



---

# THE MILHIM TAWHEEL BRANCH

---

**Including “The John and Anna Tweel Story”**

**Revised  
June 2020**

**William T. Tweel Jr. MD MPH**

## ABOUT THIS REVISION

As I write, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have not been venturing out except when necessary. But there can be a positive side as well. What better way to bide some of that “confinement” than exploring family history using the many mediums available to us?

When I first drafted this document, I did a limited distribution to friends and relatives. Acknowledging there might be errors, I also welcomed additional information as there were knowledge gaps that still and may always remain. Most gratifyingly there was an outpouring of additional “finds” as people began to look at those tucked away pictures and documents.

I trust that this expanded revision will be enjoyed as much as the first attempt. Any necessary corrections were made. Unfortunately, I could not include everything brought to my attention; though all was enjoyed immensely. No doubt those kind efforts also brought some good memories. However, I have acknowledged those persons who submitted items actually used.

As a sort of disclaimer, a project such as this depends on “soft data”, e.g. the oral histories, penned family documents, constructed trees, important clues in those photographs. Even “official” documents have their discrepancies. Therefore, I can never vouch that the content herein will ever be free from error. But I will always welcome additional information as the document may evolve.

With appreciation,

*W. T. “Ted” Tweel Jr.*

wtweel@comcast.net

## Table of Contents

Preface

Chapter I The Taweel Family of Kfeir (Arreph El-Khoury c1960) \*

Chapter II The Life of Milhim Taweel (William T. Tweel Jr.)

Milhim was Married Twice  
The P.E.I., Canada Connection  
The Death of Milhim Taweel

Chapter III The Offspring of Milhim Taweel (William T. Tweel Jr.)

Chapter IV The John and Anna Tweel Story (William T. Tweel Jr.)

The Early Years  
John W. Tweel Returns to Kfeir  
The Brotherhood Begins  
The Great Depression  
The Death of John W. Tweel  
The Years Following the Death of John W. Tweel  
The Death of Anna Thabit Tweel

Chapter V Life in Kfeir (Letter from Mary Louise Tweel 1929) \*

Chapter VI Remembrances (William T. Tweel Jr.)

Mary Louise Haddad Tweel  
William "Bill" Theodore Tweel, Sr.

Appendix (Documents Not Included in Text)

- 1897 New Method for Learning English Language by K. Saad (belonging to John W. Tweel)
- Drawings of an American woman and notations of Syrians in W.Va. (belonging to John W. Tweel)
- 1926 Kfeirian school book
- 1930 Al-Kfeir Brotherhood cards
- 1937 flood letter (from Mark Marcos)
- 1937 letter re: emmigration restrictions and murder of an American Consul General (from Ayoub Abou Nasser, Kfeir)
- 1942 Palmerian Society Christmas card
- Wooden carved Greek Orthodox altar bread and maamool molds (probably from Anna Tweel)

\* With clarifying edits and additional information/footnotes

## PREFACE

Growing up, I remember history as my least favorite subject in school. It emphasized the memorization of names and dates of events without exploration of the “why”. No doubt the answers would have often been uncomfortable or controversial. Genealogy seeks to discover family relationships; but the understanding of how relationships were defined and influenced by the culture, hardships, and difficult decisions of the times is when true learning and understanding begins.

My original intent was to provide information about my father’s family for my children. Then I reasoned there were Kfeirian descendants that might also find the information of value. Believing the narrative format is more interesting (and hopefully more likely to be read), I humbly offer this Milhim Taweel branch history to the already substantially documented Lebanese immigration story. Recommended is the abundance of historical information listed on the [www.kfeir.com](http://www.kfeir.com) website.

In addition to the many on-line public documents, I consulted the following:

1. “Al-Kfeir in America”, a dissertation by Mary Louise Tweel-Haddad, Columbia University Teachers College, 1991
2. “The Taweel Family of Kfeir” by Arreph El-Khoury prepared for Mary Louise Tweel-Haddad c1960
3. Correspondence from Mary Louise Tweel-Haddad sent from Kfeir, 1929-1931
4. Other material belonging to my mother and to my aunt Mary Haddad (in some cases translated from the Arabic)

Finally, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my relatives who have taken the time to provide additional material, especially those undocumented but invaluable oral histories.

*W. T. “Fed” Tweel Jr.*

wtweel@comcast.net

## CHAPTER I

### The Taweel Family of Kfeir

by  
Arreph El-Khoury <sup>1</sup>

c1960

(Editing for clarification with added information, including footnotes, provided in red by W. Tweel, Jr.)

The history of the Taweel family of Kfeir antedates the rise of Islam in the Middle East. Years before the Mohammadan conquest of Roman Syria,<sup>2</sup> the present Taweels, and their cousins the Qasirs, were a Christian Orthodox tribe living in and around Amman, the now capital of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordon, called then Philadelphia. The name of this tribe has been lost; but we know that its chiefs were two brothers: one very tall (Taweel) and the other short (Qasir). For some reason or another, the tall brother took his clan of the tribe and migrated to northern Lebanon where they were known as the House of Taweel. The Taweel brother and his followers remained Christian; while the Qasir brother, who remained in Jordon, embraced Islam under the nickname of Qasir. The Qasir family is now scattered all over the Arab world. The Taweels of the New World write their name as Tweel, which is the true nomadic pronunciation of the word Taweel.

In north Lebanon, the Taweels settled in the town of Tibshar where they remained a hundred or two hundred years, and where they became good weavers. They then migrated to Kfeir with their families:

Abou  
Aboud  
Isbir  
Jabour  
Khair  
Makhoul  
**Milhim**  
Salamah  
Soulieman

---

<sup>1</sup> Thought to be requested by Mary Tweel Haddad who in Kfeir in 1929 referenced "Aref Corey's brother". Arreph El-Khoury is a noted Kfeirian author born in 1905. Some of his early (1930s) works include The Snare, A Woman of the Hills, and Hillbred. Historical information from El-Khoury is posted on the kfeir.com site.

<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> century

At the outset of their settlement at Kfeir, the Taweels built looms and began weaving, a craft at which they were very skillful. In due course of time their numbers increased appreciably and they became one of the largest families in the village. Some of their men were clever in casting coins which aroused the ire of the Shihabi princes at Hasbaya. The Shihabis were feudally ruling the region at that time. They compelled the Taweels to abandon Kfeir and go to the town of Tieby in Jabal Amil of southern Lebanon where the powerful Assaad family ruled; and the Shihabis could not reach. Here the Taweels became the Assaad refugees for a considerable period of time.

At that time, Ahmad Bushnaki, the Turkish governor in Acre<sup>3</sup>, better known as the “Butcher” Jazzar, set out to subdue Jabal Ammil<sup>4</sup>, recruiting for the campaign a large army. The Assaad family along with the Taweels, fled to Damascus and remained there until the Heimour family of Kiraoun in the Bekaa Plains intermediated between the Butcher and the Assaads who were permitted to return home. The Taweels came and settled in the village of Ayha.<sup>5</sup> A Taweel man by the name of Jirjis was ordained a priest of the Greek orthodox community of the village and remained there all of this life. Sometime later, the Taweel family went to the regions of Akim Al-Balan on the western slopes of Mount Hermon and lived at Majdal Shamiss, Trinji, and Ain Al-Shaara on the Syrian side of the holy mountain. Others went to Haifa in Palestine. After the settlement of Kfeir, some of the Taweels went to Joudiedat Marj-Ayoun and settled there and are known as Salamah-Taweel. Of this family’s outstanding persons was Abdullah, the village priest, who was a very pious man and exceedingly able in settling knotty local disputes among the people. He was loved and respected by all sects.

Many migrating Taweel men made good abroad. For instance, Farid Salamah and his brothers in Australia, Elias and Simon in the U.S.A., and Nimir and Nakad in Canada (PEI). The branch of the Taweels who remained in Damascus embraced Islam. Among its outstanding men were Hassan (? Husson in U.S.A.) Taweel and his family.

Below are the names of the various branches of the Taweels as best we were able to gather when there were no records or local histories:

### **Aboud**

- Zakhour
- 1. Aboud, went to U.S.A.
- 2. George, went to U.S.A.
- 3. Hannah, went to U.S.A.

---

<sup>3</sup> Acre, Northern District of present day Israel

<sup>4</sup> Jabal Amel, a Shia community in southern Lebanon that fell under Turkish Muslim rule in 1516

<sup>5</sup> Probably Aaiha

**Isbir** <sup>6</sup> (Esper Tweel 1861-1926 m Jeany Haddad 1881-1926), went to U.S.A.

- Naif (Naif Esper Tweel 1898-1976 m Margaret Cassatly 1913-1995), went to U.S.A.
- Angelo (Enslow Tweel 1902-1965), went to U.S.A.
- Naifey Tweel (?birth-1976 m Charles Assaf Farhood ?birth -1962), went to Canada
- Edna Tweel m Frank Sayer

### **Jabour**

- Mansour (Monsor L. Tweel 1891-1978 m Bertha M. Tweel 1907-1968) in U.S.A.
- Hanna (Hanna Tweel m Ghytoun Zahghour) in U.S.A.  
Ayoub (1886-1936 m Sophia Kays 1904-1967)
- Soulieman, Sa'id, and Habib in Canada
- George and Jabour in Cuba

### **Makhoul**

- Butros at Kfeir (Butros El-Khoury Taweel 1889- Butros was a cousin and “best man” to John W. Tweel, so possibly Makhoul and Milhim were brothers. Butros was father to Nimir (Nimir Tweel 1886-1970 m Saidah Zakem 1894-?death) and Nakaad Taweel <sup>7</sup> in Canada.
- Wehbi and Sa'id Assaf in Cuba
- Soulieman (a monk) and brother Ayoub in Brazil

### **Milhim** (See Chapter II)

- Hannah (John)
- Jirjis (George)
- Soulieman (Solomon)
- Fahid (Fred)
- Adilah (Ada)

---

<sup>6</sup> Isbir and Milhim were brothers

<sup>7</sup> There is a picture at Kfeir.com of Mary Haddad placing a fez on Nakad Taweel at the 1959 Kfeirian reunion

**Salamah** <sup>8</sup> (“... majority of its members are in Marj-Ayoun where they made good and enjoy a good reputation”)

- Elias, went to U.S.A.
- Faris, went to U.S.A.
- George, went to U.S.A.
- Khalil went to U.S.A.
- Nicola, went to Australia
- Nimir, went to U.S.A.
- Simon, went to U.S.A

### **Soulieman**

- Ayoub (**Ayoub Tweel c1850- ? m Mary Bohalka 1854-1931**), went to the U.S.<sup>9</sup>
  1. Simon (**Simon Tweel 1870-1924 m Regina Kassis 1882-1960**)
  2. Elias (**Louis Tweel 1880-1945**) went to U.S.A.
  3. Zahia (**Zahia Elizabeth Tweel 1883-1955 m Joseph Hage (Hiajj 1867-1932)**), went to U.S.A.<sup>10</sup>
  4. Ibrahim (**Abraham Tweel 1887-1941 m Nellie Bolus 1905-1984**), went to U.S.A.
  5. Mikhail went to U.S.A.

