

ROSE FESTIVAL IN KARLOVO
The interview with Mrs. Ivanka Baltova
was conducted by Assoc. Prof. Dr Emilia Velikova



Mrs. Ivanka Baltova graduated from the University for Cultural and Educational Personnel, profile "music" in the town of Haskovo; "Management of Culture" at the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", course "Journalism and Library Science"; school for conductors of choirs. Throughout her career, she has worked in a Cultural Center. She is a member of the "Impression" music trio, a mixed choir and a chamber ensemble for school singing, as well as the leader of the vocal group "Detelina". After her retirement, Ms. Baltova continued to engage in community service, both in the town of Karlovo and in her home village of Karavelovo. She is a winner of a number of international and national music competitions and festivals.

Mrs. Baltova, as one of the organisers of the cultural life in the town of Karlovo, tell us when the beautiful Rose Festival was established in your country.

The holiday was celebrated for the first time in 1903. As a centre of rose production and processing of the rose flower, Kazanlak and Karlovo were famous long before the Liberation. For many years it was only a livelihood, but only in the 1930s the rose gardens, beautiful nature, and architecture and the local rose industry are recognized as attractive things that arouse the interest of Bulgarian and foreign tourists. The holiday was regularly celebrated in Karlovo after the end of the First World War. Initially, after the restoration of Vasil Levski's native house, the dates May 31 and June 1 (Pentecost and Holy Spirit) were celebrated in Karlovo as Levski Days and the city organised a large national festival, which was attended by many people from all over the country. On this occasion, the place of Kazanlak was mentioned as part of the Rose Valley. A curious moment of the festivities at that time was presented to us by Nikola Stanev in his travelogue from 1936: "During these days Karlovo is the most beautiful, then the harvest of roses takes place. The Karlovo field stirs as a sea, whose surface overflows with rose fields and mint gardens... The air is light and full of the aroma of various medicinal and field flowers. Passengers arrive by train, cars in continuous rows. They immediately head to the churches, the Monument of the Apostle, and the market square next to the city clock. Across the streets there are endless wreaths of roses hanging from poles, windows, gates, and balconies, homes are decorated as well as churches and squares. Nimble boys and girls, dressed festively, with wreaths on their heads, hold in their hands large baskets full of colourful roses, the latter they give to each guest for free with a smile, welcoming him. "

What does the program of the holiday include nowadays?

The festival is held on the last Saturday of May when the harvesting of roses in the valley is in full force. The day has a festive and entertaining character. The program includes:

- 1) "Rose picking" ritual - in the rose gardens near the town of Karlovo. The ritual involves amateur groups from Karlovo municipality - mummers, singing and dancing groups for authentic folklore, the chosen Queen of Roses for this year, and 6 little companions. In the rose gardens, tourists are given the opportunity to take part in the process.
- 2) Procession of the Queen of Roses: the procession starts from the rose gardens, passes through the streets of the town of Karlovo, and reaches the central square, where on a special stage the cultural program continues.
- 3) "Holiday in the Rose Valley": includes an official opening ceremony and a rich folklore program.
- 4) Demonstration of rose oil extraction and tasting of rose products: in the Historical Museum of the town, the process of rose oil extraction from the beginning of the last century is being re-created for guests and local citizens.
- 5) Happy children's afternoon: as an innovative event, a children's contest "Mini Miss Rose" is organised here. It is attended by children from Karlovo Municipality aged 4 to 8 years.
- 6) Festive fun: this is the evening program that ends the Rose Festival in Karlovo. There is a rich and varied entertainment program for the citizens and guests of the city.

Who is the face of the Rose Festival?

This is the Queen of Roses, which since 1992 has been chosen through a competition. It is attended by beautiful and intelligent girls from Karlovo municipality aged 18 to 23, who present themselves only in sports and formal wear. Throughout the year, the newly elected Queen of Roses actively participates in the events of Karlovo Municipality.