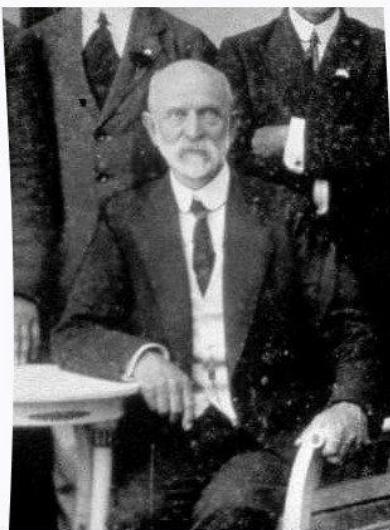




Humans of AFS

Founder of AFS: Dr. John Henry House



Humans of AFS

Dr. John Henry House is still here. His spirit, his aspirations, his vision, his love for people, and his urge to give and educate are rooted in the soil and found under every stone at the American Farm School. His emblematic and charismatic personality has decisively contributed not only to the founding of the School but also to its establishment in the wider region as one of the best educational institutions.

People who had met him personally said that "He was a man of peace, creation and teaching. He always spoke jokingly about the past and among his friends were Metropolitans and priests of the Orthodox Church, Roman Catholics and Muslims."

He was born on Thursday 29 May 1845 in the small town of Painesville, located in northeastern Ohio. He graduated from the Western Reserve University in 1868 and in 1871 he received his degree in Theology from the Union Theological Seminary. A year later, on September 27, at the age of 27, he married Susan Adeline Beers, who was five years younger. They were still newlyweds when they left the US and came to the Balkans as part of a mission.

Dr. John Henry House and his wife settled in Thessaloniki in 1902 from Bulgaria where they had served as missionaries for 30 years. He was always working, building, cultivating, and generally did whatever was needed to help the poverty-stricken

Balkan region.

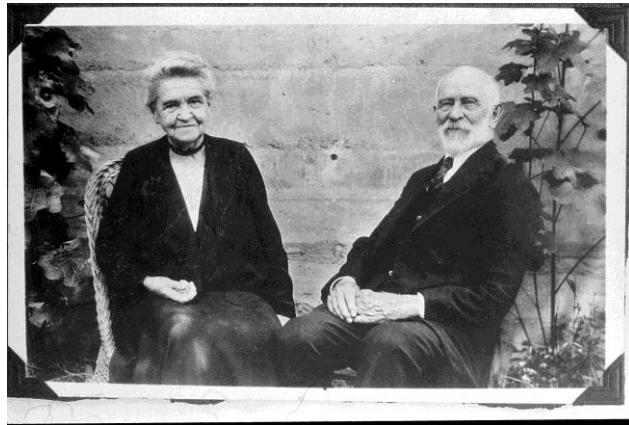
He was 65 years old when he found the area in Central Macedonia to build the Farm School of his dreams. The Congregationalist Church did not support his efforts, so he resigned from his position and started a new life. He focused on a school with ten children who had survived a massacre at a Monastery. He found volunteer teachers: a builder, a carpenter, a tailor and a shoemaker who were willing to teach their art in exchange for learning about priesthood. They all stayed in a hut.

Dr. House never questioned his venture, but he often had to persuade others. Teachers who have their own ideas about what education is are not always easy to convince; he did not know how his faith would shatter the waters. He strongly believed that if life conditions in the Balkans improved, it would lead to maintaining peace in the region.

Dr. and Mrs. House had seven children, grandchildren, and were lucky to even see great grandchildren. As the children grew up, one after the other returned to the US to study, which made it impossible for the whole family to be together.

Even at an old age he never stopped working. He would walk around the School - even if he was inappropriately dressed, wearing his suit and vest with the golden "key" Phi Beta Kappa (a symbol given to honor roll students at the graduation ceremony) hanged on his chest, a white collar and a soft hat – and would saw trees or farm using a plow. He passed away on April 19, 1936, leaving behind a huge legacy that forever marked the course of the American Farm School.

Angelos Angelidis



AFS Donor: Dimitris Vlachos (class of 1954)

"My dear children today I graduate with you again, making my dream come true since 1954: one day I come back and offer back what kindly I was given."

