



# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



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Newsletter

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## The Southern Experience: From the Blockade to the Battle of Columbus

During the Civil War, 18 year old Isidor Straus ran the blockade from Charleston, SC. He remained in Europe from July 1863 through the end of the war. We have not investigated, until now, the circumstances of this adventure and its larger historical perspective.

Isidor's father Lazarus Straus and their family settled in Talbotton, GA in 1854. He was a merchant and owned a dry goods store. The Strauses were active in their community and enjoyed life in Talbotton, at least until the Civil War. In 1863 a Presentment issued by the Grand Jury in Talbot County, by order of Governor Brown, accused the Jews of usury. Lazarus, who up until that time considered himself a valuable member of the community, decided he could no longer live in Talbotton and moved 38 miles west to the larger city of Columbus, GA in Muscogee County.

Earlier, on April 19, 1861 President Abraham Lincoln issued a blockade proclamation. Ships interfering with the commerce of the Union would be treated under the laws of piracy. England quickly recognized the state of war between the two factions and declared their own neutrality. This act was seen by the Union as sympathetic to the South.

From the beginning of the war, leaders of the Confederacy realized they would have to obtain great quantities of military supplies from abroad. The mostly rural and agrarian South had not developed an industrial base and found itself without the military armaments necessary to conduct a protracted war with the Union forces. The South didn't have a merchant fleet large enough to bring these supplies from Great Britain, Nassau, Bermuda or Havana.

In order to remedy this, companies were formed, like the Georgia Importing and Exporting Company. A newspaper article from June 17, 1863 announced its formation "for the purpose of opening and carrying on direct trade with foreign countries. In carrying out their objects [sic] aforementioned they propose to employ ocean steamers in transporting merchandise and produce to and from the ports of the different Governments of Europe, Great Britain, the Islands, and Provinces belonging thereto and the different ports of the Confed-

erate States of America. The capital of the Association consists of seventy-seven hundred and sixty-four bales of Cotton, reasonably worth thirteen hundred and fifty thousand dollars, actually paid in and employed in carrying out the objects of the Association." Members of this Association familiar to us were: L. Straus & Co., L. Kohns & Bro., S. Rothschild & Bro., L. G. Bowers and C. A. L. Lamar.

The plan of this new Association was to run the blockade with ships laden with cotton and produce from the South. This cargo would be transported abroad from Confederate ports where it would be sold and the proceeds used to build newer and larger blockade running ships. On their return voyage to the Confederacy, these fast, light-drafted, steel and iron-hulled steamers brought much needed supplies that were no longer available from the Northern cities that once supplied them. Stephen R. Wise reported in his book, *Life-line of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War*, that 60 percent of the South's arms arrived on blockade runners. In the six month period preceding December 1864, the seaports of Charleston, SC and Wilmington, NC received more than "500,000 pairs of shoes, 300,000 blankets, 3.5 million pounds of meat, 1.5 million pounds

of lead, 2 million pounds of saltpeter, 50,000 rifles, 43 cannon plus huge amounts of uniform cloth, medicine and other essential supplies." The blockade runners arrived at Confederate ports during the night, slipping past the Union warships. And as long as these ports remained open, the Confederacy could arm, clothe and feed its soldiers. Once these ports were captured, failure of the Confederacy was inevitable.

The Georgia Importing and Exporting Company had a contract with the state for the shipping of state-owned goods in



Lazarus Straus  
Straus-LaVert Memorial Hall

Photograph Courtesy Michael H. and Debbie Buckner

*"If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree."*

Michael Crichton

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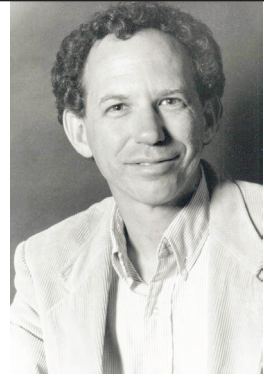
Catherine McIlvaine Smith

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 Secretary  
Mark Altschuler**



The Straus Historical Society (SHS) has brought me gifts. Not the kind that come in wrapping paper and ribbons. SHS gifts connect me to other people, other times, my own time. Gifts I don't fully understand. Perhaps unfathomable gifts are the best kind.

In 2012, the centennial year of the Titanic, I attended three Titanic/Straus events in Manhattan: one in April at the Center for Jewish History, another in April at Macy's, and one in May at Straus Park. Although I am not an historian or Titanic scholar, these events inspired me to do some reading, and research brought me the gift of a platform to share the Titanic/Straus story with others.

In August 2012, I made a presentation in Chautauqua, NY about the Titanic and Isidor and Ida Straus and my connection to all that. Chautauqua Institution, founded in 1874 as a retreat for Methodist Sunday school teachers, is now a 9-week cultural bash where people come for learning vacations. I have taught courses there since 1995.

There is something about the last quarter of nineteenth century America that draws me in (Chautauqua beginning/Major League Baseball forming/Mark Twain writing Huck Finn/Strauses developing Macy's). Something I don't quite understand.

That August presentation gave me the opportunity to spend some time with Rabbi Lee Moore from Kent, Ohio. She was directing a program for children about Bible stories. Joan Adler, of course, brokered the connection for me with Rabbi Lee. The gift of people and stories. Stories from other times, our times. Although it is not certain, (so much about the Titanic is covered in mist and myth), it seems likely that Ida Straus gave her lifeboat seat to a 7-year-old boy from Romania, travelling third class, immigrating to the U.S. That boy was Lee Moore's grandfather. Hearing Lee talk about her childhood memories of her grandfather was a moving experience for me. Unlike Paul Kurzman, SHS Board chairman, I am not a direct descendant of Isidor and Ida. Nonetheless, through the Strauses, meeting Lee Moore felt like part of that gift, that connective tissue that eludes understanding.

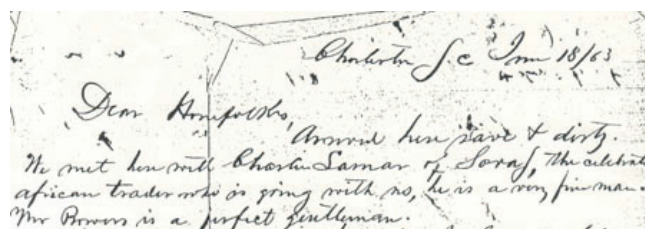
I am the child of Holocaust survivors who does not have a very large extended family. My father's family was sponsored into this country by a member of the Straus family. My father loved to talk about his connections to the astonishing German-American Jewish family, the Strauses, who helped build America and gave gifts in the form of philanthropy and legacy.

