

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. 12 No. 4

April 2016

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

Were your ancestors here at the start of Czech Chicago, right after 1848? At our winter meeting on February 21st, **Irena Cajkova** and **Tom Gaulkin** explored the important role of the Czech people from when Chicago had about 10,000 residents until today, touching upon the importance of the Bohemian theater and special buildings like Thalia Hall and St. Procopius Catholic church. They explained the movement of the

center of Czech settlement from Praha (right where the Chicago Fire started and where the monument for the fire department now stands), to Pilsen, to Czech California, and out to Cicero and Berwyn. Of course Mayor Cermak had a big role, and we also talked about our beloved Judy Baar Topinka. Our new meeting place, Chicagoland Czech-American Community Center in Berwyn, offered a chance to see

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photo by Andy Bultas

Live from BNC

The cemetery continues to upgrade the water tower after being cited for violations by the City of Chicago. The court dismissed those citations after **Joseph Vosicky**, Bohemian National Cemetery attorney, showed the court the progress on correcting those violations.

Duro, of Mulroy Excavating & Demolition, has begun filling the

potholes in the cemetery.

The Floating Opera Company approached General Manager **Beth Raleigh** and BNCA President **Dave Pimm** about the possibility of staging an opera in the Ceremony Hall of the crematorium/columbarium building. They were recommended to the cemetery by **Janita Tucker**, Executive

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Heritage Happenings

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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

My apologies (again) that this issue is late. I hope that many of you were able to attend the Mother's Day program at the cemetery. It is wonderful that the children from the T.G. Masaryk Czech School are participating in activities at BNC and being exposed to the beauty, culture, and history at the cemetery.

Every year around Memorial Day there are news stories about cemeteries overseas where American war dead (most often from the world wars) are buried, and how the local people honor the sacrifices made by those foreign soldiers by respectfully tending their graves. For six years, my uncle was one of those fallen soldiers buried far from home. A Marine Raider killed on Bougainville Island in the South Pacific in 1943, he was interred in a temporary grave overseas before his remains were repatriated to the United States in 1949 for reburial in the family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery. The United States has not been a battleground for international war, so we do not have cemeteries within our borders sheltering the remains of allied soldiers who died in combat far from their homes. But soldiers aren't the only ones who die in a foreign country. Some Czech and Slovak democratic leaders were exiled from their homeland during World War II and the communist era that followed. Unable to return home during those years, not even in death, they ended up at Bohemian National Cemetery. On page four begins a two-part article about some of these exiles. We can honor their deaths by remembering their lives and their sacrifices.

Na shledanou!
carol jean smetana

Welcome to Our New Members!

Allan Nemec ... Macomb, IL

Steven Durkovic ... Mt. Dora, FL

Děkuji Vám!

Glenn Spachman
 for working with contractor bids

Irena Cajkova and Tom Gaulkin
 for their presentation at our February meeting

Mary Syrup, Arline Artist and Helen Gaydusek
 for providing treats for our February meeting

Judie Mason
 for volunteering to be Publicity Chair

What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

posters about Sokol, various Czech pottery – a really interesting place to be! About 45 people were able to join us that afternoon. We appreciated **Ted Polasek's** hospitality and welcome.

Do you remember BNC 60-plus years ago? Our summer meeting on August 21st at 1:30 p.m. will feature a DVD made from some 16mm color film of the cemetery from the late 1940s and 1952. Come and see the spectacle of a Memorial Day that featured two bands, multiple marching groups, and the Lyre men's chorus. Watch men digging a grave by hand, a horse pulling a

hay wagon, and grass cutting with push mowers! We will also share some memories of those who actually participated in these events. At our meeting, we will also unveil the plaque, purchased by Friends of BNC, showing that the cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places.

We also hope our members will help with flag placement for the cemetery's Memorial Day program on Friday, May 27th at 10:00 a.m. Bring dandelion diggers to help make the holes for the flag dowels. Then join us on Memorial Day itself, starting in the gatehouse with refreshments at 9:00 a.m. **Joe Vosicky**, BNC attorney, will be the speaker. Joe's

Memorial Day speech in 2003 was part of the impetus to start Friends.

Always memorable are the wonderful tours led by **Albert Walavich!** Join us on Sunday, May 22nd, to explore the cemetery and enjoy treats afterward!

