



## *Greek Community*

*Discover what brought families from Greece to Missoula, how they earned a living, and how they continue to maintain a strong community within Missoula to this day.*

- **1800s.** In the late 1800s and early 1900s, railroad construction brought numerous southern European laborers to western Montana. Included in this work force were men from Greece. Most of these workers were unmarried and seldom stayed longer than the work lasted. A few decided to remain for a variety of reasons, but mainly because they liked the environment or saw business opportunities that could make them a decent living.
- **1900s.** Marrying local women, Greek men quickly integrated into American society, tried to learn the language and to become literate enough to get along. Those who decided to marry within their ethnicity waited until they had established themselves enough to return to Greece and bring a Greek bride to Missoula. This resulted in less than a dozen families with both husband and wife being Greek. Many of Missoula's Greek families arrived in the early 1900's.
- **Railroad workers.** Among those who made careers with the railroads and stayed till retirement were Andrew George, Gus Datsopoulos, Peter Pappas and Gus Papanauom on the Northern Pacific and John Kafentzis and Peter Robbins on the Milwaukee Railroad.
- **Business owners.** Greeks that didn't stay with the railroads branched out into a variety of small business, usually with partners. In many instances these partners were relatives. Typically these businesses included restaurants, fruit markets, floral shops, candy stores with soda fountains and shoe shine parlors with shoe repair shops. A short list would include:
  - **Garden City Floral**...Jim and Sam Caras
  - **Park Hotel**...Peter and John (Jocko) Lambros
  - **The Grill Café**...Sam and Bill Poulos
  - **Sunshine Candy**...John and Mike Pappas
  - **High School Candy**...George and Nick Papantony
  - **Pallas Candy**...John Gogas and George Koures
  - **Missoula Shoe Shine**...Christ Callas and Jim George (They also cleaned and blocked felt hats.)
  - **Pony Café**...Harry Bates and Tom Theros
  - **Jim's Café**...Jim Zakos
- **AHEPOA.** Greek immigrants to the United States, realizing the importance of education as well as integration, formed a nationwide fraternal organization: The American Hellenic Education Progressive Association. The association's objective was to develop more informed, responsible American citizens. Missoula had a very strong AHEPOA chapter in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Annual rotating conventions were hosted with Butte, Great Falls, and Billings. The ladies association was called the Daughters of Penelope. The youth auxiliaries were the Sons of Pericles and the Maids of Athens.
- **Orthodox Church.** For centuries the Orthodox Church has been an integral part of Greek culture. Greek immigrants, if they could afford it, usually established a community church. In Montana, the first church was built and maintained in Great Falls. Missoula had no church of its own until 1957. Thus, if the priest in Great Falls could not travel to Missoula for religious services - baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc., - then local Greeks had to go to Great Falls.
- Greek immigrants continued to come to Missoula into the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, usually sponsored by a family member who had been here for some time.
- The makeup of the Greek community, however, has changed considerably as the first generation has passed on and the second and third generations have scattered. Yet, a few of the old family names linger on with considerable importance in law, real estate, and landscaping.

*Information provided by Greek pioneer descendants and local businessmen George Gogas and Bill Caras.*