

# Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Winter Issue ~ Vol. 12 No. 3

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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

Prague visitors in November? Most unusual, but on November 1st, we had 17 teens from Prague, part of the **Gymnázium nad Alejí** exchange between Chicago and Prague schools sponsored by the Chicago-Prague Sister Cities Committee. It was a beautiful day,

about 60 and sunny (!), and since we were so close to Halloween, **Chuck Michalek**, our tour guide, and I decided we should have trick-or-treat bags for the kids. They were very well received, as was the apple cider (no need for the hot chocolate I had

*(continued on page 3)*



*Czech Minister of Education Kateřina Valachová lays a wreath at the new Eastland Memorial at BNC. (photo by Andy Bultas)*

## Live from BNC

Bohemian National Cemetery is 138 years old, and as with many older places it encounters some problems. The year 2015 brought about two enormous problems for the Cemetery to face. The first was a lawsuit by the City of Chicago over inspection and repairs for the Cemetery's water tower; the water tower accident in Wrigleyville in 2013 prompted the city to take a closer look at all the water towers in the City of Chicago. Bohemian National Cemetery retained the services of

attorney **Joseph Vosicky** to represent itself in the law suit. The cemetery also hired a structural architecture firm, **Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE)**, to conduct an inspection of the water tower and then submit a report to the court. Throughout the summer and fall, repairs were made to the water tower. Railings were painted and Chuck Cervenka's nephew **Dan Theil** did some iron work and rebuilt the bottom section

*(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, 167 County Road A4A, Sapello, NM 87745-5026 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

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### *from the editor's laptop*

Every time I visit Bohemian National Cemetery, my wanderings lead me to new discoveries. I'm always intrigued by personalized monuments, illustrations or writings that are uniquely chosen for the particular gravestone. Sometimes the intended meaning is obvious. Other times, research is required; such was the case with the Kacer stone I found last October. There was a little serendipity in the research. In 1948, Adolf Kacer helped promote travel to Czechoslovakia in conjunction with the XI. Sokol Slet in Prague, promoting it as an opportunity for Czech-Americans to travel back to their homeland.

My paternal grandfather apparently responded to the suggestion and returned home for the first and only time since his emigration in 1911. He visited his only sister and her husband in Prague, toured the mountain regions of Czechoslovakia, and was among the almost two million people who attended the festival. Over half a million athletes (although apparently none from the United States) participated in the Slet, the largest in Sokol history.

The festival and the accompanying parades included spontaneous demonstrations against the new Communist government, and within months the Sokol organization was banned in Czechoslovakia by the government. Many Sokol leaders were imprisoned, while some escaped into exile. Almost half a century would pass before the Sokol movement was once again allowed in the country of its origin. With the return of democracy to Czechoslovakia, the XII. Slet was held in 1994.

*Na shledanou!*  
carol jean smetana

## Děkuji Vám!

Thank you and bon voyage to **April Hasson** who is moving back to Oregon. We will miss you, April.

**Chuck Michalek** - for leading two tours, one for Czech dignitaries and one for Czech high schoolers

**Glenn Spachman** - for his work with the contractors for the stairs

## Welcome to Our New Members!

**Frank Chambers** ... Stillwater, OK

**Edith Folta** ... West Hartford, CT

**Irene Taube** ... Chicago, IL

**John & Dee Terwilliger** ... Deerfield, IL

**Joseph & Christina Topinka** ... Riverside, IL



## What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)  
brought - too warm). The students were delightful, including one boy armed with a high-tech camera who took pictures. They were accompanied by their host families and organized by **Irena Čajková**, a Czech teacher at T. G. Masaryk School.

Then on November 15th, we welcomed **Mgr. Kateřina Valachová**, the Czech Minister of Education, Youth and Sports; **Jaroslav Kantůrek**, Special Envoy

for Czechs Living Abroad, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and **Martin Pros**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Also **Dr. Mila Saskova-Pierce**, from the University of Nebraska, joined us. Our Chicago Consul General, **Bořek Lizec**, and his lovely wife, **Kateřina**, brought them for a tour led by Chuck Michalek. They placed real flower wreaths at both the *Eastland* Memorial and the Cermak Mausoleum. They were impressed with the cemetery, and we enjoyed their very nice compliments. These kinds of visits are surely one of

the real joys of being part of Friends!!

I hope to see everyone at our February 21st winter meeting. The location will be the Czech American Community Center (see back page) because Klas is closed. The interesting historical pictures and information **Irena** and **Tom** have for us will include some new information, I bet, for even the most historically aware of us!!

