

## EARLY GREEK AMERICAN MASS MIGRATION

My name is James Peter Gianukos. I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. I am the son of a Greek immigrant who came to America at the age of 13 in 1914. On my mother's side of the family, I am also the grandson of a Greek immigrant who came to this country in **1885** at the age of 19. He was brought here by his uncle who had immigrated to the United States in **1873**. Both of my parents and all of my close relatives were born in a nearly 2000-year-old village high in the Parnon Mountains outside of Sparta, Greece. A village called **Tsintzina**.

I'd like to tell you a story. Since the time of Homer, we Greeks have loved telling stories. And this story is quite amazing. One that you could not make up. And more importantly, it is a true story supported by uncontested historical facts and research. It's the story of early Greek mass migration to America **before** the turn of the Twentieth Century.

And more than a story, it is as much a personal journey of discovery.

A number of years ago, The Greek Heritage Society of Southern California produced a documentary about the first Greeks who migrated to America in the early 1900's. It described how after landing in New York and Boston, the most adventurous of these Greeks headed west to California. They called them "**The Pioneers**" and titled their documentary "The Pioneers 1900 -1942". But what many didn't realize is that there was an **earlier** group of Greek immigrants who historians now call "**The Greek Pilgrims**". Who began migrating to America, **as well as** Southern and Northern California and Hawaii between the **1870's** and 1900.

At the time the documentary was made, the leading authority on early Greek immigration to America was Professor Charles Moskos who was referred to in the film. Professor Moskos had been a post graduate student protégé of the renowned UCLA Professor Theodore Salutos, who, in 1964, published the definitive work on the subject of Greek immigration entitled "**The Greeks in the United States**". In its preface, Salutos thanked Moskos for his important assistance.

In his book, Salutos described the beginning of Greek mass migration to America in the following way: "Between 1820, the beginning of the Greek war of independence from the Ottoman Turk, and 1870, only **93** European immigrants to America were Greek as compared to over 6,500,000 from other European countries. The **Spartans** were the first Greeks in the modern era to give signs of emigrating. Heavier emigration from Sparta began during the **1870's** and reached a peak between 1890 and 1910, when an estimated **three-fourths** of the male population from there between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five departed for the United States."

“Triggering the initial flow of immigrants from Sparta and the Peloponnese, was an obscure young man named **Christos Tsakonas**, who was born in 1848 in the village of **Tsintzina**. This ‘**Columbus of Sparta**’ displayed the attributes of many of his contemporaries who were to emigrate. After completing two years in the village grammar school, Tsakonas set out for Piraeus in quest of a job. Making little headway there, he left for Alexandria, Egypt, where, after encountering a similar lack of opportunities there, he decided in **1873** to leave for America.”

“At this time, it was unusual for a man of peasant stock to seek his fortune in the New World. Tsakonas apparently found the United States to his liking. And after a brief visit in Greece in **1875**, he left again for America, this time in the company of **five** compatriots. **This group seems to have constituted the nucleus for the succeeding waves of immigrants from Sparta. Mass immigration** to the United States began in **1877**, when twelve to fifteen men left from the village of Tsintzina. Early in April **1882** about seventy more left from the same general area. In between, a couple of hundred more had arrived in America from Tsintzina.”

So that is where historical scholarship stood with respect to information about this group of Greek men from the Sparta area, who kicked off this mass migration movement to America in the 1870’s. Historians knew there was one man who initiated and encouraged hundreds and hundreds of his friends and relatives from a remote mountain village to immigrate to America. But historians knew nothing of the details surrounding this particular mass migration phenomenon. That is until the **1980’s**.

After Salutos’ death, Charles Moskos, with master’s and doctoral degrees from UCLA, chose to carry on his mentor’s study on the subject of the Greek American experience. Charlie and I had been casual acquaintances since after he had become a professor at Northwestern University where I had obtained my under-graduate and law degrees. In 1980, Charlie published his own history called “**Greek Americans – Struggle and Success**”. In it, he reiterated Salutos’s background information on the importance of Tsakonas and his Tsintzinian compatriots and went on to write that “During the 1880’s about two thousand Greeks came to America, mostly from Sparta.”

When I ran into Charlie at a book signing event at Northwestern, I mentioned to him that Christos Tsakonas, whom he had described in his book as the “Columbus of Sparta”, was none other than my grandfather’s first uncle who brought him to the United States in 1885. And in 1888, Tsakonas set him up in a business in Oil City Pennsylvania that my Papou operated successfully for over 50 years. And since my wife’s father had also come from that area during that same period, Charlie signed the title page of his book, “December 1982. For Jim and Denise, who are part of this story.”

