

A Thesis

Entitled

Planting the Cedar Tree:

The History of the Early Syrian-Lebanese Community in Toledo, OH, 1881-1960

By

Hanady M. Awada

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Master of Arts in History

Advisor: Dr. Diane Britton

College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

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An Abstract of
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This thesis will tell the story of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their children who lived in Toledo from 1881 until the 1960s. Through oral interviews, local newspaper articles, church and mosque records, and historical works on immigration and ethnicity in the United States, this thesis will chronicle their immigration to Toledo, their experiences with Americanization, and their endeavor to maintain their ethnic identity through community building and home-making efforts, as they made the United States their permanent home. This analysis will be accomplished by examining eleven steps that the Syrian-Lebanese people took to make the United States their permanent home. These

steps were either assimilative- influenced by an external force, or a home making and community building effort- caused internally by the community to recreate a Syrian village-like atmosphere to make their stay in America pleasant.

In eight decades, the community grew from a small Christian colony, to a large, well-respected, religiously diverse community. They successfully established families, business, and religious and cultural associations to preserve their ethnic identity, while actively participating in Americanization efforts that ensured their economic and social success.

While this work only encompasses a brief period of the community's existence, it is a start, which must be expanded upon by future scholars.

*I dedicate this thesis to my Parents and my Grandparents, my Children and my
future Grandchildren*

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Introduction:

Where is Toledo's Syrian-Lebanese Community?

To date there has been no comprehensive study of Toledo's Syrian-Lebanese community. Therefore, this thesis will tell the story of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their children who lived in Toledo from 1881 until the 1960s. Through oral interviews, local newspaper articles, church and mosque records, and historical works on immigration and ethnicity in the United States, this thesis will chronicle the immigration of the Muslim and Christian populations to Toledo, their experiences with Americanization, and their endeavor to maintain their ethnic identity through community building and home-making efforts, as they made the United States their permanent home. Although there were forces of assimilation that yearned for their Americanization, their level of acculturation was influenced by their settlement patterns, religion, and the city's attitude towards them. In eight decades, the community grew from a small Christian colony, to a large and well-respected religiously diverse community that successfully established families and businesses mainly in the North End. They

also opened religious institutions and cultural associations to preserve their ethnic identity, while actively participating in Americanization efforts to ensure their future economic and social success. While this work only encompasses a brief period of the community's existence, it is a start, which must be expanded upon by future scholars.

In order to understand the history of the Syrian-Lebanese people in Toledo, it is imperative to explore other historical works on immigration and ethnicity and where they fit in these studies. Historians have written for years about the immigration and assimilation of various ethnic groups in America, yet in most of these works, the Syrian-Lebanese have often been overlooked, even though they shared many of the same experiences as the Italians, Irish, Jews, and others. This is mainly due to their late arrival in America, small numbers, and lack of group unity.

In 1985, John Bodnar published *The Transplanted*, the "Most powerfully argued interpretation of the immigrant epic since Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*."¹ However, it did not include the experience of the Syrian-Lebanese people who immigrated at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In John Higham's analysis, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, he examined the spread of ethnic prejudice and violence that targeted certain groups such as Asians, Jews, Irish and Italians to name a few, but not the Syrians. Even more recently, *Roots Too*, written in 2006 by Matthew Frye

¹ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), back cover.

Jacobson explored the ethnic revival that swept America in the 1960s, which caused many Americans to reconsider their own ethnic past. According to Jacobson, “Ethnic traces and trappings that had been lost, forgotten, or forcibly cast off by prior generations in their rush to Americanize were now rediscovered and embraced by a younger generation who had known nothing but ‘American’ culture.”² He documents ethnic movies such as *The Godfather*, which revived Italian ethnic identity in descendants of Italian immigrants, while John F. Kennedy’s trip to Ireland led many Irish Americans to reconnect with their Irish heritage. Greeks and Jews are also mentioned, but he does not mention any revival efforts made by the Syrian-Lebanese progenies in the United States or the revival’s impact on them.

While not completely ignored, the community is occasionally mentioned but not to the extent of other major ethnic groups. In Oscar Handlin’s groundbreaking work, *The Uprooted*, includes little valuable insight on the experiences of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. When discussing the assimilation influence of the Roman Catholic Church on new immigrants, Handlin does state, “The Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians, and Syrians found themselves minorities within minorities and were therefore more dissatisfied, more open to temptation to falling away from the Church.”³ They are lumped with other ethnic groups, without specific examples of the implications of Syrian discontent with the Catholic Church or why the Syrians are “minorities within minorities.” In

² Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

³ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 122

Becoming American: An Ethnic History by Thomas J. Archdeacon, Syrians are included in two tables regarding their immigration and remigration rates along with dozens of other immigrant national groups.⁴ There is no explanation of data or mention of Syrian immigrants in the text of his book, except in the Epilogue. Archdeacon mentions the number of Middle East immigrants who entered America in 1977 and created “notable ethnic and racial diversity” even within their own ethnic group who had come to America early.⁵

Although David R. Roediger does include more information on the Syrian-Lebanese than Archdeacon or Handlin, he merely provides snippets of information in *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*. In his index, he sites six pages where he mentions the term Syrian. However, they are not exclusively mentioned on any of the six pages.⁶ For example, on page fifty-one, Roediger explained a poll conducted in 1926 in which the young, middle-class American respondents classified what immigrant groups they would prefer to associate with, in which “Clustered above them, all radically more subject to being excluded than ‘old immigrants,’ were Syrians, Greeks, Hungarians, and Poles.”⁷ On page seventy-three, they were included among other groups who were deemed desirable for employment in “Help Wanted” ads.⁸

⁴ Thomas Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 119t, 139t.

⁵ Archdeacon, 242

⁶ David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 337

⁷ Roediger, 51.

⁸ Roediger, 73

While scholars have not researched Syrians to the extent that other ethnic groups have been examined, it would be incorrect to say that this population of immigrants has not been covered. In 1937, a comprehensive study of immigrant groups in America by editors Francis J. Brown and Joseph Slabey Roucek included Syrian immigrants. Writing on behalf of the Syrian population in *One America The History, Contributions, and Present Problems of Our Racial and National Minorities*, Habib I. Katibah documented the Syrians racial status in America, immigration pattern, culture and assimilation, and contributions to American life.⁹ However, they are not mentioned in other chapters that explain and compare different immigrant groups' experiences in American education and democracy. On page 464, the "Mohammedan" religion was described as a religion, "Beyond the Christian pale," without further explanation.¹⁰ Yet, for such an early work in immigration studies, the editors must be credited for including the Syrians in their book. In 2002, Roger Daniels published a similar analysis of different ethnic groups. *Coming to America A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* examined the impact of immigration legislation on Asian, Western Hemisphere, and European immigrants from the colonial period through the present. Yet, there is no analysis of the impact of immigration restrictions on

⁹ Habib I. Katibah, Brown, "Syrian Americans." In *One America*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph Slabey Roucek (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), 291. Ironically the section on Syrian immigrants is included in chapter ten, "Asiatic Immigration" even though the Supreme Court ruled that the Syrian people were not part of the Asian race in *Dow v US* in 1915, twenty-two years before this book was initially published and thirty years prior to its second edition.

¹⁰ Stewart G. Cole, "Culture Patterns of Minority Groups." In *One America*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph Slabey Roucek (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), 464

Syrian communities in America. He did, however, afford them less than three pages, in the “Arabs” section.¹¹ Daniels loosely explained that not all Arabs are Muslims, and discussed early immigration patterns, occupations, and settlements. In 2000, Orm Øverland authored *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930*, which chronicled how European immigrants created “home-making myths” to establish the United States as their “rightful home.”¹² Although this book focused on European immigrants, the Syrian experience was cited and it is easy to make parallels between the home-making myths of Europeans with that of the Syrians. He also analyzed how the Syrian American newspaper *Syrian World* strove to instill ethnic pride in the children of Syrian immigrants.

Although Syrians are briefly mentioned in several works, they have not been thoroughly included in comparative analyses of immigrant assimilation and ethnic identification in America. Scholars interested in their immigration have noticed this void and diligently worked to ensure that they are not forgotten. As early as 1922, historian Philip Hitti published *Syrians in America*, which focused on the Syrians from a historical perspective and explained how they fit into American society.¹³ This was one of the only substantive books on the Syrian-Lebanese in America until the 1970s ethnic revival. At this time, interest

¹¹ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* 2nd ed. (Princeton: HarperPerrenial, 2002), 206. Unlike Brown, Daniels correctly includes the section on Arab immigrants in his chapter on Mediterranean immigrants, since Arabs are from the Mediterranean region of the world.

¹² Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 8.

¹³ Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005).

regarding Syrian-Lebanese immigration increased leading to the publication of several books, newspaper features, and journal and magazine articles about this group in America over the next thirty years.

In 1962, Dr. Alixa Naff traveled to Syrian communities throughout the United States to record the personal histories of pre-World War I Syrian immigrants for her dissertation. After compiling over 450 oral interviews, Naff wrote *Becoming American* as a comprehensive study of how the Syrians throughout the United States assimilated into American society, mostly through their peddling experiences, before World War II. This book became the leading source on Syrian immigration for some historians, while it inspired other historians to thoroughly analyze the communities in cities like Detroit, Michigan, Birmingham, Alabama and Waterville, Maine.¹⁴

The Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo has not been entirely disregarded by Arab immigration scholars. Gregory Orfalea included Toledo in his study of Arab Americans, but only in the context that it was home to great actors such as Danny Thomas and Jamie Farr. Even Naff made no significant mention of Toledo, except when explaining that Syrians migrated to Toledo, among many other cities, from pioneer settlements in cities such as Ft. Wayne, Indiana and New York City. They are often excluded because Toledo sits in the midst of other large Syrian-Lebanese communities, most notably Detroit. Although Toledo is only forty-five miles south of Detroit, it is completely unique

¹⁴ Eric Hooglund, ed., *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987).

and deserves to be studied in its own right. Abdo Elkholy wrote the only major work on Toledo's Syrian-Lebanese community, *The Moslems in America*, in the late 1950s. Written from a sociological perspective, it lacks the historical documentation and information necessary to understand the immigration and ethnicity of any group or people. Therefore, it is the goal of the current study to fill the void, and explain the formation and growth of the Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo.

There are several general characteristics about the Syrian-Lebanese people that must be considered before examining the community in Toledo, Ohio. It is important to understand the differences and similarities between the terms *Syrian* and *Lebanese*. Until the end of World War I, the people of present-day Syria and Lebanon were grouped under one collective entity, Greater Syria, which included the present-day countries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq.¹⁵ This area was controlled by the Ottoman Empire until the end of World War I. Most immigrants who came from Lebanon were from the cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and the Bekaa Valley. The immigrants from this area fluidly shifted between the terms *Syrian*, *Lebanese* and even *Turkish* through the 1950s. It was the children of the early immigrants who later in life shed the *Syrian* identity once it was realized that their parents' home village was not located in Syria and when the term *Lebanese* became more fashionable and socially accepted by American society. According to Evelyn Shakir, by the mid 1950s, "It was more comfortable to be associated with Lebanon, a loyal, if obscure American ally, than with Syria,

¹⁵ Beverlee Turner Mehdi, ed., *The Arabs in America, 1492-1977* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1978), viii.

a nation flirting with socialism and ever more bitterly at swords' point with the United States."¹⁶ In this thesis, the terms *Syrian* and *Syrian-Lebanese* are used to describe the first generation: the Syrian immigrants. The terms *Lebanese* and *Syrian-* or *Lebanese-American* are used to describe the second-generation: those born and raised in America. The terms *Greater Syria*, *Syria* and *Lebanon* are used interchangeably to discuss geographic location and cultural customs, since they all refer to the same area.

It is also necessary to define other important terms, like assimilation and Americanization that will be used throughout this thesis. According to Orm Øverland, assimilation is a "process in which the immigrant discards all distinguishing traits, all vestiges of the culture of the old country, and becomes an empty shell, good for little but extinction in the melting pot."¹⁷ This required that immigrants and their children adopted English as their dominant language, ceased to cook ethnic foods, and became American citizens who claimed America as their homeland, without identifying any distinguishing ethnic ways.

On the other hand, Hitti defines assimilation as "more of a weaving process- weaving according to the old and slow hand-loom system by which each contributes towards the production of the final product."¹⁸ Syrians never fully assimilated because there was no weaving of cultures. Instead, he argued

¹⁶ Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 1.

¹⁷ Øverland 38-39.

¹⁸ Hitti, 99.

the knowledge of English is a step towards Americanization, but it is not Americanization itself.

Donning American clothes and eating American foods does not constitute Americanization. America, being more than a geographic entity, is a set of ideals and Americanization means divesting one's self of a certain deep rooted patrimony of ideas, sentiments, traditions and interests, and an acceptance of, and participation in, a certain new spiritual inheritance. Such a thing cannot be accomplished completely in one generation. Even the second generation among immigrants cannot be fully assimilated.¹⁹

In Toledo, Americanization was undertaken to achieve economic and social success by American society and it took several generations before Syrian descendents spiritually inherited American sentiments to make them fully Americanized.

Most immigrants at the turn of the century did not fully divest themselves of their ethnic traditions. Incorporating Hitti's and Naff's theories, this thesis argues that their assimilation was segmented: Syrians adapted some ethnic behaviors, while leaving others unchanged.²⁰ Toledo's Syrian-Lebanese did not surrender their heritage to become an empty shell. Rather, they voluntarily began the process of assimilation in order to achieve economic success. By culturally and linguistically adjusting to American society, rather than abandoning their culture, they achieved economic success and social acceptance in the city. Their voluntary assimilation allowed them to choose the aspects of their ethnicity they were willing to compromise in order to succeed. Initially, the early immigrants

¹⁹ Hitti, 99.

²⁰ Caroline R. Nagel and Lynn A. Staeheli. "We're Just Like the Irish': Narratives of Assimilation, Belonging and Citizenship Amongst Arab-American Activists," *Citizenship Studies* 9, no. 5 (November 2005): 488.

adopted English outside the house, but spoke Arabic at home; they began to cook American dishes, but continued to cook Syrian food, especially on holidays; they legally named their American-born children American names, but at home they called them by their Arabic names. For example, a child legally named Michael would be called Mohammed at home.

Historian Marcus Lee Hansen argued that the second generation, “Who in their rush to become American, ‘deliberately threw away what had been preserved at home’.”²¹ However, he continued, third generation children would successfully reverse the assimilation process. According to Naff, children were more devoted to Americanization than their parents.

Acceptance of the United States as their permanent home came well into their American experience for many of the pre-World War I immigrants. Meanwhile, their American-raised and American-born children were being raised up without a meaningful grounding in the family’s language or ethnic heritage. Consequently, when the parents died, few children retained appreciation for the relics of documents of a poorly understood past; except for certain sentimental items, most disposed of their parents’ cultural legacy.²²

The first generation took basic steps towards adopting American culture and ways, while never fully assimilating. The second generation cherished Syrian food, music, religion, and the familial bonds; however, they also accepted American ways, such as speaking English and intermarriage, which was influenced by their changing residential patterns. Subsequent generations can only be considered fully Americanized when two things occurred: first, their

²¹ Jacobson, 3.

²² Alix Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 5.

parents and grandparents must be born in the United States (or at least the mother or grandmother, since her time with the children is more vital in forming the child's ethnic identity); second, there must be little to no contact with relatives and events in Lebanon, since they no longer consider Lebanon their *long-lost* home. The culmination of not speaking Arabic, not eating ethnic foods, abandoning ethnic religious institution, and adopting Anglicized names voided Syrians of their ethnic identity. Yet, rarely did this happen. Their early acceptance of American society enabled pioneer immigrants to assimilate outside the house, while retaining certain traditions at home and within the North End community. The second generation's pride in their parents' heritage proved that they did not want to forget everything.²³ They willingly Americanized, but "As long as there remained a nucleus of native values that resisted assimilation. For Syrians... [that was] the essence of being Syrian."²⁴ They picked up a few Arabic words, learned how to prepare favorite ethnic dishes, and continued to enjoy Arabic music. After World War II, as they moved out of the North End, many dropped incompatible Syrian values, like preparing ethnic foods daily and adopted a more American method of child-rearing.²⁵ As long as the third, fourth, and proceeding generations acknowledged and appreciated their ethnic heritage, they have not been fully Americanized.

²³ Jacobson, 3.

²⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 11.

²⁵ Naff, *Becoming American*, 329.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, which chronologically analyze the growth of the Syrian community, their community building and home-making efforts, and internal and external forces that assisted them in transitioning to America. Chapter One: Good-Bye Village, Hello America, discusses the causes of Syrian immigration to America and where immigrants settled prior to coming to Toledo. The Second Chapter: Welcome to Toledo: A City on the Brink of Becoming a “Future Great City of the World”²⁶ explores the factors that drew Christian-Syrians to Toledo between 1881 and 1914. Residential and occupational patterns, along with internal and external forces, are analyzed to explain the transition from a semi-transitional Syrian colony to a permanent Syrian community. Chapter Three: A Whirlwind of Changes: Two Decades of Growth, Community-Building, and Assimilation will explain the implications of World War I on their decision to remain in the United States. For the Syrians who may have still desired to return to the old country, World War I, sealed their fate in the United States as war, famine, and economic collapse destroyed the country they left behind. Between the two Great Wars, the community experienced a period of family reunification, establishment of churches and fraternities, and increase in the rate of home ownership to recreate a sense of the old world. Furthermore, they participated in Americanization efforts like learning English and achieving citizenship in an effort to be accepted as good

²⁶ Tana Mosier Porter, *Toledo Profile: A Sesquicentennial History*. Toledo, OH: Buettner (Toledo, Inc., 1987), 45. This quote was actually the title of a book written by former editor of the *Toledo Blade*, Jesup W. Scott in 1868. He gloriously declared that, the city’s centralized Midwest location meant it would be “destined to become the most populous and prosperous city in the world.”

Americans while climbing the economic and social ladder of success. Finally, Chapter Four: Economic and Social Success Achieved analyzes two major changes in the Syrian-Lebanese community as the world emerged from World War II. One change was the first substantive wave of Muslim settlers who migrated to the city to capitalize on its lucrative business opportunities caused by the repeal of prohibition. The second change occurred within the Christian community, as many achieved middle-class status, moved out of the North End, engaged in professional occupations, and fully immersed themselves and their children in American society.

Scholars of immigration and ethnicity such as, Hitti, Naff, and Khater have often asserted that the Syrian people did not immigrate to the United States with the intention of remaining permanently. According to Khater, "Financial success, homesickness, and unwillingness to accept the harsh pace of life in the United States meshed into a singular desire to go 'home'."²⁷ However, by examining the Toledo community's efforts in adjusting to the United States, it is evident that early in their experience they took steps to make their stay in America permanent. There are eleven steps to permanency that the Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo took which indicated their intentions of long-term aspirations in America. By using census records, oral interviews, city directories, and church records, each of these steps will be measured throughout this thesis in order to identify what trends were occurring and when they occurred. While

²⁷ Akram Fouad Khater, "Back to the Mountain: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon." In *American Dreaming, Global Realities: Rethinking U.S. Immigration History*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia and Vicki L. Ruiz (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 231.

some trends can be easily measured by examining census records which provide an abundance of information from street address, to marital status, to year of immigration, other trends will require information derived from oral interviews and newspaper articles to explain how Toledo Syrians made the United States their permanent home. Each step taken was assimilative- influenced by an external force, or a home making and community building effort- caused internally by the community to recreate a Syrian village-like atmosphere to make their stay in America pleasant.

The first step to permanency, immigration pattern, occurred before the immigrants left Greater Syria and was a community building effort. By analyzing the year of immigration of men, women and children it can be determined if the immigrant was more likely to return to Syria or remain in the United States. Male immigrants who traveled to America with their wives and children were less likely to return to Syria. Furthermore, when men who initially immigrated alone, sent for family to join them in the United States or returned to Syria to marry and bring the new bride to America, they were even less likely to return. The presence of family migrations, especially when children were involved, removed the homesickness factor caused by loneliness. In turn, as children entered American schools, made friends, and became accustomed to their new home, they resisted parental efforts to return to Syria.

The second step is a home-making effort caused family immigration patterns. The birth of children in the United States, is further evidence that the Syrian families were less likely to return to the old country which encouraged

them to engage in home-making, community building, and assimilative efforts to adjust to their new environment. In communities where there was a high degree of American-born children, like in Toledo, they established religious and cultural institutions to teach their children about their heritage. It was their decision to establish these centers that clearly identified the shift from sojourners to permanent settlers in America. These institutions also served in attracting more Syrians to the area. This brings us to the third step of permanency, the presence of extended families, which is another home-making effort intended to recreate village life. According to Khater, immigrants often returned to Syria because they “Missed their families, their homes, and villages, their language and food.”²⁸ However, in Toledo the presence of parents, cousins, and siblings diminished their loneliness, since extended families lived together or in the same neighborhood. The fourth step, creating an ethnic neighborhood, occurred as families were created, immigrated, and settled in the city. These settlement patterns slowed the immigrant’s assimilation because they were residentially segregated from non-Syrians. In Toledo, the majority of early Christian immigrants lived in the North End area until the 1950s. Within the neighborhood, Syrians spoke Arabic, participated in community activities, socialized with Syrian neighbors, and established churches and social clubs to complete the old village lifestyle. It was the atmosphere of the neighborhood that encouraged them to invest money to purchase a house. This money, many scholars argued, was intended for their return to Syria. Thus, their investment in the United States

²⁸ Khater, “Back to the Mountain,” 231.

instead of Syria was a significant step in declaring their permanent intentions. As they left the North End for better neighborhoods around the city, their assimilation was accelerated through intimate contact with their middle class neighbors. On the other hand, Muslim settlers did not create an ethnic neighborhood, which accelerated their assimilation as immigrants and their children learned first-hand how middle-class America lived and strove to immediately imitate these ways.

The fifth step, another community building effort, was the occupational preference of the Syrian community, which influenced their decision to remain in America. Most immigrants, argued Naff, intended to work as peddlers, which suited their sense of impermanence.²⁹ Toledo, however, did not have a large peddling community. The first Syrian in Toledo, Michael H. Nassr was a peddler before moving to Toledo where he immediately opened a supply store for peddlers traveling through the area. Peddlers, who came to Toledo, usually traded in the peddling pack for the keys to dry good shops and fruit stores as longer-range aspirations replaced short-term goals. Adopting American mannerisms was the sixth step to permanency. As the notion of returning to Syria faded away, they adopted American mannerisms, like preparing American meals as opposed to ethnic dishes. While this cannot be measured statistically, stories indicate that parents preferred Syrian food, while their children, who were introduced to meatloaf and pork chops at school and at their friends' homes, adopted an American palate. Furthermore, as little girls grew into young ladies with their own families, rarely did they cook time-consuming Arabic meals, which

²⁹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 128.

were reserved for Sunday dinner at the grandparent's house. Once Syrians decided to remain in Toledo, they engaged in the seventh step of permanency, establishing religious and cultural institutions to pass on part of their culture to their children and complete the old world atmosphere. This community building effort also required the investment of their capital in the United States, as they strove to replicate the old world atmosphere that they left behind in Syria.

In Toledo, Syrians did not object to or resist external efforts to assimilate. They actively participated in Americanization programs during the 1920s and 1930s in order to become good and successful Americans. According to Naff,

In the decades leading to World War II, Americanization was frequently passed on immigrants by an uneasy and, at times, chauvinistic American public... More than a few immigrants groups, the Syrians among them willingly acquiesced to Americanization and, from their own perspective, to the benefits of becoming American."³⁰

Within years of immigrating to America, many Syrians attained citizenship to secure their legal status in their host country. They were not targeted or pressured to assimilate, however, they participated in programs offered by Toledo's Americanization Board and the Friendly Center, because they wanted to improve their social and economic status in the United States. More Syrians also began speaking English, which according to Naff and Elkholy, was key in becoming American.³¹ In Toledo, their occupational preferences required that men spoke English in order to deal with non-Syrian customers; however, they failed in teaching their children Arabic at home, because in order to succeed in

³⁰ Naff, *Becoming American*, 9.

³¹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 324.

America, it was more important that their children spoke English, as opposed to Arabic.

As the American-born generation grew up in America, few returned to the old country to marry. Instead, the tenth step to permanency, change in marital traditions, began to peak by the 1920s, as more interethnic marriages occurred and more Syrian couples were born or raised in the United States. These marriages were very assimilative, because neither spouse had direct contact with the old country and only knew American ways, which severely decreased transnational ties as their Syrian-born parents and grandparents passed away. The eleventh step, decline in transnational ties, is an inevitable result of immigration. As World War I and its aftermath hampered transatlantic travel, and first generation immigrants passed away, subsequent generations failed to maintain transnational ties. Transnationalism, however, remained high among Muslim immigrants, who immigrated after World War II, at a time when improved transportation and communication methods facilitated these connections.

These eleven factors indicate that by the early 1910s, the Syrians would not be returning to the old country. Economic stability was their main motive in settling in Toledo where they invested in long-term business opportunities. Shortly thereafter, they invested in homes and religious institutions. According to Naff, among the first signs of permanency was home ownership and establishing religious and cultural associations. In 1910, Toledo's Orthodox community began planning for St. George Church, when home-ownership was nearly nonexistent in the city. The presence of family and friends in the North End, and their change in

marital trends assisted them in their decision to remain in the United States.

Their early acceptance of permanency encouraged them to participate in Americanization programs, learn English, and attain American citizenship. By World War II, Syrians in Toledo successfully executed these steps and joined the ranks of middle-class Americans, economically and socially.

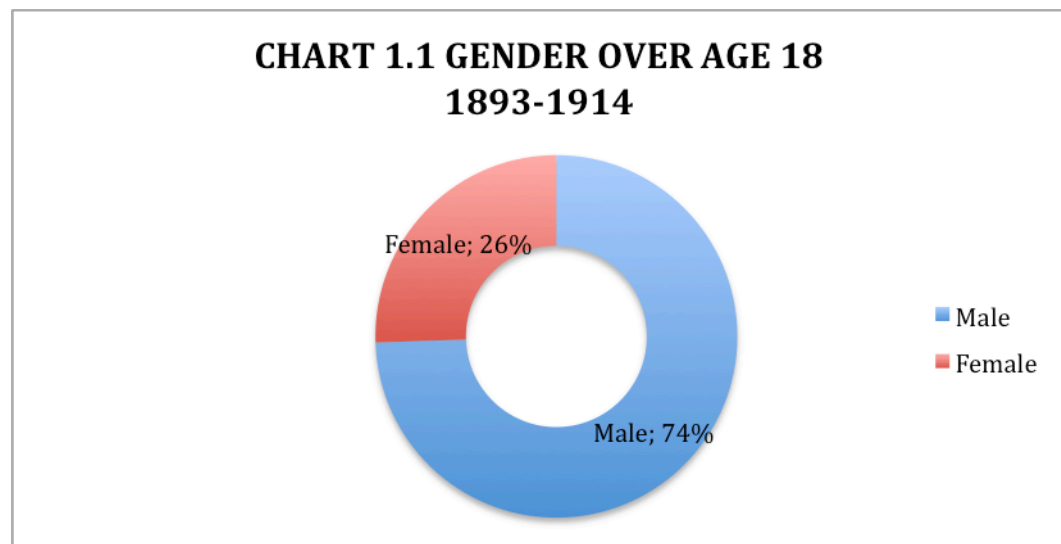
Chapter One

Good Bye Village, Hello America!

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants came to Toledo in two major waves starting in the mid-1880s. The first wave, between 1881 and 1914, was predominantly Christian men, who came directly from Syria or after settling somewhere else in the United States first. The second wave occurred from World War I until 1960. This was a time of community growth and community building marked with family emigration and the start of the Muslim community. World War I also marked the beginning of the community's decision to stay in the United States permanently. Hence, in the years after World War I, they began a series of community building and assimilative activities such as establishing religious institutions, forming ethnic clubs, and taking steps towards becoming good American citizens.

Scholars agree on the general characteristics of the first wave of Syrian immigrants. According Gregory Orfalea, "Sixty-eight percent of the early Syrian emigrants were male, a majority unmarried and in their twenties. Of those that were married, only twelve percent brought their families to America in the first

wave.”³² Alixa Naff and Phillip Hitti also assert that over ninety percent of the early immigrants were Christian and from the lower economic strata, who intended to stay in the United States for a few years, save money, and return home. Although the number of immigrants who left Syria and came directly to Toledo was not as high as those who settled in other American cities before coming to Toledo, they shared many of these characteristics. Approximately 195 people immigrated between 1893 and 1956. However, the majority came between 1894 and 1914. They were mostly single males, between the ages of sixteen and thirty-two, and were farmers in the old country.³³ The following four charts illustrate the gender, age, marital status, and homeland occupation of those immigrants.



³² Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 74.

³³ The Statue of Liberty- Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. www.ellisland.org Ellis Island Database collection of Syrian immigrants that stated they intended to live in Toledo at Ellis Island. This is a modest number and analysis.

Chart 1.2 AGE AT IMMIGRATION BY GENDER, 1893-1914

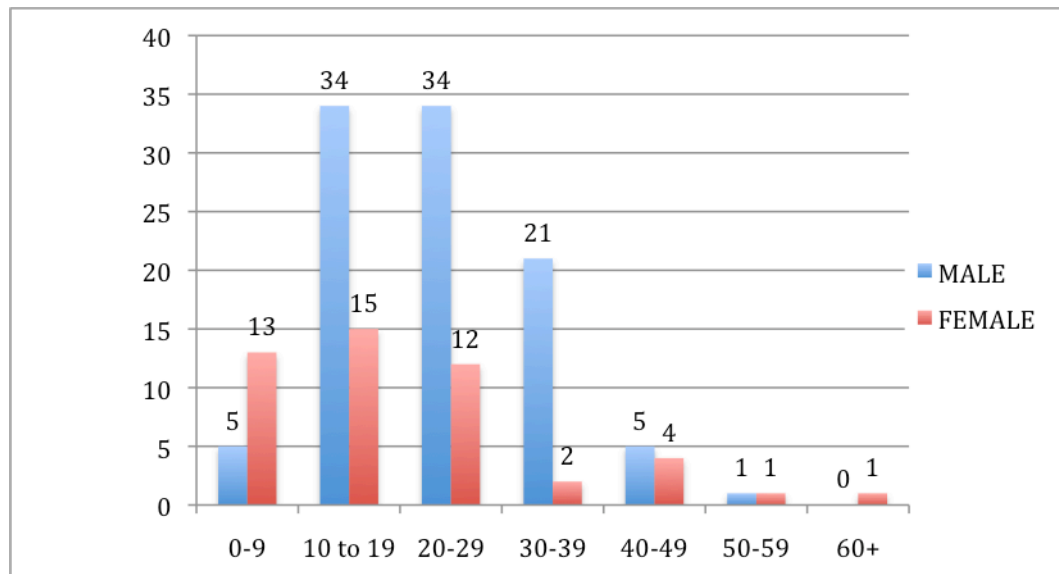
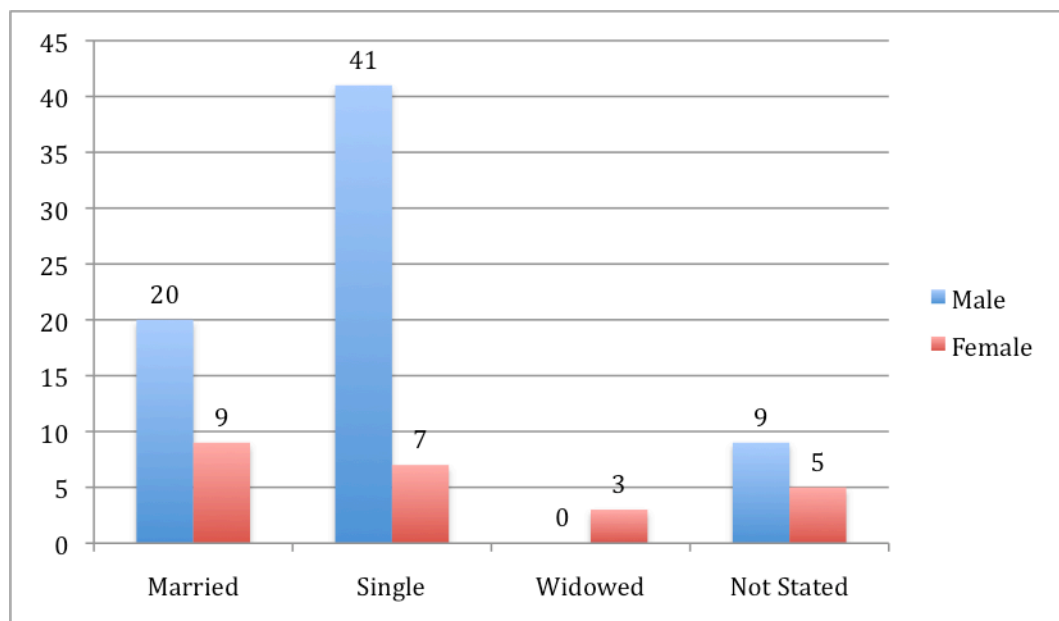
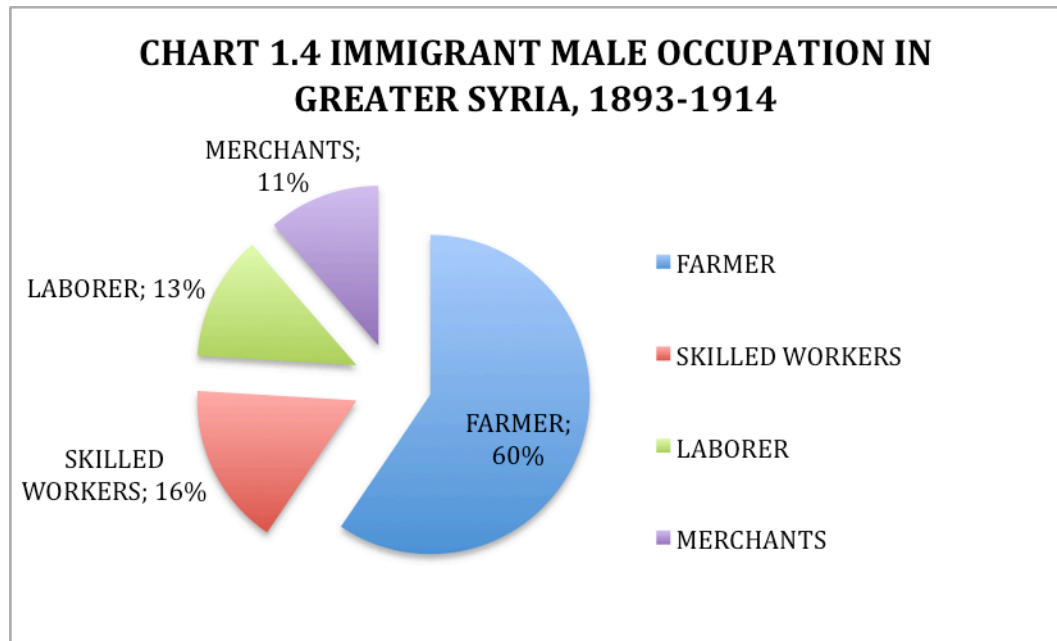


CHART 1.3 MARITAL STATUSES UPON IMMIGRATION, 1893-1914





There were several reasons why the early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants left their village for America. Most came for economic reasons, but supplementary motives, such as religious persecution or to avoid military conscription, also influenced their move. Nevertheless, their decision to come to the United States, a nation in the midst of an industrial and economic boom, was evidence that they primarily immigrated for economic reasons. Naff explains, “Had the discovery of the moneymaking opportunities of America not turned Syrian eyes towards a new direction, Syrian migration very likely would have remained an individual rather than a mass matter.”³⁴ They initially immigrated to make money, working in the United States for a short period and returning home financially secure. Toledo resident Deib Hady, explained, “After working for two or three years in the United States, they figured, ‘they could take a few dollars

³⁴ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 83.

and they would be millionaires' in Lebanon."³⁵ Jenny Brack's father immigrated in the early 1900s because "He got sick and tired of eating rishta and mjaddara."³⁶ Beatrice Shalhoub Rooney's father immigrated because "There's work, better conditions over here. They were tired over there. Their government was not for the people over there, and they had a lot of wars. So to get a job, everyone thought it would be wonderful here. And it was for them. They loved this country. It was a safe haven."³⁷

After the American Civil War, the nation's industrial economy rapidly expanded. Factories, laying railroads, and building construction spread across the country and required workers to operate the machines. As news of America's industrial revolution spread Europeans immigrated to America in increasing numbers. These jobs attracted some Syrians; however it was the success of Syrian traders at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 and in Chicago in 1893 that inspired others to immigrate. According to Hitti,

Between 1885 and the year of the Chicago exposition, the flow of emigration was augmented to such an extent that it spread itself all over the country east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio River.... But the movement did not assume large proportions until the early nineties, the Chicago Exposition of 1893 constituting the first general bugle call to the land of opportunity.³⁸

³⁵ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community," *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 6.

