



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
 CONTACT: LEIGH TRAPP, PUBLICITY FOR HERITAGE MUSEUM  
 949.610.5570 OR LEIGHTRAPP@MAC.COM

### **Straus Painting Needs Restoration**

Submitted by Betty Sherrill

With a slight kindly smile on his face, the portrait of Harry S. Straus hung over the fireplace in the Ecusta cafeteria for many years. Straus was the founder of Ecusta Corporation which made fine papers for cigarettes, Bibles, air mail envelopes and other utilizations.

As the demise of the paper mill approached a few years ago, Transylvania County Planner Mark Burrows was contacted by the local volunteers at the county's archives, to investigate the possibility of saving the Straus portrait and other historical photos from the plant. After Burrows spoke with David Poor, the last plant manager of the paper mill, the items were promised by Poor who stored them in his home until the opportunity to turn them over to the county's archives committee.

About that time the county's archives merged with the Rowell Bosse North Carolina History Room at the new Transylvania County Library. The portrait and photos were donated to the Transylvania Heritage Museum as a better repository for exhibit.

### **Restoration**

Art restorers, Bill and Linda Muir of Muir Fine Arts, now have the portrait and are ready to rehabilitate both the portrait and the frame. "It's well painted and the frame is worth restoration, too" said Linda Muir. A condition report and proposed treatment will be filed, however two main needs are obvious. "There is a hole in the painting, which shouldn't be too hard to repair and repaint but the frame has numerous dings," explained Muir. The total costs are quoted as \$1,500 but \$250 being donated by the Muirs. Therefore \$1,250 must be raised before the work can begin.

### **A Mystery**

Although there is a signature by the painter, it cannot be read. The Transylvania Heritage Museum would like to know when the Straus portrait was painted and who the artist was. Any other information such as when the painting was acquisitioned and how old Straus was at the time of the painting would be useful information to retain by the museum.

### **Memories**

Former Ecusta employee, Ruby Sprouse, commented on Harry Strauss. When asked if Ecusta employees liked their boss, she said, " Oh yes, absolutely! Mr. Straus was admired by the employees. He was generous and good to us. He was also very involved in the community."

Current city councilman Mac Morrow also worked for Ecusta. He remembered that at one time, Straus' portrait was removed to a private office and a photo of Whiteside Mountain was hung over the cafeteria fireplace instead. "Everybody had a fit," said Morrow. "They were very fond of him." The portrait was soon returned to its proper spot. "He did a lot for the people in this community," Morrow remarked



**Photo of painting attached -  
 Courtesy of the Transylvania  
 Heritage Museum**



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## **Straus Painting Needs Restoration (pg 2)**

### **A Brief History**

Hans Herman Straus, later known as Harry, had a relative in New York so he emigrated from Mannheim, Germany in 1903 expressly to learn English. However, he married Martha Washington Landeck and decided to remain in America. He began working in sales for a cork and machine company and was unanimously elected president within five years. Straus biographer, Bryan duToit said, "(Straus) was a bright, hard-working young man and full of initiative." His position later led to work with the endless belt operations and the Peerless Rolled Leaf Co. When the company "went public" on the stock exchange, Straus ended up with the majority of the stock," said duToit

By 1912, Straus had bought a rotogravure printing company, then the OK Button Molds Manufacturing Co. and then the Franks Machine Co. which produced gold, straw, silk and wood veneer cigarette tips. There were also two other companies that he either owned or partnered. It was during this time that Straus became a naturalized citizen and began to use the name "Harry."

Straus wanted to become more involved in the tobacco business and started research on hemp and flax for cigarette papers in California. He searched the south for a plant location. Among his specific requirements were a site not in a major manufacturing area, but rather a small town with a highly employable population, a clean high volume of water and close proximity to a railroad.

Straus hired a research team from the University of North Carolina to help find an appropriate site. "After looking over 28 sites, the search narrowed down to four sites (all in western North Carolina) and Brevard was the eventual winner," said duToit.

After construction and operations begin in the late 1930s, the paper plant eventually employed 2,300 employees. With the addition of the cellophane division, total employees at the Ecusta site were over 3,000.

