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# The philanthropic life of the merchant and humanitarian Nathan Straus

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The Merchant and  
Humanitarian Nathan Straus**

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**The Philanthropic Life  
of the Merchant and Humanitarian  
Nathan Straus**

by

Mark David Cohn

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of Lehigh University

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in

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This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Nathan Straus (1848-1931) assured himself a prominent position in the annals of American Jewish philanthropic history by uniting humanitarian interests with his private fortune. He was a member of the first generation of American Jewish entrepreneurs who had the means to donate countless hours and large sums of money to secular, political, and religious causes. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of growing anti-Semitism in America, men like Nathan Straus provided highly visible and vocal models of American opportunity, Jewish success and assimilation to counteract the stereotypes, restrictions, and attacks made on the Jewish community. He combined his wealth, business acumen and prominence with his particular view of religion and his Americanism to become one of the leading innovative philanthropists at home and abroad.

As a part owner of L. Straus & Sons, wholesaler of crockery, china and glassware, R. H. Macy & Company and Abraham & Straus, Nathan Straus was able to amass enough money to put his ideas of helping humanity into action. Like other philanthropists of his day, he stressed the need to "help others to help themselves" and did not want to sacrifice the respect and dignity of the recipient. His major contribution in the United States and Europe was the establishment of milk stations, where individuals could purchase pasteurized milk for below cost. Straus's program encouraged preventive medicine and helping children of all backgrounds. During the years of Straus's milk campaign (1893-1920), infant mortality rates, in cities which adopted his plan, more than halved.

Straus's other major philanthropic concern was the upbuilding of Palestine as a Jewish homeland. Although usually not a member of Jewish organizations, Straus made an exception for the American Zionist movement. He was an honorary vice-president and chairman for the Zionists of America and the American Jewish Congress, respectively. In



Palestine, he contributed to the first Hadassah nurses settlement and created a health bureau for Jerusalem along with a soup kitchen and workrooms. In 1929, Straus inaugurated the Nathan and Lina Straus Health Centre for all races, creeds, and colors which he gave outright to Hadassah as a center of preventive medicine, education and welfare.

Through all his activities he remained outspoken and usually chose to work alone. He gave "because it feels good" and as part of his Judaic heritage. Although an "uptown" resident of Manhattan, he felt a strong connection to the "downtowners." He occasionally isolated himself from his fellow philanthropists by chastising the rich for not giving enough of themselves and their fortunes. He was different from many other public health reformers and philanthropists in that he did not have a hidden agenda of moral reform in his work. Rather, he concerned himself with safe, pasteurized milk distribution and preventive medicine.

## **Introduction: The Straus Family, their Judaism, and America**

1

Nathan Straus assured himself a prominent position in the annals of American Jewish philanthropic history by uniting humanitarian interests with his private fortune. He was a member of the first generation of American Jewish entrepreneurs who had the means to donate countless hours and large sums of money to secular, political, and religious causes. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of growing anti-Semitism in America, men like Nathan Straus provided highly visible and vocal models of American opportunity, Jewish success and assimilation to counteract the stereotypes, restrictions, and attacks made on the Jewish community. He combined his wealth, business acumen and prominence with his particular view of religion and his Americanism to become one of the leading innovative philanthropists at home and abroad. Nathan Straus was a merchant prince who rose to great prominence through business and philanthropic endeavors that spanned the globe. At his funeral, members of various races, creeds, and colors lined New York's Fifth Avenue outside Temple Emanu-El where thousands paid tribute to a life of earnest effort on behalf of humanity. Nathan Straus was one of those rare, fine people, who, possessing exceptional qualities of mind and character, left the world a better place than he found it.

The force at the very center of Straus's being was the Judaic faith of his ancestors. However, like many of his coreligionists and compatriots in America, he confronted a troubling question: Can I be a Jew and an American at the same time? Straus answered emphatically "Yes." For him, to be a good Jew meant to be a good American. Other notable Jewish immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century such as the lawyer and human rights advocate Louis Marshall, banker and philanthropist Jacob Schiff, and Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise also shared this outlook. They believed that one could be Jewish in America openly and proudly; loyalties to religion and country were not mutually exclusive in any

way. In fact, America allowed the Jew to be Jewish more openly than in Europe without any limitation on the rights of citizenship.

During the early nineteenth century in Germany, certain elements of the Jewish community began reforming traditional practices. Political emancipation forced the Jews to reconsider their place in society and the structure of their religion. The granting of citizenship meant potential acceptance by the non-Jewish community. If nothing else, it meant that Jews and non-Jews were equal in the eyes of the state. By adopting more modern, secular ways, Jews altered their religion so that they could accommodate concepts from the Enlightenment such as political emancipation and equal rights. As early as 1817, enough Jews in Hamburg, for example, felt that reform was necessary and created the "New Israelite Temple Association" because they saw the need to restore "dignity and meaning to Jewish worship" and "revive interest in the ancestral religion."<sup>1</sup> Rabbis, Jewish intellectuals, and laymen held conferences in Germany during the 1840s to determine how Judaism and modernity could work together. Issues such as intermarriage, Sabbath practices, and liturgical language were at the heart of the discussion. Many Jews feared leaving tradition for the sake of acceptance in the larger community. Assimilation and modernization potentially spelled the doom of Judaism. Jews so willingly accepted modernity and secularism that they frequently lost and left their own religion. Reform Judaism, on the other hand, offered a means to insure the survival of the religion.

As democracy and reform swept Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, German Jews participated in pushing for change in their own country. However, the revolution, of which Nathan Straus's father was a participant, failed in 1848 and many Germans were either forcibly removed from the country or chose to search out democracy elsewhere. Many Germans chose America as a place to live under democratic rule and seek economic opportunity. Upon arriving in America, Jews experienced a degree of freedom to which they were unaccustomed. With the combination of nationalism, the "rugged" frontier, and

commercial enterprise, immigrant Jews in America found it increasingly difficult to continue practice of traditional Jewish rituals. Inspired by exposure to reform back in Germany and anxious to adapt to their new surroundings, many Jews chose Reform Judaism as a means to continue the practice of their religion without abandoning it altogether.

Reform Judaism attempted to interweave modernity with Judaism. For example, Reformers eliminated prayers that called for a return to Zion, or the promised land. The Jew, because of political emancipation, could be a citizen of France or the United States and thus would no longer need to return to the promised land. Furthermore, Jews did not want to appear as if they might have dual loyalties -- one to the state and one to Zion. In fact, Reform Jews wanted to assure their compatriots that Judaism, like Christianity, was a religion and *not* a people. Nonetheless, Reform Judaism remained committed to such fundamental tenets of the religion as *tzedakah*, or justice/philanthropy. Reform Judaism offered a flexibility and a means to remain Jewish while embracing the culture of America or Europe. This new sect of Judaism appealed to many Jews as they tried to assimilate and gain acceptance in their new home. It was easy for them to see America as their Zion and in an effort to unite their Judaism and their Americanism, they found Reform Judaism to be the perfect answer.

According to his youngest son, Oscar, Lazarus Straus was "American in spirit" before even arriving in the United States. Initially, in 1852, Lazarus Straus ventured to America alone. By 1854, he had saved enough money to send for the rest of his family and rent a storefront in the county seat of Talbot County, Georgia -- Talbotton. As Jews like Lazarus Straus settled in isolated communities such as Talbotton, they found themselves as the only Jew within miles. By placing themselves in such communities, Jews gave up access to many traditions. For example, kosher butchers, a *mikveh* (ritual bath), or a *moyel* (one who is trained to circumsize) are typically only found in larger Jewish

communities. Straus could have chosen to live in a larger Jewish community like Philadelphia or Charleston. By not living in surroundings which could accommodate traditional Judaism, Jewish families chose to reform their ancient heritage or perhaps abandon it entirely. By residing in a town like Talbotton, Lazarus Straus made a statement about how unimportant ancient traditions were in his form of Judaism. Straus did not abandon his religion despite the increased challenge as the only Jew in town. He made certain to teach his children the Bible, prayers, and Jewish ethics. Of course, he had no Sunday school to which he could send his children. Thus, on Sundays, he sent his elder two children to the local Methodist Church and his younger two to the Baptist Church. By so doing, he exposed his family to the dominant religions in the region and also showed that he maintained an interest and investment in the community. Perhaps the father Straus had ulterior motives in sending his children to the local Sunday schools as well. As a merchant in town, he surely had to keep good ties with his customers. Regardless, Talbottonites respected the Straus family. When the local ministers discovered that Lazarus Straus was somewhat of a Hebrew scholar, they frequented his home to get a direct translation of what the Bible contained. Lazarus Straus made the challenge of maintaining his Judaism into a beneficial lesson for his entire family.

The years of 1863-1896 led the Straus family from virtual obscurity to international prominence. During the Civil War, the grand jury of the Talbot County Court issued a judgement condemning Jewish merchants for taking advantage of wartime emergencies. Each member of the jury paid a personal visit to Lazarus Straus to explain that they were not accusing *him*, only other Jewish merchants. Outraged nonetheless, Straus closed his shop and moved the family to Columbus, Georgia. Following the signing of the treaty at Appomatox, Straus moved his family once more in search of better economic opportunities. This time, under the influence of his eldest son, Isidor, Lazarus Straus decided to settle in New York City, where he opened L. Straus & Sons, a wholesale

business in crockery, china, and glassware. Nathan Straus was the chief salesman for the company. Perhaps Nathan Staus's shrewdest maneuver came as a result of contact with the New York small retailer of fine dry goods -- Rowland Hussey Macy. In 1874, Nathan Straus paid a visit to the store owner and inquired if he would care to diversify his inventory and carry some of the products offered by L. Straus & Sons. Owing to a financial panic and competition from other retailers, R.H. Macy entered into an arrangement with the Strauses to sell their products on a consignment-like basis. Nathan created similar arrangements with retailers in cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. By 1886, the New York Times reported that the Strauses "do a larger business than any other house in this line of merchandise in this country or in Europe."<sup>2</sup> In 1888, while maintaining their activities and ownership of L. Straus & Sons, Nathan and Isidor Straus each became one-quarter owners of R.H. Macy & Company and by 1896 owned it outright. In 1894, they each became one-sixth owners of the reorganized Brooklyn retailer Weschler & Abraham. Upon their entry to this last firm, founder Abraham Abraham renamed the business Abraham & Straus. Nathan Straus maintained his interest in R.H. Macy & Co. until 1914 at which point the Nathan Straus and Isidor Straus families parted ways. Nathan Straus's side retained a one-third interest in Abraham & Straus and owned L. Straus & Sons entirely. Isidor Straus's side became sole owners of R.H. Macy & Company.

The move to New York proved financially, emotionally, and spiritually prudent. By settling in a city with a large Jewish population, the Straus children enhanced their understanding of what it meant to be an American Jew. Lazarus Straus was a founding member of Temple Beth-El in New York City, eventually becoming director of its Sunday School.<sup>3</sup> Beth-El Rabbi David Einhorn, a leader of the radical element of Reform Judaism, undoubtedly influenced the Straus family's religious outlook. Einhorn continually stressed the idea that the Jewish people had a moral responsibility to God to be the chosen

people. Since, "all of Israel collectively was the messianic people," they were the appointed ones to spread the universal doctrine of Judaism.<sup>4</sup> When Nathan Straus fought tuberculosis by championing the cause of pasteurized milk, or when he established health centers in Palestine for all races, creeds, and colors, he practiced Einhorn's teaching that Judaism was a universal religion.

Straus accepted the concept that Jews, due to their heritage, had a special mission toward uniting the world's peoples into "an amalgamation of one strong, hopeful, patriotic people."<sup>5</sup> His feeling that Judaism had a universal message reflected part of the historic Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, which outlined the structure of Reform Judaism at the end of the nineteenth century. Article Six of the Platform states: "We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and, therefore, we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men."<sup>6</sup> When the Pittsburgh Platform was enunciated, the leading rabbinical union, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, did not endorse it. Nevertheless, the principles put forth in the document set the stage for the future of Reform Judaism. Perhaps the most significant article of the document was the eighth and last. Not only does it demonstrate the changes in Judaism as it adapted to modernity, but it reflects the influence of America and the idea that all Jews -- men and women -- can be religious without the restrictions of dietary laws, daily prayer, dress codes, and ancient rituals. This article states: "In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relation between the rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."<sup>7</sup> Straus's philanthropic works demonstrated an attempt to work on behalf of justice and righteousness and strove to lessen the gap between rich and poor by distributing his wealth.

In 1893, the social status of the Straus family was between that of immigrants and elites but closer to the elites. By that time, Isidor and Nathan Straus, with their father's guidance, had become partners in R. H. Macy & Co. as well as in Abraham & Straus. Only forty years after the first Straus reached the American shore, the family had achieved great success in the American business, political, religious, and philanthropic circles. They reached their position by embracing America while holding true to their Judaism; while establishing the Straus name as a respected one in American business, they retained their traditional synagogue membership and full participation in Jewish communal activities. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, the Strauses led a comfortable life and had created an identity for themselves.

By integrating themselves as much as possible while not losing sight of their religion, Jews straddled the line between acculturation and tradition. The members of the Straus family were not alone in their attempt to gain acceptance in America and establish themselves, and still retain their ethnic heritage. They were part of a large migration of central and western European Jews who came to America between the years of 1820-1880. Jews who arrived in America during this period were quite conscious of the need to become, as Naomi Cohen points out, "the proper American Jew." Emancipation for the Jew meant explaining traditions, looking secular, and worrying about what the non-Jews might say.<sup>8</sup> In America, as immigrants and Jews, the Jewish community had to concern itself with nativism and xenophobia as well as anti-Semitism. Few Jews gained complete acceptance into the non-Jewish world in America. In 1870, the wealthy banker Joseph Seligman was unable to stay the night at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York. In the early 1880s, a large resort in Lakewood, New Jersey refused to house Nathan Straus because of his religious background, despite his business success. While Jews had gained substantial ground in the American marketplace, they had not fared well in terms of social acceptance. In fact, they were faring worse as time went on.