³⁶ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008 . Mjaddara is a lentil dish common among Syrian peasants.

³⁷ Beatrice Rooney Interview, July 11, 2008.

³⁸ Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 48.

Immigration was a major expense that Syrian peasants would not take on had they not been assured of success in the United States. According to Khater, "We find that an average peasant started out of Beirut or Tripoli with a \$63 purse. If we throw in some intangibles such as bribes and food, the figure could go as high as \$80, or close to 250 piaster's- the salary of a policeman or the tuition at a boarding school for the children of the elite in Lebanon."³⁹ To pay for this trip, they often sold possessions or took loans from relatives to be repaid from the riches they were to make in the U.S. They heard "Tales of entrepreneurial Eden, [and] hurried to the United States, 'seeking the gold-paved streets of America.'"⁴⁰ Stories of streets paved with gold along with remittances that trickled through remote Syrian villages prompted thousands of villagers to venture in search of gold. Khalaf states, "As early as 1890 some of the early emigrants returned home with stories and evidence of their stunning and swift success. Such episodes were usually followed by waves of renewed exodus."⁴¹ When they returned home after years in America, western clothes and stories of prosperity convinced others to make the journey. According to Shakir, "The reputed success of two or three brothers might trigger the wholesale departure of up to a hundred from a

³⁹ Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 56.

⁴⁰ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community," *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 6.

⁴¹ Samir Khalaf, "The Background and Causes of Lebanese/Syrian Immigration to the United States before World War I." In *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 19.

single village or town.”⁴² Many who came to Toledo, immigrated with siblings, uncles, and cousins. Dorothy Saba’s father left Syria with his cousins.⁴³ Charles Cassis’s maternal grandmother immigrated at the age of fourteen because her brother brought her to America to join him.⁴⁴ In 1913, Frieda Aossey’s mother immigrated with her uncle because she wanted to come to America.⁴⁵

Steamship agents also played an important role in the early increase of Syrian immigration. Agents were sent to villages surrounding Beirut and Tripoli dressed in western-style clothing, to recruit immigrants by telling exaggerated tales of the economic potential that America held. For a fee, they helped prospective immigrants cross Syria’s mountainous terrain, bribe Turkish officials, and board a boat destined for the U.S.⁴⁶ Mike Shaheen’s father and several other villagers encountered one such agent in 1907.

They couldn’t make a living in Lebanon, and they want to come to America and they couldn’t come here and they snuck at nighttime... They had a guy he’d come to the village and say “I’ll take you to America if you got the money and you pay me... and I’ll get you on the boat.” And the guy come in to *Lucy*. And gathered all the guys that [wanted to] come here, and you usually get one from *Lucy*, one from *Ghazi*. He gathered a truckload and he take [them] country.⁴⁷

⁴² Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 24.

⁴³ Dorothy Saba Interview, July 11, 2008.

⁴⁴ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁴⁵ Frieda Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁶ Naff, *Becoming American*, 93.

⁴⁷ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008. *Lucy* and *Ghazi* are villages in the Bekaa Valley of present day Lebanon.

Many Toledo Syrians also cited religious persecution as a motive for immigration. Former mayor of Toledo, Michael Damas, recalled hearing stories of how the Ottoman Empire regularly raided his grandparent's village, and had "heard rumors that his grandfather was killed in a war with the Turkish Army."⁴⁸ Dr. Najib Sallume escaped in 1895 after he "Became connected with the political movement known as the Young Turks, a coalition of reform groups that led a revolutionary movement against the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II."⁴⁹ Danny Thomas's father, Shadid Ya'qub, immigrated in 1901 "After witnessing Ottoman Turk atrocities."⁵⁰ George Tanber's ancestors also cited persecution. "Riches awaited they were told. Also, with the Moslem Turks of the Ottoman Empire running Lebanon, Christian Arabs like the Tanber's faced frequent persecution."⁵¹

Regardless, persecution was rarely the primary motive to immigrate. Had they been persecuted, they could have immigrated to Europe before America's economic potentials was discovered. Had they been persecuted, Syrian immigration would have been a permanent family phenomenon, as opposed to predominantly young single men, who wanted to make money and return home. It would be difficult to believe that they would willingly leave behind a wife and children in such a dangerous place. Khater also refutes this motive as nothing more than a myth, created by Christian-Syrians for sympathy, because people of

⁴⁸ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community," *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 6.

⁴⁹ Betsy Hiel, "Najib Sallume: Soldier, Explorer, Diplomat, He Was a Doctor to Many in Early Toledo," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

⁵⁰ Orfalea, 124.

⁵¹ George Tanber. "The Way Home Leads Through Ellis Island," *The Word*, February 1996, 7.

Mount Lebanon enjoyed greater autonomy, were taxed less, and Christians could avoid military conscription until the Constitution of 1908 revoked their exemption.⁵²

Christian conscription forced families to send young boys out of Greater Syria. Naff explains, "Experience of others had convinced Syrians eligible for service that once conscripted, soldiers would never be seen or heard from again; that Syrians were assigned hazardous and difficult duty in the Arabian deserts."⁵³ Immigration was a way to save children from the Ottoman regime, as well as improve their financial situation. "If the family's economy must suffer from the absence of its males, it seemed prudent to send them to America where not only would their lives be spared, but their increased earnings would benefit the family."⁵⁴ By 1913, "Every steamer bound for North or South America has been crowded, mostly with Christians anxious to evade the military draft."⁵⁵ During a return visit to get married in 1914, James Shemas's father, Frank and his new bride had to quickly leave Syria because he was wanted for conscription. "The Turkish army began looking for boys and men for their army. So Frank hid in Melvina's grandmother's house below them. He shut all the windows and they

⁵² Khater, *Inventing Home*, 49.

⁵³ Naff, *Becoming American*, 85.

⁵⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 85.

⁵⁵ Khalaf, "The Background and Causes of Lebanese/Syrian Immigration to the United States before World War I," 29.

told the Turks there was no one there. Shortly thereafter, they fled to Junieh on the sea to get away from Beirut.”⁵⁶

While Christian conscription began in 1908, Muslims were always subject to mandatory service. According to Fatima Al-Hayani, this was the reason that the first Muslim in Toledo, Abdullah Ganoom’s father left Syria. “Many young men had no work and were inducted into the Turkish army. These were the reasons that many of them emigrated.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, even if persecution caused their immigration, they chose the U.S. and not Europe or South America simply for economic reasons.

The journey to America was an eventful and emotional experience for many immigrants. The decision to leave their home, family, and way of life was not made lightly, since it would be years before they would return, if they ever returned. The journey was long and expensive, and a visit to Greater Syria would delay their goal of quickly returning home. Saying farewell to loved ones was the most emotional part of the immigrant’s journey. Charles Cassis’s grandmother “Was 14 years old when she came over... and she never, except for her brother who lived here, saw anymore of her family ever again. Her mother or her father or anybody.”⁵⁸ Melvina Shemas Haddad’s mother anguished in the days before Melvina was to depart. “Mihgee was laid up in bed, sick with fever for three days

⁵⁶ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview Conducted by Elaine Shemas George, March 17, 1985.

⁵⁷ Fatima Al-Hayani email interview, August 11-12, 2008.

⁵⁸ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

when she realized Melvina would be getting married and leaving for America.”⁵⁹

When it was time to leave, Mihgee followed her to the port, and as the boat departed, “Melvina saw her mother crying on the shore. Melvina’s heart ached because she was unable to bid her mother farewell or kiss her goodbye.”⁶⁰

The same emotional farewell was recalled by Mitcheal Salem, who was born in Danbury, Connecticut to immigrant parents from Jib Janine, Syria. In 1924, his family returned home after twenty years in the United States, but Mitch returned to America at the age of 16 after his father lost money in American banks during the Depression. Holding back tears, Mr. Salem reminisced about saying good-bye.

It was a sad affair. My parents were really sad about the idea of my leaving and I was emotionally upset also. I remember, upon saying goodbye, how everybody was gathered at the Jib Janine at the bottom of the town where we boarded the bus for Beirut. It was an emotionally upsetting experience, that’s all I can say about departing, saying goodbye.⁶¹

Immigrants in the early years walked up to three days to get to ports in Beirut, Tripoli, Haifa, or Jaffa. They bribed Turkish officials for a *tazkara* (identity card) and purchased ticket for a dinghy voyage to a European port, where they boarded a large steamship to the United States. This was not always an easy matter. In the spring of 1915, Melvina and Frank Shemas took their passports to the Turkish police station for permission to depart, where they paid two gold liras, about ten dollars for the policeman’s signature. Then they traveled to Beirut for a

⁵⁹ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

⁶⁰ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

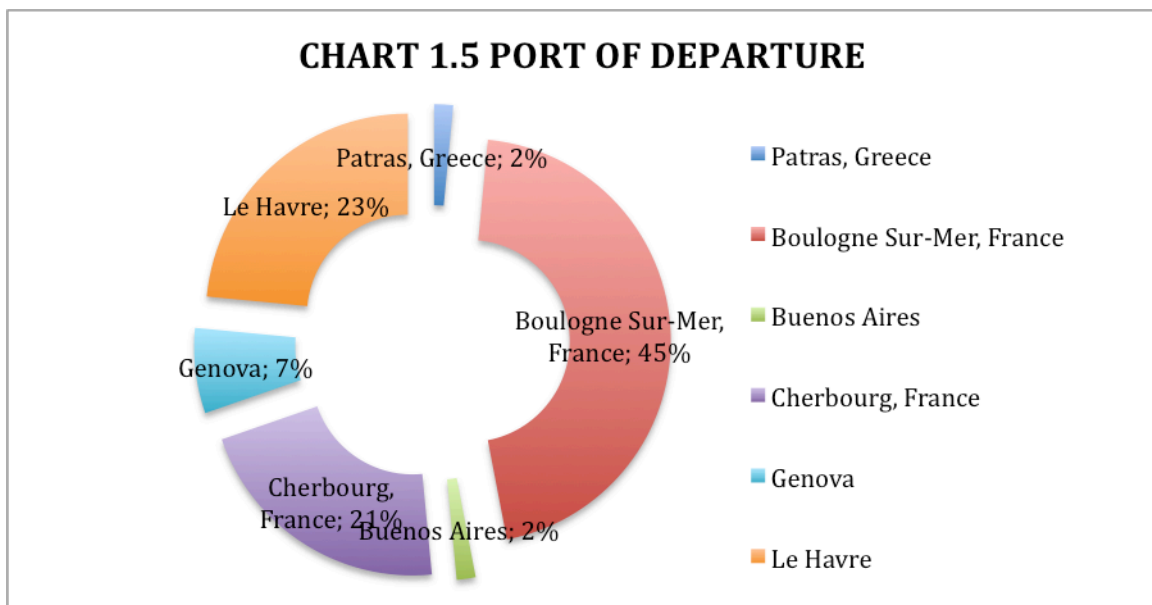
⁶¹ Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 6, 2008.

ship to take them to Alexandria, Egypt and then Europe where they boarded a steamship to America.

On the advice of a friend, they spoke no Arabic so that Frank would not be taken to the Turkish army.... The Turkish authority had them walk between two soldiers' bayonets. They showed them their paper (including his American citizenship) and Frank and Melvina made it through beneath those bayonets. Melvina states that if they had known that Frank was Syrian, they would have killed him.... Not only was Frank "shaking in his boots," but his complexion turned yellow as a lemon.⁶²

Most travelers went to Europe to board a steamship for the United States.

Although Marseilles, France was a clearinghouse for the ships coming from Beirut, the majority of those who came to Toledo sailed to the United States from Bologne Sur Mer, France, as can be seen in Chart 1.5.



⁶² Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

Once they arrived in Europe, they had to wait several days before setting sail to the United States. Mr. and Mrs. Shemas stayed in a hotel in Naples, Italy for a week before boarding a steamship for the United States.⁶³ The journey took approximately ten days in the early 1900s and could be quite dangerous. Upon returning to the United States, Mike Shaheen's ship, the Skandiryie, sailed for twenty-three days because of poor weather.

We had to stop in Italy because we had bad weather. And when we sailed from Italy to whatever, I don't know if they came direct to New York or not, but we had another storm, and we lost all the boats and whatever we had on there. I think they gave us up for a lost boat because we tied it up. When we used to sleep we used to tie ourselves to those army bunks. When that boat goes up, the water goes 'shhhh.' Goes back up the other way, the water comes back. People get sick and vomit. We had a really nasty, nasty, nasty trip. When we hit New York, we stunk.⁶⁴

After their long journey, immigrants were delighted to see the New York Harbor and Ellis Island. James Shemas's mother was "Very happy to get here. But one of her brothers landed in New York, saw the statue of liberty. He climbed the tall towers of the ship and dove into the ocean. He was so happy."⁶⁵

Most Syrian immigrants entered America via Ellis Island; however some came to other east coast stations. The first Syrian in Toledo, Michael H. Nassr, entered the United States via New Orleans in the 1870s.⁶⁶ During Frank Shemas's first trip to American in 1900, he entered via "Rhode Island or one of those [other] ports that immigrants came in."⁶⁷ Charles Cassis's paternal

⁶³ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

⁶⁴ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁶⁵ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

⁶⁶ Betsy Hiel, "Toledo Provided Hope to Settlers," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

⁶⁷ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008.

grandfather entered through Sanford, Maine⁶⁸ and Jennie Brack's father entered through Augusta, Georgia.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Ellis Island was the main receiving station on the Atlantic coastline. According to Orfalea, a majority of the 150,000 Syrians who came to the United States were processed at Ellis Island.⁷⁰ Third class and steerage immigrants boarded a ferry for Ellis Island to be questioned and examined in the Great Hall. Interrogations took less than ten minutes, but any physical or mental conditions that would impair the immigrant's ability to be self-sufficient in America, caused officials to pull them aside for a thorough examination. The story of George Tanber's grandparents, the Faroh family was one such example. "When it came time to be interviewed, the immigration officials took one look at the 60-ish Monsour, his 20-something wife, young Edna, and the two-month-old baby and pointed to the center door."⁷¹ Fearing that there would be a problem because of Monsoor's age, they sent their eldest son Nick, to enter with their cousins. "Sitti always remembered the explanation her mother gave her: 'If we got in and something happened to your father, then the government would have to take care of us.'"⁷² When word of the family's detainment reached relatives in Indiana, a lawyer was sent to help, but officials still refused their entrance. While many immigrants were detained, not everyone was subsequently deported. Several years later Edna Faroh tried to reenter the United States, however, upon arrival Edna, "Worn down from the long boat ride

⁶⁸ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁶⁹ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁷⁰ Orfalea, 75.

⁷¹ Tanber, "The Way Home Leads Through Ellis Island," 9.

⁷² Tanber, "The Way Home Leads Through Ellis Island," 9.

and anxious about finally seeing her brother again, she developed a high fever and was sent to the island's infirmary." She was released several days later when her fever broke.⁷³

According to Naff, "Many Syrians came in cabin class or used alternate ports with lax procedures to reenter America when initially denied entrance."⁷⁴ Syrians generally sailed in third or steerage class, because it was the cheapest method of travel. George Tanber's grandmother traveled in third class, because it was more comfortable than steerage. Some came in cabin class, where they were briefly examined aboard the boat, in order to avoid the dreaded interrogation at Ellis Island. An alternate entrance to America, the Mexico-United States border, was especially problematic for immigration officials, because they "feared that a diseased Syrian or Asian immigrant would cross the border 'dressed as a Mexican' knowing that 'no one would question' him."⁷⁵ Syrians, aware that Mexicans were exempt from many of the vigorous examinations performed at Ellis Island, saw the southern border as a prime back door entry. According to Michael Aosse, "They wasn't as fussy in Bromfield like they were in New York...He talked with a Lebanese fellow in the immigration there and they told him to go through Vera Cruz, Mexico. He went to Vera Cruz, Mexico [then from] Bromfield, Texas to Cedar Rapids."⁷⁶

⁷³ Tanber, "The Way Home Leads Through Ellis Island," 10.

⁷⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 102.

⁷⁵ Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 159.

⁷⁶ Mike J. Aosse Interview, March 24, 2008.

Misunderstandings occasionally caused an immigrant to be detained, the majority went through the process with only one long-lasting problem: thousands of Syrian names were changed. Some made the choice to change their name on their own, by adopting anglicized first or last names. "This is especially true where the original patronymics are hard for Americans to handle."⁷⁷ Zion Aosseey changed his name to Sam when he came to the U.S. "Everybody changed their name to Sam because Sam was the United States."⁷⁸ Sisters, Evelyn Zoghaib and Dorothy Saba's mother's name was Skandariya and like many other women, changed her name to Mary, as "it was easier to say."⁷⁹ Not everyone chose to change his or her name. Munir Simon's father's name was Abdullah Alfaqueeh, however, at Ellis Island his last name was changed to Simon, because "The immigration [officials] decided to change things. They said this was easier to pronounce. They made a lot of Simons. So, there are a lot of Simons that are Jews, Christians, and Muslims," explained Munir.⁸⁰ Although actor Jamie Farr changed his last name from Farah to Farr as an adult, immigration officials initially changed the family name to Farah when his father came through Ellis Island in the 1910's. "Immigration officials asked him the last name of his father, which was Malooley. 'He gave them our grandfather's first name, which was Farah... and we became Farah's immediately.'"⁸¹ Hussein "Sam" Shousher immigrated with several cousins through Ellis Island in 1902, where his last name

⁷⁷ Hitti, 101.

⁷⁸ Mike J. Aosseey Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁷⁹ Dorothy Saba and Evelyn Zoghaib Interview, July 11, 2008.

⁸⁰ Munir Simon Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁸¹ Betsy Hiel, "A Soldier in a Dress Put Toledo into America's Living Room," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

was also changed. “They asked him [his] name and he thought they asked him ‘What [do] you do? Your cousin, he’s a barber.’ Barber is hallaq. So the guy said Hallick? And he thought they asked him what’s your job, ‘What you do?’ He said ‘Halaq.’ So he says ‘Okay Hallick. Go.’”⁸² Their illiteracy meant they could not spell their name in English, thus, immigration officials hastily wrote what they heard. Mitcheal Salem’s father was Mahmoud Salem El-Khatib, however at Ellis Island, the overwhelmed immigration inspector shortened his name.

El-Khatib is the family name. When my father first arrived in the U.S., he went to Ellis Island. He couldn’t speak English and they asked him what his name was so he said Mahmoud Salem El-Khatib. And you know how they were in a hurry. ‘They said Mahmoud Salem?’ And he said ‘Yes.’ So that’s what they put down. Mahmoud Salem and they eliminated the El-Khatib at Ellis Island. That’s how we retained the last name of Salem although the family name is El-Khatib.⁸³

At the time, name changes were not seen as problematic, yet as the years progressed, the change forever impacted their identity. Arab poet, H.S. Hamod wrote an emotional poem after his father death. “Dying with the Wrong Name,” clearly explains the ramifications of losing an ethnic name.

These men died with the wrong names,
Na’aim Jazeeny from the beautiful valley
of Jezzine, died as Nephew Sam,
Sine Hussein died without relatives and
because they cut away his last name
at Ellis Island, there was no way to trace
him back even to Lebanon, and Im’a Brahim
had no other name than mother of Brahim,
even my father lost his, went from
Hussein Hamode Subh’ to Sam Hamod.
There is something lost in the blood,
something lost down to the bone

⁸² Yehia Shousher Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁸³ Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 28, 2008.

in these small changes. A man in a dark blue suit at Ellis Island says, with tiredness and authority, "You only need two names in America" and suddenly- as cleanly as the air, you've lost your name. At first it's hardly even noticeable- and it's easier, you move about as an American- but looking back the loss of your name cuts away some other part, something unspeakable is lost...

Syrians able to enter the United States stayed in New York for a brief period, while others immediately boarded a train to their destination. Mike Shaheen's father immediately boarded a train for West Virginia. "They put him on a train to West Virginia. He [doesn't] know how to speak English. [He had] a signed paper that's written in English and Arabic for the conductor or whoever it is. [He] don't know how to take care of it."⁸⁴ Frank and Melvina Shemas stayed in New York for a week before continuing to Peoria. "They visited Coney Island and were invited every night to various homes of people formerly from Beirut."⁸⁵ Mike Aosseay recalled his father's frustration while waiting for the train to take him from Texas to Iowa. "When he got to Bromfield, Texas he kept asking when the train was coming. He couldn't talk English. He couldn't talk Spanish and he'd ask them and they kept telling him *manana* which means tomorrow in Spanish."⁸⁶

For most immigrants, Toledo was not the first city they settled. Some started in New York, while others went to Iowa, West Virginia, Illinois, or other industrial Ohio cities. According to Habib I. Katibah, "It is safe to say there is no

⁸⁴ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁸⁵ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

⁸⁶ Mike J. Aosseay Interview, March 24, 2008.

city in America with a population of 100,000 or more that does not have a nucleus, however small, of Syrian population.”⁸⁷ Hitti explained that the first and largest settlement began in New York City along Washington Street, but eventually they migrated to cities in the interior of the country.⁸⁸ By following relatives, Syrians tended to live together in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, called *Little Syria's*, in cities along the east coast and Midwest. According to Al-Hayani, “It is historically clear that ethnic groups tend to migrate to areas where they can find comfort with people close to them.” Chain migration eased a newcomer’s fear and anxiety as relatives formed a valuable networking system. Most communities were set up on an “Intricate web of kin and communal associations. The immigrant would not enter America alone.... Immigrants seldom left their homelands without knowing exactly where they wanted to go and how to get there.”⁸⁹

West Virginia’s coal industry attracted a sizeable Syrian-Muslim settlement. Munir Simon, Asma Matt, and Mike Shaheen’s parents settled in Rossmore, Logan and Omar, working as peddlers, grocers, or in the coalmines.⁹⁰ According to Mr. Shaheen, “Whoever the first one that came to this country, he must’ve went to West Virginia, and everybody followed.”⁹¹ According to Naff, another early settlement, Cedar Rapids, Iowa was “Well located in the heart of

⁸⁷ Habib I. Katibah, Brown, “Syrian Americans.” In *One America*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph Slabey Roucek (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), 293.

⁸⁸ Hitti, 66-7.

⁸⁹ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 57.

⁹⁰ Munir Simon Interview, March 19, 2008; Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁹¹ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

the rich agricultural area along the swift surging rapids of the Cedar River.... [It] attracted both skilled labor and immigrants.”⁹² Frieda Aossey’s family moved there, “When the Hamadi’s moved to Cedar Rapids my mother didn’t want to be out on the farm by herself... So she talked my father into selling and we moved to Cedar Rapids.”⁹³ Peoria also attracted peddlers because of the railroad lines and depots that served the city’s agricultural industry. Frank Shemas moved “directly to Peoria, because he had a sister living there and some first cousins.”⁹⁴ Others settled along the east coast, like the Salem’s who initially settled in Springfield, Massachusetts, which had a small Syrian population. They then moved to Danbury, Connecticut, before making the third and final move to Toledo in 1920.⁹⁵ Helen Rahal’s father also settled in Danbury in 1907 because his brother-in-law Moses was the boss at a fur factory and secured him a job.⁹⁶ A few also moved to other cities in Ohio. Elizabeth Soockey’s father came to Canton where he had relatives who owned a linen store. “They gave my dad a suitcase, put some stuff in it, and told him to walk the streets. They called them peddlers.”⁹⁷ Dorothy Saba’s father worked in Wauseon, Ohio as a peddler in the early 1900s before moving to Toledo with his wife and newborn child.

By the late 1870s, the migration of Syrians to America was set in motion as thousands of men and a few women came to the country to improve their economic status. Their journey was long and difficult, but they were determined

⁹² Naff, *Becoming American*, 149.

⁹³ Frieda Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁹⁴ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2007.

⁹⁵ Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 6, 2008.

⁹⁶ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Soockey Interview, December 23, 2008.

to enter and succeed. While early settlements sprang up in Danbury, Peoria, and Cedar Rapids, within a few decades, the economic potential of the city of Toledo was discovered, setting off an ongoing stream of Syrian immigration to the city. These immigrants worked early on to establish the city as their home and quickly attracted friends and relatives to join them.

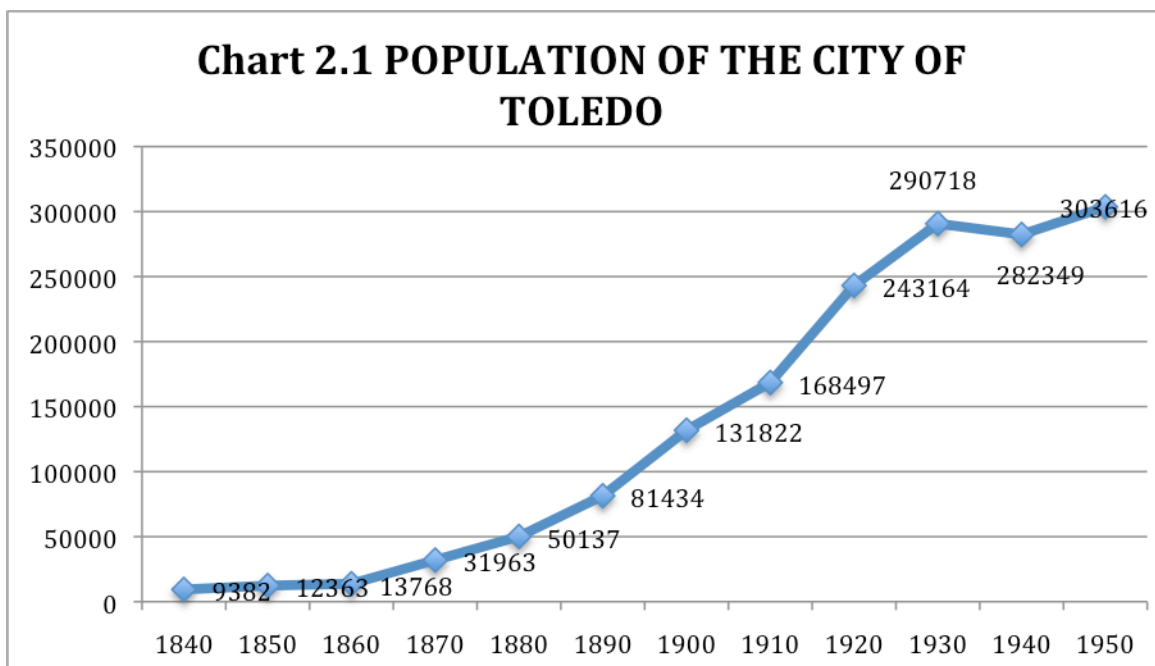
Chapter Two

Welcome to Toledo: A City on the Brink of Becoming a “Future Great City of the World,” 1880-1914

Tana Mosier Porter documented the impact of industrialization and urbanization on the city of Toledo and its appeal to immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. Although Porter recognized the growth of the Irish, German, Polish, and Hungarian communities, the Syrians were not mentioned.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, many of the same attributes that attracted other groups also attracted Syrians. The area’s position along the Maumee River, Lake Erie, and between the larger cities of Cleveland to the east, and Chicago to the west, made it a strategic location for a trading center. After Europeans settled in the area in the 1760s, the region’s population rapidly increased through the 1830s. (See Chart 2.1) Toledo’s intricate rail system that connected the city to Chicago, Fort Wayne, and Cleveland, expanded the shipping capacity along Lake Erie and Maumee River. By the late 1800s, Toledo was not only a major trading city, but

⁹⁸ Tana Mosier Porter, *Toledo Profile: A Sesquicentennial History*. Toledo, OH: Buettner (Toledo, Inc., 1987)

was also showing signs of future industrial growth. As early as 1873, industries such as Millburn Wagon Work, Libbey Glass Company, Toledo Scale Company, and Toledo Machine and Tool Company were attracted to the city because of its ideal location, drawing in thousands of factory workers. However, it was not until 1911, when Willys-Overland Company moved its automotive operations from Indianapolis to Toledo that thousands of workers moved to the city for these factory jobs. According to Porter, “In 1916, one-third of Toledo’s wage earners worked in the automobile industry, one-fifth of them for Willys-Overland Company.”⁹⁹



⁹⁹ Porter, 72.

Michael H. Nassr was the *Dean of Toledo Syrians* and founder of the city's Syrian-Lebanese community.¹⁰⁰ He came to the United States in the late 1870s through the port of New Orleans, with his wife, Dabla. Their first child, Anthony, was born in 1880 in Louisiana. Shortly thereafter, the family moved to Toledo where they had their second child, Mary in 1882. In Toledo, Nassr opened a dry goods store and produce stand on Cherry Street. According to Alixa Naff, Syrians sought economic opportunities in cities like Toledo, where there was potential to open a business, after initially working as a peddler.¹⁰¹

According to Naff, pioneer immigrants, like Michael Nassr, "Occasionally, they chose their place to plant their settlements judiciously, sometimes intuitively; but they considered not only the town's market potential but its surrounding area."¹⁰² Toledo's intricate railroad tracks, strategic geographical location, and growing industrial center combined to make it an ideal location for a new Syrian settlement. The city is geographically situated between Cleveland and Fort Wayne, which had large Syrian peddling communities, with no peddling supply center in between. Nassr probably realized the economic potential, and established a store to restock Syrian peddlers with goods as they traveled through Toledo on their way to the next city. "A supplier [such as Michael Nassr] opened his shop and set the process in motion by sending for his relatives and

¹⁰⁰ Betsy Hiel, "Toledo Provided Hope to Settlers," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹⁰¹ Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 153.

¹⁰² Naff, *Becoming American*, 137.

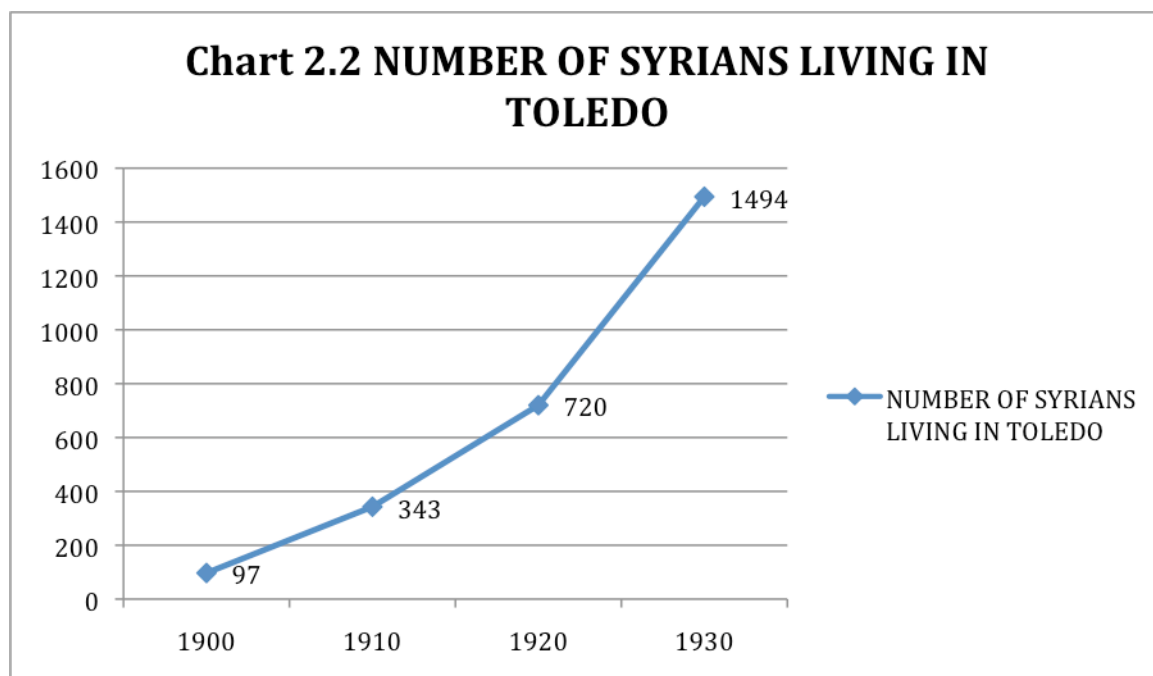
townsmen.”¹⁰³ Mr. Nassr became a magnet drawing in friends, relatives, and people from his village to Toledo.¹⁰⁴ As they became successful, they notified others, which triggered a continual chain of migration. Evelyn Shakir, explains Syrian immigrants, “Selected a destination where they could picture a familiar face, where someone- a distant cousin, an uncle’s wife, a former neighbor would take them in for a while or rent them a room and give them pointers about making it in America.”¹⁰⁵ For example, Olga Haddad and her parents, moved to Toledo from Charleston, West Virginia in 1914 to be near family.¹⁰⁶ What began as a tiny colony in the 1880s quickly grew to nearly fifteen hundred people by 1930. The community’s dramatic growth can be seen in Chart 2.2.

