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Greasy Spoon Dagoes: Sydney's Greek Food-Catering Phenomenon, 1870s–1952

Leonard Janiszewski and Effy Alexakis¹

Over the first-half of the twentieth century, Sydney's Greeks became numerically prominent as food caterers and radically transformed the character of the city's popular eating-houses. They introduced new American commercial food-catering ideas, technology and products and influenced the development of cinema, architectural style, and popular music along American lines. Greek-run oyster saloons, soda/sundae parlours, cafés and milk bars became powerful vehicles for socio-cultural change. Initially radiating out from within the city's central business district to the east and south, by the early 1920s, Greek food-catering establishments were operating in the western suburbs, including Parramatta, and as far north as Hornsby. The profound changes that Sydney's Greek food caterers engendered are explored, together with the personal vicissitudes of the food caterer's themselves. Despite their commercial food-catering popularity, Sydney's Greeks experienced racist attitudes that perhaps reinforced the safety of transferring aspects of modern American culture, rather than their own traditional cultural elements.

This paper builds on material from a number of earlier publications by the authors which deal, either in full or in part, with Sydney's Greek food-catering phenomenon (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1988; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003; Janiszewski & Alexakis,

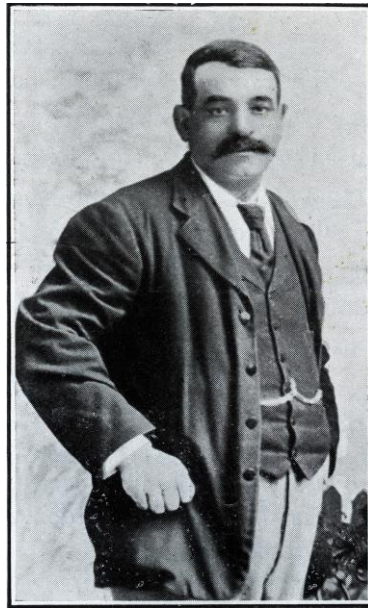
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2003/2004; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008; Janiszewski & Alexakis 2011; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016).²

According to demographer Charles Price, over 85% of Sydney's first generation Greeks owned or worked in food-catering businesses (Price, 1968:8). During the Australian gold rush era (1850s–1890s) “golden Greeks” such as Spiro Bennett, Mark Gless, Andreas Kourouklis, Spyridon Magnarisi and James (Ioakeim) Zannis, opened up stores, taverns or small hotels. Recognising that gold digging was essentially a lottery, they directed their attentions towards servicing miners' needs on the fields, including the supply and preparation of food – regular income was almost guaranteed through such enterprise whilst the goldfields lasted, or better still, became permanent settlements (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2017:171–172; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:34–35). Greek involvement with food catering in Australia had commenced.

From the 1870s, increased prosperity and population (including the number of Greeks, primarily through chain migration) as a result of the rushes, witnessed more Hellenes entering food servicing in Australia – not just on the goldfields. In Sydney, John Capatchos (Kapazzo/Kapazzos) became an oyster saloonkeeper, a Corfiot named Spinelli opened a *kafeneion* (traditional Greek men's coffee house) and Athanasios Comino (Kominos), originally from Kythera, began to sell fish-and-chips, oysters and coffee (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:34). Athanasios, together with his younger brother John (Ioannis), are inextricably linked to early Kytherian settlement in Sydney and the entry of their compatriots and other Greeks into the food-catering trade in the New South Wales capital and beyond – principally oyster saloons, fish shops, fruit and vegetable outlets, restaurants, refreshment rooms, soda and sundae parlours, confectionery outlets, cafés, and later, milk bars. Throughout Australia between the late 1800s and the end of the 1940s, most Greeks were arriving from coastal Greece and the Greek islands, with three islands predominating – Kythera, Ithaca and Kastellorizo. In Sydney, the Kytherians became the most pronounced regional group, followed to a lesser degree by the Kastellorizians (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:20).

² All oral history interviews cited in this paper as being conducted by the authors are part of the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.



Athanasios Comino (Kominos); most probably Sydney, NSW, late nineteenth century.

Comino became a pioneer of Greek-run oyster saloons and oyster farming in New South Wales. His commercial success, and later, that of his younger brother John (Ioannis), encouraged other Kytherians to migrate to Sydney and enter the city's growing food-catering industry. Both Athanasios and John acquired the title of "Oyster King".

Photo from J. D. Comino et al., 1916, *Life in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd, p. 88 (published in Greek). Held in the "In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians" National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Athanasios Comino arrived in Sydney in 1873, aged 29. During a stroll down Oxford Street in Darlinghurst, it is claimed that he entered a fish-and-chip shop owned by a Welshman and considered its potential as an occupation. Comino judged it to be much easier than the physically demanding labouring he had been undertaking. Moreover, personal income would increase if the business did well. Consequently, in 1878, he and a compatriot, John Theodore, opened a small fish-and-chip shop at 36 Oxford Street; a Greek fishmonger had occupied the site in the late 1850s, and by the 1870s, given the burgeoning trend of destination shopping on the street, the premises had essentially become an oyster saloon (oyster saloons derived from Britain and characteristically focused upon oysters — bottled, cooked

and fresh — amongst other seafood offerings directed primarily towards a working class clientele). The business grew rapidly (Comino et al., 1916:88–89; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1988:50–51; Collins et al., 1995:44; Gilchrist, 1992:194–195; Faro & Wotherspoon, 2000:97; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:180; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:92).

