

Rocky Mountain Jewel Preparing To Celebrate Its 100th Anniversary

By Steve Frangos

Special to The National Herald

On October 8-9, St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church of Pueblo, Colorado will observe its 100th anniversary celebration. This highly anticipated commemoration of a historical Greek Orthodox landmark in America is a once-in-a-lifetime event.

The Greek American community of Pueblo was established as a result of the massive waves of immigrant laborers who traveled from Greece between 1880-1920 seeking temporary work in the American West. Various steps between 1903-1907 led to the foundation of the St. John parish community. As news of the fledging church spread among the Greeks in the West, the regularly attending communicants of St. John's Sunday and holiday services soon began to arrive from hamlets, small towns and cities located just south of Denver all the way to Taos, New Mexico. Individual Greeks and entire families traveled from the east as far as Garden City, Kansas. The western boundaries of the St. John parishioners extended to Grand Junction, Colorado.

MULTI-COMMUNITY PARISH

Over the course of 100 years, the Pueblo parish membership's geographic dispersal eventually led to circumstances under which the majority of parishioners do not hail exclusively from the city of Pueblo itself. As documents, community memories and present circumstances all indicate, St. John's has always been a "multi-community" parish. A partial list of these other locations for regular parishioners would have to include

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Greek Jewel of the Rocky Mountains to Celebrate its 100th Anniversary

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not limited to) Alamosa, Aspen, Canon City and Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, La Junta, Lamar, Leadville, Salida, Trinidad and Walsenburg in Colorado; Garden City, Kansas; and even the small towns of Questa and Raton in northern New Mexico. As a consequence, those who regularly attended the St. John parish, and who retain fond memories of the community, have never been exclusively from Pueblo.

This unique situation resulted in the historic parish drawing its congregation from an area of roughly 87,000 square miles. Due to the wide dispersal of its parishioners, St. John the Baptist Church became - strictly in terms of the geographic area it served - the largest Greek Orthodox community in the nation. Moreover, its multi-community base has never changed.

In any consideration of the Pueblo parish's history, the fact that this parish community has never moved its church edifice from its original location is especially notable. St. John the Baptist parish thus has the distinction of being the oldest Greek Orthodox community in the nation to continuously observe services in the same church structure west of the Mississippi River.

On February 28, 2002 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Pueblo, Colorado was placed on the National Register of Historical Places (the National Register is the official federal list of the country's cultural resources such as buildings, landmarks, murals, statues and other items deemed worthy of preservation).

Yet the Pueblo parish is not a museum, but a viable community. All the events and subsequent waves of immigration experienced in the rest of the United States over the last century have seen expression in this community, as well. If one is aware of Greek American history, it is also true that, for many who are descended from the 1880-1920 wave of Greek immigrants to North America,

Pueblo and the West have a special meaning.

THE EARLY YEARS

The largest emigration from Greece in modern times took place between 1880 and 1920. Since the greatest number of Greek immigrants departed from the Peloponnese, it is not surprising to learn that one out of ten men from that region migrated to the United States of America. As community memory has it, the first Greeks to come to Pueblo in the late 1890's arrived via the railroad section gangs.

Greek immigrants journeyed to Colorado to work as rough laborers in the newly established mines, as smelters, and to help build America's ever-expanding railroads. The Sante Fe and the Missouri Pacific Railroads both had section gangs of Greeks who wintered in Pueblo. The Greek settlement in Pueblo was due principally to Minnequa Metal Works (later the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company), which soon became the largest complex of smelters west of the Mississippi.

As Colorado's rich natural resources were steadily exploited, the general settlement pattern followed the rich mineral deposits of the region. Along the state's eastern border, a series of cities formed (or were rejuvenated), running roughly north to south: Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Boulder, Denver, Castle Rock, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Walsenburg and Trinidad. Collectively, these cities are known even today as the Front Range. These cities are also situated along the eastern border of a series of mountain ranges like the Medicine Bow, Tarryall, Wet and Sangre De Cristo. These mountains are of a slightly lower altitude than the Rocky Mountains, which border them on the west. Given the east-to-west historical expansion of settlers in this region, the Medicine Bow Mountains and all the rest "front" the Rockies.

