



# STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Volume 16 Number 2

Straus is the German word for ostrich

February 2015

## Lina Guthertz Straus

There have been several requests for articles about the women in the family. It is our pleasure to present an article about a truly amazing woman, Lina Guthertz Straus. Lina was Nathan Straus' wife and true partner, who championed his life's work, supported him through his bouts of depression and showed a strength that was not generally evident in women of the time. Through her letters and those of other family members, as well as through her own writings, we get a picture of the life of the Nathan Strauses as a couple, their passions and their love of family. One cannot write about one without including the other. They were inseparable, bonded, totally entwined in each other's lives and philanthropic causes. At a time when women were generally left to tend to the home and children, Lina's life was filled with travel to promote Nathan's Pasteurized Milk Laboratories and their work to relieve suffering in Palestine. We are honored to present a biography of Lina Guthertz Straus.

Lina Guthertz was born on April 20, 1854 in Ludwigshafen, Germany to Dr. Simpson Guthertz (1824-1866) and Jeannette Levi (1826-1889). She was the third of ten children. We are fortunate that Lina shared so much of her own family history with her children (and the Straus Historical Society through them). She wrote that there were five cases of marriage between the Straus and Levi families. Lina's grandfather was Ischen Levi. His daughter from a first marriage was Fannie Levi, and Fannie was the first wife of Lazarus Straus. After Fannie died, Lazarus married his first cousin Sara. They had five children; Isidor, Hermine, Nathan, Jacob Otto and Oscar. Fannie Levi and Lina's mother Jeanette Levi were half sisters.

Lina wrote that her father, Simpson Guthertz was the son of a butcher, who "studied medicine at Munich, Heidelberg and Prague, giving lessons, working on copies as secretary to professors, and in that way making enough money to enable him to study. He must have been a brilliant student as I know from some reports of his university years. In his last year he won a scholarship which enabled him to go to Italy for some special post-graduate studies.

"While he was in Italy the revolution of 1848 broke out. He was recalled by the Bavarian government, as typhus had broken out in a garrison in Ludwigshafen, Palatinate (part of Bavaria).

He not only treated the sick, but nursed them, and at night he carried the dead on his back out of town to a graveyard. This is one of the episodes of his short useful hard life. After the revolution failed and the country settled back to normalcy, he remained in Ludwigshafen, and married in 1850.

"He built up a large practice, working day and night, treating rich and poor alike - mainly the latter. He often was called out in the night and had to walk distances in midwinter, there being no kind of conveyance. It made no difference to him. He answered the call, if it was a rich or poor person. This strenuous life gave him rheumatism, which went to his heart, and he died



at the age of 42 in 1866. He left my mother with nine children in very modest circumstances, as no matter how hard he had worked, so many people could not and would not pay him. And the bringing up of so large a family, no matter how modestly, used up nearly all he had been saving. But he left a fine name, and was beloved and mourned by all. At one time the King of Bavaria passed through Ludwigshafen, our home town, and was taken sick. Although there were more famous and older physicians across the Rhine Bridge in Mannheim, the King sent for my father, who treated him so skillfully that he received an official testimonial praising him for his services.

"My mother was a very brave woman. When my father died in 1866 and left her with nine children (one died in early childhood) she faced life with the greatest of courage and with very limited means. She gave us all a very good education, the same as the children of the well-to-do received. We even took piano lessons although none of us had much talent. But being considered part of a good education, she stinted and denied herself everything, and labored to bring up this large family.

"As we graduated from school, one after the other, she put us into a store to learn the art embroidery business. When the three oldest, 18, 17 and 16 years (I was the third) had learned sufficiently, my mother started with us a business in 1870 un-

*If you would understand anything,  
observe its beginning and its development.*

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

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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 SHS Chair  
Oscar S. Straus III**

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals who contributed to the Straus Historical Society (SHS) in 2014. With your continued and increasing support we are able to continue the mission of the SHS to research, document, preserve and disseminate the history of what the many members of the Straus family have contributed over the generations to New York, America and to the world.

Your matching contributions to the wonderful David A. and Mildred H. Morse Charitable Trust matching grant have provided those additional funds that allowed us to hire Catherine McIlvaine Smith as our Assistant Director. Cat has continued to update and add material to our website and Facebook pages. I urge you to take a look at each. We think they are very appealing and professional. She is in the process of completely reorganizing our SHS archives and its companion bibliography. She's been working on this project for some time and it nears completion. We plan to begin digitizing these records, many of which have been in our archives for more than twenty years. Once they are digitized, we will make them available online to scholars, researchers, authors, students and other interested parties. Catherine was invaluable in preparing for, and during, our September speaking trip to Chicago and again in November when we revisited Georgia and did further presentations there. She has also contributed greatly to our new Straus presence at the Rutgers University School of Public Affairs and Administration's Virtual Museum of Public Service. [www.vmps.us] We have no idea how we could continue to carry on the important work of SHS without her.

Your generous contributions to our regular fund raising effort this Fall allowed us to finish out the year with gifts equal to our needs. We are grateful for your interest and support.