This was the beginning of his speech by the graduate of the School Dimitris Vlachos when, a few years ago, he was invited to attend the Graduation Ceremony of the Secondary Program. Recently, Mr. Vlachos has acquired another property, that of the donor. Together with his wife Lydia, he offered a generous donation for shaping the surrounding area of the School Church and continues to contribute to the educational mission of the institution in a variety of ways.

Mr. Vlachos came to the School from Velvento, a small village near Kozani, in 1950. Four years later, he graduated with four other students - one of whom was Mr. Pantelis Panteliadis, a successful entrepreneur and school curator on years.



Humans of AFS

As a student, he worked as an assistant at various shops in the city, and - with the help of his professors - he wrote to various American educational institutions trying to find study opportunities. He managed to be admitted to a Texas College with a Fulbright Scholarship for a year. During this time he improved his English and earned a scholarship from the Arizona State University (ASU) for agricultural studies specializing in crop production. But he did not stop there. At the same time, he found work in a botanical garden of the desert and managed to cover the costs of boarding and feeding.

He graduated from the ASU with a degree in agriculture and languages. Over the next 7 years, he has been working on the electronics and the next 7, as a professor of agronomy and Spanish. With the money he raised he bought land in Arizona, he started his own landscape architecture business and today - along with his son - they are supplying their products to large stores in Southwestern America.

Mr. Vlachos recounts the years at the School as the years of his personal paradise. He says this school is different from everything else. His students acquire strong bases in science, technology and practice. But above all, they learn to appreciate the earth and respect their fellow human beings. His course had many challenges and required hard work. He never feared, though, because the School taught him that.

At the end of his trip from Velvento to Arizona, he feels he has earned a lot. Most important of all, experiences. This is also what he tells to his sons up to this day, that all he can promise is experience. In them, everyone adds his personal value. For him, his timeless value remains the American Farm School.

Athena Peristeropoulou

Retired AFS Employee: Tasos Apostolidis



For 36 years Mr. Tasos Apostolidis painted with his exuberant and emblematic personality the halls, the offices, the streets and the memories of the people who collaborated with him at the School.

From the position of Vice President and Director of Secondary Education Programs, he generously offered his charismatic attributes to the School from 1979 to 2015 when he retired. A successful scriptwriter of 40 books (mostly comics), with excellent communication skills and memorable sense of humor, he left his mark on the institution's history.

He changed the School and the School changed him. The effect of the School on his personality as he admits was multifaceted and multifarious: "Living in such an environment and educating young people helps you grow both as a scientist and as a person. And because teachers learn too, the biggest lesson I learned is that you get what you give. Whether it is a project, love, respect or dedication."

His memories from his time at the School are endless. He will forever remember the visit of his friend and well-known music composer Mikis Theodorakis in the winter of 1992. He distinctly remembers Miki tearing up as the students welcomed him on the stairs of Princeton Hall singing one of his songs, while groups of teachers and workers were humming coming out from the surrounding streets and heading slowly towards the building.

Mr. Tasos Apostolidis speaks fondly of many of his colleagues but he does not forget Kostas Paschaloudis, head of the maintenance department, who, with his calm and courtesy, showed him the most effective road to creation:

composure and optimism. He also vividly remembers working with teacher Vouli Proussalis, who taught him the joy of volunteering, true altruism and especially respect for all those who had offered their service to the School. Litsas the Director, Andreas the agronomist, Mr. Giorgos the gardener and so many others!

For Tasos Apostolidis, the American Farm School stands out for many reasons, but after 36 years, he reminds us that - above all - the School helps us become better students, better teachers and better people.

Elli Konstantinou

AFS Employee: Stergios Kambouris



Humans of AFS

With a constant smile on his face and always willing to help you, Mr. Stergios Kambouris has been a teacher of the High School Practical Training Program for more than 18 years and in charge of the Environmental Program for preschool and primary education students since 2011.

An AFS graduate himself, he was never able nor did he desire to leave the American Farm School. His course of life was “inevitable” as he puts it and he is eternally grateful for that. Being close to nature and working with young minds is the reason he continues to love his job like he did on the first day.

