



# OUR STORY

## NAŠA ZGODOVINA



Canadian Slovenian Historical Society ~ Vol. 15 ~ Spring 2025

### EARLY YEARS

*This year CSHS will explore Slovenian immigration and settlement in Canada. Our first video ~ Slovenians in Canada: The Early Years will be presented on April 6, 2025.*

***We are sure that there are many remarkable stories about your families that would be of great interest to our readers. Please share these memories with us. They will be printed in Our Story, anonymously if you wish, for us to share the joys and the challenges of choosing a new life in Canada.***

*To learn more about the early Slovenian settlement in Canada please refer to some of these authors: Cvetka Kocjancic, Rudolf Cujes, Rev. Tone Zrnc Alojz Rebula, Valentin F. Rucigoj, Pierre Burton, and many others listed on our website [www.slovenianhistorical.ca](http://www.slovenianhistorical.ca).*

*Below is a synopsis of early Slovenian immigration to Canada.*

Much has already been researched and written about our missionary, Bishop Friderik Baraga who came to North America in the mid 1800's and was assigned to administer to the indigenous cultures in Upper Canada. Information about Baraga has been published in magazines, books, and newsletters. (*Our Story, Volume 7, summer 2017*).

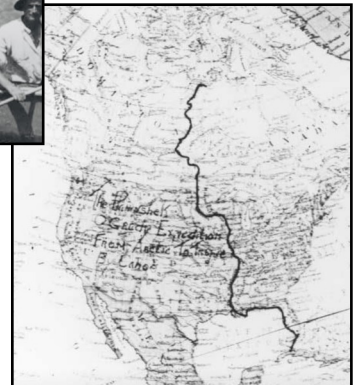
According to statistics, immigration from Europe to Canada seems to fall into three distinct periods: post WWI - 1924 to 1930, post WWII - 1947 to 1951 and from 1957 to 1970. Although there were Slovenians who came to North America prior to the 1920's, we do not have adequate data about these newcomers as many were admitted as either Austro-Hungarians or Yugoslavs. These first immigrants settled mainly in the United States. Canada was not yet well known in Europe or open to immigration. Most who came to Canada found jobs in mining, logging and railroad work, hoping to return one day to the homeland after earning enough income to do so. A few came for the adventure.

One such adventurer was Anton Stander. In 1886 he ventured north to the Yukon territory in search of wealth. He discovered gold in Eldorado Creek, which became the richest waterway in the Klondike. He became quite wealthy, married a Dawson dancing girl, and travelled the world. In 1903 he built one of America's finest hotels in the west – Stander Hotel in Seattle. In the end, he squandered most of his wealth and died penniless in 1952.

Another adventurer was Janez Planinshek. He came to North America at the age of seventeen in search of gold.

He travelled from Mexico to Siberia where he was temporarily imprisoned until he escaped and lived among the Inuit, who protected him. He later moved to central Canada, lived with the Caribou people, married an indigenous woman and had five children. He worked

as a hunter, farmer and prospector. He took part in the Planinshek-O'Grady



Expedition that canoed from the Arctic Circle to Havana, Cuba. He was known as *Eskimo Charlie*.

After World War I, Slovenians began emigrating directly to Canada from Europe. They moved into the forests of British Columbia, the farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the mines in Ontario. Many were also destined to work on the railroads. As travelling to Canada became easier many of the families joined the men who were working in the various areas of Canada. In these communities they formed social and cultural organizations. In the 1930's some of these families moved from Ontario's northern regions to the fruit belt area of Vineland-Beamsville in southern Ontario. There they established orchards and fruit farms.

Prior to WWII there were several Slovenian communities in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Due to the Great Depression and the threat of war in Europe, immigration to Canada stopped. After 1947, many Slovenians came to Canada from refugee camps. They were contracted and scattered where needed to various Canadian occupations: logging, mining, farming, railroad work, and domestic household work. Thus, the Slovenian presence spread throughout Canada. MC

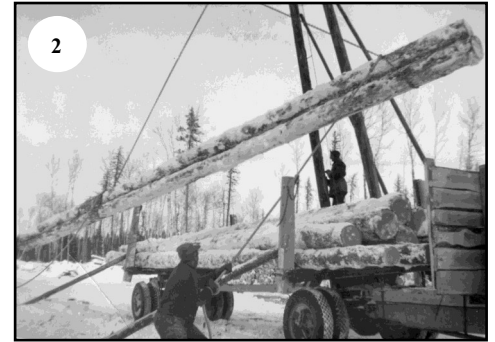
This column creates a digital repository of the artefacts that are important to the history of Slovenians in Canada that the Archives cannot accept due to limited space, other restrictions, or the donors wish to keep in their family.

