



STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



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Straus is the German word for ostrich

February 2018

COMING SOON: STRAUSES AND THE ARTS

During my many years of research into the history of the Straus family, it has appeared to me that the family had a disproportionate interest in, and aptitude for, art and all things artistic. When I delved more deeply, I found that there were many more members of the family than I expected who were involved in the arts in some manner. There are painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, authors, photographers, quilters, a philharmonic orchestra conductor, a professor of music theory, many collectors and patrons of the arts.

An article in the February 2014 issue of the SHS newsletter contains information about the artistic endeavors of some of the Strauses. Our new book, *Strauses and the Arts*, which is due to be published this year in the late spring, will feature photographs and articles about current family members who are pursuing their passion for art. I interviewed thirty people who are involved in the arts and asked them, not only about their family background and education, but also about their early exposure to the arts. We then talked about their philosophy of art. The responses to my questions were thoughtful and comprehensive. Every artist explained how they felt about their work and described several projects; some that failed and others that succeeded.

Strauses and the Arts, will contain entries about each family artist fashioned from these interviews. It will also include a head shot of the artist and several examples of their work. In conjunction with the release of the book, (which we plan to issue as an ebook), SHS will be conducting a Silent Auction. Each of the featured artists has agreed to donate one or more pieces of their artwork which will be offered for sale during the auction. Further information about this will be forthcoming.

When asked for her definition of art. Mollie Heron, a quilter, said: "The motivation to be artistic comes from within, but it is different for everybody. I find it's within myself since I've started quilting. If I don't, if I'm not creative for a while, I really start to get antsy, fidgety. I think that for me, and I know it is true for several other people, if you don't have the opportunity

to, for instance, quilt, or paint, because of circumstances, then you turn to something else, like cooking. Cooking is very creative. I'm not sure people would call that art. But you know people talk about great chefs. I think that is a form of creativity, a form of being artistic."

Sculptor and educator Laurie McKean spoke about her art during a period when she was teaching in a special education setting, "Art is a way of tasting and celebrating the world. Also, it may aid in making sense of complex situations. In crisis,

it is easy to become hardened, too well-defended and to, in fear, shut off avenues of positive change. I made sculptural armor that was like wearing your insides on the outside. It was full of holes to let light into hidden places. To remain vulnerable to hope and possibility requires courage. I believe art can be a way of waging a different kind of battle. It can be a war in which the enemy is the sense of powerlessness, fear, a way of opening the heart to change. It is, in essence, a war of love, not against other individuals, but against a problem at hand, pro-self and pro-hope."



Watercolor by Irene Pastarnack

Kirsten Theurer, an artist and educator wrote, "I think that for me art is part of the emotional being. There is something about self-expression, how you see the world that comes out in different ways for different people. For me, it's through my art that I can express who I am and where I came from, what the world looks like to me. I luckily was born into a family where we are artists. It came kind of naturally for me. I tend to be an introspective person and do a lot of thinking. Art is almost cathartic. It's therapeutic for me. A way of processing the world."

***If we are not inspired by the past,
where will we find the strength to fight
for our future.***

Paraphrased from a quote by Jackie Kennedy Onassis

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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 Chair:
David H. Kurzman**

I am happy to return to the Chair of the Straus Historical Society after a multi-year hiatus. There is much work to be done. The Board is aggressively taking steps to increase our relevancy with the family and our outreach beyond the family.

There are several topics to discuss, so let's get to it.

Morse Matching Grant

We are fortunate in 2018 to again be eligible for the David A. and Mildred H. Morse Charitable Trust Matching Grant. You will soon receive a request to donate to this important matching grant, which we only receive if sufficient funds are raised. Please join me as I make one of my personal donations for 2018 to help the Straus Historical Society meet its goal to receive these funds. Proceeds from the grant are used directly to fund our operating budget, including the work of the Society's Assistant Director (and new mother!) Catherine McIlvaine Smith.

The Straus Historical Society Scholarship

The Straus family has a wonderful history of public service and philanthropy, starting with Lazarus and Sara Straus, and continuing with their descendants. I am proud to announce that, for the Society's first scholarship, we received 41 applications!

The \$5,000 scholarship will be awarded to a qualified college graduate who has accepted admission to, or is currently enrolled in, a strong graduate program that emphasizes preparing graduate students for a career in public service. The award will be based on academic achievement as well as an essay of 500-1,000 words that describes a social problem the applicant considers important and offers ideas on steps that might be taken to meet that problem. The award money from the Straus Historical Society will be sent directly to the graduate school of the scholarship recipient's choice.

Each essay will be judged by an Award Committee of outside educators with no family relationship to the Strauses or to SHS board members. We expect to announce the recipient of the scholarship in April.

Silent Auction

The committee overseeing the Silent Art Auction has made significant progress. The Auction will be held before the summer. It will be held in conjunction with the release of *Strauses and the Arts*, which Joan Adler (our talented executive director) and Catherine Smith are creating from interviews with family members who are involved in the arts. The book will be available in electronic and paper versions. It will be a great way to learn about many of the artists offering items in the Silent Auction Please email us at info@straushistoricalsociety.org to pre-order your copy.

