

The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Nathan Straus

Papers, 1840-1990 (bulk 1865-1930)

Compiled by Julie Miller
June 1988

Additions compiled by Laura K. O'Keefe
October 1992

Summary

Title: Nathan Straus Papers, 1840-1990 (bulk dates 1865-1930)

Size: 26 boxes, 19 slipcases (13 linear feet)

Source: Gift of Flora Straus, 1976.
Gifts of Flora Straus, Virginia Straus Bersohn, Nathan Straus, Jr., and Ann Straus Gertler, 1992; 1994

Access: Unrestricted

Biographical Note

Nathan Straus (1848-1931), was a German-born New York city businessman and philanthropist. After making his fortune as a partner in the New York department stores Abraham and Straus and R. H. Macy and Co., Straus, with his wife Lina Gutherz Straus (1854-1930), turned to philanthropy. He advocated milk pasteurization as means to check the spread of tuberculosis, opening the Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory, 1892, in New York at his own expense; he founded the Tuberculosis Preventorium for Children at Lakewood (later it was moved to Farmingdale), New Jersey in 1909; he supported Jewish colonization efforts in Palestine; and he provided relief for the poor during economic and natural disasters.

Straus, like his brothers Isidor (1845-1912) and Oscar S. (1850-1926), was also involved in politics. He served as Park Commissioner in New York City, 1889-1893, as president of the New York City Board of Health, 1898, and in 1894 he refused the Democratic nomination for mayor.

Scope and Content Note

Of the Nathan Straus materials received in 1976, half consists of letters and documents, and the other half of scrapbooks, all dating from the late nineteenth century until soon before Straus's death and primarily documenting his activities as an advocate of milk pasteurization. The 1992 additions include two boxes of family photographs, as well as genealogical materials, a scrapbook, printed matter, a small amount of family correspondence, 1840-1954, and other writings.

The bulk of correspondence dates from 1910 to 1914 and consists primarily of drafts and carbons of letters written by Straus or by secretaries on his behalf, and includes some letters by Lina Straus. A smaller number of letters received by Straus is included. A few letters are in German. The chief topic of the correspondence is milk pasteurization, specifically, the operation of the Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory in New York, and the "milk depots" set up to distribute the Laboratory's milk and infant formulas in poor areas of the city. Also covered are the operation of milk laboratories and depots in other parts of the United States and the world, and Straus's larger efforts to promote milk pasteurization through speech-making before medical and public health groups, and advocacy of legislation.

Other topics include the Tuberculosis Preventorium for Children; Straus's relief efforts on behalf of earthquake victims in Italy, 1909; Oscar S. Straus's 1912 gubernatorial race; a 1914 trip to California; work in Palestine; and some personal, household, and business matters.

Prominent correspondents include Joseph Barondess, Arthur Brisbane, the newspaper editor and a friend; and Hugh J. Grant, mayor of New York, 1889-1892, with whom Straus shared an interest in horse-racing.

Telegrams received by Straus on his 70th birthday, 1918, and condolence notes received on the death of Lina Straus, 1930, are included.

Documents other than correspondence include manuscript, typescript, and printed speeches and articles by Straus, largely undated, on milk pasteurization and tuberculosis. His milk pasteurization work is documented by materials put out by the milk laboratories, including reports, brochures, instructions for mothers, recipes for infant formulas prepared at the laboratories, an order book containing coupons to be redeemed at milk depots, instructions for use of a home pasteurizer ("system Nathan Straus"), and article reprints, ca. 1890s-1910s.

Material on the Tuberculosis Preventorium includes a disassembled scrapbook containing correspondence, minutes, and reports, 1909-1910, with a few later items dating to 1916. These concern the founding and organization of the Preventorium, and the controversy that led to the move from Lakewood to Farmingdale. Also included are some additional correspondence, minutes, statements, reports, and clippings, 1909-1917, concerning the Preventorium, which were removed from scrapbooks in the collection. Of note are two illustrated brochures, 1909 and 1912, which describe life there.

