

The Danish Peace Academy

MARIA JACOBSEN AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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INTRODUCTION

By Karekin Dickran, 2004.

In the 1890s as news of the widespread massacre of Armenians in Turkey spread throughout the world it created a tangible outrage. Christian congregations and church organizations in Europe, moved by the horror of the events, demonstrated their solidarity with the victims by reaching out with offers of help, especially for the widowed women and orphaned children. In 1898 Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis of England, a feminist activist and champion of women's rights, visited Copenhagen and met with women civic leaders. Under the motto "solidarity among women, help by women for women" she galvanized Danish women to form organizations to help alleviate the plight of women, wherever they might be.

Within two years Danish women established the K.M.A, or Women's Missionary Workers (K.M.A./*Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere* (1900)). Its first Board of Directors included Miss Andrea Bøtcher, Baroness Olga Schaffalitzky, Miss Emsy Collet, and Baroness Sigrid Kurck. In the beginning their programs and daily activities consisted of doing local social work, teaching practical skills, and teaching about missionary work. In 1901, for the first time, K.M.A. sent a missionary to the work field in Armenian Anatolia, and between 1901 and 1920, six more missionaries were sent to Armenia to serve in Mezreh, Bitlis, Van, Malatia, Harpoot, and elsewhere. Maria Jacobsen was to be the fifth missionary and was sent to Harpoot in 1907 and remains unique for the many detailed diaries she kept of her experiences.



Maria Jacobsen, 1910

Jacobsen was born in the small town of Siim, Dover Denmark on November 6, 1883 to a loving Christian family. She spent her childhood in Horsens Denmark with her parents, her father Jens Jacobsen (born 1853) and her mother Ane Kristine Pedersen (born 1857). In 1898 she attended a Christian Congregational meeting organized by Baroness Sigrid Kurck who was campaigning to publicize the sufferings of the Armenians. Fifteen-year-old Maria Jacobsen was deeply moved by the news of the massacre and persecution of the Armenians. An urge to relieve the suffering of the people grew in her heart day by day. In 1905 young Jacobsen was in Copenhagen for her higher education and soon found a job as a nurse-trainee working in the children's ward at Sundby's Hospital. She cared for and loved her little patients but felt lonely and perplexed. At the time there were few women employed in that kind of work and she was the only woman working at the hospital. Then one day she went to the YWCA (*KFUK*) where she met other young nurses like herself and was soon selected to lead a study group of young Christian women engaged in missionary work.

In the fall of 1905 Jacobsen began course work at K.M.A.'s mission school and was selected to join K.M.A.'s Armenian Committee. After graduating as a nurse in 1906 she returned to K.M.A.'s mission school then went to study in London. While studying English in London she worked a few months at a

polyclinic (emergency ward) practicing her nursing skills. At the same time she was becoming increasingly interested in missionary work. Inside K.M.A. senior staff members were following her development. One day they offered her a position to travel abroad as a nurse and missionary, but Jacobsen declined. She felt her place was among the sick children at Sundby's Hospital where she was content leading a small study group. But when she received a personal request from senior K.M.A. staff to travel to the mission field, she began to waver. One Sunday at Trinitatis Church in Copenhagen while she was praying for guidance, she made her fateful decision. From that moment on one Danish woman's destiny was set. Twenty-four year old Maria Jacobsen's fate was formally sealed on October 4, 1907 during a missionary farewell ceremony at Garnisons Parish Hall where she received her ordination and first field assignment.



“Emmaus.” Danish orphanage in Mezreh, where hundreds of Armenians were saved.

During those hard times K.M.A. was able to do much constructive work. To begin with, six years before Jacobsen was sent to Harpoot, they had already opened a modest home or orphanage (Emmaus) in Mezreh, on the lower plain of Harpoot to aid Armenian orphans and other persecuted souls. The first Danish missionary sent to Armenia, and who established Emmaus, was 28 year old Christa Hammer who left for Armenia in August 1901 with Alma Johansson, a Swedish K.M.A. member. After a brief visit to a missionary school in Freienwalde, Germany they joined four German missionary sisters also heading for Anatolia. Miss Christa established the home at Mezreh in 1901 and named it “Emmaus,¹” where at the time K.M.A. provided for 65 children.

