

histoire de la photographie

KATSEHAMOS AND THE GREAT IDEA

ROYALTY
ROYALTY

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recher

Peter Prineas

KATSEHAMOS
AND THE
GREAT IDEA

A TRUE STORY OF GREEKS AND AUSTRALIANS
IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

BY PETER PRINEAS



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2. AMERICA

It was known in our family that when Panagiotis Firos Katsehamos was a young man he went to America, but I did not know where he went or what he did there. A long time ago I asked my father, who said he thought Panagiotis went to Philadelphia. This stuck in my mind. It seemed right that my grandfather, *o Papous mou*, would go to a city with a Greek name, the city of brotherly love. It became part of family lore. But I have not found any evidence for it, and so a whole city must be cast out of this story. The proof of my grandfather's journey to America is held at Ellis Island in New York harbour, the gateway through which millions passed into the United States. Today Ellis Island records can be searched on the internet but during a visit to New York I thought it would be interesting to go there.

Walking through downtown Manhattan to the ferry pier at Battery Park on an autumn day, I came upon a huge bronze bull. I was in Wall Street and the monument needed no explanation. The beast's metal hide had a cold sheen, like steel, and its great hanging testicles gleamed from the caresses of countless stockbrokers. I walked on, glancing up side streets to see the statue of the bear, but I must have missed it. At Battery Park I boarded a crowded ferry for the Statue of Liberty. The vessel stood high out of the water with an open upper deck and, when we moved away from

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the dock and turned, Liberty came into view in the distance, her torch held high. All the people on board crowded to one side to see her. The ferry leaned over sickeningly as the weight shifted and I thought we were going to capsize, but American design had anticipated this and the boat righted herself with a jolt before gliding out into New York harbour.

Seeing Liberty from the streets of Manhattan does not prepare you for the experience of meeting her. She is a colossus. Beaten sheets of copper were fixed to an iron frame in Paris to make this large neoclassical lady, and then she was brought to New York and placed on a pedestal on her own island. Her message has changed over the years. She was conceived as a symbol of freedom. Then she became 'Mother of Exiles'. Now she is an emblem of American culture and power. I took a ferry over to Ellis Island where the immigration hall, with its red and cream masonry and domed towers and spires, looked like a cross between a museum and an old-fashioned mental asylum. I landed and walked into the great hall where, from 1892 to 1954, 12 million people passed beneath the galleries and high-vaulted ceilings. There were photographs displayed in the long corridors, of immigrant family groups, of Greek miners in Utah holding up whisky bottles and guns as tokens of their success in the new country, of people in long rows, waiting. There was a 1905 letter of reference for 'a very nice little fellow by the name of Fiorello La Guardia'. I read fragments of graffiti on the polished stone walls, many of them in Greek: '*Kardia mou*, My heart', one began. I wondered about *papou's* journey through this place.

On 16 July, 1907, the *Francesca*, a Glasgow-built ship of 5,000 tons blew smoke from her tall stack and moved from the dock at Patras in Greece. She steamed west uneventfully at about 12 knots over the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar, and across the Atlantic to New York. Among the 1,500 third-class passengers the *Francesca* landed at Ellis Island on 3 August was 'Panayiotis' Firos, a young single Greek man, five feet four inches in height, who said he was 19 years old and a labourer from the island of Kythera. He was certified by the ship's master after the surgeon's 'physical and oral examination' to be in good health, not afflicted with

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tuberculosis or a 'loathsome or dangerous contagious disease', free of any deformity, neither an idiot nor an imbecile, or insane. The young man had given assurances that he was not an anarchist or a polygamist. He was not a pauper either, as he had \$25 in his possession, apparently enough in 1907 to get him through the gate and into the land of the free. He seems also to have satisfied anyone who inquired that he could read and write. He said he was on his way to join his brother, 'Georges' Firos, in Market Street, St. Louis Missouri.

Was this 'Panayiotis' my grandfather, Panagiotes Firos? It seems possible. He said he was going to Missouri and there were later records at Ellis Island of other Firos boys, Philippos and Cosmas, going to join him there. Yet, there were some things about this Panagiotes travelling on the *Francesca* in the high summer of 1907 that did not add up. One was his age. This young man said he was 19 but if he was my grandfather he would have been 16 at that time. The other discrepancy was his height. This young man was five feet four inches. *Papou* was of modest stature, but he was not that short; he was five feet six. I continued searching but found no other record of a passenger who could be my grandfather.

