

A white rectangular banner with a thin black border. In the center, the text "Follow Us!" is written in a black serif font. Below this, the text "Stay up to date with the latest SHS news, upcoming events, and interesting family history!" is written in a black serif font. On the left side, there is a blue Facebook 'f' logo. On the right side, there is a blue Twitter bird logo. At the bottom left, there is an Instagram logo (a camera icon with a rainbow gradient). At the bottom right, there is a red YouTube play button logo. In the center of the banner, below the main text, are the social media handles "@StrausHistoricalSociety" and "@StrausHistory" in a black serif font, stacked vertically.

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

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

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A Message from SHS Board Member Alex More



I am thrilled to be a newly elected member of the Straus Historical Society's board of directors. SHS was originally envisioned and launched by my grandfather, Robert K Straus. I am honored that I can help to carry on the great work he started, and that Joan Adler and SHS have continued. The purpose of SHS is to research, collect and disseminate the stories and history of the Straus family, their ancestors and their descendants, of which I am one.

This work started 30 years ago as a personal passion project. But with the rise in access to technology, including widely available genetic testing from companies like 23andMe, and the growth of sites such as Ancestry.com to the digitization and searchability of public records, etc. people's interest in genealogy, ancestry and family history has never been higher. I feel so fortunate to know so much about the incredible stories of those who came before me through the amazing work done by the SHS.

One of my missions is to continue the great work of Joan, Cat, the board of directors, and our many supporters, for years to come. With this in mind, we have launched a new social media strategy in the effort to reach even more people, especially the younger generations, who would be interested in the Straus family's extensive history in public service, business and philanthropy. Understanding that we spend more and more time online, and on our phones, we want to make sure we meet people where they are, while they are discovering and consuming information, photos and news.

Last November, we launched a new Instagram channel, refocused our Facebook page and are working to grow our Twitter presence. We will be using these platforms to share fascinating stories about the Straus family and their impactful contributions, from R. H. Macy & Company and the Titanic, to historic government policy and community programs. We are highlighting "this day in history," introducing our amazing scholarship winners who carry on the tradition of public service, and providing updates on SHS, upcoming events, projects, Straus Park and more!

Please follow, like, comment, save and share on your preferred platforms. If you have any requests, suggestions or questions you would like answered, please feel free to reach out to us directly.

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Thank you for your continued support!

A Note from Joan Adler: I am delighted to welcome Alex to SHS's board of directors. She has served on the Social Media Committee for a year and has proven to be an invaluable member of that committee. I look forward to working with Alex as a member of the board of directors of SHS and on the Social Media Committee.

they bought a luxurious Lower Saranac Lake house that was situated on four and half acres just west of the Algonquin Hotel. They also acquired an additional 33 acres. The house was built by architect E. J. Dunning, Jr. The original Dunning camp, built in the autumn of 1881 and the spring of 1882, was the first luxurious house erected in the area. It had real plumbing. Both the fixtures and the plumbers were imported from New York City. It is possible that Nathan Straus knew Dunning since Dunning was a well-known financier whose business was in the city.

According to local residents, Nathan and Lina Straus were friendly with Fred W. Rice, a guide and boat builder, and his wife Kitty, who lived a short distance down the lake toward Ampersand Bay. The story, as told by Maitland De Sormo in his book, *Summers on the Saranac*, is that Mrs. Straus tried to adopt a baby from Mrs. Rice and pay \$10,000 for that privilege. The Strauses had lost a daughter, who died at age two on a ship going to Europe. Kitty Rice declined, but allowed Mrs. Straus to name the baby. Erna (Ernestine) Straus Rice Eskuche wrote the story about her naming, but does not mention the offer of adoption – that may not have happened. She says she grew up playing with the Straus girls and thought she, herself, was Jewish because of her name. She says that, when she went to school and was asked her nationality, she responded, “Jewish.”

In 1890, Nathan Straus bought 10,000 acres of land on the west side of Lower Saranac Lake from the Mutual Life Insurance Company for \$27,000. The deed conveyed all land in the 10,000 acres which had been surveyed by Averill “that remained unsold.” His intention was to build a hotel in the Adirondacks similar to the one in Lakewood that was open to all, as Jews had been turned away from existing Adirondack hotels.

In the fall of 1891, Nathan, Isidor and Oscar Straus, Jacob Schiff, Max Nathan, Simon B. Stern and Simon Rothschild were the directors and principal investors. “It is proposed to establish a game and fish preserve, hold and improve real estate, establish parks, and maintain and operate hotels.” A \$1,000,000 hotel was to be built in anticipation of W. Seward Webb’s new railroad that would run near the property. News articles of the day report that Nathan Straus had a deer park on his property and that a nearby sawmill was ready to begin work. The project was never undertaken.

Part of this property, 500 acres, became Knollwood Club. It was bought by the founders: Louis Marshall, Daniel Guggenheim, Max Nathan, Elias Ashiel, George Blumenthal and Abram Stein from Nathan Straus and the remaining investors in his hotel and game preserve project. Knollwood Club was built on the north shore in about 1900 by local architect William L. Coulter. Each owner had his own camp, while a casino, boathouse, caretaker’s house and several out-

buildings were communally owned and managed. In addition to the caretaker and main housekeeper, each family had its own guide. (Descendants of Nathan and Lina Straus still own a house at Knollwood and still summer there.)