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

## Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

**Sunday May 8, Mother's Day at 11:00 am ~**  
**Wreath-laying at the Mother Statue**  
**Refreshments in gatehouse**

**Sunday May 22nd at 1:00 pm ~**  
**Tour of the Tombstones guided by**  
**Albert Walavich**

**Friday, May 27th at 10:00 am ~**  
**Place flags for Memorial Day**

**Monday, May 30th at 9:00 am ~**  
**Memorial Day Ceremony**

**July ~ Annual Picnic, date to be announced**

**Sunday, August 21st at 1:30 pm ~**  
**Summer meeting of Friends**  
**Watch future issues for program details**

**Saturday, September 24th at 10:00 am & 1:00 pm ~**  
**Tours of the Tombstones guided by**  
**Albert Walavich**

# Stories of the Stones: Kacer and CANA



by carol jean smetana

Wandering Bohemian National Cemetery last October, I spied a grave marker with a symbol that intrigued me, one I had never seen before: the Statue of Liberty flanked by the words “Liberate Czechoslovakia.” What was C.A.N.A.? Who were Adolf and Marie Kacer, the couple buried there?

The inscription at the bottom of the marker gave clues. Kacer was the chairman of the Czech National Alliance in America – also called the Czech American National Alliance – CANA. Yet I had to turn to sources from the Czech Republic, where he is remembered for his philanthropic work for the Czech people, to learn about his life.

Adolf Kacer (Kačer in Czech) was born on March 8, 1891, in Borová u Náchoda, a small village east

of the war. But by 1923 he had opened his own business, the Lawndale Milk Company, and by 1930 he owned his own home. Kacer immersed himself in Chicago’s vibrant Bohemian-American community as well. He joined the Freethinker group Svobodná obec and the Bohemian American Cremation Society, participated in Sokol clubs, and was a member of the Lyra Singing Society, eventually serving for a time as its vice-president. Most notably, Kacer poured his energy into the Czech-American National Alliance, also known as the Czech National Alliance (České národní sdružení).

The Alliance had been founded in Chicago in 1914 to support the liberation of the Bohemian lands from Habsburg rule and became the major



northeast of Prague nestled on the Polish border. When he was eleven, his family moved to Prague. After graduating from trade school, Adolf worked as a shop clerk, and in 1910 he immigrated to Chicago. Although Kacer only lived in Borová for the first eleven years of his life, the town’s official website includes a timeline with this notation for the year 1956: “In America, Borova native Adolf Kačer died; he was the chairman of the Czech National Association for the whole of America.” (The website also has a link to a one-page biography in Czech of Kacer.)

On June 3, 1916, Kacer married Marie Kostal (Košťálová), who had recently emigrated from Bohemia. In 1917 Kacer became a U.S. citizen and soon thereafter enlisted in the American army. Adolf and Marie had two children, a girl Vlasta Georgiana, born in 1918, and a boy Zdenek (Sid) Adolf, born in 1923. Kacer had worked as a



*The inscription translated reads:  
Beloved president  
National patron and philanthropist  
In recognition of his noble and selfless work  
the Czech National Alliance in America dedicates this  
Greatness attains, in life and in death, only to those who  
serve their country and nation, not themselves.*

the Czech National Alliance and the National Alliance of Czech Catholics continued to work with the Czechoslovak National Council as it shifted its focus to promoting Czech and Slovak culture and sponsoring student and cultural exchanges. During this time, in 1935, Adolf Kacer became the treasurer of the Czech National Alliance. Three years later, the intensifying German pressure on Czechoslovakia, which would culminate in Munich, reinvigorated the patriotic organizations. The Czech National Alliance, the National Alliance of Czech Catholics and the newly



source of funds for T.G. Masaryk’s campaign to create a Czechoslovak state. To coordinate the activities of the Czech National Alliance, the Slovak League, and the National Alliance of Czech Catholics, the Czechoslovak National Council (Československá národní rada) was formed in February 1918. After the war, the visibility and strength of the organizations receded somewhat, but

organized Slovak National Alliance reorganized the Czechoslovak National Council and focused once again on joint action supporting the liberation of Czechoslovakia. In 1941, Kacer became the president of the Czech American National Alliance. During World War II, the Czech American National Alliance was the strongest of the member organizations of the Czechoslovak National Council and successfully shouldered the greatest fundraising burden.