¹⁰³ Naff, *Becoming American*, 137.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Hooglund, “From the Near East to Down East: Ethnic Arabs in Waterville, Maine.” In *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 89.

¹⁰⁵ Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 31.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.



Few Syrians lived in Toledo prior to the twentieth century. In addition to Michael H. Nassr, George Darrah worked as a peddler and Mr. Nassr's brother Anthony worked as a grocer in 1890 and 1891.¹⁰⁷ By 1895, at least twenty-seven Syrians lived in Toledo.¹⁰⁸ In 1900, the early settlement's population increased to ninety-seven people, less than .073 percent of the city's total population. The number increased to 341 people, in 1910, only .028 percent of Toledo's population. Although the Syrian community was a mere *drop in the provincial bucket* when compared to the city's overall growth, family migrations contributed to a three hundred percent growth of the community in only ten years.

¹⁰⁷ Toledo City Directory, 1889, 1890, 1891, www.ancestry.com.

¹⁰⁸ 1895 Polk City Directory of Toledo, OH. Lucas County Public Library Local History Department.

By 1900, most Syrians in Toledo were immigrants. There were eighteen women and thirty-five immigrant men from Greater Syria in Toledo, including five couples that immigrated with at least one child. Naff explained, “Generally, a high rate of immigrant children is characteristic of family migrations and permanent settlement in the new land.” Pioneer immigrants, who intended to stay in the United States for a short period, generally did not bring family with them. However, in Toledo, six women immigrated with their husbands, four followed their husbands, and one came before her husband. The high proportion of couples that immigrated together is indicative that the community would become a permanent family settlement as opposed to a transient settlement. In 1910, more than half of Syrian men married to Syrian women brought their wives over after they immigrated. This action changed the immigrant’s intention of residing in America from temporary to permanent.¹⁰⁹ Evelyn Shakir suggests,

The theory is that the first *Syrian* men here, out to make as much money as they could as quickly as they could, soon realized that it made sense to send for wives or sisters or daughters, whose earnings could supplement their own and thus hasten the day of their return. The tendency to send for women (or bring them in the first place), it is said, only accelerated as time went on and it became increasingly clear that the family’s future lay in America.¹¹⁰

However, this is not to say that the community had a strictly familial identity. Both Naff and Hitti, argued that the majority of men who came to the United States without families were single, which held true in Toledo. Hitti noted: “Like birds of passages, or nomads of the deserts, these men, usually unattached to families and non-professional, make their transit from one place to another in quest of

¹⁰⁹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 227.

¹¹⁰ Shakir, 28

livelihood.”¹¹¹ In Toledo, there were twenty-one boarders in 1900 and twenty-three in 1910. While the number of Syrian boarders increased numerically, there was a substantial statistical decline when compared to the entire Syrian population, from twenty-one percent to less than seven. This decline is also indicative that Toledo was a family settlement, not a transient or boarding settlement.

The birth of children was another early indication that the community would make Toledo their permanent home and eventually establish places of worship and ethnic associations. Between 1900 and 1910, the number of American-born members saw impressive growth. While in 1900, only thirty-six percent of the community was born in the United States, by 1910, that number grew to forty-two percent. More importantly the number of American-born children increased during the two decades. In 1900, there were fifteen families with fifty children, sixty-eight percent of which were born in the United States. In the next decade, the number of families with children increased to fifty-nine with eighty-four percent of children born in America. As more children were born and raised in America and became attached and accustomed to American society, the less likely the family would return to the old country.

In 1900, only two families shared the same last name. Since it had been commonly regarded that Syrians drew in family as they became successful in a new city, the lack of direct relatives shows that in 1900 the Syrians were in the

¹¹¹ Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 68.

early stages of establishing themselves. As the decades progressed however, uncles, siblings, and friends joined these pioneers. By 1910, there were a number of families with the same last name living in the city. The most numerous family name was Nassar with eight families, followed by the Bassieth family with five households, then the Joseph and Haddad families with four households each.¹¹²

According to Naff, it was not uncommon in Syria to find a house crowded with extended family.¹¹³ This tradition continued in the United States, however, she argued, “Among [America’s] most profound impacts on Syrian life was the disintegration of the traditional patriarchal extended family into nuclear units... because American influence and education compelled sons to establish their own households as they married.”¹¹⁴ In Toledo, this was not the case. In 1900, the majority of households consisted of only the nuclear family, and perhaps a boarder, but by 1910, many of the Syrian-Lebanese households included members of the extended family. In 1900, there was one mother living with her adult head-of- household son. Yet, by 1910, nineteen households included extended family members. Four houses included a married child’s family living with his or her parents, and fifteen included extended relatives, such as nieces, siblings, and mothers. Syrians were accustomed to and cherished the presence of family, but in the United States, this living arrangement also meant that

¹¹² 1900 United States Federal Census AND 1910 United States Federal Census www.Ancestry.com. Also spelled as Nassr, Bassett.

¹¹³ Naff, *Becoming American*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 281.

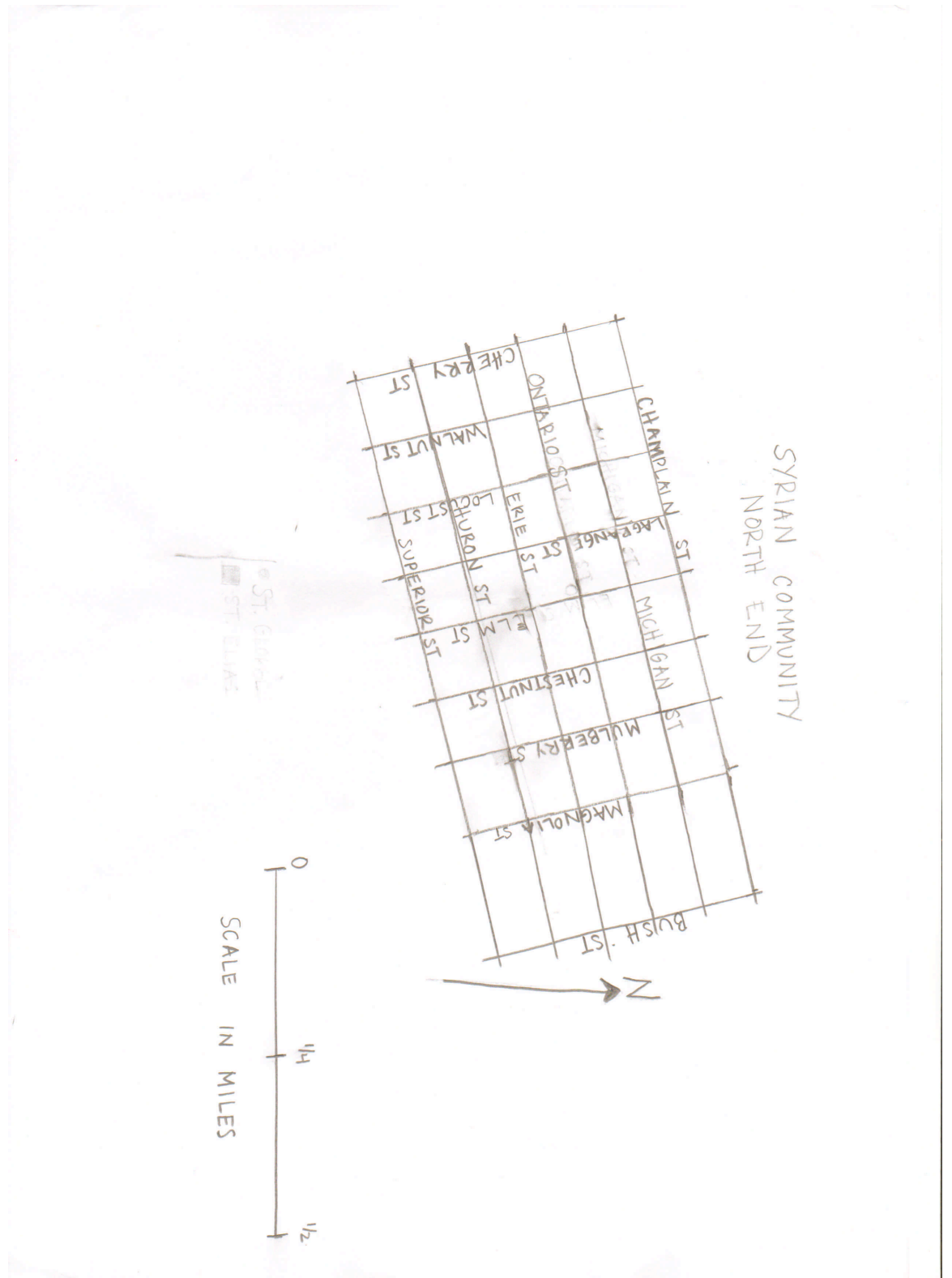
relatives could contribute to the household by paying rent, helping with young children, and cleaning.

Syrians, like other ethnic groups, preferred to live near each another in an effort to replicate the old village lifestyle. As the leader of the community, Mr. Nassr assisted many Syrian immigrants by providing them shelter in his North End home. Ethel Zarick recalled, "When you first came to Toledo, you stayed with Michael Nassr. He didn't turn anybody away."¹¹⁵ People later moved into homes near Mr. Nassr, because they found comfort being near people they knew who spoke Arabic, enjoyed the same cultural activities, and more importantly could give them advice about living in America. According to Naff, these areas, affectionately nicknamed, *Little Syria*, were "havens of continuity with the past which helped to ease the adjustment shock of the present."¹¹⁶ In Toledo, that neighborhood was the North End, where businesses and places of worship were established along Bush, Cherry, Champlain, Chestnut, Elm, Erie, Lagrange, Locust, Magnolia, Michigan, Mulberry, Superior and Walnut streets. Situated near most of Toledo's factories and businesses, the neighborhood had affordable homes, it was an ideal location for the Syrian community. (See Map of North End)

¹¹⁵ Betsy Hiel, "Toledo Provided Hope to Settlers," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹¹⁶ Naff, *Becoming American*, 202.

MAP OF NORTH END



The area had previously been home to many of Toledo's earliest immigrant groups, including the Germans, Italians, Hungarians, and Poles. Syrians were among the last group to move into the ethnically mixed North End. According to John Bodnar, "Few urban neighborhoods were populated exclusively by one particular group and seldom did one group choose to live in one specific location."¹¹⁷ As the twentieth century approached, sixty percent of the community resided in the North End; however, a minority lived in other areas, usually a few streets away from the early colony. In the North End, Syrians were scattered around the area without a clear majority on any one street, as can be seen in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1: SYRIAN SETTLEMENT PATTERN BY STREET, 1900

| Name of Street, 1900 | # Of Houses Owned or Rented on Street | Total # of Syrians on Street |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Adams | 1 | 2 |
| Cherry Street | 3 | 15 |
| Erie Street | 1 | 5 |
| Indiana Ave | 2 | 8 |
| Locust Street | 1 | 11 |
| Michigan Street | 1 | 2 |
| Ontario Street | 1 | 1 |
| Ottawa Street | 1 | 6 |
| Seneca Street | 1 | 10 |
| Smith Street | 3 | 14 |
| Summit Street | 3 | 14 |
| Superior Street | 1 | 8 |
| Washington Street | 1 | 1 |

¹¹⁷ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 177.

New immigrants continued to move into *Little Syria*, illustrating their preference to remain a shout away from Syrian friends. As a child, Mrs. Brack recalled, “my aunt lived one door away from us. She’d get on her porch, and my mother [would] get on her back porch, and they’d call to one another.”¹¹⁸ In 1910, nearly three-fourths of the community lived in the North End, with the largest cluster on Summit Street. However, Ontario and Locust Streets also attracted many families. (See Table 2.2) While most Syrians lived in or near the North End, clusters could be found along Starr Avenue, Woodville and Oswald on the East Side and on Avondale, Ashland, and Woodland on the West Side.

¹¹⁸ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

TABLE 2.2: SETTLEMENT PATTERN BY STREET, 1910¹¹⁹

| Name of Street, 1910 | # Of Houses Owned or Rented on Street | Total # of Syrians on Street |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Adams Street | 3 | 13 |
| Ashland Street | 1 | 4 |
| Avondale | 1 | 4 |
| Broadway | 1 | 7 |
| Cherry | 3 | 18 |
| Elm | 1 | 11 |
| Erie | 2 | 9 |
| Fulton | 1 | 7 |
| Galena | 1 | 2 |
| Huron | 2 | 14 |
| Indiana Ave | 1 | 10 |
| Lagrange | 1 | 4 |
| Lawrence | 1 | 3 |
| Locust | 3 | 21 |
| Matt Ave | 1 | 1 |
| Michigan Ave | 2 | 7 |
| Monroe Street | 2 | 5 |
| Ontario | 5 | 31 |
| Oswald | 1 | 7 |
| Ottawa | 1 | 3 |
| Smith | 1 | 6 |
| South | 1 | 3 |
| Starr Ave | 1 | 4 |
| State | 1 | 2 |
| Summit | 11 | 112 |
| Sycamore | 1 | 8 |
| Tenth | 2 | 14 |
| Woodville | 1 | 5 |
| Woodland | 1 | 4 |
| Toledo State Hospital for the Insane | 2 | 2 |

¹¹⁹ Bolded street names indicate they are located in the North End Syrian enclave.

Alix Naff claimed that one of the earliest signs of permanency among Syrians in America was home ownership.¹²⁰ In Toledo, there were twenty Syrian-occupied houses, but none were owned. In 1910, there were fifty-five Syrian-occupied houses; yet, only five were owned. In Toledo, signs of permanency by this time included the investment of capital to open businesses as well as the increase in number of American-born children, and planning for an Orthodox church, as opposed to initially investing in homes.

Although Toledo was a growing industrial city, few early Syrians worked in factories. Only nine Syrians, twenty-four percent of the male population, however, were employed as laborers, three of which were dairymen who did not work in a factory. Instead, they opened dry goods stores and produce stands, or worked as peddlers. According to Kayal, “Imbued with a desire to succeed and own property, a readiness to gain financial security and independence, they looked for and found opportunity in the free-enterprise climate of America.”¹²¹ They found suppliers to provide them with goods to sell and teach to them the ins and outs of peddling. Many early Syrians worked as peddlers before coming to Toledo and opened grocery stores, restaurants, or confectionaries. As a peddler, “Training for the road was minimal. Besides, most newcomers were impatient; they had come to make money quickly and were eager to get on with it. Within a day or two, someone put a kashshi [a back pack full of goods to sell] in their

¹²⁰ Naff, *Becoming American*, 203.

¹²¹ Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 95.

hands and took them out for their first day's earnings."¹²² It was a lucrative profession earning nearly one thousand dollars a year, compared to three hundred and eighty two dollars as a factory laborer.¹²³ George Nassar peddled linens to farmwives in Wauseon, Ohio.¹²⁴ Mike Shaheen recounted his father's experience as a pack peddler.

When he got to West Virginia, whoever was there met him and took care of him. And he went to whatever the headquarters they had there and that's how put him in business. Next day they put a bunch of clothes on his back and he went in the mountains and start peddling the stuff.¹²⁵

In time, peddlers saved enough money to open dry goods or confectionary stores, like George Nassar and Mike Shaheen's fathers. Syrians in Toledo shared similar occupational experiences as those in other parts of the country. J.K. David explained, "They worked, opened stores, traded, and saved, until the course of time, they became able to establish business, to acquire real estate, to erect buildings, to build homes, etc."¹²⁶ Thomas Zraik peddled goods in Illinois before settling in Toledo in 1900 to open a fruit store.¹²⁷ Financial success was the goal of the early Syrians, and entrepreneurship afforded them that opportunity. Ten Syrians were self-employed merchants: five were fruit dealers, one was a fruit and candy merchant, two were confectionary merchants, and two

¹²² Naff, *Becoming American*, 165.

¹²³ Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 89.

¹²⁴ Dorothy Saba, March 17, 2008. This is interesting because, Alixa Naff said that many Syrian peddlers who went to Toledo and other Great Lakes cities started their peddling from the Fort Wayne settlement. Wauseon lays in between the city of Toledo and Fort Wayne.

¹²⁵ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

¹²⁶ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 103.

¹²⁷ Betsy Hiel, "Toledo Provided Hope to Settlers," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

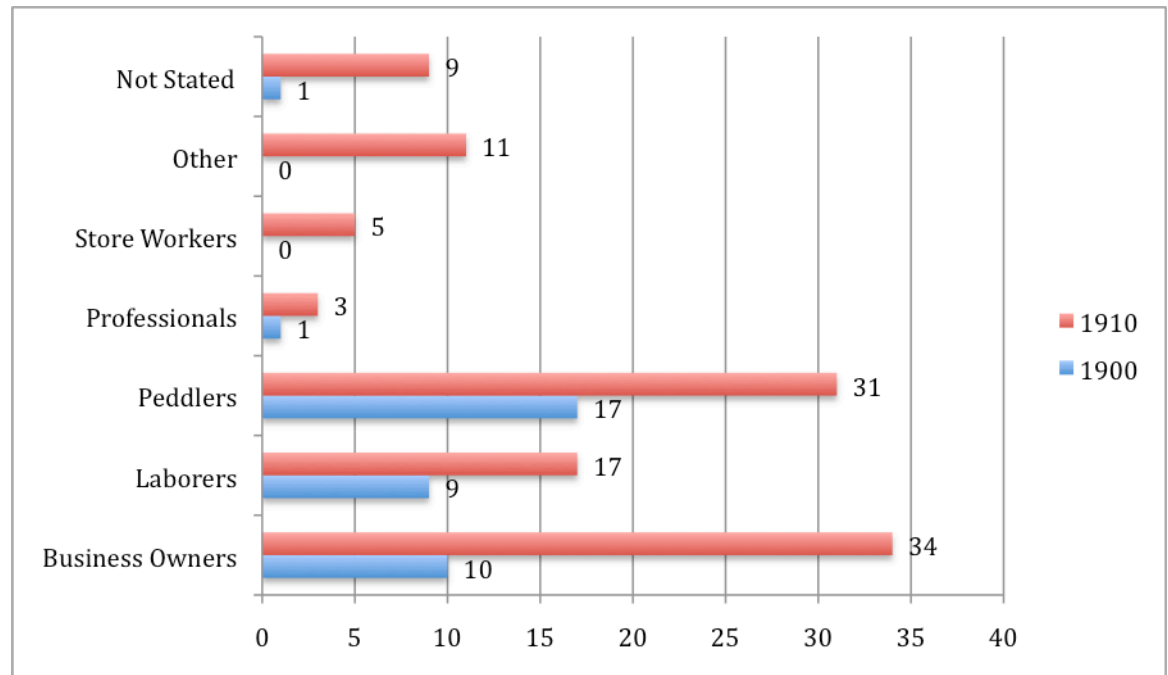
identified their professions as simply merchants. Merchants like Michael Nassr, represented important figures in the Syrian community. According to Naff,

As businessman, leader, and often founder of a settlement, a supplier served many functions. He attracted and sometimes recruited peddlers, supplied them (frequently on credit), organized their routes, banked their savings, mediated between them and local authorities, rented them the crowded and poorly furnished quarters suited to their itinerancy, frugality, and temporary status, and involved himself in their social life and community welfare.¹²⁸

By 1910, Toledo followed the national trend in the decline of peddlers. Only twenty-eight percent of Syrian men peddled, compared to forty-five percent ten years earlier. There was also a decline in the number of factory workers; however, there was a substantial increase in the number of merchants. As they invested their capital to open confectionaries, tailor and barber shops, dry goods, retail and fruit stores, the less likely that they would return to Syria. Others worked as policemen, tailors, barbers, flyers and city watchman just to name a few. The variety of jobs that they held is testament to their resilience and creativity in finding employment. Chart 2.3 compares the occupational preference of the Syrian community between 1900 and 1910.

¹²⁸ Alixa Naff, "Arabs in America: A Historical Overview." In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham, (Detroit: The Association of American University Presses, 1983), 16.

**Chart 2.3 SYRIAN MALE OCCUPATIONS OVER AGE
16, 1900 AND 1910**



There were two professional Syrians whose stories have garnered not only local, but also national attention. Dr. Najib Sallume, the only Syrian physician in Toledo, immigrated to the United States in 1895. After studying medicine in Maryland, he moved to Toledo in 1897 to open a medical practice.¹²⁹ According to a 2000 *Blade* article,

The people of Toledo have come to know Doctor Sallume not only as one of the most able members of his profession but as one of the most gifted personalities and most brilliant intellects that the old world of the East has given to New America... The elegantly dressed bespectacled man with a luxurious white scroll-like mustache delivered many of the Arab babies in Toledo, calling on patients in an Arabian horse-drawn buggy.... He was a believer in the medicinal powers of *leben* (Arabic for yogurt) and

¹²⁹ Betsy Hiel, "Najib Sallume: Soldier, Explorer, Diplomat. He was Doctor to Many in Early Toledo," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

prescribed it internally and externally as poultice to combat the effects of influenza.¹³⁰

The second person was Anthony (Tony) Nassr, an aviator and son of Michael Nassr. He was nicknamed the *Daring Syrian*, by local media because he dazzled the city and the world with “his daredevil aerial feats.”¹³¹ Supported financially by his father, he built a sausage shaped air blimp, “covered with Japanese silk sewn together in a quilted pattern, with linen cord drag ropes tying the balloon down. He operated the hydrogen gas-filled balloon from a spruce framework during the flight.”¹³² In July 1908, his attempt to fly his machine over Toledo attracted the attention of the *New York Times*¹³³ Although his expeditions were dangerous and meant to delight spectators, Anthony Nassr later used his aerial expertise to command an air defense base in New York during World War I, and serve as director of Toledo’s first airport

¹³⁰ Betsy Hiel, “Najib Sallume: Soldier, Explorer, Diplomat. He was Doctor to Many in Early Toledo,” *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹³¹ Betsy Hiel, “Tony Nasr: Early Aviator, the Daring Syria, Wowed the World with his Aerial Exploits,” *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹³² Betsy Hiel, “Tony Nasr: Early Aviator, the Daring Syria, Wowed the World with his Aerial Exploits,” *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹³³ “Airship Would not Obey,” Special to *The New York Times*, July 31, 1908 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005)), pg 1.

AIRSHIP WOULD NOT OBEY.

Special to The New York Times.

New York Times (1857-Current/fig); Jul 31, 1906; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2025)

pg. 1

AIRSHIP WOULD NOT OBEY.

Toledo Aeronaut Has Some Dangerous Adventures in His Flight.

Special to The New York Times.

TOLEDO, Ohio, July 30.—Tony Nassr, a Toledo aeronaut, had thrilling experiences here this afternoon while attempting to take a flight over the city in his new airship. He started from his aerodrome near Walbridge Park early in the afternoon and landed on the Salvation Army Building on Perry Street, where he was forced to tinker with his engine for an hour or more before he could go on.

He then tried to do some evolutions over the ball park, but the machine persisted in going earthward and landed on Spellbusch Avenue, near the Court House. When he again got into the air the gas had condensed so his craft was unmanageable. It tore a chimney off a Canton Street house and cut half a dozen telephone wires, after which it fell on a house at Canton and Smith Streets. Nassr was unhurt. The machine was carted home in a wagon.

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At the turn of the century, only five of the twenty-five Syrian women over the age of fifteen were employed. According to Kayal and Kayal, "This was due not so much to a lack of financial ability or to the spirit of economy, as to the persistence of the belief that a woman's place is in the home where she is to do all the household work."¹³⁴ Four women peddled and one worked in a factory as a machine operator. Evelyn Shakir explained simple economics regarding women's preference to peddle. "Homemakers felt more comfortable buying personal items or domestic notions from a woman or because a woman at the door was less threatening than a man or a more plausible object of sympathy."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Philip M Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation*, 92.

¹³⁵ Shakir, 39.

Syrians capitalized on this and decided that the family's financial security would best be served with the wife working alongside her husband or other male relatives as a peddler.

The number of women employed outside the home increased slowly, which differed from other geographic areas such as Fall River, Massachusetts. According to Shakir, "Nearly every unwed *Syrian* female in Fall River (fourteen years of age or older) had a paying job."¹³⁶ However, in Toledo they had similar occupational patterns as those described by Naff and Shakir. In 1910, twelve percent of Syrian women in Toledo were employed: five peddlers, one private housekeeper, one office book keeper, three factory workers, one woman was a partner in her husband's confectionary business, and one stated she was a washer at home. Three of these women were widowed, four married, four single, and one divorced.

Prior to World War I, Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their American-raised children encountered moderate efforts to Americanize. They adapted much of their culture to suit America, however, they did not completely discard their unique ethnic culture. The community actively worked within their religious circles and in their families to maintain their culture, like the continued preparation of foods made in the old country. While the early women immigrants predominantly maintained food traditions, it could not have been done without the businessmen's initiative in distributing the ingredients necessary to preparing these complex meals.

¹³⁶ Shakir, 49.

Ethnic foods are important aspect of the Syrian-Lebanese identity, regardless if they lived in the United States or in the old country. Hitti explains, “The Syrians as a rule desire good and wholesome foods and their dishes follow them wherever they go. To everything American they readily adapt themselves, but in matters that pertain to the menu they are always Syrian.”¹³⁷ After a long day at work, husbands returned home in anticipation of a home-cooked Syrian meal that reminded them of home.

According to Charles T. Klinksick’s, Syrians in Toledo acquired produce from other settlements, such as Charleston, West Virginia, and Akron, Ohio where there were larger and more established communities.¹³⁸ “Their preference was naturally for their own food, and although some of the special ingredients, such as cracked wheat (*burghol*) and Middle Eastern herbs, were ordered in bulk (sometimes from the supplier) from New York importers, most of their needs were purchased locally.”¹³⁹ For example, to make *mjaddara*, a favorite dish among many families, lentils, rice and onions were the only ingredients required. As long as they had the necessary spices and herbs, any dish could easily be adapted. Some ethnic staples could not be purchased from suppliers. For example, *kishik*, a powder made with a mixture of burghul and yogurt that was dried in the hot sun had to be made at home. Dorothy Saba recalled watching her mother and the other ladies in the neighborhood prepare it on their roofs. “*Fruke, Fruke*” (rub, rub) her mother would say as she kneaded the thick yogurt

¹³⁷ Hitti, 75.

¹³⁸ Charles Klinksick. “The New Community,” In *‘Lower Town:’ Toledo, Ohio, 1838 and What Became of It* (No Publisher, 1987), 54.

¹³⁹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 209.

on sunny days, waiting for it to dry into the powder used in cooking. Mrs. Saba's mother also prepared Syrian bread at home, a necessary staple on any Syrian's dinner table.¹⁴⁰ Recipes were later passed on to their daughters in hopes of keeping cooking traditions alive in America. However, few American-raised daughters cooked these complex meals on a daily basis instead, they were reserved for special occasions.

Gregory Orfalea described the early Syrian community on Washington Street in New York City in the early 1900s: "On Sunday after church, the Washington Street Syrians would amble uptown to take the children for a walk through Central Park."¹⁴¹ Although Toledo's community was not as large as New York City, they interacted with each other on a daily basis, for business and pleasure, gathering at each other's homes for the men to play cards, while women served strong Arabic coffee in between gossip sessions, and children played ball in the street. Adults spoke in Arabic, and children listened, without fully understanding the conversation. They ate and drank traditional Arabic delicacies, and behaved the same way they would in the old country. In this way, children were exposed to a basic element of the Syrian culture: hospitality and congeniality, which was maintained in the homes of later generations of Syrian Americans. This form of unstructured community gatherings was the most primitive and simplest method of cultural maintenance. They attended church on Sunday and visited afterwards, usually congregating at one person's home for

¹⁴⁰ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

¹⁴¹ Orfalea, 94.

Sunday dinner. According to long time North End resident Laura Mickel, “The church was the main focal point. It was our spiritual and social life.”¹⁴²

Religious events and marriage ceremonies provided excitement and anticipation for members of the community. While religious functions provided an opportunity to become spiritually closer to God, marriage celebrations gave them the chance to get dressed up and dance the *dabke*, a traditional Syrian-Lebanese line dance, for hours. Orfalea colorfully described the excitement when there was a wedding.

At the sumptuous wedding feast, a lace sack of almonds was placed along with sweetened *qamh* (barley) and *zibib* (raisins) near each guests’ place setting. Much dancing and singing ensued... ‘An Arab wedding was not just a family event, a community occasion, and a weekend of festivities. It was, rather, a command performance. Everyone had to sing and everyone had to dance’¹⁴³

By 1910, the Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo was exclusively Christian, which is divided into major religious groups: the Maronite and the Melkite sects of the Eastern-rite Roman Catholics, and the Greek Orthodox. Religion was an integral part of life, in the U.S. and in Greater Syria. Hitti explains, “The Syrians are loyal to their church because of the national aspect of its character, and it, therefore, forms an integral part of the constitution of their community wherever they may be.”¹⁴⁴ Living in small isolated villages, religion was their main focus in Syria, which they tried to implant in the United States. However, establishing ethnic churches was a difficult and long journey for both groups.

¹⁴² Betsy Hiel, “Muslim or Christian, Heritage Nourished by Religion,” *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

¹⁴³ Orfalea, 96.

¹⁴⁴ Hitti, 35.

Early Orthodox families in Toledo included the Darah, Saba, Bassett, Haddad, Corey, Skaff, and Cassis families.¹⁴⁵ They came from villages, cities, and towns throughout Syria, including Aitha, Kfeir, Damascus, Zahley, Beirut, Latakia, Tripoli, and Kirby. The Farah family came from Jib Janine and Aitha, located in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.¹⁴⁶ Charles Cassis, Dorothy Saba, Evelyn Zoghaib and Charles Abood's parents were from Aitha, Lebanon.¹⁴⁷ Jack Zouhary's "father is from Latakia which is in Syria; my mother from Tripoli, which is in Lebanon."¹⁴⁸ The Shemas' were originally from Beirut, although his mother moved to Damascus during World War I.¹⁴⁹

According to Naff, Maronites lived in secluded villages throughout Mount Lebanon.¹⁵⁰ Danny Thomas' father and Michael Nassr both immigrated from Beshherri. However, Genevieve Brack's father, as well as, Lorice and Freda's father, Haseeb Manassa, were born in Sour, also known as Tyre, a town on the coast of Lebanon, not in the mountains.¹⁵¹ Melkites were scattered in towns and cities across Greater Syria.¹⁵² The Mount Lebanon city of Zahley, although

¹⁴⁵ James. J. Damas, "The History of St. George's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral," November 2, 1969.

¹⁴⁶ Betsy Hiel, "Toledo Blade. A Soldier in a Dress Put Toledo into America's Living Rooms," *Toledo Blade*, March 28, 2000.

¹⁴⁷ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008; Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

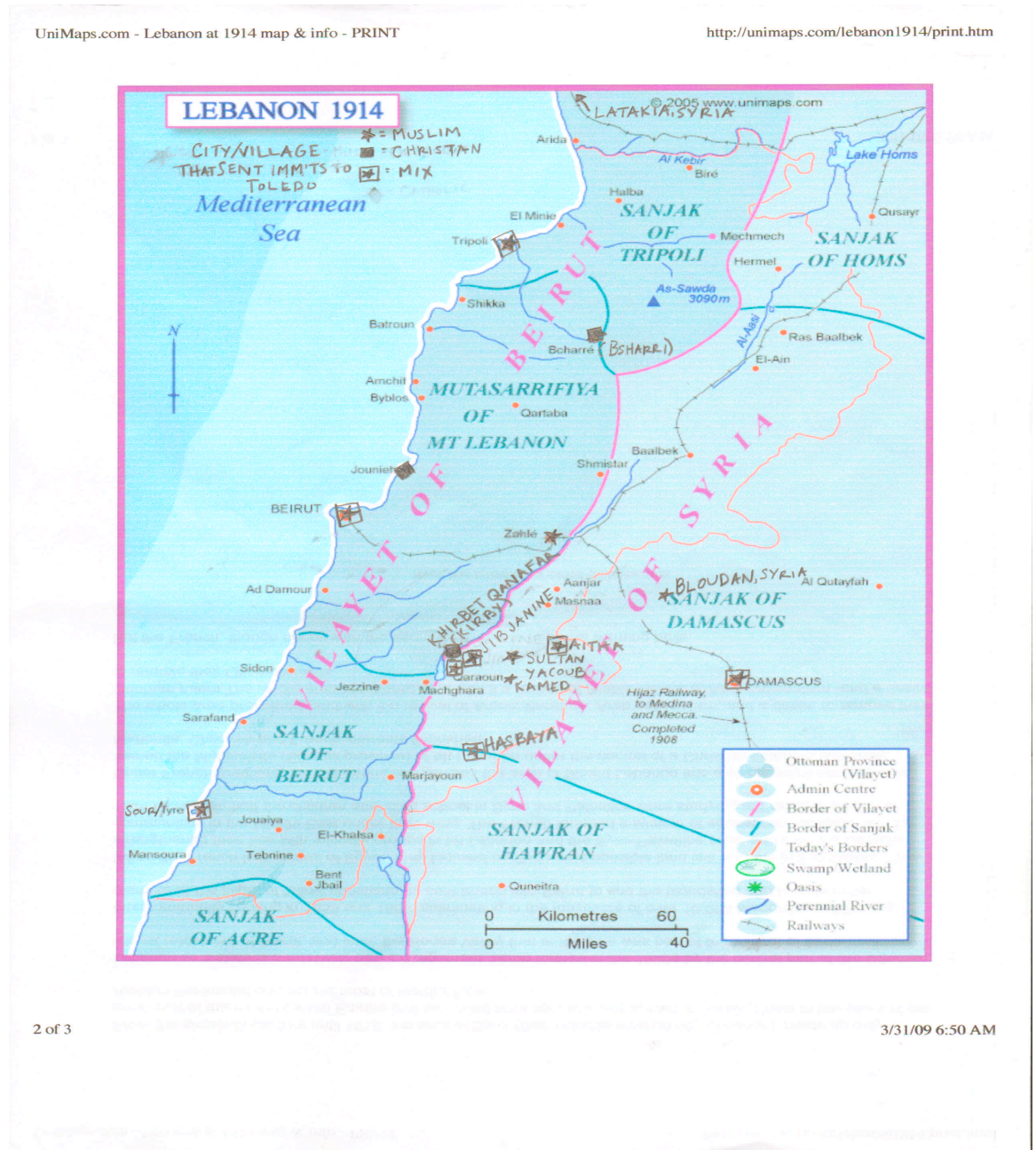
¹⁴⁹ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview Conducted by Elaine Shemas George, March 17, 1985.

