

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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## Boshwitz Diary Tells of World War I

One-hundred years ago on July 28, 1914, "The Great War," later referred to as World War I, began when Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia after the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the war continued, multiple nations became involved including Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Britain and France. The United States did not enter the war for three years, but when the number of casualties had mounted into the millions and Europe faced total devastation, President Woodrow Wilson called upon Congress for "a war to end all wars," saying that this would "make the world safe for democracy." Congress voted to declare war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

Ten days later, on April 16, 1917, seventeen-year-old Avrome Harrison Boshwitz of Memphis, Tennessee, enlisted in Company I of the 1st Tennessee Infantry, also called the Chickasaw Guards. Avrome Boshwitz was from a prominent Jewish family who at that time had already resided in Memphis for two generations. His grandfather, Abraham Boschwitz, had come to Memphis from Rogasen, Prussia, in the mid-1800s. His parents were Julius and Jennie Boshwitz. (There were several spellings of the family name, which eventually became Boshwit.)

Avrome Boshwitz served his country for two years. During this time he kept a diary of his war experiences. The remainder of this article is comprised of excerpts from this fascinating first-hand account.

### The Diary

**April 27, 1917:** Entrained at Memphis for training camp at Nashville, Tennessee.

**April 28:** Detrained at Camp Belle Meade, Nashville, Tennessee. Stayed in Nashville for about a month and sure put in some awful drilling in that month.

**May 25:** Entrained at Nashville for Columbia, detrained the same day at Columbia during a big rain storm. Pitched tents that evening on the campus of Columbia Military Academy. Culver and I went to town the following night and came near getting arrested for leaving the campus without permission.

**June 27:** Left Columbia for Aspen Hill, Tennessee. Did guard duty on railroad bridge. Arrived at Aspen Hill the same day. We found a place to board at Mrs. Herbert's, great food. Stayed on out post duty for one month and then went back to Columbia.

**July 31:** Left Columbia for Nashville, arrived in Nashville the same day.

**Sept. 9:** Entrained at Harding Station for Greenville, S.C. Had to camp in dense woods, hardly room enough

to pitch pup tents, mud was up to our knees.



*(Continued on Page 6)*

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986  
6560 POPLAR AVENUE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38138



## President's Message . . . .



*David Ross*

Recently I was re-elected to serve a second term as president of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

First, I must say how sorry I am that we recently lost such a staunch supporter of our historical society for many years. Not only was Sumner Levine my mentor during my first term in office, but I considered Sumner a very good friend. Our Jewish Historical Society will miss Sumner and the entire Memphis community has lost a true leader.

At our meeting in July, our board passed a motion to call our speaker program the Sumner Levine Speaker Series, and we have set up a special fund that will accept donations to help us continue to have outstanding programs which meant so much to Sumner.

Last year was an exceptional year for our society. We had a speaker or event each month from September to June. Our speakers were quite varied in their expertise. In addition, we had a wonderful trip to Charleston, S.C. and were so fortunate to have had Rabbi Radinsky along with us. Rabbi Radinsky held two lectures as well as provided us with much of the Jewish history of Charleston, having served as Rabbi of the Orthodox synagogue in Charleston.

This coming year we have scheduled Ambassador Dennis Ross, past adviser to several presidents on the Mid-East, as our first speaker of the year on September 14th. We anticipate a large crowd including many local dignitaries.

We are also planning other excellent programs throughout the year.

In addition to our programming we have a large committee of volunteers led by Freda Brode and Barbara Zitron who are working diligently to keep up the archives which are stored at Temple Israel. One of the major areas of concentration is the oral history section, which is so very important.

Dick Rubin has worked very hard and spent many hours on our website, [www.jhsmem.org](http://www.jhsmem.org). Our website is looking great due to both his time and his creativity.

