Family

At the time that Kehila Kadoshan Janina was established in 1927, there were an estimated 500 Jews of Romaniote descent still living on the Lower East Side, many having already made the move to the outer boroughs of the Brooklyn and Bronx, or “upturned” to Harlem. Of those “500”, all were connected, through familial ties, either through marriage or by blood, probably a core family grouping of no more than 50 families. Family would always play an important role for this conservative, traditional, observant group of Greek Jews. Most lived in close proximity to each other, filling the tenements on Broome Street adjacent to the synagogue, or on the surrounding blocks of Beth Edgeschon, Allen, Orchard, Delancey and Grand. There was no need to lock the apartment doors. Everyone was related. Children were safe within the cocoon woven by the community. Nona and Papou lived close by, as did aunts and uncles. Family defined their world.

Our extended family now includes many friends who, while not born into this world of Greek Jews, have become seduced by the smells and tastes of traditional Greek Jewish foods and the sounds of our music. Annually, Kehila Kadoshan hosts thousands who enter through our portals, initially coming as strangers to learn about us, many leaving as friends and “family” who will spread the word of the special world they encountered. In addition, many of our core families continue to come home. One can always stop returning sons or daughters, as they may momentarily pause when entering the sanctuary, tears gathering in their eyes as they look in the direction of the spot on the bench where their mother, father, Nona or Papou once sat.

I owe a great personal debt to the Yanioti community who have interacted with my sons and have helped shape their character and perspectives on life. Those individuals have given them love and taught them sensitivity and understanding. To say I have received more than I have given is an understatement. We all learn from each other, and I thank God my family has had the ability to grow within such a beautiful community.

Sincerely,

Marvin Marcus

Message from our President

As President of Kehila Kadoshan Janina, I am often asked on a regular basis to complete many requests. Receiving requests, signing documents but, most important, attending services on Saturday at KKJ. As a family, Phyllis, Andrew, Ethan and I have become a part of the KKJ family. In return, we have been blessed with the support of our extended family who care the lives and experiences of members of KKJ; the Pastas and the Sisterhood.

I very much appreciate the continuing support of the many members of the various branches of the Janina family, past and present, who continue to serve the community in so many different capacities.

Thank you all for your continuous support.

Sincerely,

Marvin Marcus
In its 12th year, the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry continues to be the only body of its kind devoted exclusively to Greek Jewry, and we take this responsibility seriously. Obviously, we do so elsewhere. When the United States Holocaust Museum was searching for a means to increase their photo archives on Greek Jews, they contacted the Association. When the Consul General of Greece in New York needed names for the annual January 27th commemoration of Greek-Jewish Holocaust survivors, the Association provided the names. When the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki wanted help in distributing their English-language newsletter (El Ivaro), they contacted the Association. When the Jewish Community of Ioannina needed help in restoring their synagogue and cemetery they contacted the Association. When Confucius Jews in the Philadelphia area wanted to raise funds for a memorial plaque in the synagogue in Gaeta, they contacted the Association. When the Synagogue in Rhodes was in jeopardy of collapsing, the organization of Greek Jews contacted the Association. The Association of Greek Jewry has a proven track record. We reach out to more Greek Jews in the Diaspora than does any other organization in existence. The amazing thing is that all this is done by a staff that receives absolutely no financial compensation. They are driven by a passion to make a difference. Of course, none of this could possibly happen without the support of our members and friends. Some members both here in the United States and worldwide.

In 2009, we were part of a three-way collaboration (partnered with Kefala Kedossa Janina and the Sisterhood of Janina) to raise funds for the repair of the recently desecrated tombs in the Ioannina cemetery. We are proud that our museum is a part of the only organization working to preserve the remains of Greek Jewry. Make a difference.

MESSAGE FROM OUR MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The opening of our exhibit on Weddings “Something Old, Something New” before 1960—the older the better): and again, photos are pouring in. We are played host to numerous groups from the world, and our lunch tours are more popular than ever. Our lunch tours have been incorporated into the exhibit throughout the museum and, in addition, a photo album and a DVD with Greek wedding songs were created, in the hope that everyone would have at least one of their wedding photos become part of the exhibit. The wedding exhibit can now be accessed on our website: http://www.museumofjewishheritage.org/photoweddings. Over 175 guests attended the opening reception. The exhibit will be on view to date. Over 175 guests attended the opening reception. The exhibit can now be accessed on our website: http://www.museumofjewishheritage.org/photoweddings. Our Museum continues to be a sought dynamic places on the Lower East Side.

