

LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS

by

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In the latter part of the nineteenth century many people immigrated to America from Lebanon and settled in various parts of the United States. One group of Lebanese immigrants settled in the city of Pittsburg, Kansas, and the surrounding area. Like immigrants from other parts of the world who settled in Southeast Kansas, the Lebanese people brought with them a wealth of folklore and folk customs which helped to give this part of the country its rich heritage and varied culture. The Lebanese people have become American citizens and are proud of their citizenship; they are also proud of their heritage and uphold many of the customs of their native land. However, many of these customs are fast falling into disuse, and much of the folklore is in danger of being lost as older members of the community die out.

As Lebanon is an Asian country, and most of the literature published concerning immigrant folklore in America has been published about people from European backgrounds, some explanation is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the culture from which this body of Asian folklife is derived. Although Lebanon is a small country, its location on the Mediterranean Sea has made it a strategic point for shipping, and because of its strategic position, Lebanon has been under the control of Syria, Turkey, France, and England, only becoming independent after World War I. Through all of this turmoil, the Lebanese people have remained loyal to their own traditions and their own faith, whether it be Moslem or Christian.

The history of the late nineteenth century, and particularly the history of the immigrants themselves, is what is most important to this discussion. During the 1890s, the period when Lebanese people began to immigrate to this area, most of them lived in small villages which were divided into several smaller units according to class and rank. Lebanese people were, and are, very class conscious. Although they would transact business with each other, the classes never mixed socially. Classes were determined by wealth, family standing in the community, and industriousness. One of the stories still told by many Lebanese concerns a lazy brother and an industrious one.

Once, there were two brothers, one who worked hard, and one who was lazy and would never work at all. The one who worked hard had plenty of money, but the lazy brother was close to starving because he was too lazy to earn money to buy food with. Everybody in town just raved and raved because the rich brother just let his lazy brother starve.

Finally, the rich, hard-working brother decided that he would give his lazy, good-for-nothing brother some money, but he didn't want his brother to know

that the money came from him. So one day when he saw his brother coming down the street, he took a big bag of money and put it in the middle of the street, knowing his brother would stumble over it when he went by. Then the rich brother hid to see what would happen when his lazy brother found the bag of money.

Well, the lazy brother came slowly down the street toward where the bag of money was laying, and the rich brother watched him coming. Just about the time he would be reaching the bag of money, the lazy brother decided to find out what it would be like to be blind. So he shut his eyes and walked right past the money and never found it.

The rich brother said to himself, "if my brother is so blind and so stupid that he can't even pick up money out of the street, let him starve!" And he never tried to do anything for his lazy brother again.¹

As can be seen from this story, lazy people were and are also regarded as stupid.

The Lebanese people who immigrated to Southeast Kansas were generally from one of two villages, Biet Smalla or Helta. Although separate and distinct, these villages were only separated by a small stream, and the people could easily visit from one village to another. These villages were not far from the cities of Batroun and Beirut where the farmers sold their olives, grapes, and silkworm cocoons and bought the staples that they needed. The goods sold were later exported to France and England. The villagers lived in stone houses with clay or tile roofs. These houses had clay storage bins for the staple foods: rice, lentils, wheat, beans, and flour. The main source of meat was lamb. Chickens and eggs were extremely rare and were considered a great treat. These villages, with their several communities, were arranged around the church. Each section of the village had its own church, but all were Maronite Catholic.

Each section of the village also had its own stone oven for baking bread. These community bakeries were called djins, and the women of the village had their own days for baking. Usually, two or three women would bake for their families on a given day. Anyone who came along was offered a piece of hot bread. Once a loaf was broken, it was an insult to refuse a piece. By the same token, it was an insult if the women didn't offer bread to a passerby. The Lebanese people consider bread as more than the staff of life; bread is a sacred gift of God. If a piece of bread is dropped on the floor, it is picked up rather than swept up. It is considered extremely bad luck to drop a piece of bread. No woman would even think of starting to make bread before first making the sign of the cross over the flour. After the dough is mixed, the woman again makes the sign of the cross over it before it starts rising. This is done not only to bless the bread, but to thank God that they have food. These customs came from Lebanon with the original immigrants, but they are still practiced by the Lebanese people in Southeast Kansas today.

