



Buffalo Tales



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Buffalo County Historical Society

March 1986

THE FIRST GREEKS IN KEARNEY - Part II

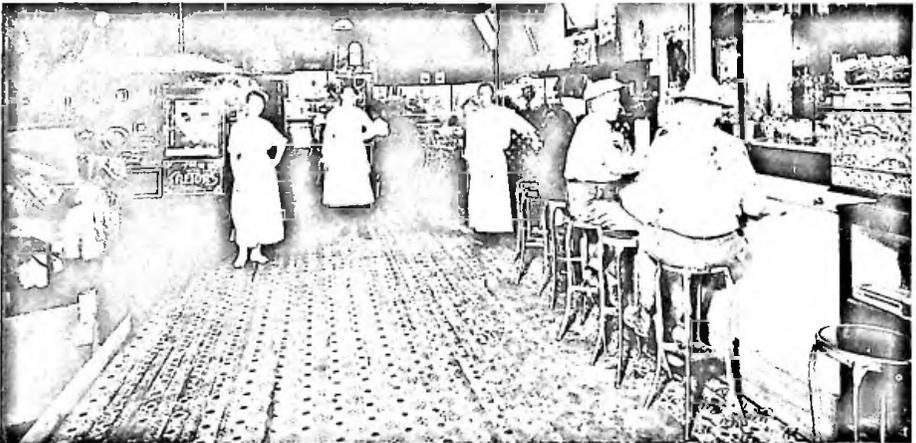
by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

Kappas

Theodosius and Athanasses Kapareliotes (Charles and Thomas Kappas) were twin brothers born February 11, 1885 in the small Greek village of Alikia about twenty miles south of Tripoli. They came to America in 1904, arriving in New York City on April 10. They eventually settled in the Kansas City area where Tom found a job with the railroad and Charles went into farming. Later their younger brother Kosta (Gust) joined them and worked at Charles' farm for a few weeks. Wanting to learn the candy making trade, he went to work for his cousin Charlie Mitchell and learned from him how to make candy and ice cream.

On a vacation trip with a friend, Charles and Gust came through Kearney. They liked the city, found the people very friendly, and observed that no one had a business of homemade candy and ice cream and decided this might be a place of opportunity for them. In 1917 Charles and Gust moved to Kearney and opened the Emporia Candy Kitchen at 2222 Central Avenue, a business they would continue for nearly thirty years. Shortly thereafter their brother Tom joined them in the business, and later Charlie Mitchell became a business partner. By 1922 a second candy shop was in operation at 2100 Central Avenue, known as the Kearney Candy Kitchen. However, this place of business was of short duration.

Gust and Charles Kappas were bachelors when they moved to Kearney. Tom was married to Clara Kaluroi who came to America from near Tripoli at an early age to join an older brother. Clara worked in the candy kitchen and cafe, at times as many as



Interior of the Emporia Candy Kitchen, about 1920. Mrs. Clara Kappas is pictured at left.

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BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68847. It is sent to all members of the Society. Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people. Annual dues, payable January 1, are.

Basic Membership	\$ 7.50
Institutional Membership	\$10.00
Supporting Membership	\$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Chandler Lynch III; Vice-President, Barb Avery; Secretary, Margaret Hohnholt; Treasurer, Leo Henriksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Merlin Berglund, Leonard Silver, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnett Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Robert Stubblefield and Marian Johnson; Publications Chairman, Alice Howell.

Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director.

Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

The **March Meeting** of the Buffalo County Historical Society will be held at the Amherst Community Center on March 16, at two o'clock. The program will be *Willa Cather and the Prairie*, presented by Dr. Hal Nagel of Kearney State College.

Note change of meeting date because of Palm Sunday and Easter.

Thanks and appreciation is given to Godberson Mortuary, Central Nebraska Telephone Co., The Shelton Clipper and the Gibbon Reporter for funding the February program at Shelton on *Barns Tell A Story*.

