

EVELETH'S LAGGES BROTHERS

GREEK IMMIGRANTS TO THE RANGE RAN POPULAR CANDY KITCHENS

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GROWING UP IN EVELETH

My family moved from Alexandria in west central Minnesota to Eveleth in November 1960 when I was six years old. Shortly after coming to Eveleth, a nice Greek man came to our door to welcome our family to the city. He had learned that my mother was half Greek and said it was customary when a fellow Greek arrived in a new city to greet them at their new home. This nice Greek man was Pete Lagges. At the time, he and his wife, Angie, owned Pete's Place, this wonderful confectionery (sweet shop) at 412 Pierce St. Unfortunately, the building is gone now, part of the bank's drive-through on the corner of Pierce and Grant Avenue.

Within a few months of coming to Eveleth, my mom took a job at Cluett Peabody & Company's Arrow shirt factory on Garfield Street and Adams Avenue, two blocks from our new home on A Avenue. Each Friday, when her workday was over, my siblings and I would take turns meeting her at the Arrow plant. We would then go with her when she deposited her check at the First National Bank on the corner of Grant and Pierce. Our ulterior motive was that Pete's Place was located across the street. My favorite was having a root beer float while spinning on the stool at the counter. My mom would have these wonderful long conversations with Pete and Angie while drinking her coffee.

This Greek-owned confectionery, which was also a newsstand, soda fountain and coffee shop, had a special place in our family's hearts, since my Greek maternal grandfather also had a confectionery, called the Morris Candy Kitchen, in Morris, MN, about 40 miles from Alexandria. Our trips to Pete's Place became a Friday afternoon tradition.

Unfortunately, there are no pictures that could be found of Pete's Place. However, Jimmy Lagges, Pete's son, remembers the following layout of the store as you walk in: on the left side after the entrance, a comic book rack, candy bar display, tobacco cabinet, and counter with stools; and on the right side after the entrance, a magazine rack, a bench with more magazines and newspapers, a freezer chest that had popsicles and frozen treats; and at the far end, a soda fountain.

Two years after coming to Eveleth, our grandfather's confectionery closed when our grandmother became ill and our grandfather retired to care for her. Then, unfortunately, Pete and Angie sold their store.

The *Eveleth News* of July 5, 1962, said, "The sale of Peter Lagges' coffee shop and confectionery store was announced by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lagges, who have been operating the business for 15 years. Peter



Sam, Pete, and George Lagges and waitresses at the Eveleth Candy Kitchen, 320 Grant Ave. in Eveleth, in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of Jimmy Lagges.

Lagges arrived in Eveleth in 1909 and was co-owner of the Eveleth Candy Kitchen for about 14 years. He then operated Pete's eatery place on the corner of Fayal Road and Adams Ave. for 13 years. The Lagges' will continue to make their home in Eveleth at 413 Cleveland Street. As of July 1, the new proprietor, Mary Strahan, will continue the business in the same manner as the Lagges' have enjoyed in the past."

The name stayed as Pete's Place until 1964 when it was sold to Casey and Georgie Johnson, and it became Casey's Newsette. However, we continued our Friday tradition of going with our mom to the bank and afterwards, to the confectionery, although it had this new name and new owners.

Casey's kept many of the special things people liked about Pete's Place. As a kid I still have my old books. Casey's books were a big thing back then, too. When I was in junior high, they added an arcade in the back room. I would spend hours on the pitch and bat baseball pinball machine—oh so many dimes I spent. Casey's, due to its similarities to Pete's Place and our grandpa's Morris Candy Kitchen, maintained that nostalgia for us for the remainder of our childhood in Eveleth.

During the 1960s, besides going to Pete's Place (and later to Casey's) we would

also go to the Midget News Stand one block over on 410 Jones St. Our mother had told us that it was owned by Pete's younger brother, George. A classmate of mine, George Mileusnic, remembers getting penny candy which would be put into a small brown paper bag and the Topps penny or nickel-pack baseball cards with gum. Pete's son, Jimmy, told me that when George became ill in the late '60s, his dad, although retired, helped George during this time running the store. George died on May 1, 1970.

