

The Armenians in Madison, Maine

An overview:

Presented at the Madison Historical Society on October 15, 2003, by Miriam Kochakian

Pahrev (greetings) from the Nanigians, Hagopians, Kojigians (Jacob), Garabedians, Kochakians, Tatoyians, and Donigians – and all of the other estimated 100-125 Armenians who came to Madison to work and live between the early 1890's and the late 1920's.

I do not come to you as an expert on Armenian history or as a special biographer of the Armenians in Madison. I was born in an apartment on the top floor of the Wentworth Building (owned at that time by Dickram and Sarkis Garabedian) on Madison Avenue. Dr. Sawyer delivered me in his black bag – as all respectable doctors did in 1927- to my parents, Moses and Ashalous (Alice) Kochakian, Armenian immigrants from Turkey. Mrs. Hope Kojigian (Jacobs) helped Dr. Sawyer deliver me from the black bag, as she did with all the births in our family.

While I was still an infant, we moved to 19 Perkins Street, and I spent 27 years of my life there. So I come to you from Madison!

My information on Madison Armenians comes from many sources: from oral history; from life among the early Armenian residents as close kin in my early years; from ongoing interviews and conversations with the oldest living descendants of those families especially Helena (Hagopian) Herring of Lumberton, North Carolina; Marguerite (Kojigian-Jacobs) Krikorian of Lowell, Massachusetts; Mary (Kojigian-Jacobs) Donigian of Salem, New Hampshire; and from members of my own family.

The history of the Armenians as a nation and a people comes from my extensive reading of a large number of books and other publications available on the subject, for those who have an interest in reading about an ancient civilization that has survived, against great odds, over 4000 years.

I would like to give special thanks to Sybil and John Leland, without whose kind encouragement and timeless research into Madison sources of information about Armenians who settled here, I could not have prepared this account of Armenians who came to Madison from the early 1890's to the late 1920's. Sybil and John spent long hours researching census records, old newspapers, microfilms, and even cemetery stones! (And what colorful and imaginative and multiple spellings of our strange names

they sometimes found in your records. Obviously those early settlers did not speak English to your record keepers!)

I learned a great deal from Sybil and John about our people. And Armenians were only a small segment of the Madison population. Imagine what they have done for the rest of the town's history. The only way I can reward them, is by adding an **IAN** to their names – and that could be dangerous, as you will see.

You may have noticed that most Armenian names are distinguished by IAN at the end of the surnames. IAN means “the son of” or “from the patriarchal family of” (Hagop-IAN- from the family of a forebear named Hagop). Sometimes IAN is added to the name of the family occupation or even to a nickname. Occasionally a forebear's name will drop the IAN from the forebear's name for ease of spelling or pronunciation (Hagop to Jacobs – English translation of a forebear's first name).).

I also want to thank the members of the Madison Historical Society for including the records of the Armenian immigrants and their descendants, in your archives, despite the fact that the Armenians in your community have been gone for many years. We who grew up in this lovely place, have special archives in our memories from this wonderful town and its good people.

They say “you can't go home again.” But I am home again – standing on hallowed ground – the Old Point School, where I got my first and best education!

One morning in September of 1932, I took my mother's hand, accompanied by a neighbor who spoke English; and I walked from 19 Perkins Street where I lived, turned right down Old Point Avenue to the Old Point School. I was the first born child of Armenian parents from Turkey, who spoke a strange ancient language at home. I spoke little English (I am told).

My mother had come to Madison in 1926 to join my father after a long separation from him, in exile from her native country in a refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon. Her first order of business was to have three babies in three years: Miriam, in 1927; Queenie, in 1928; Victoria, in 1929. She had little time and thought to taking English classes at night school in Madison at that time.

Through interpretation, my mother left me in the kindergarten of the Old Point School in the care of a wonderful and compassionate teacher named Miss Beryl Holden. Strangely, Miss Holden did not speak one word of Armenian! Apparently she had not had bi-lingual education as special education teachers do now. But she taught me my first English words as kindly and patiently and even-handedly as she taught all the other pupils in the class, expecting me to learn as much as they. I remember no pain or discomfort in this transition. Miss Holden's method of English immersion worked for me as it did for many other “language challenged” pupils in the Old Point School.

