

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE

ARMENIAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

1830 to 1975

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
In History

By

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August 2012

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ABSTRACT

ARMENIAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

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Master of Arts in History

This study begins with the arrival of young Armenian male students of American Protestant missionaries from the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, who attended universities on the East Coast in the early nineteenth century, and continues through a discussion of the generation of post 1915 Armenian Genocide immigrants who arrived in the United States prior to 1975. Many of these children and grandchildren of survivors were two or three-step migrants whose experiences whose repeated migration facilitated their adaptation to a new language, customs, and surroundings by the time of their immigration to the United States.

Armenians first established communities in multi-ethnic, working class neighborhoods in East Coast industrial cities including Worcester, Massachusetts,

Syracuse, New York, and Providence, Rhode Island, and some later moved to work in factories in Racine, Wisconsin and Detroit, Michigan, but many eventually migrated to Fresno, California, where an Armenian community formed in the first decades of the twentieth century. The next generation of Armenian Americans moved from Fresno to San Francisco to obtain an education or work at the variety of jobs available in the city. Ultimately, Armenians in California outnumbered their predecessors on the East Coast, and Los Angeles became the home of most Armenians in California.

Regardless of geographic location, Armenians contributed to their communities as Americans, while retaining many of their cultural traditions. This complex balancing of identities was shaped by their experiences with discrimination and exclusion, which at the same time created opportunities for inclusion in other spheres, such as business and education. Their common Christianity with most white Americans, their familiarity with American culture due to the presence of American Protestant missionaries, and their exposure to American relief workers after the Genocide also provided incentive for Armenians to immigrate to the United States. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the history of Armenian immigrants in the United States, the communities they established, and how they helped shape its diverse landscape.

Armenian Immigration to the United States

Armenians who arrived in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century comprised a small but diverse group of immigrants from the six provinces of the waning Ottoman Empire. Armenians were part of the large influx of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who settled and labored in the industrial cities of the East Coast and Midwest, and about whom we know a great deal through the works of Robert De C. Ward, Oscar Handlin, John Bodnar, Roger Daniels and others.¹ But in several important respects, Armenians differed from most of them, and their story challenges traditional narratives about eastern European immigration. Largely literate, bi-lingual and in many cases multi-lingual, Armenians were displaced refugees of the deportations and massacres and therefore especially challenged to redefine their identities and forge new ones as Armenian Americans. Many were multi-step migrants who had lived as refugees in host countries prior to their arrival in the United States, which added another dimension of complexity to their identities. It is likely that their history of endurance as both a religious and ethnic minority in the Muslim Ottoman Empire ultimately facilitated the preservation of their cultural identity in the comparatively hospitable United States. Additionally, they shared the common Christian faith and values of the majority of white Americans, and were familiar with American culture due to the network of churches, schools, colleges and hospitals Protestant missionaries had established among them

¹ John Bodnar. *The Transplanted*. (Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1985) ;Robert De C. Ward, "National Eugenics in Relation to Immigration," *The North American Review* 192 (July 1910) ;Roger Daniels. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Oscar Handlin. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951).

during the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. This previous experience made them uniquely qualified to integrate into American society.

At the same time, however, white Americans were largely unfamiliar with this obscure group of immigrants who did not fit neatly into a category other than perhaps, “ethnic.” Some, particularly urban Americans, had heard of Armenians through the energetic fund-raising campaigns of missionaries and churches to aid victims of the Armenian Massacres and deportations in the Ottoman Empire, or they had read about them in newspapers. Although the Progressive Era American public responded generously to these appeals to aid the “starving Armenians,” they were not necessarily comfortable with Armenian immigrants living among them. To Anglos, it was unclear if Armenians were Caucasian, but they were an uncommon ethnic minority from the Near East that spoke a foreign, ancient language and had unfamiliar customs and traditions. As such, Armenians were subject to the same discrimination and exclusion as Polish, Mexican, Japanese, and other minorities. This was especially true at the height of the eugenics movement in the 1920s as Armenians when racial covenants excluded Armenians from home ownership and some petitions for naturalization were denied. Yet, many Armenian immigrants managed to overcome or bypass such limitations and open businesses or enter professions where their talents, together with their resourcefulness and strong work ethic, benefited both their neighborhood and the larger community.

Immigration scholarship has largely overlooked the comparatively small group of Armenians among the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Instead, Armenian immigration to the United States has been studied through a few Master’s Theses and

some regional community histories, with the notable exception of Robert Mirak's comprehensive work, *Torn between Two Lands*.² In the last two decades, a growing crop of memoirs in which the author explored the history of the Armenian-American community through the life story of a survivor parent or grandparent has shed further light on their experiences. Increasingly, the study of immigration history has shifted from the analysis of general patterns of adaptation and resistance by Oscar Handlin and John Bodnar to more specialized scholarship focusing on various immigration issues, such as the roles of eugenics, immigration laws, class, discrimination, identity and the sharing of space in multi-cultural neighborhoods.

The study of an immigrant group, both as a community and in the multi-cultural context of a neighborhood, is benefited by an understanding of that group's homeland history. Jon Gjerde argued that as immigration historians, "We need to know our subjects and their particular history and culture. It suggests that we should not lose sight of the context of individual migrations."³ Indeed, this background is the prism through which that group understood their role in the host society, and in the case of the Armenians, it is essential.⁴ Additionally, Armenians experienced a multi-step migration. After the massacres of 1915-1919, most survivors lived in host countries such as Syria, Greece, France, and others for a time as refugees awaiting the documentation, funds, and permission necessary to immigrate to the United States. Living and working among the population during that time, these future Armenian-Americans learned the language and customs of their host countries and incorporated certain traits and characteristics of their

² Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

³ Jon Gierdje. "Response," *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol.19 No. 4 (Summer 1999): 152.

⁴ See, for example, George J. Sanchez. *Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

culture, including language, cuisine, social customs and habits, while rejecting others.

Many refugees in France, for example, adopted French words or phrases, and developed a preference for French fashions or a taste for certain foods. As a result, in addition to their strong national identity, an Armenian refugee who lived in France for a time would feel part French, and after living in the United States, part American as well. Certainly, this is neither a unique nor modern phenomenon, as the migration of peoples throughout history has resulted in an exchange of cultural traits which served to enrich and add dimension to each.

Armenians in the United States did not live in isolation from other ethnic and religious minorities, but among them, and interacted daily with non-Armenians as neighbors, students, consumers and proprietors. Upon their arrival, most Armenians lived in small working class neighborhoods scattered in different areas of cities alongside other immigrants and minorities, including some Armenians from parts of the Ottoman Empire with unfamiliar dialects and customs. Despite names such as “Armeniatown” or references to an “Armenian Quarter,” these enclaves were not exclusively Armenian but multi-ethnic. Accustomed to living among other populations for centuries, their adaptability was rooted in their history of living among Greek, Kurdish, and Assyrian minorities as well as Turkish neighbors in the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, and then living in host countries, and by extension, these experiences served them well in the multi-cultural United States. In the South Cove area of Boston by 1900, Armenians shared a neighborhood with Chinese, Greek, and Syrian neighbors, and in Providence, Rhode Island, they lived in the Douglas Avenue neighborhood alongside Irish, German,

and Jewish immigrants.⁵ In factories and various workplaces, Armenians worked alongside other immigrants and minorities, as well. In Fresno, California, Armenian women took summer jobs at canneries and in the fields during harvest time, where Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Mexican women were also employed.⁶ Both unmarried and married Armenian women, previously excluded from employment in their traditionally patriarchal Old World society, found that opportunities to work outside the home were available in the United States, and they could contribute a much-needed income and help support their families.

The work of historians Mark Wild and Allison Varzally reflect the current trend in immigration history of the study of ethnoracial interaction between groups that shared urban neighborhoods in California early in the twentieth century. Varzally noted that the study of the interconnected history of minorities benefits Americans in “the appreciation for the conditions and history of minorities and a willingness to reflect on past injustices.”⁷ Wild similarly focused on the interaction between residents of multiethnic neighborhoods and argued that the understanding of the interplay and inequality that both unites and divides the American people is crucial to understanding the American character.⁸ Although Armenians are not specifically mentioned by Wild or Varzally, their conclusions presumably apply to Armenians as well, since they were present as a minority in such multicultural Los Angeles neighborhoods as Boyle Heights.

⁵ Varoujan Karentz, *Mitchnapert the Citadel: A History of Armenians in Rhode Island*, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc.), 38. Vartanian, Hrag. “The First Armenian American Communities Take Root: The Armenian-American Plymouth,” *Armenian General Benevolent Union Magazine*, March 1, 2001, 8-9.

⁶ Berge Bulbulian, *The Fresno Armenians: History of a Diaspora Community*, (Sanger: Quill Driver Bo

⁷ Allison Varzally. *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 156.

⁸ Mark Wild. *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 7.

Like other ethnic and religious minority immigrants, Armenians made the sacrifices necessary to provide for their families, negotiated the parameters within which they were confined, and whenever possible, created spaces where they actively pursued opportunities for self-improvement. Stigmatized by their statelessness following the massacres, most Armenian immigrants hastened to obtain American citizenship and the entitlement to full rights that it would presumably give them. In forming new communities in the United States, however, Armenians also brought with them ancient, unresolved religious and political issues which resurfaced and sometimes divided them. Yet, over time, the Armenian community contributed many businessmen, writers, artists, scientists, engineers and politicians in numbers that over-represented their small group.

The flow of Armenian immigration stopped abruptly as the National Origins Act of 1924 established quotas which significantly limited immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and Asia. This legislation was an extension of the nativist thinking of the time, which Roger Daniels defined as “the opposition to all or to certain groups of immigrants.”⁹ According to one of its provisions, a maximum of two percent of the number of foreign-born Europeans already in the United States per the 1890 census, were allowed to emigrate annually from Europe.¹⁰ The number of Armenians admitted annually, per this new quota, was 0.03 percent by ethnic classification which restricted Armenians to approximately 100 per year.¹¹ In the case of Armenians, this was further complicated by their statelessness, as they were without a national quota and charged to

⁹ Roger Daniels. *Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-135.

¹¹ Merrill D. Peterson. “*Starving Armenians: America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 152.

the Turkish quota for a time, then to the Soviet Union's.¹² Thereafter and until the 1965 Immigration Act re-opened immigration, very few Armenians could immigrate to the United States. Most who did manage to immigrate between those decades joined family members already living in the U. S. after an exhaustive amount of paperwork and often, after several failed attempts. This study, therefore, is concentrated on Armenian immigrants who arrived from the end of the nineteenth century to the time the 1924 law went into effect, and the communities they and their descendants formed in the United States. Additionally, interviews were collected and analyzed to understand the residual effect of their experiences upon their now aging descendants who immigrated to the United States by 1975. Despite the gap of decades, the stories of this aging population are important for the historical record.

The early generation of multi-step migrants, almost exclusively from the six provinces of Turkish Armenia, was especially challenged to succeed in the United States as displaced massacre survivors. Since historiography of Armenian immigration to the United States is limited, community studies, memoirs, oral histories, contemporary articles and other available materials were examined to provide insight into the community. How did they navigate the barriers created by discrimination and exclusion and gain acceptance in a United States dominated by xenophobic white Americans? How did they negotiate these obstacles and retain their traditional identities at the same time that they adopted an American way of life? What were their thoughts about other ethnic and religious groups? And how can the success of many Armenians who rose to prominence beyond the Armenian community be explained, given the limitations placed upon them?

¹² Ibid, 152-153.

Admittedly, this work leaves many questions about Armenian immigration unanswered, and more scholarship needs to be done to explore questions such as how Armenians co-existed with other minorities in the communities they shared and how their paths intersected where they lived and worked with one another. Because the focus is on those survivor refugees from the pogroms and Armenian Massacres who immigrated to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the Twentieth Century, Armenian survivors that repatriated to Soviet Armenia are beyond the scope of this work. Their case prompts a separate study, since their circumstances and experiences differed in significant ways from that of Armenian-American immigrants.

I argue that the familiarity of Armenians with American culture through their ties to missionaries, their common Christianity with the majority of the United States population, together with strong family ties, work ethic and resourcefulness enabled most to overcome any discomfort and setbacks they experienced by exclusion or discrimination. They were groomed and primed by missionaries to operate efficiently by applying the Protestant work ethic ethos, which facilitated their Americanization while retaining their cultural identities. More importantly, perhaps as survivors of the genocide, their spirit, if not their bodies, was unshaken and a strong will to succeed was their motivation. Having no home or community to return to, it was in their best interest to look forward rather than back and they gratefully took advantage of the opportunity that the United States offered these stateless immigrants for safety, education, dignity, and upward mobility.

A Brief History of the Armenian People

The first reference to a group of people as “Armenians” was made by the Greek historian Herodotus in describing the residents of the area around Lake Van in the 5th century B.C.¹³ Located around the Black Sea, the Caucasus mountain range, and east of the Caspian Sea, this area had fertile valleys, many rivers, and high plains with mineral-rich soil, but its strategic geographical location between Europe and Asia caused the continuous invasion of historical Armenia, beginning with Persians in the Sixth through Fourth Centuries, the Seleucid Greeks in 330 B.C., and Rome in 190 B.C.¹⁴

Armenia became the first nation to declare Christianity as its state religion in 301 A.D. Thereafter, Christianity was ingrained into the Armenian culture and stubbornly defended by Armenians as they found themselves a minority among larger ethnic and religious groups, including Persians, Muslim Seljuk Turks and finally, Muslim Ottoman Turks. Thus, in the absence of their own government, Armenians turned to the Armenian Apostolic Church as the pillar of the community and the keeper of the Armenian language and culture, in addition to the Christian faith. After centuries of speaking a distinct language rooted in the Indo-European family of languages, a monk named Mesrob Mashdotz invented the Armenian alphabet in the 5th century A.D. and inscribed the first Armenian bible. Around the same time, a distinct style of church architecture of a cruciform structure with a lofty dome was developed, which Armenian churches continue to utilize today.¹⁵

¹³ David Waldstreicher. *The American Armenians* (Singapore: Library of Congress, 1989),16.

¹⁴ Ibid,17-20.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17-20.

In 387 A.D., the Byzantine Empire in the west and the Persian Empire to the east divided Armenia between them. Beginning with this historic division, distinctive eastern and western Armenian dialects, each with its own grammar and spelling, developed over the centuries. Islam dominated the region beginning in the 7th century and as the minority Christian Armenians resisted conversion, the long history of persecution began. In the eleventh century, half the Armenian population fled the invading Seljuk Turks, migrated westward, and created a province they named the Kingdom of Cilicia adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea in Southern Asia Minor.¹⁶ This further divided the cultures of western and eastern Armenians, as each was influenced by and incorporated some characteristics of, the dominant Near Eastern/European and Persian cultures, respectively.

In 1453, the Ottomans conquered the Seljuk Turks, brought down the Byzantine Empire, and established Constantinople as their capital. Thus began the period of social and political oppression of Armenians and other non-Muslims as they became “Millets” or separate communities of the empire. Although given freedom of worship and political autonomy overseen by “patriarchs,” Ottomans placed heavy taxes on these segregated millets, and gave no police protection. The population in the six Armenian provinces was subject to the ruling patriarch or “vali” who could be kind, or as was the case in Afyon Karahisar, could decree that an Armenian who spoke his native language could have his tongue cut out.¹⁷ Consequently, Armenians of such provinces spoke Turkish for generations. It is not surprising that later, massacre survivors would forbid their children to speak Turkish, and insisted they learn and speak Armenian at home, even if they themselves did not.

¹⁶ Ibid, 17-20.

¹⁷ Peter Balakian. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 42.

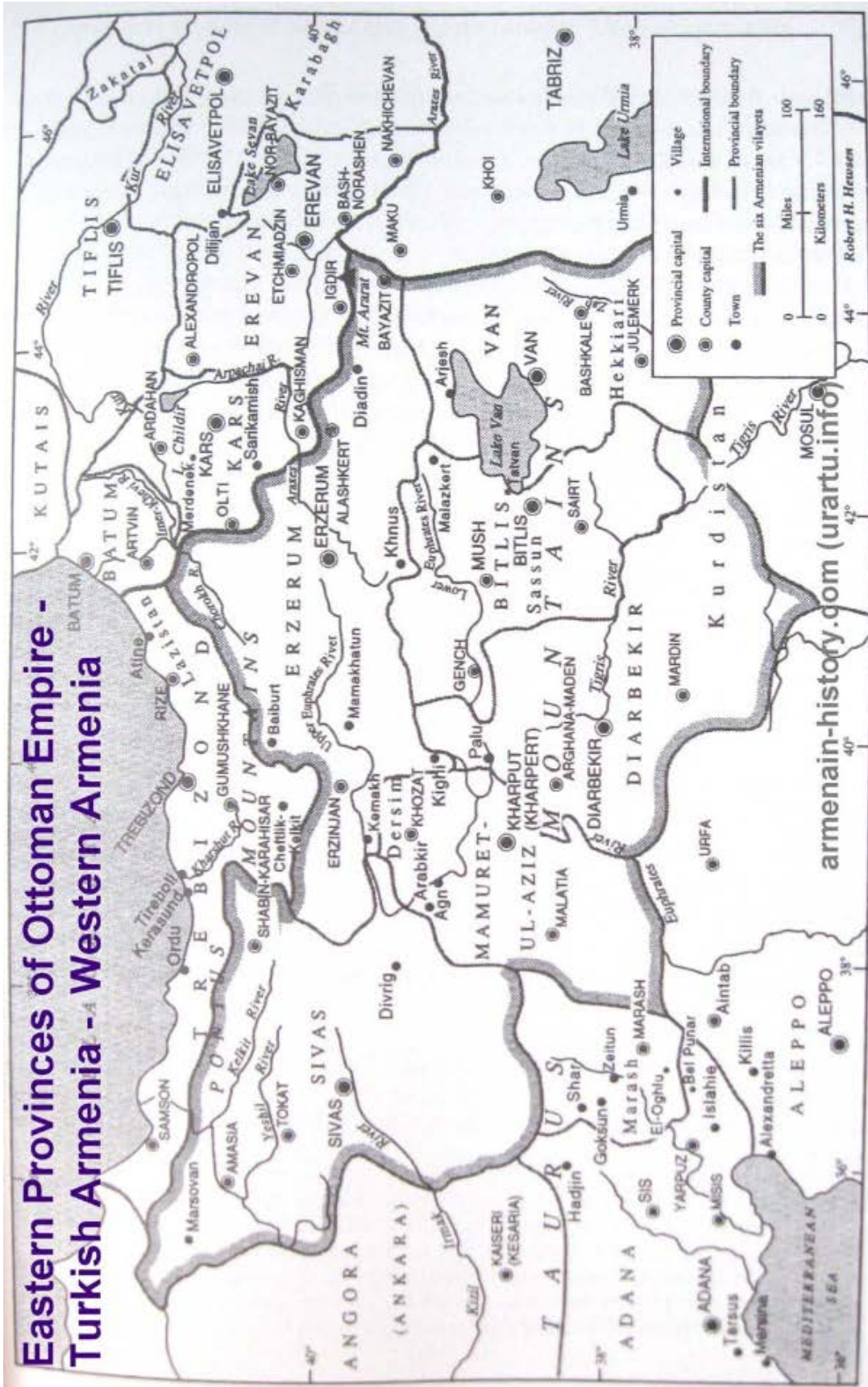
Hated by most Turks as “unclean infidels,” millets were periodically attacked, while paradoxically, the Ottoman view that commerce is corrupt gave Armenians, Greeks, and Jews the opportunity to prosper as merchants and bankers.¹⁸ Thus, wealthy Armenian businessmen in the port cities of Constantinople and Smyrna were exposed to Western society through their business travels and dealings, while the majority of Armenians in the provinces remained poor farmers and villagers. Armenians and other “dhimmi” or non-Muslims, were not allowed to own weapons, but were subject to additional taxes such as the “hospitality tax,” a winter-quartering obligation to house and feed Kurdish and Turkish soldiers in their homes.¹⁹

Eastern and western Armenians were separated further in 1828 at the end of the Russo-Persian War, when victorious Russia forced Persia to sign the Treaty of Turkmenchay, which divided the traditional lands that had been home to Armenians for over two millennia, yet again. Under its terms, two thirds of Armenia fell into Ottoman territory, while the remaining third was divided between Persia and Russia. Due to the continuing hostility between the leaders of the Ottoman and Russian empires, Armenians living in the Russian empire were effectively cut off from Armenians in the Ottoman and Persian empires. Consequently, western Armenians later experienced the massacre, while Armenians living under Russian and Persian rule were spared.

¹⁸ Waldstreicher, 22.

¹⁹ Balakian, 41.

Eastern Provinces of Ottoman Empire - Turkish Armenia - Western Armenia



American Missionaries in the Ottoman Empire

Turkey was the unlikely destination for American Protestant missionaries who arrived in 1830 as an extension of the Second Great Awakening. That year, the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent New England ministers Eli Smith and Harrison Gary Otis Dwight into the interior of Turkey, Russia, and Persia, to conduct a survey of the Armenians.²⁰ The following year, missionaries Reverend William Goodell, arrived in Constantinople, and the Reverend and Mrs. Wheeler and their daughter Emily, in Kharpert Province. Their attempts to convert Muslim Turks failed, and missionaries sought instead to convert Apostolic Armenians to Protestantism. By 1908, they had expanded their missions to 20 stations, 269 outstations, 130 organized churches, 5 theological schools, 49 colleges, and numerous boarding and high schools.²¹ Not surprisingly, their success was resented by the Apostolic Church, whose enraged patriarch excommunicated Armenians who converted to Protestantism. At the same time, these missionaries were forces for progressive change and democratic ideas, as they advocated education and literacy.²² In fact, according to Peter Balakian, missionaries planted American ideas of freedom of expression and justice in the face of oppression in the minds of their converts, “ideas that fostered resistance to the existing structures of Ottoman authority as well as pride in Armenian cultural values.”²³ These ideas also gave rise to nationalism and on the part of Armenian intellectuals, a strong

²⁰ Hagop Martin Deranian, *Worcester Is America: The Story of Worcester Armenians: The Early Years* (Worcester, MA: Bennate Publishing, 1998), 3.

²¹ Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 24.

²² Balakian, 26.

²³ Ibid, 28.

desire for independence from the Ottoman yoke. An unintended result of the missionaries' success was the division it created in the Armenian people, whose Apostolic church was the center of each community for centuries. Thus, conflict within the Armenian community was created between those who converted to Protestantism and created separate community networks and those who remained loyal to the ancient Apostolic church. This conflict was not confined to the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, but extended to Armenian communities in the United States and around the world.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, American and European missionaries found themselves in dire circumstances when they became unintended witnesses of the massacre and deportation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Their official correspondence to their headquarters in the United States, as well as their private letters and journals, attest to the atrocities they witnessed. Significantly, although missionaries did not succeed in converting the majority of Armenians to Protestantism, the Protestant work ethic, Western education and values they taught became ingrained values of most Armenians who lived in the communities surrounding their institutions. The second unintended result of their efforts was their grooming and preparing Armenians for life as immigrants in the United States, through their introduction of American culture.

