“I came to the U.S. to stay,” Alice Abraham concluded of her arrival from Ottoman Mount Lebanon in 1909, “but I was more sure of that after I got here.” Abraham arrived in New York City at fifteen years old before proceeding to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to join her brother and father. Speaking to historian Alixa Naff in 1962, Alice reported that her family had not originally decided whether their time in America would be temporary or permanent. Instead, the First World War and the Ottoman Empire’s disintegration rendered return to Lebanon impossible. Another of Naff’s interlocutors, Simon Abdelnour, came to the United States for medical school and intended to return home but was prevented from doing so by the war. For Simon, the war’s end brought not a reopening of borders but further alienation: “I applied for a passport to go back but they weren’t issuing passports; this was in 1919–20.... I came to Los Angeles and gave up the idea of going back to Lebanon.” This experience of being stranded in diaspora was a common one among the half million Arab immigrants living in the Americas. After 1918, the victorious European powers occupied and partitioned the eastern Mediterranean, governing Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine as a system of imperial Mandates and largely excluding emigrants from travel and nationality rights.

The war and its aftermath invalidated their old passports and left their political futures uncertain. Alixa Naff’s oral histories with first generation Arab Americans, held by the Smithsonian Institution and digitized by the Arab American National Museum (AANM) reveal the coercive geopolitics that undergirded the linear archetype of the “to America” story. Documenting dozens of personal narratives of transit, arrival, and integration, Naff wrote them into Becoming American: the Early Arab American Experience, a foundational work in Arab American history. Her interviewees touch on a common theme: a sense that the war, redrawn borders in the Middle East, and passport politics left people feeling fixed in place, stuck by force of massive, geopolitical circumstances beyond their control.

We now inhabit another moment of being fixed in place. The causes of our fixity and how we experience it are different than they were a century ago. But for historians more comfortable with transit and crossings than we are with shelter-in-place, this moment presents challenges to our research and teaching. How do we teach migration history amid the closure of key archives due to COVID-19? This essay suggests ideas for teaching Arab American history through digital collections, emphasizing classroom work with primary sources. I’ll introduce key archival collections and propose how students might use them to answer questions about movement, fixity, and immigration mythmaking.

In the migration history classroom, pushing against the sedentary bias—the belief that staying put is a normative human state—is a common objective. To shift away from justifying migration or framing it as extraordinary, we consider how immobility warrants explanation. What conditions lead people to stay put? Invention of new borders? Travel bans? When and how is immobility the product of historical structures? In Arab American history, the period following World War I represented such a moment. With the establishment of the Mandate system in the Middle

(ARAB AMERICAN continued on page 6)
From the IEHS President

Thanksgiving weekend is a fitting time to pen my last message as president for the IEHS newsletter because I have had so much to be grateful for during my time as steward of this great organization. Dozens of generous and talented colleagues—most of whom I cannot name here—supported my efforts to continue expanding IEHS’s scholarly community, services, and programs with their contributions of expertise, idealism, and labor.

The three IEHS presidents who immediately preceded me—Barbara Posadas, Hasia Diner, and Maria Cristina Garcia—modeled leadership by women. I have continued their long campaign toward building a “big tent” that fosters community and shared intellectual ground among scholars who often operate in silos imposed by the specific groups that they research. From IEHS’s origins in the 1960s, when immigration history focused primarily on Europeans, our organization has evolved to encompass the experiences of immigrants and ethnic communities originating from all parts of the world. I have also had the good fortune to inherit stable finances from my predecessors as president, past treasurer Tyler Anbinder, and the editors of the Journal of American Ethnic History (JAEH). These revenues have enabled IEHS to fund more awards, grants, and online programs.

Being able to handover authority to a highly qualified successor is surely one of the greatest accomplishments for a leader, and I take great satisfaction in knowing that Kevin Kenny is waiting in the wings. He has been unusually active as vice president, working as program committee chair and assuming a major role in developing our digital projects program. During the pandemic, he has worked with Maddalena Marinari, Ellen Wu, and Torrie Hester to organize online events such as author talks that have been recorded and will be made available on YouTube. Under the supervision of digital projects officer Heather Lee, the IEHS website is being upgraded and will include an expanded educational resources section featuring projects such as Teach Immigration History and #ImmigrationSyllabus, along with recommendations of books, websites, organizations, and archives. Current webmaster Bryan Zehngut-Willits also coordinates communications with new social media officer Sergio Gonzalez and newsletter editor Alison Efford. We continue to add new followers on social media and expand the readership of the IEHS blog, edited by Chienyn Chih, and Heather Lee and Sarah McNamara have plans to develop an IEHS podcast.

