

Remembering New Greektown Of Chicago's Hellenic Districts

By Steve Frangos

Special to The National Herald

In the turbulent period of the 1960's through the 1970's there were two Greektowns in Chicago. Both districts were known for their nightclubs, restaurants, gift shops, bakeries, grocery stores and coffee shops, but only one was really a neighborhood where Greek immigrants gathered and lived together. Construction of first the Eisenhower Expressway in the late 1950's

and the University of Illinois Campus in the early 1960's destroyed the long-established Greek neighborhood which was located at Halsted, Harrison and Blue Island on Chicago's west side. Known in Chicago as the Greek Delta, this neighborhood lost some 50,000 people when the expressway and new campus were built, including some 30,000 Greeks.

Beginning in the mid-1960's, a second Greektown developed on Chicago's north side. This "New Greektown" was only seven miles north and two miles west of the Delta in the Lincoln Square neighborhood. To this day, many local Chicago Greeks assert that, when the wrecking ball demolished the Halsted, Harrison and Blue Island neighborhood, the New Greektown was made up of those who left the old one.

"The residents (of New Greektown) have come from smaller 'Greek ghettos' throughout the city: from Halsted Street; from Harrison Street and Central; from 77th Street and Stony Island; from west side homes displaced by the University of Illinois Circle campus (Chicago Tribune, October 15, 1970)." New Greektown experienced phenomenal growth. By 1980, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24,000 Greeks lived in the Lincoln Square area, out of a total of 56,000 Greeks in the city of Chicago.

The boundaries of this New Greektown centered at the intersection of three streets: Lawrence, Western and Lincoln Avenues. Lawrence was the northern border and Western the eastern, with Lincoln running at a north to south diagonal cutting into those two streets just beyond where the other two met. The highest concentration of Greeks and Greek-owned businesses were congregated along the five streets due west of Western Avenue, all running south of Lawrence: Artesian, Campbell, Maplewood, Rockwell and Talman. The three east/west avenues running south of Lawrence formed the intersecting streets of Leland, Eastwood and Wilson, which was the southern boundary.

Investment Banker Flees, SEC After Him

By Dimitri Soutogiannis

Special to the National Herald

WASHINGTON, D.C. - According to civil charges filed last week against the president and founder of a raft of related investment funds under the Oracle Services and Oracle Evolution names, Spiro Germentis, 34, fled to Athens last month after "misappropriating millions of dollars of investor funds."

His car was found at Kennedy Airport on October 13, after his wife filed a missing person's report. More than \$6 million in client investments, including money belonging to his father-in-law, are missing, according to the complaint filed by the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn. People familiar with the

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Those boundaries outlined, Greeks who lived outside that grid were most certainly a part of that neighborhood's daily life. But for all intents and purposes, it can well be argued that those streets formed New Greektown's core.

This neighborhood was known variously as Greek Town North in various Chicago newspapers; simply the Lincoln Square neighborhood by city historians; and New Greektown by Chicago Greeks. By 1970, we hear that "Today, the area near Lawrence and Western Avenues has more than 90 Greek-owned stores abutting the German-dominated shopping area along Lincoln Avenue. It is known as New Greek Town by area merchants (Chicago Tribune October 15, 1970)."

This once thriving Greektown is gone, however, as if it never existed. A handful of businesses remain, as does Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, which predated the explosive growth and almost as sudden demise of Chicago's second Greektown. No more than a handful of newspaper articles document that this Greek district ever existed.

EARLY DAYS

According to local Lincoln Square historian Mark Lawson, "Greek merchants bought commercial property at the corner of Western and Lawrence as early as 1905, and had a variety of ice cream parlors, grocery stores, bakeries and other businesses in the area by the 1920's. The St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox parish was established near Carmen and

Washtenaw in 1928. The Adinamis Funeral Home, which was originally located at Lawrence and Talman, served the local Greek community in the 1920's, as did the Hollywood, Presto, California and Legion restaurants. The American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association (AHEPA) had a chapter at Lawrence and Western in the 1920's, one of ten chapters in Chicago, and the Sons of Pericles, a youth organization, attracted 900 boys, including many from the neighborhood... The local Greek American Legion Post in the 1950's was the fifth largest post in the state of Illinois (Greek Star, October 31, 2002)."

The history of Greeks in Chicago's Lincoln Square neighborhood before the 1965-70 period definitely deserves more serious attention. Just to offer a glimpse into the area's role in Greek American cultural life, for reasons lost to history at the moment, a number of commercial records were recorded at the Webster Hotel, which was long a fixture of this neighborhood. Aside from these commercial records, dances, weddings and fraternal organizations, such as the local AHEPA and Sons of Pericles chapters, used this hotel's facilities on nearly a daily basis.

By 1965, Greeks began to move into the Lincoln Square neighborhood it took sometime for the Americans to notice. Most Chicago newspaper reports date from 1970 to 1974; predictably, most are article-related to the district's restaurants and pastry shops.

