

Hoops History and Armenian Heritage

by Kurt Prenzler, CPA, Madison County Treasurer
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The true story of poor immigrant boys, who rose above hardship in 1940 to win Granite City's only high school basketball state championship title, is headed to the "silver screen."

The movie "Men of Granite," which started filming earlier this year, was adapted from the Dan Manoyan book of the same name. It's not only a tale about the team nicknamed the "Happy Warriors," but the rich Armenian history of Granite City.

On Friday, people around the world will attend ceremonies remembering the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. An estimated 1.5 million ethnic and religious (Christian) minorities were killed by Turkey's Islamic Ottoman Empire.

This month, Madison County Board member Art Asadorian of Granite City brought forth a resolution (passed by the county board) in remembrance of the genocide. Pope Francis recently said, "it's necessary and indeed a duty to remember the Armenians killed."

Hundreds of Armenians who fled their homeland landed in Granite City to work in its steel mills. They took up residence in the neighborhood, Lincoln Place, or “Hungary Hollow” as it was known due to its Eastern European, mostly Hungarian, demographic.

Manoyan, himself of Armenian descent, tells the story of teenage boys of Eastern European heritage, including four whose parents were genocide survivors. The “Men of Granite” is not only a story about basketball, but a classic American “underdog” story.

Granite City still boasts an Armenian community. St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church and its community center, serve as a focal point for religious and cultural events.

Lincoln Place Heritage Foundation celebrates the history and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood. It holds its annual festival in September.

Armenian families worked hard to provide a better life for their children. The second, third and now fourth generations are living out their ancestors’ American dream. They include attorneys, teachers, doctors, judges, elected officials and business owners throughout Madison County.

Let us not forget that their history is our heritage.