This is the Oral History of Jack Straus, a fourth generation member of the family of Lazarus Straus, who arrived in the U.S. from Germany.

Oscar, Nathan, and Isidor Straus, sons of Lazarus, opened a china and glassware department in Macy's New York. After the death of Mr. Macy, the brothers bought the store and then moved it from 14th Street, where it had been, to 34th Street, where it still is today.

The Oral History contains a short summary of the family history, as well as of the retail firm.

Herein are recorded also, the civic activities of Jack Straus, who believed very strongly in the making of a contribution of skills and experience to the community.
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### JACK STRAUS

#### ORAL HISTORY

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Q: Jack, would you tell us when you were born and where you were born?

A: I was born in New York City at 49 E. 74th Street, on January 13, 1900, and lived there until I was about 11 years old, and then moved to 399 Park Avenue, and lived there until I got married.

Q: How did it feel to be the fourth generation of a great retailing family?

A: I never had any particular feeling about it at all. As a matter of fact, originally, I had grave doubts as to whether I wanted to go into the business. I wanted...I thought I wanted to be a professional musician. I thought I wanted to be a Dick Rodgers, and I wrote music for The Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard. I wrote some music for a Junior League show here in New York, and the Spence School show which they put on at that time. It was so bad that I made up my mind that I couldn't do that, so I decided to go into merchandising.

Q: What was your...You played the piano, did you not?

A: Yes. I played the piano.

Q: Yes. Right. So you decided to go into merchandising. But wasn't there an episode when your father sent you up to Paris to help this...

A: Well, it wasn't an episode. After I had been on Training Squad at Macy's, my father wanted me to go over to Paris and learn something about international banking. I went and spent about eight months in Paris, and worked for two banks over there, the first one being a small bank, which were our bankers, in Paris. I really learned very little there, because all I did was to add up the columns of figures. So I left there and went to the old Equitable Trust
and saw Mr. Lankin there. I asked him if I could work as a volunteer, and
whether I could go through the bank. He was marvelous to me; put me through
every part of the bank, including going down to the Bourse with the people
who were at that time doing all the exchange for the bank. I learned a great
deal. But after I'd done it for about eight months, I was delighted to come
back to New York and go into the retail business in a serious way, and I
went all through the various stages of management....

Q: Could you tell us in some detail what you remember about the kind
of training you had then?

A: You mean...on the Squad at Macy's?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, we were trained, really, in every branch of the business.
We spent a little time in merchandising, management, control, and publicity,
which were four divisions at that time. I added a fifth, which separated
management from personnel. And we now have five divisions, personnel being a
separate division. Incidentally, G.G. Michaelson at one time was the head of
that division. And...we went all through each division getting a smattering
of each one, and then you...

Q: How long a period of time did you work in each...

A: On the Squad? You were there about six or eight months. And then
you became what we called at that time a Section Manager. It's now called
a Sales Manager. Then I went into management in a big way, and became
eventually Fourth Assistant General Manager, which meant nothing, because
the store was very small at that time. Then after I'd done that...

Q: There were no branches....Excuse me....There were no branches at
that time.

A: When I went into Macy's we had one store. Thirty-fourth Street. And
I then went back and became a Junior Assistant Buyer and Assistant Buyer and Buyer, and then eventually became a Divisional Merchandise Manager. I'll tell you something very amusing that happened at that time. I was very much interested in management and personnel, and after I'd gone through that part of it, I was told that I was going to go back and go into merchandising. I went up and spoke to my father, and I said, "Father, you know, I think I'd like to stay in the Personnel and Management division of the store instead of going into merchandising." Father made what I considered to be a really fantastic remark. He said, "Jack, I can take a pushcart out on 34th Street and fill it full of management. I've got nothing to sell. That's the business we are in." So I went back and took merchandising. I've never done a job in my whole life that I haven't liked a little bit better than the one I had before. I don't care what it was. The only one that I didn't like quite as well as the one I had was when I had to retire, and I became Chairman of the Executive Committee instead of Chairman of the Board.

Q: Yes. Right. So...What were the departments that you were...

A: Well, I was Assistant Buyer in the underwear department, as I remember. I was an Assistant Buyer in Men's Furnishings, and I was Buyer of Women's Sweaters. And then I became Merchandise Manager of all of our accessories divisions. At that time we had just acquired Davison's in Atlanta and Lasalles in Toledo, and they wanted somebody to sort of be the Macy's-New York attachment to the stores. Eddie Marks, who was my sidekick in merchandising, became the contact for Lasalle's and I became the contact for Davison's, in Atlanta.

Q: Now, on the history of Macy's, or the Straus family and Macy's I should say, china and glassware has played a very important role...

A: That's the way they got into the business. Mr. Macy invited my
grandfather and his brother Nathan Straus (my grandfather was Isidore
Straus who, with his wife, went down on the Titanic). His brother, Nathan
Straus, was in the business with him. And they were in the importing busi-
ness of china and glasswear from Germany, where their family had come from.
As a matter of fact, my great-grandfather came over from Germany and settled
in a little town called Talberton, Georgia.

Q: His name was Lazarus?

A: Lazarus. And when...and lived in Talberton, which is about, I
would think, 50-60 miles from Columbus, Georgia: between Columbus and Macon.
I've been there many times.

Q: I was going to ask you if you've gone...

A: Yes, I've been there many times. As a matter of fact, the main
little place where the Mayor is and some of the...It's a little bit of a town
...it's called Straus-Laverte Hall...And strangely enough...

Q: I'm sorry. Would you mind spelling his name? Straus is his first...?
You said "Straus-Laverte" Hall...

A: Straus-Laverte...Straus hyphen Laverte...I don't know who Mr. Laverte
was...But it's Straus-Laverte Hall. Some years ago, the Georgia Historical
Society decided to put up a plaque in memory of my great-grandfather who came
over. My great-grandfather was an itinerant salesman, and he had a horse and
buggy, and he went around selling his wares. Evidently in those days
(which was before the Civil War) these traveling salesman were very welcome
in people's houses. They'd put them up over night and gave their horses hay...
He did that. And it amused me very much as far as the plaque was concerned,
because my great-grandfather left Talberton, Georgia because of Anti-Semitism,
and moved to Columbus. And my grandfather, Isidore Straus, I think, was sent over to England by the Confederacy to trade cotton for guns.

Q: How interesting.

A: I don't think he ever made very much of a thing out of it. I don't think that he succeeded very well, but that's what he tried to do. Then he came back, and went into Macy's. Mr. Macy had several partners, and as they died out, he evidently had an attachment to my grandfather and his brothers. He allowed them to buy their shares. When Mr. Macy died, they bought his share, and owned the whole thing, and moved up to Herald Square in 1902. And, incidentally, I laid the cornerstone of that store.

Q: Did you really?

A: When I was two years old. Everybody always says to me, "Do you remember it?" I say, "I remember it very well. I was two years old at the time." But... That's the way they happened to get into the business. Of course, when they moved there, this was moving way uptown. Thirty-fourth Street and Broadway was really almost country, and my grandfather...

Q: They had been down on 14th Street before that?

