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## **Albanians of Hudson and the Origin of the Independent Albanian Orthodox Church**

**William Wolkovich-Valkavicius**

During 1909 in the town of Hudson, a grim newspaper report became "the chief topic of discussion" of a midsummer week, as residents learned about "The untimely death of Mr. and Mrs. James Pondee supposedly from impure water . . . ." Bad sanitary conditions led to the contamination of the household drinking supply with typhoid germs. "Mr. Pondee is a native of Albania . . . a stranger to the English tongue," the report noted.<sup>1</sup> Through this poignant notice, a large number of inhabitants probably for the first time became aware of the tiny Albanian enclave in their factory town in Middlesex County, thirty miles west of Boston.

The stricken immigrant (whose correct surname most likely was "Pandi") and his countrymen had begun coming to the United States in noticeable numbers in the early years of that decade, with most coming from their native Albania. That Balkan land is surrounded by the Adriatic Sea on the west, by Yugoslavia to the north and east, and by Greece on the south. An ethnic group with an estimated world population of one and a quarter million in 1900, Albanians had lived under the Turkish yoke since the fifteenth century, until they briefly became independent in 1912. By religious affiliation, roughly seventy percent are Moslems, twenty percent are Orthodox Christians, and ten percent are Roman Catholics. The Catholics have been subject to the

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1. The Hudson Enterprise, July 23, 1909.

Latin Rite, while the other Christians traditionally have been under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Church and under strong Greek cultural influence.

In Boston, young Albanian men became fruit peddlers, candy store owners, and restaurant workers. Elsewhere in the Bay State, they began settling in Clinton, Fitchburg, Framingham, Hudson, Marlboro, Natick, Southbridge, and Worcester. Typical of the masses of newcomers, these mostly illiterate Balkan peasants gravitated toward available factory jobs, which were no longer being filled by those of English and Irish ancestry. Flourishing Hudson shoe factories, a rubber company, and a woolen mill provided Albanians with jobs. Soon after their arrival in Hudson, a curious episode in this otherwise unassuming immigrant cluster would spark the start of an independent Albanian church in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the century, there were sporadic signs of the "Albanian National Renaissance" in the Albanian diaspora, such as at Bucharest, and then in the United States, a land that provided Albanian patriots "a freedom of action which they could never find in any other country."<sup>3</sup> The Albanian majority of the United States, echoed in Hudson, was swept up in this tide of rising nationalism. This sentiment caused a collision in the area of religious affiliation. Traditionally the Orthodox Christians among Albanians worshipped according to the Byzantine liturgy as members of the Greek Orthodox Church, "which had nurtured them on strong pro-Greek sympathies." The Greek Orthodox clergy "preached against the use of the Albanian tongue in church," and pro-Greek priests "systematically and blatantly spread ideas antipathetic to Albanian nationalism."<sup>4</sup>

From the Greek viewpoint, Albanian nationalists became traitors, not only in the political sense, but also disrupting religious unity within the Greek Orthodox household. One of the Albanian leaders, Soterios Petsis (or Sotir Petsi) -- Boston editor

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2. On a brief social history of the Hudson Albanians, see this writer's series in the bilingual newspaper Liria (Liberty), starting Nov. 1, 1987, to also appear in future issues of The Hudson Daily Sun.

3. Stavro Skendi, The National Awakening, 1878-1912 (Princeton, N.J., 1967), p. 160.

4. The Albanian Struggle, pp. 33, 41-42. For a distinctly Greek outlook on the Albanians, see Pyrrhus J. Ruches, Albanian's Captives (Chicago, 1965), pp. 20 ff.

of *Kombi* (The Nation) begun in 1906 -- was considered to be nothing but a "turncoat Greek." A pair of other spokesmen of Albanianism, Fan Noli and Faik Bey Konitza, were called "two of the slickest manipulators of Balkan intrigue." Indeed, the same Greek source denied that Noli was even an Albanian, but rather that he was "the most unusual 'Albanian' on earth."<sup>5</sup>

Not all Albanians applauded the anti-Greek viewpoint. A small minority appreciated its haven in the Greek church that had long served Albanian religious needs. While tending to espouse a more conservative nationalism, this minority remained comfortable in its Greek surroundings, as indicated by two Albanian parishes in Chicago and Boston, which to this day remain under Greek ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Thus, like fellow countrymen elsewhere, Hudson's Albanians separated into fervent nationalists and those of Greek Orthodox affiliation, or "Graecomaniacs," as the more numerous brethren pejoratively called them.

