

Greek Cultural Resources: Sharing Our Lost Greek-American Heritage

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Most Greek Americans remember the Divry books –language, prayer, history and cook books; but especially dictionaries. What they don't know is that Divry also published an illustrated weekly magazine for at least two years, 1914 to 1915.

Early in 2024 my nonprofit organization – Greek Cultural Resources (GCR) – received a large collection of old Greek-American publications. According to the donor, they were bought 20 years earlier at a rummage sale for \$10. The collection included bound volumes of the *Atlantis* and *The Ethnikos Keryx* newspapers from 1915-1922. But there also were bound volumes of the *Olympia Greek Illustrated Weekly* (1915, vol. II), published by Olympia Publishing Company, New York, NY, D. C. Divry, president. I'd never heard of the *Olympia* although I've widely researched Greek-American magazines and newspapers. I found no reference to it in any library or special collection in the world; no references in any scholarly articles or books. It's a newspaper lost over time. And it's not alone.

Much of our Greek-American history and artifacts – recordings, books, publications, interviews, and more -- remain undocumented, unarchived, unknown. As living memories fade, some of this history remains gathering dust in basements and attics while tragically, much more is thrown out and is lost. This has been the source of a lot of the GCR current collection – people not wanting, but not wanting to throw away, the historical collections of their parents or grandparents.

Several traditional libraries and archiving institutions have Greek-American history and culture collections. But careful cataloging of those collections is not universal, and access to them for the general public and even for scholars is often restricted or even unavailable. This is why I started Greek Cultural Resources in 2006 – to reclaim and document our history; to preserve and celebrate our heritage; and, perhaps most

important, to insure that whatever I collect is easily available to whoever needs or wants it, whether or not they are scholars.

I grew up in Manchester, NH, the grandson of Greek immigrants from villages near Kalamata and Thebes. We spoke Greek at home, listened to Greek radio shows. Greek culture was central to our lives – in the church, holidays, and at the table. As an adult, I lived and worked in Greece for one year. Back in New Hampshire I often DJ'd at Greek festivals and joined in the dancing. For the past 15 years I've hosted *Mondays with Meleti*, tapping my archives to present Greek-American history stories, on WNTN, Boston, MA.

In fact, Greek-American music was the incentive for creating GCR. I wanted to document and understand Greek music's historical context and traditions and to rescue and preserve thousands of old recordings. That focus soon grew to other areas that expanded and deepened the context and understanding of music, including film, video, field recordings, radio broadcasts, interviews, newspapers, journals, books, photographs, sheet music, and ephemera.

Over time, I also realized that Greek music shared traditions with music from Armenia, Turkey, and the Balkans. Therefore the archives began to include a broad span of shared music. GCR now houses the notes – in four thick binders - and about 300 accompanying audio cassettes of Dino Pappas, considered to be the father of the Greek-American discography. I try to digitize as much as I can. I scan print material, but recordings take special effort. I've collected thousands of recordings across various formats including aluminum, shellac, wax, and vinyl records, and magnetic tapes - and worked on creating as many true digital copies as possible. A collection of recordings of 40 player piano rolls, dating back to 1910, are a special part of the GCR archives, a gift that led me to a deep investigation of perhaps the earliest form of musical recording.

I've also collected radio station programs, live events, and field recordings. Long-running Greek-American radio program collections that have been donated include *Grecian Echoes* (WNTN, Boston); the *North Shore Greek-American Comedy Show* (WNSH, Saugus, MA); the *Soul of Greece* (WLYN, Lynn, MA); *Mediterranean Melodies* (WLLH, Lowell, MA); and *Hellenic Harmonies* (WGBB, Astoria, NY). In addition to these more recent programs, I've archived Greek-American radio programs dating back to 1930.

It was soon clear to me that GCR should not be limited to music heritage, as rich as that is. I consciously expanded the archives to include all aspects of Greek-American cultural history, including church records, newspapers, books, diaries, photos, etc. As a result, the Greek Cultural Resources' archives have become a collection of collections, and the collecting, processing, documenting, and archiving of the material is an on-going process. So is the responding to requests for resources. I've received calls from Greece, Australia, and across the United States. Several years ago, for instance, I was contacted by

Dr. Hatzidimitriou, the editor of this publication, who was looking for copies of *Niki*, a rare Greek-American newspaper. I was able to send him some digitized copies.