We are very fortunate in Memphis to have had outstanding leadership in our Jewish Historical Society, and it is for that reason it has continued to be so very

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\*Of Blessed Memory

Be sure to check out our website:  
[jhsmem.org](http://jhsmem.org)



**Dick Rubin, Webmaster**

relevant. I look forward to working with our board to continue the momentum from the past and moving us forward into the future.

*David Ross*

President 2014-2015



# Ambassador Dennis Ross to Speak at Temple Israel on September 14

Ambassador Dennis Ross will speak on "The United States-Israel Relationship in Today's Middle East" at the first JHS program of the 2014-2015 season. This program will take place at Temple Israel on Sunday, September 14, at 2:00 PM. Ambassador Ross's visit is made possible by the Berz-Stern Fund of Temple Israel.

Ambassador Dennis Ross is counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He served two years as special assistant to President Obama and National Security Council senior director for the Central Region, and a year as special adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Born in San Francisco, his Jewish mother and Catholic stepfather raised him in a non-religious atmosphere. Graduating from UCLA in 1970, Ambassador Ross became religiously Jewish after the Six Day War.

He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Soviet decision making, and from 1984 to 1986 served as executive director of the Berkeley-Stanford program on Soviet International Behavior. He received UCLA's highest medal and has been named UCLA alumnus of the year. He has also received honorary doctorates from Brandeis, Amherst, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Syracuse University.

For more than twelve years, he played a leading role in shaping U.S. involvement in the Middle East. A highly skilled diplomat, he served as point man on the peace process under Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. He was instrumental in assisting Israelis and

Palestinians to reach the 1995 Interim Agreement; he also brokered the 1997 Hebron Accord, facilitated the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty, and intensively worked to bring Israel and Syria together.

Ambassador Ross was awarded the Presidential Medal for Distinguished Federal Civilian Service by President

Clinton, and Secretaries James Baker and Madeleine Albright presented him with the State Department's highest award.

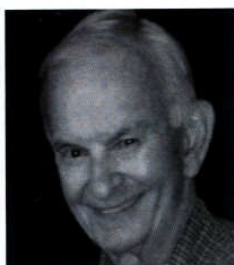
Prior to his tenure in the Clinton administration, Ambassador Ross served as director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. In that capacity he played a prominent role in U.S. policy toward the former Soviet Union, and he continues to write extensively on the former Soviet Union, arms control, and the greater Middle East. He has authored many op-eds in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*.

Ross is the author of several influential books on the peace process, most recently *Myths, Illusions, and Peace: Finding*

*a New Direction for America in the Middle East*, coauthored with Institute peace process expert David Makovsky. An earlier study, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*, offers comprehensive analytical and personal insight into the Middle East peace process. *The New York Times* praised his 2007 publication, *Statecraft, And How to Restore America's Standing in the World*, as "important and illuminating." As an expert on the Middle East and the Soviet Union, Ambassador Ross's Memphis visit couldn't be more timely. ☆







## In Memoriam . . .

# Sumner I. Levine

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South mourns the loss of Sumner I. Levine, who died suddenly on June 27, 2014, in Athens, Greece, where he was vacationing with his wife of 59 years, Phyllis Ratner Levine. He was a board member and past president of the local Society, as well as a past president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Sumner quickly became rooted in the South after moving to Memphis. As his oldest grandson Jeff expressed in his tribute at Sumner's funeral, he "loved Memphis, the Memphis Jewish community, and the soul and culture that the greater Memphis community represents."

He was a dedicated volunteer in both the Jewish and secular communities, always putting the needs of others before his own. When some people retire, they think about things they can do for themselves, such as playing golf, or moving to Florida. When Sumner retired, he thought about how he could help others with all that free time. He delivered Meals on Wheels to the needy in Memphis every week on Temple's route. He often visited the sick through Temple Israel's organization God's Unfinished Business. Sumner was a true Mensch.