Four years later, Athanasios decided to venture into oyster farming — aiming to additionally become a primary producer of one of the principal staples of his and other oyster saloons. He initially acquired the lease of oyster beds at the mouth of the Lane Cove River, but this proved unremunerative. In 1884, he obtained almost 2km of foreshore for oyster cultivation along the Evans River on the New South Wales far north coast. That year his brother John arrived in Sydney, aged 30. In 1885 John followed Athanasios' lead and acquired oyster leases on the Bermagui estuary on the state's south coast. By the early 1900s, the Comino name had not only become part of the firm that dominated oyster marketing in New South Wales — Woodward, Gibbons and Comino — but had developed into a well-recognised and popular “chain” of oyster saloons/parlours; John ultimately owned five shops in Sydney and had financial interest in others in country towns. Stimulated by such success, male relatives and friends migrated out from Kythera, some “adopting” the Comino name for trading purposes and in the process, ensuring that it became synonymous with Greek-run oyster saloons (Cunneen, 1981; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1988:51–52; Gilchrist, 1992:195–197; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:92, 94).

Following Athanasios' unexpected death from a hernia in 1897, John inherited half of his brother's estate and took over guidance of their business interests. He also acquired his brother's popular title of “Oyster King”, and continued to encourage the migration of Kytherians to Sydney to take up work in the city's food-catering trade. By the early 1910s, Kytherian migrant/settlers, such as the Cominos, the Aroney (Aronis) brothers (Efstratios, Antonios, Panayiotis and Minas), another member of the Aroney clan, Nicholas M. Aroney, the Samios brothers (Kharalambos and Ioannis in partnership with their cousin Konstantinos Kasimatis), and the Psaltis (Protopsaltis) brothers (Ioannis, Nikolaos and Kosmas), were arguably the leading retailers of oysters in Sydney — the Cominos were additionally of course, amongst the leading cultivators and distributors of oysters not only within Sydney, but throughout the state. Non-Kytherian Greeks such as the Stamell (Stamellatou) brothers (Efstathios, Nikolas and Markos) from Ithaca, and Christos Stratigiou from the Arcadian region of the Greek Peloponnese were also emerging into prominence as oyster saloon proprietors (Comino

et al., 1916:88, 121–124, 226, 130, 132–133, 151–152, 164–168; Gilchrist, 1992:195–197, 199–200, 207, 215, 217; Cunneen, 1981; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1988:51).



Comino's Cosmopolitan Oyster "Parlors"; 136 Pitt Street, Sydney, NSW, c. 1895

Zacharia Comino was the proprietor. Note the American spelling of "parlor". Initially these were fish-and-chip outlets, and although they maintained a focus on oysters (bottled, cooked and fresh), they soon acquired a wide diversity of foods (cooked meat and seafood, fruit and vegetables, chocolates and ice cream) that could be purchased at reasonable prices. These enterprises provided sit-down meals in men's and women's lounges and welcomed families.

Photo by Charles Bayliss, courtesy State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.



Con Mottes' Comino's Oyster Saloon; William Street, Sydney, NSW, c. 1910

Stimulated by the success of Athanasios and John (Ioannis) Comino (Kominos), male relatives and friends migrated out from Kythera, some “adopting” the Comino name for trading purposes and in the process, ensuring that it became synonymous with Greek-run oyster saloons. Con Peter Mottes (Mottee [Constantine Motis]), is said to have initially migrated out from Kythera in the 1860s, followed later by his four sons — Peter, George, Jim and Emanuel. Con established the oyster saloon and it was later operated by two of his sons, Peter and George. Rooms above the shop were utilised as a boarding house — primarily for newly arrived Kytherians seeking work in food catering.

Photo courtesy C. Mottee, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century it became common practice to have young Greek boys, generally between the ages of twelve and sixteen, chaperoned out to Australia for work in Greek food-catering businesses — such a practice had earlier been instituted in migration to the United States to secure staff in Greek-run catering enterprises. Born in 1914, Xenophon Stathis “came out to Sydney in 1928 ... there were nine of us [young boys] from Kythera who were brought out to work in cafés...Greece was a rather poor country” (Stathis, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:156; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:20). Similarly, Peter Prineas, who was born on Kythera in the same year, recalled that an uncle in Sydney’s inner-western

suburb of Newtown wrote to him “that Australia had a future” and so “I came out with a group of eight of us [young boys] escorted by Kosmas Psaltis (Protopsaltis) ... destined for cafés” (Prineas, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:203). Born in 1897 in “a very small village called Hristorforianika, near Logothetianika, on Kythera”, Anthony (Antonios) Flaskas proudly indicated that:

I was the pioneer ... I was fifteen when I came out to Australia ... There were seven of us ... six boys and an old man, Nicholas “Melitas” [an alias] ... He was looking after us ... My parents sent me to Australia — we were a very poor family. Australia was a new country, there were more chances [to improve oneself] ... I had never been outside of Kythera ... I landed in Sydney with half a crown [two shillings and sixpence – 25c] ... It was [only] a week before I found a job [in a Greek-run café]. (Flaskas, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:90–91; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:20, 132–133)



