



# OUR STORY

## NAŠA ZGODOVINA



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### Božične jaslice

Anne Urbančič



When I was a child growing up in the community of Marija Pomagaj parish in Toronto, Christmas brought marvelous magic traditions that seamlessly merged the sacred and the secular. Thinking about Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve with the choir singing “Glej zvezdice božje migljajo lepo” still fills me with wistful wonder. At Christmas, our house was crowded with people, old and young; there were lots of colourful greeting cards perched on all the window sills and shelves of our small living room; my mother spent countless hours in the kitchen preparing special foods and baked goods. There was always a freshly cut fir tree with its pungent resinous smell, like a forest in summer, and underneath the tree, protected by our old family cat who

tucked herself into a doughnut shape around the trunk, there were our jaslice, our nativity scene with its humble plaster figures. If you looked closely, some of the sheep had extra support from match sticks because, as my mother warned, the delicate legs broke easily and had to be glued back together. The three kings had flaking paint at points where we children fruitlessly tried to make them sit on their respective camels. The star that led the shepherds was always somewhat lopsided, although it did shine brightly.

Jaslice means stall; even in its name, the commemoration of Christ’s birth through this tableau speaks to his humble beginnings as recounted in the Gospel narratives by Matthew and Luke. Today, of course, the nativity scene is ubiquitous in many Christian celebrations of Christ’s birth and truth be told, some of these representations are not humble at all. The Metropolitan Museum in New York City, for example, has an elaborate breath-taking display; the figures are museum pieces from Naples, Italy. Many have complex mechanical workings that animate them. My own daughters used to admire particularly the figure of a friendly cow slowly chewing her cud and lifting her head to check on the Baby Jesus.

How did the practice of a nativity scene at Christmas come to be? The beginning of this tradition is humble, belonging to the poor of almost 800 years ago. In the small Italian town of Greccio, lived a wealthy man named John whom Francis of Assisi invited to create a living memorial to honour the Christ child. Francis wanted a living scene with a manger in a cave, and only an ox and donkey in attendance. Here is the story of this very first nativity tableau as Tommaso da Celano, the friar who was the first biographer of St. Francis, tells it:

Francis said to John: “I would like to make a memorial of the Child born in Bethlehem, to behold with bodily eyes His infant hardships; how He lay in a manger on hay, with the ox and the ass standing by.” When the good and faithful John heard this request, he quickly prepared all the things that the Saint had asked for. The day of gladness drew near, the time of exultation arrived. The friars were summoned from many places; the men and women of Greccio with exulting hearts prepared

candles and torches, so they might illuminate that night which with its radiant Star has illuminated all the days and years. At length, the Saint of God [Francis] arrived, and finding all things prepared, beheld them and rejoiced. The manger had been made ready, the donkey led in. There Simplicity was honored, Poverty exalted, Humility commended; Greccio seemed to be a new Bethlehem. The night was lit up as the day, and was delightful to men and beasts. The people came, rejoiced with new joy at the new Mystery. The woodland rang with voices. The friars sang praises to the Lord, and the night resounded with jubilation. The Saint of God stood before the manger, full of sighs, overcome with tenderness and filled with wondrous joy. Mass was celebrated over the manger. The Saint of God was vested with priestly ornaments, and with sonorous voice chanted the holy Gospel in an earnest, sweet, clear and loud-sounding voice, inviting all to the highest rewards. Then he preached to the people who stood around, and uttered mellifluous words concerning the birth of the poor King and the little town of Bethlehem.

At length, the solemn vigil was ended, and each one returned with joy to his own place.”  
Like the citizens of Greccio on that long ago Christmas night, may you also share in the same joy as you celebrate Christmas around your own jaslice.

(The story is told in Vita beati Francisci by Tommaso da Celano, a biography commissioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1228 on the occasion of the canonization of Francis. This version was adapted from M. L. Cameron, The Inquiring Pilgrim’s Guide to Assisi, translated by A. G. Ferrers Howell (London, 1926).



