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St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church

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678 Richmond Road • Richmond Heights, Ohio 44143 • 216-381-6590

September 16, 1996

The Most Rev. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian  
Primate, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church  
630 Second Avenue  
New York, NY 10016

Your Eminence,

Enclosed you will find a letter from Mrs. Anna Karayan together with a history of the choir of St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church, which she prepared on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America.

→ On Sunday, November 10, 1996 we will have a requiem service in memory of Miss Lillian Tookman, our first choir director and for all deceased choir members. This will be followed with a program in honor of all former and present choir members. The guest speaker will be Mrs. Rose Mekenian.

We would greatly appreciate a letter of recognition about Lillian Tookman and her work as the first choir director; and generally all former and present choir members and altar servers. Presently Mrs. Anita Arpajian serves as both organist and choir director.

Thank you in advance for your attention in this manner.

Sincerely,



Deacon Norman Odabashian

5489 State Road  
Parma, Ohio 44134  
September 6, 1996

The Most Rev. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate  
Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church  
North America  
630 Second Avenue  
New York, New York 10016-4885

Your Eminence:

It is in humility and with great respect that this cover letter is addressed and written to you. It is written at the suggestion of Deacon Norman Odabashian. Your kindness and understanding have shown in all of the wonderful and meaningful work you have rendered.

The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you a local project assumed to honor the first choir director of our community and also to remember former members and honor present members of our choir. The 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Armenian Association of Church Choirs of America seemed to be the appropriate time for the community to make this recognition. Our commemoration will take place Sunday, November 10, 1996. Rose (Benneian) Mekenian will be the guest speaker.

The first choir director was the late Lillian Tookman. She comes from a family who have served our church over a span of 50 years. The attached letter addressed to Deacon Norman Odabashian and the Parish Council (dated September 3, 1996) explains some contributions Lillian and her family made to the Church. Lillian was a gifted, loving and giving person who was instrumental in the formation of our choir less than 50 years ago. We plan to have a memorial Hokehankist for the soul of Lillian as well as for all deceased former choir participants.

You will find attached a write-up of the "early history" of the Cleveland Community Church Choir and the names of the many people who contributed to its growth. The write-up will be published in the October, 1996 issue of PAROS. We are all very grateful to our present choir who are the best.

A biography of Lillian was written by Ardemis (Bagdasarian) Matteosian (Belmont, Massachusetts). She is a former Clevelander and a first-cousin of Lillian. A copy of the biography is attached to introduce you to the personal contributions made to the Armenian Church by Lillian. At the time, the diocese was under the leadership and spiritual guidance of the then Archbishop Torkom Manoogian (now His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian).

We want to express appreciation to Deacon Norman Odabashian who has been supportive throughout our research. His sense of fairness, charity and objectivity made our work easier and truly a labor of love. He has a genuine appreciation for our community's early historical foundation. Among the names listed in the "early history" you will find persons who were also the solid "building blocks" in the establishment of our Parish.

The Most Rev.  
Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

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September 6, 1996

It is our wish that you provide a letter of recognition for Lillian's work. We, friends and former choir associates, want to give recognition to a fine person.

Thank you.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anna Karayan".

(Mrs.) Anna (Chobanian) Karayan

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cc: Deacon Norman Odabashian  
Deacon-in-Charge

September 4, 1996

Deacon Norman Odabashian,  
Deacon-in-Charge  
and The Parish Council  
St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church  
678 Richmond Road  
Richmond Heights, Ohio 44143

Dear Deacon Norman:

This year, as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America (A.A.C.C.A.) in our Diocese, former and present members of the Cleveland Choir recall memories of the early days of the Cleveland Armenian Church community. There were many wonderful, dedicated people who contributed to the growth of our choir and our parish.

Histories have been written of our church organizations for various community event souvenir booklet publications. When the Choir Assembly was held in Cleveland in 1991, a very nice souvenir booklet was published including some history of the Cleveland Choir from 1946 onward. Early choir members have since contributed some additional interesting early history.

Specifically, major contributions by the late Lillian Tookman, who was the first Choir Director of our parish's organized choir under the A.A.C.C.A. are related in the attached write up.

Thank you for publishing this "early" choir history article in the PAROS and for providing a copy to the choir for their records. It has been suggested that the History also be presented to the A.A.C.C.A., to add to the already submitted well-written history of the choir as it appeared in the A.A.C.C.A. souvenir booklet in 1991. It is agreed that Lillian's important contributions be recognized. They are part of our community's early local history.

