

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring/Summer Issue ~ Vol. XVIII No. 4

April/July 2022

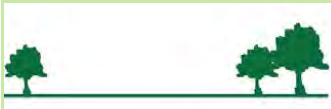
carol jean smetana, editor

Mission Statement:

Promote the historical significance, enhance the beauty, and preserve the artistic heritage of Bohemian National Cemetery

Vision:

Create an appreciation of BNC in local, national, and international audiences



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What's New with Friends of BNC

Our annual winter meeting (held in the spring on April 10) featured Klára Moldavá, the head teacher at T.G. Masaryk Czech School in Cicero. Klára spoke on the many facets of this 100-year-old school and all the connections it has had with Bohemian National Cemetery. One of these was a very special Mother's Day celebration by the Mother statue, with songs and a special gingerbread the children made for all who attended! T.G. Masaryk is the only Czech school in the United States that has had classes for all 100 years in the same building. We

learned so much about this special place from her talk! If you weren't able to join us live, the video of Klára's presentation is available here:

<https://www.facebook.com/181958125204936/videos/644008083590548>

Did you go to the Czech Republic and travel to one of your ancestors' villages, find the cemetery, and hope to find some relative's name on a gravestone? If you did, possibly you had no success, as was the case for my family, even though

(Continued on page 3)

Live from BNC



Bohemian National Cemetery continues to be a popular attraction for both domestic and foreign visitors. On June 4th, an impressive delegation of visitors

from Prague toured the cemetery. Included among them were officials who were in Chicago to commemorate the

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Heritage Happenings

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Manuscripts, articles, photographs, and advertisements for *Heritage Happenings* may be submitted to carol jean smetana, 511B 9th St, Las Vegas, NM 87701-3911 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

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from the editor's laptop



You may have seen news reports about the Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak fires that ravaged northern New Mexico in April and May. I had to evacuate my home on County Road A4A twice—first for almost two weeks, and then again (four days after we were allowed back home) for almost four weeks. I filled up my Subaru Outback with the items I deemed most vital to save. These included of course my passport, checkbooks, key to my safety deposit box, an envelope of “emergency cash”—but almost two-thirds of the cargo space was filled with irreplaceable genealogical items: photo albums, scrapbooks, and hundreds of letters written home during WWII by my uncle, a Marine Raider killed in the war. My major summer project will be to digitize all of these items so in the next disaster I won’t have the added stress of having the only copies of family mementos. As I digitize, I’ll follow best practices and have at least two different back-ups of all the digital files,



one of which will be in the cloud. Lesson learned—hopefully not too late!

How about you? Have you ensured the safekeeping of your family photos and documents? Can they survive a natural disaster? The last two newsletters were late by a couple of months. I had hoped to catch up in April, but the chaos of the fire and mandatory evacuation made that impossible. This issue combines the April and July issues of *Heritage Happenings*. I hope I will now be able to get back on our normal publication schedule with our newsletter. My apologies.

*Na shledanou
carol*

Děkuji Vám!

Chuck Betzold and the **Wednesday Volunteers**—**Carl Brader, Jim Miller, Bill Serviss, and Bob Weniger**—for their work on the dead trees and branches - the Lumberjacks!

Mary Lachiewicz for tending the cemetery’s flowers;

Chuck Michalek and **Connor Michalek** for patching potholes on cemetery roads;

Chuck Michalek for his work with Marion Restoration to plan for the next step in preserving the Crematorium/Columbarium;

Klára Moldová for her excellent program on the 100th anniversary of the T.G. Masaryk Czech School;

Joe Topinka and the **Judy Baar Topinka Foundation** for hosting our winter meeting and board meetings on Zoom.

What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

your research said that a great-uncle or great-aunt didn't come to America with your ancestor and would reasonably be buried there.

Most likely the reason for your lack of success was the practice (still in effect today) of having to regularly renew the grave rental; in other words, there needs to be someone still alive who is concerned enough to make ongoing payments to keep the gravesite in the family. Our ancestors who arrived in America in the 1800s probably believed they wouldn't be able to return home for a visit, and with all the expenses of setting up housekeeping in Chicago, paying the grave fees didn't seem crucial. Of course this is a generalization, and no doubt there are those families that did pay or had someone there who would do so, and you had no trouble finding your gravestones.