¹⁵⁰ Naff, *Becoming American*, 51.

¹⁵¹ Lorice Burkett and Freda Hadeed Interview, March 25, 2008. Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

¹⁵² Naff, *Becoming American*, 51.

religiously mixed, had a large Melkite population, which sent many villagers to Toledo. (See Map: Greater Syria, 1914)



While many Syrians may have intended to come to the United States for a short period and return home, by the early-1910s, it was clear that the community that formed in 1880 had begun to take on permanent qualities. In addition to giving birth to American-born children, purchasing their own business, and slowly transitioning from renting to buying their homes, they also took steps to open ethnic churches, to pass religious and cultural traditions on to their children and satisfy their desire to worship as they did in the old country. According to Kayal, “Unlike other ethnics, Syrians were neither able, nor interested in establishing community-wide association based solely on ethnicity, in order to pass the cultural heritage. Rather, they pinned their interests and hopes on the family and church.”¹⁵³ Thus, by the first decade of the twentieth century, serious efforts were underway in both Catholic and Orthodox circles to establish place of worship.

The early Orthodox community initially worshipped in Protestant Churches or rented social halls, like Michael’s Hall in the North End. “For many years they held Eastern Orthodox services only when a traveling priest would visit Toledo. Then they had to depend upon the indulgence of Protestant churches for a place to worship, or hire a meeting hall.”¹⁵⁴ Some attended Episcopalian churches for mass and ceremonies. Dorothy Saba’s parents wed in 1904 at Trinity Episcopalian Church in Toledo. However, in 1912, the Orthodox Church began to discourage the use of these churches because they “Were deceiving people into

¹⁵³ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 84.

¹⁵⁴ James. J. Damas, “The History of St. George’s Syrian Orthodox Cathedral,” November 2, 1969.

believing that Orthodoxy and Anglicanism were synonymous.”¹⁵⁵ After thirty years in Toledo, the Syrian Orthodox community realized they formed the religious associations necessary to establish such a church. In 1910, Orthodox families from different Syrian villages formed a Men’s Club, and in 1915, the Ladies Benevolence Society. “For three or four years the efforts of the members was given to garnering enough money to add to the money solicited by the men to purchase the double house on the corner of Elm and Erie Streets for the site of the church.”¹⁵⁶ As the community grew and showed more signs of permanency, the desire to pass on their Oriental-religious heritage to their children prompted the Orthodox to work together to achieve this common goal.

In Toledo, Syrian Catholics were discouraged from establishing a church by the Irish-dominated diocese that desired to “Build a single, unified American Catholic church devoid of any ethnicity but their own.”¹⁵⁷ According to James Shemas, “The Bishop was opposed to having a Syrian Melkite Church here.”¹⁵⁸ Instead, they were encouraged to attend services at local churches in the city. Most joined St. Francis and St. Joseph’s parishes, rather than continue the push for an ethnic church. Kayal concluded, “Rather than inform the American Catholic public of their legitimate differences, however, the Syrian Catholics allowed themselves to become a Latinized Catholic ethnic group rather than make

¹⁵⁵ Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 92.

¹⁵⁶ James. J. Damas, “The History of St. George’s Syrian Orthodox Cathedral,” November 2, 1969.

¹⁵⁷ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ James Shemas Interview, June 18, 2008.

American Catholicism pluralistic in terms of rite, language, and liturgy.”¹⁵⁹ They saw American churches as a natural part of adaptation in America. Melkite ordained, Reverend Alan Maloof, explained,

They wanted to be more “American” in all aspects of the word. Americanization remolded home, work, family, and recreation. Some, unfortunately, overzealous in their good intentions, confused the word “Americanization” with “Latinization.” The general idea seemed to be, “We are American now, therefore our churches and customs should be the same as those of the other American Catholics (Latin’s); so that we may all be alike; we should not confuse other people.”¹⁶⁰

Although the Catholic Church played an external role in assimilation and Americanization, it was the Syrians’ acceptance of the Church’s will that facilitated this process. “They wanted to be Catholic Americans no matter what the cost to their communal life.”¹⁶¹ An envy of the prosperity among the western Catholics caused them to abandon much of their ethnic traditions. “In the Syrian immigrant’s mind, to be modern, affluent, and American meant to be Latin.”¹⁶²

The implications of no ethnic church where the liturgy was recited in Arabic and traditions were practiced as they were back home became evident with future generations of Syrian Catholics. This disconnect, deprived children of a place to develop and participate in regular cultural activities and regularly socialize with other Syrian Americans. According to Kayal, “The primary interest and function of the churches became preserving ethnicity and attracting the American-born Syrians simply because they were all *wlad Arab* (children of the

¹⁵⁹ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 146.

¹⁶⁰ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 149.

¹⁶¹ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 149.

¹⁶² Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 125.

Arabic East)... Syrian Americans not affiliated with any Syrian institutions are really Americans of Syrian ancestry.”¹⁶³ Another long-lasting impact, which was seen among the second generation Catholics, was the higher level of exogamous marriages than other Syrian religious groups.

There were two forces of Americanization: external factors that influence the community, such as schools, the American church, and the United States government; and internal factors from within the community itself, such as their desire to imitate middle-class Americans and their quest to attain citizenship. While immigrants took steps to Americanize they did not become an *empty shell*. In Toledo, Syrians attempted to duplicate their village life in Greater Syria and maintain their cultural traditions, while accepting aspects of U.S. society compatible with their ethnic culture.

Syrians were not explicitly pushed to assimilate prior to World War I. Naff points out that, “At no time did the Syrian population represent a cumulative religious, political, or social force that attracted national attention.”¹⁶⁴ Their response to external forces led to their rapid acquiescence to the American way of life. If it had not been for their internal desire to be perceived as modern and good Americans, subtle external forces would not have been so effective. These influences paved the foundation for the pioneers’ slow conformity to American, which deeply resonated in the way their children grew up in the United States.

¹⁶³ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 170.

¹⁶⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 248.

Government policies between 1882 and World War I were one such external force promoting Americanization. In 1907, responding to increased nativist fears, Congress established the Dillingham Commission to “Investigate immigration and make recommendations about policy.”¹⁶⁵ It determined that Syrians were a mix of Syrian, Arabian, and Jewish blood, distinguishable from their Mongolian-blooded Turkish conquerors. Although Syrians were a small part of the Commission’s finding, they were lumped together with other new immigrants as “Less desirable than the old and constituted a threat to the welfare of the United States.”¹⁶⁶ There were also a handful of politicians who blatantly attacked the Syrian population. For example, in 1907, Alabama Congressman John L. Burnett called Syrians, “The most undesirable of the undesirable peoples of Asia minor.”¹⁶⁷ There were no reported incidents of discrimination by Toledo politicians, but news of problems in other areas of the country and other immigrant groups served as a stimulus for the community to ensure their political security and social status in America.

Toledo Syrians attained American citizenship to secure their permanency in the U.S. With citizenship papers in hand, they could prove to the American people, government, and themselves that they were capable of being *good Americans*, just like the middle-class Anglo-Saxons that they strove to mimic.

¹⁶⁵ David M. Reimers, *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn Against Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 17.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 163.

¹⁶⁷ Nancy Faires Conklin and Nora Faires, “‘Colored’ and Catholic: The Lebanese in Birmingham, Alabama,” In *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 76.

The earliest applicant was community founder Michael H. Nassr, who declared his citizenship intentions on August 19, 1884, and was naturalized on August 31, 1887. Mr. Nassr, like many others, applied for citizenship only a few years after immigrating to the United States. In 1900, seven Syrians were naturalized. Ten years later the number increased to fifty-two, and seventeen had first citizenship papers. Although this is a small percentage, the increase between 1900 and 1910 does reveal they were taking many step towards permanency.

In addition to external pressures, forces within the community also encouraged assimilation. The strongest force to Americanize was Syrian interaction with Americans. Whether it was early on as peddlers, or later in diverse neighborhoods or at grocery stores, Syrians were in constant contact with Americans. Naff credited Syrian assimilation with these early exchanges. "Peddling must be held to be the major factor in explaining the relatively rapid assimilation of Arabic-speaking immigrants before World War I."¹⁶⁸ Nearly every Syrian household had a peddling family member, who brought a first-hand account of what the American people were like. Standing at the door of a farmhouse, peddlers had their first glimpse of what American houses looked like, how women dressed and spoke, and what items they purchased. These glimpses stayed in their minds and encouraged them to imitate the Americans they met. Dry goods and fruit stores, and tailor shops, also catered to non-Syrians, gave them continued contact with American people long after they stopped peddling. Najeeb Halaby, father of Queen Noor of Jordan, explained his

¹⁶⁸ Naff, *Becoming American*, 1.

father's Americanization in the early part of the 20th century, "The first generation of the immigrant Arabs really wanted to be 100 percent American and changed their names and their religions even. They wanted to be in the Rotary and the Shriners and the country club. And they wanted to arrive socially, politically, professionally."¹⁶⁹

Their eagerness to be accepted by American society and attain financial success encouraged many to discard incompatible aspects of their culture to be good Americans. They enthusiastically adopted what they perceived as a better way of living. To them, Americanization was the embodiment of not only societal acceptance, but also of modernization, shedding aspects of backwardness. According to Philip and Joseph Kayal, "It was financial success motivated by their desire for freedom and financial independence that set the stage for their assimilation into the dominant society around them and which led to their overall monetary accomplishments no matter where they settled."¹⁷⁰ While families maintained their culture at home and through community activities, they incorporated their experiences in America to change not only their behavior, but also their mindset. In time, more families spoke English at home, accepted interethnic marriages, and traveled back to Syria less often.

There are several examples of simple ways Syrians changed their behavior to be more compatible with their host society. For instance, most parents stopped naming children foreign names, and instead chose English

¹⁶⁹ Orfalea, 138.

¹⁷⁰ Philip M. Kayal, et al., *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 96.

names. Names such as Joseph, George, and Mary were more common, while Arabic names like Elias and Shafica became less popular. “That’s what they did because everybody was in a hurry to be known as an American. They took American names because they wanted to learn English and be treated as Americans.”¹⁷¹ Naff asserts that this was not done *intentionally* to “disguise their ethnic identity [but to] overcome the difficulties of spelling and pronouncing Arabic sounds that are alien to Americans.”¹⁷² Mitcheal Salem changed his name in elementary school. “When I was in school, in grade school, I was Mohammed, you know. And the kids used to laugh. They didn’t know about Islam then.”¹⁷³ Even as a young child, he knew that his name was a hindrance to social acceptance.

Syrians also learned English so they could communicate with non-Syrians neighbors and customers. For men who worked as merchants, it was necessary to speak some English in order to interact with their customers. It was not as imperative for women, since few worked or had constant contact with non-Syrian. According to Stanley Liebeson and Timothy J. Curry, immigrants were able to maintain their native language only with sizeable influx of newcomers.¹⁷⁴ The constant influx of new immigrants prior to World War I gave pioneers in Toledo the opportunity to speak Arabic. Life in the North End also provided an arena to speak Arabic with neighbors daily. Liebeson and Curry concluded that “Relatively

¹⁷¹ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

¹⁷² Naff, *Becoming American*, 263.

¹⁷³ Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 28, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ Gerber, David A. and Alan M. Kraut, *American Immigration and Ethnicity: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 264.

homogenous immigrant populations are less likely to acquire English since the possibility of communication through their old-world mother-tongue is much greater than in a city where the immigrant groups are from diverse sources and hence do not share a common language alternative to English.”¹⁷⁵ In the North End, there was a large enough population that they could mingle only with Syrians who lived a few houses away.

As Syrians prolonged their stay in the United States, not only did their language skills improve but also more people learned to speak English. In 1900, only fifty-six percent of the Syrian community over the age of eighteen spoke English, however by 1910, seventy-three percent spoke English at home.¹⁷⁶ This number is remarkably high for any Syrian-Lebanese community at the time, but it correlates with the high percentage of male entrepreneurs. When asked if his parents spoke English, James Shemas responded, “Oh yeah they certainly did because my father was in business and... he and my mother went to Lagrange school at night and the principal of Lagrange school taught the English.”¹⁷⁷ Children become proficient in English at school, and parents picked up words from their children’s conversations as well. This was the case for Jamie Farr’s father. “My father was from Lebanon and wanted me to speak English in our home so he could learn to speak properly.”¹⁷⁸ Many Syrians spoke English when necessary, however they preferred to speak Arabic at home. Frieda Aosse’s

¹⁷⁵ Gerber, et al., 265.

¹⁷⁶ According to Naff, there is no such thing as “Syrian” language. The Syrian people speak “Arabic.” However, respondents on the census reports stated Syrian, therefore I will use the terms Syrian and Arabic interchangeably.

¹⁷⁷ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ Jamie Farr Email Interview.

parents spoke broken English, but at home her father pushed them to speak Arabic. "My dad had this saying when you leave the house, leave the *Arabi* here *wa imsak al Inglesi* (and use the English language)...but then when you come in the door from school *khali al Inglise barra, wa imsiko al Arabi* (leave the English outside and bring the Arabic inside). Oh yeah we had to speak *Arabi* in the house."¹⁷⁹ Many of the second-generation understand Arabic; however, they do not speak it. According to Abdo El-Kholy, communication between parents and children meant that the parents spoke Arabic, and the children responded in English.¹⁸⁰

The Syrian's opinion about marriage changed due to their exposure to American culture. According to Naff, the number of interethnic marriages prior to World War I tended to be rare because "They were believed both unworkable and undesirable."¹⁸¹ There was only one interethnic couple in the Syrian community in Toledo. In 1910, there were sixty-three married couples in Toledo who were both of Syrian descent and only four couples, two men and two women, involved in an interethnic marriage. One of the women, Mary Nassr, Michael Nassr's daughter, was the first American-born Syrian to marry a non-Syrian.

¹⁷⁹ Frieda Aosseey Interview, March 24, 2008. *Arabi* is Arabic for *Arabic*.

¹⁸⁰ Abdo A. Elkholy, *The Arab Moslems in the United States: Religion and Assimilation* (New Haven: College and University Press Services, Inc., 1966), 88.

¹⁸¹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 237.

Few Syrian men returned overseas to marry or have a wife selected by relatives and sent to the United States, especially among the younger generation of immigrants. Between 1900 and 1910, the number of men who returned to Syria to marry declined from twenty-one percent to twelve percent. In 1900, most couples immigrated to America after they married in Syria; however, in 1910, a slight majority of couples married in the United States after they immigrated. The earliest such marriage was George Merhab and his wife Jennie who immigrated in 1884 and 1893 respectively, but married in 1895. Salem Helway immigrated in 1891 and his future wife Rosa immigrated in 1898. The couple married in 1900.

The number of couples that wed in America after immigrating is surprising, considering the reported difficulty in finding available Syrian brides in the United States. Their number was limited because few women immigrated before World War I. (see Chart 2.4) Naff explains,

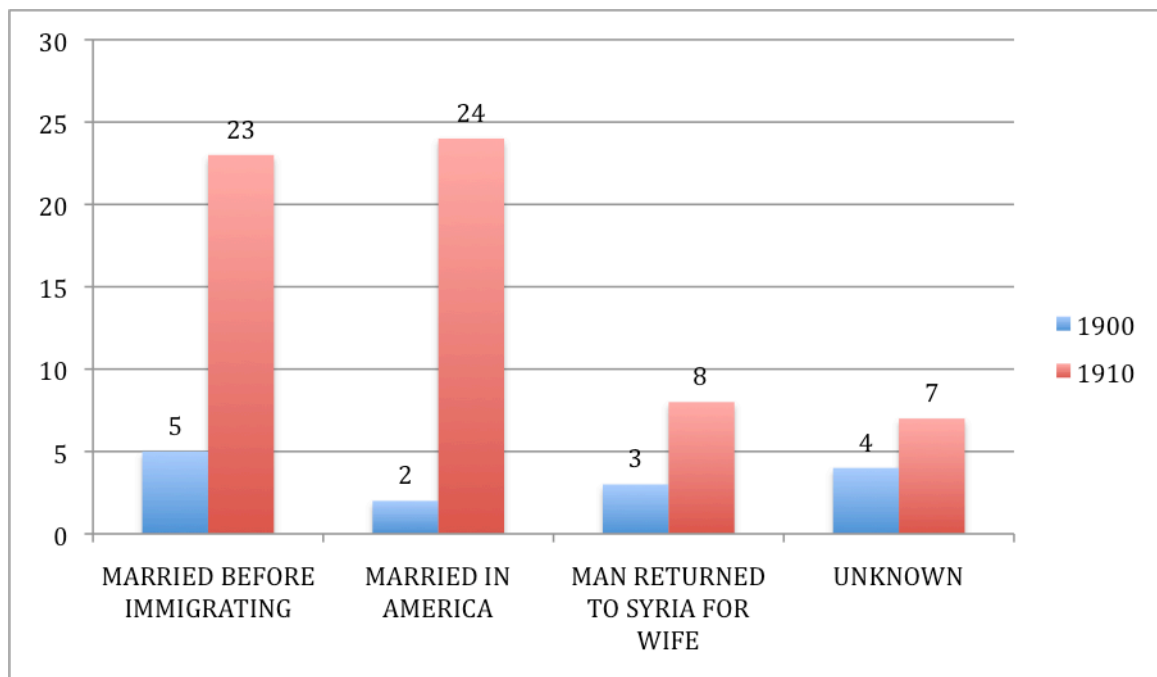
Although Christian women had been arriving in a small steady stream since the beginning of Syrian immigration, the ratio of men to women averaged at least four or five to one until after World War I. Among them were the unmarried sisters and daughters of men, who at the first scent of success, had sent for them as housekeepers and helpers.¹⁸²

Charles Cassis' grandmother Catherine's marriage to her husband Harry Haddad was one such example. Catherine immigrated to Toledo in 1892 when she was fourteen years with her brother. A year later, she married Mr. Haddad who was already living in America.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Naff, *Becoming American*, 227-8.

¹⁸³ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

Chart 2.4 Marital Pattern of Syrian Couples, 1900 and 1910



Maintaining ties with the homeland, either by making return visits or sending letters to relatives stuffed with money orders were two ways in which transnationalism existed prior to World War I for the Syrian-Lebanese people. According to David Gerber and Alan Kraut, immigrants “cannot be understood solely within the narrow confines of one nation, but must be understood as creating a social and cultural spaces, networks, and institutions that span national borders.”¹⁸⁴ The U.S. Immigration Commission reported the rate of return for Syrian immigrants from 1908 to 1910, was approximately 26 percent.¹⁸⁵ In Toledo, less than a dozen individuals returned to Greater Syria for a visit before World War I. The first Syrian in Toledo to return to the old country was Anthony H. Nassr, brother of Michael H. Nassr, in 1893. However, Akram Khater

¹⁸⁴ Gerber, et al., 8.

¹⁸⁵ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 111.

cautiously explained, “We do not know exactly how many Lebanese returned to the Mountain before the onset of World War I.”¹⁸⁶ What is more important is to understand why they returned. Most went to Syria for short visits with the intention of returning to America within two years. Khater summarized that the first wave of immigration returned because of “Financial success, homesickness, and unwillingness to accept the harsh pace of life in the United States meshed into a singular desire to go ‘home’.”¹⁸⁷ According to Naff, other men returned to Syria to find a bride or to help wives and children make the journey to the United States.¹⁸⁸ For example, in 1903, Magrum Esaz traveled to France to retrieve his wife and children who were previously denied entry to the United States. They successfully entered the United States on January 5, 1904 through Hartford, Connecticut. Anthony Nassr, son of Michael Nassr, on the other hand, traveled to Syria in 1897 and returned in 1903 to Toledo with a new wife, Mariam. Most remigrants were single men. There was only one family remigration; Samuel Otto applied for a passport for himself, his wife, and their four children in 1902, for a one-year visit to the old country.

Even though many Syrians desired to return home in the years before World War I, the evidence indicated that few did. Instead, they maintained ties with parents, wives, children, siblings and cousins by sending letters stuffed with \$300 to \$400 checks every six months to the relatives who remained in the old

¹⁸⁶ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 110.

¹⁸⁷ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 114.

¹⁸⁸ Naff, *Becoming American*, 227-8.

country.¹⁸⁹ According to Khater, remittances “accounted for about half the annual income of the Mountain.”¹⁹⁰ After visiting Syria in 1907, an immigration committee reported: “The Syrians send (home) more money per capita than the immigrants of any other nationality. Between Beirut and Damascus, one sees homes built with American money, more than one would see in a trip five times as long in Southern Italy.”¹⁹¹ The money sent back to relatives was used to buy land, improve existing homes, build new homes, lay down roads, and construct schools. However, transnationalism as a form of cultural maintenance was rarely passed on to their children. When parents passed away, rarely did children continue to visit or send letters and remittances to grandparents and distant cousins overseas.

As the First World War began in Europe, the Syrian community in Toledo exhibited multiple signs of permanency. Several factors, such as the birth of more children in America, the decline in peddling and subsequent increase in proprietorship, early steps to establish an Orthodox church, increased rate of naturalization and speaking English, along with the declining trend of returning to Syria to marry, illustrated their desire to remain in the United States. The fate of their permanency was sealed after World War I, as the aftermath of the conflict made returning home undesirable. For the next fifty years, the Syrian-Lebanese community, established religious and cultural institutions, encouraged chain migration of relatives still overseas, and participated in Americanization programs

¹⁸⁹ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 79.

¹⁹⁰ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 116.

¹⁹¹ Beverlee Turner Mehdi, ed., *The Arabs in America, 1492-1977* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1978), 10.

in order to recreate the village they left behind as well as secure their political, social, and economic future in America.

Chapter 3:

A Whirlwind of Changes- Two Decades of Growth, Community-Building, and Assimilation, 1914-1936

World War I and its aftermath marked two major changes in the Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo, Ohio. The first was the migration of Abdullah Ganoom, the first Muslim settler in the city, who signaled the start of Syrian-Muslim settlers in Toledo. The war also changed the Syrian's short-term objective to long-term aspirations of community building and upward economic mobility. Their establishment of St. George Orthodox Church in 1919 marked the community's first formal step in making the United States their permanent home.

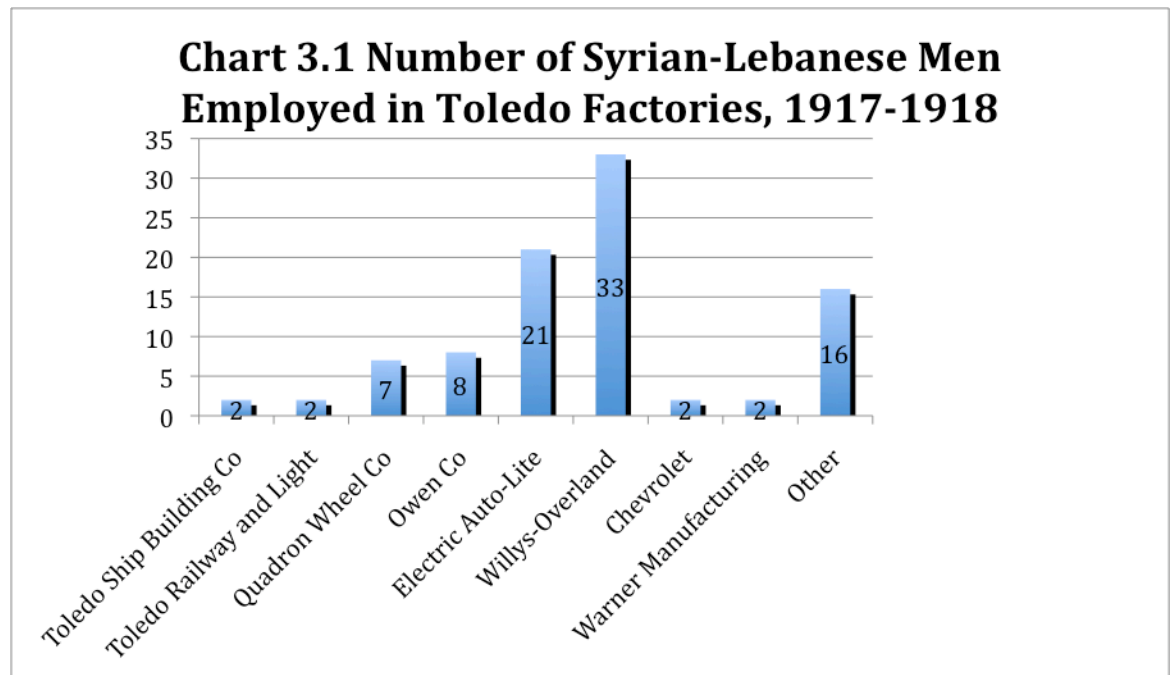
While the Syrian community grew slowly through the first decade of the twentieth century, the economic opportunities created by World War I led many to migrate to Toledo. Factories that previously built ships and automobiles started to build weapons, artillery, and military trucks, by 1917. According to Tana Mosier Porter,

In August 1917 the federal government requisitioned all ships under construction at the Toledo Ship Building Company. In 1918 the government built a nitrate plant in East Toledo to produce munitions.

Other Toledo industries shared in the defense work. The Willys-Overland Company made airplane parts and motors, and artillery shells, the Toledo Bridge and Crane Company made shell casings, the Toledo Steel Products made artillery shells, and the Hettrick Manufacturing Company and the M.I. Wilcox Company made tents, truck covers, and other canvas goods for military use.¹⁹²

Thousands of people flocked to Toledo to find employment in these factories.

“The number of wage earners increased from an average of 27,076 in 1914, to an average of 42,090 in 1919.”¹⁹³ This included many Syrians who sought work in the automotive and manufacturing industries.¹⁹⁴ Chart 3.1 shows the various factories that Syrian-Lebanese men worked at in Toledo.



¹⁹² Tana Mosier Porter, *Toledo Profile: A Sesquicentennial History*. Toledo, OH: Buettner (Toledo, Inc., 1987), 69.

¹⁹³ Porter, 72.

¹⁹⁴ WWI Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. www.ancestry.com

When the United States declared war against the Central Powers, which included the Ottoman Empire on the side of the Allied Powers in the spring of 1917, the Syrians did not sit idly by as the country prepared for war. Men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one were ordered to register for the draft under the Selective Service Act of 1917.¹⁹⁵ Syrians registered in record numbers. Nationally, seven percent, or 13,965 Syrian Americans enlisted.¹⁹⁶ During the first round of drafts on June 5, 1917, over 150 men in Toledo registered for the draft. By war's end more than 210 registered. Twenty-two Syrian men were drafted into the National Army, one in the National Guard, one in the United States Marine Corps, and one in the Air Force.

David Baz was the first Syrian to enlist in the military. On May 6, 1917, one month before the mandatory draft, he joined the National Army and served until June 30, 1919. During that time, he reached the rank of sergeant.¹⁹⁷

Anthony Nassr had an especially prestigious role in the war. "Nassr put his aerial expertise to use during World War I when he commanded at the air defense base in New York and was the official army balloon inspector in Akron."¹⁹⁸ According to Jenny Brack, when her father was drafted as a medic, "He thought he could get out of it. He says 'I don't speak English.' They [said], 'You could do it.' So

195 World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, M1509. <http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/military/ww1/draft-registration/>

196 Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 103.

197 Ohio Military Men, 1917-18. www.ancestry.com

198 Betsy Hiel, "Tony Nassr: Early Aviator, the Daring Syrian Wowed the World with His Aerial Exploits," *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

they took him for two years.”¹⁹⁹ Joseph Prephan’s father was drafted to the National Army. For immigrants not yet naturalized, like Mr. Prephan, “The officers at the training camp in Virginia lined up all the immigrants, swore them in as citizens, and shipped them off to the trenches the next day.”²⁰⁰

None of the Syrians from Toledo were killed in combat; however, several were injured. Frank Farris was injured and subsequently honorably discharged on July 9, 1918. Charley Abdoo, a member of the U.S. Air Force, was wounded but his injuries were not serious, allowing him to serve until May 9, 1919.

Although Juan Moras was not injured during the war, he was taken prisoner by the Central Powers and released before the war ended. The remaining Syrians from Toledo were honorably discharged, by November 18, 1919, except Allen Hassen who deserted in June 1918.²⁰¹ Overall, the Syrians’ eagerness to fight alongside of the United States and the sacrifices they made to ensure the country’s victory illustrates their continued commitment to the United States as they proceeded to become good American citizens.

With the war over, the growth that the community experienced during this period was different from the pioneer era. Christian-Syrian families continued to grow and migrate to Toledo, but the first Muslims also came to the city at this time. According to Alixa Naff, “while several thousand Christians had formed a steady stream of emigration for a generation, only a few hundred Muslims and

¹⁹⁹ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

²⁰⁰ Betsy Hiel, “Toledo Provided Hope to Settlers,” *Toledo Blade*, March 26, 2000.

²⁰¹ Ohio Military Men, 1917-18. [www. Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com).

Druze had become sufficiently emboldened to defy the anxieties of living in a Christian country.”²⁰² The first Syrian-Muslim migrated to the city thirty-five years after Mr. Nassr. According to Elkholy, “The majority of the Toledo Moslems established their community after several years of peddling from one state to another.”²⁰³ The story of an elderly woman, whose father wanted to immigrate to the United States in the late 1880s, illustrated the attitude and feeling of many early Muslim immigrants.

In 1885, my father planned to accompany some Christian friends to America. He bought the ticket and boarded the boat. Shortly before sailing he asked the captain whether America had mosques. Told that it had none, he feared America was *bilad kufr*, a land of unbelief. He immediately got off the boat.²⁰⁴

Fear, skepticism, and uncertainty restrained Muslims from immigrating in the same large numbers as Christians. Nevertheless, continuous success stories of Christian immigrants provided the necessary incentive for Muslims to immigrate.²⁰⁵ They came for the same reasons as the Christians, and had similar experiences in the early years. Few pioneer Muslim settlers were women because they “felt it was immoral to take their women to a Christian land.”²⁰⁶ Many had their names Christianized to blend in to their adopted Christian

²⁰² Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 85.

²⁰³ Abdo A. Elkholy, *The Arab Moslems in the United States: Religion and Assimilation* (New Haven: College and University Press Services, Inc., 1966), 56.

²⁰⁴ Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 104.

²⁰⁵ Yvonne Haddad, “Arab Muslims and Islamic Institutions in America: Adaptation and Reform,” In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit: The Association of American University Presses, 1983), 66.

²⁰⁶ Naff, *Becoming American*, 90.

country, stripping them of religious names. For example, immigration officials changed Talib Mohammad Hashim's name to Tom Albert at Ellis Island.²⁰⁷

Muslims were scattered all across the U.S., without a large community in any city. Anna Mae Albert's father "immigrated from Lebanon in 1908. He was fourteen years old when he came by boat to Ellis Island. Traveling through the United States following transient jobs, working on the railroad, he eventually settled in [Sioux Falls] South Dakota."²⁰⁸

The war attracted Muslims to large industrial cities for factory work. "Lured by General Motors and Ford to Detroit, US Steel to Pittsburgh, box factories and Willys Auto in Toledo, or the loom industries in Quincy, Massachusetts, the Muslims also found themselves working on train cars in Michigan City, Indiana."²⁰⁹ Abdullah Ganoom, also known as Albert, initially immigrated to New England in 1914 before moving to Toledo to open a grocery store.²¹⁰ While Mr. Ganoom was the first Muslim person in Toledo, the Simon's were the first family, who came to the city, "after eight years of wandering in the United States."²¹¹ Their early movement led to the migration of other Muslim families. Like, Nassr, Ganoom encouraged friends and relatives to migrate to the city. Mitcheal Salem's father sold his grocery store in Danbury to move Toledo at the urging of his cousin, Mr. Ganoom in 1920.²¹² Elizabeth Sooke's husband moved to

²⁰⁷ Natasha Rafi, "Muslim Women Blend Heritage and a New Culture," *Toledo Blade*, October 15, 1995.

²⁰⁸ Rafi, "Muslim Women Blend Heritage and a New Culture."

²⁰⁹ Orfalea, 105.

²¹⁰ Fatima Al-Hayani Email Interview, August 11-12, 2008.

²¹¹ Elkholy, 17.

²¹² Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 6, 2008.

Toledo because his sister, Albert's wife, lived there.²¹³ The Simon house "was a kind of safe house for Muslims coming into Toledo. They were the first family, and they took in many immigrants - often for free, until they could find work and/or places to live... They often found people jobs or helped them transition into the mainstream. This is a Simon tradition that continued with every generation - even today."²¹⁴

Two decades later a flourishing Muslim population developed. In 1922, the Toledo *News Bee* reported that there were sixty-five "Mohammedans," scattered around the city. In an effort to educate readers about them, it described their religious practices, and assured the public of their kindness and honor, stating,

And because they came from the same land of the Arabic tongue as their Christian brothers, they may be expected to have those same desirable qualities of thrift and enterprise, respect for law, and obedience of established rules as these other Syrian neighbors who are moving forward with such great promise in the life of our city.²¹⁵

Muslims changed the dynamics of the Syrian-Lebanese community, but their numbers remained relatively small until after World War II. According to Elkholy the first wave occurred between 1945 and 1949 and consisted of individuals who were lured from other American cities by the flourishing and highly profitable liquor business created by the repeal of Prohibition.²¹⁶ Before this time, only a handful of Muslim settlers moved to the city, however, Christian-Syrians constituted the majority of the Syrian-Lebanese population in Toledo through the

²¹³ Elizabeth Sooke Interview, December 23, 2008.

²¹⁴ Munir Simon Email Interview, April 23, 2009.

²¹⁵ Dan Palmer, "Mohammedans of Toledo Give Daily Praise to Allah," *Toledo News Bee*, December 24, 1922.

²¹⁶ Elkholy, 17.

1950s. Post-World War I, Christian newcomers included the separated wives, children, and relatives from overseas who reunited with male family members.

By 1920, there were 720 Syrians in the community that continued to take on characteristics of a permanent family settlement. A decade later, the community more than doubled to 1,492 people, as settlers came to be near relatives and friends and for industrial jobs. When compared to Toledo's overall population, the Syrian people were the small fish in a large, ethnically diverse pond, making up a mere .3 percent of the city's inhabitants in 1920, but increased to .5 percent in 1930.²¹⁷

The start of World War I caused more than nine thousand Syrians to immigrate to the U.S. Twenty-three Syrians in Toledo immigrated to the United States in 1914. Families fled to Syrian ports to be reunited with relatives in America. Immigration sharply declined "during and after the First World War, then rose again, albeit briefly, to a level of about five thousand in 1921."²¹⁸ The decline was due to the difficulty of travelling across the Atlantic Ocean. Only twelve Syrian immigrants settled in Toledo during the war, having left behind a country with the knowledge that they would never return and immediately worked to establish themselves in America permanently.

²¹⁷ Porter, 75.

²¹⁸ Samir Khalaf, "The Background and Causes of Lebanese/Syrian Immigration to the United States before World War I." In *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 19.

The Great War made it nearly impossible for Syrians living in the United States to return to their villages to check on friends and relatives. Instead, those who survived the war and its aftermath in Syria begged relatives in United States for money to purchase a ticket to escape the destruction. The area became “a giant gravestone, whose inscription would be written by expatriate poets and the colonizing French, who took over the country.”²¹⁹ Thousands of conscripted men were killed, leaving wives, children, and relative dependents to fend for themselves. Syria was not only devastated directly by the war, but the subsequent spread of the bubonic plague and typhoid fever, along with an infestation of locusts which covered the scarce crops in a veil of darkness, the population of Greater Syria lost one-fourth of its inhabitants.²²⁰ Immediately after the war, fifty-seven people migrated from Syria to Toledo. Eighteen wives, some with children, joined their husbands and four widowed mothers came to live with adult children. After the war, Frank and Melvina Shemas wanted to return home, but were persuaded not to by relatives. “In 1921, following World War I, Frank desired to make a trip to Beirut. However, Melvina’s mother wrote and said, ‘Don’t you come; send for us. We want to go to America. This country is no good for us anymore’.” Within two months, her mother and siblings left Beirut for the United States.²²¹

²¹⁹ Orfalea, 71.

²²⁰ Orfalea, 71.

²²¹ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview Conducted by Elaine Shemas George, March 17, 1985.

After the war, immigration restriction prohibited more Syrians from making the journey. According to Thomas Archdeacon, World War I, “called into question the loyalty of the old immigrant groups, which had created the ethnic subculture that mediated between the host society and the newest arrival.”²²² With the war over, politicians and citizens feared a flood of European refugees and foreign radicalism and enacted legislation to restrict the number of new immigrants who could enter America.²²³ In 1921, Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, capping immigration to 357,000 persons per year.²²⁴ In 1924, it passed a permanent and more restrictive act, which shaped American immigration policy for the next forty-one years. Roger Daniels explained the reasons for more restrictive legislation,

The importance of the 1924 act is hard to overemphasize... To understand it, one must be aware of the historical context and of the issues that were contested. In 1924 it was a foregone conclusion that there would be a permanent restriction of immigration. Although the short-lived post-war depression was over, fears about job-stealing and the lowering of the standard of living by immigrants willing to work cheap were still shaping the national mood. The nation was also gripped by xenophobia and a rejection of Europe. Most important, perhaps, was the beleaguered feeling of so many old-stock Protestant Americans. Immigrants and their non-Protestant cultures, they felt, represented a serious and sustained challenge to American values.²²⁵

²²² Thomas Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 166.

²²³ Archdeacon, 168

²²⁴ This number was derived from the 1910 census, by limiting immigration to three percent of the foreign-born population from each country already in the United States at that time. Exempt from the quota, however, were the children and immediate relatives of American citizens or resident aliens. (Not Like US, 133-134).

²²⁵ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 49.

Syrians did not fare well under these acts. Their country was in economic shambles after the war and divided by the British and French governments. The nations of Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq were carved out of the area once known as Greater Syria to be placed under British mandate, while the new countries of Syria and Lebanon were partitioned under French mandate. Immigration to the United States would have relieved the inhabitants from the ensuing famine and depression, but the Quota Acts allotted only 103 quota slots for each Syria and Lebanon per year; and under the National Origins Act of 1929, reduced that number to 129 for the two countries combined.²²⁶

Determined to immigrate, Syrians found ways to circumvent these laws. Wives and unmarried children of American citizens, returning from visits abroad, students, religious ministers, and academic professors, were exempt from the 1924 law and able to enter the United States with little problem.²²⁷ Others first immigrated to a country in the Western Hemisphere, which was exempt from quota limitations, and then traveled to the United States. According to Mitcheal Salem, Abdullah Ganoom's brother, Melvin, came to the United States via Cuba.

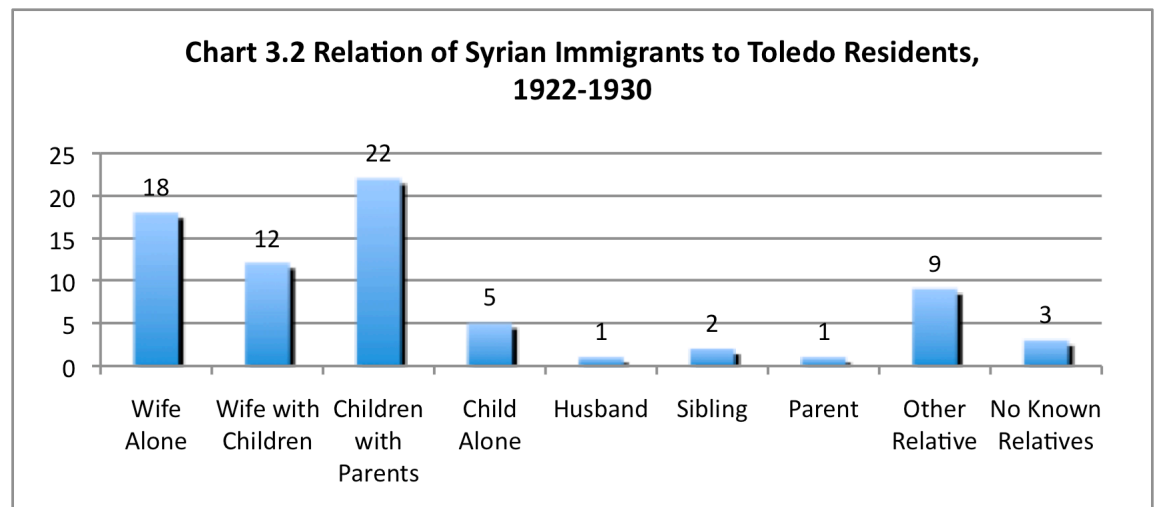
He couldn't enter the United States under the quota system. He didn't want to wait. My father helped him financially to go from Lebanon to Cuba. The Cuba quota system was more generous for foreigners and that's why Melvin Ganoom went to Cuba instead of the United States... There was a few like my cousin's brother also went to Cuba from Jib Janine. But I don't know. A few others went to Cuba but I don't know who they are or their names or anything... They went to Cuba. They went to Columbia. They went to Brazil... Some went to Venezuela... Most of them went to these countries and stayed there. There were a few that would make arrangements to come to the United States under the quota system,

²²⁶ Khalaf, 19.

²²⁷ Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 53.

because each country had a quota of people that could enter the United States.²²⁸

Between 1922 and 1930, eighty-seven Syrians immigrated to Toledo, more than thirty of whom were family reunifications. Eighteen wives came to Toledo without children and twelve with children.²²⁹ Mary Darah, and three of her four children, Paul, Margie and Frieda entered the United States on December 24, 1924 to join her husband Jacob and eldest son William who immigrated in 1914. Immigration was not limited to children and spouses of American citizens, other newcomers included parents, siblings, and cousins, who also immigrated with their own families. Two brothers, one mother, one aunt, one uncle, joined family in Toledo during this period. Chart 3.2 illustrates the relation of post-immigration restriction immigrants to Toledo residents.



²²⁸ Mitcheal Salem Interview, August 7, 2008.

²²⁹ 1930 United States Federal Census. www.Ancestry.com.

Quota exemptions assisted in reuniting many Syrian families throughout the United States; however, it impeded the immigration of those who did not fall into these categories. In spite of this, the Great Depression brought Syrian immigration to a near halt, because the United States was no longer a desirable or profitable destination to make money. However, by that time, “the local community was already settled in.”²³⁰ In the upcoming years, dozens of families were reunited in Toledo and the era of growth and creating ethnic religious and cultural institutions had begun.

The number of Syrian-Lebanese families in Toledo continued to increase by the end of World War I. The opening of an Orthodox church along with migration of relatives and friends of early residents made the city a desirable place to establish a family. By 1920, there were more than one hundred families with children, and twenty-six married couples without children. In 1930, there were 246 families with children and seventy couples without children. Furthermore, only ninety-three single men and women resided in Toledo, or six percent of the community, a decline from the previous decade. The increased presence of families and decrease in single residents was an important indicator of the Syrian permanency. Nearly fifty years after Michael J. Nassr immigrated to the city, the Syrian community clearly developed into a family-oriented and permanent fixture in Toledo.

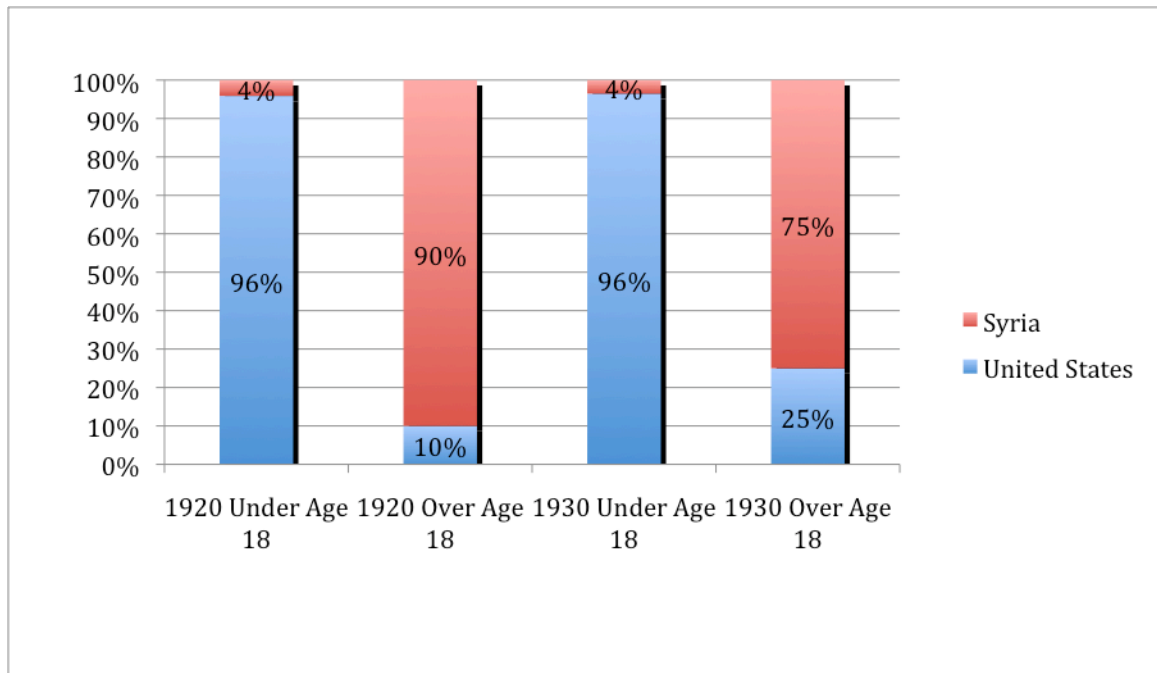
²³⁰ Betsy Hiel, “Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Head Toward War,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

Once wives reunited with husbands they often gave birth to children in the United States. Thirteen of the eighteen wives, who immigrated to Toledo, between 1922 and 1930, bore children in America, like Salim and Gole Hadeed, who had two children in Ohio. Another six women traveled to America with children and had more after immigrating. The creation and growth of the nuclear family unit while in the United States allowed them to acquire the necessary characteristics of a permanent community. Dieb Hady stated, "After they got their families over here, it was a foregone conclusion that they were going to stay."²³¹

As more families moved to Toledo, the rate of American-born children increased. In 1920, ninety percent of Syrian adults were born overseas, while ninety-eight percent of children under age eighteen were born in the United States. This indicates that the greater the percentage of American-born Syrians the higher the probability that they would remain permanently. While the percentage of children born in America between 1920 and 1930 remained constant, more adults were born in the United States in 1930 than in the previous decade, because American-born children of early immigrants never returned to the old country, and started their own families in Toledo. This shift can be seen in Chart 3.3. Families with children became accustomed to their new environment and rarely chose to return home. Determined to remain, they took deliberate measures to make America their permanent home.

²³¹ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine*, April 6-12, 1986, 7.

**Chart 3.3 Place of Birth of Syrian-Lebanese Community,
1920 and 1930**



By 1920, the largest family in Toledo was the Haddad family, which included eleven families with a total of forty-nine members. The next largest family was the Nassar's with five families.²³² By 1930, with the number of Syrians in Toledo nearing 1,500 people, there were a dozen last names with five or more families. Nearly thirty percent of the Syrian-Lebanese community included the Abdoo, Bassett, Corey (Koury), Francis, Geha (Giha), Haddad, Jacob (Jacobs), Joseph, Nassar, Scaff (Skaff), Sodd, and Tanber families. The presence of large families and relatives worked to recreate the old world and declined their urge to leave.

²³² Although some families spelled it Nasser, Nasar, Nasr, etc...

Forty years after immigrating, the community continued its tradition of extended family living arrangements common in the old country. As parents, siblings, and cousins immigrated, they lived with relatives, increasing the commonality of extended family living arrangements to thirty households in the city. Usually it was a parent or sibling living with grown child or an older sibling. Edward Tanber lived on Oakwood, with his wife, daughter, his mother, father, and two brothers. When fathers passed away, mothers moved in with their eldest son, even if he had a family, and less often with a daughter. Mary Sodd, an early pioneer in Toledo, widowed by 1920, lived with her grandson Fred's family. Nassif Farran opened his house not only to his widowed mother, but also to his brother's family, three single brothers, and three sisters. These living arrangements illustrated that even children who were raised in the United States, were committed to their parents and saw family as "the keystone of Syrian identity and social organization."²³³

While other traditions began to wane by 1930, the importance of respect and family were characteristics still practiced by the second-generation. Hitti explained that even in America, "The father is still considered in fact as in word the head of the family. The children are expected to treat him with reverence and his affection for them is in return unlimited."²³⁴ The family unit, nuclear and extended, was of utmost importance to the American-born children. The fear of shaming the family, not only kept family loyalty in tact, but it also kept Syrians off police blotters. According to Mrs. Brack, the most important part of her Syrian

²³³ Naff, *Becoming American*, 280.

²³⁴ Hitti, 80.

heritage was her family. “It was just the matter of being closely-knitted in the family and closely-knitted to the aunts and uncles and first cousins and second cousins. We were proud of our family, [regardless] that we’re first cousins or third cousins.”²³⁵ Families lived near each other, planned activities, and established associations to keep extended families together.

The First World War, immigration restriction, and the Great Depression hampered Syrian growth, but by the 1920s, it was a well established and permanent, albeit, small fixture in the city’s ethnic mosaic. North End streets overflowed with Syrian children, while women gossiped on the porch, as men played cards. In time, churches and clubs were established in the neighborhood to recreate the old village. According to John Bodnar, the presence of churches and merchants of similar ancestry reinforced the idea of neighborhood.²³⁶ Although not exclusively Syrian, those who moved into the neighborhood between 1911 and 1930 made Syrians a dominant group in the area. Lorice Burkett and her sister Freda Hadeed grew up in the North End recalled, “We were surrounded by Greeks and Syrians at the time.”²³⁷ Jenny Brack added, “On our block we had one, two, three, four, five, six [Lebanese] homes. There was only one American.”²³⁸

²³⁵ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

²³⁶ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 179.

²³⁷ Lorice Burkett and Freda Hadeed Interview, March 25, 2008.

²³⁸ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

Earlier Syrians congregated mainly on a few North End streets, but by 1920, their preference for the area was evident. In 1920, seventy-six percent of the community owned or rented homes there. In 1930, the number of Syrians in the North End declined to sixty-eight percent because few Muslims chose to live there. Instead they resided throughout the city with no regard to forming a community. For example, Mike and Abdoo Simon and their family's lived on Junction Ave, in the city's west end. Mr. Ganoom, on the other hand, rented a room in the city's south side on 522 Jervis with another Muslim man, Joseph Hassen. Alex Hammoud rented a room on Detroit Ave.

In 1920, Ontario Street had the most Syrian inhabitants, but ten years later Erie and Ontario were the most populated streets. After the Shemas family moved from Iowa to Toledo, they rented a home in the North End.

We lived there for about a year or so and then we moved to 1229 North Erie Street. Across the street there was a little Arabic community. We were across the street from the Lutife family... And William and Sophie Rayess... And the Hanna family... They were directly across the street from us there.... The whole street was practically Arab people.²³⁹

The North End was the nucleus of the community, where Syrians rented their first home and established shops. According to Habib I. Katibah, Syrians excelled when they "live in medium-sized towns. They are 'lost' in both the big cities and in rural districts."²⁴⁰ Automobiles, a luxury that few Syrians could afford, made proximity to one's place of employment imperative. In Toledo, they lived within walking distance to the church, places of business, and friends and relatives'

²³⁹ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

²⁴⁰ Habib I. Katibah, Brown, "Syrian Americans." In *One America*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph Slabey Roucek (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945), 297.

homes. "In 1924, when you walk down Summit Street you could stop at Allay Mohamed's restaurant and coffeehouse at 841, and K. Assad's barber shop at 817. On Cherry Street, you might drop in at Haddad Brothers Confectioners at 303-7 and down the block, Saba and Joseph Grocers at 502-6."²⁴¹ These houses were affordable, and large enough to house sizeable Syrian families and boarders.

As the older generation's aspiration of returning to Lebanon diminished, they began to invest their savings in home ownership. In 1920, fifty-two individuals owned homes, but in 1930, that number increased to 144 Syrians with an average home value of \$7,512. Most homeowners were married with children, which illustrated their family's commitment to remain permanently in Toledo as children began school, made friends, and did not want to leave the U.S.²⁴²

According to Reverend W.A. Mansur,

Syrian parents had been living with the hope of an early return to the homeland. The Great War now marks the dividing line between the old and the new in Syrian American thinking. Syrian Americans awoke to the fact that they had become accustomed to, and part of, American thought and life, and that a return to the homeland would be impracticable.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986.

²⁴² 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005. www.Ancestry.com.

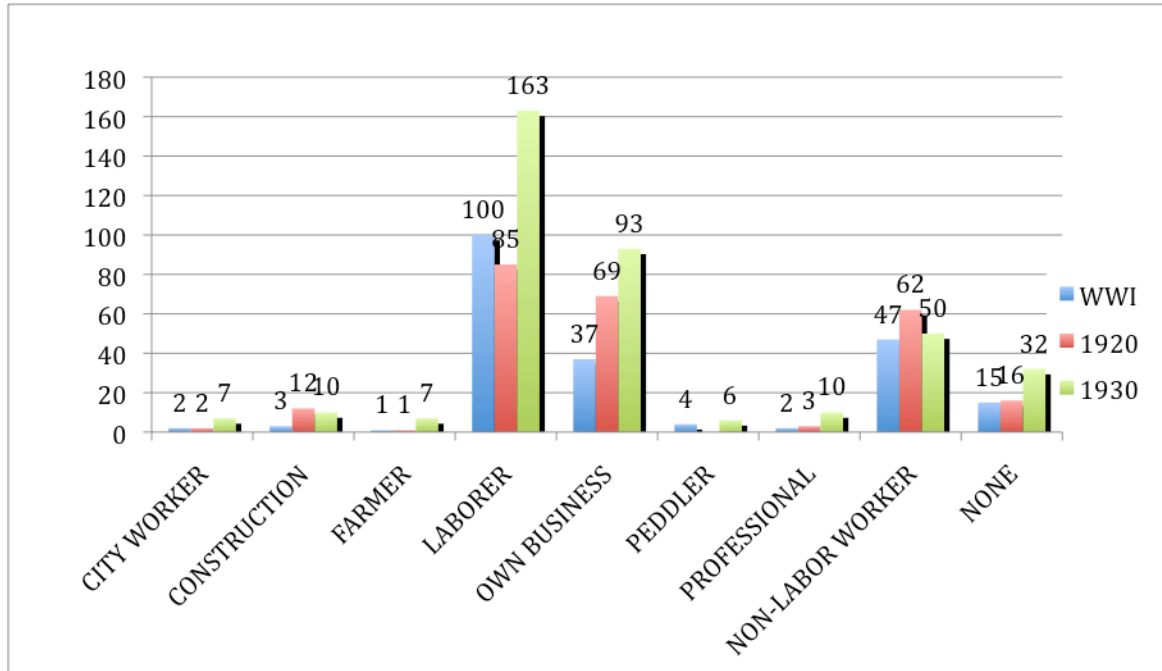
²⁴³ Michael W. Suleiman, "Early Arab-Americans: The Search for Identity." In *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 46.

After the war, the majority of Toledo's Syrians continued their traditional employment preference as business entrepreneurs. Forty-seven percent of men who registered for the draft were factory workers, yet by 1920 that number decreased to thirty-five percent. On the other hand, the number of businessmen increased from seventeen to twenty-seven percent. In 1917, when George Jacobs registered for the draft, he was a car cleaner at Toledo Railway Light Company, but three years later, he became a fruit store proprietor. Like in Detroit, where "Father and sons saved their factory wages until one could open the family store,"²⁴⁴ this also occurred in Toledo. David Corey, a machine operator at the Electric Auto-Lite Company and his brother Albert, a carpenter during the war, pooled their money together and opened Corey Candy Company, which employed many Toledo Syrians. After working as a tailor for LaSalle and Koch's in the early 1920s, Frank Shemas opened a dry-cleaning and tailor shop on Cherry and Superior.²⁴⁵ The decrease in laborers and increase in entrepreneurs explained the temporary lure that factory work had on World War I settlers in Toledo. By 1920, peddling continued to decline among Syrian workers as they returned to Lebanon, opened retail stores, or took factory work; in Toledo, only five men peddled. Chart 3.4 illustrates the occupational preference of Syrian-Lebanese men between World War I and 1930.

²⁴⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 271.

²⁴⁵ Melvina Shemas Haddad Interview, 1985.

Chart 3.4 Syrian-Lebanese Male Occupation, 1917-1930



As the twenties rolled around, Syrian women, married and single, left the house in search of work. According to Naff, “The contribution of the woman to the family’s economic mobility- initiated before World War I- continued after it.”²⁴⁶

Twenty-six Syrian women were factory laborers, saleswomen, and even boarding- house proprietors, in 1920. Their preference for factory work was due in large part to the same wage-making opportunities and job security that attracted the men.

The Roaring Twenties was a prosperous era for the Syrian-Lebanese, however, by the end of the decade, the world sank into a deep economic depression, and as their savings were depleted, homes were lost, and businesses were shuttered. By April 1930, with the country in recession, 16,173

²⁴⁶ Naff, *Becoming American*, 274.

Toledoans were out of work and unemployment ran deeper than just factory laborers.²⁴⁷ According to Porter, “Many small companies and shops went bankrupt. Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals lost everything, as did stockholders and employees of the banks... Some stores offered credit to employed customers, but with little money in circulation, most business in Toledo stopped.”²⁴⁸ Syrian families, many of whom had accumulated much of their wealth during the 1920s saw their fortunes plummet. “The Damas family lost their home and were forced to move to a much smaller place.”²⁴⁹ Charles Cassis’ grandparents were hit hard; his grandfather, “used to have a meat market... in [the] 1930s...he had 55,000 dollars owed to him by restaurants. He never got a penny.”²⁵⁰

During the Depression, 124 Syrians, or twenty-eight percent of the community was unemployed, up from seven percent in the previous decade. Nearly half of the unemployed were factory workers. Two proprietors also lost their businesses. George DeWood, a restaurant owner and Joseph Hatch, a fruit store merchant witnessed their businesses collapse from the strains of the depression. Losing one’s job was devastating, however losing a business, where they invested much effort and capital, “was a blow akin to sacrilege.”²⁵¹ Yet, few, if any Toledo Syrians took government relief. Instead, they pooled resources to get through tough times. According to Naff, “The emphasis on family and group

²⁴⁷ Porter, 84.

²⁴⁸ Porter, 84.

²⁴⁹ Betsy Hiel, “Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Heads Toward War,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

²⁵⁰ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

²⁵¹ Orfalea, 113

cohesions and honor- 'of taking care of one's own'- kept the Syrians, with remarkably few exceptions, off the relief rolls."²⁵² Even though Harry Haddad, lost his grocery store, and died shortly thereafter, his wife and children did not take government aid. "She's very proud they never ever did that."²⁵³

With industries and businesses failing, Syrians did what they could to survive. Philip and Joseph Kayal suggest,

The early Syrian immigrants encountered the hard economic conditions of the Great Depression, but their experience with subsistence-level living in Syria helped them to survive and prosper again. They found that economic opportunities existed for those who were willing to invest their energies and time in enterprises that could not directly be adversely affected by the economic cycle.²⁵⁴

Some worked as janitors, street sweepers, or painting; while others sought employment from friends and relatives as store clerks, waiters, or salesman. Beatrice Rooney's father worked as a city sweeper. "They all worked for the city... That was the only job they could find."²⁵⁵ Dorothy Saba and Evelyn Zoghaib added, that their father also "Worked in the street department. Those days, they had to go through certain areas and keep those streets clean. Just like now, they have the trucks and everything. They used to do that almost by hand. Push... push broom."²⁵⁶ Their family also took in boarders, charging them \$16 per month, to add to the family's finances. Others relied on teenage children to supplement the family income. Fifteen-year-old George Sodd worked as a janitor

²⁵² Naff, *Becoming American*, 212.

²⁵³ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

²⁵⁴ Philip M. Kayal and Joseph Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 186-7.

²⁵⁵ Beatrice Rooney Interview, July 11, 2008.

²⁵⁶ Dorothy Saba Interview, July 11, 2008.

in a poolroom and George Ammar worked at the age of seventeen in a grocery store. Many took government jobs created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal economic recovery program. Federal work relief programs, such as the Works Progress Administration, "provided funds to pay workers on projects requiring many laborers and little money for supplies."²⁵⁷

Helen Rahal's father had a confectionary store until it could no longer support his large family. She recalled, "During the Depression, he was taking in \$7 a day and he had all these kids and all this expense, so he went on WPA to work. He worked very hard... I think they built streets."²⁵⁸

The Depression forced many families to break away from the tradition of keeping daughters and wives out of the workforce. According to Evelyn Shakir, "Wives and mothers, who had primary responsibility for domestic chores and especially for child rearing, were usually not so well positioned for venturing out as were their husbands and older children- thus the widespread practice of unmarried girls joining the labor force at an early age."²⁵⁹ In Toledo, there were sixty-five single girls working various jobs. Many parents preferred their daughters take jobs as grocery clerks and bookkeepers where there was less interaction with men, but twenty girls were employed as factory laborers where wages were better. It was difficult for married women with young children to work outside the house, but with the economy in shambles the money they could earn was desperately needed. Jamelia Farah supplemented her butcher husband's

²⁵⁷ Porter, 87.

²⁵⁸ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

²⁵⁹ Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 49.

income by working as a seamstress when her daughter Yvonne was in school. Martha Abood worked as a machine operator in an automobile factory even though she had two young children.

Out of necessity, widowed and divorced women also worked. Soliciting welfare was not a desirable option, and widowed women could only rely on family support for so long. Thus, they found jobs or took over family businesses after husbands passed away. In 1930, three divorced women were employed, as a saleslady, factory worker, and housekeeper. In 1932, after Frank Shemas passed away, his wife “tried to keep the tailor shop going but there was no business. People couldn’t afford to buy new clothes or even clean their old clothes during the Depression.”²⁶⁰ After Beatrice Shalhoup Rooney’s mother became widowed with thirteen children, the family worked together to make ends meet without taking welfare or community donations. Mrs. Rooney explained,

My father was killed when I was nine years old. We were on Superior Street going to the Damas’ to visit and a car just hit him. After that my mother took in washing. We all [worked] to help support the family. ... Welfare was a disgrace. Welfare, no, no welfare! And then she would bake bread and sell it. She would bake about seventy-five pounds of flour a week to sell. You know, *khubiz marqooq*?²⁶¹ She’d make that. And we took people in.... [The church did not help] because there was seven of us. My brother had to quit Waite his freshman year and he went to work for my Uncle Sam in the produce. My sister Oddie had to quit school and get a job. And the rest of us did what, you know, babysit and cleaning house. Oh yea, no welfare... That was a shame. To go sit and wait in line or anything like that.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

²⁶¹ A traditional thin Arabic bread

²⁶² Beatrice Rooney Interview, July 11, 2008.

At home, elderly Syrian women continued to cook Arabic food, but began to cook an occasional American meal. Jenny Brack's mother cooked, "Mostly Arabic, but she'd get the beef tenderloin and we'd have steak, like porterhouse on Thursday because on Friday you couldn't eat meat. So she'd have mjaddara [lentil-based meal] and baba ghanooj and hummus and Syrian potato salad, the whole bit."²⁶³ Sunday's remained the day when women, like Nick Darah's mother, prepared typical Syrian-Lebanese feasts.

Sunday was feast day in the North End, and Nick Darah, a Lebanese kid in knickers and heavy stockings, lived for these feasts. Family and friends were welcome at home, of course, but lamb was dear and it had to be stretched to last.

Nick's mother, Helen, couldn't afford to buy a slab of meat to fill their plates. So she'd pick up a leg or shoulder of lamb at Giha's at Superior and Mulberry streets, or Saad's on Locust. Then Nick's aunts would devote five or six hours to concocting ambrosia out of lamb and wrapped grape leaves, vegetables, and rice.²⁶⁴

Getting necessary staples to make ethnic food was less difficult after the war.

According to Jenny Brack, Mrs. Tarsha made contact with a merchant from New York to sell from the basement of her house. "He would send her the burghul [cracked wheat], and what is it? A hundred pound bag of rice, and hummus, and halawee [a sweet sesame spread] and all of that. And we'd all go over there and we'd buy, you know, amardeen [dried apricot], and jibnee kashkawan [cheese], and all of that other stuff there and pay her."²⁶⁵ After she passed away, an

²⁶³ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

²⁶⁴ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 4.

²⁶⁵ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

Armenian from Detroit came to Toledo every Wednesday and Saturday in a big red truck, selling pita bread, burghul, Turkish tea and coffee.²⁶⁶

While immigrants preferred ethnic foods, the decline in their preparation was due to Syrian children, who were introduced to American food at their friends' dinner table and in the school's lunchroom. Nick Darah loved the food his mother prepared, but, "Couldn't wait for the chance to go to a friend's house for pork chops... When his American friends came over, he'd says to his mother, 'Can't you fry us a pork chop? They don't want to eat stuffed squash or grape leaves'."²⁶⁷ Furthermore, second-generation wives, accustomed to American ways, found cooking Arabic food too time-consuming and reserved them for special occasions and social gatherings.

Most community activities also took place in the North End, usually at one another's homes. Dorothy Saba recalled, "My dad used to have a card game and he used to have more Catholic men than anything. There would be about two tables of four... And Mama used to make Turkish coffee for them."²⁶⁸ When Syrians were not at relative's homes, they were dancing the traditional Syrian *dabke* over Hanf's Drugstore on Bush and Erie Street. "They were often

²⁶⁶ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

²⁶⁷ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 5.

²⁶⁸ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

entertained by the Jacob brothers, including the most famous of which was, Amos Jacobs.”²⁶⁹

Children of early immigrants, like James Shemas, Dorothy Saba, Josephine Geha Zraik, Evelyn Zoghaib, Elizabeth Sookey, and Helen Rahal came of age during the Roaring Twenties. Their stories are filled with laughter and tears as they remembered what growing up in the North End surrounded by Syrian friends and relatives was like. It “was the best time in the world. It was the best place to be,” reminisced Mrs. Zoghaib.²⁷⁰ Josephine Geha Zraik recalled, “The Syrian boys would gather on Chestnut and Erie streets at Abs Haddad’s confectionary store, where he sold candy, ice cream, cigars and cigarettes at the soda fountain. ‘Sometimes the Syrian boys would go across the river to date the Hungarian girls on the east side.’”²⁷¹ When the children were not running up and down the streets of the North End, they could be found at the Friendly Center, which was, affectionately called *The Syrian Country Club* because most of the boys and girls who played there were Syrians. According to the *News-Bee* and *Toledo Blade* articles that covered the dedication of the facility on November 13, 1927,

The house, which is located just off of Summit Street, was purchased in August and has been redecorated, furnished, and equipped for use as a community center for girls and boys primarily. There is a large assembly room where neighborhood clubs can meet. There are clubrooms for the Camp Fire Girls and Boy Ranger Cubs of the district. A demonstration

²⁶⁹ Betsy Hiel, “Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Heads Toward War,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

²⁷⁰ Evelyn Zoghaib Interview, July 11, 2008.

²⁷¹ Betsy Hiel, “Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Heads Toward War,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

dining room and a model kitchen will provide classrooms for the cooking students. Classes in practical nursing for young mothers will also be taught...

Mrs. Zahia Corey, president of the Syrian Women Welfare Club, and James Bassett extended the welcome of the Syrian people in the neighborhood to the house staff.²⁷²

Miss Maude McKee ran the center, and recruited the first members: John Addis, George Margy, Joe Francis, Dave DeWood, Jim Hanna, George Kallile and Mose Haddad, all Syrian American boys. The Center gave them a place to “have fun, make friends, and learn about life outside of the neighborhood. Their parents, hoping to give their children better chances in life than they had, encouraged them to go there.”²⁷³ Syrian families struggled to make ends meet during the Depression, had little money left over for entertainment, but the Center provided free activities, where they were introduced to new sports and friends. They put on plays, had a basketball team, and attended a summer camp program at Camp Storer. James Shemas, who became active there in 1932, recalled his experiences.