Thanks to **Mary Syrup** and **Arline Artist**, Friends will again have a flower plot in front of the gatehouse and by Cermak's mausoleum. Try to make a trip to BNC in May – so many chances to see its beauty!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery



- Saturday, May 7th at 9:30 am ~ Join Hands Day**
Meet at gate house
- Sunday, May 8, Mother's Day at 11:00 am ~**
Meet at gatehouse
- Sunday, May 22nd at 1:00 pm ~**
Tour of the Tombstones guided by **Albert Walavich**
- Friday, May 27th at 10:00 am ~**
Meet at gatehouse to place flags for Memorial Day
- Monday, May 30th at 9:00 am ~ Memorial Day Program**
for more details about May events, see page 6 and back cover
- Sunday, July 24th ~**
Bohemian National Cemetery Annual Picnic
Watch next issue for details
- Sunday, August 21st at 1:30 pm ~**
Summer meeting of Friends
Read "What's New with Friends" for details.
- Saturday, September 24th at 10:00 am & 1:00 pm ~**
Tours of the Tombstones guided by **Albert Walavich**

Stories of the Stones

The Exiles at Bohemian National Cemetery

by carol jean smetana

We are mindful of the significance of Chicago's Bohemian National Cemetery in the lives of Czech and Slovak immigrants and their descendants. But not as well-known are the cemetery's connections to the history of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech and Slovak Republics). Perhaps you are aware of references to Czechoslovakia at the cemetery, such as this one on the World Wars I and II Memorial: "Czechoslovak legionaires [sic] participated on the part of the Allies on all fronts in World War I." You probably recognize that the cemetery's Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum, with its Beneš and Štefánik wings, honors the names of the three leaders of the fight to establish an independent Czechoslovakia during the First World War.

But there is a more personal connection between BNC and the history of Czechoslovakia. For fifty years, beginning with the outbreak of World War II and continuing through the years of the Cold War, the United States offered a haven to Czechoslovak exiles who came not as immigrants but as temporary refugees intending to return home once democracy was restored. Our cemetery became the interim burial place for distinguished Czech and Slovak patriots who died in exile while their homeland was under first Nazi and then communist rule.

The death of **Milan Hodža** during World War II established the pattern. Born in Slovakia in 1878, he worked for the creation of Czechoslovakia during World War I,



and in 1935 he became its Prime Minister. After the 1938 Munich Agreement, he went into exile, first to France, and after it fell, to the United States. Milan died on June 27, 1944, in Clearwater, Florida. His



funeral was held in Chicago, where he was eulogized by Jan Masaryk, the Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and son of President-Liberator Tomáš G. Masaryk, as the "most interesting and picturesque figure in Slovakian history." Milan was buried at BNC in a grave marked by a simple stone inscribed with his name, his governmental title, and years of birth and death.

Vojta Beneš was the brother of Eduard Beneš, who succeeded Masaryk as the president of Czechoslovakia. During both World Wars, he traveled throughout the United States advocating for Czechoslovak independence, which earned him the epithet of "Czechoslovakia's Paul Revere." After World War II he was elected to the Czechoslovak Parliament but fled the country after the

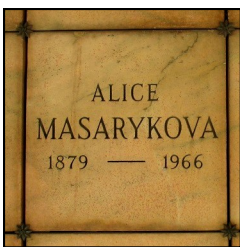
communist coup in February 1948. Vojta settled in Indiana, where he died on November 20, 1951. His body was cremated at BNC, and his ashes were safeguarded at the cemetery for 25 years until they were "picked up" (cemetery records do not record by whom).

Růžena Pelantová, born in Plzen in 1886, was a teacher, social worker and politician. After Munich, she worked for the resistance until she was arrested by the Gestapo in March 1943, found guilty of treason, and sentenced to eight years forced labor in a German concentration camp. In 1946 she became the first female Deputy Mayor of Prague. She escaped communist Czechoslovakia in 1949 and found refuge in the United States, where she established and chaired the National Council of Free Czechoslovak Women. Růžena died in New York in September

1959, and eight months later her ashes were placed in a niche in the newly opened Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.



