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Straus is the German word for ostrich

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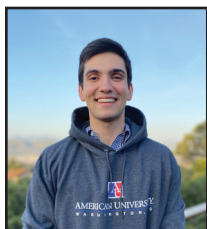
Straus Historical Society 2021 Scholarship Program

Introducing SHS Scholarship Winners:

**Danielle Marie Bertaux, Dillon Kabir Cooke,
Iris Hinh and Miriam S. Israel**

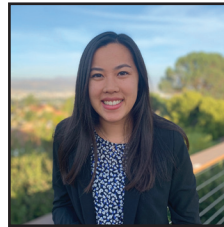
The Straus Historical Society Scholarship Program was created with the goal of supporting the continuing education of a graduate student whose professional goal is in the field of public service. Thanks to your generous contributions, the Straus Historical Society has awarded ten scholarships to date. We are pleased to announce that, in 2021, Danielle Marie Bertaux, Dillon Kabir Cooke, Iris Hinh and Miriam S. Israel have been selected to each receive a \$5,000 Straus Scholarship.

Danielle Bertaux is a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University where she is pursuing a Masters of Arts with a concentration in Public International Law and Human Security focused on Latin America and she is specializing her studies on human rights. Danielle is particularly interested in learning about gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict and humanitarian crises. She aspires to join the U. S. Department of State as a political officer in a specialized track as a human rights officer. She hopes to focus on gender-based issues and problems of sexual violence including sex trafficking and femicide.



Dillon Cooke is a graduate student at American University where he is seeking a Masters in Public Administration with a concentration in Public Policy and focusing on healthcare policy, international management, and regulatory administration. He hopes that his work will affect the reorientation

and prioritization of foreign aid funding in a manner that proactively targets the causes of emerging issues, including climate change, immigration, and international security, with public investments rather than responding to the symptoms of these issues. After completing his degree, Dillon hopes to secure a full time position with the House Committee on Foreign Affairs where he can most effectively apply his analytical skills and research background to implement policy change on a systemic scale.



Iris Hinh is a graduate student at Teachers College of Columbia University where she is seeking a Masters Degree in Politics and Education. She is developing her academic foundation in preparation for policy leadership roles within government agencies, foundations and research. Iris hopes to work in Washington, D.C. to integrate original research with advocacy to both policymakers and individuals for broader impact on the education system. She also plans to obtain her teaching credentials for middle or high school history and government, since she believes that educators often are the most influential actors impacting students' academic achievement and well-being.

Miriam S. Israel is a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University where she is pursuing a Masters Degree with a concentration in International Development and Environmental Policy and Gender and Intersectional Analysis. Miriam believes that the biggest problem facing society is climate change, and specifically, the way that a changing climate will disproportionately impact women, young people, ethnic, religious, and indigenous minorities and other marginalized communities. She hopes to work with communities around the world to address climate change, helping prepare faith communities to be leaders on issues like conservation and sustainability, and giving local leaders tools to address climate change.



We hope you are as impressed with the accomplishments of these four young people as we are. Their essays, (part of their application) may be found on pages four through seven.



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The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Lazarus Straus family and the historical context in which they lived through research and education. You are invited to submit articles or ideas for articles, calendar events, and material relating to the Straus family and to their history.

The Straus Historical Society, Inc. is a tax exempt organization as described under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Contributions to the Society are deductible to the extent provided by law. A copy of the annual report of the Straus Historical Society, Inc. may be obtained from the Society or from the New York State Attorney General, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271

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**A Message from
SHS Board Chair
David H. Kurzman**



As we begin to emerge from quarantine, we are grateful that science has given us a path that allows us to slowly resume a more normal life. We, at SHS, want to thank you for continuing to support us during these difficult days, and for showing us that our work has value to you.

SHS continued to work on our important projects during this time of isolation. We were pleased to award scholarships in 2021 to four deserving graduate students who are planning for a career in public service. Your generous support of this initiative is very much appreciated.

Our office has reopened and we have already hosted two researchers, both of whom are writing about Nathan Straus.

Zoom meetings and presentations have become a common mode of communicating. Joan gave presentations to: the Middletown (NJ) Historical Society, Young Israel of Northern Netanya and to the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Society's members. We find it a great way to reach a larger audience and we plan to continue our presentation schedule via Zoom.

Now that the world is opening up, we have begun making site visits again. Catherine and Joan are planning a day trip to Middletown, NJ to visit the former Herbert and the Percy Straus home sites. They spent a day in New York City where they saw a very exciting Leeser's Tanakh, which was once owned by Hermine Straus Kohns and family. This bible, now purchased through the generosity of family members, was the first Hebrew bible in the US that was translated into English. It was likely given to Hermine upon her marriage to Lazarus Kohns in Columbus, GA in November 1863. The book contains several pages with handwritten notations of various births, marriages and deaths within the Straus Kohns family. We are thrilled to be able to add this book to our archival collection.

Social media has become even more important during the pandemic. SHS hosts a Facebook page that regularly posts interesting articles and photographs as well as announcing upcoming events. SHS recently created Instagram and Twitter accounts where companion posts keep even more people informed of Straus history as well as upcoming events. Visit us frequently - and like us.

Facebook: @straushistoricalsociety
Twitter: @straushistory

Instagram: @straushistoricalsociety
YouTube: Straus Historical Society

You can find the links to all our platforms at straushistoricalsociety.com

SHS is pleased to announce that we have partnered with Donate for Charity, an organization that accepts vehicle donations and distributes funds from the sale to the nonprofit of your choice. This is a new way for you to donate to SHS.

And so, while it seemed as though the world stopped for a while, we have been busy. The work of SHS, and its programs, can only continue with your support. Please consider making a contribution of any amount in support of our projects.

