



STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 18 Number 2

Straus is the German word for ostrich

February 2017

Announcing the Publication of: *Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft*

The Straus Historical Society is pleased to announce the publication of Oscar S. Straus' autobiography, *Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft*. From Oscar's boyhood memories of life in rural Georgia to his distinguished career in public service, this book is as relevant and enchanting today as when it was originally published in 1922. We present here, for your enjoyment, a brief excerpt from *Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft*.

"On April 3, 1908, the Savannah Board of Trade celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, and I was asked to be one of the speakers. ... The Mayor and prominent citizens of my former home, Columbus, upon learning of our presence in the South, sent us a pressing invitation to visit that city. A committee met us at the station, and in the evening a dinner was given at the Opera House, at which about a hundred of the leading citizens were present. The dinner was served on the stage, and while the toasts were being responded to, the curtain was raised, disclosing an auditorium crowded with people. I was quite touched by this fine attention by the citizens of my former home, who took great pride in the fact that one of their former townsmen was a member of the Cabinet. In the audience were several of my schoolboy friends and those of my brothers, and I found several friends and companions of my parents still among the living.

"In the South at that time it was still rare for a person to change his politics, and one of the questions that was put to me was why had I, a member of a Democratic family, once a Democrat myself, and even having held office under a Democratic President, changed over to the Republican side. In other words, why had I been on both sides of the political fence, though they were too polite to ask the question in that direct form. I told them that perhaps no one had a better right than they to ask the reason for my political affiliations. It was true, I said, that I had been, as it were, on both sides of the fence, but that was not my fault; the fence had been moved. This produced great merriment and applause.

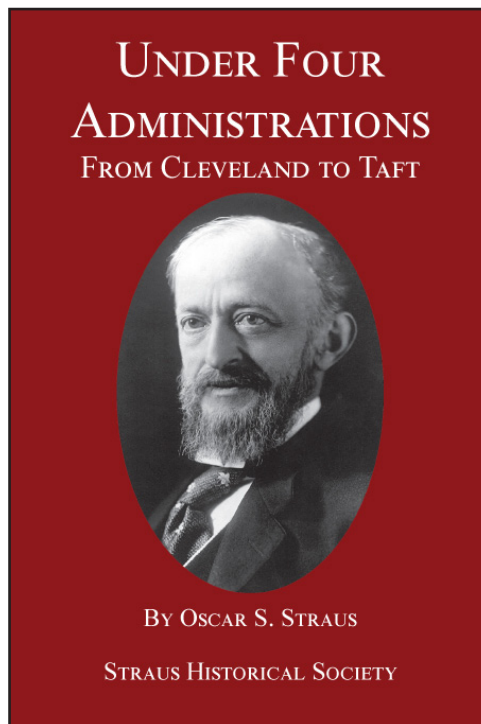
"Talbotton, the first American home of my family, also extended an invitation to us, which I accepted with pleasure. A dinner and reception were given in my honor at the public hall known as the Opera House at which the Mayor of the town made an address, as well as several other prominent citizens. While in Talbotton we were the guests of the Honorable Henry Persons, former member of Congress and an old friend of our family. He gave me my first rubber ball,

when I was six years old. I visited all the scenes of my boyhood; it was forty-five years since I had lived there. The population of the town was about the same, equally divided between the whites and the blacks. The little Baptist church where I went to Sunday school was much smaller than it had loomed up in my imagination. Collinsworth Institute was abandoned, and only the recitation hall was left standing. The several houses wherein my family had lived brought back vivid memories of the toils and pleasures of my parents. The little frame cottage with the green blinds especially impressed upon me how little is required for happiness where there is the love and contentment which always blessed our family. All who remembered my father and mother spoke of them in the highest terms. I met a number of my boyhood friends, grown gray and old. On the whole the little town had not changed much, though it had fewer signs of prosperity.

Before the Civil War it was the center of a rich slave-holding county. The people, however, seemed contented and happy."

Oscar S. Straus' autobiography is as relevant today as it was in 1922 when it was first published. World conditions, and the issues Oscar had to deal with in his many public service positions, have not changed much. Factual accounts of a fascinating life, spun by a true wordsmith, make this life's story an enjoyable read. It has been a pleasure and an honor to bring *Under Four Administrations* to you.

To purchase this book, go to
www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications



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

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

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**A Message from the
Assistant Director:
Catherine McIlvaine Smith**

During 2016 Marissa Pelliccia, our SHS intern, has been working on a project to digitize our archives. She has scanned the documents and photographs from several collections and entered information about them into our new museum standard software program. This will allow everyone to more easily access SHS's archival materials and for us to make it available to everyone.

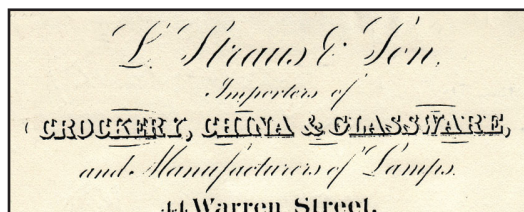
**We are pleased to announce that
the L. Straus & Sons collection
from the Straus Historical Society's Archives
is available online!**

As of January 2017, we have added the Society's entire collection of L. Straus & Sons materials to the online database. Now, if you go to www.straushistoricalsociety.org and go to the menu item "Archives" a dropdown menu will appear with the option to go to the "Online Collection." The online collection page is filled with information about how to search through the materials. You can go directly to the different parts of the collection including the "Archives," "Photos," "Libraries," and "Objects." You could also look through "Random Images" from the collection. If you are looking for something specific, this page gives the options to do a "Keyword Search," or an "Advanced Search" to find an item. Each entry has an image of the item and information about its content, its creation date, as well as other relevant descriptors. You can magnify the image, request a copy of that image, e-mail the entry to a friend, or send us feedback.

