



# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 13 Number 2

Newsletter

February 2012

## RMS Titanic - 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Memorial & Commemoration Events

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of Titanic will occur on April 15, 2012. SHS recognizes the public's enormous interest in this disaster and in honoring the memory of the lives lost at sea including those of Isidor and Ida Straus. As a service to those who are interested in attending this kind of event, a partial list of memorial Titanic events in which SHS is involved is presented here.

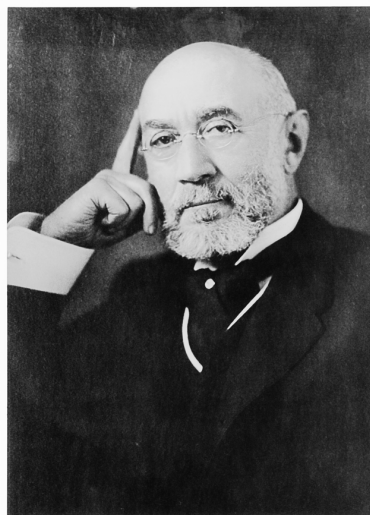
On April 1, 2012 the Straus Historical Society and the American Jewish Historical Society will co-host *Love, Loss & Legacy: Isidor and Ida Straus & The Titanic* at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City at 3:00 PM. Direct descendants of Isidor and Ida Straus will be present to discuss their legacy, which will be placed in an historical



context by Professor Steven Biel, Executive Director of the Humanities Center and Senior Lecturer in History and Literature at Harvard University. Original artifacts and documents from the Titanic belonging to the Straus Family will be on display and the newly republished *Autobiography of Isidor Straus* will be available for sale. Paul Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus and chair of SHS, and Joan Adler, editor and author of its Supplement, will be available to sign your copy. A wine, cheese and dessert reception will follow the program. Tickets will be available for purchase through smarttix.com Contact [info@ajhs.org](mailto:info@ajhs.org) or SHS for information.

R. H. Macy and Company and SHS will co-host a cocktail party on Tuesday, April 10, 2012 in the Executive Offices of the Herald Square flagship store on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. The Strauses owned Macy's for almost 100

years. The loss of their lives 100 years ago aboard Titanic cannot go without both a memorial and a celebration of their lives and their accomplishments. This is the perfect venue. Family artifacts, memorabilia, letters and photographs will be on display at this evening event. Straus family members are invited to join politicians, media and Macy executives for this interesting evening.



The Titanic Museum Attraction at Pigeon Forge, TN and at Branson, MO will host Titanic memorial events the weekend of April 13-15, 2012. SHS family members expect to participate in these events. For further information and ticket purchases, contact them directly. [www.titanicattraction.com](http://www.titanicattraction.com)

The Titanic Historical Society, Springfield, MA will hold a Titanic

Centennial Memorial dedication ceremony at Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield and a gala dinner the weekend of April 20-22. Family members will participate. Contact Titanic Historical Society for more information. [www.titanic1.org](http://www.titanic1.org)

Straus Park, dedicated to the memory of Isidor and Ida Straus on April 15, 1915, is located at West 106<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and West End Avenue in New York City. This is one block from where the Strauses lived. Friends of Straus Park, a neighborhood association, will host a memorial event at the Park on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Henry's, a restaurant that is located at the exact address of Isidor and Ida Straus' home, will offer a Titanic lunch.

Updates will be posted on the SHS website. SHS's contact information is on the sidebar on page two. We look forward to seeing you at these very special events.

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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

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**A Message from  
the Chairman of the Board:  
Paul A. Kurzman**



We do live in exciting times, and the past year has been no exception for the Straus Historical Society. Many of the highlights of our activities, past and present, are noted in this issue of the Newsletter, and they include preparations for many collaborative events this spring in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the sad loss of the RMS Titanic.

In partnership with the American Jewish Historical Society, a SHS Steering Committee (led by Board Vice-Chair Richard Gerstman and Board Member Al Berr) has developed an exciting afternoon event entitled "Love, Loss & Legacy" for Sunday, April 1<sup>st</sup>; a cocktail party and reception in honor of the Strauses on April 10<sup>th</sup> at the Executive Suite of R. H. Macy's, hosted by the department store's current leaders; and our participation on April 21<sup>st</sup> in a Titanic Centennial Memorial Unveiling which is being sponsored by the Titanic Historical Society. In addition, our able Executive Director, Joan Adler, has arranged for our Society to be represented on April 13-14<sup>th</sup> at a series of major centennial events being sponsored by The Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge (Tennessee); a SHS family presentation on March 19<sup>th</sup> at a special Student Assembly of the Isidor and Ida Straus Elementary School in New York City; and is assisting editors, at their request, in their preparation of articles and special issues in honor of the Strauses' heroism upon the occasion of their tragic death 100 years ago; and, for the publication of a revised and expanded edition of the original *Autobiography of Isidor Straus*, hot off the press, in time for these anniversary celebrations.

