

Hellenes in America During Greek War of Independence

By Steve Frangos

The National Herald Staff Writer

CHICAGO - Nicholas Kanaris Maniates is among those young Greeks who first arrived in the United States during the Greek War of Independence. Learning something of the story of this man's life can help us begin to understand the experiences and overall nature of life for other pioneering Greek immigrants from the 1821 to 1830 era, such as George Colvocoresses, John Zachos and others who also not only stayed in North America but established families. As we shall see these early Greek settlers

formed a unique cadre of individuals who had their own distinct influences on the local communities in which they ultimately settled.

For those of you new to the idea of Greek immigrants in the United States prior to the American Civil War, be aware that Greek American Studies has its own chronology and development that does not always coincide with standard American historical conventions. As we progress in a finer-grained study of the Greek presence in the Western Hemisphere we can note the organic emergence of a chronology and cast of historical characters unique to our Hellenic experience. For our purposes here we need only consider the relationship between two distinctly Greek American time frames: 1821 to 1829 and then 1830 to 1880.

The era of 1821 to 1829, marks the period of the explosive response of Americans and Western Europeans to the Greek bid for

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Continued on page 4

Hellenes in America During the Greek War

Continued from page 1

freedom. The popular American and European press invariably presented the Greek War of Independence as a heroic struggle and called the grass roots response to the Greeks' struggle, 'the Grecian Fever'. Early Greek American historians such as Spyridon Kotakis, Seraphim Canoutas and others write of the lives and experiences of various individual Greeks who arrived during the 1821 to 1829 era. Later writers such as Eva Catafygiotu Topping and the late Alexander Karanikas extended the work of the early Greek American histories in a series of distinguished journal articles and chapters in books on the Greeks of the Nineteenth Century.

Yet for reasons, not now, well understood, it was only with the publication of Dr. Constantine

(who was also known as Hi Jolly) of Arizona, George Caralambro (aka Greek George) of California, or Rev. Father Theoclitos Triantafilides of the West in general and others that, by a process of gradual accumulation of documentation and historical narrative, we are developing a more refined sense of Greeks before the arrival of the massive waves of Greek immigrants in the 1880 to 1924 era. As each of these new studies comes to light our re-reading of existing accounts such as James Patrick McGuire's, "The Greek Texans" (San Antonio: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1982), resounds with new meanings

In the spirit of regional studies directed at larger issues I offer here something of the life of Dr. Nicholas Kanaris Maniates and his family. Young Nicholas, a native of the city



Hatzidimitriou's volume of documents, "Founded on Freedom and Virtue: Documents Illustrating the Impact in the United States of the Greek War of Independence, 1821-1829" (New York City; Athens: Caratzas, 2002), that this critical period of Greek American history was finally accepted by the larger body of academics. Hatzidimitriou's volume is a primary source publication offering select examples drawn from period newspaper accounts, diaries, government documents, and other sources.

It is through the writings and research of Rev. Father Doumouras that we first hear in some detail of the initially small collectives of multi-ethnic Eastern orthodox faithful who began to worship together in the port cities of the United States beginning in the 1830s. The growing number of parish anniversary albums scattered across the coastlines of the nation concur with the late Father Doumouras' findings. The appearance of the HYPERLINK "<http://www.Orthodoxhistory.org>" www.Orthodoxhistory.org website only promises to extend this overall area of study.

In like manner, a reading of Michael Contopoulos' "The Greek Community of New York City: Early Years to 1910" (New York City; Athens: Caratzas, 1992) - with an eye towards Hatzidimitriou's volume of documents, Doumouras' various articles and the new pan-Orthodox website - gradually sharpens our perceptions of this era from a distinctly Greek American historical point of view.

