

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Greek Immigration to America

Personal Experience

O.H. 1204

KALIOPE E. GINNIS

Interviewed

by

Michael G. Passas

on

October 7, 1988

KALLIOPE E. GINNIS

Kalliope Ginnis was born on December 20th, 1900 in Kalymnos, Greece. She married Emanuel Ginnis in 1919. Her father was a laborer and her mother was a millinery worker. Kalliope and her family had very difficult times during World War I. After bearing three children, Emanuel sent for Kalliope in 1935 from America. She disembarked on Ellis Island in New York where they had to go through several long lines for formalities required by the custom officials. Her first impression of America was a confusing one. The first place she resided in was Campbell and has been there ever since. Now, at the age of ninety-two, Kalliope is a widow, living with her daughter Sylvia.

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INTERVIEWEE: GINNIS, KALJOPE E.  
INTERVIEWER: Michael G. Passas  
SUBJECT: Entering through Ellis Island  
DATE: October 7, 1988

P: This is an interview with Mrs. Kalliope Ginnis, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Greek Immigration to America project, by Michael Passas, on October 7, 1988, at 480 Blossom Avenue, Campbell, Ohio.

Tell me about your parents and how they made a living in Kalymnos, Greece?

G: My father was a man of the soil, agricultural work. He once came to the United States and stayed for a period of four years. Then, he returned to Kalymnos. He made other trips back to the States. (See next question).

My mother was a housewife and helped in agricultural work. My mother worked hard her entire life. She also was instrumental in helping to build a small monastery near her home.

P: Financially, how did your parents fare?

G: My parents had very little money. To try and give our family a better life, my father made four different trips to America seeking work. First, he went to Tarpon Springs, Florida. Then, he went to the mills in Campbell. He often returned to make sure his family needs were met. My father, upon his return, would spend time with the children telling us rhymes and,

sometimes, prayers. I remember one prayer in particular:

Oh, my angel, ever blessed, grant that my soul may be untroubled, and my life humble. I beseech you with tears in my eyes. Oh, my archangel, who is great and powerful, when our Lord Jesus sends you to take my soul, do not come as a black whirlwind or a dark spirit. Seven heavens behold our Lord's golden cross, both in front of you and behind you. Oh my angel and archangel, our Lady, the ever Virgin Mary, all glorious and blessed, was born in sacredness and was raised in purity. In a great and dark cave the Panagia, all holy, gave birth to Jesus Christ. He spoke to her once; he spoke to her twice; he spoke to her three times, telling her, "Sleep and rest, oh my lady." I do not sleep, oh my Son, nor do I snooze. I saw you in a great dream, oh my Son. Tell me your dream, oh my Mother. I saw that they took you before Pilate in his courtyard, and you stood in front of the Christ's door. They nailed your hands; they pierced your heart; they gave you no water. Vinegar and gall they gave you to drink. All those tortures and passions I will endure for the faith of the Pious and Orthodox Christians. Whoever learns and prays this three times daily will not see thunder nor lightning, nor suffer a terrible death. In the final judgment, his soul shall receive mercy and charity.

P: Can you tell me some details about your childhood?

G: We went to school and played children's games. Most of the time, we helped our mother with household chores and working the land.

P: How was your family directly affected by the outbreak of World War I?

G: We were affected by the blockades--food was scarce. The basic staple food was flour mixed with milk, goat and cow; and [it was] eaten as a pudding or, at times, fried as a pancake. Prior to the Second World War, 1935, the Italians controlled the islands. The women often helped the men fight the intruders. Curfews were enforced. The Italians also captured all of the Greek Orthodox priests on the islands and sent them to the large island of Rhodes. There, the priests were often forced to conduct services to the Italian Army.

I remember one of our priests, Father Tsougrani. We had him hidden in one of our churches, St. Xaralimbos. We dressed him in women's clothing, and we took him to a small nearby port and hid him under a tree. He was smuggled to Turkey by ship.

- P: Did the Greeks in Kalymnos endure many hardships under the Italian rule?
- G: They killed some of our men, enforced curfews, physically beat some people, harassed women, and rationed food. Fortunately, my father sent some money from America.
- P: Did you have any hopes or ambitions as a young girl that you wished to fulfill?
- G: Not really. Kids went to school, temporarily. Rarely did you finish. I went until the fourth grade. Girls hoped for marriage and to become homemakers. I was married in 1919, in Kalymnos. Three of my children were born in Greece: Philip, George, and Niki. My daughter Sylvia Pantellis was born in America. My son, Philip Ginnis served four years in the United States Army, in Korea; and my son, George, served two years in the Army also.
- P: After your marriage, did you immediately come to America?
- G: No. I was married in 1919. Then, my husband left for America to seek work. We were separated ten years before my husband, Emanuel Ginnis sent for me.
- P: What year did you come to the States?
- G: [I came to the States in] 1935. I brought three children to America by way of an ocean liner. We left the Port of Perieus, Athens. The voyage took us to Paris, France, then to New York, Ellis Island. From here, we came to Youngstown, Ohio, by train. The final leg of the trip was by car or bus, to Campbell, Ohio.
- P: What kind of challenges did you face on your journey?
- G: [We faced] a language barrier, but people helped along the way. When we arrived in America in 1935, a depression existed. Many people were out of work. Even though we couldn't immediately find work, the Government provided us with food and clothing.
- P: Did you encounter any difficulties at Ellis Island?
- G: None, believe it or not. The real trouble occurred in Greece. The Italian occupants did not permit Islanders to travel to Athens, where departure papers were available.
- P: How did you get your papers?

G: I wrote to a friend in Athens, and he obtained all the necessary papers for me.

P: How did you feel about leaving your homeland, Greece?

G: [I felt] depressed. I left my father, grandmother, and sister. My mother died before the decision to leave for America.

P: What expectations did you have about life in America?

G: I hated the Italian domination. My son Philip Ginnis, who at the time was fifteen years old, had a run-in with an Italian policeman.

P: What was your first impression of America when you arrived in New York?

G: I saw the great numbers of people, trains, dirty air, etc. I told my son, Philip, "We've entered hell while still alive!" The train ride to Youngstown was long, but the conductors were helpful. We were met by my husband, Emanuel Ginnis, and a few friends.

P: What was your impression of Campbell?

G: Well, the depression was on. People were out of work. My husband was working only two days a week. We depended on government handouts.

P: Where did you reside in Campbell?

G: Gordon Street, Jefferson Street, 10th Street, 9th Street, and finally 5th Street. I became a housewife. I got my citizenship papers. My teacher was a Black man. They asked me laws, etc. The examiner asked me to return again the next day. In broken English, I told him, "No! Hurry up cry the baby!" I got my papers that day.

P: What hopes did you fulfill in America?

G: Well, I came to find a better life. Initially, I didn't because of the Depression. Now, my life is good. I have returned to Greece five times since 1935, and I always feel like a stranger. The people of the island that I knew are all gone. Many of my relatives are also no longer there.

P: Thank you very much.

G: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW