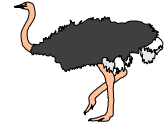


STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 5 Number 1

Newsletter

August 2003

Oscar Solomon Straus

Lawyer, author, merchant, Philanthropist

The last two issues of the Straus Historical Society's newsletter have contained articles about the two older brothers of Oscar Solomon Straus; Isidor and Nathan. While Isidor was a merchant, he was also a public servant. Nathan, who was known for his philanthropy, was a merchant and public servant. In this article I will write about the career of Oscar. Although best known for his public service, he was also a lawyer, author, merchant and philanthropist.

A *New York Times* article of September 1893 stated about Oscar S. Straus, "As a member of a leading house of importers with business interests of sufficient magnitude to absorb the time and exhaust the energy of an ordinary man, Mr. Straus finds leisure for study which blooms into literary work of various types. ... he has become influential in undertakings designed for the public welfare alike in the fields of charity, benevolence, and of good government."

Oscar S. Straus was the youngest of Lazarus and Sara Straus' four children; Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar. His career as a public servant has been well documented. He was the Minister to Constantinople and Ambassador to Turkey. He was Secretary of Commerce and Labor. He served under four presidents; Democratic and Republican. Throughout his very public professional life, Oscar S. Straus consistently advocated political reform; seeing it as an issue of morality and law rather than politics. He campaigned for the use of arbitration to resolve differences between politicians, labor leaders and unions, and nations. He was a supporter of the Monroe Doctrine and an advisor to all the United States presidents beginning with Grover Cleveland until his own death in 1926. Known best for his public service, Oscar S. Straus' service to the people and nations of the world goes far beyond his ministry, ambassadorship and cabinet posts. In this article, I will share these other facets of Oscar S. Straus' career.

Oscar Solomon Straus was born in Otterberg Germany in 1850. He emigrated to the United States with his mother and siblings in 1854 and settled in Talbotton Georgia where he began his education. In 1865, at the close of the Civil War, the family

moved to Philadelphia and in 1866, to New York. After spending most of the war in Europe, Oscar's older brother Isidor returned to the United States an accomplished businessman. He had no desire to return to school. By then Nathan also felt his schooling was behind him. Both young men joined their father's New York firm, L. Straus & Sons, importers of crockery, china and glassware.



Oscar S Straus - at the time of his graduation - 1873

Oscar, however, wanted more education. His brothers supported him fully when he enrolled in Columbia Grammar School. After spending two years catching up on his skills, he enrolled in Columbia College where he graduated in 1871, sixth in a class of 31. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his third year and was the class poet, delivering "Truth and Error," his own work, at the commencement ceremony. In his 1922 autobiography, *Under Four Administrations*, Oscar wrote, "Isidor arranged for my schooling. A picture of Columbia College set me to thinking how wonderful it would be to study there. Considering the modest income of the family, the tuition fee and the cost for books were large, but my father, economical in all other respects, was liberal beyond his means where education was concerned. My brother, moreover, was desirous that I should have the advantage of the college training which circumstances, notably the war, had withheld from him."

Oscar wrote that he didn't feel compelled to go into law. Aside from working in the family firm and a summer job writing for the newspaper, *New York Sun*, he had no practical work experience. He decided to enter Columbia Law School, not because he had any special aptitude but "because I preferred it to business. ...

**The history of the Straus family is part of world history
It is written for the present
It provokes discussion, imagination and creation
It ties the present with the past and draws pathways to the future**

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The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Lazarus Straus family and the historical context in which they lived through research and education. You are invited to submit articles or ideas for articles, calendar events, and material relating to the Straus family and to their history.

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is a tax exempt organization as described under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Contributions to the Society are deductible to the extent provided by law. A copy of the annual report of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. may be obtained from the Society or from the New York State Attorney General, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

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**A Message from the Vice Chair:
Robin Schafer Dillon**

When I first joined the board of the Straus Historical Society, I was a little skeptical. I thought, "What are these people doing sitting around talking about their/my family and why? Then I started to learn about *our* family and how unbelievable some of its members were and are. Then I started to realize how cool it is to be related to such a famous and established family.

Do you know that Nathan Straus brought pasteurization in this country, a task that when completed cut the death rate of children from milk borne illnesses by thousands? In every movie about the "Titanic" there is always a scene in which Isidor and Ida's last moments are included. What an historic event, and our family members were there. In New York City, where I grew up, there is a public school named for Isidor and Ida Straus and one named for Jesse I. Straus and Straus Park and Nathan Straus Square and a Nathan Straus Reading Room at the Donnell Library. There is a large group of statuary in front of the Ronald Reagan Federal Building and International Trade Center in Washington DC dedicated to Oscar S. Straus.

While I could go on for hours about the incredible family I come from, I will not. I only want to say what a pleasure becoming vice chair of our board had been and how interesting it is to meet family members and friends of the family at board meetings and Straus Historical Society sponsored events. When we have future events, please come along because you will not only learn about this amazing family, but you will get to meet some of the amazing members of it. In addition, food and drink is usually provided.

I hope you will take this letter seriously and perhaps become more involved in the Straus Historical Society. It is not only educational but also immensely fulfilling. If you are interested in talking more about the family or some aspect of becoming more involved in the SHS, please don't hesitate to contact me.



**A Message from the
Executive Director: Joan Adler**

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. has completed its five year probational period as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. We have filed the appropriate paperwork and have been informed by the IRS that our not-for-profit status has been officially granted.

It is thanks to you, our donors, those who have availed themselves of our materials, read our publications, offered helpful suggestions and criticisms and donated materials to our archives, that we are recognized not only by the IRS, but by scholars, historians, educators, genealogists and the interested public as an organization that makes a valuable contribution. Our goal is to continue this important work and, with your help, to expand our knowledge base and programs.

Let Me Hear From You

My entire outlook was idealistic rather than practical. As with many young men, it cost me considerable mental struggle to harmonize the two divergent views into a workaday plan."

