



Photo from the US ball program 1945.

First row (seated) from left: Anna Gavriel, Chrysafina Merzeni, Xenia Karazepouni, Eleni Tsalatanou, Evangelia Loukoglou, Kalliopi Niti

Second row (seated) from left: Christina Merzeni, Christina Mihalaki, Eleni Christou, Moscha Passari, Maria Christou, Anna Christou

Third row (standing) from left: Kostas Christou, Stamatios Passaris, Stamatios Merzenis, Ioannis Papadimitropoulos, Despina Gavriel, Iakovos Sotirakis, Evangelos Christou, Konstandinos Mihalalakis, Yeorgios Tsalatanos

THE CASTELLORIZIAN BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA

A Personal Reflection

by James A Kyprios, New York

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Anthony Kyprios, my mother, Anna Kyprios, and my late brother, Emanuel Kyprios

I have come to learn that Kastellorizian Associations are not only plentiful but thriving in Australia. In a recent conversation, Marilyn Tsolakis, the Co-ordinator of *Friends of Kastellorizo*, was surprised that such a group had once existed in New York. It certainly did, and for a short while it also thrived. Here is what I recall with the help of the published programs (*Iefkómata*) published in 1945 and 1948 to coincide with the annual Castellorizian Ball in New York City.

My family

But first some background information. My father, **Anthony Kyprios**, migrated from Kastellorizo to New York City in 1916 (all alone aged 16) when the USA was

open to all sorts of immigrants who thought the streets of New York were paved with gold. By 1921, he was in business for himself as a furrier.

There were many Kastellorizian families who settled in New York City in those early years. Unfortunately, America closed its doors to 'undesirable' immigrants in 1924. This excluded all except those from northwest Europe. During the next 40 years, Greeks could still come into the country, but only by being sponsored by other Greeks already established here. Instead, many Kastellorizians went to Australia, and we all know how numerous and prominent their descendants have become. America's loss was Australia's gain.



My parents' wedding on Kastellorizo on 27 April 1939; Anthony Kyrprios and Anna Stamatoglou

Life in New York and New Jersey

The Castellorizian Benevolent Society (hereafter 'the Society') was founded in 1926. Around that time, my father and his business partner, **Nick Carras**, were living in Chatham, New Jersey, as single men in a lonely place without even a movie theater and with no other Greeks. Their reason for moving there was that there were much better economic opportunities there than in New York. Nick, who was also from Kastellorizo, and my father established, owned and operated a successful delicatessen called the Chatham Delicatessen. In 1933, they obtained a license to sell alcoholic beverages. They were not disappointed economically, even during the Great Depression.

To say that the store was their whole life in Chatham is an understatement. Their only respite came from going back regularly to New York City (24 miles away) where they could meet up with other 'Kazzies' living there. Eventually, Nick went back home and returned with a bride; and at about the same time, my father's sister Anthoula and her family settled in Chatham. My father went back to Kastellorizo in 1939 and returned to Chatham with his bride, my mother, **Anna Stamatoglou**. Another sister, **Flora**, lived in New York City with her husband, **Athanasios Tsakounis**, who was also from Kastellorizo and a founding member of the Society.

When I was growing up in the 1940s, it seemed that we were in New York City every weekend, except for the summers when we went to the New Jersey shore. My parents loved to swim and my mother told me that the shore reminded her of Kastellorizo. From September to late May, we invariably went to New York City on Sundays. I think we went to the apartments of almost everybody my parents knew from Kastellorizo. It was always a lot of fun for me because my parents were so happy and because there was so much to see and do in New York City. I have lived in New York City now for almost 60 years and the city has never lost its allure in my eyes.

Memories of the Society

Every four weeks, there would be a Sunday meeting of the committee of the Society in Manhattan. We would drive in from Chatham and hang out with others while the gentlemen (it was only men then) met. What they discussed we never knew. And there is no one alive now to speak about what went on. I do know that far too often the members would come out of the meeting and you could just tell there were heated arguments behind the closed doors. I remember once that two of the members came out and they looked like they were about to come to blows. They kept arguing in front of us and one of the men threw down his hat and started trampling it.

I know that the Society raised money and sent it to Greece to help people in need, but I have no further details. It seems that one of the major sources of funds came from the Society's annual Ball. I still have the program from 1948 and it contains many fascinating pieces of information about the Kastellorizian presence in the USA at that time.

