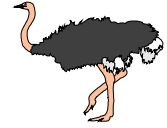


STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 6 Number 2

Newsletter

February 2005

Jesse Isidor Straus 1872 - 1936 Part Two

The August 2004 issue of the Straus Historical Society's newsletter contained the first of a two-part biography of Jesse Isidor Straus. The biography continues in this issue, picking up with Jesse's appointment as head of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) during the Great Depression by New York State Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Official announcement that Jesse Isidor Straus would head TERA was made September 30, 1931. He would administer the \$20,000,000 fund for the relief of the needy unemployed in the state during the coming winter. Frank Friedel, in *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Triumph* wrote, "Straus had practically a free hand in organizing the T.E.R.A." He named Harry L. Hopkins, who was executive director of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association, executive director of TERA. Hopkins had already demonstrated his abilities in the field of social welfare. One of TERA's first tasks was to name a woman "of demonstrated ability" to establish a woman's division. Roosevelt said that the "Big Three" "had been equipped with broad powers to establish whatever organization may be required to meet the emergency. To the extent this is possible the commissioners would enlist volunteer workers and also whenever possible use unemployed persons entitled to relief, in salaried positions to aid the large number of white collar workers who have lost their jobs." An editorial in the *New York Times* on October 1, 1931 states, "Nothing but a deep sense of civic obligations, we may be sure, could have induced Mr. Straus to make the personal sacrifice requisite if he was to respond to the Governor's urgent invitation. President of a great business house, and responsible for the conduct of its affairs, with many other duties pressing upon his attention, he is ready to drop all these things and place his talents and energy at the disposal of the State. It is the very highest kind of public service. No office could bring such opportunities or entail such responsibilities. The work will be exacting and prolonged, but its successful achievement is made certain by the willingness of men like Mr. Straus to give the patriotic pleas first place. So long as this country can count upon such volunteers for emergency duty, we need not despair of the Republic."



Jesse Isidor Straus

On February 22, 1932 Governor Roosevelt called a conference with TERA chair Jesse I. Straus and NYC Emergency Work Commissioners to discuss the continuance of state aid for the jobless. On March 10, 1932 both houses of the State Legislature passed a bill extending the life of TERA beyond the next election.

On March 20, 1932 Jesse said, "I regret exceedingly that I am compelled to retire from the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. When Governor Roosevelt honored me with the appointment I do not think that either he or I anticipated the necessity for full-time services. ... it has been a privilege to share in the first State efforts to supplement local relief with State aid. I must now return to my own business." Governor Roosevelt "regrets Mr. Straus's resignation because of the belief that it will be difficult to find a successor who will carry on the work as efficiently and as energetically as Mr. Straus." A March 23rd *Times* editorial stated, "Under his capable executive direction plans have been formulated and competent personnel employed so that this great and necessary charity will march even after the one who has done so much for it withdraws from his active connection with it. ... there is general agreement that no one could have taken hold of the business from the start with more energy and skill than Mr. Straus, or more surely made it a going concern. ...He has been one illustration more of the resources in private life which America can draw upon in times of emergency." Jesse later said, "My experience convinced me that most of our unemployed people want work, and not charity."

**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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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 Chair:
Oscar S. Straus III**

Another year begins! We on the board are looking forward to 2005 as a year that we begin the search for outside funding to supplement the funding of family members and friends who have so generously supported the work of the Straus Historical Society.

We need all of you to continue your support, and increase it where possible. However, we are looking into other areas for additional financial support: organizations and foundations that are interested in furthering research into the history of families such as the Straus family. This is not an easy search. We welcome your input. Do you know of any organizations that might assist us? Are you on the board of any foundations that fund research by historical societies? Please let us know: call, write or e.mail us with your thoughts.

Our research continues. More and more is uncovered each year. Joan Adler, our Executive Director, seems to find new directions and have new ideas each year.

Through the magic of DNA testing, we are getting closer to tying our Georgia relatives to the correct roots of the Lazarus Straus family tree. In addition, people who are also looking for their roots, and who have had their DNA testing done, are turning up all over the world. We have even more new relatives with new ties somewhere in the past. It is fantastic what Joan is uncovering!

We are always looking for additions to our Board of Directors. Through telephone conference calls you can join us and participate without having to live in New York City or attend the board meetings in person. We meet three or four times a year in the evening (New York time) and would like to add a few new committed members. You can contact me through our new Straus Historical Society e.mail address: info@straushistoricalsociety.org if you are interested in attending a meeting or have any questions about the Society.

Thank you all for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar S. Straus III".



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

I am lucky to have found work that I love. To have that work valued and appreciated makes it all the more special.

Thank you to the Board of Directors for your unwavering support of my work and for your generous contribution of your time in that support.

And thank you to all of you who take the time to tell me that you enjoy the newsletter, who contribute to my work whether financially or through interviews or the donation of material and who make the "work" such a pleasure. I look forward to many more productive and interesting years of service to the Society.

Jesse Isidor Straus - continued

Although he resigned as chair of TERA, Jesse continued his civic work. He was a member of the executive committee of the Chamber of Commerce. Jesse also served on the Salvation Army United Appeal general committee. In May 1932 he made an address over the radio appealing for support of Block-Aid. "...those who can do so much provide means to give work to those who are still without jobs. ... many of those who are now in need have in better times helped their neighbors. Now we, their neighbors, must help them."

On April 29, 1932 Jesse announced the formation of a Roosevelt Business and Professional League for the support of Roosevelt's candidacy for president. He was named president of the league. He said, "I have reviewed letters from all over the country in connection with the formation of the league. It really seems to fit a need. I have been surprised at the emphasis that has been placed on the need for party harmony and the confidence that the citizens of every State have in the ability of Governor Roosevelt to maintain this party harmony." He was on the finance committee of the executive committee of the Democratic National Committee charged with the election of Roosevelt to the presidency in 1932.

