



OUR STORY

NAŠA ZGODOVINA



Canadian Slovenian Historical Society ~ Vol. 9 No. 3 ~ Fall 2019

Remembering May 1945 – Slovenian Exodus

Anne Žagar

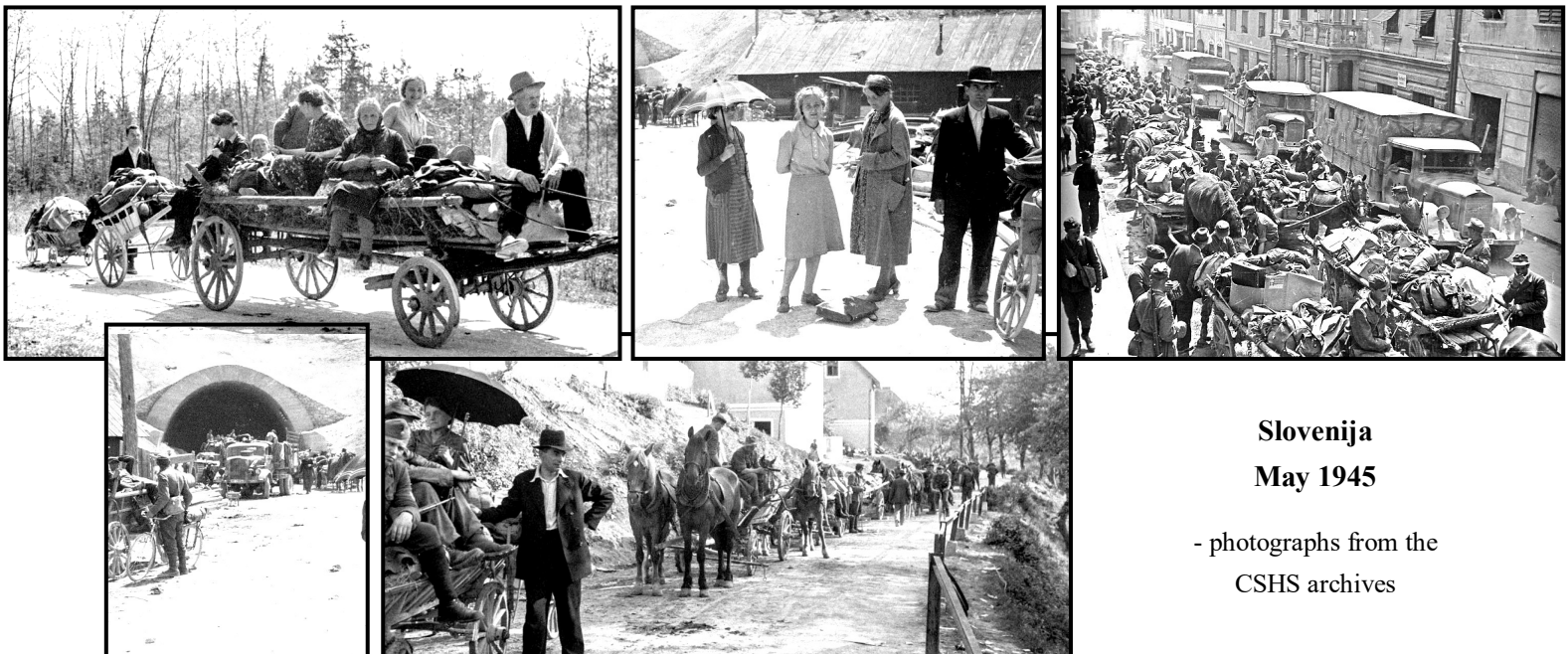
In May 1945, over twenty thousand refugees fled Slovenia when the end of WWII signaled the start of a new communist regime in their home country. Fearing for their lives, they fled across the border seeking refuge in Austria and in Italy. As the sounds of shots and explosions rang out in the distance, many climbed through windows and escaped in darkness from their homes.

These refugees took with them only basic necessities, thinking that the situation in Slovenia would be resolved in two or three weeks, when they would be able to return home. On foot, by bicycle, with horses and wagons, men, women, families with children - they trudged through the Slovenian countryside, moving about stealthily to avoid meeting up with the enemy. They slept in barns or on the ground, and ate whatever they could find or was available. When they arrived in Tržič, they joined other refugees for the tortuous, muddy, cold and dark trek through the Ljubelj pass to Austria. *This tunnel through the mountains between Slovenia and Austria had recently been constructed by the prisoners of the notorious Nazi concentration camp located at Mauthausen.* Their relief in arriving safely in Austria was quickly extinguished when they learned that partisans were ahead blocking their way. Where to go now? Returning home was unthinkable. Finally, the partisans were dispersed and the path was cleared. Thoroughly exhausted, this cavalcade reached Vetrinje, an

open field totally exposed to the weather, where they stayed for several weeks. With tree branches and sheets, they created tents as shelter. Food was limited.

