

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Fall Issue ~ Vol. XVIII No. 2

October 2021

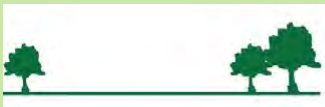
carol jean smetana, editor

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

Cemeteries are an iconic part of our recent celebration of Halloween—ghosts floating around in the night, scary eerie sounds—definitely places to avoid. As far as we know, none of these events have occurred at Bohemian National Cemetery! On the contrary, we see this as a place of heritage, beauty, of outstanding architecture, worthy of being preserved and promoted. That is just what Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery has done since November 2004, when we were incorporated.

The founders of our cemetery spared no expense in making it a testament to the excellent taste of Bohemians. For example, the

northern part of the gatehouse has an attic with a window plus a basement. The fixtures—stained glass and partly leaded windows, and a real fireplace—all contribute to a wonderful surrounding for waiting for the streetcar, the original function of this beautiful castle-like building! Before the pandemic, Friends used the building to serve visiting dignitaries, plus for refreshments and check-ins for our tours. It was the focus of our first restoration projects when we began.

At one of our organizing meetings, Ted Wachholz, who was helping us craft vision and mission statements, said no organization
(Continued on page 3)

Live from BNC

Fall is in the air at BNC and the color change to the fall landscape is slowly making its glorious annual appearance. Speaking of trees, if you missed Friends' membership Zoom meeting in August featuring "Trees and Shrubs of Bohemian National Cemetery," you can watch it on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/181958125204936/videos/522470645649676>.

Or use the link on our website: <http://friendsofbnc.org/pastevent.htm>

The presentation was made by Bob Porter, Natural Areas Manager for the Chicago Park District's North Park Village Nature Center. Bob, who works near BNC, said he had not previously visited the cemetery but enjoyed seeking
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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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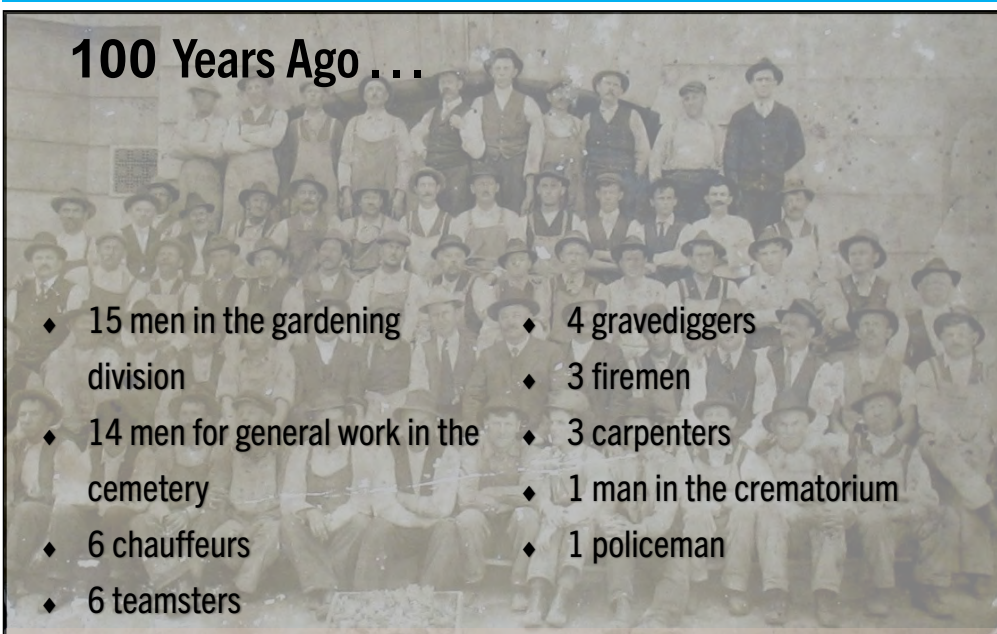
I apologize that this newsletter is over a month late in getting to your mailbox. Twelve years of editing Heritage Happenings have not improved my ability to make deadlines. But I am ready to turn over the duties to another volunteer, as is our webmaster. Are you interested?

If you would like to take a more active role in Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery without having to leave your home and are comfortable using a computer, consider volunteering to be either out newsletter editor or our webmaster. Previous experience is not necessary. The current editor or webmaster will work with you to ensure a comfortable transition. If you enjoy creative work, that's a plus, but not necessary. The newsletter's "Stories of the Stones" feature can be written by others—or you might choose to replace it with a new feature. As webmaster, you can create content for the website or just maintain it. Contact me if you would like to explore the possibility of producing our quarterly newsletter or managing our website—editor@friendsofbnc.org.