So once again, this is about where research into the Tsakonas and Tsintzinian contribution to Greek American mass migration stood **until 1986** when an historical study was published in the “Greek Accent” magazine titled **“Pilgrims Progress: The Tsintzinians in America”** by historian Peter Dickson. Peter had also authored an acclaimed biography of Henry Kissinger titled “Kissinger and the Meaning of History” published by Cambridge University Press. Dickson’s “Pilgrims Progress” told a more detailed story of Tsakonas and his “Pilgrim” cousins who followed him to America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the same issue of that magazine, Charlie had written a tribute to his mentor, Theodore Salutos. So, the next time I saw Charlie, I mentioned to him that he might want to check out Dickson’s study and maybe get together with him to fill in some of the blanks about this early period of Greek American mass immigration. They did get together in 1987. And when Charlie published his **“New Directions in Greek American Studies”** in 1989, he included a new study by Peter Dickson titled **“The Greek Pilgrims: Tsakonas and the Tsintzinians”** as well as one about pre-1900 Greek Tsintzinians in Hawaii written by Hawaii Pacific University Dean, Helen Geracimos Chapin, who like Dickson is also a Tsintzinian descendent.

By early Two Thousand, both Charlie and I were splitting our time between Chicago and Los Angeles; he in Santa Monica and I in Brentwood. We started to get together to think about a possible documentary on Tsakonas and the early Tsintzinians. It would have been based on the scholarship of Salutos, Moskos, Dickson and Chapin as well as many of my personal recollections of stories that I was told about the history of these early Tsintzinians by the “Pilgrims” themselves. It would have been a documentary similar to the ones made by the “Greek Heritage Society of Southern California”.

Unfortunately, a short time later, Charlie began his struggle with prostate cancer that eventually took his life in 2008. A little after that, my wife and I moved to the Palm Springs area, where I continued to develop a narrative for the story that Peter, Charlie, Salutos, and Chapin had brought into detailed historical light.

In case one is not that familiar with the scholarly careers of Professors Theodore Salutos and Charles Moskos, the following might be enlightening. Professor Salutos had been Chairman of the UCLA Department of History. He has been recognized as the preeminent historian of the Greek American experience. He received many academic honors including three Fulbright scholarships and a Guggenheim fellowship.

When then UCLA graduate student Moskos was asked to read the preliminary manuscript of Professor Salutos’ groundbreaking history of Greek Americans mentioned earlier, Charlie realized that he was present at the creation of Greek American studies. It was a study that, as we know, he himself would make some of the most significant contributions to in the future. Moskos stated that his own work, “Greek Americans: Struggle and Success”, was directly influenced by the highest professional standards that Salutos had set for his own study of Greek American history.

Professor Moskos was also known as one of the “most influential military sociologists” and was considered to be “the dean of military sociologists”. He was best known as the man who forged the 1990’s compromise that governed the conduct of gay military service members known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. So, it was not surprising that President Clinton cited Professor Moskos on national television in announcing that policy change. Moskos, with an undergraduate degree from Princeton and master and doctorate degrees from UCLA, was a Woodrow Wilson, Annenberg and Guggenheim Fellow as well as a distinguished member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. It was an honor to have known him and briefly worked with him.

The following is the detailed story of the Tsintzinian contribution to the earliest Greek mass migration to America. One which has been brought to light by the work of Dickson, Moskos, Salutos, Chapin, as well as many of **my own** personal conversations with many of the last of the living “Pilgrims”.

In early 1873, a twenty-five-year-old Greek young man, who historians in the future would call the “Christopher Columbus” of mass migration from Greece to America, was sipping an ouzo on the patio of a taverna overlooking the Mediterranean Sea outside of Alexandria Egypt. He reached over and picked up a newspaper sitting on a chair next to him and began thumbing through it.

One article in particular attracted his attention. It was a story about how a cow kicked over a lantern and burned the second largest city in America to the ground a little over a year before. Over 18,000 buildings were destroyed in a place called Chicago. At the end of the article, there was a call to men from around the world to come to Chicago to help rebuild it. A couple of stiff drinks later, Christos Tsakonas, decided to heed that call.