---

<sup>8</sup> Probably Salamy and/or Salem in U.S.A.

<sup>9</sup> Thought to be Milhim's first cousin

<sup>10</sup> Hodge/Hage Tree



## CHAPTER II

### The Life of Milhim Taweel

1860-1953

by

William Theodore Tweel Jr.

My great grandfather and namesake Milhim (William) Taweel was presumably born in Kfeir where he lived his entire life. According to a written family tree belonging to Mary Jane Tweel,<sup>11</sup> daughter of great aunt Ada (m Mike Tweel), Milhim's father was named John and had 2 brothers, Abe and Joseph, though that has not been seen anywhere else for verification. It would make sense that Milhim would name his first son John. Of note, great uncle Mike's father is penned as Joseph Tweel with brothers Abe and John. Therefore, all three may have been brothers since Mike was considerably older than Ada (see Offspring of Milhim Taweel, Ada/Mike Tweel)

No pictures of Milhim have been seen by me at the time of this writing. However, Arreph El-Khoury states he was a "short and stubby person with a small round ruddy face, beady eyes, and a pointed nose". My aunt Mary Haddad who knew him in Kfeir described him as a "cute short man" who resembled two of Milhim's children, Fred and Ada. Neither description would be "Taweel" (tall). According to El-Khoury, "He wore the traditional voluminous black pants and the low skull red fez encircled by a brown band known as the Tarboush and Shamli".

El-Khoury further writes that Milhim's house was "located at the southwestern part of the village about a hundred yards below the church and school in a rough and rocky place called Waara (wilderness) on account of its being dotted with large gray boulders and wild shrubberies. How Milhim and his ancestors cleared these huge rocks to build their squat one room low house is indeed a feat worth admiration".

#### **Milhim Was Married Twice.**

Milhim's first wife and my great grandmother was a Kfeirian Catholic Bihji El-Marji (listed as "Peggy Margy" in U.S. documents). They had five children: my grandfather Hannah (John), Jirjis (George), Adllah (Ada), Soulieman (Solomon), and Fahid (Fred). All of them were born in Kfeir and immigrated to the U.S. when they were young.

It is not known when Bihji was born or died. She likely would have been close in age or younger than her husband; and she would have lived to at least 1900 when her youngest child Fred was born. El-Khoury wrote that Bihji was in Kfeir when Milhim returned from the U.S. <sup>12</sup> and then died

---

<sup>11</sup> Document provided by John A. Tweel

<sup>12</sup> 1903

several years later while suffering from a mental disease. In those days it would have been difficult to separate only psychological illness from underlying or co-morbid internal medical disease, including neurological illness; and there is no available medical record. When her father John died in 1931, aunt Mary wrote that “...now he is with her [his mother Bihji] at rest ...” Therefore, it is concluded that Bihji had died before 1929.

In a 1929 letter from Kfeir, my aunt Mary Tweel Haddad indicates Milhim was living in the Hannah Hawarny (John Metree) house. El-Khoury writes Hannah Hawarny (aka John Metree 1872-1950) left the U.S. and later returned to Kfeir, building a house near the public square. He then married a girl from Marj’Ayoum <sup>13</sup> and left his home returning to the U.S. Hannah’s sister Hanneh lived in that Hawarny house. After Bihji’s death, Milhim married Hanneh and lived in that house. Aunt Mary also refers to John Metree as her grandmother’s brother<sup>14</sup> (though not her biological grandmother of course).

### **The P.E.I., Canada Connection**

According to the above mentioned written family tree belonging to Mary Jane Tweel, Bihji Marji is penned Peggy Mariage. She had 2 brothers, Joseph and Abraham, and a sister Mary. Her father was Habib Mariage, who had a brother Kalil. Her mother Nafoozh (no maiden name written) had 2 brothers, Joseph and Solomon, and 4 sisters, Katrina, Nazoorah, Haloon, and Mariam. Nafoozh’s father is written as just “Bassett”. Again, this is the only document seen with this detail.

In the Zakem-Marji Story, the patriarch Habib Marji married a Natauge Bassett. His children were also named Abraham, Joseph (Mariage),<sup>15</sup> Mary (Kays), and Betly (for whom there is “no record” nor narrative). Aunt Mary wrote about her uncle Abraham Margy, who looks like her Uncle Joe. They were with her grandfather Milhim when they first met, along with a lady named Milady. Mary Marji Kays had a daughter Melady who was born c1906 and never left Kfeir. Melady’s sister, Sophia (Kays), who married Ayoub Tweel (son of Hanna Tweel and Ghytoun Zahghour, Chapter I, Aboud/Zkghour) wrote a letter to Mary from Kfeir. Aunt Mary also refers to her Aunt Miriam as Joe Mariage’s sister. She also references Mrs. Brahim Margy and her niece Milady. Though only conjecture, if Betly Marji and Bihji Marji, which for either there is no information, were the same person; then the above relationships would be congruent except for the differences in spelling as also Natauge/Nafoozh (Bassett), Habib Marji’s wife.

Even though El-Khoury writes “village elders say that Milhim had no siblings”, I do not believe this to be true based on additional information. Aunt Mary states in her dissertation that Khushny Hanna Taweel (who married Nicola Ghiz and lived in P.E.I., Canada) was Milhim’s sister and died in her 90s the year following Milhim’s passing. She also wrote that Isbir (Esber or Esper) Taweel

---

<sup>13</sup> Attar Massad 1893-1983

<sup>14</sup> Half-brother, see narrative for Michael Tweel

<sup>15</sup> The Joseph Mariage/Iva Finney union was the first Kfeirian “inter-cultural marriage in the U.S.” in 1898, Al-Kfeir in America by Mary L. T. Haddad, pg 12(7-128).

was Milhim's brother. Mary Jane Tweel's family chart, confirms that Milhim had a brother Esber and also a brother named Solomon for which I have no information or other confirmation. I will leave it to the Esper descendants to tell their story. However, there is an interesting parallel as follows:

Nemir Tweel (1889-1970) lived in P.E.I. with his brother Nakad Taweel <sup>16</sup> and his wife Saidah Zakem (1894-1980) also from Kfeir. Nemir's father Butros El-Koury Taweel was grandfather John Tweel's cousin and the Lebanese equivalent of "best man" at his wedding when he married grandmother Anna Thabit. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that Makhoul Taweel (father of Butros) may have been a brother to Milhim and Esper. Esper owned a store at 314 ½ 11<sup>th</sup> Ave. in Huntington, W.Va. It was a corner store with the name "Tweel" engraved in wood on the building. That building is no longer standing. Nemir likewise operated a grocery store on a corner lot in Charlottetown, PEI. The building at Bayfield and University Avenue has the name "Tweel" engraved on the corner section of the building.

### **The Death of Milhim Taweel**

Milhim is thought to have died in the early 1950s. My aunt Mary Haddad wrote Milhim lived to the old age of 93 placing his birth date about 1860. When Milhim left to his living heirs (all in the U.S.) his 3 parcels of property. One parcel bordered the Sultany (vineyards known as Raghbat). Another vineyard was at the end of Al-Akaby, at the Rakaby. The 3<sup>rd</sup> property was an olive orchard bordering George Nasser's home. According to Professor Abe Bassett, the Bassett house which was at the lowest level of the village, was sold to a Taweel to finance their immigration to America in the very early 1900s. That could have been one of the parcels. Milhim also left 100 gold pounds, 100 Turkish pounds, 800 Syrian pounds, and numerous household items (beds, carpets, etc.); and how those items were handled is unknown. The estate went to Milhim's living children (John had died) and to John's children. All later relinquished their property rights to Aunt Mary and my father William. Aunt Mary later acquired my father's interest, leaving her as the sole owner. There was also correspondence sent to the Rev. Michael Aborizk, Naseef Nassar, Assad Bassett, Mrs. Brahim Margy, and Chehady Thabet, grandson of Katrina Thabet (Mrs. Sleyman Thabet,) who was a sister of my grandmother Anna Thabit Tweel. The final disposition of Milhim's land is not known to me.

---

<sup>16</sup> There is a picture at kfeir.com of Mary Haddad placing a fez on Nakad Taweel at the 1959 Kfeirian reunion

## CHAPTER III

### **The Offspring of Milhim Taweel**

by

William Theodore Tweel Jr.



**L-R seated, Ada and Fred standing John, George, and Solomon c early 1920s <sup>17</sup>**

---

<sup>17</sup> Photo provided by the Peggy Tweel Shaheen Family

**John William Tweel (m Anna Thabit)**

1884-1931

1884-1950



My grandfather John William was married in 1905 to Anna Thabit in Kfeir, immigrating to the U.S. that same year. Their last residence was 636 Trenton Place in Huntington. John and Anna had 5 sons and 2 daughters:

- Samuel John Tweel 1908-1964 WWII Veteran (Emily Mae Kamees 1908-2001)
- Thelma Tweel 1910-1970 (Michael A. Cassis 1905-1973)
- Mary Louise Tweel 1912-2000 (Edward Michael Haddad 1905-1973)
- Nicholas John Tweel 1916-2009 WWII Veteran (Joy Chapman 1924-2000)
- Charles Toufie Tweel 1917-2003 (Edna Yarid 1914-1999)
- William Theodore Tweel 1920-1983 (Eleanor Allen 1928-2005)
- Norman John Tweel 1923-1996 WWII Veteran (Gail Patricia Walker 1936-2014)

John owned "Tweel's Sweet Shop" at 902-4 6<sup>th</sup> avenue. John died from a brain disease in 1931 while visiting in Kfeir. When Anna died, the John and Anna Tweel cemetery was established in Woodmere Memorial Park, Huntington where she and John (reinterred) are buried.

## George William Tweel

1889-1961



George William Tweel was never married. He was a merchant and lived in Huntington since 1905, which is when he immigrated from Kfeir with his brother John. George died only four months before his sister Ada. At the time of their death, they lived in Huntington at 1007 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Services were held at St. George Greek Orthodox Church; although his obituary states he was a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church.<sup>18</sup> He is buried in Springhill Cemetery in Huntington.

## Ada Tweel (m Michael Joseph Tweel)

1894-1961

1879<sup>19</sup>-1939



Ada immigrated to the U.S. in her early childhood. It is not known who came to the U.S. with Ada though we know that her father Milhim and brother John came to the U.S. in 1901. She married a cousin and Kfeirian Michael (Mike) Joseph Tweel. No picture of Mike has been found to date.

Mike's parents are listed on his death certificate as Joseph and Mary (Hawarny) Tweel. According to a family tree belonging to their daughter Mary Jane, Mike's mother is listed as Mary (Abood) Tweel, with 2 brothers Abood and Nick. There is an Abood Hawarney whose half-brother was Hannah "John Metree" Hawarny, brother of my great grandfather Milhim's second wife Hanneh (see Chapter II Milhim Taweel). If Mike's mother Mary was Hanneh's sister, then Mike would have been a 1<sup>st</sup> cousin by marriage to Ada. There is also a Nick Abood ( -1950) who is buried in Toledo, Ohio. Mike's father Joseph had 2 brothers, Abe and John. Mike's siblings were Hilwa, Sadie, Katrina, and Zinie.