Notice to Members of Buffalo County Historical Society

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, April 20, 1986, 1:00 p.m.

at First Lutheran Church

3315 Avenue G, in Kearney

The annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society will be held on Sunday, April 20, 1986, in the Fellowship Hall of the First Lutheran Church, 3315 Avenue G, in Kearney. A covered dish luncheon will start at 1:00 p.m., followed by the business meeting at 2:00 o'clock.

On the agenda for the business meeting is the election of four directors, editorial correction of the by-laws, report of the year's progress and the awarding of certificates of appreciation. A membership report will be given and new life members will be recognized.

Old Kenwood is the subject of a slide presentation which will be given by Barb Avery and Alice Howell.

Bring a casserole, a salad or a dessert for the 1:00 luncheon.

NEW MEMBERS

Scott Brewer	Gibbon	Rodney Pierce	Kearney
Erwin and Donna Lasich	Gibbon	Vera Reed	Kearney
Robert Reinertson	Hazard	Joan Tarrell	Kearney
Bonnie Bernholtz	Kearney	Rob and Virginia Tingle	Kearney
Mark and Eileen Kottmeyer	Kearney	Mrs. E. M. Zalud	North Platte
Wilma A. Larsen	Kearney	George C. Mitchell	Pittsburgh, PA
Otto Lohrenz	Kearney	Mary A. (Bessie) Burcham ..	San Diego, CA

LIFE MEMBER

Roberta K. Schrunk ... North Bend, OR

nineteen hours a day. Some days 500 gallon of their homemade ice cream was made. She remembers the days of World War II as an especially busy time.

Clara and Tom had two daughters, Mary Pallas of New York City, and Helen Shaddy of Kearney. Tom is deceased, but Clara still lives in the family home in Kearney.

Christina Kokkin was born in the village of Kalamata, Greece. While visiting an aunt and uncle in Lexington, Nebraska, they dropped in at the Kearney Candy Kitchen. There she met Gust Kappas and a few months later they were married at Lexington. Christina was anxious to learn the English language. On her arrival to America, she had been held thirteen days at Ellis Island only because her name had been mispronounced and she did not understand that she was free to enter New York City. After her marriage she attended night school at the Kearney Junior High and received a certificate from Superintendent Harry S. Burke upon completion of the English course.

After the Emporia Candy Kitchen ceased business in 1945, Gust operated the Chocolate Shop at 2415 Central Avenue. For several years he also managed apartments on the second and third floors of the building at 2300 Central Avenue. Gust and Christina had four daughters, Amelia Skolitaris, who is a restaurant manager; Lulu Kappas, Alexandria Markos and Katherine Pentogenis, all of whom are teachers. Christina and her daughters all live in Hollywood, California.

From 1945 to 1955 Charles Kappas and his wife Beulah operated a small cafe at 10 West 23rd Street. Charles is now deceased, and Beulah lives in Oregon with her son Charles, Jr. A daughter, Charlavee McCoy lives in Arapahoe, Nebraska.

Mitchell-Kapotas

Charles Peter Mitsopoulos (Mitchell) was born on December 20, 1877, in the village of Alike. He attended school only to the second grade when he was taken out of the classroom to work on the family farmland. He came to America on the S. S. Patricia, arriving in New York City on April 18, 1902. Like most emigrants at that time, his first work was on the railroad. He eventually made his way to Kansas City, Missouri, where some relatives and friends from his native village were living. There he entered into the candy and light lunch business.



Charles Peter Mitchell

In 1914 he was married to Athena Kapotas. She was born on June 28, 1894 in Athens and grew up in Tripoli. The marriage to Charles Mitchell was arranged through correspondence and by relatives who had been to America and gone back to Greece. She came to America with a group of other young ladies who were all going to Kansas City to be married to Greek bachelors there. A week after she arrived she was married in the Greek Orthodox Church in Kansas City. The wedding celebration lasted for three days.

