

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Winter Issue - Vol. XXII No. 3

February 2026

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.

In this issue:

Reflections from BNC.....	Page 1
Observations from the Editor.....	Page 2
Welcome New Members.....	Page 2
The Roundhouse.....	Page 3
Thank You, Donors.....	Page 4
Christmas Luncheon.....	Page 5
Flags Installed.....	Page 5
Researcher Visits BNC.....	Page 6
Fence Project.....	Page 6
Columbarium Restoration.....	Page 6
Spring Membership Meeting.....	Page 7
Membership Renewal Form.....	Page 8

Reflections from BNC

If you stroll through BNC on a cold winter day, you'll notice the expected contrast between winter's landscape and summer's showcase of colorful flowers, green foliage and interesting wildlife. What stands out during winter are the stark and solemn rows of lonely looking tombstones and burial monuments. They are the markers locating the resting place of over 100,000 individuals who had roots grounded in the Czechoslovak culture.

For many, BNC's ethnic heritage is largely evidenced by the omnipresent and sometimes unpronounceable Czech names on these burial markers. Once I heard someone mention there are probably more Czech names on BNC's gravestones than in Prague's metro phone book.

Stopping to gaze at one of the impressive markers, one can only wonder who that person was; what they did; and how they left their mark in life. If you view past editions of this newsletter available on our website, you will see a regular feature called "Stories of the Stones" authored by our former newsletter editor Carol Jean Smetana. Carol's wide-ranging interest in genealogy and research brought to life many of the individuals and families interred at BNC. It would be well worth your time to look at some of these past editions and discover some of the interesting stories and backgrounds of individuals buried at BNC.

In this edition, Chuck Betzold, one of the board members at Friends and long time volunteer begins sharing stories of some of the lesser known buildings and features at BNC. Are you aware of BNC's former bridge across the Chicago River; or the former greenhouse complex; or the old hay fields that grew food for the network of work horses; or how the still standing landmark water tower brought water throughout the cemetery? Check out his article on "the round house" on page 3. See if you can locate it the next time you visit BNC.

Sharing stories about BNC's past and



present is what Friends does in addition to working to preserve BNC's buildings and heritage. On March 22, we invite all to attend our Spring membership meeting to hear more updates. Our featured speaker will be Mario Machnicki, President and Owner of Marion Restoration. Mario is one of the country's leading experts on masonry preservation. Marion Restoration worked on of BNC's Columbarium building and several military monuments (see page 6). The meeting's \$40 cost includes a delicious meal at Grand Duke's Restaurant (formerly Bohemian Garden) in Downers Grove. Registration details are on page 7 of this newsletter. If you have questions, please feel free to email me at: michalekchas@aol.com.

Looking forward to greeting you on March 22.

*Chuck Michalek
President*

Heritage Happenings

Heritage Happenings is published quarterly by Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

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

Cynthia Hall at
editor@friendsofbnc.org

Copyright 2025 by Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery.

Friends of BNC Officers

President

Chuck Michalek

Vice President

Juli Nelson

Secretary

Monica Pechous

Treasurer

Linda Burton

Directors

Chuck Betzold
Marge Sladek Stueckemann
Jim Trnka

Fundraising Co-Chair

Joseph Topinka

Membership

Ellen Pomes

Newsletter Editor

Cynthia M. Hall

Publicity

Jenny Llakmani

Sales/Marketing

Juli Nelson

Projects Co-Chair

Chuck Michalek

Webmaster

Open

Observations from the Editor

A friend of mine has received numerous awards and accolades over the span of her lifetime. She has served many organizations over the years but does not do it for the recognition. So, she stores the plaques, certificates and trophies she receives in her closet without any fanfare. She saves them only so her children can remember her service to the community when she passes. She is sure they will be surprised to find them!

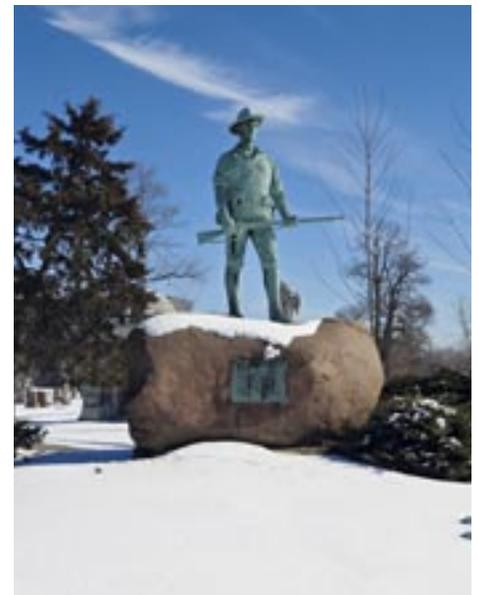
Friends of BNC is doing so much to preserve the legacy of those who have gone before us. Preserving the gravestones and niche hallways helps maintain the memory of those who have passed and may someday be a surprise someone's family member will uncover about their loved one.

