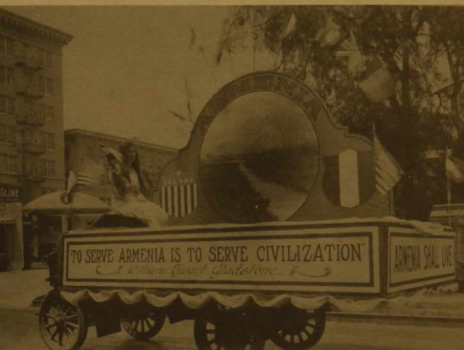


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The Armenian Community of California:

The First One Hundred Years



Armenian Float, Panama Pacific Exposition, San Francisco, 1915

A Photographic Exhibit on the Occasion of the California Armenian Centennial

Sponsored by

The Armenian Assembly of America
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**The Armenian
Community
of California:
The First One
Hundred Years**

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They Came From Armenia

The Lure of America

Armenians were on these American shores as early as the 17th century. It is not until the 19th century, however, that history records the evidence of steady Armenian immigration to America.

Due to the oppressive nature of the Ottoman Turkish government and the influence of American missionaries in Asia Minor (Armenia) scores of Armenian young men were encouraged to seek higher education and economic opportunity in the United States. Many were "birds of passage" who returned to their homeland upon the realization of their objectives; subsequently they complemented the American missionary influence with a resounding clarion call to "the land of the second chance" in the Armenian communities of the interior where the effects of racial, religious and political persecution and economic confiscation were taking their toll.

Under Ottoman Turkish rule the goal was to survive, but in America, according to the glowing reports, anything was possible. And so many Armenians chose to live in a country where there was a safe haven, a place to which they could direct their kin to escape discriminatory and confiscatory taxes, tyrannical public officials, racism, murder, and a homeland in which they had become a persecuted minority. By 1894, more than 3,000 Armenians had made the United States their home. Some had ventured as far west as the Golden State of California.

The Pioneers

Perhaps the first Armenian to visit California was Alexander Arakelian, a representative of the Russian-American Company, who spent some time in 1829 in San Francisco on company business before leaving for home. In 1874, Mardiros Yanukian visited California. His stay, while also temporary, was significant. The account of his sojourn to Philadelphia relatives had sufficient appeal to encourage members of the Normart family (meaning "new man" in Armenian) to settle in Fresno in the 1880's.

But for all practical purposes, the first permanent Armenian settlers in California were the Seropian brothers of Marzovan, Turkey: Hagop and Garabed in 1881, followed in 1882 by Simon, George, and John. After a short stay in Worcester, Massachusetts, Hagop, on the advice of his doctor, left the Bay State with his brother for a warmer climate. They found it in Fresno, California in the autumn of 1881. They were enthusiastic not only about the climate but were also delighted with the atmosphere of freedom and unlimited opportunity in the San Joaquin Valley town of 1,300 inhabitants. Their letters to compatriots in the eastern United States spurred Melkon Markarian, Stephan Shahamirian, and Bedros Bedrosian (later Peter Peters) to join the Seropians in Fresno in 1882.

The first pioneers were instrumental in convincing a group of Armenians from their native town of Marzovan to pull up stakes and journey as a unit to the New World of Fresno, California, the "Garden of Eden," a "place where things grow without cultivation," and a "land of unrealized opportunity." On September 9, 1883, forty-five men, women, and children, including the Sinanians (whose son Jonathan was the first Armenian child born in California, in Fresno on January 6, 1884) stepped off the Southern Pacific train onto the platform of the Fresno station. The following November, nineteen more Armenians arrived in Fresno directly from Turkey. The first settlers eked out a living peddling fruit, working in the fields, and selling candies, tobacco, and groceries.

An interesting sidelight to the early Armenian story in California concerns the Seropian brothers who were credited with setting up the first fig packing plant in the Valley. During a controversy with the monopolistic Southern Pacific Railroad over high and discriminatory shipping rates, the Seropians organized a mule train to the San Francisco market in open competition with the California "Octopus," thus adding fuel to the argument that the Valley needed another railroad. The Seropian episode became a television special "Six Wagons to the Sea" in 1963 on the CBS "Great Adventure" series.

In the 1883 Marsovan group were the Arakelian brothers, Harry and Krikor. By 1918, their 3,000 acres, employing 1,500 men, made them the "melon kings" of the Valley. Krikor Arakelian went on to become the founder of the Mission Bell wineries, and the first Armenian multi-millionaire in California. Another noted rancher was Vahan Azhderian who had arrived in San Francisco in 1890 at the age of 15. In 1905 he became the first "melon king" of the Imperial Valley and planted the first grapevines there.

Contributing to the agricultural development of the San Joaquin Valley, Armenians introduced the yellow watermelon, the Persian, Cassaba, Diarbekir and Turkish melons, and the Armenian cucumber. Krikor Arslanian of Yetttem prepared the first sulphur dipped raisins for commercial use, a forebear of the golden bleach process, which resulted in the California Golden seedless raisin.

