

GREEK AMERICAN NATIONALISM: THE VERVENA SOCIETY

by

GEORGE CHRISTAKES

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Approved by:

Victor R. Greene
Major Professor

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PREFACE

The writer would like to take this space to acknowledge his debt for the tremendous help extended to him in this study. The members of the committee which supervised this work were both of great help and willing to graciously give much of their time. The committee was headed by Professor Victor R. Greene and included Professors A. Bower Sageser and George Dent Wilcoxon. A grateful thank you is extended to the writer's mother, Mrs. Alexandra Papantony for her work in typing the various drafts. Finally, but certainly not least in importance, grateful appreciation is acknowledged to the members of the Vervena Society who authorized Mr. Michael Stikas to extend the great aid which he did.

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INTRODUCTION

The terms nationalism and patriotism are familiar to Americans in all walks of life. They read in their newspapers and hear on television about the nationalism of the newly rising nations and are exhorted about patriotism to their country. Yet, while the terms are so extensively used, the descriptions and interrelationships of nationalism and patriotism are often vague. The dictionary definitions,¹ do not provide a comprehensive enough meaning.

Students of nationalism, themselves, are not always in agreement over definition. One noted scholar, Carlton J. H. Hayes, has defined the term stressing the psychological element:

A condition of mind in which loyalty to the ideal or to the fact of one's national state is superior to all other loyalties and of which pride in one's nationality and belief in its intrinsic excellence and its "mission" are integral parts.²

¹The terms are defined, in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1959), as:

Nationalism--1. National character; nationality. 2. An idiom, trait, or character peculiar to any nation. 3. Devotion to, or advocacy of, national interests or national unity and independence. 4. Chiefly U. S. Socialism advocating the nationalizing of industries. Patriotism--Love of country; devotion to the welfare of one's country.

²Carlton J. H. Hayes, Essays on Nationalism (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 6.

Another noted historian of nationalism, Hans Kohn, also utilizes a psychological approach stating that, "Nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution has become more and more common to mankind."³ A third, Merle Curti, refers to nationalism as a philosophy stating that, " . . . nationalism has developed in the modern world as the philosophy of the national state. It has rested on the assumption that, by and large, the unified nation is the highest value in civilization."⁴

Agreement is easier to find on the definition of patriotism. Patriotism, as defined by Curti is, " . . . love of country, pride in it, and readiness to make sacrifices for what is considered its best interest."⁵ Joseph P. Morrey refers to patriotism as " . . . loyalty to the state . . ."⁶ The psychologist, Leonard W. Doob, has defined patriotism, using the terminology of his discipline, as:

The more or less conscious conviction of a person that his own welfare and that of the significant groups to which he belongs are dependent upon the preservation or expansion (or both) of the power and culture of his society.⁷

³Hans Kohn, Idea of Nationalism (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 10.

⁴Merle Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. viii.

⁵Ibid., p. viii.

⁶Joseph P. Morrey, Pride of State (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959) p. xii.

⁷Leonard W. Doob, Patriotism and Nationalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 6.

In order to better understand American nationalism and the patriotism related to it, it is necessary to understand the origin and nature of the loyalties of the various component parts of American society. Since the United States is composed of people of widely differing origins, cultural backgrounds, and historical experiences, including such diverse groups as the American Indians, German-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, etc.,--this obviously is not a simple task. This study is concerned with the historical development of the social structure and values of a small part of one specific group--the Greek-Americans or, as they prefer to be called, the Americans of Hellenic descent and is especially concerned with the loyalties of this group.

The major thesis of the study is that, in the case of the Greek immigrants, there are three major focal points for their patriotic feelings rather than any single one. These three are the home village, the Greek nation, and the American nation. To examine this contention a Greek immigrant society, located in Chicago, known as the Vervena Society was used as a case study to discover where the loyalties of that small group rest. The history of this group was examined in the context of the overall history of Greece, Greek immigration to the United States, the Greek colony of Chicago and other related subjects that have had influence on the development of their loyalties. It is hoped that a knowledge of this group in the context of their historical involvement will

be a contribution to a greater understanding of American nationalism. It is not suggested that to understand this small part of the development of nationalistic feelings in America plus the other component parts (large or small) will give a true account of nationalism--it will not. An awareness of the interrelationship of the component streams of history is also necessary. The only expectation is that this study will cast some light on a small part of one stream.

In order to examine the problem of the loyalties of the immigrants from Vervena, several subjects have been investigated. The first is the history of the development of Greek nationalism in both ancient and modern Greece. Second, the history of Vervena itself is studied as far as it was influential in the formation of loyalties; and third, the history of the Society itself accenting the factors involved in its member's value systems.

CHAPTER I

HELLAS AND NATIONALISM

The Greeks have had, since ancient times, a firm loyalty to the local region (city-state, village or town) in which they lived, although Greek nationalism, as such, did not really begin to emerge until the end of the eighteenth century. The reason for this regional loyalty is partially in the topography of the area. Greece is a country of mountains and valleys surrounded on three sides by the sea, and with mountain ranges preventing easy access on the fourth side. Access between the various small villages is difficult. Within the country the rugged mountain terrain makes traveling arduous even to nearby areas, with the result that the people " . . . are more in touch with those neighbors from whom the sea divides them than with those whom the land brings near them."¹ The topography therefore tended to create groups of isolated people in the valleys that had limited contact with their neighbors.

The second factor in creating local loyalty and autonomous government organizations was the economic situation.

¹M. Rostovtzeff, Greece (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 37.

As Rostevtzeff indicated, "Nature had divided her into small economic units, and she was incapable of creating large political systems."²

The political-economic system of the Greeks, the city-state, reflects both the aforementioned geographical conditions and localized economy. The city was the focus of the region, " . . . inhabited by farmers and shepherds who live either in detached houses and cottages scattered over the country, or together in villages (demes)."³ The dominant concept was of local autonomy.

There is a want of grouping and unity in the early period, and this is to a degree a characteristic inseparable from the history of Greece from its beginning to its end. . . . Nothing short of force will efface in the mind of the free Greek the ideas of his city as an autonomous and separate organization. The city is a unity the highest of all political units, not admitting of consolidation with others to the sacrifice of its own separate and individual mark. Such is the character of the race both in primitive country and in colonial settlements, in their early and late history, splitting by natural fractures into a multitude of self-administering cities.⁴

The main loyalty then was to the local region, but still, a national consciousness also existed. Herodotus spoke of " . . . The Greek Nation, which is of like blood and like speech, and has common buildings to the gods and common sacrifices, and manners of the same kind."⁵ In essence the father

²Ibid., p. 36.

³Ibid., p. 40.

⁴Thomas James Lacey, Social Heredity as Illustrated in the Greek People (New York: Gorham, 1916), p. 11.

⁵C. M. Bowra, The Greek Experience (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 25.

of history's criteria were common descent, language, religion, and culture. The ancient Greeks, in spite of their predominantly regional loyalty, were conscious of these common factors and accented them when they wished to stress their essential unity and their difference from foreigners.⁶ A political loyalty however, remained unknown to the Greeks:

Their loyalty was due first and foremost to their city-state, which very often found itself in the most bitter warfare with other Greek city-states, and allied or thought of allying itself with non-Greeks against other Greeks. There was a strong patriotic love for the native soil which found its expression especially in many passages of Euripides, but it was the soil of the city and the city-state to which all love was directed.⁷

A feeling of Greek nationalism, as such, appeared near the end of the eighteenth century. In the intervening years since ancient Greece, the area had been under the control of various great empires including those of Alexander the Great, the Roman, the Byzantine and since the fifteenth century the ottoman. The eighteenth century was a period of economic revival for Greece which was to stimulate nationalistic feelings in the country during the latter part of that century. The most spectacular factor in the Greek economic revival was the French Revolution and the Anglo-French wars that followed since during the course of these wars the British and French virtually destroyed each other's Mediterranean merchant marine creating an acute shipping shortage. The Greek ships filled

⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁷Kohn, op. cit., p. 53.

the gap.⁸ Once the Greek merchants ships dominated the eastern end of the Mediterranean, the position of the merchants also was strengthened as was the entire Greek economy. However, the Greek peasant profited little from the commercial gains; rather it was the large Turkish and Greek landowners and merchants who benefited the most.⁹ The repercussions of the eighteenth century Greek economic revival were far reaching--they created a new intellectual atmosphere and generated new political forces that were to lead directly to the revolutionary outbreak of 1821.

One of the most significant results of the economic revival was the appearance of a new middle class--the merchants.¹⁰ These merchants were constantly traveling throughout Europe with the resulting interchange and interaction having a profound effect upon the homeland. The merchants were impressed by the size and wealth of the great cities, by the progress in science and learning, and, " . . . above all, by the rule of law and the safeguarding of individual rights."¹¹ The contrast of the merchant's experience abroad and of the Turkish rule at home naturally led to the conclusion that the Turkish rule had to be cast off. To accomplish this end, the merchants founded in 1814, the Philike Hetairia revolutionary society which had required each member to swear:

⁸Leftan S. Stavrianos, The Balkans since 1453 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 275.

