

American Philhellene, Jonathan Peckam Miller

By Julius Bourodimos

A famous American Philhellene was born in Randolph, Vermont, in 1797 and lived a consequential life. This person was Jonathan Peckam Miller, one of the most important American Philhellenes during Greece's fight for independence from the Ottoman-Turkish Empire. As a young boy coming from a rural family, he trained in the US Army during the time of the War of 1812. He officially joined the US Army in 1817 and later studied at The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College in Burlington, Vermont.

The Greek War for Independence became worldwide news in the early 1820s, and many people like Miller personally sympathized with this sacred cause. These people were known as Philhellenes, and they wanted to save the founding fathers of democracy from the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire. Several Philhellenic Committees were founded in the US, such as the New York Greek Relief Committee, and were backed heavily by most Americans. Even the current sitting president of the time, John Quincy Adams, applauded the efforts of the New York Greek Relief Committee. New York alone raised over 6,600 Sterling Pounds which they sent to help the freedom fighters in Greece. That may not sound like much, but in today's money, that would be over \$200,000.

The situation in Greece appeared to be hopeless, for the Turkish population in the Ottoman Empire outnumbered all of the Greeks 40,000,000 to 940,000 (43 to 1). So by embarking into this desperate situation and joining the revolution, Miller showed how much he truly cared and believed that the Greeks could win their independence. He went to Messolonghi with \$300 in his pocket, and there he met another famous American Philhellene, Naval Officer

George Jarvis. Jarvis taught Miller how to speak the Greek language, since communication would be vital on a battlefield. Miller fought in numerous battles, and regularly wrote back to the US newspapers. This kept many Americans interested in the Greek fight for freedom. One of his most famous letters was the one he wrote to Edward Everett, another American Philhellene, on May 3rd, 1826. This was during the time of the Third Siege of Messolonghi, which resulted in a disastrous massacre of 8,000+ Greeks and Philhellenes, both soldiers and civilians. Miller was one of the key people in helping 1,000 Greeks and Philhellenes escape, and he describes this courageous feat in the letter he sent. As a result of his valiant efforts towards the Greek cause, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel, one of the highest military ranks that exists even today in Greece.

After returning to the US, he did not forget about the cause and all that he fought for, and he continued to help Greece in other ways. With the help of the Greek Philhellenic Committee of New York, Miller gathered over \$17,500 worth of supplies to help the Greeks. He continued to write articles to inspire people to donate to the cause. He made a second trip back to Greece on March 5th, 1827, however this time it wasn't to fight on the battlefield. His mission became more of a humanitarian one. On the ship, there were many supplies that would help the Greek civilians and soldiers such as clothes, food, and medical supplies. He also kept a diary where he would record information about the aid that was given to Greece, how it was distributed, who received what, etc. He published this diary as a book called *The Condition of Greece, in 1827 and 1828*. It was an informative book that helped keep the public aware of the situation and tried to encourage readers to contribute something towards the cause, whether it be fighting, donating money, or simply spreading awareness.

After a little over a year on his second trip, Miller's mission was completed and Greece finally became a free but devastated state that was filled with over 20,000 orphans. He returned to the US permanently at the end of 1828. However, before leaving, he adopted one of these orphans, a young boy from Poros who had no relatives left and was all alone. The boy's name was Lucas Miltiades, and he became part of Miller's family. Miller and his wife Sarah did a great job of raising this boy. After Lucas' studies at the University of Vermont, he became a successful businessman, and was even elected to the US Congress in 1891. Lucas Miltiades Miller became the first Greek-American Congressman.

Even after helping Greece for nearly eight years, Miller would continue his humanitarian efforts in his fight against slavery here in the US. In 1840, Miller was chosen as a participating representative of the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Thanks to his contributions, Vermont became the first state to abolish slavery. In his heart, Miller carried the Hellenic spirit of freedom for all people.

He showed tremendous courage each time he stepped out onto the battlefield in Greece. Miller showed great generosity when he helped raise thousands of dollars for wartime needs and supplies. He showed that he truly cared for the Greek cause, and was willing to devote his entire life for it. Miller never had to do any of the things he did for Greece but he believed it was the right thing to do. Without the help of American Philhellenes like Jonathan Miller, many of whom sacrificed their lives and gave money supporting the Greek struggle for independence, modern Greece would not exist today, nor would there be three million Greek-Americans in the US today.

Works Cited

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