Jesse turned sixty on June 25, 1932. Son Jack and son-in-law Bob Levy wrote a song, "Everyone Excellent Love" that was sung by the whole family at his party. The production was filmed and a copy of this film was generously donated to the Straus Archives by granddaughters Barbara and Jessica Levy. Family members sang of Jesse's virtues in verses especially suited to the performers relationship to him. It was a high point for everyone and remembered fondly, even seventy-three years later.

When NYC Mayor James J. Walker resigned suddenly in September 1932, Jesse's name was one of those proposed for election. He told a friend, "Of course I couldn't be elected - but what a job! I'd like it. I'd like to see if this city couldn't be better run by department store methods than it's ever been run by any other methods. I'll bet it could be!"

When Governor Roosevelt was nominated for president at the Democratic National Convention in Albany, NY on October 4, 1932, Jesse presided over the key luncheon in Albany and introduced Governor Roosevelt to the national audience. He also actively campaigned for Lieutenant Governor Herbert H. Lehman's bid for Governor of NYS.

In October 1932 Harvard Business School announced that "in view of unemployment and the number of young executives who, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs," it would start offering classes for "constructive training in business" to college graduates and executives. This program was

developed at the urging of Jesse I. Straus, Walter S. Gifford of AT&T and George Whitney of J. P. Morgan & Co. A formal report made at the end of October 1932 to the governor and the state legislature about the Emergency Unemployment Relief Law by Jesse, Philip J. Wickser, Harry L. Hopkins and other former and present members of TERA stated that they "have a part in what seems to us to be one of the greatest social experiments ever undertaken. ... This act has attempted this revolutionary measure in such a manner as to preserve the self-respect of every beneficiary."

Within days of Roosevelt's victory at the polls, the newspapers account of his appointments for cabinet posts began circulating. Jesse's name appeared as a possible Secretary of Commerce. Robert K. Straus, Jesse's son wrote, "As soon as Roosevelt had been elected, a great deal of speculation about who would be in the Cabinet started appearing in the newspapers By the end of January it looked as if Father was going to



Cover page of the sheet music prepared for Jesse's birthday party - June 25, 1932

be appointed Secretary of Commerce and this pleased him for both sentimental and practical reasons. Oscar S. Straus has been Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of Commerce and Labor as the two departments were combined at that time. In fact, I believe that he was the first Secretary of Commerce and Labor as it was a new department then, and he was also the first Jew ever to become a Cabinet Secretary. So this was the sentimental reason that pleased Father. - The practical reason was that he thought it was a job that he was well equipped to handle. But then the roof fell in. It developed that two Cabinet jobs had been promised to William G. McAdoo in return for switching the support of the California delegation at the convention to Franklin D. Roosevelt - a switch which guaranteed Roosevelt's nomination. And it turned out that one of the jobs that McAdoo wanted was the job of Secretary

of Commerce. This job was thus awarded to Dan Roper who had been a protégé of McAdoo's for many years. Father was rather upset. Though he never asked for any job, he thought this had finished his chances of being part of the administration. It turned out that some of his friends now went to work and he received one of the first three diplomatic appointments that the new president selected, ten days after the inauguration. (Editor's note: Jesse was nominated to be the Ambassador to France.) When he went down to Washington to see Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President told him, half seriously-half jokingly, that he had thought of appointing him to Germany as a way of thumbing his nose at Hitler, but he decided this would not be a wise move. In any event, though Father had not solicited the appointment to Paris in any way, he had many friends in Paris and was pleased."

Jesse spoke before members of the American Club in Paris on December 1, 1932 pleading for a new world ethic. "In the long run, morality must prevail, and in national as well as individual effort good-will and reputation for square-dealing are the great-

est assets. We businessmen know that what we leave to our descendants of the greatest value are a name and reputation. So, I believe, it must ultimately be with nations." These words paraphrase his father and grandfather's sentiments. The *New York Times* reported on February 26th that Jesse I. Straus would be a popular choice if appointed Ambassador to France. Roosevelt's inauguration was held in Washington D.C. March 4, 1933. Jesse placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* that appeared March 6, 1933. He quoted President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. As a citizen, the bank holiday has given me time and cause to set down a code which I am following; 'I trust my government. 'I trust our banks. 'I do not expect the impossible. - Every day, every hour, can make a turn for the better. This day can be the turning point of our nation's future. It is up to every citizen."

On March 9th Jesse was formally nominated to become the American Ambassador to France. The French Foreign Office approved his selection citing his frequent visits to France and his ability to speak the language. A March 15th article in the *Christian Science Monitor* reported, "In the naming of Mr. Jesse Isidor Straus as Ambassador to France, another glamorous chapter is added to the legend of America's merchant princes. Of the second American generation of his house, Mr. Straus is following the tradition of the public and arty distinction attained by his father, Isidor, and his uncles, Nathan and Oscar." An article by Earl Sparling of the *New York World Telegram*, March 16th stated, "Jesse Isidor Straus, the new American Ambassador to France, is almost as much at home in Paris as in New York. France knows him as both an old customer and an old friend." The *London Daily Mail* of March 19th, "If one goes back to early days it will be found that many of the first ambassadors of the United States were merchant princes, who, having gained a knowledge of the language and customs of the country to which they were accredited, were particularly able to represent their country's interests." The *Harvard Business School Alumni Bulletin* said, "As the United States does not much encourage career diplomatists, the next best thing is to appoint men of character, ability and experience. In the present case, the newly appointed ambassador has all these qualifications."

Jesse's appointment was confirmed in the Senate without debate on March 19th and his swearing in ceremony at the State Department was held ten days later. He expected to remain in Washington for about a week where he would become acquainted with his new duties and then return to New York to wrap up his responsibilities at home. On April 6th he resigned as president and member of the board of directors of R. H. Macy & Co., Inc. His brother Percy S. Straus was elected president. Jesse called his 33 year-old son Jack into his office and said, "You're to take charge of all my personal business-affairs."