Board members old and new, Alan Kraut, Rosina Lozano, and especially S. Deborah Kang, contributed to another major new initiative, the IEHS Professional Ethics Policy, which sets forth our organizational values regarding sexual harassment. Approved by the board at our virtual meeting held April 3, 2020, the full text of this policy is posted at the bottom of the Mission, History, and Bylaws section of the IEHS website and will be applied at IEHS-sponsored events. Professional Ethics Committee members are taking AHA-sponsored trainings to receive and investigate complaints.

Several turnovers and additions of IEHS officers have occurred during my term as president. Suzy Sinke has undertaken the major intellectual and administrative role of JAEH editor and has been joined by new book review editor Omar Valerio-Jimenez for the past year. Monique Laney has assumed the office of treasurer. As we issue this newsletter, we are currently searching for a new secretary to step into the large shoes of Tim Draper, who has for more than a decade has capably managed the many moving parts of core operations such as elections, membership, communications, awards committees, and banquet arrangements.

Pandemic conditions have prevented me from participating in my favorite responsibilities as president—organizing conference gatherings to meet and share conversations with my IEHS friends, honor the accomplishments of recently published authors and major IEHS stalwarts, and, perhaps best of all, choosing the menu for our annual awards banquet. I planned for, but did not get to attend, the 2020 OAH in Washington, DC. Although conditions remain too unsettled in 2021, I look forward to seeing every one of you at IEHS gatherings in the better times that I hope lie ahead.

Madeline Y. Hsu

Member Yukari Takai Receives Article Award

In June 2020, Yukari Takai received the Canadian Committee on Migration, Ethnicity and Transnationalism Prize from the Canadian Historical Association for her article entitled “Recrafting Marriage in Meiji Hawai‘i, 1885–1913,” published in Gender & History 31, no. 3 (2019): 646–64.
Seeking New IEHS Secretary

The position of secretary of the IEHS will be vacant after the Annual Meeting of the IEHS in April 2021. The secretary serves as an officer of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, appointed by the IEHS president with the approval of the executive board. The appointment, for a three-year term, is renewable. The secretary maintains the records of the society, sends correspondence, oversees elections, and assists with membership coordination and the annual meeting. The secretary will also work with the board in its current initiative to enhance digital communications for the society.

If anyone is interested in serving the IEHS in this capacity, seeks more detailed information, or has questions on the position, please contact IEHS vice president/president elect Kevin Kenny (kevin.kenny@nyu.edu), Timothy Draper (tdraper@waubonsee.edu), Maddalena Marinari (mmarinari@gustavus.edu), or Heather Lee (heatherlee@nyu.edu).

IEHS Article Awards

The Immigration and Ethnic History Society is pleased to announce that Yuri Doolan of Brandeis University has been awarded the Carlton C. Qualey Memorial Article Award for his article, “Transpacific Camptowns: Korean Women, U.S. Army Bases, and Military Prostitution in America,” Journal of American Ethnic History 38, no. 4 (2019): 33–54.


From the Programming Committee

The IEHS Programming Committee is eager to expand the presence of our society not only at the annual meetings of the OAH and AHA but also at the many other organizations in which our members participate.

We especially want to build on our connections with the AHA Pacific Coast Branch, the WHA, SHAFR, SSHA, AAAS, and any other organizations in which IEHS members are involved.

Please be in touch at any time with the IEHS Programming Committee (Maddalena Marinari, Ellen Wu, Torrie Hester, and Kevin Kenny) if you have questions, suggestions, or advice.

In Memoriam: Moses Rischin

By Jonathan D. Sarna

This necrology from H-Judaic was originally published on August 21, 2020 under a Creative Commons license.

H-Judaic is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Moses Rischin (1925–2020), emeritus professor at San Francisco State University, and a pioneering and senior scholar in the field of American Jewish history.

Born in Brooklyn, the son of two Russian-immigrant parents who loved Hebrew (his father was a friend of the famed Israeli historian BenZion Dinur), young Moses was sent to study in the then recently-opened Yeshiva of Flatbush, providing him with a foundation in Hebrew and Judaism that later served him well. He attended Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn and Brooklyn College, where his interest in history was sparked by historian Solomon F. Bloom. In 1947, he entered the graduate program at Harvard, where he fell under the spell of its pioneering historian of immigration, Oscar Handlin. Rischin was one of Handlin’s most influential disciples. He not only followed him into American history and the history of immigration but also into American Jewish history — then a new field, scarcely recognized in the academy, that Handlin, Salo Baron and Jacob Rader Marcus were simultaneously nurturing.

In advance of 1954, celebrated as the 300th anniversary of American Jewish life, Rischin worked on the first great analytic bibliography of American Jewish history, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and published as a pamphlet by Harvard University Press under the title An Inventory of American Jewish History. The volume defined the contours of the emerging field and alerted students to the breadth and depth of its literature, with valuable insights that helped shape future scholarly directions. While working on that pamphlet, Rischin also pioneered the teaching of American Jewish history at the university level, introducing one of the first-ever courses in the field at Brandeis University (1953–54).

