

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

DATE November 26, 1952

FROM HARRY M. BURT

TO _____

STATE 4200 9M-4-52

SUBJECT HOW ARMENIAN MIAMI CHURCH WAS STARTED

When the Bishop Tiran was called to come to Miami to give us Armenian service for the colony, I really cannot tell how this was started -- probably Mr. John Kulhanjian could explain that. However, the Bishop and the priest came down to give us a church service in an American church. We had a full attendance. It was very nice and every Armenian, they just liked it. After the church service was over when I went out, I saw Mrs. Dalkranian standing outside of the church talking with John Kulhanjian. Mrs. Dalkranian remarked how wonderful it would be if we had an Armenian Church in Miami so we could have more services like this. John Kulhanjian turned to me and said, "How about it Boss?" I quickly answered back. I said if we could start a church, I would be willing to donate the land in memory of my father and the church should be named in memory of my father.

That evening when the Bishop was having dinner in Palm Tree Hotel, someone called his attention to the promise that I made with the understanding. The Bishop called on me to verify and I confirmed it. Then a temporary warden was selected and a committee was assigned to find the land so I could buy it. It seems to me that the committee was not very active at all because a year has passed. I inquired from them. Nobody it seems has spent any time or thought to find the land. This was the following season. A little time after that, one of the committee called me up and advised me that while they had not located the land where we could buy, they know that the Greek Church, corner 15th St. and 1st Ave. is for sale. I immediately got busy, We had a meeting with the warden in the Saver Plaza Hotel. They told me that the Greeks were asking \$25,000. for the church, so I told the warden that I will look into it and work with Jimmy Pilafian which I did.

The following day, we spent quite a time checking up the valuation of the land which the church was on. I had two or three appraisers, I took them out there. After I got the

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appraisers' estimate, we had the second warden's meeting. I told them that we should offer \$8,000. for the church according to the survey information I got. I made out my personal check for \$800., 10% deposit of our offering price. I gave it to Jimmy Pilafian. He, in turn, went over to see the Greek Priest giving him our offer and deposit check. After three or four days, Jimmy knows more details of this, Jimmy Pilafian and I went to see the Greek Priest ourselves. After lengthy conversation the priest told us that he has taken this matter up and that the Trustees have refused to sell it at this price, but he suggested as a last effort for us to see the president of the Trustees to see if we could make a deal with him.

The president of the Trustees was the owner of the Florida Field and Oil Co., the company from which I was buying our oil for my apartment. I went alone to see the president of the Trustees and chatted with him about a couple of hours. He happened to come from Istanbul, Turkey. Finally I talked about the purchase of the church. When I brought up this matter, I was shocked and ashamed when he told me that one of our Armenian wardens in talking with one of the Greek Trustees about buying that church, the Greek Trustee told this Armenian warden that the price was \$25,000 and the Armenian suggested an offer of \$18,000 to \$20,000, so the president of the Greek Trustees told me that he would never have anything to do with it to present this offer of ours of \$8,000 when one of the Trustees received an offer from the Armenian warden of \$18,000 to \$20,000. He told me that he would be building enemies against the Trustees by them probably thinking he is getting a rake-off from us for trying to induce them to accept our offer of \$8,000. I tried to convince him that the church would be of any use to anybody for business speculation and whoever buys that for business specification, he has to tear the building down and it's only what the land is worth.

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I had two letters with me from two different appraisers stating the worth of the land was about \$6,000. That was a made-up letter that I had them put that amount down, and furthermore, I convinced the president that if they sell this church they had for their worship place for 125 years, it is not really to be used for any other purpose than as for a church and if anybody was entitled to have it for a church, it was for the Armenians because the faith was a sister of their faith. However, I could not get very far with him except he promised me he would do all he could. We became great friends so that if this church was going to be sold for any other purpose, he would discourage the Trustees and if there was any chance for a break, he would get in touch with me in Miami or Providence, collect call. This was in January of that year. We did not hear from him any more and in the first part of November, I took a business trip to Miami staying there about a week. I called up several Armenian friends -- most of them were temporary wardens appointed by the Bishop. They were all unhappy and not very much pleased because I was holding the price at \$8,000, no more. As a matter of fact, one of them, I don't care to mention his name, he was quite mad. He said you are not trying to buy the church, but you are trying to steal it. I replied to this dear friend of mine that if I was doing any stealing, I was not doing it for myself but I was doing it for all the Armenians.

I got back to Providence, then I went out of town again. A few days later, probably a week or 10 days, I got a telephone call from Miami. It was Jimmy Pilafian and the rest of the wardens in conference -- they were trying to get in touch with me to let me know that they have received word that the Greeks will accept our offer of \$8,000 and they wanted me to know if it was alright and if I would send a deposit check which I did immediately.

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Then we concluded the deal later. But one thing I do want to make a correction which is the absolute truth and I am going to give you the figures, not with any beating or bragging. Here's what I save:

For deposit	\$ 800.00
To purchase the balance	1200.00
I got out bond certificates of different denominations and made special cuts, special printing at a charge of:	400.00
I worked with our advertising man and I set up eight dummy booklets at:	160.00
I went to my Jewish and American brothers and a bank. I set a check totaling:	825.00
I collected donations from other different personal friends close to:	1500.00
I don't know the exact amount. I do have the figures in my Miami Beach home.	<u>4885.00</u>

Then, of course, I paid for the picture on alter. I don't know exactly what it was -- Basralian knows. Then I had the floor covered with linoleum, etc. so I was instrumental in putting cash with the Treasury of over \$5,000.

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It was quite a surprise that they had it on the blackboard -- myself, \$1,000 and my son, \$1,000. I complained several times to different wardens that it was not the true story. Either they should have the true story or none at all but they did not take any notice of it so finally I had to put my feet down -- either they are going to put the right figures or no figures at all.

Now this does not give a very good impression when someone is trying to do all he can and he can do more and is being antagonized. The fellows who gave the smallest, they did the most hollering.

I made several trips to see Mr. Chaachou persuading him. I did not consult anybody and I did not brag about it. Mr. Chaachou did the painting inside and outside. He also bought the curtains for the altar. It took persuading to do that. I am sure that none of the wardens ever took time to do that. It was done and that's all that matters, but let's recognize the man who did it not the people who take it on themselves that they did it when they did not. That is what I complain is not fair and right and having people take advantage.

HMB:VI