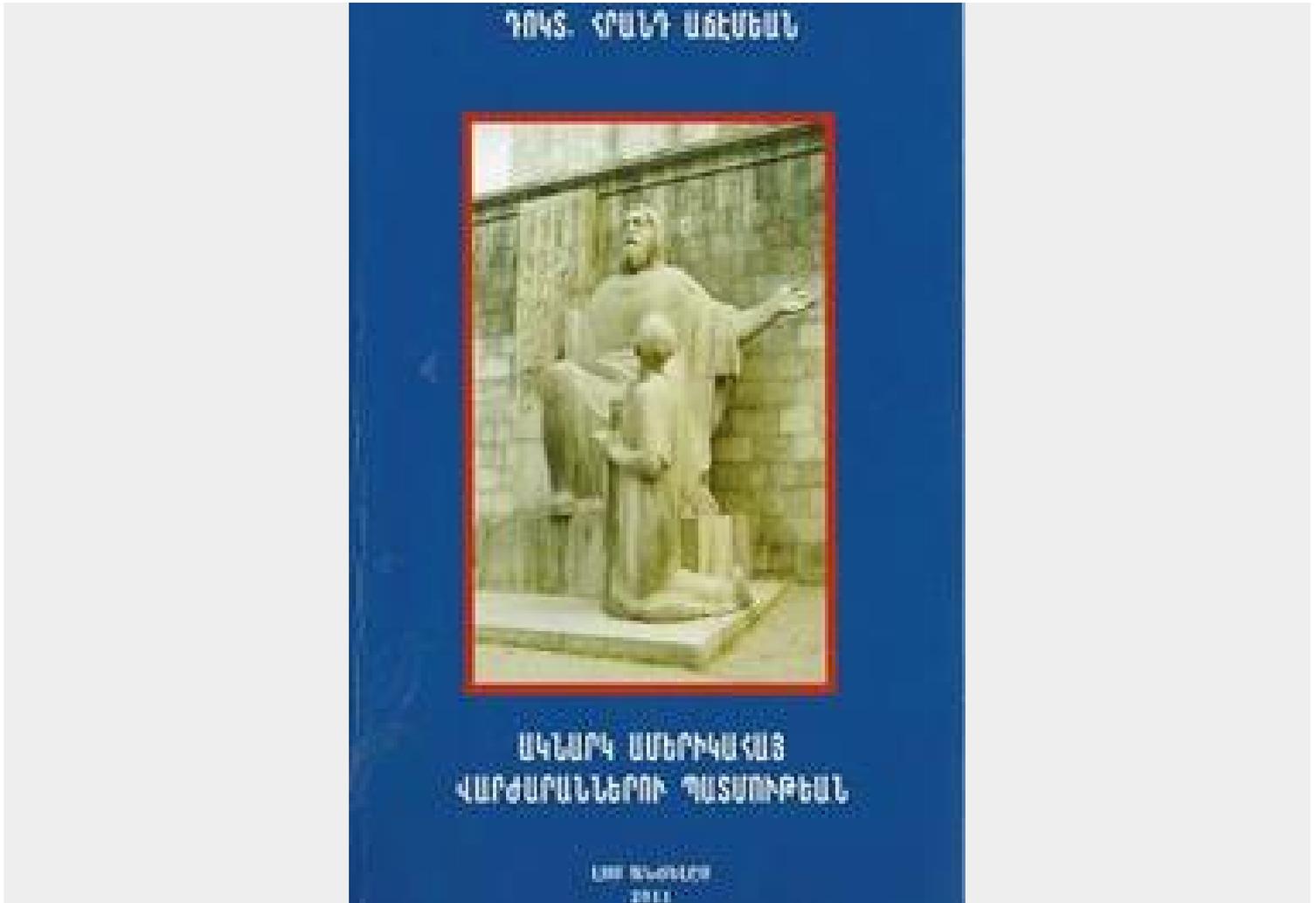


ARMENIAN SCHOOLS IN U.S.A

Posted on October 6, 2011 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



 Review by Vahe H. Apelian, 5 October 2011

This past Saturday, on October 1, on the very first day of the month we traditionally celebrate Armenian culture, I finished reading an interesting and inspiring book titled "A Glance at the History of the Armenian American Schools", "Ակնարկ Ամերիկահայ Վարժարաններու Պատմութեան" by Dr. Hrant Adjemian.