As a contribution to St. Gregory of Narek's commemoration of the A.A.C.C.A.'s 50th Anniversary, Ardemis (Bagdasarian) Matteosian, first cousin of Lillian Tookman, wrote a fitting biography to be read at the Program.

*A note of information*

*Ardemis's husband, Matthew Matteosian, was a charter member of the early founding group of the A.C.Y.O.A. He was elected and served as Central Council Chairman.*

*It should be noted that the early history of Cleveland Armenian Church choir activity was contributed by former and present choir members to the best of each one's recollection and available substantiation. Any additional historical information will be welcome for the records. Kindly inform Anna Karayan, writer of article, of any inadvertent error or omission for correction.*

Fittingly in this golden commemorative year of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America (A.A.C.C.A.), a Memorial Requiem Service for the repose of the soul of Lillian Tookman, our first Choir Director under the A.A.C.C.A. and for all deceased choir members of the Cleveland Armenian Church parish is requested on Sunday, November 10, 1996. To relieve the present Choir of the work entailed in presenting their traditional Arch Angels Feast Day coffee-hour reception, the family of Lillian Tookman (Ardemis and Matthew Matteosian), former and present choir members and friends would like to jointly sponsor with the Parish Council a fitting

Deacon Norman Odabashian and  
The Parish Council

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September 4, 1996

coffee hour fellowship reception in memory of Lillian and other deceased choir members. A program of appropriate remarks commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the A.A.C.C.A. will be presented. (Deacon Norman said that he is planning the commemoration program.) On the Armenian Church calendar, November 10, 1996 is designated as "National Armenian Church Choir Day".

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Former and Present Choir Members and  
Community Members

Former and Present Choir Members and  
Community Members who contributed information and who shared their memories are:

Kevork Arslanian	Florence Goekjian
Helen (Demirjian) Atkian	Mary (Vartevarian) Gorra
Jeannette (Bosnoian) Aurslanian	Anna (Chobanian) Karayan
Alice (Demirjian) Bagdasarian	Louise (Kurkjian) Kolligian
Marie Bosnoian	Artemis (Bagdasarian) Matteosian
Rose (Hacherian) Carr	Rose (Bannaian) Mekenian
Richard Demirjian	

*Appreciation is expressed to everyone with whom the above may have consulted in remembering and providing information.*

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9/3/96

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Reference - Schedule  
1996

Final Approved Copy of cover letter and article submitted to:

Deacon Norman Odabashian and Parish Council

Note: After typed material was reviewed by those who contributed information a few final revisions were made.

Schedule:

- Submission of Letter and Write-Up to Deacon Norman and Parish Council. July 31, 1996  
(Date of cover letter)
  - Publication of write-up article is slated for: October, 1996 issue of PAROS  
(Per Deacon Norman, needs article by September 15, 1996)
  - Received Lillian's Biography from Ardemis (Bagdasarian) Matteosian for inclusion in Program. November
  - Publicity / Mailing (Anna Karayan to help Deacon Norman, where needed) September, October
  - Committee: (Members will be advised date of first meeting to be held in September.) October
- Program: - Deacon Norman Odabashian
- Committee:
- Anna Karayan
  - Sylva Andonian
  - Alice Bagdasarian
  - Sonia Elloian
  - Florence Goekjian
  - Mary Gorra (New Jersey)
  - Rose Mekenian (New Jersey)
  - Margaret Nigolian
  - Florence Straka
  - Mary Vosgerichian
  - Alice Yessayan
- Memorial Service for Lillian and deceased Choir Members: (Deacon Norman) Sunday, November 10, 1996
  - Reception - Memorial Coffee-Hour Fellowship - Observation of the 50th Anniversary of A.A.C.C.A. with Program. Sunday, November 10, 1996
  - Program (Deacon Norman)  
Program Guest Speaker: Rose (Bannaian) Mekenian  
Reader of Lillian Tookman's Biography Anna Karayan

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St Gregory of Narek Armenian Church Choir

Early History  
by Anna Karayan

This year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America (A.A.C.C.A.) in our Diocese, former and present members of the Cleveland Choir recall memories of the early days of the Cleveland Armenian Church community. There were many wonderful, dedicated people who contributed to the growth of our choir and our parish.

In the early 1940's, the Cleveland Armenian Juniors were formed by Helen (Demirjian) Atkian and Lillian Tookman. Out of this group, came some of the early choir and A.C.Y.O.A. members.

Histories have been written of our church organizations for various community event souvenir booklet publications. When the Choir Assembly was held in Cleveland in 1991, a very nice souvenir booklet was published including some history of the Cleveland Choir from 1946 onward. Early choir members have since contributed some additional interesting early history.

