

SEMENDRE - A HISTORY OF OUR ORGANIZATION

The membership of our organization (Semendre Benevolent Society) is composed of natives of the village of Semendre, in the State of Licaonia (Konia Vilayet) bordering on the State of Kappadokia, the birthplace of St. Vasilios The Great and Gregorios The Theologian and other noted fathers of our church.

Semendre Benevolent Society derives its name from the above mentioned village. The mother society was founded by our forefathers in 1862. It was a Philoptohos, Philekpetheftiki Adelfotis “O ARHON MICHAEL.”

They built a magnificent church building, which bears the name “ARHON MICHAEL”. This took place following the treaty between Russia and Turkey, which provided freedom for all Christians to build church buildings above ground in place of the catacombs which they used as places of worship in secrecy. Also they are permitted to further the cause of education without coercion or punishment from the Turkish authorities. At the time nearly all the inhabitants were engaged in farming whose chief product was grain. In the course of time due to the increase in population, many were forced to seek a livelihood in Constantinople, the largest city and the capital of the Old Byzantine Empire. With honest effort and perseverance they became successful in their undertakings and by their self-sacrifice and unselfish devotion to their aged parents they were making their yearly contributions towards the support of the family they had left behind in the village, and made frequent visits to their birthplace and enjoyed their vacations with old folks.

A branch of the Order was established in Constantinople, and they by the efforts of these men and their generous contributions and under the personal supervision of that Great

Benefactor of prominent citizen of Semendre, Harizma Hopoglou, who was one of the most successful Commission Merchants of his time in Constantinople.

In 1890, the cornerstone for the school building was laid. Through the generous and voluntary contributions of the Order in Constantinople the Mother Order in the village the religious and educational institutions, which they established were supported in a manner worthy of praise.

When the writer, then at the age of 17, left the village, they were enrolled in the school nearly 200 students and three teachers were employed, and four grades from the 1st to the 4th were being taught.

This progress was obstructed for a time due to the continuous wars that the Ottoman Empire was involved in, such as the Italo-Turkish War, followed by the Balkan Wars of 1911-12 and the World War which climaxed all previous conflicts by its magnitude and the number of men engaged in the conflict.

Due to the introduction of parliamentary government in Turkey in 1908 and by the Constitutional changes made by all citizens were conscripted for compulsory military training that was required of the Mohammedan elements of the population in the Empire.

This accounts for our immigration into these United States, the land of our adoption.

After a short stay in the Capital, the young men of that time, who are now members of this Society, were forced to flee in order to evade military conscription which had become the law of the land.

This they strongly resented due to the fact that they were of a different race and religion and considered the Turks their Arch enemies and would not aid them in any way if it was in the power to prevent. This was the chief cause of our emigration from the land of our fathers and

seeking new homes in far distant lands, where freedom and liberty were guaranteed to all citizens.

Small parties began to arrive in New York as early as 1906 and after a short stay they moved westward to Tacoma, Washington, where this Society was founded. Until the year 1910 there were only 5 men from the Village of Semendre but thereafter many more were arriving annually to swell the number of those who had preceded them. The World War put a complete stop to immigration but following the end of the War many more came bringing their wives and families with them and thus begins the story of our founding of the Semendre Benevolent Society.

This organization was founded in the year 1913 at Tacoma, Washington by a group of our compatriots who having established themselves in a strange land decided to band together for mutual protection. These pioneers having left their homes and families-finding themselves in surroundings and among people of different racial and religious beliefs decided that in order to perpetuate the best traditions and customs of their forefathers, they must organize and accomplish collectively that which they were not in a position to do as individuals. The spirit of Brotherly love and Good Fellowship is instilled in the hearts of its members and they have at all times met the demands made upon them in a commendable and praiseworthy manner. We have made generous contributions towards those who were victims of unforeseen circumstances and have been ready and willing to bear the burdens of our less fortunate brothers. Large sums have been expended for charitable purposes, and have at all times given our moral and financial support in the hour of need.

The society has donated large sums towards the rehabilitation of our kinfolk who are forced to abandon their homes and environments, in Asia Minor, which they had occupied for

centuries, and seek new homes in Greece in an exchange of populations as an aftermath of Greco-Turkish War, following the World War.

We have assisted many of our members who became victims of worldwide depression and others who are stricken with disease.

The majority of our members are centered in the city of Detroit with the exceptions of a few families, who are residents of the States of West Virginia and Kentucky.

All members contribute according to their ability to pay. We aim to continue this benevolent work for the benefits of ourselves and our associates in the communities where we reside. We are active supporters of our creed. The Hellenic Orthodox Church of America, which dates back to the early stages of Christian church. We maintain that religion is the foundation of developing good character and God-fearing people. We aim this in view we shall strive to provide upright and law-abiding citizens who shall be a credit to the ancestry and to the land of our adoption, to which we are grateful for the privileges we enjoy. With the help of Almighty God we look forward to the future with great anticipation and hope.