Rischin received his doctorate from Harvard in 1957 under Handlin’s tutelage; it was the most important Harvard doctorate in American Jewish history to that time. From its publication by Harvard University Press under the title The Promised City: New York’s Jews, 1870–1914 (1962), it defined the highest standards of scholarship in the field. It remained in print for decades and influenced all subsequent scholarship on East European Jews in America and on the Jews of New York.
Rischin taught for two years at UCLA after his book appeared and then found a permanent academic home in 1964 at San Francisco State University, where he taught for decades until he retired. He brought to San Francisco the new study of immigration and ethnicity, which Handlin had done so much to pioneer, and he also advanced new fields like the study of the American West (and of its Jews). He is also credited with helping to define the “New Mormon History,” which he followed and reviewed.

Rischin wrote, edited or co-edited numerous books including Our Own Kind: Voting by Race, Creed, or National Origin (1960); The American Gospel of Success (1965); Immigration and the American Tradition (1976); and Jewish Legacy and the German Conscience (with R. Asher, 1991). He also edited Hutchins Hapgood’s Spirit of the Ghetto (1967); Abraham Cahan’s Grandma Never Lived in America (1985); The Jews of North America (1987); and Jews of the American West (with J. Livingston, 1991). He was deeply generous in his support of students and younger scholars. Of special importance was his deep involvement in the scholarly work of the Judah L. Magnes Museum (he directed its Western Jewish History Center) now part of the University of California at Berkeley.

For decades, Rischin set as his scholarly goal to produce a full-scale biography of Abraham Cahan (1860–1951), novelist, editor of the Forward, and leader of the East European Jewish community in New York. Nobody knew more about Cahan than Rischin did, and he felt that through Cahan he could write and interpret the history of East European Jews in America—a history that Cahan’s long life embraced, and that Rischin himself knew at first hand. Sadly, that book remained unfinished when Rischin’s health declined. In 1995, Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael edited an important festschrift in Rischin’s honor entitled: An Inventory of Promises: Essays on American Jewish History in Honor of Moses Rischin. It includes additional material by the editors on Rischin’s distinguished scholarly career.

Both Professor Rischin and his wife Ruth battled the coronavirus this summer, and both seemed to recover. They celebrated 61 years of marriage together. The following night (August 17th), Professor Rischin passed away peacefully in his sleep.

H-Judaic extends deepest condolences to his wife, Dr. Ruth Rischin, his sister, Frances Abrams, his daughters, Sarah (Gadye), Abigail and Rebecca, and to their five grandchildren.

Researching US Immigration and Ethnic History from Italy
By Marco Moschetti

When Alison Efford asked me to write about what it is like to study US immigration and ethnic history from Italy, my first thought was: hard! There are two main difficulties for those who, like me, do such research.

The scarcity of Italian studies on this issue is the first. The history of Italian emigration has certainly been studied extensively, but almost always from the point of view of the Italians. My research, instead, focuses on the receiving country, how Italians integrated into US society and how they actively took part in the political and cultural life. In my PhD thesis I analyzed the relations between Italian Americans and African Americans in Chicago after WWII, asking in particular if the Italians, after decades of intolerance—the only topic that interests Italian historians—took part in struggles against the African American community and other minorities. The conflicts over the housing issue in the Chicago settlements are a good example. For this research, I used for the first time in Italy the interviews of the Italian in Chicago Oral History Project.

Sources represent another problem. The Italian archives are only minimally digitized, and the few online often available only for a fee. Independent scholars like me often have no funding. It is even more difficult to find funds to do research abroad. I’ve never had the opportunity. The biggest piece of good fortune is the extensive digitization of the US archives. This allowed me to continue my research.

Since 2013 I have been member of the Migration History Center at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, which has been dealing with history of Italian emigration to Europe and USA between the end of the nineteenth century and WWII. Currently, in addition to my research on the Italian community of Chicago and its interethnic relations, I am working on:

- Italians in Louisiana. My interest is to understand how they related to African Americans in the rural south and shared a common history regarding emigration to the Midwest in the early twentieth century.
- Return migration from the United States to Italy. This topic (the subject of my master thesis) allows me to continue using oral sources, carrying out interviews especially in the mountains of Emilia Romagna.
NEW MEMBER PUBLICATIONS


East, French and British officials sought to stem the flow of emigration to the Americas as well as mitigate Arab repatriation from abroad. They relied on passport controls to draw lines of separation; for the first time, possession of the “right” passport distinguished authorized from unauthorized migration between the Middle East and its Arab diasporas.