Within 50 years of the Seropians' arrival, Armenians controlled the wholesale fruit and vegetable business in Fresno and owned 40% of the county's raisin acreage and represented 25% of its raisin growers. The Sun-Maid Raisin Corporation included many of them as trustees and stockholders. Other Armenians founded and governed California's first Raisin Growers Association. They were also the leading dried fruit packers and green fruit shippers, responsible for 15% of all the grapes that left California. An Armenian innovation was fancy fruit packing. A holiday season is not complete in the supermarkets and specialty stores without stocks of fancy fruit packages, all ready for mailing. Another important Armenian food product, much touted by nutritionists, is the ancient wheat cereal, bulgur. In the one hundred year history of California's Armenians they have produced almost every type of agricultural product grown in the Golden State.

Making It

Following the accession of Abdul Hamid II to the Ottoman Sultanate in 1876 and the subsequent harassment of his Armenian subjects, the emigration of Armenians took on increasingly greater proportions. Many Armenians correctly read the danger signals given off



Bakalian's Meat Market, Fowler, 1917.

by "the sick man of Europe" and pulled up their ancient roots. Eventually thousands were inspired to seek refuge and a new life in America. The compelling factor in Hamid's calculated plan to solve the "Armenian Question" was the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896. In a period of two years several hundred thousand Armenians were annihilated. The real exodus began. What had begun as an "exploratory" movement to America became a tidal wave.

For comfort of mind, heart, and body, the new arrivals, like other ethnic immigrant groups, sought out their fellow countrymen and soon created "Armenian towns," particularly in Watertown, Massachusetts and Fresno, California. Armenian immigration was now marked by the transplantation of whole groups from Turkish Armenian urban and rural centers. Possibly the news that the climate of California was like that of Armenia attracted hundreds to the Golden State. Strengthened memories of the distant homeland and ancestral heritage through the church, compatriotic organizations, and the Armenian press reinforced the newcomers' determination to cling to their native tongue, religion, customs, traditions, and foods, while making the transition from an alien status to American citizenship. Assimilation was slowed down due to the church, strong family ties, language, clannishness, continuing arrival of newcomers, renewed ethnic awareness, and native opposition.

Before the turn of the century, while most of California's Armenians settled on farms as owners, laborers, or renters, there were others who found gainful employment in town. In 1897, of 329 Armenians in Fresno County, fifty were professionals or businessmen. The rest were mostly renters of land who cultivated 1800 acres of fruit - mostly grapes.

Among the early ranchers in the Valley's Armenian community was Peter Peters, who had come to California in 1882 and sent for his family the following year. Peters purchased forty acres at ninety dollars an acre south of Fresno and attracted others to the area known as "Peters Addition to Fresno." A relative of Peters, A. Minasian, was perhaps the first California agriculturalist to produce pistachio nuts on a commercial basis.

In December 1885, Armenians acquired the first section of 20 acres of land in Fresno's Mountain View Cemetery which became Ararat Cemetery. It has remained a tradition for many Armenians of Fresno County to choose "Ararat" as their final resting place and is the largest Armenian Cemetery in the United States.

The Seropians' and Peters' agricultural prowess was also matched by Melkon Markarian and his son Henry. In 1894 they made the first shipment of California figs (White Adriatic) east of the Rockies. At the end of the First World War, Henry Markarian controlled about 20% of all the figs grown in the United States. Markarian was elected the first president of the California Fig Growers Association in 1918.

The Armenian Faith

For 1700 years one of the most important factors in the preservation of the Armenian national character and identity has been the Armenian Apostolic Church. In 301 A.D. Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as the national religion. The Church is the one institution which closely binds Armenians all over the world. Under the aegis of the Church, a written alphabet was created in the 5th century A.D. which further solidified Armenian unity.

The presence of an Armenian Church has always been the best indicator of the existence of a sizable Armenian community in America. Armenian Apostolic

Church services in California were conducted as early as 1894 in Fresno. On October 14, 1900, the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church was consecrated by the Primate of the American Diocese, Rt. Rev. Bishop Hovsep Sarajian. It was the second Armenian Apostolic Church in America. Some of the parishes that followed were Fowler (1907), Los Angeles (1912), San Francisco (1920), and Oakland (1926). The most recent church to be dedicated was in San Diego in 1981. Owing to the distance from the Diocese office in New York and the steady growth of the Armenian communities in Califor-



The First Armenian Presbyterian Church, Fresno, 1897.

nia, a Western Diocese was established in 1927. Today there are two dioceses of the Apostolic Church in California made up of over twenty Armenian Apostolic parishes in the state. Each church is an Armenian center not only for religious services but cultural and social activities as well.

Due to the influence of American missionaries in Turkey, many Armenians became members of Protestant denominations, forming their own Armenian Protestant or Evangelical churches. The first Armenian Protestant church in the state was Fresno's First Armenian Presbyterian in 1897, whose pastor, Rev. G.T. Burbank, was a former American missionary in Armenia. As an outcome of the objections which a few Americans raised against some Armenian Congregationalists attending American churches in Fresno, the Pilgrim Armenian Congregational church was founded in 1901. Presently there are about a dozen Armenian Protestant churches in the state.

