

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Winter Issue ~ Vol. XVI No. 3

January 2020

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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Friends of BNC and Wednesday Volunteers Mourn Loss

Friends of BNC and the Wednesday volunteer crew were deeply saddened by the recent loss of Jerry (Jerome) Gaydusek (1941—2020). Jerry served as one of the directors of Friends of BNC and was Co-Chair of Special Projects. He was also a delegate to BNCA and a member of the



Jerry Gaydusek
1941—2020

Auditing and Oversight Committee.

Following his retirement, Jerry became a devoted "Wednesday volunteer" at BNC who showed up nearly every Wednesday for 15 years. No job was too big or small for Jerry to tackle. Trimming trees, repairing potholes, painting, patching a roof, helping install bollards around

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What's New with Friends of BNC

Jerry Gaydusek, our director and marvelous member of the "Wednesday volunteers," died on January 10th. Traveling 42 miles one way to come to the cemetery from Bolingbrook, Jerry could sometimes be at BNC more than once a week. He was a wise board member, voicing well-thought-out comments on issues we were discussing. We will all miss him terribly. Read more about Jerry in Chuck Michalek's article above.

With an update on the progress on restoring the crematorium/

columbarium building, a great article and pictures of the Eastland Disaster Memorial, and revisions to other areas, the newly available second edition of our book, *A Dear and Precious Heritage*, reflects the changes since the first edition was published in 2012. Thanks to Carol Jean Smetana who did the work on this!

We also plan to update our columbarium booklet, first published in 2004. We had five authors for that, our first

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Heritage Happenings

Heritage Happenings is published quarterly by Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

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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Chuck Michalek

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from the editor's laptop



Most people understandably think of a cemetery as a final resting place and cherish it for that reason. My earliest memory of a cemetery involves planting flowers on the grave of my mother's brother who was killed in World War II. As I became involved in genealogy, I searched for graves of direct ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.) and collateral relatives (cousins, aunts, uncles, great-aunts and great-uncles, etc.). This search brought me to Bohemian National Cemetery and the graves of my great-grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles, cousins and others. Discovering their burial sites led me to a broader awareness of the cemetery itself. I joined Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery as a way for me to express my appreciation of the intersection of history, culture and genealogy ever present at the cemetery and to contribute in at least a small way to its preservation.

Through our quarterly publication, Heritage Happenings, Friends of BNC introduces readers to unique aspects of our cemetery. In this issue both Marge Sladek Stueckemann and Chuck Michalek share their experiences in researching history on display at Bohemian National Cemetery—a pansy painted on a wall at the cemetery connects to the cultural heritage of the Bohemian immigrants, a wheel at the Eastland Disaster Memorial connects to an event in Chicago and maritime history that impacted thousands of lives.

Friends of BNC shares stories of the cemetery to increase awareness of and appreciation for Bohemian National. Our major fundraising drive is the Columbarium Restoration Project to restore and preserve the most significant and historical building on the cemetery grounds. Please consider supporting our efforts. We welcome your participation.

We all will miss our friend and fellow board member Jerry Gaydusek, who devoted hundreds of hours to caring for the cemetery that meant so much to him. He epitomized the volunteer spirit and attitude that sustains organizations like Friends of BNC.

Na shledanou!
carol

Děkuji Vám!

Pat Nelson, Ray and Thelma Malecek for newsletter mailing;

Lin Hoogerhyde for revising the welcome letter sent to new members;

Chuck Michalek for his supervision of the repair work on the columbarium/crematorium building; and for completing the report to the Czech government regarding our grant of over \$6,000 used for the

Columbarium Restoration Project;

Juli Nelson for developing an up-to-date mailing list.



What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)
publication. I was in charge of finding out about the pansy painted on the wall in the Ceremony Hall. With no accompanying wording, trying to figure out why the pansy received such a prominent place was a challenge! BNCA published several anniversary books about the history of the cemetery, dating back to the first from 1902, but there was no mention of the pansy. This was before the internet would have made it a one-minute

search! I was asking about this when talking to one of our charter members, Laddie Vitek, and he remembered getting a pansy pin when he graduated from the freethinker school, so we figured—correctly—it was some kind of freethinker symbol. The symbol of the pansy seeming to be bent over in thought would have been recognized by all those establishing Bohemian National Cemetery. So when you plant some pansies this

spring, think of the founders of Bohemian National Cemetery.

