

CRECHE HERALD

For All Who Love, Own or Collect Creches

Vol. 17, No. 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTMAS NATIVITY

Spring 2013



COVER: *Mary is visited by the Annunciation angel in these two early 16th century wood panels.*

The paintings, by an unknown artist, are from the Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta Museum of the municipality of Gandino, Italy.

Creche Herald Tour to Sud Tyrol, Italy

Breathtaking in both natural vistas and creche collections, Sud Tyrol, Italy, was a daily cultural feast for the *Creche Herald* tour group led by David Harper. Participating were Jocelyn Adelaar and her children, Jesse Adelaar and Robyn Goodpasture, Cheryl Hamilton, Emma and Cathy Lincoln, Nancy Mallett, Alan and Mary Liz Pomeroy, and this writer.

The group met at the Milan airport, and then got its first surprise with a detour to the Museo del Presepio in the village of Albusciago. A jewel of a collection, the museum's 200 creches with their elaborate Spanish style dioramas created the first sensation of the trip.

From Albusciago, the group traveled to Bergamo for a stay of several days. Surrounded by medieval walls, Bergamo is a charming two-tiered city with a funicular that connects the two parts. Narrow medieval streets, fashionable clothing shops, and unbelievably gorgeous pastry shops were the first temptation for the eyes and palate.

Our second day took us on a sojourn to the cosmopolitan city of Milan. Home to the legendary LaScala Opera House, Italian couture shops, a cathedral whose delicate lacy exterior seems to soar right up to heaven, and of course, DaVinci's Last Supper, Milan is the epitome of sophisticated Europe.

On our way back, we stopped at the collection of Tino Cazzulani in Salerano sul Lambro. Cazzulani's collection is housed in buildings on his dairy farm where contented milk cows feed just outside the Nativities. We were honored by a special greeting by the Mayor of Salerano, Stefania Marcolin, who delivered a short speech she had written in English for us. Then refreshments of wine and a sweet Italian bread called *panettone*. Our leave taking sparked much hugging and kissing by our new Italian friends.

The following day we saw the creche collection at Brembo de Dalmine. One of the largest, if not the largest Nativity collection in northern Italy, the museum displays about 900 Nativities on two floors. A small shop on a lower floor sells creche accessories. Then on to Gandino.

The beautiful alpine town of Gandino lies in the Valle Seriana in the foothills of the Dolomites. Its origins date from before 500 B.C. and it has enjoyed a prosperous history. Its cathedral is the majestic Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta built in the 17th century on foundations dating from the 1300s. Designated a National Monument, the Basilica Museum holds many sacred treasures and about 500 Nativities in a collection first started in 1984 for a UNESCO creche exposition in Paris.

Gastronomically, the town has enjoyed a kinship with what we consider an American basic—corn. Corn was first cultivated in the early 17th century, and yellow polenta—what has become the staple corn meal dish of northern Italy—was prepared. That romance with corn continues to this day; the group enjoyed a full luncheon from pizza to pasta to ice cream and cookies all made with the newest regional specialty-flour ground of *mais spinato*—thorny corn kernels.

In Concesio we were entertained by a creche collection

that had lots of movement: wheels turned; a boy fishing caught his fish, and a baby was rocked. From there to Bornato di Cazzago where Carlo Battista Castellini not only has a vast international collection, but invited us into his workshop where he creates intricate three dimensional dioramas for his scenes.

Our most spectacular scenery was during our stay in Alto Adige in the heart of the Dolomites of Sud Tyrol. Jagged snow covered mountains counterposed against unbelievably green pastures. Trim buildings that seemed right out of a story book world dotted the landscape. Here we visited Val Gardena and Ortisei, possibly the most famous woodcarving villages of Europe, and of course bought some of their wares, especially at the Heinrich Demetz workshop.

Rain caught up to us when we visited the Muri Gries Abbey in Bolzano. Creches were on three floors of the Abbey reached by ladder-like stairs which fortunately were not as dangerous as they at first seemed. In town we had the thickest hot chocolate I have ever seen—almost a pudding—a trend we were told that had come in from Spain.

In Bolzano also we had a fascinating, non-Nativity stop when we visited the Iceman Museum to see the 5000 year old figure found buried in the ice of the Italian Alps. Given his age and violent death, the long ago hunter looked relatively good.

In Bressanone, we saw the three-centuries creche collection in the Diocesan Museum in the Prince Bishop's Palace.

Our final day in Sud Tyrol was in Lutago at the Maranatha Museum to see the extensive collection of Italian Nativities, many of which reproduce village life in the Dolomites. The tour ended with a visit to the medieval castle of Taufers, which made us all glad that five centuries had improved significantly the quality of home comforts.