For their religious needs, the Hudson immigrants looked to the closest Orthodox priest of whatever ethnic background. The nearest one happened to be in Worcester. According to Albanian sources, when a Hudson Albanian died in 1907, the Greek priest in Worcester refused to preside at the burial. In the aftermath, this rejection proved to be a turning point in Albanian religious history.<sup>6</sup>

On the morning of Sunday, August 25, 1907, Kristaq Dishnirtza died. He was a twenty-two year-old laster at a local shoe factory, called "James Christis" and "Christo James" in the town's death records and in a local newspaper, respectively. Having lived in Hudson only a few years, he was described on his death certificate as a native of Turkey, and in the newspapers as a native of Macedonia. His parents were listed as James Ertim and

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5. Ibid.

6. This incident passed into the realm of legend among Albanians. The hazily remembered burial case was transmitted without details, except for the correct year of 1907. In this regard, the now standard reference, Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, p. 26, does not even risk repeating the year, but cautiously refers only to the early 1900s. The same source incorrectly refers to a Greek priest in Hudson. A newspaper obituary of Fan Noli in 1965 wrongly locates the incident "in Boston where a Greek priest, the only one in the area" refused to conduct the funeral (Boston Globe, March 21, 1965).

Deosus Vano, with a surviving brother in Hudson, Demider James. The Albanians of Hudson grieved the death of this young victim of tuberculosis. Ethnic solidarity in bereavement alone would have brought together the entire Albanian enclave. In fact, the Hudson immigrants were joined by their countrymen from Marlboro, Natick, and even a few from Boston. On the very next day, according to the local newspaper, the funeral was attended by "all the Greek speaking residents in town," requiring "seven hacks" to take the mourners to Hope Cemetery in Worcester. The Albanian mourners were identified according to the language they spoke, rather than their Albanian ethnicity. One local publication added: "The funeral cortege was a large one, for such a distance, those accompanying the body being all men." But when the mourners reached Worcester, the Orthodox priest there refused to provide funeral rites.<sup>7</sup>

The Albanian version of this incident, in the memoirs of Constantine Demo (1960), notes several other similar episodes, and asserts that "the Greek Church this time not only refused to bury the man, but went so far as to persuade Orthodox churches of other nationalities to do likewise." Furthermore, according to the standard Albanian explanation, the young patriot Dishnitzer was automatically excommunicated from the Greek Orthodox Church because of his intense Albanian nationalism. The denial of burial privileges was also based on the belief that "the deceased and his friends were Turks and not Orthodox Christians." Risto Koki, an Albanian patriot among the mourners, then requested help from the Syrian priest in Worcester, but he too refused.<sup>8</sup> According to the Albanian Church jubilee volume, because of the rejection by the Orthodox priests, Dishnitzer was interred in a Worcester cemetery "without benefit of clergy from the church of his belief." Meanwhile, a contemporary newspaper account reported that "services according to the rite of the Greek church were held in Worcester." Actually, it was a layman, Kozma Angelo of Hudson,

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7. The issue of ethnicity in the Balkans, as in other parts of Europe, is sometimes quite complex. See "Macedonians" in the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups.

8. Constantine Demo, The Albanians in America (Boston, 1960) p. 39; Victor Angelo, six-page typescript of talk in 1976 at a Boston banquet of the national newspaper Liria, p. 3.

who "read the funeral Mass." Angelo's father and brother were priests, so Angelo was well-versed in the funeral liturgy.<sup>9</sup>

In 1939 the Albanian Historical Society of Massachusetts sponsored publication of the Federal Writers' Project's study, *The Albanian Struggle*. This work repeated the claim that "the Greek clergy refused to officiate" at Dishnizta's funeral. Yet the monograph neither identified any specific priest, nor mentioned Worcester. By 1958 the burial-refusal assertion in the golden jubilee volume of the Albanian Church changed slightly to a yet unidentified "Greek priest [who] refused to officiate . . . ." Again, Worcester was not mentioned, though this official source added that "there was no other Orthodox priest available in the vicinity." Since then, the nationally circulated Albanian newspaper, *Liria*, has repeated this narrative on several occasions.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, an investigation of these claims provides a different account of what actually happened. According to the Saint Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church of Worcester, there was no Greek priest there in 1907. In the church album to commemorate its consecration rites of May 30, 1954, the origin of the parish is given as October 15, 1914. Prior to that date, only itinerant Greek priests came to Worcester, entering records of sacraments at the Syrian church. The *Worcester City Directory* for 1907 does indicate the presence of a Father Maletious Karum, pastor of St. George Greek Orthodox Church, which was founded in 1900. But Karum was a Syrian priest, using the Byzantine or "Greek Orthodox" liturgy. The *Directory* refers not to a congregation of Greeks headed by a Greek priest, but rather to the rite of Syrian

9. Hudson Enterprise, Aug. 30, 1907; Hudson News, Aug. 30, 1907; Fiftieth Anniversary of the Albanian Orthodox Church, p. 104; telephone interview with Nicholas Arthur, April 3, 1986; Angelo typescript, p. 4; Robert N. Tochka, "The Development of the Boston Albanian Community, 1900-1920," (unpublished honors study, Boston College, 1978), p. 45. Demo (p. 39) acknowledged that the burial took place "without benefit of clergy from the church of his belief," but omitted any mention of prayers by the layman, Kozma Angelo. The fiftieth anniversary book (p. 104) misleadingly asserts: "So the young man was buried without any religious service." Dennis Lazar Nagi does not mention the burial case, in his "Ethnic Continuity as it Applies to a Less Visible National Group: The Albanian Community of Boston, Massachusetts," doctoral dissertation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, 1982, p. 67.

10. The Albanian Struggle, p. 43; Fiftieth Anniversary of the Albanian Orthodox Church, p. 104.

worshippers. According to an official Syrian source, St. George was a "mission" that used a rented hall in 1902, and moved into its own building in 1907. Meanwhile, the *City Directory* of 1907 indicates only one other orthodox congregation, an Armenian Apostolic Church of Our Savior, under Father Bogos Kaftanian.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1987, an Albanian-born resident of Quincy shared with this writer a transcribed copy of a private letter which provides an important clue to the truth concerning the burial-refusal story. It seems that, quite by chance, in the summer of 1969 in the Catskills of New York, the Quincy informant met Vangel Dishnitzer, a cousin of Kristaq (James) Dishnitzer, the subject of the Hudson burial controversy. After discussing the incident, the cousin promised to write his recollection of it. A year later he kept his promise. In his account, he insisted that no Greek priest was involved, but rather it was an elderly Syrian priest in Worcester to whom the Hudson Albanians had turned. When the Syrian was about to make arrangements for the funeral service, a group of pro-Greek Albanians from Hudson attempted to stop the service on the grounds that Dishnitzer was a Turk. To solve his dilemma, Father Karum asked to see the death certificate. When he found Dishnitzer's birthplace listed as Turkey, he refused to participate in the burial rite on the grounds that Dishnitzer was a Moslem, and not a Christian.<sup>12</sup>

Except for one crucial element, this explanation agrees with an Albanian document of 1939, which was evidently overlooked in later Albanian sources. The almanac article on the history and foundation of the Albanian Orthodox Church included an interview with the Hudson Albanian and nationalist leader, Vangel Miller. His reminiscence describes the intervention of Risto Koki, a Worcester Albanian, who arranged the Dishnitzer funeral service at the Syrian parish, as requested by the deceased's brother, Demider, and by his Albanian friends. But when the

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11. Worcester City Directory (1907); A Tribute to the Old Church in the New World, a publication of the 31st annual convention of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (San Francisco, 1976), p. 113; letter from Metropolitan Philip (Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America) to author, Nov. 22, 1986.

