

MURRAY, HELEN (ECONOMOU)

Constantine Spyridon Economou came to the United States in 1917 at the age of 16. Most of the Greek immigrants came to America believing that the roads were “paved with gold” and that they would make a lot of money in a short period of time and then return to Greece. It was not generally their intention nor Constantine’s to remain here permanently. That’s why they always talked about going back to the Xopio (Horio) or village. He went back and forth to Greece several times between 1917 and 1935. On one of the trips, he married Ourania Pliatsikas in 1925. Ourania lived with her mother-in-law for nine years while Constantine lived and worked in Worcester, Massachusetts. On another extended visit to Greece, their first child, Effie, was conceived and born. While living in Worcester, he boarded in a rooming house with other young immigrant men and worked in factories initially making only \$3.50 a week.

What made the stay in the United States irreversible for most immigrants was World War II. Until then, they always talked about making money and going back to Greece. When Ourania and Effie arrived at Ellis Island in 1935, Constantine embraced them with tears and excitement. Unbeknownst to them, the American dream for their family then began. They settled in Worcester and the family began to multiply. Within a five-year period, Bessie, Stewart (Sotirios) and Helen were born. The arrival of his wife and first daughter and the birth of three more children “sealed the deal” for Constantine, but not for Ourania. Her adjustment in America was difficult and she wanted to return to her beloved Greece right up until the beginning of World War II in 1941. Interestingly, Ourania’s father had come to the United States earlier in the 20th Century and had lived and worked in Sheboygan, Wisconsin for approximately a year or two. He likewise found the adjustment difficult and subsequently returned to Greece. Not surprisingly, those immigrants who decided to stay in America and made that decision early on inevitably became more financially successful than those who considered themselves transient. Constantine owned a confectionery store called Economy Sweets Company on Main Street in Worcester, Massachusetts from 1930 to 1970. All members of the family at one time or another worked in the store. It would become a formative part of their upbringing.

Both Constantine and Ourania came from a small mountain village called Finiki, Filiates in Epirus, Greece, in the northwest corner of the country. The village seemed to have a great emotional hold on those who left it because they kept sending money to preserve the homes and the character of the village. As a result, the Greek government designated it as a historical landmark.

Helen grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts and was an active member of St. Spyridon’s Greek Orthodox Cathedral and a member of the Choir, GOYA and Girl Scouts. Eventually, she moved to San Francisco, California and met her husband, Thomas Eugene Murray, III. They were married at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral in 1968 and lived in San Francisco for two years. Tom transferred from San Francisco to Omaha, Nebraska in 1970 to work for the Union Pacific Railroad and together they drove across the country in their 1968 Camaro convertible to the plains of

Nebraska. They found St. John's Greek Orthodox Church in Omaha and soon became members. Not long after, their daughter, Elena, was born who attended the church's Sunday school, was a Mirofori and learned to Greek dance. She participated in the GOYA basketball tournaments with her fellow Goyans. She is now married to Shawn O'Donnell and has a daughter named Callie (Calliope) Ourania. They reside in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Since becoming a member of the St. John's Greek Orthodox Church in 1970, Helen has been a member of the Daughters of Penelope, serving as an officer, sings in the choir and chaired the boutique and participated at our Greek festivals.