My high school classmate, Rob Tomassoni, told me, "I do remember buying candy and having a cherry Coke at the Midget!" The kids today and their parents probably think that cherry Cokes always came in a can or bottle, but back in our day, the old-fashioned soda fountains made it by mixing cherry-flavored syrup into cola. Another classmate, Ed Bonch, said, "The Midget News was a favorite of mine!"

It is not surprising that Pete's Place and the Midget News, in addition to being confectioneries and soda fountains, both sold newspapers and magazines. "The Greek above all men loves to devour his newspaper. If you enter his place of business for a friendly chat and he is reading his paper, you must wait" (from Thomas Burgess's

1913 book *Greeks in America – An Account of Their Coming, Progress, Customs, Living and Aspirations*).

After our college graduations in the mid 1970s, all my siblings and I moved from Eveleth. Our father died in 1978, and the next year my mom decided to move from Eveleth back to Alexandria, where my uncle and grandmother lived. Future trips to Eveleth were infrequent for me until after my mom died in 1995.

One day after my 45th high school class reunion in 2017, my twin sister and I took a walk through the town, all the while talking about the fond memories of our childhood in our hometown of Eveleth. On a walk down Grant we saw in one of the windows photos of yesteryear. One of the photos had a street map of Eveleth's business district from 1935 for a celebration called Eveleth's March of Progress. To our surprise, the map showed at 320 Grant, a store called The Eveleth Candy Kitchen, which brought back memories of our grandpa's Morris Candy Kitchen and Pete's Place. As I later found out, many of the Greek owners of confectioneries across America called their stores candy kitchens

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since they made their homemade candies on location in copper kettles.

THE LAGGES BROTHERS COME TO AMERICA

To learn more about the history of the Eveleth Candy Kitchen, I went to the Gale Family Library at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul shortly after my reunion. To my surprise, I found that the Eveleth Candy Kitchen was owned by Pete and George Lagges, and their older brother, Sam. Sam founded the Eveleth Candy Kitchen in 1909, with Pete joining him less than a year later. Their younger brother, George, joined them in 1913. Therefore, the period of time I went to Pete's Place and the Midget News was only a fraction of the history of the Lagges' brothers' confectioneries. In 1913, Sam, Pete and George were only 23, 19, and 15, respectively. Young men in a new country.

The Lagges brothers were from the small village of Katavothra, about 48 miles southeast of Sparta in the Laconia administrative region of Greece. It is in the southeastern part of the Peloponnese, a peninsula that constitutes the southernmost part of mainland Greece. In the 1920s, the village had less than 800 people. In 1961, the village was renamed Metamorfosis, the Greek word for the transfiguration of Christ.

The largest city near Katavothra is Molai, a town of about 2,000, three miles to its west.

"The Spartans were the first of the modern Greeks to emigrate to America. ... The primary reason for their departure was the drop in the price of currants, the main money crop, which brought hard times for growers. In general, poor soil conditions, repeated crop failures, difficulties in making a living, floods, earthquakes, oppressive taxation and frequent changes in the government forced many to look to the United States as the land of opportunity. They came predominantly from the rural areas." (Source: *The Greeks in America – A Students' Guide to Localized History* by Theodore Saloutos, 1967.)

It must have been difficult for the brothers to leave Greece, since their three sisters, another brother, Athanasios, and their mother, Chresula, remained in Greece, but in the early 1900s it was not uncommon for the Greek younger men to come to America to send money back to their family in Greece. The Greeks from Sparta—from which three-fourths of its men left for America at the turn of the 20th century—were some of the first to be confectionery owners in the United States.