Specifically, major contributions by the late Lillian Tookman, who was the first Choir Director of our parish's organized choir under the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America (A.A.C.C.A.) are related.

Before 1946, there was choir activity--the Cleveland Armenian community members who participated over the years at varying times whenever there was a visiting priest (and for a brief period when we had an assigned priest) were:

*Harry Arakelian	Dr. Garo Garabedian
Kevork Arslanian	*Dr. Kegham K. Goekjian
*Dicran Asadorian	*Minas Goevjian
Helen (Demirjian) Atkian	Sarah (Bedrosian) Hadley
*Marie Bagdasarian	*Krikor Hovivian
*Varjabed Barsamian	Jennie (Bagdasarian Kapoudjian
*Garbis Balderian	*Florence (Chakamian) Karoghlanian
*Araxi Bosnoian	*Armen Kasabach
*Hagop Boyajian	*Sarkis Keshishian
Rose (Hacherian) Carr	*Dicran Kilimian
*Harry Chakamian	*George Kilimian
*Anna Chakerian	*Ardemis (Bagdasarian) Matteosian
*Armenouhi Condoyan	Rose (Bannaian) Mekenian
*John Condoyan	*Elmas Meketarian
*Mary Dedyan	Koharig (Panosian) Meketarian
*Arousiag Demirjian	*Nazareth Mirakian
*Karekin Demirjian	Shakey (Mirakian) Mooradian
*Margos Demirjian	*George Panos
*Shnorhig DerHagopian	*Levon Tarkanian
*Haigouhi Elloian	*Anahid Tookman
	*Lillian Tookman
	*Khosrov Vosgerichian
	Krikor Yeranian

\* Deceased

The early Deacons were Garbis Balderian, Margos Demirjian, Minas Goevjian and Dicran Kilimian. Dr. Kegham Goekjian was later ordained a Deacon.

Representation of the Cleveland Armenian community played an important role in the historical founding of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America in 1946-1947. The late Lillian Tookman attended and participated in constitutional Diocesan choir meetings during that period.

Through the efforts of Lillian Tookman and encouragement by Deacon Margos Demirjian, the Cleveland Community became an active and contributing member of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America. Lillian invited the community to participate in the Choir. She purchased a grand piano for her home to use to accompany the choir during rehearsals. Choir members at the time our church joined the A.A.C.C.A. were:

- \*Lillian Tookman (Choir Director)
- Rose (Bannaian) Mekenian (Soloist) (Assistant Director)
- Florence Goekjian, (Organist)
- Alice (Demirjian) Bagdasarian
- Rose (Hacherian) Carr
- Mary (Vartevarian) Gorra
- Sarah (Bedrosian) Hadley
- Jennie (Bagdasarian) Kapoudjian
- Anna (Chobanian) Karayan

As the choir became a viable church organization, others who joined the group were:

- Lucille (Bedrosian) Andonian
- Paul Apkarian
- \*Shakey Apkarian
- Garabed Arpajian
- Mary Arslanian
- Hagop Asadourian
- Harry Aurslanian
- Jeannette (Bosnoian) Aurslanian (Soloist) (Choir Director)
- \*Rose Azarian
- Mary Bagdasarian
- Obie Bagdasarian
- Arsen Barsamian
- \*Rose Bedrosian
- John Benneian
- \*Margaret Benneian (Soloist)
- Marie Bosnoian (Soloist)
- Carlos Bozoklian
- Jenev Chakamian (Organist)
- Shakey Diermendjian
- Alice (Seferian) Doyle (Organist)
- Tom Elloian
- Herman Kamparosian
- \*Armand Kazaros (Soloist) (Choir Director)
- Louise (Kurkjian) Kolligian (Organist)
- \*Eve (Arslanian) Kurkul
- \*Irene Martiesian
- Sam Mirakian
- Dr. Ernest Noble
- Adele (Arabian) Ourlian (Soloist) (Choir Director)
- Jerry Ourlian
- Linda (Paroonagian) Prisk
- Stephen Sarafian (Choir Director)
- Benon (Kouyoumjian) Sevan

\* Deceased

When choir music and robes became available through the Diocese, Lillian solicited community members for donations to purchase these for the choir. The choir even went Christmas caroling to the Terminal Tower lobby and to Armenian homes and received gift donations which were applied to the purchase of choir robes and music. Additional needed money was provided by Dr. and Mrs. Kegham Goekjian. Mrs. Koharig Vartevarian made and donated all of the beautiful hand-made lace headpieces.