⁹Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 277.

¹¹Ibid., p. 277.

I will nourish in my heart irreconcilable hatred against the tyrants of my country . . . and I will exert every method for their injury and destruction . . . I swear by the future liberty of my countrymen, that I shall consecrate myself to (my country); that henceforth thou (it) shalt be the scope of my thoughts, thy (its) name the guide of my actions, thy (its) happiness the recompense of my labours.¹²

While it is true that the middle class merchants were greatly involved in the revolutionary nationalistic agitation, other elements in Greek society played important roles--both pro and anti revolutionary. The peasants were goaded into action supporting revolution by land hunger which made them susceptible to a revolutionary nationalism, which offered a means of getting land.¹³ The small prosperous aristocratic class of Greeks, known as 'primates'--who assisted their Turkish masters, dominated the local government, controlled the tax-collection apparatus, and owned most of the Christian-held land--were against the Revolution, with some exceptions, since they were in danger of losing their privileged positions. Likewise, the phanariotes, who were Greeks that worked in Constantinople and other administrative centers of the Ottoman Empire as both minor and major officials, for the most part did not support the revolution, although the few that became revolutionaries were extremely important because of their background.¹⁴

¹²Shafer, op. cit., p. 176.

¹³Stavrianos, op. cit., p. 280.

¹⁴Leftan S. Stavrianos, Balkan Federation (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Press, 1944), p. 33.

The Greek Orthodox Church was split over the question of revolution much as the Russian Orthodox Church was split over revolutionary sentiments in the latter nineteenth century. The higher clergy, including the Patriarch, were strongly opposed to the revolution, since again--as the primates and phanariotes--they were in danger of losing their positions which were secure under Ottoman rule.¹⁵ The village priests, on the other hand, became staunch supporters and even active combatants in the revolution because their illiteracy both forced and enabled them to live on intimate terms with their congregations, a condition which tended to encourage identification with local aspirations and movements.¹⁶

The revolution itself began in the spring of 1821 and by 1827 the modern Greek nation was established realizing the goal of the Greek nationalists. After a few years of internal conflict the government solidified in the form of a monarchy with Prince Otho of Bavaria becoming the Greek King on February 6, 1833.

The revolution itself revealed a lack of intense nationalistic feeling among the Greeks who, although opposed to Turkish rulers, divided themselves along class and sectional lines:

The revolution was by no means a national crusade in which all Greeks fought side by side for country and for faith. It was rather a complex movement in the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶Stavrianos, The Balkans since 1453, p. 281.

course of which the Greeks fought not only against the Turks but also among themselves. Sectional differences ranged Peloponnesians against continentals, and islanders against both; ideological differences set cosmopolitan Phanariotes against guerrilla chieftans and high prelates against village priests; conflicting class interests separated wealthy shipowners from unemployed sailors and powerful primates from landless peasants.¹⁷

Even during the intensely patriotic period of the Greek revolution, as can be seen above, the regional loyalties continued to exist. The two trends of regionalism and nationalism continued to persist, although in different strengths, in modern times as they had during the period of ancient Greece. Travelers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries noted " . . . a tendency to set the interests of a district or town above the general interests of the nation. The Greeks today are no more inclined to take a large, national view than were the Greeks of classic times. . . ."¹⁸ By the middle of the twentieth century the cultural anthropologist, Ernestine Freidel, during her field work in the village of Vasilika, Greece, found the same two forces, national and local, still arousing the people's loyalty:

The villagers speak of Vasilika in the way Greeks from other villages speak of their home communities. A man or woman's patridha, that is, his village of origin in this context (patridha may mean Greece as one's nation of origin in contrast with other nations, is always recommended as a place to visit. . . . The people of one's own village were endopyi (home folks) in contrast to Kseni (strangers), and the term Kseni was used equally to refer to a man from Parori two miles away, and to us from the United States thousands of miles

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁸ Thomas James Lacey, op. cit., p. 25.

distant.¹⁹

Friedl goes on to indicate the other main focus for the loyalty of the villagers:

Greekness itself--and the Greek nation as a political entity. The villagers awareness of and pride in their Greekness is profound. . . . Moreover, the villagers associate certain qualities with Greek ethnicity: the desire for political independence and the willingness to fight for it against overwhelming odds . . . the people of Vasilika think of themselves as Greeks with a set of ethnic characteristics which they believe they have shared with the inhabitants of the country in historical continuity from classical Greek times, through Byzantium, into the present.²⁰

From the above it can be seen that the Greeks, in their native land at least, have had a long history of a dual loyalty to their local area and to Greece itself. The question that arises and is of concern in this paper is what happened to their loyalties when the people emigrated to the United States and were exposed to a new environment.

¹⁹Ernestine Friedl, Vasilika, A Village in Modern Greece (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 104.

²⁰Ibid., p. 106.

CHAPTER II

OLIVES, PESTS, AND MIGRANTS

The major influx of the Greek immigrants to the United States was mainly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of the "new immigration." Up to this period in American history there had been a few Greek immigrants, but they were insignificant in number.

The Greeks from the region of Sparta were the first to start emigrating during the 1878's with their migration attaining, . . ." a peak between 1890 and 1910, when an estimated three-fourths of the male population between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five departed for the United States.¹ After 1890, the exodus spread to all parts of the country as well as to the Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire, although the outflow was the greatest from the Peloponnesus. In all, the Greeks emigrating to the United States before 1924, were to total not quite two hundred thousand people.

The major factor which stimulated the Greeks to leave their ancestral home was a lack of economic opportunity at home while Greek newspapers, letters from relatives already

¹Theodore Saloutos, The Greeks in the United States. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 24.

in the United States, advertisements of steamship companies, and other sources all told of the great wealth to be gained in the New World. The most significant change which had occurred in the Greek economic situation, at the time of the "new immigration," was in the currant industry. The production of currants on a mass scale instead of the more traditional olive trees began during the late 1860's because of the ruin of the French currant industry by a pest (phylloxera) accidentally imported from America in 1863.² The Greeks capitalized on this French problem by converting much of the land normally used for silk culture and for olive trees to currant raising in order to supply the demand which had been created on the French wine market. However--unfortunately for the new Greek currant industry, upon which the economy of the country now rested, France solved the problem, late in the nineteenth century--by importing a variety of American vines capable of surviving despite the pest. This spelled disaster for Greece whose export market for currants (by then her major crop) was almost entirely eliminated. The olive trees could not again become the supporting agricultural crop of Greece, at least not immediately, since it takes a period of years from the time of planting until an olive orchard is really productive. Fairchild commented that the ". . . severe and comparatively sudden disaster to the market for the principal

²Henry Pratt Fairchild, Greek Immigration to the United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), p. 76.

export crop furnishes the immediate stimulus which was needed to make a people already in depressed condition, seek for some relief from the burdens of their existence."³

It was to the United States then that the Greeks turned to seek relief from their economic distress. The means of transportation was available since the steamship by the late nineteenth century was dominant in the Atlantic sea lanes and needed passengers.

The steamship agents of practically all of the principal Mediterranean lines were soon established in Piraeus, Patras, and other ports, as well as in most of the important interior cities and villages, in order to capitalize on the emigrant trade. The agents scoured the countryside, exciting the imagination of the peasants as to the glories and opportunities in the New World, aiding the prospective emigrant with any potential difficulties, and in some cases advancing the money for the journey.⁴ The agents were so numerous that they caused one observer to comment:

One of the first things that attracts the eye of the traveler landing in the Piraeus port is the amazing number of American flags flying from office buildings all along the water front and the neighboring streets; their significance is somewhat perplexing until he learns that they are steamship offices or emigration agencies--for there is no great distinction between the two.⁵

Probably the largest single factor encouraging

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Thomas Burgess, Greeks in America (Boston: Sherman, French, & Co., 1913), pp 20-21.

emigration, along with the steamship agents and the economic distress, was the letters that were received in Greece from relatives and friends already in the United States. Regardless of whether or not the immigrant had attained fame and fortune in the United States, pride dictated that their letters home tell of their good fortune. The Greek immigrants were prone to exaggerate about their situation with often highly colored reports of salaries, positions, and glowing prospects of their success:

For example, a waiter in a hotel sends a photograph of himself, seated in an automobile, wearing a heavy watch chain and a big, cheap ring. They think he is rich. His two cousins take the next boat for New York. Clippings from the Greek newspapers in America are enclosed to relatives, containing accounts of weddings, baptisms, contributions for some patriotic purpose by a Greek society, and the like. These are read in the villages and do much to incite emigration. The wedding of a poor peasant should figure in a newspaper and be so brilliant a social event, under such fine auspices--such a report of a peasant's wedding would never have been published in a newspaper in Greece! . . . And here is the news that Andropoulos, the poor shepherd who was nothing in his native village, has attained the exalted rank of President of the Society of the Arcadians in the world-famed metropolis of Chicago! Is it any wonder that the Greek peasants look on the United States as a land of ease and glory? Even if they are told the truth of the grinding work and hardships, they will not believe it--for do they not hear from all sides that it is otherwise?⁶

Financing of the trip to the United States was a problem to the Greeks but not an extremely serious one. Some sold their land or farm animals. Others borrowed money from either relatives and friends, or in many cases professional

⁶Saloutos, op. cit., p. 33.

money lenders. "Creditors lent money regularly, as long as they were reassured that the borrowers would pay their debts."⁷ One of the principal sources of finance was the money or sometimes tickets that the Greeks already in the United States sent back in 'immigrant letters'.

