

THE PELOPONNESIANS AT THE GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY MELBOURNE 25 MARCH 2012



The Greek Independence Day March

It was the year 25 March 2012 and Melbourne was bristling with thousands of visitors speaking in the language of two nations. It was not hard to distinguish between the two if you were a long time resident of Melbourne, it was obvious that it was English and Greek being spoken. Australians of Hellenic heritage had come together to commemorate a day that is forever a passionate part of their makeup and embedded within their hearts and minds.



Guests and representatives

Amongst the guests was The Hon Ted Ballieu (Premier of Victoria), Eleni Lianidou (Greek Consulate General of Melbourne Victoria), Member of the Hellenic Parliament, The Bishop Iakovas and Mr. Kon Kontis (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia), Maria Vamvakinou, (Member for Calwell), Nicholas Kotsiras (Minister for Multiculturalism), John Panadazopoulos, (Member for Dandenong), Vasili Papastergiadis (Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria), Sophie Mirabella (Member for Indi), Anne Barker (Member for Oakleigh), Chin Tan and Phillip Bain (Multicultural representatives), Jenny Mikakos, (Member for Northern Metropolitan Region) Martin Ferguson, (Member for Batman), Victoria Police, Australian Defence Force representatives, community leaders, and Hellenic representatives.

At this year's parade the Peloponnesians' were in attendance, some their communities, some with the colleges and schools, welfare and womens groups and others amongst the myriad of people that had thronged to Melbourne for the Day. Visitors had lined both sides of the steps leading up to the shrine, which in many aspects reminds the Australians of Hellenic heritage of their own icon, the Parthenon atop the Athenian acropolis. Amidst the many colours of various Hellenic costumes, banners, placards and flags of both nations fluttering in a breeze, the chatter of birds flying overhead added to the din of the congregate of the crowd below.



Australian Hellenic Communities

Organisations, such as Colleges, schools, Australian Hellenic communities, such as the Peloponnesians, Pallaconians, Cretans, Womens Associations, Epirotos, Pan Macedonians, Cypriots, Athenians, Islanders, Peloponnesians, AHEPA and various school bands, stood around, making their final adjustment to their dress, costumes, unfurling their banners and flags in preparation for the parade. It was a sight that brought many a tear to the older generation who had known and could remember the horrors of WW2 and the Greek civil war.



The official commemoration

To be sure, The Greek Independence day would take priority for those of a Hellenic background as it is synonymous with freedom and everything associated with it. The Greek independence Day is what ANZAC Day is to all Australians and both nations commemorate to Remember, Revere, Respect and to reflect on the sacrifices of a generation now in the bosom of mother earth. The parade began at the lower part of the shrine near St Kilda road and made its way up the centre towards the dignitaries', veering to the left and finally coming to rest at the eternal flame for the official presentation.



Australian Hellenic Women Associations

At the conclusion of all the speeches relating to the Greek Independence day, the crowd dispersed into their particular groups and slowly melted away. The cumulus clouds above scattered allowing the sun's rays to penetrate the earth, bringing warmth to the crowds below was like an unseen signal that it was time to go home. The Peloponnesians had done their fair share, satisfied in having paid their respects and homage to a generation long gone but never forgotten. **Lest we forget** Peter Adamis

