

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Summer Issue ~ Vol. XXI No. 1

Summer 2024

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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In Memory of Helenka Gaydusek

On July 31, 2024, Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery lost our secretary of ten years and a dear friend as well. After a long illness under the



tireless care of her daughter, Karole Gaydusek, Helenka was called to her eternal home. We are filled with grief and sadness on this immense loss to Friends of BNC and to CSA Fraternal Life. Helenka was the heart of her Lodge 409 for so many years, and, along with her late husband Jerry Gaydusek, was a faithful, active member of Friends.

Helenka always made time for CSA and her membership in Friends of BNC. She was employed by CSA in the insurance department for many years and later became an officer before she retired. She and Jerry's generous contributions to

Bohemian National Cemetery, whether monetary or maintenance of the crematorium-columbarium building, cemetery grounds or participation in the tours and projects, will not be forgotten.

Dear Helenka, we miss you and will keep you in our memories.

Linda Burton
Treasurer, Friends of BNC

Live from BNC

Chuck Betzold and Chuck Michalek, Friends of BNC members and BNCA trustees, recently welcomed to the cemetery the Honorable Miloslav Stašek, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the United

States. Ambassador Stašek indicated he was greatly impressed by the Czech history, heritage and culture evidenced at BNC. The Ambassador was joined by staff from the Czech Consulate General

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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, 511B 9th St, Las Vegas, NM 87701-3911 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

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Officers of Friends of BNC

President:

Marge Sladek Stueckemann

Vice-President: *Juli Nelson*

Secretary: *open*

Treasurer: *Linda Burton*

Directors:

Chuck Betzold

Jim Trnka

open

Fund-Raising Co-Chair:

Joseph Topinka

Membership: *Ellen Pomes*

Newsletter: *carol jean smetana*

Publicity: *Jenny Llakmani*

Sales/Marketing Chair:

Juli Nelson

Projects Co-Chair:

Chuck Michalek

Webmaster: *open*



from the editor's laptop

Many of our members are not able to attend our public events at the cemetery. Some, like myself, do not even live in the Chicago area. This issue of Heritage Happenings gives us all an opportunity to experience the recent tours and Memorial Day events through the words and photos shared by members who helped make them happen. I hope you enjoy their articles.

We always are in search of volunteers to help Friends of BNC fulfill our mission. Volunteers taking on specific roles in the organization are encouraged to attend our online board meetings that happen every couple of months. Current open positions include secretary and webmaster. Also, many of us have been in our positions for years and would welcome a change of pace that your help could provide. Please reach out if you're interested in helping in any of our "officer" areas listed at left.

We also would like to set up a pool of volunteers on whom we can call to help with our various public events and tours by welcoming people, staffing the sales table, providing refreshments, etc.

If you would like to volunteer in a formal or informal capacity, please email us at info@friendsofbnc.org.

Díky a na shledanou!
carol

Welcome to Our New Members!

Otto Dolansky ... Berwyn IL

Carol J Gago-Paustian ... Walcott IA

Děkuji Vám!

Chuck Betzold and Chuck Michalek for helping plan the BNC Memorial Day commemoration and for participating in the program.

Linda Burton and Juli Nelson for helping set up refreshments in the gatehouse and welcoming attendees to the BNC Memorial Day program.



Donations

Benefactors

(\$1000—\$9999)

Pamela Morang

Patrons

(\$500—\$999)

John and Patricia Taska

Sponsors

(\$100—\$499)

Marlene Bostelman *in memory of* Helen Gaydusek

Otto Dolansky *in memory of* Laddie Dolansky

Karole Gaydusek *in memory of* Mom

Lisa and Nick Kosmas *in memory of* Helen Gaydusek

Chuck Michalek *in memory of* Helen Gaydusek

Stoklasa & Grabinski Families *in memory of* Helenka Gaydusek

Donors

(\$25—\$99)

Lisa Cassai *in memory of* Helenka Gaydusek

Juli Nelson *in memory of* Helen Gaydusek

Joseph and Susan Pritasil *in memory of* Helen Gaydusek

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

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Fall Tours of the Tombstones

Sunday, September 22, 2024

11:00 am and 2:00 pm

We encourage you to buy tickets online in advance at friendsofbnc.org

Czech Heritage Week Open House

Monday or Tuesday, Sept 23 or 24—date to be determined

The Open House offers a fascinating exploration of the cemetery with rare artifacts and memorabilia at the Gatehouse. Attendees will receive a map highlighting key historical points, making it a compelling experience for history enthusiasts and families.

