

Continuing Faith and Fervor of Utah's Greek Community

By Steve Frangos

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One of the real pleasures of being alive at this precise moment in Greek American history is being able to read all the historical publications the community is now producing. Long abandoned by scholars, Greek Americans are avidly taking on the responsibility of writing and preserving their own historical experiences. "100 Years of Faith and Fervor: A History of the Greek Orthodox Church Community of Greater Salt Lake City, Utah 1905-2005" by Constantine J. Skedros is, without question, one of the very best of these recent historical volumes.

The text of this volume is based on more than 400 pages of documents collected by Mr. Skedros since the mid-to-late 1940's composed of his "collection of letters, programs, reports about church activities, and meetings, newspaper articles, obituaries, etc. (page 147)." Mike C. Korologos and Mary P. Chachas, both professional journalists and fellow parish members, helped Skedros tailor his voluminous data and corresponding manuscript into a well-rounded volume of some 160 pages.

To this volume's credit, Skedros also draws extensively upon the "Greek Oral History Collection" at the Manuscripts Division of the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library. So we frequently hear first-person thoughts and reactions of Greek immigrants and their children as the historical text rolls out before us.

"Faith and Fervor" is also one of the most beautiful historical volumes yet produced. At 11 inches in

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width and almost 9 inches in height, once the book is opened, we are offered a full 22-inc panorama of text and images. The heavy gloss paper used throughout allows for a captivating employment of historical photographs and documents. The hardcover binding and full-color dustcover are also made of the most durable material. It is important to stress these physical qualities. To be quite frank, such professional attention to quality printing is not always tended to in the present flurry of community-generated publications.

The volume is composed of ten chapters: Historical Overview; Dawn of the Greek Church-Community; Era of Expansion; The War Years Through 1959; Controversy and Growth in the 1960's; Community Growth in the 1970's; An Era of Cultural Contributions; Consecration of Prophet Elias Church; Church-Community Solidarity; and Year-Long Centennial Celebration, 2005. After these chapters, the volume also contains a brief three-page vignette on the Pappasotiriou Family; an appendix listing priests, chanters and volunteer chanters; an annotated resource list; and a name index.

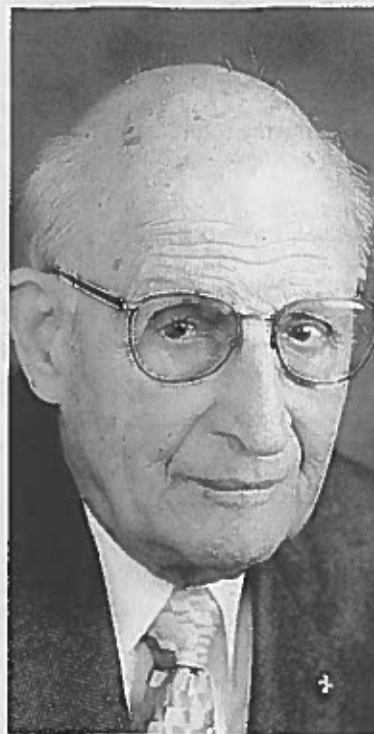
The overall historical text reads well, and the period photographs

seems to be a compilation of facts.

This focus on facts translates into a narrative composed largely, but not exclusively, of names, dates, direct quotes, geographic locations or street addresses. So concerned are they with accurately providing this kind of data, they openly lament missing documents. As someone who has contributed and worked in archives, I fully appreciate their misgivings when full documentation is not available. This is far from a causal concern for Constantine Skedros, who has long been the Holy Trinity community of Salt Lake City's official historian and, as such, also a primary force behind the community's Hellenic Cultural Museum.

It is striking that, with all the individuals involved with producing the historical text, Skedros, Korologos and Chachas feel that it is fundamentally incomplete – that somehow the actual history can only be fully written later. As Skedros himself frames this collective concern, "It is my wish that someone with the necessary skills in historical research will build upon what I have compiled and write a more definitive history of our community – one that highlights the cultural, family and community spirit of the Greeks (xiii)."

The fear here is one of competency – that ultimately this vol-



Constantine J. Skedros

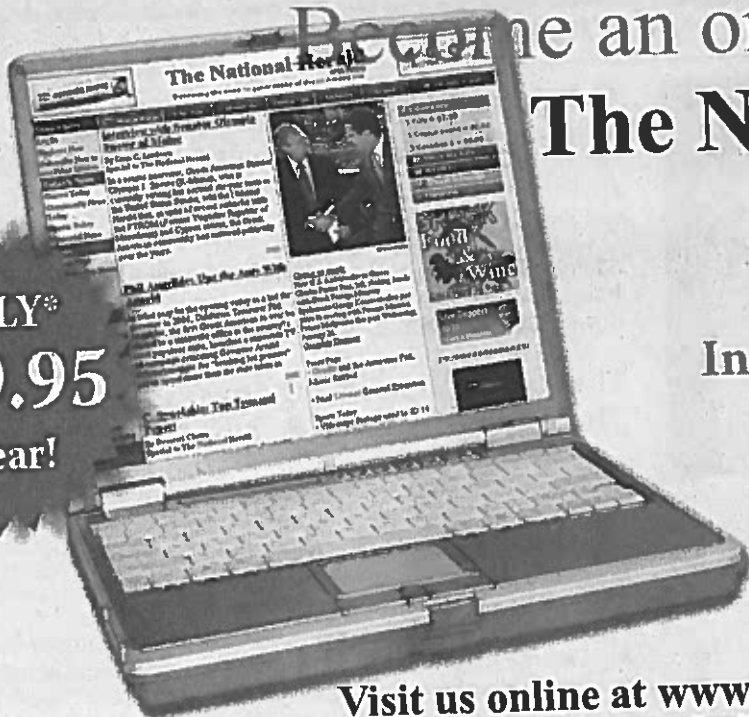
experience in Greek America. Over the last 20 years, in numerous parish and fraternal organization histories, we see one example after another of long lists of names provided in chronological fashion. This seemingly stylistic choice is, in fact,

are stunning.