Anthony (Antonios) Flaskas; Temora, NSW, 1989

“I was the pioneer ... 1913 ... I was fifteen when I came out to Australia ... There were seven of us ... six boys and an old man, Nicholas ‘Melitas’ [an alias] ... He was looking after us ... I landed in Sydney with half a crown [two shillings and sixpence – 25c] ... It was [only] a week before I found a job [in a Greek-run café]”.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Often sponsored by employers already established in Sydney, new Hellenic arrivals would commence work in Greek food-catering businesses as cooks, kitchen hands, dish washers, oyster openers, and – for those who had a grasp of English – as waiters. Ioannis Notaras arrived in Sydney in 1906 aged eighteen and was employed as a dishwasher (Notaras, 1990). Tony Rafty (Raftopoulos) recalls his father working very long hours as an oyster opener at Victor’s Oyster Bar in King Street in the city during the early 1930s (Rafty, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:95). Most persisted with long hours of such employment in the hope of saving enough money from their wages to purchase their own business. This was often not easy, as a portion of their wages was generally sent back to Greece to assist the family, or utilised to repay their fare out (which in many cases had been paid for by their employer). There was also board to pay and sometimes wages were not that generous. Arriving in Sydney in 1939, Kosmas Theodorakakis took almost three years to pay off his fare of £28: “I was getting half-a-pound (\$1.00) a month washing dishes starting at 6 o’clock in the morning and sometimes, at 2 o’clock in the morning!” (Theodorakakis, 1990; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:134). Some new arrivals such as Chris Pappas (Papadopoulos) even experienced harsh exploitation by their employers:

My family didn’t want me to leave [Greece] so early for Australia [in 1911 at the age of thirteen] ... those days the ‘slavery market’ [a peonage system]; relatives wanted someone to work for them who they trusted ... That’s my bad luck.

Quite a number did return to Greece, but many stayed (Pappas, 1986; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:8, 79; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:20, 126; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:20; Gilchrist, 1997:246–247).

By 1908, the number of Kytherian Greeks in Sydney, according to Nicholas Laurantus – who had arrived during that year – totalled 150 individuals. It is very likely that the actual number was higher, particularly if family groups are considered. What is certain, is that most Kytherian males, together with those from other regions of Greece, were primarily engaged in food-catering enterprises (Michaelides, 1987:2–3; Gilchrist, private papers).

Nicholas Aroney's Oyster Saloon; 9
Alfred Street, Circular Quay, Sydney,
NSW, c. 1916



Originally from Kythera, Nicholas M. Aroney (Aronis) spent some time as a merchant in Smyrna (modern Izmir in Turkey) before migrating to Sydney in 1902. By the early 1910s, Nicholas, together with the Cominos, other members of the Aroney clan (the brothers Efstratios, Antonios, Panayiotis and Minas), the Samios brothers (Kharalambos and Ioannis, who were in partnership with their cousin Konstantinos Kasimatis), and the Psaltis (Protopsaltis) brothers (Ioannis, Nikolaos and Kosmas), were arguably the leading retailers of oysters in Sydney.

Photo from J. D. Comino et al., 1916, *Life in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd, p. 133 (published in Greek). Held in the "In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians" National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Offering a regular, reasonable income, potential material improvement, independence, maintenance of the family unit, and requiring only limited education and knowledge of English, it should not be surprising that the Kytherians, as well as other Sydney Greeks, continued to undertake work in oyster saloons, fish shops, restaurants, fruit shops, soda and sundae parlours and cafés. Furthermore, such a field of self-employment was well supported by their traditional sea-orientated and farming backgrounds and was not affected by union restrictions concerning the limitation of foreign labour; prior to the late 1940s the unionised industrial workforce was fearful of the potential threat to their jobs and hard won work

conditions by “cheap” foreign labour — particularly Asian and southern European labour (Tsounis, 1975:21,35; Tsounis, 1987:112–113; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:21). Louis Elias recalls that his father, who arrived in Sydney in 1924, was sacked from a cement factory because it was discovered that he was a Greek, not a German (Elias, 1987; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1998:96). Angelo Raftos (Evangelos Raftopoulos), who migrated out to work in his uncle’s Elizabeth Street café in 1923, clearly recalls the prevailing attitude: “Oh no, Greeks were certainly not allowed to work in factories — you had to work in cafés as cooks or waiters” (Raftos, 2002; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:184). As James Plodis (Dimitris Ploudias), who arrived in Sydney in 1928 eager “to make a few pounds” to help his parents back in Greece, succinctly states, “Australians wouldn’t give us jobs, we had to rely on the Greek café” (Plodis, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1998:128).

Anthony (Antonios) Flaskas, who arrived in Sydney in 1913 and spent most of his working life in Greek cafés and *kafeneia*, quite forcefully and emotionally elaborates:

We couldn’t get a job you had to go to the Greek café. You see, it was very, very strict White Australia ... the White Australia Policy ... You see, we were fighting them days. Really, we were fighting for our existence ... we were fighting for our life. That’s how hard it was ... Third class citizens was us really — third class, not second class, third class! (Flaskas, 1989; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:90–91; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:132–133)

Peter (Beneto) Veneris points out that even when his family became successful food caterers, racism persisted: “We were proud of being Greek, but not of being called dagoes. When we got the café it [racist name calling] changed from dagoes, to ‘greasy dagoes’ — ‘greasy spoon dagoes’” (Veneris, 2002; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:20, 99). Peter’s older brother Jack concurs: “When you do look back [to the 1910s – 1930s], you realise just how much hatred was pointed at us — yes, there was hatred!” (Veneris, 2002; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:99).