Liberty Ship *SS Ida Straus*

Previous issues of the SHS newsletter contained information about the Liberty Ship *SS Oscar S. Straus*. I knew little about another Liberty Ship, the *SS Ida Straus* until I received an email from Brian Hill, a retired ice technologist, who was researching the history of the *SS Ida Straus* in preparation for an article he and co-author Alan Ruffman were writing for the Spring 2021 issue of *Voyage: The Official Journal of the Titanic International Society*. Brian and Alan have generously granted me permission to present the information from their article.

World War II caused a dramatic increase in the demand for cargo ships. Military facilities were overburdened and could take on no more shipbuilding orders. The Liberty Ship was designed for emergency construction by the U.S. Maritime Commission. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt nicknamed them "ugly ducklings." There were 2,711 built at a cost of approximately \$2,000,000 each. A ship could be built from 250,000 parts in 70 days or less. A Liberty Ship could carry more than 9,000 tons of cargo plus airplanes, tanks and locomotives; 2,840 jeeps, 440 tanks or 230 million rounds of ammunition. President Roosevelt said, "They delivered two thirds of the military cargo and turned the tide against Hitler." The first was launched in September 1941.

Liberty Ships were named for deceased Americans. But it was quite unusual to name two ships after people from the same family. The *SS Oscar S. Straus* was launched November 22, 1943. She was an ET 1-S-C3 type Liberty Ship, the 79th built by the Delta Shipbuilding Company of New Orleans, LA. Construction of the *SS Ida Straus* began July 1, 1944. She was launched in Texas on August 10, 1944 and was ready for service on August 22nd. She was built by the Todd-Houston Shipbuilding Corporation with war bonds raised by the the Straus family.

In September, 1944, the *SS Ida Straus'* maiden voyage was an unescorted trip from New Orleans to Trinidad. For the remainder of the war, she joined various convoys traveling to South America, across the Atlantic to Africa, Europe and back to the United States and the Caribbean Islands. After the war with Europe was over, she was ordered to join Convoy ON 303 departing Liverpool for New York on May 17, 1945. The convoy carried 4,000 homeward bound troops. There was still the danger of rogue U-boats on patrol in the ocean and so Coastal Command aircraft patrolled the waters. The convoy consisted of 83 merchant ships under the protection of the Mid-Ocean Escort Group B.1. As one might imagine, this many ships covered a huge area. They traveled in a box formation of 14 columns, each separated by 1,000 yards, with up to eight ships in each column. The *SS Ida Straus* was

assigned to the eleventh column from the left and seventh ship in the line. She carried pennant number 117.

Brian wrote that the "ship named after *Titanic* heroine had its own brush with icebergs." The path of Convoy ON 303 was The Great Circle Route, from offshore southern Ireland to "The Banks" of offshore southern Newfoundland. It was late enough in the year that initially there wasn't too much concern about the iceberg fields in the Atlantic. However, icebergs

were reported further south than expected and the convoy made several evasive maneuvers to avoid them. There was heavy fog and rain in the area at the time. Brian Hill conjectured that, because the war was over, the crews were not as alert as they should have been. In the adverse conditions, the convoy suddenly came upon icebergs. The Convoy Commodore ordered emergency turns but, in the restricted visibility and confusion, four ships collided with the icebergs. In the chaos of the whole convoy attempting to undergo a 90 degree course change, another 21 collided with each other, sometimes more than once. None sank and the *SS Ida Straus* was undamaged. Eventually,

the convoy regrouped and slowly turned southward in search of better weather. Brian wrote, "In its sojourn south, some 90 nautical miles from the icebergs and all the collisions, the convoy – and with it the *SS Ida Straus* – ... came closer to her namesake than one ever would have imagined. At that point, a mere 37 nautical miles to the west lay the wreck of the *Titanic* and the last resting place of Mrs. Ida Straus."

North Atlantic convoys were phased out by the end of 1945 and Convoy ON 303 was the *SS Ida Straus'* last

convoy. She continued to sail independently until April 1946, when she went aground in Bermuda, with 8,000 tons of coal aboard, while on a trip from Charleston, SC to Le Havre. An eleven foot crack had been torn in her plates. Although the crack was repaired, the *SS Ida Straus'* end-of-voyage logbook was filed in Norfolk, VA at the end of May. She was eventually scrapped in Baltimore, MD in 1960.

The article written by Brian Hill and Alan Ruffman for *Voyage* is far more complete. Space considerations prevent me from writing more.

Thank you to Brian and Alan for granting permission to use the information from their article and to Charlie Haas, editor of the journal, for his kind words, assistance and also for the granting of his permission to write this article based on the information in article published in the *Titanic Society's* journal.



Ida Straus
About 1910



The only known photograph of the *SS Ida Straus*
1946 when she went aground off the coast of Bermuda
Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

Danielle Marie Bertaux

Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

Despite the great global challenges facing my generation, I view the power of diplomacy as an indispensable solution to building peaceful relations, easing conflict, and securing better livelihoods for all. My commitment to public service and the betterment of human lives fuels my motivation to work on complex human rights issues in pursuit of influencing a more just and humane world. Currently at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, I am studying Human Security and Public International Law with a regional focus on Latin America. My ultimate goal is to work as a political officer in the U.S. Foreign Service focused on human rights diplomacy and policy abroad.

Working directly with asylum seekers, I have seen the ways in which global issues of gender-based violence translate into personal lived traumas and narratives of resilience. As a paralegal at The Right to Immigration Institute, I worked predominantly with women hailing from Central America, many of whom were fleeing gang-based violence. In my interactions with these women asylees, I navigated the emotional complexities of individuals who had endured significant trauma utilizing my Spanish fluency and knowledge of the region to facilitate communication and connection across cultural boundaries. My experiences with asylees has cultivated a deep sensitivity for others and a curiosity to expand my knowledge on gender and human rights issues across the globe. I possess the emotional capacity and sensitivity to work across cultural boundaries and build relationships in sensitive situations.



