Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Fall Issue - Vol. XXII No. 5 | September 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.

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Reflections from BNC

During a recent nighttime drive along BNC's Foster Avenue border, I unexpectedly witnessed a strange eerie glow emanating from the roadside gravesites. It took a moment to realize this strange glow was the result of numerous solar-powered plastic decorations amidst the silhouetted gravestones and monuments. Like them or not, the use of low-cost and low-maintenance plastic flowers and decorations is resulting in significant changes to how people choose to decorate the graves of their loved ones.

Changes like this can be difficult for those of us who remember BNC's artistic floral decorations and the opportunity to purchase live flowers grown in BNC's complex of greenhouses along Pulaski Road. In these modern times, changes are inevitable - even in our cemeteries. (See photo below of florals representing the Czechoslovakian Freedom and Independence Testimonial and others on the back page.)

Next year, BNC will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Friends of BNC and BNCA are planning to celebrate this milestone with a special banquet that will include reflections on BNC's early days and noteworthy changes over the years. Mark your calendar for April 11, 2027 and plan to attend. Registration information will be forthcoming.

A sad change earlier this year was the passing of Glenn Spachman. Glenn was a former treasurer for Friends of BNC and also a delegate to Bohemian National Cemetery Association from CSA Lodge Woodrow Wilson. Our condolences to Glenn's family.

This August, many of our members were informed via public media coverage of an investigation being conducted by the Illinois State Comptroller into BNCA's crematory practices. The cemetery has been cooperating with the investigation which was precipitated by the need for equipment repairs. Those repairs are underway and when completed, cremations at BNC will resume. Burials and visiting hours have not been affected and remain unchanged. In light of media comments about this investigation, I want to emphasize that Friends of BNC is a separate 501(c)(3) organization and not involved with BNCA's cemetery operations and business practices. Friends is continuing with its mission to promote the historical significance, enhance the beauty, and preserve the artistic heritage of Bohemian National Cemetery.

Friends will again offer a Fall walking tour as noted in the flyer on page 7. Join us to view BNC's historic grounds and autumn colors.

Finally, we want to offer ongoing thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic that again provided us with a grant to help support our ongoing projects.

Chuck Michalek
Friends of BNC
President
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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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Wild Weather at BNC this Spring and Summer

Our beautiful cemetery looks very green at this time of year. Thanks to a wet spring and summer, the trees, shrubs, and grasses have never looked better.

With those seasonal rains, came a higher than normal number of strong thunderstorms, with high winds causing significant tree damage.

About a dozen large trees were either uprooted or snapped in half. But not to worry, our volunteer lumberjacks have been busy all spring, cutting up the fallen trunks, limbs, and branches in each section. As a result, you may see piles of tree debris alongside the cemetery roads as well as in the middle of larger sections. That debris will be removed by heavy equipment throughout the summer and fall.

Joining us this year is a new volunteer, Chris Losavio. As our first "LumberJill", she has been a big help, assisting with the recent storm cleanup in late June.

Fallen Catalpa Tree in Section 11

Volunteers Bob, Chris and Carl taking break from tree cutting

Czech Heritage Week in Chicago

Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago

The Consulate General Office of the Czech Republic in Chicago is again organizing Czech Heritage this September. For information, visit mzv.gov.cz/Chicago.

As part of the Czech Heritage celebration, Friends of BNC is offering tour opportunities of the cemetery starting at the gatehouse during the morning of September 22.

All are welcome to join us!

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Welcome to Our New Members

Vivian Schaefer
Naperville, Illinois

Steve Sonberg
Chicago, Illinois

BNC Memorial Day Service: Past and Present

Warm weather and a clear blue sky welcomed BNC's 2026 Memorial Day service, continuing a tradition dating back to the 1892 dedication of the Bohemian Civil War Veterans Monument, an event attended by thousands. In 1913, the Czech newspaper Denni Hlasatel reported:

Throngs of people eager to get on to their destinations boarded the street cars bound for our cemeteries. The line going to the Cesky Narodni Hrbitov (Bohemian National Cemetery) was particularly crowded….The parade started at West 18th and May Streets. Brousek's Military Band led the group which marched through the streets of our Pilsen district to Robey Street, where cars were waiting to take the marchers to the Ceska Utulna A Sirotcinec (Bohemian Old People's Home and Orphanage)…..

At the Utulna the parade reassembled… While Brousek's Band played funeral marches, the parade resumed its march to the Cemetery… headed by Mayor Carter Harrison.

……After the wreaths and other floral offerings had been placed at the Civil War Veterans Monument, a three shot salvo was fired to honor fallen Bohemian soldiers… Mayor Harrison started his speech by saying that as mayor of the City of Chicago, he considered it a great honor to spend such a beautiful afternoon among the Bohemians… because he knew that among them there were many who did not hesitate a single moment when their new homeland was in danger and sacrificed even their lives for freedom, humanity, and right…

While the number of at this year's Memorial Day service did not come close to matching the crowds of yesteryear, much appreciation for fallen veterans was apparent as Jerry Silhan played "Taps" at the opening flag raising ceremony at the World Wars I and II Memorial. Jack and Krystyna Miuccio led the crowd in the singing of God Bless America followed by the US Army and Navy Color Guard leading the march to the Ceremony Hall in the Crematorium/Columbarium Building. BNCA board member Angeline Bultas and Josef Dvořáček from the Czech Republic General Consul Office in Chicago provided welcoming remarks followed by Illinois' Czech-Slovak Queen Klara Sebestikova reading the Czech and English version of the poignant poem "Flanders Field." US Air Force veteran Chuck Betzold provided a stirring speech on the importance of remembering veterans and their sacrifice for our country. Chuck Michalek offered closing remarks and the service concluded with the playing of Otto Dolansky's recently composed song, "Bless the USA".