Not long ago a woman from Greece studying Karagiozi shadow puppet theater contacted me, interested in how Karagiozi had evolved in America. I not only had digitized news stories and recordings to share with her, but I also suggested she might be interested in some material I had on the evolution of Greek humor in the U.S. She was! I was also able to help another Greek scholar in her research on the evolution of Greek ecclesiastic music in America, providing her digitized historic 78-rpm recordings. Many scholars, including myself, have drawn off the archive. It's also proved invaluable in several large projects, including an extensive Greek music exhibit in Florida; an award-winning book on Greek music; and a federally supported archive project at Indiana University. I was part of the teams on all three of these projects, including contributing writing to the book and working as a consultant on the exhibit and archive.

Of course, there are many individuals and institutions who call me with collections they want to donate to GCR on an ongoing basis. They make up the backbone of GCR and I wish I had the space to list them all here. But space – in print and at GCR – is at a premium. Due to lack of space, I have had to turn down more than I wish, but I always try to find a home for collections where they can stay intact, be catalogued, and be made available. I consider that to be part of the GCR mission.

For example, a library in a small Massachusetts town called when it received 14 boxes of books, all in Greek, including many signed first editions. I could have found room, but I knew the Hellenic Library of Southern California, which promotes public access to Greek literature, would put the books to better use than I could. So, I arranged to have the collection sent there. Another time, at the request of his children, I helped place the late music scholar Soterios (Sam) Chianis' large collection of books, recordings, and musical instruments. The former Binghamton (NY) University professor had scores of books, clippings and other print items; 175 instruments from around the world; and more than 300 field recordings of music, as well as textiles and clothes, he collected in dozens of Greek villages. I arranged for the recordings and books to be sent to Indiana University. And then I contacted the University of Athens in Greece which took the entire instrument collection. Finally, I helped find a home for the textiles with the Boston *Lykeion Ellinidon*, which runs programs on Greek folk dance and culture.

Facilitating communications and networking is also a large part of the GCR mission. The longer I am delivering lectures around the country and talking with people about the GCR, the more interconnections and coincidences that seem to occur. For instance, when the Greek American Legion Post Number 1 in Lowell, MA, sold its building, a person in Oregon heard about it and contacted me. She was concerned because the legion had

extensive Greek history files. She'd gotten my name through a mutual friend, Steve Frangos, a noted Greek-American history writer. I called the veterans and asked to see the collection that was stored in a nearby basement. We quickly discovered mold was invading some of the documents, which included, among other things at least 400 photographs of early Greek immigrants in Lowell, and decades of material on the Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA). I was allowed to remove the entire collection. A GCR intern, Nicholas Lambros, took on the task of cataloging most of the GOYA material.

Another example of the importance of networking and facilitating communications within our community, relates to Steve Frangos who gave me a photo of the Peter Andys orchestra in New York in the 1930s for the archive. Several years later, a man in New Orleans, who heard about GCR on the internet, called to see if I wanted a large box of materials that belonged to his father, an orchestra leader in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. When he told me his name -- Andy Peter Antippas -- I asked if his father's band was Peter Andys orchestra. He was surprised I knew. The Frangos photograph helped me facilitate another rescue and donation.

When I was growing up, I felt not only connected to my own Greek-American heritage and community, but to that community nationally. It seemed that across the country churches, schools, libraries, and other Greek-American organizations worked together. That isn't as evident these days. I also sense a decline in interest in our cultural heritage of the last 100 years, especially among younger Greek-Americans who need to know that while Homer, Plato, the Acropolis, and the Parthenon are part of our heritage, it doesn't end there. My hope is that Greek Cultural Resources can help restore and expand both a pride in our heritage and a sense of national community. But GCR is facing challenges. It currently is housed in my four-room condominium in New Hampshire. Every room is filled with archives, as well as scanners, and other processing equipment. Space and funds are dearly needed. If you have any ideas or suggestions, or wish to make a donation, please visit our website: (greekculturalresources.org) or contact me, meletios@greekculturalresources.org.

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