

Fr. John K. Antonopoulos

## **Our Village Kastania**



My small and beautiful village,  
accept my prayer!  
In the warmth of your embrace,  
my soul has grown.  
You nurtured it,  
and its roots carry  
something from the tops of the trees,  
and from the water that flows!

Fr. John K. Antonopoulos



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Give to this village what it deserves and what belongs to it.

BY THE SAME

The Community of Saint Demetrius Astoria  
in the stadium of the Church in America, 2007

Distillation of love, 2016

Offering  
Fr. John K. Antonopoulos  
to the Kastania Association  
"Saint John the Baptist"

## FOREWORD

The present work is an aesthetically pleasing and particularly interesting edition that describes the mountainous village of Kastania in Nafpaktia with all its beauties and the wonderful world that surrounds it.

Kastania is amphitheatrically built on the steep western side of the Ardini Mountain, at an altitude of 800 meters, between shady ravines of plane trees, firs and oaks that testify to the visitor the strict beauty of wild nature.

Kastania is 60 kilometers away from the city of Nafpaktos and 3 kilometers from Evinolimni, the lake created by the Evinos dam, while administratively it belongs to the Municipality of Nafpaktia.

The center of the village, with its stone-built structures, its cobbled square, its perennial plane trees, its abundant running waters, and its excellently arranged shop in the same space, predisposes the visitor for a pleasant and tranquil stay. The old stone church of Agios Pannes, the stone traditional building of the school, and the chapel of Agios Elias, adorn the wider green area.

The beautification and renovation of Kastania is the result of the fraternal love of the members of the Kastania Association, and particularly, certain privileged elected ones who loved it very much and devoted all their forces, time, effort and money to see it beautiful and well-groomed.

The doctor Mr. Christos Angelakis, the lawyer Mr. Athanasios Lellos, and Mrs. Vasiliki Loi are the pioneers and the driving force that contributed to the success of this work. They are people who do not require recognition but deserve it with all our love and respect. Congratulations!

We wish that over time our villagers will prove worthy to welcome a better tomorrow with their new and good families as they have the abilities required to enjoy a peaceful and beautiful place, full of people with a great joy of life.

In this brief retrospective of the village's history, our fellow villagers will find all the necessary basic elements collected that will bring them in contact and acquaintance with the village and its surrounding area.

The author, Rev. Father Ioannis K. Antonopoulos, together with my collaborator Mr. Spiros Antonopoulos, have recorded this small history of the village of Kastania Nafpaktias and we ask for the indulgence of all in case of omissions of full names, people and/or place names. We respect and love the present and the development of the future, but we do not erase the past.

This is also our message.

Father Ioannis Antonopoulos





### **Our village, Kastania Nafpaktias**

The sky of the village is the same as all the skies of the earth. But what distinguishes this small village is the world and the environment around it. It is said by many that the earth where you are born, the earth that hears your first cry, the earth that is watered with your first tear, is sweeter than any other land. Perhaps, of course, it does not have to offer you what you want and are looking for. However, it gives you its air and its water. It embraces you with its springs and summers. It confronts you with very beloved faces. With people you have shared joys and sorrows, songs and tears with... It gave you the blessing to grow up with beautiful memories of a carefree childhood life.

And I, a child of this land, my heart wished to write a brief historical review, going as far back as possible. Within this history flowed and still flows my own journey, as well as that of many of my fellow villagers. It is not a significant historical review for others, but for us, who originate from there, and for life itself that has been flowing for so many years without a word, without any mention. The mention of individuals, families, situations, and toponyms of the village, it is understood, will breathe life and sufficient renewing power into our national tradition which we hold unconsciously as something distant and anachronistic.



I want to deal more with the romantic part of the lives of my fellow villagers. This will benefit our new generation considerably. This devout and sympathetic story that unfolds in the difficult years of wars, poverty, and many deprivations will claim its place in the present. Stubbornness existed and exists, but times do not tolerate this behavior. Cooperation and progress are needed.

In recent years, the thoughts and plans of some fellow villagers advocated for a revival and renovation of the village. And for this important work, a lot of effort, time, and money was required. They deserve the praise and the attention and respect of all.

### **The village of Kastania**

It is well known to many that the village was a small settlement in the district of Perpiani Chomori. We do not know if there is documented evidence but we will respectfully accept the information given to us by the knowledgeable Ant. Drosos in his wonderful poem "The Echoes from Chomori".

The region of Perpiani, west of the village of Komori, is and was arable and a good pasture. Therefore, it was possible to support many inhabitants. It had enough water to irrigate the gardens, a necessity for a community of people and their animals. I remember this place very well with a lot of wheat and corn crops. There is also another location whose place-name continues to be "Mavroi". It is equally productive land, mainly for the production of vegetables. Immediately after there is Diaselo where the borders of Chomori and Kastania are. There was the famous Han of Giakovo. Its foundations and its walls existed until recently, when a bulldozer flattened them to allow the public highway to pass. The full name of the owner of the Han was Chrysanthos Giakovo.

This settlement, then, of Kastaniotes, was forced to abandon this area violently and by necessity. Criminals and paid robbers killed the men and forced the orphaned families to move and settle in the current location of the village, after obliging them to renounce any claim of property or other rights.

Marks and toponyms confirm the prior ownership of the Kastaniotes. From "Xani tou Giakouvu - Diaselo" begins a mountain range all the way to the foothills of Mount Ardini. In this mountain range, there were fields where barley was cultivated, and they still bear names of Kastaniotes such as "Kouvara," "Staikou," "Plakoules," and others.

The writer remembers my uncle Giannis Antonopoulos (Liolio) building small paths to hold the soil and sow barley. And he had progress. Nearby are the ruins of the church of St. Sosti.

Over time, various events occur and significant changes that each of us would like to know. To know them not out of curiosity but from a genuine desire to be able to understand the life of our ancestors and the place where they lived.



Changes have happened and continue to happen. Not only in the physiognomy of the place but also in social composition. The physiognomy of the place is naturally changing. As long as people abandoned the place and its care, what else would grow but wild plants, fir trees, prickly oaks, cedars, and oregano? However, the place did not cease to have a different charm, equally natural and very beautiful.

Several years ago, there was no uncultivated land. From the gardens of the village to high up in Diaselo, wheat and corn and the corresponding harvest. These were for the year's living. People were conservative, without high demands.

In the cultivation of these fields, families met to help one another in threshing, peeling the corn, etc., and this was a sign of friendship, humanity, and entertainment together.

There was some human cooperation to make the impossible possible amid great difficulties of poverty and deprivation. Those who would tell us much about their life and the difficult situations rest in the cemetery, next to the Church of St. John. Along with them are hidden the stories, the events, and the sorrows that would move our hearts, if they had not been hardened by the foreign place with foreign perceptions and foreign life.

Indeed, it would be very beneficial for our new generation to delve into the history of their ancestors. There, they would see the resilience and patience of their people. They would

witness the true face of humanity, which only manifests itself through struggles, hardships, and during the challenging situations of war and hardship.

Our ancestors, therefore, were remarkable individuals and made numerous contributions. We are descended from them and for them we are grateful. You can see how important the seed of our Mother, Kastaniotissa, is!

### **First Generation Immigrants 1900-1930**

1. Antonopoulos, Georgios
2. Antonopoulos, Ioannis
3. Antonopoulos, Konstantinos
4. Antonopoulos, Nikolaos
5. Vasilopoulos, Spyros
6. Vellios, Nikolaos
7. Vellios, Dinos
8. Loi, Lambrini
9. Lois, Vasilios
10. Lois, Ioannis
11. Lois, Konstantinos
12. Lois, Charalampos
13. Manolis, Spyros
14. Evkis, Vasilios
15. Xykis, Konstantinos
16. Skaniás, Ioannis (Skaniogianis)
17. Staikos, Georgios

This is also evident from the songs and laments we old ones used to hear. The songs and laments encapsulate longing and suffering. They spoke loudly of the companionship of Mother and Father. Of the shade of the grandfather and the grandmother, moreover, of the estrangement of the brother. For them, nothing was more sacred. A word and a phrase full of sorrow. Just so that the heart can breathe a little and unburden itself from the woes for a moment. All of this comes to my mind and has followed me since my early years. I do not want to forget them so as not to be deprived of these legends that my village and life near it have given me.

It is good to look ahead, seeking a beautiful village and a beautiful life within it. I, the old one, and others like me, also look back because life and its past fill our mind and soul and make us proud. And we say loudly: some of us were and some of us are. With this 'we are', we declare enlisted not in some political power and threat, but in giving life, friendship, kinship, and love to the place where we lived, where our unforgettable ancestors lived. And to feel the joy of the soldier who, returning home victorious from a hard battle, looks and re-looks at the door and the windows of his house, caresses his basil plants, and his heart rejoices. Many of us do not find the door and windows, neither basil plants nor pots.

I visited the village one past summer to acknowledge the old neighborhood. To see Giorglaika, where my aunt Spyridoula lived, and my heart clenched. I did not see doors, neither windows, nor even any standing stone. I thought for a long time and said words of painful prayer: "And you my sweet sky, why do you bring the harvest so quickly?" So I thought that everything comes and goes too quickly. The voices and songs have stopped, the complaints have also stopped.