It seemed to me when I was young that practically all the Kastellorizians in America in the 1940s lived in New York City, but the program reveals that Greeks from Kastellorizo were to be found in many cities and towns across the nation. Some examples are **Nikolaos Christou** from Birmingham, Alabama, or **Anastasios Lakerdis** from Wilmington, Delaware, or **Nikolaos Paraskevas** from Edinburgh, Texas. But there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Kastellorizians who had migrated to the States settled in New York.

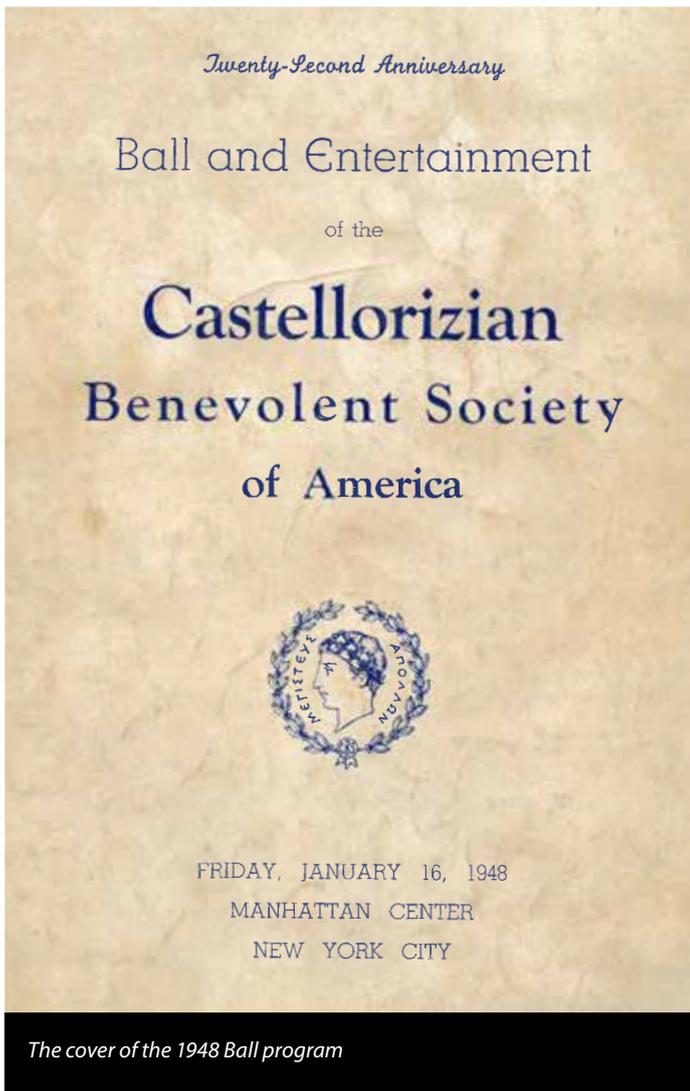
A picture of the committee in the 1948 program shows some of the more prominent identities. There are 11 of them and we knew every single one of them and their families. On another page, there is a picture of the women's social committee, which comprised mostly of wives of committee men.

What is also interesting is the variety of the advertisements and messages in the program which reflects the diversity

