



# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 23 Number 2

Straus is the German word for ostrich

February 2022

## Jack Straus and His Music

I learned of Jack Isidor Straus' interest in music when I first started working with the Straus family. That was in 1990. I found a large valise in the Macy's archives that contained a paper mâché sculpture of Jack sitting at a piano. Bob Straus, Jack's brother, explained that Jack was an excellent musician/pianist who probably would have preferred a career in music rather than working at Macy's. Bob's daughter Penelope Shandra-Chakar wrote, "My father, his younger brother, said that Jack could go to a Broadway show and come home and play the whole score by memory and ear."

I have been working with the Straus family for thirty one years, and in that time we have amassed a large collection of papers, photographs, books and artifacts by and about family members. But nothing rivals this wonderful paper mâché sculpture of Jack sitting at a piano.

And so, when a recent SHS Twitter post started a communication with Phil and Denise Toohey of Bainbridge Island, WA, we were excited to learn that they owned an original piece of sheet music written by Jack. They offered to send it to us if we were interested. Of course, we were. Phil is Jack's grandson, the son of Jack's daughter Patricia.



Jesse Isidor Straus II was born in New York City on January 13, 1900. He was the second child of Jesse Isidor and Irma Nathan Straus. Shortly after his grandparents Isidor and Ida died in the Titanic disaster in 1912, Jesse's name was changed to Isidor Straus. Then, in 1929, he again changed his name, this time to Jack Isidor Straus.

Jack grew up at 720 Park Avenue in a building the family called the Straus Apartment Building. Jack's father Jesse built it and 730 Park Avenue in the late 1920s after he was denied rental in a similar building because he was Jewish. Jesse's three children, Beatrice, Jack and Robert, all had apartments in the building and their children grew up there.

After graduating from Harvard College in 1921, Jack began his career at R.H. Macy & Company, the family concern. Jesse was the oldest of Isidor and Ida's three sons and the president of Macy's when Jack joined the firm. It was clear from the outset that he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps.

Jack's son Kenneth Hollister Straus began writing his autobiography in 1991. What resulted was *Reflections*, which was privately published several years later. Much of what I have learned about Jack's early years came from the wonderful stories Ken wrote in his book. "Dad love the piano. During his years at Harvard, it proved most, if not all, of his extracurricular activity. He was a member of the Hasty Pudding and the leader of the Harvard Orchestra. He often reported having told his father that he was going to enter the world of music rather than Macy's. His father said, "No," in the years when one did not argue with one's parent. As history shows, Jack made the most of both."

Jack accepted his father's direction and excelled at his profession. In 1926 he had become executive vice president of Macy's, a director by 1928 and on the executive committee and president by 1929 at the age of 29. In 1931 Jack's father, Jesse Isidor, was appointed chairman of TERA (Temporary Emergency Relief Administration) by then NYS Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. With little preparation, Jack was required to take over his father's executive duties at Macy's. In 1932, Jesse was appointed U.S. Ambassador to France, a position he held until his death in 1936. While

his father was away from the firm doing diplomatic work, Jack devoted himself wholeheartedly to R.H. Macy & Co., often at the expense of his family.

Sometime before 1900, Jesse and Irma bought a large house in Mt. Kisco, in Westchester County, NY. They called their house Northview. Once their daughter Beatrice married Robert Levy, she built a house on the property and then Jack and his wife Margaret (Peggy) Hollister Straus also built a house there once they married in 1924. Jack called his house



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

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

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**A Message from  
SHS Board Chair  
David H. Kurzman**



We were pleased to award four SHS scholarship in 2021, and SHS plans to award an additional four scholarships in 2022. The judges are hard at work reviewing the pool of 56 applications from accomplished and deserving graduate students who are planning a career in public service. We will announce the winners of the four 2022 SHS Scholarships at the end of April. We would not be able to award them without your support, which is very much appreciated.

Joan Adler's talks are in demand. She spoke about the relationship of Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr. at a Zoom meeting in February. She will be giving a talk, Write What You Know, to the Jewish Genealogical Society of San Diego on March 18th and to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Oregon on September 18th. Joan finds Zoom talks are a great way to reach a larger audience. SHS plans to continue our presentation schedule via Zoom for the foreseeable future.

We have engaged the services to three interns, university students who are majoring in history. They will be working on our digitization projects.

Social media has become even more important during the pandemic. SHS hosts a Facebook page that regularly posts interesting articles and photographs as well as announcing upcoming events. SHS recently created Instagram and Twitter accounts where companion posts keep even more people informed of Straus history as well as upcoming events. Visit us frequently - and like us.

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When we published the SHS newsletter last August, we were excitedly anticipating the relaxation of COVID restrictions and a return to normalcy. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Your continued support during these difficult times is most gratifying. It shows us that our work has value to you.

Delta, and then Omicron, have prevented our full return to normal office activities. But we have continued to work on our important projects, even in this time of isolation. Although we have not hosted scholars, researchers or authors in the office for several months, we are still working hard to provide them with the information they request as they write or produce their books, articles and videos.

And so, while it seemed as though the world stopped for a while, we have been busy. However, the work of SHS, and its programs, can only continue with your support. Please consider making a contribution of any amount in support of our projects. You can donate to a specific fund, like the Morse Grant, the scholarship program or the digitization initiative, or donate to the general fund. All donations are important, and welcome. We would also enjoy hearing from you about how we are doing: what you like about the Society and its projects, what is of interest to you, and what new projects you would like us to undertake. Let us hear from you.

Noview. These were their weekend and summer homes. After commuting back to the city for several years, Jack decided to relocate to Long Island. The commute was easier and he had more room for his now perquisite two pianos in the living/music room.

