

Book Tells Story about Greeks in Wash. State

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By Steve Frangos

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What are enduring historical and social facts? Which details of everyday life need we carefully preserve for future generations? How do we write about our lives and experiences as accurate objective accounts of Greek American history during our times? These are all questions no one is asking Greek Americans. No academic researcher. No Greek Government official. No other clerk or elitist expert scribbling at their desk.

These questions are all the more pressing because an entire generation of Greek Americans is now passing away. I am speaking of that generation of American Hellenes, now in their seventies and eighties, who are the children of the massive wave of Greek immigrants who arrived in the 1880 to 1920 era. This bridge generation has much to teach us, much that they, and only they, can bear witness to for succeeding generations.

And let us not forget those Greek immigrants who came to American shores only after World War II. What can those eyewitnesses recall for us about Greece during the Second World War and then the Greek Civil War? Are their experiences here in America in the 1940's and 1950's not worth recording? More than 600-700 thousand individual Greeks are said to have arrived in the United States between 1940 and 1980. What of the lives and experiences of these Hellenes?

A new account has appeared which explores a number of these

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critical issues.

"Hellenic Heritage: A History of Greek Immigrants in the Yakima Valley through 1950" by A.R. (Tony) Adeline, Katherina Adeline and Cleo Adeline-Rumpakis is a self-published book. Many of the new Greek American histories and biographies within the last 20 years follow this independent route, rather than bother to listen to what a literary agent believes will sell or what some editorial adviser (who most often is not a published writer, by the way) thinks the book should include. Greek-American histories and biographies are appearing across the country, issued by small local presses or simply as self-published accounts.

COMMON EXPERIENCES LED TO SUSTAINED FELLOWSHIP

No church joined the sprawling Yakima Valley community together. Common experiences, ethnicity, work and geography drew these people into sustained fellowship. As we are told, "The Yakima Valley Greek Community extended from Ellensburg to Prosser. Even though families and individuals had assimilated into American society, had their own friends and belonged to various groups and lodges, they assembled for Greek celebrations. The social life centered on activities sponsored by the local AHEPA chapter, and for baptisms, weddings, anniversaries, celebration of saints days, name-days, and housewarmings."

The authors are clear that the "primary purpose of this book is to record the presence and identify the activities of Greek immigrants in Benton, Kittitas and Yakima Counties in the state of Washington, from the first known settlers to 1950. Included are vital statistics about them, as well as activi-

2. Early Greek Immigrants to Washington State.
3. Greeks of Central Washington.
4. Professions and Businesses.
5. Social Life of the Greek Community.
6. American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.
7. World War II Participation.
8. Wapatox Canal Incident.
9. Wymer Tragedy.
10. Wrestling Scene.
11. Family Histories.
12. Railroads.
13. Appendix A Restaurateurs.
14. Non-Greek Spouses.
15. Greek File Index.

Each of these thematic sections has concise but thoughtful introductions. It must be noted that, all in all, this volume is more a reference guide than a history in the sense of a chronological narrative where the 'story' of the community is told. In the author's sense of 'history,' they are engaged in a neutral presentation of "just the facts." Therefore, in each thematic section, we find full text to newspaper accounts, short family histories, as well as itemized listings of individuals, their professions and often even very detailed information on the individual (such as declaration of intent numbers or other data).

This approach unintentionally creates a problem. Since there is no 'story,' no narrative and simply broad thematic groupings, the reader has to fill in the broader historical context. If you are Greek American whose ancestors arrived in the 1880-1920 era, then you'll have no problem with this unintended consequence.

Now, before I proceed any further, I would also like to recommend this volume, without reservation, to any Greek American who wishes to read about the history of Greeks in Central Washington State. Furthermore, any Greek community wishing to find

there are no newspaper accounts of anything negative about Greeks. This seems extremely unlikely and appears to be a blind spot for contemporary Greek Americans everywhere. On the one hand, nearly any senior Greek American you wish to speak to is quite willing and immediately able to tell stories of how they, individual members of his or her family, or someone they grew up were shouted at in public, physically attacked, threatened, or otherwise ill-treated by 'native-born' Americans. Yet these same individuals inexplicably believe any and all negative news stories found in the American press about other Greeks. This must have something to do with the shame half of our honor and shame culture.