Times were often hard for the Lebanese people for many reasons. The main products of the Lebanese, olives, tobacco, and silk, were exported to France and England. By the end of the nineteenth century, France and England had spheres of influence in the Middle East, and exports were taxed so heavily that two-thirds of the crops went to pay the taxes. There was also a marked increase in Turkish military activity at this time, and the Lebanese people had to leave their villages and flee to the caves in the nearby mountains to protect themselves. Being dedicated to their land and to their country, they realized that they must do something or risk starvation; therefore, considerable emigration ensued at this time.

The first man to leave the village was John Farris. He first sought work in a cigarette factory in Egypt. This did not work out, and hearing of the opportunities in America, he decided to go there. The exact date of his coming to the United States is uncertain, but it is known that after landing in New York, he started off across the United States peddling dry goods. When he got to Cleveland, Ohio, he first heard of Pittsburg, Kansas. It was common talk that there were hundreds of immigrants moving to Pittsburg because of the coal mines being developed. Seeing this as a great opportunity, he made his way to Pittsburg as soon as possible. After arriving, he sold dry goods from door to door until he earned enough to set up a wholesale dry goods business. Not only did he earn money to live on, but he was also sending money to Lebanon to help his relatives there. He had accumulated enough money by 1898 to enable his younger brother, Henry Farris, to come to America. Henry was twenty years old when he first came to Pittsburg, and he went to work for his brother John. He walked door to door selling dry goods and notions to the people in the mining camps. He also sent money back to his family in Lebanon.

As reports of the success of the immigrants reached the villages, more people began looking toward America as a haven. Most men, however, did not want to leave their land for fear it might be stolen; so some sent their wives and daughters to the United States to make money to send home, and they stayed behind to protect and cultivate their land. Martha Fersen left her husband, Selime, in Lebanon, and with her young daughter Mary, came to America in 1902 to make money to send home. The ship on which they sailed was, based on their descriptions, almost like one would picture a slave ship. It was filthy dirty and crowded with as many immigrants as possible. Even in the overcrowded and dirty conditions, however, people washed their children and dressed them up before bringing them up on deck. They wanted their children to look their best so that marriages for the children could be arranged between the parents. Marriages were often agreed upon by the parents for boys of ten or twelve and girls of seven or eight. The marriages would take place after the children reached marriageable age. This assured a Lebanese spouse for one's son or daughter, even in a strange land.

When Martha and Mary arrived in America, they came immediately to Southeast Kansas. They found a little house in Weir and settled there. At that time a streetcar line ran

from Pittsburg to Franklin, Kansas, a distance of about ten miles. From the end of the line, the two women would walk to the different mining camps to sell their dry goods, shoestrings, buttons, needles, pins, or anything they could carry in a suitcase. They did not speak much English, so they often had to trust the people they were selling to to give them the right amount of money or to make change for themselves from the money they held out in their hands. If it grew dark before they were close enough to the streetcar line, they would have to ask a friendly miner's wife if they could stay the night. Many nights they slept in barns or on the ground if there was no one to take them in. The Lebanese peddlers soon became so common in the mining towns that they earned the nickname "the shoestringers," from the fact that all of them carried the shoestrings needed by the miners for their mining boots. It was a hard life, but they all got by, and began saving money to send home to Lebanon.

