



Memory

The Newsletter Of Friends of Straus Park
Fall/Winter 2004

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

Letter from the Editor Don't forget to put Straus Park 2005 Events on your calendar. Anyone interested in joining as volunteer, artist or photographer, or book vendor for upcoming events, please contact us. **HAPPY HOLIDAYS!** Margie Kavanau

Note from our Gardener: John Olund planted 600 tulip bulbs in the center garden and in the street tree pits. "The Dogwood Tree," recently planted this year, will likely bloom for the first time next spring. We can also look forward to repeat performances from the spring flowering shrubs, Rhododendron, Forsythia and Azalea. The Clematis vines promise to improve each year. There were some attempts last spring to pull out several of the clematis by the roots. We lost one completely, but the others made a nice comeback. It remains to be seen whether the shadow from the new apartment building across the street on Broadway will have an affect on the blooming plants.

Art in the Park 2004 was a big success! Manhattan Commissioner William T. Castro, and Mr. Namshik Yoon, Parks and Recreation, joined our event. Billy Simms, artist, organized this year's Art in the Park, and he plans an even bigger event for next year. His efforts were celebrated at the end of the day by a sudden torrential downpour! Thank you to our volunteers who helped make for a festive and special day in Straus Park. Special appreciation goes to Indian Café, Henry's Restaurant and Silver Moon Bakery for their food donations to support our event.

Isidor and Ida Straus' House at West 105th Street and Grand Boulevard

By Joan Adler, Executive Director
Straus Historical Society

In 1866, New York City Sheriff in Boss Tweed's administration Matthew Brennan built a clapboard Italianate style house on the northeast corner of West 105th Street and Grand Boulevard. It had a mansard roof, ornate dormers and a six-sided cupola, all of which were topped with spiked ironwork. The front and rear of the house had broad porches; the front was glass enclosed. One side of the house was covered with a huge wisteria vine that, as one observer noted, mercifully covered a great deal of



Lazarus Straus (Isidor's father)

(continued)

the brownish gray siding and dark trimmings. The large barn was positioned on the West End Avenue corner of the property.

The Strauses bought the house with an acre of land in 1883 because Ida felt there was too much illness among the city's children. She wanted to move out of the heart of the overcrowded city. 105th Street was far enough removed to satisfy her. Isidor loved the idea of a house and property large enough to shelter his growing family, his future sons and daughters-in-law and their children. The property contained an apple orchard, grape arbor, pear trees, a small baseball field, chicken coops, a barn with cows and goats and a stable that boarded Nathan Straus' horses as well as those of his friend, New York City Mayor Hugh Grant. The Strauses moved in July 1884.

There were few streets in the area and no thoroughfare from Broadway to West End Avenue. The "Straus Farm" ran uninterrupted from West End Avenue to upper Broadway (called Grand Boulevard at the time) and northward to about 110th Street.

The six Straus children enjoyed the freedom that comes with rural living. They could play ball in nearby Riverside Park and sled down the lengthy park descent from 105th Street to 93rd. Jesse became part of a large group of boys that called themselves the One Hundred and Fifth Streeters.

One entered the property through the 105th Street gate. The front pathway divided around a grass plot with a cast iron fountain in the center. It reunited again in front of a high flight of stone steps leading up to the front porch. The front door was in the middle of this porch.

The main floor of the house contained a center hallway at least twenty feet long. On rainy days the Straus children could be found racing up and down this hallway. To the left were the library, dining room and pantry. To the right were the drawing room and billiard room; the latter a rarity in the day. The rooms were spacious with extremely high ceilings. The second story contained bedrooms and bathrooms. There was the first indoor porcelain bathtub installed anywhere. It was so heavy that the beams had to be reinforced for its installation. This raised the floor six inches above the floors of the other rooms. The house also contained a large attic and access to the cupola via a ladder.

Isidor wrote to the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company in January 1884 regarding the price of installation of a telephone line. He was told that he could connect to the Harlem Exchange for \$108 per annum with a fee of ten cents per five minutes to speak with other people connected to the New York City Exchange. Connection with the New York Exchange would cost \$366 per annum. "This apparently high rental is accounted for by having to run so long a wire from your residence to the nearest central office of the exchange system. For a private telephone line connecting a house in 49th St. bet 8th & 9th Avenues (or 8th Ave & Bway), with your residence above named, the regular yearly rental would be \$445 for a contract of one year." Isidor's father and siblings lived on 49th Street in 1884.

The Strauses died in the Titanic disaster in 1912. Their children, who were grown with families and houses of their own, decided to sell the 105th street house. The neighborhood had changed and many of the beautiful older houses were being torn down. Apartment houses replaced them. The house and property was sold to Harry Schiff, whose Clebourne Apartment House at 924 West End Avenue, was completed in 1913. Straus Park, on West 106th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue was dedicated April 15, 1915.