In his book, Ken wrote that Jack was very tired when he came home from work. He and his wife Peggy would have a cocktail and then dinner together, all in silence. Ken never knew if Jack was troubled or just mentally addressing a work problem. Weekends were a different matter. There was always something to do somewhere on both Friday and Saturday nights. The core of every party was music.

At some point the Howard twins came into their lives. Both were lawyers and both played the piano. In fact, they had been playing together since they were six years old. They sat on the same bench; Norm played the bass and Henry played treble. They could imitate anyone's style and run circles around the professionals who, on occasion, were invited guests. Those evenings had a standard pattern; cocktails, dinner and music. Anyone and everyone who could play well enough was invited to take turns and even some who had more scotch than skill were permitted a tune or two.

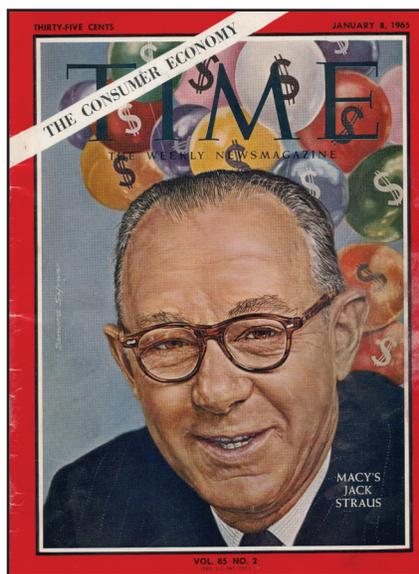
Jack had two pianos in the music room so the twins were able to accompany anyone. These musical evenings continued throughout most of Jack's life. He became acquainted with the Hollywood crowd and several well-known stars became frequent guests: Walter Wagner and Joan Bennett, Robert Montgomery, Stu Erwin, George Murphy, Ann Southern, Dick Powell and his wife June Allison. Powell started his career as a saxophonist in a dance band and could play all the reed instruments. June became an overnight success playing and singing the ingénue role in the Broadway musical "Best Foot Forward." Roger Kahn, who could play every instrument but the strings, would load his station wagon with his collection of horns and bring them to Jack and Peggy's house. The Howard twins would accompany any of them on piano and Jack and Roger took the other. Dick Powell played the clarinet and June would sing.

Ken wrote about the visits of Lionel Hampton and his wife Gladys. On these occasions, Jack rented a vibraphone for Lionel who sometimes brought his bass player whom he called Stinky. One can only imagine the jam sessions that took place on those nights.

In 1932, Jesse's children, Beatrice, Jack, and Bob produced a movie congratulating their father on the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Son-in-law Robert Levy wrote a poem and the lyrics for music that was written and played by Jack. The sheet music was "Introduced and Featured by Jesse Isidor Straus, The Mooning Crooner of West 34<sup>th</sup> Street." The song written by Jack is called "Everybody Excellent Love." This was a

phrase used by many members of the family to sign off when sending telegrams to each other. Beatrice and Jack's children also performed in the movie. Barbara, Jessica and Gerald Levy, Pat and Ken Straus gave performances: on the piano, violin, recited poems in English and German and sang a song. We are fortunate that a copy of this movie, with other family movie clips attached, was donated to SHS many years ago. Although the quality of the film is not great, this 90 year old movie is a real treasure.

In my recent conversations with Phil and Denise Toohey to arrange for the donation of the sheet music, which is called "Tea Time," Phil told me that Jack and Peggy owned three houses; one at 19 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in NYC, another called Crow's Nest in Oyster Bay on Long Island and a third at Boca Grande in FL. In each house Jack had two pianos in the living/music room. When Jack passed away in 1985, his daughter Pat inherited one of the pianos and, upon her passing, it was sent to Phil who lived in Napa CA. He also received the piano bench that was covered with a handmade needlepoint bench cushion that was created by his grandmother Peg (Margaret Hollister Straus). Inside this bench Phil found the sheet music for "Tea Time" that was written by Jack.



Having no musical background of my own, I asked some of the family members who are in the music field to help me learn something about it. Joseph Nathan Straus, a Distinguished Professor of Music Theory at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York wrote, "It's a song. I'm not sure why the words are not written in, but it's a song for a woman's voice with piano accompaniment. It's in a somewhat jazzy, Great American Songbook style, including an introduction for piano alone, a verse (where the voice sings lightly and rapidly), and a chorus (which he labels "refrain"), which has the main lyrical tune. By style I'd guess 1940s

or 1950s." Joe continued, "This is not a musical repertoire I know well. It is possible that this is not an original song but a transcription of a published song that he liked and wanted to write down. It's really pretty good, as far as I can tell – musically skillful and a nice tune. It's by someone who knows what he is doing."

We are looking to have someone play this music and record it. Once that is done, we will post the recording on our website so that you can enjoy it for years to come.

We are indebted to Denise and Phil Toohey for donating to SHS the sheet music for "Tea Time." And, for starting us on a journey of discovery about Jack's musical talent. It has been fun putting the pieces together. We are hoping others will consider donating their artifacts, and information about them, to SHS. They will be archivally preserved and stored for future generations.

# Kenneth Hollister Straus

## Macy Executive and Fire Department Enthusiast

When writing the newsletter article about Jack Straus and his passion for music, I kept thinking about how sad it was that Jack wanted to pursue a career in music, but did not, because his father required him to work in the family business, R.H. Macy & Company. It was more common in those days (early 20<sup>th</sup> century and before) for boys to obey their parent's wishes than it is today, and for parents to require that their sons follow in their footsteps, at least professionally. Jack managed to play the piano throughout his life, and to write music from time to time. But his goal of becoming a professional musician was not to be.