And then over the Brenner Pass to the World Crib Congress in Innsbruck, Austria—and more Nativities

RBB

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your response for photos of your "favorite" Nativity. In this issue we are putting in as many as we could. In the summer issue we shall try to print others. The variety of Nativities was wonderful.

We are thinking about an on-line version of *Creche Herald*. Currently, that would be in addition to the printed version. Let us know what you think. Write at bocassoc@verizon.net.

With fond hopes that your Christmas holidays were blessed and happy and that you have greeted the new year with good health and anticipation of exciting times to come.

— Rita Bocher, Publisher

Creating interesting creche backgrounds

by Cathy Lincoln

The *Creche Herald* trip to the Dolomite Mountains of northern Italy took us to see some incredible Nativities. The Tyroleans created elaborate creche dioramas using forced perspective and a mix of scales that created a hyper realism that was breathtaking. Collectors of international Nativities often placed them in scenes of Africa, China or South America. They were imaginative and can be made for your collection.

Most dioramas we saw were set in boxes with painted backgrounds of skies and landscapes. For your Nativity, boxes can be made or purchased at your local dollhouse store. Instead of hand painted backgrounds, use photographs. Calendar photos can be enlarged at your local Kinko's or other duplicating shop. Place the photos on a curve to give a more realistic look.

Depending on the origin of your Nativity, the ground cover and stable can be made of different materials.

African Nativities: Use grass cloth for the ground or sand colored paper. Paint it with glue and sprinkle sand on it for more texture. A train supply store or Grandt Line will have everything you need. The stable could be a waste can turned upside down, and an opening cut for the Holy Family. If your figures are small, use a coffee, oatmeal or hat box. Glue straw around the can to make a grass hut. Bamboo also can be used. A straw lampshade is perfect for the roof. Those can be found at Michael's or any other craft store. Use little huts and other figures. Place them in the back and it will help with the forced perspective. Search the floral department of the craft store for roots that look like trees and place them in the foreground to frame the scene.

Asian Nativities: Go to the Chinatown in your city or in a city nearby. Buy fans, Foo dogs, pagodas, and lanterns. The fans can be taken apart and glued onto a box to create a stable. Hang lanterns and place the Foo dogs in front. To create depth, buy little bridges, stone lanterns and figures. Set them in the distance as if they are walking to the Holy Family. A river can be made by cutting shiny blue paper and lining the edges with moss and leaves from the floral department of a craft or department store.

South American: The Tyroleans used a lot of styrene and styrofoam to create buildings and landscapes. They covered that material in plaster, and then carved out stones and rocks. A simple way is to cut white styrofoam into blocks and glue them together, using toothpicks to hold them in place. Make the cuts jagged to look like rocks and cliffs. Paint it all with glue, and sprinkle sand and grass purchased at the train store. That is messy, but you get great results.

Roman Ruins can be simulated by using wedding cake pillars. Place the pillars on their sides for a tumbling effect. Sponge a little gray and sandy colored paint on them for age.

Take a photograph of a scene you want to create, walk around a craft store and ask for help. It is amazing how ordinary objects viewed in a different way can be used to create a scene. Waste cans become stables; soap dishes become cribs, boxes wrapped in bamboo become stables, a lampshade a roof, and junk becomes treasure.

Cathy Lincoln writes from Shaker Heights, Ohio.

NEW BOOK FOR ALL AGES STEFANO AND THE CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

Weeks before Christmas, little Stefano and his grandfather put together their nativity scene or *presepio*, one figure each day. Nonno tells Stefano the amazing story of each of the miniature people and about the wondrous miracles that happen when they visit the Baby Jesus.

For ages 7 and up, this is a story for grandparents, parents, children—and everyone else! By Paul Salsini, award-winning author of *A Tuscan Trilogy*. (126 pages, photos throughout) Amazon. \$7.95.



Pottery Nativity by Edith Vargas-Muñoz, Colombia. Collection of Carolyn Winterroth, Bloomington, Illinois.



Banana Leaf Nativity from Costa Rica. Collection of Ruth Amstutz, Huron, Ohio.



FRIENDS OF THE CRECHE NOTES

Dear Creche Friends,

I certainly hope that by now you have returned your membership renewals. If not, please remember to do so now. The success of this society depends on its members for its support.

And while you are returning things, why not return your registration for our upcoming convention, "Symphony of Nativities," this October in Cleveland. Not only will it help us gauge attendance, but it will save you a couple of dollars as there is a fee discount for early payment. Further details are on this page and you also can download and respond to the convention brochure and registration directly from our website.