It was an adventure made in heaven for Tsakonas, who had the unfortunate fate of never knowing his father who died shortly before his birth. His mother struggled against poverty in trying to raise two sons and two daughters. In 1862, at the age of 14, Tsakonas decided to strike out on his own. He left Tsintzina for Piraeus and Athens where he worked in coffee shops. This line of work, however, did not satisfy his desire for something more substantial. By 1870, Tsakonas decided to try his luck in Egypt where he worked for wealthy Greek cotton merchants and tried his hand as a money changer but did not fare so well.

So, in February of 1873, he sailed for America, arriving in New York City on March 5, 1873, on a twin-mast steamship named the ‘Anglia’. At this time there were only a couple of hundred Greeks in all of North America, with most of them being sailors and a few merchants in the port cities of New Orleans, Boston, and New York.

Tsakonas was shaped by his initial experiences in New York City. At the time there were only 40-50 Greeks living there. Only one Greek immigrant had made his mark in the city. He was Eleftherios Pilalas, another Spartan, from a mountain village a few miles from Tsintzina. Pilalas was the first Greek to open a candy store in America around 1870 in the two hundred block of South Fifth Avenue. Tsakonas learned a little about the candy trade from him.

Early on in 1873, Tsakonas had a crucial encounter in New York with Demitrios Botassis who was serving as consul for the Greek government. Botassis was extremely hostile to the idea of Greeks coming to America. He insisted that Tsakonas return immediately to Greece. He argued that the obstacles of a different language, alphabet, and numerical system as well as different cultural, economic, and legal systems were insurmountable for peasants from an agrarian society that had completely missed the Industrial Revolution.

Whereas the other six million European immigrants, who had started coming to America during the early parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, had developed, by the 1870's, a support system for new arrivals from their group through churches and ethnic philanthropic organizations. The Greeks had none. Greek immigrant chances for economic success, let alone survival, in this seething caldron of ethnic competition, were virtually slim to none, with the emphasis on none.

Botassis was strong-willed in his convictions and was working closely with the Greek government and Athenian newspapers through the 1870's and 80's to discourage would-be Greek immigrants by painting a gloomy picture of what America had to offer.

But against all these arguments and odds, Tsakonas pressed on to Chicago; a city that the 1870 Federal Census listed a total ethnic Greek population of ten. When he arrived in the fall of 1873, he found a boom town. But without capital and no skills in the construction trades, he decided his only choice was to become a fruit and candy peddler on the mean streets of a hostile Chicago.

But because Chicago was in a major reconstruction mode that offered moneymaking possibilities, he found himself wealthy enough two short years later, in 1875, to return to Greece and pay off his family's debts. With proof of his apparent economic success in America, five young Tsintzinian cousins were encouraged to join him on his return to Chicago. Passenger ship records, in the National Archives, confirm that he returned to America in September 1875 along with five young men. These five young men and Tsakonas were the nucleus of what Saloutos called the "succeeding waves" of immigrants from Sparta.

He continued going back and forth to Greece every few years thereafter, bringing in the process hundreds of more friends and relatives to what he knew was the land of opportunity. The turning point clearly occurred in the spring of 1882 when three Athenian newspapers noted the departure from Piraeus of nearly 100 hundred people from Tsintzina and nearby villages for America.

This phenomenon captured Greek public attention because such an exodus to the New World was unprecedented. The passenger ship records and Athenian newspaper articles confirm that at least 106 were from Tsintzina and a few other neighboring villages. By the early 1890's, nearly one-third of all the Greeks in the United States were from this Tsintzina area.

Tsakonas' effort to establish a beachhead in America for Tsintzinians and other Greeks might easily have turned into a disaster however, because the arduous journey to a strange land was an awesome step for the average Greek peasant. One man in particular deserves special credit for helping these Greek pilgrims get off on the right foot. That man was Ioannis D. Zachariou, a prominent, in fact *the only* Tsintzinian living in Athens in the 1870's.

Zachariou was an extremely successful businessman who operated a catering service for the Royal Palace and foreign embassies in the capital. He unselfishly used his experience and valuable contacts to assist the first Tsintzinian pioneers in their effort to secure passage to America. Athenian newspapers described seventy-some Tsintzinians dressed in "**fine European clothes**" and ready to sail to America in March of 1882. It was Zachariou who groomed them for their journey. Any Tsintzinian planning to migrate to America up through the early 1920's was told to "**Go see Zachariou**".

