

248th Anniversary of the 500 Greeks who landed in America was celebrated June 24-25, 2016 at St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine

St. Augustine, FL – On June 25th the chanters sang the holy Orthodox hymns under the direction of Protopsaltis Nicholas Lekas of St. Augustine, FL, as Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos, assisted by Very Rev. Father Joseph Samaan and Deacon Athanasios Kartsonis, celebrated the early morning matins, hierarchical divine liturgy, and the memorial service in commemoration of the 500 Orthodox souls who numbered among the 1,400 New Smyrna colonists of 1768, in the chapel of St. Photios at the Greek Orthodox National Shrine located in St. Augustine.

The souls of Archbishop Iakovos of America, Bishop John of Amorion, Shrine Founders and the Archdiocesan Shrine Committee members, Shrine benefactors, Andrew and Eula Carlos of Atlanta, Georgia, and godparents of the Shrine, George and Georgia Croffead of Charleston, SC, were also commemorated.

Anastasia Papadopoulou of Falls Church, VA, sponsored the Blessing of the Five Loaves for the health and well-being of her family and in honor of His Grace Bishop of Xanthos. The service concluded with Father Samaan reading Greek Landing Day greetings from His Eminence, Metropolitan Alexios.

The civic ceremony began with her Honor Mayor Nancy Shaver reading the City of St. Augustine Greek Landing Day Proclamation. His Grace then led the clergy and laity in the dedication of the new permanent exhibit, the Three Hierarchs of St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine. St. Photios Foundation First Vice President Archon Dr. Manuel Tissura and his wife Elaine, and Shrine Architect, Archon Ted Pappas and his wife Mary Lee, were among the dignitaries present. The new exhibit was designed by Tissura and Pappas, and made possible through the estate of Bishop John of Amorion.

All proceeded to the Shrine's Constantine Sisters Courtyard where the youth of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Daytona Beach, FL, performed four Greek folk dances. St. Barbara Philoptochos chapter of St. Demetrios, Daytona Beach, then hosted a reception and bake sale. Toulia Klironomou and her son Peter, of the AHEPA Speedway Chapter, hosted the Landing Day Luncheon in honor of Bishop Dimitrios.

Over 500 people stopped by the Shrine during the 2-day festivities. Shrine volunteers and staff offered formal tours of the chapel, talks on the history of the Greek colonists, savory and sweet samples of Greek cuisine and a wine tasting on Friday evening. After Saturday's ecclesiastical and civic ceremonies, Shrine Director Polly Hillier and Andrew Lekos, Missions Team Director at the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, spoke with Father Sampson Kasapakis and the youth and adults visiting from St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Tarpon Springs, Florida about these programs of the Orthodox Church located in St. Augustine. This was a first time Shrine visit for many.

For the past 30 years, the St. Photios Foundation has observed the June 26, 1768 arrival of Andrew Turnbull's ships in St. Augustine as a day of solemnity and a celebration of faith and perseverance. Archbishop Iakovos of blessed memory coined this observance "Greek Landing Day". This is made possible through the efforts of the parishioners of St. Demetrios, Daytona Beach, Holy Trinity, St. Augustine, and St. John, Jacksonville. Each year they take a turn in chairing the event. The Foundation recognizes the financial support of Leadership 100 and the National Ladies Philoptochos Society, who so generously and steadfastly support this event each year.