Still I do have some reservations about what could be called the book's inherent point of view. For Skedros and his colleagues, history

ume's authors feel they simply could not interpret the history of the Greeks of Salt Lake City correctly, or in full measure. Regrettably, this is an all too commonly shared

a concern with getting the historical narrative correct (which is done only by citing agreed-upon facts), along with the compiler's fear of forgetting to mention someone



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within the community in the overall text.

In terms of visual images, this same collective approach sees expression in collage pages where no one in the photographs sees identification. The page itself may be headlined as "The Choir," "AHEPA" or "The Festival," but by not having an up-and-down, and by not identifying anyone by name, then individual importance or hierarchy can not be imputed, something such collective Greek American publications must always strive for. It also smacks of insider-versus-outsider knowledge and status.

The classic Greek American volume dedicated to the naming of everyone is George J. Leber's, "The Order of AHEPA 1922-1972" (Washington, DC: AHEPA, 1972). In January 1985, during a telephone conversation with George E. Perry, the then recently retired Head of the Slavic Room and Greek Area Specialist at the Library of Congress, I asked about Leber. Perry had worked in partnership with Leber on AHEPA's 1976 touring museum exhibition, which was the reason for my call. In sharing his memories with me, Perry told me that Leber's history of AHEPA had been heavily edited and it was not the original text submitted. Leber's historical account had been replaced by the endless list of names

main confusion with this otherwise excellent volume.

Aside from the obvious contribution, clearly evident on every page of "100 Years of Faith and Fervor," history – in the sense that I take it Skedros, Korologos and Chachas seem to wish see written about the Greeks of Salt Lake City – can already be read in any of Helen Zeese Papanikolas' publications. What is so striking in reading through "100 Years of Faith and Fervor" is how fundamentally different in tone it is from any text by Papanikolas one would care to name.

LIGHT YEARS BEYOND

What is so obvious here is the belief that Skedros and company unselfconsciously report that they were fundamentally disqualified from writing a full and complete history. This smacks of the view that only "experts" can possibly know the real history of the Greeks in Utah. Stylistically and in narrative, "100 Years of Faith and Fervor" is light years beyond the telephone book presentation seen in Leber's wounded volume. But the fundamental orientations are regrettably the same.

When I was a child, I was told to stand up when any Greek elder walked into the room. If I didn't (or if I didn't do it fast enough) my grandmother gave me a pop in the

half required nothing less. This is why I am personally so very angry with the complete avoidance of Greek American history by scholars who now occupy the 38 chairs in Modern Greek Studies.

Okay, perhaps by current Athenian definitions, I'm a true Greek. Fine. But all four of my grandparent's left Greece in the greatest emigration from that region in modern times. They were of that generation of immigrants seen on every page of "100 Years of Faith and Fervor" who materially and politically altered the Modern Greek State as no other collective group since the 1820's. These same individuals also physically and culturally helped build the American Society we all now enjoy. They live on as real people in the memories of those who knew them as they were in flesh. They were giants on Earth.

Is this entire generation of intrepid Hellenes – after all their physical labors, steadfast devotion, lifetime of support and unending humanitarian efforts directed towards Greece – now less than nothing? It is no exaggeration to report that Modern Greek history can not be written without factoring in the Greeks of the Diaspora. That the Greek immigrants to North America are so blatantly omitted speaks volumes for the disdain – and yes, rank ignorance – of the current

which now compose this unfortunate volume.

History, as a jumble of facts, is not why we are proud of our ancestors or relatives. And here lies my

back of my head. In time, I learned why this unrestricted respect was so whole-heartedly given. The suffering and sacrifice these men and women made on our collective be-

generation of Modern Greek scholars.

My complaint is not with Mr. Skedros and his collaborators. They have honestly and completely devoted themselves to preserving and enhancing what they were given. They have been let down by our academic, civic and intellectual leaders. After 100 years in North America, we somehow feel as if we can speak authoritatively about ourselves.

The introduction Skedros has written for this volume – about the future challenges facing Greeks and their descendants in the United States – is one of the most concise and insightful accounts I have ever read. His commitment to his faith and heritage can be read and seen on every page of this wonderful tribute.

But we must also write from our hearts and break out well beyond the boundaries of acceptable discourse when our ancestors and their good works are so generally and systematically ignored.

To order a copy of "Faith and Fervor," send your name, address and \$29.95 (plus \$10.00 for shipping and handling) to Faith and Fervor P.O. Box #26793 Salt Lake City, UH 84126-0793. Please make payable to "Greek Orthodox Church."

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