With the rich physical geology of Colorado, a whole complex of additional mines, smelters and other supportive commerce fundamental to the metal

working industry were scattered throughout the southern regions of the state. The railroads carried the raw ore and finished metals out of the region, generally to the Front Range cities first, and then out to the East and West Coasts. Greek immigrants could be found scattered in every community and in every niche of Colorado's booming steel and coal industry.

Few of the names and experiences of these literally thousands of Greek immigrants laborers have ever been included in historical accounts of the American West.

MEN WITHOUT BIOGRAPHIES

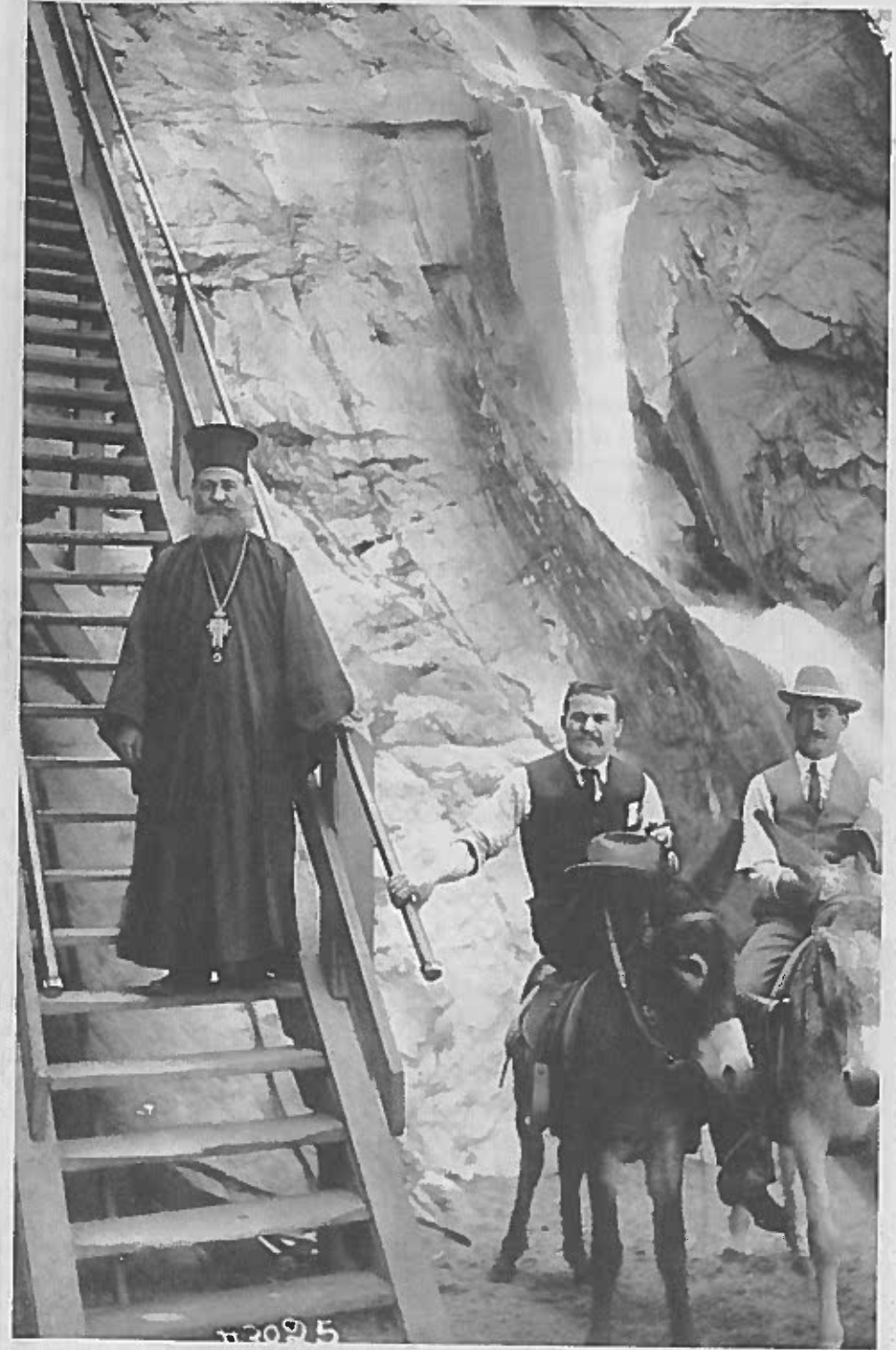
In writing about one such Greek immigrant, Helen Zeese Papanikolas said: "Let him stand for a whole generation of immigrant workers who found themselves, in the years before the First World War, caught between the realities of industrial America and their aspirations for a better life. They are an anonymous generation: factory hands, pick-and-shovel men, some union organizers... they are men without biographies."