So how was Tsakonas able to inspire this type of mass migration? First, he set up his cousins, and others that followed, as peddlers of fruits and candies in Chicago. Then in 1880 and 1881, Tsakonas opened **two fruit stores** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He felt that a smaller town environment, with less competition, would lead to a greater chance of success. In 1883 and 84 he turned these two successful businesses over to four of his nephews and in 1885 moved on to Akron, Ohio where he opened a third store. In 1886, he moved to Youngstown, Ohio where he opened a fourth and later in 1887 a fifth one in New Castle, Pennsylvania. As he moved from one opening to the next, he turned the stores over to his immigrant cousins whom he had diligently trained in how to operate them properly.

In 1888, a sixth store was opened in Oil City, Pennsylvania and turned over to his nephew, **my grandfather**, whom he had brought to America in 1885. By 1890, he had opened stores in Franklin, Sharon, Titusville, and Warren, Pennsylvania. And in 1893 he moved to Niles, Ohio, where he finally built a home and opened his last of a dozen fruit stores.

In these stores, he employed hundreds of other friends and relatives that he had brought from Greece. They in turn went off on their own to open businesses all around the Midwest and East, in such additional states as Indiana, Michigan, West Virginia, Kansas, and New York.

All in all, over 60 fruit and candy stores were established in this way under the banner of a legal entity called “**The Greek American Fruit Company**” that Tsakonas had obtained an official **charter** for in the early 1890’s. Despite stiff competition from native born entrepreneurs, the businesses Tsakonas established for his cousins turned out to be very successful. So, what was it that contributed to this extraordinary success?

To answer that, we have to meet some of the Tsintzinians who pushed on to California and Hawaii after their initial stop in Chicago. Demitrios Camarinos was one of 12 to 15 young Tsintzinians who Tsakonas brought to America in 1877. After a year or so in Chicago as a peddler, Camarinos pushed on to San Francisco in 1880 where he began operating small businesses. His brother Peter arrived in Chicago in 1881 and joined his brother in San Francisco in 1883 where the brothers began opening fruit stores and wine and liquor outlets. In 1886, Peter was sent to Hawaii to start a fruit company and begin exporting pineapples and bananas to his brother Demitrios in San Francisco.

So, by the late 1880’s, the Camarinos brothers were engaged in a lucrative triangular trade where they shipped fresh produce and wines from California to Hawaii where they on-loaded bananas, pineapples, and opium for the trip back to California. They then forwarded by rail the bananas, pineapples, and other California fruit on to two of Tsakonas’ cousins in the wholesale fruit business in Chicago. One of these was my father’s uncle who brought him to America in 1914. They, in turn, sent that produce on east to their cousin’s stores that were part of “The Greek American Fruit Company”.

Gaining access to this so called “exotic” fruit, that their competitors couldn’t get, turned Tsintzinian fruit stores into very successful businesses. I know this to be a fact because my grandfather, who began operating that fruit store in Oil City in early 1888, had said in a newspaper interview that he was barely getting by until he started receiving Hawaiian bananas and other California fruit in late 1888 and beyond. “My cousin just shipped me whatever he thought I needed and never questioned my credit or lack of it. Almost immediately, sales went **up** by more than **ten** times from what they were before”.

John and Nick Chronis were also brought to Chicago by Tsakonas in the late 1870’s. After learning all they could about the fruit business there, they left for Los Angeles in 1883 where they opened a fruit store on Spring Street. It was the **first** Greek-American business in Los Angeles. They also hired Chinese laborers to pick lemons and oranges that they also sent off to Chicago by rail.

Their sons James and George worked for their fathers in the fruit business until they decided to follow their Camarinos cousins to Honolulu in the late 1890’s. There they opened a restaurant and by the 1920’s another one at the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. It was the only business to remain open to first responders during the Japanese bombing attack and its aftermath on December 7, 1941. During the war years, all Greek American soldiers and sailors ate free at their restaurant. And also, every Sunday, all Greeks of Tsintzinian heritage stationed at Pearl, were invited to the Chronis’ homes, situated high above Waikiki Beach, for a home cooked Greek meal. I visited them with my family in 1957 and heard many of their fascinating stories.

Of all the interesting and challenging lives that were lived by these “Tsintzinian Pilgrims”, none was more exciting than that of George Lycurgus, my father’s uncle. Born in 1858, he arrived in Chicago with his cousin Dimitrios Camarinos in 1877. The following year, he left for California to work in a Salmon cannery on the Sacramento River that his brother had established a few years earlier. Unfortunately, it burned to the ground in 1879.

