

## American Monuments of Greeks

By Steve Frangos  
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The monuments of Greek America are all around us. Not all of them, however, were established by Greeks. Instead, many were created by local American communities in recognition of some individual Hellenic. No systematic listing of Greek-American monuments exists, nor has any writer systematically researched and written about those monuments as a distinct classification. That is especially strange, not because there are so few existing monuments – namely, sites and physical markings of the Greek experience along the American landscape – but rather because there are so many. In fact, it is impossible even to list them all within a single article.

If you find all of this hard to believe, remember that the word "monument" includes: historical houses and buildings, graves, statues, commemorative plaques, public works of art, streets, gardens, parks, public buildings, boats, rooms, war memorials, walls, swimming pools, historical markers, fountains, and stadiums.

We need to locate and identify all of those sites. Taken together, they are part of our collective heritage as Greeks living in North America. Nonetheless, even as we consider this a yet-to-be researched area of Greek-American studies, we must always be conscious that those memorials represent two different sorts of visions: one distinctly Greek and the other ever and always American. Given the magnitude of this topic I will fo-



cal markers.

The Greeks' presence in the United States predates the arrival of Greek workers during the 1880-1920 era. Consequently, public plaques are dedicated to persons and events that reach back to the first Greeks that arrive in the New World.

**MONUMENTS DURING THE  
EXPLORATION ERA**

Greeks who arrived in the New World during the Age of Exploration include Don Teodoro, Pedro de Candia, Juan De Fuca, and Eustrate Delarof. All of those men have had some type of monument dedicated to them. For instance, various historical markers in the United

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# Landmarks Commemorating Greeks Sta

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States and Canada offer testimony to the seamanship and discoveries of the Hellene the Spanish called Juan de Fuca, one of which is found West of Port Angeles, WA on Highway 101. A Seventeenth Century account states that Apostolos Valerianos discovered a waterway through the northwest corner of North America in 1592 – a Northwest Passage. Valerianos reportedly sailed for the Spanish under the name “Juan de Fuca.”

For a century and a half, no one utilized the claim. Finally, in the late Eighteenth Century explorers of many nations sailed their tall ships to the Pacific Northwest to chart, claim, and trade. In 1787 Charles William Barkley, an Englishman commanding the Imperial Eagle and seeking sea otter pelts from Indian people, sighted a major inlet. Honoring that legendary ancient mariner, Barkley named the inlet “de Fuca.”

Many scholars have no difficulty in accepting Apostolos Valerianos as an actual historical figure. Like other aspects of history, however, markers are a perennially-debated topic – subject to far more interpretation, outright censorship, and competing ideologies than the average observer might realize.

Incidentally, for those Greek-Americans who have never heard of Valerianos (a.k.a. de Fuca) de Candia, or the others, some basic research and reading is in order. If Greek-Americans will not take the time to explore their Hellenic Heritage, then why should anyone else?

## MONUMENTS

### DURING THE COLONIAL ERA

During the American Colonial Era, the New Smyrna Colony was first major migration of Greeks to North America. Dr. Andrew Turnbull, a Scottish doctor married to a Greek woman from Smyrna, established that colony some 70 miles south of St. Augustine, FL. Numerous historical markers commemorating that colony were established by Greeks and non-Greeks alike. In New Smyrna Beach, FL there is a bronze plaque embedded in a rock formation. The inscription reads: “To the past, to the present, to the future... Dedicated on this 200th anniversary in honor of those intrepid Hellenes who

came to the New World in 1768 as settlers of the historic New Smyrna.

Americans proud of their Hellenic heritage who have participated in the ideals of democracy and freedom as embodied in our American way of life so that generations yet unborn may fulfill the hopes engendered by these priceless legacies. Presented by the Order of Ahepa, American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, May 4, 1968.” The first time I saw it a local Greek woman who led me to it told me that on May 3, 1968 – the eve of the bicentennial anniversary of the colony’s founding – vandals had thrown red paint across it. Several Greek women had to clean it off before the dedication ceremonies took place the next day.