Your Board works hard to direct Joan Adler in her work. It is getting increased attention, not only throughout the country, but worldwide. This year Joan has scheduled presentations in NYC, FL, GA and again in the Chicago area. She and Cat are beginning to collect data and do interviews for SHS's upcoming book on Strauses and the Arts. And she will begin to formulate plans to hold a silent auction to celebrate the publication of this book. Look for additional exhibits in the Virtual Museum too.

We look forward to more exciting projects and the enhancement of others as the year progresses. Keep checking our website and Facebook pages as the announcement of new projects will be posted there.

Of course, none of this will happen without your support. Please consider increasing your contributions in 2015 so that we can increase our work; research, outreach and writing.

If you wish to contact me or Joan, please feel free to email me at the SHS email address info@straushistory.org or my personal email ostraus3@aol.com. We are interested in your thoughts about the future direction of SHS and about projects you'd like to see us undertake.

I look forward to hearing from.

der the firm name of Geschwister Guthertz (Brothers and Sisters Guthertz). Behind the scenes she did more than we did. But we all worked very hard together and did very well - and from that time on we were better off and lived more comfortably.

"Your father (Nathan Straus) was on a business trip from New York. He came to Germany with R. H. Macy whom he assisted in buying goods. Papa had become associated with Mr. Macy by starting a China and Glassware Department in the store of R. H. Macy & Co. in 1874. On leaving New York your grandfather (Lazarus Straus) gave him a list of the names of friends to visit when he came to Germany. Among them was the name of my mother with whom he had been on terms of great friendship through the relationship, he having married in first marriage my mother's half sister Fanny Levi. Although being discouraged by people who took him around in Mannheim, and they told him "there were only women folks in the family," Papa insisted on paying us a visit because his father had given him the name. And thus, we met. After a courtship of five weeks, most of which time Papa spent on the road buying goods, we were married on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1875.

"For many years after our marriage Papa went abroad annually, and whenever possible I accompanied him. The first time was in 1877, when we went to Mannheim, taking our first child Jerome, then a year old, along. We remained with my mother for a year, during which time Papa once went to New York. When we finally left, we took Aunt Lucie, my mother's fifth daughter, along to New York. She was then seventeen years old and very beautiful. When we got off the steamer in New York, Uncle Isidor and Aunt Ida were there to meet us, as they always were. The moment Aunt Ida saw Aunt Lucie, she made up her mind, as she afterwards told us, that that was the girl for her youngest brother, Abie Blun. The young people met and before long they were engaged and married."

Lina was devoted to both her Guthertz and Straus families. She kept in touch with her brothers and sisters in Germany and with many other relatives. Her devotion to them is clear from her letters, some of which are in the SHS archives.

In the 1890s the Nathan and Isidor Straus families were part owners of R. H. Macy's & Company. Both families were extremely close. They owned side by side houses at Lower Saranac Lake, NY. When one brother was in New York City tending to business, the other brother traveled to Lower Saranac Lake to be with his family. During this time, sisters-in-law Lina and Ida helped each other care for their large families. We have many letters from this time period describing their daily activities and the affection they held for one another.

On July 15, 1890 Ida wrote to Isidor upon her arrival at Saranac Lake. She described the hospitality Lina showed and how Lina made certain every detail was attended to, to ensure their

comfort. At least one of Isidor and Ida's children was already at the lake and was being cared for by Lina. Ida wrote that Lina was taking care of him as though he were her own. Since Nathan and Lina's son Hugh Grant was born in September 1890, it is interesting how fully engaged and active Lina seemed to have been so far into her pregnancy. Ida wrote to Isidor later in the summer about her concern for Lina who insisted in traveling back to New York City on her own shortly before the baby's due date.

When the families returned to Saranac Lake in 1891, Ida and Lina traveled together by train. It seems that Ida's family stayed in Nathan and Lina's guest house until their own house was ready. Ida wrote, "Lina insisted on my taking a room in the house (rather than the guest house) .... We take our meals with Lina also. The two cooks working together in perfect harmony. ... Lina and our darlings send love."

Lina was very protective of Nathan who suffered from bouts of depression. In a letter to "Bro. Isidor" from Saranac Lake on July 24, 1891 she wrote about her concern that a lumberman they hired was dishonest. She didn't want to trouble Nathan about this and so she turned to her beloved brother-in-law for assistance. "I know Nathan would be very much disappointed if things went wrong and I should like to spare him, as far as possible."



Nathan and Lina's  
wedding photograph  
April 28, 1875

Lina's sister Lucie, the young widow of Abie Blun, married for the second time, this time to Edward Mammelsdorf. She often spent her summers with her sister's family. Lina explained in her letter to Isidor that she wanted to return to NYC to see Nathan before he left for Europe. "Lucie is here and will take complete charge of the household when I leave so that Ida will not be taxed any more through my being away."

After their son Jerome died of pneumonia in 1893, Nathan and Lina didn't want to return to Saranac Lake where they had so many memories. They sold that house and bought Villa Olympia on Cherry Island in New York State's Thousand Island area. This island was only large enough for three houses, a twin house to Nathan and Lina's was owned by Abraham Abraham, business partner with the Strauses in Brooklyn's Abraham & Straus department store, and a third house owned by Lina's sister Eugenie who married Louis Marx. The guest book from Villa Olympia reveal many visits by family members.