And this is not all. With the special support of Joan and Oscar Straus II, we have been offered a challenge grant of \$6,250 from the David A. and Mildred H. Morse Charitable Trust, which we intend to fulfill. Special contributions, earmarked for this purpose, are particularly welcome.

In addition, since Joan works eight days a week, she has been able to help doctoral students and seasoned scholars who are conducting research on the accomplishments of Lazarus Straus, and his four remarkable children, Nathan, Oscar, Isidor and Hermine; to correspond with and assist the current civic leaders of Otterberg, Germany; and to plan an October Straus Family Tour for us of Talbotton and Columbus, Georgia, where Lazarus and Sara Straus first settled in America, and are most fondly remembered.

We can do all this because of your generous support, Joan's energy and commitment to us, and the leadership provided by the members of the Board of Directors, who are listed on this page. To all of them I say thanks for being so generous, committed and thoughtful. You are the best of the best.

# Many Waters Cannot Quench Love

## - Neither Can The Floods Drown It

The world has long been aware of the enormous sacrifice made by Ida Straus when she declined a seat on one of Titanic's lifeboats and chose to perish alongside her husband of 41 years. A Broadway play, many books, Hollywood movies, poems, songs, and thousands of articles were written about the Titanic disaster and about those who lost their lives on April 15, 1912. The facts of the Straus' last trip to Europe and the events leading up to their final voyage have never before been made public. This is a personal story about two people and their relationship with one another and with their family. The ending is well known, but the story of the Straus' final trip to Europe has never been told.

On November 11, 1911, Isidor Straus' secretary wrote the Cunard Steamship Company Ltd. requesting booking on the steamship Caronia for January 6, 1912 going to Europe where they would spend the winter. Their ticket would cost \$1,300 for two rooms and bath for himself and Mrs. Straus, and accommodations for a valet and maid at \$77.50 each. Another couple, the Speddens, were booked on the Caronia and were also on the Titanic when she sank. Frederic and Daisy Spedden and their son Douglas were saved along with Douglas' favorite toy, a stuffed polar bear. Daisy Spedden mentions the Strauses in her diary, which also survived. The story of this family's experience has been turned into a marvelous children's book, *Polar, The Titanic Bear*, written by a descendant of the Speddens, Leighton Hammond Coleman III.

Beginning January 13, 1912, Jesse, Percy and Herbert, the Straus' three sons, kept up a running correspondence with Isidor and Ida. Each of the sons was involved in the running of Macy's Department Store, the family business. Jesse, being the oldest, reported almost entirely on business matters. He kept Isidor abreast of the progress, or lack of progress, of the various departments in the store, gave him detailed financial accounts and wrote about merchandising decisions made in his absence. He wrote, "My Dear Parents." Percy, the second oldest, wrote to his parents at least once a week telling them about the weather conditions and about the activities of various family members. His letters included some

news of business and city events. They began, "Dear Papa and Mamma." Herbert, the youngest son and fifth youngest of six surviving children, wrote "Dear Father." His letters contained news of the city and about other merchant's activities. Between the three brothers, Isidor and Ida were kept fully informed about politics, business and family news.

Throughout their time in Europe, it is clear from the information in their letters that Jesse, Percy and Herbert were responding to questions Isidor had asked. Each son wrote to Isidor about some aspect of business and in many cases seemed to be explaining or justifying an action or decision. Although we do not have all the matching

correspondence, there is enough information to conclude that Isidor was very much a part of the family firm even though he was on a protracted European trip. The sons wanted to keep their mother informed about the health and well-being of all family members.

From Jesse, April 2<sup>nd</sup>: "A few days after this reaches you we shall probably communicate with you by Marconi from the Amerika: on which we sail ...." Jesse, his wife Irma and their oldest child Beatrice were about to leave for a European vacation. While there, they planned to look for a school where Beatrice might receive French lessons.



Isidor and Ida Straus - about 1909

From Ida to "Dear Children" from Claridges Hotel, London, April 4<sup>th</sup>: "Papa enjoys London so much more than Paris, and just revels in going about here. Do not imagine that I am brining a lot of presents, ... Papa would not allow me to shop for anything in Paris, except a hat pin for myself at Noarys and while there they showed me a gold bag with emerald and diamonds on the bars, which Papa gave me - We are just shipping Marie back to Paris, as while there I could not get a maid in her place, ... she had been behaving very badly over here. When Papa sours on a girl you know there is a good cause, and he is disgusted with her. I have engaged a nice English girl now but as with the other do not know whether I can count on her, .... I suppose tomorrow there will be a big egg hunt up in 105<sup>th</sup> Street. I wish I could be there to take part in it. You may not know that this is already





2745 Broadway,  
the 105<sup>th</sup> Street home  
of the Isidor Straus family

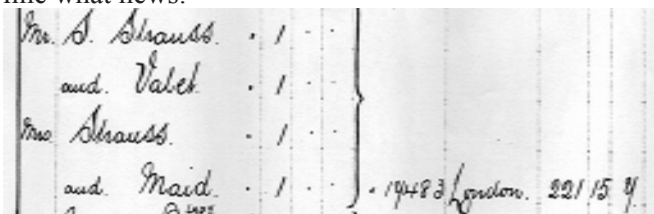
the third day of Pesach (Passover) and that you should all be eating Matzos - Claridges does not serve them so we cannot do our duty."

