

President Calvin Coolidge and the Armenian orphan rug

By Dr. Hagop Martin Deranian



“ Mr. President: Your words as to the observance of Golden Rule Sunday last year have gone out into all the earth, as the lines of which the Psalmist spoke . . . the most impressive is this beautiful rug which the [Armenian] children in the orphanage in the Lebanon have made for you. . . They began work on it as soon as your sympathetic words reached them. As only four girls could work at one time at the loom . . . They have tied into it the gratitude of tens of thousands of children to you and to America. And what they have tied into it will never be untied. . . It is sent to adorn the dearest of our temples, the White House of our President.”

—Dr. John H. Finley,

Vice-Chairman of the Near East Relief Executive Committee

“ The beautiful rug woven by the [Armenian] children in the orphanage in the Lebanon has been received. This, their expression of gratitude for what we have been able to do in this country for their aid, is accepted by me as a token of their goodwill to the people of the United States. . . The rug has a place of honor in the White House, where it will be a daily symbol of good-will on earth.”

—President Calvin Coolidge

White House, December 4, 1925

“ After what I experienced, I had felt that I had been summoned from the Heavens. . . . The Lord had shown me the path . . . [and] led me to a people, who, despite all adversities and miseries, had resolved to remain faithful to their God and the Lord. . . . Isn't this the same people who just a couple of years ago [1894-1896] had been subjected to horrible massacres? Their villages razed, plundered and tens of thousands massacred. And yet, this very people, with resolute faith in God, continue to remain hopeful that better days are yet to come and that they will be more felicitous. God dispatched me to such a people so that I can attend to their wounds as their true brother. Thus, I resolved to serve that people [the Armenians] as a true brother. Ever since, I have come to deeply believe that all barbaric schemes to destroy the Armenian people will always be destined to fail.”

—Jakob Künzler

In the Land of Blood and Tears

“The beautiful rug woven by the [Armenian] children in the [Ghazir] orphanage in the Lebanon has been received. This, their expression of gratitude for what we have been able to do in this country for their aid, is accepted by me as a token of their goodwill to the people of the United States. . . The rug has a place of honor in the White House, where it will be a daily symbol of good-will on earth.” These words of President Calvin Coolidge on December 4, 1925, were made in response to Dr. John H. Finley, Vice-Chairman of the Near East Relief Executive Committee, who presented the rug for the Armenian orphans who “have tied into it the gratitude of tens of thousands of children to you and to America. And what they have tied into it will never be untied. . . It is sent to adorn the dearest of our temples, the White House of our President.”

On Sunday, October 20 at 3:00 p.m. the Armenian Cultural Foundation will have a reception and presentation of Dr. Hagop Martin Deranian's work *President Calvin Coolidge and the Armenian Orphan Rug*. A labor of love it is dedicated to the memory of the Armenian orphan rug weavers of the Near East Relief orphanage in Ghazir, Syria (presently Lebanon). Successor to the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, the Near East Relief was established in 1915 in response to urgent pleas from Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador to Turkey, and through the efforts of industrialist and philanthropist Cleveland Dodge and the support of President Woodrow Wilson. As such Near East Relief embarked on a herculean task of saving the lives of over 1,000,000 refugees, including over 100,000 Armenian orphans scattered throughout the Middle East and the Caucasus in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Over \$100,000,000, an astronomical figure at the time, was raised between 1915 and 1930 and an army of 1,000 American physicians, nurses, civil servants, and volunteers labored to save countless lives.

The result of over three decades of research and investigation, Dr. Deranian's work traces the history of the rug and the Armenian orphans: their transportation from Urfa to safety to the present day Lebanon by the great Swiss humanitarian and physician Jakob Kunzler, known as the "Father of the Armenian orphans." He details its journey to the United States, presentation to President Calvin Coolidge in the White House, several decades in the possession of the Coolidges and its return again to the White House in the mid-1980s, where it is stored to this day.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1922, Dr. Hagop Martin Deranian was born to genocide survivors the town of Hussenig, Kharpert Province, Ottoman Empire. He is named Hagop in honor of Hagop Bogigian, his mother's uncle, who was a pioneer rug merchant in America and benefactor of education for Armenian young women. His mother, born Varter Bogigian, who died in 1929, was a survivor of the genocide, having lost six children, her first husband, and parents. His father, Marderos, who died in 1957, arrived in America in 1900 and operated a grocery store in Worcester. His father raised him from the age of seven.

Dr. Deranian, a graduate of Clark University and the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine, served as Lieutenant (junior grade) in the United States Navy (1951-53) and has been engaged in the private practice of dentistry while at the same time serving on the faculty of the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine.

His translation of his father's memoir, *Hussenig, The Origin, History and Destruction of an Armenian Town*, was published in 1996; an earlier bilingual edition

appeared in 1981. His second book, *Worcester Is America, the Story of Worcester's Armenians*, appeared in 1995 followed by *Miracle Man of the Western Front: Dr. Varaztad H. Kazanjian, Pioneer Plastic Surgeon*, which was published in 2007.

The event, open to the public, is co-sponsored by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and the Amaras Art Alliance, and will be held on Sunday, October 20, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. A reception will follow the presentation. For more information, please contact the Armenian Cultural Foundation during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) or check your local Armenian news outlets.