


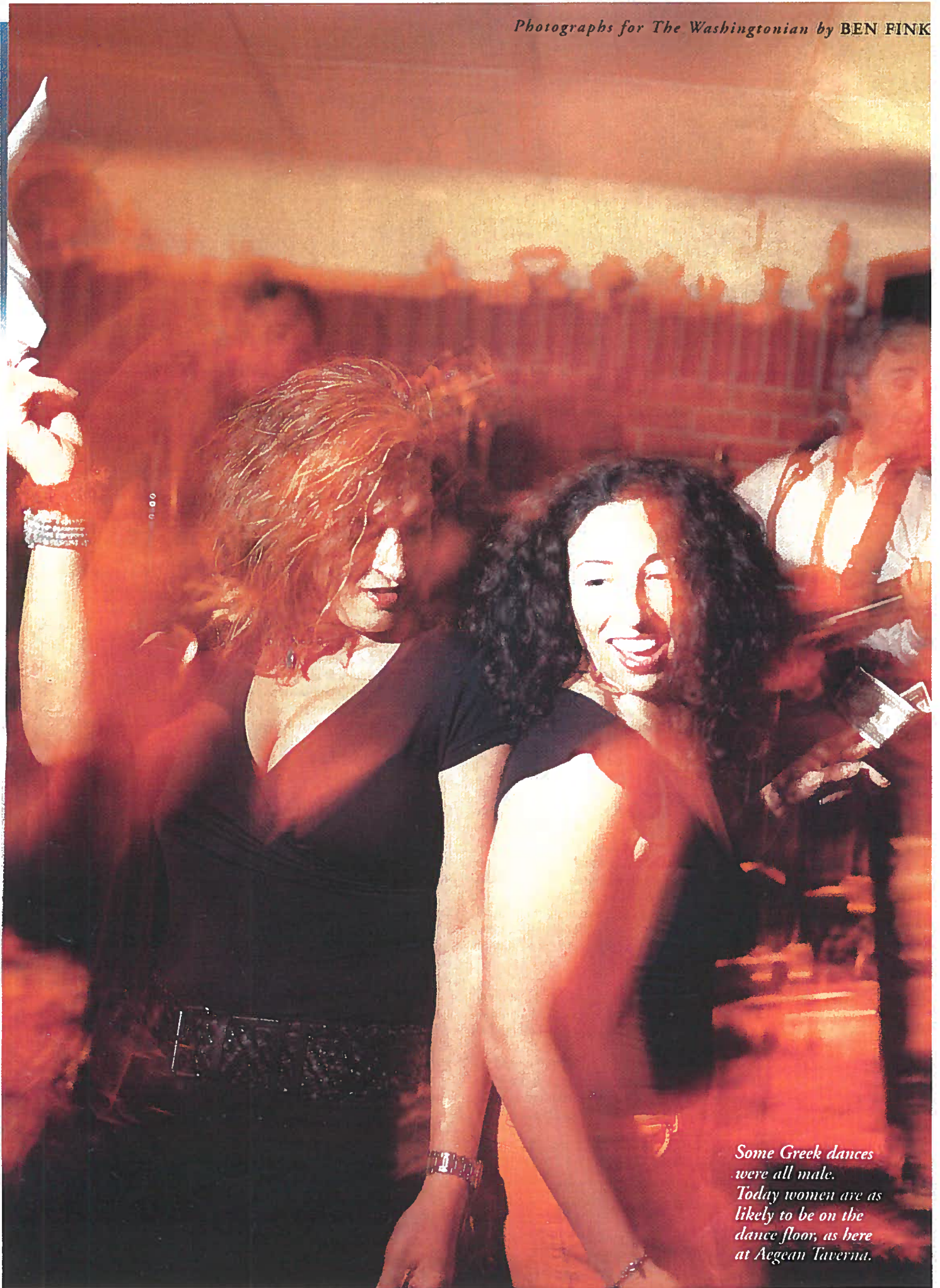
It's Good to Be Greek

Washington's Greeks Endured Hardship on the Way to Acceptance and Success.

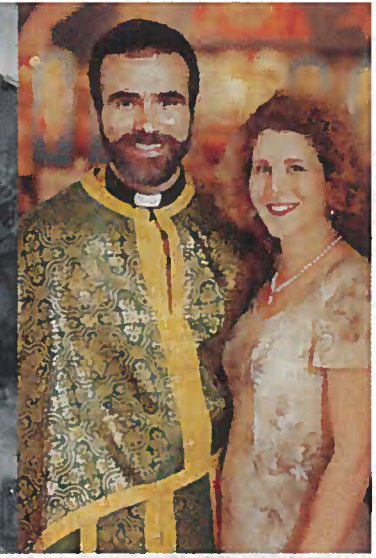
The Challenge Now Is to Maintain an Ethnic Identity—and Church, Family, Music, Food, and Festivals Help Keep the Spirit Alive. *By Aphrodite Matsakis*



Baklava—layers of nuts, honey, and buttery pastry—is a staple at Greek festivals and restaurants. This is the version at Melio's.



Some Greek dances were all male. Today women are as likely to be on the dance floor, as here at Aegean Taverna.



In the Greek community, the old world lives side by side with the new. The Greek Retirees Club—former businessmen, chefs, waiters, and others—gets together daily. Father Jim Paris of the

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George and his wife, Eleni, represent a switch from previous generations: She has her own career. Traditions such as dance and music bridge the gap.

“Someone hears my name, and the next question is ‘Are you Greek?’ ” says

AT THE FESTIVALS HELD BY LOCAL GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES, I relive some of the sweetest moments of my childhood. In those days, some 40 years ago, there was a dance every weekend—if not at church, then at a home or a hotel. It was practically the only time a good Greek girl could hold hands with a boy. As I joined the circle of young and old, I flirted with my childhood Adonis. His name was Harry—short for Hercules. Dancing the steps of our ancestors, we cemented our bonds to our heritage.