Now, through SHS, I can connect to Rabbi Lee Moore, to my father who left us in 2009, to something profound and humane and mysterious. Chautauqua has brought me a sense of community over the years. I meet someone in a class for a week, and he/she becomes family. SHS does the same for me. Perhaps, as the child of Holocaust survivors, that is always the gift I seek: a sense of community, a stranger in a strange land that somehow becomes part of the whole family. *My invitation to you is to embrace this gift as I have. Become involved in SHS. The rewards are immeasurable.*

addition to its own cotton. Charlie Lamar formed a partnership with Liverpool based Henry Lafone (both men are mentioned in Isidor's letters). Together they ordered six blockade running ships and purchased another to carry their goods across the ocean. Lamar placed the steamers under the charter of the Governor of Georgia who gave priority to their cotton and goods. Because of the requirement to carry the cargo of the Confederacy and not only the cargo of the Georgia Importing and Exporting Company, the possibility for profit was limited.

Although Isidor tried to form a military company of local boys and was even elected First Lieutenant, their offer to join the Confederate Army was turned down by Governor Joseph E. Brown because the South didn't have enough money to arm the soldiers already in uniform. On September 19, 1863 Isidor wrote to his Uncle Emanuel in San Francisco. "The war in which the South has been engaged within the last three years has called upon the requisition from time to time all the resources within her command, men were called out from 18 to 35 & I approached the age faster than circumstances looked favorable. This made the climate a little too hot & I began to look for a cooler Spot. A company was made up in our city for the purpose of purchasing Ships, wherein to run cotton out & merchandise into our country, ... An agent was appointed to go to Europe, & to try to negotiate a loan with the cotton as Side Security. This agent appointed me as his assistant with the understanding that I were to pay my own expenses & if he Succeeded in negotiating then I were to purchase the merchandise wherein the ships were to be loaded. Father was very anxious for me to accept this position, as it was one of the few chances which men offered wherewith I could So honorably bid farewell to our once happy but now almost miserable country."

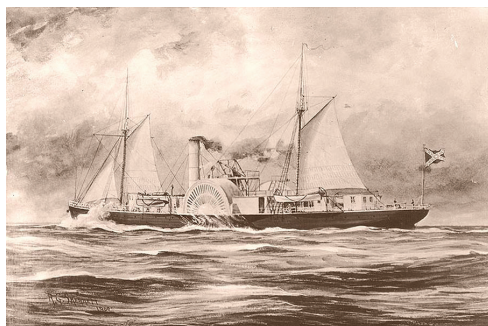
Isidor was taken on by the Georgia Importing and Exporting Company as the secretary of Lloyd G. Bowers. He traveled to Charleston where, in his first letter home on June 18, 1863 he wrote, "Arrived here save & dirty. We met here with Charlie Lamar, the celebrated African trader who is going with us, he is a very fine man. Mr. Bowers is a perfect gentleman."



Dear Uncle Emanuel,  
 Charleston S.C. June 18/63  
 Arrived here save & dirty.  
 We met here with Charlie Lamar of Savannah, the celebrated African trader who is going with us. He is a very fine man.  
 Mr. Bowers is a perfect gentleman.

Blockade running was a dangerous endeavor. Many ships were sunk before leaving the harbor. Bowers and Lamar decided they might have better luck in Wilmington NC while Isidor remained in Charleston. The reasoning was that Isidor was still a boy and that, if captured, the authorities would not treat him harshly. Isidor found passage on the "Alice" which left that night and "Succeeded in running by Seventeen Iron Clads & monitors without even being discovered much less fired at." Theirs was the only ship to successfully run the blockade on June 18<sup>th</sup>. Isidor wore an undershirt-like garment into which his mother had sewn \$1,200 in gold. He was required to lie

quietly below the waterline of the *Alice* until the ship was safely out of Charleston Harbor. He described his appearance after being allowed on deck as that of a man who had been in the Russian baths. He arrived in Nassau New Province on Sunday, June 21, 1863 and, after a stopover in New York, arrived in London on July 24<sup>th</sup>. Although he'd expected to begin selling the cargo of his ship and buying stock for the return voyage, he was advised by Bowers that "with the present state of things there is no use to attempt anything in the way of negotiations, So Mr. Bowers advised me to go to Germany So as to Spend as little money as possible."



Blockade Runner *Ella & Annie*  
 - similar to the *Alice*

A contract between the *Alice's* Captain James Carlin and Wm C. Bee & Co. in August 15, 1863 reads, "I do hereby agree with Wm C. Bee & Co agents of the Importing and Exporting Company of South Carolina, that my Compensation in full for services rendered the said company as Master of the Steam Ship *Alice* shall be as follows: One half of all passage money to be paid me. For the first outward trip of the said ship to Nassau N. P. Four thousand Dollars payable in Nassau." For the first inward trip of the Said Ship to Charleston - Fifteen Thousand dollars, payable in Currency of the Confederate States of America."

The *Alice*, previously called the *Matagorda*, was owned by the Importing and Exporting Company of South Carolina. She averaged 925 bales of cotton each trip and could bring in a profit of about \$100,000 (in 1863 dollars). This company paid out 9,000 Confederate dollars to its shareholders and 120 pounds (English currency) per share. What was not paid out in profits went toward paying off expenses, purchasing cotton and inbound cargoes and additional steamers. Since it is estimated that only 10 percent of these steamers made more than one trip through the blockade, although there was enormous profit to be made, sometimes as much as a quarter of a million dollars per run, there was also enormous risk. Only two successful trips brought in enough profit to compensate for the loss of the ship on a third run. The price of cotton in the South in April of 1863 was six cents per pound and fifty cents or greater per pound in London when it was sold. But as the war continued, Confederate money was worth less, fewer blockade runners were able to escape from Confederate ports, and profits diminished as the South's ability to ship good quality cotton evaporated. In the end it is speculated that investing in England would have been more profitable than in the cotton exporting business.