Jesse and Irma sailed for Europe on the US liner "Manhattan" on May 24th, landing at Le Havre, the same port from which his grandfather Lazarus left Europe 85 years earlier. A welcoming delegation from the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the municipality of Le Havre boarded the ship to greet them when they arrived.

The *New York Times* reported on June 1st, "His welcome, both from French officials and the American colony, was simple but hearty, for in all minds there was the realization that not since the war has any American Ambassador commenced his duties here in such a critical period for Franco-American relations. ... There will be only one week then before the London economic conference, with such grave problems before him as the war debt, monetary difficulties and the severe handicaps with which Franco-American trade is now struggling. He arrives at a time when France herself is sorely tried with internal difficulties of a fiscal nature and foreign problems that are arousing deepest concern."



Jesse, grandson Kenneth and son Jack I. Straus - 1930 at the ceremony to lay the cornerstone for Macy's new building

Even before presenting his credentials, Jesse and Irma presented a wreath at the French Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This gesture served to deepen the friendly view already held by the French. He presented his credentials to President LeBrun on June 6th officially becoming the United States Ambassador to France. He said, "President Roosevelt has indicated the attitude of cooperation that the United States of America is ready to take with respect to the legitimate preoccupations of Europe of disarmament and consequent economic readjustment." By July 4th Jesse was deeply immersed in his duties. He strongly felt that Schuyler's dictum was correct: "The best and most effective diplomatic business is facilitated, if not indeed effected, in the drawing room."

In praising President Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" Jesse said, "The most important factor in Mr. Roosevelt's success so far is undoubtedly the fact that he is the possessor of a remarkably magnetic personality. He likes to consult, likes to hear the opinions of others whose opinions he respects. He listens quietly and attentively, and having weighed the arguments, even though they be in opposition to his own, makes up his own mind and acts." Jesse's youngest son, Robert K. Straus, was a junior member of the "Brain Trust," describing it as a high point in his life.

Jesse and Irma sailed home on September 7th for medical treatment that "might involve a minor operation." He expected to return to France no later than November 1st. He visited with President Roosevelt in New York to confer about foreign relations and foreign debts. While he was away the official US Embassy moved to a new building on Place de la Concorde. It was called "the most palatial and luxurious American foreign services building in the world." Jesse and Irma sailed for France on the liner "Ile de France" on January 13, 1934. It was reported

that Jesse's health was considerably better and that he was anxious to return to his post in Paris. He said, "It is gratifying to be able to report in person to our friends in Europe a measure of recovery in America which can have only far-reaching benefit to affairs on the other side. ... Three things, of course, are required in any such forward march: a national emergency, a brave people and a gallant leader. Our country had all three. The mood of America, so long troubled, is wholesome once more. I could carry no better news abroad." "Mr. Straus returns at a time when Franco-American relations are chiefly concerned with commercial matters, and his knowledge of business affairs as well as the opportunity he has had to get the latest instructions from Washington make him especially welcome," the *New York Times* reported January 20, 1934.

On April 13, 1934 Jesse spoke before the British Advisory Club, a group of the most prominent Britons in France. He assured them that President Roosevelt was not moving toward a socialized State. "All corrective measures taken by the administration at Washington are solely for the purpose of alleviating internal conditions. ... The accusation that nationalism is running riot and that international repercussions would result and might, in fact, be intended to follow, is unjust. That some plans undertaken might conceivably result in harm to other nations may doubtless be considered as a possibility, but the first duty of the administration is a regard for the stability of its own government and the comfort, health and security of its own people." In an address on American Day, a two-day celebration of the Lafayette centenary Jesse said, "Such difficulties and misunderstandings as may from time to time arise between our two great sister republics should always be handled in the light of the great friendship between Washington and Lafayette, the two illustrious men who played the most important roles in the establishment of modern democracy."

King Alexander of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou were assassinated in Marseilles in October 1934. The king was in France to begin his first official visit since the war. Stunned dignitaries attended funerals for both men. Jesse officially represented the United States. In February 1935 he and French Premier Pierre-Etienne Flandin spoke at a George Washington anniversary dinner. Both urged freer trade. Jesse said, "We need foreign markets for our prosperity. ... War usually finds its beginnings in economic jealousies and bickering. World peace can only be attained by friendly commercial intercourse."

Jesse's wife, Irma Nathan Straus, was presented to the King and Queen of England by Mrs. Robert W. Bingham, wife of the American Ambassador to London in March 1935. She was among ten Americans to bow at the Jubilee Court, the king's silver jubilee. Irma's gown was a simple Mainbocher ice blue and silver lame with a train of the same material. She carried a white ostrich fan. Ambassador Bingham presented Jesse. In

April he completed negotiations with French Foreign Minister Laval to end double taxation of American companies on French soil. At a Fourth of July dinner at the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris in 1935 Jesse urged a trade pact be signed that would be advantageous to both countries. He asked the members of the Chamber of Commerce to "do yeoman work to help dissipate the old fallacy that imports are harmful." Jesse, French Premier Laval and British Ambassador Sir George Clark discussed an international policy to prevent the Ethiopian conflict in preparation of the League of Nations Council meeting scheduled for July 25th.

Jesse and Irma returned to the US on July 25th on the US liner "Washington" accompanied by Jesse's sister, Sarah, Mrs. Alfred Hess. On August 7th he lunched with the president in the White House kitchen, an informal and personal luncheon. He was expected to return to Paris in mid October where one of the most pressing issues would be to observe and report on the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.