The Massacres

The first wave of attempted genocide of Armenians by the Turkish government commonly referred to as the Hamidian Massacres, occurred in 1894-1896, when Sultan Abdul Hamid II brutally targeted Armenians in response to their demand for reforms.²⁴ Armenians had done so, empowered by the European Concert's agreement that entitled them to reforms by Article LXI of the Treaty of Berlin, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1878.²⁵ In the spring of 1894, Armenians resisted double taxation and extortion by tax collectors in the cities of Mush and Sasun, and Sultan Hamid responded by ordering an invasion by nomadic Kurds. This resulted in the massacre of some three thousand Armenians, according to British Consul R.A. Graves, who was stationed in Erzerum province.²⁶ On October 1, 1895, 2,000 Armenians planning to deliver a "Protest-Demand" to the sultan, which decried the Sasun massacre and the condition of Armenians throughout the empire, gathered in Constantinople. As police and soldiers ordered the crowd to disperse, violence broke out and as horrified foreigners and European diplomats looked on, a massacre of Armenians began in Constantinople and its surrounding suburbs.²⁷ That fall, the killing, rape, and plunder that began in the capital spread east to the Armenian provinces and continued through 1896. Throughout this period, accounts of these atrocities were printed in articles in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, and *San Francisco Examiner*, among other major newspapers, provoking public outrage in the United States and Europe.²⁸

²⁴ Mirak, 205-207.

²⁵ Ibid, 205-227.

²⁶ Robert Windham Graves. *Storm Centres of the Near East*, 1879-1929 (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), 144.

²⁷ Balakian, 58-60.

²⁸ Ibid, 66.

In response, the American Red Cross organized its first international mission to the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire in February of 1897, headed by 74 year old Clara Barton, who set up headquarters in Constantinople and directed relief efforts during her eight month stay.²⁹ The New York-based National Armenian Relief Committee, whose board members included Spencer Trask, Jacob Schiff, and Supreme Court Justice David Josiah Brewer, also organized fund-raising drives.³⁰ In an age when a loaf of bread cost five cents, Americans raised over three hundred thousand dollars in 1896 alone, for Armenian relief.³¹ These funds were used by relief teams to aid survivors, whom agents found starving and suffering from typhus, dysentery and smallpox throughout the Armenian provinces. In spite of public outrage, ample press coverage, and the passing of the Cullom Resolution in 1896, denouncing the sultan, there was no forceful intervention by the European or United States governments to stop the massacres.

In July of 1908, the forced exile of Sultan Abdul Hamid by the Young Turks seemed to signal the implementation of long-sought after reforms for all the people of the empire, including the minorities.³² As it turned out, this was far from the case for the Armenians, and by April of 1909, it became evident that there would be no reforms; rather, Armenians would become victims of the new Turkish government. In the city of Adana on the Mediterranean coast, gangs of Turks began looting and killing, and according to British vice-consul Doughty Wylie, Turkish soldiers fired on Armenians trying to protect

²⁹ Clara Barton. *The Red Cross in Peace and War* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Press, 1899), 278.

³⁰ Merle Curti. *American Philanthropy Abroad* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 121-123.

³¹ *Ibid*, 121-123.

³² William Miller. *The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors, 1801-1927, with an Appendix, 1927-1936* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 476..

their lives and property, rather than on Turkish looters.³³ Turkish soldiers then set fire to the Christian quarter, burning 4,437 Armenian houses. In his official report, Wylie estimated that about 200 villages were ravaged, with a death toll of between 15,000 and 25,000.³⁴ Major Wylie, missionary William N. Chambers, who ran an American school for girls, and journalist Charles Woods found Governor Jevad Bey and military commandant Remzi Pasha responsible for these massacres, and were outraged when these men were later given mere slaps on the wrist for their roles.³⁵ Ironically, the warships of England, France, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the United States, all stationed a few miles off the coast, had no authorization to intervene. According to Peter Balakian, “Adana was a turning point for the Armenians. The massacres there were another major step in the devaluation of this minority culture, and a step forward on the road to genocide.”³⁶

The Committee of Union and Progress, the fiercely nationalist faction of the Young Turks, staged a coup d’état in January of 1913, and by June, the new ruling triumvirate of Enver, Jemal and Talaat Pasha was in power in Constantinople. At the same time that Turkey lost its Christian Balkan territories, Armenians pressed European powers to push Turkey to enact reforms promised decades before. Consequently, the Armenian Reform Agreement of February 8, 1914, which required the stationing of European inspectors, was signed as international law in Constantinople, but was deeply resented by the Turks, who launched a militant pan-Turkish movement.³⁷ Next, Turkey entered into an alliance

³³ Balakian, 149.

³⁴ George Frederick Abbott. *Turkey in Transition* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909), 305.

³⁵ Balakian, 155.

³⁶ Ibid, 155.

³⁷ Jay Winter, “Under the Cover of War: Genocide in the Context of Total War,” (paper presented at the conference, “The American Response to the Armenian Genocide,” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., September 28, 2000), 4.

with Germany, and by March, high-ranking German officers took commanding positions in the Ottoman army and entered the First World War in November of 1914. One month later, the two European inspectors in the Armenian provinces per the Reform agreement were sent home by Talaat Pasha's imperial rescript, rendering Armenians defenseless.³⁸

In the spring and summer of 1915, under the veil of World War I, the plan to liquidate the Armenian population was implemented in the towns, cities, villages and hamlets of the Ottoman Empire. This began on April 24, 1915, when 250 prominent Armenian intellectuals were arrested in Constantinople in the middle of the night. The bewildered men, mostly in pajamas, were taken by military caravan outside the city, separated into smaller groups, and tortured. A few escaped, including priest Krikoris Balakian who later wrote his memoirs, but most of these writers, professors, physicians, reporters, merchants, bankers, assemblymen and representatives were killed. In this way, the vocal leadership of the Armenians was eliminated, and attention was directed to the Armenian provinces.³⁹

Meanwhile, the Ottoman Parliament enacted legislation, including the Temporary Law of Deportation of May 27, 1915, which gave officers the legal power to lead the removal of Armenians. The Temporary Law of Expropriation and Confiscation followed on September 13, 1915, and enabled authorities to confiscate Armenian properties, livestock and wealth.⁴⁰ In each province, able-bodied Armenian men between the ages of 13 and 70 were rounded up, arrested, taken outside the city or town and shot en masse,

³⁸ James Bryce, and Arnold Joseph Toynbee. *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Folloden by Viscount Bryce* (Princeton, New Jersey: Taderon Press, 2000), 635-636.

³⁹ Grigoris Balakian, translated by Peter Balakian and Aris Sevag. *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 52-70.

⁴⁰ Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 182-187.

while women, children, the elderly and infirm were given short notice to leave their homes, businesses, possessions and assets behind and deported on foot or by train in cattle cars, to the “interior” with only small items in tow. En route, countless babies and the elderly, unable to keep walking or bear hunger and especially, thirst, were left behind to die, while young women routinely threw themselves into the Euphrates River to drown. Concentration camps, makeshift tents and refugee camps in the desert, along with starvation and disease, awaited those who survived the long death marches. Among these, tens of thousands of women were abducted into harems or Muslim families, while an equal number of children were taken into families and converted to Islam. The remaining survivors were dispersed into refugee camps across Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Russia, and Iran, where many remained. In the following decades, many migrated to Europe, the United States, India, China, Australia and South America, “in what became a major twentieth-century diaspora,” according to Peter Balakian. Scholars estimate the total number massacred to be 1.2 million between 1915 and 1922, as historical lands inhabited continuously for over two thousand years were cleared of Armenians.⁴¹ The names of the towns and villages they left behind were changed to Turkish ones, and homes and businesses that were not destroyed were taken over by Turkish families.

⁴¹ See “Armenian Genocide Resolution Unanimously Passed by the Association of Genocide Scholars of North America, June 13, 1997.”



In 1916, the State Department in Washington had urged the ABCFM to withdraw missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, but most remained and became helpless witnesses to the Armenian massacres.⁴² Among these were Elizabeth S. Webb and Grace Knapp, who witnessed the massacres in Adana, Dr. Clarence Usherr and his wife Elizabeth in Van, and Mary Graffam in Sivas. Although their letters and telegrams were not allowed to pass the Ottoman censor, missionaries devised other ways to send messages to their intended destinations, such as using private messengers and codes.

Missionaries and consular officials were often approached by desperate Armenians before their deportation who begged to deposit their jewels and other property with them for safekeeping.⁴³ One such official was American consul Leslie Davis in Harput, who hid an enormous amount of wealth in his quarters. In the fall of 1915, when the vali, or governor, sent orders that Davis must turn over Armenian property to him, Davis refused,

⁴² Suzanne Elizabeth Moranian. "Bearing Witness: The Missionary Archives as Evidence of the Armenian Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: Palgrave, 1992), 103-128.

⁴³ Ibid, 114-115.

seriously jeopardizing his safety.⁴⁴ In Constantinople, American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who communicated regularly with consuls stationed all over the empire including Davis, was outraged at the atrocities he witnessed and those described to him in the detailed reports from his provincial consuls, but his ardent protests to the Turkish government were futile, as were his appeals to Washington to intervene. The frustrated Morgenthau wrote his memoirs after his return to the United States, in which he outlined his observations during his tenure as ambassador. His book was and continues to be a comprehensive and revealing expose' of the systematic execution of the planned Armenian Massacres by the Turkish government.⁴⁵

In addition to Armenian homes, businesses, and schools, the 2530 churches in the empire were ransacked and pillaged, after which most were burned. Besides being places of worship, most of these churches had amounted to small museums, where rare manuscripts, books, paintings, gold and jewel-encrusted chandeliers and other valuable items were housed.⁴⁶ Over the centuries, as protectors of the people in the absence of government protection, the Armenian Church had also assumed the role of record keeper and voice of each community. Thus, with their destruction, documents such as birth, marriage, and death certificates for the community perished.

German railway engineers, employees, and soldiers also found themselves witnesses to the Armenian massacres and deportations, but as allies of the Turkish government, most did not interfere. Some, however, defied orders and placed themselves in danger, such as Armin T. Wegner, a German medic and second lieutenant who secretly took hundreds of

⁴⁴ Balakian,236.

⁴⁵ Henry Morgenthau. *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co,1918).

⁴⁶ Balakian,233.

photographs of massacred and deported Armenians, which later became documentary evidence. Wegner risked his life by delivering messages to Ambassador Morgenthau and especially, by hiding these negatives in his belt and successfully smuggling them to Germany.⁴⁷

As earlier, no foreign governments intervened to stop the massacre of Armenians and others in the Ottoman Empire, but humanitarian aid poured in from citizens of several countries, in the aftermath. Personnel, volunteers, money, and supplies arrived in refugee camps in and around Aleppo, where an estimated 150,000 Armenian survivors were sheltered.⁴⁸ Agencies in the United States such as the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, later renamed Near East Relief, energetically organized a massive campaign to aid survivors. The American public was especially sympathetic towards the Christian Armenian victims, whose plight was portrayed with the slogan to help save “Starving Armenians.” Americans responded with generous donations for relief, as mothers told their children to remember the “starving Armenians” and clean their plates. By the end of 1916, Americans had raised more than \$20 million in aid, and a network of relief agencies, orphanages, schools, and hospitals was formed by Americans and citizens of other countries to help survivors rebuild their lives. These institutions were instrumental in helping these homeless, hungry, ill, disoriented and now stateless survivors regain their health by providing food, shelter and medicine. They later enabled many survivors to obtain an education and through sponsors, provided some the opportunity to immigrate to countries including the United States, to begin new lives. The fact that Armenians survived the massacres at all can probably be attributed in large part to the presence of missionaries and foreign personnel in the Ottoman Empire, whose communications and appeals alerted the rest of the world to the

⁴⁷ Armin T. Wegner. *Armin T. Wegner and the Armenians in Anatolia, 1915* (Milan: Guerini E. Associati, 1996) , 35-36, 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 353-355.

atrocities and the subsequent swift mobilization of relief. As for the Young Turk leaders, each left Turkey after the end of the war, and lived in exile in European countries under aliases. In the next few years, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation organized “Operation Nemesis” and each Triumverate member was targeted and assassinated, along with the three Armenian traitors who aided them with information.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Michael Bobelian. *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 52-64.

Armenian Immigration to the United States

Perhaps surprisingly, a few Armenians were present in North America since its beginnings as a British colony. In fact, the first Armenian arrived as a member of the Jamestown, Virginia, colony in 1618 as a servant of Governor Yeardley. Referred to as “Martin ye Armenian” in the records of the Virginia Company of London, he was brought to teach the art of tobacco production and later became one of the first naturalized British citizens on the continent.⁵⁰ Three decades later in 1653, Edward Diggs brought two Armenians to Virginia, one of whom was named George, for their expertise as cultivators of silkworms. Apparently, their work was quite successful, as evidenced by the following resolution made by the Virginia Assembly in December 1656:

That George, the Armenian, for his encouragement in the silk trade, and to stay in the country, have four thousand pounds of tobacco allowed him by the Assembly.⁵¹

No further mention of Armenians in North America exists on record for the next three centuries. By the mid nineteenth century, Armenians from Turkish Western Armenia began coming to the United States for higher education, though none ventured further west than Chicago. These students of American Protestant missionaries were encouraged to attend American universities, in hopes that they would return to their homeland and aid missionaries in spreading the gospel as community leaders.⁵² M. Vartan Malcom estimated that between 1870 and 1894, there were thirty-five to forty Armenian males enrolled at Yale, Princeton, Union, Andover, Amherst, Wisconsin, New

⁵⁰ Aram Serkis Yeretizian, “A History of Armenian Immigration to America With a Special Reference to Conditions in Los Angeles” (Thesis, University of Southern California, 1923), 17.

⁵¹ Yeretizian, 17.

⁵² Mirak, 37-38.

York University, and Clark University.⁵³ One of them, Yale student, Christopher Der Seropian, who arrived in 1843 is credited with starting the custom of class yearbooks, and later, with developing the green color used on United States currency.⁵⁴

As missionaries had hoped, by 1875, of 75 Armenians living in Atlantic Coast communities, three-fifths returned to the homeland after graduation to fill the need for lawyers, doctors, and other professionals.⁵⁵ A few remained, such as New York University alumni Khachadur Osganian, sometimes spelled Voskanian, who worked as a journalist for the *New York Herald* who served briefly as consul for the Turkish government in New York City, and was later elected President of the New York Press Club.⁵⁶ According to an article in September of 1868 in the *Cincinnati Inquirer*, Osganian planned an Armenian colony in Richmond, Virginia, which he wanted to name, “New Anni,” after the capital city of medieval Armenia known as “The City of 1001 Churches.”⁵⁷ Osganian’s plan never came to fruition, however, for unknown reasons. Other Armenian graduates of American universities distinguished themselves as well, such as Dr. Simon Minassian, Dr. Calousdian, and Dr. Bornig Mataosian, all of whom served in Philadelphia hospitals during the Civil War.⁵⁸

Apart from Armenian student arrivals earlier in the nineteenth century, the first large group of permanent immigrants, in 1894-1896, was comprised of Armenians who fled the Hamidean Massacres in Turkish Armenia, when Sultan Abdul Hamid brutally targeted Armenians in response for their demand for reforms.⁵⁹ Like the students who had arrived

⁵³ M. Vartan Malcom. *The Armenians in America-1919* (Pilgrim Press, 1919), 60.

⁵⁴ Mirak, 58.

⁵⁵ Bulbulian,, 8.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid .8.

⁵⁸ Malcom, 58.

⁵⁹ Mirak, 205-207.

earlier, this was an exclusively male group, the majority of whom were literate and planning to return to their homeland after working and accumulating their earnings. In fact, according to historian Thomas O'Connor, those arriving between 1899 and 1910 surpassed all other newcomers with a literacy rate of 76 per cent.⁶⁰ Despite their meager salaries, these early immigrants sent money home to their families until such time that they could be reunited. In many ways, this was a group in limbo, uncertain of their futures and the fate of their families and homeland.

The second wave of immigrants was a larger group of Armenians who fled the genocide perpetrated in 1914 by Talaat Pasha, in the Eastern provinces of Turkish Armenia. Thus, this first and second wave of Armenian immigrants were overwhelmingly comprised of massacre survivors who were traumatized, yet grateful to be alive and have the opportunity to start a new life in the United States. Those already living in the United States abandoned the idea of returning and directed their energies toward creating a new life for themselves and bringing any family members who had escaped or survived the massacres. Survivors and family members outside of the Ottoman Empire placed ads in Armenian newspapers in areas where refugee camps, orphanages, and relief agencies were located, in hopes of finding one another. The Armenian Church assisted in reuniting and relocating survivors, along with American agencies such as Near East Relief. For refugees in Aleppo, the Armenian Church became “the clearing house for all mail addressed to refugees.”⁶¹ In the United States, agencies sponsored by church groups also organized the cumbersome task of locating and bringing

⁶⁰ Thomas O'Connor, “The Armenian Experience: Roots of the Past, Realities of the Present,” in *The Armenians of New England: Celebrating a Culture and Preserving a Heritage*, ed. Marc A. Mamigonian (Belmont, MA: Armenian Heritage Press, 2004), 7.

⁶¹ Mae M. Derdarian, *Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide*. (Los Angeles: Atmus Press, 1996), 235.

refugees, including many orphans, who arrived on ships such as the RMS *Pannonia* and USS *Olympia*.⁶² As Thomas O'Connor pointed out, unlike other contemporary immigrants, Armenians came to the United States to escape the cruelty of others, while the Irish and Italians, for example, sought escape from natural disasters.⁶³ Perhaps this is one explanation for their resilience in overcoming hardships and prejudices that enabled their adaptation. Armenians also differed in that, unlike most Irish and Italian immigrants, they usually arrived alone rather than in families, often as the sole survivor in their immediate and extended families.

After having lived and worked in the industrial cities and towns of the East Coast and the Midwest, some Armenians were attracted to the reports of fresh air and the prospect of living among other Armenians who had moved to Fresno in a second-step migration. Robert Mirak explained:

By the eve of World War I, immigrants in numbers were leaving factories and mills to enter small businesses or agriculture. Having arrived in the New World without capital, unable to speak the language, and unfamiliar with American business skills, Armenian immigrants had naturally gravitated to the factories and mills of the Northeast and Midwest.⁶⁴

Many, especially those with capital, did not have experience in agriculture and were taking a risk in pursuing this venture. Most Armenians, however, remained in established East Coast cities and developed communities that flourished in time, and where many of their descendants remain today. Worcester, Massachusetts, became the gateway for

⁶² Pamela E. Apkarian-Russell. *Armenians of Worcester* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 34.

⁶³ O'Connor, 6.

⁶⁴ Mirak, 93.

Armenian immigrants and as historian Hagop Martin Deranian described, the first
“hometown of Armenian communities.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Deranian, 146.

Armenians of the East Coast

A century and a half ago, young Armenian men arrived on the East Coast of the United States seeking a higher education and intending to return to Turkish Armenia. However, as violence toward Armenians escalated rather than decreased in their homeland, they remained and entered the work force in the large industrial cities of New York City and Boston, but also in less likely cities such as Worcester, Massachusetts, Troy, Syracuse, and Providence, Rhode Island. Family members and other Armenians arrived to join them, and small neighborhoods grew into communities where churches and educational, cultural and political institutions were soon established. Over time, Armenians made significant contributions as Americans, while maintaining their cultural traditions. In doing so, they applied an extension of their centuries-honed dual identity which enabled them to create a balance between the two and succeed in both spheres.

The Armenian Community in Worcester, Massachusetts

Like other immigrants, Armenians generally arrived by ship at the Port of New York, and after passing inspection at Ellis Island, disembarked in New York City. Depending on where they had family or other contacts, some remained in the metropolis, while others traveled to Boston or other industrialized New England cities. But the destination for most Armenians was Worcester, Massachusetts, where the earliest Armenian community took shape, for two main reasons.

The main reason for the selection of Worcester was its connection to the Protestant missionaries with whom Armenians had developed ties in Turkish Armenia. Worcester

County was home to Reverend George Cushing Knapp, Reverend William Goodell, and Reverend and Mrs. Wheeler and their daughter Emily, all of whom served as missionaries in Turkish Armenia for several years.⁶⁶ Through their schools and churches, students and parishioners learned about America, and were undoubtedly influenced to partake in the opportunities it offered.

The first known Armenian in Worcester arrived with missionaries in 1867. On leave from his missionary work, the Rev. Knapp brought home a servant with him named Garo from Bitlis, whom he wished present when he lectured in Worcester about missionary work in Turkish Armenia.⁶⁷ An Irish laundress in the Knapp home told Garo he could earn more money in Worcester factories than his current earnings of seventy five cents per day. Apparently this appealed to Garo, as he remained in Worcester rather than returning to Turkish Armenia with the Knapps. Soon he wrote letters home about his \$1.50 daily wage at a mill, no doubt enticing friends and family to follow.⁶⁸ At first their connection to missionaries brought Armenians to Worcester, but it was the prospect of employment that brought greater numbers of immigrants, including Armenians, to the small city, according to Hrag Vartanian: “While the missionary establishment did much to bring Armenians to Massachusetts, it was rapid industrialization that guaranteed a continuing flow of settlers.”⁶⁹

The second reason Armenians came to Worcester was the availability of work in the factories, including the largest, the Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company at 94 Grove Street, which was known as the “wire mill.” The first permanent Armenian settler

⁶⁶ Deranian, 60-61.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁹ Hrag Vartanian, “The Armenian American Plymouth,” *AGBU*, March 1, 2001, 2.

in Worcester was Hovhannes Yazijian, who arrived in New York in 1873 and moved to Worcester the following year. Later changing his name to its literal translation, John Writer, he found employment in the aforementioned wire mill, where he continued to work until his retirement at the age of 65 in 1903.⁷⁰ More Armenians followed, and by 1889, 265 of the 4000 workers at Washburn and Moen were Armenian, with others employed in other factories such as the Osgood Bradley Company.

The precise number of Armenians is difficult to ascertain, since early state censuses listed Armenians from the Ottoman Empire as Turks. The Massachusetts state census in 1930, for example, listed 15,000 Armenians and 8,000 Turks, of whom half were presumably Armenian.⁷¹ The overwhelming majority of Armenians can be identified by traditional surnames that end in “ian” meaning “son of” joined to the name of their father, family occupation, trait, geography or aristocratic descendancy. However, this is not decisive, as some Persian and other ethnic names also end in *ian*.