The soft-cover book is published in Los Angeles (2011). It is 331 pages long and is in Western Armenian. The publication of the book has been realized by the generosity of the Caloust Gulbenkian Foundation for which the author expresses his gratitude.

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The book presents the evolution and the chronology of the founding of the Armenian schools in the United States of America. The author first presents a brief history of Armenian presence in the country and the structuring of the nascent community in Worcester, MA and subsequently across the Mainland onto the West Coast in California.

The author notes that it took decades from the establishment of the first Armenian Church (Evangelical) in Worcester in 1888 to the founding of the first Armenian school in California in 1964. The author attributes the lag of time to the belief of the community that the Church is the best guardian of our heritage hence the communities vested their energies into building churches. Along the way the Armenian Americans enabled Armenian communities elsewhere by rendering them substantial financial support while not daring to venture into establishing their own schools. Adjemian subsequently presents in detail the founding of the first Armenian school by Gabriel Injeikian, whom he calls "a saint of a daredevil", "Սրբազան Խենթ". Gabriel Injeikian is born in Kessab, Syria and educated in the United States. He initiated the first Armenian School in Encino, California in September 1964 with 12 students. The School is named after Mr. Matheos Ferrahain who had willed a substantial sum of money towards the first Armenian school in America. Gabriel Injeikian acted as its founding principal for the next 25 years. The Holy Martyrs Ferrahain Armenian School gave impetus to the establishing other schools. The author subsequently



presents a brief history of the founding of each of the next 22 Armenian Schools in U.S.A., 16 of which are in California – 13 in greater Los Angeles, 1 in Orange County, 1 in Fresno and 1 in San Francisco. There is an Armenian School in Southfield (MI), in New Milford (NJ) and in Philadelphia (PA). There are 2 Armenian Schools in New York (NY) and in Boston (MA).

After briefing the history of the founding of the Armenian Schools, Adjemian presents thought provoking essays on whether these schools are justifying their mission; on the challenges to pass the Armenian heritage to the next generation in America; on the state of the Armenian language in the Armenian Schools in U.S., and whether the Armenian Schools are preparing community leaders. The author also proposes ways and means to further the mission of the Armenian American Schools and make it more effective.

Adjemian states that after 1986 no other Armenian School was established in US. Gabriel Injeikian took upon himself to venture again into uncharted territories and after a decade long planning found the Ararat Charter School in Los Angeles last year, 2010. The Ararat Charter School is the first of its kind established for public good by dedicated Armenian educators under the leadership of the youthful octogenarian, Gabriel Injeikian. It should be noted that the Alex & Marie Manougian Armenian School in Southfield, MI is also a charter school; however, it had started as private Armenian School but was chartered after the death of the school's benefactor, Alex Manougian.

The book is well researched and fills an important historical void. The author lists the many sources he has consulted. He does not enumerate them, but cites in the text. The book is also a tribute to the told and untold many that had faith in the mission of Armenian Schools in the United States of America as well and the vision to make them a reality there also. Going back to the future, I wonder if it did not look even "bleaker" in 1964 when Ferrahian Armenian School was found that continues with vigor to this day.

The author, Hrant Adjemian, possesses impressive academic credentials and experience in Armenian Diaspora education. He is born in Beirut in 1941 and is a graduate of the Seminary of the Catholicos of Cilicia. Subsequently he taught and supervised Armenian Schools in Iran and established and conducted two choirs there. He received his B.A. from the Department of the Armenian Studies at the University of Isfahan.

In 1972 Hrant moved to France and enrolled in Sorbonne University while he taught in Armenian Schools and found and directed a choir in France as well. In 1977 he received his doctorate degree in Eastern Studies.

Dr. Hrant Adjemian moved to U.S. in 1988 and presently is a lecturer of Armenian language and literature at the University of La Verne. He is the author of 9 other books he lists inside the back cover of the book and contributes to various Armenian periodicals. He may be reached at 1107 Furman Place, Glenda, CA 91306.

