



Volume 1  
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Editor

## Heritage Happenings Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

### ***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*

**We Are Now Online! Check out our new website at <http://www.friendsofbnc.org/>**

### **What's New with Friends of BNC**

What a thrill it was to see Civil War veteran Frantisek Steiskal come to life as our February 27th program enthralled the audience. Thanks to re-enactor, Dan McCarthy, who with a uniform, gun, greatcoat and a fantastic memory, transported us to the 1860's and then forward to 1932, the year of Frantisek's death. Member Ray Capek and BNC Superintendent, Phil Roux, appeared in authentic gravedigger uniforms to escort him back to the "other place" he'd come from. (Don't miss the story of the Civil War Monument's dedication on page 3.) You can be sure our Frantisek was there at the dedication. We invite you to stop and view the Civil War Monument and Frantisek's grave the next time you are visiting BNC.

We invite you to join us on May 7, 2005 at BNC for one, or both of our Spring Tours. Please see the enclosed flyer for a registration form.

Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup> is Memorial Day and the annual ceremony begins at 9:30 A.M. with a short procession from the Administration Building to the Columbarium for services. We plan to present a

carnation to each of the ladies attending as we did last year. We also hope to have the flagpole surrounded by flowers by Memorial Day.

Last December we gave \$1,000 to the cemetery, part of the proceeds of the 2004 tours and the Board responded with a very sincere thank you for the check. Also, thanks in part to the letter campaign of 2004, about \$9,000 were received for maintenance and beautification. Since our mission is to enhance and preserve our cemetery this was a wonderful way to end our charter year!

Thanks to our new webmaster, Sue Zielinski, Friends has their web page up and running. Sue has been working hard to develop user-friendly pages with pictures, history and upcoming events. Log on to our web page at <http://www.friendsofbnc.org/>.

At the recent tour of the Columbarium, there was great interest in the organizations represented by the symbols surrounding the chapel area. Partly funded with our Czech Embassy grant monies, Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Marilyn John, Juli Nelson and Albert Walavich are at work preparing a booklet with (continued on page 2)

colored illustrations and explanations about this treasured place.

The 6 burial books in need of repair are in the process of being rebound with beautiful lambskin covers & stamped with gold lettering. We thank those who made this possible: Ray Capek, Charles and Martha Cervenka (2 books), Don and Evelyn (Krenek) Fergle Marge Sladek Stueckemann and grant money from the Czech Embassy (1 book). Our thanks to Ray for his hard work in photographing each page.

Save the date of Sunday, August 21, 2005 for our next free program. It will be held in the lower Marble Room at the Columbarium at 2:00 p.m. when Kathy Mallin, granddaughter of the artist who decorated the chapel, will explain his work.

In line with our by-laws which call for a yearly election, the Nominating Committee presents the following slate: Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President; Ray Capek, Director; Donna Desai, Vice President; Charles and Martha Cervenka, Directors; Bill Hosna, Treasurer; Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Director; and Juli Nelson, Secretary.

Paper ballots will be available at the election, which will take place at 12:30 P.M. in the Flower Room on May 7, 2005 between the tours. Additional nominations may be made from the floor that day provided a minimum of 3 members have signed a petition and the person nominated is willing to serve. If you want to cast an absentee ballot please write to our secretary, Juli Nelson, 300 Claymoor #2F, Hinsdale, IL 60521-5076.

Thanks to all who are doing so much to make Friends of BNC a real success! Do join the fun!  
Marge Sladek Stueckemann, Chairperson

### **Family History at BNC**

Ms. Stueckemann,

I always was fascinated by Bohemian National Cemetery. I remember as a kid, my mother pointing to the graves that were circles or crescent moons and whispering, "They were cremated!" She could not explain why BNC was one of the first cemeteries in the country to have a crematory (when cremation by non-Asians was very rare) or why so many were

cremated there. Then a couple of years ago, one of my cousins who is doing the Soucek genealogy, sent me an article on the history of BNC. In it, the reason became clear: the cemetery was founded by Freethinkers in protest against the Catholic Church for refusing to bury a young woman who had died in childbirth. I am eager to learn more of the cemetery's history. Again, many thanks. Charles Walton

