

Photographs That Live!

By Steve Frangos

We know little about Greek immigrant professional photographers, although enough published material exists dating back to the turn of the century until well into the 1950s that we can be sure many such individuals worked successfully all across America. What follows is a short biography of one such studio photographer.

The Hatziminas Collection

Five hundred photographs, along with other documentation, comprise the Basil and Persefoni Hatziminas Photograph Collection. The types of photographs range from home snapshot pictures to 5x7 photographs and to the majority of images in 8x10 format. Four oversize photographs and 30 photograph strips are also part of the overall collection.

Existing objects, documents and publications, when crossreferenced with the photographs, provide internal evidence sufficient to adduce and reconstruct various aspects of Basil Hatziminas's personal life and professional career. This material includes: 15 hours of interviews which identify many of the individuals and occasions seen in the photographs, over 200 pages of business papers, 55 pieces of Hatziminas family correspondence. five Karpathian Educational Progres-



Group portrait in front of Ss. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Gary, Indiana

1,000 photographs, negatives, books and other documents were scattered about the basement floor. Many photographs and negatives fell apart as they were picked up. Piles of 8x10

Identifying Greeks

To bring some order to the collection, I immediately began to place numbers behind

and circumstances portrayed in the photographs can be identified in a number of other ways. Several of the large fraternal groups which commissioned commemorative photographs have the date and the group's name printed on the front of each picture. The majority of these fraternal group portraits were taken on the steps of the first Ss. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Gary.

The five Karpathian Educational Progressive Association of America dinner-dance books, dating from 1943 until 1947, provide some of the best evidence. Full-page advertisements with photographs appear in every book. Persons, families and locations seen in the Hatziminas photographs can be easily identified. Once all these various sources of information were compared, new connections between photographs, documents and oral histories became evident.

And Across the Seas

Beyond the documentation of the lives of Greeks and non-Greeks in northwest Indiana, Basil Hatziminas has left yet another important body of photographs: images of Greece and Karpathos, offering a rare look into the experiences of Greeks during the 1930s.

Aside from the scenery, the windmills, group portraits and individual studies Hatziminas documented, one special event has been recorded that is yet a mystery. In 1930,

sive Association of America dinner-dance books, the 12th edition of the *D.A.R. Manual For Citizenship*, 15 documents from AHEPA's 1930 Excursion to Greece, four Greek books and pamphlets, and even a printer's electrostat block of the three Hatziminas brothers: Panayotis, Manolis and Basil.

Life History

For nearly half a century, Basil Hatziminas, a Greek immigrant hailing from the village of Othos on the island of Karpathos, was a studio photographer in Gary, Indiana. Upon his return from France, where he was stationed during the First World War, Hatziminas moved to Indiana and set up his studio.

Hatziminas's Sun Studio had three Gary locations, all on Broadway Street: 1082 before he married; 1206 when he married; and 1320 sometime after he married. Once Basil married Persefoni, she managed the store's daily operation. Basil would travel anywhere and everywhere the customer required, carrying his 8x10 glassplate cameras and equipment. Persefoni stayed at the studio (they lived in the apartment above) taking orders, giving people their photographs and generally running the business.

I learned of Basil Hatziminas in 1984, while conducting research on an Indiana Arts Council project. At the suggestion of several local Greeks, I went to the 1320 Broadway building to see if any old photographs might still be found. This site was then an abandoned building in the ghetto district. Over

photographs were fused together and could not be saved. Water damage and exposure to the continuing changes in the weather were unquestionably the causes of decay. Taken collectively, these materials constitute the only evidence for Basil Hatziminas's career.

The photography in this collection, while certainly a visual record of the Greek community in Gary, also sheds light on life in northwest Indiana in general. Many photographs document specific moments along the lifecycle, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. The photographs also provide us a closer look into the moments of everyday life in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s, including sporting and social club group portraits, night school classes, promotional photographs for local bands, family portraits, private gatherings in homes, gatherings out in the country, advertising photos of the interiors of local businesses, civic events, parades and what seem to be Hatziminas's studies of local buildings in Gary.

Greek images abound in the collection. Without question, Basil Hatziminas was the principle studio photographer for the Greeks living in all of northwest Indiana. As one would suspect, the Greek portrait photographs fall into many categories of images. Large group photographs of Greek fraternal organizations such as the American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association, the Greek American Progressive Association and other local societies are striking documents, as are the Gary Greeks' theater troupe portraits and Greek School Graduation Program photographs.

each photograph. Xerox copies were made of every photograph, with the identification number placed onto the xerox. The original photograph was then shown to local Greek Americans living in Gary and its surrounding suburbs. As the persons and events were identified, I circled and numbered them and wrote out the necessary information directly onto the xerox.

In tape-recorded interviews with the local Greeks, many of the individuals and events shown in the photographs were identified. In some cases, persons who had posed in these photographs in the 1920s and 1930s identified themselves during the 1984 interviews. The 15 90-minute oral history interviews conducted include lengthy conversations with eyewitnesses including Nick and Deena Adams, Ann Christakis, Artemis Pangere and Millie Melton. This method provided not just identification of individuals in the photographs, but often resulted in detailed conversations about specific occasions and/or the particular person in a given photograph.

John Giolas, a second generation Greek American, is the present owner of Sun Studio (now located in Merrillville, a suburb of Gary). Mr. Giolas still owns the two 8x10 cameras that Basil Hatziminas used throughout his career. When Sun Studio was sold to Mr. Giolas in 1956, the Hatziminas couple moved to West Palm Beach, Florida. Basil Hatziminas lived well into his nineties, but the exact date of his death is not recalled.

Imaging Collective Life

Aside from the interviews, the persons

a small party of Greek Americans arrived on Karpathos. For reasons yet to be determined, a large celebration took place centered around a church. The photographs show massive crowds sitting and eating at tables that stretch out of the church courtyard and down the winding road.

Photographs from this one event are seen over and over in the Karpathian Educational Progressive Association of America's dinner-dance books from 1943 until 1947. Whatever this event commemorated, it produced a series of images highly significant to the members of this fraternal organization.

Personal Images

The photographs included in this collection document not only the social and cultural life of people living in Gary (and Greece) from the post-First World War period to the mid-1950s, but Hatziminas's own life and extended family. Several photographs of Hatziminas as a young man in his dapper bow tie and tailored suit, and as a World War I US infantryman exist. Many photographs of Persefoni Hatziminas, many picturing her in native Karpathian costume, are also in the collection. Basil's family -- his mother, Stamatoula Hatziminas, and his two brothers, Manolis and Panayotis, are shown, not just in portraits but in the Karpathian dinner-dance volumes as well.

Several photographs are taken in the interior of Sun Studio at 1350 Broadway. One photograph shows Basil Hatziminas in his

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smock casually adjusting the lens on his 8x10 box camera while taking Persefoni's portrait. The photograph offers Hatziminas as he wanted the outsider's eye to see him. What is particularly charming about this obviously posed photograph is that Persefoni, rather than looking at the camera Basil is adjusting, is looking directly at us. Hatziminas, often remembered as a shy, softspoken romantic man, never engages our gaze directly. Yet, as in each of the photographs he has left us, we see how he envisioned the world around him

-- And we are truly the richer for his steadfast point-of-view.

Lasting Images

The Hatziminas Collection is a body of documentation which offers a unique vista of Greeks in the United States of America "Photographs That Live!" the motto found on Hatziminas's business cards, has new meaning today, in terms of Greek American history. Having said this, however, more needs to be collected and analyzed on the other Greek immigrant professional photographers, before their visual legacy is lost forever.

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