Today the majority of Armenians are of the Armenian Apostolic faith. While the Protestant Armenians are a sizeable minority, Armenian Roman Catholics make for the smallest group among Armenians in the United States. In California they have one church and a school in Los Angeles.

Branching Out

While all Armenian roads west led to Fresno in the early decades, the raisin capital itself became a launching pad for the founding of other Armenian communities in the Valley. Yettem (the Armenian word for "Eden") was the only settlement in America that was originally established (1901) and inhabited by Armenians. By 1910, about twelve per cent of the Armenians in America were in the San Joaquin Valley.

As a result of the Adana massacres of 1909 in Turkey, many more thousands of Armenians escaped Turkish repression. The persecution that ensued and lasted until the infamous genocide of April 24, 1915, witnessed the coming of 34,000 Armenians to America

including over 2,000 destined for California. By 1918, about fifteen thousand Armenians had become permanent residents in California.

Although Armenians were often stereotyped on the basis of their agricultural accomplishments, because of their considerable number there were also many who were businessmen or who entered the professions. Armenians however, were conspicuously absent from employee rosters in the public sector such as the police and fire departments, post office, public schools and libraries. As a matter of record there were no Armenians teaching in the Fresno public schools until 1921.

The Armenian Press

The records of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service state that eighty-three per cent of all Armenians who entered the country could read and write. As early as 1890, two years before Fresno had a public library, the Fresno Armenian Library Union was organized, an example that was emulated by Armenians in Fowler and Los Angeles. Armenian elders established schools to teach the mother tongue within the Apostolic Church and held classes after school and on Saturdays.

The first Armenian newspaper in California was a non-partisan weekly called *Kaghakatzy (The Citizen)* in Fresno. It was a one-man publication operated by H. H. Eguinian which appeared on October 7, 1902. In 1899, Eguinian enjoyed the distinction of publishing the first book in Armenian in California. *Kaghakatzy* evolved through numerous editorial and name changes until 1923 when it became *Nor Or (New Day)* which continues to be published in the Armenian language in Los Angeles as the organ of the Armenian Democratic League. The second Armenian language newspaper in California, *Asbarez (Arena)* was started as a non-partisan paper in 1908 by a group of Fresno Armenians under the editorship of A. G. Seklemian. Currently it is published in Los Angeles and has become the organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

Contemporary publications are *Nor Or, Massis, Lraper, Kach Nazar, Nor Serount*, and *Asbarez* in Armenian; *The California Courier* (1957) published in Fresno and *The Armenian Observer* (1970) published in Los Angeles, are English language weeklies; *Nor Gyank* an Armenian/English weekly founded in 1978 comes out of Glendale. Three other newspapers emanate from California college campuses: *Mashtots*, by American-Armenian International College in La Verne; *The Armenian Horizon*, published by the UCLA Armenian Students Association and UCLA Armenian Studies Program; and *Hye Sharzhoom (Armenian Action)*, published by the Armenian Students Organization and Armenian Studies Program of California State University, Fresno. Many Armenian churches also publish newsletters.

Social Organizations

The Armenian quest for social outlets was addressed within the Armenian community with the founding of scores of organizations that adequately took care of the joiner's needs; from the Bay Area to San Diego they have covered a wide spectrum, literally from A (Armenian Assembly) to the esoteric Z (Quiver Carriers of Zeitun). Today there are about 300 Armenian organizations in the state. There is something for everyone. One of the most unique organizations in California today is the Triple X Fraternity founded in 1918. Prohibited from joining local school fraternities and ostracized from general American community social affairs, eight American-Armenians set themselves a goal of recruiting thirty (XXX) fellow Fresno Armenian men. Eventually the idea was harnessed to charitable ac-

tivities and spread to Armenians elsewhere in California. Presently it has over a thousand members in eleven California chapters.

The Armenian Genocide

With the outbreak of World War I, there was a renewed concern for the welfare of countrymen in Turkey. Unfortunately the worst fears were realized when the "Young Turk" dictatorship launched its genocidal program to finalize the "Armenian Question." On April 24, 1915, orders were carried out to round up and execute the Armenian intellectuals within the Ottoman Empire. Over one and a half million Armenian men, women and children were massacred. Another one million who survived the genocide of 1915-1922 were compelled to flee a homeland that was theirs since the 8th century B.C. No Armenian family in the world was untouched by the 20th century's first genocide. The combined protests of governments, organizations, and individuals, Armenian and non-Armenian alike, were to no avail in preventing the genocide.

During World War I, over six hundred California Armenians joined the United States armed forces. Several thousand Armenians in the diaspora, mostly from the United States, fought in the Allied Forces in Europe and the Middle East. John A. Shishmanian, a native-born American and an alumnus of Stanford, commanded the Armenian Volunteers with the French Foreign Legion under General Allenby in the Syrian campaign.



Armenian-American Volunteers, World War I.