While writing the article about Jack and his musical passion, I was reminded that, in 1993, I started working with Jack's son, Kenneth Hollister Straus who had decided to write his own autobiography at the urging of his son Tim. What immediately became apparent was that Ken would have preferred to become a firefighter than to work at Macy's. Like his father, he honored his father's wishes/demands and had a long career at Macy's, the family firm. And, like his father, who never lost his passion for music, Ken never lost his passion for firefighting. Moreover, like his father, he was able to maintain/sustain/merge the two throughout his lifetime.

Ken's career at R.H. Macy & Co. was long and successful. After returning to the U.S. from military service in the European Theater in 1945, he attended New York University's School of Retailing and then joined Macy's in 1947. Jack made it clear that Ken would have no advantages and would have to start at the bottom and work his way up. Ken was hired into Macy's Training Squad. It took approximately nine months to complete the course. He was assigned to various departments to perform different functions. He spent most of that time in merchandising and management positions. Based on his talents and interests, he was assigned as a junior assistant buyer in the fabric department. This began his long career in the buying office within Macy's.

In 1957 Ken attended Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program. Although he found the course work difficult, he thoroughly enjoyed his interaction with the other members of the program and maintained his relationship with many of them after his graduation from the program. By the time Ken retired from Macys in 1985, he was serving on the board of directors, and was chairman and chief executive officer of the corporate buying office.

In 1993, I started working with Ken on his autobiography. It was a wonderful task that took many years to complete. Ken learned late in life that he was dyslexic and that his failure to enjoy reading or academics most likely stemmed from this disability. Once he learned to use the computer, it freed him.

But he never got over his insecurity. That's where I came in.

Ken told me, or wrote, stories about his life. I would write up the stories he told me or edit the ones he wrote himself. We generally worked together in his home office where the shelves along one wall were filled with fire department mementoes and antiques. It became clear very early on in this process that Ken would have preferred talking and writing about the fire department and had to be drawn back to stories about his very long and successful career at Macy's. He seemed most alive, and enjoyed telling me fire department stories more than any others. I learned about his specially equipped car with its detachable flashing lights that could be affixed to the roof when he was going to a fire. The car had a siren and radio transmitter. It also had a powerful engine, all of which allowed him to race through NYC's congested streets, even when traffic was almost at a standstill.



Since Ken was writing his autobiography, I asked about his early years. He reported that he was born in NYC on February 18, 1925 to Jack Isidor and Margaret Hollister Straus. He was their first child and only son. Sisters Patricia and Pamela followed.

One of Ken's earliest memories was of being taken to the site of the New York City Fire Department Training School. He was about four years old. He wrote, "I remember a large courtyard with apparatus either parked or in use at various locations. I can still visualize the firemen climbing their ladders which were leaning against a building that was used for training purposes. There were always lots of hose and lots of water. Someone barked out orders and this resulted in much activity. Most of all I remember the engines. Oh, how colorful, powerful, shiny and noisy they were." Ken felt that this was the nexus of his lifelong fascination with firefighting, a passion that never waned.

When I first met Ken, he wore three pagers on this belt and had a radio transmitter in his home and one in his office so that he could keep informed of the doings in the fire department. If a large fire was occurring, he would leave his office and join the members of fire and police departments at the site. His specially equipped car, a Crown Victoria, allowed him to race to the scene of any major fire event while all the time following the transmissions from the dispatcher along the way.

Ken's first involvement with firefighting was in 1950 when Ken and his wife, Elizabeth Browne (Chou) moved from NYC to Jericho on Long Island. During their years there, Ken was a member of the town's volunteer fire department and drove their Ward Le France Pumper.

After they moved back to the city, he became a member of The Fire Bell Club; a group of buffs, men and women who have an interest in some aspect of firefighting. Some were apparatus buffs. Others were photographers. Still others were interested in the history of the service and its antiques. Ken was interested in the strategy and the fight.

The fire department issues the Buffs a badge through which they are recognized by both the fire department and the police. They also receive a Fire Line Card that allows them entry through established fire lines. These privileges enabled Ken to get to know many of the commissioners and chiefs. He believed that led to his eventual appointment to honorary official status. He was appointed Honorary Deputy Chief in 1958 and by 1963 he had risen through the ranks and was appointed Honorary Commissioner. In 1966 he was appointed trustee of the Honor Emergency Fund, a position he held for thirty years, and for which he served as vice chairman for about ten. The fund was established to provide financial assistance to both the uniformed and civilian members of the department and their immediate families at times of crisis and financial need.

Ken wrote, "My interest in firefighting and my affection for firemen is not curbed by international borders. I am privileged to have visited the headquarters or training facilities of the fire departments or brigades in London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Delhi.

"My interest in and acceptance by the firefighting fraternity has always been an enigma to many. I believe my father (Jack) headed the list. He was totally without interest, or skills, when it came to anything mechanical or requiring tools. He had no interest in firefighting nor did he understand mine. I, on the other hand, had always been interested in the nuts and bolts.

"I would be a liar if I didn't say I get some enjoyment out of the excitement of responding to an alarm and the activity that takes place at a fire scene or other emergency. I enjoy the walkie-talkie reports and the orders as they are transmitted and received by the chiefs and the firefighters. I try to anticipate the instructions they might give and the moves they make when fighting the "Red Devil."

I have acquired much of what I know from being at the scene and observing. I've spent many hours in the back of firehouses listening to the chiefs and firemen rehash their experiences. All of this has allowed me to serve the department in a variety of ways. I have been asked by the Fire Chief and the Fire Commissioner to respond to major incidents and organize a group of responsible buffs willing to assist with crowd control and the organization of the press. I have, over the years, been an auxiliary dispatcher at the Fire Alarm Bureau in both

Brooklyn and Manhattan. I have been put to work by various chiefs who knew me and asked if I would temporarily act as their aide so they could use their firemen in other capacities. On more than one occasion, I was asked to help the medical teams assist in administering oxygen to firemen who had been overcome by smoke. I've even taken injured firemen to the hospital in my car."

