

Saint Photios Shrine Tells Story of New Smyrna Colony

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By Steve Frangos

Special to The National Herald

The Saint Photios Shrine in St. Augustine, Florida is the first and only National Greek Orthodox Shrine in the United States. Of special interest then is the upcoming yearly celebration of the Saint Photios Shrine.

February 4-5 will feature a two-day round of festivities planned to not only commemorate this event but also to mark the 24th annual pilgrimage to the Shrine, which is located in a refurbished Spanish colonial building constructed in 1749, the Avero House. This small building is one of the oldest existing hacienda-style homes from the era when Florida was still a part of New Spain. The Avero House is on 41 Saint George Street, bordered by Orange and Cuna Streets.

It was on Saint George Street where the survivors of the New Smyrna Colony first settled after their escape in 1777. Since that time, this area of Old Saint Augustine has been called "the Greek Quarter" and alternately "the Minorcan Quarter." Specifically, the Avero House has long been acknowledged as the site for what is recalled, in folk memory, as the "Greek" or "Minorcan Chapel."

In 1777, the Spanish governor Vicente Manuel de Zepedes gave the abandoned Avero House to Father Pedro Camps and his parish of mixed Corsicans, Greeks, Italians and Minorcans. Eventual-

Saint Photios Shrine Helps Keep Sto

Continued from page 1

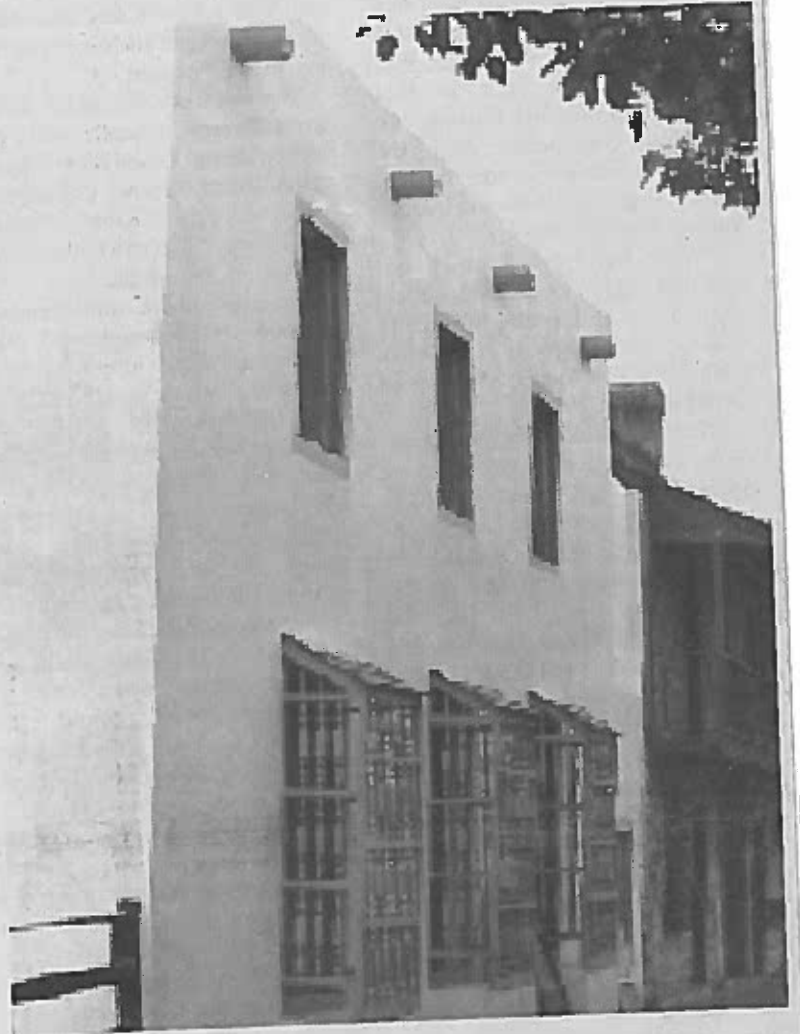
ly, the second floor of the Avero House was turned into a chapel. The Chapel of San Pedro served its mixed parish community for approximately seven years.

The Avero House and its chapel figure prominently into the later period of the New Smyrna Colonists' fate in the New World. Their collective story is one of the most dramatic and compelling of any community in the colonial era. Few Americans have heard of this colony of mixed Mediterraneans, fewer still of whom were of Greek descent.

