



STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 14 Number 1

Newsletter

August 2012

100th Anniversary Events Titanic Memorial Commemoration

On April 15, 1912, the world learned of a great maritime disaster, the sinking of Titanic. She was the largest, most modern ship built to date. The White Star Line created its newest ocean liner with luxurious first class accommodations, a gym, kosher food and even comfortable accommodations for the steerage passengers, something unheard of at that time.

Titanic was supposed to be unsinkable. But, as we all know, she hit an iceberg and sank in the cold waters of the North Atlantic killing 1,496 souls. Only 712 people survived. Isidor and Ida Straus were among those who perished. Their story of devotion to one another and their heroism, choosing to die together rather than accept seats in a lifeboat even when they were offered, touched the imagination and sympathy of people around the world. Their ultimate act of sacrifice is remembered to this day. An article about their last winter in Europe and their Titanic experience appears on the Archives page of the SHS website www.straushistorical-society.org/archives.php Scroll down to *Many Waters Cannot Quench Love*.



Titanic memorial events were planned by many organizations. There were exhibitions and talks during the several months leading up to April 15, 2012 and continuing for several months beyond. Newspapers, magazines, television stations and online media from around the world produced Titanic related programs. The Straus Historical Society was among them. Paul Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida and Chair of the Society spoke eloquently about his ancestors at all of our events as well as in multiple interviews.

SHS co-hosted an exhibition and series of talks at the American Jewish Historical Society in New York City on April 1st. We also co-hosted a cocktail party and exhibition in the Executive Suite at R. H. Macy & Company on 34th Street in New York City on April 10th. Isidor and Ida's great, great grandson Brett Gladstone spoke before a crowd of 150 people at Straus Park in New York City on April 15th. This lovely Park was dedicated to the memory

of the Strauses on April 15, 1915 and today is a focal point of many neighborhood events sponsored by Friends of Straus Park. We attended memorial events at the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, TN and at the Titanic Historical Society's commemorative weekend in Springfield, MA.

The Autobiography of Isidor Straus

For the Society, celebrating the memory of Isidor and Ida began in 2011 when *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus* was republished. Isidor wrote his autobiography for his family in 1911. He had no intention of publishing it. Unfortunately he died before it was completed. Then, in 1955, the Strauses oldest daughter, Sara Straus Hess, privately published the autobiography. To this day, members of the family proudly talk about how much they treasure this book and about the moral lessons Isidor

*"When you're through learning
you're through"*

John Wooden

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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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**REPORT FROM THE
STEERING COMMITTEE:
Richard Gerstman and Al Berr**



With the Titanic anniversary approaching, the Steering Committee was convinced that a program in the spring of 2012 would be an ideal moment for the Straus Historical Society (SHS) to commemorate the lives of Ida and Isidor Straus.



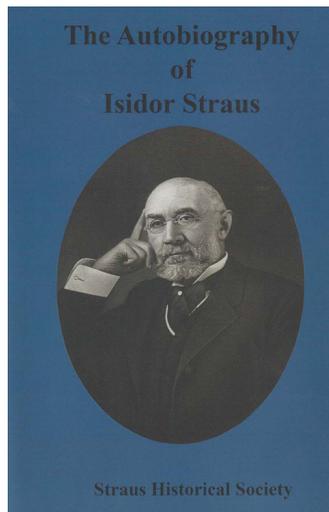
The survey that we conducted last year helped us to identify specific goals for such a program. They were: to reconnect the Straus family and their descendants; to promote SHS and the Straus family achievements; to build connections with organizations and individuals in order to increase our support.

To meet these goals we planned several events on or about the anniversary date. We pursued several venues including the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), whose first president was Oscar S. Straus. Approximately a hundred and twenty people attended our co-hosted program on April 1st, among them several Straus family members. The program was called "Love, Loss, and Legacy." The speakers were Steven Biel, a well-known Titanic historian, Paul Kurzman, great grandson of Isidor and Ida and SHS Chair, who spoke about his ancestors and the wonderful legacy they left for the family, and Joan Adler, SHS Executive Director, who recounted the family history. Following the program, a reception outside the auditorium featuring photos, letters, and artifacts from the SHS archives, presented the participants with a good opportunity to become acquainted. And, from their remarks, the program was deemed a success.

We also contacted Macy's, whose Special Projects Division planned with us a two-hour cocktail party in the store's Executive Suite on April 10th. Among the approximately eighty attendees were Straus family members, some of whom were meeting each other for the first time. As with the AJHS event the previous week, the space featured SHS archival objects which received a lot of interest, especially in relation to the family's past ownership of the store. Again, from the remarks of the participants, this event was also highly praised.

Other Titanic-related events took place in April at which SHS personnel and family members participated, including those at the Titanic Museum Attraction in TN, the Titanic Historical Society in MA, and Straus Park in NYC. Details about these are narrated elsewhere in this newsletter. We feel gratified that our efforts have achieved a positive response. With your help we will continue to pursue opportunities to meet our goals and expand them to the benefit of SHS and this remarkable family.

wished to convey to his children. As a tribute to Isidor Straus, the Society republished the autobiography, added photographs and a Supplement written by our Executive Director Joan Adler, which contains articles that enhance and complete the story of Isidor's life. It also contains articles about Ida Straus and about her devotion to Isidor and to her children. The autobiography is available for purchase on the Society's website.



Isidor and Ida Straus School - PS 198M

It seemed fitting to work with the PTA of the Isidor and Ida Straus School, Public School 198, on Manhattan's Upper East Side. We'd been in communication with them for several months. All agreed that a relationship between the Straus family, the Society and the school was desirable, even important. With the upcoming Titanic anniversary, our first visit to PS 198 should relate to this



disaster. On March 19th, Paul Kurzman spoke about his family before two assemblies; kindergarten, first and second graders in one and

the rest of the elementary school classes in a second assembly. Joan prepared a slide show to enhance his comments. The students were mesmerized. After Paul's talk the students were proud to show us their own creations ranging from poetry, to artwork and even a song and dance number. At the end of each assembly several students stayed behind to ask more questions of Paul. Their questions showed how much they appreciated his coming to their school and how excited they were to learn about the history of the people for whom their school was named.