Confronted by stereotypes and closed doors, Jews had nowhere to turn but to themselves for help. Thus, they created an intricate web of social, political, and economic organizations to help one another survive and enjoy the new American surroundings.

Thus, the Jews in America entered a new phase of Judaism, one which was different due to the American environment. At the same time, however, they maintained their Judaic heritage by identifying those aspects of Judaism that made sense to them and adopted those aspects of American culture that fit with their definitions of themselves as Jews. Like most newcomers to America, they believed, if their actions tell us what they thought, that to add on a new layer of identity did not require a total stripping away of the old one and that past and present, tradition and modernity, could coexist in harmony.<sup>9</sup> Nathan Straus, in defining his own character, united his Judaism and his Americanism most passionately in the form of philanthropy. By giving of himself, in terms of money and time, Straus continued in the Judaic heritage of philanthropy. By working for the betterment of the entire community, namely through public health programs, Straus showed the fusion of Jewish principles in the American setting.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 58.

<sup>2</sup>New York Times, Jan. 1, 1886.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Nathan Straus to Oscar Straus, Jan. 25, 1888. Oscar Straus Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Nathan Straus to Oscar Straus, Dec. 10, 1887. Oscar Straus Papers.

<sup>5</sup>New Palestine, Feb. 3, 1928. This entire issue was dedicated to Nathan Straus on his eightieth birthday.

<sup>6</sup>Meyer, Response to Modernity, 388.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 388.

<sup>8</sup>Naomi W. Cohen, Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830-1914 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), 109.

<sup>9</sup>Hasia R. Diner, A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880, The Jewish People in America, ed., Henry L. Feingold, no. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 230.

## "Helping Others to Help Themselves" -- The Push for Pasteurized Milk

Philanthropy in America during the late nineteenth century paralleled the growth and changes in U. S. industry and took on many forms. As businessmen like Nathan Straus succeeded, they had more wealth to share. Different philanthropists took their business acumen to their philanthropies in varying degrees. The concepts of "investment" and "scientific" philanthropy became popular in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Roy Lubove describes "investment philanthropy" as giving that the donors did not consider charity. Housing reformers, in particular, measured their success by the strict use of business principles. Model tenements "represented nothing but business investments tempered by justice. In paying prevailing neighborhood rents but getting good housing in return, tenants were not recipients of charity but only of the justice to which they were entitled."<sup>1</sup> "Scientific philanthropy" and "investment philanthropy" complemented each other as the former stressed greater efficiency and humanity in the application of benevolent efforts. Under the latter form of good works, donors and administrators demanded "something better than soup and alms for the poor. They wanted better organization of relief operations and more discrimination in the bestowal of assistance and more attention to the individual needs of the persons helped."<sup>2</sup> Although Straus did not subscribe specifically to these approaches, they surely impressed upon him the importance of looking at philanthropy as a business enterprise and as something which needed efficiency, direction, and purpose.

Men like Andrew Carnegie, John Rockefeller, and Nathan Straus felt it was their moral obligation to be the "Administrators of surplus wealth." In 1889, in an article titled, "Wealth," in the North American Review, Carnegie advocated that one must "assist, but never to do all."<sup>3</sup> He explained that millionaires had only themselves to answer to, but were trusted with the responsibility of sharing wealth. Straus, on his seventy-fourth

birthday, wrote an editorial for the New York Times in which he stated that "During my whole life I have maintained that wealth, whether moderate or great, creates an obligation upon the holder to use it for the benefit of mankind."<sup>4</sup> Carnegie believed in helping agencies that acted as "ladders upon which the aspiring can rise." Furthermore, "the state should care for the helpless, while millionaires should bestow beneficence on the industrious."<sup>5</sup> Carnegie implemented his ideas by building libraries for towns on the condition that the town would stock it with books. Straus also stressed the need of the wealthy to help others to help themselves. Outright charity, in Straus's mind, was demeaning and would never help the recipient become independent. Straus's philosophy is a direct reflection of his Jewish upbringing. In the Jewish tradition, the highest form of giving, according to the Jewish scholar and philosopher Maimonides of the twelfth century, is to help a person *before* he becomes impoverished. In 1894, Straus wrote an article, "Helping Others to Help Themselves," for the same journal which had published Carnegie's "Wealth." Straus insisted that his work should "not be regarded as among the charities. To preserve alike the independence of my customers and my own freedom of action, I have steadily claimed for it a place as a business enterprise."<sup>6</sup> While Straus used good business practices in the functioning of his milk depots, they were not a money-making venture.

The prevailing philosophy of the Gilded Age clearly favored the idea of independence in giving of philanthropy. In 1888, the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York issued a publication titled "Methods and Machinery of the Organization of Charity." In the pamphlet, the author Alexander Johnson states

The evils of pauperism, if not increasing, are yet becoming more apparent, and old methods of meeting them are found more and more inadequate to the demands of modern life....

The cure of pauperism is to be found in the promotion of neighborliness. To establish neighborliness between rich and poor, and between all the charitable agencies of every kind in its district, is the aim of the Conference...

'Not alms but a friend.' -- That is to say, not alms as a finality, not alms as a panacea for every form of distress, not alms and let the recipients go to ask alms again next week....Alms promote dependence; there is no remedial virtue in them; at the best they are merely palliative. But the work of the Friendly Visistor is remedial. He strives to lift up his poor friend to independence.<sup>7</sup>

This pamphlet can be found among Nathan Straus's private collection of manuscripts and reading material and appears to have been read. He fully embraced the notion of bridging the gap between rich and poor as well as maintaining the respect and independence of the poor.

During the 1880s and 1890s, urban areas like New York and Chicago witnessed a new type of philanthropy which involved the direct interaction between the giver and the recipient: the settlement house. Jane Addams was one of the earliest individuals to participate in this kind of philanthropy which worked to create ties between the rich and the poor. Addams, Lillian Wald, Mary McDowell, and others tried this type of social work in order to address immediately, directly, and affirmatively problems and concerns of poor neighborhoods. These pioneers in social welfare work had the distinct ability to "reduce abstract issues to human terms and to *translate high ideals into prosaic practice*."<sup>8</sup> During the 1890s, social work began to replace the colder, less personal "scientific philanthropy." The Henry Street Settlement in New York, for example, dedicated its resources to the founding of a nursing service which remained considerate of "the dignity and independence of the patients, free from denominational or political influence."<sup>9</sup>

Straus respected the settlement houses and followed their lead by focusing on health and welfare issues, paying no regard to color, creed, or race. However, he differed from most settlement workers and typical Progressive reformers in that he did not try to

reform or "Americanize" the recipients of his philanthropy. He did not interest himself in solving the problems of poverty or improving the morals of the community. He also did not follow the same route as industrialists who established philanthropies and foundations to study the condition of the poor. Individuals like Carnegie and Rockefeller established large organizations to study the poor and ways to improve the conditions of the nation's cities. Straus wanted his money to go directly to helping the individual and providing for those who needed help. He feared giving money to large bureaucracies with high administrative costs. While Straus may have agreed with the ultimate purpose of the foundations, to devise a potential plan for solving the problems of the city, he wanted to focus his efforts on the poor and work to recruit other wealthy individuals into the business of philanthropy.

Social and moral reform have been a part of the American experience since Europeans first brought missionaries to the "New World." During the mid-to-late 1800s and early 1900s, individuals, typically from the middle- and upper-classes, considered the connection between poverty, crime, and housing. These reformers believed that by improving the living conditions of the slum dwellers, society could be stabilized. For example, in 1843, a group of New York City merchants and businessmen created the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in order to improve the "defective character" of the poverty-stricken. Also in New York City at mid-century, a group of concerned citizens formed the Council on Hygiene which later advised the New York City Board of Health, established in 1866. The purpose of these health organizations was to investigate, create, and implement sanitary regulations to improve the existing conditions of New York. Underlying these organizations was a feeling of moral and mental superiority on the part of the health-minded advisers and reformers. In addition, those individuals involved frequently tried to combine sanitation of physical conditions with improving the morals of those parties living in an unhealthy environment. These

movements and the conditions of the poor influenced Nathan Straus's philanthropy but he simply lacked the moral goals of the Christian reformers. He was primarily concerned with good health for all.

Nathan Straus was imbued by family, community, and with the ethical teachings of Judaism. As a successful merchant, he was also well versed in the values of commerce. By bringing the precepts to bear in the distinctive New World setting, Straus exemplified what it meant to be an American Jew. America, "land of the free," was a hospitable place for the idea of helping people to help themselves. Eliminating pauperism fit neatly with the social ideals of late nineteenth century industrial capitalists, who envisioned a world of competent, efficient, and orderly citizens. It also fit well with the growing anxiety felt by native-born Americans as they contemplated the consequences of an open immigration policy. Benevolence was a partial means with which to address the problem of poverty, but it was also one that could confer the stigma of dependency. In his later years Straus reflected that the word "charity" was

a beautiful word in its inception, but its constant association with poor unfortunates has almost taken from it its original meaning...In New York, there are thousands of people in dire distress who will not accept 'charity.' From their point of view it would mean a loss of self-respect and independence. I know from thousands of examples that the poor--men, women, and little children--think a great deal of their self-respect. Help them to help themselves. Eliminate the word charity in your dealings with them. In whatever I have done in this direction this has been my first aim.<sup>10</sup>

Because of his "aim," historians, journalists, and public health workers today believe that Straus saved thousands of lives through his milk depots which "were the forerunners of the child health centers."<sup>11</sup> In an age when tuberculosis was the great destroyer of urban life, Straus entered the campaign against the "white plague" for personal reasons. His youngest daughter had died at the age of two after becoming ill aboard a ship where safe milk was unavailable. When he and his wife Lina heard of the work being done by Dr. Edward L. Trudeau at his Adirondacks sanitarium in upstate New

York, they decided to help in the fight against tuberculosis. In November 1889, the Strauses gave over \$1,000 towards the construction of a unit at the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium.<sup>12</sup> Then, in 1893, their eldest son, Jerome Nathan, who was about to enter Cornell University, suddenly became ill with pneumonia and died. The son had helped with his father's first milk stations and was thus exposed to assisting the less fortunate. As Jerome lay dying, he urged his father to devote his efforts to child welfare work, and thus began an intensified life of philanthropic endeavor.<sup>13</sup>

Soon after, their interest in tuberculosis turned toward work based on prevention. While Trudeau treated patients who had the disease, the Strauses wanted to prevent it from spreading through a common and recently discovered medium of transmission, milk.<sup>14</sup> Though his interest in milk was associated somewhat with the death of his two children, Straus and his family may also have been exposed to the problem during a stay at their summer home, where they enjoyed fresh milk from their own cows. One day, presumably in 1890, the farm manager informed Straus that one of the cows had died from tuberculosis, and Straus shuddered to think of the danger to which he and his family had been exposed. Not long afterward, he began to investigate the status of milk in New York City and found it, from production to distribution, to be immersed in filth and disease.<sup>15</sup>

As New York City grew in the 1880s and 1890s, fresh vegetables, meats, and dairy products became increasingly scarce commodities. Good, fresh milk was especially hard to come by. In order to shorten the distance from producer to consumer, and also to maximize profits, large dairies were operated in conjunction with breweries in Brooklyn. The swill or waste products from brewing were carried in troughs to the cows stabled nearby. Unfortunately, this sole source of food for the animals was far too rich for their bodies, resulting in ulcerations and diarrhea. Consequently, the quality of the milk produced was far below what would later be considered "standard" or "certified." Worse



yet, distributors and retailers further adulterated the already questionable substance. "The formula for this adulterated product was: to a gallon of milk add one pint of water [which may have been from a contaminated well], then a dash of chalk and plaster of Paris. On rare occasions a soupcon of egg would be added to increase the 'body.'"<sup>16</sup> Finally, to add literal insult to injury, the distributors charged rates for their milk which low-income families could not afford.

Nathan Straus had a clear grasp of the plight of the poor and of the importance of safe milk. But it was Dr. Abraham Jacobi, a prominent New York physician who had performed research on milk pasteurization techniques, who advised Straus to concentrate his money and energy on a pasteurized milk distribution program.<sup>17</sup> On June 1, 1893, Straus opened a pasteurized milk depot in New York City, the first in America, charging a penny per glass, two cents per pint, and four cents per quart. Located in front of the East Third Street Pier, milk was brought to the depot from Warwick, New York, under the medical supervision of one of the first physicians to support pasteurized milk, Dr. Rowland Godfrey Freeman.<sup>18</sup> Alexander Kinkead, Straus's secretary in charge of the operation, told the New York Times that the milk was sold below cost and proved to be extremely popular.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1893 and 1920, Straus increased his sponsorship of milk depots on Manhattan Island from one to eighteen. He also established five depots in Brooklyn. As a result, his campaign for pasteurized milk and better health facilities spread across America and eventually to Europe. The "vigor with which he advocated the operation of such depots must be recognized as having been a great force in the world in influencing cities to undertake the reduction of infant mortality by such means."<sup>20</sup> With his wife's help, Straus directed a long campaign in favor of pasteurized milk for children. Most of their efforts were exerted in behalf of the lower classes but in actual practice assistance was given to anyone in need. By June 1894, during a severe depression, Straus was distributing

pasteurized milk from six depots, and Kinkead stated that "the special object of the charity is to educate the poor people to understand the value of sterilized milk as a food for their babies, and to supply it at a reasonable rate."<sup>21</sup> By mid-summer, Straus had added an additional eight stations and decided to build a permanent pasteurization plant. Sales averaged about 6,000 glasses per day to a "colorful" assortment of patrons: "Hebrew mothers," "Union League members," workingmen, white collar-workers, and children. The city Board of Health stationed a "free doctor" at the depots to provide general check-ups for the children. Straus also gave the doctors coupon booklets, with coupons good for free milk, which they could distribute to families unable to provide for their children.<sup>22</sup>

As Straus expanded his efforts, he became part of the push by health reformers to stress the importance of prevention as a means to improve the status of one's health. The bacteriological revolution led to greater understanding of the causes of disease and how best to prevent infection. While the "attempts of the sanitarians of the first half of the nineteenth century were directed largely towards combating dirt, bad smells and overcrowded and uncleanly living and working conditions," wrote Edwin O. Jordan in 1921, "active endeavor now became transformed to the definite aim of preventing infection."<sup>23</sup> In 1898, when Mayor Van Wyck took office, in recognition of Straus's efforts of health reform, he appointed Nathan Straus to be a health commissioner and as President of the Board of Health.<sup>24</sup> Straus was one of only eight laymen to serve as Board president during the century from 1866-1966. Unfortunately, due to Tammany Hall politics, he was forced to resign within months of his appointment.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, his brief public service clearly indicates that he was at the forefront of the public health movement.