While peddling dry goods for John Farris, Mary Fersen first met Henry Farris, who was also a peddler. They fell in love, but knew that in matters of marriage, they would have no choice if they left it up to their parents. By this time, Henry had saved five-hundred dollars and had a house in Galena, Kansas. Henry and Mary discussed what they should do. They knew their parents would never approve of their wish to marry without having it arranged for them, so they decided to take matters into their own hands. Taking the five-hundred dollars Henry had saved, they caught a train and ran away to St. Louis, where they were married. This took place in 1903 when Henry was twenty-five and Mary was fifteen. By the time they returned to Galena, Henry and Mary had spent the entire five-hundred dollars. Both of them worked hard selling dry goods to build their savings. Although their families were upset at first about their marriage because it was not arranged, they soon accepted it since both were from the same village in Lebanon, and both were from good families.

By hard work and scrimping, the young couple finally saved enough to set themselves up in business. In 1907, they opened the Busy Bee restaurant on East Fourth Street in Pittsburg, Kansas. This first restaurant was only twelve feet by fourteen feet, but they had a good business from the start. Chili was five cents a bowl, and one could get a whole meal for fifteen cents. A breakfast of pancakes and syrup was a dime. Mary baked all the pies and cakes at night after they closed. She and Henry and their son Ernest, born in 1906, slept on a mattress, which they kept rolled up under the counter in the daytime. Business was growing every day, so when a new building was erected on the southeast corner of Fourth and Locust, Henry rented it and moved his restaurant. Mary, by now, had a rooming house located on the northwest corner of the same streets. Most of the people who lived at the rooming house ate at the restaurant, as did many of the businessmen in town. Many people bought the meal tickets that Henry had printed and sold for two dollars. These tickets were punched each time the person ate at the restaurant until the entire two dollars was used up. A second son, George, was born in 1908. With a growing business and a growing family, Henry and Mary were well on their way to success.

Mary's mother, Martha Fersen, returned to Lebanon in 1911. On the way back, the ship she was on passed another ship coming to the United States. On this ship was Martha's oldest daughter, Marianna, and her future husband, Mike Thomas. Mother and daughter were able to exchange brief greetings as their ships passed; it was the last time they would ever see each other. Returning home, Martha was reunited with her husband, Selime, and her family. She once again saw her daughter Sophia, who had been only three years old when her mother had left nine years before. The family was not to be together long, however, because Frank, the oldest son of Selime and Martha, was determined that he too would go to the United States. When his brother-in-law, Henry Farris, wrote in 1912 and offered to send him the money to come to America, Frank was more than ready to go. He talked his mother and father into letting his little sister Sophia go with him. Since her daughter Mary would be there to watch after Sophia, and since Mary's husband Henry had become the accepted leader of the Lebanese people in Pittsburg, Martha reluctantly agreed to let her youngest daughter go to America.

When Frank and Sophia first arrived in Pittsburg, Frank went into the fruit and vegetable business. Eventually he built a store in Girard, Kansas, called Frank and Sons, married, and had several children. For one year, Sophia worked in the restaurant owned by her sister and brother-in-law. Since she was young and pretty, too many of the men who came into the Busy Bee would try to flirt with her, so Henry refused to let her continue to work there. Since she was now fourteen, both Henry and Frank thought it time that Sophia



Fig. 1 Busy Bee Restaurant about 1907. Henry Farris, son, Ernest, Mary Farris, his wife and one of their waitresses.

married, so they began to search for a husband they felt worthy of her. However, their views and those of Sophia's sister Marianna did not agree. Sophia tells of her marriage in her own words.



Fig. 2 Inside the Busy Bee Restaurant on Fourth and Locust about 1922.

I was just a young girl, and I didn't expect to get married then. My brother didn't want me to get married; he wanted me to marry his brother-in-law, which I hated. That's his wife's brother. I didn't care for him at all. My sister, she said, "She won't marry him. If you say she marry him, I'll take her. I'll grab her and take her away." And she did.