At today’s festivals, the dancing usually takes place in the church courtyard or, if it rains, inside the church hall. The aroma of Greek food—roast lamb, moussaka, stuffed grape leaves, baklava and other pastries—fills the air. Tables are arranged with a view of the band and the dance floor, and a troupe in traditional attire performs folk dances. As the music gets faster, the audience starts clapping. After the performers finish, the music continues and everyone dances.

Food and dancing aren’t the only defining features of Washington’s Greek community. Greek-Americans are among the most highly educated ethnic groups in the United States. Until the 1970s and ’80s, the emphasis was on assimilation; today the struggle is to retain a Greek identity, and churches are the focal point of this effort. Fewer and fewer Greek-Americans speak the mother language, but education, hard work, and the centrality of family life are ideals that haven’t died.

“SOMEONE HEARS MY NAME, AND THE NEXT QUESTION IS ‘ARE YOU GREEK?’ ” says a Falls Church engineer whose first name is Themistocles. “Then suddenly I’m on a Greek island listening to souvlaki stories.

“When my 12-year-old goddaughter, Eleftheria, insisted on changing her name to Ella, I gave her a hard time. On the other hand, at age 50 I’m tired of being mixed up with a Greek sandwich and am seriously considering changing my name to Tom after my parents pass away.”

I know what he means. Men have asked me, “Is it Halloween, or is Aphrodite your real name?”

“I’m named after my grandmother,” I explain, “to keep her memory alive.”

.....
Those people identified only by first names have been given pseudonyms to honor their request for anonymity.

“Aphrodite was the goddess of love, right?” some have said seductively.

“Don’t get your hopes up,” I’ve replied.

A Bethesda dentist named Achilles—a.k.a. Larry—says: “You can only go to so many Greek dances and eat so much baklava. It’s the Greek spirit that makes us Greek.”

Over six feet tall with straight red hair and small eyes and nose, Larry doesn’t fit the stereotype of the olive-skinned Greek with curly dark hair, large dark eyes, and a distinct nose.

“I don’t stereotype myself as a Greek-American—I could be Italian, Jewish, Asian, or Irish,” he says. “We all have the same story, coming over with nothing and making something of ourselves. What makes Greeks remarkable is the history.”

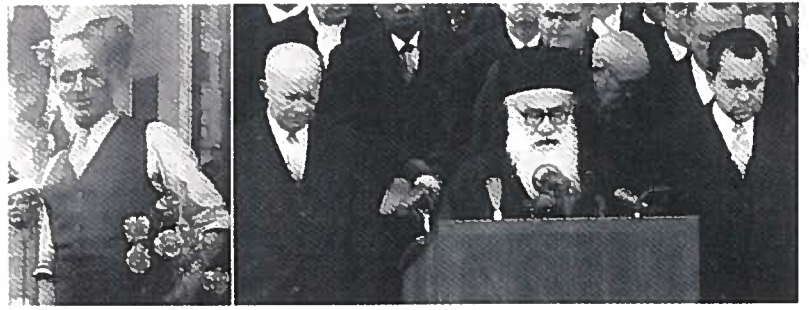
ON DECEMBER 17, 1904, THE WASHINGTON STAR REPORTED THAT “in the very heart of the national capital dwells a community of nearly 500 souls whose lives, customs, religion, and amusement are utterly alien to our institutions. It is the Greek colony. . . . They are among us, but not of us.”

The reporter had a few kind words: “All day long and on Saturday, far into the night, these men are business only—pushing the cart, working in market stands, barber shops, or fruit stores. When the work is over, they seek club houses, and the moment the door closes behind them, they become a different people—light hearted, jovial.”

Greeks had begun to emigrate to the United States after the Greek war of independence against the Ottoman Turks in the 1820s. The largest migration occurred between 1900 and 1930. Greeks were no strangers to poverty, but the collapse in the European market for raisins, a major Greek export, toward the end of the 19th century led to economic devastation. By 1890 there were at least 16,000 Greek-Americans.

In the early 1900s, the local Greek community centered around Pennsylvania Avenue and John Marshall Place, later called 4½ Street, near today’s E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse. The Greeks largely settled in Northwest DC around the Capitol, bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th Street, with some spillover into Northeast and Southwest. The first Greek church in DC was founded in 1904 above a bicycle shop at 619 Sixth Street, Northwest, near today’s MCI Center.