When Friends first began in 2004, Bohemian National Cemetery was sending out "grass-cutting" invoices to

families who'd chosen not to prepay for perpetual care of their cemetery lots. Often BNC didn't have a current address, and many of the letters were returned as undeliverable. But even if a family hadn't paid the bills for a long time, the burials in those lots were never disturbed. If a family decided to use one of the graves purchased long ago by an ancestor, they would have to first pay the back charges. In the Czech Republic with its grave-rental system, the deceased might be dug up, the bones put in a general ossuary, and the gravesite leased to a new family. Of course with a country so much older and having so much less land to use, this practice seemed practical!

Now that the worst of Covid seems to be behind us, I hope you can come for a visit to see your family gravestones and enjoy the beauty of the flowers, and buildings, especially enjoy all the improvements to the Columbarium we have been working on for years now. Be

impressed with our huge trees just a year old for us (but having grown to a huge size at the nursery before being planted a year ago).

I hope you and a friend or two will join us for our first in-person gathering since Covid struck! We will gather for a meet and greet Czech dinner—breaded pork tenderloin, roast pork and chicken—at Bohemian Crystal on Sunday, August 28 at 4:00 p.m. There is plenty of free parking, and the restaurant is wheelchair accessible. I am so excited to be able to see everyone in person and to have a Czech meal, which I have not had in 2-3 years! Reservations are required. The back page of the newsletter tells you where to mail your check, or how to reserve online on our website.

We are wishing a very speedy recovery to Friends board member Mary Syrup, as she recovers from some serious health concerns.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Summer office hours:
8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. weekdays;
9:00 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays.
Closed Sundays.

Cemetery Grounds are open from
7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m 365 days of the year.

The cemetery has a **new email address:** Bohnat@bnca1877.org
Check out the cemetery's **new website:**
<https://www.bnca1877.org/>



Stories of the Stones: Anastazie Kučera

by carol jean smetana

The stone story in the previous issue of *Heritage Happenings* provided some history of the burials in the Kučera-Dubsky family lot in Section H, how the three families buried in the lot were related to each other, and how six of their members had actually been reburied there from a lot in Section Y in December 1912.

Among the reburials were the remains of two children of the Kučera family, sisters who had died within three months of each other in 1903. It was one of the Kučera sisters' deaths that first led me to this marker and its stories.

In the 1900 census, Matej and Marie Kučera are enumerated at 736 Allport Street in the Pilsen district of Chicago. Living with them are their three daughters, 26-year-old Marie, 19-year-old Rosy, and 17-year-old Anastasie. Sometime during the next three years, Rosy travels to California, where she dies of tuberculosis on September 2, 1903. Her remains are returned to Chicago for burial.

Three months later, on December 15, 1903, tragedy again strikes the Kučera family: their youngest daughter Anastazie dies, also from tuberculosis. Her December 16 obituary in *Denní Hlasatel* announces that her funeral procession will travel from the family home on Allport to Bohemian

National Cemetery on Friday, December 18.

But the newspapers that Friday morning bring ominous news. "LIVERY DRIVERS ON



"STRIKE TODAY" announces the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. "Even Hearses Will Be Under Union Ban and Mourners Must Use the Cars."

For the first time in any large city of the country there will be no livery carriages to hire today, for the drivers are on strike. ...

The funerals that are scheduled for the day will have to be conducted in a manner new to Chicago. ... [M]ourners ... will have to go to the burial grounds in street cars or by

train, while the undertakers' wagons must answer for hearses.

The next day, papers around the country described the situation. "CHICAGO FUNERALS STOPPED BY STRIKE," reported the *Atlanta Journal*. "Sixteen Hundred Carriage and Hearse Drivers Throw Down the Reins Today. ALL FUNERAL PROCESSIONS ARE DESERTED BY DRIVERS. Not a Livery Carriage Driver Can Be Hired for Love Nor Money in the City—Strike Hourly Grows."

The decision to strike was reached ... after four weeks of negotiations for better wages and better conditions. The demand is for an increase of \$2 a week. The employers refused to make any concession, claiming that business did not warrant it in view of the inroads made by automobiles.