Where in the World Is Joan Going to Speak Next?

Keep an eye out for Joan Adler as she is giving several talks around the country. She is a great and engaging speaker, and she often brings copies of books available for sale by the Straus Historical Society. If she runs out, we can ship you a copy. Here is an overview of where she will be next:

March 10, 2018: Tucson Festival of Books; The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721.

April 18, 2018: Hadassah Suffolk; The Greens, 1 Altessa Blvd, Melville, NY 11747

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please feel free to email me at dhkurzman@gmail.com.

Titanamania

The world has long been aware of the sacrifice made by Ida Straus when she declined a seat in a Titanic lifeboat and chose to perish alongside Isidor, her husband of 41 years. There have been movies, a Broadway play, books, poems, songs and thousands of articles written about the Titanic disaster and about those who lost their lives on April 15, 1912. The passage of time, even after more than one hundred years, seems only to enhance, rather than dampen the interest in all things Titanic. While we have written about the Strauses and their experience aboard Titanic before, it seems that the 20th anniversary of the release of James Cameron's film, *Titanic*, has reawakened what historians and enthusiasts alike call Titanamania.

For the Straus family, this is a personal story about the relationship of their beloved ancestors. The ending is well known, but bears revisiting, not only due to the continued interest, but also because it provides an opportunity to correct some pervasive misinformation.

[Articles about the Strauses and Titanic can be found on the SHS website: www.straushistoricalsociety.org Go to the drop down menu on the left hand side of the Home Page. Select Archives and then Newsletters. You can scroll down to view all past issues of the newsletter. Click on the first page of each newsletter to access the entire newsletter. Articles about the Strauses and the Titanic appeared in the August 1995, August 2005, August 2007, August 2010, February 2011, February 2012 and August 2012 issues.]

Isidor and Ida Blun Straus sailed to Europe on January 6, 1912 aboard the Caronia. He was 67 and she was four years younger. They shared the same birthdate, February 6th. He was born in Otterberg and she was born in Worms, both located in the Rheinpfalz area of southwestern Germany. The Straus and Blun families knew each other before separately immigrating to America.

Isidor, his mother Sara and siblings Hermine, Nathan and Oscar followed their father Lazarus who immigrated in 1852, arriving in New York on September 13, 1854 on the maiden voyage of the mail ship St. Louis. Nathan Blun had arrived in New York in 1850 and his wife Wilhelmina and their five children came the following year. And, while the Lazarus Straus family settled in rural Georgia, the Bluns settled in New York. (Later, the Blun's daughter Amanda married Columbus, GA resident Frank Rothschild, a close friend of the Strauses.) During the Civil War, Isidor was sent abroad to sell cotton in England. He was to buy military supplies for the agrarian south and to commission the building of blockade running ships. On his way to Europe, Isidor stopped in New York where he had a letter of introduction from his friend Amanda

Blun Rothschild to her father, Nathan Blun. Amanda's much younger sister Ida was just fourteen, too young to woo but old enough to notice. Upon his parent's move to New York after the war, Isidor renewed his acquaintance with the lovely young woman and her family and on July 12, 1871 Isidor and Ida were married at the home of her father.

Their's was an uncommon love story. We have copies of hundreds of letters they wrote to each other every time they were separated. Even though it was still the Victorian Era, when women generally did not express their passions, Ida wrote that she was looking forward to the time when their imagined love making would come to an end, upon Isidor's return.



Isidor and Ida Straus
at the Folies Bergère
April 4, 1907

And so, when we learn of Ida's refusal to leave Isidor's side when Titanic was sinking, and to choose death with him rather than a life without him, we should not be surprised, even though we might not choose it ourselves. That is what piques our fascination; and reels us in.

Discovery and Retrieval of Artifacts

In 1985 Dr. Robert Ballard of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute led a joint French-American expedition of discovery. On the last possible day of exploration, they discovered the Titanic resting on the sea floor at a depth of 12,460 feet. Since that time, hundreds of people have visited the site in small robotic submarines, and thousands of artifacts have been removed from the ship and the sea floor. This retrieval has caused intense discussion about whether this area should remain an international memorial.

After a court hearing, RMS Titanic, Inc. was granted the right of removal and display of artifacts under stringent guidelines. Nothing brought up can be sold other than small pieces of coal.

Ellen Bird

When the Strauses traveled to Europe in January 1912, Marie, Ida's maid, and John Farthing, Isidor's valet, accompanied them. On April 4th, Ida wrote to her children from Claridges Hotel in London, "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 I do not know whether I can count on her." The "nice English girl" decided at the last minute not to go to America. Ellen Bird, a woman from the hamlet of Staxford in rural Norfolk, UK was hired as a last minute replacement.

