

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. XIII No. 4

April 2017

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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A Tribute to Evelyn Krenek Fergle

by Marge Sladek Stueckemann

Evelyn Krenek Fergle, a Director of Friends of BNC, passed away on April 13, 2017.

With the passing of Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Friends of BNC has lost one of its founders, a tireless volunteer, and a dear friend.

At a 2003 meeting of the Bohemian National Cemetery Association delegates, Evelyn took action



Evelyn holds one of the cemetery's original burial books; their preservation was an early project funded by Friends of BNC.

after a year of discussions when she proposed a Friends group should form. From the back of the room a voice said, "And I think Evelyn Fergle should start it!" Even though Evelyn lived in Michigan, she accepted the challenge. She organized initial meetings, drawing nineteen interested people to the first one. Linda Hudecek served as the first secretary and Evelyn was joined by Marge Sladek Stueckemann, Mary Ellen Panoch-Zuro, Bill Hosna, and Juli Nelson by

(Continued on page 3)

Volunteers Making a Difference at BNC

The arrival of spring weather provides numerous opportunities for BNC's volunteers to leap into outdoor action. **Chuck Betzold** has been working with staff to place numerous blue water barrels throughout the cemetery along with strategically placed trash barrels. For several years the blue water barrels substituted for the old underground piping system feeding a network of water spigots for watering grave plants. Activating the old watering system would necessitate repairing leaks in the large vertical pipe

column inside the historic water tower, refurbishing the large water pumps in the pump house, and making repairs to sections of the underground piping system.

One annual sign of spring is the emergence of wildlife activity throughout BNC. **Jerry Gaydusek**, **Chuck Michalek** and **Glenn Spachman** cleaned the crematorium/columbarium stairs and placed several barriers at the top ledge of

(Continued on page 7)

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

Evelyn Krenek Fergle was an energetic, enthusiastic, bright presence in our lives. She was a pillar of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery, present at the creation, as Marge describes in her tribute to her dear friend. She touched many lives through her involvement in Friends and various Czech organizations throughout the Midwest, including the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI). When CGSI decided to convene their Genealogical and Cultural Conference in Lombard, Illinois, in 2013, Evelyn volunteered to lead one of their neighborhood tours. She was praised as "the very knowledgeable tour guide" and "the best Neighborhood Tour guide of Chicago." A fellow CGSI member described Evelyn as providing "an always interesting discussion." It was obvious to all that "Evelyn was truly proud of her heritage." Everyone who knew Evelyn enjoyed her "pride and love of all things Czech."



Evelyn and Marge,
Founding Mothers

Evelyn and the other founders of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery envisioned an organization that would help preserve and protect the cemetery, its historic buildings and beautiful grounds, and also promote a wider appreciation of its history and cultural significance. It seems only fitting that this issue of Heritage Happenings highlights some of the work that dedicated volunteers continue to do at the cemetery. Chuck Michalek (front page) details several projects completed by the "Wednesday volunteers," and Marge (page 6) writes about upcoming events as well as the new railings Friends purchased for the crematorium/columbarium building. Our main article by Chuck Betzold (page 4) features an ongoing safety and beautification project. All these activities in support of our cemetery are a testament to the success of Evelyn's vision. We are grateful for her legacy, but oh, how she will be missed!

Na shledanou!
carol jean smetana

Děkuji Vám!

Chuck Betzold for coordinating the tree removal project with SavATree

Chuck Betzold, Jim Miller, Bob Weniger, Bill Servis, and Carl Brader for cutting up trunks,, moving logs and branches to the dump area, and cleaning up after SavATree's work was done

Welcome to Our New Members!

Judith Votruba Borchardt ... Lake Forest, IL

Marlene Bostelman ... Oak Brook, IL

Arlene Smutny Rabbitoy ... Plainfield, IL

A Tribute to Evelyn Krenek Fergle

(Continued from page 1)

spring of 2004, when our first newsletter was written—by none other than Evelyn! With one other person, Evelyn paid for a planning session with Ted Wachholz to create our vision and mission statements, which have guided us when we weren't sure just what project best fit into what we were trying to do.

Coming in from Michigan for our meetings, passing out membership brochures, even to people she met

on the train riding into Chicago, being the wise person to consult when there were conflicts—and having her bubbly, upbeat personality a part of each event made it a joy to work with Evelyn. She joined me to represent Friends of BNC at two conferences in the Czech Republic, the first one sponsored by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in Ceske Budejovice where the theme was immigration and we gave an illustrated talk on the cemetery. Then in 2012, Evelyn joined me in

Prague to attend a special conference for Czechs living abroad, where we met people supporting Czech culture in various ways around the world. She was always there despite the distance. We will miss her so very much.

It was Evelyn's wish that memorials be made to Friends of BNC. A link to her obituary can be found on our website, www.friendsofbnc.org.