Late in 1915, British-Australians ran riot in Sydney along George and King Streets and into the Haymarket area, targeting Greek-run oyster saloons and cafés — in particular, Stamell’s, the Aroney brothers, Dimitrios Vernardos’ business and Dionysios Kouvaras’ shop. The violence was essentially fuelled by the alleged pro-German sympathies of Greece’s monarch, King Constantine I, whose wife, Sophia of Prussia, was the younger sister of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Insurance companies refused to cover the damage, claiming that the policies held by the Greeks did not cover civil

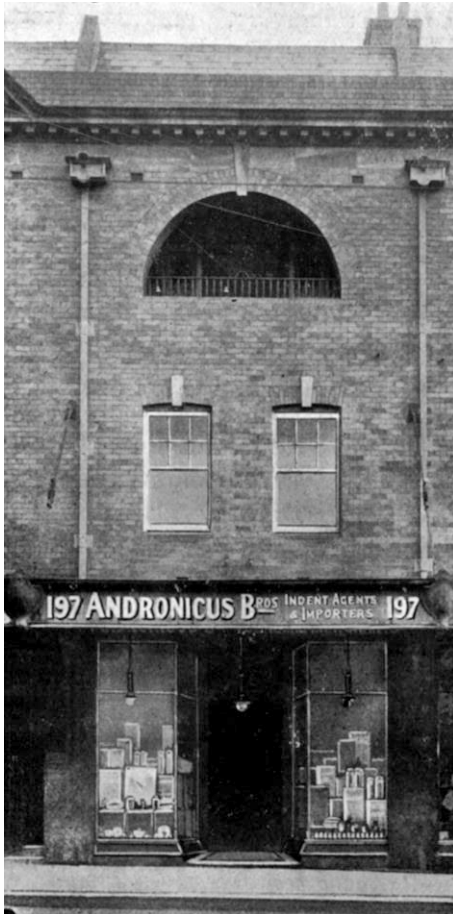
riots. The city's Greek shops continued to be intermittently targeted during 1916. During the Depression years of the early 1930s, despite clear evidence of their economic and civic contribution to Australian society, particularly by those in food-catering occupations, Melbourne geographer J. S. Lyng, described the Greeks as “the least popular foreigners” in Australia. Some of Sydney's Greek food caterers, in order to restrain any potential physical attacks upon themselves, their shops, or their goods during the economic downturn, had “identification posters”, declaring that they were naturalised British subjects, displayed on their shop windows (Gilchrist, 1997:20–22; Lyng, 1935:142; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:51–52; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1998:14–15; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:12–18, 25 [endnote 83]). In 1937, the *Australasian Confectioner* reported that 40 leading Greek food caterers in New South Wales, including Emmanuel Andronicus of Andronicus Brothers, Sydney, had formed the Combined Buying Association Pty Ltd two years earlier:

A feeling of resentment has been growing steadily for some years amongst the Greek retailers — resentment against the alleged granting by manufacturers of special concessions to chain store companies; and ... an unfair attitude on the part of the manufacturers and wholesalers towards Greek traders, from a racial standpoint. (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1937:1)

The company was estimated to have begun with a buying power of well over £100,000 a year and as such, was now able to leverage fairer dealings for Greek caterers (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1937:1; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:52).

Although racist attitudes persisted, the generally excellent, quick service, long opening hours and competitive prices offered by Greek food caterers, won them at least broad commercial popularity amongst Sydneysiders. Moreover, such popularity appears to have nurtured a growing acceptance of fish and seafood amongst the city's increasing population (the Roman Catholic observance of eating fish on Fridays ensuring particularly brisk trading on that day). Of course, Greek restaurants and cafés also provided British-Australians with their traditionally familiar meals — steak and eggs, chops and eggs, mixed grills, ham with tomatoes, omelettes, corn beef and salad, and sausages with mashed potatoes. Traditional Greek dishes were not introduced, as catering to the established tastes of customers was paramount (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:21).

By the opening years of the twentieth century, Sydney's central business district had a fair collection of Greek-run food-catering establishments. Greek oyster saloons and fish shops were to be found along George, King, and Pitt Streets and then to the east and south-east of Hyde Park down William and Oxford Streets. Beyond the oyster saloons and fish shops, one of the most commercially successful Greek-run enterprises was the tea, coffee and chocolate business of the Andronicus (Andronikos) brothers — one of Australia's earliest commercial coffee roasting establishments. In 1904 Emmanuel and Charles (Kosmas) Andronicus opened a small shop at 127 York Street under the business name Andronicus Brothers, Indent Agents and Importers. They supplied Greek café proprietors, *kafeneia*, and Greek families with products and items they required. Whilst Greeks, central Europeans and Turks were major customers for their roasted coffee, the British-Australian public was the principal consumer of their teas and custom-made chocolates. In 1910, Emmanuel and Charles, together with two other brothers, Mick (Minas) and John (Ioannis), moved the business to 197 George Street, near Circular Quay. At this time they were roasting 90kg of coffee daily. Their trademark became "AB — Always Best" (Janiszewski, 1995:21–22; Wolforth, 1974:215–216; Gilchrist, 1992:203–204; Baker, 1993; Ostrow, 1987:23–36 Comino et al., 1916:128–131; Gilchrist, private papers; Andronicus, private papers).