Jesse (3d from left) and Irma (5th from left) Straus after presenting his credentials at the Elysee Palace

Jesse entertained the diplomatic representatives of all the American republics at a luncheon in the American Embassy in Paris on the 1936 anniversary of Washington's birth. He said, "All of us can rejoice together at our increasing friendship, mutual confidence and interest in each other's peace, prosperity and economic progress. In the midst of the many uncertainties that prevail in other parts of the world, we can point with just pride to the fact that at no time in the history of the American republics had the spirit of co-

operation, confidence and mutual helpfulness reached a higher level than at present." As the political situation between France and Germany deteriorated, French Foreign Minister Flandin traveled to London in March 1936 to discuss the possibility of France going to war rather than "submit to carnage two years from now when the treaty breakers will be strong." Jesse met with Flandin and characterized his talks as routine. It was believed that Flandin was exploring how the United States Neutrality Act would affect France in case of war.

In May 31, 1935 the *News* reported that Jesse said, "The specter of human slaughter for purely selfish national aggrandizement still hovers over the world." He called for the prevention of future wars. He had been studying the political situation in Europe quite closely. He wrote to President Roosevelt on January 20, 1936 stating that he felt the contents of his letter were too sensitive to be delivered by diplomatic pouch. He asked a friend to bring the letter to the White House personally. "I have been turning over in my mind the advisability of giving you my impressions of France after 2 1/2 years residence. The draft was composed after the two year-end session of the Chamber of Deputies, at which I listened to the debate on the government's foreign policy. One must always remember that, if rumor and innuendo are to be believed, there is little honesty, intellectual or moral, among the politicians in France. Whether they are as

dishonest as is reported, whether most of them are purchasable, as is reported, I can of course not assert. The press is paid to be, almost without exception, venal. Italian money is said to flow into some coffers in large amounts. Russian, German and Japanese into others. In some cases domestic money is used to forward some political or industrial interest. It is a dirty picture, and as I see it, portends no very brilliant future for France. Business here is rotten. Prices are high; the franc is overvalued, and though there is a fairish and I think growing sentiment in favor of devaluation, led by Reynaud, former finance minister, there is also, for obvious reasons, a strong opposition to what is realized and admitted to be the only way out. Invisible exports, so much needed in France's economy, are continuing to decrease. There is a surly attitude towards foreigners; one of injured innocence, strikingly apparent. There is an unwillingness to admit internal error and to seek to correct it. - There is a constant dread of Germany, no doubt warranted. France's Air Force is insignificant, poorly equipped and unprepared with modern machines, compared to Germany. Her budget continues unbalanced Tax evasion, because of lack of proper audit, dishonest and bribable agents, and general unwillingness on the part of the average Frenchman, rich or modestly so, is, if one can believe what one hears on all sides, widespread. The Chamber of Deputies with its 600 and odd members is a poor looking and bad acting national assembly. In an important debate the various parties shout at one another, interrupt and revile an opposing speaker, and twice during the closing days of the last session, the chairman left the rostrum, thus recessing the séance until the rough necks calmed themselves in the lobbies and would let the proceedings continue. From all the above diatribe you may conclude that I'm depressed. Not personally, but for France's future. This job is fascinatingly interesting and instructive the latter largely in what not to do politically, financially or industrially. There is a lack of courageous, vital, disinterested, resourceful and imaginative leadership. Where we would have landed in 1933 under similar political direction is too painful to contemplate. They have a vague feeling here that as we pull out of the "crise," so they call it, we'll help them to pull out. I don't believe it. They need a Franklin D. as surgeon and everyone admits there ain't one in sight. The atmosphere is Paris and in France is soleful. What does the future hold in store for France? It's anyone's guess. The French still proclaim their inventiveness, their ingenuity, their artistic sense. They're enveloped in a fog of fear of Germany, and they are justified. Whether they will end up as vassals, or whether they can form some kind of effective military coalition who knows. Something is bound to happen in the next 10, 12.5, or 25 years, unless they can by the introduction of new blood, not only increase by change the stature and character and mental make-up of the population. All of the foregoing may be of no value to you whatsoever, may be utter drivel but I had it on my chest and I had to get it off."

Roosevelt responded February 13th, "That is not only an intensely interesting letter of yours but also proof positive that

you can see the forest without being overwhelmed by the individual trees. ... In more pessimistic moments I have of necessity come to believe just as you do about France and the French future. One cannot help feeling that the whole European panorama is fundamentally blacker than at any time in your life time or mine. The armaments race means bankruptcy or war there is no possible out from this statement. You are in the best listening post in what may be the last days of the period of peace before a long chaos, and I am very happy, indeed, to have your careful judgment after these two and a half years of observation. Heaven only knows I do not want to spend more money on our Army or Navy. I am initiating nothing new unless and until increases by other nations make increases by us absolutely essential to national defense. I wish England could understand that and, incidentally, I wish Japan could understand that also."

By July 30th 1936 poor health forced Jesse to cancel his schedule and make plans to return to the United States. He wrote to



Irma and Jesse Isidor Straus
Presented at Court - 1935

President Roosevelt on August 18th, "When I left Paris at the beginning of the month, I had hoped to return about the first of October. Upon arriving at home, however, my physicians informed me that I was in a very run-down condition and that I must have a complete rest for six months. In view of the fact that there is much work to be done in Paris at the moment, I feel that it is imperative to keep the embassy at the full compliment. I, therefore, tender my resignation, to be accepted immediately or at your pleasure. Needless to say, I give up my post with regret. The three and a half years that I have held it has been filled with enjoyable, interesting and instructive experiences." On August 26, 1936 President Roosevelt issued a statement saying that he had accepted Jesse's resignation with "deep regret."

French officials expressed much regret at Jesse's resignation. The *New York Times* reported on August 27th, "During the three years that he has represented the United States in France, French leaders say he has shown such qualities of heart and such keen comprehension of how best to find the middle way between French and American differences of view and interest that he has won a very genuine affection and respect."