Completing this part of the project was a time consuming endeavor. It has not happened overnight. It will take quite a long time to get everything in the extensive SHS archive entered, scanned, edited and uploaded. Our collection is large and Marissa's time is limited. For now, only the L. Straus & Sons collection is online. It will give you some idea of the exciting possibilities as we work to complete more of this project.

It is still possible to ask us for information or materials that do not appear in the L. Straus & Sons collection but which may be part of our overall holdings. For now we will research what is available relating to your request, report that to you and make every effort to supply you with the images, documents and/or scans.

Creating this online collection has allowed us to bring the history of the Straus Family directly to you. As Marissa continues go through our extensive archives, we will add more and more to the online collection. We hope you enjoy looking through our materials. We look forward to making more content available to you in the future!



Lee Kohns

1864 - 1927

The Straus Historical Society's newsletter has published many articles about the older generations of Strauses. It's time to turn to the next generation.

We know that the Straus family originated in the Rheinpfalz area of southwest Germany. Lazarus and Sara Straus and their four children; Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar immigrated to the United States. Lazarus arrived in Philadelphia in 1852 where he was advised there would be greater opportunity in the south. He settled in rural GA obtaining work as a pushcart peddler. Two years later, after opening a dry goods store in Talbotton, the Talbot County seat, he sent for his family.

Daughter Hermine was eight years old at the time of her immigration. In 1863 the Strauses moved to the larger city of Columbus where it is likely Hermine met Lazarus Kohns. He immigrated in 1847 from Giebelstadt, Germany, a town west of Otterberg where the Strauses originated. We know he was acquainted with the Straus family because he was a subscriber in the Georgia Importing and Exporting Company which was formed in June 1863. Lazarus Straus was also a subscriber.

Hermine Straus and Lazarus Kohns were married in Columbus, GA on November 18, 1863. Their first child, Lee, was born there on September 1, 1864. The first reference to Lee was when uncle Isidor, then nineteen years old and in Europe buying and selling Confederate Bonds during the Civil War, wrote to his family back in GA exhibiting great excitement about becoming an uncle. On October 20, 1864 he wrote to his mother, "It affords me more than pleasure to congratulate you upon the ascendancy to the title of Grandparents and pray that kind heaven may yet permit you to see great grandchildren. How do you, my dear mother, feel in the shoes of a grandmother? Perhaps as awkward as I in those of an uncle. Instead as before of having to take care of 3 (Hermine, Nathan and Oscar), as you now have to look after 4 children. Often when I am a little dreamy headed I see before me a vision of my dear Sister and her son fighting as to who is to have the largest piece of candy, which unfortunately, the good grandmother broke into unequal parts."

On June 16, 1865 after having received word that the war was over Isidor wrote, "The idea of returning home with the responsibilities of an uncle on my shoulders is perfectly elating, and I put in my claim upon the little nephew through his reverent mama to have exclusive control over all leisure hours until further notice. Unless you make yet good use of the interim to secure the little darling a plenty surplus of flesh he will have very little but bones and skin left by the time I have him a few weeks under my exclusive care."

Lee was the first child in the Lazarus Straus family to be born in America. Shortly after the Civil War the Straus and Kohns families moved from Columbus to New York where they opened L. Straus & Sons, a china, crockery and glassware concern. Hermine's husband Lazarus Kohns worked at L. Straus & Sons his entire career.

Lee's sisters Clara, Flora and Irene were born in New York in 1866, '68 and '71 respectively. Clara and Flora died in early childhood. New York City census records reveal that Lazarus and Hermine lived with her parents in 1870 and 1880.

Lee attended Donai Institute and the College of the City of New York from which he graduated in 1884. Soon after his graduation he became the permanent president of his class and presided over annual dinners and reunions of the student body. In 1884, upon his college graduation, Lee became a member of the firm of L. Straus & Sons founded by his grandfather

Lazarus Straus. His father and uncles Isidor and Nathan were also members of the firm. Lee remained at L. Straus & Sons throughout his career. For a long period he was a managing partner. He retired in 1923 in order to devote his time to educational and philanthropic work. Through his interest in L. Straus & Sons he became a partner in Abraham & Straus of Brooklyn, another family firm, and later when it was incorporated, he became a director and vice-president.

When Lee died in 1927 his cousin Roger Williams Straus delivered a eulogy that was reprinted by the American Jewish Historical Society. It encompasses quite

a lot of what I learned about Lee Kohns during his sixty three years and so, although lengthy, it is presented here. "Although he had never held, nor even been a candidate for public office, he devoted a large portion of his time, energy and ability to public and semi-public matters. Primarily a businessman, and a successful one, he did much more than merely attend to his own personal business, he was always alive to, and keenly interested in, any movement which would improve civic conditions and tend to give greater opportunities to the mass of people. As a result, at the time of his death, he was first vice-president and chairman of the executive committee of the Education Alliance, trustee of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropic Societies, trustee to the Andrew Freedman home, trustee of the United Hospital Fund, and trustee of the College of the City of New York."