After our visit to the school, PTA co-president Eugenia Tinsley wrote, "I want to thank you, Mr. Kurzman and

The Straus Historical Society for the wonderful piece of history and connection you gave to our students at PS 198M/The Isidor and Ida Straus School this Monday. Your generosity and kindness was very appreciated by all. I was especially touched watching Mr. Kurzman show some students the locket and then even letting them hold it. It will be a memory none of us will ever forget. Then to be able to connect that history to our school is remarkable - and to find out Mr. Kurzman walks by the school each day on his way to work and sees his great grandparents names, continues the connection to the present. I could go on and on, but I will stop.

I do want to tell you that our children came home that day and the first thing our six year old son asked me was, "Can we go to the park he talked about? The one that is in memory of his great grandparents." I said, "Absolutely, what a good idea Haven." Then yesterday he said, "I think the Strauses were really nice people. I wish they were still alive."

He then told me he had been given a bookmark with a picture of each of them on it and a picture of the Titanic. He is very happy to have this and has also asked if I would look for a model of the Titanic. I can see his six year old brain taking in all these facts and processing them all and it is so fascinating to watch. Our older nine year old boy was also very interested in what he learned and has asked for some books to read on the topic.



Titanic art project created by the first graders at PS 198/M
Photo credit: Eugenia Tinsley

My favorite part about the whole story is how good and kind the Strauses were. To know they valued education for all and see that borne out in their legacy and then get to watch our students learn about this brave couple from their great grandson is remarkable. Thank you ..."

Paul owns a locket that was found on Isidor's body when it was recovered. It was given to his grandmother, Sara Straus Hess, who was Isidor's oldest daughter. She, in turn, gave it to her oldest daughter El-



Photo Credit: Henry Leutwyler/
Contour by Getty Images

eanor who gave it to Paul, Eleanor's youngest son. Paul proudly brings this locket with him when he is speaking about his ancestors. The children were fascinated to see it and had many questions about Isidor and about the locket. We all agreed that this presentation at the Isidor and Ida Straus School was a wonderful way to begin the Society's memorial presentations.

**Love, Loss & Legacy
Isidor and Ida Straus & the Titanic**

THE AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND THE STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Present

LOVE, LOSS & LEGACY
ISIDOR AND IDA STRAUS & THE TITANIC

One hundred years ago, on April 15, 1912, the largest passenger steamship of the day sank in one of the saddest maritime disasters in history. Among the victims were Macy's owner Isidor Straus and his wife Ida. Their example of love and heroism forms one of the truly remarkable stories of the Titanic.

Direct descendants of Isidor and Ida Straus will be present to discuss their legacy, which will be placed in an historical context by Professor Steven Biel, Executive Director of the Humanities Center and Senior Lecturer in History and Literature at Harvard University. Original artifacts and documents from the Titanic, belonging to the Straus Family, will be on display.

A wine, cheese & dessert reception will follow the program. The newly republished 100th Anniversary Edition of the Autobiography of Isidor Straus will be available for purchase and inscription by the editor and Straus descendants.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2012 3:00PM
CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY
 15 WEST 16TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

TICKETS: 212.868.4444 or smarttix.com
 ADMISSION: \$30
 FOR MORE INFORMATION:
 info@ajhs.org or call 212.294.6160

Straus HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 CELEBRATING 120 YEARS

Invitation to the AJHS/SHS event -
April 1, 2012

On April 1st SHS and the American Jewish Historical Society co-hosted *Love, Loss & Legacy: Isidor and Ida Straus and the Titanic* at The Center for Jewish History in New York City. We brought artifacts from our collection. They were on display in the Great Hall at the Center along with many, many photographs of the family and of the events in their lives. Professor Steven Biel, Executive Director of the Humanities Center and Senior Lecturer in History and Literature at Harvard University, and author of *Down With The Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster*, spoke about the culture of the period. As Executive Director of SHS, it was my job to speak about the history of the family including the events leading up to Isidor and Ida's last winter in Europe and their final trip aboard Titanic. Then Paul Kurzman, their great

grandson, gave a moving talk about their legacy and what that means to him. Portions of his talk are reproduced below. A brief Q&A followed the talks. Many family members were in the audience including Oscar Straus Schafer, whose great grandfather Oscar S. Straus was one of the founders of the American Jewish Historical Society. It was a pleasure to acknowledge their presence.



Joan Adler, Steven Biel, Paul Kurzman
and Jonathan Karp, Executive Director of AJHS
during the Q&A

Excerpts from Joan Adler's Talk

"The Straus family originated in the Rheinpfalz area of southwestern Germany. They were prosperous, educated people. In 1852 Lazarus Straus emigrated to the U.S. after his involvement in the failed Revolution of 1848, and the deteriorating economic conditions in the area made him realize that it was prudent to look for new opportunities elsewhere. He established a peddlers route in rural southern GA and in 1854 he opened a dry goods store in Talbotton, the county seat. Now he felt sufficiently established to send for his wife Sara and their four children: Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar.

The Strauses were comfortable and happy in their new country until the deprivation and discrimination of the Civil War forced Lazarus once again to leave his home to seek a better life. He moved his family to New York on the advice of his young son Isidor who spent the war years in Europe trading Confederate bonds. The two opened L. Straus & Son, a china and crockery concern. Lazarus paid off all his antebellum debts, something that was unheard of. He said he wanted to leave his children his good name if nothing else.

The Straus name is synonymous with prosperity. It is not as well known that integrity, philanthropy and honor are their driving characteristics even to this day."

Excerpts from Paul Kurzman's Talk

"What I think we saw in my great, grandparents, Isidor and Ida Straus, was foresight, courage, principle and

probity. We can understand that in the context of three major phenomena that surrounded the loss of that good ship, Titanic. The first is the enormous hubris that was represented by this supposedly unsinkable ship. On its maiden voyage, bigger and finer and better built and faster than any steamship in the history of the world and therefore that they could set a record and take the northern route, rather than the safer southern route as they approached this country. ... Well, the hubris of it all is, the chutzpah perhaps in our terms, is that you don't challenge mother nature in that way because mother nature has a tendency to win. I think it was man's feeling that one could defy the laws of nature. That was part of the reason for the disaster and the sinking of this unsinkable ship.

