



# THE ORDER OF AHEPA



**ORDER OF AHEPA  
MOTHER LODGE**



		
<b>NICHOLAS D. CHOTAS</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>		<b>JAMES CAMPBELL</b>
		
<b>S. J. STAMOS</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>	<b>HARRY ANGELOPOULOS</b>	<b>GEORGE A. POLOS</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>
		
<b>JOHN ANGELOPOULOS</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>	<b>GEORGE CAMPBELL</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>	<b>JAMES VLASS</b> <i>(Deceased)</i>

AHEPA FOUNDING MEMBERS - July 26 1922

# DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE

## MOTHER LODGE



*Alexandra Apostolides  
Sonenfeld*



*Marie Petros*



*Efsthimia Choppelas*

*Founded  
November 16, 1929  
San Francisco, CA,  
U.S.A.*



*Varvara Solon*



*Arete Choppelas*



*Sophie Canellos*



*Rubene Nicholson*

### **“What is AHEPA? What does it do? What is its mission? Why should I join?”**

These are some questions people often ask when they are invited to join AHEPA. Because some of fathers or grandfathers were members or even founders of AHEPA we tend to take the long and commendable history of AHEPA for granted, we just grew up with it. And because AHEPA is the largest and oldest association of American citizens of Greek heritage, unfortunately, we tend to blindly assume that everyone else is aware of AHEPA and its achievements. This is not so.....

There are many Greeks & Greek Americans who do not have even the slightest idea what AHEPA is all about. Here in Greece many know of the hospital in Thessalonica and have seen the AHEPA Wing at the Evangelismos Hospital, but there is a whole lot more to AHEPA than this - the mission & ideals of AHEPA that built, amongst a lot of other acts of philanthropy the AHEPA Hospital in Thessalonica and the Evangelismos hospital wing in Athens.

AHEPA has been around for so long that even our own members don't have quick and easy answers to these questions.

### **AHEPA - A SHORT HISTORY**

One hot summer day in 1922, two Greek American businessmen, George Nikolopoulos (Polos) and John Aggelopoulos, both traveling salesmen working out of Atlanta, met by chance in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Among other things, they talked about the growing wave of hostility that targeted their nationality and religion; it was a time when the Ku Klux Klan, reorganized in 1917 and thriving on militant patriotism, was enjoying a renaissance of hatred in the South. Meanwhile, in Washington DC, Congress and the Federal Government were discussing ways to stem the tide of "*less desirable*" immigrants from "*certain*" countries, which invariably included the Balkan nations.

Both men agreed there was a real need for a patriotic organization that would direct and channel the energy of the Greek community in the United States, a group that would be politically non-partisan and religiously non-sectarian.

There was never a shortage of Greek fraternal organizations whose members came to America from the same region, island or village. These were the *topika somatia* that tended to departmentalize the Greek American community, keeping it well outside of the larger, mainstream American community.

These regional associations, along with the local parish church, brought the struggling immigrant some much-needed comfort satisfying the basic human need of "belonging." In so many cases the members of these *topika* were instrumental in organizing and building the Greek Orthodox parish church across the land. Fortunate for future generations, many of these organizations are still around, so are the communities they helped establish.

However, faced with the tenor of the times, Polos and Angelopoulos agreed an organization with a much larger, national scope was needed. The idea for a Pan-Hellenic organization wasn't new. There had been the Pan-Hellenic Union, established in 1907, but victimized by its own fiscal mismanagement and charges that it was flat-out an agent of the Greek government, it suffered an ignoble end before the outbreak of World War I.

Both men agreed that a *truly American fraternity* of Greeks was the order of the day, a national group that could lead its members to rise above the political fights between Monarchists and Venizelists that typified Greek American community life that added to its detriment. Both believed something that so many immigrants refused to admit - that Greek settlers were here to stay. This was a reality that the Greek community in the United States was slow to accept.

The remarkable thing is that these two businessmen, determined to contribute to American society and not be devoured by it, didn't just talk but they acted. They presented the idea to a group of twenty-five members of the Atlanta Greek community.

Seventeen men offered their support. Now this group met in closed session and on July 26, 1922, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, The Order of AHEPA, became a reality.

