

# October 26, 2005: A Great Day for Pueblo & Greek American Studies

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By Steve Frangos

Special to The National Herald

On October 26, the largest collection of photographs documenting the lives and experiences of Greek Americans in the state of Colorado was deposited into the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library ([www.pueblolibrary.org](http://www.pueblolibrary.org)). Representatives of the Saint John Greek Orthodox Church of Pueblo, Colorado undertook this deposit as the last logical step in their nearly five years of research, restoration and preparations for their parish's Centennial celebrations.

Over 290 digitized historical images on the Greeks of Pueblo and southern Colorado dating from 1907 to the present saw deposit. Augmenting these images is

an identification book with computer printouts of each photograph. This spiral-bound volume identifies as many individuals or events in each image as are now known. Accompanying documentation includes a translation of the St. John parish's baptismal records dating from May 1907 to March 1938. Also included was a photocopy of St. John's 1952 consecration book, and a listing of over 400 known individuals buried in graveyards in Pueblo and across southern Colorado. Finally, two copies of the St. John parish's recent publication, the Commemorative Album of the Hellenic Orthodox Community 1905-2005, showcase and identify many of the deposited photographs, and documents were included in this collection (this volume is available for

\$15, plus \$5 for shipping and handling, from the Hellenic Orthodox Community Association P.O. Box #3011, Pueblo, CO 81005).

Many factors led to this particular deposit of historic material. Part of the motivation was the inadvertent disappearance of church documentation over the last ten decades. Complimenting this fact was the common recognition reached during the course of compiling the historic narrative for the commemorative centennial album that basic information, known to all within the community, was simply not to be found at any single location of historical sources.

Unique to the long history of the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is the fact that this

Continued on Page 6

# October 26, 2005: A Great Day for P

Continued from page 1

parish was never exclusively composed of individuals living in Pueblo. Neighboring communities such as La Junta, Canon City, Salida, Colorado Springs, Trinidad, Rocky Ford and elsewhere had been communicants from quite literally the very establishment of the parish. Seen in this light, the visual and print documentation now deposited into the Rawlings Library represents not simply the Greeks of the city of Pueblo, but also a wide array of individuals and communities scattered across southern Colorado and elsewhere.

In response to all the positive feed back, as well as to allay any fears that perhaps some parishioners or their families had not been given adequate time to assemble and copy historic photographs or documents, the St. John Historical Committee has announced through its most recent newsletter that a second deposit of materials will be made in February 2006.

Other documentation is also pending. Oral histories I have been collecting among Pueblo's Greeks since 2003 are still to be deposited. As well as a documentary video highlighting the events of the parish's two-day Centennial celebration.

Many may ask, just how important is this kind of historical collection? In 2003, when I visited both the Denver Historical Society and Denver's main library in search

of Greek-related materials, I found only two photographs of Greeks from the city of Denver, and then a handful related to Greek Labor leader, Louis Tikas, and the Ludlow Massacre. Nothing else. It can not be emphasized enough that the photographs and documents now held at the Rawlings Library are the largest collection of their kind in Colorado.

The late Helen Zeese Papanikolas, while she was searching for photographs for her book, "An Amulet of Greek Earth," complained bitterly to me that, after an exhaustive nationwide search, not only were there almost no collections of readily available Greek American photograph collections, no one in the Greek American community seemed to care that no such collections existed. It is a shame upon all of us that this state of affairs has not changed considerably since Dr. Papanikolas voiced this complaint.

It should be noted that the historic St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church of downtown Manhattan, which was destroyed along with the World Trade Center on 9/11, lost all of its records. All church records on baptisms, weddings and deaths were lost. Scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings and photographs on the parish's history were also lost. This kind of detailed accumulated documentation is now impossible to reproduce.

When I began insisting back in 2003 that the St. John Centennial

Committee seek out historical photographs and documents related to the parish's history, and that all the gathered information be deposited in a public archive, there was some initial resistance. "What's his gimmick?" Or in referring to my role as a freelance journalist working for the National Herald, "Why is New York so concerned with Pueblo?"

## FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Those were just two of the questions posed to my insistence in this matter. Not only do such remarks tellingly report on the disunity of Greeks in North America, they also point to the fundamental fact that many local Greeks could not believe there was a real need for historical preservation just for its own sake.

Moreover, the new drive for a second deposit of images by February 2006 is not simply prompted by a concern with historical documentation. After the publication of the Centennial album, it dawned on many within the community – often for the first time, I am sorry to say – that their picture or pictures of their family were not included. Even after a sustained two-year drive for historic images, many within the community simply didn't get it. Sadly, competition and the desire not to be ignored are now fueling much of the new drive to get images into the library.

A good question to raise at this point is, why did a significant number of the Pueblo Greek com-

# Pueblo & Greek American Studies

munity's members ignore the call for photographs and documentation? Simply put, no one had ever raised the arguments for importance of preserving such materials to them. No one is systematically reaching out to the Greek American community at-large to explain the need for such collections.

With 38 individuals occupying academic positions in Modern Greek Studies programs across the country, not one of those individuals is studying, let alone depositing, Greek American historic documents in a public place. This is nothing short of criminal.

Who does not remember that these university positions were expressly established to aid and support Greek America? Is it forgotten that the vast majority of the money raised for these programs came from Greek Americans? In the 1970's, when many of these positions were first established, language learning and cultural retention were lauded as the best means to preserve our culture and society in North America. Yet what has happened? Today, the general Greek American public is left without the support of the intellectual community. Greek America has been abandoned and left to its own resources at a time when qualified help is most needed.

So in the end, who can blame the individual communities for not understanding these issues?

This is why the deposit of historic photographs and documents in the Rawlings Library is so

significant for the whole of Greek American Studies. The Greeks of the Pueblo community now recognize the need for the inclusion of additional images.

During the course of compiling, writing and editing the Commemorative Album, a forceful individual on the Historical Committee argued that the volume not include funeral, wedding or baptismal photographs. This is now viewed as an ill-conceived notion.

Contemporary Greek American social structure can report on why this decision is not, by any means, unique to Pueblo. The reasoning behind this decision to exclude entire genres of photographs is that, by including specific photographs of specific individuals, this very process would mean others are excluded, and would so cause (or exacerbate) dissent in an already divided community. Not surprisingly, such thinking is voiced all across Greek America.

This attitude can actually be seen in the collage pages of photographs in many of the fiftieth, seventieth and now hundredth anniversary volumes issued by Greek Orthodox churches across the United States. The very layout is meant to express unity and, by its very lack of an up-or-down, or left-or-right, a total lack of hierarchy. At the same time, none of the individuals on these collage pages are identified. While it is true that many of these pages are offered as examples of the Choir, Youth Group, AHEPA chapter, festival

and so on, that is very often the full extent of information provided. As a consequence, these pages of historical photographs are now virtually useless as documents, since few outside the community – and, if the truth be told, few inside the community – can now identify any of these individuals or events.

The Greeks of Pueblo and southern Colorado have, through their Commemorative Album – with its detailed captions, narrative history and full-page expressions of congratulatory and salutatory nature – identified a wide array of persons, families and organizations. People who are normally lost to history, in both the sense of not having their life and experiences fully recorded and in the sense of not having images of themselves preserved, are compensated with both this publication and the establishment of this Greek American collection at the Rawlings Library.

As we were leaving the Rawlings Library, Penny Zavichas, president of the St. John parish community, remarked that her mother, Joan Vetoyianis Zavichas, would have been 95 years old that day. It is for both our Greek ancestors and all who follow that such collections should be established in libraries, historical societies and archives all across the United States of America.

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