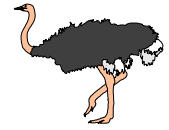


# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 5 Number 2

Newsletter

February 2004

## Ralph Isidor Straus 1903- 1996

Ralph Isidor Straus was the oldest child of Percy Selden Straus and Edith Abraham Straus. He followed his family's career path, choosing to work at R. H. Macy & Company where he distinguished himself in executive level positions. When World War II broke out, he left merchandising and offered his services to his country. After the war, Ralph became active in international economic and political affairs. His extensive travel and frequent speeches are well documented in diaries, photographs and copies of his speeches. The Straus Historical Society is indebted to Ralph's sons, Thomas Percy and Bradford Peter Straus who donated Ralph's papers, photographs and slides.

Ralph Isidor Straus was born in New York City on October 11, 1903. Brothers Percy Jr. and Donald followed in 1906 and 1916 respectively. In about 1908 Ralph wrote to his "big grandma and grandpa (Isidor and Ida); "I must write and tell you of the happy Xmas Junior and I had. Santa Claus has been very good to us. He brought lots of beautiful toys. Mother said Santa made an awful noise coming down the chimney. His bag must have been very heavy. I tried to keep awake so as to catch him but fell asleep. On Xmas day we went to Brooklyn and had dinner with little Grandma. (Rose Abraham) For dessert I had an ice cream Santa Claus and I ate every speck of him. Junior and I wish you both a happy happy New Year. With lots of love and kisses. Your loving grandson Ralph"

Percy wrote to Isidor and Ida in January 1910 that Ralph had been ice skating for the first time. He "did very well." In March 1910 Ralph had a mastoid infection that required hospitalization and an operation. Family letters at that time describe him as a good patient with a remarkable healing capacity. March 21, 1910, "Ralph continues to improve and will probably come home some day next week. He is gaining more confidence in his ability to move about without hurting his ear and now sits up and turns his head in all directions without hesitation. Tomorrow he is going to have his first trial at standing on his feet since the operation." March 28, 1910, "We moved him from the hospital to the house on Wednesday last and he is now in very

good condition. He takes a daily automobile rides in the park and is feeling apparently as well as ever, except for the lack of his usual strength, which is more or less natural considering what he has been through. ... By the end of the week I think he will be able to take short walks in the park, and after that it will be a matter of days when he will be able to follow his usual pursuits."



Ralph Isidor Straus

Donald Straus commented that Ralph was thirteen years older and that they really never even lived in the same house. "He was more like an uncle than a brother!" Ralph accompanied his parents and brother Percy Jr. to Europe in 1913, traveling to Dublin for the horse show and then spending the rest of the summer motoring around Great Britain. In 1914 they were once again abroad, return to New York aboard the "Mauretania." When Ralph was in college he often sent gifts to his younger brother. Don still remembers one of the first presents he ever received. It was a leather cowboy belt that he wore for many years with great pride.

Ralph attended The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT and won honors for his work on his entrance exams when he entered Harvard in 1921. He graduated in 1925 with an AB.

While working on his MBA at Harvard, Ralph spent the summer of 1926 working at Selfridges in London. A letter home July 2<sup>nd</sup>, describes his experience. "I am to take a Superintendents course and then be put on a job by Gordon (Selfridge, age 26, head of Selfridge's). It is remarkable how much faith they put in the human touch and how far it gets without the great amount of effi-

The past is always with us.  
It behooves those who were part of it  
or remember  
to pass the experience and memories  
on to those who follow.

Straus Historical Society, Inc.  
Newsletter (ISSN 1536-9188)  
is published semi-annually

by the

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Society, Inc**

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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.



**A Message from the Secretary:  
David H. Kurzman**

At our February board meeting for the Straus Historical Society, the executive committee asked itself some difficult, but necessary, questions. We challenged our mission statement and asked ourselves where we wanted the Straus Historical Society to go from here. In the ensuing months, I expect to report back to you on our efforts to develop a lasting legacy program that I expect will challenge you to view the Straus Historical Society with an eye toward what we can become. In the interim, ask yourselves why it is important to sustain our history and our heritage.

The consensus of the Board was unanimous in its support to develop a program that not only maintains our family history and to educate ourselves and others, but to grow beyond our borders. We will make our ideas and information available to you through our website, currently under development. We welcome your feedback. It is essential that our voice is in concert with that of our society. Feel free to e.mail me at [dkurzman@kurzmanpartners.com](mailto:dkurzman@kurzmanpartners.com) our chair, Oscar S. Straus III at [ostraus@volsprobono.org](mailto:ostraus@volsprobono.org) or the Society's director, Joan Adler, at [famjad@aol.com](mailto:famjad@aol.com) with your thoughts.

I believe the Straus Historical Society is a young community, one still growing into its purpose. We have the unique opportunity to reflect the qualities and values that were exemplified by our ancestors. It is my belief that the difficult questions we asked ourselves at our recent board meeting are appropriate and necessary.

For answers I don't think we need to look far: the history of the Straus family is, in my opinion, one of the finest examples of an American success story, exemplifying some of the best values and qualities that a person can strive to represent. Our predecessors were immigrants looking for an opportunity to "make it" in a young land called America. They came for the American Dream, and by many measures, they obtained and exceeded it, becoming successful and wealthy business owners. They owned and operated the world's largest department store (R.H. Macy's) expanding its profitability and sales reach. They operated a very successful cut-glass business, producing beautiful specimens that are still recognized for their originality, durability, and design.

Though some might have been tempted to stop there, the Strauses went much further. They gave back to their communities by leveraging their intellect and the opportunities that provided them their successes. They served in politics as Ambassadors and Congressmen for the United States. In fact, a Straus was the first Jew appointed to serve in the Presidential Cabinet at a time when Jewish people were not generally afforded such important and influential roles (Can you name him?). Strauses have been philanthropists, advancing education, housing, and the arts. The values and qualities of our ancestors provide us much to be proud of, and much to preserve and share with others.

The story of the Straus family is also one of loss and disaster. Our family suffered diseases, such as meningitis, which took the life of a Straus infant before he had the opportunity to succeed or fail. And of course, we suffered the catastrophic loss of two prominent figureheads, Isidor and Ida, when they were lost at sea in the Titanic tragedy.

I don't know what the Straus Historical Society will become many decades down the road. I am sure it is not up to me alone to decide.