The officers elected were:

- Ὑπατος Πρόεδρος: “Νικόλαος Β. Τσορτας”
- Ὑπατος Γραμματεὺς και Ταμίας: “Χαρ. Αγγελουλος”
- Ὑπατος Κοσμήτωρ: “Ἰωαννης Αγγελουλος”

Twenty more meetings were held that year to lay the groundwork. A Constitution and by-laws were adopted. It was decided that members had to be U.S. citizens or in the process of becoming citizens, English was adopted as the organization's official language, annual dues were set at \$10, and officers were elected. AHEPA's first decade was characterized by an explosive growth - initially it was a fraternity based in the south, and southwest of the 32 local chapters established between September 26, 1922 and October 14, 1923, just three were based in cities north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Appealing to a rising middle class of Greek Americans interested in climbing the proverbial ladder of success and committed to raising their families in America, AHEPA had 49 chapters and over 2,800 members by the end of 1924. By 1928 there were 192 chapters and over 17,000 members nationwide. Now many of the bigger chapters were in northern cities and some of the larger cities were host to two or more AHEPA chapters.

The first of 86 National Conventions was held in Atlanta in 1923. The second conclave gathered in Washington DC in September of 1924. The delegates agreed that the Order should have its headquarters in the nation's capital, despite the fact that Washington had no enormous Greek community. Seraphim Canoutas wrote in his 1918 *Greek American Guide*, "This community of about 600 Greeks is one of the most peace-loving and progressive in America, showing none of the absurdities which are usually seen in some of the other communities and colonies."

At this convention the 47 delegates laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They also called at the White House, where they were cordially received by President Calvin Coolidge. AHEPA was making its presence known and from the very start had its critics: people, who objected to its Masonic approach, were suspicious of its secrecy, disdainful of what one dissenting voice called "Little Napoleons vying for power".

Above all, the most vocal critics condemned AHEPA's unabashed Americanism and what was perceived as sending young AHEPANS to Greece teaches the next AHEPA generation about Hellenic culture, while the campaign to return the Olympics Games to Olympia promotes Hellenism in North America. *Evezones* from the Hellenic Presidential Guard present the Greek flag during the 1986 Congressional Banquet unrestrained assimilations.

By 1923 AHEPA had a rival: GAPA, or the Greek American Progressive Association. Along with publications of the Greek Press, GAPA charged that AHEPANS were "opportunists" - "pseudo-patriots" and "anti-Hellenes committed to a program of de-Hellenization."

On the language question AHEPA stood by English as the language of the country in which they'd chosen to live. AHEPA's publications were in English, GAPA's publications were in Greek, Greek was heard more or less exclusively at GAPA meetings. GAPA chose to openly ally itself with the Greek Orthodox Church in America; an institution that in the '20s admittedly needed all the help it could get. AHEPA maintained its distance from religious affairs. GAPA made its headquarters in Pittsburgh, where it was founded, amid a large Greek community. AHEPA had quickly opted for Washington.

The Royalist - Venizelist controversies more or less a thing of the past, the rivalry between AHEPA and GAPA now kept community affairs lively and sometimes hostile. Though by 1928 GAPA had organized fifty chapters, primarily in cities with large Greek populations, it never achieved the success AHEPA enjoyed.

AHEPA would be inherently bettered suited for the transition from a strictly Greek-born membership to one that accommodated Greeks born in the old country and the New World. It would prove more in tune with what it recognized early on was the inevitability of assimilation resulting from undeniably permanent residence in a multi-national country like the United States.

Nor was AHEPA as radical as its detractors charged. Once its super-patriotism cooled off somewhat, AHEPA adopted a blend of what its members considered the most positive aspects of both the Hellenic and American cultures.

In 1924, AHEPA President, V.J. Chebithes appealed to chapters to sponsor Greek orphans left homeless following the Asia Minor disaster of two years earlier. Five dollars a month was required to sponsor a child, and some AHEPA chapters sponsored as many as thirty. The "Faso" hat was adopted as an emblem for its members.

At its 1925 Chicago convention AHEPA urged the U.S. government to extend a \$50 million loan to Greece-and the aid came through, \$12,000 was appropriated for a scholarship fund. And, in an effort to keep peace in the volatile Greek American community, AHEPA took pain to emphasize it did not oppose the existence of the foreign-language press in the United States.