Straus served as a United States delegate to the Third International Congress for the Protection of Infantile Life (III Internationaler Kongress für Sauglingsschutz - Gouttes de Lait), Berlin, 1911, and documents and notes, in French and German, from that conference as well as from the Deuxième Congrès International des Gouttes de Lait, Brussels, 1907, are included.

Straus's interest in Zionism is documented in by-laws, reports, minutes, and letters, 1910-1913, of the Jewish Agricultural Experiment Station, Haifa, Palestine; Henrietta Szold, Secretary, and Dr. Aaron Aaronsohn, Managing Director of the station are the principal writers. Also, minutes, 1912-1913, with some related correspondence and printed material, of the Executive Committee of the Federation of American Zionists; printed material, chiefly from the Zionist Organization of America, concerning the dedication of Hebrew University, 1925; and a report, (no. 14, April/May 1913) of Das Aktionskomitee der Zionistischen Organisation, Berlin, on colonization activities in Palestine.

A trip to California in 1914 is documented by printed material from California Zionist, civic, and other groups, and visiting cards collected in San Francisco. Invitations, texts of speeches, menus, and presentation volumes, 1894-1930, are from testimonial dinners and meetings given in honor of Straus (one of these, 1909, was for Oscar Straus). Similar materials document a dinner given in honor of Prince Henry of Prussia by the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* to the American press at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, 1902. Invitations to dinners given for the Belgian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, and Russian war commissions who were visiting New York, May 1917; an 1898 report of the New York City Board of Health; two large notebooks kept by Straus while a book-keeping student at Bryant and Stratton College, New York, 1865-1866; clippings; and printed material, 1890s-1910s, concerning infant mortality, milk pasteurization, and public health from around the world, particularly Germany, are also included.

Over forty scrapbooks contain clippings and some letters, documents, and printed material, 1885-1929 (only a few items date from before 1890). Clippings are from New York and foreign newspapers; some are in German and a few are in French and other languages. These chiefly document Straus's own activities, particularly his efforts on behalf of milk pasteurization. Other topics include the New York panic winter of 1892-1893, during which Straus supplied coal, at cost, to poor citizens; the progress of anti-tuberculosis efforts; Jewish colonization in Palestine and the work of the Strauses there; Straus's political and business careers; R. H. Macy and Co.; travels and health; Straus's career as an owner of trotting horses which he raced on New York's Harlem River Speedway; and the careers of his brothers, Isidor and Oscar. There are separate scrapbooks concerning the Lakewood Hotel, Lakewood, New Jersey, 1908-1909 (clippings of advertisements for the hotel), in which Straus held an interest; the Preventorium, 1909; relief for earthquake victims in Italy, 1909; and the deaths of Isidor and his wife Ida Straus on the *Titanic*, 1912.

CONTAINER LIST

I. Correspondence, 1892-1930

- 1 1892-Oct. 1910
- 2 Nov. 1910-Sept. 1911
- 3 Nov. 1911-Oct. 1912
- 4 Nov. 1912-Nov. 1913
- 5 Dec. 1913-May 1914; 1917-1918
- 6 1918 (birthday telegrams), 1929, 1930 (sympathy messages), and undated.

See also three folders of correspondence, 1840 (typed transcription of a letter from Lazarus Straus, Nathan's father), 1889, 1917, 1921, 1925, 1927, 1940, 1954, and undated, in Box 20; and letters of condolence to the family after Nathan Straus's death in 1931, in Box 23.

II. Speeches and Articles

III. Philanthropic Work, 1890s-1925

A. Child Health

- 7
- 8 Milk pasteurization, ca. 1890s-1910;
Berlin conference, 1911;
Brussels conference, 1907;
Preventorium, 1909-1916.

B. Zionism

- 8 Jewish Agricultural Experiment Station, 1910-1913;
Federation of American Zionists, 1912-1913;
Hebrew University dedication, 1925;
Actionscomite der Zionistischen Organisation, 1913

IV. General, 1898-1917

- 8 California trip, 1914
- 9 Testimonials, 1894-1930;
War commissions invitations, 1917;
Prince Henry of Prussia testimonial, 1902;
Report of the New York City Board of Health, 1898

V. Clippings and Printed Material, ca. 1890s-1930

- 10 **A. Clippings, ca. 1890s-1930**
- B. Printed Material, 1890s-1910s**

- 11 Germany
- 12 Great Britain, United States, Belgium, Cuba, Egypt, Holland, Spain

See also the clippings and other printed matter in boxes 20-23.