A second factor that Steven touched on so well both in his presentation and in his book is the classism that we see represented in the Titanic that is so infrequently spoken of. What I mean is - when you look at that cover page of the Titanic literature, which we saw in his presentation, what you see is the fact that they speak of (and the title of and the big font on the top of the page), is all about the famous people in first class; the Astors, the Guggenheims, the Roebings and yes, the Strauses. There was very little talked about the largely Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans in third class, then known by a term I'm not all that fond of, steerage, and the very significant number who were in the mostly forgotten class, second class, who tended to be working Americans and middle class foreigners coming to this good land. ... I think we have to recognize the seriousness of the classism that was represented as an element of inequality in the rescue efforts for the Titanic.

The third is the many acts of bravery and heroism of which the Strauses actions were only one. In many ways that story is often told from Isidor's point of view, being better known than his wife Ida, and because in 1912 we lived in a less androgynous society than we do today and the accomplishments and the bravery of a man were perhaps more quickly to be recognized than those of a woman. But I want us all to be clear that the bravery of my great, grandmother was every bit as full as the bravery of Isidor, her husband. ... It was she who went into the lifeboat; after all it was women and children first, and therefore Isidor did not. He felt that until every woman

and child had an opportunity to be rescued, men had no place in lifeboats. They had a place on the ship, and to go down on that ship if that would be their destiny. But it was she who decided to step out of the lifeboat, to join her husband and to go down at sea. He had already made that judgment based on gender.

I think it's important for us to therefore recognize that what was shown here to me as a descendent, are three overarching principles that I value. The first was **COURAGE** - it's not easy to choose death over life. Let's be realistic about that. Under any circumstances, and especially if one's faith does not lead you to believe in the power and the authenticity of an afterlife. Therefore, even if it was expected of you as a man to go down with the ship, there certainly was no reason that an exception couldn't



be made. Indeed one of the officers said, "We recognize who you are Mr. Straus and you're an elderly man (however, much younger than I am now!) Of course you can get into the lifeboat and join your wife." So he too made a decision that showed courage.

The second I think is the concept of **PRINCIPLE**. It's easy to talk principle when you have nothing to lose. ... Here principle meant the ultimate sacrifice and both of them took a position of principle much as had Isidor's father. In one anecdote, that comes from Lazarus' early years in America, was that at the end of the Civil War he was in debt, as were many southerners. He had taken out loans that he wasn't able to repay because the Union armies had devastated the South in their victory. Lazarus went to some of the people from whom he had loans, not so much banks in those days but others who were more successful merchants and suppliers of the wholesale goods which Lazarus sold in his store on a retail basis and said, "Now that the war is over and I'm in better circumstances," - his teenage son after all, Isidor had gone to Europe and came back with enough money to buy his parents a house in New York (My children, however, have never offered to do that for me!) He then went to each of those to whom he had an outstanding loan and said, "I'm ready to pay you back." They said, "Mr. Straus, I'm sure that's a good thing for you to do. How much on the dollar that you owe me will you be able to pay me?" He said, "Dollar for dollar." They said to him, "But Mr. Straus, nobody who's lived in the south pays back dollar for dollar. I thought that you might say 40 cents on the

dollar or 50 cents on the dollar." Lazarus said, "No. When I take a loan, I repay it." It's that kind of principle that he passed down to his four children which I think is part of the experience – the legacy if you will – that Isidor and his siblings inherited.

The third, but to me in no way the least of these three – principle, courage and devotion – is the **DEVOTION** reciprocally that Isidor and Ida had for one another. They loved each other deeply. We have some of their hand written letters. This was really the Victorian era, an era where one didn't say things that one casually says today. But the letters are almost embarrassing to read, they're so intimate in nature, between these two very much grown parents. Their devotion to one another was that they would die together as they had lived together. It would have been very easy for them to both be in a lifeboat because they both had so much to live for. ... What could be happier, for persons of a certain means and financial success, now that they had turned over R.H. Macy's largely to their sons Jesse, Percy and Herbert (who were doing a wonderful job), than to retire, be recognized, enjoy some of the wealth they had worked hard to accumulate, spend time with their six children, and delicious days their 18 grandchildren. It takes devotion to decide to make that sacrifice. The options were not hypothetical. They were real - as was the authenticity of their decision, and their devotion.

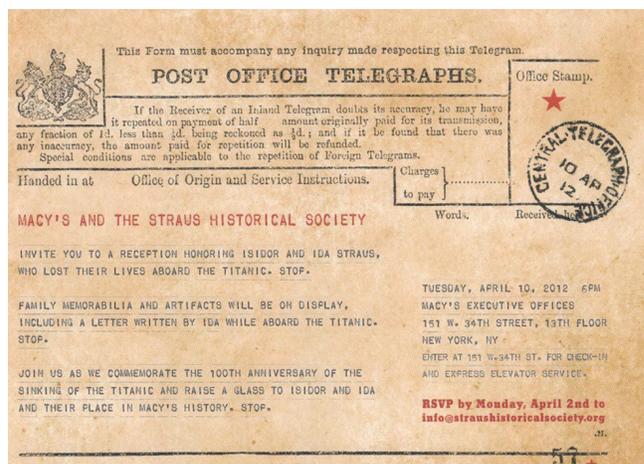
Because his two brothers and his sister were also children of Lazarus and Sara Straus, I am absolutely certain that if they had been on board Titanic rather than their older brother Isidor, that Nathan and Lina would have made the same decision; that Oscar and his Sarah would have made the same decision; that Hermine and Lazarus Kohns would have made the same decision. The principles that Lazarus and his wife Sara Straus stood for were imbedded in their children as much as was any financial success with the department store.

Therefore, I feel that Isidor and Ida's greatness was not in their death, but in their life, and in their legacy – Love, Loss & Legacy. We who are fortunate enough to be the descendents of Isidor and Ida Straus have inherited a legacy of a beautiful death and a beautiful life. Embedded in that legacy is vision, integrity, principle and courage. Today, we who are their progeny can only hope in turn to be able to honor them, and that the way that we can do so is to recognize that they gave a gift. That gift wasn't to us. It was to history and to this wonderful country that became their home. Thank you."

AJHS sent SHS a DVD that includes the entire presentation of Steven Biel, Joan Adler and Paul Kurzman as

well as introductory remarks by AJHS Executive Director Jonathan Karp and the Q&A period that followed our talks. A copy of the DVD is available from SHS for \$10 which covers shipping and handling.