A: They had been down on 14th Street and 6th Avenue. And my grandfather had a house at 105th Street and Broadway, and it was a farm. I remember it very well. I was 12 years old when he died, and I remember it very well. They had chickens and... I'm not sure they had cows. I know they had horses, because he used to drive down to the store from 105th Street. And I remember...

Q: Drive down in a horse and buggy?

A: Horse and buggy. There was no such thing as automobiles in those days. I remember the first car he had. Those were really quite some times. I
remember his funeral. He and my grandmother both went down on the Titanic, and his body was recovered and my grandmother's never was. His body is now in a vault up in Woodlawn Cemetery where my father and his two brothers built a mausoleum.

Q: You mentioned that your grandfather used to come...go down by the store by horses and buggy. What was the public transportation like in those days?

A: I think pretty poor. As a matter of fact, I think in those days the trolley cars were pulled by horses. And I think that the Sixth Avenue subway, which was the 6th Avenue Elevated, at that time was steam run. I think it had steam engines on it. Now, this is rather vague in my mind. I'm not sure what year that was, but it's rather vague. When I went into business, they were no longer that. There were automobiles at that time, but I was 21...I remember when I was a kid, they'd go down in horse and buggy. I remember, as a matter of fact, the coachman for my grandfather, after they gave up horses, became the office boy, office manager, really, for my father and his two brothers, after my grandfather died. And I remember him very well. He used to be at Macy's for years.

Macy's was very different then. At the store, we did...When I went into the business, we did about $50 million a year.

Q: This was about 1921?

A: Twenty-one. And that was big volume in those days. And we hoped to do...We got up to $99.8 million--something like that--in 1929, before the crash. And my father was very anxious to see us reach $100 million. And we never did, before he died. My father became Ambassador to France in 1933, and he died in 1936 of cancer, and he never saw the store do $100 million.
But I've thought it so often; I wonder what he'd think of us now. Ninety-two stores... When I became head of Macy's, we had four stores--New York, New Jersey, Atlanta and Toledo.

Q: New Jersey was Bamberger's...
A: Bamberger's...
Q: And Toledo was...
A: Lasalle.
Q: And Davison was Atlanta...
A: And when I retired in 1966 or '67, we had 65 stores. But things... changed tremendously after World War II. And this was one of the things that interested me so much. I knew General Wood of Sears-Roebuck reasonably well. I used to take lunch with him from time to time. He was a very, very wise gentleman. He said to me at the time, he said, "I think after the war, things are going to change. I think people are going to use automobiles a lot more than they did before for shopping. And we're going to start building our stores not in the center of cities, but outside the cities." Now, they built self-standing stores at that time. They did not... This was before anybody thought of shopping centers. But they built self-standing stores. And he was right. That was the beginning, really, of the thinking about shopping centers. And I think that he was the one who forecast this whole change in people's ideas about how to shop. And the thing that did it was the automobiles.

Q: If you could go back just a few years before we hear some more about that--which I would love to hear--when your father became Ambassador to France, he left the store in your hands...
A: No.
Q: He did not.

A: No. He had a brother, Herb...There were three brothers. My father, Jesse, was the oldest; Percy was the second, Herbert was the third brother. And they took over the business after my grandfather died. And the three of them ran the business from that time--1912--until my father left in 1933. He became the head of the Temporary Emergency Relief under Mr. Roosevelt...in 1932, that was...And in 1933, he became Ambassador to France. And when he left, Mr. Percy Straus, my uncle, took over. Mr. Herbert Straus had died in 1933 I think...No...He died in 1932;.....he had died before my father left. So the only one left, really, was Mr. Percy Straus. Mr. Percy Straus had a very severe stroke in 1939, in the Arizona-Biltmore Hotel. He was brought back, unconscious, to New York, and was six months unconscious in New York Hospital. And I became the acting head of business. After six months, Mr. Percy Straus recovered, came back to the store for five years, and died in 1944. At the time he came back, I asked him if he wanted to run the store, because I was acting President, or if he wanted me to, and he said he wanted me to because he didn't think he was quite up to it. And I said, "Well, only one person can run an organization like this. You've got to understand, then, if I'm going to run it, if you have any comments, they ought to come through me." And he said he did, and we got along pretty well. I was very grateful to him for really doing what he did, because after all, I had not built the business. He had. And I thought it was his decision to make if he wanted to run it. And he just wasn't quite strong enough to do it, although his health and mind were perfectly good. A little bit handicapped by a little paralysis in the right arm and right leg. But outside of that he was pretty good. Mind was fine.

Q: Jack, how had your father and your uncle divided up the duties in the store?
A: They were an unusual combination. My father and Herbert Straus were the merchants and they... My father had all the ready-to-wear and the women's apparel, and the advertising. Herbert Straus had some of the merchandising also. I worked, as a matter of fact, for Herbert Straus. I was one of his Division Managers. Percy Straus had all the home goods and management. My father and Mr. Percy Straus were an unusual combination. One, my father, I think, being a brilliant merchant, and Mr. Percy Straus being, I think, a brilliant management man, made a great combination.

Q: But they still divided the duties of merchandising between them. That is to say...

A: Between the three of them.

Q: Between the three of them. They had different divisions. Now, which of them was concerned with china and glass?

A: Mr. Percy Straus.

Q: Mr. Percy Straus.

A: See, that was home furnishings.

Q: Right. Right. And it was with him...

A: Yes, but I mean, the china and glasswear department....

After they had gotten into Macy's...It was really no more important than any other department.

Q: I see.

A: It was just another department. And I they had a man--I don't remember his name--who ran it for years, very successfully, and... But it was just a department...They happened to get into Macy's through it, but it was never anymore than just a department.

Q: Well, now, from the year 1933 until you became the acting President in 1939, what were some of the things that you did? Because those were apparently very busy years for you.
A: 1933? Oh, yes. Because what happened then was I took
over....I originally had the accessory division. Then I took over
the whole men's division, the children's division, and the miscellaneous
departments, like groceries and drugs and all that type of thing. Eddie
Marks had the whole ready-to-wear—lingerie and underwear, women's
apparel—and I had the men's and children's, and Oswald Knopf, who was
the third divisional merchandise manager, had all the home furnishings.
So that there were three of us who ran merchandising in the stores. In
addition to that, in the beginning at least, when we bought Bamberger's,
we were sent over there to do the same job, with the same individual
responsibilities. And that was impossible. It just wouldn't work. We
were working six days a week then, and we'd spend four days a week in New
York and two days a week in New Jersey, and it just didn't work. There
wasn't enough supervision for either one of them, so we gave that up after
two or three years and got other management, the two stores were very
difficult to run anyway, together. Macy's-New York, being an underselling
store, which undersold by 6%, couldn't buy an awful lot of the merchandise
that was "price fixed," the manufacturers wouldn't sell us. And, of course,
at Bamberger's we could, because Bamberger's was a credit store. It would
have been much easier if the two had meshed. Of course, today, they're meshed.
We don't have the underselling policy anymore. That was another thing that I
had really an awful struggle with to determine what we should do, and I'll
come to do that later. But, we had that underselling policy all through the
war. No, it wasn't all through...We gave it up during the war. '43, '44...
I'm not quite sure what year it was.

Q: I think it might have been later, because my recollection is
that when I was with the Little Shop, which was at the end of the 40's, there was still a problem with resources because of underselling...

