The Vice-Consul of Greece

Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host Dick Gibson

In 1900, Greece maintained nine consular offices in the United States – consuls in New York, where the Consul General was located; Chicago; Boston; Philadelphia; and San Francisco. Vice-Consuls provided services in Norfolk, Virginia; St, Louis, Missouri; Nashville, Tennessee; and Lowell, Massachusetts. On December 7, 1900, the King of Greece issued a decree naming a fifth Vice-Consul: George Scholomiti of Butte.

George Scholomiti was born in Kosmas, in the Parnonas Mountains of Greece, not far from Sparta. He came to Butte about 1890 and was connected to the restaurant business for most of his time here. In 1891 he was a clerk and cashier at the Theater Comique, on South Main Street where the southern part of the Metals Bank building stands today.

By the time he was appointed vice-consul, Scholomiti was operating a successful restaurant at 28 South Main Street. The two-story building there before 1900 contained two saloons and “female boarding” – meaning, a brothel, but I believe it was renovated or possibly replaced by another two-story building that housed Scholomiti’s restaurant by 1900-01. He maintained his office as vice-consul at 62 West Park, where he lived upstairs. That building was part of the complex of structures that housed Symon’s store until they burned down in 1905, and the Phoenix Building rose to replace them.

George and his bother Peter were operating two restaurants in 1907, a tiny one at 8 South Main (one of many small buildings that were replaced by the Rialto Theater in 1916, where the US Bank is today), and the original one at 28 S. Main. The two-story building at 28 South Main, on the corner with Galena, was gone by 1951, replaced by the one-story building that housed the Butte Weekly and adjacent businesses in recent years.

George appears to have died or left Butte by 1909. His brother and other relations (perhaps sons?) continued in the restaurant business, with one at 825 East Front Street (the Bennett Block, Brinck’s Building demolished in 2014), operated by Chris Scholomiti, and the Globe Café at 28 South Main where Chris, John, and Michael Scholomiti all worked.

About 1915, Chris Scholomiti built a boarding house at 1100-1102-1104-1106 South Utah Street. It appears to have been an investment as no Scholomitis lived there, but it still stands today, with the name “Scholomiti” across the upper front facade. In 1928, it held Mrs. Duffy’s Grocery Store on the ground floor. Residents included Leo and Luella Lehti – he was a driver for the Western Creamery Company; Roscoe Baldridge, an engineer, and his wife Minnie; and Edgar and Margaret Price. Edgar was a switchman on the Great Northern Railroad. The last listing in the city directories for any Scholomiti is 1928.

St. George’s Day, England’s National Day, is usually identified with the British in Butte, and the Sons of St. George celebrated the day on April 23. But Greeks celebrated it as well, on May 6 – the same day, but according to the Gregorian Greek Orthodox calendar. The 100 or so Greeks in Butte in the early 1900s celebrated with a picnic at Nine Mile Canyon, with all expenses paid for by the three Greeks in Butte with the name “George” – George Scholomiti, George Stamatiou, and George Buller.

Someone in Butte must have subscribed to the primary Greek-American newspaper of the day, the Atlantis, published in the Greek language in New York. Issues of the Atlantis from January 1921 were glued onto boards now in the basement of the Wah Chong Tai building in Butte's Chinatown to serve as minimal insulation. Were these just random pages of discarded newspaper that the Chinns, proprietors of the Wah Chong Tai used? Or was there a closer connection between the Chinese family and the Greeks? The Scholomiti restaurant at 28 S. Main was just a short block and a half from the Wah Chong Tai.

The last Greek store in Butte was probably Athens Grocery and Imports at 601 Utah, operated by Ernest and Georgia Pappas for 45 years. The Scholomiti legacy lives on in the building at 1100 S. Utah, and in connections around the world. A few years ago, Joel and Sheri Broudy (of Wein’s Men’s Store in Butte) were traveling on business to Chicago. A taxi driver picked them up at the airport, and inquired where they had arrived from. When he heard “Butte, Montana,” he told the Broudys that his grandfather had been the Greek Vice-Consul in Butte, Montana – George Scholomiti.

As writer Edwin Dobb has said, "Like Concord, Gettysburg, and Wounded Knee, Butte is one of the places America came from." Join us next time for more of Butte, America’s Story.