

The Hellenic Music of Yesteryear: 1s

By Steve Frangos

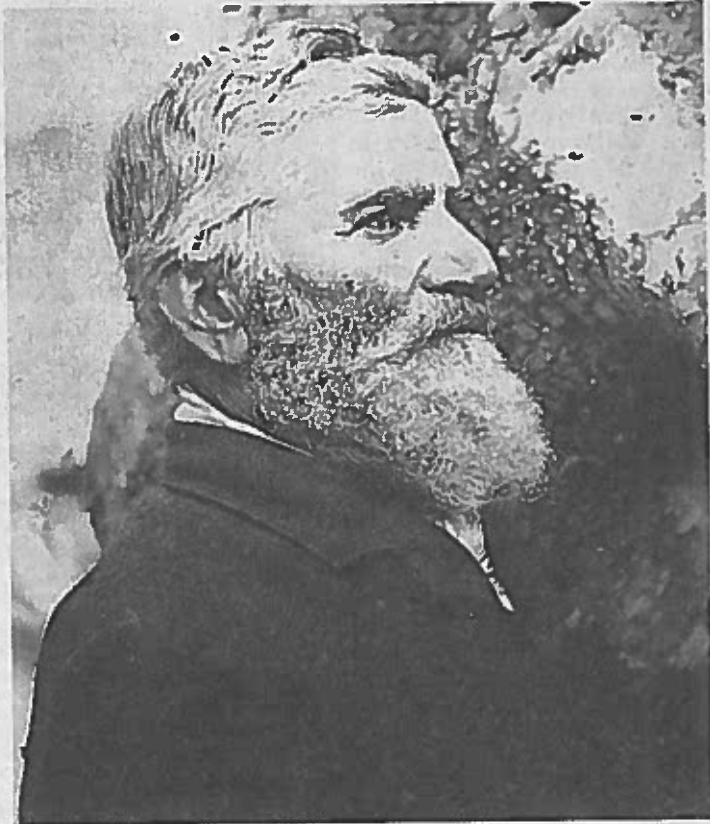
TNH Staff Writer

CHICAGO- Who was the first Hellene in the New World to raise his or her voice in song? Far from an imponderable question we can easily chart, in broad terms to be sure, Greek singers in North America from the 1830s onwards. There is no telling what future research and writings will provide. With publications such as *Gaspar Papi and Ana Pons Their Lives and Descendants* by Latrell Pappy Mickler (Media, PA: Infinity, 2008) appearing on the New Smyrna Colonists, by one of their descendants, we may yet hear family tales that involve song.

For those of you sick the day they taught about the New Smyrna Colony in Greek school it was the largest British colony every established in the New World. Andrew Turnbull (1718-1792) a Scottish physician organized this venture by founding New Smyrna, Florida, named in honor of his wife's birthplace, in 1768. Turnbull was married to Maria Gracia Dura Bin, the daughter of a Greek merchant from Smyrna. His colony was located in the province of British East Florida, and encompassed some 101,400 acres; it was nearly three times the size of the colony at Jamestown. More than half of the 1,225 immigrants were Greeks or of Greek descent.

One of the indentured servants among these colonists was the 17 year-old Gaspar Papi. Surviving the failure of the colony Papi moved to St. Augustine and today his descendants live throughout the United States.

By the 1830s, according to the research of Archimandrite Alexander Doumouras (1936-1987), Greek and other Orthodox merchants had found each other and gathered together in port cities across the United States. Doumouras contends that these collectives of merchants sought to maintain their Orthodox faith and did so but



1903 photo of Greek George taken by Charles Fletcher Lummis, who centered his home's patio around the sycamore tree.

in the English language. With no priests, it is unclear in Doumouras' account, as to the manner in which these Orthodox faithful observed their faith together. On one point Doumouras is crystal clear, they sang together, and again did so in English. I look forward to church histories providing us more detailed accounts of these early meetings of Orthodox in America.

On May 4, 1896, Michael Arachtingi recorded eight songs for Berliner records in New York City. Berliner Gramophone was the first flat disc record label in the United States. Its records were played on Emile Berliner's invention, the Gramophone, and therefore not cylinders as were more common in the recording industry of the 1890s. I have never heard these recordings. From the names alone it would seem that the first Greek recordings made in North Amer-

ica were Anatolian in origin. I say this given the titles of individual songs such as "Smyrna Serenade," "Great Constantinople Song" and the fact that one of them is said to be in Turkish.

The late Dino X. Pappas, one of the leading collectors on Greek and Balkan commercial recordings, contended that many of these very first commercial recordings, made in the United States, were of musicians who worked on the ocean liners then crossing back and forth endlessly over the Atlantic ocean. Upon landing the musicians would disembark and play in various city venues until their ship set sail for Europe once more.