Macy's Cocktail Party



Invitation to the Macy's/SHS Cocktail Party
April 10, 2012

A wonderful cocktail party in the Executive Suite at R. H. Macy & Co. was held on April 10th. This venue was chosen because of the Straus' more than 100 year ownership of Macy's. It seemed the perfect place to honor their memory - in the edifice they built in 1902. Once again, the Society brought artifacts and photographs. The photos were displayed on large black panels provided by Randall Okey and the Macy's "Center Core Department." The artifacts were displayed in glass enclosed cases.

Family members and invited guests enjoyed the elegant atmosphere as they viewed the displays, enjoyed the delicious hors d'oeuvres and mingled with one another.

Although there were no formal speeches, Robin Hall, Senior Vice President of Macy's Parade and Entertainment Group, Paul Kurzman and I briefly thanked our guests and spoke about the legacy left by Isidor and Ida.

Mary Lou Teel, producer of CBS Sunday Morning News, graciously gave SHS a DVD containing the segment she produced. It includes an interview she taped with Paul Kurzman at Macy's in the mural walled conference room which played nationally on April 15th on CBS Sunday Morning with Charles Osgood. The video also contains additional footage of the cocktail party at Macy's and a very special interview with Rabbi Lee Moore whose family was saved in the Titanic disaster because Ida gave up her seat in the lifeboat. *A copy of this DVD is available from SHS for \$10.*

Attendees at the Macy's/SHS Cocktail Party



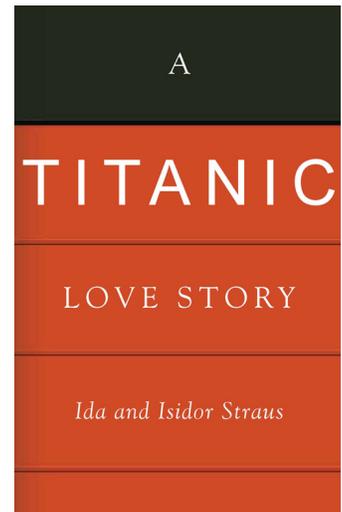
Above: Pam Haber, Callie Schwartz and Chris Straus
Below: Ceci Kurzman, Callie and Mara Schwartz



Above: Al Berr and Mischa Byruck
Below: Liza Loop and author June Hall McCash



Author and retired history professor June Hall McCash flew in from Nashville, TN to attend the Macy's event. She recently published an excellent biography: *A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus*. Great grandson Paul Kurzman wrote, "June Hall McCash has written an extraordinarily cogent and deeply moving book about the life of a heroic couple, Ida and Isidor Straus ... With an ever observant eye for poignant detail, McCash has penned a biography that will both have interdisciplinary relevance for the scholar, and a very strong popular appeal." (June's book is available for purchase on the Society's website.)



We were pleased that Rabbi Lee Moore could attend. Lee's great grandmother and grandfather, Beile and Meir Moor were coming to America aboard Titanic, traveling in steerage. When the iceberg and Titanic collided, they made their way to the deck where they boarded a lifeboat after Ida Straus gave up her seat. It is believed by both families that Ida's sacrifice enabled the Moor family to survive.

Catherine McIlvaine, Assistant to the Executive Director at SHS, and I were relieved to be done with the major SHS hosted events. We'd both been working twelve hour days to complete the work necessary to produce the high quality exhibits and talks for our events. Now it was time to begin enjoying several events where the preparation was left to other organizations.

SHS Steering Committee members Al Berr and Richard Gerstman did an outstanding job arranging the various events and following through every step of the way. None of these very special functions would have occurred without their skill, expertise and perseverance.

Many people were excited about the prospect of seeing a plaque that was dedicated in memoriam to Isidor and Ida Straus by the employees of Macy's in 1913. This plaque had been prominently displayed on a wall at a 34th Street entrance to the store. Unfortunately we were told by Senior VP Robin Hall that the entrance was closed in 2005 and is now scheduled for reconstruction. The plaque is still on the wall but that wall now sits in an office of the fine jewelry department. Robin promises to let me know

when the reconstruction is complete. There are plans to hold a rededication ceremony that will include family members. A notice will be sent once the rededication ceremony is scheduled so that those who are interested can attend.



Ida Straus
Born Feb 6, 1845
Isidor Straus
Born Feb 6, 1845
Died April 15, 1912
"Their Lives Were Beautiful And Their Deaths Glorious"
This tablet is the voluntary token of sorrowing employees

Titanic Museum Attraction

The Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, TN was the location of the next 100th anniversary memorial event. Straus family members Paul Kurzman, Barbie Gurgan and Liza Loop were invited. On Friday, April 13th we were treated to a VIP tour of the Titanic museum. Reporters interviewed Paul, Barbie and Liza for local television news and for the local newspapers. Paul Burns, curator of exhibits, hosted a dinner for the descendants and



The actual facade of the museum in Pigeon Forge, TN

Titanic historians. It was fascinating to meet other people whose ancestors were aboard Titanic or who have a passion for researching its every aspect.

The following day was a full one. We lunched again with the descendants and historians. This time there were even more people invited. Historian Phil Gowan hosted this interesting luncheon. We then went to the museum for an afternoon of tours, interviews and photographs.

The spectacular evening presentation began after yet another wonderful meal, this time hosted by Mary Kellogg and John Joslyn, owners of the Titanic Museum Attraction. John wrote, "In 1987, I embarked on the adventure of a lifetime. Two years earlier, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute had discovered Titanic and now I coled a 6 million dollar expedition to the site of the sinking. Our team's mission was to explore the wreckage, retrieve artifacts and film the broken remains. Standing on the slippery deck of our salvage ship, it was thrilling to hover more than 2.5 miles above the legendary Titanic."

Since 1987 John has devoted his life to the legacy of Titanic, producing a TV show about its discovery and then building two Titanic museums. "I want to share as closely as possible with guests what Titanic's actual passengers and crew experienced aboard ship."