Where could Antonis be, where is Koula, Foto, Kostas, and Vasilis? This question torments the minds and hearts of many of my fellow villagers. Let's understand from these changes that everything changes, passes, even those things we thought would remain forever. Relationships, friendships, marriages, baptisms, and festivals! What happened to those fields, those gardens, all moistened with the salty sweat of the face. Nostalgia and memories often bring us back to the past. The past that follows and aids the future. So let's move forward to the future. Renovate the village. The roads and alleyways have changed, the houses have been repaired, and the dance floor with the two large old plane trees is new. Let's walk where our ancestors walked.

### **The village and its place**

The village of Kastania is a beautiful village. I can't say it's an eagle's nest, but it's in the embrace of a mother earth who hides her children from enemies. The Church of Saint John and the small Church of Saint Elias are great witnesses who say: "Look, here we are. We see you. Come and see us too." In this embrace, many have lived.

It rests west on one foot of the mountain Ardinis. It borders the village of Chomori, the villages of Agios Dimitrios, Platanos, and Perista, with the mountain Xerovouni in between - which doesn't suit its name because it has many water springs.



Its pillow is the tree-lined path that protects and beautifies it in spring, summer, and more so in autumn with its many autumn colors. Its peak -the Zygos- was once a cultivated place. There, the village teachers took us on excursions during the school period. An indelible dream for me, which is interpreted as kinship and connection of nature with the human heart.

The mirror of the village is the mountain, Xerovouni. Every morning, every villager, willing or unwilling, looked at the majesty of the sunrise. What it reflects in the village, I do not know. All I know is that it foretold some hope in the village but also some worry. Its slopes are full of people and many flocks of sheep and goats. I know that printed words and phrases cannot faithfully represent the thoughts and emotions that arise, nor describe the natural beauty of the village and its surrounding area. Someone has to let his mind free, full of imagination and calculations. This is how we should think about this place where our parents and grandparents lived. These alleys, these paths, these neighborhoods were once buzzing with voices and life noise. In these houses, they experienced joys and sorrows. In them, they celebrated baptisms, engagements,



and weddings. In these cafes, they drank their coffee and their little wine. A past that is difficult for many to understand. But it has its history. The past does not only cause shame, on the contrary, a force of admiration and exhortation to appreciate the value of work and culture properly. To withstand the difficulties of life and to get through with optimism.



#### **Kastaniote Families 1950**

1. Angelakis, Dimitrios
2. Athanasiopoulos, George
3. Antonopoulos, Ioannis (Lioliinos)
4. Antonopoulos, Dimitrios (Lioliometros)
5. Antonopoulos, Konstantinos (Dioliokotsos)
6. Antonopoulos, Konstantinos (Lioliokotsos)
7. Antonopoulos, Konstantinos (Darlak)
8. Antonopoulos, Christos
9. Vasilopoulos, Ioannis (Vasiloynos)
10. Vasilopoulos, Grigorios, Baeklina
11. Vellios, George (Dinos)
12. Vellios, Konstantinos (Tasa)
13. Velliou, Nikaina
14. Zaharopoulos, Zacharias
15. Kallimanis, Euthymios
16. Kallimanis, Charalambos

17. Kouvaras, Ioannis
18. Lambos, Athanasios (Koliothanasios)
19. Lambos, Athanasios
20. Lambos, Theodoros
21. Dambos, Konstantinos
22. Lambospyrina
23. Lellos, George
24. Lellos, Dimitrios
25. Lellos, Dimitrios
26. Lellos, Spyros, Zoitsa
27. Lois, Ioannis (Giorgloinos)
28. Lois, Ioannis (Kolotsoinos)
29. Lois, Ioannis (Lionas)
30. Lois, Aristidis
31. Lois, George (Georgoulas)
32. Lois, Konstantinos (Karlaftis)
33. Lois, Kostantas (Kolotsokostas)
34. Manolis, Antonios, Stavraina
35. Manolis, George
36. Manolis, Spyros
37. Manolis, Christos
38. Dikas, Dimitrios
39. Efkes, Konstantinos
40. Efkes, Charalambos
41. Papadimitriou
42. Svokos, George
43. Skaniis, Ioannis (Skaniogiannis)
44. Skaniis, George
45. Skaniis, Ioannis (Tsitsas)
46. Skaniis, Konstantinos (Lazaros)
47. Skaniis, Nikolaos, Charalambina
48. Staikos, Ioannis (Sfounas)
49. Staikos, Theodoros
50. Staikos, Fotios
51. Stakos, George
52. Taratsas, George
53. Isintzelis, Alexis
54. Isintzelis, Leonidas
55. Charalambopoulos, Dimitrios

The Diaselo, the vista of the village! What can one see these last decades. The place has been forested everywhere with firs, cedars, and holm oaks. There are no longer trails that connect one place with another. For many years, the villagers would descend from a unique rugged path about 3 km to reach the village. You would see small and large groups descending. You would



see women loaded with caramel-colored sacks and colorful headscarves. Who can imagine what tormented their minds and what sorrow their hearts had, apart from the great fatigue and hardship.

In the last decades, our villagers enjoy the asphalted highway that reaches the village center, a sign of great change and progress. The road crosses through Hani Lioliou, Hani Koletta, and Hani Psimada and continues to the village center, something owed to the care and perseverance of the Committee members. Descending from the Diaselo we pass between abandoned fields. In these fields, they used to sow wheat and corn. Crops of the year. Locations full of memories and toponyms.

These toponyms take us many years back and are linked to certain events and people, for example, "Xyki's threshing floor". There used to be a fruitful field that later became the property of Kostas Antonopoulos (Liolikotsos). Descending, we see to the west the location Vourlamovrysi. And there many landowners of fields K. Antonopoulos, N. Antonopoulos, Priest and many other fellow villagers. There are no longer cultivable locations, no one claims them. They can only be used as pastures.

A short distance down is the location Lykopati. I don't know why it was named "Lykopati", but I can imagine it. Many fellow villagers' estates, a large estate of the Loaion (Giorglaion) family. Uncle Yiannis with his aunt Spyridoula and his two daughters, Koula and Foton with much effort and nagging were sowing this estate.



I want to continue this description from Diaselo until I reach the village: to the right and east of the road we see the Han of Lioliou. Its story is great and wonderful at the same time. A place

known throughout the Province of Naupaktia, Aitolia and Evrytania. It has been there for many decades. It is a hub for the meeting of people. It is a crossroad for people from the mountainous villages of Naupaktia and Evrytania. This place has a truly wonderful and amazing story that when someone who knows it narrates, it is moving.

Uncle Antonis was the first innkeeper, owner and master of this place. This Inn was the resting place of distant travelers. They found guards and protectors there. It was not only the tsipouro and the wine, but also the stove in the heavy winter and the storms of the fall. From Diaselo they saw the blue smoke and one said to the other: "we have reached the Inn to take a breath". Later, Uncle Giannis and Uncle Kostas, children of Uncle Antonis, continued this human help and care. And it continues to this day from the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I will come back later with much more information about the Inn of Lioliou.

Descending this road, sometimes a road of sighs and other times of joy and song, we reach the plains of the village, the leveled places. Once, they were fields and vineyards taken care of, with several chestnuts and cherry trees. Spring, God's joy, the month of May. Many housewives and young women with song and lament accompanied the birds of the sky and behind perhaps each song was hidden some grief and some complaint. A little further to the left, "Manzavin", that's what the place with the two great ageless chestnut trees is called, they still exist today, it is the estate of the Liolios family.

Close by there is also the cabin of Christos Antonopoulos and next to it is Giannis Loi's (Giorglouinou). We know this location as "Petrálonas". With sweet grapes on the edges of the trail, it is a fairly productive region. In this region, the sources of water are limited. Despite this, there is a spring that Kostantakis Velios used for irrigation of his fields. He had a small house - a cabin - in which the family was accommodated.



*The first owner and proprietor of this place*

On the right and close to the estates of the Lioliai, is the chapel of the Joyous Virgin Mary. We celebrate her feast on the 15th of August every year. We revere Spyridon Lelo who cared for it with his personal expense and we are very grateful to father Nikolaos Antonopoulos and others who cared for its renovation. Fortunately, the authorities of the village care for it and maintain it. It is shielded and protected by large plane trees. We no longer go on foot to her feast as we used to. A branch of the motorway passes very close, and this is thanks to Dr. Angelakis, who extended the road to the slopes of the mountain, up to the place Kranies. Right near the chapel is the stream. After crossing the stream and immediately on the right is the vineyard and some old chestnut trees of the Kallimanaioi.

A little higher up are pastures with plane trees and cedars where the goats of some families used to graze. The shepherd girls with their chirping voice used to spread some companionship in our solitude. Certainly within this were hidden secret longings and sorrows. There were two or three of them. A few steps further down and we reach the Cross.

## **The Cross**

A point of rest. An inseparable friend of a traveler is his faith in God, even if it does not appear and is not confessed. At this point of our journey, we take a breath, a hope, a sigh, a reserve of weight. This point helps us for the rest of the journey. Come on... and we have reached our home. Let's refresh ourselves with the cool water of the Karkaki spring that runs alongside, in the streamlet. I don't know how it got this name. Anyway, it has enough water to quench the thirsty. The cistern (gurna) collects its water and it is enough to irrigate the vineyards and the vegetable gardens of our fellow villagers. From this point we can not only admire Xerovouni and its sides but also the hanging rocks with the dark streamlets. Joy of God. In two turns, we come face to face with our church, St. John's.



Countless times passing by with my sisters going to school. I will also speak about this, when the time comes.