The Mitchells operated two candy stores in Kansas City, but had a problem obtaining sugar because of the rationing during World War I. The Kappas brothers, who were second cousins of Mitchell, invited them to come to Kearney and become a partner in their candy store operation. They had been able to get the sugar necessary to carry on their business at both the Emporia and the Kearney Candy Kitchens. The Mitchells moved to Kearney in 1918 and were associated with the Kappas brothers for eight years.

In 1926 Charlie Mitchell bought a small building at 2415 Central Avenue and started Hamburger Inn No. 1, the first such inn in Kearney. Hamburgers were 5¢ each, or six for 25¢. Imprinted brown bags for carrying out the hamburgers read, "Buy 'em by the bag." At this same time he also opened the College Sandwich Shop in a refurbished box car at the college corner, 25th Street and 8th Avenue.

The first root beer stand in Kearney was opened by Mitchell next to his hamburger inn on Central Avenue. Hires Root Beer was offered, both counter and curb service. George C. Mitchell recalled that Robert Dean, who later became a well-known band instructor, had his first public performance when Mr. Mitchell hired him as a high school student to lead a small band of high school kids on the occasion of the grand opening day.

Charlie and Athena Mitchell were determined that their children should have the education that was denied them in their youth. When Charlie died on September 23, 1933, he left five children, Peter, Helen, Nick, George and John, all of school age. Athena, in ill health herself, saw that all the children stayed in school. This was during the "great depression" of the 1930's. The Mitchell savings had been wiped out by the failure of a local bank, and the family income consisted only of the rent from the hamburger stand, a \$50.00 monthly insurance company benefit, and whatever work the children could find after school and on Saturdays. According to John Mitchell, it was a great day in the Mitchell family when George got a job in the mimeograph department at the college that paid 15¢ an hour. John caddied at the country club, Peter worked in a cafe, Nick and Helen worked in the Deeb open air market on East 21st Street, behind the bank building on the corner of 21st and Central.



Athena Kapotas
Mitchell

Athena's first priority was education for all of her children, despite the adversities she encountered after her husband's death. With the family all pulling together, her goal was accomplished. All five of the Mitchell children graduated from college, four of them with two or three degrees.

Athena Mitchell now lives in California. She will be 92 in June. Peter is an optometrist in Bakersfield, California; Helen is a teacher in the Los Angeles public school system; Nick is a teacher in the U.S. Defense Department school in Kaiserslautern, Germany; George is executive director of the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, PA; John is a lawyer in Omaha, and serves as president of KGFV/KQKY radio stations in Kearney and KQKQ/KLNG radio stations in Omaha.

Kampton

Emanuel Kapotopoulos (Max Kampton) was born in Tripoli on October 15, 1901. He was a brother of Athena Mitchell and Antigone Kotsiopoulos. He arrived in New York City on August 7, 1916 on the S. S. King Constantine. He came to Kearney about 1925, first managing the College Sandwich Shop (also known as the Box Car Lunch) owned by his brother-in-law, Charlie Mitchell. Later he opened Mary Ann's Cafe at 2010 Central Avenue and ran it until 1941 when he moved to Chicago. He had two sons, Charles and Nick. Max was remembered by his nephew, John Mitchell, for his impersonations of Charlie Chaplin. The cane and tuxedo used by Max were given to the Mitchell family when he left Kearney.

Poulios

Jim Poulios did not come to Kearney until 1938, so does not qualify as one of the early Greeks in Kearney. He and two brothers, Alex and Steve, emigrated from the village of Mazi near Corinth in 1918. He went first to Lincoln, then to York where he attended school. He wrestled and played football there, and all his life was an avid sports enthusiast. In 1922 he settled in Grand Island where he and his brothers operated the Royal Chocolate Shop. In 1938 he moved to Kearney and operated the Camel Cafe at 18 West 24th Street until after World War II. Around 1950 he opened the Rainbow Cafe at 2416 Central Avenue and managed it for about ten years.

