks."

For the next several years family letters include information about a knee injury Sara suffered and how long it was taking her to recover. Granddaughter Joan de Graaff wrote that she'd been told the family went to dude ranches for vacation and that Sara was kicked in the knee by a horse. Joan didn't know if this was true, but suggested that this might be the source of the original injury. On November 25, 1896 Isidor wrote to Percy: "Sara is getting along nicely but her complete recovery, so that she can walk without any hinderance, will take some time yet. ... The doctor says that she was on the eve of a physical break down of which the development of the knee trouble was both an indication and a timely fortunate premonitory." November 26, 1896: Percy responded: "Do you think she will be able to return to college before Xmas?" On November 27<sup>th</sup> Percy wrote: "... I think it would be wise to keep her home until after Xmas. She can follow her courses in a general way by prodigious reading and thus make the work she will have to do on her return easier."



About 1899: Beatrice Straus, Irma Nathan Straus, Vivian, Minnie, Sara, Jesse, Percy, Herbert

Sara graduated from Barnard College in New York City in June 1900 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her class consisted of 38 women. For many years following her graduation Sara was a member of the Loan Fund Committee, devoting time to raising money so that young women who would otherwise not be able to attend college could do so. She was also a long time member of the Board of Trustees at Barnard.

Announcement was made in May 1901 of the incorporation of the Social Halls Association with a capital stock of \$100,000. Co-presidents were Sara Straus and Virginia Potter. *The New York Times* reported that "Its general purposes are set down as "the buying, selling, owning, controlling, improving and leasing of real estate in the City of New York, the establishment and conducting of public baths, gymnasiums, libraries, bowling alleys, billiard rooms, restaurants, roof gardens, public halls, &c. ... While the underlying idea has been one of altruism, the promoters of the enterprise decided that their purpose would be best served by placing it on a business foundation." Among the investors was Sara's brother Percy.

In May 1901 Isidor and his daughter Sara sailed for Europe where they were to attend a reception given by King Edward VII at Windsor Castle. On May 31<sup>st</sup> Sara wrote to Ida: "I think I am rejuvenating Papa for you so that he will not be satisfied to sit at home night after night anymore. ... Tomorrow the King's reception at Windsor takes place and the notice says that it has been found impossible to permit the ladies to go to it ... The women as a whole that you see stalking around London are freakish looking. Their figures are frightful, they go in where

they should come out and come out where they should go in and dress as though they were servant girls on their Sunday outing. Even Papa daily remarks on their utter lack of good looks and good taste." On June 4<sup>th</sup> she wrote: "... the gentlemen trotted off by themselves. They all returned full of enthusiasm and delighted with the cordiality and informality of their reception. ... The whole thing was a huge success and so successful that all London is discussing it. While Papa was hobnobbing with royalty, I was lunching at Sir Samuel Montague's, which was not highly exciting." The rest of the letter describes other activities to which they were invited. Sara often attended a dinner and then two parties of an evening just to keep up with the social demands placed upon her during this trip.

Sara Straus married Dr. Alfred Fabian Hess Wednesday, October 12, 1904, at noon, at Sunnyside, the Elberon, NJ home of her parents, Isidor and Ida Straus. A special train with several Pullman cars brought the guests to the Elberon station at 11:45 A.M. The family published a tongue-in-cheek newspaper, the "Shadyside Sunnyside, High Noon Edition." Subtitles proclaim: "Straus -- Hess, Celebrated (Already) To-Day at Shadyside, The Home of The Bride, With Democratic Simplicity. Fancy Prices Demanded By Unscrupulous Speculators For Grand-Stand Seats. Throngs Within and Without Cause Embarrassment to the Young (?) Couple. Bride Notorious For Her Many Gifts (From Others) To Charity. Groom a Badly Known Veterinary." The text of the article is so charming that I include it all here.

"Miss Sara Straus, only oldest daughter of the Hon. Isidor and Hon. Ida Straus (also only oldest) niece of the Hon. Oscar S. Straus, the well-known Republican Machinist, and Hon. Uncle Nathan Straus, the Horse and milk king; aunt of Messrs. Ralph, Jack, and Beatrice Straus; sister of Minnie Straus, author of "Love Letter of an Igorrote," and Vivian Straus, a child of extraordinary precocity and discernment, was married at high tide to-day in the summer house of her parents. The bride, a delicate featured, dimpled brunette of the petite type, with a cupid's bow mouth and limping eyes, has for many, many years haunted society but has never been married before, as far as we know. She was, during the period of her social meandering, rumored engaged to the entire Academy of Medicine. ...The groom is equally well known in many grateful stables through his exploitation of the "Dr. Hess Happy Ointment and Kidney Tabloids," "Peerless Dog Biscuits," "Moth Exterminator," and other chemicals. He was descended from his ancestors on both sides, and as this is also true of his bride, the combination is a rare one."