At the 1926 convention in Philadelphia a junior order, the Sons of Pericles, was organized for the 12-21 age group. Established February 3, 1926, the first Sons chapter was established a short time later in Manchester, New Hampshire. The Sons of Pericles was officially recognized as the Junior Order of AHEPA in 1928.

In time AHEPA would add auxiliaries for women and young women, too. The Daughters of Penelope and the Maids of Athena would round out a complete 'AHEPA Family," That an annual trip to Greece be established. AHEPA contributed \$6300 to hurricane victims in Florida Established November 16, 1929 as the Women's Affiliate of AHEPA, the Daughters of Penelope is the first Greek-American women's organization in the United States. One of its crowning achievements is "**Penelope House**", a shelter for battered women in Mobile, Alabama. It is the first shelter established for battered women and their children in the state of Alabama.

The Maids of Athena was founded July 5, 1930 as the AHEPA Junior Women's Auxiliary. The two youth groups, The Maids & The Sons, have combined to contribute to such worthy causes as Muscular Dystrophy, The Deborah Heart & Lung Foundation, The Special Olympics, St. Basil's Academy and Cooley's Anemia Research.

What makes AHEPA unique from other organizations is the creation of the AHEPA Family. Together with three affiliated organizations, the AHEPA Family works as a unit toward the fulfillment of a common mission. Combined, the four organizations have contributed well over a billion dollars to national projects throughout their history.

In 1927 AHEPA raised more than \$53,000 for charitable and philanthropic activities. The \$1000 set aside for scholarships was raised to \$2500. A bi-weekly bulletin is established. A vote for \$1000 is set aside for historical research was passed.

In 1928, in a matter of a few critical months, the members pooled over \$40,000 to aid the city of Corinth, which had been devastated by an earthquake. AHEPA was making a difference, insisted its members, and on *both* sides of the Atlantic. They needed to find a way to honor the memory of the Greek American hero of the WW1 George Dilboy; for the Supreme Lodge to

collect \$100,000 for scholarships for youths of Greek origin; to establish the Hellenic Hall at the University of Pittsburg. It was decided to hold an annual banquet in Washington to honor government officials and other personalities. The first annual trip to Greece took place in spring 1928; this group of Ahepeans was led by newly elected Supreme President Konstantions Alphantzis.

In 1929 a corps of AHEPANs marched in President Herbert Hoover's inaugural parade - an all time "first" for any Hellenic-American group, It was a proud and genteel occasion that also included a visit to the White House.

In the coming years AHEPA built a stronger, more visible profile in Washington. Seventy-five Senators and Congressmen attended the Order's first Congressional Banquet, organized by George C. Vournas. Today that biennial event is an AHEPA tradition. In recent years honorees have included President Lyndon Johnson, Vice Presidents Spiro Agnew (whose father, Theodore, helped found Baltimore's AHEPA Chapter No. 30 in 1922) and Hubert Humphrey, former Greek Prime Minister the late Constantine Karamanlis, Patriarch Athenagoras and comedian - humanitarian Bob Hope.

In 1932 AHEPA fought tooth-and-nail the speculations of the Wickersham Congressional Committee on Crime in the U.S. Its damning allegations infuriated the Greek American community one of its victims. AHEPA, relying on as grass roots strength across the land, organized fact-finding forces in every state and succeeded in proving that the Wickersham Report was nothing more than a shameful and inaccurate disgrace and sham. In this kind of activity, AHEPA was an active anti-defamation group that the Greek American community never really had.

AHEPA's friendly, indeed brotherly relations with President Franklin D. Roosevelt also enhanced the organization's stature. FDR had been initiated as a member of AHEPA back when he was Governor of New York; now AHEPA's regular visits to the Oval Office took on an added significance. They weren't the stiff, formal occasions they had been with Herbert Hoover.

The dark days of World War II changed many a life, galvanizing the AHEPA membership and demonstrating just how much such an organization could achieve. The poignant turning point for Greek Americans came more than a year before Pearl Harbor. On October 28, 1940 Mussolini's troops invaded Greece from the north. That day is still remembered and revered as "Ohi Day".

An AHEPA visit to President Roosevelt, a short time after brought about what the White House termed "an unusual procedure" as FDR announced a promise of U.S. aid to Greece in her hour of peril.