Klara Sebestikova

Anna Ramirez, Otto Dolansky, and Navy sailor

Scene of the Memorial Day Service in the 50th Anniversary Year of 1927.

BNC Memorial Day Service: Past and Present, Continued

Chuck Betzold

Jerry Silhan

Josef Dvoracek

Live from BNC

April 26, 2026 was another successful tour day for Friends of BNC. Our two Spring walking tours attracted more than 50 participants. They were welcomed in the gatehouse for refreshments and given a brief history of the cemetery, and told about opportunities to volunteer at BNC helping with light tasks such as picking up branches and litter, watering plants, etc.

Following the tour, a group of three friends expressed a desire to volunteer after seeing the cemetery's historic and charming grounds. Maria, Angela, and Jennifer soon became regular volunteers and immediately joined in by helping place roadside flags for the annual Memorial Day service. Shortly afterword, they used their talents as tattoo artists by repainting inscriptions on the cemetery corner stone at Pulaski Road and Foster Avenue. They also repainted in "Cubby blue" the ballpark bench and chairs at the "Beyond the Vines" columbarium.

We salute the ongoing work of volunteers who assist with cutting and removing trees and branches; watering plants and repairing equipment and a myriad of other tasks: Chuck Betzold, Carl Brader, Jennifer Barber, Angela Koscal, Mary Lachiewicz, Chris Losavio, Maira Mejia, Chuck Michalek, Nef Morales, Bill Servis, Kensly Victor, and Bob Weniger.

New volunteers - Maira, Jennifer, and Angela

Once again, we are grateful for a generous grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The 2026 funding is for fence repairs along Pulaski Road and paint repairs in the crematorium/columbarium building.

Cornerstone repainting

Angela and Jennifer painted baseball bench

Live from BNC, Continued

Preparing for the Spring Walking Tour

Kensly repairing potholes

Nef repairing the gatehouse downspouts

Děkuji vám! - Thank you!

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery
is grateful to the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic
for their generous 2025 grant to assist in our ongoing efforts to make improvements at Bohemian National Cemetery.
We greatly appreciate their continued support.

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

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago
National Slovak Society of the USA
BetterLife/CSA

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Chuck Michalek
In Memory of Glenn Spachman
Charlotte J. Sirovy
Marge Stueckemann
In Memory of Glenn Spachman
Susanne Zielinski

Donors ($25-$99

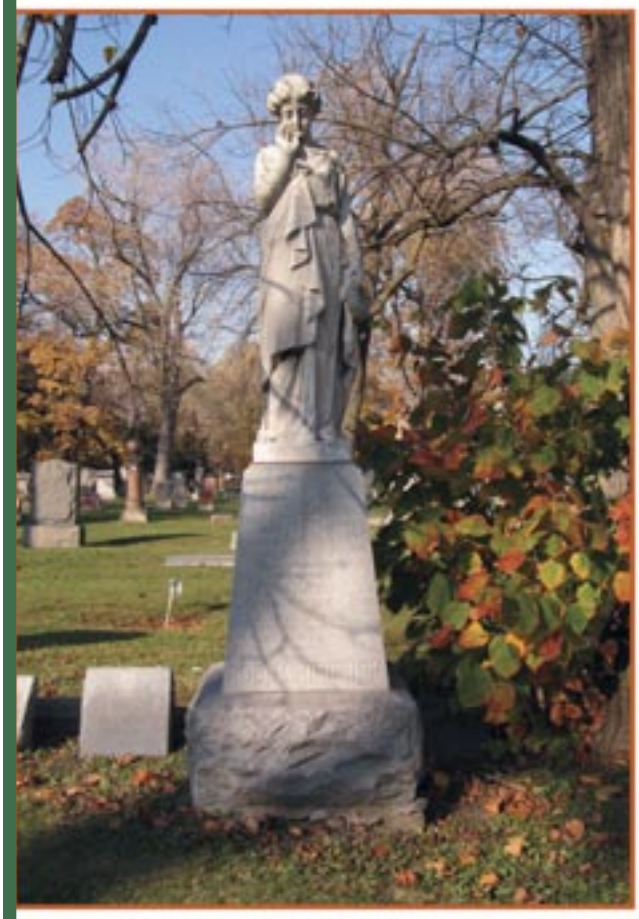
CSA Lodge Brookfield No. 475
Elaine Collina
June Jansa
William and Crystal Kerins
April Meyers

Thank you to our weekly volunteers who help:
paint, cut and remove trees and branches, repair equipment, and water plants.

This list reflects donations received through September 1, 2026.

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Autumn Tours of the Tombstones



When: Sunday, October 4, 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.

Reservations are recommended.

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

or 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

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Fall 2026

1934 floral tribute to President Franklin Roosevelt (right)

Memorial to Anton Cermak (left)