When a person dies, a few significant things about them are mentioned. Panagiotes Firos' passage to America when he was just 16 is one of those things. This fact is printed in his obituary published nearly half a century later in the *Southern Cross* newspaper in Junee, New South Wales. When the *Francesca* made that voyage in July 1907 Panagiotes Firos would have been 16. Might he have put up his age when he traveled to America? There were reasons why he would. An unaccompanied boy seeking a passage to America might be turned away at the shipping office at Patras. He might be refused entry at Ellis Island. The young man on the *Francesca* seems to have been unaccompanied except perhaps for two brothers named Kaponas, also from Kythera. Their names appear in the passenger manifest next to Panagiotes' name. But the Kaponas brothers were little more than boys themselves, aged 18 and 17, and they gave their destination as Baltimore, Maryland, not St. Louis, Missouri. Panagiotes Firos probably decided, or

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was advised, that his chances of getting to America would be better if he passed himself off as a 19-year-old. That left the discrepancy in height. At five feet four inches, the Panagiotes on the *Francesca* was two inches shorter than my grandfather. But his age could account for that too. At 16 he would not be fully grown. He had several years to make up those two inches. I felt sure that this young man was my grandfather.

And what of 'Georges Firos', the brother who Panagiotes said he was going to join in St. Louis, Missouri? I went looking for George. On 17 October 1903 a ship named *Calabria* sailed from Naples, southern Italy, and arrived at New York on 4 November. *Calabria's* passenger manifest, duly recorded at Ellis Island, included an entry for a young Greek man named G. Firos. He was 23 years old. He declared his last place of residence as 'Pires', evidently Pireaus, the port of Athens. The young Firos had \$12 cash to show the immigration officer. The copperplate script of the passenger manifest records his occupation as 'peasant', but he could read and write. Asked where he was going, the young man said he was intending to stay with his friend Vasilio Angelopoulos in 113th Street, New York. Two other Greeks, named Michelopoulos and Capos, were apparently travelling with G. Firos; they too said they were from 'Pires' and were heading for the establishment of Mr Angelopoulos.

In 1907 more than 22,000 Greeks left Greece for New York, most of them from Patras, the main port of embarkation, with lesser numbers from Kalamata and Zante. Others went from Piraeus and from ports in Italy, France and England. In Greece there was alarm at the scale of this emigration. Nothing comparable had happened since the fall of Constantinople. Soon the new Greek Minister to the United States, Lambros Coromilas, was telling his audiences, perhaps with a note of anxiety, that a quarter of Greece's working population was in America. There were concerns in the United States too. President Theodore Roosevelt tried to get the Greek authorities to cooperate in stemming the flow. But the Greek Government would not act. No doubt the money the Greek Americans were remitting back to Greece was a consideration.

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Both the Greek state and the Greek Church worried that Greece would be bled of its young men who were wanted at home for nation building. There was concern at the depopulation of rural areas and the rising cost of labour. A steady refrain was kept up by persons in authority who painted America as the original *mavri xenitia*, or black foreignness, a place of suffering and privation where Greeks lived in teeming cities and worked like galley slaves. Much was made of unfortunate returnees sometimes carried from the ships at Piraeus — struck down by consumption or other diseases. Inevitably, the case against immigration was exaggerated and the Greek Minister to the United States was attacked by the Greek-American daily newspaper *Atlantis* for depicting Greek immigrants as dying in city streets, becoming rag and bone pickers, leaving for Chile, or — worst of all — depending on Italians for charity. The warnings did not affect the stream of emigrants, however. For Greece's many rural poor, America was the land of opportunity and everyone, it seemed, knew a man who had gone there for a few years and returned with enough money to set himself up for life. Yet, even decades later the Greek Church was warning its flock against the perils of emigration. On a visit to Kythera in the early 1980s I went to a church service one Sunday in the village of Mitata. There, a visiting bishop sermonised against the lure of wealth in foreign lands. He warned of the joyless life and the unremitting labour that awaited us in such places. I think his point was lost on the many Australians in the congregation.

I kept wondering about that young Greek, G. Firos, who arrived in New York on the *Calabria* in November 1903. Was he the brother 'Georges', mentioned by Panagiotis Firos? I could not say with any certainty that he was, but there seemed to be no other immigrant recorded at Ellis Island with a comparable claim. Yet, even the existence of a Firos brother named George had to be questioned. I had collected the names of 10 children of Ioannes and Maria Firos of Mitata and, although there was a Georgia, there was not a George among them. There are two Firos or Feros descendants in Sydney, Australia, named George but each believes he is named from his mother's side; not the Firos side. However, the descendants agree on one

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thing about Ioannes and Maria Firos: they had 13 children. I wondered if it was possible that George might be among the three unknown ones; an older brother who was not stillborn, who survived infancy and who went to America early, settled in St. Louis, never married, died long ago and was forgotten? Unlikely. But it was an intriguing idea.