The Greeks did believe the 'immigrant letters' as can be seen by the fact that almost two hundred thousand of them emigrated to the United States. The Greeks, as did the other members of the 'new immigration,' arrived in the United States at the Port of New York. The immigrants from Greece usually young adventurous males, came from a rural, agricultural environment, but once in the United States went to live in the urban centers for several reasons. Like the Irish immigrants of an earlier period, the Greek immigrants and Greeks in general have no love for the land. In Greek society, the farmer is not a highly respected figure with the result that the ambitious moved, when possible, from the rural areas to the city. Also, in American cities there were jobs available for the poor immigrant to work, whereas in order to start a farm, an amount of capital would be needed that the newcomer seldom had. The fact that in a large city there would be Greek compatriots and often, as time progressed, a Greek Orthodox Church, were also significant factors in the immigrant's decision to choose a large city as his home in the new land. The result was that "in time, the Greeks started

⁷Ibid., p. 45.

forming colonies in the cities of the New England states; New York City; the metropolitan areas of the upper Mississippi Valley, especially Chicago; and, in the far west, San Francisco."⁸ Upon arrival, the Greek typically went to the home of a relative or friend who would help to orientate him.

The Greek, while he left Greece because of the poor conditions there and a desire to advance economically, often thought of the United States as a place to make his fortune rather than as a permanent home. Consequently he planned to eventually return to Greece with the wealth he hoped to gain in the new country. At first in the United States, even after the new immigrant discovered wealth was not as easily obtainable as he had thought, the dream of returning still persisted as an immigrant revealed in Syracuse, New York during 1918 when asked if the Greeks planned to return to Greece:

All of us, who would not go back to his home and his own? We are strangers in a strange land; we do not know the language of the country; neither can we learn it; we are working hard like slaves and then our earnings fly away from us, everything is so dear. At home, we have our houses, fields, vineyards and our relatives and friends are all there.⁹

Some actually did fulfill this dream by eventually returning to Greece,¹⁰ but the majority did not and remained in the

⁸Ibid.

⁹J. P. Xenides, The Greeks in America (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922), p. 79.

¹⁰For further information on the immigrants who returned see Theodore Saloutos, They Remember America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

United States.

The Greek immigrant in his new urban environment had to find a job. The early immigrants because of their lack of knowledge of English and a lack of training for skilled jobs, had to be content with menial tasks. They worked at first in " . . . the petty street trades and sold cigars, flowers, sweets and other articles; or else, they kept lodging and boarding houses or small taverns for seamen."¹¹ After the turn of the century, the immigrants began to become involved in more fixed employment. Statistical data on the occupations of these early immigrants is unavailable. However, in 1907, Demetrios Botassi, the Greek Consul General in New York City estimated:

of the 150,000 Greeks in the United States, between 30,000 and 40,000 were working as laborers in factories and railroad construction gangs. Others were employed as bootblacks, waiters and clerks in stores that catered to the immigrant trade. Some had become apprentices in various trades; the more ambitious already had become shopkeepers. An undisclosed number owned and managed their own grocery stores, coffeehouses, barbershops, clothing stores, bakeries, carpentry shops, saloons, cleaning and pressing shops, laundries, print shops, meat markets and brokerage firms. The legal and medical professions were also represented, but in relatively smaller numbers.¹²

The Greek immigrant now found himself in a new home in a new country--but what of his loyalties to Greece and to his local region that were discussed in the first chapter? To answer this question, at least in part, the next chapters

¹¹Saloutos, The Greeks in the United States, p. 46.

¹²Ibid., p. 47.

will discuss immigrants from the village of Vervena, as a case study in order to ascertain what happened to some of their values, especially loyalties, in the new country.

CHAPTER III

VERVENA AND VERVENIOTES

The village of Vervena is a small rural center in the mountains of Arcadia, Greece, with a population of approximately 1,000 people. Located at a fairly high altitude, the village can be inhabited only part of the year. The battle of Vervena in the Revolution is responsible for the modern fame of the village, as the small towns of Lexington and Concord are famous in this country because of the American Revolutionary War battles that were fought at those locations. Vervena's geographic location does not provide an abundant livelihood for the villagers. The soil, being in mountainous country, is stony in nature and consequently has limited fertility. The high altitude would not permit extensive agricultural use of the land even if the soil were richer since the growing season is not long. The villagers, therefore, have had to content themselves primarily with the raising of goats and sheep although gardens are maintained to help supply fruits and vegetables for local consumption. The mountainsides provide grazing areas for the animals which then can be sold or traded to villages lower in the valley in order to furnish the Vervena community with its other needs.

The story of the village is an old and honored part of the long history of Greece. Vervena dates back at least to the ninth century having being mentioned in the famous primary source book, of the Byzantine historians, known as the Chronicle of Morea.¹ Modern Greece remembers Vervena for its role in the Greek Revolution (1821-28). The revolutionary leader, Ypsilanti, located his headquarters there and on May 17, 1821, led the second battle of the Greek Revolution which occurred at Vervena.²

In the late 1890's the village, being largely dependent upon local trade, suffered with the rest of Greece when the export currant market failed. The people of Vervena, in company with Greeks throughout the country, had heard of the economic opportunities in the United States. Since the depressed economics of the village provided so little opportunity, a small group of adventurous young men decided to emigrate to the United States during 1897 and 1898.³ Their destination was Chicago which they already knew contained many Greek immigrants. Letters from Chicago, back to the village⁴ would attract several hundred people between 1897

¹Vervena (Athens: Vervena Society of Athens, 1960), p. 7.

²From the "History of the Battle of Vervena," an unpublished article in Greek by Mr. Michael Stikas which is in the Vervena Society files.

³Vervena, op. cit.

⁴Information provided in a series of interviews held in Chicago, with Mr. Michael Stikas, Secretary of the Vervena Fraternal Society, during the summer of 1965.

and 1924 when the new "National Origins" quota law would virtually shut off the flow of immigration from Greece.

In Chicago, these immigrants from Vervena became part of the Greek Colony of the City which Fairchild had described in 1911:

The district . . . around Blue Island Avenue and Polk and South Halsted Streets, is today more typically Greek than some sections of Athens. Practically all the stores bear signs both in Greek and English, coffee-houses flourish on every corner, in the dark little grocery stores one sees black olives, dried ink-fish, tomato paste, and all the queer, nameless roots and condiments which are so familiar in Greece. On every hand one hears the Greek language, and the boys in the streets and on the vacant lots play, with equal zest, Greek games and baseball. It is a self-sufficient colony, and provision is made to supply all the wants of the Greek immigrant in as near as possible the Greek way. Restaurants, coffee-houses, barber shops, grocery stores and saloons are all patterned after the Greek type, and Greek doctors, lawyers, editors and every variety of agent are to be found in abundance.⁵

Immigrants from Vervena, or Verveniotes as they were called, had to find work in the strange new country where they did not even know the language. They usually obtained their first jobs in the United States through the "Boss" or "Padrone system" since,

During the early years, ignorance of the language and of the ways of the country compelled the bewildered newcomer to rely on his employer, who frequently was a labor contractor as well as a compatriot and who had a limited knowledge of English and working conditions.⁶

John Sourrapas was the "Boss" for the immigrants from

⁵Henry Pratt Fairchild, Greek Immigration to the United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), p. 124.

⁶Theodore Saloutos, The Greeks in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 48.

