

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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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



Inside this issue:

| | |
|--|---|
| Officers | 2 |
| from the editor's laptop | 2 |
| Děkuji Vám | 2 |
| New Members | 2 |
| Veterans' Organizations Recognize BNC | 3 |
| Stories of the Stones— "A Memorable Celebration" | 4 |
| Columbarium Restoration Project Update | 6 |
| Donations | 6 |
| Friends Winter Meeting Save the Date | 8 |

What's New with Friends of BNC

I think everyone learned something new about Bohemian National Cemetery during Chuck Michalek's presentation about the cemetery, in historical terms, in the present, and into the future. The historic views and lovely slides of the current beauty made for a very interesting program that was enjoyed by about 25 people. We were delighted that Jan Kubišta, deputy head of mission at the Chicago

Czech Consulate General, was able to join us. We also met James Heath, the newly hired general manager at BNC, who will replace Beth Raleigh when she retires after many years of service. Beth and James will work together for some months as she trains him in the operations of BNC.

We are happy to have scenes of the television programs *Empire*

(continued on page 3)



See page 6 for update on the Columbarium Restoration Project.

Live from BNC

As we move into the fall season, volunteers continue the ongoing task of removing fallen branches and dead trees. Chuck Betzold recently reported to the BNCA Board that there were approximately 1000 trees at BNC. He formulated a map showing the location of 37 diseased sycamore trees and over 40 dead trees and

provided an article about a weather-related fungal infection impacting sycamore trees in the Midwest, including the ones at BNC. Many thanks to Betzold and his weekly volunteer crew, including Carl Brader, Jim Miller, Bill Servis, and Bob Weinger who

(continued on page 7)

Heritage Happenings

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Manuscripts, articles, photographs, and advertisements for *Heritage Happenings* may be submitted to carol jean smetana, 167 County Road A4A, Sapello, NM 87745-5026 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

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from the editor's laptop

As you can tell from Chuck's update on page six, Friends of BNC is making steady progress on the **Columbarium Restoration Project**. We've gotten a lot done, but there's a lot more to do on this 100-year-old gem of a building. While Chicago's notorious winter weather forces us to take a hiatus from the actual rehabilitation work, it gives us an opportunity to focus our energies on fund-raising for the next phase of restoration, which we would love to be able to start next year.

Be sure to read the flyer inserted in this issue of the newsletter. Our **membership year** ends in December: You can use the enclosed form to renew by mail, or renew online on our website www.friendsofbnc.org. Please do so now! Your membership dues not only pay for newsletter printing and postage but also help provide moneys for social events, matching grants from the Czech government, and smaller needs at the cemetery. Members receive a discount on books and gifts we sell.

Finally, we are thrilled to announce a revised second edition of our book **A Dear and Precious Heritage**. It includes a new section on the Eastland Centennial Memorial at the cemetery and some updated information. Books will soon be ready for shipping. Use the enclosed form to order one for yourself and additional copies for friends and family—an easy solution for some of those problem people on your gift list “who have everything.”

Na shledanou

and

Na zdar (see “Stories of the Stones”)!

carol

Děkuji Vám!

Paul Nemecek, longtime member of Friends, who donated classic slides of BNC from about 20 years ago—Paul created a program for our first meeting in 2003 using these slides;

American Legion Post 0488 in Riverside and **Joseph Topinka**, Post Commander, for a beautiful thank you plaque to Friends;

Chuck Michalek for presenting an excellent program at our summer meeting; for guiding various officials from Prague around the cemetery; and for supervising the restoration work;

Mary Syrup for providing kolače and homemade brownies for our summer meeting.

Welcome to Our New Members!

Walter S. Arnold...Elgin, IL
Kapsa Monument Co. ...
Downers Grove, IL

James Karela...Chicago, IL
Alan Penczek...Cockeysville, MD



What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)
and *Chicago PD* filmed at BNC. It is a great opportunity for the national television viewership to get a glimpse of how special BNC is!

