

At St. George and St. Nicholas' Annual
Dinner in Bridgeport

port parish, for example, donated \$100 for the latter in 1959.

By participating in the inter-Orthodox church organizations, they help keep active the cultural and social traditions of the Syrian people while at the same time they promote a greater understanding of all religious groups.



Rev. Fr. Victor F. George is the spiritual leader for the congregation of St. Nicholas' Syrian Orthodox Church.



The Sociology Colloquium from the University of Bridgeport.



Michael Terek, George Nimer, Vito Rallo, Father George K. George, Father Victor George, John D. Zamary, John Nassra, Frank Fornl, George N. Macol, Francis Showan.



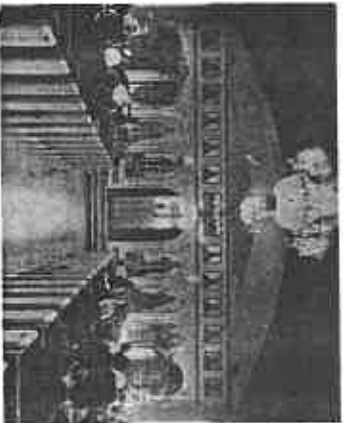
Mrs. Francis Hanna, Mrs. J.D. Zamary, Mrs. George N. Macol, Nicholas Macol, Mrs. Frieda Mosesian, Miss Cecile Hawle, Miss Mary Gramesty, Mr. William Hawle.

CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS



CHURCH MENS SOCIETY

George A. Terek, (Treasurer); Kostra M. Mosesstam, (President); Father Victor F. George; John M. Macol (Secretary); Toofic J. Hanna, (First President of Organization).



A view of the interior of St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Church.
The 11:00 o'clock Divine Liturgy (Mass)



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

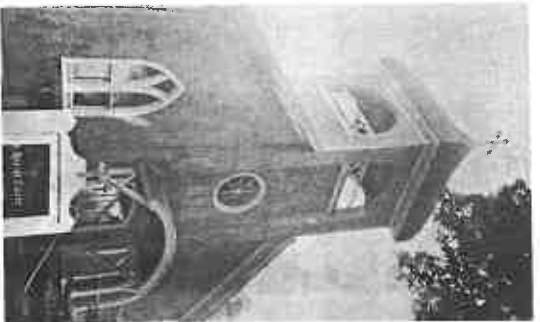
1st Row:
John Nassara; John G. Beter, (President); Father Victor F. George; Francis J. Showah, (Vice President); John D. Zamary.



LADIES AUX. SOCIETY

Mary S. Beter, (Corresponding secretary); Karem M. Fletcher, (Vice President); Father Victor F. George; Dolores M. Terek, (President); Helen C. Mezias, (Recording secretary); Olga H. Macol, (Treasurer).

2nd Row:
George A. Terek; George D. Shamlas, (Secretary); Michael A. Terek; George M. Showah (Treasurer); William A. Hawle; John G. Mike; George N. Macol.



St. George Syrian Orthodox Church
Danbury, Connecticut



SYRIAN ORTHODOX YOUTH ORGANIZATION

Joan Beter, (Secretary); William O. Sam, (President); Father Victor F. George; Mary G. Moram, (Vice President); Mary Gramesty, (Treasurer).



Mr. Sahied (Sidney) Karam



The Lebanese-Syrian Community participates in Bridgeport's annual P.T. Barnum Festival.

ACCULTURATION

The Syrian people due to their eventful history and the more or less impassable barriers in their native environment have tended toward clannishness and factionalism, which Hitti calls "the most pronounced feature of the Syrian character".¹² This in-group feeling has promoted the intensification of family consciousness.

It is for this reason that several aspects of the Syrian culture have been maintained and kept alive in this country. This is especially true of the close family ties so characteristic of our Syrian neighbors.