Robert K. Straus wrote, "Father had an attack of cancer six months or so after he had arrived at his post. He returned to the United States for treatment and the clippings covered this first failure of his health. On July 14, 1936, he fainted while viewing the Bastille Day parade. It was the first evidence that the cancer had spread. Sister (Beatrice Straus Levy) and Bob Levy (her husband, a physician) went over to France immediately and Bob, I believe, recommended that he resign and return to the United States. He came back a month later and Bob and I went to see President Roosevelt at Hyde Park and gave him father's letter of resignation. The President was sitting in his tiny office which was about 10' x 10' where he always "held court" while he was staying in his mother's house. I always suspected that he

had been informed that Father was critically ill. He listened to Bob's account and pushed a button for his secretary, Miss LeHand, and said, "Missy, tell Bill Bullitt he's going to Paris." The fact that he did this so quickly indicated, I think, that he was prepared for Father's resignation. Father died about six weeks later." Jesse was never told the nature of his illness and his son Bob believed he never knew.

Jesse Isidor Straus died in New York October 4, 1936 with his family at his side. The cause of death was reported a pneumonia. His funeral was held at Temple Emanu-El with internment in the Straus mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery in The Bronx. Sympathy and praise poured in from all corners of the world. In his eulogy Rabbi Samuel H. Goldenson reminded family and friends of the "high and abiding things wrought by his spirit, this integrity he stamped upon his enterprises, his philanthropic endeavors, the patriotic service rendered his country - twice blessed is he who has it within him to transmit such a name untarnished and ennobled." Ambassador Bullitt, upon learning of Jesse's death said, "Mr. Straus was a business man of the highest ability who had the breadth of mind to be able to turn his great talents to the service of his country." A memorial service for Jesse was held at the American Cathedral in Paris on October 12th with representatives from many of the European nations and the entire staff of the American Embassy in attendance. On October 13, 1936 Jesse was posthumously awarded the French "Grand Croix" of the Legion of Honor.

Jesse felt that Judaism was a religion, not a nationality, and that Jews, and members of all religious groups in any country should assimilate. He lived what his father Isidor professed, "The Jewish religion is living the Ten Commandments, not professing them." Jesse's philanthropy was widespread and nonsectarian. He refused all traffic with the Zionists and rigidly opposed pro-Jewish discrimination at Macy's.

"Nothing could be more tender than Jesse's enduring devotion to his mother. As long as she lived, when they were in the same city, there was no day on which he did not visit with her. He would interrupt any business to telephone her almost hourly, if she was suffering from so much as a cold. He loved her but he worshiped his father: worshiped and emulated. He allowed no printing of his name as simply "Jesse." It had to be "Jesse Isidor." When nearing forty, a highly placed executive, he would defer to the parent always addressed as "Poppa" and, long after Isidor's death, continued to remind his business-partners, when any matter of traditional policy was in dispute or when any question of new policies could be determined by reference to the past: "Poppa would want to have this done thus." Jesse's

son Robert K. Straus said that even on his deathbed Jesse remarked that "he thought Poppa would have been pleased with what his sons had done with Macy's."

Jesse left his fortune to his widow in trust for his children. He added a codicil to his will in 1934 canceling bequests to many charities because of the new estate taxes and his fear that it might endanger the security of his family. One bequest that did remain was income from 350 shares of Macy's stock to be used to award the best sales promotion ideas of each year.

On December 2, 1936 the first direct telephone communication between France and America was achieved over a radio circuit 3,000 miles long. George H. Payne of the Federal Communication Commission paid tribute to Jesse. "The arranging of this new bond between France and America was a final and great accomplishment of a noble career. As one who worked with him, I know how eagerly he looked forward to this event, and it is therefore fitting that on this day respect is paid to his memory."



Family portrait painted by John Wells in 1932
 Front Row: Margaret (Peg) Straus, Kenneth H. Straus, Patricia Straus, Irma Straus, Barbara Levy, Jack I. Straus
 Back Row: Robert Levy, Beatrice Levy, Gerald Levy, Jesse I. Straus, Jessica Levy, Robert K. Straus
 Sleeping: Midas, Jesse & Irma's Harlequin Great Dane

In February 1937 Irma Straus established a fellowship in radiology at the Memorial Hospital for the Treatment of Cancer and Allied Diseases in memory of her husband. She also endowed the Jesse Isidor Straus Traveling Lectureship given to a French statesman, writer or scholar of distinction who "will visit colleges of the United States to lecture on some phase of French civilization and culture." Irma also established the Jesse Isidor Straus Child Health Station. The Jesse Isidor Straus Award for scholarship, job performance and personality ratings were given to six New York City students, graduates of the Board of Education's Cooperative High Schools program by R. H. Macy

& Co., Inc. In 1950 Harvard Business School received a gift to be known as the R. H. Macy & Co., Inc. Scholarship Fund in memory of Jesse Isidor Straus. Harvard School of Business Administration also has a Jesse Isidor Straus Professor endowed by Jesse's sons Jack and Robert.

In 1950 Leo Perper, president of Roger Kent, paid tribute to Jesse when he recalled that he got his start in retailing in 1910 as a "boy" with R. H. Macy & Co. He said, "As his first employer and mentor, Mr. Straus on numerous occasions developed his philosophy that profit comes as a reward of service to the consumer and not merely from being in the business for profit." In 1953 the Committee on Awards of the Conference on Distribution named Jesse and Percy to the Hall of Fame of Distribution. On March 24, 1964 New York City Board of Education dedicated Public School 199 in Manhattan the Jesse Isidor Straus School with members of the family in attendance. I'm sure Poppa would have been proud.

How Our Branch of the Family Came to America

By Edith Maas Mendel

A note from Joan Adler: Edith Maas Mendel is a descendant of Babette (Barbara) Straus Maas. Babette was the sister of Sara Straus, wife of Lazarus. Edith has written several delightful stories about her branch of the family and had graciously offered them for publication in the Straus Historical Society's newsletter. They will be reprinted as space permits. I hope you find them as enjoyable as I have.

