



# OUR STORY NAŠA ZGODOVINA

Vol. 6 No. 2 Summer 2016

## 25 Years Later

Dorothy Lenarčič

Happy 25th  
Birthday  
SLOVENIA!



Candlelight vigil - Toronto City Hall



In front of Parliament buildings

Across Canada we held our collective breath as Slovenia declared independence on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1991. What would the reaction be? As the Yugoslav People's Army responded with tanks and aircraft, we gathered in our communities to express anxious concern for relatives in our tiny homeland. What could we do from here? How could we help? Emergency meetings were called and community members took time from their jobs to focus on the crisis. Hastily, we created the Slovenian Information Centre from which information was sent to media, most of whom knew nothing about this tiny nation. At large public rallies, we gathered with signs of support for the homeland, demanding that the Conservative government under Brian Mulroney, recognize Slovenia as a sovereign state. Our greatest fear was that the Yugoslav People's Army would overrun Slovenia and the international community would stand back and let it happen. It was vital that the public support Slovenia and it was up to us to get that attention. And we did! Television media came to the Slovensko Letovišče (Slovenian Summer Camp in Bolton) when Slovenia's government representative flew to Canada to speak. Extensive coverage across Canada, kept up the pressure on Ottawa. Equally important, community leaders raised money for medical and relief supplies, to send overseas.

Slovenia successfully resisted attacks by the Communist controlled Yugoslav People's Army. The tense 10 day war

was followed by a ceasefire that none of us took for granted. It wasn't until the early August that we could breathe a sigh of relief that the worst was over. A free and independent Slovenia was on it's way. Now, 25 years later, we look back with pride, on what we accomplished.



Demonstration for Slovenia's Independence



VICTOR ZENKOVICH  
Slovenian Relief Fund  
CFTO



PETER CEKUTA  
CANADIAN SLOVENIA CONGRESS



# Canadian Slovenian Historical Society Open House and Student Showcase

Pamela Gosgnach

On Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society held a very successful, well-attended open house at Dom Lipa in Etobicoke. Student family research projects from both the Toronto and Hamilton Slovenian heritage language schools were the main focus of the display. Individual and group projects written in Slovenian and English recounted stories of how family members began a new life in Canada, the challenges they faced and the successes they achieved. These memories sparked much discussion and reminiscing among the approximately 125 registered visitors who attended the exhibition.

Marjan Ulčar, the society president, spoke briefly about the work of the society and introduced Dr. Marjan Cencen, the current Slovenian Ambassador to Canada, to those in attendance. Dr. Cencen congratulated the students on their hard work and interest in their Slovenian heritage.

Each school received a donation cheque in the amount of \$500 in recognition of a commitment to the preservation of the Slovenian language and culture. Certificates were prepared for the 48 students involved in the project: Jerry Ponikvar presented the cheque, a plaque in recognition of participation and individual certificates to Sandy Ferletič and students from the Hamilton school while Dr. Janez Vintar made the same presentations to Marta Jamnik-Sousa and the students from Toronto.

Following the presentations, visitors were able to view the projects, tour the archival offices and enjoy refreshments.

All society board members contributed in some way to the success of the day, but special thanks go to Miriam Čekuta and her team of Jerry Ponikvar, Mary Desanti and Dr. Janez Vintar for being the driving force behind the project. The historical society would also like to express thanks to the staff at Dom Lipa for facilitating an event such as this, by providing the space where the stories of so many Canadian Slovenian families could be shared. The number of positive comments received by phone, e-mail and by word of mouth has encouraged the society to consider organizing a similar exhibition in future years.



Jerry Ponikvar with Mateja Mihelčič, Sandy Ferletič and students from the Hamilton school



Dr. Janez Vintar with students from the Toronto school



Marta Jannik-Sousa and students from the Toronto school



Fr. Drago Gačnik with staff, parents and students from Hamilton

# Pencil Me In!

Anne Urbančič

Have you ever thought about how many pencils you have owned in your life, sharpening them over and over until you have had to discard them? In my house I have a drawer full of these undeniably useful instruments, even in this high-tech world of computers. In preparing for this article, I realized that not a day goes by that I haven't used a pencil. Where did they come from? How did they develop?

