

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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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

As president of Friends of BNC, I frequently have opportunities to welcome visitors from the Czech and Slovak Republic. It's encouraging to witness the enthusiasm and interest these visitors experience upon seeing the ethnic history and heritage on display at BNC. Historical records and pictures along with buildings named after Masaryk, Benes, or Stefanik as well as monuments dedicated to Czechoslovakian veterans who served the U.S. or even seeing the family mausoleum of Chicago's Bohemian Mayor Anton Cermak all help generate interest.

Two such recent visitors from the Czech Republic were Czech Diplomat Jaroslav Olša, Jr. and professional photographer Hynek Adamek. You can read about their interest in visiting BNC on page 4.

Many thanks to our Board and volunteers and all our organization's members who attended the successful Friends of BNC lunch meeting at the Grand Duke Restaurant. Our newsletter editor Cynthia Hall was in attendance with her husband and photographed the luncheon. Check out

her pictures on page 2 of the event which featured a presentation by Mario Machnicki, the masonry preservation contractor who worked for several years on BNC's Columbarium and several military monuments.

Be sure to mark your calendar for two important events in April and May. We will again have a walking tour of BNC on April 26 and continue the tradition of hosting a Memorial Day celebration on May 20 starting at 9:00 a.m. See details on page 6.

Finally, 2027 marks the 150th year of BNC's existence. The BNCA Board of Directors along with Friends of BNC is in discussion about the possibility of celebrating the occasion. Watch for further news. In fact, if you have a connection to BNC and have ideas about how we could honor this anniversary, feel free to send me your ideas.

Happy Spring.

Chuck Michalek
Friends of BNC
President
michalekchas@aol.com



Chuck Michalek (right) with diplomat Jaroslav Olša, Jr. (center) and photographer Hynek Adamek (left) viewing historical records in BNCA Board Room

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:

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Annual Luncheon Features Speaker from Marion Restoration

Friends of BNC recently held their annual meet and greet luncheon at Grand Duke's Restaurant in Downers Grove. Attendees enjoyed a delicious Bohemian-style lunch followed by a talk and slide show presentation by Mario Machnicki, President of Marion Restoration. Mario is a noted expert on historic building masonry restoration and is the contractor selected to work on the exterior wall preservation for the multi-year Columbarium Restoration project funded by Friends of BNC. His restoration company worked on recent BNC projects - restoring the Civil War Monument and WWI-II Memorial.



Pictured with Chuck Michalek are Rosemary Wisnowski, Emeritus Honorary Council for Slovak Republic (left) and Marge Sladek Stueckemann, former President of Friends of BNC (center).



Presentation by Mario Machnicki, President of Marion Restoration, Inc.



Among over 45 attendees enjoying the event were (left to right) Cindy Bueneman, Ken Dvorsky, Mary Ellen Janda, Mario Machnicki and Chuck Michalek

Welcome to Our New Members

Lenore Becker
 Watervliet, Michigan

Sandra Brown Family
 Winfield, Illinois

Michael E. Condon
 Chicago, Illinois

Carol J. Gago-Paustian
 Walcott, Iowa

Cynthia Hall
 Rockton, Illinois

Lynette Kleisner
 Downers Grove, Illinois

Vivian Schaefer
 Naperville, Illinois

Today's feature – “The Bohemian Sharpshooters”

Urban workers of America were beginning to flex their political muscle during the decade of the 1870s. Small groups of Chicago immigrants formed armed self-defense clubs to protect themselves during confrontations with the local police and military troops. The workers were tired of having their lawful meeting places disrupted by the authorities; as well as being physically intimidated at the polls or at social gatherings.

Each of these groups drilled with rifles, pistols, sabers, and bayonets. They held shooting contests and mock battles. They provided security at their respective ethnic picnics and sponsored events.

One such group was the Bohemian Sharpshooters, organized in 1874 and first known as Company C, Third Regiment.

During the Great Railroad Strike and Riot of 1877 (the United States' first nationwide strike), scores of workers were injured and killed during blood-soaked confrontations between police and enraged mobs. Most of the action occurred at the Halsted Street viaduct, at nearby 16th Street, at Halsted and 12th, and on Canal Street. During these riots, the Bohemian Sharpshooters were stripped of their armament by local authorities. When things quieted down, the guns were returned and the Sharpshooters were permitted to drill and assemble as before.

But by 1879, the Bohemian Sharpshooters found themselves in the middle of the impending militia law controversy, scheduled to go into effect on July 1. The State of Illinois enacted a law barring all armed militia groups from drilling or parading together without a permit. In addition, a new state militia was created and designated as the Illinois National Guard, the only militia authorized to arm themselves and assemble in public.

On June 22, the Sharpshooters' services were requested by the organizers of the St. Wenceslaus school picnic. School authorities had attempted to obtain police protection for the event but were turned down. Hence, the involvement of the Sharpshooters that day.

The picnic was to be held at Silver Leaf Grove, a popular picnic/beer garden/shooting competition area. Today it's hard to imagine a combination of beer, guns, and school children but such was the case in Chicago during the summer of 1879.