Ellen Bird was the daughter of shepherd Samuel Bird and his wife Maryann. She was born in 1881, one of eleven children. Little is known about her until she was hired as the maid to Ida Straus in 1912. John Balls, the author of *Titanic: The Norfolk Survivors*, suggested the possibility that Ellen worked in one of the large country houses in Norfolk prior to her employment by the Strauses, and that a recommendation by the employer is how the Strauses found her. On April 10th Ellen traveled with the Strauses from London to Southampton where they boarded the great ship. She was assigned to cabin C97. John Farthing, Isidor's valet, was assigned cabin C95. Their cabins were across the hall from the Straus' suite, first class cabins C-55-57.

John Balls wrote about Ida and Ellen after the ship and the iceberg collided. "At first Mrs. Straus seemed uncertain what to do. At one point she handed some small jewellery [sic] to her maid, Ellen Bird, then took it back again. Later she crossed the boat deck and almost entered Lifeboat 8 – then turned around and rejoined Mr. Straus. Now her mind was made up. 'We have been living together for many years. Where you go, I go.' Many people are reported to have tried to get Ida to enter a lifeboat but she staunchly refused, knowingly choosing to perish with her husband than to live without him."

Ida gave her fur coat to her maid, explaining that she no longer needed it and that Ellen would be cold in the lifeboat. After the rescue ship Carpathia reached New York, Ellen Bird visited the Strauses eldest daughter, Sara Straus Hess, offering to return the coat. Sara simply said that her mother had given the coat to Ellen and she should keep it. Although we would like to learn what became of the coat, we are not aware of any further information about it.

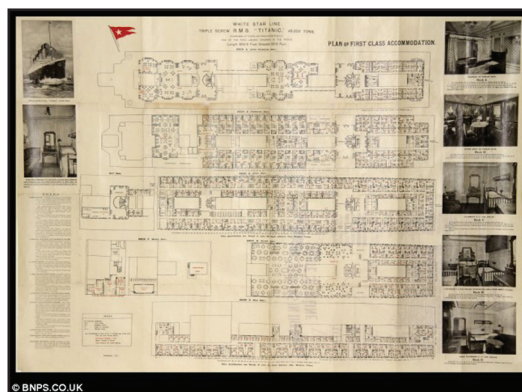
When the 324 first class passengers boarded Titanic in Southampton, they were given a deck plan that would help them navigate the massive ship. It folded down into a booklet with schematics of the decks and photographs of the first class public rooms. It was headed: White Star Line, Southampton-Cherbourg-New York Service, First-Class Accommodations. Ellen Bird had that deck plan with her when she boarded Lifeboat 8. It survived with her, one of only three known copies to survive. Two of those copies are in private collections, and

Ellen's copy, which seems to have been stored quite carefully, in the dark and laid out flat, was made available for auction in October 2011. Auctioneer Andrew Aldridge of Henry Aldridge & Sons in Davizes, Wiltshire, UK said, "This represents the zenith of collectables pertaining to Titanic." The deck plan brought 30,000 Pounds, about \$36,610 US. The same buyer bought a photograph of Isidor Straus at that auction for \$20,746 US.



Ellen Bird

Once the furor over Titanic died down, and after she had given her testimony before the U.S. Senate Inquiry, Ellen went to work for the family of another Titanic survivor, Daisy Spedden who lived in Tuxedo, NY. Coincidentally, in January 1912 the Speddens had traveled to Europe on the same ship as the Strauses.



Copy of the Titanic deck plan that Ellen Bird had with her when she was saved.

Ellen married Edward Beattie, a yacht captain, on June 3, 1914 at the Church of the Transfiguration in New York. The couple had one daughter who died at the age of two. Ellen, (who was known as Nellie), and Edward lived in several states and seemed to have been in service together, spending 25 years in Newport, RI in the employ of a prominent family. Edward was let go and, since the family wanted a married couple to work for them, Ellen was also relieved of her duties. They moved to Boston where Edward worked at a hotel restaurant. During this time, he served Jesse Isidor Straus, Isidor and Ida's oldest son. Edward introduced himself to Jesse explaining that he was the husband of Ellen Bird. This story is well known to the family but no one remembered the man's name until John Balls sent me his interesting book that contained the article about Ellen Bird. She died in 1949 and is buried in Acushnet Cemetery in MA where several of Ellen's siblings and family members are buried. Her husband died in 1963 and is buried beside her.

Museums, Exhibitions and Historical Societies

There have been permanent displays and traveling exhibitions that have attracted the attention of millions. Very often these exhibitions include actors who are dressed in period costumes and who portray actual crew members and passengers aboard the great ship. Several descendants of Isidor and Ida Straus have visited these exhibits and have identified themselves as Straus descendants to the actors portraying their ancestors. It is always an emotional experience for all.