I should quickly note that several

writers in Greek and English described the life and times of Greeks along these Chicago streets. During the 1970's, the Greek Star had offices along Lincoln Avenue. The late writer, Katherine Byrne (nee Manousopoulos), offered some of the most thoughtful and heartfelt descriptions of this neighborhood when it was bursting with the energy of Greeks.

A VIRTUAL

I am going to provide as many locations of Greek-owned stores along first Lawrence and then Western Avenues as possible. The names and addresses for these businesses are drawn from various published accounts.

At its height, an estimated 100-150 Greek-owned businesses were located in this neighborhood. What follows is not a complete listing. All we can do here is to provide the basis for a more complete listing, which I hope some dedicated researcher will attempt to do in the not too distant future.

Please realize that this listing does not represent the complete neighborhood at any one moment in time. It is simply a composite listing. The New Greektown neighborhood never had this precise configuration.

If you think this is an idle exercise, where are the descriptions of Greek Town in Astoria, Chicago's Delta, Lowell's Greek Triangle Acre, Pueblo's Northern Avenue and all the other Greek Towns which once literally stretched from New York to California? Assuming that someone is documenting all these locations

Not One, But Two Hellenic Districts

and writing up detailed descriptions on their history is a fantasy the Greek American community can no longer afford to entertain.

LAWRENCE AVENUE

Greek Family House (2425 West Lawrence Avenue); the Olympia Restaurant (2415); Pannellinon Imports (2411); The Psistaria Grecian Restaurant (2412); Sallas Realty and Insurance (2515); Treasure Island Grocery Store (2540); Parthenon Gift Shop (2555, of which Spiros Aronis was the owner in 1970); and the Akropol Pastry Shop (2601).

In the very late 1970's and early 1980's, the Progressive Greek Students Association of Chicago rented a small apartment where they met at 2602 Lawrence.

I remember vividly the no-name "Greek Souvlaki" located at 2602? W. Lawrence. In 1971, Laura Green, columnist for the Chicago Daily News, in her survey of Greektown, visited this location and spent some time describing the 1970's new food sensation, the souvlaki. Whatever else may be said for Ms. Green's brief account, it unintentionally reported upon the tenacity at the heart of the district's Greek store-owners and employees: "First stop for the dedicated glutton is the souvlaki stand on the north side of Lawrence just west of Rockwell. It's identified only by a yellow Vienna Red Hots sign. The place seats about 12 persons at six tiny tables with a one-man-wide aisle between them. If you don't speak Greek, staring at the hammered metal icons over the front door or a strand of brass cow-

bells above the counter are your only diversions while you wait for your order to be filled. The cook looks as worn and strong as the cast-iron stove she never leaves. Her dark hair is pulled back in a sever bun, and the melancholy of her face breaks only when she tosses an occasional remark over her shoulder to a customer. The souvlaki she sells is the king of handheld foods. She rolls chunks of tart marinated grilled beef, oregano, yogurt, and cucumber sauce, slightly wilted onions, tomato slices and drifts of salt into a pita, a flat chewy bread that looks like a slightly risen pancake. Peel off the paper wrapping as you eat. A very happy way to spend 75 cents," she wrote.

By 1977, this "Greek Souvlaki" stand became the "Byzantion," with gyros selling for the skyrocketing price of \$1.35 each.

Continuing down the street, we find the New Deal Grocery & Liquors (2604); Kosmides' Coffee Club (2615); "Triana" was a Greek American social club (2617); Hellas Pastry (2627); The Delphi (2659); The Apollo Bakery and Food Market (2707); George's Club (2741 was a cafenion); and then the Vrahos Gyros (3256).

WESTERN AVENUE

On October 15, 1970, Terri Shultz, in her Chicago Tribune article, "Dismantled Greek Community Relocates on Lawrence Avenue," cites Pete Panagos as the "owner of the Olympic Flame Shishkebob & Steak House, 4657 N. Western Ave., which features a 10-piece Greek band every evening. The Olympia is

one of 50 northside Greek businesses which sponsor the weekly radio program 'New Greek Town' on WEAW FM, Evanston."

Traveling south of the Lawrence and Western intersection along Western, we find the Greek-owned Quick Stop (4774 Western). This Quick Stop was once a pharmacy found in the small triangular building formed by the intersection of Lawrence, Western and Lincoln Avenues. When Peter and Margarite Economopoulos owned the business, it was a watch repair and sales shop, as well as a Greek import shop with an amazing selection of items given its size.

Continuing down Western, we find the Pesto Restaurant (4742); Symeon's Celebrity Club (4726); and Adinamis Funeral Home (4700). This four-story corner building was both the business and residence for the Adinamis family who had served the Chicago Greek community from 1905. Individual family members continue this tradition, but no longer at this location.

Directly across Leland Avenue from the Adinamis Funeral Home was the Catranis and Sons Flower Shop (4666). Immediately across from the flower shop was the hugely popular Olympic Flame Restaurant (4657). Next was the Odyssey Book Store (4643), and finally, the southernmost end of Greek businesses on Western, the Manousos Flower Shop (4555).

These are but a fraction of the businesses, owners, residents and personalities who collectively constituted Chicago's New Greektown.

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