Sumner touched many lives and had a wide circle of friends. He was the best kind of friend—he wasn't the "facebook" or digital friend of today's world, texting to communicate to avoid intimate social interaction. He was always there, in person, to support, console, or celebrate life with his friends.

At Sumner's funeral, his daughter Beth said, "Sumner Levine was the ultimate people person—he engaged everyone in conversation and knew their life story after a 15 minute encounter at the airport. He was genuinely interested in other people and people responded to that interest. My husband commented that Sumner has been in Heaven for about a week now, and he knows everyone who is there and everything they did while on earth."

He was interested in the world around him, constantly expanding his knowledge of Judaism, Southern Jewish history, Israel, politics, sports, and the news. He displayed just as much enthusiasm when attending operas and symphony concerts as he did when attending University of Memphis basketball games. His greatest joy, however, was his family—his wife Phyllis; two daughters, Jan Levine Reisman and Beth Levine Orlansky; five grandsons; and one great-grandson. He took his whole family on trips all across the country, but what mattered to Sumner was not so much where they went, but that they got to spend time all together.

Sumner devoted countless hours to the Jewish Historical Society. To him, the past wasn't just old names or places—Meridian, Tupelo, or Yazoo, Mississippi, where Phyllis was from. They were people, with their own lives and their own stories. He wanted to preserve for them what he saw in everyone—their humanity.

As Peggy Jalenak, a past president of the Society aptly put it: "Sumner was a very special person and friend, who contributed so much to the Historical Society and the community. He was the 'wind beneath the wings' of the JHS. We shall all mourn and miss him."



# Sumner Levine Speaker Series Fund

Sumner Levine was a driving force behind the excellent programs that the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South (JHS) has enjoyed through the Spring of 2014. In his memory, JHS has set up a special fund to help provide the necessary resources to continue bringing programs of comparable quality to Memphis in the future. If you wish to donate to this fund, mail checks to:

**Jewish Historical Society  
of Memphis and the Mid-South  
6560 Poplar Avenue  
Memphis, TN 38138**

The checks should be made payable to the Jewish Historical Society with a memo indicating that it is a donation to the **Sumner Levine Speaker Series Fund**.

**As of August 26, donations have been given to the Sumner Levine Speaker Series by the following:**

May Lynn and Dr. Charles Mansbach	Barbara and Earl Magdovitz
Vicki and Dr. Edward Lazarus	Flora and Harry Samuels
Jim Pfeifer	Marilyn and Herb Notowich
Freddi and Joel Felt	Martha and Jerrold Graber
Carol and Bert Barnett	Gloria and Edward Felsenthal
Ina and Dick Eiseman	Joy and Leo Bearman, Jr.
Dot and Stanley Bilsky	Linda and Dr. Edward Kaplan
Mindy and Dr. Jack Rosensweig	Rose and David Ross
Jill and Scott Notowich	Bobbie Shainberg
Phyllis Levine and Family	Beth and Steve Orlansky
Madelyne and Jay Daneman	Rachel and Stephen Shankman
Evelyn and Jerome Makowsky	Rachel and Dr. Richard Goldberg
Judy Boshwit and Raymond Shainberg	Amy and Scott Friedenber
Judy and Nick Ringel	Joy and Larry Wilk
Peggy and L.R. Jalenak, Jr.	Marcia and Bill Levy
Beverly and Gil Halpern	

## 2014-2015 Program Preview

- **October 19: Baila Miller - "The Early Influence of Jews in the Art World"**
- **November: Dr. Ralph Nurnberger, professor of International Relations, Georgetown University**
- **Speaker: Dr. Dan Bahat, former Head Archeologist of Jerusalem**
- **March 22: Tour of Jewish Memphis led by Judy Ringel**
- **An evening at the newly renovated Civil Rights Museum**

*Additional programs and further details will be announced later.*



**Sept. 14:** Companies "I" and "K" were consolidated into Battery "E," 1st Tennessee Infantry was changed to 115th Field Artillery (Heavy).

