

## THE HISTORY OF GREEKS OF CANBERRA AND DISTRICTS

### *The Karpathian Greeks*

Migrants from the island of Karpathos were the first Greek settlers to establish a parochial brotherhood in Canberra and the surrounding districts in 1959. The island of Karpathos was under Venetian, Turkish and German occupation for some 635 years, before being reunited with Greece (7 March 1948). As a result the island's overall progress was limited. The local population lived under serious financial and infrastructure constraints. But the rich Hellenic cultural tradition and the strong ethno-linguistic awareness of the Karpathians in the diaspora led them to strive for the reconstruction and development of their native island.

The Karpathians of Australia, most of whom lived in Canberra, were instru-



The Progressive Association of Karpathos was established in Canberra in September 1959. This was the first parochial organisation of the Greek community. The foundation Committee comprised: (From left) N. Pahos (President), C. Mantinaos, G. Leon, G. Economidis, M. Vassiliotis, E. Xyrakis, F. Diakovasilis.

mental in the drive to revitalise the island of Karpathos economically and socially. The Karpathian migration and settlement in Australia took place in two stages: (a) The pre-WWII settlement (1935-1939) and (b) the post-WWII (1946-1974) settlement. Ninety per cent of the Karpathians who settled in Australia originated from two Karpathian villages—Pyles and Othos—the rest came from the villages of Olympus, Volathas, Menetes, Mesohori and Aperi.

Pioneer Karpathian migrants arrived as Italian subjects in Queanbeyan in early 1935, by means of chain migration. Manolis Tsiragakis was the first Karpathian settler. He arrived in Sydney in 1932 and worked in the service industry in Newtown, Sydney and then in Port Kembla. In 1935 he moved to Queanbeyan and worked in the local cafés owned by the Kassimatis brothers. By the end of the same year, three more Karpathians arrived to ply their trades in Queanbeyan. They were Elias Sakellaridis, who played a leading role in the establishment of the Greek Community of Canberra (see Chapter Six), and Nikolaos Constantinidis and Ioannis Kostetsios. They helped trigger an inflow of Greek migrants from Karpathos during the years before WWII. In 1936 Manolis Tsiragakis invited his brothers Vasileios and Constantinos Tsiragakis and his compatriot Antonios Papadopoulos to Australia. Other Karpathian settlers who arrived during the following years included Minas Georgopoulos, Minas Patsourakis with his family (1937), Minas Constantinidis, and the brothers Andreas, Georgios and Elias Papoutsakis (1938).

Serious time delays and economic grievances hampered the post-WWII migration. Hundreds of Greek migrants were stranded in Port Said for many months, some for more than eleven months. They were trapped, destituted and unemployed, waiting for a ship to take them to their sponsoring relatives in Australia. The naval authorities gave priority to servicemen returning from the Middle East and Egypt. Many of the stranded migrants were forced to borrow heavily to survive. The scarcity of transport even delayed the third Greek Orthodox Prelate, Metropolitan Theophylactos. He prolonged his stay in Greece for almost one year in 1947. Despite Greek Government authorities and the Ecumenical Patriarchate exerting pressure on his behalf, it was virtually impossible to secure a return berth between Greece and Australia.

Amongst the first post-WWII migrants, who set out in 1946 and arrived in 1947, after being stranded in Port Said, were Nikolaos Aslanidis, Irene Georgopoulou,

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Irene Constantinidis-Kostetsiou, Minas George Papadopoulos and Manolis George Kostetsios. These migrants sought tickets in a highly competitive market exploited by fly-by-night travel agencies. They paid exorbitant black market fares, reaching as high as 220 English pounds sterling for a cargo berth. By mid-January 1948, another wave of stranded migrants from Karpathos finally arrived in Queanbeyan. They were Constantinos Elias Mantinaos, Kalliope Mantinaos-Constantinidis, Minas Kamaratos, Minas Ekonomidis, the brothers Kostas and Chronis Haniotis, and Minas Emanuel Papadopoulos. Manolis Xyrakis arrived in 1949, while Constantinos Hanouzas, Michael Xyrakis, Ioannis Praxoulis and Ioannis Nikolaos Ekonomidis arrived in 1950. Ioannis Elias Mantinaos and Kostas Haniotis came

The Karpathian Progressive Association Committee of 1997: Leo Mantinaos, Nota Zorzis (Treasurer), Manos Constantine (Secretary), Ioannis Kostas Mantinaos (President), Nikolaos Moullakis and Evy Constantine.



in 1951 and George Pasiaris, Georgios Zamalis, Georgios Leon and Nikolaos Lagonikos in 1952.

A group of community leaders headed by Nikolaos Pahos, Georgios Leon and Constantinos Mantinaos provided the impetus that generated the feeling amongst the Karpathian migrants that they needed to be organised collectively in order to assist their native island of Karpathos. On 25 August 1959, they met at the café in Canberra, known then as Leo's, which was owned by Constantinos Elias Mantinaos and Ioannis Minas Ekonomidis. Following an inspiring meeting they decided to call a general Assembly of the eighty families of Karpathians in

Canberra and the surrounding districts to notify them about their plans and request their support. A second interim meeting was organised expanding the number of participating members. The additional community members invited to attend included Manolis Xyrakis, Antonios Papadopoulos, Minas Constantinidis, Ioannis Praxoulis, Michalis Vasiliotis and Georgios Ekonomidis. The gathering decided to compile an interim Constitution before the First General Assembly of the members, which was called on 20 September 1959. The Constitutional Committee comprised Antonios Papadopoulos, Minas Constantinidis and Ioannis Praxoulis guided by the motivating trio of Nikolaos Pahos, Georgios Leon and Constantinos Mantinaos. The inaugural Assembly took place at the Blue Moon Café in Canberra's Civic and the Constitution of the Karpathian Progressive Association was passed following a long debate. The members elected Nikolaos Pahos as their founding President, Constantinos Mantinaos as their Vice-President, Georgios Leon Secretary, Georgios Ekonomidis Treasurer, and Emanuel Xyrakis, Frangios Diakovasilis and Michalis Vasiliotis Counsellors.

