

# Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. 11 No. 4

April 2015

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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## What's New with Friends of BNC

What do you think of when you hear the word "memorial"? At our January meeting, **Chuck Michalek** showed not only previews of the upcoming memorial in honor of the centennial of the *Eastland Disaster* but also many other views of points of interest. His committee is on track to have the memorial completed for the dedication at the BNC picnic on July 12th from noon to 4:00 p.m. One of the elements of the memorial, a huge steering wheel from a former steamship, was taken to BNC in late March.

Sixty-eight people had a delicious Czech dinner that day, and about ten more joined us just for the program. After Chuck's presentation, we

then heard from **Tony Kartsonas** about his work to restore the artwork and refinish the doors at the entryway to the crematorium/columbarium. Be sure to take a look when you are there next time, and especially appreciate the beautiful ceiling!

With the arrival of spring and warm weather, the bids are coming in to replace the stairway and handrail to the entryway of the crematorium/columbarium building. It is the next item on our master plan of restoration and will cost approximately \$45,000. We hope everyone can respond generously to our spring solicitation letter.



A new window is installed in the gatehouse, paid for by Friends of BNC. (photo by Chuck Michalek)

Friends has paid to replace the 100-year-old-plus cracked glass pane in the

(Continued on page 6)

## Live from BNC

The cemetery roads need repairs. **Chuck Michalek, Jerry Gaydusek, Jim Miller, Andy Bultas, and Chuck Betzold** started to fill the holes on the entrance road to the cemetery by the water tower. Chuck Betzold conducted a survey of the cemetery roads, mapping the approximately seven miles of roads in the cemetery and indicating which sections are in most need of repair. Chuck presented this map to the cemetery board

so it could be on record for future road work.

Jerry Gaydusek and Chuck Michalek found a crack running the length of one of the large windows in the gatehouse. Window repair companies were called for estimates. **Advanced Glass Service, Inc.**, gave the lowest bid, plus included in their bid the caulking of five other interior

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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@friendsofbcn.org.

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## from the editor's laptop

Ahoj!

This newsletter comes to you a few weeks late, but it's filled with articles and news I hope you'll find interesting and useful. As Marge notes in her column, late spring/early summer is a busy time at the cemetery, and there are a lot of events beckoning, including celebrations of mothers and veterans in May and the dedication of the new Eastland memorial at the July summer picnic. If you'd like the satisfaction of donating a few hours to a good cause and seeing immediate results, roll up your sleeves and come to the cemetery for CSA Join Hands Day on Saturday, May 16th, to help spruce up the cemetery grounds, and return the following Friday, May 22nd, to help place flags for Memorial Day. Our tour dates for 2015 are set: Sunday, May 31st, and Sunday, October 10th.

If you're planning a trip to Prague in the future, have been there in the past, or if you are just an armchair traveler, you will enjoy our Friends' August meeting and its program featuring some of the special cemeteries in Prague, the city "whose fame will touch the stars." For more information about the program and to learn who made that prediction, check out our website. Those of us who have had the good fortune to visit Prague will readily agree that the prophecy was fulfilled!

Many of us have joined Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery because we have relatives buried at the cemetery, and that is reason enough to want to preserve and protect the grounds and buildings. But as we get to know the cemetery, we recognize we also are fulfilling an obligation to a wider audience, to people who perhaps have never visited our cemetery, people who remain unknown to us but who value our cemetery for its history, its artistic and cultural representations, its reflections of the Czech and immigrant communities, its commemoration of patriots, and its welcoming vision. The article on page five introduces us to yet another significant personage buried at BNC, and the article on page four reminds us that appreciation for our cemetery has both national and international reach.

Na shledanou!  
carol jean smetana

## Děkuji Vám!

Volunteers at our winter meeting:

**Chuck Michalek** for a great presentation on the Eastland Disaster Memorial Project.

**Tony Kartsonas** for his excellent illustrated explanation of his restoration work on the entry to the crematorium/columbarium

**April Hasson** and **Mary Syrup** for book table help

**Juli Nelson** for name tags, check-in procedures and book table help

**Jerry Gaydusek** and **Chuck Michalek** for coordinating the work on the gatehouse windows

## Welcome to Our New Members!

**Don J. Jenkinson** ... Chicago, IL

**Elisa and Allan Kletcka** ... Lake Forest, IL

**Mari Minarik** ... Oak Park, IL

**Beverly Verner** ... Clearwater, FL



## Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

### **Sunday, May 10th ~ Mother's Day Ceremony at 11:00 am**

Ceremony to place a wreath at the *Mother* monument at 11:00 am.  
Refreshments in the gatehouse from about 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

### **Saturday, May 16th ~ CSA Join Hands Day at 9:00 am**

Help with clean-up projects at the cemetery. Meet at the gatehouse for refreshments first.  
All are welcome - you don't have to be a CSA member.