Andronicus Brothers, Indent Agents & Importers; 197 George Street, Sydney, NSW, c. 1916

Andronicus (Andronikos) Brothers was one of Australia's earliest commercial coffee roasting establishments. They supplied Greek café proprietors, *kafeneia*, and Greek families with coffee and other products and items they required. In 1910, they were roasting 90kg of coffee daily. The British-Australian public was the principal consumer of their teas and custom-made chocolates. Their trademark became "AB — Always Best".

Photo from J. D. Comino et al., 1916, *Life in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd, p. 131 (published in Greek). Held in the "In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians" National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

The proprietors and staff of Greek-run city enterprises lived either above the shops, or close to them, particularly around the eastern and southern ends of the central business district — such as in Surry Hills, East Sydney, Woolloomooloo, Darlinghurst, and Kings Cross. Greek-owned shops had even begun to appear in Sydney's inner-ring of suburbs, such as Newtown and Waterloo (Janiszewski, 1995:22).

A distinguishing feature of Sydney's popular Greek-run oyster saloons were their successful melding of food-catering ideas that originated from both Greece and the United States — a process of transference and transformation instigated and accomplished through the transnational flux of Greek migration. Oyster saloons were originally introduced from Britain, where public eating-houses were rigidly, socially structured — British oyster saloons were the eating and drinking abodes of working class males; their food offerings were limited, and cheap to purchase. Whilst continuing to provide inexpensive eat-in meals, the Greeks diversified and broadened the food items of their saloons beyond oysters, fish and beer, to include red meat, fruit and vegetables, "American-style" milk chocolates and assorted candies and "American-style" ice-cream and ice drinks (freezes and crushes). The tantalisingly rich, smooth sweetness of "American-style" milk chocolates, ice cream (promoted as "sundaes"), and candies (boiled sugar lollies of various flavours, colours and patterns), wooed the taste buds of adults and children alike. So popular were American sweets that before the mid-1910s, at least two Greek-owned Sydney confectionery factories were producing them — Pantazis K. Gahnis' Olympia Confectionery Factory in Newtown and Alexandros G. Grivas' Novelty Candy Co. in Manly — and one of the city's leading confectionery shops was the Chicago Candy Store on George Street operated by George Panagakis and another Greek. The titles of some ice cream sundaes unquestionably declared their origin as being from across the Pacific: American Beauty, Monterey Special, Yankee Doodle Dandy and Mexican Banana Split. Additionally, Greek oyster saloons introduced women's lounges and welcomed families. This reflected the tradition of public eating in Greece — socially inclusive, rather than exclusive. The diversification of food items was based upon American commercial food-catering concepts. The influence of American food-catering ideas

and products quickly came to dominate the ongoing development of Greek-run oyster saloons — the saloons were gradually being transformed (Alexakis & Janiszewski 2016:14–15, 33, 40, 42, 44–45, 48, 55, 56, 60, 91, 102; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:38–40; Comino et al., 1916:216–218; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1956:27).

The introduction of American food-catering ideas to Sydney through its Greek shopkeepers, essentially arose, as quite a number of these migrant/settlers had relatives or friends living and working in the United States, or had been there briefly themselves, working for, or as, Greek-American food caterers — the United States remained as a major drawer of Greek immigrants until the imposition of restrictions in the early 1920s. The early leading protagonists of the Comino family seem not to have had food-catering experience in the United States, but some members of the extended clan who arrived in Australia during the opening years of the twentieth century, most certainly did, as well as other Kytherians. However, it was three Arcadian Greeks from the United States — the brothers, Peter and Constantine Soulos (Panopoulos), in partnership with Anthony Louison (Loizos/Illiopoulos) — who appear to have been the stimulus behind the incorporation of a revolutionary piece of American food-catering technology into Sydney's Greek-run oyster saloons and food-catering businesses — the “front service” soda fountain (*The Greeks in California*, 1917–1918; Comino et al., 1916:178–179, 236–237; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:39; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:22; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:180–182; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:36, 105).



**“Front service” soda fountain,
Paragon Café; Lockhart, NSW, c.
1925**

The soda fountain was patented in America in 1819. It was designed for placement on the back wall of shops. In 1903 a revolution in design created the “front service” fountain — placed on the front or service counter, permitting interaction with customers. Three

Arcadian Greeks from the United States — the brothers, Peter and Constantine Soulos (Panopoulos), in partnership with Anthony Louison (Loizos/Illiopoulos) — appear to have been the stimulus behind its incorporation into Sydney’s Greek-run food-catering enterprises; use of the new fountains then spread rapidly beyond the New South Wales capital.

Photo by J. Check, courtesy J. and P. Veneris, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

In 1912, the Soulos’ and Louison, founded the Anglo-American Company and opened two shops in George Street and another on Manly’s Corso (this outlet was in partnership with another Arcadian, Panayiotis S. Karkanztis). By the mid-1910s, the number of shops had grown to five. Their shops were influenced by the iconic small business of “Main Street USA”, the drugstore soda “parlor”, which initially had offered customers soda water as a means of taking pungent tasting medications, but had quickly developed the beverage into a highly popular and profitable refreshment (Comino et al., 1916:178–179, 236–237; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:39; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:22; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:180–182; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:36, 43, 105).