Enjoy the holidays, and stay healthy!

*Na shledanou
carol jean smetana*

100 Years Ago ...



- ◆ 15 men in the gardening division
- ◆ 14 men for general work in the cemetery
- ◆ 6 chauffeurs
- ◆ 6 teamsters
- ◆ 4 gravediggers
- ◆ 3 firemen
- ◆ 3 carpenters
- ◆ 1 man in the crematorium
- ◆ 1 policeman

... the cemetery employed 53 people
(not counting clerks)

Source: The Semi-Centennial Jubilee of the Bohemian National Cemetery Association in Chicago Illinois by Dr. J.E.S. Vojan, p 109 (1927)

Photo of Bohemian National Cemetery employees, courtesy BNCA—date unknown

Welcome to Our New Members!

Stephen Farley

Tucson AZ

Sara Martinek family

Riverside IL

Annie Rosean family

Mount Prospect IL

What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)
will succeed with just doing fundraising activities, that fellowship is important. We planned meetings and tours to incorporate the personal contact, but the pandemic halted that.

Friends belongs to the Czechoslovak American Congress (CAC) that meets to coordinate the events planned

by the different Czech/Slovak Chicago groups so we don't end up having events on the same day. Mary Syrup is our delegate to the Congress. Concerned that many groups were not meeting in person or virtually, CAC offered generous grants for member organizations to plan something. We were able to apply for our virtual August meeting and were

awarded a grant!

Goodness knows the pandemic has caused so much disruption in our lives. We are all hoping soon we can get back to normal.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Live from BNC

(continued from first page)
out the vast array of trees throughout the grounds.

Volunteers continue to help with cutting and removing fallen trees and branches. They also help with watering plants at various

sites, including the gatehouse and office entrance, Klacel Circle, the Eastland Disaster Memorial, and Cermak Family Mausoleum. Thanks to

volunteers Chuck Betzold, Bill Servis, Carl Brady, Bob Weiner, Mary Lachiewicz, Mitch Jacobson and Chuck

Michalek.

Several improvements at BNC involve work at the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum and Beyond the Vines (Cubs) Columbarium. At the outdoor Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum,

concrete, new handrails will be installed. At the outdoor Beyond the Vines Columbarium, the unfinished east wall will have niche spaces installed, and new granite facing will be installed on both the east and west walls.

Chuck Michalek
Friends of BNC Volunteer
Wednesday Volunteer



contractors are rebuilding the front entrance walkway, stairway and ramp. In addition to pouring the new



Stories of the Stones: Vojta Holeček

by carol jean smetana

I enjoy meandering through the cemetery looking at tombstones. This one, with its lyre—a common symbol of musical talents—sparked a journey to learn about the life of the man it memorialized.

The tombstone tells us Vojta Holeček was born February 11, 1841, in the Vršovice neighborhood of Prague, that he died December 23, 1908, and that he was married and had children—“Rest in peace, dear husband and father.”

But details of Vojta Holeček’s life were scarce. Vršovice parish registers



(available online) record the marriage of Vojtěch (Vojta is the Czech short form; Adlabert and Albert are common English variants) Holeček to 20-year-old Marie Pěknice on November 10, 1868; Vojta’s occupation was listed as *zedník* — bricklayer.



Nine months later their first child Aloiš was born. In 1882 their fifth child Marie was born, and Vojta for the first time in the church records is described as a *hudebník* — musician.

Then I found a reference to Vojta in *A Passion for Polka: Old-Time Ethnic Music in America*, by Victor Greene (1992). In a discussion about European bands touring the United States around the turn of the last century, Greene reported: *American concert promoters, aware of the public’s high regard for European musicians, must have been eager to arrange tours of foreign bands. For example, the 1884 tour of a thirty-two man Czech group under Vojtech Holecek proved highly profitable. The band’s*

inaugural concert drew an audience of ten thousand to Philadelphia’s Ridgeway Park on May 11; obviously not all concert-goers were Czechs.

Holeček’s band had been hired for the six-month “spa season” at the park, where they played daily afternoon and evening concerts. Advertised in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* as the “Grand Military Band from Prague, Austria,” their performances included tunes from Dvořak, Smetana and other Czech composers.

In May 1886, Vojta returned to the United States with a band of 25 musicians that included his younger brother, 30-year-old Václav. For their concerts, the band dressed in Sokol uniforms and were sometimes billed as the Vršovice Sokol band. They toured several eastern cities and then based in Chicago for the winter, planning to return to Prague

in the spring of 1887.