## Logging Near Geraldton, Late 1940s

Mary Rožmanc has been an active and dedicated volunteer at the CSHS for many years. When the Society began its photo identification program *Kdo smo?* she was always happy to help those who dropped by to identify the photographs that had been donated to the archives. More recently, she has also participated in the photo scanning days that the Archives of the CSHS offer. It comes as no surprise then, that among her personal cherished items is a small collection of photos depicting her father's earliest days in Canada.



According to Mary, Vinko Rožmanc was a minimalist, a man not given to accumulating items. Consequently, she has treasured the nearly dozen black and white photos he kept of his logging days at the Abitibi Lumber camp near Geraldton, Ontario, where he had been sent in 1947 to fulfill the terms of his Canadian immigration contract. The photos were mostly informal ones, likely taken by members of the logging team. *Photo 1* depicts a logger with his horse. Both are well protected against the winter snow, and must have been known to Vinko. Regretfully, since the logger is not Vinko, he and the photographer have been “lost to history”.



While Mary's collection may hold its secrets, it does speak openly of the undeniably rudimentary conditions in which her father and his fellow loggers found themselves. Trees, lots of gigantic old-growth trees whose height amazed Vinko (*photo 2*); unending snow for months ( $\frac{1}{2}$  meter of snowfall was not unusual); while Spring and Autumn brought boggy puddles (*photo 3*); the shabby, well-worn trucks reveal the consistent use demanded of the machines, horses to help transport the logs to the river; and, the men who worked in the forests (*photo 4*). Working in the clear-cutting practice of the day, the lumber jacks were paid by the cord of wood they chopped, and they worked hard to chop as much as possible, usually two cords of spruce per day.



With the workday done, the men returned to their bunkhouses. *Photo 5* shows that these were no more than large single storey shacks cobbled from planks, covered with tarpaper and raised a foot or so off the ground. The long skinny smokestack poking out of each roof indicates that inside there must have been some kind of stove, likely woodburning, to keep the winter weather at bay in each building. Windows are small, and doors are crossed boards on hinges. A bunkhouse was home to a team of 40 men, sleeping in 20 beds along each side. While the exterior of these buildings is not inviting, Mary's father often spoke about the plentiful meals deliciously prepared in the cookhouse by the cook, the only woman in the camp.

When he gave the photos to Mary many decades later, Vinko still remembered the names of some of his campmates; he remembered the nationality of others: Slovenian, Serbian, Ukrainian and the Swedish boss. And, although he had forgotten her name, he still remembered fondly how the cook, who spoke to everyone in Ukrainian, gave him his first introduction to “Canadian” cooking. In particular, he never forgot her delectable apple pie, a treat he had never tasted before, which she served every night for dinner.



Mary's pictures also show the camaraderie among the men of Vinko's team. In some of the photos, the loggers are smiling into the camera. They are dressed in their Sunday best, although we will never know whether they smiled at the urging of the photographer, or because it actually was Sunday, and they were headed into town on their day off. As a bonus, if they had worked hard during the week, their day off on Sunday would be paid. The loggers look well-fed, and content. The accordion, fiddle and guitar indicate that whether they stayed at the camp or not, camp life allowed for times of relaxation and music (*photo 6*).



## Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant

Ontario  
Trillium Foundation



Fondation Trillium  
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An agency of the Government of Ontario  
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For the second year in a row, the Canadian Slovenian Historical Society (CSHS) has been awarded funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). We are honoured to receive a 2024-2025 Capital grant as part of its Community Investments program aimed at improving local programs and services. The OTF is funded by the Government of Ontario.

The CSHS was awarded \$11,900 to enhance and further develop our community outreach activities through the purchase of new equipment and software.

This year's grant has enabled the CSHS to expand our oral history program and improve the preservation of these interviews for future generations. Our oral history program provides the CSHS with a unique opportunity to document the stories of Canadian Slovenians across Canada through audio and video interviews. These interviews are preserved in our Archives, used in our documentaries, and some are made available on our website.

The OTF grant has also allowed us to expand and enhance our community outreach events and activities. The funding has enabled the CSHS to purchase additional computer equipment, a high-speed photo scanner, editing software, and a portable projector.

