



OUR STORY NAŠA ZGODOVINA

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Reflections on the Images of Canadian Slovenian display in Ljubljana June 20 to July 20 2012.

Mary Rožmanc

Recently a unique opportunity arose for the CSHS board members to work with Dr. Urška Strle of the Slovenian Migration Institute at the Scientific Research Centre (SRC) of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), Ljubljana, Slovenia. The collaboration between the two organizations resulted in a display of Canadian Slovenians and their contributions to the arts (visual and literary), culture, religion, sports and communications of Canada. The open, light-filled and airy Atrium of the SRC SASA proved to be the ideal space to hold the display, which could be viewed from June 20 to July 20 2012. At the same time, the National and University Library (NUK) showed Canadian-Slovenian printed materials such as books and periodicals.

After months of planning, Dr. Urška Strle arrived in Toronto the month of April 2012 to discuss and finalize with the CSHS board members the various possible themes for the display. She spent many hours with CSHS Archivist Frank Majzelj; together they selected a representative group of Canadian Slovenians to profile. Many young Canadian Slovenians also answered our Facebook invitation to contribute comments about their heritage. It is thanks to the Canadian Slovenian community all across Canada that the CSHS had sufficient material and information to contribute so fully to this exposition.

The exhibit itself consists of a number of descriptive panels illustrated with photographs of Canadian Slovenians at work and play. Of course, the

large Canadian flag graced the front of the Atrium in Ljubljana. Red maple and linden leaves covered the edges of the Atrium floor surrounding the walls of the display panels, creating a natural guide from one panel to the next.

The opening ceremonies, which were held June 2012 at 18:00, brought many notable guests including Ljudmila Novak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Slovenians Abroad and Zvone Žigon, Secretary for Slovenians Abroad, as well as our very own John Doma, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Slovenia. I was honored to represent the CSHS and to address and welcome the numerous guests at the opening. Denis Majzelj, son of CSHS archivist Frank Majzelj, who now resides permanently in Ljubljana, recorded the proceedings, which are now in the CSHS archives. It is evident that Canadian Slovenians have made and continue to make valuable contributions to society at large. Canadian Slovenians should be proud!

The exhibit is intended to become part of the CSHS permanent collection. But first, it will be shown in various parts of Canada starting with the Toronto City Hall. CSHS hopes that the traveling display will increase awareness amongst Canadian Slovenians of the value of archives in Canada that document the history of Canadian Slovenians. When Dr. Zvone Žigon stated that the Canadian Slovenian Archives are recognized in Slovenia for their progress in archival activity, Canadian Slovenians can be proud, considering that other countries have had older Slovenian emigrant communities.

Please help us continue with the archiving activities by volunteering, donating and supporting the CSHS. We especially look for participation by the next generation of Canadian Slovenians. Youth can provide volunteer services and receive volunteer hours that can apply to their required high school volunteer hours. Please contact the archivist at cshistorical@gmail.com.

You may also speak with any one of the CSHS board members.

If you wish to have the display in your community or organization, please contact the archivist via e-mail at the address in this Bulletin.



After 95 Years, Slovenians Still Find Refuge at St. Cyril's Church

By Erin Lebar



On St. Marks Place in New York City, a church that came back from the brink of closing is, if not thriving, at least surviving. Father Krizolog Cimerman, who 19 years ago was charged with closing St. Cyril's Church but works there to this day, said that 200 worshippers attended Christmas Eve mass last year. Two months prior, 150 people had celebrated the church's 95th anniversary. But on Christmas Day and New Years, only 20 to 30 people showed - evidence that the Slovenian community that has long frequented the church is in a state of transition.

The brownstone church is long and narrow, with just enough room to fit one pew on either side of an aisle that can only accommodate two people standing side-by-side. American and Slovenian flags flank a modest altar overlooked by a large stained glass depiction of St. Cyril. There are no altar servers and often no choir.

Each Sunday after mass, members of the small parish stay and chat with each other in their native tongue - a tradition stemming not from their homeland, but that developed as Slovenians began moving further away from each other and seeing each other less frequently. »This is not only a church, but a cultural

center as well,« said Father Cimerman.

