



STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 24 Number 2

Straus is the German word for ostrich

February 2023

Letters in the SHS Collection Courtesy of June Hall McCash

In 2012, June Hall McCash, a retired history professor from Murfreesboro, TN, published *A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus*. June is the author of several books. She is a thorough researcher who turned to SHS for information, documents and photographs about the entire Straus family as she prepared to write her book. She also turned to many other sources, including, but not limited to: the New York Public Library, the University of Georgia and the Library of Congress, Manuscript and Archives Division, where many letters written by Isidor, Nathan, Oscar and other family members are part of their collection.

Last summer, June sent SHS the research materials she used while writing her book. There is a large volume of materials and it has taken us the entire year to review them and add them to our already extensive bibliographic collection. And we have not completed the task. Some of these materials are duplicates of items we shared with June many years ago. But others, that are part of the Library of Congress collection, are completely new to us, including letters written by Isidor, Nathan or Oscar. We are pleased to present a small sample of these letters, with credit and thanks to June.

One set of letters was written by Isidor dating from mid to late 1887, after Oscar was confirmed as Minister to Constantinople.

Isidor, a frequent letter writer, gave his youngest brother advice, which Oscar seemed to appreciate. He advised both Oscar, and his wife Sarah, to keep a daily diary. He also advised him about the many people he should write to, whether because they were political allies or friends who wished not to be forgotten. Isidor made certain Oscar knew what the newspapers in the US were writing about; affairs about which Oscar should be apprised.

On July 8th, Isidor wrote to Oscar, "If you contemplate going to housekeeping in the Fall, had you not better see about your china and glassware, which we can order for you from England and France. Should you decide to send an order you had better find out exactly how many plates of each size you require, or in other words, how many people you desire to be able to serve at one sitting. In glassware it will be necessary for you to state how many size wine glasses you require as I am utterly ignorant of the usages of that conglomerate audience which your cosmopolitan circle gathers at one board."

Isidor advised Oscar, who was quite frugal, "You may also if you go to housekeeping want some ornaments. Whatever extra expense you may incur for having to ship them that distance, can be saved to you again when you come back to this country, as you are permitted to bring them in free of duty."

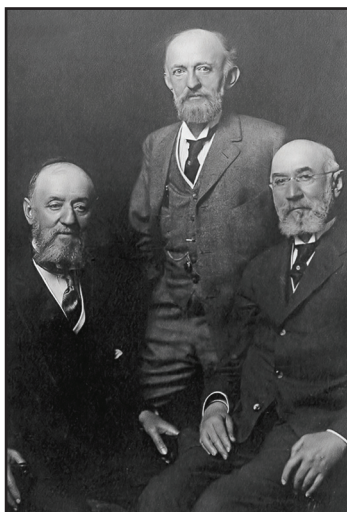
Later in August he wrote, "I would like to know whether Sarah is keeping up her diary, as I suggested to her. I am sure it will be a great pleasure to her and her children one of these days. Of course if she has not kept it up regularly every day,

it had better be begun now than neglected altogether. I fancy it will have far more interest to her however, if she writes daily so she can read what her instantaneous impressions were of all the new experience she met with. If written otherwise than on the first impulse it does not convey the impressions so acutely, nor so vividly and, I fancy, so interestingly, as if written from recollection in a quieter moment."

Sarah did keep the suggested diary. An article with many quotes from it appeared in the February 1997 issue of the SHS newsletter which may be found on the Archives page of our website: https://www.straushistoricalsociety.org/uploads/1/1/8/1/11810298/nwsltr297_5.pdf

The August 1994 and February 1995 issues of the newsletter contain articles with information and some quotes from letters written during Oscar's service as Minister to Constantinople.

In this same letter Isidor wrote, "With regard to the china and glassware for your table ... I would suggest for you to order different decorations for different courses, and if you carry out this idea I guess that the Royal Worcester, or the Crown Derby would be the best place to get dinner and soup plates from;



Nathan, Oscar & Isidor Straus



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Straus Historical Society, Inc

Post Office Box 416
Smithtown, NY 11787-0416
631-724-4487
info@straushistoricalsociety.org
info@straushistory.org
www.straushistoricalsociety.org
@StrausHistory



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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 SHS Vice Chair and Scholarship Committee Member Richard Gerstman



“My receiving the Straus Historical Society scholarship has genuinely encouraged individuals within governments and non-profit organizations to view me as someone who strives to impact the world.”
- Rachel Boakye, 2022 SHS Scholarship recipient.

After receiving the award, and noting her passion for public service and the SHS scholarship throughout her job applications, Rachel has obtained her dream internship at the US Department of State Bureau of African affairs, which is one step closer to her career goal of becoming a diplomatic lawyer. In Rachel's words, “The Straus Historical Society Scholarship has positively impacted me in various ways, and I will always be grateful for this scholarship.”

“The Straus Historical Society scholarship has greatly helped me prepare for the expensive endeavor of law school, prior to completing my master's program at the School of International Service at American University.” - Amy Lyons, 2022 SHS Scholarship recipient.

Amy is in her final semester of law school. After her bar exam, Amy will be completing her final semester of her master's program at the School of International Service at American University. Instead of focusing on the challenges of every day expenses, Amy said, “I feel much more comfortable focusing instead on bar preparation, and this is in large part due to the SHS scholarship.”

“The SHS scholarship allowed me to finish my graduate education without debt.” - Iris Hinh, 2021 SHS scholarship recipient.