During the 1890s Greeks departing for the United States were primarily Peloponnesian, with Arcadians being quite pronounced. It was these Greeks (such as the Soulos’ and Louison), who when undertaking food-catering work in America, would have experienced the growing popularity and commercial success of, initially, the “back service” soda fountain (also referred to as a “wall fountain”) and after 1903, the front

service fountain — first installed in J. W. Stoever’s pharmacy in Philadelphia. Soda fountains created effervescent water through impregnation with a gas (carbon dioxide) under pressure, to which flavours (usually as essences) were added, and if desired, ice cream. Back service fountains were placed on the back bar wall, but the front service fountains were designed to be installed on front counters, permitting direct interaction with customers (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:39; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:180; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:36, 43; Funderburg, 2002:112–113).

A wide range of “exotically” flavoured soda drinks quickly attracted public attention and ongoing consumption. Soda flavours included pineapple, strawberry, ginger beer, banana, passionfruit, raspberry, kola, lime juice, orange, sarsaparilla, ginger ale, lemon and hop ale. Initially, soda fountain compressors and pumps were imported directly from the United States (principally Chicago) by individual shop proprietors, but the burgeoning popularity of soda drinks was such, that in 1916, two major Sydney-based, food-catering equipment firms — Mauri Bros. and Thomson Ltd and W. B. Harris and Co. — were publicising their services as soda fountain importers to Greek caterers. By the late 1920s, three soda fountain manufacturers were reported as operating out of New South Wales (presumably Sydney), collectively selling about one hundred fountains per year. With their huge mirrored back bars, lined with silver and gold topped essence bottles, and coloured electric lights, soda fountains forged an initial link between food and fantasy that would later include architectural style, cinema and music — they were the original, modern “light fantastic”, long before neon light signage acquired the title. The link between food and fantasy was yet another adoption from the United States (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:182; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:40; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016: 16–18, 98, 100; Comino et al., 1916:92, 118; Reinders, 1999:253).

By the close of the opening two decades of the twentieth century, Sydney’s Greek-run oyster saloons and food-catering outlets had become synonymous with soda fountains, American-style lollies, milk chocolate and ice cream — whilst retaining sit-down meals (both seafood and red meat based), they had transformed into soda and sundae “parlors” (American spelling was often utilised on signage) (Janiszewski & Janiszewski, 2003/2004:182; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:40; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:65).

Just prior to the 1920s, Greek food businesses were highly concentrated in Sydney's central business district. In 1916, of the 173 Greeks — primarily young single males — documented within the city's central area, at least 138 were involved in some capacity with food catering — almost 80%. While a total of 65 Hellenes appear to have owned (solely or in partnership, usually with relatives) food-catering businesses such as oyster saloons, tea rooms, cafés, restaurants, fish shops, fruit shops, hawking runs, refreshment rooms and confectioneries, some 73 of their compatriots were employed by them. Further expansion into the suburbs had also continued. Redfern, Newtown, Paddington, Balmain, and Manly all had significant collections of Greeks, most being employed in, or owning, local food-catering establishments. Other suburbs with a Greek presence include Double Bay, Woollahra, Waverley, Coogee, Kensington, Long Bay, Campsie, North Sydney, Mosman, Annandale, Petersham, Parramatta, Kogarah, Gladesville and Hornsby. At this time, some 130 Greek-run shops were peppered throughout Sydney and its suburbs (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:23–24; Gilchrist, private papers; Comino et al., 1916:205–206, 216–220, 236–238, 191).

During the 1920s, before the Great Depression, Sydney's Greeks maintained and further developed their conspicuous preponderance in the food-catering trade. But Greeks were not just settling in the city. As early as 1911, just over 50% of Kytherian Greeks (the dominant regional group) were in rural New South Wales. They were again entering the food-catering trade, and so successfully that the country Greek café became synonymous with rural life in the state. Significantly, Sydney adopted an important role as the Greek labour distribution centre for New South Wales, with the city's Greek *kafeneia* acting as the specific communication points from which café job networks could be broken into (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:24; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:28–29). Arriving in Sydney from Kythera in 1913, Anthony (Antonios) Flaskas explains:

We had to go to the Greek coffee house ... went to Castlereagh Street ... it was run by Nick Calopedis ... In the country towns and all that ... if you wanted to help in a shop, you had to make contact at this place. They send you to a job. That's how I got a job. (Flaskas, 1989; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:24)

Twenty-six years later, when Kosmas Theodorakakis arrived in Sydney from Kythera, the situation had not changed: "...if you wanted to get a job, you had to go to the *kafeneion*" (Theodorakakis, 1990; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:24).

Early in November 1932, two decades after the founding of the Anglo-American Company, a Greek known as Mick Adams (Joachim Tavlarides [Tavlaridis]), returned to Sydney from a trip to Greece and the United States and opened the first modern "American-style" milk bar — the Black & White 4d. Milk Bar, at 24 Martin Place. A claim by the Burt brothers, Clarence and Norman, to have been operating such an enterprise before Adams has been demonstrated to be erroneous — the Burt's claim of having the "first open milk bar" actually refers to the "open frontage" of their 1929 business. Adams' modern milk bar concept emerged principally from the fusion of two seminal influences — the American drugstore soda "parlor" and the *galactopoleion*, a traditional Greek shop specialising in the sale of milk products (in English, *galactopoleion* translates into "milk shop") (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:15–16, 24 [endnote 32], 31, 62–64; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1998:106; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:320–332; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:40–44; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:182–186; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:22).



