



The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP)

COLLECTION ERNST G. STRAUS – P 290

Ernst Gabor Straus, my father, was born February 25, 1922 in Munich the youngest of five children of Elias (Eli) Straus, a prominent attorney and leader of the Jewish community, and Rahel Goitein Straus, a medical doctor, feminist and Zionist. Shortly after the death of Eli Straus in 1933 the family relocated to Palestine where Rahel settled in Jerusalem with Ernst and his sister Gabriella. Straus, who had developed as a mathematical prodigy from an early age, studied at the Hebrew University. He cut short his studies to emigrate to the United States in 1941, and without an undergraduate degree, was admitted to graduate school at Columbia University. On Thanksgiving Day of 1944 he married fellow graduate student mathematician **Louise Miller** (b. June 7, 1919, d. June 13, 2008) under the auspices of The New York Society for Ethical Culture. Shortly after their elopement, the Strauses moved to Princeton, New Jersey where Ernst began a four-year mathematical assistantship with Albert Einstein at the Institute for Advanced Studies. During this period Straus remained a graduate student at Columbia, since the Institute does not grant academic degrees. Straus, as Einstein's sole assistant during this period, worked daily with him on mathematical models to support the quest for a unified field theory. When a position at UCLA opened in 1948, Straus wrote a manuscript on work with Einstein that served as his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University and formed one of three papers published with Einstein. My father and Einstein remained in frequent contact and continued to collaborate by mail until Einstein's death in 1955.

My father's career at UCLA was spectacularly productive. He specialized in numerous areas of mathematics including number theory, combinatorics, group theory, linear algebra, geometry and graph theory. He was among the founders of Euclidean Ramsey theory. His publications number 139, and at the time of his death he had seven manuscripts in progress, and was the second most productive mathematician in the history of the UCLA Mathematics Department. He also served on the board of the Pacific Journal of Mathematics from 1951-64, and served as Managing Editor from 1954-1959.

Straus often spoke of his association with Einstein, and many of those talks are in this Archive. His usual topic was "Einstein the Man." I would like to take this opportunity to say something of Ernst Straus the man. My father was a remarkable person. He knew something, usually a lot, about nearly everything (except sports). I recall his ability to work the very difficult New York Times crossword puzzles using only the clues across (in his second language!). He was very generous, kind, modest, and decent to all people. He especially loved children and animals, and children from blocks around brought all the injured animals they found to him for nursing. In a speech in this Archive memorializing Einstein one month after his death, Straus comments "In fact his ability to wiggle his ears was the only accomplishment of which he would boast shamelessly and which he was quite eager to show off." This brings to mind my father's ability to touch the tip of his nose with his tongue, to our endless delight. I am not sure who would win that particular talent contest, my father

or Einstein. A lifelong pacifist, he was very active in the anti-Vietnam war movement and the nuclear freeze effort. He had a wonderful sense of humor and I recall his howls of laughter watching such American TV fare as “Get Smart,” “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In,” and “All in the Family.” He did most of his mathematics at home between ten at night and three in the morning, writing on a yellow pad and walking out to gaze at the stars regularly. A diabetic since 1946, he was careful managing the disease and remained remarkably healthy, never complaining of the inevitable difficulties, until problems began to mount in his last year. On July 12th, 1983 he picked strawberries in the garden and suffered a fatal heart attack shortly afterward.

Louise died at my home in San Jose shortly after her 89th birthday. From 1948-1954 she had been an early computer programmer at a National Bureau of Standards facility (SWAC) on the UCLA campus, and she taught correspondence courses in math for UCLA after my birth in 1954. She did much volunteer work for developmentally disabled children.

As did my father, I, **Daniel Albert Straus** (b. November 2, 1954), had the experience of working for a Nobel laureate (Robert H. Grubbs) and am currently a chemistry professor at San Jose State University. My brother **Paul Elias Straus**, a carpenter, was born in November 29, 1957 and deceased September 24, 2010. He leaves behind two adult children, **Emily Louise Straus** (b. December 26, 1989) and **Benjamin Frederick Straus** (b. July 30, 1992).