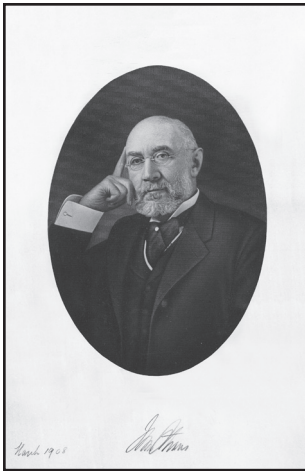
Iris graduated from Columbia University in May 2022 and moved to Washington DC to work at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – a non-partisan research and policy institute that advances federal and state policies to build an inclusive nation and shared prosperity. Iris is currently a policy analyst covering the education portfolio for the state fiscal policy research team, including equitable K to 12 funding/finance and higher education affordability. She helps provide technical assistance support to state partners in 43 states, DC, and Puerto Rico. In her role, she advocates across the country to make meaningful policy changes at the state level, presenting a unique opportunity to improve the quality of public education. Iris said, “The scholarship reduced financial stress and allowed me to complete my degree part-time in two years. I am thankful to the Straus Historical Society for providing graduate students with opportunities to pursue degrees in the fields of public service.”

At the Straus Historical Society, our goal for the Scholarship Program is to help support the continuing education of students whose professional goal is in the field of public service.

As a consequence of the Straus families' involvement in government, commerce, and philanthropy, the Straus family exemplifies and brings to life the true American story. It is in this spirit that we encourage young people to engage in public service in these challenging times. The Scholarship Program is an important part of our organization's spirit. All the funding comes from tax-deductible donations to the Straus Historical Society scholarship program.

Letters in the SHS Collection

continued



fish plates and game plates, I think might well be adapted from Haviland's Presidential set, fruit plates and dessert plates, and A.D. Coffee of some other French decoration. This I only throw out to you as a hint, so that you can reflect upon it and communicate your idea to Marx who has good taste and can undoubtedly get you up a set that would be unique and tasty."

Isidor continued to encourage Oscar to stop worrying about his expenses. On November 12, 1887 he wrote, "I am surprised that you should feel the least discomfiture with regard to your expenditures; I am really amazed that you should lose a moment's thought with regard to them. You have drawn so little compared to what I expected you should, that just prior to receipt of your advice of having drawn the last 400, I was wondering how you managed to get along. convinced that you cannot enjoy any money spent with the feeling that you are going beyond what you should, and for this reason I would adjure you to dismiss every notion of this kind from your mind. Whether it costs you \$5,000 more or less is of no consequence whatever; besides, even if you draw as much more this year as you indicate in your last it will not bring your expenditures for the calendar year of 1887 but a thousand or two dollars above what you were accustomed to spend when you were at home, as you can see from memo enclosed, and then, that portion of the money which has been used in procuring carpets, furniture, and other articles, or more or less permanent value, is not right to be construed as an expense, for when you return the articles will come in for their full values, and even more, as you can bring them in without Duty, in fixing your home here."

November 18, 1887, Isidor wrote to Oscar, "I saw a recent letter of Sarah's to her mother, and feel constrained to repeat what I wrote you before, not to stint yourself and endeavor to strain unnecessarily to economize. It is not necessary; I might go further and add that it is out of place."

Apparently Isidor was hoping that Oscar and Sarah would settle down as their neighbor when they returned from their mission in Turkey. He wrote in the same letter, "I have not thought of disposing of the 105th St. lots, and shall be glad to reserve them, as you suggest, with a view of your becoming our neighbor." In 1884, when Isidor and Ida bought their home at West 105th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue, they bought the house on a large property. They had stables



Sarah Lavanburg Straus

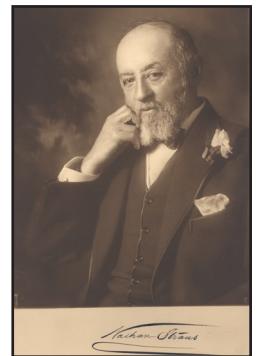
where Nathan and his friend NYC Mayor Hugh Grant kept their horses and they had a vegetable garden. Later, Isidor sold off part of his property and by 1895, but most likely quite a few years before, a house was built on that site. We have a New York Public Library photograph of what is supposed to be the Straus' West 105th Street home, but is not. It was the house built on the property he sold off. Until the receipt of these letters, we did not know that Isidor was hoping to sell the property to his brother Oscar.

Until now, we had no information about how, or even exactly when, the Strauses became partners at R. H. Macy & Company. Included in the packet of letters of Isidor to Oscar, and one from Nathan to Oscar, we get a clear picture of the break-up of the Macy partners and how the Strauses became partners in R. H. Macy & Company in 1888.

On October 10, 1887 Isidor wrote to Oscar about the break-up of the partnership between Charles Webster and Jerome Wheeler, partners at R. H. Macy & Company. "The contract between Charley and Jerome expires next May, and as they have agreed to separate, it is now a question as to which will buy the other out. They have such serious differences that they had very little personal intercourse with each other, but matters have taken such a shape that they will be able to separate in an amicable manner."

On November 18th Isidor wrote, "Charley has bought out Jerome to take effect the 1st of Jany. It is not known to any one excepting them and ourselves."

On December 10th, Nathan wrote to Oscar and Sarah, "About four weeks ago Charley bought out Jerome's interest. Although Charley confided in me I could not conscientiously advise him to do so; however, he did it of his own accord, and it seemed to lay a little heavy on his stomach. Just three weeks ago Charley was at my house to dinner. After dinner we took a coupe and rode down to the store, as he was just getting ready to have his opening in toys. On the way down he offered to let me have the whole business, as he was tired of it all. I told him to sleep over it and if he was still of the same opinion the next day I would either take half of it or the whole of it, but I would much preferred half, as I knew very well that if he sold the whole of it he might later on rue it, for one that is accustomed to such an active life as he has had it would be anything but wise to retire so suddenly. Well, to make a long story short, the following day we consummated the contract, and he sold us half interest. Isidor and myself will go into the Firm with the understanding that between the two are to do one man's work. So far, everything has progressed satisfactorily, and as the entire business is simply one big machine, we apprehend no trouble of any kind. You know what kind of man Charley is, and since he has made the sale to us he acts and feels like a

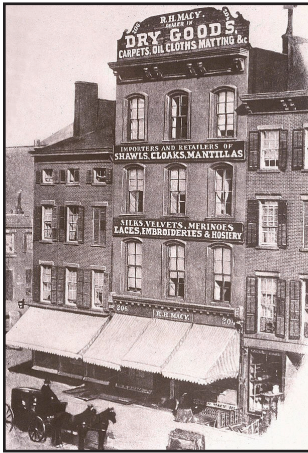


Letters in the SHS Collection

continued

new man. Jerome will devote his time to his western interest entirely.”

