

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Volume 2, No. 1, Summer 2005 Chris Repa Visconti, 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

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

What's New with Friends of BNC

Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President

On May 7th 69 people joined our tours, 32 in the morning and 37 in the afternoon. Thanks to Albert Walavich's superb guidance, we learned much about the eastern area monuments including the Kolar mausoleum (landlords to the infamous Mrs. O'Leary of the Chicago fire fame) on our afternoon tour.

Wrapped in ivy for remembrance, containing roses for purity, and decorated in pink ribbon, a wreath was placed near the Albin Polasek monument, "Mother" to honor and to remember all mothers as we celebrated Mothers Day.

Thanks to the following for your help that day. To Dolores Benes Duv who accepted reservations, Martha and Chuck Cervenka for outstanding Czech foods, and to Mr. Roland Weis (who donated money to cover the cost of refreshments). Lastly a thank you to Juli Nelson (morning) and Laddie Vitek (afternoon) who acted as hostess and host and accepted donations for books, notecards and new memberships.

Thanks to George Vytlačil for his graphic design expertise shown in the marvelous new gatehouse sign and attractive membership brochures.

The Friends purchased pink and white geraniums and member, Mary Ellen Panoch-Zuro, planted them in the Columbarium plant holders. The colors and plants were chosen to return the building to its appearance as shown on a historic postcard. The beautiful flowers planted around the flagpole were purchased by FOBNC and planted by the Cervenkas.

Thanks to a generous donation by Evelyn Krenek Fergle, special memorial envelopes will be available in the cemetery office for those wishing to remember loved ones living or dead.

Our next free program will be August 21st at 2:00 p.m. in the Columbarium and will feature Kathy Mallin discussing the work of her grandfather, J.A. Mallin. He is the artist who did the beautiful gold leaf decorations in the chapel. While you are there, purchase a copy of the newly completed, 24 page booklet, "Introduction to the Bohemian National Cemetery Columbarium /Crematorium". Cost: \$5/members, \$6/non-members.

Our next tour will be Sunday, September 18th at 1:00 p.m., a general features tour that will highlight the monuments of the Eastland victims, as this summer marks the 90th anniversary of that tragedy.

For those Charter members who joined Friends of BNC in 2003 and 2004, it is time to renew your membership. We have already received some renewals and I thank you. Please use the form on the back of the mailer to renew your membership for the calendar year 9/1/0 -8/31/06.

Those who have donated money to BNC in 2004 are listed on a separate insert in this newsletter. All donations were received with the heartfelt thanks of BNC and made a real difference. It is a pleasure to see our organization grow and thrive. Our thanks to all who have done so much to make it a success.

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Frantisek B. Zdrubek *Prominent Czech-American Freethinker*

Frantisek Boteslav Zdrubek was born July 26, 1842 in Bezdedice near Hostonice, Bohemia. When he was two years of age he and his parents moved to Hostonice where he had a strict upbringing by his mother and father. His entire education had a religious foundation, so it is not surprising that the young man joined the Brothers in the Seminary of the Sacred Heart in the town of Styraska Hradec. It was here because of events in the seminary that he began thinking deeply about religion, and began realizing that a person should think for himself, and not be led to believe everything that is taught as truth. A change overtook him that made him reject the strict religious rituals. He made an acquaintance with some Protestant theologians and hoping to find inner peace he left for Basel in Switzerland where he was accepted as a tutor at the private university. As an advanced theologian, he left for America in 1867, to serve the spiritual needs of the Czechs.

He accepted the position of the "Reformed Church" on October 18, 1867 and settled in Caledonia near Racine, Wisconsin. His basis was to preach good manners, love, sincerity in all relationships, and nationalistic awareness. With this he gained many friends and admirers, and also many enemies among the religious who were not as lenient. When Karel Jonas founded a Czech Freethought publication, "Pokrok", in Chicago, Zdrubek became a subscriber and when the publication moved to Racine, he became Editor. At that time the young Zdrubek married. His friend, the well known poet, F. J. Sladek, Professor in Prague, brought Zdrubek's fiancé, Miss Linda Raisl, to America. The day she arrived in Racine, August 14, 1868, they were married. Mrs. Zdrubek was conscientious, highly cultured and an avid nationalist, who participated in public and club life as long as her health allowed and was a helpmate to her husband in times of sorrow and joy. She gave her husband 5 children, but only one son, Julius Zdrubek, survived. Mrs. Zdrubek died five years before her husband. Her last wishes were to have her body cremated and placed in a private mausoleum at the Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago.

The publisher of "Pokrok" moved from Racine to Cedar Rapids, Iowa and from there to Cleveland and as editor, Zdrubek moved also. In Cedar Rapids he helped the library club build a National Hall funded by the Czech-American community. Here he also accomplished a great feat, which will forever remain written in the history of Czech-America and Czech freethinkers. He founded, with the help of Boteslav Trojan, also a dedicated Czech nationalist for free thought, the "Alliance of Freethinkers". Immediately thirty other free thought councils from 15 states joined. He also compiled the "New English Dictionary" in 1874, published by A. Geringer in Chicago. In August 1874, publisher E. Rosewater offered him editorship of "Pokrok Zapadu". Zdrubek accepted and arrived September 15th in Omaha, Nebraska. It was May 1875 when he arrived in Chicago from Omaha going to visit friends in Caledonia and Racine. He stopped by August Geringer's & they discussed the need for the continuance of a Czech publication in Chicago. Mr. Geringer hoped to publish a paper as intellectual and sincere as possible and lead in the spiritual traditions of Freethought.