K.M.A.'s mission in Armenia was to provide poor women with financial aid to help them buy school materials and to teach them practical skills so they could support themselves financially. Their other mission was to bring Christian revival to souls left in darkness, thus spreading the good news of the Bible to places like Ourfa, Bitlis, Van, Ayntab, Harpoot, and Mardin in Asia Minor. They sometimes coordinated their work with other foreign missionary societies, such as the Swedish, German, and American Board. Maria Jacobsen was the fifth woman missionary K.M.A. sent to Asia Minor to bring aid to Armenians. In her heart burned a fire of love and compassion for the persecuted women and children.



The town of Harpoot, 1907. On the hillside of the mountains can be seen the American missionary buildings that served as residences and hospitals, a school and a university.

Embarking on her journey in 1907, Jacobsen traveled first to Berlin where she met Sister Laura, a German missionary who had been in the mission field in Anatolia. Through her conversations with Sister Laura, Jacobsen, for the first time, got a glimpse of what was waiting for her in Asia Minor. As the train departed the Berlin station, Sister Laura cried and cried as Jacobsen began to understand that its one thing to hear about missionary work in a small congregational meeting in Copenhagen, a safe distance from the real events, but something quite different to actually be in the middle of a foreign country where the events are occurring.

¹ Taken from Luke 24:13-35, signifying a place of refuge and renewal.

From Berlin she went to the harbor town of Constance in Romania then sailed to Constantinople (Istanbul). But she was unprepared for the sight that greeted her in Constantinople. Crowds of frenzied people in ragged clothing, shouting, crying, dragging and pulling their suitcases in a fearful panic, were everywhere. It was so chaotic and strange to her that she was confused and disturbed by these overwhelming impressions. She was relieved when she was able to free herself from the crowds and board the ship that would take her to Samson, a small harbor town on the northern coast of Asia Minor. After landing in Samson, she went shopping for supplies at a local market and saw other missionaries on the way to their respective mission stations who were also buying provisions for their difficult journey—fuel lamps, field beds, blankets, kitchen utensils, etc.

From there she continued her journey to her destination, the small town of Harpoot (Kharpert), in the highlands of Anatolia in the middle of Asia Minor. The journey took 16 days by *baroosh*, an open-sided, flat, horse-drawn cart normally used for freight on which a carpet was spread out for her. It was to be the home of the young nurse for the sixteen day journey. Nights were miserable. She slept in lodging-houses and stables devoid of sanitary facilities and human comfort. The situation got even worse as she went deeper into Asia Minor's wilderness. After a long and tiring journey, as she approached Harpoot the first sign of encouragement that greeted her was the American doctor, Dr. Raynolds. He was riding down from the highlands to greet her and saw the Danish nurse. He immediately raised his hands to heaven and exclaimed, "It is for you that we have been praying for so long to come!" As an American missionary in Armenia for several years, he had personally witnessed the massacres of Armenians during 1895-96. He had also fallen into the hands of the Turks himself who had mistreated him severely and had cut off his nose. Fortunately, he was able to sew it back together again himself while standing before a mirror.

American missionaries had already opened a station at Harpoot with a small temporary hospital. It had doctors but no nurses so the arrival of a Danish nurse was the greatest event the staff had experienced in a long time. Even before her arrival, when they first heard that K.M.A. was sending a nurse, they had referred to her as the angel of salvation. So when she arrived they all rode out in small groups to welcome her. When it was revealed that her 24th birthday was the same day she arrived in Harpoot, her birthday was celebrated with great festivities. The very next morning Jacobsen began the serious business of her work with the American physicians. It usually took missionaries from one to two years to learn the Armenian language but for Maria Jacobsen things were quite different. She had no time to wait to learn the language. The hospital needed nurses more than anything else so she had to begin working immediately. The Mission-station rented a house nearby where beds were lined up next to each other and Jacobsen took her lodging in one corner of the room with her field bed and utensils.

An Armenian pharmacist was appointed to teach her Armenian, which could only take place after nightfall, and usually after a long, hard working day. Harpoot's high altitude affected her too; the climate was exhausting. During the winter she struggled with her work and language studies. Not even an hour of respite was granted her. She rode with doctors along high mountains and through plains to assist in births. Sometimes she had to ride for five days in snowstorms to reach villages to help mothers deliver their babies into the world. She never complained nor regretted, even for a second, that she had left a calm and comfortable life back home to devote her life to fatiguing humanitarian work in Asia Minor.

