



“wholedamfam”



Volume 6 Number 1

STRAUS FAMILY NEWSLETTER

February 1998

It Really Was A Rainy Night - And Day - in Georgia

Nothing Could Dampen Our Spirits



On Friday, October 24th, 1997, a group of family members gathered at the Columbus Hilton Hotel in Columbus, Georgia for a weekend of discovery. We were returning to the place where Lazarus and Sara Straus, Mathilda and Fannie Straus and the Kaufman brothers settled after arriving in America. Our hosts for the weekend were Mike H. Buckner and the Historic Talbotton Foundation, Gus B. Kaufman and three of his four children, Cindy Straus, Laurette Rosenstrauch and her brother David Rothschild. Thirty three people spent the weekend learning more about where they came from, who their ancestors were and who their relatives are. We ate some mighty fine food along the way and made some wonderful new friends.

The participants of this weekend adventure were from two family groups. Gus B. Kaufman's family, whom I have called the Straus/Kaufman family, can trace their roots to Moses and Magdalena Straus of Otterberg and their children Mathilda and Fannie Straus. Mathilda and Fannie married Julius and Jacob Kaufman, Lazarus' business partners. Although we have not yet been able to find a definite connection between the two Straus families, there is ample circumstantial evidence that they are related. Gus did a yeoman's job of gathering his family in Georgia for the weekend. Those joining us were Al Freedman, Dottie Cohen, Shoshona and Marco Ben-Zoar, Janet Aschaffenburg, Eleanor Freund, Mark and Julie Cutrufelli, Bill Levitt, Cindy Straus, Gus Kaufman Jr., Marianna Kaufman and Lise, Sig and Mamie Dayan from the Straus/Kaufman family. The Lazarus Straus' who participated were Gail Nutku, Rana

Nutku, Paul and Margaret Kurzman, Nancy Kurzman, Joan de Graaff, Melinda Schwartz with her three children Callie, Jesse and Mara, Barbara and George Douglas and Tom Straus. Marianne Middleton, a close friend of Gus', Mike H. Buckner of the Historic Talbotton Foundation and Harry Franklin, a reporter for the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, accompanied us for most of the weekend. Harry wrote a wonderful article with photographs which appeared in the Sunday paper.



We were scheduled to meet at the Hilton Hotel by five in the evening on Friday. Unfortunately, the weather delayed almost everyone. Most had no time for dinner. Some of us ate cheese straws and cookies from the hospitality suite for dinner Friday night. Thank goodness Cindy Straus knew all the best bakers and cooks in town.

Inside this issue:

- Nathan Straus, 1848 - 1931
- Friends of Straus Park
- Straus Historical Society Board Meeting
- Titanic, the movie
- Announcements
- And more.....

Our first stop was Temple Israel in Columbus. A larger than expected crowd from their congregation attended Friday night services in anticipation of meeting members of the Straus family. There was a lovely Oneg Shabbat (a reception) following the service. Cindy Straus, widow of Jack Straus Sr., supplied beautiful floral arrangements for the temple and hospitality suite.

Many people in our group expressed their confusion or amazement that the people of Columbus and Talbotton were so interested in meeting us. The people of Georgia have not forgotten the many kindnesses of the Straus family and are genuinely delighted that the family has not forgotten them.

Saturday morning we met informally for breakfast in the hotel's dining area. This was a good opportunity to get to know one another. I, for one, had known names, but now had faces and personalities to connect. Members of the Straus/Kaufman family didn't know any of the Lazarus Straus family. In fact, many of the Lazarus Straus family didn't know each other. Breakfast provided a great opportunity for informal conversation.

We left on a bus tour of Columbus at 10 AM in the drizzling rain. We visited Springer Opera House where Oscar S. Straus gave a speech in 1908; the best speech ever delivered in Columbus. We were treated to a tour and brief history of the opera house by Clayton Kyle. Then we boarded the bus for the short ride to the Frank Rothschild house. Frank's wife was the sister of Ida Blun Straus. Although the house is not currently occupied, it is owned by Clayton's family. He is very knowledgeable about its history. He gave us a good idea of what life in the 1860's must have been like in Columbus. After that, we continued on our bus tour of Columbus which included stops to see the site of the Lazarus Straus home and Amelia Straus Julius' home. Then we headed to Talbotton.

It seemed as though all of Talbotton had turned out for our reception. Mike Buckner and Mrs. Henry Persons hosted a luncheon in honor of the Straus' visit to Talbotton. Mike arranged to have a peddler's cart in front of Straus-LeVert Memorial Hall when we arrived. It was newly painted, with a sign proclaiming "J. Kaufman & Bro's, Oglethorpe, Georgia, L. Straus, Agent." It was filled with items which might have been on Lazarus' cart when he traveled throughout Talbot County selling his wares. It was a lovely touch and provided a backdrop for many group photographs. (See page one)



Paul Kurzman, Barbara Douglas and Tom Straus



Gus Kaufman Jr. speaking at lunch in Talbotton

After the introductions and photographs, we were asked to take our seats. A beautiful buffet lunch was served. Mayor Gus Persons spoke. Then Gus Jr. and I were asked to make a few remarks about the Straus' time in Georgia. Tom Straus presented the Historic Talbotton Foundation with a commemorative plate of Straus-LeVert Memorial Hall and a copy of our artistic family tree.

The one damper to our weekend, beside the rain of course, was the fact that Gus Sr. was not able to attend. After spending years trying to get the family to Georgia, Gus had a medical problem which precluded his being able to participate in the weekend's activities. Although he was not present, his spirit could be felt in everything we did. His son, Gus Jr., graciously agreed to read his father's speech and act as substitute host along with Gus' daughters Marianna and Lise. Although Gus was missed, his family performed admirably and were fine representatives in his stead.

Following lunch, we again boarded the bus for a ride to the new Talbotton Library and a tour of the town. The librarians and volunteers at the library had prepared a tea for us. We stopped in the entryway to enjoy their "Straus" display and chatted informally with our hosts. We were promised a video of the history of Talbotton. When it arrives, it will be available to historical society members.