Ada and Mike were wed in 1920 by the Rev. Dr. Roger Tyler of Trinity Episcopal Church in Huntington. A MikeTweel is listed in the Huntington 1907 directory as "Tweel & Koury", 939 3<sup>rd</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> No Syrian Orthodox Church was in Huntington at that time.

<sup>19</sup> Mike's date of birth is listed as 1879 by month day and year on the death certificate, but as 1881 on the gravestone.

Avenue. He is recorded on his death certificate as a “grocery merchant”; but the location of his store is unknown. Ada and Mike lived at 1007 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Huntington. They had four sons and one daughter:

- Raymond 1922-1971 (Betty Roach ? dates)
- Joseph (1924-1986) WWII Veteran
- James N. (1924-1986)
- Edward (1925-2009) WWII Veteran m Tressie Louise Tweel (1920-2013)
- Mary Jane 1930-2014 (Phillip George Tweel 1911-1997)

Mike died several years before Ada. Ada and her daughter became members of the Central Christian Church. She and Mike are buried in Spring Hill Cemetery in Huntington along with their children and Mike’s sister Sadie Tweel (c1873-1955).

### **Solomon Tweel**

1895-1946



According to Solomon’s death certificate he was “single”. However, the word “separated” is struck through so it is not clear if he married. His occupation is listed as “store owner”, residing in Williamson, W.Va. Solomon was a WWI veteran and died in the Veterans Hospital in Wayne county, W.Va. He is buried in Woodmere Memorial Park in Huntington.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Photo from page 10

## **Fred William Tweel Sr. (m Lucille Bassett)**

1900-1955

1911-1933



Fred Sr. was married to Lucile Bassett. Lucile's parents were George and Wasilla (nee Hawarney) Bassett from Marj-Ayoun. Fred and Lucille lived at 311 ½ 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Huntington where Fred owned "The Nut Shop" on 11<sup>th</sup> street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> avenue.

Fred and Lucile had 2 children, Fred W. "Billy" Jr (1930-1996) and Peggy (living) who married Eassa "Ace" Shaheen Jr. (1927-1997). Lucile tragically died within months after giving birth; and Fred did not remarry. Both Fred and Lucile are buried in Woodmere Memorial Park in Huntington.<sup>21</sup>



---

<sup>21</sup> Photos submitted by the Peggy Tweel Shaheen Family



## GENEALOGY SUMMARY

### Milhim Taweel 1850-1943 (Bihji Marji)

**1. John (Hannah) William Taweel 1883-1931 (Anna Thabit 1884-1950)**

Samuel John Taweel 1908-1964 WWII Veteran (Emily Mae Kamees 1908-2001)  
Thelma Taweel 1910-1970 (Michael A. Cassis 1905-1973)  
Mary Louise Taweel 1912-2000 (Edward Michael Haddad 1905-1973)  
Nicholas John Taweel 1916-2009 WWII Veteran (Joy Chapman 1924-2000)  
Charles Toufie Taweel 1917-2003 (Edna Yarid 1914-1999)  
William Theodore Taweel 1920-1983 (Eleanor Allen 1928-2005)  
Norman John Taweel 1923-1996 WWII Veteran (Gail Patricia Walker 1936-2012)

**2. George (Jirjis) William Taweel 1889-1961** (Never married and no known children)

**3. Ada (Addlah) Taweel 1894-1961 (Michael Joseph Taweel 1881-1939)**

Raymond 1922-1971  
Joseph 1924-1986 WWII Veteran  
James N. 1924-1986  
Edward 1925-2009 WW Veteran (Tressie Louise Taweel 1920-2013)  
Mary Jane 1930-2014 (Phillip George Taweel 1911-1997)

**4. Soloman (Soulieman) Taweel 1895-1946** WWI Veteran (Question as to whether ever married or had children)

**5. Fred (Fahid) Taweel 1900-1955 (Lucile Bassett 1911-1933)**

Fred William Taweel Jr. 1930-1996  
Peggy Shaheen (Eassa "Ace" Shaheen Jr. 1927-1997)

## CHAPTER IV

### The John and Anna Tweel Story

by

William T. Tweel Jr.



**L To R. front row, grandparents John William and Anna Thabit Tweel Back row, my father William Theodore, with siblings Nicholas John, Mary Louise, Samuel John, Thelma, Charles Toufie, and Norman John <sup>22</sup>**

---

<sup>22</sup> Photo, location unknown, probably taken in 1929. Document in John's vest may be a passport. It is not known why my father's coat buttons on the left.

## The Early Years

In 1901, Milhim traveled with his oldest son, my grandfather John, to America where they stayed until 1903. “Exploratory” travel to America, leaving wives and children, was not unusual, though accompanied by much angst for those left behind. It was also not unusual for Kfeirians to make more than one trip to America. Those men who were young elected to stay despite the hardships they saw and the realization that the streets were not really paved in gold. In addition to the poverty in Kfeir, their eligibility for conscription into the Turkish army was a factor. Travel was usually by steerage in crowded uncomfortable conditions.

Although many Lebanese remained in large urban areas, others joined early “pioneers” in areas like Huntington, W.Va. of similar latitude and hilly terrain. Like other Kfeirians, peddling of housewares and homemade items in rural areas of states like W.Va. was a natural pathway to acquiring needed funds. Kfeirians were accustomed to much walking, even by moonlight. Kfeirians learned the names and locations of other Syrians in the surrounding areas. They would typically find or return to a Syrian temporary home where they could replenish not only themselves but their supply of goods. The sharing of resources was vital to their economy and safety. Women peddled too. In most cases the Lebanese were welcomed by women who were relatively isolated from city stores. But it also was not without instances of real danger by persons suspicious of darker skinned people who did not speak fluent English.

In Part III of my aunt Mary Haddad’s book Al-Kfeir in America, she outlines the names and stories of those who were early migrators to American and the Huntington area. In the Appendix of this document are photos of the book used by my grandfather John to learn English, as well as hand sketches of an American woman and the names/residences of other Syrians.

In 1903 Milhim and John returned to Kfeir. Milhim’s brother Isbir (Esper) and wife Jeany (nee Haddad) also returned to Kfeir from Fort Wayne, Indiana where Naif was born. They built a new home with intentions of remaining in Lebanon. Milhim also wanted to remain in Kfeir; but John felt otherwise. However, John first was to marry a Kfeirian before traveling back to America. Tragically his wife became ill and died within two months of the marriage.<sup>23</sup>

That tragic event was attributed to the “evil eye”. The evil eye has pervaded Lebanese culture and other countries of the Middle East, Italy, and beyond for many hundreds of years, predating Christianity with parallels in the Jewish and Muslim religion as well. Its “usefulness” is justification of unexpected tragic events, especially death and childbirth. The sale of nazars (amulets/pendants) and talismans is part of the tourist trade even today. When my mother was pregnant with me, grandmother Anna told her she could not look at a particular woman in Huntington because she had the evil eye. The concept was completely foreign to a non-Lebanese

---

<sup>23</sup> My mother told me my grandfather had been married before. I didn’t have an affirmation or know the details until after aunt Mary had passed away and I read her dissertation

who could not understand the assignment of evil power to an otherwise seemingly acceptable member of the community.

Esper and his wife, who had seen Anna at their housewarming party, recommended to Milhim that John be married before returning to Kfeir. The parents of his first wife also agreed that John



should remarry before returning to the U.S. Esber and Jeany then called on Anna's father Habeeb asking she be betrothed to their nephew John. Anna's mother was deceased at the time. Both Anna and her father were in agreement. To avoid community concern over a remarriage, John and Anna eloped at the home of Anna's cousin Malakie Thabit (later Mrs. Fadlow B. Hodge). Priest Antonius Taweel performed the ceremony. Malakie represented Anna; and Butros el-Khoury Taweel represented his cousin John. Butros el-Khoury Taweel was father to Nimir Taweel (Nemir Tweel 1886-1970 m Saidah Zakem 1894-?death) in PEI, Canada. John and Anna left immediately for America (arrived in 1905). John's brother George (next oldest) accompanied them. The Esper Tweels eventually returned to Huntington.

#### **Katrina Thabit in Kfeir, 1950**

[Anna had a brother John Habeeb Thabit (10/18/1878-8/29/1951)<sup>24</sup> buried in Woodmere and a sister Katrina (Mrs. Slayman Thabit 1874-1952) who remained in Kfeir. Katrina had a son David (Daoud) who went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is thought to be Tom Sam Davis (Kfeir 1895-Wisc. 1967).

The details of Anna's parents and the precise relationship with the other W.Va. Thabits/Thabets has not been conclusively determined. Anna's death certificate does not name any parents; and a draft obituary by my Aunt Mary only names her father as Habeeb. The one definitive relationship is Anna's brother John Habeeb Thabit who is buried next to Anna. The gravestone identifies him as Anna's brother. However, his death certificate names his parents as Abe Thabet and Mary (nee) Thabet, i.e. a Thabet married a Thabet.

All historical family and DNA information points to the patriarchal Joseph Thabet tree, i.e. one of my Thabit great grandparents would have been Joseph's son or daughter. Because of close physical resemblance, it is tempting to place Sitti Anna and her siblings in the Jacob/Katrina Thabet tree, especially since Jacob was mistakenly referred to as Abe on his son John Thabet's

---

<sup>24</sup> The gravestone is different from death certificate which lists him as Thabet from 636 Trenton Place with the same date of death but a different birth date of 3/20/1874.

death certificate<sup>25</sup>. Also, Ayoub Hiajj/Thabet married Mariam Abou Hasson Thabet, one of whom could have been a child of Joseph. This would place a congruent relationship with the Hage/Hodge trees, and by marriage the Ayoub Tweel (m Mariam George) tree.<sup>26</sup> But of course, there is no evidence that either was a Habeeb. There is also a Habeeb (m Mariam Shumundy) tree but the gravestone birth/death dates would not be compatible.]



**John Tweel at home in 1920s.**

It is not known whether John went back to peddling. The coal industry and the railroad were primary contributors to an economically booming Huntington during the early 1900s and relatively small amounts of money could open a business. Numerous business ventures were tried by partnering with other Kfeirians. Those that were successful were sometimes bought out by one of the partners, the other opening a new business of their own. According to the 1910 census, great uncle George, along with 2 roomers, were living with John and Anna at 1134 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The 1913-14 city directory shows John and George at the same address with a dry goods business "John and Bro" at 1050 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. [Simon Tweel and his son Samuel owned had a confectionary store in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Hotel building. Simon's brothers Louis and Abraham

had a jewelry business at 937 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Louis is listed as residing in New York City where he died in Brooklyn.]

---

<sup>25</sup> Information from Kevin Donley

<sup>26</sup> Includes the Simon Tweel family.