In 1906, or perhaps 1907, another Firos brother traveled to America and headed for St. Louis, Missouri. This was Philippos Firos Katsehamos, on the first of his two sojourns in America. Deciding which year Philippos first went to America requires a choice between two versions he gave of his travels, assuming one does not reject both of them. On his second trip in 1910 he told immigration officers at Ellis Island that he had previously been in America from 1906 to 1908. In 1911 he told the Cole County Circuit Court in Jefferson City, Missouri that he landed at New York on 8 March 1907 from the White Star Liner *Baltic*. There seem to be no records at Ellis Island to support either version.

I passed through St. Louis once, in a Greyhound bus on the way to Oklahoma. It was a hot August morning in 1977 when we sped onto a bridge and the Mississippi River was suddenly beneath, the banks so far apart, so much murky water flowing between them. If you come from Australia and see the Mississippi River for the first time you can only look upon it in silence and awe. Ahead of the bus, sprawling on the western bank, was downtown St. Louis, and over it towered another American symbol, the Gateway Arch, evoking the city's history as the portal to the Great West. In the old capitals of Europe and the Near East there are masonry arches built by the Romans to mark their triumphs, and more recent ones serving much the same purpose. This arch expressed the same idea but in a streamlined way, not in bricks but in gleaming metal, and on so vast a scale and rising to such a height that it posed a hazard to passing aeroplanes. Such is the triumph of America. The arch carried another meaning. It resembled those iron hoops on the covered wagons that started out from St. Louis in the nineteenth century, following the long trails to Santa Fe and San Francisco and Oregon.

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In the early 1900s a young man landing in America would see good reason to make his way to St. Louis. Immigrants or their children accounted for more than half of the population of the city, so there was work there for newcomers to America. St. Louis hosted the World's Fair in 1904, and great exhibition halls had been built in the city's Forest Park. In the same year the Olympic Games, previously held only in Europe — in Athens and Paris — crossed the Atlantic to be held in St. Louis. The city grew up at the centre of North America on limestone bluffs overlooking the great flow of the Mississippi River near its meeting with the Missouri. These great navigable waterways linked St. Louis to the interior of the continent and to the ocean through New Orleans. The region was part of the vast French province of Louisiana when fur traders judged it to be a suitable place for a trading post and began building there in 1764 among the native Osage and Missouri Indians. The village was named for Louis IX, the sainted King of France, but centuries earlier others had settled there and all around were to be seen pyramids of earth left by a vanished people known as the mound builders. The title to Louisiana went to Spain and then back to France before it was purchased by the United States in 1803. President Thomas Jefferson was anxious to explore the new territory and in the following year Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out from St. Louis in a keel boat and voyaged west up the great muddy Missouri River on an expedition that would take them to the shores of the Pacific. Positioned at the crossroads of the continent, St. Louis in the mid-nineteenth century was a large and confident city that dominated the commerce of the West, but the decades that followed would see its star fall as Missouri — a slave state with Union sympathies — was torn in the struggle between North and South. When Panagiotis Firos arrived in St. Louis it was still a vital city, but its pre-eminent position in the Mid-West had been lost to Chicago which eastern money had favoured for 50 years and had fashioned into the railway hub of America.

Over half a million people lived in St. Louis in 1907, including old German and Irish and Jewish immigrant communities. Italians and Greeks

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were recent arrivals. There were coloured neighbourhoods but the great migration of rural blacks into the city had not yet begun. Market Street, where Panagiotes said he was heading, was close to the heart of town, a street many blocks long running west from the Mississippi River. In the early 1900s there were saloons there catering to most classes of people. Tom Turpin's Rosebud Bar was a gathering place for coloureds to drink and play pool, enjoy music, and eat in the cafe in the back. The western end, around Market and 20th Street, was known as Chestnut Valley, a neighbourhood of brothels and rough taverns and black social clubs that inspired the stories of 'Frankie and Johnny' and 'Bad Man Stagger Lee', and where the popular music of the day, a fusion of Afro-American and European harmonies called Ragtime, was born. A young man like Panagiotes would be a fan of Ragtime music. The American middle class were, and they were buying it in rolls for their player pianos and in wax cylinders for their phonograph machines. Scott Joplin and his publisher John Stark, who launched the craze with Maple Leaf Rag, were both St. Louis men, although Joplin left his fifteen-room house situated several blocks north of Market Street, and quit the city in 1906.