By 1895, Straus had erected a 4800 square-foot pasteurization plant, the largest of its kind in the world, at 151 Avenue C. He welcomed citizens to come and observe the pasteurization process and increase their knowledge regarding safe milk. After thirteen

years' operation, the plant on Avenue C had to be expanded, and thus 348 East 32nd Street became home to a new pasteurization and bottling plant. [See Table One.] By 1912, the New York Health Department's Child Hygiene Bureau operated its own depots as well. However, Straus's depots remained unique as a source of "modified" as well as pasteurized milk; the former containing additional ingredients such as fine barley, oats and sugar, recommended by Doctors Freeman and Jacobi.

Despite the growing popularity of Straus milk depots, Straus was criticized for trying to make a profit, taking advantage of ignorant people, and confusing the facts. A vocal segment of the medical profession did not believe in pasteurization, refusing to listen to a layman tell them what was healthy and what was not. At a time when the profession generally stood low in public esteem, its leaders were particularly sensitive to what they perceived as affronts to medical authority. Doctors like Henry L. Coit and Henry Dwight Chapin believed that pasteurization was unnecessary as long as cows were kept in sanitary environments and milked under hygienic conditions. Coit helped to establish the Certified Milk Movement which promoted the sanitation of the dairy, education of the dairyman about proper cleanliness, and governmental inspections of milk at each stage of production.<sup>26</sup> Many pediatricians and other opponents of pasteurized milk feared that "pasteurization not only encouraged carelessness in the handling of the milk supply, but also discouraged efforts to create a sanitary source for the production of a clean and safe milk."<sup>27</sup> Eventually Coit and the Certified Milk Movement were discredited when local, state and federal milk commissions performed tests on herds of cattle, discovering that on average thirty percent of U.S. dairy cows were tuberculous.<sup>28</sup> Although the Certified Milk Movement led to improvements in the processes of milking and distribution, it overlooked the crucial step of pasteurization.

The ultimate goals of the Straus campaign were pasteurized milk as the form of milk to drink, and the passage of municipal legislation compelling the milk producers to

insure proper pasteurization. Perhaps the greatest single boost to these objectives came in 1906, when the Hygienic Laboratory of the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service of the United States published its Bulletin Number 41, Milk and Its Relation to the Public Health. Under the direction of Surgeon-General Walter Wyman and Hygienic Laboratory Director Milton J. Rosenau, friends of Nathan Straus, this document was reissued in 1909 as Bulletin Number 56. The report provided statistics demonstrating the success of the milk campaign; in 1891, for example, when there was no pasteurized milk distribution system in New York City, the annual death rate among children under five years of age was 96.5 per 1,000. By 1906, when Straus's depots were distributing thousands of quarts per day, the child death rate had nearly halved to 55.0. In the summer months, which were always the deadliest, the death rate fell from 126.4 in 1891 to 62.7 in 1906.<sup>29</sup> During this particularly difficult season, Straus doubled his distribution efforts. [See Tables Two and Three.] Some of the most startling results of Straus's work came from Randall's Island where orphans were housed under the protection of New York State. Many of these children had already contracted tuberculosis or other diseases, giving them little chance for survival; others simply had no home. In 1895, before Straus introduced pasteurized milk to the children at Randall's Island, forty-two of every one hundred children died. After the installation of a pasteurization plant in 1898, the death rate fell to seventeen per one hundred by 1904, with an overall saving of 1,200 child lives during the six year period.<sup>30</sup> The decline of the child mortality rate was also partly attributable to other advances in public health, including general milk and food inspection, diphtheria antitoxin, fresh air campaigns, improved tenement housing, cleaner streets, and other hygienic factors. Despite the statistics and popularity of Straus's milk, New York was not the first city in the United States to mandate pasteurized milk. In January, 1909, Chicago became the first city to enact an ordinance mandating pasteurization of milk sold within its limits.<sup>31</sup>

In 1907, Straus and his wife began a year-long European campaign, with Nathan speaking at the Second International Congress Des Gouttes De Lait at Brussels in September. He had attended the first congress in 1905 in Paris and was the only American to speak in favor of pasteurized milk. Meanwhile, the U.S. government had endorsed his work in the Hygienic Laboratory Bulletin Number 41.<sup>32</sup> Straus was well received in Brussels due to tremendous interest in his work, since nothing comparable had yet been done in Europe. Nathan and Lina then went to Liverpool where they donated a pasteurizing plant and the services of a medical officer to supervise its installation. Following a tour of England, Straus offered to build twenty-five additional plants and to employ Dr. S.G. Moore, the former Health Officer of Liverpool and later Huddersfield as the project's medical supervisor.<sup>33</sup> Just as Andrew Carnegie built libraries and relied on the different communities to fill them with books, Straus built pasteurization plants as long as the municipality guaranteed continued use of only pasteurized milk in the town.

Straus went on to donate pasteurizing plants to Dublin, Heidelberg and Karlsruhe, Germany, and also one in Austria. After a meeting with Lady Aberdeen in Ireland, he had a private audience with the Grand Duchess of Karlsruhe, who was interested in his charitable work and reportedly "expressed her gratitude not only for the good Mr. Straus's own laboratories in Germany are doing, but for the widespread interest in the cause of humanitarian work which the New Yorker's initiative has called forth."<sup>34</sup>

A year after Straus's return from Europe, news reports began to give accounts of his successful overseas endeavors. Not only did the milk save babies, but it also changed people's minds and attitudes. Prominent British and German physicians, who had been skeptical about pasteurization, wholly endorsed it after seeing the results.<sup>35</sup> The mayor of Sandhausen, a District of Heidelberg in Baden, Germany, wrote to Nathan Straus in 1911: "You will surely rejoice to learn that in the past month of January there has not been a single death of children under two years of age. If only the world would recognize that

the Pasteurization of milk in laboratories such as you have established one here, is the only effective protection against infantile mortality."<sup>36</sup>

Although milk pasteurization had gained modest success by the middle of the Progressive Era, there were still battles to be fought. However, Straus took tough times in stride, once telling his wife that when things look gloomiest, "Now we have something to fight for."<sup>37</sup> But, in 1910, Dr. William Park, a noted doctor in New York, claimed that only 2.5% of all tuberculosis cases were caused by milk, an argument that seemed to undermine the need for pasteurization. At this point James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald began a series of vicious attacks on Straus. This incident between Dr. Park, Bennett, and Straus raises the question of Straus's character. While many contemporaries lauded his work others felt that Straus was doing it merely for the name recognition. Unquestionably, Straus was a strong-willed and occasionally indignant man.<sup>38</sup> He preferred to work alone and only once in his life did he team up with a fellow philanthropist, J.P. Morgan, to help the needy. Straus tended to steer clear of committees and bureaucracies as he felt they were a waste of money and time. He wanted to direct his resources to a specific solution. His milk work was done entirely by himself, his wife, his sons, various secretaries, and Doctors Freeman and Jacobi. Every bottle and glass of milk as well as every delivery truck and distribution depot literally had the Nathan Straus signature on it. [See Figure One.] Straus was extremely proud of the work he had done and the lives he had saved. He felt that by helping children and adults gain access to a healthy product he improved the world a little. However, there were two things which he would not stand for: the dissemination of lies and questions about his motives. When the attacks by the New York Herald turned personal, Straus decided to close the depots. He neither profited from the milk distribution nor used the philanthropy for name recognition.

Both the New York Times and the Evening Journal published numerous editorials, articles, and personal pleas for Straus to continue his work, and the Daily Express carried

a telegram from Lady Aberdeen of Ireland praising the good that Straus's pasteurization plant was doing in Dublin. Nevertheless, on September 1, 1910, Straus ordered his depots closed. The Health Commissioner of New York City, Dr. Lederle; the President of New York City College, John Finlay; writer, Theodore Dreiser; the New York City Board of Aldermen, and a host of other individuals pleaded with the philanthropist to reopen them. Thousands of men and women gathered at the Cooper Union on the Lower East Side of Manhattan to express their appreciation to Straus and their desire to see his work continue. Finally, on October 25, 1910, he reconsidered and reopened the depots.<sup>39</sup>

Following the controversy, a number of prominent figures in American business and philanthropy gathered at a banquet honoring Straus's contribution to child welfare. August Belmont, Andrew Carnegie, William Randolph Hearst, Henry Morgenthau, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles M. Schwab, and William Sulzer were members of the committee that organized the event at the Cafe Boulevard. More than 1,000 people attended the dinner on the night of January 31, 1911, receiving a booklet detailing the merchant's philanthropic endeavors. The honor paid to Nathan Straus on this occasion was a testimony to the far-reaching effects of his struggle on behalf of humanity.

By 1912, Straus had established pasteurized milk laboratories in such diverse places as the Phillipines, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Dublin. [See Table Four.] In doing so, he had instilled in the minds of philanthopists, doctors, health officers, politicians, and the public the importance of pasteurized milk. In dedicating his 1912 book The Milk Question to Nathan Straus, Milton J. Rosenau expressed his belief that no discussion of pasteurized milk and its effect on infant health was complete "without recognition of the debt we owe Mr. Nathan Straus for his early and persistent advocacy of pasteurization and the establishment of his infant's milk depots. Through his influence and philanthropy this movement has now spread to many cities of this country and abroad."<sup>40</sup>

In New York City alone, Straus's work spread through a variety of ethnic, working-class neighborhoods, despite his "uptown" residency and upper-class status. Blacks, Irish, Jews, and Italians all had access to milk depots. [See Map One.] Straus's chief concern remained with children and preventive medicine, regardless of class or race. Occasionally however, Straus would increase his distribution specifically to help those less fortunate or temporarily displaced. For example, during a cloak and suitmaker's strike in 1916, Straus extended his concerns to "all sufferer's of the strike," and issued free milk coupons. [See Figure Two.] Straus dropped class and business related issues when it came to public health.

In 1919, after twenty-seven years as a leader and innovator in public health, Nathan Straus decided to withdraw from his pioneering work. On January 5, 1919, the following letter appeared in the New York Times:

My Dear Mr. Mayor:

The educational side of my work is finished. The necessity of milk pasteurization for both children and adults is today recognized by scientists and by the medical profession throughout the world and its principles are embodied in the ordinances now in force in this city, for only through pasteurization can we obtain effective protection against milk-borne diseases...

I should be perfectly willing to lease it (the plant and equipment) to the city at the nominal rent of \$1 per year, or to give it to the city in fee, subject only to the condition that it should always be used for the benefit of the children of New York. If the time should ever arise when it was no longer needed for milk pasteurization then it could be used for scientific purposes in experimental work on dairy products.

Sincerely,

Nathan Straus

After over a year of inaction, Straus renewed his offer, stating that he would close the depots if the city rejected his offer. Finally on August, 12, 1920, New York City Health Commissioner Royal S. Copeland announced that the city would assume operation of the



Straus Pasteurization Laboratory and the milk stations. In accepting the offer, Dr. Copeland stated that "Nathan Straus, through his milk stations, has saved more lives than any one man that I know of" and that "his gift of the milk stations and laboratory is the greatest gift that the City of New York has ever received."<sup>41</sup> Thus on September 2, 1920, the philanthropist's twenty-seven year crusade for child and public health came to an end. Speaking at the transition ceremony, General Nelson A. Miles explained that, as a soldier, he "fought a visible enemy and that he had seen all sorts of heroic deeds, but that Nathan Straus fought an invisible enemy in as scientific a manner as ever a soldier had done."<sup>42</sup> While Miles may have witnessed the deaths of thousands, Straus had helped to save thousands. A New York Health Department Report credited the philanthropist with saving the lives of over 250,000 people by distributing milk through his depots.<sup>43</sup> [See Table Five.]

On January 12, 1912, Rabbi Samuel Schulman, friend and rabbi to the Straus family, wrote in a letter to Nathan Straus that

You have certainly by your unique philanthropic work, directed to the saving of children by the safeguarding of the quality of the milk, which is their main nourishment, realized in your life, the teachings of Judaism, which to quote the Talmud, tells us that 'he who has saved one life, is as if he had observed the whole Torah [sic].'<sup>44</sup>

The rabbi quoted an often cited phrase of the Talmud, the written source of Jewish *halacha* or way of life, to the effect that for he who saves one life, it is as if he saved the whole world. As Schulman indicated, Straus exemplified Judaism in its historic and contemporary forms. In contrast with the Judaism of the pre-Enlightenment era, Reform Judaism focused largely on social action and social justice. Straus's efforts on behalf of humanity made him as religious a Jew as one who prays and studies Torah continuously.

Perhaps the reason why Straus did not try to make a profit from his milk depots was his interest in something other than recognition and money. By observing the Jewish

philanthropic tradition of helping others to help themselves, he fulfilled a commandment. On a more subconscious level as an immigrant of a much despised religious group, Straus might have performed such benevolent acts with the intention of gaining respect and admiration for the American Jewish community at large, which surely is far more beneficial than a monetary return. Straus and his family had made their impact in the American marketplace and politics. By tearing down part of the wall of anti-Semitism, Nathan Straus could have truly said that he benefitted humanity. Again, Straus was not unique in his efforts to give a good name to the American Jewish community; yet, his actions and ideas were innovative. Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company, gave millions of dollars to rural schools for African-Americans living in the American South. Jacob Schiff, president of the banking firm Kuhn, Loeb & Company, gave millions to Harvard, Columbia, the Salvation Army and other secular institutions. These men, and others like them, gave generously to Jewish and non-Jewish causes. They "tried hard to prove that they were like other respectable Americans, but many *goyim* could not get that through their heads."<sup>45</sup> Regardless of their philanthropies they remained Jewish and while they were proud of their heritage and notably inspired by it, it was a disappointment that they continued to be labelled and segregated.

**TABLE ONE**

The following figures demonstrate the way in which the work expanded over the years. The figures are given by years ended September 1.

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>BOTTLES</u></b>	<b><u>GLASSES</u></b>
1893	34,400	.....
1894	306,446	572,150
1895	589,064	371,360
1896	658,064	576,178
1897	647,728	369,900
1898	567,533	706,140
1899	566,096	783,000
1900	690,240	854,100
1901	791,151	765,000
1902	1,202,287	875,700
1903	1,777,612	692,685
1904	2,233,818	811,090
1905	3,167,871	1,016,731
1906	3,140,252	1,078,405
1907	3,031,510	1,230,130
1908	4,167,675	1,411,017
1909	3,319,063	1,522,998
1910	2,900,675	1,384,021
1911	2,217,512	1,335,363
1912	2,193,684	1,326,100
1913	2,193,210	1,542,419
1914	2,148,119	1,747,984
1915	2,175,208	1,441,580
1916	2,153,963	1,595,447
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42,873,181</b>	<b>24,009,498</b>

Source: Lina Gutherz Straus, Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization, the Life Work of Nathan Straus, Second Edition (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1917), 77.

**TABLE TWO**

**POPULATION, DEATHS AND DEATH RATE OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE**

**(Old City of New York -- Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx)**

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b>POPULATION UNDER FIVE YEARS OF <u>AGE</u></b>	<b>DEATHS UNDER FIVE YEARS <u>OF AGE</u></b>	<b>DEATH RATE PER 1,000 <u>PER YEAR</u></b>
1891	188,703	18,224	96.5
1892	194,214	18,684	96.2
1893	199,885	17,865	89.3
1894	205,723	17,558	85.3
1895	212,983	18,221	85.3
1896	217,071	16,807	77.4
1897	221,339	15,395	69.6
1898	225,804	15,591	69.1
1899	230,480	14,391	62.5
1900	235,585	15,648	66.4
1901	240,078	14,809	61.7
1902	244,652	15,017	61.4
1903	249,310	13,741	55.1
1904	254,051	16,136	63.5
1905	258,841	15,287	59.1
1906	263,367	15,534	59.0
1907	268,095	15,645	58.4
1908	273,040	14,909	54.6
1909	278,221	14,940	53.7
1910	283,309	14,674	51.8
1911	290,662	13,769	47.4
1912	298,016	12,819	43.0
1913	305,370	12,442	40.7
1914	312,723	11,691	37.4
1915	320,077	12,017	37.5
1916	327,430	11,149	34.0

Source: Straus, Disease in Milk, 90.

**TABLE THREE**

**POPULATION, DEATHS, AND DEATH RATE OF CHILDREN FIVE YEARS OF AGE -- FOR THE MONTHS OF JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST ONLY**

(Old City of New York -- Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx)

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b>POPULATION UNDER FIVE YEARS OF <u>AGE</u></b>	<b>DEATHS UNDER FIVE YEARS <u>OF AGE</u></b>	<b>DEATH RATE PER 1,000 <u>PER YEAR</u></b>
1891	188,703	5,945	125.1
1892	194,214	6,612	135.2
1893	199,885	5,892	117.0
1894	205,723	5,788	111.7
1895	212,983	6,183	115.2
1896	217,071	5,671	103.7
1897	221,339	5,401	96.9
1898	225,804	5,047	88.7
1899	230,480	4,689	80.7
1900	235,585	4,562	76.9
1901	240,078	4,642	76.8
1902	244,652	4,389	71.2
1903	249,310	4,037	64.3
1904	254,051	4,805	75.1
1905	258,841	4,892	75.0
1906	263,367	4,426	66.7
1907	268,095	5,030	74.5
1908	273,040	4,336	63.0
1909	278,221	4,067	58.0
1910	283,309	4,426	62.0
1911	290,662	3,669	50.1
1912	298,016	3,407	45.4
1913	305,370	3,261	42.4
1914	312,723	2,937	37.3
1915	320,077	3,358	41.6
1916	327,430	3,256	39.5

Source: Straus, Disease in Milk, 90.

**TABLE FOUR**

By 1916, the following cities had followed Straus's example of opening infant milk depots. The cities appear in the order in which they adopted a pasteurized milk program.

<b><u>CITY</u></b>	<b><u>NUMBER OF MILK DEPOTS</u></b>
New York	79
Philadelphia	25
Chicago	20
St. Louis	12
Boston	12
Cleveland	15
Baltimore	2
Pittsburgh	21
Detroit	6
Buffalo	2
Milwaukee	4
Cincinnati	9
Newark	2
New Orleans	15
Los Angeles	5
Minneapolis	4
Kansas City	6
Indianapolis	6
Louisville	4
Rochester	12
Jersey City	2
Providence	4
Denver	1
Syracuse	2
New Haven	4
Scranton	1
Birmingham	1
Paterson, N.J.	1
Omaha	3
Dayton, Ohio	4
Lowell	1
Nashville	4
	<hr/>
TOTAL	297

Source: Straus, Disease in Milk, 79.

**TABLE FIVE**

**DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE AND LIVES SAVED  
(Old City of New York -- Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx)**

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b>NUMBER THAT WOULD HAVE DIED AT 1892 <u>RATE</u></b>	<b><u>ACTUAL NUMBER OF DEATHS</u></b>	<b><u>LIVES SAVED</u></b>
1893	19,229	17,865	1,364
1894	19,790	17,558	2,232
1895	20,486	18,221	2,265
1896	20,882	16,807	4,075
1897	21,293	15,395	5,898
1898	21,722	15,591	6,131
1899	22,172	14,391	7,781
1900	22,663	15,648	7,015
1901	23,095	14,809	8,286
1902	23,535	15,017	8,518
1903	23,984	13,741	10,243
1904	24,440	16,136	8,304
1905	24,901	15,287	9,614
1906	25,336	15,534	9,802
1907	25,791	15,645	10,146
1908	26,266	14,909	11,357
1909	26,765	14,940	11,825
1910	27,254	14,674	12,580
1911	27,962	13,769	14,193
1912	28,669	12,819	15,850
1913	29,376	12,442	16,934
1914	30,084	11,691	18,393
1915	30,791	12,017	18,774
1916	31,499	11,149	20,350
TOTAL	<u>597,985</u>	<u>356,055</u>	<u>241,930</u>

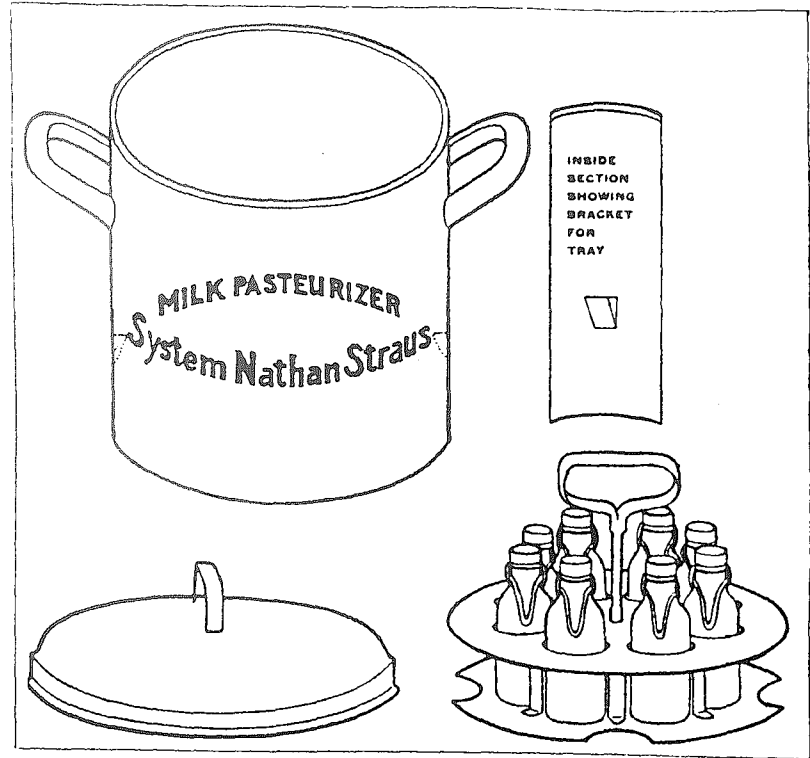
Source: Straus, Disease in Milk, 91.

FIGURE ONE

Directions For Manufacturing Home Pasteurizer--  
System Nathan Straus



DELIVERY AUTOMOBILE.



	SIZE I Eight 3 oz. Bottles	SIZE II Eight 6 oz. Bottles	SIZE III Six 8 oz. Bottles	SIZE IV Six 16 oz. (pint) Bottles
--	----------------------------------	-----------------------------------	----------------------------------	---

Height of Pan.....	10½ in.	10¼ in.	12 in.	14¼ in.
Diameter of Pan.....	10½ in.	10¼ in.	10½ in.	10½ in.
Distance of Top of Bracket from Bottom of Pan.....	3 7/16 in.	4¾ in.	4¾ in.	6¾ in.
Amount of Water.....	5 quarts	6¾ quarts	7¾ quarts	9 quarts

Source: Straus, Disease in Milk, 38, 86.



FIGURE TWO

No. 1437

**SAVE THE BABIES**  
**FREE DISTRIBUTION OF MILK**  
*for the Relief of the*  
**SUFFERERS of the**  
**CLOAK and SUITMAKERS' STRIKE**

*Nathan Straus*

**NATHAN STRAUS PASTEURIZED MILK**

SERIES JULY 1916 26

*This Coupon is Good at any of the Following Depots:*

348 E. 32d Street	54 Market Street	402 W. 37th Street
303 E. 111th Street	322 E. 59th Street	38 Macdougall Street
Tompkins Square Park, 7th Street and Avenue A		
Mount Morris Park, 116th Street near Madison Avenue		
Battery Park	East 3rd Street Pier	
Central Park	East 24th Street Pier	
Seward Park	East 112th Street Pier	
Educational Alliance	West Barrow Street Pier	
Roof Garden	West 50th Street Pier	

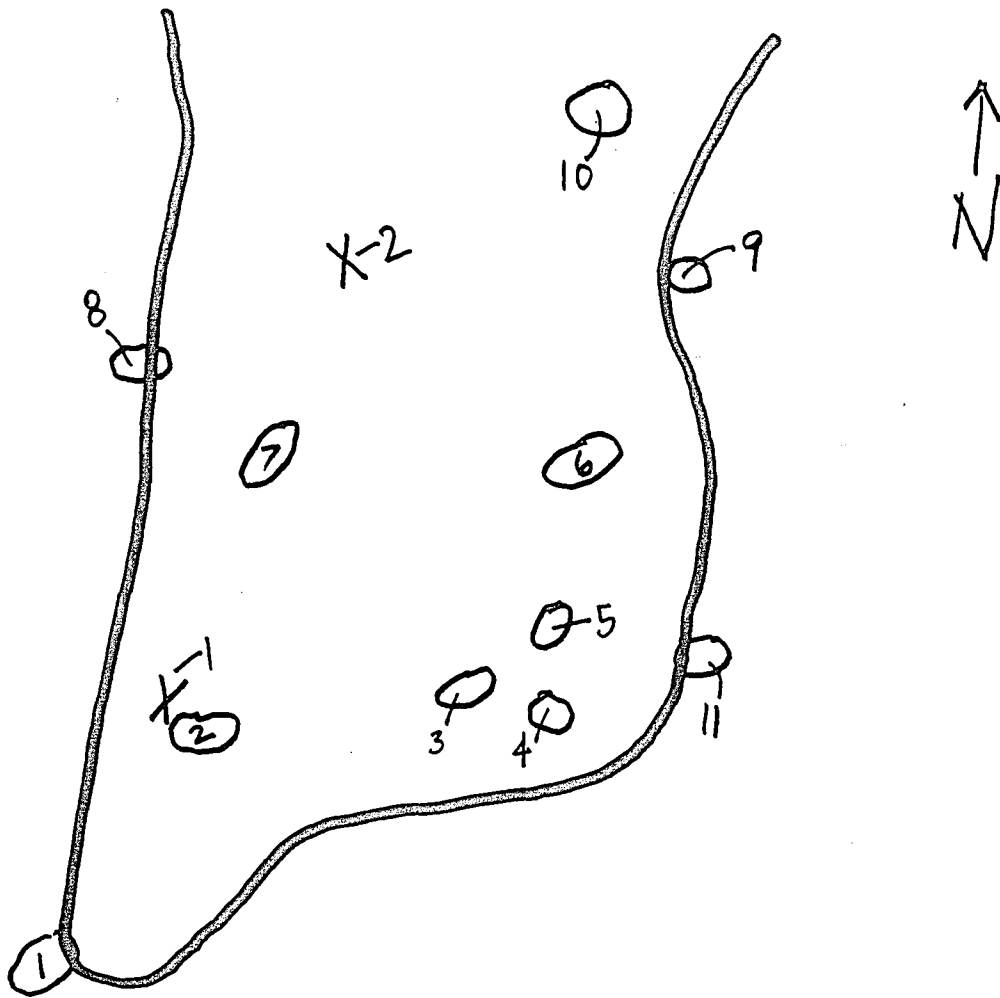
**FOR**

Five 6 oz. bottles, Formula No. 1,      Eight 3 oz. bottles, Formula No. 3  
or Five 6 oz.      "      No. 2,      or Eight 3 oz.      "      No. 4  
or Two 16 oz. bottles Pasteurized Whole Milk,  
or Four 8 oz. bottles Pasteurized Whole Milk,  
or Four glasses Pasteurized Milk.

