

# The animated Nativity scene of PERTEOLE

## A CENTURY OF HISTORY (in three machines)



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Associazione  
"Amici del Presepe Animato di Perteole"

In Perteole at the beginning of the Twentieth century people started thinking of setting up a peculiar automatic crib. Since Christmas time used to be experienced and waited for in a rather simple and intense way and with faith, this newness came as a big change. In the following years the automatic crib became famous even in the nearby villages so that it is a matter of fact that already at the beginning of the **twenties** a great number of people, both alone or gathered in groups, used to go and visit the crib which at the time was exhibited in the church in front of the Mary's altar. The volunteers and the sexton and a group of friends used to spend their evenings working on the wooden statuettes trying to make them move. An electric motor, a series of contraptions made out of old bicycle wheels, wooden pulleys, cords, and a lot of good will are only few of the means they made use of. A big cloth painted with a typical scenery of the time was on the background. The water of the river floating slowly, clouds moving softly in front of the moon. During midnight Mass at Christmas night the guiding star used to descend among the enchanted devotees from the organ-loft onto the stable crib, meanwhile a soft sound used to come from a wind instrument whose name is '*uccellino*'. This was the so called "*prima 'macchina'*" which unfortunately stopped working and being used during the Second World War.

The period of rebirth of the postwar was a more stimulating one, so that a group of fellow countrymen decided to follow their fathers' footsteps. That is how the '*seconda macchina*' was brought to life in no time. This new machine was based on the old one but had more animations. The automatic crib continued to be shown inside the church for a couple of years but then it was moved into a bigger neighboring room. Here the crib could grow in dimension both because of the space and because the volunteers had more time to devote to its construction. Anyways, until then the crib had been assembled and disassembled quite a lot of times so some pieces and mechanisms had got lost or damaged. That is the reason why the crib could not be exhibited for a couple of years. But this had already become part of the local tradition and a group of young fellows together with the authors of the *seconda macchina* decided to reassemble it once again and kept on showing it for a couple of years.

It was in 1968 that this group of young passionate emerging fellows decided to start over again. They decided to combine together the new techniques they had learned at work and what their fathers had taught them. They could make use of the exhibiting room at any time and they devoted all of their free time to the reconstruction of the machine, this is what enabled them to give

birth to the '*terza macchina*' over the period of a year. This third machine differed from the old machines in two ways:

- 1) **the structure** which now was an unmovable one not set to be assembled and disassembled.
- 2) **the setting** which now took inspiration from Palestine.

From then on the crib has been continuously renewed and enriched in new animations, lights, setting details and sounds becoming more accurate, precise and refined day by day. This has been made possible thanks to the work and contribute of a group of young people that in 1976 took up the baton and still continue to work on the crib together with one of the founders. Today what visitors see is the landscape of the Palestine of two thousand years ago so as the creator of the crib imagined it that is, the simple and secluded Grotto of nativity framed by Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the desert, the oasis, the hills and the shepherds. The 10 cm. tall statues move in circle and perform and symbolize the everyday life of the area – the figurines go to the Grotto of Nativity, they rest at dawn and wake up again at sunrise. Around them houses, animals, sheep, and daily simple and common objects are surrounded by a mild and pleasant landscape which falls into a sweet dream underneath a starry sky. In the dark of the night music and lights cooperate to convey the idea of spirituality and emotion caused by the birth of Jesus. Some vapors rise from the shepherds' crave and hundreds of stars shine bright up above. The sky is based on the real map of stars visible from Palestine at the time, so you can see **Jupiter in conjunction with Saturn in Pisces constellation** – as it was at Jesus Christ birth and as the Three Wise Men knew. The crib is limited in dimension and this enables a certain accuracy. Moreover every six minutes sunrise, daylight and dawn are repeated together with a fixed set of music and sounds. All of this is made possible by means of a complex electro-mechanic system which is controlled by means of a Computer. This is the final result of technological development, creativity and the hard work of the curators and volunteers. This is a precious handcrafted *watch* which thousands of people visit yearly and which is among the most famous and valued in the Region.

Such a long and intense story has been made possible thanks to the cooperation of a great number of people that have been willing to devote their time to this tradition, a tradition that over the years has become a symbol for this small village in the area of the Bassa Friulana. In front of this Nativity the people from Perteole renovate their faith and honors the memory of the past generations and still appreciate the present in order to create continuity by means of this refined jewel.