George pressed on to San Francisco where he sold candy on the streets by day and at night washed dishes in cheap eating houses. He went on to various small but better jobs and was able to save a little money. Through friends he learned of a small oyster house that was for sale in Sausalito and he had saved enough to buy it. He named it the Oyster Grotto. It became extremely popular with young wealthy San Franciscans and George was brought into the city’s Bohemian-intellectual-theatrical crowd. His “Barbary Coast” eatery came to be patronized by such notables as the world champion boxer John L. Sullivan, William Randolph Hearst, as well as literary figures like Ambrose Bierce.

He later opened a fruit store on Sansome Street in San Francisco in partnership with the Camarinos cousins who, as I said, by this time were in business in Hawaii. His cousins began to strongly encourage him to join them there. But he declined because he was so thoroughly enjoying his life in San Francisco. In 1889, a close friend, who owned “The Oceanic Steamship Company” and a sugar cane business in Hawaii invited George on board one of his ships for a poker game. By the time George noticed, the ship was on its way across the Pacific to Hawaii. After a short stay, he fell in love with the Islands. Upon returning to the mainland, he sold his restaurant and moved to Hawaii.

His first business venture there was to turn a property on Waikiki beach into a restaurant that he called the “Sans Souci”; French for ‘without care’. He expanded it into a resort that many celebrities such as Robert Lewis Stevenson visited. It became one of the most popular destinations for tourists from the mainland.

Members of the Hawaiian royal Kalakaua family became regulars at his resort as well as becoming very close friends of his. He felt more comfortable with the monarchy than the missionary Americans and sugar cane planters who were seeking political control of the islands. From his Royal Hawaiian friends, he earned the nickname “Duke of Sparta”. He was a handsome six-footer who wore a dashing panama hat and a white suit with a cummerbund. He and his cousins spoke English and Hawaiian to others but Greek to each other.

King Kalakaua died in 1891 and was survived by his sister Queen Liliuokalani. On January 17, 1893, the missionary party, supported by an American gunboat in Honolulu Harbor and the American Minister to Hawaii conspired in a revolution that overthrew the monarchy. A counter revolution was mounted by the native Hawaiians. George and other Greeks rushed to the side of the Queen. The actual plan for the counter revolution was hatched at Lycurgus’s Sans Souci resort. Peter Camarinos arranged for a shipment of guns to the counterrevolutionaries concealed in his brother, Demetrios’s, cargoes from the West Coast to the Islands.

Recalling the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, these Spartan Greeks led by the Duke himself fought the provisional missionary government in the field, but within days of the January 7, 1895 uprising, the rebels were crushed by well-financed and organized government troops. (Maybe a little too much hyperbole.) The government arrested the Queen and 190 others including George and Peter. Peter was deported from the islands, never to return. George was charged with treason, and though never tried, spent 52 days in jail. In 1901, he opened the Union Grill in Honolulu and would hold annual celebrations that he called “Jailbirds of 1895” nights.

In 1904, he bought the Volcano House hotel on the rim of the active Kilauea volcanic crater on the Big Island of Hawaii. Two months after he purchased it, Kilauea erupted and that made the hotel the place to visit for anyone who came to the Islands. “Uncle George”, as he was called, entertained Kings, Queens, Presidents, world famous scientists and writers, and any and all prominent people who ever visited the Islands.

Including myself and my family who visited him in 1957 when he was 98 years old, three years before he died in 1960 at the age of 101. I have vivid memories of the stories he told of his early immigrant days in Chicago as well as those in San Francisco and Hawaii. He was a man who possessed all of his faculties to the very end of his life.

So, thanks to Tsakonias’ California and Hawaiian cousins, a transnational and transcontinental source of unique and exotic “fancy California and Hawaiian” fruit products were provided to members of “The Greek American Fruit Company” chain of stores. Those products were crucial to the early success of those businesses.

From what we know from written and oral histories of these Tsintzinian Pilgrims, Tsakonias was selfless in his devotion to the young men he encouraged to immigrate to America. He mentored them by teaching business techniques that he learned by trial and error. In addition to turning over businesses he had established, he assisted others in selecting locations and loaning them startup money. They would look to him for help and advice if they were having problems in their operations. If they quarreled, he was there for them as an arbitrator.