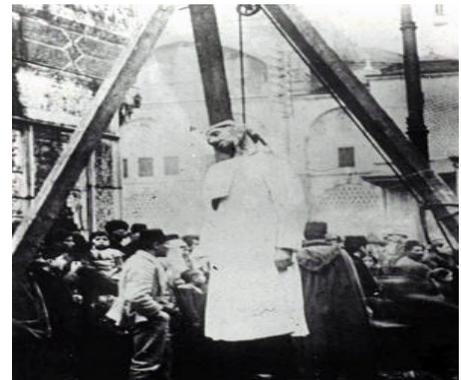
THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

In 1915 the massacres of Armenians began all around Maria Jacobsen. She was alarmed by the magnitude of the catastrophe that was spreading day by day. On April 24, 1915, the most important figures of the Armenian community in Constantinople—newspaper editors, writers, churchmen, intellectual leaders, even parliamentarians—were taken from their homes and summarily deported to remote regions. Most were never heard from again. Armenian society in the Ottoman Empire had just been decapitated.



1915. A group of deported Armenians

When the Turks and Kurds carried into effect the horrible massacres and the genocide against the Armenians in 1915, it was more than the little Danish woman could bear. Soldiers were posted at doors and on rooftops to prevent Armenians from escaping. Supplications by missionaries to help the sick were rejected by government officials who said they had already sent physicians and nurses with the deportees. Women and children were forced together on death marches where they were brutally mistreated, driven ruthlessly south in endless caravans of human flesh, while missionaries who saw the brutalities stood powerless. Just as sheep are led to slaughter the people were driven out of town, beyond the highlands and plains where, hidden from view, an orgy of death began of terrible abuses and horrible murders. Thousands upon thousands of Armenians were murdered in the most bestial of methods. Dead bodies covered the roads. There were neither nurses nor doctors to move them, as trucks and wagons drove over the dead.



1915. Armenian intellectual leaders were murdered or hanged to spread fear among the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.

Missionaries in the city were not permitted to leave for six months. When they did venture out they saw thousands of skeletons lining the roads as far as the eye could see. Places where once they enjoyed Sunday excursions and vacations, they now saw only scenes of horror and desolation. Many women and children had been beheaded and thrown into the lake. Others had been tortured in unmentionable ways and left for dead. It was evident not all had died immediately. The dead were spread throughout the plains and meadows, a hand sticking out of the ground here and there, bodies hastily covered with a handful of soil. They could do nothing but witness this unspeakable slaughter. The sick, the dying, and the dead piled over each other and spilled into ditches. Their district was now referred to as "the Slaughterhouse" because Armenians from all over Asia Minor were driven there where Turks and Kurds murdered them mercilessly in cold blood and were allowed to do with them whatever they desired. On a single day 30,000 people were driven out of the city and massacred. Almost no one survived.



1915. Survivors of a family stand powerless before a dying family member during the massacres.

Maria Jacobsen witnessed the heroic suffering of the Armenian people. Orphans with horror in their eyes wandered around as skeletons, almost maddened by the reign of terror. A little seven-year-old girl that the Turks had sold to a Bedouin family fled and managed to hide in a tree where she clung to the branches with both arms. A Turk gendarme discovered her when the poor child, sick and weak, fell from the tree unconscious. Fortunately, Jacobsen was there at the time it happened and adopted the girl instantly. She was the first child Jacobsen personally adopted. She named her Hansa. The second child she adopted was named Beatrice, and the third was Lilly, whom she found in miserable condition along the side of the road. Very soon Maria Jacobsen had taken over 3600 children under her protection and helped to hide them from the Turks.

The mornings were especially painful. When she came out of her house each day she would find the bodies of 10 to 15 children who had died of hunger during the night. An old Armenian woman buried the dead for her. But the old lady was nearly blind and could not dig the graves deep enough so during the night wild dogs would eat most of the corpses. All day long new orphans came knocking at Jacobsen's door and each day she opened her heart and home to them. Some Armenian houses in town had a hole dug inside their homes that led to an underground shelter or hiding place where they would take refuge when danger threatened the family. It was here that Jacobsen placed the children she found. During the night she brought them food and divided it into three rations so the children could have three meals a day, just enough to be life sustaining. When the bread got bad and moldy she boiled the pecked wheat into a kind of soup. The only fuel she had was manure that old Armenian widows gathered and dried for her.

As she recalls, "We lived this way for a year fearing that all the children would die of hunger. Each day new groups of children stood in front of my door asking for help, but what more could I do? I had nothing more to give them. One day a 13 year old boy stood out among a starved group of children that came to me. His belly was not swollen up with hunger as were others so I told him, 'There are many in worse condition than you who need help. Yours is the least serious, that's why I am sorry but I cannot take you in.' That evening when I went to our kitchen's fireplace, my eyes caught a child lying crumpled on the warm ashes. It was the boy I had sent away. He had died of hunger. That day I thought I would never be able to smile again. Each day we found 10-15 children that had died of famine."