## **The Church of Saint John**

What should we remember and what can we say about this beautiful church of the village? It is God's beloved house, in which we find comfort and support. From it, we draw strength and solace to endure and overcome.





As a small child, I saw my mother Ekatirini with a large skein of yarn in her hand, circling the church many times. Why, and for what reason, I do not know. A ritual I have never seen repeated. We celebrate its feast day on August 29th. Celebrations and anniversaries come, pass, and go. This feast remains in our hearts with the great wish of "and next year". This phrase is a seed deeply rooted in the bowels of many of our fellow villagers. For those who are close to us and those who are far away. It is always in their minds. This is confirmed by their frequent contributions. If only I knew their names, and with a good heart of gratitude, we could say "thank you" to them many times. One of these distant people is John Evkis, son of Barba-Kostas. The beautiful paving of the churchyard is his work, along with many other things.

### **The Bell Tower**

Who does not take pride in the Bell Tower, which is like a royal throne and commands all? While first the joyful bells hung on a horizontal wooden column, and on two vertical ones, a great offering from Vasilis Xyki. Great is the work of the bell tower of the Church of Saint Elias! The "thank you" on behalf of all of us also belongs to the priest of our village, Father George Lello. Father George, with his hard personal work, cared for the maintenance of the Cemetery, the Necropolis, where our ancestors rest.

Wild shrubs and weeds no longer sprout there. The floor of the Temple is paved with good iconography. The Temple has, among other things, a Baptismal font that is noteworthy in its chronicle as well as in its quality. In this, surely, many of us have been baptized.

To truly know our village and the surrounding area requires study and desire. The periphery and locations are not only Diasela and the downhill path with its surrounding locations. It is also surrounded by the beautiful side of the mountain and has rich descriptive content. Apart from the beautiful nature, there were also large families. It was inhabited by eminent families who worked hard and struggled daily.

On this hillside, there are a handful of houses scattered amongst gardens and fields. Yet they still communicate with the village center. There are two paths of communication. Now they seem remnants of a bygone humble era. Wild trees, shrubs, oak trees, and thorns climb the slopes. There are no goats. The shovels and hoes will be leaning in some corner...



It would be a very beneficial journey for anyone who wanted to undertake it. Let's start from the location of Koutsoupia and reach up to the high peaks of the mountain, Lambaika. These locations might bring to many some memories, some questions, and admiration. After all, there is now a trend for exercises and fitness. It would be beneficial if some people could undertake this excursion.



### **Koutsoupia**

It is the lowest location and the closest to the Feidari river. A winter region. When the snow falls -not often- in the winter, it doesn't stay more than a day or two. It is a cultivable area worked by families with large crop yields. One of these families was that of Kostas Xikis, who traveled to America with the first villagers. Upon his return, he built a house there with all necessary spaces. Another family was that of Spyros. Spyros Manolis, himself, after returning from America, built a spacious house with plenty of comforts. A kitchen, a storeroom, and other convenient spaces. A particular and noteworthy event was the tin roof of the house, especially in red color. Barba-Spyros himself did not endure America for long. The environment was suffocating, he wanted to breathe his own free air. Another family also lived in the neighborhood, that of Antonis Manolis (Malantonis). A large family and as simple as possible. Another family was that of Nikos Skania (Skanionikos). The personal life of these families, which I can't describe, is noteworthy. On a small hill is also the house of Manologiorgaina. This location (Megali laka) is also a point of reference.

*We leave this region and immediately climb to the upper Koutsoupia.*

In this place lived several families with their little houses and their entire households. The house of Mrs. Kouvarou, sister of Malantonis. It is the neighborhood of the Skania family. The family of Nikolaos Skania. The house of old Balas, one of whose sons had some adventures on the mountain Xerovouni. A snowstorm covered him inside some rocks and he survived. Also another Skania family in this neighborhood was the family of Skaniothanasio, Georgios Skania and his successor Athanasios Skania. Thanasis, a good and hardworking man, built the sheepfolds and pathways of the village. Neighbor of Asimakaina with her little house and her stone threshing floor. The place names that are one after the other do not change the slopes of the mountain. It is a beautiful route, with cultivable fields. For better distinction and recognition, they bear names such as, Stragales, Michali's threshing floor, etc. Here we recognize a great, beautiful world, life fighters and suffering, but good village fighters. With their little gardens and their sheep and goats, they met their needs. They did not abandon the region. They had closely tied to the weapon of life. They had not stopped their contact with the center of the village. History tests the endurance of people. They endured as well as many others in this place. The truth is that these parts do not give much but give the necessary.

### **Platania**

Climbing a bit higher, we reach the location of Platania. In this place, two large families lived. Those of Barba-Dimitris, Dim. Antonopoulos (Liolimitrou) and of Aristeidis Loi. Barba-Dimitris knew the village's behind-the-scenes. And amidst his many activities, he always offered a smile to the children. He was beloved, a relative, and a friend of my father Kostas Antonopoulos (Liolikotsou). I knew him for brief moments. How everything inevitably slips into the past! These memories tighten my heart. But I know that all this is the work of time, the work of the times.

### **Pantazis the Pournari**

Houses of Georgios Sbokos and Zoitsas. Let me not forget Georgios Sbokos. A guard of the place for many years. To drink a glass of wine, only one, he could not bear a second or third. In this one, he drowned his sorrows. Nearby lived other families. The families, Kostantakis K. Vellios and Ioannis Loi Kolotsiinou. Their little houses still exist. Next, the cabin of Aretoula with the hidden spring. I wish I knew more information, my own heart would be much happier, as well as many other fellow villagers of mine.

### **Mahchorafi**

Another family near the same place. Skanias Ioannis (Tsitsas). In a dominant position the cabin with the threshing floor of Tsitso Papadimitriou, and in the same neighborhood the cabins and the barns of Charalambopoulos. In this position there are many fields with specific names, Komatakia, Komtsakia. And nearby the cabin of Thodoroula Velliou. According to the narration of Dr. Angelakis, the wife gave the same name to her husband Theodorouli, while his name was Georgios.

## **Kefalovryso**

In this area there were and there are many waters that irrigated all the surrounding fields. And in this position on the mountain slope, many Kastaniotik families lived. I will mention a few of them. The cabin with the threshing floor of Nikolos, mother of Tarsitsa. Around there are also the fields of Papazaharina with the cabin of Father Georgios Lellou.

## **Harhara**

There are the ruins of the Exochurch of Agia Paraskevi. When could it have been built? We do not know, we only assume. It was built at the beginning of the 20th century. There would be a need because the area around had many families that could not operate in the village center. This assures us not only of the religiosity of the world but also the multitude of the people. Next to it is still preserved the cabin of Priest G. Lellou.

## **Cranes**

Houses of Georgios Staikos and the old-Koutas. The ruler of this region is now the noble doctor Christos Angelakis, who turned it into a beautiful garden with many kinds of fruit-bearing trees. In this place lived the large family of Angelakaioi. I remember the old-Koutaina, hunched over but a proud lady. She hung the bags with cheese to strain on a peg. In this neighborhood were also the Kallimanaika. Kallimanothymios, the father of Giannis Kallimanis who now lives with his family in the distant land of Australia, visits our village and particularly honors and diligently takes care of it. We admire his beautiful palace at the top of our village.

## **Section**

Gregorios Vasilopoulos, nickname Baeklos, his progress is considerable. Also the family of Ioannis Vasilopoulos (Vasiloynos). Next to it is Kalampokia with its irrigation gardens that supplied the entire neighborhood. With its cold water from the Haliki spring, people, animals, and gardens are watered and cooled. Nearby are the houses of Fesa Athanasiou Lampou and Vasilogiannaioi.

## **Pierogies and Cherry Trees**

There were several families of Lambaioi. It would be an honor for me if I could mention all these families. Along with the family of Athanasios Lambos (Lampothanasis). His hut at the highest point of the mountain's slope. We used to call it Seri. Yes, years pass, like water with hopes and mainly with ephemeral flashes like the sun falling on the morning water for only a moment. Images come to mind from years ago, and I realize the fast passing of beautiful life. An old man with his old wife, hand in hand, slowly saying goodbye to the place, bidding farewell to friends and relatives. Whose heart does not bleed!



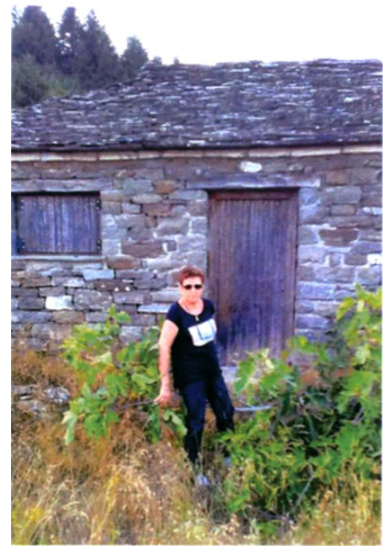


*The euphoria of their souls, of these people, is not forgotten and not overshadowed, not even after the distant years. Memory embraces them involuntarily and without particular effort.*



*A tightening of love and affection of a brilliant family of Kastaniotis, who left a story with a lot of kindness content.*

Some of us are looking for some images and sounds from the past natural life. We will not see or hear them anymore. These images and these sounds filled our minds and souls with a certain tenderness. Every afternoon around 2:00 p.m., the herds descended from their stables to graze and reached the bodies. These chirpings of Cyprus sheep filled the earth with a sweet noise of life. Our village, Kastania, is truly a child of nature. It has many joys, real beauties and real jewels, like this crystal-clear little spring with its gushing waters, which quenches mountaineers, travelers, watchmen and the entire animal and natural kingdom around it. And not just that. From the magical position it has on the mountain slope, it gives so much simplicity to the human gaze, it frees a person's mind and spirit with its tranquility, its solitude, and makes him hum with the murmur of the spring the hymn of nature from a poem by Dionysios Solomos. Nature is a charm and a dream in beauty and grace, it speaks with a thousand tongues. Fellow villagers, young men and young women, gathering all our senses let's listen carefully to what mother nature and the best teacher of the world says with a thousand tongues and performances. And let's fill the cells of our village with optimism and dreams for progress and advancement. The old generations are leaving but the New Generations are coming.



