



# Armenian Cultural Conservancy NEWSLETTER

## Editor's Reflections

by Mary Mirigian Ekmalian

This season has been quite eventful for the Armenian Cultural Conservancy (ACC). Our volunteer committee recently made the exciting move to our new office space at the California Armenian Home (CAH). We are now located next door to The Vineyards dining room and welcome your visit during limited office hours of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. We are currently learning a complex software system and will soon be able to send our membership renewal notices and this newsletter electronically. So as to reduce mailing expenses, please provide your e-mail address to us: [armenianconservancy@gmail.com](mailto:armenianconservancy@gmail.com).

We appreciate your continued support and participation! During this settling-in period, we hosted several events:

On January 16th, we arranged for another "Let's Eat Out" Fundraiser Night at the Old Spaghetti Factory in support of the ACC while also enjoying company in an establishment decorated with historic photos and memorabilia.



Our second in a series of *Culinary Demonstrations* was held on Saturday, January 26 at the CAH, AACL Hall. Workstations were set up around the room for a hands-on experience of making *manti*. Approximately 30 bakers had the opportunity to roll out dough, cut it into little squares, stuff them with the



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Deacon Van Der Mugerdechian displays a map showing the location of Van, Armenia.

## From Armenia to America: The Histories of Two Immigrant Families

by Michael Rettig

Documenting and preserving the stories of one's ancestors and their immigration to America is itself a noble endeavor, and it takes on increased importance for those whose ancestors survived genocide. The very goal of a genocidal regime is to obliterate a people and any memory of their prior existence. To remember those lost, as well as those who survived, honors their suffering and perseverance. For this reason, the Armenian Cultural Conservancy (ACC) of Fresno hosted a community lecture, "Family Histories of Immigration to the United States," at the Woodward Park Library on April 25, following the 104th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Presenters Deacon Van Der Mugerdechian, ACC board member; Zaroohi Der Mugerdechian, former principal of the Charlie Keyan Armenian Community School; and Dr.



Family History Presenters, from left, Deacon Van Der Mugerdechian, Zaroohi Der Mugerdechian, and Dr. Matthew Jendian.

Matthew Ari Jendian, Professor of Sociology and Director of Humanics at Fresno State, shared their family histories using oral histories, memoirs, letters, and photographs.

Deacon Van opened the event by emphasizing the importance of documenting family stories for future generations. He encouraged the audience to research their

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## Editor's Reflections

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meat mixture, and arrange it in a pan.

After baking the finished product, we enjoyed our efforts with a light, yet hearty lunch. (See photos.)



A note of appreciation goes to the Armenian Relief Society "manti ladies" (Mary Ekmalian, Jill Eskender, Serpouhie Messerlian, Barbara Mortanian, Arda Toktas, Patty Torosian, Ani Tutunjian, and Audra Stockdale) for assisting in the manti-making instructions.

The Conservancy also thanks Zar Der Mugrdechian for taking on the responsibility of curating an encased window-display (highlighting Armenian Mimiatures) at the Woodward Park Regional Library during the month of April. On April 25, our first in a series of *Family History Nights* was engaging and well-received. (See Michael Rettig's article and photos.)

Our long-awaited office *Open House* was celebrated on Sunday afternoon, May 19. Although the threat of rain discouraged attendance, those present witnessed the presentation by retired FRESNO BEE artist Perry Huffman of his Saroyan paintings. George Juarez, The Vineyards Executive Director, was present to accept the gift of Hoffman's Saroyan collage. The weather ended up being clear, so refreshments were enjoyed by all out in the patio. Thank you to the ladies that prepared the appetizers and desserts. (See photos.)



The next *Movie Night* will be held at the CAH, AACL Hall on **June 21**, at 6:30 p.m., so that the CAH residents will have the inter-generational occasion to participate. (See flyer.)

On Tuesday, **July 30**, 6:30 p.m., the Woodward Park Regional Library is reserved for another *Family History*

presentation. If you are interested in sharing your family story and photographs as part of this series, please contact Van Der Mugrdechian by calling our office: 559-835-0837.

