

THE GREEKS OF BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN



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The Greeks of Berrien County, Michigan

“Can you go to America to save the rest of them?” she asked her eldest son. He did not say anything. He just put his head down. The next day she heard him leaving. When he arrived in the USA, he did not have enough money to buy his train ticket, so he borrowed the money from a fellow Greek. He missed the train because he did not know English and could not read the signs or ask for directions. Thus began the young Greek immigrant’s journey to the *xeneetia* (the strange land).

The immigrants came to the United States for a better way of life; they struggled, but they found that better way of life and “saved the rest of them.” They also contributed to their newly adopted country, the United States of America.

Beginning in the 1880s, immigrants settled in the industrial cities like New York, Chicago, Gary, or Detroit to work as laborers in the factories and steel mills, as shoe shine boys, dishwashers, or peddlers, or they traveled west to help build the railroads and work in the mines. They came as uneducated single young men from the poor farm villages of Greece because of devastating economic conditions. They worked bone-tiring long hours at menial labor under deplorable conditions to earn enough money to feed their families and provide dowries for their sisters. They planned to return to their homeland and rejoin their families in Greece. Up to one-third of the early pioneer Greek immigrants to America did repatriate. However, those who married and established themselves in small businesses remained to become outstanding citizens of their adopted country.

Many Greek immigrants who settled in Berrien County (an agricultural area in the extreme southwest corner of Michigan) in the early 1900s had previously lived and worked in big cities like Chicago. They had saved enough money in those jobs to open restaurants, candy stores, groceries, and other small businesses in Berrien County. Some felt that it was better to raise a family in a small town, rather than in a big city. Also, the countryside, with its grapes, fruit trees, and lake reminded them of Greece.

Only a few Greeks lived in Berrien County, Michigan in the first two decades of the 20th century. According to the 1900 United States census, no one was recorded as having been “born in Greece.” The 1910 census records only six people whom were “born in Greece.” The census data does not give any information about whether there were others of “Greek descent” (i.e., immigrants’ children) but that number would probably not have been very large, since the early Greek immigrants were single young men and had not had much time to establish their families. Early Berrien County Greeks came to this area from the Peloponnesus in Southern Greece, with some from Roumeli and a few from Greek islands. The early immigrants to the county settled primarily in the Benton Harbor area, according to a 1933-1935 roster of the local chapter of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), a national fraternal organization. Unlike big cities like Chicago, they did not congregate together in neighborhoods but were scattered. Just a few lived in the southern part of the county around the village of New Buffalo. A perusal of the 1942 *Lakeside, New Buffalo, Three Oaks Telephone Directory* revealed only three Greek names. Clyde Pappas recalls there were six families in the 1940s.

In the early years, Greek men outnumbered Greek women, since the Greek women did not immigrate until later, after the men decided to make America their home. Because of the lack of Greek women, quite a few of the men married outside of their ethnic group. Many of the women became integrated into the Greek community. These non-Greek women joined the local Greek Orthodox church, the Philoptochos (a church women’s organization that translates to “friends of the poor”) and the local Daughters of Penelope chapter—the women’s auxiliary of the AHEPA. The 1959 *Daughters of Penelope Annual Convention Ad*

Book lists the officers of the Daughters of Penelope. Four of the twelve officers were not Greek, although married to Greeks. As one of their daughters stated, "They got things done." Alma State, an immigrant's non-Greek wife, organized the chapter and later was elected District Governor of Michigan.

The immigrants' children also married non-Greeks, often over the objections of their Greek parents. Marriage for love is a New World phenomenon. In the old country, marriages were arranged. The ratio of mixed marriages of Michigan Greeks to total marriages conducted is indicated in this survey of the marriage records of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church: between 1951 and 1960, five out of 15; 1961 to 1970: 11 out of 17; 1971 to 1980 10 out of 12; and 1981 to 1990 four out of five. For the intermarried couples of the second generation, love proved stronger than the fear and reality of family rejection. A son of an immigrant Greek couple, after he married a non-Greek woman, had to leave the family business. Even some of the immigrants who had married non-Greek women wanted their children to marry Greeks. One father, who had married an Irish woman, objected to his daughter marrying a non-Greek whom she had met while vacationing in Michigan. The father became estranged from his daughter because she rejected the Greek man he had selected for her in favor of her true love. Another man related how his immigrant father, who had married non-Greek, told him that he should be married through *proxinio* (arranged marriage) so that there would be "Greek blood." He married a non-Greek woman.