Although the basic characteristics of the Syrian culture are still intact, they have been greatly modified by the necessity of adapting to a new country with a different dominant culture pattern. To illustrate this readjustment we have chosen to examine the role of women, with special emphasis on the similarities and differences between a woman's role in Syria and her role in the United States.¹³

The Syrian Woman in Syria

The following information on the woman's role in Syrian

12. Hitti, Philip K. The Syrians in America, New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924, p. 24.

13. Personal interviews with: Mrs. Ann Beter (president of the Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches) 58 Rocton Ave., Bridgeport, Connecticut; Miss Freida Terek, 355 Anson Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut; Mr. Francis Showah, 816 Riverton Terrace, Stratford, Connecticut.

society today, refers only to a particular area in Syria called Soueidle. However, it also gives a picture of the life of the women all through Syria.

The Syrian woman lacks political rights and her social life is limited to visits at relatives' and friends' houses. She does not belong to any clubs or organizations. Similarly, she possesses a limited education with the only exception of a few primary school teachers. The lack of education and social life limits the Syrian woman's world to her own home.

The care of her house takes most of her time due to the fact that with few exceptions most homes lack the modern household conveniences. Under these conditions she not only cleans the house but also makes all the linen (tablecloths, towels, sheets, bedclothes, rugs) herself. In preparing the meals, she usually kneads the bread, dresses the poultry, and picks the vegetables from her own garden. The above responsibilities occupy most of her time during the day leaving her but a couple of hours to go out and help her husband or father with the cultivation of silkworms. Her day activities end when those of the evening begin. It is usually during the evening that women sit together to knit, sew and embroider. Unmarried girls under the supervision of older women make their own clothes as well as the linen for their trousseau. They also make a little pieces of embroidery for sale.

Marriage is usually arranged by the parents of the girl since she does not have the opportunity to meet men herself. The husband is usually a distant relative of his wife and is, as a rule, eight to fifteen years older than she.

The dress of the Syrian woman represents her religion as well as her social and marital status. It is simple and long for everyday use and fancier for holiday and other special occasions. The outfit is completed with a scarf which covers the head and sometimes the face leaving only a space for her eyes. Though there are modern clothes for women in the big cities of Syria, their use is limited.

The Syrian Woman in Bridgeport

The difficulties with the English language, the common background, as well as the new living conditions faced by the Syrian women in Bridgeport determined their organization as a club twenty four years ago (1937). Their home is no longer their only occupation since many work outside to contribute financial help to their family.

Beside the acquisition of political rights as citizens of the United States, they also have acquired a higher educational status. The first Syrian women in Bridgeport with a College Degree, Mary Mike Shawah, is today thirty one years of age. There are also Syrian grade teachers in the Bridgeport Schools.

The Women's Club existed long before the Syrian Orthodox Church was built (1957). At that time the activities of the Club were mainly social functions (dinners, dances, bazaars). Later these social functions provided the income to supplement the needs of the Syrian community in Bridgeport. One of these was that of building their own church. The contribution of the Women's Club to that project was tremendous. Besides their financial contribution, they offered their services in office work and in the fund raising campaign.

When the church was completed the Women's Club changed its name to the Women's Auxiliary. Among the activities of the Auxiliary are: an annual Bazaar selling items made by the members, dinners, dances and social welfare activities. They also prepare all the food not only for their own affairs but for all of the Syrian community affairs. Besides the above mentioned activities their program includes social functions and entertainment exclusively for members.

Today the Women's Auxiliary has approximately sixty members ranging from eighteen to eighty years of age, and meets regularly once a month. Outside their club Syrian women participate in other community activities such as church choir, Sunday School teaching, and the Parents Teachers Association.

As members of the Syrian Orthodox Community of Bridgeport, Syrian women belong to the Council of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. This year the president of the Council is Ann Betar.

Cultural Changes in the Church

"A Syrian is born to his religion, just as an American is born to his nationality. In fact, his church takes the place of the state for him", reports Hitti.¹⁴ This statement makes evident how strong is the Church's influence on the Syrian people. It is the nucleus around which all religious and social functions are patterned and as such is the most dominant force in the life of Syrian-Americans.