In his book *Macy's: The Store. The Star. The Story*, author Robert M. Grippo wrote, “On January 14, 1888, less than two weeks after the *New York Herald* announced the new partnership, Isidor Straus wrote to his brother Oscar, I am spending my time entirely uptown so as to familiarize [myself] with the working of everything, it is an exceedingly pleasant task as all the surroundings are happy in the extreme.” On Charles Webster he added, “Charley and myself constitute the firm, we seem by instinct determined that we all get a lot of fun and agreeable episodes out of each day’s hours.”



The first New York City
R. H. Macy & Co. store

Grippo wrote, “Although the Straus brothers and partner Charles B. Webster clearly were on friendly terms, from the beginning of the partnership the Strauses played a more active role in Macy’s management. During Webster’s long vacations abroad, he and Isidor kept in constant contact, with Isidor providing information about sales. But Isidor did not encourage Webster to hurry home and tend to business. Rather, he wrote, “Prolong your trip and enjoy yourself.” Isidor and Nathan had energy, drive, and experience, and

Webster gladly deferred to their business decisions. Webster’s interest in running Macy’s continued to diminish with time. Interestingly, until his death in 1916, Webster kept an office in the store, and every day would join either Isidor or Nathan for lunch. But in 1896, eight years after the partnership had begun, Webster sold his interest in R. H. Macy’s to the Straus brothers for the amount of \$1,200,000.”

Jerome Wheeler and Charles Webster were such good friends with Nathan Straus that Nathan honored them by naming one of his sons Jerome Nathan Straus and another Charles Webster Straus. Charles Webster Straus later changed his name to Nathan Straus Jr.

Nathan continued, in his letter to his younger brother Oscar, “Expenses: If I were in your place I would not harp so much on the subject. Money is made to spend, it can also be used for lending purpose. All that you can use to the former you need not make yourself any uneasy moment about, as you can afford it to your hearts content. Your letters, I mean Sarah’s also, would read so much better if you left off the whining about “it costing so much.” – Take care of the Turks & the dollars will be looked after in N.Y. ... Money is made to spend”

When Oscar and Sarah went to Constantinople in 1887, they took their four year old daughter Aline with them but left their

five year old daughter Mildred (Milly) at home in the care of relatives.

Lee Kohns the son of Lazarus and Hermine Straus Kohns, worked at the family firm of L. Straus & Sons. He wrote about business matters to his aunt and uncle, Sarah and Oscar, when they were in Constantinople but also included lovely comments about their daughter Milly.



Lee Kohns

On December 2, 1887 he wrote, “I took supper in 46th St. on Tuesday night. Little Milly sat at table for my special benefit.” (46th Street is where Lazarus and Hermine Kohns lived with her father Lazarus Straus.) “I will not begin to tell you about her brightness & exceeding loveliness, for if I did I fear I should be about as bad as her Grandpa Lavanburg is when you get him wound up on that subject. Suffice it to say that she is beyond all question – the best & loveliest child one can imagine. I am honored by being loved “the best of all the uncles.” Almost every Sunday morning I call & walk with her up Fifth Ave. to the house where she stays for dinner. After that, I make her go through all her accomplishments – mentionable & the reverse. But I must stop, as I said before it would take me a long time until I should feel that I had said enough in praise of the little darling.”

Lee continued, “Yesterday Uncle Isidor & Uncle Nathan signed a contract with Charles Webster by which they become partners in the firm of R. H. Macy & Co. from Jan 1/88. Wheeler retires from the firm then. It is an immense ... & all the negotiations were conducted so rapidly & pleasantly that there is great rejoicing all around. Uncle Isidor has been busy for the past few days with Frank Einstein arranging the papers and will most probably not get a chance to write you by this mail. Of course, this will tie me down here as I shall shoulder Uncle Isidor’s duties after the first of the year.”



On March 21, 1888 Nathan wrote to “Dear Brother & Sister” (Oscar and Sarah). This letter is unusual because we do not have many letters written by Nathan to his siblings in our collection that are not business oriented or that show so much warmth and humor. There had been a blizzard in New York. Nathan begins this letter with a description of how he fared during the storm.

“First of all, everyone here is in the prime of heath although we

Letters in the SHS Collection

continued

have had a very rough March, the papers give you the details. I started for Macy's at nine, got as far as 19th St. & stuck until two, when I came down on a ..., walked to the store & rather than to venture back I remained until the next day, for there were no trains running on any of the roads. All the news for the past ten days comes under the head of Blizzard.

"I bought a house of a Mr. Gans in 57th St between 8th & 9th, 21 feet wide for \$34,000. It is about such a house as your parents live in.

"It is more than likely that we will make a flying visit across the big pond as my dear Lina is desirous to see her Mother who has been quite sick for several months, but from last report is getting better again. We have not fixed upon a date yet.