One blockade runner that met an early demise was the *Mary Bowers*. This steamer was the only one commissioned by the Georgia Importing and Exporting Company using the proceeds from the sale of cotton in England. She was built by William Simons and Company in Renfrew, Scotland. She ran into the wreck of the "Georgiana" while trying to enter Charleston Harbor on August 31, 1864 and was a total loss. Today, a model of the "Mary Bowers" is on display at the Port Columbus Civil War Naval Museum in Columbus, GA.

The *Alice* was built by Harlan and Hollingsworth of Wilmington, Delaware in 1858. She was 220' x 30' x 10'6" and weighed 616 tons. She had an iron hull and sidewheel propulsion. She was a successful blockade runner in Texas, Alabama and North Carolina from April 1862 through September 1864. She was captured on September 10, 1864 by the "Magnolia" after clearing from Galveston and sold to private interests on November 12, 1864. She was abandoned in 1871.

Isidor remained in Europe throughout the remainder of the war, establishing himself in the bond business. He complained of not receiving mail or instructions from home while others were getting letters regularly. "You must use your efforts in forwarding me letters by blockade steamers as we receive mail from Nassau & Bermuda ..." "I have speculated a little in cotton with Elias (Haiman) & made 120 pounds (English currency) for my part." Isidor sent shoes, silk gloves and kid gloves home for his mother and sister and a 2 year Hebrew calendar for his father stating that no matter the price at home, it was cheaper to buy goods in Europe and send them by steamer.

On December 19, 1863 Isidor wrote, "I fear the ship is lost & I hope that you have provided ...It may still be afloat but it will sink ... Dont keep on hand much white goods."

On the same day he wrote, "Yours of 28<sup>th</sup>

Oct by flag of truce has come to hand, but the difficulty with letters sent by this means seems to be that they are not allowed to contain business matters."

Lloyd G. Bowers was still in contact with Isidor and still making regular trips to Europe through the blockade. Isidor often sent his letters home with Bowers on his return trips. On December 26<sup>th</sup> he wrote, "Perhaps one can still accomplish something with Bowers. I feel he will do all in his powers for me."

On January 16, 1864 Isidor wrote, "All parties in the Confederacy having agents in this country have Succeeded in placing funds to their credit in this country & you should do the same. ... If you could purchase some Beaver skins, it would pay well to forward them, as they take up so little room that any steamer will carry them for you. They will bring from 75 cts to a Doll a piece. Should you buy any dont let any one know your object, as few have thought of this advice. Spare no pains

as one thimble full in this country is worth a bushel in Dixie." When asking for goods to be sent, he reminded his father to send them to an agent in Wilmington because Wilmington was the only remaining available eastern Confederate port.

Isidor wrote on February 29, 1864, "Each stockholder of 100 B/C (bales of cotton) in Bowers company will receive from 125 to 200 Doll with profit; perhaps you could purchase some more shares advantageously?"

On July 2, 1864 he wrote, "Should my friend Julius K. (Kaufman) desire to come out, I may be able to make arrangements for him, however, if you have any idea of the war ending soon, then I would not advise him to come, for whoever leaves the Confederacy during the war can surely never return when peace is restored. The general belief here is that the best business in the whole world will be in the South immediately after the war; & hence my object in So expressing my views -, for we must make use of the times & establish a regular business between here & there. So Soon as you

have any prospect for peace rent a house in Wilmington or some other Sea port, for every spot will be occupied. Should Grant be defeated thoroughly, then a prospects for peace will be good, but this may only Spark of hope. A resolution for the recognition of the Confederacy was to have been discussed in Parliament on the 12 of June, but the day for discussing same was postponed for a later day & general belief here is that their object in postponing was to hear something more definite in regards to this pending campaign."

Isidor wrote from Cologne on October 20, 1864, "As for buying more goods to ship to you, it is not at all advisable at present on account of the expected attack on Wilmington which renders blockade running more dangerous than ever. ... Since your letter Atlanta & Mobile have fallen." Wilmington, the only remaining active Confed-

erate port for blockade runners was sealed off in January 1865 when the defenses at the mouth of the Cape Fear River were captured at Charleston, S.C.

On June 16, 1865, two years and two days short of his blockade running experience, Isidor wrote to his beloved Mother and Sister, ""Thank God' that after a period of four long Succession years of bloodshed and civil strife, a bright star is once more seen in the distance, making its way Slowly but surely through the thin mist of clouds which have enveloped the heavens; the tree of prosperity and harmony, is once again Seen spreading further the buds of peace, which through its fragrance and green foliage invites the exhausted to seek rest and shelter under its refreshing shades. To day two years past I first was doomed to venture upon the search of these fruits which that tree had failed to supply, at the sacrifice of life's greatest charms - home sweet home. But it seems that after the costly nourishment of the blood of thousands of able hearts,



Isidor in Paris - 1865

was applied to its roots, it once again gave tokens of life, yet remaining in its shattered frame, and from that moment began gradually to survive, so as to give good promise of an abundant harvest. Already can I pluck one of its relishes by being once more able to make use of that means of intercourse which kind nature has supplied to bring, as it were, distant relatives and friends, in speaking proximity though oceans roll between and mountains shot their lofty peaks to the skies to obstruct

the paths. .... Sad indeed was the news of the fights and hardships to which you my dearest ones were exposed in consequence of the armies and battles in your very midst; ... but after all that when I reflected upon the critical position and its fortunate very miraculous result, I could not help but feel relieved at the assurance that notwithstanding the many dangers you were subjected to you all came out with losses comparatively insignificant, such as are within the power of man to repair."

## The Battle of Columbus

The story of the fall of Columbus had obviously reached England. Isidor seemed to know some of the terrible details of its capture. Further research has provided us with the details of two days in April 1865 when Union forces entered Columbus, burned many of the businesses and terrorized its citizens. A closer look is warranted.

The following information comes from *Columbus Georgia 1865: The Last Battle of the Civil War* by Charles A. Misulia. All quotes are taken from this book. In early April 1865 the Confederate cause was almost lost. Fighting was still going on in a few southern states including Alabama. Union forces were marching toward Columbus, Georgia just east of Alabama across the Chattahoochee River. Columbus was the Confederacy's last depot and supply center and on that basis, became a target. Confederate General Howell Cobb thought that the capture of Columbus was essential to the Union's success. His hopes of a successful defense were dashed when he learned, on April 9<sup>th</sup>, that President Jefferson Davis had ordered "all men between eighteen and forty-five in the reserves, whether officers or privates, [were] to be sent to conscript camp for assignment." (p56) This severely depleted the remaining male population in Columbus and the surrounding areas. The Union forces were massive and well equipped. They had manpower with Spencer repeating rifles, horses, and supplies. The Confederate forces were ill equipped; lacking these same things - manpower, horses or supplies.

