

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

FALL ISSUE Vol. 2, # 2, September 2005 – Christine Repa Visconti, 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

We Are Now Online! Check out our website at <http://www.friendsofbnc.org/>

What's New with Friends of BNC

Welcome to Henrietta Bartizal Pons, our new Membership Chairperson. Our thanks to Chris Repa Visconti for serving so well in the past as Membership Chair. Chris is going to continue to devote her time to editing the newsletter.

Are you afraid of heights? John Anton Mallin, the wonderful artist who decorated our beautiful chapel was STILL climbing on scaffolding to paint even into his 70's! Our August 21st program was a success thanks to Kathy Mallin's superb presentation. She showed slides of her grandfather's completed work at some of the over 100 churches in the Chicago and Midwest areas. His artistry was displayed on the walls of churches, banks, and even the Bohemian Home for Orphans and the Cuneo Mansion. Kathy also showed family slides of her grandfather relaxing in his studio with his dog, Rex, and even the artist enjoying a glass of Moravian wine at a festival in the Pilsen area of Chicago. We most enjoyed seeing the slides made from his professional photographs of the Chapel in 1929. As we were seated in the Chapel we could look at the slide and then look up and beyond the screen at the dome and the decorations and the beautiful gold leaf work he added after 1928 when CSA was formed. Lastly, using our brand new publication, *"Introduction to Bohemian National Cemetery Crematorium / Columbarium"*, we looked around the chapel at the symbols of numerous patriotic and fraternal organizations instrumental in the workings of the cemetery during its early decades. Thanks to Martha Cervenka we had delicious apple and poppyseed strudel at the gatehouse, where we enjoyed sitting on the porch, and visiting afterwards.

Friends of BNC have donated the cost of the plantings found in our new "Prairie Berm" located just north of the gatehouse. Designed and planted as a community service by two recent graduates of our neighboring Northeastern Illinois University, Tracy Hueshel and Gina Lettiere, this planting contains native grasses and flowering plants. To help create more color as we wait for our prairie plants to mature, the cemetery office is planting annuals as well. Jens Jensen, famous landscape architect who designed the winding pathways of a section of the cemetery just east of this planting, would be delighted to have us use our native prairie plants.

We want to welcome another column to our newsletter: "Monumental Musings" by Albert Walavich. His first column on page three features Eastland monuments to compliment our next tour. Albert will highlight the monuments of the Eastland victims, as this summer marks the 90th anniversary of that tragedy. The tour will be held on Sunday, September 18th, at 1:00 P.M. at BNC.

It continues to be a pleasure to work with so many enthusiastic people who support our cemetery.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President

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Don't miss having your own copy of our new booklet, *"Introduction to Bohemian National Cemetery Crematorium / Columbarium"*. Read Marilyn John's review on page four of this issue. Over 75 copies have already been sold. Proceeds from the sale will go to projects to enhance the Crematorium/Columbarium.

Family History at BNC

Memorial Day 2005 Chuck & Martha Cervenka

It was a quiet time. The people who had paid tribute at the Memorial Day Program were gone for the day and just a few minutes ago the chimes let us know it was one o'clock. We finished our planting and were at the gatehouse to wash our hands when we noticed a car parked a little way from the entrance. On the bumper was a sticker showing two castles and the name "Sumperk", a town in the Czech Republic known for its textiles.

As we checked out the scene, a sailor in his dress whites got out of the car and walked to the World War monument. He looked up and then slowly ascended the stairs and walked around the monument, pausing at each panel to read the inscriptions. After he descended, he turned to face the monument and flags and saluted. The flowers were a vivid scarlet in the sun, the flags were moving in the breeze and it was an impressive sight.

We watched as he drove to the Columbarium and walked in. It was then that we decided to walk over and talk to him when he came out. We introduced ourselves to the sailor and said we were very pleased to see him give the salute. We then commented on the material in his uniform, as it looked nicer than the cotton uniform of old. This one had some polyester in it and kept the creases well. He said he had served in the Middle East and was scheduled to go out again.