After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1873, Oscar went to work for the law firm of Ward, Jones and Whitehead. Within six months he left to form Hudson and Straus with James A. Hudson. Much of their work involved railway litigation. He thoroughly enjoyed the intellectual challenge of trial work; taking part in an investigation of the New York Legislature into charges of discrimination by railroads in freight fares. In 1881, when his weight dropped to 105 pounds, Oscar's doctor advised him to seek less demanding work. His family invited him to join L. Straus & Sons.

Oscar felt he had no aptitude for business and was grateful when his family granted his wish for time to research material for a book he was writing. Leaving his law practice had another consequence. He had not planned to marry, thinking that "the law is a jealous mistress. ... I was economically independent as a single man, and could devote my time to the law for its own sake. This I preferred to do, as the idealist that I was, rather than pursue the law for economic reasons first, and for its own sake as much as possible secondarily, which I felt would have to be the case if I married, But as a business man things were different, and I decided now to marry." On April 19, 1882, 31 year old Oscar S. Straus married 21 year old Sarah Leah Lavanburg at the New York home of Sarah's parents, Louis and Hannah Seller Lavanburg.



Sarah Lavanburg Straus

"At about that time I became interested in public spirited undertakings." The YMCA was gaining popularity. Recognizing the need for a place for young Jewish men to find cultural and intellectual advancement, Oscar and a group of civic leaders founded the Young Mens Hebrew Association in 1874. He also founded the L. Straus & Sons Employees Mutual Benefit Association the same year. It served as a model for similar organizations elsewhere. Oscar was a trustee of The Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Asylum Society, chairman of the Educational Committee of the Institution for Improved Instruction of Deaf Mutes, trustee of the Baron de Hirsch Fund and the Carnegie Fund. He maintained his association with these philanthropic organizations throughout his life. In 1896, when Armenians were being massacred and left their country in droves, the United States immigration department tried denying them entry into America claiming they were "likely to become a public charge." Oscar gave a bond so that all Armenian refugees who came to this country would be allowed admittance.

Oscar's interest in colonial American history led him to write *The Origin of a Republican Form of Government in the United States*. It was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1885. He then wrote *Roger Williams, the Pioneer of Religious Liberty*, published in 1894. It developed from the study done to prepare for his first book. Both books were warmly received. In 1896 he published *The Development of Religious Liberty in the United States*, a slim volume that was an amplification of an address he

delivered at Yale University. Oscar served on the executive committee of the Authors Club and the Lotus Club.

Naomi W. Cohen wrote in *A Duel Heritage: The public career of Oscar S. Straus*, "Straus' scholarly interests reflected his attempts to fuse his Jewish heritage with his Americanism and reduce the two to the common denominator of liberty. Perhaps more important, they revealed his own ability to live an integrated life as a modern American Jew." He was a founder of the American Jewish Historical Society in 1892 and served as its president until 1898. He wanted this new organization to gather information about the role of Jews and their contributions to the development of America. He commissioned Dr. Meyer Kayserling to research and write *Christopher Columbus and the Participation of the Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries*. It was published in 1894 and was dedicated to Oscar's father, Lazarus Straus.

When Oscar Straus was appointed Minister to Constantinople in 1888, he saw it as an opportunity to prove himself away from the successful images of his two older brothers. "Had diplomacy been a career, nothing would have pleased me more than to continue in such service to my country."

During his tenure as Minister to Constantinople in the late 1890's, part of his time was devoted to the plight of Russian Jews being persecuted by the Czar. When he returned home, and until the onset of World War I, he continued to focus on the problems of Eastern European Jewry. He convinced President

Harrison to send a commission to Russia to investigate the conditions there and he worked with Baron and Baroness de Hirsch to formulate a plan to help Jews emigrating to America. Although there was no official organization, Oscar Straus joined with men such as Jesse Seligman, Mayer Sulzberger and Jacob Schiff to work on this problem. Their efforts were fourfold: to press the administration to publicly condemn Russian persecution, to work with Jews worldwide to obtain information and coordinate efforts, to improve the image of Russian Jews in the eyes of the American people and to provide relief for Russian Jewish refugees. He wrote, "I look upon the Russian persecution as another of those disguised blessing to our race that will force them out from their degraded conditions into more civilized lands, where there is some hope and every chance for their rising up to the standard of our Western Civilization."

When he attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, it was as a representative of the United States government. But his stand on Jewish issues was well known. As early as 1917 he had encouraged Max. J. Kohler to write a history of Jewish representation at other international congresses as a guide for Jews at the Paris Peace Conference. "Our people must learn cooperative effort otherwise they will continue to be discriminated as long as they discriminate against themselves." Representatives of the American Jewish Congress and from other delegations were insisting on the official recognition of a national homeland in Palestine and the incorporation of minority rights "in

the treaties of new or enlarged European states." Oscar wrote, "I am not a Zionist but I will cooperate with them knowing that what will be accorded to them under the Balfour Declaration will be no more than what they should have, equality for all in Palestine-just as they and we have in free America." Here he stressed that he was not advocating a national Jewish homeland because the Jews were in the minority. He wanted a place where people of all nationalities and religions could be free. This, of course, was in keeping with his belief in civil and religious liberty. He sponsored a religious liberty amendment to the covenant of the League of Nations.

Oscar was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Trade and Transportation. He served on many committees that dealt with national finance, tariff reform, the repeal of the silver coinage act, the Rapid Transit Bill, universal free education reform and insurance policy and reform. His service began in 1891 and continued through the early 20th century.

He wrote, "I was naturally disposed to be an independent in politics, especially in city and State politics. ... I was a believer in election reform and in later years became the president of an organization for vitalizing the party primaries." In May 1894 Oscar became chairman of a general committee of Democrats dedicating itself to reform; linking lawyers, publishers and businessmen in opposition to Tammany Hall. He was an advocate for morality in politics. He said, "We are assembled to-night, not as partisans, but as citizens, as merchants, manufacturers, and laborers, to make known the reasons for the widespread misery that reaches from one end of the country to the other, and to protest against the continuance of the causes which are responsible for this wretched and deplorable state of affairs." In an 1896 talk he said, "... in this country, where the Government rests upon the people, it is important that the people should not only know the laws of the country, but should also be familiar with the development of those laws." In a speech delivered as president of the Board of Trade and Transportation he said, "Many come into public office as law makers who lack experience, and who must learn. If a citizen who had the special knowledge and experience does not think it worth his while to instruct his representatives, ... he has himself to blame for the slipshod and unwise laws that are made for his government. To instruct, to advise, to guide our law makers on the special field that comes under the sphere of government in relation to commerce, is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why such bodies as we are have been organized."