Young Panagiotes Firos arrived in America with no capital, some elementary schooling and a few words of English, so he did not have a wide choice of employment. He needed the help of an established man just to get started. But he was smart, physically and mentally strong, and a willing worker. He could expect to find employment as a shoeshine boy, a dishwasher, a labourer; he could also push a handcart through the streets peddling sweets or flowers or vegetables. Many young men made their way to America under a system of indentured labour. A patron would advance them the fare and some money for expenses through an agent in Greece and in return they would be obliged to work for the patron for their first year. Every cent they earned, including their tips, belonged to the employer who paid them a tiny wage. This system operated in immigrant communities other than the Greeks and the widely-used name for the men who profited from it was the Italian *padrone*.

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According to the historian of Greeks in America, Theodore Saloutos, a *padrone's* boys would be crowded into cramped living quarters, often above or in the back of a shop. They would work 14 hours a day or longer, seven days a week. Their letters home might be censored, contact with Americans discouraged, and opportunities for learning English and bettering themselves denied. The *padrone* had ways to ensure that a boy repaid his investment; he might even take a mortgage over the parents' home and lands. These arrangements were illegal under United States labour laws but were common in the shoeshine business and the street peddling trade and, in 1907 when Panagiotis Firos went to America, well-publicised efforts were being made by United States authorities to stop them. New laws had been passed and some of the *padrones* had already been convicted. Yet there were always boys ready to work for the *padrones*. They cheerfully accepted the poor pay and conditions as the price of entry to America. I suspect there was once a *padrone* who could answer questions about the journey made by the young Panagiotis Firos to America: how a 16-year-old boy found the resolve to leave his home and travel thousands of miles to a strange country; how he got the fare for his passage and the \$20 'show money' he needed to pass through Ellis Island, and why he would tell the shipping line and immigration officers that he was on his way to meet a non-existent brother in St. Louis named George.

Many jobs in America were not open to young Panagiotis as the labour unions were unfriendly to this latest wave of immigrants. The organisers, usually of northern European background, saw the Greeks as too different in their appearance and in their ways. Similar antipathy was shown to Italians, Bulgarians and Hungarians. The union men had all sorts of reasons for excluding Greeks: they were not citizens; they spoke a strange language; they stuck together; they sent their money back to Greece; they were a threat to wages and conditions. They had been used as strikebreakers in Chicago in 1904. In Omaha, Nebraska in 1909 Greek labourers were accused of acting as strikebreakers in the slaughterhouses. An incident sparked a riot there and in eight hours a mob smashed the properties

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of the Greeks and drove 1,200 of them from the city. The newspapers did not support such extreme reactions to the Greeks but they did reflect the general feeling of antipathy.

Panagiotes probably spent most of his first year in St. Louis either working or sleeping. But even under the worst conditions there would have been a free hour late at night or at the midday break, which he could spend at a nearby *kafeneion*. There he could join friends to eat and drink, play cards, read the Greek-American dailies *Atlantis* or *Panbellinos* out of New York, or *Hellas* out of Chicago, argue about politics and do business, all in an atmosphere thickened by cigarette smoke. The *kafeneion* might be a rented shop in some likely spot with some cheap tables and chairs and a picture on the wall of the Parthenon or a hero of the Greek War of Independence. The owner would pitch into the work himself to keep costs down and would be busy preparing and serving thick coffee and mezedes, sweets and soft drinks. Meanwhile a man with a *bouzouki* or a *santouri*, or sometimes a *Karagiozi* — Punch and Judy — show, would provide entertainment, the performers making their money from tips. There was a large Greek population in St. Louis and the national predilection for forming organisations would also have produced a *Leskbe*, or Greek club, for each of the larger island and provincial communities.