*Mrs. Vasiliki Loi-Lambou  
in front of the family's hut Lampothanasi*

## Tseligkades

What our young people will seek are the shepherds. Flocks of sheep and goats with the Tseligkades (shepherds). We, the older ones, lived with them and accompanied them from spring until the end of autumn. They all had something good to say and something beautiful to give. To talk about their winters and summers. They lived respecting and befriending each other. Now, the pastures are silent, desolate, and orphaned. They've grown over with firs, cedars, and plane trees and even the birds of the sky have abandoned the place. The partridges and the nightingales also stopped singing, as if they too felt the desolation of the place and protest. The Tseligkades, proud people, adorned and accompanied the place. They lived their tradition with simplicity and respect without bothering anyone. They loved their place. The sound of bagpipes was a particularly emotional music that only the carefree can understand. Life is not regulated and ruled only by money. There is something else, an inner psychic rhythm that escapes statistics and electronic brains. However, the shape of the place changed without these sheepfolds.



The place was warmed and stirred, and life flowed in its deep rhythm with the people. We were poor but also rich, with all these. The descriptions of the surrounding places with their inhabitants bring us memories that are precious and worthy with some rare aesthetics. These settlements express relatively the way and quality of their life. These descriptions are very useful for the upcoming generations to appreciate the toil and the privations that the old ones endured. That's why they should be careful at every step, respecting the legacy of our grandparents. Look at the photograph and the words that a good fellow villager of ours says about his Mother.





A memory of our Mother from thousands of images and moments that we have in mind. Always laden, always something to carry from childhood to old age without complaining about the burden of life. Here, in the scorching sun, without a headscarf, loaded with handfuls from abundant and golden ears of wheat, she carries the family budget. Memory and emotion together because in the distance our village, Saint Elias, Saint John, and her last residence is visible... She lives in our hearts since she gave them life.



With the guard of the youth and the rearguard of the past, we will reach the esteemed position that times demand from us, and despite the fact that some of us are of advanced age, we appreciate this development. We thank the Association of Kastaniotes, the Association of Initiatives and Actions, which beautified the village because of its cause. The care for it is an obligation of us all. And it's worth getting to know it up close in its entirety.

The works stand out and are not few. The square, which is also the center of the village, is a jewel that recalls many nostalgic days and festivals. A place where every villager found a break from the daily routine and took a breath. From time to time he also found his company and they discussed the matters of the time.

There in the shadow of the two plane trees, all memories were awakened. Steps further up, the square was surrounded by a few coffee shops, of Barba-Yiannis (Liona), of Vasilis Loi (Esilia), and a little further away of Barba-Kosta Xyki. There, the expatriates, as well as the visitors from the surrounding areas, would converse.





**Monument to the Fallen  
in the center of the village - Square**

1. Vellios, Vasilios son of Tasia
2. Manolis, Vasilios of Manoloharalampina
3. Xykis, Ioannis of Charalambos
4. Xykis, Manthos of Konstantinos
5. Staikos, Georgios
6. Staikos, Georgios of Fotis
7. Tsintziris, Alexis of Leonidas

This place used to buzz with voices and life. Even the birds were chirping till late in the evening. The branches of the plane trees were full. They were bidding farewell to the passing day and thanking God for the coming of the night. Such scenes and events are unrecognized by many. What a pity..! The square or "chorostasi" is embraced by the new establishment.

It is also a great work that beautifies and serves the villagers, especially during festivals and fairs. Under it run cold and refreshing waters. These are the three fountains or the three stone "bowls", the care of the expatriate villagers. The contribution of the Antonopoulaioi. The spring was finally cleaned and repaired so that there is no possibility of contamination.



With the contribution of the good and selfless villagers and the care of the members of the Club, we reached a point of pride. Why not! When, oh when could anyone imagine it would be possible to park a car in front of the Church! How was it possible to park several cars in the small school yard. Once the small lanes were widened, some widening for car parking would be done too.

The School is also a testimony of love. Many of us Kastaniotopouloi learned to read in this School. Now it does not operate as a School but as a Cultural Center of the Community. It must stand upright and well cared for as it is a building-testimony of many generations. Many, oh many, are the memories of our student life and many the scuffs on our heads, we still remember from our teachers. The Teachers were ambitious in their duties, but in their minds were the cities of Greece. They stayed for a while, like Papa Zacharias, the village Priest and a few others before him. The most dynamic was Mr. Gerasimos Dotsikas, from Dorvitsia as well as Mrs. Vas. Sakellariou from Platanos, who are considered benefactors of our small society. Also, the teachers Dim. Arvanitis, Petros Foutzoulas, Adam Papadokalakis, G. Kastanos and G. Katsaras.





## **The Public Road**

Some people struggle more for the common good. A common interest in the development and transformation of the village is the Public Road. Those who cared for the Public Road made sure it was asphalted for both the residents and the visitors. Many people provide ideas and a few think. Many do not demagogue, but love. There truly exists a reservoir of people who care, love, help and feel pain. Well done!

## **The Water Supply Reservoir**

The gathering of water sources. This too is a great achievement of the Association. The village's water supply is one of the basic achievements of progress. The gathering of water sources into a water supply reservoir for the convenience of the inhabitants is a great testament to culture and philanthropy. The history of civilized peoples attests to the water supply of cities hundreds and thousands of years ago. In the Old Testament, we read about the underground water supply of the city of Jerusalem, which is unknown to many. In the cities of the Romans, water was conveyed to the city via bridges, like the city of Mycenae and many other cities. Everyone in our village is grateful and highly appreciates this work. Furthermore, it thanks and is grateful to our local lord, Yiannis Kallimanis, who lives in the very distant Epirus, Australia. His mansion at the top of the village dominates and is proud. Congratulations!



## The Feast of Saint John

The Feast of Saint John is celebrated on the 29th of August. It was the only and universally recognized as the greatest and most liberating festival of the region. It was a congregation of worshipers from all the surrounding villages who considered their visit a sacred pilgrimage. And so it was. On this day, both the devout and non-religious fasted. You could see with emotion organized groups gathering in the center of the village and around the church.

At this festival, merchants came to sell their goods, fruits, pears, watermelons, and other necessities. Photographers, with their old-fashioned cameras, were doing their work. We stood near the springs for a good pose.

After the end of the Divine Liturgy, the whole village along with its visitors prepared for the big dance, having feasted on tomatoes and potatoes with bread. There were three or four circles of dance. The joy and laughter had taken on a lively face. Traditional songs, syrtos and kalamatianos, scattered life and cheerfulness together with a wave of coolness. During this time, slowly but surely, traditional song, celebration, and the gallantry of old were being killed off.



The young and beautiful made an impression that filled the villagers with great optimism. The brave young men, in turn, impressed the world with their dance and their whistles, without fainting their wallets with so many expenses. Little Giannakis alone did not dance because his father had hung on his shoulder a small box of Turkish delight to sell at the fair.

My memories from the village fair are numerous and still vague in my mind. How much would I like to have some company from my time! Good, beautiful, and developed girls. Good and beautiful brave men. That's why I would like to become young again, even for a moment.

After describing the village and my place, let's go back to the old days because our history requires it. More than a hundred years ago, the young people of the village periodically left the village for another land. America. These young men were brave and impulsive. Courage is needed, first of all. Courage puts the world in your pocket and makes any part of the earth hospitable, even if it doesn't have a drachma in its pocket. Courage along with hope would endure in this foreign country. And it proved that they endured.

Life in the village had its problems. The restless spirit of young people did not calm down with deprivation and poverty. In our village society, there was no comparison between rich and poor but between poor and extremely poor. Therefore, the departure for foreign lands was very justified.



The first young Kastaniotes who traveled would have been at the end of the first decade of the century. Most of them traveled in the middle of the second decade of the 20th century, such as Loi Charalambos, Loi Maria, Loi Ekaterini, Loi Panagiota, Evkis Vasileios, Manolis Spyridon, Antonopoulou brothers (Lioliades), Ioannis, Georgios, Nikolaos, and Konstantinos. These people paved the way for many others later. This epic of the Kastaniotes has not yet found its historian. And perhaps it will never find it. However, it exists in the mind of each one of us.

They were seeking opportunities and means to improve their lives. The situation was difficult and the prospects for some improvement were non-existent. All these people found what they desired and sought and from this our own society also benefited later.