Couvelis Family, c. 1935
Photo courtesy Babe Couvelis

The early Greek pioneers, with hard work and perseverance, established successful businesses. They did well in America despite lacking formal education, knowing little or no English when they came to the United States, prejudice, and not having the support of family members they left behind in Greece.



Greece. Photo courtesy Michail Kerhoulas

Berrien County Greeks worked primarily in the food business, especially restaurants. They entered the restaurant business because opening a restaurant did not require a good command of English, did not need a large cash outlay, and it was a place where you could be your own boss. Also, the first immigrants started in that business; the immigrants who followed (often brothers, cousins, nephews or friends from their hometown) worked for them and then later ventured out on their own. Often the wives and the children of the immigrants also worked in the family businesses. Only a few of the children continued in the business.

As early as 1909, the Olympia Ice Cream Parlor advertised regularly in the local newspaper. Owned by James Andros and George Spires, it stood at 128 Pipestone Street in Benton Harbor. Of 26 men

whose occupations were indicated on the 1933-1934 AHEPA membership registries, ten were proprietors of restaurants or confectioners, and four were cooks. The early Greek restaurants of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were concentrated primarily in downtown Benton Harbor and included: Palace of Sweets, Harbor Restaurant, Manhattan Waffle Shop, Main Restaurant, Apollo Restaurant, Market View, Candyland, Moutsatson Restaurant, Coney Island Lunch and Lions Bar. Another downtown business was a small but busy popcorn store beside the Bijou Theater. John "Popcorn John" Moutsatson is said to have served "the best popcorn in the world, with lots of butter." The Manos' shoe repair and hat cleaning shop also operated in the downtown. George Andrews and Nick and John Dorotheon operated the Michigan Hotel. Other families (Fasseas, Manglaris, Douvas, Davros, Billionis, and Pavlides) established themselves in the summer resort business throughout Berrien County. They rented rooms or cottages, usually with communal dining, to the hundreds of Chicago Greek vacationers who came to frolic in Lake Michigan and enjoy the countryside from the 1920s until the 1960s.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Greek-owned restaurants in New Buffalo included Greg's Grill, Theo's Lane, Log Cabin Barbeque, Calvin's Grill, Buffalo Café, J and J Restaurant, and Karagon's Grille. At present, there are at least twelve Greek-owned restaurants scattered throughout Berrien County.

Greeks developed other businesses and enterprises as well as restaurants. Two Greek immigrants developed the Sunset Shores area of New Buffalo: Peter Kerhulas (who started out as a fruit and poultry farmer) and his partner, Steven Rummel (a respected New Buffalo lawyer). Nick Argondelis built a successful fruit processing and fruit export business (Pearl Grange Fruit Exchange outside of Benton Harbor). Nick Katsulos and his partner, John Giaras, started a thriving trucking business in Stevensville.



Wedding held at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, Benton Harbor. Photo courtesy Michail Kerhoulas

Greek immigration to the United States virtually ceased in the 1920s due to immigration restrictions against the peoples of the Balkans and Southern Europe. In 1924, the quota for Greek immigrants was set at 307 per year. In addition to immigration restrictions, most of the early Berrien County Greek immigrants could not go back to Greece to see loved ones left behind because of the Great Depression, World War II and the Greek Civil War that lasted from 1945-1949. Some of the immigrants' children never knew their grandparents, who remained in Greece. The enactment of the Displaced Persons Act following WWII, led to a second wave of immigrants entering the United States in the 1950s. Not until the 1950s and 1960s could immigrants travel to Greece to visit relatives they had not seen in decades. Sadly, some of the earlier immigrants never did see their parents or siblings again.

There was a surge in the number of men and women who reported Greece as their country of origin in the Berrien County 1960 census, perhaps in large part because of the new immigrants. In 1960, the census reported 175 men and women "of foreign stock that reported Greece as their country of origin." In 1950, only 36 had claimed Greece as their "birthplace," 74 in 1940, and 55 in 1930.

