

A HISTORY OF LEBANESE CULTURE IN WICHITA

by

Kathryn E. Potenski  
Wichita State University

## I. INTRODUCTION

The life of man in the cities until fairly recently has been studied solely by the sociologist. However, as peasants began leaving the villages and migrating to the urban centers the anthropologist followed. Thus, the major area of concern in early urban anthropology was to study the rural migrant's adjustment to life in the city. The influx of foreign immigrants to the United States gave rise to another area of research--the ethnic enclave. This paper deals with Eastern Orthodox Lebanese immigrants (and their descendants) to Wichita, Kansas. Its primary focus is on the early history of immigrants to this American community. A brief history of Lebanon, as it relates to stimuli for immigration, will be presented. Also necessary to a full understanding of the culture of the Lebanese immigrants in America is an overview of traditional society in Lebanon. Noteworthy in this regard is that many of the traditional Lebanese values were an aid in the cultural transition of the immigrants. Second, some of the cultural institutions that have been initiated by the

Lebanese community in Wichita will be examined and discussed in terms of how they promote in-group feelings. The last section is devoted to interviews, interpretations and conclusions. The interviews will be cited according to how they reflect dominant values. It is the basic premise of this paper that the Lebanese people in Wichita have succeeded economically, socially and politically because of their strong allegiance of the family group.

## II. BACKGROUND

The country of Lebanon is a mosaic of peoples of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. There are seven major religious groups--four Christian, two Islamic and one Druze. There are also five smaller groups. Almost all Lebanese belong to one or another of these religious communities. The last official census in 1932 indicated that Christians made up about 53 percent of the population; Moslems, 39 percent; and all adherents of other faiths, the remainder. Moslems have probably surpassed Christians numerically since this census was taken. However, for the sake of internal political stability the government takes the position that these ratios still hold true. Religion and politics are closely intertwined. Seats in the legislative body of government, the Chamber of Deputies and the Cabinet are distributed proportionately

among the major religious groups. This policy has become known as confessionalism (Smith, et al, 1974:123).

Although this paper is primarily concerned with Eastern Orthodox Lebanese immigrants, a discussion of the various religious communities will prove helpful in understanding the complex nature of Lebanese history and culture. Among the Christian groups are a smaller number of Roman Catholics; a large number of Roman Catholic Uniates; a substantial number of adherents to the churches of the East, Orthodox and schismatic; and a few thousand Protestants. The Roman Catholics comprise less than 1 percent of the population and are mostly of European extraction. The Lebanese refer to the Roman Catholics as Latins to distinguish them from the Uniate groups; none of which use the Roman liturgy. The Uniate churches are in full communion with Rome and agree with the Holy See in matters of religious doctrine. However, they do not practice the Latin rite. They have retained their own ancient rites in various languages. Uniate groups in Lebanon represent about 37 percent of the population. The Maronites are the largest of the Uniate groups and the largest single religious group, Christian or Moslem, in the country. They are estimated to comprise nearly 30 percent of the population (Ibid:124-5).

The Eastern churches not in communion with Rome include the various Orthodox Churches and several small schismatic churches. Although the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches share many of the same elements of the Christian faith, differences have persisted into modern times. Primarily, Orthodox reject the concept of the universal primacy of the Pope and feel that he cannot be infallible in matters of faith and morals. The Orthodox Church also adheres to a somewhat different list of sacraments and to slightly different rituals and customs. Arabic is the liturgical language. Greek Orthodox adherents comprise approximately 10 percent of the population. The community includes people of varying social origins, ranging from urban upper-class families to village peasants. Between these extremes are middle-class persons who have left the village and achieved some measure of success in the urban setting (Ibid:128).

In 1968, official estimates indicated that there were about 1 million Moslems in Lebanon, constituting slightly less than 40 percent of the population. They were almost evenly divided between the two branches of the Islamic faith, Sunni and Shia. Moslems believe in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Mohammed. The Shia Moslems split from the Sunni Moslems in A.D. 632. The controversy centered around whether Ali, a cousin

and son-in-law of the Prophet, should succeed Mohammed. The Shia Moslems supported Ali but they lost the struggle. Sunni Moslems, found largely in the Coastal cities of Beirut and Tripoli, are in all professions and trades. Some are also village farmers. Shia Moslems are nearly all low-income farmers. A few work as unskilled laborers in the cities (Ibid:129-132).

Druzes make up approximately 6 percent of Lebanon's population. They are a close-knit, well-organized community consisting largely of farmers. They share the slopes of Mount Lebanon with Shia Islam. But they do not regard themselves, nor are they regarded by others, as Moslems. They reject the most important article of the Islamic faith--the supreme prophethood of Mohammed. The Druzes have a practice which was probably instituted for survival purposes in a country that is made up of diverse groups and has often been ruled by foreign governments. This custom, called tagiya, permits, and even encourages, an individual, for his own protection, to profess and practice the religion of the ruling group under which he lives (Ibid:132).