A: Yeah, but I think that probably existed for a long time after we got out of the thing, because of the fact that people hadn't sold us before. They were a little scared of us I think, that we'd cut the prices on them. I had a very interesting experience there because I had to make up my mind what we ought to do as far as that particular thing was concerned, because I believed that credit was going to be far more important after the war. And at our Board of Directors one day I said, "Now, I don't want anybody to talk out loud. I want you to put on a piece of paper what you think would happen to Macy's volume and profit if we gave up our 6% policy and took on credit." And I got all the slips back, and the variation was perfectly enormous. Some thought we'd gain about 15%, and others though we'd drop about 15%. It was a very, very difficult problem to do. And I finally made up my mind, after consultation with a lot of my associates, so...I never did anything alone...

Q: But ultimately the decision had to be that of the President.

A: Had to be. And it was the right decision. And, incidentally, Sears-Roebuck, and Penney, and all the rest of them, had the same decision to make. They were all cash; but they didn't undersell. And in addition to that, after the war, the amount of national advertising that was done by products increased enormously. We used to carry very little nationally advertised merchandise; practically everything was under our own brand. That is really what Sears-Roebuck does. In other words, they carry very little merchandise under anybody else's brand. They do Eastman Kodak
film, or something like that. But really, even in TV and radio, they
don't carry anything except their own brand. I thought this was
probably going to be very difficult for us. I'm quite sure we made
the right decision. I made up my mind, after we got off our selling
policy, our underselling policy, I said to my people "All right, we'll
now allow you to carry 15-20% of your merchandise on nationally advertised
brands." My guess today is we don't carry 15% of the merchandise under our
own brand. That's the way the thing has shifted. And this is in a compara­
tively short period of time. What is it? Forty years? And in a business
like ours, that's very short. Really very short time.

Q: And Macy's is 115 years old, or something like that...
A: Macy's was 100 years in 1958, so we're hundred and...what is
that? About 24 years...124 years...

Q: Right. Right. And so, as you say, 40 years out of that period
of time is a comparatively short period of time...What are some of the changes
that you were talking about that have taken place since the Second World War,
for example?

A: Well, I would say that's the main one. The main one being
getting off cash and going onto credit. And that was a tremendous change for
a business that had really developed and been very successful under its old
policy. And when you had to make the decision to change something like that,
it's like monkeying with a buzz saw. You don't know really what
happen. You know you have been successful one way, but then you've got to
look ahead and say, "Is this going to continue?" And we did not think it was
going to continue, and I say "we," because, as I say, none of these things
was done unilaterally by me. Incidentally, another thing I think I'd like
to record is the fact that I was going to go back to Harvard Business School. I didn't do it, because I got married; I always regretted it, because I never really learned enough about accounting to be useful to me. The result of it was I had to have somebody by my side who really had great expertise in the field. I was awfully fortunate. I had a gentleman by the name of Mr. Edwin Chinlund, who was a former partner of Arthur Anderson and Co., and he was a terrific person. A marvelous character and a very, very fine accountant. And then, of course, after that, Don Smiley, who succeeded me as Chairman of the Board, is a a very fine financial man himself. Probably one of the best in the country.

Q: But you're saying you wish you'd taken an MBA?

A: Yes. I think I should have known more about it. I think it handicapped me a little bit, that I couldn't make decisions as easily as I might have made them if I'd known more about it. And I liked it. I'm sorry.

Q: What are some of the policies that you really feel very keenly about. As for example, I know you feel a great deal about the role of the department store and service. Service...the role of service in the department store.

A: Well, I'm a bad one to talk about it now because I think that as far as stores are concerned today, there is no such thing as service. And yet, stores seem to prosper without it. I think all service, including our own, is very much lacking. You've got to pick out your own merchandise. After you pick it out, you've got to find somebody to take care of your transaction. I think it's most difficult. Now, I understand why. Costs are so high we can't afford to have the number of people we used to have. But nevertheless, from the standpoint of people selecting things, it's awfully
difficult today, very difficult. It's much more difficult than when I was in the business originally. We used to have people who would want to help you. Today they couldn't care less, I think. I've believed for years, for example, in commissions for people. Because I think if they get something out of it, they'll work a little bit harder. Personnel people don't believe in that because they think that the opportunities are too uneven, that a person that happens to be put in a place where the merchandise is low cost, has to do much more work than the person with the high check. And there's something in that. But nevertheless, I think you work harder if you get something out of it.

Q: Tell us what you think of the role of fashion, because you mentioned that word earlier, and I'm interested to know how you feel about that in relation to the department store.

A: Well, what do you mean by "the role of fashion?"

Q: Well, you said that you thought that fashion was terribly important.

A: I sure do. No, I think that particularly today, much more than before the war, I would say that women are much more conscious of fashion today. And I think this has been done very cleverly by a tremendous amount of advertising, making everybody feel that they want to look a particular part. I think that this is good for business, very good for business. I think that the fashion people have done a marvelous job, in being able to create things that are wearable. Now, that lets out an awful lot of people too, because I think the fashions that are created in Paris are just awful. I don't know why they produce them. I really don't. When you see the fashions that appear in Women's Wear, I don't believe that you see one person out of a million wearing them. Now, maybe they set a trend, but I just don't think that people wear those clothes. I've never seen them. You certainly
don't see them around the streets of New York.

Q: In the days when you used to go to Europe--because you did make some trips--what kinds of things were you looking for? What were you doing?

A: Well, as a matter of fact, When I went to Europe, I was doing more non-fashion things. Because I was in charge of the men's division, which at that time was pretty staple. And the children's division. I really never was in women's fashions. Mr. Marks did that. But after I became head of Macy's, obviously I was interested in what was being shown, and we did cover the openings, and we used to bring back models and make line for line copies, which you remember, probably, from the Little Shop. We did very well with it. But I think in those days they were far less outlandish than they are today. I think today the things they create people can't wear. Now, maybe they create an idea, and the idea will be taken out and worked with so that it becomes something wearable. I don't know how you feel about that, but it seems to me that when you look at the clothes that are created in Paris, you don't see them.

Q: In the days when Macy's was doing line for line copies, it was of the couture, and this is prêt-à-porter.

A: Well, even the prêt-à-porter...For example, I've been looking at Women's Wear recently, on these openings...and look at the clothes that are shown, and you won't see one person in a million wearing them. Here. Maybe they do in Paris but they don't here.

Q: And, of course, it's also interesting, isn't it, to know how accurate their reporting is.

A: Well, they take pictures of them. They can't be inaccurate.
Q: They take pictures of a selected group.
A: Well, these are created by the couturiers there, and their pictures, so they must be creations by them. But to me, and to most of the people I know, they don't wear them. Do you know many people that wear them?

Q: I think probably the number of people who wear such clothes, exactly as they are, as they are bought, is very small. I don't know what percent it represents of the total amount of merchandise sold...
A: Again, they can take a trend and do something with it. That I can understand. But the way they show them in Paris, I just don't understand that at all. And they spend a lot of money creating them.