Constantinos Mantinaos who became the longest serving President of the Karpathians, maintaining that leadership role for over twenty years replaced President Nikolaos Pahos four months after the elections. The Karpathians also acknowledged the contribution of their female members, electing Fina Vassiliotis as their President (1992-1994) and Kalliope Vassiliotis (1999- ).

The elected Presidents of the Association and their terms in office appear as follows: Nikolaos Pahos and Constantinos Mantinaos (1959-1960), George Leon (1960-1962), Nikolaos Lagonikos (1962-1963), Constantinos Mantinaos (1963-1966), Michalis Xyrakis (1966-1968), Nikolaos Vassiliotis (1968-1969), Nikolaos Xyrakis (1969-1971), Ioannis Praxoulis (1971-1972), Manolis Kostetsos (1972-1973), Constantinos Mantinaos (1973-1986), Manolis Xyrakis (1986-1988), Constantinos Mantinaos (1988-1992), Fina Vassiliotis (1992-1994), Michael Vassiliotis (1994-1996), Ioannis Constantinos Mantinaos (1996-1998) and Kalliope Michael Vassiliotis.

At first, the establishment of the Karpathian Progressive Association, did not meet universal endorsement from its members. A vocal minority attempted to obstruct consolidation of the organisation within the Greek community in Queanbeyan and Canberra. However, the determination and the personality of the leading Karpathians convinced their compatriots to join. Approximately 250 Karpathians from all over Australia became members of the Association and were instru-



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mental in serving their island with generous contributions. The organised Karpathians were instrumental in assisting their island to refurbish its Cathedral, restore their churches, and provide for the earthquake victims in Greece. They also contributed effectively in local Australian appeals offering substantial amounts for the erection of the War Memorial Appeal in Canberra, the Hellenic Club and the welfare appeals of the Greek Community of Canberra.

Karpathian leaders discreetly kept their members away from intra-community dissension, confining their activities mainly to providing opportunities for socialisation and the maintenance of their island tradition. In 1973, they established their own soccer team, entitled “Karpathos” which competed well but was forced to dissolve in 1979 due to heavy financial burdens. The stability of the Karpathian Progressive Association was mainly due to the strong resilience of their members and their social coherence. Constantinos Elias Mantinaos and Emanuel Georgiou Xyrakis faithfully served the Association for approximately twenty years.

### *The Macedonians*

In 1970, the President of the Greek Community of Canberra, Nikolaos Tsoulas, was instrumental in the official establishment of the Macedonian Association of Canberra and Districts. Approximately forty Macedonian settlers, mainly from Florina and Kastoria in Western Macedonia, gathered at the premises of the Macedonian settler Pantelis Kouleas to establish their association. Tsoulas spoke in favour of the new Macedonian collective entity, encouraging the community to form an organisation and elect their own representatives. Following encouraging speeches by other Macedonian leaders, including Ioannis Papayiannis, the members unanimously agreed on the establishment of the Macedonian Association of the ACT



Constantinos Mantinaos, foundation President of the Karpathian Association shares pleasant moments with President Tsoulas and other compatriots in Canberra (1964).

and elected their inaugural Council. The Foundation President was Pantelis Karatsoreas. Thomas Maliganeas became Vice President, Georgios Georgopoulos Secretary, Ioannis Papayiannis assistant Secretary, Pantelis Kouleas Treasurer, Thymios Stanisiotis Assistant Treasurer and Stefanos Naoumides, Stefanos Sipingas and Georgios Satlamantis Councillors.

One year later in 1971, the members of the Macedonian Association of the ACT decided to join the Pan-Macedonian Association of Australia, headed by Nikolaos Tsoulas. Five years later, in 1976, they elected Paul Dellys as their first Governor in the Pan-Macedonian Association. In 1974, Nikolaos Tsoulas and Paul

Dellys decided to establish yet another Macedonian organisation to cater for the social needs of those migrants who originated from the districts of Florina and Kastoria in Western Macedonia. They called it the Florinian and Kastorian Association. Paul Dellys was elected foundation President of this brotherhood, with Pavlos Armenakis Vice President, Ioannis Mangos Secretary, Athanasios Balkos Treasurer, and Demetrios Tsakalos, Ioannis Milianis, Thomas Maliganeas, George Georgopoulos and Christos Mangos Councillors. The latter soon afterwards became the second President of the Association and Ioannis Milianis after him. Their goal was to serve the cultural and social needs of their members and promote their Hellenic historical legacies as indigenous Macedonians. The Florinian and Kastorian Association remained active until 1984, when it began to phase out progressively. The dissolution of this brotherhood was mainly due to the desire of the Macedonians of Queanbeyan to establish their own local church in the name of St. Demetrios, the protector (*poliouchos*) of the capital city of Macedonia, Thessaloniki and to form their own independent community.

A parish (ecclesiastic) Committee was established amongst those Macedonian settlers who elected Paul Dellys as their foundation President. The aim of the