

GEORGOPOULOS - PARASHOU

Demetrios Georgopoulos (Georges) was also born in a small village in the Messinian Prefecture of Greece near Kalamata. Many of the villages in Messinia near Kalamata were written about in the "Iliad" and the whole area is rife with locations and relics of battles resulting from the many ancient wars with Sparta. Demetrios immigrated to the United States and to Omaha to work on the Rock Island Railroad. His brother, Evangelos (Joe), arranged the passage and Demetrios began work out on the railroad lines. Taller, more cautious but more deliberate than his older brother, Demetrios instituted the name change to Georges. Unlike his brother, however, Demetrios determined to learn the English language and obtain record making experience through formal training so that he too could rise to the status of Section Foreman. He enrolled in night school, obtained the necessary polish and ability to pass tests or at least enough competence to satisfy any reporting requirements of the Rock Island. So, Demetrios successfully achieved the rank held by his brother before him. Directing his section crew, he serviced the Rock Island area from Murdock, Nebraska to South Bend and later took the area South of Papillion, Nebraska

By the 1920s, only a few hundred Greeks were to be legally admitted into the United States under a legal quota system long after the original flood of immigrants to the United States. Accordingly, Greek men seeking wives, either traveled to sites near Greece (a return by a Greek workman to Greece would have subjected the returnee to military service) or arranged for prospective brides to travel to sites near the United States where a marriage would take place to a Greek who was by then either an American citizen or a legal alien with an American passport. The citizen could legally bring his bride to his home in America. The latter was the arrangement selected by Demetrios Georgopoulos after the match making had been completed for his marriage. Details of the matchmaker, their correspondence, picture exchange or telephone contact, if any, are now known. However, Spyridoula Parashou was to become the bride of this Section Foreman.

Spyridoula Parashou was the first born child of Nicholas Parashos and his wife, Maria, winery workers in Kalamata, Greece. Kalamata was, and is, a larger Greek city and a transportation hub. A dance in 7/8 time carries the name of the city, the Kalamatianos, as do Kalamata olives. Many ancient naval battles were fought in Kalamata Bay.

An easy-going and free smiling woman, Spyridoula Parashou would perfectly complement the reserved and contemplative Section Foeman to whom she sailed from Greece to meet and marry in Havana, Cuba. Demetrios traveled from Omaha to Havana to meet and marry his bride. Whether an agent or translator was engaged to help with a civil or church marriage in Cuba is also not known. Properly married they were however on July 28, 1929 in Omaha at St. John's. Demetrios was one of the first Omaha Greeks to own an automobile. A photo of Spyridoula in the driver's seat of their enormous, suicide-doored, four door, open, phaeton sedan can be seen appended along with a photo of Spyridoula and her sister in law, Elizabeth Georges. The Rock Island provided a home for the couple in Meadow, Nebraska where they frequently entertained guests and reared two children, Soterios (Sam) Georges and Christine Georges, in the verdant countryside some miles South of South Omaha. They moved to Omaha many years later.

Despite the distance to St. John's from their residence, Demetrios and Spyridoula were faithful communicants of St. John's until their deaths, Demetrios in 1969 at age 70 and Spyridoula in 1971 at age 61. They had instilled in their children the same fervent Orthodox Christianity they brought from the Messinian Prefecture of their birth and which they practiced at St. John's. Soterios (Sam), an artist at the Calandra Camera Company and a photographer, followed the Georges church tradition serving on the Board of Directors of St. John's all the while displaying the serious demeanor of his father. Soterios was the photographer who shot the picture of the then Archbishop Iakovos and the 1973 Board of Directors before the icon screen. Sam lived with breathing problems from a youngster. He died on October 1, 1976 while still in his forties.

The youngest child, Christine, an indispensable member of the St. John's Choir (where she sings to this day), and a faithful Greek Orthodox communicant as were her parents, married Peter Simmons, another ardent church worker. They met at St. John's. The pair contributed mightily to the St. John's family serving on its Board of Directors, Philoptochos, Daughters of Penelope, GOYA and AHEPA for many decades in many offices and at many tasks. Christine was widowed in 2000 but remains a stalwart supporter of St. John's as she has been for more than fifty years.