Q: Jack, Macy's...Let's say in the forties, which is when I knew more about Macy's than I do now, had as it's policy, I believe, the idea of catering from the upper-lower to the lower-upper. Is that...Am I right about that? Would you explain...
A: I used to give a lecture on that. And I said our bull's eye was really middle income. We'd get the upper-lower to the lower-upper. And that was our target. I think today we would go a little beyond that. I would say the middle to upper. We're not in the middle-low. We're in the middle-high and the middle. I don't think we are very high, and I don't think we ever will be. Well, that's not true about all things. I know, for example, that we've got a shop of Vuitton trunks, which is very high. I think this is putting polish on the apple, which I think is fine. It gives a picture of class that I think is great for Macy's. Incidentally, I'll make some comments later about the people who succeeded me, but having worked and seen Macy's for 60 odd years, I'm so proud of the way the people who have followed me
have done, and I know that they've done a much better job than I could have done, had I continued on in the business.

Q: Why do you think that?

A: Well, I think you've got to be awfully introspective. I think nobody knows you like you know yourself, and I just think they're doing a better job.

Q: You were talking...I'd like to hear some more about your feelings about the dramatic changes brought about post-war by the introduction of the automobile as a much more....

A: Well, the obvious thing that it really brought about was the shopping center. It couldn't have done without the automobile, and today, shopping centers have been so successful, from every standpoint. From the standpoint of convenience to the customer, from the standpoint of bringing costs down enormously for the retailer. In other words, I think when I....When we entered the war, we were delivering about 44% of our merchandise. Today we deliver around 4%.

Q: Really.

A: Well, that's a tremendous difference in cost. And the reason for it is that people take automobiles over to the shopping centers, and they take purchases home with them. It's very convenient for them, and God knows it's convenient for the retailer. So that has made a complete change in shopping habits. People don't come into town as much as they used to. They don't have to. And I think that's very fortunate too, because transportation today is not that easy. I mean, for example Long Island, where I go in the summer, if you try to get into New York in the early morning to shop, you can't. The trains are...Well, I was on the Board of the Long Island Railroad for a long
time, so I can't talk about that. But the transportation leaves something to be desired, let's put it that way.

Q: The...ah...

A: Shopping centers have made a tremendous difference in the whole aspect of retailing.

Q: Were you concerned at the point where it appeared we were going to be in for a major oil crisis. That the shopping centers....

A: Yes...Yes...Yes. Definitely so. Because if there had been a major oil crisis, one of the things that I asked at that time was what about our mass transportation to our shopping centers. In other words, buses and so forth. That would have been vital to them; without public transportation, where's your shopping center? Without automobiles today...First of all, I think without automobiles we'd all stand still. So I think that oil is very important not only to this country, but all others.

Q: Would you tell us about some of the changes that have taken place inmanagement style of the business as it has grown?

A: Well, I told you one thing which has taken place, which is the shift...The separation of management and Personnel. I think that is very important. In other words, Personnel has become so important today, the handling of personnel, that it needed a separate division. And I separated them, oh, I would think, about thirty years ago. I know there was a great deal of talk about whether that was a good idea or not. But Fred Atkinson, and G.G. Michaelson, and others who were...I'm not sure they were consulted at that time, but they were around at that time, I think--We all thought it was the thing to do.

Q: What about the separation of management from merchandising.

A: They were never together. As far as I know, they were never
They were never together at Macy's.

Q: Well, buyers at Macy's, years ago, had responsibilities on the floor.

A: Well, that's different. Well, of course...Listen. I wish they still had it. That was part of merchandising. In other words, you used to give lectures to your people about the new merchandise you brought in. You can't do that anymore with branch stores. The buyer doesn't get around anymore. The buyer today is really the person who buys the merchandise which they're going to sell. As far as education is concerned, he definitely can't get around to 30 stores. So, they have to supplement that by written material to a certain extent. But again, when you come right down to it, the clerks are not as well informed as they used to be. They can't be. But they don't have to be, because they don't sell anymore. You pick up a piece of merchandise and take it to a desk and say "I want to buy this." And that's it. But that's not the way it used to be.

Q: No. That's the way...

A: But that's the way you do it. You take any big store today. Even small stores, practically, with the exception of the mama and papa stores. That's the way you buy. You go in, you select. I know a lot of small stores on Long Island that my wife goes to, and you go in and look at the thing that you want, and then you take it over to somebody and say "I'd like to buy this." Actually, if you ask people if they carry certain things today, the clerks don't know most of them. They're not that well informed.

Q: When I mentioned management style before, I was really thinking also of what has happened as the store has grown beyond the point where it could remain a family managed store. That has represented a whole big change too.
A: Well, my God yes, but that was true...It really hadn't been a family managed store, since my father left and my other uncle, Herbert, died. I mean, Mr. Percy Straus was left there alone. The store was doing around very close to $100 million. And he couldn't run that alone. No, I mean...The family influence, I would say, became very minor. Certainly during my period of time of running it. Very minor. I happened to be in the right place at the right time. Otherwise I'm not sure I would even have been picked to run it.

Q: Oh, I suspect you would have been picked to run it.

A: I might have not been.

Q: I think there you're being much too modest. Because I have heard nothing but qualities about you that would have made you...

A: Well...You can't look back on these things. I was there. I'm very lucky to have had a crack at turning it. I loved the business. But believe me, no business like this today is one man. And it shouldn't be. It isn't today, and it shouldn't be.

Q: You know, you feel very strongly about advertising, because you mentioned that very specifically as a separate part of the whole picture. Would you like to reminisce a little bit about the early days of advertising, because Macy's was very colorful.

A: It's been very colorful. You're right. We had Margaret Fischback at that time, and we had...

Q: About what years?

A: Oh,...Margaret Fischback was with us, I would say, early '30's. And then we had, you know, what's her name, that worked for Gimbel's after...

Q: I know who you mean...ah, Bernice Fitzgibbon.

A: Bernice Fitzgibbon. And then we had a man by the name of Paul Hollister, who was our Advertising Manager, and a brilliant man. And we ran
ran some awfully good advertising at that time. Different from New York. Margaret was very amusing, Paul was very amusing, and Bernice Fitzgibbons, I think was a masterful advertiser on a rather serious note. But the combination was just terrific.

Q: Now, what kind of advertising was run in those days?

A: Institutional...

Q: And what about some of the other sales promotion things that Macy's did as an institutional....

A: Well, of course, the Thanksgiving Parade is number one.

Q: Right. And when did that start?

A: 1926.

Q: The first one.

A: Right. A man by the name of James Gould, who was our advertising manager, was the one that suggested it. We were not the first, though, in the country, I think. I think both Gimbel's in Philadelphia and Eaton's in Toronto had a parade before we did. I've never missed one. Since 1926...I come up from Florida to see it.

Q: Are you doing that again this year?

A: Uh huh. Every year. I'm a little superstitious about it. I don't want to miss it. But, the Parade has been a great institution for New York. And then we started fireworks. I wanted something in the summer, to give
to the children of New York that they didn't see regularly. We started the fireworks and we had a very unfortunate accident after about five or six years. A couple of men--who, incidentally were experts; Japanese, who had come over here to set them off--one of them got killed, and another one jumped overboard and drowned.