Do you have a family history story to share? We would love to hear it. Please mail your story to Chris Repa Visconti, Editor, 550 Alcoa Lane Hoffman Estates, IL 60194 or email to: [Dagochek@aol.com](mailto:Dagochek@aol.com) ■

### **Past Programs**

"Meet Civil War Veteran, Frantisek Steiskal"

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery hosted a free program on Sunday, February 27, 2005 at 2:00 P.M. at the Westchester Public Library. The program featured Dan McCarthy, a Civil War re-enactor. Doing a first person impression of Civil War veteran Frantisek Steiskal, he discussed life during the time of the war including specific information about Frantisek and his unit. Frantisek, who is buried at Bohemian National Cemetery, marched in the Memorial Day Parade at the cemetery until the 1930's. There were over 100 people in attendance at the library and it was standing room only for this 1 1/2 hour program. As his story ended, 2 men dressed in authentic BNC gravedigger uniforms, which had been found stored in the attic since the 1930's, escorted Frantisek out of the room.

### **Bohemian National Cemetery Monument**

A bronze and stone Eastland disaster monument will be dedicated and will permanently reside near Section 16 where the greatest number of Eastland drowning victims were buried. The monument is the result of a collaboration between three organizations - Eastland Disaster Historical Society, Bohemian National Cemetery, and Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery. A triangular-shaped piece of property, near Baby Haven, has been earmarked for the monument. To view the proposed monument go to <http://www.eastlanddisaster.org/newsletterbncmonument.htm>



## Dedication of the Bohemian Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument 1892

Source: Chicago Daily Tribune Archives  
Article, May 30, 1892

Bohemian valor in the cause of liberty has now for the first time an enduring memorial. At the head of the main avenue in the Bohemian National Cemetery at Irving Park stands a monument typical of the Bohemian-American defenders of the Union. It was dedicated yesterday, with all the pomp and solemnity of the Grand Army ritual in the presence of 5,000 Bohemian citizens of Chicago.

The statue is of bronze, of heroic proportions, representing a private soldier in full fatigue uniform. He stands in an attitude of dauntless courage, with his left hand supporting a color staff, the pike partly buried in the earth at his feet and his silken folds flowing about his shoulders. In his right hand he holds his bayoneted musket ready to repel any one who dares assail the flag. Joseph Klir, artist, born in 1860 designed the statue.

At 10 o'clock yesterday morning the societies participating in the ceremonies assembled at Dearborn and Adams streets and formed the column which moved to the Northwestern depot. Joseph Sindelar was the Marshall of the Bohemian societies and A. J. Miksch commanded the veterans division.

Arriving at the cemetery the military and civic organizations were disposed about the monument, the stands of colors forming a complete circle around the pedestal. President Matousek delivered the address of welcome. The singing society, under Prof. William Apmadoc, rendered "America". Miss Albina L. Steiskal, in behalf of the Bohemian-American Singing Association, then presented to the officers of the cemetery a large American flag, which was accepted by Joseph Kostner, the Superintendent.

Chief Marshall Lewis invited the Grand Army to perform the rite of dedication. H.S. Dietrich, Past Senior Vice Commander of the Department of Illinois, responding to the invitation, said:

"In the name of the Grand Army of the Republic I thank you for the honor you have done us in asking us to dedicate this beautiful monument. Our Bohemian citizens responded

bravely when our country was assailed and left their homes to preserve the flag of their adopted country. This monument is not only a memorial to your heroic dead, but it will hereafter teach all men that in this country there can be but one government and one flag."

Commander George Howison of Post No. 91 administered the ritual of dedication. Commander Howison then ordered the flag unfurled and pronounced the words of dedication:

"And now in the name of the Grand Army of the Republic I dedicate this monument to the memory of the navy - the mariners who guarded our rivers and our seacoasts; and to the men of the army - who fell in defense of our flag on hill and plain; to the army and navy of the United States."