A proclamation was declared: "Citizens of Columbus: The time has arrived when it is necessary for every man who is determined to protect his family and home, to arouse themselves to the necessity of organizing into companies to repel the invading foe, with which we are now threatened. The Commandant of the Post is ready and anxious to arm and equip as many of the citizens as will organize. I therefore call upon and request the citizens of Columbus and county, to delay no longer, but meet together and organize, we have men sufficient with the force our Government can furnish to drive the enemy back, so never let it be said that Columbus fell without a struggle. Organize and protect your homes." (p61)

Six guns would be fired by the artillery on Broad Street to alert the townspeople to the approach of the invading forces. It was recommended that eighty-five thousand bales of cotton be burned rather than allowed to fall into enemy hands.

On April 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia fell and Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. All fighting in the Carolinas ceased and arrangements



for the surrender of the Tennessee Army were underway. All major fighting in eastern Alabama and western Georgia was to be suspended. Somehow, this news did not reach the Union forces in this area. Montgomery, the capital of Alabama, fell on April 12<sup>th</sup>. The push to Columbus would come next.

Seeing that their protective forces were sorely undermanned, an order was given that no man able to bear arms was permitted to leave the city. Confederate forces had only thirty-three cannons and three thousand soldiers at their disposal. At least 9,000 Union soldiers were marching toward Columbus.

The Confederate forces and the local population had adequate time to prepare their defense. The four bridges over the Chattahoochee were stuffed with flammable material and prepared for burning to prevent the Union soldiers access to the city. Forts were erected and earthworks and trenches dug. But very early on Sunday morning, April 16<sup>th</sup>, Union forces began their advance on Columbus. "Wrapped in the shadows inside the Confederate lines, old men stood beside schoolboys, cavalrymen beside naval officers, and veterans beside hastily assembled militia, all watching in the intense darkness for any sign of the approach of the enemy. Most were there because they wanted to be, some because they were supposed to be, and a number because they were forced to be by a government that they felt had overstepped its bounds in a cause that was obviously lost." (p119)

The men were instructed to start yelling loudly as soon as the attack began in order to scare and confuse the enemy. Mike Bunn wrote, "The first shots, from artillery and small skirmishing, were exchanged earlier in the day on April 16<sup>th</sup>, but fighting began in earnest at night." Very quickly, though, once fighting started, many of the men ran from their posts after realizing they were grossly outnumbered and out armed. "Though there was some scattered fighting, for the most part



the Confederate resistance along Ingersoll Hill evaporated before the head of the advancing Federals." (p145) Because of the darkness and the confusion of the retreat, neither side could tell who was a friend or foe and they were afraid to shoot. In total from both sides, by the end of the battle, only 140 men were killed or wounded. Confederate forces set several houses and stores on fire to light up the night sky enough to show their own line where the assault was coming from.

Charlie Lamar, whom Isidor described as "the African trader," was fully embroiled in the fight for Columbus. With his fiery temperament and competitive nature, he was well suited for the battle. He fell that morning as he might have wished, astride his horse, sword in hand, in mortal combat with a Federal soldier. According to Confederate Secretary of State Toombs, the fighting in Columbus, "... was the damndest mess you ever saw." (p152) Once Charlie Lamar fell, all organized resistance ceased. "The mounted men rode through



Photograph Courtesy of Charles Misulua

Charlie Lamar

The major fighting ended just before 10 P.M. General Wilson reviewed the damage and declared Edward F. Winslow in command of the city. His job was to oversee the occupation of the city and destruction of the city's industries and war related facilities. Approximately fifteen hundred prisoners were taken, almost half the Confederate force. They were placed under armed arrest. By 11 P.M. the streets were quiet. The local citizens who could, returned to their homes. Some went into hiding. General Wilson ordered his troops to maintain discipline. Some of the Federal soldiers pitched tents in backyards and persuaded the homeowners to prepare supper for them. Where the homeowner was absent, they occupied the house and helped themselves to not only provisions but also to the personal belongings of the townspeople. Looting did occur and the destruction of property followed. Some of the local citizens, thinking that they could avoid trouble, were quite cordial to their occupiers.

When the fourteen hour battle for Columbus ended, the occupation began. In general, cities that offered little resistance to the invading armies fared better than those that put up a strong fight. According to Wilson, "As Columbus was the last great manufacturing place and storehouse of the Confederacy, and we were still without official information as to what had taken place in Virginia, I resolved to destroy everything within

reach that could be made useful for the further continuation of the rebellion." (p174) Wilson's Raiders were well prepared to burn the city's industries as they'd left a path of fiery destruction through Alabama on their march to Georgia.

After a night of calm, morning brought dancing and celebrating by the Union soldiers. The town's black population began to realize they were freed and celebrated along with them.



General James Wilson

Orders were soon given to torch the government and military stores as well as any other property that could be of value to the Confederacy. Buildings and installations within this purview were railroad depots, freight houses, arsenals, foundries, factories, laboratories and mills. Soon, the local population that had started to relax after the relatively peaceful night, realized that daybreak was bringing horrible destruction. "Blocks and blocks burning and falling shells bursting, and powder exploding made day and night hideous. Whole streets were burning." (p175) 125,000 bales of cotton were ignited. It is estimated that their value was more than 43 million dollars and, in the Northern or world markets could have brought in excess of 62 million dollars. One mill and a gristmill owned by the Bowers family were spared in order to alleviate the suffering of the town's hungry poor. Wilson ordered the city's residents to provide meals for the occupying forces.

General headquarters for the invading army was moved from The Mott House to the unoccupied Rothschild house. It was reported that officers enjoyed sitting on the balcony listening to the exploding shells as factories and munitions depots burned. Frank Rothschild was the husband of Amanda Blun, the sister of Ida, who would later marry Isidor Straus. One Union soldier described this house as the finest mansion in town. It's well stocked wine cellar and brandy supply were an added bonus for the tired but elated conquering army as were the "elegant accoutrements."