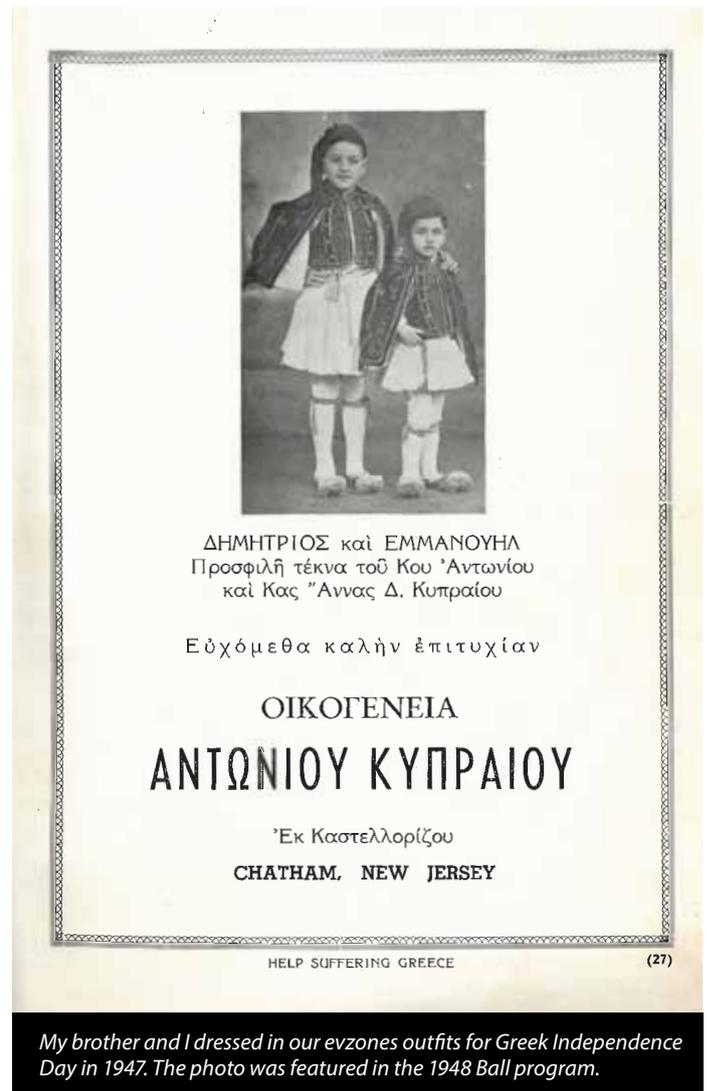
of the enterprises established by Kastellorizians in America. For example, there is an ad from a Greek Orthodox parish in Pittsburg. There are messages of support with family pictures usually from Society members, but also from relatives abroad. Even non-Greeks were asked to contribute. My father persuaded his Jewish milk suppliers, Schwartz Dairy Farms of Chatham, New Jersey, to put in an advertisement.

One message that stands out for me is a picture of my cousins **Peter, Evangeline & Elizabeth Panegyres** of Perth. Another one is an advertisement submitted by my uncle and aunt, **Athanasios & Flora Tsakounis**, showing their children: two-year-old Connie, seven year-old Jim, eight year-old Gus and ten year-old Anna. Gus and Anna are now gone; Connie and Jim are my only remaining cousins on my father's side. Jim and I were both named after our grandfather Dimitrios Kypraios. We still celebrate our name day together almost every 26th of October by going to a Greek restaurant.

In 1947, my maternal grandmother, **Elizabeth ('Zabetta') Stamatiou** died in Rhodes. It was a big shock for my mother and she had a difficult time adjusting. We were to go to visit family in Rhodes in 1948. My mother did not have the heart to go. "I don't want to go back to visit my mother's grave." She got a good deal of solace from



The cover of the 1948 Ball program



My brother and I dressed in our evzones outfits for Greek Independence Day in 1947. The photo was featured in the 1948 Ball program.

The Society's committee in 1948. Seated from left: Moschos A. Paraskevas, Nikolaos Karazepounis, Andreas Michalakis (president), Athanasios Tsakounis, Sotirios I. Sotirakis, Standing from left: Yeorgios Sotirakis, Christos A. Christou, Emmanuel Kailis, Antonios Kyprios, Konstandinos S. Passaris and Antonios P. Papantoniou



a beautiful poem written for my mother by my Greek tutor, *kýrios* Dimitriades. This poem, with a picture of my grandmother who died at age 57 after two years living in the camps of Gaza during World War II, also appears in the 1948 ball program. Even now as I read it in Greek, I am deeply moved.

We must remember that our parents and grandparents journeyed to far-away places which they often called '*xeniteiá*'. My mother cried when she pondered that all her brothers and sisters were living in Greece and Australia. "I have no one here" she would complain. My aunt Anthoula told me that when she left Kastellorizo in 1939, her mother was trembling and told her, "Goodbye my daughter, I will never see you again." James Joyce once said that the Atlantic Ocean was 'a bowl of bitter tears.' I know too well what he meant.

The Annual Ball

No description of the Society would be complete without discussing the Ball itself. I remember the event all too well. In those days, there was no bouzouki. Instead, the dominant instrument was the clarinet played one octave above the melody. And there was wonderful Greek food which we did not always get in Chatham except when my mother, my aunt or my father's partner's wife prepared it. One of the highlights of the festivities was the Greek dancing. My father loved to dance and he was good at it. So was my cousin and godfather, **Mike Giannakis** (son of Dimitrios Hatziyiannakis). Some of these male dancers

were acrobatic show-offs. But everybody was so happy - it was as if we were all home.