But the Holeček brothers stayed in the United States, and in that summer Václav got married in Chicago. A year later, in May 1888, Vojta's wife Marie and their five children, ages 5 to 17, sailed to Baltimore. The reunited family settled in Chicago, where Frank, Vojta and Marie's sixth and last child, was born a year later.

Vojta continued to work as a bandleader. In April 1894 he drove to Cleveland, where Václav and his wife had settled, to share conductor duties at an 11-hour-long (!) band concert. Vojta directed the closing number, a popular Czech polka called "Kovarna v lese" ("Smithy in the Forest"). It featured his brother Václav playing the anvils—"masterly executed," reported *Dennice Novověku* (a Cleveland Czech-language newspaper). (You can hear how the anvils might have sounded in this early 20th-century recording of "Kovárna v lese" at <https://www.loc.gov/item/jukebox-25897/>). Imagine the fun the brothers had making music together once again!

Sadly, it was likely the last time the two brothers saw each other.

In December 1894, Václav traveled to Bohemia with several compatriots from Cleveland. For the return trip home in January 1895, he was one of 354 passengers on the *SS Elbe*. Barely 14 hours out of port, amid freezing rain and roiling waters, the *Elbe*

was struck by a cargo steamer in the North Sea and sank within 30 minutes; there were only 20 survivors.



"VACLAV HOLECEK
(Lost on the Elbe)"
from *Cleveland Plain Dealer*
February 12, 1895

Despite the tragedy, Vojta sailed to Europe that summer, taking a band to Prague for the 1895 Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition. (At a concert in Thalia Hall to raise funds for the trip, Vojta conducted a piece featuring a cornet solo by Bohumír Kryl.)

Vojta and his band left for Prague in May 1865. A member of the traveling party later recalled the trip for *Amerikan* (a Chicago Czech-language paper). He reminisced that as their ship neared the area where the *Elbe* had sunk and his brother had perished, Vojta asked the

captain to slow down.

"We all gathered on the ship, the band played a mournful march ... and then we blanketed the scene of the disaster with flowers."

Vojta Holeček continued to work as a musician and music teacher until his death in Chicago on December 23, 1908, aged 68. His wife Marie died in 1933.

Vojta and Marie are buried in a family lot that also holds the remains of their married daughter Josefa Plechacek, who died in 1893, only 21 years old; their son Thomas, who died in 1898, aged 24; and their daughter Emma Turek and Emma's daughter Blanche, who have the only other marker on the lot.

Note: Details about the lives of the Holeček brothers come from various vital records and passenger lists; Czech-language newspapers, notably Amerikán, Dennice Novověku, and Pokrok Zapadu (all three published in the U.S.); Dalibor (published in Prague); as well as the Cleveland Plain Dealer. All are available online.



The symbol on the Turek stone, between the names of daughter and mother, is the logo of the Pythian Sisters. Emma Turek had been a member of the fraternal organization for 59 years.

The letters stand for Peace, Love, Equality, and Fidelity.

Donations

Benefactors

(\$1000—\$9999)

Ken Dvorsky

Sponsors

(\$100—\$499)

Jenny and Anton Llakmani

Katherine Mallin

Raymond and Cathy Riha

Thomas and Judith Ruzicka

Donors

(\$25—\$99)

Robert Kunesh *in memory of* Anna,

Joseph and Virginia Kunesh

John Persic

Thank You

(\$1—\$24)

Leslie Marshall

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

Děkuji vám!

Chuck Michalek for help with our August program, for representing us at the Czech Day celebration at the Czech Consulate in Chicago, for work on our fall solicitation letter, and for helping staff our virtual booth at the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International's biennial conference last month;

Chuck Betzold for continuing with watering and caring for our

seven large trees at the cemetery from the Driehaus grant;

Joe Topinka and the **Judy Baar Topinka Foundation** for tech help and hosting of our Zoom August meeting;

Czechoslovak American Congress and **President John Pritishil** for a grant to help with expenses of our August meeting;