Miss McKee came to my house and begged my mother to let me go the YMCA and no charge, just to go in the Big Brother period and everything for free. My mother had a tough time letting me go but she finally agreed to let me go. That was one of the best things I ever did in my life. It taught me how to swim and they used to have little sessions where we sat under the trees in the fields and we’d say some prayers and they had games—capture the camp and swimming and rowing boats. We learned how to row canoe. Once I passed the swim about swimming about 50 yards and then, then I, then I could ride the canoe, see. Go and go all the way across the lake to the senior side where the senior boys were. So, the Friendly Center had a lot of influence not only on young boys, but [also] on the young girl’s classes. They used to take cooking classes, sewing classes.

²⁷² John Ingwersen and Susan Carr Saunders, *The Friendly Center Story, 1900 to 1920* (The Friendly Center, Inc., 1991), 9.

²⁷³ Carr, et al., 11

We, we learned how to archery. How to make a bow and arrow. That kind of stuff. We built a tennis court on an empty lot right next door to it. Straightened it out made a tennis court and learned how to play tennis. We set up our own football team. George Margy was the quarterback and Joe was a backfield man. Tarzan, Jimmy Tarzan Hanna was, was the fullback. Jimmy Tarzan Hanna wasn't really a smart guy but he was strong. He was very small. One time he lifted up a Packard car from the back bumper so the fellows can change the tire... That was the best thing that happened to the kids in North Toledo.²⁷⁴

Ethnic consciousness at home and within the community did not suffice in maintaining the Syrian culture. In time, Syrian-Americans worked to establish cultural and religious institutions outside the house to preserve their culture. However, only the Orthodox community was successful in establishing a church. Syrian-Catholics joined St. Francis and St. Joseph churches in Toledo with few problems as they became more fluent in English. Religion remained important to them. Jenny Brack went to church "Every Sunday and every holy day... It was something we looked forward to because it was instilled in us... They used to say if you don't go to church on Sunday you're going to hell."²⁷⁵ Her parents attended St. Francis Church and as a child she attended the church's school. "They had a school behind the church and since it was just a mile away from the Lebanese community, all of the Lebanese- Catholics went there."²⁷⁶ Lorice Burkett recalled, "We'd go to church and then we'd come back to her house for breakfast and then we'd go home and then my mother would cook dinner."²⁷⁷ Catholics occasionally frequented the Orthodox churches for religious celebrations. According to Freda Hadeed, "We used to go to St. Elias's every Easter and they would have—well

²⁷⁴ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

²⁷⁵ Genevieve Brack, March 31, 2008.

²⁷⁶ Genevieve Brack, March 31, 2008.

²⁷⁷ Lorice Burkett Interview, March 25, 2008.

every Easter they used to have a candle with flowers around it and we'd walk around the church and outside have a precession and we used to go for some reason."²⁷⁸

The Orthodox residents marked their intention of permanency in Toledo in 1910, when they began to plan for the establishment of their own church. On August 4, 1913, Najib N. Sallume, Louis G. Darah, Mike Saba, William E. Farran, Mike Bassett, George Kerbawy, Samuel Dewood, Michael Nasser, and Sleman Baz officially established the Saint George Syrian-Greek Orthodox Church Association,

To promote the cause of Christian religion, to provide a place of worship for its members, to be conducted in accordance with the rules and laws of the Greek Orthodox Church; to receive, hold, and disburse gifts, bequests, and other funds for said purpose; to own and maintain suitable real estate and buildings for its purpose, and to do all things necessary and incident to.²⁷⁹

They purchased a double house on the corner of Elm and Erie Street in 1919 and on May 9, 1920, the church was formally dedicated and consecrated to serve the religious and cultural needs of Toledo's Orthodox community. The location, in the heart of the North End, encouraged hundreds of Syrians to settle in the area. According to Jamelia Farrah, "When we moved to Toledo, we went to the North End because we wanted to be near our church."²⁸⁰ The Shemas family was attracted to Toledo to be near relatives and the church. Frank Shemas,

²⁷⁸ Freda Hadeed Interview, March 25, 2008.

²⁷⁹ "Articles of Incorporation," Saint George, Syrian-Greek Orthodox Church Association, August 4, 1913.

²⁸⁰ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 7.

“found a home to live in right across from St. George on the second floor with two bedrooms and one bath and front and back porches.”²⁸¹

By creating an institution to gather for religious services, celebrations, and cultural activities, the church became the center of Orthodox life. Services were held on Sundays, as were weddings and funerals. Afterwards, families gathered for dinners, music, and entertainment. James Shemas recalled:

When everybody was free on Sunday we all go to Church. My father would stand by the Bishop's throne and lean against the Bishop's column and he probably would doze off a little bit you know. He used to like to hear Archimandrite Samuel David the Priest there because he had a great, a gorgeous voice... And then after church was over we all gather outside and we'd talk to all the neighbors and all the friends and go home and my uncle Bill Haddad used to play the *oud* and my other uncles would play the *darbake* [a Syrian handheld drum] and stuff and sing and dance and have a little *araq* [a liquor similar to Ouzé] and a little *maza* [Syrian side dishes like humus].... And some of the neighbors would come over. And you know everybody lived on the front porch in the summertime and you didn't need a formal invitation. If there was something going on they would gather around and participate in the social activities.²⁸²

Shortly after opening the church, the first major attempt to establish the institution as more than a building of worship occurred. In 1924, under the direction of Father Samuel David, St. George launched an Arabic language class for children of all ages. Among the first students were George Bardwell, Mike Cassis, future city of Toledo mayor Mike Damas, Olga Haddad, and Alice Saba.

By 1920, the Orthodox and Catholics had been in Toledo long enough to establish a separate church or become members of an American one. The Muslims however, with fewer than one hundred people in Toledo, were not large

²⁸¹ Melvina Haddad Shemas Interview, 1985.

²⁸² James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

enough to support a mosque. Furthermore, their religious differences prohibited them from joining an American church. By 1940, only four mosques were scattered across the country. Similar to pioneer Christians, Muslims resorted to worshiping in private homes, relying on respected individuals from the community to lead them in prayer. "With no religious leaders here, Muslims were forced to call on an Imam (religious leader) from Detroit for marriages or deaths. Members without any religious training attempted to lead services in a rented hall, the YMCA, or someone's living room."²⁸³ Abdullah Journah, a barber by trade, was the "leader to whom the other Musslmans in this city turn to for advice and guidance."²⁸⁴

By the 1930s, Syrians in Toledo formed social, geographical, religious and cultural clubs, to retain some traditions as they continued to Americanize. Although "Syrians organized for many civic and social purposes and performed beneficial services for the people in the United States and abroad, but, by and large, many were for the purpose of socializing."²⁸⁵ In the early 1910s, the Orthodox Men's Club and Ladies Benevolence Society were the first clubs to be formed in Toledo. "The Ladies' Benevolent Society is the strength and support of the Cathedral. Beginning in 1915, with Mrs. Sadie Tanber as President, it has worked continuously since that time for the progress of the church, contributing

²⁸³ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community," *Toledo Magazine*, April 6-12, 1986, 10.

²⁸⁴ Palmer, "Mohammedans of Toledo Give Daily Praise to Allah." The lack of information about the Muslims was why Muslims were mistakenly called *Musslmans* and even *Mohammedans*.

²⁸⁵ Naff, *Becoming American*, 307.

the ultimate in time and money.”²⁸⁶ After the church was built, they continued to take care of minor maintenance like painting the kitchen, and putting on activities to pay for church expenses.²⁸⁷ Later, the Victor’s men’s club and Victorette’s women’s club were formed “as a social club for the young people from St. George Cathedral. Just young fellas. They would give dances and plays.”²⁸⁸ Catholic men in the North End formed the social club, Bozaks.

Other organizations were dedicated to assisting the community. The Syrian American Welfare Club was organized with the aid of the Y.W.C.A. International Institute, to “promote civic and social activities among Syrian girls by emphasizing the spirit of Americanism.”²⁸⁹ Through historical and cultural performances that emphasized Syrian music, the club “hoped to bring about a feeling of understanding between American and Syrian classes.”²⁹⁰ The Welfare Club also visited the sick and helped many families during the Great Depression and times of personal crises. It had a combination of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, and even a few Muslims, recalled Evelyn Zoghaib.²⁹¹ Members in 1923 included, vice-president Linda Tambor, president Fanny Michel, and Jenny Hanna, who served as secretary. Daughters of Phoenicia, a sorority for young Syrian girls met at the Friendly Center, where they learned to cook and sew, and even put on a play. These clubs organized based on Syrian ethnicity, but focused

²⁸⁶ James J. Damas, “The History of St. George Orthodox Cathedral,” Antiochian Orthodox Diocese of Toledo, OH and Dependencies, July 7, 1974.

²⁸⁷ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

²⁸⁸ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008.

²⁸⁹ “Syrian American Welfare Club Officers,” *Toledo Times*, March 7, 1923.

²⁹⁰ “Syrian American Welfare Club Officers,” *Toledo Times*, March 7, 1923.

²⁹¹ Evelyn Zoghaib Interview, March 17, 2008.

on American ideals and standards in cooking, housecleaning, and child rearing.²⁹²

Clubs were also formed exclusively for members of certain Syrian villages. “With the idioms and accents of the homeland still on their minds, immigrants first came together in village and town clubs to preserve old relationships.”²⁹³

Toledo’s Syrian Zahley Society, formed in 1932, was a social organization for immigrants and their children from the village of Zahley. According to a 1936 *Toledo Blade* article, there were over 220 members in the Society, including Joseph Tamber, George Haddad, George Ghiz, Abraham Fadell, Abraham Abood, and Shahady Abrass.²⁹⁴

Three fraternities were established for residents in the North End following World War I that were quite active through the 1950s, especially for residents on Mulberry and Superior streets. Sigma Sigma Phi, a nonsectarian social fraternity, started by second-generation Syrian Americans, included Roger McCarius, James Shemas, and Eli Geha.²⁹⁵ Those Greek letters were used, according to Mr. Shemas, because they stood for *Syrian Social Fraternity*.²⁹⁶ They held a play on November 5, 1938 at the Toledo Turner Building. The program “Going Abroad,” was a three-act comedy about two American-born Syrian brothers who are persuaded to return to Syria to find a wife by their father. It was written by Ted E. Haddad, with music performed by Paul Spor’s Orchestra, and an all-male

²⁹² Shakir, 59.

²⁹³ Naff, *Becoming American*, 308.

²⁹⁴ “Haddad Heads Syrian Society,” *Toledo Blade*, March 3, 1936.

²⁹⁵ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

²⁹⁶ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008.

cast, which included Jonny Addis, Toufic Baz, Al Francis, Joe Francis, Eli Geha, George Haddad, Mose Haddad, Simon Hodge, George Margy, Bobby Nassar, Jimmy Shemas, Johnny Sheroian, Nick Tanassy, Ray Theep, and Ray Zraik. A second fraternity, Sigma Alpha Phi, was for “the fellas that were older than us,” recalled Shemas, while Kappa Chi, was for the youngest members of the second-generation.²⁹⁷

Social and religious clubs were the highlight of Syrian activities before and after World War II, however, there were few Syrian political associations in the United States. According to Hitti, “Syrians cut no figure in the political life of this nation. Very few of them interest themselves in politics or aspire to office. Nothing else could be expected from a people coming from a country where ‘We the People’ does not exist.”²⁹⁸ Nationally, most Syrians favored Republicans but in Toledo, they preferred the Democratic Party for economic reasons. “Those who were Democrats generally adhered to the party’s social and economic platform, conservative in the South and liberal in the North.”²⁹⁹ In the 1930s, the Lucas County Syrian American Democratic Club, a nonsectarian political association, used their influence to support President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and again in the 1950s to support the city’s first Syrian-Lebanese mayor, Mike Damas.

²⁹⁷ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008.

²⁹⁸ Hitti, 89.

²⁹⁹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 328.

Between the two World Wars, Syrian clubs were established and flourished; however, few were sustained past the second-generation Syrians. As they left the North End in the early fifties, the assimilation of the Syrian community became more pronounced. The third-generation did not desire to distinguish themselves from the American neighbors and friends. They remained loyal to the Orthodox Church; however their interest in ethnic clubs and associations never peaked as it did in the previous generation.

Life in the 1920s and 1930s was a whirlwind of excitement, desperation, and change for Syrian families in Toledo. They enjoyed the economic boom of the Roaring Twenties, and then scrimped to eke out a living the next decade, all while economically and culturally adjusting to American society. Initially, they adopted new customs because they perceived nothing wrong with being American while in America. Yet, after World War I, American culture was accepted because they aspired to achieve middle-class status and respect by the dominant society.

The First World War, government and private organizations set forth programs to assist immigrants as they adjusted to American society. "Freed from pressure of heavy annual immigration, the United States was able, from the mid-1920s, to make substantial progress toward absorbing the foreign element already in the population."³⁰⁰ These initiatives did not focus exclusively on Syrians; nevertheless, Syrians enthusiastically took part in them to achieve their postwar goal: middle-class status and respect in American society.

³⁰⁰ Archdeacon, 174.

Nothing proved American loyalty more than citizenship. In the 1920s and 1930s, more Syrians filed for naturalization to secure their legal status. By 1920, there were 319 naturalized males and fifty-seven naturalized females in Toledo, most of whom were married. In 1930, the rate of naturalization dramatically increased to seventy-six percent of the community. Eighty-eight percent were married. This is evidence of the correlation between marriage and permanency.

With a new perspective on their status in Toledo, Syrians eagerly participated in various programs to culturally adapt. Syrian parents pushed children to speak English, in order to effectively communicate with their future boss, coworkers, and middle class neighbors. Children were also encouraged to go to college to further their social and economic position. James Shemas' parents encouraged him to become either a doctor or lawyer.³⁰¹ After serving in World War II, he enrolled in the University of Toledo Law School.

According to Hitti, "Time there was in which naturalization was looked upon as wielding a sort of magic wand in converting the alien into an American."³⁰² This appeared to be true for the community in Toledo, as external efforts to assimilate were expanded after the war. Toledo's Americanization Board and the Friendly Center were two organizations that worked to change foreigner's behavior. While children participated in various activities at the Friendly Center, staff worked with "predominantly Syrian, Lebanese, and Greek immigrants, teaching them about the language, customs and history of their

³⁰¹ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

³⁰² Hitti, 98.

adopted country and enabling them to seek citizenship.”³⁰³ It was nativist belief that the immigrants’ uneducated children would become a burden on American society; therefore, Miss McKee made education a top priority at the Center. She “understood very well how important it was for a child to learn in order to succeed in life.”³⁰⁴ Courses were offered in industrial arts, cooking, and sewing. During the mid-1930s, Syrian boys such as, Ray Saba, Charles Kallil, George Haddad, and Toots Zurob eagerly attended industrial art classes, while Natalie Mickel, Frances Haddad and Sue Abood took part in sewing classes.³⁰⁵

As early as 1919, the Americanization Institute, under the auspices of the Board of Education and the Toledo Americanization Board, began work with the city’s immigrant population. Their purpose was,

To create an intelligent and efficient citizenship among the foreign-born to interpret to them American ideals, laws, customs and traditions; to stimulate a desire to acquire the English language; to abolish racial prejudices and discriminations; to foster better community spirit and to help each immigrant to feel at home and to realize all the benefits and advantages which America has to offer.³⁰⁶

Classes were held at Woodward High School, in the North End, an ideal place to target a large proportion of foreigners. They offered assistance in the naturalization process, sent welcome letters notifying them of citizenship classes, and sent reminder letters to those with first papers to continue their naturalization proceedings. While Syrians were a small ethnic group in Toledo, their

³⁰³ Tony Bassett, “The History of the Friendly Center Now Available in Book Form,” UNKNOWN NEWSPAPER, 14.

³⁰⁴ Carr, et al., 21.

³⁰⁵ Carr, et al., 28-29.

³⁰⁶ “Toledo Americanization Board Constitution.” Lucas County Public Library Local History Department.

participation was disproportionately high, consistently ranking among the top ten groups to request the Board's service. In 1923, the Board noticed this, citing, "According to the numbers of the nationalities here in Toledo and those receiving aid through the office, the Board is used most frequently by the Syrians in proportion to population."³⁰⁷ In that year, 220 Syrians began the naturalization process with help of the Board, and in September 1925, they were the leading group to seek assistance. Their continued use of its services illustrated their ongoing efforts to attain permanent status in Toledo.

The Americanization Board provided a forum to educate Toledoans on the contributions and cultural richness of the city's foreign population. In the early 1920s, the Americanization Group of Toledo Social Agencies, including the Americanization Board, held a "Builders of America" pageant, in which sixteen ethnic groups presented skits highlighting their traditions. Scene 14 focused on the Syrians.

The Syrians have turned back the pages of history for their selection of representation and have taken their invention of the alphabet, which was given to them by the Phoenicians. Many Syrians have attained notable positions in the business world, particularly in the importing line. They have developed the manufacture of the kimonos and have done much to promote popularity to hand-made laces in the United States. Joseph Yazbeck of New York invented the Eureka power machine. Before the World War, Anthony Nassr of Toledo originated an airplane. There are at present time over 200,000 Syrians throughout this country.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Toledo Americanization Board Report: January 1st 1922 to January 1st 1923, 5. Lucas County Public Library Local History Department.

³⁰⁸ "The Pageant Extraordinary: Builders of America," Presented by The Americanization Group of Toledo Social Agencies. February 19-21. Lucas County Public Library Local History Department.

Syrians' attention on how they constructively contributed to American society was an attempt to gain acceptance and recognition by middle class America.

According to Orm Øverland, these arguments were formed to secure "a place of prominence for their group in American history, these immigrants would also secure their position in the nation itself."³⁰⁹ The Syrian's skit augmented their positive and continuous contribution to the United States.

As the Syrians remained in America, the percentage of the community that spoke English continued to increase, a fundamental part of accepting American culture. According to Naff, "English, by the twenties, was becoming dominant, if not in most homes, then in most social functions as well as in business."³¹⁰ In 1920, ninety-one percent of the community spoke English and that number increased to ninety-three percent in the next decade. However, they did not stop speaking Arabic; ninety percent claimed Arabic and another three percent claimed both English and Arabic as their mother tongue.³¹¹ Hitti explains,

The old generation of Syrians still hold the Arabic in almost sacred regard, and, true enough their souls cannot be thrilled other than through its instrumentality. They throng to hear a speaker in this rich and musical mother tongue, but see no reason why they should tolerate anyone lecturing them in another language. The reverse is true of the native-born generation.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 48.

³¹⁰ Naff, *Becoming American*, 324.

³¹¹ 1930 Census Database. www.ancestry.com

³¹² Hitti, 101.

While Arabic was still spoken among the older generation, parents spoke Arabic to their children less often. This is because Syrian American youth did not have the passion to learn Arabic in a country where school peers, employers, and neighbors spoke English. Beatrice Rooney recalled, “My family only spoke Arabic. And then when we started going to school, then we learned English.”³¹³ According to Gregory Orfalea, it was the second-generation who failed to grasp the Arabic language. “Arabic was a tongue whispered in warmth or shouted when a glass was broken at the dinner table. It was not the language that made friends or secured work, and it certainly was not useful in assembling a field rifle in the army.”³¹⁴ Those who could speak it, either picked it up by chance, or only learned basic phrases and words. Immigration restriction of the 1920s further hampered efforts to retain their ethnic language as fewer Arabic-speaking immigrants came to the United States, which decreased the pool of native speakers, as the older generation passed away. Another reason for the decline in Arabic use was the Great Depression, which reduced the urgency and push to speak Arabic. Orfalea suggests,

Hard times effectively quashed the inclination there was in the first native-born generation to learn Arabic. It was difficult enough to eke out a paltry living from the unregenerate edifice of English-speaking America in broken English; it was impossible to do it in Arabic. Jobs were found in English. To Sam Kanaan- who wrote a memoir in meticulous Arabic script- writing Arabic in America was ‘like pissing in the wind’.³¹⁵

³¹³ Beatrice Rooney Interview, July 11, 2008.

³¹⁴ Orfalea, 122.

³¹⁵ Orfalea, 114.

As the Syrian family became accustomed to American ways and desired to imitate them, their marital traditions were transforming. Alixa Naff explains, by the 1920s, “Protection of daughters virtue was unyielding to change, but the practice of early and arranged marriages began to bear the taint of backwardness and foreignness as some, admittedly relatively few, daughters began to insist on romantic love and personal choices, oblivious to family obligations.” Marriage to a non-Syrian, although not desirable was not a taboo, especially for sons. However, when the roles were reversed and their daughter desired to engage in an interethnic marriage, parents usually objected before finally acquiescing.³¹⁶ Helen Rahal, who’s sister married a Polish man recalled, “Finally my mother did go to her wedding, but my dad wouldn’t.”³¹⁷ By 1930, at least ten girls, nine American-born, and one Syrian-born were married to non-Syrian men. Although Naff argued that Syrian girls who defected from marital traditions were “painfully distanced from their families and their children were lost to the group,” this did not hold true in Toledo.³¹⁸ Several daughters married to non-Syrian men lived with their parents or in the same neighborhood. American-born Freda Johais, married a non-Syrian, but remained living with her new husband in her parents’ home. Anna Murphy, who married a non-Syrian, lived with her Muslim parents Mike and Mary Dedo, along with her newborn daughter. Had she been ostracized, it is doubtful that her parents would have allowed the couple to live

³¹⁶ Naff, *Becoming American*, 285.

³¹⁷ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

³¹⁸ Naff, *Becoming American*, 278.

with them, nor would the daughter have been comfortable living near the community that shunned her.

Nevertheless, there were few exogamous marriages among the Syrians in Toledo through the 1930s. Of 122 married couples in 1920, only eleven men and one woman were married to non-Syrians. While this is an increase from the two previous decades, it is hardly a phenomenon. According to author Naff, it “is not to say that there was a mass defection by single men to ‘American’ brides. One or two in a settlement, here and there.”³¹⁹ In 1930, the number of interethnic couples in Toledo increased significantly to more than fifty couples because several Muslims and American-born Syrians chose non-Syrian brides.

Most Syrians married a Syrian spouse. Syrian women were scarce in the United States prior to World War I, but as more immigrated and young daughters of pioneer immigrants came of age, the number of marriageable girls in American increased. Few Christian men returned overseas to find wives and even fewer strayed from their ethnic group. In 1920, eighty-six percent of Syrian brides were born overseas, but by 1930, declined to less than eighty percent. For Muslim men, it remained difficult to find a Muslim wife in the United States even after the war, which caused a high rate of interethnic and interreligious marriages. According to Naff, “With no marriageable females of their faith [Muslim] males faced more acute matrimonial problems than the Christians did.”³²⁰ Ob Olive married an American woman, as did Mike Shaheen’s father. Sam Talb married a

³¹⁹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 237.

³²⁰ Naff, *Becoming American*, 241.

Russian woman and Michael Aosseý's father met and married a German woman after moving to Iowa. According to Mr. Aosseý, "At the time there [were] very few Lebanese women in this country to marry. My father married and a lot the Lebanese men married outside."³²¹ These occurrences were inevitable and generally accepted as part of the Americanization process.

Not all Muslim men resorted to interreligious marriages. Some, like Alex Sheronick and Hassen Ingram, returned to the old country for a spouse. Helen Rahal's mother was sent to the United States to get married to a distant cousin living in Connecticut.³²² After the war broke out, Muslims, like Syrian-Christian men, sent for the wives they had left behind when it became evident that a return to the old country was not possible.

Syrians in America continued to send money to help starving family members trapped overseas, and less frequently returned to the village to check on property and family. More often, men sent for wives, children, elderly parents, and siblings. Family reunification and the death of relatives from the war and famine essentially cut any reason for them to return. "Many of the Syrian Americans who had planned to return home have since changed their mind, and the few who did return are already coming back. Some are going to Syria, but only to settle their business there, sell their property and bring the rest of their

³²¹ Mike J. Aosseý Interview, March 24, 2008.

³²² Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

families.”³²³ As time progressed, they were surrounded by family and friends and died in the United States without stepping foot in Syria again.

Few circumstances affected the second-generation’s ability to appreciate their heritage more so than the lack of contact with the old country. Although it was not the immigrant’s intention to remain in the U.S., it caused them to postpone teaching children about their ethnic heritage. The second-generation, while proud of their Syrian ethnicity, focused on starting families and joining the ranks of middle class America, rather than keeping up with events of distant relatives in a country they never knew. According to Naff, “Much of what the immigrants transmitted was fold knowledge- glorified nostalgic reminiscences of village life- which constituted the villagers’ perception of their heritage.... Their village view of Syrian culture left their children poorly informed about their ethnic heritage.”³²⁴ Occasionally, they sent money back to aging uncles or aunts out of respect for their deceased parents, but there was no physical contact between them. American-born James Shemas considered contact with Lebanon as the least important aspect of his ethnicity. “We don’t have close relationships anymore. The only ones living [were] second cousins... You lose track the further away from the pyramid of relationship.”³²⁵

Few families returned to Lebanon after the war. Mitcheal Salem’s family moved to Toledo in 1920, but returned to Jib Janine, Lebanon in 1924. Mr. Salem explained,

³²³ Hitti, 60.

³²⁴ Naff, *Becoming American*, 292.

³²⁵ James Shemas Phone Interview, June 18, 2008.

They left because my father was in ill health. I don't remember what the...what type of ailment he had but Dr. Shabudah here in Toledo told him that the climate does not agree with him and he should move to a different climate like California or else to go back to Lebanon. After deliberating, my father and mom decided to go back to Lebanon in 1924.³²⁶

However, he is quick to explain that had his father not been sick, his parents would have remained in Toledo because they were happy. Upon returning to Syria, they quickly adjusted to village life; they built a new house in Jib Janine, and his father even became mayor there.

Well we, when we first arrived, we stayed in relatives house, we didn't have a house of our own until a few months after that. My father decided to build a home in Jib Janine.... It was a stone house, built out of stone. It was a square shape and it consisted of an entrance hallway and on either side of the hallway there was two rooms on either side. And one in the back part of the house, which we considered like three bedrooms and a kitchen and so forth and so on.... Soon after we arrived my father was elected mayor of Jib Janine.... He was popular and well liked and he happened to know something, more of administration and handling people and events and all that so he was highly regarded. It was not much of a problem to elect him mayor and he remained as mayor for more than about 15 years.³²⁷

Mitch enrolled in school at the American University of Beirut; however, his education was cut short because his parents lost the money that they had invested in American banks during the Great Depression. Mitcheal returned to the United States with two family friends, Mike Omer and Sam Talib to make money for his family. "They were coming back to the United States. My father decided that it would be a good idea if I really wanted to, to come back to the United States with them."³²⁸

³²⁶ Mitcheal Salem Interview, August 7, 2008.

³²⁷ Mitcheal Salem Interview, August 7, 2008.

³²⁸ Mitcheal Salem Interview, August 7, 2008.

Mike Shaheen's father was always determined to return to Lebanon. In 1932, he gathered his belongings and returned to Sultan Yacoub with his American wife and children. He took his "money from here, and had enough money to buy whatever he needed to set up a mill. And he went on from there.... He was the first man in Bekaa Valley to own a mill."³²⁹ Like Mitch Salem, Mike Shaheen returned to the United States on February 1, 1947.

My dad had a big family, and we used to go to school in the old country you go to boarding school, and that's pretty expensive, and my dad said the load is getting too big and you're old enough to take care of yourself, and if you like to go to America call, I'll send a letter with you to a few people and be on your way. My mother was American, she [kept] saying America, America, and that's the reason I came.³³⁰

Once children were old enough to attend school, the influence of parents began to wane as they were introduced to American culture, habits, and mannerisms. It was the task of Syrian parents to ensure that as children adopted American ways, they did not lose their Syrian-Lebanese identity in the process. The ideal place to encourage their culture was within the household and the North End, where Syrian mothers cooked ethnic food, men and women spoke Arabic, and Syrian American children were taught the Syrian motto of respect. However, the efforts that parents made could not compete with the constant influence of American society. As children married, they continued to adopt new values, in an effort to be accepted socially and economically as middle class Americans.

³²⁹ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

³³⁰ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

As the Great Depression subsided and World War II approached the Syrian community had become a vibrant and permanent fixture in the city. Christians, present in America for nearly seventy years, established families, ethnic church and ethnic associations, embraced Americanization, and began to move up the social and economic ladder. On the other hand, the Muslim community, a small religious minority in the city, quickly settled in, opened business, and began to establish a family community. In the post-World War II era, the dynamics of the Syrian-Lebanese community continued to develop: Christians moved out of the North End, leaving behind their Syrian identity, for middle-class America and the first significant wave of Muslims migrated to Toledo, which in subsequent years achieved the city's respect and established their own religious and cultural institutions.

Chapter Four

Economic and Social Success Achieved, 1936-1956

Just as the Syrians in America enthusiastically participated in World War I, they prepared to assist their host country once again against the Axis Powers during World War II. While it was the pioneer immigrants who fought alongside Americans in the First World War, World War II called upon the American-raised generation of Syrians to demonstrate their loyalty. Nationally, more than 30,000 “GIs of Arab lineage fought for this country against the Axis powers.”³³¹ In Toledo, the first Syrian men to register for the draft were brothers Albert and George Fadell, who did so on October 15, 1940. Yet, by the end of World War II, more than 270 Syrian men had registered.³³² Most were born in America and were eager to defend the United States, because they “felt they were as much American as Arab.”³³³ The stories of those drafted are numerous and provide an

³³¹ Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 116.

³³² WWII Draft Registration Cards, 1942 and WWII Enlistment Records, 1939-1946. www.ancestry.com

³³³ Betsy Hiel, “Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Head toward War,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

insight to their devotion to the United States. For example, Captain Eddie Haddad proudly served as an intelligence officer in North Africa under General George Patton.³³⁴ On August 12, 1941, James Shemas enlisted and became an intelligence officer in the Air Force. He was later promoted to captain, briefing pilots and notifying them of aircraft missiles. He proudly recalled his years of experience in the Air Force, serving in Africa, Europe, and South America:

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, I was a corporal in charge of a barracks for our company in Denver, Colorado. And they called me in the next day and said 'We see you've had a lot of college experience. What are you studying?' I said I was studying law... So then they sent me to Officer Candidate School in Miami Beach, Florida and I graduated as a second lieutenant in June 1942...I became the intelligence officer for my squadron- the paratroop carrier command. They used to drop the paratroopers... We dropped paratroopers and gliders on Sicily and then we moved into Sicily when we cleared the ground of enemy. And then we stayed there another six months or so and got on a boat back to North Africa and then... to Liverpool, England. And we stayed there for about a year and prepared for the invasion of the continent, and we dropped paratroopers on the Corantijn peninsula.... And from there I was there a year and then we moved over to France and took over an airfield that was occupied by Baron Riechting who had a pursuit squadron. Of course they bombed the runway and everything before they left... We came in there and straightened it all up. We patched the holes and we were there three or four months until the European war ended. And then they shipped us down to South America to try to get ready for attacking the Japanese on the Eastern theater but fortunately they dropped the other bomb you know.³³⁵

As a young boy, Charles Cassis would beg his father, Charles, to tell him about his experience in the war. Hesitantly, his father told him one story.

He said when he came back from the service, when they got on the ship he threw everything overboard but an army blanket that he had a German snipers rifle he had wrapped in, and the uniform on his back. He threw

³³⁴ Betsy Hiel, "Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Head toward War," *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

³³⁵ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

everything else overboard. He didn't want anything else. He was in the signal core so they went in before the Army and everybody else to lay the phone lines down. And I used to ask him about the war. I'd say tell me tell me, and he [told] me one story and never told another one. He'd tell me how beautiful the French girls were and all these other things and stealing eggs and cheese, and he hates eggs and cheese because that's all they ate. And he'd tell me he and his buddy were putting the lines down and then there was some shooting and they both dove into the foxhole. When the shooting was done he nudged his buddy to see if he was okay, his buddy fell back and had a bullet through his helmet. And that's all he told, which means my dad had to have shot the German sniper, which is how I have the German snipers rifle. That's the only story he'd ever tell and I never asked anymore after that. And he was such a sweet, kind person, my dad, and you look at someone who goes to war and does all that and then comes back and, it gives you great respect for that person.³³⁶

In Toledo, the Service Club, started by Job Darah, published a newspaper called SA-SO, (Syrian-American Servicemen Organization) to be sent "periodically to all of our boys telling them of the news back home."³³⁷ The paper ran several stories regarding the achievements and experiences of the local Syrian military men. In October 1944, among other tidbits of information, the paper reported that Sergeant George Saba was stationed in Italy and Joe Keween in England, and that First Lieutenant Gilbert Koury, stationed in England was awarded the "Presidential Citation as well as the Air Medal and two Oak Leaf Clusters."³³⁸ Nick Shemas, James Shemas' younger brother, the paper reported, "was just awarded his pilot wings and commissioned Second Lieutenant on August 4, 1944 at LaJunta Army Air Base, LaJunta, Colorado."³³⁹ SA-SO also reported that Kappa Chi member, Harry Sheroian, a radio operator and aerial gunner, was

³³⁶ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

³³⁷ "He is Not Gone, He is Just Away," SA-SO (October 1944), 3.

³³⁸ "Rendezvous in Italy," "Gil Koury Decorated," Joe Keween in England," SA-SO (October 1944), 5.

³³⁹ "Getting Around with Emeline Fadell," SA-SO (October 1944), 6.

reported missing in action in 1943 in Turin, Italy.³⁴⁰ It was later revealed that he was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans on June 6, 1945, and released on March 22, 1946.³⁴¹ Joe Baz was also reported missing in action, but a few weeks later a sign went up in Baz's grocery store announcing, "Joe is safe and on his way home. Free ice cream bars for all the kids."³⁴²

Syrian men were not the only ones to serve their country during World War II. Anne Jacob, Catherine Haddad, and Elizabeth Geha also enlisted for service in the Women's Army Corp. SA-SO reported in 1944 on Elizabeth's eighteen-day furlough in Toledo citing that she "looks very trim in her uniform.... is stationed at Kelly Field, Texas."³⁴³

The majority from Toledo came home unscathed by their time in combat. The death of one of their own affected the entire close-knit Syrian community. As a youth, Jamie Farr watched the older boys from the neighborhood leave to fight in the war. He remembered the community's sadness when someone would not be returning as he solemnly recalled the death of George "Sonny" Skaff:

³⁴⁰ "Kappa Chi Member Missing in Action," SA-SO (October 1944), 5.