Deacon Margos Demirjian was the caretaker of the choir music and robes. A worn, much-used leather satchel contained the church's entire library of sacred music and choir records. The robes and satchel were toted by Deacon Margos whenever a church was rented for a Liturgy conducted by a visiting Armenian priest.



Prior to community-scheduled Divine Liturgy services, the rented Episcopal churches kindly offered their facilities for choir rehearsal use. Lillian appointed Florence Goekjian and later Louise (Kurkjian) Kolligian to accompany the choir in rehearsals and at Divine Liturgy Services. On occasion, rehearsals were held at the Y.M.C.A.'s Nationalities Services Center and other locations.

For many years, Rose (Bannaian) Mekenian, Soloist, also sang the Variables of the Divine Liturgy and portions of special services until other choir members became more familiar with them.

In 1952, the first A.A.C.C.A. Study Seminar was attended by Mrs. Florence Goekjian, Louise (Kurkjian) Kolligian, Alice (Seferian) Doyle and Deacon Margos Demirjian. There was always a Cleveland contingent at the Choir Seminars for many years afterwards.

In 1953, when the A.C.Y.O.A. Assembly was held in Cleveland, the Jashou Service of the Divine Liturgy was televised through the efforts and guidance of Lillian for the first time in the United States. The celebrant was the late Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. The choir was led by the then Very Reverend Father Torkom Manoogian. The choir consisted of people from all the parishes in the Diocese represented at the Assembly.

Dr. and Mrs. Kegham Goekjian graciously invited the choir to have rehearsals in their home where they were held for a number of years until the church property was purchased. When Choir members arrived at the Goekjian's house, their well-known German Shepherd dog "Ike" met each car and escorted Choir members into the house. After the church property was purchased, the existing residence on the premises served as the meeting place for rehearsals.

Lillian Tookman went on to serve the Armenian Church Diocese in New York as Public Relations Director. She performed the monumental task of coordinating nationally, the first-time visit to the United States of His Holiness, Vasken I, the late Catholicos, as well as numerous other assigned Diocesan responsibilities during this period. She continued to devoutly, quietly serve the Armenian Church with her many talents.

When the present church property was acquired, under the direction of the then Deacon-in-Charge, Nerses Jebejian, a chapel was constructed in the Parish House where the choir took part in Divine Liturgy services.

In 1964, the Cleveland Parish built St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Church. Choir activities continued and flourished in our own facilities since that time.

Those who participated in the choir and altar service during the 1960's and later include:

Robert Abdalian  
Panos Agopian  
Archie Andonian  
Christopher Andonian  
Gregory Andonian  
Thomas Atkian  
Anita (Aurslanian) Arpajian (Organist) (Choir Director)  
\*Gregory Arpajian  
Haig Arpajian (Sub-Deacon)  
Dick Atkian  
Thomas Atkian  
Ara Bagdasarian  
Bart Bagdasarian  
Jay Bagdasarian  
Leslie Bagdasarian  
Ross Bagdasarian  
Thelma Bagdasarian (Soloist) (Choir Director)  
Peggy Chakerian  
\*Anahis Davidian (Organist)

Hagop Demirjian  
Louise (Aurslanian) Demirjian  
Murad Demirjian  
Serop Demirjian (Deacon)  
Gregory Elloian  
Hagop Emrikian  
Cheryl Arslanian-Gideon  
Ani Ghazarian (Organist-in-Training)  
Krikor Ghazarian  
Simon Ghazarian  
Ara Hamamjian  
Nuvart Hamamjian  
June Herbe  
Arshag Kalaijian  
James Karayan  
John Karayan  
Phillip Karayan  
Dr. Krikor Krikorian  
Hagop Koeshkarian  
Zaven Koeshkarian  
Lucine Arslanian-King  
Martha (Menashian) Lucas  
Martin Meketarian  
Margaret Meketarian  
John McDonough  
John Mirakian  
Rachel Mirakian  
Sam Mirakian, Jr.  
Sue Mirakian  
Victoria Mirakian  
James Nazarian  
David Ohanian  
Erica Ohanian  
Kevork Tufankjian  
Mary (Goekjian) Walsh  
Margarite (Davidian) Yeranossian  
Margaret Yeranian  
Alex Yessayan  
Milissa Yessayan  
Valerie (Goekjian) Zahirsky

*It should be noted that the early history of the Cleveland Armenian Church Choir activity was contributed by former and present choir members to the best of each one's recollection and available substantiation. Any additional historical information will be welcome for the record. Kindly inform Anna Karayan, writer of article, of any errors or omissions for correction and addition.*

ak  
9/3/96

Listing of names for Memorial. "Hokehankist":

