

# Lebanese First Settled In City 60 Years Ago

Fall River has approximately 2,500 persons of Syrian-Lebanese descent living here. Of these almost all are properly speaking Lebanese rather than Syrians. Lebanese are almost all Christians, while Syrians, except for some conversions, are predominantly Mohammedan.

The migration from the Levant to this country and to Fall River from the Levant was almost exclusively from Lebanon.

The Lebanese migrated to escape the persecution of the Turks, which was as much religious as political in motivation. Although Americans of Lebanese descent will celebrate in 1954 the 100th anniversary of the first man of their race to migrate to this country, the first Lebanese to come to this city settled here less than 60 years ago.

Although no one knows exactly who was the first Lebanese to take up residence in Fall River, among the first were Tanous Rahmy, Yousuf Ferris, Nahim Haddad, Saleem Buiz, Habib Najer, Joseph Coury and Joseph Bshara.

These first settlers lived on lower Columbia Street or in Globe village. For the most part, they were pedlers and small shopkeepers.

## Group Settles in Flint

The second group of Lebanese immigrants took up residence in the Flint, particularly around Quequechan Street. They had been attracted by stories of the high wages paid in the mills, and it was as mill operatives that they found employment.

The great majority of the Lebanese here are members of the Maronite Catholic Church. From the start their social as well as their religious life centered about their church.

At first the Lebanese here attended mass each Sunday in Notre Dame or in St. Anne's Church where Lebanese or Syrian priests from Boston officiated.

## House Becomes Church

In 1911, a house at 286 Jencks Street was purchased by Rev. Gabriel Corkemaz of Boston. Father Corkemaz spent three months here that year with a view to determining the religious needs of the Syrian-Lebanese community, and it was as a result of that visit that the house was bought and converted into a church for the use of persons of the Maronite rite.

The Parish of St. Anthony of

the Desert was founded at that time. Its first pastor was Rev. Ignatius Sayegh, who administered the parish until 1920.

Rev. Caesar Phares succeeded Father Sayegh, and was pastor until 1929. It was during his pastorate that the Jencks Street property where the old church stood was sold, and the land purchased for the present edifice.

Early in 1929 Msgr. Elias Hayeck spent two months with Father Phares in an administrative capacity.

## Father Eid Arrives

Rev. Joseph Eid became the new pastor of the parish in 1929. On Oct. 12, 1930, Most Rev. Bishop James E. Cassidy blessed the new St. Anthony of the Desert Church.

The mortgage on the church was burned in October, 1945. In the meantime the parish and the Lebanese in general had considerable difficulty and hardship to face during the years of depression.

During the war well over 200 Lebanese from Fall River saw service in the Armed Forces, and several sealed their identification with the United States with their lives.

The other representative church of the Syrians and Lebanese in Fall River is the Syrian Presbyterian Church, of which Rev. Joseph Zaidan is the pastor.

## Preserve Traditions

The Lebanese and Syrians here, while entering fully into the life of the city, have, to a considerable degree, preserved their sense of national heritage with distinctive societies of their own.

Of these the best known is the Lebanon American Society which in 1946 merged with the Near East Civic League. The Lebanon-American Society has quarters adjacent to St. Anthony of the Desert Church, and its activities closely correlated to those of the church.

Another prominent society is the Syrian-American Association, whose quarters are on Flint Street.

Recently the number of societies was augmented by the formation of the Lebanese American Veterans Association with headquarters in the Lebanon-American Society Building.

## Pastor Elevated

In 1952 Father Eid was elevated to the rank of Chor-Bishop by the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch. This honor, consented to by Most Rev.

honor, consented to by Most Rev. Bishop James L. Connolly of Fall River, was shared by the parishioners of St. Anthony of the Desert Church and by the Lebanese-Americans in Fall River generally.

Taken together, these facts reflect the steady growth and development of a strong group within the city proper, whose energy and industry have made them prosper out of proportion to their numbers, and whose capacity for assimilation has already made them valuable citizens of Fall River while they still retain strong ties of feeling with their ancient homeland in the Near East.



**LAYING OF CORNERSTONE** at St. Anthony of the Desert Church. The crowd pictured above gathered on the afternoon of April 15, 1930, to watch the pastor of the church, Rev. Joseph Eid, as he presided at the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone of a new church for the Lebanese people in Fall River. The church on Quequechan Street was opened in October, 1930, and has since been the spiritual center of Lebanese Catholic life in this city.