Between 1908 and 1923 seven children were born to my grandparents. John eventually owned “Tweel’s Sweet Shop” located at 902-904 6<sup>th</sup> avenue. That store, in addition to rent from other properties, provided income for the family during the 1920s and 30s. Dad used to talk about Green River, a popular soda syrup in those stores with fountains. In 1939 the store was taken over by Albert and Margaret Kamees.



**Left, Margaret Kamees and probably Anna Tweel inside c1935. Right, matchbook cover. c1935<sup>27</sup>**



There were many Lebanese owned stores in that vicinity. Sam Taweel Joseph’s “Sammy’s” was on 9<sup>th</sup> Street near the Hotel Pritchard in the 1950s. Simon Tweel had a store on 9<sup>th</sup> Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenue which was later sold to Sid (Saied George) Tweel, and then to Leonard Tweel as his second store. On 10<sup>th</sup> street 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue were Naif Tweel’s

**Sweet Shop with Albert and Margaret Kamees out front c1935**

pharmacy/fountain store and across the street, Leonard Tweel’s first store, a dairy bar. According to Richard Tweel, Sam Bolus (Abe Tweel’s father-in-law) was the first to sell beer “to go” in 1942 at his store on 9<sup>th</sup> street and 7<sup>th</sup> avenue.

My father, William Theodore Tweel Sr., was born in 1920. He was given his middle name by a baptizing visiting Orthodox priest. There was no Orthodox Church in Huntington in the early

<sup>27</sup> Photos provided by John A. Tweel



1900s and a visiting priest would hold services at homes. Orthodox services were also held at Trinity Episcopal Church in its present location where many Tweels became life-long members.

At the time, the Tweels were renting Callie Barnett's home at 810 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Callie, whose husband was principal of Douglas School, had temporarily vacated her home to be with her sons who were attending Ohio State. In a segregated educational system, Callie, who was educated in Ohio, believed her children would receive a better education there than in W.Va. After her children graduated, Callie returned and remained in her Huntington home for over 80 years. Having been born in the Barnett home, Dad formed a close relationship with Callie. "The Callie Barnett Collection" can be found in the W.Va. State Archives, including material from my Dad. At 109 she was the oldest living person in W.Va.

The Tweels may have moved next into the 636 Trenton Place house where family members continued to reside intermittently, paying rent as adults to their mother, until the home was sold after Anna's death.

Prior to the Great Depression the major events were WWI (1914-18) and the influenza pandemic (1918-1919). Great uncle Solomon was a WWI veteran. However, the older John was married with a family. As far as I know there were no relatives who died of the pandemic. However, Lebanese and other immigrants who lived in crowded housing in big urban areas such as Boston died in large numbers.

### John W. Tweel Returns to Kfeir



In September of 1929, my grandfather decided to return to Kfeir having not seen his father in 24 years. This time the trip would not be by steerage but cabin on the French liner SS Alesia. John decided to take my aunt Mary with him. Why he did not take aunt Thelma, who was older and still single, is unknown. This of course left her and uncle Sam, the oldest and married, to manage the store. My cousin tells me that Sam was 14 years old when he had to quit school to help in the family store. With time, the other sons would assist as age appropriate. Sam and Emily were living at 208 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

There were rumors in Kfeir that John had been quite ill. I suspect that was shared with his wife Anna but questionably with the children. On August 26, 1929, just prior to his September voyage, John made out a will leaving his possessions to Anna and appointing his brother Fred William and cousin Abraham Tweel as executors. John had also taken out insurance on the store.



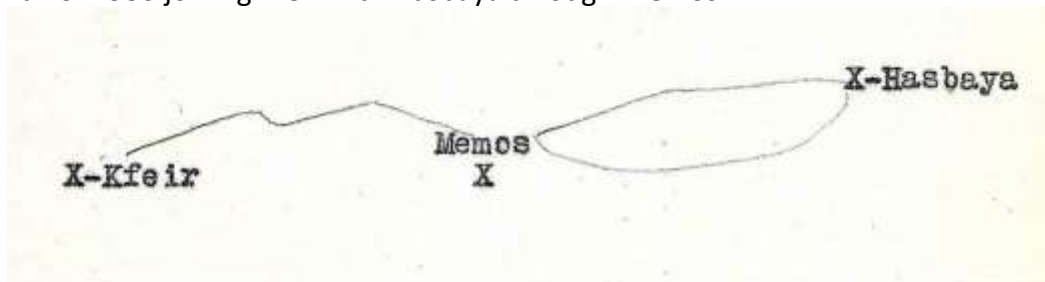
The timing of John's trip to Kfeir was very unfortunate. One month after leaving in September 1929 the stock market crashed; but the family impact would not be immediate. Aunt Thelma was concerned about her responsibilities with her father away and whether she would be able to enter Marshall College after high school. Young Thelma and Mary were very close and regularly corresponded. "Care packages" from home with photographs, reading material, personal items such as hosiery, sewing patterns, and money were greatly welcomed. Letters and packages arriving from America were public knowledge in the village as well as at home.

### **Sisters Thelma (L) and Mary Tweel probably in 1929 upon Mary's high school graduation**

Because of the price of postage, it was not uncommon for letters and items for others to be included in the same envelope or package in either direction.

### **The Brotherhood Begins**

The Milhim Tweels were among the early proponents of the Brotherhood Charitable Society (forerunner of the Kfeirian Foundation). In late 1929, my uncle Sam Tweel joined the Brotherhood. A parallel Brotherhood was being formed in Kfeir (see Appendix, Brotherhood cards). A pre "Women's Lib" Mary Tweel "crashed" those all male meetings in Kfeir to assist since she was from Huntington. The decided priority of the Kfeirian Brotherhood Society was to construct an automobile road from Hasbaya to the village. The trip by donkey or camel was about 2 hours once the mountainous terrain was reach from Beirut. The road construction began in the Fall of 1930 joining Kfeir with Hasbaya through Memos.<sup>28</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Drawing by Mary L. Tweel, 1930



### 1933 Kfeirian Reunion



**Uncle Sam Tweel**



**Aunt Mary Tweel and Great Uncle Fred Tweel**

### The Great Depression

In 1930 the family was beginning to feel the impact of a growing depression and there had been a bank failure in Huntington. Unfortunately, John was intermittently ill, forcing him to leave family functions early. He began to consult doctors who failed to make the definitive diagnosis by which he would succumb.

By March 1930, Huntington was experiencing an increase in robberies. Sam is urged to sell a parcel of family holdings and entertain offers for the family store. By July of that year, responsibilities are weighing heavily on Sam; and the family cannot make a loan payment forcing them to reach out to other Kfeirians for assistance. At the end of 1930, John, requests from Kfeir that Sam and Thelma draw up legal papers to the landlord allowing rent to be reduced due to slow business at the store.

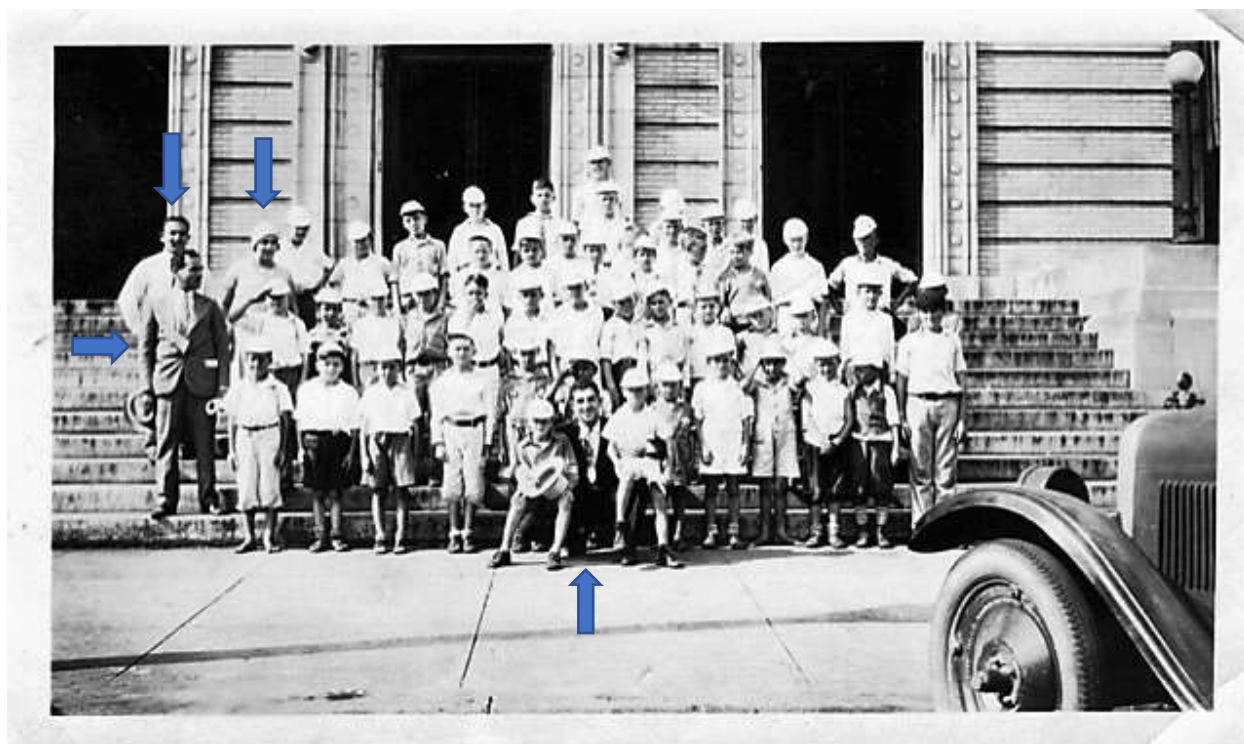
By early 1931 the family was in much debt; and Aunt Mary is asking about any offers for a house on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue as well as the family store. Huntington's Union Bank and Trust had failed and a run was started on the First Huntington. Many letters came to Kfeir from the relatives who lost their money in that bank. Meanwhile, members of the family are seeking other sources of income. As Uncle Nick and others matured, they assumed work responsibilities at the store.

My grandmother Anna would pick wild onions from a nearby vacant lot and sell her crocheted handiwork for milk money. Those many grape vines planted at the Lebanese homes were at least

the start of rice filled warak enab. No doubt there were gardens of squash, eggplant, and other vegetables as well. One wonders if any of those plants no doubt brought from Lebanon prior to the restrictions we have today. I recall one Lebanese man taking out his pocket knife, cutting a branch, and sticking it in the ground where it grew into a large vine. “Starters” for Laban yogurt were passed among the women no doubt with a strain of bacteria from Lebanon giving it a unique flavor from today’s versions.

Other Depression stories abound such as the meatless bread sandwiches (“a piece of bread between two pieces of bread”) that Dad would share with Campbell Hage (Cam’s Ham restaurants). In his book The Syrian Yankee, Salom Rizk discusses the surprise and lack of understanding by Kfeirians about the Great Depression. How could such a wealthy country with plenty of coal in W.Va. and corn in Iowa have hungry Americans with no fuel? Those in poor al-Kfeir would simply share their resources.

