

Katerina Stephanova Tsilka

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INSTITUTE *for* ALBANIAN & PROTESTANT STUDIES





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EARLY LIFE

The eldest daughter of Dimiter and Elena (Mandieva) Stephanov was Katerina, whose birth in the village of Bansko, Macedonia occurred between 1868¹ and 1870² although one source shows 1871, and two others show the year of her birth as 1873.³ Her birthdate appears to have been April 23rd.

According to a memoir she composed late in life, some of her earliest memories were of the events surrounding what was later termed the 1878-1879 Kresna-Razlog Uprising, a valiant, but failed attempt of Macedonians to throw off the yoke of Turkish occupation. This effort that had been successfully achieved by their Bulgarian kinsmen during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, but Macedonia remained under Turkish rule for another three decades.

¹ Cornell University Alumni Association Questionnaire, completed 28 May 1933, by Skender Gregor Tzilka; copy in possession of Dr. Richard M. Cochran, Big Rapids, MI.

² Marriage Record #8775, Gregory M. Tzilka to Katherine Demeter Stephanova, (1900) issued by Bureau of Records, County of New York, State of New York. This record was signed by Katerina, and states she was then 30 years old (born 1870).

³ Death Certificate #830, Katerina Cilka, (1952) issued by the Albanian Bureau of Vital Statistics, Tirana, certificate issued 29 Jun 1992; copy in possession of Dr. Richard M. Cochran, Big Rapids, Michigan. This record lists her birth year as 1871. The 1900 U.S. Census, 54 Eighty-Third St., Borough of Manhattan, New York Co., New York, ED 513, Sup Dist 1, Sheet 16b, 9 Jun 1900; digital copy seen on ancestry.com [82/212 Stephanove, Kate, boarder, b. --- 1873, 27 years old, single, b. Turkey/Turkey/ Turkey; immigrated to America 1892; nurse] Note: Katerina was among 18 boarders with Miss Aliza[s] Lapham, b. Apr 1847 NY/NY/Canada; one of the other boarders was Lucy Ryder, b. 1875 VT/VT/VT who is mentioned in some of the correspondence following her abduction. Katerina is also listed as born in 1873 in the passenger list of the ship that transported her and her family to America in 1903: Manifest of Passengers on the S.S. Patricia, sailed from Cuxhaven, April 4, 1903 and arrived at New York on April 16, 1903; printed page 50, line 25. Available at ellislandrecords.org and ancestry.com.



The events that directly affected the citizens of Bansko was recalled by American missionaries in 1893 as part of a series of *Notes and Reminiscences of Insurrection and War*:⁴

The occupation of Bulgaria by the Russians and the treaty of San Stefano did not end the woes of Bulgarians. Macedonia was to have its share of suffering. Restless spirits in many places were ready for any thing that gave hope of freedom, and bands of adventurers, some of whom were daring mountain brigands, incited and aided, it is said, by foreign influence and money, were ready to light the torch. Such a band entered the Razlog district, during the fall of 1878, and took possession of Bansko, its largest town, and from sympathy or fear, were joined by a considerable number of inhabitants who, from behind the heavy walls about the surrounding gardens and fields, were able to defend the place against all the available forces which could be sent against them from the government headquarters at Mehomia. The insurgents were however shortsighted in their plans. A strong body of regular troops soon arrived from Nevrokop, on the south and surrounded the village of Banya. Many of the Bulgarian inhabitants of this place went out to oppose them but were quickly overpowered and soon their homes were in flames. Men, women, and children left all, and, with little but the clothing upon them at the time of the attack, fled to the mountains pursued and cut down by the troops. A large part of the Bulgarian dwellings were consumed.

From their higher locality the people of Bansko saw the fight, the flight, and the flames. They had no hope of successfully contending with regular troops and they too fled. Some went to the lofty Pirin mountains whose base is close to the town, but the larger part took the paths leading through the valleys and over the mountains to the N.W. toward Djumaya. All night long many feeble and weary ones, walking and then resting, pressed on to reach a place of safety. Some were two or three days in going a distance of nine hours. In one of the wooded valleys the mountain robbers fired a few shots toward the fugitives calling out "The Turks, the Turks." Consternation seized the refugees. They threw away the clothing and valuables which they had taken for the flight, for life was dearer than all else. Mothers even threw away their infant children, some of whom were crushed to death by the iron hoofs of the horses which were being urged on by their frightened

⁴ *Missionary News from Bulgaria*, Samokov, Bulgaria #45, July 27, 1893, p. 4.



owners. Many villages and hamlets to the S. W. of Bansko were involved in this uprising, and their inhabitants also fled to Djumaya.

Mr. Palgrave, the English Consul in Sophia, visited this place soon after the flight and reported to us that over 10,000 fugitives had come in to Djumaya, of whom about 4000 remained in the town and surrounding hamlets. The others scattered to different parts of Bulgaria but were most numerous in Dubnitsa and the nearer places.

Among these fugitives were a large part of the members and congregation of the Evangelical church in Bansko, the largest of all the Bulgarian Evangelical churches. Mr. Palgrave urged us to do what was in our power for the relief of the refugees who must suffer much during the severe cold of winter.

A scholarly summary of the uprising, based on Macedonian source materials, was published in English in 1979.⁵ Specific mention of the 1878 invasion of Bansko was included:

Parallel with combat operations in the Kresna area, on 8/20 November the Uprising flared up in the Bansko-Razlog hollow. The volunteers' *cheta* of Baniu Marinov (born in the town of Teteven in northern Bulgaria), a former revolutionary and member of the Bulgarian Volunteers' Corps which was joined by dozens of local insurgents, played an important role. After bitter fighting, the *cheta* succeeded in taking the town of Bansko, but the *voevoda* was gravely wounded. The village of Bania became the second center of the Uprising in the Bansko-Razlog hollow, where the insurgents from the village of Gorno and Dolno Draglishte, Godlevo, and Debursko concentrated. They successfully defended themselves for several days. However, due to certain weaknesses, such as the substitution of Major L. Voitkeevich for Baniu Marinov and the numerical supremacy of the adversary, the insurgents were routed. Hundreds of women, children and old men fell as victims to the *bashi-bazuk* atrocities. This forced a large mass of refugees to start for the territory of the Principality [note: Bulgaria]. Among them were Georgi Dimitrov's parents. [note: Georgi Dimitrov was Bulgaria's long-reigning Communist leader.]

In her own words, Katerina's personal memoir brought an eye witness perspective to that fearsome time. She recalled that:

⁵ Doinov, D. "The 1878-79 Kresna-Razlog Uprising" in *Southeastern Europe*, vol. 6, pt. 2 (1979), pp. 223-232; quoted material appears on pp. 228-229.



A BASHI-BAZOUK.

One Sunday morning in 1879 [actually November 1878] father left home very early in order to be in time for the first church service. Nearing a square he was surprised to see a crowd of armed men who told him to take his family and run to the mountains, since a big force of "Bashi-bazouks" (irregular Turkish soldiers) was approaching, killing everybody on their way.

Father took my younger brother in his arms, mother held her three-week baby and told me to follow, holding her skirt, and thus we started running toward the mountains. Although the silence was almost complete, we saw many people running, as we did, for their safety. I felt sleepy and tired from the very beginning, stumbled and fell down, but was immediately up again and running uphill as in a nightmare.

Thus we ran many hours, until finally we stopped at a place where immediately I fell asleep to wake up only the next morning and see the sun pouring through

the trees on a miserable crowd of silent men, women staring at nothing, and children whimpering for the hurts received from stumbling and falling during their flight.

We stayed in the mountains for two days during which time the Turks had sacked the town and killed many of those who had not succeeded in escaping. Father lost all his movable property, but that was easily forgotten since none of the family had lost his life. After several months order was restored and life resumed its usual course for most of the families.



The flight of the Stephanov family to safety must have been an often-repeated family story. Katarina's younger brother, Professor Constantine Stephanove, mentioned it to the English journalist, John MacDonald, and the Englishman included it in his dispatch printed in the March 30, 1903 issue of the London *Daily News*:

One morning, while we were strolling through the bazaar at Serres, Stephanoff suddenly stood still before an inn gateway, into which a countryman was leading his mules laden with merchandise of all sorts. They stared at each other, the young man and the old. They grasped each other hands affectionately, exchanged a few words and parted. It was Stephanoff's uncle, from Bansko. After ten years they scarcely recognized each other. With the Zaptiehs about, they did not venture to be more demonstrative. "In 1879," said Stephanoff, "when I was three years old, and when my father and mother and the rest of us, fearing a massacre in Bansko, fled to Philippopolis, it was my uncle who carried me on his back across the mountains. The scar on his lip was made by the knife of one of three Bashi-Bazouks who attempted to rob him and a small company of his fellow-traders returning home from market." So it still is the same Macedonia--only twenty-four years nearer its end.

EDUCATION AND THE MISSIONARIES

Katerina's memoir tells what happened next, once the family returned to Bansko to resume their life in the aftermath of the confrontation:

A few months later Father had to leave us for two weeks in order to renew the stock of goods he used to keep in his shop. When he came back he surprised the neighbors that came to welcome by saying: "It is time our women in Bansko begin to learn to read and write; they have remained ignorant like animals. I shall make the start. I have decided to send my only daughter to school next year. People may laugh at her at first but later they will envy her. Yes, next year she goes to school."

So, early one October morning I took a piece of wood under my arm and started for school. It was the custom that every child should carry a piece of wood every morning in order to keep the iron stove of the classroom burning. Father and mother stood at the gate and watched me go. I had not been before in a school and wondered what it looked like. In the school yard I saw what seemed to me hundreds of boys playing and shouting to the top of their voices. I stopped at the gate and could not make up my mind to enter, so afraid I was of boys. Luckily one of them who happened to be my cousin saw me and led me by the hand through the crowd of boys, who now stopped their games and came to stare at me. By and by he took me to the teacher and explained to him who I was. The teacher, instead of receiving me kindly, looked at me with disgust and said: "So, you want to be a learned woman, or maybe a teacher?" After a few more such remarks he led



me to a bench already occupied by two giggling boys who had to squeeze in order to make a place for me.

Here I sat for many days in perfect misery. As soon as the teacher turned his back, the boys began to pull my hair, to pinch me and to tease me in many other ways. The conduct of the teacher himself did not make me any better off. When he asked me to rise to recite the lesson he would stand before me holding a ruler in his hand, look at me steadily and say: "Now, let us see how many whacks you deserve." Invariably I forgot everything I had learned and the ruler struck fiercely at my hands. I would put my bruised hands in my mouth and try to soothe the pain with my breath, then try again only to find out that I was again failing. I was convinced that I was to blame for my incapacity. I tried harder and harder and began to learn all my lessons by heart (often having no idea of their real meaning) but the hateful man refused to be satisfied. I had the impression that he was always on the lookout to find faults.

Once, although I had always been quiet and obedient, he accused me of gross misbehavior and ordered the boys to pass in turn in front of me and to spit in my face. Until then I had endured scolding, threats, and beatings, but this was too much. I could not stand such a disgrace. As the teacher was urging the boys to come nearer, I took advantage of a moment of hesitation, jumped over the benches, ran through the door and kept running until I reached the market place where I knew I was safe. Here I waited until it was time to return home, said nothing to my parents, and went early to bed, not to sleep, but to think what to do next. There was no question of my returning to that school, but my desire to learn was very strong and I had to find a way out of my dilemma. Then I remembered that two girls whom I knew, Maria and Alexandra, went to a school in the upper part of the town and said it was alright.⁶ But it was a Protestant school and as such was condemned by our priests. It was even rumored that the Protestant missionaries put an invisible stamp on anyone they got hold of and claimed his soul after his death.