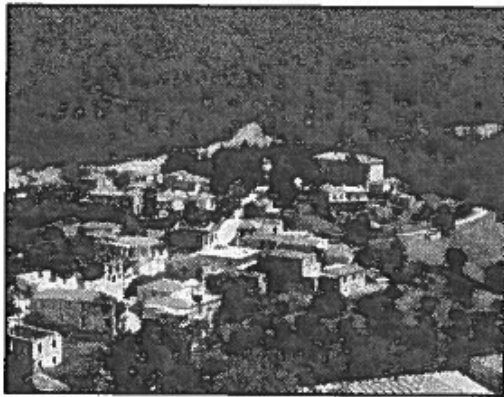
The immigrants who came to Berrien County after World War II felt grateful to leave war-ravaged Greece. The Greeks suffered through World War II under the occupation of the Italians and the Germans, as well as the Greek Civil War. (The civil war between government forces and the communists took place from 1945 to 1949 and ended with defeat for the Communists. According to those we interviewed, it created even

greater havoc than World War II since “brother fought against brother, father against son. In World War II, you knew who your enemy was. During the Second World War you could not trust even your neighbor.”) The two wars destroyed cities and killed family members. Three Berrien County Greeks reported that they had to flee their homes and live in the mountains. The Germans burned over 80 percent of their village.

The later immigrants often came to Berrien County to join family members who had previously settled there. The early immigrants often sponsored them. Michail Kerhoulas’ uncle brought Michail and his late brother John to Berrien County. Michail’s cousin, John Arvan, was sponsored by a man from his village who had settled in South Carolina. John then traveled from South Carolina to join his cousin Michail Kerhoulas in Berrien County. John in turn sponsored his brother Angelo

Arvanitis. Often brothers had different last names, a result of translating the name from Greek to English, because one of the brother’s names was Anglicized or shortened and the other’s was not, or simply personal preference. The cousins, Kerhoulas, Arvan, and Arvanitis, working alongside their wives, did well in Berrien County: Mike in the real estate and insurance field, and John and Angelo as restaurateurs. Many other immigrants who came after the wars also entered the restaurant business, including Chris and Anastasia Lepeniotis in Bridgman, Sophe and the late Nick Fatouros in New Buffalo, George and Chrisoula Billionis in Stevensville, and Tom and Sylvia Stavropoulos in Benton Harbor.

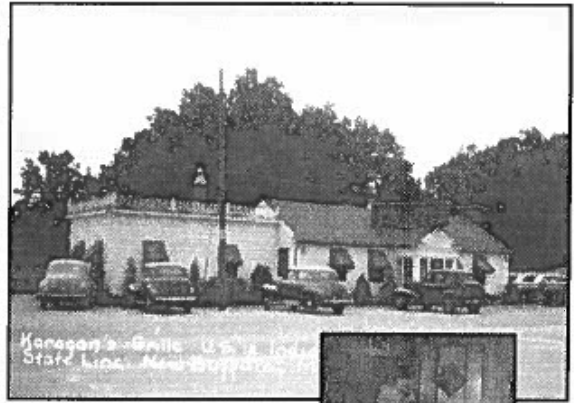
John Papoutsis first attempted to enter the country by jumping ship in 1967 or 1968. The adventurous young man traveled from the East Coast to Benton Harbor to stay with his aunt, Jennie Couvelis, and work at Bendix Corporation. After a few months, the immigration officials deported him. Not giving up his dream of America, he then came a second time as a student. He married, had two children, worked for many years at Bendix and volunteered to organize and coach children’s soccer teams. He also served as treasurer for the Annunciation Church. He is now retired.



Greek village where Michail Kerhoulas, John Arvan and Angelo Arvanitis were born. Photo courtesy Michail Kerhoulas

In contrast to the immigrant pioneers who came to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, the Greeks who immigrated after the wars often had the good fortune to visit relatives in Greece. Their relatives also came to the United States from Greece to visit or to settle in America. At least three of the later immigrants (Mike Kerhoulas, John Arvan, and the late Nick Fatouros) returned to Greece to find wives.

The women who immigrated in the 1960s and 1970s had to work long hours beside their husbands in the family businesses, as well as keep up with the household tasks and raise their children. Some had difficulty adjusting to a new life. Sophe Fatouros, for example, reported that when she first came to the United States



(above) Karagon's Grille, south of New Buffalo near the Indiana state line. (Right) George Karagon at the bar of Karagon's Grille. Photos courtesy James Karagon



with her new husband, she cried because she missed her family and friends and did not know the language. With help from customers at the restaurant, however, she learned English and made friends. She raised her two boys, now college graduates, in New Buffalo and is happy to live in America.