Armenian immigrants were grateful for employment and uncomplaining despite low wages and harsh working conditions. More importantly for their employers, they were uninterested in labor unions, which drew the resentment of union workers. Particularly when hired as strikebreakers, many were harassed, beaten, and called “dumb foreigners” by the workers they replaced. One such incident was reported by *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on May 10, 1894, describing an attack against Armenian strikebreakers at the Arthur E. Mann factory in Stoneham, Massachusetts, the previous day. As a group of

⁷⁰ Deranian, 18.

⁷¹ Charles Goldenberg, ed. *The Armenians in Massachusetts: American Guide Series for the Works Progress Administration* (Boston: Armenian Historical Society, 1937), 34.

strikebreaking Armenian men leaving work were boarding an electric car, a mob of union workers boarded and forced them off while the larger surrounding mob threw rocks and stones. One Armenian, James Esidjian, “drew a long knife and began to flourish it.” Police came to rescue the Armenians and arrested the six who had brandished their daggers.⁷² Significantly, no mention is made in the article of any arrests of the non-Armenian attackers, for whom the police were originally dispatched.

Especially hurtful was being called “Turks,” and Armenians asked Roman Catholic priests to inform their congregations and clarify that Armenians were not only a different ethnicity but in fact, Christians.⁷³ Another attempt made to address such misunderstandings was the formation of the Armeno-American Ameliorating and Protective League, to assist Armenians when they were denied protection. At a September 1891 meeting, leader Krikor Der Krikorian urged Armenians to become American citizens so they would be entitled to government protection.⁷⁴ Sadly, Armenians suffered abuse not only from Americans, but also from fellow Armenians who mistreated and exploited newcomers by offering, for example, the buying of jobs at exuberant prices. Such unscrupulous middlemen collected fees to arrange lucrative factory employment for newly arrived immigrants desperately in need of work. In 1889, two accused men, a foreman and his assistant, were fired for accepting such bribes from Armenians.⁷⁵

Contemporary newspapers reveal that American workers were concerned about the competition for jobs that the Armenians presented. In an article dated October 21, 1896 in

⁷² “Knives vs. Stones,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1894,5.

⁷³ Deranian, 27-28. Also, *Worcester Telegram*, July 7, 1934, obituary of Sara Writer.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁵ Vartanian,,3.

The Sun, the issue of whether to allow 137 refugee Armenians who had arrived at Ellis Island into the U.S. was debated. The article cited the objections of workingmen to the competition these immigrant workers would create, as well as Commissioner Joseph Senner's position that Armenians should not be given preferential treatment. The article stated that Armenians have "lowered the standard of wages in some industries," and ended with the paraphrasing of a telegram sent to "Secretary Carlisle" by the Boston rug merchant Hagop Bogian (sic) who offered to pay a bond and wrote, "Will furnish all you may reasonably wish" so that the Armenian group can land.⁷⁶ This is not surprising, as Bogigian (the correct spelling of his name), who later became known as "the first Armenian-American millionaire," was active in the effort to bring refugees from Turkish Armenia and often guaranteed their support.⁷⁷ There was also much concern that Armenians would become public charges, according to newspaper articles. Referring to the same group of Armenians, *The Idaho Statesman* reported on October 29, 1896, that Lady Henry Somerset also offered her personal bond to assure that the Armenians who had arrived on the *Obdam* and *California* will not become public charges. This appeal was made to the same Commissioner Senner, and through the intervention of Somerset and the W.C.T.U. of Massachusetts, one hundred Armenians were admitted.⁷⁸

Occasionally, an article came to the defense of Armenians and other immigrants, such as one titled, "Is Massachusetts Joining the Majority?" published in *The State* on August 24, 1908. This article discussed the murder of two policemen in the town of Methuen, Massachusetts, and the public's suspicion that the murderers were surely

⁷⁶ "Armenians as Immigrants: Commissioner Senner Says American Workingmen Complain of Competition," *The Baltimore Sun*, October 21, 1896.

⁷⁷ Mamigonian, 74..

⁷⁸ "Armenians Landed: Bonds to Guarantee They Will Not Become Public Charges" *Idaho Daily Statesman*, October 29, 1896, p.1.

“foreigners.” The newspaper cautioned against “race prejudice” and scolded Bostonians and citizens of Methuen who had called for the expulsion of all foreigners from their mills. In seeking to purge the Armenians and Greeks, the article pointed out, Irish-Americans and French-Canadians were forgetting that not long before, they also displaced the workers before them.⁷⁹

The early Worcester community of Armenian men usually lived together in boarding houses close to factories, designating one of the men to cook and clean while the others were at work. Living this way, the men saved their money and sent it to their families back home and saved for their futures. Emphasizing the importance of learning English, night schools offered classes to these working men and were well-attended. For social companionship, an Armenian Club with a membership of 70 was formed in September of 1888 and served as a place to gather, drink Armenian coffee, and play “tavloo” a game similar to backgammon.⁸⁰ The following year, this small community sought spiritual leadership and guidance, and members drafted a letter to their patriarch in Constantinople, asking for a priest to be assigned to Worcester. While awaiting a response, the club wasted no time in planning the building of an Armenian Church, and devised a unique, clever method of soliciting donations from unknown Armenians in other U.S. cities. Letters were drafted and addressed to a non-existent “Mr. John Armenian” in Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans, and other cities in hopes that the postmaster would deliver it to any Armenian he located. This was successful, as Armenians in twenty cities responded with donations and contributed significantly to a

⁷⁹ “Armenians as Immigrants,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, Maryland, October 21, 1896, 8.

⁸⁰ Deranian, 65.

church building fund.⁸¹ The result of their efforts, the Church of Our Savior, was built in the Laurel Hill neighborhood of Worcester, where most Armenians lived. This first apostolic church in the Americas was consecrated on January 18, 1891.⁸² A decade later, at the cornerstone- laying of the first Protestant Armenian church on July 14, 1901, Rev. Albert W. Hitchcock, a former missionary in Turkey, referred to Armenians as pilgrims seeking religious freedom and dubbed them the “Yankees of the East.”⁸³

Women joined family members by the turn of the twentieth century, beginning with Sara Yazijian (who later changed her name to Writer) the first to arrive and join her husband John in 1882. Soon the community grew in numbers and some Armenians moved from factory jobs to small business ownership, such as the Velvet Ice Cream Company, owned by the Kalenian brothers, and the Armeno Cereal Company, the first to manufacture cracked wheat, known as “bulgur” in the United States.⁸⁴ Before the end of the nineteenth century, the Armenian community in Worcester had at least nine coffee houses and restaurants, a drama group, an Armenian Bicyclists’ Club, and four Turkish baths.

Worcester became synonymous with the United States for Armenians, as illustrated by Hagop Deranian, who related the following conversation between an Armenian immigrant and an immigration official at Ellis Island. Asked to name his destination, the Armenian replied, “America,” and the official answered that he was, in fact, in America.

⁸¹ Deranian,,81.

⁸² Deranian, 82.

⁸³ Albert B. Southwick,*Once-Told Tales of Worcester County* (Worcester, MA: Databooks,1994), 105.

⁸⁴ Vartanian,,4.

Not convinced, the immigrant insisted, “No, Worcester is America!”⁸⁵ Such was the connection between Worcester and America in the mind of Armenians in the homeland.

Once the community institutions were established, attention was directed towards helping those suffering in Turkish Armenia. Organizations were formed, including the Armenian Orphan’s Aid Society founded by the ladies of the Church of Our Savior in 1898, which famous reformers, including Alice Stone Blackwell, joined, and the National Armenian Relief Committee founded by the aforementioned missionary, Emily Wheeler. Families were reunited when the new, liberal Turkish Constitution of 1908 briefly loosened emigration policies and allowed the emigration of family members to join those already in the United States.⁸⁶ Worcester bachelors who had given up the idea of returning home and wished to marry exchanged photographs through intermediaries and arranged for the immigration of “picture brides” from Turkish Armenia. Many bachelors, especially those who had lost family members to the Massacres, deliberately sought brides from orphanages in Aleppo, Beirut, Jerusalem, Athens, and other cities where rescued Armenian orphans were cared for and educated. Subsequently, the children of these marriages became the first generation of American born Armenians. Although Worcester remained the undisputed “hometown” of Armenians in the United States during this era, Boston became the favored destination of Armenian immigrants by the 1920s.

⁸⁵ Deranian,143.

⁸⁶ Deranian,.172.

The Armenian Community in Providence, Rhode Island

Like in Worcester, the missionary connection in Providence, Rhode Island, was an early pull factor for Armenian immigrants. Park Place Congregational Church in Pawtucket was the headquarters of American church missionaries who had worked in Turkish Armenia. Area universities were another draw, as were the developing factory industries in Providence, known as “The Five Industrial Wonders of the World.” These included the world’s largest tool factory, Brown and Sharpe, as well as Nicholson File, Corliss Steam Engine Company, American Screw, and Gorham silverware, in addition to jewelry and wool product manufacturers.⁸⁷ Additionally, some ship lines brought immigrants directly into the Port of Providence, such as the Fabre Line of a French steamship company based in Marseilles, France.⁸⁸ Non English-speaking immigrants arriving in New York were assisted by an agency called Traveler’s Aid inside Union Station, whose Armenian volunteers directed arrivals to trains to Providence in person or by phone.⁸⁹

The Travelers Aid Society had its beginnings in St. Louis, a major stopping point along the Mississippi River where pioneers headed west were often stranded due to stagecoach delays and diseases like cholera. These hardships caused shortages of food and medicine and concerned the mayor of St. Louis, Bryan Mullarphy, whose city was ill-equipped and lacked the funds to adequately aid these travelers. In his will, Mullarphy left one third of his estate, amounting to half a million dollars, to aid such travelers and upon his untimely death in 1851 at the age of 42, this money was used to create a fund for travelers in need.

⁸⁷ Karentz, 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 10.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 10.

The influx of Industrial Revolution immigration prompted the Travelers Aid Society to direct their attention to major East Coast cities such as Boston, New York, Atlanta, and Philadelphia, to protect and assist stranded travelers. In 1914, Grace Hoadley Dodge created the “chain of service” concept to assist travelers with transportation between cities, including Armenian immigrants headed to other cities from New York. Travelers Aid continued to meet the needs of travelers as the changing times demanded, including serving as an original United Service Organization, or USO, providing “troop transit” lounges to service men and women in 175 locations during World War II.⁹⁰ Over a century and a half later, the organization continues to provide assistance and services to travelers in today’s considerably more complicated and sophisticated world.

Due to the Industrial Revolution, jobs in Providence as well as Pawtucket and Central Falls were plentiful, and for factory owners in need of workers, race and lack of knowledge of English were temporarily insignificant matters. In fact, recruiters and foremen representing various factories interviewed and hired men on the decks of arriving ships at the Port of Providence. Those intending to travel to other destinations were often enticed to remain in Providence due to this instant employment opportunity. This was the case with Hovaness Aprahamian, who happened to stand in the American Screw Company line, was hired on the spot, and given a piece of paper with the address to report to the very next day. Aprahamian and other Armenian newcomers joined the mostly Irish immigrant workers at these factories, where these new foreigners were resented. Initially, as in Worcester, men shared housing within walking distance of the factories at Smith Hill, in the Douglas Avenue neighborhood where they intermingled

⁹⁰ “History and Programs: A Helping Hand Along the Way,” accessed 21 October, 2011: available from <http://www.travelersaid.org>; Internet.

with Irish, Polish, German, and Jewish immigrants.⁹¹ After work, the Armenians learned English at night classes taught by volunteers. Armenians who fled the Hamidian and later, the 1915 Massacres, generally arrived alone, often having witnessed the horrific deaths of their family members:

...separated and dispersed as individual survivors with both physical and psychological scars. They had lost everything, including fathers and mothers, spouses, siblings, and even their own children. Their valued possessions consisted of only their native language. Some had additional language knowledge such as Turkish, Arabic, French, or Greek. They carried few if any personal items or had any heirlooms or tangible possessions.⁹²

A historical auditorium at 50 Exchange Place served as the site of spiritual, political, and cultural lectures and gatherings for these early Armenian immigrants. There, to provide the holy ambiance of the traditional Armenian Church, immigrant Garabed Pashalian built a portable Armenian altar for use during Sunday church services.⁹³ Soon, businesses were established to serve the growing community's needs, including grocery stores, a photography studio, restaurants, and professional services, such as the medical offices of Dr. Arshag Der Margosian and the dental offices of Harvard Dental School graduate Dr. K. Emirzian.⁹⁴ In 1914, immigrant Caspar Rustigian, the first Armenian attorney in Providence, opened his offices following his graduation from law school in Boston.⁹⁵ That same year, to serve the growing Armenian community, the first Armenian Apostolic church, St. Sahag and St. Mesrob, was established at 70

⁹¹ Karentz, 174.

⁹² Karentz, 8.

⁹³ Ibid, 38.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 46.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 45.

Jefferson Street. The Armenian Evangelical Church of Providence had been established earlier, in October of 1889.⁹⁶

In addition to Smith Hill, other Armenian neighborhoods developed, as explained by Varoujan Karentz:

Not being comfortable with the English language and the strange American values coupled with the strong desire to remain Armenian had dictated remaining together. As more immigrants arrived, they too sought out relatives and fellow villagers from the old country.⁹⁷

John Pakradounian was born in Providence on December 11, 1926, the first of six children born to massacre survivors.⁹⁸ His mother Yeresapeth was the sole survivor of her family from Sepastia, and after World War I, was taken to an orphanage by a Syrian soldier. There, through ads placed to find family members, her older brother Aram Shamlian, living in New York, answered the ad and sent money for Yeresapeth to join him. She journeyed alone and arrived in Providence via Boston in 1922. There, she worked at the Karagozian Rug Factory in Manhattan until friends introduced her to Aram's father, a survivor from Kharpert, who lived in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. They married and moved to Providence, and moved frequently during the Great Depression. John described one neighborhood they lived in as 40% Italian, 18% French Canadian, and 3% Armenian and others, but the "real Americans lived in College Hill, next to Brown University."⁹⁹ John's parents worked for the Works Progress Administration during the Depression years, while John worked at a variety of jobs to help his family, including delivering newspapers and shining shoe. At the age of seventeen, following the

⁹⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 174.

⁹⁸ John Pakradounian, Interview with Author. February 8, 2012. Burbank, California.

⁹⁹ John Pakradounian. Interview with Author. February 8, 2012. Burbank, California.

tradition of most young Armenian men in Providence, John enlisted in the Navy, as did his brothers, except the youngest, Albert, who broke tradition by joining the Air Force. John reminisced that during World War II, “there were more sailors than civilians in Providence.”¹⁰⁰

In 1934, five hundred and forty Armenian-owned businesses were listed in the directories of Rhode Island, of which forty percent were groceries or food related establishments. The remaining included shoe repairs, barber shops, tailor shops, bakeries and jewelry stores that served Armenians as well as the greater community. By the following year, thirty eight licensed and accredited Armenian doctors, lawyers, dentists and druggists, all immigrants, were practicing their professions in Providence.¹⁰¹ In the succeeding decades, many Armenian families moved into suburbia and were absorbed by the surrounding population, or to other cities, following family, friends, or business prospects. Providence continues to be the home of many Armenian descendants of the first immigrants.

The Armenian Community of Syracuse, New York

The first Armenian resident of Syracuse, John Bayerian of Marash, arrived in 1895 via Waltham, Massachusetts, and worked for the Solvay Process Company.¹⁰² Employment opportunities attracted Armenian immigrants like Bayerian from other East Coast communities to Syracuse, at the time a major manufacturing center for men’s

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Karentz, 285.

¹⁰² Arpena Mesrobian, *Like One Family: The Armenians of Syracuse* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2000), 4.

clothing. There, Armenians lived all over the city in small clusters rather than in specific neighborhoods, usually near the factories where they found work. Finding language a barrier to participation in American life, immigrants eagerly attended the English and Civics classes offered in the evenings, after work. Initially, when the Armenian community was very small in number, Protestant and Apostolic Armenians both attended Sunday services at the Fourth Presbyterian Church, presided over by itinerant priests. The church basement served as a gathering place for suppers and various meetings, as well as the aforementioned classes. The Presbyterians offered their church and facilities to the Armenians free of charge, but from time to time, Armenians donated a ton of coal as their contribution. As additional families moved to Syracuse, small Armenian businesses including grocers, tailors, and oriental rug dealers were established to serve the needs of the growing community.

Several important relief organizations were organized in Syracuse to aid Armenians in Turkish Armenia. Among them was the Armenian Red Cross of the U.S., which was established by a women's auxiliary group in 1910, and grew to fifteen chapters by the following year. The Committee for Relief in Armenia was also formed in Syracuse, whose members set up an orderly system to collect contributions of food, clothing, and cash. Benefit concerts, plays, auctions and picnics were organized to collect additional donations to be sent to alleviate the suffering of Armenian refugees in the aftermath of the genocide. In 1919, the American Committee for Relief in the Near East in Syracuse was granted a national charter, to provide aid to widows and orphans and to assist in the resettlement of refugees.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Ibid, 71.

A prominent Armenian immigrant was watchmaker and inventor Harutun Bab Azadian, who arrived in Syracuse in 1899 and became one of the country's outstanding instrument makers. Azadian was the son of a wealthy family in Constantinople who showed an early aptitude for technical skills and studied astronomy and mathematics and apprenticed as a watchmaker in Geneva, Switzerland. He then studied art and engraving in Paris, and completed his education at the Polytechnicum in Stuttgart, Germany, before Azadian, his fiancé Akabi, and her friend Joanna Zimmer departed for Syracuse, where Joanna had a relative. After a year of engraving, illustration and lithography work, Azadian went to work at the Syracuse Improved Gauge Company, and in 1902, was granted a patent for his adjustable rack and pinion mechanism design. He opened his own business, the Azadian Gauge Manufacturing Company in 1909, where he employed many Armenians, in addition to other immigrants. Through his contract with Brown Company Industries, his company supplied parts for Henry Ford's Model T.¹⁰⁴ Azadian later rose to national prominence when he was appointed as technical advisor to Woodrow Wilson's administration on the U.S. War Industries Board, along with Bernard Baruch, Thomas Edison, George Eastman, and Henry Ford.¹⁰⁵

Mr. and Mrs. Azadian became leaders in the community and actively encouraged Armenians to learn English and become American citizens. In 1916, the Americanization Committee of the Chamber of Commerce was established in Syracuse, and the couple became board members and representatives of the Armenians. Stigmatized by their statelessness following the massacres, most immigrants hastened to obtain American citizenship and the full rights it would presumably give them and eagerly attended the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 15-18.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 15-19.

English and Civics classes offered. The program was formed in 1917, to “develop sympathy and understanding between the various ethnic groups and also to assist immigrants to learn the English language and to become naturalized American citizens.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps these socialization programs were indeed “more appropriate for the factory than the classroom” as Roger Daniels asserted, but they were well-attended by Armenians.¹⁰⁷ This committee also sponsored and presented a week-long series of tableaux at the New York State Fair of 1919, where small ethnic groups exhibited important events in their history. In addition to a costumed pageant depicting an important battle in Armenian history, an Armenian booth displayed several rugs and a centuries-old embroidered altar piece.¹⁰⁸ The Americanization Movement was supported by the Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Naturalization, and the Committee on Public Information, and flourished between 1914 and 1921.¹⁰⁹ Azadian remained a lifetime leader of the Syracuse Armenian community and utilized his political connections to enlist the participation of dignitaries such as Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Theodore Roosevelt, and Calvin Coolidge, among others, at fund-raising dinners for Armenian refugee support, including one held at the Plaza Hotel in New York on February 8, 1919.¹¹⁰

Less known but as important to the Armenian community was the farm owned by the Babikian brothers, Mihran and Nishan, who had arrived in Syracuse in 1908.

¹¹¹The Babikian farm of over one hundred acres became the gathering place for

¹⁰⁶ Ibid,126.

¹⁰⁷ Daniels, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Mesrobian,127.

¹⁰⁹ Daniels, 89.

¹¹⁰ Ibid,64.

¹¹¹ Mesrobian, 14.

community picnics each summer, where families enjoyed music, shish kebab, and a relaxed visit with relatives and friends. Such picnics were a summertime staple in every Armenian community in the United States, and functioned as a vehicle for social interaction. It included the participation of friends and relatives from other communities, who traveled to the picnic every year. A group photo was taken annually, which many picnic-goers purchased as a memento and displayed in their homes. Although a small community of Armenians remained in Syracuse, the larger Armenian communities of Detroit, Chicago and California attracted many Syracuse Armenians by the end of the 1920s.

A Few Noteworthy East Coast Armenians

Aside from Worcester, Providence, and Syracuse, Armenian immigrants settled in other small East Coast communities, drawn by either the availability of jobs, or their connections to missionaries. Such was the case with the seemingly unlikely city of Portland, Maine. The first Armenians to settle in Portland were the Charles Yeghoian family, who fled the violence in Constantinople in 1896. Stranded in Marseilles, the family was one of many that Frances E. Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Lady Somerset, with the Salvation Army, arranged to relocate to America.¹¹² Mrs. Willard Stevens, President of the WTCU in Portland, personally sponsored the family, and provided an apartment, furniture, and food. Charles found employment in the Portland Stone Ware Company, known locally as "The Pottery," making drain pipes,

¹¹² Anthony P. Mezoian. *The Armenian People of Portland, Maine*. (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire, 1985), 10.

bricks, and garden urns. By 1908, 25 Armenian families were settled in Portland, and by the 1930s, 75 Armenian families lived in a nine-block area two blocks north of City Hall called the Portland Armenian Settlement.¹¹³ As in other communities, small businesses were opened and operated by Armenian proprietors, and annual picnics were held and enjoyed by the entire community.

In Boston, Armenians first lived in the enclave known as the “Orient of Boston” in the South Cove area, which was also home to Syrians, Greeks, and Chinese.¹¹⁴ As their economic situation improved, some Armenians moved to Watertown, while the wealthier families chose the suburbs of Newton, Arlington, and Belmont. At the beginning of the jazz era in 1929, the Zildjian family opened, or rather, relocated their cymbal manufacturing company in the Norfolk Downs section of Quincy, outside of Boston.¹¹⁵ Three centuries earlier in Constantinople, alchemist Avedis Zildjian had discovered an alloy of copper, tin, and traces of silver in 1618 and created cymbals with an extraordinary sound which so impressed the sultan that he was invited to live at Topkapi Palace. There, Zildjian made cymbals for the Ottoman military’s elite Janissary Corps, which they used for royal weddings, military processions and calls to daily prayer. Zildjian, which translates literally to “cymbal maker” opened his own factory outside of Constantinople in 1623, and passed on his secret formula to succeeding generations. The political climate of hostility and persecution of Armenians in the early twentieth century prompted then-President Aram Zildjian to contact his nephew and sole surviving male heir Avedis III in the United States, and impress upon him the need to relocate and

¹¹³ Ibid, 50..

¹¹⁴ Hrag Vartanian, “The First Armenian-American Communities Take Root: The Armenian-American Plymouth,” *Armenian General Benevolent Union Magazine*. March 1, 2001, 5.