Above: The First Class Sitting Room of Isidor and Ida Straus recreated in the Pigeon Forge museum. Notice the clock on the mantel to the left.
Below: Left: Clock in its original condition. Credit: Harland & Wolff/Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
Right: Clock photograph taken on the Deep Ocean Expedition Summer 2005. Credit: KM_Collection



John and Mary have extensive TV production experience. How does one, after all, produce something dignified and somber to reflect the tragic loss of so many people's lives while still being entertaining? It was a delicate balance that they achieved with perfection. There were songs from the Broadway musical, *Titanic*, and songs by several choirs. Descendants of Titanic passengers were introduced to a crowd of more than 2,500 guests. A Jumbo Tron allowed everyone, no matter how far back they were seated, to see the descendants as Titanic "crew members" escorted them to their seats. The evening closed with the lighting of an eternal flame in a reflecting pool near Titanic and a fireworks display emanating from the ship.



Above: Barbie Gurgan, Paul Kurzman, Liza Loop in Pigeon Forge, TN

Below: Paul Kurzman, Barbie Gurgan, Liza Loop with descendants of Titanic survivors Helen Benzinger McKinney, great granddaughter of Margaret Brown ("The Unsinkable Molly Brown") and Tim Lightoller, grandson of Charles Lightoller (second officer aboard Titanic). Beth Haynes is in the center. She is a reporter from WBIR-TV, the Knoxville NBC affiliate.



As one nears the end of the tour of Titanic at the Pigeon Forge museum, a Thank You Wall is presented where contributors to the museum are acknowledged. SHS sent the text of our plaque at the request of curator Paul Burns. It reads: "As its principal purpose, the Straus Historical Society is committed to education, research and

dissemination of information with respect to the Lazarus Straus family, their ancestors and their descendants. The focus of the Society's activities is based on the Straus family's historic leadership in government, commerce and philanthropy. As a consequence of the family's involvement in this broad spectrum of American life, they exemplify and bring to life the American story and its spirit.

Artifacts, photographs, albums and letters from the Straus Historical Society's archives enrich the displays in the Isidor and Ida Straus Sitting Room on the 2nd floor of the Pigeon Forge Titanic Museum Attraction.

The Society's focus on the history of the Straus family includes information about Isidor and Ida Straus' ill-fated voyage aboard RMS Titanic. However, this is only one facet of their remarkable lives. Further information about the family's history and about their accomplishments may be found on the Society's website: www.straushistoricalsociety.org or by contacting the Society, a nonprofit organization, at info@straushistory.org "

Landmark West and Friends of Straus Park

Two memorial events were held in New York City's Straus Park, one by Landmark West and another by Friends of Straus Park on Sunday, April 15, 2012. This venue is very special to the community because Isidor and Ida's home was near the Park on West 105th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue. Two articles about this dual commemoration appear on pages 13-15 in this newsletter along with an article about a June 27th Titanic event also held in Straus Park. Many family members attended. Catherine McIlvaine brought photographs of the Strauses and of their West 105th Street home that were passed around for all to see. She also sold several copies of Isidor's autobiography.

MS Balmoral

Two ocean liners docked in New York City in mid April after recreating the transatlantic voyage of Titanic. Paul Kurzman and I were invited to speak to the passengers of one of them, the MS Balmoral.

Several of passengers were dressed in period costume when they attended Paul's talk. We understand that many passengers were dressed in this manner for the entire duration of their ten day voyage. The passengers were thoroughly knowledgeable about Titanic history. Many were descendants of people who had been on the maiden voyage while others simply are fascinated with every aspect of Titanic. They enjoyed learning about the Strauses

from a direct descendant and posed many thoughtful questions at the end of Paul's talk. We brought photographs and prepared a photo loop that was shown on a large screen. The passengers purchased Isidor's autobiography which Paul autographed. They also purchased the biography written by June McCash.

Titanic Historical Society

On the weekend of April 19 -21 Paul Kurzman and I attended the Titanic Historical Society's annual convention in Springfield, MA near where THS has its museum. Karen and Ed Kamuda, the founders of THS, hosted many tributes to Titanic. Every facet of the weekend was carefully thought out and planned to perfection.



Photo courtesy Titanic Historical Society

On Friday night we attended a buffet dinner and lecture by Simon Wells, the owner of Titanic's sister ship, Britannica. Like Titanic, Britannica sank, but she sank to

the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, not the northern Atlantic. Wells is trying to decide if he should raise her or dedicate her as an underwater museum. He spoke at length about her characteristics and how she differs from Titanic.

Before Wells' talk there was a cocktail hour with ample time for guests to mingle and for people to buy *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus*. Paul Kurzman graciously inscribed each book purchased and stood for photographs with the book in hand next to its purchaser. Several guests came in period costume.

After a rainy night we were happy to see the sun shining on Saturday morning as we joined a large group of invited guests at Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield, MA where a special ceremony culminated in the unveiling of a granite Titanic



memorial. Paul spoke movingly about the legacy of his great grandparents. Many people commented that they were unable to hold back tears during his talk. Beside the many people in the audience taking photographs, local ABC TV affiliate WGGB cameramen filmed the talks and the ceremony. An article about this event can be found in the local Springfield newspaper, *The Republican*. Copies of the article are available from SHS.



We had a few hours before the evening's event. Paul and I used this time to visit the THS's museum which is located in two back rooms of Henry's Jewelry Store in nearby Indian Orchard, MA. Karen and Ed Kamuda have a large collection of Titanic artifacts and memorabilia on display as well as a large collection of merchandise for sale. The store was crowded with Titanic buffs anxious to view the displays and to buy a mementos of the weekend.

Saturday evening we went to a gala at The Castle in Springfield. More than two hundred people attended, many in period costumes. During the cocktail hour there was time for people to buy books and get them signed. A contest was held to judge who wore the best costume. A speaker shared his insights into the lives of many of the first class passengers. His talk was accompanied by a slideshow.

Although there was another event scheduled for Sunday morning, both Paul and I were "Titanic-ed" out and opted to rejoin our families who had been most patient about our absence for the past month.

Although we had no more appearances to make, and no more interviews scheduled, we were far from finished with our Titanic month. Follow-up e-mails flooded our SHS mailbox for an additional four weeks. Now it was time to collect the information from the various articles no matter what their sources. The agendas for the board meeting in May and a special board meeting in June were replete with discussions of what events and interviews we had participated in, how we felt about them and how SHS was going to capitalize upon the public's expanded awareness of our mission.

