

AMERICAN PHILHELLENES SOCIETY  
DEDICATION OF MONUMENT TO LUCAS MILTIADIS MILLER  
AND JONATHAN PECKHAM MILLER  
OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN  
April 20, 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered today to pay homage to a great American Philhellene, Colonel Jonathan Peckham Miller and his adoptive son, later American soldier and statesman, Lucas Miltiadis Miller.

I am profoundly proud to be invited by the American Philhellenes Society and its President Mr. Nikolopoulos to address such a distinguished audience and to have the privilege to highlight this important event.

What connects us today, all of us in this room, is memory. Memory and respect to those who fought for freedom, our freedom, and democracy. Memory, however, doesn't go without knowledge. So if we look back into the past and trace the first days of Greek American relations in 1821-1830, when Greeks struggled for their freedom after four hundred years under the Ottoman yoke receiving the generous support from the people of America, we will realize of how closely the United States and Greece were connected in their development as modern states: The United States was founded on principles derived from ancient Athens. And later Americans were those who supported the establishment of an independent Hellenic state which too would be founded and dedicated to those same democratic values.

That kind of support was given in two different ways: on a political level, and I remind you at this point the presidential declarations in December 1822, 1823 and the resolutions of the American Senate and the House of Representatives in December 1823, but also on the ground by the American Philhellenes who rushed to help Greeks with money, food, clothes and weapons. For those heroes who rushed to help redeem Greece from slavery it was primarily a matter of idealism. They sacrificed their health and fortune, and in some cases their lives, to the cause of Greek freedom.

Among them there was the man whose memory we honor today, Jonathan Peckham Miller.

Miller of Randolph, Vermont, a non-commissioned veteran of the War of 1812 and later a student of Law at the University of Vermont lost all of his material belongings in a fire that destroyed that college and the dorms where he lived. Influenced by his classical studies and his love for Ancient Greece, he decided to come to Greece and fight for Greece's freedom. Without money or other means, he appeared before the Philhellenic Committee of Boston that paid for his

travel expenses and his first stay in Greece, periodically sending him checks so that he could make ends meet. He was one of the most ardent American Philhellenes. Brave, bold and with a straightforward, unstudied frankness was considered as approaching the borders of roughness.

Listen how Samuel Gridley Howe, another great American Philhellene from Boston with whom Miller was closely connected describes him in his writings:

*“He is a brave man as ever stepped foot in Greece; has the most sterling integrity, and an entire devotion to the cause of liberty. You would laugh to see him: he has his head shaved, has on the Greek Floccata and petticoat trousers, and with his pistols and dagger stuck in his belt, and is musquet on his shoulder, cuts a most curious figure. Miller is noble and generous, though stern, enthusiast. He has cheerfully marched all the long day among mountains, and at night lain down on the ground”.*

In Greece, Miller began his military activity as a captain and by the time he left, he had been promoted to colonel. He immediately began learning Greek up his arrival and dressed like the local Greeks. He served under the Jarvis corps and stayed in Missolonghi until June of 1825, from which he managed to escape in a small craft, breaking the Turkish encirclement in the first phase of the siege of that city. He headed to Nafplio, and from there to Myloi. He took part in the battle of Myloi along with Dimitrios Ypsilantis and showed outstanding courage living up to his Greek nickname, “The American Dare Devil”. In autumn of 1826, Miller returned to the United States, where he gave a series of speeches in large Northern cities, in order to inform them and to attract Americans to the Greek cause.

In February of 1827 Miller returned to Greece, this time as representative of the Philhellenic Committee of New York, in order to distribute philanthropic assistance to the starving population. In 1828, returning to America to stay, he published the study, “The Condition of Greece in 1827 and 1828”, which was in essence the diary he kept while he was in Greece.

Returning with Miller to the US was a young orphan he had adopted, Loukas Miltiadis Miller. Jonathan Miller found the young, bony and pale boy wandering with his sister in Poros. On June 26, of the same year, Miller married Sara Arms. With his family settled now in Montpelier, Vermont, he studied law and opened a practice. He was an ardent advocate for the antislavery movement in the Columbia area, through public speeches, and resolutions and/or proposals through the representative of the State of Vermont in Congress.

He died of an injury in 18457. His fame for honesty, integrity, and kindness and character remained with him until his last breath.

His son, whom we also honor today, a native of Livadia, was a black-eyed boy of two years of age, an orphan, adopted by him and upon his return to America, given a chance to reap the benefits of a good, honest and hardworking life in America. He attended public schools until he

was 16 in Montpelier and later took over his father's law practice and studied Law. When he was only 23 years old he made his way towards Wisconsin. Along with many immigrants Lucas Miltiadis Miller settled in Oshkosh, a small town without infrastructure at the time. Granted his numerous years in public office he was nominated for municipal legislator, state senator, state treasurer and even lieutenant governor.

In the year 1891 Lucas Miller was nominated the Democratic candidate for Wisconsin in the House of Representatives. He was elected to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Congress. He was the first American-Greek Congressman until his death in 1902.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should all of us in this room, Americans and Greeks be very proud of our heroes of the past. Their vision and courage have meant so much not only to the development of Greece as a modern, free and independent state, but also to a long series of radical changes in the map of the Balkans. It wasn't without reason after all what one of the greatest American volunteers once said when he called the Greek War of Independence one of the most important, and certainly the most interesting political event of that age.

Listen how perfectly Miller described in his diary the state of affairs by the time: "Greece will be free or must be exterminated from the earth". As about himself he declared "I have fared like a Greek and with the Greeks I am willing to suffer for the cause of religion and freedom. Call me in America a crusader, or what you will, my life is devoted to the overturning of the Turkish empire. And, if it be the will of God, I hope to see the downfall of the false prophet. God is on the side of the Greeks..."

Today we live in a new, globalized environment. Respect and tolerance of civil and religious rights all over the world are non-disputable values, nevertheless incidents of violation are frequently reported in different places of our globe. It seems that we still need to learn to live together not only to exist together.

In this remote time however, religion and freedom were principles strictly connected to each other: The civilized and Christian nations were confronted by the barbarian in inhuman sword of Islam. Humanity has unfortunately seen before similar scenes of horror. However, the Greek War of Independence was, no doubt at all, the most brutal and atrocious war ever stained earth, with ferocious deeds of a brutal soldiery, set on by the clergy and followers of a fanatical and merciless religion, and rioting in excesses of blood and butchery.

Could someone call it today two centuries later a primary clash of civilizations?

In our era, Greece located in a region, where Christianity meets Islam and Judaism, maintains excellent relations with Muslim countries and Israel.

The Greek Governments throughout the last decades have taken important steps to further cross-cultural understanding, rapprochement and cooperation in various fields with Turkey and other neighboring countries with strong Muslim population, thus enhancing the stability of the wider region.

To that direction the governments and people of Greece and the United States are at the forefront of efforts to advance freedom, democracy, peace, stability and human rights.

Allow me to leave this floor repeating one paragraph of this year's Presidential Proclamation, by President Barack Obama.

“In both America and Greece, we are inheritors to great republics, entrusted to safeguard the ideals that make representative government work. Our peoples have learned that democracy flourishes when we respect our differences, hold fast to the principles that unit us, and move forward with common purpose”.

Let us all deliver to eternity and to the respect of coming generations the names of all those brave men who fought for our freedom and succeeded the bands of gratitude and fraternity to unite forever the Greeks and the Americans in their quest for freedom and democracy.