Unfortunately, the situation in Slovenia and Yugoslavia did not improve as was hoped. Many of these Slovenian refugees were forcibly, and through deception, returned to Slovenia where they were summarily executed. In June 1945, those refugees remaining in Vetrinje were resettled in various displaced persons camps throughout Austria, such as Peggez, Spittal, Lienz, Judenburg and Sankt Veit. Some refugees went to Italy in camps at Barletta and Senigalia. Classified as displaced persons and stateless, they remained in these camps for several years.

For many of us living here in Canada, this is a brief outline of the story of the journey our parents and grandparents undertook to start a new life. May 2020 marks 75 years since this exodus out of Slovenia. To commemorate this event, the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society will be hosting a luncheon followed by a short program outlining the events that transpired during their exodus. It will take place on Sunday, April 19, 2020 in the church hall on Browns Line in Etobicoke. For more information about this event, contact Mario Ulcar at marioulcar@gmail.com or Anne Žagar at a_zagar@hotmail.com.



Slovenija
May 1945

- photographs from the
CSHS archives

Veseli Dom

Anne Urbančič

What is WorldCat? It is the world's largest and most authoritative database of books, cds and videos, readily accessible on the internet, bringing in collections from 72,000 libraries from across the globe. Archivists love it to check information about published items. It grows almost daily with new information from libraries and publishers and is a marvelous aid to researchers looking to find titles and authors. Recently, during one of my own research visits to the site, I chanced upon a title familiar to me as a child: *Veseli dom: učna knjiga za višje oddelke slovenskih šol*. This was a reader and language book for children attending Slovenian language classes at the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians in Toronto. Prepared by a group of collaborators led by Rev. Tone Zrnec, it was published in 1965 and had a sister volume, *Materin jezik*, also published for the school in 1966.

I received a Slovenian language school certificate, beautifully drawn by Vilko Čekuta, soon after the two books were published, and used *Veseli dom* in my last year of language classes. Thinking back more than fifty years about the publications, I am proud and humbled by what the two volumes represent. The Canadian Slovenian community was still relatively new at the time, with members immigrating to Toronto largely in the two decades preceding. The first Slovenian Parish had been established only in the fifteen years or so previously. That language classes for the Canadian born children of Slovenian parents had developed to the point that books were needed to teach Slovenian language in the context of a new Canadian Slovenian reality was an admirable testament to the growth, strength and tenacity of the community. It spoke to the great desire of parents that their children know the culture of their grandparents, hard as its grammar was (and is). The collaboration of authors, mostly teachers in the school, spearheaded by Fr. Zrnec, accomplished nothing short of a miracle in producing the volumes. They had realized that in order to preserve Slovenian language and culture for Canadian born children, the photos, stories and articles of the book had to reflect accurately both Slovenian roots as well as Canadian experiences of a new generation of children. Texts imported

from Slovenia could no longer do this effectively.

I still remember that one of my fellow students was featured in the book with a short piece on the Toronto Subway just as the Bloor Danforth line was slated for inauguration in February 1966. A new land, a new reality, with new words such as *podzemeljska železnica*. The authors of *Veseli dom* realized that referring only to the stories, the histories and the culture of Slovenia would not appeal to children who had never been there. Triglav, majestic and beautiful, was too far away for the Canadian children to appreciate its wonder and history, but the new Toronto subway was an aspect of their everyday lives, one they could speak to their parents about.

Seeing the title *Veseli dom* in the renowned WorldCat listings uncovered a disappointing problem. The organization had erroneously categorized the volume as a Slovak textbook for language learning. I wrote to them immediately asking for a correction to the oversight, and, after some consultation, they did change Slovak to Slovenian. Nonetheless, that such an error should occur underscores the need of a society such as the CSHS to promote the history of the Slovenian heritage in Canada. The volunteers work hard to achieve this goal and, as the past fifteen years have shown, they have undertaken projects with pride and success among the various Slovenian communities across Canada. The volunteers deserve much credit for making sure that Canadian Slovenian stories and achievements are not merely a footnote in the history of Canada. As the fifty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Veseli dom* approaches, it brings a moment for all of us to reflect with gratitude on the foresight of community leaders who supported and encouraged the book, and who ensured that the story of Slovenians in Canada was told from an authentic perspective that included Slovenia and Canada. It also brings us a moment to reflect with gratitude on the efforts of all the CSHS volunteers who strive so assiduously to preserve this wonderful heritage.