Interview with Judith Norrell of Silver Moon Bakery

Interviewer for Friends of Straus Park: **Andrea Craig**

FSP: When did the bakery open and what inspired you to open it when and where you did? **Judith:** The bakery opened on November 8, 2000. I have lived in this neighborhood since 1970 and except for the bakery on 100th street where I bought birthday cakes for my daughters and which closed some time ago, there was nothing in the neighborhood. I have always loved bread. I had been baking professionally for several years but was frustrated at the limited menus of the places where I worked.

Because I have always believed in neighborhoods, and, of course, liked the idea of not having to subway it to work, I originally hoped to open a bakery at the Regent Family Residence, which would have also enabled me to work with disadvantaged people. Because I didn't have any business experience, that didn't work out. When I saw the "for rent" sign at 2740 Broadway, I called immediately. It is a tiny space, human-sized, one might say, which was perfect for my concept of a real neighborhood place. The landlady, Georgia Stamoulis, was enthusiastic; she loves food and has actually now opened another place, Georgia's Bakeshop, further down Broadway. I am not involved in it.

FSP: What were your expectations for the store? Did the products people wanted to buy, for example, surprise you in any way? Did you aim to have a "café" from the very beginning? **Judith:** I had no expectations. On my business plan, I listed that I would sell 10 cups of coffee a day! I was surprised and thrilled at the enthusiasm of the neighborhood for good quality - quality is what is important to me. I knew we couldn't have more than 2 tables for the café and those we had to squeeze in. The outdoor café, which was Georgia's idea, took many months to be approved. Some people on the community board didn't believe we would actually provide wait service as they had been deceived by larger restaurants (which shall remain nameless.) Both Georgia and I promised that not only would we have wait staff, we would use china - not throw away cups. I am deeply committed to protecting the environment, and although we have not yet found a suitable substitute for plastic-lined paper cups for take-away, I keep looking.

FSP: It appears to me that your product "menu", especially in the beginning, is influenced by traditional French breads and pastries. Do you have a particular connection with France? **Judith:** I have always admired French breads & pastries, and so, in the beginning, until I became bolder, I started with those. Now, of course, we experiment a lot, sometimes unsuccessfully. We are fortunate that many of our customers are willing to taste and comment.

FSP: Do you have a particular philosophy about the role of neighborhood businesses? **Judith:** I believe in neighborhoods. The impersonality of the large chains, which are trying, and indeed have succeeded, in establishing themselves in our neighborhood degrades the quality of life. Neighborhood businesses, where the workers and the clients know each other, support warmth, communication, and make a geographical area a home. On the day of 9/11 and the day after, the bakery was as crowded as on any holiday - people came in to talk to us, to each other, to be in a good-smelling, friendly, secure environment. They needed something to fill their stomachs, calm their nerves, and let them know that life can go on. Bread is truly the staff of life.

FSP: I understand that you are engaged in another business on the west side of Broadway, a few blocks south. What is happening there? **Judith:** I opened PicNic Market & Cafe on Broadway between 101 & 102 Streets with some new partners, Jean-Luc Kieffer, his wife Jennifer, and my husband Ian. It features take-away foods prepared by Jean-Luc, a wonderful French chef who actually baked with me for fun while waiting for his new baby, Olivia, to be born. PicNic carries really great cheeses, oils, pates, coffees and teas, and many other items, as well as baguettes from Silver Moon. Eventually, there will be a sit-down cafe with wine, and even delivery service.

FSP: What are your responsibilities at Silver Moon and what parts of your job provide the most satisfaction? **Judith:** I oversee everything, discuss all the pastries with Jose the pastry chef, work with the managers, and maintain quality. I experiment with new items and bake our traditional breads (although, with PicNic opening, not as often as I would like.) Baking and creating new breads satisfies me the most, but I must say that a close second is creating a warm environment for the workers and knowing over half of the clients.

November 15, 2004

Save the Date

2005 EVENTS CALENDAR

April 13, 2005	rain date: 4/14	Evening event
May 14, 2005	rain date: 5/15	Photography and Art in the Park
June 15, 2005	rain date: 6/16	Evening event/Concert
July 9, 2005	rain date: 7/10	Book Fair
October 1, 2005	rain date: 10/2	Art in the Park

Friends of Straus Park

Officers: Kate Ford, President; Deirdre Wulf, Treasurer; Margie Kavanau, Secretary; *Memory* Editor (212) 866-9038

Join our organization and help keep Straus Park a very special place!

Write/donate to: Friends of Straus Park, Inc.

Cathedral Station P. O. Box 2021

New York, NY 10025

Don't forget to include your name, address and telephone number.

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24th Police Precinct:

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Parks and Recreation: (212) 360-8111

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