He passed on the following advice to his compatriots:

- Don’t work for the **man**, be the **man**. By that he meant, be your own boss. Be an entrepreneur. Don’t follow what other immigrant groups were doing; which was going to work in the mines, factories, railroads, and construction for long hours and slave wages. Don’t rely on others. Rely on yourself and each other.
- If you do want to be the “man”, choose a wholesale or retail food business. It doesn’t require a lot of capital that we obviously don’t have access to. It only requires hard work and long hours that others are want to engage in.
- And confectionaries, restaurants, fruit stores, and grocery stores offer another important benefit, which is, your family will never go hungry. And they can be fed at wholesale prices. It was an important message to peasants who had experienced hunger in the old country.

- Then branch out into bowling alleys, florists, pool halls, taverns, hotels, rooming houses, commercial real estate, and theaters. Which they did.
- Set up your business in smaller towns and cities with robust economies based on local industries in places like eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and New York State, to begin with. Look to the industrial heartland of America. You'll find less of a hostile anti-Greek environment in those types of locations and less competition than you'll run into in large cities with more deeply entrenched entrepreneurs from other ethnic groups.
- And you'll find it easier to become part of the social fabric of the community in that small-town environment.
- To be successful, we'll have to stick together, help each other, and cooperate for our common good. We must embrace the values of industry, prudence, ambition, neatness, order, moderation, and continual self-improvement.
- Join local community clubs, societies, and philanthropic organizations. Become upstanding members of our communities.
- And most important of all, make sure your children get the best education possible. All our kids are smart. They're Greeks after all. If they work hard in school they will become doctors, lawyers, scientists, teachers, and captains of industry. Professional people. And, of course, they did.

So, what is the long-term significance of the accomplishments of these Tsintzinian "Pilgrims" led by their revered leader Christos Tsakonias?

- They triggered mass migration from the Sparta region in the 1870's and beyond, which in turn encouraged hundreds of thousands of Greeks from all parts of Greece to come to America during the first quarter of the Twentieth Century.
- They established some of the earliest Greek churches and the first exclusively Greek societies in Chicago and San Francisco that became a template for the creation of others that followed in the rest of the country.
- They created the first Greek owned business franchise, "The Greek American Fruit Company", which was also transcontinental and transoceanic in scope. One that encouraged Greek immigrants who followed them in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to think about creating larger scale businesses that were more cooperative in nature.
- They popularized the fruit and candy store business among early and later Greek immigrants. By 1920 they enjoyed a near monopoly with their confectionaries, ice cream parlors, and snack shops and diners.
- They demonstrated the success Greek immigrants could have if they chose to open businesses in smaller towns where industrial development was in full sway.
- They stimulated a strong orientation toward the conservative social value system of the small storekeeper in contrast to the outlook of a farmer or industrial laborer.
- They created a successful business template that other Greek immigrants who came in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century could follow. One that could smooth their difficult transition from their agrarian roots. One that was a proven avenue to success.
- They quickly assimilated themselves into American culture and society by becoming active members of local lodges of the Elks, Moose, Masons and others.

The Tsintzinians were not only the largest single group of Greeks in America (over 3000 in the 1920's and 30's) but were widely recognized as among the richest and best educated. The ability of these Tsintzinian pioneers to place some of their sons in Ivy League universities before 1920 (including my uncle Jim) is the best evidence of their role as a model for other Greek immigrants and as originators of a pattern that has been characteristic of the Greek American experience ever since the early years of the Twentieth century.

The accomplishments of Tsakonas are so extraordinary and unique that patterns directly or indirectly associated with him might never have evolved. Had he decided to stay in Egypt, the Tsintzinians, other Spartans, and the Arcadians of the 1880's and 90's probably would have never had any reason to think of America as a promised land. If these Peloponnesians had not been encouraged to migrate to places like Chicago and beyond, instead of the 20,000 Greeks in America in the year 1900 along with the Greek Churches and societies that they created, there might have only been 500 or 1000 unorganized Greeks with no societies or churches.

Without the unique phenomenon of 'Barba' Christos Tsakonas, the Greeks would have lost more than twenty years in terms of institutional and social development. Finding themselves even further behind other and significantly larger European immigrant groups. To be sure, America would still have been a magnet for impoverished Greeks after 1900. And these people eventually would have found the means to make their way. However, it is not unreasonable to claim that their task was made easier by the paths cleared by those who came before them. In this respect, Tsakonas certainly deserves the title as the trail-blazing 'Greek' Christopher Columbus. And his young Tsintzinian cousins were indeed the founding pilgrim fathers of the Greek American community. They truly were a "Band of Brothers" in the best sense of the phrase.