In the Shadow of the Acropolis
We, in the Sisterhood, are truly sisters in the literal and true sense of the word. In 1995, we were originally a group of all the members lived on the Lower East Side of New York and were related to one another. When the “Sisterhood” club would climb up the stairs to collect the annual dues of $.25, she was treated as a welcome visitor, not a collector, and the traditional Turkish coffee and sweets were offered gratis. Raised and shared. She then would go down the stairs to another member, and the ritual was repeated. Eventually, our family of “sisters” grew to include those living in the outer boroughs and Long Island. We now have sisters in many states, and whenever we meet, it is as if we meet our closest relatives. Why? Let’s hope our ranks continue to grow to include our daughters, granddaughters and cousins into our family circle. Please, if you’d like to join this historic, one-of-a-kind, philanthropic sisterhood, contact us at friends_greek_jewry@verizon.net. Thank you, Sam! The wonders of the world are now available to more Greek Jews in the Diaspora than ever before. Now, learning of the recent arson at Elitz Hayim Synagogue in Hania, Crete, the Association dedicated its 2010 fund-raising campaign to helping Nikos Stavroulakis repair the damage. The Association arranges annual tours to Greek Greece in May (unfortunately, space is no longer available) and Greece in August. For information, prices and itineraries, contact us at friends_greek_jewry@verizon.net.

Thank You,
Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos

Meet the Board: Lois Ledner

As our Board enters its second decade, it is with great honor that we highlight a second generation Board member, a third-generation Yanniotte member of our community, a true member of our family: Lois. Lois grew up on the Lower East Side and attended the Kehila Kedossia Janina her whole life. The daughter of Hy Genee of Blessed Memory and Lil Genee, Lois attended Hebrew school at Kehila Kedossia Janina. In the class at the sixth-grade graduation. At the time, Bat Mitvahs were not fashionable, especially within the traditional world of Romaniote Jews and, in 1999, Lois became a Bat Mitivah at Congregation Anshe Emeth in South River, New Jersey, under the tutelage of Rabbi Busch. Lois grew up learning Yanniote names, Matza. “Pessah” and “Matza” are obvious but the family history behind “Hametz” and “Pessah” comes upon me to fulfill that mission.”

Lois is married 37 years to Eddie, “the most wonderful husband,” and is the proud mother of Daman and Melissa (nickname) of “Hametz,” a name his ancestors would carry centuries afterwards. Colchamiro, on the other hand, come from Kalchamira, the opening lines of a prayer said as the house of the founder of Hametz. According to the Colchamiro family oral history, the patriarch of the family was involved in the building and selling of textiles, a popular occupation among Greek Jews) that they trusted them by saying it was as if he was saying the kalchamira prayer. The family livelihood and branch of which we think was the Matathia family became known as Kalchamira or, in this country, Colchamiro. There have been many myths surrounding the origin of the Matza surname, some attributing it to Italian surname, some attributing it to Italian, in all likelihood, it was an occupational surname having to do with the production of Matzoh. The fact that there were so many Matzas in Ioannina, not all of whom were living in the shadow of the Acropolis—credence to it being an occupational name. In certain communities in Greece, there is a well-known custom in which the woman of the family (such as Conf) was often called Magza. Sami Magza gave us an excellent explanation of this. “How do you pronounce ‘pizza’? Certainly not pizze, but rather pize. It is not a pizza but rather a zazz, as the family has been living there for generations (such as Conf) on his name, the word was often spoken in Greek as ‘pizza’.

Sisterhood of Janina

The special dishes have been put away, the ancestral recipes restored, the unused matzoth thrown away, and now we have the time to muse over little idiosyncrasies of the Yanniote community (a topic that can easily preoccupy us until next Pesach). Many of the summates of Yanniote names, Colchamiro, have gained a lot of respect and recognition for his fabrics (he was involved in the production of Yanniote names, Matza). “Pessah” and “Matza” are obvious but the family history behind “Hametz” and “Colchamiro” gives us fascinating insights into the religious observances of this small, traditional Greek-speaking community. According to the family oral history, the patriarch of the family was involved in the building and selling of textiles, a popular occupation among Greek Jews) that they trusted them by saying it was as if he was saying the kalchamira prayer. The family livelihood and branch of which we think was the Matathia family became known as Kalchamira or, in this country, Colchamiro. There have been many myths surrounding the origin of the Matza surname, some attributing it to Italian origin, others to a Ladino offshoot but, in all likelihood, it was an occupational surname having to do with the production of Matzoh. The fact that there were so many Matzas in Ioannina, not all of whom were living in the shadow of the Acropolis—credence to it being an occupational name. In certain communities in Greece, there is a well-known custom in which the woman of the family (such as Conf) was often called Magza. Sami Magza gave us an excellent explanation of this. “How do you pronounce ‘pizza’? Certainly not pizze, but rather pize. It is not a pizza but rather a zazz, as the family has been living there for generations (such as Conf) on his name, the word was often spoken in Greek as ‘pizza’. The fact that there were so many Matzas in Ioannina, not all of whom were living in the shadow of the Acropolis—credence to it being an occupational name. In certain communities in Greece, there is a well-known custom in which the woman of the family (such as Conf) was often called Magza. Sami Magza gave us an excellent explanation of this. “How do you pronounce ‘pizza’? Certainly not pizze, but rather pize. It is not a pizza but rather a zazz, as the family has been living there for generations (such as Conf) on his name, the word was often spoken in Greek as ‘pizza’.

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