Joan de Graaff, Talbotton Librarian and Margaret Kurzman

As the rain began falling in earnest, we boarded the bus once again. Mike showed us many of the plantations that might have been on Lazarus' route. Mike's family has been living in Talbot County for generations. He is extremely knowledgeable about its history. The plantation homes were really lovely and the

tour was all the more interesting because Mike was able to explain so much about the history of each house and the family that owns it.

We ended the tour at the Buckner's home. Mike and Debbie bought their house, which originally stood in Talbotton, and disassembled it piece by piece. They numbered each board as the house was deconstructed. Then, with meticulous care, they reconstructed the house on land that had been in Mike's family for generations. Although they projected that the reconstruction would take six months, it actually took ten years. We all thought it was worth the effort. Their house is lovingly decorated with antiques, each of which has a story. The beds are covered with quilts made from cotton grown on their land, spun into thread by Mike's grandmother which she then wove into cloth and sewed into beautiful traditional quilts. What could be more special? Mike showed us the last bale of cotton grown in Talbot County.



Rana Nutku, Joan Adler, Gail Nutku and Dottie Cohen at Mike's Grist Mill

Mike gave us a real treat when he demonstrated how his grist mill works. The mill is run with power from a dam in his lake. He opened a sluiceway and water began pouring in, turning the gears. Then he showed us how dried corn is separated from the chaff and ground. He even prints his own bags for containing the grain. Several of us brought home five pound bags of corn and recipe books.



Mike's three children could not have been nicer. His oldest son and a friend were very solicitous to the older members of our group and even offered us rides on their horses. If we thought the whole town had turned out for the luncheon, we then began to wonder where all these

other people had been hidden. There must have been more than 60 additional people at Mike's house for dinner. They all

pitched in; cooking, serving and cleaning up. Southern hospitality is certainly alive and well in Talbotton and Columbus. We were treated to an oyster roast, fish fry, barbecued chicken, hush puppies, pickled peaches, key lime pie and many other delicious treats. Mike had promised us Southern fare and he delivered.

Gus Jr. and I were asked to give our talks again to this new audience. Mike said a few words and Paul Kurzman made the presentation of the commemorative plate and family tree for the benefit of those who missed it at lunch. Paul brought fine chocolates as thank you gifts for Mike, Gus and Laurette. We were reluctant to end this wonderful day. The hour bus ride back to Columbus found most of us subdued but also beginning to feel comfortable with our new relatives and friends.



Joan Adler and Paul Kurzman presenting the family tree

There was a tornado warning for Sunday morning. Severe thunder storms with high winds and torrential downpours caused us to scrub our plan for a walking tour of Columbus. Laurette Rosenstrauch was resourceful and organized a very interesting program. We all met in the hospitality suite at ten. She told us all we could have expected to see on the walking tour. Then we got into cars and caravanned through the streets of Columbus viewing the sites Laurette had described. We visited the home of Julius and Mathilda Kaufman, Gus' grandparents. This home has been lovingly restored by Ralph and Kathy Evers. They gave us a fascinating tour.

We ended our weekend with a luncheon at the Green Isle Country Club hosted by David Rothschild, Laurette's brother. There was New Orleans style jazz and delicious food. Fortunately, the weather began to clear and most of us were able to leave on flights as planned.

Special commendations must go to Eleanor Freund. The airline lost her luggage. She spent the entire weekend in one outfit, tried to leave Columbus on Sunday only to learn her flight had been cancelled and had to stay an additional day. Throughout it all, Ellie never complained nor lost her smile. She is one special lady. I'm sure this is one weekend she will never forget!

Everyone seemed sorry when the weekend was over. We had many wonderful memories to take home and new historical connections to think about.

Nathan Straus

1848 - 1931

Nathan Straus was born in Otterberg, Rhenish Bavaria, on January 31, 1848, in the same house where his mother, sister and brothers were born. His father, Lazarus, had married brother Solomon's daughter, Sara. Strauses had lived in the area for generations and were a well respected family. They were educated, speaking French, German and Hebrew. They were land owners who sold their local crops in the markets of Mannheim and Kaiserslautern. Lazarus became involved in the Revolution of 1848 and, it would seem, both economic conditions and the possible threat of censure due to his participation in the resistance, caused him to decide to emigrate to America. He left Otterberg in 1852, took up residence in Georgia and sent for his family two years later. (See previous issues of the newsletter for article about the earliest Strauses and Lazarus and Sara's years in Georgia.)

Six year old Nathan arrived in New York September 12, 1854 on the maiden voyage of the "S.S. St. Louis" with his mother and three siblings, Isidor, Hermina and Oscar. Nathan was listed on the passenger manifest as Nathalie, female, eight years, six months old. He reported that it seemed to take a very long time to disembark after arriving in New York. He could see Lazarus waiting for them on the dock and was anxious to be reunited with his father. Lazarus prepared to escort his family to their new home in Talbotton Georgia. They postponed their Southern journey because of a yellow fever epidemic in Savannah, staying in New York for a few days and in Philadelphia for several weeks. Then they traveled by ship, train and stagecoach to reach their home. Nathan was both delighted and amazed to find their house unlike any he had ever seen. It was erected on wooden posts set several feet apart and the whole house was raised up off the ground. He later wrote, "We found a very comfortable home, and our family was received with kindness and hospitality."

Nathan's early religious training was carried on in Georgia by the local Baptist minister who had become one of Lazarus' most intimate friends. Because there was no Jewish synagogue in Talbotton, the minister agreed to teach the Straus children in his Sunday school classes. He taught them to read from the Bible, but only from the first five books, the Old Testament.

Nathan's lifelong interest in animals developed during childhood. The earliest photograph we have of Nathan is one taken in Talbotton Georgia when he was six years old. He is holding a dog in his lap. Stories about Nathan as a child often include horses. Six year old Nathan stopped a runaway horse which was causing panic among the farmers and townspeople of

Talbotton on market day. He rushed at the horse, catching its bridle in a flying tackle and hanging on until the horse stopped running. The owner presented Nathan with ten cents, the first money he had earned. This was also the first recognition Nathan received for public service. He bought candy with his reward and divided it among his playmates.