In 1885, New York State established, by law, the Forest Preserve. A Forest Commission was set up. The Adirondacks Park plan was created in 1893 and Nathan Straus was appointed to the five member board. It is likely he was appointed because of his interest in the Adirondack region but also because he was Park Commissioner of New York City at the time. Lumbering interests were very powerful and they kept finding loopholes in the law. An 1894 amendment to the constitution of NYS states, “The lands of the State, now owned of hereafter acquired, constituting forest preserve as fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands.” Through a sly bit of manipulation, three members of the board brought an injunction against this act. Nathan was in Europe when this took place. Upon returning, and learning of this action, he immediately tendered his resignation from the board. He wrote, “I regret exceedingly that three of the Forest Commissioners granted, during my enforced absence, the right of way through the forest preserve to the Adirondack Railway Company. I consider this grant entirely contrary to the purpose of which the Forest Commission was created, viz. To preserve the State forests. And I desire to record a most emphatic protest against the action of the three commissioners --- I hope you will pardon my seeming presumption in the following suggestion: That when you select my successor you name a gentleman who has no interest in lumbering.”



Nathan and Lina Straus Cottage
at Lower Saranac Lake

I have previously written about Nathan and Lina Straus and their efforts to get pasteurization accepted around the world. The story begins at their Lower Saranac Lake home. As told by Nathan, himself, “One day, the cow became sick. I could not seem to do anything for her, and she died very suddenly. It did not seem to me that she could have died from natural causes. I thought she might have been poisoned. So I had a post-mortem held to assure me. The doctors found that the cow’s lungs were eaten away, and that she had died from tuberculosis. I realized at once the menace of such a condition among milch (the German word for milk) cows to public health.” That same year, Nathan Straus established a pasteurization laboratory as well as distribution depots and stations in New York City.

Having already established himself as a philanthropist, one of Nathan’s first large gifts, in 1891 due to his growing interest in the cure and prevention of tuberculosis, was a cottage to the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, later called the Trudeau Institute. He established a “Preventorium” in Lakewood, NJ, on the grounds of the Lakewood Hotel. In 1909, it moved to Farmingdale, NJ after the Lakewood residents protested its presence there.

In August 1886, Isidor wrote to Ida, "I enjoyed the stage ride and felt quite fresh upon reaching here. ... I have donned my mountain costume but have not done any boating or fishing yet. ... This place, this house and its surroundings as well as the temperature and atmosphere impress me fully as favorably as ever, and I am more convinced than ever that it is the place of places for our boys as well as for every one that seeks thorough benefit from summer vacations."

During the summers, either Isidor or Nathan would come up to Lower Saranac Lake and stay for a week or two, while the other brother was home in New York City, tending to their business, R. H. Macy & Co. When Isidor was in the city, Ida wrote to him daily. Her letters give us a very good picture of what it was like to be at Villa Plaisance, their home at Lower Saranac Lake and the activities of the people there. We have excellent descriptions of the children's fishing, deer and partridge hunting, boating, picnics, lawn tennis and croquet, their social activities, and even the daily weather.

By 1890, Isidor and Ida bought a small mountain cottage of their own next door to Nathan and Lina's larger, and more luxurious, house. Up until that time, Isidor and Ida and their children had been staying with Nathan and Lina at their house during their trips to the Adirondacks. The brothers were extremely close and it appears that the sisters-in-law also shared a warm and loving relationship. Isidor and Ida called their house Villa Plaisance but, in her letters, she referred to it as the guide house. It was much smaller, and not as luxurious, as Nathan and Lina's house. Ida described the process of furnishing and moving into their new house with the help of her beloved sister-in-law.

On July 15, 1890, Ida wrote to Isidor, "Lena did not expect us until tomorrow as was just in the process of arranging the guide house beds and bed-rooms." July 17, 1890, Ida to Isidor, "Very soon after writing the first load began to arrive and nearly all of our household utensils, beds and furniture came. I expect everything that is not here yet will be delivered in the course of the day and then we will start in housekeeping. Until now, Lena has taken care of us, and you know what she is for attention. ... the additions to the guide house are very well done; the kitchen is just as nice as it can be, and the billiard room over in Nathan's house is lovely. Nathan has had a landscape gardener on the grounds who did some of his work very well, made a regular park of the stretch of ground to one side of the drive, filled in a great deal and really improved the aspect of the place greatly."

One July 18, 1890, Ida wrote to Isidor, "Our darlings are enjoying themselves hugely. Puss (Percy, age 14) is out fishing again for a change. The day we arrived he and Jerome (Nathan and Lina's son, age 14) brought in 50 of the most beautiful trout you ever saw."