I do remember that this place had so many new and exciting things for me to learn and do, that I could not wait to get to school each day. It was a magical place for a child of immigrants, who spoke another language at home.

There followed similarly happy years in the first grade with Miss Eleanor Heald; in second grade with Mrs. Hazel Danforth; in third grade with Miss Alta Young. All of these teachers were equally dedicated and determined "to leave no child behind." They taught me and my sisters and children of many other ethnic backgrounds to read and write English. What a great gift – one that has lasted a lifetime -one that inspired me to teach English for 41 years!

We remember you well Miss Holden, Miss Heald, Mrs. Danforth, Miss Young – fondly and gratefully. You and all the other memorable teachers that followed in Madison schools, changed our lives. Thank you. And thank you to the Old Point School.

Who were the Armenians in Madison?

Between the early 1890's and the late 1920's, approximately 100 – 125 Armenian immigrants (from Turkey) came to Madison to work in the mills and live. Who were these people of a different culture who had strange names ending in IAN and spoke a strange language to one another and ate unusual foods – grape leaves wrapped around ground lamb and rice, cracked wheat pilaf, thin flat bread with sesame seeds, yogurt made at home every week? (Long before Colombo and Dannon appeared in the market). Where did they come from? Why? Why did they come to Madison? Where have they gone?

A Brief History of Armenians

The Armenian are an ancient people who have lived in the region of Mount Ararat in Asia Minor and Europe, for over 4000 years. Their long tradition tells them that they are "descendants of Noah's great grandson, haik. ("Hai"-in Armenian means Armenian) Although Mount Ararat and a major part of historic Armenia are now occupied by Turkey, Armenians can still look out the window in their tiny country and on a clear day enjoy the majestic peaks of Mount Ararat.

Once a fairly large empire ("stretching as far as Palestine, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Caspian Sea' – (Mike Wilson, Armenia – Cobblestone Publishers, Sept.1999), after many occupations by

stronger powers, present day Armenia is a tiny land – locked, mountainous country in the Caucasus region (the size of Maryland) struggling to survive among much larger nations. For the first time, in nearly 600 years, Armenia became an independent nation in 1991, after the break up of the Soviet Union, which had claimed it as one of its republics for over 70 years after the first World War.

In the late 14th. Century, the Ottoman Turkish Empire occupied Armenia, and Armenians remained under the harsh rule of the Ottoman sultans and their successors for over 500 years, suffering many persecutions and massacres as a minority Christian people. All of the Armenian immigrants who came to Madison, were born and had lived under that Turkish rule until their immigration or deportation from the 1890's to 1923.

The Armenian Church

Above all other historic events in their storied past, Armenians take great pride in the fact they were the **first** people in the world to declare Christianity as their state religion, in 301 A.D. The Armenian Apostolic Church – an independent liturgical church is the national church of Armenians in Armenia and worldwide. Its Holy See, Etchmiadzin, and its chief Bishop (Catholics) are located in Yerevan, Armenia (where some of the world's oldest churches are still standing).

This fourth century church serves all Armenians, whatever their individual church affiliations are now, as the keeper of their ancient faith, their culture, their language, and their history. During the long years when Armenians had no independent government of their own, the Church served as the interim government and the intermediary to the nations ruling them. It is a church that has suffered much for its faith and people, and all Armenians respect it as a symbol of their survival. In 2001 Armenians all over the world celebrated the 1700th. Anniversary of the founding of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Influence of American Protestants on Armenians in Madison

In the early 1800's Protestant missionaries – especially Congregationalists from New England – came to Turkey on evangelistic missions. Seeing the plight of the Armenians in a hostile environment, the missionaries tried to improve their lives. They built schools and colleges and seminaries giving the people hope through education. Later, when the need arose, they built orphanages and shelters and hospitals for the suffering. For the first time the Armenians heard about the equalities and opportunities in America, and they became more discontented with their own restricted lives.