Continued on the bottom half of page 6

ciency and 1600 + forms of 34<sup>th</sup> B'way." On July 11<sup>th</sup> he wrote, "... the system is very much like Macy's and I have not derived so much concrete benefit as I have from the general atmosphere that pervades business over here - at least at Selfridges. They don't spend money on efficiency methods if they do not see actual money saved over old methods. They depend more on the personal touch for control and of course that means it is not as tight a control as you have."

RALPH I. STRAUS  
Harvard University, A.B. '25  
875 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.  
A-11 Gallatin Hall



Ralph received his MBA from Harvard in 1927. Before formally joining R. H. Macy & Company, Ralph was part of a National Student Federation of America Delegation to Russia. The group traveled from Cherbourg to Paris, Leningrad, Riga, Moscow, The Volga, The Caucasus, Tiflis over the Georgian Military Pass, Georgia, Batum, the Black Sea, Yalta, The Crimea, Odessa and Kiev. The many photographs he took and a diary he kept with its detailed descriptions enables the reader to travel along with him more than seventy five years later.

Starting in 1928 Ralph held various positions at Macy's. He described his employment from 1928 to 1930 as "various minor jobs" with a starting salary of \$25 per week. In fact, he was in the training squad, following the tradition of the elder Strauses to have all family members joining the firm start at the bottom, learn the business, and work their way up. He held subsequent positions as departmental manager, general manager in charge of non-selling departments with about 3,000 employees, merchandising executive, vice-president, corporate secretary, member of the executive committee of the board of directors and director. He was also in charge of two subsidiaries; LaSalle and Koch Company, the largest store in Toledo OH and Davison-Paxon Company in Atlanta GA. Throughout this period Ralph was also actively involved in charitable affairs organized by New York retailers such as the Greater New York Fund. In 1932 he was one of three members of a commission appointed by Mayor McKee to inquire into and make recommendations for centralizing purchasing for New York City.

Ralph met Matilda Bradford Day at Macy's when she worked there during the Depression. On August 31, 1933 Ralph married Matilda (Tillie) at All Saints Chapel in Kidders-On-Cayuga, NY. One could say that she married the boss, or at least the boss' son. Ralph father Percy was president of Macy's at the time. Ralph and Tillie's two month honeymoon abroad appears to have been idyllic. He wrote home from the "Ile de France," "Tillie is really

marvelous fun as we play ping-pong and deck tennis about evenly, like to dance and partake of alcoholic liquors to just about the same extent, and seem to like the same people. Pretty soon we will have to look for something to fight about just to say we have." After their return to the States, the couple made their home in New York City. Their two sons, Thomas Percy and Bradford Peter were born in 1935 and 1937 respectively.

Ralph and Matilda were returning from Europe aboard the US liner "Manhattan" when World War II was declared in Europe in 1939. He left his position at Macy's to contribute to war planning. In 1940 he became a member of the committee of five that inquired into federal government procurement policies and recommended a federal coordinator of purchases. From April 1941 through May 1942 he was employed by Export Control as an expert consultant on administration. He prepared the overall plan of organization for economic warfare, becoming the executive assistant to the chief of operations of economic warfare. He served as branch chief of the War Production Board in Washington DC from 1942 to 1943, engaged in organization and operating problems in connection with the process of centralizing the board.

In May 1942 he learned that an Army Specialists Corps was being organized by the Adjutant General's office. During this time he campaigned to be admitted to the US Army and finally received a commission as major in the specialist reserves. In 1943 he attended the School of Military Government in Charlottesville VA. There, American officers were taught the principles of administrating occupied territories. He wrote to David Niles, Administrative Assistant to the president on July 20, 1943, "The primary function of military government is to deal with a civilian population in such a way that they will not hinder military operations and if possible will assist them."

In the Fiftieth Anniversary Report of the Harvard Class of 1925 Ralph wrote, "At the time of the invasion of Italy, the army found itself desperately short of military government personnel, and so in my case it was only four months from the time I was commissioned in Washington to the time I was landing on the beach at Salerno as part of the military government team attached to the British 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. When the battle lines moved further north I was with the team that entered Naples on October 1, 1943, as the Economics Officer on the military government team." Ralph became the Military Governor of Naples. He was responsible for procuring food for the starving inhabitants of the city. Newspaper articles of the day tell of his amazing ability feed the people and to restore order. An article dated April 15, 1944 for the American Civilian Affairs Training Center reads, "The difficulties facing A.M.G. officials in general and Major Ralph I. Straus



Matilda Day and Ralph I. Straus  
newspaper wedding photo

in particular, are enormous. Major Straus, a vice-president of R.H. Macy & Co., New York department store, is especially charged with the feeding of Naples. His life for the last few days has been more hectic than Christmas in Macy's basement. The Germans destroyed ninety percent of the food supplies in warehouses. They broke into 'alimentaria' carrying off champagne, wines and luxury foods, and permitted mobs to loot the remaining stocks. They sowed the Gulf of Naples with magnetic mines so that waiting foodships still are denied entry. Major Straus found virtually no meat, no milk, no flour, and a small store of sugar. Scouting the country-side, A.M.G. patrols uncovered 2,500 quintals of grain six miles from the town - enough to last Naples for a day and a half. But mills are without power to grind the grain into flour and no power will be available for at least four days."

Once the situation in Naples had been secured, and the population began receiving food from outside sources, Ralph became part of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) based in London. His unit was the Traffic Division, Solid Fuels Section. "It will be the function of the traffic division to collect and compile information and statistics on ports of entry and on transportation facilities which can be used for the transport of solid fuels and mining materials."

Percy Selden Straus died April 6, 1944 in New York but Ralph was unable to leave his post in Naples to attend the funeral of his father. A year later he applied for leave so that he could attend to his duties as executor of Percy's estate. The Army allowed him leave pending his discharge. Ralph was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the US Army November 1945 shortly before his discharge. He received four battle stars. He wrote to his friend Captain Tony Leiche on December 10, 1945, "... I was actually home in my own apartment very late in the night on Friday the 16<sup>th</sup>, just exactly two weeks after leaving Frankfurt. A motor trip to Camp Dix, New Jersey, on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup>, and I was back home again on the night of Tuesday the 20<sup>th</sup> and am now on terminal leave until the end of January. ... I am going to take a trip with my wife down to Mexico after Christmas." On April 18, 1946 he wrote to Margaret J. White in England, "I am back on civey street and am living in New York at home with Tillie, my wife, and our two boys. The war seems something in the far distant past, yet at this writing V.E. Day took place less than a year ago, and I have only been home five months."