I hope to see you at our February meeting! The musician who will perform and the delicious Czech meal will make for a wonderful afternoon at Czech Plaza Restaurant in Berwyn. Find more information and reservation details on the back page—don't miss it!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President



The Pansy

The Congregation of Bohemian Freethinkers of Chicago, *Svobodná obec*, was founded in 1870 and played a vital role in the establishment of Bohemian National Cemetery. The freethinker symbol is the pansy: the word pansy comes from the French word *pensée*, which means "thought." By 1880 there were 40,000 Czechs in Chicago, the majority of whom were freethinkers.

Next time you visit the Ceremony Hall in the crematorium/columbarium building at Bohemian National Cemetery, take a moment to find the pansy adorning the wall. This and the other decorations in the Hall were painted by Moravian-American artist John A. Mallin almost 100 years ago.

Welcome to Our New Members!

Janice DeValk ... Saint John, IN
Tom Drebenstedt ... Chicago, IL
Ronald Hejna ... Chicago, IL
Cathy Loomis Family ... Bloomingdale, IL

Laurie Reyna ... Dyer, IN
Beatrice Holly Scholz ... Wayne, PA
Elizabeth Vogel ... Chicago, IL

Stories of the Stones: The Eastland Memorial Wheel



by Chuck Michalek

Since the 2015 dedication of Bohemian National Cemetery's *Eastland* Disaster Memorial commemorating the centennial of the *Eastland* disaster, the memorial site has been visited by countless individuals and groups. Many have commented on the impressive steering wheel rising out of the large granite block and have inquired if the wheel is the actual wheel from the *Eastland* ... unfortunately, NOT LIKELY. How amazing it would have been to locate the actual *Eastland* steering wheel and incorporate it in the *Eastland* memorial at BNC, where the largest number of *Eastland* victims are laid to rest, more than in any other cemetery.

Following the *Eastland* disaster in 1915, the ship was raised and refurbished as a naval training vessel and renamed the *Wilmette*. Towards the end of WWII, the *Wilmette's* role became unnecessary, and she was decommissioned in November 1945. The following year she was sold to a scrap dealer and towed to the Inland Steel Co. plant in East Chicago, Indiana, where she was cut up in 1947.

When considering an

appropriate maritime object for the memorial site, the *Eastland* memorial organizing committee decided to purchase

it from Chicago's outdoor weather and adding new wooden handles. The wheel was cut and fabricated to

create the appearance of being partially submerged in the "granite river." Drifting waves were sculpted into the granite base at the point where the wheel intersected the water. The angled position of the steering wheel symbolizes both the capsizing of the *Eastland* as well as its being



from the Great Lakes Nautical Antiques Co. a large old ship wheel, described as a "steering wheel from a Great Lakes freighter." While in all likelihood it was not from the *Eastland*, it may have come from a similar ship that sailed the Great Lakes.

To incorporate the wheel into the memorial, the Bevel Granite Co. in Merrionette Park, Illinois, was selected to fabricate the monument, based on its excellent reputation for creating monuments. The selected design incorporating the wheel came from a Czech artist, Lubomir Dosta, who was an acquaintance of the owner of Bevel Granite Co.

Following its arrival in Chicago, preparation and installation of the 66-inch iron wheel involved "powder painting" the wheel to preserve

raised out of the murky waters of the Chicago River after the disaster on July 15, 1915, which claimed 844 lives.

Looking closely at the wheel, one notices the two inscriptions around the wheel's 66-inch circumference: "BATH MAINE" and "HYDE WINDLASS." These words provided clues to researching the wheel's history and led to my visiting the Main Maritime Museum in Bath, Maine. Over the years, the city of Bath housed numerous shipyards. In 1909, one of Bath's shipyards launched the *Wyoming*, a 450-foot, six-masted schooner reported to be the largest wooden ship ever built.