"Nath" was a sharp witted, fun-loving schoolboy with unruly black hair, twinkling eyes and the habit of winning at marbles according to the Atlanta newspaper *The Constitution*. Oscar described Nathan as constantly scheming to make money. Knowing that face powder was a luxury difficult for Southern women to obtain, Nathan ground a 25 cent lump of talcum powder into four balls which he sold for ten cents apiece - a gross profit of 15 cents. As a teenager during the Civil War, Nathan was determined to have an income of his own. He collected and sold old hemp and hemp rope, scarce commodities at the time, and waste copper. With the money, he bought a bay pony which became his and Oscar's prized possession. They named it Patrick. Patrick was seized by General Wilson's men at the end of the war.



Six year old Nathan with his dog
Talbotton - 1856

Although philosophically opposed to slavery, the Strauses did own slaves. These slaves were hired by the family, but they begged to be bought. Lazarus did so and then taught them to read and write and prepared them for a trade. Sara Straus sent her teenage son Nathan to the slave market to buy her a maid. He returned with his "bargain" a pregnant woman, thinking they would have two for the price of one. He hadn't considered the trouble this condition would bring to the household and his tactful mother did not enlighten him.

During the war, Nathan made a number of trips for the Adams Express Company. In April 1865, the 17 year old was put in charge of a long wagon train going 100 miles from Columbus to Macon. It carried immense quantities of valuables. He got 20 miles east of Columbus when the city was captured by the Federals. By pushing hard, he was able to reach Macon safely a day before the arrival of the Yankees. He was able to secure a pass, but it took him more than a month before he could find a horse in order to return home.

Isidor and Nathan attended Collingsworth Institute between 1856 and 1861. It was a local preparatory school. They studied Orthography, Writing, Geography, Grammar, Arithmetic, Higher Mathematics, Astronomy, Rhetoric, Latin, Greek, Declamation and Composition. Nathan's report card for the period of January to July 1860 show that his standing in Orthography was Very Good. He earned a standing of Good in Reading, Fair in Writing, Good in Geography, Excellent in Arithmetic and Fair in Declamation. He was absent from Prayers seven times. Once the family moved to Columbus Georgia in 1863, Nathan and his brothers attended private school. There were no public schools

in Columbus. Later, he was sent to Montgomery Alabama, where he remained for a year, pursuing more advanced studies and furthering his religious education. He received lessons in Hebrew at that time from a rabbi who was a family friend. Nathan also attended Packard's Business College in New York once the family moved there after the Civil War. He wanted to learn book-keeping in order to fit himself into a mercantile career. He graduated in 1886 and was chosen orator of his class.

After the burning of Columbus by General Wilson in 1865, Lazarus moved his family to Philadelphia and then to New York. An incident on this trip is said to have made a great impression on Nathan. It changed the course of his life. He happened to be wearing grey clothing during the trip North. As the family was boarding an express train in Nashville, Nathan was jerked from the platform by a Union soldier. The moving train departed with the Strauses but without Nathan. He had only fifty cents in his pocket. After convincing the soldier that he was no threat, Nathan was released, alone in a strange city. He soon realized that he was hungry. He found a restaurant which served something he had never seen before, ice cream. He tasted one serving and decided he had to have another. Unfortunately, this consumed all of his money. The proprietor of the restaurant learned that Nathan was now penniless and alone. He offered to return the money Nathan had spent on the ice cream but Nathan refused to take it. The next day he was able to join his family, but for twenty four hours Nathan had nothing to eat. He learned what it meant to be among strangers, penniless and hungry. He never forgot. It is said that, there and then, he determined that if he ever became able, he would do something to relieve hunger in the world.

The family arrived in Philadelphia where Lazarus repaid the debts he incurred during the war. He was advised to move his family to New York where there would be greater opportunities. He did. Within six months, he opened L. Straus & Sons, a china, glassware and crockery business. In a letter to his family in Germany, Lazarus wrote, "Nathan is very valuable to me in business, only he does not have much patience to learn much." Nathan was full of energy and ideas, some good, some bad. Isidor, the older brother, sorted them out and made the good ones work.

As his brother Oscar had observed, Nathan was always scheming. The Strauses were honest men and hard workers. They prospered. Nathan became their outside salesman. His boundless energy made it difficult for him to be contained in an office all day. He opened a selling office in Chicago in 1872 after "the big fire." He traveled all over America opening up new markets, and throughout Europe looking for new products to sell. At one point, Nathan was traveling throughout the northern states of middle America during the winter when he realized that his clothing was more stylish than practical. He bought woolen

cloth off a bolt and wore it wrapped around himself as he had seen on the Native Americans. Nathan prided himself on his appearance. He must have been freezing to draped himself in such a manner. Later in this trip, while on a lake steamer, the boat stopped to rescue the victims of a prairie and forest fire. They had fled to the lake after being driven from their homes and nearly stampeded by animals escaping the same fire. The steamer picked up the people and Nathan gave them, not only his money, but most of his clothing and the woolen cloth. By the time he got to Chicago, he was penniless and half frozen.

Nathan soon tired of being away from his family so much. He wanted to find a way to remain closer to home and still use his creative energies. He convinced Roland H. Macy to allow L. Straus & Sons to open a 25' X 100' concession in the basement of the store in 1874. It succeeded so rapidly that it soon became one of the most important departments in the store. Nathan and Macy became good friends. In 1877 the pair traveled to Europe on a buying trip and for a rest at one of the German spas. Macy died in Paris in February 1877. Partners continued to run the firm and by 1888, the Strauses owned a 40 percent share of Macy's. By 1896, they were sole owners.



Lina and Nathan Straus
Wedding Photograph 1875

With ambition and audacious plans, Nathan convinced his family to open a glassware factory in Steinschonau, Bohemia. Later they opened a porcelain and decorating plant in Carlsbad, Austria and a china decorating branch in Limoges, France. A pottery factory was constructed in 1883 in Rudolstadt, Germany. The firm of L. Straus & Sons became known all over the United States and in many parts of Europe. The brothers had become friendly with General Abraham Abraham who owned a department store in Brooklyn with a partner, Joseph Weschler. General Abraham is said to have foreseen the advantage of locating his store within close proximity to both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Brooklyn subway line. In 1893, Isidor and Nathan bought out Joseph Weschler's share and the store became Abraham & Straus. They had also set up china and glassware departments in Wanamaker's and in stores in Philadelphia, Chicago and Boston. Their expansion led the way for the idea behind chain stores.