The missionaries were among the first to alert the world to the intolerable circumstances of the Armenians under Ottoman Turkish rule. They encouraged many Armenians to immigrate to America, especially students whose education they supported.

It is not surprising that some Armenians in Turkey were converted from their national church to Protestantism and founded the Armenian Evangelical Church, with the help of the American missionaries. That church is still very active in many parts of the world today, as well as in America. In America, the Armenian Evangelical Church is usually affiliated with the United Church of Christ.

Most Armenians in Madison, whatever their original church affiliation attended the Congregational Church or the Methodist Church. Having no national church of their own to attend, they were drawn to the “churches of the missionaries” to whom they were grateful.

The Influence of the Armenian Alphabet

Աւ	Բբ	Գգ	Դդ	Եե	Զզ	Էէ	Ըը	Թթ	Ժժ	Իի	Լլ	Խխ
ayb	ben	gim	da	ech	za	ēh	ět	t'o	zhe	ini	liwn	kheh
a	b	g	d	e, y	z	ē	ě	t'	zh	i	l	kh
[a]	[b]	[g]	[d]	[jɛ/ɛ]	[z]	[e]	[ə]	[tʰ]	[ʒ]	[ɪ]	[l]	[x]
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20	30	40
Տտ	Կկ	Հհ	Չճ	Ղղ	Ճճ	Մմ	Յյ	Նն	ՇՇ	Ոո	Չչ	Պպ
tsa	ken	ho	dza	ghad	cheh	men	yi	now	sha	vo	ch'a	peh
ts	k	h	dz	gh	ch	m	y, h	n	sh	o	ch'	p
[ts]	[k]	[h]	[dz]	[ɣ]	[tʃ]	[m]	[h-, -j-]	[n]	[ʃ]	[vo, -o-]	[tʰ]	[p]
50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800
Ջջ	Ռռ	Սս	Վվ	Տտ	Րր	Յյ	Ո՞ո	Փփ	Գգ	Օօ	Ֆֆ	
jheh	ra	seh	vew	tiwn	reh	ts'o	yiwn	p'iwr	k'eh	ōh	feh	
j	r	s	v	t	r	ts'	w	p'	k'	ō	f	
[dʒ]	[r]	[s]	[v]	[t]	[ɹ]	[tsʰ]	[u]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	[o]	[f]	
900	1000	2000	3000	4000	5000	6000	7000	8000	9000	10000	20000	

Second only to their pride in their ancient religious foundation Armenians take pride in their original alphabet created in the early fifth century by a learned monk named Mesrob Mashtots, specifically for the purpose of translating the Bible into Armenian and providing written materials for Christian worship and education. Thus the Armenian alphabet (38 letters) is revered by Armenians as an instrument of their early faith. It is not unusual to find the Armenian alphabet displayed in the homes of the early Armenian immigrants with reverence.

The Armenian translation of the Bible was completed in about 438 A.D. The Armenian word for Bible is Astvadzashoonch (Breath of God).

The Armenians of Madison

All of the early Armenians in Madison came from Turkey. As a minority Christian people, Armenians had few human rights and were often persecuted as “infidels,” during the year 1894-1896 the Ottoman Turkish officials ordered large scale massacres of the Armenians population, which extended to the villages in Kharpert where the Madison Armenians lived. It was after those events that the first mass

exodus of Armenians from Turkey began. Thus started the first wave of immigrants to Madison also.

The Early Settlers

John Nanigian, the earliest recorded Armenian settler in Madison came to America in 1891 and to Madison in 1895, probably anticipating worsening conditions in his country. After living in Massachusetts and Vermont for four years he came to Madison to work in the Great Northern Paper Mill and to make arrangements to bring his family in Turkey to safety in Madison. His wife, Sarah, and his daughter, Miriam, joined him in 1896.

Many other Armenian immigrants followed John Nanigian to Madison, several from his native village, Habousi, in Turkey – often with John's encouragement. They continued coming until the late 1920's.