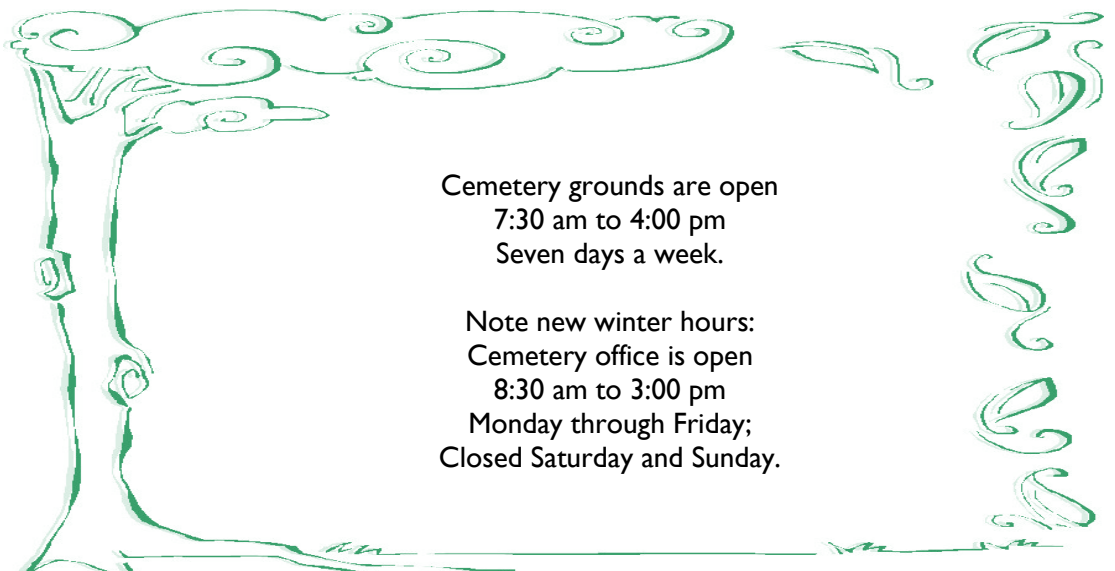
Carol Jean Smetana for her virtual presentation on Bohemian National Cemetery presented at the October Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International's virtual biennial conference, for helping staff our virtual booth at the conference, and for her work on our fall solicitation letter;

Linda Burton for promoting our revised crematorium/columbarium booklet.

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Cemetery grounds are open
7:30 am to 4:00 pm
Seven days a week.

Note new winter hours:
Cemetery office is open
8:30 am to 3:00 pm
Monday through Friday;
Closed Saturday and Sunday.





Columbarium Restoration Project Update

Back in the July 2014 edition of the *Heritage Happenings* newsletter (Summer Issue—Vol. 11 No. 1), Friends of BNC announced the start of its multi-year plan to weatherproof and restore the exterior of Bohemian National Cemetery's historic crematorium/columbarium building.



entrance steps and railings, repairs to several components of the main dome and complex roof

phase of repairs that will involve stabilizing the front entrance stairway cheek walls, stabilizing and resealing the upper-level stairway, and repointing the north limestone facade.

Once again, Friends is counting on the generosity of donors and organizations who share Friends of BNC's mission to promote BNC's historical significance and to help preserve its important heritage for future generations.

Watch for mailings on how you can help with support or please visit friendsofbnc.org. We thank you for your ongoing interest and support.

Chuck Michalek
Chair
Columbarium Restoration Project
michalekchas@aol.com



The first step involved contracting with a well-respected and experienced preservation architect for a thorough assessment of the building's needs, followed by the submission of a detailed long-term work plan. Substantial improvements over the past six years, funded by numerous donors, with many of our members contributing, have been completed, including replacement of the front

system, replacement of the copper gutter system surrounding the dome, and various repairs to the limestone walls and cornices. More detailed descriptions on these work projects can be viewed in past editions of *Heritage Happenings* posted on Friends website: www.friendsofbnc.org.

This fall's fundraising is earmarked for the next



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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

Your membership in Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery is vital to the preservation of our cemetery. As a member, you will receive our quarterly newsletter and be entitled to discounts on merchandise. Above all, you will enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you are helping to maintain, improve and beautify Bohemian National Cemetery.

Our membership year is January - December. This means that **all memberships, except those renewed for two years last year, will expire December 31, 2012.** New members joining in the last quarter of a year (Sept.-Dec.) receive those 3 months as a bonus, and their membership year begins the following January.

Please send in your renewal now! Or save a stamp and renew on our secure website <https://friendsofbnc.org>.

Memberships:

One year: \$30 individual; \$40 family;
\$25 senior

Two years: \$55 individual; \$70 family;
\$45 senior

Send renewal form with check payable to
Friends of BNC or credit card information
to:

**FOBNC c/o Miss Juli Nelson
300 Claymoor #2F
Hinsdale, IL 60521-5076**

*Friends of BNC is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit
public charity. To make a tax-deductible
donation to fund improvements at BNC,
please write a separate check with a
notation on the memo line. Thank you.*

Membership Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code (+ 4) _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Type of Membership _____

For credit card payment (Visa, Master Card, Discover, American Express), include:

Card number _____ Expiration date _____

Security code _____ Signature _____