

Michael Agelasto Obituary

There was a time in the present century, when Michael Agelasto's name appeared in public prints. The sports writers of the period had much to say about his exploits on the tennis courts. Norfolk had a thriving cotton business in those days and Mr. Agelasto was one of its active figures – first in association with the Norfolk office of the international Ralli Brothers brokerage firm, and later as manager, successively of the Dixie Manufacturing Company, and the Norfolk Cotton Company.

Mr. Agelasto's early managerial connection with the Dixie cotton bagging concern coincided with his service here as consular agent for the Greek government. The bagging company and many other Norfolk enterprises needed manual workers. Greece had more workers than it needed. So it came about, with Consul Agelasto's help, that many natives of Hellas came over here and went to work in the city's industries. Almost without exception, they prospered. Soon they brought over their families. The names of these families are today found on the signs of some of Norfolk's most prosperous business firms.

These are some of the things that an older Norfolk generation will recall on reading of the death of Mr. Agelasto, yesterday, at the age of 80 – alone in a downtown hotel room which had been his last retreat in a long period of failing health. But they are not the things, one may be sure, that Mr. Agelasto himself would have considered of any importance. What mattered most to him, ever since his university days at Hopkins and Columbia, were the explorers and trail-blazers in science and philosophy and the creators of beauty in literature and the fine arts. He attended to business only because that meant bread. His true staff of life was the fare he took from treatises, prints and paintings, and from companionship, personal or vicarious, with those who produced them. Many a Norfolk youngster aspiring to a place in the arts found him a stimulating guide and mentor.

The experimentalists and explorers of the art world interested Mr. Agelasto more than the academicians. So he became the friend of Havelock... when most of the pure in heart were his enemies – and an excited decoder of Gertrude Stein a generation before the Toklas biography earned her the attention of every village book club.

When Miss Stein produced her *Four Saints in Three Acts* in 1934, Mr. Agelasto sent her his compliments, accompanied by a note of critical appreciation. "Thanks so much," she replied in English, "you do understand." And then she added in pure Steinese: "Judging from accounts the importance of the opera is beginning as I said in composition as explanation – to make anybody see the beauty, and once they see beauty they see nothing else. And so one does appreciate those who saw before they saw only the beauty."

Mr. Agelasto voyaged far in the realms of gold and brought back many treasures. What he collected in these quests - invariably good things or rare - he gave to his friends, or to the Norfolk Art Museum. Norfolk is poorer for the passing of this uniquely stimulating man.

(read by Parker Agelasto)