

## «ΓΝΩΣΙΣ» (KNOWLEDGE) FROM THE HELLENIC SCHOOL MINISTRY

### Ypsilanti, the Town, the General, and My Family

As a youngster, we spent a great deal of time with my yiayia and papou. We would walk around the block holding yiayia's hand; looking at the statue of the pioneer, the great water tower and a brilliant white bust of a man. Two flag poles stood near this statue, one American flag and one Greek flag blowing in the breeze, high above the bust.

Sometimes my yiayia would talk about people in the community she knew one way or another; some who are recognized by many Americans. Our town was the birth place of pizza delivery. In the 1960's, two brothers opened a small pizza business. According to my yiayia, they had no room for tables, and no real parking for easy pizza pick up, so they began taking their pizza's to people's homes. Domino's Pizza and the concept of home delivery were born.

When the movie TUCKER came out in 1988, my yiayia said, "I remember him. He'd drive his car up and down Michigan Avenue late at night. He was working out the bugs at night when no one really pay attention to him. Sometimes he would stop into your papou's bar, before going home."

I attended university in this town and walked past the bust near the water tower on a daily basis. The sight of the Greek flag being flown with the American flag was a natural site to me; one I grew up with and never thought twice about. I grew up in Ypsilanti Michigan. My mother told me my papou was involved in the erection of the white marble bust of General Demetrious Ypsilanti.

Ypsilanti Michigan was originally named Woodruff's Grove and was established when 3 enterprising property owners settled along two Native American trading routes and the Huron River. Around the time this new community was beginning, news of the Greek's fight for independence was spreading across the United States. With America having won its struggle for independence less than a hundred years before, the fight in Greece struck a chord with many Americans and much of the news about the Greek battle for independence was available, even in new communities such as Woodruff's Grove Michigan.

As it turns out, one of the 3 enterprising property owners was Judge Woodward. He became very interested in the Greek struggle for independence. He marveled at the military skill of a young General, Demetrious Ypsilanti, who was able to defend the Citadel of Argos in 1824 with 220 soldiers, against an army of 8,000. Ypsilanti managed to do this without a single injury to his 220 soldiers. Woodward was so impressed by this general, he suggested they change the name of Woodruff Grove, to Ypsilanti in 1825. In 1832 Ypsilanti became the village of Ypsilanti. By 1857, this small village became the City of Ypsilanti, honoring the Greek Icon of the successful struggle for Greek Independence and Democracy.

In exploring The Greek War of Independence and my family, I discovered the final battle was actually fought near the place where my papou was born and raised. The battle of Petra took place on September 12, 1829, when Demetrious Ypsilantis and 2000 troops awaited the arrival of the 7000 Muslim troops, who had left Athens in August. This battle took place in Petra, which is located in a narrow pass in Boeotia, between Livadeia and Thebes. When the two armies met, the Greeks let loose a hail of gun fire, and then charged the opposing army with swords. Demetrious Ypsilantis and his army won with few casualties; 10 dead, and 12 wounded. This could not be said for the 7000 Albanian Muslims. They lost several hundred men. According to the truce signed that day, the Turks would surrender all lands from Livadeia to the Spercheios River in exchange for safe passage out of Central Greece. Livadeia is very close to the village my papou grew up in.

My papou's name was Xenophon Yorgos Lambrou. He americanized his last name to Lambros. He was born in Mazi Greece somewhere around 1896. Mazi is a small mountain village located between Lavadeia, and Aliartos. He was working in the united states, sending money back to his family in Greece in the early 1900's. He was planning to return to Greece when World War I broke out. Being afraid of passenger ships being targeted, he remained in America. Despite his desire, he was never able to return to his home in Greece.

He did, however, settle in a community where he could see the flags of both his homes flying proudly together. He and my yiayia purchased a home a block away from the water tower and the bust of General Ypsilanti. After my mother told me he had been involved with the presentation of the statue to the city of Ypsilanti, I did a bit of research.

I discovered this statue was presented to the City of Ypsilanti by the Order of AHEPA as a part of the national convention, held in Detroit, August 1928. Two thousand Greek Americans, including The Greek Minister to the United States, and the Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church were present. Since August 1928 many members of the Ypsilanti family has visited this site and the city.

In 1928, we believe my papou was living and working in Chicago. My yiayia, Aliko Pernokis, was 11 years old and living in Toronto. She and my papou would not be married for another 8 years. About 15 years after the dedication of the bust of Ypsilanti, my grandparents were living in Ypsilanti. Their house was within view of the Ypsilanti water tower and the statue of General Ypsilanti. My papou owned a bar down town and walked to work everyday, passing the water tower, which is reported to have 3 Greek crosses build into the construction. One on the outside facing east and two more located on the interior of the water tower. He would walk past the bust of General Ypsilanti. He would walk past by the two flags summing up his life and source of pride, the American and Greek flags.

I have to believe my papou was so moved by the dedication of this bust, carved from white marble quarried in Pendeli Greece and carved by the sculptor Christopher Natsio, who carved the famous statue of the Unknown Soldier, in Greece, to choose it as his home town.

Every day he was reminded of his two homes; the one of his birth and the one of the birth of his children. Every day he walked by the flags of two countries who fought and won a war for independence and democracy. Every day he could proudly say he was from Ypsilanti, knowing the community he called home and the history of the general who was a hero in his country of birth. Now, every day I am aware, of how his choice of home provided all of us with a connection to both our Greek heritage and history.



Bust of General Demetrios Ypsilantis  
at the Ypsilanti Water Tower



*Christina Mount  
Hellenic School Student*