The wartime decline in Armenian immigration was radically turned around in 1921. In that one year, Armenians entering the United States set an all time record that still holds, when almost eleven thousand gained admission here - the remnants of the Armenian massacres. But with the passage of the immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 which set up discriminatory "quota systems," Armenians gaining admission declined to less than nine thousand from 1925-1949. This ebb-tide reached a low of fifty-three Armenian immigrants in 1943. The "national origins" clause was finally stricken from the statutes in 1965 when the present immigration law went into effect banning discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, and nationality.

All Roads Lead from Fresno

Until the 1920's, the Armenian focus had been on Fresno and its agricultural opportunities. America's farmers were among the first to feel the heavy impact of the end of the wartime boom. The Armenian farmers of the San Joaquin Valley were no exception. Having borrowed large sums of money to expand their holdings

and take advantage of the wartime profits surge, many farmers overextended themselves. With the collapse of prices after World War I, scores of farm families defaulted and lost their productive lands. Many an Armenian farm family gathered what tangible goods it still possessed and left Fresno County seeking a new life to the north in Sacramento and the San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose Bay Area or to the south and the milder climate of the ever-growing Los Angeles County.

By 1930, Armenians were no longer concentrated in the Central Valley. Los Angeles had surpassed Fresno as the number one Armenian colony in California. Other urban areas such as San Francisco, Oakland, Pasadena, and Sacramento also acquired large Armenian populations. These urban centers collectively represented sixty per cent of California's Armenians at the beginning of the "Great Depression." The remaining forty per cent remained basically rural dwellers. Along county lines the top five were Los Angeles, followed by Fresno, San Francisco, Tulare, and Alameda. While Fresno remained the ancestral "home" in California, the other Armenian centers assumed increasing importance from the 1930's on.

By 1898, a small group of Armenians from Russia had already settled in Los Angeles. They encouraged their friends and relatives to leave the Czarist domain south of the Caucasus. By 1914, about 2,500 had immigrated to America. Some members of the Los Angeles colony eventually made their fortunes in rubbish collection and disposal as early as 1908. Thirty years later Armenians controlled seventy-five per cent of the waste disposal business in the county. They remain a solid force in all aspects of that vital enterprise today. Among them was Ben K. Kazarian who started in 1918 with a one-horse-drawn wagon. Today his BKK Co. operates fifty vacuum trucks that remove hazardous materials. Another family, the Agajanians, tied their scavenger operation to pig-farming as well. In 1960, five out of seven officers of the State Rubbish Collectors Association were Armenians. Hagop Shirvanian has been a member of the California Solid Waste Management Board for years.

Rug Merchants: Myth and Reality

Prior to their arrival in the United States and California, Armenians were universally known as the foremost merchants and dealers of Oriental rugs. Their experience and knowledge in this endeavor gave them the opportunity to introduce these works of art which are also used as floor coverings. These businesses provided some of the impetus for the founding of Armenian colonies outside of Fresno County.

Probably the first Oriental rug entrepreneur in California was Iskandar Bey, an Armenian, who opened a shop in Oakland in 1893. After a couple of years he sold his business to his nephews B. M. and Paul Kourian. In 1900 Paul went to Los Angeles and established the first Oriental rug store in southern California. B. M. Kourian continued to operate the Oakland store under the name of "Mihran" until 1913 when he sold his inventory of rugs to the White House department store in San Francisco. Headquartered in Los Angeles since 1953 is Harold and Ted Haserjian's "Carpeteria" Company, "the supermarket of the carpet industry." It includes forty-six stores in California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, and Texas. Although others have entered the field, Armenians continue to enjoy a unique reputation from San Francisco to San Diego in the capacity of dealers, both retail and wholesale, or as cleaners and repairers of Oriental rugs.

Inevitably the stereotype of the Armenian rug dealer

soon evolved, although there were more Armenian tailors, barbers, cleaners and pressers, shoemakers, and professionals. In the Bay Area today, there are about twenty active Armenian rug dealers, but over forty pharmacists, doctors, and dentists. And in Los Angeles there are over sixty Armenian service station owners alone, eclipsing the rug dealers in the region. Suffice it to say that Armenians in California have entered almost every field of professional, industrial, and commercial life.

Family and Community

The glue that held the Armenians together was the father-dominated but mother-centered Armenian family wherein traditions and customs were maintained. The conflict between heredity and environment began with the second generation who learned of democracy in the public schools and initiated changes within their own families. Children were naturally bilingual and inclined to speak English in preference to Armenian because of associations away from home. Parents, oddly enough, picked up much of their English from their children and verbal intercourse became spotted with quaint Armenian-English expression. In contrast to American society, it was customary and indicative of filial loyalty that children lived at home until married. For years divorce was alien to the Armenians. Of the thousands of Armenian immigrants who came to the United States from 1899-1932, only five females are known to have been divorced. In the fifty year history of the Armenians in Fresno, less than fifty divorces had been granted by 1930.

The early Armenian "colonies" in America, were not without a unique cultural pattern which had characteristic uniformity wherever there was a concentrated Armenian population. Rare was the Armenian community which did not have its rug merchant, barber, tailor, shoemaker, carpenter, jeweler, lawyer, physician, dentist, clergyman, merchant, and storekeeper who specialized in stocking those standard items requested by his countrymen. Armenian shops provided meeting places and rest stops for the Armenian residents in the vicinity, not unlike the cracker-barrel meetings in rural American village stores.