In a strange land Greeks looked to the church more than they did at home. It was something familiar they could hang on to. When Greeks began going to North America they found the Eastern Orthodox Church already there ahead of them, but it was not the Greek church. Russian Orthodoxy had followed Russian settlers from Siberia across to Alaska in earlier centuries. After the United States purchased that vast territory from the Czar, the Russian church spread south to San Francisco and then east across the United States. When there were only a few Greeks in America they attended Russian or ecumenical Orthodox services, but nationalist politics and nervousness about Pan-Slavism soon required that Greeks have their own churches. Similar concerns dictated that the Greek Orthodox Church in America should be answerable to Athens rather than

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Constantinople, although years later politics would intervene once more to reverse the situation. Whenever Greeks settled in a city, a *kinotitos* or community organisation soon appeared to set up and manage a church. This happened in St. Louis in 1904 when the Aghias Trias Church Community was founded. The inevitable factional disputes among parishioners soon led to the founding of a second Church, the Evangelismos. There is no reason to think that the arrival of Greek clerics was much noted by the general community in St. Louis. However, Saloutos notes that the appearance of Greek priests in the streets of American cities did sometimes produce a reaction. Their long hair and beards, stovepipe hats and robes seemed bizarre to American tastes and some were harassed or followed by jeering mobs. A few were even stoned. There were lessons to be learned before the church would adapt to the new environment.

When Panagiotis Firos came to St. Louis in the summer of 1907 the *laissez faire* spirit that inspired American capitalism was in retreat. The stockmarket had crashed in March and it crashed again in October with the failure of the Knickerbocker Trust and the Westinghouse Electric Company. This touched off a panic that spread across the nation. Banks and businesses closed their doors. This fourth economic downturn in as many decades would lead to the regulation of the economy through the United States Federal Reserve System. In Missouri, Joseph Folk, a Democrat, had been Governor since 1904. He rose to prominence as a St. Louis Prosecutor by bringing corrupt city 'bosses', officials and businessmen before the courts. He had some success in curbing the power of the railroad lobby and brought in laws to control child labour and implemented compulsory education laws. Governor Folk also curtailed gambling and enforced Sunday closing laws, although he could make little impression on the levels of vice and crime in the cities. The Attorney General in the Folk administration was Herbert Hadley who had prosecuted the huge Standard Oil company and won. Hadley, a liberal Republican like Teddy Roosevelt, went on to become Governor of Missouri in 1908, however, his programme was frustrated by the Democrats' hold on the State Assembly.

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President Teddy Roosevelt had been in the White House since 1901, the year that McKinley's term as president, and his life, were ended by an assassin's bullet. Roosevelt's trust-busting crusade against great corporations — the 'malefactors of wealth' — and his reforms in the stewardship of natural resources such as water, forests and coal, were popular in Missouri. He was elected in his own right in 1904 with the help of Missouri voters who had not supported a Republican Presidential nomination since electing one of their own, the Civil War hero Ulysses S. Grant, in 1868.

The elections of 1908 were among the first to see motor vehicles used in a political campaign. The Senate candidates, William Stone and Joseph Folk, drove all over Missouri and spoke to hundreds of audiences. Stone, the older man and the incumbent, was re-elected. Republican William Howard Taft won the presidential campaign that year with the blessing of the retiring President Roosevelt. Missourians voted for Taft by a small margin expecting he would pursue a liberal program and carry on the reforms Teddy Roosevelt had begun, but they would be disappointed.

Philippos Firos left St. Louis and America in 1908 and returned to Greece to perform his service in the Hellenic Army. When he completed his term he boarded the *Patris* at Pireaus and departed for his second stint in America. On 28 April 1910, at the age of 23, he arrived at Ellis Island. A few years older than his brother Panagiotes, Philippos was a strong man with the build of a wrestler. He had been a sailor with the British Merchant Service. He had served in the Greek Army. He knew his way around. The carefully formed script of the passenger manifest is disturbed in several places by what may be Philippos' insistent hand. He would not have his name spelt 'Fyros'; it is struck out and 'Firos' written in its place. Later, following his brother Peter's example, he would change the spelling to 'Feros'. He would not be described as a 'workman'; this was struck through and 'sailor' written in its place. Nor would he allow anyone to demean his financial standing; where '\$25.00' had been written as the amount of cash in his possession, this was crossed out and '\$38.00' written instead. Having established that he was a man of some consequence and able to both

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read and write, Philippos went on to confirm ‘Johannie’ — Ioannes or John — ‘Firou’ as his next of kin in Greece. Unlike entries for other passengers which bear no endorsement, his entry is stamped ‘Admitted’ — perhaps the immigration officer had doubts about him and referred his papers to a superior.

Philippos declared at Ellis Island that he was going to join his brother ‘Peter Feros’ at 109th Street, St. Louis. Panagiotis Feros was adapting himself to life in America. His given name Panagiotis does not have a direct equivalent in English and he followed the convention in calling himself Peter. Changing Feros to Feros might have checked the annoying tendency of Americans to pronounce his surname as Fyros. He had also moved. He was well away from the saloons of Market Street. Perhaps he was on his way up in the world.