**Sept. 18:** We were attached to 55th Brigade, Headquarters. Brigadier General George G. Gatley in command. Now right here is where we started making Camp Sevier.

**Nov. 10:** Took out \$10,000 insurance with the government, paying \$6.40 per month. Also bought one \$50 Liberty Bond.

**Nov. 15:** Spent 3 months clearing drill field, damn those stumps.

**Feb., 1918:** Went home on 7 day furlough, had a good time while I was there but didn't stay home but 1½ days. Stayed a day over time and was sentenced to 10 days in the Brig, better known as guardhouse.

**March 28:** Hiked to Greenville, S.C. and took part in the 3rd Liberty Loan parade, had to hike back to camp in a big rain storm.

**April 20:** Left Camp Sevier for target practice on Artillery range at Cleveland Mills, S.C. Hiked 20 miles through some awful mud.

**April 22:** Fired on range for first time. No. 4 Battery "E" made very good record.

**April 27:** Left Cleveland Mills at 8:10. Made record hike of 21 miles in 7 hours and 10 minutes, arriving at camp at 3:30. MOONSHINE WHISKEY PLENTIFUL.

**May 19:** Hiked to Paris, S.C., boarded troop train...were wonderfully taken care of by the American Red Cross...

**May 21:** Arrived in New York and detrained at Mineola, L.I. Hiked to camp Mills, a distance of about 5 miles. We went into tents, 8 men to a tent, had cots.

**May 22:** Herbert Culver, Gorden Allen, Oswald Ransom and myself went to New York together. The first thing was to see Broadway just like the rest of the rubes that come to New York. After see-

ing as much of Broadway as we could without cost, we went to see "The Rainbow Girl" at the New Amsterdam Theater. After seeing this show we went to see Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic. It was sure some show and take it from me I sure saw some good looking women including

Ann Pennington and Billie Burke. It was announced that Mr. John McCormack, the great Irish tenor, had raised \$100,000 for the American Red Cross. The people applauded him with great interest and yelled for him to sing, and after a few moments he got up and said "If anyone will give \$5000 to the Red Cross, I will sing." The house was quiet for a few moments and then it was announced that Mr. and Mrs. Ziegfeld would give the said amount. Mr. McCormack sang "My Little Gray Home in the West" and ended up by singing "Mother Macree." After leaving we went to the Martinique Hotel where we raised H--L the rest of the night.

**May 23:** The same crowd of fellows went to N.Y. the following day again. We first went to Coney Island. The fellows that go to Coney Island rent overalls so they won't wear out their pants and the girls wear bloomers so they won't soil their dresses. We left the Island about 1:30 and went back to N.Y. and spent the rest of the night with WINE, WOMEN, AND SONG.

**June 4:** Left Camp Mills for port by train, detrained at ferry station, took ferry across the Hudson and boarded the fastest ship afloat, His Majesty Ship Mauretania, sister ship to the Lusitania, which was torpedoed by the Germans and was one of the inhuman things the Boche did that brought on this terrible war. (Ed. Note: Boche, a WWI term, was derived from the French "Tête de boche." Boche was taken to mean "hard headed" and "rascal")

and was used by the French to describe the German soldiers.) Sailed from New York City about 6:30. I was put on a gun crew as soon as we started from port, my





post was on the top deck, 2nd gun. I was very fortunate as the soldiers were not allowed to go out on deck until we had passed Sandy Hook. I was on the top when we passed Miss Liberty and believe me it certainly was a sad feeling.

**June 7:** Fired 20 rounds from gun in mid-ocean for target practice.

**June 8:** Slept from this date to June 10.

**June 10:** Picked up 4 American destroyers 500 miles off the English coast, passed merchant convoy of 16 ships. RUMOR: German submarine came up 60 yards off starboard side but submerged too quick for us to fire on him.