My four years at Brandeis were defined by my commitment to service and dedication to community development. At graduation, I was awarded a silver medal by the Brandeis University Department of Community Service for my contributions, amounting to a total of more than 700 hours of service to the Waltham and Greater Boston community. Wanting to learn more about human rights topics, I participated in the School for International Training's Social Movements and Human Rights program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In this program, I studied human rights intensely, with an ethnographic and community-based approach. I have completed courses detailing the social intricacies and theories associated with immigration across the globe, and alternative courses focused on direct service to diverse immigrant communities in the city of Waltham. The experience I gained working in tandem with diverse communities has encouraged my interest in working in public service within multicultural contexts.

As long as I can recall, I have always gravitated towards public service. I am pulled into issues which affect the livelihoods of all people and view human rights diplomacy as the most effective tool to resolve conflict, further democratic values, and safeguard the rights of all persons across the world. I

wish to dedicate the skills and experiences I am enriching during mytime at The Fletcher School to make my lasting contribution as an FSO furthering human rights for all.

We asked Danielle how receiving the SHS Scholarship has made a difference to her. She responded: I am so grateful for the support I have received by the Straus Historical Society. As I previously shared, I study public international law and human security with a specific focus on gender-based violence in areas affected by conflict. I feel extremely fortunate to share with SHS that I have been interning with Free to Run a nonprofit which uses adventure sports as a gateway for leadership development, empowerment, and advocacy for gender equity for young women in conflict areas. They have programs based in Afghanistan and Iraq. I have been on-site in Erbil, Iraq since the start of July. We work with young women (ages 13-25) in the Harsham and Baharka Camps for internally displaced persons. Many of these resilient young women's families were displaced in 2014 following ISIS's occupation of Mosul and nearby areas.

I am working on direct programming for participants. I am taking lead on the implementation and execution of a marathon training program for their marathon race on 10/26 and their 5k race on 7/26. Additionally, I have been leading a project on researching monitoring and evaluation standards for gender-based violence prevention training. I am compiling desk research as well as interviews with community stakeholders (camp directorates, EMMA organization, UNFPA among others) to direct my development of a new gender-based violence prevention curriculum for participants.

I would love to share this with Straus, and think it is important for donors to see their support is making opportunities such as this one possible for myself and others. With the support I have received from SHS, I am able to complete this unpaid internship with this wonderful non-profit over the summer. The work we are doing is really making a difference for these young women, and I feel so grateful I am able to contribute thanks to SHS's support. I'm happy to share upcoming photos from our 5k race and team hikes in the coming weeks. Please let me know if there is any additional information I could provide. Thank you so much!

Support the SHS Scholarship Program

The Straus Historical Society has awarded scholarships to deserving graduate students who are pursuing a career in public service or philanthropy.

We would like to continue, and even expand, this very worthwhile program. When thinking of making a donation to a non-profit, please consider supporting SHS with a targeted gift earmarked for the scholarship program.

Dillon Kabir Cooke

American University

Over the past four years, the US Department of State has experienced an unprecedented brain drain as both career civil servants and political appointees have exited the diplomatic corps at alarming rates. These trends were also exacerbated by the State Department's hiring freeze from 2017-2018. While one of my long-term goals is to attain a leadership position for a congressional committee dealing with foreign affairs, I also hope to use my understanding of public administration and international relations to help recruit and rebuild the diplomatic capacity of the US. The problems of the 21st century—like climate change, democratic backslides, and global health challenges—are more complex and globalized than ever before. Reversing these trends and mitigating the threats they present will require the US to engage with multilateral institutions and global partners. In turn, this will require a robust, diverse, and competent diplomatic corps capable of conducting outreach to other nations.

The federal government has taken steps in the right direction, with respect to developing the federal diplomatic workforce. This development has come mainly in the form of an executive order reinstating a mandate for diversity training which will be administered to federal employees. The emphasis on cultivating diversity in the public workplace and strengthening cultural literacy amongst federal employees is especially important for those who will be engaging with the other nations on behalf of the US. While the recently-signed executive order is a commendable first step in the professional development progression for the State Department's employees, more leadership, better training, and higher-quality management will ultimately prove necessary. I hope to use my understanding of public administration and management to enact policies designed to develop the State Department's workforce. Improvement is not only necessary for rank and file diplomats at stations across the globe, it must also be implemented for the benefit of the policy and planning staff who require a large-scale reorientation toward proactive diplomacy. The Department's rigid hierarchy prevents flexible management approaches that are better suited to geopolitics in the 21st century. For example, State Department officers in the field must have more access to their peers at different diplomatic missions. By flattening the State Department's organizational chart, diplomats in the field can be empowered to engage more directly and cohesively with foreign governments and organizations. I hope to bring my knowledge and my practical experience to bear in implementing policies to address the Department's personnel management practices.