One source of income was selling Liberty magazines. Liberty was a very popular weekly publication from 1924 to 1950. Brothers Nick, Charles, and Dad all sold Liberties. The magazine was also famous for their contests. For selling the most magazines in W.Va., my father won a boys rifle which he cherished for life. He told me a story about entering a store on a rainy day to sell his magazines when he was thrown out on his ear, scattering his magazines on the sidewalk. In those days, broadly applied prejudicial slurs such as “wop” were yelled by some to recent immigrant families. The Liberty kids who worked for the “Huntington News Agency”, owned by Fred and Abraham Tweel are shown on the next page.



**Liberty Magazine kids in front of Huntington City Hall c1929 (auto probably dates earlier)  
Adults on far left, bottom "Abe" Tweel, and above, Great Uncle Fred Tweel and wife Lucile  
Front row middle crouching, Uncle Sam Tweel.<sup>29</sup>**

### **The Death of John W. Tweel**

On the evening of April 25<sup>th</sup> 1931, John died in Kfeir of "cerebellar disease" as certified 18 days later by attending physician Dr. Elias Haddad. The death certificate was issued by Kfeirian priest Ibrahim Nasrallah. The American Consular Service report for an American death states graves were not numbered but marked by a tombstone. Burial regulations in Lebanon required that the body not be removed for a period of one year unless embalmed and placed in a lead lined coffin at the time burial. According to Professor Abe Bassett, when he visited the Christian graveyard in Kfeir, there were very few tombstones. Abe said his mother remembers the burial of her mother which was a dug hole with the body wrapped in a sheet and covered with dirt.

---

<sup>29</sup> Photo provided by John A. Tweel

## **The Years Following the Death of John W. Tweel**

The years 1931-33 following John's death were at the height of the Great Depression. Later the 1937 Ohio river flood would add to the misery.<sup>30</sup> In the Appendix is a letter from Mark Marcos describing the impact on the Syrian people in Huntington and their efforts to collect money for the Red Cross.

John's children, widowed Anna, relations and friends would find their way through those hardships through support for each other. They would make significant and memorable contributions to their fellow citizens and their "new" country. What follows are their stories.<sup>31</sup>



**Siblings L-R front, my father William, aunts Thelma Cassis and Mary Tweel Haddad Back, uncles Charles, Samuel, Nicholas, Norman**



**L-R counterclockwise brothers Toufie, Bill, Nick, and cousin Jim. Mid 1920s**

---

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix, 1937 flood letter from Mark Marcos

<sup>31</sup> They are all buried in the John/Anna Tweel cemetery in Woodmere Park, Huntington.

## Samuel “Sam” John



Sometime after John’s death, Uncle Sam and Aunt Emily left Huntington for Bloomington, Indiana where Emily’s family lived. However, they eventually returned to Huntington. As a young man Sam was a salesman for the George Tobacco Company which also sold candy and cigarettes. During WWII, Sgt. Samuel Tweel, the only son sent overseas, fought in the



Battle of the Bulge. After Sam returned home in 1945, he, Emily, and their son lived for a short time at the Tweel home on Trenton Place. Sam became owner of Mayflower Distributors at 1122 3rd Avenue where he wore his signature white coat. He sold the store just before an untimely passing. After Sam died, aunt Emily worked in sales at T. A. Nassar’s department store.<sup>32</sup>

## Thelma



Aunt Thelma married Michael A. Cassis from Toledo, Ohio in 1935. My uncle Mike Cassis told me he traveled at the age of 15 (1920) to America and earned 25 cents a week unloading produce from trucks. In 1926 the city market by the 6<sup>th</sup> street bridge was built. Uncle Mike had a company there, trucking produce from Detroit and Toledo, Ohio. The market closed in 1968. Aunt Thelma and Uncle Mike had 3 sons.

**L, 1927 high school class picture**

**R, 1935 engagement announcement**

---

<sup>32</sup> Photos provided by John A. Tweel



## Mary Louise

ماري لويز الطويل



After Aunt Mary (see Chapter V Remembrances) returned from Kfeir, she was determined to further her education. Mary graduated from Marshall College in 1934 and worked as a teacher in Huntington and Canton (Ohio) where she met and married in 1938 businessman Edward Michael Haddad. Uncle Ed was from Ain Aata, Lebanon. They had a daughter.

In 1944 Mary organized and sponsored the Al-Banat "The Girls" Club. The club was for Lebanese or Syrian girls 12-18 years old. The purpose was "to study Arabic culture ... unite the best of the American and Arabic culture ... friendship, understanding, and service ... and to stand for the best in the home, church, and the community". Members were Elaine Bassett, Jeanette Bassette, Julia Anita Bokair, Mary L. Bokair, Joan George, Emily Mansour, and Rosalie Mansour, and Peggy Tweel.



In 1948, Mary continued her studies at Columbia University; but she would not finish her dissertation until 1991 because of family obligations. She also maintained interest in the Kfeirian Foundation. In 1959 she was the first woman chair of the Kfeirian reunion.



**L-R Front row, maid of honor Aunt Thelma Tweel Cassis, bride Aunt Mary Tweel Haddad, groom Uncle Edward Haddad, and his best man probably brother George. Back row, uncles Charles Tweel, Nick Tweel, Sam Tweel, and 2 unidentified gentlemen. 1938 Trinity Church, Huntington, WV**

## Nicholas “Nick” John



In 1936, Uncle Nick passed the civil service exam and worked in the post office. Capt. Nick Tweel served stateside in WWII. Following the war, Nick, along with other family members and Lebanese in the community, had various business ventures. Some of them were short lived in the early years such as the Mayflower Broadcasting Company (WKYO) 194 at 1124 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Nick became a successful businessman in multiple venues. He married Joy Chapman; and they had 2 daughters. According to his obituary, he was a retired financial analyst for Holiday Inns in Huntington and later Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, eventually returning to Huntington.

## Charles “Toufie”



My uncle Charles owned the Mayflower Lunch on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue next to the old State movie theater, both of which were demolished long ago. His signature drink was a malted shake “you can eat with a spoon”. On May 19, 1940 WCMI radio (located at 625 4<sup>th</sup> avenue) aired directly from the Mayflower; and uncle Norman sang.

Around 1950, he and my uncle Ed Haddad (Aunt Mary’s husband) formed the very successful Yellow Cab Co. [An earlier Yellow Cab Co. had gone defunct in 1937.] Their mother Anna joked about the Yellow Cab Co. and Dreamland swimming pool (of which Nick was a part owner) saying the cab company made money in bad weather and the pool in good weather.

Charles married Lebanese Edna Yarid. They had 2 daughters

and a son.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Photos provided by Patricia Tweel Coddington





**Uncles Ed Haddad (L) and Charles Tweel  
at the Yellow Cab Co. in 1950**



**Taxi in the company shop**

### **William “Bill”**



**1923 L-R, “leader” Bill with baton in R hand, “vocalist”  
Vivian Thabet, and Edward Thabet on “sax”**

My father Bill (see Chapter V Remembrances), with an early interest in music, played the harmonica for classes in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He was given his first accordion in 1932, but struggled despite his proficiency, to profit from his talents during the Depression. With perseverance, he formed the regionally

successful “Bill Tweel and His Men in Blue” (later “Bill Tweel and His Society Orchestra”). Early members included Jim Tweel (Jim’s Steak and Spaghetti House), who played the string bass and

Naseeb Tweel, who played the drums. In 1948, he met my mother at a social event; and she married “the leader of the band”.

When my mother became pregnant with me, my father, who had built a riverfront home in Chesapeake Ohio, sold the house to live in the Tweel home on Trenton Place. She and grandmother Anna became very good friends. Mom learned how to cook Lebanese writing down



her best guestimate of measures since Sitti Anna’s hands were her measuring tools. Dad also worked for the C&O railway as a secretary and court reporter. In the 1950s the big band era died. He entered Marshall College, graduating with both bachelors and masters degrees. He later became a much beloved elementary physical education teacher; but he continued to entertain with his music until his early death in 1983 while performing. At the time, he was working on his doctorate from Pepperdine University.

**Bill at the C&O railway office  
in the late 1940s**

### **Norman “Norm”**



Uncle Norman, the youngest in the family, was a very fit man. Dad told me that in his youth he boxed in the W.Va. State Golden Gloves tournament winning the city championship. Sgt. Norman Tweel was also a WWII veteran. While in service, Norman had the opportunity to spar with the great Joe Louis. Following the war, Norman turned professional.

In the 1950s, Norman became president of the American Cigarette Service Company, a wholesale vending machine company. Uncle Norman was an active member of the Kfeirian Reunion and the Kfeirian Foundation, serving as president of the board of trustees in 1958. Norman also had an artistic side. He was a performer/member of the Huntington Community Players and occasionally wrote poetry. Norman was also a founding proponent of the Holy Spirit Orthodox Church in Huntington.

Norman had a daughter and was married to Gail Patricia (nee Walker) at the time of his death.

**Norman Tweel, late 1940s**

## The Death of Anna Thabit Tweel



In 1950 my grandmother Anna experienced progressive stomach and swallowing symptoms but refused the x-rays recommended by local doctors. In April of that year her family gathered for a special birthday celebration; but less than two months later she would be diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic with cancer. Anna, however, wanted to return to Huntington for what would be only palliative surgery as the disease had spread. She passed that July.

Anna's service was conducted at Trinity Episcopal Church by Reverend Robert Hall; but Orthodox services were also held at the home by Father Nicholas L. Viernon of the recently established St. George Greek Orthodox Church.

### Anna Tweel likely taking her home cooking to relatives around 1948



A John and Anna Tweel Family Cemetery was established in Woodmere Memorial Park cemetery, Huntington. Aunt Mary arranged the exhumation of John's body for reburial next to his Anna. On January 14, 1951, a reburial memorial was held in honor of both grandparents at Klingel Carpenter Mortuary. A stain glass window depicting St. George was placed in Trinity Episcopal Church, Huntington in their honor.



### John/Anna Tweel window in Trinity Episcopal Church and family cemetery monument <sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Photos taken by W.T. Tweel Jr.

## CHAPTER V

### **Life in Kfeir**

A Letter from Mary Louise Tweel

1929

(Edited by William T. Tweel Jr.)

#### **Forward**

In 1929 an enthusiastic 17 year old Mary Louise Tweel accompanied her father John to the village of Kfeir in Lebanon, staying there until after his death in 1931. This was the first time she had been abroad, leaving her mother Anna and siblings behind. It was a trip that she would later describe as "...a crucial experience in my life. It helped me find the self I had been looking for since I was a child." <sup>35</sup>

During that stay she wrote letters to her home in Huntington, W.Va. chronicling her experiences. What follows is an early letter written in English approximately 2 weeks after her arrival to Kfeir. It is my small effort to provide Kfeirians another firsthand account of our cultural history and trust you enjoy reading this as much as I have.