12. Original hand-written letter given to Bishop Mark Lipa, transcription in possession of the Quincy informant.

body of the deceased was brought to Worcester, the Syrian priest refused to perform the liturgy. His reversal was blamed on "political intrigue and the Greeks," to use the translation of the expression used by the editor who provided this caption for a section of the article. Earlier in the article, the pseudonymous author, "Tivarit," explained that Hudson's Albanians were divided into two camps, nationalists and "fanatic Graecomaniacs," again using the translation of the original. There was no Greek priest on the scene in Worcester, nor were any Greeks involved. It was pro-Greek Albanians of the Hudson area who intervened with the Syrian priest to block the Orthodox burial of Dishnitza.<sup>13</sup>

The origin of the descriptions of other burial refusals by Greek priests, which was uncritically repeated in subsequent sources, is the 1960 memoirist, Constantine Demo. According to him, many if not most Albanians considered themselves to be long-suffering victims of Greek religious and cultural oppression. The Greek clergy continued "to make our life miserable," he lamented, "even here in America." To prove his contention beyond doubt, he referred to the deaths of four Boston Albanians between 1901 and 1907. According to Demo's painful recollection:

The Greek Church had refused to bury our dead. We were forced to take them to Lowell, Mass. for burial, and Lowell in those days seemed very far away. There, a Syrian priest said their last rites in a Syrian church.<sup>14</sup>

Curiously, Demo gave no particulars other than the names of the four men. The statement that the deaths occurred between 1901 and 1907 suggests that Demo was guessing about the time-frame, knowing that Albanians began arriving in America around 1900, and that Albanian-Greek religious friction came to a head in the disputed Hudson Dishnitza burial case of 1907.

Demo's "recollection" demands scrutiny. The fact is that there was no Syrian church in Lowell in that decade. Only a fleeting reference in the *Lowell Directory* of 1901 mentions a St.

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13. "Historia e Themelimit te Kishes s'one Orthodoxe kombetare," in *Kalendari I Botes I Vitit 1939* (Boston, 1939). *Liria* reprinted this article in July of 1986.

14. Demo, *The Albanians in America*, p. 39.



Michael Syrian Orthodox church, under Reverend Michael Husson. That was evidently a short-lived mission. The souvenir book of the 1976 bicentennial religious convention of Syrians in San Francisco is silent on any Lowell origins. Nor do church headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey, have any information on this Lowell priest and the start of the local Syrian colony.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there was as yet no permanent resident Greek priest, nor was there any related Orthodox church in the Boston area in 1903, the critical year, as will be explained shortly. The St. George Greek Orthodox community in nearby Lynn had been organized on July 6, 1903. There, on December 16, 1905, the immigrants purchased a Swedish Evangelical church. As to Boston itself, the future Greek Orthodox cathedral parish had not yet held its first organizational meeting, in the fall of 1903. Prior to that, visiting priests held services in rented halls.<sup>16</sup>

Through state vital statistics and a Lowell newspaper it was possible to locate obituaries of three of the four Albanians, with all deaths occurring in 1903. Nothing could be discovered about the fourth Albanian, Toli Thoma Zoto. A married twenty-nine year-old shoemaker, Gregory Apostolos of Boston, died at the Tewksbury State Hospital on April 4, 1903, but was buried two days later in Edson Cemetery at Lowell. A mill worker, Lucas Spira, still single at the age of thirty-nine, died in Boston on September 13, 1903, but he also was buried in Edson Cemetery. Finally, a forty year-old married fruit-dealer, Herris Stavra, died in Boston on September 19, 1903, and he too was buried at the Edson Cemetery.

In all three cases, the newspapers reported that services were held at "the Greek church" in Lowell, with Reverend Joakin Georges presiding.<sup>17</sup> The Greek parish in Lowell dates from 1894, according to the official annual *Desk Calendar and Year*

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 15. Lowell City Directory 1901-1903; Tribute to the Old Church in the New World; and Metropolitan Philip to author, Nov. 22, 1986.

16. 50th Anniversary and Dedication Album of St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Lynn (1954), n.p.; Greek Orthodox Cathedral of New England 75th Anniversary 1905-1980, p. 26.

17. Commonwealth of Mass., Public Health Dept., Registry of Vital Statistics -- Boston, vol. 5, p. 544; vol. 6, p. 164; Tewksbury, vol. 540, p. 750; (Lowell) Courier-Citizen, morning edition, April 6 and 7, Sept. 16, 21, and 22, 1903.