³⁴¹ National Archives and Records Administration. World War II and Korean Conflict Veterans Interred Overseas [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2000. Original data: National Archives and Records Administration. Register, World War II Dead Interred in American Military Cemeteries on Foreign Soil and World War II and Korea Missing or Lost or Buried at Sea. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. www.ancestry.com

³⁴² Jamie Farr and Robert Blair Kaiser, *Just Farr Fun* (Clearwater, FL: Eubanks/Donizetti Inc., 1994), 17.

³⁴³ "Getting Around with Emeline Fadell," SA-SO (October 1944), 6.

Skaiff's family had his picture in their living room window, along with a blue star in a little flag, until that blue flag came down and a golden one went up, because Sonny had been killed in action fighting with General Patton's Army in Germany.... When someone in our neighborhood was killed it was as if we had lost one of our very own. The whole neighborhood cried.³⁴⁴

Paratrooper Carl Joseph was also killed in World War II in Normandy, France on D-Day. The events of his tragic day were recalled during a 2003 memorial in his honor at the University of Toledo's Carlson Library: "He jumped at about 4 a.m. with the 504th Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division after serving in Africa, Italy, and Sicily. It was about 10 a.m. when a German sniper got Carl. We were told this by a paratrooper from Steubenville, Ohio who was with him at the time."³⁴⁵ George Lutife, a staff sergeant in the Army and good friend of James Shemas, was killed on October 20, 1944. Mr. Shemas somberly remembered, "I used to write to him in the service when he was in the service; he stepped on a mine and died."³⁴⁶ William Ellis was killed in combat in the Pacific realm on October 26, 1945.³⁴⁷ He was awarded the Purple Heart posthumously for his service in the United States Navy Reserve.³⁴⁸ A seaman second class in the United States

³⁴⁴ Farr, 17.

³⁴⁵ "This Book in one Purchased by the Carl Joseph Memorial Library" sticker from Carlton Library at the University of Toledo.

³⁴⁶ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

³⁴⁷ Betsy Hiel, "Little Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Head toward War," *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

³⁴⁸ National Archives and Records Administration. World War II and Korean Conflict Veterans Interred Overseas [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2000. Original data: National Archives and Records Administration. Register, World War II Dead Interred in American Military Cemeteries on Foreign Soil and World War II and Korea Missing or Lost or Buried at Sea. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. www.ancestry.com

Navy Reserves, Job Darah was also killed on his way to the South Pacific on July 3, 1944. He never saw the periodical he worked so hard to establish.³⁴⁹

While the men were at war, those who stayed behind quickly found employment in the war-producing factories. Toledo Machine and Tool Company, Willys-Overland, Champion Spark Plug Company, the Hettrick Manufacturing Company, and the Toledo General Manufacturing Company were awarded government contracts to build various military components by 1940.³⁵⁰ With unemployment rampant, those who remained in Toledo eagerly sought jobs under these contracts. In 1942, Sam Hadeed and Abraham Fadell worked at Electric Auto-Lite Company; Abraham Moore and John Musser were employed at Toledo Machine and Tool Company, while Mike Nassar, Asa Nassar, and James Bassett worked at Willys-Overland.³⁵¹

Tana Porter explained, "As the orders increased, the plants expanded, but the men went into the military and left Toledo. For the first time, women began to fill manufacturing jobs."³⁵² Syrian American women in Toledo did not pass up these opportunities; dozens of young ladies filled these positions in various factories. During the war, Olga Haddad worked at Champion Spark Plugs, before she married. Her son Charles recalled, "During the war she said she put the spark in the plug. She's an independent little red head."³⁵³ Dorothy Saba worked

³⁴⁹ "He Is Not Gone, He Is Just Away," SA-SO (October 1944), 3.

³⁵⁰ Tana Mosier Porter, *Toledo Profile: A Sesquicentennial History*. Toledo, OH: Buettner (Toledo, Inc., 1987), 98.

³⁵¹ WWII Draft Registration Cards. www.Ancestry.com

³⁵² Porter, 100.

³⁵³ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

at Rossford Ordnance Depot from 1942 to 1949 as an administrator, supervising sixteen women. She “did all the hiring and the firing and all the paperwork and [sent] in reports to Washington.”³⁵⁴ Josephine Geha-Zraik, worked the “Night shift at Auto-Lite. I’d come home at seven a.m. and get the kids off to school and then I’d sleep.... I did piecework on the line. My job was to file the hands on electric clocks to make them smooth, and boy, did I have swollen hands!”³⁵⁵ Helen Rahal also worked the midnight shift at Electric Auto-Lite for two years after family friend Sam Talb got her a job. “He worked in the factory and that’s how he got me in the auto line. See you had to have somebody to sponsor you then.”³⁵⁶

In May 1942, Toledo held the first of seven War Bond drives, nearly doubling its four million dollar goal.³⁵⁷ Syrians contributed considerably to this amount. As a child, Mr. Farr purchased Bonds, which he later used to buy a train ticket for Pasadena, California.³⁵⁸ A 1943 *Toledo Blade* article called Albert (Abdullah) Ganoom, who was awarded a certificate for his War Bond sales record, “An American citizen, a War Bond champion of Lucas County and ‘a natural’ democrat.”³⁵⁹

The number of Lebanese in Toledo had continued to grow in the late 1930s through the creation of new families, migration from other American cities, and, from new immigrants. The second-generation, who came of age during the

³⁵⁴ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

³⁵⁵ Josephine Geha-Zraik Interview Conducted by Joseph Geha, 2007.

³⁵⁶ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

³⁵⁷ Porter, 101.

³⁵⁸ Farr, 16.

³⁵⁹ Nan E. Ewing, “East Meets West in Toledo Home,” *Toledo Blade*, October 13, 1943.

Roaring Twenties and Great Depression, started families following World War II. James Shemas met his wife, Emily Yazbeck, in 1948 at the Midwest Syrian Federation Convention in Chicago. After marrying in 1950, they started a family and had three children. Dorothy Saba met her husband James in 1949, at a Lebanese dance. His sister pointed to Dorothy and said, "There's a good girl."³⁶⁰ After marrying, they remained in Toledo, and raised three children.

The number of new Christian immigrants declined after World War II, since those who wanted to immigrate had done so before the war. However, there were occasional newcomers, like the Geha Family in 1946. "There was a lot of turmoil and unrest in the Middle East then, and America was where we would have a better life," explained daughter Genevieve many years later. In 1948, Jack Zouhary's mother immigrated to Toledo from Tripoli, Lebanon.

She came along with her brother to meet some of her family here. Some of them she had not known, because she was a little girl when they left. Her family was split. There was Aunt Rose and Uncle John who were here for a long time. Their mother came over in early 1940s ... to visit. The war broke out and she couldn't go back. Finally when she was able to go back, [my Uncle Ed] and my mom came over here to return [with her. But] [my mother] met my father and she stayed.³⁶¹

The Muslim community's growth was caused in part, by family creation; however, it was the influx of post-World War II immigrants that contributed most significantly to the community's development. Muslim immigrants, prior to the Second War, were merely a trickle. The number to settle in Toledo was hardly enough to call a community. Yet, all of this changed after the war when the

³⁶⁰ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

³⁶¹ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

number of Muslims to settle in Toledo continued to increase over the next decade and a half. They came from all over America and overseas during and after World War II to join relatives and partake in the city's postwar prosperity. After being discharged from service in the Korean War, Mike Shaheen made a visit to Toledo to see his sister and never left. "My sister told me that my brothers are coming too. So I guess I stayed in Toledo and at the same time I fell in love with my wife."³⁶² A few months later, his brothers, Rushdie and Harroun immigrated to Toledo.

According to Elkholy, "It has become well known in and around Toledo that the city's liquor business is almost monopolized by the Muslims who had actually started this trend by chance, and continued it by profit-orientation, cohesive relationships, and natural jealousy among the relatives to imitate the successful members."³⁶³ Muslims working at the Ford factory in Highland Park, Michigan were especially drawn to Toledo as news of the city's entrepreneurial potential spread. The parents of Eva Hatoum, Karen Aosse, and Kathy Hammoud all moved from Detroit to Toledo to open businesses. Eva's father, Nageb Deen, opened a bar in Toledo in the late-1930s, after losing his hearing working the air hammer at Ford.³⁶⁴ James Adray's father, a native of Highland Park, moved to Toledo to be near his sister and open a bar.³⁶⁵ Najib Burkett migrated from West Virginia in the 1940s, to be near his uncle Mahmoud "Jim"

³⁶² Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

³⁶³ Abdo A. Elkholy, *The Arab Moslems in the United States: Religion and Assimilation* (New Haven: College and University Press Services, Inc., 1966), 18.

³⁶⁴ Eva Hatoum Interview, March 24, 2008.

³⁶⁵ James Adray Interview, March 26, 2008.

Burkett, and also opened a bar. Mitcheal Salem moved to Massachusetts after marrying Naife, but Toledo's lucrative bar businesses lured him back. "I looked for another business in Springfield. I didn't find anything that was suitable so I took a trip to Toledo and looked around and the first place that interested me was... the Lincoln Bar near the art museum."³⁶⁶ Michael and Frieda Aossey moved to Toledo to open a bar in 1954 after Frieda's sister relocated there and persuaded them of the city's economic potential.

We got talked into it. Well [Frieda's] aunt and uncle were here. And her cousins were here. And they, every time they came to see her they'd say 'Oh they can make money there and go into business there. It's easy and everything else'... Actually, Mary and Fred [Frieda's sister and brother-in-law] wanted to come. They sold their business there, my sister and her husband wanted to come and they couldn't do the business there by themselves they needed someone to go in with them. And she talked us into it... She thought they were making big money here. They were in the bar business in Cedar Rapids and they sold their business. I don't know what the reason for, and all the people here my aunt, and all of them come to Toledo, you can go in the bar business here, and that's why they came. And she talked us into it. [Michael] was just working in the factory and he was working outside summer and winter and it was not good. So we thought, well with what we had and what they had we could go into a bar business, go into business together.³⁶⁷

By the 1960s, Muslims owned more than twenty-five percent of the bars in Toledo.³⁶⁸ According to Elkholy,

[They] were mainly attracted to the city by the liquor business which one Moslem family was said to have entered. The family imported relatives from other states and employed them to meet the business expansion, securing maximum profit with minimum cost in paying. But those business-minded relatives very quickly realized the attractive net profits,

³⁶⁶ Mitcheal Salem Interview, March 26, 2008.

³⁶⁷ Mike J. and Frieda Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

³⁶⁸ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 7.

and thus branched in the same business direction, helped by the first family.³⁶⁹

Since selling or consuming liquor was prohibited by Islam, “The members who came to Toledo were selective groups from among the Arab Moslems scattered all over the United States. Selectivity here meant that the liquor business attracted to Toledo a special class of Moslems - those characterized by readiness to sacrifice some traditional values.”³⁷⁰

Just as St. George and St. Elias Orthodox Churches enticed Orthodox settlers, Toledo’s mosque established in 1954, created a new wave of Muslim migration that continued for several decades. Prior to World War II, the community slowly grew to approximately seventy-five Muslim families in Toledo.³⁷¹ By 1965, more than 130 families were listed as members of the American Moslem Society in Toledo.³⁷² According to Mr. Salem,

[The community] wasn’t growing fast. It was growing at a moderate rate. People coming to Toledo, I would say at the rate of maybe a family or two every year for a few years until Toledo became known as a very nice city to move to from other places and establish a business or get a job or something, so more people started migrating to Toledo from places like Detroit and Chicago and even Danbury, Connecticut and Hartford and Cleveland and surrounding areas. They liked what they were hearing about Toledo and the atmosphere because the few families that were here were getting together quite often and talking about establishing a meeting place or in future years building a mosque... After the mosque was built we acquired our reputation, the Muslim community in Toledo, which resulted in many families moving to Toledo from areas like Detroit,

³⁶⁹ Elkholy, 18.

³⁷⁰ Elkholy, 140.

³⁷¹ Betsy Hiel, “Muslim or Christian, Heritage Nourished by Religion,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

³⁷² American Moslem Society Directory, 1965

Chicago, Cleveland, other places, surrounding area, because of the Muslim community and also the mosque.³⁷³

The North End continued to attract Syrian families through the 1960s, as new immigrants and second-generation families initially moved to the area. However, their settlement was temporary due to the increase in the neighborhood's crime rate, the death of early settlers, and their economic success and desire to move to middle-class neighborhoods. Residential dispersion out of the North End began immediately preceding World War II, and picked up momentum after the war. In 1940, there were more than 220 homes inhabited by Syrians, less than 180 in 1950, and less than 150 in 1960.³⁷⁴ Unlike early immigrants who craved Arabic-speaking neighbors and wanted to recreate Syrian village life, the second generation, accustomed to the United States through school, military service, and television, did not attempt to segregate themselves by remaining in the North End. They sought to surpass their parents' lower economic status and "found their places in the upward movement of American society."³⁷⁵ Returning to Syria or Lebanon was never an option; they were permanent residents of Toledo who saw themselves as Americans of Syrian heritage. "Syrian" to them did not mean the Syrian village. It "had a simple meaning: food habits, crafts, music, dance and the rites of hospitality."³⁷⁶ By the 1960s, professional businessmen, doctors, and

³⁷³ Mitcheal Salem Interview, March 26, 2008 and August 7, 2008.

³⁷⁴ City of Toledo Polk Directory 1940, 1950, 1960.

³⁷⁵ Carr, 65.

³⁷⁶ Philip M. Kayal, "Arab Christian in the United States." In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, eds. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit: The Association of American University Presses, 1983), 51.

lawyers had “become almost indistinguishable from other Americans of their class.”³⁷⁷

According to Mr. Shemas, after “WWII [the Syrians] began to diversify and move into better homes... as they became more affluent.”³⁷⁸ He initially lived in the North End with his parents and new bride before moving to South Toledo in 1950, where he remained for thirty-eight years.³⁷⁹ Dorothy Saba adds, “older ones would pass away and the younger ones would marry, they’d start pulling away from the North End.”³⁸⁰ She moved out of the North End in 1949 to Point Place, because her husband wanted to live by the water. Her sister Evelyn Zoghaib’s family followed and bought a home a few blocks away.³⁸¹ After Jack Zouhary’s parents married, they lived with family on Superior Street, next door to his mother Mary’s brother, George Darah. However in 1950, they moved to Merrimac, near Ottawa Park in west Toledo, “To get their own home [and raise a family in a] part of town that [was growing]. I never really asked but I think that schools in part were a reason... And that was the beginning of the flight to the suburbs.”³⁸² As the second-generation bought new homes in the west and south side of the city, they tried to persuade elderly parents to also relocate. Genevieve Brack’s parents refused to leave the North End, “It was an old house when my dad had a chance to move, he says no. He says why should I move we’ve had

³⁷⁷ Alixa Naff, “Arabs,” In *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, eds Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 135.

³⁷⁸ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

³⁷⁹ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

³⁸⁰ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

³⁸¹ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

³⁸² Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

good lives with the children, I'm gonna stay. And my poor mother, she worked hard. I mean that house was so old."³⁸³

Once immigrants were content with remaining in Toledo, they purchased homes, but their children moved out of the old neighborhood for better homes in middle-class neighborhoods. The trend for Syrian-Lebanese settlement in the North End peaked in 1930 with more than 222 houses in the area. By the 1940s, a slow decline accelerated through the 1950s, as thirty percent of the community moved out of the North End. This is similar to other communities across America. For example, in New York City, Michael Suleiman explains, the Arab community moved out of "run-down and extremely crowded tenements of Manhattan to the nicer environment of South Ferry in Brooklyn and beyond."³⁸⁴ Although Toledo's *Little Syria* was not rundown or overcrowded, new families no longer saw the North End as a desirable neighborhood and their internal desire to live in middle-class areas strengthened. By the late 1960s, the once vibrant Little Syria had lost much of its inhabitants, ending more than eighty-years of Syrian-Lebanese community building and growth in the North End. The implications of this dispersion on future generations of Syrian-Americans would not become evident until years later, as many families assimilated into American society, becoming indistinguishable from their new non-Syrian neighbors.

³⁸³ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

³⁸⁴ Michael W. Suleiman, "Arab Immigrants to America, 1880-1940," *Awraq* (16 no. 16, 1995), 82.

According to Thomas Archdeacon, “The hard work of the foreign-born made it possible for some of them and their children to take part in the post-war exodus to the suburbs, but, with the restrictive immigration laws in place, not enough countrymen came to take their places and keep alive the ethnic character of the old neighborhoods.” By the end of the Second World War, Christian-Syrians, who had spent nearly a generation scouring the country for a viable city, were settled in America and found little reason to move once again to cities like Toledo where new business opportunities had sprouted. While a handful of Muslims moved to the North End, they did not recreate the old world lifestyle like Christian pioneers and moved out within a few years as they saw the neighborhood’s imminent decline. Karen Aossey’s family remained on Yates Street in the North End, until she married and moved to Oregon on the east side. However, after she married, her widowed mother remained in the North End, until an illness forced her to move in with her daughter.³⁸⁵ However, by 1965, only ten Muslim families remained on Cherry, Chestnut, Elm, Huron, Mulberry, and Ontario streets.³⁸⁶

After World War II, Muslims remained scattered throughout Toledo, however, a sizeable community had begun to form on the east side, where houses were inexpensive. The Aossey’s initially rented an apartment on Broadway, but purchased a house in East Toledo, because Frieda’s sister “Lived on Midvale on the east side. So that’s why we bought this lot here and had this

³⁸⁵ Karen Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

³⁸⁶ American Moslem Society Directory, 1965. Located at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo.

house built.”³⁸⁷ Munir Simon, born in the North End, moved to East Toledo with his mother to be near her family after his parents divorced.³⁸⁸ Mike Burkett’s parents, Najib and Fern, also resided in East Toledo for a number of years, near the Olive, Kadri, and Talb families.³⁸⁹ The parents of Eva Hatoum lived there for a short while before buying a house in West Toledo for \$12,000.³⁹⁰ Mike Shaheen purchased a home on Manhattan, where there were no Lebanese families, because “It was a very nice neighborhood at the time. And that was the house I could afford. I paid \$11,000 for that house.”³⁹¹

Although there was a decline in the number of Syrian-Lebanese families living in the North End through the late 1960s, the neighborhood continued to be the epicenter of the community’s cultural occasions. As a youth during the postwar era, Mrs. Brack,

Played in the alley with the boys because there were no women around, except the Haddad women. When I wanted to play dress up, like get in their mother’s trunk and wear big hats and high heels, I’d go to their house, or play dolls. If we were going to play one old cat I’d play with the boys. And then I’d go over to [Lorice Manassa’s] house and see if [she] could play, and I remember we were always outside.³⁹²

The youth continued to frequent the Friendly Center after the war. Mrs. Brack recalled, “They had dances, and they had different games that we played. [I played] volleyball.”³⁹³ Going to the local parks was also a common pastime for

³⁸⁷ Mike J. and Frieda Aosse Interview, March 24, 2008.

³⁸⁸ Munir Simon Interview, March 19, 2008.

³⁸⁹ Mike Burkett Interview, March 20, 2008.

³⁹⁰ Eva Hatoum Interview, March 24, 2008.

³⁹¹ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

³⁹² Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

³⁹³ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

the community. According to Lorice Burkett, they would go to Pearson Park, Shady Shore, and Riverside Park every weekend in the summer. After Lorice's grandfather urinated on a tree at Pearson Park one day, the community nicknamed the park, "Park Abu Anton" and it became a favorite place to hang out for the Syrian Catholics.³⁹⁴ Watching movies at the Paramount and Mystic Theater was another favorite community activity. Jamie Farr recalled,

For ten cents, plus the price of popcorn, five cents, we would have a fantastic Saturday afternoon at our neighborhood theater. Some would save the popcorn nickel- and bring in a bag full of goodies from home: feta cheese, olives, tabouleh salad (made with onions and garlic), pita bread. Those in the theater who were not Arabs soon learned to live with the aroma of onions and garlic.³⁹⁵

The community also rented the Ohio Theater to play Arabic movies several times a year.³⁹⁶

Syrian-Christians were enthusiastic about the performing arts and held several Syrian plays to entertain the community. The Syrian Dramatic Club presented the First Annual Charity Show on September 3, 1936 at the Y.W.C.A. Auditorium.³⁹⁷ Under the leadership of A.A. Haddad, the Club presented several mini-plays, as well as musical performances, tap and acrobatic dance routines. The co-ed cast included, George Moses, Elizabeth Mickel, Dave Ansara, Sadie Skaff, Mike Damas, George Deeb, Mary Assaly, Adele Nassr, Beatrice Deeb, Eli Cassis, George Saad, Abe Haddad, Robert Mickel, Johnny Cassis, and Mr. and

³⁹⁴ Lorice Burkett Interview, March 9, 2008.

³⁹⁵ Farr, 57.

³⁹⁶ Lorice Burkett Interview, March 15, 2008.

³⁹⁷ Syrian Dramatic Club Program. First Annual Charity Show. September 3, 1936.

Mrs. William Sodd.³⁹⁸ In 1959, at the Fourth Annual Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Diocese Convention, members of St. Elias performed “Beirut Bound.” Produced and directed by James Shemas, starring Donald Mickel, Thomas Zraik, John Shibley, and Nicholas Assaley, the production consisted of a singing and dancing ensemble, as well as a style show and five-scene play. Mr. Shemas, who played the character Fathalla, recalled the song, “The Old Syrian,” that he sang during the play:

*I’m an old Syrian, from the Mahrajan, and I eat my soup, with my beit injan, I love my kibee and kousa too, I love to eat like the old folks do, give me ... Give me some kibee kibee kibee naya hoon. Kibee kibee kibee naya.*³⁹⁹

Even as they left the North End, activities continued to bring them back to the old neighborhood. St. Elias and St. George churches drew the Orthodox to the area every Sunday and on religious occasions. At St. Elias, younger church members formed the Junior League in 1946, “to promote the spiritual, moral, and educational welfare of the youth in the parish.”⁴⁰⁰ The next year, the First Convention of the Syrian Orthodox Youth Organization was held in Toledo at St. Elias Church. Others had parents and relatives living in the North End, that they visited. Jack Zouhary recalled his visits to the North End, years after his parents relocated,

³⁹⁸ Syrian Dramatic Club Program. First Annual Charity Show. September 3, 1936.

³⁹⁹ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008. *Mahrajan* is an area in Syria; *beit injan* is Arabic for eggplant; *kibbe* is ground meat often served *naya*, or raw; *kousa* is Arabic for zucchini.

⁴⁰⁰ “A Short History of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church Toledo, Ohio.” St. Elias 50-Year Anniversary. Located at St. Elias Church.

Now we lived on Merrimac in west Toledo so that was a ways but every Sunday there would be church, and there would be probably something going on, if not at my grandparent's house, some social functions at church or a way for me to interact with other children my age, whether it was through the youth group or something else.⁴⁰¹

Catholics, on the other hand, gathered for picnics and their annual trip to Carey, Ohio for the Our Lady of Fatima Shrine Festival in August. Freda Hadeed and Lorice Burkett recalled making the weeklong trip every year. The Tarsha, Sahadi, Sodd, Manassa, Jacobs, and Nasta families traveled together to Carey, where they visited the church with the blessed virgin, camped, and danced the *dabke* all night.⁴⁰² According to Mrs. Brack, "We had a corner of the park and some of them stayed in bed and breakfast places, you know, but they didn't eat breakfast it was just a rooming house. And we stayed in the park with the tents."⁴⁰³ However, their contact with the North End was limited to visiting relatives who never left the area.

The post-World War II residential dispersion enabled Syrian Americans to learn first-hand how the American middle-class lived and socialized. The time-honored tradition of unannounced visits and walking into each other's homes without knocking faded away. According to Mr. Shemas, these visits became "More formal. Now you don't drop over unless you call and make arrangements. That's very true. Even as far as family is concerned you call first."⁴⁰⁴ Occasional visits did not substitute for the ethnic immersion that the second-generation experienced as youths in the North End. As they joined the American middle-

⁴⁰¹ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁰² Freda Hadeed, and Lorice Burkett Interview, March 25, 2008.

⁴⁰³ Genevieve Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴⁰⁴ James Shemas Interview, August 1, 2008.

class their children lost parts of their Syrian-Lebanese heritage that their parents had once cherished, like speaking and hearing Arabic.

Families moved out of the North End, but men continued to return to the area to work at Willys Overland and their restaurants, bars, or grocery stores. Mr. Zouhary returned to the North End as a young boy to help at his father's store, Zouhary's Market.⁴⁰⁵ Corey Candy Company, Bismarck Café, and Geha Market also stayed in the area long after their owners moved away. After World War II, many second-generation Christians found professional occupations as they moved up the economic ladder of success. Paul T. Fakehany became the city's first Syrian-Lebanese police officer in 1908. He was appointed Superintendent of the Police Bureau of Identification in 1938. On October 6, 1938, the Lebanese-Syrian Business and Professional Men's Club held a banquet in recognition of his prestigious appointment where "A diamond-studded gold badge, significant of the rank now held by Mr. Fakehany, was presented to the Superintendent by Michael Nassr, first Syrian to settle in Toledo, who 20 years ago presented Mr. Fakehany a gold badge when he was named Assistant Superintendant of the Bureau."⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁰⁶ "Syrians Honor Paul Fakehany," *Toledo Blade*, October 7, 1938, 6:2. The general committee in charge was composed of George Abdo, Sam Abdo, Mike Addis, John Cassis, Albert Corey, Mike Damas, Louis Darah, Barber Farris, E.K. Francis, Joseph Francis, Albert Ganoom, Czar Haddad, William Haddad, George A. Haddad, A.A. Haddad, Ted Haddad, Lester N. Haddad, Nicholas M. Haddad, George Hanna, William J. Jacobs, A.H. Jamra, Oscar Joseph, Fred Kirdahy, John McKenna, Fred Mickel, Nap Nassr, George J. Saad, Mike Saba, George Sabbagh, George Saad, Abe Shimmaly, and James Shimmaly.

Charles Hider, the city's first Syrian-Lebanese attorney, became a role model for the younger generation, exemplifying that education and hard work can bring social and economic success in America. For example, in 1947, Mr. Shemas followed in Hider's footsteps and became a lawyer. Mr. Hider, "helped the newcomers obtain naturalization papers, and being well-versed in liquor laws and licensing regulations helped them in setting up businesses, restaurants, and bars. There was a time when you could not get a liquor license in Toledo without Charlie Hider's signature."⁴⁰⁷

American-born Michael J. Damas was elected mayor of Toledo, from 1959 to 1961. "When he came home [from service at World War II], he went on to win election to the Ohio House of Representatives in 1948, serving three two-year terms. Four terms on council followed, and in 1959, Mr. Damas was elected mayor, the first Arab-American elected mayor of a large city in America."⁴⁰⁸ His political accomplishments showed future generations that there were more occupational options than merely factories and bars.

Danny Thomas took his comedic skills to Hollywood to become a famous actor in the early 1940s; Jamie Farr did the same a decade later. Thomas "dropped out of Woodward High School as a junior to pursue his show business dream. It was not until he landed a job in 1940 at the 5100 Club in Chicago.... Danny went from making \$50 a week in Chicago to \$5,000 a week in California in

⁴⁰⁷ Betsy Hiel, "Syria Thrives in Toledo as the World Heads Toward War," *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

⁴⁰⁸ Betsy Hiel, "Mike Damas: Mayor and State Leader," *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

a few years. His big break came with *Make Room for Daddy* in the 1950s.”⁴⁰⁹

After graduating from Woodward High School in 1952, Farr moved to California.

After several years of trying to break through, he scored a prominent role as

Corporal Maxwell Klinger on the television show, *M*A*S*H*.⁴¹⁰

Muslim men were predominantly independent bar owners. For example in 1940, Ob Olive and Michael Abdoney owned bars on Adams Street. When Mike Shaheen came to Toledo in the early 1950s, he noticed that, “Everybody that came from the old country, that’s what they went in most of them, the bar business.”⁴¹¹ From 1951 to 1977, he owned nine bars throughout the city. While the consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden in Islam, the liquor business was the Muslims’ way of attaining success. Secular rationalization made this forbidden occupation acceptable in the community. According to one bar owner, “If we don’t sell liquor, someone else will anyway. We neither encourage drink nor initiate drinking places. Drinking is a habit in this country and we just follow the pattern as any legal occupation. Furthermore, our customers are not Moslems they are Americans. We scorn any Moslem who may come to drink.”⁴¹²

Mike Burkett, whose father Najib owned several bars in Toledo, explained the ease of attaining success in liquor sales. “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to buy a case of beer for twelve dollars and sell it for twenty-four so you keep track of your profit. You use a certain size shot glass for so many shots that fit the

⁴⁰⁹ Betsy Hiel, “Danny Left his Heart in Toledo,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

⁴¹⁰ Farr, 16 and 163.

⁴¹¹ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴¹² Elkholy, 58.

liquor so when the liquor bottle's gone there should be so much profit, so there's basic math."⁴¹³ After the repeal of Prohibition, Muslims "had businesses that they converted into bars. Or else they sold it and then went into the bar business just because it was profitable. That's the only reason... It was economics."⁴¹⁴ Helen Rahal's father initially opened a confectionary store when he moved to Toledo, but converted it into a bar when the economic potential of liquor was realized.⁴¹⁵ They also purchased confectionary stores and other shops from Syrian-Christian businessmen, who had been in Toledo for "one or two generations longer, were climbing up the profit ladder, moving out of the bar business and into fine restaurants and the professions."⁴¹⁶ According to James Adray, Christian businessmen enticed Muslim men from Detroit to migrate to Toledo to open bars in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Christians were in the bar business and got out of the bar business when the crackdowns started to come... What happened was Charlie Hider was a lawyer; his son-in-law was Tommy Saleh. He was a real estate man. Charlie Hider did the liquor transfers; Tommy Saleh sold the bars. Tommy Saleh got the bars and party stores the liquor licenses, listed [them], he sold them. Charlie Hider did the transfers. And they sold [them] to the Muslims coming into town... Gave them their opportunity. That's how the Muslims got into the bar business.⁴¹⁷

However, not all Muslim businessmen owned bars. Karen Aosse's father, for example, came to Toledo in the late 1940s and opened a hotel. "The big thing in Toledo for Lebanese was either bars or hotels. My father didn't want anything to

⁴¹³ Mike Burkett Interview, March 20, 2008.

⁴¹⁴ Mitcheal Salem Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁴¹⁵ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴¹⁶ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 7.

⁴¹⁷ James Adray Interview, March 26, 2008.

do with the bar. So he had a hotel. It was downtown on Cherry Street right by Summit and it was across the street from St. Francis Church.”⁴¹⁸ Very few Muslim residents took factory jobs. Mr. Adray explained, “The reason they came here, to Toledo, was to get away from the factory, to get into private enterprise, to get into their part of the American dream. And remember that part of the American dream is owning your own business, and not having to work for the slave master.”⁴¹⁹ Several Muslims became respected professionals. Jamel Ganoom became a lawyer and his brother Richard became a doctor. According to Mr. Adray, the Ganoom brothers became role models for the Muslim youth. “They had gone to professional school and they were professionals, they were not owners of bars, they were not party store owners. They got education. There weren’t that many Muslim attorneys, so I decided I wanted to be an attorney.”⁴²⁰ However, like early Christian immigrants, Muslim newcomers came to America to be businessmen and that is what most did in Toledo.

In the postwar era, entrepreneurship was no longer reserved for Syrian-Lebanese men in Toledo. Ann Harp-Sharp owned a “Grocery store, Sharp Variety, at the corner of Western and Langdon while her husband worked on the railroad.”⁴²¹ Helen Rahal owned a confectionary store from 1948 to 1959, at 1602 Monroe Street. After working at Sam Talb’s restaurant for many years, Ms. Rahal

⁴¹⁸ Karen Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴¹⁹ James Adray Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁴²⁰ James Adray Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁴²¹ Natasha Rafi, “Muslim Women Blend Heritage and a New Culture,” *Toledo Blade*, October 15, 1995, 4.

decided to purchase the store next door, when her boss gave the business to his son.

I wasn't going to get married, I knew, and I wanted to be in business. So I worked for this man, he was Lebanese... And I worked for him when I was a kid. And I used to work six days a week, you didn't know this, I don't think, five dollars a week.... So every time I wanted to quit I would quit and then I'd come back and you know, this and that. And I'm the one that kept that business going, when I wasn't there, and I'm not giving myself credit.... I bought the place next door, across the street, for a \$1,000 and every pan and every dish... I threw [them all] out because they were so dirty and greasy in there. And all the neighbors helped me. All the businessmen, Borden's ice cream company, they gave me all the machinery for nothing.... Because they wanted to see me make a go.... I used to go with my dad all the time to his place. I just wanted to --- and I mean a lot of things, I didn't know how to do the taxes or nothing, I learned everything.... Well I had ice cream, a little bit of groceries, I had beer and wine to carry out but you hardly sold that because you know the apartments. And then I started having a lunchroom, that's where I made my money.⁴²²

The Orthodox community in Toledo was large, vibrant, and united, until 1934, when a disagreement over the election of the church's next Archbishop divided the community throughout the country. "A new bishop [Antony Bashir] had been chosen for the New York Archdiocese, and Toledo's Rev. Samuel David had been passed over."⁴²³ After being passed over, Reverend David was consecrated in 1936, without authority from the church, leading to his excommunication, until March of 1939. According to "The History of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church of Toledo, Ohio,"

It was during those 3 ½ years that the main disputes and quarrels broke out in St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church of Toledo, between those backing the excommunicated and former pastor for 16 years, Samuel

⁴²² Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴²³ Betsy Hiel, "Muslim or Christian, Heritage Nourished by Religion," *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

David, and those who supported the Mother Church of Antioch and Metropolitan Antony Bashir. In 1937, it was those faithful members of St. George's of Toledo, who chose to obey the Mother Church of Antioch and to loyally support their newly elected leader Metropolitan Antony Bashir, who began to form, what was later to become, the Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church of Toledo, Ohio.