The great majority of Syrians in the Greater Bridgeport Area, belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church of their ancestors, and in this way maintain their most important tie; however the Syrians Orthodox Church has witnessed many modifications in keeping with its new locale.¹⁵ Following, are some of the important changes:

The Arabic language is being supplanted more and more by the use of English in the Church services. Although the basic symbols in the sacraments remain unaltered the ritual has been sharply abbreviated. The older way of collecting Church dues has been replaced by a systematic program of pledges. All modern office equipment is utilized and the meeting rooms, halls and church structure itself is more elaborately erected. The participation of laymen in the church service in the choral response is more widely practiced.

In Syria, all clergymen must be robed and are required to

14. Hitti, Philip K. The Syrians in America, New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924, p. 34.
15. Interview, Rev. Father Victor George, St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Church, 5456 Park Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

wear beards and unbobbed hair, while in this country the formal attire of Priests is permissible. The youth group is a new adjunct to the Church, as is the official Board of Trustees, both unheard of in Syria.

OUTSTANDING SYRIANS IN THE BRIDGEPORT AREA

Although the greatest contribution that the Syrians have made has been collectively, there are many individuals who stand out for their personal contribution in the community.

Like most minority groups who have migrated to the United States, the first generation Syrians were handicapped by their inability to speak, read, or write English. These people worked diligently, however, to save enough money to insure the education of their children.

Among the first Syrians to attend college were the Mike children, Spero, John, Nicholas and Mary. The three boys are all successful engineers. The privilege of designing a necklace for a member of the Rockefeller family was given to one of the sons. The closely knit Syrians in our area are represented in almost every professional pursuit. Many have become prominent engineers, lawyers, teachers, artists and businessmen.

John Midney is one of these successful persons. Having received an engineering degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he then went to Yale where he earned his law degree. Another attorney, George Shamiss, has recently been appointed President of the Board of Bridgeport Fire Commissioners.

In the field of commercial art, George Zariff and Henry J.

Shawah have made their presence felt.

Another field in which the Syrian Americans have made important contributions is that of education. Although it isn't possible to list all of the people who have become successful educators we will name a few to indicate the number of teachers of Syrian descent: Joan Betar, Mary Showah, Julia Mascol Wonneberger, George Deeb, Albert Chaparr, Nicholas Mascol and Samuel Sadie.

There are also several Syrians who have achieved success as partners in various business enterprises. John Nassra, and George N. Mascol are partners in the American Banana Co., while Louis Shamas was a partner in the Chemical Plating Company and owned the U.S. Plating Company.

The Syrians also have several store owners within their group. Michael Terek owns the Nile Avning Company and several other merchants have their own retail markets. Betar's Market, George's Market, Cut Spring Grocery, and Zannary's Market are all local stores with Syrian-American proprietors. The Rev. Father Victor P. George as the Pastor of St. Nicholas Eastern Orthodox Church on Park Avenue is the spiritual leader of the Syrian community and as such has been the most dominant force in promoting inter-group understanding.

This brief sampling of some of the outstanding Syrians in Bridgeport should indicate the wide scope of interest displayed by the Syrian-Americans, not to mention the versatility with which they adapt themselves to the needs of their community.

APPENDIX
LEBANESE IN THE GREATER BRIDGEPORT AREA.

Historical Background

Lebanon, an infant republic, with a population of approximately 1,000,000 is half the size of New Jersey. The land has a historical span of some five thousand years, about thirty times that of the United States.¹⁶

In the late 1870's Lebanese emigrants started arriving in America in small numbers. Stray ones had reached the Atlantic shores before, but the movement did not develop into a mass one until the early nineties.¹⁷ Between 1900 and 1911 the population of the country is said to have been diminished by one fourth or 100,000, through emigration to the far corners of the globe. The estimated number, with their descendants, in the United States is a quarter of a million; in Brazil - the largest center - a third of a million.¹⁸

Most of the Lebanese in the United States live in the large urban centers on the eastern coast, particularly New York and Boston.¹⁹

