

Greek Landing Day Celebration 2017 **St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine**

St. Augustine, FL – The trustees of the St. Photios Foundation invite the public to celebrate the 249th anniversary of Greek Landing Day on Monday, June 26 at St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine. Father John Hays of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in St. Augustine will begin the ecclesiastical services at 9:00 a.m. The Honorable Nancy Shaver will proclaim all of St. Augustine Greek for a day. She will read the City of St. Augustine Mayoral Proclamation at the Civic Ceremony which begins at 11:00 a.m.

In April 1768, 1,402 people of Mediterranean descent sailed for the New World under the British Indentured Servants Act with Englishman, Dr. Andrew Turnbull. They came from Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, France, Corsica and Minorca seeking freedom and therefore, a better chance to succeed in life. About 500 of these pilgrims were Greeks.

Over 200 died en route. Today, we remember these souls lost at sea at the Odyssey Memorial in New Smyrna Beach, Florida through the efforts of the National Middle Marker Project.

After taking on fresh supplies in St. Augustine, they sailed 75 miles down the Florida coast to establish the New Smyrna Colony. For 10 difficult years, they struggled to survive against insurmountable odds. The survivors returned to St. Augustine in 1777 where Governor Patrick Tonyn received them as refugees. They were granted sanctuary in the Avero House, located at 41 St. George Street. For three generations, this house was called the Minorcan or Greek Chapel.

In 1965, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America purchased the property. For nearly a decade earlier, Olga Fotiou and Tom Xynidis led the campaign to remember the early Greeks of St. Augustine. Fueled by the diligent research of Dr. Epaminondas Panagopoulos, four couples took a leap of faith and signed the binder that would eventually transfer the ownership of the property to the Archdiocese. These four St. Augustine couples are our Shrine Founders: James and Stella Kalivas, Steve and Gerry Sarris, Tom and Despina Xynidis, and Spero and Martha Zepatos.

The annual Greek Landing Day Celebration honors the memory of the first Greek colonists to America and celebrates the pioneering spirit of all immigrants. It is an opportunity for the public to visit this 'jewel of St. George Street' and 'beacon of Orthodoxy in America'. The Foundation thanks the National Ladies Philoptochos Society, National AHEPA, Leadership 100 and the many individuals and parishes that provided financial support for Greek Landing Day 2017.

Members of the Kimisis Tis Theotokou Philoptochos Chapter of Holy Trinity invite the public to refreshments following the civic ceremony.