Perhaps RMS Titanic, Inc, the salvors, has the greatest number of exhibits of all the commercial ventures. They can be found in Guangdong Sheng, China; Torino, Italy; at the Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV; in Orlando, FL and in Flint, MI. <http://www.premiereexhibitions.com/corporate/all/rms-titanic-inc>

Another commercial venture is the very successful Titanic Museum Attractions in Branson, MO and in Pigeon Forge, TN. At both these sites large scale replicas of the ship have been created which tourists can walk through. Interactive displays include replicas of the Straus' stateroom that include photographs, letters and albums on loan from the Straus Historical Society. A new exhibit at the Titanic Museum Attraction celebrates the accomplishments of several women who were aboard Titanic, including Ida Straus. The Pigeon Forge location also displays Isidor Straus' wedding band, recovered with his body after the sinking, also on loan from SHS. <http://www.titanicpigeonforge.com/>

Recovered bodies of the victims of the Titanic disaster were brought by the ship, Mackay Bennett, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where three local cemeteries received them. The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic tells the story of Titanic's creation and demise, drawing out the key role which Halifax played after the disaster. While Titanic's survivors went to New York, all who perished came to Halifax. <https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/>

A recent addition to the growing list of sites focused on Titanic is the Harland and Wolff Shipyard in Belfast, Ireland where the Titanic and her sister ship, the Olympia, were built. Titanic Belfast extends over nine interactive galleries, with multiple dimensions to the exhibition. They invite visitors to explore the shipyard, and to virtually travel to the depths of the ocean to uncover the true legend of Titanic in the city where it all began. <http://titanicbelfast.com/>

The Jewish-American Hall of Fame was founded by Mel Wacks in 1969 at the Magnes Museum in Berkeley, CA. It became a division of the American Jewish Historical Society in 2001. Their award-winning website came under the auspices of the American Numismatic Society in 2012 because they had issued medals for many of the historical events they feature. More than a million visitors a year take the virtual tour through 500 years of Jewish-American history. Mel wrote about a 1968 medal designed to commemorate Jewish lives associated with Titanic. "This limited edition medal was designed by Mel Wacks and sculpted by the award-winning artist Alex Shagin. It features a poignant scene of a crowded lifeboat with the Titanic sliding into the ocean. The other side is split diagonally into two parts, each using a different sculptural technique. The upper half features an incused engraving of the heroic lovers, Mr. and Mrs. Straus, in each other's arms. David Sarnoff is depicted in high relief on the lower half, surrounded by his pioneering 'wireless' equipment." <http://www.amuseum.org/jahf/>



Titanic historians have turned to the Titanic Historical Society in Indian Orchard, MA since its inception for information and Titanic related events. Their website states, "The Titanic Historical Society, Inc. (THS), established in 1963, is the premier source for Titanic and White Star Line information. THS is the original and largest Titanic society in the world. Nearing the half-century mark, our mission of preserving the great ship's history can be seen in our outstanding publications, Titanic Museum and annual themed events." Paul Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus, and I participated in their annual convention in 2012, on the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the great ship, and can attest to the popularity of THS's events and the dedication of Titanic enthusiasts. The Titanic Commutator, THS's glossy periodical, has a well-deserved, wide readership. <http://www.titanichistoricalsociety.org/>

Rose Amélie Icard

Another Titanic survivor was Rose Amélie Icard who traveled aboard Titanic as a companion to Mrs. Martha Evelyn Stone. She was born in 1872 in Vaucluse, France. The two were rescued by the Carpathia from lifeboat 6. In 1955 Rose Amélie Icard wrote about their experiences. Translated from French: "It was Mrs. Stone who took the tickets in London and told me she was delighted that we were going to embark on the most beautiful liner. Nights before I had dreamed of death, of trunks smashed open, maybe a presentiment told me that I would not have chosen the Titanic. Captain Smith, even though on the verge of retiring, was designated by the White Star Line to command this floating palace for her maiden voyage. I can still see him, a handsome old man with a white beard. It was him [sic] who helped me get in the lifeboat. During the four days that the ephemeral cruise lasted in the splendid transatlantic there was constant truly royal luxurious receptions, ceremonial dinners, the most sumptuous clothes, a dazzling display of jewelry, diamond riviére, worthy of oriental splendor. ... While the liner was at full speed a horrifying shock threw us out of bed. ... I took a coat, my lifejacket and followed her (Mrs. Stone) on deck. There I found my travelling blanket and my fur coat left on my long chair. They consequently proved to miraculously protect me. ... Next to me were two handsome elderly people, Mr. and Mrs. Straus, owners of Macy's Department Stores in New York. She refused to get in the lifeboat after having let her maid get in it. She hung to her husband's neck while telling him, 'We have been married for so many years. We



Rose Amélie Icard
1951

never were apart. I want to die with you.” This lengthy letter and its translation was shared with SHS by Mike Delgado who purchased it at auction.

Why Titanic?

It has been suggested that the reason the Strauses chose to sail aboard Titanic was because it was the newest, largest, most luxurious ship in the transatlantic fleet. I regularly receive emails explaining that Isidor and his beloved brother Nathan and their wives were traveling around Europe together. When they reached Palestine, Nathan was so moved by the poverty of the people, he decided to stay and devote a significant portion of the rest of his life to helping them. The story continues, that Isidor was so disgusted with the poverty that he decided to leave. And, because he was unfeeling and mercenary, he booked passage on the most expensive ship, while Nathan stayed in Palestine to help people, and this is the reason why Isidor and Ida died while Nathan and Lina were spared. However, there is nothing whatsoever in the facts to support this. I direct our readers to the article, “Debunking the Story,” that appeared in the August 2007 issue of the SHS newsletter.