### **Friday, May 22nd at 10:00 am**

Meet in the gatehouse to help Friends place flags along the roads leading to the crematorium/columbarium building to decorate for Memorial Day.

### **Monday, May 25th at 9:00 am ~ Memorial Day**

Meet in the gatehouse at 9:00 am for refreshments, then join in the parade, led by the Sokol Spirit color guard, to the crematorium/columbarium building for the ceremony, which will include music and the honoring of veterans in the audience.  
Alderman Margaret Laurino and Kristyna Driehaus, chair of the Chicago Czech Center, will be the speakers.

### **Sunday, May 31st ~ Tour of the Tombstones at 1:00 pm led by Albert Walavich**

Same-day registration begins at noon in the gatehouse. The walking tour lasts 1-1/2 to 2 hours and costs \$10 for Friends members, \$15 for non-members.  
Dress for the weather and walking. Refreshments in the gatehouse.

### **Sunday, July 12th ~ BNC Annual Picnic ~ noon to 4 pm with dedication of *Eastland* Memorial at 1:00 pm**

Enjoy live music, potato pancakes, sausages, bakery items, and our Friends book table. The new *Eastland* Memorial will be dedicated at 1 pm,  
See page 6 for more information about the dedication.  
Visit [www.friendsofbnc.org/eastland](http://www.friendsofbnc.org/eastland) for information on donations or purchasing a brick.

### **Sunday, August 16th - Friends Summer Meeting at BNC 1:30 pm in Ceremony Hall**

Paulina Dropka, Sokol Spirit head Czech language teacher, will present a program, "Vyšehrad, the Oldest Prague Jewel and More," a look at some of the cemeteries in Prague. Refreshments served after meeting and program. Free.

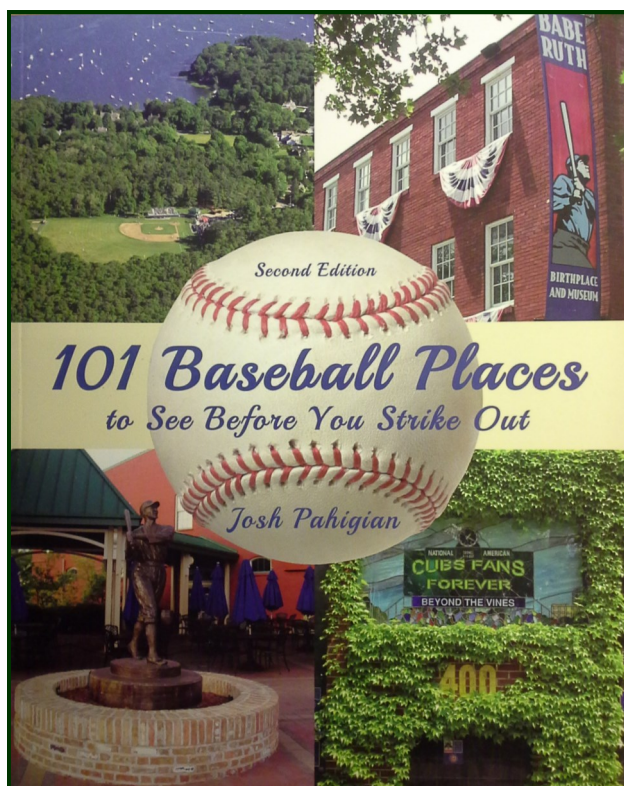
### **Sunday, October 10th ~ Tours of the Tombstones at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 pm led by Albert Walavich**



## Bohemian National Cemetery in Print

by carol jean smetana

Six Illinois locations made author Josh Pahigian's list of *101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out (Second Edition)*, including Chicago's Wrigleyville (number 29), the Billy Goat Tavern (number 48), and the "Black Sox" Trial Courthouse (number 55). But the highest ranked Illinois



baseball site, and ranking higher than the Bull Durham Movie Site in Durham, North Carolina (number 11), and the Jackie Robinson Ballpark and Museum in Daytona Beach, Florida (number 84), is our own "Beyond the Vines" Columbarium, which broke into the top ten at number nine! A close-up photo of the unique outdoor columbarium even made the cover of the book! The write-up, covering two pages, relates the history of the columbarium, describes it in detail, and concludes with an invitation to readers to "visit this impressive monument to the lives of one team's most ardent rooters within Section V of Chicago's Bohemian National Cemetery."