From Isidor to Rev. H. H. Redgrave, M. A., from Claridges Hotel, London, April 9<sup>th</sup>: "I learn from the Daily Telegraph ... of the dire distress you are attempting to aid in relieving in the Pottery Districts, with which my firm has been in business for almost half a Century. I ask you to accept enclosed order in the Manchester & Liverpool District Bank for Fifty Pounds to assist in the worthy work ..."

From Rev. H. H. Redgrave, M.A. to Mr. Straus, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1934: "For 22 years now I have kept secret from the world a matter in which the British public would have evinced the most profound interest, namely, the last letter which your beloved Father, Isidor Straus, wrote on earth, only the day prior to the day he and your saintly Mother joined their ship of destiny - The Titanic."

Isidor and Ida Straus were booked on the maiden voyage of the Titanic along with Ida's new English maid, Ellen Bird, and Isidor's valet, John Farthing. They boarded in Southampton England on April 10, 1912 after having been issued ticket number 17483.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> Isidor and Ida cabled from the Titanic to Jesse on the Amerika. At the time, ship to ship cables were a novelty and used most often to send friendly messages. Isidor wrote: "fine voyage fine ship feeling fine what news."



From the passenger manifest of Titanic  
Isidor and Ida are listed with a valet and maid

\* Note the misspelling of the Straus name

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, Nathan Straus, Isidor's beloved younger brother, cabled Jesse from New York: "Delighted with message everything fine. Nathan."

The story of the sinking of Titanic need not be told here. It is well known by all who read these pages. What may not be as well known is the fact the Ida Straus refused to leave her husband's side, refused a seat in a lifeboat, and perished with him. Her maid, Ellen Bird, did accept a seat in one of the lifeboats at Ida's urging. Ida Straus gave Ellen Bird her fur coat saying, "I won't be needing this." After surviving the disaster, testifying before an investigative Senate Committee, and after some of the furor about the accident had died down, Ellen Bird went to the apartment of Sara Straus, the Strauses oldest daughter, and offered to return the coat. Sara told Ellen to keep it as Mrs. Straus had given it to her; wanted her to have it. After Titanic, Ellen went to work as a maid for the Spedden family in Tudex Park, NY. In the 1920's, Jesse Straus dined in a Boston hotel restaurant where he was approached by a waiter who introduced himself as Ellen Bird's husband. At the time, Jesse didn't think to record the man's name.

(The Titanic Historical Society in Indian Orchard, MA publishes a quarterly journal called The Titanic Commutator. A recent issue contained an article about the post-Titanic life of Ellen Bird. Contact THS for more information: [www.titanic1.org](http://www.titanic1.org))

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, unaware of Titanic's sinking, Irma Straus wrote from the Amerika to her children at home "Two days ago the captain knocked at our door at seven o'clock in the morning to tell us to come on deck and see two big ice-bergs. - We only had time to put on nappers and fur coats and go on deck."

On April 18<sup>th</sup> Jesse received word from Liverpool: "regret no news yet of mr and mrs isidor straus."

A Macy's employee, Altmeyer, in Paris, cabled Jesse on the 18<sup>th</sup>: "have been exchanging cables with newyork answers are that no definite news will be obtainable until Carpathia carrying survivors reaches Newyork. Altmeyer."

Percy cabled Jesse from New York on the 18<sup>th</sup>: "Father and mother not on Carpathia which picked up seven hundred survivors just have unconfirmed rumour that baltic due queenstown carries two hundred fifty more survivors walter beer meet you on tender plymouth with later news if any. Percy."

An undated cable from Percy reads: "Badenoch arrived his story gathered from survivors leaves no hope Mother refused to leave father danger realized too late

both showed perfect courage and composure to the end = Percy.” John A. Badenoch, Macy’s Grocery buyer, was on the Carpathia, the rescue ship.

On April 24, 1912, John Badenoch wrote:

*“Dear Mr. Percy: As per your request, I submit herewith the facts as desired. About 1:30, on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>, I was awakened by the unusual sounds of activity on the deck over head. Just then the fog-horn blew and I got up and looked out of the port hole. It was a perfectly clear star light night and the sea was without a ripple. Of course I immediately realized that either we or some other vessel was in trouble. I then went into the companion-way and saw a steward who informed me that it was the Titanic that was in trouble. He said they had been in communication with her since twelve o’clock and at that time, which was about 1:45, had just received her last message in which it was said she was sinking. The discipline about the Carpathia was perfect and she was using every ounce of steam to hurry her to the scene of the accident.*