The Greek immigrants who came in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s brought a new vitality to the Greek-American community, with their love of the Greek Orthodox religion, Greek language and Greek traditions. They took leadership positions in the church and AHEPA. Immigration of Greeks to the United States has almost ceased since the 1980s due to improved economic and social conditions in Greece and stricter immigration laws. There is no infusion of new immigrants into Berrien County at this time, nor is it anticipated in the future.

AHEPA membership continued to decline, however, despite the participation of the new immigrants. The local Greek immigrant men organized Fruit Belt Chapter No. 292 of the AHEPA in 1933.

The chapter enrolled 30 members during its first year of operation and by 1952 its membership increased to 60. According to members' recollections, AHEPA ceased sometime in the 1980s.

The Daughters of Penelope Andromache No. 14 Chapter organized in 1934 with 11 charter members: Helen Katsulos, Alma State, Jennie Kanalos, Theodora Smirniotis, Helen Manos, Stella Burganis, Jane Smirniotis, Mildred State, Jada Baccash, Genevieve Smirniotis, and Zafero Shenias. The Daughters of Penelope hosted rummage sales, bake sales and other drives to raise money for the Greek Orthodox church. Together with the AHEPA, they held annual picnics to benefit the church. The Daughters of Penelope stopped functioning several years after the formation of the Philoptochos in 1955, since the women felt it was too difficult to support both groups.

One binding element for Greek immigrants was their religious faith. Young college student Joanne Bilonis, when interviewed stated, "You can't separate the two; if you're Greek, you're Greek Orthodox." Since nearly 100 percent of the early Greek Berrien County immigrants were baptized in the Greek Orthodox faith, having a Greek Orthodox church in the community was very important. Before building their church in Benton Harbor in 1949, the immigrants and their children would travel to South Bend to attend church. A few, although they kept their Greek Orthodox faith, attended local Protestant churches as well, such as the Lutheran, Episcopalian and Congregational churches.

On April 11, 1945, an AHEPA meeting "was called to determine the attitude and the desires of our community towards the oft discussed church problem." At that meeting a church committee was appointed. Tom State, on AHEPA stationery, writing about the history of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, related that the Greek community held a general meeting regarding the church at the Apollo Bar in Benton



Wedding procession in Greece.



Wedding of Nick and Sophe Fatouros in Greece.

Photo courtesy Sophe Fatouros

Harbor on May 13, 1945. The twenty people attending elected the following officers: president, Peter Kerhulas; vice-president, John Kanalos; secretary, Tom State; treasurer, George Andrews, and the following trustees: Stephen Roumell, Nick Rantis, John Giaras, Angelo Rose and Gust George. They arranged to have the priest from Kalamazoo come every second Sunday to hold services. The congregation held services at the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), in Benton Harbor where the AHEPA also met. AHEPA paid \$80 annual rent for the use of the hall.

The church organizing committee raised more than \$25,000 for the building of the church. Individuals donated thousands of dollars. The AHEPA and Daughters of Penelope brought in money through their fund-raising events. Nick Dorotheon crafted church-shaped wooden canisters that were placed in Greek-owned businesses to collect funds for the church. Non-Greek as well as Greek customers supported the construction of a church by depositing their change in the canisters and attending the fund-raising events.

The Berrien County Greek Orthodox Community incorporated in 1948 with the following purpose: "To own and conduct a Church under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church for North and South America; to conduct a school for the perpetuation of the Greek language and to do such other things for the education and physical development for youths of Greek decent." Stephen Roumell, William Couvelis, Nick Rantis, John Kanalos, Peter Kerhulas and George Andrews signed the incorporation papers. The first board also included Alex Gust, Tom State, John Moutsatson, John Giaras, and George Smirniotis.

According to the *Souvenir Book of Dedication*, 1956, "In June, 1949, Nick Dorotheon was elected as Chairman of the Building Committee and ground was broken" for the white Greek style Annunciation Church in a residential neighborhood at 725 Broadway in Benton Harbor. In 1954, the church purchased a house next door at 715 Broadway for the residence of the new priest, Rev. Christos Moulas, his wife and three daughters.

According to the *Souvenir Book*, "In November, 1949, at a meeting, Mr. Nick Argondelis offered more money for the name of the Church, which he named "Evangelismos tis Theotokou" or Annunciation. On November 23, 1950, a banquet was given for the burning of the mortgage."

