LONE WOMAN AMONG MEN

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9.–1909ի Աղէտէն ետք կազմուած Օգնութեան Յանձնախումբը։ Ա. շարք՝ Յակոբ աղա Քիլաղպեան, Հաճի Յովսէփ Գազազեան, Դամիանոս աղա Աթիկեան, Յակոբ աղա Յովսէփեան, Միսաք աղա Չիրիքեան։ Բ. շարք՝ Միս Չէմպըրս, վեր. Տիգրան Գունտաքճեան, Տ. Պօղոս քհնյ. Աթիկեան, Տ. Մովսէս Ծ. վրդ. Ոսկերիչեան, Հ. Սապաթինօ տէլ Կայծօ, սարք. Սողոմոն Արկեան։ Գ. շարք՝ վեր. Յովհաննէս Էսքիճեան, Սողոմոն աղա Մղտսեան, Յակոբ աղա Մանջիկեան, Սերոբ Գալայճեան, Շիւքրի Փոլատեան, Կարապետ Արկեան, Սերոբ Պօղոսեան, Վահան Ուզունեան։ Դ. շարք՝ Յովսէփ Քիլաղպեան, Սիմոն Այանեան։

Category: Opinions

Vahe H. Apelian, January 2012
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I came across it while going over the many pictures presented in the first volume of Hagop Cholakian's exhaustive work in three volumes about Kessab. The picture is that of the committee that oversaw the relief and the rebuilding at the aftermath of the pogrom and ransack of Kessab in 1909. This tragic event is known in our history as the Massacre of Adana.
For historical accuracy I would like to list the names of the members of the relief committee who represent the three Armenian religious denominations. In a show of unity they have congregated together to rebuild their lives anew. They are all men, with an exception of a lone woman who had ventured from Iowa to carry what God had lead her to do, render spiritual and material support to the Armenians subjects of the Ottoman Empire. She is Miss Effie Chambers and she acted as the secretary of this relief committee. Typical of the prevalent gender roles of the times, she had devoted her attention to improving the state of the Armenian women by establishing a girls' school in Kessab. Prior to that she had taught at Armenian girls' school in Erzeroum.

The members of the relief committee were the following, from left to right; first row: Hagop Agha Kilaghbian, Hadji Hovsep Kazazian, Tamianos Agha Atikian, Hagop Agha Hovsepian, Missak Agha Churukian; second row: Miss Effie Chambers, Rev. Dikran Koundakjian, Gahana Father Boghos Atikian, Vartabed Father Movses Vosgeritchian, Father Sabatino Del Gayzo, Dr. Soghomon Apelian; third row: Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian, Soghomon Agha Meghdsian, Hagop Agha Mahshigian, Serop Kalayjian, Shukree Poladian, Garabed Apelian, Serop Boghossian, Vahan Ouzounian; forth row: Hovsep Kilaghbian, Simon Simonian.

It is evident that most of the committee members were esteemed leaders of the community, as evidenced by the honorific titles they carried as agha or hadji. Both of these titles were used in the Ottoman Empire. Agha is an honorific title bestowed upon a wealthy person by the standards of the day. Hadji means pilgrim. The title was also socially bestowed upon those who had gone to pilgrimage to Jerusalem at a time when such pilgrimages could only come about after elaborate

preparation for the long journey ahead that may have been even dangerous or risky as well. Only the well to do could have afforded the pilgrimage giving them an added social standing. In all probability most of the committee members perished in 1915 as two thirds of the Kessabtsis fell victim to the Genocide.

The descendents of some of the survivors are in United Stated of America. Rev. Hovhannes Iskijian's late grandson Luther is the founder of the Eskijian Museum at the Ararat Nursing home in Los Angeles. A Major Baseball League (MBL), the Johnson City Cardinals, recently selected Dr. Soghomon Apelian's young great grandson, Gary Apelian, into professional baseball. Simon Simonian later became a priest – gahana-as Der Houseg in Beirut and later moved and settled in Australia with his family.

Miss Effie Chambers, as the secretary of the committee, reported to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) on the actuality of the attack on the village, the ensuing pogrom and her determination to stay with the people of Kessab. In here July 22, 1909 report to the Board she wrote "I am where God wants me be and am doing my duty as long as he needs me" ABCFM was the first American Christian foreign mission agency.

The following excerpt was also found when searching about her in Internet. In a publication tiled Life and Light for Women, she wrote the following: "Sometimes the thought comes to me, if they had not burned my house and the girls' 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".

Rev. Dikran Koundakjian reported to ABCFM board about funds received from the government. Historians may shed light on this. It appears that in typical Ottoman cunning ways, the authorities allocated funds on the pretext of righting the wrong done to their Armenian subjects by 'unruly' mobs. The funds were used towards rebuilding the demolished houses, businesses and houses of worship. Funds also seemed to have arrived from foreign missions.

Miss Effie Chambers returned to Iowa in 1912. Her family was among the early pioneers of the State. She brought with her embroidery gifted to her by the people of Kessab for remembrance as a token of their gratitude. The Chambers family has kept the embroidery to this day. Decades after her return, she reflected upon those by gone days and wrote the following in her autobiography dated October 22, 1944 that remains with the Chambers family, "I can't tell you how we did it. Just step by step, one day at a time and by the autumn of 1911, before the rains set in, those who stayed in Kessab and lived through the horrible ordeal, were back in their rebuilt houses, with their schools and churches going".

She passed away in 1947 and is buried in Iowa in a cemetery donated to the county by her family. The cemetery is known by her family's name. She was one of the early Christian missionaries from the State of Iowa who ventured onto foreign lands at a time when communication with home was a far cry from what it is nowadays and the journey to such far away places was only for the

determined to undertake. Her services to the Armenians in Turkey lasted 19 years during which time she did not return home. She remains fondly remembered by Kessabtsis to this day but she remains mostly unknown to the Iowans.

Miss Effie Chambers, the daring and driven daughter of one of the early pioneering families of the state, still awaits recognition as another inductee into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame.