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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Arthur Gregian by Joseph Conforti

Arthur Gregian

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Rhode Island College
ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 9

with

Arthur Gregian

April 21, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 7 He would have preferred to be born in America. U.S. has many opportunities. He hated time and place where he was born--in Turkey of Armenian parents.
- 22 His father was American citizen before he was born but he wasn't aware of this until he was 14 or 15.
- 30 Father came to U.S. as young man and became citizen. Then he went back to old country. Planned to bring his family here but Balkan War broke out and after that he was jailed and massacred.
- 47 He was sent to a Moslem family. Lived with different Turkish families so he wouldn't be massacred.
- 82 His sister located him and he went to an American orphanage.
- 114 Learned to read and write Armenian in the American orphanage.
- 120 In 1922, Armenians were deported--to Beirut then Constantinople where he went to school for a short time. Then sent to American orphanage in Greece.
- 127 In Greece, he learned he was a U.S. citizen.
- 150 His uncle made arrangements for him to come to America. Sent passage money, process took 2 years.
- 190 Lived in orphanage on Corfu.
- 200 Uncle had farm in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Had 35 acres of land and was very proud of it.
- 214 His father had come to Providence and worked in a bakery.

Arthur Gregian

- 220 He came to Providence, had cousin here. His life was very hard when he first came. He walked 1½ miles to school. First thing he bought was a second-hand bicycle for \$2.50.
- 238 Organized Sons of Armenia in 1926. They had plays, debates, talks about Armenian life. Had church on Jefferson Street.
- 254 Worked in jewelry shop, fruit store, market--always looking for better job. Decided he wanted to return to school so worked on uncle's farm in Lawrence to save money. Only earned \$70. so couldn't go to school.
- 270 Went to New York and worked in rug shop.
- 280 Back to Providence, jewelry shop, learned stonemasonry, job lasted 3 months.
- 286 Back to New York, then Worcester where his sister was living. Stayed with her from 1929-40. Worked in market and earned \$12. a week. Joined several clubs of social nature in Worcester.
- 315 Married in Worcester. Very active in Armenian community. Organized AYF in 1933-34, on executive committee. Active in church and in political affairs.
- 338 Wife from Connecticut. Met through AYF. Moved to Hartford.
- 359 Got into life insurance business and moved to Providence.
- 388 Involved in Armenian community here. Belongs to church, AYF, Masonic lodge.
- 415 Armenian community split from 1930's on.
- 426 He thinks 50% of Armenians have totally assimilated.
- 475 He feels he has lost much of feeling of being Armenian--he's an American.
- 503 He was very concerned about getting an education. He came to America to become an intellectual but never had the chance. He went to high school at night.

Tape 1 Side 2

- 2 His children know the Armenian language but can't speak it. All his children belong to Armenian church.

Arthur Gregian

- 15 No such thing as Armenian neighborhood anymore. Used to be grocery stores, tailor shops, barber shops.
- 30 He's not disturbed by disbanding of Armenian neighborhood. Progress necessary.
- 40 Sense of community still preserved by churches and organizations.
- 93 Protestant and Catholic Armenians are united only about attitude toward Turkish question. But many are apathetic about the massacres.
- 140 Armenians around country receptive to appeal for help for Armenians in Lebanon. Active in Armenian Relief Society. Get help from all generations, especially third generation because ethnic identity more acceptable in U.S. culture now. Before World War II, many Armenians changed their names. He has shortened his name.
- 225 He sees no future for Armenians because of problems with having a homeland. He feels the culture is being lost and will be lost forever in 50 years.
- 260 They tried to have schools to preserve language and culture but not successful here.
- 305 Armenians very committed to education for their children.
- 345 This trend will change also--more indifference now. He thinks the Armenians who are really Americanized don't care as much about education.
- 395 Third generation drifting away from Armenian heritage.
- 455 Intermarriage accepted by Armenians. Prior to World War II was unacceptable. Changed because people became more assimilated.