Why Greek Americans automatically accept the racism and open hatred printed in American newspapers is beyond my ability to comprehend. Over the last 25 years, in one Greek-related project or another, I have closely surveyed American newspapers from small cities in Colorado, Florida, Iowa and Michigan. Without fail, negative and, at times, openly racist stories on the recently arrived Greek immigrants is commonplace. Young Greek men are often arrested for no greater a crime than dating a "white girl."

Another story category seen over and over again is the one about Greeks arrested for gambling which most often took place in a Greek café, restaurant, home or other setting. The deep and direct involvement of Greek immigrants in the labor movement all across the country is another genre of news accounts found everywhere.

Consequently, it is very hard to believe that not one single news story appeared anywhere in central Washington state which spoke ill of the new immigrants.

ties in which they participated."

Given the distances involved, we should point out that an especially high percentage of these Greeks worked for the various railroads, so transportation even across vast distances within the state was not all that difficult to traverse. As we learn, "The railroad provided free transportation for employees. The Northern Pacific, Great Northern and Milwaukee had reciprocity for each, so travel was easy and inexpensive." Given the incredible amount of specific information offered in this volume, I would strongly suggest that, if you are not intimately familiar with the geography of Washington State, you have a detailed map on hand.

The Greeks of Central Washington are described and presented in 15 chapters. Naming these can provide a quick summary as to what this volume offers:

1. Greek Immigrants to the United States.

a guide for how to compile its own unique history would be well served to closely review this book.

I just have some minor observations. First, in terms of newspaper accounts, there seems to be an unintentional focus on a specific time period rather than a broad sweep of articles from 1900 to 1950. While we see news items from, say, 1913 and the late 1900's, the vast amount of information quoted comes from sources between the 1930's and 1940's. Part of this chronological omission is undoubtedly due to the disappearance of basic materials on Greeks in the United States. Unquestionably, one of the primary reasons this volume has appeared (along with the explosion of other Greek community and family histories, biographies, establishment of regional museums, etceteras) is because, at the community level, it is absolutely recognized that much already has been lost.

Another telling point is that

TAKING ACTION

This volume is especially rich in its focus on World War II, and the Greek war relief effort. This is Greek America's lost moment of glory, and one in which the Greeks of Central Washington contributed to with all their considerable strength.

We know so little of Greeks in the Great Northwest. Tony and Katherina Adeline and Cleo Adeline-Rumpakis, in their carefully crafted volume, have done much to offer the rest of us a glimpse into the past. Greek Americans, from sea to shining sea, are taking independent action and are writing the histories they can not find anywhere.

Paradoxically, Modern Greek history seems to be repeating itself on American shores. In Penelope Papailias' new book, "Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece (Palgrave, New York: 2005)," we hear about how and who first began to collect and

How Community is Taking Action

compile Modern Greek history: "Predictably, the first efforts to gather documents relating to the country's modern history were undertaken not by the state, but by private individuals and groups galvanized into action by the state's failure to act as responsible guardian to national memory (pg. 26)."

As a long and difficult labor of love (as well as scholarship and plain hard work), copies of "Hellenic Heritage: The Greek Immigrants of Yakima Valley, Washington" were given to the individuals and families cited in the book, but are not for sale. Given that the three authors have long supported Greek Studies Programs throughout the country, available copies of Hellenic Heritage are to be secured through interlibrary loan from the University of Washington, University of Minnesota, Sacramento State University and other such institutions.

This is the history of Greeks of central Washington future Hellenes will read no matter where they live. Clearly, eek America does not require any outside help to remember and honor those who founded, and now compose, our communities.

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Under the Auspices of The Consulate General of Greece in New York

The Hellenic-American Chamber of Commerce
The American Friends of the Jewish Museum in Greece
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of the Holocaust of The Greek Jewry**

As designated by
the Greek Parliament, the European Union and the United Nations

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At seven o'clock in the evening**

**At The Center for Jewish History
15 West 16th Street - New York City**

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The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation
will present medals to the Citizens of Greece
who helped save the lives of their Jewish compatriots