I would like to finish this piece by sharing with you another picture from the 1948 ball program. It's March 1947, and my brother and I are dressed up as '*evzones*' to take part in the Greek Independence Day parade in New York City. Before the parade, my parents took us to 'Acropolis Studio' on 9th Avenue to have our picture taken. It seems like yesterday.

The Castellorizian Benevolent Society of America brought us all together in one small geographic spot for a relatively short period of time. I loved every golden minute of it. May the memory of the Society and those who took part in its activities be eternal.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Marilyn Tsolakis for encouraging me to write this article and to Nick Pappas for supplying me with valuable material including parts of the 1945 program. And thanks also to Moska Pappas (nee Passaris, whose father was an early member and whose uncle was the Chairman of the Annual Ball) for giving me her copy of the 1948 program. And, of course, thanks to my wife Judy for being my diligent editor.

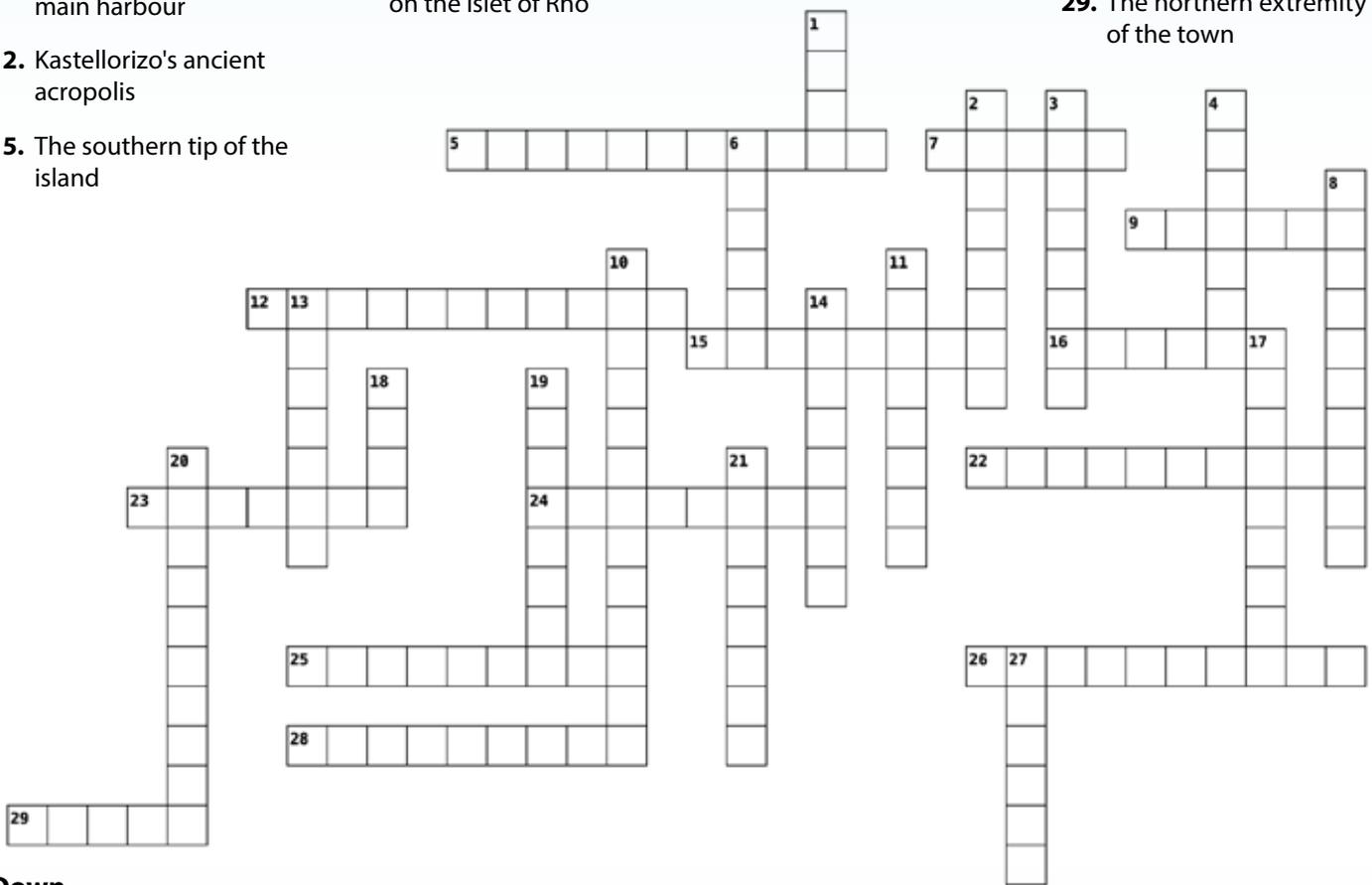
Kastellorizo Crossword Challenge No. 1

The Crossword Challenge is a new Friends of Kastellorizo feature created by Nick Pappas that will be appearing in Filia in every second edition. We hope you enjoy building your knowledge about the island.

Answers will be published in the March eNews.

Across

- 5. The island's WWII hero whose bust stands in Kavos square (two words)
- 7. The Ottoman bathhouse near the castle
- 9. A bare hill rising above the western side of the main harbour
- 12. Kastellorizo's ancient acropolis
- 15. The southern tip of the island
- 16. The nine large water basins in the valley above the main harbour
- 22. The 4th century BC rock-cut burial chamber (two words)
- 23. The first name of the woman who lived alone on the islet of Rho
- 24. The surname of Italy's governor of Kastellorizo between 1925-1934
- 25. The saint to whom the church below the castle on the Mandraki side is dedicated
- 26. The codename for the British commando raid on Kastellorizo in February 1941
- 28. The surname of the benefactor who funded the construction of the boys' school
- 29. The northern extremity of the town



Down

- 1. A Kastellorizian 'colony' famed for its monastery of St Nicholas
- 2. The surname of the island's mayor in the 1920s and early 1930s
- 3. A sheltered cove on the island's east coast
- 4. The surname of the first Kastellorizian to set foot in Australia