As was their custom, various family members regularly traveled to Europe. After they no longer spent summers at Saranac Lake, Long Branch or Lakewood NJ became summer destinations. Letters home from these places always enumerate the well being of family and who was caring for the health of whom. Lina is often mentioned as a caregiver or as someone with whom all had great affection. It was de rigueur to attend Sunday dinner at the home of Aunt Hermine. Once again, let-

ters to those absent were told about the well-being of all the Strauses and Lina was often mentioned.

When her father-in-law Lazarus died, Lina wrote a long letter of condolence to Isidor, Ida (who were at Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo, Egypt) and their daughters. "Before all let me report, what the cable has already assured you, that every one stood the ordeal like heroes and heroines and we feel better now than we did before the sad event occurred. Even Hermine and Irene (Hermine's daughter) who certainly had the worst of the trial, are quire cheerful and begin to realize how much we all have to be thankful for, and what little cause for murmuring against fate. I am sure you agree with me when I say that we were singularly blessed to have such a father and to have him live to ripe old age in happiness and within a short time in good health also. But when his strength failed him he was not happy because he could not enjoy life as he was want to, and he was quite ready and satisfied to go. Poor father had been failing since ever you left. I could not see the change from day to day and still hoped against hope that he might improve, and enable me to let you know it. I could not make up my mind to write you the truth, neither did I wish to deceive you. He was only abed for the last three days and even then he had no pain or ache, just a general giving out of the organs, when the angel of death called, he peacefully went to sleep. We were all with him and neither before nor after a strange hand touched the beloved one. Dear Nathan bore up bravely. He felt the responsibility of the oldest son at home and realized that he had to show a good example. Your boys were truly grand - they could not do enough to make up for your absence, and in trying to replace you, they really did more than could be expected from such young fellows. Dear Irma (Jesse's wife) also was a great comfort. She acted like an own daughter, never leaving us, and her quieting and soothing manner charmed us and endeared her anew to our hearts. Poor father enquired after you the day before - he addressed me and asked distinctly, "Was hoert Ihr von Isidor?" (What do you hear from Isidor) When I answered that we had good news, he said, "So, das ist recht" (So that is right) and then relapsed into unconsciousness again. This was one of the few things we could understand as he seemed to be dreaming all the time. But he must have missed you and remembered you were away, in spite of his condition. The general sympathy which our loss has aroused is something unprecedented - we are just overwhelmed with cards and letters of condolence. The funeral was the largest attended that has even been held in the Temple and all our dear ones seem to take great comfort in these demonstrations of respect and sympathy. ... You have contributed so much to your Father's happiness and always did your son's duties to the utmost. May the remembrance of this brighten every day of your life henceforth.

In 1892 Nathan Straus became interested in learning how to produce clean milk. Two stories are attributed to why Nathan

Straus first became interested. The first is that in the early 1890s he owned property that was a completely self-sustained farm. Two of his cows died of tuberculosis. He reasoned that if the cows were sick, then the disease must be carried to their milk. Perhaps this had something to do with the deaths of two of his young children, Sara and Roland. The other story is that Lina was in Central Park and bought milk for her children at the Boat House. When she saw the bluish tinge to the milk, she reasoned that the milk could not be clean and was concerned about allowing her children to drink it.

Nathan learned that sterilization would kill pathogens in milk. At the time there was no regulation of the dairy industry. Cows were kept in barns that were not cleaned. There was no rule that dairy cows must be free of disease. Nathan started exploring how to produce what he coined pasteurized milk. Nathan hired doctors and scientists to learn the process and then built the first Nathan Straus Pasteurized Milk Laboratory on East 32nd Street in New York City. Once the formula and process was perfected, he created milk depots around New York City to distribute this low cost healthy product. And then, for the rest of his life, Nathan Straus, supported and accompanied by his wife Lina, traveled the world, offering to build a milk pasteurizing laboratory for any municipality that would send professionals to learn the process.



Nathan and Lina in their NYC apartment - 27 West 72 Street  
Charles Webster (Nathan Jr) Lina,  
Nathan, Hugh Grant, Sissie

In 1917 Lina wrote *Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization: The Life Work of Nathan Straus*, a loving tribute to her husband. This book describes in minute detail the process of pasteurization and the distribution of pasteurized milk. Testimonials from prominent medical and scientific personnel, as well as government officials and philanthropists, are included. She wrote, "Milk, then, in its pure state, is a most desirable food; but conditions to-day make it almost impossible for the person of average means to obtain such milk. ...The impossibility of efficient

supervision of the health and cleanliness of the dairy hands and of the herd causes the constant peril of disease germs in the milk. All these conditions tend to make milk as it comes from the farm to-day an unsafe food. ... Every effort should be made to have milk produced in a sanitary way. ... The process is named after one of the greatest scientists, Louis Pasteur, of Paris. It was he who suggested heating below the boiling as a means of destroying bacterial organisms in fluids. However, his experiments had to do not at all with milk. The first extensive application of this process to milk was made by Mr. Straus.