She came in there, and they was having a party in front. It was my brother's party with the wedding; all of them were up front. So my sister came from the back. She lived on Seventh Street, right on the corner. And she came through the alley. They told her my sister-in-law was going to make me marry her brother, and that's the one I hated, and my sister hated him. She didn't want me to marry him. She wanted me to marry a different man. My brother-in-law, my sister Mary's husband, got mad because she took me, because she didn't ask him, see. I was just like his daughter, and she grabbed me from the back door, and she brought me to her house. And I started crying, and I said, "What's it all about"? She said, "Well we want you to marry John Nogel." I said, "I don't know him. I never had not acquaint [sic] with him." And I was crying, and I wanted to go home. Then my sister's husband found out I wasn't there and my brother did too. And they wanted to know where I went. My brother said, "Where did Sophie go? I want my sister! I want to know where she went!" And another man was in there, and she said, "We don't know where she went."

Then he went down to my sister, and he said, "What did you do with Sophie? You better tell me who she is going to marry." He was mad. You see, he thought she brought me to a different man, not to John. He said, "I want my sister!" My sister says, "Shut up! We arranged for your sister to marry John

Nogel, the best man in town!" he says, "John Nogel? That's fine; that's fine with me. But if she marry someone else, I'm taking her back." She says, "You go back home. We got her now. They're going to get married!" They had a big fight over me. And my brother went back to his party. But my sister-in-law got mad at my sister and she never talked to her for a long time because I didn't marry her brother. But I didn't care.²

The wedding of John and Sophie took place on April 5, 1914. The union lasted until John's death in November of 1983, at the age of ninety-five. Sophie still lives in Pittsburgh and enjoys telling about how her marriage was arranged and also about the wedding ceremony which she and John had. Their wedding was traditionally Lebanese, and although some of the customs are no longer practiced today, many of them are.

Our weddings are different from anybody's. When you get married in the old country, the boy he buys all the clothes for the girl--her wedding dress and all; she don't buy nothing. Everything is on the boy. They have a big party and celebrate for a week. They dance every night and drink and celebrate for seven nights. The bride sits on a big high chair, high like a baby chair, you know. And they decorate it all over, and the bride sits on it. And the groom sits by her. And the people who come, relatives mostly, they bring them a big bouquet, and they make a great big cake of bread dough on a round table. They make bread dough on it, and each person who comes sticks candles in it, lots of candles, and they decorate it with flowers all the way around, and they put that right in front of the bride and groom. The bride does not move; she sits there, and everybody dances except the bride and groom. They let them dance at the end of the day, first together, and then each one of them dances alone.

When the bride and groom come from the church, the groom stands on top of the house they will live in, and he has oranges in his hands, three oranges. The bride comes through the door, and he takes the oranges, and he throws them at her. If she don't catch it the first time, he throws her another one, and if she don't catch it the second time, he throws the third one. She has to catch the last one because that means they will have good luck. Then she takes the oranges and runs into the house. And everybody starts to clapping and dancing, and everybody sings and dances and have a good time. They have beer and whiskey, you don't know how much. Food--they have food enough to last a whole week. Everybody who comes to the wedding brings something to eat.

The groom pays for all the expenses. Women don't do nothing, just be the bride, and he buys her everything. When I got married, my husband took me to the biggest store in Pittsburgh, on Fifth and



Fig. 3 Wedding picture of Sophie Ferson and John Nogel, April 5, 1914.

Broadway. I got my wedding dress there, beautiful dress. I made my own veil. And he bought me four bracelets, two for each hand. And he bought me two rings, one wedding ring, and one ruby. And he bought me a gold locket. That was the best wedding that ever was; my brother got married one week, and I got married the next.

In Lebanon, the girl dresses up in her wedding dress, and she rides a beautiful white horse, and they decorate it all up, and they lead the horse all over with all the wedding party on horses behind her. They take her to the church on the white horse. After the wedding, they come out of the church, and they celebrate all over town. They go all over, and there is a big celebration. We did that here, but we didn't ride horses. We rode in a carriage; the bride and groom and bridesmaids and the best man in one carriage. After the wedding, they took us to the house, and they throw rice on us. I remember every bit of that, and I've been married sixty-four years in April.³

After their wedding, John and Sophie set up housekeeping and opened a grocery store. John also began going out to the mining camps in the morning and taking orders for groceries from women who could not get into town; and then he delivered them in the afternoon. In two or three years, he had saved enough to buy a truck to replace his horse and wagon. He

would often make two round trips a day taking orders and delivering them.