*At about 3:15 we sighted the first life boat and it was alongside at 3:45, just as day was breaking. This first boat was about three quarters filled with people about one quarter of whom were women. None of those rescued in the first life boat knew whether or not your Father and Mother were on the Titanic. The second boat which came alongside about fifteen minutes later was fairly well filled, and almost exclusively with men. There were not more than four or five women in that boat. From one of the passengers on this second boat, I received the information that Mr. & Mrs. Straus were aboard the Titanic. It was not until the third boat arrived that I was able to get a Titanic passenger list and verify the statement that your Father and Mother were booked as passengers. I watched every boat load with intense interest and while it was almost impossible to distinguish the faces of the first arrivals, it was quite day light by the time the fourth or fifth boat arrived. After that they unloaded four boats at one time, two on the port side and two on the starboard side. As I could not watch all these boats unloading, I described your parents to a fellow passenger, so that they would not be brought aboard unobserved by me. After that, however, the boats came in singly. About from the sixth to the ninth boat, two of them came in with not over twelve people in her and the other not having more than twenty people.*

*At 7:30, we had taken in all the boats in sight. We then steamed at slow speed into the wreckage and again lay too expecting to find more boats. It was then about 8:30 o’clock and the Captain of the Carpathia seemed to think that he had taken aboard all who were in the boats. I then spoke to an officer who appeared to be one of the White*

*Star men, (he was the third officer) and asked him to tell me whether or not all of the Titanic’s boats had been accounted for. He refused at first but when I stated my reason for knowing and insisted on an answer, he told me that all the boats had been accounted for and that in his judgment there was almost no hope for those who were not already rescued. Thinking possibly that your father and mother had been taken aboard and I had missed them, I covered the entire ship from bow to stern, and searched the saloon, second and steerage. Also looked in every stateroom, irrespective of its occupants so that I could satisfy myself beyond a doubt whether or not they were aboard. By this time it was almost ten o’clock. I then wrote the message which you received Thursday morning, handed it to the Purser and explained to him the absolute necessity of getting it off at once. He replied very courteously that he would do the best he could but that the muster was just being made and that it must take precedence over private messages. This I accepted as being reasonable. The muster was not completed until noon time when they assured every one that the names had been sent to the offices of the line in New York. I fully expected that such being the case, all the names of the survivors would be published in the New York papers by three o’clock that afternoon. Later in the afternoon, I asked the officer if any of the private messages had been sent and he replied that he did not think any of them had been sent, but that they would surely be sent that night.”*

*(Note: Mr. Badenoch wrote a rather lengthy description at this point about the difficulty he had getting a message sent. He believed his message was not sent until late Wednesday.)*

*“Realizing how anxious you would be to get the most accurate information about the last that was seen of your Father and Mother, I circulated among the survivors and although many claimed to have some knowledge of their actions, those whom you have personally interviewed are the ones I finally decided could give the most authentic account. From what I heard on board and that which I have learned since, I think that the statement given to you by Mr. Woolner is the most accurate. All the survivors agree on one fact and this is if the proper discipline had obtained, there is not the least doubt but that your Father and Mother would have been saved.*

*Taking the statements of eight or ten of the survivors and comparing them, I believe that the following can be considered the most accurate.*

*Mr. & Mrs. Straus were in bed at the time of the accident. Immediately after the boat struck they were seen in the companion-way, in bath robes. At this time an officer, as*

well as several of the passengers assured them that there was no trouble and the best they could do would be to return to their rooms. The maid's story after this is that your Mother seemed to realize the danger and prepared to dress, requesting your Father to do likewise. To hurry matters, she sent the maid for his valet to assist him in dressing. Shortly thereafter they both appeared on deck, fully clothed, mingled with the other passengers and discussed the danger in a perfectly calm and collected manner. They evidently did not believe that there was any great danger of the ship sinking. On the advice of the Captain, they put on life preservers over their fur coats, and assisted other passengers in doing the same. By that time the boats were being filled with women and children and your Mother was asked by an officer in charge and urged by your Father to get into one of the life boats. She refused to do so and insisted that the maid take her place in boat No. 8. They stood by while other boats were being filled, all the while your Father continuously urging your Mother to enter one of them. Finally when it became apparent that there was no hope of the Titanic staying afloat, your Father insisted that your Mother enter the second from the last boat that was being launched from the side they were on. She still refused, saying she would not go without him and when the officer in charge, again urged her to enter, and, in fact, attempted force, aided by the urging of your Father, she placed her foot in the boat, thinking at the time that your Father would accompany her. Just then, some demonstration seems to have been made by the men standing around and the officer in charge ordered all the men back. Mr. Isidor, thinking that your Mother was safe in the life boat, stepped back with the other men. Your Mother, looking around and seeing that your Father was not with her, got out of the boat, went to where your Father was standing and put her arms around him. The officer in charge seeing that it was no use in trying to get your Mother to leave your Father ordered the boat lowered away. Your Father and Mother then walked to the opposite side of the ship and when last seen were standing, clasped in each others arms, calmly waiting for any help that might come. Just what happened after that is not quite clear, but I believe they did not attempt to enter any other boat or make any effort to get away, caused, I believe by the unruly behavior of a number of the passengers.