Ralph and Tillie lived at 895 Park Avenue in New York City. They bought "Rockledge Farm" on Old Croton Road in Bedford, NY in November 1946. Tom reports that Ralph always loved "Rockledge." It was their summer/weekend home. The dining room held one of the world's largest clamshells, maybe six feet across. It came with the house and it contained a fountain. Their pool was an engineering feat; built out of solid rock. Nearly sixteen years later, on April 25, 1962, while Ralph was in

the Far East, the house and all of its contents were completely destroyed by fire. Extensive newspaper coverage attest to the extent of the destruction.

Once discharged from the Army, Ralph did not return to Macy's but remained on the board of directors. He divided his time between charitable and civic pursuits. He was deeply concerned about the world economic situation, writing and speaking frequently about the development and promotion of free trade. In 1949-1950 he was a member of the European Cooperation Administration, Department of Commerce whose mission it was to investigate Western Europe's dollar earnings. He was then appointed a special assistant to W. Averell Harriman from 1950-1951. Harriman was a roving ambassador and Ralph was a director of one of eight divisions of the Marshall Plan in Paris. His mission was to lead a trade promotion section for the countries receiving aid under the Marshall Plan.



Ralph I. Straus  
at Rockledge Farm

Ralph came close to dying on a plane traveling from London to Paris during this time period. A newspaper article from the *English News Chronicle* of April 14, 1950 reports, "Air Liner Torn By Lightning: 31 Aboard. ... Lightning struck a Paris-bound B.E.A. Viking with 27 passengers and four crew aboard at 3,500ft. over Dieppe last night critically injuring the stewardess..." Further investigation revealed that a bomb exploded onboard. Ralph reported to British European Airways that he saw a suspicious looking man enter the lavatory of the plane shortly before the bomb exploded. His letter and subsequent testimony were turned over to Scotland Yard.

Immediately following the war Ralph was involved in a number of businesses including building prefabricated houses, developing new products, handling trust investments and in charity work. He became a member of the board of trustees of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Ralph's mother, Edith Abraham Straus, suffered from multiple sclerosis. This surely influenced his decision to establish the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. He served as its president and on their board. He remained active in both these organizations for many years.

In Harvard's fiftieth anniversary report Ralph wrote, "War years increased my previous interest in government and public affairs. My first official public position had occurred when, in 1932, I was appointed as a member of a three-man committee to report on centralizing purchasing for the City of New York. ... I was further intrigued by government and international affairs when my uncle, Jesse Isidor Straus, was appointed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt as Ambassador to France, 1932-1936. This interest of mine was further stimulated by my war experience as a military government officer where I was able to observe and take part in the interesting interactions between the economic, the political, and the military."

For the remainder of his professional career, Ralph worked in various capacities, many of them involving international economic matters. He spoke frequently about free trade and traveled around the world investigating economic conditions in Third World countries. In May 1955 Ralph was part of a delegation of American businessmen to the International Chamber of Commerce meeting in Tokyo. He made a fourteen country and colony trip accompanied by his son Tom. Theirs was a three month adventure. Tom reported that his father must have had very high connections because they were treated so well. They visited a maharaja's palace in India. He remembers being served an amazing meal in Hong Kong with enormous platters of food of every description. And in Ankor Watt, Cambodia they visited ruins overgrown by banyon trees that were only partially dug out. Tom said he was there to be Ralph's memory. Ralph could never remember people's names and Tom was able to do that for him. It seems such a small price to pay for this amazing experience.

Ralph spoke to the League of Women Voters in March 1956: "The Organization for Trade Cooperation, An Essential Element of US Foreign Policy." He spoke at the Henry Street School of Social Science in New York City on May 1956. His talk was "Trade - A Two-Way Street. A debate in November 1956 with Karl H. Helfrich at the Morristown Forum Association was titled, "Are More Trade Policies or Less Liberal Trade Policies in the Best Interest of the US?"

As a special consultant for the U.S. Department of State in 1958 Ralph prepared a report for C. Douglas Dillon, Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs titled, "Expanding Private Investment for Free World Economic Growth." In this report he wrote of the excess of local currencies piling up in many countries. He was also coauthor of "Accumulation, Administration of Local Currencies" for the International Cooperation Administration. He was appointed director of the American Council on NATO in 1959.

Ralph wrote a proposal for President Johnson in November 1964, "United States Leadership and Initiative in the Atlantic World." He wrote, "... we should get on with the job of constructing the Atlantic world through advocating the policy of the "vacant chair." The principal obstacle to the advancement of the Atlantic concept had been the opposition of the French government - perhaps not backed by a majority of the French people. The President should state the goals to which we aspire and indicate the willingness of the United States to join with other like-minded nations to go forward even if France decides to stay on the sidelines. The "chair" would be held vacant until France wishes to occupy it, and there would be no recriminations, merely the statement that honest men can differ in their opinions."

A trip to the Middle East for the Council on Foreign Relations from the end of January to March 7, 1965 took Ralph to Beirut,

Baalbekm Damascus, Amman, Jerusalem, Haifa, Negev, Tel-Aviv, Jaffa, Lydda, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beersheba, Dimona, Sodom, Mazada and Ein Gedi.

In October 1965 he gave a speech, "The Future of US Foreign Trade Policy After the Trade Expansion Act Expires, Outline of a New Initiative." In it he wrote, "Calling for a redefined authority to negotiate to zero tariff agreements governing items for which the U.S. and Western Europe (not merely the six Common Market countries) account for at least 80% of world trade. A broader grant of authority to the President to negotiate non-tariff barriers should also be included. Another possibility which at least is worth exploring is whether the U.S.-Canadian agreement to free trade in automobiles could serve as a model for wider functional "little common markets" in specific industries."

