

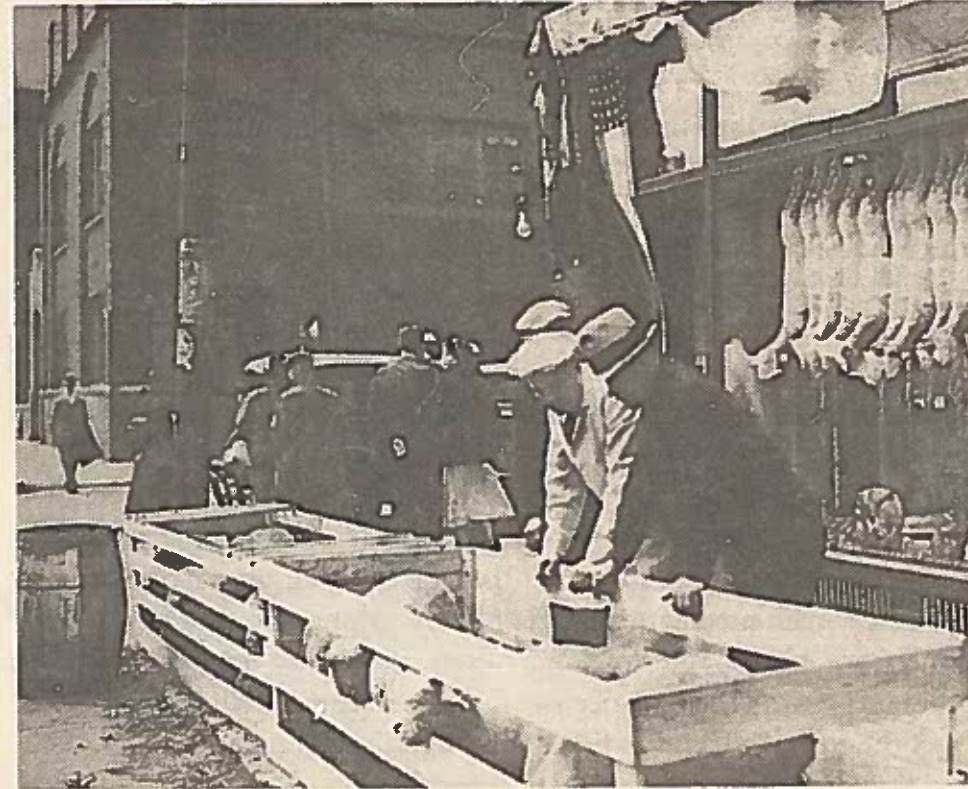
Looking for Easter

By Steve Frangos

In 1935, Wallace Kirkland, 1891-1979, a member of the Hull House settlement in Chicago, toured the main streets and back alleyways of nearby Greektown taking photographs. Kirkland left no written account of the reasons behind this particular sojourn, but life in Greektown must have intrigued the young social worker because he eventually took ninety-one photographs, the majority of which document the 1935 Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations. As it so happens, Kirkland returned to Greektown six years later, on April 18, 1941, to photograph an Epitafio procession.

Within a year of the 1935 series of pictures Kirkland joined the staff of Life Magazine, and in the course of the next two decades developed an international reputation as a photojournalist.

Unfortunately, few of these Greektown photographs have ever been published. Aside from the occasional retrospective article or book on Hull House, only Mary Ann Johnson's *The Many Faces of Hull House: The Photographs of Wallace Kirkland* and various publications over the years by Andrew T. Kopan, Professor Emeritus of DePaul University, have reprinted any of the 1935 photographs. After sixty years, these



Outside the Colias Brother's butcher shop in Chicago's "Greektown," 1935. Photo courtesy of the Jane Addams Memorial Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago.

The Greek Delta

surrounded by a careful arrangement of dyed Easter eggs that cover the entire display.

Trinity parishioners stating that he attended the decorating of the Epitafio.

Rumors have long circulated that the first photographs Kirkland ever sold were to the Chicago-Sun newspaper of the Epitafio procession. After carefully studying all the available photographs, it is evident that Kirkland documented at least two, and perhaps three, different Epitafio processions.

The 1935 photographs are a set of blurred photographs shot on the street. Given the poor quality of these images, it appears Kirkland was unprepared for the difficulties involved with shooting in large crowds.

It could well be that Kirkland felt he had not gotten the Epitafio procession photographs he originally wanted in 1935. This would explain why in 1941 he chose only to photograph the Epitafio processional. Here the photographs are strikingly clear, and all are taken above the street scene, probably from some first floor window vantage point.

The Silogo Celebration

After photographing the Easter church services, Kirkland moved on to document a neighborhood celebration. Given the content and composition of the photographs, the group depicted in this series appears to be a local fraternal organization or silogo.