On June 26, 1768 eight ships carrying 1,255 Mediterraneans arrived in St. Augustine. Collectively, this is said to be the largest single contingent of colonists ever to immigrate to North America. The colonists included individuals from Corsica, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and the Balearic island of Minorca near Spain. While the individuals who composed this colony were drawn from numerous locations in the Mediterranean, Greek and Greek-Corsican colonists numbered nearly half the original contingent.

The New Smyrna Colony was financed and established by the British East Florida Company under the leadership of the Scotsman, Dr. Andrew Turnbull (1718-1792). After having spent years in the Ottoman Empire, Dr. Turnbull married a Greek woman, Gracia Maria Rubina Turnbull (July 13, 1736 - August 2, 1798) from the city of Smyrna on August 22, 1753.

The New Smyrna Colony was Father Pedro Camps and his parish of mixed Corsicans, Greeks, Italians and Minorcans. Eventual-



LEFT: The Avero House, a refurbished Spanish colonial building now home to a wave of Greek immigrants settled in the late 18th Century St. Augustine, Florida, is holding its annual pilgrimage on February 4-5. **TOP RIGHT:** The site of the Turnbull Plantation, where Dr. Andrew John Turnbull, a Scotsman, had married a Greek woman.

Forni and Masiadoli.

Bernard Romans, the famed Dutch topographer (1720-1784), witnessed the execution and left this riveting account:

know that men such as Petros Cot-sifakis, Gaspar Papi of Smyrna, Ioannis Giannopoulos of Mani, Ioannis Koluminas from Corsica, Anastasios Mavromatis of Melos,

SMYRNA BEACH

named in honor of her city of birth. Aside from family sentiments, Dr. Turnbull believed Greeks who were used to a Mediterranean climate and agriculture would be perfectly suited to the lands in eastern Florida.

This mixed bag of Mediterranean colonists came as both freemen and indentured servants to work on a large plantation some 70 miles south of St. Augustine near a place then known as Mosquito Inlet. The British Crown Colony in what is today the general area of New Smyrna Beach awarded a grant for some 40,000 acres of land to Dr. Turnbull and his partners. This is where the weary colonists traveled in the summer of 1768, immediately after their arrival in St. Augustine.

THE DOOMED COLONY

With food, tools, provisions and housing for only 500 colonists awaiting the 1,255 individuals, circumstances at the new plantation would have been difficult under any conditions. What made matters worse was that Dr. Turnbull chose to ignore the agreements set forth by the indenture contracts. With the ill-fed colonists exposed to severe weather and cruelly mistreated by overseers used to driving Negro slaves, trouble was inevitable.

In 1768, a revolt took place on the plantation. The colonists were subdued by British troops and put on trial in St. Augustine. Three of the rebel leaders were condemned to death: Carlo Forni, Giuseppe Masiadoli (alias Bresiano), and Elias Medici. In an obvious attempt to divide the strong alliance which had developed between the numerous unmarried Greek and Italian men, the life of Elias Medici was to be spared on the condition that he be the executioner of

"On this occasion, I saw one of the most moving scenes I have ever experienced: long and obstinate was the struggle of this man's mind, who repeatedly called out that he chose to die rather than to be executioner of his friends in distress. This not a little perplexed Mr. Woodridge, the sheriff, till at last the entreaties of the victims themselves put an end to the conflict in his breast, by encouraging him to act. Now we beheld a man thus compelled to mount the ladder, take leave of his friends in the most moving manner, kissing them the moment before he committed them to an ignominious death."

Ironically, after the failed revolt, the New Smyrna Colony eventually prospered, yielding vast sums of money as an indigo plantation. Nevertheless, through mismanagement, greed and political intrigue within the Colonial government in St. Augustine, the plantation failed in 1777.

There was great loss of life at the colony. The survivors, who only numbered around 600, literally escaped the plantation in the dead of night, making their way over seventy miles along the shoreline beach to St. Augustine. Upon their arrival in St. Augustine, the surviving colonists, among whom were a sizable number of Greeks, soon distinguished themselves. Many houses and shops still found on St. George Street and throughout Old St. Augustine bear bronze plaques, announcing not only their status as buildings on the Historical Register of the United States, but also the Greek colonists who owned those buildings.