"It was Adele. No doubt about it. Even her name, printed under the picture confirmed her identity. But how could Adele belong in any book entitled, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life In The Far West?* The most remote category for my glamorous aunt was that of "Pioneer." Yet here she was!

According to the authors, Harriet and Fred Rochlin, the lives of the vast majority of early Jews in the West added up to unending arduous, backbreaking labor and abject poverty. I read and reread the pages on Aunt Adele, and had to agree that the authors had indeed accurately portrayed her life in the West. She was a bird of paradise among hard-working sparrows desperately scratching out an existence in that young area of our country.

The most interesting aspects of Adele's presence in the West were the circumstances which brought her there and these circumstances were never even referred to in the book. The authors must have wondered how the daughter of a wealthy family from the beautiful, highly cultured city of Weisbaden, Germany ended up in the tiny frontier town of Port Townsend, Washington.

Adele's was a luxurious home in Weisbaden, built by her father, Adolf Maas, a prominent and highly successful architect. He built it around 1880, and when I visited the place in 1928, the huge rooms, the crystal chandeliers, the ceiling murals, the marble floors and the staircase with delicate and intricate wrought iron balustrades impressed me. And most amazing for that time period - there were tiled bathrooms on each floor.

The living there was pleasant. Each morning the "friseur" would arrive to dress the hair of the mother and three daughters. The hairdresser served a dual role. She was also the local newspaper, bringing gossip from all the other homes she served.

Each month the suits of the father and sons were packed in a huge box and sent to London to be cleaned and pressed. It seems the German tailors lacked a certain style with which their London counterparts were blessed.

The family strolled leisurely along paths of the famous Kur Garten and sipped coffee in its pavilion, attended the opera and concerts in town and led a life appropriate to its means and position.

Why, then, would a young woman leave this lofty milieu in favor of an under-developed, almost primitive place - the most Northwest town in America?

Adele was handsome, with striking, wavy, auburn hair, well figured, intelligent, witty, willful and delightful. That was her downfall. She caught the eye of a young man who arranged to have an introduction to her and subsequently became an ardent suitor. When the news of his infatuation reached the ears of the family, the World trembled. The young fellow was a member of a lesser nobility of the German Imperial Family. For him to be involved with a commoner was distressing; but when it was discovered that this commoner was Jewish, the situation was unthinkable!

The love-sick youth resisted breaking up his romance with Adele. Thus, her parents received a formal visit from two representatives of the ruling family. Their message, though diplomatically couched, was impossible to misinterpret. It would be greatly to the advantage of Adele and her entire family if she would disappear; leave Germany without a trace!

Her parents were frantic. How does a family dispose of a daughter? In consultation with relatives, they finally dredged up the name of a distant cousin in a distant land. They were assured that he was a fine man, single, successful, Jewish, living in Port Townsend, Washington, a small town lying West of Seattle, across Puget Sound. Israel Katz and his partner

owned a warehouse there and ships coming from South America and the Orient dropped cargo and picked upon supplies at their place. After some correspondence, Mr. Katz embarked on the long journey to fetch his bride. Adele told me she cried herself to sleep every night, fervently praying that his ship would sink.

It didn't. After a quiet wedding the newly-weds, plus Adele's personal maid, set sail for their new home. Because their liner did not tie up at the wharf in Port Townsend, the new bride had to be lowered to a boat no larger than a canoe, which carried her to shore. There was no dock low enough for this small boat, so men in huge hip boots had to wade out to the rowboat and carry her the rest of the way to land. She entered her new life soaking wet, bedraggled and not too joyous.

Her lifestyle in Port Townsend was an eye-opener. The frequent and warm entertaining in their opulent new home, along with her personality, her elegance and wit, drew people to her. Her husband was a sweet man, even-tempered and gentle. He was universally held in high esteem and served several terms as Mayor of Port Townsend. He died before I knew him, but his



Israel and Adele Maas Katz
Courtesy Jefferson County Historical
Society Museum, Port Townsend, WA

children and many nieces and nephews spoke of him with deep fondness and in loving memory. Even with so much going on for her, Adele missed her family and sent letters urging one and all, not only to visit, but to stay with her. Eventually three of her brothers accepted her hospitality, remaining permanently in this country. My father was one of them.

Four children were born to Adele and Israel; two survived. As the years went by, I guess their marriage would have been considered good and solid. Life went on in their big house, filled with vibrant, interesting people until the Army established a post in the town. Sooner or later, everyone gravitated to the Katz home, and when Adele met a good-looking, charming, young Captain stationed at the Army post, her world was transformed. The two of them were soon desperately in love.

Israel Katz was aware of their mutual passion, and offered to divorce Adele, if she so desired. Their sons were grown by then, he said, and he realized their marriage was an arranged one which had brought little romance into her life. He would not stand in the way of her future happiness.

They were divorced and she immediately married her sweetheart and moved into his modest little cottage.

Shortly after her marriage, she came home one afternoon to find a rather large trunk standing in her living room.

Mystified, she opened it and found it crammed with exquisite lingerie of silk and satin, lace trimmed negligees, and hand-embroidered slippers. There was also a note from her former husband explaining that he knew how much she loved such

things and he was afraid she could not afford them on a Captain's salary.

Adele's friends always told me she was fascinating. I guess they were right."



Adele Maas Katz

Courtesy: Jefferson County Historical Society Museum, Port Townsend, WA

Further information from Harriet and Fred Rochlin's book, *Pioneer Jews*, tell us that Adele and her new husband, Herbert Millar, moved to San Francisco where she opened a beauty salon, the city's first. But life did not settle down for Adele. Before long Herbert ran off with one of the beauty salon's assistants and all of Adele's assets. She was alone and without funds. A nervous breakdown forced her into a rest home where she eventually recovered her strength. Once again she entered the beauty business.