*Book of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.* Land was purchased in 1901 and the building which was constructed on 85 Lewis Street has been regarded as "the First Greek Orthodox Byzantine structure in the United States."<sup>18</sup>

Albanian scholar Stavro Skendi, writing in *The National Awakening, 1878-1912*, cited the Hudson case, but said nothing about the "burial refusals."<sup>19</sup> The Albanian Orthodox Church golden anniversary publication of 1958 also says nothing of the Lowell story, while noting the Hudson dispute.<sup>20</sup> Neither is there any mention of Lowell in the otherwise thorough study, *The Albanian Struggle* of 1939, that does recall the Hudson incident.<sup>21</sup> Nor did any church official report for the federal religious census of 1916 any burial-refusal story.<sup>22</sup> Surely if Greek priests in 1903 had denied burial to four Albanians, three of whom died within six months of each other, it would have created a sensation in local Albanian circles. These events would have been frequently discussed, and sooner or later repeated in Albanian sources. Yet there is no such story in any source written between 1903 and 1960.

In his twilight years, Demo correctly remembered the Lowell burials of the young Boston Albanians. He could not remember the exact year or years, much less the months, and so he surmised that the funerals must have been between 1901 and 1907, as already indicated. But his Albanian nationalism obscured the real reason for taking the bodies to Lowell. The truth was that the Greek priest in Lowell was the closest one to Boston, and that priest did conduct the funeral services. The Boston and Lynn Greek Orthodox churches did not yet exist, and there were no Greek priests on hand who could have refused to preside at the burial. Demo apparently remembered the Syrian parish in Lowell,

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18. Undated parish leaflet, St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Lowell.

19. p. 162.

20. pp. 104-05.

21. p. 43.

22. U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies, 1916, part II, Separate Denominations, History, Description, and Statistics (Washington, D.C., 1919), pp. 252-53.

and so he assumed that the funeral services were held at that church.

In any event, news of the 1907 controversial burial sped through the immigrant community. Acting as a catalyst, the vague accusation that Greeks were to blame heightened nationalist sentiment to a fever pitch. Bruised Albanian ethnic sensibilities now slipped beyond the limits of endurance. Hudson's Albanians, led by James Dishnitzer and the Miller brothers, spearheaded the start of a movement for an Albanian church which would be separate from the Greeks. They met to discuss the need to find a priest. There is no available evidence as to the precise date and place of this session, but it must have taken place in Hudson, late that summer or in the early fall of 1907. There were seven Miller brothers, of whom the eldest -- Vangel, Andrew, and James -- were the activists. Victor Angelo, in a rare recollection, described this significant meeting:

I remember my father speaking of the gathering that took place to discuss the formation of a church and the selection of one to enter the priesthood. It was quite a hectic meeting. There were two factions, each with a candidate. They couldn't raise enough [votes] to support one, never mind two. My father and the Millers were staunch supporters of Fan Noli and campaigned for him. Through the democratic process a vote was taken and Fan Noli was elected, and by a very small margin at that.<sup>23</sup>

According to a somewhat different version, the first choice was Kozma Angelo. His spouse objected, however, not wanting to be a priest's wife. Their son, Victor Angelo, had no recollection or knowledge of that possibility. The next choice was the twenty-five year-old zealot, Fan Noli. He had been in the country barely a year, working in a Buffalo lumber mill for three months until Sotir Petsi recruited him for a newspaper post in Boston. When Noli was laid off, he took a night job in a factory, and he later served as an interpreter for the visiting nationalist, Bayo Topulli,

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23. Angelo typescript, p. 4.

who was on a lecture tour through the United States. When Noli received his call from the separatist Albanians, he came to Hudson to meet with them.

Another version places the organizational meeting in Boston, and names Petro Nini Luarasi of Clinton as one of two nominees, the other being Fan Noli. According to Robert Tochka, Luarasi declined, "believing that this task should be undertaken by a younger man." Consequently, Fan Noli unanimously won the election. The description given by Tochka must refer to a second meeting, which apparently was held after the one in Hudson.<sup>24</sup>

At this point, the Albanians needed a sympathetic orthodox bishop who would ordain Noli. The Albanians found a benefactor, in Russian Orthodox Archbishop Platon Rozhdestvensky, of New York City. A committee of four, including Vangel Miller of Hudson, was directed to make all arrangements. The ordination took place on March 8, 1908, at the Russian cathedral of St. Nicholas. Attending this highly significant ceremony were three Massachusetts Albanians: Vangel Miller of Hudson, and Bostonians Spirido Ilo and Sotir Petsi, the editor of *Kombi* (The Nation). Miller's presence testifies to the importance of Hudson's Albanians. Precisely how the Russian Orthodox hierarchy viewed Noli is a complex question of ecclesiology outside the scope of this study, but one which deserves to be pursued.