Photograph Courtesy of Thomas Francell

Simon and Frank  
Rothschild's  
House  
Columbus, GA

Before long the soldiers began breaking into stores and shops. They took what they wanted and destroyed the remaining merchandise. Some of it was thrown into the streets while much was burned. Surely the merchandise from Lazarus Straus' store was among that which was destroyed. Windows were broken and doors kicked in. When news of this looting spread, soldiers from all over the city raced to claim their spoils. Accord-

ing to several accounts, slaves participated in the looting. It was accepted that the army "to a great extent ... would leave on its route nothing behind save the people, the buildings and the land." (p180) And then, as their frenzy increased, the soldiers began turning to the private homes of Columbus' citizens and pillaged those. They took anything and everything including personal jewelry and clothing, sometimes removing it from the wearer's pocket or hand. Whatever they didn't take, they destroyed. They confiscated all livestock. Horses and mules would be used to transport the spoils of war and the captured arms and munitions. Fourteen year old Oscar Straus wrote, "All horses were seized, and among them our little pony, which I never saw again, although I still retain a vivid picture of him in my mind's eye."

Blacks were clothed, armed and allowed to join forces with the Union army who started leaving the city by the evening of April 17<sup>th</sup>. In one last effort, a factory filled with cloth used to make Confederate uniforms was torched. The soldiers held off until the last possible minute in order to allow homeowners whose homes were nearby to remove their valuables because it was expected that these buildings would also go up in smoke when the factory burned. Some effort was made to spare the homes of the poorest members of the community. Orders were given to prevent the destruction of their property and the looting, similar to that which occurred elsewhere in town. Of course, in the frenzy of the moment, these orders were not always obeyed.

By the end of day on April 17<sup>th</sup>, the soldiers began regrouping for their march toward Macon, their next objective. The Franklin Street Bridge was the last of four destroyed. As the troops marched out of town there was a marked feeling of esprit de corps due to the success of their campaigns across Alabama and in Columbus. The column of more than ten thousand moved steadily through the fields and forests including escaping blacks who brought up the rear.

"The blow struck by Wilson's Raiders in the closing days of the war was crippling. The two days of Union occupation that followed the battle transformed Columbus into what one witness described as "burning, smoking ruins of wasted rebellion." The Confederacy was dead, and for all its patriotic effort and courage in the face of overwhelming odds, Columbus received only disaster." (p213) News of the end of the war began reaching the soldiers on their way to Macon through Talbotton.

The city of Columbus was left a shell of its former self. All of the factories were gone. Their walls were crumbling. Mills and stores were burned or otherwise destroyed. The bridges spanning the rivers were all gone. Only the foundations of the warehouses and depots could be found. Communications were also disrupted as telegraph wires were cut, river traffic was disrupted, no newspapers could be printed and the postal service had collapsed. It took more than a week for the news of war's end to reach them even though Macon was only 100 miles away.

On April 19<sup>th</sup> the authorities of Columbus, still reeling from the destruction of their city, met to discuss what needed to

be done to restore order, to feed the population and to begin reconstruction. A major problem was the feeding of the citizens because whatever food had not been consumed by the Federal troops, or taken away with them, was destroyed. Many people were homeless. With no communication with the outside world, and no way to cross the river, Columbus was on its own. Committees were formed to deal with the recovery process. Nearly one third of the population was destitute and dependent on the community for all basic needs including food, shelter and clothing. Confederate money was almost worthless. Barter became the only means by which commodities could be obtained. Blacks who were initially elated by their emancipation now found that the responsibility of taking care of themselves was not as easy as they had imagined. Many entered the city looking for food only to find that everyone was as hungry as they were.



Photograph Courtesy of Columbus State University Archives

The only known photograph of Columbus - taken during the battle

Food and supplies started to trickle in by June 6<sup>th</sup> and, at least, the danger of starvation abated. General Wilson, who was still in the area, commanded his men to give assistance to the beleaguered populace. Workers began cleaning up the bricks from the destroyed mills and factories. Although their pay was meager, it was something. The local government vowed to cooperate with the Reconstruction government to secure property and commence rebuilding. A garrison of soldiers were left in Columbus to safeguard this peaceful process. The destruction of the town's bridges and railroads made reconstruction particularly difficult.

Many plantation owners found themselves unable to recover without their slaves. And, because Confederate money was now worthless, some of the wealthiest people in town were now poor. By the 1870's, Columbus was well on its way to regaining its former Southern charm. "... through their shared hardships was fostered a spirit of common reliance and interest that would help see the community through the darker and more turbulent days of Reconstruction." (p225)

Isidor wrote, "So disheartened and discouraged [was] my father, that he made up his mind that he did to care to waste away the time which he feared would be consumed before normal conditions could be established. And it was on this account that he took his family north." (p223) But for many in Columbus there was great pride that they made a stand and tried to defend their city against insurmountable odds.



# Oscar S. Straus II

## 1914 - 2013

The Straus family lost a true gentleman, in the largest sense of the word, on January 11, 2013 when Oscar S. Straus II passed away at his Bellport, NY home. Oscar was the son of Roger Williams Straus and Gladys Guggenheim Straus and the grandson of Oscar S. Straus and Sarah Lavanburg Straus. He was a leader in industry and in the not-for-profit world; a United States Coast Guard officer, a partner in Guggenheim Brothers, a director of American Smelting & Refining, and president of the board of directors of The Fred L. Lavanburg and Daniel and Florence Guggenheim Foundations. Oscar believed in public service. He was president of the Congregation of Temple Emanu-El for many years, honorary chairman of Rensselaerville (NY) Institute, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and served on many boards. But none of these fully describe this man of many facets. We leave that to his beloved wife of more than 30 years, Joan Sutton Straus.

*Remarks by Joan Sutton Straus at a memorial service for Oscar S. Straus 2<sup>nd</sup>, Herman Chapel, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, Canada, Monday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.*

Recently, John Downing drew my attention to a quote from Thornton Wilder. Wilder wrote: "The proper response to death is not grief, but gratitude". Today we are here to express gratitude to Oscar, for the man he was, the life he lived, the gifts he shared with us.