Over then ensuing years Adele's fortunes continued their roller coaster ride. She married and divorced two more times, had a run-in with the law regarding impurities in one of the cosmetics she manufactured and suffered the amputation of her leg. All of this did not dampen the spirit of this remarkable

woman.

It is certain that Adele was a strong woman with a zest for adventure. That must have been necessary to survive, and even thrive, in the early days of the American West. I found these same characteristics in her grand niece, Edith Maas Mendel. Edith's intelligence, curiosity and strength of spirit are surely inherited from her glorious Aunt Adele, the American Pioneer.

Thank you Edith, for sending me this delightful story about your Aunt Adele. I hope the newsletter's readers enjoy it as much as I have.



Family Stories

When Jesse was Ambassador to France, daughter-in-law Margaret visited her in-laws with grandchildren Kenneth, Patricia and Pamela. Seven year old Kenneth remembered the trip quite well because he got to sleep in the same bed that aviator Charles Lindburgh slept in the night following his trans-Atlantic flight. The footboard of the bed had a silver plaque stating that Lindburgh slept there.

Jesse was always fastidious about his grooming. He expected his family to follow suit. Granddaughter Jessica Levy remembers being brought to visit with Jesse, only to be sent out of the room with orders to clean her fingernails before returning. Jessica, today, has a large collection of ornamental hands that are displayed on a lovely table in her apartment. When I asked her about them she told me that her interest in them stemmed from her early admonitions from her grandfather. She, too, remembers visiting Jesse and Irma at the embassy in Paris.

Dr. Hans Steinebrei's Books

Dr. Hans Steinebrei has been researching and writing about the emigration of Jews from Otterberg and the Rhein Pfalz area where the Straus family originated. His research has been invaluable in documenting the early days of the Straus family in Germany.

Dr. Steinebrei is the author of a book, *300 Years of Emigration from Otterberg* published by the Institute of Palatinate History in Kaiserslautern. His new book, also about the emigration of Jews from Otterberg, is due to be published shortly. Once again, the Straus Historical Society has contributed material to Dr. Steinebrei for this book.

If anyone is interested in obtaining a copy of either of Dr. Steinebrei's fascinating books, which are written in German, please let me know. I will put you in contact with Dr. Steinebrei and his publisher.

Philip Richard Toohey, Jr. Wine Maker, Mountaineer, Philanthropist

One never knows where a phone conversation will lead. This was certainly true when I called the Toohey family to learn more about the marriage of Phil Toohey's son Peter last October. Phil's sister Tina told me about an exciting new project in which Phil had become involved. Of course, I had to learn more.

I caught Phil just as he was returning from a week of backpacking/camping in Yosemite National Park. He told me he is part of the Yosemite Fund, a private non-profit fund-raising organization for Yosemite. Once a year he spends a week providing support for the mountaineers of the area. It was necessary to cross-country ski the eleven miles to the site. This year the weather was so nice, only 30 degrees at night, that he slept out doors.

I did not know that Phil was a mountaineer until this phone conversation. He is the owner of Sparrow Lane Vineyards where he makes zinfandel wine in Angwin, CA in the Napa Valley. Phil and his lovely wife Denise did an amazing job hosting the Straus family's get-together, "caldamfam" in 1999.

As our phone conversation continued, Phil proceeded to tell me he was in Nepal in May 2003 for the 50th anniversary of Sir Edmund Hillary's triumphant ascent of Mt. Everest. The mountaineering community had gathered to celebrate. He met Sir Edmund, a beekeeper from New Zealand, at a barbecue. Together they washed dishes and brainstormed about ways to do fund-raising and planning. Sir Edmund has spent the past 30 years devoting his energies to environmental causes and to humanitarian efforts on behalf of the Nepalese people. They both feel that the climbing community has used the resources of the area and that they must give something back for that privilege.

Phil is a member of the Rotary International and past president of his chapter. He has a personal tradition of "helping." While on this trip to Nepal in May 2003 he happened to be in Kathmandu when there was a local Rotary International meeting. He said, "Of course, I attended." They were looking for projects to help the local people. On the 17-hour flight home Phil mused over this problem. He told me that coincidence often plays a roll in life and this particular situation was no exception.

Upon returning home a friend introduced him to Kenneth Behring, real estate developer and former owner of the Seattle Seahawks. Ken made a fortune in his professional life and was now in the process of "giving back." He founded the Wheelchair Foundation, an organization whose goal was to distribute one million wheelchairs around the world. After their meeting Phil decided he would like to become involved in this project. He went back to Nepal, met with the Minister of Finance, and

arranged duty free status for the wheelchairs. When he got home he organized a Rotary fund-raiser. Ken's organization will pay half the cost of a container for shipping. So Phil's group needed to raise \$22,000. They raised \$44,000 and sent two containers of wheelchairs to Nepal, almost 600 wheelchairs. Each wheelchair costs \$150. The Wheelchair Foundation matches every \$75 donation: www.wheelchairfoundation.org

Phil returned to Nepal in April and October 2004. His story has been written up in the Himalayan News and for National Geographic. He has become deeply involved in his efforts to help the Nepalese people. He is working with an orthopedic outreach program where, for \$5,000, the group will bring an orthopedic team to outlying villages. He is also working with a global outreach program that is making micro-loans to woman in a effort to help them with start-up businesses. He told me about one woman who makes holiday greeting cards that she sends to the United States for sale. She was loaned

\$100 and is paying that back from the profits of her card sales. Phil has been making presentations at Rotary International Clubs to get more people involved in these kinds of projects.

In November 2005 Phil will be honored as an "Unsung Hero" by the Dali Lahma. He will be presented with a prayer, a kata. Phil appears to be humbled by the honor.

