

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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November 2025

Cynthia Hall, 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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Reflections from BNC

While touring the grounds of Bohemian National Cemetery, one cannot help but notice the presence of many majestic trees of different size, shape and species. With so many nearing the end of their life cycle, endless volunteer and staff time is involved in cutting and removing dead trees and branches. (See photo on page 4.) While completing this tree maintenance amidst countless old Bohemian gravesites, it occurred to me that the sprawling old roots of these aging trees are connected to roots of the early Bohemian immigrants who envisioned and started BNC.

In Czech language, the word for roots is "koreny" which is also used when talking about one's family history or genealogical background. Many visitors from across the USA still come to BNC's office to research their "koreny," in addition to visiting burial sites. Likewise, it's not unusual for foreigners, including Czech government officials, to visit their emigrated American relatives at BNC. While the Mayor of Prague's recent visit to the family mausoleum of Chicago's Mayor Anton Cermak did not reveal any of his known relatives, he was delighted to discover a gravestone engraved with his surname - Svoboda.

Just as old trees disappear and new trees are planted, the neighborhood landscape around BNC also changes as new populations and cultures replace the old. As these changes occur, BNCA (the business entity) continues to serve its traditional ethnic community as well as new and local emerging populations. Through all the changes, with your help and support, Friends of BNC can continue its ongoing mission to preserve the cemetery's heritage and historic buildings, monuments, and cultural artifacts.

Speaking of change, with this newsletter we welcome our new editor of our *Heritage Happenings*, Cynthia Hall. Cynthia is the long-time editor of *the Journal*, the monthly magazine published by CSA Fraternal Life (now merging with BetterLife In-



Prague Mayor Bohuslav Svoboda standing by a grave with his surname (not relation).

urance). She brings a wealth of talent and experience writing about national Czech fraternal lodge activities. We are grateful to have her join our organization and look forward to her future contributions as our new editor.

Finally, its hard to sum up the many contributions of our recent past editor, Carol Jean Smetana. Carol took on the role of our organization's newsletter in 2009 and has shared her extensive knowledge of the Czech community in her writings and in particular her regular newsletter feature "Stories of the Stones". Carol is also the editor of what I consider to be the definitive past and present chronicle on the Bohemian National Cemetery.... *A Dear and Precious Heritage* first published in 2012. She edited a second edition in 2019 which contains updated descriptions and pictures. The book traces BNC's history, describes its many monuments and buildings, and provides portrayals of prominent individuals buried at BNC and so much more. The book is available on Friends website or at the BNC office. Moc děkuji, Carol!

Chuck Michalek
President

Heritage Happenings

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Manuscripts, articles, photographs, and advertisements for *Heritage Happenings* may be submitted to:

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Observations from the Editor

I have been given the honor and privilege to serve as the editor of *Heritage Happenings*. While I have experience working for both a Polish fraternal organization and a Czech and Slovak fraternal organization, this is my first time serving a cemetery. Unlike many of the Friends of the Bohemian National Cemetery volunteers, I don't have fond memories of visiting the cemetery as a child. I don't have memories of visiting any cemeteries except during burial services. To be honest, I would say that cemeteries just aren't my thing.

Then, along came Chuck Michalek. He mentioned that editor Carol Smetana was ready for a "break" and asked if I knew anyone who may be interested. I wanted to learn more and Chuck invited me to a cemetery tour. My husband and I accepted, although I expected it to be a little creepy.



Chuck Michalek highlights features on a gravestone during a recent tour.

I was wrong. It took only moments to realize that the Bohemian National Cemetery is some place special. The grounds are beautiful. The gravestones tell a story in their own spectacular and artistic way. Some are designed as trees with branches that are adorned with items that reflect the personalities and lives of the person who has passed. (See photo above.) Others are designed as permanent reminders of the patriotism of the immigrants who lost their lives fighting for this, their new country. The columbarium is an exquisite site to see; ornate, extravagant, indulgent even, yet tasteful. It features niches, which are uniquely individual tributes to the lives of people who have gone before us.