Once a year I like to publicly acknowledge my fellow Board members for their dedication and service to the organization. Before doing that, though, I would like to thank our recently retired Board members Peter Frein, New Jersey, and Frank Walkingshaw, Ontario, Canada, for their service to the organization. Now I wish to thank our current Board members: Barbara Beckwith, Cathy Lincoln, Reverend Johann Roten, (all Ohio); Judy Davis, Sheryl Logan, Sydne Yanko-Jongbloed (all California); Rita Bocher, Reverend Charles Hull (both Pennsylvania); Bonnie Pfanenstiel, Kentucky; James Johnston, Texas; Susan Soldat-Schumacher, Illinois; Bill Smith, Oklahoma; Holly Zenger, Utah. I have to say it is good to have representation from coast to coast and north to south.

We often hear these days about thinking outside the box, and perhaps that strategy might be used to help promote interest in our association. This year my family held our Nativity

exhibit the weekend prior to the national election due to space availability, and though warned that "nobody thinks about Christmas this early," etc., we were pleasantly surprised by the wonderful turnout and thanks for doing this before things get crazy after Thanksgiving. We also found many more people took more time to reflect instead of rushing through the exhibit.

Last November, I was fortunate to attend the World Crib Congress in Innsbruck, Austria, and represent Friends of the Creche along with the other 19 societies and our newest member, Slovenia. The one thing that struck me most was a visit to the creche school housed in the lower floor of an actual elementary school where members gather, learn how to build elaborate stables, etc., sort of a shop-creche class complete with creche *keller* next door for socializing and where the groups' awards were proudly displayed. Amazing!

A reminder that we are in need of people to host our one-day meeting and our conventions in the future, and of course to put their names in for nomination to the Board.

Some time this year, probably with the ballot in the summer, we hope to have a survey of membership. We hope you will thoughtfully answer the questions regarding membership in Friends of the Creche. We are trying to obtain a more realistic picture of why people join us and what their expectations are and if we are meeting them.

Have a fantastic spring.

Mike Whalen, President
Crecheguy@att.net

SET YOUR CALENDARS

An invitation to the Friends of the Creche Convention

A Symphony of Nativities, October 17-19, 2013, in Cleveland, Ohio, will have terrific programs, tours and displays. Read all about them in the enclosed registration brochure. We look forward to welcoming you at the convention. Beside the great events at the convention, Cleveland offers many different fun things to do.

It will be high foliage season, so if you're driving, don't forget to see the covered bridges of Ashtabula County. That is just east of Cleveland. To the south is Amish country, another great tourist destination. In the city, we have the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; next door is the Great Lakes Science Museum. University Circle is home to the world famous Cleveland Art Museum (free entrance). The Cleveland Orchestra (tickets are fairly easy to obtain), Museum of Contemporary Art, the Cleveland Botanical Garden, the Natural History Museum, and the Western Reserve Historical Society with an auto and airplane museum. Northeast Ohio was the western reserve of Connecticut during the Revolutionary War. Their soldiers came and settled this area so we have many New England-like towns and homes.

One of the most quaint New England-like towns is Chagrin Falls, about 15 minutes from the hotel. This charming

town has upscale stores and restaurants and the most beautiful homes and gardens. It is joy to walk, enjoy the Falls and have an ice cream cone from the Pop Corn Shop.

Cleveland is a foodie paradise. Iron Chef Michael Symon has three restaurants; his burger joint is five minutes from the hotel. Within shuttle distance of the hotel is the seaside restaurant row with a wide range of excellent eateries. Another area is Little Italy, and further on, Tremont, two other foodie havens. The West Side Market is celebrating its 100th anniversary and is an unique European food market. A great place to shop and eat.

In the surrounding area is Kirtland, home to the first Mormon temple. Ohio is home to seven presidents. Nearby in Mentor is President Garfield's home to tour. South in Canton is President McKinley's home and the Baseball Hall of Fame. Akron has a great art museum and the First Ladies Museum.

Cleveland offers so much, from the most visited national park (Cuyahoga Valley) to the Orchestra. You will have a hard time choosing which sites to see. Come for a week. Come to the convention and see your friends and all our treasures.

Cathy Lincoln, Shaker Heights, Ohio. Chair of the 2013 Friends of the Creche Convention.

Too Many Creches??

By Judith Davis

Can a creche aficionado ever say—I've seen enough Nativities to last me a very long time—and mean it? Well, almost! A few years ago, after celebrating Thanksgiving in London, my husband and I set off on a driving tour that would take us on a round trip starting with Frankfurt, then south through Austria and Italy, west to the Provence and north through France.

We arrived in Nuremberg, Germany, in time for the opening of the Christkindlmarkt. All was silent and dark prior to the official start of the market. Soon the bell of the Frauenkirche began to ring. When it stopped, the lights went on, people began to move, and there was noise and excitement everywhere. At the heart of the Market is a large Nativity, always surrounded by crowds of people. The next morning we set out to tour the krippen exhibit on the Street of the Artisans along the old city wall, an always interesting display of traditional Christmas scenes. In the afternoon we visited the annual Nativity exhibit at Saint Egidien Church. Here the Friends of the Creche of Nuremberg display both traditional and folk art scenes as well as historical creches related to an actual past event in the city.