Isidor, being the oldest child, took the responsibility of mentor quite seriously. His relationship with Nathan was always very close. Throughout their lives their letters reflected the true love and respect each held for the other. In business, Isidor showed executive talent and Nathan was a creative genius. Their natural partnership proved unbeatable. Between them, their business flourished. Their younger brother Oscar had no desire to join the family business and both Isidor and Nathan supported Oscar's wish for education and a life in public service.

It was on one of Nathan's buying trips to Europe in 1875 that he met Lina Guthertz. He was traveling with R. H. Macy at the time.

Lazarus had given Nathan a list with the names of friends to visit when he arrived in Germany. Among those was the name of the Gutherz family. Nathan was discouraged from visiting them by the people taking him around Mannheim because there were "only women folks in the family." Nathan insisted on paying a visit because his father had given him their name. Nathan and Lina met and, after a courtship of five weeks most of which time Nathan was away buying goods, the couple were married April 28, 1875. Nathan brought his bride to New York.

Lina Gutherz Straus wrote; "For many years after our marriage, Papa went abroad annually, and whenever possible I accompanied him. The first time was 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." Lina Gutherz's mother was Jeanette Levy Gutherz. Jeanette's half sister, Fanny Levi, had been married to Lazarus Straus in his first marriage. After Fanny died, Lazarus married Sara Straus. Lina's mother was widowed and responsible for raising her nine children. When the Strauses opened factories in Europe, two of Jeanette's Gutherz's sons, Oscar and Edgar managed them.

The Straus Family Collection contains one page which appears to be a record of one of Nathan's European trips. It is "Route for Spring 1880." He arrived in Queenstown on April 10, traveled to Belfast, Glasgow and Scotland, Manchester, London, Nottingham, Calais, Paris and vicinity, St. Gall, Paris and Nottingham. He completed his trip on June 10.



Nathan and Lina driving Cobwebs in Nice - about 1900

Nathan bought a horse and carriage shortly before his marriage but found he could not afford both a horse and a wife. He sold half his share in the horse. When his bride came to America, she found out about the sale and saved money from her household allowance to buy back the half share of the horse. He drove that horse on The Speedway, which is now Harlem River Drive in New York City, a major highway. In fact, Nathan was nicknamed "King of the Speedway." In 1887 Lazarus wrote that Nathan "has his pleasure with racehorses which brings him into contact with honorable men." Nathan's first famous horse was Defendum, which he took to Europe and drove on the roads of France and Germany. Joe Ripley, Majolica, Cobwebs and Ida Highwood were among his other famous horses. Nathan was only interested in trotters. New York Mayor Hugh J. Grant shared and managed the stables and kept his own horses, runners, there. (Nathan's youngest son was named Hugh Grant Straus in honor of the mayor.)

Nathan and Lina had six children; Jerome Nathan, Sara, Sissie, Roland, Charles Webster and Hugh Grant Straus. Sara died shortly before her first birthday and Roland died when he was three. Both are buried at Salem Field Cemetery in graves just outside and in front of the Straus-Kohns Mausoleum. Jerome died a few days before his 17th birthday. Charles Webster was named for a Macy's partner and friend. He changed his name to Nathan Jr. shortly before running for political office when he was 21. Flora Stieglitz Straus, Hugh Grant Straus' wife, told me Charlie gave everyone three months to learn to call him Nathan. Flora must have been a bit feisty because she also told me she delighted in calling him Charlie, much to his chagrin.

Nathan and Lina lived at 27 West 72nd Street. Their apartment was decorated in the latest style. The front parlor was called the Pompeian or Egyptian Room and was the scene of many social and political affairs.



Charlie, Lina, Nathan, Sissie and Grant at 27 West 72nd Street - about 1895

In the Summers of the early 1890's, the Nathan and Isidor Strauses maintained homes on Lower Saranac Lake in the Adirondaks. Either Nathan or Isidor would be in New York at Macy's while the other would be in Lower Saranac Lake with his family. The many letters we have from Ida Straus give evidence that the two families shared a very close relationship. Ida admired Lina's housekeeping, Lina's relationship with Nathan and close relationship with the children of both families.

Nathan and Lina's son Jerome died in February 1893. After that, Lina found it too painful to return to Lower Saranac Lake. They bought a cottage on Cherry Island in the 1000 Islands of Northern New York State. They called it Villa Olympia. Abraham Abraham had an identical cottage on this island. General Abraham's daughter Edith married Isidor's son Percy in 1902. Flora Stieglitz remembered visiting Nathan and Lina at Cherry Island and going out on their boat Sisilina. Flora married Nathan's son Hugh Grant in 1913.

They moved in July 16, 1900. The guest book from Villa Olympia shows that the Strauses had an active household with many visitors. Their first lunch guests were Rose, Edith and Abraham Abraham on July 17. Guests their first summer included Hermine

and Lazarus Kohns, Percy S. Straus, Irene K. Wise and Edmond Wise and Sara Straus. On August 8, 1901 they reported a terrific hailstorm at 3:40 P.M. with "hailstones the size of eggs - five to the pound. Made holes in the ground two inches deep." On August 7, 1902 thirteen year old Charley (Nathan Jr.) wrote, "I caught my first muskallonge to-day. It weighed a little under two pounds." One of the guests, C.H. Fatman summed up the family's feelings about their 1000 Island home when he wrote, in 1904, "I sought for peace and paradise - and found it at Olympia." June 29, 1905: "Arrival of our new launch "Talbotton." In 1909, 20 year old Charley signed the guest book "Nathan Straus Jr., (not yet, but soon)." July 10, 1909 the "Ostrich", a 35 ft, 23 mile motor boat arrived, the "show boat at the New York Motorboat Show." Fishing and boating were important activities as was bathing once the temperature of the lake and the St. Lawrence River became acceptable, often not until August. August 3, 1912, "Enjoyed fishing and the company of the Stieglitz girls." August 6, 1912, We watched from the dock of the Casa Blanka the spectacular flight of the Lieutenant Ellyson of the U.S. Navy in his hydro-aeroplane. Like a gigantic dragonfly he whirred into sight from the distance, then dipped from the height to dash along the surface of the river only to rise again while circling the neighboring islands. The entire length of the flight was more than two hours." August 9, 1909 "Oscar S. Straus, Sarah Straus & Roger W. Straus - arrived, having attended the Convention as First-Delegate at-Large to the National Progressive Party at Chicago, which nominated Roosevelt and Johnson." Nathan wrote "Season 1913, ... the Summer sees the realization of my cherished hope in the engagement of Flora to my dear Grant."