Alfred and Sara's daughters Eleanor and Margaret were born in 1906 and 1907 respectively. In 1909 son Alfred Selmar Hess was born. He died of meningitis in 1917. June 17, 1919 Sara gave birth to a premature baby boy who died the same day. This last tragedy deeply affected her. From then on Sara wore only black.

The Hess family lived in a brownstone at 154 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York City in 1910 with six servants. In 1913 they bought a

private house at 16 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street. One of the selling points of this house was an Otis elevator and four bathrooms. Dr. Hess' office was on the ground floor. The family lived on the floors above.

In December 1933, Sara's husband Alfred Fabian Hess died suddenly after presenting diplomas to graduate nurses at the Hebrew Home for Infants. Alfred was a renowned pediatrician and clinical professor of children's diseases. He is credited with co-discovering vitamin D, the first vitamin isolated. He also discovered that the bone-building vitamin cured rickets in children and that food could be indirectly irradiated with ultraviolet rays to fortify it with vitamin D. Sara unsuccessfully campaigned to have this achievement recognized by the Nobel Commission. Dr. Hess also discovered that vitamin C prevented and cured scurvy; discovered thromboplastin, a substance that stops hemorrhages; invented a duodenal tube for the investigation of fermentation in the intestines; showed that rubella was caused by a virus and was the first to use blood inoculation to prevent mumps. He also invented a cheap icebox, one that could be built for less than twenty cents, that would keep a five-cent piece of ice cold for 24 hours during the summer. This was done to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and tubercule bacilli in the milk.



Sara Straus Hess  
with daughter Eleanor

After the death of her husband, Sara moved to a large apartment at 875 Park Avenue, NYC. It was large enough that her recently married daughter Margaret (known as Peggy) and Peggy's husband Jan de Graaff could also live there. Family members believe that Sara moved to this particular building because her brother Percy's wife Edith Abraham Straus was ill. Sara wanted to be nearby so that she could help care for Edith. Sara had health problems of her own. She had an unsuccessful sinus operation that left her plagued with sinus difficulties. In fact, she was in Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, MD getting treatment for her sinus ailment at the time of her husband's death.

It was rare for women of Sara's generation to work unless it was financially necessary. Family members have told me that Sara had both the intellect and the drive to become one of the heads of the family business, R. H. Macy & Co., Inc. No one but Jesse was more intellectual than Sara. Sara was a suffragette. She spoke German, French, Italian and Spanish. For many years an Italian woman was invited to lunch every Saturday so that Sara could practice speaking the language. She hosted Sunday dinners for the family that also included many notables from politics, education, society, philanthropy, music and the arts. Grandson Paul A. Kurzman likened her Sunday dinners to the closest thing America has to the European "salon." She enjoyed being the "grand dame." She maintained a chauffeur driven limousine in which she would escort friends and family to concerts. Grandson Harold P. Kurzman, Jr. told me that Sara's chauffeur drove all of her grandchildren to school every day and picked them up and delivered them home after school. Sara was the center of the family's activities.

Phyllis K. Gladstone, Sara's oldest grandchild wrote, "We all called her "Gaga." It may have started with me not being able to say grandma. I had my own little room at her apartment and she even had a set of toiletries: hairbrush, etc. with my initials on them. Sunday lunch was at Gaga's. Important people like Robert Moses or Cornelia Otis Skinner were there. They sat at one end of the table and we children at the other. There were often as many as 24 people present. When we children wanted to be excused, we had to go up and give her a kiss. Even after I was married we had to go. We had a crib in the back room for her grandbabies. I went to Europe with her several times and had to speak french in France. She ordered an iron and ironing board in each hotel and did the ironing herself. She had her own laundress at home and a room in the basement just for her. With all the company and clothes that had to be ironed Peggy, who was with Gaga for more than 30 years, was kept busy. We had a farm in NJ during the war. Gaga went out and collected the eggs herself."

Grandson Harold Jr. wrote: Sara and her son-in-law Harold P. Kurzman "purchased the Triple Brook Farm in Holmdel, NJ in the mid 1940's. Sara (Gaga as we grandchildren called her) looked forward to her weekend and summer visits and to being a "gentlewoman" farmer. Most remarkably she would regularly collect eggs from the hen house and talk to the chickens, encouraging them to be more productive. Weekly, at least 30 dozen eggs would be loaded into her chauffeur driven car and delivered to a grocer in her Park Avenue neighborhood."