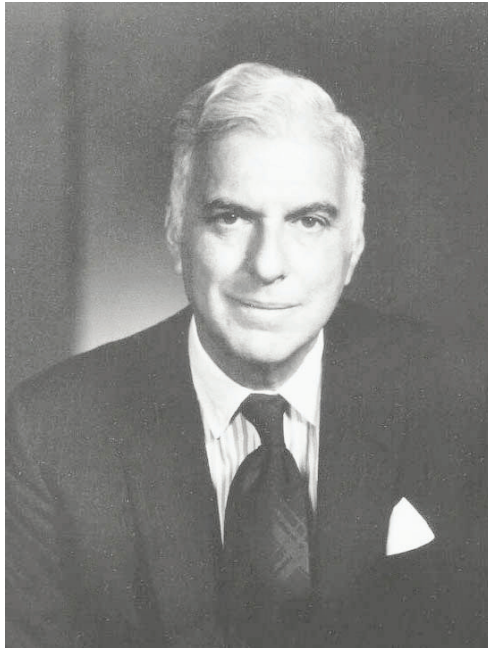
The last third of Oscar's life was spent in Toronto or with friends he made here - shooting at Griffiths Island with John Robarts and Ernie Jackson, sailing Lake Ontario with John Lockwood, playing tennis with so many of you, and I had the joy of sharing those years with him.

What was it like to live with Oscar? Well, he smoked a cigar after lunch and another after dinner. He could not tell a lie. He could not keep a secret. He would not listen to gossip. He was always immaculately groomed and perfectly dressed, even at breakfast. And, however much he ate or drank, he never gained an ounce. Living with Oscar could be very frustrating.

It was also glorious. You kept your bag packed, your passport up to date, and your hand on your hat. One night we might be at a birthday party for Brooke Astor. The next we could be in a kitchen in the Bronx, listening to a mother describe the crack dealer who had taken over her building. And Oscar would bring all the resources he could marshal to create a safe environment for that family.

We might be in England, passing the port the right way but we could just as easily be sitting on a log, eating from a tin plate with a paper towel for a napkin.

He had an extraordinary vocabulary and could use words like pusillanimous and eleemosynary, but that vocabulary did not include the word budget. If a thing was worth doing, it was worth doing well and if you couldn't do it well, well, don't do it. Which does not mean that he did not have his economies. The moment he checked into the Connaught, he would go out to buy bottled water. Paying for a room at the best hotel, fine: Being overcharged for a bottle of water? Never.



He sailed the way other men breathe and could singlehandedly manage Sea Swallow, but he was equally comfortable below, where he could - and did -- fix anything. Nothing threw him. Not even the rock in the Atlantic that was not on the chart. The Donatos were with us when we heard that awful grinding of keel on stone - When it was clear there was nothing to do Oscar just went below and made a pitcher of martinis and the four of us sat waiting until the tide lifted us off. A life lesson from Oscar: if you wait long enough, most things solve themselves.

He was also passionate about fly-fishing, so much so that when he asked me to marry him, I said yes, he said, Good then, you'll learn to fly fish. Of

course I could have learned to fish in my Toronto backyard, but Oscar being Oscar, I found myself in England with a ghillie from the Hardy fishing school by my side, learning to cast a fly rod in a London park. I didn't catch a nanny or a duck and learned to cast the way the Queen waves, so I was deemed a success. But to watch Oscar throw a dry fly was to see Baryshnikov dance - graceful and true every time.

As patient as he could be fishing, he could also be abrupt. He did not tolerate fools, bullies or braggarts. But any brusqueness was nothing compared to his essential humanity. When my sister-in-law Lillian was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1987, I made plans to go to Orangeville to be with my brother and their family. Oscar at that time was at the height of his public life and I did not expect him to come with me. Not only did he come: There he was, in my brother's kitchen, preparing meals, teaching Mandy how to properly butter bread, and taking Janice grocery shopping.

That was a revelation to me, an Oscar I did not expect. And if the perception has been that it was spontaneous and emotional Joan who opened up the very proper Oscar, let me set the



record straight. It was Oscar who taught Joan the true meaning of intimacy, of marriage that embraced past, present and future to become a complete partnership.

I would see that caring side of Oscar, expressed in the practical, many times over our years together. After my surgery, he slept in my hospital room, put slivers of ice in my mouth and when I came home, disappeared only to return with one of his perfect cheese soufflés, a tossed salad, and a rose from his garden all perfectly arranged on a beautiful tray. His tenderness, to me, and those I loved, was truly infinite.

He was an extraordinary man. When he was twelve, he was sent to St. Paul's boarding school – an all boys Episcopal church school where he was not only the only Jew, he was the first Jew – a situation others of his generation would find themselves in often. Attendance at chapel was mandatory and each boy in turn was required to read from the New Testament. When it was Oscar's turn, he refused and soon found himself in the rector's office. At the end of that meeting, there was a deal: Oscar would read in chapel, but only from the Old Testament. And in a school where no boy was permitted to leave during midterm except for death or illness, Oscar had permission to return to New York to attend Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services at Emanu-el. He was 12!

If you read his obituary, you know that he was a serious man, concerned throughout his life with serious issues. But he was also fun, and very funny. He was the master of the pause followed by the zinger. He was not impressed with wealth in itself – because, he said, money doesn't care who owns it. He had seen so many boldface names come and go that the idea of high society amused him. Joan, he said, if you want to be a great hostess in this town, there is nothing to it. You just hang a turkey out the window and everyone will come.

He was secure enough to enjoy the fact that I was a minor celebrity in Toronto and he had fun with it. We were at dinner at Winston's when the waiter came over and said that Mr. Arena would like to send us complimentary drinks. I got all prissy and said, Mr. Arena knows I don't accept free drinks. Oscar just looked at me and then said to the waiter, She doesn't, I do, I'll have two Armagnac.

And when I was asked to be Agent General, he encouraged me to accept, saying, I'll help you, just remember, I don't mind being Prince Philip, but I won't be Denis Thatcher. Oscar could never be Denis Thatcher because he could never be invisible. Whether it was the height, the hair, the smile, the tailoring, or the air of authority, Oscar was always a presence.

Oscar and I played hide and seek with that terrible thief called Alzheimer's for seven years. So I cannot mourn his death, because death spared him more indignities. But I can, and do,

mourn his absence. And I am discovering that absence, too, is a presence. A huge palpable presence.