Vervena.⁷ He had been one of the pioneers that had emigrated from Vervena to Chicago⁸ and consequently had had more opportunity to learn both some English and methods of obtaining work that the newcomers could do. The jobs that he obtained for the Verveniotes were usually as members of railroad construction gangs.⁹ The Verveniotes would often work as a crew by themselves and not mix with workers of other nationalities.¹⁰ After acquiring a little English, most of the Verveniotes would follow the familiar pattern of the Greek immigrants' climb up the economic ladder, from peddler to owner of a restaurant, candy store, fruit store, flower shop, etc.¹¹

The Verveniotes consisted of men only during the greater part of their first decade in Chicago. This was not extraordinary for Greek immigrants who, as indicated in Chapter I, were mainly young males. Fairchild estimated in 1911 that, "Of the 15,000 Greeks in the city, only about 700 or 800 are women."¹² The first women from Vervena did not arrive in Chicago until 1907, almost a decade after the first male immigrants.¹³

⁷Interview with Mr. Stikas.

⁸Vervena, op. cit., p. 22.

⁹Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹²Fairchild, op. cit., p. 125.

¹³Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

The men during the first decade in the United States usually lived in boarding houses in the Greek Colony. In such boarding houses a majority would be men from the same village--in this case Vervena. Even if not from the same village or area of Greece, the other boarders would still be mainly Greek immigrants. Living together as they did would tend to maintain the cohesiveness of the Verveniotes. Since their ancestors had lived in the same village for generations, with subsequent intermarriage over the generations, most of the Verveniotes were related to each other and now in the boarding house they would still be with their fellow villagers. Their quarters then tended to maintain solidarity among the Verveniotes. In fact, the Verveniotes--as well as other villagers from Greece--not only roomed together, but worked together, and frequented the same coffee-houses, clubs, and restaurants.¹⁴ The center of the Verveniote's life then was his fellow villager with whom he lived, worked and played. Surrounding this center would be the Greek Colony in which he lived and which formed the second focal area of his life. Finally the Colony was located in the American City of Chicago which would be the third major orientation for the Verveniote.

One Verveniote recalled, during a recent interview,¹⁵ that his earliest housing in Chicago in 1907-10 was in such

¹⁴J. P. Xenides, The Greeks in America (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1922), p. 22.

¹⁵Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

a boarding house at Hastings and Blue Island Avenues, with ten other men. They hired another Greek immigrant to take care of housekeeping chores and do the cooking while they worked long hours as street peddlers. This hiring of a man to take care of the housework and cooking for all, was comparatively inexpensive and extremely important to the young immigrants who sought enough to return to Greece.¹⁶

Religion was also a part of the immigrant's life. Almost all the Greek immigrants in America, with few exceptions, belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church; " . . . even the indifferent and the non-churchgoers regarding themselves as Greek church people."¹⁷ The Verveniotes considered themselves part of that tradition. Yet, this religion in America was modified and secularized in the new country as was noticed by the biased but observant Protestants of Greek extraction, Xenides:

Worldiness.--This is partly due to religious indifference of the people, and partly, probably with a good many, to the rush and tear of American life. Worldliness dominates the people and things spiritual recede into the background. All work hard and get tired on week days, and are anxious to rest physically on Sundays, so they get up late and spend the rest of the day in outings, visiting and amusement. Even those who attend the morning Church service spend the rest of the day in pleasure. Sunday observance among the Greeks everywhere is the continental and not the Puritan method. Even church attendance with a good many is perfunctory, consisting of a brief time at the mass, lighting a candle before the icon and making the sign of the cross. Many

¹⁶Vervena, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁷Xenides, op. cit., p. 118.

indulge in conversation during the services.¹⁸

The social aspect of the Verveniote's life was quite similar to that of other Greek immigrants. The absence of women from Vervena before 1907 and the presence of few other Greek women meant that, on the whole, their social life consisted of all-male activities. Associating with non-Greek women was frowned upon by Greek immigrants since as one coffee-house philosopher said, " . . . Marry a Greek girl and you have nothing to worry about. If you want to open tin cans and eat out of them for the rest of your life, then marry someone else."¹⁹ The social activities of the Greek immigrants in their leisure time centered around a few activities such as the coffee-houses, picnics, receptions and visiting one another.²⁰ Again, in the coffee-houses and other gathering places, Greek immigrants from the same area would tend to fraternize primarily with each other. At work and at play the localism prevailed:

A Lacedemonian, a Thessalian, An Arcadian, a Macedonian or a Cretan could generally be found working with compatriots from the same village or province. The same divisions were observed among the coffeehouses and restaurants; the Lacedemonians had theirs, as did the Macedonians, the Arcadians, the Messinians, the Stereoladitans. The Greeks tended to work, sleep, eat and drink according to villages, districts and provinces.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

¹⁹ Saloutos, op. cit., p. 314.

²⁰ Xenides, op. cit., pp. 88-91.

²¹ Saloutos, op. cit., p. 76.

The localism that Saloutos describes among the Greek immigrants was evident in the appearance of the Greek fraternal societies. Membership in such societies was limited to people from the same village or area in Greece. A study made at the University of Chicago revealed that in Chicago, at least seventy-six organizations related to a province of Greece and thirty-four connected with a village existed in the Greek-American community.²² The purposes of these fraternal organizations were summarized in a University of Chicago as desires; to promote friendship and mutual assistance among the members; to assist spiritually as well as materially, in case of accident or sickness; to rekindle and maintain due respect for the Orthodox Church, the cultural heritage, and traditions of the "Motherland"; to maintain a high spirit of respect and conformity with the laws, constitution, and authorities of " . . . our adopted country. . . ."²³ The activities of the organizations according to the same source included:

. . . recreation, such as picnics and dances; observances of religious and national celebrations; and participation in fund-raising drives for the old country (for example, building hospitals and helping the Greek war orphans, etc.) in addition, of course, to the payment of sick and death benefits.²⁴

²²Constantine Yerecaris, "A Study of the Voluntary Associations of the Greek Immigrants of Chicago from 1890 to 1946, with special Emphasis on World War I and Post-War Period" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1950), p. 35.

²³Ibid., pp. 45-46.

²⁴Ibid.

The appeal of the organizations for the members was complex. A desire to aid their friends and relatives in the home village was one of the motives, as well as a need for the social comradeship of the meetings, and the prestige of holding offices.²⁵ The University of Chicago study of the immigrant societies as a whole, said that:

. . . early organizations of the Greek immigrants in Chicago were predominantly directed toward the carrying on of a feeling of belonging; the transplanting of the informal, communal life of the small village with its distinct and unique coloring. The highly differentiated human relations in the American urban society resulted in the structuralization of the common elements of their background. In the homeland, the communal life is all inclusive, habitual and sacred. The position of the individual, his role, and his conception of himself are pre-determined in a stable manner in which no significant deviation is possible. It is transmitted unaltered or with slow and unobservable change, from generation to generation. Social knowledge consciousness does not exist in such a society. Conformity to the sacred tenets of the group is the process whereby naturally and non-reflectively the individual is able to participate in the communal life. Social consciousness arises only where there is opposition to the established pattern.²⁶

From the above analysis the Chicago study further suggests that the forming of immigrant organizations was the most effective way for the individual member to attain a feeling of identity and belongingness. In the organizations the immigrant could find expression for the outstanding elements of his cultural tradition including communal solidarity, local cooperation, and mutual aid.

The Vervena Fraternal Society was one of thirty-four

²⁵Saloutos, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁶Yerocarlis, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

Greek village societies formed in Chicago. The organization was formally established January 6, 1901 at a meeting of about 8 to 10 immigrants from the village, held at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.²⁷ The organization had its roots in a committee that had been founded the preceding year (1900) in order to obtain funds to build a church in Vervena.²⁸ The stated purpose for organizing the Society was to build the church in Vervena and some monuments for war veterans from the village. However, the concept of the role of the Society soon expanded until it was a comprehensive beneficiary organization to aid the village of Vervena in any way possible.

Membership was never large. During the first few years it had an average of twenty to twenty-five members attending the meetings. Eventually, the organization was to reach a peak of about one hundred active members. In recent years, with the advancing age of the original immigrants and only a trickling of new immigrants from the village, membership has dwindled down to about fifty. Women were not allowed to participate directly but did form an auxiliary group known as the Society of ladies of Vervena in Chicago, which was especially active in aiding the various fund raising activities of the men's organization.

The meeting places for the Vervena Society changed over the years but always was inside Little Greece near

²⁷Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

²⁸Vervena, op. cit., p. 22.

Harrison and Halsted streets. The Society now meets at a hall near Jackson and Halsted streets. The most famous meeting place of the fraternal group was at Hull House during the Thirties, where they were provided a meeting room and had the privilege of knowing Jane Addams.²⁹ Hull House was located in the midst of the Greek Colony which the Greek immigrants heartily approved of--so much so, that on the one occasion " . . . they succeeded in convincing the Bulgarians, for the time at least, that it was intended for the Greeks alone . . ."³⁰

This chapter has sketched an outline of the background of the founding, and the actual founding, of the Vervena Fraternal Society as well as information concerning the Greek immigrant organizations as a whole. Some material was provided on the influences affecting members of the Society but little was said about the group values of the fraternal organization, or its' activities and accomplishments, both of which will be discussed in the two following chapters.