We have already put our new equipment to good use. In October 2024, our new high-speed scanner made its debut at our annual community photo scanning event. The scanner was instrumental in helping CSHS volunteers scan over five hundred digital images from twelve new collections.

The new computer equipment and editing software has also been used to create the new CSHS documentary entitled *Slovenians in Canada: The Early Years*. This documentary will premiere at our annual luncheon at Our Lady of Miraculous Medal on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025. It will also be shown at the event using our new projector!

We are grateful to the OTF for this year's funding to enhance and further develop our community outreach activities. Outreach is an essential part of the CSHS mandate. It allows us to engage and connect with Canadian Slovenians. Most importantly, our outreach activities and events help to foster a sense of pride and belonging within the Canadian Slovenian community through our shared culture and heritage.



- \* Our AGM, held on Saturday, March 8th was well attended. The annual report indicated a growth in membership and new acquisitions for the CSHS archives.
- \* Our library at St. Gregory Church - Hamilton needs a volunteer for our book collection. If you are interested in assisting, please contact us at ourstorymcek@gmail.com
- \* On Sunday, April 6th, we will present a new video at our annual lunch entitled *Slovenians in Canada: The Early Years*. A video about the immigration and settlement of Slovenians in Canada.

Our display for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marija Pomagaj Church is ongoing in the church hall at 611 Manning Avenue, Toronto.

On December 8, 2024, the 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebration for Marija pomagaj was held with a ceremonial mass, an elaborate meal and a special program including folk dancing accompanied by Slovenian music.

Honoured guests included Bishop Anton Jamnik from Slovenija and Ambassador Gregor Rode. Anne Žagar, a CSHS member, spoke about her experiences in the Slovenian Heritage Language program.

*Please see her speech - Slovenian Language School on page 4.*

## 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.

### SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOL



Ten days before the Marija Pomaga 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, I received a surprise phone call from g.Valant inviting me to make a short speech about my personal experiences at Slovenska šola and its related activities. It's been more than half a century since I attended and there are some amazing memories. So, let's turn back the clock.

I started Slovenian school when I was six years old when I was in grade one at English school. I attended for six years and learned a lot about Slovenia, its literature, geography and its history. The geography lessons were very helpful, because for as long as I can remember, I have been giving geography lessons to those who have no idea that Slovenia even exists and where it is located.

I also remember memorizing things like hiša, hiše, hiši, hišo, pri hiši, z hišo, and so on. I was good at memorizing but had difficulties figuring out Slovenian grammar. It wasn't until I was in grade 9 and took Latin that I finally figured it out. Latin is like Slovenian, which has the declensions with different case endings, and the feminine, masculine, and neutral genders, and singular, dual and plural.

When g.Zrnec arrived, taking over as principal of the school, youth choirs were formed, and concerts, plays, and music festivals were presented. It was a very busy time.

I was eight years old when I performed as one of the fireflies in the operetta Kresniček (The Firefly). We wore a brown costume with a little light bulb on the brown cap

over our foreheads. A wire ran from that light bulb to our hip where the battery was located. We sang with enthusiasm!

A year later, when I was nine years old, it was Zvezdica Zaspanka (The Sleepy Star). Those of us who played stars were dressed like angels in sparkling star-covered white robes. The skies shone brightly as we held up large cardboard stars covered with aluminum foil. Again, we sang from our hearts!

In April 1966, we sang on television on the Uncle Bobby show, and later at Christmas, we performed at the new Toronto City Hall.

There were many music festivals and events over the years. The choirs sang in 3 or 4-part harmony, had an extensive repertoire, and we sang very well, better than the high school choir I later joined!

My daughters also attended Slovenska šola. One day after class, one of them announced that she had learned that turkeys had invaded Slovenia several centuries ago! Turkeys? The birds? Well, it was the Turks who had invaded during the "turški napadi". And she had confused the Slovenian pronunciation of Turki with the English word "turkey."

Attending Slovenian school and singing in the choir enabled us to make connections and friends that have lasted a lifetime. And, despite the very low population of Slovenia, Slovenians, who love to sing, have proven to be survivors - they are resilient, smart, resourceful, hard-working and dedicated. As proof of this, I will conclude with this inspirational fun fact: During the past three Olympic games, Slovenia ranked near the very top as far as gold medals won per capita - more than Canada, the US and other European countries.

Hvala lepa!

### HVALA ~ THANK YOU

CSHS appreciates everyone's support. Your generous donations assist in the preservation of Canadian Slovenian heritage.

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