

The Rocky Mountain Hellenes: The Early

By Steve Frangos

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The 1870 Census documents the first Greeks living in Denver, Colorado. While only noted as "two unnamed Greeks" it is with this anonymous duo that the present community grew. By 1890, the Greek colony had grown to include 24 individuals. In 1910, a reported 240 Greeks lived in Denver. Yet even this early gathering of Hellenes was enough to support their own small group of traditional musicians. We know this because in 1911, five Greek musicians from Denver were deported for lack of the proper immigration papers.

By 1913, approximately 500 Greeks were living in Denver, another 700 in Pueblo, along with some 2,000 Greek laborers in scattered mines and railroad camps throughout the state. Clearly an ever growing stream of Greeks was finding Denver an opportune place to settle, if only for a little time.

It must not be forgotten that these early Greek workers had no intention of making Denver their new home. The vast majority of these Greek workers only wanted to labor in the ksentia long enough to dower sisters or accumulate enough cash to improve their economic standing back in Greece.

With the outbreak of the 1897 Greco-Turkish War the Denver Times carried a story that reveals the patriotic fervor and effortless ability of Denver Greeks to work together, decisively. "But few of the sons of the man of the 1953 National Convention, held at the Shamrock Hotel.

for the continuation of the Turco-Greco war but first to send the fifteen men mentioned to the field of battle..." "There will be no use in living if Greece is conquered," said Allison yesterday, "if she must fall, then all her sons will fall with her and that so why we will go to Greece (April 23, 1897)."

In 1883, George (Krouskos) Allison (1871-1935) arrived in Denver from his birthplace of Sparta. Allison was a pioneer in yet another sense because in 1883 there were probably fewer than fifteen thousand Greeks in the entire United States. Soon joined by his brothers Frank, Nick, and John, young George Allison is credited with opening his first candy store in 1895. Always a colorful figure in Denver's political life Allison's "candy store at 15th and Curtis Sts. was a gathering place of many politicians and unofficial headquarters for campaign workers for nearly half a century (Denver News May 2, 1935)." Allison was also the founder of the Denver chapter of the Greek-American Progressive Association.

Greeks were not the only new foreigners in the American West. Everyday Armenians, Assyrians, Austrians, Chinese, Croatians, Italian, Japanese, Lebanese, Poles, Russians, Slovenians, Ukrainians, Urgo-Rus, Volga Dutch and other foreign laborers arrived. While these new arrivals differed in many ways Eastern Orthodoxy also united more of these immigrants than any Anglo-Saxon Protestant could imagine.

Under the auspices of Archbishop

Tikhon (1865-1925), on September 29, 1898, the Transfiguration of Christ Orthodox Church was incorporated in the town of Globeville, Colorado. One of the three trustees of the new church was George Pristes. In 1910, Globeville was a separate town from Denver and only annexed years later, now forming the northwest quadrant of the city. Greek contact with this church has never been broken. Aside from contemporary parishioners who are of Greek descent individual Greeks from across Colorado still attend this church from time to time as their spiritual needs require.

On August 15, 1998, the Assumption of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Metropolis Cathedral of Denver issued its Consecration and Celebration Album. An extremely handsome volume with fabulous photographs this book offers a rich historical narrative. Here is a description of Denver's early Greek Town:

"The early Greeks in Denver fell into three broad categories: the railroad men, many of whom worked in Wyoming during the week but spent their free time in the local coffee shops of kafenions; the restaurateurs and shopkeepers, who started out with popcorn carts or shoeshine stands near "Greek Town," the area once known as The Loop and now the edge of Lower Downtown, roughly between 14th and 20th and Curtis and Market Streets; and the laborers who worked in the coal mines in nearby Erie and Lafayette and the smelters in Globeville, north of

ton, NY from 1994 to 2007.

plucky little kingdom of Greece reside in Denver, but those who do are as excited and as full of true patriotism as if they were on the scene of the conflict and were fighting the enemies of their native country. But if plans succeed which are now in the process of formation, fifteen able bodied Greeks will leave Denver during the latter part of next week for New York City, where they will embark for Greece. The majority of the Greeks in this city are not rich and some difficulty is anticipated in the matter of securing funds for the railroad fare to New York city, where they will embark for Greece. The majority of the Greeks in this city are not rich and some difficulty is anticipated in the matter of securing funds for the railroad fare to New York, for transportation will be furnished the recruits when they reach the metropolis.