Isidor and Ida spent much of the winter of 1912 in Europe, arriving in London in early April. At the time, there was a coal strike crippling British industry. Available coal was being diverted from other ships and loaded on the Titanic for its maiden voyage. After all, it was the most famous ship of the day -- the largest, most luxurious and unsinkable ship in the White Star fleet. And so, when Isidor and Ida booked passage onboard the Titanic, it simply was the only ship scheduled to sail at the time they wished to go home. They had not been in Palestine with Nathan and Lina Straus nor were they the kind of people who would be disgusted, (as suggested in these articles), by the unfortunate circumstances of their fellowman. Like his brother Nathan, Isidor was a philanthropist who quietly worked to alleviate poverty, served to better conditions of the working poor, and to increase health care throughout the world. One could find no better example of philanthropy and humanitarianism than to look toward the Straus family and their many deeds aimed to alleviate suffering.

Current Articles and Documentaries

James Cameron produced the blockbuster movie, *Titanic*, in 1997. And, although he vowed to produce a movie that was authentic to the story, he did take many creative liberties including portraying the Strauses clutching one another in bed in their stateroom while the waters of the Atlantic engulfed them. We know from witness statements that this is not how the Strauses spent their last moments. Nonetheless, like all other Titanic related information, the movie captured the public's imagination and rekindled a new wave of Titanamania.

In December 2017 Cameron released a 20th anniversary documentary commemorating the release of his movie. Several Titanic historians and descendants of Titanic passengers including Paul A. Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida were invited to fly to CA for an interview and tour of the Titanic exhibit at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in

Simi Valley. Paul's article about his experience can be found immediately following this article.

Cameron's resulting documentary was shown to a wide audience on the National Geographic channel in December 2017 and, true to past experience, it captured the imagination of its fascinated viewers. It wasn't long after its airing that SHS began to get requests for Paul to give interviews to publications that were planning to write articles about the Strauses and the Titanic.

Articles appeared in *Time*, *Country Living* and *Life*. Links to these articles may be found on the next pages along with an article written by Paul detailing his experiences with James Cameron, (sometimes called "The Great Man,") including his interview and visit to the Titanic exhibit at the Reagan Library.

Members of the Straus family and the Straus Historical Society are pleased that Isidor and Ida's the legacy of love and honor has not been forgotten. We celebrate the lives, and death, of these two noble people who chose to die together rather than to live apart. Which of us can say we would make the same decision?

"Lovely and pleasant were they in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided."

11 Samuel 1:23



Straus Family Mausoleum
Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY
Isidor's body is buried inside the gate below
the replica of the Egyptian funeral boat

An Interview with "The Great Man," James Cameron by Paul A. Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus

The RMS Lusitania sunk at sea with the loss of 1,200 lives, merely 3 years after the loss of the RMS Titanic, yet how many books and films have been made about the tragedy of the Lusitania – even though many historians in part have blamed its sinking for America's actual entry into World War I? There must be something unique about the experience of the Titanic that it is still able to capture the imagination of a worldwide audience now, more than 100 years later. And indeed, for the famed film director James Cameron, the fascination has long been present, and his rationale for making the Academy Award winning movie simply titled, "Titanic".

Cameron, a Canadian billionaire philanthropist, filmmaker, entrepreneur, and explorer, served as creator and director of the film, first issued in 1997. It cost a then record-breaking \$200 million to make, grossed a record \$2 billion, lasted more than three hours, received 14 Oscar nominations in 1998, and won a remarkable 11 Oscars, including for Best Picture and Best Director. In the industry, Cameron soon became known as "The Great Man", and the movie launched its stars, Kate Winslet and Leonardo Di Caprio, to fame. Now, 20 years after the movie's debut, The Great Man decided that he wanted to make a TV film, in cooperation with National Geographic Television, to look back and to celebrate the film, and his subsequent research on the great ship Titanic. Titled "Titanic: 20 Years Later", the one-hour TV special was first shown on November 26, 2017 – exactly twenty years after the original movie's introduction in Hollywood. This new National Geographic hour-long program was designed in large part to feature the stories of three well-known people who were aboard the Titanic when it sank: John Jacob Astor IV and his young bride Madeleine, Margaret [The Unsinkable Molly] Brown, and Ida and Isidor Straus.

James Cameron's interest in and commitment to the story of the Titanic is one of legend. Isidor's locket, found on his body after the Titanic disaster He has personally made 33 dives to explore the Titanic wreckage, and was the one who discovered the elaborate Straus stateroom and suite (much by accident) in one of his later dives. It was in good shape, with the beautiful clock (shown in National Geographic Magazine's 2012 feature article) still secure on the fireplace mantle. He was thrilled! Cameron decided to pour a good deal of his own funds into this 20th Anniversary film project, and invited descendants of each of the three "famous families" to come to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, in Simi Valley, California, this past August to partake in the National Geographic film making project. Jacqueline Astor Drexel, granddaughter of the Astors; Muffet Brown, great granddaughter of Margaret [Molly] Brown; and myself, a great

grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus, represented the families whom Cameron selected to be interviewed.