James Poulios is now retired. He, his wife Theony, also a native of Greece, and their daughter Elaine all live in Lincoln. A niece, Peggy O'Dea, daughter of Alex Poulios, lives in Kearney.

Paul

Peter Paul also does not qualify as one of the first Greeks in Kearney, but he had ties to the city through his sister, Venetia Peterson.

Peter Papapavlou (Paul) left his native village near Sparta in 1920 when he was twelve years old. An uncle brought him to America, along with his sister Venetia and several cousins. The trip took nineteen days. Peter stayed in New York City with an uncle, and even at a young age found work. In addition, he helped in the flower shop run by his uncle. He went to school in New York City for about six months. One winter day while in class it started to snow. The teacher, wishing to help her pupil with the English language, pointed to the window and said, "snow, snow." To her surprise Peter picked up his coat, left the school and went back to the flower shop. His uncle asked why he had come home in the middle of the day and Peter explained that the teacher had pointed outside and said, "Go, go." Later the kindly teacher came to the shop to find out what had happened.

In 1933 Mr. Paul left New York and went to St. Paul, Minnesota, where a sister lived. While there he made a visit to Nebraska to visit his sister in Kearney and relatives in Fremont. When he stepped off the train at mid-afternoon in Kearney, it was dark, the street lights were on and all the cars had their lights on. He had arrived in one of the worst dust storms of the Dust Bowl days. He found his way from the depot to the Central Cafe, and Jack Ryan at the restaurant sent him to the Peterson home. There Mrs. Peterson had hung wet towels over all the doors and windows, trying to keep out some of the dirt, and it was difficult to get in or out of the house. The following day Peter had had enough. He took the train to Fremont, spent a day there with relatives and returned to Minnesota.

Mr. Paul was drafted into the U. S. Army in January, 1942. He attended the Cooks & Bakers School at Fort Riley, Kansas, then was sent to the European Theatre where he served as mess sergeant for the rest of the war. He came to Kearney soon after the war and in 1947 bought the Tasty Tea Room at 2300 Central Avenue and operated a restaurant at that location until 1975, remodeling it and changing the name to Paul's Broiler in 1958. Coffee was a nickel, as was a roll or a doughnut. There was no community food pantry then and the Salvation Army often sent the hungry to his place for a meal, and they were never turned away.

In 1947 he married Helen Katres of Sioux City, also of Greek descent. They have two sons, George, who is a Medical Librarian at the University of Virginia Medical

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Library in Charlottesville, and John, who works with the Conference of Christians and Jews in New York City. Peter and Helen Paul reside in Kearney.

Other early Greeks in Kearney were John Lianos, cousin of Don Patsios, who had a shine parlor; Gust Poulos, a cook at the Emporia Cafe, and James Stemas, chef at the Central Cafe. All moved from the city many years ago.

The Greeks were too few in number to build and support their own church so joined with the Syrians in Kearney in building and supporting St. George's Orthodox Church. Later some of the Kearney Greeks joined with Greeks of Grand Island and Hastings and built the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Grand Island.

A young educated Greek was hired to come to Kearney once a week to teach the children to speak, write and read Greek. Lessons were held in the Mitchell and Kappas homes or in a downtown hall. A love of learning was a quality found in all of the Greek emigrants. Although the emigrant had not had educational opportunities, all saw to it that their children received not only a high school diploma, but a college degree as well.

SOURCES

Letter from John C. Mitchell, February 5, 1986; letter from George C. Mitchell, February 14, 1986; telephone interview with Lulu Kappas, March 3, 1986; interviews with Helen Kappas Shaddy, Clara Kappas, Peggy O'Dea, Peter and Helen Paul; Kearney Daily Hub, September 24, 1933; Buffalo County Naturalization Index; Kearney City Directories, 1915-1970.