Marion Restoration has completed the most recent phase of weatherproofing work on the crematorium/columbarium building, which required putting up scaffolding first on the western wall and later on the eastern wall. We were delighted that the proposed replacing of the lintels turned out not to be necessary; just a good cleaning will suffice. This enabled us to use the money saved for other problems.

Joseph Topinka, Friends board member and commander at the American Legion Post 0488 in Riverside,

and Tom Day, founder of Bugles Across America, came to BNC; Tom played a flawless taps as we looked at the American Legion emblem in the Ceremony Hall. Joe also presented a beautiful thank you plaque to Friends on behalf of the American Legion Post.

I am pleased to report that BNCA has allowed the volunteers to resume their activities at the cemetery. We are still in discussions about the resumption of our tours.

Please put Sunday,



February 16th, on your calendar for our winter meeting. It will be a midday meal at Czech Plaza in Berwyn. Watch for information about the program in the winter newsletter. Hope to see you there!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Veterans' Organizations Recognize Friends of BNC

by Chuck Michalek

Prominently featured throughout Bohemian National Cemetery are numerous monuments that help us remember our country's military campaigns and the many soldiers who fought for our country's freedom. On the walls of the crematorium/columbarium's Ceremony Hall are painted several insignias of veteran organizations, and the building itself houses the niches of many veterans.

Recently, American Legion Post 0488 commander Joseph Topinka and Bugles Across America, founder and president Tom Day toured BNC and met with several Friends of BNC members. Day is familiar with BNC and has played taps numerous times at veterans' burial services throughout the country, including at BNC and Arlington National Cemetery. Topinka likewise is very

familiar with BNC and is a dedicated patron of the cemetery, as was his mother Judy Baar Topinka (deceased 2014). Both Commander Topinka and Tom Day expressed appreciation to Friends of BNC for its commitment to the preservation of BNC's heritage and recognition of veterans. They presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Friends president Marge

(continued on page 7)

Stories of the Stones—“A Memorable Celebration”

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from the article “A Memorable Celebration” published on December 8, 1913, in the Denní Hlasatel newspaper. The translated article was part of the Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey published in 1942, the product of the Chicago Public Library Omnibus Project of the Works Progress Administration of Illinois that translated various news articles published in Chicago's foreign-language newspapers from 1855 to 1938. It included 4860 articles from the Bohemian press (of which 4426 articles were from the Denní Hlasatel). The entire Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey is provided online by the Newberry Library at flps.newberry.org. This article can be found at https://flps.newberry.org/article/5418478_7_1174.

In spite of the sudden change in weather—it turned unusually cold—a great number of representatives of the Český Národní Hřbitov (Bohemian National Cemetery) and their friends assembled yesterday afternoon in order to witness the laying of the cornerstone of the first Bohemian crematorium in the world. [...]

The building was begun in October, and now the foundation is all ready and several feet of the main walls have been built. If the weather is favorable, at least to some extent, the rebuilding of the old chapel will begin soon.

Since the venture has reached its present state of development, the moment has arrived for the special ceremonies decided upon by the board of representatives of the Český Národní Hřbitov—the commemoration of the laying of the cornerstone. Within this cornerstone will be placed important documents referring to the life of the Bohemian colony in Chicago. This is a significant moment [in the lives of] Chicago's Freethinking Bohemians.

The representatives assembled yesterday shortly after 1:00 P.M. in the offices of the cemetery, where all documents to be put into the cornerstone were made ready for the ceremony. The assembled delegates and guests proceeded to the site of the building near whose northwest corner a speaker's platform had been erected. The cornerstone was placed on the platform while the chairman of the board of representatives, Mr. Jan Pecha, opened the ceremony. He greeted all those present and said:

"Friends! A moment of rare significance has arrived. It is the historic moment when we, Bohemians of Chicago, are laying the foundation of an undertaking which symbolizes our liberal principles and crowns the work we have done in trying to make this cemetery worthy of our nation.