The first documented occasion, that I have been able to locate, when Americans heard us sing, was in 1903. It was a singular event.

Charles Fletcher Lummis (1859-1928) is a striking ro-

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t Greek Singers in the United States

romantic figure of the old Southwest. A man of many parts Lummis was, at different moments in his life, City Editor of Los Angeles Times, librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library, and founder of the Southwest Museum, Indian rights activist, magazine publisher, and home builder. Lummis was never able not to write and given that he played host to any and all visiting (and all local) intellectuals and eccentrics he unintentionally left a vivid and unique record of Los Angeles and many parts of the Southwest.

I do not wish to make Lummis' life sound like an archival project. A man of large parts Lummis regularly hosted dinner parties at his home. Lummis had named his home, "El Alisal," after the property's sycamore grove. He had constructed his home such that its patio was centered about the most majestic tree. This endless stream of parties, which Lummis termed "noises" by the way, proved to be a magnet for musicians, poets, writers, artists and assorted others.

This movable feast of bohemian and intellectual culture often saw inclusion in Lummis' writings. Given Lummis' many enthusiasms these same individuals (and groups) were often the subjects of a portrait in front of his camera. Today, the Autry National Center in Los Angeles holds the vast majority of his private papers, photographs and other artifacts.

It was in 1903, that Lummis was introduced to George Allen. Allen had changed his name from Yiorgos Caralambo (d September 2, 1913) and was in fact better known throughout the Southwest, simply as Greek George. This encounter sees extensive description in a chapter of Lummis' book, *Mesa, Canon and Pueblo* (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1938). It seems mutual friends brought the two men together. Allen had served as a scout, guide and camel drover for the United States Army before and during the Civil War. Allen had been brought to Lummis in an effort

to help Allen secure a military pension.

Again, for those of you unfamiliar with American as well as Greek-American history, Allen was part of the United States Army's efforts to introduce camels into the west. American military officers visited western Anatolia in an effort to purchase camels and to hire experienced drovers. On February 10, 1856, Caralambo and seven other drovers arrived at the Port of Indianola in Lavaca County, Texas with their animals aboard the USS Supply. The most cited account of this venture is Steven Dean Pastis' article, "Go West Greek George," which first appeared in *Greek Accent* (July-August 1984) a magazine published by the National Herald.

The eight men are identified: Caralambo, Hi Jolly (later known as Philip Tedro), Mimico Teodora (Mico), Hadjiatis Yannaco (Long Tom), Anastasio Coralli (Short Tom), Michelo Georgios, Yanni Lliato and Giorgios Costi. Needless to say the handling and care of these great beasts of burden required special knowledge and abilities. Greek George, Hi Jolly and the others were hired to teach the soldiers how to handle and pack the animals. In time 100 camels were brought to the United States by the government. This is a complicated topic since private citizens and various companies also brought camels as pack animals to North America during this same time period. Innumerable government reports, books and popular articles now exist of this army experiment and its ultimate abandonment in 1862. What happened to these eight Greeks, after 1862, is now not simply American history it is the stuff of Western legends and lore.

Caralambo, soon nicknamed Greek George remained, for the most part, in the Los Angeles area. Aside from his own exploits and legends Caralambo is most associated in western history with the capture on May 5, 1874, of Tiburcio Vasquez, the most notorious of the Mexican banditos to terrorize Cali-

fornia in the 1870s and 1880s. A debate still rages around Caralambo's exact involvement in this affair. Caralambo eventually later moved to Montebello, CA where he became a U.S. citizen in 1867, changing his name to George Allen. Descendants of Caralambo/Allen still reside in California.

As it so frequently happened on the day Caralambo met Lummis a dinner party was planned. Here is a section of Lummis' account of that evening: "I coerced Greek George to stay. The bath removed his stains of farming, and his blue jeans were cleaned. He had never before sat to such a table and such a company; but he carried himself irreproachably, with the modest poise of his patriarchal kind, and gave a good account of himself in conversation, I interpreting (Lummis and Caralambo spoke to each other in Spanish). He sat beside Francis Fisher Browne of *The Dial*, and opposite was that queen of the American stage, Helena Modjeska, and her husband, Count Bozenta, all of whom asked him many questions. When we had come well along in community singing, I begged Greek George to sing. 'Surely...you must remember the songs your mother taught you, the songs of when you were a boy.' Timidly, leaning against the door-jam, he began; and one by one, as he sang, the old folksongs of his native land came back to him. And tears ran down into his huge beard - and tears trickled down the cheek of Modjeska, and many others of that brilliant company were wet-eyed. He was no singer; but, lost in memory and emotion, he held us spellbound for half an hour."

The arrival and presence of Greeks in North America is not simply a matter of raw demographics. There is no denying that we represent and have always represented much more to those among whom we live in the Diaspora. And they listen to us far more carefully than most among us now imagine.

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