My pencil drawer actually contains a rather ingenious invention that developed over centuries. The term *pencil* comes to us from the Latin, meaning "little tail". The etymology reminds us that early pencils, which consisted of a string wrapped around a stylus made from lead, really looked like a little tail. Writing with the lead left marks on papyrus and other materials. This early history can be seen in the Slovenian name as well: the word *svinčnik*, clearly tells us that this type of writing instrument contained lead (*svinec*). However, even though we still refer to "lead pencils", today's pencils contain no lead at all, and have not done so since the late 1500s when, according to the story, shepherds in the Cumberland area of England discovered a fallen tree with unusual black stuff clinging to all the roots. This was graphite (also known as wadd). The shepherds soon realized that graphite was a superb substance for identifying their sheep. If it marked the wool of their flocks, could it mark paper? It could indeed, and by 1610 the prototypes for our pencils came into use. They looked somewhat different because they were made from graphite sticks glued between two pieces of wood casing. The graphite cores were squared because such a shape required a groove in only one of the casing pieces.

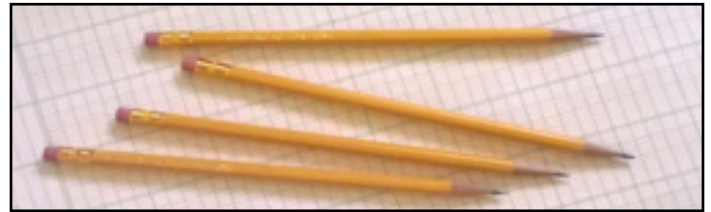
Pencils developed mostly to suit the needs of artists and craftsmen. Nonetheless, mass production of pencils began in Germany by the late 1600s. In 1795, Nicolas-Jacques Conté, a Frenchman, applied for the first patent for a formula of clay and graphite for the pencil core; different proportions of the mixture result in different hardnesses of the pencil leads, and different shades of blackness. His formula is still valid today. By the first decade of the 1800s, pencils were being made by American manufacturers. Their popularity is seen in the fact that, according to historian Henry Petroski, about 20 million pencils were produced annually in the U.S. by the 1870s. It was also at around this time that public schooling began in earnest; increased literacy helped create an even greater demand for pencils.

It soon became evident that round or hexagonal cores were more adaptable to pencil sharpeners even though this meant that grooves had to be cut in both sides of the wood casing. But as pencil making machinery improved, the round or hexagonal shaped leads became industry standards. Colouring the casing, and imprinting it with brand names began in the late nineteenth century. American producers

decided to choose yellow as the casing colour. While it is the predominant shade of even the most humble pencils today, and has no bearing on the quality of the product, the yellow coloured pencil was originally an advertising strategy that let consumers know that the graphite core for their pencils had come from China, home of highest quality graphite. Why yellow? Yellow was a regal colour, reserved for royalty and highly respected personages in China.

Pencils are ubiquitous today; my pencil drawer has pencils of all sorts of lengths, widths and lacquers. Like most pencils, my pencils are durable, effective and, most of all, inexpensive writing instruments. Some pencils, however, are collectors' items. The *Faber-Castell Perfect Pencil*, for example, crafted of olive wood more than two centuries old, and boasting ferrules (metal tips) of 18 carat white gold as well as three small diamonds, costs about \$14000.00 CAD. You can imagine how many ordinary wooden pencils such an amount can buy.

Collectors need not depend only on expensive pencils. A former colleague of mine displayed her extensive treasury in her office with unsharpened pencils from around the globe arranged in colourful groupings. These were her special pencils, for admiring, not using. She herself wrote with an ordinary yellow pencil, like most of the ones in my kitchen drawer.



## 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: [chistorical@gmail.com](mailto:chistorical@gmail.com)

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)



# CSHS Exhibits at Provincial Legislature for Third Time! This time, Niagara farming communities recognized

by Dorothy Lenarčič

Readers will recall that in 2011 and again in 2013, CSHS was chosen in competition to create a display at the Ontario Legislature. In our last display, we focused on the Slovenian community in northern Ontario, namely, the miners and their families.

In late 2015, we submitted a new proposal and were chosen again. Our display “Building Community Far and Wide: The Life of Canadian Slovenian farmers and their families in the Niagara Region”, follows families moving from northern Ontario to settle in the south west of the province and resume their farming skills.

For continuity, we are displaying the Slovenian cookbook and children’s slovar we used in our previous display, both lovingly used by the Benchina family. Alongside them we placed photographs donated by the Zabukovec family. They show the Pecek family at work on their fruit farm in Vineland, Ontario, harvesting grapes and peaches. Another photo shows the Pecek sisters standing by the family automobile and home. They are an example of the hard work and success of Slovenians who settled in the Niagara region, contributing to Canada’s growth.

Once again, it was a pleasure to work with the Queen’s Park co-ordinator, Haley Shanoff, who guided the process. You can view the display just steps inside the front door of the Ontario Legislature until the end of July 2016.



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