In later life, after the age of 40, Nathan became well known for his philanthropic work. But his concern for human suffering began early in life. About his childhood he wrote that he was often on the losing side which, "caused me many a hard knock, and on some occasions I was brought home seriously hurt, which must have caused my mother, whom I adored, much distress and sorrow. Even as a small boy, I thought if I could save one human life, it would be wonderful. Little did I dream that I was destined and would be privileged to save them by the thousand."

During his days at Macy's, it came to Nathan's attention that two girls in their employ were virtually starving themselves in order to save enough to provide the care necessary for their sick mother. Nathan took action. His social compromise was to open a dining hall in the store at which a full meal could be bought for five cents. He often observed his employees. If he noticed someone who appeared to be suffering, he would take him aside and find out about the employee's problem. Sometimes he provided a new suit of clothes or extra money for the employee's family. When he learned that the daughter of a superintendent was desperately ill, he obtained the services of a

famous surgeon and the girl was cured. During an extremely hard winter an advertisement appeared in local papers offering free turkeys to anyone who couldn't afford one for his Thanksgiving dinner. The ad was unsigned. Thousands of turkeys were served in thousands of depressed homes. For many years, no one knew that Nathan Straus was their benefactor. He and Isidor were the first men in America to inaugurate Mutual Aid Societies for their employees.

Nathan is famous for bringing pasteurization to America. I have heard two stories about how this came about. Both may hold the kernel of truth. Nathan and Lina had six children, two of whom died in early childhood. It was thought that they died because of impurities in their milk. The other story is that one of the cows died on Nathan's Valhalla farm. The cow had been supplying the family with milk and Nathan wanted to know what could have caused a seemingly healthy animal to die so suddenly. Autopsy inspection revealed that the cow was tubercular. Nathan worried that, if his cow could be infected in a

carefully tended and cleanly kept farm, what must be the state of affairs in the dairies around the country. He found out that the source of the country's milk supply was in a filthy state.

After extensive bacteriological investigation, he set up a pasteurization laboratory in New York City in 1892 and a depot for distributing milk to the city's poor. He did not want to demean people by offering charity and so he charged five cents for a day's supply of milk. Coupons for a day's supply of milk were also distributed throughout the city free of charge by physicians, the Board of Health, the Salvation Army and other agencies. He maintained these milk stations at his own expense until 1920. The first such station opened in 1893 on the East Third Street Pier in Manhattan. Prior to pasteurization and Nathan's milk stations, 125.1 per thousand babies would die in New York City each year from milk-borne infections. As

a result of pasteurization, the death rate dropped to 15.8 per thousand.

He personally visited cities around the country demonstrating pasteurization with a model plant and often donating pasteurization equipment. By 1920, 297 depots had been set up to distribute clean, safe milk to children all over the country. He also established laboratories in Heidleberg, Sandhausen, Karlsruhe, Baden Germany and in Ireland. He offered to furnish free, a complete plant to any European city that would agree to keep it in operation. He offered to send his own engineers to erect it and his own physician to superintend the inauguration and to demonstrate its use to local doctors and health reformers. Health experts came to his plant in Heidelberg from all parts of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Russia, Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, Portugal and England. Within twenty years of the death of his cow, pasteurization became an elemental part of disease pre-



A sterilized milk depot, ca. 1894. From the booklet *New York History*, in an article by Miller "Straus and Pasteurized Milk."

vention standards all over this country and then the world. It is said that, because of pasteurized milk, Nathan saved the lives of almost half a million children in the first twenty five years after its use.

Nathan realized the vital necessity of the work he was doing. It changed the course of his life. He was a natural. His zeal for the battle; public, private, moral or physical, coupled with his financial resources, gave him the ability to take on the ills he perceived and to right them. He did this on his own, not with committees, solicited funds or the cooperation of other men of his station. His causes were his own. He didn't want to rely on others nor did he want to do battle over how his money would be allocated. He has been called Nathan, The Good, The Great Giver and Saint Nathan. Such was their depth of appreciation for Nathan Straus' character, the New York City Board of Aldermen passed a resolution renaming East Broadway Straus Square only nine days after his death. In a report of the Committee on Public Thoroughfares the board said, "... the designation of Straus Square pays tribute to the memory of a beloved son of New York who distinguished himself as a citizen, philanthropist and patriot."

The August issue of "wholedamfam" will feature the conclusion of this article. I will write about Nathan's many philanthropies, his honors, his Zionism and the more human side of Nathan Straus. I have interviewed some of his grandchildren, and will call on the rest, in an effort to learn more about this man as seen through the eyes of his family. It is clear, from the research I have done, that few men were more revered, more esteemed, than Nathan Straus. He touched a great many people and truly made a difference.



**Golden Wedding of Nathan and Lina Straus
April 28, 1925 - At "Driftwood" Mamaroneck**

Standing: companion, Flora, Grant, Sissie, Nathan, Helen, Henry Bernheim, Melrose Day.

Seated: Edward Mamelsdorf, Sarah & Oscar Straus, Lina & Nathan Straus, Lucie Mamelsdorf, Irving Lehman, Hugh and Jerome Straus

Straus Historical Society Board Meeting

The board meeting of the Straus Historical Society was held Monday, February 2, 1998 at the home of Alan and Birgitta Hockstader. They are gracious hosts who provided members of the board with a delicious dinner of REAL Swedish meatballs with cranberry sauce and pickles, a typical Swedish combination. Alan and Birgitta make it appear effortless and put everyone at ease.