Most of Washington’s early Greeks were bachelor laborers

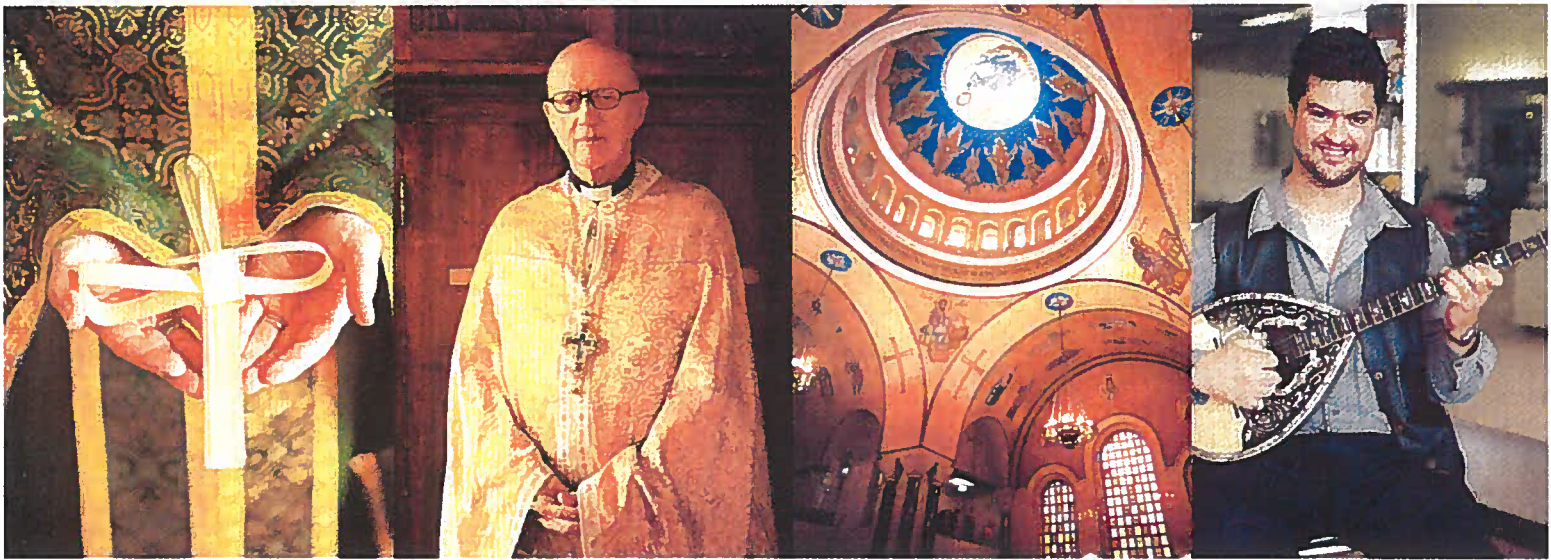


By the 1920s, many local Greeks had established small businesses: Charles Comert was a florist. The Archbishop of America—leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in this country—spoke at the 1957 inauguration of President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon.

A man named Themostecles. Then suddenly in on a Greek island listening to souvlaki stories



Now that the community has dispersed, churches are the focal point for many Greeks. These are parishioners at St. Sophia in DC.



Young people are returning to the Greek Orthodox faith, where rituals have remained unchanged since early Christianity. Priests such as St. Sophia's Father John Tavlarides wear richly

embroidered vestments, and churches are decorated with ancient icons. Local musician George Barlas sees a growing enthusiasm for bouzouki music as well.

and street vendors. Six to eight slept in a room, sometimes in shifts. Their goal was to help support their families overseas and raise dowry money for their sisters. Only after these obligations were met did they return to Greece to marry and bring their brides here.

WHEN GEORGE COKINOS WAS TELLING ME HIS STORY, I FELT AS IF I were looking at my father. The brightness of his eyes said something. I sensed that Cokinos, like my father, had known obstacles yet managed to keep on.

My father, who came to America during the Depression, roamed the streets saying, "Gimme job, gimme job," until he was hired as a dishwasher. He graduated from dental school with the help of a Greek-American dictionary, supporting himself by teaching Greek school and cooking lunch for his classmates. Like Cokinos, my father is in his eighties and still mows his lawn.

Cokinos's father, Peter, left Pyrgos, Greece, in the early 1900s and began working in his brother's candy store, Cokinos Brothers, on Ninth Street, Northwest. The family opened a second store at 11th and H streets, Northeast, then sold both and opened the Cokinos Cafeteria at Wisconsin Avenue and Macomb Street in Cleveland Park. As Washington grew, the property gained in value, and George's parents closed the business and retired early.

George didn't share their good fortune. At 18 he was disinherited for marrying an American girl. At that time, marrying a non-Greek was inconceivable.

Some 65 years later, George and his wife, Bebe, are happily married in Po-

Aphrodite Matsakis (amatsakis@erols.com) is a counseling psychologist in Wheaton. She is the author of 11 books; her latest is *Growing Up Greek in St. Louis*.

tomac. But after George's disinheritance, he earned his living at Hecht's (\$15 a week), stocking merchandise and picking up hangers people dropped in dressing rooms and working nights at a soda fountain. By saving his pennies, he opened a restaurant with his brother-in-law in 1941 at Wisconsin and Macomb, which he rented from his father. Today the Tex-Mex restaurant Cactus Cantina is there.

"People didn't like Greeks back then," Cokinos says. "I got into a lot of fights in school with kids who called me greaseball.

So we named the restaurant Churchill's."

It did well, but the owners tired of the long hours. For a time, Cokinos and his brother-in-law built homes in Rockville for returning GI's.

"They went like hotcakes," Cokinos says, "but we came close to bankruptcy because of having to underbid more-established competitors."

They decided to rent linens to restaurants. Soon their Modern Linen Service encompassed a plant on an acre of property. Cokinos sold the company in 1984.

In 1950, he started the 130 Club, a group of Greek businessmen who met at Blackie's House of Beef at 22nd and M. The owner, Blackie Auger—Ulysses Augerinos, whom some used to call "Useless"—began as a coffee-and-doughnut vendor but is now part of Washington's business elite.

After 1960, the 130 Club started meeting at other restaurants, including Mrs. K's Toll House in Silver Spring. Today this landmark is owned by a Greek-American couple, Dena and Theo Markos.

FROM 1900 TO 1915, ONE OUT OF FOUR Greek men between 15 and 45 left his village for America. Although political instability was a factor, their main motive was to save themselves and their families from poverty.

As these immigrants brought over

Where the Festivals Are

FESTIVALS FEATURE GREEK FOOD, MUSIC, and crafts. Starting in the afternoon, a band plays and anyone can dance. Usually a church troupe in Greek dress performs traditional dances. Here are local churches that sponsor festivals.

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, 7701 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda; 301-469-7990; www.stgeorge.org. May festival.

Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, 4115 16th St., NW; 202-829-2910. September festival.

St. Katherine's Greek Orthodox Church, 3149 Glen Carlyn Rd., Falls Church; 703-671-1515; www.saint-katherines.org. June. September festivals. No June festival this year due to construction; call about September.

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral, 36th St. and Massachusetts Ave., NW; 202-333-4730; www.saintsophiawashington.org. May. September festivals.

St. Theodore's Greek Orthodox Church, 7101 Cipriano Rd., Lanham; 301-552-3540; www.sttheodores.org. June, September festivals.