Missionaries' House, Bansko

⁶ Alexandra was probably Alexandra Kolchagova, daughter of Michael and Marie (Venedikova) Kolchagov, of Bansko. Alexandra's first cousin, Kirafinka Dimitrova Puneva married Katerina's younger brother, Ivan Stephanov on December 20, 1899.



I made my secret plans and the next morning started for school as usual. I followed a small boy who used to go to the new school and when we neared the small school building I stopped him and asked him to tell the teacher to come out because I had to see him. Presently a well-dressed young man came out and with a gentle, slightly amused smile, asked me what I wanted. At first I was unable to say a word, but soon recovered and blurted out: "I want to come to your school!" He took me by the hand, led me to a classroom and put me in a desk next to a girl of about my own age, then left me there until the end of the hour. I had all the time I wanted to watch the room, the furniture, the girls and the teacher and to listen to his voice. Everything seemed so different from the school I had abandoned only a day before, especially the teacher, for whom I felt a great affection and admiration. When the hour was over and the girls had gone out, the teacher took me aside, asked me many questions about myself and said that he would accept me gladly, only I had to have my parent's permission.

So I had to tell my parents and, of course, broke the news first to my mother. She scolded me and complained that through such actions, I was ruining the good name of the whole family. But I insisted and finally she consented to talk to father. He became furious and said he would thrash me to death and that he preferred to see me dead rather than let me go to a protestant school. I pleaded, cried, told him how nice the school was and went on until finally father turned to my mother. He told her I had inherited her stubbornness and always got what I wanted, that I would bring misfortune to the house, but finally gave his permission. Later I realized that he did not feel so strongly against the Protestant school but feared the criticism of his neighbors.





So I went to the new school where I felt perfectly happy, learned quickly, and soon became one of the best pupils. The months passed quickly, one year ended, then another, then it was all over, all too soon. This was an elementary school, and the town had nothing more to offer. But during my last year my teacher had advised me of a secondary boarding school for girls which the Protestant mission had founded several years before in the town of Plovdiv in Bulgaria. This time I did not have to insist too much and obtained my father's consent more easily than I expected.

One September morning all our friends and relatives gathered to see me off, at the same time reproaching my father for sending me so far away (four days' journey on horseback) to which he replied that he had given his word and had to stick to it. I traveled in company with a large group who went to the same destination with different purposes, and after a few days of beautiful mountain scenery, we arrived in Plovdiv and I was led to my school. The teachers and students received me with undisguised curiosity and much kindness and very soon I felt entirely at home.

The influence of the surroundings was so strong that at the end of the first year I desired to become protestant. Not many months later my father and my whole family were converted to the new faith.

My first year in school passed in joy and happiness and I proved very successful in my lessons. The first summer vacation seemed to me a great event. For the first time I felt that I was of some account for my friends and neighbors who came to see me and listened attentively to what I had to say. I felt sure of myself and my future seemed open and serene before me.

Autumn came and I was again ready to go and again I started our horseback rejoined by many other travelers. The second day we were passing one of the most beautiful mountain scenes I ever saw. The narrow path was winding in and out in a forest of pine trees. The ground below was strewn with grass and mountain flowers, the air fresh and excitingly full of the scent of pine resin. Everything seemed full of life and joy. As I was about to dismount and walk, my horse suddenly stopped and I saw a savage looking strange man hold the reins of my horse. I screamed for help but very soon saw that every horse was held by a man and realized that we were being held up by robbers. They took what valuables and money they found on us as well as most of our food provisions, and disappeared. The travelers looked pale and frightened, but somewhat relieved. I had not realized the full extent of the danger and had been more curious than frightened. I had watched the robbers with interest, their dirty, ragged clothes, their heavy cartridge belts, the guns and daggers, their long hair and fierce eyes and marveled at the rapidity with which they acted.

"You were not frightened," said one of the muletiers to me.

"No, I have seen robbers before. This is my second time." I said proudly.

"I hope it is the last," said he. "They are very dangerous and do not think anything of human life. We were very luckily to escape without anyone being killed. That man there is a merchant; he lost



a big knot of gold, but he too, is thankful for his life. Many travelers have been killed at that exact place."

"Well," I said, "I have had my share of robbers and hope to see no more of them."

Because of her later notoriety, Katerina's early life was an object of curiosity in America and several accounts appeared in print. Rev. C. L. Goodrich, of Plainfield, New Jersey, writing in the November 2, 1901 issue of *The Congregationalist and Christian World* (p. 666) recounted this period of her life:

She is the daughter of a Greek priest of Bansko, Macedonia. Her father had such pride in his child that he wished to make her distinguished by doing something for her which other fathers did not do for their daughters. So he sent her to school. But the school was for boys, no girls were expected. The boys made sport of her, the teacher was rude to her--the result was that one day she fled from the school in tears, feeling that she could never go back. But she wished to learn. She knew that in another quarter of the town there was a school whose teacher had been taught in an American mission. Converts of the missions were despised by the members of the Greek Church. Children were forbidden to go near them. But this child found her way thither and stood hesitating without.

The teacher came out to her with a smile and invited her in. There she met only kindness. "It seemed like heaven," to the child. The end of the session came all too soon. That night she dared not confess what she had done. The next day saw her again in the place she had enjoyed so much. But confession had to be made at last, and then her parents, greatly incensed, forbade her to visit the school again. "If I cannot go to that school I will die," was the surprising answer. The next morning she would not rise, she would not eat, not a morsel did she taste that day or the next. With singular determination in a child of eight -- shall we not call it a providentially directed obstinacy, to open the way to a larger life? -- she would not take one morsel of food till her parents were constrained to let her have her way. Soon the teacher wished to know the girl's parents. He called to see them, to the girl's consternation and her father's great displeasure. But with Christian tact he won their good will, and she was allowed to continue her studies unmolested.

When she was thirteen years of age her father arranged for her marriage. The groom had been selected, the ceremony was to take place, but the bride disappeared. With enlightenment beyond her parents and the customs of her land, and with remarkable courage and firmness, she refused to enter into the marriage arrangement. Instead, re-enforced by her teacher's influence, she gained permission to leave home to attend a school of higher grade. Later she graduated from the American Board School at Samokov. And by that time she had won more than intellectual culture--she had won her mother, her brothers and her father to Christ.



In her own writings, Katerina does not mention the marriage arranged for her by her father, but during a visit to Bansko by the creator of this website in 1975, it was the consensus of Katarina's cousin, Milenka Biveva and her two octogenarian aunts, that the young man's surname was Balev, an old Bansko merchant family.

That Katarina had transitioned to a new phase of her life was signaled by a small notice in the August 9, 1892 issue of *Missionary News from Bulgaria* (p. 5):

"The three workers from the Razlog, went horse-back by the mountain pass to the south, the shortest route to Macedonia. They were accompanied by Miss Sandra Kolchagova, who, after doing a beautiful work in her native village of Bansko as one of the teachers of the large school there, goes in September to Philippopolis, to teach the evangelical school; her associate in Bansko, Miss Katerinka P. Stefanova, who has been a whole-hearted worker with Sandra, and her close friend, left, a couple of weeks since, for America, to our great regret."

FIRST JOURNEY TO AMERICA 1892

Katarina's personal memoir does not report the exact date, or the name of the ship she boarded, which brought her to America. However, the 1900 census states she arrived in America in 1892 and given the limited number of people who traveled from Bansko to America in that year, checking through Ellis Island passenger lists, there's little doubt that she is the 23 year old female passenger "Ka. Stefanov" from Bansko, who embarked on the steam ship *Pennland* at Antwerp, Belgium, and arrived in New York on Monday, August 15, 1892.⁷

Having mastered English as a student in Samokov, Katerina would have had an easier time of getting her bearings in New York than many immigrants from Eastern Europe. Had she spent three cents for that day's *New York Times*, she would have read through a barrage of news about politics, strikes, and one story that still resonates today – news that

⁷ Coincidentally, Lucasz Kaczmarek, the Ruthenian great great grandfather of the creator of this website, embarked on this same ship in Antwerp two and a half years later, arriving at Philadelphia on April 22, 1895. Thirty-one years later his granddaughter would become the wife of Katerina's nephew, Dimiter Ivanov Stephanov. Their daughter is my mother.



Lizzie Borden of Fall River, Massachusetts was considered by many to be innocent of the crime that we have come to recall through these familiar couplets:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks.
And when she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one.

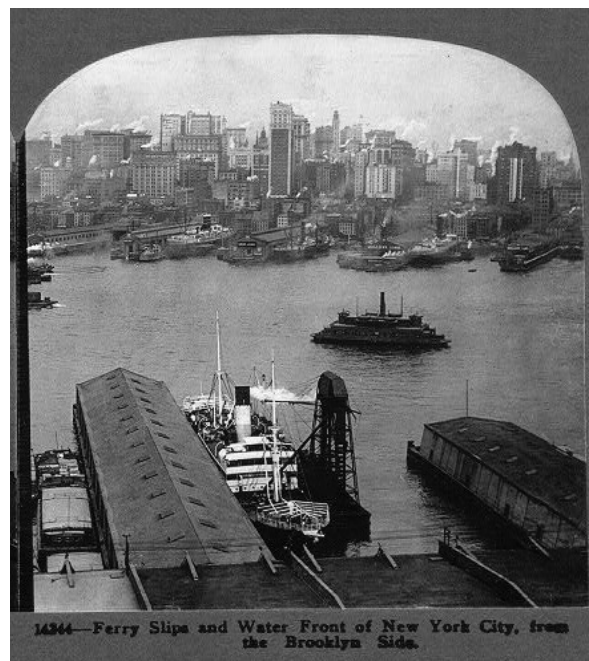


Steerage Deck of the SS Pennland, 1890 and 1893



But Katerina likely paid no heed to the news that day. The sights and sounds of New York were all-consuming. And the East Coast weather that greeted Katerina as she passed through Ellis Island was fine – Hudnut’s Pharmacy on Broadway recorded an average temperature of 71 7/8 degrees on Sunday, and the beginning of the work week was forecast to be just as agreeable.

Katerina’s arrival in mid-August 1892 was especially propitious, for she landed just days ahead of a cholera outbreak which had traveled across Europe to Hamburg and affected passengers bound for America. When the ship *Moravia* sailed from Hamburg on August 17, all was well, but when it arrived in New York harbor on August 30th, twenty-two passengers had already died enroute. A speedily composed presidential proclamation by Benjamin Harrison imposed a twenty-day quarantine on all ships coming from infected European ports.⁸ Several later-arriving immigrant ships belonging to the Hamburg-American Line showed an even higher number of passenger fatalities. The weeks and months following were especially difficult for immigrants from Eastern Europe who were under suspicion of carrying life-threatening disease. Katerina makes no mention of the situation, but a casual perusal of newspapers and magazines published during the autumn of 1892 reveal a growing fear of, and hostility to the newcomers.



14364—Ferry Slips and Water Front of New York City, from the Brooklyn Side.

⁸ “Outbreak of Cholera and Quarantine at New York Harbor.” *Harpers’ Weekly Magazine*, 17 Sep 1892.



But to return to Katerina's memoir:

After my graduation from the American school in Samokov, I went back to Bansko and taught at the very same elementary school which I had left eight years before. During the three years I stayed there I realized that my education was insufficient to satisfy my ambitions and I began to think of going to the United States that I considered to be the source of education and culture. My aim was positively achieved, but not without trial and suffering.

Through the intercession of a former teacher of mine, I was accepted to work temporarily in a private boarding school in New York. In the letters I exchanged with the principal of that school we had arranged to meet at a certain day and hour at the Central Station of New York. In order to be recognized I was to wear a white kerchief tied around my arm.

I traveled with the money I had saved during my work as a teacher, which was just sufficient to bring me to New York. I was punctual for the appointment, white kerchief and all, but nobody came to meet me.⁹ For more than an hour I waited there, embarrassed by the crowd, painfully conscious of the few dollars I had in my pocket. Finally I went to a cab, showed the cab driver the address of the boarding school and asked him whether he could take me to it for a dollar. So I was taken to the place, rang the bell, and when the so-called principal appeared I attempted to embrace and kiss her but she drew back and blushed as if annoyed. I swallowed my disappointment and tried to be pleasant but she remained cold and distant.