Dr. Rahel Straus, née Goitein, was born in Karlsruhe March 21, 1880 to rabbi Gabor Goitein and schoolteacher Ida Loewenfeld. Rahel’s father died in 1883, a suicide. He had been close to Eli’s father, wealthy self-made banker Samuel Straus, who had visited Rabbi Goitein for private lessons each morning. When in 1893 Samuel’s wife died at the age of forty, the Goitens (Ida and her four surviving children) moved into the Straus house where Ida watched after both broods. Rahel was thus raised with her future husband. Rahel graduated from a “girl’s finishing school” and in 1893 became a member of the first class of the first girl’s high school in Germany. She gave the valedictory at Karlsruhe Girl’s High School in 1899. She embarked on her medical career at Heidelberg University in 1900 as the first regular female student in medical school in Germany with full financial support from her uncle Raphael Loewenfeld. Rahel completed her state examinations in 1905 and soon married lawyer and Jewish community leader Eli Straus, to whom she had been engaged for three years, and they established a home in Munich. After completing her doctor’s thesis following three years of clinical experience, she opened her own practice in her home in 1908, with the wide hallway as her waiting room.

Rahel Straus was active in social, professional, and political organizations in Munich, most centered on women’s issues and Zionism. These included the Women’s Interest Organization, the Society for Voting Rights, the Society of Jewish Women for the Advancement of Culture in Palestine, and the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). She also served on the national executive board for the Jewish Women’s League and was under consideration to become its president in 1932.

In 1933 Eli Straus died of cancer at age 54, and the family soon after migrated to Palestine. Rahel continued to practice medicine until 1940, and immersed herself in social and political causes. The organization AKIM, a society for care of the retarded, begun by Rahel, still functions in the Straus House under the name Beit Rahel Straus.

This organization grew from Rahel's determination to find useful purpose for the excess or climate inappropriate clothing brought from Germany by migrants. She employed retarded people to cut the cloth into ribbons that were sewn together and woven into rugs, and this became a commercial success. When Rahel published her well-received autobiography "Wir Lebten in Deutschland" she donated the proceeds to AKIM. In 1952 Rahel founded the Israeli chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. As the sociologist Katarzyna Czerwonogóra pointed out "...we can easily argue that the social services, educational system and health care of Israel was built by women's organizations (Hassadah, WIZO) or particular women (see, for example, the book "Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel" by Margalit Shilo). It was thanks to their work that when the State of Israel was established in 1948, it was ready to absorb immigrants, to provide them with social care, schools and health care. Rahel's calls contributed to the discourse that provoked this process."

Rahel Straus remained mentally vital and engaged with vigor in the causes she championed throughout her entire life. Rahel remained in close contact with her children; her correspondence with my parents is in this archive. We visited Israel in summer of 1960 and I still remember the warmth and playfulness of my grandmother. I recall her painting watercolors. I have four vibrant landscapes depicting her neighborhood in the Palestine days in my home. Rahel died in her home while playing cards at her table on May 15, 1963.

Daniel A. Straus
San Jose, California, July 2012

Correspondence between Ernst and Louise Straus and his mother Rahel Straus

Record No.	Description	Quantity	Date
1	Letters from Rahel Straus to her son and his wife, Ernst and Louise Straus German, English [the letters to Ernst are in German and the letters to Louise in English]	7 letters	1943 - 1945
2	ibid.	15 letters	1946 - 1947
3	ibid.	13 letters	1948
4	ibid.	15 letters	1949
5	Letters from Rahel Straus to her son and his wife, Ernst and Louise Straus German	12 letters	1950
6	ibid.	13 letters	1951 - 1952
7	Letters from Rahel Straus to her son and his wife, Ernst and Louise Straus and to the grandchildren German, English	8 letters	1953 - 1958

8	Letters from Rahel Straus to her son and his wife Ernst and Louise Straus German	6 letters	1960 - 1961
9	Incomplete or undated letters from Rahel Straus and from other family member to Ernst and Louise Straus <u>incl.</u> : request from Rahel Straus to her son to send a letter or telegram to the American Consulate in Haifa, promising that she will only be a visitor in the USA and will return to Palestine and that Albert Einstein will give his personal promise for it; list with things she orders from Ernst Straus German, English	6 items	no dates
10	Letters from Ernst and Louise Straus to his mother Rahel Straus English, German	28 letters	1954 - 1959
11	ibid.	19 letters	1960 - 1961
12	ibid.	12 letters	1962
13	- Letter from Ernst Yechiel, Jerusalem to Gedalyah describing the rumors re the Jews in Europe and the situation and his personal life in Palestine, Jan. 1942 - Undated or incomplete letters from Ernst and Louise Straus to his mother Rahel Straus - Birthday wishes from the grandchildren to Rahel Straus - Note from Ernst's aunts regarding the collection of the letters to Rahel Straus, 1963	15 letters	1942, 1963, no dates
14	Last poem written by Rahel Straus German	1 p.	1962