The 130 Club started more than 50 years ago; it's a group of Greek businessmen. Blackie Auger is seated. Standing are Harry Magafan, John Deoules, George Bilidas, Gus Stamoulis, and Ernest Kousis.

Ulysses Augerinos, whom some used to call "Useless," changed his name to Blackie Auger. He began as a coffee-and-doughnut vendor but is now part of Washington's business elite



More Greek-American women are bucking the old male-dominated culture. Irene Glinos Schaffner's watercolors of DC have been purchased by presidents as gifts to foreign

dignitaries. Maria Kyriakoudis works with her husband at their restaurant, Melio's, which serves this dish featuring stuffed grape leaves. Women also have prominent roles in the church.

"It was okay to talk Greek at home, but I felt ashamed if my parents

relatives, Washington's Greek population grew. The political strife in Greece caused a split in the immigrant community, leading to the formation of two DC churches. In 1904, those who supported the liberal Eleutherios Venizelos formed St. Sophia at Eighth and L, Northwest. In 1918, those who favored the monarchists formed Sts. Constantine and Helen at Sixth and C.

By the 1920s, many former vendors and shoeshine boys had small businesses. Nicholas Manthos, who began by selling magazines and fruit, opened Manthos Brothers Confectionary, on Louisiana (now Indiana) Avenue between Fourth and Sixth streets. It was a restaurant that also sold Greek candies such as *pasteli* (sesame-honey bars), *loukoumi* (soft-center cubes of various flavors), and *koufeta* (sugar-coated almonds). In the early 1900s, Nicholas Skiados opened the Broadway Café at Seventh and O, a soda fountain that sold candy made in the back of the store as well as ice cream.

Typically, Greek small businessmen lived near or over their stores or restaurants. Most were hit hard during the Depression in this country. Some, like Manthos, lost everything. But as government grew in the '30s and '40s, businesses flourished, and more Greek-Americans could afford homes.

Between 1948 and 1952, the Greek community of central DC shifted to what was considered the suburbs: the Northwest area, especially around 16th Street near Walter Reed Army Hospital. They also flocked toward two high schools, Theodore Roosevelt High School at 13th and Upshur and Coolidge Senior High School at Fifth and Tuckerman.

The churches followed. In 1953 Sts. Constantine and Helen moved to 16th

and Upshur. St. Sophia moved near Wisconsin and Massachusetts avenues; President Eisenhower laid the cornerstone in 1956.

IN OCTOBER 1940 MUSSOLINI OF ITALY ATTACKED GREECE, AND IN April 1941 Hitler invaded. In the days after Mussolini's attack, Greek-Americans put aside their differences and organized the Greek War Relief Association, which was credited with saving a third of Greece's population.

Greek businesses and restaurants displayed GWRA posters and collection boxes. Church committees and associations raised funds door to door and from "soldiers' dinners," where full price was charged for a dinner of bread, olives, and feta cheese. Greek millionaires donated generously, and Greek businesses contributed part of their profits.

Five months after Oxi Day—October 28, 1940, the date Greece said no (*oxi*) to Mussolini's demand for surrender—the GWRA had raised \$5 million in money and supplies, primarily from Greek-Americans. After Hitler occupied Greece, the GWRA shipped 700,000 tons of food, clothing, and medical supplies on neutral Swedish vessels.

In Washington as elsewhere, Greek-American men enlisted while women rolled bandages. Peter G. Dounis, now 76, of Silver Spring suffers from foot and hip injuries from the Battle of the Bulge.

"My feet were frozen, but I kept on walking," he says. "Near me was another Greek guy, his feet bleeding, his toes popping out of his torn shoes."

Dounis's father, George, had

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Moussaka and More

HERE ARE THE MOST COMMON GREEK dishes served at church festivals and in restaurants.

Baklava: layers of nuts in buttered phyllo dough soaked in honey syrup.

Dolmades avgolemono: grape leaves stuffed with seasoned rice, sometimes with meat, in an egg-lemon sauce.

Kourabiedes: delicate almond- or brandy-flavored butter cookies rolled in powdered sugar.

Moussaka: layered eggplant, meat, and potato in a cream sauce.

Pastitsio: noodles with cream sauce, sometimes with meat; often nicknamed "Greek lasagna."

Souvlaki: tangy marinated cubes of beef, lamb, and pork on a skewer, seasoned with garlic and oregano.

Souzoukakia: fried round or sausage-shaped meatballs of hamburger, onion, rice, parsley, garlic, oregano, basil, and sometimes mint or cumin, served in tomato sauce.

Spanakopita: layers of buttered phyllo dough filled with spinach, feta cheese, and eggs. Variations include onion and Parmesan or other cheeses.

Tropita: feta and other cheeses wrapped in buttered phyllo dough.

Historical photographs courtesy of St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral



In keeping with the move toward assimilation, Greek Independence Day celebrations like this one were matched by equally big ones for July 4. But a "good Greek girl" would never marry a non-Greek.

spoke Greek in front of non-Greeks. I wanted Mom to make **chocolate-chip cookies.**"



In the dances originating in Greek villages, participants link arms and move in a circle. The contact among the dancers, the circular pattern, and the uniformity of steps reflect the unity of village life.

IT'S GOOD TO BE GREEK

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stowed away on a boat at age 12 to come to America. According to church records, Peter's mother, Katherine Skiados, was the first Greek girl born in DC, in 1902.

Recognition of the Greek-American war effort, through newspaper articles and appearances of government officials at Greek-American events, brought pride and dignity to Washington's Greeks. The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association led the way in US war-bond sales, selling 50 million dollars' worth. The first bond was sold to Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House, by an AHEPA member, Steve Vasilakos, a vendor who sold peanuts outside the White House.

The DC Red Cross had never thought to ask the Greek colony, as it was called, to take part in fundraising. But in 1943, Greek-Americans offered their services and raised \$7,000 in seven days. In 1944, the Red Cross gave them a quota of \$10,000; the Greeks doubled it.