During the 1880's and 90's, some Tsintzinian families would, from time to time, picnic together at a park or home within a short drive of each other. There were attempts to organize a national convention as early as 1896. A first reunion was finally held in 1905, and beginning in 1914 these gatherings became annual affairs, continuing to this day with a few wartime exceptions. The strong tribal bonds among the Tsintzinians are striking. Even Tsintzinians living in Hawaii would occasionally make the long journey to these conventions.

To this day, a large club house on Lake Chautauqua, near Jamestown, New York, on five acres of land, still serves as headquarters for these annual reunions. The Tsintzinians bought the property in 1921, at which time the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association – AHEPA – was just beginning to take shape. The original pioneers considered the club house "a sacred altar", to quote one of the early convention yearbooks, "where we could perform our patriotic mass."

The Tsintzinian reunions also had the additional purpose of providing assistance to new immigrants starting small businesses. The gatherings were in fact described as conventions of the “Tsintzinian Business Men’s Association of America”. The directory in their yearbooks listed more than 500 Tsintzinian businessmen who gather “to help foster commercial ties, social contacts, as well as share successful business practices.” Another aim of the organization was to raise money for philanthropic projects in the old country. They periodically raised funds for churches, schools, and new roads, not only to benefit their village but also for the Sparta region in general.

In addition, they sought to promote intermarriage among American-born Tsintzinians. My mother met my father there a few years before they were married and three of my uncles met their wives-to-be at those conventions. I attended them regularly during the 1940’s and 50’s. In many ways, they were the highlight of my summer. I still have many happy memories of annually getting together with old friends to boat on the lake, play cards and baseball, hang out at a large amusement park just blocks from the clubhouse, and Greek and American dance until all hours of the night.

In the last decade, the descendants of the original Tsintzinian “Pilgrims” have formed the “Tsintzinian Heritage Society of America” that seeks to preserve the group’s historical contribution to the Greek American experience. It acts as an archive and resource center that showcases the early and current history of Tsintzinian immigrants to America especially highlighting their business, artistic, economic, and athletic achievements.

The following is some background information on Tsintzina, a village high in the Parnon Mountains northeast of Sparta in the Province of Laconia. It has been claimed that Tsintzinians are direct descendants of the Dorians who originated in northwestern Greece and Macedonia over 3000 years ago. The Dorians expanded to all other regions of Greece including the southeastern region of the Peloponnese called Tsakonia. Some of the earliest settlers of Tsintzina were Tsakonians who spoke their own particular dialect and followed their own separate and unique cultural traditions which had Doric roots. They were relatively late to convert to Christianity, preferring to practice traditional Hellenic customs.

The name Tsintzina is from the purely Tsakonian dialect that means “small knot” or “small crossroads”. For it was a junction of several medieval trails. Archeological evidence of continuous habitation in the area takes the village back to at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D. The first recorded historical mention of Tsintzina occurred in a Byzantine Imperial Decree of 1292.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, during the time of the Crusades, the Norman French conquered southern Greece and brought feudalism to the areas around Sparta that included Tsintzina. The Frankish Dukes and Princes brought with them an opulent feudal world of tournaments and troubadours. The Franks maintained order in the area through the so-called “*gasmouloi*”, a knightly caste of the offspring of Frankish knights and their Greek wives who were the daughters of Greek regional leaders.

The area surrounding Sparta was the domain of the “*Melissinoi*” family. Their vassal in Tsintzina was the “*Koumoutzis*” clan, many of whose descendants still reside in Tsintzina to this day. The Byzantine recapturing of the area in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century was fiercely resisted by the “*Melissinoi*” and their vassal clans because of their close familial relationships with their French overlords.

Prior to the Ottoman invasion of Greece in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Tsintzina was a cool retreat from the hot summer months for farmers in settlements in the valleys along the Evrotas River. It was a peaceful village in the tall pine tree forests of the Parnon Mountains with fast rushing streams of clear ice-cold water running down from the higher snow-covered elevations.

But that all changed when the Ottoman Empire invaded Greece in 1453. Two types of migrations occurred at that time. The first was that the rich Byzantine Greek intelligentsia migrated to Western Europe, taking with them the intellectual treasures of ancient Hellenism to the enrichment of the Renaissance period.

