

#2008.118

**Materials of the Compatriotic Union of Gurin
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Grace

In the late 19th century Armenian immigrants from the Ottoman Empire began to migrate to areas outside the historic homeland, ranging from Constantinople and Smyrna in Western Turkey to France, Argentina, the United States and distant countries. The improvement of transportation systems during the Victorian period made frequent communication with the homeland possible, and visits back to the home town or village practical. This interaction led emigrants to create "Compatriotic Unions", associations of individuals from the same geographic region, who banded together to raise money to assist the home village by funding schools and other philanthropic projects.

Most of the villages were destroyed during the Armenian Genocide, and the compatriotic unions shifted their goals to assist survivors or refugees from their home region in the refugee camps of the Middle East, in resettling countrymen in the Armenian SSR, or assisting migrants settling in other countries. These groups (e.g. Pan-Sebastia Educational Union, Union of Marash, Union of Vaspouragan, General Union of Harpoot, and many others) became some of the most important social networks outside of Armenia with branches throughout the diaspora. (The Armenian Church, the political parties and the AGBU were the other major community institutions of this generation). These compatriotic unions could be provincial, but helped maintain the specific foods, dialects, family networks and regional culture of each area of Western Armenia.

As the original immigrant and refugee generation died out and was succeeded by its children, the compatriotic unions shifted goals to assist the descendants of their membership through scholarships, or by assisting other needy groups in Armenia and the diaspora. These new named programs served to memorialize the names of the original villages or regions. Once central to Armenian community life, most of these organizations died out in the late 20th century, as new generations and needs emerged in a changing world.

The “Compatriotic Union of Gurin” was one of these many active organizations. Founded in 1922, the Union preserved the traditions of the Armenians of the town of Gurin in the province of Sepastia for decades, but disbanded in the 1990’s. ALMA recently received the archival files of the organization including membership lists, ledgers, by-laws, press clippings, photographs, books, correspondence, bank records and other documents.