The address she had given me was a kind of office. After the preliminary exchange of questions and answers she took me to her home and to what was to be my room. It was a pleasant room, nicely furnished, and very soon I forgot all the unpleasantness of the day and went to bed. The next morning I woke up early, put on a nice dress in which I thought I looked suitable for my future functions (I thought I was going to teach). But the stern old lady said it wouldn't do and gave me to put on an old dress in which I looked positively ridiculous. Some girls look well in anything they put on, but this was not my case. Then she told me that for the moment I was to tend to the house, to clean, wash and cook. In brief, I realized that she had taken me not to teach, but to be an ordinary servant. The place was not a boarding school at all; she had three or four girls to whom she gave private lessons, that was all.

For three months that lady treated me like a slave; she spoke to me harshly, fed me poorly, and besides the housework, she gave me to do piles of drawings, when she found I was rather good at it. Later I learned that she sold the drawings.

⁹ Katerina's brothers, Constantine and Nikola were to follow their sister to Ellis Island. Constantine was "Kosta Stefano" a 20 year old native of "Bulgary" who arrived on the SS Westernland from Antwerp, on August 15, 1893. Nikola was "Nikola Stefanoff" a 19 year old native of "Banska" in "Bulgarian Turkey" who arrived on the SS Southwark from Antwerp on September 21, 1897. Presumably Katerina greeted her younger brothers at the pier! Her third brother, Alexander, arrived at Ellis Island on the ship Aurania, on September 10, 1903.



One day, as I was going to a nearby shop, a pleasant-looking lady stopped me and asked me whether I wouldn't like to go to her house right by the corner and have a nice chat together. "I have been watching you some time," she said. "You are a stranger and you do not look well; you do not seem to have any friends, either. Would you like me to be your friend? Could I do anything to help you?" Her manner was so frank and open, her face so gentle that at once I felt I could confide in her unreservedly.

She introduced herself as Miss Austin, asked what my name was, and asked me to tell her everything about myself.

"We know the woman with whom you are staying," she said. "She has had other victims like you. Some of them ran away, we do not know where, some we succeeded in rescuing. She always takes girls who come from abroad, who know nothing about this country, and have no friends and uses them as servants without paying them anything. Won't you stay with us for a while until we find something more decent for you?"

I told her that I had come to America to improve my education, but at the same time I had to find some kind of work for my living. She told me to go to them as soon as I could manage; that same day or the next.

That evening I went back to the old lady, cleaned the house, prepared the table for supper, packed my trunk and waited for her to come home. When I told her that I was leaving, she got very angry, said that I was mean and ungrateful, that I had been left in her charge and she wouldn't let me go. I only smiled. I felt triumphant, but also a little sorry for leaving her alone to her life





D. T. Moody

without joy. But just the same, the following morning, I took my things and went to the Austins.

In my new temporary home I was once again free and happy. They took me to church, to socials and entertainments and treated me as their own child. I was introduced to many people and made new friends who remained such for many years thereafter. I had regained my personal dignity and confidence in my future. In the meantime, Mrs. Austin had arranged for me to go on a scholarship basis to Northfield Seminary in the state of Massachusetts, a kind of junior college where I could get preliminary preparation for teaching, evangelical work, or to continue my education in an advanced school.

The three years I spent in Northfield were years of complete happiness. The founder of the school, Mr. Moody, and its principal, Mrs. Hull were exceptional people, loved by all the students of whom there were 500.

I graduated in 1895 and for the next two years did various kinds of work, trying at the same time to decide what to do next and to arrange something for my further education.

A query to the Northfield Mount Hermon School in 1975 slightly contradicts Katarina's recollection of her sojourn there (the school's records show 1893 to 1896) and the following article appeared in the February 28, 1902 issue of the *Springfield Republican* qualifies that she did not actually graduate from the seminary:

Was Student at Northfield
Mme. Tsilka, Recently Released by Brigands,
Attended Moody Seminary

The people at Northfield have followed with close interest the reports of the captivity and the release of Miss Ellen M. Stone and Mme. Tsilka from the Bulgarian brigands, for Mme. Tsilka was formerly a student at the Moody seminary for young women. Mme. Tsilka (Miss. Katarina Stephanova) was born in Bansko, Macedonia, in 1870, of Bulgarian parents. She was educated in the Greek church, but was converted to Protestantism and joined the Congregational church at Samakov, Bulgaria (sic). Her mother was a member and her father an attendant of the Congregational church at Bansko. Her parents were



farmers, the father selling lace from city to city. Miss Stephanova graduated from the mission school in Samakov, Bulgaria, through which she worked her way. She was six months in the United States before applying for admission to Northfield Seminary. During that time she was engaged in kindergarten work with Miss Coe in East Orange, N.J. Being fond of books and studies, she learned to read and speak the English language in a few months. She entered Northfield seminary in September 1893, at the age of 23, and remained until June, 1896, but did not graduate. From Northfield she went to the Presbyterian hospital in New York city, and became a trained nurse. Her object to coming to the United States was to educate herself for a missionary, to return and work among her people. While a student at Northfield she was engaged to a young Bulgarian, who died in his second year at Union theological seminary.¹⁰ It is understood that she met Mr. Tsilka when engaged as a nurse with a sick person in the Adirondacks, after leaving the

¹⁰ It is virtually certain that Katerina was engaged to Lazarus Konstantine Kuchukoff (1868-1899) who died almost a year before she married Grigor Tsilka. The Obituary Record of Graduates of Amherst College for the Academical Year Ending June 27, 1900, 4th Printed Series, #8 (Amherst, Mass.: The College, 1900) pp. 282-283 includes this sketch:

Class of 1897

LAZARUS KONSTANTINE KUCHUKOFF, the son of Konstantine and Maria G. (Kuchukoff) Obetzanoff, was born at Bansko Razlogg, an out-station of the American Board of Missions, Macedonia, Turkey, March 22, 1868. After the death of his father, who was a Bulgarian, he took the family name of his mother.

About 1884 he was apprenticed to a tailor in Sophia, the capital of Bulgaria. Two or three years later he returned to Bansko, and began to attend the services of the Evangelical church, together with his mother. Both were converted, and united with the church, March 27, 1887. Soon after, through the influence of his pastor, he became a member of the American Collegiate Institute in Samokov, Bulgaria. The third year of his school life, he was drafted into the Bulgarian army, but being a Turkish subject, he deserted, and returned to Bansko in November, 1889. From that time until the summer of 1890 he worked at his trade as a tailor, and on Sundays preached to the small evangelical community at Banya, a village near Bansko.

In 1890 he came to the United States, and was fitted for collage at the State Normal School in Fredonia, N.Y. From September, 1897, to September, 1898 he was a member of the Union Theological Seminary, and from Oct. 6 to the last of December, 1898, of the Junior class in Auburn Seminary. After about two months in the City Hospital, he went, on the advice of his physician, to the Adirondacks, but deriving no benefit from his stay there, through the kind offices of a seminary class-mate he was enabled to make the journey to New York City, in the hope of returning to his native land. He died of consumption, in St. Luke's Hospital in that city, May 30, 1899.

He was a man who commanded the respect and love of those who knew him in college and seminary.



Presbyterian hospital. He was a medical student at the time, or had possibly graduated from the medical college.¹¹

The *Springfield Republican* newspaper article may have garbled the occupations of the two men in Katerina's life – Balev and Tsilka, for Gregory is known to have pursued only his theology studies at the Union Theological Seminary, and then, as a special non-degree seeking student, studying sociology and statistics at Columbia University. But Katerina's memoir generally agrees with what was published. She continued:

I had come to America with the purpose of obtaining such education and knowledge that would help me in my future work in the service of my people in Macedonia. I was gradually convinced that medical training would be the most appropriate for this purpose, but had no opportunity to follow a university medical course. Then some friends advised me to take nurse's training for which no financial means were required. After much hesitation I applied and was accepted at the Training School for Nurses in the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City.

When I was first received by the principal of the school, Miss Anna Maxwell, a tall, dignified woman, serious, with a soft voice and very kind eyes, I was told that perfect discipline and obedience to my superiors and condolence and kindness to the patients were essential if I was to complete the course.

Such was the influence of Miss Maxwell and her personal example that in the life of the nurses "self" did not seem to exist, only the needs of the patients counted.

The nurse's training course lasted three years. After completing it I decided that now the time had come for me to return to Macedonia. That same year (1900) Mr. Grigor Cilka had finished his theological studies in New York City and was making his plans to return to his country. I had known him for a long time, since he too was a graduate of the Samokov school; we had lately become good friends and as he was going to Albania and his country school, had the same fate as mine (both Albania and Macedonia were provinces under Turkish rule), we decided to unite our fortunes and work together. So we married and went to Korce, Albania to work in the school founded by Gerasim Kyrias. This was in 1900.



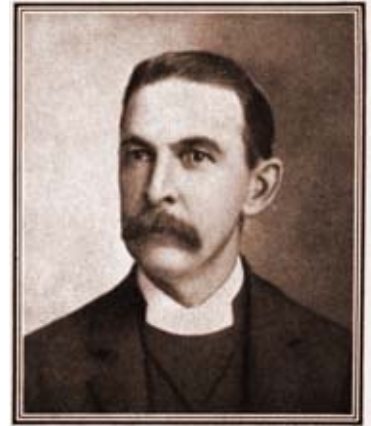
Anna Caroline Maxwell
(1851-1929)

¹¹ Springfield (Mass.) Republican, 28 Feb 1901, p. 7.



As has been pointed out previously, Katerina appeared in the 1900 U.S. Census under the name “Kate Stephanove,” when the census was enumerated on June 9th. She resided in Manhattan with a group of nursing students, at 54 West Eighty-Third St. Technically, though, on the day the census enumerator came to call, Miss Stephanove had become “Mrs. Tsilka.” Gregory and Katarina were married by the President of the Union Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall, at his residence, 700 Park Avenue in Manhattan on May 26, 1900.8]

Interestingly, Gregory has not been located in the 1900 census; at the time of his marriage, he listed his residence as 41 East 69th St. in Manhattan. It's possible that his foreign name may be obscured by some census taker's misinterpretation of his family name. In any event, the couple immediately set out for their return trip to Europe, but it would not be long before they returned as celebrities.



Charles Cuthbert Hall

THE TSILKAS RETURN TO EUROPE, 1900

As winter weather faded at the beginning of 1900, Gregory and Katerina began to think about their return. On March 29, 1900, Rev. Lewis Bond, the American missionary in charge at the Monastir station, with whom Gregory was very well acquainted, wrote back to Boston: “I am in correspondence with a young Albanian, Mr. Gregory M. Tsilka, now in the Senior year at Union Theol. Semry. New York. He is very desirous of preaching to his own people but I am not able to make him any offer. The spirit of his letters is excellent and I judge he would make an efficient worker. I regret that [I] cannot secure his services when the need is so very urgent. Perhaps some church would interest itself in him and his people.”¹²

Bond's subsequent letter to Barton on July 6, 1900 revealed that Gregory's background was not so very different from Katerina's, so far as arranged marriages were concerned. “Mr. Tsilka was engaged to a graduate of the Kortcha school before he went to America”

¹² Ltr, Rev. Lewis Bond, Monastir to Rev. James L. Barton, Boston, dtd 29 Mar 1900, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) Papers, Microfilm Reel 578, Frames 0279-0280.



wrote Rev. Bond. “It seemed to us and to everybody but the relatives of the girl a very undesirable match. Mr. Tsilka had the girl follow him to America to be further educated. While there the flame of love – if there ever was any – died out and by mutual consent the engagement was broken off. Now the girl’s relations here in Monastir and at Kortcha [are] furious. A brother, formerly a member of our church and excommunicated, arrested Mr. Tsilka as soon as he reached Monastir. Under the circumstances it seems that for Mr. & Mrs. Tsilka to work elsewhere for a year at least. We like him and his wife and I hope they will eventually do good work in Albania.”¹³



Gregory M. Tsilka circa 1900

Gregory and Katerina were back in Albania by the end of Summer, 1900. Writing from Samokov to Boston, James W. Baird noted “On account of a law suit, Mr. Cilka cannot leave Monastir vilayet and so has given up his hope of going to Radovish & will work in Monastir field, most probably at Kortcha.” Baird concluded his note with an interesting observation: “There are reports of a rather larger number of deeds of violence than usual, but the efforts of the Bulg. Revolutionary committee may be responsible for much of that. That Committee has brought & will bring only trouble & useless suffering on Macedonia. Perhaps its vain efforts will cause Macedonians to think of a salvation unmixed with political aspirations.”