Ralph was appointed director of the Committee for the National Trade Policy in 1966. In January 1967 he wrote "Proposal for New Initiatives in U.S. Foreign Trade Policy." "The times will demand inspired political judgment to determine a course of action in the national interest of the U.S. and at the same time politically acceptable and economically advantageous to both the industrialized nations and the developing countries, and hopefully attractive to at least some of the countries from the Communist bloc." His speech was published in *ORBIS Magazine*, a quarterly journal of world affairs of the Foreign Policy Research Institute of Pennsylvania. He was given a Presidential appointment by Lyndon B. Johnson to the Public Advisory Committee on U.S. Foreign Trade Policy in 1968. In January of that



Ralph I. Straus - R.H. Macy's & Co.  
Annual Report 1978  
Board of Directors

year he wrote an outline for a symposium on the institutional arrangements for the future liberalization of international trade. "The organization of trade among the industrialized countries cannot be divorced from political objectives ... world-wide prosperity and stability is of greater importance to the U.S. than to any other single individual country, chiefly because we are more likely to be involved in the future as we have in the past in any outbreak of financial, economic or actual warfare anywhere in the world" He testified before the Trade hearings of the Office of the Special Representative for Trade Negotiations in Washington DC in May 1968. In October he said, "The closing days of 1968 find the government without a long-range international trade policy." He suggested, "A multilateral free trade association (MFTA) is an alternative means of further liberalization of world trade."

A draft of a letter to the president in 1970 reads, "My purpose in writing to you is to convey my personal apprehension and conviction that this country is on the razor's edge of a potentially disastrous trade war with Europe, to a lesser degree with Japan." In an April 1971 speech to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the International Chamber of Congress in Vienna Austria titled "The US and the Future of International Trade Liberalization," Ralph said, "As we move into the decade of the 70's, we are all aware

that a crisis stage has been reached in the progressive liberalization of international trade ... the forces of protectionism are on the march. ... plan the negotiation of an international economic treaty to embody broad principles of economic relationship, and to codes of fair behavior and fair trade, to agree to consult when unilateral actions by any member might harm the economics of others. It would embody the principles of consultation and conflict resolutions..."

Some of the many positions Ralph held throughout the years include: 1930-1994, Council on Foreign Relations; 1932-1975, Chamber of Commerce of NY; 1949, Volunteer Committee of Housing and Construction in NY; 1955-1990, National Planning Association; 1958-1981, U.S. Council - International Chamber of Commerce; 1959-1969, National Association of Manufacturers; 1960-1969, Harvard University, Visiting Committee for the Board of Overseers for the Center for International Affairs; 1961-1991; the Atlantic Council of the United States; a member of the Working Group of the U.N. Committee, Arms Control. In addition, Ralph was a trustee and vice-president of The Educational Alliance; trustee of the Museum of the City of New York; director and member of the executive committee of the National Retail Dry Goods Association; vice-president of the Citizens Union; general vice-president of the Greater New York Fund and a member of the council of advisors of the Atlantic Union Committee.

Ralph was always acutely interested in the outdoors, in travel

and in nature. He took every opportunity to travel the world and his photographs and diaries of these trips attest to his delight with each new experience. Whether for business or pleasure, Ralph documented each journey. Fortunately, his sons Tom and Brad donated these photographs and diaries to the Straus Historical Society. He made trips to Russia, China, Africa, the South Pacific Islands, Iceland, throughout Europe and the Caribbean. Ralph was an avid fisherman who enjoyed salmon fishing. In 1975 he wrote, "I have killed Atlantic salmon in Canada, Iceland, Norway, Scotland and Ireland. I am looking forward to many more such trips just so long as I am able to wade in a flowing river." Ralph was also a horseman, played polo, golfed and hunted. He was member of the Harvard Club, University Club, Sky Club, Metropolitan Club and Shinnecock Hills Golf Club. When Ralph spoke of being retired, he explained that it meant, "... remaining active, both mentally and physically, but with more frequent periods of traveling and so-called vacation. It also means keeping up with the political and economic affairs of our country, and the very parlous state of international relations around the world."



Ralph I. Straus - 1974  
Fishing in Scotland

In later years, Ralph maintained homes in New York City, Southampton, NY and Carefree, AZ with his second wife, Katherine (Katney) Mulvane whom he married August 6, 1956. He died in Arizona February 5, 1996. In his memory, Katney commissioned a window for the St. Andrew's Dune Church where they worshiped in Southampton, NY.

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### A Message from the Secretary: David H. Kurzman

Continued from page 2

But I do have images of what I think we can become. And I feel a responsibility to lay a strong foundation upon which future generations of our family can build a lasting and meaningful tribute to the values and qualities (and to the successes and tragedies) of our ancestors however you choose to view them, whether as immigrants, business owners, politicians, philanthropists, or otherwise.

It's easy from the comfort of **my** chair to picture long-term goals for the Straus Historical Society that include scholarship funds and grants for students and business people working to succeed in America. I imagine the development of broad social and business contacts through our extended family and the cooperation of the Straus Historical Society with other communities and non-profits to expand our reach and positive influences. But, while it may be tempting to look down the proverbial road and imagine activities and causes that the Straus Historical Society could address, I am not eager to jump to "step ten" just yet, especially when we are still at step two or three and without a firm view of the intermediate steps.

So I challenge you to ask yourself some difficult questions from the comfort of **your** chair. Ask yourself why it is important to sustain our history and our heritage. I encourage you to determine how you would like to sustain the values and qualities that the Straus family represents. Look to future issues of this newsletter for information about how you can participate, whether it be with your time, resources, financial commitment, or otherwise. Our website will be a great way to gain information and express ideas on how the Straus Historical Society could grow.

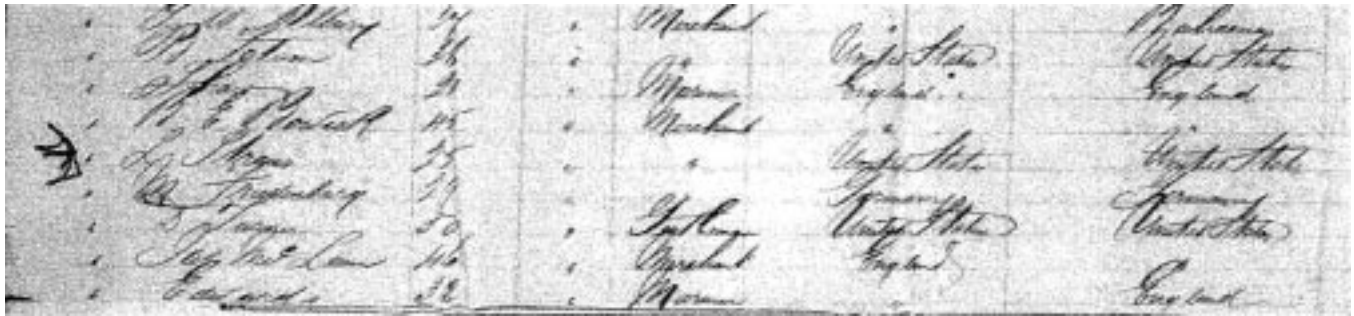
I am ready to accept the challenge: to work on the development of a Legacy Society as one way the future of the Straus Historical Society may be ensured and enhanced. I welcome your participation and your suggestions. What else can we or should we be doing? Please contact me. [dkurzman@kurzmanpartners.com](mailto:dkurzman@kurzmanpartners.com)



## Isidor Straus, Blockade Runner

Isidor Straus described his adventures as a blockade runner in his autobiography. It was privately published by his oldest daughter, Sara Straus Hess in 1955. He reported that he left Charleston Harbor on the steamer "Alice," in June 1863. It was the only ship to successfully run the blockade that night. He reached Nassau "without further excitement."