Lebanon was constantly ruled by foreign governments from 900 B.C. up until their independence in A. D. 1941 from the French. Only the last several rulers will be discussed here. The Ottoman Turks ruled from 1516-1918 A.D. and the French

Mandate from 1918-1941 A. D. The Turks instituted several programs which have had profound effects on the social and political history of Lebanon. Most important of these was the millet system. The millet originally referred to a religious community that was not restricted to a geographic area but embraced all adherents of a particular faith within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. The spokesman for each millet was the religious leader and he had ultimate authority over the faithful in matters of personal law (Christopher, 1966:66-7). The confessional basis of Lebanese political life in the twentieth century is a legacy of the millet system.

The Turks by establishing the millet system fostered the Lebanese tradition of group loyalty and solidarity within the family, village community and religious sect. It also promoted factionalism and distrust between the various religious communities. The disproportionate distribution of wealth and power also created intragroup tensions. This combination of sectarian and social strife led to the massacres of 1860. Between May and July of that year dozens of villages east and southeast of Beirut on Mount Lebanon were burned by the Druzes. Ottoman troops attacked Christians trying to flee to the towns, and garrisons in the towns disarmed the refugees and let them be massacred.

Estimates of the number slain range from 5,000 to more than 10,000, and the victims included Greek Catholics and Orthodox as well as Maronites (Ibid:77). This type of Turkish oppression and uncertain social and economic conditions triggered the first wave of emigration in the latter part of the 19th century. The first migrants were peasants who confined their movements to neighboring regions of Lebanon, Syria and Egypt (Smith, et al, 1974:47).

Wherever the migrants travelled, whether to neighboring countries or across the world, they retained many aspects of traditional Lebanese society. The interviews illustrate that some of these values are still held by the Lebanese people in Wichita. But first, a view of the culture of Lebanon. The average Lebanese has traditionally felt himself to be a member of three communities--his family, his village and his religious sect. Often, bonds of kinship, language, religion and local residence coincided creating numerous distinctive and cohesive groups. These groups tended to maintain separate institutions and marry within themselves. Occupational specialization made each group a necessary part of society, and most intergroup contact took place in the field of commerce (Ibid:59).

Every Lebanese is closely affiliated with the family into



which he was born. Most turn to family members for social life and business partners. Even the individual who does not maintain close family ties is judged by the family from which he came. Generally, social relationships within the family are close and long lasting. A relative is often the most trusted choice for a business partner and family businesses are common. Marriages within the family circle are frequent at all levels of society. At higher levels in the society alliances between families through marriage become more common (Ibid:60-61).

An old Arab saying best illustrates the traditional Lebanese' view of the family: "I and my brother against my cousin, and I and my cousin against the alien (Christopher, 1966:138)." This attitude, with its stress on family feuds and tribal rivalries, is still evident in modern Lebanon. The brother, in particular, still acts as the guardian of the family's honor. John Gulick, an American anthropologist, in his study, Social Structure and Culture Change in a Lebanese Village, suggests that Lebanese feelings about the family might be expressed this way:

The strongest tie which binds one person to another is the tie of blood, reckoned in the male line. The only people in this hard world in whom I can put my full trust are my relatives. Therefore, the best people in the world are my relatives--my brother, my father, my father's brothers and their sons, and beyond them, everyone on my father's lineage.

When one marries, one chooses the best person one can find, and the best person is to be found among one's kinsmen--the closer the better (Gulick, 1955:127).

This attitude demonstrates both the closeness within the family group and the general distrust of non-kin.

Whether in Beirut or in a village the social activities of the average Lebanese are focused on such family events as engagements, weddings, baptisms and funerals. Other occasions for family gatherings are religious holidays and the departure or return of relatives visiting or emigrating abroad (Christopher, 1966:140).

This spirit of closeness also underlies the custom that each family takes care of its own, nursing relatives who are ill, providing a home for the aged, and feeding the unemployed brother or nephew. Many families are tied together by family awqaf (charitable foundations) which, although they have an ultimate charitable aim, benefit family members as long as the family continues to exist. Since every family has in effect arranged its own social security, the Lebanese government has been slow to assume the functions of a welfare state (Smith, et al, 1974: 61).

For most Lebanese the local community, village or urban neighborhood is the same as the local segment of a person's

religious community. In the rural setting everyone is also likely to be related, even if only remotely. When local residence, religious community and kinship coincide, the result is a strong and cohesive community. Most Lebanese maintain ties with the village from which they or their families came. Even Lebanese emigrants abroad are sentimental about their native villages (Ibid:62).

Next in importance to the family and local community is the religious community. Because conversion or intermarriage between religious communities is rare, the members of one's family are nearly always in the same religious community. The result, consequently, is that no loyalty conflict exists between the two (Ibid:61).

According to the Ottoman millet system, non-Moslem groups were organized under their own religious heads. This practice institutionalized the religious community as a largely autonomous entity. The sacred and secular aspects of life are closely interwoven, and the influence of religion is pervasive. Religious communities bear the responsibility of education and charity, and they have legal control over marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other family affairs of their members. Religious communal legal institutions create and execute law in the field of personal

status; there is no secular law concerning personal status (Ibid:61-62).

