

Sweet Memories

By Steve Frangos

In the late 1990s, restaurants are the archetypical business setting for Greeks in North America. In the early 1900s, candystores were the businesses most often associated with Greeks. Many elderly Greek Americans can well remember that just before and immediately after the Second World War, these candystores gradually transformed into soda fountains and then small restaurants. What has slipped away from our collective memory is the prominent role Greek immigrants once held in the candy business.

Something of the "golden era" of Greek involvement in American handmade candies and ice cream still survives. The extremely popular Andies Candies are found all across the country. Carvel Ice Cream corporation, founded by Tom Carvel (Thomas Andreas Carvelas, 1906-1990), the self-proclaimed "Ice Cream King," has franchises thriving in 16 states with 65 stores in Israel, Malaysia, Taiwan and elsewhere. Even the yuppie-approved Dove Ice Cream Bar can trace its origins to a Greek and his lone candystore. While few in overall numbers, the remaining Greek-owned candystores and ice cream parlors are yet to be found scattered across the country. A look into the life of one such "candy-man" can serve as a broad case study of the experiences and careers of his compatriots.



before Theodoros journeyed east. Theodoros may also have worked for some unspecified time for other Chicago-area candystores. This seems likely, given that several family photographs exist of Theodoros in a white jacket and long apron in front of The Little Sweet Shop. We do know that at some point during his years in the American West, Theodoros Liakopoulos changed his name to Ted Poulos.

Ted Poulos in his new business was to experience fame and recognition.

The Candy Man

"Ted, the Candy man," is how longtime residents of Antioch, and Lake County in general, refer to Ted Poulos. For nearly 40 years, Poulos's store at 41 Lake Street in

Over the years, the Ted's Sweet Shop became a local center. The Greyhound busline used the shop as a regular downtown stop. Newspapers, cigars and sundry items eventually found their way onto the counter. In the late 1930s, the shop was especially popular among local teenagers and patrons of the Antioch Theatre. Many people still recall a weekend date only costing 25 cents: 10 cents to get into the movies and 15 cents for one of Ted's splendid banana splits. But the accounts of Ted Poulos's life do not end with simply candymaking.

County Folkartist

In 1956, ill health forced Ted Poulos's retirement. Never able to remain idle for long, he soon began drawing. At first these colorful drawings were given away as gifts. Then, Ted's decorations on envelopes and as stationary designs began to be sold in Antioch stores. Unexpectedly, the old Greek had found a completely new career as a sought-after folkartist.

Paper constructions is the only way to describe the mixed media artwork that Ted spent the greater part of his time creating. First he would take photographs of friends and attach them to a square piece of hard cardboard. Then, with the care and attention to detail of a master candymaker, Ted took up colored pen and ink to draw borders, trees, vines and birds. With these frames and branches as his guide, Ted would next take

To the Foreign Lands

In March 1914, Theodoros Liakopoulos (1895-1979) emigrated from the remote mountain village of Ano Vlasia in the Kalavryta district of the Peloponnese to McGill, Nevada. Theodoros stayed with his sister and brother-in-law, finding steady employment at the town's copper smelter. Given his native agility and physical strength, Theodoros was encouraged to become a professional wrestler. At 190 pounds, young Liakopoulos was an imposing opponent. It is recalled that he once fought the fabled Jim Londos in an exhibition match. Eventually he was thrown badly, hurting his shoulder. His manager, a fellow Greek, who happened to own a candystore in Ogden, Utah, quickly gave the injured Liakopoulos a job.

How long Theodoros Liakopoulos was a part of the western wrestling circuit is no longer remembered. From letters, newspaper clippings and family recollections it seems Theodoros was involved in wrestling for 10 years. While always identifying Ogden as the city where he learned the candy trade, Theodoros consistently referred to such work as "part-time." So it may well be that young Theodoros's dream of wrestling fame did not immediately fade after his injury.

