ARAB AMERICANS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES OF CLEVELAND

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Chapter 12

THE ARAB-AMERICANS IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

In attempting to trace the history of the Arab-Americans in Cleveland, one fact is sadly apparent—that the early Arab settlers and their first generation children were living their history, not writing or documenting it. Because they were busy with the priorities of making a living, getting an education, and preserving their traditions and customs within the limited boundaries of the ethnic group, much of the history of the first years unfortunately has died with the people who made it.

Life for the Arab immigrant no matter where he settled, was a traumatically different experience from his life back home. From an agrarian society where often land was registered in the names of two or three men who were leaders of the entire community, and where the family was subordinate to the father, the new immigrants were thrust into an industrialized community where everyone worked, and where the community leadership did not control the economics of the individual family.

Arab women in America found that their domestic skills could be put to use not only for the requirements of the family, but also to add to the family's income. They were accustomed to sewing for their husbands and children; now they could sew for "rich" ladies and supplement their husband's earnings.

The children went out and got odd jobs, peddled small goods or hawked newspapers. When husband and wife went into a small business there were grandparents or an old aunt
at home to care for the children. These patterns were similar in most of the cities in which immigrants found themselves. However, if they went to the mill towns of Massachusetts or Rhode Island, the rubber city of Akron, Ohio or the infant automotive centers in Detroit or Cleveland, they did not always continue to work in the mills and the factories or on the railroad arteries carrying industry in and out of the cities. By inclination, the Arab tends toward self-employment and a desire to be his own boss. So it was in Cleveland.

Immigration into Cleveland is believed to have begun in the 1870's, coinciding with that of the Lithuanians, but no documentation has been found to indicate whether many of the first immigrants remained in the city, made their way to other American towns, or having made some money, returned home to Syria. The greatest likelihood is that these newcomers were itinerant salesmen, peddling their Holy Land olivewood crosses and rosaries and mother of pearl artifacts and shrines. Those who came later, in the 1890's, put down the roots which would establish the present Cleveland Arab-American community.

From about 1890, the immigration of Syrians into Cleveland escalated until it peaked around 1910. Many of these immigrants were from the agricultural villages and towns surrounding the cities of Beirut and Damascus, the majority coming from the rich and fertile Bekaa Valley of the Lebanon, the ancient Coele-Syria. Most came from the towns of Zahle and Aiteneet, while some came from northern Lebanon, from Aramoon and Kuba.

There were no olive or fig, orange or lemon groves in Cleveland, and the apple, peach and grape industries accepted little help from immigrants, so the industrious
Syrian-Lebanese set about to establish themselves in whatever trades they might find. Some went to work in the steel mills, and others in the new automotive factories. They went on road building jobs and worked for sewer contractors. Some found jobs in carpentry and the housing trades. They began as unskilled laborers, but as the years progressed, they established their own contracting businesses, and their own building and real estate companies.

From their day laborers' wages they opened grocery stores, fruit and vegetable stands in the West Side and Central Markets, restaurants and diners, and some dry goods stores. Out of these grew wholesale houses jobbing tobaccos, candy, paper products, appliances and gift items; large first class restaurants serving downtown and suburban clienteles; super-markets, automobile agencies, and specialty shops.

Some of the women, particularly those from families settling in the Haymarket District, took their handmade laces and tatting, their embroideries and finely sewn aprons, dresses, and baby clothes, and, with their children at their side, went to such parishes as Old Stone Presbyterian to sell their crafts to more affluent and longer established Americans.

Most of the early settlers lived in the Haymarket District on Woodland, Orange, Carnegie and Webster Avenues, Bolivar Road, Eagle Street and the areas between East 9th and East 22nd Streets. There were also large settlements on Cleveland's near West Side in the old Ohio City, and on West 14th Street from the Central Viaduct to Clark Avenue.
Downtown on the East Side, the children were enrolled at Eagle and Brownell schools, and at St. John's Cathedral school, and, on the West Side, most went to St. Patrick, St. Mary, West Commerce and Lincoln schools.

From the beginning, the parents, like the East European immigrants, recognized that there was only one direct route for their children out of the factories, fruit stands, confectioneries and peddling itineraries in which they, themselves, earned their livings. This was the path of education denied to the parents by the circumstances of government and class in the mother country. Since education was now open to their children in an American system which enforced learning, the children would one day be the doctors, lawyers, businessmen, teachers, and government leaders which their forbears could never have hoped to become. In the 1890's, gaslight illuminated the little copy books the children studied by, and some of them managed to get through a few grades of elementary school before they had to go to work, or, as in the case of many of the girls, to be married at the age of fourteen or fifteen. These were, for the most part, not the American born generation, but those children who had accompanied their parents on the long hard voyage to America.

After the 1900's, when the American-born generation was enrolled in the schools, more and more young people continued from elementary education to commercial training in two-year high schools, to college preparatory courses in the private schools, and on to all the colleges and the universities for advanced degrees.

It was not easy. Economic circumstances did not change rapidly for the first families. Gradually, through
struggle, failure and success, the long-sought ambitions were realized. This philosophy was handed down to the younger generations.

Those early settlers, like the immigrants from other countries, were a generation of Titans. They were "stronger than ten" in their physical prowess and durability. The women endured hardships, embarrassment, and humiliation with a good will. Both men and women made friends of their skeptical and often inconsiderate neighbors. They rose, step by step, to positions of acceptance, trust, and respect in the community.

These people were themselves trusting and faithful. Their word was their bond. Their basic values were simple, honest, and unaffected. An eight-hour day was a foreign concept to them. They worked in their businesses from dawn to late night and taught their children that hard work was a proper way of life.

Life centered around the home and the church, and all its special events -- births, baptisms, weddings, and funerals -- took place within those sheltering walls. On Bolivar Road, phonographs playing Arabic records sounded throughout the street, and the people took part in the simple pastimes of their own Mediterranean cultures. The men, Greeks and Syrian-Lebanese, sat on stools and soda fountain chairs on the sidewalks in front of their stores and engaged in friendly if somewhat volatile matches in the "Towlee," that ancient game of backgammon which enjoys rediscovered popularity today. The boards were exquisitely inlaid with mother of pearl on fine woods. Immigrant craftsmen took pride in producing each piece more elegant than the previous one. Card games were popular.
These included Basra, a form of casino, and, in later years, Whist. The children could spend an entire Saturday afternoon in the movie houses for five or ten cents. In the evenings, families visited each other's houses for card parties, or to exchange the old country news coming from New York in one of the Arabic language newspapers, to read letters from the village back home, or just to sit in parlors before a stove in winter, reminiscing about life in the village or discussing plans for new partnerships or ventures in this new land.

On summer evenings everyone came out to sit on the sidewalks, to call to each other over tenement balconies, to rock on a porch or front stoop, sip lemonade flavored with mazzaher, an orange flower water, and to nibble at Kahik, Sambousek, or Mamouhl, Arabic pastries. They could be equally delighted with the new tastes of pretzels or good American sugar cookies.

A new arrival from the old country meant days of reunion and celebration, everyone coming to greet him and make him welcome. If the arrival was a young man cousin or young girl cousin, the visitors came with a speculative eye that here might be a suitable match for a son or daughter.

Sometimes there were tears. An old grandfather, having stayed a few years, would be leaving America to spend his last moments on his own bit of land, anxious to be buried in the mother soil. When someone, young or old, made plans to return to the old country, the farewell was one of terrible grief. This was a funereal moment, for a return almost certainly meant a parting forever from the loved ones in this land. The tears and farewells were loud and agonized, and songs of lament would be heard along the street and from
the balconies. Because transportation was not a matter of a few hours and money was not gotten easily, most of those early arrivals had come to spend the rest of their lives in the new country, and those who returned, returned forever. How many a small grandchild, sensing that this parting would be forever, ran screaming and wailing down the street, tugging and pulling at the suitcase and carpet bag, pleading with Jidouh, Grandpapa, not to go but to stay, to stay? How many a grandfather tore the sob from his throat in that last embrace?