"A nominal charge for the milk is regularly made to avoid pauperization. When even this small expense is too great a burden, the physician, who is in constant touch with all of the milk depots, reports such cases to the central laboratory and steps are taken to let such families get the milk free. In addition physicians and philanthropic agencies are supplied with books of coupons on which the poor can obtain free milk at any of the Straus stations." They are credited with saving the

lives of more than one million children. And, although Louis Pasteur first described the process whereby germs could be destroyed through heating, it was Nathan Straus applied this knowledge to milk and who coined the term pasteurization.

Nathan and Lina Straus first traveled to Palestine in 1904 where they were disturbed by the poverty of the people and the unhealthy conditions in which they lived. The Strauses became Zionists, believing in a Jewish national homeland. Much of their philanthropy from this point onward was directed toward Palestine. [An article about their efforts appeared in the August 2014 issue of the SHS newsletter which can be found online on the archives page of the SHS website [www.straushistoricalsociety.org](http://www.straushistoricalsociety.org).] Lina donated all of her jewelry to Hadassah to be used to erect a health center in Jerusalem. The first annual report of the Nathan and Lina Straus Health Center described its unique purpose: "The Health Center embodies an attempt to bring together under one roof all the forces in a community engaged in promoting the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants, and to coordinate their activities to the end that the maximum good may be achieved with the minimum effort. It is a community of workers motivated by the same idea and ideal, striving together to a common end - fostering the health of the inhabitants. In this building the infant is watched from its inception in the mother's womb and guided through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and manhood." In 1929 Nathan and Lina donated \$50,000 for the endowment of a fund to aid in the repair and maintenance of the Health Center in Jerusalem. Lina and Nathan supported soup kitchens for more than twenty years. They supported stations where people could learn a skill and prepare for employment and they generously donated to charitable organizations that provided services to the people.

Lina carried on an active correspondence with family members who remained in Germany. Although she lived in the United States since her marriage to Nathan in 1875, Lina wrote to her German relatives in German. In 1924 she wrote to Luise, the granddaughter of Lazarus and his first wife Fanny. A translation reads, in part: "We old people devote ourselves to the needy both here and in the European countries, where sadly our belief-sharers have it worse than during the war years. One must do his best ...Great progress will be made in Palestine in every direction and great satisfaction in consideration of our belief-sharers who are welcome nowhere. There the country will be built up in order to offer them a home. I dare not write about that because I would never stop. The theme is inexhaustible and very close to our hearts."

We have seen Nathan Straus' concern for the condition of his fellow man and his remarkable efforts to ameliorate suffering. Several previous issues of the SHS newsletter contain articles about his philanthropy. What is unusual is that his wife Lina was at his side and an active participant in all his endeavors. This was a time when women rarely worked outside the home,

especially married women with children. And it was a time when wives were generally not involved in their husband's activities. For Lina to be at Nathan's side, and to support his efforts on so many fronts, speaks volumes for this diminutive Victorian era woman.

Among her papers Lina left a Living Will: "Whatever happiness life has brought me, has been through Papas and your own limitless devotion - our in-laws the same as those of our own blood. - I feel grateful for all this and bless you for it to my last breath. - I don't speak of our grandchildren - You know the joy they have brought into our lives. - I only add my prayers for your precious health. - I know you will under all circumstances keep up the family tradition in our branch - of unity and mutual devotion - and not permit anything to interfere with it. - I have nothing further to wish for when my time of parting comes. God bless you and guard you all the days of your lives! Mamma.

Lina died May 4, 1930 at "Driftwood," the Straus' Mamaroneck, NY home. She was lauded in countless newspapers and journals. One on her obituaries reads, in part, "Mrs. Lina Gutherz



Nathan and Lina Straus  
50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary  
April 28, 1925

Straus, who for forty years worked side by side with her husband Nathan Straus, as one of this city's greatest philanthropists, is dead. She was seventy-seven. Death came gently while she slumbered at the embowered Straus estate Driftwood, at Mamaroneck, in spring decked Westchester county. Mrs. Straus lived two lives. First, as an immigrant girl bride, she worked with her husband until she saw him become one of the city's merchant princes. Then, with her husband, she turned her back on material achievement and devoted the mellow half of her life to tireless work in the cause of human helpfulness. Perhaps Mrs. Straus' greatest gift to the world was the saving of the lives of an estimated 1,000,000 babies. She, as wife of the man once elected "the worthiest American Jew," aided him in establishing a laboratory for

supplying pasteurized milk to the poor as early as 1892. ... Early in life the deaths of an infant daughter and a son in his teens turned Mrs. Straus toward child welfare work. Later she, with her husband, gave millions to the Zionist movement." Another obituary stated: "The maiden name of Mrs. Nathan Straus was Lina Gutherz. Gutherz is the German word for "good heart," and no woman had better claim to this title than the companion of Nathan Straus."