In 1996 Donald B. Straus, son of Percy, and Don's wife Beth wrote "Some Recollections of a Great Lady" for the Straus Historical Society's August newsletter. "Aunt Sara was, to both of us, a wonderful mixture of a strong and dominant woman and a loving aunt." Don wrote, "When I was still a child I would pay rather formal visits to Aunt Sara, usually with my Dad (Percy), who adored her. 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." Beth wrote, "I met Aunt Sara on my first trip to 875 Park Avenue as a young bride. ... I was sent ... 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 promise 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. ... She was so kind, so terrifying and, really, our favorite aunt."

On her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday Sara hosted a family reunion at her apartment. She privately published The Autobiography of Isidor Straus with a forward by Sara Hess in 1955 and distributed it to family members at this party. This book provided information about the family's genealogy and it inspired nephew Robert K. Straus to begin researching the family's roots. The Straus Historical Society, Inc. grew from his efforts.

Sara's letters to the editor of *The New York Times* were frequently published in the paper. She wrote on a variety of subjects including: the need for psychotherapy for sexual offenders, the right of the United States to assist West German rearmament, a report on the Democratic caucuses in Texas for the election of General Eisenhower as president in 1952, the need for more trained psychiatrists and psychotherapists rather than more hospitals to house the mentally ill. She also wrote to call attention to the Russian system of satellite countries that she called "slave colonies."



Sara Straus Hess  
Alfred Fabian Hess



Grandson Alfred de Graaff wrote, "Sara suffered from very severe chronic sinus headaches which were the result of rather brutal operations that were the only treatment before the discovery of antibiotics. ... She was very stoic and believed one should never complain about one's health. In April 1960 she had planned a large charity cocktail party in her apartment and even though she was desperately ill she insisted that it not be cancelled. She received her guests in her bedroom and would not go to the hospital until the last guest had left. She died two days later. She was an exceptionally kind and generous woman but I think what most distinguished was her need to be active and useful. She was always involved in charitable and philanthropic work - during the war she was very active on the AWVS (American Woman's Voluntary Service) and later she was on the board of Beth Israel Hospital and Barnard College. She once told me that one of her greatest regrets was that women of her generation could not go into business."

Sara died April 10, 1960. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in The Bronx, NY along with her husband, sons and the children's governess. Sara's obituary in *The New York Times* includes a very long list of philanthropic activities. A few were: president of the Tuberculosis Preventorium for Children in Farmingdale, NJ, trustee of Barnard College, trustee of Beth Israel Hospital and a governor of the Menninger Foundation. She served on the American Committee of the School for International Studies in Geneva and was an officer in the Women's Democratic Union. She left daughters Eleanor Hess Kurzman and Margaret Hess de Graaff, grandchildren Phyllis K. Gladstone, Peter, Harold Jr. and Paul A. Kurzman, Alfred and Joan de Graaff.

## A Day of Remembrance

In the last issue of the newsletter I published a list of the many family members who lost their lives during the Holocaust. Since then family members have submitted additional names of their loved one who also lost their lives in the Holocaust. They are remembered here.

Oskar Hahn - Theresianstadt - Czechoslovakia

Sara Hahn - Theresienstadt - Czechoslovakia

Alice Neumann - Holocaust



Conditions in Germany were rapidly becoming difficult for Jews during the 1930's and early 1940's. Many family members moved to the Netherlands and some immigrated to the United States during this period. But many others believed they would be exempt from the harsh treatment their co-religionists were receiving and stayed where they were. As conditions in Germany became more difficult, they realized it was necessary to leave everything behind and flee if they were to survive.

The borders closed and visas were no longer being issued without the sponsorship of family members in other countries. The United States Department of State told Sissie Straus Lehman, daughter of Nathan and Lina Straus, that she could not possibly have so many relatives. They told her she could not sponsor any more people. Lee and Clara Kohns and Roger W. Straus also sponsored many relatives.

In the last issue of the newsletter I published an article about Eugenie and Guglielmo Weinberger who lost their lives during the Holocaust. In the current issue of the newsletter I am pleased and honored to present three articles written by Edith Mass Mendel about family members who survived.

### Just Made It

by Edith Maas Mendel

My cousin, Rudolf Maas, was growing more and more uneasy. The situation for Jews in Germany was becoming tenuous, dangerous, even this early in the Hitler regime and he considered leaving. He had money stashed away in various countries and did not fear financial problems if he left his business interests in Wiesbaden where he owned an apartment house and a successful factory that manufactured athletic equipment. An unexpected visit from local politicians urged him to remain in Germany. They reassured him that he was the kind of Jew they needed -- a decorated officer from World War I and a citizen who furnished employment to many families in the city. He agreed to remain but as time passed, he grew increasingly concerned. He and his wife Liesel packed small suitcases with important papers, passports and basic possessions for a quick flight, if necessary.