Ken served as a director of the department's Fire Safety Education Fund and was executive director of the New York Fire Department Institute. He also served as the president of the Fire Foundation of New York and chaired the Honorary Fire Officers Selection Review Committee. He was past president and director of the Honorary Fire Officers Association. He wrote, "I feel privileged to have been accepted by the men of the FDNY. All my efforts have been labors of love."

After his retirement from Macy's in 1985, Ken was not ready to stop working and to relax. He now had the time to devote to his many other interests. Just about all of them were service oriented. He joined the National Service Executive Corps, an organization that matches skilled executive with short term

clients who are in need of some kind of guidance from a business executive. Ken took on seven different assignments between 1985 and 1991. He described his role as one of encouragement and support and reported that he thoroughly enjoyed them all, each in a different way depending on the need of the client and his ability to creatively help them.

Another of Ken's post-retirement activities was with Crime Stoppers. This is an organization that was developed to enable the public to help

the police and other crime prevention agencies without fear of reprisal. Crime Stoppers makes it easier for witnesses to anonymously volunteer information to the police. Ken was one of the founders of Crime Stoppers in New York City. Like the many other fire and police activities that interested him, Crime Stoppers became one of his consuming passions, and one of the organizations of which he was most proud. Once again, he wore a pager on his belt. This one kept him alerted to the many police department events that might require a response. During the period when we were working on his autobiography, Ken often referred to Crime Stoppers and kept his ear poised in case a report came through on one of his ever-present pagers.

Times have changed and, for the most part, sons are no longer required to follow in the footsteps of their father. We are pleased to present the two articles in this issue that clearly illustrates that, when faced with this dilemma, both Jack Straus and his son Ken found a way to follow their passion while still honoring the expectations of their father.



# Flora Stieglitz Straus - Part One

by Catherine Smith

Flora Stieglitz Straus was the wife of Hugh Grant Straus, son of Nathan and Lina Straus. Theirs was a long marriage, 1913-1955 that produced five children; three surviving to adulthood. Joan felt privileged to meet Flora shortly after she started working with the Straus family. Flora was already in her nineties but still sharp and active. She was very busy compiling a Straus family history and generous with her stories. She wrote a memoir, *Bits and Pieces*, that contained many tales about all the members of her family. Many of her accounts are about a time gone by that we can only imagine. We've found them so charming that we've decided to share some of them with you.

Leopold (Lee) Stieglitz was born in New Jersey. His German born parents sent him, along with his twin brother Julius, to Germany to study. Leopold played the violin, always an amateur, while Julius played the cello. Elisabeth (Lissie) Stieffel was invited to make a trio. She played the piano. She brought her older sister, Anna, who sang, and the four became friends. "When the young men left for their university studies, this relationship continued and became more ardent as they matured. When the possibility of Lee marrying Lissie loomed, Grossie, mother of the two girls, disapproved. They were a German family and she didn't want her Lissie to be far away in a strange country with a young American Jew, just a fledgling doctor. In order to test their feelings, she insisted that they not see each other, nor write to each other, for a year. This test proved their devotion. Letters and poems resumed and were voluminous indeed." Leopold and Lissie were married April 29, 1894 in New York.



Flora and Elizabeth Stieglitz  
About 1901

Uncle Julius married Anna Stieffel. He was a leading chemistry teacher at the University of Chicago. Their older brother Alfred Stieglitz, was a photographer and gained national recognition in the field as well as in the world of contemporary art. On her mother's side, Flora's grandfather was a professor of mathematics and was among the first to theorize that weather came in cycles. He published the first farmer's almanac.

Flora Stieglitz was born February 5, 1895 to Leopold and Elisabeth Stieffel Stieglitz in New York City. They lived in the only apartment house on Park Avenue at the time at 63<sup>rd</sup> Street. Theirs was both part doctor's office and part home, with the living room serving as the waiting room and the dining room as the office. Her father, a young doctor, delivered Flora himself in their home. She was premature, weighing only four pounds. She was named after her father's sister who had died in childbirth a few years prior. Flora wrote that she never liked her name, but was proud to be named after her beloved aunt.

Flora's sister, Elizabeth, was born two years later, and two years after that, the family moved to 60 East 65<sup>th</sup> Street. Flora wrote, "Nearby Park Avenue was a downgraded area with steam engines spewing steam and black smoke as they rumbled through the tunnel. Then it was lined by small houses with shops at street level and almost tenement-like small apartments above...I fell asleep hearing the night noises that echoed on our quiet street and I awoke to the clip-clop of the horses and the rattle of the milk bottles which were delivered in the morning. I remember the iceman with his great big squares of ice that he carried into the house and how the coal rattled down the chute into our cellar for the furnace."

"We did a great deal of looking out the window...By day, we could see directly opposite us a double apartment house, the Essex and the Sussex...A little farther west was a handsome double house, which I learned much later belonged to the Roosevelt family, with Sara Delano Roosevelt on one side, and Franklin, Eleanor and their children on the other. I remember first watching the carriage with two handsome horses, a fat coachman and a spry footman driving up. Later, an electric brougham, and still later, a regular automobile town car came to their door."

Until she was four years old, Flora only spoke German, as her parents did. Then, they all switched to English. Their mother was very close to the children, though they did have nurses and later a so-called governess. She remembered, "On some Sunday afternoons at home, when the maid was off and the weather bad, mother would take down her long hair and tie it with a big blue bow. She would pin up her skirt which touched

the ground and sit on the floor to play with us two girls and our dolls. We glowed with pleasure."

