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"Steaks and Chops Cooked to Order"

The Orphan and the Immigrant

Vice President Spiro Theodore Agnew inherited his genes from a man and a woman with enough gumption to quit their ancestral surroundings to seek a new and faster life in the city. Even now, he knows only vaguely about the life his parents left behind.

The girl who would become his mother, Margaret M. Akers, was born in the Allegheny Mountains of the southwestern tip of Virginia, where the state protrudes into Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky. Her home was Bristol, which straddled the Tennessee border and thus employed two full sets of local officials for a population of less than ten thousand.

Akers was an old if not aristocratic name in Virginia. There is documentary evidence that two of Agnew's grandparents and four of his great-grandparents were Virginia-born. John Akers, who was born in Virginia in 1758 and later fought as a private in the Revolutionary War, could well have been a relative. As an old man John Akers lived not far from

Lynchburg, where Agnew's grandfather William L. Akers lived as a young man.

Vice President Agnew has up to now been unaware of one bit of genealogy that might help him in certain precincts: his grandfather William Akers was a Confederate soldier in the Civil War. To trace this previously unknown bit of Agnewiana one starts at the National Archives in Washington, a repository for federal census records from the nineteenth century. Checking through the 1860 census lists, one finds a twenty-one-year-old clerk named W. L. Akers living in Lynchburg, Virginia. He was the city's only W. L. Akers in 1860.

The next piece of proof must be found in Lynchburg. There, in the City Clerk's office, is an aging Register of Marriages which establishes that on January 23, 1861, a William L. Akers, age twenty-two, married one Eugenia B. Porter, age eighteen.

Back at the National Archives are microfilms of all the personnel records maintained by the Confederate Army. One file belonged to William L. Akers, a twenty-two-year-old clerk who was recruited in Lynchburg in the spring of 1861 as a private in the 11th Regiment, Virginia Volunteers. Originally, Private Akers was assigned to a rifle company, the Lynchburg Rifle Grays. But within a year his commander, apparently impressed by his talents as a clerk, reassigned him as commissary sergeant for the whole regiment.

The assignment of handling the unit's provisions lasted through the rest of the war, as the 11th Virginia Volunteers fought their way through the battles of Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. Although Akers filled a sergeant's billet, he was never promoted beyond his rank of private, which earned him $11 a month. But the job had other compensations. According to his personnel records, he came through the war unscathed except for a minor wound he suffered while at home on furlough.

When the census taker came around to see William L. and Eugenia B. Akers in 1870, they had moved to Nelson County, Virginia, near a private academy known as the Norwood School. William was listed as a bookkeeper. Their household included five children, ranging from infancy to eight years, and a boarder, Walter Holliday, who counted as a "professor in mathematics."

In 1880 the census taker found the Akers family living at the Norwood School, with William now identified as "clerk for school." There was no boarder but the family had nearly doubled. By now there were seven sons and a daughter—Wade, Cora, James, William, Wallace, Porter, Joseph, and Jno. Although Agnew's Virginia grandparents evidently spent much of their adult lives around educated people, they were not a wealthy family. No servants lived with them. And the census takers left blanks in the columns where they were supposed to record the family's real estate and personal property, except in 1860 when W. L. Akers was shown as having property worth $800. Still, he was one of the relatively few men in that part of Virginia who didn't work with his hands.

Vice President Agnew's mother, Margaret, was born to William and Eugenia Akers within a year after the 1880 census. Subsequently a tenth child, Lilly, arrived to round out the family. Although the evidence is sketchy, the Akers family apparently moved from Nelson County, Virginia, to Bristol before the last two children were born.

When Margaret was a young girl, both of her parents died. What killed them is a minor mystery. Until recently the Akers family assumed they simply died of old age. But the census schedules at the National Archives indicate that in the year Margaret was born, her mother was forty and her father forty-five.

"It is my understanding that my Aunt Margaret spent most of her childhood in an orphanage," says Miss Lucille Akers of Roanoke, who is the Vice President's first cousin. That, at least, is the story told to Lucille Akers by her father, William Eugene Akers, who was Margaret's older brother. After Margaret and her sister Lilly had lived in the orphanage for a time, they came to stay with another older brother, James Akers, in Bristol. Jim, who was sixteen years older than Margaret, was a trainmaster for the Norfolk and Western Railway, which ran south through Bristol into Tennessee.

By 1901 Margaret was a dark-haired belle of twenty, sometimes known to her friends as "Maggie." Unlike most of her contemporaries, she had no mind to sit at home and tend house. A Bristol city directory published in 1901 discloses that Margaret M. Akers held a job as a stenographer for Bailey and Byars, a two-man law partnership at 18½ Lee Street. She was living with her Uncle Jim.