Black & White 4d. Milk Bar exterior; 24 Martin Place, Sydney, NSW, 1934

In November 1932, Mick Adams (Joachim Tavlarides [Tavlaridis]), opened Australia's first modern "American-style" milk bar in Sydney's Martin Place. On the first day of opening some five thousand customers are reported to have crowded into and around Adams' new light

refreshment business. Vehicle traffic and pedestrian access along Martin Place were severely affected. Police were called in to deal with the situation in an effort to maintain public order. Adams, pictured here with children from the Dalwood Health Home, "believed that the Depression gave a fillip" to milk bars "as the public very quickly realised the value of milk as a tonic food ... and also the price [of fourpence (4c) per glass] ... considerably eased the financial position".

Photo courtesy L. Keldoulis, from the "In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians" National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

The idea of a food-catering business focussed primarily upon a single product area could have been initially stimulated by Adams' rekindled memories and observations of *galactopoleia* whilst visiting Greece. Potentially, a narrow-focussed business could provide extensive cost reduction benefits when compared to those incurred in maintaining a mixed catering concern — the Depression would have underscored the need to limit financial outgoings; Adams had previously been running a confectionery and soda fountain business on George Street in Sydney's Haymarket. In the United States, Adams' observations of drugstore soda "parlors", and in particular, the presence of electric malt drink/milkshake mixers, would have provided greater form and direction to his initial stimulus. Sydney's existing Greek-run oyster saloon and soda/sundae parlours had placed prime importance on sit-down trade for meals, drinks and desserts. American drugstore soda "parlors" emphasised quick stand-up and bar-stool bar trade (soda drinks, malted milks,

milkshakes and sundaes) over sit-down meal trade. Adams firmly took up the American soda “parlor” catering emphasis and, utilising the *galactopoleion*’s narrow product focus, limited catering to refreshment beverages — highlighting the milkshake. No cooked meals were provided, only flavoured milkshakes, pure fruit juices and soda drinks (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:15, 31, 62; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:320–323; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:40–43; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:182–183; Gerondis, 2013:23, 25).

A rapid stand-up trade in milkshakes became the successful commercial foundation of Adams’ Black & White 4d. Milk Bar. Seating capacity in the premises was restricted to just six small two-seater cubicles along one wall, the main feature being a long hotel-style bar with soda fountain pumps and numerous American-made electric malt drink/milkshake mixers (manufactured by the Hamilton Beach Company, in Racine, Wisconsin). Adams’ acquisition of these electric mixers ensured the swift mass production of milkshakes — essential for his business concept to succeed (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:15, 63; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:323; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:42–43; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:183).



Black & White 4d. Milk Bar interior; 24 Martin Place, Sydney, NSW, 1934

The service or fountain bar of the milk bar with its soda fountain pumps and straw dispensers. On the mirrored back bar are the milkshake mixers (manufactured by the Hamilton Beach Company, in Racine,

Wisconsin, USA) which would whisk the refreshment’s ingredients. The service bar, designed by Adams, had refrigerated storage capacity for 50 gallons (almost 230 litres) of milk in addition to fruit juices. Note the limited seating capacity.

Photo courtesy L. Keldoulis, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

The milkshake is purported to have appeared in Australia well before Adams' milk bar. By 1900, milkshakes — composed of vanilla powder, cold milk, and water — were being sold at street stalls, pubs and emporiums in Sydney. During the very early 1930s, milkshakes were selling for ninepence (9c) per glass. Adams solidly undercut this price by over 50% — the 4d. (fourpence – 4c) in the business' title indicated the cost per glass. Ice cream was not one of the drink's original key ingredients, even during Adams' time. It was a component that was later added. Adams' milkshakes included a variety of ingredients other than milk and basic flavoured essences, depending on the strength of taste and texture required: varieties of fruit (mostly fresh, some dried), cream, butter, eggs, chocolate, honey, caramel, malt, and yeast. Two flavoured milkshakes became quite popular: the banana milk cocktail, and "bootlegger punch", the latter of which contained a dash of rum essence (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:15–16, 62–63; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011: 323–324; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:43–45; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004: 185–186).

On the first day of opening five thousand customers are reported to have crowded into Mick Adams' milk bar, and as many as twenty-seven thousand per week then began to patronise the establishment (*The Milk Messenger*, 1935:30; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1932; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:16; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:324; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003:7). Such was the success that Adams soon established a "chain" of Black & White milk bars: Brisbane and Melbourne in 1933; Adelaide initially in 1934 and a second in 1936; Wollongong, New South Wales, in 1937; and a second outlet in Sydney at Town Hall Railway Station in 1944 (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:16, 62–63, 66; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:324; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:43; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004: 183–184).

Adams' modern "American-style" milk bar certainly succeeded in leading the way to dramatically popularising the milkshake as a leading refreshment beverage, nationally — by 1937 some four thousand milk bars were operating in Australia. Within a year of Adams opening his original Black & White 4d. Milk Bar in Martin Place, Sydney was bursting with milk bars — most were Greek-run. At the time, social commentator W. Robert Moore clearly recognised the increasing American influence in Sydney's catering establishments: "American institutions have touched the city. Milk Bars, or soda fountains, fruit-juice stalls and light lunch restaurants have become popular". Moreover, many Greek-run

milk bars, soda/sundae parlours and cafés, had embraced Americanisation even in name: such as, the “Niagara”, the “Monterey”, the “Californian”, the “Hollywood” and the “Golden Gate”. Today, Nicholas Fotiou’s Olympia Milk Bar, located along Parramatta Road in Sydney’s inner-western suburb of Stanmore, is the last of the authentic, original milk bars from this era; it was established in 1939 (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:16, 234–235; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2011:325; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:37–38, 43; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004: 180, 183; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1956:24).