Nalbandian's Flower stand, San Francisco.

If the Armenian community was of fair size, then it usually had its bakery and coffeehouse. California's first Armenian bakery was Fresno's Valley Bakery in 1922. Its round flat cracker bread not only met the Armenian community's needs, but like yoghurt (introduced in New York City in 1884 by Dr. Markar Dadourian), gained a place in the American diet and supermarket as a gourmet item. The coffeehouse became a rendezvous

for friends and bachelors where an Armenian newspaper, a strong cup of Armenian coffee, a game of backgammon, and the fellowship of compatriots were always available.

Anti-Armenian Bigotry

Despite the excellent record of the Armenians in America, the strongest prejudice by the native born against Armenians was in Fresno County. Not being class conscious, having no interest in labor unions, and showing no dissatisfaction with working conditions, they incurred the hostility of American workers and were scorned. The differences in food habits, customs, dress, language, and religion were also contributing factors. Furthermore, the fact that the Fresno Armenians were a large homogeneous entity made them conspicuous. What many a native failed to recognize was that the Armenians were inured to oppression. In comparison to the Turkish yoke, American bigotry was mild. As was often the case among successful immigrant groups, earlier settlers in Fresno envied their success. Indeed, discrimination was so strong and pervasive that Armenians were excluded from social clubs, fraternal organizations, and the Fresno State College sororities and fraternities, and discouraged from seeking employment in the public sector. They paid a higher price per acre than any other nationality, from twenty to two hundred percent above average. And yet they succeeded in accumulating more property in Fresno County than any other national group. However, for years restrictive covenants designated particular areas of Fresno out-of-bounds to Armenian home buyers. In time, the discriminatory covenants were outlawed by anti-discrimination housing laws.

Another aspect of intolerance was the compulsion many immigrants felt to sever old world ties hoping that it would expedite their entry into the American mainstream. As a result, some Armenians changed their names by dropping the "i-a-n" suffix or Anglicizing their full names. Presently, name-changing is rare in the Armenian community. This is probably due in part to a renewed and revitalized ethnic awareness in this country especially since the 1960's and in no small measure to Armenians whose names have become familiar in the American community.

In time the Armenian reaction to bigotry was to organize. Ted Ashjian of Fresno arranged a meeting in 1931 of the Armenian members of the American Legion of Fresno. They instituted the Armenian-American Citizens League which was able to present a united front. Its success was soon emulated with branches in the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

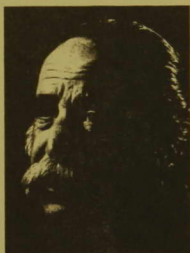
Racial prejudice and discrimination in Fresno County were quite strong and longer-lasting than in any other Armenian community in the United States. It has gradually dissipated since World War II. Unfortunately it is distressing to note that ethnic intolerance has not disappeared. Prejudice and conflict presently focus on Armenian newcomers from the Middle East and Soviet Armenia. With large Armenian minorities in Hollywood, Pasadena, and Glendale today, most of whom have recently emigrated to America, social tension is again a serious concern in the schools and in the community.

Armenians in the Arts

Complementing the many successful Armenian agriculturalists were numerous Armenians who made outstanding contributions in other fields of endeavor. Among the early California Armenian artists was sculptor Haig Patigian, one-time president of the Bohemian Club, whose bronze statue of William McKinley is in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park; his remarkable

creation of the sitting Lincoln still commands attention in front of San Francisco City Hall. Henry Lion was another sculptor whose subjects dealt with American and California history: "Felipe de Neve" in Los Angeles' Olvera Street, "The Pioneer," "Juan Bautista De Anza," and "The Stage Coach." Varaz Samuelian's statue of the Armenian hero David of Sassoun is an imposing sight in front of the old Fresno County Courthouse. The late Esther Fuller (nee Torosian) spearheaded the drive for the architectural triumph - the Oakland Museum.

It is said that film is the art form of the Twentieth Century; if so, then Rouben Mamoulian shares in the credit. His directorial talents were evident in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" which was Fredric March's first Academy Award performance, and "Queen Christina," one of Greta Garbo's films. Mamoulian's genius in combining substance with entertainment in musicals was applauded in his outstanding stage productions of Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma," and "Carousel."



William Saroyan, 1908-1981.

If ever a literary skyrocket burst upon the American scene, it was Fresno's native son William Saroyan, with his *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* in 1934. Saroyan never stopped turning out short stories, screenplays, novels, commentaries, articles, and plays until he died in 1981. His rejection of the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 for his play *The Time of Your Life* underlined the unique idealism of Fresno's *Here Comes There Goes You Know Who*. While Armenian farmers helped make Fresno County the most productive agricultural area in the world, William Saroyan, Fresno's Everyman, put the city on the map. Rejecting honors in his lifetime, it is fitting and perhaps ironical that he is the first American of Armenian ancestry to be honored by his native city by having his name placed on a public building - the Fresno Convention Center William Saroyan Theatre.

