



## *Memory*

The Newsletter of Friends of Straus Park  
**Winter 2007/2008**

"Memory" is the name of the memorial statue above the fountain in Straus Park.

### **Letter from the Editor**

The lush garden, flowers, bushes, and newly planted trees continue to provide beauty and joy for many people. A rosebush and six hundred tulip bulbs were planted. Rats are fewer, despite it being the Year of the Rat, while mice have increased. Skateboarding has resulted in some damage to the granite bench and the circular area near the fountain, and many small azaleas have been crushed by people walking into the garden area. Bathing and splashing in the fountain pond is ongoing, despite the Parks Department's warning sign. Once again, the water is unclean due to rats, mice, pigeons, dogs, and human wastes.

The Book/Photography Fair was in July. The weather was beautiful, and our regular participants sold books formerly cluttering their apartments. Some children sold books, too, and they had a great time. Many donated books were sold at a bargain price, with leftovers donated to the NY Public Library. The photographs on panels lined the garden and walkways. Artists discussed their work with passersby, and considerable talent was enjoyed by all. Art in the Park in October was quite successful. At this event, wonderful musical groups enlivened the day, to include Willie y Sus Amigos (salsa and merengue), The George Gee Band (Swing and Big Band sound), The Turnstyle Jumpers, and Suzy Schwartz Brazil Jazz. Glitterbug did face painting, and the children (and some adults) were gleeful, as their faces were transformed into butterfly and cat faces. We would like to thank Indian Café, Henry's, and Silver Moon Bakery for their generous food contributions to our October event. At the Luminaria and Song event for the Winter solstice during the holiday season, luminaria lined the central garden area, and we warmly gathered and sang holiday songs with French horn accompaniment, drank hot cider, and ate cookies.

We also would like to thank all contributing individuals, OPUS Board, J.M. Kaplan Fund, and the Anti-KFC donation for helping to support our efforts to maintain the beauty and presence of Straus Park. For this coming year, anyone who has any new ideas or who wants to help out, or if anyone wants to report ways to keep Straus Park safe and beautiful, please get in touch with us.

Margaret G. Kavanau, Editor

## 2008 Calendar of Events

Wednesday	May 21	(rain date: 5/22)	5:30pm – 7pm	Music in the Park
Saturday	July 12	(rain date: 7/13)	10am – 4pm	Book/ Photography
Saturday	October 18	(rain date: 10/19)	10am – 4pm	Art in the Park
December	(date, to be announced)		Luminaria and Song	

### The Small Park

*By Abraham Moussako*

Many parks in New York City, like Straus Park, are small; they are called ‘pocket’ parks. Straus Park is unique among this group as it was built by the city in 1895, and called Bloomingdale Square. In 1912, it was dedicated to the memory of Ida and Isidor Straus. Many of the other small parks in the city, however, were built by the “master builder,” Robert Moses, mostly in the 1930’s, during the height of the Great Depression. The goal of these parks was to provide natural “flora” and a place where neighborhood children could play. Other small parks are owned by apartment developments.

Today, with increased pollution, the benefits of a small park include providing a place for

fresh air, physical activity, or just quiet contemplation. Straus Park is especially quiet, as two of the three streets it borders are not very busy, and sitting in the park, looking at the memorial statue, can generate contemplative moments. Small parks are where the neighborhood can gather for special events, such as fairs, shows, birthdays, and, sometimes, weddings. Small parks are also where many childhood memories are made. My friend Isaiah said, “The park outside my building allowed me to spend more time playing with my family.” Jack said, “I took my first steps in the park near me, and many other of my memories were made in that park.” Without our small parks, the city would be a very different place.

### Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr.: Their Letters Discovered at New York's YIVO

*By Joan Adler, Executive Director, Straus Historical Society*

A file containing letters written in 1941 between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr. were discovered at New York’s YIVO. They document Frank’s desperate effort to save his family and Nathan Straus, Jr.’s desire to help. The tightening restrictions of the U.S. State Department, along with deteriorating conditions in Europe, prevented even those with powerful connections and money from securing the necessary documents that would allow the Frank family to immigrate.

Nathan Straus, Jr., and Otto Frank were college roommates at Heidelberg University in 1908. Soon thereafter Frank worked at Macy’s, the Straus family owned department store but in mid 1911 Otto returned to Germany. The two families remained close.

As conditions in Europe worsened, Otto was urged to leave Germany. Like many others, he felt he was a German, had fought for Germany in World War I, and would not face discrimination.

It is easy to wonder from today’s prospective why the Frank family remained in the Netherlands. Professor David Engel of NYU compared the correspondence to a blind chess game where the rules kept changing. “Understanding the situation of the Jews in the Netherlands under Nazi occupation ... requires suspension of hindsight.”