In the Fall of 1891 he was a vice president of the state Democratic Committee and a delegate from District Nine to the Democratic State Convention at Saratoga. "In politics I had become more impressed year by year with the importance of reform in our electoral system, especially in large cities. The bosses in the two big parties were the 'invisible powers' who dictated the nominations. Primaries were primaries in name only, and were conducted as to strengthen the power of the bosses." Oscar

was named to the Committee of Fifty that met in Albany to map out the tactics of the Cleveland loyalists and was the delegate from the 19th Assembly District to the Democratic Convention in Syracuse. His concern for morality in politics caused him to break with Cleveland when the latter appointed James J. Van Alen Ambassador to Italy as an apparent reward for a large contribution to Cleveland's campaign.

As a member of the National Civil Service Reform League, he prepared a paper on the separation of the consular service from the spoils system. He served on the Committee on Consular Reform and testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on this subject.

In December 1895 a *New York Times* article stated, "Oscar S. Straus, formerly United States Minister to Turkey, has for many years devoted much time to the study of international questions which figure in the diplomatic business of this country.

With considerable emphasis he endorses the position of President Cleveland on the Venezuelan question. He maintains that the re-statement of the Monroe doctrine as being the American doctrine was a necessary and wise thing." This question concerned a boundary dispute and reflected Straus' thoughts with regard to international law. In November 1896 he was quoted by the *Times*, "My idea in reference to the Cuban question is that we should not depart from our traditional policy of neutrality, and from the spirit and meaning of the Monroe Doctrine." In 1896 he was a member of a committee that proposed the formation of a court of arbitration between the United States and Great Britain. Chairman Hewitt said, "The two nations

should, in my opinion, adopt some system by which war between them would forever become impossible." Oscar continued to be an advocate of arbitration, both in national and international politics as well as in labor and management disputes.

When Oscar broke with the Democratic Party in 1896, he voted for the Republican candidate, William McKinley. He advised McKinley to avert war with Spain and to settle the Cuban question peacefully. He was concerned with the plight of Armenians who were being massacred in Turkey. He kept contact with and had good relations with the Turkish officials and seemed ready to resume his diplomatic career for a second time. In 1898 McKinley appointed Oscar Minister to Constantinople. McKinley wrote to Oscar, "I don't know whether you know it, but your nomination had been received with more praise by all parties than any nomination to office I have made since I am President." Oscar wrote, "Of course, as I had been a Cleveland Democrat, my appointment by a Republican President created a great sensation in the press; it was heralded as a step toward the merit system in our foreign service."

While in Paris on his way to Constantinople, Oscar met with the American ambassador, General Horace Porter, and proposed periodic meetings of American diplomats abroad. He thought they each acted in isolation and without much guidance from



Oscar S. Straus - 1888

home and that each could benefit from the knowledge and experience of the others. Nothing resulted from this meeting but later Oscar was instrumental in the formation of the Diplomatic Corps.

In January 1898 the National Primary Election League was formed and Oscar was elected its first president. "The conference gave a distinct impetus to primary reform all over the country, and in many of the States led to the passage of laws providing for such reforms."

During Cleveland's second administration, Oscar used his position as an ex-diplomat to advise the president on problems of foreign relations. Naomi Cohen wrote, "... he emerged clearly as an anti-imperialist, an advocate of international arbitration, and a firm believer in morality over expediency in international behavior." He supported the Monroe Doctrine, seeing it as a moral commitment by the United States and the European countries equally not to interfere in other continents." He felt strongly that nations establish procedures for arbitration as the rule and was a member of the Executive Committee of the New York State Committee on International Arbitration.

In December 1901 he said, "one-half of the misery of the world results from ignorance and the remainder results from passion. I am sure a large share of the trouble between capital and labor are traceable to these two disturbing factors." On December 18th a permanent labor board, to be known as the Industrial Department (later the Arbitration Committee) of the National Civic Federation, was selected with the aim of finding a way to settle disputes between the public, capital and trade unions. Oscar was named to represent the public. He was chairman of the conference and served on the organization's Conciliation Committee.

In 1915 Oscar was appointed chairman of the Public Service Commission of New York. He commented, "I have no business, but I have been very much occupied as a kind of public harrack." He was an advocate of mediation and arbitration to solve the problems of labor and management. His experience in the cabinet and in industrial arbitration led him to feel that publicity and public opinion could be used effectively to settle industrial disputes. Naomi Cohen wrote, "His stand bespoke the moderate reformer concerned with healing the sores of an existing system, the legalist seeking to establish areas of social activity on a fixed system of law, and the idealist aiming to direct the behavior of capital, labor and the public along moral lines."

After returning to America from Constantinople in 1900, Oscar returned to the many activities that filled his life. He resumed his affiliation with such groups as the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Trade and Transportation. He revised and published a second edition of *Origin of a Republican Form of Government* in 1901 and prepared talks that were delivered at the American Jewish Historical Society, the Author's Club and Harvard University, to name just a few. At a dinner given by the

Civil Reform Association on December 15, 1900. The *New York Times* stated that he "compared the civil service reform movement with the movement against slavery fifty years ago, and prophesied a like victory."

When Oscar resigned from his ministerial position, President McKinley told him he would not accept the resignation unless Straus accepted a higher post. The assassination of McKinley in 1901 squashed the talk of a Cabinet level position.

Oscar wanted to be appointed to the court of arbitration at The Hague. The court has been established at the 1899 peace conference but existed only as a panel of judges appointed by each nation. He was finally appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 and held this position until his own death in 1926. Naomi Cohen wrote, "Of all the positions Straus filled this was the one he held in greatest esteem. For him personally the appointment meant recognition as a jurist, an office of international dignity, and the kind of respect usually reserved for elder statesmen. Far more important, it meant his participation in an institution, "the crowning act of the nineteenth century," which could help lead the world to everlasting peace."