Often letters from the village or town brought news of an illness or death in the family and everyone would be sick with anxiety and grief, for this marked another parting and loss, the beloved face and voice to be seen and heard no more, and "here we are thousands of miles across the sea, without a last glance, without a last word."

*Rite of Initiation*

For the Arab Christians of the early immigrations, a baptism was not a simple ritual at the holy water font. A new life had been given to a whole people. God had smiled on the family. The baptism of the infant was a festive occasion planned with great attention. Who would be the Godfather and Godmother? Why, of course, the grandfather on the father's side, or perhaps the grandmother on the mother's side. Or an old, favored aunt. Sometimes, following a more modern idea that the godparents should be young enough to raise the child if need be, the sponsors would be the bridesmaid (from the parents' wedding of eleven months or a year before) and the best man, whose obligation it had been to help arrange the same wedding and the feast.
The godmother would provide the finest gown, soft white linen, lawn and lace, with many fine tucks on its three to four foot train, ribboned, lace-drawn, trimmed with silk rosettes; this must be the most magnificent dress that this special little boy or little girl could be given. The bonnet would be soft wool in the winter, fine linen in the summer, and it, too, would be lace- and ribbon-trimmed. The delicate wool coat would have a madeira-embroidered capelet. There would be new undergarments and stockings, and soft little booties or shoes.

These garments would be carried by the godmother to the family's house where all the relatives would be waiting. Now the child, in everyday clothes and wrapped in warm blankets would be carried by the godfather to the waiting carriage, or often the entire entourage would walk down the street to the church, godfather and baby at the head of the parade, with all the relatives and all their children hurrying happily behind.

There would first be Mass at the church, and the priest would announce that this was the occasion of the baptism of this particular family's child. His sermon would include some laudatory remarks about the virtues of the young parents, their family's respectful place in the community, and abundant good wishes for this child's future.

The Mass in the liturgy of the Eastern rite would be long -- an hour and a half or more, a long time for an infant of three to six months who waited fretfully for his baptism. The older children would stir restlessly, but ever mindful of the stern glance of father or uncle.

After Mass, most of the parishioners would remain in their places, for the baptism was a community affair, and
these people would later attend the dinner and party at the parents' home.

"Now let us bring this infant before the Lord," The godfather would carry the baby to a towel-draped table near the Holy Water Font and everyone would crowd as closely as possible to this little tableau as the grandmother/godmother, imposing and proud in her added authority, would commence to undress the baby, layer by layer down to his soft, warm olive skin. Perhaps this task would be performed by the former-bridesmaid/godmother, not yet married, conscious of all eyes upon her, especially those of eligible and handsome male cousins and friends. Flushed and rosy with this special honor, her coat removed to reveal the silk shirtwaist and new plum velvet skirt, she would begin the ritual of cleansing this little creature of God.

Delicately and gracefully she would unbutton the cuffs of her silk shirtwaist, bought with great selectivity for this occasion. Then up would go the sleeves to her elbow, the young godmother not unaware that her arms were rounded and smooth, and her elbows dimpled. With strong and supple fingers, relishing the sighs of approval around her, the happy godmother would complete the undressing of the infant. Taking fresh white soap and a new cloth, she would lather the infant in the presence of the company and his tearfully happy parents, wipe him off and gently pat him dry, and then lovingly touching a kiss upon his forehead, lay him in the arms of the priest.

Now, the little babe of the Lord, was immersed in the Holy Font, cleansed from the sins of the world, anointed with oil, and given salt to taste, and the tears were gently wiped from his eyes. Holy words were spoken over him, he
was wrapped in a soft warm towel, and given again to the pretty young godmother, praying over the baby for a husband and child of her own.

Baptism of Bruce Salem Bird, son of Naef (Frank) and Anne Shibley Bird -- Msgr. Malatios Mufleh officiating. March 7, 1948.
Now baptized, and in some liturgies confirmed, the child was placed by the priest into the arms of the godmother and the congregation sent up a sigh of accomplishment and gratitude.

Then he was laid upon the table, the small head dried, the wet tendrils of soft dark hair brushed smooth, and a fine cloth patted upon the pink-bloom cheek. Each new piece of clothing was placed upon him, slowly and proudly, the knit band around the belly to protect it from rupture, the undershirt, the new diaper, the long white stockings, the slip, embroidered, lace-trimmed, closed at the shoulder with tiny pearl buttons. Now the splendid dress went over all, and the ruffled bonnet, the beautiful coat, and to add in the cold winter, the cocoon silk shawl, its softness an enveloping cloud.

With each addition, a murmur would go from the assemblage. What finery. What good taste. How well this godmother had fulfilled her holy obligation. What a credit to her family. What a fine catch for someone who will deserve her. And why not my son, or my young cousin, or my brother's or sister's son?

Then the holy child, pure in his baptismal innocence was lifted up by the godmother for all the friends to admire. Ah, let him cry; that is a sign of a long and vigorous life. Let the wails pour from this cleansed but tired baby. Good luck that means. Is he quiet? Is he sleepy? Then it is the godmother's responsibility to pinch him surreptitiously. "Now he cries in a loud and angry voice, everyone is satisfied, and I am happy. I have done it all properly and with honor. And yes, this is my godchild, and I will love him well and remember the Meyroun," — an obligation between the
godparent and the godchild, between the godparent and the natural parents that establishes a special relationship between them forever. Through the Meyroun, they are parents together, brothers and sisters together, the child their bond and covenant.

What of the godfather? Indeed, he is not forgotten. It is he, who in lieu of the baptismal garb, makes the gift of money. And, it is he who also observes for the rest of his life the special relationship between himself and the parents, and himself and the child. If bad fortune does prevail and the father becomes ill or dies, it is the godfather who must assume the obligation to care for this child. He and his wife and family must see that the mother of this child, and the other children, is aided, and looked upon as a sister. When the time comes, he must help to educate this child, help him get started in his work. He must even see that he finds a suitable bride, or bridegroom, for a girl is even more to be cherished and protected, since she is more vulnerable.

Unfortunately, the changing patterns of society, the urbanized and industrialized culture under which all suffer a little in this modern age have dimmed the old traditions, but that is the Baptismal obligation among the Arab Christians.

Rite of Marriage

Marriage was forever. The marriage document was signed, sealed, and duly recorded by the priest and by the people. A marriage took months to prepare for and days to celebrate. It was a bond that united not only the couple, but the families, for usually it was the culmination of an arrangement between the families, initiated with meticulous negotiations, all proprieties observed.
The family of the groom would come to the father of the bride to speak for her hand long before the groom was permitted to meet publicly with the girl. Often the marriage itself was preceded by a betrothal ceremony some six months to a year before, in which the young couple would appear before the priest, in the church, in the presence of both families and selected special guests.

Certain formalities would be exchanged between the families, certain promises made by the young man and young woman, and the priest would pray over and bless the engagement ring. Sometimes the young man did not even have the pleasure of slipping the ring on his beloved's finger. This might be done by the priest or the father of the groom.

The betrothal ceremony gave the young couple the privilege of walking out together, and being seen in public with a chaperone. They could go to some social functions, shop together for their new household, and get to know each other a little better throughout the year of courtship which would prepare them for the marriage that would follow.

A broken engagement was not to be taken lightly. In such a case, this betrothal, blessed by the priest, had been betrayed, and protocol demanded that the priest himself be required to dissolve the arrangement. It was not viewed casually by the group and most often the onus fell upon the young woman and jeopardized her chances for another match.