"Lee Kohns' recognized integrity and business ability was such that he was offered the Fusion nomination for President of the Borough of Manhattan on the Gaynor ticket in 1909, which he declined, and again in 1918 he refused the office of Deputy Commissioner of Public Welfare. He also declined



various public offices offered him by Presidents Cleveland and Roosevelt.

"After the World War, Lee Kohns, believing that a proper understanding of each other by the people of France and the United States was essential for the well-being of both countries, conceived the plan of establishing a chair of American history, civilization and letters at the Sorbonne (University of Paris). He accordingly endowed this chair which very properly was named for him. Although the plans for the establishment had been perfected less than a year before his death, he saw the great enthusiasm among well-informed people of both countries, and that the work was about to start with every prospect of becoming a valuable contribution to international good-will.

"While Lee Kohn's public and business life was successful, useful, well-rounded and fulfilled much of his time, he had at the same time the happiest of home lives. On November 18, 1896, on the wedding anniversary of his parents, Lee married Clare E. Elfelt. They had three children: Robert Lee, Irene Dorothy and Paul L. Lee Kohns was a man whose outstanding quality was friendliness and ability to make friends. He was loved and esteemed by all who came into contact with him."

One can see Lee Kohns' concern for his fellow man by the many organizations in which he participated. In 1884, at the age of twenty, he became secretary of the newly formed Young Men's Hebrew Association of the Sanitary Aid Society of the Tenth Ward in New York City. It was formed because of the deplorable poverty, crime and filth existing in the Tenth Ward which included the Five Points area. Lee remained secretary at least through 1893. He was a trustee of the Society to Aid Jewish Prisoners (1893) whose mission was to provide spiritual and other instruction to prisoners of the Jewish faith who are confined within the US and to aid them when they were released.

In 1886 Lee received a passport and traveled to Europe. His aunt Ida commented in a letter on his appreciation of Paris and London. She wrote, "Your estimation of Paris and London tallies exactly with uncle Isidor's; you prefer like he does something substantial to the flimsy filigree and superficial splendor."

In 1891 a petition was presented to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison and James G. Blaine, Secretary of State in support of "The Restoration of Palestine to the Jews." This was a time of extreme measures against the Jewish population in Russia. The petition reads, in part; "It is both unwise and useless to undertake to dictate to Russia concerning her internal affairs. The Jews have lived as foreigners in her dominions for centuries and she fully believes that they are a burden upon

her resources and are prejudicial to the welfare of her peasant population, and will not allow them to remain. ... We believe this an opportunity for all nations and especially the Christian nations of Europe to show kindness to Israel. A million of exiles, by their terrible suffering, are piteously appealing to our sympathy, justice, and humanity. Let us now restore to them the land of which they were so cruelly despoiled by our Roman ancestors." Lee Kohns of L. Straus & Sons was a signer of this petition. It is interesting that this is one of the important issues his uncle Oscar S. Straus dealt with when he was Minister to Constantinople in the 1890s.

As a member of the Reform Club Lee was a lifelong Democrat who actively supported the presidential election of Grover Cleveland in 1892. Cleveland ran on the platform of an honest uprising of the honest people. Cleveland spoke of the

meaning of a true democracy at a time of discontent. Lee's continued interest in the Democratic Party led to his becoming a delegate to the Democratic League of New York County in 1910. He was the speaker at their mass meeting at Carnegie Hall on October 25th.



The Educational Alliance was founded by several public-spirited citizens of New York who felt that the dense populations of newly arrived immigrants needed more provisions for intellectual, social and physical activity than the city itself afforded. Isidor Straus was one of its founders and Lee Kohns was actively involved in a leadership position since its inception in 1893. He continued to serve in many capacities including chairing

committees. In 1912, following the death of Isidor Straus, he was elected vice president. The Lee Kohns Cultural Arts Center at The Educational Alliance is dedicated in his honor.

In response to an economic depression in 1894, Lee Kohns urged the signing of a Tariff Bill that would reduce tariffs on imported goods. His uncle Isidor was a member of the House of Representatives at the time and was actively involved in this fight for tariff reform. In 1897 Lee was part of the Finance Committee and the Advisory Board of a new organization, the Merchants' Association of New York, "for the purpose of advancing the commercial interests of New York." He was a member of the Crockery Board of Trade of New York, an Incorporator of the Industrial and Commercial Exhibition Company and a director of the New York Exchange Bank. Lee served for many years on the New York Board of Trade and Transportation where he became involved in taxation, trade, railroad regulations, whether to build a tunnel to NJ, a longshoremen strike, truckers unions and the conservation of coal by public utilities. In 1918 he was elected the Board of Trade's president, a position he held for seven years. In 1904 he was appointed to the Committee on Customs Administration. The same year he served on a newly formed committee of the

National Importers Association. Lee was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce. When the New York Exchange Bank and the Irving National Bank merged in 1907, Lee was one of the incorporators of the new entity, the Atlas Trust Company. He was also a director of the Fidelity Trust Company. In 1917 he was an incorporator of the Federation for the Support of Jewish Charities.

The Lee Kohns Collection of autographs and letters at the New York Public Library was donated by his family after his death. The collection includes the autograph or a letter from every president of the U.S., many kings, queens, potentates, nobles, literary and musical celebrities and men of note everywhere as well as books and reproductions of famous works. A Finding Aid for the collection may be found on the NYPL website.

