

The Coming of the Greeks



Church of the Assumption in Pawtucket



Rev. Germanos Papa Johannou, Pastor Church of the Annunciation, Providence.



Church of the Annunciation on Smith Street



George A. Vaka, First Greek to Settle in this State

Nomads by tradition harking back 30 centuries to the Dorian Invasion: wandering far and wide over the face of the globe, the Greeks in their meanderings somehow did not hit the trail leading to Rhode Island until 21 years ago. It was then that the first Hellenite came to this state to take up a temporary abode in Pawtucket.

In the little more than two decades that have since intervened the Greek population has grown with such steadiness and stability that recently the Metropolitan of Athens added a second priest to the Rhode Island service, appointing to the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Pawtucket, Rev. George Sakaleriou. Papa George "Papa" being the equivalent of "Rev. Father" in the Roman Church, had been officiating for the Pawtucket community for little more than a year, but he was without regular and permanent appointment until now.

Five years after that first Greek came to Pawtucket he made his home in Weonsocket. Even at that late day he was about three years in advance of the first Greeks to arrive in Rhode Island in any considerable number. These, at Pawtucket, established the largest Hellenic colony in the State.

Pawtucket still holds the record for the largest Greek colony, although there are more representatives of the ancient race in this time than are in any county. More reside in Providence, but the Greeks are well-scattered, the nearest assemblance to a colony being on upper Washington, near Dean Street. Newport has quite a sizeable colony, the members of which are largely identified with lobster fishery, their homes being on Long Wharf.

The vanguard of the Rhode Island Greeks was George A. Vaka. Ten years before he came to this country there were, he asserts, not to exceed a dozen of his countrymen in the United States.

When Mr. Vaka went to Lowell in 1869 there was not another Greek in that city. Now there are 10,000. There is a Greek population in Boston approximating 9,000 and a total Hellenic population in the country of 206,000.

Rhode Island's quota of this racial representation is about 2,500. It would be nearly 500 greater were it not that, moved by an intensely patriotic spirit, many of the Greeks as "reservists" left for their native land last year to give their services in the war to be waged against the Turks.

That was a splendid exhibition of patriotism. A considerable number of those who threw up lucrative employment to fight under the Greek standard were naturalized citizens of the United States. These not only offered their lives upon the altar of Freedom from Turkish invasion and domination, but they gave of their accumulated savings for the support of the war movement. The oth-

ers, who were in the large majority, had been in this country but a year or two, some but a few months. These to get where they could enter the Greek army had to borrow money with which to pay their passage home.

In a small way, comparatively, the Rhode Island Greeks shared with their compatriots resident in the United States in contributing to the Greek war fund, the total offerings being something like \$1,000,000. A single contribution forwarded from Philadelphia was \$100,000.

From all over the world was sent to the mother country remittances like those sent out from Rhode Island, until today there is by far a greater balance in the Greek treasury than was ever before known, so it is asserted by a Greek publication. It is explained that the Greek government has acknowledged each of the subscriptions in the form of a certificate. These would be redeemed upon demand at the cessation of hostilities, but as one of the Rhode Island Greeks asserts, not one of these will ever be cashed. The money was sent for a cause and it was a free gift to be used whatever way the Home Government might elect. In years to come these certificates will be treasured. It was said as souvenirs of a great epoch in the history of the nation.

Of the patriots who rushed to Greece from every direction and they and their money came from surprising parts of the world - Some Hellenites had taken up their abode in Japan, China and even in Africa, where it was not dreamed they had settled - 150 went from Providence and a like number of Pawtucket. Since their departure for the front but little has been heard of their movements. The initial information received was to the effect that those who had not been naturalized in this and other countries were immediately assigned to regular armies.

The Greek Government, to avoid entanglement sent the Americanized volunteers to one side. They were assured

that the Government could assume no control over them, but that if they so elected they might fight as an independent body. One illustration which has come out of the war belt shows an independent organization proceeding to the front, with the American flag carried on the left of the Greek standard.

That regiment participated in the recent attack upon and capture of the Turkish city of Janina. There was a considerable loss of life in engagement, hence tidings are now anxiously looked for from the front by the Greeks of Providence and Pawtucket.

The Greeks of Rhode Island were rejoicing over the splendid fighting done by their compatriots at Janina, when they were shocked by the intelligence that King George of Greece had been assassinated. A memorial mass was said at the Church of the Annunciation last Sunday and one will be celebrated at the Pawtucket church today. Both edifices were appropriately decked in black and purple, the official mourning colors.

