



ANDOVER  
CENTER  
FOR  
HISTORY  
& CULTURE

97 Main Street, Andover, MA  
AndoverHistoryandCulture.org

# CONNECTIONS

Connecting you with the Andover stories you help save

*Thank you for helping share a story that needs to be told.*



## Inside Your Spring 2021 Newsletter

- ~ Finding home after escaping genocide
- ~ Rediscovering the Heroine of Sivas
- ~ Why We Give, walking tours, and more

Mrs. Ovegen Arakelian

# Finding home after escaping genocide

*It's a story that needs to be shared. Thank you for helping keep their story alive.*

Armenians had been living in Turkey for centuries when the tide turned against them. At the start of World War I Turkish authorities believed that the Armenian minority was conspiring with Europeans against the Turks. A devastating military defeat along the Russian border was blamed on Armenian soldiers, who were disarmed and murdered. At the same time, other groups attacked Armenian villages. Mass deportations to desert refugee camps began in April 1915.

Hundreds of thousands of people died during the march and in the camps. Many Armenians emigrated to other countries, including the United States.

## West Andover was one destination

Ovegen and Rose Sarkesian escaped Turkey and came to America around 1915. They bought a farm in west Andover near farms owned by 4 or 5 other Armenian families all from their same hometown. The Armenian farms became a very important part of the Andover we know today.

Ovegen's son Sarkis Sarkesian talked with the History Center about how hard life was for his parents and their generation of farmers. Sarkis recalled the men shoveling snow from the streets, working for the WPA, and in Andover's factories all while maintaining their farms.

Like much of New England, Andover was once a farming community, and as recently as the 1930s there were 130 farmers in Andover. Today, there is just one working farm left in Andover.

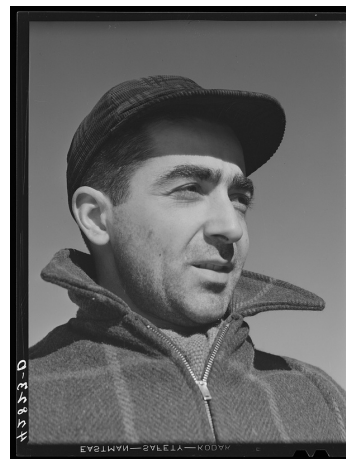
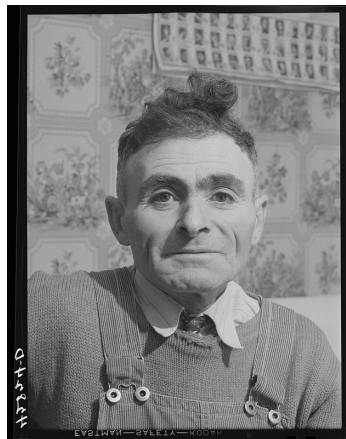
As much as we might mourn the loss of Andover's farms, farming was a hard way to earn a living. Sarkis Sarkesian and his generation worked to send their children to college rather than into farming.

**Thank you for helping keep this story alive now and for future generations.**

In 1941, the Federal Works Progress Administration sent a famous photographer, Jack Delano, to document the Armenian community in West Andover. The entire collection of photographs can be viewed on the Library of Congress website. Search for West Andover at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).



Works Progress Administration photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Ovegen Arakelian. Life wasn't easy for Andover's farmers. Although the Arakelian family owned an 11 acre vegetable farm, family members still found work elsewhere.



Clockwise from upper left: WPA photographs of Ovegen Sarkesian, unidentified woman, Hazar Loosigian, Amos Asoian



# In the face of terror, she refused to leave her post

## *With your help, the Heroine of Sivas' story is told*

**Mary Graffam** grew up in Andover. She was a member of the South Church and a graduate of Punchard High School. While attending Oberlin College, Mary decided to become a missionary. Her goal to work in Japan was delayed six years as she worked as a teacher to pay off her school debts.

In 1901, at age 31, she accepted a post in Sivas, Turkey, where her sister and brother-in-law already worked as missionaries.

Mary worked for 20 years as a missionary in Sivas. In 1910, after a trip home to raise money and awareness, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions appointed her principal of the mission's girls' school.

Mary was fluent in Armenian, Turkish, German, and French, and taught algebra, geometry, trigonometry, music, and domestic science.