In the Albanian almanac of 1939, Hudson was called the "djepi" [cradle] of nationalist liberty. It is clear that the Hudson Albanians took the initiative to gain autonomy from the Greeks. Yet their role has received little recognition by America's Albanians. The official narrative vaguely credits "the Albanians of Massachusetts, who called a meeting . . . . They invited Fan Noli to undertake this mission." Another source simply says that "Noli jumped to head the movement for religious separatism . . . ." Another source describes how New England delegates assembled for a convention in Boston, and "resolved to create their own national church with an Albanian priest." Yet, it is clear that the Hudson meeting was the spark that led to the subsequent major gathering. That second conclave was recorded as the inaugural

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 24. Tochka, "Boston Albanian Community," p. 45; Fiftieth Anniversary of the Albanian Orthodox Church, p. 148.

session, which served to obscure the importance of the original Hudson meeting.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, for a generation at least, the role of Hudson's Albanians was known. Their significant and essential contribution was abundantly clear as late as 1934. On Labor Day of that year (September 3), there was an extraordinary gathering of Albanian clergy and laity in Hudson, to mark the twenty-seventh anniversary of the "founding in Hudson of the Albanian National Orthodox Church . . . now a national institution [that] had its inception in this town." Referring to the Dishnitzer burial problem of the summer of 1907, a local newspaper recalled that the controversy "caused local Albanians, led by James Dishnitzer and the Miller brothers, to start a movement for a church of their own." A Worcester newspaper also wrote of the church "founded in Hudson." Thus, in 1934 a solemn liturgy was celebrated at St. Luke Episcopal Church, in the center of Hudson, where eighty Hudson Albanians had been worshipping regularly. Father Peter Shali of Natick officiated, with other participating clergy being Bishop Fan Noli, Father Nicholas Christopher of St. George Church in Boston, Father John Shani (or Chami) of St. Trinity Church of Boston, Father Thimi Theodores of St. Mary Church in Worcester, Father George Lali (or Souli) of Saints Peter & Paul Church in Philadelphia, Father Nahum (or Naum) Cere of Jamestown, New York, and Father Nicholas Preft (or Prifti) of St. Nicholas Church in Southbridge. After the ceremony, some six hundred Albanians traveled to nearby Stow, Massachusetts, for a large picnic on "the old Teele farm." As a result of this gathering, national attention was momentarily focused on the Hudson Albanians. A congratulatory telegram arrived from Faik Koni(tza), the Albanian ambassador to the United States. In addition, the Albanian Consul in Boston sent his greetings, in the person of his secretary, Hito Sadik. Also among the dignitaries present was Vasil Pani of Boston, president of Vatra, the Pan-Albanian Federation of America. A very wide photo of this rare

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25. Ibid., p. 106; The Albanian Struggle, p. 43; Tochka, "Boston Albanian Community," p. 45.

occasion shows Fan Noli with four other clergy, surrounded by a huge throng of people.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the overdue recognition of Hudson's Albanians in the origin of the Albanian Orthodox Church, another oversight needs correction. All the sources consulted by this researcher assert that the first liturgy in the Albanian language was performed in Boston on Sunday, March 22, 1908. But Fan Noli was ordained on March eighth. Where did he worship on the intervening Sunday? The truth is that he came to Hudson to celebrate the first liturgy in Albanian on March 15th, as a mark of esteem for the Hudson Albanians. He used a second-floor rented hall at Wood Square, in the center of town. To record this momentous event, Noli and thirty-eight young Albanians posed for a photograph. Michael Dhionis, one of the immigrants in the photo, often talked to his family about this unforgettable event. His son, Peter, has testified to the liturgy of March 15 in Hudson, in which the elder Dhionis participated, and who was identified as being in the photograph.<sup>27</sup>