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

**Sunday May 14, at 11:00 am ~ Mother's Day
Wreath-laying at the Mother Monument
followed by refreshments in the gatehouse ~ no charge**

**Sunday, May 21st at 1:00 pm ~
Tour of the Tombstones guided by
Albert Walavich**

**Friday, May 26th at 10:00 am ~ Flag Placement
Meet at gatehouse to help set out flags
for Memorial Day weekend**

**Monday, May 29th at 9:00 am ~
Memorial Day commemoration**

Sunday, July 9th, noon to 4:00 pm ~ BNC Picnic

**Saturday, September 23rd at 10:00 am & 1:00 pm ~
Tours of the Tombstones guided by
Albert Walavich**



Stories of the Stones—and the Trees

by Chuck Betzold

Hundreds of deciduous trees, mostly ash, maple and elm, grace the 125 acres of Bohemian National Cemetery, helping to create its peaceful, parklike atmosphere. Old age, weather, and disease, however, are taking their toll on the trees. To ensure safety and prevent damage to cemetery monuments and buildings from falling branches and trees, I led a group of volunteers, including some members of Friends, in developing a focused plan of tree pruning and removal. We mapped locations of the trees needing attention and then worked with SavATree, a tree care company, to identify and prioritize trees for pruning or felling. We identified more than 150 trees determined to be in critical condition and 13 trees considered at high risk for failing.

A generous, anonymous donation jump-started the project in February. Setting up a system of coordinated tasks that will serve as a template for future work, volunteers first prepared the area around the targeted trees by protecting the gravestones and laying plywood for heavy equipment access. SavATree then began the removal of the highest priority tree, working carefully around the monuments. In all, SavATree was able to cut down six trees, maximizing the use of funds available by leaving ten feet of trunk standing on four of the six trees they removed, as volunteers can easily bring down those trunks without hitting any monuments. Once the trees are felled, volunteers cut up and remove the downed trees and limbs.

Friends of BNC has submitted a grant request to the Czech Government for additional funds to remove more of the dangerous trees. If we are successful, SavATree will be back at the cemetery



This tree broke in half along Foster Avenue in March. Miraculously, the trunk rested gently atop a cross without damaging the monument.

in late fall or early winter to cut more trees.

Removing tree debris isn't a new task for the volunteers. For years, we have been cutting up and removing debris from trees that are blown over by the wind. If a tree is down close to a roadway within the cemetery, we try to hand-carry the debris to the road

to load onto our dump truck. If a tree is closer to the middle of a section, too far to hand-carry the

debris to a road, we instead pile up the debris in the area where it fell and rely on the cemetery grounds staff to use heavy equipment to scoop up the piles and place them in the dump truck. But with the wet spring we have had lately, we have to wait until the ground becomes dry and firm before driving on the grass. So it's never as simple as it seems.

Whenever a windblown tree or branches fall on a monument, leaving it totally or partially broken, I make a point of photographing the site of the damage. I then gather the pieces of the monument, label them and place them in a plastic storage tub. A three-ring binder is kept in the office with photos of the damaged items. We have actually had a lot owner come in to inquire about a missing piece of a family monument, and we were able to locate it amongst the stored tubs. The owner took the broken limestone crucifix and did the repairs himself.

Monuments are actually the responsibility of the lot owners. Tree damage to monuments is classified as an Act of God, just as if a tree had fallen on a private car. Homeowner insurance sometimes could possibly cover such a loss. The cemetery does not make it a practice to try to re-attach broken fingers, hands, arms or heads on statues at BNC. We do not have the time or expertise. And we would be liable if the repair work failed. Unfortunately, we do not have contact information



At left: SavATree prepares a tree for felling at Bohemian National Cemetery.

Below: Volunteer Jim Miller begins cutting down a diseased tree at BNC. The adjacent grave markers have been placed face down so they will not be damaged as the tree trunk falls in their direction. Jim is a retired high school and college math teacher. His math skills pay off when he calculates the direction the tree will fall, and he always gets the trees to fall where he wants them to. But the rest of us still stand far enough away to play it safe.