Was she irresponsible? Was she too proud? Was she extravagant? Never mind that a woman of integrity, realizing that this young man was not her ideal for a lifetime, might insist upon breaking the contract. Never mind. This girl
must be extremely difficult to please or to understand, too wilful, too demanding. Better to look elsewhere.

It is interesting to observe that this betrothal ritual, much the same in all Eastern rites although not practiced by later generation Arab-Americans, closely resembled the Islamic ritual which is still universally observed. This is called "Khatibit il Khatabb," the Writing of the Book, the marriage contract, in which the young woman and young man are considered man and wife, except that their physical union takes place only after the bride leaves her father's house to enter the groom's home to live. However, the Muslim young people, too, are accorded in this ceremony the privilege of walking out, going to entertainments together and preparing, during this year of pre-marriage, their trousseau and home. This contract is even more binding upon them than is the Christian betrothal, for a broken contract is considered a divorce, and the young man must pay to the father of the bride the dowry sum agreed upon, so that she will not be forced to remain in her father's home without means and dignity. In past times, it would have been most unlikely that the girl would get a second offer.

When the wedding date drew near, a wave of excitement rippled through the whole community. Everyone knew nearly everyone else, the friendships carrying over from the days of village life before coming to America. Customs carried over too, and tradition was preserved and continued into the new life.

One of these Middle East customs was "Il Leilat el Ghosal," when the bride was given a special party by all the girls and women, much like the Spinsters' night in the American custom. This was a night when the men were
excluded, and they might hold a party of their own for the bridegroom.

The feminine contingent would all bustle down the street to the bride's home, singing that spontaneous chant called the "Zaghloot" which praised the bride's attributes, and wishing her health, wealth, a happy home, a loving husband, and at least a dozen children, most of them sons. The bride's mother would meet them at the door with a dignified welcome, and only after all were seated would the bride enter the room, attended by her sisters and radiant in new finery.

There would be much laughter. The older ladies, enjoying the feminine intimacy, would exchange stories about their own weddings and their total ignorance of all things connubial. Each would direct a sly remark toward the bride at which all the others would laugh heartily. The bride would blush and they would all laugh again.

"When my own wedding feast was over," said one, and "everyone was leaving my husband's fathers house, I put on my hat and prepared to go back home with my sister. 'No' she said to me, 'you stay here, this is now your home.' And there I was with a husband I hardly knew. I was tired, and I didn't know where I was to sleep that night." Then with a smile grown soft with years of acceptance she said, "I soon found out.

And from another: "In my day, there was not all this picking and choosing. They just told us who, and that's who it was. Not everyone was as lucky as you, my girl. Think of this one you're getting. Already he has a stand in the market, and look at those shoulders, and those eyes a woman could
drown in. I tell you if I were younger I would run away from my husband, if your bridegroom had a brother."

"And what would you do, old grandmother," laughed another, "hold him in your lap and feed him grapes?"

Before the wedding feast all the women from the bridegroom's family (for the wedding was given by the man's side) would spend days preparing great trays of sweets--Bahlawa, Sambousek, Mahmoul, Ghraibeh, rich with butter and syrups, and filled with pistachios, walnuts or dates. There would be mounds of nutmeats, and candies imported from New York -- Raha, which was similar to the Greek loukoumi, and apricot squares, sugared and pistachioed. Food for the wedding feast was prepared by the women, and long tables would be set up to hold the chicken and pilaf, stuffed grape leaves, Kousa, (white squashes filled with rice and chopped meat,) and Kibbee--(lamb, pounded and pulverized in a large marble basin, and mixed with bulghur wheat and seasonings.) Vegetables were scrubbed and washed for salata, a salad mixed with lemon and olive oil. Huge round sheets of bread were tossed to paper thinness over the flying arms of the expert women bakers and baked for the feasting only hours before the great moment.

On the morning of the wedding, these same women, who had worked through the night over the stoves and ovens, would dress in their finest clothing. With their husbands and children they would form an entourage to the bride's house to bring her to the church. Singing with joy, they would come to the bride's family who would meet them with somewhat less than a show of enthusiasm. It was not proper to demonstrate any overt pleasure over giving up a daughter to another's household. There would be a cool
politeness, which of course the groom's family understood, since they themselves had to observe the same proprieties when the groom's sister married.

The bride's mother would weep and the bride's father would bite his lip as the eldest of the groom's relatives -- his mother, grandmother, aunts, and godmother would troop into the bride's bedroom, where she waited in her fresh, white beribboned underclothing for the ritual which would follow.

All the men would sit together in the parlor, jovial and brotherly now, while the women crowded close in the bride's room for the dressing of the bride.

The groom's mother, grandmother, aunts and godmother would toss flower petals upon her, and sprinkle perfume on her, chanting their happy Zaghloot. All the women would gasp and utter sighs of admiration as each garment was placed upon the bride by the bridegroom's mother. Over the underclothing, the camisole, then the petticoats, and now, the beautiful white dress. As the dress went over the bride's head and was smoothed down on her gently by the bridegroom's mother, the mother of the bride would utter a sigh and shed more tears. This is the little girl I dressed and now another mother takes her from me to her own house. Oh, will she treat her well, this daughter, whom I guarded from the breath of the wind?

The bridegroom's mother as if reading these thoughts would then glance reproachfully at the bride's mother, as if to say, "Have I not a daughter of my own, whom I have given to another woman's house? Have no fear, sister, I will bring no hurt to this girl of yours." As if to prove it, she would draw proudly from around her own neck a gold chain, to
place it around the bride's throat, a symbol and a promise. The bride's mother would sigh more peacefully now that all the proprieties had been observed.

At last the moment comes, and the bride is seated, while both mothers fuss importantly with her veil. Finally when it had been adjusted to everyone's satisfaction, all the women would chant their happy song and bring the bride out before the entire company.

All the women of the families would receive flowers from the bridegroom's mother, and the men would also choose some for their lapels.

Then the bride, her parents, and attendant would take their places in the hired carriage and start off for the church.

In those days, there was no rehearsal and stylized wedding procession with their tableau of bridesmaids, ring bearers and flower girls. Her white gloved hand gripping a nosegay of white roses, the bride walked into the church with her parents and sponsor where she would meet the groom at the altar.

The wedding was long, for, after the lengthy Mass, the ceremony uniting the young couple might last another hour. The rings were blessed with much chanting, and crowns placed upon the heads of bride and groom, blessed and interchanged three times, as the cantor sang and the priest prayed over them.

The priest would then lead the couple around the altar, and along the aisles of the church, all the while chanting the nuptial liturgy and swinging the thurible vigorously as the sweet and heavy vapors of incense filled the air. They would even march out the door, outside around the church, priest and acolytes, the cantor, the bride and groom, the sponsors
and old relatives who felt they had a special role in this wedding.

Expressions of joy were spontaneous and genuine among the early immigrants, their own village habits still strong in them. As the priest completed the ceremony and bent down to congratulate the bride and groom, an exultant Zaghloot would ring out in the little church, easing the solemnity of the long and symbolic ceremony. "Now good," an old grandfather would be heard to say, "Praise God, we have them married, let's get on to the feast."

He would rise up in his pew, giving the signal for all to follow.

The bridal feast was served in the bridegroom's house by all the women of the family, the old and dignified matrons and every young girl who could carry a platter without spilling its contents.

Group after group of diners sat down and rose up from the table, each in the order of his social position, the bride and groom seated together at the head, the priest at their side, the fathers, grandfathers, elderly uncles and cousins, the mother and grandmother of the bride and a few old friends whom time had given a position of community respect. At the first table, too, would be the adult guests from other cities. A Cleveland wedding could draw company coming on the train and the interurban from every city in Ohio, and even from New York, Detroit and Chicago.

The tables were set and reset until all had been fed, and at last the children were called, their Sunday clothing dusty from play in the street. Fed and given their share of sweets, they then could join the other guests, seated and standing in
a great semi-circle around a dais, on which the bride and groom accepted the good wishes of the company.