A number of social values are shared by the various religious communities in Lebanon. Such moral virtues as honor, charity, kindness, forbearance and helpfulness to others are taught at home, in the classroom and at church. Other social values include such concepts as hospitality, frugality, and ingenuity in meeting the challenges and hardships of life (Ibid:135).

Honor is the most important quality of the good Christian as it is basic to all others. A man of honor carries out his duties and obligations to others, particularly his kinsmen. Loyalty to the family is one of the areas in which honor is judged. The honorable man is loyal to his family. As a fundamental social unit, the Lebanese family enjoys a solidarity that has resisted the changes of time. The individual derives support from the family, but is expected to give his services and loyalty to it. The sovereignty of the family transcends all other loyalties, the individual is expected to suppress his personal needs and interests if they interfere with those of the family.

The importance placed on proving oneself trustworthy to relatives and carrying out personal responsibility to them is

reflected in the political and economic life of the country. Every individual learns to think and behave in terms of improving and protecting the interests of his family and, beyond that, his religious community. In seeking political office, any man expects the support of his kinsmen, who willingly give it since, if he is successful, they also benefit. One of the important expectations of family loyalty is finding employment for relatives.

The man who fails to meet his family obligations can expect to be reproached by those who do. They will say he is a man without sharaf (family honor). Lebanese, in general, are highly sensitive on this point and make every effort to avoid being accused of ayb (family shame) (Ibid:136).

Other values which seem relevant in terms of easing the transition of the Lebanese immigrant to this country include frugality, adroitness and ingenuity. Frugality is not only a necessity but also a traditional virtue. The Lebanese also pride themselves on being clever talkers and living by their wits. The businessman who takes a small amount of money and builds a successful business is greatly admired. Lebanese often say of such an individual: "He is a man who can make a wine cellar from one grape (Ibid:139)".

Education is highly valued in Lebanon. The country has a literacy rate of 86 percent and functions as the educational center for the Arab world. Respect for learning permeates the society. The educated man is respected and each step up the academic ladder brings added prestige. Education is a means for enhancing family honor and one's social position but it does not usually bring wealth and success in Lebanon. Because education is not linked to material betterment there is a greater emphasis on the study of liberal arts. Law is also favored as an aid to a career in politics. Technical or vocational training is generally regarded with disfavor, especially by urban groups (Ibid:110).

### III. THE LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS

It has often been stated that more Lebanese reside outside of Lebanon than in the homeland itself. Unfortunately, this claim cannot be substantiated, since estimates of the number of emigrants range from 150,000 to 2 million. The larger figures undoubtedly includes not only the emigrants but their children and grandchildren as well. Another complication arises from the fact that before World War I Lebanese immigrants in the United States were not identified separately but were counted

together with the Syrians. Thus, many of the "Syrian" merchants of early twentieth century America were actually Lebanese (Christopher, 1966:156).

Emigration from Lebanon, as stated earlier, began in the latter part of the nineteenth century and resulted from the massacres of 1860, in which many Christians were slain. Other waves of emigration followed as a consequence of Turkish oppressions before World War I and famine, epidemics and strict military rule during the war years (Ibid:157). As with other migrant situations, the "push-pull" effect is apparent. The push was Turkish oppression, religious persecution and starvation. The pull was wider economic opportunities and greater religious and political freedom. Emigration was heaviest between 1900 and 1914, amounting to an annual mean of 15,000, most of these emigrants travelled to the United States, South America, especially Brazil, and West Africa. Emigration fell off sharply during the years of World War I. Between 1921 and 1939, about 4,400 Lebanese left each year but about 1,400 returned, making a net annual emigration of only 3,000 during the time period (Smith, et al, 1974:47).

The characteristic occupations of the emigrants were, on the one hand, the professions and skilled trades--medicine, journalism,

teaching, engineering and others--and, on the other, business. Business enterprises run the gamut from peddling wares to operating international trading firms (Christopher, 1966:158).

In general, the government of Lebanon is greatly concerned with the welfare of emigrants because they make an important contribution to the economy of the homeland. Remittances by emigrants to their relatives in Lebanon help to pay for Lebanon's imports. These gifts of money from Lebanese abroad to their relatives are estimated to average about \$40 million a year (Ibid:133).

The first group of migrants to Wichita arrived around 1895. Most of the Lebanese people who have settled in Wichita came from the village of Marj'Uyun in South Lebanon (see map, Appendix A). One of my informants had done some research on his family origins and found that, not only had his family lived in Marj'Uyun for centuries, but that the families in the village were all once part of a single tribe. In a book by a nineteenth century Arab historian, George Zaidan, he came across this account of the tribe of Ghasan. The following quotation is taken verbatim from the elderly gentleman's notes on Zaidan's book.