In Innsbruck, Austria, we visited the Tiroler Volkskunst Museum, with its outstanding permanent crib display. There were old sets with many figures and one room full of modern ones. While touring the folk furniture portion of the Museum, we discovered two bureaus with Nativity scenes painted on the cabinet doors.

On to Italy! We visited the Christmas market in Bolzano on the Italian side of the Brenner Pass through the Alps, and then drove on to the Museo del Presepio in Brembo di Dalmine, near Bergamo.

Our first stop in France was in St. Maximin la Ste Baume, one of our favorite places, where we viewed once again the skull of Mary Magdalene in the Basilica. Just outside of town we stopped by the Atelier de Santons Y. Eygazier, where we had purchased clothed santons over a period of several years. This time we chose a spectacular set of Wise Men. Mme. Eygazier was at home sewing small clothing for the clay figures produced by her husband. We saw him later at the Foire de Santons in Aix-en-Provence, manning their sales booth.

The Santon Fair in Aix opens on the first Saturday in December in the old part of town. After the hustle bustle and great variety of the German and Austrian Christmas markets, we found the Santon Fair somewhat small and subdued.

With Aix as our headquarters, we toured a large area of the Provence, trying to visit as many creche-related sites as possible. The Bouches-du-Rhone Tourist Office publishes a wonderful booklet on the area which includes a "Nativity Trail." See also <http://www.visitprovence.com>

Arles: My trip diary notes say WOW!! That was my initial and overall reaction to the Salon International des Santonniers, held in Arles, France, in the Romanesque rooms of the Cloister of St. Trophime, every year from the third Thursday in November through the third Sunday in January. The Salon's publicity describes it as an exhibit of creche art

and its personages, and not a fair. Indeed, only a few postcards of santons and creches were offered for sale.

But what a feast of creche art there was! Four large rooms were dedicated individually to works produced by some 38 professional santonniers, works of 33 amateur creche makers, Nativities from Slovenia and Croatia, and the religious creations of Sister Samuela Premuzic of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Zagreb.

The professionally done Nativities were, for the most part, elaborate traditional displays, with great care given to facial and clothing details. The amateurs were perhaps the most imaginative. In one, a beach scene, Mary and Joseph were depicted as surfers, with Jesus on a float board. In a snow scene, skiers rode a chair lift to the top of the mountain, past the manger scene and traditional Alpine farms and villages, and even past animals waiting two by two to board Noah's ark.

Judith Davis, El Cerrito, California, will continue with her creche trip in a future issue of Creche Herald.



Nativity from Poland carved from a tree trunk and painted. Purchased at Nuremberg market. Collection of Judith Davis.



Embroidery by Anna Isma van Hulst
Krimpen aan den IJssel, The Netherlands



Tree of Life (Mexico)
James Johnston, Corpus Christi, Texas

A Few of Our



Italian creche, 1950s
Margaret Bonaccorsi, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



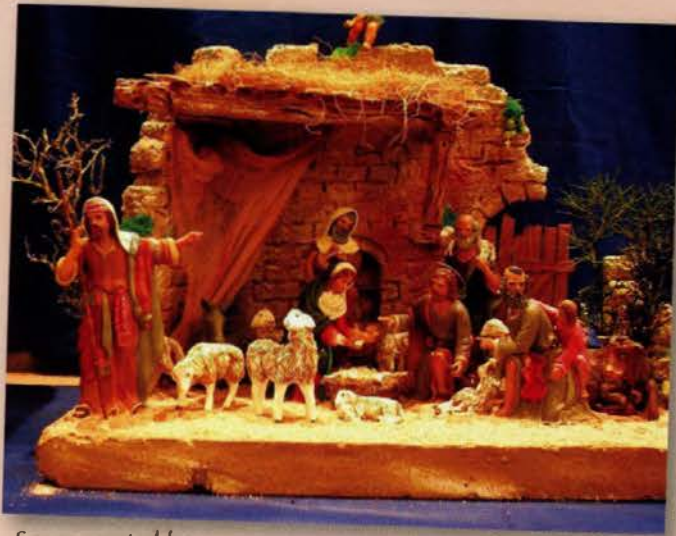
Creche made by Sue and Bill Weed
Kensington, Maryland



Frank Brito Nativity,
Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado



Milan Zábranský
Prague, Czech Republic



Scene created by
Joseph Camilleri, Gozo, Malta



Creche from Virginia McDonald,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Favorite Creches



Mantlepiece creche
Clifton and Dorothy Potter, Lynchburg, Virginia



Creche by Debbie Doyle, Talkeetna, Alaska
Harry & JoAnn Yates, Athens, Georgia



Creche by Mary E. Quintana-Baca Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico
Rev. Charles Hull, Seven Valleys, Pennsylvania



Creche by Jack Black, Arizona
Michael Whalen, Clinton Township, Michigan



Stained glass Nativity at the Saint Stephen's Indian Mission of the Wind River Indian Reservation with Sister Monica.