Linda Ellis' poem, "The Dash" reflects on the significance of the dash between a person's birth and death dates on a tombstone as the time spent living on earth. She encourages readers to make the most of their own "dash" by focusing on what matters and making changes needed to make a difference.

Friends of BNC provides an opportunity for service to the community. Consider volunteering if your schedule allows or donating if your budget permits. If you are in the Chicagoland area, join us for the Spring Membership Meeting featuring a family style Czech dinner and interesting presentation. (See details on page 7.)

Bohemian National Cemetery is filled with "dashes" that represent so much more than a simple punctuation mark that indicates a break in thought or a pause. What will your dash represent?

Cynthia M. Hall



Welcome to Our New Members

Lisa Smisek
Dyer, Indiana

James Zeman
Broomfield, Colorado

Jamila Zemla
LaGrange, Illinois

Timothy Hadac
Chicago, Illinois

Nancy Purcell
Chicago, Illinois

Behind the Scenes at Bohemian National Cemetery: Today's feature – “The Roundhouse”

Most urban burial grounds like Bohemian National Cemetery feature a trio of buildings on their property. Namely a cemetery office, a chapel, and a maintenance garage. Bohemian National Cemetery has all of those and much, much more.

Observant visitors to BNC have probably wondered about the octagonal roofed building, tucked away adjacent to our cemetery pond. It's unique to BNC and it's called “The Roundhouse” due to its somewhat circular shape.

The “Roundhouse” is a one story, brick structure built during the early years of the 1900s. It provided a space for seasonal workers to change into their work clothes. The interior is a simple open space, with coat hooks lining the perimeter walls of the single room. A basement below the structure held a sink for workers to clean up at the end of the day.

Cemetery lore alludes to a stove in the middle of the floor of “The Roundhouse”, supposedly used in winter months for cemetery visitors to warm themselves after visiting a grave.

Before the advent of motorized vehicles, most cemetery chores were done by hand. During those early years at the cemetery the outdoor workload would have been labor intensive and time consuming, much like the work done on nearby farmland. Seasonal workers would have been digging graves by hand, moving soil by horse and wagon, mowing grass with push mowers, planting grass in the spring and gathering leaves in the fall. They also tended the elaborate floral arrangements on graves, which were a very popular cemetery custom years ago.

Czech-speaking seasonal workers were recruited from the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. To avoid a daily 24-mile roundtrip commute, they would have lived in tents on the grounds of the cemetery from spring until fall. Most outdoor work came to a halt in the winter months when the ground was frozen and burials had to wait until the spring thaw.