Many months after that visit, the guard at the entrance to his factory phoned his office excitedly, "Gestapo commpt!" Rudolf instructed one of his staff to call Liesel and he fled out of the factory in his car by way of a back exit. In the three minutes it took the Gestapo to reach the front entrance, he was already on

his way home. Liesel was waiting for him with the packed suitcases and they raced to the railroad station. They bought tickets for Paris and were not apprehended.

However, they knew full well that when the train reached the border, they would be picked up. As the train slowed down, approaching the border, they jumped from the train, hid until dark and walked into freedom in France, where they were immediately interned as enemy aliens!

I do not know the details of their release, except that they were able to contact another cousin, Dr. Alice Maas, a resident of Paris, who guaranteed that they were merely passing through France en route to New York and were not remaining as permanent residents. After their release, of course, they immediately headed for New York where they remained for the rest of their lives, along with their two sons, Norman and Ronald, who were born after they settled in the United States.

Rudolf refused to work while living in New York. He said he saw his entire life's work crumble in the three minutes it took for the Gestapo to cover the distance from his factory gate to his office and he never wanted to take the chance of that happening again. Instead, he spent every day at the New York Stock Exchange, buying and selling securities. He must have been a pretty savvy trader, for his family lived very well.

As the years passed, history did not stand still: the attack on Pearl Harbor, World War II and finally, peace.

After things quieted down somewhat, Rudolf decided to return to Germany and reclaim his properties. Most Jews who escaped the Holocaust had to sell all their possessions, homes, jewelry, businesses at the going rate of five cents on the dollar. They were desperate to pay for transportation out of Germany and had to take whatever was offered. Early in Hitler's power, they were allowed to bring with them unlimited clothing, some furniture and linens. Later on, they could leave with only one valise of clothes and ten marks in cash (\$2.50). However, Rudolf never sold any of his properties and still had the documents to prove ownership.

His first visit was to his apartment house, where he found his former superintendent sitting at the desk in his office. As Rudolf entered, the man paled as if seeing a ghost and could only blurt out, "What are you doing here, Mr. Maas?" Now Rudolf was six feet four in height, and his figure and bearing closely resembled that of General de Gaulle's. He roared back, "What are you doing sitting at MY desk? Get out!" The man was terrified and flew out of the building, not even stopping to grab his hat and jacket. Retrieving his factory was also readily accomplished, but did not offer the same dramatic confrontation.



Liesel and Rudolf Maas

Rudolf continued to run both businesses once more until, after many years, he tired of the long commute between New York and Wiesbaden. He eventually sold all his holdings in Germany and spent the remainder of his days in New York with his time divided between his family and, once again, the stock market.

## By The Skin of Their Teeth

By Edith Maas Mendel

Werner and Lotte Maas had a good life in Berlin. He was a highly regarded lawyer who was eventually appointed to the bench, while Lotte supervised the running of more than a hundred shops they owned. These shops carried women's intimate wear, blouses, etc., and were scattered in towns and cities throughout Germany.



Lotte Neumann Maas

impossible to close up all their stores, dispose of their possessions and sell their home in such a hurry.

A second warning from Mr. Straus was more urgent and Werner's response was to remind his cousin that his countrymen were not the barbarians he had alluded to, but were the people of Beethoven and Goethe. A third warning from Jesse reminded Werner that in his government position he was privy to much information that was not available to the average person. Werner should not argue or quibble, but MUST get out of Germany immediately.

Jesse's warning had alerted them to pay closer attention to what was going on around them and they finally decided to follow their cousin's advice. First of all, they sent their twin sons out of the country. Egon went to England and Kurt (Kenneth) to France. Then they proceeded to dispose of their holdings as rapidly and as quietly as possible. Things moved along well and all the necessary arrangements were made for their trip to France, where they planned to stay until their visas were in order for their entry into the United States. However, France was not accepting any more refugees at that point. In order for them to gain admission there, their son Kenneth joined the French Foreign Legion. French law permitted residence for the families of soldiers. So all was set for their departure from Germany.

Of course, they heard the rumblings of vicious anti-Semitism in the country, but these unpleasant incidents never seemed to touch them personally. Thus, they were amazed to receive a letter from their cousin, Jesse Isidor Straus, urging them to leave Germany as quickly as possible. At that time, Mr. Straus was the American Ambassador to France. Werner's response was to point out that it was

Just two days before their leaving, the Gestapo stormed their home and brought Werner to a huge commercial loft that contained hundreds of cots. He was told to find an empty one but, after a search, he reported to the guards that they were all occupied. A guard offered to find one for him. He then walked up and down the rows of cots, shot an old man and announced to Werner that he now had a cot.