I have minimally edited the document so as to preserve the persona of the author at this less experienced time of her life. This included correcting syntax, spelling, and grammar, as well as repositioning and restructuring some sentences for clarity. I have also provided clarifications/explanations, particularly for persons mentioned (in bold), in both footnotes and within the body of the document. Though only known to the writer, out of respect I have also removed any content I feel she might have not wanted for publication.

William T. Tweel, Jr.

---

<sup>35</sup> Al-Kfeir in America, dissertation by Mary Louise Tweel-Haddad, 1991, pg 13

## The Letter

Kfeir, Hasbaya

Beirut, Syria

[A Monday] November 4, 1929

Dearest Sister and Brothers,

You asked me to tell you about the life and country here. There isn't much here; yet there is plenty. It is quite different [from Huntington, W.Va.]; but I am quite used to it now. I'll try to make it as clear as I can.

Life here is quite simple. This home we live in belongs to **John Metree**.<sup>36</sup> It is situated by the mountain [Mount Hermon]. That is a very good point for it is close to the only place to get water here in Kfeir. If you stand outside in the morning you can see about everybody (girls and women). They bring their jars on their shoulders, fill them from the fountain, and then take them back home.

Half of the population, maybe more, is Druse. The entire population is 1100. The Druse women always keep their faces covered except for their nose and eyes. Of course, their dresses are immensely long. When they sit on the floor their dresses cover their feet. They sit with their legs crossed under them. By habit they leave their shoes in the hall before entering the room. Some wear hose; and some don't. Most of the men don't.

Some of the homes have couches, or rather benches, along 2 or 3 walls. There are comforts [comforter or quilt] on the floor for the women, while the men sit on the benches. Most homes have 2 rooms, one for sleep and the other for cooking. Some have just 1 room. This one has 3 and a small hall. **Cleo Bassett's** <sup>37</sup> home here is the best I've seen. There are 6 [? Appears to be a 6] large rooms in that house and a dining room too. A dining room means a room which has a table and chairs. That doesn't mean there aren't other things there. We have no high table. It has short legs. We must sit on stools (they call them chairs here) or on a pillow or the floor. Homes are quite barren. Plain grass rugs are used for carpets in most homes.

We have carpets in the living room and in the other (bed) room. I just say that really all the rooms are also bedrooms.

---

<sup>36</sup>Hannah Hawarny 1872-1950. According to Arreph El-Khoury, Hannah left the U.S. and returned to Kfeir, building a house near the public square. He then married a girl from Marj'Ayoum (Attar Massad 1893-1983) and left his home returning to the U.S. Hannah's sister Hanneh Hawarny lived in that Hawarny house. She later married Mary's grandfather Milhim Taweel; and they lived in the Hawarny house for the remainder of their lives.

<sup>37</sup> Probably Khalil "Cleo" Assad Bassett 1903-1983 who married Emily N. Bassett 1910-1974. This may have been the family home of his father Assad Bassett who married Regina Tweel.



There are no such things as beds here. You sleep on one comfort. We sleep on 2 (Dad and I). The very thick and heavy comforts are mattresses to them; and the light ones are for cover. When you make the beds you merely fold the comfort in half, put them along one side of the wall, pull the cloth meant for a curtain, and presto you have your empty room again. Of course, there are many pillows on the comforts. These can be used for chairs, arms of chairs, and back rests. When I sit on the floor, I surround myself with pillows.

Then there is no such thing as a bathroom around here anyplace. A bathroom is any place where nobody is looking. There is a woodshed beneath our porch which has inside a box used for a toilet. When we came we asked about such a thing [privy]. It was of no use being covered with dirt and cobwebs. This shed has a key. By the way keys are long, within an inch of this [writing] tablet; and the key parts are about 2 inches [long].

Means of transportation are legs and donkeys. Camels are used for heavy loads. I have learned to know one camel. I see it quite often. It is the one we hired when we arrived.<sup>38</sup> It carried both of our trunks, 2 large boxes the size of trunks, and 3 chairs (we bought them in Beirut-straight wooden ones). I felt sorry for it [the camel]. You asked me if I had ridden a donkey yet. Yes, when we arrived the automobile brought us so far then we hired donkeys to carry the load. There was a moon that night. About 9 pm we heard mountain calls.<sup>39</sup> **Abe Nassar**<sup>40</sup> had left us to go call help and assistance. [] At last after 2 hours they arrived where we were. It was cold too, believe me. Well, I got on a donkey. The brother of **Nasef Bassett**<sup>41</sup> walked beside me to make the donkey move and hold on to me for a while. I was rather shaky; but then I could hold on. The mountain was very steep. For 2 hours and a half we were on the way. Dad walked. There were other men he knew who came to meet him. They walked together. The donkey moves oh so slow. Well when we reached the top, we could hear people shouting, rushing along to meet us. When we got here at the house it was packed. I have never seen so many relatives in all my life. It was 11:30 pm. That is late for them. It gets dark around 5:30 here. People go to sleep about 8:30. I can't sleep though until about 9:30. Imagine sleeping that early. It was always the opposite at home.

Any way as I was saying they were all relatives. There was mother's sister<sup>42</sup>, my grandmother, **John Metree's sister** [Hanneh Hawarny Taweel], and others. I saw **Phillip Bassett**<sup>43</sup> in the hall standing. I was so happy to see him I almost wept. I know it was because I knew him. I felt the same about **Joe Kassab**<sup>44</sup>. Well, I couldn't stay thrilled very long. My next problem was to trying to answer 10 questions at a time instead of 100. Here I was in a room full of people I didn't know except for Phillip and Mr. Kassab. I didn't see till Sunday night we arrived Thursday, people with bare feet wearing baggy pants ask mother about them. Most young fellows wear a fez and many wear the Arab head dress, a white scarf with heavy black bands. You know how they dress in the movies. I always think of Behind That Curtain.<sup>45</sup> Remember how we all got the giggles. To get back (I need somebody to just push me when I get off the subject), here I am sitting among people with their faces covered heads covered Christians well you don't know and cant

---

<sup>38</sup> Beirut is ~70 miles from Kfeir by the shortest (not presently fastest) and likely old route

<sup>39</sup> With no telephones voice calling was the only means of communication within the suitable distance

<sup>40</sup> Not identified on the Kfeirian tree

<sup>41</sup> Not identified on the Kfeirian tree

<sup>42</sup> Katrina Thabit (Mrs. Sleyman Thabit) 1872-1950. Katrina never immigrated to the U.S.

<sup>43</sup> Probably Phillip Bassett 1900-1992 who married Josephine Peslis 1917-2007

<sup>44</sup> A Joseph Kassab appears on the Kfeirian tree

<sup>45</sup> A 1929 American Charlie Chan mystery movie with sound and an Iranian desert setting

know until you experience yourself the feeling that I had. I had seen sights like this in Istanbul and Algiers but never thought the Kfeir was the same. There are a few here who wear the European attire. Some of the young fellows and men who have been to America and came back do. Frankly you can wear anything here and get by with it.

There are no such things as [city] blocks here; but Mr. Kassab lives about that distance from here if you count the turn and curves. Well one morning he came here in his flannel nightgown to invite us to dinner. I retired for I remembered the old adage that children must be seen and not heard. People ask Dad why he doesn't go around in his bathrobe.

There are no such thing as stores here. You have to wait until people come from Hasbaya with their wares. There are a couple of shoemakers here. **Raifa Hanna's brother**<sup>46</sup> makes shoes. You see everything is made by hand. I may have a pair of slippers made. I need some thing I can walk in. This place has all the stones in it that everyplace else got rid of. There isn't a smooth place here to walk. To most Kfeirians I seem like a trapeze walker for I am able to walk on high heels. That's a miracle to the old folks and some of the young. Most young fellows have been to Beirut and have seen a modern girl. **Toufik Facoury**<sup>47</sup> is a carpenter here. That is **Nobiba's brother**.<sup>48</sup>

Another thing, strangers and relatives alike seem to have the idea that whoever comes from America brings gifts for the entire Kfeir- **George A. Thabet's mother**<sup>49</sup> for one. Do you know Joe Kassab is still giving things and he's been back several years. Such is the custom.

I've seen gypsies around here. When gypsies find out Americans are in town, they go there to play and sing. You'd think you wouldn't have to give them something; but don't fool yourself, you most certainly do. Most will take food; but one would take nothing but money.

Right now most of the people are busy making arak (whiskey) or picking olives.<sup>50</sup> We haven't started picking our olives yet. Yes, Dad and I are going to help Grandfather and mother so we can finish sooner.

All of the places we've been invited to for dinner, we've had arak.<sup>51</sup> It isn't so bad at all. It is the real stuff. They make it themselves. I only drink one glass so don't get nervous.

Let me tell you about their dinners. At first you drink Arak and what goes with it, salted things or tomatoes. We talk or sing, drink coffee without sugar for arak, smoke nargileh [**Turkish water pipe**] or cigarettes. No, I don't do that [**smoke cigarettes**]. They offer it to me though. Isn't that funny. They must think I'm really modern. I might really fool them and smoke one of them sometime.

Well in about an hour or two you eat your dinner. You then take your seat and you are served coffee again. Then if they wish, whatever else they want. Their discussions are usually about wishing they could go to America and about olives, arak, money, etc.

---

<sup>46</sup> Raifa Hanna not found on Kfeirian tree

<sup>47</sup> Probably Toufic J, Fakhoury

<sup>48</sup> Possibly Nahia Fakhoury 1904-1990, Toufic's sister

<sup>49</sup> Probably George Albert Thabet 1884-1995 who married Amaline Thabet 1886-1950. His mother was Alrecksa Berxia Jebran (Gibran) who married Deeb "Tom" "Albert" Thabet who died in 1971

<sup>50</sup> Olives picked late in the season were allowed to ripen fully thus producing more olive oil

<sup>51</sup> A grape based distilled anise flavored drink of high potency

When you leave you can borrow an oil lamp, if you didn't bring your own, or a flashlight to see your way home. It is pitch dark when there is no moon. I'm sorry I didn't follow mother's advice about a flashlight. I am going to get one the first chance I get or the first place I see one.

Phillip and Abe go bird shooting here. They've brought me birds lots of times. Sweet of them isn't it? I went with Phillip once and he shot 9 birds in 10 shots. I practiced on a target. He says I'm a sweet marksman. The next time I'm going bird shooting too. I don't know. I may get a gun later. You see there is nothing to do here and no place to go. You've got to do something to amuse yourself.

I've got a little ironing to do and I dread it. You must put fire in the iron. It is quite large and inconvenient to handle; and I have no ironing board. I suppose I can manage some way or another.

The teacher here goes pigeon hunting on Friday (no school then). He sent me one [a bird] once and promised us a pigeon dinner some evening. **Romes Ramey**<sup>52</sup> sent me birds once too.

Before I arrived, the fellows were all planning to go to America on my citizenship. When a fellow talks to me I hear hints, such as if there was a way I'd go to America [with them]. Is it true a girl can take a fellow from here? I just want to know.