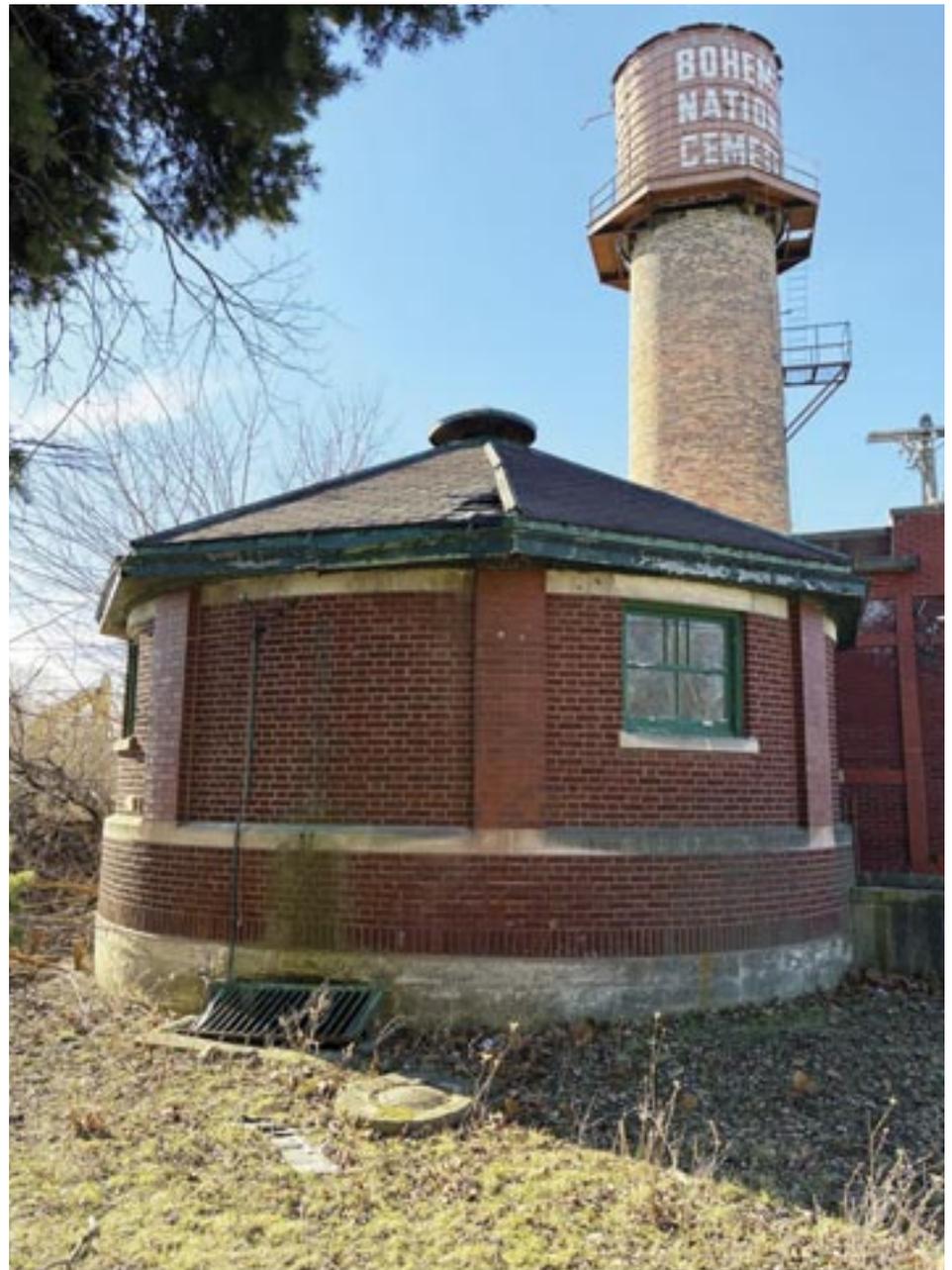
Today the grounds at BNC are maintained by an outside landscaping contractor and by Friends of BNC volunteers. Grave digging and cremations are handled by a paid staff of four year-round employees.

“The Roundhouse” now serves no function but to store a variety of cemetery oddities; a mini warehouse for odds and ends that have accumulated over time.

If you entered “The Roundhouse” today

you would find an old canoe, once used to inspect the nearby pond. There would be a pile of no-longer used metal (tin) covers from the body storage shelving in the crematorium/columbarium building's morgue. In addition, there are some old and broken marble crypt covers from the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum.

Chuck Betzold



The Roundhouse™ as it looks today

Děkuji vám! - Thank you!

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

Anonymous
Carol Krauser
Marlene M. Murray (Estate of)
Randy and Kristin Novotny
- In Honor of Anna Kastal Novotny
CSA Lodge DuPage Pioneers No. 409



Patrons (\$500-\$999)

Joanne E. Herber
Daniel Jares
John D. Purdy
- In Memory of Walter and Edith Vesely
Glenn Spachman
Brad Suster and Hector Hernandez
Thomas J. Ruzicka
- In Honor of Joseph Ruzicka Family
Patricia Volkman
- In Honor of Robert, Anne, and Linda Kostuba

Sponsors (\$100-\$499)