**In Memory...**

**Hokehankist - For the Repose of the soul:**

Lillian Tookman - First Choir Director  
Shakey Apkarian  
Harry Arakelian  
Gregory Arpajian  
Dicran Asadorian  
Rose Azarian  
Marie Bagdasarian  
Garbis Balderian  
Rose Bedrosian  
Margaret Benneian  
Araxi Bosnolian  
Hagop Boyajian  
Harry Chakamian  
Anna Chakerian  
Armenouhi Condoyan  
John Condoyan  
Anahis Davidian  
Mary Dedyan  
Arousiag Demirjian  
Karekin Demirjian  
Margos Demirjian  
Shnorhig DerHagopian  
Haigouhi Elloian  
Dr. Kegham K. Goekjian  
Minas Goevjian  
Krikor Hovivian  
Florence (Chakamian) Karoghlanian  
Armen Kasabach  
Armand Kazaros  
Dicran Kilimian  
George Kilimian  
Eve (Arslanian) Kurkul  
Irene Martiesian  
Elmas Meketarian  
Nazareth Mirakian  
Levon Tarkanian  
Anahid Tookman  
Khosrov Vosgerichian

.....In blessed memory.....

ak  
9/3/96

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## LILLIAN M. TOOKMAN - A REMEMBRANCE

Lillian May Tookman was born February 7, 1925, in Cleveland, Ohio. She was the first child of Anahid and Hrant Tookman, and the grandchild of Merger and Eliz Tookmanian. Lillian attended kindergarten and first grade at the Prospect Elementary School in East Cleveland; her family then moved to Cleveland Heights where she continued at the Boulevard Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High, and Heights High School.

While attending high school, Lillian worked part-time in a record shop across the street on Lee Road. Lillian had found her niche. She became manager of the store and was determined to have a career in the record business. Upon graduation, Lillian worked in the record department at Halle Bros. Co. She moved ahead to the Higbee Company, where she eventually managed the record department. It was during this period that Lillian worked with executives in the recording industry and arranged promotional appearances of recording artists.

In 1958, Lillian was offered a position with Decca Records, Inc. She moved to New York City where she supervised press relations for Decca, Coral and Brunswick recording labels. Lili thrived in New York; she loved the city with all its challenges and opportunities.

Lillian became one of the founding members and served as Executive Director of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which presents the Grammy Awards annually to artists who are voted by its members as the best in each category of recorded music.

In 1962, Lillian accepted a position as Public Relations Coordinator with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where she conceived promotional programs on an international level for major films such as Dr. Zhivago, Mutiny on the Bounty, etc. This involved location shooting throughout the United States and Europe. She was involved in all facets of publicity and public relations.

Lillian was always devoted to the Armenian Church and had worked zealously as choir director in Cleveland. She was proud to be an Armenian. It became apparent that the dream of an Armenian cathedral in New York was to become a reality and Lili directed all her talents to the project. As Director of Public Relations at the Diocese, Lillian administered and coordinated the itinerary for the State Visit of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of the Armenian Church and all activities in conjunction with the consecration of the first Armenian Cathedral in North America. She negotiated and acquired a television network special with CBS and handled all media. She also coordinated receptions and visitations for His Holiness throughout the United States and Canada with religious, political and civic leaders. Her television and press coverage was unprecedented in the Armenian church in this country and set the standard for future media dissemination in our diocese.

After leaving MGM, Lillian worked as public relations consultant for the New York Couture Business Council, the Mobile Oil Corporation, the Urban League, and Aurelian Lintermans, Inc. of Brussels (who were introducing Godiva Chocolates in the United States for the first time).

In 1979, Lillian was afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease which slowly and insidiously robs one of memory and speech. She died in 1989. She is survived by her brothers, Berge and Ned, and several nieces and nephews and a beloved family friend-sister, Margaret Nigolian.

Perhaps more than her accomplishments, the essence of Lili's character was defined by her exuberant sense of adventure in all the possibilities in life. Lili had style. She was bright and articulate, with a marvelous sense of humor. As it celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of America, the St. Gregory of Narek Church Choir and community should be commended for honoring and remembering the service and devotion of one of its own. I would also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the untiring efforts of Anna Karayan, Rose Mekenian and Mary Gorra, who were instrumental in initiating this special tribute to Lili. On behalf of her family, I would like to express our appreciation.

Lili was not only my first cousin, but my sister and best friend. I like to think that in remembering her we recall not so much what we lost, but what remains most dear to us. I shall never forget Lili.

**Ardemis Matteosian  
Belmont, Massachusetts**

AM:ak

September 6, 1996