The business meeting opened with the distribution and acceptance of the minutes from our September 27, 1997 meeting. Topics for discussion included a treasury report by Rob Straus. An abbreviated version of this report appears on page twelve of the newsletter. If you care to learn more about the state of the Society's finances, please contact Rob. His address and phone number are also on page twelve.

We then discussed our upcoming events; the rededication of Straus Square on the Lower East Side and the Oscar S. Straus Memorial in Washington D.C., and what plans would be made for these events. Suggestions were made about how to get more interest and cooperation from city and government officials.

Other agenda items included making policy with regard to our mission statement; to remain not-for-profit in intent, even though we have not yet filed for 501(c)(3) status. The feeling of the board is that it might be possible to file soon if the level of membership contributions continues to grow.

We have been receiving mail and phone calls from people interested in the family due to the recent fervor over Titanic. Many are seeking information about Isidor and Ida Straus. Others have recently discovered they are related to Strauses. Some of these people have joined our Society or have expressed an interest in doing so. I have been contacted by writers for several magazines and newspapers. We have recently contributed photographs to an article which appeared in the Heritage Jewish News. An article will appear in People Magazine sometime in March to which we contributed information and photographs.

Before his death, Bob Straus had suggested that a present be sent to Dr. Steinebrei. The board has decided to send a check, part of which would buy Dr. Steinebrei's book about the Jews of Otterberg. Dr. Steinebrei has been researching this topic for many years. He has given us an enormous amount of information about the earliest Strauses.

The next meeting of the Straus Historical Society board of directors will be held Monday, June 8th at a place to be announced.

The board wishes to invite all members to become involved in the Society and to participate on its board of directors. Please contact Paul Kurzman, the chair, if you would like to attend a meeting or join the board.



Friends of Straus Park

Although the weather outside is frightful, the Friends of Straus Park have not been idle. Monthly events have been planning throughout the year. January's event was held Friday evening, January 16th at the park. The weather cooperated enough for a midwinter song fest to be held. Afterward, friends and neighbors convened at Jo Abrams apartment for wine and cheese. Events planned for the remainder of the season include a Spring concert and reception May 1st, a day planting flowers in the Park May 2nd, First Annual Straus Park Sunday Brunch in the Park May 17th, jazz concerts in the Park June 17th, July 22nd and August 12th, The Second Annual Art in the Park - a Day-Long Celebration of Music, Art, Dance and Food, a day planting flowers in the Park October 17th and a Thanksgiving Concert November 20th. Those of you who attended any of the Friends events, particularly the jazz concerts last Summer, can attest to their excellence. Special mention should be made of the **First Annual Straus Park Commemorative Celebration to be held Sunday, April 19th from 11-3**. There will be a String Quartet, Story Readings and refreshments at this first annual celebration of the Park's rebirth. Don't miss it!

Friends is also putting together an interactive school and park program using the park as an historical and natural resource. Last Summer, school groups met at the park for story telling, art experiences and natural history walks. This program is being expanded and enriched. Contact Leon Auerbach if you would like to become involved in any of Friend's programs or have ideas for future programs. Friends is in need of childrens' books for their story telling in the Park. If you know of any sources for good children's books, or have books you wish to donate, please contact Jo Abrams at 212-666-6244.

The Straus Historical Society's Second Annual Straus Day in Straus Park was held in conjunction with Art in the Park on Saturday, October 18th. Although the weather was rainy early in the day, it cleared in time for the event and was glorious for the remainder of the day. Several members of the Straus family stopped by to enjoy the music, dance lessons, many varieties of ethnic food and wonderful artwork on display and for sale. Eric Mattes, the landscape architect who designed the plantings, gave walking tours, explaining the plantings and giving the rationale for why each was chosen for its location. There were flowers in bloom and greenery everywhere. I couldn't help but think that Isidor and Ida Straus would have been pleased to know that their park was being used in such a special way. If you missed this event, you missed something wonderful.

Shadow Cities by Andre Aciman

Andre Aciman is an author and professor of English Literature at Bard College who grew up in Egypt. The Upper East Side is now his home. Straus Park has come to hold special meaning for Andre. He has given a talk at the New York Public Library about his feelings for the Park. That talk was published in the December 18, 1997 issue of The New York Review. If you are interested in reading a copy of Andre's talk, please let me know, and I will send one to you. It is a fascinating piece written from a unique perspective.



Art In The Park
October 18,
1997

Dance Lessons at
Art In The Park



A Rockaway in Talbot, Travels in an Old Georgia County by William H. Davidson

Paul Kurzman recently received the following letter. A rockaway, by the way, is a horse drawn carriage with large wheels.

"When the Straus family group was in Talbotton last year, were you not made aware of Talbot County books by me as author? I enclose a brochure about the books, A Rockaway in Talbot, Travels in an Old Georgia County.

"There is much early Straus history in Volume I, published 1983, and Lazarus Straus in old Carsonville (originally in Talbot County until 1852) now Taylor County, where there was a store and property of Lazarus Straus. Volume IV contains the Carsonville Straus information, as well as Julius Kaufman, who emigrated to join the Strauses.

With best wishes,
Sincerely, William H. Davidson

Vols. I, II, III, IV, available, \$65.00 per volume, plus \$6.00 per volume postage, insurance and handling.
There is still a small supply of all four volumes."

Titanic, The Movie

A group of family and friends attended a private press preview of the movie Titanic on December 8th at the Astor Plaza Theater on West 44th Street just west of Broadway in New York City. The movie had received so much pre-release press, it had already generated quite a lot of interest. Many were curious to see what James Cameron, the producer, had done to make this \$200 million movie different, or special. Others were interested to see how Isidor and Ida Straus had been portrayed along with the other passengers.

Because of the early hour of the screening, it was decided that an informal event would be held at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. People met at the piano bar on the eighth floor for cocktails and a light snack. No formal cocktail hour or dinner was planned. Others came directly from work or home and picked up their tickets outside the theater.

We were given 50 tickets by the publicity department of Paramount Pictures. Unfortunately, we weren't notified that the tickets would be available until one week before the screening. It was impossible to call everyone. I tried to invite those who had expressed an interest in attending the movie, those who had previously participated in the society's events, and those who lived close enough to New York City to come into the city on short notice. I had hoped to arrange an additional screening during the Christmas holiday but was unable to get another block of tickets. My apologies to those who would have come but were not notified.

