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Cohen Family Collection  
1908-1997

Collection 266

## Champaign County Historical Archives

**Compiled by:** Matthew Mayton, October 2019; Shalini Smith, April 2023

**Creator/Corporate Name:** Jack A. Simon

**Inclusion Dates:** 1908-1997, bulk 1980-1989

**Physical Description:** 2 boxes, 1.5 linear feet

**Provenance:**

This collection was donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives on October 24, 2004, by Jack A. Simon.

**Access:**

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of the Urbana Free Library.

**Biographical Note:**

**Julius Cohen**

Julius Cohen was born on May 15, 1888, the second son of Nathan and Addie Cohen. At a young age, Julius studied music with his great aunt and opera singer Clara Bernetta in New York and traveled to Budapest to study with some of the best vocalists in the world. Julius served with the American Expeditionary Force during the First World War.

Julius taught voice lessons from his family home at 511 West Elm St. Several of his students went on to become successful vocalists, such as Doris Jung of the Hamburg and Munich Opera companies and the New York City Opera, concert artist William Wolff of New York, David Rae Smith of the New York City Opera, and Jane Morrow who sang with Beverly Sills. In 1959, Julius published *Far-Off Whistle*, a collection of lyrical poems.

Julius was the head of the Sinai Temple choir for forty-six years and sang in churches throughout Champaign County. With his brother Sol, Julius wrote music and performed at local gatherings, service clubs, and other community events at no charge. In 1972, Julius and Sol were designated Men of the Year by the Grand Prairie Lodge of B'nai Brith for their dedication to the community. Julius died on November 26, 1973.

**Sol Cohen**

Sol Cohen was born January 11, 1891, the youngest son of Nathan and Addie Cohen. He began studying violin with Charles Foster in Urbana until 1903 when he traveled to the Chicago Musical College on weekends to study under French violinist Emile Sauret. Sol studied under Sauret for a couple of years until Sauret returned to Europe. Sol remained at the Chicago Musical College until 1908, where he would first travel to Prague to study under Otakar Sevcik and then to Budapest to study under Jenő Hubay.



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In 1911, Sol began teaching violin in Bloomington, Illinois, until 1912 when he joined the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. A year later, Sol returned to Illinois and taught violin at Peoria Musical College while also performing at churches and community events. In 1917, Sol left the college to serve with Army Intelligence in France during World War I.

After being discharged from the military, Sol returned to France to resume violin lessons and tour with a group of musicians. In 1920, Sol moved to Los Angeles and joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra for a few years. He also spent his time in Los Angeles composing scores and playing for various silent film directors such as D.W. Griffith, Cecil B. DeMille, and Thomas Ince. He advocated for the construction of the Hollywood Bowl and performed there several times. He became the musical director for the American Denishawn Dance Company's co-founder Ruth St. Denis and wrote several ballets for her, including "Angkor-Vat." Sol was also associated with American composer Charles Wakefield Cadman and singer/songwriter Carrie Jacobs Bond for whom he composed several pieces.

After the 1920s, Sol spent the next several decades taking various teaching positions throughout the United States, including musical director at Champaign High School. He also spent time at the MacDowell art colony in New Hampshire, where he became friends with Marian MacDowell. In 1944, Sol spent a year in New York City arranging for the Blue Radio Network and being the assistant conductor for the Paul Whiteman Philco Hour. In 1961, Sol became the musical director at Crystal Lake Camp in Hughesville, Pennsylvania, during the summers and held that position for twenty years.

Despite traveling, Sol continued to make Urbana his permanent residence. He offered violin lessons from his family home at 511 West Elm St. Sol was the first conductor of the Champaign-Urbana Community Arts Symphony Orchestra and a violinist for the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra. With his brother Julius, he wrote songs and performed for community events and service groups at no charge. In 1972, he was awarded Man of the Year by the Grand Prairie Lodge of B'nai Brith along with his brother Julius for their dedication to the community. He was presented with the first President's Award by the Champaign County Arts and Humanities Council. In 1984, the Illinois Society for the Performing Arts established the Sol B. Cohen Award for distinguished achievement by children in music. In 1982, Sol published his memoirs *Years of Pilgrimage: Memoirs of an American Musician*. Sol died on September 29, 1988.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The Cohen Family collection consists primarily of documents relating to Julius and Sol Cohen. Within this collection are selected newspaper clippings depicting the influence the Cohens had on the Champaign-Urbana community. The collection also contains a program and letter from the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, dedicating its performance to Sol Cohen, papers pertaining to the Sol B. Cohen Award, and Sol Cohen's memorial book from his funeral service.



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The collection also contains select musical and manuscript work by Julius and Sol Cohen. This work includes the poem "Beauty," Sol Cohen wrote in 1908 for *The Thronburn Thistle*, a high school publication, an excerpt from Julius Cohen's book *Far-Off Whistle*, and a song written for the Urbana Exchange Club in 1961.

**Arrangement:**

The collection is arranged alphabetically by material type.

**Separated Material:**

Photographs were removed from the collection and placed in the Cohen Family Photograph Envelope.

**Related Material:**

Researchers interested in this collection may also wish to consult other resources in the Champaign County Historical Archives:

- *Years of Pilgrimage: Memoirs of an American Musician* by Sol B. Cohen
- *Far-Off Whistle* by Julius Cohen
- Collection 34, Sholem Family Papers, contains Nathan Cohen's manuscript of *Memoirs*
- Photograph envelopes for Cohen Family, Julius Cohen, Sol Cohen, Cohen House (Urbana, Ill.)
- Vertical files for Cohen Family, Sol Cohen, Illinois Society for the Performing Arts. Sol B. Cohen Award
- Oral histories for Sol Cohen, "Recollections of Urbana," "History of Jews in Champaign-Urbana in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries," "1983 annual meeting of the Urbana Half-Century Club," and "Early memories of Urbana" (1980)

Researchers interested in this collection may also wish to consult the Sol B. Cohen Papers, 1870-1988, located at the Illinois History and Lincoln Collection at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

**Subject Terms:**

Jews

Jews—Urbana--History

Music

Poetry

**Name Terms:**

Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra

Cohen Family

Cohen, Julius B.

Cohen, Sol B., 1891-1988



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Illinois Society for the Performing Arts. Sol B. Cohen Award  
Urbana Exchange Club

**Container List:**

**Box 1:**

- Folder 1: Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra Dedication Concert
- Folder 2: Cohen Family Research, 1991, 1995, 1997, undated
- Folder 3: Cohen Poetry and Music, 1908, 1929, 1959, 1961, 1965, 1989, undated
- Folder 4: Memoirs by Nathan H. Cohen, 1920
- Folder 5: Newspaper Clippings and Press Notices, 1911, 1973, 1977, 1980-1989, 1991, undated
- Folder 6: Personal Correspondence, 1936, 1988-1990, undated
- Folder 7: Sol B. Cohen Award Papers, 1983-1985, 1987, undated
- Folder 8: Sol Cohen Memorial-Book and Service, 1988
- Folder 9: Sol Cohen Memorial-Correspondence, 1988-1990

**Box 2:**

- Folder 1: Musical scores and Urbana Exchange Club newsletter