On St. George Street in St. Augustine, where many monuments to the New Smyrna Colony exist, one in particular reads: “Casa Avero – St. Photios National Greek Orthodox Shrine. Built 1794-Restored 1979. This shrine is dedicated to the memory of the 400 Greeks who arrived in St. Augustine in 1768, took on fresh supplies, and then journeyed south to help settle the colony of New Smyrna, Florida. After ten difficult years, the survivors of that colony sought refuge in St. Augustine, where they gathered in the Avero House for worship. These pioneers comprised the first permanent settlement of Greeks on this continent. This house is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Property of Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Of North and South America”

## MONUMENTS IN MODERN ERA

A two-sided historical marker was placed in Bessemer, AL in 2010 by the Alabama Tourist Department. One side of the marker reads: “Bright Star ‘Alabama’s oldest restaurant.’ In 1907, Greek immigrant Tom Bonduris invested his savings and opened a small café with only a horseshoe shaped bar at First Avenue and 21st Street in Bessemer, Alabama. Outgrowing three locations, the Bright Star moved to this site in 1915, and introduced patrons to a new dining atmosphere. The interior of the restaurant has remained true to its 1915 glory, with hand

painted murals on the walls, a marble-tiled floor, and a couple of private curtained booths. Major alterations and renovations of the premise and kitchen were completed in 1966. The dining room was expanded in 1978 with the addition of the ‘1907’ room. Another expansion of the Bright Star occurred in 1985 with the addition of the ‘Dixie’ and the ‘Green’ rooms. Throughout the years, the Bright Star’s reputation and longevity excelled because of one family’s continued commitment to outstanding service and superior cuisine, and the dedication of their staff members.” The restaurant’s other side reads: “This restaurant ‘An American Classic.’ Family patriarch Bill and Kate Koilkos emigrated from Greece in 1923, and two years later purchased an interest in the Bright Star from Tom Bonduris, who opened in 1907. In 1966, Bill’s two sons, Jim and Nick Koilkos, became owners and operators of the business. Since opening the Bright Star expe-

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experienced remarkable growth, expanding from a 25-seat café to a 300-seat restaurant, all without sacrificing quality. The Bright Star has garnered numerous awards, including being

Your immediate ancestors traveled halfway around the world to help build this American country and culture that you now enjoy. Nothing can or should get in your way to establishing a Greek-American monument in your own community.

listed since 2005 in the '100 dishes to eat in Alabama before you die' brochure created by the Alabama Tourism Department. In 2010, it was honored by the James Beard Foundation with the American Classics Award, The American Classics Awards given to five restaurants a year

with timeless appeal, beloved for quality food that reflects the character of their community—from small, regional restaurants, watering holes and shacks, to lunch counters and down-home eateries that have carved out a special place on the American culinary landscape."

## ARE THERE GREEK-AMERICAN MONUMENTS IN YOUR HOMETOWN?

The Greek-American historical markers mentioned above are obviously less than a handful of those found, quite literally, from sea to shining sea. Some others designate churches on the National Registry of Historical Places, including some in Detroit, MI; Salt Lake City, UT; Pueblo, CO; Oakland, CA; and various others. Many might immediately presume that either AHEPA or the Archdiocese was principally responsible for those monuments. But no Greek-American monument that I am aware of ever came into being without the initial efforts, long-term agitation, and direct sup-

port of the local Greek community in which the monuments now stand.

Does a Greek-American monument exist in your hometown? Greek America's enduring local political connections and effective engagement of city, state, and federal agencies are certainly responsible for a vast number of monuments. Accordingly, no one is stopping you or your local community from establishing a Greek-American historical marker, statue, or some other kind of monument in your own hometown.

Your immediate ancestors traveled halfway around the world to help build this American country and culture that you now enjoy. You are descended from a people whose conception of monuments established this form in Western Civilization. What are you waiting for? Nothing can or should get in your way to establishing a Greek-American monument in your own community.

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