¹¹⁵ *The Armenians in Massachusetts: Written and Compiled by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Massachusetts.* (Boston, 1937).

reestablish the business in America. Initially, Avedis was reluctant to do so, as he was now an American who owned a successful candy factory. He relented, and over the years, the company grew and became a staple in the industry. Currently located at Norwell, Massachusetts, Zildjian continues to manufacture its extremely popular cymbals under the leadership of the company's fifteenth generation heir and first female CEO, Craigie Zildjian.¹¹⁶

Some Armenian immigrants distinguished themselves by making significant contributions both to their immediate and larger American communities. An early arrival in 1835, Ottoman Consul Joseph Iasigi settled in Boston, where he and an American partner established India Wharf, which became a successful import-export business. Eventually, Iasigi made gifts to the city of Boston of the statues of Columbus and Aristides, which are still in Louisburg Square in Beacon Hill today.¹¹⁷ Less known but significant nonetheless was Jacob Arakelyan, who was brought to Boston by a missionary as a servant. He eventually became the owner of the largest printing and book binding company in New England, later known as Pilgrim Press.¹¹⁸ Another prominent Boston Armenian was the aforementioned Hagop Bogigian, who opened an Oriental rug store in Harvard Square in the late 1870s. His first client, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, befriended Bogigian and later, when the store moved to fashionable Beacon Street, Longfellow met friends there for discussions before heading down the street to Atheneum

¹¹⁶ "Every Company Has a Story: Ours Starts in 1623," accessed 29 October 2011: available from <http://zildjian.com/About/History/Background;Internet>.

¹¹⁷ Vartanian, 5.

¹¹⁸ Deranian, 13.

Literary Club.¹¹⁹ Bogigian is remembered for being the “first Armenian American millionaire.”¹²⁰

Varaztad H. Kazanjian from Erzingan, Turkish Armenia, was another exceptional Armenian immigrant who arrived as a penniless sixteen-year old in Worcester in 1895. He immediately began working at a wire mill, and enrolled in night school to learn English. Like most young Armenian men, he intended to remain long enough to save money and return home, but the political situation back home worsened and he remained. He never missed a night of school for the next seven years, after which he attended Harvard Dental School, and graduated in 1905. In 1915, during the First World War, Kazanjian joined the Harvard Medical Unit and was assigned to serve as a dental surgeon in the British Royal Army Medical Corps, where he treated injuries suffered by soldiers during trench warfare. His skillful reconstruction of their shell-shattered faces earned him the nickname of “The Miracle Man of the Western Front” and later, his investment by King George V as a Companion of St. Michael and St. George at Buckingham Palace. Upon his return from the war, Dr. Kazanjian enrolled in Harvard Medical School, received his medical degree, and gained prominence as the “Father of Modern Plastic Surgery.” Due to his reputation for skillful reconstruction, he was called to Vienna in 1931 to devise an “appliance” for Sigmund Freud, who had lost a large section of his jaw to cancer. Back home, Kazanjian continued to work long hours in his Boston laboratory, taught at Harvard Dental School, and devoted some time to the Massachusetts General

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹²⁰ Vartanian,4.

Hospital, as well. Additionally, Dr. Vartazad Kazanjian found the time to write the forward to the Federal Writers' Project's study, *The Armenians in Massachusetts*.¹²¹

Another unique Armenian immigrant was Moses H. Gulesian, who arrived in New York alone in 1883 at the age of seventeen from Marash, Turkish Armenia.¹²² Not knowing English, and with only a few coins in his pocket, he spent the first few nights on a park bench, until he located his only contact, an Armenian weaver whose name he had written on a piece of paper. After working for the weaver for six months, Gulesian moved to Worcester, where he worked at a wire mill and saved enough money to enroll at the Worcester Academy to learn English. In 1887, he moved to Boston and worked as a coppersmith and in 1889, opened his own copper, sheet metal, and zinc business, which became very successful in a few years and enabled him to purchase land on Waltham Street and build a six story factory. In 1891, Gulesian became an American citizen, married Cora Plummer, a member of a prominent Boston merchant family and became a part of the Boston elite.

Gulesian was exceedingly proud of his American citizenship and had a deep interest in American history. In 1901, he was commissioned by the City of Boston to replace the rotting, historic wood and lion statues on top of the Old State House with copper replicas. As relics of the British monarchy, the controversial wooden figures were unwanted and were to be discarded by the city, but Gulesian thought it was important to preserve them as part of Boston's heritage. He bought the rotted wooden statues from the city, restored them, and placed them outside his mansion at 85 Commonwealth Ave., where they remained until their destruction by a hurricane in 1938.

¹²¹ Federal writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Massachusetts. *The Armenians in Massachusetts*, 17, 38.

¹²² Mamigonian., 69.

A few years later, Gulesian's attention was brought to another historical matter. When reading a newspaper article in December 1905 about the impending destruction of the USS Constitution, Gulesian took offense at the suggestion that "Old Ironsides" be used for target practice.¹²³ That evening, he read the history of the ship and found that it was made in Boston, that Paul Revere made its copper bolts and spikes, and that the ship earned its nickname because it had never lost a battle. The next morning, Gulesian sent a telegram to the Secretary of the Navy, offering to buy the ship for \$10,000.00.¹²⁴ Charles J. Bonaparte replied that only Congress had the authority to sell the ship, and gave the telegram to the Associated Press. The story made headlines, and a campaign to save the ship was launched. Soon, Congressional hearings were held to debate the issue, and \$100,000.00 was appropriated to repair the ship.¹²⁵ Gulesian was interviewed, and much interest was generated by a curious public about his immigrant origins and his staunch patriotism. Gulesian was then invited by the Boston chapter of the Sons of Liberty to lecture on his interest in Old Ironsides, and his speech so moved members that they unanimously elected him as a member, the first not descended from one of the American patriots of 1776.¹²⁶

Armenians were present in the newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sometimes featured prominently like Gulesian, but other times as unfortunate victims of opportunists. A March 3, 1897 article in the *Wheeling Sunday Register*, for example, described a Virginia mountaineer who induced the Women's Christian Temperance Union to send him several Armenian refugees, promising food and board,

¹²³ Mamigonian, 73.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 71-72.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 72.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 8.

clothing, and \$10 per month wages. Upon arrival, the immigrant men were put to work in a Moonshine Whisky Distillery, paid in Confederate money, and trained to shoot Revenue officers. Apparently, when a letter arrived asking for five more workers, the suspicious WCTU sent an official with the group to investigate the operation. The official found the workers content and unwilling to return, although puzzled that the local store did not accept the money they were paid. Upon examination, the official found that the money was in Confederate bills. According to the article, one of the Armenians ran away, and the other seven returned to Boston with the investigator.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ “He Was a Base Imposter: A Virginia Mountaineer Works a Scheme on the W.C.T.U.” *Wheeling Sunday Register*. Wheeling, West Virginia. March 7, 1897,p.1.

The Armenian Community of Fresno

Unlike the industrialized East Coast of the United States, populated by Europeans and their descendants since the seventeenth century, the barren San Joaquin Valley of California remained largely unsettled until 1870. That year, the Central Pacific Railroad selected the ancestral home of the Yokut Indians that Spanish and Mexican conquerors had considered uninhabitable, for its new line. Over the next decades, Fresno, named for the area's native ash trees, grew from a sleepy railroad depot to a full-fledged agricultural community.

The story of modern Fresno's development began in 1868 and 1869, when William S. Chapman and Isaac Friedlander bought large tracts of government-owned land.¹²⁸ They sold 80,000 acres to the German Land Association, of which member Anthony Easterby purchased 5000 acres at Chestnut, Belmont, Clovis and California Avenues.¹²⁹ His failed attempt to grow wheat due to the lack of water, prompted Easterby to hire Moses James Church to build an irrigation canal.¹³⁰ The next year, in Central Pacific Railroad scouts looking for a suitable town site in the area were encouraged by Easterby's green wheat fields and established a line for its new Southern Pacific division three miles away. When a store was established, the town of Fresno Station was born, while Church's expanding network of canals, known as, "Church's ditches" transformed the arid plain into farms.

¹²⁸ Virginia E. Thickens, "Pioneer Agricultural Colonies of Fresno County," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 25, No.1 (March 1946),18.

¹²⁹ Ibid,18-20.

¹³⁰ Ibid,18.

Thus, Fresno was slowly transformed into an agricultural haven where an assortment of vegetables, melons, fruit trees and especially, grapes thrived.

By the summer of 1874, there were 29 businesses and 25 homes in Fresno.¹³¹ Also at this time, small communities called “colonies” were established in the area, beginning in 1868 with the Alabama Colony of displaced Civil War Southerners. Virginia Thickens defined a colony as:

A large tract of land on which every settler owned his lot, and worked and improved it as he saw fit. Binding these settlers together was a common interest to better their own locality. The result was ‘a system of ideal rural homes and communities, where the science of tillage is carried to its greatest perfection, and where comfort, good taste, and an admirable spirit of helpfulness and neighborliness abound.’¹³²

In addition to colonies formed by regional or national groups including the Scandinavian Colony, Washington Colony, and Nevada Colony, religious ones such as the Church Temperance Colony were formed.¹³³

In the late nineteenth century, this new town became the unlikely destination for Armenians from the East Coast and overseas, seeking a non-industrial community where they could connect with one another and create new lives for their families. Despite the harsh discrimination they faced, and for many, dire poverty, most Armenians overlooked these obstacles and enthusiastically promoted Fresno in letters to family and friends. Soon, Fresno replaced the East Coast communities, including Worcester, as the favored destination for Armenians in the United States.

¹³¹ Ibid,19.

¹³² Ibid, 24.

¹³³ Ibid,169.

Early Fresno Armenians

An amusing anecdote, as told by Charles Mahakian, relates the story and mindset of the very first Armenian to come to Fresno in 1874. Earlier, upon entering the United States, Mardiros Yanikian had answered “Normart,” literally translated as “new man,” when a Customs official had asked for his name¹³⁴ Obviously, this gentleman felt coming to the United States offered him a new beginning, a sentiment shared by many immigrants.

Normart was born in Erzerum in Turkish Armenia, and lived in Philadelphia when he traveled to California for health reasons, but when he returned to Philadelphia that same year, his praises of Fresno prompted other Armenians to venture west. In 1885, Normart moved to Fresno with his family and opened a bicycle shop, which later became a taxidermy store, and finally a fur shop, which his descendents operated until the early 1990s.¹³⁵ It was the enterprising Seropian brothers, however, who were the first Armenians to settle in Fresno. According to an interview of youngest brother George conducted by Nectar Davidian in San Francisco in 1945, older brothers Hagop, Garabed, and Simon had immigrated in the early 1870s to Worcester, Massachusetts, with returning American missionaries from Marsovan in Turkish Armenia.¹³⁶ In Worcester, Hagop opened a fruit, stationery, and notions store while his two brothers returned to

¹³⁴ Charles Mahakian, “The History of Armenians in California. A Thesis” (Master’s Thesis, University of California, 1934), 15.

¹³⁵ Aram Serkis Yeretizian. “A History of Armenian Immigration to America with Special Reference to Conditions in Los Angeles” Thesis, University of Southern California, 1923), 16-17.

¹³⁶ Nectar Davidian. *The Seropians: First Armenian Settlers in Fresno County, California* (Berkeley: 1965), 6-24.

Marsovan to settle the estate of their father. In their five year absence, Hagop had contacted Tuberculosis, and was ill when Garabed and Simon returned with youngest brothers George, 8 and John, 10, in tow. Doctors advised the ailing Hagop to move to a warmer climate, and the five brothers headed for Fresno in 1881, with letters of introduction from the Congregational Church to Miss Hatch and Miss Austin, who owned a vineyard on Elm Avenue, in Washington colony.¹³⁷

The Seropians wrote letters to friends and family about Fresno's favorable climate and the availability of land, eliciting a favorable response by many recipients. Three years later, in September of 1884, a group of forty Armenians from Marsovan arrived in Fresno, followed by a larger group three months later.¹³⁸ A partnership of the two brothers from the first group, Krikor and Harutune Arakelian, later became one of the largest landowners in Fresno County and Imperial Valley. According to Wallis Wilson, their melons cleared \$165,000 in 1915, and the K. Arakelian Brothers and Company was known as the largest growers of melons in the United States by 1918.¹³⁹ Later, Krikor established the Mission Bell Winery in 1934, and after his death, his survivors established the Arakelian Foundation for educational and charitable grants.¹⁴⁰ The Seropian brothers went on to own and operate grocery stores in Fresno, and then became exporters of figs and dried fruit to cities all over the United States. Their bold November, 1894, challenge to the Southern Pacific Railroad's high freight rates, by hiring mule

¹³⁷ Davidian., 6-24.

¹³⁸ Bulbulian, 31.

¹³⁹ Wallis Wilson and Nectar Davidian. *Fresno Armenians to 1919*. (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1965), 42.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 33.

teams to deliver their dried fruit products to San Francisco, captured the attention and approval of *The Examiner*, which covered the 210 mile-journey over Pacheco Pass.¹⁴¹

Thomas Mouradick moved to the United States as a child, and graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio. Through the Pilgrim Congregational Church of Cleveland, Mouradick secured a job as a fireman with the Erie Railroad, and became a locomotive engineer in 1902. After working in South America for a Peruvian railroad and later, as an engineer for the Santa Fe in Los Angeles, Mouradick moved to Fresno and invested in the fruit business. His label “Locomotive Engineer” became one of the biggest fruit growers and shippers, but he kept his ties with the railroad though maintaining his membership in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers in Calwa, California. Thomas Mouradick died in Fresno in April of 1936, leaving his business to his son, Thomas Jr.¹⁴²

While Mouradick, the Arakelyans and Seropians enjoyed success in business, making a living was not easy for most Armenian immigrants in Fresno, as letters to Vartan Hagopian attest. In a letter dated March 7, 1914, Caloust Hagopian in Fresno wrote to his brother Vartan who had recently moved to San Francisco, complaining about the drought.¹⁴³ He wrote: “We’re in the vineyard business, but for whom? This year the weather has worked against us; there has been practically no rain. If this drought continues, we will lose everything.” Clearly, the aforementioned canals did not extend to every farm, and Calousd Hagopian’s was at the mercy of nature. The climate continued to challenge Calousd and other farmers in Fresno, as a letter written nine years later reveals.

¹⁴¹ Ibid,16-24.

¹⁴² Erie Magazine, November 1933.

¹⁴³ Hagopian, Vartan, Khosrov Antoyan, and Karekin Ohanessian,1923.*Vartan Hagopian Correspondence*, March 7, 1914. (The Bancroft Library: University of California, Berkeley) Photocopies of letters.

In that January 26, 1923, letter, Caloust wrote his brother Vartan to expect a small box of fresh apricots he just sent, but that he dried just enough for the use of his own household. He added that he was glad they had very few apricots this year, and although he did not clarify the reason, “we’re free of that burden.” The vineyards, however, were not doing well, Calousd explained: “The vines this year are hopeless in every way-the prices of raisins are low, and the weather hasn’t helped. We haven’t had a decently hot day, and because of the cold, only 25 percent of the harvest has dried so far.”¹⁴⁴ Aside from problems with their crops, the letters to Vartan Hagopian from his brother and other friends in Fresno reveal that the small Armenian community of which they were a part was vibrant and active, as evidenced by references to visits back and forth between San Francisco and Fresno, their attendance of church services, Easter and Thanksgiving celebrations. Occasionally, the writers indulged in a bit of gossip, as well.

Despite the challenges, agricultural Fresno had immense appeal for Armenian immigrants living in the industrial cities of the East Coast and Midwest. Finding low-paying, dead-end factory work discouraging, many Armenians responded eagerly to the reports of open spaces and the prospect of agricultural work that California’s Fresno offered.¹⁴⁵ Once settled families sent letters about the favorable climate, fertile land, and the growing Armenian community, additional family members and friends joined them. However, their growing numbers appear to have alarmed the white community of Fresno, prompting a report by the California Commission of Immigration and Housing in 1918, titled, “Report of Fresno’s Immigration Problem,” which included the following remarks:

“ Although the Armenians are probably the most important numerically of the foreign born in Fresno, they are capable of taking care of

¹⁴⁴ *Vartan Hagopian Correspondence*, January 23, 1923.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Immigration Commission, Reports, vol. XXIV, 633-634.

themselves.....They came to California from New York and other Eastern centers about thirty years ago, because they were desirous of devoting their energies to agriculture. A few leaders investigated various places for opportunities and finally decided on Fresno.”¹⁴⁶

In addition to Mexicans, Chinese, and other ethnic groups, Armenians contributed to the agricultural success of Fresno in several ways. Armenians brought seedlings from fig, apricot, pomegranate, and mulberry trees, as well as vegetables and grapes, to plant in their new back yards, and some became staple crops for Fresno. Many chose to be independent farmers like Calousd Hagopian, but others sought work as laborers, although American farmers preferred to employ “native” or Western European hands, which they considered, “more skillful and versatile” than Asian or Armenian hands.¹⁴⁷ A few of these laborers went on to buy their own lands to cultivate, but inexperienced Armenians often purchased what they believed to be potentially profitable land for farming at inflated prices, and overextended themselves, losing their properties to foreclosure when crops failed. Additionally, the grape industry was negatively affected by the passing of the 18th Amendment in 1919, prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol, which caused bankruptcies that were compounded by the Great Depression that followed.

Like in other immigrant groups, Armenian women and children supplemented the income of the family by working in canning and packing during the summer fruit and vegetable harvest seasons. Local children called these immigrant workers, “cannery ginks,” one third of whom were Armenian and the rest Spanish, Italian, Portuguese,

¹⁴⁶ Mahakian, 21.

¹⁴⁷ Mirak,,115.

Mexican, and other ethnic compositions.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, although language barriers prevented interaction between these immigrant workers, there are no records of serious conflicts.

Armenian language newspapers were established in Fresno after Haigaz Hovhanness Eguinian imported the first Armenian type from the Mekhitarist Fathers Monastery in Vienna, and Armenian letters from Constantinople in 1888.¹⁴⁹ In 1902, he founded the first Armenian newspaper in California, a weekly he named *Kaghakatzi*_(city-dweller), at 1033 J Street. Later, this evolved into, *Nor Gyank*, (New Life), which is still in circulation today. *Asbarez*, (The Arena) followed in 1908, moved to south to Glendale in 1974, and is still widely read. The support of non-Armenians was crucial to its success and survival, and some responded generously, such as Dr. Chester Rowell, founder of the *Fresno Morning Republican*, Fresno mayor, and later a state senator, who printed *Asbarez* at a discount and ensured its survival. At his June 1912 death, the grateful Armenian community of Fresno raised \$400 to purchase a silver urn for his ashes, and held a special memorial service to honor his memory.¹⁵⁰ Haig Patigian, who lived in Fresno briefly as a youth, sculpted his statue, which is still displayed at the Courthouse Park at Van Ness Ave and Tulare Street today.¹⁵¹ None of these newspapers was commercially profitable, and by 1919, the six Armenian independent publications printed in the relatively new community of Fresno were financed by either political parties or religious institutions.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid,63.

¹⁴⁹ Mirak, 82.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 35.

¹⁵¹ Ibid,.40.

¹⁵² Malcom, 123-124.

Discrimination and Exclusion

Once the pressing need to earn a living was satisfied, the small, close-knit Armenian community of Fresno sought to establish a social life. At first, this seemed to exclude non-Armenians, but much of this was due to the fact that Armenians were themselves excluded from employment as well as Fresno's white socials clubs, while racial covenants prevented them from purchasing property in certain areas. This tradition was rooted in early Fresno history, and certainly not directed at Armenians alone. In the nearby town of Millerton, for example, citizens had unanimously passed a resolution in 1867, restricting the Chinese to one part of town, and excluding Chinese women altogether.¹⁵³ By 1915, the total population of Armenians in Fresno County had reached 6,000 and threatened the Anglo-Saxon status quo. As Sally Miller explained:

Others greeted Armenians with hostility because of at least two factors. The first was their visibility. By World War I, Armenians comprised one-fourth of the foreign born population in the Fresno area, and they became a lightning rod for ethnic prejudice, as may happen under such circumstances. Second, because some Armenians were so economically successful, and far from servile (as a by-product of surviving in the homeland over the centuries of oppression), they stirred resentment and envy.¹⁵⁴

Some Americans who had worked and lived among Armenians in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire worked to educate Fresno citizens about these people, in an effort to dispel commonly held misconceptions about their ignorance. In the 1890s for example, a "Miss Peabody," who had worked as a missionary in Erzerum, presented lectures and published articles in the *Fresno Weekly Expositor* newspaper about Armenians and their

¹⁵³ Bulbulian, 105.

¹⁵⁴ Sally Miller, "Changing Faces of the Central Valley: The Ethnic Presence," *California History* Vol. 74 (Summer, 1995), 185.

history, pointing out that while parts of Europe were still nomadic, Armenians were “civilized, cultured, had built great cities” and were the first officially Christian nation in 301 A.D.¹⁵⁵ Despite such efforts, Miss Peabody and others were unable to change negative attitudes. Discrimination peaked in the 1920s with the eugenics movement, and Armenian students were barred from high school clubs, college fraternities, and sororities. In fact, only some truly exceptional athletes’ names could be found on team rosters.¹⁵⁶

Many children at school endured hurtful name calling, such as “dirty black Armenian” and “Fresno Indian” which may have started when Hollywood production companies hired Armenians as extras to portray Indians in movies.¹⁵⁷ Born in Fresno, James Baloian expressed his hurt and shame as the target of such discrimination in his poem titled, “Fresno Indian.” Baloian described how he felt at the age of thirteen, when schoolmates pointed to him and uttered the racial slur, “..with our hollowed eyes and eagle-beaked noses, but my grandmother said, they called us “Starving black Armenians....first.”¹⁵⁸ That both Native Americans and Armenians had lost their lives and lands at the hands of oppressors should be grouped together in this particular slur was a bitter irony indeed.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid,106.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid,107-108.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid,108.

¹⁵⁸ James C. Baloian, *The Ararat Papers* (New York: Ararat Press, 1979) , 56

George Seropian recalled a school fight during his boyhood, when he and other Armenian children were upset about being called “Turks.”¹⁵⁹ They had previously asked the principal to intervene on their behalf and ask the young offenders “not to taunt Armenian newcomers just because their clothes were a little different, they could not speak English well, or their hair and eyes were dark,” but to no avail.¹⁶⁰ At the next name-calling incident, a fight broke out in the schoolyard between eight boys and one Armenian girl, Suzie Markarian. Several children were injured, and most ran away or scattered, but the Armenian children were not punished, because Dr. Chester Rowell came to their defense. The principal also lectured the school on proper behavior toward Armenians, and according to George Seropian, there were no further incidents.¹⁶¹

In this age of eugenics, Armenians were generally thought of as non-white, and their different language, customs, food, and clothing offended some. Considered shrewd competitors in business, “clannish,” and bargain-hunters, Armenians were charged and they paid higher prices for land, prompting the resentment of other ethnic groups.¹⁶² White Americans also found it odd that Armenians preferred to live frugally, save their money, and invest in businesses or land rather than spending on themselves. Despite these concerns, Armenians were in fact not welfare burdens, and according to Berge Bulbulian, a study of county hospital admissions in 1927, they did not seek help at publicly supported hospitals, even during times of economic distress.¹⁶³ Still, Armenians were restricted from home

¹⁵⁹ Davidian, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 5.