Q: When was this?
A: Oh, I can't give you the year, but my guess would be about 20 years ago. Then we gave them up for a while, and now they're back with us again. Unfortunately, I think we're back now in a bad place. The police don't like to have us up around where we were. We ought to be around 110th Street, 120th Street, something like that, so they can see us off Riverside Drive. But we're down by the Battery now, and not enough people can see us, I don't think. But anyway, they're going to continue to do it as far as I know.

Q: And it's done around July 4th....
A: On the Fourth of July. And it's great, again, for kids. It's a good show. And I think that's important. They grow up with Macy's, which I think is fine.

Q: Yes. Indeed, if you've been to a Macy Thanksgiving Day Parade every year of your life...
A: You don't forget them.

Q: Right. Could we just take a few minutes out...You wanted to talk about some of the people who succeeded you...
A: Well, people who succeeded me were Don Smiley, Chairman of the Board, and a man by the name of Herb Seegal. One man, Ernie Malloy, succeeded me originally, but he died very shortly thereafter of cancer. Then Don Smiley became Chairman and Herb Seegal became President. And those two men did a fantastic job.
I think that I contributed the volume to Macy's, and I said to Don Smiley many times, I think he was the one that contributed the profit. We're much more profitable today than we were when I was running it. But we were growing at that time. We were growing very quickly. I would say during those years we grew from four stores to more than 60, and Herb Seegal, I think, was a master trainer. Practically all the people that we've got today, running our divisions, and running the main corporation, Ed Finkelstein, were trained by Herb Seegal. That's a great tribute to a man who really did such a marvelous thing, leaving behind him these men trained by him.

Q: It certainly is. As a matter of fact, Macy's has the reputation of being the trainer of the retail world and is notable for its programs...

A: Well, I think our training squad has been notable for years. It started in 1919, and I think we have, probably, as distinguished a group of alumni as any university in the country.

Q: Yes. I remember once discussing with somebody the fact that if you ever had a reunion of all the graduates of Macy's training...

A: It would be quite something.

Q: Yes. The main floor would be fully taken.

A: Quite something.

Q: Right. Yes. Mr. Jack, could you please tell us something about Webster House?

A: Webster House was started by Mr. Webster, obviously, who was a partner of Mr. Macy's. He wanted to have a place for young girls who came to New York, to work, to stay at a low cost. In those days, obviously, youngsters didn't get too much money. He set up this trust, and established Webster House. My father was interested in it, and my sister succeeded my
father on the Board, and my niece is still on the Board. Her name is Barbara Levy.

I got into the thing somehow or other. Somebody asked me to take an interest in it, and I looked into it, and to my astonishment, we had people at Macy's who had been with us 20-25-30 years, living at Webster House. I talked to the people there, and I said "I do not think this was the purpose of Mr. Webster, who set it up. I think what he wanted to do was to take care of young people who needed help, while they were getting established." So, much to the discouragement of a lot of our own people, we made a rule that you couldn't stay there more than seven years. And, really, it was quite....They didn't like me for it. But it was the right thing to do. And today I think that rule is still in existence. But G.G. was on it, Fred Atkinson, who was our Personnel Director, at that time, was on it. And I got off the Board after having tried to make it what Mr. Webster wanted it.

Q: Very good. Thank you.

(Side 2)

Q: Since yesterday was the 56th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, I think it would be appropriate if you would discuss the beginnings of that parade, and its role as one of Macy's contributions to the community.

A: Well, the parade was started in 1926. It was originated by a man by the name of James Gould, who was at that time the Advertising Manager of Macy's. I do not think we were the first. I think the first parade in this country was Gimbel's in Philadelphia, and there was another parade, I think, at the time we started, up at Eaton's in Toronto. But we adopted the parade for New York. And, of course, since then, it's gone into a tremendous institution. As a matter of fact, I think the first year that we had it, there were about something
like 800,000 to a million people who saw it along the route of march, because at that time we started at 110th Street and came all the way down to Herald Square. And, of course, this was before television or radio. This year, I think, I just read in the paper, we're supposed to have shown it to 80 million people. So, it's quite a different kind of parade now than it was at the beginning. It's much longer now. It goes...actually...The festivities go on from about 8:30 in the morning until noon. But the parade itself is about two hours. It used to be about an hour. And it's all been adapted to television, which didn't exist at that time. But it's a great institution in New York, and I think it's something that the children don't have a chance to look at at any other place. As a matter of fact, I wanted something for the summer as well as the winter, and we adopted the idea of having fireworks on the 4th of July so the children of New York could see fireworks. And we adopted that many years ago. It's still a great institution. And, again, it gives the children of New York something that they don't ordinarily see. And, from my standpoint, beginning with children, we think we'll make them customers of Macy's when they grow up, if they remember Macy's.

Q: Right. Keeping in mind that the Macy parade was...is an institution that Macy's started and has maintained for many different purposes, I think it's appropriate to talk about what you have done, as a business leader, for the city of New York. I wish you would discuss some of the things that you have done, and in which I know you have been an active participant.

A: Well, of course, I believe that any business man should participate in civic activities, and there are certain ones that particularly interested me. As a matter of fact, one of the first I got interested in was when Mayor LaGuardia... when Mr. LaGuardia was Mayor. I got interested in traffic, and he appointed me
to be chairman of a committee on traffic, and I was active in traffic all the time period when Bob Wagner was mayor. Since then I haven't done anything about it. But traffic in New York has always been one of our great problems, trying to move traffic through the city. I made studies of various kinds. I made a study of the garment center years ago, for Mayor LaGuardia. It took me about two years; I had people assigned to me by the police department to help with the study. I made recommendations. I gave the report to the Mayor, and I don't think he ever looked at it. But, just as a matter of interest, I think the garment problem could be solved tomorrow if they were willing to do what I suggested at that time, and this goes back, now, about 30 years—and that is to have what we have in Macy's; a delivery platform, in each garment building, in which people would deliver to each individual company in the building, rather than having each deliveryman deliver to each individual company in the building; which takes forever, and blocks up the streets. The same thing would be true of delivery and shipments. But, for example, we have a delivery platform in which trucks bring us merchandise and we take it through the building and when the deliveries go out we ship them out in big hampers and we don't have trucks taking individual things to each department. That is what they do in the garment industry. It's a simple thing, but they've never done it. They still are studying the garment area for traffic problems. I haven't done anything about it recently; because I thought it was kind of useless now. But that was one of the things that interested me. And, of course, there were various other things. The Economic Development Council, which was one of the things that George Champion and I started. It was done because...

Q: That started about '65....

A: We got into that because we were worried about the City of New York, and new businesses in the City of New York. And we got a hold of a gentleman,
whose main job was really logistics. In other words, he was the person whom a company thinking about moving into an area would get hold of and say, "Where is the best place, from the standpoint of both labor and shipments, etc." He said to Mr. Champion and myself, "We haven't been able to recommend New York to anyone in 20 years," Well, this was kind of a shock to us; and we decided we ought to do something about developing business in New York, and finding out why we couldn't get new business in New York. So we started the Economic Development Council, which has worked very closely with the City. Each Mayor since we started--and Bob Wagner was the first--has been very interested in using the facilities the organization offers. I've been off the Board now for several years, since I retired, but it's still a very active organization and it's headed at the present time by David Rockefeller; and is sort of an adjunct to the Chamber of Commerce. That is a committee I was on, and which I think is rather ineffective in New York. As a matter of fact, when I went on the Executive Committee of the Chamber, I said to them that I hadn't heard anything about the Chamber in 20 years, since I've been in New York. It's sort of a dormant organization. Since then it's been active, reactivated, I think, somewhat, but I think the Economic Development Council is much more important in New York than the Chamber, which I think is too bad. My grandfather, at one time, was head of the Chamber of Commerce and it may have been more active in those days than it was when I was in business.

