



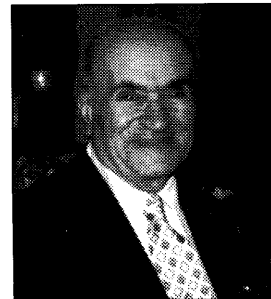
Monsour Dow



Josephine David



Thomas Moses



Joseph G. Hardin



L-R: Anthony H. Thomas, Anthony G. Thomas, Edward P. Coury

Music & Dance

The text and photos in this section of the Parish History
are dedicated to the memory of
Thomas Moses, Joseph G. Hardin, Josephine David, Anthony G. Thomas, Monsour Dow

It has been said that music has a unique power of stating who we are and what we believe. Whether we hear the "Star Spangled Banner" or "Angels We Have Heard On High" we immediately feel a certain way. This phenomenon is even greater for an immigrant group.

When the majority of our forebears left Lebanon they were in their late teens or early twenties. They left the security

ence. This is due to the fact that if an immigrant group has marching band it may participate in civic celebrations such as parades and thus declare to the world that the group is part of the "American Experience." In our parish the band was known as "Zirhat Algaib Ahmagiat". This band marched in a number of parades in New Bedford in the 1930's.

Aside from the marching band, our parish has had a rich

Arabian Knights. Anthony G. Thomas would later teach Robert M. Thomas of the Sheiks and Matthew J. Thomas of Hafroon to play the oud. Thus, Thomas Moses' simple act of teaching a young boy to play the oud would have an effect on music in the Parish for over fifty years. While there were a number of persons who could play the oud, it was usually Richard Morad would play the derbakee.

The music of the Arabian Knights was synonymous with haflis and mahrajans in the parish from the 1950's until the 1980's. While "professional" entertainers would be brought in to perform, it was assumed that "Tommy, Tommy and Eddie" would also perform. For

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of their homes to seize the promise of America. However, they brought with them the ability to evoke the feeling of home no matter where they were. Their religion was a major factor in this ability to feel at home just as their ability to cook their favorite meals. However, there was one factor that transcended the boundary between the religious and the secular. That factor was music.

When we hear a certain Arabic lullaby, we are transported back to our youth and we are sitting in a grandparent's lap. In much the same way, the singing of Psalm 8 during the Palm Sunday Procession is as much a part of our Palm Sunday Tradition as the palm branches themselves. Clearly, our music has a unique power over our emotions. In our Parish, music has always been important. We are fortunate in that we have developed a rich musical tradition, both in religious and secular music.

The creation of a marching band is usually an important part of the immigrant experi-

musical tradition in other secular areas. Perhaps the first person to play the oud in the parish was Monsour Dow. At times Mary Dow would sing with him and at other times he would sing. Hykel Simon also played the oud and had rich deep singing voice. However, Thomas Moses had the greatest influence of these earlier oud players. It was Thomas Moses who taught Anthony G. Thomas how to play the oud. Anthony G. Thomas would later join Anthony H. Thomas and Edward P. Coury to form the

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those of us in the baby boom generation the heartbeat of our social interactions with fellow parishioners was set by the infectious drum beat of Eddie Coury. While a significant portion of the baby boom generation could not speak Arabic, we



Claire Thomas DaSilva often performed folk dancing to the music of the Sheiks, shown in this photo from circa 1964.

nonetheless knew when to answer "Smallah" when Anthony H. Thomas exhorted us to do so. And finally when Anthony G. Thomas began the introduction to the "Wheat Song" we all knew it was time to dabke.

Although they were friends from childhood, it was not until 1947 when Tommy, Tommy & Eddie first publicly performed as a group. This took place in Waterville, Maine where they were performing as part of another band. For the next forty-six years, until Anthony G. Thomas passed away in July of 1993, they would play together as a group.

An important part of our culture is the act of passing traditions from one generation to another. So to , our musical traditions have been passed from one generation to another. In 1964, Robert M. Thomas, Arthur M. Thomas, Jr., Robert Joseph, Ralph Joseph and Charlie Murray joined together

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to form the Sheiks. The boys were all members of the Parish Youth Group. The Shieks appeared on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour and were quite successful. Approximately fifteen years later Camille Saade, Michael P. Thomas and Matthew Thomas would join to form a group known as Hafroon.

While music was an important part of our daily lives, it was also an integral part of our religious expression, and leading that expression was the



The infusion of youth which occurred after 1973 is evident in this photo of the choir taken following an ordination in Middletown, NY.

Choir. Among the pioneers of the Choir were Joseph G. Hardin, Hykel Simon, Annie S. Thomas and Josephine David. Thomas Moses who played the organ accompanied them. Although they had very little formal musical training, these individuals gave of their time and their talents to lead the congregation in singing the praises of the Lord. Younger members were always encouraged to join the choir, but it was not until 1973 that the youth movement really began to take hold.

Michael G. Thomas assumed the role as organist and choir director. Having a formal music education he notated the choir hymnal and some of these original notations are still being used today. The number of youth in the choir also increased at this time. Under watchful eye and tutelage of Father George the Choir began to learn a number of Syriac hymns and devel-

oped a musical style that would continue for approximately fifteen years. Patricia Thomas succeeded Michael Thomas and

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James Thomas succeeded her. Andrew Thomas succeeded James Thomas and Christine Peter succeeded him. Betty David succeeded Christine Peter and James Thomas, who once again assumed the role as Choir Director, succeeded Betty David. Although the identities of the Choir Directors and members would change, as would the language of the hymns, the devotion of the Choir and its goal to sing God's praises remained unchanged.