Steering Committee members Richard Gerstman and Al Berr have proposed that we begin to collect information about possible venues where presentations can be made about some aspect of Straus family history. Each presentation can be tailored to the specific agenda of the organization. Many people can be tapped to give these presentations depending upon their location, interests and skills.

If you have a suggestion about where a presentation can be made, please advise me. Or, if you would like to give a talk about your branch of the family, I am anxious to learn about that too.

Comments from Family Members and Friends

Hugh Grant Straus III: "I enjoyed the warmth of the Macy's cocktail party. It was fun to reconnect with family members and associates of SHS in very welcoming surroundings.

For me the defining moment was when I opened my copy of the *Forward* which comes in mid-April. The weekly paper normally has two sections, news and arts & culture. This week it had three sections. The third was devoted entirely to the Titanic, about 80% of the section covered the Strauses and SHS including an interview with our chair, Paul Kurzman.

Another wow moment came when a friend gave me a copy of the *National Geographic* with a photo of Isidor and Ida's stateroom as it looks at the bottom of the sea. Underneath that picture was one of the same staterooms as it appears on the Titanic sister ship *Olympic*."



Hugh Grant Straus III attending the Friends of Straus Park Titanic memorial event

June Hall McCash: "What a pleasure it was to join members of the Straus family and their guests at the commemorative event to honor Ida and Isidor Straus held

in Macy's Executive Suite on April 10. I was delighted to receive the invitation and flew up from Nashville just for the occasion. It was a joy to meet so many members of the Straus family, all of whom were most warm and welcoming. One group even invited me to join them for dinner.

I was especially happy to meet Paul Kurzman, who had so graciously endorsed my book, *A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus*, even though we had not previously met. It was also wonderful to see Joan Adler again. She is such a treasure and has been an enormous help throughout my ten years of research and writing. Thanks to Macy's and to the Straus Historical Society for including me. The assembled photographs and documents from the lives of Ida and Isidor that were on display at the event were a beautiful tribute to a beautiful couple, whom I now know so well that I feel like a member of the family." (A photograph of June at the Macy's event appears at the bottom of page 7)

Harold P. Kurzman: "The reception at Macy's gave me a first opportunity to meet several of SHS' Board members. On display were many artifacts I had never seen before. Many thanks to those who organized this event, especially to Joan Adler."

Barbie Gurgan: The memorial presentation at the Center for Jewish History in NYC on April 1st, was an important evening because it reminded our family and others of the Jewish heritage of our Straus family. The next day, Aunt Caroline and I went to the Straus mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery. We met some reporters from the *Wall Street Journal* who accompanied us, taking photos and notes. Caroline and I did a television interview at the mausoleum with a local Bronx news station, which gave us the opportunity again to honor Isidor and Ida.

I attended the Macy's cocktail party and enjoyed seeing the Executive Suite. The dining room was most impressive. CBS was there to film the event. I was pleased to know that by this, more and more Americans have learned about my ancestors.

I attended the 100th Titanic anniversary commemoration at the Titanic Museum on the 14th, at which we Strauses and Joan were treated like royal celebrities. This gave us the opportunity to inspire an already enthusiastic audience of museum goers, television and newspaper audiences, about the lives of Isidor and Ida. John Jocelyn and Mary Kellogg did an awesome job putting together the commemoration show, in which they honored all of the Titanic descendants present. A rabbi gave a heart-warming speech and prayer in remembrance.

Additional Titanic Events, Articles, Video, Newspaper and TV Commemorations

Although it felt as though we were everywhere, it was impossible to attend all the events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the sinking of Titanic. SHS contributed artifacts, articles, photographs and greetings to several organizations and municipalities that were hosting their own events.

Otterberg, Germany

On April 14th, Otterberg, Germany, the town where the Straus family lived in Germany, held a memorial at Town Hall. Historian Roland Paul spoke about the history of the Straus family and read a translation of greetings sent by board chair, Paul Kurzman. There was a exhibition of photographs and memorabilia of the family. In the evening the the U.S. Air Forces in Europe gave a concert.



Paul's comments: "To the Honorable Mayor of Otterberg, Germany: On the occasion of your commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the death of my great grandfather, Isidor Straus, and his beloved wife Ida Blun Straus, the entire Straus family in America is honored that you are taking this moment to remember the family's proud legacy. Born 167 years ago in Otterberg, the eldest child of Lazarus and Sara Straus, Isidor never ever forgot his home, and visited it often as an adult. The courageous death of my great grandparents aboard RMS Titanic, their refusal to enter a lifeboat (since there were still women and children on board), their dual devotion to Germany, their country of birth, and America, their country of emigration, and their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice to uphold a time-honored principle of sea, and thereby forgo the opportunity to return home to be with their 6 children and 18 grandchildren -- such was the integrity that was instilled in them in Otterberg, and to which they always remained faithful, as German-Americans.

I wish that I could be with you today, perhaps sitting by the Jungfernsprung, or raising a stein of good beer at the Blaues Haus, in their honor, but I want you to know that I and all of their descendants in America are very much with you today in spirit."

People Magazine

A lovely photograph of seven descendants of Titanic passengers, among them Paul Kurzman, was published in the April 9th issue of People magazine.

An additional photograph, of Isidor's locket, that also appeared in the People magazine story can be found in this newsletter on page 3.



Photo Credit: Henry Leutwyler/Contour by Getty Images

Voice of America

Paul was interviewed at length for a video produced by Voice of America. It was shown in approximately 80 countries and in 43 languages. They reach 141 million people per week. This video can be found on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2Gv26SJCT8>

Forward

Michael Hirsh and Paul Berger are two reporters from the Jewish Daily Forward, a New York newspaper. Given the enormous public interest in all things relating to Titanic, the newspaper decided to publish an extra section completely devoted to Titanic information. The Strauses figure prominently in this section. In fact, almost half the articles are either about the Strauses or mention them.