The Maine Maritime Museum is now on the site of the old shipyard that built the *Wyoming*. Located on the Kennebec River, the museum



showcases impressive displays of old ship-building techniques and maritime hardware exhibits. The museum also houses a research library that contains numerous catalogues from the turn of the century and features much of the hardware and mechanical equipment sold by the Bath Iron Works to shipbuilders around the country.

Bath Iron Works was incorporated in 1884 by Thomas W. Hyde. Originally making iron hardware for wooden ships, the company greatly expanded its production to include constructions of various commercial and military ships. Today Bath Iron Works is building several ultra-modern Zumwalt-class destroyers for the U.S. Navy.

The *Eastland* was built in 1903 by the Jenks Ship Building Company in Port Huron, Michigan, for the Michigan Steamship Company. More than likely, the *Eastland's* extensive mechanical equipment and iron hardware were built by the Bath Iron Works, including her large steering wheel.



"WINDLASS"

In reviewing some of the old Bath Iron Work catalogues from 1892, I was able to locate materials mentioning "steam and hand power windlasses... steam winches, boilers, tanks, steerers..." etc., all of which could be some of the equipment ordered to outfit the *Eastland*. Of particular interest

were pages devoted to steering wheel equipment. It was exciting to see references to iron steering wheel assemblies and drawings of wheels like the one at BNC's *Eastland* memorial. It could very well be that one the wheels described in the catalogue was actually ordered by the Jenks Ship Building Company and installed on the *Eastland*. In any event, we are now confident we know the "birthplace" of the steering wheel in the *Eastland* Disaster Memorial.

Cemeteries often provide rich genealogical opportunities to discover family connections that sometimes reveal unexpected outcomes. As I researched the steering wheel, I began to wonder what connection there might be between the wheel at BNC and the one that was touched by the hand of *Eastland's* captain as the ship was listing and capsized into the Chicago River back in 1915. Could the two wheels have been connected in ways previously unknown? Perhaps over a century ago, they were created side by side at the

Bath Iron Works production line. Is it possible they share the same metallurgic DNA by being cast from the same pour of molten iron ore steel and had been stored side by side while waiting shipment to the destined ships they would each steer around the Great Lakes? Could their respective ships

have sailed side by side on one of the Great Lakes, or have been docked next to one another on the Chicago River?

As one considers their possible connectedness, one is led to ponder the ultimate connection between the two old wheels—that the wheel at BNC's *Eastland* Disaster Memorial is, in some remote happenstance, the same wheel that was on the *Eastland*. The mystery remains...



"BATH...MAINE"

More information on the *Eastland* disaster and BNC's *Eastland* Disaster Memorial can be found in the second edition of *Friends' book, A Dear and Precious Heritage*,

or by visiting: www.facebook.com/Eastland-Memorial-Project-at-Bohemian-National-Cemetery-870029149685589/

or: friendsofbnc.org/Eastland/index.html

Donations

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Thank You
(\$1—\$24)
Jackie A. Dortch
Wesley Janca

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

Friends of BNC and Wednesday Volunteers Mourn Loss

(continued from first page)
the *Eastland* Disaster
Memorial, sweeping floors,
and cleaning various nooks
and crannies were all



Jerry Gaydusek helping install the bollards at the *Eastland* Disaster Memorial at BNC.

approached with a level of
passion that revealed his
dedication to and love of the
cemetery.

For several months in
2012 Jerry worked with
other volunteers
and staff to
significantly
renovate the
interior of the
historic
gatehouse. It
was noteworthy
that the rarely
heard old bell
atop BNC's
gatehouse
entrance was
heard chiming its
sad refrain as

Jerry's funeral procession,
with his wife Helenka, family
and numerous friends,
passed through the
gatehouse entrance, bringing
him home to his final resting
place in the Masaryk
Memorial Mausoleum—
fittingly, on a Wednesday.

Those of us who knew and
worked with Jerry over the
years will certainly remember
his "helping hands" spirit.....
and will wear big smiles on
volunteer Wednesdays when
we pass by his resting place
at BNC's Masaryk Memorial
Mausoleum.