Far more important, it meant his participation in an institution, "the crowning act of the nineteenth century," which could help lead the world to everlasting peace."

The peace movement was gaining ground all over the world and Oscar took a prominent role in many new peace organizations. He wrote, "Let the nations exact the same standard from one another that they exact from their subjects, substituting international morality for international expediency, and they will have, instead of the arbitrament of war, the arbitrament of law." He advocated for a

stronger role for the Court of Arbitration at The Hague and felt that domestic policy and international concerns should be linked.

In 1903 he helped draft a memorandum to the Russian Government regarding the Kishineff Massacre of the Jews and in November of that year participated in a conference on the Panama Canal. In 1906 he was named Secretary of Commerce and Labor by President Theodore Roosevelt. He spoke at a Civic Federation dinner shortly before assuming office. "It has been an education to me and whatever qualifications I may have for the post to which I have been called, at least as far as the industrial department is concerned are due to the way the federation has brought me into contact with the labor leaders." His accomplishments in this office will have to be left to another article.

When TR declined the nomination for a third term, Oscar Straus supported and campaigned for the election of Republican William Howard Taft. Taft told Roosevelt that he intended to keep the cabinet intact. However, as the election drew near, a rift developed between Straus and Taft and that promise wasn't honored. Oscar Straus wrote to Isidor in January 1908, "I have been in so many different spheres of employment, I think I shall be able to fit myself into a sphere of unemployment." He proposed to make "the remainder of my life as useful as possible for the public good." He also proposed to avoid anything that involved money-making.

Never fully reconciling his rift with Taft, Oscar tried to gain support for TR's return in the presidential campaign of 1912. A new party, the Progressive Party, was formed when 83 out of 90 Republican delegates committed to Taft's re-election. Oscar attended the New York State Convention of the Progressive Party. "All during the first day and night, amid lively discussions as to the selection of candidates for Governor, committees urged me for permission to present my name as a candidate; but I steadfastly declined since the governorship being so largely a political office did not appeal to me ... the next day I was asked to take the permanent Chairmanship of the Convention. This I was willing and glad to do; also it was a forgone conclusion the acceptance of the chairmanship excluded me as a candidate for the nomination for Governor." Despite his disinclination for this office, Oscar was nominated and accepted the nomination for Governor. He ran under the slogan; the "unbossed candidate of the unbossed people." He campaigned for women's suffrage, a bureau for drafting legislation and an improved system of direct primaries. "I knew from observations during my campaign from one end of the State to the other, how poorly from a political standpoint, the Progressives were organized, and I confess I did not see the slightest chance of being elected. I was not disappointed, and I think that the men generally who ran for offices on the Progressive ticket were not disappointed. They realized that their contest was waged for a cause and not for office, and from an educational point of view the campaign was eminently successful."

The American Spirit, a collection of articles and speeches by Oscar S. Straus was published in 1913. He wrote on such topics as; international peace and morality, social justice, humanitarianism, freedom of conscience, industrial conciliation and diplomacy. Naomi Cohen wrote, "*The American Spirit* was a testament to the pre-war world, when an optimistic faith in man's rational progress toward the goal of human understanding still held sway. Like all dedicated peace advocates, Straus grimly read the signs of heightening tension across the Atlantic..." He was encouraged by Andrew Carnegie's gift of a Peace Palace to The Hague in 1914 and wrote that it symbolized "the spirit which will dominate the future relations of nations-peace and justice." He served on numerous committees and state societies, attended national meetings and international congresses in an effort to obtain the cooperation of all countries in the ideals of world peace through arbitration toward a peaceful resolution of international political differences.

Although he and President Wilson did not often agree, Oscar continued to advise the president on matters of international importance. He worked tirelessly to get the president to appoint an investigative commission to study the problems of the Mexican revolutionary situation. He also advised Wilson to work for the repeal Panama Canal Act of 1912 giving American shipping toll free access to the Panama Canal while all other nations were required to pay. He was appointed to the New York Peace Society and testified before the Senate Committee

on Interoceanic Canals in 1914. Once again, Straus' position was that political partisanship should yield to national honor.

With war in Europe looming, Oscar traveled to London in 1914. He became Chairman of the Embassy Committee, working tirelessly to find transportation for those Americans who wanted to leave the continent.

During the early days of the war, Oscar dined with Count von Bernstorff who was attache of the German Embassy when Oscar was in Constantinople for his first ministry. Oscar broached the subject of mediation as a way to settle the war. Bernstorff stated that the Germans stood for peace. Lengthy negotiations ensued with Ambassadors from Great Britain, the United States and Germany participating. In the end, Germany refused mediation. "Had Germany's oft-reiterated peace professions been sincere, she would have accepted this offer for mediation. By her refusal the falsity of her professions was exposed, not only in Great Britain and in our own country, but in all the neutrals; and the exposee served as added proof to all peace-loving and neutrally minded persons that the responsibility for the war and its continuance rested upon the German Government."



The *New York Times* reported that, at a dinner of the Baptist Union on November 13, 1911, Oscar S. Straus stated that he had changed his mind "as to the advisability of the settlement of all international disputes by conclusive arbitration, and has come at last to agree with Col. Theodore Roosevelt that the surest means to preserving peace is the strongest possible navy." He said, "Many of our wise pacifists have developed into belligerent pacifists. I confess I belong to that school myself. Before the war began, the

proposition presented itself in the glaring phrase, 'Utopia or hell!' Can you blame us for choosing Utopia? We did not realize that we had to wade through the jaws of hell to reach Utopia."

In 1915 the League to Enforce Peace was organized in the United States. Oscar became a member of the executive committee and the committee of foreign organization. He also participated in several other peace organizations such as the New York Peace Society, the World Court League and the Central Organization for a Durable Peace.

Oscar wanted to be part of a commission that was sent to Russia after the fall of the Czarist regime in 1917. The aim was to show American support for the new democracy and to encourage Russia to remain on the side of the Allies. President Wilson was encouraged to send a labor leader and a Jew but he declined to send the Jewish representative claiming it might arouse anti-Semitism. Oscar expressed his disappointment by declaring that he would be interested in becoming a candidate for Congress in the election of 1918 on the Republican Party's ticket. In this way he could become part of the national solution to postwar legislation. He stated that he would only run if his nomination was supported by both major parties. It was sug-

gested that he become a candidate in a largely Jewish district to which he replied, "In all my private and public life I have always been an American first and last, and I would not run in a district where it could be properly said I was appealing to a racial or religious class instead of to an electorate on purely patriotic grounds."