When America entered the war in 1917, Americans were compelled to leave Turkey. Maria Jacobsen alone stayed to run the hospital and to help care for the children who were totally cut off from the rest of the world. When the war ended and American missionaries from the Near East Relief returned in 1919 they brought with them 20 heavily loaded automobiles packed with all kinds of food, provisions and clothing to distribute among the children. By then Maria Jacobsen was caring for and administering the provisions for over 3,600 orphans, most of whom were hidden by Armenian widows among ruined houses and cemeteries scattered throughout the area. The American Near East Relief would now assume the care and responsibility for them. In the fall of 1919, Jacobsen returned to Denmark to recuperate and to report on her work, and to lecture on the continuing needs in the field.



1915. A group of children lament their torment as they wait to be received into "Emmaus," Maria Jacobsen's children's home in Mezreh, near Harpoot.



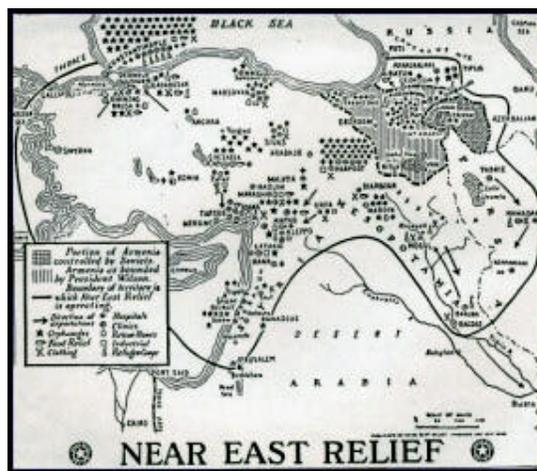
1915. One of many orphaned Armenian children found naked and starving, drifting aimlessly amid the ruins of a house.

Maria Jacobsen saw the terrible suffering of so many people that she could not simply stand by and watch without interfering. Chaos ruled Turkey and the battlefields. For several months, soldiers stayed in town just to survive the hardships. There were thousands of sick and wounded soldiers that hadn't even the means of transportation back to their homes. Most who tried to reach home died like flies on the way. Corpses lay all over the roads. They had neither money nor food, nor warm clothing, as winter snowstorms were raging. Even here, Maria Jacobsen brought aid and comfort where she found even the slightest sign of life. One of her plans was to open shelters along the way for the wounded and destitute but it did not succeed for her. Infectious diseases were so prevalent that she wrapped both her hands and feet with naphthalene bandages to protect against infection, but her precautions were to no avail. She came down with typhus fever and cerebrospinal meningitis. For six months she lay sick in bed and followed the horrors of war from her window. She saw executions and killings, blindfolded men shot and their bodies carried away, and many other things now documented in her diary. K.M.A.'s archives include reports, eyewitness accounts, personal experiences, and letters written by Danish missionaries corresponding back home, which describe everyday life inside "Emmaus" and the national tragedy of endless persecutions and killing orgies, especially in the period of 1914–1922 when it was the hardest and darkest times for the survival of the Armenian nation.

When Jacobsen regained her health, she returned to Denmark but the stories of her work in Turkey as mother to 3,600 children had already reached the United States. People were eager to see and hear this extraordinary woman. It was difficult for many to grasp how it could have been possible to save 3,600 children under such conditions. Jacobsen traveled to the United States in October 1920 and for seven months, until March 1921, she toured the country telling her incredible story of the heavy burden missionaries carried in Turkish Armenia. She helped to raise money and materiel for Armenian refugees still being driven south toward the Mesopotamian desert and further down to the Middle East.

THE BIRD'S NEST

When she returned to Denmark from America in the spring of 1921, she learned that the Turks were intensifying their persecution of the remainder of the Armenians. But before the final round of massacres began, the American Near East Relief was able to take 110,000 orphans out of Turkey. Some were transferred to Greece, to Russian Armenia, and others to Syria (Lebanon). With the transfer of so many orphans to Syria and Lebanon, and in order to continue the great task entrusted to her and Sister Karen Marie Petersen, who was already deeply affected by the sufferings of the Armenians, Jacobsen returned to the work field on January 17, 1922 where she greeted the new refugees in Beirut. The situation was nearly indescribable. Everything was in chaos. Mobs of people with bundles on their backs were suddenly gathered in one place where they had to raise tents or find a corner to sleep, or gather their families, find food or do cooking amid rain and mud as pools of water flowed everywhere. More help was needed. K.M.A. sent 19 missionaries between 1923 and 1970 to help care for the growing numbers of survivors in Syria and Lebanon. The Near East Relief had gathered orphans from different refugee camps and entrusted their care to Maria Jacobsen. By July 3, 1922 she was entrusted with 208 children from Cilicia who found a new home at Zouk Michail, between the cities of Byblos and Beirut. This was the seed that was to become the "Bird's Nest" in Sidon.