After the war, the Alliance, under Kacer's leadership, withdrew from the Czechoslovak National Council. Not all Alliance members agreed with the decision, and some CANA chapters dissolved or reconstituted themselves as part of the Czechoslovak National Council instead. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 exacerbated the schism within the Czech-American community. As president of CANA, Adolf Kacer traveled to Czechoslovakia in March 1948 and met with the Czechoslovak political leaders, including Klement Gottwald, the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Communist Party, and Vladimir Clementis, the Communist Foreign Minister who had replaced Jan Masaryk after his mysterious death that same month. The Czechoslovak Communists were anxious to garner American support for their new government and to ensure American participation at the XI. Sokol Slet, scheduled for July. The American Sokol Organization, however, withdrew its participation in protest of the Communist crackdown on Sokol leaders in Czechoslovakia. Kacer reportedly promised the new government that Sokols would participate in the Slet; he facilitated tours for Czech-Americans to Czechoslovakia for the festival. Some suggest that Kacer insisted that CANA take a neutral stance regarding the new Communist government, in part so their relief work in Czechoslovakia, which required government cooperation, could continue. However, his meetings with the Communists were publicized extensively in Czechoslovak newspapers in an effort to demonstrate that Czech-Americans agreed with the regime change. Kacer was, of course, strongly criticized in the United States and denounced for what were seen as his Communist sympathies. The controversy took its toll on the Czech American National Alliance. From an organization

that at its peak boasted 213 chapters, it was soon down to less than 50. Nevertheless the Alliance continued its relief efforts. Kacer himself was a major factor in postwar assistance to the people of Czechoslovakia – through his work with the Council, his work with the American Red Cross, and his business contacts – until his death on March 6, 1956. He raised funds to build a children's center in Březejc, Czech Republic, in 1952 for children maimed in

*During World War II and its aftermath, CANA held annual bazaars and other fundraisers, using the proceeds to support the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and Czech refugees, and to send clothing, shoes, food, soap and other supplies to assist in Czechoslovakia's recovery after the war.*



World War II and children with cerebral palsy; it now serves children with physical and mental disabilities.

In 1957 the city of Brno installed a commemorative

plaque at the Centrum Kocianka (ÚSP Kociánka – ústavu sociální péče pro tělesně postiženou mládež – institute of social care for physically handicapped youth). It reads: “To the memory of Adolf Kacer, devoted patron of the Czech National Alliance in the USA, which contributed to the facilities of this Institute.” In 2013, the achievements of Adolf Kacer were included in an exhibition in Brno on "Expatriates in the U.S. and Exiled Military in Support of the Restoration of Democracy in Czechoslovakia 1948-1989."

Marie Kacer shared her husband's passions and succeeded him as president of the Czech-American National Alliance. A year after his death, she traveled to Prague to receive a medal for “outstanding service to the Czechoslovak Red Cross.” She died on June 14, 1992.

*Sources for this article include:*

- “Adolf Kačer” and related entries in Encyklopedie dějin města Brna [http://encyklopedie.brna.cz/home-mmb/?acc=profil\\_osobnosti&load=2851](http://encyklopedie.brna.cz/home-mmb/?acc=profil_osobnosti&load=2851)
- website of Březejc school <http://www.skoly-brezejc.cz/historie-skoly/>
- website of village of Borova <http://www.borovaunachoda.cz/obec/z-historie-obce/borova-v-datech/> and <http://files.borovaunachoda.cz/200002463-1a3681aeb71ADOLF%20KA%C4%8CER.jpg> (biographical sketch of Adolf Kačer)
- Panorama: A Historical Review of Czechs and Slovaks in the United States, Czechoslovak National Council of America, 1970 [?]
- www.ancestry.com for records of immigration, marriage, birth, etc.

## Donations (September 17, 2015 through January 7, 2016)

### Benefactors (\$1000—\$9999)

Carol Krauser  
Jean Uhlir *in honor of Linda Uhlir*

### Patrons (\$500—\$999)

Frank Chambers *in honor of his  
grandparents, Frank and Anna  
Pukys, at rest in a niche*  
Dr. Margaret Peaslee  
Jane Pugh

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Agnes Helen Souta*

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Katherine Mallin  
Joe and Kimberle Martin  
Wynelle Noelke  
Bill and Ruth Rosol  
Glenn Spachman  
Cheryl Svoboda  
Alois Vana

### Donors (\$25—\$99)

Kirk and Julie Anderson *in memory  
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Helen Brassington *in memory of  
Agnes Helen Souta*  
Cynthia and Robert Check *in  
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Renee Frantini *in memory of Agnes  
Helen Souta*  
Jerome and Helen Gaydusek *in  
memory of Agnes Helen Souta*  
Ray Hemzacek  
Phillip Kasik  
Linda Kostuba

Joseph D. Krizek *in memory of  
Agnes Helen Souta*  
Paul MacHalek  
Marjorie and David Stueckemann  
*in memory of Helen Souta*

### Thank You (\$1—\$24)

Lilli Nemeč *in memory of Helen  
Souta*

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

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Friends is looking for people to fill two volunteer positions.  
We need a Publicity Chair and a Fundraising Chair.