I happened upon reports of this strike one afternoon when I was searching online for historical newspaper articles about Bohemian National Cemetery and found a story published in *The New York Times* on December 19, 1903, headlined "CHICAGO LIVERYMEN STRIKE. Hearse Drivers Also Go Out, and Police Guard Funerals from Attack." One sentence in particular sparked my curiosity:

Only the presence of a large police guard prevented strike sympathizers from attacking a



The one funeral of the day at which an attempt was made to have the customary cortege of carriages, was that of Mrs. Mary Kucera, 726 [sic—the Kučeras actually lived at 736] Allport Street. Fearing that an attack would be made on the nonunion drivers, Lieut. Ptacek of the Canalport Avenue police station sent a detail of patrolmen to escort the funeral to the Bohemian national burial ground.

buried December 18 at Bohemian National Cemetery.

With errors in the first name of the deceased and the street number, I wondered if reports might also be about whose funeral procession they were describing? The *Topeka Daily Herald*, in an article headlined "CORPSES IN WAGONS - Chicago Drivers Strike Hard on the Undertakers" included this paragraph:

The burial of A. M. Kucera, dead four days, was to have been held today, but the undertaker could secure no drivers for his hearse, and the remains were taken out in a wagon. Another undertaker succeeded this afternoon in securing the services of non-union drivers and called upon the police for protection at a funeral held later in the day. A detail of officers was sent along with the carriages and hearse, and stood guard around the church while the services were conducted.

funeral today, when a hearse carrying the body of Mrs. Mary Kucera, followed by a long procession of carriages, started toward the Bohemian National Cemetery.

This of course led me to a search of death and burial records for details about "Mrs. Mary Kucera," but there was no record of a woman by that name dying or being buried at BNC within that timeframe. Instead, I found death and

An article published that same day in the *Chicago Tribune* under the banner "STRIKE AGAINST EVEN THE DEAD - Livery Drivers Out and Undertaker's Wagons Carry Rich and Poor Alike to Grave" provided more details:

Rich and poor, eminent and obscure, were given the same simple burial yesterday in Chicago. The city's dead were borne to the cemeteries in unpretentious undertakers' wagons, not one hearse being used in the eighty funerals held. Few friends and mourners went to the burial places, and those who did rode in [street]cars, for carriages were not to be had.

While the strike of the livery drivers was felt at the hotels, at social affairs, and at the theaters, it caused the greatest inconvenience at the funerals. [...]



burial records for an Anastazie Kučera. My research led me to conclude that the newspaper accounts were mistaken in whose funeral was being described: Not that of Mrs. Mary Kučera, but of her 21-year-old daughter Anastazie, who had died the morning of December 15, 1903, and was

The Logansport (Indiana) Journal printed a brief two-paragraph article about the strike: CHICAGO STRIKE INTERFERES WITH FUNERAL CORTEGES:

Protected by a squadron of police, the body of Anastria [sic] Kucera was taken from the home through a large crowd of sympathizers with the striking Livery Drivers' union to the Bohemian national cemetery.

This was the most exciting incident of a day marked by the stopping of funerals, by calling out the carriage drivers.

(Continued on page 6)

Donations

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(\$1000—\$9999)

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Thank You

(\$1—\$24)

Janet Cundiff and Lillian Prazak

**Thank you all for your
generosity.
Your donations help preserve
and restore Bohemian National
Cemetery.**

(Continued from page 5)

Corteges were abandoned, and while bodies were taken to cemeteries in undertakers' wagons or express wagons, mourners and friends rode in street cars or went in 'buses.

On Saturday, December 19, under the headline "Překažené pohřby - Stávka kočárnické unie a čeští pohrobníci" ("Disrupted funerals - The strike of the coachmen's union and the Bohemian undertakers"), *Denní Hlasatel* reported that a union delegate arrived at the Kucera home at 736 Allport Street as the funeral procession was organizing and sent the 15 waiting carriages home. The undertaker, Mr. Urban, nevertheless proceeded with the funeral, driving the

horse-drawn hearse himself.

Flowers were placed in one carriage and two policemen sat in the other, because Mr. Urban was afraid that he would be attacked by the strikers. The bereaved were forced to go to the cemetery in a hearse, but many of the participants returned home.