Curiously, it is from a growing number of regional historical studies such as those of Captain Nicholas of Galveston, Philip Tedro

of Athens, was driven from his home during the War of Independence. In the resulting chaos, Nicholas, "[while] in another boat saw his parents' boat fired on by the Turks, and it sank in sight of land in the Mediterranean sea (Fort Worth Star-Telegram August 4, 1912)." Maniates and his descendants always claimed he was the nephew of Greek hero Admiral Constantine Kanaris. It was not long after the death of his family that the young orphan Nicholas (who was fighting with his uncle's forces) was "severely wounded in the leg by grape-shot (Democrat Expounder June 27, 1861)."

While young Nicholas was recovering in Athens, he met Reverend George Jones, an acting chaplain aboard an American vessel. Historical accounts do not always provide us with detailed explanations. In terms of Nicholas Maniates' life we learn that the wounded Greek youth somehow "attracted the attention of the Rev. George Jones, of Annapolis, Maryland" and that for reasons not offered the good reverend "made a proposal to him (e.g. Maniates) to take him to the United States and educate and provide for him as he would a son of his own (Democrat Expounder June 27, 1861)."

With the consent of his uncle Constantine and an American naval officer only referred to as 'the Commodore', young Maniates sailed for the United States, when he was about 14 years of age, arriving on American shores July 2, 1828. Not long after, the Rev Jones had Nicholas enrolled in school at New Haven, Connecticut. As Maniates would report decades later, not long after his enrollment the Rev-



"Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley", consistent film star Mary Pickford (above same title written by Dr. Maniates' da

erend Jones experienced severe financial losses which made it impossible to continue to support young Maniates' education. Maniates left New Haven, and through Rev Jones' offices went to the Commodore in Washington D.C. The Commodore "procured [Maniates] a steward's berth in the Naval Hospital, where he soon became a general favorite amongst the surgeons and patients and was afforded unusual opportunities for improvement and promotion."

Nicholas Maniates spent at least two (and perhaps four) years at the United States Dispensary and Naval Hospital in Washington D.C. and then five years as an apothecary in the firm of Hull and Brown in New York City, (Marshall Statesman February 22, 1847; Democrat Expounder June 27, 1861)." Maniates, while in New York City, be-

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TORY

r of Independence: The Maniates Family



newspaper ran for well over a year, "Doctor Maniates has recovered his Office to the second story of Hodge's Building - His residence at the Chisholm house, south of the Court House." At some point Maniates purchased a house in nearby Jackson, Michigan but always seems to have retained his principal office in Marshall.

Around 1851-1852, Nicholas Maniates married Martha Arabelle Becker of New York State. Miss Becker hailed from a distinguished Yankee family who traced their roots back to Lt. Abraham Beck who fought in the Revolutionary War. According to the 1860 United States Federal Census, the Maniates couple had three children: Zoe 7 years of age, May 4 and Nicholas 2. It also seems that a relative, perhaps a brother, Henry W. Becker; aged 40, also lived with the Mani-

include "David Dunne" (1912); "Amarilly of Clothesline Alley" (1918); "Mildew Manse" (1916); "Our Next Door Neighbors" (1917); "Amarilly in Love" (1917); "Little Boy Bear" (1917); "Penny of Top Hill Trail" (1919) and "Sand Holler" (1920). Contemporary readers must have been especially taken with Belle Maniates' tales since two of her novels were made into films "Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley" (1918) and "Penny of Top Hill Trail" (1921). "Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley" is considered one of silent screen legend Mary Pickford's finest films and is still very much available in a newly restored DVD edition.

Belle Maniates is also recognized in local Michigan historical circles for her first book, "A Souvenir of the Thirty-Fifth Michigan Volunteer Infantry" (Lansing,



nsidered one of the finest films of (ve), was based on a novel by the daughter Belle Kanaris Maniates.

came a naturalized citizen on April 10, 1834. Maniates was clearly an individual looking for a better life since he left New York City for Detroit, working again as an apothecary. Around 1843 Maniates left Detroit for Marshall, Michigan. To get overall perspective on this last move, the year that Dr. Maniates arrived in Marshall was three years before the Mexican-American War and seventeen years before the American Civil War.

