

BMNECC 90TH ANNIVERSARY MURAL

VISION AND INSPIRATION BEHIND ITS CREATION

The 90th Anniversary Mural was commissioned in December 2019, completed in May 2020 and unveiled during the 90th Anniversary Celebration of the Bulgarian Macedonian National Educational and Cultural Center - BMNECC.

The vision for the mural is a symbolic and geographic representation of Bulgaria and Macedonia and their rich cultures and traditions. It is also a tribute to the immigration of our ancestors from Bulgaria and Macedonia and other countries of Europe from the early 1900s through present day. These immigrants carried and instilled their individual and shared values, culture, religion and sense of family to America and settled in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, whose topography was similar to their homeland.

In 1930, Lambe Markoff, an immigrant from Macedonia, became the founder and first president of the Bulgarian Macedonian Beneficial Association, the forerunner of the BMNECC. Our mission, never political, is to preserve, present, and promote the cultural values and rich traditions of the Bulgarian and Macedonian people; offer a comprehensive source of Bulgarian and Macedonian historic and educational information; and contribute to the cultural landscape by presenting unique artistic events and performances.

Today, the BMNECC is a thriving organization, successfully fulfilling its mission on an ongoing basis. We maintain an energetic and forward-thinking board of directors, have increased membership and renewed our commitment to education via our accredited Bulgarian School, and have expanded community participation throughout Western Pennsylvania and beyond with our many cultural offerings.

This mural is a testimony to our organization: our founders and benefactors, our community constituencies and our members from all ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Within this documentary contains a brief description of the inspirations and symbolisms behind the mural itself.



↪ In the upper background of the mural is the beautiful Vitosha Mountain, a mountain massif on the outskirts of Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. It is one of the symbols of the capital and a popular site for hiking, alpinism and skiing, with an elevation of 7510 ft.



↪ Affixed at the top of the church in the mural is the Orthodox Cross inspired by the cross located on top of Sveta Nedela (Saint Sunday) Orthodox Church in the small village of R'Zanovo, several miles northwest of Ohrid. Sveta Nedela, over 400 years old and functional today, is the church in which Lambe and Nevena Markoff were married in the early 1900s.

↑ The dancers in the mural are ten current members of the BMNECC and Otets Paissii Performing Folk Ensemble, the oldest continuously performing Bulgarian/Macedonian folk ensemble in the United States.

Each dancer adorns a different costume from our expansive wardrobe of original archives housed in our Cultural Center. The costumes are representative of the different ethnic regions including Shop, Dobrudja, Thrace, Rhodope, Northern Macedonia, and Pirin.

The overarching representation of the mural is captured in two prevailing themes: tribute to our ancestors and cultural unity in diversity. The dancers' ages span over 60 years. In addition to Bulgarian and Macedonian ethnicities, our dancers' ethnicities include Serbian, Croatian, Slovak, Polish, German and Irish. The diversity in our organization symbolizes our outreach as a cultural center to an expansive and varied population in the western Pennsylvania area.

Several dancers in the mural were born in Bulgaria; others represent first, second, and third generation of immigrants to the United States. One dancer in the mural is the great granddaughter of the founder, Lambe Markoff.

The dancers in the mural are holding hands, signifying cultural unity, in a traditional dance step of Bulgaria or Macedonia to which everyone who has attended a Vecherinka can relate.



↪ Pictured in the mural is the Macedonian Orthodox Church located at The Monastery of Saint Naum, founded in 910 AD and named after medieval Saint Naum. It is situated along Lake Ohrid, 29 km (18 mi) south of the city of Ohrid in Macedonia.

Saint Naum was a medieval Bulgarian writer, enlightener, and one of the seven Apostles of the First Bulgarian Empire and missionary among the Slavs. He was among the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius and is associated with the creation of the Cyrillic

script. Naum was one of the founders of the Pliska Literary School, and later worked at the Ohrid Literary School. He was among the first saints declared by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after its foundation in the 9th century.

Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion in Bulgaria and Macedonia to this day. Characteristic of the cornerstones of villages throughout these two countries is the Orthodox Church as depicted in the mural.



↪ Also in the background of the mural are several homes inspired by the house to the left located in Etara, an architectural and ethnographic

complex, and the first of its kind in Bulgaria. Built 50 years ago in the heart of the Stara Planina near the town of Gabrovo, Etara is an open air museum dedicated to the lifestyles, cultures as well as the craftsmanship of our ancestors from a few centuries ago. The mural depicts the orientations of the family village homes surrounding the Orthodox churches in the regions of Bulgaria.

↪ The dancers in the mural are placed in a grassy field inspired by the fields of R'Zanovo, the hometown of Lambe Markoff. The picture below, taken in July 2014 during Sveta Nedela Day in which the grandsons of Lambe and their wives participated, inspired the venue and choreography of the dancers in the mural.





Jennifer Rempel, the artist of the mural is one of the premier muralists and decorative painters working today. Her concepts, problem-solving skills, project execution, and raw, innate artistic talent are of world-class caliber. She renders both classical and modern styles in a remarkable display of technical virtuosity that is always tempered by a deep sensitivity to the needs of the site and the desires of the client.

A graduate of Carnegie-Mellon University with a B.A. in Fine Arts, Jennifer was co-founder of the ARTificial School, Pittsburgh's first professional school of decorative arts. Today she works from her spacious studio in a century-old former school house that overlooks our Cultural Center and the region's historic industrial neighborhoods in Homestead and West Homestead.

www.JenniferRempel.com

We wish to thank four individuals who were the benefactors and sponsors of the mural:

Christine Jordanoff, former Chair of the Music Education Department and Director of Choral Organizations at Duquesne University, as well as the Artistic Director of the Children's Festival Chorus of Pittsburgh, was married to the late Nicholas Jordanoff. Nick was the founder and first Artistic Director of Otets Paissii Performing Folk Ensemble. Ms. Jordanoff's donation is dedicated in memory of Nicholas Jordanoff.

Elsa Limbach is a dancer, teacher and choreographer whose career has bridged two cities, Sofia and Pittsburgh. As a founding member of Dance Alloy and eventually its Artistic Director, Elsa performed with the company for 15 years in more than 100 works by dozens of contemporary choreographers. Elsa, a current member of BMNECC and former board member, is a longtime supporter and benefactor of our organization.

Dana Spiardi is a retired Director of Communications at Westinghouse Corporation, current member of the BMNECC and former board member, and designer/creator of the original BMNECC website and its emerging upgrade. She is an overall media and communications consultant and founder of the pop culture blog: www.HipQuotient.com.

Ed Markoff, president of the BMBA from 1979 to 1999 and current president of the BMNECC, is the grandson of Lambe Markoff, the founder and first president. He is a retired director from Alcoa for 38 years and adjunct math professor for Duquesne University for 36 years.



*Concept: Ed Markoff
Design: Beth A. Stafura, Gábor Dobi
Photo credit: Ed & Marilyn Markoff, Public Source*