THE NATIVITY AT THE INDIAN RESERVATION REMEMBERS

by Mary Bonaccorsi Herzel

In the Mission Heritage and Gift Shop of Saint Stephen's Indian Mission of the Wind River Indian Reservation in central Wyoming visitors are surprised at what they encounter—a blending of the past with the current. Artifacts and materials are displayed to show the relationship between the Mission of Saint Stephen's, over one hundred years old, to the Shoshone and Arapaho Native Americans. Along with history, arts and crafts, clothing, accessories, photographs, quilts, Museum curator, Sister Monica Suhayada, CSJ, presents a stained glass Nativity.

Local Arapaho artists put together stained glass pieces left over after the remodeling of the stained glass windows at Saint Stephen's Indian Mission Church in the 1970s. The Nativity interweaves the Christian message with Native American symbolism. Thus, following Pope Paul VI's comments at Vatican Council II that the Catholic religion's role is to be heard and understood by all, Saint Stephen's took the stand of combining Christian and Native culture.

To understand the beauty of their Nativity, we learn that the Arapahos, for hundreds of years, lived a nomadic life. They followed herds of bison, deer, and elk across the Great Plains. They lived in cone-shaped tents called teepees that could be erected and taken down quickly. When a baby was born, older relatives would come to pray for the newborn's health and strength.

Tribal members shared a deep faith in the Creator God and

a nature-based spirituality. Every year, the tribe gathered for the Sun Dance, their most important religious ceremony, where they sang, danced, and performed complex rituals. Summer was the Pow-wow season with drummers and dancers performing to honor tribal members, recognize important events, and seek protection for warriors and hunters.

Music and dance, important in American Indian life, can be seen in the Reservation's stained glass Nativity. In the center of the scene is the Holy Family: Mary and Joseph in colorful clothing—possibly in fabrics exchanged with the French fur traders. Feathers in Joseph's headpiece show a man of honor. The couple stand adoringly around the Baby resting inside a cradle made of ornamented buckskin stretched over a willow frame.

On one side of the Holy Family is a female Pow wow dancer flirting a fan; on the other side is a male Pow wow dancer, with feathers for protection on his shoulder, and holding a hunting or war shield. The shield is decorated with paintings and a small circle representing the circle of life and the connectedness of living things. Below, the green grass of the prairie stretches out to showcase a bison and a red fox.

The Nativity has brought joy and comfort to some Native Americans of the Plains as they adjust to hardships, poverty, and change.

Mary Bonaccorsi Herzel writes from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

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What Israelis Wore at The Time of Jesus

by Dr. Carma de Jong Anderson

In Israel there was a huge mix of peoples at the time of Christ. The Fertile Crescent was filled with Greeks, and Greek was the Mediterranean language of business and most literature. Of course, there were Roman soldiers under King Herod, Turks doing business in big blousy pants, and wandering Bedouin Semites and Arabs (not Moslems as Islam formed in the 7th century). Anciently, women did not mingle much with the biggest crowds for shopping but stayed closer to home and their water wells. Servants were sent to markets. The average Jew on the streets spoke Aramaic, a common form of Hebrew, but not the elegant ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament scrolls which the rabbis read in the synagogues.

The Jews wore clothing that covered them up more than any other people in the temperate zones of the world. For prayer purposes, men would wear a prayer shawl of a light color and possibly some decoration of black or blue stripes across the fringed ends; it would be draped around the neck for going to synagogue and be pulled up over the head while reading.

Men did not take off their headdresses indoors, even for eating, unless they were staying indoors for the next 24 hours. The head covering started with a *yarmulka*—a washable scull cap on men to keep hair grease from staining their *kaffiyehs*; boys wore the scull cap most of the time. The *kaffiyeh* was a huge square of fabric over the head with the two points hanging down each side of the face. Sometimes the cloth was woven in a fancy weave or checkered design, sometimes it was plain. It was worn by Bedouins or Jews moving around the desert. The *kaffiyeh* was held down by the *habalim*—two cords that wrapped around the head to hold the scarf in place. In wealthy men, the *habalim* might be made of black and colored wool and silk yarns; for others it would be a plain or decorative yarn. Wrappings around the head of the very poor shepherd would possibly be seen in just long scraps of cloth wrapped around the *kaffiyeh*.