Flora started school when she was six, entering first grade. Her mother had carefully guided her and her sister's kindergarten experiences learned from their German aunts. At the end of her second year, she became ill with an acute strep throat that consequently infected her kidneys. Her father kept her home in bed for the rest of the winter and each year after, she developed a severe sore throat with recurring complications. She never went back to school and was educated at home by various "Ethical Culture" teachers. Her sister was kept home as well.

"My parents were not strict and were very modern in their attitudes. Of course, there were certain rules, most of them were 'health rules,' and you could interpret all of life in terms of health – what you wore, what you ate, when you went to bed, when you got up. In general, there was no real discipline but rather kindly discussion about procedures, and I

had a feeling of cooperation throughout my childhood. As an invalid, I was especially loved. My father's pet name for me was Flora-Girlie or Fleurchen and I felt very secure in the love and support of both parents."

Flora wrote that her father kept his professional charges exceedingly low. He never wanted a patient to forego the services of a doctor because of the cost and he affiliated with smaller hospitals that had low-income patients to whom he gave his advice freely. He started life with no resources himself except his earnings but he made very careful investments.

Flora's mother had grown up living very modestly and managed their house frugally while at the same time showing great kindness to less privileged friends and family. Her mother was very forward thinking. She invited Flora, at the age of thirteen, to march in the Second Suffragette Parade in New York City. "She invited me to go along with her but I was too shy at thirteen to be seen in any parade. So, I stood on the sidelines at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 34<sup>th</sup> Street and waved at my mother as she marched by with the other 'liberated' women, led by Inez Milholland riding a white horse."

Flora's family visited her grandparents often and every Sunday, her aunts hosted a family dinner. They summered as a family on Lake George. She remembered fondly, "My sister and I lived in a room above the kitchen and I recall hearing the old cook, Katie, arriving downstairs at five in the morning to bake fresh bread for the family breakfast...Most of our food was delivered directly to the house. The butter-egg-chicken man would rattle up in his wagon. There was also the fish man, a vegetable man, and a butcher, each making the rounds of the lake shore estates on certain fixed days of the week...When I was about nine-years old, I was allowed to drive down to the village with the old coachman, Fred Varnum, using the old buggy and grandfather's gentlest horse.

I was proud when I could hold the reins on this important trip. The road was dirt, later blacktop, now cement. The young maple trees that Grandfather had planted alongside his property grew to be stately old trees in the many years that I made the pilgrimage to the lake."

Flora's father was increasingly concerned about her persistent kidney problem. After receiving advice from several doctors, the decision was made that Flora, her mother, and her sister would spend the winter in Egypt. "Mother made Egypt so alive and dramatic that I can remember almost every day there. Traveling by train from Alexandria to Cairo, we saw Roman ruins and the ruins of windmills that Napoleon had built to grind corn for his army when he tried to conquer Egypt in the early 1800s. We really sensed the march of centuries." Healthwise, the trip was unsuccessful, as they caught chicken pox initially and then, during the spring sand storms, Flora

developed her usual tonsillitis and her kidneys flared up. A year later, a tonsillectomy completely cured her and she remained in excellent health through the rest of her long life.

Flora was a conscientious student. While they were well educated at home, there were also some gaps. She was determined to go to college. She and her sister prepared together for the entrance examinations. For the College Boards, they were allowed to take the subway for the first time from Grand Central to Columbia Heights. She recalled, "The subway had been opened in 1905 and when we took our first ride in 1912, we didn't know that there were two uptown lines, the Lenox Avenue and the Broadway subway lines. We took the wrong one to Lenox Avenue and found ourselves at 116<sup>th</sup> Street under the Morningside Cliffs, a good half mile away from the University. We galloped uphill to Columbia, and barely made it... We both passed all tests, if not gloriously. Certainly, the run up the Heights had been hardly helpful."

In the summer of 1912, what Flora refers to as "the Hoff Affair," caused her father to move the family for a season. Her father had a romantic attachment to Mrs. Hoff, a family friend and patient. The fallout from the affair deeply affected her father's health and he chose to spend the winter away with his family in Munich. There, Flora's sister attended art school and studied the violin. Flora struggled to get through the remaining college entrance requirements but attended University of Munich thereafter.



Flora Stieglitz  
About 1915

In Germany, life was very rich and full. She and her sister savored the trips, concerts and holiday celebrations. Their final outing was the celebration of the summer solstice called Johannesnacht. "We took a train with a crowd of young people out into the country, lit a huge bonfire and, taking hands, danced wildly around it long past midnight...we came home on the milk train and arrived at the

house about four in the morning...I never guessed that an entirely different world would open before me on our return home to America in July. Within a few weeks, Grant and I would fall in love and would dare to plan a marriage and a life together."



We look forward to presenting part two; Flora's stories about her life, in the next issue of the SHS newsletter. In this article we will reveal the closeness Flora felt toward her in-laws and new Straus relatives and share more stories about her interesting and long life. We are indebted to Flora for sharing her passion for the Straus family and its history and to her descendants for donating her memoirs, *Bits and Pieces* to SHS.

# Last Word

By Mark Maas with an introduction by Joan Adler

In 2002, I met Mark and Diane Maas and their three beautiful children at their New York City apartment. I was struck by how close the family was and how much their young children were included in our conversation. Shortly after that meeting, Mark set me an article he had written about the adoption of their daughter Jennifer.

Recently, Mark and I have been corresponding. He wanted to let me know about the engagement of his son Daniel. This prompted my questioning him about where his children are living and what they're doing professionally. In the course of this correspondence he sent me the article he had written about Jennifer's adoption. I thought it was so sensitive, and so beautifully written that, with Mark and Jennifer's permission, I've reproduced here.