¹⁶² Bulbulian, 109-110.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 111.

ownership in areas covered by racial covenants, and some petitions for naturalization were denied on the basis of the ambiguity of their classification as white.

Two cases involving Armenian defendants on the issue of race reached the courts at the height of the eugenics movement in the early twentieth century. In the second and final case, the federal government moved to cancel the citizenship of Portland, Oregon Oriental rug merchant Tatos O. Cartozian, naturalized as a United States citizen on May 17, 1923, on the grounds that "Armenians are not Caucasians, and therefore not eligible for citizenship."¹⁶⁴ Three months earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court had decided in the case of Hindu Bhagat Singh Thind of Portland, Oregon, that immigrants of "Asiatic" origin from the Near East or Asia Minor were not eligible for citizenship.¹⁶⁵ Following this ruling on October 5, 1923, four applicants from Asia Minor, including a Persian, a Turk, a Syrian, and an Armenian cement contractor in Chicago, were deemed ineligible for citizenship by the ruling of Judge George Carpenter in the U.S. District Court for Northern Illinois.¹⁶⁶ Based on these precedents, the new commissioner of naturalization in Washington D.C., Raymond F. Crist, incidentally the author of an Americanization pamphlet, instructed the Portland attorney general's office to file a cancellation suit, *United States v. Tatos Osgihan Cartozian*. Armenian groups responded quickly and organized a defense committee with New York attorney M. Vartan Malcom acting as chief legal representative of the Armenians. The committee collected information and

¹⁶⁴ Bulbulian, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Earlene Craver, "On the Boundary of White: The Cartozian Naturalization Case and the Armenians," *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 2009), 36-37.

¹⁶⁶ Craver, 39.

hired the prestigious Portland based law firm of McCamant and Thompson.¹⁶⁷ During the trial on May 8 and 9, 1924, in the U.S. District Court in Portland, defense attorneys Wallace McCamant and William Demarest Guthrie presented expert ethnological and linguistic evidence, in addition to a number of witnesses. According to The Oregon History Project, the *Morning Oregonian* newspaper reported on April 8, 1924, in their article, “Racial Questions Involved in Trial,” that renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, as well as ethnologists Roland Dixon and Paul Rohrbach gave “scientific” testimony in support of the Cartozian case.¹⁶⁸ Malcolm himself testified that if the Armenians lost, “The Hindu and the Japanese have their Governments and their country to rely upon and return to. The Armenians have no place to go to. They will become truly a people without a country,” that is, stateless.¹⁶⁹ Over one year later on July 27, 1925, Judge C.E. Wolverton decided that the suit had no merit on three grounds: that Armenians are white persons, of Alpine stock, and “they amalgamate readily with the white races, including the white people of the United States.”¹⁷⁰ The defense team expected and prepared for an appeal, but one was never filed by the United States government. Thus, the Cartozian case set a precedent and effectively ended legal challenges to American citizenship eligibility of Armenians on the basis of their “race.”

Racial covenants on the other hand, had come into use after the Supreme Court invalidated the racial zoning in the 1917 case of *Buchanan v. Warley*.¹⁷¹ These additions to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid,44.

¹⁶⁸ Joshua Binus. “Tatos O. Cartozian with his Daughters,” *The Oregon History Project*..April,2005.

¹⁶⁹ Trial transcript, *U.S. v. Tatos Oshihan Cartozian*, U.S. District Court, District of Oregon, Portland, May 8-9,1924, Record Group 21, USDC-Oregon, Case E-8668, National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle, WA.

¹⁷⁰ Craver,50.

¹⁷¹ Ibid,115-116.

property deeds could not be removed and required buyers to agree not to sell or rent property to specific racial or ethnic groups, including Armenians, Japanese, and others deemed “undesirable.”¹⁷² The Norman Villa housing development, for example, advertised in *The Fresno Morning Republican* on April 25, 1925, as the “choicest suburban property, to be sold under rigid restrictions” and promised to “fully protect buyers from re-sale to undesirables.”¹⁷³ As Mirak perceptively pointed out, restrictive covenants also served to protect the profits of landlords of tenements and shanties, where these excluded “undesirables” were forced to remain.¹⁷⁴ No such covenants existed for farms, however, which enabled Armenians to purchase this type of property.¹⁷⁵ By the time the American-Armenian Citizens’ League was formed in 1931 to fight discrimination, the Great Depression had greatly reduced discrimination and the eugenics movement died, as well.¹⁷⁶

Armeniatown and Yettem

Armenians responded to their exclusion by the Anglo-Saxon community of Fresno by creating enclaves of their own, in the tradition of American compatriotic communities in the area. As such, Armeniatown came into being when Armenians began to move northward across the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks after the turn of the century. When the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church was built at Ventura Ave and M. Street in 1914, the area from Los Angeles Street to Kern Street around the church began to be

¹⁷² Bulbulian, 115.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 116.

¹⁷⁴ Mirak, 133.

¹⁷⁵ Bulbulian, 118.

¹⁷⁶ *History of St. Mary’s Armenian Church* (Yettem: 1911-1976)

known as Armeniatown.¹⁷⁷ Despite its name, German-Russians, Japanese, and Chinese lived there, as well.

The first Armenian businesses in the area almost exclusively served the Armenian community with familiar foods and items that did not interest most non-Armenians. One of these, the Valley Bakery, was established in 1922 by Gazair Saghatelian adjacent to his home, and is operated today at the same location by his daughter Janet and granddaughter Agnes, under the name Valley Lahvosh. The change in name reflects the changing climate of acceptance of ethnic foods in the years since, as Bulbulian explained:

The bakeries originally served Armenians only since their products were not known or favored by non-Armenians. In recent years, with increased interest in ethnic foods partly the result of television cooking programs, Armenian foods have become better known outside the Armenian communities. All the local bakeries now export their products throughout the United States.¹⁷⁸

Familiar foods and products made available at stores such as these comforted immigrants, who attempted to re-create some of the essence of their lives in the Old Country, which as Matthew Jendian describes, fits in with the pattern of immigrant adaptation.¹⁷⁹ Another example is the Hanoian Market, established at 2454 Railroad Ave. in 1912, when Peter Hanoian Sr. moved to Fresno from Boston, like George Seropian and others, for his health. To supplement the modest income from groceries, Hanoian also sold gas and operated a weigh station, which expanded into a large shopping center in 1956. The Hanoian Market remained in the family and members continued to operate the business until 2001.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Hereafter, History of St. Mary, 1911-1976, 37.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Jendian. *Becoming American, Remaining Ethnic*. (New York: LFB, 2008) 2.

¹⁸⁰ Paula Lloyd. "Hanoians Grew Grocery Business to Large Center." *The Fresno Bee*. August 23, 2010.

Approximately thirty miles northwest of Fresno in Tulare County, the settlement of Yettem was established in the fashion of the aforementioned colonies. Yettem was planned, according to Nazareth Spenchian in the *History of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church of Yettem, California*, at a meeting which took place at an “undisclosed location” in the Old Country, where Protestant Minister Rev. Haroutyun Jenanyan of Adana, Nazareth Spenchian of Malatia, and Gabriel Bedoyan were chosen to select land in the San Joaquin Valley of California for Armenians to settle.¹⁸¹ Despite attempts by both Armenian and non-Armenian farmers and officials in the San Joaquin Valley to dissuade them from this venture, the committee proceeded with their plan.¹⁸² Upon their arrival in the area, the three made their first scouting journey northeast from Visalia toward the Sierra Nevada Mountains, but could not agree on which parcels to buy. On their second journey in 1901, the men put up tents in an area named Churchill, where Bedoyan bought 80 acres and Jenanyan purchased 140. Jenanyan was soon joined by his son-in-law and cousin with their families, and as more families arrived, three names for the new community were submitted to the United States Post Office, which selected and approved Yettem, meaning Eden. In an attempt to keep Armenians living in Yettem out of the government courts, a committee of five immigrants established an Arbitration Commission, with the right to hear and pronounce sentences.¹⁸³ According to Robert Mirak, a 1913 report stated that five disputes involving a total sum of \$5570 had been

¹⁸¹ Hereafter, *History of St. Mary*, 1911- 1976.

¹⁸² *History of St. Mary*, 1911- 1976.

¹⁸³ Mirak, 144.

successfully arbitrated, and both the townspeople and officials of the county court were pleased with the Commission.¹⁸⁴

In the early days, church services were held in alternate homes each Sunday, until enough members assembled for combined Protestant and Apostolic services between 1904 and 1910 in the former Churchill school, re-named Yettem School. Tension was created when Protestants conducted their services in the Turkish language, which offended the Armenian-speaking Apostolics, for whom the use of the language of their oppressors was a point of contention. This matter was resolved when Krikor Arslanian bought three acres with the stipulation that an Apostolic church be built on the property, and remaining portions be sold to several Armenians to build homes at \$60 per lot. The proceeds from these sales made it possible for the title of the church land to be free and clear, and Arslanian subsequently drew up plans, supervised the building of the church, and kept financial records. Women and children helped the men build the simple structure, as mothers carried dirt in their aprons and children carried rocks. On July 3, 1911, the Church of St. Mary in Yettem at 14395 Avenue 384 was consecrated, and five years later, the mortgage was paid in full. When this church building was destroyed in a fire in 1945, members undertook its rebuilding, but this time in the traditional Armenian Church architectural style. Later, a choir, Ladies' Society, Youth Organization, and Sunday school were organized as the Yettem community grew.

The use of the Armenian language over Turkish was at the root of another dispute involving Armenian immigrants in Yettem. Armenak Saroyan, educated by Protestant

¹⁸⁴ Ibid,144.

missionaries in his hometown of Bitlis, Turkish Armenia, immigrated to New York in 1905.¹⁸⁵ Saroyan became the Presbyterian minister of a small parish in Paterson, New Jersey, under the tutelage of his sponsor, Rev. Dr. William Stonehill, but soon after the arrival of his wife Takoohi, her mother Lucy, and their children, the women insisted on moving to Fresno, California, where some family members lived. In 1910, Armenak was to take the pulpit in the Armenian Church in Yetteem, but much to his disappointment, he found upon his arrival that the congregation was Turkish speaking. Although Armenak spoke Turkish, he refused to preach in that language on principle, and the family packed their belongings in a wagon and returned to Fresno, where fourth child William had been born two years earlier on August 31, 1908. There, Armenak, a poet and preacher, worked as a laborer on farms in Fresno and briefly moved to San Francisco to work for the Salvation Army. He died of a ruptured appendix at the age of 36, and his penniless widow was forced to place their four children in an orphanage in Oakland for five years.¹⁸⁶ Although Armenak did not find success in life, his American-born youngest child became a Pulitzer prize-winning playwright and an Academy Award winner for his work, “The Human Comedy.” William Saroyan based much of his work on his childhood experiences in Fresno, including *My Name is Aram* and *Fresno Stories*.¹⁸⁷

Two early Yetteem immigrants were Arshag Genian and Eghia Horasanian, who arrived from Wisconsin in 1917. The two men had been enticed by news about Yetteem from letters of others in the area and were curious to see the new community, although neither had friends or family in the settlement. Their first night in town, the pair found Yetteem exceeded their expectations, when they happened to meet Mr. Parounag Najarian,

¹⁸⁵ William Saroyan. *The William Saroyan Reader* (New York, New York: Barricade Books, 1958).

¹⁸⁶ Saroyan, xi.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 140.

who offered to put up the men in his home. Many Armenians who migrated to Yettem from Wisconsin, like Genian and Horasarian, were formerly employees of U.S. Steel Corporation plants or furniture manufacturers in Racine, who perhaps tired of the extreme weather and confining, unpleasant work.

Each man wrote to his brother, Abraham and Sarkis, respectively, who soon joined them with their friend Harry Barsamian. The group came to be known as “The Five,” and spread the word that although it was not easy, Yettem was a potential “paradise” in that Armenians living there were determined to succeed and helped one another to do so. All five of these men were from the town of Tomarza in Turkish Armenia, and established the Yettem branch of the United Association of Tomarza in 1930. A Women’s Group followed in 1932, to serve others financially and otherwise, locally, nationally, and internationally. World War II interrupted their efforts, as men in the community volunteered or were called to serve, and women took over some of their responsibilities.¹⁸⁸ By 1948, the young had moved to larger cities for jobs or a higher education, while the older generation remained. The 2010 census listed this once exclusively Armenian town of Yettem as having a mostly Latino population of 211, but the pomegranate groves they planted remain.¹⁸⁹

While early Armenians responded to discrimination by Anglo-Saxons in different ways, nearly all adjusted to life in the community of Fresno and took advantage of its economic opportunities by establishing farms or small businesses. One explanation for

¹⁸⁸ Mirak,.144.

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Census (Washington D.C.Government Printing Office,2010).

their resilience is offered by M. Vartan Malcom: “Years of oppression and the struggle for existence against untold economic barriers have made them accustomed to hard work.”¹⁹⁰ As for the choice of Fresno as their ultimate destination, Robert Mirak explained that Fresno was a “health spa” of sorts for those with respiratory illnesses, as well as an attractive destination for families: “What explained the concentration of families in California was the salubrious climate, the fact that farming provided jobs and prosperity for the entire family, and the opinion among many families that settlement in California, away from the city, strengthened family ties.”¹⁹¹ Today, the word Fresno, for Armenians, is synonymous with Armenian community and a source of pride for the many famous people it nurtured.

¹⁹⁰ Malcom, 85.

¹⁹¹ Mirak, 137.

The Early Armenian Community of San Francisco

As stated, the first generation of Armenian immigrants in California settled and raised families in Fresno, but the next generation moved to San Francisco for two reasons. First, the dynamic city offered these American born and educated second generation Armenians work in professions and businesses outside of the realm of agriculture. Charles Mahakian stated prejudice as a second reason Armenians left Fresno, preferring the more tolerant climate of San Francisco and other cities.¹⁹² Mahakian explained:

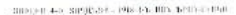
The “social anticipation of persecution” and other disagreeable traits, which some of the Armenians of the first generation had, would have been the cause of their being disliked as individuals, but would not have given rise for a prevalent race prejudice if the Armenians were not concentrated in such large numbers, relative to the native population. One of the worst effects of this social and racial prejudice, felt by the second and third generation Armenians of Fresno, is the social inferiority complex which is developed in many of them. Happily when they leave Fresno and establish themselves in other localities, they soon outgrow this complex and mingle freely with Americans and associate with them on an equal footing.¹⁹³

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there was no structured Armenian community in San Francisco, although enough were present to organize and participate in a 1918 Fourth of July parade. In a photograph taken that day, a group of approximately fifty men and women are pictured on Market Street, holding signs, “Send Us Arms for Liberty and Justice,” apparently appealing for U.S. aid to Turkish Armenia. Significantly, these individuals are also holding United States flags, showing their respect and loyalty to their adopted country. While the identity of these early Armenians is

¹⁹² Mahakian, 64-65.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 66.

of the city's history.



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By mid-century, the community peaked and flourished, with the affluent living in Pacific Heights, and the working class in the Richmond and Sunset districts, and erected churches, community centers, and later, a school. By the end of the twentieth century, most Armenian families left the city limits, preferring to live in suburban homes in communities surrounding the bay area and beyond. However, many remained connected to San Francisco, commuting to work, attending church services and partaking in ceremonies, driving their children to the Armenian school, or to participate in any number of sporting or social events in the city.

Two early Armenians with a connection to San Francisco were the aforementioned George and John Seropian of Fresno, who owned a successful fruit packing business and as early as 1890, made regular trips to San Francisco to sell their dried fruit, which they transported via the Southern Pacific Railroad. When John discovered that the monopolistic Southern Pacific was charging them very high freight rates while giving other companies rebates, he devised a creative alternate method of delivering his fruit. He hired a driver and twelve mules, hitched them to two wagons packed with figs, raisins, and oranges, and sent the caravan the 210 miles over the Pacheco Pass to San Francisco.

¹⁹⁴ *The Examiner* published articles on November 17 and 18, 1894, documenting this mule train and propagandizing this protest of sorts against the Southern Pacific.¹⁹⁵ This generated much excitement locally and outside the borders of the United States, prompting a Mexican landowner to write Seropian and offer his “excellent mules” for

¹⁹⁴ “As in the Days of ’49: Fresno Resorts to First Principles to Solve the Problem of Freight Transportation.” *The San Francisco Examiner*. November 17, 1894, p.23.

¹⁹⁵ “The Shippers’ Revolt: The Fresno Experiment of Combating the Methods of the Southern Pacific.” *The San Francisco Examiner*. November 18, 1894, p. 26.

this venture. San Franciscans, themselves frustrated by the high rates, sympathized with the Seropians and followed the story with much interest. At a mass meeting in the city, a committee chaired by sugar magnate J. Claus Speckels, likely motivated in part by self-interest, subscribed \$2 million for a rival railroad, which later resulted in the San Joaquin Railroad. Sometime later, George Seropian moved permanently to San Francisco, where he was interviewed by Nectar Davidian at his residence on April 23 and May 2, 1945, two years before his death.¹⁹⁶

An exceptional San Francisco Armenian was Leon Hagop Nishkian, born in Erzurum, Turkish Armenia, on March 28, 1881. Having moved to San Francisco as a young boy, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of California in Berkeley, in 1906.¹⁹⁷ After gaining some experience working for other firms and the City of San Francisco Building Department as their Consulting Structural Engineer, Nishkian established his own firm at 1005 Sansome Street in 1919. Throughout his career, he made professional contributions to the city, including engineering such familiar San Francisco landmarks as the Palace Hotel, the Furniture Exchange Building, the Fox Theater, the Castro Theater, and several Waterfront projects. Additionally, Nishkian was consulting engineer for the San Francisco Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge and its toll booths, as well as the San Francisco portion of the Hetch Hetchy project.¹⁹⁸ He also designed private projects, including his family home at 65 Germain Street, in 1935.

¹⁹⁶ Nectar Davidian, *The Seropians: First Armenian Settlers in Fresno County, California* (Berkeley, 1965), 6-24.

¹⁹⁷ Mark Daniels, "Twenty Five Years of Engineering," *Architect and Engineer*. June 1945, 14-18.

¹⁹⁸ Daniels, 14-18.

Nishkian lent his expertise to the United States military when the Navy called upon him to solve a daunting but also very sensitive problem involving the “righting,” of the U.S.S. Arizona following the bombing of Pear Harbor in Hawaii. After failed attempts by others, Nishkian successfully devised a unique flotation system to allow the remains of sailors to finally be retrieved from the wreck, thus enabling families to give them a proper burial. His ability to solve difficult engineering problems prompted his colleagues to dub his cutting-edge solutions “Nishkian radicals.” For example, along with D. Steinman, Nishkian developed a method of conjugate points, allowing a graphic solution to continuous beam problems, which is still in use today. Nishkian’s sudden death in 1947 prompted the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to pass Resolution 6596 on Monday, June 2, 1947, to adjourn in honor of his memory.¹⁹⁹ Clearly, Nishkian was a respected professional and citizen of San Francisco.

Leon’s son Byron Levon Nishkian had worked alongside his father and succeeded him, continuing his father’s legacy with a list of accomplishments of his own. Like his father, Byron earned his degree in engineering at the University of California at Berkeley. Working on post-World War II projects as a structural building expert, Byron’s list of projects reads much like his father’s. Some examples of his projects include the Bank of Hong Kong and Shanghai building, Bank of America Service Center, Marine World and Aquarium, the Hilton Hotel, and the State Compensation Insurance Fund Building at 8th and Market. In July of 1982, Byron and his wife, Elvira, created the first fully endowed chair in the College of Engineering at University of California at Berkeley, thereby

¹⁹⁹ George Christopher, *Board of Supervisors Meeting of June 2, 1947* San Francisco.

establishing a lasting legacy. Byron retired in 1981, leaving the family business to his engineer son, Levon.²⁰⁰

Today, Byron's son Levon Nishkian continues to run the family business, currently located at 1095 Folsom Street in Founder's Square, which is fitting, considering that the Nishkian firm engineered the building. Levon, along with partners, has expanded the firm with offices in other cities, including Los Angeles, Portland, and Bozeman, Montana.

Sculptor Haig Patigian is another San Francisco Armenian whose work dots the city's landscape to this day. Born in Van, Turkish Armenia, on January 22, 1871, his family moved to the east coast of the United States in 1888 and then to Fresno, where he worked in a vineyard. Haig and his brother Khoren were listed in an 1891 city and county directory as an artist and sign painter with a studio at 304 E Street.²⁰¹ Later, the self-taught sculptor, whose famous artworks adorn the parks and buildings, made San Francisco his home base. Patigian gained fame creating sculptures for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, after which he was commissioned to create sculptures such as his 1921 General John Pershing bronze statue.²⁰² According to an article in *The Bellingham Herald*, this work of art was presented to the city by physician Dr. Morris Hirzstein, and unveiled in Golden Gate Park at a ceremony on Armistice Day, November 11, 1922, with military dignitaries present. His 1928 Abraham Lincoln statue is another

²⁰⁰ *History of the Greater San Francisco Bay Region: Family and Personal History*, s.v. "Byron Levon Nishkian."

²⁰¹ Bulbilian, 205.

²⁰² Glenn B. Opitz, "Haig Patigian," in Mantle Fielding's *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*.

fine example of his work, as is his bronze statue dedicated in a 1933 ceremony in North Beach, commemorating the Volunteer Fire Department of 1849-1866.²⁰³ Patigian also exhibited his work at the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939, and his architectural sculptures include the 1911 San Francisco Savings Union Building, and the former Metropolitan Life Building, which today is the Ritz Carlton.²⁰⁴ Additionally, Patigian served as president of San Francisco's private Bohemian Club at 624 Taylor Street, for two terms. The artist died in San Francisco on September 19, 1950.

An Armenian immigrant who made a contribution of a different kind to San Francisco was George Mardikian, who was born in Bitlis, Turkish Armenia, on November 7, 1903. His family moved to Constantinople to escape the massacres when Mardikian was a child, but after his father was among the men rounded up by Turks on April 24, 1915, and never returned, the enraged teenager ran away from home and joined freedom fighters in Armenia. Mardikian was captured by the Turks and imprisoned, but through the intervention of Near East Relief supervisor George D. White, he escaped and made his way to Constantinople. From there, Mardikian, who did not speak English, boarded a Greek steamer to join his older brother and sister in San Francisco. Upon his arrival in New York in June of 1922, he was met by ladies from the Traveler's Aid Society, who led him to a train bound for San Francisco. The ladies, who spoke the "universal language of kindness," hung a card with his name and destination on his lapel, gave him some sandwiches and a box of fruit for his journey.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Opitz.