Saturday, 26, 1890 Sara (Isidor and Ida's oldest daughter, age 12) to Isidor, "Yesterday we ate lunch on the sand beach which we all enjoyed very much. ... We have only been out rowing once so far but mama says we must begin doing so regularly. We are all very comfortable in the guide house."

August 25, 1890, Ida to Isidor, "Our help all had a great time last evening, a ball in the boat house. I furnished the refreshments and paid for the fiddler and they are all in ecstasies."

August 29, 1890, Ida to Isidor, "There has been great excitement in camp today. A guide brought in a young fawn which he had caught while rowing in the lake, and Nathan kept it. It's a lovely creature but wants taming."

Nathan and Lina's youngest child, Hugh Grant Straus, (named for NYC mayor, Hugh Grant) was born in September 1890. Lina traveled back to New York City at the beginning of

September to await the birth of her child. Nathan returned to the city later in the month, but not before entreating Ida to move to their larger and more comfortable home for the duration of their stay in the Adirondacks. Ida commented in her letters to Isidor about how comfortable she was in this larger house.

On June 24, 1891, Ida wrote to Isidor, "The ice house seems to be excellent; it has of course not yet been put to the test having been filled only a few days ago that is the

storage rooms for meats, milks and fruit, each separate; I was just in the meat room and find the thermometer there was 38 degrees and it will get much lower. Ebbe says it takes one hundred weight of ice to fill the box for the storage rooms... The whole is a house about 18 feet square and higher than the guide house."

On July 21, 1891, Ida wrote to Isidor, "This place is so beautiful today one might easily stretch the imagination and dream that the whole world were a paradise like this."

On July 24, 1891, Lina wrote to Isidor, "I have to trouble you with a few lines in regard to the man who I have in charge of the lumbering business here – From all I hear I am afraid he is not honest – It has even been hinted to me that he sells all the lumber and does crooked things in more than one way. Making due allowances for exaggeration of my informants, I still have heard enough to make me distrustful."

On July 29, 1891, Ida wrote to Isidor, "I was out fishing yesterday with Percy and just think of it I with my own hands landed six trout. I am very proud of my achievement as I have to the best of my knowledge and belief broken all former records of ladies fishing."



Nathan and Lina Straus
canoeing on Lower Saranac Lake

In February 1893, Nathan and Lina's son Jerome died of pericarditis and double pneumonia, six days shy of his sixteenth birthday. After Jerome's death, Nathan and Lina couldn't bring themselves to return to the Adirondacks. Nathan's sister Hermine disposed of Jerome's clothing and personal effects at home and Ida and son Jesse did the same at their summer home. On October 14th, Ida wrote to Isidor, "It breaks one's heart to think that all the care, and forethought and heart-love which every portion of the house bespeaks on Lina's part, should now go to strangers. There are so many delicate little arrangements which her kind heart alone dictated, which it is such a pity that she should lose all benefit of." Jesse, Isidor and Ida's oldest son, wrote, "One is so forcibly reminded of Jerome on all sides." Ida noted that the name of their cottage,

Villa Plaisance, had to be changed since it wasn't so pleasant anymore.

In 1893, Nathan and Lina's house was rented for the summer, possibly to Charles M. Swain of Philadelphia. In December, Swain bought the house for \$35,000. Isidor and Ida rented their smaller house to the McCutcheons the summer of 1893.

By 1900, Isidor and Ida were building a house in Elberon, NJ, leaving behind their no longer happy days in the Adirondacks. And Nathan and Lina took up summer residence on Cherry Island in New York's Thousand Islands. Neither Straus family returned to the Adirondacks.

Lower Saranac Lake, Adirondacks Summer 1891



Front row, seated:

Oscar with Vivian, Herbert,
Percy (with dog), Jerome

Middle row:

Lucie Mammelsdorf with baby
Charlie Webster (Nathan Jr.) on her lap,
Sissie (seated), Minnie (standing)

Upper row:

Mrs. Charles Webster, Philip Kupfenheimer,
Sara, a nursemaid in the background standing
on the porch directly behind Sara, Charles
Webster, Ida, Isidor

Presentations

This past year, in light of current conditions, all presentations were conducted online using Zoom. Joan gave virtual presentations in May, September and November. Additional presentations are scheduled in the coming months. A flyer announcing the event, date, time and a link to the Zoom, will be sent to everyone on our mailing list.

On April 5th, Joan will give a presentation to a group in Netanya, Israel who are interested in Nathan Straus, his history and his philanthropy in then Palestine.

On April 19th, Joan will be speaking to the Middletown (NJ) Historical Society about the Middletown estates of brothers Percy and Herbert Straus.

During the week of August 2-5, Warren Klein, Karen Franklin and Joan Adler will be giving their talk, *Two Great Families and their Temple: The Strauses, the Lehmans and Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth El* for the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) at their annual conference in Philadelphia, PA.

If your organization is interested in hosting a presentation, please contact Joan Adler at info@straushistory.org to discuss the options. Each talk will be customized to suit the interests of the group. Videos of Joan's previous talks may be found on YouTube or on the SHS website:

www.straushistoricalsociety.org

The Lakewood Hotel, Lakewood, NJ

Lakewood, NJ was the place to be in the 1890s. It was a luxurious retreat for the New York elite, a resort in the heart of the pines. Several magnificent hotels opened their doors in 1891. Among them was Laurel-in-the-Pines and The Lakewood Hotel.