The tunic or kaftan was the basic undergarment of a man, either to the calf or ankle length. Shorter tunics for fishermen had wide strips of cloth wrapped up across the body diagonally and between the legs to hold the tunic skirt up farther on bare legs for work in small boats. Tunics were cut as completely flat clothing, without shaped armholes for sleeves. They were made of white linen or natural light colored wools. Necklines were always bound with a little bit of other fabric, often in colors, or a narrow woven flat braid, possibly of many colors.

The tunic was held with a sash tucked in around the waistline or by a belt of leather, sometimes on top of the sash. Hanging from the sash there might be a little leather dagger holder or a small bag of leather for money. A shopkeeper or builder might wear a vest over his tunic for warmth and convenience.

Men's coats also were flat garments, and could be longer or shorter than the underlying tunic. Sometimes a

poor man had an even shorter ragged coat to his lower hips. No buttons. Often coats did not have sleeves any longer than the elbows, and they exposed the undergarment which showed to the wrist. Coats were made of wools, and in summer possibly of earthy colored linens. They might be heavy striped woolens of two colors in a vertical or horizontal design.

Shepherds out in the desert had to dress for warmth. A lambskin could appear over the shoulders of a shepherd, but only over other clothing and never over a half naked shepherd boy, belted, as seen in paintings, or he would have frozen in the night cold. Weather from November to March was far too rainy and cold. Israel was not a warm desert year-round, but was a seasonal desert and could be summer hot in the day and bitter cold at night.

Women's clothing was modest. A woman's dress would consist of an under tunic of narrow sleeves, shaped like a T when attached to two lengths of fabric. As fabric was labor intensive and usually not woven more than 24" wide, extra fabric had to be added in long triangles, two to each side. A dress could be cream color wool, or white linen, or other darker colors of goldfish and dark rust, or black, for old women. Blue was a color not used in abundance but sometimes a tiny blue stripe on white was used for young women. Mary never could have worn an all-blue part of any of her garments.

Around the time of the beginning of the Christian Era, a tradition arose for the color of fresh leaf green to be used in dyeing wool as a fertility color for a young woman. She would wear it in a heavier wool dress over a white linen long sleeved under-dress.

Among Jews, the tradition was to teach a four year old girl to sew with a needle. She often learned embroidery while serving in the temple. By the time she was fifteen she could become an excellent decorator of fabrics; however by age twelve she no longer was permitted to work in the temple as she then was believed to be unclean. The difference between a poor girl and a princess was the amount of jewelry worn.

A young woman wore her dowry money attached to the embroidered cap on her head, under a 25" folded white head square of fine Egyptian cotton. A woman had her head covered most of the time; a young girl did not.

The law stipulated that a husband should supply his wife with two pairs of sandals at all times so that if one sandal broke, she immediately could slip into another. Women also wore little slip-ons in various colors of leathers, sometimes embroidered.

Babies were wrapped in a swaddling cloth, wrapped in an embroidered or plain band, covered tightly for about five months. This was believed to keep the child's limbs straight.

Dr. Carma de Jong Anderson, Provo, Utah, is considered an expert in historical clothing of the world.

FROM OUR READERS:

(The following is an excerpt from a Christmas letter received from subscribers serving as missionaries in Mexico).

December is a month of fiesta in Oaxaca. Traveling by bus recently, we saw several groups of young people on bicycles traveling with a flower-bedecked truck, on bike pilgrimages to the various shrines, Guadalupe or Juquila. Yesterday we took part in a pilgrimage from our village to the town center of Tilantongo for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Some walked down into the deep valley and up the other mountainside cross-country, while we drove our old pick-up truck for those who weren't able to walk. Then we all met outside Tilantongo and made the rest of the way all together on foot to the church, taking turns carrying banners of our village, San Isidro, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. There we were met by other groups arriving in pilgrimage from other, even more distant, villages across the mountains.

This Sunday will mark the beginning of the Posadas, the nine days before Christmas, with a gathering each night to reenact the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Families will assemble and walk with candles, singing the traditional songs as they journey each night to a different house up and down the mountainside. Outside each house, according to custom, a group sings the verses requesting lodging for the night, then to be answered by a group inside whose song turns them away, until finally they agree to let them in, at which time all gather inside the house for prayers and then refreshments and a social time. We will host the posada for one of the nights, other families on other nights, and on Christmas Eve, the final posada will end at the dirt-floor chapel, which will be decorated for the fiesta, with colorful streamers, balloons, plenty of fireworks, food and drink.

These customs are an expression of faith and joy of celebration in community. Also participating are extended family members who have migrated out to urban centers, and always love to return to their villages of origin. Presents generally are not part of the Christmas celebrations, but as most families in the village live without television, they don't seem to feel they are missing anything.