The livery drivers would suspend their strike twice before it was finally settled. The first time was a Christmas Day truce. Then, in reaction to Chicago's horrific Iroquois Theater fire on December 30, 1903, in which 700 people

perished, the livery drivers' union declared another truce. The strike was renewed on January 14, 1904, and the next day a settlement was reached and the strike ended. The owners and union agreed to maintaining a "closed shop" and to submit the livery drivers' salary demands to arbitration. On February 2, 1904, the arbitration board made its ruling, renewing the contract of the previous year with the same hours and pay over which the drivers had struck. They gained nothing from their strike.

Two weeks later, yet another drama surrounded yet another death and burial in the same Section Y lot. I will tell that story of the stone in our next issue.

**Welcome to
Our New Members!**

**Donna Kostel ... Forest Park IL
Thomas Vana ... Darien IL**

Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

centennial anniversary of the T. G. Masaryk Czech School in Cicero. The visit was coordinated with help from Jaroslav Kantůrek, the Consul General of the Czech Republic in Chicago, and included Miloš Vystrčil, the President of the Senate of the Parliament of



Chuck Michalek with Jaroslav Kantůrek, president of the Senate of the Czech Republic

the Czech Republic, other members of the Senate and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The visitors were welcomed by BNCA President David Pimm and were provided a tour by Chuck Michalek and Chuck Betzold. During the tour, Senate President Vystrčil placed a wreath at the mausoleum of Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak, and he was presented with a copy of the second edition of Friend's book about the cemetery, *A Dear and Precious Heritage*. The delegation expressed their appreciation of the cemetery's cultural

significance and its historical representation of the Czechoslovak population in the Chicago area.

Other recent notable visitors included Anna Jagoš, who completed her master's degree in history and archival sciences at Masaryk University in Brno. Anna toured the cemetery as part of her research of the historical development of the Czechoslovak population in Chicago.

If you are fan of YouTube, Caitlin Doughty recently visited BNC to film her forthcoming episode on victims of the *Eastland* disaster. Caitlin is a well know expert and author in the funeral and burial industry and has posted many interesting videos.

Work has been completed on placing new granite on the Beyond the Vines outdoor Cubs columbarium. As



Connor Michalek, one of our younger volunteers, perfects his pothole patching skills.

summer arrives at BNC, volunteers continue their helpful work. Thanks to Chuck Betzold and the team of "lumberjacks" he leads, who cut and trim fallen and dead trees and branches: Carl Brader, Jim Miller, Bill Serviss, and Bob Weniger. They also placed American flags along the roadways to commemorate Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. Also thanks to Chuck Michalek and young Connor Michalek for pothole patching (an endless task). And special thanks to Mary Lachiewicz, who can be found most Sundays tending the cemetery's flowers.



Mary Lachiewicz is so dedicated to watering that the flowers smile when they see her coming.

Work on the next phase of the Columbarium Restoration Project will begin late summer or early fall.

Chuck Michalek
Friends of BNC Volunteer
Wednesday Volunteer

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

P.O. Box 72746
Roselle, IL 60172-0746

Phone: 847-362-9036
Email: info@friendsofbnc.org



Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



Summer Meet and Greet

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery



invites you to gather for our annual meeting to hear updates on our current projects and enjoy a delicious Bohemian meal.

Sunday, August 28, 2022, at 4:00 pm

Bohemian Crystal Restaurant

639 N. Blackhawk Dr, Westmont, IL

Free parking — Wheelchair accessible

Join us for a family-style Czech dinner of

homemade rye bread and rolls, soup, roast pork, breaded pork tenderloin, chicken, sauerkraut, sweet-sour cabbage, dumplings, mashed and boiled potatoes, fresh vegetable, coffee and desserts.

Paid reservations are required. \$30 per person includes dinner, tax and gratuity.

Send your check payable to Friends of BNC, postmarked by August 20, to

FRIENDS OF BNC, 5255 N Pulaski Rd, Chicago, IL 60630

or reserve online with credit card by August 25 at the store on the Friends of BNC website

www.friendsofbnc.org

Dobrou chuť !