From 1843 onward, literally dozens of advertisements were placed by Dr. Maniates in the newspapers of Marshall, Michigan. By 1844 Maniates was a member in good standing of the Calhoun County Medical Society. In the slower times of rural America before the Civil War, beginning in June 4, 1851, this same announcement in the Marshall Statesman

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In 1860, Nicholas K. Maniates was elected a City Recorder for Marshall Michigan, which makes him one of the earliest Greek immigrants to hold city office in the United States (Democratic Expounder March 8, 1860). With the outbreak of the Civil War, Dr. Maniates enlisted as a surgeon to the Michigan Sixth Regiment but never served. In his lengthy obituary Maniates' illness is simply called alternately a 'disease' and a 'fever' from which he finally died on June 21, 1861.

We do have one unexpected problem in our study of Nicholas Kanaris Maniates and his family. In his long and detailed obituary in The Democratic Expounder on June 27, 1861, it is clearly stated that "he leaves a wife and four lovely and loved children." Documents of all sorts abound on Dr. Maniates wife and the children. But the dates never seem to agree when it comes to the age(s) of his youngest daughter, Belle. Since this woman's age varies between 2 to 5 years depending on which published account(s) cited I believe we can, without being judged overtly sexist, safely assume vanity prompted her to lie about her precise age. The importance of Belle Kanaris Maniates' age and her personal knowledge about her father will become more important as our story progresses.

Upon Dr. Maniates's death his wife first took a job at the Marshall post office and then at some later time became a local school teacher (Marshall Statesman July 7, 1869 and October 11, 1889). Zoe Maniates, who was born on October 31, 1853, married Dwight Smith and was an active member of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Maniates couple's only son, "Young Nick Maniates of Jackson (Michigan) was selected as one of the messenger boys of the [State] House," (Marshall Statesman January 8, 1873) and seemed headed for a career in government. Then, totally without warning, "N. K. Maniates died at his home in Jackson, on Thursday, last of cerebro spinal meningitis (Marshall Statesman February 13, 1879)." I can only find passing mention of May Maniates in references to her other family members.

It is with Dr. Nicholas Maniates' youngest daughter, Belle Kanaris Maniates, that we find the unexpected. Belle also went into state government, working first as a stenographer and then at progressively more important positions within the bureaucracy in Lansing, Michigan, where she spent the majority of her adult career.

The energetic Belle Kanaris Maniates also became an incredibly prolific short story writer and then a successful novelist. Belle's novels

which commemorates those who served in the Spanish American War.

Belle Kanaris Maniates, who never married, died on November 16, 1931 in Lansing, Michigan of arterio sclerosis and was buried in the family plot at the Oakridge Cemetery.

As this modest survey demonstrates, detailed accounts of Greeks who arrived in the 1821 to 1829 era and raised families in the 1830 to 1880 era can be readily compiled. To be sure, at times, we would wish for more detailed information or for answers to what seem like contradictions in the documents. Still what are we to do, ignore what we do know and write nothing? We must begin somewhere in our studies of these notable pioneering Hellenes.

Contact Steve Frangos at grecianmon@yahoo.com.

GREEK POETRY

Dance

(for Artemida Ressou)

*From end to end a dance
 both moves and binds all worlds
 with rhythm's golden chains.
 -Your body, a silent hymn, holy,
 ritual of both flight
 and bonding,
 graceful Lady.*

*All around dancing from you,
 with you,
 the flowers your gentle hand
 sprinkled on us,
 the evening ripple
 in the distance,
 certain songs carried
 into the poet's memory;
 and Shakespearean images
 caressing the poet's fancy
 as if by a magic Ariel:
 -My beauty, when you were born
 a star danced in the heavens.*

Kostis Palamas (1859-1943)
 Translated by Edmund Keeley
 and Dimitri Gondicas in "The
 Greek Poets" edited by Constantine,
 Hadas, Keeley and Van Dyck.

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