By the time you read this article, the movie will have been out for two months and you will have heard many differing points of view about its merits. The overall impression I got from those who did attend was one of disappointment at the lack of historical merit. I think most were happy they had seen the movie but felt that history was subjugated in favor of fiction. For the family, the absence of information about the real passengers seems inexcusable when so much effort was made to reconstruct the ship in 9/10 scale and to exactly duplicate its interior and furnishings. For the general public, Titanamania seems to be flourishing, fueled by just another in a long list of sensational fabrications.

Thanks are in order to all those who did attend, for their continuing support of the society and for their participation in our events. We raised \$1500 from this fund raiser.

For those who are fascinated with the Titanic story, there are many websites where information can be found. Stephen Day Straus sent me addresses for two.

<http://www.rmplc.co.uk/eduweb/sites/phind/html/home.html>
then go to:

<http://www.rmplc.co.uk/eduweb/sites/phind/html/strausi/html>

<http://www.titanic.ed.com>

Did You Know?

In January 1915, Nathan Straus and Miss Florence Straus visited Talbotton, Georgia. They were entertained in the home of Mr. T. H. Persons, Sr. Some of the guests were Nathan's former teacher, Prof. McLaughlin, former classmate Mr. Kimbrough and Leonard and E.T. Smith. Other guests were J.A. Smith, A.P. Persons, T.H. Persons, Jr., R.K. Persons and Miss Virginia Persons. This information was supplied to me in Talbotton by Nelson Goalsky, taken from the January 1915 issue of the *Talbotton New Era*. Mr. Kimbrough remembered the teacher banging his head together with Nathan's whenever Nathan did something wrong. Even with that, they remained close friends.

Also given to me in Talbotton was a page from There Was A Land by Robert H. Jordan, brother of Frank Jordan, Sr. This page lists the genealogy of Captain Barnard Curley who was a business partner of Lazarus Straus in Talbotton. Apparently, Lazarus couldn't open a dry goods store because he needed a license and they were expensive. So he talked Captain Curley, who owned a tailor shop, into leasing half the store to him. Their association seems to have been successful. The store is no longer standing but, during our trip to Georgia, we were shown the site and could still see the back wall of the building. Captain Curley had been a captain in the Southern Rifles and served as mayor of Talbotton at one time. This page was given to me by the maternal great granddaughter of Captain Curley. She still lives in the area and is very proud of her family's association with the Strauses.

In 1933, Herbert Nathan Straus and Therese Kuhn Straus built an enormous house on 71st Street between 5th and Madison Avenues. The cost, at the time, was \$3 million. Aunt Teddy, as she was known to the family, was a stickler for authenticity and insisted that entire rooms be imported from France. When the architect suggested building a reproduction staircase rather than bringing over the original, citing that no one would know, Teddy said, "But I will know the difference." Herbert died of a heart attack before ever moving into the house. His son Edward swore that Herbert had told him that the house would be his death. Many family members felt it was.

Herbert and Therese's art treasures have been donated, mostly to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The building could not be sold during the depression and was finally donated, to be used as a Catholic School.

Bob Straus maintained that his own parents enjoyed the same level of extravagance. He said their house, "Northview" in Mt. Kisco, was his mother's own WPA project. After Jesse died in 1936, Irma had the house torn down, stating that it was too large for her. She had a new house built using the same bricks but had to add bricks to complete it. "Northview" is now owned by Seema Boesky. She has added on, placing a dome over her third floor bedroom. Seema invited Pat Harrah and me to tour the house. The house is beautifully decorated and the grounds are well maintained. She clearly loves living there. Seema was interested in the house's history and enjoyed hearing stories from Pat, who visited her grandparents there.

Announcements

Expecting: Colleen and Geoffrey R. Douglas are expecting their first child in April. Geoffrey will be separating from the service in the Summer. He is a pilot and flight instructor for the US Air Force. Colleen is a hospice caseworker. Geoffrey is the son of George and Barbara Selden Douglas of Austin.

Born: Nora Laine Herzog, daughter of Michael and Erin Herzog of Louisville Colorado, in September 1996. Michael is the son of John Paul Herzog.

Born: Nicholas Oliver Gertler, son of Franklin and Catherine Gertler of Montreal, Canada, on August 7, 1997. Although news of Nicholas' birth was announced in the August issue of the newsletter, I did not know his first name at that time.

Born: Jessica Eleanor Burstein, daughter of Nina and Bernardo Burstein of Bay Harbor Islands Florida, on August 25, 1997. Nina is the daughter of Phyllis K. Gladstone.

Born: Twins Charles Bernard and Minna Louise Straus to Dr. Richard Kelly Straus Sr. and Julie Straus of Fortson GA, on December 5, 1997. The twins are the grandchildren of Richenda (Cindy) Kelly Straus of Columbus GA, widow of Jack Straus, Sr.

Engaged: Leonard Albert Hockstader III to Flore De Preneuf. A July 4, 1998 wedding is planned in Brittany, France. Flore is from Paris and is a freelance journalist currently based in Sarajevo. Lee is bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, currently based in Rome. They met in Moscow where Lee had previously been posted. Lee is the son of Leonard Hockstader II and Didi Hockstader.

Engaged: R. Peter Straus of New York City to Marcia Lewis. Peter is chairman of Straus Communications, a newspaper and radio chain. He is a former assistant secretary of state. His wife, Ellen Sulzberger Straus, died in 1995.

Performing: The youngsters in the dance troupe of Jacques D'Amboise, in May, at a place to be announced. Tracy Straus, a lead instructor for this troupe, has choreographed a dance in memory of Nathan Straus. It takes place on the Lower East Side of New York City at about the time of the milk stations. Tracy has volunteered to have her troupe perform this dance at the rededication of Nathan Straus Square. More on this when we get a date from the Parks Department. Tracy is the daughter of Barnard Sachs Straus, Sr. and the great granddaughter of Nathan Straus.