The Greek settlement in Rhode Island began about 1900-1. Prior to that period a few Hellenites had come out of the mother country, lured by information published in the home newspapers of the successes the vanguard had met with in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. This information was based upon communications that had been sent home by the successful pursuers after the American dollar. It was picked up and carried into the newspaper offices just as relatively important neighborhood news dribbles into the sanctums of the country editors in this land.

As one of the principal Greeks in Pawtucket says, the Hellenic race has even been obsessed with the idea of seeking better business conditions. The publication of those wonderful stories from America aroused his countrymen and caused them, he explains to seek

their fortunes here.

Later there were other causes contributing to the Greek advance upon the United States. One of these was the decline of the current business among the Macedonians of the Peloponnese living in Arcadia and in the vicinity of Patras.

There was a great overproduction of currants, the price steadily declined and the substitution of some other kind of fruit by the distillers of ardent spirits seemed to knock the bottom out of that industry. The vineyards were not kept up and there appearing to be no opportunity for acquiring competences in that line a general hegira to this country ensued.

Thus the Peloponnese came to Pawtucket and there laid the foundation for a Greek colony which monopolizes the tenement houses in an area included portions of Pleasant Street and Pawtucket and East Avenues. The Providence Greeks are almost exclusively Spartans, or Lacedamonians.

Almost every Greek coming out was of the middle class and, therefore, a laborer. Not in the acceptance of the term as it applies to the ordinary wielder of the shovel and pick, but utilitarians. The first impulse was that getting something to do which would afford a living, and the initial undertaking was the connection with the push-cart in purveying bananas and other fruits. As explained by one of the race, what one man did which brought him in money another would immediately copy.

Some found employment in the cotton and woolen mills and their successes moved others to seek the same kind of employment. It was the same with regard to taking up employment at one of the large tool-making establishments in this city. Then one or two branched out as confectioners, hiring compatriots to assist them. The latter gaining a knowledge of candy manufacture set up shops of their own. Some went into the restaurant and quick-lunch business and by their successes encouraged others to get into that line. Identically the same results worked out in connections with boot-blackening establishments, and it was declared that whatever business might hereafter be taken up it would sure to be

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Centre of the Greek Colony in Pawtucket



Rev. George Sakaleriou.

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adopted by others. There are now 75 restaurants in Providence controlled by Greeks. Six confectionery establishments are in operation and there are dozens of fruit merchants.

This is for the reasons that there are no idlers among the Greeks. For one to be content out of employment is a rarity. Long ago, comparatively speaking, the Greeks discarded the push-cart and sought more lucrative callings. Some have obtained positions in the textile industries that are netting as high as \$20 per week, and it was knowledge of this which caused a tidal wave of emigration to set in Americaward just prior to the beginning of war operations. When hostilities cease the wave will again sweep in this direction.

The Pawtucket colony felt the impulse of prosperity and began the erection of the first church to be built in this state by the Greeks just prior to the Greco-Turkish imbroglio. The community purchased a lot on George Street for which it paid \$1,000. Then it contracted for the erection of a \$4,000 edifice. This was completed a few months ago and \$1,500 has been paid upon it.

As one of the parishioners of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary declared, the re-

mainder of the indebtedness will be taken care of when the Turks have received their final dressing down and the victors return to Pawtucket to take up their usual vocations.

Prior to worshipping in this edifice the colonists assembled for religious purposes in Carpenter's Hall, North Main Street. Following the custom which had obtained in the Orthodox Church the community requested the Metropolitan at Athens of that Church to assign them a pastor.

Acting under the power conferred upon him by Patriarch Germanos V. of Constantinople, the head of the entire Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan of Athens sent Rev. George Sakalariou to Pawtucket. Papa George found in Pawtucket a community of about 500 Greeks. These he organized into an effective church body and as soon as conditions would permit funds were solicited for the purchase of a lot and the erection of an edifice.

A few days ago Papa George received word that he had been appointed to a permanent pastorage.

Papa George Sakalariou is a native of Korinthos, Luce, Greece. He was ordained 15 years ago. Soon after, he came to this country to officiate, his last location before coming to Pawtucket being

at Peabody, Mass.

Attending mass at this church would be a severe trial for one not accustomed to the Orthodox Church seeing that there are no sittings except for the very aged and infirm. For three and one-half hours the congregation stands while the impressive service is conducted and Papa George delivers the sermon. There is no instrumental music: no selected choir. The congregation renders all of the music of the mass, the compositions being those used in the Orthodox Church from time immemorial.