Zdrubek knew that the opportunity was better in Chicago than further west to work in the vein of nationalism and freethought. He accepted a paying position to work on the Czech language newspaper. Zdrubek quit his job in Omaha and came with his family September 15, 1875 to Chicago, to begin work in a position he loved. Immediately preparation began for the first Czech daily in America. Ads were collected for the first issue and set in type. The daily was named "Svornost". The first issue came out October 8, 1875. Soon after establishing Svornost, Zdrubek was elected Spokesman and President of the "Alliance of Freethinkers." It was his responsibility to enroll the organization at all state agencies as the religious Alliance of Freethinkers. He preached goodness not only in words but also in deeds.

Mr. Zdrubek was one of the main organizers of the Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago. It was he who made the first motion for its establishment. In a lecture at T. J. Sokol Hall, January 7, 1877, he mentioned the need of a cemetery for Czechs. The idea began to formulate until it actually became a reality. In his private life, Mr. Zdrubek was humble, a model of manhood, quiet, level headed, who never hurt anyone with a word or thought. He had a kind word for everyone. He loved his small family with all his might, heart and soul. After the death of his wife (January 8, 1906), his health declined. He remained very sick the last three years of his life and Zdrubek passed away on September 14, 1911.

His funeral was held from the Cesko-Anglicka Svobodna Skola (Bohemian-American Freethinking School) on Eighteenth and May Streets. The body lay in state in the center of the hall and hundreds of people filed past to pay their last respects. Mr. M Mangasian, well-known freethinker and lecturer of the Svobodna Obec (Rationalist Community) spoke about the great merits of the deceased countryman, the fearless, persistent defender of rationalism, & the fighter for the spiritual and political freedom of his countrymen. Mr. Jaromir Psenka then spoke on behalf of the publishers of Svornost newspaper describing the rare character of the deceased. The casket was carried out and placed on the funeral carriage. The Alliance of Freethought, Lodge Lincoln, C.S.P.S led the procession. Frank B. Zdrubek is buried in Bohemian National Cemetery, Chicago. His grave is located in Klacol Circle, a burial space of special recognition for leaders in Czech-American history.

[Source: The article is from the book "Historical and Cultural Essays on Czechs in America" written by Paul M. Nemecek, President of the Czech & Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois. The book won a Certificate of Excellence from the Illinois State Historical Society in April 2005, and is available for purchase through the website >www.csagsi.org.]

Frank B. Zdrubek's portrait has recently been rehung in the western niche area of the Columbarium. You can also find a photograph of him in the office.

Chris Repa Visconti, Editor

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Family History at BNC

My cousin, Kathie Newman, lives in the Chicago area. Kathie's grandfather & my father were brothers who grew up at 2006 S. California Ave., in what I'm sure must have been a big Czech neighborhood. I have to say that Czechs are not too common here in Atlanta and so I envy you.

My wife Louise & I enjoyed visiting this historic cemetery a few years ago for the first time. We located ancestors that I had no idea were buried there. I knew my grandparents, Frank & Anna Skach Cerny were there (Lot 10, Block 2, Section X). I was surprised to also find my great grandparents, Vaclav & Josefa Cerny and my great grandfather, Anton Skach, Kathie's great great grandfather (an unmarked grave), all whom I had not known had come to the U.S.

In an unmarked grave was what the administration office simply showed as "baby Cerny, d. 1903", who must have been another of Anna's children. In the same lot were other relatives (Lukes, Janos & Myslivecek), some of whom I'm still trying to fit into the family tree, as well as Janos & Malecek (Lot 157, Section 30). The people in the administration office were helpful in providing information on four other Mysliveceks, apparently siblings, all of whom died young. Their sister Helen, who I had enjoyed visiting in Elmira (Lowman), NY, is now in a nursing home. They are all related to us through their mother, Barbara M., a sister of Anna Cerny.

Good luck in your work with that interesting cemetery.
Best wishes, John C. Cerny, Atlanta, GA

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: Dagocheck@aol.com

Live from Bohemian National Cemetery

Ray Capek, President BNCA

Distinguished Visitor

On Friday April 29th Dr. Vaclav Kral, head of the International Division of the Czech chamber of lawyers, visited The Bohemian National Cemetery. The Czech chamber of lawyers is the equivalent of the American Bar Association for the Czech Republic. He was given a tour of the Cemetery by Helen Sclair and was escorted by Cemetery Counsel, Joseph Vosicky. Also involved in the visit were Past President of the Cemetery Robert Baumruk and current President Raymond Capek.