Ultimately, the health of the State Department's diplomatic corps begins with the pool of individuals who are recruited and employed and culminates with those who transition out of public service entirely or into other public sector roles. Deemphasizing recruitment from Ivy League and large-

name universities is critical to improving the diversity and representativeness of voices that participate in foreign policymaking. A federal effort to implement these kinds of recruiting policies would not neglect or ignore the nation's premier institutions, it would simply offer the same level of attention to smaller universities and schools with niche focuses that complement emerging and existing global challenges. For example, the State Department might direct its foreign service recruiting practices more toward universities on the west coast in response to the emerging importance of the Asia-Pacific region in international politics. Similarly, many of the leading universities studying climate change are also clustered on the west coast and a greater emphasis on recruitment from those institutions would attract and develop a broader scope of talent in the public sector, especially with regard to utilizing foreign policy as a means of combatting global challenges. Another barrier to the diversification of the US diplomatic corps is the foreign service exam. While there is no doubt that an exam of this sort is critical to ensuring that US diplomats are responsible, intelligent, driven, and



prepared enough to represent the United States on the international stage, programs to assist nontraditional applicants must be scaled up significantly. One approach to overcome this barrier and cultivate a more diverse workforce at the Department of State is expanding existing fellowship programs to ensure that individuals from all walks of life are able to join communities of young professionals in public service for support in overcoming practical and academic challenges on their way to joining the foreign service. While expanded fellowships for those seeking to join the Department of State would be largely benefit the agency's workforce, those who do not ultimately fulfill their commitment to joining the foreign service would still receive high-quality preparation for other careers in public service.

Throughout the rest of my career, I hope to center my professional efforts around better diversifying, training, and managing the US diplomatic corps. In order to effectively respond to the geopolitical, financial, public health, and climate crises that are converging in the 21st century, the United States Department of State must stand ready to engage with the growing coalition of European, African, and Asian superpowers on the rise in international politics. This will require institutional leadership that can leverage a firm understanding of public administration ethics and management approaches in order to recruit and strengthen a more inclusive, engaging, and prepared diplomatic infrastructure.

Note from Joan: Dillon has accepted a full-time job with a Member of Congress and is working full-time as a Legislative Correspondent on Capitol Hill while simultaneously attending graduate school at American University where he is pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Administration

Iris Hinh

Teacher's College, Columbia University

As a first-generation college student, I recognize that postsecondary education has offered the opportunity to better understand inequity issues while exacerbating the knowledge gaps between my family and myself. Knowledge is a powerful tool for enacting changes for the broader benefit of communities and society. Unfortunately, there are great disparities in quality and accessibility of education in the U.S. and around the world. The depth of education shapes opportunities for civic participation, appreciation for history and the arts, the pursuit of scientific innovations—among other aspects of community and individual empowerment. I hope to increase the accessibility of evidence-based knowledge and accountability in education institutions and policies in the field of public service. Families, students, and community stakeholders should also be entitled to research that conveys the essential practices and policy recommendations that decision-makers are privy to. The rich knowledge expands the scope for self and community advocacy on salient concerns but also facilitates greater individuals' voices in shaping education policy making.

Broadly speaking, "equity" can encompass a wide range of policies and proposed solutions. I hope to center research in arguing for increased public investments in birth-to-five education and childcare. In order to achieve effective and meaningful changes in educational opportunity, research can blend the efforts of both individuals and policymakers. My personal and professional experiences have guided my interest in this dual approach to public knowledge, and overall commitment to preK-12 education. I often find that the work of research and policy recommendations are omitting the individuals who have greater autonomy to hold decision-makers accountable and adapt new practices. Systemic change in education requires expanding conversations beyond academic and political circles and empowering advocacy in communities, driven by evidence-based, accessible information.

While most think tanks and policies target K-12 and higher education, early education and care are fundamental to laying the groundwork for social-emotional development, linguistic expressions, problem-solving, and other vital functions for later academic achievement. The very disparities in student learning occur in the earliest years of their lives. However, most families and communities are unaware of the long-term ramifications from simple everyday interactions with children during birth-to-five. For example, my mother tried her best to read some books in English to my sister and me when we were younger but eventually, the level of syntax and verbiage was beyond her scope of knowledge. As a single mother of a low-income, Cantonese-speaking family, her education stopped at Vietnam's equivalency of high school before she immigrated to the U.S. My mother read to us when she had some spare



time between work shifts but was not consciously diversifying the vocabulary, outlining examples of emotional language, or exposing us to cultural norms and language beyond our family. I struggled with English language arts throughout most of my preK-12 education and often found myself spending extra time to learn vocabulary words that my peers already knew and double-checking my work for grammatical errors. My own encounters with the limitations of scaffolding learning at home and access to resources provides a different perspective on what policies and resources are necessary to better support young learners. I acknowledge my mother's efforts in emphasizing the value of public education and recognize the difficulty in establishing learning foundations in infant years is a consistent challenge for many families.

Research has proven that birth-to-kindergarten learning foundations are instrumental to preparing young learners for later academic and life success. Translating that research to family child care providers, Head Starts, state preschools, and families are fundamental to bridging the gaps for educational opportunities. By developing more localized public forums and producing research that caters to different community needs, families and students can better access this knowledge that informs policymaking. Their own practices at home can drastically shift to become intentional in implementing quality educational building blocks. With mixed delivery systems for child care, education and some states having universal preschool, there are greater challenges to disseminating research-based practices. My current Policy

and Research Intern role with the Learning Policy Institute has allowed me to explore the unique challenges related to funding and the disparate levels of quality early education. In-service professional development for various providers and educators in California, Alabama, and Washington have been successful in advancing early education needs based on individuals' different levels of experience. Family child care providers often lack the formal educational and professional expertise necessary to conduct research-based activities and pedagogies. The ability for knowledge to permeate through these various institutions shifts the paradigm for child care to also encompass an educational component.