The group loyal to the New York Archdiocese took the name of the St. George Conservatives and they took the policy of fighting to restore the Toledo Church to its rightful home, as a church in the New York Archdiocese. In 1937, Metropolitan Antony was called to Toledo and, in a meeting of his followers, convinced the St. George Conservatives to disband their idea of fighting and instead he inspired them to build themselves a new Church in Toledo.⁴²⁴

Led by George Darah, many families formed the St. Elias Men's Club and Ladies Society that year to raise money to build a new Orthodox Church. The founders of St. Elias Church were Michael Habib, William Haddad, Michael E. Haney, Elias Hanna, John McKenna, George Joseph, George Kerbawy, Sam M. Bassett, Tom Baz, George K. Darah, Alex Mickel, Moses Tanber, William Rayess, Louis G. Darah, George J. Ghiz, Albert H. Jamra, Sr., Henry Sabback, George Sadd, and Isaac Shamy.⁴²⁵ "The Saleem Tanassy mansion at the corner of Mulberry and Huron Streets was purchased on February 17, 1938, to serve as the first church site... That summer the Ladies' Society held a very successful picnic and made their first payment of \$500.00 on the mortgage."⁴²⁶ One year later a fire destroyed the structure, forcing the community to rebuild a new church. It was completed in 1940 and served the parish's religious needs for thirty-seven years. St. Elias became just as important as St. George for half of the Orthodox

⁴²⁴ "The History of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church of Toledo, Ohio." August 6, 1974. Pg. 3. Located at St. Elias Church.

⁴²⁵ "A Short History of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church Toledo, Ohio." St. Elias 50-Year Anniversary. Located at St. Elias Church

⁴²⁶ "A Short History of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church Toledo, Ohio." St. Elias 50-Year Anniversary. Located at St. Elias Church.

community in Toledo. As a youth, Jack Zouhary recalled, St. Elias had “a clearly social function to the church, not just a religious function, it was a cultural function as well and all those activities centered around there frankly.”⁴²⁷

Tension between the two churches remained high for many years. Charles Cassis recalled, one woman “would walk down the street going grocery shopping from Joseph’s, [when] she saw my grandmother on the porch, she would cross the street and walk down Erie this way and then come back to go to her home.”⁴²⁸ According to Mr. Farr, “The parents were at war with each other, literally. It was the children who brought them together because we went to school with one another.”⁴²⁹ For St. George parishioner, Mr. Cassis, the split nearly prevented him from meeting his future wife Corrine. “My wife Corinne was a member of St. Elias. And honestly and truthfully before we started dating, that was part of the reason I never asked her out. She was from St. Elias... Corinne and I started dating- now I’m Lebanese and Orthodox, [but it still] took her grandmother one year... to really accept me because I was from the other church.”⁴³⁰ Although some members of the community began to reconcile over the years, the community officially remained divided for nearly four decades.

Early Muslim immigrants dreamed of establishing a place of worship; however, it was the influx of World War II immigrants that made this dream a reality. Their presence, according to Yvonne Haddad, “helped to preserve old

⁴²⁷ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴²⁸ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁴²⁹ Betsy Hiel, “Muslim or Christian, Heritage Nourished by Religion,” *Toledo Blade*, March 27, 2000.

⁴³⁰ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

country ideals and customs and to slow down the process of acculturation and assimilation.”⁴³¹ Early immigrants acquiesced to interfaith marriages and assimilation, but new immigrants were not prepared to lose their children to American influences. “A more visible community started to crystallize at this stage, composed of extended families from the same place and living in the same city.”⁴³² Families organized to establish a religious center, where they could “pray together, to educate their children in Islamic religion and customs, and to provide a place where their children could socialize with each other... To build a mosque would, in some respect, ‘nationalize’ their religious community in the same way a church symbolized the Christian community in America.”⁴³³ The community realized that their children needed to identify with an Islamic institution or they would turn to the American church to fill the void. Religious associations “were primarily meant to keep the kids from breaking away, as well as to provide a place for families to socialize and for weddings and burials to be performed within traditional context.”⁴³⁴ According to Mitcheal Salem, although the community supported Americanization, “They wanted an identity... They wanted to be able to get together, worship, and have a place for the children to

⁴³¹ Yvonne Haddad, “Arab Muslims Arab Muslims and Islamic Institutions in America: Adaptation and Reform,” In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit: The Association of American University Presses, 1983), 66.

⁴³² Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed, “Muslim Organizations in the United States,” In *The Muslims of America*. Ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

⁴³³ Mary Lahaj, “The Islamic Center of New England.” In *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 298.

⁴³⁴ Ahmed, 12.

be there. To absorb, the Arabic atmosphere, the Islam, and at the same time, we did not forget that we're in an American environment and we had the desire to assimilate."⁴³⁵

In 1943, more than fifty Lebanese families officially established the American Moslem Society, to

Gather all the Moslems in Toledo into one solid and united organization, identify the society's personality as a religious group and to strengthen the Islamic belief among the Moslem people... [And] to have a home for the society to use and a school to teach the Moslems, particularly the youths, what they should know about their religion and history in the future.⁴³⁶

A few years later, personal quarrels and a lack of funds forced the Society to disband. However, by the 1950s, Muslim mothers frustrated with their children's Americanization, "Began nagging the men, saying, 'Our children are growing up and we're not teaching them our religion.'"⁴³⁷ Pressure from the women, along with the influx of new settlers provided the boost that the community needed to reorganize and form the Syrian American Moslem Society. Headed by Mohamad Omar, its main objective was to establish a "mosque to use for meetings rather than renting a hall each time it wanted to meet or practice religious duties or have social gatherings."⁴³⁸ Mike Shaheen recalled,

We'd meet at the YMCA, we'd met at the Swiss Hall, and we met at our own home. Whoever had a house then, we used to go to house. We met quite a few times at Ob Olive, at Jim Dean's house, at Kadri's house... Each family would take some food, you know, and of course we had our

⁴³⁵ Mitcheal Salem Interview, July 38, 2008.

⁴³⁶ Ahmad Naserdin, *History of American Moslem Society* (Toledo, OH, 1970), 17.

⁴³⁷ Laurie Krauth, "Toledo's Lebanese Community." *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 10.

⁴³⁸ Naserdin, 27.

ethnic food, Arabic food. And we danced and talked and finally we decided we [wanted to] open up a mosque. And we pushed it. We met together; we used to meet once a week, sometimes more often according to how important the meeting is. And we collected enough money from different families and we decided to open a mosque.⁴³⁹

In 1952, many members of the community attended the first Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada in Cedar Rapids and returned to Toledo motivated to open a mosque. The next year, they held the second annual conference in Toledo. Over a thousand delegates from across the country met at the Commodore Perry Hotel and Ottawa Park from July 3-5, for a weekend of activities, election of Federation officers, and planning of various programs to promote the religion and culture of Islam in America.⁴⁴⁰ After the convention, the dream of building a mosque was set in motion.

In October of 1953, the Society purchased a lot at 722 Bancroft Street, to construct a mosque. The construction committee headed by Albert Talib, Mahmoud Jim Burkett, Mohammed Showsher (Mike Hallick), Kassem Moussa, and Najib Burkett, collected donations from around the world to pay the \$48,000 construction costs. Funds were collected from Highland Park, Grand Rapids, and Logan, West Virginia, as well as Moslem societies from Canada, and the governments of Saudi Arabia and Iraq. "The society kept working hard to raise more funds for the building work and kept busy collecting pledges and donations, collecting dues, and preparing suppers and parties. The mosque building fund received other incomes, such as marriages, deaths, and gifts from big

⁴³⁹ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴⁴⁰ Undated Newspaper article found at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo. "At Moslem Convention, Moslems Open Convention; to Draw 1,000."

businesses and industrial companies.”⁴⁴¹ Mr. Shaheen recalled, “Anytime we need donations or to collect money, I was very active in it.... We used to go from bar to bar... Me and Eddie Simon and Mike Ayash, we used to go [collect money]. If we don’t find him at the bar we’d go to his house. That’s how we collected money.”⁴⁴²

On April 4, 1954, Ali Mahadeen, a wealthy New Jersey businessman who contributed \$1,000 to the construction fund, placed the building’s first cornerstone. Once the mosque was completed, chairman of the dedication committee, Mitcheal Salem, organized the dedication ceremony of the first mosque in the State of Ohio for Sunday May 29, 1955. “It was a great and highly emotional experience in my life. We had finally established a place to worship, educate our youth, and meet socially. It gave us the opportunity to acquaint others with Islam, I was thrilled to be a part of it.”⁴⁴³ Mr. Salem opened the ceremony with a few brief words, followed by several prominent political and religious speakers, including Mayor Czelusta, “who praised and thanked the society for the invitation and its endeavor to build the new mosque.”⁴⁴⁴ The first

⁴⁴¹ Naserdin, 31.

⁴⁴² It is ironic that the community used the proceeds from a forbidden occupation to build a religious center in the name of God. “The beautiful mosque, the most striking religious institution in the community is built from liquor money.... As businessmen have no limited ceiling on their earnings, the Moslem community in Toledo believe that the more they give for the support of their religious institutions, the more they will earn and their earning will become blessed and purified from the sin of its means.” (Elkholy)

⁴⁴³ Mona S. Sayed and Habib Khan, “Meet Our Elders: An Interview with Mitch Salem,” written for the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo’s *Monitor*.

⁴⁴⁴ Naserdin, 34.

religious leader, Mohamad Y. Abdoney, served the mosque for free for four years, before ill health forced him to return to Lebanon.⁴⁴⁵

The community was very proud and excited about the mosque on Bancroft. Munir Simon recalled,

It was just a simple building but the basement was pretty much for socialization and food and kids and Sunday school. But everybody knew everybody. Everybody was friendly to everybody and there was really no visible animosity or hidden animosity... People always had a lot of fun. I always looked forward to going to the mosque on Bancroft.⁴⁴⁶

They also established a school, “to teach the members and their children the spirit and culture of the Islamic religion.”⁴⁴⁷ Classes taught in English, ranged from Islamic philosophy and history for those over the age of fifteen, to simple religious stories about the prophet for children under the age of six, taught exclusively by second-generation women. Parents enthusiastically sent children to classes and by the mid-1950s, more than 150 children ages four to fifteen attended Sunday school at the mosque.⁴⁴⁸ However, Ahmad Naserdin explained, attendance declined as parents stopped going to the mosque regularly and because of the lack of qualified teachers.⁴⁴⁹ As children, Karen Aosse and Cathy Hammoud would “beg our parents to go to the mosque and they’d refuse [because] they were busy. They were working and that.”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁵ Naserdin, 43.

⁴⁴⁶ Munir Simon Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁴⁴⁷ Naserdin, 38.

⁴⁴⁸ Elkholy, 133-134.

⁴⁴⁹ Naserdin, 39.

⁴⁵⁰ Karen Aosse and Catherine Hammoud Interview, March 24, 2008.

With no neighborhood or building to congregate in during the early years, Muslim families found other ways to socialize. They often met at Navarre Park on the east side, and participated on certain occasions in other cities across America and Canada for their religious celebrations. However, after the mosque was built, the Ladies Auxiliary held annual suppers to raise funds to pay the mosque's loan as well as maintenance expenses. The Young American Muslim Society was an important part of the youth's lives as it provided an environment to socialize without the watchful eyes of overprotective parents. Cathy Hammoud explained, "We had the youth club that met every other Wednesday night. It was socialization. And that was it. We weren't allowed to go anywhere."⁴⁵¹ Karen Aossey elaborated, "I was not allowed to play a whole lot with neighborhood kids. My socializing... outside of the home was done through the youth group at the mosque."⁴⁵² The club also hosted annual conventions. According to Mrs. Hammoud, the convention was a highly anticipated event for her and other Muslim youths. "The youth convention was two nights. We got together Friday and it was casual, Saturday it was kind of dressy and then we came back on Sunday."⁴⁵³

Although the mosque was a solemn place of religious worship, early members used the building for cultural events that often departed from Islamic teachings. According to Elkholy, "Their Americanized religious activities, such as publishing religious material, holding conferences, and sponsoring parties, raised

⁴⁵¹ Catherine Hammoud Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁵² Karen Aossey Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁵³ Catherine Hammoud Interview, March 24, 2008.

their prestige and self-esteem. These promoted religious activities acquainted the Moslem youth with one another and with the Moslem youth in other communities.”⁴⁵⁴ Early mosques, Yvonne Haddad argued, “formed here tended to emphasize Arab culture and the politics of the Middle East rather than the religion of Islam.”⁴⁵⁵ In doing so, they adopted traditions and practices from the American church, such as conducting weddings in the prayer room as well as piano music, and making Sunday the day for religious activities at the mosque, as opposed to the traditional Friday Sabbath. According to Elkholy, “The same loudspeaker which broadcasts the recorded Quranic verses before Friday prayer now broadcast rock-and-roll music for the third generation and waltzes for the second.”⁴⁵⁶

The Americanization of the mosque, as well as the religion itself, was done to prevent Muslim youth from abandoning their faith. Early members, like Dorothy Jabarin, witnessed many children leave the community. “The mosque did some things it shouldn’t have done to try to keep them: for one, it held dances. Dancing is forbidden, especially in the mosque.”⁴⁵⁷ As youths, Karen and Carolyn Aosse, Eva Hatoum, and Cathy Hammoud, recalled dances organized by the Young American Moslem Society held in the centers basement. “We used to have dances at the mosque. We would turn all the lights off and just a Pepsi

⁴⁵⁴ Elkholy, 33

⁴⁵⁵ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “Introduction: The Muslims of America,” In *The Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xx.

⁴⁵⁶ Elkholy, 33

⁴⁵⁷ Laurie Krauth, “Toledo’s Lebanese Community.” *Toledo Magazine* April 6-12, 1986, 11.

clock would be the only illumination we had to dance to. We used to always have chaperones. We used to have like bands in there.”⁴⁵⁸ James Adray added, “There were *hafilas* in that mosque. The mosque was as much a religious center as it was a cultural and social center.”⁴⁵⁹ As the mosque attracted more Muslim settlers, the young community worked hard to establish themselves as good Muslim-Americans, and create strong ties with the city of Toledo.

Across the country, Muslim immigrants believed that the only way to survive in a Christian country was to be involved in the local community.⁴⁶⁰ The Muslim community wanted an organization that could inform the American public about Islam and the similarities between their beliefs and Christianity.⁴⁶¹

According to Yvonne Haddad,

The minority status of the Muslim community has added to the imam’s duties, which now include attending to the community’s general welfare as well as representing them in religious functions. He became the spokesman for the group, the ambassador of the Muslims to the community, frequently lecturing about Islam in churches and schools.⁴⁶²

Imam Kamal Ardvich successfully executed this role in Toledo, creating a positive relationship with the community. Elkholy explained, “[The Imam] also feeds the local press with news of his community and of religious events, indicating their social significance.... In Toledo, the press consults the religious

⁴⁵⁸ Catherine Hammoud Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁵⁹ James Adray Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁴⁶⁰ Lahaj, 297.

⁴⁶¹ Mitcheal Salem Interview, March 26, 2008.

⁴⁶² Yvonne Haddad, “Arab Muslims and Islamic Institutions in America: Adaptation and Reform,” In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit: The Association of American University Presses, 1983), 73.

leader in such matters and, because of its excellent communication and good relations between the community representative and the press [negative attacks] would probably not appear in the Toledo press.”⁴⁶³ For example, in 1959, the *Blade* interviewed Imam Ardvich about the Islamic holy month of Ramadan for an article.

In the years following World War II, external forces of assimilation towards foreigners declined. Archdeacon explained,

Acculturation inexorably took place as men and women of the second and later generations became increasingly important in the makeup of the nation's foreign stock. Individual members of ethnic groups adapted their behavior to the manners and mores of the country, and the institutions that served and were led by them experienced analogous alterations of values. Moreover, the religious, economic and political conditions affecting foreign-stock Americans worked to transcend their particular ethnic identities and to bind them into a common subculture. As a result, the heterogeneity of the population was much less an issue in the United States during and after World War II than it had been in the decade between 1915 and 1925.⁴⁶⁴

During this period, Syrian Americans began a new wave of assimilation: they moved out of the North End, were employed in professional occupations, and gained the city's respect. Again, Archdeacon elaborated, “As the United States faced the second-half of the twentieth century, its foreign-stock population was composed overwhelmingly of people who spent their entire lives or at least all their adult years in America.”⁴⁶⁵ Their determination to move up the economic and social ladder was evidence that the Americanization Board, American churches, school, and people had a positive effect on the Syrian population in

⁴⁶³ Elkholy, 38, 40.

⁴⁶⁴ Archdeacon, 174.

⁴⁶⁵ Archdeacon, 186.

molding them into ideal American citizens during the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1950s, the Syrian Americans in Toledo were cooking less Arabic food, speaking less Arabic, Americanized their churches and clubs, and cut most transnational ties with relatives in Syria or Lebanon.

Christians found their assimilation and adjustment to American society eased by their religious orientation and organizations developed by their community and American society at large to facilitate this transition. Lahaj suggests, "The Muslims, on the other hand, had no institutions to help them assimilate or support them in the process of social integration."⁴⁶⁶ Their desire to be successful in America and save their children from becoming completely absorbed in American society influenced the degree in which the early mosque and its members embraced Americanism, since their early success dismissed any notion of returning to Lebanon. Elkholy explained, "Having committed themselves to a permanent settlement, they accepted and welcomed the inevitable associate factor of being American. But being American they saw, does not mean being without religion."⁴⁶⁷ For early Muslims in Toledo, Mitcheal Salem explained, there was a "great consciousness of being assimilated... They want to be part of the American culture... And be accepted as good American citizens."⁴⁶⁸ For example, citizenship continued to be a priority for the community. Michael S. Orra's father "applied for citizenship many, many times. I think it

⁴⁶⁶ Lahaj, 293.

⁴⁶⁷ Elkholy, 92.

⁴⁶⁸ Mitcheal Salem, Interview July 6, 2008.

probably took him ten times before he passed. But that was important to him. And he always considered himself, you know, an American citizen.”⁴⁶⁹

According to Elkholy, “The first agent of assimilation is language. Without the new language the immigrant finds it difficult to understand, much less assimilate, the prevailing values in any given social system... The less English-speaking in an ethnic community in America, the more clannish it is and the more it segregates itself from American life.”⁴⁷⁰ Most notably, their residential dispersion and occupational preferences influenced their ability to speak English. By the late 1950s, more than eighty-five percent of first-generation Muslims could speak and read English.⁴⁷¹ Muslim immigrants tried to teach their children Arabic at the mosque; however, like the Christians, few became proficient, since parents did not push the language at home. “They most likely understand their mother tongue to a certain extent, but they cannot answer in Arabic.”⁴⁷² For Mike Shaheen, American school and his wife explained why his children never learned to speak Arabic.

When your kids start going to school, they bring their friends in, and they speak English, when you speak Arabic in front of the other kids, you know, they feel like ‘Why you speaking to me in Arabic?’... And it was easier for the mother. The mother had a lot to do with it. If she speaks Arabic, a lot of the kids learned it, but Rudy (his wife) didn’t speak. She spoke Arabic but she didn’t push it.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁹ Mike Orra Interview, March 17, 2008.

⁴⁷⁰ Elkholy, 69.

⁴⁷¹ Elkholy, 85.

⁴⁷² Elkholy, 85.

⁴⁷³ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

There was an increase in interreligious and interethnic marriages among the third-generation, as well as in the Muslim community. Mr. Shemas's children all married non-Syrians, as did Dorothy Saba's daughter. Ironically, these marriages, which the second-generation accepted as part of becoming American, were discouraged and frowned upon only a decade or so earlier. Mr. Shemas explained, "I don't have a problem with that. The best looking, the best looking children come from the mixed marriages."⁴⁷⁴ Mrs. Saba added, "This is America. He was a wonderful kid."⁴⁷⁵ Jack Zouhary married an Irish woman, and jokes that his two daughters "are affectionately known as Lebanese leprechauns."⁴⁷⁶

Most Muslim parents did not want their children to cross cultural and religious lines, however, they accepted interreligious marriage as an inevitable part of living in a Christian country. These families had two choices: they could either lose a daughter and a member of their community or gain a son and bring a new family to the community. Abdo Elkholy explained that Toledo Muslims generally accept their son or daughters mixed marriage, insisting that, "besides keeping its own children, [they] gained new members."⁴⁷⁷ By the mid-1950s, twenty-seven percent of second and third generation Muslims were married to non-Muslims.⁴⁷⁸ This trend developed for several reasons. The community was small and scattered. Children were deprived of playmates and neighbors who shared their religious practices and cultural attitudes. Prior to World War II,

⁴⁷⁴ James Shemas Interview, March 18, 2008.

⁴⁷⁵ Dorothy Saba Interview, March 17, 2008.

⁴⁷⁶ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁷⁷ Elkholy, 123.

⁴⁷⁸ Elkholy, 33.

pressure to assimilate caused the young and fragile Muslim community to lose the motivation to educate their children about Islam. Like Christians, they assumed they would return to Lebanon where they would educate their children of their religion and culture, but this rarely happened. Most children of early Muslim settlers were lost to American society, but the new Muslim immigrants served to rejuvenate the early settlers religiosity.

These marriages, according to Elkholy, “are of the strongest agencies of assimilation.”⁴⁷⁹ He continued to explain that in Toledo, “The Moslem girl in a mixed marriage tends to retain her ties to the Moslem community and her personal assimilation become a means of increasing the entire community’s level of assimilation.”⁴⁸⁰ For example, when Lila married a non-Muslim, her parents, Elizabeth and Sharkey Sookey did not object. Many men also brought non-Muslim wives to the community, which further increased the community’s level of assimilation. The non-Muslim wives of Najib and Jameel Burkett, Fern and Lorice respectively, were fully embraced by the Muslim community. They became active members in the mosque’s Ladies Auxiliary, bringing their experiences as Americans to further the clubs success.

According to Mitcheal Salem, prior to 1944, the pool of marriageable women in Toledo was small and required the scouting in other communities or returning to Lebanon for a prospective bride. Naff explains, “Contacts were especially important for bride searches... Muslims of Cedar Rapids, for example

⁴⁷⁹ Elkholy, 72.

⁴⁸⁰ Elkholy, 72.

made contacts with Muslims in such cities as Michigan City, Indiana; Highland Park (later in Dearborn), Michigan; and Toledo, Ohio.”⁴⁸¹ Elizabeth Sooke met her husband, Shakeeb (Sharkey) Sooke through her uncle, Michael Harp in 1936.

He came down one week and the next week I was married. Honest to God. He asked my father if he could take me to the movies... Well he said it first he said ‘You know why I’m here don’t you?’ I said no, but I did. And he says will you marry me? And I say’s I don’t know. He says I like you, he said I like you... And the next week he came back and brought the Imam with him from Michigan. And in the kitchen of this home on Seventh Street, we were married. And I went back home with him and I didn’t know nothing. I didn’t know anything. But I was 19 years old, but I never got away from my mother long enough to talk to anybody.⁴⁸²

In 1942, Mr. Salem wanted to get married to a Muslim girl and began his search by enlisting the help of relatives with connections in other Muslim communities.

He explained how he met his wife, Naife.

My wife was not a Toledoan, you see. Where I was working that sweet shop [for] Albert Ganoom, he knew her family in Springfield Massachusetts. And he had seen a picture of my wife and he said “You should take a trip over there.” And we did. We took a trip over there to Springfield, Massachusetts. That’s where I met my wife. This was in 1942, I think or something, like that. Anyway I liked her and indicated that I would like to get married but she wasn’t interested at the time. So anyways I came back and I kept writing to her once in a while- writing letters. Once in a while she’d write me but nothing, no interest... After my acquaintance with Naife... someone paid a visit to Springfield, Massachusetts and they were talking to my future wife and she indicated a desire to resume contact with me. [That person] told me about it and I started writing to her and she started writing back and she became interested and I was telling her about getting married. So I made another trip out there and it became successful and we got engaged. This was in the first part of ’44, 1944.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Naff, *Becoming American*, 246.

⁴⁸² Elizabeth Sooke Interview, December 23, 2008.

⁴⁸³ Mitcheal Salem, Interview July 6, 2008.

Mike Shaheen was also successful in finding a Muslim bride in America, without leaving Toledo. Mr. Shaheen explained how he met his wife, Rudy May, after moving to the city in 1951. "Ob Olive, he's from the same village my dad's from. I came to visit him, and he was pretty active, and I liked him and he liked me, and he just happened to have a daughter there... I made up my mind that's what I wanted. That's how we met."⁴⁸⁴

Weddings were a major form of entertainment for the Muslim community. When Mike Shaheen married Rudy May in the early 1950s, they had a big wedding at the Commodore Perry Hotel, with more than seven hundred guests. "We had a dabke, we had people from Iowa, people from Detroit, people from Florida. From all over."⁴⁸⁵ In March 1955, the community celebrated the first wedding in the newly built mosque on Bancroft. The next week, the *Toledo Blade* ran an article entitled, "Elation Over New Mosque Adds Significance at a Moslem Wedding," describing the historic wedding of Ida Mahfuz and Casim Olwan.

The Wedding of Ida Mahfuz and Casim Olwan last Sunday- the first such ceremony in the new Moslem mosque- was not only a joyous event for the young couple, but also had special significance for the Moslem congregation.

It was a double ring ceremony in the American tradition, and was blended with Moslem rites. The reception following was typically Syrian since most of the local followers of Islam are from Syria.

The romance began in July 1953 when the International Moslem Society held its second annual convention here. Mr. Olwan, formerly of Ashland, Ky., is the treasurer of the International Society. His bride is a model and formerly attended the University of Toledo.

⁴⁸⁴ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴⁸⁵ Mike Shaheen Interview, March 31 2008.

For the 400 family friends and relatives, many who assembled from numerous parts of the United States and Canada for the nuptials, it was also a long-awaited chance to see the new mosque at 732 East Bancroft St. It will be dedicated May 15. The local mosque building campaign fund received a \$5,000 start at the society's convention here.

Although Moslem wedding ceremonies are usually held in private or in the community room of the mosque, the Toledo congregation has agreed that nuptial rites may be performed in the mosque prayer room.

The bride is the daughter of Mrs. Tom Mahfuz, of 2041 Fernwood Ave., and the late Mr. Mahfuz. Her husband, sports editor of the Ironton O., Tribune is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ollie Olwan of Ashland.

For the ceremony, the congregation was also permitted a piano to be brought into the prayer room, although generally there is to be no music in the mosque. The processional music was the Wedding March from "Lohengrin" and the recessional was the familiar Mendelssohn March.

Two clergymen officiated. The local imam, Yusef Abdoney, conducted the rites in Arabic. The other clergyman, Sheikh Mohamad Jawad Chirri, of Michigan City, Ind., and a friend of the family, led the vows in English.⁴⁸⁶

The Syrians born in America maintained little ties with their parents' native country. Few second-generation and even less third-generation Christians returned to Syria or Lebanon following World War II, although many would like to return. For example, American-born, Charles Cassis, "Would love to go. I can't wait until we do... I have to go see the little mud shack my father's family lived in."⁴⁸⁷ Jenny Brack had the opportunity to go to Lebanon, but never went.

My father wanted me to go with my mother and my two aunts, and he was willing to pay for it. I was working for the government, and I got to thinking there's so much in America I have not seen and I felt that I owed something to my heritage more than theirs. And I say 'Pop, not at this time, maybe the next time.' Well, the next time they went I was married.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Lee Z. Hafkin, "Elation Over New Mosque Adds Significance at a Moslem Wedding," *Toledo Sunday Blade*, March 6, 1955.

⁴⁸⁷ Charles Cassis Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁴⁸⁸ Jenny Brack Interview, March 31, 2008.

Jack Zouhary did travel to Lebanon and Syria.

I was there as a child. It would have been 1959. I spent a summer there and that's when I got to know a lot of my cousins there and that's when I really learned the language. Then I went back [twice] when I was in college ... Unlike most of my Lebanese contemporary friends, because I have family there, because I have visited there, I have stronger ties there than they do. To them it's a country to which their parents or grandparents came from and they have some affinity for it. But ... they don't have the same feeling that I do for it.... For me it made all the difference as far as feeling part of the Lebanese community and spirit.⁴⁸⁹

By the mid-1950s, thirty-six percent of the Muslim community in Toledo returned to the old country, usually for a visit.⁴⁹⁰ Laughing, Helen Rahal explained why she never went to Lebanon. "They used to say the bathrooms were outside."⁴⁹¹

However, Mike Burkett visited his father's native village of Sultan Yacoub several times as a youth.⁴⁹² When he was ten years old, Munir Simon's "Mother took us on a visit, supposed to be for summer, and we started learning Arabic language and so she decided to keep us there."⁴⁹³ Chereffe Kadri returned to Lebanon with her family in the 1960s. "We were only supposed to stay there for a year. We stayed for three and we even forgot our English."⁴⁹⁴ The degrees of the Muslim's transnational ties did not permanently and abruptly end with the passing of the immigrant generation. The constant stream of new immigrants, as well as the continued trend of returning to the old country to marry, encouraged transnationalism among subsequent generations of Muslim-Americans.

⁴⁸⁹ Jack Zouhary Interview, March 24, 2008.

⁴⁹⁰ Elkholy, 43.

⁴⁹¹ Helen Rahal Interview, March 31, 2008.

⁴⁹² Mike Burkett Interview, March 20, 2008.

⁴⁹³ Munir Simon Interview, March 19, 2008.

⁴⁹⁴ Rafi, "Muslim Women Blend Heritage, A New Culture," 4.

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants successfully adapted themselves to American society. Children surpassed their parents' social and economic status, while at the same time developing religious and cultural institutions to preserve cherished aspects of their ethnic identity. The city of Toledo had two Orthodox churches, one mosque, several cultural clubs, and a religiously diverse and prosperous community created by the hard work and determination of Syrian immigrants and their children who wanted to be successful and good American citizens. In less than one hundred years, the Syrian-Lebanese community developed from a small Christian colony with one foot in America and one foot in the old country, to a multi-religious, prosperous, and well-respected community with permanent ties to Toledo.

Conclusion

Future Growth and Changes

After the 1960s, the Lebanese community continued to see substantial growth from new Muslim immigration and family creation, albeit, many of the new Christian families included non-Lebanese spouses. Residential dispersion that began after World War II continued through the late 1970s as increased criminal activities infiltrated the North End and financial gains allowed families to purchase homes in better neighborhoods. Since few young Lebanese couples remained in the North End, where cultural traditions thrived, the assimilation of subsequent generations quickly increased. Without the old neighborhood and an ethnic church, the Catholic community saw the most dramatic assimilation among Lebanese religious groups. Orthodox members continued to rely on St. George and St. Elias Church to nurture the community's cultural traditions. Political upheaval in the Middle East set off a chain migration of relatives and friends of the first wave of Muslim settlers. Others were college students who immigrated for educational and professional reasons. As these two communities

flourished, they eventually moved and expanded their religious centers to better suit the needs of its members.

The Immigration Act of 1965, which eased immigration restriction, allowed thousands of Muslims to immigrate to the United States from war torn Lebanon. Internal conflicts and a war with neighboring Israel forced thousands of Lebanese to leave their homes. Although many immigrated to other Middle East countries, Europe, and South America, those with family in the United States opted to immigrate there. The 1965 act had a family reunification clause which enabled the first wave of Muslim immigrants to bring siblings and cousins, who were previously restricted from entering quota free. Not all new immigrants, however, were family related. Hundreds of professionals also immigrated to Toledo to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered at the local university. “The mostly Christian and mostly assimilated Arab-American immigrants have been joined by a wave of educated, mostly Muslim newcomers who have taken jobs in local universities, hospitals, and other professions.”⁴⁹⁵

Just as post World War I immigration was marked with family reunification indicating their intentions of permanent settlements, the same occurred for the Muslim community during the post-1965 wave of new immigrants. Both communities had become fully invested in the city of Toledo and their presence in the city continued to take on long-term qualities, such as establishing larger religious institutions and moving into middle class neighborhoods. These

⁴⁹⁵ Betsy Hiel, “Latest Arrivals from Middle East are Educated Professionals,” *Toledo Blade*, March 28, 2000.

immigrants' early investment in establishing an Orthodox Cathedral paid off and as the number of parishioners increased, St. Elias and St. George built new churches, forcing the two churches to relocate to more centralized locations in West Toledo. St. George Orthodox Cathedral was the first religious center to move its facility out of the North End. Members at St. George had a groundbreaking celebration on April 23, 1972 at the new site on Woodley Road. On June 6, 1976, St. Elias Church followed suit and broke ground for a new church on Holland Sylvania Ave and Harroun Road in West Toledo and was consecrated on April 27, 1976. The Muslim community relocated their mosque from the old neighborhood to Perrysburg. The small size of the early mosque on Bancroft became apparent as new immigrants rapidly increased the size of the Muslim community in Toledo. "With the influx of many more Muslims to the Greater Toledo area in the late sixties and early seventies, the Bancroft Street Center could not meet the religious and social needs of its members."⁴⁹⁶ On October 22, 1983 the Perrysburg Mosque was dedicated to service the religious needs of the large Muslim community.

From its early days as a small colony, the Syrian-Lebanese community in Toledo showed trends indicating long-term settlement intentions. By 1910, the Orthodox's investment in the city of Toledo was marked by the establishment of St. George Orthodox Church, a turning point in which Syrian sojourners became permanent American settlers. Early on, Toledo was not a temporary settlement to serve a transient community's economic needs like many other American cities.

⁴⁹⁶ Dr. Amjad Hussein, "History of Islamic Center of Greater Toledo." Found at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo.

Immigrants in Toledo may have aspired to return to the old country, but did not because they liked their new home and what the city had to offer. Instead, many sent for wives, children, siblings, parents, other relatives, and friends to join as the city's economic potential was realized. Businessmen opened retail stores, confectionaries, barbers shops, and tailor shops, scattered across the city, although the majority were congregated near their homes in the North End. As children grew up in Toledo, their family's chances of returning to the old country diminished. In time, new Syrian and non-Syrian friends were made, houses were purchased, religious institutions were established, English was learned, American customs were adopted, citizenship was attained, and transnational ties were cut within the Christian community, although the influx of new Muslim immigrants assisted in maintaining their contact. The Christian and Muslim immigrants who settled in the city by 1960 made Toledo their home and successfully climbed the economic ladder of success becoming well-respected members of middle-class America.

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