In one of the first images we see a truck

rare historical documents are still virtually unknown.

A Photographer's Life

In 1921, upon his acceptance as a student at George Williams College, Kirkland and his family moved to Hull House Boy's Club. After graduating in 1923, he accepted a full-time job at Hull House as Director of the Men's and Boy's clubs. It was during his tenure as director that Kirkland began to have daily contact with the local neighborhood Greeks.

It was by chance that Kirkland became involved in photography. In 1923, the manager of the Eastman Kodak store in Chicago donated a 5" x 7" view camera to the Boy's Club. It was immediately put to use. In *Reflections of a Life Photographer*, Kirkland recalls that "we rigged up a closet in the club for a darkroom, and with the help of the boys I made photographs of the teams, the classes and other activities." During the next eleven years, Kirkland took more than 1,000 photographs of daily life at Hull House.

By 1934, Kirkland resigned his position at Hull House to devote himself full-time to freelance photography, lecturing, and writing; however, he and his family continued to live at Hull House until 1936. In 1937, Kirkland began contributing photographs to *Life Magazine*, and by 1942 became a full-time staff member. He worked there until his retirement in 1959. Sometime in the mid-1970s Kirkland gave more than 1,000 original 5" x 7" nitrate and glass negatives to the Jane Adams Hull House.

In 1935, Chicago's Greektown centered around the triangle formed by Halsted, Harrison, and Blue Island Streets. During the 1920s and 1930s, the neighborhood was believed to be home to the largest concentration of Greeks anywhere in the country. Today, the University of Illinois at Chicago campus occupies this general area.

While it is true that Kirkland left no written account of these photographs, the images themselves clearly show his intent. The subjects that Kirkland chose to photograph indicate that he wished to document the full sequence of preparatory events that collectively made up Greek Easter celebrations. The photographs break down into three broad categories: public shops, church services, and collective celebration.

Public Shops

Kirkland's photographic eye was immediately attracted to the Easter decorations adorning the store fronts that lined the thoroughfares of Greektown. These photographs are not random. Food, religious artifacts, and music are singled out as subjects for the lens. Food stores receive the fullest treatment, with Kirkland creating studies of a Greek butcher shop, bakery, and pastry store.

The majority of photographs are devoted to the Colias Brother's storefront widow, and they appear to have been taken on several different days leading up to Easter. There are images of the front window with loafs of Christoforos up against the plate glass and bottles of wine. The loafs and bottles are all

Other images show eleven dressed lambs hanging above the bread, wine, and eggs. Still other photographs show the outside of the display window, with one depicting a banner that reads in Greek "KALO PASKA." In another image we see a pen in front of the butcher shop filled with live lambs.

The Phoenix Pastry shop window display is one of Kirkland's most reproduced Greek Easter photographs. Moreover, it may well be that the interior of an unidentified bakery depicted in so many of Kirkland's photographs is also the Phoenix. This set of images shows bakers preparing innumerable pans of Christoforo.

The Central Candle Company is another store front and interior Kirkland elected to photograph. Aside from the huge and elaborate candles shown hanging in the window, there are photographs of the making of candles. It does not seem out of place to presume that Kirkland's choice of photographing this store relates to his fascination with the candle-lit Epitafio procession.

Less obvious, perhaps, in Kirkland's overall holiday scheme, is the role of the Mouzakiotis Brothers music store; however, it is clear that he found the complex array of 78rpm records, sheet music and other goods in the window display worthy of documenting.

The epitafio

Kirkland's contacts with the Greek community were exceptionally good. We know this by the various accounts given by Holy

with a cargo of spring lambs being unloaded. The lambs are being taken to a large holding pen. All that we see of the killing and dressing of the lambs is several shots of a huge pile of sheep skins. The skins are piled on the street next to a fire hydrant. Other images show a group of men in a backalley attaching the lambs to ten foot long spits. Despite the messiness of the work, everyone present is in their best Sunday attire. Some of the photographs depict women and children watching the men prepare the lambs.

Kirkland's photographs of the roasting of lambs and of men holding up their wine glasses in a salute are some of the most reproduced images from his series. Yet the more interesting image is the photograph showing various individuals about to break Easter eggs together. Given the perspective of some of these "roasting the lambs" photographs, Kirkland must have been standing on nearby shed roofs or fences. These images show Greeks gathering and eating together under tied down tarpaulins. In some photos Greek and American flags can be seen. Strangely enough, Kirkland, who must have stayed well into the afternoon, took no photographs of Greek dancing.

Lasting Impressions

Kirkland's photographs document a striking moment in the holiday celebrations of Greeks in Chicago. Moreover, they provide us images of a lost world, and conjure up personal memories of relatives and friends long gone but not forgotten.