Just before he slipped into that last deep pre-death sleep he reached up, put his hand on my chin and turned my face away. I think he was telling me it was time to let him go. But, knowing Oscar, he could also have been saying, stop talking Joan, which is what he surely is now, so I will.

*Remarks by Rabbi Ronald Sobel at Oscar's funeral service on January 15<sup>th</sup> in Beth El Chapel at Temple Emanu-El in New York City.*

Accomplished. That was Oscar Straus II – accomplished. In what manner? Oscar strove to become the best that it was possible for him to be. He competed, but only with himself. He envied no one, bore no malice, and tried and succeeded to live with grace and dignity and that we know well he did wondrously. The adjectives – handsome, gorgeous, manly, Adonis – fitted Oscar as well as anyone we could possibly imagine.

Elegant and suave – was there anyone who could match him? Standing tall, walking erect, sailing a ship, shooting a pheasant, more often than not, that seemingly ever present cigar in his hand.

He stood in awe of all things beautiful. Oscar admired beautiful women. He admired elegant furniture. He savored a splendid meal, either that he made himself or was made by someone else. He could talk with authority about wines. He did all of that. And places. Glorious places – the places could be

the glorious places for Oscar, the rugged coastline of Maine, Nova Scotia, the elegance of Venice or Paris, and the special qualities of England, Italy, and Spain, the metropolitan character of Toronto or Manhattan, and above all, Manhattan. Yes, he loved all things. He was at ease wherever he was and with whomever he was, principally because Oscar was at ease with himself.

Oscar ... was the democratic man to the very core of his being. On all the current issues of our time – women's rights, health-care, affordable housing – he was as liberal as anyone could possibly be. ... The man who embraced among his friends, Oscar could count fishing guides and the dog trainer, and they were as important to him as friends who were the heads of major American corporations. He had a profound sense of responsibility for the world. And he responded to the moral imperative to help make of this earth a better place and in that response, he did it gloriously and nobly. The humanity of Oscar S. Straus II will remain a lasting treasure in the hearts of all the lives he touched.

*Editor's Note: Thank you, Joan, for allowing us to reprint your very moving tribute to your late husband, Oscar S. Straus II. And thank you Rabbi Sobel, as well, for your very personal and moving eulogy. Rest in peace Oscar Straus II.*



## Returning to Georgia and Other Straus Presentations

By Joan Adler

SHS board members Al Berr and Richard Gerstman have initiated a program called Straus Presentations. They are in touch with historical societies, schools, museums, libraries, JCC's and Y's as well as other venues to offer a presentation regarding some aspect of the Straus family's history. Each talk would be tailored to the location, audience and the wishes of the host. As new presentations are planned, information about them will be posted on the SHS website and on our Facebook page. Look for announcements on the Upcoming Events page on the News dropdown menu of the SHS website.

Michael H. Buckner, of Junction City, GA, an SHS board member and president of Historic Talbotton Foundation, recently gave a talk to the Taylor County Historical Society about the Georgia roots of the Straus family. He said his talk was very well received. I suggested that we do a follow-up talk about what happened to the family once the Lazarus Straus branch left Talbotton and Columbus.

Since Mike and his wife Debbie host "Harvest Days in Old Talbot," a weekend event at their lovely home the first weekend in November, he suggested that we combine my talk with the weekend's festivities. There will be a ready and interested audience. **And, perhaps, those out-of-town family members and friends who have been longing to visit Talbotton and Columbus, will find this a good excuse to join us.**



The lovely GA home of  
Michael H. and Debbie G. Buckner

On Thursday, October 31<sup>st</sup>, I will be giving a presentation at the Talbot County Historical Society. There will be many Straus photographs and artifacts on display the day of my talk and Isidor's autobiography will be available for sale. Then, "Harvest Days in Old Talbot," the seventh annual weekend hosted by the Michael H. and Debbie G. Buckner at their Patsiliga Museum in Junction City, GA, will follow. Enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of a by-gone era on Saturday and Sunday, November 2 & 3, 2013 from 10 am to 5 pm.

Talbot County was created in 1827. A wave of new settlers brought their families in search of farm land. Lazarus Straus settled in Talbotton with his family in 1854. He owned and operated a dry good store. One of the oldest continuous businesses in Talbot County is the Fielder's Water Power Grist Mill located on Mike's property. During the weekend's festivities visitors will see the mill grinding meal, flour, and grist. They

can also see a 1896 Lummus Cotton Gin. Up the hill there is an 1840 Greek Revival home originally built in Talbotton by John W. Attaway, later known as the Daniel, Raines, Passmore Place. The downstairs of this historical home is open for tours. Many other demonstrations, exhibits, vendors and activities will be available.

You are encouraged to spend the day. Bring your own picnic lunch or enjoy the hot dogs, hamburgers, and barbecue sold by the Junction City Volunteer Fire Department. Adult admission is \$5 and children under the age of 5 are free.

Patsiliga Museum, Inc is located on 780 Fielders Mill Road, Junction City, GA 31812. For more information, contact Joan Adler at 631-724-4487 or Mike Buckner at the Museum at 706-269-3630.

On Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at noon, I will be speaking at the Port Columbus National Civil War Naval Museum in Columbus, GA jointly hosted by the museum and the Historical Chattahoochee Commission.

Catherine Smith and I will be staying in the area and will be touring some of the other historic sites of Columbus on Monday and Tuesday. We invite family and friends to join us.

On November 15<sup>th</sup> I am giving a talk in New York at the Suffolk (County) Y Jewish Community Center between 10:30 and noon. This talk will be an overview of the history of the Straus family. There will be time for questions and answers after my talk as well as for a book signing. I will be bringing *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus* and *For the Sake of the Children* to the "Y." There will be a bagel and coffee lunch after the presentation. Please join us at 74 Hauppauge Road, Commack, NY 631-462-9800 for further information.

I will be speaking in Los Angeles at Simon Wiesenthal/Museum of Tolerance about the letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr. on a date to be announced. Information about these letters and about my book, *For the Sake of the Children: The Letters Between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* can be found on our website and Facebook page where an announcement of the date will be made once it is established. I will also be speaking at the Los Angeles Jewish Genealogical Society at a date to be announced.

Please let us know if your organization is interested in having a speaker give a presentation or do a book signing. And join us as we share the fascinating story of the Straus family.

