

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

WINTER ISSUE Vol. 2, # 3, December 2005 -- Christine 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 website at <http://www.friendsofbnc.org/>

What's New with Friends of BNC

I guess we really got the message out that Bohemian National Cemetery is a very special place. More than half of the 60 participants at our September 18th walking tour were first timers. Thank you all for attending the tour and a special thanks to Sher Hudak for acting as tour registrar.

The tour highlighted the monuments of the Eastland Disaster victims; 144 of the 844 people who lost their lives in the Chicago River that day found their final resting place at Bohemian National Cemetery. A ceremony took place at the Sindelar Family Monument where a special wreath was placed to honor both parents and their five children who perished together. We continue to remember this disaster and celebrate the 90th anniversary of the sinking of the Eastland at our February 26th program. Join us at 2:00p.m. At the Westchester Library, Westchester, IL. While this is a free program, there is limited seating, so please remember to call and register - 708/562-3573.

Thanks to all FoBNC members who helped place flags on veterans' graves in preparation for the Veterans Day Ceremonies on November 11, 2005. Thanks to Martha and Chuck Cervenka for obtaining the flags and FoBNC funds for purchasing almost 3,000 flags. The cemetery personnel collected the flags afterwards and will use them again on Memorial Day and Veteran's Day 2006. We continue with our project to survey all the veteran's gravesites. If you can help, please come to the office any weekday or Saturday morning and ask for what sections need to be surveyed.

Our *Columbarium booklet* and the Joseph Calek family history book, *Interface* are both for sale in the office. A recent visitor from Prague was most interested in purchasing copies of both to bring back to the "homeland". This is your last chance to purchase a Columbarium booklet at the premier publishing price of only \$5.00 (plus \$1.50 mailing). **Beginning January 1, 2006 the cost will be \$10 for members and \$12 for non-members.** Send your check to FoBNC, 300 Claymoor #2F, Hinsdale, IL 60521.

Interface books are available at the tours.

Our Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery 2005 Fundraising Campaign has begun and our annual solicitation letter has been mailed. We hope you have received your letter and will consider a generous tax-deductible gift to BNCA.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President

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Wreaths and Christmas Trees Available at BNC

The cemetery office has Christmas trees decorated with bright packages (\$25) and wreaths (\$20) that will brighten your gravesites.

Call the office 773/539-8442 or 708/788-8442 to order your Christmas decorations. Cemetery personnel will be glad to place these decorations on your gravesites.

Monumental Musings

Albert Walavich

The Civil War Monument

When entering Bohemian National Cemetery through its historic gate, one encounters the flagpole and base, which serve as the cemetery's monument honoring those who fought in World Wars I and II. Today we are going to travel further east to the first of the war monuments in the cemetery, that honoring the veterans of the Civil War and the 18 Grand Army of the Republic members who eventually became part of the Bohemian National community of the dead.

In 1888, as the nation approached the 25th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, a group of Bohemian-American veterans gathered to discuss the building of a war memorial in Bohemian National. In December of that year the cemetery was approached and it provided a delegate to the committee that had taken up the subject of erecting such a monument.

The project moved along swiftly, and on July 28, 1889 the cemetery held its annual celebration in conjunction with the laying of the cornerstone for the Bohemian Civil War Veterans Monument as it was then called. The Grand Army of the Republic (the principal veterans organization of the Civil War) and Sons of Veterans participated in the ceremony at which more than 100 documents were sealed into the cornerstone.

Though no record exists in the Bohemian National histories of a ceremony for the 1890 erection of the monument's granite base, the May 29, 1892 unveiling of the completed monument was an event of major proportions. Thousands attended the ceremony and heard, among others, Chicago's Mayor Carter Harrison.

The bronze statue, signed Gorham Mfg. Co. and Art Founders Sc. and dated 1892, is one of the most dramatic of the Chicago area's Civil War monuments. A uniformed soldier stands triumphantly with a bayoneted rifle in his right hand and the American flag in his left. The small bronze platform upon which he stands proudly proclaims "Pro Novou Vlast" while the granite base announces "Ceskym Rekum 1861-1865" on its face with the inscription "Bohemian Soldiers 1861-1865" on its north side.

The truly outstanding quality of the statue is its attention to detail. The rifle is so realistically depicted that an expert in Civil War era weapons could probably identify

its manufacturer, and the dynamic stars on the flag the figure holds seem ready to fly off and fill the sky.

The erection of the statue in 1892 did not end the honoring of Bohemian veterans of the Civil War, however. The bronze GAR Memorial plaque containing the names of the 18 Civil War veterans buried in Bohemian National was installed in 1944.

No discussion of the Civil War monument could be complete without mention of the family plot to the southwest of the monument circle. In this lot, under his government issued marker, rests Frank Stejskal who died in 1942 and was said to be the last surviving Bohemian-American veteran of the war. For many years the leader of the Decoration Day parades, Stejskal now lies within the shadow of the monument to his war.