That highly significant photo has circulated in Albanian sources, with incorrect or incomplete identification. The 1958 golden jubilee book of the Albanian Orthodox Church (p. 109) bears the caption: "Fan Noli as priest with friends, Marlboro, Massachusetts, 1908." The mistake reoccurs in a church memorial brochure.<sup>28</sup> In fact, only a few of the thirty-eight men in the photo were Marlboro residents, the majority being from Hudson. The Boston-based newspaper, *Liria* (Liberty), in June of 1985, carried the caption "Hudson-Marlboro," to describe the places of residence, but the article indicated a lack of awareness of the

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26. The inscription reads: "Themelimit Te Kishes Kombetare" (Foundation of the National Church), and it is in the possession of Angelina Fatses of Hudson. On the celebration, see The Hudson Enterprise, Sept. 3, 1934; and Worcester Evening Gazette, Sept. 4, 1934. The arrangements committee included Christy Botka, president of the Hudson Albanian Society, Lefly Milkani, secretary, Sokeat Kotto, treasurer, along with Louis Peter and Nicholas Dishnica.

27. Interview with Peter Dhionis, Hudson, June, 1986. The major Boston newspapers did not record the Boston liturgy of March 22, 1908.

28. Archbishop Fan Noli (1882-1965) -- Second Apostle of the Albanians (n.d., but after 1974).

meaning of the photo as evidence of the Hudson Albanians' part in the start of the independent church.

Over a period of time, the role of Marlboro's Albanians became inflated, and in the minds of some, they even became the ones involved in the founding of the secessionist Albanian Orthodox Church.<sup>29</sup> The Albanian population of Marlboro has long been at least double that of Hudson. Possibly this numerical superiority led to the incorrect conclusion that the Marlboro Albanians had to be responsible for the origin of the church. This unsupportable claim is laid to rest by the 1910 federal census, which recorded only twenty Albanians in Marlboro. Of them, only ten had come to the United States before 1907, the year of the Hudson burial controversy. All ten may not have been in Marlboro in that year, since they could have reached Marlboro in the years before the 1910 census. Only a few from Marlboro participated in the Hudson separatist meeting of 1907, and in the first Albanian liturgy in 1908.<sup>30</sup>

A week later, on March 22, the first Boston liturgy took place. The same day a committee of Albanians met in Phoenix Hall, on Tremont Street in Boston, to organize St. George parish and plan the future cathedral. Meanwhile, trustees appointed for neighboring enclaves included Andrea Dishniza, Irakli Theodore, and Andrew Miller, for Hudson. Others were designated for Marlboro, Natick, and Worcester, Massachusetts, and for Manchester, New Hampshire. Again, the Hudson connection was evident.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the essential role of Hudson's Albanians in the start of their separate church, the Hudson colony -- not even in conjunction with Marlboro -- never grew in numbers to warrant a separate parish, as did the nearest Albanian settlements in Natick and Worcester. In Worcester, on August 13, 1911, St. Mary's Assumption became a mission of the Albanian mother church in Boston. By 1912, the Southbridge colony had its own building. By 1918, Worcester's Albanians were able to support a resident

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29. As recently as the annual Liria banquet in Boston, on Sunday, Nov. 30, 1986, a priest of the Albanian cathedral expressed that belief to this writer.

30. U.S. Federal Census, 1910, microfilm reel that includes Marlboro: T 624-602.

31. Fiftieth Anniversary, pp. 108-109, 148.

priest.<sup>32</sup> Hudson's Albanians therefore continued to rely on neighboring clergy for their spiritual needs. The Natick parish drew many of the churchgoing Albanians of Hudson. Eventually, when route 290 was opened, it gave Hudson easy access to Worcester. Accordingly, some of Hudson's Albanians shifted their allegiance to the ethnic parish in Worcester. Throughout its existence, the small Albanian enclave in Hudson has remained outside the mainstream of activity among their fellow countrymen and their offspring. Nevertheless, this group proved to be a catalyst in the origin of a separatist national church, an event of significance in both Massachusetts history and in the religious history of this nation.

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32. *Ibid.*, pp. 160ff. and pp. 171ff.