This took place before the concentrations camps and gas chambers were up and running and bribery was still possible. Werner later told us that he then bought the most expensive "postage stamp" in his life: \$1200 to get a note delivered to Lotte. With more money changing hands, they made arrangements for his escape, a place to meet and to quickly leave Germany.

They wondered how the Gestapo became aware of their original plans and later learned that their "faithful" maid, who had been with their family for seventeen years, had notified the authorities.

I don't know how long it took for all of them to safely reach the United States, nor do I know what their lives were like during the interim between leaving Germany and coming here, but I do remember that when our country entered the war, both Kenneth and Egon were in the U. S. Army.

Unfortunately, Werner somehow could not make the adjustment. He took his own life. His wife found employment in many and varied fields and finally worked for my husband (Bill Mendel). He said she was intelligent, capable and conscientious; a real gem. The two sons married most happily. Kenneth had two sons. Egon's only child, a son, died in his twenties.



Egon and Kurt Maas

Werner, Lotte and their sons have all passed away by now, but we treasured our friendship with these bright, highly cultured and charming relatives.

A note from Joan Adler: Egon once told me that he spent the duration of the war playing chess in an alien detention camp on the Isle of Mann.

## Lifelines

By Edith Maas Mendel

Affidavits. Affidavits. Those precious papers were the lifelines for those Jews still caught in Nazi Germany and desperate to reach the safety of this country. Jewish groups, organizations, temples and synagogues banded together to sign multiple affidavits. But there were never enough to fill the unending and

tragic need. They were desperately sought and not easy to come by.

In filling out an affidavit one had to swear that he or she was a relative of the applicant and would guarantee that this person would not be dependent on public funds in any way for the first five years after arriving in the USA. By that time, the immigrant could have become an American citizen and the obligation for the person who signed the affidavit would be at an end. Given the fact that this country was still in the depth of the Depression, that was no small obligation to assume.

All of our relatives who needed to get out of Germany had already left. When frantic friends and even patients in ultimate despair begged my father to sign affidavits for members of their families, he did not have the heart to refuse. He was fully aware that it was his signature or their lives. Mother was a little more timid. The possibility of being financially responsible for all these people did not bother her as much as the false testimony. Not only lying, but lying to the GOVERNMENT! Swearing that all these people were relatives when they were total strangers. That made her extremely uneasy.



Dr. Max A. Maas and his wife Emma

But when the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> affidavit was signed, Uncle Sam stepped into the picture. Mother and Dad were instructed to report to a certain official at the U.S. Department of Labor. This gentleman had stacks of information about Dr. and Mrs. Maas on his desk and the relationship of those whom Dad was bringing over was of little interest to him. He informed Dad that they had been examining his income tax returns and there was no way he could support all those people on his income. Dad had to admit that such might be the case, but the people he was signing for were hard-working, well-educated, and would soon be self-supporting in the fields of medicine or business or science or teaching or research, etc. The official was skeptical and loath to have foreigners take work away from American doctors or businessmen or scientists, teachers or researchers. After much discussion, he relented with the proviso that Dad would put \$5,000 into the bank for every refugee he brought over in the future. And the account had to be exclusively in the name of that person. Not an account held in trust or in joint names, but under the complete control of the immigrant. Four such accounts were established before World War II broke out and all further contacts came to an end.

Jobs were almost impossible to obtain at that point. My Dad did his best to help out. He would take a refugee in his car when he made calls. If the patient owned a shop or a factory, etc., Dad would inquire if he could use a nice, bright, honest man anywhere in his business. Then he would call the refugee into the

house and introduce him. It worked a couple of times. These were desperate people and they gratefully accepted any kind of work. Men who were lawyers or scientists, ending up cleaning machinery in a factory. Women who formerly had beautiful homes and household help, found themselves trudging from house to house with pitiful trays of pins, needles, thread, talcum powder, etc., begging anyone who answered the door to buy at least one item. Many went into domestic service. It was a rough time. But at least those refugees living in our area never had a doctor's bill to pay. For many years, until they "got on their feet," Dad never charged them.

With time, things got better. The war effort eventually produced more employment, even for the foreign born. As for those 18 affidavits he signed and the bank accounts he opened for people he didn't even know: my father never lost a cent!

## The Family of Lotte Stern

by Joan Adler

Lotte Stern is a relative of Sarah Lavanburg, Oscar Straus' wife. She told me that she and her mother came to the United States in 1936. The American Consulate refused to issue a visa for her father because he was severely injured fighting with the Germans in World War I.