A plan has been hit upon by George Allison, the leading Greek of this city...Allison's scheme is to organize a local patriotic society whose object shall be to help furnish funds

Greeks of Denver

downtown. A great number of smelter workers and miners were brought to Denver specifically to replace other workers who had begun organizing to demand better pay and working conditions in the notoriously dangerous plants. Most spoke or read little English, and many found themselves the victims of either unscrupulous padrones, or labor brokers, who wound up with all their hard earned pay, or other ethnic groups who resented them for unwittingly undermining their unionizing efforts. The practice of labor brokering was officially outlawed in Colorado in 1907, but continued for some years after that in the Greek community (1998: 16)."

Between 1901 and 1910 roughly 170,000 Greeks came to the United States and this from a country with a population, then, of no more than two and a half million people.

Among the early, and ultimately, permanent Greek settlers were "Angelo and Gus Koclanes in 1897; the Zaharias brothers and James Damaskos with his sons George and Gust in 1903; Mike K. Saros in 1901; James Argiropoulos in 1902; Efstathios Yiannopoulos in 1903; Mike Karamigos in 1904; George and James Stathopoulos, George Dikeou, his brother James T. and son James G. by 1905; Steve Economy opened the Economy Grocery on Market Street in 1900...Tom Vermis and Theodore Sarantos set up a bakery near-by in 1905. C.K. Pappas opened the Old Mexico Chile Parlor on Market Street in 1907 (1998: 15)."

Even in the earliest period of Greek migration to Denver there were a handful of women: "Perhaps the first married man to bring his wife to Denver was John Andrews; Katina Andrews was the first Greek woman in town, arriving in 1900...Other early pioneer women included Stavroula Economy, who married Steve in Chicago in 1910; Athanasia Allison, who returned to Denver with husband Frank from Greece in 1915; and Dimitroula Frangos, wife of Gus...Vasiliki Pappas may have been Denver's first Greek bride when she married C.K. sometime before 1910 (1998: 16-17)." Another name must be added to the earliest Greek sojourners to Denver. Ilias Anastasios Spantidakis, a young Cretan from the village of Loutra arrived in Colorado sometime in September 1906. During his first few months of travel in America he changed his name to Louis Tikas. On April 1, 1910 Tikas went into District Court in Denver and made his Declaration of Intention to become an American citizen. At that time Tikas was half-owner in a kafenion at 1746 Market Street in Denver's Greek Town. In 1910, it must be recalled; there were only a reported 240 Greeks in Denver.

All official statistics could never document the total reality of any immigrant community, then, in Colorado. As Zeese Papanikolas correctly notes: "[I]n reality there were hundreds more, itinerants moving from job to job, newcomers shining shoes or washing dishes in their country-

men's restaurants, men trying to catch on in some small business they could collapse to the size of a suitcase overnight if disaster overtook them or a new opportunity called in another town. In the winter, with the end of railroad work, still more Greeks flocked to the city. They filled the transient hotels and boardinghouses and haunted the labor agencies looking for a job."

On October 13, 1913 Louis Tikas raised his hand and became a United States citizen. In a series of events no one could have predicted young Tikas was destined to become a hero of the American Labor Movement. Tikas first became a translator for the Greek laborers who were among the United Mine Worker strikers. The UMW had established, on land rented by the union, a tent colony of strikers near Ludlow, Colorado. Of the 1,300, striking miners and their families at Ludlow, 600 were Greeks. On March 20, 1914, Colorado militia in an unprovoked attack used machine guns and fire leveling the camp and killing 21 people. By all accounts if the Greeks had not been armed and resisted this attack more innocent miners would have been slaughtered. The Ludlow Massacre and Tikas' pivotal role may be a forgotten moment in Greek American history but this lone Cretan is one of the most revered figures in all of American Labor history.

Readers interested in contacting Mr. Frangos are welcome to e-mail him at greekwrite@yahoo.com.