Something of the spirit of Bristol, population 9,850, still pervades the crinkling pages of that old city directory. "Fine mountain scenery—bracing climate," boasted one advertiser. "Above malaria," said another. The index of Bristol businesses included two architects, twenty-nine lawyers, three funeral parlors, two coal-mining companies, one baking powder manufacturer, seven butchers, and thirteen bakers. The introduction to the volume listed some of the reasons

Bristol was a thriving city: "Cheap fuel . . . and progressive people."

All this was not enough for Margaret Akers. If it was unusual for a Virginia lass to enter the world of commerce, it was virtually unheard of for a Victorian lady to venture forth to a distant city to find a job. Nevertheless, at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three, she packed her clothes and moved to Washington, D.C., which was more than three hundred miles away. With her went a friend, Miss Mittie DeArmond, and also Mittie's uncle, Roland L. Davidson, who had landed a 50-cents-an-hour patronage job in the Public Printer's office. At first Maggie and Mittie shared quarters in a house on Capitol Hill; later Maggie moved to Q Street, closer to downtown Washington.

Mittie, who later returned to live in Bristol, told retired Bristol newspaper publisher C. J. Harkrader that she and Maggie had two goals in mind when they left for Washington. "They were looking for work, but principally they were looking for romance," says Harkrader.

Maggie Akers found both.

In the Washington city directories published in 1904 and 1906, Margaret M. Akers was listed as a stenographer. For whom she worked is still unclear, however. Vice President Agnew's own version is embarrassingly muddled. In a letter to Harkrader in 1969, Agnew wrote, "Basically, most of the detailed information is very hazy because my mother never talked a great deal about her early life. However, I can confirm the general information that she lived in Bristol and left there to work in Washington in the office of the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull [sic]."

The flaw in Agnew's account is that Cordell Hull was a Tennessee judge when Margaret Akers came to Washington. He became a United States Congressman in 1907, the year she moved away. Hull didn't join the State Department until twenty-six years later.

The government's Official Register, listing every federal employee, made no mention of a Margaret Akers in its biennial editions of 1903, 1905, or 1907. It is possible, however, that she did work for a short time for the government between editions. During the 1968 campaign Agnew's mother was sometimes described as a former White House secretary, but Agnew subsequently passed the word to me that he never heard that story from his mother. His latest version is that he thinks his mother worked at the War Department.

Romance entered Margaret's life right on schedule, but not with Spiro Agnew's father. According to the story Mittie brought back to Bristol, Margaret found an attractive young beau from New England shortly after she got to Washington. His name was William S. Pollard, and he was studying to be a veterinarian while holding a patronage job with the Public Printer—the same bureau where Mittie's Uncle Roland worked.

Marriage ensued in 1906. The following year Margaret and William Pollard moved to Baltimore, where he had gotten a new job as a veterinary inspector for the Agriculture Department's Bureau of Animal Industry. Their only child, a son whom they named W. Roy Pollard, was born in November 1907. The elder Pollard's salary while Roy was a child was $150 a month, enough to provide very nicely for the family in the days when $14 a week was a decent living wage. For a onetime orphan girl who had been so bold as to leave her home town in Virginia in search of a new life, William Pollard must have seemed like quite a catch.

One of the curiosities about Vice President Agnew's ancestry is that within a few months of the time his mother was deciding to leave Bristol, Virginia, his father was making his choice to emigrate from Greece.

Theofraste Spiro Anagnostopoulos was born into a prosperous family in the village of Gargalianoi on the southwestern slopes of the Peloponnesus. The town used to be right on the blue Ionian Sea, but after raids by some Algerian pirates about 1850, the townspeople moved a few miles inland. Today Gargalianoi is a village of 7,000 inhabitants who live in whitewashed stucco houses with red tiled roofs, making a living chiefly by tending olive trees, fig orchards, sheep, and cattle. It is eight hours from Athens over a bumpy road.

At the corner of Socrates and Aristotle Streets is an ample two-story house with a small balcony and an inner courtyard where Theofraste grew up. When he was born in 1878, the Anagnostopoulos family owned acres of olive groves and was considered rich by Gargalianoi standards. In addition to being a landowner, his father was a notary public, a position of considerable stature in the village. Thanks to his father's affluence, Theofraste acquired far more than an average education. Many years later he told a friend in Baltimore that he had finished high school and then enrolled in the medical school at the university in Athens.