NEAR EAST RELIEF MAP. Missionary Review, Vol. 42, January 1922

Other missionaries arrived in refugee camps and did tremendous work for the Armenians. By opening workshops, clinics, soup kitchens, kindergartens, skill centers and Bible schools they fulfilled a desperate need for both physical and spiritual care. The number of Danish missionaries grew as more medical specialists came. The home at Zouk Michail grew so rapidly that many practical problems developed. The shortage of water forced Jacobsen to search for a better home for the children. A Druze prince helped her by renting her his huge villa in Sidon (Saida). She moved there with the entire household on May 1, 1923.

On one sunny day as Maria Jacobsen was standing on the steps of the new home and surrounded by three hundred orphans, she had in her hands a bag filled with candy she was distributing. The children immediately grew excited and crowded around her. Anxious to reach her, they shouted “Mama, Mama” (mother, mother) and stretched their hands out above their shoulders trying desperately to reach the candy. Suddenly the picture of the children with their hands outstretched struck her with a vivid image: “They are like newly hatched birds,” she thought. From that day on she decided she would name the new home the “Bird’s Nest.” Although the home was only rented and temporary, Jacobsen finally succeeded in creating a safe haven for her small Armenian children.



Maria Jacobsen, 1960

Five years later, in 1928, K.M.A. purchased property from the American Near East Relief, which had run an Armenian orphanage in Djoubel (Byblos) Lebanon from 1922 to 1928. With the purchase of the property Danish missionaries were now able to establish a solid foundation for a permanent home for the long dreamed of “Bird’s Nest.” Since then the Danish “Bird’s Nest” has become legendary and is known not only in Denmark but also all over the Middle East. They also established in the village of Terzaya, a health resort high up in the mountains, a summer home in 1930 to provide for the children during summer vacations.



Group photo of the children of the Home shown with Maria Jacobsen, mailed as a Christmas gift to the Danish “fathers” (supporters) of the Bird’s Nest.

K.M.A. encountered problems during World War II when all communications were cut. Through the aid of Christian organizations, especially Armenian-Americans, closure of the home was prevented. New missionaries arrived at the end of World War II to help refurbish and rebuild the staff and buildings and to add classrooms. They established a scouting movement (F.D.F) in 1948, improved educational standards, and established the “After Care Foundation” in 1953 for the higher education of Bird’s Nest graduates, and expanded Danish personnel to eight missionaries. Besides Maria Jacobsen there was now Pastor Oluf Emil Paaske with his Norwegian wife (“Tante”), Kirsten Elizabeth Ask Paaske, and (Aunty) Magda Sørensen. Maria Jacobsen’s sister, Anna Jacobsen, was already hired in 1931.

In 1950 Maria Jacobsen received the Danish Kingdom’s Gold Medal Award in appreciation for her humanitarian work. And on December 14, 1954, for her 50th Jubilee celebration at the American University in Beirut, she was presented with the Gold Medal of Honor by the Lebanese government, the

Protestant Congregation, and the Gregorian community, as appreciation for her work among the Armenians. From her post in Lebanon she toured Denmark in 1957 to report on her activities to friends of Armenians in Denmark. While there she said, “I think this will be the last time I see Denmark. She knew she would live and die among her beloved Armenian people and that her home was now the Bird’s Nest.

Beginning on a Sunday evening the last week of April 1957, and for the following three Sundays, Jacobsen related her life story and her experiences in Harpoot (Turkey) to the children of the Bird’s Nest. I was one of those children. I was only eleven years old then but I still remember her vivid and emotional stories now documented in her diary. She felt the need to explain to us why she wrote so much, so emotionally and descriptively, in her diaries during the massacres, a period in which she wrote hundreds of pages compared to but a few in less turbulent years. The diary functioned as her only outlet, a sanctuary to take refuge from the daily inhumanity practiced by the Turks and Kurds against the Armenians. The atrocities she witnessed during the massacres had so appalled her that she could only talk about them them in her diary.