A young person is young. A young bird tied to a frosty window, closed in solitude, feeling its forces paralyzed by the bindings and unable to do anything. It simply writes a letter to someone and says: "Please, get me out of here and I will never forget you in my life". This kind of despair and thought tormented the young people of that old era. In the village, as in all the surrounding villages, large families forced the first and strong boys to look for places where they would find work. "Go, my child, to help us back here too". Three quarters of the young people abandoned the village. Some within Greece and others in foreign countries. Migration, therefore, dissolved the primary and dynamic productive base. What could a parent say to the optimistic young man and woman? Plow the fields or raise sheep to live? Apart from flight, those who could not travel



to distant places, for some reason, took some "mostra" (as they called the portable shop - with small things) and sold in the cities and villages of Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace. And others took photographs and made enlargements.

We see the restless spirit not being satisfied. Each household was saving the necessary to get by. They got their oil and olives from Peloponnese. Family members worked there for one or two months and supplied the household. There were many vegetable gardens and they were quite productive for the primary and necessary needs of the family. Fortunately.

I can't describe the agony and thinking of our fellow villagers of that era. However, we can imagine and calculate how the frequent and great conversation between family members and small social gatherings were about escape and what I would do, when and how. The Kastaniotes were honest and hardworking people. They were constantly looking for something to do. They were never heard of for any bad deeds or crimes. Minor grudges are never mentioned because they exist and will always exist.

A photo among many tells us a thousand and two words. These people, brave Kastaniotes, were a promising group in the village. We miss them. And I say, how much sorrow every guard of the departed has. It's about the ages that have passed from life.

Unnoticed in the variety of time, change is always taking place, eternal and irreversible. Some relatives, some of your loved ones, some of your people. Some with whom you shared laughs and joys, ate together, and drank your little glass. You feel the invisible butterfly of vanity covering your heart. Some faces that you loved and respected. Some faces that once inspired you. Now you see decay and death in its most vindictive expression.



Time in the full cycle of age calls one by one all these, from former times, for a farewell. They left something for us. The photograph brings many memories. The 30s bring us into the world of necessity. It sought to find some relief in everyday life and some solution to the difficult problems of poverty and deprivation. Everyone strong and daring had escape in mind. Of course, without stopping caring for the daily needs of life. Each person saw himself alone without a guide in his despair, one traveled and five-ten followed. The small story brings us to the 40s. For this period, there is still a living testimony. The start of World War II. We were tormented by endurance, now we had to resist the enemies of the Nation of Greece.

Hunger and various painful diseases were decimating families. The most incomprehensible event that is not compatible with any human logic or sense of civilization was the civil war. I will not mention the fact, as indifferent, but also to not deviate from the beautiful small historical flashback of our village and its people.

The Occupation, the National Resistance, and the Civil War were a very desperate situation for all. Schools were not operating due to the flight of the student youth. The Churches were not operating due to a lack of Priests. Public Authorities were disorganized. The entire world was mixed with ideas and ideologies. Even our fellow villagers armed themselves with M4 weapons and multiple M.H.D.E.S. Armed, without lacking courage and bravery. Equal in peace and war, hard-working, fighters, and tireless in toil. We should respect the photographs and remember the people who accompanied our life with all those adventures.



Now we are entering a different era. A reorganization of things. The gates of various countries have opened, America, Germany, Canada, and Australia. Disruption all over Greece and in our villages. Different perceptions, different family plans. The young people at the time and generally the student youth ran for something different and better, namely schools and teachings, even universities.

## **Second generation of Migrants 1950 and after**

### **Australia**

1. Athanasopoulos, Fotios
2. Vellios, Ioannis
3. Vellios, Spyridon
4. Velliou, Maria
5. Kallimani, Zoe
6. Kallimani, Loula
7. Kallimani, Tasia
8. Kallimanis, Aristeidis
9. Kallimanis, Ioannis
10. Kallimanis, Lampros
11. Loi, Vasiliki
12. Loi, Maria
13. Lois, Konstantinos
14. Lois, Charalambos
15. Papadimitriou, Nikolaos
16. Staikou, Giannoula
17. Taratsas, Ioannis

### **America**

1. Antonopoulos, Dimitrios
2. Antonopoulos, Thomas
3. Antonopoulos, Ioannis
4. Antonopoulos, Spyridon
5. Antonopoulou, Angeliki
6. Antonopoulou, Antonia
7. Antonopoulou, Georgia A.
8. Antonopoulou, Georgia K.
9. Antonopoulou, Georgia
10. Antonopoulou, Evgenia
11. Rellios, Ioannis
12. Lambos, Athanasios
13. Lambou, Ekaterini
14. Lellos, Dimitrios
15. Lellos, Athanasios
16. Lois, Georgios
17. Manolis, Christos
18. Manolis, Christos and family
19. Evkis, Emilio and family
20. Evkis, Ioannis and family
21. Svokos, Adam
22. Svokou, Giannoula

23. Skania, Helen
24. Skania, Haido
25. Staikos, Konstantinos

### **Germany**

1. Svokos, Konstantinos

### **Canada**

1. Skania, Haido

This period many of our compatriot families are rejoicing and enjoying higher positions in the nation's services as well as individual businesses. The old life fades deeply behind us. Life was a furnace for many of us. We endured it. Now more or less we breathe free air. What is the difficulty that could hinder us?

The first start was the decision about where, when, and how. Lions in a cage. We arrived at another era, a post-war era, which provided opportunities for many successes that many of our compatriots exploited, either within Greece or abroad.

### **Migration of families to Greek cities, years 1940-1955**

1. Antonopoulos, Nikolaos - Athens
2. Vasilopoulos
3. Vasilopoulos, Vasilios - Agrinio
4. Vasilopoulos, Dimitrios - Agrinio
5. Vasilopoulos, Ioannis - Agrinio
6. Vasilopoulos, Kostas - Agrinio
7. Vasilopoulos, Kostas - Athens
8. Rellios, Konstantinos - Nafpaktos
9. Zacharopoulos, Georgios - Patras
10. Lambou, Euthymia - Nafpaktos
11. Lellos, Vasilios - Athens
12. Lellos, Georgios
13. Lellos, Konstantinos - Nafpaktos
14. Loi, Margarita - Nafpaktos
15. Loi, Maria - Athens
16. Loi, Stavroula
17. Dohis, Vasilios
18. Manolis, Lemonia and family - Agrinio
19. Evkis, Ioannis
20. Papadimitriou, Ioannis - Agrinio
21. Taratsas, Kostas - Aigio
22. Tsintzilaos - Agrinio

In the exploitation of opportunities, many of our fellow villagers succeeded because they had been matured by the previous difficult period. Their efforts were very persistent and they formed the first step of success. Time rewarded them. The 1960s and early 1970s were difficult, but they did not remain unexploited. They were also filled with bitterness and struggles. However, we had our own breeze with improved spiritual, mental, and physical strength. We became the leaders and protectors of the younger generations. And these generations have a duty to the future, to correctly appreciate with a pure heart their meaning and to store their messages in daily action.



*Looking at the photos with the people and the place they stepped on, a great sorrow comes over you and so many dramas come to mind with so many emotions and with these emotions, no one can be bad, instead one can only improve. And you reminisce and reminisce about the past.*





### **The developments also brought some comforts**

The conveniences that were created with the changes and developments were quite useful and brought some comfort. The first comfort was the extension of the highway from the village of Simi towards the mountainous villages Platanos, Chani Lioliou-Kastania, Agios Dimitrios, Neochori, Arachova, etc. The transportation was quite unsafe. The ground at many points was slippery due to rain and snow. The buses were designed for these mountainous areas, but they were dangerous on such roads without fences, wall constructions, and road protection. Therefore, the villagers did not know the security and safety of transportation. The safest and most secure transportation was during the summer months. The people who drove these buses on these roads remember their struggle against rain and snow, on muddy roads, cliffs, and uprooted trees. Loaded with whatever one could imagine. Yet, this transportation was considered a relative comfort as the older ones had to hike for 5 and 6 hours to reach the village. And especially sometimes they carried loads of 25 and 40 okas on their shoulders. And when they reached Diaselo exhausted, they looked at the chimneys of their houses with the blue smoke, took a breath and said, "we reached our home".



*The legendary carnival in Chani Lioliou in the 1960s*

Now they visit the village with comfort and with their private cars. And especially they park a few steps from their house's door. This is comfort. For this comfort, however, the simple Kastaniotes never asked what the state services did for them, the latest policies of the century. Instead, within their power, they took picks, shovels, and spades, and did good work on the roads and the village lanes. It was moving to see people standing on pillars and fences working. Lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and other simple people of the village.



A second beneficial relief, a result of development, was the electrification of the village. The 60's and the beginnings of the 70's are not considered revolutionary with some personal or group ideologies. It is the era of the restoration of individuals and families. Electrification brought satisfactory comfort. Apart from electric lights, people obtained radios, televisions, and refrigerators. With these comforts, the people of the village had subdued their fears of poverty, contempt, and decay. And they are not ashamed to look back at their poor, naked and hungry, yet pure ancestors. With all these achievements, they know how ready they are to take up the burden of new eras in order to go further. They renew themselves without abandoning their past and move forward to new paths without losing their orientation. A new breath to modern needs. With the unique wealth of appreciating hard work and honor.

### **Our Young People**

We are proud of our Youth. We see them and we are proud of them. These young people will keep the heritage of their fathers and grandfathers alive. Who knows what time will bring us... However, they are ready to face every challenge of the times. They are capable of choosing any beneficial thought and action. We believe this and hope this. The situations around the world are fluid and perhaps dangerous. The international community has lost its balance. However, you, the people of Kastaniotopoula, have a strong heart and your minds in what your parents chose. You know their purposes, and for this to participate in their goals! Participate! In your name, the reckoning is summed up on the threshold of the future.