Michael and Paul spent hours researching their stories, interviewing people, asking for photographs and clarifying and correcting information. Theirs are some of the most accurate accounts of what transpired that fateful

continued on page 16

A GREAT DAY IN STRAUS PARK

By Al Berr

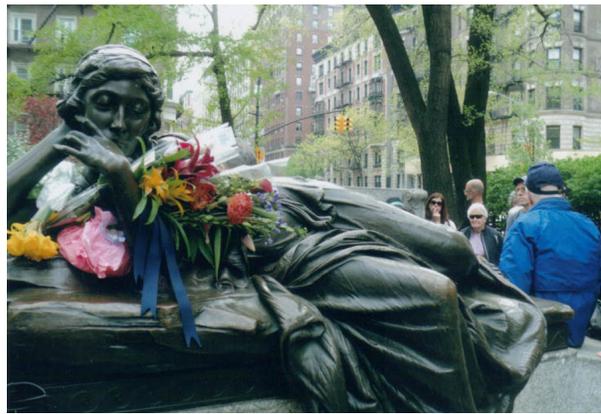
April 15, 2012 was quite a memorable day for Straus Park. It was not only the hundredth anniversary of the Titanic sinking. It was also a day on which there was perhaps the largest assembly of visitors since the dedication in 1915 when the park was renamed for Isidor and Ida Straus.

The first events of the day, begun at 2:00PM, were sponsored by Landmark West, an Upper West Side community and preservation organization. Gilbert Tauber, an urban planner and historian, gave a talk on the development of the neighborhood from the dates of the Indian settlements to the renaming of the Park. Then, Al Berr, a Friends of Straus Park (FSP) board member spoke briefly about the renovation of the park in 1997 and displayed photos of the Strauses and their house, a block away at Broadway and 105th Street. Brett Gladstone, a direct descendant of Isidor and Ida and a SHS board member, then spoke about the family and their legacy. These talks were received very well by an audience of approximately fifty people gathered around the “Memory” statue.

By 3:30PM, the crowd had swelled to three times that number and filled the entire park. FSP conducted a candle-lighting ceremony, aired tunes that may have been played by the Titanic musicians, and planted a tree, all in commemoration of the day. It was also decided that Brett should repeat his speech because many of the new visitors would not have heard it. And it was received just as enthusiastically as it was the first time it was delivered.

News about the park events had been circulated by the city’s Parks Department, by Landmark West, and by FSP. Most likely this accounted for the record-breaking crowd and the number of local media representatives who interviewed Brett and FSP members about the Strauses and the Park, and who were interested in the photos and text of *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus*, copies of which were available for sale.

By 5:00PM, most of the crowd had dissipated. A few had repaired to Henry’s, the nearby restaurant that is currently located on the site of the former Straus home. Some of the early evening television programs, capitalizing on the Titanic centennial, featured segments about the day’s events in the Park. It was a fitting and gratifying successful end to a memorable day.



Photos courtesy Margaret G. Kavanau

100th Anniversary Remembrance Concert in Straus Park By Margaret G. Kavanau

Friends of Straus Park presented the 100th Anniversary Remembrance Concert in Straus Park on the evening of June 27, 2012. This event honored those who lost their lives on the Titanic in 1912, including Isidor and Ida Straus who lived on the northwest corner of 105th Street and Broadway. Under clear skies and in balmy clime, rows of people in chairs provided by Parks and Recreation enjoyed The Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, a wonderful group who performed swing, blues and traditional jazz, as well as songs from decades ago. The group is comprised of acoustic guitar/vocals, upright bass, homemade washboard percussion, trumpet and saxophone. During intermission Bill Castro, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, NYC Department of Parks, addressed those assembled, as did Paul Kurzman, great, grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus, for whom Straus Park is named. Joe Arbo surprised core members of Friends of Straus Park with facsimile Titanic memorabilia in thanks for their efforts to help keep Straus Park’s memories and presence in the community alive.

The next event in Straus Park will be Art in the Park, scheduled for October 13, 2012 [rain date: 10/14/2012]. Check our SHS website for further details.

Speech by Brett Gladstone at Straus Park New York City - April 15, 2012 The 100th Anniversary of the Sinking of the Great Ship Titanic

Brett Gladstone, a Straus family member who serves on the board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, spoke at an event organized by Landmark West, a NYC historical association and Friends of Straus Park, a nonprofit organization formed to provide for the maintenance and improvement of Straus Park, West 106th Street, New York City, New York.

More than 150 people gathered at this lovely New York City vest pocket park to hear his words and to honor the memory of his ancestors who died in the Titanic disaster.

"My name is Brett Gladstone, great, great grandson of Isidor and Ida Straus, who are being honored here today, the 100th year anniversary of their heroic death on the Titanic. I am immensely proud of my great, great grandparents and so honored that all of you would take time from your busy lives to be here today.

First, our family would like to thank the organizers of this event, Landmark West. We would also like to thank my fellow board members of the Straus Historical Society, especially Al Berr and Richard Gerstman, and its president, Paul Kurzman. I also wish to thank Friends of Straus Park. And immense thanks to the Straus family historian, Joan Adler, who for more than two decades has researched our family history in this country after 1852 and for hundreds of years before in Germany. Joan has published a number of articles and has organized family events such as the cocktail party this week at the Macy's Executive Offices on 34th Street sponsored by the Macy's senior executives and board of directors.

Macy's store originally consisted of a dry goods store on 14th Street. The Straus brothers opened a small concession there for the sale of their china in 1874. Isidor Straus and his brothers became the majority partners in Macy's department store in 1888, eleven years after the death of R.H. Macy in 1877 and sole owners of the store in 1894. They built the building on 34th street in 1902 and, after Isidor's death, the Straus family continued to own the store through the third quarter of the 20th Century.

My great, great grandparents' last hours on this earth have been portrayed in three Hollywood movies, two TV series, a Broadway musical, poems, songs, books and thousands of articles. Today, Titanic Museums around the country draw enormous crowds of people who want to learn about the ship and the Strauses and others who tragically lost their lives.

For me, as a child growing up in Manhattan in the 1960's, a turbulent time when there were few good role models and great cynicism about leadership and heroes, my great, great grandparents lives had special meaning. It was humbling to walk past this park and the schools named for them and see the great plaque honoring them at Macy's. Family stories repeated their philanthropy and good deeds, including Isidor's selfless government service as a member of Congress and advisor to mayors, governors and presidents even while running the great store. This was inspiring enough and imbued me, as the hoped for future lawyer in the family, with a drive to succeed in an honorable profession and to honor their legacy.