Research for policymaking at local, state, or federal levels generally circulates among those who wield the decision-making power. As a whole, I believe families and communities have the capacity to also leverage evidence to advance the overarching objective of improving quality, equitable education. Equipping these individuals with knowledge and expanding the policy conversations will enable greater accountability for education institutions and decision-makers to adhere to the needs of society.

continued on page twelve

Miriam S. Israel

Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

Before starting college, I received a year-long State Department scholarship to study Arabic in Oman. It was the longest I had been away from home, and my first time without a tight-knit Jewish community like the one where I grew up. I was lucky to be placed with an amazing host family, but I struggled to navigate cultural differences and overcome the language barrier. I expected to bond quickly with my new family and my inability to connect felt like a personal failure. This was particularly true with my host mother. She was the most devout member of the family, which I perceived as an additional hurdle. My host family was Muslim and knew I was Jewish, but I was unsure how to properly express my religious identity, thinking it might only distance us further.

That changed when I found my host brother absorbed in a children's book about the biblical story of Jonah and the whale. Excitedly, I tried to explain to my host mother that I also knew the story, hoping it might help us relate. To my surprise, she disappeared into her room and returned holding a stack of books, each with a different prophet on the cover. We sat on the floor, growing increasingly animated as we discovered that we shared not only Jonah, but Jacob, Noah and Moses. Suddenly these stories weren't just part of an identity that I kept to myself, but an unexpected opportunity for connection. The books were in simple enough Arabic for me to understand, and for hours we sat together as she helped me with pronunciation and I told her the prophets' Hebrew names.

I'd assumed that religion had no place in our relationship but, although the names of our prophets were different, their stories were the same, and our shared faith gave us a way to communicate. From then on, religion was our common denominator. We celebrated Hanukkah, complete with my embarrassing attempt at latkes, and she taught me how to put on a hijab. We continued to marvel at each new similarity, from eating restrictions to prayer, and as my language skills improved we were able to move more into the abstract, discussing God and life and death.

This experience exemplifies why I am so passionate about interfaith engagement and international relationship building. Finding creative ways to connect with my host family helped me find new meaning in my Jewish identity and prepared me to approach international work with humility and creativity. I learned how to move beyond my comfort zone and embrace the cultural and religious diversity of the world. These lessons motivate me to pursue an academic and professional path that serves communities on a global scale, while valuing individual backgrounds and perspectives.

These types of relationships, that are created despite differences in background, religion, nationality or other

factors, can be incredibly powerful because they teach us to see the world in new ways, and can enable us to find new solutions to any problem. As I begin my professional career, I continue to be motivated by the possibility for change and understanding that exists in new relationships. Without these human connections, any public service work is bound to be incomplete, or at minimum, less impactful than it could be.

When faced with massive social challenges like climate change, it is critical to remember the people and communities that are impacted on a micro level, and the social patterns and identities that can perpetuate these problems on a macro level. I hope to use my understanding of these intersections to create global solutions that are durable and grounded in the context of local communities. Specifically, I hope to leverage the influence of faith communities to motivate large-scale behavioral and social change that will promote environmental sustainability and conservation and mitigate the effects of climate change.



Nearly every religious and belief tradition has teachings about the importance of environmental stewardship and the sacredness of the natural world. Many indigenous communities have centuries-old conservation practices and a deep understanding of how people can better live alongside nature. However, most climate policy does not include these perspectives and does not adequately consider the value of religious traditions in combatting climate change. This is a critical gap in understanding and I hope to use my graduate studies to learn as much as possible in both fields in order to be an ambassador for each and help facilitate long-term climate solutions that will protect the most vulnerable members of society and ensure a healthy, vibrant planet for generations to come.

Honorary Straus Scholars

The Award Committee was very impressed with the high quality of the scholarship applications. Out of a pool of 71, the Committee recommended that five applicants be designated Honorary Straus Scholars. They are: Kelly O'Steen Boehms, Alexis Koumjian Cheney, Liana Rose Kabins, Sara Anne Lodgen and Christopher Crane Tingley.

Each Honorary Straus Scholar received a letter of acknowledgment for their outstanding accomplishments and a copy of Oscar S. Straus' autobiography, *Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft*. Oscar Straus' legacy of public service is a guidepost which we are honored to follow. Congratulations to our honorees! We look forward to hearing from you and to learning of your future accomplishments.

Nathan Straus

by Judah Harstein

It is well known that Netanya was given its name in honour of Nathan Straus, a renowned American philanthropist who donated large sums of money to the Zionist cause. But who was Nathan Straus, and how did the town get to bear his name? Following the trail of this particular piece of history is an intriguing journey that tells us the story of a unique individual who did more than almost anybody else to ensure the fulfilment of the Zionist dream.

Nathan Straus was born in Otterberg, Germany in 1848. In 1854, when Nathan was 6 years old, the family emigrated to the US and settled in the village of Talbotton in the state of Georgia. It is told that they were the only Jewish family in the village, and visiting Baptist preachers were in awe of Nathan's father who was able to translate passages from the Hebrew Bible into English!

The close of the Civil War, in 1865, left the family impoverished; their house had been ruined and their cotton stocks destroyed. They moved to New York, seeking the opportunity to rebuild their lives and their prosperity. The Straus' financial situation was soon improved, but the period of poverty that the young Nathan had endured was to have a formative effect on his life – he was determined that if it ever was in his power, he would fight to eliminate poverty and deprivation.

Nathan Straus' rise to fame and prosperity is well documented. In 1888, he and his brother, Isidor, acquired an interest in Macy's, one of the largest department stores in the world, later moving to full ownership as well as to the acquisition of other business enterprises. The brothers' financial and business acumen earned them the soubriquet of "the merchant princes" and the family's fortune began to soar. Nathan saw his business success, not as an end in itself, but an opportunity to give his time – as well as his material resources – to the relief of human suffering and distress.