While I was doing research for a book about K.M.A.’s Danish Bird’s Nest I puzzled over a book of 112 pages published in Danish in 1920 entitled, “In the Shadow Valley” by Maria Dinesen, who was a writer and a member of K.M.A. In the book she recounts the memoirs of a woman named “Grace Dickson” who had returned from Harpoot. I did a lot of research on Grace Dickson’s existence with no results. No one in K.M.A. had even

heard of a woman with that name and I never saw that name while researching the archives. However, while I was reading Dickson’s sad stories, they reminded me of the stories Maria Jacobsen had told us about the massacres she witnessed. In fact, one was exactly as she described it with all the details. Only then did I realize that it was Maria Jacobsen herself who used the pseudonym of Grace Dickson. But more importantly, I understood why. Her experiences with the Turks had been so terrifying that even after she returned to her safe home in Denmark, she still did not wish to reveal her name or the existence of her diaries, probably because of her determination to return to her work field among the Armenians. She must have also believed it necessary to keep her discretion as the servant of God and not act as a political commentator. That also explains why no one knew about her diaries because they only appeared ten years after her death.

Maria Jacobsen died on April 6, 1960 after a long and fruitful life dedicated to helping others. Although physically weakened, she was still at her post writing letters to raise funds for the Bird’s Nest, even up to her death. Whether having good or bad days she always remained a missionary and worked to save souls, which for her was her greatest task. As mother to thousands of orphaned children she felt a special call to help them. She was entombed in a special chamber the way the old Phoenician Kings were buried. Her last task was to strengthen the bond between the Bird’s Nest children and the



On December 14, 1954, at the American University in Beirut, Maria Jacobsen was awarded the Gold Medal of Honor by the Lebanese government, the protestant congregation and the Gregorian community as appreciation for her humanitarian work among the Armenians.



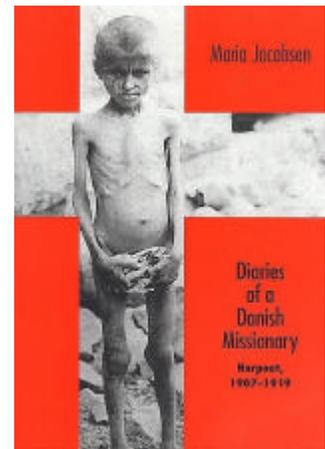
friends of the Bird's Nest around the world. For her last Christmas she wrote over 600 letters, quite a task in her old age, something few could achieve. The memory of Maria Jacobsen is still alive and her name is legendary among Armenians. She was a beacon of light and hope amid the darkness of the times and she set an example for others to follow. After she passed away, her sister Anna Jacobsen took charge of The Bird's Nest. She had come to The Bird's Nest in 1931 to just spend her holiday with her sister but that "holiday" lasted until May 1967.

After (Mama) Maria Jacobsen's death in 1960, and through the sixties, work at the Bird's Nest concentrated on building and renovation as well as reforming the entire educational and children's pedagogical system and upgrading the Home to the standards of the surrounding community. New missionaries and specialists were brought in to carry out this work and they forged new relationships with other institutions of higher learning. With the purchase of property in Beirut they constructed a building that would be used for social events and club activities for former Bird's Nest students. It became the home of the "After Care" organization created to strengthen the social and spiritual needs of youngsters during the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. In 1970, K.M.A.'s last chairman, Sister Kirsten Vind, transferred the responsibility of "The Bird's Nest" to the Cilician Armenian Patriarchate with its headquarters in Antelias, Lebanon. In 1980 K.M.A. formally ended its association with missionary work. In its place, "Folkekirkens Nødhjælp" (Church Aid) a national organization involved in world wide relief projects (1970) assumed responsibility for transferring donations to the Bird's Nest from the Friends of the Bird's Nest in Denmark to the Bird's Nest in Lebanon, which continues to today.

REGARDING MARIA JACOBSEN'S DIARIES PUBLISHED BY GOMIDAS BOOKS

The translation of Maria Jacobsen's diaries was undertaken by K.M.A. under the supervision of Sister Kirsten Vind, their last chairman. I had great pleasure in cooperating with her on Bird's Nest matters for the last three decades. Kirsten Vind entrusted the original manuscripts of Maria Jacobsen's diaries to me after being assured that I consider them our national heritage.