**June 11:** Arrived Liverpool, England, left the same day.

**June 12:** Arrived at rest camp at Romsey, England. This is the camp where they tried to starve us to death. This was some "REST" camp—when we slept we were thrown in small tents with 40 to each tent and when we ate, we ate nothing but old moldy cheese.

**June 13:** Hiked from Romsey to Southampton, England. It was really hotter than HELL and besides the heat, the little kids would worry us until we gave them a penny, there must have been a thousand kids hollering for pennies. Stopped at another rest camp, also nothing to eat.

**June 14:** Left that morning for docks, embarked on the transport Antrem of Belfast. Disembarked before leaving as she had a burst boiler, so we got off and hiked back to the rest camp at Southampton—more of those little English boys, they got cussed out this trip.

**June 15:** We embarked the next morning on the Meivana, which had 200 horses aboard and the worst part was we had to sleep in the same place as the horses. The most dirty thing about our trip was the Hindu crew, sailed across the channel that night but we had to lay out in the harbor all morning until the tide came in.

**June 16:** Arrived at Le Havre, France. Hiked to rest camp outside of Le Havre, took a good vapor bath while I was there.

**June 17:** Entrained at Le Havre in box cars, pulled out that night.



**June 18:** Rode all day in a damn old box car.

**June 19:** Arrived at Guer, France, detrained and hiked to Camp Coetquidan. This is where we trained for the front with the French 155m-m howitzer equal to our 6 inch field piece.

**July 6:** Battery E 115 H.F.A. started firing on range, fired every day. On August 17 we put over a barrage that lasted 72 straight hours.

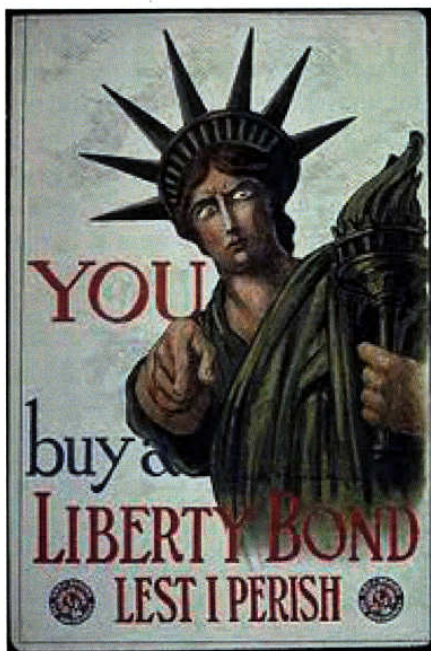
**July 8:** Were issued our sea caps and sparrow leggings, also gas mask and helmet.

**July 29:** Started having gas instructions every night and we had to wear our gas mask one hour each day, we could not even take them off to talk or smoke.

**Aug. 25:** Left Camp Coetquidan for the front.

**Aug. 28:** Detrained at Toul, France, after staying in box cars for three days and four nights eating nothing but cold corned beef and a couple of hardtacks. Stayed under cover all day but started hiking for the front that night. We hiked in a big rain storm as rain never stops. Went into our first position that night near Mannonville, France. This small town was inhabited by French peasants and had a number of pro-Germans. We had to put guards on our telephone wires as these pro-Germans would cut them.

**Aug. 30:** We had our first gas attack. I was in bed when I heard the alarm and you should have seen me put my mask on. The men and women of this town all wear gas masks, no matter where you see them—in the field or on the street they always have their masks around their necks.



(Continued on Page 8)



**Sept. 9:** Big American ammunition dump was blown up near Menil La Tour by the Boche.

**Sept. 10:** Met Jim Nathan in Mannonville, had a long talk with him. I took him to see some of the Memphis fellows he knew. Nathan was later killed inside a dugout—a shell exploded outside and some of the shell fragments came through the door. The same shell wounded others in the dugout but Jim was the only one killed.