AFTER THE GREEKS STOPPED MUSSOLINI in 1940 and became the first country to successfully fend off a fascist takeover, kids stopped calling me Daffy," says a government attorney named Daphne. "For the first time, I wasn't ashamed of being Greek."

"Both before the war and afterward, the emphasis was on fitting in," says McLean attorney Dean G. Popp, his voice emotional as he describes how his immigrant father graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then worked as a structural engineer on projects including the Hirshhorn Museum, the Brazilian Embassy, and the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas.

"My dad changed his name from Papadopoulos to Popp and was proud to do so," Popp says. "Even though I was taught that we were the keepers of the true religion and to be proud that Greece had fought with the Allies in both world wars, my parents were fully American.

"It was okay to talk Greek at home, but I felt ashamed if my parents spoke Greek in front of non-Greeks. I wanted Mom to make chocolate-chip cookies, not *mela-*

moukarouna or *diples*."

In keeping with this move toward assimilation, the large celebrations for Greek Independence Day (on March 25, 1821) were matched by equally large ones for the Fourth of July. On July 4, 1936, the *Washington Post* described a feast of "20 lambs, 5 chickens, 10 hams, and a plentiful supply of the Greek drink Mastiha" at Sts. Constantine and Helen Church, where Greek-Americans hailed the United States as the "greatest country."

"We were part of a generation that held to a high standard of adhering to your duties as a citizen," Popp says.

YOU HAVE AN OVERDEVELOPED SUPER-ego," a psychologist friend once told me, referring to the part of the psyche where moral messages from parents and society reside.

No kidding, I thought. How could any Greek baby boomer have escaped?

Many of our parents lusted for education but couldn't afford it; their children were expected to fulfill their dreams. In gratitude for their sacrifices and in keeping with the ancient Greek notion of excellence, we were expected to strive for perfection. At the very least, we had to do well enough not to bring shame to our name or give "Americans" cause to look down on us.

Here's my father, frowning at my third-grade report card, all A's.

"Where's the A-pluses?" he asks.

My school had just changed its grading policy. There would be pluses and minuses for B's, C's and D's only.

"Papa, they don't give A-pluses in American school anymore."

"Get one anyway. You don't want people to think that Greeks are no-good, dirty loafers, do you?"

"There were enormous expectations for excellence," says John Sitalides, executive director of the Western Policy Center, which promotes US interests in the eastern Mediterranean and southern Balkans. "You were not allowed to fail or complain."

Although high standards are part of the Greek culture, the pressure to excel was intensified among Greek-Americans.

The push for education began in the 1930s, when the busboys and fruit vendors who had gone on to start their own businesses wanted their children, especially their sons, to go to college.

"My father woke up at 3 AM, was at work by 4, and worked two to three jobs—anything to provide for his family and get his children through school," says Sitalides.

"My mother, a widow, made \$20 a week as a waitress, but every week she put aside a dollar for her children's education," says Gene Rossides, a former Treasury assistant secretary and now general counsel for the American Hellenic Institute, one of the most effective lobbies in Washington.

Greek-Americans not blessed with family financial support found their own way up the educational ladder. In 1960 and 1970, the US

Where to Eat Like a Greek

HERE ARE SOME OF THE AREA'S MOST AUTHENTIC Greek restaurants.

Aegean Taverna, 2950 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington; 703-841-9494; www.aegeantaverna.com. Aegean Taverna—decorated with Hellenic statues, pottery, and icons—has a very Greek menu. In warm weather, there's outdoor seating with a canopy of grapevines. Live music on Fridays and Saturdays.

Cafe Plaka, 7833 Woodmont Ave., Bethesda; 301-986-1337. Murals of the Parthenon and other Greek images grace the walls of this restaurant, which serves Greek and American food. Specialties include Mediterranean-style veal, lamb, fish, and chicken. Outdoor patio for warm-weather dining.

Greek Deli, 1120 19th St., NW; 202-296-2111. This popular daytime carryout—lines often stretch out to the street—features generous helpings of roast leg of lamb, moussaka, Greek-style chicken, orzo with lentils, and other specialties. Breakfast features sausage-and-egg sandwiches with feta cheese.

Mello's, 4849 Massachusetts Ave., NW;

202-364-1004. A family-oriented restaurant with Greek dishes including moussaka, souvlaki, and baklava as well as American entrées; items from the grill are prepared with a Greek slant.

Mykonos Grill, 121 Congressional La., Rockville; 301-770-5999. A mainstay in downtown DC until its move to the suburbs a few years ago, Mykonos has a Greek-island motif and offers traditional food and grilled items such as swordfish and salmon. Live Greek music and dancing on weekends a couple of times a month.

Parthenon Restaurant, 5510 Connecticut Ave., NW; 202-966-7600; www.parthenon-restaurant.com. The Parthenon, decorated in blue and white with Mediterranean pictures, offers a mainly Greek menu featuring 30 appetizers and entrées in-

cluding Mediterranean seafood and lamb. **Taverna Cretkou**, 818 King St., Alexandria; 703-548-8688. Taverna Cretkou has a Greek-island decor with frescoes and a menu featuring both regional and classic Greek dishes, such as *kikladiitiko*—baby lamb with black olives, red wine, and sun-dried tomatoes. Live music on Thursdays.



Alexandria's Taverna Cretkou evokes the Greek islands.

Who's Who in Greek Washington

WHEN PETE PAPPAS CAME TO WASHINGTON from Sparta in 1902, he lived atop a stable with 17 other immigrants. He worked in candy, fruit, and vegetable stores until 1915, when he bought a pushcart and sold tomatoes, apples, oranges, and lemons.