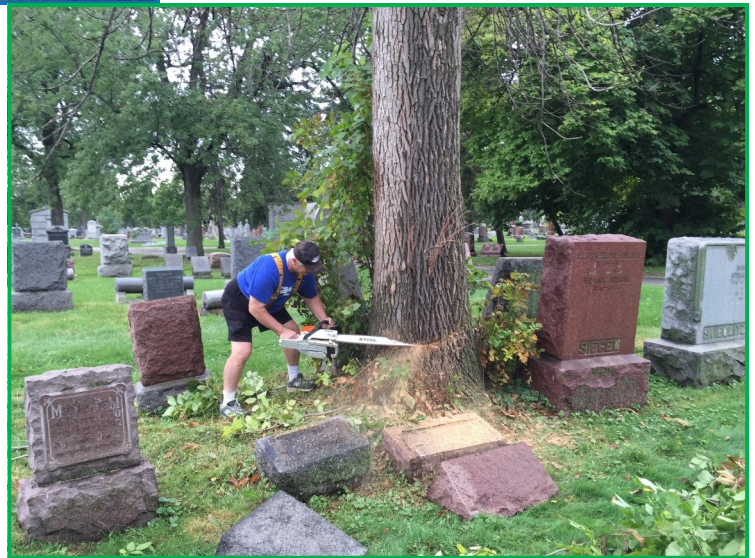
Once the tree is down, we move in to cut branches, limbs and trunk into manageable sizes, and haul the tree debris to our dump site. Then we return the markers to their original positions. The volunteers bring their own chainsaws, axes, pry bars, steel wedges and sledgehammers when they come to cut trees.

all photos by Chuck Betzold

for most of our lot owners, so over the years most damage goes unattended.

I try to survey the grounds periodically, to notice any new fallen or broken stone crosses, urns, flower pots, etc. If the piece cannot be uprighted on the monument and the piece is small enough, it is stored at the crematorium/columbarium building. If the piece is large and will not remain free-standing any longer, we leave it at the base of the monument, usually behind the monument and out of the way of the grass-mowers.

Tilted and fallen monuments are a whole different category. Again, the monuments are the responsibility of the lot owner, not the cemetery. We do not have the resources to have a crew dedicated to straightening monuments. As you can imagine, moving and repositioning heavy granite requires skill and heavy equipment. And most importantly for us, it is time-consuming, and there is some cost involved with foundation cement, gravel and sand. If a lot owner comes into the office and alerts us to a tilted or fallen monument, we try to straighten the stone as soon as possible. If the owner wants instant service, there is a fee.



The volunteers can usually maneuver smaller slab markers back in place. For instance, on the eve of our dedication of the Eastland Centennial Memorial, the volunteers straightened a dozen markers in Section 16 to spruce up that section. Sadly, there are hundreds of tilted and fallen stones throughout the cemetery. We try to upright as many markers as we can, but the task is simply overwhelming for our small group of volunteers.

What's New with Friends of BNC

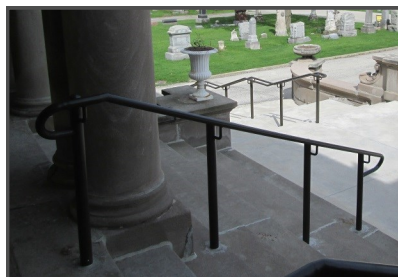


The delicious smells of crisp potato pancakes, ham, sliced roast beef, all manner of veggies and marvelous salads and special desserts (including kolače), made the meal at Sawa's Old Warsaw Inn eagerly anticipated by the 26 people who attended our Friends winter meeting in February. **Judy Vessely** and her accompanist provided lively music with some of us joining in to sing as she played show tunes. **Helen and Jerry Gaydusek** had created large posters featuring our many accomplishments of restoring buildings at Bohemian National Cemetery, including the repair and protection of the art-glass windows, raising \$25,000 to restore the historic water tower, and providing new storm windows and refurbishing the gatehouse. View the posters in the office next time you visit BNC!

Is your mother, grandmother or great-grandmother at rest at BNC? Come on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 14th, at 11:00 a.m. to lay a wreath at the Mother statue and join other families in the gatehouse for refreshments afterwards. Free. Our spring tour will be on Sunday, May

21st, at 1:00 p.m., starting in the gatehouse and, after a two-hour walking tour, returning to the gatehouse for refreshments. Cost is \$10 for members of Friends and \$15 for non-members.

Then return on Monday, May 29th, for the Memorial Day remembrance. We start at 9:00 a.m. with refreshments in the gatehouse. From there we walk to the crematorium/columbarium building for an inspiring program built around the Sokol color guard, music,



Day commemoration.

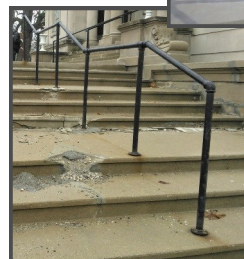
Be sure to look for the beautiful, smooth, new railings, which make climbing the crematorium/columbarium steps so much easier. Paying the \$19,000 for the railings was the most recent Friends of BNC project.