Men from the groom's family gathered before the bridal couple. The leader waved a handkerchief as the group danced the quick and emphatic dabke, the age old folk dance of every festive occasion. They stood before the young people, their hands upon each other's shoulders and sang extempore, praising the bride's beauty and virtue, the groom's nobility and manly attributes, and the parents' respect among all their friends. Loud and long, in joyous expression, their voices rang out to the street. When all these uncles had been kissed in turn by the bride and groom, the bride's relatives, not to be outdone, composed even longer songs, more lavish in their praise, their voices rising to echo and mingle with all the memories of the house.

For so many of those people who could not read or write, extempore versing was a preservation of the poetry and music of generations, each adding, improvising and embellishing. As the first untutored generation died away, these verses were lost. The men rhymed their extempore not only at weddings, but on every festive occasion, for they were singers, these men, and poets, and all the human emotions found expression in those strong voices.

The women, too, vied with each other to compose beautiful chants. Rhyming and lilting, laughter and joy were captured on a golden chain of words ending in the pealing, exultant cry of the Zaghlout. "La La La Lu lu lu l'aishe. To life" they sang, "to life." An Arab wedding was not just a family event, a community occasion, a weekend of festivities.
It was, rather, a command performance. Everyone must sing, everyone must dance.

Before the immigrants learned to sing the American National Anthem, they sang the song of Syrian independence long years before independence became a reality. They sang this song at every wedding, and later generations, who learned not one word of Arabic, can still remember those phrases of patriotism sung out by their grandparents. "Enthee Souria ya biladi," Thou art Syria, my country. Love songs were sung and ballads from home, and tears of rememberance glistened in the eyes of the guests as they applauded the singer.

The oud, that pear shaped instrument, thrummed its plaintive, yearning notes against homesick hearts, and said to the bride and groom, "Young lovers sing and be happy. Can you know what lies ahead of your feet? Sing and be happy, young lovers, tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow will come only too soon."

Now the derbecki took its turn, this old drum with its stretched goat skin. It was tapped, and knocked upon and slapped with a gentle hand, a light and swift hand. Let it be thumped by fingers that can pull shouts from its throat, and let the young girls dance, their slender arms graceful as the willow in the lake, their feet disciplined in each exquisite turn.

The Family

All life centered around the home. The Arab immigrant home -- tenement rooms, or back-of-the-store apartment, small house or large, poor or increasingly affluent
was the heart of all the family activities. Children were born there, the women of the family assisting the doctor.

The kitchen table, and the stove in the parlor, or the balcony porch or front door stoop were the gathering places for family and friends.

When mothers fell ill, the relatives gathered to cook, launder and care for the children. When fathers fell ill, the relatives banded together to see that the family should not want. They paid the rent and bought the family's food until the father could return to his work.

Old parents, old aunts and uncles, unmarried brothers, sisters or cousins shared the family house. Friends from the family's village in the old country could always find a welcome and a grubstake.

When the old ones fell ill, they would not go to the hospital, for to go to the hospital meant one was close to death. If one must die, then let it be in his own bed, with his loved ones standing around him, so that he could direct them as to his last wishes and admonish them to be loving and watchful of one another. What they prayed and hoped for often happened. Everyone in the family would come to visit the old one, and respectfully kiss the old hand, receiving the blessing from this beloved grandparent.

Wakes were held in the family house. For three nights, the women would sit up all night in the parlor, saying their goodbyes, and remembering all the days of their youth. They would weep a great deal, and then one, to lighten the grief, would make a little joke, or remember something funny that the departed relative had said or done. All the women would smile self consciously, and conceal their little laughs behind tear soaked handkerchiefs. They sat on
straight, hard chairs, prayed a little, talked a little, and dozed a little but there was no thought of going to their own houses and leaving the bereaved alone.

The men, too, sat together, heads bowed, silent and remembering.

Softly, softly, the zaghloot, now chanting the attributes of the beloved lost one, and remembering the happier times in this final farewell, would murmur mournfully through the house, and all, the men and the women, would fall to weeping.
Chapter 13

EARLY SETTLERS

One of the earliest of the Syrian immigrants in Cleveland was Salim Farres, who came to this country from Lebanon in 1891 and first made his living as a peddler. He later opened a store at 508 Woodland Avenue which supplied small dealers and other Syrian peddlers in Northern Ohio with thread, needles, safety pins and sundry items. Salim Farres came to America well versed in the English language and American history, having been educated at the American University of Beirut, in the Lebanon, a Presbyterian college established in the 1860's and one of the leading universities in the Middle East today.

Among the oldest settlers in Cleveland were members of the Caraboolad and Otto families.

Mr. Michael Caraboolad, a Cleveland insurance agent, in tracing his family's history, gives the following information:

Mr. Salim Caraboolad came to Cleveland in 1892 and married Najeebie Otto in 1893. They are listed in old records of Cleveland newspapers as pioneer Syrian families. They are from Lebanon, which at that time was a state in Syria; now we have our own country, Lebanon.

Since about this time, more and more people were immigrating to the United States. In 1898, my father organized and was first president of the St. George Society, a fraternal organization. The purpose of this club was to help these new immigrants get settled in the Cleveland area. They helped them get jobs, housing, get legal aid, and apply for citizenship and register and vote.

Since my father was a personal friend of Mark Hanna, he voted Republican from the start, but he encouraged our people to register
and vote for the best man no matter what party he belonged to. We had no church for our people, and we attended various churches nearby. In 1905, my father organized and founded St. Elias Church, with help from the St. George Society. This was the first church of the Syrian Lebanon people within a 500 mile area of Cleveland. It was attended by Melkite Catholics, Maronite Catholics and Orthodox and other groups.

They bought two old houses on Webster Avenue and remodeled one into a rectory, and built a brand new small brick church next door. Our first pastor was Rev. Marcia; since this was the only Syrian Lebanon Church, all of our young people attended these services. The second church we bought was a former Protestant Church at 3166 Scranton Road. We spent a lot of money to remodel this building into a Catholic Church, rectory, and Sunday school quarters.

On Christmas week in 1952, our new assistant pastor, Rev. Ignatius Ghattas, arrived in Cleveland from Lebanon to help Rev. Malatios Mufleh, who had been here since 1921. Later, Rev. I. Ghattas, because of Rev. M. Mufleh's health and age, took full charge of the church.

Rev. Ghattas started a building fund to remodel the Church, and after spending a lot of money, and having auto parking problems, we found that a lot of our people who formerly lived nearby had moved to the outskirts of the city, so we decided that we should buy a lot in the outskirts of the city and build a brand new church. We bought a two and a half acre lot and later bought additional property, so that now we have about five acres of land with a beautiful new Byzantine Catholic Church at 8023 Memphis Avenue in Brooklyn. We have about 325 families in the parish.

In 1953, I organized a St. Elias Holy Name club and was its first president. Our church, which cost over $650,000 to build, includes a rectory, large hall and meeting rooms, and a large auto parking area, fully cemented.

Kalil Caraboolad, my uncle, who was a charter member of St. Elias, was godfather to one hundred and fifty-five children in the parish, and a picture was taken in front of the old church on Webster
Avenue, which many members of the parish still have in their homes. He is listed in "Believe it or Not" by Ripley in his Florida Museum.

As our population grew, my oldest brother, George Caraboolad, organized the Syrian Boys Club, and he was its first president. This club membership increased to 350 members, and the main purpose of the club was to assist our people to become United States citizens. It was the duty of every member to volunteer to be a witness for these new citizens. Two witnesses were required, and since my father had a store on Bolivar Road, I was called on more often than anyone to be a witness, and some days I would be a witness for as many as three new citizens.