Your dedication assures us that we live in a new beautiful world, with new choices and plans, with new families and optimism for tomorrow. You have the powers required to see a place that is peaceful, full of beloved people and with great enthusiasm for life. Your activity and your initiation for renewal and shaping of the place are commendable. You fully deserve the praise. Avoid what is often said, "aren't you tired, brother"... and some do not want participation in common programs and common joyous celebrations. Do not lose laughter and song, for it is about to be lost. You should persistently seek friendship, love and cooperation.

You, the young, thus have the floor. Prove yourselves strong, not only in our small province of the village but also in the wider space of the homeland. Become companions of the older ones in age, few as they may be. Speak with your simple presence about the things that interest the village and the world around it. This will happen with your vitality, with your song and dance. And you are not anonymous, you have a name, compatriots, patriots, competitors, friends. You are our support, the lively bond of blood. That's why we squeeze your hand one by one and cross-kiss you wherever we meet you.





*Our young ones, source of joy and optimism, called to struggle for this place. They will offer company to those who seek it.*

You are a different world that many of us envy and wish for! We know how you travel on boulevards and in bustling cities of our Greece. Leave, however, enough room in your heart for the wild but very hospitable and sweet place of the village. We, the retirees, always live with the nostalgia of the village and come here to see and learn the news about our own society, to say our own and to have a glass of wine with all of you.

Hold some festivals with appetizers, with cheese, sausages, and above all, let the aroma of the appetizers with their deliciousness wander. And a little wine in the glasses to ignite mythical visions in your eyes and let your heart stir full of humanity. Learn to sing and dance the dances of bravery without forgetting your ancestors.



*Youth of Kastaniotis in the square of our village, 2016.*

Somewhere at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, I saw an announcement in a local newspaper, "Plataniotika News". It mentioned the achievements of the goals of the Committee of the Kastaniotes Association. It was a reference that concerned the maintenance and pleasant appearance of the village. And for this purpose, there is and continues to be a continuous struggle with cooperation and coordination at all levels. So, the announcement writes: "Despite the times that want the Associations to lay down their arms and gradually become inactive, the Kastaniotes Association rallied and moved to a second phase of activities, led by the lawyer Athanasios Lellos, the doctor Christos Angelakis, Ms. Vasiliki Loi-Lambou, and the Administrative Council of the Association, which are actively followed by members, our expatriates, as well as friends of our village".

### **This year we proceeded with the following works**

1. Cleaning of the central fountain's tank.
2. Construction of an enclosure below the property of E. Lellos.
3. Construction of a retaining wall for the square.
4. Construction of infrastructure works for a playground.
5. Construction of infrastructure works for a football field.
6. Completion of street lighting from the Drema location to the Prophet Elias. The procurement of the poles was a donation from the Georgiou and Thanos Tomaras brothers.
7. Expansion of the Municipal Store with infrastructure for a pergola-vineyard.
8. Lighting of the large enclosure above the square. The projectors are an offer of the Association and the lanterns are a donation from I. K. Antonopoulou, Konst. Staikou, and Andrea Angelaki.
9. Restoration of damages to the Church of Agios Elias. The first works have been done and the replacement of the tiled roof, which is a donation from Vasilis A. Loi, has been scheduled.

That's all for this year. With the blessing of all of us to be all well and give an appointment in 2004. With the hope that we will catch the train of development and make our vision a reality. Association-Local Council.

### **Our Expatriate Villagers**

Our expatriate villagers reach the birthplace sparingly to take something from its roots but also to give. They arrive with dignity, loaded and with enough experience from abroad to tell us with their own life about the difficulties of expatriation. We rejoice and love them because they are ours and flesh from the flesh of our Hellenism. They are not the poor migrants who took their belongings to find a better fortune. They progressed and with their labor, they made a fortune and send a part to their Homeland, to the village.

We are proud to have had, and still have, emigrants from Kastania who have not forgotten their village, having their minds and kind hearts turned towards it. They rejoice to hear about change and satisfactory progress without loosening their bonds.

This satisfies us all and gives us enough optimism for the creation of closer relationships based on a broader spectrum.

### **Venerable advice from a Kastaniot emigrant**

About 40 years ago, under the age-old plane trees in the dirt square and then at the board of the ever-remembered Lion, under the vine arbor, a group of ambitious young people, with determination and big dreams, proposed the renovation of the village.

The vision sounded very good, but it seemed like a deceptive dream in terms of its implementation. So, one by one, and while enjoying on one side the sounds of the clarinet of the ever-remembered Teacher Lambros Mamalis, and on the other the tastiness of the roast and the sweet wine of the ever-remembered Darla, in the morning hours, we made the decision. We raised the elbow to the top of the Plane tree, much higher than feasible. We decided to upgrade Kastania and make it the best village in the mountainous Nafpaktia.

The next day we woke up, we realized that to implement the decision we had made the previous night for Kastania, a Herculean task and self-transcendence of all of us was required, but we estimated that we would be writing history by achieving this feat.

So we overcame fear, doubt, and the questioning of the vision and with the financial participation of the great benefactor of our village Ioannis Xydis, the dream became a reality.

For the first time last year, the state, through our mayor, admitted that the village of Kastania deserves to receive a gold medal not once but twice, because in the works for the upgrading of the village neither the state nor the government participated, but only the people of Kastania.

"My name is Yiannis Efthimios Kallimanis and I dare to communicate with you and introduce myself at the same time, because many recipients of my letter may not know me. I left the village at the age of twelve and immigrated to Australia when I was 17 years old, where I have been living permanently ever since. I visit the village every year in recent years with my wife and I also participated symbolically in the group of Young dreamers, as I refer in my introduction, the Ithetia of '80.

Allow me to share my own feelings about our village with you. Personally, I believed, and have confirmed over the years, that when we are somewhere together, nothing unites us as much as our common place of origin. Nothing is as powerful as our bond with our fathers' land. Nothing can replace the feelings we experience when we step on the sacred soil of our unique homeland. Nothing can replace the memories when, with reverence, we pay homage by lighting a candle in their memory, at the graves of our loved ones.



We are all from Kastania, wherever we are, however far apart we are, wherever we have been assigned to dwell on earth. We might be the leaves that the wind of fate and life has scattered in all four corners of the horizon, but we should never forget that we are leaves of one tree, our village, our Kastania. I know that time has not been equally fair to all of us.

We were born and raised under very difficult circumstances. Some have suffered more, have been tormented, embittered, disappointed, and maybe broken. While for some others, things in life came easier. In all of us, however, the same flame burns deep within our soul, that of nostalgia and love for Kastania. A flame that sometimes consumes us and sometimes warms us. Let us then forget all the other things that separate us and let this flame that unites us all ignite within us, and let us instill this flame of love into our children and grandchildren. Our village needs all of us. Each of us has something to offer in the great goal of keeping Kastania alive. Some have money, others have knowledge, experience, connections, a desire to work. Each can offer something equally important. The only thing we should strive for is unity, concord, and love in every joint effort of ours.

We have seen how much Kastania has transformed and revived, I would say. We have seen how much the surrounding villages "envy" it - surely in a positive sense. We have seen how many now talk about our beautiful little village. We have performed a small miracle under the most adverse conditions and have set an example for all. Let's live up to the circumstances and continue in the same direction. Far from any differences, personal or otherwise. We owe it to the memory of those who paid for this great love and devotion with their blood. We owe it to the memory of our ancestors. We owe it to ourselves.

Kastania can become a pole of attraction and a model of development. Let us further prove that even the crisis that is plaguing our Greece will not discourage us from showing the strength we, Kastanians all over the world, hide within us when we decide to. Let us not let our ancestral lands become desolate and the village turn back to the oblivion of time.

I think this can really become the new vision and the next dream that will unite us all together again and give strength to those who remain in the village for a new start. Implementing a program with the necessary construction but also maintenance works that will be decided jointly and will only be implemented when the required funds are available.

Mass participation in the General Assembly of August 2016, the result of the economic mobilization for debt repayment, the high morale of the locals, our burning desire for all to stop divisive disputes.

The personal letter I received from the elected friend and fellow lawyer, Mr. Athanasios Lellos, is the reason for me to write this letter to all my fellow villagers. With this, trying to get as deep as I can into your mental space and sensitize your feelings and your love for our village. At the same time, I will ask you to contribute in any way you can to continue the development of our village.

Now I will convey to you the thoughts of the Association and the Community that personally find me in complete agreement.

Let us plan the grand reunion of the Kastaniotes from all over the place for the summer of 2018. The probable date is the weekend of August 18 and 19. This reunion should include many and special events. I am convinced that the Committee to be established will innovate in the choice of topics as it has done in the past.



However, it must also be combined with a financial goal that will allow first to pay off the amount of 11,000 euros that remained as a debt balance and secondly to construct one or more projects in the village. Works that will be inaugurated and will promote, at the same time, our village. Projects that we will all decide together. Projects that we will deem necessary for the upgrade and promotion of our village. I, personally, have undertaken a specific task: the shaping and upgrading of the entrance of the village where the aqueduct is located. I believe these moments of reunion will be priceless and unforgettable, especially for villagers and our relatives who have not even been acquainted with the sacred lands of our grandfathers and fathers. I hope that I find you all in agreement and that the conditions are more mature than ever to proceed with the planning of this historic reunion and to give the green light. We have a year and a half ahead of us to work for the entire program to be set up with absolute success.