A few extended family groups came to work and live in Madison during the early 1900's. However, most of the new arrivals were young husbands who came with just enough travel fare for themselves, hoping to save money from their work in the mills to send for their wives and children in Turkey and to help their needy families at home. Among the first arrivals were also some single men who wanted to start new lives and families in a free country. Many of them dreamed of “going back home” one day in “better times.”

Most of these early immigrants came to large cities first like Worcester, Lawrence, Lowell, and Providence. They came to Madison when they heard about the plentiful jobs in the Madison Mills – in a small peaceful community where they could live without fear and eventually raise a family and grow things again in large garden plots.

John Nanigian, Patriarch

John Nanigian, the patriarch of the Armenians in Madison played a major role in bringing many Armenians immigrants to work in the Mills in Madison. After working for ten years in the Great Northern Paper Mill himself, he bought a farm on lower Old Point Avenue, just above the Old Point Camping Grounds. He began farming as a full-time occupation. Some of the early immigrants who came to Madison, including my father, worked and lived on that farm. John and Sarah Nanigian raised nine children on that farm: two boys and seven girls.

John Nanigian was a familiar and colorful figure riding up and down the streets of Madison in his

horse drawn wagon piled high with farm produce for sale. His “whoa” to his horse rang out on Madison streets, and his cigar never left the corner of his mouth.

John was a regular participant at all of the country fairs of the area, showing his wares and trading goods and farm animals with “Yankee skill.” In 1912 he traveled to Constantinople, Turkey (now Istanbul) to try to bring home a special breed of sheep with heavy wool and a flat tail- common in his native land, where lamb and wool were a vital part of Armenian livelihood. He planned to breed those sheep in Madison and show them at the local fairs. He was unsuccessful, but the story added color to his growing legend. He added to that legend when he became the deputy sheriff in Madison in the 1920's.

Being a natural entrepreneur, John Nanigian also started a boarding house and restaurant for the early Armenian immigrants, on Pine Street (close to the Mills) – located on a hill across from Madison Depot. He traveled to the larger cities where Armenians first came to bring back some of his compatriots to work in the mills and live in his boarding house or on his farm. Many of those men were from his home village in Turkey. Among those men was my father, Moses Kochakian (who came about 1910). In 1913 his three cousins – Manoog (Michael), Vartan (Walter) and Giragos (George) Kochakian followed him. Earlier, John had traveled to Worcester and brought Malcolm Hagopian to Madison. Malcolm married John Nanigian's eldest daughter, Miriam, and started another well known family in Madison.

Other Armenian immigrants came independently for various reasons. In the early 1900's Charles (Kojigian) Jacobs came to Madison with a group of recruits to fight fires in the Madison area. He stayed to take a job in the pulp mill and sent for his family in 1913. Some of those men rented separate quarters or boarded in private homes.

Armenian Life in Madison - Work

All of the first Armenian immigrants in Madison, worked in the local mills: the Great Northern Paper Mill, the American Woolen Mill, the Indian Mill, and the H & W Pulp Mill. They were glad to have jobs of any kind and were willing to work long hours to support their families and send help to their relatives in their native land – always a priority! Above all, they were determined to make their own way and not be a burden on their new country. Accustomed to hard work and long hours in their native country, they brought that work ethic with them. Here, in this free country their hard work allowed them to dream of a better life for their children, even with their low wages. They constantly preached that work ethic to their children.

Citizenship

Nearly all of the Armenian immigrants in Madison became American citizens as soon as they could. They learned English as a second language at night school with local teachers (like Miss Maud Powers) to prepare them for their citizenship tests. They especially needed citizenship to send for their families left behind.

Armenian Businesses in Madison

A few years after their arrival, some of the Armenian immigrants started their own businesses in Madison. In 1920, Dickran and Sarkis Garabedian purchased the Wentworth Building and operated a lodging house and several businesses there for a few years. Charles (Kojigian) Jacobs operated a pool room on Madison Avenue and then a neighborhood grocery store on Weston Avenue. Malcolm and Miriam Hagopian opened a confectionery store on Main Street and later moved to Old Point Avenue where they ran a neighborhood grocery store for many years. Nishan Hagopian, Malcolm's brother, operated a tailor shop on Main Street for a few years before he moved to Rhode Island. Harry Hagopian owned and rented property in several locations in Madison although he kept his regular employment in the Great Northern Paper Mill and the Madison Electric Company. Harry and his wife Qoovar also operated a large market garden business on Rear Main Street. They also sold eggs. Michael (Mickey) Tatoyian and his wife, Miriam, opened the second "dynamite" luncheonette in Madison, on Main Street ("Mickey's Lunch").