²⁹Interview with Mr. Stikas.

³⁰Burgess, op. cit., p. 132.

CHAPTER IV

THREE FLAGS

Organized groups tend to have some values held in common by the entire membership. Innumerable examples could be cited such as the value of racism to members of the Ku Klux Klan, of Beethoven to members of a musical society, or of the belief in God by members of the Roman Catholic Church. While the preceeding groups and values vary widely, they are all organized groups which within each have a membership that accepts the validity and worth of their particular values whether it be racism, Beethoven's music, or God.

The Vervena Society, as an organized group, also has values held in common by the Society and the individual members. Some of the values, those involving loyalty, will be discussed in this chapter, particularly ones stressed by members of the Society and shown by the examination of their manuscripts. These are: (1) an attachment to the village of Vervena itself, (2) an awareness of the history of the village, (3) a feeling of the common descent of the villagers and themselves, and (4) a sharing of customs and traditions with the villagers remaining in Greece. In a way, this value system could be looked upon as a miniature localized nationalism in

absentia. Hans Kohn has indicated that nationalities came into existence when certain bonds delimited a social group.¹ Kohn said that, "A nationality generally has several of these attributes; very few have all of them. The most usual of them are common descent, language, territory, political entity, customs and traditions, and religion."² The values of the Society, while related only to a small village, are of the same as those that Hans Kohn assigns to nationalism.

The value that the Verveniotes assign to the village and land is of utmost importance. Psychologically, this is only natural, according to one psychologist's, Leonard W. Doob, analysis of the attachment of people to a land area:

The initial referent of patriotism must be the land on which people live. . . . Psychologically, too, land is basic, since the goal of consequence of much early activity by infants and children is the exploration of even wider areas of space. . . . The land remains a concrete reality: here the home is located, here a living is earned, here the web of human relationship exists, here death eventually occurs. . . . Obviously, the land and its special features evoke strong emotional responses when they have been associated with a people's way of life, for then they realistically represent the important values of the Society.³

The esteem that members of the Vervena Society place on the village and land, even though thousands of miles distant, is expressed through the many references, frequently

¹Hans Kohn, Idea of Nationalism (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 15.

²Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³Leonard W. Doob, Patriotism and Nationalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 25-27.

of a sentimental nature, made by members of the group.⁴ Michael Stikas, Secretary of the organization, wrote a poem expressing his feelings about his patridha, Vervena. Patridha in this context, means beloved village of origin although the term usually refers to country rather than village, and is the root word for the English term patriotism.⁵ The poem, translated from the original Greek by Mr. Stikas and George Christakes, loses the poetic beauty of the original but still conveys the poet's emotional feeling for the land on the occasion of a return visit to Vervena in 1960:

Dream of the Stranger

Again I come back to the Holy land, my patridha
 To enjoy with gladness its' natural beauty.
 I didn't come only for that, but I came to marvel
 at the marble church, the monuments, and the schools,
 which fill you with joy. The schools which I attended
 and in which dawned my first educational light.
 I always have you first in my heart.

I came back after many years,
 Having left your arms as the other boys
 left their loving homes.
 And, far away as I was, my
 thoughts were to you--

For someday with joy you
 would welcome me again.
 And now, on my return, I
 want to put my foot on the
 Holy Ground which I left, and
 kiss the land.

⁴Vervena Society records.

⁵Ernestine Friedl, Vasilika (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 104.

The years pass by like a day
 My joy today is indescribable--to me.
 And now you welcome me in your arms.
 Have hope and joy for all your sons.

My patridha, now without request,
 I describe my dream--
 Because this way I feel, is my dream.
 My years are a great many--so when I die--
 welcome me to your Holy Ground.

The stranger woke up from his dream.
 He smoothly rubbed his eyes, with joy and cried:
 'Ah--My sweet patridha, for one moment
 I saw you in my dream and I longed for you,
 sweet patridha.⁶

One member of the Vervena Society has shown his attachment for the home village in a dramatic fashion. He had included in his will, instructions that his body should be shipped to Vervena for burial. When he died in the early nineteen sixties, his wish was carried out.⁷

The members of the Society also place great value on the history of the village, particularly of the role of the village in the Battle of Vervena during the Greek War of independence. The Vervena Fraternity expressed its pride, in the role of the village as the battle site, by having erected a monument in 1920 to commemorate the battle, which was dedicated at the one hundredth anniversary in 1921.⁸ A plaque was also provided by the Chicago Verveniotes to mark the spot where Ypsilanti was reported to have directed the engagement.

⁶ A copy of the unpublished poem was furnished by Mr. Stikas.

⁷ Interview with Mr. Stikas.

⁸ Ibid.

The newspaper clipping book maintained by the Vervena Society has more clippings from Greek newspapers about the battle and the annual anniversary celebrations than about any other single subject.⁹ Representatives, or at least messages, continue to be sent to the village for the yearly commemorative ceremony on May 17th.¹⁰ The Secretary of the organization even wrote a short unpublished article entitled, "The History of the Battle of Vervena," which is read at meetings of the Society on each anniversary of the battle.¹¹

The regard for the historical past, of the village in the Battle of Vervena, can be regarded as part of such a system of miniature local nationalism in absentia. One historian, Boyd Shafer, names as one of the ten conditions present in nationalism, "A belief in a common history (it can be invented.)"¹²

The common descent of the people of the village and the members of the Vervena Society, as well as the common descent of members of the fraternal group, is also held in high regard. Even a special term compatriote (compatriot), is used to refer to people from the same village in Greece. Thus one member of the Society would introduce another Verveniote as 'my compatriote'. A Greek-American from a different

⁹Vervena Society Records.

¹⁰Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹¹Vervena Society Records.

¹²Boyd C. Shafer, Nationalism Myth and Reality (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), p. 8.

village of origin would be referred to as a 'fellow Greek' rather than as a compatriote. An obligation to help a compatriote during time of need is felt by members who have on various occasions helped one another as individuals and on a few occasions, when the need for help was more extensive, the organization as a whole moved to the aid of a distressed member.¹³

Two of the three remaining criteria of Kohn, language and religion, are applicable to the Vervena Society. All of the members are Greek Orthodox in religion and all speak the Greek language. However, no allegiance as such is apparent to the village government. Political loyalty is the third criteria but is not evident in the records of the Society.¹⁴

The values of the Vervena Society that have been discussed up to this point support the supposition that the Society represents a miniature localized nationalism in absentia. Five of the six criteria given by Kohn for nationalism are apparent in the fraternal organization. The focus of the loyalty is upon the local area, as it had been in the ancient Greek city-state system, and since the members of the group are thousands of miles distant, it would have to be considered in absentia.

However, again as it had been in ancient Greece¹⁵ and

¹³Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹⁴Vervena Society Records.

¹⁵C. M. Bowra, The Greek Experience (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 25.

as it has remained into modern times,¹⁶ the Greeks have other factors common to their feelings of loyalty. With the introduction of the groups two other main loyalties--a loyalty to Greece with an identification as Greeks and a loyalty to the United States with a self-identification as Americans--the concept of a miniature localized nationalism in absentia is no longer broad enough to characterize the value system of the Vervena Fraternal Society. The values of the group are more complex and must be examined as such.

The Verveniotes, in spite of their pride in their relationship to the village, identify as Greeks. Over the years, the Society has participated in the annual Greek Independence Day Parade held in downtown Chicago in which Greek-Americans from all over the metropolitan area, as well as various political dignitaries sensitive of bloc voting, the Mayor of Chicago and often the Governor of the State of Illinois, participate in order to celebrate the achievement of an independent Greek nation.¹⁷

Following World War I, the Society donated fifteen hundred dollars, to the Greek War Relief Fund which was used to aid all of Greece--not just the village of Vervena.¹⁸ During World War I and the Balkan War which preceded the

¹⁶Ernestine Friedl, Vasilika, A Village in Modern Greece (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. 104-106.

¹⁷Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹⁸Ibid.

'Great War', Verveniotes returned to the mother country to fight as members of the Greek Royal Army.¹⁹ One example of a Verveniote who returned during the Balkan War was Daniel Felaretos. Mr. Felaretos emigrated to the United States in 1907 and then when Greece went to war in 1911, he returned voluntarily to fight for Greece in the conflict. He was wounded in the right arm--the injury caused a permanent disability because of the poor medical facilities of the Royal Army--and eventually returned to Chicago after the war was over.²⁰

The strength of the loyalty to Greece of the members of the Vervena Fraternal Society was recognized by an award bestowed by the Greek government for the Society's work for Greece. In 1964, King Paul, before his death, authorized an award certificate and a medal for the Society. King Constantine actually made the presentation of the award.²¹ The award of the Greek government together with the accompanying medal occupy positions of honor in the possessions of the fraternal group.