Fig. 4 The three Ferson sisters, Mary, Sophie, and Marianna.

Many more Lebanese immigrants came to Pittsburg in the years preceding World War I, and many of the earlier immigrants returned to their homeland to visit or to get Lebanese wives. Sometimes, the trips did not go exactly as expected. In 1909, Charles Murry received a letter from his mother in Lebanon telling him that his father was dying and wanted him, as the oldest son, to come home to help settle affairs concerning the estate. Charles was married and had two very young daughters, but he borrowed the money necessary for the trip so he could do as his father wanted him to. Because his wife would have to be responsible for taking the wagon out each day to sell fruits and vegetables in his absence, it would be nearly impossible for her to care for both children and the business. Charles, therefore, decided to take his oldest daughter, two-year-old Flora, to Lebanon with him.

Soon after he arrived, his father died, and when the affairs had been settled, Charles prepared to return to the United States. With the death of her husband, Charles' mother was all alone because all of her children had gone to America. She begged her son to leave his daughter Flora with her for a while so she could have one of her grandchildren near her for a time. Realizing that there was much travel between the two countries, Charles agreed to leave Flora behind and he sailed for home. He did not plan to leave her for more than a few months, however. But worsening world conditions slowed travel

down. People were not returning to Lebanon to visit, and new emigrants were finding it more difficult to leave Lebanon. The years went by, and then World War I broke out, and travel halted completely.

With the outbreak of World War I, Lebanon was overrun by troops, and times became extremely hard. The war and also nature devastated the villages. Hordes of locusts came and ate everything, even the bark off the trees. People were starving, and because of the war, no help could be expected from relatives in the United States. Many people starved during these hard times. It was not until the end of the war that communications between families in Lebanon and America were reestablished, and travel between the two countries became possible again. Then Flora Murry returned to her family in Pittsburg. The story of her return shows some of the things that immigrants had to go through to get to America.

After the war, this man came from Springfield to get his nephew. The boy's parents had both died of starvation, and his uncle came from Springfield to get him and take him to live with him. So my Dad asked him to bring me back too. We had to get my papers so I could go to America. We went to Batroun to get our first papers there.

In the morning, we'd go, and there was a place, a path fenced in so some would go in and others would go out. We stood all day, and by the time we got to the door, it was closing time. So we had to stay there a month.

When we got to America, we had to go to Ellis Island. When we got there, we had to go in a room, you know, men on one side and women on one side for an examination. Well, when I come out, I had left my clothes sitting by the door, and they was gone, and that man that brought me was gone, and I thought I was lost.

A man came and took me by the hand and took me to a hospital across the bridge there, and I didn't know what was going on, and I cried night and day, until I couldn't even talk. I had a ringworm on my neck, and they had to burn it out before they'd let me in the country, but I didn't know that. I couldn't talk English, except to count to 100. They told me before I left home that my Dad's name was Charlie Murry, and he lived in Pittsburg, Kansas. I thought if I told them who my Dad was and where he lived, maybe they'd send me there. I was there about one month. They had all kinds of food there, but I couldn't eat because I was so scared, and I thought I was lost. I couldn't talk to nobody.

One day, somebody came to the door of the hospital and said something, and we all followed him, and it was visitor's day. I went in that hall, and that

man from Springfield was there, and that was the happiest moment of my life. He told me, "Don't be scared. If you're here three or four months, I will wait for you." So I felt good after that, and then I could eat.

It took a while, because they had to send for my birth certificate. I was born here, but they had to have my birth certificate, and the first one got lost, and my Dad didn't have another one, so he had to send affidavits. Finally they let me go.