I'm trying to think of what other things....Well, of course, I was on the Board of the Stock Exchange. I that what you want to talk about? I was asked to go on the Board by Keith Funston as one of the three public governors of the board of 30 people. And it was very interesting, because I said to Keith Funston at the time, when he asked me to go on the board, "You're asking the one man in New York who knows probably less about the Stock Exchange than anybody else." And he said, "Well, that's one of the reasons I'd like to have you go
on."

Well, I couldn't have been more fascinated with it. I was on it for four years, and was one of the people that was asked to reorganize the board; and today they have 10 public members, 10 inside members--which is a much better reorganization of the board, because three public governors out of 30 is not enough. I know Milton Eisenhower was one of the board members when I was on, and the President of Pennsylvania University was one of the members, and I was the third. But, it was a fascinating experience and... One of the interesting things about... It was really fascinating... We were asked to make a guess as to what the average number of shares would be for the following year. And I guessed 8 million shares, and I was the high man. They claimed they couldn't handle more than about 10 million shares a day on the Stock Exchange, and they were talking about building a new building, and leaving the present building they're in. Well, as you know, at the present time, they've handled up to 200 million shares, and... No, I'm not... Yes, I guess they have handled 200 million. Anyway, it's an enormous amount. Today, 70 million shares is a small day. Of course, the difference is computers. They didn't have computers when I was down there. They were just beginning to use computers, but they are still in the same building. They can handle the amounts perfectly well, and the tape... On the day that they had their biggest day, they handled it, and there was no more delay in the tape at that time than there was when they were handling 8 million shares. It's quite amazing.

Q: Yes, it is indeed.

A: The Public Development Corporation is an interesting thing which I helped to start I think. I'm still on the Board. The purpose of that was, again, to see if we couldn't try to develop properties in the City of New
York which would interest business to come into the City, and help us to employ more people. And it's been very active, and it still is very active...

Q: What year was it started. Do you remember?

A: Oh...Around '66 I think. So it's not too old. But it's very active today. More active than it's ever been. As a matter of fact, it's going to participate in the whole new 42nd Street development between Broadway...between 7th and 8th Avenues. And that is something that I think has made a great contribution to the City. As a matter of fact, they're handling most of the city properties. Now, in getting them either developed or sold, the city gets the funds out of it instead of carrying empty properties. Well, I see here Governor Rockefeller's Committee on Hospital costs. I was on that. The Governor asked me to go on it. I was I guess Chairman of the Executive Committee at that time, of Roosevelt Hospital, and subsequently became Chairman of the Board. But we wanted to make a study of hospital costs and I don't know how many people were on the committee. Not too many. There were probably about seven or eight of us. And we made a complete study. We had professionals helping us, and we made recommendations to the Governor after this report came out, which I think was helpful. I don't think that it created too much of a change but it was helpful in guiding the thought of where the tremendous costs really were in hospitals. That still is a problem in the City. Actually, the cost of hospitals, primarily, is in wages. And unfortunately you have the same costs, regardless of occupancy. Now, I'll tell you an amusing story about that. When I first became Chairman of the Executive Committee of Roosevelt, I started talking about this occupancy thing, and I said that the one problem in a hospital is occupancy. And empty bed is the most costly thing you can have, because you've got the same organization whether that bed is occupied or not. And the doctors complained about the fact that they didn't want to see the hospital run like a department store. So I asked to talk to the medical group, which I did. And I said to them, "Gentlemen, I'm a trained professional admini-
strator. And you're competent at taking care of your patients; I know a lot about running the hospital. So you stick to your knitting, and we'll stick to ours, and we'll run a good hospital." And we got along pretty well after that. But the hospital is an organization that has to be run like any other, and I think it's complicated. Because you do have the problem of meshing administration with medical care and, obviously, medical care has to be the most important part of it. In other words, you cannot reduce medical care in order to accomplish savings the way you might be able to in an organization like a department store.

Q: Are you still involved with them?
A: No. I'm an honorary trustee, and go to meetings occasionally when I'm here. But as you know, since then, Roosevelt and St. Luke's have merged, and it's a large operation. I think it's the biggest hospital...

It's the biggest hospital organization in the city now, bigger than Columbus Presbyterian I believe, and it's being very well run by Walter Rothschild, whose father, incidentally, was once head of Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn.

Now, let me see what else we've got here....

Q: You were also involved with the 1964 World's Fair weren't you?
A: Yes I was. And being on the Board of the 1964 World's Fair was like being in the subway. Everybody in New York practically was on that Board. But it was very interesting, because I knew Bob Moses pretty well, who was the head of it. And Bob Moses was a very, very able man, and probably will go down in history as one of the men who did the most for New York of any man who ever lived. But Bob was not exactly a man who knew too much about entertainment. And I remember one of the first meetings I went to, Bob said, "Now, we're not going to have any midways at the World's Fair. It's going to
be primarily education." And I was a little skeptical about this, because I knew that the midway at the last World's Fair before that...I forgot... I think Grover Whelan was the head of it; I don't exactly remember the year. But they had a big midway at that time. They had a lot of entertainment. My wife and I went out to California, and through Dick Powell, who was a good friend of mine, I got the opportunity to get a VIP tour through Disneyland in Anaheim. I was terribly impressed with that. I thought it was one of the finest things ever done. I mean, you could eat off the streets, it was so clean. And the entertainment was just terrific. So, I came back to New York and I went out to see Bob Moses, and I said, "Bob, you know, I'm very skeptical about your plans for the World's Fair. You don't know anything, really, about entertainment, and I don't either. Mr. Franklin Roosevelt's lawyer, whose name I don't remember, was in charge of entertainment. And I said, "He doesn't know much about it either. But you're talking about drawing 11 million people the first year, and 11 million people the second year, and I suggest to you that you spend $25,000 and invite Walt Disney to come into New York and show him your plans. And if he says that that will draw the number of people you think it will draw, I'll keep my mouth shut. "Well, he never would do it. Bob wouldn't do it. And as you know, the fair was a tremendous financial flop. I told him at the time—which was very amusing—the single most important or profitable item in the World's Fair of 1939 was not exactly what I would call educational. It was a girl who was lying on a cot, over a tank of water. And you'd buy three baseballs for 25¢ and if you hit the target under the cot, it would dump the girl into the tub of water. And I said, "That isn't exactly educational, but that was the biggest single attraction at the World's Fair." But, as I say he wouldn't listen. I don't don't think you can have a World's Fair without entertainment; I don't think
it can all be educational. And this was no exception.

Q: Will you tell us something about your activities in the world of education?