The Reagan Library site was chosen since it was housing a major new 10,000 square foot temporary exhibition on the Titanic, replete with original materials and artifacts both from the 1985 discovery of the ship at the bottom of the sea, as well as set pieces from Cameron's 1997 movie. [<https://www.reaganfoundation.org/programs-events/webcasts-and-podcasts/podcasts/inside-the-reagan-library-titanic-at-the-reagan-library/>] Establishing a major Titanic exhibit at the

Presidential Library (which just ended its run) was in tribute to President Reagan who initiated and then signed the 1986 RMS Titanic Memorial Act to designate the wreck an international maritime memorial from which no artifacts could be removed. [www.reaganfoundation.org/media/127839/titanic-lead-press-release.pdf]

Cameron was meticulous in ensuring the authenticity of facts and objects in the movie, and retained three Titanic historians – Parks Stephenson, Ken Marschall, and Don Lynch -- to guide him in every step along the way. Nonetheless, as film director, Cameron took what he called "artistic license" on many occasions. Of course, there were no characters (or romance) such as that which was portrayed by Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet; First Officer William Murdoch did not shoot a passenger, or himself; and Isidor and Ida Straus were not in their stateroom when the ship went down at sea. Such were the artistic liberties that Cameron inserted, in part to enhance the drama of the screenplay. (I did indeed scold him regarding the inaccurate portrayal of Isidor and Ida, and he did then graciously insert, in this National Geographic special, their authentic discussion on deck about entering a lifeboat, which had been filmed, but ultimately cut from the original movie.) This scene is so important, because in both text and spirit, Ida's words remind us of the beautiful verse in the Old Testament's Book of Ruth [1:16-17] when Ruth says to Naomi, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay....and where you die, I will die, and there I too will be buried".

While much of the National Geographic TV special (shown in 171 countries, in 45 languages) focuses on Cameron's fixation with how the RMS Titanic sank, and how it lowered its lifeboats, the personal stories of the descendants were the feature. Kate Winslet's original film stateroom was in fact modeled on the Straus' suite (which is so noted here in the TV version). It was beautifully replicated at the Reagan Library exhibit, along with the famous clock on the fireplace mantel, as well as authentic



Paul A. Kurzman,
great grandson of
Isidor and Ida Straus



deckchairs, life jackets and similar memorabilia. [www.imdb.com/title/tt7620568/mediaviewer/rm1697340416] Cameron himself was not in California when we descendants arrived, but later landed at the Los Angeles airport, where his private helicopter brought him to the helicopter landing pad that Nancy Reagan had insisted be constructed adjacent to the Presidential Library. Soon we heard the National Geographic project manager say, "The Great Man is landing, everyone on deck", and James Cameron arrived to greet us all. I presented him with a copy of *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus*, and we sat down to talk, with 18 cameras recording sight and sound! As always, Cameron was very interested in seeing Isidor's locket; with discussing Ida and Isidor's mutual decision to remain on board; and their heroic commitment to dying as they had lived -- together.

SHS was also contacted by two online feature news programs: Country Living.com and Today.com, both of which were interested in running 20th anniversary stories in tandem with James Cameron's special. Rose Minutaglio of Hearst Digital Media and Country Living.com posted quite a long story, teasingly titled "The Tragic True Story Behind Titanic's Cuddling Lovers", including the deleted scene of the Strauses on deck from the 1997 film; an original news article on Ida and Isidor's decision to stay aboard; photographs of the couple at the time of their wedding and five years prior to their death; and of course, of Isidor's locket. [www.countryliving.com/life/

inspirational-stories/a46065/titanic-cuddling-couple-true-story]

Gina Vivinetto of Today.com wrote a good piece for Today's online "popculture newsletter", once again featuring Isidor's gold and onyx locket; Ida's gift of her mink coat to her maid, Ellen Bird (who tried to return it to my grandmother who refused, saying it was her mother's gift to Ellen); and my reference to the Book of Ruth as a guidepost for Ida's decision to remain with Isidor, rather than be saved. [www.today.com/popculture/great-grandson-elderly-titanic-couple-shares-their-real-story-t120095]

I insisted that Today.com end their story with proper credit to the Straus Historical Society, which they graciously agreed to do. It reads: "Learn more about Isidor and Ida Straus's remarkable story on the website of the Straus Historical Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the achievements for educational and research purposes of the family of Lazarus and Sara Straus".

All in all, it was a busy but satisfying experience, and I am most grateful to James Cameron, in particular, for his tribute to the three families aboard the Titanic, each of which made a great sacrifice to uphold principles which they felt were dear to their lives, and their legacies.



