

Tebi Abaka/Towards the Future Arshag Dickranian Biography

Arshag H. Dickranian was born on January 26, 1905, in Izmit (Kocaeli, Turkey) in the Ottoman Empire. When he was nine, his family moved to the town of Adapazari, where he grew up in a multiethnic locale with Greeks, Turks, and Armenians, with about 20,000 Armenians. He described the Armenian district as an extensive network of schools, churches, and businesses run within and by the community.



The Ottoman Empire entered into the First World War in the fall of 1914. Arshag shares that by spring of 1915, the government imposed policies on Armenians which resulted in the conscription of young Armenian men into the army (never to return again) and deportation of Armenians from Adapazari—under false pretenses of safety precautions by summer of 1915. Three days after deportation orders were administered, Arshag and his family were transported to the city of Eskişehir via a caravan animal wagons, with thousands of Armenians from the town, which Arshag described as unbearable and unsanitary. Arshag remembers remaining in Eskişehir without any shelter, until they were made to walk to Konya by foot. The Armenians of Adapazari would eventually be exiled to the deserts of Der Zor. Arshag and his family evaded this fate through bribes and disguising themselves as a Turkish family. During his time in Konya, Arshag attended Turkish school but learned Armenian, illegally, in the evenings.

When Arshag was 13 years old, his father sent him to Istanbul to ensure his safety, until he would later be reunited with his family. In 1922, Arshag's father decided it was time they left Turkey. Upon receiving authorization to travel to the United States, they traveled to the United States, through New Orleans, Louisiana, until they moved to Fresno, California and eventually settled in Los Angeles.

Arshag became a successful businessman, philanthropist, and community leader. He married his wife, Eleanor, and had two daughters. The Tekeyan Cultural Association Arshag Dickranian Armenian School was established in Los Angeles in 1981. Arshag was interviewed on April 28, 1977—part of the Richard G. Hovannisian Oral History Collection—and later by the Armenian Film Foundation on November 30, 1984 and December 28, 1989 in Beverly Hills, California. Both testimonies are digitized and available in the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.