George Lagges's first home in America was Eveleth, but his older brother, Sam, first immigrated to upper Michigan after leaving Greece in 1904 at 14 years of age. He worked at Peter Apostle's Marquette Candy Kitchen; Apostle was Sam's first teacher of the candy trade. In 1907 he went to Escanaba, MI and worked at the Laggis and Glados Confectionery and Ice Cream Parlor (later the Escanaba Candy Kitchen),



The Eveleth Candy Kitchen at 320 Grant Ave. is the one-story building in this photo, circa 1940. Rexall City Drug is at the far left, then the Stop and Shop grocery store, the Eveleth Candy Kitchen, and Brownell Drug. Photo courtesy of Jimmy Lagges.

owned by George Laggis, a possible cousin.

Pete joined Sam at the Escanaba Candy Kitchen after immigrating in 1908, also at the age of 14. They both went to upper Michigan before coming to Eveleth in 1909 because many of the earlier Greeks from their village of Katavothra settled there. Most of the Greeks from Katavothra opted to be a proprietor or a clerk of a confectionery.

Sam Lagges's first confectionery was at 213 Grant Ave., and John Poulos, from Katavothra, was one of his clerks. By 1915, Mr. Poulos was listed as the owner of the Ely Candy Kitchen in the 1915 *Greek-American Guide & Business Directory* by George N. Helms. This was another example of the once trainee becoming a trainer of a new apprentice and passing the candy making skills on to start yet another Greek-owned candy kitchen.

In 1913, around the time their brother George arrived, Sam and Pete opened the Eveleth Candy Kitchen at 322 Grant Ave. According to Pete's World War I draft registration on June 5, 1917, he was employed at the confectionery store in Eveleth, but by the time he was drafted, he was working at the Chisholm Candy Kitchen. The *Eveleth News* on May 30, 1918, said, "Sam Lagges was in Chisholm Saturday where he visited with his brother, Peter, who left with the drafted men for Camp Lewis Washington." Pete did not have to serve overseas. The Armistice to end WWI was signed on Nov.

11, 1918.

The Chisholm Candy Kitchen was owned by Sam Pappas (Pappandakis), from Katavothra, and James Palmer (Paspaliaris). Pappas and Palmer also owned the Olympia Candy Kitchen in Chisholm. Around the same time, there was a George Pappas (Pappadakis), from Katavothra, who had the Midget News in Chisholm. George Pappas was acquainted with the Lagges family. The *Eveleth News* on September 20, 1917, wrote, "George Pappas of Chisholm was in this city Wednesday visiting with Sam Lagges of Eveleth Candy Kitchen. Pappas was drafted and will leave for training at Camp Dodge, Des Moines, on Saturday." George served in the military as a sergeant from Sept. 21, 1917 to March 21, 1919.

Shortly after being discharged, George Pappas moved to Eveleth and was briefly employed by Sam Lagges at the Candy Kitchen before opening up the Midget News stand at 406 Jones St. in Eveleth. According to the *Eveleth News* of June 19, 1919: "The building formerly occupied by a barber shop next to the post office was opened up last week by George Pappas, who was employed by Sam Lagges at the Eveleth Candy Kitchen. Mr. Pappas is selling newspapers, books, magazines, cigars, cigarettes, tobacco and candies." On the 1935 business map, the Midget News eventually was located at 410 Jones, across the alley from the State Theater at 412 Jones.

The Lagges brothers were accepted into

the community despite the limited number of Greeks in Eveleth. Friendships were formed by men of different nationalities, as can be seen from this article in the *Eveleth News* on March 13, 1919, regarding a curling event: "The first consolation trophy in the First National Bank event was won by the Tellefsen rink over the Morrill rink. The score was 8 and 7. Tellefsen's rink is composed of Victor Yakich, Peter Lagges, Fred Lind and skipped by Tellefsen." A Slovenian, a Greek, a Swede and a Norwegian. Sports has always helped in this way.

An article in the March 6, 1919, *Eveleth News* described the purchase of the 320 Grant building by Sam Lagges: "Sam Lagges, proprietor of the Eveleth Candy Kitchen, has purchased the building now being occupied by the William Glenn pool hall and the Commercial Barber shop from John Murnik of Coleraine. He does not intend to move from his present location, however, until the latter part of next summer. ... The soda fountain and candy cases will occupy the front end of the building, the rooms in the back end will be used as a candy kitchen and Mr. Lagges will manufacture his own ice cream in the basement." In late 1920, Pete rejoined his brothers in Eveleth.

