

# Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. XIX No. 4

April 2023

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
New Members	2
Děkuji Vám	2
Upcoming Events at BNC	3
Stories of the Stones - Anton Čermák	4
Update on World Wars I and II Memorial Project	6
Donations	7
Columbarium Restoration Project Update	7
150th Anniversary Celebration of Čermák's Birth	8

## What's New with Friends of BNC

"Every Czech is a musician" — "Co Čech to muzikant." Have you seen this in print (I actually have notecards with this sentiment) or heard it said? We are excited to participate in a celebration of Anton Čermák's 150th

birthday on May 6. Please see details elsewhere in this issue. Part of the celebration will include Czech, Moravian and Slovak national songs performed by Canadian musician Lenka Lichtenberg.

When Friends first got started in 2004, one of our earliest projects was to have the huge books that held the burial records rebound in leather. They were literally falling apart, only kept together with

*(Continued on page 3)*

*Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery is grateful to the*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of the Czech Republic



*for their generous grant in support of our project to restore the World Wars I and II Memorial and to help with road repair. We appreciate their continued support.*

## Live from BNC

### Volunteers Emerge from Hibernation

Fortunately, Chicago's recent seasonal snow fall was mostly mild in comparison to past winters. As the temperature warms, a resurgence of nature emerges around Bohemian National Cemetery. Sightings of wildlife and emergence of green grass, flowers and budding trees is evident throughout. As in years past, a

small dedicated group of volunteers will again take on the task of helping clear fallen branches and trees. Recently Chuck Betzold, Bill Servis, Chuck Michalek and Ron Guichard cleared a section of weed trees and brush near the maintenance garage.

*(continued on page 7)*

## 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, 511B 9th St, Las Vegas, NM 87701-3911 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

Copyright 2023 by Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

### Officers of Friends of BNC

President:

Marge Sladek Stueckemann

Vice-President: Juli Nelson

Secretary: Helen Gaydusek

Treasurer: Linda Burton

Directors:

Chuck Betzold

Mary Syrup

Jim Trnka

Fund-Raising Co-Chair:

Joseph Topinka

Membership: Juli Nelson

Newsletter: carol jean smetana

Publicity: open

Sales/Marketing Chair:

Juli Nelson

Projects Co-Chair:

Chuck Michalek

Webmaster: open

### from the editor's laptop



*It's times like these when I wish I lived in the Chicago area—what fun it would be to attend the Čermák celebration on May 6 at the cemetery. Hopefully we will have a report about the program in our next issue.*

*Our in-person get-together last August at Bohemian Crystal was such a success that we are thinking about another gathering for food and fellowship, possibly on August 20. If it becomes a reality, our July issue will have details, as will our website.*

*Please take a look at the back page of your newsletter. If you see a red stamped message reading **LAST NEWSLETTER PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP**, this will be your last newsletter unless you renew. Our website has the renewal form and information. Renew online or send a check to our address on the back page. Contact us at info@friendsofbnc.org if you have any questions or problems.*

*Thank you for your ongoing support. We are an all-volunteer organization, and we depend on the support and generosity of our members to help us fulfill our mission. If you have any questions, suggestions, or would like to volunteer, please let us know. Contact information is on the back page of this newsletter.*

*Na shledanou  
carol*

## Welcome to Our New Members!

**Pavla Peroutka ...**  
Wheaton IL

## Děkuji Vám!

We are so delighted to have received a grant of \$9,000 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for use in repairing the cemetery roads and restoring the World Wars I and II Memorial.

It is so rewarding to have the support of our motherland!

We send them a most hearty Thank you—Děkuji vám!



## What's New with Friends of BNC

(Continued from page 1)

duct tape! Burials and the occasional cremation were recorded in the Czech language for all the earliest years.

Various people wanted to help support this rebinding and often chose to sponsor the book (there were about six volumes) in which their ancestors were recorded. If they made a generous donation, a book plate, printed with the names of their ancestor(s) and their own,



was placed in their chosen volume.