Kathy and Phil Dahl-Bredine, Oaxaca, Mexico. In their letter, the Dahl-Bredines further reported that for the first time in the history of their village of San Isidro, every house in the village has piped in water—the result of a two year water project they initiated.

This year the local newspapers, the *Austin Daily Herald* and the *Austin Post-Bulletin* interviewed us and had photos. The *Old Times*, a newspaper distributed in antique shops had an article and many pictures. We also had a city-wide open house for two days with many appreciative viewers; however, the visitors we most enjoyed were the ten Spearhead Rugby Academy young men. My son, Rob, heads the academy, and they had come to Austin from St. Paul to run a clinic for the high school rugby club. After looking over the Nativities, one young man said, "We should make our own scene." With that, he lay down on the floor and began to suck his thumb. "I'm Jesus!" Two put up the hoods on their sweatshirts to be the Wisemen. There was no one willing to be Mary ("I'm not a girl!") so I guess the rest were Joseph and shepherds.

Helen Holder, Austin Minnesota

Enclosed is a photo of a creche I made this year. I call it my "Sewing Box Nativity." As you can see, I used only materials used in sewing: spools for people, embroidery hoop for stable, scissors for angel, etc. I was very pleased how it turned out. My friends tell me, "LaVerne, you see creches everywhere." I guess I do.

LaVerne Schettl, Oronoco, Minnesota



Enclosed is a picture of gourds that I raise and take to the Virginia Hospital for patients. One gourd has a Nativity.



Vincent Barrisi, Virginia Beach, Virginia. (Vince_6856@hotmail.com)

The 9/11 Creche

by Eileen Canty

Serendipity always has played a role in my involvement with creches—from a golden glass set shining in the clearance section of the Smithsonian found during an accidental visit following my son's wedding to a Nepalese creche with a Buddhist inspired stable spotted from a cab in Kathmandu. And so it has continued when one morning, a sample copy of *The Daily News* was delivered with my *New York Times*. I peeked at *The Daily News* before automatically depositing it in the recycling pile. Then I spied a story about something called the 9/11 or Solidarity Creche on display in Staten Island.

My interest was piqued for several reasons. Naturally, the creche was primary, but, secondly, my recently deceased brother had been a retired New York City firefighter with many ties to those involved in the Twin Towers rescue attempts, including 343 firefighters who died. Overwhelmingly, the mention of 9/11 raised many memories of that day. Not too long before the tragedy, I had visited Two World Trade to meet with my former work group who, shortly after my retirement, had been moved there from mid-town to join segments of our parent company. It was late that night before I learned that my staff, despite harrowing experiences, survived although scores of my parent company colleagues did not. Additionally, as a native New Yorker, I had friends and relatives who worked and unfortunately died in the debacle—Father Judge, fire department chaplain, who had supported a close friend during her husband's long illness, the pregnant attorney daughter of a neighbor and grammar school classmate, the fire lieutenant brother-in-law of a cousin, the groomsman for a recently married cousin—all located on the top floor of Cantor Fitzgerald, and on it went.

The creche display on Staten Island was to be open for only a few days more, so I called in a favor from my older son to drive me there. There turned out to be Casa Belvedere, the Italian Cultural Foundation, an Italianate mansion in the Gympes Hill section of Staten Island overlooking New York harbor. The foundation is a not-for-profit with the mission of encouraging "an appreciation of the Italian language, arts, cuisine,

literature, history, fashion and commerce through educational programs, exhibits and events."

Once there, I learned that the 9/11 creche had been presented to the New York City Fire Department by the Naples Chamber of Commerce in commemoration of the heroism of the police, emergency medical technicians, and particularly the firefighters who had responded to the Twin Towers disaster.

In a bit less than three months, masterartisans of the Campania region of Italy crafted their 18th century style creche, formally named the *Presepio Della Solidarieta*, the Solidarity creche, familiarly called the 9/11 creche. The set (16 feet x 7 feet x 5 feet) was the work of Master Giovanni Sinno, and the 83 figures and 28 animals were done by Alfredo Molli, Ulderigo Pinfildi, and Giovanni Sinno.

The figures, following traditional methods, are crafted of terracotta, with wooden hands and faces, and hemp and iron bodies. Clad in cotton and linen, the figures typically are a foot high.

There are three major sections. On the right are figures from the countryside, highlighted by a country inn complete with hanging foodstuff such as hams and garlic. A visitor to the creche was impressed with the authenticity of the costumes; she said that one of the female figures was clad in a dress just like the one in which her grandmother had been buried. On the left, a sloping hill is peopled by more country folk involved in occupations such as tending sheep.