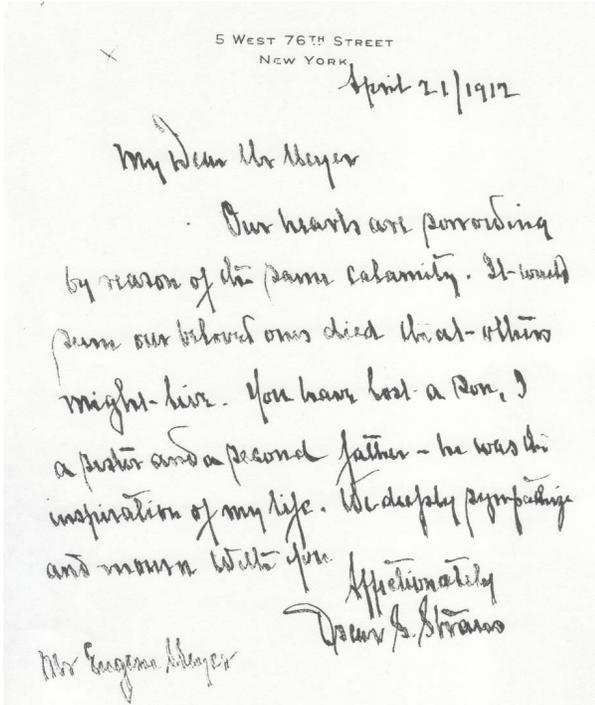
A third obituary read, "She stood side by side with her husband in all his philanthropic undertakings- was his advisor, his inspirer, his secretary, his nurse - with all but one object in mind, that their united efforts should benefit mankind."

We are honored to present this article about the life of a truly strong and dynamic woman, Lina Gutherz Straus who, above all else, saw to it that the greatness of her husband and his work be appreciated worldwide.

## From Our Archives

The Straus Historical Society maintains an extensive Archive that contains a variety of fascinating letters, books, photographs and memorabilia. From time to time, as space permits, we are pleased to share some of this material with you.

The letter shown below was written by Oscar S. Straus, whose beloved brother and sister-in-law, Isidor and Ida, died in the Titanic disaster only a few days before this letter was written.



Oscar S. Straus, 5 West 76<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, April 21, 1912 to Eugene Meyer. "Our hearts are sorrowing by reason of the same calamity. It would seem our beloved ones died that others might live. You have lost a son, I a sister and a second father - he was the inspiration of my life. We deeply sympathize and mourn with you."

Affectionately,  
Oscar S. Straus

Mr. Eugene Meyer

The online *Encyclopedia Titanica* reveals that Eugene Meyer's son was Edgar Joseph Meyer, a 28 year old mechanical engineer traveling with his wife of two years, Leila. Leila wrote, "I tried and tried to get Edgar to come into the lifeboat with me, and pleaded to be allowed to stay behind and wait until he could leave, he not caring to leave before all the women had been saved. Mr. Meyer finally persuaded me to leave, reminding me of our one-year-old child at home. I entered the lifeboat and watched until the Titanic sank, but only for a short time did I see my husband standing beside the rail and assisting other women into boats in which he might have been saved." Other survivors corroborate this story. Beginning as soon as the lifeboats started to be filled, he was actively engaged in helping to settle the women and children in these boats and lower them over the side of Titanic. From the outset he would not consider leaving himself although he desperately tried to get his wife to do so.

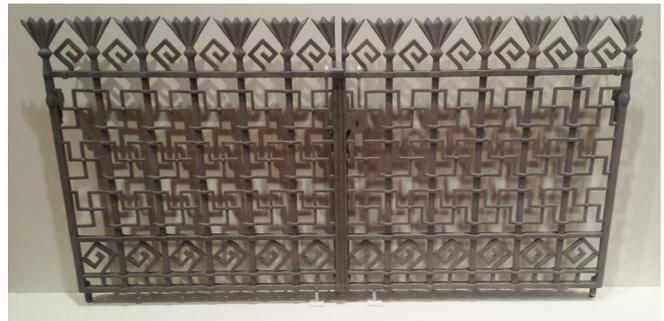
## Gates from the Straus Mausoleum The Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY On Display at Columbia University

On Friday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, Woodlawn Cemetery hosted a reception for the exhibition, "Sylvan Cemetery, Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn". The exhibit was housed at the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University from September 3<sup>rd</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>. Prominent in the exhibition were the gates of the Straus Mausoleum from Woodlawn Cemetery.

Joan and Catherine attended the reception and were overwhelmed by the number of interesting and diverse materials on display. After viewing the exhibit, we joined other guests in a separate room where professionals from the university, the cemetery and the art gallery spoke about the creation of the exhibit.

Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services of The Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY arranged for the cleaning and restoration of the gates, which were removed from the mausoleum property and sent to Columbia University for this exhibition. Susan is the consummate historian who knows just about everything about the history of Woodlawn Cemetery. We worked closely to engage the family of those interred in this mausoleum so that their wishes were respected.

Thank you to Susan Olsen for arranging to include the Straus gates and for the invitation to this exhibit.



Straus Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY

# SHS Trip to Chicago September 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014

by Catherine McIlvaine Smith

In September of 2014, Joan and I traveled to Chicago to give a number of presentations about the Straus family and about Joan's book *For the Sake of the Children: The Letters between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus Jr.* We arrived September 11<sup>th</sup>. Nathan Straus Jr.'s grandson Barney, his wife Nancy and their son Graham Straus invited us to stay at their lovely home. Barney is a descendant of Nathan Straus. After the first three days we moved to Jim and Lilli Greenebaum's apartment. Jim is a descendant of Lazarus Straus' mother, Johanne Greenebaum. We were made to feel completely at home with both families and want to thank the Strauses and Greenebaums



Book signing at The Standard Club

for their hospitality.