Deposit required on bottles from everyone: 3 cents on each 16 oz. bottle; 2 cents on each 6 or 8 oz. bottle; 1 cent on each 3 oz. bottle; 2 cents on each stopper. This deposit is refunded on return of the bottle.

**THIS TICKET IS GOOD FOR ONE DAY'S FEEDING.**

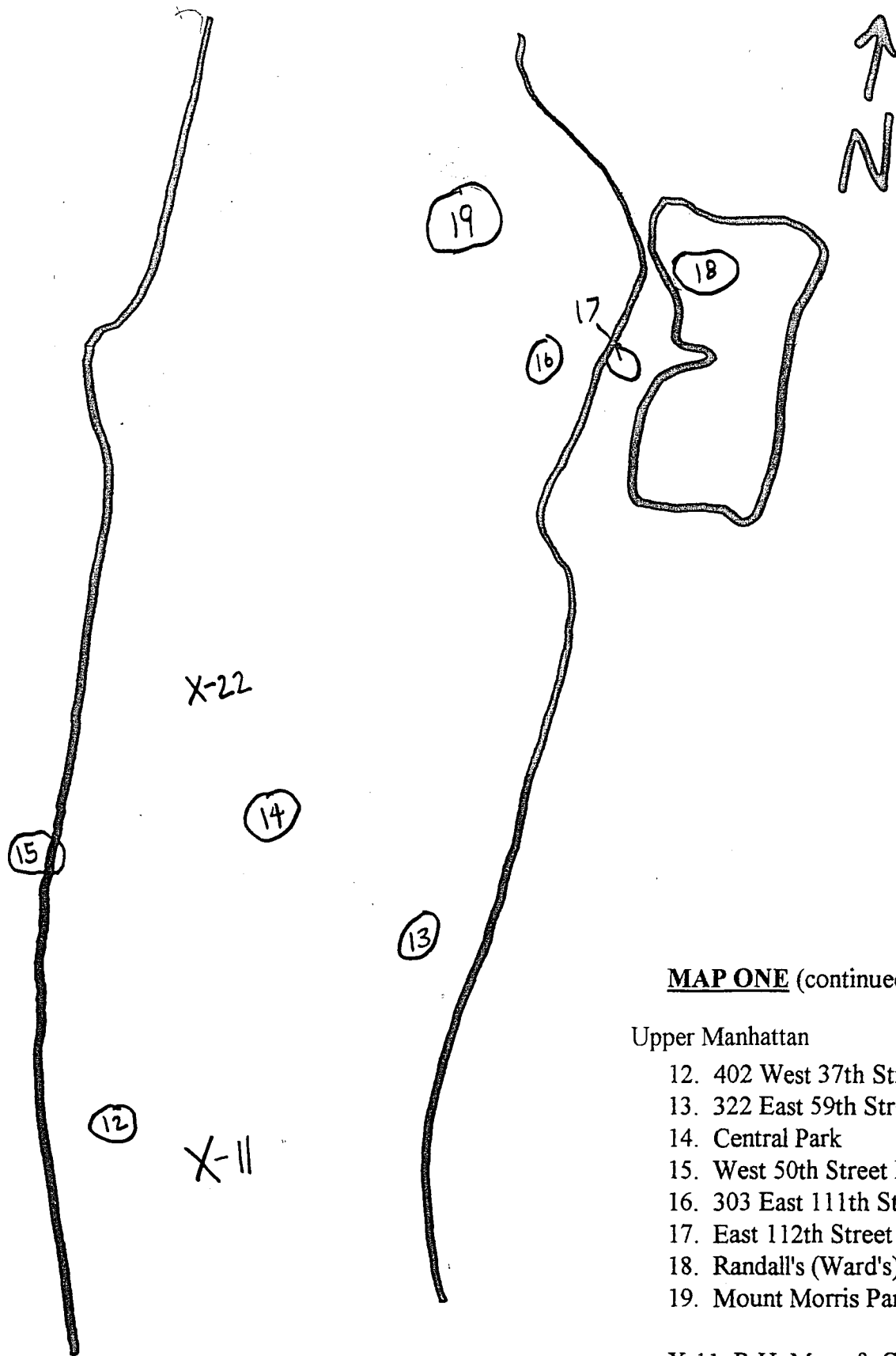
REPRODUCTION OF COVER AND LEAF FROM BOOK OF COUPONS.  
For Distribution of Milk for Strikers' Babies.



**MAP ONE**

Lower Manhattan -- Straus Milk Stations and business locations

1. Battery Park
2. City Hall Park
3. Seward Park
4. Educational Alliance Building (Jefferson Street at East Broadway)
5. 151 Avenue C (Pasteurization plant 1895-1908)
6. Tompkins Square (Seventh Street at Avenue A)
7. 38 Macdougall Street
8. West Barrow Street Pier
9. East 25th Street Pier
10. 348 East 32nd Street (Pasteurization plant after 1908)
11. East Third Street Pier
- X-1 L. Straus & Sons (42-48 Warren Street)
- X-2 R. H. Macy & Company (Sixth Avenue at Fourteenth Street until 1902)



**MAP ONE** (continued)

Upper Manhattan

- 12. 402 West 37th Street
- 13. 322 East 59th Street
- 14. Central Park
- 15. West 50th Street Pier
- 16. 303 East 111th Street
- 17. East 112th Street Pier
- 18. Randall's (Ward's) Island
- 19. Mount Morris Park

X-11 R.H. Macy & Co.  
(Herald Square after 1902)

X-22 Nathan Straus's home  
(27 West 72nd Street)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roy Lubove, The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 104.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bremner, American Philanthropy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 97.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, Jan. 31, 1922.

<sup>5</sup>Bremner, American Philanthropy, 107.

<sup>6</sup>North American Review, May 1894.

<sup>7</sup>Alexander Johnson, Methods and Machinery of the Organization of Charity (New York: Charity Organization Society, 1888).

<sup>8</sup>Bremner, American Philanthropy, 115 -- italics mine.

<sup>9</sup>Moses Rischin, The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 207.

<sup>10</sup>New Palestine, Feb. 3, 1928.

<sup>11</sup>John Duffy, A History of Public Health in New York City, 1866-1966 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 468. NYT, Aug. 12, 1920.

<sup>12</sup>Fourth Annual Report of the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium (Saranac Lake, NY, Nov., 1889), p. 12. It is hard to tell exactly how much the Strauses gave because they had also given a \$500 donation with a Mrs. W.J. Ehrlich in February 1889. The average cost for a four bedroom, two story cottage was between \$1300 and \$1500, judging by the expenditure sheets in the annual reports.

<sup>13</sup>Notes of reminiscences of Nathan Straus on S.S. Homeric, c. 1925. Herman Bernstein Papers, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Nathan Straus, Jr. Oral History Project, Columbia University.

<sup>14</sup>Milton J. Rosenau, The Milk Question (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912). Rosenau dedicated this book to Nathan Straus.

<sup>15</sup>Tina Levitan, The Firsts in American Jewish History (Brooklyn: Charuth Press, 1952), 170-171.

<sup>16</sup>Norman Shaftel, "A History of the Purification of Milk in New York or How Now Brown Cow," New York State Journal of Medicine, 58 (March, 1958), 913.

<sup>17</sup>Charles E. North, "Milk and Its Relation to Public Health," in A Half-Century of Public Health, Mazyck Porcher Ravenal, ed. (New York: Arno, 1970), 272. This book was a reprint done of the 1921 edition of the book.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 278.

<sup>19</sup>New York Times, May 30, 1893; June 2, 1893; June 21, 1893; July 30, 1893. A quart of milk at normal retail was between eight and ten cents.

<sup>20</sup>North, "Milk and Its Relation to Public Health," 279.

<sup>21</sup>New York Times, May 16, 1894; June 9, 1894; July 7, 1894.

<sup>22</sup>New York Times, July 16, 1894.

<sup>23</sup>Edwin O. Jordan, "The Relations of Bacteriology to the Public Health Movement Since 1872," American Journal of Public Health, 1921, 1046.

<sup>24</sup>Duffy, A History of Public Health in New York City, 1866-1966, 239.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>26</sup>Manfred Wasserman, "Henry L. Coit and the Certified Milk Movement in the Development of Modern Pediatrics," Bulletin of History of Medicine 46 (Jul-Aug 1972), 370.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 373.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 381.

<sup>29</sup>Hygienic Laboratory, Bulletin Number 56: Milk and Its Relation to the Public Health, Revised and Enlarged Edition of Bulletin Number 41 (Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1909), 241.

<sup>30</sup>Milk and Its Relation to the Public Health, 242.

<sup>31</sup>New York Times, Jan. 2, 1909.

<sup>32</sup>Lina Gutherz Straus, Disease in Milk: The Remedy Pasteurization, the Life Work of Nathan Straus, Second Edition (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1917), 221.

<sup>33</sup>New York Times, Oct. 20, 1907; Nov. 17, 1907. Dr. Moore had received recognition for developing a home child care nursing service.

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, Dec. 18, 1907.

<sup>35</sup>New York Times, May 23, 1909.

<sup>36</sup>Letter from Mayor Hembrecht of Sandhausen, District of Heidelberg, Baden, Germany to Nathan Straus, Feb. 1, 1911. Nathan Straus Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>37</sup>Notes of reminiscences of Nathan Straus on S.S. Homeric, c. 1925. Herman Bernstein Papers.

<sup>38</sup>Historian Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, interview by author, 5 January 1993, Cincinnati.

<sup>39</sup>New York Times, Aug. 25, 1910; Aug. 26, 1910; Sept. 1, 1910; Sept. 5, 1910; Sept. 21, 1910; Oct. 9, 1910; Oct. 12, 1910.

<sup>40</sup>Rosenau, The Milk Question, 208.

<sup>41</sup>New York Times, Aug. 12, 1920.

<sup>42</sup>New York Times, Sept. 2, 1919.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Samuel Schulman to Nathan Straus, Jan. 12, 1912. Nathan Straus Papers.

<sup>45</sup>Milton Goldin, Why They Give: American Jews and Their Philanthropies (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976), 38.

## The American Jewish Community, Zionism and Palestine

Nathan Straus intended his philanthropic work in milk to be for all humanity. His goal was the improvement of the public health. As a consequence of his efforts, he gained respect, recognition, and actually helped a generation of youths. Some Jews criticized Straus for working so hard on a campaign which did not focus on specifically Jewish concerns. Those who felt his secular work was detrimental to the Jewish community failed to comprehend Straus's philosophy and the Jewish ethic of giving and caring for all persons. American Jewish philanthropists of the late nineteenth century tried to balance their donations to Jewish and secular institutions in an attempt to prove their Americanism as well as their belief and pride in Judaism. As American Jews became increasingly assimilated, a large split developed between the established and the immigrant communities.

One of the great problems facing the American Jewish community in the early twentieth century was this lack of unity. "Uptown" or established Jews frequently blamed "downtown" Jews for the growth of anti-Semitism. Certain elements of the established community were embarrassed by their poor immigrant cousins and disliked having to help alleviate the condition of the poor. While "uptown" Jews blamed their newly arrived coreligionists for their not gaining acceptance in the non-Jewish social community, the "downtowners" remained alienated and disaffected as they refused to accept responsibility for what they considered mild inconveniences. After all, "compared to a pogrom, a residential covenant which prohibited Jews, or a policy of not accepting Jews at certain high-class resorts" looked rather insignificant.<sup>1</sup> The torrent of immigrants and the rise of social welfare organizations led to a proliferation of Jewish communal groups. The established Jewish community went to help their coreligionists in part to "Americanize" them but also in remembrance of *K'lal Yisrael*, the community of Israel. In effect,

"organized charity became a principal bridge between the 'uptown' and 'downtown' Jews."<sup>2</sup> However, as the new immigrants arrived, they felt more comfortable with their fellow eastern Europeans and began to establish their own agencies to take care of their own problems rather than look to the intimidating "uptowners."<sup>3</sup> By 1918, the New York City Jewish community alone had 3,997 organizations. In 1927, "the 4,228,000 Jews of America had 17,500 registered organizations to support their political, fraternal, welfare, defense, and economic needs."<sup>4</sup> Thus, while Jews in America retained their heritage and adapted to their new surroundings, they experienced divisions which left them isolated, confused, and ill-prepared for the future.

More than any other question, the issues of Palestine and Zionism created the deepest schisms within the community. American Jews aligned themselves on all sides ideologically, financially, and politically. While most religious Jews considered the creation of a modern, messianic Jewish state impossible until God sends the Messiah, secular Jews considered a Jewish state the answer to anti-Semitism. Initially, Reform Jews tended to believe that a Jewish state was not necessary since political emancipation enabled Jews in the modern world to have citizenship. Meanwhile other Jews seized onto the concept of a Jewish state as the fulfillment of a lifetime of dreams. They considered Palestine as the place where Jews could return and reestablish themselves as a nation. Unfortunately, while American Jews tried to determine where they stood on Palestine and Zionism, thousands of their brethren died in Europe during World War I and afterward. During the period 1910-1940, European and American Jews entered into an ideological and financial power struggle over the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Zionism is a Jewish nationalistic movement that began in the nineteenth century, as European Jews sought to counterbalance the Enlightenment, assimilation, Judaism, and messianism. Zionism is a modern movement in its affirmation of the right of self-determination for Jews as a people, a nation, and a religion. Zionism, in essence, is the



modern manifestation of a people who have been in exile since the destruction of their Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. As an adjunct to the forces of liberalism and nationalism, in the late nineteenth century, Zionism fits as part of larger movements. In accordance with Jewish teachings that the Jewish people are to be a nation of priests who will spread the word of God, Zionism takes the messianic era "to full flower in a national community in Palestine living as a moral priesthood whose authority is accepted by all mankind."<sup>5</sup> If the Jews could create a nation of their own, they could break the "parochial molds of Jewish life in order to become part of the general history of man in the modern world."<sup>6</sup> Finally, Zionism is a means for Jews to be like all the other nationalities of the world by creating a separate Jewish state.