Well this book will hold no more. Please give my love to all who ask about me. Kiss mother and each other for me. Give her the enclosed letter.<sup>53</sup> Please write often and tell me how she is. If you intend at any time to send anything let me know because I may want you to send something of mine from home.<sup>54</sup> Sam, the dear Lord will repay you for your kindness. It's a job to do what you're doing.<sup>55</sup>

Your loving sister,

Mary Louise

---

<sup>52</sup> Not identifiable on the Kfeirian tree

<sup>53</sup> Because of the price of stamps for international mail, letters to others were sometimes enclosed within a single letter

<sup>54</sup> Packages from abroad often contained items to be distributed to others thus minimizing shipping costs

<sup>55</sup> Samuel J. Tweel 1908-1964, married and the oldest sibling, was left responsible for the Tweel confectionary store while his father was abroad



CHAPTER VI

**REMEMBRANCES**

“Remembering is Meeting” <sup>56</sup>

Gibran

---

<sup>56</sup> Sand and Foam by Kahlil Gibran

Remembering  
**Mary Louise Tweel Haddad**

1912-2000

by

William T. Tweel Jr.



My aunt Mary Louise Tweel Haddad was born in Huntington, West Virginia to parents John William Tweel and Anna Thabit Tweel from the village Al-Kfeir, Hasbaya, Lebanon. Her father first immigrated to the United States with his father Milhim (William) Taweel in 1901, returning to Kfeir in 1903. In 1905 John married my grandmother Anna, returning with her to America in 1905. Milhim remained in Kfeir.

In 1929, a young and enthusiastic Mary Tweel traveled to Kfeir with her father who had not seen Milhim in those 24 years. Having never experienced Lebanon and village life first hand, the journey would be a culturally broadening life experience that would motivate and greatly influence her career in education.

During that time in Lebanon, Mary deferred the culturally expected early marriage, determined to pursue a college degree after returning home. Unfortunately, the stay extended well beyond her expectation, complicated by an ailing father. But this also gave Mary time to learn as much as she could about middle eastern life, traveling to other villages, and even staying awhile in Damascus with relatives. She took the opportunity to brush up on her French, study written Arabic, and teach English classes there. She would eventually become expert in Arabic, French, and Spanish. Then tragically in 1931, my grandfather died in Kfeir.

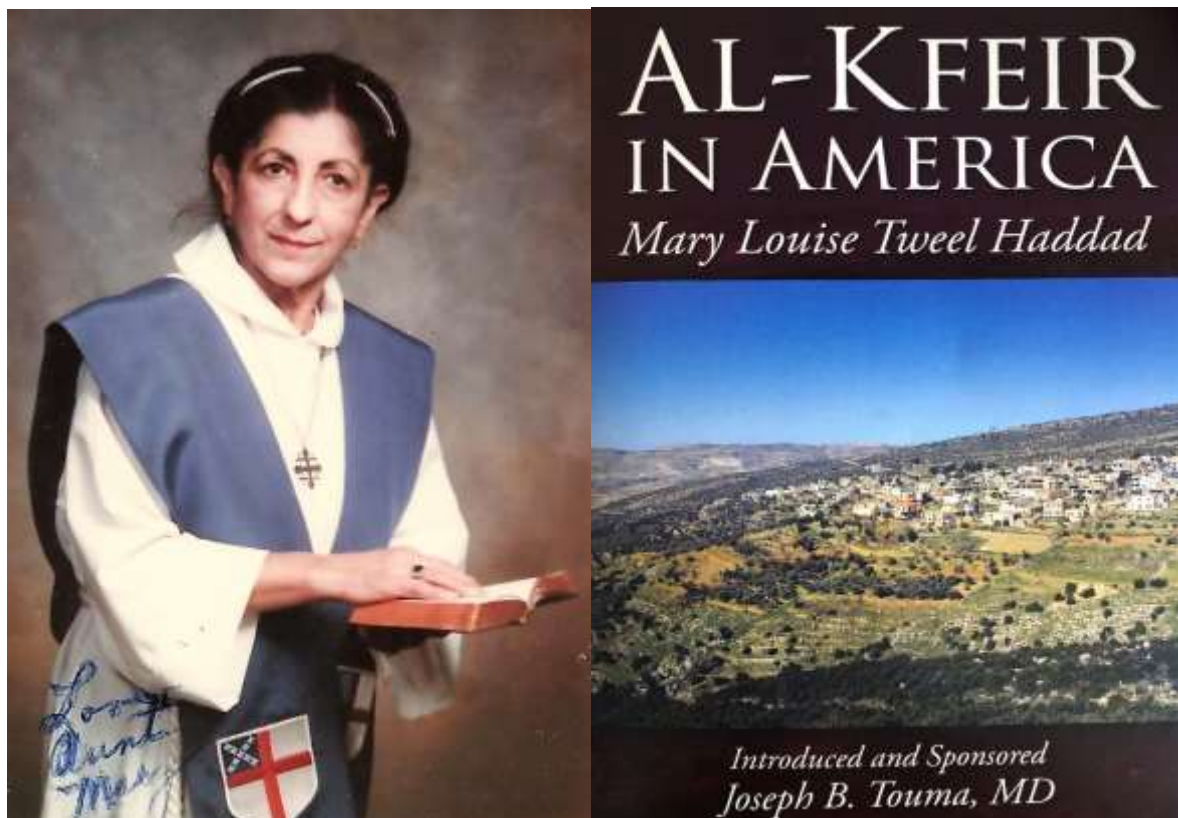
When Mary returned home, she entered Marshall Teachers College (now University) graduating in August 1934 with a Bachelor of Arts in education. She took teaching positions at Huntington High School and in Canton, Ohio. In 1938 she married a Lebanese man, Edward Michael Haddad, from Canton, Ohio. They were later blessed in 1942 with a child.

Even though Mary worked as a teacher and had the usual parental responsibilities, she was still determined to continued her education. In 1945 she earned her Masters of Arts in education at Marshall. But that would not end her educational pursuits for she was a lifelong learner. Traveling to New York City in 1948, staying at the multicultural International House, she continued studies at the University of Havana, New York University, and Columbia Teachers College. Unfortunately, her studies were interrupted in 1950 when my grandmother Anna became terminally ill.

It would be 41 years later when Mary, at age 79, and then the oldest Columbia College doctoral candidate, would defend her dissertation **"Al-Kfeir in America"** which was published posthumously in 2013.

In her career, Mary served as a consultant on middle-eastern culture co-authoring a Columbia University handbook for foreign students. She also assisted with the protocol for King ibn Saud's visit to the U.S. during the Nixon administration.

On a final note, Mary was a very religious person. In 1982, Mary was ordained into the Episcopal Order of Jerusalem. Respectful of her middle eastern roots, she was also a supporter of the Holy Spirit Orthodox Church established in Huntington in 1969.



Remembering  
**William “Bill” Theodore Tweel Sr.**

1920-1983

by

William T. Tweel Jr.



My father “Bill” was born in Huntington, West Virginia to parents John William and Anna Thabit Tweel, immigrants from the village Al-Kfeir, Hasbaya, Lebanon. Dad was a life-long resident of Huntington and “extrovert extraordinaire” who was involved in many community venues. But he was best known for his devotion to music, entertaining thousands young and old, and his 23 year career as an educator in the Cabell County Schools. Upon his untimely death in 1983, the Council of the City of Huntington, Cabell and Wayne Counties passed a Memorial Resolution recognizing his devotion and contributions to the community.

## MUSICIAN AND ENTERTAINER



Dad had a proclivity for music at an early age singing and playing the harmonica before each class at Buffington Elementary. In 1932, he received his first of many piano accordions, rapidly excelling to become a teacher Kenny and Zwick music companies. Unfortunately, in the middle 1930s solo work was not profitable. In 1938, Jim Tweel (Jim's Steak and Spaghetti House) was putting in long hours at his dairy bar. In his few hours off, he learned to play the string bass. Jim and Dad formed a strolling duet that received public attention. But competition was keen; and Dad decided to form a band known as the "Bill Tweel and His Men in Blue Society Orchestra". Peter Marshall (then Peter Lacock) was the vocalist. Years later in his career, Peter continued to mention that early band as recently in 2009 in the PBS special "The Big Band Years".

Jim Tweel continued to play the bass and his nephew Naseeb Tweel played the drums. Thanks to the assistance of "Happy Hauck" Hayes at the renowned Club Continental, Dad made changes. The group was renamed "Bill Tweel and His Society Orchestra". The new band was a hit and became widely known in the mid-Atlantic area. In 1948, my mother met Dad at a social event; and she married "the leader of the band". Interestingly, my mother played the accordion at a recital as a young girl and also played the piano. In the 1950s the big band era started to disappear. Dad decided to further his education at Marshall thus starting another career. But his first love was always music, dying while performing with his trio.

Dad outlined his musical career in a graduate paper at Marshall in 1978; and earlier in 1957 he wrote a history of symphonic orchestra music in Huntington. In 1977, he donated his big band arrangements to the Marshall music department.

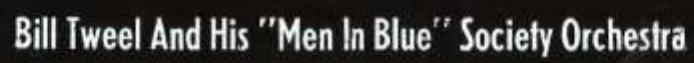
Copyrighted musical compositions to his credit are:

1944 Think of Me 1971

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a yellow dress and a flower in her hair, is holding a large orange book titled "The Big Book of Love". The book features a picture of a couple. She is looking down at the book.

By: (Name)  
 Artist:  
 "Music After 70"  
 Date:

Early (1980s)  
 (1980s)  
 Early (1980s)  
 (1980s)



46





BILL TWEEL and his SOCIETY ORCHESTRA



Bill Tweel with his patriotic Uncle Sam accordion

## EDUCATOR AND CHAMPION



Dad was always fond of sports. He was perhaps best known for his table tennis. As a USTTA member he deplored the term “ping pong”. His career credits are:

- Huntington city championship 1933
- Five times WV Open champion. In 1954, he took 4 state championships and completed 61 straight matches without a loss
- In 1953, he ranked 17th in the U.S. and was a contestant in the Canadian International tournament, Toronto
- In 1953, he led the Marshall College team (ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation) against Ohio State (national champions)

**Campbell Hage (L) of Cam's Ham Fame and Bill Tweel winning the W.Va. Men's Doubles, 1936**



**Bill Tweel 5<sup>th</sup> From Left**

Dad was also an excellent tennis player and swimmer. Beside his band engagements at Dreamland Pool, he was a lifeguard there. At Marshall he won first place medals in 8 different sports.

After graduating from Marshall Teachers College with a B.A. and then M.A. degree, he later began teaching. Dad at one time taught a variety of subjects at almost every school in Cabell county and Lawrence county. There was still a one room rural school house with a wood burning stove that the students had to help stock with wood. He worked with the school board to obtain a modern furnace for that school.

Dad later specialized in elementary physical education. His final teaching years were at Barboursville Elementary which won Presidential Awards for Physical Fitness 3 years in a row. Barboursville was designated as one of only 41 U.S. schools as a demonstration center by the President's Council on Physical fitness as noted in the February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1972 Congressional Record.