*It is now history all over the world that they displayed the most magnificent courage, self sacrifice and devotion known to modern times.*

*Yours respectfully, John A. Badenoch"*

The family was notified on April 26<sup>th</sup> that Isidor's body had been recovered and was sailing to Halifax aboard the steamer Mackay Bennett along with the bodies of 205

other victims of the Titanic disaster. Isidor's body was returned to New York on the Boston Express train on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, accompanied by Mr. James Reilly of Macy's. Maurice Rothschild acted as the family's agent, arranging all details of the identification and transfer of Isidor's remains. A private funeral, officiated by Rabbi Samuel Shulman of Temple Beth-El, was held at Isidor and Ida's home, which was also Percy's home at 2745 Broadway (105<sup>th</sup> Street), on May 8<sup>th</sup>, delayed a day in the hope that Ida's remains would also be recovered. Ida's body was never found.

Isidor was buried in the Straus-Kohns family mausoleum at Salem Fields Cemetery in Brooklyn New York. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1928, a deed was drawn for a family plot on Myosotis Street in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx and another Straus family mausoleum was erected. This mausoleum consists of a group of three buildings, one for the each of Isidor and Ida's sons, Jesse, Percy and Herbert, and their families. Isidor's body was moved to Woodlawn Cemetery where he is interred in front of a stone replica of a galley ship in the courtyard of the three buildings. There is an inscription on the wall upon which the galley ship sits. It is dedicated to both Isidor and Ida. "Many waters cannot quench love - neither can the floods drown it." Oddly enough, R. H. Macy and his family are also buried at Woodlawn Cemetery.



Straus Mausoleum  
Woodlawn Cemetery,  
Bronx, NY

Memorial services for Isidor and Ida Straus were held around the world. 6,000 people attended the service at Carnegie Hall on May 12<sup>th</sup> and many thousand stood outside in the rain, unable to gain admittance to the hall. A reported 40,000 attended memorial services for the Strauses. Within two months of the sinking of the Titanic, a committee was formed, contributions were being collected, and Straus Park was planned as a memorial to the nobility and heroism of the Strauses. It was dedicated April 15, 1915.

Almost 100 years later, the Park is still the focal point



of this Upper West Side neighborhood's activities. A not-for-profit group, Friends of Straus Park, holds regular events including art shows, concerts, neighborhood cleanups, plantings and readings. Memory, a beautiful allegorical statue, looks down on the people of New York, seemingly happy not to have been forgotten. Her design, by the artist Augustus Lukeman, was chosen because it "represented a scheme of peaceful contemplation over a sheet of water, leaving it to the meditative public to muse over the sacrifice that the same element demanded of the Titanic disaster." (*Elegant New York*, Seth Lowe's West Side) A quote from the Bible is inscribed on the stone wall behind Memory.



In Memory of Isidor and Ida Straus  
Lovely and Pleasant Were They In Their Lives  
And In Their Death They Were Not Divided  
11 Samuel 1:23

Several additional articles about Isidor and Ida Straus, Titanic and other related topics were published in past issues of the SHS newsletter. Every issue contains a report of the activities at Straus Park sponsored by Friends of Straus Park. The articles can be found on the Archives page of our website.

[www.straushistoricalsoceity.org/archives.php](http://www.straushistoricalsoceity.org/archives.php)

If you click on any issue, it will open in a separate page as a PDF which you can read on-line or print and save.

The articles include: a description of the Straus-Kohns Mausoleum, Straus Park Reconstruction; Titanic on Broadway, the Musical Play; Rededication of Straus Park; Isidor Straus' Ethical Will; a telegram sent by Lee Kohns, nephew of Isidor and Ida, to a friend aboard the rescue ship Carpathia looking for information about his uncle and aunt; the Kruger and Fireman's Memorial, the last philanthropic endeavor by Isidor Straus before his trip to Europe in 1912; Isidor Straus in the House of Representatives; Isidor Straus: Blockade Runner; Beile and Meir Moor: A Survivor's Story - This article describes

the Moor's family's trip to America aboard Titanic and the amazing coincidence relating to their survival; Deep Ocean Expeditions, a commercial group that brings up artifacts from Titanic - Photographs of the interior of Titanic taken from the sea floor are included; 2745 Broadway, the home of Isidor and Ida Straus; Debunking the Story - Several times a year, usually around the Jewish New Year, Chanukah and at Passover, a story is circulated describing the activities and character of Isidor and of Nathan Straus. The gist of the story is that Isidor was not as philanthropic as Nathan and that somehow, because of this he died in the Titanic disaster while Nathan was saved; a walking tour of Beth El and Salem Fields Cemetery; a walking tour of Woodlawn Cemetery; the grand opening of the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, TN, SHS's involvement and the family's participation; Ida Straus' last letter, written on RMS Titanic stationery April 10, 1912.

## The Autobiography of Isidor Straus



**Straus Historical Society**

The August 2011 issue of SHS's newsletter contains an announcement about the republication of *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus*. It is available for purchase for \$40 through SHS. This 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition contains the full text of Isidor's 1911 autobiography plus many photographs and a Supplement containing original articles as well as articles from past issues of the SHS newsletter. You can purchase this newly published autobiography directly from SHS. Information about the book and how to order it is available on our website

[www.straushistoricalsociety.org](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org)

Your \$40 payment includes shipping and handling.