Other Armenians who made contributions to the literary and artistic fields include the late University of California, Berkeley Professor Richard Hagopian, (*The Dove Brings Peace*); Leon Surmelian (*I Ask You Ladies and Gentlemen*), and Laura Kalpakian (*Beggars and Choosers*). In the arts there are the late Mihran Serailian, who was Luther Burbank's personal artist; Manuel Tolegian, prolific Los Angeles painter whose Armenian themes have been displayed in museums here and abroad; Jean Dakessian whose oil pump and tank sculptures and paintings have been a Coalinga attraction for years; John Altoon, one of the leading abstract artists of the Los Angeles scene until his tragic death in 1969.

In music there are San Francisco's Lucine Amara, a Metropolitan Opera star for thirty years; the late Haig Yaghjian, conductor of the Fresno Symphony; the late Ross Baghdasarian whose popular compositions and records ("*Come on a My House*", the "*Chipmunks*") sold in the millions; the late Rick Besoyan whose musical "*Little Mary Sunshine*" was a hit spoof of operettas; Patricia Michaelian, concert pianist.

Armenians have also succeeded on the screen stage, and television and these include Ray Agayan (costume designer), Guy Thomajian (screenwriter), Hank Moonjean (producer), the late Akim Tamiroff, Mike Connors ("*Mannix*," "*Today's FBI*"), Cher (nee Sarkisian), and Howard Kazanjian (Executive Producer, "*Raiders of the Lost Ark*").

Settling Down

The period between the Crash of 1929 and the Allied victory in 1945 was one of retrenchment and resettlement for many California Armenians. Even though movement to California from abroad and the eastern United States declined noticeably, there was considerable relocation going on within the state. This rejuvenation process was evidenced by the establishment of new businesses, shops and stores; the founding of new parishes, churches, and community centers, new organizations, increased memberships in established clubs and societies; and the emphasis on social functions (banquets, concerts, lectures, dances, bazaars, plays, and picnics). Nowadays, on some weekends in Los Angeles there may be as many as half a dozen functions on the same day appealing to various segments of the southland's Armenian society.

World War II and Its Aftermath

In the course of World War II, several thousand Armenian-Americans from California saw service in the Armed Forces and many gave their lives in defense of their new homeland. The most honored California Armenian serviceman was the late Lt. Victor "Transport" Maghakian of Fresno. He fought with Carlson's Raiders in the Pacific and went on to win the Navy Cross, two Silver Stars, two Purple Hearts, and a Bronze Star, being discharged as one of the most decorated Marines of the war. His exploits as well as that of Carlson's Raiders were depicted in the movie "Gung Ho."



UC Berkeley Armenian Club, 1950.

World War II introduced many American servicemen to the wonders of the Golden State, and among them were Armenians from the East. With them the great Armenian surge west was renewed in the post war years. The factors that attracted the veterans and their families west were the climate, educational and

economic opportunities, existence of Armenian colonies, friends and relatives, and a chance to start a new life.

The overwhelming preference was Los Angeles. At the same time there was a strong incentive to seek a higher education not only because of the G.I. Bill but because of the upward mobility it offered. In the late 1940's a record number of over one hundred Armenian students at the University of California, Berkeley, warranted a reconstitution of the Armenian Students Club. A good number of them were male students from out-of-state, most of whom became permanent residents of California. Whereas most Armenian breadwinners had been engaged as shopkeepers or skilled craftsmen, a trade usually acquired in the old country, the trend was now towards the professions and white collar ranks. Tailors, barbers, shoemakers, cleaners, and pressers, once the predominant occupations, have become almost extinct in the Armenian community. The pattern has been radically altered. The sons and daughters of Armenian ranchers, rug merchants, and tradesmen are now involved in accounting, banking, computers, electronics, insurance, law, medicine, merchandising, public service, and especially in teaching. Today every Armenian community has significant representation in the local school and college faculties.

World War II Refugees

It was in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1947, that George Mardikian, restaurateur of San Francisco's "Omar Khayyam's," host chef of the 1945 formative meeting of the United Nations, and then food consultant to the U.S. Army in Europe, discovered a camp harboring 3,500 destitute Armenian refugees. Together with Suren Saroyan, a San Francisco attorney, he founded the American Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA). Eventually several thousand Armenian displaced persons found new homes in California.

Challenges and Innovations in Education

The 60's marked another period of remarkable growth in the Armenian communities in California. The tide from the East and abroad continued to roll into the Golden State and with it came a concern for perpetuating the Armenian culture, language, and traditions. An interest was soon generated to establish Armenian day schools. In 1964 Holy Martyrs Ferrahian Armenian High School was founded in Encino, the first in the USA (95% of its graduates attend college) followed by nine other schools in California, with a total enrollment of almost 3,000 students.