He suffered his own personal loss with the death of three of his children, and this only served to heighten his sensitivity to human suffering. He undertook a period of public office in New York City during which time he became passionate about the development of public health resources. Having learned that infection from germs breeding in raw milk was a prime cause of infant mortality and that a process – pasteurization – had been invented to kill these organisms, he fought doggedly and single-handedly to install pasteurization plants firstly in New York and then throughout America. Many of the installations were provided at his own expense. The results of this initiative were startling: the death rate for infants in New York, standing at 125.1 per thousand in 1891, fell to 15.8

per thousand by 1925. This achievement, alone, earned him widespread recognition during his lifetime.

In the 1890s and early 1900s his philanthropic activities grew enormously, but in his own individual style. He did not like the word "charity," with its patronizing implications. He insisted that those who needed to benefit from his largesse should in no way have to sacrifice their self-respect or

independence. The projects that he initiated enabled people to help themselves, with dignity, rather than to accept hand-outs. Sometimes the recipients did not even realize that they were benefitting from philanthropic assistance. And always Nathan Straus was at the helm of his projects, personally attending to the myriad of details that ensured their smooth running.

1904 was a turning point in his life. In that year, aged 56, Nathan Straus visited Palestine for the

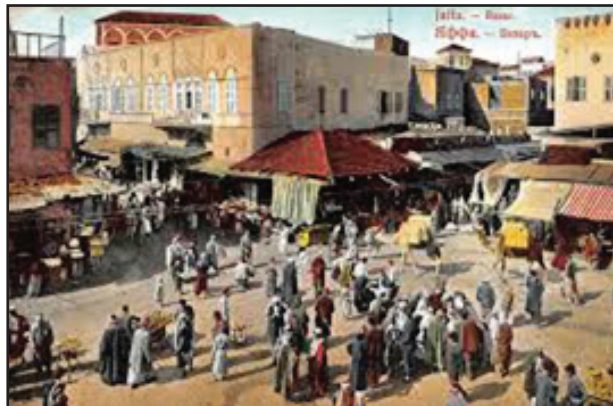
first time. In his words: "We travelled like other tourists stopping at Madeira, Gibraltar, Genoa, Naples, Sicily and other points of interest. On reaching Jerusalem we changed our plans. What we saw in the Holy Land made such an impression on us that we gave up the idea of going to other places. From that time on we felt a strange and intense desire to return to the Holy Land."



Nathan Straus
about 1900



Lina Gutherz Straus
about 1900



Palestine - 1904

From that time on, too, Nathan Straus together with his wife became ardent and enthusiastic supporters of the Zionist cause. Their next visit was in 1912, when they arrived to begin their practical work to aid the residents of the Yishuv (the body of Jewish residents in the land of Israel). In true Straus fashion, they established workrooms to help young people to acquire skills; they created a Domestic Science School for girls and set up a fund to support the Bezalel School of Art. They also acquired various tracts of land. Again, in Nathan Straus' own words: "On learning that a piece of land opposite the Tomb of Rachel was for sale we acquired it in order to prevent this holy ground from getting into undesirable hands."

The pinnacle of their achievements at that time was the establishment of a Health Department for Palestine, headquartered in Jerusalem. Its function was to spearhead sanitary and hygienic reform in the Holy Land and to fight rampant diseases such as malaria and trachoma that were claiming so many victims. Subsequently, a Pasteur Institute to supply anti-rabies serum for the region was added. As he had done in New York, Nathan Straus through his vision and dogged determination, succeeded in creating a public health revolution that saved countless lives.

Having been bitten by the Zionist bug, the Straus' began to apply themselves with characteristic zeal. They became enthusiastic supporters of Henrietta Szold, and worked closely with her in the early development of the Hadassah organization. Henrietta Szold later recounted how Nathan taught her to have faith in her vision and to pursue her dreams in spite of the obstacles that threatened to overwhelm her.

The Great War prevented Nathan from making further visits to Palestine until 1923. It was then that he began to take a wider interest in the life and work of the Chutzim (pioneers) throughout Palestine who were, as he put it, "all working for the building up of Eretz Israel fulfilling the expectations of a praying and waiting Jewry all over the world."

The story of Natanya began a few years later, though there is an interesting dispute as to what actually happened. The following is one, rather disparaging, account of events that is circulating: "The lovely seaside city of Natanya was named to honor Nathan Straus in the hope that they would benefit from his charity. Nathan stated that he had already given away 3/4's of his fortune and had no more to give. The Mayor of Natanya, a fellow by the name of Ben Ami, visited Nathan at Driftwood, his Mamaroneck home. The young Ben Ami was very poor and was looking

forward to a great repast. He was sorely disappointed when he was served cereal, bananas and poached eggs.

The documentary evidence that exists gives the story a somewhat different color. Oved ben Ami – later, indeed, to become the first Mayor of Netanya – was one of the leaders of "Bnei Binyamin," an organization dedicated to the development of Jewish agricultural settlements in the Holy Land. He and his colleague Itamar Ben Avi – the son of Eliezer Ben Yehudah, the founder of the Modern Hebrew language, had met Nathan Straus during his 1923 visit and had introduced him to their organization and its work. Nathan took a fond interest in Bnei Binyamin and its leaders and willingly gave them his moral and material support. Today, in the Netanya museum can be seen a letter from Nathan Straus, dated September 1926,



Netanya - 1930's

which demonstrates the affection that he had for this group. In the letter he warmly congratulates Oved Ben Ami and his bride on their marriage, asking him to "accept my wife and my heartiest greetings – also to Mr and Mrs Ben Avi and all our mutual friends in the Holy Land."

In 1928, the year of Nathan Straus' 80th birthday, Itamar and Oved were on a visit to the United

States seeking funds for the development of a new seashore community north of Herzliyah. Itamar Ben Avi decided that it would be a wonderful idea to name the new settlement "Nathaniah" in honor of Nathan Straus and in recognition of "Natan Kah" that God had given the land to His people.

