

Suburbs Are Arab Melting Pot

By W.W. EDGAR

This may come as a surprise, but Observeland now is rated one of America's strongholds for the Arabic speaking people whose roots are deeply imbedded in the Holy Land.

With the City of Livonia as the hub of activities, more than 800 persons are now helping to carry on the traditions -- religious and social -- of the old world where they have been part of life for centuries.

Most of them now are Quakers and follow those principles because they, too, are what Dr. Roger Ajluni, a Livonia doctor and one of their talented spokesmen, calls "poor fighters but great peace-loving people."

The doctor is one of six children who was born and raised in Ramallah, a small town 10 miles from Jerusalem.

"It is now part of Palestine," he pointed out, "after being a part of Jordan from 1918 to 1967, our homeland was won back."

"Since 1948 more than 5,000 people from Ramallah have migrated to America. The close affinity was brought about because of the religious setup and the presence of the Quakers who are so active in education."

Like the Amish, who settle in a group in one community, the Arabic speaking people have spread their activities throughout the area -- but they stick together.

"We have one big convention each year," Dr. Ajluni explained, "and it is there that our sons and daughters, meet and many times marry within our own ranks."

We look forward to this convention, too," he continued, "as a sign of reunion. It is at these conventions that we meet many of our former school chums from back home and the older folks visit again with old friends they haven't seen in years."

The convention is taking on more importance since it will be held in Detroit in 1974 and already extensive plans have been made.

My father is a graduate of the American University and later a teacher. He meets many of his former students at these gatherings, and he's looking forward to the big one coming up."

Explaining some of the traditions, Dr. Ajluni recalled that there were only three Christian cities -- Bethlehem, Nazareth and Ramallah -- in the Holy Land.

The Quakers came to Ramallah in 1868, he said, not to attempt to convert anyone, but to live a simple life in peace.

"It was this trait that fascinated our people," the doctor said, "and we became Quakers."

Aside from encouraging marriages with their own people, these Arabic speaking natives of Ramallah have another great belief.

"We believe that every man can be two men. That is, he can be an American and enjoy living here. But he also can be another man by learning our Arabic language and carrying on the traditions of the home land."

Among these traditions are to

- Develop the culture.
- Support hospitals back in the Holy Land.
- Sponsor youth activities to the utmost and help in their development.
- Help all young people to get an education.
- Help preserve their identity.
- Learn the Arabic language and follow the culture of mother and dad.

These Arabic speaking people have no clubs, club rooms or so-called fraternity meeting houses. They gather in each other's homes to plan and carry on their activities.

Dr. Ajluni used his own life as an example.

Now only 37, he'll tell you he came to America when he

was 17 and immediately started to absorb an American education.

He attended Alfred University, a branch of Columbia University in New York City, and later specialized in Internal Medicine at New York Medical Center.

Following his graduation he was advised to continue his medical career at Detroit

Receiving Hospital and that brought him to the area.

"I liked Livonia when I saw it," he said, "because it was wide open -- just like home. And the people were friendly."

While he has reached several of his goals, set when a young man, he now has one more burning desire -- he would like to see a plan

whereby old folks could live out their years gracefully, without fear -- and with activities that would enable them to enjoy the waning days of their lives.

He has no objection to the current senior citizens homes, which provide a living space, for the elderly. But he claims they don't go far enough.

They don't provide the many activities that help them enjoy their days and many of them are still living in fear of an interruption of the program.

"I hope to see the day," he said, "when old age can be lived more gracefully."

He didn't say so, but he hinted that such a program could be in the planning stages by the Arabic speaking people who now are located in Observeland, one of the seven such groups in America. The others are located in the larger cities, like San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia and the like.

"It would be a grand thing, wouldn't it?" he asked, not expecting an answer.

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