

MICHAEL COSTULAS

Michael Costulas was born in *Souapi* in the Greek province of Thessaly, the son of Adam and Theodora Maze Costulas. He was one of five children. His parents farmed tobacco and bred horses. His father died when he was three years old. Young Michael Costulas was able to attend grammar school where he thoroughly learned the Greek language.

In 1911, when he was 16, conditions had deteriorated in the Balkans and the family decided to send Michael to the United States. He was told to go to Woonsocket, R.I. where there were many Macedo-Romanians.

Michael sailed from Piraeus, the port of Athens, on the 5000-ton Greek liner *Patris*. The ship arrived in New York on December 16, 1911, and after a brief stay on Ellis Island, he took the train to Woonsocket.

When he arrived in Woonsocket, he went to a house whose address had been given to him by a friend aboard the ship. There were five other single men living in the house and Michael shared the rent with them while each did his own cooking. The rent was \$1.25 a week and food was purchased at a nearby store on a weekly payment basis.

Michael Costulas arrived in Woonsocket on a Friday and by Monday he had a job working as a sweeper in the local cotton mill. The job paid \$5.00 a week for a 65-hr. week, which included 12 hrs. a day from Monday through Friday and five hours on Saturday. He saved all the money he earned that did not go for food, rent or clothing. His only luxury was to spend five cents a week to buy a big bag of chocolate kisses.

His economic condition improved after he had been working in the cotton mill for some time. Nicholas Gartsu, a friend, got him a job in a woolen mill which paid \$6.14 for the standard 65-hr. week.

While working in the woolen mill he wanted to make more money, so he went to work at a shoe shine stand in downtown Woonsocket. He was paid five cents for a shine and usually received a 10-cent tip.

He then moved from Woonsocket to the neighboring town of Blackstone, Mass., where he learned to

be a weaver, which enabled him to get better jobs in the local textile industry. In Blackstone he lived next to the Fatsys, a Macedo-Romanian family with 16 children, and he became attracted to their daughter Jenny who worked in a local cotton mill. They were married in Blackstone on November 23, 1919.

Soon after he was married, a Turkish friend told him that there were good opportunities to make money working as a barber. He soon learned how to cut hair and give shaves and went to work for a Woonsocket barber for the next three years.

In 1927, Mr. and Mrs. Costulas and their two children moved to Bridgeport where he became a partner with Joseph Welch in the Square Deal Barber Shop located at 264 State Street. He later bought out Welch and sometimes afterwards became partners with Petra Fatse. The Square Deal Barber Shop was a well known establishment in downtown Bridgeport and in advertisements it was said to be "the oldest place in town, with the very best of service, for many miles around."

Soon after he moved to Bridgeport, Michael Costulas became active in the Romanian Orthodox Church which was just acquiring its first building on Lee Ave. Money was needed for the new church and he helped by heading the church's dramatic society which charged admission for its productions in order to raise funds for the church.

He took several Greek dramas and every night, after working all day at the barber shop, he painstakingly translated them into the Macedo-Romanian language. He directed the members of the church's dramatic society in the first of the plays, "Golfu," which was presented in 1928.

The plays were usually tragedies with a "Romeo and Juliet" theme of tragic love in which the hero and heroine usually commit suicide or are killed. "Esmea," which he produced and directed in 1935 and which had an all-female cast, was about a Turkish soldier who falls in love with a Macedo-Romanian girl.

The plays were popular and realistic to their audience and women would often cry or faint during the tragic love scenes. In earlier plays admission was 25 cents for men and 15 cents for women which went to the church fund. The plays which he translated, produced and directed from 1928 to 1961 went on tour to Woonsocket, R.I., Southbridge, Mass., and other areas where there were large Macedo-Romanian colonies.

Mr. Costulas and his partner sold the Square Deal Barber Shop in 1961, shortly before urban renewal razed the old building to make way for an urban shopping area. At about the same time, the Costulas family moved to Fairfield.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Costulas have three children: Despa, married to Nicholas Cipu, they have a son Robert who resides in Monroe, a daughter Marie who lives in Wilton and has three sons and three grandchildren, and another daughter, Elaine, who is a buyer for Howlands Department Store.

Son Peter Costulas heads Sperco Typography, Inc. of Bridgeport. He married the former Florence Babiana of Woonsocket, and they have a daughter, Mary Jennifer.

Daughter Ellen is married to Theodore Andry who comes from Woonsocket. They have two children, David and Cyndee.