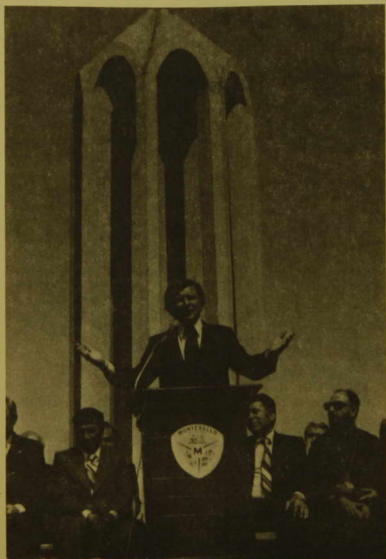
At the same time, Armenian studies programs have been established at the university level. In 1968 an Academic Chair for Armenian Studies was established at UCLA and it continues to offer a wide selection of courses to undergraduates, M.A., and Ph.D candidates. Professors Avedis Sanjian and Richard Hovannisian are primarily responsible for the success of the program. The dedication of the late Dr. Louise Nalbandian proved to be the catalyst that established the Armenian Studies Program at California State University, Fresno, now under the direction of Professor Dickran Kouymjian. Community college districts in Glendale, Pasadena, and Oakland have been offering language and history courses for many years.

Among the prominent Armenian educators in the California schools and colleges are Herant Katchadourian, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Stanford University; Grant Beglarian, Professor of Music, former Dean of the School Performing Arts, University of Southern California; the late Zohrab

Kaprielian, Dean of School of Engineering, Executive Vice-President, USC; former United Press editor Roger Tatarian at California State University, Fresno; and Ben Bagdikian, Pulitzer Prize honoree, University of California, Berkeley. In 1976 the American Armenian International College, the first in the Americas, was established in La Verne under the leadership of Dr. Armen Sarafian, former long-time Chancellor of Pasadena City College. All told, a 1976 survey by the Armenian Assembly identified almost 250 Armenians on college and university faculties in California.

April 24: Armenian Martyrs' Day

In an inspiring demonstration of unity, Armenians came together in April 24, 1965, to remember the martyrs who perished in the genocide of fifty years past. There was a world-wide outpouring of support from statesmen and leaders: Pope Paul VI, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the California State Legislature, former Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr. and mayors throughout California who issued proclamations recognizing Armenian Martyrs' Day. Armenian church services and a requiem mass took place at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco led by the Armenian Primate, Bishop Torkom Manoogian, with the eulogy delivered by the late Bishop James Pike. At the same time, the Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Monument was dedicated by Ronald Reagan in Montebello before an overflow crowd of Armenians and dignitaries. If the Turkish government was under any illusion that its silence and denials of fifty years would bury the holocaust launched in 1915, it was mistaken. A year doesn't pass without its commemoration of Martyrs' Day through concerts, cultural programs, marches, and church services.



Armenian Martyrs Monument, Montebello.

Recently, congressional hearings were conducted regarding compensation for Japanese-Americans confined in US relocation camps during World War II. For thirty years there have been reminders of this incident in the media and in public schools. Yet for sixty-seven years the Armenians have not been offered any form of compensation for the losses of lives, property, and country. On the contrary, the Armenians in Turkey (sixty thousand today compared to two and a half million in 1915) are under constant harassment and are still subjected to racial discrimination.

In the diaspora, the Turkish government has a penchant for intervening in the internal affairs of nations whose citizenry includes Armenians. The United States is a graphic example. The activity of Armenians in America perpetuating the April 24 remembrance has alarmed Turkish authorities. In California, Turkish harassment has become common practice. Since 1934, when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the rights to Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* which describes the heroic resistance of one Armenian village in 1915, the Turkish government has left no stone unturned in preventing the filming of Werfel's novel, including pressure applied on the U.S. State Department and Hollywood. In April 1973, the honorary Turkish consul in San Francisco was temporarily successful in cancelling a television program made up of a panel of Bay Area Armenians discussing the significance of April 24. In another instance in 1978, after a group of Armenian students had been given permission to set up an exhibit, "The Perseverance of a People," in the Doe Library at the University of California, Berkeley, the university, responding to the pressure exerted by the Turkish Consul in San Francisco, informed the students that the exhibit was to be withdrawn. Only after a public outcry from the media, faculty, Bay Area politicians, and concerned Armenians was the exhibit restored in its original form and presented to the public. Turkey to this day has never acknowledged the twentieth century's first genocide. That is why the Turkish government and its people have to be reminded of it by such Armenian organizations as the Armenian Assembly, Armenian Rights Movement, Armenian National Committee, Armenian commemorative committees, and Armenian students clubs.

America! America!

The removal of the national origins clause from immigration statutes in 1965 radically reversed the downward trend in Armenian immigration to the United States. This action combined with the liberalization of Soviet emigration policies and unrest in the Middle East (particularly the tragedies in Lebanon and Iran) has resulted in another period in increased Armenian immigration. In the last fifteen years, tens of thousands of Armenians have been admitted, the overwhelming majority disembarking at the Los Angeles airport. California has been the number one state of future residence of Armenian immigrants for a quarter century now, and Los Angeles has become the Western Hemisphere's "Armenian metropolis." And they keep coming. In 1979 alone, 3,200 Soviet Armenians arrived in Los Angeles followed by a 50% increase in 1980.