- 6. The plant collected for the traditional celebration on the eve of a wedding
- 8. The saint after whom the island's subterranean chapel is named
- 10. The monastery overlooking the main harbour dedicated to the saint associated with water (two words)
- 11. Kastellorizo's secondary harbour
- 13. The elevation that rises above the Mandraki
- 14. The town opposite Kastellorizo now known as Kas
- 17. Greece's most easterly islet upon which stands a lighthouse
- 18. The place where the bulk of the Kastellorizian refugees were settled between 1943-45
- 19. The name incorrectly attributed to the island in Antiquity
- 20. The saint after whom one of the island's three neo-gothic vaulted churches is named
- 21. A Kastellorizian 'colony' now more widely known as Kalkan
- 27. The filigree fastener worn by the womenfolk as part of the traditional bridal costume

Caught out here.



Delivered to your door.

Be one of the first to get new season "Skullies" delivered to your door.

Subscribe to our mailing list and receive 10% off your first order.

Skull Island.
Order Skull Island prawns direct to your door.



KASTELLORIZO APARTMENTS

Megisti, Kastellorizo 85111 (GR)
+30 6945916904 +30 6955928967
Kastellorizoapartments@gmail.com
www.kastellorizoapartments.com




KASTELLORIZO CONSTRUCTION

Megisti, Kastellorizo 85111 (GR)
+30 6945916904 | 2246049265
Kastellorizoconstruction@gmail.com
www.kastellorizoconstruction.com




POSEIDON HOTEL 

Authentic Greek Hospitality
Located by the harbour, Poseidon Hotel offers its guests a relaxing stay and beautiful moments on the enchanting island of Kastellorizo. The various types of accommodation provided will meet the needs of those who wish to experience a magical escape to this unique island.



Organise with us the perfect birthday party or a beautiful and inspiring wedding event!

Our comfortable studios, suites, apartments and villas ensure an enjoyable stay.

kastellorizo-poseidon.gr | +30 22460 49212 | mob +30 6956617585

Avonmore
on the Park
BOUTIQUE HOTEL



In the heart of Sydney's eastern suburbs lies Avonmore, one of Australia's grandest boutique hotels. Featuring thirty sumptuous suites, Avonmore looks forward to hosting you on your next visit to Sydney.

 34 The Avenue, Randwick NSW 2031
avonmoreonthepark.com.au | (02) 9399 9388

To become a member, to advertise or for general information contact Marilyn Tsolakis,
coordinator@kastellorizo.com
PO Box 218 Churchlands, Western Australia 6018.
www.kastellorizo.com