On August 12, 1900, as she and Gregory waited at Monastir, Katerina wrote to her old mentor in America, Miss Anna Maxwell:

Do not worry about us. We are perfectly happy—both because of God’s love to us and of our devotion to each other. We have been on a missionary tour these last two weeks. The American students were with us too. There were no Christians in that place, so we hired two big rooms and did our own cooking. The principal of the American school and Mr. Tsilka did the dishwashing. Afterwards we had a man and girl to do our work, so we devoted our time to Christian work. On the Sundays I thought Mr. Tsilka would preach himself to death. The place was so crowded that the people had to look over each others’ heads. I have done a good deal of medical and surgical work here. The people are so ignorant of the laws of health! A woman will come to me with a

¹³ Ltr, Rev. Lewis Bond, Monastir to Rev. James L. Barton, Boston, dtd 6 Jul 1900, ABCFM Papers, Microfilm Reel 578, Frames 0282-0283.



baby in her arms. ‘Sick,’ she says, ‘has fever.’ A few questions, and I ask, ‘Do you bathe the baby every day?’ ‘Oh no! no!’ she screams, expecting my approval of her not bathing the baby. My prescription is usually castor-oil, regular feeding, and a bath every day, and in a week’s time the creature is just as bright and happy as any baby in America.¹⁴

Rev. Lewis Bond, writing to Boston on August 13, 1900 declared: “We are very glad to know that there is a possibility of our mission being reinforced with two new families if not with three. If but two come, I fear the Albanians will have to wait. Mr. Tsilka will probably get clear of his difficulty with his would-be brother-in-law very soon now. I hope the way will be open for him to enter the Albanian work a year hence. Our friends in Monastir & Prilep like him very much. And his wife is excellent.”¹⁵

On October 2, 1900, Bond wrote again to Barton and reported: “Mr. & Mrs. Tsilka have entered upon their Albanian work. They will reside for the present – perhaps permanently – at Kortcha... Mr. & Mrs. Tsilka have made an excellent impression here and at Prilep and we anticipate much good from their efforts in Albania. Mrs. Tsilka is handicapped at the start by ignorance of the language, but she is giving herself heartily to the work. I sincerely hope you will not fail to appreciate the £30 which is put in our estimates for past support of Mr. Tsilka. The Seminary have pledged his salary for two years but Mr. Tsilka assures me that no definite sum was named and that a number of those you promised aid conditioned it on their success in securing good pastorates. Of course nothing was given toward their traveling expenses from America...Native agency at this station is in a somewhat hobbling condition.”¹⁶

Katerina’s initial difficulties at Kortcha were reflected in a second surviving letter she wrote to Anna Maxwell:¹⁷

¹⁴ Ltr, Katerina Tsilka to Miss Anna Maxwell, dtd 12 Aug 1900, extracted in “Foreign Department” column, *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 2, #6 (March 1902), p. 473.

¹⁵ Ltr, Rev. Lewis Bond, Resen, Eur. Turkey to Rev. James L. Barton, Boston, dtd 13 Aug 1900, ABCFM Papers, Microfilm Reel 578, Frames 0283-0284.

¹⁶ Ltr, Rev. Lewis Bond, Monastir to Rev. James L. Barton, Boston, dtd 2 Oct 1900, ABCFM Papers, Microfilm Reel 578, Frames 0284-0285.

¹⁷ Ltr, Katerina Tsilka to Miss Anna Maxwell, dtd 21 Jan 1901, included in the “Foreign Department” column, *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 2, #6 (March 1902), p. 473-474.



Kortcha, Albania, Turkey, Europe, January 21, 1901

My dear Miss Maxwell,

Since we arrived here it seems to me as though I have sunk way down into the deep of the sea. Shut in from all communication with the civilized world, no papers, no people of enlightenment. Mail comes only twice a week, and that not to be depended upon, for the postmaster (a Turk) distributes it whenever he pleases. The women are ignorant as goats, for they are not allowed to go out of their houses. They think it terrible for women to be in the presence of men. They must use neither eyes nor mouth. Obedience, and only obedience, is their virtue. All my actions seem wonderful to them. The men treat me very respectfully, even the Turks. Woman is not respected because she is ignorant, and does not know how to respect herself. I have more nursing and doctoring than I can possibly do. There are few doctors, whose diplomas say 'Good only for the East.' That is, they go to a medical school in Athens and study a few things, and then get a diploma with the above statement. You would have smiled if I told you that I was called to a consultation by the doctors here on a case of septicaemia. I do miss nursing under a competent doctor. They are trying to get permission from the Sultan to build a hospital. I do hope that he may grant it, for it will give me a fine chance for training girls how to nurse the sick. There are very interesting cases of sickness. To-day I visited one of the Bey's (or Lord's) houses. Everything about the house was royal, but the women – oh, so blank! They showed me some of their fancywork, and their skill and taste is wonderful. There was a chemise embroidered most wonderfully with gold, and its value is over eighty dollars. I do wish you could visit here sometime. Our line of work is of every kind. My husband teaches a few hours a week in the girls' boarding-school. This school was daily, and this year we decided to make it boarding, and then only we can have the girls at our command, and mould their character and training in the right direction. I plan to start a class in nursing in the school. Besides all these things, I have a house of my own to look after. My health has been perfect. Since I came here I do not know that I have a stomach. The climate is even better than at Asheville, N.C. The only calamity is poverty, and that is because of the terrible rule of the Turks. There are rich mines, but they will not permit their opening. There is so much of which I want to write, but, knowing how busy you are, I shall have to control myself. Let me say that my going to America would have been useless had I not taken the nurse's training – it is of such a help to the people here.

That I am homesick for America I cannot deny, but then I feel strongly that my duty calls me here. I am enjoying my home life, and we are very congenial in our work. Mr. Tsilka is so interested in my work that he plans to take a medical course in America when we come to visit. I have wished to write you long before this, but, as I have said, my time has been simply crowded. Please kindly remember me to Miss L. Welch (I do not forget her), Miss Stone, and Miss McArthur. I do not dare to expect a letter from you, but if I do get one I shall be more than happy.

Very respectfully yours,
Kathrina Stephanova Tsilka



A third letter from Katerina to Miss Maxwell on May 16, 1901 showed that the Tsilkas' work continued to be as arduous as ever:

We have had hard work this year, and it won't be any easier next year. No Christians at all, and training the girls is a terrible job, but, as I have expressed myself while yet in America, I did expect hard work. You know one wishes to accomplish so much in a short time. I want to have the boarding-school well organized and then start my training of nurses, but it will take some time yet. We have no hospitals. This year I have felt so strongly the need of nurses. The world needs more the nurse than the doctor, because the nurse, in many cases, can do the work of a doctor as well as of a nurse. There are a few doctors here, but they are comparatively useless. Their diplomas say 'Good only for the Orient' – that is, their work is not wanted elsewhere. I have had the whole town and surrounding villages come to me for help. Of course, I cannot help all, for I am not a doctor, but I can do good in many cases. I have opened an abscess in the breast and was very successful, so much so that the doctor here reported me to the government, but the government, instead of stopping me, asked me to be a government nurse—that is, to be paid by the government and sent to visit any case they may ask me. But, of course, I told them that my object is not money, but to help the needy. They admired my diploma. It is a very great thing to have a trained nurse in a place like this. There are some very interesting diseases here. There is one which begins with chill and fever, then eruptions at all the joints. If the patient does not eat fish and chicken he recovers, otherwise goes into consumption. This place is very healthy, but the people do not know how to guard against contagious diseases.¹⁸

Speaking of the Tsilka's activities in Albania, upon their return to Europe, the *New York Daily Tribune* of February 19, 1902 (page 9) described them this way:

Mrs. Katherina Stephanove Tsilka...is a native of Albania[!]. During several years which she spent in this country, Mrs. Tsilka took a partial medical course, studied for two years at the Moody Bible School, Northfield, and was graduated as a trained nurse from the Presbyterian Hospital Training School. Just before sailing for her home country last year she was married to Gregory M. Tsilka, one of her own countrymen who had been her classmate in the American Mission School at Salonica [Samokov], Turkey and with whom she had disputed academic honors. Since returning to her country the couple have been located at Kortcha, Albania, in Turkey, where, independent of any board, they have been engaged in active missionary work among their people.

Mr. Tsilka was graduated in 1900 from the Union Theological Seminary of this city, and his classmates, headed by the Rev. Howard A. M. Briggs, president of his class of '00, have endeavored to make themselves responsible for the financial support of their work. At present the interest is centered on the support of five Albanian girls in the school for girls established at Kortcha by Mr.

¹⁸ Ltr, Katerina Tsilka to Miss Anna Maxwell, dtd 16 May 1901, extracted in the "Foreign Department" column, *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 2, #6 (March 1902), p. 474-475.



and Mrs. Tsilka. This institution has forty students, all that the resources permit. It is the only Christian school for girls in Albania. Mrs. Tsilka's efforts have been devoted, since her return, to benefiting her countrywomen physically as well as spiritually. It is her aim to establish a work among the women which shall lead them so as to understand the general laws of health that better sanitary conditions may prevail in their home and that the children may have better hygienic surroundings.

In a letter to a friend in this city not long ago, Mrs. Tsilka gave some insight into her work. She said:

We began in the girls school with three pupils, and have increased the number as money would allow. We feel that little can be done unless the girls are taken from the bad influences of their homes and put under Christian influences and everyday example. If you know any man or woman who would like to give a helping hand to a noble cause, let him or her support a girl in the school. The expense for each, including board, tuition and room, is \$40 a year. Mr. Tsilka is working with and preaching to the people. I am, meanwhile, trying to win their confidence and affection by relieving physical suffering. We are having a hard time, but we know we are needed here and we shall stay and work, and trust God for the rest. The country is beautiful. It is only the people who are not in tune with God. As I go to my patients, Mr. Tsilka accompanies me, as it is not safe for a woman to go alone. The people are so interested in my work of nursing and healing that they occupy nearly all of my time and are beginning to come to me. Our girls in the school are nearly naked. Their clothes are so patched that it is almost impossible to see the original fabric. How often I have thought of the many cast off clothes in America.

It was not obvious from the letters (or the surviving extracts) written to Miss Maxwell, but Katarina was pregnant and sometime in the latter part of the summer of 1901, she gave birth to her firstborn, a baby boy named Victor. As described in a later letter, Victor was baptized by the Tsilka's colleague, Rev. Lewis Bond, probably in Monastir, where the Bond family was stationed. Because she needed to recuperate, had not seen her parents, and Victor was their first grandchild, the Tsilkas decided to travel to Bansko for a short visit. The episode that would forever change the lives of the Tsilkas has already been mentioned, but two letters succinctly introduce what transpired on an early September afternoon in 1901:¹⁹

¹⁹ Ltr, Gregory M. Tsilka to Miss Lucy Ryder, dtd 7 Oct 1901, included in the "Foreign Department" column, *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 2, #6 (March 1902), p. 475.