In 1906 Lee became a trustee of the City College of New York, his alma mater. He was a member of the Mayor's Commission studying whether Normal College and the City College should give up their preparatory departments and return their pupils to the high schools of the city, and whether City College, the Normal College and Training Schools for Teachers should unite their programs. Lee Kohns was a strong advocate for these proposals. He generously undertook to defray the expenses for summer classes in 1918.

Lee and Clare Kohns lived on West 79th Street in NYC. In 1906 they bought a summer home on Kings Point, Long Island. It burned to the ground in 1921 after a workman's torch set the roof on fire. They bought another summer home in Kings Point which was sold after his death in 1927. In 1911 it was reported that Lee Kohns was serious ill with typhoid fever and confined to his home at West 79th Street. Fortunately this illness didn't seem to have had any lasting effects. In 1914 Lee and Clare bought 38 East 52nd Street where the family continued to live until his death.

True to his character, Lee was active during the First World War. Lee served on a committee to press President Wilson to protest against the British order to blockade trade of German non-combatant merchandise. He also worked to raise funds by serving on the Pioneer Division of the New York Savings Committee. He was tasked with raising money through the sale of War Bonds within the Crockery, China, Glassware, Lamps, Lanterns, Toys, Oriental Goods and House Furnishing businesses of New York City.

In 1919 Lee became a member of a Fair Price Milk Committee appointed by NY Governor Alfred E. Smith. It was suggested that this was because of his relationship to Nathan Straus, his uncle, who championed pasteurization starting in 1894. One

of its recommendations was that the milk industry, because of the essential nature of its product, be managed as a public utility.

In 1924 he participated on a committee charged with studying the means to bring world peace through world understanding. Its aim was to stop wars through education. Lee's endowment of a chair in American History, Literature and Civilization at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1926 most assuredly grew out of his work with this committee and his conviction of its correctness. Unfortunately he died one week before the formal dedication of the Lee Kohns Chair.

It is clear from the many memorials and eulogies in his honor, Lee Kohns was an exceptional man. George Gordon Battle, a prominent New York City lawyer and leading Democrat said, "He was a man of great public spirit, always ready to participate in any enterprise for the general good. Also he had very wide human sympathies. His energies and his purse were always at the disposal of any worthy cause. He was an

intelligent, energetic and successful man of business and wielded a strong and beneficial influence in mercantile and commercial affairs. Furthermore, he has a notable capacity for friendship. He was truly hospitable. Nothing gave him more pleasure than to meet and to entertain those for whom he held high regard and esteem. He came to New York from Georgia along with his kinsmen of the distinguished Straus family. Certainly he and they made a distinct contribution to the life of our city. His family and private life was to the highest degree

admirable and beautiful. He has left a memory fragrant with honor and good deeds. The name of those who mourn him will be legion."

An obituary in the *New York Times* on January 20, 1927 by the Board of Directors of the American Exchange Irving Trust Company stated; "His well-ordered mind and carefully balanced judgment, his high integrity, his strong sense of civic responsibility and his never-filing appreciation of the importance of the things in life which make for human happiness – these are the qualities we knew well in Mr. Kohns, the qualities which made us love him."

No article about Lee Kohns would be complete without mentioning that his wife Clare Elfelt Kohns actively worked to rescue family members as World War II drew close. Several family members have told me that their entire family are alive today because of her sponsorship.

Philanthropy and concern for the welfare of their fellow man was clearly a family trait.



Clare E. Kohns, wife of Lee Kohns, with children
Irene Dorothy, Robert Lee and Paul Lazarus - about 1901

Anniversaries in Straus Family History

At the May 5, 2016 SHS board meeting it was suggested that our readers might find it interesting to learn about the anniversary of events relating to the Strauses. Taking this suggestion to heart, we created an Excel spreadsheet with the anniversaries of events. Check out our Facebook page where we will post information about the events on their actual anniversary dates.

Since the newsletter is published twice a year, and the number of anniversaries is great, we will present small vignettes about some of these events in each issue. We present here a few of the anniversaries in March through August. The next issue of the newsletter will contain stories about some of the anniversary events that occurred in the six months from September through February.

March

Nathan Straus was known around the world for his many philanthropic endeavors. In 1904 Nathan and Lina Gutherz Straus visited Palestine. The poverty and helplessness of the people greatly affected them and they became ardent Zionists. They vowed to do something to help alleviate the suffering they witnessed. An article in the August 2014 issue of the SHS newsletter describes some of their efforts in Palestine.

On March 4, 1927 the cornerstone was laid of the Nathan and Lina Straus Jerusalem Health Center. The center was formally presented to Hadassah by the Strauses at a tea given in their honor on May 29th. Nathan said, "Jerusalem is the centre of the world's three greatest religions and will become the capital of world peace."



Nathan and Lina Straus Jerusalem Health Center
View above: ca. 1930

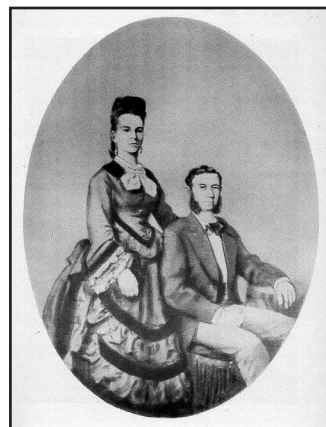
View below: Recent photograph



April

On April 12, 1915 RMS Titanic struck an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic taking with it 1,517 people including Isidor and Ida Straus. But this was not the only family event of note that occurred in April.