In 1910, the year that Phillip had his reunion with Peter, a move was made to bring prohibition to Missouri. An amendment was proposed to the State Constitution. It was defeated by a decisive margin and the ‘No’ vote was especially large in St. Louis. The prohibition movement in America must have seemed a mystery to the Feros brothers, who, as Greeks, attached no great moral significance to the taking of alcohol, generally used it in moderation, and saw wine as a natural accompaniment to food. No doubt there were other things about the country that puzzled them. The following year saw the arrival of the last of the Feros brothers to make the journey to America. This was ‘Casmus’ — Cosmas or Cosmo — who was 19 when he landed at Ellis Island on 4 August 1911 from the *Athinai* out of Patras. His entry in the ship’s passenger manifest mentions his father ‘Joanney’ — Ioannes — in Kythera. It seems that by this time Peter and Phillip had moved from St. Louis to Jefferson City, as Cosmas declared that he was on his way to the Missouri capital to join his brother ‘Peter Feros’ at 114 E. High Street.

Jefferson City is a morning train ride west of St. Louis on the south bank of the Missouri River. When Peter and Phillip Feros took that train ride, perhaps late in 1910, they would have come to a smallish town dominated

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by a domed capitol building standing on bluffs rising above the muddy Missouri. Over on the northern side of the river the prairie stretched away under fields of corn and livestock, and on the south side were hills covered in forests of oak, ash, elm, and hickory running up to the Ozark Plateau. There was a large bridge spanning the river, and there was also a state penitentiary where the inmates were kept busy in factories turning out all manner of goods for sale, or else let out for hire to work around the town. There was a governor's mansion, the usual shops and houses, and a country club. High Street, where Peter and Phillip would live and work, was near the centre of town, not far from the capitol building and a few blocks back from the river.

Sometimes towns are created to serve as capitals because there is no existing town powerful enough to take the prize. Australia's capital Canberra, situated between Melbourne and Sydney, is one of these compromise capitals. Jefferson City, situated between St. Louis and Kansas City, is another. The site, chosen in the 1820s, was rocky and hilly and had not been made into farms so there was plenty of government land to sell as the new capital expanded. The place was named for Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States.

The work Peter and Phillip Feros were engaged in at Jefferson City — and perhaps in the latter years at St. Louis — is suggested in Phillip's naturalisation record filed in the local county court office in January 1911. It gives his occupation as 'candy maker' and one assumes that both brothers were in the confectionery business, a trade that many Greeks entered at the time. Some of the candy Phillip made might have found its way into the receptions held at the Governor's Mansion but it is unlikely that Phillip or Peter ever did. Yet, there were some exciting moments in their time in Jefferson City. One of these was on the night of 5 February 1911 when a bolt of lightning struck the capitol building. It caught fire and burned furiously, and the heavily timbered dome eventually collapsed into the interior in a shower of sparks and flame. At one point it appeared that all the historic papers in the building would be lost, but men were pressed into service

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in the crisis and much was saved. Prisoners from the penitentiary figured in this dangerous mission and Governor Hadley later commuted the sentences of several of these men in recognition of their efforts.

The destruction of the Capitol building renewed opposition to Jefferson City as the state capital and for a while the future for the town looked grim. But a campaign was organised by local business interests and their efforts were rewarded in August 1911 when Missourians voted to authorise a bond issue funding the construction of a new capitol building in Jefferson City. The result of the vote came late at night but this did not stop a crowd of revelers coming out to celebrate and an impromptu parade passing through the streets. By the time the new capitol building was completed in 1917, Peter and Phillip Feros had quit Jefferson City, but I imagine they would have approved of the reliefs reminiscent of the Parthenon that adorned its pediment, the great columns with their Corinthian capitals, and the statue of Ceres — the goddess of agriculture — topping the cupola.

* * *

My father told me that Panagiotes Feros Katsehamos served in not just one war like most men, but in three wars: he served in the First Balkan War against the Turks and in the Second Balkan War against the Bulgarians. No sooner had he married Kyriakoula Kondre in 1917 than he was called away to the First World War. His brother Philippos also served in the Balkan Wars. They must have returned to Greece from America in 1912 to enlist. George Cosmas Protosaltis, known as Dessis, who met both men later in Australia and came to know them well, told me, 'they got together with a group of Greeks in America and the lot of them went back to Greece and signed up for the war'. Later, when I learned more about those times in America, I understood what these words from Dessis meant.