Salonica, Turkey, October 7, 1901

Dear Miss Ryder:

You will wonder why I am writing to you instead of Katharine, but what follows explains:

On our way from Mrs. Tsilka's home to our work we were surrounded by a large group of armed men -- about twenty-five in number--and carried into the forest. After that they took Miss Stone and my wife. They kept the rest of us all night, and in the morning they were gone, having carried with them Miss Stone and Katharine.

It was pretty nearly one month before we got any answer from them, and now they ask one hundred thousand dollars ransom for both of them. They must be saved soon. Miss Ryder, the friend of my wife, is my friend too, so I confess that she is in the family way of six (?) months. Victor, dear little Victor died. So please do something and collect as much as you can from the nurses and some of the friends, and send it by mail to Salonica, care of Dr. House. There is mail connection with Salonica for money-orders. Enclosed you will find a letter for Miss Bell Judd--I have forgotten her address. Please forward it.

Please tell the story to the following persons: Mrs. Anna Cross, 6 Washington Square, New York City; Mrs. Walton, Munn Avenue, East Orange, N.J., Mr. Kennedy, Presbyterian Hospital, New York City; Mr. Russell Sturgis, Mrs. Kirkner, Plainfield, N.J.

These are some of my wife's friends, whom she wants to know about it, and help if they can with something. Miss Ryder, please pray for the safety of your friend and my wife.

Hoping this will find you well, I am

Respectfully yours,
Gregory M. Tsilka

Miss Ryder received a second letter from the Tsilka's colleague, Rev. Lewis Bond in October 1901:²⁰

Vodena, Europe, Turkey
Miss Lucy F. Ryder, New York

Dear Miss Ryder:

²⁰ Ltr, Rev. Lewis Bond to Miss Lucy Ryder, dtd Oct 1901, included in the "Foreign Department" column, American Journal of Nursing, vol. 2, #6 (March 1902), pp. 475-476.



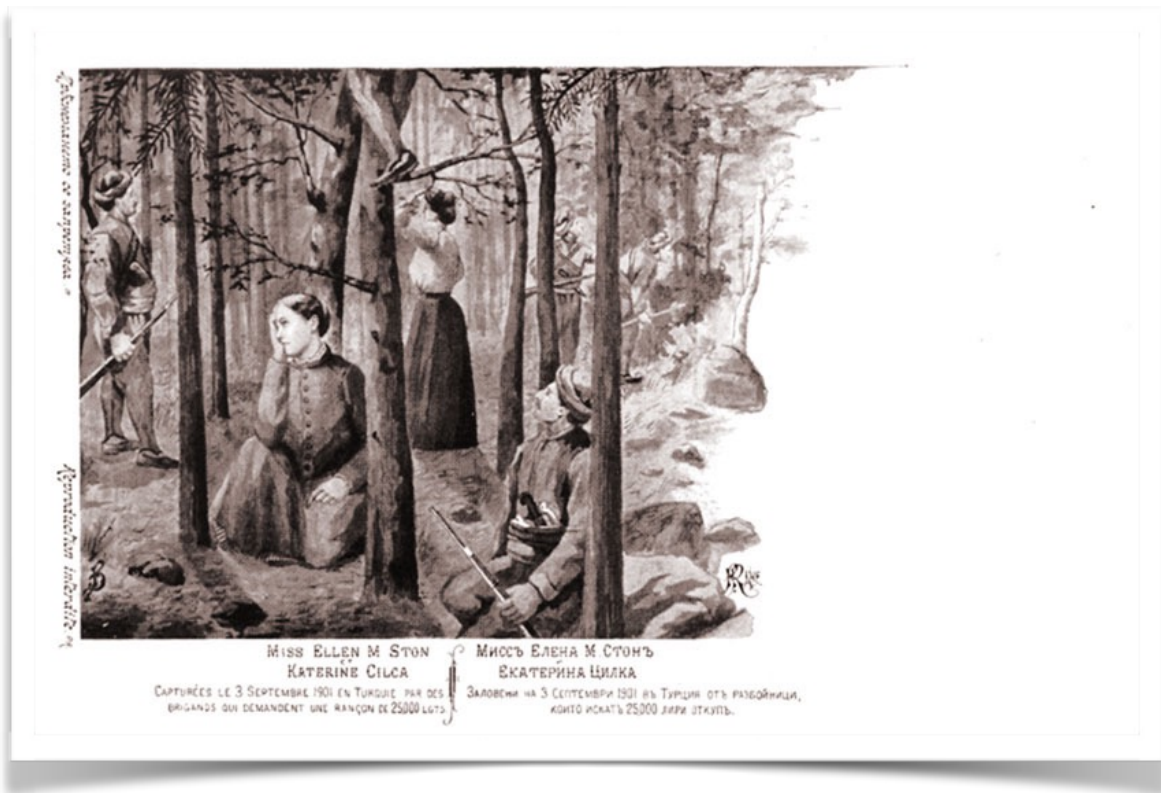
Your letter of September 26 reached me as I was about starting for this place. I wish I could tell you of the release of our dear friend, Mrs. Tsilka, and Miss Stone. However, as to that you would have the announcement in the New York papers quite as soon as we should know it here. Perhaps I may give some items about the capture which have not appeared in print. Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka, Miss Stone, four or five young native lady teachers, our Bible-reader--female-- and several boy students were captured September 3 on the road from Bansko to Djumaya. A little in advance of this party of Protestants was a man on horseback, presumably bound for Djumaya. This man was severely wounded, and our friends were halted by a party of brigands numbering from thirty to fifty, according to the varying estimates. One of the girls says that about fifteen rifles were pointed at them. All were obliged to dismount and go into the woods two or three miles off the road. The wounded man, who seemed to be a Turk, walked with great difficulty, and when they came to a halt he was put out of his misery. The robbers asked for money, watches and other valuables, but did not search pockets or use any roughness with the ladies. Mr. Tsilka, supposing he would be taken captive, managed to pass on to his wife some money, about twenty-five dollars, which he had. First of all Miss Stone, who had been holding a summer-training school with Mrs. Tsilka's assistance, was taken off by herself. Presently Mrs. Tsilka was taken in the same direction. The horse of the Turk and two muleteer horses were taken. One of the brigands came and, looking over a lot of things scattered on the ground, picked out Miss Stone's Bible and, putting it under his arm, walked back. It is supposed that our two sisters were taken during the night to a place of safety. Mr. Tsilka and the others were kept at the halting-place, silence being enjoined. At daylight they found that their guards had disappeared and they returned in sadness to Bansko. The brigands spoke Turkish only, and were very sparing of speech. Some had their faces blackened or wore masks. Some wore Turkish uniform, other Albanian clothing, and a few were attired as shepherds. It is my opinion that they were all Bulgarians. Mr. Tsilka was at Salonica last week and wrote me that he had received three letters from his wife, written, I suppose, at the dictation of the captors to further the getting of the ransom--twenty-five thousand dollars. As to anything further, the papers have published all and more than we know. We are simply praying and waiting. It has been a sad season for Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka. Their beautiful baby boy, Victor, whom I baptized before they started for Bansko, died at the home of Mrs. Tsilka in Bansko. Then Mrs. Tsilka was dangerously ill and started to come to our annual meeting (In the New York Observer of September 19 I have written a short quarantine experience which may interest you.) But we rejoice that our suffering friends are all persons of strong Christian character. No real evil can come to one who is in close touch with Jesus. We pity the brigands and sympathize with the captives. Mrs. Bond is here with me touring. I will pass on to Mr. Tsilka your kind word of sympathy.

THE ABDUCTION OF ELLEN STONE AND KATERINA TSILKA

Mention has already been made of the abduction of Katerina Tsilka with Miss Ellen Maria Stone, the well-known American missionary stationed in the European Turkey. Miss Stone was the object of the abduction, which was devised by Macedonian revolutionaries who hoped to receive a large ransom to finance their insurgency against the Turks.



The six-month ordeal for the two women began on September 3, 1901 and ended nearly six months later, February 23, 1902, after a ransom of \$66,000 raised mostly in America, had been paid. It was Katerina's misfortune to have been at the wrong place, at the wrong time. But her innocence and pregnancy added poignancy to the whole episode, and the story was followed closely in the press, and millions of readers around the world.



Contemporary Postcard Depicting the Plight of the Miss Stone and Madame Tsilka

Newspaper accounts of the prolonged negotiations with the captors appeared in virtually every city of the country, and after the women were freed, the Stone-Tsilka kidnapping was recalled in a number of books. Even before the women were released, the entrepreneurial magazine publisher, S.S. McClure, traveled to Europe to secure an exclusive account from the women for his monthly magazine, McClure's.

The six serialized articles that appeared in McClure's can be viewed in their entirety, in pdf format [here](#):



[McClure's -- May 1902](#)

[McClure's -- June 1902](#)

[McClure's -- July 1902](#)

[McClure's -- August 1902 \(by Katerina\)](#)

[McClure's -- September 1902](#)

[McClure's -- October 1902](#)

William Eleroy Curtis, a newspaper journalist, was interested in the events of the Middle East and interviewed both Ellen Stone and Katerina Tsilka in the United States, after their release. In 1903 he published a book entitled *The Turk and His Lost Provinces* and devoted Chapter XI to the kidnapping. [This chapter can be read here.](#)

The abduction of the American missionary and her companion excited the interest of Broadway playwright Charles Alonzo Taylor (1864-1942) who penned "Held for Ransom; A Spectacular Drama in Five Acts and Eleven Scenes" in 1902. According to the script, it was to be "a grand spectacular production...over three hundred people and horses on stage." It's uncertain whether the play was actually produced, however. According to the New York Times (1 Jun 1904, p. 9), Taylor filed for bankruptcy with \$12,275 in liabilities, and no assets. More than half a century later, in 1957, the story was taken up by Yugoslavian film makers, and a full-length movie, *Mis Ston*, appeared in theatres across the Balkans. Clips of this movie may be viewed on the internet on YouTube. Here are links to clips of the first and second part of the movie:

[Mis Ston - Part 1](#)

[Mis Ston - Part 2](#)

Several books provide important details about the abduction and its participants. Laurie Beth Sherman completed a doctoral dissertation at the University of Sofia, and published her dissertation, an account of the Stone-Tsilka kidnapping in 1980 under the title: *Fires on the Mountain: The Macedonian Revolutionary Movement and the Kidnapping of Ellen Stone* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs). Mercia Macdermott published a biography of Yane Sandansky, a major, if not the main architect of the kidnapping, entitled: *For Freedom and Perfection: the Life of Yane Sandansky* (London, Journeyman Press, 1988).



The latest work, written by Pulitzer-prize winner, Teresa Carpenter, a thoroughly researched, very readable account, is *The Miss Stone Affair: America's First Modern Hostage Crisis!* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

In addition to visiting libraries and archives around the United States, Ms. Carpenter traveled to Europe, including Turkey and Bulgaria, to research this excellent book.

The next section will discuss the Tsilka's attempt to return to normalcy after Katerina's release, and their eventual return to America.

LIBERATION, AND FLIGHT

With the ransom paid and the time and place of release negotiated, the ordeal was nearing an end. As dawn broke after a final hard night march through the wilderness on the morning of February 23, 1902, Miss Stone and Katerina Tsilka found themselves on the outskirts of a village not far from the town of Strumitsa. After attending to baby Elencha, the two women gloried in a long bath, and began the process of recuperating their strength and well-being.

Both women were subjected to close questioning and interrogation, but as Turkish subjects, the Tsilkas were naturally under greater threat of reprisal by Ottoman authorities. Both Tsilkas prepared depositions with their recollection of events, and Katerina's transmittal of a copy for the American embassy revealed some of her frustration:

Salonique, Turkey, March 29, 1902

Dear Sir,

Your letter of March 21st, is at hand. In the enclosed statement I have tried to write all I can remember of our captivity which may assist in the discovery of the villains, but in case I have failed to answer points you may desire, I shall be glad to answer any questions you may choose to ask me.