While reflecting on the tour of BNC, I thought about time I spent emptying my grandparents' homes of all their worldly possessions and the difficulty I had trying to discern between trash and treasure. Items were more than their monetary value. The sentimental value had to be considered. While cleaning my grandmother's home, I found war rations, countless photos and small odds and ends that flooded me with childhood memories that I knew I had to share with my daughter. While cleaning my grandfather's home, I found military honors commending him for his service as a minesweeper. He was the guy that went out on a wooden boat to locate mines to allow his ship to pass safely. I never knew this about my grandfather but was able to get some of the story from other family members. While grieving the loss of my grandfather, I also grieved the untold stories. Of course, there are other things: missing recipes, forgotten traditions, heirlooms lost, etc.

During the tour, we quickly realized the stories behind the cemetery, the gravestones, and the niches are critical to overall history of the BNC. The Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery have committed to preserving not only the grounds but the memories of those who are buried there. While small in number, these volunteers play an invaluable role. I am proud to be part of this preservation and hope I can inspire others to do the same.

Cynthia M. Hall

Welcome to Our New Members

Heather Burke Family

Chicago, Illinois

Kathryn Engel

Chicago, Illinois

Tracy Kurasiewicz

Lake Forest, Illinois

Walter Lang

Rolling Meadows, Illinois

Chris Puccini Family

Chicago, Illinois

Alan Rusy

Batavia, Illinois

Ray Sanders

Chicago, Illinois

Kristine Stalzer

Bartlett, Illinois

David Wetzel Family

Chicago, Illinois

The History of Porcelain Photos on Headstones

The history of porcelain photos on headstones originated in France with the 1854 patent by Bulot and Cattin for fixing a photographic image onto porcelain by firing it in a kiln. The process involved duplicating an image, separating the collodion layer from the glass plate, and then firing the ceramic disk over it with the image permanently fixed. These ceramic photos were more durable than earlier paper photographs, which could be damaged by sunlight and weather.

This technique, which created durable photoceramics, became a way to create more affordable and personalized grave markers. The tradition spread across Europe, South America, and eventually to the United States, particularly through immigrant communities. Italian and Jewish immigrants, among others, brought the practice to the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Joseph Albert Dedouch, the Bohemian immigrant whose company is said to have produced more than a million memorial photos in its 111-year history, is buried at

the cemetery. Joseph Dedouch is an immigrant with a success story. Ten years after four-year-old Joseph arrived in the United States with his family, he made his first enamel miniature photo. By the time he was 30, Joseph had his own company well on its way to becoming the premiere American manufacturer of memorial portraits for headstones. His photographs became so popular and widespread that his surname Dedouch became synonymous with the product: they were called "Dedos."

By the 20th century, companies like Sears and Montgomery Ward included porcelain portraits in their monument catalogs, further increasing their availability.

The process evolved, with later versions allowing for color and edited images to be incorporated into the portraits. While newer methods exist, photoceramic portraits remain a common feature on headstones today.

<https://friendsofbnc.org/newsletters/vol17no1.pdf>

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Heirloom Returned!



Jan Buchal, section 29
Great Great Grandfather of Anna Cooková

Many thanks to FBNC and all of you who put in so much work to continue our amazing legacy.

Our daughter and I enjoy visiting BNC just as my great-grandmother used to do with her mother and wrote about doing so in her journal, which was discovered among the very few things that she kept close to her when she passed away.

One year, several years ago, we visited their gravesites and were so saddened to see that the ceramic tile oval picture of my great great-grandfather was missing from our family's headstone in section 29. I thought that it was gone forever, and had come to terms with that.

But...during Czech Heritage Week in Chicago, former online Czech language student and friend Dawn Prazak Clewett had posted pictures of the display that was up during the Tour of the Tombstones of some of the lost and found items on Facebook. I couldn't believe my eyes when I noticed that right there on the display table was the very picture that had been missing!

I am forever grateful for all you do and, while we live up in northern Wisconsin and cannot make it to your in-person events very often, we do love staying connected and seeing the pictures online! Thank you also to Chuck Michalek for getting it back to us so quickly!

by Anna Cooková of CzechTalk.com
AnnaCookova@gmail.com

Can You Identify These Porcelain Portraits?