On Friday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, we were hosted by The Standard Club in downtown Chicago for a Lunch and Learn presentation about Joan's book. After a delicious lunch, Joan began her talk to a very interested

audience. Following the presentation there was a Q&A session and a book signing. We had the opportunity to speak with many of the attendees who showed real appreciation for Joan's presentation. Several people suggested other venues where her talk might be well received.

Later that evening, Congregation Sukkat Shalom in Evanston hosted a presentation by Joan about her book. The program was held during evening services at the synagogue. Joan spoke for about a half an hour, accompanied by an informative PowerPoint. After services concluded, the congregation and guests gathered for Oneg Shabbat (dessert) and Joan was available to answer questions and sign books. She was delighted to meet several people with whom she'd had an e.mail correspondence for several years but could now meet face to face.



Ellen Kahn, Brian Zakem and Joan Adler

On Saturday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, B'nai Yehuda Beth Sholom and Congregation Am Echad in Homewood jointly hosted a presentation entitled "The Remarkable Straus Family Saga." The presentation followed Saturday morning services and was attended by more than 100 people. Brian Zakem, a member of the congregation and the facilitator of our trip to Chicago, introduced Joan who then spoke about the history of the Straus family while photographs were passed around. After her presentation, Joan answered audience questions and then invited the guests to join her for dessert.

On Sunday, Joan and I returned to B'nai Yehuda Beth Sholom and Congregation Am Echad to speak about her book, *For the Sake of the Children*. Joan spoke as a PowerPoint played behind her. At the conclusion of her presentation there was time for Q&A. The audience asked thoughtful questions that Joan answered to the best of her ability. Joan was available to sign books as dessert was served to those who attended.



The engaged audience at B'nai Yehuda Beth Sholom and Congregation Am Echad

On Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, Joan and I toured the city of Chicago, went to the Shedd Aquarium and then to a Chicago Cubs game that evening. We had a fabulous time and even witnessed a Cubs win, a rare event.

Our trip to Chicago would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Brian Zakem and Ellen Kahn. Together, they procured a grant from the Jewish Federation of Chicago to fund our travel. They also worked hard to promote the presentations we gave. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. In addition, we would like to thank Elizabeth Ziola, Programming Coordinator, and Gina Ciaccio, Membership Director, of The Standard Club, Rabbi Sam Gordon of Congregation Sukkat Shalom, Penny Shnay, President, and Rabbi Carmit Harari of B'nai Yehuda Beth Sholom and our gracious hosts, Barney & Nancy Straus and Jim and Lilli Greenebaum.

Thanks to all of the positive feedback and support we received during our 2014 trip to Chicago, we are pleased to announce that we will be returning in the spring of 2015! As of now we have scheduled a talk at the Highland Park Public Library on Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. This program follows *The Diary of Anne Frank* which will

be performed by a local group from the Writers Theater. On Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup> we will present at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie and on Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup> at Congregation KAM II in Chicago. We anticipate adding talks at several other local venues. Announcements will be sent once we have the schedule finalized. In the meantime, mark your calendar and keep these dates in May open. We look forward to meeting new and existing family and friends and to share the story of the Strauses.

# Straus Room at the Virtual Museum of Public Service Rutgers University School of Public Affairs and Administration

by Catherine McIlvaine Smith

The Straus Historical Society and the Rutgers University School of Public Affairs and Administration in Newark are pleased to announce the addition of the exhibit "The Straus Family: A History of Public Service and Philanthropy" at the Virtual Museum of Public Service. This room contains exhibits about the Straus family's involvement in public service and includes photographs, stories, and links to information about various family members.

Rutgers University in Newark, NJ hosted a launch party on October 7<sup>th</sup>. Guests gathered in the School of Public Affairs and Administration building on the third floor where hors d'oeuvres and refreshments were served. The walls were lined with photographs and text from the Straus exhibit in the virtual museum. In addition, a monitor in the conference



room displayed a loop of supplemental photographs. Many Straus family members, historians, and members of the Rutgers University community attended.

The group gathered in the conference room where Dean Marc Holzer of the School of Public Affairs and Administration greeted and thanked all those in attendance. He explained the Virtual Museum and the Straus

family's association with Public Service. He then introduced Joan Adler, executive director of SHS, who discussed the Straus' connection with New Jersey and the importance of the Society's partnership with Rutgers University.



Oscar S. Straus III, the chairman of the board of Directors of SHS, spoke about his legacy as a Straus descendant. Finally, Al Berr, a member of the SHS board, spoke about his connection with SHS and Dean Holzer. The guests then returned to the hall where they had a further opportunity to view the exhibits, converse and to enjoy dessert.

The event was streamed live and was available worldwide. A video of the event will be posted to the SHS website shortly. We would like to thank Dean Marc Holzer, Elizabeth Hall, Hilary Halliwell, and all those who helped put this event together. We are pleased to be associated with the Virtual Museum and hope our readers will often visit The Straus Room. We anticipate submitting many more exhibits and upgrading those already on display.