A Second Wave of Armenian Immigrants

During the years 1915-1923, under cover of the first world war and its aftermath, a new group of Turkish leaders (The Young Turks) planned and executed widespread massacres and deportations of the Armenian population in Turkey in an effort “to rid the country of all Armenians.”(Wilson, Armenia Cobblestone Publishers, 1999) An estimated 1.5 million men, women, and children were killed, and many others were displaced and scattered in refugee camps and orphanages in hospitable countries across the Middle East. Historians have called that event “the first genocide of the 20th. Century.” On April 16, 2003, the State of Maine formally recognized the Armenian Genocide that many of its early immigrant, citizens had survived, in an official ceremony at the State House.

Some of those who had survived that final holocaust, were wives and children and relatives of the early settlers in Madison, who now waited in refugee camps and orphanages to join their husbands and families as soon as their passage could be cleared – sometimes with long legal complications and immigration restrictions that took years to resolve.

The coming of the refugees from about 1920's to 1929, was the second wave of Armenian immigration to Madison. Men who had lost their wives in the genocide went to Middle Eastern countries and Europe to marry second wives, often natives of their own villages. There was no “going back” to their homes again. Their villages were depopulated and razed. With the reunion of old families and the beginning of new families, the Armenian immigrants in Madison could now go about rebuilding their lives and raising their children with new hope.

Armenian Family Live in Madison

Most of the Armenians in Madison lived simple lives in modest but comfortable homes throughout the town: Old Point Avenue, Perkins Street, Gray Street, Locust Street, Madison Avenue, Hagopian Court, South Maple Street, Main Street. Most of the Armenians that stayed in Madison to raise their families, owned their own homes.

These early settlers did not make excessive purchases for themselves or their homes because they were always conscious of saving money to send to their less fortunate relatives in other parts of the world and providing a better life for their children in “this land of dreams.” Few of the early immigrants had cars until their children were grown. Having known deprivation at its worst, they never felt deprived even during the hard Depression days. They considered themselves “wealthy” and passed

that feeling to their children.

Nearly all of the early Armenian immigrants in Madison, like John Nanigian, were from the Province of Kharpert in Eastern Turkey, mainly from two agricultural villages – Habousi and Perchentz, where their families had lived for many generations. Most of the villages in Kharpert were small agricultural villages with lush vegetation. Perhaps that fact explains the long thriving gardens and grapevines behind every Armenian-American home in Madison. Those gardens provided a good portion of the food that the Armenian families ate.

Gardening was a serious second occupation to many Armenians in Madison. Some of the families sold the excess produce from their gardens to supplement their incomes. My father, in addition to his regular work at the H & W Mill, raised a large variety of vegetables to sell. He took great pride in developing a commercial grade of celery that he supplied to local stores and to the “dynamite makers” in town, especially to Sandy's Lunch. His cousin, Giragos (George) Kochakian, also raised large patches of celery and vegetables for sale. When the Madison Woolen Mill closed, Giragos and his wife Martha, became full-time market gardeners, with a large number of customers.

Our parents were resourceful in their raising and gathering and preserving and storing and using of food as they were accustomed to doing in their native villages, where few things were bought in stores. The cellars and closets and bins and kitchens of Madison homes were crammed with bottles and jars and crocks and boxes and barrels of homegrown and homemade foods. Nothing was wasted!

In addition to the foods that they could raise or preserve, or buy locally, Madison Armenian families (two or three together) would order some of the staple ingredients necessary for their native dishes, in bulk, from an Armenian food importer in Boston (Ararat Grocery Co., Inc., Boston) A typical order would include bulghor (cracked wheat), red lentils, chick peas, cracked barley, long-grain rice, orzo, black olives, spices and flavorings – according to the individual needs and tastes of the families.