## Barbie Gurgan to Attend A Performance of Titanic, The Musical in Nashville, TN April 5-8.

Barbie Gurgan, the great, great granddaughter of Isidor and Ida Straus will attend a gala dinner and performance of Titanic, The Musical in Nashville, TN the weekend of April 5-8, 2012. This production by Circle Players will be but one of many 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary memorials to honor the loss of her ancestors and the hundreds others who also lost their lives in this disaster. Barbie was particularly moved by the love, honor and integrity shown by her great great grandparents when Isidor Straus would not enter a lifeboat as long as women and children were left aboard Titanic. And his wife Ida would not leave her husband's side, preferring to die with him rather than live life without him.

Barbie feels a deep connection to this revival. She visited Nashville with her late husband George when the Circle Players first presented Titanic in May 2010. She and George already had attended numerous other Titanic related events. But this one turned out to be quite remarkable. First, Nashville was in the midst of deadly flooding that weekend. And everywhere the couple visited, the flood was only minutes away. But in each instance, they avoided a disaster.



George Gurgan, Ida Straus,  
Barbie Gurgan, Isidor Straus

"While we were watching the Titanic production and the scenes of people falling from the ship and drowning, at that same exact time, people were drowning in the flood waters right outside, not too far from where we were and we didn't even know it. The next day, as we were flying home, the heavy rains continued with more flooding and many cast and crew from the musical who we had just been with were struggling for their lives, sustaining injuries, losing loved ones and losing their homes in the flooding, which was the most severe in the area in history.

### Did You Know?

A first class deck plan was given to the first class passengers when they boarded Titanic. The Straus' plan went up for auction in October 2011. Newspaper articles in the English papers report that it sold for 30,000 pounds, about \$50,000 US. The article states that Ida gave the deck plan to Ellen Bird, her maid, who was one of the survivors of the disaster. The deck plan is only one of three known to exist. It was auctioned by Henry Aldridge and Son in Devizes, Wiltshire, England.

It was an understatement that George and I barely escaped each area of flooding as it occurred. We had to get up and out of the hotel at 5 am to get to the airport before it shut down. We knew it would be safer at the airport even if it did shut down because our hotel was beginning to take in water and the roads leading from our hotel to the airport flooded within the hour after we had driven on them to escape with almost no visibility as we drove because the rain was so heavy." It seems like Barbie and George were having their own water related disaster, fortunately with a happier ending than for Isidor and Ida.

Although Barbie and George expected to see the play, they did not expect to become part of the production. They were asked to speak to the crowds at a dinner before the performance. Barbie's heartfelt words touched everyone. Once the couple returned to their Texas home, George, a musician, put on a benefit concert for those affected by the floods. George's last conversation included memories of their Nashville experience. Barbie's felt a connection to the Circle Players, to Nashville and to Titanic, The Musical ever since.

2012 will be a year of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary Titanic memorial events.

Barbie Gurgan will be only one of thousands who attend them. But for her, this will be a personal journey. She feels strongly about her connection to the Circle actors who will be portraying her relatives, to her previous time in Nashville and to her own story of loss. She couldn't be anywhere else. She knows that telling the story, and keeping the memory alive, is one way to honor the lives of those who came before. "Isidor and Ida are my heroes."

Thank you to the Honorable William Cavendish who sent me the newspaper article about this auction. William's grandmother Julia was the daughter of the owner of Siegel-Cooper Department Store located at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue in New York City and was reported to be the largest store in the world. Henry Siegel, Julia's father, owned a Mamaroneck, NY estate called "Driftwood," later owned by Nathan Straus. Julia and her husband shared their dining table with the Strauses during their Titanic voyage. She survived. Her husband Tyrell did not.



## **Straus Family Papers 1810-1962**

### **New York Public Library**

In 1990 Robert K. (Bob) Straus hired me to get his family papers out of R. H. Macy's & Company. The family owned the store for almost 100 years when, in 1986, there was a bitter leveraged buyout. On a handshake, the family was promised their personal papers, items that had been stored there for all those years. Because of the bitter nature of the LBO, and because they had no legal agreement, the family was denied their documents and they had no legal recourse.

Bob wanted those papers. He had already hired three or four people to get the papers out of Macy's before he contacted me. None of them was successful. I had no idea what I could do that would be different but I promised to try.

I was given access to the Macy's Archives and was permitted to photocopy all the papers that were of a personal nature relating to the Straus family. This became the basis of the Society's fledgling archival collection.

Although I could not get them to release these papers to the Straus family, I proposed an alternative; donating them to the New York Public Library. This seemed like a logical alternative because the family's business was centered

in New York and family members had already donated a large amount of material to the library. The Nathan Straus Papers, a collection of articles, letters, photographs and ephemera were donated by his daughter-in-law, Flora Stieglitz Straus. And there were lots of other materials in their Straus collection.