I look forward to seeing you at at least one of our May events!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President



honoring of all branches of the armed services (do you know the songs associated with each branch?), an inspired address, and seeing the cemetery in its light green finery. There is no charge for the Memorial



Contrast the old steps and railing (left) on the west side of the crematorium/columbarium building with the new steps and railing (above).

photos by Chuck Michalek

Donations

Benefactors

(\$1000—\$9999)

Eastland Centennial Project

Marge and Dave Stueckemann *in memory of Evelyn Krenek Fergle*

Sponsors

(\$100—\$499)

Marilyn Cerny *in memory of Alan James Cerny and Elmer James Cerny*

James and Elaine Fergle *in memory of Evelyn Krenek Fergle*

Lori-Jo A. Fergle *in memory of Evelyn Krenek Fergle*

Frank Mareska

Lorraine Marholz

Kimberly and Joe Martin

Henrietta Bartizal Pons *in memory of Evelyn Krenek Fergle*

Joseph Vosicky

Donors

(\$25—\$99)

Walter Bond

Dolores Duy *in memory of Evelyn Fergle*

Helen and Jerry Gaydusek *in memory of Evelyn Fergle*

William and Crystal Kerins

Richard Masek

Juli Nelson *in memory of Evelyn Fergle*

Glenn Spachman *in memory of Evelyn Fergle*

Sylvia Sykora

Robert Vance *in honor of Linda Tassin*

Thank You

(\$1—\$24)

Junita Spirek LoGiudice

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



Volunteers Making a Difference at BNC

(continued from first page)

the building's tall columns to prevent pigeons and other birds from nesting and soiling the main entrance walkway. Jerry, Chuck and **Ed Cervenka** made lock and woodworking repairs to one of the portico side doors. Jerry and Chuck also added security features to several of the garage's side doors.

Chuck Betzold along with **Jim Miller, Bob Weniger, Bill Servis, and Carl Brader** have kept the chain saws working overtime in the ongoing effort to clear the grounds of numerous dead trees and fallen branches. Chuck in particular worked closely with **SavATree**, a professional tree service contracted to remove several

large trees that were a hazard to surrounding tombstones. The tree removal performed by SavATree was paid for by an anonymous donor (see article on pages 4-5).

A big thank you to **Linda Odenbach** (Chuck Michalek's sister) for her donation of a well-maintained Chevy Blazer to BNC. Chuck B. provided

BNC lettering for the Blazer. The donated vehicle provides more mobility for BNC staff and adds a respectful appearance when staff lead funeral processions from the entrance to gravesites.

Many simple to more involved tasks are always available for volunteers who want to help preserve and improve BNC's buildings and grounds. Volunteers typically gather on Wednesdays. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Chuck Michalek at michalekchas@aol.com. No special skills are required.

Chuck Michalek Volunteer

Our regular contributor Andy Bultas is recovering from a torn tendon. We hope his "Live from BNC" column will return in the next issue.



Traffic Delays Near BNC

On your next visit to BNC you may notice some traffic delays in the area surrounding our cemetery. It's all part of the Albany Park Stormwater Diversion Tunnel Project currently underway at the southern edge of BNC.

The project's goal is to eliminate flooding along the banks of the Chicago River during times of heavy rains. The nearby Albany Park neighborhood and BNC have experienced 100-year flood levels in 2008 and 2013. Part of the nearby area is a natural flood plain.

An inlet drop shaft is being excavated next to the river on a two-acre parcel of land that was once owned by BNC until 1999 (our former maintenance yard). Swollen river water will enter the drop shaft and flow into the 18-foot diameter

diversion tunnel under Foster Avenue. The tunnel will extend to the east for one mile. At that point an outlet will allow the water to enter the North Shore Channel, a much larger body of water which can handle large rain events.

Visitors to our cemetery should be aware that heavy construction vehicles will be in the area during the weekday hours of 8 am to 5 pm. These vehicles will be hauling away up to 100 truckloads of soil and rock per day. In addition, explosives blasting will occur once per day. There will be appropriate traffic signage and audible warning signals along Foster Avenue. Seismic sensors have been placed on the grounds of the cemetery to monitor effects. We have been told not to expect any alarming results.

This project is a welcome improvement to the surrounding neighborhood. During recent floods, water from the river overflowed into our maintenance yard, covering our lagoon area and extending to within a few yards of the back of our crematory building. In addition, the basements of our caretaker bungalows were flooded. Worse yet, our neighbors on the other side of Foster Avenue were inundated with waist-high water for blocks and blocks.

Foster Avenue will remain open for the duration of the project, which should be completed sometime in 2018.

Chuck Betzold Volunteer

*Friends of Bohemian
National Cemetery*

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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



*Led by
professional guide*

Albert Walavich

Has it been awhile since you last toured BNC?

Join us on

Sunday, May 21st at 1:00 pm

Rain or shine

Meet in the gatehouse

Tour of the Tombstones

\$10 for members

\$15 for non-members

*Walking tours last about two hours and
cover between one and two miles
on asphalt, grass, and gravel.
Each tour is a different experience.
Men's and women's facilities are available in the gatehouse.*