The large wooden shipping boxes from the importer were delivered to Mr. Welch's freight office on Pine Street and then carted to one of the family homes where the goods were divided among the family purchasers.

Tucked among the basic foods, much to the delight of the children, were some small packages of delicacies like Turkish paste, salted and candied chick peas, halvah (sesame candy), muscat raisins, and dried mulberries. These goodies were usually kept for holiday treats.

Fresh lamb was the meat of choice for the early Armenians. In the fall the families would buy sheep from neighboring farmers – like the Westons and the Johnsons – for fresh meat cut to their specifications. Some of the meat was preserved in crocks to cook with vegetables. Nearly every part of the sheep was used in a variety of dishes. The wool was used for warm mittens and winter comforters. On festive occasions with large community gatherings or special guests, a whole lamb would be roasted as a centerpiece of the meal.

According to early Armenian cultural practices, every housewife was expected not only to cook enough food for the family but also to cook “a little extra” for anyone who happened to stop by at mealtime. We of the first generation did not find it uncommon to have an extra guest – or more – at our table – announced or unannounced. However simple the meal was, our mothers could stretch it for one more! For Madison Armenians, food was a way of “speaking to people” in a common language.

Community Life

Many of the first settlers were not strangers to one another. In the early days they naturally formed close kinship and community with people of their own background and language. They visited one another often and shared meals. I remember many Sundays at the Nanigian farm where there were cows and pigs and horses and chickens to entertain us children, and many happy adults to watch over us and feed us good things.

I remember the many Sunday rides with Malcolm and Miriam Hagopian in the family car driven by their daughter, Helena. “We're going to the mountains!” Malcolm loved to say. We drove over the Anson Bridge and turned right toward Bingham and beyond, until we came to some “mountains.” And predictably one of the adults would say, “you call those mountains!” You see they were looking for Mount Ararat and the Caucasus Mountains in Maine. It was a “game” that never failed to delight us children. Best of all, we would settle down at some scenic spot for a picnic of delicious foods and listen to wonderful stories from imaginative adults.

Then there were the Sunday visits to our cousins, the Kochakians who were family. We always looked forward to visiting the Charles and Caspar Jacobs families, whose older children always spoiled us with their attention. Food was a regular part of our visits.

We were also excited when these people and others visited us and shared our hospitality. For us who lived in a family-oriented community, these visits were part of a happy childhood.

Armenian Community Activities in Madison

Having lost many of their family members tragically, the Armenian immigrants of Madison became extended family to one another. Coming from the same village – even though that village no longer existed – meant coming from the same “family.” The term “Habousetzie” means a person who comes from Habousi and is therefore related in spirit to all others who come from Habousi. Most of the Armenians in Madison were either “Habousetzie” or “Perchentzie” (one who comes from Perchentz. “Where are you from?” was a common question among the early immigrants.

The Madison Armenians organized clubs and had community picnics at the Old Point camping grounds. They held many fund raisers out of their meager earnings in order to send relief to their needy compatriots around the world. They started one of the earliest branches of The Compatriotic Union of Habousi, dedicated to seeking out and helping the people from their lost village and their children who were recovering from exile.

That organization continued actively for many years in the Salem, New Hampshire area, where many of the early immigrants settled after leaving Madison. In 1985, their descendants – about 200 of them have been located – revived the organization in remembrance and celebration of their forebears. They meet annually for a reunion in the Salem, New Hampshire area.

Where Have All the Armenians of Madison Gone?

Not all of the Armenians who came to Madison stayed. Many came in the early 1900's worked in the mills a few years – like the Manoog and Philip Hagopians, the Kayajan Garabedians, the Hagop Tatoyians, the Luke Akmakjians, the Sarkis Garabedians, the Sarkis Donigians, Hovhannes Garabedian, Thomas Donigian, Nishan Hagopian, Manoog Kochakian, and Giragos Melkonian – and moved mainly to the Lawrence Massachusetts – Salem, New Hampshire area, where they operated their own produce farms or worked in the mills. They participated in the larger Armenian community and Armenian church life there (Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts, or The Ararat Armenian Congregational Church in Salem, New Hampshire). Most of them are buried in Salem, New Hampshire or Lawrence, Massachusetts. They have many descendants.