Summer office hours:

Monday through Friday
8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Closed Sunday.

Cemetery Grounds:

Open from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.



April Tours of the Tombstones

Overcast skies lent an appropriately sepulchral atmosphere to the cemetery for the Tour of the Tombstones on April 28, but the event itself was far from gloomy. A total of about 80 people — most of them not members of Friends, and many of them part of one of several Meetup groups that had signed up — took part in two tours that started at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. and were led by BNCA trustees and Friends board members

participants were fascinated by the glass-fronted columbarium niches and



We are offering two fall tours on Sunday, September 22, at 11 am and 2 pm. See back page for details.

wowed by the beautiful Ceremonial Hall. As the group entered the hall, one tourgoer said, “This is my favorite part!” A trip down the stairs revealed the inner workings of the coffin lift.

The tours then stopped

by Beyond the Vines, a tribute columbarium to the Wrigley Field outfield wall where fans who have gone on to the other side can keep right on cheering for their beloved Cubs. Tourgoers learned about BNC’s zinc monuments, which date from 1874 to 1914, and stopped to pay their respects at the Anton Cermak mausoleum and at the memorial to those who lost



Chuck Betzold and Chuck Michalek.

Friends began sponsoring spring and fall tours since 2004. The first tour following the pandemic hiatus was held last fall.

The spring tours started inside the historic gatehouse with introductory comments and homemade Czech pastries including kolache and poppy-seed cake. The groups then headed to the crematorium-columbarium building, where



their lives on the *S.S. Eastland*. Several participants shared their own stories of family members who were connected with the tragedy. Finally, the groups paid a visit to the section of Bosnian Muslim graves before heading back to the gatehouse.

At the end of the day, two participants expressed delight that they had made a last-minute decision to join the second tour. “It was better than I could even have imagined,” one said.

**Jenny Llakmani
Publicity Chair
Friends of BNC**

Wednesday Volunteers

This has been an unusual year at BNC for the lumberjack volunteers. Early spring was quite wet, so the volunteers were not always able to work in the soggy sections of the cemetery.

However, the remainder of our spring has been quite busy. Windy weather produced a higher-than-expected number of tree failures.

Although not one tree was knocked over, many trees lost

tree—and would require the grave-digging crew to dislodge the limb with their backhoe. On occasion the volunteers would tie a heavy-duty strap to a reachable limb and pull it down by hand. Quite the sight to behold: Four 70-year-old men playing tug of war with a tree!

At this time last year, the volunteers had already cut down (felled) approximately 20 trees. Surprisingly, the volunteers have not yet cut down one single tree this year. All their time has been taken up by chain-sawing the wind-torn limbs that have been sent crashing to the ground this spring.



very large limbs in dozens of sections of the cemetery. Sometimes as much as half a tree would break off.

Some of those limbs were so large, that it took a crew of four men half a day to cut up one limb into manageable pieces.

Even worse, some of those limbs did not completely break off the main trunk of their trees. They would remain attached—high up in the



Unfortunately, a number of monuments have been knocked over and damaged by these falling limbs. As time permits, fallen monuments will be set upright by the cemetery grounds crew.



In the meantime, the lumberjack volunteers will continue to play “catch up” with the onslaught of falling limbs and branches. Then it’s on to the backlog of dead trees that still remain to be cut down.

Hopefully, we will hear the cry of “Timber” throughout the summer and into the fall seasons.

Chuck Betzold
Friends of BNC Director
Wednesday Volunteer



Friends of BNC Preservation Project

After a successful renovation of BNC's World Wars I and II Memorial, Friends of BNC is now evaluating needed repairs to the Civil War Veterans Monument. This impressive monument was dedicated in 1892. Restoration work will include cleaning and caulking the monument itself; replacing the sinking cement bollards



surrounding the monument; and cleaning and preserving the massive chain connecting

the bollards.

Watch for further information on our restoration plans and progress.



Chuck Michalek
Project Coordinator

Memorial Day 2024 at BNC

The grass was a lush green carpet amidst the 500 small fluttering American flags that



flanked the roadways. It was a perfect day for a stroll in the cemetery.

The annual Memorial Day



Services at Bohemian National Ceremony were back on schedule after a five-year hiatus because of Covid-19. Speakers and participants included Jakub Utěšný, Consul General of the Czech Republic



in Chicago; David Pimm; BNCA president; William Hudecek, BNCA vice-president; Chuck Michalek; Irena Čajková and students from the T.G. Masaryk School in Cicero; and Jan Vitt, singing director. The service in our Ceremonial Hall was well

attended.