The church was located in a residential neighborhood close to where many of the immigrants and their families lived and not far from their downtown businesses. According to Margie Souliotis, several families lived in a ten-block radius of the Annunciation Church during the 1950s, including the Moulas, Govatos, Andrews, Souliotis, Dorotheon, Kanalos, Gust and Couvelis families.

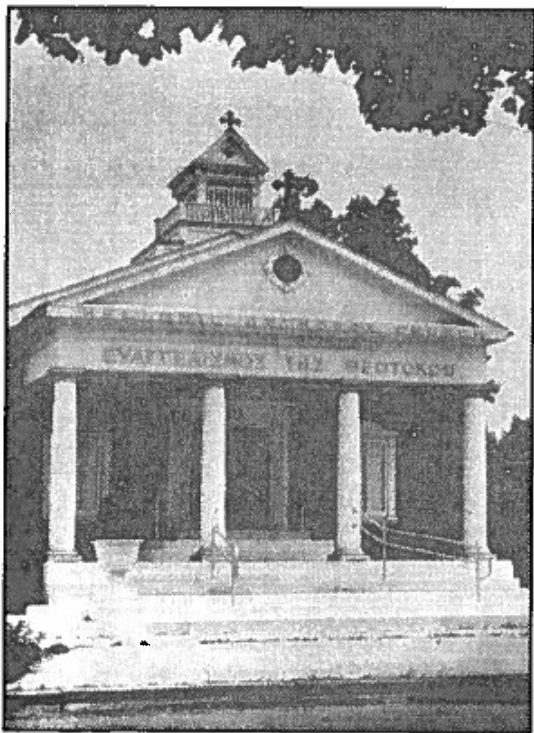
Today, the church congregation has moved from the Benton Harbor area. The Greeks started leaving Benton Harbor in the late 1960s and 1970s, partially due to "white flight," but also because of the declining economic opportunities with the loss of many manufacturing companies and lake passenger travel. The church remained, however, until 1996, when it relocated to New Buffalo. The Greeks have scattered throughout the Berrien County area, with many full-time and second-home Greeks living in the southern part of the county around New Buffalo and Union Pier. Not all of the Greeks living in Berrien County attend



AHEPA members. Photo courtesy Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church.

Annunciation Church. Some attend St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Church in South Bend, Indiana, and a few attend Holy Trinity, a Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Michigan City, Indiana. Some of the original immigrants' children attend other denominations.

In 1982, the church purchased the former Tin Tree Theater on Behner Road in New Buffalo, which they equipped with a kitchen and remodeled as a banquet facility. The American Hellenic Center, as it is now known, provides revenue for the church and space for its social functions and special events. In 1994, the church purchased the former Golden Door Restaurant at 18000 Behner Road, just across from the American Hellenic Center. Blessed on November 12, 1995 by Chancellor of the Detroit Diocese, Very Rev. Archimandrite Efstathios Metalinos, the remodeled facility served the parish as a second church— St. Paraskevi.



Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, c. 1959

In 1996, the congregation sold its original church, the Annunciation, as well as the two houses they owned on either side of the church. Since the sale of the original church, the congregation has celebrated services at the 18000 Behner Road site. The New Buffalo church became known as the Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church. The newer church's interior bears a striking resemblance to the interior of the old church since the interior decoration from the old Benton Harbor church (including the iconostasis and pews) were moved and installed in the new church.

The immigrants wanted their children not only to retain their Greek Orthodox religion but also to hold on to the Greek language, history and traditions. Tom State writes, "On October 4, (1945) a school committee was appointed and decided to have school services in Benton Harbor on Thursday afternoon and in New Buffalo on Friday at the expense of \$15.00." For decades the school educated young Americans in the Greek language and traditions in classes held after regular school hours or on Saturdays.

Joantha Andrews Argoudelis remembers attending classes

once a week at the New Buffalo High School in the 1950s, along with three other students—the priest's daughters. With the infusion of the immigrants who came in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, attendance at Greek school increased during the 1980s. According to Louisa Kerhoulas, up to 15 children attended classes held in New Buffalo during the 1980s. The children proudly recited Greek poems and sang patriotic songs in Greek for the church congregation on Greek holidays such as Greek Independence Day (celebrating Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821 after 400 years of domination) and *Ohi* (No) day (when the Greeks said "No" to Benito Mussolini's demand to surrender during World War II). The immigrants' children, on the most part, retain at least a basic speaking knowledge of the language. However, many of the grandchildren have not retained the language, especially if their mother or father is not Greek.