Please save the date of **September 28** for our annual fundraiser to be held in the beautiful courtyard of The Vineyards. The committee is beginning to make preparations and we welcome the involvement and input of additional people and ideas. If you would like to be part of lending a helping hand, please call our office with your name and phone number.

This year has been a time of many exciting opportunities. In addition to acquiring our new office space, ACC was recently notified that the historic Vartanian house located downtown on "F" Street must be moved for development of the property. We have the opportunity to save the house by finding a new location and covering the cost of the move. Built in 1891 for Hovageem Vartanian, the house is an architectural marvel and one of the oldest houses in Fresno! (See photo.) It is in excellent condition, (updated to serve as offices for the

Fresno Rescue Mission) and as a ready-to-use facility, it can serve our immediate need for a repository to be the home of ACC's mission. We are looking for a

new location, as well as raising sufficient funds to facilitate the move. If you are inclined to contribute to these relocation expenditures, please contact us. Time is of the essence and we appreciate your support in making our dream for a designated space of our very own to become a reality in -- and for the benefit of -- our community.

## Family Histories

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own ancestors and to share their histories with the community in similar lectures in the future. "This presentation is one step towards the Conservancy's goal of preserving this history."

Deacon Van and his sister Zaroohi shared the story of their grandfather Anooshavan Der Mugrdechian, using his memoir, "Anooshavan: The Intrepid Survivor," as well as family photographs and stories. Anooshavan grew up in Aikestan, Van. He fought in the city's defense during the Hamidian Massacres before moving to Urmi, where he met his wife Rakel Sahagian. He moved to the United States to seek a safe haven for his family, but responded to the call for volunteers to return to his homeland to fight in the Defense of Van in 1915. Anooshavan and the other Armenian volunteers successfully defended Van, but were forced to evacuate the city with the Russian Army. Later, during the long exodus from Van to the Caucasus, Rakel left their infant daughter Lucy on a rock because she felt they could no longer feed her. Upon hearing the cries of her daughter, Rakel immediately returned for her. They traveled through Siberia to reach Yokohama, Japan, and then to the United States. Lucy died in Fresno at the age of 102. Several community members in the audience remembered her.

Anooshavan's family immigrated to Fresno County in 1917 when the congregation at the St. Gregory Armenian Church in Fowler invited his father, Der Melkisedek, to serve as parish priest. Der Melkisedek was a school-

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Dr. Jendian dons his grandfather's Armenian costume. Right photo: Dr. Jendian displays a picture of his great-grandparents



## Family Histories

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master, teacher, and author in Van who opened the first all-girls school in the city and created children's songs.

Deacon Van shared that while he was preparing his photo exhibit for the night's presentation, Dr. Jendian noticed his own great-grandfather in a photo, as the caretaker at the St. Hripsime School for Girls, which was established by Der Melkisedek. "Discovering both of our great-grandfathers in the same photo in Van is another revelation of the connection we all have if we look deep enough," Dr. Jendian remarked. Deacon Van and Zaroochi concluded their family history by sharing childhood memories from their grandparents' home in Fresno.

Dr. Jendian presented his family history, wearing his grandfather Avedis Antranikian's traditional Armenian clothing. Avedis, also from Van, grew up in a home his family had lived in for generations. However,

Avedis' early life was marked with tragedies. When Avedis was eight years old, his father, Ohannes, was ambushed and murdered by Turkish gendarmes. Three months later, Avedis' 17-year-old brother, Armenag, died from an unrelated accident. Avedis did his part in defending Van by digging bullets lodged into the wall from Turkish gunfire and giving them to the gunsmiths to reload shells, and often dodging bullets whizzing past.