The CSHS (Canadian Slovenian Historical Society) is a not-for-profit organization supported by many volunteers. Its goal is to research, record and preserve the history of Canadian Slovenians.

In order to raise funds to continue this work, the CSHS is hosting a luncheon on Sunday, January 22, 2017 at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church hall.

Menu choices include:  
Chicken schnitzel and potatoes  
Vampe and polenta  
Golaž and dumplings

Meals will be offered after all masses for \$15.00 a plate, and salad is included. Take home will also be available.

Invite your family and friends to come and enjoy Maria Soršak’s delicious cooking. Tickets should be ordered in advance by January 15, 2017 by contacting:

- Miriam Čekuta (905) 277-3992  
[mmcekuta@gmail.com](mailto:mmcekuta@gmail.com)
- Jožica Vegelj (905) 661-9800  
[jivegelj@gmail.com](mailto:jivegelj@gmail.com)

## Donating to the CSHS Archives

Are you interested in donating your records to the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society (CSHS)?

If so, we accept donations by appointment only. Please contact archivist, Emily Chicorli, by e-mail: [cshistorical@gmail.com](mailto:cshistorical@gmail.com) or by phone: 416-856-4488.

In your e-mail please describe the records you wish to donate to the archives, detailing the **types of records** (i.e. photographs, letters, postcards, etc.), **the years the records were created** (ex. 1945, 1956-1990), and a **brief outline of what the records are about** (ex. “these letters are in Slovenian to my grandmother about my experiences coming to Canada”).

For more information about the CSHS Archives and how to donate, please visit our website:

[www.slovenianhistorical.ca](http://www.slovenianhistorical.ca)



*Vesele božične praznike  
ter srečno novo leto 2017*



*Merry Christmas and a  
Happy New Year!*

# Slovenian Music in the Archives

Emily Chicorli

Music is an important cultural and artistic component of Slovenian-Canadian heritage. From classical music to polka and folk tunes, the sounds of Slovenia followed many to North America and still resonate today.

Depending on when the albums were produced, many are technically from “Yugoslavia”, highlighting the regional changes that occurred only after Slovenia’s independence in 1991.

Many albums in the CSHS Archives are from the 1960s. We also have a few albums that were produced in Ontario and feature a Canadian-Slovenian artist/band. Here are a few highlights from our collection:

## Slovenian records produced in Canada



**The Walter Ostanek Band**  
**Country:** Canada  
**Released:** 1978  
**Genre:** Folk, World, Country  
**Style:** Polka



**Songs of Slovenia**  
**Country:** Canada (Willowdale Ont.)  
**Released:** 1975



**Vilma Bukovec: In Concert**  
**Country:** Canada  
**Released:** 1979  
**Genre:** Opera, Classical



**Ansambel Štajerski Fantje - Canadian Slovenian Fellows - Toronto**  
**Country:** Canada (Toronto Ont.)  
**Genre:** Folk, World, Country  
**Style:** Polka, Waltz

# 40 Years of Planica H&F Club

Planica celebrated its 40th anniversary at its annual picnic on August 2, 2016. The Board of Directors did a terrific job of organizing the events associated with this celebration – Mass celebrated by Planica member Rev. John Nosan, assisted by Rev. Toni Burja, and music provided by Andy Kuri's family with Jesse Williams. As in the past, Ivan Bračko brought a busload of members of The Slovenian Association - Ottawa. Irene Bric and her helpers held another successful Fun-Education week with many children and grandchildren of the club's members in attendance. As always, food was professionally prepared by Tončka Vrečar and her volunteer helpers. Let's not forget the boys who roasted the pigs.



Planica's young Board of Directors



Rev. John Nosan and Rev. Toni Burja



Children attending the Fun-Education camp



Andy Kuri's and his children with singer Jesse Williams



Ivan Bračko, President of Slovenian Association Ottawa presented a plaque of recognition to the President of Planica Frank J. Brence



Planica buildings from the air: Dom I in the middle, Dom II on the left and Dom III on the right.

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