

**THE HISTORY OF MIGRATION OF THE BULGARIAN COMMUNITY INTO SOUTH
AUSTRALIA PRESENTED BY JOHN BENNETT**

PRESIDENT OF

THE BULGARIANS' EDUCATIONAL & FRIENDLY SOCIETY INC.

Българско Културно Просветно Дружество

COMMUNITY HALL

443 Tapleys Hill Road,

Fulham Gardens S. A. 5024

Phone (08) 8356 3254 Fax (08) 8355 0461

DATE: 12th March 2005

VENUE: MIGRATION MUSEUM 82 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide. South Australia

OFFICAL GUESTS:

1. Michael Atkinson Attorney General MP & Peter Louca Ministerial Advisor on Multicultural Affairs Contact Paul on 8207 1714
2. Paul Caica MP Member for Colton
3. Julian Stefani The Honouable MP
4. Jennifer Rankine MP Member for Wright
5. Mr Joe Scalzi MP representing The Honourable Rob Kerin Leader of the Opposition
6. Alessandro & Pamela Gardini – Fundraising member to Museum
7. Brian & Carla Moulds Executive Director SA Property Council
8. Maria Barredo Multi Cultural Affairs
9. Councillor Judith Brine
10. Dr Chris Magasdi deputy Mayor Adelaide

A Short history of Bulgaria

1. location in Eastern Europe
2. area of a Bulgaria – similar in size to Victoria
3. many ethnic factions existed in Bulgaria.
4. dominated by the Ottoman Empire 1396-1878 until the Turkish yoke shackles were finally broken by a bloody war of 1880's, the Balkan Wars 1911-13 and WW1 1914-1918

Main Reasons for Migration of Bulgarians to Australia

11. the ravages of war in the region
dominated by the Ottoman Empire 1396-1878 until the Turkish yoke shackles were finally broken by a bloody war of 1880's, the Balkan Wars 1911-13 and WW1 1914-1918
12. Social Environment
13. The great Depression
14. the communist revolution

Why Australia?

Social economic conditions the great depression in the early 20th-century in Bulgaria made for desperate measures. Australia was seen as a stable country sheltered under the umbrella of the British Empire far from Europe's expansionism ravages and political instability. Most of the migrants looked at settling into Australia for the short term. Working for several years and then returning to their "homeland". The early settlers were mostly hard working peasant farmers who were prepared to come to South Australia to work hard to improve their life. A few migrants stuck to this short term plan but for most the migration into Australia was permanent.

Unfortunately, records of early Bulgarian settlers in Australia are very sparse. A lot of the information relating to early settlers has been handed down by word of mouth.

The earliest information I believe were ship manifests dating back to 1907.

Total emigration into South Australia is estimated to be between 500 - 1000 families. We are a small ethnic Community.

People from the North eastern region of Bulgaria, from the village of Strahilovo, and nearby made their momentous decision to emigrate. The greatest exodus out of Bulgaria occurred at this time. Most settled in Adelaide and predominantly in the Seaton, Grange, Lockleys, Marion, Morphettville and Fulham Gardens Areas.

The greatest concentration of new emigrants originally settled in Fulham Gardens. In those days the Torrens outbreak had recently been built and the area considered undesirable by the established Australians of Adelaide, at that time. How things have changed!

Fulham Gardens, in those days, was mainly a farming and grazing area. An odd piggery and dairy existed in this undeveloped land. Bitumen roads in the area barely existed.

The early settlers in the area had to start with little more than their bare hands and the ground upon which to establish the most common activity of market gardening. Many initially rented land or worked

elsewhere to survive as most of these people who came to this country had nothing more of value with them than their culture and the clothes they wore on their backs. Social welfare was not known in those days and there was no system in place by which Bulgarians had the opportunity to learn the English language. Most of the new arrivals were farmers in Bulgaria. Hard work was not unknown to them. In their old country they worked to survive. These people came to a hostile country, a hostile environment and hostile people in pursuit of a new way of life. Many believed they would work a few years accumulate some wealth and return to their homeland. Fortunately most did not return.

With a dream and a vision for a better life these new arrivals into Australia began to establish their foundations as hard working responsible people in a new world. Their hard work soon brought results. Most of the new emigrants prospered through their hard work and bought their own properties within a few years.

These Bulgarian people had been drawn to each other like a magnet. They would meet and socialise in the most basic of ways. I can recall as a child when vast tracts of land in the Fulham Gardens area was nothing more than grazing pasture sprinkled with many box thorns. These paddocks were very inviting for them to meet and socialise in. They would hold picnics and readily bringing along baskets of their traditional foods and drinks they created for the occasions to enjoy the company of their own kind dancing to their folk music and signing Bulgarian love songs.

Amongst these early settlers it did not take long for them to see a need to establish a central base for the Bulgarian community in this State. The people first talked about it amongst themselves. There was a consensus of opinion that something should be done. With each social meeting amongst the people the urgency to unite grew quickly.

A meeting was called on the 24th May 1949 amongst all the Bulgarian people here who were interested to form a community centre. At that meeting 54 people voted to form this Society and each of them became the foundation members of this Society –formed as a non political social and religious Society formed where political debate is banned.