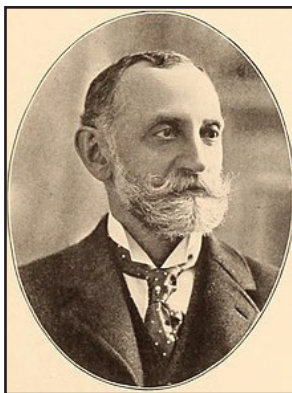
"Business at 14th St. is running without any friction, Isidor likes it ever so much better than wholesale, instead of selling A.B & Co. on credit, we only sell to C.O.D. for cash. Even your good mother Sarah, has fallen into line like a Trojan & can be seen almost daily with her pocket book in hand, shopping. She complained a little at first you know!

"We keep a detective in all the large stores & any of the family caught in the act without a very plausible excuse is banished to purgatory for the first offense, & for the second they are condemned to ... well I hate to say what.

"I have never had much ambition to travel for pleasure but the trip you are now making is one that I have always longed to make, that is to go to Jerusalem. I hope you fully enjoy it even if the ducats vanish so fast. I gave you my ideas on this subject in a former letter."

Following the death of Lazarus Straus on January 14, 1898, business partner Abraham Abraham wrote a condolence letter to Isidor and Ida.

"Mrs. Abraham & I both were pleased to hear that the trip is proving so beneficial to your health, and we trust that the taking away of your father will not interrupt or retard a complete recovery to your usual good health. While we are all afflicted some time in life it is not everyone's privilege to see a parent live to the ripe age of your father, honored and respected by the entire community, as well as by those who had the good fortune of his intimacy. While I will not attempt to assuage your sorrow, - for it is natural to lament the loss of your dear ones, - your grief is tempered with the consciousness that your father's life was a joy and a benediction to your entire family.

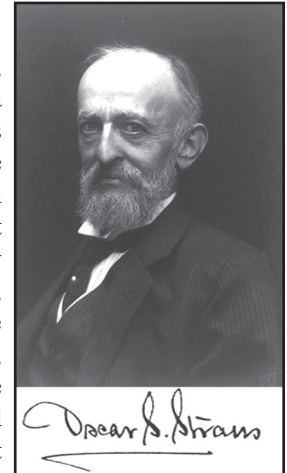


General Abraham Abraham

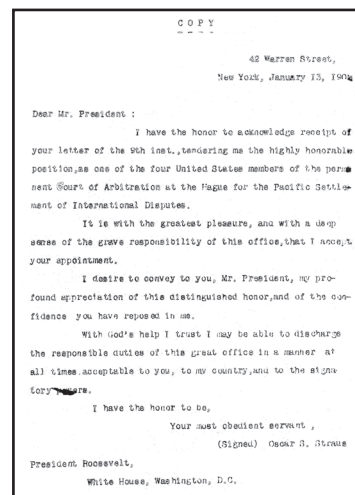
"The text of Rev. Dr. Kohler in his eloquent oration was singularly appropriate, "Mark the perfect man, for the end of that man is peace. He was an upright man, and one to whom two generations looked up with veneration and love, kindly and genial in disposition, - in short a perfect gentleman. His old age was a happy one, surrounded by all his loved ones he passed away, serenely, contentedly and peacefully."

"The store is gradually assuming shape, and it is not egotism to say A. & S. will possess as fine a store as there is in America when completed, and that means the world as America has the best stores anywhere. By the time you return I think it will be about completed."

In January 1902, Oscar S. Straus, having already served twice a Minister to Constantinople, was appointed as a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague by then president Theodore Roosevelt. On January 13, 1902 Oscar wrote to Roosevelt, "I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 9th inst., tendering me the highly honorable position, as one of the four United States members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes.



"It is with the greatest pleasure, and with a deep sense of the grave responsibility of this office, that I accept your appointment.



"I desire to convey to you, Mr. President, my profound appreciation of this distinguished honor, and of the confidence you have reposed in me.

"With God's help I trust, I may be able to discharge the responsible duties of this great office in a manner at all times acceptable to you, to my county, and to the signatory powers.

"I have the honor to be, Your most obedient servant, Oscar S. Straus."

As the Straus family's historian for the past 32 years, it was exciting to see so much new material among the papers June McCash sent, and to learn so many new facts. We hope you enjoyed reading about these new materials. We are indebted to June Hall McCash for donating her research materials to SHS and wish to acknowledge and thank her for them.

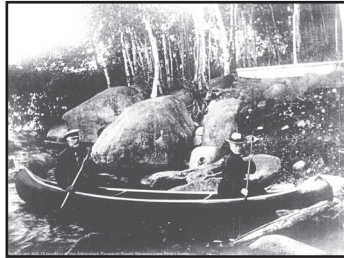
The Strauses and Their Recreation

Most often, when we write articles for the newsletter, we focus on the professional lives of the people we write about. We've been interested in their careers, public service and philanthropy. But people are much more than the sum of these facets. Even the most dedicated merchant, public servant or philanthropist made time for some sort of recreation. And so, we turn now to how the members of the family spent their leisure time.

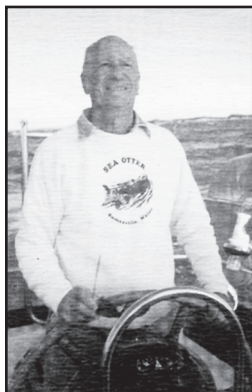
We don't intend this to be an all-inclusive article. In many cases, we simply don't know what people did other than work. Perhaps you will let us know if we have omitted one of your ancestors who had an interesting hobby or recreation. We have also not included members of the current generations as the opportunities and types of activities have changed dramatically over time. And there is far more time for people to pursue activities other than work, and far more opportunities and types of activities for them to pursue.

There is an old saying, "All work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy." One could never say that any of the Strauses were dull. And so, in this article, we highlight some of the hobbies, recreations and sports in which the Strauses participated.

From the many letters Ida wrote to Isidor during the 1890s, the time their family, and Nathan's family, spent summers in the Adirondacks, we learned that boating and fishing were frequent summer activities for the children and adults alike. The older children were permitted to go on several day excursions with a guide where they hunted, fished and rowed throughout Saranac Lake. There is little evidence that they swam or played other sports like tennis or golf during this time although rowboats and rowing across the lake to visit other families is frequently mentioned.