"... it was planned that I should try to reach London, if possible, without passing through any part of the United States, as it was considered dangerous for any Southerner to be discovered sojourning in the north. I found some acquaintances at Nassau who advised me to take the steamer "Corsica" for Havana, which was expected in a few days on her regular voyage from New York via Nassau for London. I followed that advice, and after spending a few days in Havana, I was persuaded that the quickest way for me to reach England would be via New York." As you will note in the image below of the manifest from the "Corsica," Isidor is listed as L. Straus, age 25, a merchant and citizen of the United States. He was, in fact, 18.



Isidor stayed at the Astor House in New York, intending to leave on the steamship "Great Eastern" for England. His reason for choosing this ship was that "She was the wonder of the age - the largest boat ever launched." As a child he'd arrived in New York on September 13, 1854 on the maiden voyage of the SS St. Louis. It's ironic that he died on the maiden voyage of "Titanic," "the largest boat ever launched" almost 50 years later.

Isidor was given advice about the dangerous conditions for Southerners in the city and decided to leave almost two weeks earlier for Liverpool on the ship "City of Baltimore." "The advice for us to leave New York on account of expected draft riots was based on correct prognosis, as it proved true, for the riots did take place and were of a most serious character, resulting in the murder of hundreds of negroes as a manifestation of hatred against causes of the war. ...

"The sympathy in England at the beginning and at this period of the war was entirely with the Southern cause, based undoubtedly on the selfish reason that the cut-off of the cotton supply was most detrimental to Great Britain's manufacturing interests."

The archives of the Straus Historical Society contains pages from Isidor's sales of Confederate bonds in England made after cotton became impossible to obtain. The page to the right reflects the accounting of the sale of Confederate Bonds for Mr. L. G. Bowers by I. Straus on April 11, 1864. We know that Isidor

arrived in England in the summer of 1863 as the secretary to Lloyd G. Bowers. He and his colleagues hoped to use Georgia cotton as collateral to raise money for the purchase of ships to run the Union blockade. This seemed to be an advantageous business venture since cotton was in much demand in England. The ships would return to the South filled with goods that were unavailable in the South and, once refilled with cotton, run the blockade back to Europe. The "Mary Bowers" was the only ship actually built by this group. A model of it is on display in the Port Columbus Civil War Naval Museum, in Columbus, GA.

When Isidor arrived in England, Bowers had no immediate need for his services. He was sent to his grandparents' home in Germany for several months. Isidor's early letters home beg family members to send him guidance. As time passed, Isidor became more confident. He established himself as a trader, buying and selling Confederate bonds on the European markets. A page from his accounts for the end of August and the beginning of September 1864 lists as many as 14 steamers carrying his packages homeward with a value of \$130,000.

1650  
London April 11/64

Account of Sale of Confederate Bonds for  
Mr. L. G. Bowers by I. Straus

25000/	10/0	£ 962	10
10000/	10/0	349	
4000/	10/0	140	12
2000/	10/0	550	
4000/	10/0	135	10
5000/	10/0	750	0
2000/	10/0	106	15
6000/	10/0	312	10
75000/		£ 2666	05 10
By reference, telegrams, vouchers &c			
made to my account amount £ 17 -			
Expenses of my trip 25 -			
Bill stamps 1 -			
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for my use for expenses 500 -			
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Isidor returned to his own country after the Civil War with \$10,000 in gold he'd earned buying and selling bonds. The eighteen year old boy who was sent to Europe in 1863 came home an accomplished twenty year old businessman.

## The Straus African Expedition of 1929

A member of the Oscar Straus branch of the family recently asked what had become of the bird specimens collected by Sarah Lavanburg Straus on her expedition to Africa in 1929 for the American Museum of Natural History. This seemingly simple question set me off on a journey of exploration and discovery that could not have been more interesting.

The first information I was able to gather about this trip was from an article published May 8, 1929 in *The New York Times*, "Mrs. Straus Back From Africa Hunt, Encountered Many Perils in Trip for American Museum of Natural History." The article reports that the four month journey took Sarah, her grandson Edward Schafer, ornithologist Rudyerd Boulton and his ethnomusicologist wife Laura on a 15,000 mile adventure. They had to make their own roads for about 1,000 miles through the jungle and build trestle bridges along the way. Much of the trip was accomplished on foot. Sarah was almost trampled by a herd of elephants and narrowly escaped being knocked down by a charging rhinoceros. She saw lions at close range and more than 150 ostriches standing together at one time.

In a letter dated November 15, 1928 the Director of the American Museum of Natural History Dr. George H. Sherwood wrote to Sarah's son Roger W. Straus, "... I want to thank your mother for giving the Museum this opportunity to secure greatly desired material from Africa and we appreciate the fact that she desires to have her expedition to Nyasaland of direct benefit to the Museum."

Sarah Straus was the 68 year old widow of Oscar Solomon Straus in 1929. She, her grandson Edward "Ned" Schafer and researchers Rudyerd Boulton and his wife Laura spent four months in Central Africa, first on a photographic safari and then on a collecting expedition. During the expedition more than 900 bird specimens were collected. Laura Boulton collected insect specimens as well as recording native African music. The trip was documented by photograph and film. Ned is credited with taking many of the photographs. In a *New York World Telegram* article of February 9, 1945, Ned was said to be an "outstanding hunter and angler." Unfortunately, a search of the museum collections has failed to turn up the films.

An e.mail query to the American Museum of Natural History got me in touch with the ornithology collections manager, Paul Sweet. Not knowing how the museum and it's field researchers work, my original naive questions were whether any of the



Sarah Straus on the barge "SS Nuer" on the Upper Nile in Sudan

bird specimens had been used for display and what had become of them? The answers were far more complicated and interesting than I expected.