After being asked by factors of our village to participate in a committee for the organization of this great event, I agreed to participate because I firmly believe that I will have all the Kastaniotes and the Kastaniotissas by my side to share these unique moments of emotions. To give a promise, an oath, one to the other, that never this Tree of Kastania from which we all come, will be without leaves. Finally, please accept my love and respect for you."

*Congratulations to Mr. Kallimanis for his wonderful suggestions, and we wish him health and patience.*



### **The Meeting of the Kastaniotes with their roots**

One August, the Kastaniotes will gather as pilgrims to reunite with their roots. To get to know each other, to converse, and to say much about this long period of communication disruption, due to changes in situations and eras. The young and the elderly who remain will remember the old ways of life with its legends. For a while, they will relive old scenes from the village life. They will gaze at the slopes that bear witness to a hard past life. They will look into each other's eyes. And some will embrace crosswise because they will be given the opportunity to revive the past. Thus, love and friendship for the village will grow more. Let everyone's contact become alive. The barrier of great distances does not separate people from love and interest in their place.

The tender roots that remained deeper in the earth with the uprooting of the tree are those seeking contact. It is the handkerchief of the mother, moist with tears, for her traveling son. The bonds remained warm beyond the waves, beyond time, and even further beyond life. And if someone lives far away, let him live with his mind and heart close to his roots. Let him remember holidays and festivals. This feeling should be the same also for those who live within our homeland Greece.

### **The song and the company**

Let us pay attention to another event. And that is the song we used to sing and dance. The music we listened to and had fun with. We need to relive it once we rediscover its beauty. The world may be flooded with melodies, every kind of music may have its beauty - and it does - but among all its forms, ours is irreplaceable. No foreign music can provide expression. Can express what you feel. The bravery, the manliness, the love, and the pure passion of people for the significant events of life.

### **Festive events**

Holidays and all our group gatherings are oases. There, the mind is filled and the heart rejoices with good company. The soul lightens from the incessantly competing and technologically advancing world. The soul feels joy in the village with the company and expresses its desires and longings, and exchanges wishes for health, peace, and progress.

This behavior is the victorious power around which all human feelings revolve. And, far from the company, selfishness, which is the greatest flaw in the world. Someone is more knowledgeable, someone is stronger, someone is more decisive, and someone is more daring than us. Let's follow and contribute. When respect and brotherhood are within us, this is the success of the great change, both of the place and its inhabitants. Let the good-hearted love of our families be present in these events. Let them get to know and connect with true and sincere friendship.

### **An old world comes to my mind**

This world sometimes brings me tears and sometimes sorrows and pains. I wish I could describe it. A mother told her neighbor. My husband is traveling and when he will return, I do not know. It's been a year now.

Another neighbor's eldest son is also traveling for a long time. No letter, no writing. She would ask the village postman every now and then.

So many like these, were anxiously and eagerly waiting for their news. Others from the father, others from the brother and others from their beloved for the wedding. But, others for their companionship.

So, they spent years and seasons, with wishes and prayers without the song of emigration missing, which resembled a strong lament. The matter of loneliness in the human soul is big. It does not easily pass by with a wine or a sip of tsipouro. This feeling is strong in the Kastaniotis, because it is a sprout from the Kastaniotissa Mother. This is the reality and no one underestimates the reality.

And you, Kastaniotopoula, with a strong feeling and a lot of love, give to the mother and father, to the grandfather and the grandmother. Give also to this village that deserves and what belongs to it.

### **The land complains**

Let's acknowledge the fact that the land complains and its complaint appears clearly when wild trees, brambles, and ferns grow. They block the little roads and paths, making it difficult to walk from one place to another. The same happens with the abandoned houses. Their courtyards are overgrown, the flowerpots with the geraniums and basil plants don't bloom. The grapevines dry up too. They miss the tender care of the housekeeper. The more the place is loved and cared for, the more it calms and warms our souls. This care is the lively contact that relaxes everyone who understands its importance. Therefore, let's have an understanding of it, as well as everything else around us that beautifies and brings joy to our lives. These things will give us a lot, from their side. Whether they are greenery and flowers, or apple and cherry trees. Don't forget that the neighborhood of the village also has something to offer.



*The unforgettable later Papa-Lellos from the forehead of Asia Minor, 1917.*





*Family of George Dimitriou Lellos (Papa-Lellos) 1935-1936.*





*Standing from the left: Lambrini Ioan. Loi, Aglaia Georg. Lellos  
Sitting from the left: Ioannis II. Lois, Georgios D. Lellos  
(later Papa-Lellos), 1952.*



*Every time I look at these photos, they take my soul with them and attract the clouds. And they always lower to sweeten and soften my soul to endure the great distance of time and estrangement. My dear mother with her family, parents, and siblings.*







*Once upon a time, they stood out for their beauty and bravery. Koula and Foto Gianni Loi, Georgia, Pannis and Evgenia Konst. Antonopoulou, Margarita and George K. Lois.*



*Nothing flees as quickly in this world as time and it takes many from our group with it. Here we see a few who we miss. The Barba-Kostas Liolios, the Barba-Giannis Giorgloinos, Emilios Xykis, and Leonidas Tsintzelis.*



*Past and present time coexist in this historical photograph. We recognize them and we bring to memory their company and the interesting parts of life that we once shared.*



*This photograph keeps our nostalgia for old days fertile, thus our pride for the good and beautiful world of our village grows.*





*These faces with our young students remind us of significant moments that take us deeper into understanding the time that has passed.*



*The simplicity of people's beauty and kindness never disappears. It is these qualities that are inherited by the descendants. Our gain is the memory of these young people. Angeliki Velliou, Vasiliki Xyki, and Maria Vasilopoulou.*





*Students of the Elementary School of Kastania in a voluntary cleanliness work in the 1960s.*



*Celebration of 25th March 1965. From the left standing: Adamantios Papadokokkalakis (teacher), Ioannis IR. Vasilopoulos, Konstantinos Aim. Evkis, Panagiotis Ioan. Loi, Nikolaos Georg. Athanasopoulos, Panagiotis Ioan. Kouvara, Areti Kon. Antonopoulou, Konstantinos Ant. Manolis, and Christos Dim. Aggelakis.*

*From the left seated: Konstantinos Hr. Antonopoulos, Charalampos Dim. Aggelakis, Nikolaos Ioan. Vellios, Spyridoula Georg. Athanasopoulou, Angeliki Athan. Antonopoulou, Evanthia Ioan. Velliou, and Ioannis Ant. Antonopoulos.*



*Papa-Lellos with Athanasios Skania during the excavation of the foundations of Ai-Lias, where oversized bones were found in tombs, 1963.*



*Standing from left to right: Georgios Ant. Manolis, Areti Georg. Manoli, Lemonia Georg. Manoli, Aikaterini Ant. Manoli, ..., Stavros Ant. Manolis, ..., and Christos Dem. Lamos. Sitting from left to right: Konstantinos Dem. Lellos, Konstantinos Ant. Manolis, Sotirios Georg. Manolis, Tasia Georg. Manoli, Dimitrios Georg. Lamos, Antonios Kon. Manolis, Vasiliki Ant. Manoli, and Sotirios Georg. Manolis, 1966.*





*From left: Aglaia Georg. Lellou, ... Pylarinos, Papa-Lellos, Aikaterini Pylarinou, Ioannis II. Lois (Lionas), Lambro Ioan Lois, and Aikaterini Pylarinou's daughter sitting, (1965).*



*From left: Konstantinos G. Vellios, Patramanis (Teacher), Charalampos Dem. Angelakis, Eleni Dem. Angelaki, Areti K. Velliu, Vasiliki Chr. Antonopoulou, Ioanna Athanassopoulou, and Dimitrios Angelakis, 1973.*



*Standing from left: Ierigórios Vas. Vasilopoulos, Konstantinos Georg. Vellios, Evgenia Kon. Antonopoulou, Antonia Kon. Antonopoulou, Koula Ioan. Loi, Savvoula Ath. Charalambopoulou, Foteini Loi (bride), Konstantinos Georg. Vellios (groom), Athanasios Dem. Charalambopoulos, Konstantinos Ioan. Lois, ..., Nikephoros Georg. Vellios, Pannoula Ioan. Kouvara, Stella Ioan. Velliu, and Vasiliki Antonopoulou (Liolenas).*



*Sitting from left... Maniatis and Nikolaos Vas. Vasilopoulos.*  
*Ai-Lias, 1965. From left: Papa-Lellos, Nikolaos Ioan. Antonopoulos, Ioannis Kon. Vellios, Nikolaos Theofanis, Xanthi Ioan. Antonopoulou (Theofani), Haido Georg. Skania (Kormousi), Georgios Kormousis, Koula Ant. Antonopoulou, Maria Ioan. Velliu (Katsika), Stella Ioan. Velliu, Christina Georg. Skania, Konstantinos Ioan. Skanias, Ioannis El. Lois (Lionas).*





*It is  
strengthening  
to recall in  
one's  
memory  
the experiences  
and life events  
from the  
community  
life of the  
village.  
These feed  
our emotional  
bonds that  
we once had  
in the  
past times.*