The School has shaped him on both a personal and a professional level. As a student he was taught to love the environment and work methodically, while, as an employee, he learned how to cooperate and selflessly give to others.

His memories are countless and most of them were created at the residence halls. He made friends through school trips, hikes and other activities – friendships that still last – and developed a strong bond with his teachers.

Stergios Kambouris is greatly appreciated by colleagues and students. A testimony to that was the “Employee of the Year” award he received by the President in 2017. Today, he continues to serve the American Farm School with all his will.

Zoe Vergou

AFS Alumna: Eleni Gkini (class of 2017)

Eleni Gkini is one of the successful alumni of the School's recent history. An AFS High School graduate, she studied on a full scholarship through the "President's Scholarships" program. Raised in Thessaloniki, her dream was to study abroad and she succeeded! For more than a year now, she has been living in the United States where she studies Neurobiology at Brown University on a full scholarship. She has also been working at the University's Advancement Office, gaining experience and valuable knowledge.

We met her on campus during her summer vacation and we talked about her life as an American Farm School student. As the conversation went on, Eleni became more and more emotional. The stories about her life here are countless and all of them defined her as a person. As a student she couldn't grasp the full meaning of the institution's vision and mission. She realized it the day she had to leave campus and become an adult. She felt like losing her "home". The teachers were her parents, guiding her and showing her the way to work methodically and within a team. "You won't go far if you move alone", Mr. Malakozis, her Math teacher, told her one day and it is something she reminds herself every day. She was an honor roll student before she came to the School but, here, she learned to be humble and strong-minded at the same time. Being a volunteer at School's events and other occasions, broaden her horizons and changed her perspective, while practical training taught her the value of manual work.



ΕΛΕΝΗ ΓΚΙΝΗ

As an adult, she dreams of having a fulfilling job that she loves. As an Alumna, she is determined to always return and give back to the School.

Zoe Vergou



Group for Student Services (GSS): Dora Papastefanou



Humans of AFS

A typewriter was the reason Ms. Dora Papastefanou was introduced to the American Farm School. She was widely respected as a staff member and continues to offer her services to the School through her volunteer work as a member of the Group for Student Services (GSS).

When the School's management decided, 34 years ago, that students should be taking extra typewriting lessons, Ms. Papastefanou was the right teacher to ask. The recommendation came through teacher Vouli Proussali, who was the aunt of her husband. For a whole year, the students were attending a typewriting class on Fridays and Saturdays. A year later, she started teaching on a regular basis as the class was incorporated to the curriculum.

As a staff member, she met many people that changed her core. "I got to know a wonderful School, where children learned things that not taught in other schools, such as respect for life and property, skills and entrepreneurship", she says.

She has many stories to share but she can't help but mention the story of a young couple who – back in the day – got suspended by the Resident Life Coordinator due to inappropriate behavior and returned to the School as a married couple years later. She also remembers the visit of a German education inspector who praised the School as a unique institution worldwide.

She speaks fondly of the people she closely worked with like Mrs. Joan Ryding Beltes and Vouli Proussali and she still considers the American Farm School "a School of excellence."

Angelos Angelidis

History trivia

A Week of Loss, Love & Labor

Thessaloniki 20th of April 1916

“The telegram that was sent to America on Tuesday refers to the simple fact of the fire incident that destroyed our beautiful building”

This is how Susan Adeleine Beers, spouse of the founder of the school Dr. John Henry House, begins her letter describing the fire that destroyed James Hall. Five days earlier, on the 15th of April, a worker was repairing the ceiling of the building. The charcoal he was carrying to melt some irons, combined with the stormy winds, left - within an hour - nothing but the building foundations. Without any audiovisual footage it's difficult for someone to realize, these days, the proportions of a disaster as such. Just like Brenda Marder notes on the *Earth caretakers*, ‘without James Hall the School was disabled’ (p.113).

The week that followed is summarized by Beers in three words: loss, love and labor. The building might had been gone along with students' and employees' personal belongings but her testimony credits all those who helped: students, staff, soldiers from neighboring allied troops, foreign missions.

Six months later, James Hall was ready to accept students and personnel as the school year begun.

Damiana Koutsomiha