VI. Scrapbooks, 1885-1929

see also box 27

- 13 1894-1906; 1894; 1908 (Europe)
- 14 1912 (Titanic); 1916-1925; 1918
- 15 1910-1911 (Washington Drive); 1909-1914
- 16 1909; 1909 (Tuberculosis Preventorium); 1909 (Italian Earthquake Relief)
- 17 1907-1908 (Europe); 1907-1908; 1907
- 18 1908 (Montreal); 1908 (Europe); 1908 (2)
- 19 1925-1929; Bryant and Stratton College notebooks, 1865-1866

VII. 1992 Additions

- 20 Correspondence: 1840, 1889, 1917, 1921, 1925, 1927, 1940, 1954, and undated
Genealogical materials for Straus and Guthertz families
Lina Straus's account of NS's efforts to end coal strike, 1902
Articles by and about NS, 1920s-1990
Awards given to NS, 1908, 1923
- 21 Guestbook, 1900-1913
Autograph album, ca. 1888-1889
NS's prayer book, inscribed by his father, 1874
The New Palestine, v. 14, no. 4, Feb. 1928: dedicated to NS in honor of his eightieth birthday
Memorial tribute to NS by New York City Board of Aldermen, 1931
- 22 First and fourth annual reports of the Nathan and Lina Straus Health Centre, Jerusalem, 1932 and 1935
Scrapbook of clippings about NS, 1906
- 23 Scrapbook with reproductions of pictures of Otterburg, Germany, and Straus family tree
Scrapbook of clippings, letters of condolence, etc., concerning NS's death, 1931
- 24 Photographs:
Three daguerreotypes (ca. late 1840s?) in wooden box
(a man, a woman, and a boy and girl.)

Ambrotype: Nathan Straus at about age 8, ca. 1856.

Tintype: Sarah and Lazarus Straus, ca. 1857.

Tintype: Hermine Straus, ca. 1860-1862.

Tintype: Nathan Straus with trotting horse, ca. mid-1880s.

- 25 Photographs:
- Nathan Straus, ca. 1854-1925 (three folders).
 - Lina Straus, ca. 1870-1925.
 - Nathan and Lina Straus's golden wedding anniversary, 1923.
 - Straus relatives, ca. late 1800s-early 1900s.
 - Gutherz relatives, ca. 1860-1923.
 - Straus family home, W. 72nd Street, New York, ca. 1890-1917.
 - "Groups in Adirondacks," ca. 1889-1891.
 - Talbotton, Georgia, 1988.
 - Nathan and Lina Straus Health Centre, Jerusalem, 1920? and 1985.
- 26 Scrapbook / Guestbook from "Driftwood," the Straus family home in Mamaroneck, New York, 1914-1926. Interspersed with guests' signatures and comments are correspondence, mostly of an official nature, and newspaper clippings on Zionism, the end of World War I, and related topics.
- 27 Scrapbook, 1894-1906. Acquired, 1994
Tributes to Nathan Straus on the occasion of his 80th birthday, 1928 (bound volume of photoreproductions of original letters prominent persons and public figures). Acquired, 1994.

Slipcases

- | | |
|----|-----------|
| 1 | 1885-1894 |
| 2 | 1890-1894 |
| 3 | 1893-1894 |
| 4 | 1893-1905 |
| 5 | 1893-1907 |
| 6 | 1894-1904 |
| 7 | 1895 |
| 8 | 1897-1904 |
| 9 | 1905-1906 |
| 10 | 1906-1908 |

11	1908-1909
12	1908-1909
13	1908-1909 (Europe)
14	1908-1909 (Lakewood Hotel)
15	1908-1912
16	1909
17	1909-1910 (Milk)
18	1910
19	1910-1912