**Sept. 12:** Beginning of the St. Mihiel drive, it was our first barrage on the front and that is one night I will never forget, our gun position was just outside Noviant, France.

**Sept. 13:** Saw one of our observation balloons taken down by the Boche.

**Sept. 14:** Left Noviant on long hike, saw several battles, we were shelled on the road and had to double time into Thiercourt. Our lives were not

worth 2 bits, the shells were hitting 50 feet on each side of us. Our Captain yelled, "Every man for himself," well after that you should have seen us get to those shell holes. This hike lasted 10 straight nights, the most miserable nights I ever went through. Out of the 10 nights it rained 8, it was cold as Hell and we had to sleep on the wet ground and cover with wet blankets. We had to stop 8 or 9 times to unharness some horse that dropped dead of exhaustion. We lost 150 horses on this hike, just think of the poor men.

**Sept. 25:** First night in the Argonne Forest before the drive started, 2 brothers were killed by the same shell and also the 1st sergeant of Battery "F." These fellows were sleeping under a wagon when the shell exploded killing a horse and the three men.

**Sept. 26:** The Argonne drive started at 2:31 AM. Put over an awful barrage, this was the hottest drive in which Americans participated and the casualties were far greater.

**Oct. 11:** Arrived near Hannonville, France. Gee how the Huns did shell us. They shelled us almost all the time.

**Nov. 10:** Fired at the Boche all day, it was sure hard work, we hardly had time to eat.

**Nov. 11, 1918:** ARMISTICE SIGNED, We fired all morning up until 10:30 and then we got orders to CEASE FIRE. What a grand and glorious feeling.

**Nov. 12:** First payday in 3 months.

**Nov. 30:** Still sleeping.

**Dec. 12:** Arrived in Luxembourg in a town called Esch, billeted in a large school-house. Beer and schnapps were plentiful. Left Esch the next day.

**Dec. 15:** Were caught in a big snow storm on the outskirts of Luxembourg City.

**Dec. 16:** Arrived in Lintgen. We were billeted in private houses, some had featherbeds. I wasn't that fortunate but I was very comfortably fixed on the floor. The people treated us like Kings.

**Dec. 21:** Turned in rifles at this town, we were sure glad to get rid of them. They weigh 9 pounds but on hikes after you walk

with them a while they felt as if they weigh 100 pounds.

**Dec. 28:** Still in Lintgen, was excused from drill by Captain Key to wash clothes and take bath—some bath, took it in a bucket about 1 foot in diameter. Went to town that night with a boy from Kosciusco, Mississippi, went to bar and had a nice drink of schnapps, went home early and painted "cootie bites" with iodine.

**Dec. 31:** New Years Eve and also pay day. I drew 55 Marks, paid a few debts and ate a nice waffle supper. Stayed up till 12 o'clock to see the New Year and the drunks come in.

**Jan. 4, 1919:** Had inspection, we were informed that we were relieved from the Army of Occupation and that our first move would be towards home.

**Jan. 6:** Left Lintgen for Lucy, France, a town just outside of Toul.

**Jan. 12:** Arrived at Lucy, the snow was a foot deep on the ground. Cold as Hell.

**Jan. 15:** Turned in our 115 m-m howitzers at Toul. We were sure glad to get rid of them.

**Jan. 21:** My 19th birthday was enjoyed in a big box car





too crowded to move. We had a big train wreck, I was issuing out candy when it happened, 35 of our men were crushed to death. As it was, the wreck could not be avoided as the French government won't allow the Americans to use air brakes.

**Jan. 27:** The men that were wounded, hurt in any way, or sick on the front were sent to a hospital. Shea, Snowden, and myself found a champagne cellar under our kitchen and we certainly had "Beaucoup" as long as it lasted which was not so long.

**Jan. 29:** Brigade started drilling, preparing for passing review of General John J. "Black-jack" Pershing.

**Jan. 30:** Passed an inspection and review of General Pershing and was complimented for our work at the front. During the tour of inspection he would walk past us and snap his fingers in our faces to see if we would blink.