The annual events organized by the Greek community brought Greek culture to the broader Berrien County population. Starting in the late 1930s, the AHEPA and the Daughters of Penelope hosted annual Greek picnics. In the 1950s and 1960s, up to 1,500 people flocked to picnics held at the Davros Resort (formerly the Manglaris/Douvas Resort) in St. Joseph along the St. Joseph River and at Sportsman's Park, north of Berrien Springs. They enjoyed Greek chickens, potato salad, and pastries and danced to Greek music at

the all-day affair. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, annual "Greek nights" held at the Bridgman American Legion replaced the all-day picnics. They also featured delicious Greek food and American and Greek dancing. From 1985 into the 1990s, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church had a food booth (featuring gyros and Greek pastry) at the Venetian Festival, which is held annually in St. Joseph, Michigan. Since the purchase and renovation of the American Hellenic Cultural Center, the Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Church has held its annual Greek nights there, attracting 400 to 500 people. Since 2000, it also holds a two-day Greek festival in the early summer.

The non-Greeks of Berrien County enjoy delicious Greek pastries such as honey-drenched *baklava* baked with layer upon layer of thin philo dough, or powdered sugarcoated butter cookies called *kourambietes*. Hundreds of women lined up to purchase the delectable "take-out" Greek pastries baked annually and sold from the Benton Harbor church by the Philoptochos women. Presbytera Bessie Moulas, the wife of the priest and an energetic, talented woman, spearheaded the effort. Patsy Govatos and Margie Souliotis fondly recall the women had "so much fun" baking the pastries together in the basement of the church.

The small Greek community organized all these projects. The Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church membership never numbered more than about 70 families and individuals. In the summers, during the 1950s and 1960s, attendance at the church increased since many of the Greeks who vacationed in Berrien County during the summer months attended church services.

Priests who served the church in the early years included Rev. Ioannis Panos, Very Rev. Father Chrysostom Trahathaes, Rev. Ireneos Souris and Very Rev. Christos Moulas, who served the church from 1955 until his retirement in 1982. Rev. Moulas organized the Philoptochos. He encouraged the development of the choir



Annunciation Church choir. Photo courtesy Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church.

that continued until the 1960s when Rev. Moulas' daughters, who used to play the organ, left home for college. Rev. Moulas also taught Greek school, assisted by Louisa Kerhoulas and Christine Hager.

After Rev. Moulas retired, other priests who served the congregation included the Very Rev. Archimandrite Efstathios Metallinos, Rev. George P. Savas, Very Rev. Evangelos Vaggalis, and Rev. William Conjelko, who for a short time served along with Rev. Basil Stamas. Since 1992, Father Basil Stamas, from Kalamazoo, Michigan, has conducted services twice a month and on special holidays. His wife, Presbytera Angela Stamas, often serves as a *psalti* (cantor), together with Michail Kerhoulas. Father George Topitges, who retired from Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Michigan City,

has assisted the church community of Berrien County for many years, originally working along with Father Moulas and now assisting Father Stamas.

The immigrants take pride their Greek heritage and have transmitted Greek cultural values to their children through the strong family unit and the family's participation in the Greek Orthodox church, social events, Greek school, and AHEPA. Most of the 21 immigrants the Berrien County Historical Association interviewed spoke some Greek in the home. John Papoutsis says that he spoke only Greek to his children, even when they were in public. The immigrants who immigrated from the 1950s through the 1970s also took their

children on trips to Greece. They stayed for weeks at a time with grandparents, uncles or aunts, thus invigorating their "Greekness."

The immigrants celebrated traditional holidays, such as Easter, Christmas and New Year's Day, and namesdays (day sacred to the saint whose name a person bears), by serving traditional foods, such as roasted lamb and *pastichio* (pasta), and dancing and singing Greek songs. Even non-Greek spouses learned how to cook Greek food. One prides herself with the ability to select tender grape leaves off the vines for *dolmathes* (grape leaves rolled and filled with ground meat). Some non-Greek spouses even learned the language.



Greek dancing. Photo courtesy Michail Kerhoulas.