He had helped place flags at the cemetery across the street and was spending the day paying tribute to veterans in other cemeteries. We pointed out the Civil War monument and gave him information about those veterans and also directed him to the Spanish American War Memorial. We told him volunteers had placed flags on the graves of about 1600 veterans here at Bohemian National.

We asked about the bumper sticker and he said it represented his wife's hometown, they met four years ago and they were the best of his life. She is even teaching him Czech and though he thought it was a difficult language to learn, he had a good accent. As we left each other, his parting words were, "Diky, Na shledanou, Ahoj." Ours were "Good-bye and Good Luck".

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Do you have a short family history story you would like to share with our readers? Please mail your story to Chris Repa Visconti, Editor, 550 Alcoa Lane, Hoffman Estates, IL 60194 or email: Dagochek@aol.com

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The following is an excerpt from the introduction to the book, *The Semi-Centennial Jubilee of the Bohemian National Cemetery Association, Chicago* by Dr. J.E.S. Vojan, 1927.

*"Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie,
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me:
"Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."*

This beautiful little poem from Robert Louis Stevenson is the most sublime expression of the human longing for eternal peace when in Shakespeare's words "we enter the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns".

Our duty is to take from every grave its fear. From the wondrous tree of Life the buds and blossoms fall along with the ripened fruit, and in the common bed of earth patriarchs and babes sleep side by side. Why should we fear that which will come to all that exists? Death means peace and rest for the departed. But to those who survive and live separated from their loved ones, it means grief. The custom introduced in this country by the communities of Moravian Brothers, who formed their burial places into gardens, has changed cemeteries to Gardens of the Dead. The Bohemians of Chicago trod therefore in the steps of their fellow-countrymen when they made the Bohemian National Cemetery of Chicago a beautiful Garden of the Dead.

The Bohemian National Cemetery owes its existence to regrettable circumstances, which arose in the seventies of the 19th century. Some Catholic priests so far forgot the charitable teachings of the founder of their religion as to refuse to permit burial of Bohemian freethinkers in the ground of their cemeteries. But as James Thomson said, "from seeming evil still educing good," the Bohemian freethinkers who in those days, just as today, formed about 75 per cent of the Bohemian population of Chicago, joined together and founded their own cemetery which grew so successfully from such small beginnings that the present Bohemian National Cemetery is the pride not only of the Bohemians of Chicago, but of the Bohemians of the whole United States.

The Bohemian National Cemetery is a splendid monument to the united fraternal action of Bohemian societies of this great city and is proof that the greatest things may be built from modest beginnings if a zealous and enthusiastic love fills the minds and hearts of intrepid men. The Bohemian freethinkers of Chicago leave their beautiful Bohemian National Cemetery to their sons and all their posterity as a dear and precious heritage with the deep conviction that the honor for the dead beloved who sleep in the bosom of this sacred Garden of the Dead will always be an incentive for those who will come after us to zealously guard this national property and to take care of it with the same love as their fathers and forefathers did. Such is the heartiest wish of those who put this book into the hands of our people, to the greater honor and glory of the Bohemian name.

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Monumental Musings

Albert Walavich

July 24, 2005, marked the 90th anniversary of the worst tragedy in terms of lives lost that Chicago has ever experienced, the capsizing of the Eastland as it sat docked in the Chicago River with picnic goers boarding the ship for a trip across Lake Michigan. Bohemian National Cemetery has a special relationship to the Eastland Disaster. Many of the more than 800 fatalities were Chicago-area Bohemians, and many of them were brought to a final rest in Section 16.

The Eastland, like many disasters in the early 20th century, was the cause for the printing of postcards. Some showed the capsized ship in the Chicago River and the removal of victims from the ship. One of the most moving, however, is of the Sindelar family being brought to Bohemian National. The postcard shows coffins stacked like cordwood as seven members of one family made their final journey from a watery grave to a newly purchased family plot. Their plot, just off the road between Sections 15 and 16, is marked by a simple yet dramatic grey granite monument containing names, ages and dates and the emblems of the Masons to which George belonged and the Order of the Eastern Star of which Josie was a member.