Left: Photograph of a reproduction of the clock found in the Titanic stateroom of Isidor and Ida Straus
Right: Actual image of the same clock taken during a robotic visit to Titanic on the sea floor
Photo credit: Ken Marschall



Photo: from left to right: Ken Marschall, Parks Stephenson, Don Lynch, Muffet Laurie Brown (great granddaughter of Margaret Brown), James Cameron, Paul Kurzman, Jacqueline Drexel (granddaughter of John Jacob and Madeline Astor) and Nicholas Drexel (great grandson of the Astors) at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library for the production of *Titanic: 20 Years Later with James Cameron* in August 2017.

Photo Credit: James Glader

2017 List of Donors to SHS

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society wishes to thank those who made contributions in 2017. Your generosity made it possible to continue the important work of SHS.

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An Update: The Straus Historical Society Scholarship Program

The Straus Historical Society Scholarship Program, as announced in our August 2017 newsletter, is proceeding on schedule.

The Program's Administrative Committee, consisting of SHS board members Richard Gerstman, Al Berr, and Liza Loop, has chosen three educational institutions to participate in the Program's initial year. They are: The School of International Service at American University in Washington D. C., The Long Island University School of Business and Public Administration in New York, and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Massachusetts. They are all esteemed and honored for their schools of public service.



We plan to award \$5,000 this spring to an exceptional college student who has been accepted to a graduate program in preparation for a career in public service, a field in which the Straus family has had a long and honored history. The award will be based on academic achievement and the submission of an application that will include an essay which should reflect the contribution that the applicant anticipates making in the field of public service.

The Administrative Committee has chosen three people who are eminent in the field to serve on the Award Committee. They will evaluate the students' applications and select the scholarship recipient: James Doig, Visiting Professor of Government, Dartmouth College; Donald Greenberg, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Fairfield University; and Marc Holzer, Distinguished Professor, Institute for Public Service, Suffolk University.

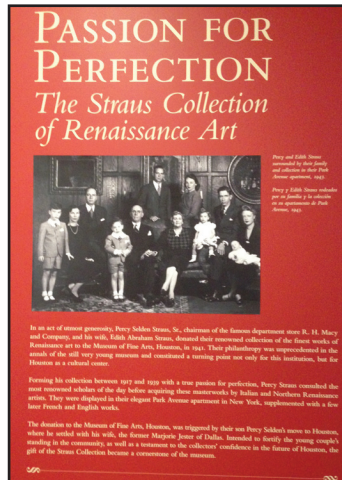
The application period began in November 2017 and closed at the end of January 2018. We have received a good number of applications (41) which will be evaluated by members of the Award Committee during February and March. The Award will be announced in April, and an Award Ceremony will take place on a date to be determined.

We are also gratified to report that we have received pledges and special contributions toward the Scholarship Program and for what we expect will be the first year of an ongoing commitment. Of course, we will continue to be delighted to receive future contributions earmarked to support this scholarship program which SHS considers to be an investment in the future of public service.

Passion for Perfection: The Straus Collection of Renaissance Art At The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Through June 17, 2018

When Edith and Percy Straus gave their remarkable collection of European art to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 1941, their generous donation marked a turning point for the MFAH.

Since the Museum's opening in 1924, its European collection had been relatively insignificant—a situation that changed dramatically with the Straus gift. The 83 objects that arrived in late 1944, after Percy Straus passed away, not only formed the cornerstone of the European art department, but also put the MFAH firmly on the map. Building on his father's collection of Italian Renaissance paintings, Percy, together with his wife Edith, had acquired mainly Italian paintings of the late medieval and early Renaissance period, carefully guided by the best scholars in the field.



Two artists—the painters of the Straus Madonna and the Sienese Straus Madonna—are named in honor of this collection that comprises their masterworks. Works by outstanding masters like Fra Angelico, Giovanni di Paolo, and Bartolomeo Veneto continue to be highlights of the MFAH collection.

Besides these Italian paintings, the Straus Collection also includes exceptional works by Northern Renaissance masters such as Hans Memling and Rogier van der Weyden, as well as a number of 18th-century French and English paintings and works on paper. A fine group of Italian Renaissance bronzes, and a number of Northern and French sculptures from the 15th to 18th century, add yet another dimension to the collection.

Audrey Jones Beck Building, 5601 Main Street, Houston, TX 77005 through June 17, 2018

Straus Presentations

by Catherine McIlvaine Smith

Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles, October 8, 2017 San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society

October 15 & 16, 2017

Joan gave presentations at JGSLA and to two groups of the SFBAJGS. At each venue she presented, *My Family: I Could Write a Book*, suggesting several methods of documenting the stories of a family in book or newsletter form in a way that is not overwhelming, even for those who feel they have no writing talent. She told fascinating and funny stories about Straus family members as a platform upon which to illustrate her points. She brought several examples of the kinds of books and newsletters that are easy to create and of a professional quality. In the end, each person came away with many new ideas and the inspiration to try their hand at a writing project. The talks were well attended and Joan received very positive feedback.