A: Well, I haven't had too many, but it's interesting...My father at one time said he would rather be an Overseer of Harvard than President of the United States. And he was an Overseer of Harvard at the time he became Ambassador of France and had to resign as a result of going abroad. I became an Overseer of Harvard in 1950. I was an Overseer for four years, which was one of the most fascinating experiences I've ever had. It's a great honor, I think, to anybody who graduated from Harvard to be an Overseer. And my class of 1921 had more Overseers than any class that ever graduated from the university.

Q: Do you have to be a graduate of Harvard to be an Overseer?

A: You have to be a graduate of Harvard, or one of the graduate schools. Or, actually, you can be a graduate of Radcliffe now, because Harvard and Radcliffe are together. But, in those days, it was all Harvard. But, as a result of being an Overseer, you go on several committees; you're made the head of several committees, depending on what your particular interests are and what your particular experiences is. I was on the...Well, of course, I was on the Harvard Business School Board for 26 years, and was on the Board at the time I became an Overseer. But I was put on two or three other committees. I don't remember...One was the administration committee, with which I worked with the administration of the university. That was something that, fortunately, I knew something about. And I was also on the Overseer committee...on the control of the university. I had some meetings with the people who were doing
the control work for the university. I was only on that for four years, but it was a fascinating experience. As I say, it's....The Overseers of Harvard is a strange organization. The university is really run by the corporation, and those members are elected for life. The Overseers can really create nothing, but they have a complete veto, so that any decisions made by the corporation have to go to the Overseers for their acceptance and....

Q: Are those decisions financial or....?

A: Everything. Everything that has to do with the university. Appointments. Any kind of changes in curriculum. Anything that has to do with the university goes to the Board of Overseers. And it's a very, very interesting experience, and the people on it are probably the most distinguished people.....Excepting me.....that you can have in any particular board. In addition to that, I have received from...honorary degrees...I've received a Doctor of Law from Adelphi on Long Island where I've lived for many, many years. And I received a doctorate in Commercial Science from New York University, which was particularly something that I was proud of at the time. Another thing that interested me particularly, having been so active in hospitals.....There is an organization that trains hospital administrators. It's called the College of Hospital Administrators, and they gave me an honorary degree, which pleased me because I was really terribly interested in the hospital work. Administration of hospitals. Let me see what else there is here...

Q: You apparently were involved with the Police Athletic League for a number of years. Do you want to talk about some of the things that they
did, and about which you had some...in which you had some interest.

A: Well, the Police Athletic League...I was asked to go on that board many years ago by the Police Commissioner, and I agreed to it, and I was Vice President of it for many years. They wanted me to be President of it and I didn't want to, because it would have taken too much time. As a matter of fact, at the present time, Bob Morgenthau is President of it (he is our District Attorney here). Federal District Attorney. I think he's done a wonderful job. I think he's been President of it now for many, many years. I was Vice President under him. They do a terrific job in the City. It's completely organized to take care of...help young boys...young boys and girls, actually. Particularly during the summer months, when they're out of school, to keep them active. They run play streets in the City. They run camps. They have all kinds of activities in which they have bands. For example, we had their band in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade from time to time. They have dancing classes. They have all kinds of athletics. And the purpose, as I say, is to keep kids that normally don't have enough to do in the summertime active. And I think it's made a tremendous contribution to the city in keeping kids out of trouble.

Q: I know that you've also, of course, been in a number of Boards of Directors of business companies. But...And that's in addition to all these other activities which you've described. Could we take just a couple of minutes and have you tell us about the decorations you've received, and what the background is on some of these awards?

A: Well...The first one I received was this order of Leopold II from Belgium. And the reason that that was given to me was that....
Q: That was in 1951...
A: Yeah. '51. After the war, Mr. Bernheim, who was the head of one of the large department stores in Brussels, and whom I knew quite well, wrote me a letter and asked me if I could do anything to help them get warm underwear for the children in Belgium. And he said it was impossible to get it in Europe. And they couldn't get it out of the United States. So I organized a small company and we bought about $5 million worth of underwear for kids of all different sizes, and we got them shipped to Brussels. And the result of that was that some years later they gave me this decoration. As far as the Italian decoration was concerned....

Q: What decoration was that?
A: Well, there were two of them. One was called the Star of Equality, and the other one was the Order of Merit. I believed, after the war, that wars could possibly be avoided, if that were possible at all, through international trade. Italy had been so badly hurt during the war that we organized a fair for the Italian goods, and we got manufacturers in Italy to send over samples and people to demonstrate their wares, and we set up about 50-60,000 sq. ft. in Macy's and had this fair. And we gave out catalogues to anybody who came in so that they would know where to buy these various things in Italy.

Q: One moment....This is not just a retail fair?
A: It was really wholesale...It was retail merchandise, but we wanted to name the wholesalers where they could buy it. So we did that, and the following year the government told me they increased their sales in the United States on this merchandise by about 50%, and they gave me the decoration
as a result of that. As far as France was concerned, we, among other retailers, did a great deal to help France recuperate after the war. We bought the line for line copies. We bought originals over there, and brought them over here and copied them. And a result of that, I think there were several retailers at that time who were decorated, because we were all helping France get back on its feet after the war. And those are the four decorations that I have. Now what else?

Q: You've been very active in civic activities which are not specifically related to the betterment of the Macy image, but that appear to be reflections of your own inner thinking. Could you talk a little bit about your philosophy concerning such activities?

A: Well, I believe that, obviously, a man who heads a large business in the City, or in any city, is recognized, to a certain extent, as being a leader in that community. I believe that being in that position a person should contribute to the good of the city. You get many opportunities. You get opportunities to do things civically. Business boards are a little more remunerative because they pay you a fee, but others do not. But to me they were more remunerative in the opportunity to do...to make a contribuiton to the city in which you live. I always felt that I had a responsibility to make some kind of contribution to the city, and I've done various things that I thought were important to the city. Maybe other people didn't think they were as important as I did. But it....You have opportunities as the head of a business, the head of a big business, that you don't get if you were not in that position. And my opinion is that when you have that opportunity you ought to use it. Use it effectively, and make whatever contribution you can. Obviously, since I'm out of the business, I'm practically on none of them now.
I'm still a member of the Public Development Corporation. But again, being out of the City so much now, I've offered my resignation. They've asked me to stay on. I go to meetings when I'm here. And I think I'm making a very important contribution to the City, which is something I'm very proud of because I'm one of the people that started it. And today, as I said before in our interview, they're really handling most of the real estate for the City, which is important.

Q: Jack, could we just summarize a little bit about your own personal life. That is, could you repeat for us, or tell us about your antecedents, and about your family today?

A: Well, my great-grandfather emigrated from Germany.

Q: His name was Lazarus.

A: His name was Lazarus. Exactly. And he settled in a little town in Georgia called Talbotten, Georgia. And I've been down there many times...

Q: Would you spell "Talbotten".