On April 28, 1871 Lazarus Straus wrote to his family in Germany announcing the engagement of his oldest son, Isidor to Rosalie Ida Blun, daughter of Nathan and Wilhelmine Blun. Lazarus wrote, "The purpose of this letter is to let you know that my dear Isidor got engaged yesterday with the daughter of Nathan Blun who used to live here in Worms. My dear wife and I and Isidor are very pleased indeed with this matchup, since it is in every respect an outstanding one. ... My wife is so beside herself with joy that she is not even capable of writing her own name."

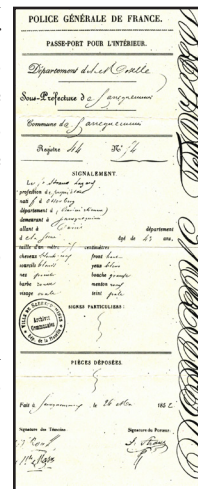


Isidor and Ida Blun Straus
Wedding Photo - July 12, 1871

May

On May 26, 1852 Lazarus Straus was issued a passport for travel within the interior by the General Police of France at Sarraguemines, France. We believe he used this passport to travel to LeHavre where he embarked on a ship to Philadelphia because he learned he was going to be called before the courts to explain his role in the failed Revolution of 1848. Although Lazarus was not an active participant in the Revolution, he did raise money for the cause. A contributory factor to his decision to emigrate was that after the failed revolution the economic conditions were very bad and he wanted to preserve whatever money remained for his family. It has been suggested that, had he stayed, it would have been necessary for him to declare bankruptcy.

On his passport Lazarus was described in detail. He was 43 years old. His hair was blond. He had blue eyes, a pointed nose, an oval face, high forehead, large mouth, round chin and a pale complexion



June

On June 7, 1892 Oscar S. Straus was installed as the first president of the American Jewish Historical Society. He served in this capacity through 1898.

In the spring of 1892, Cyrus Adler, who was then the Honorary Assistant Curator of Oriental Antiquities at the Smithsonian Institution, sent a letter to 175 prominent figures of the established American Jewish community, including academics, clergy from across the denominations, politicians, philanthropists, businessmen, educators, and librarians, as well as a few prominent Christian historians, inviting them to a meeting to form an American Jewish Historical Society. On Monday, June 7, 1892, forty men and one woman answered Adler's invitation and convened at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), for a lengthy meeting in order to determine the proper scope of the society's mission.

The American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) was founded with the mission to foster awareness and appreciation of the American Jewish heritage and to serve as a national scholarly resource for research through the collection, preservation and dissemination of materials relating to American Jewish history. It is the oldest national ethnic historical organization in the United States.

In each of his presidential speeches delivered at the society's annual meetings, Oscar S. Straus emphasized that the aim of the society was to gather data related to the history of the Jews in America in order to expand the public understanding of what constituted American history. He reiterated that the society was to be "not sectarian but American," and that American Jewish history was American history, first and foremost, and should be described as such. Straus also maintained that looking to the past as a guide for the future was an act of patriotism.



Oscar S. Straus - 1888

July

Jesse Isidor Straus, II was born on January 1, 1900. He was the son of Jesse Isidor and Irma Nathan Straus. On July 5, 1912, three months after his grandparents died in the Titanic disaster, Jesse II was legally renamed Isidor Straus II to honor his grandfather's memory. Then, on August 15, 1929, he legally changed his name one last time, this time to Jack

Isidor Straus. Jack became a vice president of R. H. Macy & Co. at 32 years old when his father was named Ambassador to France. He became acting president in 1939 and president in 1940. He continued in that position for 40 years.



Time Magazine cover
January 8, 1965
Macy's Jack I. Straus

August

On August 11, 1922 the first stock in R. H. Macy & Company was issued. The Straus brothers, Macy president Jesse Isidor, vice president Percy Selden, and secretary and treasurer Herbert Nathan Straus undertook this financial re-organization to make possible a program of expansion of their 34th Street store. Their move from the original R. H. Macy store on 14th Street, then the center of NYC commerce, to Herald Square in 1902 was called venturesome. Ten years later Penn Station opened and the Herald Square area became one of the busiest in the city.

The new financing through the stock issue made possible the completion of the firm's proposed nineteen story annex. In addition to the nineteen stories planned above ground, two stories were planned below ground. It gave the new building, combined with the existing structure, an aggregate floor space of 1,500,000 square feet. In 1922 there were 118 departments with about 8,000 employees. The Straus family's interest in Macy's ended in 1986.



1903 view of Macy's

An Irony: The Lemlich/Straus Connection

Although I am not a Straus family member, I have been the Straus historian and genealogist for more than 26 years. It seems that no matter where I go, no matter who I am speaking with or whatever I am experiencing, I find some aspect of the Straus family or their history.

It came as quite a surprise when, after working on my own family's genealogy, I came across a series of documents regarding my ancestor, Pinchos Lemlich, who was deported in 1907 by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. The Bureau then was under the direction of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor and Oscar S. Straus was Secretary of Commerce and Labor at that time under President Theodore Roosevelt. Therefore, indirectly, Oscar S. Straus was responsible for the deportation of my relative!

My father's family originated in what was then known as the Pale of Settlement, Russia. Pinchos Lemlich, the son of Khaim and Khave Lemlich, was born 5 November 1869 in Starokonstantinov, Russia (now Ukraine). Sometime before 1907, he married Rivka Bekelman and they had one child. Pinchos was a laundryman and tailor.