**Bill Tweel first on Left next to Governor Arch Moore. Source and other names unknown. 1972.**

Dad incorporated music into the P.E. curriculum and was a proponent of activities in which every child could participate regardless of ability. He advocated lifetime sports that people could adjust the activity level as they aged.



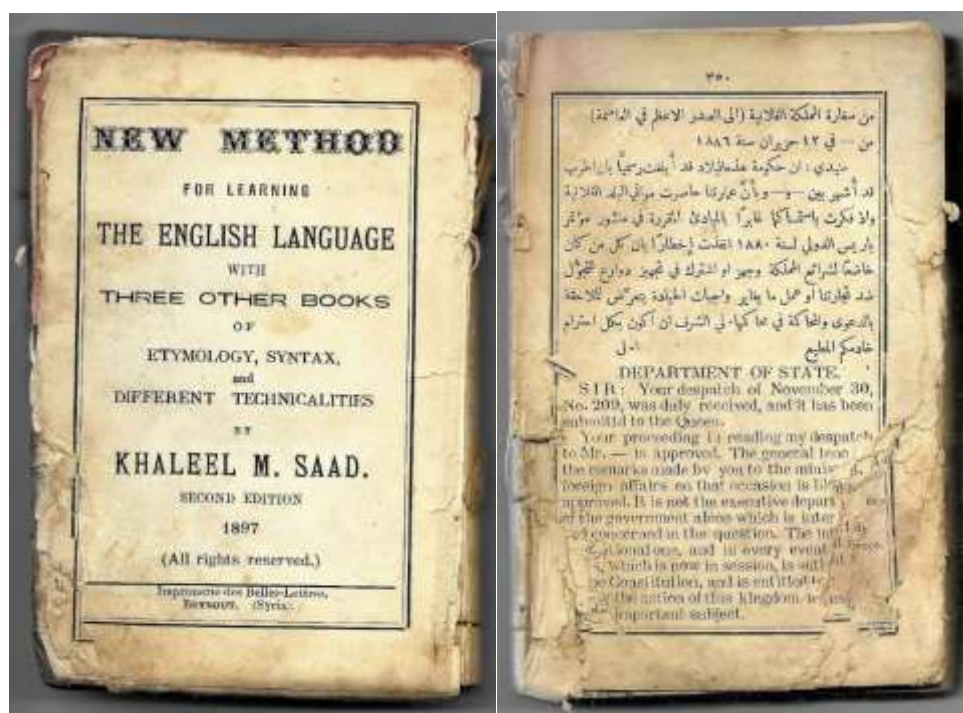


**Herald Dispatch May 9, 1977**

In 1967, Dad created the game **Half-Moon “Game of the Space Age”**, a dribbling ball game on a basketball court. 1973 he developed the **Balloon Balance** (copyright 1973) where students balanced on their heads large meterological size balloons. In the seventies he traveled to Germany where he discovered and brought to the U.S. the “rhoenrad”, a giant open wheel rolled by a student positioned inside. In 1972 the W.Va. School Journal published his article “Jesus the Physical Educator”. At the time of his death, he was working on his doctorate from Pepperdine University.

## APPENDIX

### 1897 English language book used by John William Tweel



Drawings probably by John William Tweel, with names of Syrians in W.Va.: George Jaber in North Fork and Sam Allie in Mahen. Circa very early 1900s.



1926 Kfeirian schoolbook, front and back

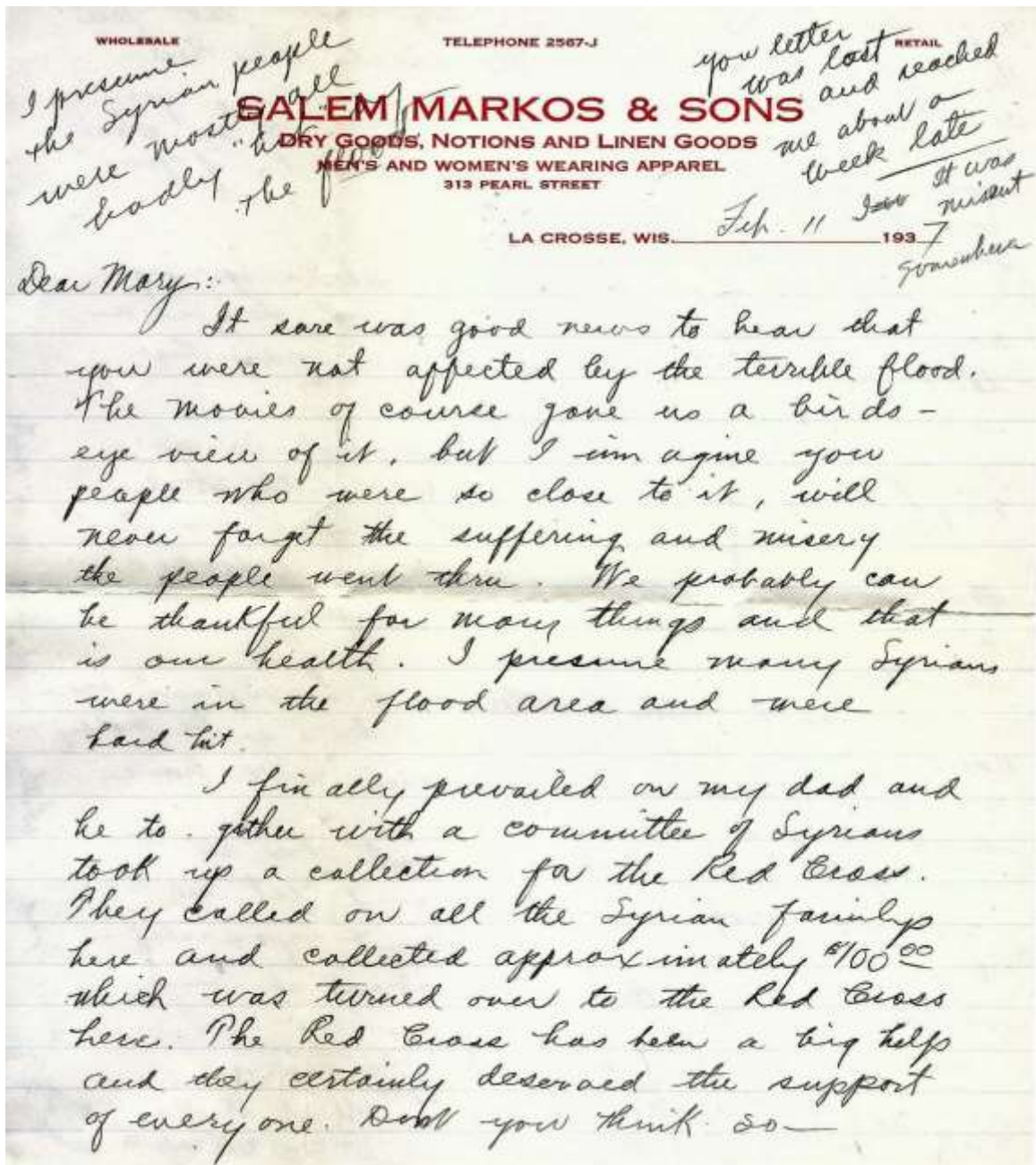




1930 Al-Kfeir Brotherhood Society cards, front and reverse



1937 Flood Letter (Mark Marcos)



1937 Letter re: emmigration restrictions and murder of an American Consul General (from Ayoub abu Nasser, kfeir)

Oct 24/37

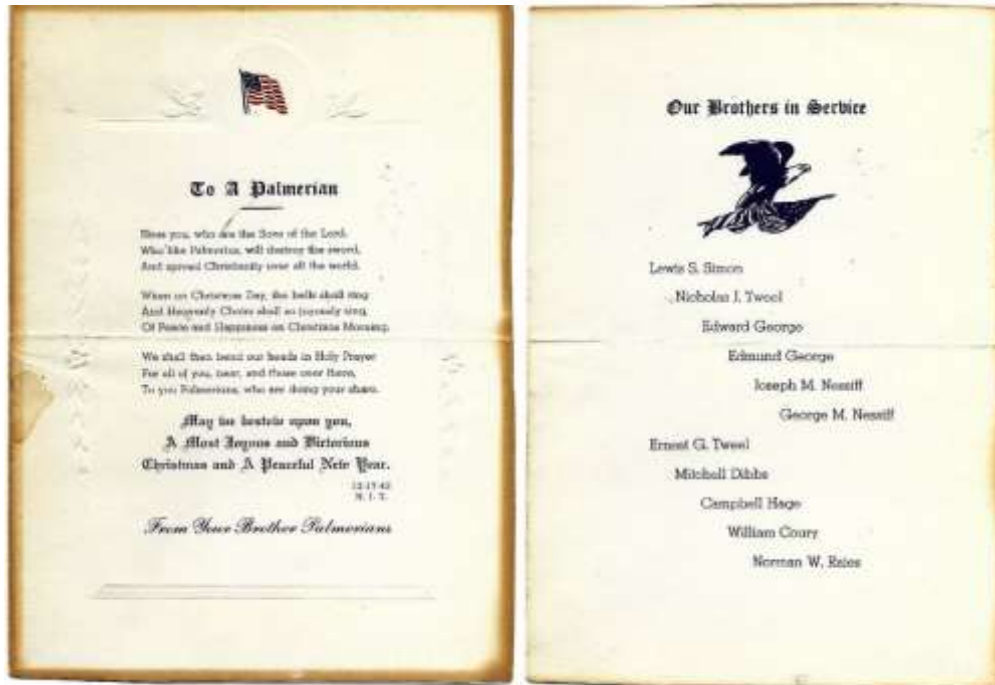
Dear Mary

Just a few lines to let you know that I am feeling fine and hope you are the same. Having not written to you for a long while which is not due to any forgetfulness, but to negligence on my part, therefore, I promise you that henceforth I will write you continually, provided that on the other hand I will hear from you. How can I forget you Mary and I had spent my last two years in America among the Huntingtonians whom I still recall and wish that the time would reiterate itself, so that I may be amongst you again and see you once more, as there is nothing dearer to my heart than being among

2

my relatives and friends. It does certainly break my heart, when I think that I have to remain in Syria for unknown time, as I can not at present time return to the States on account of the divergent views that ~~exist~~ exist between my and the American Consul at Beirut, who after promising to let me sail, changes his position and refused to let me return. I would pay a big amount of money in order to be able to do so, but, at present time, seems impossible of accomplishment, therefore, I must wait and wait for unlimited time and not until the Omnipotent God clears the way for me and throws aside all rejection offered by the American

## 1942 Palmerian Society Christmas Card





Syrian hand carved wooden Greek orthodox holy altar bread press (top) and maamoul mold (bottom). Symbols are IC (Jesus), XC (Christ), and NIKA (conquer). Maamoul mold was meant to stand up on the flat end. The hole for hanging was probably added later.<sup>57</sup>



---

<sup>57</sup> May have belonged to Anna Tweel and passed along to my mother. Photo provided by Sarah Tweel-Gomez