The Greeks fought the Italians for five months and dealt Mussolini utter defeat. They managed to hold off Hitler's massive war machine for another three weeks before being overwhelmed, that heroism captured the world's admiration.

The Greek War Relief Association (GWRA), spearheaded by the Skouras brothers and other AHEPANs in the movie theatre business raised \$4 million in food and supplies by May 1941. AHEPANs in various businesses donated a day's or a week's profits to the cause, and many contributions came from non-Greeks. AHEPANs provided about 90% of the labor force in GWRA efforts speculate historian Theodore Saloutos, thanks again to its grassroots strength.

AHEPA's 1942 convention, celebrating the Order's 20th anniversary, was held in Atlanta. George Vournas of Washington DC was elected President and would lead the organization through the war years.

At the Atlanta convention it was announced that the Treasury Department had named AHEPA an official Issuing Agent for U.S. War Bonds, an honour achieved by no other civic organization. Quotas were assigned to each chapter to reach a goal of \$50 million in only four months.

Steve Vasilakos, dubbed 'AHEPA's No. 1 War Bond Salesman' had long been a familiar face in front of the White House, selling peanuts from his pushcart. He offered a free bag of goobers to each person who bought a bond. His first customer was Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives. The exchange was seen at the movies on the newsreel. There were many more customers, and the successful drive was extended.

Michael Loris, a Brooklyn AHEPAN, sold 24,142 individual, small denomination bonds in twelve months. In Zanesville Ohio, an AHEPAN sold \$44,566 worth of War bonds in one day, ultimately the project brought in revenues of \$500 million.

The success of the War Bond drive launched a new era for the AHEPA, an era of increased visibility, influence and involvement in Washington that continues to this day. In its so-called first phase, from 1922 to 1945, the emphasis was on "Americanization" and citizenship programs. Following the War AHEPA broadened its scope and horizons. Now over half of the membership was American-born. Many of AHEPA's Post-War projects would be related to rebuilding a war-torn Greece and, in contrast to its original goal, keeping Hellenism alive among the American born generations of Greeks.

Following World War II AHEPANs continued raising money for hospitals in Greece and other Greek war relief programs. However, civil war was raging in the motherland, AHEPANs were concerned. So was the Truman Administration. On March 12, 1947 President Truman appealed to Congress for immediate military aid. Congress came through and the Truman Doctrine, as it came to be known, was vital in saving Greece from Communism.

AHEPA maintained the warmest of relations with Truman, who was initiated into the Order on Greek Independence Day-March 25th-1946. When the President addressed AHEPA's Congressional Banquet, he said, "I've never had a more enthusiastic reception anywhere!"

That year AHEPA's first Health Center opened in Chrysoupolis, in northern Greece. Construction began on an AHEPA Wing at Athens' Evangelismos Hospital. Other health centers were rising, though construction was often slowed and sometimes halted by guerilla attacks.

AHEPA had come of age; there was no question about the loyalty of Greek Americans to the United States or about citizenship. The reason for establishing such an organization was now a proud memory and AHEPA's enduring foundation.

AHEPA continued its educational and humanitarian efforts and civic-minded programs, focusing much of its energy on a homeland in desperate need of help.

In the vanguard, AHEPA passed a resolution urging self-determination for Cyprus as early as 1946, setting up a Cyprus Affairs Committee two years later. In 1950 AHEPA called the world's attention to the estimated 28,000 children abducted by Communist forces in the Greek Civil War. In 1964 AHEPA sent its first delegation to Cyprus.

In the last fifteen + years, demonstrating an increasing sense of unity not always characteristic of the inner workings of AHEPA in previous years, the organization has worked to become a bridge between the Greek and American people and their governments.

In an effort to inform the Greek American community, as well as the larger American community and the Washington community in particular, AHEPA sponsors conferences on foreign affairs that bring together government officials, political scientists, leading journalists and, of course, AHEPANs.

Nor is it uncommon to find AHEPA leaders testifying on Capitol Hill before the House Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East or the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

AHEPA's official voice is its magazine, the *AHEPAN*. The first issue of the *AHEPAN*, edited by Achilles Catsonis, came out 61 years ago.