Although the museum had an active research and collecting program in Africa, the 1929 annual report of the American Museum of Natural History states, "The generosity of Mrs. Oscar Straus and Mr. Edward Schafer enabled the Museum to send Mr. Rudyerd Boulton to collect birds in Uganda and Kenya Colony, followed by four months field work in Nyasaland, from which region the Museum previously had no collection." An article in *Natural History Magazine*, Volume XXIX, Jan-Feb, page 105-6 reads, "On January 10, the Straus expedition sailed



Edward "Ned" Schafer accompanied his grandmother Sarah on the expedition

for a four months' trip to collect birds for the American Museum. The party, which included Mrs. Oscar Straus, her grandson Mr. Edward Schafer, and Mr. and Mrs. Rudyerd Boulton plans to go up the Nile through Uganda by automobile to Nairobi, and spend about two weeks visiting the big game fields there."

I had the opportunity to visit the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and to see the photographs and

some of the bird specimens collected during this expedition. Mark Katzman is the museum's special collections supervisor. He was most helpful; facilitating my visit, granting me access to the photographs and written material about the expedition and then having excellent copies of the photographs made for the Straus Historical Society. Mary LeCroy, Research Associate in the Department of Ornithology arranged to show me the bird specimens. She patiently explained how field work is accomplished; how a bird is caught, skinned and preserved, and how an expedition documents its work. Whatever meager understanding I now possess about bird taxonomy is directly due to Mary's ability to bring her vast knowledge to my elementary level. She wrote, "These birdskins were prepared as scientific studyskins, and probably would not have been mounted for display, but rather stored in our collection for scientific study by specialists. While mounted specimens are of great use in preparing exhibits for the public, by far the largest part of our collection is stored in insect-proof and light-proof cabinets, where they remain accessible to scientists from all over the world. The Straus expedition specimens are still serving that purpose in our collection."

Although Rudyerd Boulton was associated with the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, he seems to have been at the American Museum of Natural History when the Straus expedition was proposed. It appears he was doing research there but not affiliated with the museum. Perhaps it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. Shortly after his return from Africa,



he returned to the Carnegie Museum as Assistant Curator of Ornithology. To show their appreciation for the loan of Mr. Boulton to the American Museum of Natural History, the Curator-in-Chief proposed to present a "series of the duplicates of the collections of birds, which Mr. Boulton will acquire." The museum in Pittsburgh received approximately 200 bird specimens.

Robert Gengewere, a Carnegie Museum Archivist, granted permission for me to quote from an article written by Rudyerd Boulton, Volume 4, May 1930. In it, Boulton is referring to the area traveled during the Straus African Expedition of 1929 "Orchid-festooned forests - unmapped volcanos which pierce soft layers of low-hanging clouds, sifting and filtering down steep ravines - giant mahoganies, strangling figs, and tree ferns - it is not often that a naturalist is permitted to have a laboratory so romantically equipped, yet such was the workshop awaiting Mrs. Boulton and me in central East Africa, where we were to pursue our problem: the study of distribution and causes of distribution of the birds of the mountain rain forests. To reach our field of operations was fascination in itself, but that is another story. Up the Nile we went from Cairo, by train and river steamer, and across the Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya by motor with the Mrs. Oscar Straus Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History. As we traveled, we shot with camera and movie the big game - elephant, giraffe, wildebeest, kongoni - of these incomparable plains. Then an east-coast steamer took us from Mombasa to Beira, the thriving port of Portuguese East Africa, and a biweekly train chugged its way from the coast to



Sarah Straus with a Grants Gazelle  
Khartoum Sudan

the Shire Highlands in Nyasaland, a snug little protectorate of the British Empire. From there a monthly government mail steamer transported us and our ton and a half of equipment the length of Lake Nyasa to Mwaya in Tanganyika Territory at the head of the lake. Our five-thousand mile preface was ended, and our work was at hand."

Sarah Straus and her grandson Edward Schafer returned home in May 1929. Rudyerd and Laura Boulton continued their field work in Nyasaland, collecting on Mt. Rungwe north of Lake Nyasa. From there, they moved to the Union of South Africa and Southwest Africa for an additional four months. They continued collecting bird specimens, this time exclusively for the Carnegie Museum.

Boulton named a small African warbler with a chestnut throat for Sarah Straus. It is *Apalis chapini strausae*. Dr. James P. Chapin, Ph.D., was the Associate Curator of Birds of the Eastern Hemisphere at the American Museum of Natural History

when the expedition took place. It is common for scientists to name new species to honor people and Boulton seems to have done just that. This warbler species lives at 5,600 - 8,000



Drawing from: Urban, E.K., C.H. Fry and S. Keith 1997 *The Birds of Africa*, vol.5  
London, Academic Press, 669pp

feet above sea level. It is a small insect eating bird with blackish feathers and a chestnut colored throat.

Rudyerd Boulton moved to the Field Museum in Chicago in 1931. Their Bird Catalogue of August 30, 1946 notes, "... some of the interesting birds (Boulton) collected on the Straus Exp. near Mt. Cameron and in S. Nigeria." An e.mailed response by David Willard of the Field Museum states that there are 655 bird specimens in the Field Museum collection that were collected during the Straus West African Expedition in 1934. The 1945 *New York World Telegram* article reports that Sarah Straus financed an expedition for the Chicago Field Museum in 1935 at the age of 74. The additional specimens Mr. Willard mentioned must have been from this second expedition.

A *New York World Telegram* article of February 9, 1945 tells of Sarah's love of travel and adventure. In 1935, at 74, she returned to Africa, funding an expedition for the Field Museum of Chicago and led by Rudyerd and Laura Boulton. On this expedition the party "Took 700 small mammals, 300 phonograph recordings of native African music, 1000 still pictures, 15,000 feet of motion pictures and 700 varieties of birds."

"We got lost in the Sahara on our way back to Dakar after the expedition," Mrs. Straus reported with a chuckle, "and it was days before we could find our bearings again. We had planned our return trip so that we'd be back before the stormy weather but our calculations went wrong and we ran into a series of sandstorms that buried our station wagon. There was nothing we could do but sleep on the hard sand in blankets and dig our way out in the morning. None of us was strong enough to dig out the car, and, besides, we didn't have any shovels. Luckily, another party of hunters came along and got us out of our predicament after the storm had passed."