Philoptochos members prepare pastries for the annual bake sale. Photo courtesy Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church.

funds for a Greek hospital. The national AHEPA lobbied to increase the quota for Greek immigrants after World War II and the local chapter sent letters to congressmen for that purpose. The immigrants have always sent money and packages of food and clothes to their families in Greece and provided dowries for their sisters. They helped to build churches and schools in their old villages. Peter Kerhoulas built a cheese

The Greek Orthodox sacraments, such as weddings and baptisms, are celebrated at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church as they have been celebrated for centuries in Greece. Through baptism, families have cemented relationships to each other. In the Greek tradition, when you become a godparent to a child you become part of the family.

The priest of the Annunciation and St. Paraskevi Church conducts the service mostly in Greek. One thing that has changed is that in America both sexes sit together, instead of men separately from women, as is the custom in Greece. Also, the choir was a New World innovation.

The immigrants continue to have strong ties to Greece, where some of their relatives reside. Nick Fatouros, when his son posed the question, "Which do you like best, Greece or America?" responded, "I like America. I like both. I have two *patridas* (countries) now."

The Greek-Americans have assisted Greece since they first arrived in America to the present. During the 1940s, the Fruit Belt AHEPA Chapter raised \$1,058 for the Greek War Relief and contributed

factory in his old village so that the people there could have employment. He also set aside a sizable portion of money in his will to be used for a project to improve his hometown.

The Greek immigrants and their children have become American. Several of them, in the interviews conducted by the Berrien County Historical Association, said, "God Bless America." They credit America for giving them opportunity and take pride in their American citizenship. Beginning in the early years when they first came to America, they participated in American celebrations such as Christmas with a Christmas tree and Santa Claus, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and birthday parties. They have served in her wars. Over 25 percent of young Greeks across the nation joined the U.S. Army during World War I—the highest percentage of enlistment in the U.S. Army of any immigrant group, according to a publication of Greek Heritage Society of Southern California. Through the efforts of the local AHEPA Naturalization Committee, Berrien County Greeks taught fellow Greeks the responsibilities of citizenship and encouraged them to become naturalized. Fruit Belt AHEPA Chapter No. 292 supported non-Greek charities such as the Community Chest, Infantile Paralysis, Red Cross, Good Fellows and local hospitals. Its accomplishment in selling War Bonds during World War II won renown. The chapter sold over \$200,000 worth of war bonds under the chairmanship of Nick Peters.

Many Greeks accepted leadership roles in various organizations, including the Masons, Elks, Moose, Chamber of Commerce, American Legion, IOOF, Girl Scouts and children's soccer leagues. Very few Greeks have been elected or appointed to political offices, with a few exceptions such as the late Michael Govatos, who served as Benton Harbor City Commissioner for many years, Spiros Polymeris who serves on the Bridgman Planning Commission, and Clyde Pappas who had served on the New Buffalo planning commission and school board.

The Greeks have always comprised a small minority of Berrien County's population. The 2000 federal census lists 390 people of Greek descent residing in Berrien County, out of a total of 162,453 residents, a mere 0.2%. The census does not count the many people of Greek descent who have second homes in Berrien County. Although small in number, the Berrien County Greeks have had an enormous impact on the community and take pride in their Greek and American heritage. They have gone, as one of the immigrants stated, "From no shoes to driving a Cadillac."

A strong work ethic, as well as a religious foundation, has built the Greek community. An example of this ethic is found in the early pioneers who built the Benton Harbor church and more recently in the group, which included Michail Kerhoulas and Ted Lavedas, who were instrumental in moving and renovating the church.

The immigrants often did not have much education, but they stressed the value of education for their children. Their children have done well in college and achieved success in their professions. Although many have left the area, a nucleus of young people remain. In recent years, young Greek-American professionals have bought second homes in the area. The perpetuation of the culture and traditions is now in the hands of the young Greek-Americans.

The Greek community has come full-circle. No longer is it necessary to "save the rest of them" back in Greece. The relatives have immigrated to America or if they are still in Greece, they are getting along fine. Now the Greeks focus on building a life in America, while retaining Greek values and traditions. Only a few of the early Berrien County Greek immigrants repatriated. None of those who came more recently are known to have returned. The immigrants of Berrien County have come to stay and have enriched Berrien County with their vibrant ethnicity, enthusiasm, and community spirit.

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