### **Community Involvement**

As well as buying camp Sapphire as a recreation area for his employees and their families, Straus had interests in other county activities, especially music. He formed the Ecusta Band. Former band member Bobbie Sherrill Rimmer remember he bought everything. "He supplied the uniforms, the instruments and the teachers," she said. Straus also helped form the Brevard High School Band and was a great supporter of the Brevard Music Center. His comment was, "The music center is one of the greatest additions to the cultural life of Brevard. My support of (this) effort is the result of my observations of the wonderful work being done," Straus became a loyal benefactor and trustee of the music center for many years.

### **Restoration Funding**

In order for the Harry Straus portrait to be restored, The Transylvania Heritage Museum is asking for donations. "We need to complete this project by the time the summer season is fully open, perhaps early June," said museum director Rebecca Suddeth. "There are a lot of former employees that are still faithful to the memories of Ecusta and many have remained close friends. We hope these folks will join together to save this important artifact that symbolizes the huge impact the paper mill had on our population and our history."

Checks should be made out to The Transylvania Heritage Museum and marked for "Straus painting restoration" or just "painting restoration" and mailed to: Transylvania Heritage Museum, P. O. Box 2347, Brevard, NC 28712. Donors may also come by the museum at 189 West Main St. to make their donation. Regular hours are 10:00 a.m. until 5 p.m., Wednesdays through Saturdays.

Bryan duToit's book, "Ecusta and the Legacy of Harry H. Straus" is found in the museum shop, Heritage Gifts.

For any questions, please call the museum at 884-2347



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**Transylvania Heritage Museum 2012 Calendar  
Opening February 18th, 2012  
Wednesday - Saturday, 10am until 5pm**

**Special Exhibits:**

- February 18th – June 30th: Perseverance, Strength, and Faith: The African American Experience in Transylvania County
- July 4th – November 24th: Roads, Rails, and Trails
- December 1st – December 15th: Rock Around the Decade: The 1950's

**Special Events:**

- 4th Friday's of the Month
- May 26th: White Squirrel Festival
- July 4th: All American Fun at the Museum (Large Bingo, under the tent from 5:30-8:30pm)
- September 1st: Founders' Day Festival from 10am - 5pm
- October 6th: Rosman Heritage Day Festival from 10am – 5pm
- October 27th: Halloweenfest - Scarecrows on the Lawn
- December 1st: Twilight Tour - Rock Around the Decade Exhibit opens

**Walking Tour Schedule:**

- May 26th (White Squirrel Festival): Rosenwald Community Tour 10:30am, Departure Location TBA
- Saturday, June 16th: Behind the Scenes: East Main 10:30am. See the buildings, businesses and churches from the Court House to the Inn at Brevard, including visit to a cemetery and the home of one of our town's founding fathers. Departs from the Compodium parking lot at 10:30am. Reservations required by the preceding Thursday at noon. Cost is \$10 per person. Tour lasts approximately 45 minutes.
- July 4th (4th of July Festival): Probart Street Tour 10:30am. Discover the link between some of the founding families and the town's growth and economy; including the Red House Inn, the oldest home in Brevard. Departs from the Transylvania Heritage Museum at 10:30am. Reservations required by the preceding Thursday at noon. Cost is \$10 per person. Tour lasts approximately 45 minutes.
- August 4th, Behind the Scenes: West Main 10:30am. Explore Brevard and learn about the early families and architecture of West Main from a different perspective while walking behind buildings and through alleyways. Departs from the Transylvania Heritage Museum at 10:30am. Reservations required by the preceding Thursday at noon. Cost is \$10 per person. Tour lasts approximately 45 minutes.
- September 1st (Founders' Day): Founding Fathers' Tour 10:30am. Learn about the people behind the formation of the County and the establishment of the City of Brevard by visiting several namesakes through the city. Departs from the Transylvania Heritage Museum at 10:30 am. Reservations required by the preceding Thursday at noon. Cost is \$10 per person. Tour lasts approximately 45 minutes.
- October 27th (Halloweenfest): Haunted Town Tour 5:00pm.