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JUD MS 02 Portland Jewish Community Center USO Guest Book Finding Aid

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**JEAN BYERS SAMPSON CENTER FOR DIVERSITY IN MAINE
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**PORTLAND JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER USO GUEST BOOK
JUD MS 2**

**Total Boxes: 1
Linear Feet: 1**

**By
Karin A. France**

**Portland, Maine
April 2010**

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Administrative Information

Provenance: The Portland Jewish Community Center USO Guest Book is the product of social events at the Portland Jewish Community Center from 1943-46. The guest book was donated in February 2010 by Nancy E. Bogg of Cape Elizabeth, ME on behalf of the estate of her cousin, Eleanor Edison Taft.

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Cite as: Portland Jewish Community Center USO Guest Book, Judaica Collection, Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

History and Biographical Sketch

Eleanor Edison Taft (1924 May 8 – 2010 Jan 5) was the third daughter of Bessie Swankin Edison and Benny Edison of Portland, Maine (her sisters are Estelle Fineman, currently of Newport News, VA and Leona Roberts, currently of Norfolk, VA). She was married to Jack Taft, and had one son, Leonard Taft, both of whom predeceased her. At the time of her death, she was a resident of Revere, MA.

Eleanor's first secretarial job after high school was at the Jewish Community Center on Cumberland Avenue in Portland, Maine. The Community Center was the site of United Service Organizations (USO) social events regularly from at least October 1943 to September 1946, and Eleanor saved this ledger listing the names of attendees at these events when the office was being cleaned out shortly thereafter. She recalled that several local young women (not named in the ledger) served as hostesses who volunteered for one particular evening each week to help with the refreshments and clean up. Eleanor also said that many Portland Jewish women met their husbands there, including one of her sisters.

Most of the servicemen (and some women who were nurses) were in the Navy and stationed on ships docked or anchored in Casco Bay. They were from throughout the United States and abroad, as well. The Jewish Community Center was known as a popular USO destination and both Jewish and non-Jewish servicemen attended the social events. Friday night services with refreshments were sometimes brought to one of the islands in Casco Bay to accommodate servicemen stationed on ships nearby. Occasionally, local servicemen from other military branches home on leave would attend events, too. There are many signatures from individuals listing Portland, Maine as their home base.

Note: Many of these details were relayed to Special Collections by Nancy E. Bogg based on her conversations with Eleanor Edison Taft.

Description of the Guest Book

The book is labeled "Guest Book" on the page opposite the front cover. Beginning on page one, there are columns for guests to enter their name, street address, and city and state of origin (although most actual entries do not include a street address). Each new date is listed above each new group of names or on the side margin. The first date is

October 25, 1943 and the last (on page 185) is September 11, 1946. There are entries for nearly every evening except Fridays, especially in the earlier years.

Aside from the rank and names of the servicemen, it is notable that names of ships were occasionally listed. Visitors came from throughout the United States and some were from other countries, such as France, various locations in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and perhaps even Tunisia and Algeria (page 126).

There are doodled drawings on the inside leaves, including some of Popeye, and additional comments throughout, such as on Thursday November 29, 1945 (page 175) when Bernard Glazer wrote near his signature: "Eleanor look me up." French visitors most often wrote comments beyond their names, praising the hospitality.

On one of the final pages (299) a Bruce Bailey wrote "Since I've seen action with the U.S. Navy Countries + Cities I've seen in my Travels: Honkong China, Plymouth England, Southampton England, Cardiff S. Wales, Glasgow Scotland, Naples Italy, Bombay India, London England, Cairo Egypt, Iran Mesopotamia ...Victory."

The fabric on the book's cover is coming loose in numerous spots and is held on in the front by Scotch tape. Entries have been written in both pencil and ink. Some of the pencil entries have become somewhat smudged.