Nathan Straus welcomed the gesture and gave the project his blessing, a gift of \$1,000 and a promise of \$1,000 per year for the next four years. (\$16,000 per year today)



Oved Ben Ami
The first mayor of Netanya

It may well have been the case that Itamar and Oved had hoped for a much larger donation, but it really appears that the naming of the settlement was a genuine demonstration of gratitude and appreciation for a man who had done so much to help the Yishuv. For Nathan Straus it has proved to be a permanent memorial that ensures that the name of this remarkable man is forever on everyone's lips.

On April 5th, Joan Adler gave a presentation to the Monday Club from Young Israel in North Netanya, Israel. Netanya, founded

in 1927, was named to honor Nathan Straus, who made many philanthropic contributions to the region. As noted, he built soup kitchens, supported workrooms so that unskilled laborers could find employment and built health stations that ministered to the victims of malaria and trachoma. He provided \$250,000 for the establishment of the Jerusalem Health Center and made possible the founding of a Pasteur Institute.

Presentations

Nathan & Lina Straus and Netanya
April 5, 2021

This presentation was attended by more than 50 excited and interested participants. Members of the Monday Club asked fascinating questions and engaged in a vibrant discussion about Nathan and Lina Straus. A recording of the event is available on SHS's YouTube channel.

Thank you to Judah Harstein and Alan Gold of YINN for the opportunity to speak with your members!

The Middletown Estates of Percy & Herbert Straus
April 19, 2021

On April 19th, Joan Adler gave a presentation to the Middletown (NJ) Township Historical Society about the Middletown estates of Percy and Herbert Straus. In the early 20th century, the Straus brothers purchased large farms in Middletown which were to serve as their country retreats. The Strauses developed the land and, although Percy and Edith left the area after their home burned to the ground in 1929, Herbert and Therese developed their estate, reconstructing the buildings in the French Norman style.

Attendees learned about the history and importance of their farms, including the complex known as Cobble Close. The guests were fascinated by the incredible photographs and stories shared by Joan, many of which were taken in 1930 during the extensive reconstruction of the estate. A recording of the presentation is available on SHS website's Video Page.

Thank you to Tom Valenti and Randall Gabriellan of the Middletown Historical Society for their interest and support!

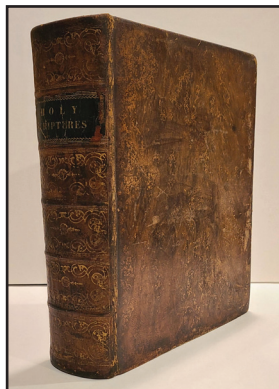
Two Great Families and Their Temple

August 2021

On August 4th, Joan Adler, Karen Franklin and Warren Klein presented their talk, *Two Great Families and their Temple: The Strauses, the Lehman's and Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth El*. This talk was for the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies at their annual conference which, due to COVID concerns, was held remotely. This enabled the speakers to reach a wide and international audience. There was an animated Q&A following the talks and each presenter received a high rating from the attendees.

Leeser's Tanakh
Hermine Straus Kohns Family Bible

Thanks to the generosity of three family members, SHS is pleased to announce the acquisition of the Hermine Straus Kohns family bible. This book, a *Leeser's Tanakh*, was most likely given to Hermine on the occasion of her marriage, in Columbus, GA in 1863, to Lazarus Kohns.

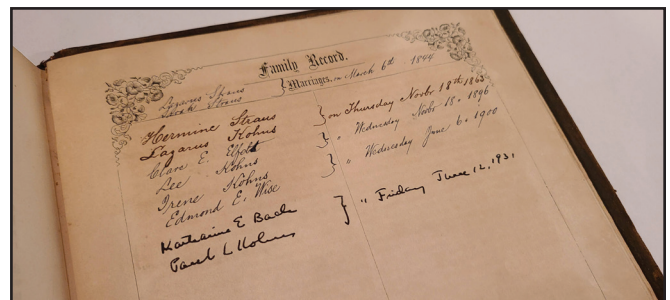


Bookseller James Cummins described the *Leeser's Tanakh* as his "Magnum Opus." It was the first English translation of the complete Hebrew Bible (1853-54) by a Jew and includes explanatory notes. It has come to be known as the standard bible of English speaking Jews.

Cummins wrote, "This example with provenance to Hermine Straus Kohns (1846-1922), who has annotated the family register with marriages, births and deaths, including her own marriage to Lazarus Kohns on November 18, 1863, as well as the date of birth, marriage and deaths of her parents, Lazarus and Sara Straus, the births of her children (and the premature deaths of two of them), the marriages of her children, and the births of her grandchildren. A later descendant (Paul L. Kohns? or his wife Katharine) have added a few further dates including the death of Hermine."

Not only is the date of the event noted, in many cases the place and time of the event are also recorded.

The Hermine Straus Kohns branch of the family is very small compared to the other branches and we do not have as many artifacts from Hermine's branch as we do for some of the other branches. The *Leeser's Tanakh, Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures*, adds a rich and important component to SHS's Hermine Straus Kohns archival collection. We look forward to sharing information from our collections in future issues of the newsletter.



Handwritten list with the date and time of death for:
Lazarus Straus, Sara Straus, Hermine Straus, Lazarus Kohns,
Clara E. Elfelt, Lee Kohns, Irene Kohns, Edmond E. Wise,
Katharine E. Bach and Paul L. Kohns

by Al Berr
Photographs by Joe Arbo

We thought it might be instructive for the faithful readers of this column to be let in on the decision-making process of the Friends of Straus Park board. During the Pandemic Period, as is true for many boards of directors, we have had to make decisions that we had not made previously. In our case, we had decided to cancel our two major events last year, a Titanic commemorative on or about April 15 and an Art in the Park in event in autumn.

