

New York Times article – September 15, 1895

## MINISTER FOR SYRIANS

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Christian Church to be Filled by a Damascus Preacher.

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WILL ALSO VISIT OTHER CITIES

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Bishop of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands Asked the Emperor of Russia to Make the Appointment.

Among the foreign colonies the Syrian colony is one that is attaining importance, as it has been steadily growing in numbers for several years past. The number of Syrians at present residing in this city is estimated at 10,000, and in the United States at 150,000. Of course nearly all of them are Christians, either Maronites or members of the Orthodox Church, and should they keep on coming to this country at the rate they have been it will not be very long before only few Christians will be left in Syria. The natives will all be Mohammedan and Druses. To what extent the industries and trade of that country will be affected by the loss of this thrifty population can hardly be determined at present, for the Christians of Syria have certainly been the mainstays of industry and commerce there, as well as of agriculture.

Many Syrians of the better classes have of late been coming to the United States, among them representatives of commercial firms in Beyroot, Damascus, and other cities. The great majority, however, come from the working classes, and there are now here shoemakers, weavers, spinners, and farmers, not a few of whom have gone to California where they are engaged in the cultivation of the vine, figs, oranges, apricots, olives, and other fruits. There was talk some time ago of going into the silk-raising business, which the mountainers of the Lebanon understand so thoroughly, but it was decided that that industry could not well be conducted on a large scale, and small farmers were not forthcoming who could afford to wait several years until the mulberry trees should grow large enough to yield leaves for the silkworms. In the Lebanon the work of feeding the worms is given to the women and children, and the utmost cleanliness, care, and proper ventilation, and temperature are required, for without these the worms either sicken and die or their silk becomes coarse.

In New-York, Syrian Arabs live all over the city, but the headquarters where old residents have lived for years, and where the new-comers go, is in the lower part of Washington Street and cross streets. A good many of them are easily distinguishable by a rather dark complexion, and might by some be taken for Italians or Frenchmen from the South of France, but not a few are of quite light complexion, with light-colored hair. Some of the girls that come from Damascus and certain parts of the mountains are of amazing beauty, and some of the darker beauties have strikingly bright-looking black eyes that retain their lustre until old age.

As a rule the Syrians discard their native dress after their arrival here, not, perhaps, because they dislike it, but principally to avoid annoyance from the tough elements in the streets. Even the fez, or tarboosh, as the Syrians call the red Turkish cap, has generally been abandoned, and is rarely seen except on the newcomers in the stores and houses in the Washington Street colony.

They preserve, however, their native habits and customs, and favor Syrian dishes as much as they are able, and to accommodate those who have no settled homes, several Arab restaurants

have been opened, where the Syrian can eat the same dishes on which he was brought up at home. They much resemble other Oriental cookery. Hard boiled rice, so prepared that the grains separate, and yakhny, a delicate, savory stew, is a favorite dish. A weakness of the Arabs is stuffed vegetables, called mahshee. The inside of a tomato or cucumber is taken out, and it is then stuffed with finely-chopped meat, spiced, and sometimes mixed with rice. Some sweetmeats, a small cup of strong, fresh-made coffee and a cigarette, or a nargilah, or water pipe, winds up the dinner--the Asha--and then the Arab is ready to sip more coffee, and smoke and tell stories or play backgammon, which game they call tawla, and of which they are passionately fond. An Arab "sport" will play tawla as long, and with as much earnestness and zeal, as a New-York "sport" will play poker.

The Syrian loves water, trees, and flowers, and perhaps one great reason that keeps Syrian colony in the lower part of Washington Street is its nearness to the Battery, where they can have a view of the bay, and see the fine trees and grass in the park. Many Arab mothers and their children can be seen about the Battery in the afternoon as and the men also go there toward evening to sit and talk and look. In Syria they will go miles to sit and smoke by the side of a streamlet. In the Arab quarter many of the Arab houses can be distinguished by plants that are reared on the fire escapes and window sills. Climbing plants are favorites, and the convolvulus, and even the cucumber vine, can be seen winding their tendrils about the fire escapes. The rehan, or sweet marjoram, is a great favorite with all.

There is a great deal of affection in the family circle among the Syrians, and respect for parents, especially for the mother, is the universal rule, and the children who do not honor their mother through life, and care for her in her old age, are considered worse than heathens. Such rules are universal, both among Mohammedans and Christians.

Many of the Syrian mountaineers who have come here have gone into the peddling business. They first started with religious trinkets that they sold to Roman Catholics, and then they gradually traded in other wares sold by peddlers. Several enterprising Syrian merchants started peddlers' supplies stores and are doing a large business. Others work in silk embroidery, make stockings, wraps, pocketbooks, suspenders, pearl beads, and perfumery, and one Syrian has recently patented a waistcoat button with a receptacle for perfumery.