The use of porcelain portraits in Chicagoland cemeteries dates back to 1893. These ceramic photographs were made to last for a century or more. However, just like any cemetery artifacts, porcelain portraits suffer the same damage issues such as chipping, impact marks and vandalism.

condition of the markers by periodically walking the grounds, looking for those loose or fallen portraits. Corroded screws or adhesive failure are the main reasons that porcelain photos end up on the ground.

At BNC, efforts are made to monitor the

fallen portraits do not always remain near their original monument. Weather con-

ditions like heavy rains, thawing snow and ice, or strong winds can flip over and carry these portraits quite a distance. In addition, lawnmowers and other cemetery equipment can also contribute to movement.

When a fallen photo is discovered and can be matched to a nearby monument, the name and location is marked on the back of the piece. The porcelain is then stored in the office until a time when a number of photos can be re-adhered at once.

At times, some well-intentioned cemetery visitors bring fallen porcelain photos into the office but do not recall the section in which the piece was found. These unidentified photos are also stored in the office with hopes that a family member might visit some day and identify their family member from the photos.

Děkuji vám! - Thank you!

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery is a 501(c)(3). *Friends of BNC* is a separate and independent organization from The Bohemian National Cemetery Association, which operates the cemetery.



Chuck Betzold stacking branches from a fallen tree.

Friends of BNC raises funds for the restoration and preservation of Bohemian National Cemetery. You can support our mission by becoming a member, or making a donation.

Leadership (\$10,000 and above)

Ken Dvorsky

Benefactors (\$1,000-\$9,999)

CSA District Council No. 12

Pamela Morong

Patrons (\$500-\$999)

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Lori-Jo Fergle - *In Honor of Fergle Family*

Czech Culture & Education Foundation of Nebraska

CSA Fraternal Life Lodge Lincoln No. 7 -

In Appreciation for Maintenance of Veteran Memorials

Donors (\$25-\$99)

Cindy Bueneman

Rudolf Kozel

Thank You to Our Volunteers:

Volunteers at Our Fall Tour

Chuck Betzold, Dale Burton, Linda Burton, Mary Lachiewicz, Jenny Llakami, Chuck Michalek, Juli Nelson, and Ellen Pomes

Weekly Volunteers Who Cut and Remove Trees and Branches, Repair Equipment and Water Plants

Chuck Betzold, Carl Brader, Mary Lachiewicz, Chuck Michalek, Nef Morales, Bill Servis and Bob Weniger

Military Monuments at BNC... Civil War

This past October, Bohemian National Cemetery was visited by Civil War historian Andy Partak, a member of the South Will County Historians group. Andy is also a member of Sons of Civil War-Camp 39 and works with the Illinois Department of Grave Registration. He was interested in locating and documenting known Civil War graves in our cemetery, something he does throughout the State of Illinois. While visiting, he and Chuck Betzold walked the cemetery grounds to get an overview of all our military monuments. (See photo on page 7.)



Chuck Betzold prepared the map (below) listing Civil War Veterans buried at BNC and known locations of some of the veterans. Mr. Partak plans on returning to BNC with other Civil War buffs from his Will County group to do further research on BNC's Civil War graves.

Presently, Bohemian National Cemetery honors a group of 18 known Civil War vets, with a plaque at our Civil War monument. Future research hopes to gain a more accurate accounting of Civil War veterans buried at BNC.

Pictured (right) is BNC's Bohemian Civil War Veterans Monument, dedicated in 1892 at a Memorial Day service (then called Decoration Day) attended by over 5,000 people. Wording at the top of the monument reads "Pro Novou Vlast." This translates to, "for our new country," and proclaims the patriotic sentiment of Bohemian immigrants to their new country.



Generous support from members of Friends of BNC made possible the monument's recent renovation.