Behind the Sindelars is a grander and perhaps even more touching monument to Lillian and Julian Mulac, sisters ages 22 and 24. They appear in ceramic portraits as an ever-present reminder of the untimely death of so many young people setting off on a day of pleasure that became a day of tragedy.

Another monument on the same path as that of the Sindelars is to Frantisek and Eliska Velan. Their pictures show a jaunty 24-year-old with his hat dramatically cocked on his head and his 15-year-old sister dressed in her finest white dress with a large bow in her hair and a colored ribbon pinned to her dress. What she holds is unclear, but this could very well be her graduation picture with her diploma in her hand.

One last family lot in Section 16 always draws my attention. The simple markers over the four graves are memorials to Kristina Mosna and her two children killed on that fateful day, plus Jan, who survived the disaster only to lose his family and follow them in death merely four months beyond July 24. Like the Mulacs and the Velans, the Mosna family has porcelain pictures on their stones--stern formal portraits showing a married couple aged 50 and 51 who lie next to their 17-year-old son and 21 year old daughter.

Cemeteries throughout the Chicagoland area contain the graves of Eastland Disaster victims. Section 16 of Bohemian National with these four monuments joined by dozens more with the inscription zem 24 Cervenc 1915 seems to offer a stronger sense of memory, as so many buried there lost their lives in the murky waters of the Chicago River. Many monuments in Chicago contain the motto "Many hopes lie buried here", a sentiment that could apply to this entire section.

Live from Bohemian National Cemetery

Ray Capek, President BNCA

Flowers

With this summer's drought, the most important things that are alive in Bohemian National Cemetery are the flowers planted by our staff. The flowers around the War Memorial and at the Chapel were planted for the Memorial Day observance. The remaining flowers for the graves followed. Because of the severe drought, watering was almost as time consuming as planting. But, with the cemetery water system and an auxiliary tank on our truck, the staff has kept the plants healthy. Charles Cervenka arranged for the purchase of a 425-gallon tank, which when mounted on our truck allows rapid watering of the graves with flowers. The tank is invaluable should problems be encountered with the water system.

Burial Books

The first six of the interment books, which have a record of every burial, entombment, inurnment, or cremation since August 6, 1877, have been restored. They cover the time period from 8/6/1877 to 6/9/1973 and "burials" from # 1 to # 100,164. The books were in dire need of restoration for they were the ultimate source of information and for many years they were used daily for reference purposes. The restoration took 5 1/2 months, as we would only allow two books at a time to be away from the cemetery. All books were resealed by hand in addition to replacing their covers. The books are now all the same tan sheepskin covering with gold lettering and "no duct tape" holding them together. They are fitting of the heritage they represent and the information they contain.

Although there is a marker showing the first interment in Bohemian National Cemetery of N. Brada on July 1, 1877, the interment book lists the date of the interment of N. Brada as August 6, 1877. A possible explanation is that The Bohemian National Cemetery did not exist when N. Brada was buried there. After the burial, the Bohemian National Cemetery Association applied for the cemetery permit. The second burial at Bohemian National Cemetery was on August 10, 1877. The third, fourth, & fifth interments were on November 1, 1877. After that, 22 more burials took place in 1877. There were 159 burials in 1878 and 176 in 1879.

Book seven has yet to be restored, and book eight, which starts on 1/1/2000 with interment # 113,794, is in a computer data base. A printed and bound version of book eight will be made when book nine is started.

The burial books are not as frequently used now since the file cards often have the needed information. The *Czech and Slovak American Genealogical Society of Illinois (CSAGSI)* has undertaken a project to record all of the information in a computer database. When that program is completed it will provide the much more useful alphabetical listing of the "burials". The CSAGSI project is directed by Special Projects Chair, George Rokos, and is succeeding because of the enormous amount of work by Ron & Sharon Davis and many other hard working volunteers. The project is important, as it will make burial information more readily available. The burial

books can only be used by the cemetery staff or a member of the Assembly of Delegates of the Bohemian National Cemetery, so the CSAGSI project will provide a more accessible reference for the "burials".