Pappas then rented a stall in the old Center Market at Fifth and K streets, Northwest. In the 1930s he moved to Union Market—today's Florida Avenue Market, at Fifth and Florida, Northeast—with his son Gus. The Florida Avenue Market is now almost entirely wholesale, but in the 1930s vendors sold goods, chain stores like Giant and Jumbo had warehouses, and a vendor like Gus Pappas bought their excess merchandise and worked all weekend selling it.

One day in the early 1940s, a truck carrying a load of tomatoes had an accident. "Dad bought the whole load, sorted out the damaged ones, and sold the rest," says Gus's son, Peter, 51.

This incident led to their selling packaged tomatoes to Giant and Safeway. Following World War II, Gus's younger brother George joined the company, expanding it to include strawberries. In 1999 Pete Pappas & Sons was joined by Peter's son. It's one of the largest tomato and produce wholesalers in the Mid-Atlantic.

AFTER HIS FATHER DIED IN 1936, WILLIAM Calomiris dropped out of Eastern High School and took jobs, including being a baker's apprentice, to support the family. He served in the Marines, then returned to expand the real-estate business he'd started in 1940 by turning aged buildings into rooming houses. Today the eponymous company is one of the most prominent developers in Washington.

Calomiris cofounded HEROES (Honor Every Responsible Officer's Eternal Sacrifice), which helps support families of police and firefighters killed in the line of duty, and as president of the Greater Washington Board of Trade in 1968 he promoted youth programs and low-income housing.

During the 1968 riots, Calomiris donned riot gear and observed police in action; he later was instrumental in the reconstruction of downtown DC. In 1962 he raised more than \$8 million for the United Givers Fund (today's United Way) and in 1998 was inducted into the Washington Business Hall of Fame. He died in 2000.

IN 1965 DEMOSTHENES "DAN" LECOS WAS part of the effort that expanded McDonald's locally from 3 restaurants to 250 by 1968. That year, Lecos left to operate seven area Pappy's restaurants. He believed in

community life and was instrumental in building Lake Barcroft Recreation Center near Falls Church. In his last years, from 1985 to 1999, he was regional manager for Grecian Delight Foods, which helped popularize the gyro sandwich here.

Since 1999, his son, William D. (for Demosthenes) Lecos, 45, has been vice president for policy at the Greater Washington Board of Trade. Previously he headed the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington.

PETE L. MANOS WAS instrumental in enlarging Giant Food from a grocery on DC's Georgia Avenue in 1936 into today's \$4-billion chain; he served as Giant president from 1992 to 1999.

In 1975 CBS sent television and radio journalist Icarus "Ike" Pappas to Washington from Chicago to cover the Pentagon. In his career, he has covered Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination, Vietnam, Kent State, and six presidential campaigns and has received numerous awards.

With the growth of the city, the brothers Ted and Jim Peadas made a fortune in DC's movie-theater business, starting the old Circle chain and then the production company Circle Films.

Acclaimed crime novelist George Pelecanos—*Hell to Pay* is his latest book—grew up and still lives here; his father owned a coffee shop in downtown DC.

The Yeonas brothers—Stephen, Constantine, Jimmie, and Paul—became major homebuilders in Northern Virginia.

After the war, John Deoudes began DC Vending Company with the late John Cokinos. It operates candy, soda, and cigarette machines and provides jukeboxes and video games to area businesses.

FEMALE PHILANTHROPISTS HAVE RAISED millions for local charities: Aliki Gregory Bryant for the National Rehabilitation Hospital and Second Genesis drug-rehabilitation programs and Angene G. Rafferty for Children's Hospital.

Among prominent women in other fields: Eva Catafyglotu Topping is the author of

many articles and books on women's history, Greek-American history, modern Greek poetry, and more.

In 1979 Barbara Spyridon Pope joined the Small Business Administration, where she rose to administrator. In 1986 she became deputy assistant secretary of Defense and in 1989 assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs. She's now assistant secretary for the Office of Civil Rights at the State Department.

Christine Warnke was founding president of the Hellenic American Women's Council, a national organization of professional women of Greek descent. She serves on the DC Commission for Women and is honorary chair of Boardroom Bound, which promotes women and minorities for corporate boards. Since 1993 she's been a trustee of the National Institute of Building Sciences.

Opera singer Eleni Peyser has performed with the Washington Savoyards,

the Summer Opera Theatre, and the Other Opera Company of Bethesda as well as in concerts and recitals.

GEORGE TAMES, BORN AND RAISED WITHIN sight of the Capitol, became a White House photographer, winning 17 White House News Photographers' Association awards. He died in 1994.

George Peter Alafoginis, from Sparta, began his career in the States as a busboy. In 1942, he opened the Bay State Beef Company, one of the area's largest hotel, restaurant, and institutional suppliers.

Stamatios M. Krimigis, head of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory's space department, is a two-time recipient of the NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement.

More recently, Washington has attracted Greek-American professionals such as Paul Glastris, editor of the *Washington Monthly*; CIA director George Tenet; and Ted Leonis, an AOL executive who is the majority owner of the Washington Capitals.

Greek-Americans figure prominently in American politics, from former presidential candidate Michael Dukakis to US Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland.



William Calomiris as a child in 1922. He became a successful real-estate developer and community leader.

Census showed that second-generation Greek-Americans had the highest educational levels of all ethnic groups. They continue to rank among the best-educated in the United States.

HIGH EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT DESCRIBES Greek-American women as well as men, but equal education doesn't mean equal power.

A few *yiayias* (grandmothers) still don't drive, but it seems that the pattern of male domination—especially in Washington, where Greek-Americans are among the most assimilated—is being broken.

"Don't say that—Greek men won't like it," whispers a Georgetown coed.

Dancing and Singing Like Zorba

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF TRADITIONAL Greek dances: those that originated in villages and those from the cities.

In village dances, participants hold hands or link arms and move in a circle. The leader twirls, jumps, or otherwise improvises, but everyone does the same basic steps. Some say the contact among the dancers, the circular pattern, and the uniformity of steps reflect the unity of village life.