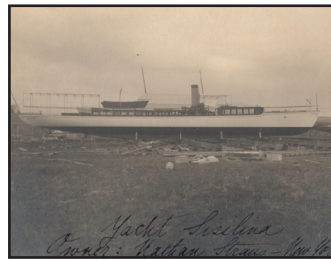
Nathan and Sarah canoeing on Saranac Lake



Donald Blun Straus at the helm of his sailboat

that there was no need for words.

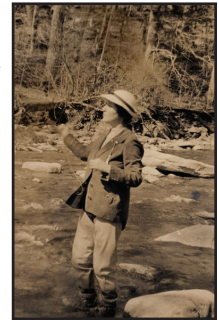
Sailing: Oscar S. Straus II owned several sailboats over the years which he sailed off the southern coast of Long Island. One of his boats, the Ostrich, flew a pennant with the ostrich proudly flying from its mast. Donald Blun Straus was also an enthusiastic sailor who owned several sailboats during his life. In later years, once he and his wife Beth retired to Mt. Desert in coastal Maine, they rowed together in the Atlantic every morning when the weather permitted. He once commented that they were so in sync with each other



Sissilina

recorded the many excursions taken on the St. Lawrence River and the many fish caught during these trips. In 1916, Nathan sold his boat, Sissilina, to the U.S. Coast Guard and used the proceeds to feed war orphans.

Fishing: Many family members enjoyed fishing. Gladys and Roger Williams Straus owned a house in Claryville, NY where they fly fished in the Neversink River that ran through their property. Roger grew up in a family that enjoyed fishing. Oscar and Sarah, his parents, owned Megantic Fish & Game in Maine where family members were required to hike many miles to their rustic cabin before any hunting or fishing could take place. I believe Megantic is still in family hands after all these years. Ralph I. Straus



Gladys G. Straus fly fishing in the Neversink River



Ralph fishing in Scotland

enjoyed salmon fishing and often found time to fish when on his many trips abroad. Oliver Herbert Straus salmon fly fished on the Restigouche River in New Brunswick, Canada. Nathan Straus Jr. enjoyed fishing so much that, when he was looking for property to buy in Westchester County, NY, he brought a thermometer with him. He would not buy a house there unless the lake on the property was a certain temperature to support the kind of fish he wanted to fish for in the lake.

Swimming: Sissie, Nathan and Lina's daughter, and her husband, Irving Lehman were an exceptionally bonded couple. They swam in their pool every day, only swimming side stroke so they could face each other and talk while they swam. Percy and Edith Straus had an oval pool at Hilholme, their Port Chester, NY estate, where famous people like Esther Williams and Johnny Weissmuller swam during their parties.

Golf: Nathan Straus played golf in Canada with Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden. Grandson Barnard Sachs (Barney)



Nathan with Prime Minister Borden

Straus remembered Nathan's putting green at his Mamaroneck, NY home. Barney was offered a monetary prize for each ball he holed.

Hunting: Several Strauses were hunters. Oscar and family hunted at Megantic in Maine and Isidor and Nathan's family hunted when they summered in the Adirondacks. Percy Jr. took his wife Edith on a Big Game Hunt in Africa shortly after the birth of their son Percy III. Several family members have attributed their hearing loss to the repeated loud retort of their guns so close to their ears.

Horseback Riding and Racing: Nathan's stable of horses was famous. He won many a race on The Speedway in Harlem, in NY on a track that is now Harlem River Drive. Isidor was admonished by Ida that he should be certain to ride daily when he was home while she was in the Adirondacks with their children. It is unclear whether he rode the horse or rode in a carriage pulled by a horse. He maintained a stable on his West 105th Street property where he, his brother Nathan and NYC Mayor Hugh Grant kept their horses. When Isidor and Ida went to Europe for the winter of 1912, Isidor's horse was boarded at an upstate stable. A newspaper article reported that the seemingly healthy horse unexplainably died a day or two after the Strauses died in the Titanic disaster. Percy also maintained a stable at Hilholme, his Port Chester, NY estate and could often be seen riding to the hounds on his and nearby department store owner, Gimbel's, property.

Tennis: Barney Straus was an excellent tennis player. He was the director of the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, RI and was inducted into the Senior Division.

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned the activities of many women, so far. In general, women of a bygone era did not participate in sports that made them sweat. We do know that Ida, Lina and Sarah rowboated and fished.

Art: Ida was an accomplished artist. We've published images of some of her pencil drawings in a previous newsletter. Eugenie Blum painted ceramics. She gave pieces to her grandchildren who treasure them to this day. Eugenie loved hearts and flowers and used that motif on her ceramics.



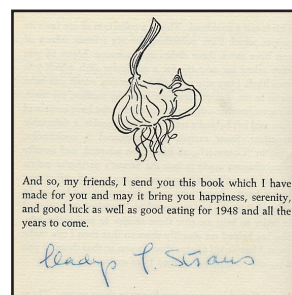
Gardening: Several Straus women were avid gardeners. Irma Nathan Straus, Jesse Isidor's wife, and Edith Abraham Straus, Percy's wife, both participated in many garden shows where they each displayed some of the roses they had crossbred. Both won many prizes for their lovely roses. Margaret (Peggy) Hess De Graaff was married to a Dutchman, Jan, who crossbred and grew lilies at their Portland, OR farm. They traveled the world promoting their lilies. She once commented that it was a wonderful profession because no one disliked flowers.