Our other activities were to invite candidates for office to speak at our meetings so our members could meet them. One week we would invite Democratic candidates to speak, and we would ask them questions, and the following week we would invite Republican candidates to speak and do likewise. We did not show any partiality to any one. My brother, Ellas Caraboolad, was elected president of the Syrian American Club and some years later I was elected president.

During the First World War, the Syrian American Club took an active interest in the war effort. We sold War Bonds, collected blood donations, encouraged our boys to enlist in the service of our country, and helped the Red Cross in their work.

My mother, Mrs. Najeebie Caraboolad, organized the Syrian Red Cross group and was its leader, and they assisted in many activities such as making bandages, wrapping packages to be sent to boys in service, corresponding with them, giving them local news to show them that we appreciated their war effort. Our small group was honored for their devotion to our country and making such an outstanding record.

In 1931, the Zahle Club, which owned a dwelling on West 14th Street, south of Clark Avenue, finding the older members were dying off and wanting to keep the club alive, asked younger members to form a club. Mr. Alfred Anter, a son of one of the founders of the club, Michael Anter, asked me to attend a meeting to help organize such a club. To make a long story short, we organized the first
Lebanon Syrian Athletic League in the United States. We had six backers the first year and I was elected President, against my will, as I didn't feel qualified to lead this organization. Fortunately, we had many qualified officers to assist me, such as Mr. Ernest Sabath, our secretary, and Mr. Zig Shaheen, who knew more about the rules of the game than any person in the league.

This organization had a baseball division, basketball and bowling. This same year, the end of the 1931 season, we helped to form a similar league in Detroit, Michigan, and we have been friendly rivals each year, playing at the end of the season, once in Detroit and the following week in Cleveland. This Athletic League has done more to unite our young and older people together, than any other organization.

We are now entering our forty-fourth year, with a total membership of over 200 in the Cleveland area. During the second World War, we organized a Lebanon Syrian War Committee, like other nationality groups, to help in the war effort. I was elected Executive Secretary, and our purpose was to get blood donations, encourage sale of war bonds, encourage enlistments, help Red Cross donations and we had a house to house drive in which we not only collected our $1,900 quota but were oversubscribed with a total collection of $5,500, which we turned over to the Red Cross.

We had a lot of help from the Syrian Junior League girls who kept corresponding with over 450 of our boys in various branches of the armed services. They mailed them every year fifty packages in the name of the Lebanon Syrian group. Without their help, we could not have made such a good record for our people. Many of the boys wrote to thank us for our war effort. Our group was honored by the local chapter of the American Red Cross, Mayor Frank Lausche, and public officials for our outstanding civic devotion.

I was elected Executive Secretary of the Knights of Columbus Luncheon Club, and during my term of office, we elected Mr. Ernest Bohn National Housing Director, Catholic Man of the Year. A few years before I took office, we elected Mr. Ralph Perk Catholic Man of the Year, who became our Mayor of Cleveland. I had been formerly active in the Citizenship League, Conference of Christians and Jews,
Council on World Affairs, Founder and president of the Syrian Lebanon Cultural Gardens, which is now being reorganized by a new group, charter member of the First Friday Club, and a member of many clubs too numerous to list.

My brother, Elias Caraboolad, organized an insurance and surety bond agency in 1923, and, in the middle of the depression, in 1931, I took over the business.

In 1950, my nephew, Salim Caraboolad, a graduate of Princeton University, entered the agency, and we sent him to the Insurance Company of North America home office training course. In 1953, my other nephew, Walter V. Spellman, after he left the United States Air Force, entered the agency, and we sent him to the Hartford home office training course.

On April 1, 1962, my nephew, Salim Caraboolad, left the agency and formed a new life insurance company. That same year, we incorporated the agency in the name of M.S. Caraboolad Insurance Agency, Inc. with Walter V. Spellman as president, Nora G. Caraboolad as Vice President, and Michael S. Caraboolad as secretary and treasurer. In January of 1974, we changed the name of the agency to Spellman and Associates, since he was the main producer and brought into the agency many nationally known accounts, supermarkets, shopping centers, contractors, manufacturers, golf courses, tobacco jobbers, and so forth. Our small group has been law abiding and civic minded, and we want to keep this tradition alive for the sake of the younger generation as they are not familiar with our local history.

---------- Michael S. Caraboolad.

Michael Caraboolad's mother, Najeebie Otto Caraboolad, was a linguist and accomplished speaker, often lecturing before non-Arab civic groups on the culture, religions, and politics of the Middle East, particularly emphasizing the struggle of Lebanon for independence. Mr. Kalil Caraboolad, the godfather of one hundred fifty-five
children, enjoyed great popularity, kept close contact with his godchildren, and was regarded as one of the leading elders of the community.

'The Irish Cop: Godfather of Arab Families'

Not all the godfathers in that little community around Bolivar and the Haymarket were Arab. There was an Irish cop on the beat who for long years was the brother member of many a family of Arab immigrants. He would daily visit the grocery stores and restaurants on his rounds, stopping to have a friendly word with owners and customers, or looking in on the tenements, checking on the sick and jobless.

The neighborhood relied on him to advise them about the necessary licenses, ordinances at City Hall, and applications for citizenship. He was a happy participant in the process of their assimilation into the big city and the big country. His name was Timothy Costello and he later rose to the rank of Chief Inspector of Police.

Tim Costello was as completely at ease with a plate of raw kibbee before him as he was with Irish stew or corn chowder. Among his close friends were the Anter brothers, who owned a grocery store, which was later expanded to a large wholesale house, and Sam Macron, their brother-in-law, who operated a restaurant at the foot of West 9th Street near the Erie Depot.

As children were born to these families, Tim Costello became an Arab godfather, and he too kept the Meyroun faithfully throughout his life.

Sometimes Tim Costello would voice his disapproval in strong direct language:
"Don't take this girl out of school; you must educate your daughters as well as your sons."

"Yes, that is true, but we need the money she will earn to bring over our relatives from the old country."

Tim would persevere and persuade, and some of those girl students of the early years owed their high school diplomas to his persistence.

Early and arranged marriages he could never understand. "That is a little baby you are marrying off. She doesn't even know this fella she has to marry," he would shout.

And the soft voices would respond:

"Ah, but you don't understand. Her cousin and his family are our own people; they will treat her well."

"Ah, but you don't understand; it is better to have her married than to send her to the factory, maybe to get in trouble or meet somebody not of our people, whose ways are not like ours."

"Ah, but you don't understand; this man is from our own village. He is from a very good family, and he has much land over there, and he owns a good business here. He will take good care of our daughter."

These arranged marriages had their failures, but they also had an overwhelming number of successes, and years later when Tim would attend thirty-, forty-, and fifty-year celebrations, he would shake his head over a glass of "Arraqh" and mutter, "Well, I never figured it would last."

The compassion, encouragement, and support of this Irish policeman and other kindly Americans motivated many of the early settlers to begin English language courses, and citizenship classes in night school, getting their first
papers as quickly as was possible in spite of the long, hard hours spent at the daily jobs and businesses which supported their families.

_The New Citizen_

Of the earliest generation, only a few remained aliens. Most of the immigrants eagerly grasped the privilege of the vote and embraced the responsibilities and obligations of citizenship with staunch good will. Children would drill their parents in the required questions and answers that would make them Americans. When a man or a woman passed the test and got the papers, the occasion signalled the start of another celebration. Friends and relatives would hurry over to spend the evening and toast the newly ordained citizen with a glass of "arraqah," that anise flavored, crystal clear liquid lightning reserved for the special occasions of baptisms, marriages and citizenship celebrations.

The new citizen would recite the Pledge of Allegiance for the edification of his guests and would slowly and proudly ennunciate careful English the Oath of Citizenship administered that day: "I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any prince, potentate, state or sovereignty. . ."