In the early 1900's, Lakewood was known as the region's winter resort, attracting wealthy tourists from New York and Philadelphia. In the days of Richard Croker, known as "Boss Croker," The Lakewood Hotel was the winter headquarters of Tammany Hall. At the time, many important and wealthy people called Lakewood home, or second home, and the train from New York arrived every 20 minutes. *The New York Times* even published a weekly article making note of prominent New Yorkers who were vacationing in Lakewood.

Lakewood lost its allure once plane travel replaced train travel as the preferred mode of transportation and people could easily reach more distant vacation destinations.

Family lore tells us that Nathan Straus wanted to vacation in Lakewood, but was denied admission to the hotel because he was Jewish. Not to be denied, he put together a syndicate of friends and bought the hotel. The hotel and its property covered 14 acres between Clifton Avenue and Lexington Avenue. There were several outbuildings including cabins, one of which was to be Nathan and Lina Straus' home away from home. It was set on eight acres adjoining the hotel property. Nathan loaned this cabin to Grover Cleveland and his wife, Frances, whenever they felt the need to get away from Washington, DC. Cleveland wrote his acceptance speech there after being elected president for the second time. And it was there that president-elect Cleveland selected many of his top Cabinet officials.

The cottage was reported to be a handsome one with all the modern comforts. It nestled in a grove of pines and cedar not far from The Lakewood Hotel. It became known for a time as "The Little White House." Cleveland visited the cottage many times between 1892 and 1908 and stayed for several months during the winters. In 1908, it stayed open long after the season closed, to enable President Cleveland to pass his dying days as peacefully as possible.

In 1901, after the hotel had been running at a deficit for several years, Max Nathan and Nathan Straus each took half interest in the company. Alfred Nathan, Max's son, became the director. Max Nathan made a gift of the cottage to Nathan

Straus for his personal use. Straus made several alterations to it and even stocked it with his own wine.

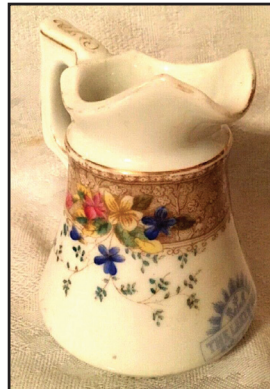
On November 10, 1909, the *New York Times* reported, "Cleveland Home to Be a Sanitarium ... the old Grover Cleveland Cottage at Lakewood, N.J., has been converted into what is called a tuberculosis "preventorium" for children and, unknown to the outside world, it has been running as an

experiment since July. The work has been made possible largely through the generosity of Nathan Straus, who made a gift for the purpose of the old Cleveland Cottage, which he owned and which, for years, the late president rented. Mr. Straus donated a majority of stock in The Lakewood Hotel, in which he has been interested, the proceeds from which will be applied to the running expenses of the "preventorium." (An article

about The Cleveland Cottage and the preventorium appeared in the February 2009 issue of the SHS newsletter.)



A 1906 postcard from
The Lakewood Hotel



The idea for this article originated with an email from James D. Henderson, who has been researching Bohemian decorated porcelain for many years and has written two books on the subject. The Straus and Guthertz families were owners of factories in Europe that produced these beautiful pieces. Jim's interest in The Lakewood Hotel was because of the china and porcelains used there. The restaurant china pictured on this page was produced at the Marx & Guthertz factory in Stará Role, a suburb of Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad), Bohemia for The Lakewood Hotel.



From an article "Bohemian Export Porcelain - A Legacy of the Hapsburg Empire," by James D. Henderson: "Marx gained experience as a European buyer with L. Straus & Sons. In 1884 he teamed up with Oscar Guthertz with the support of Straus and established a porcelain decorating factory in Stará Role, Bohemia. The firm began exporting porcelain to the United States in 1884 using both the Straus and Marx

& Guthertz backstamps. An extensive variety of household ware and tableware were produced. Following the deaths of Lazarus Straus in 1896 and Max Marx in 1898, the factory ownership changed. Edgar Guthertz moved from Rudolstadt and joined his brother Oscar and established the Oscar and Edgar Guthertz factory. Their slogan was "French Taste, French Quality at Karlsbad Prices." The factory remained in business through World War I, when it was sold and consolidated with several other Bohemian porcelain factories in 1918." Oscar and Edgar Guthertz were Lina Guthertz Straus' brothers and Max Marx was also a relative.