A: T-a-l-b-o-t-t-e-n, I think it is. It's a little town between Columbus and...I'll think of the other name. Anyway, it's not too far from Columbus. He was an itinerant salesman. He went into the business of having a horse and buggy and he traveled around Georgia selling his wares. In those days, evidently, an itinerant salesman was welcomed by people and spent the night at their homes and went on his way the next day, and ate with the family, and so forth. And he left Talbotten, Georgia, because of anti-semitism, and moved to Columbus, Georgia. Talbotten is a very small town, in which the main building is called Straus-Laverte Hall. Some years ago, it must be 20 years ago, the Georgia Historical Society wrote me a letter asking if I would come
down to Talbotten for the dedication of a plaque that was to be put on the property that my great-grandfather lived on. That amused me a bit, because he left there on account of anti-semitism. But I did. I went down and was there for the ceremony. It was a very lovely ceremony at which the Governor and I made speeches. And we had a luncheon at which the mayor of the town—the town being about 500 people—gave a speech and I gave a speech, and it was... They had a school band out. It was a holiday in the town, that day. So, it was really quite a ceremony. I was very much impressed with it. But that was one of the reasons, I think, that my family originally wanted to go back to Georgia, and bought Davison Paxon where we've got quite a large operation now, all through the state. We have stores in Augusta and Macon, incidentally, that's the town Talbotten is between...Macon and Columbus. But we have quite a large operation down there. Very successful.

Q: Lazarus had children...

A: He had three sons. Isidor... He had three sons and three daughters. He had... My father was the oldest. I'm sorry... Lazarus had three sons. I don't know how many daughters he had. I think he only had one daughter. I was thinking of my grandfather. Oscar was the youngest, Nathan was the middle, and Isidor, my grandfather, was the oldest. They were down there, in Talbotten or in Georgia, during the Civil War. I know that my grandfather was sent abroad to England to trade cotton for guns for the Confederacy. And I think Nathan Straus was in the Confederate Army. After the war, they moved to Philadelphia and subsequently got into the importing business of china and glassware from Germany, where they'd come from, and that's the way they got into Macy's. Mr. Macy invited them to come in and open a china and glassware
department in the department store on 14th Street and 6th Avenue. And they did, Mr. Macy had several partners, and ultimately, as the partners died or retired, he offered their shares to my grandfather and his brother, Nathan Straus. And they bought them. And eventually, when Mr. Macy died, they took over the store and moved up to 34th Street. Oscar Straus never was in the business. He was Secretary of Commerce and Labor, I think. At that there were two different departments that are now separated. But I know he was Ambassador...or Secretary of Commerce. My grandfather, Isador Straus, went down on the Titanic. He and my grandmother both were lost on the Titanic. And it's an interesting story...My father and mother were on their way across the ocean, going the other direction, to Europe, and my father was awakened one morning by the Captain of the America, which is the ship they were on. The Hamburg-American line...And asked to come up to the bridge to show him an iceberg. And he said to the Captain, "Have you wirelessed the Titanic?" And the Captain said he had. So my father sent another wire to his father who was on the Titanic, saying that they had sighted this iceberg. And that was the iceberg that the Titanic hit that night. They paid no attention to it at all. To the wireless. They were trying to make a record. Subsequently, my father and two brothers....

Q: Your father was...?

A: Jesse Straus, who became Ambassador to France. They took over Macy's, and were responsible for building it. I went into Macy's in 1921, after I graduated from college. At that time we just had the 34th Street store, which was what we called the "east building", which is only about half of Macy's now. But it's interesting that the loft building was built behind the 34th Street store, in 1925 or '26 I think. By the time we hit 1930, we needed
that building, so they knocked down the loft building and rebuilt it to correspond to the floor heights that we had in Macy's in the Herald Square building, so that we had a complete store. The building was only up for about five years before they knocked it down. And, of course, today it's the largest department store, I think, in the world. I don't know about Gumm in Russia, because I've never seen it, and I don't know how big they are. But we're the largest, certainly, in the world, other than possibly Gumm. We have 2,100,000 sq. ft. in Macy's Herald Square. What else...

Q: Now what about your own family...

A: Oh. My own family. My father was head of Macy's with his two brothers for many years, when the Titanic went down. Mr. Herbert Straus died of a heart attack in 1933, and my father left Macy's in 1933 to become head of the TERA, which was the Temporary Emergency Relief that Mr. Roosevelt set up. And then he became Ambassador...Father left in 1932, and became Ambassador in 1933. That left Mr. Percy Straus, the only remaining brother, in the business, about 12 years; and I became or I was one of the three senior merchandise managers, which I think I mentioned before. And Mr. Percy Straus was the head of the business until 1939, and he had a very bad stroke out in Arizona and was unconscious for six months. I think I may have told you this before.

Q: I think you did.

A: I became acting head of the business. He came back for five years but I became President of the business, and he didn't want to...He really wasn't capable of running it at that time, and I was head of it ever since...up until the time I retired in 1968.
As far as my family's concerned, I've got a wonderful family. I had a...I was married to Margaret Hollister in 1924, and was married to her for just about 50 years. She died very suddenly, three weeks before our 50th Wedding Anniversary, for which I'd made arrangements...My children and my grandchildren were all coming in for the gala event. And I'd seen my wife in the morning and asked her what she was going to do and she told me. Among other things, she was going to go into a shoe store to buy a pair of shoes to go with a suit she'd bought for the spring. She had a little card in her pocket, which I carry, saying, "If anything happens to me, please take me to Roosevelt Hospital". I was sitting in my office in Macy's, when a policeman called me on the phone, he said, "Mr. Straus, I've just taken your wife, unconscious, over to Roosevelt Hospital." So I immediately went up to Roosevelt Hospital. I was met at the Emergency Room by my doctor, and he told me that she was dead. I suppose for anybody it's a wonderful way to go, but obviously it was a terrible shock to the family....

Q: How many children did you have?

A: I have three. I have a son and two daughters. My son is in the business. Has been for 35 years. He's the head of our...What we call our corporate buying office and foreign operations office. He has been doing that for many years.

Q: And you do have grandchildren, of course.

A: I've got nine grandchildren. My son has two, and one of my daughters has three, and the other daughter has four. So...One daughter lives up in Connecticut, and the other one lives out in San Francisco. And my daughter in San Francisco is remarried. She lost her husband very suddenly.

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He was out jogging one day—he was a doctor, incidentally, and should have
known better. He was out jogging on the beach, and came into the house and
dropped dead. Wonderful man, I've had wonderful children and wonderful
grandchildren. I've been a very lucky man.

Q: I think that's just great.

A: My children are all devoted to me, I think. Incidentally, I
remarried, to a lady I've known for 40 odd years, who lost her husband about
four years before I lost my wife.

Q: And her name is?

A: Her name? Was McGeer...Virginia McGeer. And she was married
to a man...Mr. Fowler...Mr. Thomas P. Fowler. I've known her for years. And
after considerable amount of urging, I got her to marry me.

Q: Wonderful. That's just great.

A: And we've been married about eight years. We'll be married eight
years next month. And it's been a wonderful experience for me.

Q: That sounds terrific. And you had a wonderful Macy's Thanksgiving
Day Parade, and Thanksgiving Day with your grandchildren...

A: Well, I had only one grandchild here. Mine are pretty well
separated. Four of them are out in California, and one that came and had
lunch with us yesterday lives in Connecticut, and teaches. He's about 31 years
old...One of my grandchildren lives in Atlanta, one of them lives in Florida,
and they're both married. They're my son Kenneth's children. And they're a
great crew. I am very lucky. I've got a great bunch of kids.

Q: Well, I congratulate you on all of that, and I thank you very much.
A: You're very welcome.