²⁰⁴ Honor for Pershing: General's Statue Unveiled at Golden State Park," Bellingham, Washington. *The Bellingham Herald*, November 11, 1922

²⁰⁵ George Mardikian. *Song of America*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 34.

In San Francisco, Mardikian immediately enrolled in night school to learn English and found work as a dishwasher at Coffee Dan's, a speakeasy and restaurant at Powell and O'Farrell. He later worked at Compton's restaurant, where he eventually became a manager. Mardikian's interest since childhood had been food, and in August of 1928, he signed on as a steward on the *President Wilson*, for a four month, around the world voyage. At each destination, including exotic ports such as Singapore, Shanghai and Alexandria, Mardikian visited the local Armenian Church, where he observed the cooks and collected their recipes. His goal was to open a restaurant and introduce Armenian and Near Eastern food to Americans in San Francisco, a risky venture at a time when exotic food was not popular. Upon his return, he applied for American citizenship and took the oath on June 3, 1929.²⁰⁶

Mardikian established his first successful restaurant in Fresno on February 12, 1931, and then opened Omar Khayyam's in San Francisco, at the former Old Dan's, on February 25, 1938, which soon attracted dignitaries as well as loyal locals. During World War II, Mardikian was asked to improve the food for military personnel at Fort Ord and other training camps along Pacific Coast Highway, as the assistant to the Quartermaster of the U.S. Army, a post he kept from 1942-1954. In 1945, he also supervised the food for the United Nations Conference, for which he refused payment. President Harry S. Truman awarded Mardikian the Medal of Freedom in 1951, for his contribution and dedication to the U.S. military. Through his work, he met and befriended such dignitaries as Herbert Hoover, a fellow member of the Bohemian Club, and Dwight D.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 57, 93, 100-110, 115.

Eisenhower²⁰⁷. Each Christmas Eve, Mardkian and his wife Naz closed Omar Khayyam's to the public to serve their employees dinner, in return for their hard work. In May of 1954, George Mardikian was featured on the television show "This is Your Life," but his proudest accomplishment was his founding of the American Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians, and later, the Save the Children Foundation, with Dr. John Voris, to help all homeless and destitute children. Mardikian remained ever grateful to the United States for the opportunity it gave an immigrant like himself to succeed and help others, and celebrated the day of his arrival in the U.S., July 24, as his birthday each year.²⁰⁸

William Saroyan made San Francisco his home base in 1926, while working as a clerk-typist for the Southern Pacific Railroad and was living at 348 Carl Street when his first story, "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" was published. He left for New York in 1928 to further his literary career, but returned the following year and continued to live in San Francisco off and on with his wife and daughter until 1948. Saroyan used his experiences in the city with which he was very familiar, as a backdrop for some of his work. A house Saroyan built for his mother in Golden Gate Heights was purchased by his niece, Jackie Kazarian, who today conducts tours by appointment.²⁰⁹

Saroyan's contemporary and childhood friend from Fresno, A.I. Bezzerides, also became famous as a novelist and short story writer. Born in Samsun, Turkish Armenia, on August 9, 1908, to a Greek father and an Armenian mother, his family moved to Fresno when he was two years old. Growing up, young Bezzerides helped his father work

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 262, 277.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 301.

²⁰⁹ John Leggett. *A Daring Young Man: A Biography of William Saroyan.* (New York: Knopf and Random House, 2002), 48.

in the produce markets and fields, and observed the “cutthroat tricks of the fruit trade and the inequities between owners and workers.”²¹⁰ Buzz, as he was known, attended the University of California at Berkeley, and studied electrical engineering before moving for a time to San Francisco to work.

His passion, however, was writing, fueled by his mother at an early age. An avid reader, she had learned English at the Presbyterian Missionary School in Samsun. As a kid, Buzz recalled his mother reading *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* with awe. Curious, his grandmother asked her daughter to translate the story, responding “hiyanali!” Armenian for “incredible!” Intrigued, Buzz picked up the book and reading it, was amazed at how the jungle of words translated to an image in his mind, and claimed that he became a writer on the spot. Later, recalling his keen observations, he based his novels and stories on his real-life experiences.

In 1940, his first novel *The Long Haul*, about the gruff world of produce haulers, was made into a movie starring Humphrey Bogart and Ida Lupino, titled, “They Drive by Night.” This launched his career as a screenwriter under contract for Warner Brothers, for \$300 per week. His third novel, 1949’s *Thieves’ Market*, was based on the underworld of San Francisco’s produce market, with its “juke joints, whorehouses, and swindlers revealed.”²¹¹ Not surprisingly, the City of San Francisco objected to the book’s negative depiction of the Embarcadero produce market and asked that the name of the movie adaptation be changed. The studios relented and named the movie “Thieves’ Highway” to

²¹⁰ Eric Nazarian. “Road Warrior,” *Written By*. Nov. 2003, 36-39

²¹¹ Nazarian, 37.

disassociate itself with the negative Embarcadero connotation.²¹² Soon after, Bezzerides' adaptation of Mickey Spillane's *Kiss Me Deadly*, which he disliked, ironically launched his reputation as a creator of the "film noir" genre.

In the 1950s, Bezzerides wrote for television shows such as "Bonanza" and "The Virginian" and in the 1960s, co-created "The Big Valley" series starring Barbara Stanwyck.²¹³ During this time, Buzz used the Seropian mule caravan story as a backdrop for an episode of CBS's Great Adventure series, which were televised plays with historical backgrounds. "Six Wagons to the Sea" was based on the aforementioned Seropian Brothers mule caravan to San Francisco, and aired in 1963. The following year, Buzz abandoned show business and returned to his first love, writing novels. At his death January 1, 2007, at the age of 98, Bezzerides was writing his last novel.²¹⁴

Saro Melikian was an unlikely resident of San Francisco from 1956 to his death in May of 1960. Born Soghomon Tehlirian in Erzerum, Turkish Armenia, he assassinated Minister of Interior Talaat Pasha of the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress Party on March 15, 1921, in Berlin.²¹⁵ Talaat, one of the leaders responsible for the 1915 massacre of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire, was living in exile under the alias of Ali Salieh Bey. Tehlirian, whose entire family was massacred, shot Talaat in broad daylight on a residential street in a suburb of Berlin. The ensuing trial on June 2 and 3 gained worldwide attention, as his attorneys presented witnesses in addition

²¹² Nazarian, 36-39.

²¹³ Dennis Mclellan, "A.I. Bezzerides, 98; Novelist Became a Screenwriter Known for Film Noir Classics," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 2007.

²¹⁴ Mclellan

²¹⁵ "Talaat Pasha Slain in Berlin Suburb." *New York Times*, March 16, 1921.

to submitting telegrams, government memoranda, and documents compiled from government sources and interviews as evidence, creating a detailed chronology of the genocide.²¹⁶ Tehlirian had confessed to the investigators and the jury, and was stunned when, after one hour of deliberations, he was acquitted of all charges under a form of temporary insanity. The crowd in the courtroom burst into applause, and the *Los Angeles Times* reported “Vengeance Justified.”²¹⁷ Following the trial, Tehlirian’s name was changed for his protection and he lived for many years in Belgrade before moving to San Francisco in 1956. Tehlirian, who was working as an office clerk, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 63 in San Francisco in June of 1960.²¹⁸ He was buried in Ararat Cemetery in Fresno.

While a few individuals gained fame for their exceptional work, most early San Francisco Armenians were ordinary people, focused on establishing themselves and their families, being law-abiding citizens, and fitting into the fabric of the city. Clearly, San Francisco offered opportunities for Armenians without the confinement of exclusion they experienced in Fresno.

The next generation of the now established San Francisco Armenians set out to create a lasting community and came together more formally, dedicating their time and energy to organizing the building of churches, social organizations, and schools. Whether they gathered to prepare Armenian foods for fundraising events, donated their professional services, or offered the use of their homes for meetings and church services,

²¹⁶ Bobelian, 62-63

²¹⁷ “Vengeance Justified.” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1921.

²¹⁸ “Armenian Hero Dies in ‘Frisco.” *New York Times*. May 26, 1960, 21.

these dedicated individuals laid the foundation on which the community was built, while also enriching the landscape and the cultural tapestry that is San Francisco.

One early organizer of the Armenian community of San Francisco in 1925 was Reverend Father Khatchig Krouzian. At this point in time, the Armenian community was too small to have a permanent church of its own, and so Father Krouzian offered mass in the homes of individual families. That a clergyman was the first organizer of the community is not surprising since the Armenian Apostolic Church has historically been instrumental in bringing together the community wherever Armenians have lived. This applied to the small percentage who converted to Protestantism through the active missionary presence in Turkish Armenia, as well. Regardless of denomination, and especially since the Genocide, all Armenian Churches have been the pillar of their communities, and absolutely essential to keeping the Armenian language and cultural traditions alive in the Diaspora.

The Calvary Armenian Congregational Church had its beginnings on December 17, 1922, when Rev. M. Saladian held church services in Armenian in a rented room at Calvary Presbyterian Church, officially organizing with 34 charter members in 1926. During the Depression Era, the group continued to a rent hall on Divisadero Street, and churches on Twenty-Third Street, Farrell Street and Seventh Ave. In 1947, after renting facilities for over 20 years, the congregation purchased the Immanuel Baptist Church on 38th Ave, for \$18,000.00. By 1980, the church had outgrown that location, and purchased its present location at 725 Brotherhood Way. Today, the Calvary Armenian

Congregational Church is active with youth groups and charities actively serving not just the Armenian, but the entire community.²¹⁹

St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church, the outcome of Fr. Krouzian's early efforts, was formally established as a congregation by 1953. Electing a Board of Trustees and forming a Ladies' Auxillary, the group held its first Divine Liturgy on December 27, 1953, in a Serbian Church, with a visiting priest from Fresno, Fr. Mkhitarian, and Mr. Krikor Krouzian, brother of Fr. Krouzian, directing the choir of 35. The following year, a building committee was formed to acquire a suitable site for a church, and in 1955, four sites were submitted for consideration, and 51 Commonwealth Ave in Pacific Heights was selected as the most suitable. In the interim, services were held at the American Episcopalian, Greek, Syrian, and Yugoslav churches, led by visiting priests from Fresno and Los Angeles.²²⁰

The Commonwealth property, formerly Jordan House, was purchased in 1956 for the sum of \$67,500. Its large library, which accommodated 120 people, was temporarily converted into the church, and its kitchen and second floor rooms housed the first permanent pastor, Fr. Shirinian, and his family. The first service was celebrated on November 24, 1957, and soon after, the congregation of 300 families set to fundraising work to raise money to pay off the mortgage. The first such banquet raised \$60,000, and by 1964, a mortgage burning ceremony was held, celebrating the paid off debt.²²¹

²¹⁹ *Calvary Armenian Church History*, 2001.

²²⁰ *History of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church 1953-2001*(San Francisco:2001).

²²¹ *History of St. Gregory*,1953-2001.

Fundraising was also done by the Ladies' Auxillary, which organized bazaars and was in charge of food preparation. These bazaars attracted so many people, that they were relocated to the Furniture Mart, and later to the Kabuki Theater, until the Armenian Community Center was built much later, in 1979. Ladies gathered to prepare home made sweets and Armenian foods such as stuffed grape leaves, spinach and cheese pies, and other delectable recipes passed down through the generations, to sell at these bazaars and fundraisers. Photos of ladies in aprons surrounded by large pots and pans, preparing these foods show bright smiles and are indicative of the social atmosphere these events created. No doubt a bit of friendly competition over whose recipe was best took place, as well. In addition to these bazaars, an annual black-tie Camellia Ball was organized, with all proceeds going toward the Building Fund. The end result of these efforts was a second mortgage burning ceremony on November 4, 1974, followed by a banquet at the Scottish Rite Auditorium. The Church Annals state the contribution of the community:

Each stone, every nail, each board and every corner contains a piece of the heart of the people who worked, planned, contributed and toiled towards the realization of our dream. It is veneration to the ancestors who clung vehemently to their strong faith despite hardships; the church symbolized the rebirth of the Armenian people despite Genocide. The Armenian people of San Francisco erected the church with a deep conviction that they were providing a bastion for their survival.²²²

One such remarkably dedicated individual who contributed to the future of Armenians in San Francisco was Mr. Hratch Tarpinian.²²³ A single man with no relatives, Mr. Tarpinian was a tailor who lived modestly in a hotel for \$30 per month, his entire life. He owned one suit, which he wore on formal occasions for twenty years.²²⁴ Mr. Tarpinian started the first Saturday school in the home of a friend, volunteering to teach

²²² St. Gregory Church History, 1953-2001.

²²³ No relation to the author.

²²⁴ Khajag Sarkissian, interview with author, March 27, 2009.

young students the Armenian language and history. Two years later, attendance grew to 50 students and the school was moved to a formal classroom at a local Armenian club. This led to the establishment of a permanent Armenian Saturday school in 1962, with enrollment growing to 160 students in a few years.²²⁵

Families expressed interest and pledged their support for a permanent Armenian day school, and a Board of Trustees was appointed in 1970, to find a suitable location. Five years later, a two and one quarter acre property became available on Brotherhood Way that would accommodate not only a school, but a community center, a social hall, in addition to a church. Construction began in three phases for this project and once again, successful fund raising resulted in the September 6, 1980, opening of the Krouzian-Zekarian Armenian School of San Francisco, named for Father Krouzian and another patron, with thirty three students. On September 7, 1987, at a banquet celebrating the 21st anniversary of the St. Gregory Church, an announcement was made that the now elderly Mr. Hratch Tarpinian had donated \$210,000 towards this new school, requesting that it be named Vasbouragan Middle School, after his ancestral homeland in Turkish Armenia.²²⁶ A self-sacrificing philanthropist, Mr. Tarpinian had not only donated his time to educate young Armenians, but had lived modestly while amassing a small fortune not for himself, but for future Armenian generations.

One of the board members of the original Building Committee was Mr. Khachig Sarkissian, who has been involved in the development of both St. Gregory Church and the Krouzian-Zakarian School, during his 50 years as a resident of San Francisco. In

²²⁵ St. Gregory Church History, 1953-2001.

²²⁶ St. Gregory Church History, 1953-2001.

1959, Mr. Sarkissian came to San Francisco from Lebanon to attend the University of San Francisco at the recommendation of his aunt, who had recently traveled to the city. He soon connected with other university students of Armenian descent, all of whom had the common interest in preserving their language and culture, while becoming active American citizens. According to Mr. Sarkissian, there were about 5-8000 Armenians living throughout the city of San Francisco at that time.²²⁷ The 1950 U.S. Census lists a total population of 773,357 for the city of San Francisco as a whole, and 6,174 for the Pacific Heights neighborhood, Tract J-0004,²²⁸ where St. Gregory Church is located, and the 1960 Census figures show a decrease in the city's total population, to 740,316, while Tract J-004's total population increased to 6361.²²⁹ However, there is no concrete number for the Armenian population of the city, considering Armenians were classified as white, Armenians born in the United States are not a separate category, and foreign-born Armenians may be from any number of countries. Mr. Sarkissian's figure, therefore, may be the most reliable, since it was based on a list of church and community members, and directories kept by the church office.

A structure which has an unexpected connection to the Armenian community of San Francisco is the Mt. Davidson Cross. Built in 1934 by the city as a public monument, the 103 ft. cross sitting atop a hill became a city landmark, and for two decades, the subject of controversial debate which resulted in a lawsuit. In July of 1990, three groups, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, the American Jewish Congress, and the American Civil Liberties Union, jointly filed a lawsuit against the City

²²⁷ Khajag Sarkissian, *Interview with the author*, March 27, 2009.

²²⁸ U.S. Census (Washington D.C. Government Printing Office, 1950)

²²⁹ U.S. Census, (Washington D.C. Government Printing Office, 1960)

of San Francisco, demanding the removal of the religious symbol from public property on the basis of unconstitutionality.²³⁰

The cross, located in a man-made wilderness surrounded by a crowded city, has been visited and enjoyed by both religious and non-religious groups over the years, including hikers from the Sierra Club, urban dwellers seeking solace, and people attending annual non-denominational Easter sunrise services. By 1980, however, the illumination of the cross, which had been terminated during the energy-conscious 1970s, had become a controversial subject of city-wide debate. This issue extended to the meaning and purpose of the cross as a religious symbol, as some argued that it was a historical landmark, and others, that it was a now outdated and unconstitutional religious symbol. With no resolution in sight, the July 1990 lawsuit was filed and seven years later, an agreement was reached by the City and the three plaintiffs, allowing the private sale of the land with provisions. These required that the land be used only for open space, that no construction be allowed, that it be kept accessible to the public, and that the cross be lit only two days a year. Additionally, the city of San Francisco was to place a plaque clearly indicating that the cross was not on public land.²³¹

In July of 1997, the nonprofit Council of Armenian American Organizations of Northern California, representing twenty four Armenian agencies, won their bid of \$26,000 to purchase the Mt. Davidson cross and the small parcel of land on which it sits. Opposition by Turkish groups, who claim that the 1915 massacre never took place, was

²³⁰ Marie Bolton, "Sacred or Profane? The Cross at Mt. Davidson Park, San Francisco," *The Pacific Historical Review* 67 (November 1998), 543-571.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 543-571.

easily overcome as San Francisco voters approved the sale, two to one, in the November 4, 1997 elections. The CAAONC pledged to abide by the provisions and dedicated the cross as a memorial to the one and a half million Armenians massacred by the Turks in 1915. Though this resolution was not acceptable to all, it effectively ended the court battle and controversy about the cross. The first Easter following the sale was a telling one, with the cross lit in the rainbow colors of the gay liberation movement and a non-denominational service with 300 in attendance.²³²

Over a century has gone by since the first San Francisco Armenians challenged the monopolistic railroad, created beautiful art, contributed their literary work, or their engineering skills for safe structures and buildings. Individuals gathering in one another's homes for religious worship and fundraising eventually organized the building of churches and community centers that continue to serve and enrich the city landscape. Today, in addition to the four churches and school within the city limits, there are scouts and youth sports programs as well as volunteering and study opportunities to nurture future generations. Armenian student and alumni organizations continue to be active at nearby UC Berkeley and Stanford University, while the CAAONC and Armenian Professional Society are just some of the twenty four organizations that serve the San Francisco and Greater Bay Area communities. Clearly, Armenians have made lasting and worthwhile contributions to the city of San Francisco, and have laid a solid foundation that will serve many generations of Armenians and Americans to come.

²³² Bolton, 543-571.

The Backbone of Armenian Communities

Men were the public faces of the Armenian community, but the women were the backbones of their families, their neighbors and their neighborhood organizations. They were omnipresent in the lives of their husbands, children, relatives and friends, and essential to the success of their futures. Through their participation in community ladies' organizations where they often utilized their domestic skills, women contributed differently but equally to the progress of the Armenian community. As survivors of the massacres, most of these immigrant women had become accustomed to negotiating their survival and livelihood as children and young women without the protection and assistance of their male family members. In fact, most were sole survivors of their families, and navigated the dangerous and confusing journey that eventually led them to the United States at a time when "respectable" women did not travel without a male companion. Consequently, these women developed confidence in their ability to direct the course of their lives. After all, as genocide survivors and refugees, they had been living outside of the traditionally patriarchal Armenian society for most of their lives.

It seems that once women arrived to join men and returned to family life, however, each sex was content to return to his or her traditional role, and abandon those that the times necessitated. Thus, men ceased to perform household chores and directed their full attention to earning a living and providing for their families. Soon after their arrival, women set up homes, seeking to duplicate the comforts of domestic life for their families with limited resources in an unfamiliar and sometimes unfriendly foreign society. The arrival of women allowed for not only the growth of the community, but its cohesion as

well. As Anny Bakalian pointed out, women do the work of kinship, including “telephoning family members, keeping the network informed of each other’s activities, sending birthday cards, buying Christmas presents, planning and cooking holiday meals for the whole family.”²³³ In the Vartan Hagopian Correspondence, this is illustrated by several references to his wife Nevart’s hospitality in letters to Vartan in San Francisco, and her connection to family and friends in Fresno.

Arpena Mesrobian described the Armenian mother as the “chief designer and defender of the fortress” of the Armenian home, and noted that her responsibilities included teaching her children the Armenian language and traditions, the Armenian Christian faith, and supporting her husband when necessary.²³⁴ Indeed, if their income was needed, married women worked outside the home, but continued to perform their domestic work as well. In Rhode Island, for example, they worked in laundries and factories such as the American Silk Spinning Factory.²³⁵ An additional income was especially necessary during the Great Depression, when Alice Deukmejian worked at a factory making neckties, and then the local Montgomery Ward in Menands, New York near Albany, to supplement husband Courken George’s income as a rug merchant. Both had immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s from Turkish Armenia. Their son Courken George, Jr., born in Menands on June 6, 1928, grew up to be the Attorney General of California and then its thirty-fifth governor from 1982-1991.²³⁶

²³³ Anny Bakalian. *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 68.

²³⁴ Mesrobian, 104.

²³⁵ Karentz, 183.

²³⁶ “The Armenian American Governor.” accessed 13 November, 2011: available from <http://interviewsbynedanajibi.blogspot.com>.

Unmarried women worked as clerks and office workers, or in photography studios, as did Mianzara Zahrajian Eckoff at the Star Photo Studio in Syracuse, New York.²³⁷ Later, the Denholm and McKay Company of Boston employed many first-generation Armenian women at their department store during the first and second decades of the twentieth century.²³⁸ Some English speaking Armenian women taught other newcomers skills such as canning work, according to an article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* titled, “Foreigners Teach Canning” on June 23, 1918. Sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, these demonstrations were held at the Massachusetts Agricultural College during that summer.²³⁹ Women also assisted their self-employed husbands at their family business, as needed.

Armenian women organized a type of informal credit union among themselves, called *shirket*, a method of pooling their money, borrowing by turn, and loaning sums to those in need. In times when banks were intimidating or otherwise unavailable to immigrants, this Old World practice was not unique to Armenians. Japanese immigrants, for example, had a similar financial system called “tanomoshi,” where money was collected from each member of the group for a period of time and then used to assist one member per month until all members received assistance.²⁴⁰ Membership in a *shirket* was generally available to a select number of neighborhood women, and included a rotation of the office of treasurer among the group. Importantly, a *shirket* allowed immigrants to finance large expenses such as funerals and weddings that would otherwise be a hardship for their

²³⁷ Mesrobian, 104.

²³⁸ Apkarian-Russell, 96.

²³⁹ “Foreigners Teach Canning” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 23, 1918, 13.

²⁴⁰ David J. O’Brien and Stephen S. Fugita. *The Japanese American Experience* (Bloomington,: Indiana University Press, 1991), 27.

families. Since women generally contributed money from their household or personal allowances, the decisions of the group were entirely independent of men.