Congratulations: To Cecelia Kurzman who has been named vice president at Epic Records. Cecelia is the daughter of Harold and Udine Kurzman.

Congratulations: To Carol Herschel Straus. Two of her beaded purses were selected by the New York Bead Society in conjunction with the American Crafts Museum to be in an exhibit called "The World of Beads." They were on display at the museum last summer.

Healed And Back On The Slopes: Oscar S. Schafer rapidly recovered from a broken leg he suffered on the ski slopes when another skier ran into him. It didn't seem to slow Oscar down one bit. Oscar was one of the many family members who attended the preview screening of Titanic. In fact, he has just returned from a ski trip to Europe.

Thank You: To Fran and Jonathan (Jonno) Straus for putting together an excellent Website for the Straus Historical Society. We have received quite a lot of mail from people who have visited their site. Several people report they have just learned they are related to the Strauses and have expressed interest in joining the Straus Historical Society. Others are interested in some aspect of family history and some want to learn more about the Titanic and the Strauses part in that disaster. As a result of this exposure, I believe we will be able to increase our membership, adding new family members and many people who want to stay in contact.

Thank You: To Tom Straus who has volunteered to design our new database. It will be used for keeping track of and organizing information and will also be the basis of a new Straus family address book. Tom is a computer specialist with experience in database design. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Straus Historical Society.

Thank You: To Mike H. Buckner and the Historic Talbotton Foundation, Gus Kaufman and his family, Laurette Rosenstrauch, Cindy Straus, David Rothschild, Clayton Kyle and the wonderful people of Talbotton and Columbus who welcomed us into their midst and showed us that Southern hospitality is alive and well in Georgia.

A Special Thank You: To Donald Straus, Rob Straus, David Allen Straus, Sara Byruck, Penelope More, Christopher J. Straus, Melinda Schwartz, Tim Straus, Oscar S. Schafer, Billy Straus, Oscar S. Straus III, Mildred Morse, Barnard Sachs Straus Sr., Peggy de Graaff, Patricia Harrah and Pam Haber. Your generous contributions, above the suggested membership contribution level, have made an enormous difference. We will be able to continue the work Bob Straus started because of your generosity and commitment to the Society. Heartfelt thanks, also, to the board of directors, for their willingness to give of their time and energy in support of the Society. I appreciate your support, enthusiasm, and kind words. It has been a pleasure to work for this wonderful family. I look forward to continuing my work for the family for as long as the family wishes.

New Members to the Straus Historical Society: Geoffrey and Colleen Douglas, Bruce Freitag, Dr. Lawrence Kahn, William Levitt Jr., J. P. Lowens, Linda G. Marcus, Kristin Sanders, Debra Schafer, Warren H. Simmons Jr. In addition, The New York Public Library and Friends of Straus Park have both indicated their intention of becoming members of the Society. They will be our first corporate sponsors.

A Note From Joan: This newsletter is written for the enjoyment and education of the members of the Straus Historical Society. Please let me know what you would like to see published.

Upcoming Events

On March 9th Linda G. Marcus will participate in a panel discussion at The New York Athletic Club organized by the "Investment Management Institute." The topic of her panel presentation is *Developing The Next Generation for Philanthropic Leadership: Investment and Financial Issues.* Paul A. Kurzman, chair of the Straus Historical Society, and I met with Linda on February 11th. We discussed how my work for the Straus family began, how the historical society was formed and what we have done since its inception. Linda will be speaking before an audience of philanthropists and heads of large corporations. We hope her talk will give us exposure and help us learn more about how to make our society viable.

The rededication of Nathan Straus Square on the Lower East Side in New York City will be held in late Spring. Tracy Straus, a principal dancer and instructor for Jacques D'Amboise, has volunteered to bring her troupe of youngsters to the rededication ceremony. They will perform a dance choreographed by Tracy to honor Nathan Straus. Tracy is the great granddaughter of Nathan and Lina Straus and the park is the site of one of Nathan's milk stations. An announcement will be mailed to you once a date has been set for the rededication.

Rededication of the Oscar S. Straus Memorial in Washington D.C. on the plaza outside the new Ronald Reagan Building, 14th Street between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues. The building is scheduled to open in April with a week of ceremonies. One day will be set aside to dedicate the artwork, including the memorial fountain and statuary. I will be working with government officials and the construction units to have a more formal ceremony at this time. I will keep you informed.

If you missed the A & E Biography of R. H. Macy which aired on Thanksgiving Day, the producer, Cheryl Johnson of Greystone Productions, has mailed me a video of the documentary. John Wendell Straus was interviewed and a short segment of this interview was used. I have received permission to reproduce the video for members of the family as long as it is for their private use. Please let me know if you wish to receive a copy. Send \$20 to cover the cost of reproduction and mailing.

Did You Know?

There is a Titanic Memorial in Washington D.C. near Fourth and P Streets S.W. The statue was sculpted by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. It has been adopted by a group of broadcast journalists who pay tribute every year on April 14th. They dress in formal wear and dine from a banquet drawn from the menu served the last night on the ship. Society members then pile into limousines for the trip to the monument where they place wreaths and toast the departed.

A popular new form of entertainment is attending a "Last Supper." Restaurants and dining clubs have been presenting a nine course meal duplicated from the menu of the First Class Cabin on the Titanic. In New Orleans alone, the dinner is served every Tuesday and has been fully subscribed for months.

Available from Straus Historical Society:

Back issues of the newsletter - \$5.00 each

Newsletter Binders - \$30.00

Artistic family tree - \$55.00

Family tree update - \$15.00

Video tape of "Titanic on Broadway" with Joan Adler interview and CNN segment of interview of Paul Kurzman regarding "Titanic" - \$20.00

"The Autobiography of Isidor Straus" a privately published book by Sara Straus Hess, in softcover - \$20.00

Photograph Album of Talbotton and Columbus Georgia Trip - Oct 24-26, 1997 - \$20.00.

Two Souvenir Albums of Gerogia Trip (given to participants on the trip) - \$10 each

Please send your check, payable to **The Straus Historical Fund**, if you would like to purchase any of these items. Be assured that all money received by me is deposited into the fund's account. I do not profit personally from the sale of these items.