The article, written when Sarah was 83 years old, reported that she would return to Africa again if her doctors permitted it.

This article could not have been written or photographically illustrated without the assistance of: Mark Katzman, Special Collections Supervisor and Mary LeCroy, Research Associate, Department of Ornithology of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Bernadette G. Callery, Museum Librarian, Carnegie Museums in Pittsburgh and David Willard, Collections Manager - Birds, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Thank you all.

## Lazarus' First Family

By now you are familiar with the history of Lazarus Straus, his wife Sara and their children Isidor, Hermine, Nathan and Oscar. I've written extensively about the lives of each. Up until now we've had little information about Lazarus' first wife Fannie Levi, their daughter Karoline and her family. I've always wondered why Karoline didn't live with Lazarus and Sara and why she didn't emigrate with them.

Although all of my questions aren't answered, we've recently begun to solve the puzzle. You may recall that I've been corresponding with Dr. Hans Steinebrei of Kaiserslautern Germany for many years. He wrote a book about the emigration of Jews from Otterberg. We exchange information; my supplying him with letters from the Strauses to their relatives in Otterberg and he answering my many questions about the loved ones who stayed in Germany. It was Dr. Steinebrei who told us about the Straus family's financial difficulties as a result of the Revolution of 1848. We learned that this was part of the reason why Lazarus emigrated to the United States.

Lazarus married Davora (Fannie) Levi, daughter of Ischen Levi and Catherine Boris in Otterberg on July 31, 1837. She was almost 24 years old. The marriage was witnessed by her brother, Abraham Levi III, a 27 year old businessman; Abraham Levi Sr., a businessman, age 52, uncle of the bride; Wilhelm Roos, a 35 year old school teacher; and Jakob Legrom, 50 years old; all residing in Blieskastel. Daughter Karoline (Lina) was born May 25, 1838 in Otterberg. Fannie died January 31, 1843. Lazarus then married his first cousin Sara Straus on March 26, 1844. Their first child Isidor was born on February 6, 1845. The custom of marrying relatives seems to have been quite common. Fannie was also a relative. And her father's granddaughter (by a second wife) was Lina Gutherz the wife of Nathan Straus. Genealogical records show that the Levi family and the Straus family are related in five ways in this time period.

When Sara came to the United States with her children, her step-daughter Karoline didn't accompany them. When Lazarus' family emigrated, a family council elected Karoline's uncle Abraham Levi to be her guardian. The date was July 14, 1852. It is presumed she went to live in Blieskastel. We haven't been able to locate the passenger manifest of the ship in which Lazarus traveled to the United States but we do know that his passport was issued May 26, 1852 in Sarreguemines France. We believe he left from LeHavre.

Karoline married Moritz Weiss. The couple lived in Mannheim and had son Ferdinand born there January 26, 1862. When

Lazarus Straus died in New York in 1898, he left \$10,000 to his grandson Ferdinand of Mannheim. In his will it is noted that Karoline was deceased.

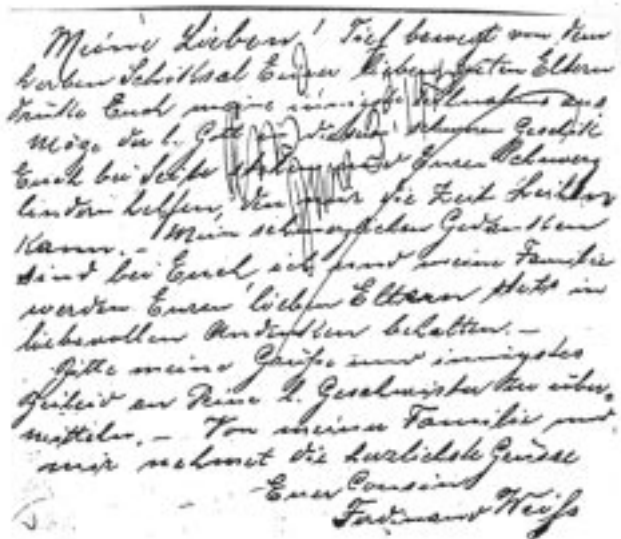
I recently came across a card written by Ferdinand in 1912 offering condolences to his "cousins" after Isidor and Ida lost their lives on "Titanic." It is shown in the center of the page. The translation reads, "Dear Ones, Deeply sorry about the fate of your dear patents. I herewith send you my deepest condolences. May God stand by your side at this serious moment and we hope that time may heal your wounds. My sad thoughts are with you. I and my parents will always remember your parents with love. Please give my good wishes and deepest condolences to your siblings. From my family and myself, I am sending my best wishes. Your cousin. Ferdinand Weiss." Until I uncovered this note I had no idea that the two families stayed in touch or even knew about each other.

I immediately wrote to Dr. Steinebrei asking him to find out what had become of Ferdinand Weiss and if he had any remaining family. Dr. Steinebrei responded with the information that

Ferdinand Weiss married Amalie Kunstler. The couple had three children; Frieda Luise, born November 26, 1893, Friedrich Wilhelm Siegfried, born August 21, 1895 and Ernst, born August 11, 1901, all in Mannheim. Frieda Luise married Dr. Nathan Roos. Wilhelm Roos was a witness to Frieda's great grandparent's Fannie and Lazarus' marriage. More research will have to be done to learn if Dr. Nathan Roos was a descendant of Wilhelm. I have been told that the Strauses paid the dowry when Frieda Luise married Dr. Nathan Roos. The second

child of Ferdinand and Amalie Weiss was Friedrich Wilhelm Siegfried Weiss. He died during World War I. The third child was Ernst Weiss, a merchant. He lived in Frankfurt from 1921 to 1924 and then moved back to Mannheim. He emigrated to the United States in 1927. I've located a 1930 Manhattan census for Ernest Weiss, age 29, single, living at 370 Manhattan Avenue. He was a stock clerk for a tea bag manufacturer. He died in New York in April 1981.

By the next newsletter, I hope we will know more about Ernest Weiss: if he married, had children, what became of his family, where he is buried and, most important, if he or his family ever knew the Strauses or that they were his relatives. His relationship to Lazarus Straus is the same as that of Donald Blun Straus, John Wendell Straus, Nathan Straus III, Barnard Sachs Straus, Sr., Irving Lehman Straus, R. Peter Straus, Ann Straus Gertler, Mildred Hockstader Morse, Oscar S. Straus II, Roger Williams Straus, Jr. and Florence Straus Hart. They are all Lazarus' great grandchildren. It is my hope that Ernest Weiss married, had children and that we may one day reunite the two families.