A Brief History of R. H. Macy & Company

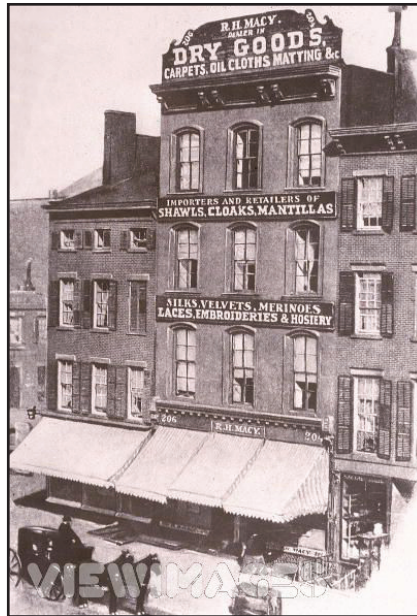
It is not generally known that there was an actual person, Rowland Hussey Macy, for whom the great store, R. H. Macy & Company, was named. The history of this man, and of how the Strauses came to be the owners of the "Greatest Store in the World", is the subject of this article.

In 1823, Rowland Hussey Macy was born in Nantucket, MA. He spent four years on a whaling ship before deciding to go into retailing. It is thought that the red star, that became R. H. Macy & Co.'s iconic logo, was derived from a star tattoo on the back of Macy's hand; one that he acquired during his whaling adventures. In 1844, once Macy decided to settle down, he opened a small dry goods store in Boston. That, and several subsequent ventures, failed. It was not until he moved to 204 and 206 Sixth Avenue, just one door off 14th Street in New York City at the end of October in 1858, that his commercial enterprise succeeded. And succeed it did, in dramatic fashion.



Rowland Hussey Macy
1823 - 1877

In the 1850s, no American city offered as much opportunity as New York. It was by far the largest city in America with a port that served as the country's primary gateway for commerce. Vast crowds of immigrants filled the streets, requiring products of all kinds. Macy's first sign advertised dry goods, carpets, oil cloths and mattings. Offerings found inside the store on the first day were: fancy dry goods which included French embroidered collars, Cambric floundering, feathers, real and artificial flowers, French head dresses, corsets, lace medallions, ribbons, collar and sleeve sets, hosiery, woolen and cotton socks, woolen shirts and drawers. Macy's first day's sales in his twenty five foot wide by one hundred foot deep establishment was \$11.06 (about \$349.73 in 2020). By the time Macy died in 1877, the sales for the year exceeded \$1,000,000 (about \$2,466,401) with daily receipts often amounting to between \$5,000 (\$123,320) and \$10,000 (\$246,640).



Macy's First NYC Store

In the ensuing years, Macy was able to expand, taking over adjoining buildings on Sixth Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets. One of the reasons for Macy's success was that he had learned how to manage creditor relations. Another successful innovation was attributed to his offering goods for a cent or two under a dollar amount, thereby implying savings for the customer. He also did extensive, aggressive advertising with a creative flair. One such ad suggested the prospective customer take public transportation to the store. "The ride will give you strength to look us over and buy judiciously."

Macy established a one price, cash only policy. He allowed no bargaining. Author Robert M. Grippio, in his book, *Macy's: The Store, The Star, The Story*, wrote, "New York City provided the perfect environment for Rowland's talents by offering hundreds of thousands of consumers with cash in hand."

As the enterprise grew, Macy took on partners Abiel T. Laforge and Robert M. Valentine. Macy had two children. Macy's son was not temperamentally suited to run the business and his other child was a girl. Although Macy broke with tradition by promoting Margaret Getchell to an executive position, females were not generally included in the executive workforce.

In 1865, after the end of the Civil War, Lazarus Straus brought his family north. The town where they lived, Columbus, GA, was burned. At 56 years old, Lazarus felt it would take too long for the south to make an economic recovery. Lazarus' oldest son Isidor, had been in Europe since 1863, trading in Confederate bonds. Isidor returned to the states after the war with \$12,000 in gold, determined to go into business rather than return to school. He convinced his father to open a china, glassware, and crockery business. They bought a business from Mr. Caldwell for \$6,000 (about \$102,992 in 2020). Caldwell told them they should not expect to get rich but could earn a good living. They named their firm L. Straus and Son. In their first year, they earned \$60,000 (about \$1,029,920 in 2020), a feat they attributed to industry and frugality.

After the next younger son, Nathan, completed high school in New York City, he joined the family firm as did Lazarus Kohns, the husband of Hermina, Lazarus and Sara's only daughter. Nathan did not have much patience for sitting still. He did not want to stay in the office doing paperwork. This suited the Strauses just fine as Nathan's talents were different than Lazarus or Isidor's. Nathan traveled the country opening up markets. He went to Europe on buying trips. He was gregarious, and made friends with a great many people during his business dealings. One of those people was Rowland Hussey Macy.

In 1874, Nathan Straus convinced Macy to allow L. Straus & Sons to open a 25x100 foot concession in the basement of Macy's 14th Street store where they would sell L. Straus & Sons merchandise: china, glass, and crockery. It soon became the most popular department in the store. For the first time, dry goods and home furnishings were sold under one roof. It

was on this distinction that Macy's claimed to be the original department store. The Straus' concession accounted for 60% of the sales of Macy's in the first year it was open.