About the turn of the century hard times befell the family and he left medical school, apparently after one semester. "There was, not a depression, but some sort of disaster in the olive industry and they were pretty well wiped out financially," Vice President Agnew has explained. With the future looking glum in Gargalianoi, the family decided to send Theofraste, the eldest son, to make a new start on the gold-paved sidewalks beyond the Atlantic.

The best authority on the young immigrant's life in America is Daniel St. Albin Greene, a reporter for *The National Observer* who spent weeks researching Agnew's background in 1970 but then published only part of what he learned. What follows about Agnew's origins and childhood depends heavily on Greene's spadework.

An authorized campaign biography of Agnew published in 1968 stated that his father arrived in Boston in 1897. The actual immigration records, which turned up later, demonstrate that Theofraste's entry into the promised land occurred on September 19, 1902, through the port of Hoboken. Quickly the twenty-four-year-old immigrant shortened his name to Theodore Anagnost and made his way to Schenectady, New York, a chilly city of 56,096 people and 2,588 dogs on the Erie Canal. Knowing very little English, young Anagnost had no choice but to take a job as a barber. "The proprietor apparently took pity on him and kept him on and taught him barbering," said his son Spiro much later. Judging from successive entries in the annual Schenectady city directories, the Vice President's father was a barber until 1907, five years after he arrived on these shores.[1]

But restlessness drove him to go into business for himself, as in the case of many of his former countrymen. Another Greek immigrant who happened to meet Agnew in America, Luke Carmen, has given an apt description of what success was like for a typical immigrant: "The Greek is a great individualist. He doesn't want to work for another person. If he can get away and do something for himself, he will do it. He would get a little stove and start selling chestnuts in the street. Then he'd sell hot dogs on the street with a pushcart. The next thing, he had a wagon with a horse, and expanded to pork chop sandwiches, hamburgers, fish sandwiches.

"The next thing he'd open the corner store—it had to be the corner to get traffic from both sides—or the old-time quick lunchroom. Then that fellow who opened the lunchroom, he would need help and he would bring his brother, his cousin, or his nephew over from Greece and put him to work in the kitchen. But that doesn't last for long because the cousin starts thinking, I am going to go do something for myself."

Thus it was that in 1908 Theodore Anagnost became the proprietor of a lunchroom at 436 State Street, Schenectady, in the same building where he had worked as a barber. The following year he moved a few doors down State Street and opened another lunchroom, which he named the Hygienic Lunch. Within the next two years, his brother George and his girl cousin Angeliki arrived from Greece to live with him. Another Greek cousin, who Anglicized his name to Pete Lambert, became his partner at the lunchroom.

Theodore was apparently in no mood to cling to all the symbols of his past. By 1909 he had learned enough English to become a United States citizen. By 1911 he again shortened his name to Theodore S. Agnew. Of the forty-five restaurants in Schenectady, at least three featured Greek cuisine, but the Hygienic Lunch was not one of the three. Its quarter-page advertisement in the 1911 Schenectady directory read as follows:

P. Lambert Theo. Agnew
Hygienic Lunch
Open Day and Night
Steaks and Chops Cooked to Order—Lunches put up to take out
412 State Street, Near street railway waiting station
In the heart of the city.

For a while the Hygienic Lunch did a good business, good enough so that Theodore Agnew could open another Hygienic Lunch in nearby Troy, New York. But in 1912 something happened that made him sell out and move away. The only available explanation comes from his onetime Schenectady acquaintance, Pandelis Chrissikos, who was interviewed after the 1968 election when he was eighty-five years old and again living in Greece. According to Chrissikos, Theodore Agnew's restaurants simply failed to support him.

Then came three quirks of chance. First, Theodore Agnew and his brother George happened to settle in Baltimore, perhaps simply because they liked the Maryland climate better than that of snowy New York. Theodore opened a restaurant on North Howard Street called the Brighton Lunch Room.

The second coincidence was that Mr. and Mrs. William S. Pollard stopped in at the Brighton from time to time for a meal, and in the process they got to know Theodore Agnew, the proprietor. Occasionally the Pollards would invite him over to dinner at their house on West Fayette Street, knowing that he had almost no friends in Baltimore.

The final quirk was that William Pollard, who was in his late thirties, suddenly died of leukemia in April 1917.

A widow at thirty-six, Mrs. Margaret Akers Pollard probably considered going back to Virginia. Instead, she took her nine-year-old son, Roy, and her maiden sister, Lilly, and moved to a two-bedroom apartment over a florist shop which happened to be several blocks from the Brighton Lunch Room. Like Theodore Agnew, she was also something of an outsider to Baltimore. It was not surprising that they saw more and more of each other, despite their differences in origins and the fact that she was Episcopalian and he was Greek Orthodox. Agnew, who was still unmarried at the age of thirty-nine, was handsome in the way Vice President Agnew is handsome today, although about four inches shorter. The widow Pollard was good-looking and nearly as tall as Theodore.