Under the direction of activists and philosophers such as Theodore Herzl, Professor Chaim Weizmann of Manchester, England, Rabbi Judah Magnes, Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, and U.S. Circuit Court Judge Julian Mack, Zionism led ultimately to the creation of a Jewish state. However, during the first half of the twentieth century, the movement divided the world Jewish community, leaving many of its members in isolation. Cultural, revisionist, political, and religious Zionists each, in turn, attempted to control planning for the establishment of a homeland in Palestine. Prior to World War I, Palestine was under Turkish rule. Following British General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem in 1917, Palestine became part of the British Mandate. Subsequently, many European Zionists looked to Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, as their leader during the 1920s and 1930s, and Weizmann eventually became the first president of Israel. In America, Zionists divided between the "Weizmann faction" and the "Brandeis-Mack faction," each group representing a different element of the American Jewish community and a different philosophical strain of Zionism. In 1913, Louis Brandeis had been a leader of the Federation of American Zionists, which was a

loose amalgamation of Zionist groups in the United States. In the early 1920s, the FAZ became a more centralized organization as the Zionist Organization of America.

The split which occurred between Weizmann and Brandeis went to the roots of Zionism as "Weizmann saw the Zionist movement as a national renaissance, while Brandeis saw it as a political phenomenon."<sup>7</sup> In retrospect and at the time, the debate was labelled as one between Pinsk and Washington, East versus West, traditional, messianic Jews and assimilated, secular Jews. The dispute between the two factions reached its apex in 1921 when the struggle for power erupted over fundraising. The WZO and Weizmann followers wanted one central fundraising organization for Zionists world-wide: the Karen Ha-Yesod. Brandeis and his followers in the ZOA wanted a separate fundraising branch for American Zionists which they would be allowed to disperse as they so desired. Ultimately, Weizmann's interests carried the day at the ZOA Convention in June 1921. Consequently, Louis Brandeis, Julian Mack, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Dr. Harry Friedenwald, Nathan Straus, and thirty-one members of the National Executive Committee tendered their resignations from the ZOA. Straus was an honorary vice-president. One month later, this minority faction created the Palestine Endowment Funds, Inc. which was to create a program for Palestine development based on "a wholesale co-operative corporation, building and loan associations, industrial corporations, construction corporations, and a farm loan fund."<sup>8</sup> Straus became an honorary vice-president of this organization as well. Ironically, in 1930, because the Weizmann faction could not effectively manage the ZOA, they invited the Brandeis-Mack contingent back into the leadership ranks. Regrettably, this division of opinion led to wasted time, effort, and money as the American Jews found themselves confronted by such difficult post-World War I issues as European refugees, settlements in Russia, and developments in Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

One of the earliest attempts to unite the Jewish community was made by a group of "uptown" Jews, Oscar Straus and Louis Marshall prominent among them. Oscar

Straus, Nathan's younger brother, served as the United States emissary and later ambassador to Turkey during the Cleveland, McKinley, and Taft Administrations. As Secretary of Commerce and Labor for Theodore Roosevelt, he was the first Jewish cabinet member. In 1906, Oscar Straus, Marshall, Schiff, Magnes, and several other wealthy, assimilated Jews of German ancestry, formed the American Jewish Committee (AJComm). The AJComm had visions of uniting the Jewish community under the leadership of a core group of policy-making elites, a leadership that tended to "be more concerned with their Americanism and viewed their Jewishness in religious rather than ethnic terms."<sup>10</sup> Following the lead of Reform Judaism, the Committee remained anti-Zionist at worst and non-Zionist at best, placing the highest value on acceptance and assimilation as measures of success. By supporting the notion of a Jewish state in Palestine, they feared calling into question their Americanism and commitment to the United States. The result was ambivalence, since, on the one hand, men like Jacob Schiff and Oscar Straus had achieved considerable prominence in American society and government, yet, on the other, many Jews felt uncomfortable with their position in America. Many successful Jews feared losing what they had achieved, and did not consider the establishment of a Jewish homeland of paramount importance. After the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, however, the AJComm, led by Louis Marshall, approved the creation of a homeland for Jews.

The core group of leaders who created agencies like the American Jewish Committee have been criticized for being elitist, exclusionary, and too compromising with the larger community. Historian Milton Goldin believes that "this self-appointed group spoke for all Jews independently of any referendum and looked forward to full integration of Jews in American life. They were willing to use money, power, and influence unstintingly to achieve their goal." He goes on to state that "unanimity of purpose would be their most striking characteristic...remarkably free of backbiting, distrust, and struggles

over power that common efforts usually engender."<sup>11</sup> By attempting to distinguish themselves from their coreligionists, the established Jews alienated that group which they were trying to help. The German-Russian schism in the Jewish community has been recounted in most American Jewish historical volumes but frequently neglects to give sufficient credit to critical individuals like Nathan Straus, Stephen Wise, Judah Magnes, or Louis Brandeis who worked to bridge the gap between "uptown" and "downtown," employer and employee, American and foreign. Nathan Straus was not on the board of directors for the American Jewish Committee, perhaps in part because of his distaste for bureaucracy and more importantly his instinctive association with his coreligionists downtown. Since Straus believed in "deed, not creed," his lack of involvement in the American Jewish Committee speaks to his lack of strong association with "uptown" Jews. Yet, one can learn even more about his personality when realizing his involvement in its rival organization, the American Jewish Congress.

While the "uptown" Jews in the AJComm debated the issues of Jewish nationalism, they were confronted by a group of "downtown" Jews, who created an alternative organization, the American Jewish Congress (AJCong). Louis Brandeis realized the outbreak of World War I provided a glorious opportunity to unite the Jewish community on political grounds -- philanthropy being one aspect of that opportunity. Brandeis began a campaign "for an American Jewish Congress, a representative body whose delegates, elected by the masses, would work toward international solutions of Jewish problems."<sup>12</sup> During World War I, Jewish efforts to raise money on behalf of the United States and more importantly refugees in Europe did unite the community. Jews of all walks of life gathered at Carnegie Hall and the Cooper Union to raise millions of dollars during the war. Men like Straus, Schiff, and Rosenwald frequently led various campaigns by pledging tens of thousands of dollars at a time. During the war, "the community solidified its central position through such energetic and amazingly successful War Relief

drives...and concomitantly discovered previously untapped reservoirs of financial strength."<sup>13</sup> In order to benefit from the increased involvement within the Jewish community, leaders such as Nathan Straus, Louis Lipsky, Bernard Richards, and Stephen Wise drafted the platform for the AJCong. Officially formed in 1918, AJCong's "founders viewed it less as an organization than as a popular movement to unify American Jewry...and agreed to stay organized only for a specific purpose--to represent Jewish interests at the Paris Peace Conference."<sup>14</sup> In 1920, however, the AJCong was reorganized and became an advocate of Zionism. While the AJCong lacked the financial power and political connections of the AJComm, it was nonetheless crucial to the American Jewish experience. It is critical to note that several leaders of the AJCong lived "uptown," had financial means, and were of German ancestry -- Nathan Straus chief among them.

Nathan Straus, though not usually one to serve on committees and boards, served as either Honorary Chairman or President of the American Jewish Congress on several occasions. He spoke frequently at their conventions, and his name was on their letter-head; yet, he was more of a figure-head than an active organizer. An examination of the minutes and letters of the board shows that Straus was not always part of the decision-making process. Executive committee minutes indicate that although he was clearly respected by his associates, he was not the driving force behind the resolutions, reports, and actions. Rather, men like Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Joseph Barondess, and Bernard Richards carried the weight of decisions. Occasionally, AJCong meetings were held at Straus's office, where he was present, but usually his name appeared in the minutes only if someone mentioned him. Thus, while Straus was well-respected among his coreligionists in the Congress, he played but a minor role in its administration. Rather, he represented a time gone by; he was tradition. By 1920, he was seventy-two years old. Yet, it was his values upon which the new, young men would launch an effectual, practical assault in

favor of Judaism, Zionism, and a national homeland. In America, while immigration restrictions were being placed on Jews along with growing anti-Semitism, and as Jews suffered in Europe, Nathan Straus stood as a leader to whom people looked for dependable advice.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of the 1920 American Jewish Congress, honorary President Nathan Straus made the opening remarks. He said:

This is no time for extended speeches, although it would seem that speeches are always in order at a Jewish meeting. I merely wish to say that the Congress has abundantly justified itself during the last two years. There has been a great work for Jews to do together, and in the name and through the medium of the Congress they have done it. The delegation to Paris, led by Judge Mack, Mr. Louis Marshall and Dr. Wise, has done everything that could be done in order to protect and further Jewish interests. The Jewish name is more honored today than it was because we Jews have had the courage and self-respect to stand up together and try to solve our own problems.

My great-grandfather was one of the men whom Napoleon called together for the meeting of the first Jewish Sanhedrin more than a century ago. To me it is given to do something more than to have part in a new American Sanhedrin, for this Sanhedrin is called together not by a King or an Emperor, but by the will and determination of the whole Jewish people of America.<sup>16</sup>

In these remarks to the American Jewish Congress in 1920, Nathan Straus citation of the attendance of his great-grandfather at the Napoleonic Sanhedrin of 1807 is highly significant. This Sanhedrin, or council of elders, had the distinct goal of advising Napoleon on the political emancipation of Jews under his regime. Nathan Straus demonstrated the active involvement of his family in Jewish history over many decades. The idea behind the Congress was democratic representation as opposed to appointments as Napoleon had done in 1806. In 1920, over twenty organizations participated in the Congress, ranging from B'nai B'rith to the Jewish Theological Seminary to Jewish labor unions. Jews participated in the AJCongress as a means to determine American Jewish policy towards Palestine and the creation of a Jewish homeland. Much time had been lost during the 1910s because of varied opinions and World War I. In 1920, after the Balfour

Declaration and repeated attacks on Jews in Poland, the Jewish community looked as if it may have been on the verge of coming together on the issue of Zionism. For Straus to have led the AJCongress, even if only symbolically, represented a highlight of his lifetime. He had led a successful career in business and philanthropy by 1920. Furthermore, the Jewish community recognized him as a leader, a motivator, and an inspiration in his unending battle for humanity on behalf of Judaism.

Nathan Straus once said that "others may be better able than I to talk about Zionism--but none can feel it more deeply than I."<sup>17</sup> For Straus, Palestine, the American Jewish Congress, and similar efforts gave him the opportunity to express his Judaism, his Americanism, and his humanity. His efforts in Palestine transcended race and creed as he sought to benefit all the inhabitants of the Holy Land. Although he was but one of several philanthropists to have an impact on the settlement of Palestine, his contributions were reflective of his humanitarianism and innovative means of giving. Jews in Palestine and America hailed Nathan Straus not only for giving money as did Baron de Rothschild, Moses Montefiore, and Jacob Schiff, but also for giving his heart and mind to the cause of Judaism and humanity. While others may have given more monetarily, few of his peers were as fervent and devoted. Whatever he gave, Straus wanted assurance that the money would not pauperize or humiliate the recipients. He also sought to maintain an element of control over expenditures and to exercise supervision of the disbursement of funds, rather than making blanket, unspecified donations.

Traveling to the Holy Land for the first time in 1904, Nathan and Lina Straus were part of an organized tour which had stops at various points of interest in the Mediterranean. Straus later recalled that "on reaching Jerusalem we changed our plans. What we saw in the Holy Land made such a deep impression on us that we gave up the idea of going to other places. Visiting the holy sites, of which one hears and reads since childhood, watching scenes and life as pictured in the Bible, is most soul-stirring. From

that time on we felt a strange and intense desire to return to the Holy Land."<sup>18</sup> Back in America, they met Dr. Judah Magnes, rabbi, scholar, Zionist, and ultimately founding chancellor of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Together, Magnes and Straus decided to make a trip to Palestine in 1912 so that Straus might determine how best to help the growing region. Magnes had created the New York *Kehillah* (1908-1922), or community, as a means of uniting the two Jewish groups in New York: the "uptown" and the "downtown." Under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee, the Kehillah tried to bring social welfare, education, and cultural organizations under one umbrella in a unified effort. Although the vision of unity continued to elude the American Jewish community, men like Straus and Magnes never lost sight of the goal.<sup>19</sup>

In 1912, having traveled to Palestine with Judah and Beatrice Magnes, Nathan and Lina Straus saw the need for a soup kitchen in Jerusalem. Once underway, the Kuppas Tamhui served over 1,000 people daily, providing food regarded as superior to that of other soup kitchens in the city. One grateful recipient observed that "There is a vast difference between the Soup Kitchens. Mr. Straus's is done with love."<sup>20</sup> Those who criticized the Strauses over the Kitchen "said that it encouraged pauperism and that it drew undesirable element to Jerusalem."<sup>21</sup> In Jerusalem, however, the number of homeless and hungry was great, and the Straus soup kitchen and others like it were welcome relief for those without means. And in keeping with their universal humanitarianism, the kitchen was open to members of all races, creeds, and colors.