Only a couple of years after the grand opening of the Eveleth Candy Kitchen at its new location, the brothers received heartbreaking news from Katavothra. Their mother, who had resided in Greece all her

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life, had died.

Most Greeks who came to the Iron Range and upper Michigan were single men who worked for railroads, mining companies or lumber mills. According to U.S. Census data, in the cities and surrounding areas of Buhl, Chisholm, Eveleth, Hibbing and Virginia, the peak census year of Greek born residents was in 1920.

Based on WWI draft registration cards (ages 18 to 45), which list their employer, in 1917/18, the three largest employers of Greek immigrants were Oliver Mining Co (78), Great Northern Railroad (43), and the Virginia & Rainy Lake Co. (28), the largest white pine sawmill in the world at the time. The next largest employer were the Greeks themselves, owners of confectioneries and restaurants. These were the ones who put down stakes in the communities.

OTHER GREEK CONFECTIONERS

During my research at the Minnesota History Center, I also learned more about my grandfather's candy kitchen and wrote an article for its county's history center. His mentor was a Spartan from a village only 27 miles west of Katavothra. After I finished writing my article, I shared it with Pamela Canelake Matson, the granddaughter of Gust Canelake (Kanellakis), the Greek founder of Canelake's Candies in Virginia. Pamela told me her grandfather and his three brothers started four stores on the Range in the early 1900s. Gust and his brother, Thomas, ran the confectioneries in Virginia, the Virginia Candy Kitchen and the Olympia Candy Kitchen; and their brothers, Christ and Nicholas, ran the confectioneries in Hibbing, the Hibbing Candy Kitchen and the Arcadia Candy Kitchen. Pamela and her sister Patricia also own the Great! Lakes Candy Kitchen in Knife River, MN, which they started in 2007.

The Lagges brothers were contemporaries and friends of the Canelake brothers. The Canelakes came from the village of Sikia, less than three miles from the Lagges's village of Katavothra. Gust's wife, Anna Batsakis, was also from Katavothra. When Anna Canelake died in 1963, Peter Lagges was a pallbearer at her funeral. The Lagges brothers gave back to their home village of Katavothra by donating funds for a new well. It is believed this was done in the 1930s. Pamela Canelake Matson visited her paternal grandmother's hometown in 2004 and saw the plaque acknowledging the donation by the Lagges brothers from Eveleth.

Gust Canelake started the Virginia Candy Kitchen in 1905 and in 1916 moved into a new building at 414 Chestnut St., the present location of Canelake's Candies, which was purchased by Pamela and her siblings in 2018. The name was changed to its current name shortly after WWII when Gust's children, John and Leo, became partners in the ownership of the store. It is amazing for this confectionery to still be in business after 115 years—who can resist chocolates? Pete Lagges was the co-owner of the

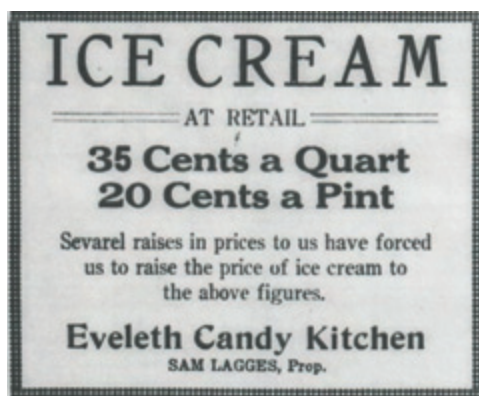


Canelake's Candies in Virginia was founded in 1905 by Gust Canelake and his brothers. Submitted photo.