When the project was completed, we celebrated with Czech food and a Czech bagpiper—can't have such a celebration without



music! The bagpiper, Michael Cwach, was from Nebraska, and had been so taken with

the Czech bagpipe (*dudy*), which is different from the kind we often see at Chicago funerals, that he took lessons both in America and the Czech Republic. Michael came dressed in the kroj of western Bohemia.

The musical portion of the celebration for Čermák isn't scheduled to include *dudy*, but just hearing Czech music such as Anton surely would have listened to, will help make the special event even more memorable. We hope to see you at the cemetery on Saturday, May 6, at 11:00 a.m.

**Marge Sladek Stueckemann**  
**President**

## Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

**Saturday, May 6**  
**Celebration of 150th anniversary of Anton Čermák's birth,**  
 Presented by T.G. Masaryk Czech School  
 Program begins at 11:00 am at Čermák family mausoleum.  
 See back page for more details.

**Summer office hours begin June 3:**  
 8:30 am to 4:00 pm  
 Monday through Friday;  
 9:00 am to 1:00 pm Saturday;  
 Closed Sunday.

**Cemetery Grounds are open from 7:30 am to 4 pm daily.**

## Stories of the Stones: Anton Čermák

by carol jean smetana

In 1872 Antonín Čermák, a coal miner in Kladno, central Bohemia, married Kateřina Frank, a young widow whose first husband died working in a coal mine. Their first child, Anton (Antonín), was born in house #844 on May 9, 1873.



Postcard from website *Kladno minulé (Kladno Past)* provided by Jaroslava Livancová ([www.kladnominule.cz](http://www.kladnominule.cz))

Around 1874 or 1875 (I have not been able to find them on ship passenger lists) Antonín and Kateřina and their young son Anton immigrated to the United States. One apocryphal story claims that Anton celebrated his first birthday on Ellis Island—but Ellis Island was not used for immigration until 1892. On his passport application in 1921 Anton wrote that he emigrated in May 1875. His second passport application, three years later, gives a date of October 1874.

Antonín, Kateřina and young Anton were not the only members of the family to immigrate. Antonín's younger brother Josef also immigrated in the mid-1870s. And in July 1877, Antonín and Josef's

parents—the future mayor's paternal grandparents—immigrated with their two youngest children, Anna and Emilie. (I suspect you won't be surprised to hear Anton's grandparents' names were also Antonín and Kateřina!)

During their first two decades in the United States, the Čermák family apparently moved back and forth several times between Chicago and Braidwood, a mining center with a population of 15,000 located about 65 miles southwest of Chicago. Antonín and Kateřina and their toddler Anton settled first in the Pilsen neighborhood, where Antonín found occasional work as a carpenter and bricklayer. But soon they moved to Braidwood, and Antonín again labored in coal mines. In 1880 the family was living in Braidwood, and seven-year-old Anton had two younger siblings: Joseph, born in 1877, and Emilie, born in 1879. Anton's grandparents, Antonín and Katie, were also living in Braidwood in 1880—the elder Antonín, who had been a carpenter in Kladno,

now too was working in the coal mines, despite being 67 years old!

Like Chicago, Braidwood was home to a significant Bohemian community. In fact, during Anton's youth, Bohemians formed the largest ethnic community in Braidwood; there were smaller Irish and Italian communities as well. Anton grew up speaking Czech as



House #844 in Kladno is no longer standing, but a commemorative plaque marks the birthplace of Chicago mayor Anton Čermák. The original plaque was mounted on the family home and unveiled on June 16, 1935, but was removed and hidden during the Nazi occupation.

In early 1947, the plaque was reinstated in a ceremony attended by the U.S. Ambassador. In the 1970s, the plaque was again removed when the houses on the block were razed to make way for panelák apartment buildings.

In 1993, in celebration of the 120th anniversary of Anton Čermák's birth, a new memorial was placed on the spot where the house once stood. (The original plaque is in the Kladno museum.)

Photo courtesy of Irena Čajková



**THE MAYOR'S PARENTS**  
Antonín and Marie Čermák, are buried at BNC in a lot purchased by Anton Čermák when his father died in 1911. Anton's sister Emilie and her husband Jan Kalal are also buried in the lot, along with Anton's brother James (Václav) and his wife.

