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MS-130: World War I Letters of Henry W. Straus

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MS-130: World War I Letters of Henry W. Straus

Description

This collection comprises 48 letters from Henry W. Straus to his wife Anna. They were written between June 1918 and March 1919, when Henry, as a U.S. Army medical officer, was serving a British ambulance corps in France. Throughout the letters, Straus addresses his wife with great tenderness and yearning, anticipating their reunion and post-war life. He also displays a progressive attitude with respect to women's independence, abilities, and right to do useful work.

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Keywords

World War I, WWI, First World War, War Correspondence, 105th Sanitary Train, 30th Division Field Hospital, 130th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps, Jewish soldiers

Disciplines

European History | History | Jewish Studies | Military History | Oral History | United States History

Guide to the World War I Letters of Henry W. Straus



**Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections & College Archives**

**Processed by Devin McKinney
December 2012**

MS – 130: The World War I Letters of Henry W. Straus

(.33 cubic feet, 1 box)

*Processed by Devin McKinney
December 2012*

Inclusive Dates: June 1918 - March 1919
Bulk Date: 1918

Collection size

The collection consists of 1 box containing 5 folders.

Biographical note

Born in New York, New York, on May 21, 1891, Henry William Straus was the son of Russian immigrants Herman and Ida Straus. He had three brothers, Samuel, Abraham, and Leon. Another sibling died very young.

Choosing medicine as his career, Straus matriculated at New York University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College in 1909. Four years later, he completed his studies at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Baltimore; he then served a two-year internship at Baltimore's Hebrew School of Nursing (later renamed Sinai Hospital). While there, he met Anna Ligourie, a nursing student from New London, Connecticut. They were married in 1917.

Soon after, the couple moved to Brooklyn, where Henry opened a private practice. In 1918, he made the Honor Roll of the Medical Society of the State of New York for Kings County.

That year, Straus enlisted in the U.S. Army. Commissioned as a lieutenant with the 105th Sanitary Train, 30th Division Field Hospital, Ambulance Company No. 117, he departed for his posting in France on June 22, 1918. Like many young Americans, he was assigned to assist the medical corps of an allied foreign power, in this case Great Britain's 130th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps. Straus served as a medical officer at various bases and hospitals in central France for the brief remainder of the war, ultimately attaining the rank of captain. During her husband's absence, Anne supplemented his allotment checks by providing home nursing for private clients.

After the war, Henry Straus resumed his practice in Brooklyn, and joined the visiting staff of the Jewish Hospital as a pediatrician. Specializing in children's diseases, he became a pioneer in the field of immunology, co-authoring studies on the human implications of immunological response in rhesus monkeys. He was also a member of the Pediatric Society and the American Medical Association.

On November 21, 1937, Henry W. Straus died at his home in the Prospect Heights area of Brooklyn, following an illness of several months. He was just 46 years old. Anna Straus passed away in her hometown of New London on May 23, 1966, age 75.

Scope and content note

This collection comprises 48 letters from Henry W. Straus to his wife Anna (whom he usually refers to as “Anne”). They were written between June 1918 and March 1919, when Henry, as a U.S. Army medical officer, was serving a British ambulance corps in France. Throughout the letters, Straus addresses his wife with great tenderness and yearning, anticipating their reunion and post-war life. He also displays a progressive attitude with respect to women’s independence, abilities, and right to do useful work.

Straus’s military experience appears to have been remarkably placid. He never saw combat, and his greatest difficulties seem to have been the rigor of long hikes and the tedium of awaiting his next set of orders. In the meantime, he eats well, enjoys local entertainments, and is billeted in a succession of picturesque villages far from the fighting. He often expresses both relief and regret that fate has not exposed him to the harsher realities of the war.

The absence of any account of these realities is perhaps the weakness of the collection. Yet researchers will find the Straus letters of anecdotal interest on the subjects of World War I, the diversity of American involvement in that conflict, and the experience of young Americans in the foreign medical corps. The letters are also worthwhile for the sentiments they reveal of a young husband far from his young wife, wishing to serve the cause of peace in a time of war, uneasy with his comparatively soft station, yet seemingly protected by the gentle hand of chance.

Note: Because of wartime censorship, Straus, like other soldiers stationed overseas, was not able to identify his precise location. This explains the heading “Somewhere in France” that is found on most letters.

Box 1

Series I: Letters to Anne Straus, June 1918 – March 1919

Folder 1

- June 8, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- June 24, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- June 26, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- July 5, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
“ . . . in a small village in southern France, behind the American Front.”
- July 15, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- July 18, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
Headed “Letter no. 1,” all letters to be numbered from now on; “then you will know which ones are missing.”
- July 25, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- July 28, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”

The company's temporary duty is assembling ambulances that come from the US in pieces.

- August 5, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- August 19, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- August 22, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”

Folder 2

- September 2, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- September 6, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- September 23, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- October 3, 1918 — “France”
- October 11, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
“It is better that we stay here a little longer now, and make sure that this sort of thing shall never happen again. By making the additional sacrifices now, we will secure for our children the right to live in peace.”
- October 17, 1918 — “France”
- October 25, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- October 28, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
Brief note from “a village with nothing but soldiers and ruined houses in it.”

Folder 3

- November 2, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- November 6, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- November 11, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
HWS heard the previous night of the Armistice, the treaty ending the war. “This is perhaps the most glorious day in history.”
- November 13, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- November 16, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
- November 29, 1918 — “Somewhere in France”
Stars and Stripes says Straus's division will be one of the first sent home.
- December 9, 1918
- December 21, 1918 — “Teille – France”
- December 24, 1918
- December 27, 1918
- December 29, 1918 — “Montbizot” (near Le Mans)

Folder 4

- January 4, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
- January 5, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”

- “ . . . we haven’t anything to complain about — only this dreadful monotony, and the restlessness to be going home.”*
- January 10, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
 - January 14, 1919
 - January 22, 1919
The division was inspected the previous day by Gen. John Pershing.
 - January 24, 1919
 - January 24, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
 - January 26, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”

Folder 5

- February 4, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
- February 9, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
“Your independence was in fact one of the things I most admired about you before we were married. I hate people with such a narrow view of things, as to look down on a woman doing her share of the work . . .”
- February 12, 1919 — “Montbizot – Sarthe”
- February 16, 1919 — “Le Mans”
- February 23, 1919 — “Forwarding Camp, Le Mans – Sarthe”
- February 24, 1919 — “Le Mans”
- February 28, 1919 — “Le Mans – Sarthe”
- March 3, 1919 — “Le Mans – Forwarding Camp”
- March 10, 1919 — “Forwarding Camp”
- [undated] “Monday”
It is difficult to ascertain when this letter was written. Straus refers to getting an upper berth (on the train) after leaving Washington, and suggests Anne stay over Christmas (in New York?) before returning to Baltimore. He says the weather is warming and the snow melting, indicating it is early springtime.

Front image: “Unknown US Army Ambulance men ‘Somewhere in France’ circa 1918.” Original source unknown. Located at http://www.usmilitariaforum.com/forums/index.php?/topic/17577-meatwagons-military-ambulances/page__st__20.