Afterward, a dozen participants opted to walk the grounds for a tour of our cemetery's military graves and monuments, led by Chuck Betzold, veteran and cemetery trustee. Highlights included the Civil War Veterans Monument, the Spanish-American War Veterans Monument, and the dozen or so individual statues of Bohemian soldiers who died in service during World War I.

Miniature American flags were placed at each military grave along the tour route. It was a fitting way to show our respect for the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Chuck Betzold
Friends of BNC Director
Wednesday Volunteer



What's New with Friends of BNC

Recently I was part of the funeral procession for Helen Gaydusek, our former secretary. As we drove through the



big gates, past the gatehouse, the bell high above our heads was tolling—very fitting in that Friends had repaired it years ago. The tolling of a bell for a funeral was very common in years past, something typical of our heritage.

Friends has done many things to preserve and enhance our heritage at BNC. One of our first projects was to rebind the interment registers, which at

the time were literally held together with duct tape! When they were all restored, we had a reception featuring Michael Cwach who dressed in a Pilsen kroj and played the Czech bagpipe! I hope you can join us at one of the September tours to celebrate the beauty of our cemetery.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Live from BNC

to make it happen. The three recommendations made were: put up a sign, perform a burial, and build a fence.

The aging fence that now surrounds the cemetery—like many of BNC's buildings, structures and monuments—is showing wear and tear. Many of the handsome finial-topped brick columns holding the iron fence panels suffer various forms of deterioration. In particular, the brick posts along Pulaski Road are leaning inward, with each post experiencing degradation of

the brick and mortar joints. On some columns, the bricks have separated and appear ready to fall onto the pedestrian sidewalk. Various explanations have been given for what caused the extreme leaning of the brick posts. Long term remedies need to be explored.

Recent private donations to the cemetery have enabled BNCA to remedy the most serious brick deterioration by grinding and tuckpointing the damaged areas.



Ambassador Miloslav Stašek (center), guided by Chuck Michalek (left) and Chuck Betzold (right) enjoyed the cemetery on a beautiful summer day.

(continued from first page)

office in Chicago.

When the early Bohemian free thinkers and founders of BNC first conceived of having a cemetery for Chicago's Bohemian population, a lawyer was consulted to determine the necessary steps



Chuck Michalek

Project Coordinator

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Heritage Happenings Summer 2024

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery Fall Tour of the Tombstones

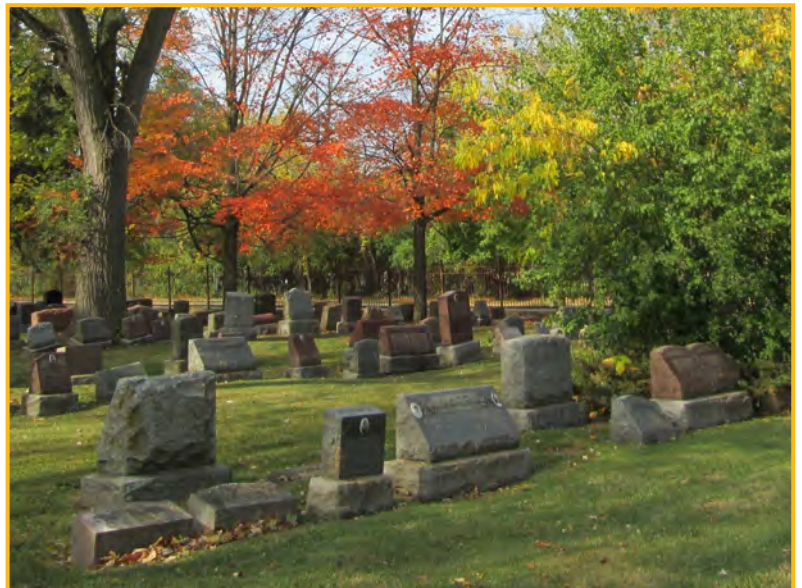
Join us on our cemetery walking tour, led by experienced guide and cemetery historian
Chuck Betzold

When: Sunday, September 22, 2024, at
11:00 am and 2:00 pm

Cost: \$10 for Friends members
\$20 for non-members

*Please arrive at the gatehouse 15 minutes
before tour starting time.*

*As each tour is limited to 30 participants,
reservations are highly recommended. Tickets
can be purchased in advance by credit card at
friendsofbnc.org.*



If space is available, tickets can also be purchased on the day of the tour at the gatehouse, by check or cash.