Women were energetic fund-raisers who volunteered in the organization of events such as picnics and church bazaars and especially, in the preparation of food for these functions. Whether it was for the community church or school, or to raise money to aid the needy overseas, their energies were not spared in the labor intensive and time consuming preparation of delicacies such as stuffed grape leaves, “kufte” or stuffed meatballs, baklava and other pastries. Donating their time and working together in groups, these women succeeded in generating money for their charitable purpose while also introducing the greater community to these unfamiliar foods. Ingredients were often donated or provided at cost by neighborhood grocers and butchers, which maximized profit. Over time, many non-Armenian neighbors and community members acquired a taste for the exotic home made delicacies they sampled while attending these bazaars. As a result, attendance at these events grew every year.

Often, women were central to the lives of their families, as illustrated by Peter Balakian in *Black Dog of Fate*. His mother, grandmother and aunts figure prominently in his childhood and their influence remained with him as an adult. Balakian related how he spent Friday afternoons making “choreg” with his grandmother as a boy of nine, while listening to her stories. No doubt the aroma of those wonderful pastries baking evokes his memories of her to this day.²⁴¹ Aside from the outdoor grilling of meat such as Skish Kebab, the preparation of food was almost exclusively the domain of women and a form

²⁴¹ Peter Balakian. *Black Dog of Fate* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997),6-7.

of skillful expression in Armenian communities, but food was also instrumental in their relating to the greater community.

Certainly, not all women were helpful and giving. In the Vartan Hagopian Correspondence, Calousd Hagopian in Fresno wrote to Vartan in San Francisco about his tenant's request for a laundry shed to be built in the back yard of the property. In his letter dated April 8, 1923, Calousd estimated that the cost would be a minimum of \$75, and recommended that Vartan deny this request, as the woman of the household seemed "high tone" with her husband, and that their home "smelled like a stable."²⁴² He advised his brother against going into debt to accommodate this couple, and wrote that hopefully, a refusal would prompt these tenants to move.²⁴³

Random acts of kindness were also a feature of immigrant Armenian life, which enabled survival in times of difficulty. These acts were often anonymous, to preserve the dignity of the receiver. In her article about life in Armenian neighborhoods in New England, Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill related the story of a hungry young Armenian boy who smelled the aroma of wonderful food as he passed by a Mrs. Zarouhie's house on his way home from school. Unable to resist, he would often knock on the door on the pretense of asking if his mother was there, and after replying that she was not, Mrs. Zarouhie would invite the boy in and insist he eat some of what she had prepared. In return, this boy would run to help Mrs. Zarouhie when he saw her carrying heavy parcels

²⁴² Vartan Hagopian Correspondence, April 8, 1923.

²⁴³ Ibid.

into her house.²⁴⁴ While hospitality is a feature of the Armenian culture, it took on additional proportions in the early immigrant Armenian communities. During the deportations, and later in orphanages and refugee camps where food was scarce, survivors shared what little food they had with one another and evidently this insecurity about hunger and the helplessness many felt at being unable to satisfy the hunger of their family and others may have manifested itself into an almost obsessive need to feed others. For some survivors, this lifetime sensitivity prompted a trip to the kitchen to offer and sometimes, insist that guests and at times, strangers, eat or at least sample a dish.

Armenians, along with most Americans, suffered greatly during the Great Depression, and pride prevented most from asking for help. Varoujan Karentz related a story about his mother in Providence who went to help her sick neighbor with chores and found the woman in tears. Her husband was out of work, and there was little food in the house, so Mrs. Karentz took the several coins she had been saving for a much-needed winter coat and wordlessly placed them at her neighbor's house the next day.²⁴⁵

Certainly, kindness was not limited to women. Harry Chinchinian wrote of a gentleman named "Uncle Agopenny" in his Troy, New York, neighborhood, whose sons delivered coal in the winter and ice in the summer. During the Great Depression when Harry's father was out of work, Uncle Agopenny's son George would deliver ice to the Chinchinians each week and refuse payment, saying that it was a piece too small to sell.

²⁴⁴ Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, "Changing Patterns of Armenian Neighborhoods in New England," in *The Armenians of New England*, ed. Marc A. Mamigonian (Belmont, MA: Armenian Heritage Press, 2004), 21.

²⁴⁵ Karentz, 195.

Each evening, Uncle Agopenny would stop by and tell of places he'd heard that were hiring, until Chinchinian's father found work.²⁴⁶

Finally, credit must be given to neighborhood photographers who not only made a living with their craft, but also preserved memories for their clients. At least one photography studio could be found in every early Armenian community, where individual, family, and wedding portraits were taken. Pamela Apkarian-Russell suggested that this was especially important to genocide survivors, who often had no photographs of relatives and friends to remember them by.²⁴⁷ Indeed, photographers captured the images of Armenian families and their activities and not only preserved a rich resource for the community, but a historical record as well.

It was this type of neighborhood camaraderie and the willingness of women and men to help one another that enabled these young Armenian immigrant communities to get through difficult times and eventually create new lives for themselves. While a few individuals gained remarkable levels of prominence given their disadvantaged state, countless others made equally important contributions, albeit anonymously and without glory. Helping to translate for a friend or neighbor, teaching English, making job referrals, preparing food to sell for charity, and thoughtful acts of kindness were all essential to the survival of these immigrant families, neighborhoods, and communities.

²⁴⁶ Harry Chinchinian, *Immigrant Son: An Armenian Boyhood*. (Clarkston, WA: Plum Tree Press, 1996), 79-84.

²⁴⁷ Apkarian-Russell, 76-77.

Memoirs and Oral Histories

In the absence of government-issued documentation, memoirs and oral histories are an essential component to the work of historians, anthropologists, sociologists and other professionals. This is especially true in the case of survivors of the attempted genocide of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, whose oral histories enable the study of this tragic episode and its effect on the survivors and their descendants as they immigrated to the United States and created new lives and communities.

A few survivors shared their life stories by writing their memoirs in their old age, often after decades of silence about the painful subject. These testimonials are at once tragic and empowering as stories of human survival and ultimate triumph. Souren Aprahamian from Van, Sarkis Narzakian from Garmri, Ramela Pilibosian Martin from Malatia, Elise Hagopian Taft from Banderma, Aliza Harb from Mardin, and many others traced their survival of the massacres and the long and difficult journeys which took them from refugee camps or orphanages to a new life in the United States. Taft explained her difficult decision to write her memoirs as follows:

For more than sixty years I buried these sights and sounds and experiences of my childhood into the recesses of my mind. I could neither tell them to anyone nor write of them. Whenever the subject came up I would freeze into silence and withdraw... .It was only past my sixtieth year that I gradually began to unwind enough to begin writing of the anguish I had carried within me for a lifetime.²⁴⁸

Survivors who began new lives in the United States, married and raised families often spoke little about the massacres and the loss of family members, the horrors they

²⁴⁸ Elise Hagopian Taft. *Rebirth: The Story of an Armenian Girl who Survived the Genocide and found Rebirth in America*. (New York:New Age Publishers,1981),59-60.

witnessed, and the suffering they endured. Given that as immigrants, they had to cope with the traumatic mental and physical scars as they navigated through the unfamiliar barriers of geography, language and tradition to carve a new niche for themselves, perhaps it is not surprising that survivors repressed their memories and focused on building a future. However well they may have coped publicly, privately many struggled for a lifetime with the aftereffects of the trauma. Some experienced nightmares and bouts of depression and despondency, while others endured the physical aftereffects of childhood malnutrition. Not all Armenians adjusted, as evidenced by mentions in memoirs of mental breakdowns, vagrancy, homelessness, suicides and institutionalization of those who succumbed to their anguish. In an age before Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome was understood, Armenian massacre survivors, as well as war veterans and victims of crimes were expected by society to proceed with their lives as best as they could, and most did.

No doubt motivated in part by the belief that they were sparing their children pain, survivors would at most share brief anecdotes which amounted to no more than snippets of their painful memories. However much survivors attempted to secure the emotional well-being of their offspring by remaining silent about the genocide, the issue emerged and haunted some of their children and grandchildren. The fact that a succession of memoirs has been published in the last two decades suggests that the American-born children and grandchildren of survivors were strongly impacted by the suffering of their elders. In response, some felt compelled to act on their behalf as the voice of the survivor, perhaps in hopes of attaining understanding and closure for themselves and their families, if not obtaining the still elusive justice for Armenians.

Sarah Vartabedian expressed this unexpected awareness and interest in some descendants of survivors in her thesis about the symbolism of Soghomon Tehlirian's Monument, alias Saro Melikian, in the Ararat Cemetery of Fresno. Addressing the reason this site continues to be significant to a new generation of American Armenians, she wrote, "Armenian collective memory and identity are formed around these episodic narratives of unresolved trauma and loss that are perpetuated and dislocated further as they pass from generation to generation."²⁴⁹ In her study about American-Armenians, Anny Bakalian argued that what psychologists term "survivor syndrome," applied to some Armenian immigrant survivors who carried guilt and were convinced that good family members died, while leaving unworthy ones like themselves behind. Additionally, some bore the lifelong physical affects of malnutrition during the deportations, while others were institutionalized after breakdowns.²⁵⁰ However, in their interviews of one hundred survivors, Donald and Lorna Miller found this was not the norm:

Contrary to research that remarks on the guilt that survivors feel for having survived while others around them died, we seldom encountered such feelings, at least at an explicit or a conscious level. Instead, we found survivors pondering the meaning of their survival rather than feeling guilty about it. When we did encounter guilt among survivors, it was related to the tragic moral choices that were required of them.²⁵¹

The overwhelming majority of their descendants, however, experienced no such struggles. For them, the atrocities their parents or grandparents experienced remained in the distant past, were not revisited and did not disturb their lives. Certainly, the fact that the Turkish government denies that a massacre occurred is an obstacle to justice and

²⁴⁹ Sarah Vartabedian. "Commemoration of an Assassin: Representing the Armenian Genocide." (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2007), 3.

²⁵⁰ Bakalian, 347-352.

²⁵¹ Donald and Lorna Tourian Miller. *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 180.

closure and a basis for ongoing discussion. Still, many who write memoirs and keep the subject alive have no political motivations, but rather, to tell their story. Examples of children who wrote the story of their parent include David Kherdian , who wrote about his mother Veron Dumehjian Kherdian's experiences, and Margaret Ajemian Ahnert, who wrote about her mother Ester, while Stina Katchadourian wrote her mother-in-law Efronia's story, based on a memoir Efronia wrote during the last few years of her life in Palo Alto, California. In any case, and without a doubt, the experience and memories of the massacres impacted and shaped the Armenian immigrant community in the United States.

The stories of the next generation, many of whom are multi-step migrants, have largely been neglected, but potentially serve as rich sources of information, as well. Despite the fact that a considerable gap of decades exists between them and their survivor generation parents or grandparents who are no longer alive, their experiences offer valuable insight into the study of immigration. As the children of displaced Genocide survivors, many of these now elderly Armenian men and women also lived through adversity as they experienced the aftereffects of the Genocide along with their parents. They witnessed their parents struggle psychologically to cope with the trauma of their ordeal, as well as their displacement as refugees in host countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and others. As they attempted to rebuild their lives among cultures with a different language and religion, many experienced serious economic difficulties. Seeking better opportunities, they eventually immigrated to the United States and other countries, and once again experienced the challenges of learning to adapt to a new culture and language while making a living and raising families. It was this aging population of mostly multi-

step migrants whose stories I sought to record, and found that in some ways, their stories of adaptation mirror that of many other ethnic groups who left the Old World behind and immigrated to the United States. In other ways, however, their adaptation was unique to this small minority group. These interviews provide valuable insight into the struggles and challenges these immigrants endured and overcame, and as such, contribute to the history of migration and immigration to the United States.

The subjects were told that the interview was part of a research project to collect information about their experiences as Armenian immigrants and their adjustment to their adopted country. Questions included: Upon arrival, did they connect to the existing Armenian community, or settle among non-Armenians? How did they cope with not knowing the language and customs? Significantly, how did they overcome these and other obstacles, and what drove them to persevere despite such difficulties? I confined my interviews to western Armenian immigrants whose parents or grandparents survived deportation and massacre in the Ottoman Empire, and arrived in the United States prior to 1975. I was also interested in whether or not they incorporated aspects of their host culture into their own, to what degree they continued to participate in the Armenian culture, and how they balanced each.

Two interviewees were born in California, one in Rhode Island, and nine had immigrated to the United States from Middle Eastern countries and have been living in this country for at least four decades. The immigrant interviewees were in their sixties or older at the time of their interview, and therefore had memories of their childhood and early adulthood in another country before immigrating to the United States, and as multi-step migrants, they had experienced both the discomfort of immigration and the challenge

of adaptation in a new country. All have been “outsiders” their entire lives, in terms of living as Armenians and minorities in other countries. The three American-born Armenians had recollections of early Rhode Island, Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley, and provided insight into these communities. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, and the four in Armenian were translated into English during the transcription process.

For these Armenian immigrants, the United States was truly the land of opportunity, where they enthusiastically applied their hard work ethic, resourcefulness, and business savvy, and in several cases, prospered. Unlike in the politically volatile and economically limited Middle East, Armenian immigrants were able to focus on their families, establish small businesses, educate their children, and better their lives in the comparatively stable Americas. They maintained their ties with the Armenian community to varying degrees, but all made an effort to blend into their surrounding communities, while also retaining traces of the host culture. As ethnic and religious minorities, the concept of a dual identity was developed and ingrained over generations, and therefore, in these immigrants, this was a quality they did not have to make an effort to develop, which facilitated their successful adaptation. In every case, the immigrants interviewed and those who wrote their memoirs were immensely proud of obtaining American citizenship, and most described their emotional reactions to seeing the Statue of Liberty in their memoirs or interviews.

Interestingly, these immigrants did not dwell on the suffering of their survivor parents or grandparents, but chose to focus on the journey to their successful survival.

However, all mentioned an anecdote about how their survivor parent or grandparent fled the massacres. Mrs. Arshalouys Mahseredjian, for example, related that her grandfather in Aintab, forewarned about the deportation, made special belts for each of his four children, with secret compartments for the hiding of gold pieces.²⁵² Such anecdotes were examples of wisdom the survivor parent or grandparent was willing to share with their offspring, rather than details about their helplessness. That way, perhaps, the few positive outcomes would serve as examples of the ingenuity and creativity that led to their survival. Indeed, it seems that such anecdotes had the effect of instilling courage and a certain sense of pride in descendants, however painful the context.

Many proudly outlined their list of accomplishments as they perceived them, which are not insignificant considering they had to overcome the obstacles of language barriers and cultural differences, in addition to applying themselves to their chosen endeavors. That Armenians did not allow feelings of intimidation or inferiority due to not knowing the language to be a barrier to learning is another reflection of their dual identity. In their multi-step migration, Armenians had to gain a level of proficiency in the languages of their host countries, and therefore, took it for granted that they can and will learn another language. As a result, it is not unusual for Armenians to be multi-lingual; in fact, many Armenians move fluidly between languages in conversation, choosing to express their thoughts in the language that best describes them. Immigrants who arrived in the first few decades of the twentieth century, however, tended to be sensitive about limitations due to their accents and incorrect speech, but strived to overlook such shortcomings in their quest to learn and succeed. Ramela Martin exemplified this in her

²⁵² Arshalouys Mahseredjian. Interview with the author. 11 December, 2008, Granada Hills, California.

memoir, when she explained about her first day as a nurse at the obstetrics unit at Grace Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut in 1931. Although Martin was grateful for the kindness of the other nurses, she wrote:

Still, it was not easy for me to eradicate the self-consciousness caused by my accent. Until I opened my mouth, I was the equal of anyone in my professional circle, but, as soon as I spoke, it seemed as if a part of me escaped, revealing to the world a strangeness I wanted to conceal, a strangeness which somehow diminished me and cut me off from all those who were part of the new life I was so desperately trying to create.²⁵³

No doubt the xenophobic climate of the early 1930s United States played a role in Martin's initial feelings of insecurity, and yet, she continued to pursue her education, obtaining an R.N. and a postgraduate certification in obstetrical nursing. However uncomfortable she privately felt about her accent, she actively pursued educational and professional opportunities and achieved her goals. Decades later, this was the case with Mrs. Margo Babikian, as well. She had earned her nursing degree from the American University in Beirut when she and her husband moved to Wilmore, Kentucky in 1965, but she pursued an additional Bachelor's degree in Behavioral Sciences from the University of La Verne, and a Master's degree in Healthcare Administration from UCLA.

Upon their arrival as immigrants, all of the interviewed connected with family members, friends, and the existing Armenian community, where earlier arrivals had established churches and organizations. The support and direction newcomers received from these fellow Armenians was paramount to their successful adjustment to life in a new country, and ultimately facilitated their settlement.

Not all remained members of Armenian churches and organizations, however, for varying reasons. Krikor Kemhadjian related that when he first arrived in Los Angeles in

²⁵³ Ramela Martin. *Out of Darkness: Ramela's Story*. (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 1989), 116.

1975, he sought out the social companionship of other young Armenians and attended a few dances and picnics sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union.²⁵⁴ Soon, however, his work schedule prevented his regular attendance, and he never became a member of the club.

Personal ambition is another quality shared by many Armenian immigrants, and may again be rooted historically in the denial or limitation of opportunity as an oppressed minority. Perhaps this drive to succeed is a feature of the survival mentality ingrained in the culture, where the attempted extinction of a group, had the opposite effect of instilling a drive to succeed. Evidently, this passes to some members of succeeding generations, as the interviews of two highly successful Armenian women illustrate. Margo Babikian, Executive Director of Ararat Nursing Facility in Mission Hills, and Hermine Mahseredjian, founding and current member on the Board of Directors of Ararat Charter School in Van Nuys, California, immigrated to California in the 1960s, and pursued a higher education while working in their respective fields of nursing and education. Both went on to establish programs and dedicated their energies to bettering the lives of the elderly, for Mrs. Babikian, and students, for Mrs. Mahseredjian, at the same time that they were raising their children. Their interviews reveal pride in their personal accomplishments, but more so for their contributions to their communities. Mrs. Babikian revealed an uncommon dedication to the elderly, and was enormously proud of instituting a policy of individualized care of the long-term, mostly Armenian residents of Ararat Home, including the continuation of their previous lifestyle. She related that upon admission, each resident is asked a series of questions about his or her

²⁵⁴ Krikor Kemhadjian, interview with the author, 31 October, 2010, Shadow Hills, California, 9.

daily routines and preferences. Discussing the importance of providing continuity of their life at home in a nursing home setting, Babikian explained: “I instituted the coffee specifically-it’s expensive, our Armenian coffee is very, very expensive, but I said no, we have to have it. These people drink Armenian coffee every day, and then they turn their cup and somebody goes and reads their fortune in the cup.”²⁵⁵

Clearly, Mrs. Babikian values the importance of preserving the dignity and quality of life of her elderly patients, for whom coffee has a special significance. The demitasse, espresso-like beverage is more than a drink for this generation of Armenians. Whereas Europeans and Americans meet for coffee at a sidewalk café or neighborhood coffee house, Armenians take pride in the preparation and serving of coffee, usually accompanied by a baked treat, during visits at each other’s homes. Symbolically, coffee serves as the social glue that binds Armenians together during these visits, where community ties are reinforced and cemented. In fact, in the Armenian language, the word visit has replaced the word for coffee, as people refer to visiting one another as “going to coffee” at someone’s house, or people are invited to “come and drink coffee.” Usually, after the last sip, the coffee cup is swirled and then placed upside down in the saucer, allowing the thick sediment left at the bottom to dry. Then, a neighborhood elder, most often a female, is asked to read the person’s fortune in the cup. As all those present listen attentively, the reader will point at lines in the coffee sediment, explaining how the likenesses of certain shapes symbolize or predict an event. For example, the presence of a bird suggests news on the way, and ‘road-like’ lines symbolize upcoming trips. Most often this ritual is the domain of women, although the occasional male, tongue in cheek, will indulge in this pastime as well. Fortune readers, whose predictions are thought to be

²⁵⁵ Margo Babikian, Interview with the author, August 11, 2010, Mission Hills, California, .9.

accurate, are highly coveted, but cups are read privately in her intimate circle for the most part, lest the reader be burdened by a never-ending assembly line of ladies asking for their cups to be read. Those who are very religious, however, scoff at the reading of cups, and traditionally, during periods of mourning, all refrain from this indulgence altogether and drink their coffee blank as a reflection of the bitterness of their loss. The ritual of serving coffee, which was a luxury and an indulgence, and then reading fortunes in cups during visits to each other's homes, is probably rooted in Armenian village life, where entertainment was restricted to visits to each other's homes and the occasional wedding, baptism and festival. In any case, this custom, in addition to storytelling that highlights a moral lesson, has survived the many multi-step migration of Armenian immigrants, and is still enjoyed by many today, which is why Mrs. Babikian insists that patients at Ararat not be denied this pleasure.

It is significant that neither Mrs. Babikian nor Mrs. Mahseredjian discussed her personal life, or elaborated on the daunting challenges of juggling motherhood and family life with their professional responsibilities. Perhaps the passage of time has softened memories of the struggle, and as is the case with male professionals, lives and attentions are often consumed by the demands of work. Eventually, their professional, rather than personal, accomplishments tend to define the individual. Significantly, both women arrived in the United States in the mid to late 1960s while they were in their early thirties, and therefore experienced the contemporary social changes which extended to them as Armenians and as women. Thus, they were able to incorporate their traditional roles of wife and mother with the pursuit of professional ambitions.

Not surprisingly, none of the immigrants interviewed expressed any regret about immigrating. It seemed, rather, that once they left their country of origin, they never looked back. This is not surprising, given the political and economic instability in Middle Eastern countries, and their limited opportunities for advancement. More importantly, as attached to the country of their birth as they may have become, it was not their “homeland” they left behind, and therefore, they had limited emotional attachments to the country itself. As immigrants in the Americas, they made certain sacrifices and adjustments in learning a new language and becoming accustomed to a new country and culture, but also had choices and over time, rebuilt their lives. In fact, none seemed to feel like immigrants after many decades, but considered themselves rightful, fully-participating citizens of their adopted country.

A rather important issue for certain immigrants emerged unexpectedly when I noted during an interview that the subject, Mr. Antranig Mouradian, reached into his shirt pocket more than once and proudly showed his identification card.²⁵⁶ Later, reflecting on the interview, I remembered conversations in the Armenian community throughout the years, about the lack of, or importance of, documentation. I sensed that those who did have documentation felt privileged, as well as legitimized, while those who did not had struggled to obtain these elusive and often expensive papers, and were elated when they finally did. Among Armenians, the obtaining of official documentation was a cause for celebration, with pastries shared with neighbors, friends, and colleagues, in accordance with the Armenian tradition.