**Feb. 7:** Were deloused for the first time since we hit France.

**Feb 9:** 115th Field Artillery put under quarantine on account of influenza.

**Feb. 13:** I took influenza, gee I was certainly some sick, they wanted to send me to the hospital but not me, we were too close to home for anything like that.

**Feb. 14:** Stayed in bed all day and took a good dose of saults.

**Feb. 22:** Washington's Birthday. Ate chicken dinner, first chicken I had eaten in a year.

**March 3:** Went on pass to Le Mans, had a swell meal and everything.

**March 7:** 115th F.A. left forwarding camp for St. Nazaire.

**March 9:** Hiked from camp at St. Nazaire to port and boarded the good ship Finland for the United States.

**March 11:** Sea very rough, almost everybody sick, I was one of the very lucky few.

**March 15:** Came in clear view of the Azores Islands.

**March 17:** Slept and read from the 17th to the 22nd.

**March 23:** Arrived at Newport News, Va. Hiked from docks to Camp Stuart, where we were placed in barracks, the best place we had ever seen to sleep in months. Gee that was fine. After getting settled and dismissed by our hard 1st sergeant, I went right straight to the Western Union and wired home for \$50.00. Also drank my first Coca-Cola on this day for a whole year.

**March 24:** I received the \$50.00. We were deloused that evening.

From March 24 to March 27 I had some good time.

**March 28:** Left Camp Stuart for Knoxville, Tennessee, where we are to parade.

**March 30:** Left Knoxville for Nashville to also parade there.

**March 31:** Paraded in Nashville, some crowd, had a big luncheon and were all given medals from the citizens of Nashville.

**April 1:** Left Nashville for Fort Oglethorpe where we are to be discharged. We arrived in Chattanooga.

**April 5:** Was discharged from the U.S. Army and drew my final pay which was \$91.90. Same day left Chattanooga for home on the 12:30 Memphis Special.

**April 6:** Arrived home, was met at train by Mother, Father, and family. After seeing the 115th F.A. parade, we went to "Home Sweet Home." ☆



*Avrome H. Boshwitz, c. 1917*



*Many thanks to Judy Boshwit for sharing this diary and to Suzy Boshwit for the photo of her grandfather. Other photos and illustrations are from various websites on the internet.*



# George M. Cohan's Song "Over There" Was An Inspiration for Americans in World War I

**T**he song "Over There" was one of the most famous songs of World War I. It was written by George M. Cohan, an American entertainer, playwright, composer, lyricist, actor, singer, dancer and producer. Cohan published more than 300 songs during his lifetime, including "Give My Regards to Broadway," "Yankee Doodle Boy," and "You're a Grand Old Flag." He wrote, composed, produced, and appeared in more than three dozen Broadway musicals.

Cohan was born in 1878 in Providence, Rhode Island, and despite his surname sounding Jewish, his parents, Jeremiah and Helen Costigan Cohan, were Irish Catholic. A baptismal certificate indicated that he was born on July 3, but Cohan and his family always insisted that he had been "born on the Fourth of July!"

George's parents, better known as Jerry and Nellie, were traveling vaudeville performers. George was their second child, and they interrupted their tour of the variety circuit so Nellie could give birth in her hometown of Providence. When the time came to get back to trouping, Jerry and Nellie took the children along.

George got his start as a performer playing the violin in theatre pit bands; however, his aim was to appear on stage. When he was eleven, he and his sister Josie joined their parents in a family song and dance act known as The Four Cohans. He already had begun writing songs, skits, and one-act plays as a teenager. Sometime around 1895, his father put him in charge of the family act. While it must have been difficult for a veteran entertainer to defer to a teenager, it proved to be a brilliant decision.