Letters from Ernst Straus to his wife Louise

15	Letters from trip to Israel	6 letters	Nov. 1976
16	Letters from Sabbatical at the University of Michigan Union, Ann Arbor, Michigan	14 letters	Jan.-March 1977

Memoirs of Ernst G. Straus

17a-b	Drafts of a partially completed (unpublished) autobiography of Ernst Straus (typed and handwritten versions)	ca. 130 p.	Aug. 1975, 1979 - 1980
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Working with Albert Einstein

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| 18 | Poem written by Albert Einstein on the occasion of Daniel Straus' birth
German text written by Einstein with English translation (copy) | 2 p. | Nov. 1954 |
| 19 | Notebook with observations on Einstein and Einstein's comments, including remarks on logical thinking, simplicity, religion, God, human relationships, science etc., written by Ernst Straus while working with Einstein | 18 p. | 1944 - 1948 |
| 20 | "Albert Einstein's Work", typescript by Ernst Straus for a speech at the Westwood Synagogue in Los Angeles | 8 p. | no date |
| 21 | Memoirs on work with Albert Einstein (probably the manuscript of an article or speech) | 13 p. | no date |
| 22 | - Memoirs of E. Straus on his work with Albert Einstein 1944/1948 – typescript for a talk given in Jerusalem, 1979
- Typescript for a talk about Einstein and his thoughts of education, at Yeshiva College, 1979
- Notes for a panel on "working with Einstein", no date | 53 p. | 1979, no date |
| 23 | - Speech and remarks by Ernst G. Straus at the "Einstein Centennial" in 1979 (typed version), including letter sent to Louise attached to the speech
- Letter from Louise Straus to her son Daniel (Danny) re this and other speeches by E.G. Straus | ca. 20 p. | 1979, 1984 |
| 24 | Biographical article on Albert Einstein, written by Ernst Straus probably for the <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> | 5 p. | no date |
| 25 | Thoughts and notes by Ernst Straus re the relationship between Albert Einstein and Kurt Gödel | 4 p. | no date |
| 26 | Draft of letter from Ernst Straus to Prof. Eckehard Koehler about the relationship between A. Einstein and Kurt Gödel | 7 p. | no date |
| 27 | Draft of letter from Louise Straus to Prof. Jeferman (?) recounting several episodes of the relationship between Albert Einstein and Kurt Gödel, written 2 years after the death of her husband Ernst Straus | 4 p. | Feb. 1985 |
| 28 | Typescripts prepared by Ernst Straus of scientific articles by A. Einstein and E. Straus at the "Institute for Advanced Study", Princeton, New York:
- "The Influence of Expansion of Space on the Gravitation Fields Surrounding the Individual Stars", by Albert Einstein and Ernst G. Straus
- "A Generalization of the Relativistic Theory of Gravitation", by Albert Einstein
<u>incl.</u> : uncompleted draft of letter by E. Straus to Bernie (?) | ca. 20 p. | ca. 1945 - 1946 |

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| 29 | Reprints of articles by A. Einstein and E. Straus:
- The Influence of the Expansion of Space on the
Gravitation Fields Surrounding the Individual Stars", by
Albert Einstein and Ernst G. Straus, 1945
- "A Generalization of the Relativistic Theory of
Gravitation II", by A. Einstein and E.G. Straus, 1946 | 15 p. | 1945 - 1946 |
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Photos of the Straus family

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| 30 | - Photos and drawing of Rahel Straus' parents, Gabor &
Ida Goitein
- Photo of Ernst Straus' grandfahter, Samuel Straus | 4 photos | 1931, no date |
| 31 | Photos of Ernst Straus' father, Eli(as) Straus | 4 photos | 1925, no date |
| 32 | Photos of Rahel Straus, some with her siblings or other
family members | 12 photos | ca. 1890 –
1960 |
| 33 | Photos of Ernst Straus
Sketch of Ernst Straus giving a talk at the Albert Einstein
Centennial Symposium, UCLA Sept. 1979 | 3 items | ca. 1935 -
1979 |
| 34 | Photos of Ernst Straus' brother, Peter Straus | 3 photos | 1957, no date |
| 35 | Album with photos of the Straus family and other relatives
in Germany | 1 item | no dates |
| 36 | Photos of various family members | 4 photos | 1956, no dates |

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| 37 | Familiy Chronicle of the Straus family, dedicated to
Samuel Straus, Karlsruhe on his 60 th birthday by his son
Dr. Eli Straus, who conducted the extense research of the
family
(English version) | 15 p. | Sept. 1903 |
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