

History of St. Catherine's Monastery

First third of 15th century – A Gothic chapel made of stones stood on a rocky hill above the Dubovský Stream in the woods of the Little Carpathians. The existence of this chapel is evidenced by an archaeological research.

Late 1500s – A shepherd allegedly had several apparitions of St. Catherine of Alexandria and built here a small chapel into a cave.

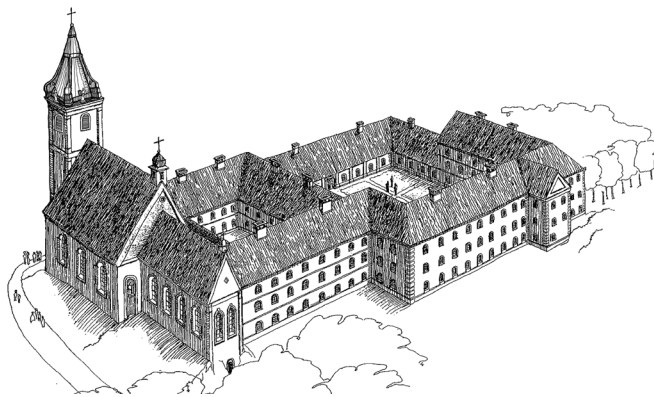
1617 – A ploughman John Manca from Dechtice allegedly had an apparition of St. Catherine. A noble young man **John Apponyi**, a son of a rich count from Jablonica, came to live here as a hermit in the cave. His noble family disagreed and forced him to come back home. He died of sorrow the following day. Even nowadays he is venerated as a candidate to holiness.

1618, 21st December – **Count Christopher Erdödi**, a domain owner, issued a foundation document **establishing a Franciscan monastery** on this site

1619 – The chapel was enlarged and the first 12 monks came to live in the monastery.

1645 – The monastery was plundered and set on fire during an armed rebellion of the Hungarian nobility led by George Rákoci I.

1646 – Restoration and reconstruction of the monastery and the church was led by the founder's son Gabriel Erdödi and his wife Judita Amade. The church was substantially rebuilt to incorporate the original small one from 1618 that served as a sanctuary to the new one.



Approx. 1650 – A new lay Franciscan order called "the Chordigers" was established at the site. Apart from religious activities, their main ministry was to take care of the poor and the sick. The king Joseph II abolished this fellowship in 1782 for alleged abuse of indulgences.

1663 – The monastery was attacked by the Turks, then by the emperor's army. The soldiers killed noblemen who were seeking refuge from persecution here.

1683 – Troops of Imrich Tökoly damaged the monastery.

1697 – During a pilgrimage attended by a huge number of people soldiers of the emperor's army forcibly tried to recruit young men.

The crowd of pilgrims pushed the soldiers into the church and one soldier was lynched to death.

1701, 9th January – After the murder, the church was reconsecrated. George and Christopher II. Erdödy issued a deed of gift of 500 ducats for the church's maintenance. Subsequently, a new tower and side chapels were built.

1710, 9th September – A well-known Franciscan monk **Benignus Smrtník** (born 1650) died here of cholera during its epidemic. He was an author of various religious books written in the Slovak language, e.g. *Kunšt dobre umriti* (The Art of a Good Death).

18th century – Numerous donors, mainly nobility, but also villagers, supported the monastery generously. Noble families (Erdödy, Apponyi, and Labšanskí) built their crypts here.

1782 – George Fándly, the parish priest in Naháč, complained that people from his parish preferred attending the holy masses in St. Catherine's church to their village church. He expressed his anger in a well-known book *Dúverná zmlúva medzi mníchom a diablom* (1789).

1786, 22nd July – St. Catherine's monastery (together with other 738 monasteries in the empire) was **abolished** by a decree of **Emperor Joseph II** abolished monasteries were regarded "useless" since they neither took care of the poor nor educated the youth.

1787, 22nd January – The monastery was taken over by the state. Monastic property and valuable items were gradually taken to churches and monasteries around; many of these were stolen or lost forever.

1788 to 1792 – Seven war invalids from Trnava lived in the abandoned monastery.

1793 – The church crypts were plundered by three thieves.

1797 – The deteriorating monastery was bought by Joseph Erdödy as a tribute to his ancestors buried in the crypts there. However, the objects went gradually to ruins.

1811 – A Calvary sculpture from St. Catherine's monastery was moved to Dechtice by the Erdödy family.

1835 – The last official record of "a guardian of the St. Catherine" (Jozef Kollár from Dechtice).

1869, 1891 – The first historical publications about St. Catherine's monastery were written by Odoricus Balázsovits and Pál Jedlicska.

1905 – Four sandstone statues of Franciscan saints were moved from the top of the church tower to the Pálffy family burial crypt in Smolenice cemetery.

1930s – Scout camps and Franciscan novices' trips were organized here.

2nd half of 20th century – The communist state lost an interest in this historical object and only historians dealt with it (Hadrián Radváni and mainly Jozef Šimončíč).

1995 – 3rd July – The picturesque ruins came back to life again thanks to youth activity and their "Order of St. Katarína, the preservationists".

KATARÍNKA



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Katarínka project

Katarínka are majestic ruins of a Franciscan monastery dating back to early 17th century. It is situated deeply in the woods of the Little Carpathians, over the Dubovský Stream, close to villages Dechtice, Naháč and Dobrá Voda.

Katarínka is also a project started in 1994 for young people who are trying to preserve this monastery – not only its walls, but also its rich history. Young people from Slovakia from the age of 17 can join one of four two-week summer camps as volunteers.