All would sigh with relief, that here now, rising out of the ashes of the suppressed and agonized beloved land, where for four hundred years men had lived out their days under the heel of foreign occupation, here now was an American, privileged to share with his fellow Americans the new country's bounty and protection.

And to vote? To speak his will over who would govern him? To choose his leaders out of conscience and without
fear? Fazeha! What a momentous thing! What an awesome obligation was now this man's!
PART VI

SETTLEMENTS AND SETTLERS
"For all eternity America is indebted to the Immigrant Mother, whether she was an Italian, Jewish, Polish, Austrian, Hungarian, German, Russian, English, Slavic, Greek, Syrian, Bulgarian, Czech, or Irish . . . Born in the old country, she usually married at a young age . . . while her husband worked in the bitter cold of winter, or in the blistering heat of summer, in ditches laying sewers . . . she worked from early morning to late at night, cooking at a coal stove, washing her clothes with a washboard, and heating the water in a big copper tub on that same coal stove. At the same time, she took care of the children, preparing breakfast, making lunches, and sending them to school . . . her children must have an education so that they may be respected and amount to something someday . . . she is the unsung heroine and pioneer of America . . . may the people of America never forget what they owe to that sweet and blessed soul, the Immigrant Mother of us all.

.................... Anonymous
Chapter 14

THE WOMEN WHO GAVE

Although the early immigrants began to move out into the further west and east side neighborhoods within ten years of the earliest immigration, their first associations in the new country, like the immigrants from other countries, were within their own groups. Their American contacts were the business people, landlords, and school teachers within the immediate area.

Typical of these communities was the Bolivar Road settlement. Alva Bradley owned most of the tenements in this area, and Bradley Court became known as Il Babhour, the Boat, a continuation of the exodus from the motherland into the new country. It was crowded, hot in summer, cold in winter, and full of all the trials and tribulations that accompanied the confined experiences of the immigrant community.

A bright and aggressive young married woman, herself an early immigrant, was Bradley's superintendent for the tenements. She collected the rents and responded to the tenant's problems, serving as a liaison and interpreter between the landlord and her countrymen. Her name was Deebe Sahley, and she and her husband operated a stand in the market for years. She was a courageous woman and she became a legend at the market and among her own people. It was said that she could work longer and harder than half a dozen men, and her strong figure and big voice, calling out to customers, bargaining over prices, became the trademark of her "stand." She was a shrewd business woman, level
headed and straight forward and was much sought after for advice. Throughout her life, Deebe Sahley held a position of leadership, not only in the women's circles, but among the men as well.

As the reasons for the early immigrations were much the same for all people -- refuge from oppression, a chance to prosper, a search for adventure, flight from conscription into the Turkish army -- so also were the life stories of the immigrants similar. Hard work, deep religious commitments, respect for law and order, and a love for the new country were the watch-words of their lives. The women, as homemakers laid the foundations for the lives of their American children.

_The Story of Rose Joseph_

A life long resident of Cleveland, Mrs. Abdallah Joseph says:

My father's name was Abdallah Yousef Aftoora, and my mother was Asma Khalil Geha. My father was a cobbler in Zahle in the Lebanon, and he had a good business, but he was young and adventurous, and he heard that the people who went to Australia and South America were becoming very rich, and so he thought, 'Well, I will go, and see what I can do.' Then his plans changed and he decided to come to America. First he would leave my mother and the children behind and he would come over here, work, and send for the family. But my mother was young and adventurous too, and she said, 'No, if my husband goes, I will go with him.' So they left my two older sisters with our grandmother, and they brought me, an infant in my mother's arms, to Cleveland. It was 1892 when we set sail. In a little while, my parents began to miss my sisters very much, but trips back and forth were not easy then. Finally after three years in America, we returned to Zahle. Then it was another five years before we came back again. This time, in 1900, my parents brought us three daughters and came to Cleveland to establish a new home.
We lived on Canal Street in the Flats, and on Bolivar Road in those early years. I remember that some of the first families were the Caraboolads, the Zlakats, the Zegiobs, the Nymes, the Jalatys, who were originally from Baalbek, a Mr. Fatouche who owned a dry goods store, the Ottos, the Amors, and the Karams. There were the Makhouts who were the first to move to East 105th Street, (Doans Corners) which was really considered very far away from town.

Rose Joseph recalled that there was a Mr. Najeeb Zlaket who had a big job at the Workhouse and that other people also began to get jobs with the city and with the county. That was considered a real advancement in those days, particularly since Syrians and Lebanese in their own country were limited to minimal participation in the administration of their own towns and villages. Only the most influential and wealthiest were selected by the Ottomans to represent their people in the millet governments established by the Turks. Therefore, it was a stimulating experience to be an employee of the government in America. As a small girl, Mrs. Joseph was sent to old Eagle school, then to Brownell, and to St. John's Cathedral School where she studied for First Communion.

She was a familiar visitor to St. John's and to the Bishop's office. "I remember," she said, "that my father and our priest would take me with them to Bishop Horstmann so that I could interpret for them while they discussed plans for a new church for our people. I never could understand why," she laughed, "because they would only be there a few minutes before they all started jabbering in French, and there I was, bored to death, not understanding anything they were saying. Each time they went, I would say to my father, "You don't need me to go along, but he would say, 'Never mind, you come.' I don't think I was ever much use to them,"
they all got along so well, but anyway, I really got to visit the Bishop."

She recalled that before the Syrians established the first church in a building on East 9th Street, masses were sung as early as 1901 in the Melkite Byzantine Liturgy in the Chapel of St. Joseph Franciscan Church at East 23rd and Woodland, and also at St. John's Cathedral.

"We had Palm Sunday processions there," she said, "and every one would come out to see the Syrian children dressed in their Easter clothes, carrying candles and flowers, marching around the Cathedral."

In describing the sense of unity the early settlers had with each other, Mrs. Joseph noted that the founding families of the first eastern rite church, St. Elias, were not all of the Melkite Byzantine following. There were Maronites and Antiochian Orthodox as well, whose churches would not be established until some years later, but so lonely were they for the ancient liturgies that they too joined in founding the first church and participated for years in its ceremonies and functions.

Probably the first of the language schools was one conducted by a young doctor, Khairallah Karim, who became known as "Mouallam" (teacher) Karim. In the early years of the century, he set up classes at the Friendly Inn and taught Arabic to the young people who had been brought over at a pre-school age, or who had been born in the United States of the first wave of immigrant parents. As he taught these students Arabic to help them preserve the mother tongue, he also taught English to others to prepare them for entrance into school, or to assist the young adults in preparation for their citizenship papers.
Rose Aftoora, who had been brought to America as an infant, taken back to the old country as a child of three, and returned to America at the age of eight, attended Mouallam Karim1s little school and learned the language which would otherwise have been lost to her.

There was also a club, she remembered, called Wardot Sooria, Roses of Syria.

In 1918, she married a man from Utah who was visiting in Cleveland. His name was Abdallah Joseph, but all his life he would be known, because his home city was Tyre, the Arabic Sur, as Abdallah el Suri or Abdallah the Suri.

"It was wartime," she recalled, "and my husband went into service, but he didn't have to go overseas for which we were grateful. There were many many men from our Cleveland community who went into the army, which when you think about it was really rather unusual. You know, many men left Syria because they did not want to be conscripted into the Turkish army, but when America entered the war, they signed up to serve. Some weren't even citizens yet, but that gave them a chance to get their citizenship, and some who were already citizens wanted to fight for the new country. I guess maybe it was because America was free, and their old country, Syria, was still not free for its own people. Anyway, it always surprised me how many of our men were veterans of the First World War."

The Josephs moved to a large house on West 14th Street, which was then a fashionable and prosperous neighborhood to which many of the Syrian Lebanese were moving, away from the Haymarket and downtown districts. Social functions centered around the churches, and some cultural activities took place at the settlement houses.
There were plays produced in Arabic at Alta House, which was at that time at East 22nd and Woodland.