The addition of a loyalty to Greece by the Verveniotes, could be compared to other villages. The people of Vasilika,

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Information on Daniel Felaretos comes from a life-long acquaintance the writer had with Mr. Felaretos until the gentleman's retirement in Greece in 1959.

²¹Vervena Society Records.

Greece, Ernestine Friedl concluded, had a feeling of loyalty both to their local village and to Greece as a whole.²² A comparison could also be made to ancient Greece where Bowra feels the same dual loyalty existed.²³ Yet, there is still one remaining major factor to be considered--a loyalty to the United States.

The difference that separates the Verveniotes of Chicago from the villagers who did not emigrate--who, however, share all the values mentioned except this last--is the loyalty to the United States that members of the Society have acquired during the sixty-eight years in which emigrants from the village of Vervena have resided in Chicago. This loyalty to their adopted country has shown itself in several ways. In World War I, while some Verveniotes served as aforementioned in the Royal Hellenic Army, others served in the United States Armed Forces.²⁴ By the time of the beginning of World War II, most of the Verveniotes, who had immigrated before 1924, were too old for active military service, however, many of their children fought in that conflict for the United States.²⁵ Members of the Society, and the fraternal group as a whole, were active during both wars in various United States bond

²²Friedl, op. cit.

²³Bowra, op. cit.

²⁴Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

²⁵Ibid.

drives to raise funds in order to conduct the global conflicts.²⁶

The most graphic illustration of the three main objects attracting the loyalty of the members of the Vervena Fraternal Society can be seen in their flags. The flag is a concrete symbol that reflects an emotional feeling for the country or whatever else it symbolizes.²⁷ At the meetings and official functions of the Society, three banners are always displayed.²⁸ One is the pennant of the fraternity itself which symbolizes both the group and the village. Another, is the blue and white flag, with a white cross in the upper left hand corner, symbolizing the Orthodox Greek nation. The third flag displayed is the flag of the United States. On the occasion of the dedication of a school in the village, for which the Verveniotes had provided the funds to build, the Society sent two hundred Greek flags and one hundred American flags.²⁹ Representatives of the fraternal group attending one of the annual anniversary celebrations of the Battle of Vervena were dismayed when they discovered that the American flags that they were planning to hold while singing the Star Spangled Banner during the celebration, were lost in shipment from Chicago.³⁰ Yet, here in the United States, in the Greek

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Leonard W. Doob, Patriotism and Nationalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 33.

²⁸Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

Independence Day Parade of Chicago, it is the Greek flag that is featured.³¹

The evidence of multiple loyalty in the display of flags exists in the rest of the Chicago Greek-American community as well as the Verveniotes. Greek Orthodox churches in the city have both Greek and American flags on staffs at the front of the Church. In the cemeteries of metropolitan Chicago, on Memorial Day, loyalties again can be observed through flags. Some cemeteries catering to multi-ethnic groups are divided into sections which are designated for people of the same nationality to be buried. The resemblance to the division of the people in life, in ethnic areas of the city is again present in death by the ghetto-like divisions.³² In the Greek-American section of Elmwood Cemetery for example, on the city's outskirts, every Memorial Day, a colorful display of miniature Greek and American flags, one of each, on almost every grave, can be seen among the bright flowers and green grass.³³ Even in death, the loyalties of the immigrant are symbolized by the presence of the two flags.

The Verveniotes who fulfilled their dreams by returning to the village to live their last years in retirement,

³¹Ibid.

³²In recent years, this pattern has begun to disintegrate in the cemeteries as it has in the city itself.

³³This scene has been witnessed by the writer all of his life.

again show their identification as Americans.³⁴ In the village they are referred to by the villagers as 'Americans' and have gone so far as to form a club of former residents of Chicago.³⁵ Even back in the home village then, their loyalty to the United States, acquired during their many years in this country, is retained suggesting the sincerity of their patriotic attachment to America.

The Vervena Fraternal Society members, this chapter has shown, have three main loyalty values--the village of Vervena, their mother country Greece, and their adopted country, the United States. They have shown their patriotic feeling for all three by symbolism, words, and actions.

³⁴For further information on the self-identification of returned immigrants as Americans see both: Theodore Saloutos, They Remember America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), and Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality in American Life (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), pp. 201-217.

³⁵Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

CHAPTER V

THE SOCIETY AND THE MAN

The Vervena Fraternal Society was and is essentially a service organization. The original purpose for its formation is already mentioned, was to erect a church in the village which was eventually accomplished. The background of the organization, the historical traditions influencing the members, and the values of the group have been discussed in the preceding chapters. This chapter will view the Society as an organization, its activities, its accomplishments and the outlook for the future.

Meetings of the Vervena Society have been held over the years since the founding of the group in 1901 approximately once every month. Normally they were scheduled for the first Sunday evening of each month at 4:30 P.M., but this varied slightly depending upon time of the year and the type of activity slated.¹ Attendance also varied with circumstances usually consisting of twenty-five Verveniotes out of the one hundred to two hundred members which the group had at different times through the years. Members would drift in to the

¹All information about the meetings of the Society was obtained in the interviews with Mr. Michael Stikas.

meeting hall before the actual meeting began in order to see their friends and exchange the latest news concerning events occurring in the Greek colony and other more personal experiences.

The formal meeting itself would usually last from two to three hours. The language used at the meetings was Greek because even through the years all of the members had acquired a knowledge of English, they still preferred to use the Greek language. However, each one had a slight accent depending upon the number of years in this country, whether or not his work required the frequent use of English, and of course, individual differences in ability to acquire a second language. Parliamentary procedure was used to conduct the meetings. This is interesting since it shows the influence of the American culture upon the Society in acquiring the idea of using parliamentary procedure from the new country. Often Verveniotes would be members of other organizations, such as the Masons, American Legion, or the Moose, where they were exposed to such new concepts.

After the meetings, refreshments (coffee, wine and Greek pastries) would be served and members would have an opportunity to discuss the meeting informally and to socialize. The meetings were an important social event as such, since as the years passed by the members had scattered around metropolitan area of Chicago which meant that this was one of

the few opportunities they had to see one another.²

Topics of discussion at the meetings frequently involved the problems of the village of Vervena and possible courses of action that the Vervena Society could undertake in order to help alleviate those problems. Often, again influenced by the American culture, committees would be formed to delve further into such problems, devise possible courses of action and report back to the organization as a whole. Standing committees were also created to work on major long range involvements.

The organization of the Vervena Fraternal Society also was similar to other groups in the new country. The offices created to run the organization were those of president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. Elections were held every year for those offices. These positions, with the exception of that of the secretary, would rotate among the active members of the organization. The office of secretary has been held from 1912 to the present, excepting three scattered years, by Michael Stikas who also has been unofficial archivist and historian for the Society.

The role of Michael Stikas has been a major factor in the history of the Vervena Society.³ He emigrated from Vervena

²Other opportunities would include church on Sundays, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and special social activities the Society sponsored.

³Information of Mr. Stikas and his work with the Society was provided by Mrs. Kay Volas, Mr. Nicholas Koovales, and Mr. Stikas in a series of interviews.

as a young man in his late teens arriving at Ellis Island on July 3, 1907. Mr. Stikas was not one of the pioneers who, coming over in the late nineteenth century, were firmly enough established that they could devote time and money to establishing the Society in 1901. Yet over the years he would play an important role in the organization.

Michael Stikas, now an elderly man living in retirement on Chicago's far west side, led a life that was not too atypical in many ways from the other Verveniotes. When he first came to Chicago, he was met by his Uncle John Mansolas, who had been writing letters urging the young man to emigrate, and was taken to a boarding house located at Hastings and Blue Island Avenues in the Greek colony. There, Michael lived with ten other immigrants--one of whom did the cooking and housework while the other men worked as street peddlers. At first, the young man worked mainly to accumulate money to bring his brother over who came after the First World War but became ill and died in the early Twenties. During his early years in this country, Michael Stikas worked with a horse and wagon, later an old truck, selling fruits and vegetables in an Irish neighborhood. In 1936, he quit the peddler business and went to work as a clerk for another Verveniote, John Planos, in a grocery store at 5547 South Halsted Street. Michael continued his job there until he accepted Social Security and retirement in 1962.

Two major factors distinguished Michael Stikas from

the other Verveniotes--his remaining unmarried and his dedication to the Society. The principal reason he did not marry is found in the obligations as the oldest son of a Greek close knit family. As already mentioned, during the years before World War I, he was saving to bring over his brother who was to die shortly afterward. There were also three sisters named Sophia, Anna, and Helen as well as a brother, George, besides Petro the oldest who had died.