Upholding the idea of helping others to help themselves, the Strauses also established a number of workrooms that employed hundreds of individuals in making souvenirs and mother-of-pearl beads. Lina Straus, in her book on her and her husband's philanthropic work, mentioned that "in the Colonies, in the rural districts, agriculture offers work for all, but there are no industries for the city dweller."<sup>22</sup> She was particularly distressed by the number of unemployed people in Jerusalem despite the efforts of



Rothschild, Montefiore, and Baron de Hirsch. Writing to her brother-in-law, Oscar Straus, she described under-supported schools, hospitals, and asylums that fell far short of the need. The Strauses thus committed themselves to extensive efforts to helping the residents of Palestine. Fearing the loss of money through administrative costs, the Strauses supervised their own philanthropy, only later appointing Dr. Isaac Levy, President of the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Jerusalem, as trustee of their funds.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most important Straus philanthropies in Palestine was the establishment of a health department. Having witnessed the effective work done by Dr. Aaron Aaronsohn in Haifa, Straus wanted to do something similar in Jerusalem. The result was a health bureau organized in four divisions: general hygiene, bacteriology and serology, therapeutics and an eye dispensary.<sup>24</sup> To head the health bureau, Straus picked Dr. William Bruenn, a German Jew who had received his education and training in Berlin. Bruenn immigrated to Palestine where he was the physician for the Chedera colony. The health bureau's services were to be available for all inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the Strauses emphasized the primary importance of prevention as a means of combatting disease. In addressing the health problems in Palestine, the Strauses did not seek to be miracle workers but rather to encourage other Jews to help in the creation of a safe, healthy homeland.

Beside the need for health services in Jerusalem, Straus had another motive in establishing the health bureau. During the early 1910s, as the German government prepared for war in Europe, the Kaiser ordered the Hamburg Tropical Institute to make medical preparations for soldiers who might be needed to protect the Berlin-Constantinople-Baghdad railway. Dr. Bruenn, who was familiar with the Tropical Institute and suspicious of their increased interest in Palestine, encouraged Straus to open an independent health agency. Thus, when the Institute sent "doctors and sanitary engineers, one of whom was known to the Jews of Jerusalem as a dangerous and rabid

anti-Semite, to close cisterns and give quinine prophylaxis," Straus felt this added factor-- to counterweight to the German activity-- and was "convinced to answer the urgent call of Dr. Bruenn and the Jewish community."<sup>25</sup>

Other Straus philanthropies resulting from the 1912 visit included a substantial donation to the Bezalel Art School, the purchase of land opposite the Tomb of Rachel, a prospective university, endowment of a bed at Schaare Zedek Hospital in memory of Lazarus Straus, and sponsorship of a cleaning crew to sweep the street leading to the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, where the Holy Temple once stood, three times daily. Apparently, "this street was one of the dirtiest in all Jerusalem, but at Mr. Straus's orders and expense" it was kept in perfect condition.<sup>26</sup> Among the various Straus donations, those in behalf of preventive medicine and public health reform appear to be the most significant. The health bureau was based on European and American models; the workrooms and soup kitchen were an adjunct to his efforts to provide practical, useful philanthropy which would not deny the recipient his or her self-respect. No doubt the purchase of land for the prospective Hebrew University was influenced by Judah Magnes, who worked assiduously with Chaim Weizmann to establish a center of learning in Jerusalem.

These initiatives and activities were more than just philanthropy for Straus; they were a means by which he and his wife could express their Judaism in its universality. In addition, by supporting organizations that served for all races, creeds, and colors, they walked in a broad path of humanitarian effort. Following their second trip to Palestine, Nathan and Lina Straus went to Rome where Nathan served as an official United States delegate to the Third International Tuberculosis Convention. It was during their stay in Rome that the Strauses learned of the terrible news of the *Titanic* disaster. The news was particularly devastating for the Straus family because Isidor Straus and his wife Ida were on board the fated ship. Stories of heroism followed the *Titanic*. Isidor had refused to

board a lifeboat until all women and children were saved. As Ida wanted to stay with her husband, both perished. Upon returning home from Rome, Straus gave the following press release, a statement that not only indicated the Strauses' mood, but also pointed toward their future endeavors:

"A Brotherhood of Life"

There is such a shadow of sorrow hanging over my heart that I am not in a condition to talk. But I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks for the overwhelming tokens of sympathy which have poured forth from all parts of the world.

The one gleam of consolation I find in the darkness is the thought that it was a Jew and a Jewess who gave to the world this example of self-sacrifice, heroism and mutual love.

I have always heard a good deal of Christian love, but it is too often found wanting. I thought that by going to Palestine to the fountain-head I should surely find it. I return more bewildered than ever at the mutual hatred of the believers in the various creeds.

Turkish soldiers of the Moslem faith guard the Holy Sepulchre to keep the peace between Greek Church and Roman; while these three same Christians unite in persecuting the race from which their Saviour sprang. "Love one another" went forth the mandate from Jerusalem, and how pitifully has it been forgotten. Will it ever be thus?

In the "Titanic" tragedy all creeds were at least united in the brotherhood of death. If one could only hope for a brotherhood of life!

Why wait for death to teach us the lesson of human fraternity?<sup>27</sup>

Waiting less than a year to return to Palestine, in 1913, Nathan and Lina Straus brought with them: Eva Leon, Rachel Landy, and Rose Kaplan. These women established the American Daughters of Zion Nurses Settlement, Hadassah, a woman's Zionist organization formed in 1912 to address the public health problem in Palestine. Henrietta Szold, the first president of Hadassah, had a vision of establishing a Nurses' Settlement House in Palestine similar to Lillian Wald's in New York City. When Straus heard that Szold's dream was unfulfilled for lack of money, he replied, "That has nothing to do with it -- Start!"<sup>28</sup> Soon, he committed himself to providing transportation for two nurses and provisions for four months while the nurses settled in Jerusalem. Over the

years, the Strauses maintained a close connection with Hadassah, as they helped the women's organization grow in Palestine to greater usefulness.

Due to poor health and World War I, the Strauses were unable to return to Palestine until 1923. During the intervening years, however, they remained committed to Zionism, while turning their efforts to war relief for Jews in Europe, especially those in Poland. At the outbreak of war, Straus expressed gratitude for being in America while Europe broiled in conflict; consequently, he undertook to help those in need both during and after the hostilities. Straus also spoke whenever possible on the importance of working for peace and preventing the destruction of human life, calling on adherents of all religions to put their doctrines to work by uniting to assist those who suffered. He chastised the rich for failing to do their financial duty, and set a personal example by selling his horses, yacht, and island home, and by placing his Manhattan home on the market in order to raise additional funds.<sup>29</sup> At a meeting of the National League for Women's Services, Straus attacked those wealthy capitalists who spent \$250,000 on artwork while making millions off of the war effort, yet refusing to give to the war relief campaign. Though German born, he was fully committed to war relief.<sup>30</sup>

On November 2, 1917, when the British government issued the Balfour Declaration designating Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people, Zionists around the world celebrated the realization of a lifetime goal. Soon, Straus became the vice-chairman of the Palestine Restoration Fund, a trust of \$100,000,000 to be used for the development of a homeland. Speaking before thousands, Straus said,

I stand before you in appearance and somewhat in fact an old man. Many of these gray hairs have come through years of striving for the national cause of our people. My eyes have grown weak watching, my heart heavy with praying; but all this time, as the soldiers say, I carried on. And this moment is my reward.

All we who have worked for Zionism are rejuvenated now. But the support which is most necessary is that of the masses of Jews, and the masses of Jews are Zionists. If they are not I'm sorry for them. In Zionism the Jew and the non-Jew have found a bond of brotherhood.

This promise of England has made me young again. All Jews are young now. I feel that this appearance of mine is camouflage; I want to buy a horse and plow, a cow--for I can't be separated from the milk business--and begin a new life in the old land. All Jews are young now and we shall make our old country flow with milk and honey.<sup>31</sup>

In his later years, Straus continued to dedicate himself to efforts in Palestine, including his soup kitchen, the health bureau, and a Hadassah milk depot similar to the ones established in Manhattan. In 1927, he began work on the Nathan and Lina Straus Health Centre which was to be "the first of its kind in the Near East. It [became] the headquarters for a medical social service conducted by Hadassah for the benefit of all races and nationalities in Palestine."<sup>32</sup> The center contained laboratories, clinics, and classrooms among its facilities for research, clinical medicine, and education. After the cornerstone was laid during the dedicatory ceremonies, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that people of many nationalities were present to witness the opening of the health center on April 30, 1929, intended for all residents of the Holy Land. Henrietta Szold, director of Hadassah, spoke at the ceremony, expressing her gratitude and calling the Health Centre a "'Temple of Preventive Medicine, a People's Health University,' a crowning achievement of the Straus's work in Palestine." The Centre would allow Hadassah, she said, to centralize "its preventive undertakings and direct them conciously and effectively toward the end of educating the public in the art of hygienic living."<sup>33</sup> In recognition of Nathan Straus's philanthropy in behalf of Palestine, in 1928, the Jewish colonizing organization, B'nai Benyamin, bought 800 acres of land with which to create a fourth colony. Located between Jaffa and Cesarea, the new colony was named Netanyah, in honor of Nathan Straus.<sup>34</sup>

Nearly a year after the opening of the Health Centre, Lina Gutherz Straus died. Upon hearing the news of her death, the Zionists of America adopted a resolution praising her for having "typified the Biblical virtues of the Jewess."<sup>35</sup> The recently settled

community of Netanyah also adopted a resolution declaring that "all the girls born in Netanyah during this year, shall be named Lina." As a permanent memorial the community designated the Lina Straus Forest in honor of "the Immortal Mother" of Palestine.<sup>36</sup> During her life, Lina Straus encouraged thousands of Zionists and non-Zionists to aid in the struggle for a Jewish homeland; she was a companion and counselor to her husband in all his endeavors, and together, they generously shared their wealth for the betterment of humanity. After her death, certain newspapers printed erroneous articles asserting that the Strauses devoted their lives to Jewish charities. Nathan Straus immediately issued a press release, insisting that his

wife's charity knew no bounds. She loved all humanity. Her burning desire was to relieve distress. Neither she nor I knew any difference between Jew and non-Jew when we could be helpful. She sympathized with and perhaps in a measure inspired my own conviction that charity is the expression of divine love, and like divine love cannot be limited by race, creed or country. In all our work together that has been our guiding principle.<sup>37</sup>

With his wife gone, Nathan Straus survived only another eight months; he fell ill and never recovered.

In keeping with his belief that Jews have a special responsibility because of their heritage, Nathan Straus and his wife championed humanitarian efforts because of a belief in humanity and because of their Judaism. Their convictions of preventive medicine and helping others to help themselves demonstrate the universalism of Judaism and merged most appropriately in the Holy Land. For, as he so often said, "Out of Zion shall come forth the Law, and the word of God from Jerusalem."<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Henry L. Feingold, Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 143.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>3</sup>Milton Goldin, Why They Give: American Jews and Their Philanthropies (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976), 68.

<sup>4</sup>Henry L. Feingold, A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945, *The Jewish People in America*, ed., Henry L. Feingold, no. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>5</sup>Arthur Hertzberg, ed., The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader (New York: Atheneum, 1959), 20.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Stock, Partners and Pursestrings: A History of the United Israel Appeal (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 21.

<sup>8</sup>New York Times, July 5, 1921; Philip Goodman, 66 Years of Benevolence: The Story of PEF Israel Endowment Funds (New York: PEF Israel Endowment Funds, Inc., 1989), 7-9.

<sup>9</sup>Feingold, A Time for Searching, 155-188.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>11</sup>Goldin, Why They Give, 43.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>13</sup>Marc Lee Raphael, Understanding American Jewish Philanthropy (New York: KTAV, 1979), 79.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>15</sup>Source of information on Straus's role in the Congress comes from the American Jewish Congress files located at the American Jewish Historical Archives.

<sup>16</sup>AJCong files at the AJHS.

<sup>17</sup>New Palestine, Feb. 3, 1928.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Howard M. Sachar, A History of the Jews in America (New York: Knopf, 1992), 194-196.

<sup>20</sup>Conversation between Miss Landy and Nathan Straus. Judah Magnes Papers, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People.

<sup>21</sup>Lina Gutherz Straus, Disease in Milk, The Remedy Pasteurization: The Life Work of Nathan Straus, Second Edition (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1917), 149.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>23</sup>Lina Straus to Oscar Straus, March 21, 1912. American Jewish Committee Archives, American Jewish Committee.

<sup>24</sup>New York Times, March 24, 1913.

<sup>25</sup>Marla Levin, Balm in Gilead: The Story of Hadassah (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 19.

<sup>26</sup>New York Times, Sept. 28, 1913.

<sup>27</sup>Straus, Disease in Milk, 354.

<sup>28</sup>Levin, Balm in Gilead, 19.

<sup>29</sup>New York Times, Dec. 14, 1914; July 1, 1915; Oct. 15, 1915; Dec. 22, 1915; Feb. 11, 1916; May 30, 116.

<sup>30</sup>New York Times, May 19, 1917.

<sup>31</sup>New York Times, Dec. 24, 1917.

<sup>32</sup>New York Times, Dec. 28, 1926.

<sup>33</sup>Henrietta Szold, The Nathan and Lina Health Centre: Hadassah in Palestine, 1918-1928 (New York: Hadassah, 1929), 15.



<sup>34</sup>New York Times, Sept. 8, 1928.

<sup>35</sup>New York Times, May 5, 1930.

<sup>36</sup>Letter from O.B.A. to Nathan Straus, June 9, 1930. Nathan Straus Papers.

<sup>37</sup>Statement by Nathan Straus, May 9, 1930. Nathan Straus, Jr. Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.

<sup>38</sup>Speech by Nathan Straus, Jan. 31, 1929. Nathan Straus Papers.

## **Conclusion: Nathan Straus's Character and Context**

Nathan Straus embodied the best of American Judaism in the dynamic age of industrialism. Straus's distinctive blending of Jewish, American, and universal principles into non-sectarian, humanistic ideology helped set the tone of American philanthropy in the early twentieth century. His actions as a philanthropist are similar to others like the retailer Julius Rosenwald of Sears, Roebuck & Company or the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie. In the age of entrepreneurship, intense capitalism, and growing generosity, Nathan Straus emerges as an individual among other fine examples of the day. Although he was not unique in his endeavors, he left a permanent mark on the world by his philosophy and his actions. In an attempt to understand who Nathan Straus was, one must look at what he did, why he did it, and the context of his actions. At the same time, one must also define who he is not. While he was an American Jewish philanthropist, he restricted his giving neither to a particular religion nor a particular nationality. Although he was active as a public health reformer during the early twentieth century, he is not a traditional "Progressive" in that his goal was not to reform society. Finally, in his efforts on behalf of Zionism and Palestine, he stands in a small group of wealthy Jews who wanted to see the "masses" involved with fund-raising and the upbuilding of a Jewish national home rather than just a small coterie.