When he opened his business in New York City, Macy had four employees. By 1877, R. H. Macy & Co. had one general supervisor, six buyers, four hundred clerks, twenty cashiers, ten bookkeepers, several floor walkers and a host of cash girls. Robert M. Valentine and Abiel T. Laforge became Macy's partners in 1875 and by 1877, Margaret Getchell was one of America's first female executives. The store encompassed the entire block on Sixth Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets.

Managing such a large enterprise took a toll on Macy's health. He suffered from inflammatory kidney disease (Bright's disease). Macy, his wife and daughter traveled to Europe in early 1877 where Macy expected to rest and seek treatment for his ailment. He died suddenly, on March 31st, in Paris, after being abroad only seven weeks. Nathan Straus is said to have been on a buying trip with Macy when Macy died.

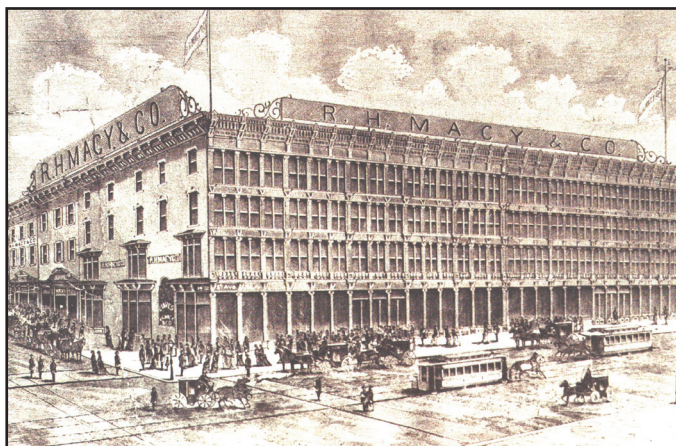
In 1878, Macy partner Abiel T. Laforge died. And in 1879, Robert M. Valentine died. Various partners tried to keep this thriving business float. After the death of Laforge and then, Valentine, several other distant relatives were hired and, with little success, tried to manage the store.

In 1888, Isidor and Nathan Straus became partners in R. H. Macy & Co. with a 45% interest. Isidor was the organization

man and Nathan was the promoter. Their youngest brother, Oscar, opted for a life of public service, with his family's blessings, rather than join the family business. By 1894, the Strauses were sole owners of R. H. Macy & Company. The rest, as they say, is history.

The last partner to be bought out of R. H. Macy & Company was Charles Webster, who decided to give up ownership of the great store. He moved west, citing the stress of owning

and running such a large business was injurious to his health. Nathan and Lina Straus thought so highly of Webster that they named one of their sons, Charles Webster Straus. When he became twenty one, Charles Webster Straus legally changed his name to Nathan Straus, Jr. He was thinking of going into politics and thought it would be advantageous to bear his father's very recognizable, and revered, name.



R. H. Macy & Co. - 1883
Sixth Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets

We all know that Macy's became a dominant presence

in the merchandizing field, with more than 800 branches throughout the country. It was Isidor and Nathan, with the assistance of Isidor's sons, Jesse and Percy, who were responsible for building the 34th Street and Herald Square building you will read about in the next pages. And it is their vision, guidance and leadership, along with that of their younger brother Herbert, who joined the firm after completing Harvard College, that enabled R. H. Macy & Co. to become a dominant symbol of good merchandise with fair prices. But few realize, or remember, that there was an actual man, Rowland Hussey Macy who followed his dream to New York City and opened the original R. H. Macy & Co.

The Straus Connection to the Ostrich

SHS board member, Al Berr, sent the following: "What was the connection, I once wondered, between Straus and ostrich? Yesterday's word in my Word-A-Day calendar was struthious, which means of or relating to the ostriches and related birds.

The explanation goes further and says 'The extended use of the word suggests a tendency to bury one's head in the sand like an ostrich. But do ostriches really do this? No – the bird's habit of lying down and flattening its neck and head against the ground to escape detection gave rise to the misconception. The word struthious has been fully visible in English since the 18th century. Anglo-French speakers created ostriz



Illustration from an old German book published in 1676

from Vulgar Latin avisstruthio (ostrich bird). So, the connection between struthious and Straus looks clearer. However, the reason to choose that name is still puzzling.

Anyway, with so many important topics to consider during these troubled days, it's almost a relief to consider something sort of trivial."

Another story about how the Strauses got their surname is that there was a bas relief plaque outside the front door of their house in Otterberg, Germany, with an image of an ostrich on it. When, in 1808, Jews were required to adopt fixed surnames, the family chose Straus, which is the German word for ostrich.

The Story Behind the Notch

By Catherine Smith

On the corner of 34th Street and Broadway in New York City, you will find a small building that is now a Sunglass Hut. It is topped with a large red shopping bag proclaiming Macy's "The World's Largest Store." This small store, surrounded by the overwhelming grandeur of the flagship Macy's department store has proven to be one of the most interesting real estate transactions in New York City.

The original R.H. Macy & Co. was located at 14th Street and Sixth Avenue, in the center of commerce at the time. The business prospered and, by 1894, the Strauses became sole owners of Macy's. They expanded their business to neighboring properties, one by one, until they owned all the buildings on the entire block. It soon became clear that even this expanded location was becoming too small for their growing business.