- ◆ The main responsibilities of the Publicity Chair are 1) to work with the board to create flyers for events we host, and 2) to promote Friends events, mostly through emails to the Chicago community and our Facebook page.
- ◆ The main responsibilities of the Fundraising Chair are 1) to help generate and pursue ideas to raise funds for restoration projects, 2) to help with Friends biennial gala, and 3) to write grants, with the board's help.

If you think you might be interested or would like more details,  
please contact Marge Stueckemann at 847-362-9036  
Thank you.

## Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

of the inside staircase. This didn't complete the needed corrections identified in WJE's inspection report; however, because the cemetery started to make corrections, the City of Chicago dropped the suit. Nevertheless, the cemetery must continue working on the problems that WJE found. The City of Chicago will conduct inspections of the water tower every two years.

The second problem the Cemetery encountered this past year was the removal and replacement of the outside columbarium cement stairs. Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery contracted to have the old stairs removed and new stairs installed. To make a long story short, the contractor did not tool the new stairs properly. After several months of negotiations, **Glenn Spachman**, the Friends treasurer, was able to negotiate a significant price reduction with the contractor. The project is on hold until the weather warms up.

As you can see the cemetery has much more to deal with than just burials and grounds-keeping chores.

The grounds keeping at the cemetery has been proceeding very well, with the continued support of the volunteers. **Chuck Betzold** and his friend **Jim Miller** have gotten their boyhood friends to assist them in picking up the fallen tree branches

and limbs. They go throughout the cemetery with a truck to pick up the fallen tree branches and limbs. Some of the tree limbs are so large and thick that they have to be cut into small pieces in order to be removed. Chuck and his group have also been cutting down and removing dead trees. Between Chuck's group and the other volunteers, debris is being removed as soon as it falls.

The Cemetery's employees, under their supervisor **Jerry Douglas**, have been straightening headstones, in addition to doing burials. The Cemetery grounds are looking very good. Come out and visit and see for yourself.

Two groups from the Czech Republic have visited the cemetery recently. First were a group of students from **Gymnázium nad Alejí** in Prague. They presented a program at **T. G. Masaryk Czech School** in Cicero, Illinois, on Karel Čapek. **Irena Čajková**, a T. G. Masaryk Czech School teacher, and **Marge Stueckemann** of Friends, arranged for the students to have a tour of Bohemian National Cemetery on November 1, 2015. The students were accompanied by their teachers **Klára Braunová** and **Yvetta Popsišilová**, along with their chaperones and Irena. **Chuck Michalek** led their tour and also spoke to them about the *Eastland* Disaster. Friends of BNC provided

refreshments for all after the tour.

On November 22, 2015, the Consul General of the Czech Republic Consulate General in Chicago, **Bořek Lizec**, and his wife **Kateřina**, escorted the Minister of Education of the Czech Republic, **Mgr. Kateřina Valachová**, and her group on a tour of the cemetery. Among the group were the Director of the Department of International Relations, **Ladislav Bánovec**; a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Martin Pros**; and the Special Envoy for Czechs Living Abroad, **Jaroslav Kantůrek**. After Ms. Valachová and Cemetery President **Dave Pimm** exchanged gifts, everyone went to the gatehouse for refreshments, which were provided by the Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery. After refreshments, Chuck Michalek conducted the group on a tour of the cemetery. During the tour Ms. Valachová laid wreaths at the *Eastland* Memorial and at the Cermak Mausoleum. After the tour the group had time to walk around the cemetery grounds on their own.

As I have stated before, people from other countries and cultures come to our beautiful historic cemetery. So why don't you join them and visit? I am sure you will enjoy it.

**Andy Bultas**  
Vice-President



Oops! I only got the photographer credit half right  
in our October 2015 issue.  
**Jeff Tucek** took all those wonderful photos of our FallFest  
celebration.  
My apologies to Jeff for my error.

~ carol smetana, editor

# *Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery*

P.O. Box 72746  
Roselle, IL 60172-0746

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



## *Heritage Happenings*

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



## *Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery invites you to A Glimpse of Czech Chicago*

Presenters:

*Irena Cajkova* – language teacher, University of Chicago, School of the Art Institute and  
T. G. Masaryk School

*Tom Gaulkin* – Communications Coordinator, University of Chicago Center for International Studies



*Sunday, February 21st at 1:30 pm  
Chicagoland Czech-American Community Center  
6635 Cermak Road, Berwyn, Illinois  
next to post office and across the street from Vesecky's Bakery*

*slide-show talk and refreshments  
no reservations needed  
for more information call 847-362-9036*