

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR ARMENIAN STUDIES AND RESEARCH

404 PARK SQUARE BUILDING \* BOSTON 16, MASSACHUSETTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARMENIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

HOLDS FIRST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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BOSTON, Mass. -- By its actions and deliberations the first national Assembly of Members of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Hamazgayin Hagagitakan Miuthiun) on June 11 and 12 at the Hotel Commander in Cambridge, Mass., registered overwhelming approval of the plans and policies outlined by the Founders' group and the Acting Board of Directors.

With this support and mandate the new Board of Directors can go ahead to realize the objectives of the Association: to advance Armenian studies in America through scholarship, research, and publication and to endow a Chair of Armenian Studies at Harvard University.

Distant Regions Represented

More than 75 Charter Members and Founders participated in the Association's first nationwide assemblage. Many came from such distant points as California, Michigan, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. The membership of the Association now exceeds 280 and extends to 18 states and the District of Columbia. Over one hundred of the members come from outside of Massachusetts.

Under the chairmanship of Manoog S. Young, chairman of the Acting Board of Directors, the members formalized and legalized the existence of the Association by adopting a constitution, clarifying the objectives, and discussing reports and future plans for the organization.

Non-Partisan Character Stressed

In his remarks to the Assembly Mr. Young stressed the rigorously non-partisan, non-political, and non-sectarian character of the Association. He stated that in

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the few short months since the Association was formally launched at a public meeting on March 2, 1955, in Harvard University, the organization has received enthusiastic and unstinting endorsement and support from the clergy, writers, scholars, professional people, and business men throughout the country.

The strong attraction of the Association's unique objective, a Chair of Armenian Studies at Harvard, has cut across all party, organizational, and religious lines. "Harvard has a fine Armenian tradition," Mr. Young added. "Its Dumbarton Oaks Library in Washington has the noted Prof. Sirarpie Der Nersessian as acting head. Harvard, situated in one of the oldest and largest Armenian communities in America, has in its library the largest collection of Armenian books and manuscripts in the United States. It is close to several fine collections at other libraries and to the Armenian daily newspapers. At present ten members of the Harvard faculty are able to sponsor Ph.D. programs in several Armenian fields."

#### "Down Payment" to Harvard

The highlight of the Assembly came at the Saturday evening banquet when treasurer J. Mark Kolligian presented a "down payment" of \$2700 on the Harvard Chair of Armenian Studies to Dean Peter Elder of the University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. This sum was collected primarily from among the Board of Directors and comes in advance of the Association's main fund raising effort in the fall.

It was emphasized that all such monies that are turned over to Harvard will become part of the University's endowed or capital fund and only the interest from the investment of such funds will be used for the advancement of Armenian studies and research. Treasurer Kolligian pledged that \$50,000 would be raised by the end of the year in order to establish a research fellowship and a graduate school scholarship in Armenian studies as an interim program until this sum can be increased to the necessary \$300,000 to establish an endowed chair.

#### Pusey to Speak in Fall

A second "down payment" to be made during the summer will consist of over 350 books and pamphlets to be presented to the Harvard University Library from the

collection of the late Hiram A. Dikjian of New York by his wife and daughter. Previously Chairman Young announced that President Nathan M. Pusey of Harvard University will be the principal guest of honor and speaker at the fall kick-off banquet of the Association on Sunday, October 30, at the Harvard Club of Boston.

The banquet was followed by an impressive and highly informative panel session on "Armenian Studies and Research - Problems and Needs" in which noted Harvard scholars participated. They spoke in enthusiastic terms of the Association's program and objectives and reminded the audience that Armenian scholarship and culture through the ages has belonged to the whole field of learning and must be made more readily available to scholars as well as lay people who do not know Armenian. Earlier during the banquet Dean Elder reiterated the need for the advancement of Armenian studies and research and stressed the important part these studies would have in extending the variety and scope of subjects offered for instruction and research in a graduate school.

#### Harvard Scholars Speak

Prof. Roman Jakobson of Harvard's Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures called the Golden Age of Armenian literature in the fifth century A.D. "the strongest bridge between the classical tradition and modern thought." Touching upon the interrelation of Armenian and other cultures through the centuries, Prof. Jakobson pointed out the strong continuity of the Armenian language and literature, "the most eloquent example being the history of the Armenian language which for the most part remained faithful to its Indo-European roots," despite the impact of new cultural factors and influences by non-European languages.

Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Research Fellow at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, spoke on scholarship's vital need for translations of the countless Armenian manuscripts and documents now scattered throughout the monasteries, churches, and private collections. The availability in English of such material would help in filling in the gaps in the histories of Persia, Russia, and other countries having intercourse with Armenia. He cited the 18th century Afghan

invasion of Isfahan, for an account of which we must rely on the narrative of a Polish Jesuit priest, although Isfahan had a large Armenian population at that time, and material can probably be found in the archives of the Armenian church there.

#### Armenian Scholars Participate

Three Armenian scholars completed the panel discussion of which Prof. Richard N. Frye of Harvard was chairman. Rev. A. A. Bedikian pointed out that this was the first time that Armenians themselves had come together and conceived a practical plan for the promotion of Armenian studies, thereby "gaining self-respect intellectually." Abp. Tiran Nersoyan declared that "American scholarship must now take up Armenian studies where European scholarship left off." Prof.-emeritus H. H. Chakmakjian of Tufts College stressed the need for a more up-to-date and accurate Armenian-English dictionary even though his dictionary, long inaccessible, was being reprinted by the photo-offset process in Beirut. He also called for the preparation of a companion English-Armenian dictionary.

Zareh Thomajan, famed Boston haberdasher and humorist, served as toastmaster of the banquet and Miss Sonya Aronian, pianist, furnished the musical interlude which included a selection from Alan Hovhanness. A small part of the collection of Armenian manuscripts and relics of Mr. Haroutune Hazarian of New York was on exhibit in the hotel foyer during the Assembly.

#### New Board of Directors

On Sunday afternoon the Assembly terminated with a meeting of the permanent Board of Directors elected the previous day. They chose for their Executive Committee the following: Manoog S. Young, chairman; Dr. Arta S. Avakian, first vice-chairman; Jack Guvegan, second vice-chairman; Haig Der Manuelian, secretary; and J. Mark Kolligian, treasurer.

The other directors of the Board include: Thomas T. Amirian, K. Merton Bozorian, Richard N. Frye, G. John Gregory, Richard Malkasian, Zabella D. Tahmizian, and Gen. Sarkis M. Zartarian, all of Boston, and Rev. A. A. Bedikian of Leonia, N. J., Abp. Tiran Nersoyan of New York, and Prof. Manasseh G. Sevag of Philadelphia. Also

lected to the Board was Miss Armine Dikjian of New York who resigned as of the end of the first Board meeting in order to permit greater local representation.

#### Extensive Support Received

In the report of the Acting Board of Directors the excellent press coverage and support from other Armenian organizations were mentioned. Among the organizations listed were the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Knights of Vartan, the Armenian Evangelical Union (Eastern States), and the Detroit Armenian Cultural Association. In other action the Assembly voted to have the N.A.A.S.R. become incorporated by the fall and also to acquire tax exemption status by then. The charter membership period was extended until then, or September 1, whichever comes first.

The Assembly voted on a resolution presented by James Etnekjian, chairman of the Resolutions and New Business Committee, to give Mr. Young a testimonial scroll in recognition of his "dynamic leadership, meticulous planning, and unselfish devotion" in the formative year of the organization during which he served as chairman of the Acting Board of Directors.

#### Assembly Committee Chairmen

The chairmen of the various Assembly committees were: Rules, Gregory H. Aramian; Constitution, H. Der Manuelian; Nominations, Jack Gurveyan; Resolutions and New Business, James Etnekjian; Audit, Vaughn Sayian; Armenian Studies and Research, Richard N. Frye. The chairman and secretary, respectively, of the Assembly Arrangements Committee were Thomas T. Amirian and Martin Martinian.

Further information on the Association can be had by directing inquiries to the Association at 404 Park Square Building, Boston 16, Massachusetts.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: There are new photos and cuts available for your use. They include photos of the banquet and panel participants and of the new Board of Directors. They will be gladly furnished upon request.