Interesting Collection: Eugenie Blum Bijur collected sewing birds. She had the second largest collection in the world. This beautiful antique tool was designed in the 19th century for



hand sewing. Clamped to the edge of a table, it acted as a "3rd hand" keeping the fabric taut as one sewed. By pressing the top and bottom tail together it opens the beak, which allows the sewer to place the fabric in the beak holding it securely while stitching a hem or seam. Keep in mind that the sewing machine was not invented yet. Women would buy fabric to make their kitchen towels, sheets, quilts, blankets, aprons and clothes for the family. This involved a lot of hand sewing, to be exact, hemming! A very handy tool to have before the invention of the sewing machine. Eugenie willed the collection to the Monmouth County Museum in New Jersey. She also collected twine holders.

Cooking: Gladys Guggenheim Straus, wife of Roger Williams Straus, was interested in food and in nutrition. In 1940, she was a co-founder of *Gourmet Magazine*, of which she was assistant editor from its inception to 1950. She hoped to use its audience to encourage healthful and cost effective meal



preparation. Governor Thomas E. Dewey appointed her a Nutrition Commissioner for the New York Metropolitan area from 1943 to 1945 and again from 1947 to 1948. She was a member of the council of New York State College Home Economics from 1943 to 1946. The meals she served at home were so popular that her guests encouraged her to create a cookbook of her recipes, which she did. In a note on the second page she wrote, "And so, to my friends, I send you this book which I have made for you and may it bring you happiness, serenity, and good luck as well as good eating for 1948 and all the years to come." SHS has recreated Gladys' cookbook. It is available for sale on the Publications page of our website.

Music: It was de rigueur for all children to play an instrument in days gone by. Most often, it was the piano or violin that was taught. Herbert Nathan Straus collected, and played, any of the instruments in his Stradivarius quartet. In a recent newsletter, we wrote about Jack I. Straus' passion for music. Barney Straus played the violin in the Harvard Orchestra. Leonard Bernstein, who was assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony and a friend of Barney's, came to a rehearsal of the Harvard Orchestra. They were practicing the Mozart Haffner Symphony for their annual concert. They had gotten about eight bars into the first movement when Lenny dropped his baton, clasped his hands over both ears and declared, "You're terrible!" There was a deadly silence from all 125 members of the orchestra. "Let's try again," he said. This time things went better and the concert the next day was very well received. When Barney saw Lenny at a dinner party in New York about four weeks later, Lenny asked, "Hey, Barney, are you still playing the fiddle?" Barney replied, "Yes, maestro, how kind of you to remember." At which Lenny came back with, "How could I possibly ever forget!"

The Pompeian Room

27 West 72nd Street, New York City

An article that appeared in the December 6, 1903 issue of the *New York Tribune* described “Two Interesting Rooms.” One of those rooms was the “Kneipstube” in the house of Jacob Rupert, a brewer. The article states, “A peep inside this ‘kneipstube,’ as the quaint room is called, is, in imagination, a trip to the Fatherland. The other room described in this article is the Pompeian room of Nathan and Lina Straus. In the early 1990s, Flora Stieglitz Straus, the daughter-in-law of Nathan and Lina, wife of their son Hugh Grant, told me that every room in Nathan and Lina's home at 27 West 72nd Street in NYC was decorated in a different style.

I had already been interested in the Pompeian room because of the lovely photograph we have in our collection of Nathan and Lina and their children formally posed there.

Andy Fisher, an author who is writing a comprehensive biography of Nathan Straus, corresponded with Peter Kenny, curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Peter Kenny wrote a lengthy response about the use of Pompeian decorations by the Upper Crust at the turn of the century. It was Peter Kenny who mentioned the *New York Tribune* article which is quoted at length in this article.

“Another unique chamber in a New York home is the Pompeian room of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Straus. This is the front room of a second story, and the fourth of a suite including reception room, library and dining room as well. When the sliding doors are pushed back the Pompeian room is entered from the reception room at the head of the broad, winding stairway. As the visitor ascends he is accompanied at each step by a view of clustered paintings which appear to follow the side wall to the top of the tall house. Advancing to the front room, the softly playing fountain in the centre, with its low basin of black marble at once attracts both eye and ear. The mosaic floor of stone which surrounds this veritable ‘home centre’ is strewn with the skins of tiger, bear and leopard, and it takes only a small stretch of the imagination to recall the women and children of long ago reposing or playing beside it.”

“The furniture, though upholstered and with frames of carved wood, is designed from the ancient originals of stone. The reproductions are exact to the smallest detail, not only the mural paintings which cover the walls, but the winged Mercury and other bronzes, the cameos, metal pitchers, toilet articles of cunning workmanship, hanging lamps of graceful shape, the

very brazier to be moved as needed and filled with fuel – each and all are faithfully copied and were done expressly for their owner by the president of the Naples Museum. The impression given by these copies is that of impossible freshness, until it is remembered that the work is exact and that the originals have this appearance on account of the preservative quality of the covering of loose ashes and powdered pumice stone which hermetically sealed ill-fated Pompeii. That the colors of the paintings compare so favorably with ours to-day is accounted for by Sir Humphrey Davy, who discovered that they used the same pigments as our artists. They, however, knew some secret that prevented fading. To the uninitiated eye, it seems as if a slight fading would soften their tints to an advantage.”



Pompeian Room at 27 West 72nd Street



“The subject of the mural painting to the left of entrance is ‘The Wedding of Zephyr and Flora.’ This shows the beneficial influence of gentle breezes on vegetation. Zephyr is represented as a beautiful boy; Flora, a fainting Hebe. Over the mantel is the painting of the child Hercules strangling a serpent in the presence of his father, Jupiter. Opposite the mantel is the well-known strong figure of Hercules watching his son while nourished by a fawn. In the group are Pomona, Paris and Fortuna. On the left of the large window, which is directly opposite the entrance, is a painting of Thetis, calmly surveying her buxom charms in the polished shield of their son. Achilles, wrought by Vulcan. To the right is ‘The Supplication of Ixion,’ bound to the wheel in the presence of Juno, Diana, Mercury and Ulysses. These painting cover the entire wall except for the space taken by the window and the four gilt figures each side of and opposite the mantel, which appear to support the ceiling.”