Lotte and her mother went to see their cousin Roger W. Straus Jr. to ask him if he would send an affidavit for her father. He did and that's how Lotte's father was able to come to America in 1937. Lotte's father begged his parents, Oskar and Sara Hahn, to come over as well. They refused, stating that nothing would happen to them. They were transported to Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia on September 24, 1942 and died in October or November of the same year. Their Page of Testimony can be found at the Yad Vashem website, [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org).

If you know of a family member who perished in the Holocaust and who has not been remembered in the February or August 2006 issue of the Straus Historical Society's newsletter, please let me know. If you have not submitted a Page of Testimony for any relative who died during the Holocaust, please do so or ask me to do it for you.

## International Tracing Service Bad Arolsen, Germany

An additional source of information about people involved in the Holocaust, not only those who died, is the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, Germany. ITS holds several million records that have not been released to the public. After years of public protest and diplomatic pressure, the board of directors of ITS has finally agreed to allow public access to these records.

Early reports suggest that this might be the treasure trove of Holocaust research. Not only do the files contain the names of people who died, they also contain detailed information about them during this time period. Once these records are released I will do my best to obtain all the information about the family that is available.

## 2745 Broadway

### The Home of the Isidor Straus Family

As you all know by now, Straus Park was named to honor the memory of Isidor and Ida Straus who died April 15, 1912 in the Titanic disaster. The reason this location was chosen was because Isidor and Ida owned a house on one acre of land on the corner of West 105<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway.

The Strauses were health conscious and felt the air was better for their family in the country. In the very early 1880's they bought a country house on Bottom Road in Inwood, NY near the northernmost tip of Manhattan. They didn't remain there for very long because Ida felt it was too isolated.

In 1883 they bought a house at 2745 Broadway at West 105<sup>th</sup> Street from Nathaniel Meyers. It was built by Matthew Brennan, a city fireman who later became allied with William M. "Boss" Tweed. The Strauses were the third owners. There, Isidor and Ida and their six children were far enough uptown that the Strauses felt the air would be healthy during the hot summer months but close enough to "the store" so that Isidor could get to work in a reasonable amount of time. This section was known as Bloomingdale.

Reginald Wright Kaufman wrote a biography of Jesse Isidor Straus, Isidor and Ida's oldest child. Mr. Kaufman described the area: "At that remote period, there existed no thoroughfare from Broadway to Riverside Drive – were, in fact, mighty few streets in the neighborhood. The Straus farm (for farm it really was) extended uninterrupted, save for a small lane, from West End Avenue to upper Broadway (there and then call "Grand Boulevard") and ran northward to a rustic development known as Woodlawn, somewhere about One Hundred and Tenth Street.

"A single bobtail car, a one-horse streetcar line, passed up and down the Grand Boulevard – the "Green Car Line" – and another paralleled the fence on One Hundred and Fifth Street. But from New York proper you could best get there by taking the steam-elevated, opened in the Centennial Year, to One Hundred and Fourth Street, and what is now Columbus Avenue – was Ninth Avenue." Isidor took this route and was driven the remainder of the way home by his coachman Patrick Mac Dermott. Jesse often met his father at One Hundred and Fourth Street and accompanied him home from work.

Jesse described the long and icy hills in the neighborhood where the children would be able to sleigh ride without worrying about traffic of any kind.

2745 Broadway was described by Christopher Gray in his *New York Times* article as "a clapboard, Italianate-style building with a mansard roof, particularly ornate dormers and a six-sided cu-

pola on top, all topped with a spiky iron cresting." One could see the cupola from as far away as the Eighty-first Street L-station. There were porches on both the front and back of the house. The front porch was glass enclosed.

Howard Matson of Westport CT wrote, in a "Letter to the Editor" of the *New York Times*, "The property was described as having an apple orchard, a small baseball field, pear trees, chicken coups, a barn with cows and goats and a stable. The frame and brick house, with its cupola, was painted brownish-gray, and at the time of the Titanic sinking in 1912 was covered profusely with wisteria vines. A circular driveway enclosed a cast-iron fountain was built by Matthew Brennan."



As one entered through the front gate a divided path led visitors to a high flight of stone steps and onto the front porch where the house's front door was centered. A front hallway at least twenty yards long cut straight through the house. On the left there was the library, the dining room and the pantry. On the right there was a drawing room and billiard room, a rarity for that period.

Isidor's brother Nathan and his friend, New York City mayor, Hugh Grant kept their horses, trotters, in the stable. They raced them on The Speedway, which is now Harlem River Drive.