When the war drew to a close, the "League to Enforce Peace" was endeavoring to co-operate in every possible way with President Wilson and the official delegates to the Peace Conference, and with similar organizations in Europe, to bring into existence a League of Nations. I had been made chairman of the Overseas Committee based in Paris." Oscar reached Paris on February 9, 1919 where he conferred with Gordon Auchincloss and Leon Bourgeois representing Great Britain and France. At this time the chances for adoption of a League of Nations were discouraging because the French Delegation wanted to include two clauses providing for the control by the League of the manufacture of all armaments of all war industries and also for an international military force to defend the French border. Lengthy negotiations ensued and Oscar was able to convince the French delegate that there would be no League if he tried to force the delegates to accept his articles as drafted. In the end, Bourgeois agreed to give up his insistence on the articles.

In May, 1919, at a session of the Plenary Session of the Conference, Oscar, who was chairman of the League to Enforce Peace, sat with the American delegates. Upon his return to the States, he visited President Wilson. The president was in favor of ratifying the treaty but several senators had reservations with some of the amendments. A committee visited the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations. Oscar was unable to gather support for the covenants to the treaty as written. "I cannot resist reflecting how much wiser the Allied Powers and America were in the conduct of the war than in the making of peace, and afterwards. In war they finally pooled their strength and won; in the peace terms they again drew measurably apart. The men who framed the peace terms subordinated world politics to home politics. The United States, by reason of a contest between the Administration and the majority group in the Senate, allowed its sense of world responsibility to be negated by partisan differences." He voiced his shame at America's refusal to ratify the peace treaty. "I can imagine no more serious national and international tragedy. This man, Wilson, putting his unbending judgment against ninety per cent of our people and against the enlightened public opinion of the world. ... I know much of the opposition is inspired by personal animosity and narrow partisanship; as long as the Treaty remains unratified, the opposition will have won, and our enemies in the war will be the gainer."

In 1919 Oscar supported Republican Herbert Hoover for the presidential nomination. Both Oscar Straus and Herbert Hoover had served on the President's Industrial Conference of 1919; Oscar heading the committee dealing with public utilities and government employees. When Hoover failed to gain the party's

nomination, Straus supported the Republican nominee Warren G. Harding. He interviewed Harding about his stand on the issue of ratification of the treaty. Harding replied that he would support the best method to ensure world peace. Oscar then knew he would have to weigh his vote carefully but came to the conclusion that the Republican stance was preferable to the Democratic one. After the election it was reported that Harding said he "voted for the treaty with the reservations as the lesser of two evils at the time. ... he was entirely opposed to the Wilson treaty and would not advocate it with reservations of any kind." Oscar was severely disappointed when the United States failed to join the League of Nations.

Oscar S. Straus was asked if he would be willing to take on the Japanese Ministry by President Harding once Harding assumed office in 1920. Oscar replied to the positive but nothing was ever mentioned about it again. He continued to advise the president but was turned down in his offers to be of service. He was relegated to the respected but ineffective position of elder statesman.

Oscar supported the rebuilding of Palestine through the Palestine Foundation Fund. He encouraged American investment in economic enterprises in Palestine and supported the Palestine

Exploration Society, an organization that sponsored archeological excavation, museum work and the restoration of synagogues. It also supported the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He donated 500 books on a variety of topics from his personal library to the university. In the terms of his will, after his children selected 100 books each, the remainder of his collection went to the university.



Oscar S. Straus Memorial, Washington DC
Dedicated in 1947 - Rededicated in 1998

Oscar S. Straus espoused free higher education, liberal immigration policies, civil service reform, freedom of opportunity, morality in government and in labor, rights of all groups, respect for individual rights and equality of opportunity, free and equal competition, individual liberty, political reform and social change. Naomi Cohen states that Oscar Straus "repeated frequently that he was merely a tool in the working out of a grand design. He wrote, "It has been permitted me to do useful work and to have interesting experiences." He completed his autobiography *Under Four Administrations*, in 1922. It is dedicated to "My grandchildren and their contemporaries of every race and creed."

Although best known as a public servant, Oscar Solomon Straus was a lawyer, author, merchant and philanthropist. I hope this brief article has given you some insight into these facets of his active and interesting professional career.

Oscar S. Straus was a member of hundreds of committees, societies, organizations and associations. The list is far too long to list here. I will be happy to send you a copy of this list with the dates of his involvement and the offices he held.

Profiles: Leonard Albert (Lee) Hockstader III

Lee Hockstader has lived all over the world working as a journalist and bureau chief for *The Washington Post*. He is currently living in Austin, TX. I caught up with him in Brittany, at the home of his in-laws. After the birth of second child Alice Margueite in Paris, Lee, wife Flore and son Theodore are taking an extended vacation in France.

Leonard Albert Hockstader III, Lee, was born in New York City July 19, 1959, to Len and Didi (nee Deschamps) Hockstader. Lee says he was lucky to know very early on what he wanted to do. He was a student at Choate when the Watergate scandal broke. The story made heroes out of journalists, and he remembers thinking how exciting, glamorous and almost noble journalism seemed. His fate was sealed.

Lee became the editor of the Choate newspaper and, four years later, of the *Brown Daily Herald* at Brown University. He had journalism internships throughout his college years. When he graduated from Brown, Lee accepted an internship at *The Economist* in London, and after that a year-long fellowship in Southeast Asia from the Henry Luce Foundation. He finally returned to the States in 1984 and secured a position as a staff writer for *The Washington Post*.

It didn't take too long for Lee to begin thinking about working overseas for *The Post*. He applied to be the paper's correspondent based in South Africa or India. But *The Post* had other ideas, and he was sent to Central America and the Caribbean in 1989. After six months in Guatemala honing his Spanish, he spent the next three years covering stories in Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Panama – a rich diet of coups, revolutions and political upheaval that accustomed Lee to the sound of gunfire and the feel of small, unstable countries.