Their stories are not found in the volumes of labor and immigration statistics. They are barely sketched in by those glimmer relics - the tallies of the dead and maimed in mine disasters and mill accidents - or in the bleak rows of headstones in industrial town cemeteries. Few had come with the idea of permanently settling in America. Many - perhaps almost half of them - returned to their native lands. The rest were able to make their peace with the new land; to settle into some more or less steady work; to buy a shop, open a restaurant, make a foremanship, or possibly arrive at real prosperity and perch there somewhat warily at the edge of American life, waiting to see what their sons and daughters would do with their opportunities. That was all."

A great deal has happened since those early days of the Greek pioneers to even outline here. It is enough to say that many of the descendants of those first

Greeks still live in Pueblo and the West, and are proudly hosting this celebration in honor and reverence for their ancestors.

CENTENNIAL OBSERVANCES
The Centennial



Rev. Kallistos Papageorgopoulos, left, the first pastor to serve at the historic St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Pueblo, Colorado is pictured in this 1907 photo. Father Kallistos left the parish in 1916 and later became Bishop of San Francisco. Parish member Peter Apostolas, center, is pictured seated on a mule next to an unidentified man.

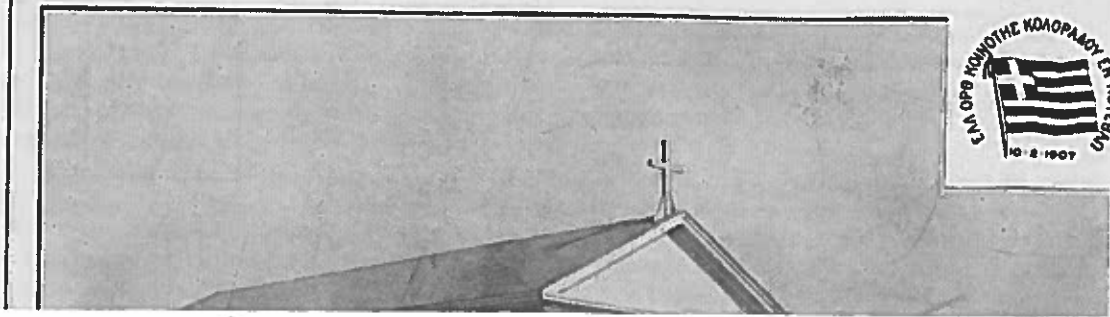
Dr. Vasiliki Limberis, associate professor of Ancient Christianity at Temple University, will speak during a dinner at the Pueblo Convention Center.

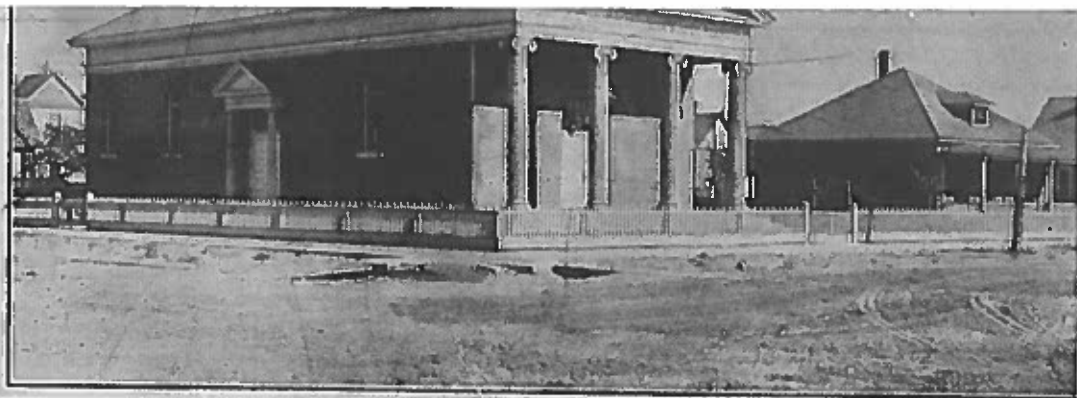
At 10 AM on Sunday, October 9, Metropolitan Isaiah along with a host of other clergymen will celebrate the Divine

be open to all.

