

Rural Patriots

By Steve Frangos

The history of Illinois Greeks has mainly been presented as an urban experience, focusing almost exclusively upon Chicago. Demographically, there can be no question that the greatest concentration of Greek immigrants lived within Chicago city limits or in its surrounding towns and villages. Still largely unexplored, however, are the experiences of Greek immigrants in the most rural areas of Illinois.

From the 1870s until the early 20th century, Greek immigrants established their families and businesses in small towns throughout Illinois, such as Alton, Antioch, Decatur, Freeport, Greenup, Highland, Kewanee, Ottawa, Springfield and a host of others. By 1910 the dispersal of Greek immigrants into the countryside of rural America had taken root, as documented in United States government reports and in academic writings. It can be interesting and informative to take a look into the lives of some of these rural Greeks, to learn more about the varying roles played out in the immigrant experience.

Directories and Guides

The most valuable sources for determining the presence of Greek immigrants in rural Illinois are the Greek language business directories, histories and guide books produced since the turn of the century. The original intention of the business directories was to provide a listing of Greek businesses and wholesalers state by state, all within one reference



for his historical account, *Christopher Columbus: A Greek Nobleman* (New York, 1943).

From our perspective in history, the present value of these directories and guides rests in the fact that they document page after page of Greek-owned businesses with street addresses and type of business for nearly every state in the country. In the specific case of Illinois, we can chart the presence of such business beginning in 1903. *Odigos Tou Laou*

opened the first Greek restaurant in the entire county. As was common in this era, two of the men were cousins and all three hailed from the village of Vlasia, in the Kalavryta region of northern Peloponnesos.

The new establishment, the Antioch Cafe, was an unmitigated economic disaster. One day in the dead of winter of 1925, a lone man came into the cafe at 6:00 am. The three Greeks were all abustle, but the man only

family stayed in the same region of Lake County, but moved south to yet another small town, Libertyville. Sam and another Greek, who is today only recalled by his last name, Pasinis, became partners in a grocery store on the west side of Libertyville's main street, just north of Cook Street.

In 1931, Dan Harris was killed in an automobile accident, and his widow sold her share of the cafe to the remaining partner, Ted Poulos. Until sometime in the late 1930s, Ted Poulos operated the cafe with moderate success. Ted later went into a business that, unlike the ill-fated cafe, would bring him unexpected fame and recognition throughout the entire county. In the recently published book, *Antioch, Illinois: A Pictorial History, 1892 to 1992*, Ted's Sweet Shop, the local confectionery store, is commemorated in a two-page spread of pictures.

For nearly 40 years Ted Poulos's store on Lake Street received acclaim far and wide for his handmade candies, and he was nicknamed "Ted the Candy Man" by the longtime residents of the area. Ted was often the subject of northern Illinois newspaper articles, where large photographs pictured him with his elaborate Easter baskets made of hand-spun candy or the six-foot candy canes he gave the local Boy Scout troop every year.

Descendants of all three men still live in Lake County, Illinois. With the phenomenal new growth in this quickly developing county, many local people make a point of stressing how long their families have lived in the area. Just mention of Ted's Sweet Shop or

...of Greek businesses and their
salers state by state, all within one reference

...of Illinois, we can chart the presence of such
business beginning in 1903. *Odigos Tou Laou*

***The most valuable sources for determining the presence
of Greek immigrants in rural Illinois are the Greek
language business directories, histories and guide books
produced since the turn of the century.***

source. The success of these directories was immediate.

The idea was simple. If provided a choice, a Greek immigrant would buy from a Greek businessman who in turn would buy from a Greek wholesaler. This scenario, while imperfect in practice, worked well enough for these directories to be produced year after year. The sheer volume of these publications attests to the fact that they received wide attention among the Greek immigrants.

Many Greek writers and publishers produced directories, business guides, and even dictionaries that included descriptive sections for areas across the United States. Seraphim George Canoutas (1874-1944) was unquestionably the most prolific of these business directory compilers, issuing his publications annually from at least 1907 until the late 1920s. While Canoutas did not limit himself to business directories, also writing legal guides, an array of histories, and even a book of manners, today he is probably most remembered

(The People's Guide), written and compiled by C. D. Skadopoulos in 1920, is one of the variations on the business directory format. It is a book on manners, but the first and second sections consist of a business directory. What makes *Odigos Tou Laou* a valuable historical document is that the majority of businesses cited in its pages are accompanied by photographs of the owners and their families along with short biographies of varying lengths.

The Antioch Cafe

Not every Greek immigrant living in rural Illinois in the early part of the century is included in business directories. One such case of rural Greeks was that of three families living in Antioch, Illinois in the mid-1920s. In 1924, Ted Poulos (Theodoros Liakopoulos), Sam Harris (Zafiris Haralambopoulos), and Dan Harris (Anastasios Haralambopoulos)

came into the cafe at 6:00 am. The three Greeks were all abustle, but the man only wanted a cup of coffee. The entire day passed without another customer. Then, just before 6:00 pm, the same man who had been there for his morning coffee came in and ordered...another cup of coffee.

Sometime in 1925, Sam Harris sold his holdings of the Antioch Cafe. Sam and his

...ing from long their families have lived in the area. Just mention of Ted's Sweet Shop or even the Antioch Cafe, and local people smile. The memories of these Greek immigrants live on in the stories their neighbors still recall. As one person recently prefaced his recollections on Ted's Sweet Shop, "Well, now, you're talking about the 'real' Lake Country!"

VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED EARNINGS

available to those who qualify for expanded sales and marketing opportunities with world-wide leader in financial services. Qualified candidates in training program can earn initial compensation as high as \$800 per week. Call George Magriples, Esq. for a meeting to discuss opportunities and qualifications. (718)447-8126



MetLife [®] EOE

N9603KAV (exp0301) MLIC-LD

2361