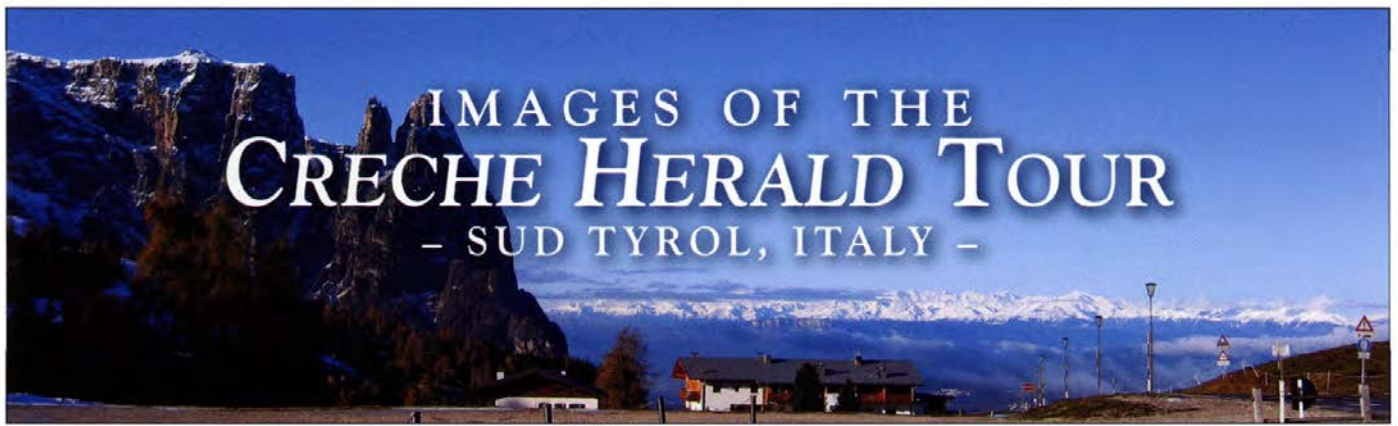
The center section is devoted to the Nativity scene itself with the usual characters advancing up a hill. The iconic figures in the Solidarity creche are the three kings all mounted on horses. Substituting for the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are three walnut sized firefighters' helmets resting on red pillows—one bearing the numeral 9, the second a 1, and the third an 01. The gifts to the Christ Child of the helmets are most special. For they, along with their shields, are the prized symbols of the firefighter's service. Following a firefighter's retirement, the helmet proudly is displayed at home, and at death by the casket. And following death, family members maneuver politely, or not so politely, for the honor of inheriting the helmet.

The display was formally donated in a solemn ceremony on December 19, 2001 with representations from the Fire Department, the Naples Chamber of Commerce, and other international, national and local organizations. It was first displayed in New York's Saint Michael's Church where many firefighters worship. However, no permanent site for the creche was designated until Casa Belvedere was appointed custodian of the display. In 2011, the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, the creche was lovingly mounted at Casa Belvedere. When Sandy struck Staten Island, the creche was untouched as it earlier had been disassembled and stored in a remote location.

Eileen Canty lives in New York City.



As their gifts, the Magi on horseback carry firefighters' helmets on pillows. On the helmets are the numbers 9, 1, 01 in commemoration of the day.



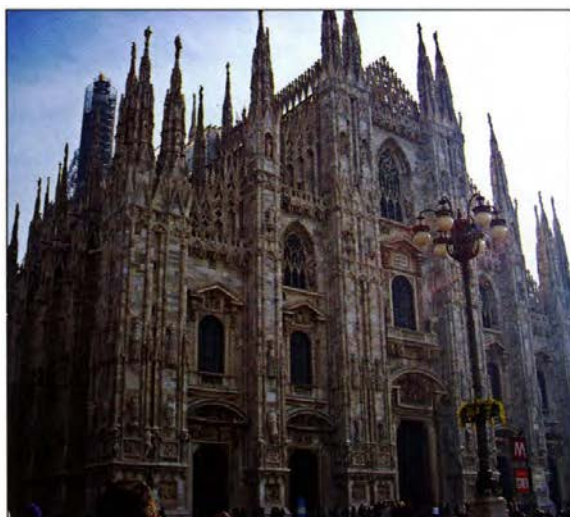
A story book setting in Sud Tyrol, Italy.



The Creche Herald tour group poses in the square in Gandino, Italy, by the Isetta of one of the Gandinese. L to R: Jocelyn Adelaar; Cheyl Hamilton; Mary Liz Pomeroy, our unknown Gandinese friend; David Harper; Alan Pomeroy; Nancy Mallett; Jesse Adelaar; Cathy Lincoln; Robyn Goodpasture; Emma Lincoln; Rita Bocher



Stefania Marcolin, Mayor of Salerano sul Lambro, greeted the tour group. Shown here with exhibit host, Tino Cazzulani.



Milan Cathedral



The Heinrich Demetz workshop