Although Maria Jacobsen was not the first woman K.M.A sent to the missionary field in Armenia, she remains unique. She was the only one to keep such detailed records of events in "secret" diaries, which did not come to light for fifty years. She recorded almost daily the genocide against the Armenians and by 1919 she had produced one of the most detailed primary accounts of the genocide ever written. In fact, the largest part of her diaries, over 600 pages in the original Danish, covers the period of the genocide. These were hand-written in four books and constitute an important record of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey. They were published as a book in 2001 by Gomidas Books (www.gomidas.org) as, "*Maria Jacobsen, Diaries of a Danish Missionary: Harpoot, 1907-1919*". See: <http://www.gomidas.org/books/jacobsen.htm>



—Karekin Dickran, Aarhus, Denmark, 2004.

Acknowledgements

The translation and publication of Maria Jacobsen's Diaries saw the fulfillment of one major goal of the work and documentation I have been involved in. I am especially indebted to Ara Sarafian of the Gomidas Institute for recognizing the importance of Maria Jacobsen's diaries and for publishing them as a book in 2001. Without him the book in English would never have seen the light of day. Richard Kloian of the Armenian Genocide Resource Center in California deserves special thanks for putting this entire project in motion from the very beginning in 1997. He was the first person from the U.S to contact me about Maria Jacobsen and the Danish missionaries and helped to keep the momentum for the project going. He introduced me to a number of key people who have been instrumental in helping to further the work and to bring attention to the role of Danish Missionaries during the Armenian Genocide, These include Ara Sarafian of the Gomidas Institute and Eric Markusen of the Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, who contacted me about KMA archives in 2001. Since then, with Richard Kloian's assistance, the Center has undertaken a pilot study of the holdings of the KMA Archives under the sponsorship of the Zoryan Institute of Canada.

Karekin Dickran
Aarhus C. Denmark, 2004

The book, *Diaries of a Danish Missionary. Harpoot, 1907-1919* (release date, September 2001) is just one part of the Gomidas Institute's Armenian Genocide Documentation Series, alongside such titles as Tracy Atkinson, *The German, the Turk and the Devil Made a Triple Alliance; Harpoot Diaries, 1907-1917*; Henry Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia: Personal Experiences in Harpoot, 1915-17*; James Barton, "*Turkish Atrocities, Statements of American Missionaries on the Destruction of Christian Communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915-1917*"; and Beatrice Morley, *Marsovan 1915*. The Gomidas Institute is a leading institute publishing original primary accounts of the Armenian Genocide. For more information on Armenian Genocide publications please visit www.gomidas.org or e-mail Gomidas at books@gomidas.org. The following are contacts for further information:

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Project Save “Bird’s Nest” Photo Archives

A second objective of my work has been the collection of thousands of photographs on CD-ROMs to preserve the photographic record of the Bird’s Nest dedicated to the friendship of the Danish and Armenian people, and that the photos may also serve as a modest contribution to enrich the holdings of Armenian Genocide Resource Centers around the world. To that end, an archive was developed devoted to collecting, documenting and preserving the “Bird’s Nest’s” photographic holdings from 1900-1970. The photo CD-ROMs complement material in Maria Jacobsen’s book as well as the book about the Danish Bird’s Nest by illustrating most major events during the 1900-1970 period. The CD-ROMs also include portraits of Danish missionaries, as well as many Armenian orphans who spent their childhood in the homes of Mezreh, Zouk Michael, Saida and Djoubeil.

We have already produced 15 CD-ROM photo albums containing more than 2500 photographs scanned at a resolution of 600 and 800 dpi. Another goal of the Project Save Bird’s Nest Photo Archives is to collect photographs from all available private sources, to have them scanned and added to the CD ROM photo album of the “Armenian” Bird’s Nest. I ask that anyone who wishes to help with the project, who may have relevant photographs, to send them to the address below. All photographs sent to me will be returned to their owners after scanning. Any and all support of any kind is also greatly appreciated. The final step of the Bird’s Nest Photo project is to establish a permanent archive at the present Armenian Bird’s Nest and to find funds to donate a powerful computer to them so that it can be a place for anyone interested in connecting to the past to come and visit or do research.