The wedding of Theodore S. Agnew and Mrs. Margaret Akers Pollard took place less than a year after William Pollard's funeral. "I just recall that one day they were married," says her son Roy Pollard. "They went to some church unknown to me and they were married. All I know, in my childish mind, they suddenly got married, that's all."

A son, who would be their only child together, was born on November 9, 1918. With Solomon's wisdom they agreed to raise him as an Episcopalian—and name him Spiro Theodore Agnew. The melting pot had melted.

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"Thank God I put on weight later."

The Perpetual Lieutenant

The rearing of young Spiro Agnew did not always involve the sort of stern parental guidance that he would ultimately hark back to as part of his appeal to the simpler values of the good old days.

"There wasn't an awful lot of home life," his half-brother Roy Pollard has recalled. "But there was an obvious reason. When Mr. Agnew had the restaurant, he and also my mother were at the restaurant most of the time. You don't have an awful lot of home life under conditions like that."

Much of the child raising and discipline fell to Spiro's maiden aunt, Lilly Akers, who lived with them and was known to all as "Aunt Teddy." As Pollard told interviewer Daniel Greene, "Teddy was a spinster and her entire life was centered around Spiro and me. To her we could do no wrong. No one would ever criticize us around Aunt Teddy because she wouldn't believe it."

Spiro's mother was the dominant member of the family, if Roy Pollard is correct. "I have to be honest," he once said.

WHAT MAKES SPIRO RUN

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SPIRO AGNEW

By Joseph Albright

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Chapter Two

The Young Manhood of Spiro Agnew

The First Suburb

When Spiro Theodore Agnew moved to Forest Park in the first year of his life, in 1919, it had neither black residents nor its own high school. Agnew was born in November 9, 1918, in an apartment over a florist's shop in downtown Baltimore, at 226 West Madison Street. Within months, the Agnew family moved to the brand-new house on a street of new houses in the neighborhood that was Baltimore's latest addition. Like most cities of size at that time, Baltimore had steadily been expanding out from its center as population and mobility increased. H. L. Mencken, a city boy, had noticed the drift to suburbia as early as the 1880's. "Baltimore was creeping out block by block, year by year," he wrote of that preautomobile decade. Forest Park was then just cornfields, meadows and woods, for the most part. By the turn of the century, however, it boasted many summer houses and a rambling hotel, where Baltimoreans of some means would go to escape the humid, mosquito-dominated summers of the low-lying port city. Part of Forest Park was annexed to the city in 1888, the rest in 1918. It was almost exclusively a community of detached houses, separated one from the other by ten to twenty feet of grass and shrubs. This arrangement distinguished suburb from city in Baltimore, that collection of street after street of narrow brick row houses. Row housing was banned in Forest Park.

The Agnews' new house at 3707 Ashburton Street (later renamed Sequoia Avenue), was a two-story, brown, shingled structure with a porch, large enough for a family that included the future vice-president, his father and mother, a half brother, and a maiden aunt. His father—Theodore Spiro Agnew—owned a restaurant on Baltimore's busy Howard Street, about seven miles away, and each day he commuted to his place of business, along with most of the residents of Forest Park. Through the early 1920's, job opportunities in the neighborhood were scant. There were a couple of stores, a branch library, and two churches when the Agnews arrived. During Spiro Agnew's youth these were joined by a fire station, more stores, several new schools and churches and synagogues, even a theater.

In the 1920's and 1930's, when Spiro Agnew was growing up there, Forest Park was almost the ideal American suburb, ideal even to the point of being open to Greek-Americans, like Theodore S. Agnew, and to Jews. "[It] looked precisely like every other self-contained suburb on the American continent, give or take a few odd features. Old oaks and sycamores overgrew the street. Flowers grew in everyone's backyard. . . . Hills garlanded the western edge of Forest Park, gradually leading into Gwynns Falls Valley and making, along the way, perfect slopes for sledding, which we used each winter. Nothing ever really happened on those hills and streets except a certain amount of necessary movement to and fro and the steady, subversive activity, mostly invisible to adults, of children picking up misinformation about life." So a Forest Park boy, Robert Kotlowitz, wrote later in *Harper's*. It sounds idyllic because it was. Later Forest Park would be an "urban" neighborhood, but by then the Agnews would all be gone. Forest Park was Spiro Agnew's first suburb, but not his last.