In 1910, when Peter and Phillip Feros were probably still in St. Louis, it seemed that the time had come to make their personal sacrifice for the Great Idea. The nationalist policies of the Young Turk regime in Constan-

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tinople were outraging Greek opinion. The mood for war with Turkey was building, not only in Greece, but also in Serbia and Bulgaria. In all the large cities in America, young Greek men were joining volunteer military units preparing to return to Greece when the war came. A committee was set up to organise the units and former officers of the Greek army offered to train them. Many of the volunteers did receive some training in marching, gymnastics and tactics, but it was rather ad hoc. The men were advised not to buy guns and uniforms but in San Francisco a local military supply store was ready to outfit volunteers in the kit of American soldiers, and a volunteer unit in Haverhill, Massachusetts posed for photographs showing every man in uniform, each wearing a peaked cap and holding a rifle. By the middle of 1910 there were about 50 units with a total membership of over 7,000 men.

In that year Spyros Matsoukas, a patriotic campaigner, came to America to raise money for a new Greek warship. Theodore Saloutos describes Matsoukas as 'a sentimentalist, a colourful orator and a third-rate poet' all of which was no doubt true and apparently just what was wanted by the great crowds of Greeks that flocked to hear him in the home country and in Egypt and Cyprus. Matsoukas often appeared in the uniform of a Greek Evzone, or highlander, a colourful figure in a white *fustanella*, or kilt, and a tasseled cap, whipping up the emotions of his audience with phrases such as 'Forward boys, our country needs money and blood to become great!' Saloutos records that in the Greek neighbourhood of Boston on 25 March, Greek Independence day, volunteer units marched in a parade while Spyros Matsoukas stood on a platform holding a silver cross in one hand and a raised Greek flag in the other. Over \$25,000 was raised for the new warship.

About this time the Greek Minister in Washington, Lambros Coromilas, hit on the idea of raising money for the Greek Government through a tax on all Greek immigrants in the United States. To avoid legal problems the tax was to be extracted as a fee for a certificate of Greek citizenship issued by Greek consular offices. Not surprisingly, the idea received little

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support from American Greeks who were willing to give to Greece but not to be taxed by the Greek government on their American earnings. While the Coromilas tax did not eventuate, his idea was not completely lost on later Greek administrations. At times, when I visited the Greek consulate in Sydney to settle family matters, I was asked to pay a fee and issued with a 'Certificate of Nationality'. Over the years I accumulated a collection of these certificates. They express some nice sentiments but I have been told that as far as nationality is concerned they are of no significance at all.

When the expected war in the Balkans did not come in 1910, the excitement faded, morale ebbed, and the men went back to their usual occupations. However, volunteers continued to meet in halls and parks and vacant lots to practise their drills in preparation for the trial to come. They would not have long to wait. Peter Feros was in America for most of the Presidential election campaign of 1912 which brought Teddy Roosevelt back to the political stage after travels in Africa and other parts. No doubt he took an interest in Roosevelt's public break with President Taft and the split in the party, with Taft as the official Republican nominee and Roosevelt leading a progressive movement. Peter Feros was probably either back in Greece or intent on getting there when the election was held and he may not have paid much attention to the way the Democrat candidate Woodrow Wilson benefited from the dissension in his opponents' ranks, and how the splitting of the Republican vote allowed Woodrow Wilson the Democrat to come through as the winner. The new president would go on to an historic role in the Great War to come, and in the peace to follow. He would also play a part in the denouement of Greece's Megali Idea on the plains of Asia Minor.

By August 1912 there were signs in Greece that war was coming in the Balkans. Military classes were being called up and men of military age arriving at Greek ports to emigrate were being sent back to their homes. Patriotic meetings and special church services were held in Greek communities throughout America. Thomas Hutchinson, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, was down at the Battery on New York harbour in