Mr. Leishman, excuse, if I ask you a personal favor. Is there any possibility in shortening our case with the government here? They keep us here apparently without doing anything. Both my husband and myself have been thoroughly examined, and now I do not see what they are waiting for. My husband has been without work for the last seven months, and now we are spending all the means we have. It is very hard on us.

Respectfully yours,
Katerina Tsilka



The Tsilkas and Miss Stone, 1902, after the Ordeal



The following month, James H. Ross, writing in Leslie's Weekly, of April 10, 1902, p. 348, summarized some of the difficulties the Tsilkas faced with the Turkish authorities:

Strange Sequel of the Capture of Miss Stone

By James H. Ross

Immediately preceding the release of Miss Stone by the Bulgarian brigands who captured her, a cablegram announced that the husband of Mme. Tsilka had been arrested charged with being a conspirator who had aided in selling his wife into captivity. Since then, the public has heard but little as to the sequel. The case is not ended. Neither is it settled. Turkey never hurries. Neither Mr. Tsilka nor the friends of Miss Stone know what Turkey will do. Technically Mr. Tsilka was not arrested, but was detained and is under surveillance. When, on February 23d he knew by telegraphic message from Serres to Salonica that the captives were released, he planned to leave at once, to meet his wife. But the police would not allow him to go. The Turks seemed to be very suspicious of him. Such restraint as there was on their part was due to the fear that foreign correspondents of the European and American press would make it hot for them.

Mr. Tsilka, on February 25th, was finally allowed to leave Salonica. Consular Agent Lazzaro conferred with the missionaries and with Vali Pasha concerning his case. On Friday, February 27th, he boarded the train in Salonica for Sofia and was called out before the train started and detained. The police mudir said that he might go anywhere he pleased in the Vilayet, but not out of the country. February 24th he was permitted to leave Salonica by rail, to meet his wife and return with her. The Vali showed Mr. Lazzaro an order from the Minister of the Interior telling him not to let Mr. Tsilka go out of sight, and adding: "I think this is its accordance with the wishes of the American legation." But he may have misinterpreted the wishes of the legation. Mr. Tsilka repeatedly said: "All I want is a fair trial without torture. If they can prove anything against me, I am ready to suffer." It was possible that letters had been forwarded to him from America, excoriating the Turks, and that they had been intercepted. But he said, with truth, that he should not be held for what another had written who was not under his control.

Assuming that he had been deceptive while living in Salonica with the missionaries for six weeks they would have condemned him in severest terms. Such baseness as was charged against him. viz.: Selling his wife and causing so much anguish to so many hearts, in many lands for six months, would have deserved heavy judgment in speech and judicial punishment. But if he has been an innocent sufferer, like the missionaries themselves and the kindred and friends of Miss Stone, any addition to his sufferings by false charges and imprisonment is intolerable. If charges against him are pressed, the civilized world will wait with wonder for the proofs.

If sound proofs are not forthcoming, his arrest will be regarded its an act of cruelty, and Turkey will lose that much in the world's estimation. Moreover, Miss Stone wields the pen of a ready



writer, and if she is convinced of his innocence, she will be unsparing in her denunciations through the press. Her character and courage are well known.

As Mr. Tsilka himself has no objections to testifying, no one else will object to his being examined by the authorities. For that purpose arrest and imprisonment are not necessary. American influence can be exerted to aid in securing him judicial and fair treatment. The commander in Serres has persistently hindered the work of liberation and broken his promises not to chase the band who held the captives, thereby imperiling their lives. He is known to be hostile to Mr. Tsilka. The American principle is to believe a man innocent until proven guilty. If innocent, Mr. Tsilka is suffering for being associated with an American citizen. The Americans in Salonica will turn every stone to help him, until he is proved guilty. Nothing yet heard would be regarded by a grand jury in this country as warranting an indictment. What Turkey will continue to do, time alone can tell. It may do nothing more: it might do much more. For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, Turkey is peculiar.

LESLIE'S WEEKLY has special facilities for keeping its readers informed of the political agitation through which Bulgaria and Macedonia are now passing, and of the quality of the leaders who are the agitators, and there are reasons for believing that the ransom of Miss Stone, the captured missionary, may only lead to new and more serious troubles. The Bulgarians, among themselves, before they obtained their freedom from Turkey, in 1878, were a comparatively pure people. Now licentiousness is bold and often brings no disgrace. The use of intoxicating liquors, aside from the wines of the country, is probably tenfold what it was in 1860, and the use of wine has greatly increased. Infidelity, bold and aggressive, was scarcely known in 1860. Now many teachers, probably the larger part of the influential men and a very large proportion of the students, are said to be boldly godless. During the past ten years, students have been expelled from the missionary schools for unmentionable vices. Infidelity, rank socialism, and all forms of godlessness have greatly increased. It seems probable that some of the ransom money paid for the release of Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka has been supplied to be used in preparation for incursions from Samokov into Macedonia.

Macedonia ought to be free. The only doubt is whether the resort to arms should be made. But the leaders of the Macedonian committee are men of no principle and their followers become like them. Plans for various inroads into Macedonia are being made. An American resident in Samokov writes as follows:

When Servia fell upon Bulgaria, I went to see five student volunteers take their summer night departure about 11 p. m. I respected them and my heart was with them. As yet I have seen no one engaged to this Macedonian movement whom I have respected, and whatever shall be done it will be done chiefly under the guidance of those who hate God, at least so far as those in Bulgaria are in this movement. All Macedonia wants freedom and will do what will seem to lead to freedom, yet I fear that all the efforts will result in much needless bloodshed, and I also fear that, in the end, no real benefit will be gained.



There is apprehension among the American missionaries in Bulgaria lest Miss Stone may not be the only captive by brigands. Fears are expressed that other plotters may plan again to show that "little Bulgaria could outwit great America and make her pay another ransom." One missionary has been accustomed to travel alone on horseback, not infrequently from five to twenty miles over old roads and mountain paths and often without any path and through tangled bushes, striking for known landmarks miles away. Twice, by anonymous letters, he has been threatened with death if he did not pay money. He has disregarded the threats, and acted essentially as though he had not received the letters. On the range of mountains among which the Turkish troops chased the brigands who had Miss Stone, there is scarcely any habitation. Hence the brigands are comparatively safe in such a region with their captives. Some of the missionaries have notified their associates and the official boards in this country, that if they are captured they do not wish any ransom to be paid. They deem it wise that no premium should be put on capturing missionaries.

On the 4th of March, thirty persons were brought to Monastir, Macedonia, 100 miles northwest of Salonica, and put in prison. Their friends are not allowed to see them. Arrests of suspected persons are made continually. The prisons are full. The state of the country is very bad and there is great suffering, and many of the sufferers are innocent. All the teachers at Racine, four hours' distant from Monastir, have been brought to jail in Monastir. There is great need that the European Powers should take up the matter of reforms in Macedonia. An autonomy would solve many problems. Macedonia is honeycombed with Bulgarian "committee" work. It was a political mistake to make captives of Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka. Much sympathy for the Bulgarian has been lost thereby. All Bulgarians do not approve of that step, however much they may desire liberty in Macedonia.

Exchanges of correspondence between Albania and the United States continued through 1902, and several letters found their way into print.

A letter from Mrs. Tsilka, dated Kortcha, Albania, May 21, reports her again busily engaged in her missionary work, which is in a prosperous condition. The school at Korcha, which is in its boarding school department, had five girls last year, now has eight. With abounding gratitude to God and to the friends who have aided her rescue from the brigands, she and her husband are devoting themselves with new energy to the work of evangelizing their people. It may be also said of Miss Stone, that though her labors are in another line, she is accomplishing much for missions, for through her numerous addresses she is reaching a multitude heretofore but partially, if at all, interested in missionary work, and it is leading them to new conceptions of what this work is, and of the character and abilities of those who are engaged in it. [Missionary Herald, July 1902, p. 272].

The following extracts from a private letter from Mrs. Tsilka...give some details not mentioned in the magazine articles: "Yes, we two women, Miss Stone and myself, and the wee little woman who joined us later, went through fearful suffering while in bondage. I have wondered at the capacity of the human being for enduring misery...



"As for nursing, I lost no chance, even among the brigands. The chief brigand fell one night and injured his ankle, so that he had to be carried. When I offered to give him all the help I could I never saw a brigand look so embarrassed and remorseful as did he. While I was douching the sprained ankle with hot and cold water, and especially when massaging it, he never looked once at me. In a week, with this treatment, he was able to walk a whole night with comfort. Though he never said 'thank you' to me (for that is not a brigand's way), I knew he was grateful, for he saved the life of my baby and me on more than one occasion...

Many of the brigands brought to me their wounded and pus fingers to treat and cure. I am sure that if they had been obliged to kill me they would have found it very hard work to do so, for they 'had learned to love me,' as a young fellow expressed himself. He was one for whom I treated four pus fingers..."²¹

Another word — from Mrs. Tsilka to Miss Maxwell, writing from Kortcha:

My adventures with the brigands were so very dreadful -- very fearful; but, thank God! that is all past, and to-day I am sitting down in a very bright cheerful room, with my husband playing with Ellenchin, and I comfortably writing this. You know, sometimes it seems so hard for anybody to live in this country that many times we have been about ready to run to America. This autumn some money was sent us from America to build a dormitory for the girls. The necessary permit for the building was obtained. Afterwards, when about half through, the government stopped us. All the material was left exposed to the weather. It was done just to give us trouble, for the government does not want improvements. Besides that, the Greek Catholic Bishop persecuted us; they do not wish to see Protestantism triumph. Besides these troubles, brigands are all around us, and I can't help shiver at any gunshot in the night. If we ever come to America, it won't be until next summer. I am afraid to expose my darling any more dangers.²²

TOURING THE UNITED STATES 1903-1905

As European Turkey exploded into the conflict later known as Ilinden, the Saint Elias Day Uprising, the Tsilkas wisely chose to avoid further reprisals from the Turks. They arrived at Ellis Island on April 16, 1903 aboard the S.S. Patricia and soon made their way to New Jersey where some of Katerina's friends lived. It was soon obvious that the public wanted

²¹ *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Dec 1902), p. 236-237.

²² *American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 3, no. 5 (Feb 1903), p. 399.



to hear Katerina's story, and the couple made many appearances over the next 2 1/2 years. Their extended stay continued until they departed on October 13, 1905.

For the most part, the Tsilkas and Miss Stone did not share the same stage, and occasionally, Gregory and Katerina spoke at separate events. In those cases, Gregory was more likely to speak on the topic of the battle against the Turkish Ottoman Empire by Macedonian freedom fighters.

At least one printed brochure was created and handed out at some of the Tsilkas' later appearances. Here is the first page of a four page publication:





In the mid-1970's, as the creator of this website was researching the Stone-Tsilka abduction, a chance encounter with Miss Margaret Conrad, a 1920 graduate of the Presbyterian Hospital School for Nurses, from which Katerina herself had graduated. Margaret had gone on to be an academic administrator and was retired when she wrote the following letter:

493 Boston Street
Guilford, Connecticut
May 8, 1978

SP5 Richard M. Cochran
HQ USA MILPERCENEUR
APO New York 09081

Dear Sergeant Cochran:

When I attended our Alumnae Day celebration in New York on May 5th I learned of your interest in securing information about Stephanova Tsilka. As your inquiry was last year, this address may no longer be correct for you but I hope my letter will reach you.

I have nothing to add to what Miss Wells has given to you of an official nature, but I should tell you of my personal contact as a little girl.