Next Lee was assigned as a correspondent in Moscow, covering the 15 republics of the former Soviet Union. *The Post* sent him to Harvard for a year of intensive Russian language study, and then to Moscow, where he lived for four years. He describes those years as “fun, thrilling, fascinating and sometimes wacky.” He roved the 11 time zones of the former Soviet Union, covering the 1995-96 war in the independence-minded Russian region of Chechnya, “an exceptionally awful, brutal event,” and stories that ran the gamut from the death throes of the Communist Party to “Sexy Alexy,” a Soviet champion gymnast at the 1996 Olympics who captured the imagination of Western women. “It was a target-rich environment for journalists,” Lee said. He even wrote Yeltsin's obituary, a piece that remains ready for publication. His most memorable event was that he met Flore de Preneuf, a French woman who had grown up around the world. She was a graduate student in Russian studies at Oxford. As she was working on her dissertation in Moscow in 1996, she applied to work for *The Post* there. She soon returned to Oxford. Lee continued to court her by e-mail.

After four years in Moscow, Lee requested an assignment in Rome as correspondent for southern Europe. He describes his time there as “sweet.” But the press of events had him constantly rushing to Sarajevo, Belgrade and Turkey. At that time Lee and Flore were planning to be married, and they wanted to be somewhere a little more settled. So they asked to go to Jerusalem, where the Oslo accords had generated high hopes that peace was on the way. Two years later, it all blew up.

Lee and Flore were married in 1998. He says they had two peaceful and semi-interesting years in Jerusalem, followed by two violent, fascinating and exhausting years, from 2000 to 2002. Their son Theodore was born in Paris in 2001. Lee spoke about how he coped with raising a small child in such a violent atmosphere, exercising certain precautions but continuing to work and live normally. He was rather nonchalant when he recounted how his and Flore's cars were blown up by firebombs right in front of their house at dinnertime. By 2002, Lee and Flore were ready for a change and, perhaps temporarily, for a little less excitement.



Realizing he had not worked in the United States since 1989, Lee found an opening as *The Post's* Bureau Chief for the Southwestern United States, based in Austin. He covers Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, but in the last year has also ranged west to Seattle and north to Chicago. Meanwhile, Flore has written a book about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a work combining her photos and essays that is being published in Switzerland at the end of this month.

Lee has worked for *The Washington Post* in more than 40 countries, often filing at least 200 stories in a year. He's covered wars and dodged bullets and artillery. “I never really enjoyed being shot at, but it's something you kind of get used to,” he said. He covered the first Gulf War, in 1991, and remembers filing his stories from Baghdad using CNN's satellite phone, loaned to him by Peter Arnett.

Although he is working in the States now, Lee says he still feels like a foreign correspondent – a native New Yorker traveling in places that seem just as foreign as some of the more exotic places he's lived. He says he is beginning to feel the tug of another overseas assignment, a calling Lee describes as “life-plus.” He explained, “There is an extra layer of excitement to living overseas, sort of like falling in love, because day after day you have these amazing, eye-opening experiences.”

I asked Lee if he had much direction from the home office. He told me he usually picks his own stories. As a foreign correspondent, and now, as a correspondent in the States, he gets to roam his territory and follow his hunches. “It's kind of fun,” he said. “You have autonomy; you use your instincts. If you're good, people will be interested in what you have to say.”

Isidor and Ida Straus School Public School 198, NYC

Previous articles have been written about Lab School 77, a school housed in the same building as Public School 198. Both occupy the Isidor and Ida Straus School at 95th Street and Third Avenue in New York City. Both Paul A. Kurzman and I have visited Lab School 77, met with the principal and parent representatives, and have made presentations to the students of that school.

On April 30, 2003 I had the great pleasure of visiting a first grade class co-taught by Michelle Feit and Aimee Safran at PS 198. The children were interested in "Titanic." When they learned that their school was named for the Strauses, two of its victims, they wanted to learn more about them. The children did quite a lot of research before the day of my visit. Their beautifully illustrated stories were on display in the main hallway of the school building. When I arrived at the classroom, a representative of the group took me to see their work.

One of the ways Miss Feit and Miss Safran prepared the class for my visit was to have the children to write their questions on index cards and on large sheets of paper. After I spoke with the class about the Strauses lives and about the "Titanic" disaster, I read the questions and did my best to answer them. Elijah,

Jenny, Faisal, Maria and Aries wanted to know why their school was chosen to be named after the Strauses, who decided, and if there were other schools bearing the Straus name. Jamie, Maya, Noor and Chantece asked what happened to their apartment and belongings, who lives there now and if the family still owns Macy's. Many of the students including Siara, Maya, Steven, Arnold, Khine and Christopher were concerned about Isidor and Ida's remains, how they were found, by whom, and what happened after Isidor's body was found. Yasmin, Albert, Anthony, Keiaru, Yacine, Patrick, Destiney, Alyssa and Tanazia asked about the children of the Strauses and about living descendants.

I brought photographs of the Strauses, their home on 105th Street and Broadway, and copies of items relating to "Titanic." I also showed the children the artistic family tree. They were a very excited and involved group.

Although quite young, they sat with rapt attention while I described

Isidor and Ida, their family and their lives. I answered as many of their questions as possible.

Miss Feit and Miss Safran then requested that the children take out their personal notebooks and write and illustrate something they remembered about the afternoon's activity. Each child remembered a different

Yasmin:
how did they died on the titanic
how did there bodenow that Isidor and Ida die
died?

aspect of the story but each enthusiastically produced an original work of art along with a brief descriptive sentence. I understand that many of these are going to be added to the "museum" already posted in the school's hallway.

I then visited with Miss Lisa Novick's first grade class They'd been at the library and unable to sit in on my original talk. They, too, were excited when I visited their classroom.

Maya
What happend to there
belongings and there apt?

Although the dynamics of the second group was quite different, each child seemed to enjoy learning something about the Strauses and each expressed interest in learning more.

Miss Feit, Miss Safran, Miss Novick and I are going to try to make these visits a regular event, perhaps working toward developing a curriculum section involving information about the Strauses.

