

722-724 Main Street: Update 6, August 2022
Another Mystery Solved



As façade brickwork continues on these houses, we were reminded of an older photo of 724 Main taken in 2017 - before Friends of Wheeling owned the property. In it, you can see that the window on the lower right is a bit different. It appears that there was a door there at some time in the past. When the first floor flooring was removed to allow for concrete to be poured to support the steel beams that are now in place, we also found evidence of a doorway from the inside.

We wondered why. What mystery does the window/doorway tell?
What other history does this house have?

When the most recent Grecian Festival was held in Centre Wheeling, Pete Chacalos took a picture of a photograph that was part of a display showing small businesses owned by Greek immigrants in Wheeling. One of those was of the “Midget Grocery and Lunch Room,” located at 724 Main Street. Mystery solved!



Additional research showed that the store was owned and operated by John Avgerenos (sometimes spelled Avgerinos), who was born in 1888 on the island of Tenedos, Turkey. Disputes between Turkey and Greece at the time led to discrimination against Greeks on the island, which may have led to his emigrating in 1906 when he was about 18 years old. John married another Greek immigrant, Mary Stergiadou (or Stergios) in Wheeling in 1924. Their first daughter, Georgia, was born a year later, and they purchased 724 Main in 1926. Their second daughter Kalope was born in 1928.¹

The 1934 Wheeling city directory shows the “North End Lunch Room” at this address, but subsequent years showed John Avgerenos as working in the restaurant business in other locations. The Midget Grocery and Lunch Room appears in city directories beginning in 1949-50 and lasting until the death of John Avgerenos in 1958. John’s naturalization application in 1934 states that he was 5 foot 9 inches tall, so the store name “midget” was probably a reflection of the small size of the store.

¹ Georgia married Nicholas Louis Mamakos of Wheeling, and Kalope married Louis Diniaco of Steubenville. Nick was a son of Louis Mamakos, of “Louis’ Hot Dogs” fame. Georgia and Nick were godparents of Pete Chacalos.