Janet Loucky Allen
American Wilbur Vault Inc.
Larry Arroy
- For Helen Anton and the Eastland
Becvar and Son Funeral Home
Edward Avis
- In Honor of Brabec Family
Donna Brehovsky
- In Honor of Joseph V. Brehovsky
Angeline Bultas
Linda Dvorak Cabanban
- In Honor of Jon Vincent Dvorak
Dennis Cermak
- In Honor of Cermak, Kroupa, Cerveny, Cervenka, and Flemr Families
Marilyn Cerny
- In Honor of Elmer Cerny
Elaine Collina
- In Honor of Heony and Polacek Families
Richard and Marilee Davies
Jack and Georgina Dortch
- In Honor of Michael Dortch
George Drost
Edith Folta
Susan Golland
- In Honor of George and Libby Krtouš
Marilyn W. John
- In Honor of My Czech Relatives
Zubair Khan
- In Honor of My Mother Jameel Sultana
Edward Kletecka
- In Honor of Kletecka and Vorel Families
Elisa Kletecka
- In Honor of Vorel and Kletecka Families
John Kurinsky
James P. Laska
- In Honor of James and Anna Laska
Jenny and Anton LLakmani
Nancy Leginski
Katherine Mallin
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Malin
Carol May
Jim and Char Michalek
- In Honor of Parents and Brother Chuck
Rudy and Chris Michalek
- In Honor of Laddie Michalek
Julie Nelson
Dolores Niewinski
John Persic
- In Honor of "Bily" Family
Ingrid Peternel
- In Honor of Macich Family
James Prihoda
Ken W. Quick
Pam Kuda Quinn
- In Honor of Frantisek and Katerina Kuda
Carol Ralsar
Linda Roaks
Bill and Ruth Rosol
Carl Schaefer
- In Honor of Benda and Chodur Families
Mrs. Charlotte Sirovy
Sonia Skubal
- In Honor of Julie "Lily" Skubalova, Vozena Zelemkova
Janet A. Smart
- In Honor of Gladys and Susan Zajicek
Sokol Chicagoland
Lois Habada Sterba
- In Honor of the Habada Family
Joseph Stoklasa
Cheryl Svoboda
- In Memory of My Mother Charlotte Svoboda and Our Friend Lillian Nemeck
Sylvia Sykora
- In Honor of Anton and Josefa Sykora
Maryellyn Visek Szwed
- In Honor of Visek Family
Kenneth Teska
- In Honor of Thomas E. Teska
Thomas Vana
- In Honor of Alois Vana
David J. Varnerin
Joseph Vosicky
- In Honor of Elizabeth Raleigh
Robert and Rae Weniger
- In Honor of Rudy and Marie Betzold
CSA Lodge Yankee Jungmann No. 77

Donors (\$25-\$99)

Dolores Benes Duy
In Honor of My Grandparents
Janet Cundiff
- In Honor of Lillian Prazak
Jo-Ellen Douglas
Veronica Foss
- In Honor of My Grandfather Otto, BNCA Delegate
Veronica Frost
Evelyn Funda
- In Honor of Carol Smetana Who Introduced Me to the Interesting History of this Cemetery
William and Crystal Kerins
Phillip and Janet Kralovec
- In Honor of Charles Vopicka and Jim Kralovec
Chris LaRocco
- In Honor of Frank and Marie Malina
Annalyn May
Diane Minarik and Gary Lilly
Sikorsky Family Fund
Janet A. Smart
Bonnie Svoboda
- In Honor of My Svoboda Grandparents
Grace Vaotina

Thank You (\$1-\$24)

Arlene L. Gaidis
Kenneth Teska

This list reflects donations received through February 1, 2026.

Christmas Luncheon



Friends of BNC provided BNCA staff and volunteers a Christmas Luncheon on December 18, 2025.

Flags Installed



BNC volunteers Chuck Betzold and Nef Morales are pictured installing new flags at the WWI-II Memorial flag pole.



Chicago's harsh weather and strong winds provide on-going necessity for flag replacement.

Researcher Fascinated by Niche Hallways at Visit to BNC

The historic Bohemian National Cemetery continues to be a popular attraction for visitors and researchers from the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.

In November, Friends of BNC and Bohemian Lawyers Association member Joe Seliga arranged a visit and tour of BNC for Adam Bartalsky. Adam is a PhD student at St. Cyril and Methodius University in Tyrava, Slovakia and is interning at the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Currently, he is conducting research on the presentation and interpretation of human remains at museums and was most fascinated to view the impressive niche hallways in BNC's Columbarium.