During the years that she was gone, Flora had forgotten her family, and had to renew her ties once more. Her father had moved up in the world, from a fruit peddler to the owner of a grocery store which is still in operation in Pittsburg, run by Flora's brother, Pete Murry. However, times were sometimes hard, and Flora tells about an incident when her father was trying to make some extra money to try to make ends meet.

Once, when money was scarce, my Dad sold some whiskey to the Indians. It was just the one time, but they put him in jail. While he was in jail, he was a trustee, and he'd go to town and everything. All the other inmates, they'd give him money, and they'd say to bring them some tobacco, or bring them some candy, or whatever. So he finally began to buy it by the case, and he was selling it to the inmates; he made a business there. He said, "That jailer, he let me go because he wanted my business."⁵

While in Lebanon as a girl, Flora had not had a chance to go to school. Their small village had no school available, so at the age of fourteen, she entered first grade in Pittsburg. She went to Saint Mary's school, a Catholic school in Pittsburg. The school she attended was a small frame building, and was really too small for the number of children who attended; therefore, the parish decided to build a new one. At this time, however, there was an active Ku Klux Klan in Pittsburg, and they did not want to see a new Catholic school erected. Repeated threats of bombings halted construction of the school. Someone wrote to the President of the United States about the threats of violence, and the church received a letter stating that federal troops would protect the school from violence if the words "SAINT MARY'S PUBLIC SCHOOL" were inscribed above the door. This was done, and the threats ceased.

There were also other threats of violence from the Ku Klux Klan. In 1926, Henry and Mary Farris and their children, there were seven of them by this time, moved to a house at 912 East Fourth Street. This was in the part of town known as "East Town," as it was east of the Kansas City Southern railroad tracks. Just across the tracks was a sign that read:

COLORED PEOPLE

DON'T LET THE SUN SET ON YOUR BACKS IN EAST TOWN

This sign so scared the colored woman who helped Mary with the washing, that she refused to come to their house again.⁶ The Klan had such a large following in Pittsburg, that a large cross was set up on the fairgrounds on North Broadway. This cross had red electric lights on it and could be seen all over town.⁷

At the time Henry and Mary moved to East Town, there was neither pavement nor street lights in that part of town. Shortly after moving to the new house, Henry became ill with pneumonia and couldn't work. The doctor told Mary that he would probably die. The doctor failed to reckon with Henry's indomitable spirit, for he lived many more years. Shortly after he got well, Henry had a heart attack and could no longer run the Busy Bee restaurant. To help the family out, Mary decided to open a little grocery store next to the house. She started the store with a stock consisting of four bottles of milk, one stick of bologna, and one case of pop. The store was on the alley, and the house was on the corner. There was a vacant lot between them. Since there was no icebox in the store, the milk and bologna were kept in the icebox in the house. When a customer came to buy something, Marie, the youngest daughter, had to run to the house to get it. Although the odds seemed against her succeeding, Mary's store prospered, and she ran it to the end of her life. After her death, her daughter Marie and her son Sammy ran the store for many years.

Mary made friends with everyone in East Town. The children of the area were especially fond of her. When firecrackers were banned one Fourth of July, Mary let some of the boys of the neighborhood shoot some in her yard. One of the neighbors called the police. When Mary saw the police car coming, she made the boys come up on her porch. When the policeman asked if anyone was shooting fireworks, she replied, "Do you hear any?" The officer had to admit that he didn't, and headed back to his patrol car. Just then, a firecracker with a delayed fuse exploded. The police officer looked at Mary, grinned, and drove off.

Henry died in 1940, and Mary was alone. She was never really alone, however, because in addition to her seven children and many grandchildren, she had many friends, including all the children who loved her. Every child who had ever come into the store in the thirty-two years she ran it loved her and called her "grandma." For twenty-five years, she gave treats to every child in Eugene Field grade school when they came parading by her store on Halloween, a tradition her daughter Marie still keeps. When Mary died in 1958, her funeral procession was one of the longest ever seen in Pittsburg; everyone came to tell grandma goodbye.