Civil War Vets	Born In	Born-Died	Age	Military Unit	Age Enlisted	Rank	Occupation
John Fishman	Brno, Moravia	1847-1915	66	5th U.S. Infantry / 8th U.S. Infantry	18	Sergeant	Fireman
Michael Hejduk	Bohemia	1844-1936	94	Company H, 90th Illinois Infantry	17		Laborer
James Hlavin	Bohemia	1825-1893	68	Unit Unknown	39		Florist
Frank Hrdlicka	Vodnany, Bohemia	1847-1882	35	Company B, 7th Wisconsin Infantry	18	Private	
Prokop Hudek	Bohemia	1843-1886	42	Company F, 24th Illinois Infantry	18	Captain	Real Estate
Jacob Kakuska	Bohemia	1845-1880	36	Company I, 9th Illinois Cavalry	19	Private	
William Kaspar	Holice, Bohemia	1835-1922	87	Company I, 4th Massachusetts Infantry	27	Sergeant	Banker
Jakub Kristufek	Talin, Bohemia	1826-1895	69	Company C, 5th Missouri Volunteer Infantry	35	Private	
Anton Macal	Nymburk, Bohemia	1837-1926	89	Company E, 12th New Jersey Regiment	28	Private	
Mathew Mitchell	Prachatic, Bohemia	1835-1926	91	Company B, 24th Illinois Infantry	26	Private	
Frank Schultz	Turkovic, Bohemia	1844-1917	73	Company C, 58th Illinois Infantry	20	Sergeant	
Frank Smola	Rychnov Nad Knezouu	1843-1903	60	Company B, 24th Illinois Infantry	18	Private	Saddle Maker
Frank Stejskal	Tabor, Bohemia	1841-1932	90	82nd Illinois Infantry	21	Private	Banking
John Talafous	Bohemia	1833-1889	56	Company F, 24th Illinois Infantry	28	Private	Blacksmith
John Tomek	Bohemia	1826-1882	56	Company F, 19th Illinois Infantry	25	Private	Tailor
Alois Uher	Kutna Hora, Bohemia	1843-1883	40	Company F, 24th Illinois Infantry	18	First Sgt.	Hardware
Martin Vranek	Bohemia	1845-1918	73	Company C, 113th Illinois Infantry	17	Private	
Albert Waska	Svihov, Bohemia	1840-1878	38	Company B, 31st Massachusetts Infantry	22	Private	Saloon Owner

Civil War Vets	Buried in	Marker Type
John Fishman	Lot 116, Section 16.	Military marker.
Michael Hejduk	Lot 3, Block 6, Section B.	Military marker.
James Hlavin	Lot 7, Block 1, Section G.	
Frank Hrdlicka	Lot 8, Block 2, Section D.	Civilian marker.
Prokop Hudek	Lot 8, Block 4, Section M.	Military marker.
Jacob Kakuska	Lot 14, Block 5, Section S.	Military marker.
William Kaspar	Lot 1, Section 14	Family mausoleum.
Jakub Kristufek	Lot 13, Block 4, Section T.	
Anton Macal	Lot 59 Section 12.	Civilian marker.
Mathew Mitchell	Lot 9 Block 2 Section K.	Civilian marker.
Frank Schultz	Lot 9, Section 15.	Military marker.
Frank Smola	Lot 19, Block 1, Section W.	Military marker.
Frank Stejskal	Lot 5, Block 1, Section V.	Military marker.
John Talafous	Lot 14, Block 1, Section G.	
John Tomek	Lot 17, Block 2, Section K.	Civilian marker.
Alois Uher	Lot 14, Block 2, Section K.	Civilian marker.
Martin Vranek	Lot 36, Block 1, Section Z.	Civilian marker.
Albert Waska	Lot 1, Block 1, Section K.	Military marker.





Restoration Project Update

Each year, Friends of BNC selects a project involving fundraising and the selection of a historic preservation contractor skilled in the work and craftsmanship necessary to restore the chosen monument, building, or connected outdoor item. These projects are funded by generous donations from our membership and other contributors such as Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Recent renovations to both the 1892 Civil War Monument as well as the World War I-II Memorial are examples. In 2025 and after approval from BNCA, work was started on repairing six limestone posts, rounded capstones, and several iron panels immediately in front of and to the side of the historic gatehouse entrance.

As you can see from pictures, the limestone posts developed extensive cracking and fracturing. The sidewalk curb had separated and revealed linear cracking. Some iron panels had rusted and their connection broke loose from the supporting limestone posts.