As is typical, every generation puts its hopes on certain persons in the next. I was blessed by wonderful educational and cultural opportunities that my ancestors made possible. As an adult, when I matured enough to know the importance of a long term life partner, it was the strength of Isidor and Ida's relationship that impressed me the most. Isidor and Ida wrote to each other every day when

they were apart and, of course, in the end preferred to die together rather than live apart.

Their last moments together have continued to capture the imagination of the public for the last one hundred years. For that reason, let's talk about their last hour, as witnessed by their maid Ellen Bird who survived to tell their story to my great grandmother Sara and my grandmother Eleanor, who told it to me.

As one of the last lifeboats was boarding, a ship officer asked Ida to get into the boat, at which point she refused. She had already insisted that her maid Ellen Bird take her place in boat No 8. She gave her fur coat to Ellen stating that she would not be needing it. When it became apparent that there was no hope of staying afloat, her husband Isidor insisted again and, in fact, a crewman started to force her entry. She began to enter the boat thinking her



Photo courtesy West Side Rag

husband of 41 years would step in next. She soon realized otherwise and stepped out of the boat to join Isidor. She spoke the following words to her husband: "We have been together a long time. I will not leave you. Where you go, I shall go." Reports from Titanic's survivors tell us they were last seen hugging each other on the deck.

Back in New York, Ellen Bird tried to return the fur coat to my great grandmother Sara. She told Ellen that her mother, Ida, wanted Ellen to have it and that she should keep it. We have no idea what happened to the fur coat after that.

A memorial service for the Strauses was held at Carnegie Hall on May 12, 1912. It was reported that 6,000 people attended that service and tens of thousands of disappointed persons, who could not get in, thereafter attended services at other locations in the city. On April 24, 1912, *The Tribune* newspaper reported that a crowd estimated at forty thousand gathered to attend a lecture about Isidor Straus. For fear the mob would rush in through the doors, the police ordered the meeting cancelled.

Within months of the disaster, a memorial committee was formed to collect contributions to create the park we stand in today. With their generosity, this park was dedicated April 15, 1915.

Isidor's body was recovered but Ida's was not. The locket on his watch chain remains with my uncle today. Those of you reading the April 9th *People* magazine's Titanic article can see a picture of that locket.

I last visited Isidor's grave last September 11th at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx after burying my mother nearby that same day. Although Ida's body was never found, her memory is honored by the beautiful statue you see here named "Memory," by the artist Augustus Lukeman. According to an account in a book called *Elegant New York*, Mr. Lukeman's work was the winner in a well known competition, was chosen because it "represented a scheme of peaceful contemplation over a sheet of water, leaving it to the meditative public to muse over the sacrifice the same element demanded of the Titanic disaster."

Those who look at the large wall behind this statue will read an inscription from the Old Testament. It states "In Memory of Isidor and Ida Straus. Lovely and Pleasant Were They in Their Lives. And in Their Death They Were Not Divided. Book 11 Samuel 1:23."

Isidor honored the unwritten and now lost tradition of women and children first. And Ida, in a world, not unlike today, where commitments were often brief and fragile, followed the Old Testament tradition best portrayed in the Book of Ruth. As we may recall, at a most difficult time, Ruth stayed close and loyal to her family saying, "Entreat me not to leave you...for where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge...and where thou diest, I will die; and there I will be buried."



Photo courtesy Margaret G. Kavanau

The location of this park was chosen because Isidor and Ida owned a beautiful home around the corner at 2745 Broadway, one block to the south.

Nothing gives me more pleasure than the opportunity to speak of my great, great grandparents --- a couple who had everything --- and yet surrendered their lives to abide by principle, and to affirm their loving and everlasting bond to one another."

Editor's Note: Brett spoke first to a group of about 50 people who came at Landmark West's invitation. He spoke again, to a larger group, later in the day when Friends of Straus Park also sponsored an event to honor his great, great grandparents. I've been told "There wasn't a dry eye in the Park."

On June 27th Friends of Straus Park hosted a Titanic commemorative evening. The Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, a musical group, played to an appreciative audience. Isidor and Ida's great grandson Paul Kurzman spoke briefly about the lives of his ancestors. Joan Adler brought a panel of photographs of the couple, their home on West 105th Street and images relating to the dedication of the Park. She also displayed the newly republished *The Autobiography of Isidor Straus* as well as *A Titanic Love Story: Ida and Isidor Straus* by June Hall McCash, both of which are available for purchase through the Society.

www.straushistoricalsociety.org

night. We are pleased that SHS played such a significant role in the preparation of this special section. Copies of this special issue can be found at your local library or directly from the Forward.

Articles about the Strauses appeared in Russia, Romania, Greece, Portugal and many other countries. It is impossible in this small space to mention all of the many interviews given during the 100th anniversary memorial period. Nor could we publish all of the links to articles and videos in which family members appeared. A more complete list will be published on our website and Facebook page. If they are not there already, keep checking. And if you know of any links we've missed, please let us know about them. We'll post them immediately.



Painting of Titanic by Ken Marschall

"Like" Us on Facebook

Many of you have already visited our new Facebook page, Straus Historical Society Inc. We will use this webpage to publish photographs and small articles about family members. We plan to add information about events as well. It is our intention to add to this page on a regular basis.

www.facebook.com/straushistoricalsocietyinc

If you "Like" us, you will receive notifications when new material is added. For those of you who are unsure what this means, once you visit our Facebook page, you will see a button that says, "Like." By depressing that button, you have "Liked" us, and from then on you will receive notifications. You must first sign up for your own personal Facebook page to participate.

www.facebook.com

We welcome your suggestions about what you'd like to see here. And we welcome your comments. If you have not visited this page, please do so. And let us know how we can make it special for you.

Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

The Autobiography of Isidor Straus privately published by Sara Straus Hess in 1955, greatly expanded and updated by SHS in 2011 including the addition of many photographs and articles, in hard cover with dust jacket- \$40.00

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

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

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

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

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

Large black & white photograph of the entire Lazarus Straus family at Luchows Restaurant in 1910 - \$40.00

Shipping and handling is included for all items. Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. You can contact Joan by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: info@straushistoricalsociety.org

You Are Invited

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

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, September 11, 2012 at the office of board chair Paul A. Kurzman in New York City at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board nor to contribute to the Society. This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in SHS may have an opportunity to participate and to share his/her views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul Kurzman 212-396-7537 for further information.