They originally dwelt in the southeast part of Arabia around 200 A. D. The reason they were called Beni Ghasan is because a dam burst in part of Yemen, and they had to leave that



country and come as immigrants to the western part of Syria. They settled in the land of Houran, which lays south of Damascus. They arrived west from Arabia, and camped around a spring called Ghasan Spring--thus the name Beni Ghasan. The people were called Christian Arabs back to 200 A. D. Some of the families settled in Merjyoun, including Hourani, Jabara, Gholmia, Bayouth, Razook, Andeel, Rashid, Naifeh, Barkat, Farha, Hamara, Rahal, Theeba and Mady (Interview with Jim Cohlma).

Mr. Cohlma still refers to large family reunions as a gathering of the tribe. He also stated that one must marry within the tribe. The significance of this quotation to Mr. Cohlma was in identifying how long his family had been known to be Christians, "back to 200 A. D."

Nemetallah Farha and Samuel M. Stevens were two of the first immigrants to establish in Wichita around the turn of the century. Four Cohlma brothers arrived in 1898. The original family name was spelled Gholmia, but two of the brothers, S. L. and F. I., decided that this would be too difficult for Americans to spell. Jim Cohlma, the gentleman who related this information to the author, also stated that the "G" at the beginning "sounded Jewish and we want everyone to know that we are Christian." Consequently, the name was changed to its present spelling. The other two Cohlma brothers took one of their first names, Farris, and used it as a last name. Thus, almost all of the Farrises are actually a branch of the Cohlma family. Most of these early immigrants

were peddlers of dry goods and household items. S. L. and F. I. Cohlma set up a wholesale dry goods business for peddlers in 1898, as did N. F. Farha. Few of these early immigrants knew English or were educated beyond the third or fourth grade. However, they did speak Arabic and, occasionally, Russian.

Several immigrants arrived in Wichita in the late 1910's and early 1920's, and later became prominent businessmen here. Among these were Ellis George Stevens and Philip F. Farha. Mr. Stevens established E. G. Stevens Tobacco Co. in Wichita and married Minnie Shadid in 1918. Philip F. Farha arrived from Marj'Uyun, Lebanon in 1920 and went into business investments. His brother, William F. Farha, arrived in Wichita in 1930 and founded F & E Wholesale Grocery Co. He was married to Victoria Barkett in 1934 (Baldwin, 1929:188; Drowatzky, 1963:73-74).

The map in Appendix B shows the distribution of Lebanese households in Wichita for the years 1925 and 1949. This information was obtained by matching a list of Lebanese surnames with those listed in the Wichita City Directory for the respective years. This list of names included Farha, Jabara, Kouri, Razook, Rashid, Cohlma, Elkouri, Ablah, Farris, Husson, Zakoura, Bayouth, Andeel, Stevens, Laham, Azar, Namee, Shadid, Naifeh, Barkett, Nemr, Ayeshe, and Ammar. There is no doubt that this is not a

complete list of all the Lebanese families in Wichita, but it includes the larger and more prominent ones.

The following family names were found listed in the 1925 City Directory: Ablah, Bayouth, Cohimia, Elkouri, Farha, Farris, Jabara, Laham, Razook, Shadid and Stevens. Referring to the map of residence patterns in Appendix B, it is evident that the migrants were first clustered in an area of West Wichita with the following boundaries: Sycamore Street on the East, Charles Street on the West, Central on the North and Maple Street on the South. Settlement patterns of migrants are usually dictated by the availability of modest-priced housing that can accomodate a large household, usually an extended family. Not only does this type of research give an indication of residence patterns, but also of the number of working adults per household and their occupations. Most of the households in 1925 contained three to four working adults and several also included a widowed woman.

By 1925 several of the Lebanese families were established in their own businesses. Among these were Ablah Wholesale Grocery Co., Bayouth Market, F & E Wholesale Grocery Co., owned by the Farha family and the Shadid's also owned a retail grocery. The Jabaras were retail grocers and the Stevens' family operated a dry goods store. Those who did not own their own businesses

worked for those who did or as unskilled laborers.

The author then checked the Wichita City Directory of 1949 to see how residence patterns and occupations of the Lebanese people had changed in a twenty-five year period. A comparison with the aforementioned list of surnames indicated that all but five families -- Ammar, Azar, Kouri, Husson and Nemr -- were present. Ninety-five separate households were tabulated, as compared with twenty-two in 1925. Residences had become more dispersed throughout the city. This dispersion was probably due to economic prosperity and a need to locate businesses in other areas of the city besides the West side. There was still some concentration of Lebanese households in the West part of the city, particularly the Riverside area. Several of the residences listed in 1925 continued to be occupied by the same family in 1949.

Most of the Lebanese still operated small retail businesses or worked as unskilled laborers. Ablah Hotel Supply was established during this twenty-five year period, as was Bayouth Printing, Laham Jewelers, Wichita Tobacco and Candy Co. and U-Select-It Candy Service, Inc. Prejudice against the Lebanese people was probably the worst during this time period. Jeannie Ablah told the author that the Lebanese people were called "Westside

Indians" in the 1940's and were accused of not having any culture.