"Sometimes, during a quiet moment, I ask myself whether we – my wife Diane and I – made the right decision in adopting Jennifer. We have two wonderful sons, Daniel (age 13) and Alex (age 10) and both boys have given us everything we could have wanted from children. The four of us have lived in Manhattan, without want. The boys are good students, good travelers, and appreciative kids. As first generation Americans, Diane and I have exposed our sons to a world of diversity, culture, language and life style.

But we took a risk, and after discussing the decision as best we could with our sons, we took the huge step and proceeded to undergo the required examination, which included an extensive review of, and interrogation about, every aspect of our personal lives: financial, medical and social. The process despite being quite invasive, was orderly and pro forma. Many people are amazed that it took "only" one year, a period during which we grew increasingly more anxious. How to know whether we were making the right decision accepting this foreign person into our home? For us as adults it would be the chance to raise a baby girl. Quite truthfully, we were most unprepared for the upheaval. For our sons, although we discussed it, we did not know how to prepare them for this most extraordinary event.

Sometimes I liken it to bungee-jumping. It is something I would ordinarily never do. But we did it. We jumped with a leap of faith that allowed us to ignore the most insignificant issues (in retrospect) of health and adjustment. We were "referred" our baby during Christmas of 1999 and were told that she was at the time seven months old. It would take another two months for us to get our paperwork and trip details together including the new requirement of an "invitation" from the Chinese government that would allow us to make the formal appointment at the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou for the final

visa approval, all of which would be facilitated by an adoption agency in the U.S. named Gladney.

We had worked with this adoption agency in the U.S. during the paperwork process. We, then traveled with Daniel and Alex in February 2000, in order to pick Jennifer up from Hunan on February 28. For 17 days we traveled in Asia, part of which was a week in Jennifer's hometown, and the three days in Guangzhou for the final exit documents. We were well taken care of, not only by the Chinese from Changsha who treated us with care and curiosity. We were not the first family to come into Changsha in order to take several of their orphan babies. People knew why we were there, and appreciated (we felt) the immensity of the event.

On this occasion, there were eleven other families also there to complete an adoption. Amazingly, each of the twelve children and each family were miraculously meant for each other. We would not have wanted any of the other children, and they would not have wanted ours. The random assignment, which is done in Beijing, results somehow in the most wonderful pairing of child with parent. Although we had received a superficial medical report and a two inch photograph from China in December, the instant delight and affection for Jennifer could not be described. Daniel and Alex were smitten, as were we.

It is now six months later. Jennifer Jiang-Lan sleeps 13 hours a night, eats everything

with delight, is healthy, engaging, curious, and is everything that a parent could ever want.

She is wonderful in every way. No mistake, not for a moment. We jumped, and we landed in a most fantastic place.

We are so fortunate to have been able to do it – to adopt a baby girl from China. We were so right to bring our boys with us to begin this adventure, which will be with them for the remainder of their lives. They have a little sister, who like their grandparents, will have come to the U.S. from overseas.

I go to China from time to time for business, and can look at people there with a sense of accomplishment and pain. How many girls have been abandoned needlessly by hearth-broken others due to the one-child policy? For whatever reasons, hundreds or thousands of girls (up to one million presently) are forced to survive against insurmountable odds. Without papers (no family history as it is illegal to abandon a child, and therefore the parents are never known), these girls cannot get schooling, cannot get medical attention, cannot work, and cannot get married. They are cursed by a social policy that



brands them. But for Jennifer, with our love and devotion, we hope that she will have a full life of joy and accomplishment. Why not?

We wake up each day and know that she is with us, happy and in a stable environment. We love her dearly, all four of us, and we see her grow each day; more comfortable. More secure, and more joyous.

Jennifer is in the college Class of 2021. We would hope to see her graduate, and enjoy all the fruits of a free and open society. For the 4,000 girls each year who were adopted into American families, we know they have been rescued. But for us, we did it for us, and are all the better for it. I've been asked, "When did we start to think about adopting?" and I can say, "I really don't remember." I've been asked, "Why did we adopt." And today I say, "Look at Jennifer. We are so lucky."

Addendum by Joan Adler: Jennifer Jiang-Lan Maas is now a lovely twenty-two year old college graduate. After reading the article by her father, I wondered about the young woman Jennifer had become. She and I arranged to talk on Facetime.

I asked Jenny if she felt connected to her Chinese heritage. She told me she did. When she was young, her family joined Families With Children From China. They held events, like an annual Chinese New Year Party, and also provided activities so that adopted children could meet other Chinese adoptees and learn about their culture. Her parents also worked with Gladney Center for International Adoption doing fundraising and special events. Starting in fourth grade, Jenny began studying Mandarin. She studied the language throughout both middle and high school and even went to a summer Chinese immersion camp, Concordia Language Villages in MN. Each day they were given the option to take a pledge to speak Mandarin the entire day. If successful, they would be rewarded.

Jenny is a thoroughly American girl with deep roots in her Chinese heritage. She attended Ethical Culture Fieldston School in New York City from pre-K all the way through twelfth grade and attended Hebrew school, Rodeph Sholom, from the time she was nine until after her Bat Mitzvah. She donated all the funds she received as gifts to the orphanage she came from to help them purchase supplies. Then, during spring break, when she was in high school, Jenny visited the orphanage, staying for a week, working with the young children, many with disabilities.