The Strauses discussed where they could move to build a flagship store that would not only suit their needs, but would be an architectural achievement, have state-of-the-art amenities, and accommodate the ever growing and changing city. They decided on Herald Square, on the block between 34th and 35th Street and 7th Avenue and Broadway. This site was pretty far removed from their original location. However, the Strauses knew that NYC's first official subway system was being built, which would have a station at 33rd Street, and that a 34th Street crosstown bus route was planned. Both would bring customers to their new location.

According to a *New York Times* article of 1901, "Real estate men have heard no more interesting or significant news in many a day than that there is to be a department store at Herald SquareHeretofore Twenty-third Street has been regarded as the northerly limit of the retail dry goods district, and shrewd buyers of realty have evidently looked upon it as a permanent limit, judging by some of the prices that have been paid for small Sixth Avenue lots to the south of it. With a large store at Thirty-fourth Street, however, the possibilities of the section between Twenty-third and Thirty-third Streets will doubtless appear in new light."

The company began quietly buying up the properties on the block. It is at this point that our stories diverge. We had been told that the owner of the store on the corner, a tobacconist, caught wind of the Straus' plan and decided to hold out with the hope of cashing in on their desperation to own the entire block. The Straus brothers decided not to give in to the tobacconist's demands, and simply built the mammoth store

around the plot, creating the iconic notch. Later, they bought the airspace above the corner store to advertise their flagship.

While doing research, trying to find images for another article about Macy's, I came across an article with a different story about the notch. I then continued to dig, and discovered several more articles corroborating the new story. Personally, I think this one is even more interesting.



Macy's 14th Street Store

The beginning of the story is the same. Around 1900, the Strauses began buying up land on Herald Square for their new store. Apparently, Macy's had a verbal agreement with owner, Alfred Duane Pell, to buy the plot at the corner of 34th and Broadway for \$250,000 (about \$6.5 Million in 2020). However, Henry Siegel, the owner of Siegel-Cooper, a rival department store, heard about the deal and, through an agent, Robert H. Smith, outbid the Strauses by \$125,000 (about \$3.2 Million in 2020). Pell understandably accepted the offer. In the *New York Times*, Smith commented, "Mr. Pell demanded \$375,000 for his property and there was no dickering. I handed him \$75,000 to close the transaction, and will pay the balance next week. That is all there is to it."

Siegel-Cooper was a Chicago-based department store that expanded to New York City in 1896. Their store was built in the same neighborhood as the original Macy's and was designed by DeLemos & Cordes, who went on to design the Macy's Herald Square store. At the time it opened, the Siegel-Cooper department store was the largest store in the world.



Macy's 34th Street Store, 1908

Although the motive for purchasing the corner plot is not certain, there are several documented plans. It is possible they simply hoped to stop Macy's from building the world's largest department store, overtaking the title that Siegel-Cooper claimed. In fact, Siegel looked into building a 12-story fire-proof building on this corner plot of land. This new store would be devoted to ladies outfitting and specialties, with one floor of the new building becoming a restaurant for the employees. This

plan was not viable, however, because the plot was too small to hold such a tall building.

Others reported that the rival department store planned to hold the parcel of land hostage. They were interested in taking over the lease for the building owned by Macy's on 14th Street. Their gamble did not pay off. In July of 1901, Macy's announced that it would build the new store in Herald Square around the corner lot. The new building would have 1.25

million square feet of retail space and stood nine stories high, towering over the small corner building. Isidor Straus told the *New York Times* that the plans of Macy's would in no way be affected by the purchase of the corner. He is quoted saying, "In fact, we would have to change our plans altogether if we had got that corner. But we are entirely satisfied as it is."

In 1903, Siegel-Cooper razed the original three-story corner structure and erected a five-story commercial building. The store front was leased to the United Cigar Store Company for \$40,000 (about \$1 Million in 2020) per year. Four years later, they sold the building to their original agent, Robert H. Smith. The location was then leased to the china and glass firm Higgins & Selter. In 1911, Smith sold the 34th Street building for a then record \$1 million (about \$26 Million in 2020), earning the location the title of "Million Dollar Corner."

The Macy's building on 14th Street was left vacant until Siegel-Cooper took it over. In 1902, Henry Siegel sold the company to one of his major stockholders, Captain Joseph B. Greenhut and his son Benedict J. Greenhut. Siegel went on to own and manage numerous stores in New York, Boston and Chicago, though he went bankrupt in 1914. Siegel-Cooper

declared bankruptcy in 1915 and the New York store was closed in 1917.

Interestingly, Henry Siegel had additional dealings with the Straus family. In 1912, his daughter, Julia, and her husband, were passengers on the Titanic and dined with Isidor and Ida Straus aboard the great ship. Only Julia survived the tragic disaster. Additionally, Henry Siegel owned a house and nine acres of land at Orienta in Mamaroneck, New York. In 1914, most likely because of his bankruptcy, he sold the house and property. Nathan and Lina Straus bought it. They called their new home Driftwood.