The veil, which had concealed the statue, was drawn down. A prolonged cheer went up from the assemblage, the Bohemian Sharpshooters fired a salvo of three, and the circle of colors around the monument was dipped three times. The first Bohemian soldiers' monument in America was dedicated. While the crowd cheered, the bands played patriotic music, and the chorus sang "The Star Spangled Banner." William Kaspar, the President of the Bohemian Memorial Association, then presented the monument to the officers of the cemetery. President Vaclav Mattas accepted the gift for the official board. After this the Bohemian societies sang "The Unveiling of the Flag," a song composed for the occasion by Prof. J. Simonek.

The Hon. Carter H. Harrison then delivered an address. He heartily congratulated the Bohemian people that they had directed the movement. Assistant prosecuting attorney Elliott and Joseph Cermak delivered the closing addresses, and after the song "Evening" by the societies and the song of the "retreat" by Bugler Van Horn the ceremonies were ended.

[Today, the Bohemian Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument is known as the Civil War Monument. I would like to thank Paul Nemecek for finding this article and allowing me to share excerpts with you. Chris Repa Visconti, Editor]

## Membership

*Welcome To Our Newest Members!*

George Drost, Esq., Honorary Czech Consulate,  
Arlington Heights, IL

Edward Duffek, Colfax, CA

Nilda Duffek, Colfax, CA

Anne Marie Dusek, Elmhurst, IL

Michael Dvorsky, St. Leonard, MD

Pam Dvorsky, St. Leonard, MD

Jim & Elaine Fergle, Westchester, IL

Christine Hrsil, Beecher, IL

Anna J. Kucera, Downers Grove, IL

Robert L. Kratky, Lombard, IL

Naomi A. Migas, Chicago, IL

Shirley Slanker, Westchester, IL

Don Slavicek, Kildeer, IL

Carol Jean Smetana, Sapello, NM

Lorraine Stastny, Chicago, IL

Cheryl Svoboda, East Dundee, IL

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## Recommended Reading

*Graveyards of Chicago* is a summary of cemeteries in the Chicago area, illustrated with black and white photos. It explores the history, art and lore of these cemeteries in and around Cook County, Illinois

\$12 members/\$15 non-members

*Journey* is the story of a Bohemian family who immigrated to Chicago in the early 1900's. One brother made his home in the city, had relatives that were buried at BNC, and was impacted by most of the events in Chicago history.

\$18 members/\$20 non-members

*Three Slovak Women* is a multi-generational story of a granddaughter learning about the struggles of her grandmother marrying and raising a family in the coal and steel towns of Pennsylvania in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

\$15 members/\$17 non-members

Books will be available for purchase at the May tour.

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A "Gift Membership" to FoBNC makes sense. You are supporting a great organization and giving a thoughtful gift at the same time.

## Volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to help us grow. If you are interested in helping with any of the following please contact Marge Sladek Stueckemann at 847-362-9036.

**Hospitality:** arrange facilities for meetings, register and greet attendees. **Membership:** maintain records of our members. **Donor and Solicitation:** build donor and volunteer support. **Grant Writing:** Complete paperwork requesting financial assistance.

*"Help Friends fulfill its mission"*

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## Upcoming Programs

*Two Special Tours of BNC*

Be sure to read the enclosed flyer regarding our two upcoming tours of Bohemian National Cemetery. Mark your calendar for Saturday, May 7, 2005 and join the friends and Albert Waiavich as he leads us on more exciting tours of the cemetery.

Questions: Contact Marge at 847-362-9036 or [mdstueck@aol.com](mailto:mdstueck@aol.com)

*Special Free Program*

Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2 p.m. – Lower Marble Room – Crematorium. Talk by Kathy Mallin, granddaughter of the artist who decorated the chapel, will discuss and demonstrate gold leafing techniques.

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## Officers

*Let us introduce ourselves to you:*

Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann, Chairperson

Bill Hosna, Treasurer

Juli Nelson, Secretary

Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Director

Chris Repa Viscanti, Newsletter Editor &

Membership Chair

Donna Desai, Publicity

Ray Capek, Director

Sue Zielinski, Webmaster