# Friends of Straus Park

Written by Al Berr

Edited by Joan Adler

Photographs by Margie Kavanau

On Saturday, October 18, 2003, Friends of Straus Park presented its 6<sup>th</sup> annual Art in the Park day, a celebration of the Park, featuring artwork for sale, performances and, of course, food and drinks.

Some of the performers were: the Soh Daiko drummers of the Buddhist Church at Riverside Drive and 105<sup>th</sup> Street, the instructors from the nearby Fred Astaire Dance Studio, the Boto Foga Bossa Nova troupe, and the Perfect Fifth Group from LaGuardia High School. Also, a number of vendors offered a variety of wares - antiques, clothing and jewelry.

We also celebrated Leon Auerbach and his years of commitment to the Park. In the spring, a dogwood tree was planted in the Park in his honor. Adrian Benepe, the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation for the city spoke about Leon's dedication to the Park. Friends board member, Al Berr, presented a poem about Leon and the tree that is reprinted in the Friends newsletter.

Leon is taking a year's leave of absence from the Friends board. It is an indication of the scope of his devotion that a number of board members have been assigned to the various responsibilities that formerly were all assumed by him.

A few months ago, Friends wrote a letter to the developers of the 20-story condominium that is planned for Broadway and 107<sup>th</sup> Street opposite the Park. The letter pointed out the obvious interest that the builders and Friends share in the continuing health and beauty of the valuable asset that the Park represents. We suggested a meeting with New York State Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell to discuss the builders' stated commitment to our neighborhood and our community. The building, called Opus, will have 64 apartments priced between \$1.4 million and \$2.9 million, and will also contain retail space. Completion is set for early 2005.

## Future Friends dates are:

**Saturday, April 17 - 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM**  
**Annual Straus Park Commemorative Celebration**

**Wednesday, June 16 - 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM**  
**Evening Concert in the Park**

**Saturday, July 10 - 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM**  
**Book Fair**

**Saturday, October 16 - 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM**  
**Annual Art in the Park**

Right: Leon Auerbach in front of "his" tree



Below: Leon and Al Berr,



Right: Soh Daiko drummer



Above: Art in the Park artists' displays and appreciative shoppers

Right: Balloons for sale at Art in the Park



## Jewish Genealogical Society of Long Island

I was invited to speak about the Straus Historical Society, Inc. and about the work I do for the Straus family at a recent meeting of the JGSLI. The group meets the last Sunday of every month at the Y-JCC on Manetto Hill Road in Plainview NY. My talk was scheduled for the January 25<sup>th</sup> meeting and more than 60 people braved the 17 degree temperature to attend.

Most of the people who attend the JGSLI meetings are working on their own family's genealogy. The speakers generally educate the audience about some aspect of how research obstacles may be overcome, how to obtain information from foreign countries, or some other aspect of genealogical research. I decided to tell the audience an abbreviated history of the family and then explain that, while I do a small amount of genealogical research, my focus is more on "social history." By this I mean, placing the details of people's lives into context: learning about the times in which they lived, the political, social and economic conditions that affected their daily interactions, and how they chose to deal with these factors.

To illustrate my points I used an 1860 slave schedule of Talbotton, Talbot County GA. We know from this schedule, a census, that Lazarus Straus had one 13 year old male slave. Family lore tells us that the Strauses did not support the idea of slavery. But they did buy slaves, took them into their home, treated them well, taught them to read and write and then freed them. Slaves from other village families asked if the Strauses would buy them. Many years ago Flora Stieglitz Straus told me that Nathan Straus bought his mother a pregnant slave thinking he was getting two for the price of one. But his mother patiently explained that they would actually be getting less help because the advanced pregnancy prevented the woman from working and, once the baby was born, there would be two mouths to feed instead of one. None of this could be gleaned from the slave schedule alone.

When I write the articles in the newsletter, I must draw upon all my sources and resources to write a comprehensive article, using materials in our archives, in the media, from books, letters, and oral histories as well as from interviews with family members. Writing often points out what I don't know, where my information is lacking and directs me to new areas of research. It is a way to organize, digest and synthesize the material. And it is one of the very best means to bring these people to life.

I will be speaking in LA at their Jewish Genealogical Society meeting on April 19<sup>th</sup>. I've been asked to speak at a Smithtown NY synagogue, a local library and at Dowling College in March. If you would like to attend one of the talks, please contact me for details. Contact information appears in the column to the right.

### An Omission

The last issue of the newsletter contained an article about Oscar S. Straus and a profile of Lee Hockstader. I neglected to mention that Lee is the great-great grandson of Oscar S. Straus. Lee's mother, known as Didi, is Diane Deschamps Hockstader.

## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

"The Autobiography of Isidor Straus" privately published by Sara Straus Hess, in softcover - \$40.00

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

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

Color photograph album of the Straus family's trip to Talbotton and Columbus GA, October 24-26, 1997 - \$50.00

Color photograph album of the Oscar S. Straus Memorial rededication ceremony and reception, October 26, 1998 - \$50.00

Videotape of the Oscar S. Straus Memorial Rededication Ceremony - October 26, 1998 filmed by Alan F. Hockstader - \$25.00

Videotape: "Titanic on Broadway," a television special about the making of the Broadway play that includes Joan Adler speaking about the Straus family and a CNN segment in which Paul A. Kurzman is interviewed regarding the play "Titanic" - \$25.00

Color photograph album of the Straus family's trip to Talbotton and Columbus GA, June 22-24, 2001 - \$50.00

Masters Thesis of Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus." West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1947 - \$25.00

Send your tax deductible check to Joan Adler, payable to: **Straus Historical Society, Inc.**, P. O. Box 416, Smithtown, NY 11787-0416. A receipt will be issued for your purchase and for your contribution to the Society. You can contact Joan Adler by phone: 631-265-0383, fax: 631-724-4487 or e.mail: famjad@aol.com

## You Are Invited

The board of directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board.

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the office of board member Paul A. Kurzman, 129 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street, New York at 6 PM. There is no obligation to join the board or to contribute to the Society.

This invitation is extended so that anyone interested in the Straus Historical Society may have an opportunity to participate and to share his/her views. Please contact Joan Adler 631-265-0383 or Paul A. Kurzman 212-452-7035 for further information.