The Lebanese people in Wichita did establish many social traditions. These were often held in conjunction with the Orthodox Church since nearly everyone in the Lebanese community was a member. When the first Lebanese immigrants came to Wichita they had a strong religious background in the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church. There was no church building or priest in Wichita. Consequently, services were held in someone's home when a visiting priest or Bishop came through Wichita. This custom continued until 1918 when a church building located at 218 S. Handley was purchased. This purchase was made for the group by Jabour Ablah, Shaker L. Cohlma, and Nemetallah Farha, as trustees.

In 1921. the St. George Syrian-Greek Orthodox Catholic Society of Wichita, Kansas was established to oversee the activities of the Church. The Society ruled under the following twelve directors: Shaker L. Cohlma, William Jabara, Aziz Farha, Bashara David, Joe Wolf, Jacob Bayouth, Nemetallah Farha, Albert Razook, Abe Swyden, Abraham Farha, Mike Jabara and Albert Farha. One of the first duties of the directors was to find a resident priest for the parish. He was Father Elias Kouri, who served from 1921 to 1925. After this time the Church was served

by several different priests who came for short periods of time. In 1934, the Reverend Father George Cohlma was ordained a priest in the old St. George Church, and was assigned to this parish as priest. Father George remained at St. George Orthodox Church until his death December 1, 1947. During Father George's service to the parish, the Society was re-incorporated in 1941 with the following thirteen directors: Adeeb Andeel, Ellis Bayouth, George S. Cohlma, Lee Cohlma, Eid Elkouri, B. F. Farha, Naseem Farha, N. F. Farha, William Farha, Ralph Jabara, Thomas Laham, B. E. Samra and Harry Taylor.

Through the years the congregation, priest and trustees had been looking for a new location for the Church. In 1945 definite plans were made and a fund was started to cover construction costs. Work on the new church building began early in 1948. The summer of 1948 a new priest, Father Anthony Woolf, was found to replace Father George Cohlma. The new St. George Orthodox Church at the corner of Walnut and Texas Streets was finished in time to be blessed and used for the first time on Easter Sunday, 1949.

In the mid-1930's St. Mary's Orthodox Church at 344 S. Martinson was founded. Today both St. George and St. Mary cooperate on many activities and projects. Many of the people in the

Lebanese community alternate attendance between the two churches. Father Paul Nemr is the current priest at St. George Orthodox Church and Father Anthony Sabbagh is the priest at St. Mary's Orthodox Church. Although most of the services were once conducted in Arabic, English is now used for about 98% of the liturgy. Father Nemr estimated that he has between five and six hundred active members. Father Sabbagh stated that he had about 150 active members at St. Mary's.

Many of the social activities of the Lebanese community are centered around the family and the church. Open house teas are held by the St. George Ladies Society in honor of new babies, engagements and other family events. As one informant stated, "anything that reflects honor on the group as a whole is celebrated." As the size of the Lebanese community increased celebrations were consolidated. So now there is a large Open House each year for all new babies born that year and another Open House for high school and college graduates of that year.

By far the most well-known tradition is the annual Lebanese dinner at St. George Orthodox Church. The fund-raising dinner was initiated in 1918 shortly after the congregation purchased its first church building in Wichita. Until 1947, when the current church was built, dinners were held at the YWCA.

But since the beginning, the menu has remained the same. The traditional Lebanese dinner includes a tossed salad, Kibba, cabbage rolls, a green bean dish served over rice, and baklaw. Kibba is a main meat dish, consisting of layers of ground meat, cracked wheat, spices and onion filling. Baklawa is the traditional dessert. It consists of many layers of paper-thin pastry, with butter between the layers and nuts, sugar and syrup poured over the top.

Approximately 2,000 people attended the annual dinner held October 3, 1976. The dinner is a project of the junior guild of the church, but whole families participate. It is an extremely well-organized endeavor, as it must be to feed 2,000 people in the space of four hours. Mrs. Florence Kouri, general chairman of the annual dinner, states, "'It's a family affair. It is such a part of the life of the people in the parish, that we all look forward to it and plan for it months ahead (Wichita Beacon, Sept. 27, 1976).'" The proceeds from the 1976 dinner helped to ensure that there would be no foreclosure on the church mortgage this year (Wichita Eagle, Oct. 4, 1976).

Another event that is held annually maintains contact between the Lebanese people in Wichita and those in other cities in the central part of the country. This event is a Labor Day



gathering and was initiated after World War II. The gathering was conceived by several young women to reestablish ties that had been broken off during the war years. Interrelated families from Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Texas would assemble in one town or another. The event was strictly social and some marriages did evolve out of it. It gave cousins in different towns a chance to get to know each other. Traditional Lebanese folk dancing was featured, often with two or three generations participating. The Labor Day gathering is held in a different city each year. Jeannie Ablah explained the attitude behind this as one of trading-off so that each city could enjoy sponsoring the gala.

The family within the Lebanese immigrant community is still very close-knit. All elderly people are called aunt or uncle out of respect. Godparents also play an important role and are treated as special people. They have a moral responsibility to teach a child the desirability of bringing honor, not disgrace, to the family. Disgrace is felt not only by the immediate family but reflects on the whole Lebanese community.