"Cremation is the most advanced, most progressive method of interment. This, therefore, is a red-letter day in the history of Chicago Bohemians; this is the day when we lay the cornerstone

of the first Bohemian crematorium in the whole world [...]

"It is with gratitude that we today remember our friends who, in the seventies of the last century, founded this beautiful cemetery of ours, upon which we are now building a crematorium [...]

"Before concluding, I consider it a pleasant duty to thank all Bohemian periodicals which helped and supported us in our efforts. My thanks go also to all members of the board of representatives, past and present, who have done all they could to assure success to our 'field of eternal peace,' and to make the cemetery a dignified final abode for our friends. Permit me to express our appreciation also to all patrons and supporters. I am sure that our sentiments of gratitude to all those I have mentioned are fully shared by everybody who is interested in the Bohemian community life in America, and all those I greet with a sincere 'Na Zdar' (To Success)!"

This speech received a very warm reception, in spite of the prevailing "Siberian"



cold. The whole audience replied with a resounding "Nazdar," and the principal speaker of the day, Dr. Frantisek Iska, took the platform. In view of the extreme cold, he shortened his speech to a few minutes, but put into it all the feeling and significance that he would have put into a long oration. He said:

"The building whose cornerstone we are laying

individual graves and of the cemetery as a whole runs into millions of dollars. This cost is eloquent testimony to the economic progress that has crowned the efforts of Chicago Bohemians, their ability, their diligence, their courage, and their perseverance. And the general appearance of the cemetery, as well as that of individual graves, speaks for the cultural progress of our people [...] Our stones and monuments are of considerable artistic value, and with the beautiful floral decorations, prove

of our fourth or fifth generation into an American nation of one single language, the Bohemians should disappear in this country, this building will remain as a permanent monument to their efforts and to their Bohemian characteristics, the most marked feature of which is courage—courage to seek truth and to fight for liberty.

"I am sure that I speak for all Freethinking Bohemians, not only in Chicago but throughout these United States, when I offer an expression of thanks to the



The 1913 cornerstone is visible on the northwest corner of the crematorium/columbarium building.

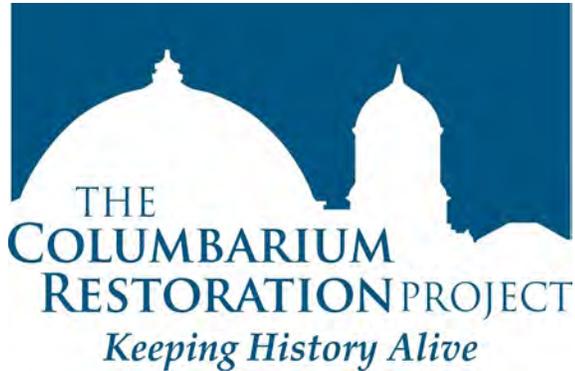


board of representatives of the Český Národní Hřbitov for helping, by building this Crematorium, to preserve in America a permanent evidence of the fact that our Bohemian people here were progressive at a time when all

today, is to symbolize the fulfillment and culmination of our national cemetery. In the comparatively short space of a lifetime, the cemetery has grown from a humble beginning to a huge enterprise, the size of which is a testimonial to the numerical strength of the freethinking group among the Chicago Bohemians. The total cost of all that has been used here for the adornment of

the Bohemians' sense of real beauty. These cultural values will be enhanced by a monumental structure [...] Let us remember that this building will survive us, that it will stand when those who speak our beautiful Bohemian language are probably fewer in number. And if, by the cessation of immigration and by the complete assimilation

around them, reactionary influences were still strongest. May this crematorium in a Bohemian cemetery proclaim to all those who come after us, that Bohemians in America were the pioneers of progress in their methods of burying their dead, as well as in every other way."