On the day of the picnic, a volunteer company of Sharpshooters was assembled to escort civilians from the school to the picnic grove and to guard the gates. The company was led by Captain Prokop Hudek. Second in command was First Lieutenant Ladweic. The Sharpshooters were armed that day with old Springfield muskets and five homemade cartridges apiece. Each cartridge contained nine buckshot. Each man also carried a bayonet.

Silver Leaf Grove was located at Ogden and Western Avenues. The grove was patronized by

various socialistic organizations at the time. Almost every picnic there was plagued by a rough crowd of thugs who would attempt to enter the picnic grounds without paying admission. These intruders not only picked pockets but picked fights and disrupted the ethnic groups assembled there.

Sunday, June 22, was no different than any other Sunday at Silver Leaf Grove. By mid-day, groups of drunken outsiders were already causing trouble. Captain Hudek of the Sharpshooters had taken ill after arriving at the picnic grove and left early to go home to rest. First Lieutenant Ladweic was left in charge.

Versions of what happened next would vary. One initial report claims that during a dance on the grounds, a fight broke out between one of the Sharpshooters and an uninvited civilian named Volney Clark. Clark was severely beaten and escorted off the property. The crowd outside the gates was sympathetic to Clark. They responded with violence. Some said that only sticks and stones were thrown back into the enclosed grounds. Others reported revolvers were fired toward the picnic goers and Sharpshooters. Lieutenant Ladweic ordered his men to load their guns and fix bayonets, in an attempt to move the gathering crowd away from the grounds. He ordered 12 men to quickly assemble outside the grounds to push the crowd back. More stone throwing ensued.

The Sharpshooters rushed the crowd, using their bayonets and eventually firing their muskets. The gang of thugs responded by retreated with their wounded. The Sharpshooters were then ordered to stack their weapons, so as to not incite further violence when the police arrived.

Here again the story varies at each turning point. Some said that Lt. Ladweic gave the order to fire on the crowd. Ladweic said that he never gave that order. He claimed he merely meant to intimidate the crowd by charging toward them. Some said that a single volley of musket fire was heard. Others claim that shots were fired irreg-

ularly. There was even testimony that the Sharpshooters had fired, reloaded, and fired again.

Six civilians were wounded by gunfire. It was initially thought that one or two of the seriously wounded would probably die. Others received lesser wounds from bayonets or by saber. None of the Sharpshooters were even scratched.

Two squads of police arrived shortly after the incident as the Sharpshooters willingly surrendered. They were arrested and formed into a marching group, heading off to the Madison Street police station, carrying the American flag the entire route. A crowd of 2,000 excited citizens followed the procession of both the Sharpshooters and the rioters who were also arrested. In a twist of irony, the police were now protecting the defenseless Sharpshooters from harm.

The youngest of the Sharpshooters was 17-year-old John Raichart. He signed his name to a Sharpshooter group photo that was eventually enlarged, and now hangs in the office building at Bohemian National Cemetery.

Sixteen of the 19 Bohemian Sharpshooters who were involved in the picnic incident were released after spending only a few days in custody. Three of their highest-ranking members were held but were able to make bail. They had to await a final judgement, dependent on the health of one of the civilians who was recovering from gunshot wounds.

Apparently, that civilian survived. There were no further newspaper accounts lamenting the incident. The public's interest in the Silver Grove Picnic shooting had peaked for about a week and then faded.

Shortly thereafter, by law, all ethnic militia groups in Illinois were required to lay down their arms as of July 1, 1879. The Bohemian Sharpshooters continued to exist as an organization, frequently marching in events like the Memorial Day celebrations at Bohemian National Cemetery, but without weapons. Their organization eventually dissolved as the American “melting pot” marched into the 20th Century.

Chuck Betzold



Sharpshooter - one of many historic pictures located in BNCA Office

Czech Diplomat Plans to Write About BNC

Among the recent out of town visitors to BNC was Jaroslav Olša, Jr., (right) who has served as a Czech diplomat for more than three decades. He previously served as Czech Republic's Ambassador to Zimbabwe, South Korea, the Philippines, and most recently served in Los Angeles as Consul General for the US West Coast Region. Jaroslav currently serves in the Office of the Special Envoy for Czech Expatriate Community and Expatriate Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Additionally, he is the author of numerous books on Czech American history and has authored a number of books involving science fiction.

Accompanying him at BNC was Hynek Adam, a professional photographer with connections to *National Geographic Cesko Magazine*. Together they visited BNC to conduct research in preparation for a forthcoming article on preserving Czech American heritage. Their interest in visiting and writing about BNC resulted from widespread recognition of BNC's pivotal role as a foundational activity that helped unify local Czechoslovak population and organizations for over a century.



Děkuji vám! - Thank you!