A series of documents held by the AANM can get students thinking about passports as documents of immobility. They show how the Mandates used passports to restrict migration perceived as unbefitting to state interests. The series begins with Joseph Nussar’s 1903 Ottoman passport and includes papers given to Arab Americans by French, British, and American authorities after 1918. Nussar’s “passport” was an Ottoman mürûr tezeresi, an internal travel document not intended for use beyond the empire but carried by Ottoman subjects to the Americas, where immigration authorities processed them as nationality-bearing documents. The war invalidated these Ottoman-era documents as passports (they could not be used for travel), but governments abroad continued to accept them as proof of nationality through the 1920s, for example, when Arab immigrants declared their intention to naturalize as US citizens. Meanwhile, the European Mandates in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine started to print passports bearing documents.

The High Commissioner sought to slow the departure of Lebanese workers to preserve a sectarian balance of power instrumental to maintaining French colonial rule. It also represents an attempt to curb the larger practice of Arab migrants travelling on defunct Ottoman documents. The French passport was good for a single year, both reflecting and obscuring the legal reality that Lebanon, at that point, lacked a nationality code and formal migration policy.

One of the only ways to obtain a passport like Mihje’s was through US immigration policies favoring family reunification; her passport allowed her to depart “to rejoin her daughters” in New York City.

In Palestine, the British employed a similar strategy of using passports to restrict migration, and Badria Howar’s 1927 passport is a case in point. Also the recipient of a family sponsorship, Howar was permitted a single-use “emergency” passport, which allowed her to accompany her husband, Joseph Howar, to New York City. A Palestinian émigré who had achieved US citizenship by 1918, Joseph had travelled to Palestine to marry Badria. As the new wife of a US citizen, the price of Badria’s passport was relinquishing her right to return: “this certificate is not valid for return to Palestine” is typed into the document and beneath it, “wife of an American citizen.” By traveling beyond Palestine’s borders, Badria Howar gave up her right to a Palestinian nationality under a 1925 law that prohibited Palestinians living abroad from citizenship protections. The AANM collection also holds two of Joseph Howar’s US passports: the first from 1919 before the creation of the Palestine Mandate and the second from his 1927 wedding trip. Joseph’s passport exemplifies a pattern: possession of foreign passports granted elite émigrés a degree of cross-border mobility not experienced by most Arab Americans, most of whom carried only Ottoman mürûr tezeresi through the 1920s. Furthermore, pairing Joseph’s US passport with Badria’s Palestine Mandate one reveals their coercive character: Joseph (a Palestinian American man) travelled between diaspora and homeland somewhat freely, but Badria’s marriage entailed a departure and loss of nationality. In the interwar Middle East, both the British and the French worked to impose a territorial determinism that force-fitted colonial subjects to a map of their own design. These passports permitted some to cross borders, but only in the context of marooning thousands abroad.

It was in the context of the immobilized 1920s that the myth that Arab American immigrants had always “come to stay” emerged. Such immigrant metanarratives (or “Mayflowerisms”) are also a common focus in migration history. Arab American history has a few of these metanarratives: for example, historians critique the “persecution theory,” the stereotype that Arab immigrants were uniformly Christians fleeing religious persecution. Scholars are also revising historiographical fixations with peddling and commercial success, nuancing older social mobility narratives that belied more varied Arab American livelihoods. These stereotypes are all still present in the Naff oral histories, voiced by her interlocutors as explanations for why Arab Americans came and why they stayed. They can be fruitfully unpacked alongside critical scholarship in Arab American studies.

A final notable example of how to use the Naff collection is to interrogate the hegemonic legibility of New York City’s “little Syria” neighborhood as the Arab American story. This narrative originated from the earliest community studies starting with Philip Hitti, The Syrians in America (1924), and it is popularized now through the circulation of iconic images of “little Syria” held by the Library of...
Digital archival collections like those held by AANM began with researchers seeking stories traditionally marginalized within government archives, composing counter archives concerned with the preservation and representation of Arab American histories. Similar collections by the Immigration History Research Center and the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies focus on dissemination of social histories. As students become more familiar with using digital archives, they can explore how availability and access to certain kinds of texts shapes our understanding of the past.

Notes

14. Philip K Hitti, The Syrians in America (New York: George Doran, 1924); see the George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

Stacy D. Fahrenthold is assistant professor of History at University of California, Davis, and co-editor of Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle Eastern and North African Migration Studies. Her book, Between the Ottomans and the Entente, won the 2020 Evelyn Shakir Nonfiction Award from the Arab American National Museum.
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Special thanks to Laurence Matthews for help with this issue.

New Publications? Awards? Conferences planned? Research projects? Let us know! Email newsletter@iehs.org or mail details to the newsletter’s return address.

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