*The proud grandmother Eleni Xyki  
and some of her grandchildren.*



*Friends with a tight bond of love and solidarity.  
These two always bring good things.  
A prayer and a good word on the lips,  
a sign of love.*



*From left standing: Georgios Ar. Athanasopoulos, Foto Georg.  
Athanasopoulou, Aikaterini Ioan. Skania, Athanasios Georg. Skanias,  
Christina Athan. Skania (Angelaki), Panagiota Ioan. Kouvara, Helen  
Dim. Angelaki, ..., Helen Ioan. Skania.*

*From left seated: Maria Dim. Angelaki, Nikolaos Ioan.  
Vellios, ..., ..., ..., ..., ..., ..., and Efthymios Ioan. Kouvaras, 1967.*





*Seeing these faces, you are prepared to love them more than perhaps, you ever allowed yourself the opportunity to interact with them before. Now, let's live with the memories.*



*Konstantina Xyki with her brother Andrea, along with her children. They remind us of times and seasons full of life and movement.*



*Some of these dear faces, you will not hear their voice or their conversation, only they will take you on a journey to places and times where you have shared springs and summers, but also harsh winters...*



*At the courtyard table of Uncle Liona. Simple, but together as a company. They were not bothered by international events, but they were encouraging each other in daily care. A little wine and a coffee added a lot to the fraternal communication.*



*Standing from the left: Aglaia Kon. Lellou, Mr. Dem. Lellou, Sophia Georg. Taratsa, Andreas Al. Isintzelis, ..., ..., Ekaterini Ioan. Skania, Koula Vas. Loi and Georgia Zach. Zacharopoulou. Seated from the left: ..., ..., Anastasios Vas. Loi, ..., ..., and Chaido Ioan. Skania, 1972.*





*From left standing: Olympia Athan. Skania, Eleni Dem. Angelaki, Demitrios Char. Angelakis, Teorgia Tchor. Skania, Christina Athan. Skania, ..., Retsina, ... Retsina, Georgios Athan. Skanias, Maria Dem. Angelaki, Vasilios Dem. Angelakis and Konstantinos Ioan. Skanias. From left sitting: Charalampos Dem. Angelakis, Euthymios Ioan. Kouvaras, Dimitrios Athan. Charalamopoulos, Dimitrios Georg. Athanasopoulos, Antonios Ioan. Vellios, Athanasios Georg. Skanias, Andreas Dem. Angelakis and Aristidis Ioan. Lois, 1969.*



*Students from all classes of the single-class elementary school of Kastania in the '70s.*



*Group photo of the village outside of the St. Demetrius school - Plebiscite Yes/No, 29-9-1968. From left standing: Konstantina Georg. Sboku, Georgia Kon. Antonopoulou (Toula), Foteini Kon. Velliou, Konstantinos Georg. Vellios (Petros), Athanasios Georg. Skanias, Konstantinos Dim. Antonopoulos, Dimitrios Char. Angelakis, Leonidas Alex. Tsintzelis, Teorgios Kon. Taratsas, Georgios Kon. Lois, Vasilios Ant. Manolis, Zacharias Ant. Manolis, Konstantinos Char. Kallimanis, Ieorgios Ar. Athanasopoulos, Charalampos Ixorg. Iaratsas, Charalampos Kon. Kallimanis, Ioannis II. Lois (Lionas), Aglaia Chr. Antonopoulou, Lampros Ioan. Loi, Ioannis Kon. Vasilopoulos (Vasiloanos), Christina Athan. Skania, Eleni Dim. Angelaki, Tasia Ieorg. Manoli, Vasiliki Ant. Manoli, Konstantina Zach. Manoli, Aikaterini Ioan. Kouvara, Kontylo St. Manoli, Foteini Ixorg. Antonopoulou, Aglaia Georg. Lellou, Konstantina Char. Kallimani, Maria Dim. Charalambopoulou, Areti Kon. Velliou, Maria I. Velliou, Fengo Athan. Charalambopoulou. From left sitting: Charalampos Ant. Manolis, Piannoula Ioan. Kouvara, ..., Antonios Georg. Manolis, Georgia Kon. Pappa, Sotirios Georg. Manolis, ..., Georgios Ant. Manolis and Dimitrios Char. Angelakis. The school is the only and the most suitable place for the gatherings of the villagers for any communal and festive event.*





*Personal work for the extraction of stone in Xerovouni. Standing from left: Eustathios Kalogiros (bus driver), his son, Teorgios Ath. Skanias, Lampros Mamalis, Andreas Angelakis, Ioannis An. Antonopoulos (Lioliou), Ioanna Ath. Antonopoulos, Hrestos D. Angelakis, Athanasios D. Lellos, Thomas Masgalas, Lamprini Antonopoulou, Dimitrios Ixorg. Lellos and Vasileios Lois. Sitting from left: Aris Lagaros, Elias G. Lellos, Stefanos Ar. Kanellos, Nikolaos Ioan. Vellios, Vasileios An. Lois, Georgios Il. Lellos, Athanasios G. Skanias and ..., 1985.*



*Construction of upper and lower wall for the landscaping above the square (Syllogos project), 1988-89.*



*Personal work for the extraction of stone in the Aninos Mountain, 1987. Dimitrios Georg. Lellos, Nikolaos Ioan. Vellios, Hrestos Ioan. Kouvaras, Athanasios Dim. Lellos, Konstantinos Chr. Antonopoulos, ..., Ioannis K. Antonopoulos, Georgios Il. Lellos, Dimitrios Kotsotas.*



*From the stone extraction in Xerovouni: Standing from left: Ioannis Antonopoulos, Vasileios Angelakis, ..., Ntrelis, Aristeidis Lois, Ioannis Xykis, Elias Lellos, Maria Xyki, Hrestos Kouvaras, Athanasios Skanias and Dimitrios Kotsotas. Seated is Athanasios Dim. Lellos, 1987.*





*From the OSYN meeting in Kastania in 2006 (representatives of the reception): Georgia Athan. Antonopoulos and Vasiliki Anast. Lois.*



*In personal work for the extraction of stone in Xerovouni: Angeliki Athan. Lellou and Vasileios An. Lois, 1986.*



*During the Holy Liturgy with Father Ioannis K. Antonopoulos.*



*In the special homeland of the president Mr. Ioannis Kallimanis, Kastania of Nafpaktia, officials and executives of AHEPA Australia decided to end their summer vacation in Greece and at the same time celebrate at the traditional festival of Ai-Panni on August 29, 2016. The president of AHEPA Mr. Ioannis Kallimanis in collaboration with the president of the Community of Kastania Nafpaktia Mr. Konstantinos Manolis invited the Local Authorities to honor with their presence this historic meeting. The Mayor of Nafpaktia Mr. Iakis Loukopoulos, the Deputy Mayors Mr. Thomas Kotronias and Thanasis Koukounas, the MP of New Democracy of Aitolioakarnania Mr. Christos Paisios, the president of the Worldwide Kastaniotes Ms. Lambrini Antonopoulou, presidents of Associations and Communities of neighboring villages and a multitude of people attended the event.*









*Standing from left: Angeliki Vas. Loi, Nikolaos Ioan. Antonopoulos, Fotini Kon. Vellios, Thomas Kon. Antonopoulos, ..., ..., ..., ..., Christos Kon. Antonopoulos, ..., Nikolaos Georg. Vellios, Elias Georg. Lellos, ..., ..., and Ioannis Kon. Vellios. Sitting from left: Georgia An. Antonopoulou, ..., ..., Konstantinos Ioan. Vellios, ..., ..., ..., ...*



*This group of young people stands out for their dynamic behavior, for their good sense of action and additionally for the song and dance, which accompanies their courage.*

## Epilogue

The collection of information and basic elements for a serious and truthful description of a place with its inhabitants is very difficult. Yet, a great effort has been made to write an accurate description of the village, as much as possible. The writer is entitled to leniency for some perhaps... inaccurate and unmentioned elements, given that his absence from the village has been long-term.

Nevertheless, we, from our vast exile, do not forget our roots and we do our duty. And you, siblings of the homeland, and especially of our village, Kastania, support the good struggle and continue to contribute. It is everyone's concern to recognize our obligations for the coming years.

What matters is that we are interested and we want to contribute, as much as possible. Also, it is very important the fact that we have met again together, we looked into each other's eyes, and warmed up by being close to each other!

Therefore, make every possible effort for a good result which time will value much later. Despite all the difficulties and problems, we hope that this book will reach the hands of all our fellow villagers. Take care of it. The Mother doesn't need to find big words to call her child to the table. She simply says: the table is ready. Her call is an offering, her hug is heartfelt. This is how our small village is. We should feel it as a mother who offers us this gift. The blessing of her genuine, unmistakable, and delicious offering will come out.

### **Our Hopes for our New Generations**

The detailed mention of our village and its inhabitants makes us all proud. And its developments in the quality of Kastanians reassure all of us and especially us, the older ones, that the newest generations have not merely followed and mimicked their ancestors, but have managed to surpass them and all the imposing difficulties and reversals of the society around them. And they are worthy of receiving every praise. They are strong and independent like the birds of the sky that rest on the branches of the tree after their flight without fear of breaking and falling, because they are supported by their strong wings. Many young men and women compete for the best success and progress in all areas of the broader environment. Their presence is indicative and significant in all branches of science. They excel, stand out and many are distinguished in education and operational positions of the Nation, employees, entrepreneurs and scientists.