The Greek

A liberal Maryland Democrat of Greek extraction once said that the only thing Agnew did for the Greek community was to leave it. That is not true. Baltimore's Greeks took pride in his rise through the levels of political power and eminence. During that rise, newspapers dutifully interviewed members of the community —"leaders" and "rank and file"—and dutifully reported that they rejoiced in the reflected glory. Providing this glory was doing something for a community. But the Maryland Democrat was wrong for a more basic reason: Agnew never left the Greek community; he was never a part of it. His father was very much involved in its affairs, but the son never was.

Theofrastos Anagnostopoulos was born in Gargalianoi, Greece, in 1878. He grew up in that village, apparently a member of a family of landowners, though the record now is not clear. At any rate, at twenty-four he emigrated to America, part of one of the most remarkable surges across the Atlantic. There were fewer than a thousand Greeks living in the United States when he was born. By 1920, there were over 176,000 Greek-born residents here. They had few qualifications for succeeding in an industrial and commercial society: they were almost all poor, almost all uneducated and untrained, almost all from peasant homes; they almost all settled in cities, however, and by and large they enjoyed prompt success. Typically, they began in some sort of menial job, quickly moved to a better one, then to a still better one—none highly prestigious—and then to entrepreneurship. Almost all the Greek immigrants of this period were young men, and once successful they generally returned to Greece to marry their childhood sweethearts. Except in this last particular, Anagnostopoulos followed this pattern exactly.

The future vice-president's father arrived in New York City on a Red Star Line steamer on September 19, 1902. He listed his occupation as "laborer." He was twenty-five, short, slight, and dark. He was en route to Schenectady, to live with a cousin. Four years later his declaration of intent to become a citizen listed his family name as "Anagnost" and included the middle name "Spiro." He now said he was a barber. In 1907, when he petitioned for naturalization, he described himself as a merchant, having graduated to the calling of restaurateur. His first cafe, opened in Schenectady in 1907 was a failure. So was a second, opened in 1908 in Troy, New York. In 1910 or thereabouts he moved to Baltimore, for reasons unknown, and opened a third restaurant, the Brighton, on a busy downtown street. This one prospered. As he approached forty, the now thoroughly Americanized Theodore Spiro Agnew decided he needed a family. Instead of returning to Greece or choosing from the local, small Greek community, he proposed to a Virginian, Mrs. William R. Pollard, who was the widow of a late friend. Her husband had had a well-paying job as a government meat inspector, and they and their one child, W. Roy, had lived a pleasant life of comfort and some prestige in a row house in west Baltimore. They had often dined at the Brighton, and Agnew had often dined in their home. Agnew and Mrs. Pollard were married in late 1917 or early 1918, and moved to the apartment over the florist's shop, where their son Spiro was born.

The life-style of the new Mrs. Agnew and her older son, ten-year-old Roy, changed with her remarriage. The standard of living was the same, but because Mr. Agnew's restaurant was more demanding of his time than Mr. Pollard's profession had been, their home life became much less conventional. Mrs. Agnew took an increasing interest in outside activities, even helping with the staff at the restaurant. The family ate out almost all the time. Mrs. Agnew also became much more sociable. She liked the races, as did her new husband. She liked long shopping expeditions. "She was a real gadabout," says Roy Pollard. When Spiro was born and the family moved to the suburbs, Mrs. Agnew's unmarried sister, Lillie Akers, took over much of the responsibility for rearing both children. She fixed their meals at home, she herded them to Sunday school. (Mrs. Agnew and her sister were lifelong Episcopalians.)

Spiro Agnew's father would have liked to see his only son take more of an interest in his Greek heritage. The situation was delicate. Though he was a stern parent, a strict disciplinarian, he shied away from forcing the boy. Agnew senior was a leading figure in the small Greek community of perhaps two thousand people, active in the American Hellenic Educational and Progressive Association and looked up to particularly by the many Greeks in businesses related to food and dining. He never went beyond offering Spiro bribes to attend Greek school. When these were refused, the matter was closed. He offered to teach the son a little of the language at home, but Spiro again refused. The very fact that his father spoke English with an accent was embarrassing to him. And for his father to speak Greek in the presence of one of young Agnew's WASP friends was agony. "It made me vaguely uneasy and embarrassed to have to be there when another child was. You resent differences at that age [pre-teens and early teens]. . . . I was very sensitive to the fact that my father was Greek and spoke with an accent, and this was sometimes a source of ridicule in my peer group," Spiro Agnew said later.

The elder Agnew, in *his* peer group, had embarrassments, too. "Mr. Agnew would have been a more contented married man had