Chantece
who lives in Isidor's
Ida Straus house?

I hope that members of the Isidor and Ida Straus family will join me on subsequent visits. If anyone wishes to be come involved in this rewarding and interesting project, please let me know.

First Foot Forward



In 1999 the Maas family traveled to the Hunan Province of China to adopt Jennifer. She is a now completely Americanized and adorable four year old little girl. They saw how many children were not being adopted and recognized their "limitless" need.

Mark has been in the leather business for 25 years. After returning from China, he set up First Foot Forward to match donations of footwear from manufacturers with those in need. He seems to have the knack of being able to convince manufacturers to donate their slightly irregular product. And he makes the process easy for them, setting up the infrastructure to warehouse, ship and distribute donated shoes. To date more than 500,000 pairs of shoes have been shipped overseas. Although most of the donations go to China, First Foot Forward has also sent footwear to Russia and other places where the need is great. Mark says it is the perfect marriage of his business and personal life. Mark is a descendant of Babette Straus Maas.

Spring and Winter Keep "Friends of Straus Park" Busy

by Leon Auerbach
 Edited by Joan Adler
 Photographs by Margie Kavanau

To commemorate the "Titanic" tragedy on April 15, 1912, to celebrate the dedication of Straus Park on April 15, 1915, and the re-inauguration of the "new" Straus Park on April 15, 1997, "Friends of Straus Park" held its annual "Memorial Concert and Brunch in the Park" on Sunday, April 14, 2003. The Undine Trio led by Suzy Schwartz (of Boto Fogo Bossa Nova fame) played chamber music while neighbors enjoyed bagels and lox, desserts and coffee. We lucked out. The rain stopped just before our start up time. We all reflected on how much the Park has meant to our community and how lucky we all feel to be able to participate in events such as the "Memorial Concert and Brunch in the Park."

The rain and steamy weather followed us for our "Evening of Music in the Park." The Leif Arntzen Jazz Band graced us with a swinging evening of pop tunes on Wednesday, June 11th. The audience was toe tapping and the children were caught up in the rhythms. It was another musical success!



Leif Arntzen Jass Band

We've continued our very informative and successful Community Forum series. District Supervisor Jorge Gabino of the NYC Department of Sanitation spoke to a small group on Wednesday, June 18th. It was 95 degrees in the lobby of 340 Riverside Drive (West 106th Street). Most people opted for the comfort of their air conditioned apartment. Those who did attend were glad they did. Mr. Gabino updated us on what's new in the city's recycling program and what the Sanitation Department is able to do about fighting the rat problem in the Park.



"Memory" decorated for
"Art In the Park"

He explained that rats follow food. He stressed that if people didn't feed the pigeons, there would be less food around and the rats would go elsewhere. We expected Battalion Chief Michael McPartland of the NYC Fire Department to speak to our group on Wednesday, August 13th. Unfortunately, he and a group of firefighters from the Upper West Side were ordered to Montana to help fight the forest fires there. We postponed his presentation until the latter part of October. The Community Forum series has proven to be very popular with our neighbors and with members of the various city service departments and

politicians who came to our community. It offers a marvelous opportunity for our neighbors to share their concerns with the people whose responsibility it is to care for our neighborhood. There is an exchange of ideas and a one to one conversation between the people who do the job and the people who need their help. We hope to continue and expand this program next year.

Our secretary, Margie Kavanau, organized a terrific "Book Fair in Straus Park" on Saturday, July 12th. In spite of lackluster attendance and presentation at our past Book Fair ten years ago, Margie's enthusiasm brought together 25 to 30 neighbors with stacks of interesting books. It was a lovely morning with book sellers and book buyers coming away happy.

Our "Art in the Park, A Day Long Celebration of Art, Dance, Music and Food" will be held on Saturday, October 18th. (Rain date Sunday, October 19th) If you haven't been to "Art in the Park" before, you've missed a won-



derful event. If you've stopped by, you know how much fun everyone has dancing along to the continuous music, snacking on the delicious goodies supplied by local restaurants and neighbors, viewing and buying the fabulous artistic creations of our vendors, and mixing and mingling with our friends and neighbors in the beautiful setting of

Straus Park. We hope to see you there this year.

Save the date - October 18th!



Straus Park in the Spring
Beautiful tulips planted in the reflecting pool area

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences "Titanic" Exhibit

Laurie McKean, one of Isidor and Ida Straus' 67 great, great grandchildren, contacted me recently to let me know that the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences was about to stage an exhibit of Titanic artifacts. We talked about her gggrandparents, Isidor and Ida Straus and about her family's history. She put me in touch with Jon Pishney, spokesperson for the North Carolina museum, who was interested in the SHS's materials. A large packet including letters, articles and photographs was sent to the Mr. Pishney.

Articles published in the Charlotte Observer give rave reviews to this exhibit that opened August 2nd. Each commented on the sensitive manner in which Mr. Pishney has handled the artifacts. Leigh Dyer, in one article, wrote about Laurie's relation to the Strauses and to the Raleigh area where she resides.

The exhibit will run through January 4, 2004 in Raleigh, NC. The museum will be holding a workshop on September 17th "for educators who wish to use the exhibit for lessons."

Front Range Music Theatre Productions

In May I was contacted by Lloyd A. Norton, Professor Emeritus of the University of Northern Colorado. He explained that he would be portraying Isidor Straus opposite Sharon Sheets as Ida Straus in a production of "Titanic." He and Miss Sheets often play opposite one another and he, a silversmith, makes rings to commemorate their performances. For this production he made wedding rings for himself and for Miss Sheets. He presented hers at the first rehearsal in a Macy's box.

I've supplied Mr. Norton with Straus materials relating to the "Titanic" disaster. He recently wrote, "The final performance of



Sharon Sheets & Lloyd A. Norton
as Ida & Isidor Ida Straus
in "Titanic" -
June 2003 - Fort Collins, CO

The Front Range Music Theatre's production of **Titanic** was given last night to a sold out house! We were so thankful to your help in our efforts! ... I tried very hard to present Isidor with care and respect. I wish I had the privilege of knowing him. Both he and his wife were remarkable people that left the world better for having existed. Their values are models for this generation and those to come. Hopefully the musical will help to continue this awareness!"