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

CSA Athletic Division No. 12
Dorothy Batka
- In Honor of Hynek J. Batka
Marge Sladek Stueckeman

- In Honor of Evelyn Fergle and Helen Gaydusek
John Taska
- In Memory of Rudolph and Bessie Klas

Patrons (\$500-\$999)

Paul Lawrisuk
Leandwere Doron Sakellaris

Sponsors (\$100-\$499)

CSA Lodge Harrison/Hus/Garfield No. 378
CSA Lodge Yankee/Jungmann No. 77
John Doolittle & Ellen Baker
- In Honor of Virginia Lesak Jakoubek

Mary Lachiewicz
Paul Machalek
- In Honor of Vladmir & Vera Machalek
Sara R. Martinek
Charles Walton



Elizabeth Raleigh
Joseph Vosicky
Rosemary Macko Wisnoski
Bhupen D. Mody
- In Memory of Rekha Bhupen Mody

Donors (\$25-\$99)

Laddie and Janice Polz
Meribeth and John Tooke
- In Honor of BNC Families of Nepil, Kuchar, Kovar, Florian and Fisher

Thank You (\$1-\$24)

Allen and Diane Kuntz

This list reflects donations received through April 1, 2026.

Live from BNC - "Call of the Wild"

Late winter and spring brought an abundance of winds and rain to the cemetery. Once again the "lumberjack" volunteers sprung into action to deal with ongoing challenge of fallen trees and branches that littered the landscape. Thanks to volunteers Chuck Betzold, Carl Brader, Bill Serviss, and Bob Weniger for their return to the "call of the wild" after a winter layoff. A special ongoing thanks to Tommy and his crew at Save-a-Tree landscaping service that assists with cutting and removing the larger trees. Thanks also to David Pimm Jr. and his crew for their help in removing larger trees.

Once again, our ace volunteer mechanic Nef Morales, along with assistance from Chuck Michalek, was at work during the

winter repairing and replacing various parts on BNC's diesel machines. Also, much appreciation goes to Bob Shaw for his many contributions in donating equipment and parts.

The winter snow and accompanying freeze overloaded gutters at the main office building causing a large section of gutters, soffit and fascia to fall. Our thanks to Mitch Dardon at Dardon Exteriors, Inc. who helped with repairs.

BNC can always use volunteers to assist with various projects. If interested or if you would like information contact us at: info@friendsofbnc.org



Volunteer lumberjacks Bill, Chuck, Carl, and Bob are taking a much deserved rest after cutting up one of several large fallen tree following a recent wind storm.



Bohemian National Cemetery Association and *Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery*

invite you to join us at the cemetery on Memorial Day to honor the men and women who gave their lives in service to our country



Memorial Day Service

Monday, May 25, 2026

5255 N. Pulaski Rd., Chicago, Illinois

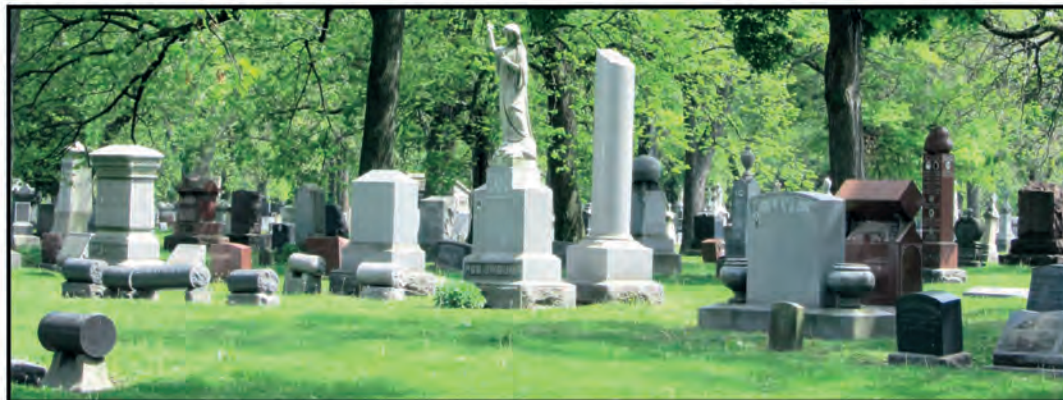
- | | |
|------|--|
| 9:00 | Assemble at the gatehouse at the cemetery's main entrance |
| 9:15 | Flag raising ceremony at the World Wars I and II Memorial |
| 9:30 | Service in Ceremony Hall in the crematorium/columbarium building |

followed by refreshments in the gatehouse
and a walking tour of BNC's military monuments led by
Chuck Betzold, United States Air Force veteran and BNCA trustee

**Bohemian National Cemetery -- 149 years of dedicated service
Listed on the National Register of Historic Places**

773-539-8442

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery *Spring Tours of the Tombstones*



When: Sunday, April 26, 2026
11:00 am and 2:00 pm

Where: Bohemian National Cemetery
5255 N. Pulaski Road, Chicago

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

Each tour is limited to 30 participants.
so reservations are recommended.

You may pay by credit card
in advance at friendsofbnc.org.

You may pay by cash or check at
the gatehouse on tour day.

Please arrive 15 minutes before
tour starting time.

Walking tours are led by an experienced guide and cemetery historian.
They leave from the 1893 gatehouse, the main entrance to the cemetery.
Refreshments are provided there before and after the tours.



www.friendsofbnc.org

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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

info@friendsofbnc.org
www.friendsofbnc.org



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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	_____