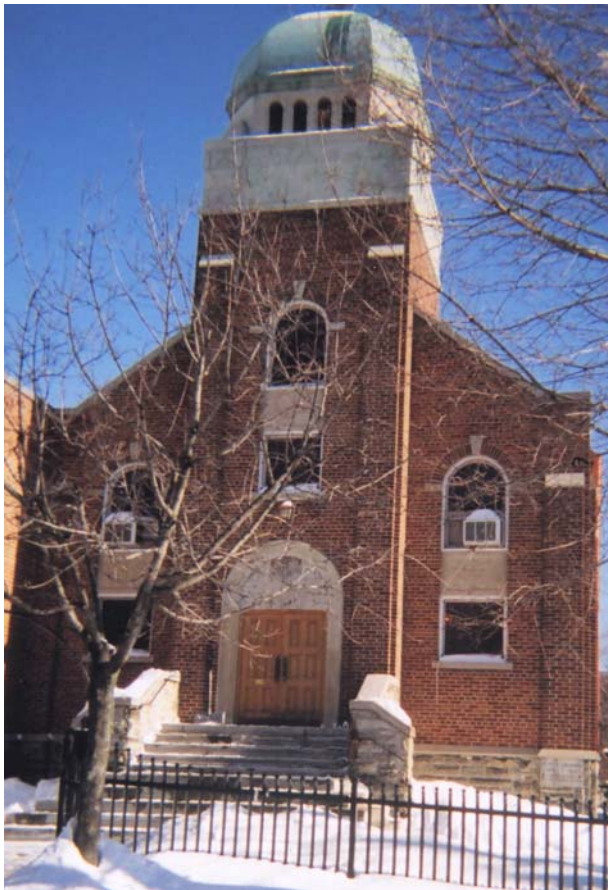


The Many Faces of Toronto- A Bulgarian Story.

The first Bulgarians arrived in Canada about 1896 from the Ottoman Empire in the geographical region called Macedonia. Most of these immigrants came from the region of Kastoria, presently northern Greece. (Encyclopedia Canadiana Vol. 6) The majority of these Bulgarians were peasants with limited education. By the year 1900, these early Bulgarians numbered four to six thousand. After the Ilinden uprising in the Ottoman Empire (1903), the number of Bulgarian immigrants to Canada increased. Again, after the first Balkan war of 1912, many Bulgarians from Kastoria(Greece) left for North America and Canada. Many others left for Bulgaria.

These early immigrants formed a community in the King and Parliament Street area of Toronto. By 1910, these immigrants had established the first Macedono-Bulgarian church, St. Cyril and Methody, on Trinity Street. This was the first Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church in North America. After the Balkan war of 1912, many of these same immigrants returned to fight on the Bulgarian side of the war against the Ottoman Turks. By 1918, the volunteers who had returned to North America formed a committee which presented their aim to unify Macedonia with Bulgaria when the Treaty of Versailles was formalized in Paris.



Eastern Orthodox Church Cathedral

In 1927, immigrants in Canada and United States of America formed the Macedonian Political Organization to support their views on the Bulgarian problem known as the Macedonian question. By 1940, Toronto had two Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox churches which served as vibrant cultural centres for these same immigrants. St.Cyril and Methody is located at 237 Sackville St, and St.George's on 17 Regent Street. By the seventies, a third Macedono-Bulgarian church was established at 201 Monarch Park Ave. by the name of Holy Trinity Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church.

The immigrants who arrived after the First World War were mostly guest workers who returned, mainly to Bulgaria, after they had saved some money. The Bulgarians who arrived after the Second World War came with aspirations of permanency. Many were Displaced Persons, some were students from various Universities and Colleges in Europe; others had escaped from Bulgaria because they rejected communist ideology. The majority of these immigrants were from the cities and well educated. It was this wave of immigrants that formed new cultural associations such as the American Bulgarian League, the Bulgarian National Front, the Bulgarian Canadian Association and the Canadian Bulgarian Business Association.

St. Cyril and Methody Macedono_Bulgarian



Holy Trinity Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church

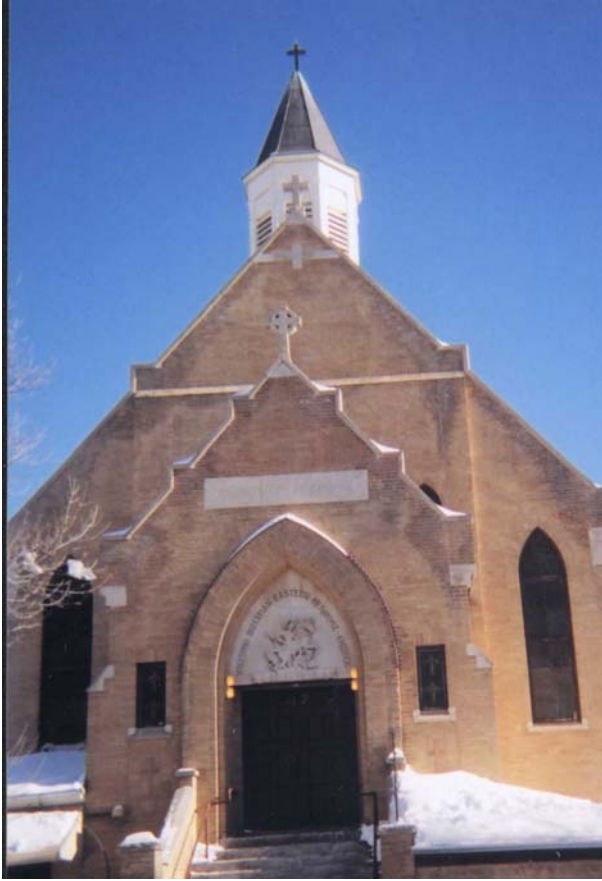
Holy Trinity Macedono-Bulgarian eastern Orthodox church