Marriages within the Lebanese community are encouraged. Marriages were once arranged, but only in the sense that the families would discuss the proposed marriage. Then the parents consulted the couple to see if they approved of the family's

choice. If anyone was dissatisfied with the proposed union, the marriage did not take place. All the parties involved were primarily interested in producing an amicable marriage. First cousin marriages are prohibited by the Orthodox Church, as well as by law in some states. In Lebanon they can take place by making a special appeal to the Bishop. Second and third cousin marriages are very common. Marriages of Lebanese to non-Lebanese individuals do take place as more young people date and find mates without the assistance of their families. But many of the old traditionalists frown on these marriages because they feel:

If a Lebanese boy likes Lebanese cooking and he marries an American girl it would take a long time to teach her and maybe she would learn and maybe she wouldn't. Well, if he married a Lebanese girl she would start cooking right off the bat just like his mother did. Its easier for them to get along (Interview with Jim Cohlma).

Thus, marriages within the Lebanese group are encouraged and are thought to be the best possible choice for a young person.

#### IV. INTERVIEWS, INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This final section is an attempt to tie all the preceding information together and apply it to the Lebanese immigrant community in Wichita, Kansas. Specifically, discussing those aspects of traditional Lebanese culture that were still found to be vibrant forces as revealed in the interviews. The author relied largely on one informant, Mr. Jim Cohlmiā, because it was possible to develop a rapport with him and he was more than willing to discuss any aspect of Lebanese life. Mr. Cohlmiā was a valuable informant, not only for his knowledge of early immigrant history in this area, but also for his expression of many traditional values in the recitation of his own life history.

Mr. Jim Cohlmiā came to the United States in 1909, at the age of 16. He came on a boat with 75 other Lebanese emigrants. He was accompanied to Wichita by a first cousin, Charlie Cohlmiā, his future son's mother-in-law and a friend. Jim attended the Eastern Orthodox schools in Lebanon through the eighth grade and learned the Arabic, Lebanese and Russian languages. He then attended the Presbyterian school for a year and a half to learn English. His father, who was a peddler, died when Jim was 10 years old. Since he had no brothers, only five sisters, he

began working in a rock quarry at the age of 13 to support the family. At the age of 16 he was eligible to be drafted into the Turkish army. According to Mr. Cohlma he would have been sent to fight in Yemen and no one ever came back alive from there. Three of his sisters had married and emigrated to the United States and were living in Wichita. The other two lived in Brazil. So, to avoid being drafted into the Turkish army, he emigrated to this country in 1909.

Mr. Cohlma emphasized the need to have a relative to help you get established in a foreign country. Of course, he had his friend, "There was another young man who came here and stayed with us a year or two and then went to Argentina. He didn't do no good here, see, 'cause he had nobody to help him. But he had a sister in Argentina." In addition, Mr. Cohlma stated that it was a common practice to help your relatives to emigrate here by sending them money. It was expected that you would help a friend or relative until they could make it on their own. This usually included finding employment for the new immigrant. No payment was expected in return, only that they do the same for other people under similar circumstances.

From 1910 to 1920, Jim worked with his brother-in-law on the farm that he had homesteaded near Woodward, Oklahoma and

in the small store that they operated in Quinlan, Oklahoma. In 1920, Jim opened his own store in Buffalo, Oklahoma. He stayed there until he was 77 years old.

Jim was married in 1915 to Rose Farha. At that time there were only two or three young women of marriageable age in Wichita. His aunt told him about a girl and arranged a meeting with the girl's parents.

The girl brought us drinking water first, and then fruit and things like that. When they treat you so nice like that it means that they're agreeable. Well, everything went fine and I told my aunt that she looked real good and I'd be happy to have her. So she talked to her mother and father and they said; we'll see. So they talked to her, she was agreeable also see. So, naturally I told my family and we had a big engagement. And when the time came to get married we had a big wedding here ...If they didn't like me or had something against me they'd treat us fair but they'd let you know that you're not wanted or not acceptable to their daughter. Its just an old custom but that's the way it is back home, see?

Jim was married in St. John Episcopal Church in Wichita. Then he and his bride returned to Oklahoma. Within six months after he was married he brought his mother over from Lebanon. For fifteen years he had his mother and his wife's parents living with him.

In 1922 Jim had his first and only child, a boy named Tommy. Tommy served in World War II and was wounded, "...but he made it

in fine shape and he came back. He wouldn't even take pension or compensation from the government. We didn't need it. I made alot of money." So Jim set his son up in his own department store in Wichita. But it was soon evident that Tommy could not do the work because of his war injuries. They sold out the business and Jim kept working until he was 77 years old so he could send his grandchildren to college.

But when my son got sick. . . I stayed in business 15 years or more longer than I would have otherwise in order to educate his children. His daughter I sent to Colorado Women's College. The two boys, I educated them, both of them are dentists. Well, that cost alot of money and my son didn't have it. So it was up to me and I stayed right in there and worked.