**THE MAYOR'S GRANDPARENTS**  
In 1880 Anton's younger brother Joseph married Katie Staněk in Chicago. After the birth of two daughters, Joseph moved his family to Highmore, South Dakota, where he

homesteaded. By the 1900 census, the family had grown to include ten children—and living with them was Joseph's widowed mother—Anton's grandmother—Katie. Joseph's wife died and was buried in Bohemian National Cemetery in Highmore. Joseph, with at least four of his children and his mother Katie, moved to Pleasanton, Michigan.

On October 30, 1902, Katie—Anton's grandmother—died of old age in Pleasanton, Michigan, where she was buried. Anton's grandfather died sometime before 1900, place unknown.

well as English—and, a natural-born leader, he learned to navigate the inherent tensions between immigrant communities, a skill that would later serve him well in his political career.

Anton left school before he turned 12. In 1885, the family relocated again to Chicago, where Anton worked in a sash-and-door factory, and his father found work in a lumberyard. Less than two years later, the family was back in Braidwood, and 13-year-old Anton joined his father working in the coal mines.

In 1889, a group of Anton's fellow miners were unhappy with their low wages, and Anton, stepping into the role of leader, took their complaint to the foreman. In the biography *Boss Cermak of Chicago*

(University of Washington Press, 1962), author Alex Gottfried describes the ensuing encounter:

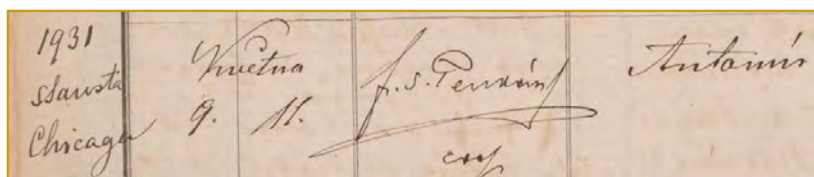
As a labor negotiator, the sixteen-year-old Čermák was not spectacularly successful. "So you want a raise, do you?" his foreman asked. "O.K., I'll give you a raise—right up the shaft."

He was fired on the spot.

Soon thereafter Anton left his family in Braidwood and returned to Chicago for good. He moved in with his Aunt Anna and her family in the Pilsen neighborhood, and for the next couple of years Anton worked for the railroad,

and then for a horsecar transportation company. In 1892 he bought a horse and wagon and found success as a contract teamster, hauling wood and coal. In 1894, Anton married Marie Hořešová. Their first of three children, all daughters, was born the following year.

In 1902, Anton Čermák, running as a Democrat, was elected to his first of several terms as a representative to the Illinois state legislature. He went on to hold numerous positions in Chicago city government, culminating in his election as Chicago's 35th mayor in 1931. The following year, Anton traveled to



When Anton Čermák was elected mayor, his counterpart in Kladno honored the town's famous son by naming a street after him. Perhaps that was when the parish priest added a notation to his baptismal record: "1931 Starosta Chicago". From Kladno 27, *Kniha Narozených 1873-1876*, image #14, *Státní oblastní archiv v Praze* (<https://ebadatelna.soapraha.cz/d/6393/14>)

Europe to promote the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. His well-publicized sojourn in Czechoslovakia included a visit with President Masaryk and a return to the city of his birth.

On February 15, 1933, while in Florida with President-elect Franklin Roosevelt, Anton Čermák was shot by an assassin. (Some historians maintain that Čermák and not Roosevelt was the intended target.) Anton died three weeks later, on March 6, 1933, and was interred in the family mausoleum, built when his wife Marie died in 1928.

