

# KEEPING THE MEMORY ALIVE

## Armenian-Americans remember Genocide

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LOWELL — The rain may have stopped a planned procession down Merrimack Street yesterday morning, but it could not silence the voices of those who refuse to forget.

At City Hall, civic leaders and representatives of the Armenian community gathered for a ceremony to remember the events of April 24, 1915, when the arrests of more than 200 intellectuals in Turkey marked the beginning of the Armenian Genocide.

While remembering the victims of that genocide, Mayor Rita Mercier told the story of Saint Augustine's reaction to his mother's death. Rather than weep, Augustine was said to have insisted that his mother was not dead as long as her memory lived within him.

"So, too, will your ancestors never die, as long as their memory lives," Mercier told Armenian-Americans in the audience.

Long denied by the Turkish government and often left out of history books, the Armenian Genocide was the first systematic attempt to exterminate a population in the 20th century. Between 1915 and 1918, millions of Armenians living in what was then the Ottoman Empire were executed by the ruling government in an effort to build a pure Turkish state.

After the end of World War I, the Young Turks, who had run the empire, were charged and found guilty of capital crimes. The sentences were never carried out, though. The rebel forces of nationalist leader Kemal Ataturk shared the Young Turks' desire for ethnic purity and killed more than 600,000 Armenians between 1920 and 1923.

Ataturk was designated president of the newly independent Republic of Turkey



Rita Mercier, right, reads a proclamation honoring Tom Magarian, left, of Tyngsboro and Paul Shamschyan of Lowell at yesterday's City Hall ceremony.

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in 1923. Since then, Turkish governments have repeatedly denied any genocide, calling the deaths of the Armenians a circumstance of war.

Lori Kayajanian, 16, a junior at Dracut High School and a member of the Armenian Church Youth Organization, spoke of how she found only one paragraph about the Armenian Genocide in her history text. At her teacher's invitation, she did research on her own and presented a report to her class.

"I asked if there were any questions, and, to my surprise, many hands went up," Lori said.

She promised that younger Armenian-Americans will never forget what their ancestors went through.

Keynote speaker the Rev. Ara Heghinian of the Ararat Armenian Church in Salem, N.H., reminded the audience that the same divisions that led to the Armenian Genocide can still manifest themselves today. He cited the example of Serbian Christians who painted crosses on their houses in 1999 so the military would

attack only Muslim houses.

"Violence and hatred which finds its ultimate form in genocide and holocaust must not be tolerated," Heghinian said.

He has a vision of a day when Turks and Armenians would stand together, resolved never to allow such atrocities to happen again.

"Only then will we be able to build a stronger Armenia," Heghinian said.

Mercier presented citations to Bhogos "Paul" Shamschyan of Lowell and Tatiós "Tom" Magarian of Tyngsboro, the only known survivors of the genocide in the Lowell area.

"We're very proud to know you," Mercier said to both men.

At the end of the ceremony, the honor guard of the Lowell Armenian-American Veterans raised the red, blue and orange flag of Armenia, along with the Stars and Stripes. City Councilor Bud Caulfield led the audience in the "Star Spangled Banner." John Magarian of Lowell then led the audience in singing the Armenian national anthem, "Mer Hairenek."

After a closing prayer by the Very Rev. Fr. Yeghisghe Manjikian, attendees went upstairs for a reception sponsored by the Lowell Armenian Relief Society and St. Vartanantz Women's Guild.

Tom Magarian, 88, called his citation a pleasant surprise, joking, "They spelled my name right."

Magarian, a native of Gurin, Turkey, and his brother and two sisters were the only survivors out of a family of 10 in the initial months of the genocide in 1915. After living in an orphanage in Lebanon, he was brought to New York in 1921, then moved to Chelsea in 1931.

Magarian married in 1942, moving to Tyngsboro three years later. He opened Nashua's first delicatessen in 1954, and has been active in the Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church in Chelmsford.

When asked what he wants from the Turkish government, he said simply that it should apologize.

"It can't bring any lives back," Magarian said, "but at least we'll be contented that they acknowledge it."