In most urban-based dances, people don't hold hands but dance alone, in pairs, or in groups of three or four. Individual variation is permitted. Urban dances originated in restaurants and nightclubs and among those forced by poverty to leave their villages and seek their fortune elsewhere.

If you've seen either *Zorba the Greek* or *Never on Sunday*, you might recall a line of men dancing the *syrtaki*, or sailor's dance, of which there are dozens of variations. This dance supposedly was created by sailors and fishermen during long hours at sea. The *zembekiko*, a slow dance usually done solo—and, until recently, primarily by men—came from the urban poor and from refugees who came to Greece to escape the early-20th-century violence in Asia Minor.

While the *zembekiko* tends to be about sad feelings, it's usually followed by the *tsifteteli*, a peppy dance with bel-

I'm more concerned about my daughters. They get upset when they see women discounting their achievements in order to assuage the feelings of men.

Although some families don't permit their girls to date until they're 20—and a few whisk their preteen daughters to Greece in hopes of protecting their chastity—there's no question that today's Greek-American woman is less bound by the restrictions imposed on her mother and grandmother.

Air Force lieutenant colonel Theodora Hancock—née Sideropoulos—who served in Thailand during the Vietnam War and then in the Defense Department, and Irene Glinos Schaffner, whose watercolors of DC have

ly-dance moves that can be done alone or with one or two partners of any age. Its rhythms and melodies reflect Turkish, Israeli, and other Middle Eastern influences.

Males who like to dance are considered very manly. Historically, some dances were all-male. The *hasapiko*, or butcher's dance, which involves a lot of jumping, supposedly began when butchers got together at the end of a workday.

During Greece's centuries of occupation by the Ottoman Empire, music and dance brought people together, gave voice to pain, and strengthened them during hard times.

Greek songs are just as often about loss, injustice, revenge, and persistence as they are about love—"Life Is a Lie," "I Wish My Parents Were Alive,"

"You Aren't Worth Hating," "May You Die Alone and Poor," "Don't Give Up Even Though You Are Losing."

At Greek festivals, shouts of "Opa! Opa!" fill the dance floor. "Opa" means "up," but two "opas" mean more. The term is best understood as an expression of encouragement urging dancers not only to keep on dancing but also to take it to the next level—to dance more intensely or jump higher. "Opa! Opa!" is sometimes used just to uplift someone who is discouraged.



It's hard to hear Greek music without wanting to dance.

been purchased by presidents as gifts for foreign dignitaries, are two local Greek-American women who have achieved.

Maria Kyriakoudis has worked alongside her husband, Paul, for more than 20 years in the restaurant business, currently at Melio's in DC's Spring Valley neighborhood. She works long hours and inspects the kitchen daily to ensure the quality of the food.

Even traditional Greek-American women don't have a history of being passive. Almost as soon as they got off the boat, they formed organizations such as *Elpis* (Hope), which developed into a nationwide church organization called *Philoptochos* (Friends of the Poor). Today, *Philoptochos* and AHEPA's Daughters of Penelope (for adult women) and Maids of Athena (for teen girls) are involved in educational and charitable projects, including battered-women's shelters, medical care for the indigent, schools for wayward children, and homes for the aged.

Within the church, women sit on the parish council, the most powerful organization in the church, and some have served as presidents of their councils. Women represent their churches at national conferences, and a few have served as cantors. In December, Elenie Huszagh, a first-generation Greek-American attorney and an active member of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, was made the 21st president of the National Council of Churches.

"MAMA, WHEN I GROW UP I'M GOING to marry Basili."

"No, you aren't. He's going to be a priest."

"But Greek priests can marry."

"That's not the point. Priests' wives aren't allowed to have fun, wear pretty clothes, or go anywhere but church."

Times have changed. Eleni Paris, 29, wife of Father Jim of the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George in Bethesda, wears colorful clothes, laughs, and—although involved in church—has a life of her own as a therapist. This is a far cry from when few Greek-American women worked outside the home except in a family business.

Yet I've never met a Greek-American woman who put her career before family, unless she rejected the idea of marriage altogether. Those who work tend to be at least as invested in their families as in their careers.

The homemakers I've met are generally afforded the dignity that comes with being seen as a modern-day Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, the glue holding the family together. The Greek word for housewife is *nikokira*, which means worthy homemaker.

"I love everything about being a Greek woman—observing the name days and religious holidays, making the traditional foods, and keeping our religious and cultural Hellenism alive," says first-generation baby boomer Irene Fostieris, a nurse before she and her husband, Kosta, opened the popular Greek Deli on 19th Street in downtown DC. "We Greeks take in our parents more, too."

“AREN'T YOU GOING TO WRITE ABOUT us—those of us who weren't lucky enough to go to college?” asks a movie-star-handsome 50-year-old waiter. Some working-class Greeks in Washington came as displaced persons after World War II and sent so much of their earnings back to their war-torn villages that they had to stay at their jobs.

One construction worker entered the country illegally and was sent back four times. He complains of being picked on by rednecks who can no longer get away with harassing African-Americans, Hispanics, and other “official” minorities.

“There's only a little more than a million of us Greeks in the US—what do you expect?” he says. “Especially when your English is not so good because you don't have time to go to night school.”

There are also small-business owners, such as Gus Theoharis, owner of Agape Bookstore on 15th Street, Northwest. His lunchtime

“I have people who don't know a word of Greek requesting house blessings and baptisms in Greek,” says Father Basil. “It sounds better that way, they say.”

Bible-study and prayer groups attract believers of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds. Close by is Eleftherios “Lakis” Karavangelos. His snack kiosk has been at 18th and K in downtown DC for more than 20 years.

The Greek Retirees Club—a group of former small-business owners, waiters, chefs, and others—gathers in the food court at Wheaton Plaza every morning. At night, members continue their discussions at the nearby Roy Rogers, across the street from the Baskin-Robbins owned by Constantine Vuras and close to Spiro Levantis's Marathon Deli. They discuss politics, compare recipes for stuffed tomatoes, debate which part of Greece boasts the best olive oil and the largest grapes, and exchange tips on how to keep their prized fig trees alive during Washington's winters.