Peter Kenny's report concluded: “... the Pompeian Room in the Straus townhouse, decorated in a time-honored and recognizable style, was far from ordinary, even among his spectacularly wealthy late nineteenth cohort. Whether such extravagant expenditure and display of wealth disturbed his sense of social justice is perhaps unknowable. Regardless of any pangs of conscience, however, Straus' aristocratic pretensions are surely confirmed by the sumptuous, exotic classical interior decoration of this room.”

Daughter-in-law Flora Stieglitz Straus told me that every room at 27 West 72nd Street was decorated in a different style. I wish we had photographs of the other rooms. They must have been equally as interesting and unique.

Harvest Days at Old Talbot - November 5-6

Michael H. and Debbie G. Buckner at Patsiliga Plantation

On November 5 and 6, 2022, Mike and Debbie Buckner held the fifteenth Harvest Days in Old Talbot at Patsiliga Plantation, their farm in Junction City, GA. I have been privileged to attend this festival for many years.

This year, after a two year hiatus due to COVID, everyone seemed excited to be together again and to share the sights, sounds and smells of a by-gone era. There were demonstrations of how sugar cane is cooked into syrup. The sweet treat was available for sale. There is a water powered grist mill on the Buckner property that has been grinding corn into meal and grits since long before the Strauses arrived in GA in the mid 1800s. In fact, the same stone is still grinding the grain as when the Strauses bought their products from this mill.

Mike, a train enthusiast, owns several steam engines and other antique train cars. One of these is a 0-6-0 Chain Drive Locomotive he's named Jack. Another is the only known



remaining Georgia built Glover Steam Locomotive. Visitors were given rides in the Glover locomotive on the half mile of track running alongside and behind Mike's enormous barn.

This is a fun and popular activity for young and old alike. A Glover family member came to the festival as did a member of the Sams family. The Sams family were the original owners of this unique Glover Steam Locomotive. The two men chatted about their connection through the locomotive and figured out that they are related, a surprise for both men.

Saturday morning there was an antique car show on the front lawn at the Buckner's home with at least fifteen cars, from all different eras, all in excellent condition, on display. One car is from 1939 and is still being driven daily by Mike's aunt.

Additional experiences included watching the firing of the tunnel style cross draft kiln. The process started at three in the morning and continued, without a stop, until three in the afternoon. Several groups of men and women continuously fed chunks of wood into the mouth of the kiln to keep the fire going at a steady high temperature. Then, the pottery, sometimes as many as one thousand pieces, would be allowed to cool down at a very slow rate. The kiln was not going to

be opened for several days. Several potters brought pottery they had previously fired in this kiln and were showing and selling their artwork. One potter set up his wheel and was demonstrating how a pot is "thrown."

There was traditional folk music in the Buckner's 1840 Greek Revival home, blue grass music on the dock near the mill, church services and gospel music on the front lawn on Sunday morning, and much more.

In the barn, the local fire department sold barbeque, coleslaw and pickles. There were numerous demonstrations and exhibits such as Forrest Buckner's band saw mill, blacksmith Justin Brown, Bill and Mel Stinson's grist mill and hoecakes, handmade goat milk soap, baskets, quilts, Wes Stinson's apiaries and honey, barrel art and wreaths, to name a few. Representatives from the state's environmental conservation agency set up a table and spoke about local issues with anyone who stopped by for a chat.

More than 500 individuals toured the Buckner's lovely antebellum home and visited me in the living room where I'd set up photographs of the Straus family and shared the story of their early American roots in rural GA. Many people are surprised to learn that the Straus family got their early American experiences in Georgia and they seem quite interested in learning their history.

This year there was a special surprise. The National Society Sons and Daughters of Antebellum Planters 1607-1861 presented Mike and Debbie with a plaque that honors their ancestors who have continuously farmed more than 500 acres between 1607 and 1861. Mike's family has owned land in Talbot County since 1530, making him the seventh generation on this land. Deborah W. Hicks presented the historic marker to Mike and Debbie and to their grandson Jackson, who is the ninth generation of Buckners living on their land. For someone like me, from Brooklyn, NY, whose roots in America go back no more than 100 years, this was a most unusual and moving ceremony.



I was delighted that the weekend festival, Harvest Days at Old Talbot, has resumed after a two year COVID hiatus. It was wonderful to see people who have become good friends. I was especially excited to stay, once again, with Mary Luna Shepherd at her charming home. She is a delightful friend who always makes certain we feel welcome and are comfortable.

I encourage everyone to join me in Georgia next year on the first weekend in November.

2022 List of Donors to SHS

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society wishes to thank those who made contributions in 2022.
Your generosity made it possible to continue the important work of SHS

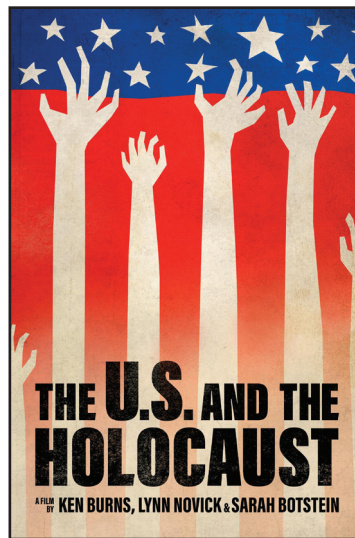
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The U. S. and the Holocaust: A Documentary by Catherine Smith

In 1908, Nathan Straus Jr. attended Heidelberg University where Otto Frank became his college roommate. Nathan Jr. said Otto was his closest friend, staying in touch and seeing each other many times in the ensuing years. As Nazism rose to power in Europe, Otto continued to adjust to the conditions around him, until he eventually was forced to move his family to Amsterdam. Tensions continued to worsen, and ultimately, in 1941, Otto felt compelled to leave Europe. Nathan Straus Jr. was the director of the U.S. Housing Authority in Washington, D.C. at the time. Letters were exchanged between the two men, and others, over the course of 15 months in an attempt to get the Frank family out of Europe. In the end, their efforts were unsuccessful. The letters show how impossibly difficult it was to flee, regardless of who you knew.