Most Lebanese left their native country for the economic advancement they hoped to achieve in America. There was little

16. Hitti, Philip K. Lebanon in History, London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd. 1957, p. 197.

17. Ibid., p. 474.

18. Ibid., p. 382-384.

19. N.A. "10,000 Attend Mahrajn Here" The Bridgeport Post, (Sept. 5, 1933).

religious persecution in Lebanon; in fact Lebanon has often been a haven for persecuted Christians (Armenian Wars).²⁰

In Bridgeport the immigrants settled on the east side of town, and today number about 200. One of the oldest Lebanese families in Bridgeport, according to Mr. James Leon, is the Joseph Saad family of 26 Clarence Street.²¹

Fraternel Organizations

In 1933, the Bridgeport Post advertised the annual meeting of "Mahrajan" which took place in Bridgeport because of its central locality and accessibility by motor car from the ten states where the majority of the 250,000 Lebanese in the United States reside.²²

The Mahrajan is a non-sectarian organization, national rather than religious in scope. "The League (Lebanon League of Progress) seeks progress of their members and their race in America. It is also held to provide an opportunity for countrymen to fraternize."²³

At one time there was a fairly active fraternel organization in the Greater Bridgeport Area called the Knights of

20. Personal Interview with Atty. George Ganlm, 1202 Main Street, Bridgeport.
21. Personal Interview with Mr. James Leon, 1766 Stratford Ave. Bridgeport.
22. N.A. "4000 Syrian End Lebanese Sessions Here", The Bridgeport Post (Sept. 12, 1933).
23. N.A. "Lebanese Open Sessions Here", The Bridgeport Times Star, (Sept. 28, 1940).

Lebanon. This organization was made up of both Syrians and Lebanese, but as nationalistic feelings deepened, the two groups moved apart and the Knights of Lebanon became a so-called "paper" organization.²⁴

Today there is only one Lebanese social organization in Bridgeport. This organization is exclusively for women and is called the "Daughters of Lebanon". They meet at the International Institute of Bridgeport at 47 Sherwood Ave. Mrs. Charles Saad is the current president of the organization and Mrs. Thomas Saad is Vice President. Registered as a charitable organization, they participate in civic activities in addition to the help given Lebanese families in need. At present, there are twenty-five active members in this group.²⁵

Acculturation

The tendency towards fraternization at least on a national scale seems to have lessened considerably since 1940, that year being the last time a Mahrajan (an annual affair) was held in Bridgeport. Perhaps the war interrupted these festivals; but the continued abandonment since then is probably due to the assimilation of latter generations of Lebanese.

Another reason, for the breaking down of this former

24. Personal Interview with George Ganlm, Attorney-at-Law, 1202 Main Street, Bridgeport.
25. Personal Interview with James Leon, 1766 Stratford Ave., Bridgeport.

esotericism might be the lack of a separate church for the Lebanese. ²⁶

The cultural tie between the 200 Lebanese residing in Bridgeport is not too strong due to the fact that there is no individual "common denominator". The Lebanese, for the most part, are Roman Catholics; thus, their religious ties are not separate from those of other nationalities adhering to the Roman Catholic faith.

There is a great deal of assimilation on the part of the Lebanese in this area due to (1) the fusing together of many national cultures through the Roman Catholic Church and (2) the small number of Lebanese residing in this area. There is a comparatively large amount of intermarriage. ²⁷

The strongest unit of the Lebanese in America, as far as cultural aspects are concerned, is the family group which is very closely knit among people of this nationality. Apart from the strong family ties, the Lebanese have diverse interests, occupations, and areas of living; and demonstrate a desire for cultural assimilation. ²⁸

26. Personal Interview with Reverend Father Victor George, St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Church.