The Pawtucket Greeks had anticipated establishing a school in which their children might be educated, not only in Greek, but in the English language. There are about 30 children now of the right school age and it was thought that these could be gathered in some room and given the kind of education essential to success in this country. If an exclusively Pawtucket school could not be established, then it was thought that one could be opened in conjunction with one in this city, the teacher to give his services during the day time in one, and in the evening at the other. But the war-cloud appearing, the school project was abandoned for the nonce, to be brought up again which "Johnny Comes Marching Home," or the equivalent to that in

the Hellenic war song. Providence had two special night schools last year. Those were city institutions. That at Doyle avenue had 35 pupils, and that at Point street, 50. Four teachers employed who spoke English and modern Greek.

Referring to the growth of the Pawtucket colony as well as the advance upon this country by the Greeks, George A. Vaka said that he was the first Greek to come to this State and the first of his race to set himself up in business in Rhode Island.

Originally, he lived in Pawtucket. That was in 1892. Prior to this he went to Lowell. That was in 1890, when he had the lonesome consolation of knowing that he was the only representative of Greece in that city. He worked in the Merimack Mills for a few days when, forming a dislike for that kind of employment, went to Boston, where his uncle was in the confectionery manufacturing business. He remained with him long enough to get a useful understanding of that trade and in 1891 drifted to Attleboro. The next year he came to Pawtucket and in 1897 went to Woonsocket, although he is still engaged in business in Pawtucket.

Thirteen years have elapsed since he stood on the sidewalk in front of the railroad station at Lowell and realized that there was not a person in that city who could understand his language. In the interim 10,000 of his compatriots have flocked into that place and as many more have taken up homes in Boston.

The Providence Greeks worship in a little church on Smith Street, near Candace, formerly the property of a Swedish religious body. This edifice was purchased two years ago last December. Prior to this, and for nearly 10 years, the local Greeks assembled for worship in a hall on Exchange Place. The Providence church is designated in Greek as "O Evangelismos Thi Theotokou." The literal translation of this nomenclature is: "There will be born unto you a Son of God," the message delivered to Mary by the angel Gabriel.

Rev. Archimandrites Germanos, Papa Johnnou, is the pastor of this church. He is a native of Smyrna in Asia Minor, where he was born in 1881. He was educated in the high school of that city and later attended the Theological School of Jerusalem, where he was appointed a doctor of divinity in 1904. Here he mastered the Latin, Russian, Arabian, Turkish and French languages. After this, he was with his uncle, the Metropolitan of Myriofyton, until he went on missionary service in Asia Minor. He came to Providence last year, having been regularly appointed to the Church of the Annunciation by the Metropolitan of Athens.

There are no Greeks in any of the professions in this state, although it is quite common to see over the door of a bootblacking place a sign to the effect that "Professor" So and So is the proprietor of that establishment. There are Greek lawyers in New York and Philadelphia, Boston has several Greek physicians. American physicians meet all the requirements of the local Greeks and in the very few litigations they become involved in they and plenty of lawyers to take their causes under consideration.

It is asserted that almost never is a Greek hauled into court for intoxication or revelling upon the streets. Often they make considerable noise in their homes, particularly on Sundays; but as one of

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the explains, nothing wrong is intended. They are simply following a home custom of assembling for the purpose of singing and talking, and the noise they indulge is merely racial ebullition coincident with a period of relaxation from all cares.

There are no social organizations among the Greeks of Rhode Island, neither have they any beneficial bodies. One, of the latter was started in Pawtucket somewhere about 1905, but when the financial depression of 1907 came on some of the members could not see their way clear to keep up the assessments and the organization went out of business.

The only regular assessments collected among them today are those for the maintenance of religious worships. These are met with such certainty that there is never any doubt as to the ability of the finance committee's to meet every obligation as it falls due.

In the earlier days of the Greek

immigration much was said concerning the existence of a *Padrones* system, especially among those who fitted up boot-blackening places. It was asserted that young men inducted to come to this country practically held in bondage and required to work at very low wages for a year or two until they had requited those who had paid their passage out. This might have been the case to some extent and it would not be unreasonable to believe that it was so, seeing that similar practices have obtained with relation to immigration from other countries, but it is declared by local Greeks that it is no longer followed by them.

Occasionally, it was explained, such a charge is heard, but boiled down to facts it is found that the allegation is based upon jealousy on the part of the proprietor of one of these "parlors" toward the owner of another near-by, the purport being to injure the latter's business; or it might be that it was based upon a desire to obtain revenge for some real or fancied slight or wrong.