Olympia Milk Bar; 190 Parramatta Road, Stanmore, Sydney, NSW, 2015

The Olympia Milk Bar opened in 1939. Next door (heading west along Parramatta Road) was the Olympia De-Luxe Picture Theatre. Both did a roaring family trade until the very early 1960s. The theatre then succumbed to the challenge of television and was converted into a roller skating rink. While in the early 1950s its proprietor was a Greek recorded as J. Aliyianis, by the close of the decade, brothers John and Nicholas Fotiou from the island of Lemnos, had taken over. Whilst the Olympia’s “use by” date has long past, a now elderly Nicholas Fotiou has remained — though the business is no longer trading. The Olympia is the last of Sydney’s authentic, original milk bars of the 1930s.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians” National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

During the 1930s and 1940s the Americanisation of Sydney's Greek-run eateries was also being clearly reflected in their architectural style, their symbiotic embrace of cinema, and the introduction of a music component. The architectural Art Deco style from the United States, known as Californian Streamline Moderne, became the popular choice of Sydney's Greek food-caterers when refurbishing their business. It was locally referred to as the "Hollywood style", the "American style", the "ship style", the "ocean liner style" and the "P & O style", and strongly favoured the curvilinear in contrast to the angular interest of European Art Deco. New cinema constructions in Sydney and its suburbs also adopted the style and many Greek food caterers quickly recognised that a working relation with picture theatres would prove commercially profitable. Some Greek food caterers became cinema operators — such as Victor Margetis, Nicholas Laurantus, Alex Coroneo and Peter Sourry — and Greek-run cafés and milk bars began to concentrate around, or placed themselves directly within, picture theatre complexes. Stanmore's Olympia Milk Bar abutted the Art Deco Olympia De-Luxe Picture Theatre, George Poulos' Rio Milk Bar in Summer Hill was a short distance from the Grosvenor Picture Theatre and even as late as the 1970s, the Zinonos family was operating a milk bar next door to the Randwick's Odeon Picture Theatre. Kings Picture Theatre on Liverpool Road in Sydney's inner-western suburb of Ashfield was built in 1937 in the Streamline Moderne style and featured Kings Milk Bar as part of the complex — Jack and Kath (née Kolantgis) Capsanis ran the milk bar from the early 1950s through to start of the 1980s. The union of Greek food-catering enterprises and cinemas offered the tastes, sights and glamour of "Hollywood" to Sydneysiders and became a metaphor for modernity. Moreover, the union was a further development of the working relationship between food and fantasy that had initially been instigated through the soda fountain, and again, such a development had been experienced by Greek-American food-caterers, who had conveyed its commercial success in the United States to relatives and friends in Sydney (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016:16–18, 231, 234–235; Alexakis & Janiszewski, 1995:117; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2003/2004:188–190; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:47–49; Capsanis, 1989; Poulos, 2014; McInnes, 2010; Bogle, 2013/2014:8–10).



The Orion Café featuring an early jukebox; 249 Liverpool Rd, Ashfield, Sydney, NSW, late 1940s

George Andrews (Andrew), who had been born in Famagusta, Cyprus, in 1907, was the proprietor of the café at the time. He had arrived in Australia in 1927. The Orion featured an Art Deco facade, soda fountain counter, confectionery counters, booth seating, and perhaps most significantly for the time, a jukebox (which can be seen directly behind the two male customers).

Photo courtesy A. Andrew, from the "In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians" National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

By the early 1940s, influenced by American servicemen on leave during World War II, jukeboxes (Wurlitzer and Seeburg models) began to appear in Sydney's Greek cafés and milk bars. Because of the American inspired elements in these enterprises, US military personnel considered them as a little piece of "home town America". For Americans on leave, a good night out was one spent with a date at a milk bar or café dancing to jazz and swing music, intermittently interrupted by the refreshing, revitalising consumption of soda drinks, milkshakes, ice cream sundaes and, if desirous of something more substantial, hamburgers (which had appeared by the late 1930s). American and British popular music were heard in Sydney's Greek food-catering enterprises, well before their broad acceptance by the city's commercial and government radio stations. The jukebox trend continued after the war, with catering concerns such as George Andrews' Orion Café in Ashfield maintaining its local popularity

During the early 1940s, up to 3,000 Greeks resided in Sydney and its suburbs. After the war, with the signing of a migration agreement with Greece in 1952, Hellenes arrived from all areas of their homeland, swamping over time, Sydney's traditional chains of Greek migration from Kythera, Kastellorizo and Ithaca, as well as, eventually, the numerical predominance of single Greek men. Whilst Greek food-catering enterprises persisted – some such as Sam Akon's (Economopoulos) two Patricia's milk bars being instrumental in the move towards today's espresso café culture – by the late 1960s and early 1970s, most were being swamped by new economic realities and job diversification. However, Sydney's early Greek food caterers had well succeeded in transferring aspects of modern American culture to one of Australia's leading urban centres. The transference of popular American rather than traditional Greek culture may have been reinforced, at least in part, by the racial intolerance of the host society – though during the second-half the twentieth century, this too began to change, and the tastes and smells of Greek cuisine became integral elements of the city's culinary landscape (Janiszewski & Alexakis, 1995:30; Janiszewski & Alexakis, 2008:53–54; Alexakis & Janiszewski:21–22, 79, 193–247; Teo, 2003:152–153).

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