One of the oldest incorporated Bulgarian organizations in Toronto is Macedonian Patriotic Organization (MPO) Luben Dimitroff which dates back to 1944. One will see the pictures of past conventions of the Macedonian Patriotic Organization on the walls of the churches. The archives of the three

Macedono-Bulgarian churches contain the names of the founding fathers: Tenekeff, Bitove, Sholdoff (Stavros), Nakeff, Tzafaroff, Markoff, Koroloff, Meanchoff, Goushleff, Maneff, Stoyloff. In St. James

cemetery on Parliament Street one will find the history of the Bulgarian people written on monuments. There one will find the names of the villages Gabresh, Drenovine, Banitza, Smurdesh and many others. All villages of the geographical region called Macedonia are now under Greek jurisdiction. At present the Canadians of Bulgarian background in and around Toronto number about twenty thousand. Most of them attend the three Macedono-Bulgarian churches. The Bulgarians in Mississauga are building a new Bulgarian church to be called St. Dimiter Solonski.

In the forties, most Macedono-Bulgarians worked in restaurants or butcher shops which were family run businesses. One prominent business was Valley View Dairy. This milk company provided much needed credit to other family businesses and also made the first investment in restaurants. This was a new idea in the new world. The salesman Dimiter Krastovski of Valley View Dairy knew many of the restaurant owners in Toronto. With Blagoi Markoff, he would collect money from them to support the newspaper Macedonian Tribune published in Indianapolis, Indiana. In the sixties before coffee shops became widespread, a member of the St. Cyril and Methody church, Mr. Evans (Ivanoff) from Kailiare (northern Greece) had the first commercial donut distribution known as Primrose Donuts. Primrose Donuts were served in most restaurants at the time. Methody Surbinoff, a driver for Primrose Donuts, recounted how his mother in the village Buff in northern Greece to-day, gave him a loaf of bread and told him to run to Bulgaria in order to make sure he did not become Greek.



We the Macedono-Bulgarians have so many stories to tell and so few pages to write it on. Can you really imagine that members of the St. George's Macedono-Bulgarian church were the major shareholders of the Maple Leaf Gardens, Manol Sholdoff. (Stavro) until 2003! Then there is the story of Lazar Bitove's dealings with the CARA corporation and his success in obtaining the franchise for the restaurants in the airport of Toronto. Another case is the immigrant from Bulgaria who came to work as a gardener in Mississauga and ended up owning most of the apartment buildings there today. Ignat Kaneff also owns many golf courses such as Lionhead Golf and Country Club and has rubbed shoulders with many of the prime ministers of Canada. Then there is the company Urban Engineering of Toronto which has designed so many subdivisions in the Metro area. Boris Ivanov as an engineer has contributed also to the many faces of Toronto. Another vibrant company is Crispo Engineering in Mississauga. Hristo Todoroff has the only engineering company for retooling in Canada

St. George Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church

where the instructions are in Russian. These were the sons of immigrants who had difficulty speaking English. These stories could only have taken place in Canada.

The majority of the Bulgarians who came after 1990 were the most educated and contributed enormously to cultural, professional and business activities. They brought new life to the three Macedono-Bulgarian churches. Whenever the churches celebrate Bulgarian national functions, the new Canadians are major contributors with music, drama and comedy. During the winter season they bring classical music and plays to the stages of the churches. Most of the plays performed are by Bulgarian playwrights with the addition of other well known international playwrights. The new Canadians of Bulgarian background also have established a radio hour known as the Bulgarian Voice of Canada at CHIN radio station broadcasting at 1540 am. This radio hour has been on the air for the past 5 years and brings news from Bulgaria and the world. At the present there are two Bulgarian student associations, one at the University of Toronto and the other at York. These students bring diversity to both universities by arranging special events which high light the history of Bulgaria and its people past and present.

After the fall of communism the Bulgarian community has been concerning itself with improving the lot of the Bulgarian people. They are demanding human rights for the Bulgarians outside the present Bulgarian borders. An example is the request to give the Bulgarians in the FYR of Macedonia the same human rights as the rest of the citizens of Macedonia. The Bulgarian community in Canada is also interested in achieving an accommodation with the Greek government to give their citizens of Bulgarian background full human rights and to honour the wish of these citizens to be identified as ethnic Bulgarians rather than Slavo Eliny (Slavic Greeks).

After the services in the Macedono-Bulgarian churches, coffee is served, and the politics of Macedonia come into discussion once again. Should we write a letter to the government of Canada and inform them that the solution to the Macedonian question is uniting the geographical region Macedonia with Bulgaria? Stories with no end in the future.

George Mladenoff Feb.5.2004