The second entailed poor Greek peasants leaving the plains and resettling in the mountains. This is exactly what happened to Tsintzina when villagers from the Evrotas valley fled to the safety of their remote mountain village to avoid the heathen Turk. More specifically, they wanted to avoid a particularly vicious practice of the Ottomans. Agents of the Empire would scour the regions they controlled for strong young boys between the ages of 6 and 14. These boys would be taken from their parents, forced to convert to Islam, and placed under the control and strict discipline of Eunuchs. They were then conscripted into military units called *Janissaries* to fight in the Ottoman Empire’s wars; mostly on the front lines.

It should be of no surprise that the Evrotas Valley peasants took umbrage at this practice and fled to their Tsintzinian mountain retreat. And there they remained, undiscovered by the Turks, for almost 400 years. After the successful conclusion of the Greek War of Independence in 1828, the Tsintzinians returned to their farming villages in the valley below. But they kept the practice of summering in Tsintzina. As they do to this very day.

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Very recently, as I completed my research, I ran across an eighty-year-old newspaper article that my mother had saved over the years. The article titled “Chacona Candy Company Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary” appeared in the October 21, 1938 edition of the Oil City Derrick Newspaper. In the article, my grandfather, A. D. Chacona, who early on had changed his name from Tsakona to Chacona, told of being brought to America in 1885 by his uncle and working in fruit stores owned by his uncle and other relatives in Chicago, Milwaukee, Toledo, Detroit, Akron, and Youngstown, Ohio. He was paid \$10 per month in summer and nothing in winter. In 1888, his uncle set him up in his own fruit store in Oil City, PA.

I've mentioned how his business became profitable after a cousin in the wholesale fruit business in Chicago began shipping him bananas, pineapples, oranges and lemons from California and Hawaii on credit. In addition to fruit sales, he began squeezing and shaking lemonades by hand and selling hundreds of them a day. In 1890, he added the O.T. Stacy candy line considered to be the finest in America at the time. His increased success allowed him to initiate a "state of the art" technological innovation by being the first to install electric lights in a business in Oil City.

But more importantly, the article adds to the knowledge of the early history of the Tsintzinians in America. It sheds light on how and why these early "Pilgrims" were able to build on their early success as fruit and candy store owners by evolving into the precursors of a full restaurant service line of what are now known as the Greek Snack Shops and Diners.

The following description of that story is as it was written in that same Oil City Derrick Newspaper article. "It was a well-known that the high school youngsters of that day made a rendezvous of the store, a custom which became traditional for many years in the city with one generation following in the pattern laid down by the previous one. A combination of boyish curiosity and ancient history made youngsters of that day acquainted with the Greek fruit store owner."

"A class in high school was studying the classic story of the stoical Spartan boy who permitting a fox, which he had under his clothing, to eat his innards without flinching, rather than reveal that he had the fox, which he had stolen. A high school instructor, in speaking to the Greek merchant, learned he came from Sparta. He told the members of the class and they came flocking down town to view the representative of the hardy Spartans. A.D. knew the story and stood the eye-searching of the youngsters in good humored fashion to the degree that the youngsters and the young 22-year-old merchant became good friends."

"It was youngsters hanging around the store who put A.D. into the restaurant business. The late Gene Seep complained quite often to A.D. about the lack of foodstuffs and insisted that sandwiches and coffee should be served, but the proprietor had other ideas and explosively brushed aside the suggestion. One noon he entered the store to discover Seep and others with bread, onions, and meat and they were busily engaged in making their own sandwiches. The practice continued several nights and then A.D. arrived one day to discover that the late Monte Griffin, who was employed there, had put in bread and materials for sandwiches and actually doing a thriving business. Then A.D. didn't frown on the idea, but installed a coffee urn. It was told later, in the manner which such traditions grow, that Mrs. A.D. Chacona made the first soup at her kitchen at home and brought it to the store in a baby carriage."

So it was, that the first Greek snack shop was born out of the humble beginnings of one the Tsakona's dozen original Tsintzinian fruit stands. It is highly likely that news about how profits could be increased by adding sandwiches, soups, and coffee for sale in a confectionary fruit store was passed along by my grandfather A.D. Chacona to owners of the other 60 Tsintzinian fruit and candy stores. We know from the charter of "The Greek American Fruit Company" that one of the principal reasons for "The Tsintzinian Business Men's Association" was "that our getting together and comparing notes as to how to better manage our places of business may result in many of these suggestions being put into practice by us that will aid materially to our success". It was a given, that these early Tsintzinian businessmen shared successful business practices with each other. And this was certainly the one that added the most to their future success.