On July 25, 1907 Pinchos Lemlich arrived in New York aboard the SS Moskwa. Abram Bekelman was also on this ship. Abram was Pinchos' brother-in-law, the brother of Pinchos' wife Rivka Bekelman Lemlich. Pinchos reported that he left his wife in Minkivtsi, a small town near Starokonstantinov, and was going to his brother-in-law, Mr. Broitman, who lived on Flushing Avenue in Brooklyn, NY. Mr. Broitman was Morris, the husband of Pinchos' wife's sister Feige/Fannie Bekelman Broitman. (She, Rivka and Abram Bekelman were sisters and brother. Morris and Feige Broitman were my great grandparents.) It was Feige who paid for Pinchos' passenger ticket and both Feige and her husband vouched for the support of Pinchos until he could get a job and become self-supporting.

But there was a problem: Pinchos was deaf. He had purposely punctured his eardrums the year before to avoid being drafted into the Russian Army -- a 25 year term of service, with the worse assignments given to Jewish soldiers. In fact, very few Jewish soldiers survived their enlistment. And many young men maimed themselves in some way to avoid being drafted into the Czar's Army.

In 1907, when a ship arrived in New York, it stopped at Ellis Island where all third class passengers were required to disembark. Their papers were examined and they were given

a thorough physical examination there before being issued a certificate of good health. Only after they were deemed healthy, and able to work, were they allowed to telegraph their loved ones on the mainland who then would verify that they were available to meet the passenger at a dock in New York City and take them home. Since the shipping company was responsible for paying the passage of all those who were deported, most of the passengers were given a certificate of good health and granted asylum. Notes from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, for example, report that the very old and very young were usually admitted even though they were dependent upon their relatives for support. Notes on Pinchos' arrival record state that he was destitute, deaf and that he could not be sworn due to his being either hard of hearing or stupid. Poor Pinchos was one of the unlucky ones. His case was held over for Special Inquiry and he was not permitted to leave Ellis Island.

15	Abraham	Pinchos	10	from Rotterdam no money
16	Abraham	Pinchos	10	from Rotterdam no money
17	Abraham	Pinchos	10	from Rotterdam no money
18	Abraham	Pinchos	10	from Rotterdam no money
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Passenger Manifest - SS Moskwa -
arrived in New York from Rotterdam July 25, 1907
Line 19: Abram Bekelman
Line 2: Pinchos Lemlich - Deported

The Special Inquiry hearing was held on Ellis Island two days after Pinchos arrived. A statement given by Pinchos (as reported by an Inspector Smiley) reads as follows: "I am married and have a wife and child in Russia, no other children, can read and write, arrived on SS Moskwa, my sister-in-law Feige Broitman, 589 Flushing Ave, Brooklyn NY paid for my passage. I am a laundryman, never here before, going to my sister-in-law, shows 70 cents. Telegraphed to call. Worked

at a trade 9 years; deaf 1 year; continued regular work since deaf. Intends to work at any trade and if cannot find work in my trade, I will do any kind of work."

Sister-in-law Feige Bekelman testified: "I am married, my husband's name is Morris and he is a presser of men's coats earning from \$12-\$15 a week. We now have \$155 in the State bank in my name. I have \$8-\$10 with me now. I have only one child depending on me for support. Pinchos is a laundryman and he doesn't have to hear. I think that I will be able to secure him employment at his regular trade."

Inspector Smiley testified: "The alien's passage was paid by his sister-in-law who appears before the Board in his behalf. The alien appears before the Board without any money and it is evident to me that he is not able to do much work. The witnesses appearing before the Board are only related by marriage. The alien is certified as being deaf. I move his exclusion as a person likely to become a public charge."

Pinchos had a determined lawyer, Mr. Reynolds, who was willing to appeal the ruling. "Although this alien is certified

as deaf, it is apparent that this condition has been corrected to a certain extent by educational means; in other words, he is able to read from the motion of the lips and to reply intelligently. His sister-in-law, who is interested sufficiently in his welfare, paid his passage to this country and appears here in his behalf. A brother-in-law also appears here and they jointly promise to secure work for him. It is my belief that the alien can be safely admitted, provided bond is furnished, as I think he can find many profitable lines of employment where perfect hearing is not required. This alien having been notified of his right under law, and having signaled his intention to furnish such bond, I move that the case be respectfully referred to the Immigration Officer in Charge at this port for his action under provision of Rule 20.

In the following letter you will note that the spelling of Pinchos' name and the name of the ship have changed. This is because spelling was pretty casual in those day and also because Pinchos' name was spelled in Hebrew characters or Cyrillic characters and translated into Roman characters by the people involved in his hearings. Both factors likely account for the change in the spelling of these words.

On July 29th Pinchos Lemlich appealed the ruling that he be deported because he was LPC (Likely to become a Public Charge). Jacob J. Becker of the United Hebrew Charities wrote the letter, which appears to have been dictated by Pinchos who signed it in Hebrew. "I, the undersigned, Pincus Lemlich, passenger ex SS Muskwa 7/25 hereby respectfully appeal from the decision of the Board of Special Inquiry excluding me as a person likely to become a public charge. I am a presser by trade and have always been able to support my family and myself without any difficulty. I have a sister-in-law in this country who sent for me and who assured me that at any time that I would require assistance she stands ready to furnish same. She appeared before your Board and gave evidence to this effect. My brother-in-law also appeared in my behalf and assured your Board of his ability and willingness to assist me. My relatives are willing to give you a bond of real estate in such amount as you may decide, to assure that I will never become a public charge. I trust that you will sustain this application for admission on bond and am, very respectfully yours."