Otto Frank made a careless remark to the

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husband of one of his employees about the inability of Germany to win the war. This man reported Otto's remark to the Gestapo. On April 18th he made his first blackmail demand. Realizing the severity of this new situation, Otto wrote to Nathan Jr. on April 30, 1941 asking for assistance. "I would not ask if conditions here would not force me to do all I can in time to be able to avoid worse. ... It is for the sake of the children ...."

Nathan Jr. was the director of the U. S. Housing Authority. His wife, Helen Sachs Straus wrote to the National Refugee Service, "After all the letters - requests for help we've had from people we hardly know, the enclosed one from Mr. Frank, - from my husband's best friend during their university years - an extraordinarily fine man - as you can tell from the letter." A series of letters to and from the Franks and the various immigration agencies ensued.

Otto wrote on October 19th, "It is all much more difficult as one can imagine and is getting more complicated every day." When Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, the Frank's had no further options. The story of what happened to the Frank family is well known and will not be retold here.

### **Partnerships for Parks**

LEAFLET, the newsletter of Partnerships for Parks, a joint program of City Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, included information about ways to care for street trees in front of our city houses. They run a free monthly workshop, offered with the New York Tree Trust, as well as a free one-year program that supports large scale, long-term street tree stewardship. For more information, contact [channaly.oum@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:channaly.oum@parks.nyc.gov) or (212) 676 – 1929, or visit [www.partnershipsforparks.org](http://www.partnershipsforparks.org).

### **Local History**

Many may know, not know, or welcome review that our area near Straus Park was like a valley or dale ("dael") covered in flowers ("bloemen"). The Dutch also called this area "Bloemendael, or

After the war Nathan Straus, Jr. wrote to Otto in Amsterdam, "Both Helen and I were glad to receive your letter and thus have direct personal news of you. Of course, ... we have heard indirectly of the tragic events that have befallen your family. ... the huge scale of the tragedy which has befallen innocent people is almost beyond the human mind to encompass."

Otto Frank spent the rest of his days celebrating the life of his daughter Anne through her diary. He wanted her words to bring tolerance and compassion to a world that had seen so much hatred and war. And he wanted it to show that the human spirit could not be destroyed. In 1957 he established the ANNE FRANK-Fonds, whose aim is to foster "as many contacts as possible between young people of different nationalities, races and religions."

The correspondence between Otto Frank, Nathan and Helen Straus, and the various agencies that tried to help the Frank family, can be viewed at YIVO in the Reading Room of the Center for Jewish History in New York City. A more detailed version of this article may be found on the Straus Historical Society's website: [www.straushistoricalsociety.org](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org)

Bloomingdale. Broadway used to be called "Bloomingdale." The Bloomingdale branch of the NY Public Library and the Bloomingdale School of Music are easy reminders.

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The Nicholas Roerich Museum in an 1898 townhouse on 107<sup>th</sup> Street near Riverside Drive houses Nicholas Roerich's possessions and about 200 paintings done by him of the Himalayas from his Tibetan travels and interest in mysticism. Born in Russia, Roerich was an artist, philosopher, artist, architect, explorer, pacifist, and he worked on scenery in collaborative efforts with Nijinsky, Stravinsky and Diaghilev. "The Roerich Peace Pact of 1935, an international agreement on the protection of cultural treasures, earned him a Nobel Peace Prize nomination."

*(TimeOut Guide)*. Roerich emigrated to New York in the 1920's and had an ardent following.

The statue of man on horseback at 106<sup>th</sup> Street overlooking Riverside Drive is of Franz Sigel. Born in German in 1824, he graduated the German Military Academy, but resigned from the German Army in 1847. Involved in radical politics and the 1848 German Revolution, he was forced to flee the country. He eventually emigrated to the United States, where he taught

in NYC schools and became director of education in St. Louis. An opponent of slavery, he joined the Union Army at the outbreak of the American Civil War. He moved up the ranks to be Major General, fighting many battles, as against Thomas Stonewall Jackson in Shenandoah Valley and against Robert E. Lee at the second Battle of Bull Run. In 1864 he was relieved of his duties. He worked as a journalist in Baltimore, and in publishing and lecturing in New York City. He died in 1902.

An orphanage used to be on the site that is now the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and an Asylum for the Insane was on land now occupied by Columbia University. "Woodlawn," a county seat at 106<sup>th</sup> – 107<sup>th</sup> Street near Riverside Drive, was the site of a revolutionary war skirmish. The Americans drove the British south from the 125<sup>th</sup> Street area to the 105<sup>th</sup> Street area. *(from West 105<sup>th</sup> Street Newsletter, 9/12/94)*

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**FRIENDS OF STRAUS PARK: Kate Ford, President; Deirdre Wulf, Treasurer; Margaret G. Kavanau, Secretary**

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