Dr. Kral was previously at the Cemetery in 1994 when he came to take Dr. Alice Masarykova's remains to the

Czech Republic for burial with her family, in the churchyard of the castle of Lany. Dr. Alice Masarykova passed away on November 29, 1966 in Chicago, and was cremated and her ashes inurned in the Masaryk Mausoleum. After the Velvet Revolution and the fall of Communism, arrangements were made for her remains to be taken to her homeland.

Eastland Disaster Victims

A search of the Burial Books revealed 149 victims of the July 24, 1915 Eastland disaster were buried in Bohemian National Cemetery. In 1950, three victims were moved to Bronswood Cemetery in Hinsdale. Subsequent reviews of the Books showed another victim, Vincenc Holub, was moved from St. Adalbert's Cemetery to Bohemian National Cemetery in June of 1916. The burial of Eastland Disaster victims at our cemetery is being researched prior to the erection of a memorial. Identification of all of the victims buried at BNC must wait for completion of the computer database being constructed by The Czech and Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois. A victim list will be compared to the cemetery interment list and that comparison will reveal any victims reburied at BNC years after the fatal event.

Memorial Day

On Monday, May 30th, the annual Memorial Day observance was held at our cemetery. As part of the Day of Honor, volunteers placed more than 1,500 American flags on veteran's graves. The cemetery hopes to identify the graves of all veterans so that each year on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, the graves can be properly recognized. The Memorial Day observance was blessed with excellent weather and good attendance. The service included a speech in Czech by Dr. Zdenek Hruban, professor emeritus of the University of Chicago and a speech in English by Roy Zimny, president of Sokol Brookfield/Spirit. We were again honored by members of Sokol Spirit providing The Color Guard, Jana Malina leading The Pledge of Allegiance, and Veronika Kneblova reciting a Czech poem. The Half and Half Singers presented The American and Czech National Anthems along with patriotic choral selections, and Tom Pajer played Taps. The speeches and presentations were inspiring, and a beautiful tribute to our veterans.

A special thanks to superintendent Phil Roux and manager Beth Raleigh and their staffs: Antonio Gracia, Beverly Bernacchi, Ernesto Martinez, Gabryel Stanislaw, Lucijan Puksza, Marion Pasierb, Mirosława Tchoryk, Neal Roux, Nora Langley, Paula Siudut and Robert Trospser for another really fine effort.

Membership

Welcome To Our Newest Members!

Janis Bente, Denver, CO
Ruth Borndahl, Palatine, IL
Duke Dellin, Chair, Prague-Chicago Sister City
Committee, Chicago, IL
Narayan & Helen Desai, Oak Park, IL
James & Monica Hanzalik Dhamer, Wheaton, IL
Robert Doubek, Washington, DC
Sher Hudak, Chicago, IL
Dolores Niewinski, Prospect Heights, IL
Elmer & Rita Pavlas, Cicero, IL
Alice M. Pulsifer, Fox River Grove, IL
Jeffrey Schramck, Chicago, IL
Mary Sherry, Indian Head Park, IL
Patricia Stalzer, Berwyn, IL
Alois Vana, Romeoville, IL
Gladys Wheeler, Indian Head Park, IL
Carole M. Blazek-Woodham, Morris, IL

[Error Correction: In the spring newsletter, George Drost was listed as the Honorary Czech Consulate. The correct term is Czech Consul. We apologize for any confusion]

The newly published,
24-page, illustrated booklet,
"Introduction to the Bohemian National
Cemetery Columbarium/Crematorium"
will be available on August 21st
\$5.00/members
\$6.00/non-members

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.

Program Chair: Schedule speakers & tours for 4 yearly events. **Fundraising:** Plan a fundraising dinner. **Hospitality:** arrange facilities for meetings register and greet attendees. **Donor and Solicitation:** build donor and volunteer support. **Grant Writing:** Complete paperwork requesting financial assistance.

"Help Friends fulfill its mission"

Upcoming Programs

Decorating the Chapel: The Artistry of J.A. Mallin.

Kathy Mallin, granddaughter of John Anton Mallin, who decorated the upper and lower chapels of the Columbarium will discuss his life and work. Join us on Sunday afternoon, August 21st at 2 p.m. in the lower level Marble room of the Columbarium.

Come see slides and pictures of the Large Ceremony Hall (chapel) when it was first opened in 1919. See beautiful decorations produced by Mr. Mallin for area churches and hear about his training in Moravia. Gold leaf techniques will be demonstrated and attendees will be able to try their hand at gold leafing.

Fall Tour

Our next walking tour will take place on Sunday afternoon, September 18th at 1 p.m. Albert Walavich, tour guard extraordinaire will lead a general features tour and will highlight the monuments of the Eastland victims. Cost is \$10.00 members and \$15.00 non-members.

Registration information will be forthcoming.

Questions: Contact Marge at 847-362-9036 or mdstueck@aol.com

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

FoBNC Officers

Congratulations to our new officers for 2005-2006 elected on May 7, 2005.

Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann, President
Donna Desai; VP
Bill Hosna; Treasurer
Juli Nelson; Secretary
Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Director
Ray Capck, Director
Martha & Chuck Cervenka, Directors
Chris Repa Visconti, Newsletter Editor
Sue Zielinski, Webmaster