In 1980, over 7,000 American visas were issued to Soviet Armenians. Nearly 50% of these recent arrivals are professionals, managers, or skilled laborers. Since the civil war in Lebanon, several thousand Armenians have left Beirut for America. The same is true of Iran since the fall of the Shah. Fortunately, Armenian agencies have set up facilities to help the new arrivals adjust to their new environment, such as the social services in Los Angeles provided by the Armenian Evangelical

Social Service Center, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and the Armenian Relief Society.

Armenians on the California Scene

Perhaps there is no better indicator that the Armenians of California have come of political age than in the realm of government. In the 1970's Robert Moretti served as Speaker of the California Assembly. In the same body were Majority Leader Walter Karabian and Hank Arklin. Presently serving as the Attorney General of California is the former Assemblyman and State Senator George Deukmejian. At the moment Deukmejian is a candidate for the Republican nomination of Governor. Charles Pashayan of Fresno is the first Armenian in California (1978) and second in American history to serve as a congressman. Paul Ignatius served in President Lyndon Johnson's administration as Secretary of Navy and Under-Secretary of Defense and presently is President of the Air Transport Association. Kenneth Khachigian of Visalia has won national fame as a speech writer for Presidents Nixon and Reagan.

Armenians have never shied from defending controversial causes. In San Francisco, Attorney Charles Garry (Garabedian) has commanded the attention of the media since the 1960's defending radical causes and clients. Among Armenians in the judiciary are Spurgeon Avakian, Alameda County; Ralph Moradian, the late Simon Marootian, Robert Z. Mardikian of Fresno County; Richard Amerian, Dickran Tevzizian, Richard Kolostian and Armand Arabian of Los Angeles.

California Armenians in sports include football stars Ike Frankian of St. Mary's, Don Paul of USC and the LA Rams, Ben Agajanian of the Cleveland Browns, and Sam Bogosian of the Oakland Raiders; Jerry Tarkanian, former basketball coach at Cal. State University, Long Beach; auto racing promoter, J.C. Agajanian. Former Alameda football star at University of California, Berkeley, John S. Najarian, is one of the nation's most respected innovative surgeons and a pioneer in transplant surgery who was the first Armenian honored as Alumnus of the Year by the University of California Alumni Association.

In the business world we find the Armenian "Horatio Alger," Kirk Kerkorian, who after WW II parlayed Trans-International Airlines, a charter carrier, into Trans-America for \$100 million and then proceeded to take over Western Airlines and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1969). In the process he built International Leisure Hotel in Las Vegas, sold it to the Hilton chain and then in 1971 began MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas (opened in 1973), followed by the MGM Grand-Reno (1978). In 1978 this Armenian wunderkind established records when MGM earned \$50 million on sale of \$401 million. Most recently he added United Artists to his holdings. Dick (Tarpinian) Turpin of the Los Angeles Times is editor of the largest real estate section in the World. Ronald V. Cloud's wholesale plumbing, electrical, heating, and sheet metal firm in California was a launching platform for his acquisition of the Cal-Neva Hotel and Casino at North Lake Tahoe. Harold Nizamian, president of R. Dakin, made it the world's largest manufacturer of soft plush toys - over 600 items and a \$40 million enterprise by 1977. Philanthropist Haig Berberian of Modesto, "the walnut king" of the Valley has demonstrated his generosity with a \$500,000 gift to Fresno's St. Paul Armenian Apostolic Church and contributions to the Stanford Armenian Language Project, the Armenian Assembly, and other worthy Armenian and American organizations. The Valley Foundry and Machine Works Co. of Fresno under management of Leon S. Peters is the largest of its kind in the Valley. During the Second World War it salvaged the USS Oklahoma at Pearl Har-

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Armenian Community Picnic, Fresno, 1905

bor and is now the major producer of wine-making equipment in the Valley.

As the Armenian community of California embarked upon its second hundred years, the Armenian Assembly sponsored a statewide demographic survey that disclosed a number of revealing characteristics. While one-third of the community was born in America, another third has been here less than ten years. However, as many as 57 per cent are found in either professional or white collar occupations, and 45 per cent have completed college or graduate school. According to the survey, in the last election 85 per cent of Armenian-American citizens voted.

Along with their participation in American society, Armenians maintain an unusually high level of ethnic involvement, with an above-average proportion belonging to voluntary organizations and 85 per cent belonging to Armenian churches of various denominations. At the same time, there is a wide diversity of opinion on issues such as intermarriage with non-Armenians, minority-group status, the appropriate methods for seeking a resolution of the 1915 Genocide, and the importance of Armenian day schools. These and other concerns are the subjects of lively debate in both the community press and numerous public forums such as conferences and workshops.

In short, the Armenian community of California is alive and well, actively entering its second hundred years with interest and involvement in the major issues confronting all ethnic communities in this state.

Author's Note

The author wishes to acknowledge the pioneer efforts of Nectar Davidian, Charles Mahakian, and Vartan Malcolm whose interest and love of the Armenian people provided some of the material upon which this booklet is based.



Krouzian-Zekarian Armenian School, San Francisco.

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