Further letters of appeal and rulings follow this case. On August 7, 1907 Samuel P. Goldman, Attorney and Counselor at Law, wrote in part: "This gentleman was found to be a trifle hard of hearing. He is otherwise in perfect physical and

mental health. His relatives ... are all real estate holders in the City of New York and are amply responsible and are entirely willing to give a bond in any amount that you may deem fit to assure the government that Mr. Lemlich will, under no circumstances, become a public charge. ... He is an experienced sewing tailor and is very well able not only to support himself, but those who may become dependent upon him. The three gentlemen above named are prepared to advance or deposit any sum of money that may be necessary to assure you or the Immigration Officials of this government of their sincerity and reliability. As it would be a gross hardship to deport Mr. Lemlich, I take the liberty of requesting that you advise me when my representative can call to see you with the proper parties and lay the matter before you in person."

COPY
Form 541

Department of Commerce and Labor
IMMIGRATION SERVICE
MEDICAL DIVISION

Port of: New York July 26, 1907

Name, Pinchos Lemlich

List _____ No. _____

Age, 40 Nat., Russia Race, Heb.

S. S. Muskwa

Arrived, July 25, 07

This is to certify that the above-described alien ~~has~~ is deaf

—affecting ability to earn a living—

Herman B. Parker
U. S. STEARNS
L. SCHWARTZ Surgeon, P. H. and M. H. S.
In Charge.

To the Commissioner of Immigration. 11-129

Medical Certificate:

Pinchos Lemlich

Arrived July 25, 07

This is to certify that the above-described alien is deaf.

and Naturalization was issued by Herbert Knox Smith, Acting Secretary, Commissioner of Immigration: "... This alien was assisted to reach the US and arrives at Ellis Island in destitute circumstances. The medical certificate against him is for deafness. The parties to whom he is destined are related to him by marriage only, and are under no obligation either legally or morally to render him the assistance that would doubtless be required should his landing be authorized. The Department after careful consideration of the record, dismissed the appeal on the first instant, and now sees no reason to changing such decision."



Abram Bekelman
fellow passenger and
brother-in-law of
Pinchos Lemlich

Pinchos Lemlich, my relative, was deported following this final ruling, never to be heard from again. Feige and Morris Broitman, Avrum Bekelman and his family and many other family members who continued to arrive on these shores for several more years, all found gainful employment and lived comfortable, if not luxurious, lives. I can only imagine that Pinchos Lemlich also would have persevered with the support of his family, have brought his wife and child to America, and have lived the American dream if not for a handicap,

and what I perceive as the unbending rulings of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization.

As I stated at the beginning of this article, I find connections to the Straus family everywhere. I find it ironic that my own family, from a completely different background and socioeconomic strata than the Strauses, had a connection to them too!

SHS Presentations

by Catherine McIlvaine Smith

Once again, Joan Adler and I traveled to Georgia for "Harvest Days in Old Talbot," the eleventh annual weekend hosted by Michael H. and Debbie G. Buckner at the Patsiliga Museum in Junction City, GA.

We arrived Friday evening to a bustling home preparing for a busy weekend. Joan and I helped by bagging flour, corn meal, and grits ground in the gristmill on their property. By the end of the night we were covered in grain dust from head to toe! It was a wonderful experience, getting our hands dirty doing the work that has been done in this gristmill since the 1800s. We imagined the Strauses having this same experience at this same gristmill, or at least witnessing it, when they lived in Talbotton, a few short miles from Junction City.

During the weekend we set up photographs, books and other informational materials in the dining room of Mike and Debbie's antebellum Georgia home. Hundreds of visitors walked through the house and many of them stopped to learn about the Straus family and their connection to Georgia. On Sunday visitors attended

church services held on the lawn in front of the Buckner's home. The sounds of the mill and the steam engine, combined with the smell of the peanut boil and fresh air contributed to this wonderful weekend in Georgia.

The festival was a great success and we are thrilled that we could be a part of it once again. Thank you to Mike and Debbie Buckner who hosted the weekend, and us. We hope to see you all there next year! It is definitely worth the visit.

On Sunday, March 12th Joan will be talking about her book, *For the Sake of the Children: The Letters Between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* There will also be a showing of *No Asylum*, a documentary film on the same topic by Paula Fouce. A Question & Answer session will follow both the talk and film at the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center

of Nassau County, Welwyn Preserve, 100 Crescent Beach Road, Glen Cove, NY 516-571-8040. A flyer will be sent to you as the date approaches. We hope you will join us in Glen Cove.



Joan and Cat bagging grits in the Buckner's gristmill

Press Release: National Museum of American Jewish History Exhibition News

ANNOUNCING 1917: HOW ONE YEAR CHANGED THE WORLD, CO-ORGANIZED BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY IN PHILADELPHIA AND THE AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN NEW YORK

Exhibition is first to illustrate how the events of a single year—America's entry into World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the signing of the Balfour Declaration—triggered fundamental changes that still impact the world today

PHILADELPHIA—The National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) announces the opening of its next special exhibition, 1917: How One Year Changed the World, on March 17, 2017. The exhibition will look back 100 years to explore how the dramatic events of a single year brought about fundamental changes in American politics and culture that reverberated throughout the world and still impact us today. It will be on view at NMAJH in Philadelphia through July 16, 2017 and then travel to New York for its run at the co-organizing institution, the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), from September 1 through December 29, 2017.