One summer, when Jenny was fifteen, she and a friend who had already been with her at Concordia, studied at a Chinese immersion school in Beijing. She'd know this friend her entire life because their families adopted them from the same orphanage at the same time and they'd stayed close once back

in the U.S. In China, their learning experiences were more intensive, but very similar to her summer camp experience. Besides speaking only Mandarin, the students learned firsthand about life in China.

Jenny told me about another friend that she'd known since before kindergarten. She was also adopted from China and their parents had become friends. Once her friend came to Fieldston, it was easy for them to form a lasting friendship as they saw each other every day. Jenny explained that it was nice to have a friend like her, someone she could share experiences with.

I commented that Jenny's parents encouraged her to know about her heritage. And that her childhood seems to have been rich with family experiences, as well as cultural experiences. Jenny commented that, because her brothers Daniel and Alex are so much older than she is, it was, in some ways, like being an only child. Daniel is twelve years older than Jenny and Alex is ten years older. Daniel left for college when Jenny was in kindergarten and Alex left two years later.



Jenny attended Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. She was drawn to the school because of its focus on human rights and humanitarianism. She majored in psychology and minored in Asian studies and added a concentration in human rights and humanitarianism. She was drawn to psychology after learning about the nature versus nurture debate in high school. She was drawn to the clinical aspects of psychology. Jenny graduated in June 2021.

Jenny has worked as an intern at Sesame Street doing content research. She wanted to see if she would like the research side of psychology. She explained that Sesame Street does research with focus groups; families from different demographics, to learn what content should go into their shows.

After graduation, Jenny got a job in St. Paul with Fraser, an organization that provides autism and mental health services. She works one-on-one with autistic children, doing trials to help them respond to cues. Her job is to get them ready for school. The first two weeks working on her own after her training period was very nerve wracking but once she got the hang of it, she found it to be very interesting work. Jenny's enjoying it. "I wasn't sure if I would. But I do."

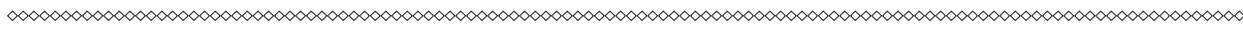
Jenny plans to stay in St. Paul, at least for this year. She's gotten much closer to her brother Alex (who lives there) and she has many friends. Her long range plan is to return to New York. She enjoys working with children and wants to stay in some field related to psychology.

It was a pleasure to meet Jenny and to follow up with her after reading her Dad's beautiful and sensitive article about her adoption.

# 2021 List of Donors to SHS

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society wishes to thank those who made contributions in 2021. Your generosity made it possible to continue the important work of SHS

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Bruce L. Freitag	Gary Mayer	David L. Straus	



## New Research Queries

As I begin each work day, I never know what fascinating bit of information, or new query that raises new research avenues, will reach me. Recent queries were about the location, and time period of ownership, of a home in Long Beach, NY. This home may have belonged to Isidor or Nathan Straus. I am not familiar with any Strauses living in Long Beach but I'm excited to have a new research request that opens interesting possibilities.

Another query was about who attended the R. H. Macy & Company holiday party given for employees at the end of 1955 or the beginning of 1956. The person asking about this was hoping to learn if his parents attended the firm's event. and if they did, was it individually or as a couple

Last month I received an email from a woman who had just inherited a large painting of a woman. It was painted in 1920 by artist Edward Saltzman. She asked if it was possible that the woman in the painting was a Straus family member. She'd learned that Edward Saltzman painted a portrait of Nathan Straus in 1929. She wondered if the family might have a relationship with the artist and that he might have painted portraits of other family members. I sent a copy of the portrait



of the woman to several of Nathan Straus' descendants but none of them recognized the woman or knew of the artist.

Further research revealed that the portrait of Nathan Straus was acquired in 1929 by the national board of Hadassah, the Woman's Zionist Organization, that was planning to send it to then Palestine to be placed in the Straus Health Center that was being built in Tel Aviv. The portrait of Nathan is bust size and gives a full face view of the subject. Additionally, Hadassah sent a bronze bas-relief sculpture of Nathan Straus to Palestine. It was to be placed in the Nathan and Lina Straus Health Center in Jerusalem and to be dedicated during Passover that year.

I've asked a correspondent from Israel if he can find the current location of the painting or the sculpture and send us information and images of each of them.

It's wonderful, after all these years, to keep learning about the Straus family and to have so many new research projects that are so interesting.

# Friends of Straus Park

by Al Berr

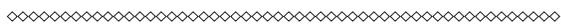
Photographs by Joe Arbo

In our previous column for the newsletter, in August 2021, which seems years ago, we gave our readers a glimpse of our board members discussing whether or not to hold our annual Art in the Park event. We are pleased to report that it was held on Saturday, October 2 in ever-beautiful Straus Park.

It was a clear, mostly sunny, not too windy, moderately cool autumn day, thanks to the weather gods, and the Park looked its best, thanks to Joe Arbo and many colorful chrysanthemums that he had planted. We displayed our customary photos, articles, and books pertaining to the Straus family, the Park's history, and Titanic. Our board member, Ian Robertson, brought examples from his maritime collection, and, as usual, when prompted, he gave his brief account of the Titanic's last moments.

There were fewer artists than usual showing their work for sale, owing to pandemic concerns. There were also fewer than usual passersby despite the good weather. However, those who were there were entertained by the music of the splendid Anderson Quartet. This is a group that, last summer, played on weekends in Riverside Park at 106<sup>th</sup> Street to the delight of the neighborhood. And, to our delight, we hired them and will again if they are available.