The PBS series, *The U.S. and the Holocaust* by Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein, premiered in September 2022. This three-part, six-hour series, examines America's response to one of the greatest humanitarian crises of the twentieth century. "Americans consider themselves a "nation of immigrants," but as the catastrophe of the Holocaust unfolded in Europe, the United States proved unwilling to open its doors to more than a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of desperate

people seeking refuge. Through riveting firsthand testimony of witnesses and survivors who as children endured persecution, violence and flight as their families tried to escape Hitler, this series delves deeply into the tragic human consequences of public indifference, bureaucratic red tape and restrictive quota laws in America."



The story of Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr. fits naturally into the documentary and was featured throughout each part. In the second part, the story focuses on Nathan Straus Jr. and the many barriers the men faced. Ultimately, *The U.S. and the Holocaust* offers little consolation to those who believe that the challenges posed by nativism, antisemitism, xenophobia and racism are buried deeply and permanently in the past.

"The institutions of our civilization [are] under tremendous stress," warns writer Daniel Mendelsohn, who shares his family's story in the film. "The fragility of civilized

behavior is the one thing you really learn, because these people, who we now see in these sepia photographs, they're no different from us. You look at your neighbors, the people at the dry cleaner, the waiters in the restaurant. That's who these people were. Don't kid yourself."

Social Media Post

If you have not already done so, check out SHS's regular Social Media posts. SHS's assistant director, Catherine Smith, creates fun, interesting and informative posts for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Here's an example:

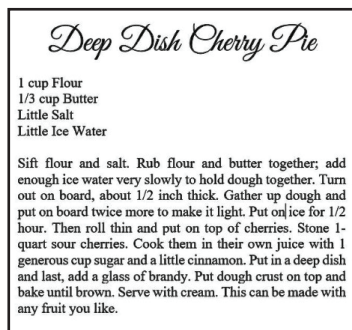
Happy National Pie Day! In honor of this fun holiday, we thought we'd share Gladys Guggenheim Straus' Deep Dish Cherry Pie recipe from her published cookbook. Gladys Guggenheim Straus was married to Roger Williams Straus, son of Oscar S. and Sarah Lavanburg Straus. Gladys was very interested in business. When she was invited to help finance the new *Gourmet Magazine*, she did so, but also became very active in its publication. She was very interested in food, healthy eating habits and diet. Her many recipes have been compiled in the *Straus Family Cookbook*, published by, and available on the SHS website. Let us know what you think of this fun old-fashioned recipe and if you try making it yourself!

Deep Dish Cherry Pie

1 cup Flour
1/3 cup Butter
Little Salt
Little Ice Water

Sift flour and salt. Rub flour and butter together; add enough ice water very slowly to hold dough together. Turn out on board, about 1/2 inch thick. Gather up dough and put on board twice more to make it light. Put on ice for 1/2 hour. Then roll thin and put on top of cherries. Stone 1 quart sour cherries. Cook them in their own juice with 1 generous cup sugar and a little cinnamon. Put in a deep dish and last, add a glass of brandy. Put dough crust on top and bake until brown. Serve with cream. This can be made with any fruit you like.

Check out the book for yourself! <https://bit.ly/3Vhgunf>



Social Media Call to Action

What would you like to see posted on our social media platforms? Do you want to see more about: family members, our collections, events, family history? Let us know what would be most meaningful and interesting to you as we continue to develop these new opportunities for communication.

Don't forget to Like, Follow and Subscribe!

Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications

Strauses and the Arts, a collection of articles about family members who are artists, patrons of the arts, musicians, dancers, or involved in the arts in some other manner. Personal interviews with the artists reveal details about their creative process and their philosophy of the arts. Images of the artists' work are included at the end of each article. Available from the SHS website as an eBook (\$4.99) or paperback (\$25).

The Autobiography of Isidor Straus privately published by Sara Straus Hess in 1955, greatly expanded and updated by SHS in 2011, including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization by Lina Gutherz Straus, a loving tribute to the life's work of Nathan Straus, greatly expanded in 2016 including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover - \$40.00

Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft, the autobiography of Oscar S. Straus. This recently re-published autobiography includes a new supplement with articles about Oscar S. Straus from past issues of the Society's newsletters and new photographs. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$40.00

For the Sake of the Children: The Letters Between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr. by Joan Adler published in 2013. When Otto Frank realized he had to get his family out of Europe in April, 1941, he wrote to his Heidelberg University roommate and lifelong friend Nathan Straus Jr. for help. This book describes their struggle to find a way to save the Frank family. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

The History of the Jews of Otterberg by Dr. Hans Steinebrei, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn and Dr. Andreas J. Schwab. This publication contains a large section about the Straus family. Many photographs complement the text. Published in English by the Straus Historical Society. Hard cover - \$35.00

My Family: I Could Write a Book by Edith Maas Mendel. A must read for all those interested in family history. Even if the people in this book are not your direct relatives, their appeal is universal. *My Family* is amply enriched with photographs of the people and places mentioned. Hard cover - \$25.00

Additional items are available for sale on the SHS website. www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications. Contact Joan Adler by phone: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistory.org if you have questions about ordering.

The Straus Historical Society collection contains many photographs, articles and other items that are also available. Contact Joan Adler if you want to learn more about the SHS collections or if there is a specific photograph or article you wish to purchase.