Who we are

Katarínka is organized by **Civil association (NGO) Katarínka** in cooperation with **Association of the**

Christian Youth Communities (ZKSM) for young Christian and also non-Christian volunteers from the whole Slovakia. We closely collaborate with the Regional Centre of the Monuments Board in Trnava, Dechtice Municipal Authority and the Franciscan Order.

The project is financially supported by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, by grants and sponsors from the private companies and by individuals.



Our goals

- ♦ To preserve and conserve the ruins and a comprehensive archaeological, historical, geophysical research of the site.
- ♦ To clean and maintain the site and the surrounding Katarína Nature Reserve (cleaning and keeping order, educational trails, elimination of illegal fireplaces, etc.).
- ♦ To give young people a chance to spend two weeks of their life in the wild far from civilization.
- ♦ To show that with enthusiasm, determination and dedication the young volunteers are able to preserve and save this valued cultural monument.
- ♦ We do not intend to completely rebuild the monastery since we want to keep its present atmosphere, uniqueness and spiritual character and conserve it for future generations.

History of the project

- ♦ July 1994 – Peter Herceg with his friends had an idea of organizing **summer camps** on the site. Consultations with experts started in autumn.
- ♦ July 1995 – First works done by almost 70 volunteers from Slovakia. They built campsite tents, cleaned the interior parts of the ruins and made a pre-preservation survey and documentation of the area.
- ♦ Since 1996 summer camps in July and August have been organized every year. Over 1,800 volunteers have participated in the project.
- ♦ In 1996 and 1999 a project documentation for a proper conservation of the ruins was prepared in cooperation with Prodis Bratislava, a structural engineering and diagnostics company, that has been supervising conservation works since then.
- ♦ In 1996 – Necessary cleaning of the site and removing trees and plants that had grown into walls of the object.

Preservation and conservation work

- ♦ 1996–2003 – Reconstruction of window arches, the original lawn was planted on the top wall layer on the east side of the **monastery**.
- ♦ 2013–2015 – Conservation works on the west side of the monastery.
- ♦ 2004–2010 – Conservation of the **church nave**, its walls, pillars and window holes and front church's gable (22 m high).
- ♦ In 2005 the **church tower** (30 m high) was saved by fixing those parts that were likely to fall.
- ♦ 2010–2016 – Reconstruction of the tower and its wooden floors took place. The top wooden floor serves as a roof of the tower. During this period the walls and windows of the tower were preserved; the wooden timbers were hand-crafted for the floor structures and these 200–300 kg heavy oak timbers were lifted and attached to the tower's levels using a historical wooden windlass that was made by the volunteers.
- ♦ 2017 – The tower was opened to public as a lookout tower for tourists.



Archaeological research started in 1997 and since then we have cooperated with the Institute of Archaeology of Slovak Academy of Sciences (1997–1998), The Western Slovakian Museum in Trnava (1999–2006) and The Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts at Comenius University. The main aim of this activity is documentation, research and conservation of the foundations of various buildings.

- ♦ 1997–2000 – A **baroque chapel** was discovered near the church.
- ♦ 2000 – Monastery's entrance was discovered and conserved.
- ♦ 2000–2001 – A **small crypt** in the church's nave was discovered, explored and covered.
- ♦ 2004 – Remains of the main baroque altar with a statue of St. Catherine, St. Thecla and an angel's torso were uncovered in the sanctuary (presented now in Western Slovakian Museum in Trnava).

- ♦ 2003–2005 and 2008–2012 – The archeological research continued in the oldest parts of site: research of the foundations of the **Gothic chapel** in the church's sanctuary and of the old cemetery around the chapel.
- ♦ Since 2013 – Research of the **big crypt** in the church nave. In 2018, the crypt was reconstructed and covered by a new vault ceiling.
- ♦ The project has been presented in mass media, at youth festivals and events, and at exhibitions and conferences. The reconstruction of the tower was awarded by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic with the prize Fenix – Cultural Landmark of the Year 2017. Katarínka project was also awarded the National Award ICOMOS Slovakia (The International Council of Monuments and Sites) – Heritage for the Future 2017 for its long-term activities.

Future plans

- ♦ Finish the conservation of the remaining ground parts of the walls and arches in the monastery.
- ♦ Continue with the systematic archaeological research and conservation of its findings.
- ♦ Cooperate with the Administration of the Little Carpathians Protected Landscape Area in preserving the Katarína Nature Reserve.

How we live in the camp

- ♦ We work in the morning (5 hours until lunch) and have fun in the afternoon – adventures, games and sports.
- ♦ The programme of the camp activities is oriented into history; we try to follow a lifestyle of the 17th century Franciscan brothers, including the regular morning and evening prayers.
- ♦ To experience the life of medieval monks who followed the ideals of St. Francis of Assisi, we observe the rules of "Order of St. Katarína, the preservationists", whose members are all camp participants.
- ♦ For two weeks, the volunteers experience a life of medieval monks in the nature and far from civilization and without using modern gadgets (watches, mobile phones, Internet). It is a simple life where community and common activities are important.
- ♦ A "ceremonial" clothing is a habit made of sackcloth.
- ♦ Campfire, fun and singing in the evening are an inseparable part of camp life.

How we work

- ♦ Refilling the missing parts of walls and pillars with stones and mortar.
- ♦ Conserving weather-worn and damaged top wall layers by taking them apart, re-assembling them and fixing them with lime mortar in order to keep the ruin character of the building.
- ♦ Inserting the handmade oak timbers in the stone walls (in the places of the old original ones) to strengthen the walls.
- ♦ Carrying out the archaeological research on the site under the supervision of eligible authorities.
- ♦ Mowing the surrounding meadows and the monastery grounds.