27. Personal Interview with George Ganim, Attorney-at-Law, 1202 Main Street, Bridgeport.

28. Ibid, George Ganim.

Religious Life

Their adherence to the Maronite faith of their forefathers characterize the Lebanese Christians here. "Because there is no church of the Maronite in this city, the nearest being in Danbury, the Maronites attend the Roman Catholic Church." ²⁹

However, since the construction of St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Church on North Park Avenue, some of the Lebanese have switched, although it is still primarily Syrian. The liturgy of the Maronite church, founded in the seventh century by St. Maron, is Aramaic of Syriac, in contrast to the Latin liturgy. ³⁰

Economics and Education

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In Lebanon, most were employed as small merchants and farmers. In Bridgeport, most are in the business field such as grocery store owners, real estate agents, manufacturers, and textile merchants. The largest Lebanese business enterprise in Bridgeport is the Hawle Manufacturing Company.

A Mr. Saad, one of the original settlers, is a retired employee of the Bridgeport Fabrics Company (it just went out of business) hinting that many of the early immigrants from Lebanon

29. Anne Whelan, "Of People and Places", The Bridgeport Sunday Post, (July 27, 1958).

30. Ibid, "Of People and Places".

31. Personal Interviews with Atty. George Ganim, 1202 Main St.; Bridgeport, and James Lam, 1766 Stratford Ave., Bridgeport.

worked with materials and fabrics in one way or another (one of the Salomeys established the Bridgeport Embroidery Company).

As is common of most second and third generation immigrant groups some of the Lebanese took to the professions. This is true of the Ganims, Raymond and George, who are presently practicing law in the firm of Ganim and Ganim.

Most of the Lebanese of today are fairly well educated, possessing at least a high school education.

Prominent Lebanese-Americans in the Bridgeport Area

Mrs. Catherine Betar - owns the Nile Aming Company, Inc., 168 Kenwood Avenue, Bridgeport.

George and Raymond Ganim - prominent Attorneys-at-law, 1202 Main Street, Bridgeport.

Joseph W. Ganim - owns the Chemical Plating Company, 120 Bruce Avenue, Bridgeport.

Jacob and Michael Hawie - own and operate the Hawie Manufacturing Co., 729 North Washington Avenue, Bridgeport.

James J. Leon - employed by the United States Government as a State Auctioneer. He is also the owner of The Leon Store Fixtures, Inc.

Ned J. Leon - Former Sheriff of Fairfield County.

Charles and Phillip Saad - own and operate the Saad Self-Service Market, 280 Parrott Avenue, Bridgeport.

Raymond Salomey - owns and operates Cedar's Restaurant in Southport.

Sassih Salomey - owns and operates the S & S Dugout Restaurant.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Wakin - own and operate Audubon Candy Store, 1262 Main Street, Bridgeport.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Wakin - own and operate Wakin's Candy Store 1385 Main Street, Bridgeport.

Family Histories

Sahied (Sidney) Karam, partner in the Lake Motors establishment, is a second generation Lebanese. His father, Thomas Karam, arrived here early in the 1900's. Sahied, as well as his father, is of royal blood, both being descendants of Prince Joseph Bey Karam, who in 1890 freed the Lebanese from the Turks. His statue can be found in the Lebanese pavillion in the United Nations Building.

Thomas Karam was born in the city of Zgharta, the birthplace of Prince Joseph. Upon arriving in the United States Thomas Karam lived in Troy for a short time before settling in Bridgeport. He became a partner in a large wholesale fruit and produce company; he is now retired.

Another Lebanese family in the Bridgeport area is that of Frem F. Saad. Mr. Saad was married to Mrs. Shatica F. Saad for 62 years until her death in 1959. Mr. Saad was one of the first Lebanese immigrants to come to Bridgeport, arriving in 1905 from Biskinta, Lebanon.

The Saads had four children:
Genevieve F. Saad, who is now Mrs. Samuel Carter
Thomas F. Saad, who is a salesman for Seaman Brothers Wholesale Grocers
Charles and Phillip F. Saad.

All of the women of the Saad Family are active in the Daughters of Lebanon of which Mrs. Charles F. Saad is the president.

32. Personal Interview with Sahied (Sidney) Karam.

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