

OldMagazineArticles.com

The New York Times.

April 16, 1912

STRAUS A FAMOUS MERCHANT

Member Both of R. H. Macy & Co.
and Abraham & Straus



Isidor Straus.

Isidor Straus, who, with Mrs. Straus, was aboard the Titanic, was born in Rhenish Bavaria on Feb. 6, 1845. His father's family came to this country in 1852 and settled at Talbotton, Ga. Isidor obtained a common school education, which he supplemented with a classical course at Collinsworth Institute. It was his ambition to enter West Point Military Academy, and probably he would have done so had not the war broken out just at the time that he had prepared himself for that institution. He was then 16 years old, and, with the war fever in the air, he volunteered for the Confederate Army. He assisted in the organization of a company of which his comrades had chosen him Lieutenant.

When he offered himself, however, he was informed that the Confederacy did not have the guns sufficient to arm its men, and wanted no boys, and the only thing left for him to do was to enter his father's store and take the place of a clerk who had joined the Southern Army. Here he remained for two years, when an opportunity came to him to go to England and remain in the employ of a company there until the close of the war. His father had in the meanwhile moved to Columbus, Ga., and was seriously thinking of moving to Philadelphia to start anew in business. His son favored New York instead, and, his advice prevailing, the family came to New York and the firm of L. Straus & Son was organized and began dealing in earthenware. The success of this venture led the firm to branch out into porcelains and chinaware, and as the other sons of Lazarus Straus reached the age at which they could enter business the firm name was changed. From that time the firm of L. Straus & Sons grew in reputation until it was known not only in this country, but throughout the world.

Early Association With Macy.

In 1874 the firm took charge of the china and glassware department of R. H. Macy & Co. This house had been established by R. H. Macy in 1858 and was already well known in the commercial world. Mr. Macy was living in 1874 and was devoting his personal attention to a business that had already acquired a considerable magnitude. His death occurred in 1877. The business continued to grow—the Messrs. Straus devoting themselves solely to the china and glassware department until 1888, when they were induced to enter the firm, the partners then becoming C. B. Webster, Isidor Straus, and Nathan Straus. Under the new management the various departments of the house were much enlarged, until the present business of the big department store was developed. Isidor Straus has been the office member of the firm since the partnership was formed, but while the details of the office constitute his immediate field, he has complete mastery of the business

Mr. Straus is a member of the firm of Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn, of which the late Abraham Abraham was for many years the head. Several years ago Mr. Straus, with his brothers, Nathan and Oscar, who control Macy's, took over the Brooklyn store. In connection with their department stores the Straus brothers have employed several thousand employes, besides maintaining cut-glass factories in Germany, Switzerland, and France. His brother, Oscar Straus, was for many years Ambassador to Turkey, and while there acquired a reputation as a connoisseur in Oriental rugs and draperies. Oscar Straus has been active as a supporter of ex-President Roosevelt, of whose Cabinet he was a member in the Department of Commerce and Labor.

His Visit to the White House.

Mr. Straus's interest in political affairs was not thoroughly aroused until Mr. Cleveland became a Presidential possibility. It was then that he began to take an active part in legislation relating to a sound currency and tariff reform. In 1893, when the condition of business was desperate and grave doubts were entertained as to the position of President Cleveland with reference to the expediency of convening Congress in extra session, Mr. Straus was prevailed upon to visit the President, and, while it has never been disclosed what his services were on that occasion, it is a fact that the proclamation convening Congress was issued on the very day that Mr. Straus visited the White House. The result of that extra session forms an important page in the history of the United States.

Mr. Straus took an active part in the campaign which resulted in Mr. Cleveland's second election. He was later mentioned for the office of Postmaster General, but made it understood that he had no desire to give up his business pursuits for the position. He was later elected a member of the Fifty-third Congress and was a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

In the field of philanthropy Mr. Straus has held a place of prominence. The Educational Alliance, the "People's Palace" of the congested tenement district of the east side, of which he is President, owes its present position as one of the great factors in the solution of the sociological problem to his tireless work.

Mr. Straus is a Director in many and a supporter of almost every philanthropic and charitable institution in New York, regardless of creed. He is a Director in several banking and financial institutions, among which may be mentioned the Hanover National Bank and the New York County National Bank, and he is Vice President of the Birkbeck Saving and Loan Company. He is Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade and Vice President of the J. Hood Wright Memorial Hospital.