The Story of K.M.A.'s Danish Bird’s Nest

Compiled By Karekin Dickran (In Danish)

A third objective of my work has been the compilation of a book about the Bird’s Nest, to tell the story of the orphanage, its history, the role the 1890s Armenian massacres played in the establishment of the K.M.A. and the Danish missionary presence in Asia Minor. The book is also about the missionaries and workers who served tens of thousands of orphans who went through its doors, but it’s also about some of the families and the orphans themselves. It recounts from the archives of the Bird’s Nest a number of personal stories recorded by missionaries as told by the survivors during their stay at the Bird’s Nest. Perhaps of even more significance, since there were thousands of orphans who came and went through its doors, and many families with mothers and children, many of whom since have lost track of or contact with each other, the archives will also serve as a repository of information, along with hundreds of photographs with family names and names of orphans and parents, so that children of survivors and their descendants can find information on lost relatives, even today. This is an invaluable resource for those interested in finding information on distant relatives to establish family linkages lost during those turbulent times.

The story of the Bird's Nest began in 1900 when the "Women’s Missionary Workers" (Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere) K.M.A. was established in Scandinavia, in Denmark. Since 1902 and for many years thereafter K.M.A. sent many missionaries to help and serve the Armenian people. The book of nearly 350 pages contains 15 chapters, an index, and more than two-dozen photographs. One chapter of the book discusses the political arena in Asia Minor during 1895-96 and includes several pages from a book by Aage Mejer Benedictsen, “Armenien” —about Sultan Abdul-Hamid’s massacre of Armenians during that period, which created the need for the relief work that followed. Other chapters discuss the foundation and organization of the Women's Missionary Workers, or K.M.A, and their work among Armenians in Anatolia (Western Armenia) where Danish missionaries were stationed at Harpoot, Mezreh (Vilayet Mamuret-ul-Aziz), Bitlis, Van, and Malatia in 1901- 1919.

Another chapter addresses Armenia and World War I with news and articles from K.M.A. archives discussing the impact of World War I on Armenia. In this respect, the Danish version of the Bird's Nest book also contains Maria Jacobsen's diaries in Danish (edited Danish version by Britta June Johnsen). Still another chapter includes accounts by Karen Marie Peterson regarding the fate of several orphans and Armenian families she had personally known. Jacobsen herself also recounts the fate of several families and orphans that she had recorded in her notes. Also moving is a memorandum record from Malatia: "Land of Tears," by missionary Jensine Ørtz.

After the genocide Danish missionaries helped to care for thousands of orphans and widows transferred to Lebanon, where the Danish Bird's Nest was finally established. One chapter describes the hardships of the transfer of orphans to Syria and Lebanon after the end of the war. Included in the Story of the Bird's Nest are many documents representing statements by American and German missionaries and German military officials on the destruction of Christians in Turkey. Another chapter describes annual summer fundraisers with Danish youngsters in Denmark that raised funds and collected provisions and clothing for Armenian orphans. The last few chapters describe the creation of the Armenian diaspora, the return of missionaries to Denmark, Maria Jacobsen's visit to the USA, the American Near East Relief orphanages in Asia Minor and Lebanon, the first K.M.A. orphanage in Lebanon at Zouk Mikhail, and the purchase of property by K.M.A. from the American Near East Relief at Djoubeil (Byblos) which would become the permanent home of the Danish Bird's Nest. And finally, for the period 1950-1970 the book includes K.M.A.'s annual reports describing in chronological order the last years of the home 1968-1970 when K.M.A.'s chairman Sister Kirsten Vind negotiated to transfer all of K.M.A.'s assets in Lebanon to The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias because of the 1967 war between the Arabs and Israel.

Although the book on the Bird's Nest is now complete it is only in Danish at the moment. It is to be hoped that one day someone will come forward to support its publication and translation into English for all to read. The work of Danish missionaries in this period is too important not to share with the rest of the world. It is a testament to the humanitarian work of Danish missionaries who saved tens of thousands of Armenians and who forever have exemplified the highest calling to which anyone can achieve.

I hope that future generations of Armenians and Danes continue to forge a bond of lasting friendship, one that began in tragic circumstances but one that continues with hope and mutual respect so that together we can create a better human future for all. Although Turkey still denies the Armenian Genocide I appeal to the Turkish Government and to the world community to restore the properties that belonged to the "deportees" to their families or ancestors, or pay compensation to the present Armenian government for their illegal confiscation.

The completion of the "Story of the Danish Bird's Nest" and the Project Save Bird's Nest Photo Archives is one way of saying thanks to the Danish people for the tremendous work they did for Armenians in times of our national desperation. It also serves to pay modest homage to those thousands of unknown Armenians who died for their faith. Gratitude alone is not enough to express our deep appreciation to the Danish people for the humanitarian work done for Armenians during the years of our national suffering. As for the unknown countless Armenians who died for their faith, we will never forget you!

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