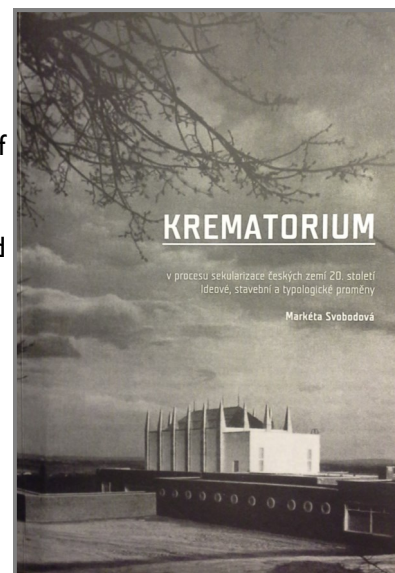
While doing research for *A Dear and Precious Heritage*, our book on Bohemian National Cemetery, I discovered that the crematorium/columbarium building was heralded as the first Czech crematorium in the world. This fact earned the building a place in Markéta Svobodová's Czech book *Krematorium v procesu sekularizace českých zemí 20. století, Ideové, stavební a typologické proměny* (Crematorium

*in the Process of Secularisation in the Czech Lands in the 20th Century, Ideological, construction and typological changes*).

The author notes the irony of the first Czech crematorium actually being outside the Czech lands, erected by Czech immigrants at Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago. The author credits the architect, František Randák, describes the glorious interior decorations in the Ceremony Hall by Moravian-born John Anton Mallin, and concludes with a sentence noting that Albin Polašek's *Mother* statue was placed in front of the building in 1927. The text is accompanied by a page of photos - a wide shot of the crematorium/columbarium building and three close-ups of Mallin's decorations in the Ceremony Hall.

(Friends of BNC received photo credits in both books.)

John Anton Mallin is the subject of an article written by Kateřina Vlačicová and sent to me by his granddaughter Kathy Mallin. It was published earlier this year in a Czech magazine, *Malovaný kraj - Národopisný a vlastivědný časopis Slováck* (*Painted Region - Magazine of Ethnography and Natural History and Geography of Moravian Slovakia* - [www.malovanykraj.cz](http://www.malovanykraj.cz)). The article, "Rodák z Hlohovce vymaloval v Americe stovku kostelů" ("A native of Hlohovec painted hundreds of churches in America"), concludes by noting that Mallin's ashes are at Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago in a niche in the crematorium building that he had also decorated.



# Stories of the Stones

## Pillar for Peace, Charles J. Vopička

### Czech Immigrant, American Ambassador

by Anna Cooková

Charles (Karel) J. Vopička made many contributions to our great city of Chicago. While serving on the West Park Commission (1894-97), he is credited with suggesting and building the United States' first ever open natatorium and gymnasium, located at beautiful Douglas Park in Chicago's North Lawndale and Pilsen neighborhoods.

Perhaps his most famous contribution to Chicago was the establishment of Česká Pivovarní Společnost v Chicagu in 1891, which later became the Atlas Brewing Company. This company, also based in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, prospered until Prohibition. Then they had to create a process to create beer containing only a half percent of alcohol. Once they figured out how to do that, Atlas became one of the largest brewing companies in Chicago and shipped their products across the entire United States.

On September 11th, 1913, Vopička was appointed by President

Woodrow Wilson to be the United States ambassador to the Balkan states of Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. He served in this capacity through World War I until his resignation in December 1920. In 1921, he published a book about his time as ambassador called *Secrets of the Balkans: Seven Years of a Diplomatist's Life in the Storm Center of Europe*, which is currently on display at the University of Chicago Slavic Department library. His efforts to promote peace, human rights and neutrality in these war-torn countries earned him four medals: the Romanian Order of Mare Cruce (Order of the Star, Grand Cross), the Serbian Order of the White Eagle, the Czechoslovak War Medal and the Czechoslovak Order of the White Lion.

Vopička was involved in the planning and execution of Chicago's 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Czechoslovak Exhibition Committee

for the fair and chaired its Gentlemen's Reception Committee. The book *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group*, published in 1933, includes a full-page biography of him.