It took me months to approach the retirees club, a modern-day version of the Greek *cafe-nio* or coffeehouse—traditionally all-male territory. Liberated or not, anyone raised as a good Greek girl doesn't walk up to tables of strange men, describe her credentials, and start asking questions.

One day I took the plunge. Within minutes, I felt as if I were listening to my parents tell their stories of the past, half in Greek, half in English. When one retiree reached into his pocket and gave me a tomato from his garden, I nearly burst into tears.

ARE THESE MEN THE LAST OF THE OLD Greeks—those who speak the native language, care about their fig trees, and still have village ways?

“I have more success than I ever dreamed of,” says a Potomac physician, his eyes becoming moist, “but I'd trade it all for a few days with my grandmother in that old Greek neighborhood on Fifth Street, where everyone knew everyone and there was Greek music in the air. Nobody had to make appointments with their kids, and nobody had to go through life alone. There was always a relative or Greek friend nearby to talk to. Maybe that's why we Greeks never needed therapy back then. We talked to other people all the time, about everything.

“And then there was *yiayia*, the repository of all the old traditions. What will happen when all the *yiayias* die and nobody speaks Greek anymore? What will be left?”

THE CHURCH WILL BE LEFT. NOW THAT THE Greek-American community has dispersed into the suburbs, the church is the focal point for many.

In the '60s, services were conducted primarily in Greek. Today, except for pockets of recent immigrants, many young people can't speak Greek, and services are bilingual. Congregations also contain more converts. According to local clergy, anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of non-Orthodox spouses convert.

“They're attracted by the beauty of the sacraments, by the warmth of the community, and by that feeling of belonging to a faith and a culture that has stood the test of time,” says Father Basil of Sts. Constantine and Helen. “There is a hunger for the stability of tradition. I have people who don't know a word of Greek requesting house blessings and baptisms in Greek. ‘It sounds better that way,’ they say.”

Greek priests wear embroidered vestments of gold, red, purple, or silver. Altar boys are more modestly attired, but the banners they carry glitter with silver and gold. The churches are decorated with icons, and the scent of frankincense and myrrh fills the air. Before the priest appears, cantors in black robes chant. The congregation stands when the priest reads from a Bible whose silver-and-gold cover sparkles. The service is made up of rituals that have remained unchanged from early Christianity.

The Greek Orthodox church is based on the Christian premise that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to forgive sins. There's also the belief in the Holy Trinity—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and in sacraments such as baptism, communion, and confession.

The churches are doing well, not only because of converts but also because some young people are coming back.

“Among the third and fourth generations, the sense of belonging to a Greek community is more theological and philosophical than national,” says Reverend Doctor John Tavlarides of St. Sophia.

However, the return is slow. Like most of

their contemporaries, young Greek-Americans want to fit in. Some reject what they see as an antiquated culture of rituals and obligations, and few new immigrants are arriving to keep the ethnicity alive. Yet local colleges have active Hellenic clubs, and even children of mixed marriages show interest in things Greek—if not the faith, then the language, dance, history, literature, or art.

A TRIP TO GREECE SEEMS TO BE PIVOTAL IN strengthening a Greek identity. "When my parents took me on vacation to Greece, I groaned," says 16-year-old Cassandra (Sandy). "Another family duty! But when cousins I had never met before greeted me at the airport with orchids and were so excited about having me that they ironed my socks, I became a believer. I soaked up the culture like I soaked up the sun. The Greek part of me woke up. Even though I'm totally American, when I grow up I'm going to do for my kids what my parents did for me: take them to Greece."

Maryland musician George Barlas, 32, has traveled all around the country playing his bouzouki, similar to a large mandolin. He's noticed that trips to Greece have created enthusiasm for bouzouki music even among young people who are almost completely American-identified.

At some of the Greek nightspots and festivals, young people balance glasses of ouzo

on their heads and look as if they want to break plates, just as in the old country—a traditional expression of abandon to the exhilaration of the moment. Even when they

"For me, being Greek means a way of thought, the spirit of exploration, the thirst for knowledge, and a sense of universal brotherhood."

don't quite know the steps, they join in the dance circles. When the *tsifteteli* starts, the floor is packed with young and old, Greek and non-Greek. The love of life knows no divide.

YET PENELOPE APOSTOLIDES IS GONE. HER local radio program and that of Demetrios "Mimis" Tsintolas, both full of Greek jokes and music, no longer exist. From 1950 to 1995, *Penelope's Hellenic Radio Hour* was a Sunday staple on local stations.

In the 1950s Penelope rented the former

Colony Theater near Georgia Avenue and Upshur Street, Northwest, and showed Greek movies monthly. In later years, her films were shown at the old Sheridan Theater at Rittenhouse and Sheridan streets and then at the old Silver Theater in Silver Spring. Going to Greek movies was a social event and a way of keeping the culture alive. Today there are no regular screenings of Greek movies here.

Watching satellite TV from Greece, I can "feel Greek" 12 hours a day if I want to. But it's not the same as being greeted at the door of the Silver with Penelope's smiles and promises to fix me up with a nice Greek boy.

Unlike Baltimore, Chicago, and New York, Washington has no Greektown. The younger generation is almost fully Americanized, and even some of the second generation don't care about what happens in the old country. Some have become Protestants.

Yet the Greek spirit lives on.

"Aside from being Orthodox," says Father Jim, "for me being Greek means having the Hellenic spirit, which is a way of thought, the spirit of exploration, the thirst for knowledge, and a sense of universal brotherhood."

"This is America," says Marilyn Rouvelas, 57, an Arlington convert to Greek Orthodoxy who wrote *A Guide to Greek Traditions and Customs in America*. "Everyone can be Greek in their own way." 