At this point, six iron panels have been re-

moved and new ones are being fabricated. Special masonry material was used to repair broken sections and fill in cracks. The posts have been cleaned and protected with sealant. Professional grade caulking is being used at the curb separation joints. The project should be completed by winter.

Our next project for 2026 involves assessing the long stretch of north-south fencing along Pulaski Road. The iron panel fencing and posts are deteriorated, rusted, and partially collapsed. Decades of Chicago's extreme weather and especially the splashing of salt on the fencing from cars, trucks and buses passing along Pulaski Road contributed to its deterioration. It is of particular concern to individuals walking or driving along the road as it gives an over-all run-down first impression of the cemetery. To repair and replace the fencing is a long term and expensive proposition requiring thoughtful planning on the part of the cemetery board and Friends of BNC.

A letter will be sent to Friends' members concerning the project and information will soon be available on our website.



Live from BNC



Friends of BNC was busy this fall hosting a number of groups who journeyed from distant places to view our cemetery. Led by Chuck Betzold and Chuck Michalek, the groups came from Prague, Oregon and Nebraska. In early September, Prague Mayor Bohuslav Svoboda came to BNC to honor former Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak, who was born in Bohemia. Mayor Svoboda was joined by several dignitaries from Prague including representatives of the Departments of International Relations and Emergency Management and Flood Protection. The dignitaries were accompanied by Joseph Vosicky and Nina Goad from the Sister Cities program and all acknowledged BNC's historical and cultural significance. (See photo above.)



Prague Mayor Bohuslav Svoboda with Chuck Michalek



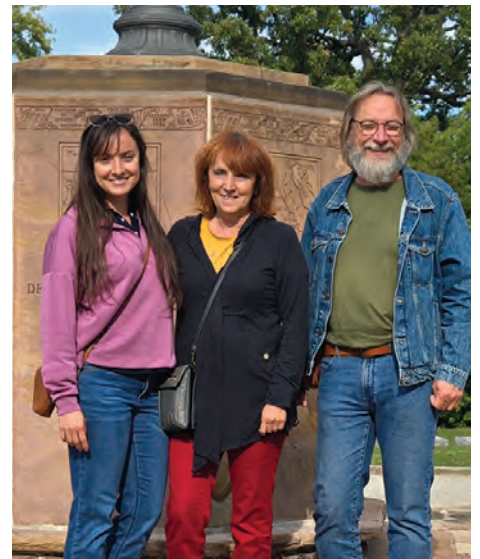
Also in September, a large group from Nebraska (pictured above) came by bus to Chicago and requested a tour of BNC. They were members of the Czech Culture and Education Foundation of Nebraska and were impressed by the many old, impressive gravestones and monuments throughout the cemetery. They especially appreciated the Columbarium building with its collection of glass niches revealing the pictures and artifacts within each niche.



Chuck Betzold and Andy Partak

Visiting from Portland was a small group representing "Uprooted", a media organization promoting multi-cultural awareness. The president of the group, Deah Partak has Slovakian roots and was interested in visiting the gravesites and doing research on Peter Rovnianek (1867-1933) a successful Slovakian entrepreneur known as the "first Slovak millionaire". They were joined by Andy Partak, a member of Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Andy is a Grave Registration Officer for the Illinois Department of Grave Registration who was researching civil war veteran burial sites. He met with Chuck Betzold who mapped BNC's Civil War veteran burial sites for Andy. (See photos to the left.)

BNC was also visited by TGM teacher Kristýna Horáčková with her parents (pictured below) who were visiting from Prague. Kristýna, along with other teachers from TGM Czech School in Cicero and their students, frequently participates in BNC activities including BNC's recent Memorial Day service.



Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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www.friendsofbnc.org



Heritage Happenings Fall 2025

Renew Your Friends of BNC Membership Today

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 to:

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery - Membership
5255 N. Pulaski Rd., Chicago, Illinois 60630-1775

Or, renew online with a credit card at our secure website: <https://friendsofbnc.org>.

*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 send a separate check with a notation on the memo line. Thank you.*

Membership Renewal

Name _____

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City _____

State _____ Zip Code (+ 4) _____

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Phone Number _____

Type of Membership _____