1917 is the first exhibition to demonstrate how three key events of that year—America's entry into World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the issuing of the Balfour Declaration, in which Great Britain indicated support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine—brought about political, cultural, and social changes that dramatically reshaped the United States' role

in the world and directly affected everyday Americans. The exhibition will feature approximately 130 artifacts, including an original draft of the Balfour Declaration, to be exhibited in the U.S. for the first time, composer Irving Berlin's draft registration card, a decoded copy of the Zimmermann Telegram, and Justice Louis Brandeis's judicial robes. Through uniforms, letters, photographs, and posters, as well as films, music, and interactive media, 1917 will take visitors on a journey into the trenches of WWI, revolutionary Russia, and debates over the future of Britain's colonial empire in the Middle East.

"The conflicts and consequences of 1917 are often overshadowed by later events, but they determined so much about the American and Jewish experiences thereafter," said Josh Perelman, NMAJH's Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions & Collections. "While the exhibition is anchored in the past, it has powerful relevance to contemporary issues we are facing today, as a nation and as individuals."

The Straus Historical Society is pleased to announce that artifacts from our archival collection will be on loan to the NMAJH and AJHS for the exhibition period. There are plans to take this exhibit on the road around the country once it closes in NYC at the AJSH. A SHS flyer with specific information about this exhibit will be sent to everyone on our mailing list by the beginning of March. It sounds like a not-to-be-missed exhibition that can be seen in either Philadelphia or New York

News From Friends of Straus Park

by Al Berr
photos by Joe Arbo

Leon Auerbach, the principal founder of Friends of Straus Park, passed away last August in Massachusetts, where he had moved several years ago to be near his daughter and her family. He was a long-time resident of West 106th Street, and, during the time of urban unrest during the 1980s and 1990s, he helped form the 106th Street Block Association.

From that vantage point, he and his colleagues persuaded the city of New York to redesign and restore Straus Park which had fallen into disrepair and disuse. That was the impetus for Leon to spearhead the creation of the nonprofit organization Friends of Straus Park in 1997.

For those efforts, Leon received recognition from Mayor Bloomberg and Parks Commissioner Benepe. In the spring of 2003, we planted a dogwood tree in the park in appreciation of Leon's work. We made it a park event. The following poem was presented on that occasion. We include it here in honor and appreciation of a singular man.

Joyce Kilmer said he'd never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
We won't presume to outdo Joyce,
We don't have his poetic voice.

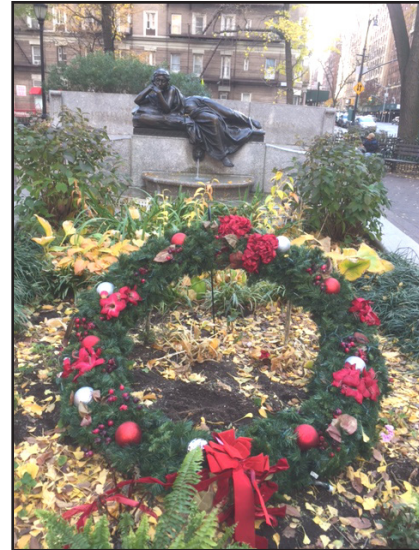
But, from his book, we'll take a leaf
And try to be as plainly brief.
We do concur with him, however.
A tree can be a joy forever.

We do not take our trees for granted:
We value every tree that's planted.
Today, and most especially,
We're here to plant this dogwood tree.

So, may it grace our neighborhood,
As you do, Leon. Knock on wood.



Leon Auerbach and Al Berr at Straus Park - June 2004



Two Renovations

I am pleased to announce that Ruth Hodges has purchased the last house belonging to the Lazarus Straus family in Talbotton, GA. She plans to renovate the house and outbuildings staying true to their historic period. Ruth invited family members and friends to share their stories and to visit her whenever they're near Talbotton. We are planning to return to GA for Mike and Debbie Buckner's "Harvest Days in Old Talbot" the first weekend in November. That would be a wonderful time to visit the house during a family reunion in GA. Please let me know if you are interested in joining us.

I received word from Carola Ibrom from the Tourist Bureau in Otterberg, Germany who informed me that the Straus house in Otterberg was also recently sold. The new owner, Ralph Hennes, is from a nearby town. He is renovating the house with the help of an architect. They've enlarged the house toward the rear and are turning it into five apartments. An informational sign about this being the former house of the Strauses, with information about the family, has been placed on the street in front of the house. The sign is in German. Carola assures me that an English language version is in the works.

We are delighted that Straus heritage is being honored, and preserved, for future generations.



AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support SHS every time you shop on Amazon -- at absolutely no cost to you. You'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to the Straus Historical Society once it is designated for this benefit. This money comes from Amazon's Foundation and is not added to your purchase price.

You must first select Straus Historical Society as your charitable organization by going to smile.amazon.com. You will be prompted to select a charitable organization from almost one million eligible organizations. After your selection, SHS will continue to automatically receive this added bonus for each purchase at no cost to you. After you register, you simply sign onto smile.amazon.com every time you shop in order for SHS to receive this benefit.

We've received two donation checks from AmazonSmile!
Keep on shopping!

Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications

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

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

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

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

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. Published in English by the Straus Historical Society, Inc. Hard cover - \$35.00

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

A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus by June Hall McCash. Extensively researched and beautifully written, author June Hall McCash honors Ida and Isidor Straus' lives in her biography of this remarkable couple. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

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

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