Chuck Michalek
"Wednesday Volunteer"
Friends of BNC Volunteer



Columbarium Restoration Project Update by Chuck Michalek

As 2019 came to a close, the Columbarium Restoration Project succeeded in completing another important phase of repairing the historic crematorium/columbarium building. Focusing on much needed exterior masonry repairs, Marion Restoration Co. was paid \$179,031 for priority work as outlined in the previous newsletter. It is

satisfying to note several areas on the inside of the building have experienced a noticeable reduction of falling and flaking ceiling and wall plaster caused by outside water infiltration.

Water penetration not only compromises the structural integrity of the building but can harm the Ceremony Hall's elaborate interior ceiling and wall decorations, painted by renowned fresco artist John A. Mallin.

We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations whose ongoing donations to Friends of BNC's Columbarium Restoration Project make the preservation of this building possible. A special thank you to the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the Czech Republic, who provided an important grant in 2019 to help with the building's restoration.

Dignitaries from the Czech Republic usually want to visit Bohemian National Cemetery while they are in Chicago. The Czech Consulate recently informed us that the Mayor of Prague has requested a tour of BNC this spring to visit former Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak's family mausoleum, as well as other significant buildings and sites at BNC.

Our work is not finished. There are several more major repairs to be done, detailed in the 2014 Survey and Master Plan for the crematorium/columbarium building. Friends of BNC will be meeting to discuss the next phases of repairs for 2020. As always, we appreciate your ongoing support.

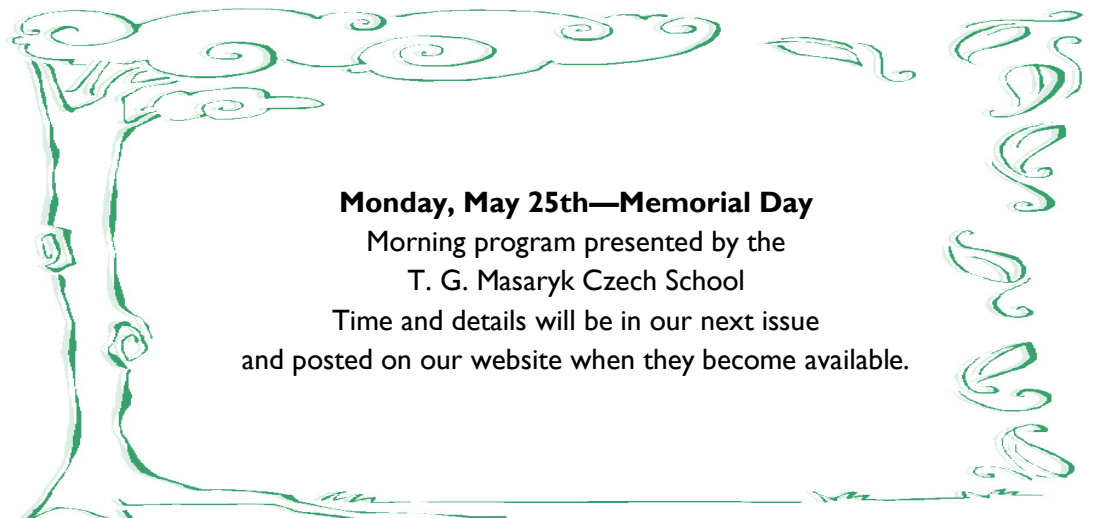


Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Monday, May 25th—Memorial Day

Morning program presented by the
T. G. Masaryk Czech School

Time and details will be in our next issue
and posted on our website when they become available.



Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



“Sing Down Memory Lane”

Sunday, February 16, 2020, at 12:30 pm
Czech Plaza Restaurant
7016 Cermak Rd, Berwyn



Join Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery at our winter meeting featuring L. J. Slavin playing mandolin, flute, harmonica, musical saw and more on classic country, swing, folk and sentimental favorites.

\$25 per person includes program; Czech dinner of liver dumpling soup, breaded pork tenderloin, roast chicken, sauerkraut, cabbage, dumplings, mashed potatoes, coffee, tea, and dessert; tax and gratuity.

Reservations needed. Prepay by sending your check postmarked by February 9th to Friends of BNC, P.O. Box 72746, Roselle, Illinois 60172 or reserve online at the store on the Friends of BNC website: www.friendsofbnc.org.