George and his family were on tour developing two of his sketches into full length musicals when he met and fell in love with actress Ethel Levey, a talented vaudeville singer and comedienne. Ethel Levey was born Ethelia Fowler. She grew up in San Francisco to Scottish and Irish parents. She later adopted the name Levey from her Jewish step-father, Sol Levey. After conducting most of their courtship by mail, George and Ethel married in 1899. She continued performing on her own, joining the Cohans for several engagements. George and Ethel's daughter Georgette was born in 1900, just in time for her parents to star in their first Broadway musical.

Cohan had clearly hoped his marriage would be like the one which his parents enjoyed, but Ethel Levey was too

talented to stay in George's shadow for long. Tensions rose between them, no doubt fueled by suggestions in the newspapers that Josie Cohan resented Ethel. When George's occasional overnight "writing" sessions at various hotels became more frequent and prolonged, Ethel suspected the worst—as it turns out, with good reason. In 1907, she obtained a divorce on grounds of adultery. Ethel remained one of vaudeville's most popular headliners and raised daughter Georgette on her own. Within months, George married Agnes Nolan, a chorus girl who was refreshingly unimpressed with his fame.

Cohan's sister Josie unexpectedly died of heart failure in 1916, and his beloved father Jerry faced the same fate a year later. Emotionally devastated, George found comfort in his work. Still one of America's top songwriters, he also owned his own music publishing firm. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Cohan's stirring "Over There" captured the nation's sentiments, proving to be an inspiration both to the young men who were being sent to fight the war as well as to those on the home-front who worried about their loved ones. It was an instant success, selling over two million copies by the end of the war.

On June 29, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded Cohan the Congressional Gold Medal for this and other songs. "Over There" was revived during World War II and continues to be a classic patriotic song. ☆



## Over There

Johnny, get your gun, get your gun, get your gun.  
Take it on the run, on the run, on the run.  
Hear them calling you and me,  
Every Son of Liberty.  
Hurry right away, no delay, go today.  
Make your Daddy glad to have had such a lad.  
Tell your sweetheart not to pine,  
To be proud her boy's in line.

### Chorus:

Over there, over there,  
Send the word, send the word over there  
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming  
The drums rum-tumming everywhere.  
So prepare, say a prayer,  
Send the word, send the word to beware -  
We'll be over, we're coming over,  
And we won't come back till it's over, over there.





# SOUTHERN JEWISH *Historical Society*

## 39th Annual Conference

**"Crossing Borders: Southern Jews in Global Contexts"**

Austin, Texas, October 23-26, 2014

Bryan E. Stone and Hollace Weiner, Conference Program Co-Chairs

Keynote speaker: Samuel D. Gruber, architectural historian, author, historic preservationist, "Saving Synagogues: Different Goals, Different Strategies in Brenham, Brookhaven, Birmingham and Beyond." Introduction by Sherry Zander, historian of small-town synagogues.

Other speakers will include:

Claudia Anderson, LBJ Presidential Library supervisory archivist, "LBJ and Austin Jewry: Reality vs. Hyperbole"

Cecily Abram, "Stepping Stones from Georgia to Geneva: Morris Abram and His Ties to Five Presidents"

Don Carleton, "Capitalist with a Conscience: Bernard Rapoport's Rapport with Bill Clinton"

Stephen Whitfield, "Bernard Baruch and Abe Fortas: No Southern Jewish Style in Politics"

All daytime events are on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin.

For more information go to [www.jewishsouth.org](http://www.jewishsouth.org)

שנה טובה *Shanah Tova!*



*Best wishes  
for good health,  
prosperity,  
and peace  
in the New Year*





Memphis' Veterans Plaza contains memorials to the veterans of Memphis and Shelby County who were killed defending the freedom of the United States. It is located in Overton Park just to the south of the Memphis Zoo. The Doughboy statue, which is the hallmark of the area, is one of the World War I memorials; it was made in 1926 of copper from pennies that were collected by local school children.

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