Alice Garrigue Masaryk, born in Vienna in 1879, the daughter of President Masaryk and sister of the martyred Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, was perhaps the most famous expatriate to end up at BNC. Alice probably first saw the cemetery in 1904, when she was working at the University of Chicago Settlement and described the Bohemian immigrants' relationship to the cemetery: "It is touching to watch the pride with



which they love this piece of American soil. All the thoughts and memories of their old home, that are so dear to

them, seem to be thought more easily and better in this garden of the dead, for something died within them when they left their homes." After the communist coup in February 1948 and her brother's death the following month, Alice was among the patriots who fled the country. She lived for several years in New York City and then moved to Florida in 1956. Ten years later, blind and needing nursing care, Alice moved to the Bohemian Old People's Home near the cemetery. She died peacefully on November 29, 1966, and her ashes were entrusted to the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.

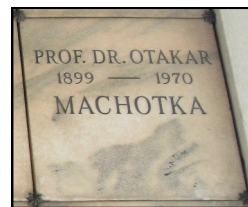
Jozef Lettrich, born in 1905 in Slovakia, was a Czechoslovak politician and journalist. During World War II, he practiced law in Bratislava. He became a co-leader of the underground Slovak National Council, which opposed Slovakia's pro-Nazi puppet government, and he helped plan the 1944 Slovak National Uprising. In 1945 Jozef was elected to the National Assembly.

After the 1948 communist coup, he resigned as chairman of the Slovak National Council (which had been taken over by the communists) and immigrated to the United States. He



helped found the Council of Free Czechoslovakia in 1949 and agitated for the freedom of Czechoslovakia and other Iron Curtain countries until his death in New York City in 1969. His ashes were consigned to the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.

Otakar Machotka, born in Prague in 1899, was a sociologist and politician who participated in the resistance movement during the Second World War. He pioneered the field of family sociology and opened the first marital counseling service in Czechoslovakia. After the war, he was active in national party politics and was involved in the decision of the democratic government ministers to resign in



February 1948, which opened the way for the communist coup. A longtime, outspoken critic of communism, Otakar realized he was in danger of arrest and went into exile to the United States with his wife and three children. He continued his academic career in New York, but also was active in the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and other expatriate endeavors. He died in New York in 1970, and his ashes were removed to the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.

Václav Majer, born in 1904 in Bohemia, was active in the labor

movement in Czechoslovakia. During World War II he was the Minister of Commerce in the Czechoslovak government-in-exile based in London. Elected to the Czechoslovak Parliament after the war, he served as the Food Minister from 1945 until the communist coup. Václav then went into exile in the United States where he worked to restore



democracy to Czechoslovakia, serving as the vice-president of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. He died in College Park, Maryland, on January 26, 1972, and his ashes were sent to Chicago to be inurned in the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.

Franta Klátil, born in Moravia in 1905, worked as a journalist, political magazine editor and foreign correspondent. He spent the Second World War in England, where he wrote for Czech and foreign publications. After the war, he returned to Prague to continue his work as a journalist and was elected to the Czechoslovak Parliament. Franta fled to England after the communist takeover in 1948, and in 1956 he went to the United States, where he died in Washington, D.C., on March 19, 1972. His cremains were conveyed to the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.



Did you realize that Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum is truly a pantheon for famous expatriate Czechoslovaks? The story of the exiled Czech and Slovak refugees who found a haven at Bohemian National Cemetery will conclude in our next issue.

Donations

January 8, 2016 through April 30, 2016

Patrons

(\$500—\$999)

First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association

Donors

(\$25—\$99)

Clyde & Nancy Rode *in memory of Art Lorenz*
carol jean smetana

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(\$100—\$499)

Karen Kautsky Knapp *in memory of Frances Kautsky*
Fred & Ellen Ranck

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

The Merry Month of May at BNC

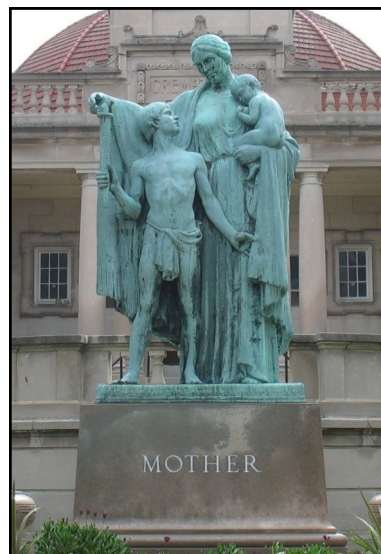
by Andy Bultas



On May 7th, CSA Fraternal Life holds its annual Join Hands Day, beginning at the gate house at 9:30 a.m. The CSA lodges of District 12, along with other Czech and non-Czech organizations, will remove debris from the cemetery grounds and will clean some of the building interiors. Ken Dvorsky, president of CSA District #12 Council, will make sure refreshments will be provided for all.