The majority of Slovenians arrived in New York near the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Many of them poor and unskilled peasants, they relocated to places with strong mining, forestry, iron and steel industries. Those skilled in straw-hat making (many of them from Domžale, where straw-hat manufacturing was the largest source of non-farming employment) settled in New York. Their trade served an abundance of Orthodox Jews living in the East Village, who covered their heads more often than not. The following years saw a rapid increase of Slovenians in New York, and the necessity for a church grew. The East Village was the most logical choice for a parish location, as the area, at that time, was the settling place for many large European groups such as Ukrainians, Polish, and most notably, Germans. Eventually, so many Slovenians were attending German masses that they were recited in Slovenian as well as German. For many years, the only thing preventing them from starting their own parish was the acquisition of a Slovenian priest. It took about seven years, from 1908 to 1915, for a contingent of priests working with the Franciscan authorities in Rome to send a permanent priest, Father Benigen Soj. The next year, in January of 1916, the Slovenian parish was made official and titled St. Cyril Roman Catholic Church. A month later, the congregation purchased the brownstone it still uses today, at 62 St. Marks Place, for \$19,000. A cornerstone was placed in the existing building, and inside of it, a roster with the names of the founding members, a few copies of newspapers, a short history of the church in Latin, and a small amount of American money. The very first mass was on Independence Day, July 4 1916. Already at this point, Slovenians were leaving Manhattan for Brooklyn. Around 1925, an attempt to start another Slovenian church in Brooklyn failed due to the death of the priest assigned to the task.

Throughout the next 50 years, most energy went to preserving Slovenian culture, using the church as a home base. A language class was created, and saw its highest enrollment during World War II.

Nineteen years ago, Father Cimerman was sent to St. Cyril by his superiors for the sole reason of shutting it down. After the threat of losing their church became more of a reality, the Slovenian community banded together and managed to donate enough money to keep the doors open.

Around this time, Slovenians began immigrating to the United States in mass quantities again. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 123,631 people

claimed Slovenian as their mother tongue in 1910. In 1990 that number was somewhat unchanged, with 124,437 people in the United States declaring Slovenian ancestry.

However, in the 1990s the number rose dramatically: the 2000 census reported 176,691 people claiming Slovenian ancestry in the United States, a growth most likely due to the recent independence of the country.

Having just celebrated its 95th anniversary, St. Cyril's is now in a state of transition. There is only one family that can say five generations have attended mass there; the rest are more recent additions, with one or two generations having been raised in the church. Children of regular church attendees have moved to the suburbs and have become involved in their own activities, while their aging parents are less able to attend. However, Father Cimerman said the baby boomer generation is becoming more willing to

trek into the city for programs that ensure their kids get the same cultural education that they did, at the same place. The Slovenian language classes that were available through the church (currently on hiatus until a new teacher can be found) were a large draw to those outside of Manhattan, since such specific language classes are not widely available. Since 1971, every third Sunday of the month, after Mass, the community gathers to hear speakers talk about anything relating to Slovenian culture, be it food, dancing, language, tourism, or politics. After, everyone sits down to have lunch together, a traditional meal of Kranjska klobasa, sauerkraut, and bread. As for the future of St. Cyril's Slovenian Church, Father Cimerman is not certain. »I know I will be here until at least the 100th anniversary«, he chuckles. »The rest? That is in God's hands«.

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Everybody wants to be Slovenian!

By Danielle Lenarčič Biss

**Meet Team Slovenia. Recognize anyone?
Surprise – none of them are Slovenian!**



Slogan printed on their jerseys:
“Najboljši slovenski hokej ekipa doslej”

Last fall, I found out four of my friends played on an intramural hockey team at my university. Naturally, I said, “That’s cool, what are you called? Do you have a team name?”

To my complete surprise, I learned they had chosen to name themselves Team Slovenia – despite none of them being Slovenian or having visited the country. My friends couldn’t believe it when I told them *I was Slovenian myself!*

Who knew there was a 14-player hockey team in the tiny town of Sackville, New Brunswick with the name of Team Slovenia! The group had joined together as students who were mostly living off campus and wanted

to compete against teams formed in the university residences. After tossing around several team names, they agreed on “Team Slovenia” in honour of one of their favourite hockey players in the National Hockey League: Anže Kopitar. Kopitar is the only player in the NHL from Slovenia, and recently led the Los Angeles Kings to the playoffs this season to win the Stanley Cup! My friends on Team Slovenia back in New Brunswick sure had the right thinking when they chose to name themselves after their “friend” Kopitar!