Through his philanthropies, Nathan Straus had achieved an array of accomplishments. He had established pasteurized milk distribution systems in numerous cities in North America and Western Europe, helped thousands of unemployed workers during the panic of 1893-97, anonymously distributed thousands of turkeys to poor families in New York City, helped settle a vicious labor-management dispute in the Pennsylvania coal mines, installed a water sterilization and ice plant in Santiago, Cuba during the Spanish-American war, and represented the United States as an official delegate

to several international health conventions.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, his family business interests flourished, earning greater profits from year to year.

Straus's benevolence to Jews and non-Jews alike shows the breadth of his philanthropic outlook. For Straus, giving was a way of sharing his profits as well as a religious commandment. As an American Jew, he felt doubly obliged to give to those less fortunate than himself and to participate actively in the world in which he lived. In America, Jews were more free than anywhere else, and Straus's association with men like Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Schwab, and J. P. Morgan shows the level of integration, acceptance, and approval which he achieved. While Straus remained true to Judaism by practicing its ethics, he embraced completely the American Dream in the Horatio Alger tradition. Although not born in rags, he did rise from a modest background to owning a home on the "upper West Side" of Manhattan and helped to take a business from two storefronts to a full square city block.

However, despite his associations and friendships with notables of American society, Straus and his fellow Jews were not part of the high society. Even the wealthiest of the Jews -- the Guggenheims and the Seligmans -- cannot be found on the New York Times society pages at the turn of the century. The Jewish community remained a segregated part of America well into the twentieth century despite the fact that men like Straus, Rosenwald, and Schiff providing millions of dollars to secular philanthropy in America. However, Nathan Straus probably would not have wanted to associate with the high society of New York even if he had the opportunity. Regardless, he had offended so many of its members by chastising them for not giving as much to philanthropy as they did to themselves that he would not be welcome even as a non-Jew. Nathan Straus considered it part of his duty to encourage others to give as he himself had. Speaking out at Jewish and non-Jewish fundraising events, Straus had little problem sharing his opinions regarding the size of other people's donations.

In his attempt to benefit humanity and encourage others to be philanthropic, Nathan Straus appeared rather self-righteous at times. Unquestionably, the man had convictions and his efforts to improve the public health and help the establishment of Palestine were noble. The 10,000 people who lined Fifth Avenue at his funeral would certainly attest to his good works and humanitarian interests. However, Straus's indignation and desire to control his philanthropy raise questions about his character. He alienated certain Jewish leaders and occasionally made rash decisions which may have hurt his reputation among his peers and provide an additional explanation why his name is not found on the letterhead of certain prominent Jewish organizations. A few examples of Straus's character may help illuminate his partial isolation in the established Jewish community.

The American Jewish Committee, formed in 1906, had Nathan's brother Oscar as one of its founders. Surely the two brothers could have joined together if they so desired. Yet, in 1906, Oscar had just been nominated to the cabinet by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt and had been a Republican since 1896 when the Democratic party nominated William Jennings Bryan and adopted the silver standard platform. Nathan, on the other hand, backed Bryan. Nathan Straus also stood by William Randolph Hearst for New York governor in 1906 while Nathan's brothers desperately tried to dissociate themselves from their brother's political leanings. Abraham & Straus even went so far as to have the New York Times publish an article explaining that Nathan Straus's advertisement in favor of Hearst had nothing to do with the retailing firm. The Times, which opposed Hearst, took a poll of the Abraham and Straus families and found that of seventeen members, Nathan Straus was the only one to favor Hearst.<sup>2</sup> Politically, Nathan Straus remained a staunch Democrat with the exception of 1912 when his brother Oscar ran for New York Governor as a Bull Moose Progressive. Even during that election, he became very excitable when his brother was not top billing at demonstrations in New York. When he heard that Jacob Schiff backed one of Oscar's opponents, William Sulzer,

Nathan became outraged. Oscar, in a letter to Lina Straus, explained that he wished his brother would not take things so seriously.

Indeed, Nathan Straus was serious about his beliefs and his intentions. Even his own rabbi was not spared the Straus temper. Long-time friend and rabbi, Samuel Schulman was opposed to the ideal embodied in Jewish nationalism. He did, however, believe that Straus's work in Palestine was exceptional and impressive. In 1918, a group of rabbis and Jewish leaders in New York, Schulman among them, wrote a letter to President Wilson explaining that as world events were unfolding, the settling of the Palestine question and the Jewish nation should not be at the forefront. In fact, the letter went as far to say that "the establishment of a Jewish State would tend to distract our coreligionists here from a full and perfect allegiance to American citizenship and obligations."<sup>3</sup> This concept was completely anathema to Straus's belief that to be a good Jew and a good Zionist meant being a good American. Upon hearing the news that Schulman's name was on the letter, Nathan and Lina Straus walked out of their seats during the beginning of Rosh Ha-Shanah, New Year, services at their synagogue where Schulman was the chief rabbi. Schulman wrote to the Strauses and explained his position as favoring equal political, civil, and religious rights for Jews wherever they lived. He expressed hope in the creation of Palestine as a nation where Jews could live freely and in their ancient lands, but he simply did not espouse the fervent nationalism and culture lure of Zionism. Rabbi Schulman taught all the Straus children and had been an admirer and friend of the Strauses, but his signing the letter was too much for the Strauses to accept. He later repudiated the letter as having said too much, but the Strauses remained on cool terms with him.

One other incident, also surrounding the issue of Palestine, demonstrates Straus's desire to work alone and assure that his philanthropic endeavors progressed according to his plans. Prior to World War One, Professor Chaim Weizmann and Dr. Judah Magnes

wanted to establish a university in Jerusalem. Their goal was to demonstrate the potential of Jerusalem as a center of learning for all nationalities. In addition, they hoped that by creating a university they could help add some permanency to the presence of the Jewish community in Palestine. Thus, they looked to individuals who were already philanthropically involved in the upbuilding of Palestine. They tried to focus on two major givers: Rothschild and Straus. Straus had already bought a plot of land in Jerusalem on the road to Bethlehem with the intention to use the land for a university. Straus, in 1913, was willing to give the land to Weizmann and Magnes, but when they informed him that the university might have a research institute which would rival the Straus health bureau, Straus began to back away from the proposal. Weizmann and Magnes wanted to combine the health bureau and a research institute under the rubric of the university. In a letter to Weizmann, Magnes stated that

it is questionable if he [Straus] will want the Nathan Straus Health Bureau to give up its identity. He is averse on general principles to amalgamating his interests with other organizations. He finds that he can do successful work only if he carries things on alone in his own way, or if he cooperates with others doing similar work, but does not organically combine them.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, Straus and Rothschild were unable to meet to determine how a university would be established and Straus left the project as he felt it more important to focus on his own efforts. Even more important though, with the outbreak of World War One, accomplishing work in Palestine, let alone Europe, became far more difficult. Thus the university project was delayed and not resumed until after the war, at which point Magnes and Weizmann secured land on Mount Scopus, owing in part to an incident which took place following United States intervention in the war. Magnes opposed Woodrow Wilson's decision to intervene whereas Straus supported it. In a letter to the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, of which Magnes was the chairman, Straus severed relations with Magnes.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the split between Straus and Magnes, the latter received an inquiry from a J. Cowen of London. Cowen wanted to know what lay behind Straus's activities in Palestine. Magnes, having been close to Nathan Straus, replied from a unique perspective. According to Magnes, Straus was a genuine lover of Palestine and thoroughgoing Zionist. He went on to say that Palestine had no better friend than Nathan Straus. Magnes considered him a modest man, despite occasional excessive publicity for his work. Even still, he said, if Straus were to use the press, it was more for the benefit of his philanthropies than self-aggrandizement. Magnes continued by stating that

Very few people seem to understand Nathan Straus and he has a host of enemies, many of them deserved, I have no doubt. He is not a man with whom you can carry on an extended argument. He is not altogether dependable, relying almost entirely upon his impressions and feelings. As a consequence, he has made a number of mistakes, particularly in some of the people about him and in the sudden way he engages in and drops enterprises. But many of these characteristics are common to men of power. Indeed, I think it is not exaggerating to say that he has in many senses the insight of a genius.<sup>6</sup>

Genius or not, Nathan Straus lived up to the meaning of his name. When Nathan Straus was born, his parents could not have chosen a more appropriate or prophetic name for their child. Unaware of what his character would become, they gave him the Hebrew name for giver: Nathan [Natan]. In his later years, people referred to Nathan Straus as the "Grand Old Man of American Jewry," a title that said much about his life. The study of Nathan Straus provides the opportunity for a unique perspective of the American Jewish experience. William Howard Taft once said "Dear old Nathan Straus is a great Jew and the greatest Christian of us all."<sup>7</sup> Taft's comment shows the feelings which leaders had about Nathan Straus. While he was commended as a Jew, he was part of the larger society. One newspaper managed to capture the essence of Nathan Straus's philanthropy, Judaism, and Americanism in one short poem. In the Hebrew Standard of December 22, 1893, the "sprightly contemporary *Hello* has in this weeks issue an excellent

likeness of Mr. Nathan Strauss [sic] arrayed as Santa Claus, with his arms full of coal and gifts for the poor, and concludes with the following:

A True Santa Claus?  
Rising higher and higher,  
With liberal dole,  
All our troubles to cure  
And all hearts to bewitch.

You heap loads of coal  
On the hands of the poor,  
And then 'coals of fire'  
On the heads of the rich!  
Santa Straus! Santa Straus!

In such a 'Santa Claus' every Israelite believes, and we wish that there were more of them."<sup>8</sup> The idea of calling a Jewish philanthropist "Santa" shows the level of acceptance and appreciation which Straus and his philanthropic works enjoyed. Yet the real essence of Nathan Straus was this Santa-like figure, one who gives to all peoples for the betterment of humankind.

Nathan Straus had the rare ability to unite various aspects of his life under an overarching philosophy of philanthropy and good works toward a united humanity. He fused his Americanism with his Judaism so that both communities could benefit. On his eighty-first birthday, he was asked to send a message for America and American Israel. For his message, he used the theme of *Shalom* -- Peace. He believed that America "is destined to exemplify this noble spirit of universal peace. The upbuilding of America is not the result of any particular stock or race. The sons of all peoples, the ideals and cultures of various lands, have richly contributed toward making it a leading force for peace and understanding."<sup>9</sup> The Straus family played a role in the 'upbuilding of America.' As consultants to American presidents, Chambers of Commerce, and International leaders, the Strauses had a positive impact on the world. As American Jews, they demonstrated



the new opportunities afforded the Jewish people in America. Thus, they set a pattern for future American Jews and they were part of a trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Nathan Straus wanted to die a poor man. He provided for his family and took his wealth to the world. He believed that "What you give in health is gold. What you give in sickness is silver, and What you give after death is lead." What truly upset him was "some people don't even give then!" During his lifetime, he gave millions of dollars to philanthropy. To Palestine alone, he gave over \$2,000,000. During World War One, he gave over \$500,000 to the relief effort. His milk crusade cost him well into the millions of dollars over the twenty-seven years of its existence. Yet more important than the actual monetary sum was the love, compassion, and devotion which Straus showed toward humanity. He used his money and his knowledge for philanthropy because it made him feel good. He told people not to "give until it hurts." Rather, one should "give until it feels good."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, for Nathan Straus, it was neither Zionism nor Judaism which beckoned him to Palestine or any other land which needed help. Rather, it was humanity. As Straus often stated, "the world is my country -- to do good is my religion."<sup>11</sup>

Straus represents the unique opportunities which were open for immigrants to America. He combined his family resources, Jewish background, and American experience to have an impact on humanity. He saved countless lives and gave of himself so others were able to provide for themselves. Influenced by his Judaism, his family, and the era in which he lived, Straus set the trend for future philanthropists, Jews, and Americans. He was a stubborn man who had great convictions. In his last letter while President of the United States, Grover Cleveland said of his friend Nathan Straus:

I write this last of my communications while in public life, to say to you that I shall never fail to remember and gratefully appreciate the many acts of friendliness and kindness which I have received from you and to express the sincere wish for your future prosperity and happiness.<sup>12</sup>

Straus's life was full of prosperity and happiness as he managed to create a role for himself in the American society while not relinquishing his identity as a Jew. He fused his philosophy with reality to save many lives of a generation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Booklet presented to guests of Dinner Honoring Nathan Straus at the Cafe Boulevard on January 31, 1911. Lina Gutherz Straus, Disease in Milk.

<sup>2</sup>New York Times, Nov. 3, 1906; Nov. 6, 1906; Nov. 10, 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Rabbi Samuel Schulman to Lina Straus, September 10, 1918. Samuel Schulman Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Judah Magnes to Chaim Weizmann, February 4, 1914. Judah Magnes Papers, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Nathan Straus to the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, Nov. 15, 1917. Judah Magnes Papers.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Judah Magnes to J. Cowen, July 13, 1914. Judah Magnes Papers.

<sup>7</sup>David De Sola Pool, "Nathan Straus," Directory of American Biography, volume 18 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 130.

<sup>8</sup>Hebrew Standard, Dec. 22, 1893. Nathan Straus Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Nathan Straus, January 31, 1929. Nathan Straus Papers.

<sup>10</sup>New Palestine, Feb. 3, 1928.

<sup>11</sup>Nathan Straus, For a United Israel: Opening Address delivered before the American Jewish Congress, at Metropolitan Opera House, Philadelphia, Pa., on December 15, 1918 (New York: American Jewish Congress, 1918), 4.

<sup>12</sup>Allan Nevins, ed., Letters of Grover Cleveland: 1850-1908 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), 470.

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