Century Country Club and Hollywood Country Club

SHS vice chair Robin S. Dillon commented at a recent board meeting that the photographs of many Straus family members grace the walls of Century Country Club in Purchase, NY. This led to a discussion about the club, who the current members were and which family members were the founders.

Robin invited me to join her for lunch at the Century Club where we met with Burton Ward, the club's general manager. He is an engaging man who is very knowledgeable about the history of the club and proud of their efforts to maintain the historical details of the building and grounds. He told us that the gardens are maintained with the same plants and design as when they were first laid out in the 1920's. Every effort has been made to restore the building to its original state as well.

Along one wall in the main building there is a row a photographs of some of the original members and a copy of the original charter. At least a third of these members were relatives. This list includes: L. Abraham, Leo Arnstein, Joseph S. Bach, Walter Beer, Henry Bernheim, Albert and Henry Blum, Harry Eising, Philip J. Goodhart, B. Guggenheim, Max S. and P. M. Herzog, Albert. F and H. G. Hockstader, Fred L. Lavenburg, Irving Lehman, Luis Marx, Alfred and Henry Nathan, V. Sidney Rothschild, Edward, Myron and Simon Schafer, W. Scheftel, Isidor, Jesse I., Nathan and Percy S. Straus, Felix M. Warburg and Edmund E. Wise.

The Century Country Club was founded in 1898. Burt explained that the original Century Country Club had both golf and tennis. It was build in the Throgs Neck section of the Bronx, near where the bridge now stands. At about the same time, the Hollywood Country Club was also formed in Deal NJ. Golf was added at Hollywood much later. I believe polo was also a sport at the Hollywood Club. Century was intended for the use of those members who had country houses north of the city while Hollywood would be used by families with homes on the New Jersey shore. In many cases, families belonged to both clubs and this is still true today.

In 1904 the Century Club was moved to 100 acres in Greenburg (White Plains) and in 1922 it was moved to its present, larger, site in Purchase. Robin is enthusiastic about the manner in which the club has adapted to modern family life. I can attest to the friendly rapport she has with its members.

Burton Ward is interested in learning all he can about the Century Country Club. The SHS is seeking photographs, letters and memorabilia from any year for either club. We hope you will share your treasures with us. As always, I will be happy to photograph or scan your originals and return them to you as quickly as possible. Please share your stories about your family's involvement with either club. I will then share this material with Mr. Ward at the Century Club and with the managers at the Hollywood Country Club.



Photo Credit: Harold P. Kurzman

American Venus: The Extraordinary Life of Audrey Munson, Model and Muse, written by Diane Rozas and Anita Bourne Gottehrer was published by Balcony Press in December 1999. This book details the fascinating and tragic life of artist's model Audrey Munson. She posed for many of the statues in New York City including "Memory," the beautiful Straus Park statue pictured here. Reading about her life has enriched my feelings about an already inspiring work of art. My visits to the Park are more interesting because of my knowledge of the life of the model who made "Memory" possible. "Memory" honors the lives of Isidor and Ida Straus. She also honors the memory of Audrey Munson.

Did you Know?

Henry Ford, an acknowledged anti-Semite, wrote articles for *The Springfield Independent*. He speculated about who would be the King of Palestine if a separate Jewish state was formed.

In his book, *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate*, Neil Baldwin wrote, "While it is the case that the first explicit 'International Jew' article with its blazing, italicized headline came forth on May 22, (1920) there actually had been several thinly veiled implications in the half-year running up to it. The paper speculated on "Who Will Be the King of Palestine?" the previous fall, going into detail about "the drama of the Jewish people" in their unrelenting quest for a homeland, and theorizing that the ambitious brothers Nathan and Oscar Straus were interested in ascending to the "throne" of this monarchical state once it was established."

Thank you to SHS Board Vice Chair Robin S. Dillon for alerting us to the information in this fascinating and important book.

Searching for Anne Frank Letters from Amsterdam to Iowa

In a new book, due to be published in October, Susan Goldman Rubin talks to a young audience about ten year old pen pals Anne Frank of Amsterdam and Juanita Wagner of Danville Iowa. She describes how they became pen pals, where and how each lived and how the war affected their families. As you know, Anne and most of her family perished in the Holocaust. Her diary survived to tell the story of this remarkable girl and her experiences. Now, with Susan Rubin's book, a new chapter has been written.

Although intended for a young audience, I highly recommend *Searching for Anne Frank* to all readers. For the Straus family it is particularly poignant because Anne's father, Otto Frank survived. He was a good friend of Nathan Straus Jr.'s and continued his relationship with Nathan and his family after the war.

Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

- "The Autobiography of Isidor Straus" privately published by Sara Straus Hess, in softcover - \$40.00
- "Genealogical Miscellany" a family genealogy compiled by Robert K. Straus with addenda - \$40.00
- Large black & white photograph of the Isidor and Ida Straus family taken at Elberon NJ in 1905 - \$40.00
- Color photograph album of the Straus family's trip to Talbotton and Columbus GA, October 24-26, 1997 - \$50.00
- Color photograph album of the Oscar S. Straus Memorial rededication ceremony and reception, October 26, 1998 - \$50.00
- Videotape of the Oscar S. Straus Memorial Rededication Ceremony - October 26, 1998 filmed by Alan F. Hockstader - \$25.00
- Videotape: "Titanic on Broadway," a television special about the making of the Broadway play that includes Joan Adler speaking about the Straus family and a CNN segment in which Paul A. Kurzman is interviewed regarding the play "Titanic" - \$25.00
- Color photograph album of the Straus family's trip to Talbotton and Columbus GA, June 22-24, 2001 - \$50.00
- Masters Thesis of Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus." Shepherd College, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1947 - \$25.00

Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. A receipt will be issued for your purchase and for your contribution to the Society. You can contact Joan Adler by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: famjad@aol.com

You Are Invited

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board.

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, October 7th, 2003 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman, 129 East 79th Street, 9th Floor, New York at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board or to contribute to the Society.

This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in the Straus Historical Society may have an opportunity to share his/her views and voice his/her opinion. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul A. Kurzman 212-452-7035 for further information.