All these celebratory events are open to the general public.

Finally, as part of its overall observances, the St. John parish has prepared a commemorative history volume of the community. This volume features





This commemorative postcard with a stamp dated February 10, 1907 shows St. John the Baptist Church and the priest's residence, right, soon after the buildings' construction was completed. No changes to the buildings have been made since, except for alterations to the fence which surrounds the church. The St. John community is observing its 100th anniversary on October 8-9.

celebration on Saturday, October 8 begins with tours of the historic St. John the Baptist parish and grounds. An all-day history presentation will be featured at the Parish House. At 5 PM, vespers and a memorial service honoring the pioneer immigrants will be celebrated. Afterwards, Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver and

Liturgy. Taking part in the service will be the Assumption Cathedral Choir from Denver. After church services are concluded, a reception and traditional Greek dinner will be held once again at the Pueblo Convention Center. Keynote speaker for the evening will be internationally acclaimed Greek American author Harry Mark Petrakis. Mr. Petrakis' own immigrant family first settled in Salt Lake City, Utah and so his own family's early experiences in North America mirrors those of the Greek Americans of southern Colorado.

After the Centennial dinner, a night of entertainment and celebration begins with the Chris Dokas Band and the Dionysios Greek Folk Dance Group from Salt Lake City. The dance floor will

not only a sweeping 100-year historical survey of the community, but vintage photographs and documents illustrating events, persons and accomplishments. These volumes are available for purchase at \$15 a copy, plus \$5 for postage and handling. Orders can be sent to St. John the Baptist Hellenic Orthodox Church, 1000 Spruce Street, Pueblo CO 81004.

The Pueblo parish is still actively seeking information from people who were part of this community over the years. If you or any of your ancestors were members of the St. John the Baptist's parish community, please contact parish president Penny Zavichus at 719-564-5604 or visit the web at www.stjohngoc-pueblo.org.

Atlanta's Annunciation Cathedral Celebrates a Century of Service

By Rebecca Rakoczy
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

ATLANTA - In the archive room of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation, 72-year-old Nick Economy peruses hundreds of old black-and-white photographs, spread over tables and hung on posterboards.

"That's me," he said, as he points out a grinning teen with a cowlick, standing behind a 1940's soda fountain.

At another table, parishioner

dox community. That community has included philanthropists like the late Michael C. Carlos and Atlanta restaurant icon Pano Karatassos, as well as parishioners - now 10,000 strong - who were central to Atlanta's celebration of the 1996 Olympics.

The Cathedral campus on Clairmont Road is also the home of the Metropolis of Atlanta and Metropolitan Alexis, the metropolis spiritual leader who administers the eight Greek Orthodox churches in the Southeast (New Orleans has

(neokoros), he said.

That church was the home of the Greek Orthodox congregation in metro Atlanta until the current domed sanctuary at 2500 Clairmont Road was built and dedicated in 1969. It holds many memories for Economy.

"We lived on Central Avenue, about two blocks from the church on Pryor. Then, ethnic groups lived around the church, and our neighborhood was primarily Jewish and Greek. Your whole life revolved around the church. We

dren in Greek language, culture and even Greek mythology, said Economy. Well-loved by his pupils, he commanded a legendary respect which is remembered almost half a century later by Economy. Greek classes are still taught today at the church, and Economy's grandchildren attend them.

TRUE TO THEIR ROOTS

When Savannah native Karatassos moved to Atlanta in 1979 with his family, he got involved in church life, juggling it along with his budding restaurant

Bill Marianes, a parishioner and second-generation Greek American, is part of AHEPA, which originated in Atlanta in 1922. The Atlanta attorney's family has been steeped in the AHEPA tradition, which includes youth organizations like the Sons of Pericles and the Maids of Athena.

"The original mission of AHEPA was to help Americanize the Greek immigrants, and help them make the transition into American culture go more smoothly," he said.

which traces its heritage to the early Christian church, alongside the progressive mission of the organization, "it created an interesting paradox," he said. "The association was symbolic and critical (as a way) for them to be members of American culture, but at the same time, they didn't want to forget their roots and faith and where they came from."

Today, AHEPA is open to both Greeks and non-Greeks, and promotes the ideals of ancient