Update by Chuck Michalek

If you visited BNC in late summer you witnessed the appearance of a web of tall scaffolding rising up on the crematorium/columbarium building's center elevation, indicating the start of work on the exterior limestone walls. This phase involved work on the building's three-story "drum" (curved-wall section). Masonry elements repaired include coping stones, balustrades, upper and lower cornices, and lintels above the stained glass windows. Work also included spall repairs and tuckpointing. The work is being done by Marion Restoration, known for its skilled workmanship and preservation of historic buildings throughout the country.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, \$158,663 has been raised by Friends of BNC to pay for the current phase of restoration work. In addition to work on the curved walls, Friends board voted to expand this year's work to include repairs of spalls on the other exterior walls. Additional work also included

tuckpointing of parapet roof wall sections suspected of letting rainwater into the east niche hallway. Marion Restoration quoted the additional work at \$20,368, a discounted quote that took into consideration the scaffolding and supplies already at the worksite.

Friends of BNC is committed to helping preserve the building so future generations can view and experience the heritage, culture and traditions represented at the cemetery. The next phase in weatherproofing will involve more masonry repairs and tuckpointing. Please consider donating to continue the columbarium's preservation. You can view donation information at FriendsofBNC.org or contact Chuck at restoration@friendsofbnc.org.



Donations

Leadership
(\$10,000 and above)
Wayne Wolf

Benefactors
(\$1000—\$9999)
Michalek family

Sponsors
(\$100—\$499)
Joanne Herber
James Karela
Paul Pirok
Carol and Gerald Vovis *in honor of*
Glenn and Susan Spachman's
50th wedding anniversary

Donors
(\$25—\$99)
Joann Poplar
Stephan Zupkas *in memory of*
John & Josephine Herrmann

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

Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

all help to maintain BNC's tree population.

Speaking of trees, BNC is now the proud home of a permanent tree that won't need trimming in the future. A family recently commissioned Walter S. Arnold to create a double tree memorial reminiscent of



Walter S. Arnold, stone carver, installing BNC's new memorial tree

BNC's many precious old limestone tree memorials. Arnold is the renown sculptor and stone carver who spoke at the Friends membership meeting in August 2018. The

new tree is a proud addition to BNC's "forest" of old carved memorial trees. Like many of the 100-year-old carved trees, the new tree memorial contains carved items representative of the family's personal interests.

During the month of September, two important visitors from Czech Republic



Renáta Fučíková

toured BNC. The first was Renáta Fučíková, author and illustrator who lives in Prague and teaches at the Faculty of Design and Art in Pilsen, Czech Republic. Her new book, *Bohemian Stories—An Illustrated History of Czechs in the USA*, features several pages about notable

individuals commemorated at BNC: Anton Cermak, victims of the *Eastland* Disaster, Albin Polasek, Alice Masaryk, and Ladimír Klácel.

Also visiting BNC was Klára Stejskalová, editor-in-chief of Radio Prague, who gathered information for a feature on Bohemian National Cemetery that will be



Klára Stejskalová and Chuck Michalek

presented on radio in the Czech Republic.

Chuck Michalek
Friends of BNC
Volunteer

Veterans Recognize BNC

(continued from page 3)

Stueckemann. Friends of BNC appreciates the donation from American Legion Post 0488 and Bugles Across America to the Columbarium Restoration Project in recognition of the building's history and heritage.

Topinka and Day also donated a Gold Star Mothers Memorial Flag to BNC. The

flag was accepted by Friends of BNC member and BNCA board member Chuck Betzold. Betzold is an Air Force veteran and regular volunteer at BNC.

At the conclusion of the visit, Day played taps in the Ceremony Hall, its dignified notes filling the rotunda in tribute to veterans.



Chuck Betzold, Tom Day, Joseph Topinka

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery Winter Meeting

Looking for a warm spot this winter? Join us at our Annual Meeting at



7016 Cermak Road, Berwyn, Illinois 60402

We'll gather for a midday meal of delicious Czech comfort food & a special program on

Sunday, February 16, 2020

Details will be published in our next newsletter and online as they become available.