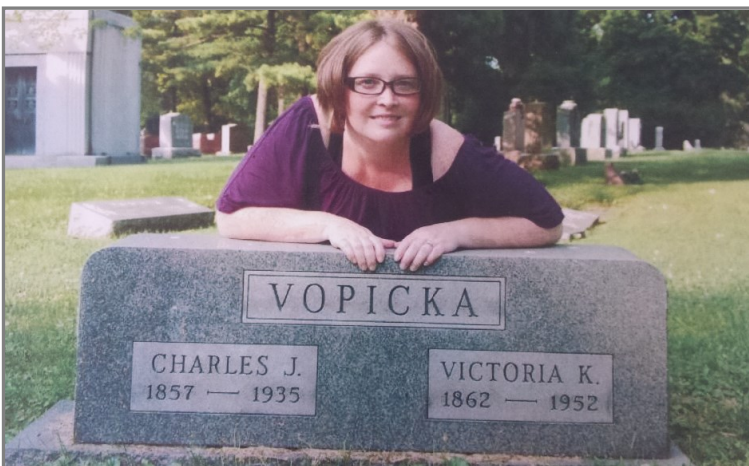
Vopička was born in the small village of Dolní Hbity, in what is now the Czech Republic. As a child he sang for



Photo of Charles J. Vopička from World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group (Czechs and Slovaks), page 133.

Kostel Svatého Benedikta (Church of St. Benedict) in Prague. He attended a business academy in Prague, then worked as an accountant for a brewery in Beroun, west of Prague. In 1880, at the age of 22, he immigrated to the United States, settled in Chicago the next year, and started a business and real estate company with Otto Kubín. In 1883 he married Kubín's sister Viktoria. Together they had six daughters who lived to adulthood. Charles and Viktoria celebrated their golden anniversary in 1933 at the Drake Hotel; the mayor of Chicago, Anton Čermák, was seated at his left side. Mr. Vopička died just two years later, on September 3, 1935, in his home at 431 Oakdale Avenue, Chicago.

Anna Cooková is a Czech Language and Culture Instructor in Chicago. To learn more about Charles Vopička and Anna's efforts to erect a monument to Vopička at the cemetery, or for information on private or classroom Czech language and culture courses, please contact Anna by email at [annacookova@gmail.com](mailto:annacookova@gmail.com).



The author Anna Cooková posing behind her ancestors' gravestone. The headstone is for Charles J. Vopicka (1857-1935) and wife Victoria K. Vopicka (1862-1952) in section 23 of Bohemian National Cemetery. (Photo by Lenka Mišičková)

## Donations

### Patrons

(\$500—\$999)

Jean Uhlir *in memory of*  
Linda Uhlir

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(\$100—\$499)

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Bodien  
Eugene and Patricia  
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Marge Sladek  
Stueckemann *in honor*  
*of a Friends volunteer*

### Thank You

(\$1—\$24)

Judith Mason

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

## Eastland Memorial Update

July 2015 marks the 100-year anniversary of the *Eastland* disaster that claimed 844 lives in the Chicago River. As we approach the centennial, the memorial planned for section 16 is progressing well. Bevel Granite Company will shortly begin fabricating the main element of the memorial. Contributions are currently being collected, and individuals and organizations can purchase engraved donor bricks for placement at the memorial. The dedication of the *Eastland* Memorial will take place during the annual BNC summer picnic, on July 12, 2015, at 1:00pm. Please join us for this historic occasion. If you would like more information on the memorial or how you or your organization can contribute, visit [www.friendsofbnc.com/eastland](http://www.friendsofbnc.com/eastland) or contact Chuck Michalek at [michalekchas@aol.com](mailto:michalekchas@aol.com).



Remembering the Eastland

## What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

gatehouse. Thanks to **Jerry Gaydusek** and **Chuck Michalek** for supervising and getting the bids. Silicone was also put around the other panes to cushion and absorb the vibrations caused by trucks barreling along Pulaski.

Please mark Sunday, September 13th on your calendar for the **2015 FallFest Gala!** It will be at the beautiful venue of Ashton Place in Willowbrook, with an elegant meal, a silent auction, and special entertainment! See the "Save the

Date" notice on the back page. We need volunteers to assist with the gala. We need help gathering items for and setting up the silent auction. There is also work for sending out the invitations – putting on stamps and address labels, stuffing envelopes – and sending thank you notes. Much of this kind of work could be done at home if you can't come to join us in person. Let me know if you are interested in helping in any way:  
847-362-9036 or  
[mdstueck@aol.com](mailto:mdstueck@aol.com).

May is always the busiest month at BNC – look at the "Upcoming

Events" list on page 3. We welcome all to help put out flags along the roads to decorate for Memorial Day. Come to the gatehouse for light refreshments at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, May 22nd, and return for the ceremony at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, May 25th.

I hope to see you at one or more of the many events offering opportunities to connect over the summer at our beautiful cemetery.