Isidor received letters from H. P. Copeland of the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company in early 1884 describing the cost of putting in a phone line at 2745 Broadway. Mr. Copeland wrote, "The price per annum for connecting your house 105<sup>th</sup> Street & Grand Boulevard, with the Harlem Exchange is \$108. Nine dollars per month on a contract for one year. To talk with New York City subscribers a toll of ten cents for each five minutes, or fraction, is charged, for the use of the wires connecting New York City and Harlem Exchanges." A further letter states, "... the price per annum for connecting your residence cor. 105<sup>th</sup> St & Boulevard with the New York Exchange system would be \$336. This apparently high rental is accounted for by having to run so long a wire from your house to the nearest central office of the New York Exchange system. For a private telephone line connecting a house in 49<sup>th</sup> St bet, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> avenues (or 8<sup>th</sup> Ave & Bway) with your residence above named, the yearly rental would be \$445 on a contract for one year." The house Isidor wanted to be connected with was at 220 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street, where his father Lazarus, brother Oscar, brother Nathan and his family and sister Hermine and her family all lived.

The country's first indoor porcelain bathtub was installed in the second floor bathroom at 2745 Broadway. It was so heavy that the room's floor had to be reinforced, requiring a six-inch

step up to gain entrance to the room. In later years a flood was described leaving more than two inches of water on the floors throughout the house.

One can only imagine that the Straus children enjoyed the relative freedom of their time at 105<sup>th</sup> Street. Here Riverside Park was only two blocks away. And descriptions of the neighborhood during that period allow one to imagine fields and parks and open land for restless children to explore freely.

After the sinking of Titanic, Isidor's body was recovered and returned to New York.

The funeral was delayed in the hope that Ida's body would also be recovered. A private service for the family was held at the 105<sup>th</sup> Street house, which was filled with floral arrangements sent by a grieving public wishing to honor Isidor and Ida's memory.



Lazarus Straus  
on the porch of 2745 Broadway

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, after it became clear that Ida's body would not be recovered, almost on month after the disaster, a public memorial was held at Carnegie Hall. More than 6,000 mourners attended the funeral. Ten days later the 105<sup>th</sup> Street property was sold to real estate developer Harry Schiff. Clebourne Apartments was built on the site. It was completed in the fall of 1913.

The Straus home at 2745 Broadway was one of the last country houses to survive. Perhaps, like the sinking of Titanic, its destruction also symbolized the end of an era.

Today, neighbors remember Isidor and Ida Straus with the lovely tribute to them, Straus Park, only a short block from the site of the Straus' home. The Park was dedicated April 12, 1915. The committee that planned the Park decided that the lovely sculpture, "Memory," was more fitting than a sculptured likeness of the Strauses. Memory overlooked a reflecting pool for many years. Family members used to visit the Park and float pink carnations in the water in memory of Isidor, who wore a pink carnation in his lapel every day at R. H. Macy's.

Today a flower bed has replaced the pool. And flowers are planted and maintained by the Park's gardener, John Olund. Friends of Straus Park, a community based organization, holds regular events in the Park. A list of them may be found on page eleven of this newsletter along with an article and photos about recent events. Everyone is invited to visit the Park and to attend one of FSP's events.



## The Straus Family and Their Friends Trip to Germany September 13 - 19, 2006

On September 13, 2006 a group of Straus family members and their friends will meet in Germany for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is sponsoring a trip to the towns in southwestern Germany where the Straus family originated. Alan F. Hockstader and Joan Adler worked with Dr. Wolfgang Grams of the Routes to Roots organization in Germany to plan the tour. Historians Dr. Roland Paul, Dr. Hans Steinebrei and Karen S. Franklin of New York's Leo Baeck Institute will accompany the group as well as add their historical perspective to the visit. I will provide the link between the family's origins in Germany and the lives of those who emigrated to the United States.

An especially exciting day has been planned for Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, when the group will be in Otterberg. In Otterberg, we will visit the homes of Salomon,

Lazarus and Isaak Straus, see the Straus cradle, learn about the family's activities in the cattle and grain trade, and visit the old synagogue and the site of the mikve (ritual bathhouse). We will also learn about Napoleon's influence on German Jewish culture at that time and Lazarus Straus' involvement in local politics and the 1848 uprising in the Palatinate which influenced Lazarus to leave Otterberg. He left for America in 1852 via the French town of Saargemünd with a French passport.

The Mayor of Otterberg has invited us to a welcome lunch and following ceremony at which time the city will re-name a square in honor of the Straus family and its heritage. We will be special guests at that ceremony.



The arrow points to the Rheinpfalz area of Germany where the Straus family originated, and where the group will be visiting

By the time you receive this newsletter the group should be in Germany. Look for an article about our trip to Germany in the next issue of the newsletter. It will be published at the end of February 2007.