When I was speaking with him on the phone I commented on his selfless contributions to the world's most needy people. He said, "After all, its my heritage. I come from a long family line of people who have done the same kind of thing."

I sent this article to Phil for his approval. His response was: "You make me sound larger than life. I'm just one guy trying to help out and make a difference." There's no question that he's succeeding.



Nepalese recipients of wheelchairs from the Wheelchair Foundation



Above, standing in center: Phil
Below: Phil, second from left, at orthopedic hospital he is helping to fund



Friends of Straus Park

Reported by Al Berr, Edited by Joan Adler,
Photos by Margie Kavanau

The annual "Art in the Park: A Day-Long Celebration of Art, Music, Dance and Food" was held on Saturday, October 16, 2004 in Straus Park at West 106th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue in New York City. Among the entertainers were Soh Daiko Drum Troupe, Floyd Lee and His Mean Blues Band, Alex Fox and His Cuban Son Group, Mike McDermott of the Neighborhood Comedy Club, and Suzy Schwartz and her Boto Fogo Band. We were honored that William T. Castro, Manhattan Borough Commissioner and Namshik Yoon from Parks and Recreation attended and delivered brief speeches of welcome.

A number of vendors set up shop and many artists displayed their work for sale. We are always grateful for contributions of food and the usual neighborhood establishments came through; namely Indian Cafe, Henry's, and the Silver Moon Bakery.

Friends and neighbors joined us as we shared the beauty of the Park and the camaraderie that comes from such events. We were lucky that the weather held up until fifteen minutes before we were scheduled to close shop. The showers did not affect what we all considered to be a very successful day.

We encourage everyone to join us for FSP's very special free events in Straus Park. Every year the greenery and floral displays in the Park become more mature and more beautiful thanks to the hard work of our Park's gardener John Olund. And our events become better and better; with artists offering their paintings or photographs for sale and with vendors selling everything from "antiques," African artifacts, handmade craft items, used books and sheet music and fresh produce and breads. The musical performances are worth the trip alone. Art in the Park truly exemplifies the very best the neighborhood and the city can offer.

Calendar of 2005 Events:

Saturday, April 13th (rain date April 14th)
8th Annual Straus Park Commemorative Celebration
5:30 PM to 8:30 PM

Saturday, May 14th (rain date May 15th)
Photography in the Park
11 A.M. to 3 P.M.

Wednesday, June 15th (rain date June 16th)
Evening Concert in the Park
5:30 P.M. to 7:30 P.M.

Saturday, July 9th (rain date July 10th)
Book Fair
11 A.M. to 3 P.M.

Saturday, October 1st (rain date October 2nd)
9th Annual Art in the Park: A Day-Long Celebration
of Art, Music, Dance and Food
11 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Delta Blues
guitarist
Floyd Lee



William T. Castro,
Manhattan Borough Commissioner

Larry and Shelley
Yates
in front of Larry's
photographs



Silver Moon
Bakery

Almost sold out
by early afternoon

A Letter from William Levitt, Jr. Red Hook, NY

In response to the article about Isidor Straus' service in the House of Representatives, William Levitt, Jr., of Red Hook, NY wrote the following:

"RE: The August '02 article on Isidor Straus and his political activities, here is a glimpse of his adolescence, as seen in a quote from a recently discovered letter by Julius Kaufman, written during the war in 1863 to his parents back in Lichtenau, Germany. The Kaufman brothers were business partners of the Strauses in Georgia; later two Straus sisters married two Kaufman brothers. Matilda Straus Kaufman was my great grandmother.

Julius writes, "The son of our dear friend Straus is going to England and through him you will receive our letters, so that delivery will be assured, providing the ship gets through. ... The name of the young man is Isador Straus, he's leaving here for England in order to buy ships for the exportation of goods and cotton. If they are successful, we will be able to write you regularly. Isador will instruct you with this letter how you will be able to continue correspondence and get it to us. ... if all goes well he will come to see you. If he can come ... it would cause us much joy and would be almost as if we came ourselves. He is only seventeen years old, but he's clever and down-to-earth more than his years would indicate."

Even in his teenage years, Isador, it seems, was dependable and solid enough to send to Europe on business."

Thank you Bill for sending this interesting information. And my apologies for not being able to print it earlier. Space limitations prevent me from printing everything I receive as early as I would like.

Bill Levitt is an artist and antique dealer. His antique shop is located in Kingston, NY.

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Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

Congratulations to Robert (Bob) Grippo whose book, *Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade*, was published by Arcadia Press in October 2004. Bob did extensive research to document the history of the parade, with special emphasis on the balloons. The book contains many photographs.

As part of his research for this book Bob applied, and was accepted, to clown school for the parade. He has been a participant in the parade for the past several years and states that it is the high point of each year.

Bob is now in discussion with film producers who want to make a documentary based on his book and the parade's history. He hopes to include interviews with Straus family members who saw the parade as children, especially those who witnessed it from the Executive Offices on the thirteenth floor. If you are interested in being interviewed, please let me know. Bob's book is available from Amazon.com and at bookstores.

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. You can contact Joan Adler by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistoricalsociety.org A receipt will be issued for your purchase.

Are You Interested In a Trip to Germany?

The Straus Historical Society is considering sponsoring a trip to Germany, to the towns and villages where the Straus family originated. We know that several of the houses that the family lived in are still inhabited by local residents and some artifacts also exist including the crib that Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar slept in as infants. If the group wants it, we can also include visits to the cemeteries in the area where Strauses are buried.

The earliest such a trip could be undertaken is Fall 2005 but the more likely time frame is Spring 2006. Before contemplating such an endeavor, the board of directors needs to know if there would be interest. Please contact me at the above address to let me know if you think a trip to Germany is a good idea and if you would consider joining us on such a trip. We will not proceed with the planning if there is insufficient interest.

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, June 9, 2005 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman, 129 East 79th 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.