[www.vmps.us/straus-family](http://www.vmps.us/straus-family)



## SHS Trip to Georgia November 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

by Catherine McIlvaine Smith

In November Joan, Oscar S. Straus III, the great-grandson of Oscar S. Straus and chairman of the board of SHS, and I were invited to Georgia for Harvest Days in Old Talbot. This is the seventh annual weekend hosted by Michael H. and Debbie Buckner of the Patsiliga Museum in Junction City, GA.

One of the oldest continuous businesses in Talbot County is Mike's Fielder's Water Powered Grist Mill. During Harvest Days in Old Talbot, visitors saw the mill grinding meal, flour, and grist. The Buckner's 1840 Greek Revival home was open for tours. More than 300 people enjoyed the old world charm of this incredible Georgia home. We spoke to many of the visitors and told them about the Straus family's connection



to Georgia and about their lives after they left the south. Many demonstrations, exhibits, vendors and activities were available.

On Sunday, we took Oscar on a tour of Talbotton. We drove past the Zion Episcopal Church which was right down the street from where the Straus family lived and then visited Straus-LeVert Memorial Hall. In addition, we drove to the original home site where Lazarus Straus and his family lived as well as the site of the store where L. Straus & Co. first existed.



On Monday we visited The Breman Jewish Heritage Museum where we spoke with executive director Aaron Berger and curator Jeremy Katz about the possibility of a joint program at their museum. We all agreed it was an idea worth exploring.

Thank you to Mike & Debbie Buckner for sponsoring our trip to Georgia. We hope to return next year to celebrate the Straus Family's rich southern heritage!

## OSCAR S. SCHAFER ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Oscar S. Schafer was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Philharmonic Symphony Society of New York, Inc., on December 13, 2014 at a meeting of the organization's Board of Directors.

"The New York Philharmonic represents the best New York has to offer, both to our community and around the world," said Mr. Schafer. "It has been an honor to serve as a member of the Board and to support the marvelous Concerts in the Parks with my wife, and I am enthusiastic about the challenge of serving as the next Chairman of the Board. I look forward to helping this orchestra carry forward, under Alan Gilbert's innovative artistic leadership, its grand tradition of over 172 years into a future that finds new and even better ways of serving music lovers at home and globally."

Mr. Parr said. "I am pleased to be turning over my responsibilities to an incredibly capable person, Oscar Schafer. ... Oscar is both a sophisticated business person and a Philharmonic lover, dedicated to this Orchestra, as evidenced by the support he and his wife Didi have given in presenting the New York Philharmonic Concerts in the Parks since 2007."

President and Executive Director Matthew Van Besien said, "Having worked with Oscar Schafer as a member of our Board and a passionate music lover, I am extremely confident in our future. I look forward to collaborating with him on major projects that will define this next period in the Philharmonic's history."

Oscar Straus Schafer is the chairman of Rivulet Capital, LLC, a private investment partnership, which he seeded in 2012. Prior to Rivulet, Mr. Schafer founded O.S.S. Capital Management in 2001, having been a member of Cumberland Associates from 1982 to 2001, and a general partner at Steinhardt, Fine, Berkowitz & Co. from 1970 to 1982. He began his investment career with positions at Kuhn, Loeb & Co., Havenfield Corp., and Boxwood Associates from 1964 to 1970. He has been a member of the Barron's Roundtable for 25 years. He earned a B.A., magna cum laude, at Harvard College in 1961 and an M.B.A. at Harvard Business School in 1964.

Mr. Schafer has served on the Board of the New York Philharmonic since 2007, including his position as chair of the nominating and governance committee since 2008. He has served on the Board of Trustees at New York Presbyterian Hospital since 2007. Mr. Schafer has served on the Visiting Committee for the Department of Music at Harvard and funded the Oscar Straus Schafer Fellowship at Harvard for teachers of its introductory music course. He has also served as President of the Daniel and Florence Guggenheim Foundation, as well as on the boards of the Harvard Club of New York City and the University Club, and Central Park Community Fund. Mr. Schafer has always had a love of music through lineal de-

scend of his great aunt, Minnie Schafer Guggenheimer, who was the grande dame organizer of New York's Lewisohn Stadium concerts, where the New York Philharmonic played in the summer from 1922–1964, as well as a member of the Board of the New York Philharmonic and Vice Chairman of the Auxiliary Board. His grandfather, Edward Schafer, bought Elias Breeskin's famous Rougemont Stradivarius violin in 1915. His family also has a long history of public service, with his great grandfather Oscar Straus having served under four administrations including as the first Jewish cabinet member as Secretary of Commerce and Labor under President Theodore Roosevelt. His family also has deep connections to New York City with family cousins having been President of Temple Emanuel, Co-Founder of Farrar Straus & Giroux, and owners of R. H. Macy's.

Oscar Schafer is married to Didi Fenton-Schafer, who serves on the board of the Central Park Conservancy, as Vice Chair of the New York Common Pantry and on the board of the Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York. The couple are special event donors and were underwriters of A Concert for New York, the Orchestra's performance on the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Since the summer of 2007, Didi and Oscar Schafer have presented the New York Philharmonic's Concerts in the Parks, which give thousands of people the opportunity to hear the Philharmonic for free every summer in the beautiful parks of New York City. In fact, Mr. Schafer conducted the Orchestra in Central Park in July 2013 as a tribute to his wife.