The Straus Family Papers 1810-1962 are available for your examination in the Manuscripts and Archives Division, The Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room, Third Floor, Room 328, New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, 5th Avenue at 42nd Street, New York, NY. An appointment is necessary and all materials must be ordered in advance. [mssref@nypl.org](mailto:mssref@nypl.org)

There are 25 boxes in this collection. You can find a list of the contents of each box on the library's online catalog [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org).

Almost all of the material in this collection is also in the Society's archives. One can query the director for information about what material is available from SHS and about how to gain access to the SHS archives for your personal research. Contact information appears in the sidebar on page two.



### **A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus**

**By June McCash**

June Hall McCash, a retired history professor, wanted to write about Isidor and Ida Straus for many years. It took a very long time for her to find the right vehicle and to meticulously research her subject. As you might imagine, she contacted SHS at the beginning of her project. We've been working together, she asking questions, SHS responding. Many times June found a missing piece in our information or helped to put our information in context.

I am pleased to announce that Mercer University Press is publishing June's book, *A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus*. It will be available for purchase in early March 2012.

Paul Kurzman, Isidor and Ida's great grandson and chair of SHS, and I both read an advance copy and found much to recommend. Paul wrote, "June Hall McCash has written an extraordinarily cogent and deeply moving book about the life of an heroic couple, Ida and Isidor Straus, who, 100 years ago, chose to perish in each others arms when the RMS Titanic hit an iceberg and sank at sea. After

mining many heretofore untapped original sources, Professor McCash offers us a lucid portrait of two prominent and wealthy Americans, who led a noble life, and who chose a courageous death. With an ever observant eye for poignant detail, the author has penned a biography that will have both interdisciplinary relevance for the scholar, and a very strong popular appeal. It is such a powerful American story."

The publishers expect this \$29.00 book to ship by March 30, 2012. You can find further information about purchasing your copy on the Mercer University Press website. [www.mupress.org](http://www.mupress.org)

The author will be doing a book signing at the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, TN in early April. Check their website for the date and other relevant information. [www.titanicattraction.com](http://www.titanicattraction.com)

## Family Heritage Tour of Talbotton and Columbus, GA October 11-14, 2012

In the summer of 1852 Lazarus Straus arrived in the United States from his home town, Otterberg, Germany. He was advised that abundant economic opportunities awaited him in the South and so he set out for Oglethorpe, GA where the Kaufman brothers were established in the dry goods business. They set him up as a pushcart peddler, a noble profession in that area at that time. He did well and in 1854 he rented half a store in Talbotton, the Talbot county seat, where he sold dry goods and notions. He felt sufficiently successful to send for his wife Sara and four children: Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar. They arrived in September 1854. The Strauses remained in Talbotton until 1863 when they moved 38 miles west to the larger city of Columbus, GA. They moved north two years later at the end of the Civil War.

Family members and friends have shown great interest in learning about the early American history of the Strauses. Two previous trips to Talbotton and Columbus, GA were interesting, exciting and deemed highly successful by the trips' participants. There were so many wonderful activities that it is impossible to note all of them. They included: visiting the home sites of the Lazarus Straus family and actually going inside the last home owned by the Strauses in Talbotton, traveling on a peddler's route similar to one that might have been traveled by Lazarus Straus, touring the homes of local residents who own furniture previously owned by the family, and participating in a community luncheon hosted by Historic Talbotton president and SHS board member Michael H. Buckner and his wife Debbie.

When we visited GA we didn't know for certain that members of the Moises Lazarus family were related to the Lazarus Straus family although circumstantial evidence suggested it. Now that DNA has proven the relationship, we will have even more family history to explore and even more places to visit.

The Society is considering sponsoring a trip to GA the weekend of October 11- 14, 2012. We will need a commitment from a number of people before a package can be put together and the specifics arranged. Reserve your place now on this historic journey.

I've heard from many people that they are anxious to visit the towns of their ancestors. Now is your chance. You will have expert guides who know the history and the customs of the area and the people. You will have an opportunity to eat the same kind of food the Strauses ate, learn about how they conducted their daily lives, and see artifacts being used in the same manner as when the Strauses lived in Talbotton. In addition, we will spend

a day in Columbus, GA where we can visit Frank and Amanda Blun Rothschild's home, the historic houses on Second Avenue including the home of Julius and Matilda Straus Kaufman, Springer Opera House where Oscar S. Straus gave a speech in 1908, tour Port Columbus, The Civil War Museum and enjoy the ambiance that is unique to these lovely southern towns.

It is possible, if there is interest, to do an add-on tour of Warm Springs which first came to prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a spa town due to its mineral springs. It is famous for the

Little White House, where Franklin Delano Roosevelt vacationed while president. We can also visit Callaway Gardens, a 13,000 acre resort complex located in Pine Mountain, GA just outside of Columbus.

A nonrefundable check for \$100 per person will reserve your spot for the October 11-14, 2012 Heritage Tour of Talbotton and Columbus GA. Don't delay. Spots are limited. This trip could sell out quickly. Please note in the memo section of your check that it is a deposit for the October 11-14, 2012 GA trip.



