A CENTURY-OLD RELIC COMES TO LIGHT - EMBROIDERY OF GRATITUDE

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By Vahe H. Apelian PhD, Columbus OH, USA, 16 November 2009

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Along with this short article you see the pictures of an embroidery. The embroidery which measures approximately 4 feet by 4 feet, is being shown publicly for the very first times since almost 100 years courtesy of Anna Lee Hein-Langlitz and Danette Hein-Snider who are Miss Chambers' grandnieces.
The embroidery should have been presented to Miss Chambers sometime from 1910 to 1912 as she brought it with her. The records indicate that she was in America in May 1912. The embroidery most probably was sewn by the women of Kessab and must have been presented to her as an acknowledgement of her dedicated services to the community at large between from 1904 to1912.

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The inscriptions on the embroidery are both in English and in Armenian. In English the following has been sewn on the embroidery: TO MISS E M CHAMBERS A MEMORY OF GRATITUDE WE WILL NEVER FORGET. Naturally the Kessabtsis wanted to make sure that Miss Chambers understood their feelings of gratitude towards her in her native language.
The Armenian inscription is equally telling, it reads IN GRATITUDE FROM KESSAB ARMENIAN REVOLIONARY FEDERATION. The battle hardened Armenian Revolutionary Federation is not an organization that would have been swayed by sentiments alone. Its members must have believed that they had every reason to express their feelings of gratitude to her to have with her thenceforth throughout the remainder years of her life.

This year we commemorate the 1909 Adana massacre. The massacre however was not confined to that city. It spread like a wildfire and reached to the northern part of Syria and to

Kessab. It is up to the future historian to ascertain whether Miss Chambers was in town when the marauding crowd attacked Kessab. However, the attackers encountered the fierce resistance of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation fighters who held the attackers at bay for up to seven hours giving time for the inhabitants of Kessab to flee, mostly towards the coastal village Kaladouran as Miss Chambers attests in the notes I read. It is not hard to imagine the ensuing mayhem. The evacuation of the villagers must have been chaotic and as in most chaotic situations, it is the elderly and the young who get left behind or get lost not being able to catch up with the able bodied fleeing in a hurry. That is what must have happened in Kessab, as the 153 Miss Chambers cites to have been killed were mostly elderly and the young.

After the ransack and massacre in Kessab a relief committee was organized and Miss Chambers acted as its secretary and kept correspondence with her peers in America asking for assistance. In her report to America she cites the following as facts:

Villages receiving aid 11
Number at present on relief lists 5251
Burned Houses 516
Burned Shops 62
Number killed 153
Widows 79
Orphans not over 15 years old 64
Received into Orphanages to recent date 6 by 1912.

A cursory look at the numbers reveals the widespread despair as 5251 of a total population estimated by Dr. Albert Apelian to have been 6543 were on relief lists. The April 1909 ransack and massacre at Kessab was followed by a bitter winter to shelter the many whose houses were destroyed. Miss Chambers writes at the aftermath of this tragedy: We are alike in Kessab these days. There are no rich or poor, but we are all one. Sometimes the thought comes to me, if they had not burned my house and the girl's school I might have given shelter to many, but I am glad on the other hand that I can suffer with them and suffer as they do."

Her round the clock work must have exhausted her physically and emotionally to compel her to leave behind the people she cared and return to her native home. God only can imagine the pain Miss Chambers must have felt when 3 years after her departure 2/3 of the people in Kessab she cared so dearly perished due to Armenian Genocide.

The embroidery is an undisputed historical piece from that era. Each and every one of us owes a degree of gratitude to the Chambers family for safeguarding the embroidery in the family in Iowa for the past 100 years. When I offered Anna Lee that I will cover the expenses to have the embroidery

professionally photographed, she declined. She said the fabric is silk and the embroidery has only been exposed when there has been a desire to see the embroidery in remembrance of her great aunt. Anna Lee added that she taught the heat and the flashlight in the photographer's studio might damage the embroidery and as result we have these pictures taken by her daughter at her home. Such has been the care that Chambers family has displayed in safeguarding part of our history both symbolically in way of the embroidery rendered by a grateful people and in the eyewitness account by one of their own, Miss Effie Chambers.

The preservation of the 100 years old embroidery and the legacy of Miss Chambers are a testament to the values that Chambers family cherishes. Danette and Anna Lee, thank you.

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