

## The American Philhellenes Society of Chicago

Panagiotis Nikolopoulos

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. In much the same manner, it takes many nations to work together in the cause of freedom. History and memory tend to focus on the “big” picture, often forgetting all the pieces that worked together for a cause to succeed.

In the early 1800s the struggle of a small European country – Greece - came to the attention of the world. Certainly, there was heroism among the Greeks both on land and on the waters of the Mediterranean. However, without the worldwide support they received, particularly financial support, the final outcome might have been very different.

In particular, the Greek quest for independence mirrored America’s efforts nearly half a century earlier. Much of the attention came from a respect and admiration of the principles and advances of classical Greece. The United States was founded on principles derived from ancient Athens. And later, Americans were among those who supported the establishment of an independent Hellenic state which would be founded and dedicated to those same democratic values.

The American Philhellenes Society was established to identify the Americans who supported and/or fought for the independence of Greece and to recognize and make known their contributions to the cause of freedom. Many of these brave individuals gave their lives in the battle against the Ottoman Empire.

Working to achieve these goals took the American Philhellenes Society in a number of different directions. Chief among these efforts, early in 2007, was contact with Anna Psarouda-Benaki, President of the Hellenic Parliament, proposing that March 25<sup>th</sup> also be recognized as a National Day of the American Philhellenic Spirit. Dimitrios Soufias, her successor as President, extended the scope of the proposal to include Philhellenism across the world. As a result, April 19<sup>th</sup> (the anniversary of the death of Philhellene Lord Byron) was recognized as the International Day of Philhellenism both in Greece and among the Greeks of the Diaspora.

In March 2009, the Society sponsored a presentation by Dr. Angelyn Balodimas Bartolomei, Professor of Education at North Park University of Chicago, summarizing Greece's contribution to the world from ancient times to the present, and more specifically, the role of American Philhellenes Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, George Jarvis and Captain Jonathan P. Miller.

In 2011, through the efforts of the Society, commemorative US postage stamps were issued honoring George Jarvis (his burial monument in Argos, Greece), William Washington (buried in the Catholic Cathedral of Nafplion, Greece) and a tribute to Greek-American relations with a photograph of the flag of both countries.

In May 2012, Mr. Moses Konstantinis, Special Advisor of the Hellenic Postal Service (EL.TA.), gave a lecture on the Greek and American stamps which have been published over the years and which document the history and the relations between the two nations and the history of Greek currencies and banknotes from the Revolution of 1821 to the present day.

Also, in May 2012, the Society sponsored a presentation at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago by Dr. Fotini Tomai-Konstantopoulou, an Ambassador, and Director of the Department of the Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on American Philhellenism during 1810-1840 and the relationship that followed between the United States and Greece. Dr. Tomai-Konstantopoulou is also the author of the book, *The American People's Support to the Greek War of Independence 1821*, and 630 copies were distributed by the American Philhellenes Society to United States Senators and Congressmen and 8 State Governors.

April 2013 set the stage for "A Greek Journey in the Windy City" an exhibition of books and other material pertaining to the Greek War of Independence and the American Philhellenes Society in collaboration with the City of Chicago, held at Navy Pier's Crystal Gardens, Chicago, Illinois.

A milestone in the efforts of the American Philhellenes Society came in April 2013 with the dedication of a memorial Obelisk in honor of Lucas Miltiadis Miller, the first Greek-American United States Congressman, and Jonathan Peckham Miller, his adoptive father and fighter with the Greek Army during the Greek Revolution against the Ottomans. The event was celebrated with the collaboration of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. The main speaker of the event was Dr. and Ambassador Fotini Tomai-Konstantopoulou. Georgia Nikolopoulos, one of the founding members of the American Philhellenes Society, spoke of the Greek tradition of *filotimo* (φιλότεμπο), and its importance in our society. Ms. Mariyana Spyropoulos, Commissioner of the Chicago Water Reclamation District, was the emcee for the event. Honorable John Scocos, Secretary of the Wisconsin

Department of Veteran Affairs, assisted in unveiling the monument. The Office of the Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, also presented a commendation to the American Philhellenes Society for its contributions to the State of Wisconsin.



Over the next few years, a number of other programs and presentations were sponsored as progress was made in the planning, fund-raising and execution of a monument to American Philhellenes. The American Philhellenes Society was honored to have the support of many prominent Greek-Americans, including Federal Judge Charles Kocoras.

In September 2019, Dr. Angelyn Balodimas-Bartolomei gave a presentation on *Philhellenism: Past and Present* in Aurora, Illinois. Honored that evening was Illinois State Senator Linda Panagopoulos Holmes. The Society presented His Eminence Nathanael, Metropolitan of Chicago, with a copy of the Russian Icon of the Virgin of Vladimir. Mr. Peter Zouras of Z3 Solutions also presented an update on the proposed monument scheduled to be erected in Aurora Illinois.

As plans for the proposed monument progressed, in May 2021, the American Philhellenes Society sponsored an essay program among the Greek Schools in the Chicago area. The topic: "The Role of the American Philhellenes during the Revolution of 1821." The program was open to Junior High School (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade) and High School (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) students. The winners included students from the Hellenic American Academy (Deerfield, Illinois), the Athena Hellenic School (Morton Grove, Illinois) and Pythagoras Greek School (St. Demetrios Church, Elmhurst, Illinois). Winners each received a monetary award and a Certificate of Recognition.

Most significantly, in September 2021 to coincide with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greek Revolution, a 24-foot monument (weighing about 22 tons) was dedicated in Wilder Park, Aurora, Illinois. The event was attended by Aurora City officials, leaders of Greek church, Hellenic societies and supporters at Wilder Park. The support of Aurora officials, including former Mayor Tom Weisner and current Mayor Richard Irvin, as well as Chief Management Officer Alex G. Alexandrou, have been invaluable in helping bring this monument to a successful conclusion.



The Wilder Park Monument to the American Philhellenes serves as a cultural and historical gathering point for individuals from the Chicago/Aurora area as well as visitors from other areas of the United States and other countries. The monument is also intended to be a teaching tool into the history of Greece, the Greek revolution and the significant part played by the Church in support of the push for freedom and the ensuing establishment of the Hellenic Republic. Not only does the monument have great historical value, but also acknowledges the contributions made by Greeks and American Philhellenes to the cause of freedom.

In May 2022, the American Philhellenes Society celebrated the International Day of Philhellenism. To commemorate the event, the American Philhellenes Society presented honorary plaques to the Mayor of Niles, Illinois George D. Alpogiannis and to Consul General Koubarakis. Also, that month, Dr. Maria Georgopoulou, Director of the Gennadius Library at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens gave a presentation on "The Free and the Brave" an exhibition on American Philhellenism which had been presented at the Gennadius. Commemorative plaques were presented to Dr. Georgopoulou and to Dr. A.G. (Tassos) Malliaris, Chair, Department of Economics at Loyola University in Chicago.

Over the years a number of articles have been published about the American Philhellenes Society and the philhellenic philosophy. These include the magazines Estiator and Ermioni, the newspapers Greek Star, Hellenic Voice, National Herald, Washington Post, New York Times, and the Greek papers Kathimerini, Ta Nea, To Ethnos and Estia, as well as the Hellenic Heartbeat television program.

The American Philhellenes Society continues to work to identify the Americans who supported and/or fought for the independence of Greece and to recognize and make known their contributions to the cause of freedom. More information, as well as pictures of the many events, biographies and documents concerning American Philhellenes, the Miller monument and the Aurora monument, are available on the website: [www.amphso.com](http://www.amphso.com).

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