On May 8th, Bohemian National Cemetery and T.G. Masaryk Czech School will present a Mother's Day program, starting at 11:00 a.m. at the gatehouse. Refreshments will be provided. Dave Pimm will make his annual Mother's Day speech in front of the Mother Statue. Klara

Moldova and Irena Cajkova, the teachers of T.G. Masaryk Czech School, have invited Vilem Zak of the Czech Republic to exhibit his photos of the UNESCO region



southeast of Prague. The exhibition will be held in the crematorium/columbarium. The children from T.G. Masaryk Czech School will sing Czech songs and present gifts to their mothers. Klara Moldova will play the violin for the occasion.

On May 30th, Bohemian National Cemetery will hold its annual Memorial Day program in the Ceremony Hall of the crematorium/columbarium building. There will be readings in Czech by students from T.G. Masaryk Czech School, and children from the Sokols will lead the parade from the gate house and post the colors. The program begins at the gate house at 9:00 a.m. After the cemetery program, the Odd Fellows will conduct a program at their monument in the picnic grounds.





Live from BNC

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Director of the **Peterson Pulaski Business & Industrial Council**. After some checking and discussion, Beth and Dave agreed to the proposal. The opera *Don Giovanni* was performed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, February 4th, 5th, and 6th. The opera company provided security and ushers. They also agreed to donate some of the proceeds to the cemetery. All performances were sold out except for Thursday's show. The opera was enjoyed by all and received rave reviews. The Floating Opera Company would like to return at a later date.

In March, new carpeting for the administration building was purchased from the Restore a

Habitat for Humanity store. **Dave Pimm, Jr.**, delivered the carpet, and volunteers helped unload it. Cemetery employees removed the old carpet and laid down the new. All costs were paid for by a donor.

Chuck Betzold is making signs and brochures explaining the cemetery's rules and regulations. The signs will be posted at the cemetery and the brochures handed out to persons attending cemetery functions.

The BNCA Audit and Oversight Committee, consisting of **Chuck Michalek, Jerry Gaydusek** and **Glenn Spachman**, is accumulating information and taking photos of the cemetery's water lines, sewer

lines, gas lines, electric lines, and boiler maintenance procedures. Chuck Betzold will put the information into a booklet so there will be a record of where everything is located.

Join Hands Day, Mother's Day, Tombstone Tours, Memorial Day: there are events happening at the cemetery during the month of May. (See page 6 for more information about these events.) And save the date of July 24th for the cemetery's annual picnic. Attend the events and enjoy beautiful Bohemian National Cemetery.

Hope to see you there.

Andy Bultas
Vice-President

The Floating Opera Company opened their 2016 season with a "chilling retelling" of Mozart's DON GIOVANNI staged in the Ceremony Hall of the crematorium/ columbarium building at Bohemian National Cemetery. The Company appreciated the cemetery's ties to the Bohemian homeland, noting that Don Giovanni premiered in Prague in 1787. On their Facebook page, they described the cemetery location this way: "This historic landmark provides the perfect eerie setting for the haunting tale of the legendary anti-hero, womanizer, and murderer - the ultimate, remorseless embodiment of extreme entitlement and privilege."

photo by Andy Bultas



*Friends of Bohemian
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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



*Put on your walking shoes
and join us on for a
Tour of the Tombstones*



Sunday, May 22nd at 1:00 pm
Rain or shine
Meet in the gatehouse.
\$10 for members, \$15 for non-members

Our "Tour of the Tombstones" is led by professional guide, Albert Walavich. The cemetery covers over 120 acres of land so tours will vary. While the walking tours are always different, they are about 2 hours and 1 to 2 miles in length on asphalt, grass, and gravel. Men's and women's facilities are available in the gatehouse.