The dowry system was a heavy obligation on the oldest brother and Michael Stikas was expected to provide for this which he did. The oldest sisters, Sophia, and Anna, both married with dowries supplied by Michael, although Anna was to die shortly after leaving a six-month-old daughter whom Michael had to help support. The youngest sister Helen, died before she married and the brother George was brought over to the United States by Michael. With the family obligations he had as older brother, Michael Stikas felt free to marry and lead his own life. The lack of his own home life however was to leave him free to dedicate himself to his work with the Vervena Society.

Michael Stikas joined the Society over a half century ago in 1912. He assumed the office of Secretary during World War I which he has held to the present time except for three separate one year intervals when he was not elected. As Secretary, he has provided continuity to the Society and was responsible for carrying out the policies of the organization.

Having one man who does a great deal of the work while the higher offices are rotated periodically, is a characteristic not only of immigrant organizations, but of American groups also. The fact that Michael Stikas was able to devote so much of his time and energy to the Society is the key to why the group has been so effective.

The major accomplishments of the Verveniotes were projects to aid the village of Vervena and Astros (the winter village) in Greece. The original endeavor of building a church in Vervena took thirty-five years to complete since the elaborate Byzantine churches of the Greek Orthodox faith require a great deal of time, skill, and, more importantly, a large amount of money for construction. The marble church, named 'Assumption', is nearing completion in the village of Astros.⁴

The construction of elementary schools for the children of the village have been major undertakings in which members of the Society have participated to aid their friends and relatives left behind in the ancestral home. Three have actually been constructed.⁵ All buildings use essentially the same instructional and administrative staff. The major school is in Vervena itself and is used by all the children during the warmer months of the year when the village is inhabitable. Another building is in the village of Astros which the majority of the children and staff utilize in the colder months. A

⁴Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

⁵Vervena Society Records.

third, smaller facility also constructed from funds provided by the fraternal group, is located a short distance from Astros where the remaining children and staff spend the winter months.

The Vervena Society also provides an annual stipend of three hundred dollars to enable the school system to have a special summer session course in home economics.⁶ The girls of the village attend this course to learn modern home economic methods which help them to improve and modernize living conditions in the village.

The Churches and schools have been the major projects of the Society in relation to the home village although they began many smaller ones too. Money was provided by the Society for various monuments commemorating the battle of Vervena, following World War II and the Greek Civil War (1944-1951), and for such things as specialized medical aid for the villagers when they could not afford it.⁷ The Vervena Society has always, whenever such needs arose, tried to help in the service organization tradition. Particularly impressive is the fact that all the help rendered to the village of Vervena has been by a group that never had over two hundred individual members!

The village of Vervena has appreciated the aid given by their American compatriotes. Every year July 25th is a special holiday to honor the Vervena Fraternal Society.⁸ A

⁶Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Vervena Society Records.

writer in the home village referring to the day that the Society was born commented, "We can unhesitantly say that because of the accomplishments of the Vervena Fraternal Society, the 6th day of January, 1901, was a truly historical day."⁹

The problem of raising funds to enable the Society to carry out the projects was solved in several ways. The first source of income was the dues which the members paid. These have been during the entire existence of the Society, twelve dollars per year.¹⁰ While providing a considerable amount, this has been insufficient to finance the many activities of the fraternal group. Three other main sources of revenue have helped to finance the work of the Society. They are: (1) picnics, (2) dances, and (3) individual donations.¹¹

The annual picnics of the Society, from their inception during the first decade of the century to the final one held in the early nineteen-fifties, were attractive social events for the Greek-American community of Chicago. These picnics held on grounds on the outskirts of the city were characteristic of Greek social events.¹² The members of the Society, their relatives, and friends would attend the picnic sponsored by the group. Refreshments and food, including whole

p. 22. ⁹Vervena (Athens: Vervena Society of Athens, 1960),

¹⁰Vervena Society Records.

¹¹Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹²Thomas Burgess, Greeks in America (Boston: Sherman French and Co., 1913), pp. 92-93.

lambs which would be roasted outdoors on an open spit, would be provided by the Society of Ladies of Vervena in Chicago.¹³ Bands playing traditional Greek music were provided for dancing. A bar would supply various types of Greek alcoholic beverages which would contribute to the festive atmosphere. Aside from serving as a social event for the entire Greek-American community, the picnic would return a sizable amount of revenue for the Vervena Society, which sold tickets for admission, provided food and refreshments (usually donated by members) which the picnickers could buy, and ran raffles and bingo games (again influenced by the American environment.)¹⁴

The second source of revenue mentioned, dances sponsored by the Vervena Society, again provided a social outlet for the Greek-American community as well as a source of funds.¹⁵ Attendance at the dances drew mainly from the same group which attended the picnics. A hall would be rented by the Society which sold tickets and ran a bar. The ladies auxiliary would provide pastries and other refreshments sold at the dance. A band would be provided for dancing which featured in the earlier years, especially before World War II, Greek music. In recent years however, American influence and the demands

¹³Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Information about the dances were provided by Mr. and Mrs. Angelo Volas and Mrs. Alexandra Papantony who attended many of the dances sponsored by the Society over the years. Both Angelo Volas and his wife, the former Kay Koovales, are American born children of members of the Society.

of the younger American born generations attending the dances, have created a change and American dance tunes such as Misty and Stardust may be heard as well as the traditional Greek Hasapicos. One interesting custom of the Vervena dances is that when a purchase is made at the bar, no change is given since it is generally understood that the difference is a donation to the Vervena Society.

The third source of revenue mentioned, individual donations, came primarily from members of the organization.¹⁶ Often this would be donated for specific projects when at a meeting the president would call for pledges to enable the group to carry out some special work. Some money has also been left to the Society by deceased members in their wills.

The Vervena Fraternal Society as shown above, has been an active force influencing the village in Greece, the Greek-American community of Chicago, and the lives of the members of the organization. Yet, in recent years, especially the last decade, a change has been occurring in the Society. This change has been brought about by the aging of the men and the resultant dwindling in size of the group because of deaths.¹⁷ Since the majority of the Verveniotes immigrated to the United States before 1924 as young men, the ages of many members now are in the late sixties, seventies, and even eighties. One result has been that they voted themselves a

¹⁶Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

¹⁷Ibid.

three hundred dollar benefit to be paid to the family of each upon his death. Another result of the advancing ages of the group is that meetings are not held as frequently especially in inclement weather. The overall result seems to have been a slowing down of the group activities if not the enthusiasm.¹⁸

There are two possible sources that exist from which younger people can be obtained to take over and carry on the tasks undertaken by the Vervena Fraternal Society. The first is the descendents of the original immigrants who now have not only sons and grandsons, but in some cases great-grandsons. This source, however, has not proven to be a very fruitful one. The children of the immigrants have supported the Society by attending their fund raising activities and through donations but for the most part, have not become members of the Society.¹⁹ The reasons, according to one descendent, that the second generation did not become active in the Vervena Society are: first, the age and cultural differences between the original immigrant members and their American born, raised, and educated offspring; and second that the majority of second generation children while marrying Americans of Hellenic descent, have not married partners whose parents were from Vervena so that consequently there would be a conflict of interest between husband and wife over whether to help the Vervena Society or the partner's village society (if one

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

existed);²⁰ and the third generation is even more distant in age and cultural values.

The second source of younger members for the Society is the village of Vervena itself--i. e., new immigrants. Since 1924, however, the Society has gained only eight to ten members from this source because the immigration laws has only allowed a small quota from Greece.²¹ With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, a new possibility has arisen which will allow more people to emigrate to the United States from Greece. The effects of this law remain to be seen, but this does seem to be where the possibility for the future existence of the Vervena Fraternal Society lies.

²⁰Interview with Mrs. Kay Volas of Chicago.

²¹Interview with Mr. Michael Stikas.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The problem of where the loyalties of the Vervena Fraternal Society lie is not one for which a simple answer will suffice. Many facets of the Society exist that lend credence to the conclusion that the prime loyalty of the group is to any of three: (Vervena, Greece, or the United States). Yet, the answer that seems most creditable is found by viewing the fraternal group as a complex organization having multiple loyalties influenced by many factors.

The influence of the Society's heritage from both ancient and modern Greece must be considered. While it may be debatable whether the Verveniotes, who are ethnically Greeks, are the physical descendents of the inhabitants of Hellas, the veneration of the ancients as their ancestors and many of the physical factors facing the classical people both still influence them now. For many of the same reasons, such as the topography, the provincialism exists today in modern Greece as it had in that land during the time of Aristotle and Pericles. So, the Verveniotes who spent their early lives in the village were influenced by the heritage of provincial local loyalty to the village as well as the natural psychological loyalty to the place where they were born, spent their

years, and where their parents had lived and died.