Armenians Who Stayed in Madison

Twelve Armenian families and two bachelors came to Madison between 1890's and the late 1920's and stayed to make their homes and raise their families in Madison.

A few – like Moses and Alice Kochakian, Vartan and Miriam Kochakian, and Caspar and Agnes Jacobs – joined their children in Massachusetts, in their retirement years. After Giragos Kochakian's death in 1965, his wife Martha, having no children, moved to Massachusetts to be close to relatives. Oscar and Araxie Jacobs joined their family in Detroit, Michigan. Several of the following long-time residents are buried in the Forest Hill Cemetery or the Bridge Cemetery.

Twelve Families (and Two Bachelors*) Who Stayed

- I. John and Sarah Nanigian – Burial – Forest Hill Cemetery – Residence-Old Point Ave.
 - II. Malcolm and Miriam (Nanigian) Hagopian – Burial – Forest Hill Cemetery-Residence- Old point Ave.
 - III. Charles and Hope Kojigian-Jacobs – Burial – Forest Hill Cemetery –Residence- Gray Street
 - IV. Caspar and Agnes Kojigian-Jacobs – Burial - Lowell, Mass. -Residence – Gray Street
 - V. Oscar and Araxie Kojigian-Jacobs – Burial – Detroit, Michigan – Residence- Madison Ave.
 - VI. Harry and Qoovar Hagopian – Burial – Forest Hill Cemetery – Residence- Rear Main St.
 - VII. Michael and Miriam Tatoyian – Burial – Salem, N.H. and Forest Hill Cemetery – Residence – Main Street
 - VIII. Dickran and Rose Garabedian – Burial – Bridge Cemetery – Residence – Perkins St.
 - IX. Krikor (George) Donigian and his daughter, Pauline Donigian – Burial – Salem, N.H. - Residence – Hagopian Court
 - X. Moses and Alice Kochakain – Burial- Salem, N.H. - Residence – Perkins St.
 - XI. Vartan (Walter) and Miriam Keochakian – Burial – Amherst, Mass. - Residence – Locust Street
 - XII. Giragos (George) and Martha Kochakian – Burial – Salem, N.H. - Residence- South Maple Street
- **Oscar Vartanian and Goolkhas Avakian came to Madison in the early 1900's and spent most of their lives working in the mills in Madison. They were long time boarders in the Harry Hagopian home on Rear main Street. They left Madison when they needed the care of relatives in the Lawrence, Mass.- Salem,N.H. Area.**
 - **Oscar Vartanian is buried I the Lawrence, Massachusetts area. Goolkhas Avakian is buried in Salem, New Hampshire.**

The First-Generation Children of the Twelve Families

Thirty-nine first-generation children of the twelve resident Armenian families grew up in Madison and received their basic education in Madison schools. Between twenty-six and twenty-eight of them graduated from Madison High School, and several of them attended schools or colleges beyond high school.

While the first-generation children were mostly bi-lingual and aware of their cultural differences, the history and the travails of their parents were hardly at the center of their interests. They enjoyed their close family ties and cultural activities at home, but they wanted nothing more than to be like every other child and youth in Madison.

They played all the games that the other children played on their neighborhood streets until dark. They enjoyed taking part in the youth activities of their town with their friends. (Some of the friendships that they made at play or at school, have lasted a lifetime.)

The first-generation children usually preferred the American food that was soon introduced in their homes, to the ethnic foods that their mothers spent hours cooking. They envied the kids who had “devil dogs” and “sliced bread” instead of homemade pastries and bread.

School and church activities were central, in the lives of the first-generation Armenian - American children in Madison, as they participated fully in many extracurricular activities. Some of them were good students and good athletes.

The first-generation children babysat and ran errands in their neighborhoods. Most of them took part-time jobs as soon as they could.