The New York Philharmonic plays a leading cultural role in New York City, the United States, and the world. This season's projects will connect the Philharmonic with up to 50 million music lovers through live concerts in New York City and on its worldwide tours; digital downloads; international broadcasts on television, radio, and online; and as a resource through its wide range of education programs. Having commissioned and/or premiered works by leading composers from every era, the Orchestra now champions contemporary music through CONTACT! and the NY PHIL BIENNIAL. A resource for its community and for the world, the Philharmonic complements its annual free citywide Concerts in the Parks with wide-ranging education programs, including the famed Young People's Concerts and national and international partnerships that combine performance with intensive training by Philharmonic musicians to cultivate tomorrow's leading orchestral musicians. Renowned around the world, having appeared in 432 cities in 63 countries, America's oldest symphony orchestra has long been a media pioneer, releasing almost 2,000 recordings since 1917 and today sharing live performances through downloads and online.

**Congratulations Oscar!**



## NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF STRAUS PARK

by Al Berr, photos by Joe Arbo

Our principal annual park event, ART IN THE PARK, was held on Saturday, October 18, 2014. The weather gods, which have been very stubborn recently, were fortunately benign, giving us a lovely autumn day. The park looked very festive, thanks to the careful and considered ministrations of our diligent gardener, Joe Arbo, and Eddie, his dutiful assistant. The planting bed in front of the monument was especially beautiful with chrysanthemums of various colors, an autumnal feast for the eyes, according to a number of visitors and passersby.

ART IN THE PARK was scheduled from 10:00AM to 5:00PM, and, for approximately half that time, music was furnished by the Lucky Dogs, a quartet that played old and new songs to the delight of the crowd, who sometimes joined in the vocals. As usual, the food for sale, very generously contributed by neighborhood stores and restaurants, was completely consumed. Artists, whose work was for sale, reported that they were pleased with the sales they made. We all agreed that we had a successful day.

Joe and Eddie continue to be vigilant, keeping the park clear of rubble, and, with the assistance of the local police, clear of vagrants. Unfortunately, the problem persists, especially in good weather. The week before Christmas, one night in the early hours, a car hit the southeast corner of the park and broke through a fence, destroying two benches as well. To their credit, within four days, the staff of the Parks Department had repaired the fence, the benches, as well as a gate whose hinges had been lost to rust. We are grateful to them.

This year, on January 22, at the invitation of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group, Joan Adler gave a very informative talk about the family, concentrating on Isidor and Ida and their home at Broadway and 105<sup>th</sup> Street. The event was held at the Hostelling International, a 19<sup>th</sup> century landmarked building, at Amsterdam Avenue and 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. Joan's presentation was accompanied by slides. Following Joan's talk, I gave a brief history of the park, mentioning Leon Auerbach, who led the formation of Friends of Straus Park, and acknowledging Joe Arbo. Slides also provided an interesting visual counterpoint to my talk. More than a hundred twenty people attended, including some SHS board members and Straus family members. Joan and I were very gratified at the reception to our presentations, as were our hosts.

The board of Friends of Straus Park will be hard at work during the next few months planning events for our lovely neighborhood Park. We value your suggestions. Please contact us with your ideas for future neighborhood events. We are actively seeking new board members and volunteers. The time commitment is not great but the benefits to your community are significant. If you have a few hours to share, consider becoming involved. We want to hear from you. Visit us on Facebook or write to Friends of Straus Park, Cathedral Station, P.O. Box 2021, New York, NY 10025.



## Straus Presentations

Paul A. Kurzman spoke about his great-grandparents, Isidor and Ida Straus to a third grade class at The School at Columbia University on November 24<sup>th</sup>. The class had just completed a study unit about the Titanic before beginning a discussion of the role and contribution of immigrants to America. Paul brought a copy of the 2011 updated *Autobiography of Isidor Straus*, a Titanic scrapbook and the locket found on Isidor's body when it was recovered at sea by the ship Mackay Bennett.

Joan spoke about the Straus family's history on the Upper West Side of New York on January 22. Her talk was sponsored by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Historical Society. She also spoke about her book, *For the Sake of the Children*, at Stratford Court in Boca Raton, FL on January 26.

Joan and Catherine have been invited to return to IL after their successful series of talks there in September 2014. Although dates are not completely settled and more venues may be added, they will be speaking the week of May 4<sup>th</sup> at the Highland Park Public Library, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, The Standard Club in downtown Chicago and at KAM II Synagogue in Chicago.

Information about these and other presentations will be posted on the SHS website and on our Facebook page.

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## Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

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

*The Autobiography of Isidor Straus* privately published by Sara Straus Hess in 1955, greatly expanded and updated by SHS in 2011, including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover with dust jacket- \$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. Hard cover - \$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. Published in English by the Straus Historical Society, Inc. Hard cover - \$35.00

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

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

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

## You Are Invited

The Board of Directors of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. invites you to attend a meeting of the board. Attendance need not be in person. The next meeting will be held Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in New York City at 6 PM. Participants may join by conference call. There is no obligation to join the board or to contribute to the Society. This invitation is extended so that all those interested in SHS may have an opportunity to participate and to share their views. Please contact Joan Adler by phone at 631-724-4487, or at [info@straushistory.org](mailto:info@straushistory.org) for further information.