Live from Bohemian National Cemetery

Ray Capek, President BNCA

This fall the Cemetery was the site of the taping of an episode of the TV series "Prison Break". The episode was taped in a 16-hour period on October 24th. Two scenes were taped on the grounds, one in the chapel and one in a room of the chapel, which in the taping appears to be a bedroom. The airtime for all of the episodes taped will only be about a minute. A second episode may be taped at BNC in the future. Because of the beautiful and unique monuments and headstones, motion picture and television show organizations look to our cemetery for shooting scenes. The major restriction we have is that no names from a monument or headstone appear in their production. You may recall BNC was also the scene of events in the movie "U.S. Marshals".

On Veteran's Day military hymns and anthems were played from 10:00 a.m. to 10:59 a.m. followed by Taps and the laying of a wreath on the World War Monument by Trustee Ann Dusak and FoBNC President Marge Stueckermann. We are very grateful to all of the volunteers who assisted in placing over 2,400 flags on Veteran's graves. In addition to placing flags, our volunteers are compiling a list of all Veterans with government headstones. We wish to identify all Veterans at Bohemian National Cemetery so that they can be properly recognized.

On Saturday, December 10th the ashes of Captain Vladimir Sasko were interred in Bohemian National Cemetery with full Military honors. Captain Sasko was a Doctor serving in the United States Army in the Pacific in World War II. He perished in a plane crash on December

10, 1944 and in 1948 the US declared the remains unrecoverable. In 1978 a local man in Papua, New Guinea discovered the crash site and in 2004 the remains of Capt. Sasko were recovered. On December 2nd his 98-year-old sister Kveta Peterson passed away finally knowing her family was reunited. The burial took place at 1:30 p.m., as that was the time at which the watch of one of the C-47 crewmembers had stopped.

For the funeral our Cemetery had a corridor of American Flags flying from the gatehouse to the World War Memorial as we do on Memorial Day. The flag flew at half-mast with Captain Sasko's name on the Memorial. ROTC cadets from Lane Tech High School, Chicago, represented our local community.

Family History at BNC

Do you have a short family history story you would like to share with our readers? Please mail your story to Chris Repa Visconti, Editor, 550 Alcoa Lane, Hoffman Estates, IL 60194 or email: Dagochek@aol.com ■

A Note from Our Members

In a note from a new member, Dolores Hemzacek Stallons she writes:

"I am 86 years old and have many relatives at BNC, Grosses, Fursts, Kramers, Schultzs, Hemzaceks, Krskas and my own baby girl. Thanks for what you are doing to keep the cemetery nice for our loved ones."

*Sincerely,
Dolores H. Stallons*

Thank you Dolores for the lovely note.

Membership

Welcome to Our Newest Members

Karyn Benda-Bieneman, Lombard, IL
Kathy Brewster, Oakbrook, IL
Cynthia Bueneman, Broadview, IL
Rose Cervenka, Downers Grove, IL
James & Elaine Fergle, Westchester, IL
Susan A. Golland, Des Plaines, IL
Hugo Havel, Lombard, IL
Shirley Jensen, Scottsdale, AZ
Wesley Johnston, Clovis, CA
Barbara Kostka, Cicero, IL
Elmer & Rita Pavlas, Cicero, IL
John Persic, Wilmington, IL
Mildred Postas, Lombard, IL
Phyllis Rodriguez, Vernon Hills, IL
Anna Schnedorf, River Forest, IL

Karin Smith, Springfield, OR
Dolores Hemzacek Stallons, Phillips, WI
Donna Stefani, Elgin, IL
Harriet Veverka, Cicero, IL
Correction of new member
Frank Kurhayez, Seminole, FL

In Memoriam

With deepest sympathy to her family and friends.

Jamila Vostal passed away in October 2005. In her honor her fellow delegates on the BNC Board made a generous donation to Friends of BNC.

Notice of by-law Changes

There will be a vote taken at our upcoming February 26th meeting to change the FoBNC fiscal year. It currently runs from September to August and we want to change it to run from January to December. If you are unable to attend the meeting and wish to vote, please contact our secretary, Juli Nelson, 630-887-0411 or Nut4Travel@att.net. She will mail you a paper ballot with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. It will need to be returned to us and postmarked no later than February 20th 2006.

From a copy of a booklet entitled *BNC Rules and Regulations, 1902, Rules to be Observed by Visitors*:
"No visitor will be permitted to disturb the birds or fowls"
Superintendent, Phil Roux explained there used to be a facility for wayward boys located where Northeastern University is now. They had farm animals as part of the program and the domestic birds regularly got out of the fence and wandered into the cemetery!

FoBNC Officers: 2005-2006

Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann, President
Donna Desai, Vice-President
Bill Hosna, Treasurer
Juli Nelson, Secretary
Henrietta B. Pons, Membership Chairperson
Evelyn Krenck Fergle, Director
Ray Capek, Director
Martha & Chuck Cervenka, Directors
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