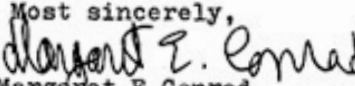
My father was pastor of the Rollstone Congregational Church in Fitchburg, Mass. in the early 1900s. A matter of deep concern to everyone at that time was the capture by "Balkan Brigands", of two American missionaries, Miss Ellen Stone and Madame Stephanova Tsilka, - whose little daughter Ellenchia (sp?) was born in captivity. They were in the care of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions ("ABCFM"). After their release, they were in great demand as speakers in this country.

We entertained Madame Tsilka and Ellenchia on such a speaking engagement. I can vividly remember building block houses for Ellenchia to demolish for the better part of an evening at the parsonage while her mother was speaking at the church.

Both Madame Tsilka and her daughter were "beautiful people" who made friends everywhere.

Years later, when I became involved in the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing, - as student, staff member and eventually Associate Dean and Director of Nursing of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, - I felt well acquainted with one of our most colorful alumnae!

I apologize for my sketchy typing, and add my best wishes to you in your present career.

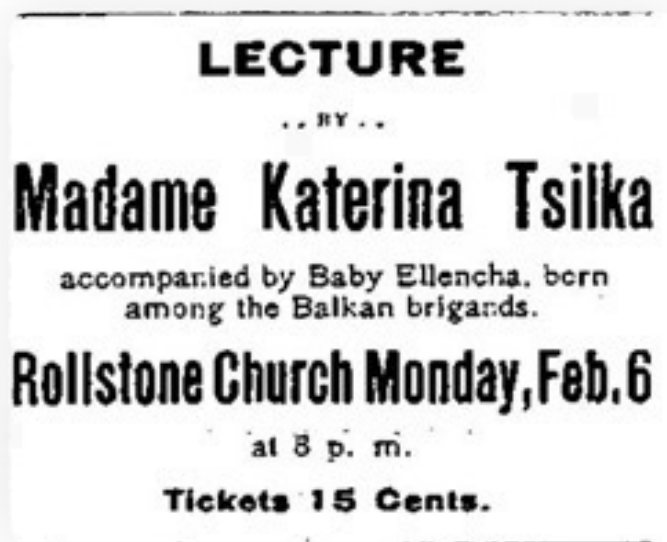
Most sincerely,

Margaret E. Conrad

cc: to Alumnae Office



Margaret Conrad '20 (standing) smiles warmly as she is honored at alumnae day luncheon. Helen Pettit '36 seated at right. Janet Monroe '56 at end of table.

Miss Conrad's recollection of the event, over seventy years before, was quite remarkable. Years later, the newspaper article and promotion of this event, which occurred on February 6, 1905, were also discovered:





The speaking engagement, which brought an audience of between 300 and 400 persons, was covered the next day.

No scrapbook or travel diary of the Tsilka's speaking engagements survive, but the following three files provide a partial accounting for their engagements, with a verbatim account of what was reported in local, and sometimes national newspapers and magazines.

Tsilka Travel Itinerary, 1903

Tsilka Travel Itinerary, 1904

Tsilka Travel Itinerary, 1905



MRS. TSILKA AND HER BABY ELENKA

Who was born in the wilds of Bulgaria when her mother was imprisoned by brigands.



RETURN TO ALBANIA



Girls' School at Koortcha, Albania.



Congregationalist and Christian World, March 3, 1906, p. 298 (Vol. 91, no. 9)

The Tsilkas at Work in Albania

Letters have been received from Madame Tsilka, Miss Ellen M. Stone's companion in captivity, and her husband, Gregory M. Tsilka, now at their old work in Kortcha, Albania, Turkey in Europe. They had been absent from their posts for more than two years lecturing and preaching in America. Prior to their visit to America and before Mrs. Tsilka's experience in captivity, they had attempted to establish a school for girls and a school for boys. Although there was great opposition on the part of the people, a girls' school was successfully begun and during the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka was continued under the direction of trusted helpers.

Since returning to Albania the Tsilkas have found a remarkable change in the attitude of the people and Mrs. Tsilka writes: "In the providence of God it seems as though the psychological moment for evangelizing the people of Albania had come." "People are dissatisfied with the old religion and anxious for something better; the welcome accorded us has been most cordial; we are constantly confronted in the streets by both boys and parents asking us to take them and teach them; people are anxious for us to secure a suitable place for a boys' school; they are even willing to help us to do so; before we left for America no one would sell us property and instead of coming to us, boys and parents jeered at us and often disturbed our services; this is all changed now and we are daily receiving great blessings in our work."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka received training for their work in America. Mrs. Tsilka is a trained nurse, having graduated from the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City after the full course of study at Northfield Seminary. Mr. Tsilka was trained under the American missionaries in Albania and then at Union Theological Seminary. They are peculiarly qualified to build on lasting foundations and their spirit and enthusiasm is such as to convince their friends that deep and broad foundations for redeeming the people of the Balkans will be laid by these native but American-trained workers. It is the hope of many of their friends in this country that some generous contributions may be made towards permanently establishing their work.



BIOGRAPHY: *Washington Post*, 12 May 1907, p. 58

BORN IN CAPTIVITY

From Human Life

Among the children born into this world who do not know where their birthplace is must be numbered Elenchie Tsilka. The circumstances of her birth, while her unfortunate Macedonian mother was a captive with Ms. Stone, during the winter of 1901 -1902, have not been forgotten by those who have heard either of the captives tell her story, or read it in the papers at the time.

Possibly the brigands who held them in their unrelenting grip know where that hut was hidden; but to this day, neither Miss Stone nor the Macedonian mother has the least idea of its location: for their captives forced them to make the journey there and back under cover of darkness.

That little hut, upon which at the time the attention of the whole world was focused, was an excavation in the mountainside for the storage of the wine casks of some Macedonian peasant. Did he ever learn that a helpless baby was born in the blackness of his hut, under the bulging side of one of his great casks, that Saturday night, January 4, 1902? Or did he, when next he visited that remote vineyard of his, as the spring days drew him thither to hoe his vines on that mountain slope, find his storage hut destroyed, and wonder with pain of heart who could have brought such damage to a poor, hard-working farmer in Turkey?

The two captives have no knowledge, save that it became their shelter before the dawn of Saturday morning, when, exhausted after their ten hours' journey on pack saddles, they were compelled to stop somewhere .

When, with her parents, the little girl was in the United States in 1904 -1905, people often inquired of her, Elenchie, where were you born ? And laughed, while a wonderful tenderness filled their hearts and tears often sprang into their eyes to hear the little voice answer softly, "In captivity!" That is all either of the captives know of her birthplace.

Since her parents returned to their work in Albania, where Mr. Tsilka is a preacher and also a teacher also of Albanian boys, Elenchie has become proficient in talking Albanian and Greek in addition to her English, and has also made good progress in the Macedonian dialect of the Bulgarian, which is her mother's language .

Five-year-old Elenchie has now become a great help to her mother in her household duties, to which are added the care of her second daughter, Afrodita (Morning Star), and practicing her skill as a trained nurse in many homes.



Elenchie, named for her maternal grandmother and her mother's fellow-captive, was called Kismatchie, the Little Luck-Child, by the brigands. Marvelously was her life preserved amid the fearful exposures of those midwinter nights of her first seven weeks, in the clutches of desperate men -- as well as during her mother's unspeakable hardships from September to January before her birth. Surely this life must have some high purpose!

May it be realized in noble achievement and the uplift of many sad lives!

BIOGRAPHY: *The Missionary Herald*, June 1908, pp. 284-285

The Kennedys Reach Kortcha (European Turkey Field)

Rev. and Mrs. P. B. Kennedy have at last reached Kortcha , and have begun work there as "teachers" of the Albanians. They were unjustly detained at Salonica for four months, but finally secured their treaty rights and were allowed to proceed. The Vali of Monastir vilayet offered them a guard of gendarmes over the mountains. So in a large, closed carriage, with mounted guards on either side and an armed kavass provided by the consul on the seat with the driver, spending the night in route in the home of an evangelical family in the town of Ressin... Some persecution is being undergone in part from the Greek Orthodox Church. The joy of reaching Kortcha was clouded by finding Mr. Tsilka , who is head of the school and whose wife, it will be remembered, was kidnapped with Miss Stone, imprisoned for connivance with Albanian revolutionists , a charge which the missionaries believe to be entirely groundless. It is more than suspected that some of the of events on which she was imprisoned was manufactured or so placed as to bear false witness against him. The sympathy and prayers of the friends of this mission are desired, both for Mr. Tsilka and the Kennedys as they take up their work in a situation so difficult and delicate.

BIOGRAPHY: *The Missionary Herald*, August 1908, p. 356

A Correction.

Through inadvertence the June Herald spoke of Mr. Tsilka as having been the head of a school at Kortcha. The facts are that Ms. Sevastia D. Kyrias has had charge of this girl's boarding school for nearly seventeen years, and that Mr. Tsilka has never even taught in it, but only preached in its building to a mix congregation of townspeople and others. We regret the twofold injustice of the misstatement.



BIOGRAPHY: *Sioux Valley News*, Correctionville, Iowa, 22 Oct 1908, p. 9

TSILKA IS RELEASED

Mme. Tsilka, Who Was in Prison With Miss Stone, Writes of the Revolution in Turkey

It was Mme. Tsilka who was in prison with Miss Ellen Stone in Turkey and it will be remembered she gave lectures in the United States three years ago. A letter from her has been received in Gardner, Mass. by Mrs. Geo. A. Swallow with whom Mme. Tsilk spent the last Sunday before returning the last time to Turkey.

About six months ago Mme Tsilka's husband was thrown into prison and without any alleged reason on the part of the officials. In order to keep him in prison the magistrates went to his home and seized all his private papers and examined them carefully to see if by chance there was anything in them against the government and their search proving unsuccessful they forwarded them to other places further examination.

The letter reads as follows

Have not written sooner because I could not possibly get the time. Four children to look after, husband in prison and twice a day sending him meals beside running about to court officials and lawyers. And no help for the housework for people were afraid to mingle with us. Two babies on my hands, Afrodita not quite two years old and little Skender, now three months old. He came to me two months after my husband's imprisonment. Before his advent I had no idea who was to assist me in such a trying time, who was to look after the children. Am a perfect stranger here. To send far for friends impossible, for traveling was very dangerous. So I just prayed and left it all to God.

Now I do not know where to begin to tell you of the wonderful change that has taken place in this country of ours. Two weeks ago groans and weepings were heard everywhere around us. A person murdered here, another there, a village burned in one place, another massacred women and children cruelly mutilated and innocent victims were dragged out of their homes and thrown into prison. The prisons were so full that the poor victims had to squeeze hard in order to get a sleeping place. The walls perspired dampness and the sun never entered there.

My ears heard the rumors among the people and officers that Tsilka would be either imprisoned for life or hung. Oh! how I used to hurry home, close the door after me and tell it all to Him. And He gave me wonderful peace. Well in the midst of all this gloom and uncertainty, two weeks ago early one morning the general of the newly arrived army accompanied by his staff walked into my husband's confinement and shouts out.

'Tsilka you are free! Come with us for we have need of such as you.'



And it was Mr. Tsilka who wrote the first outline of the new government here. And most of the important work was done in our very school. Of course when my husband was thrown in prison there was a silent indignation even among the Turks, the enlightened ones I mean. Even the enemies of our work did not dare to rejoice.

Mr. Tsilka's freedom was the beginning of the overthrow of the old government. Two days later the prison doors were wide open and every prisoner set free. The very stones seemed to rejoice Freedom, freedom of thought and action was given to every nation and tribe.

Men ran about the streets, wild with joy and shouting. Long live liberty, long live the union, long live the love, long live our country!

Women and children danced in the streets and wept with joy. All eyes were turned upward to heaven.

(signed) K S T (Katerina S. Tsilka)

She adds: "Write anything you please now and send any printed matter you like. No fear now."