"In the 20's," Mrs. Joseph said, "they all used to come to our house to practice their plays in our basement. There was my cousin, George Aftoora, and Dr. Halim Khoury, Shikry and Sadie Shantiry, and there was Alia Owen, Alice Hankish, and Adele Gantose, and I can't even remember how many others. Why they even went on the circuit. We used to go to Toledo and Akron and cities all around to put on the plays. Later on, they did operas in Arabic, and they were beautiful. Our lives were not so complicated then," she continued. "We had simpler needs and pleasures, and nobody thought very much about getting everything at once, or taking big or expensive vacations each year."

One of the highlights of many a family's year from the twenties through the forties was the annual trip to Carey, Ohio to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Here some miraculous cures had been effected years before and the little church and small town of Carey became a focal point for many of the nationality communities.

The Poles, Slovaks, and other Middle European people, as well as the Syrian-Lebanese devoutly celebrated, each August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. The walls of the tiny church were hung with mementoes of pain -- crutches, canes, hearing aids, eyeglasses, all left behind by the faithful who felt they no longer needed them.

Mass after Mass would be celebrated by priests of the different nationality groups throughout the three days of prayer and processions.
The blue and red glass of vigil candles glowed continuously, shadows of tiny flames flickering against the walls, and all the women, Arabs, Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians, Russians, would tiptoe reverently into the little church, to practice the ritual of lighting the vigils. Dropping their coins into the vigil racks, they would then ceremoniously light the long wick to touch it to the pure beeswax candle, self-consciously shake it to put out its flame, and drop to their knees before the tiny symbol of their hopes.

Throughout the day, the little church would echo the soft sound of prayer, whispered in many tongues.

"Assist my daughter, dear Mother, to have this baby she has wanted for so long."

"Help my son, dear Mother, for the sake of your own Loved Son."

All the timorous hopes of the human soul went into those little prayers of the trusting faithful. In the Church and on the streets, the prayers continued, as throngs of people in long and colorful procession followed steadfastly behind the acolytes and priests, intoning their messages to the Holy Mother. Their gaze was fixed upon the Madonna's banners, the crucifix at the head of the procession, and most steadily, and with awe, upon the silk dressed and bejewelled figure of the Lady of Carey, lifted high above the heads of the crowd, her blessing touching all who believed.
The original statue brought from Luxembourg in 1875
Old Church at Carey, Ohio. Site of annual August 15 Pilgrimage.
But all was not prayer and sombre solemnity.

"All year," said Mrs. Joseph, "when I would buy my little girls dresses, they would say, 'Oh, this one will be for Carey.' That would be our vacation, and the whole family looked forward to it. Each year, we would go on the train, and always we would stay with the same family in Carey. They
would have our rooms ready, and the Mister would be waiting to take the children down to see his corn and the cows and horses. Oh, what a good time they would all have."

Names of Carey residents like Powell and Haberman and White were linked for years with the vacation days of Arab families like Joseph and Jacob, Aftoora, Kaim, Hatton, Abdallah and Abraham, Haddad and George. The Syrian-Lebanese, unlike some of the other nationalities, would plan great festivities for the evenings after the days of prayers.

People came from everywhere -- from Detroit and Chicago and from Akron, Youngstown, Canton and Cleveland. Blufton, Amherst, Fostoria and Toledo were represented. They came even from New York, and up from the South -- from Birmingham and Jacksonville -- and points east and west, for Carey was a place of reunion.

The peaceful serenity of the park at night would be broken with the sounds of song and dance, the derbecki thumping and thrumming out the old folk music. At the first notes the debki chain would form, the best dancers leading the long line, waving their handkerchiefs to the music and calling out for all to follow.

The finest oud players in the United States coaxed golden notes from that plaintive instrument, playing soft accompaniment to the most renowned Arabic singers in the country. Musical notes and human voices rose as one in the summer air of that midwestern farm town of Carey.

Young people would walk about the grounds and find benches under the trees, lost in their own romancing, yet never far from the watchful eyes of the family elders. Many a match was made during the shrine days at Carey.
There was much food and drink and merrymaking, and nearly every Cleveland family had a favorite tale to remember about the days when Carey, Ohio was the big summer vacation.

"Those were wonderful days," Mrs. Joseph reminisced with a smile. "We did everything. We prayed, and we marched in the processions, and then we went to the park to spend the evenings with everyone we knew and loved. We sang and danced and had a wonderful time. And isn't that the way it should be, after all? Like the Bible says, 'there is a time for prayer, and a time for pleasure.' How good when we can share all of that together."

The Story of Barbara Jacob

The demographic character of the Cleveland Arab community did not change significantly until after the partition of Palestine in 1948 and the Arab Israeli War of 1967, factors which accounted for the exodus of displaced Palestinians, thousands of whom eventually came to the United States, many settling down in Cleveland.

However, an early Cleveland arrival from Palestine was Atullah Jacob. Even in those days, Ramallah, in the East Palestine district of Jerusalem, was a lush and prosperous city. Its farms and gardens nourished by the waters of many natural springs, Ramallah was fast developing into a resort and tourist attraction.

Atullah Jacob, nevertheless, was not content to remain in his native city, but was determined to come to the America he had learned so much about from the American Presbyterian teachers whose faith he followed.
He arrived in Cleveland in 1902 and died here in 1975 at the age of ninety-five.

"He was very proud of his name," said his widow, Mrs. Barbara Khattar Jacob. "Atullah means 'gift of God' and all his life he said it was his obligation to live up to that."

Barbara Khattar arrived from the Lebanon in 1913 at the age of fifteen, going first to Youngstown to her cousin's home.

"I wanted to earn some money to send home to my family in our village near Batroun, but then the war started in 1914 and communication was cut off. When I came to Cleveland," she said, "I went to work in a cigar factory at Woodland and East 14th Street with some other Syrian women. We earned $2.00 a day. That was good money then.

"Then some friends I met said that was not an easy job for a young girl, and offered me a job in their restaurant. The owner's name was Khalil Tuma, and I became good friends with his daughter Selima and shared a room with her in their house."

Atullah Jacob was, by that time, a partner with Khalil Tuma in the restaurant. "I didn't pay much attention to him at first," said Mrs. Jacob. "He was much older than I was, and of course, he was one of the bosses.

"One day I got mad at Mr. Tuma because he was angry with something I did, or maybe didn't do, I don't remember. He swore at me, at least I think it was some bad words, and I was very humiliated and so I ran away from the restaurant and from the house. You see, the expression that is used is really a curse on your father, and I couldn't stand for that, could I? After a week, some of the men came to my other
friends where I had run away to, and they acted as a
delegation to make peace between me and Mr. Tuma. I
remember Mr. Orfalie, who owned a linen store at the
Arcade. He was very kind, but stern, and he asked me why I
was so angry with Mr. Tuma who 'loved me like his own
daughter.' I said I didn't think it was nice of him to swear at
me, and Mr. Orfalie said, 'So what is that my girl, didn't your
own father sometimes swear at you? Come on now, didn't he?'

"Well, I cried, and they made me and Mr. Tuma make
up, and Mr. Tuma who was really a good man, well he cried
too. And so he hugged me, and kissed my cheek, and we
made it up. Then I went back to work in the restaurant and
back to living with Selima at their house, and we all got along
very well."

About that time, Atullah Jacob began expressing his
intentions toward Barbara Khattar, but at first she was
dissuaded by friends.

"He is a good man,' they said, 'but he is much too old
for you. And more, he is a Protestant and a Palestinian and
you are Maronite Catholic and Lebanese. These mixed
marriages don't work.'