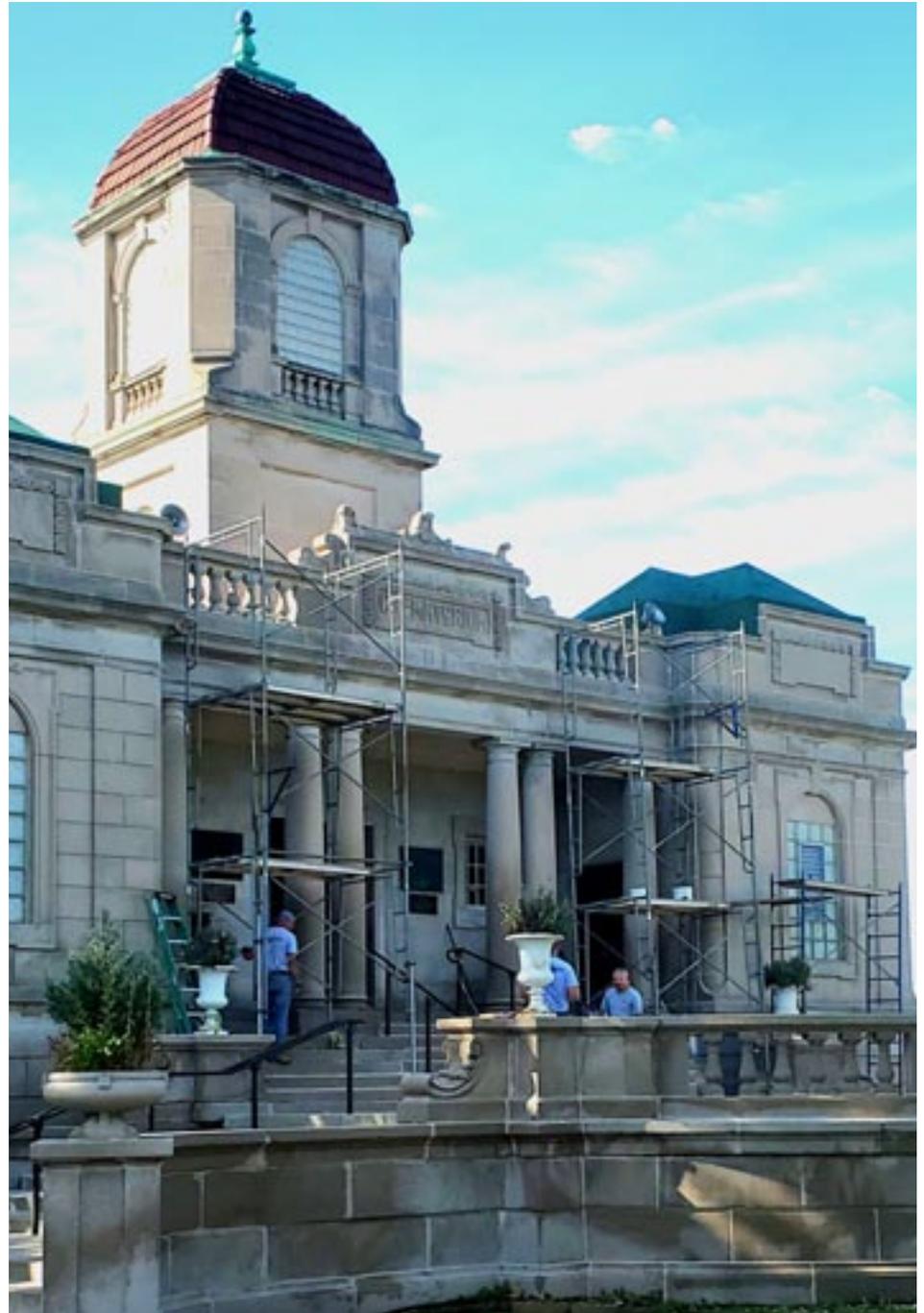


Fence Project

Recently, Friends sent out a letter to members requesting support for our 2026 restoration project dealing with the deteriorated condition of fence panels along Pulaski Road. We are encouraged by the interest and support received to date.

During the coming months, several contractors will provide recommendations. Information on this project can be found on our website, www.friendsofbnc.org, and in future newsletters.

Columbarium Restoration



Marion Restoration working on masonry repairs to front of Columbarium building in 2021. These repair are funded by Friends of BNC's ongoing Columbarium Restoration Project.

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

invites you to join us for our

Spring Membership Meeting

Sunday, March 22, 2026
12:30 pm

Grand Duke's Restaurant
980 W. 75th Street
Downers Grove, Illinois



Featuring a presentation by Mario Machnicki, President of Marion Restoration, the Midwest's foremost firm dedicated to the meticulous restoration and conservation of architectural details, including the restoration work on BNC's crematorium/columbarium building, World Wars I and II Memorial, and Civil War Veterans Monument

*Also a family-style
Czech dinner and
updates on Friends
projects at the cemetery*



\$40 per person includes dinner, tax, and gratuity
paid reservations are required:

by check payable to **FRIENDS of BNC**
postmarked by March 14 and mailed to
FRIENDS of BNC, 5255 N. Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60630

or by credit card by March 19 at the store on the **FRIENDS of BNC** website
www.friendsofbnc.org

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

5255 N. Pulaski Rd.
Chicago, Illinois 60630-1701

info@friendsofbnc.org
www.friendsofbnc.org



Heritage Happenings Winter 2026

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 _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code (+ 4) _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Type of Membership _____