This quotation clearly illustrates several traditional Lebanese values. The most obvious of these is Jim's suppression of his own personal desire to retire in favor of the long term needs of the family. In this case a good education for his grandchildren was considered most important for improving the interests of the family. The value placed on education, as a means to greater prosperity in the family, is also evident. Also interesting is Jim's son's refusal of government compensation. The family honor dictated that they get along on their own resources.

Thus, it is apparent that many of the traditional values of

frugality and ingenuity helped the Lebanese immigrants to survive in this country. They have been successful in adapting to the dominant culture because of the supportive nature of the group and the traditional value system. This success is evident in all areas of endeavor--economics, politics and social affairs.

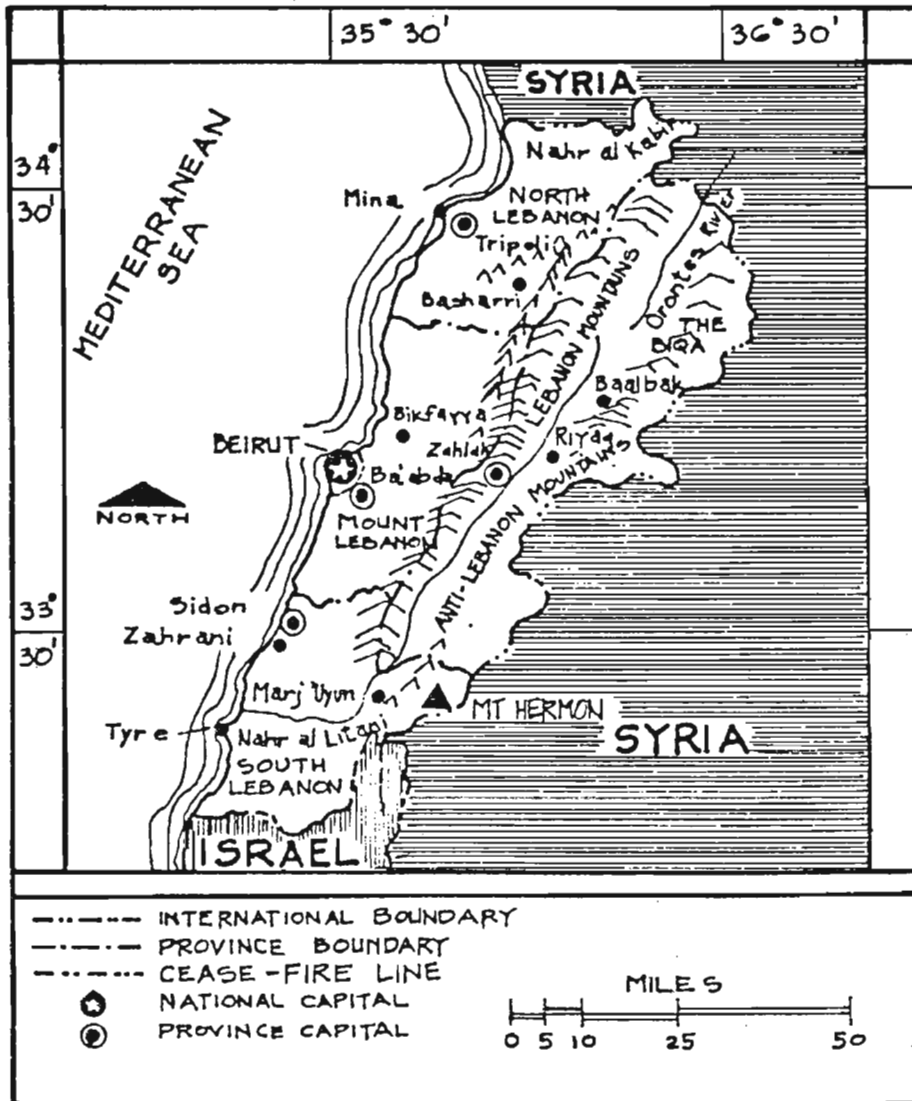
Residence patterns, religious ties and family loyalty all work together in the Lebanese immigrant community in Wichita to produce a strong, cohesive group. This group has remained alive and resistant to change because the various spheres of Lebanese life are interlocking and mutually supporting. In-group values and traditional behavior thus remain forceful in this type of atmosphere.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ablah, Jeannie. Interview on Oct. 20, 1976.
- Baldwin, Sara Mullin, (ed.) Who's Who in Wichita. Wichita: Robert M. Baldwin Corp. 1929.
- Cohlma, Fred. Interview on Sept. 27, 1976.
- Cohlma, Jim. Interviews on Sept. 28 and Oct. 16, 1976.
- Christopher, John B. Lebanon: Yesterday and Today. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1966.
- Drowatzky, Minnie. 1963 Who's Who in Greater Wichita. Wichita: The Wichita Historical Museum Association. 1963.
- Friesen, Janis. Interview on Oct. 15, 1976.
- Gulick, John. Social Structure and Culture Change in a Lebanese Village. Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 21. 1955.
- Howell, Grace. "Annual Lebanese Dinner Set For Sunday." Wichita Beacon. Sept. 27, 1976.
- Howell, Grace. "Lebanese Dinner at Church Keeps Bill Collectors at Bay." Wichita Eagle. Oct. 4, 1976.
- Nemr, Father Paul and Father Anthony Sabbagh. Interview Oct. 26, 1976.
- Smith, Harvey H., Nancy W. Al-Any, Donald W. Bernier, Fred-erica M. Bunge, William Giloane, Joseph G. Jabara, Peyton Kerr and Suzanne Teleki. Area Handbook for Lebanon. U. S. Government Printing Office. Washington, D. C. 1974.
- Wichita City Directory. Wichita: Polk and Co. Publishers 1925.
- Wichita City Directory. Wichita: Polk and Co. Publishers 1949.
- Wichita City Directory. Wichita: Polk and Co. Publishers 1963.
- Wichita City Directory. Wichita: Polk and Co. Publishers 1976.