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



## Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

windows with clear silicone. **Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery** volunteered to pay for the window installation and the caulking, and the work was completed in March.

The cemetery board decided to eliminate the superintendent position at the cemetery and instead have operations overseen by a general manager and a working foreman. **Beth Raleigh** is the current general manager, and in February a working foreman was hired. The new foreman is **Jerry Douglas**. He has around 20 years cemetery experience, including approximately 10 years working at Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago. His reason for applying for the position at Bohemian National Cemetery was because it is a family-oriented cemetery and is not run by a corporation. Jerry has been well-received by the staff, and all are working together as a team. The BNCA board looks forward to the cemetery moving in the right direction under Beth Raleigh's and Jerry Douglas's supervision.

Chuck's brother **Jim Michalek**, who owns **Fire 'n' Ice Heating & Cooling, Inc.**, donated a van, a generator and extension ladders to

the cemetery.

After a water tower collapsed in Chicago about a year ago, the city passed new ordinances regarding water towers. When the cemetery was cited by the city for violations under the new ordinances, the cemetery board, on the advice of their attorney **Joseph Vosicky**, hired **WJE Engineers, Architects and Material Scientists** to conduct an inspection of the water tower and prepare a report for the cemetery's court date. WJE rented a lift to evaluate the water tower structure, and Andrew Bultas met with the WJE project manager **Elizabeth Cassin** to provide details about previous work on the water tower. Attorney Vosicky presented WJE analysis to the judge in February. It was determined that some repairs need to be made, and the judge gave the cemetery a July 2015 court date to report on the progress of the repairs.

In December of 2014 the cemetery lost a very staunch supporter when **Judy Baar Topinka** passed away. Judy had been instrumental in helping the get listed on the National Register of Historic Places. She also was very involved in the cemetery having a pet crematory. **Kristyna Driehaus** of the **Chicago Czech**

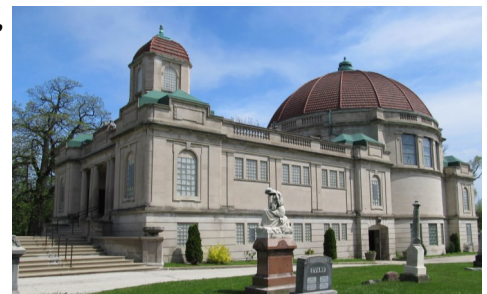
**Center** informed the cemetery board that the Center had received a donation to be used in setting up a memorial to Judy Baar Topinka at Bohemian National Cemetery. After much discussion, it was decided that more funds have to be raised. The cemetery board decided to name the picnic area the Judy Baar Topinka Memorial Park. CCC will raise funds to fix up the picnic area with landscaping and flower beds. Benches and tables could be acquired and also the roads around the picnic area could be resurfaced. However, because of all the activities that are occurring this year, such as the 100-year anniversary of the *Eastland* Disaster and the June Prague Day events, it was decided that 2016 would be the time to begin work on the Judy Baar Topinka Memorial Park.

In closing I would like to invite everyone to attend the upcoming cemetery events, which are open to all. May 10th is the Mothers Day Celebration, May 25th is the Memorial Day Celebration, July 12th is the cemetery picnic and also the dedication of the *Eastland* Disaster Memorial. Hope to see everyone at these affairs.

**Andy Bultas**  
Vice-President

## Master Plan Update

Now that the cold and snows of winter 2014-15 are (hopefully) behind us, work can resume on the crematorium/columbarium building. Friends of BNC board has given the go-ahead for the next phase, which will involve repair of the steps leading up to the front terrace and installation of railings. This carries an estimated cost of \$45,000 for the steps, the ADA hand railing, and some minor repair to the limestone wall that encases the steps and terrace. Our project manager Dan Ruzic is in the process of seeking bids for the job, and we anticipate that work will begin in late spring. Looking ahead, Friends board, envisaging the possibility of successful fund-raising efforts over the next few months, also advised Dan to pursue bids for approximately half of the dome and masonry work and some gutter replacement that comprise the next items in the master plan.



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*Heritage Happenings*

we're on the web  
[www.friendsofbnc.org](http://www.friendsofbnc.org)



*Save the Date!*

You won't want to miss our **FallFest Gala** on  
*Sunday, September 13, 2015, at 12:30 pm*

Enjoy a delicious dinner at elegant Ashton Place in Willowbrook, Illinois.

Three choices of entrees ~ wine and beer included.

There will be entertainment guaranteed to please,  
and a silent auction designed to entice!

Watch your mail in August for your invitation!