It is easy to understand the practical and symbolic importance of documentation for Armenians. As refugees of the Genocide, they had arrived at their host countries with the

²⁵⁶ Antranig Mouradian. Interview with the author. 9 January, 2011, Montevideo, Uruguay.

clothes, or rather, rags on their backs and little else, and certainly without birth, baptism, and marriage certificates. Birth in the host country did not necessarily guarantee citizenship, as in the case of Lebanon, where the law dictated that those born in the country did not qualify for citizenship unless their father was also born in Lebanon. In this way, many Armenian refugees and their children born in Lebanon were “stateless,” and as such, perpetually insecure about their legal status. On a practical level, the lack of documentation restricted travel and immigration, which significantly reduced options for the individual. The insecurity of statelessness remained with individuals long after they obtained legal documentation. Clearly, refugees who could not prove legal status, especially ethnic and religious minorities, were especially vulnerable and at the mercy of government officials. After World War I, laws were passed requiring passports and therefore the ownership of a passport became essential for persons who wished to exit one country and enter another. Earlier, on December 15, 1915, the first United States law requiring passports was passed during the First World War.²⁵⁷ Stateless individuals, including Armenian survivors, were therefore limited by their lack of documentation, which also limited their mobility outside and also inside their host country. This was the case with Ramela Martin, the sole survivor of her family, who found herself in the Near East Relief Orphanage as a small child. A bright student, she was later limited by her statelessness as a nursing student in Athens when her opportunity to enroll in a post-graduate course in the United States was dashed when she was told only Greek citizens would be granted a visa. Frustrated, she wrote, “I was not a Greek citizen. I was stateless. I didn’t feel like what they said I was. Besides, why was statelessness such a crime, or

²⁵⁷ John Torpey, “The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Passport System,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*. Jane Caplan and John Torpey, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 264.

disease, or whatever it was?”²⁵⁸ Martin was later issued a passport in Athens, and granted a visa to Cuba, from where, she was told, she could immigrate to the United States.

Although she had to marry an American citizen in order to obtain an immigrant visa, she expressed her elation as follows: “It felt good, because soon I would have the comfort of a country and would be forever rid of the stigma of being a stateless person.”²⁵⁹ Jane Caplan and John Torpey echoed this sentiment: “Perhaps only those who have experienced the limbo of statelessness can adequately appreciate the value of that kind of belonging.”²⁶⁰ It is understandable that a reversal of a stateless status was an enormous relief, which explained the immense pride my interviewee felt in carrying and producing his documents.

To obtain passports, some stateless Armenians manipulated laws and obtained false documents from churches and other organizations when necessary, while others used the documents of relatives as their own. For example, Khachadoor Sarafian, who later changed his name to its English translation Oscar Banker, bribed a Turkish officer to issue him a passport.²⁶¹ Evidently, the manipulation of information and photographs for documents was manageable and not uncommon, as in the case of Sarkis Narzakian, who used his older brother’s passport to travel from Aleppo to the United States in 1897.²⁶² The process of obtaining a passport was more complicated for Souren Aprahamian and his mother, the only survivors of their family. In February of 1921, they traveled from their refugee tent camp in Nahr El Omar, in what is today Iraq, to Basra by motorboat,

²⁵⁸ Martin, 76.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 110.

²⁶⁰ Caplan and Torpey, 10.

²⁶¹ Oscar H. Banker with Robert Hull. *Dreams and Wars of an American Inventor: An Immigrants’s Romance*. (Ohio: Oberlin Printing Company, 1982), 60.

²⁶² Sarkis Narzakian. *Memoirs of Sarkis Narzakian*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Gomidas Press, 1995), 156.

and then boarded a steamboat for the seven day journey to Bagdad, where the Armenian Church issued passports for their journey to the United States.²⁶³ In addition to these methods, some Armenians obtained passports issued by the League of Nations for stateless refugees, known as Nansen Passports. Norwegian explorer and humanitarian Fridtjof Nansen called attention to the need for travel documents for refugees and sixteen countries joined in the creation of an identification and travel document that would be accepted internationally on July 5, 1922. At first meant for displaced Russian refugees, they were extended to Armenians in May of 1924, with the participation of forty governments.²⁶⁴

A few survivors made the emotionally difficult and perilous journey to their ancestral homeland, seeking closure on behalf of their survivor parents and family members who perished during the massacres. John Pakradounian made the pilgrimage in the 1950s, to the hometowns of his father in Kharpert and his mother in Sepastia. He described crossing the border into Turkey from Aleppo, to fulfill his mother's lifelong wish to find out if any of her family members had returned. He located a tourist office outside his mother's birthplace, where a guide spoke some English and accompanied him into town. John followed a map his mother had drawn from memory, and after a bit of difficulty, located the house where she was born, using the Turkish Bath with a park across the street as a frame of reference. He knocked on the door of the Turkish neighbor who had been given the family jewelry by his grandmother, who asked that he give them to any family members who returned; otherwise, keep the jewelry. Through the guide, the

²⁶³ Souren Aprahamian. *From Van to Detroit: Surviving the Armenian Genocide*. (Southfield, MI: Aprahamian, 1993), 128-129.

²⁶⁴ John Torpey. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127-128.

neighbor's son answered that no one had returned. It was not the answer his mother wished for, but she could stop wondering. John made a second trip to the Old Country with a tour group in the 1990s.²⁶⁵

Aliza Harb also returned to Mardin, the village where she was born in 1906 or 1907, and nearby Viranshehr, where her grandmother and aunt lived.²⁶⁶ She longed to visit these places she'd known as a child, although, she wrote, "I was apprehensive about going back to Turkey, but the desire to see my birthplace assuaged the pain of emotional scars that had never fully healed."²⁶⁷ Accompanied by her husband John, Aliza traveled from her home in Detroit to Aleppo and across the border into Turkey and from there, the forty miles to Viranshehr. There, she located the house of her maternal grandmother, and her aunt's house down the street, but was reluctant to knock on the door of the Turkish families living there. In Mardin, she inquired about the family jewels her Aunt Martha had buried in a strongbox in the garden the night before the deportation and was told by the elderly guide that a Muslim woman found the box and smuggled it along with another woman. Aliza located her childhood home, now neglected and overgrown with weeds, but as strangers were living there, she decided not to knock on the door. She reflected on this visit to her ancestral home on the return trip to and wrote: : "Whatever joy I have as an American, I deeply appreciate; but I had no say in the matter of leaving my home. The dozens of my relatives, including my father, who were either killed or driven into the

²⁶⁵ John Pakradounian. Interview with the author. February 8, 2012. Burbank, California.

²⁶⁶ Aliza Harb with Florence Gilmore. *Aliza: An Armenian Survivor Torn Between Two Cultures*. (Belmont, MA: Armenian Heritage Press, 2003).

²⁶⁷ Gilmore, 206.

desert to die, were given no choice, either. While those of us who survived drew close together in mutual support, I can never forget those who perished.”²⁶⁸

Certainly, more interviews must be conducted and additional research is necessary to shed further light on the themes discussed, as admittedly, the conclusions drawn thus far are incomplete. Undisputedly, the human dimension and personal point of view that testimonials in the form of memoirs and interviews provide invaluable insight into understanding of experiences in the case of the Armenian massacre survivors and their descendants.

²⁶⁸ Harb, 210.

Conflict in American-Armenian Communities

From the outside, the appearance of the American-Armenian community as close-knit, harmonious, and free of internal conflict was mostly true, but a closer look would reveal that Armenians did face conflicts when they came together in the United States, for several reasons. Despite their strong common bond as survivors, some of these differences in this small but complex ethnic group later divided Armenian communities, at times irreparably.

The first cause of conflict was over regional differences. In the Ottoman Empire, the different provinces and even nearby villages where Armenians lived varied greatly from one another in dialect, custom, dress, and cuisine. As a result, Old World Armenians identified themselves regionally or provincially, similar to Italians who identified themselves as a citizen of a city or state prior to Italy's unification. Most Armenians had limited contact with those from other provinces, with the exception of wealthy travelers or businessmen. As mentioned earlier, Armenians in provinces where their language was forbidden necessarily spoke Turkish, and in some cases, were forced to use Turkish names as well, while Armenians from places with no such restrictions spoke their native tongue. As massacre survivors from all provinces gathered at various orphanages and refugee camps, these differences surfaced, but were overshadowed by the joy of locating other Armenian survivors, regardless of origin.

In the United States, Armenians at first sought family members and gravitated toward others from the same villages or towns, and formed a few compatriotic "colonies" such as the Tomarza Armenians in Yetteem. But this was the exception rather than the rule

as more often, Armenian immigrants settled in communities alongside Armenians from other provinces, as well as immigrants of other ethnicities. United as massacre survivors, yet unfamiliar with one another's various town-specific customs, their differences diminished over time as Armenians developed a common identity as American-Armenians and their provincial identities took on a secondary importance.

The use of the Turkish language in American-Armenian communities, however, was a sensitive and thorny issue which caused conflict, as it did for Armenak Saroyan when he discovered that the congregation of the Yetteem church he was to serve as minister was Turkish-speaking. An intense dislike of the Turkish language and the bitter memories it conjured up in survivors lingered among Armenians for decades, and its use continued to be controversial. This was the case for Khachadoor Pilibosian, who was born in Kharpert Province and kidnapped during the deportation in 1915 at the age of eleven by Kurds who changed his name to Mustafa.²⁶⁹ Khachadoor became the errand boy and servant to the Kurd shepherd's family, and endured daily beatings for the next four years. In 1919, he ran away with the help of an Armenian miller to an orphanage in Aleppo, where he discovered that his mother had died and the whereabouts of his siblings were unknown. The orphanage staff helped him locate his father, who had been working in America for a number of years. Shortly thereafter, Khachadoor immigrated to the United States, arriving in Providence in 1920. In his memoirs, Pilibosian wrote of the annual picnics at Camp Ararat in Maynard, Massachusetts, where sometimes the Armenian band sang in Turkish, which evoked painful memories: "The use of the Turkish language at picnics or any Armenian public functions angered people like me as a matter of principal. I never

²⁶⁹ Khachadoor Pilibosian. *They Called Me Mustafa: Memoir of an Immigrant* (Watertown: Ohan Press, 1992), 18.

wanted to use the language of a people who made me and all Armenians suffer so much. But many people did.”²⁷⁰ Yet, those who were forced to learn and speak only Turkish never learned Armenian naturally continued its use, but most refused to teach their children the language and spoke to them in broken English instead. For both sides, this issue remained a topic of debate and at times, bitter conflict, for some time.

One result of this tension, together with the xenophobic climate of the early twentieth century, was that most Armenian immigrants did not teach their children Turkish or Armenian. Instead, children born in the monolingual United States were encouraged to avoid uncomfortable feelings of inferiority, as well as discrimination by Americans, by learning and perfecting the English language. Additionally, at the time of their naturalization, many Armenian immigrants legally changed their names, usually to the English translation, to ease pronunciation but presumably also to disassociate themselves from the unwelcome attention foreign names attracted, and blend in, if only on paper.

Most Armenian parents were fiercely protective of their children, likely as a result of helplessly witnessing the violent and tragic loss of so many children during the massacres. As their own education was interrupted by the deportations and massacres, it was of paramount importance for most families, and parents encouraged, if not demanded, that their children take advantage of the opportunity the United States gave for the education of all children. They were also influenced by the success of Armenian graduates of American Missionary schools and colleges back home, who served as a model of the opportunities education offered for moral improvement and upward

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 75.

mobility. It must have been awkward for children to communicate with their parents in English while their parents spoke Armenian, Turkish, or broken English, but self-sacrifice on the part of immigrant parents for the sake of a better future for their children was a feature of immigrant life and not limited to Armenians. Armenian children were, however, well-versed in Armenian values and cultural traditions, and likely participated in church-centered community activities with other Armenians. Additionally, most American-born children and grandchildren of Armenian immigrants continued to marry within their community and the political affiliation of their families. Although contemporary anti-miscegenation laws probably did not apply to Armenians, endogamous marriages were a tradition in the Old Country and the norm among both the native and immigrant populations in the United States. Allison Varzally's observation certainly applied to Armenians: "Antimiscegenation laws expressed the political will and racial prejudices of whites, but they also reflected the social practices and views of minorities."²⁷¹

Not only regional but previously existing religious and political differences between Armenians complicated matters further. In forming new communities in the United States, Armenians brought with them ancient, unresolved issues which resurfaced and sometimes divided them. Contemporary accounts reveal that disagreement among Armenians was not due to tensions created by living in the Diaspora, but present in fragmented Turkish Armenia. American missionary Theresa Huntington was stationed as a teacher in Harpoot (Kharpert) Province from 1898 to 1905, and lived among Armenians during that seven year period. In a letter to her mother dated March 8, 1905, she complained: "The Armenians, here at least, never have learned to pull together. It is so

²⁷¹ Varzally, 90.

from the Primary School to the ‘Union’ of the pastors of our field. I think it is the national characteristic and one which is a fearful obstacle to progress. Jealousy is the chief cause. There is always a division or quarrel somewhere.”²⁷² Certainly, jealousy may have played a part, but political differences and a lack of decisive leadership were likely a greater cause. In writing his mother’s story, David Kherdian related that during the deportation, when their destination and fate was still unknown to them, the men of the party met secretly at night, to decide whether to follow Turkish orders or find a way to escape. After a meeting one evening, his grandmother asked her husband what the men decided, to which his grandfather replied, “Don’t you know by now that nothing is ever decided in a discussion among Armenians?” He went on to explain, “I have finally figured out why we are so theoretical, or as mother puts it, why there are two political parties for every Armenian. It comes from not having a country of your own to run, and therefore, none of our theories is ever tested.”²⁷³ This was a point worth considering, as it must indeed have been difficult to pull together in the circumstances in which the powerless, leaderless Armenian communities lived.

In the United States, deep-seated political divisions resurfaced once Armenians increased in sufficient numbers to establish communities. The most serious conflicts in the Armenian communities of the United States were the result of political differences, as political parties competed for attention and support. In the absence of government protection, Armenian parties had formed in the Ottoman Empire, and attempted to organize and respond to their persecution. However, differing opinions challenged and ultimately divided Armenians, and were complicated further as politics became

²⁷² Stina Katchadoorian. *Great Need Over the Water: The Letters of Theresa Huntington Ziegler, Missionary to Turkey, 1898-1905*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Taderon Press, 1999), 337.

²⁷³ Kherdian, 46-47.

intertwined with the Church. In fact, the Armenian Apostolic Church had political power from the medieval period to Ottoman rule, as clergy dealt with foreign rulers on the people's behalf. Significantly in 1441, the Holy See was established in Echmiadzin, in Eastern Armenia, due to political troubles, although four powerful and influential rival sees subordinate to Echmiadzin in Russian Armenia also existed. This sole symbol of Armenian unity over the centuries, however, was criticized in the nineteenth century by Armenian intelligencia in both Turkey and Russia, as corrupt and outdated.²⁷⁴

In the 1920s, this conflict resulted in two political factions in the United States, which competed for the support and loyalty of the community. The first of these was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Tashnags, who were bitter about the ill-fated independent Armenia they briefly governed from May 28, 1918 to December 5, 1920. Following the Genocide and the fall of the Russian Tsar, this small part of Eastern Armenia had gained its independence, but after the rise of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, Turkish armies supported by Bolshevik Russia attacked Armenia, determined to wipe out its population, as they had in the Ottoman Empire. In addition to this threat, Armenia was ill-equipped and unable to handle the half million homeless and destitute Genocide survivors within its borders. When the Russian XI Red Army approached the capital of Yerevan on November 29, 1920, to overthrow the government, followed on December 6 by the Secret Police at the same time that the Turkish Army was approaching the capital, Armenia accepted the ultimatum to join Soviet Russia in return for protection from Turkey.²⁷⁵ As a result, anti-Soviet animosity was rampant among the exiled Tashnag party and its leaders in the Diaspora.

²⁷⁴ Mesrobian, 181-183.

²⁷⁵ Hovanissian, Richard G. *The Republic of Armenia*. 4 volumes. (Berkeley: University of California Press,

The second political faction consisted of a non-Tashnag group including Hunchagians, or Social Democratic Party and Ramgavars, or Armenian Democratic Liberal Party that, according to Michael Bobelian,“ saw the USSR as a caretaker against Turkish extirpation. This group wanted to establish an amicable, or at least non-hostile, relationship with Soviet Armenia without regard to its ideological standing.”²⁷⁶ As a result of these opposing viewpoints centered on political events halfway around the world, American Armenians formed cliques, and associated only with those within their group, including the Armenian Church.

Into the existing strife entered Archbishop Levon Tourian in 1931, elected as leading pontiff of the Armenian Church in the United States. The conflict began in July of that year, when Tourian refused to address a crowd at the Century in Progress Exposition in Chicago, demanding that the tricolor flag of the former Republic of Armenia be removed from the stage. This enraged the Tashnags, for whom the flag was a sacred symbol and its removal was seen as disgraceful and disrespectful, requiring fifty police officers to control the ensuing melee between opponents. After this event, Tashnags saw Archbishop Tourian as a traitor, while the opposing groups interpreted his demand as the unwillingness to offend the Catholicos, or chief bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church, in Echmiadzin. After this incident in Chicago, Tourian hired a bodyguard, as the division between Armenians deepened and widened in communities throughout the United States.²⁷⁷

As serious as the Chicago incident was, the unimaginable event that took place a few months later staggered the Armenian communities of the United States and around the

1967)

²⁷⁶ Bobelian, 112.

²⁷⁷ Ibid,112-113.

world. That the Armenian Church, historically the voice and single powerful unifying force of the people for centuries, became the scene of a political murder in New York, is a paradox indeed. As he entered church on Christmas Eve, 1933, Archbishop Leon Tourian was assassinated in the Church of the Holy Cross in Washington Heights, Manhattan.²⁷⁸ That holy evening, his bodyguard, confident that no violence would take place, was seated at a distance from the Archbishop when the attack took place. Two of the attackers were beaten and detained by the crowd, while the remaining seven men were arrested shortly thereafter.²⁷⁹ The nine accused, all members of the ARF, were convicted of first degree murder after a five week trial.²⁸⁰

This chilling incident sent shock waves through both local and distant Armenian communities in the United States and around the world. Levon Boyajian, born and raised in the Washington Heights neighborhood, commented in his memoir, “The Armenian community was torn asunder along political lines. That is a gaping wound that hasn’t healed to this day.”²⁸¹ In Syracuse, Arpena Mesrobian described “widespread boycotts, law suits over ownership of churches, disruptions over families and friends, and destruction of Armenian communities everywhere followed in city after city.”²⁸² She further explained that their loving, close-knit community became bitter with hatred, and “the institutions that had been built up over the years with such self-sacrifice and effort were torn apart practically overnight.”²⁸³ On the opposite coast in Tulare, families were divided, as were their American counterparts during the Civil War. Garin Hovanissian

²⁷⁸ “Slain in 187th Street Church,” *The New York Times*. December 25, 1933.

²⁷⁹ Bobelian, 114.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 115.

²⁸¹ Levon Z. Boyajian, M.D. *Hayotz Badeevuh: Reminiscences of Armenian Life in New York City*. (Reading, England: Taderon Press, 2004), 11.

²⁸² Mesrobian, 147.

²⁸³ Ibid, 148.

wrote: “The murder of the archbishop shocked the Tulare Armenians out of their peace. On adjoining farms, the Kazarian brothers, one an ARF member and the other Ramgavar, severed their family ties while men in the small community center brawled as each side called the other ‘traitor’ and ‘priest-killer.’”²⁸⁴ Hovanissian continued:

On that winter’s night in 1934, the Armenians emerged bruised and cynical from the hall where they had once danced and prayed together. One side kept the keys, the other kept the property deeds, and in broken mutters, as they made their way back to their homes, the Armenians of Tulare vowed never to forgive each other.”²⁸⁵

Each side established its own newspapers, social and church groups, and divided the community further, to the point where marriage across political lines was forbidden. Its effect on

American-born Armenian youth was especially damaging, as it further alienated and embarrassed many and caused them to disassociate themselves from this disgraceful and painful episode in American-Armenian history. In recent decades, however, Armenians of all religious denominations and political parties unite as one in protesting the denial of genocide by the Turkish government each April 24. In every major city in the Diaspora, Armenian businesses are closed as this symbolic date that Armenian intellectuals were removed from their homes in Constantinople and killed, is commemorated by thousands of Armenians in memory of the approximately 1.5 million killed.

²⁸⁴ Garin K. Hovanissian. *Family of Shadows: A Century of Murder, Memory, and the Armenian American Dream*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 47-49.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 48.

Conclusion

Each American-Armenian community had slightly different characteristics, but shared several common features, particularly the resilience of a people toughened by their troubled and tragic past. For most immigrants, a strong work ethic and connection to one another, the essential participation of women and a highly developed level of organization, together with persistence and determination, eventually enabled massacre survivors to rebuild their lives. Ultimately, the adaptation of their centuries-honed dual identity and for multi-step migrants, the adopted identity of their host culture, enabled their adjustment and ability to navigate through obstacles in the United States and serve both the Armenian community and the greater American community in which they enthusiastically participated.

Their familiarity with American culture, due to the presence of Protestant American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire facilitated their successful functioning in the United States. Both converted and traditional Apostolic Armenians were educated at Missionary schools or received medical treatment at missionary-run hospitals and were introduced to the English language and American culture. Later, the assistance of missionaries and other foreign personnel in the Ottoman Empire was instrumental in drawing attention to the pogroms and massacres, and in organizing and operating orphanages and refugee camps in the aftermath. As such, they enabled the survival of many Armenians, as did the donations of a generous American public. Additionally, many American benefactors recognized the talent and hard work of refugee students and sponsored their relocation,

including immigration to the United States. After arrival, Armenians were further assisted by organizations that helped the immigrants find housing and employment.

As they settled into communities and married, most survivors avoided discussing their painful experiences of escape from the massacres and instead devoted their energies to earning a living, nurturing their families, and educating their children. Despite any discrimination or limitations immigrants faced, they were grateful to live in the United States, which they saw as a safe haven and land of opportunity. In spite of a history of oppression, or perhaps because of it, these immigrants retained traces of the stubborn survivor who refused to give up his or her religion and culture and be absorbed into the more powerful majority in which he or she lived. To better their lives, most of these immigrants overcame difficulties and formed a new, blended identity as both Armenians and Americans. Many Armenians secured a comfortable, if modest, living for their families and participated in community building by establishing businesses, churches, social and educational organizations, and an annual picnic attended and enjoyed by non-Armenians, as well as Armenians in nearby communities.

Evidently, the stories of survivor parents and grandparents deeply moved some of their American-born children and grandchildren, and motivated them to the scholarly pursuit of more information and research. Instead of fading away with the survivor generation, their stories have re-emerged and their impact continues to be explored by a new generation of American-Armenians, as evidenced by a surprising number of memoirs and books that surfaced in the last two decades and continue to be published to the present day.

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