In newspaper accounts written toward the end of his life, Theodoros reported that once he left the West for Chicago he worked at the Fanny May Candy Company. However, according to his *koumbaro*, Sam Harris (Zafiris Haralambopoulos), the two worked at the Politz Candy Company in Salt Lake City long

The Antioch Cafe

Through circumstances and connections no longer recalled, in 1924, Ted moved to the small town of Antioch, some 75 miles north and west of Chicago. He was soon followed by his two compatriots, Sam Harris and Dan Harris (Anastasios Haralambopoulos). In 1924, the three partners opened the first Greek-owned restaurant in Antioch and, they were later to claim, all of Lake County. Not every restaurant opened by Greeks proves a success, and the Antioch Cafe was most certainly not a monetary success.

From 1926 onwards Ted Poulos operated the cafe alone with moderate success. On October 13, 1929, Ted Poulos married Phyllis E. Hennings, who was one-quarter Greek, at the Ss. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church with Rev. Mark E. Petrakis (father of the noted Greek American author) officiating. The couple had two sons, Tom and Peter.

Phyllis's mother, Sophia Kostas Hennings, was half-Greek. All that family memories can recall is that Sophia's father was a Greek immigrant. Another family mystery is that while it is recognized that Sophie Kostas Hennings operated her own candystore in Antioch, little else is recalled of its origins. All of this is worth noting since it seems likely that Ted first came to Antioch through some contention with Sophia's Greek relatives. In 1939, Phyllis Poulos died. The outcome of this family tragedy was that Sophia stayed home to help raise two grandsons, while Ted took over her candystore. Unlike the illfated cafe,

downtown Antioch received acclaim far and wide for his hand-made candies. Given the nature of "fresh handmade sweets," Ted was making candy in the basement of his store around the clock. While he slowed down, somewhat, during the summer months, with each major holiday -- Christmas, New Year's, Easter, St. Valentine's Day -- came a flurry of work devoted to producing specialty candies particular to the season. Ted was often the subject of newspaper articles where large photographs showed him with his elaborate 20-pound Easter chocolate baskets made of handspun candy and filled with delectable candy eggs and other confections. Giant candy crosses were also highly popular Easter-tide items. Some of these delicately constructed crosses stood well over four feet high. Individuals drove up from Chicago to buy Ted's intricately constructed gingerbread houses at Christmas time.

Another annual specialty were the 15-foot 40-pound candy canes he made at Christmas time to present to the local Boy Scout troop. Newspaper accounts often reported how Ted donated a number of his elaborate Easter candy creations to the Antioch Rescue Squad raffles. One memorable Christmas, Ted donated over 260 pounds of candy to the personnel stationed at the Great Lakes Naval base. Without question the most memorable of Ted's many gestures of good will -- for individuals who were youngsters at Antioch grade school during the late 1930s and early 1940s -- was when he would send 200 pounds of candy to the school every Christmas and Easter for over 10 years.

other pieces of colored paper and cut out flowers. These flowers would often have additional flower petals cut and placed in the middle of the original. In this way, Ted constructed highly elaborate and layered multi-colored flowers of varying sizes with small balls of colored paper at the very center. Within these frames he would ever so carefully place the photograph. Today, these paper constructions are highly prized works of local folk art. I have not met anyone who will part with any of the originals.

Bygone Americana

Many Americans, as well as Greek Americans, now in their sixties and seventies fondly recall Greek-owned candystores as a part of local life now gone forever. Many such candystores can be located in regional histories all across the United States. In *Antioch, Illinois: A Pictorial History, 1892 to 1992*, Ted's Sweet Shop is commemorated in a two-page spread of pictures. Then, again, in *Lake County Roots: A Pictorial Review of Lake County* a select number of photographs are dedicated to Ted's lifetime of candy wizardry.

Recently, a large chainstore in Antioch decorated its interior with an array of historic photographs drawn from the town's rich past. There, one can see a huge blowup of a picture postcard from the 1930s. A group of children are shown standing in a "V" in front of Ted's Sweet Shop. The local press has on more than one occasion referred to this photograph; for its image still evokes the sweet memories many yet feel for the early decades of this century.