## Update on WW I and II Memorial Repair Project

Fundraising is currently underway to help make critical repairs to the cemetery's World Wars I and II Memorial at the main road entrance. Designed by architect Josef Bednářík and dedicated in 1952, the memorial was constructed of rose Crab Orchard Stone, a



rare type of durable sandstone unique to the Crab Orchard Mountains of eastern Tennessee. A large 44-foot tall flagpole rises from an octagonal base and is surrounded by eight carved panels depicting in cartographic form decisive battles and major victories of the Allies in the two world wars. In order to assess the extent of damage and identify how to best restore the memorial, preservation contractors will carefully



*The photo on the left is from 2014, the one on the right from last year. You can see how the stones forming the base layers of the monuments have shifted and been displaced.*

remove the iconic and unique panels. At the very least, the lowest visible levels of the monument need to be rebuilt or replaced.

Friends of BNC is hoping to raise an estimated \$30,000 for the restoration of this iconic military memorial. Project highlights and donation information will be available on

our website [www.friendsofbnc.org](http://www.friendsofbnc.org), or contact Chuck Michalek at [restoration@friendsofbnc.org](mailto:restoration@friendsofbnc.org)



*The World Wars I and II Memorial was dedicated on September 21, 1952, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Bohemian National Cemetery.*



(continued from first page)

The return of warm weather also invites one to think of summer afternoons watching or playing one of America’s favorite pastimes, baseball. And as many know, Bohemian National Cemetery has its own unique tribute to baseball with the Beyond the Vines outdoor columbarium providing a resting area for devoted Chicago Cub fans. Volunteers help with “groundskeeping” at the site, trimming vines and maintaining benches. Just like the outfield wall at Wrigley Field, the vines will soon need trimming at BNC’s own version of the outfield wall.



In October 2016—just 10 days before the Cubs won the World Series—Chicago Sister Cities International arranged an exchange between high schools in Chicago and its sister city Prague. Friends volunteer Chuck Michalek took the Prague students on a tour of the cemetery and included a stop at the iconic Beyond the Vines.

**Chuck Michalek**  
**Friends of BNC Volunteer**  
**Wednesday Volunteer**

**Sponsors**

**(\$100—\$499)**

- CSA Lodge #409 DuPage Pioneers
- Mary Ellen Flaks
- Cynthia Jensen McMullin
- Linda and Ron Roaks
- Richard Sykora
- Kenneth and Donna Teska

**Donations**

**Donors**

**(\$25—\$99)**

- Phihllip & Mary Kasik Charitable Fund
- Joann Poplar

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

**Columbarium Restoration Project Update**

As reported in previous newsletter editions, a major project involving planned repairs to the north section of the columbarium/crematorium building was undertaken. Masonry contractors recently returned to make final

repairs to the entrance cheek walls, which completed the 2022-23 phase of the long-term Columbarium Restoration Project. Contractors will make future inspections and recommendations to continue the building’s

ongoing restoration.

Flowers will soon be planted in large outdoor vases along the front entrance to enhance the greatly improved appearance and integrity of the building’s entranceway and north façade.

# *Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery*

5255 N Pulaski Rd  
Chicago IL 60630-1701

Phone: 847-362-9036  
Email: [info@friendsofbnc.org](mailto:info@friendsofbnc.org)  
Website: [www.friendsofbnc.org](http://www.friendsofbnc.org)



## *Heritage Happenings April 2023*

### **On Saturday, May 6, 2023, at Bohemian National Cemetery, The T. G. Masaryk Czech School Presents A Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Mayor Anton Čermák**

- 11:00 am – Meet at the Čermák Mausoleum for remarks by Consul General Kantůrek, Mr. Anton Čermák Kerner, and Ing. Slepíčka, representing the City of Kladno
- 11:30 am – program in Crematorium/ Columbarium Building will include presentations by Ing. Slepíčka, Mr. Kerner, and children from T.G. Masaryk Czech School, followed by a musical performance of Czech, Moravian and Slovak national songs by Lenka Lichtenberg
- 12:45 pm – Refreshments at the gatehouse and a tour of the cemetery for those interested



*Henry Parýzek, Superintendent of the Floral Department at BNC, designed this display to memorialize Mayor Čermák after his death. Floral tributes were a tradition at the cemetery and were often planted in the circle where the World Wars I and II Memorial now stands.*