Money was needed for the construction of a community hall. In those early days no-one was flush with funds. As there was no other source of income for the Society except from its small number of struggling members the Committee of the newly formed Society would visit members for donations to the building fund. Money was short. However, members would gladly give produce from their market gardens to the Committee to sell and generate a building fund.

The founding fathers had experienced the divisiveness that came of political propaganda so they banned the promotion of any political persuasion and this was a key issue to the survival and entrenchment of the Society.

First Wave of Immigrants

Arrival into Australia 1900-1939 creating a new life in Australia

During the second world War Years because of Bulgaria's early alignment to axis countries the Bulgarian nationals in Australia were under the threat of being interred into concentration camps. Life was very difficult with the barest essential services then and without any government assistance. The Bulgarians quickly assimilated into the Australian life style but they always treasuring their national pride and most of them become the founding fathers of The Bulgarians' Educational & Friendly Society Inc.

Many of the new immigrants into Australia were saved from interment into camps through the war because most quickly leased or purchased land soon after arrival and grew vegetables-a valuable resource for the War effort.

A Second Wave of Immigrant 1946-1950

A new wave of immigrants came before the iron curtain dropped.

The aftermath of the war years caused many Bulgarians again to look to a safer haven- Australia was a logical choice.

There was the continued emergence in the new immigrants in Australia of the need for Social interchange amongst themselves. The need to meet with Bulgarians, talk in their native Bulgarian language and enjoy amongst themselves their rich Bulgarian culture.

Construction on the community halls started in 1952 at 443 Tapleys Hill Road, Fulham Gardens in South Australia. Many of the members donated their time and effort gladly in the various stages of the building works. Most of the dream had now materialised into fact.

Third Wave of Immigrants-1949-1990

Political purges in Bulgaria and the refugees

Escaping the scourge of communism for some led them to take desperate measures to escape from Bulgaria. The secrecy of escape meant that many left family and friends behind running the gauntlet over the borders into freedom-knowing full well that the families left behind may never be seen again. They escaped in many ways-escaping by aeroplanes, boats, the swimming across borders and running over the borders often avoiding bullets. One Bulgarian after escaping into Turkey decided to return to retrieve his family and once again crossing the borders.

Fourth Wave of Immigrants

In 1990 Breaking the shackles of communism and the fall of the iron curtain came the first popular elections in Bulgaria. A new era of migration into South Australia occurred of highly educated and skilled emigrants.

Cementing the National pride the Continuation of the Bulgarian base

This need not only saw the creation of The Bulgarians' Educational & Friendly Society Incorporated (BEFS) in 1949 –as a non political social and religious Society formed but the prohibition of political propaganda was a key issue to the survival and entrenchment of the BEFS. The founding fathers had experienced the divisiveness of political ambition overseas that split the World—their foresight eliminated the political divisiveness issues from the BEFS. For these reasons the BEFS was formed as a religious, educational a social organisation. A Society that become the meeting place of Bulgarians without the turbulence of political ambitions which policy the BEFS has retained and continues to retain for the promotion of the Bulgarian traditions in South Australia that has carried them into the 21st Century. Devoid of political bickering the BEFS emerged as the strongest united organisation by Bulgarian Nationals not only in South Australia but throughout Australia. This Society could not exist without its enthusiastic support base.

LADIES AUXILIARY

Formed in 1965. Like all women in our community they have been great support to this Society. Special thanks go to Joan Stefanoff, our present lady President for her unending support.

THE CHURCH

The religious needs of this Society was satisfied with the formation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of St Petka in 1968 that regularly each week holds religious Orthodox services.

FOLK DANCING

The first official folk dancing Group was formed in 1960 and continues today. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a group of up to 85 dancers. Today there is a smaller specialized group of dancers.

BULGARIAN SCHOOL

An important tradition that has been maintained for over 30 years and still continues.

RADIO PROGRAM

Broadcasting in the Bulgarian language since 1977 5EBI and an important method of communicating with the Bulgarians here.

FOUNDATION MEMBERS

From the original 54 Foundations Members. They in 1949 created the precedent of forming a Bulgarian national identity base that was later followed by many other ethnic groups a decade or so later.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE BULGARIANS TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Some of the achievements are:-

- Development of the Market gardens and land improvement to be part of the food bowl of Adelaide;
- Developments in the business world from shopkeepers to moteliers and hoteliers
- Educating their children into all tiers of social life becoming:
- Professors;
- teachers of children at all levels as educators;
- professional medical, legal and senior administrative governmental positions
- Computer scientists, computer engineers, in all walks of business and professional life and skilled tradespeople;
- Even MPs have been touched with the mixing of Bulgarian blood

We are proud to be of Bulgarian heritage

We are proud to be South Australian
thank you

At this juncture I will like to call on the Honourable the Attorney General for a brief response before moving to the entrance of the building of the Migration Museum for the cutting of the ribbon across the doorway of the Forum in the Migration Museum building

THANK YOU TO HELPERS

Art Work by

Mark Bennett and Aaron Spiridonoff

Other substantial contributors:

Rumiana Toneva, Joan Stefanoff, Ronna Bennett, Mary Marinoff, Kinka Miteva Betty Filipoff

All ladies who have helped set up the displays and prepare the lovely food. The Committee of Management Members who have made this possible.

John Bennett LL.B.

President

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