### Important Notice

The phone number for SHS has changed to:

**631-724-4487**

Our former number will be disconnected shortly.  
Please begin using our new number immediately.



## Friends of Straus Park

by Al Berr

On Wednesday, June 26, 2013, Friends of Straus Park held its annual summer concert event in the park between 5:00 and 7:00 PM. The featured musicians were the Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, a four-piece band consisting of guitar and voice, bass, trumpet, and washboard/percussion. Their repertoire consists mainly of old songs, such as "Ain't Misbehavin'", "Chinatown, My Chinatown", and "Exactly Like You", but played with a contemporary-sounding swinging beat. We have engaged them previously, and always with hearty appreciation from the audiences.

The afternoon skies began promisingly, and soon a crowd of approximately sixty to seventy were gathered to listen to the music. At the musicians' break, Kate Ford, the Friends' President, thanked Joe Arbo, long-time Friends board member, for his work in making the park so bountifully beautiful at this time of year. Joe has replaced John Olund, our gardener of many years, who has retired. Kate also thanked Eddie McGrath for his assistance in keeping the park attractive. Joe made a brief speech with the reminder that funds are necessary in order that the Friends of Straus Park continue its mission to keep the park viable for the community. It is gratifying to report that a number of onlookers responded.

The clouds began to thicken, and, at 6:45, fifteen minutes before the scheduled end of the concert, the rain came suddenly and strongly for no more than two minutes. But, it was sufficient to disperse the crowd. However, despite the weather, we considered the event a success. SHS posted a video of the Blue Vipers of Brooklyn performing at the Park event on its Facebook page.

The Blue Vipers of Brooklyn will be returning in the fall for our annual Art in the Park: a Day Long Celebration of Music, Art, Dance and Food on October 5<sup>th</sup>. They will be joined by many other performers, artists, vendors and purveyors of fine food. Please join us on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM at this lovely neighborhood vest pocket park dedicated to the memory of Isidor and Ida Straus who lived on West 105<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and West End Avenue and who lost their lives in 1912 in the Titanic disaster.

### **Art In The Park** **A Celebration of Music, Art,** **Dance and Food** **October 5<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM** **Rain date: October 6<sup>th</sup>**

Contributions to Friends of Straus Park are tax-deductible and are used to help maintain the lovely gardens and for events such as those described in this article. Contact Kate Ford for information about how to donate. OTCSings@aol.com or at 212-666-1439



Photograph Courtesy of Margaret Kurzman

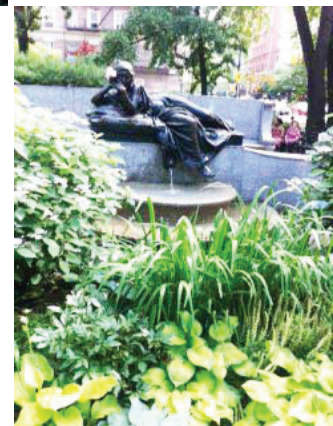


Top: Lovely Park  
photograph by  
Margaret Kurzman

Second Photo:  
Blue Vipers of Brooklyn  
performing at  
Straus Park  
on June 26

Above: Joe Arbo  
speaking to the  
appreciative crowd  
on June 26

Right: "Memory"  
and the lovely garden  
in Straus Park



Middle two photos courtesy: Catherine Smith  
Bottom photo courtesy: Joe Arbo



## Erratum

In the last issue of the newsletter I erroneously attributed the explanation of the reinstatement of Nathan Roos' doctoral degree to Dr. Andreas Schwab. The passage I quoted was actually from a book by Stefanie Harrecker: "die Aberkennung der Doktorwürde an der Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus." (The Revocation of the Doctoral Degree by the Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich During the Time of National Socialism.) Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2007. ISBN 978-38316069-1-7, page 346.

Thank you Andreas for pointing this out.

## A Message from Catherine McIlvaine Smith

When I came to work at SHS in May of 2010, I would have never thought I would be where I am today. I thought that working with Joan over the summer would be valuable experience that I sorely needed in the field I wanted to enter when I graduated. Three years later, I've graduated with my MA in history from Iona College and I see no end in sight to my amazing relationship with this organization. It has been an honor over the last few years to call this my job.

In March of 2011, I became engaged to my amazing boyfriend of six years. With an impending wedding, and with graduation within my grasp, I feared being unable to provide for my future. With the help of the David A. and Mildred H. Morse Charitable Trust, I was given the opportunity to remain at SHS as a paid consultant and continue my work with Joan Adler.

Joan reached out to everyone she could, to find a way to keep me, for which I am truly grateful. As a result of this search Joan Sutton Straus suggested the Morse Trust, of which she's a trustee. John J. Hyland, another trustee also supported our grant application. Once the Morse Trust offered us a matching grant, we went straight to work asking for donations. Many people quickly responded and we funded the grant for 2012. This year, when the grant was renewed, it was matched within a few months.

I got married in December of 2012 and graduated this past May. We are very excited about the future.

We have been overwhelmed with the amount of support that we have received for this grant. I am so humbled by the generosity of this family. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has donated. Because of your support, I have been able to continue doing work that I love.

This experience has been gratifying and I've learned so much. I hope that my work has lived up to everyone's expectations. I will continue to work hard to help make SHS the best it can be.

Thank you!

## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

***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. In hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

***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. In hard cover with dust jacket- \$40.00

***Genealogical Miscellany*** a family genealogy compiled by Robert K. Straus with addenda - \$40.00

***A Reminder: Witnesses to the Past*** by Lothar Horter and Michael Tilly, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn. This book is about the history of the Jews in several small towns in the Rheinpfalz area of Germany. A large section contains complete information and photographs of the Mehlingen Cemetery where many Straus family members are buried. - Hard cover - \$25.00

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

***My Family: I Could Write a Book*** by Edith Maas Mendel. This charming volume of stories about the members of Edith Mendel's family is 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

Shipping and handling is included. **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P.O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-724-4487, or e.mail: [info@straushistory.org](mailto:info@straushistory.org)

## You Are Invited

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board. Attendance can be in person or by conference call.

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, September 24, 2013 at the office of board chair Paul A. Kurzman in New York City at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board or to contribute to the Society. This invitation is extended so that all interested in SHS may have an opportunity to participate and to share their views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-724-4487 or Paul Kurzman 212-396-7537 for further information.