In addition to press releases, salvos fired off to government officials and letters to the editors of the Wall Street journal, the New York Times and other publications large and small, AHEPA publishes its own materials. The most recent offering was *Cyprus: "From Independence to Partition"* by University of Indiana-Purdue University Professor Van Coufoudakis.

"These publications aim to educate and inform," says Thomas L. Chase former chairman of the AHEPA Cyprus and Hellenic Affairs Committee, "They form an important part of AHEPA's overall program."

Indeed, education, in a variety of forms, has been a pillar of AHEPA since the very beginning. AHEPA started out educating the immigrant, and acclimating him, as AHEPA chronicler George J. Leber phrased it, "making him a gentleman".

In the early years AHEPA's education program emphasized citizenship and Greek as well as American history. Today it's a different story. With the third and fourth generations of Greek Americans coming of age, AHEPA is doing precisely what GAPA accused it of not doing and actually working against: that is, promoting and preserving Hellenism's and Prime Ministers, ambassadors and spirit and values.

Scholarships have been part of AHEPA's civic service since the Chicago convention of 1925. Paralleling that, AHEPA began building the bridge back to the motherland in 1928, when over 500 AHEPANs set sail aboard the S.S. Sinaia. Those days, before the Concord and Super-Savers, it was quite an event, a pilgrimage.

Today AHEPA gives scholarships on the local and national levels to promising Greek American students. Its "Journey to Greece" program, for high school students, emphasizes Hellenic culture, history and language.

AHEPA and individual AHEPANs have been a force in establishing Greek and Byzantine studies programs at colleges and universities around the country.

AHEPA has been re-focusing too, placing renewed emphasis on Hellenic culture, past and present. The AHEPA Cultural Foundation has sponsored an evening of Greek poetry and music at Wolftrap and lectures on archaeological finds in Cyprus.

As a civic-minded group, AHEPA has always recognized Americans, Greek and non-Greek, who make valuable contributions to the community and society at large. These have included Presidents humanitarians, recipients of AHEPA award made in the name of Socrates and Pericles.

The athlete has a very special place in Greek history and culture and, with AHEPA, so it remains. The Order has always taken enormous pride in the achievements of the Greek American athlete, going back to the heyday of world class wrestler Jim Londos. AHEPA's Harry Agganis Award was established in 1955, in memory of the great all-American who died in his prime. Agganis honorees have included: in football, Detroit Lion Alex Karras; in basketball, Boston Celtic Lou Tsiropoulos; and in baseball, Baltimore Oriole Milt Pappas. Among recent recipients are Olympic diver Greg Louganis and University of Georgia football coach and All-American Mike Castronis.

The William G. Chirgotis Award, made to outstanding collegiate athletes, was established in 1972, AHEPA also recognizes outstanding professional and amateur women in athletics.

On the local, district and national levels, AHEPA and its junior orders sponsor a wide variety of athletic events and tournaments, believing, like the ancient Greeks, that sports and competition are an important part of daily and civic life.

Nor has AHEPA forgotten the elderly. Facilities are being sponsored on the local level in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). St. Michael's Home for the Aged, operated by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America has also prospered thanks, in part to AHEPA funding.

Devoted to ideals of American and Hellenic culture, education and progress, AHEPA, despite its critics, has achieved singular success. Since 1922 it has been vital force in the life of the Greek American community.

Summing up the Order of AHEPA, Theodore Saloutos wrote: "More than anything else, through the years it accomplished more in identifying Greek Americans with the greater American community than did all the other organizations combined."

AHEPA's tradition is a proud one. Its legacy is a real one. Its mission goes on, setting sight on new horizons. AHEPA's active role in the Greek American community's development and achievements is a portrait of unselfish public service. AHEPA members are proud of the contributions the ancient Greeks gifted to Western Civilization. We share many of the values put forth by them: Civic Responsibility, Philanthropy, Education, Family & Individual Excellence, and the ideals of Democracy. This is the essence of our heritage and the core of AHEPA's mission. Moreover, throughout the span of its history, AHEPA has served as a vital vehicle for the progressive development and emergence of American citizens of Greek heritage into every facet of society: government, business, education, and the arts. This fulfillment illustrates the promise of the American Dream and symbolizes the hard work ethic of our immigrant forbearers who labored to achieve that dream with the principles of Hellenism rooted deep in their hearts.

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