Membership

Welcome to Our Newest Members

Lorraine Aichinger, Riverside, IL
Blanche Bartizal Babcock, Three Lakes, WI
Gwy Benda Family, Harrison, MO
Blanche Kozner, Western Springs, IL
Frank Kurhayer, Seminole, FL
Judy Lovaas, Dodgeville, WI
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Lupinek, Lafayette, IN
John & Carol May, Westmont, IL
William Mullet, Glendale, AZ
Helen Pavlik, Naperville, IL
Edna Robel, McHenry, IL
Patricia M. Stalzer, Berwyn, IL
James & JoAnn Starha, Burr Ridge, IL
Grace Vavrina, Joliet, IL
Beverly Verner, Pinellas Park, FL
Ruth G. Wulff, LaGrange, IL

Reviews

Marilyn John

The Bohemian National Cemetery Crematorium/Columbarium is a permanent monument to the efforts of our Freethinking Bohemian ancestors and their "courage to seek truth and to fight for liberty," to quote Dr. Iska at the 1913 Cornerstone Laying ceremony. The Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery have recently published a 20-page booklet describing the history and architecture of the Crematorium/Columbarium. There are detailed explanations with both black & white and colored photos of the numerous symbols used in the decoration of the large Ceremony Hall/Chapel and adjacent spaces. Using this booklet as a guide when visiting the Columbarium will make one more knowledgeable, appreciative, and proud of our Bohemian Heritage.

The newly published,
20-page, illustrated booklet,
*"Introduction to the Bohemian National Cemetery
Crematorium/Columbarium"*
is now available at our tours and programs
\$5.00/members
\$6.00/non-members

Order your copy today with the enclosed orange flyer.
If purchased by mail, there is an additional S/H charge for both members and non-members. Include \$1.50 for one copy plus \$.50 for each additional copy. SEND TO:
FOBNC 300 Claymoor # 2, Hinsdale, IL 60521

Upcoming Programs

Fall Walking Tour, Sunday, September 18, 2005. 1-3pm.

Albert Walavich, tour guide extraordinaire, will lead a tour that will highlight the monuments of the Eastland victims. View the ceramic portraits affixed to the gravestones and learn the histories of those who lost their lives 90 years ago in this tragic disaster. An Eastland Disaster photo exhibit in the historic gatehouse will follow the tour along with ethnic refreshments. Please pre-register. Cost is \$10.00 members and \$15.00 non-members. Checks payable to Friends of BNC and mailed to FOBNC, c/o Sherida Hudak, 5818 N. Manton Ave., Chicago, IL 60646. Questions: Contact Marge at 847-362-9036 or mdstueck@aol.com

Winter Program, Sunday February 26, 2006

@ Westchester Library, Westchester, IL

Set aside the 4th Sunday in February for a multi media presentation on the Eastland Disaster. Told through story, video, and slides, the EDHS program explains the problems the ship encountered and the human stories of heroism and suffering that were all part of that July day in 1915. Don't miss your chance to learn more about this tragedy.

Thank you

Thanks to Joseph Calek for the donation of 50 copies of his "Interface" family history book, which will be available at our upcoming programs and tours for a \$20.00 donation. All monies will be donated directly to the cemetery.

Renewals

For those Charter members who joined Friends of BNC in 2003 and 2004, it is time to renew your membership. Please use the form on the back of the mailer to renew your membership for the calendar year September 1, 2005, through August 31, 2006.

Volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to help us grow. Do you have time to share with us, are you interested in helping? Please fill out the colored volunteer form inserted in the newsletter, fold in half and mail to Marge Sladek Stueckemann at the address listed.

FoBNC Officers: 2005-2006

Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann, President
Donna Desai, Vice-President
Bill Hosna, Treasurer
Juli Nelson, Secretary
Henrietta B. Pons, Membership Chairperson
Evelyn Krenek Fergle, Director
Ray Capek, Director
Martha & Chuck Cervenka, Directors
Chris Repa Visconti, Newsletter Editor
Sue Zielinski, Webmaster