As a small and unfamiliar country, Slovenia was an appropriate name for the team, being the “underdogs” of the intramural university league this past year. The team embraced its name and played the Slovenian national anthem prior to the start of hockey games, waved a huge Slovenian flag whenever a goal was scored, and wore jerseys that said, “Najboljši slovenski hokej ekipa doslej.” It was quite a sight to see, and I loved cheering them on at games and showing my own Slovenian pride. One night I was given the “Fan of the Game” award: a cabbage! Now *that’s* Slovenian – a prize you can eat!



Fan of the game award presented to Danielle Lenarčič Biss

What should we do with all this stuff?

Anne Urbančič

In the end, my beloved aunt's life fit into 5 or 6 bulky brown grocery cartons. We called her Tetateta because my children could not understand the relationship between them and a "great aunt". When I explained that "great aunt" was akin to being aunt twice over, my daughters coped with the information by deciding she was like a doubled aunt and so they began to call her Tetateta. The name stuck. And she liked it as well.

Tetateta moved into Dom Lipa in the spring of 1988, not all that elderly but clearly suffering from dementia and in need of assistance. The best years of her life were then spent in Dom Lipa, free from the worries and distress that had made all her previous years scarring, traumatic. She had no children of her own, had never married. Her possessions reflected her frugal nature. Dishes and kitchen utensils. Linens. Books. Clothes. Letters and pictures. Only the last two boxes came with her to Dom Lipa.

She died in the spring of 2001, scant months before 9/11 irrevocably changed the world. Suddenly, the entire planet shared a common memory, as horrible as it was, and from all corners of the earth, people realized the importance of saving memories.

We packed up her photos and letters, now silenced memories, and wondered what to do with them. Her life, so vital to us, was not that of a famous person whose death would attract major national archives.

Her letters traced her years in Canada, from the aftermath of World War 2 until her forgetfulness became an impediment for her. They should have gone to an archive, but in 2001, in the absence of an appropriate place for them, many got scattered and lost.

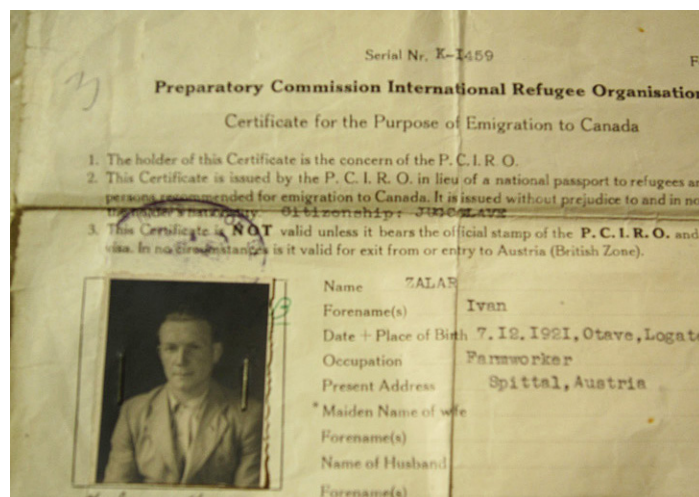
Only two years later, the idea of preserving the Canadian Slovenian experience came into existence through the CSHS.

You may have had similar experiences. A family member has gone to a nursing home or has passed away, leaving behind photos, letters, cards, recipe books, tapes, movies, diaries. All of these are valuable documents because they tell several stories. First they describe the life of that person. But secondly, they tell the story of the whole family, of how they came to Canada and how they made a life here, through thick and thin. There was no going back. And thirdly, these

documents tell the story of an entire community, the Canadian Slovenians. They name the community, making it stand out from among all the other ethnic groups who have established themselves in Canada. Slovenians are a small group and quickly disappear in the Canadian ethnographic picture. Just how quickly can be seen in my recent discovery that the University of Toronto libraries have listed the journal *Ljubljanski zvon* as being written in Slovak. (I have written to the librarian to have this corrected).

If you are wondering what to do with the letters and documents left after a relative has moved or has passed away, consider the Archives of the CSHS. We are here with the sole purpose of ensuring that Canadian Slovenians are remembered as vital contributors to Canadian history and that their history is available to genealogists and ethnographic researchers of the future. We have full membership and recognition from the Archives Association of Ontario, the Ontario Historical Society and the Canadian Oral History Association. We follow established archiving regulations and practices. We are rather proud of our achievements especially since other ethnic groups have come to us for advice as they begin similar work in documenting their own histories in Canada.

Get in touch with our archivist, Frank Majzelj. He will be happy to help you establish a permanent record of your family in Canada. You will find his contact information in this Bulletin.



Example of the documents that should be preserved.

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