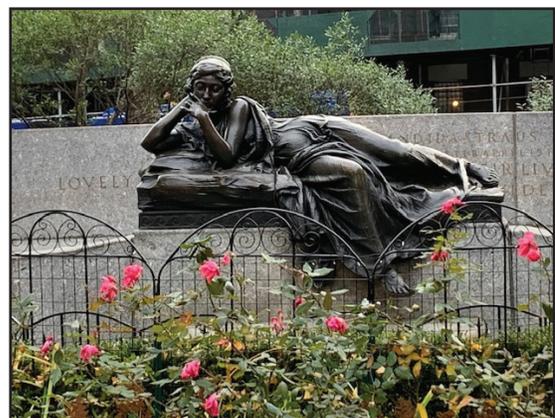
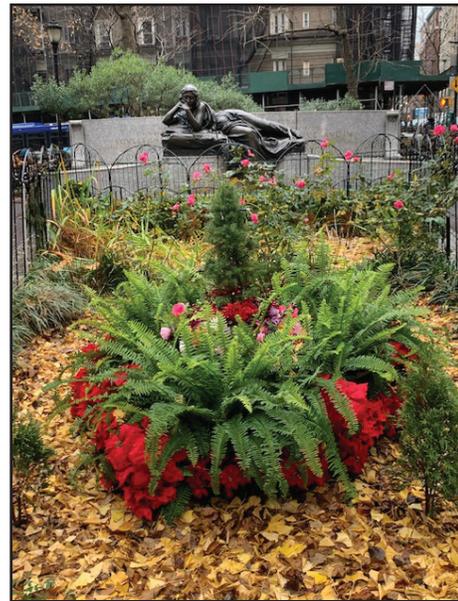
Traditionally, our next event on the calendar is a Saturday in mid-April to commemorate Titanic. As befitting the occasion, there are no artists and no music. We didn't hold it last year because of the pandemic, but we hope to resume the tradition this year. Please check our website at the beginning of April.



Some historians among us know that, within a month or so of the loss of the RMS Titanic, the family of Isidor and Ida Straus sold their home between Broadway and West End Avenue on 105<sup>th</sup> Street that Isidor had bought in 1884. It was then demolished and a large apartment house, the Cleburne, was completed a year later, in 1913. It is an impressive, twelve story building with a porte-cochere at its 105<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, originally for horse-drawn vehicles. Its address is 924 West End Avenue; the Straus address was 2745 Broadway.

In recent years, a ground-floor restaurant has occupied the Broadway side of the building. For some dozen years or more, it was Henry's, which was followed by a seafood restaurant, and, last autumn, by Ellington's. The name derives from the stretch of West 106<sup>th</sup> Street from Fifth Avenue to Riverside Drive which, in 1977, the city named Duke Ellington Boulevard, in honor of the musician who lived on the Drive near 106<sup>th</sup> Street. Of interest to us is that Ellington's has chosen to name its back section the Straus Room. We'll explore more of that in our next newsletter column.

For now, we hope you will visit this lovely oasis in the heart of New York City and enjoy the foliage, even in the snow, and the history behind the Park's dedication.

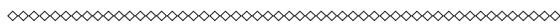


## Support the SHS Scholarship Program

The Straus Historical Society has awarded scholarships to deserving graduate students who are pursuing a career in public service or philanthropy. To date we've awarded ten scholarships over a four year period.

The judges are currently hard at work selecting the four awardees for 2022 out of a field of 56 applicants. You can read about our past scholarship winners in the August 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 issues of the SHS newsletter. They are all very accomplished young people and we are pleased to support them.

We would like to continue, and even expand, this worthwhile program. When thinking of making a donation to a nonprofit, please consider supporting SHS with a targeted tax-exempt gift earmarked for our scholarship program.



### Social Media Call to Action

What would you like to see posted on our social media platforms? Do you want to see more about: family members, our collections, events, family history? Let us know what would be most meaningful and interesting to you as we continue to develop these new opportunities for communication.

Don't forget to Like, Follow and Subscribe!



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## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

[www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications)

*Strauses and the Arts*, a collection of articles about family members who are artists, patrons of the arts, musicians, dancers, or involved in the arts in some other manner. Personal interviews with the artists reveal details about their creative process and their philosophy of the arts. Images of the artists' work are included at the end of each article. Available from the SHS website as an eBook (\$4.99) or paperback (\$25).

*The Autobiography of Isidor Straus* privately published by Sara Straus Hess in 1955, greatly expanded and updated by SHS in 2011, including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

*Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization by Lina Gutherz Straus*, a loving tribute to the life's work of Nathan Straus, greatly expanded in 2016 including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover - \$40.00

*Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft*, the autobiography of Oscar S. Straus. This recently re-published autobiography includes a new supplement with articles about Oscar S. Straus from past issues of the Society's newsletters and new photographs. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$40.00

*For the Sake of the Children: The Letters Between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* by Joan Adler published in 2013. When Otto Frank realized he had to get his family out of Europe in April, 1941, he wrote to his Heidelberg University roommate and lifelong friend Nathan Straus Jr. for help. This book describes their struggle to find a way to save the Frank family. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

*The History of the Jews of Otterberg* by Dr. Hans Steinebrei, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn and Dr. Andreas J. Schwab. This publication contains a large section about the Straus family. Many photographs complement the text. Published in English by the Straus Historical Society. Hard cover - \$35.00

*My Family: I Could Write a Book* by Edith Maas Mendel. A must read for all those interested in family history. Even if the people in this book are not your direct relatives, their appeal is universal. *My Family* is amply enriched with photographs of the people and places mentioned. Hard cover - \$25.00

Additional items are available for sale on the SHS website. [www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications). Contact Joan Adler by phone: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: [info@straushistory.org](mailto:info@straushistory.org) if you have questions about ordering.

The Straus Historical Society collection contains many photographs, articles and other items that are also available. Contact Joan Adler if you want to learn more about the SHS collections or if there is a specific photograph or article you wish to purchase.