The Syrians here are not slow in learning the English language for the purposes of general business, and among them are a number of gentlemen in the learned professions--physicians and editors. They support a few newspapers printed in Arabic, the principal one of which is published in this city and called Kawkab America, (The Star of America) edited by Dr. Abraham J. Arbeely, who has lived here many years and married an American woman, Miss Lafetra, and has several charming children who speak English better than they do Arabic. Dr. Arbeely furnishes his countrymen with a great deal of news from Syria and the Levant, and makes them acquainted with American institutions, customs, and manners. He is also preparing an English-Arabic grammar and pronouncing dictionary to facilitate the learning and pronunciation of the English language by Syrians. It will have about 500 pages.

Several months ago the Syrians of the Greek Orthodox Church in this country organized a benevolent society which they called the Benevolent Syrian Orthodox Society, and have just chosen Dr. Arbeely as President of the society. This society does not restrict its benevolence to members of the Greek Church only, as it has given assistance to Maronites and also Mohammedans in distress in a foreign land.

The Russian Bishop of Alaska, whose Episcopal See comprises all the United States, has been taking a great deal of interest in the Syrians of the Orthodox Greek Church who are in this country, and has quite recently prevailed upon the Russian Emperor and Synod to appoint a

Syrian priest who studied in Russia as a pastor for orthodox Syrians in this country under the supervision of the Russian See. The success of the Russian bishop of Alaska was first published in the Syrian colony yesterday, and has created a great deal of rejoicing. The name of the Syrian-Russian priest is the Rev. Archimandrite Raphael Hawawini, native of Damascus, and he is expected here next month.

The following is a translation of the letter of the Chief Secretary of the Synod of Russia to the Bishop of Alaska informing him of the action of the Synod on his request to have Archimandrite Raphael Hawawini appointed and to fix salaries for him and a Syrian deacon of his own selection:

Charge of the Most Holy Governing Synod of the Russian Church,  
To the Right Rev. Nicholas, Bishop of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands:

By command of his Imperial Majesty, the Most Holy Governing Synod has heard the report of your Right Reverence of the 15th of June of the present year, together with the presented petition of the Archimandrite Raphael, native of Damascus, in Syria, asking to be accepted in the service of the Alaskan diocese, with an appointment to the Church of New-York for the Arabians, emigrants from Syria, who live in America, and that he, Archimandrite Raphael, together with a Deacon—Syrian—who is to arrive, be granted a subsistence of 1,800 rubles in gold annually. And upon examination, it has come in order to consider:

Whereas the Archimandrite Raphael, a native of Damascus, in Syria, in his petition to your Right Reverence explains that the orthodox Syrians-Arabians, in divers cities of the United States of North America, whose numbers exceed 10,000 souls, have not one sacred minister who should administer to their spiritual needs, and in the worship of God in the Arabian tongue, and they request him to be their religious pastor.

Whereas the Archimandrite Raphael desires to extend spiritual support to his kinsmen, he beseeches your Right Reverence to accept him in the service of your diocese, and to obtain for him from the Most Holy Synod an appointment to the Church in New-York for the orthodox Syrians, (Arabians,) who live there, as also for those who live in other American cities, and that if his request be granted he should receive besides traveling expenses an annual income of 1,800 rubles in gold, of which 1,200 rubles are to be for his personal support, and 600 rubles for the support of the Deacon.

Your Right Reverence reports that the appointment of the Archimandrite to service in the diocese entrusted to you is considered by you most desirable, and that the amount he names for his support you find to be not quite sufficient on account of the higher cost of living in America, and you ask for an increase of the salary and that 500 rubles in gold more be allowed for expenses in missionary visitations.

Having examined the above, and, bearing also in mind the answer of the Most Blessed Patriarch of Antioch in regard to the advisability of transferring Archimandrite Raphael to the service of the diocese in America, it is therefore resolved by the Most Holy Synod:

First—That your Right Reverence be allowed to receive the aforesaid Archimandrite into the diocese entrusted to you, with an appointment, together with a Deacon selected by him from Syria, to one of the churches of the diocese at your discretion.

Second—That for the support of the Archimandrite and the Deacon 1,800 rubles in gold will be annually appropriated, of which 1,200 will be for the Archimandrite and 600 for the Deacon, and 500 rubles more for traveling expenses.

Third—That in accordance with the statute concerning passage money granted to those who officially leave Russia to serve beyond the borders and imperially confirmed on May 1, 1867, the regularly appointed sum of 150 chervonets [chervonet, about \$3.85] for passage money, and 150

chervonets for the expenses of moving and settling, the total of 316 chervonets be assigned to the Archimandrite Raphael, this sum being credited to the account for American churches and missions.

ALEXIS ZAVIALOV  
Acting secretary in chief.

Acting Secretary Ser. Kamenski  
July 17, 1895

When the Russian Bishop of Alaska received the letter, he wrote: "I am happy that God blessed this, my long desire, to give to the American Arabians a native Arab pastor! The diocesan office will send a copy of this charge to the rector of the church in New-York, and another copy to the Arabian newspaper for the information of the Syrians in America. Further, Archimandrite Raphael will annually, during two Summer months and two Winter months, visit the cities of the United States in which Arabians are more numerous, viz., Chicago, San Francisco, &c.

BISHOP NICHOLAS  
"24 July, 1895, in Novgorod."