Macy's 34th Street store

In the 1940s, Macy's began using the upper facade of the corner building to advertise and promote their flagship store. Over the years, the advertising

has obscured more and more of the building in the notch until only the bottom two floors became visible. Macy's never took ownership of the property. Today, when visiting the iconic store, you will undoubtedly recognize the large red bag with the white star prominently displayed above this small building on the corner, forever highlighting this fascinating piece of Macy's history.

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The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society wishes to thank those who made contributions in 2020.

Your generosity made it possible to continue the important work of SHS

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Friends of Straus Park

by Al Berr

Photographs by Joe Arbo

This column usually reports on the activities of Friends of Straus Park. But, not for this issue. However, we are pleased that, despite the curtailment of our special events last year, we continue to plant and maintain the flowers and shrubs in the Park. For the holiday season last year, we installed the holiday lights and ornaments as we have in past years. The tradition was upheld.

The only other activity currently, as a nonprofit organization, is our annual fundraising effort which begins with a letter sent to our mailing list of supporters, most of whom live in our zip code on the upper west side of New York. Here is an excerpt from the letter which was sent in November, 2020:

“We can all agree that this is a most unusual year, perhaps the most unusual that many of us have experienced. A lot of things have changed and we have learned to change with them.

In the spring, Friends of Straus Park had to abandon our annual Titanic memorial, customarily held around April 15, the date of the sinking in 1912. In the fall, we could not hold our annual day-long event, Art in the Park, during which local artists display their work, and our favorite band, the Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, provides musical accompaniment. In our history, only inclement weather has cancelled our events.

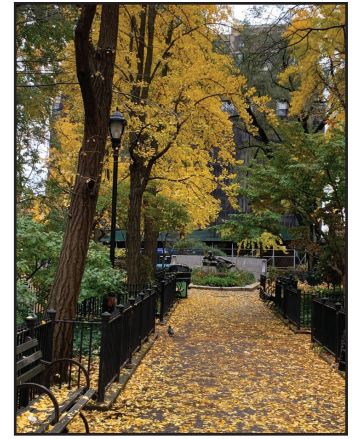
However, as most of you know, Straus Park is still here and continues to look lovely and welcoming as ever. This spring, the tulips and azaleas were as cheerful as ever. And, this fall, the chrysanthemums were as colorful as ever. All of it was owed to our gardener, Joe Arbo, who is as hard-working and diligent as ever.

We have noticed, during the past months, that the Park is more popular than ever, perhaps because it offers a convenient haven in the neighborhood from the concerns of the day. If so, we are gratified that Friends of Straus Park can offer this valuable service.”

We are gratified to report that the response to our appeal was very enthusiastic, more than in previous years, and included a number of notes of appreciation for what some people have described as a gem of the neighborhood and as an essential asset.

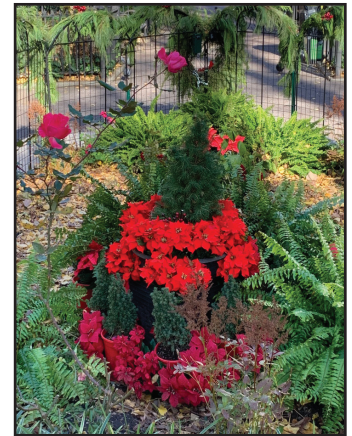
At this printing, we are not planning anything for April, 2021, and we are not planning for the fall of 2021, but our fingers are crossed for the latter. In the meantime, we wish good health to all readers of the Newsletter and to all Friends of Straus Park.

Right: Colorful leaves
at the height of fall foliage



Left "Memory" adorned
with winter holiday berries
and greens

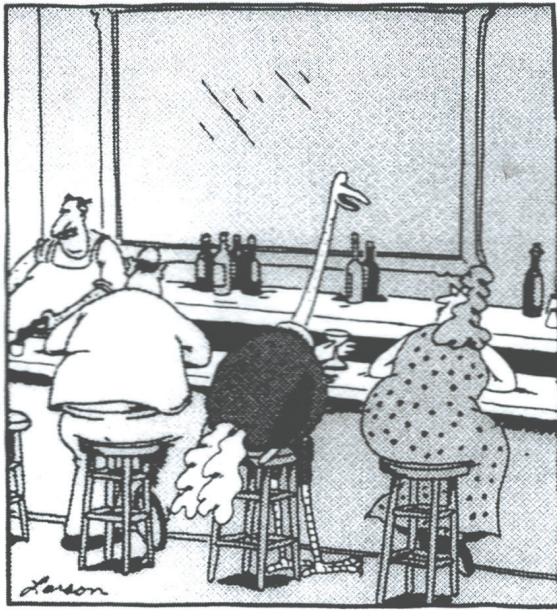
Right: Festive holiday tree created
with poinsettias and greenery



Colorful fall flowers in the Park's reflecting pool

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"Well, according to the dictionary, I'm just a large, flightless bird from East Africa. ... But believe me, Doris — once you get to know me, you'll see I'm much, much more than that."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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