BIOGRAPHY: *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 23, 1913; pg. 13

KORITSA EPISODE STIRS UP BRYAN.

Greek Seizure of American School Causes Protest.

Matron of Mission Beaten and Sent to Prison.

British Consul Attempts to Protect Teachers.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 22. - State Department officials said today that the reported seizure of the American mission school at Koritsa, Albania, by Greeks, would raise an important diplomatic question, as the status of American institutions in Albania has not been determined under the new territorial delimitations growing out of the war between the Balkan allies and Turkey and the later conflict among the allies themselves.

Under a convention with Turkey made when that nation exercised sovereignty over Albania, Americans, in addition to their rights under treaties of commerce and travel, were given extra territorial rights which protected, among other things, educational institutions.

No official report of the seizure of the school had been received today, but the State Department is prepared to protest to the Greek government vigorously for the protection of Americans and their property in Albania, under the new political order.



BRITISH CONSUL, PROTESTS

VIENNA, Sept. 22.- The Greek authorities at Koritsa, in Albania, seized today the American mission school there, where instruction is given to nearly 100 Albanian girls. The information reached here in a telegram from Avlona, the principal seaport of Albania on the Adriatic Sea.

The Greeks also have arrested and persecuted a large number of Albanians who recently returned to Koritsa. from America and other foreign countries, releasing them from detention only when Albanians promised to join the agitation for the incorporation of the district under the Greek flag.

The British Consul at Monastir has entered a vigorous protest with the Greek government on behalf of the Americans. Last week Greek officials at Koritsa endeavored to take forcible possession of the American mission school building, but the housekeeper in charge refused to hand over the keys. The Greek soldiers beat her mercilessly and then carried her off to prison.

The mission is in charge of Phineas B. Kennedy, a native of New Jersey and a Princeton graduate. Mrs. Viola B. Kennedy conducts the Ladies' Literary Society, whose object is to give the elements of education to the women of Albania.

CONTROLLED IN NEW YORK.

NEW YORK, Sept 22.-The American mission school in Koritsa, Albania, is under supervision of the Congregational Church and controlled by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

BIOGRAPHY: Tsanoff, Vladimir A. (ed.), *Reports and Letters of American Missionaries Referring to the Distribution of Nationalities in the Former Provinces of European Turkey* (Sofia, 1919), p. 76

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMERICAN BOARD, 1913.

TURKEY. AND BALKAN MISSION. .

The Servians early took possession of northern Albania, and soon after their arrival at Durazzo, Elbasan and Tirana, they arrested Mr. Erickson and Mr. Tsilka. Mr. Erickson, on December 10, was ordered to leave, with his family, within twenty-four hours after notice was served upon him, and Mr. Tsilka was kept in confinement for several weeks before he was given his liberty. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy remained at Kortcha after the Greeks had taken possession of the city for several weeks, but on April 24 they received orders to prepare to withdraw, and they were sent under Greek guard to Salonica. The reasons given by the Greeks for the expulsion of Mr. Kennedy



were wholly unsatisfactory and without any ground. The Greek Government, however, after correspondence gave assurance to our State Department, that as soon as order was restored in Kortcha, Mr. Kennedy would be allowed to return. Although Kortcha falls within independent Albania as set apart by the European Powers, up to October 1 the Greeks have not withdrawn, and indications are many that they do not intend to do so. It remains to be seen what the outcome will be there.

In Salonica there was an entire suspension of every form of work as there was in Kortcha and Elbasan during the hostilities and even down to the present time, except that the missionaries gave themselves with great abandon to the work of relief for which there was boundless call. The refugees flocked into Salonica where Mr. Haskell and Mr. Cooper devoted their entire time and strength to relief work. While they have not been personally molested by the Greek authorities, the later-development of their hostility to Bulgaria has raised doubt as to whether the Greeks would allow any work to be carried on in Salonica, or in fact anywhere under the Greek flag, in the Bulgarian language, as there was also serious doubt as to whether any work in Kortcha or in any part of Albania would be allowed to continue if the Albanian language was used. The Greek officials have expressed themselves as not hostile to the work of the American mission, but they have given no assurance that the work will be allowed to continue.

BIOGRAPHY: Dako, Christo A., *Albania: the master key to the Near East*. Boston: Grimes, 1919, pp. 194-95:

[Insurrection in Kortcha, April 2-6, 1914]

All the Christian quarter was forced to put up the Greek flag. We took down the Albanian flag, and Mr. Spencer put up the American. Mr. Spencer, Zarif our kavass [security guard], Miss Kyrias and two of the teachers took rifles and guarded the school. Firing continued most of the day. The school was often threatened. All that Sunday the fighting was terrific. . . Late that evening Rev. Tsilka, one of our teachers who had come from Elbasan, reached the school.

Early the next morning, Monday 6 April, after a good breakfast, Mr. Tsilka with Zarif my kavass and fifteen men started fighting from our gate. They slowly advanced... Then 150 men were taken to attack the Metropolis and capture the Greek Bishop. These troops were divided into three companies, Captain Doorman of the Dutch Mission made the attack from the east, Captain Ghilardi from the south, and Mr. Spencer, who had been an officer in the American navy, from the west. Mr. Spencer ordered his men to ignore the firing from the surrounding houses and to charge directly on the Bishop's residence. His men, however, were held up for two hours where two streets meet, but at last they reached the Metropolis. The Bishop gave up his arms and surrendered. As the Albanian villagers who had followed in Spencer's rear wished to hang the Bishop, Mr. Spencer placed a guard of forty men around the residence, and he himself entered with ten soldiers. After half an hour Captain Doorman and Captain Chilardi arrived. . . At



midnight for his own safety the Bishop was sent to Elbasan. . . . The Kyrias School was turned into a hospital for the wounded.

KATERINA ALONE

Katarina and Gregory found themselves stranded in Sofia, on a visit to Bulgaria, when World War I broke out. The privations of war were sufficient to have caused the Tsilkas hardship, but the end of the war brought the dreaded Flu Epidemic of 1918-1919, and among its millions of victims, was Gregory M. Tsilka.

Responding to an inquiry in 1924 from the Alumni Association of the Union Theological Seminary, Katerina provided details about her life after Gregory.

In 1927, seeking assistance for her children, Katerina wrote a letter to Thomas Jesse Jones, a former Union Theological Seminary classmate of Gregory's, and one of the two witnesses at their marriage, more than a quarter century before. By that time, Jones had become President of the Stokes-Phelps Fund, a charitable organization founded in New York in 1911.

Tirana, Albania
May 7, 1927

Dr. Jesse Jones, Phelps-Stokes Fund
101 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Jones:

Your good letter of Feb. 5th I have received and thank you for your sympathy and kindness.

I am not any longer at the hospital -- there were such changes that it was not possible for me to stay. Our best doctor has left! Then the orphanage here, housing some 120 refugee children had no managers and so many persons turned their eyes in my direction. I first went to see the children. Seeing them in filth -- vermin and sores -- I plunged in. For two months I worked and forgot everything and everybody even my own children. This institution is supported by the Albanian Red Cross, but Oh! so poorly! It is the third month I am here and not a cent yet toward my salary -- no money.

Skender, my older boy is delicate and needs some rest -my daughter too, next year being her last year, needs to rest this summer. Our countries are not like America, one cannot get a job for only



two months -- especially for a girl it is very difficult. They must come to me and I have not the means: This is awful to write to you but the fact that my daughter Ellencke became a victim to our sensitiveness and spirit of independence, emboldens me - to solicit help just for this summer.

Ellencke--over tired from hard studies during the school year--went to work summers in awful offices then when school would begin she was a rag. The result was that she contracted tuberculosis and two years after her graduation she was in the grave. I am so afraid for Aferdita now. She needs rest for she has had awful summer vacations, always away from me. Then clothing, she has worn her school mates'; but the teachers have forbidden such practice. It is a pity for a girl at the end of her College education to sicken from worry and want. So now, Dr. Jones, I turn to you to beg you and through you, Gregory's friends, to give me a helping hand for just this year, and, especially now that I am engaged in the most benevolent work. You understand the situation don't you? Or I better put it this way. Can you get some one interested in the refugee orphans to pay me a salary so that I can help in the education of my children?

You have heard of my work through Dr. Erickson. Yes, know it is difficult oven in America to raise funds nowadays!

Very glad to read Mr. Groetzinger's letter. So he is a success too.

With best wishes,

(Signed) Katherine G. Tzilka²³

During a visit to Bansko, Bulgaria in August-September 1975, the author of this website was a guest of Miss Milenka Bizeva, whose mother, Rina Stephanova, was a first cousin of Katerina Tsilka. Milenka recalled that Katerina visited Bansko from time to time, and told the story of her kidnapping on cold winter nights, with her extended family of cousins, arranged around the fireplace, attentive to each detail of the almost fairytale-like story.

An unexpected story about Katerina appeared in American newspapers affiliated with the International News Service (INS) for which Katerina's brother, Constantine Stephanove wrote for a number of years. This article was found in the Port Arthur (Texas) News, 9 Feb 1937, p. 5:

²³ Letter, Katerina Tzilka to Thomas Jesse Jones, Phelps-Stokes Fund, 7 May 1927; received from Mona Clark, Phelps Stokes Fund, New York to Richard Cochran, 19 Aug 1976; in poss of Dr. Richard M. Cochran, Big Rapids, Michigan.



WOMAN REGAINS EYESIGHT
AFTER SIX YEARS OF TOTAL BLINDNESS

SOFIA -- Feb. 9 (INS) -- Mrs. Katharine Tsilka, known to the American public as companion of Miss Ellen Stone of Chelsea, Mass., during the latter's capture by Macedonian revolutionists in 1900, has miraculously regained her sight after six years of total blindness.

"I woke up one morning and, wonderful to relate, found myself able to see clearly as I did six years ago before I lost my sight. I am a new-born woman, thank God!" These are her own words taken from her letter in her own hand to her brother in Sofia [note: Constantine Stephanove].

Mrs. Tsilka, who was Miss Stephanove of Bansko in Bulgarian Macedonia before she married Gregory Tsilka, thus becoming an Albanian citizen, is one of the most popular women in the Balkans. One year after the severe trial of six months capture as a chaperone to Miss Stone and during which she gave life to her first child [note: that survived infancy], Mrs. Tsilka traversed the United States relating her singular experience with the Macedonian revolutionists who had, nevertheless, treated both women with unheard of gentlemanliness. Being a Macedonian herself, Mrs. Tsilka could not help being touched by the anxious attention shown her by her captors, especially at the time when her baby was to be born. Her resentment during those six months turned into admiration and on being set free when the ransom for Miss Stone was paid to the revolutionists, she became one of the most ardent pleaders for the Macedonian cause.

Two years later, World War II began and Katarina would live to see it through as well as Albania's transition to a communist state. She died June 22, 1952 in Tirana, Albania, and is buried in the Shish Tufine Cemetery there.

On September 25, 1997, at the age of 87, Katerina's youngest son, Stefan Cilka recalled his mother in a letter to the creator of this website. He wrote:

I think that my mother was a remarkable woman. She was very honest and fair in her dealings with others. She had to struggle all her life for her own self, for her brothers, and for us, her children, as well as for everything else. My father died in 1919, leaving her almost without means and with four children, aged between 9 and 19, whom she managed to bring up and provide with satisfactory education with her own means, and by obtaining scholarships.

She had a very strong character and will power. In most disputed situations, she managed to have her own way, which rarely failed to be the right way. For many years she was "directress" of Tirana hospital, in fact head nurse, but officially directress and took care of all the internal problems of



the hospital. She was widely praised for her work. Later she became directress of the orphanage of the Red Cross.

She died aged 85 after her eyes and ears, as well as her mental functions failed her.

Courtesy of Richard Cochran

<http://cochranfamily.net/popstefanov/popstep5.htm>

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