

Greeks in New Hampshire

Century of Immigration to America (1820-1924)

- Greece underwent political unrest and economic decline; corrupt ruling class taxed peasants excessively; most peasants not able to sustain and chose emigration
- 1900-1920 – Largest wave, 350,000; mostly unskilled men hoping to work, save money, and return home; most were barely literate; almost none could speak English
- Greek immigrants the only large European group of which more than 1/2 returned to Greece
- Values of Greek immigrants compatible with those of middle-class Americans: importance of individual achievement, self-reliance, resourcefulness, pride, social commitment; resulted in Americans' expectation that Greeks would succeed here

Greek Immigrants

- Greeks to New Hampshire beginning about 1893
- Significant numbers of Greek immigrants to America in late 1890s
- About 80% from rural backgrounds; almost all into urban occupations, taking what jobs they could find to generate quick earnings
- Neighborhoods made up of people from their home town or region; gathered in coffeehouses where exchanged information, provided support
- Considerable numbers of Greeks became small businessmen; opened restaurants featuring inexpensive general food; other popular businesses included candy stores, confectioneries, and others catering to Greek tastes
- Immigrants hired by Greek businessmen later started own businesses
- Family seen as preserver of Greek way of life; relatively low incidence of marriage outside Greek community
- Important that language preserved; only Greek spoken at home, in church, in afternoon schools established to teach Greek

Greek Orthodox Church

- Lay initiative crucial in founding parishes; people raised money, then asked the ecumenical patriarchate or the Synod of Greece for a priest
- A “popular” church in that it identifies with the national life and goals of its people
- All Orthodox churches independent of each other; unity found in their beliefs, sacramental life, and worship; all acknowledge the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as first among equals
- Orthodox people gather around their churches and social halls for identity and support; Church uses the Greek language and provides Greek language and religious education, serving to preserve and transmit ethnic heritage
- Church leaders started Junior G.O.Y.A. (Greek Orthodox Youth of America) for teenagers to encourage cooperation with the Church by means of group action and acts of charity while enjoying companionship amongst themselves

Other Greek Institutions

- Most promoted national over local ties
- Pan Hellenic Union, formed 1907 to draw all Greeks together, encouraged them to return to Greece to fight in Balkan Wars (1912)
- To counteract anti-Greek sentiment, two defensive organizations still active today: American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), formed 1922, and Greek American Progressive Association (GAPA), 1923; both focus on traditional customs, assimilation and teaching members about American democracy

FYI

- Today about 1.5 million Greek Americans, larger than any other Greek community outside Greece
- Famous Greek immigrants during the Century of Immigration include Michael Anagnos, director of Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, world’s foremost educator of the deaf and blind and teacher of Helen Keller; Dr. George Nicholas Papanicolaou, developed the Pap smear; Constantino Brumidi, who painted the Capitol’s curved ceiling, the Rotunda; theater and film director, Elia Kazan

Early History of Greeks in America

- Some early Greek immigrants aided American colonies during Revolutionary War
- In 1820s America welcomed a small number of refugees and orphans, escaping a Greek rebellion against the Ottoman Empire; welcomed because of American sympathies for a people whose ancestors gave birth to democracy
- During 1820s and 1830s, interest in ancient Greek culture, particularly architecture, fashionable in America; fostered favorable attitude toward Greeks
- In 1823, Daniel Webster proposed (first proposal like this in U.S. history) that U.S. government send aid to Greeks fighting the Turks for control of Greece; Congress refused, but private monies raised for supplies and weapons

History of Greeks in New Hampshire Communities

- Greeks to Manchester and Nashua during the 1890s
- Clashes between Greeks and Irish in Manchester in 1906; Irish feared neighborhood deterioration and job loss
- By 1920, 3000 Greeks in Manchester; male and female workers made up about 10% of Amoskeag's workers
- Ethnic discrimination and numerically weak support system turned some Greek men to other choices, such as shoe shops, service industries; also fostered ethnic neighborhoods
- Open confrontation at times in Nashua: in 1901, the Brackett Shoe Company tried to hire Greek workers to replace strikers; brandishing of knives and guns frightened off the Greeks
- About 400 men from Nashua returned to Greece to fight in the Balkan Wars (1912)
- By 1920, about 1000 Greeks in Nashua

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