Again, as was true of the ancient Greeks, the Verveniotes also identified themselves in nationality, as being Greek before they emigrated and, as has been shown, after immigration. Their nationalism, while tempered by regionalism was still an important factor since at the time of their emigration the Greek national state was less than one hundred years old and had gone through several patriotically inspired wars.

The fact that they had brought their 'uprooted' dual loyalties with them to the United States is evident in the founding and operation of the Vervena Fraternal Society. The Society's work over the years helped both the mother village and mother country through the various projects which have been described, thus accomplishing a considerable amount for a group the size of the Society. Their poems, records, and actions all testify to their loyalty to both Vervena and Greece.

The whole story of their loyalties does not end at that point, however, since they were exposed to new experiences and influences in their adopted country--the United States. When they came, they were Verveniotes and Greeks, but they became Americans as well. With time they acquired a knowledge of the language; a sentimental attachment to their homes and the City of Chicago in which they both lived their lives and raised their children; an economic stake in the prosperity of

the new country in which they would suffer (as they did in the Great Depression) or prosper with America; and children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (who were American and whose future was completely intertwined with that of the new country) providing a blood relationship for the Verveniotes with the people of the United States. They still held the old values of loyalty to Vervena and Greece but now they had the additional loyalty for their adopted country as was graphically demonstrated by Verveniotes singing the Star Spangled Banner while attending ceremonies in Greece.

So, in summary, the loyalties themselves of the Vervena Society follow three paths, signified by the three banners displayed at meetings, those of Vervena, Greece, and the United States. The reason for these loyalties is found in the heritage of the group as Greeks, as people from the same village in Greece, and in the experiences and influences to which they were exposed in the New World.

The question remains how some understanding of this small part of the comparatively insignificant Greek immigrant group may help to better understand the larger problem of American nationalism, at least, in relation to ethnic groups. After all, the problem of what is an American is a perplexing one in itself. Is the 'melting pot' concept the real solution for the problem since the criteria in defining an American according to Crèvecoeur is: " . . . He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners,

receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men . . . :¹ Or is it in the solution that the concept of 'cultural pluralism' where the nation is made up of a combination of ethnic groups working together as Horace Kallen phrased it as " . . . a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind."² Or is it in the answer that it is necessary for complete assimilation to an Anglo-Saxon standard for a man to be an American, since as Richard Mayo-Smith said, "No nation can exist and be powerful that is not homogeneous. . . ."³ Which does the study of the Vervena Society suggest is nearest to the truth?

The loyalties of the Vervena Society seem to lend some credence to the first two of the theories but not to the third. The experience of the Vervena Society substantiates the 'melting pot' concept to some extent since as this study has shown, the Verveniotes brought over from the old country their values and added concepts acquired in the new country resulting in a group of people with a perspective which was a mixture. However, it was a mixture rather than a fusion of the two since they retained some of their old values, such as loyalties to Greece and Vervena, and only added some new beliefs

¹Oscar Handlin, Immigration as a factor in American History (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 149.

²Ibid., p. 155.

³Ibid., p. 163.

relating to loyalty to their new country rather than blending the two to come up with an entirely new set of values. This retention of older emotional attachments while having a loyalty to the United States, as it has been demonstrated the members of the Vervena Society indeed did have, supports the 'cultural pluralism' concept. The drawback to that being the most nearly accurate solution, to describe the Verveniotes' role as Americans, is that they were no longer just purely members of the Greek ethnic group working together with other ethnic groups for the general good, but were a distinct type--the Greek-American or Americans of Hellenic descent as versus being a Greek. This difference was shown, for example, when the returned immigrants formed an American club in Vervena. The third theory, that to be an American the immigrant must assimilate to an Anglo-Saxon standard, is shown to be false in the case of the Verveniotes. They did not assimilate completely to such a standard as can be seen by their retention of loyalties to Vervena and Greece so either they are not really Americans, which is not true since they demonstrated their loyalty in many ways as was shown in this study, or the criteria in the 'assimilation' theory are unrealistic in the context of twentieth century America. The conclusion of this study is that the Verveniotes are definitely Americans, but must be considered a more complex entity which includes their identification as Greeks and also as villagers of Vervena. Since there is no definite answer to the question of what is

an American, it must be concluded that persons who owe loyalty to, identify with and are legally recognized as such must be considered as Americans just as people who can answer similar requirements for identification as Roman Catholics must be considered members of the Church even though they may be Caucasian, Negro, or American Indian.

While granting that a limited study of a small group such as the Vervena Society is not sufficient to give any sort of a comprehensive solution to the problem of 'what is an American?' in relationship to the immigrant, this study suggests that perhaps the answer may be found somewhere between the 'melting pot' and 'cultural pluralism' concepts. However, it is recognized that a great deal more extensive interdisciplinary research will be necessary before anything approaching a definitive answer may be realized.

ESSAY ON SOURCES

The materials used in this study included published works, unpublished studies, a collection of papers, and several personal interviews. Since much of the thesis is original research an emphasis was placed on the papers of the Vervena Society and a series of interviews with Mr. Michael Stikas, Secretary of that organization and undoubtedly the most knowledgeable person about the group. This material proved to be of great value after subjection to intense internal criticism of both the written and oral material.

The most valuable materials for the purposes of this study, concerning ancient Greece were M. Rostovtzeff's Greece and C. M. Bowra's fine study, The Greek Experience. Of less direct value but helpful in understanding Hellas in a broader perspective were Edith Hamilton's famous study The Greek Way and H. D. F. Kitto's The Greeks.

The Byzantine period in Greece was not a major factor in the study but those interested in that great empire's influence on Greece are advised to consult A. A. Vasiliev's standard work a History of the Byzantine Empire, or Joan Hussey's short but excellent book, The Byzantine World.

The modern period of Greek history is best explained in L. S. Stavrianos' fine survey the Balkans Since 1453. Also

particularly helpful is Thomas Lacey's earlier work Social Heredity as Illustrated in the Greek People.

The history of the Greek immigrant in America is superbly related in Theodore Saloutos' The Greeks in the United States. Of lesser value but still helpful are the works by Burgess, Fairchild, and Xenides cited later in the bibliography.

Persons interested in nationalism are advised to consult the various works of Hans Kohn about the subject. Boyd Shafer's Nationalism: Myth and Reality and Merle Curti's Roots of American Loyalty are also extremely helpful.

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GREEK AMERICAN NATIONALISM: THE VERVENA SOCIETY

by

GEORGE CHRISTAKES

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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In order to better understand American nationalism and the patriotism related to it, it is helpful, as a prerequisite, to have at least partial knowledge of the origin and nature of the loyalties of the various parts of American society. This thesis examines as a case study one small group known as the Vervena Society of Chicago which is a mutual aid and social organization of approximately one hundred Greek immigrants from a village in Arcadia, Greece. Organized at the turn of the century the Society is still in existence today with largely the same people comprising the membership. The purpose of this study is to examine the loyalties, particularly of a nationalistic nature, of this group and to attempt to ascertain factors which influenced such loyalties.

This study found that the Vervena Society members divided their loyalties into three main channels as signified by the three banners displayed at their meetings--those of Vervena, Greece, and the United States. The reasons for such divided loyalties are found in the heritage of the group members as Greeks, as people from the same village, and in the experiences and influences to which they were exposed in the New World. When they came to the new country, they were Verveniotes and Greeks, but they became Americans as well. With time they acquired a knowledge of the language, a sentimental attachment to their homes and to the City of Chicago in which they both lived their lives and raised their children, an economic stake in the prosperity of the new country in which they would suffer (as they did in the Great Depression) or

prosper with America, and children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (who were American and whose future was completely intertwined with that of the new country) providing a blood relationship for the Verveniotes with the people of the United States. They still held the old values of loyalty to Vervena and Greece, but now they had the additional loyalty to their adopted country as was graphically demonstrated by Verveniotes singing the Star Spangled Banner while attending ceremonies in Greece.

While granting that a limited study of a small group such as the Vervena Society is not sufficient to give any sort of a comprehensive solution to the problem of 'what is an American?' in relationship to the immigrant, this study suggests that perhaps the answer may be found somewhere between the 'melting pot' and 'cultural pluralism' concepts. However, it is recognized that a great deal more extensive interdisciplinary research will be necessary before anything approaching a definitive answer may be realized. Since there seems to be no generally acceptable definition of an American, it must be concluded that persons who owe loyalty to, identify with, and are legally recognized as such must be considered as Americans just as people who can answer similar requirements for identification as Roman Catholics must be considered members of the Church even though they may be Caucasian, Negro, or American Indian. The conclusion of this study is that the Verveniotes are definitely Americans, but must be considered a more complex entity which includes their identification as

Greeks and also as villagers of Vervena.