

The Cretan's Fraternity "The White Mountains" Since 1928

The Cretan's Fraternity "The White Mountains", Inc. was established in 1928 in New Brunswick, New Jersey and has evolved into a non-profit, philanthropic, social, cultural and educational organization. Since its inception, the chapters' great tradition and history of warm and gracious hospitality, *Philoxenia*, to its members, friends and community at large has been its hallmark. At its root, philoxenia meant more than just hospitality. For the "The White Mountains", Philoxenia meant a responsibility that one had to his fellow man whether a friend or a stranger.

The Cretans' Fraternity "The White Mountains", Inc began in the spring of 1928 when three Cretan men, Mr. Stilianos Keranakis, Mr. Vasili Troulakis and Mrs. Nicholas Zaharioudakis, met at a local coffee house at 74 Dennis Street in New Brunswick with an idea of unity. On this particular afternoon the men were deeply concerned about the welfare of so many newly immigrated men and families who were having great difficulty in establishing themselves in a new land. Times were difficult for most people during the late 1920's, the beginning of the Depression. Work was difficult to find. For those men and women having just immigrated to the United States, assimilating to a new culture and language was challenging. Not having family and friends near for comfort and support only added to the day to day difficulties. Fellow Cretans would rally and go door to door in their community to collect donations in hopes of helping those in need of care.

These serious circumstances brought forth the true spirit of Philoxenia in the Cretan Community of New Brunswick. "The White Mountains" mission was to provide support and aid to fellow Cretans during unexpected emergencies in an organized and unified manner. During the early years the chapter was at the side of many needy Cretans in the United States and on the great island of Crete. As the association grew, a building was purchased at 25 Church Street, New Brunswick for meetings and social gatherings. The association's mission has evolved and has expanded into a non-profit, philanthropic, cultural, social and educational association. Yet the fervent responsibility to come to the aid of those in need remains and now extends throughout the immediate community, New Jersey, the United States, the island of Crete and Greece.

In January of 1942 the White Mountains chapter under the presidency of Mr. Keranakis, voted to join the Pan-Cretan Association of America (P.A.A.) by motion of Mr. Alifierakis. The vote was 4 against and 17 in favor of the union to the PAA which lasted well over 20 years. Our chapter shares PAA's mission, goals and objectives some of which are:

-To promote and develop social and cultural relationships among Cretans and descendants residing in America. To promote and develop education, raise and distribute funds to recognized philanthropic, charitable and educational institutions.

The Cretan pioneers of our chapter were ambitious and always striving to better their lives, turning challenges into opportunities. In 1973 they sold the building in New Brunswick and later purchased a property in North Brunswick with the hope and dream of building a new home. In 1996 the White Mountains chapter purchased what is known today as the "Kritiko Spiti" and the chapter's headquarters at 1152 Raritan Avenue, Highland Park, New Jersey.

Every two years the PAA convenes a weeklong National Convention. During the week of June 30-July 7, 2001 our Chapter was given the great honor and responsibility of organizing the

37th Biennial PAA National Convention under the Presidency of Mr. Antonios Kalogridis and the Board. The theme of our convention was: “100 Years in the United States and the Cretan Legacy Continues..”. During the convention we reflected back on our pioneering past and projected forward connecting our present and future. We honored our courageous Cretan pioneers who brought to the US the ideals of freedom, democracy, honor and courage, hard work and dedication to family, community, and country. We honored our present through those individuals who have cultivated these noble ideals ensuring that the Greek and Cretan legacy is projected into the new millennium with the same vitality as when brought to the United States 100 years ago. Finally we honored our future, our Youth, in events marked by their dance performances, passion for their heritage, education and culture. Appreciating the values of our culture, our Chapter hosted a first of its kind and uniquely beautiful concert honoring “100 years of Cretan Music and Hospitality”, held in Atlantic City, on December 2000. This concert was dedicated to the Masters of Cretan Music and was showcased by the talented and renown musicians Haralambos Garganourakis, Demetris Skoulas and Nikos Karavirakis and narrated by Georgos Vitoros. This paved the way for president, Mr. Themistoklis Fiotakis and the Board, in close cooperation with the PAA’s Culture & Education Committee and its chairman Mr. Panayiotis Psarakis, to embark with great zeal on a mission to disseminate our culture. Several great cultural events were hosted by our chapter like “Cretan Theatre play” with actors from Crete, the first in US “Cretan Dance & Costumes Symposium”, the concert “Christianity in Crete through the Ages”, reviving the “Kalanda” tradition and other cultural events. The White Mountains promises many more cultural events that tie our Greek Orthodox Religion, Language, Customs and Traditions that mark and define our status within our Greek culture.

What has always been prevalent in the work of our Cretan chapter is the focus and dedication to the members of all ages and in particular to the youth and our future. As our chapter celebrates PAA’s 75 years of Cretan Spirit and Pride we hope that you all carry the hope, dream and marvel of our Cretan inheritance in your hearts forever.

*Information gathered was based on research from recorded documentation available.