Like Anoshavan and the Der Mgrdechian family, Avedis and his mother, Abridsemeh, evacuated Van with the Russian army. They embarked on an 11-day, nearly 200-mile long, arduous walk to Igdır where they providently encountered the eldest Antranikian brother Mourad who had voluntarily enlisted from America to help fight in the Defense of Van. Mourad arranged for Avedis and Abridsemeh to travel by wagon and train from Igdır to Etchmiadzin, to Moscow, to Oslo, Norway, where they boarded Oscar II, headed to the

United States and arriving on Ellis Island on July 28, 1916. After a short stay with sister Calipse Hotzakorgian's family in Everett, Massachusetts, the Antranikians traveled cross-country by train and settled in Kingsburg, California, where brother Yeghiazar had settled. Avedis was known in high school for his poetry and athleticism, earning varsity letters in three sports – football, basketball, and baseball.

After graduating from Kingsburg High in 1926, he married Rose Missakian in 1933, and they worked in canneries until they built and opened the Elm Avenue Fruit Market in 1936, which became The Fresno Grape Stake Yard in the 1960s. In 1943, Avedis was touted as a "local hero" on the front page of THE FRESNO BEE, for saving Mrs. Reuben Taylor from drowning in Preacher's Hole in the Kings River. The young boy from Van who had such a tumultuous childhood, died in Fresno in 1973 doing what he loved – folk dancing.

Though many Armenians grew up hearing similar stories, it is important to document, preserve, and continuously share these memories with generations further removed from the Genocide. Presentations such as these foster collective storytelling and help elucidate the many connections among Armenians in the Diaspora. More importantly, they keep alive the memory of those who perished and those who persevered in 1915 so they will never be lost to history.

*Michael Rettig is a recent Fresno State graduate with a master's degree in History. He is the former editor of Hye Shazhoom.*



Memorabilia from the Der Mgrdechian family displayed.



Peggy Akbiyikian, Sandy and Wayne Hotzakorgian visit.





## Armenian Cultural Conservancy

2037 W. Bullard Avenue, PMB 106  
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# MOVIE NIGHT

**Friday, June 21, 2019**

**California Armenian Home AACL Hall**

6720 E. Kings Canyon Road, Fresno

Begins promptly at **6:30 p.m.**

Free and Open to the Public

Sponsored by the Armenian Cultural Conservancy

Not about to cede control of any facet of her life – or death – retired business-woman Harriet Lawler (Shirley MacLaine) hires a young writer (Amanda Seyfried) to pen an obituary worthy of her. When the results fall short of Harriet's expectations, she sets out to reshape her legacy.



## Future Home of the Armenian Cultural Conservancy?

The Queen Anne style, Vartanian home, located at 362 "F" Street, Fresno, was built in 1891. The octagonal tank house is the property's most distinctive element. Today it is the accounting office for the Fresno Rescue Mission. They plan on removing it from their property. Even though it is on the list of Local Register of Historic Resources, it can be destroyed with a City permit. As a Conservancy it is our obligation to save this house. What better way is there than to move it to an appropriate location and use it as the first structure of the Armenian Cultural Conservancy Repository. Now is the time to invest in the future home of the Armenian Cultural Conservancy. Please make checks payable to ACC, write "Building Fund" on the memo line, and mail to 2037 W. Bullard Avenue, PMB 106, Fresno CA 93711.

To collect, preserve and interpret the evidence of the Armenian experience in Central California in an enduring institution of learning.



### Armenian Cultural Conservancy Logo

The six- and eight-pointed stars have a long history in pre-Christian Armenia and have been adopted in Church architecture and decorative arts. They are thought to have magical powers and are used extensively in astronomy and sacred art. The logo's wheel of eternity signifies life; the eight-pointed star represents the eight architectural pillars of the Armenian Church; the color purple represents the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Genocide; the gold color is the richness of the Armenian culture.

This logo was created by Alain Ekmalian.

*A special thank-you to Alain Ekmalian for the photography.*

### Armenian Cultural Conservancy

2037 West Bullard Ave.  
PMB 106  
Fresno, CA 93711-1200

559-835-0837

## Community Calendar

**June 16, Sunday, 10:30 a.m.**, St. Gregory Father's Day Picnic, California Armenian Home, 6720 E. Kings Canyon Road, Music by Richard Hagopian.