This year, the Titanic event was regretfully cancelled, but the Art in the Park event was still a possibility. Recently, four members of the Friends board met in the Park to discuss this question. So, in the interest of partial disclosure, an excerpt of the minutes of that meeting is herewith presented. In the interest of confidentiality, real names are not used.



Above: Memory looking down over tulips
Below: Caladium and English ivy



Victor: The meeting will come to order. The principal item on the agenda for us is Art in the Park this year. Do we or do we not hold it on October 2?

Andrew: Why that date?

Victor: We always choose a Saturday in autumn that doesn't coincide with the Columbus Day weekend and avoids the Jewish holidays at that time.

Diane: Do you know that Columbus Day is now called Indigenous Peoples Day?

Jared: Whatever, we'll avoid it anyway. Since what we have is an outdoor event, I think that most people will be comfortable with it. And they still wear masks, if they choose.

Andrew: What about our local artists? Are enough of them still around locally who will want to participate? Let's contact them to see how many of them respond.

Diane: Good idea. If ten or twelve agree, that's fewer than usual, but probably enough for a decent showing.

Jared: And if not, we could still have an event and call it Music in the Park because we always have a band playing.

Victor: Yes. I have contacted the four-man band that recently played in Riverside Park and they are interested.

Andrew: We liked what they did – old-time songs played in a modern beat. And they attracted a good crowd. Can we afford them?

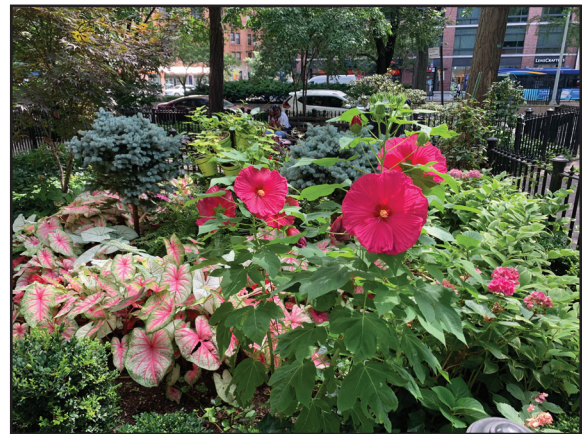
Victor: I think they will cost about the same as our previous group and for the same number of hours.

Diane: Then, can we think of a reason not to do it, whether it's Art in the Park or Music in the Park? I think not, and we can announce it right after Labor Day.

Jared: Unless there is a sudden or severe rise in Covid cases in the city. Or bad weather. We can still announce it in advance and cancel if necessary. And we have a rain date.

Andrew: So, we wait for the artists' responses that will determine the name of the event but we will still have the musicians.

Victor: Very good. Thank you all. The meeting is adjourned.



Above: Hibiscus and caladium
Below: Clematis double bloomer



As of this printing, there was no decision made. Please consult our website at www.fospark.com. after Labor Day. We look forward to seeing you soon in the Park!

Iris Hinh Essay

continued from page six

The level of self- and community-advocacy for changes in funding formulas or regulations to improve teaching practices lies with individuals, in addition to policymakers. The research on this issue should not be siloed to only academic circles and political leaders. Rather, it should be made easily accessible to families who are low-income, immigrants, don't primarily speak English at home, or belong to other traditionally-marginalized groups so that they may develop their own insights into the impact of the findings. Any policy change, such as investing in birth-to-five early education and care, requires voter participation, lobbying support, and community coalitions. Ultimately, I hope to utilize accessible research to empower individuals' roles in moving toward more equitable education practices and policy making, in addition to expanding participation in the broader field of public service.

Social Media Call to Action

What would you like to see posted on our social media platforms? Do you want to see more about: family members, our collections, events, family history? Let us know what would be most meaningful and interesting to you as we continue to develop these new opportunities for communication.

Don't forget to Like, Follow and Subscribe!



AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support SHS every time you shop on Amazon -- at absolutely no cost to you. You'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to the Straus Historical Society once it is designated for this benefit. This money comes from Amazon's Foundation and is not added to your purchase price.

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Available from the Straus Historical Society, Inc.

www.straushistoricalsociety.org/publications

Strauses and the Arts, a collection of articles about family members who are artists, patrons of the arts, musicians, dancers, or involved in the arts in some other manner. Personal interviews with the artists reveal details about their creative process and their philosophy of the arts. Images of the artists' work are included at the end of each article. Available from the SHS website as an eBook (\$4.99) or paperback (\$25).

The Autobiography of Isidor Straus privately published by Sara Straus Hess in 1955, greatly expanded and updated by SHS in 2011, including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$30.00

Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization by Lina Gutherz Straus, a loving tribute to the life's work of Nathan Straus, greatly expanded in 2016 including the addition of many photographs and articles. Hard cover - \$40.00

Under Four Administrations: From Cleveland to Taft, the autobiography of Oscar S. Straus. This recently re-published autobiography includes a new supplement with articles about Oscar S. Straus from past issues of the Society's newsletters and new photographs. Hard cover with dust jacket - \$40.00

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

The History of the Jews of Otterberg by Dr. Hans Steinebrei, translated by Frank and Sue Kahn and Dr. Andreas J. Schwab. This publication contains a large section about the Straus family. Many photographs complement the text. Published in English by the Straus Historical Society. Hard cover - \$35.00

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

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

The Straus Historical Society collection contains many photographs, articles and other items that are also available. Contact Joan Adler if you want to learn more about the SHS collections or if there is a specific photograph or article you wish to purchase.