Eveleth Candy Kitchen with his brothers until 1939 when he opened a restaurant called Pete's Place on the corner of Fayal Road and Adams Avenue. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, his brother, George, is listed as a helper at a restaurant. I'm not sure if he was helping at Pete's restaurant or if this referred to the Eveleth Candy Kitchen. Sam had two nephews, Michael Manolakos and James Govatos, both working at the Candy Kitchen and living with his wife Helen and daughter Antonia. Michael was the son of their uncles' sister Stamata, and James was the son of their sister Maria. The parents of both nephews remained living in Greece.

The Sept. 5, 1946, *Eveleth News-Clarion* reported, "After 37 years of continuous business here Sam Lagges sold out the Eveleth Candy Kitchen Saturday to John and Theodore Chresland and Theo Pondikis of Minneapolis.... Future plans of Sam Lagges and his brother George, who is associated with him, have not been announced, but the two expect to take a year's rest at least.... For years it has been one of the most popular places of its kind on the Range." In 1948, the new owners sold the Eveleth Candy Kitchen. The next owner was not successful, and the business closed permanently based on an article in the *Eveleth News-Clarion* on Nov. 30, 1950.

George Pappas, the owner of the Midget News, died on Feb. 22, 1946, and at some point, George Lagges took ownership. He owned the business by at least late 1947 based on Christmas and New Year's greetings for the holiday season. Therefore, George did not rest long, as suggested in



the article on the sale of the Eveleth Candy Kitchen. The probable reason was the unexpected death of George Pappas, the Lagges brothers' friend, neighbor and possible relative, and their desire to keep the Midget News in the family.

Pete sold his eatery on Fayal and Adams on March 23, 1950. The newspaper said, "Pete's Place has new owner now. Corner of Fayal Road & Adams Ave, Louis Pazzelli will maintain the same high-class service that Mr. Lagges and his wife have carried on for the past 10-1/2 years. Ice cream, soft drinks, cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, and a wide variety of candy and novelties are maintained at all times. Short orders, lunches and regular meals are served. 5:30 a.m. to midnight each weekday and until 1:30 on Sundays."

Shortly after the sale, based on the available Eveleth telephone directories in the 1950s at the Minnesota History Center, the restaurant on Fayal and Adams was renamed the Broiler, and Pete opened a new confectionery at 412 Pierce and called it Pete's Place, the name of his previous restaurant.

During my research, I learned about a confectionery in Tuscola, IL, called Flesor's Candy Kitchen, which was reopened in 2004 by the granddaughters of its Greek founder after being closed since the 1970s. One of the granddaughters, Ann Flesor-Beck, wrote her Ph.D. dissertation in 2014 at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign, called "Greek Immigration to, and Settlement in, Central Illinois 1880-1930" about this phenomenon of Greek confectioneries across America and particularly in central Illinois. In her dissertation, she states: "However it was spelled, Kandy (or Candy) Kitchen was by far the most popu-

lar name for a Greek confectionery" and "across central Illinois nearly every town of any size had at least one or more Greek confectionery and soda fountain."

The concluding paragraph of her dissertation inspired me to learn as much as I could about all the Greek-owned confectioneries that once were, and the few that still are, open in Minnesota: "This study of first-generation Greek confectioners in central Illinois touched on the journeys of hundreds of people, but there are many journeys yet to be uncovered. I hope that this initial exploration into local, rural, and public history will encourage others to build upon my work here, and thereby ensure that the neglected and forgotten, but fascinating lives of other generations of immigrants will be illuminated so that they, too, may be justly remembered."

In Aphrodite Matsakis' book *Growing up Greek in St. Louis*, she wrote, "So often we forget that our parents and grandparents are more than our relatives, they are people who had dreams and hopes apart from taking care of us." This not only applies to those who raised us; it applies to anyone of an older generation who touched our lives.

The Lagges brothers certainly had their hopes and dreams. When Pete Lagges sold his business in 1962, he was quoted as saying, "I wish to thank our friends and patrons from the bottom of my heart for the courtesies extended to me." It is our turn now to thank Pete and his brothers by not forgetting their legacy. S' efharistó!

James (Jim) Froemming lives in Eden Prairie, MN. He graduated from Eveleth High School in 1972.