"But finally I decided it would be all right. I could turn
for him and be a Protestant, too, because after all aren't we
all under the one God? And what if he was not from my
own country, what of that, we were all Arabs anyway.

"We were married in Mr. Tuma's house, and Selima
was my bridesmaid and Juryous Hishmeh who was also from
Ramallah was Atulla’s best man."

They went to live in a house on Central Avenue and
soon started a restaurant of their own.
"Our restaurant was at 656 Bolivar Road. We cooked many things. Ham and eggs, and other American foods but also some Middle Eastern food."

In 1919, their first son was born. "I didn't know much about those things, and I walked from the restaurant to the Maternity Hospital which was on Cedar because I had some pain, but I didn't know the time had come. Well, they knew, the nurses, and they wouldn't let me go home. My boy was born that night."

The birth of a first son was a joyous occasion and everyone coming to the restaurant was treated to "Bahlawa" the rich nut filled, syrup soaked pastry served at Middle East festivities.

Early menus at the restaurant were cheap and filling. "We sold a plate of 'Kibbee’ for 25 cents. Two 'Kousa’ were also 25 cents. Rice was 5 cents and so was a dish of laban (yogurt). Chicken with 'hashwee’ (meat and rice stuffing) was 25 cents, and 'Mishwee' (shish kabob) was 25 or 30 cents, I don't quite remember."

The Jacobs operated their restaurants for thirty years and catered weddings and parties. They provided for the education of their four children from the profits of their business.

"When we lived so close to downtown," Mrs. Jacob remembered, "I would sometimes get so sick for the smell and the feeling of the grass, and the open air that was in my own village, that I had to run away from the sidewalks. I would take my children when they were little, and we would walk to the Erie Street Cemetery, and today they laugh when they remember I let them play in the cemetery under the trees. It was so quiet and pleasant there, and there was
nothing frightening about it for us. We just took it for granted that here was another step in life.

"We found out when the memorial ceremonies were held by the Indians who came to visit and pray for their dead who were buried there. They used to tell me that the Indians who helped the first Cleveland settlers were in that cemetery, and I recall that there was once a fight between the city government and the Indians about how the graves were cared for and what would eventually become of them.

"It was good for all of us to be there among the natural things, and away for a while from the automobiles, the streetcars, the factory whistles, and all the business. It was good to smell the fresh air and to sit on the grass, and lean my hand upon the soft moist ground."

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The Story of Helenie Farage

Gently smoothing the yellowed silk and soft chiffon of her wedding dress, Helenie David Farage noted that its tunic style and rose point lace trim would fit in nicely with the mode of the present day, and she had worn it as a bride over fifty years before.

Her daughter-in-law said, "It looks as if it would still fit you today, Mother, if you would try it on."

Helenie laid the fold creased gown against her breast and smiled. "My veil just went to pieces years ago. They were illusion silk net in those days, very sheer, and we wore them to the floor, all crumpled against the train of the dress, but they were gone the minute the air got to them. Not like the new nylon they have today. That would last forever."
Her story, she said, was not different from all the stories of her friends. "We came here, most of us young girls and young men, and it was to have a better life than back home."

"But yes, I did have a little harder time at first. You see, I was thirteen when we went from Mashta in Syria, to the Port of Tripoli. I remember that we left Tripoli on July 19, 1910, and it was a long hard trip until we got to Marseilles."

It became even more difficult at Marseilles for Helenie David. Her papers were not completely in order and she could not be permitted to enter the United States. "It was a very big problem for my parents. I was the youngest of the family so what should they do? Could they leave me alone in Marseilles, or should we all return to Syria, and try to get back to America again? That would not be easy. It took a long time to save money to bring a family to America."

A relative was finally found who would look after the young girl so that the rest of the family might be able to continue on to Ellis Island and America.
Atullah and Barbara Khattar Jacob, Wedding Picture -- 1918
Mrs. Helenie David Farage in her wedding dress which was first worn in 1914 for her marriage to Khalil (Charles) Farage.
"Then my aunt arrived in Marseilles on her way to Argentina, and she took me with her to South America. When my father sent my papers to Marseilles they wrote back and told him I was in Argentina and then he had to get them to Argentina so that I could come to America to my family. That was something to have those visas and permits travelling from Marseilles in France back to my father in Amherst, Ohio, and then out to Argentina, all to get a young girl into America to her family.

"Well, finally the papers got to South America and I arrived in America in 1912, two years from the time we started out from the Port of Tripoli. I was only with my family in Amherst for two years after all that, you know, or until I was seventeen, when I got married.

Khalil (Charles) Farage was from Colorado. "It was a little town -- maybe you've heard of it, Wallsenburg, that was the name. You know, he had a bad time too for a while. You see, he wanted to get to America, but first he went to South America because that was easier. He was not happy in South America and what he did then was to get to Mexico. Well then, he got into America from Mexico and went to Wallsenburg. You see he wanted to come to America so much that he couldn't wait for all the papers. He was a wetback and it took him years before he got his papers straightened out."

The Farages stayed only a short while in Amherst then came to Cleveland where there were more job opportunities. Like many other young Syrian couples, their life in Cleveland began on Bradley Court.
"We had two rooms and a kitchen. Everybody had plain chairs and tables, not like today when couples start out with everything matching."

In those early days, life styles were based on temporary arrangements. Many were not certain they could even make it in America and home decorating was low on the list of priorities.

As jobs grew steady and the family prospered a sense of security and permanence developed.

"I remember one family, the Anters, bought a couch and two chairs that were a set, and everyone went over to see it, and soon the other women started buying couches and chairs that matched."

Life for Helenie and Khalil Farage centered around their religion. They were Orthodox and did not yet have a church of their own.

"Visiting priests would come to Cleveland, and we would have Mass in different homes. Father Sliman Merhis, who married us in Amherst, used to come here and we would have Divine Liturgy in the Armory on Bolivar Road. We used the billiards room for our services. Yes, there was Father Merhis, and then there was Father Spiridon Massouh who used to come up from Akron. Later he went to Canton and was the priest there for years. They had a big parish in Canton.

"When Father Massouh could not come, Father Atouf would visit us. We had Mass in many places, but Gray's Armory was the central location for a long time."

When no priest could visit, the Orthodox families would share in the services at St. Elias Melkite Church which was then on Webster Avenue near East 9th Street.
"Before we had our own church, we all went to St. Elias. We had weddings and funerals in that church no matter what religion we were. When there was something big happening everybody came -- the Melkites, the Maronites, the Orthodox. The Druze came too. It didn't matter what we were -- even that some were not Christian. It was important that we were all Arabic people and we stayed close to each other. We lived across the street from the church on Webster, and my second son was baptized by Father Mufleh who was the pastor. Oh, he was such a good man. You wouldn't believe how many people he helped. He used to get in trouble with his own people sometimes. You know why? He didn't keep real good books, but they didn’t know about some of the good things he was doing. Some of the people who had a real bad time, especially in the Depression later, they knew."

While Khalil and Helenie Farage attended services in other churches, they worked and planned with others of the early Orthodox families for the establishment of a church of their own.

"We did everything. We had bazaars, we had parties, the men had meetings and formed a Council. Even during the hard times, people worked to build the church. And do you know, when we finally had our Church and our Pastor, we were in it only a few years and the church burned. To the ground. Nothing was left, only the walls. We had just decorated it and we had a big party to celebrate -- and the very next day the church burned. It was terrible to see it all gone, just four walls standing. Then everyone just dug in and went to work all over again. It was the middle of the Depression and the men who were plumbers and carpenters
went in and put in plumbing and a floor. They finished the basement in a few months so we could have Mass again in our Church. When I look today at our church building, the halls and the school rooms, I think of those people who sacrificed and paid off the mortgage and worked so hard. It was a very good thing, because that way our own religion is not lost in America, and our grandchildren have the church we built.