Fr. T. Zrnec
distributing *Veseli dom*

60 Years of Nagelj

Milena Soršak

Slovenska Folklorna Skupina Nagelj was instituted in October 1959 at Our Lady Help of Christians parish on Manning Ave. in Toronto under the leadership of Ciril Soršak. The initial group of eight soon attracted many other enthusiastic individuals and they began to showcase Slovenian folklore tradition at various events in the Slovenian community, at festivals in Cleveland,(1961), Chicago (1963), Freedom Festival in O'Keefe Centre (1964), and CNE Nationbuilders concerts (1964-66). Thirty members participated at Expo 67 in Montreal and during Caravan festivities in Toronto (1969), that introduced Slovenian culture to a broader population.

Over the next four decades Nagelj introduced folkloric costumes from the five regions of Slovenia, enriched its programs and toured Slovenia seven times. They participated at numerous social and cultural events not only amongst Slovenian communities in Ontario but across Canada. Nagelj's achievements were presented in a book at their 40th anniversary gala.



Their Golden anniversary was another milestone when six couples toured Slovenia from Primorska to Prekmurje showcasing dances from all the regions accompanied by the Tine Rožanc musicians of Ljubljana. In the new millennium as older dancers disbursed, Nageljčki immersed and continued their mission.

On October 19th 2019, over 350 past and present members along with their families and friends gathered at Browns Line to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Nagelj. It was an evening to be remembered by everyone present as, old friends were reunited and revisited nostalgic moments and fond memories.

Nagelj has played an important role in the life of many young Canadian Slovenians as they had an opportunity to learn about their heritage and traditions while with their performances promoted Slovenian identity at various events.



The Original Eight

Top row (l. to r.):
Ciril Soršak
Toncka Kavčič
Martin Govednik
Erna Geder
Joe Malič

Bottom row (l. to r.):
Mary Krnec
Martin Vukšinič
Marica Kavčič

Canadian Slovenians Have Talent

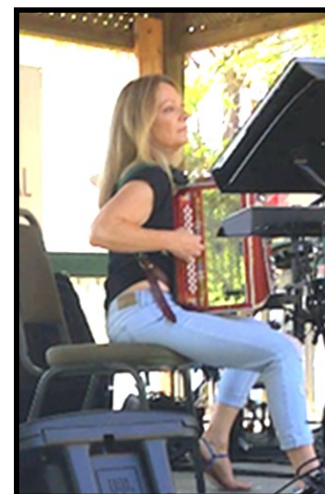
Franca Anderson

The Button Akordion Rocks Club held its first "Canadian Slovenians Have Talent" at the host site Slovenian Hunters and Anglers Club (Lovska Farma) on August 4, 2019.

Thank you to all for your ongoing support and contributions in making this event a wonderful celebration and recognition of our musical talents in the community. The performances harmonized well with the accordion. All are welcome to visit our web site: www.buttonakordion.rocks, or our face book page Button Akordion Rocks Club, to enjoy the photos and videos of the event.

The beautiful and varied talents of our Canadian Slovenian community from across the province are a great tribute to our heritage, love for the button accordion and musical talents. We appreciate the time, the commitment and work that young and old, experienced or inexperienced, devote to music, song and dance. In the future we wish to continue supporting these rich and varied talents in our community.

We are honoured to host button accordion virtuoso and teacher Klemen Rošer from Slovenia the week of November fourth to provide individual lessons and a special evening seminar for all those interested in learning how to play this awesome instrument promoted Slovenian identity at various events.



OUR VISION and MISSION STATEMENT

VISION:

To preserve the records of Slovenian immigration, cultural heritage and continued contributions to Canada and establish the legacy as Canadian Slovenians for future generations.

MISSION:

Canadian Slovenian Historical Society will:

- ◆ archive and preserve the history of Slovenian immigration, its evolutionary heritage and contributions to Canada;
- ◆ gather, record, maintain and augment relevant collections of artifacts reflecting Slovenian cultural traditions, practices and contributions;
- ◆ establish, save and maintain a collection of publications, reports and manuscripts in digital, printed and oral format from Slovenian sources/organizations across Canada;
- ◆ promote academic and literary research of *Canadian Slovenians* in Canada;
- ◆ create/build a display setting of museum format for archives and artifacts;
- ◆ raise awareness, provide access and promote education of the workings and relevance of the CSHS, and strive for community engagement.

UP COMING EVENTS

- Saturday, February 8, 2020 at 10:00am - The CSHS is holding its Annual General Meeting
All are welcome to attend!
Location: Lower level of Dom Lipa - Registration: 9:30am
- Sunday April 19, 2020 - 75th Anniversary Remembering May 1945



*Presented
by*



Sunday, April 19, 2020
Our Lady of Miraculous Medal
Church Hall
Luncheon & Short Program

HVALA ~ THANK YOU

CSHS appreciates everyone's support.

Your generous donations assist in the preservation of Canadian Slovenian heritage.

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52 Neilson Drive
Toronto, ON M9C 1V7
For information contact:
Miriam Čekuta
ourstorymcek@gmail.com



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