While their parents reminded them of their suffering kin in far-off places and admonished them frequently “never to do anything to disgrace our name or our nationality” the young people soon turned their chatter to “something that happened at school or at play.”

As they were growing up in Madison, the first-generation Armenian- American children wanted only to be typical American children, whose nationality was just a matter of birth. They were happy growing up in Madison with their families and friends.

Full Circle

It is only **now** in our late adulthood that we search for our history and roots that are fast slipping away from us. It is only **now** that we realize the burdens our parents bore to give what they never dreamed of having. It is only **now** that we appreciate what we have had – the best of two cultures – blended into one!

First-Generation Descendants Who Stayed in Madison

Five first-generation descendants of the early Armenian immigrants remained in Madison to establish homes and spend their lives:

- I. Moses Nanigian, son of John and Sarah Nanigian (married Leah Morrisette) Residence: Old Point Avenue Occupation: football coach and teacher
- II. Berge Hagopian, son of Malcolm and Miriam Hagopian (married Eugenie Batalian) Residence: Main Street Occupation: Postmaster of Madison
- III. Albert Hagopian, son of Harry and Qoovar Hagopian (married Catherine Berry) Residence: Rear Main Street Occupation: employee of G.N.P.C.
- IV. Laura (Hagopian) Moran, daughter of Harry and Qoovar Hagopian (married Robert Moran) Residence: South Maple Street Occupation: antique dealer
- V. Andrew Garabedian, son of Dickran and Rose Garabedian (married Agnes Sarafian) Residence: Towne Road Occupation: career Navy man and Linotype operator

THANK YOU, MADISON, MAINE

As a people, Armenians are small in number. Their disastrous history has scattered them all over the world in many countries. Their tiny country in the Mount Ararat region in Asia Minor has a population of only a little over 3,000,000 people.

“Who remembers the Armenians?” Hitler asked when he was cautioned about massacring the Jews. **BUT WE ARE STILL HERE!**

Our famous writer William Saroyan said: “Go ahead destroy that race, Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them to the desert without bread and water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see

if they will not laugh, sing, and pray again.”

And we are laughing and singing, and praying again because of places like Madison, Maine, that took our grandparents in, gave them jobs, allowed them to practice their culture and language and religion in peace and security, giving them time and space to become full-fledged American citizens. You educated their children and allowed them every opportunity that all other children had in Madison.

Our parents were grateful to America and to Madison, and so are we, their descendants. Madison was a good place to grow up Armenian-American. Even today, after many years of separation, we proudly tell people, “We are from Madison.”

On behalf of the Armenian immigrants who found shelter in Madison, and their descendants, I say, “Thank you Madison – just thank you.” I have nothing to give that will repay you, but I leave you with this ancient Armenian blessing: Ahs-Duh-Zoh AHCH-kuh Tzezi Vrah ul-lah-meeshd yev meeshd (“May the eye of God be upon you, always and always”- Madison.)

Postscript to “The Armenians of Madison”

Without the availability of the original Armenian settlers in Madison and the necessary documentation of many of the events in their lives, it was sometimes difficult to give accurate versions of some of the accounts recorded here. The memories (and memories are fading) of surviving descendants – including mine and those of my family members – were extensively tapped whenever possible. We have tried to keep our story of the Armenians in Madison as free from errors as possible, without denying the likelihood of a few discrepancies in dates and facts that need revision.

Inevitably, some names of early Armenian immigrants have been omitted for lack of information or records. I do not claim this account to be a complete – or even partial – history of Madison Armenians. These are only the recollections and the ruminations of an aging descendant of one Armenian family in Madison, gathered and sifted over a lifetime of being providentially Armenian-American of Madison birth and residence.

Thank you again, John and Sybil (Edwards) Leland, for your encouragement and research that sparked this project.

Thank you for your indulgence and understanding, Madison.

Gratefully presented by Miriam Kochakian (of Methuen, Massachusetts, and Madison, Maine) on October 15, 2003 at the Madison Historical Society

Note: The written form of this oral presentation was revised to include some answers to questions raised by the Madison Historical Society audience on October 15, 2003.