**June 17-21, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon**, Vacation Bible School, First Armenian Presbyterian Church, \$15 per child or \$35 per family, "In the Wild," for more info call 559-237-6638.

**June 17-21, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**, Vacation Bible School, St. Paul Armenian Church, "Saints of the Church," for more info call Tracy at 559-285-4117.

**June 21, Friday, 6:30 p.m.**, Movie Night, "The Last Word," starring Shirley MacLaine, hosted by the Armenian Cultural Conservancy, at the California Armenian Home AACL Hall, free and open to the public, for more info call 559-835-0837.

**June 21, Friday, 6:30 p.m.**, St. Gregory Family Movie Night, Pot-Luck Dinner, 559-834-2919.

**June 28, 6:00 p.m., 29, 9:00 a.m. & 30th, 10:00 a.m.**, Vacation Bible School, St. Gregory Armenian Church, "God's Love is Everywhere," for more info call Cathy 559-834-2919.

**July 15-19**, Vacation Bible School, Pilgrim Armenian Congressional Church, for more info call 559-229-2915.

**July 20, Saturday, 5:00 p.m.**, St. Mary Armenian Church, For Faith of Zion's 3rd Annual Ladies' Night, at the home of Gina Ananian, for more info call the church office, 559-528-6892.

**July 29-Aug. 2, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon**, Vacation Bible School, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church, \$20 per family, "Shipwrecked, Rescued by Jesus," for more info call 559-486-1141.

**July 30, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.**, Family History Night 2, Armenian Cultural Conservancy, Woodward Park Library, 944 E. Perrin Avenue, Fresno, for more info call 559-835-0837.

**Aug. 2, Friday, 6:30 p.m.**, St. Gregory Family Movie Night, Pot-Luck Dinner, 559-834-2919.

**Aug. 10, Saturday**, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church Fundraiser, for more info call 559-486-1141.

**Aug. 11, Sunday, 10:30 a.m.**, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church Annual Grape Blessing Festival, California Armenian Home, music by Richard Hagopian & His Band, for more info call 559-486-1141.

**Aug. 18, Sunday, 10:30 a.m.**, St. Paul Armenian Church Annual Grape Blessing Picnic, California Armenian Home, music by Richard Hagopian & His Band, for more info call 559-226-6343.

**Sept. 28, Saturday**, Save the Date, Armenian Cultural Conservancy Annual Fundraiser, The Vineyards Patio, California Armenian Home, 559-835-0837.

**Oct. 4, Friday, 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.**, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church Bazaar, for more info call 559-486-1141.

**Oct. 25-27**, St. Gregory Women's Retreat, Calvin Crest Retreat Center, Oakhurst, for more info call Malia at 559-349-3865.

**Nov. 16, Saturday**, Save the Date, Homenetmen Annual Barahantes.

**Nov. 17, Sunday**, Save the Date, Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church Annual Banquet.

*A request to all Armenian Community Organizations – Please e-mail your events as soon as you set them to [maryekmalian@att.net](mailto:maryekmalian@att.net) so they may be included in ACC's Newsletter Community Calendar and our website.*

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# Thank You to Our Recent Donors

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## Other Donations

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Van Der Mugrdechian (*Internship Fund*)  
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Please, make checks payable to Armenian Cultural Conservancy  
mail to: 2037 W. Bullard Avenue, PMB 106, Fresno, CA 93711-1200

**You can help. Become a member. Spread the word. Host or assist with an event.**

*"For when two of them meet anywhere in the world,  
see if they will not create a New Armenia." – William Saroyan, 1936*

JOIN US FOR

## FAMILY HISTORY NIGHT 2

Tuesday, July 30, 2019  
6:30 p.m.

Woodward Park  
Regional Library  
944 E. Perrin Avenue, Fresno



“If you don't recount your family history, it will be lost. Honor your own stories and tell them too. The tales may not seem very important, but they are what binds families and makes each of us who we are.”

–Madeleine L'Engle  
(American writer)