## Friends of Straus Park

By Al Berr  
Edited by Joan Adler

The 9th Annual Straus Park Commemorative Celebration was scheduled for April 22<sup>nd</sup> with a rain date of April 23<sup>rd</sup>. For the first time in FSP's history, it rained on both the scheduled date and the rain date.

This was a difficult year to hold outdoor events in Straus Park. Almost all of our planned events were rained out. Unfortunately, we were unable to reschedule the Commemorative Celebration and the Concert in the Park. We hope for better weather next year.

We combined Photography in the Park, which was rained out on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> and the Book Fair, and held both on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Finally, we were blessed with perfect weather.

This was the first time that we combined the Book event with the Photography event and it turned out to be a successful combination. A nearby independent bookstore, Labyrinth, had a table. The new high-rise apartment building across the street from the Park contributed books from its tenants. Some of the photographers told us that they were pleased at the responses and, of course, the sales. All in all, it was a good day for Friends of Straus Park.

We are looking forward to our premier event, the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Art in the Park: A day-long celebration of art, music, dance and food scheduled for Saturday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, rain date Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>. We hope you will join us at this wonderful neighborhood festival. If past years are any indication, this should be one of the best events of the year. All we need is for the weather to cooperate and for you to participate.

**Saturday, October 14<sup>th</sup>**  
**(rain date October 15<sup>th</sup>)**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Annual Art in the Park**  
**A day-long celebration of**  
**art, music, dance & food**  
**11:00 am to 5:00 pm**

Photograph by Harold P. Kurzman, Jr.



Book Fair  
and  
Photography Event

Four photographs  
by  
Margie Kavanau



## E.Mail Addresses Please

If you have an e.mail address but have not received an e.mail from the Straus Historical Society, Inc. in the past six months, it means we do not have your current contact information. As the cost of postage increases, the Society has decided to send as much information as possible, including notices of future events, via e.mail. The savings is substantial.

Please send an e.mail to:

**info@straushistoricalsociety.org**

and update your contact profile. Your current street address, phone, and fax would also be helpful.

The newsletter is mailed to almost 400 people. Every one returned for incorrect street address costs us money. Please help us to function more efficiently and cost-effectively by supplying the Society with your current contact information. And, if you change it, let us know.



## An Internship at the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

I recently met with Dr. John J. Regazzi, dean of the College of Information and Computer Science, and with Mary Westermann-Cicio, assistant dean of the Palmer School of Library and Information Science at C. W. Post. We discussed the possibility of the Society working with an intern from their program to clear up the backlog of records waiting to be added to our collection,, and to organize and digitize the Society's archives.

Dr. Regazzi and Mary Westermann-Cicio were unfamiliar with the Society. After telling them about our mission and what we have accomplished, both felt certain that this was the kind of project that would lend itself to their internship program.

An application for an intern has been submitted to the Palmer School. Our long term goal is to get the material in the archives digitized and on-line so that it will be available to scholars, researchers, students and the interested public.

## New Information - Contributions to the Society

The board of directors has decided to make a payment plan available to anyone wishing to contribute to the Society but feels that quarterly or monthly contributions would be better for them than one annual contribution.

If you wish to donate in this manner, please contact me and we will work out the details of your own particular requirements. Contact information may be found on the side-bar of page two and in the right hand column of page twelve.

## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

"The Autobiography of Isidor Straus" privately published by Sara Straus Hess, in softcover - \$40.00

"Genealogical Miscellany" a family genealogy compiled by Robert K. Straus with addenda - \$40.00

Large black & white photograph of the Isidor and Ida Straus family taken at Elberon NJ in 1905 - \$40.00

Masters Thesis of Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus." West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1947 - \$25.00

Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. A receipt will be issued for your purchase. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistoricalsociety.org

## Straus Historical Society's Newsletters Are Available On-line

Past issues of the Straus Historical Society's newsletters are posted on our website on the Archives page.  
[www.straushistoricalsociety.org/archives.php](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org/archives.php)

Each newsletter is in pdf format and requires Adobe Acrobat to view. If you do not have it, you can download Acrobat without charge.  
[www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html)

Several additional articles, and many photographs are also posted on the Archives page. Check back frequently as newsletters, articles and photographs will be added on a continuing basis. If you would like a paper copy of past issues of the newsletter, they are also available for purchase at \$5.00 per issue.

## You Are Invited

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board. Attendance can be in person or by conference call.

The next meeting will be held Thursday, October 5, 2006 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman, 129 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street, New York at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board or to contribute to the Society.

This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in the Straus Historical Society may have an opportunity to participate and to share his/her views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul A. Kurzman 212-452-7035 for further information.