**From April 1915 until her death in 1922 at age 50, Mary worked to save the Armenians of Turkey.**

When war broke out not far from Sivas, Mary joined a group of relief workers that included a doctor, a pharmacist, and Red Cross nurses, such as Mary.



*An article in the Kansas City Times, November 1919, described how Mary acquired a large estate for her orphanage and school.*

When she returned to Sivas four months later, the city was a different place. Typhus raged. Arrests and deportations had begun. Families were desperate.

Mary appealed to the local Sivas authorities to stop the deportations, but was refused. Out of desperation, she announced that if they would not stop, she would join her Armenian friends on their journey.

She later recorded the harrowing five days traveling with the deportees in August 1915. Walking under the harsh sun with no food or water, many died along the way. At other times, villagers attacked the deportees, stealing everything of value.

Finally, authorities would let her go no further and she watched helplessly as her students, friends, and colleagues walked by.

Mary returned to Sivas to run an orphanage. A 1919 article described how Mary had been offered a large estate by a local Sivas authority. She accepted the offer for the orphanage. Upon visiting Constantinople to confirm her rights to the property, she learned that the previous owner was none other than Kaiser Wilhelm II.

## **The Andover family that introduced generations of Americans to yogurt**

Sarkis and Rose Colombosian came from Armenia in 1922. His parents gave them a milk route as their wedding present. They named their goat and cow farm Wild Rose Dairy.

Founded in Andover in 1929, Colombo & Sons Creamery would provide many Americans their first taste of yogurt. Early batches were cooked over a wood stove using Rose's traditional Armenian recipe.

The family filled eight-ounce glass jars by hand and delivered them, first by horse-drawn wagon and later by pick-up truck. By 1971, Colombo was the best-selling plain yogurt in America.



*Colombo Yogurt, founded by Sarkis and Rose Colombosian*



The company was sold to a French company in 1977, then to General Mills in 1993 which stopped production in 2010.

**With your help, important, thought-provoking stories like these will continue to inform, inspire, and instruct. Thank you!**

# Paul and Dana MacKay on "Why We Choose to Be Sustaining Members of the Andover Center for History & Culture"



## Why We Give

The key to preserving our past lies with educating the next generations and knowing the past opens the door to the future.

The Andover Center for History & Culture celebrates Andover's unique and vibrant history and helps us build and preserve our community. ACHC is a cornerstone of the community, serving as a gathering place that tells the collective story of our beautiful town. It educates residents and visitors alike, offering a glimpse into the lives, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of those who have come before us and to foster a sense of pride and inspiration for future generations.

We have chosen to be sustaining members of the ACHC because we know by giving monthly the ACHC has a reliable source of income throughout the year allowing it to plan and execute programs and events more efficiently and effectively. We encourage other donors to join us as sustaining members in giving what you can on a monthly basis, whether it be the cost of a Starbucks coffee or more, to help the ACHC make a greater impact in their mission of connecting us with our local history to enrich all of our lives.

~Paul & Dana MacKay

**Sustaining members set up a recurring monthly donation by credit card or ACH payment. You can learn more here [AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/monthly-giving](https://AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/monthly-giving)**

**Thank you to Dana, Paul, and all our Sustaining Members!**  
**Because of you, the History Center will continue to dig deep into stories that are difficult to research.**

## We're back!

**Adding more wags to our walks...**

**Hitting the pavement....**

**And getting outside.**

**Will you join us for a walking tour?**



Shawsheen Village

Central Street

Main Street

Historic Mill District

History Hounds

and coming soon....Ballardvale!



Visit [AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/walking-tours](https://AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/walking-tours)  
and [AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/history-hounds](https://AndoverHistoryandCulture.org/history-hounds)

## For more information about the stories in this Connections

**America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915**, edited by Jay Winter, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Chapter 7, Suzanne E. Moranian, "The Armenian Genocide and American missionary relief efforts."

Chapter 8, Susan Billington Harper, "Mary Louise Graffam: witness to genocide."

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*A gift in your will is a wonderful way to leave a legacy and help preserve Andover's history. Please consider adding a gift in your will for the Andover Center for History & Culture. Please reach out to Marilyn Helmers, [mhelmers@andoverhistoryandculture.org](mailto:mhelmers@andoverhistoryandculture.org)*