Meadowbrook Women's Initiative, January 24, 2018

On Wednesday, January 24 at 1 pm, Joan Adler gave a presentation to the Meadowbrook Women's Initiative at the Levittown Library, on Long Island, New York. Her talk was about her book, *For the Sake of the Children: The Letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* About 50 people attended this event and, after the talk, participated in a lively Q&A with Joan.

Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento February 18, 2018

On Sunday, February 18, Joan Adler spoke to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento. Once again, Joan gave the presentation, *My Family: I Could Write a Book*, which was followed by Q&A. The event was enthusiastically received.

During her trip to the Bay Area, Joan visited with several Straus family members.

Upcoming Events

Secular Humanist Jewish Circle, March 9, 2018 Tucson Festival of Books, March 10, 2018

On March 9, from 5 to 7pm, Joan will give a presentation to the Secular Humanist Jewish Circle in Tucson, Arizona. The event will include a brief Shabbat service and potluck dinner. Joan will be speaking about her book, *For the Sake of the Children: Letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* Although this is a private event hosted at the neighborhood clubhouse of a member, it is a part of Joan's participation in the Tucson Festival of Books, held the following day.

On Saturday, March 10, Joan Adler will be displaying her book, *For the Sake of the Children: Letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* at the Tucson Festival of Books. Her booth will be located in the Indie Author Pavilion Adult Non-Fiction from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm. Her book will also be available for sale. The Tucson Festival of Books will be held at The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721. This event is open to the public.

Hadassah Suffolk, April 18, 2018

On Wednesday, April 18, Joan will be giving a presentation about her book, *For the Sake of the Children: Letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* to Hadassah of Suffolk. The talk will take place at The Greens at Half Hollow, located in Melville, NY 11747. Joan is excited to return to the Greens at Half Hollow, having given a presentation to the Men's Club in July of 2015.

Friends of Straus Park

by Al Berr

Photographs by Joe Arbo

After two successive years of disappointments, the weather decided, on this past September 23rd, to bless us with a perfectly acceptable autumn day on which to hold our annual Art in the Park event. When plans for the event have to be altered or cancelled, it is not only difficult logistically, but costly as well for items such as park permits, equipment rental, insurance, and contract penalties. However, this year all went well, for which we and our park supporters were grateful.

Art in the Park is called a Day Long Celebration of Art, Food and Music. This year's festivities certainly filled the bill. Our customary musical quartet, the Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, performed their signature old-time tunes in their inimitable renditions, and they were as popular as ever. On the occasions that we have presented them, the personnel have changed, but the character and quality of their music remain constant.

A recent addition to our board, Ian Richardson, brought some of the Titanic memorabilia from his extensive maritime collection. Also, he gave a brief talk about the ship, its construction, and its last moments. The heartwarming story of Isidor and Ida Straus and the Titanic continues to hold its fascination.

We displayed some vintage photographs from our collection which aroused interest from a number of park visitors. One photo, of the crowd in the park on April 15, 1915 at the park's dedication, drew particular attention. We would guess that the only other time that the park was so populated was in April 2012 at our Titanic centennial event. Other interesting photos were of the Straus residence more than a century ago at Broadway and 105th Street and looking more suburban than urban. Friends of Straus Park board members were, as always, eager to respond to questions about the history of the Straus family and the park.

Several artists displayed their creations, which they offered for sale. Each year the artists who show their paintings, illustrations, drawings and photographs bring a new and exciting dimension to our event which, based on the comments of the park's visitors, is most welcome.

As usual, we received many compliments on the look of the park, especially the beautiful fall plantings, which is the work of our indefatigable gardener and horticulturist Joe Arbo. All in all, a very satisfying event.

At this writing, we have not yet finalized our plans for our annual Titanic commemoration but it will likely take place on Saturday, April 14. Please check our website www.fospark.com for details. Information about the park and about our planned events may also be found on our Facebook page where one can be kept apprised of our news and about upcoming events in the park.



Above: Artists with their artwork for sale
Below: Blue Vipers of Brooklyn



Above: Straus table with photographs and articles about the Straus family
Below: Memory in winter



Did You Know

Endogamy is the custom of marrying within the limits of a local community or family. Jewish families are among those groups where endogamy is prevalent, making it difficult to tease out the relationships between people. This is the case with the Straus family where, not only did cousins marry, but naming customs reveal that there are many family members with the exact same name.

An example of endogamy can be found when, in 1838, Lazarus Straus married Davora (Fannie) Levi. The two were related to one another through five different familial relationships.

Fannie Levi Straus died in 1843, and in 1844, Lazarus married his first cousin Sara. Her father Salomon was the brother of Lazarus' father Isaak. Salomon was married three times. Two of his wives were sisters. He had children with each of his wives, further complicating the family tree.

There are six different Lazarus Strauses and eight Sara/Sarah Strauses in our database. Teasing out the relationship of any two individuals in this family becomes quite a puzzle. One could be the aunt, half-sister, first cousin and first cousin once removed to the same person. Straus genealogy is fun!



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We've received several donation checks from AmazonSmile!
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**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 is a specific photograph or article you wish to purchase.