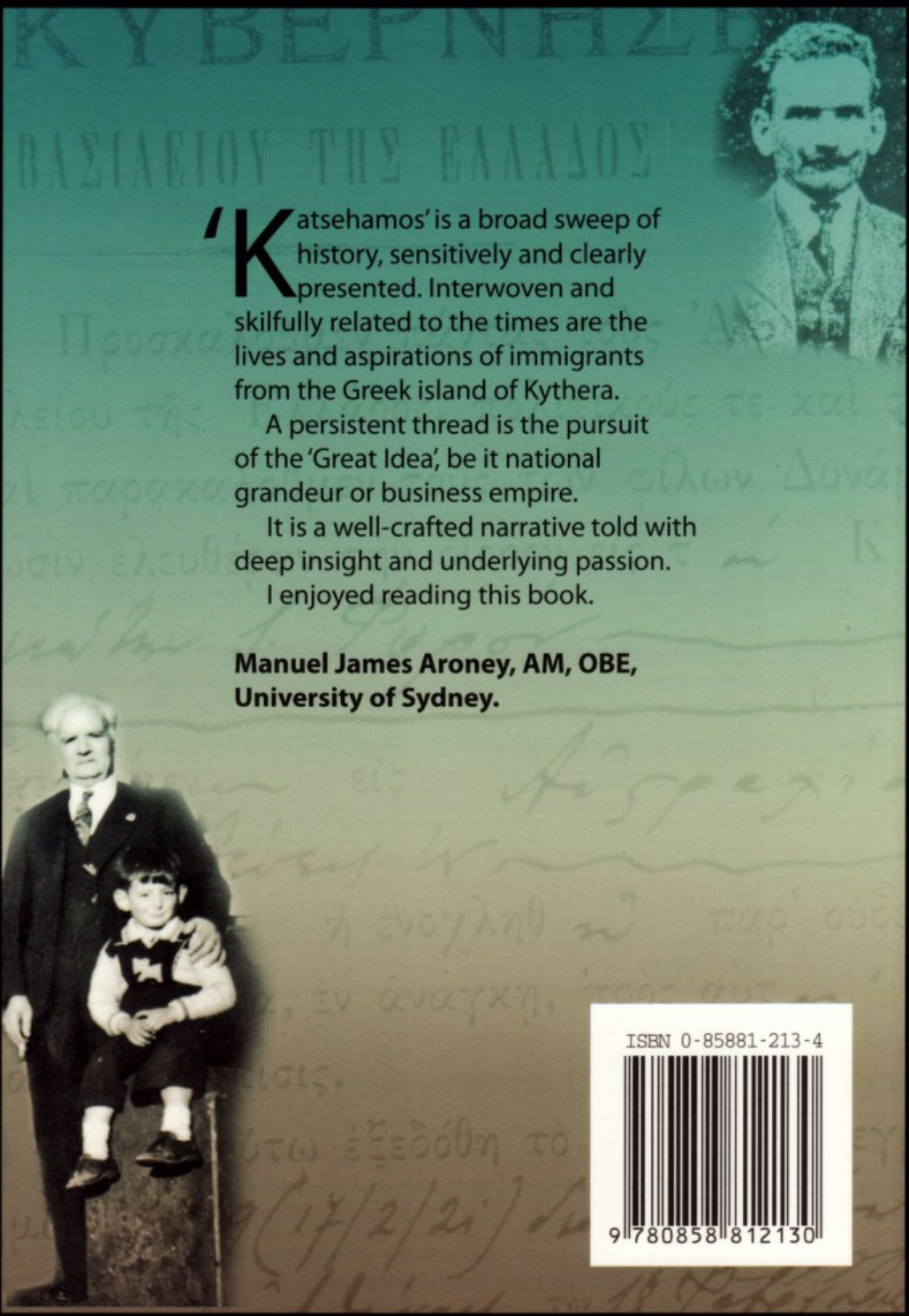
KATSEHAMOS AND THE GREAT IDEA

the autumn of 1912 and saw ‘thousands and thousands of Greek patriots boarding every ship that was leaving’. Hutchinson was disappointed with Teddy Roosevelt’s defeat in the presidential election and, ‘looking for new fields of excitement’, he decided to join the Greeks. He boarded the *Laura* in November with ‘a thousand enthusiastic and patriotic Greek volunteers, all rushing to the Hellenic Kingdom to volunteer their services’. Theodore Saloutos writes of those days: ‘The months of October, November, and December 1912 were to become memorable moments in Greek–American history. Members of volunteer units — Greeks born in Arcadia, Sparta, Epirus, Macedonia, the islands, and Asia Minor — massed together in their respective communities, paraded down the streets of their cities, listened to patriotic orators, and departed to defend their country.’ Among those departing crowds of young men were the Katsehamos boys, Peter Feros and his brother Phillip.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BRITAIN'S GREEK ISLANDS

Kythera and the Ionian Islands 1809 to 1864



'Katsehamos' is a broad sweep of history, sensitively and clearly presented. Interwoven and skilfully related to the times are the lives and aspirations of immigrants from the Greek island of Kythera.

A persistent thread is the pursuit of the 'Great Idea', be it national grandeur or business empire.

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I enjoyed reading this book.

**Manuel James Aroney, AM, OBE,
University of Sydney.**

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