SURVIVING GREEKS

Given the manner in which public records were kept, it is uncertain how many of the original Greek colonists survived. We do

Elias Medici and others survived.

Among the customs and traditional ways of life, the Greek colonists bequeathed to their descendants was the use of the pezovoli, the traditional Greek fishing net. The cry, "mulletts on the beach," which signals a run of this species of fish, has long been recognized as the freedom cry of the New Smyrna Colonists. For as custom has it, once this call is sounded, all the descendants are free, regardless of their work or other duties, to run to the beach and use their hand-thrown pezovoli.

Another time-honored relic of St. George Street is the Genopoly House. Ioannis Giannopoulos - who in time went by the name of Juan Genopoly - built a home for himself sometime around 1800. Today, this preserved building is recognized as one of the oldest schoolhouses in North America. As the story goes, Genopoly was worried his children would grow up without an education. Genopoly (or one of his sons - the stories are unclear) hired a school teacher, and generations of children from St. Augustine went to school in this building.

Anyone can visit this building. As one writer portrays this structure: "Juan's house is one of the truly unique places in the city where you can actually look back in time. The house itself is beautifully preserved, and is a very nice example of second Spanish period living. The kitchen building in the garden beautifully illustrates the necessity for cooking away from the main structure, to prevent fires - the little house would have gone up in a second from one unfortunate spark. The garden path winds graciously through lovingly tended foliage and blooms and an herb garden... the gardens seem almost

History of New Smyrna Colony Alive



ome to St. Photios National Shrine in St. Augustine, Florida, where a big e's The St. Photios Shrine, the only national Greek Orthodox shrine in T: The Genopoly House in St. Augustine, the oldest schoolhouse in the e many of St. Augustine's early Greek immigrants were cruelly treated, man.

isolated from the rest of the world behind the coquina wall which surrounds it. Benches and chairs provide quiet places to stop and reflect a moment on the history you

house itself. Looking around, it is no trouble to peel away the centuries and picture energetic children in your mind: playing tag down the paths; tossing a ball be-

benches in a corner of the garden. The Florida heat had to have made the little house terribly stuffy and warm inside, so it is easy to imagine the children moving outside to work in the fresh air (<http://positivelystaugustine.com/genopoly.htm>)." **ESTABLISHING A SHRINE**

In 1965, local Greeks in St. Augustine acquired the Avero House. Through the sustained efforts of the late Archbishop Iakovos, the Avero House was purchased by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. In 1969, Iakovos announced that this shrine would bear the name of Saint Photios, the great Patriarch of Constantinople from the Ninth Century who fought to preserve the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and remove the filioque clause, and who sent Greek missionaries to Christianize the Slavs.

A historical restoration ensued with a grand dedication celebration taking place on February 27, 1982. One of the Shrine's express missions is to honor the memories of all the New Smyrna Colonists. The Shrine consists of a courtyard and an exhibition area with artifacts, photographs and historical documents on the colony; a beautiful Byzantine style chapel (known as the "Jewel of St. George Street"); a gift shop and offices. With well over 100,000 visitors a year, the St. Photios Shrine is a premier Hellenic American Museum in this country. The intrepid immigrants of the New Smyrna Colony deserve nothing less.

Readers who would like to con-

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Italians and Minorcans. Eventual-
parish of mixed Corsicans, Greeks,

touch as you walk the uneven side the back wall; pupils bent over
paths, and the uneven floors in the their books and slates on wooden

tact Mr. Frangos may e-mail him
at greekwrite@yahoo.com.



HOLY METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY
**Saint Athanasios
Greek Orthodox Parish**

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Feast Day of Saint Athanasios the Great

Patron Saint of our Church



ΕΒΑΝΓΕΛΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ

**Great Panegyric Vespers
Tuesday, January 17, 2006 - 7:30 p.m.**

His Eminence Metropolitan **EVANGELOS** of New Jersey
will preside at the Great Vesper Service, assisted by area clergy.

**At the conclusion of the Services, the ladies of our
Philoptochos Society will offer a reception at
our community center.**

**The Feast of Saint Athanasios
Wednesday, January 18, 2006**

Orthros: 9:00 a.m. and Divine Liturgy: 10:30 a.m., lead by
His Eminence Metropolitan **EVANGELOS** of New Jersey.

**Luncheon will follow in the community center
hosted by the Philoptochos.**