Reproduction of a pushcart similar to the one used by Lazarus Straus when he first arrived in GA

## Friends of Straus Park

Friends of Straus Park, a neighborhood association, is the steward of this lovely memorial park on West 106<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and West End Avenue. They host events such as Art in the Park, the Book and Photography Fair and musical evenings. Gardner John Oland makes certain the grounds are lovely and, with the cooperation of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, the statue, paving blocks and surrounding fences are always kept in good repair.

Two months after the Titanic disaster the Straus Memorial Committee was formed, chaired by Jacob Schiff. Also serving on this committee were Isaac Seligman, Felix Warburg and J. B. Greenhut. Subscriptions were underway. The purpose was to turn a triangular plot of land known as Bloomingdale Square into a memorial park for Isidor and Ida Straus. The site was well chosen since the Strauses lived around the corner on West 105<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and West End Avenue. Their three story frame house included a wisteria vined porch and lawns which were reminiscent of the area when it was called the Village of Bloomingdale.

A competition was held in conjunction with the National Sculpture Society to select a design for the artwork. *Memory*, by architect Evarts Tracy and sculptor Augustus Lukeman, was chosen because it "fitted the configuration of the plot and represented a scheme of peaceful contemplation over a sheet of water, leaving it to the meditative public to muse over the sacrifice that the same element demanded of the Titanic disaster" (*Elegant New York*, Seth Lowe's West Side, pp 264-265). The park and statue were dedicated on April 15, 1915 with Mayor of New York John Purroy Mitchell, Seth Lowe and many family members in attendance. Restoration of Straus Park was undertaken at the instigation of Leon Auerbach and the 106<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association and a rededication ceremony was held on April 15, 1997. Friends of Straus Park makes certain that it continues to be an inviting place for neighborhood events and well as for contemplative neighbors.

Although final plans have not been made, it is anticipated that there will be a memorial event at Straus Park on Sunday, April 15, 2012 to commemorate the sinking of Titanic and the death of Isidor and Ida Straus along with so many others. Announcements of this and other future events at Straus Park are noted on SHS's website. You can also contact FSP president Kate Ford at:

OTCSings@aol.com  
or phone: 212-666-1439



Top to bottom:  
Soh Daiko  
Drummers,  
Suzy Schwartz &  
Boto Fogo,  
Titanic Memorabilia  
on display,  
Artwork on display  
and for sale





## Portrait of Murdock Pemberton

Sally Pemberton is the granddaughter of Murdock Pemberton, a newspaper reporter, Broadway publicist, playwright and poet. He was the first art critic of New Yorker magazine. Pemberton wrote about Macy's art shows and supported department stores selling art to make it more accessible to the American public. He worked closely with the Straus family.

More information about Sally's book, *Portrait of Murdock Pemberton* as well as purchase information can be found at:

<http://www.enfelddistribution.net/portraitofmurdockpemberton-2.aspx>

Sally says her 409 page book contains 400 images. Her goal was to make a "scrapbook" and she's been told that she succeeded. Early reviews have been quite positive.

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## The Woodger/Korntheuer Family

Barbara Woodger Korntheuer is the daughter of Herbert (Bert) and Annie Woodger. Bert was Percy S. Straus Jr. and Edith Abraham Straus' horticulturist at Hilholme, their Mt. Kisco, NY home. Barbara grew up on the estate. She has many fond memories of her days there riding horses, floating a homemade raft in the large pond, climbing trees and spending many happy hours outdoors.

I was recently contact by Barbara's son Bill who told me his brother Paul, a teacher in San Francisco, was writing a paper about his mother's childhood memories. Paul shared his paper with SHS. During our correspondence I suggested that many of the descendants of Percy and Edith might enjoy hearing about Barbara's experiences and might have some of their own to share. We arranged a conference call where the participants could share as well as learn from the stories of the other participants. The conversation was recorded and will provide the basis for a future article in the newsletter.

I would like to thank Barbara for her generous contribution to SHS. Her stories are wonderful. She also sent SHS Percy's ivory handled clothing brush. His "PSS Jr." monogram is unique. The letters form a diamond shape with the center "S" for Straus containing a J in the upper loop of the S and an R in the lower loop of the S. The JR is for Jr. The brush is a wonderful addition to our Archival Collection. We appreciate the generosity of the Woodger/Korntheuer family and have enjoyed hearing their stories about life on the Hilholme estate.

## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

*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. - \$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. - \$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. - \$25.00

Large black & white photograph of the Isidor and Ida Straus family taken at Elberon NJ in 1905 - \$40.00

Large black & white photograph of the entire Lazarus Straus family at Luchows Restaurant in 1911 - \$40

Shipping and handling is included for all items. Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: [info@straushistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@straushistoricalsociety.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 Thursday, May 3, 2012 at the office of board chair Paul A. Kurzman in New York City at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board nor to contribute to the Society. This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in the SHS may have an opportunity to participate and to share his/her views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul Kurzman 212-396-7537 for further information.