The Lebanese people of Pittsburg and the surrounding area are a close-knit group, many of whom are related to each other, either because they are branches of the same family, or because their families have intermarried. For several generations after the first immigrants came to this area, most Lebanese boys and girls married Lebanese. Men would sometimes go to Lebanon to find a wife if they could not find a suitable

mate here. This was especially true when an older man lost his wife and wished to remarry.

For a few years after the immigrants came, many marriages were arranged by the parents; however, this is no longer the custom, and has not been a practice in this area for some years. Weddings have also become more modern, and such customs as having the groom throw oranges to the bride, or having the bride stick yeast above the door as a sign of fertility are no longer practiced, but the weddings are still very much like those in Lebanon, as described by Lebanese immigrants. The traditional music and dances are still performed at weddings, and traditional foods are served. There are few Lebanese weddings that have only a punch and cake reception, and although wedding receptions do not last a week, they do last until the wee hours of the morning, and sometimes resume the next day. The groom no longer pays for the wedding, but the bride's family does, as is the custom of most other cultures in the United States.

Like weddings, funerals have also become more conventional, and bodies of loved ones are no longer kept at home until burial, but are taken to funeral homes. Older women no longer march all night before the casket with guns as they once did, but the Lebanese community does visit with and console families who have lost a loved one. Community solidarity is very important to the Lebanese, and any major event, whether it is happy or sad, calls for a community gathering.

Holidays are also times of community celebration, and Christmas, New Year's or Easter would not be complete without a gathering of the Lebanese community to celebrate. These holidays are still celebrated much as they were in Lebanon, but the customs popular among Americans of other cultural backgrounds have been added to the traditional customs. For example, Lebanese children wait for Santa Claus to arrive as eagerly as other children do. Lebanese children dye their eggs all colors at Easter with commercial dye rather than coloring them red with boiled onion skins as they once did; but they still practice the custom of trying to break each other's eggs by hitting them on the end with their own eggs. Children still vie to see whose egg will break the most other eggs. Palm Sunday branches are no longer decorated by children as they once were, but Palms are blessed in the church and brought home to be kept as holy objects for the coming year.

The Lebanese-Americans have also kept their religion. Most of the Lebanese in this area are Catholic, but they are now Roman Catholic, rather than Maronite Catholic, because there is no Maronite church in this area. Complete abstinence from meat and strict fasting during Lent, visiting seven different churches on Holy Thursday, and having a funeral for the slain Christ on Good Friday are customs no longer kept because the Catholic church no longer practices these customs. The Lenten fasts are more lenient now, but a few of the older Lebanese people still keep to the old ways. The younger generations usually only fulfill the requirements of the church.

The oral tradition of folktales and legends is still very much alive, and the older people greatly enjoy telling these old tales. In addition to this oral tradition, the customs that have been most widely kept are those of the music, the dancing, the food, and the hospitality. The Lebanese are a hospitable people, and anyone who comes into a Lebanese home will not be allowed to leave without having something to eat and drink. After being there for a while, even a total stranger will feel like part of the family, and will be treated as such.

Still retaining the culture and customs of the land of their birth, and passing these customs on to their children and grandchildren, the Lebanese people combine customs from both countries, creating a composite that is all their own.

NOTES

1. Marie Farris, interview with author, Pittsburg, Kansas, November, 1978. All quotations which appear in the article are taken from transcribed interviews. No attempt was made to edit the original language of the quotations.
2. Sophia Fersen Nogel, interview with author, Pittsburg, Kansas, November, 1978.
3. Ibid.
4. Flora Murry Farris, interview with author, Pittsburg, Kansas, July 18, 1983.
5. Ibid.
6. Marie Farris, interview with author, Pittsburg, Kansas, September, 1980.
7. Flora Murry Farris, interview with author, Pittsburg, Kansas, May, 1978.