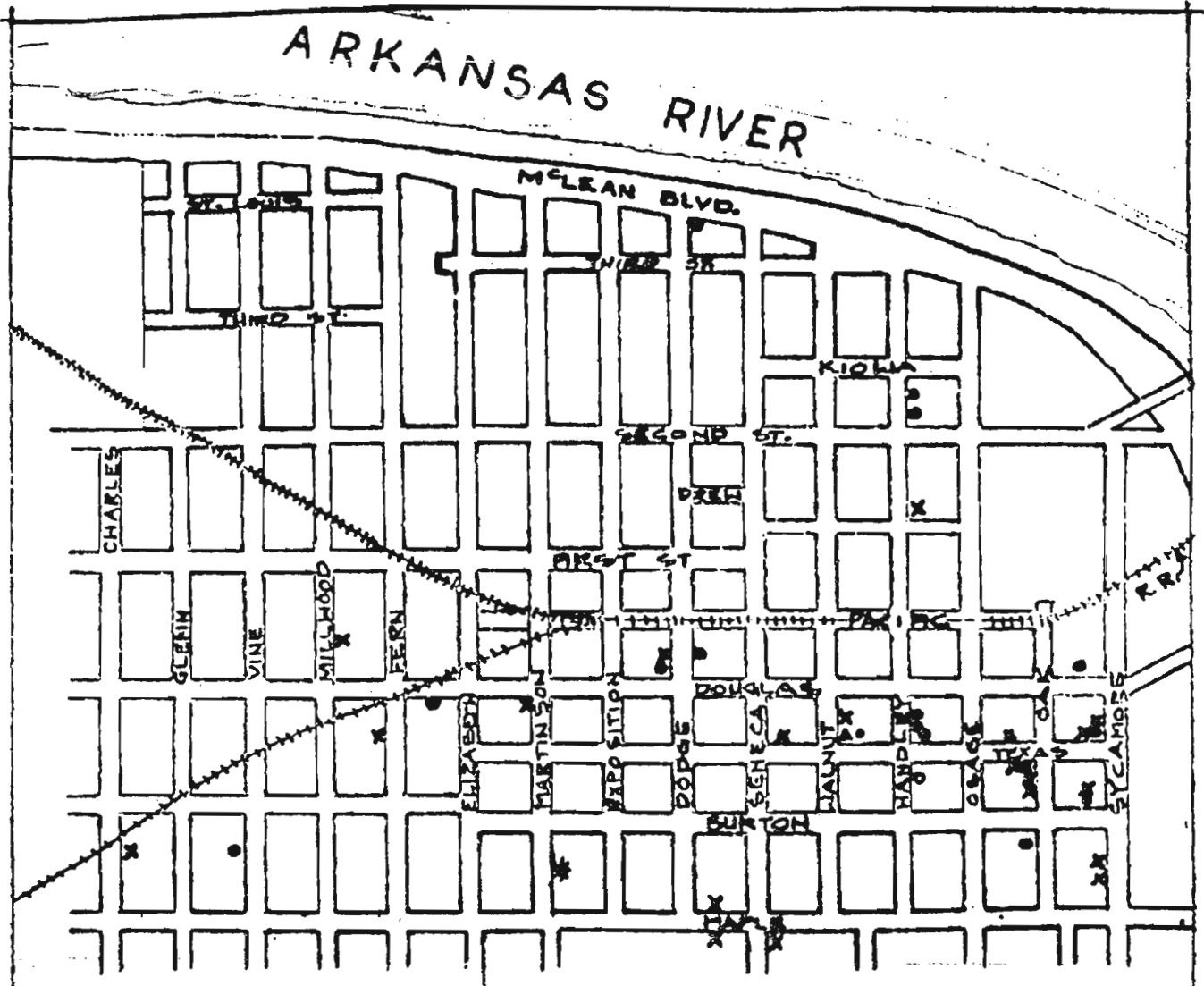
APPENDIX A  
 MAP OF LEBANON\*



\*Adapted from Smith, et al, 1974:11.

APPENDIX B

MAP OF RESIDENCE PATTERNS



LEGEND

- 1925 CITY DIRECTORY
- X 1949 CITY DIRECTORY
- ▲ NEW ST GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH
- OLD ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH
- \* ST. MARY'S ORTHODOX CHURCH