

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

SPRING ISSUE Vol. 2, # 4, March/April 2006 – 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

Muddy water. Heavy, elegant clothes. A supposedly happy event was to take place in July of 1915 but instead the Western Electric picnic goers who boarded the steamship Eastland capsized with 144 of them finding their final rest at Bohemian National Cemetery. The February 26th Friends meeting presented by the Eastland Disaster Historical Society was well received by the 85 people at Westchester Library. We also took care of some business that day. There was a unanimous vote to change our fiscal year (currently 7/1-6/30) to the calendar year.

We accepted with regret the resignation of Donna Desai as VP. Our deepest thanks, Donna, for all you have done during your time on our board. We also regret that Chris Visconti, our excellent newsletter editor, has had to step down. Thank you, Chris, for all you did as well. Sher Hudak will take over as newsletter editor. Welcome! We also welcome Meribeth Tooke as Publicity Chair and Andy Bultas as Special Projects Chair. Thanks to our nominating committee of Andy Bultas, Evelyn Krenek Fergle and Juli Nelson and to the people who have agreed to lead our organization for 2006-07. The nominees are listed on the back page. Please come to vote on May 6th from noon-1:00 P.M. in the gatehouse. Members not able to come may vote by contacting Juli Nelson, Secretary, 300 Claymoor #2, Hinsdale, IL 60521 or by email at jn@friendsofbnc.org to obtain a ballot.

On May 6th flower boxes will be available for purchase during refreshment time. The cost is \$15.00 and the box will contain begonias, geraniums and coleus. Remember that if you buy your flowers from BNC and inform the office of your gravesite location, cemetery personnel will water the flowers all summer. (A most special service!). We look forward to seeing everyone at the May 6th tours! See the information and registration form elsewhere in the newsletter for details on the tours.

"Czech" out the gatehouse where the hardworking crew of Andy Bultas, Ray Capek, Chuck Cervenka, Ken Dvorsky, Ken Quick and Jerry Cicela have been doing much needed renovations. FoBNC has made donations to purchase some of the needed supplies as they upgrade the electrical wiring. Of course we hope everyone will be present on Monday, May 29th, at 9:30 A.M. for the Memorial Day service. Come on Friday, May 26th or Saturday, May 27th at 10:00 A.M. to help place flags on veteran's graves.

Albin Polasek was the famous Czech-American sculptor who created "Mother" and "The Pilgrim", two of BNC's most important monuments. Polasek's life and art will be the focus of our next Friends meeting on Sunday, August 27th at 1:00 P.M. in the Columbarium/Crematorium chapel with refreshments in the Gatehouse. Admission is free. Donations welcome.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President

Alice Garrigue Masaryk

In 1904 a young Czech woman described the solace Bohemian immigrants in America found at Bohemian National Cemetery with these words:

"A large park near Dunning, a beautiful garden, is the Bohemian cemetery. It is touching to watch the pride with which they love this piece of American soil. All the thoughts and memories of their old home, that are so dear to them, seem to be thought more easily and better in this garden of the dead, for something died within them when they left their homes. The pure memory lives as the memory of those who have left them forever and sleep under that velvety grass, under the brightest autumn leaves and the faithful asters."

Alice Garrigue Masaryk, the writer of these words, could not have imagined that 62 years later, exiled from her home of Czechoslovakia, her ashes would be inurned in the cemetery's Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum, named after her father. Alice, born May 3, 1879, was the oldest of four children (a fifth died in infancy) of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his American wife Charlotte Garrigue. Her parents were strong proponents of women's equality, and in 1903 Alice became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in history from Prague's Charles University, successfully defending her thesis on the Magna Carta.

Alice's humanitarian inclinations prompted her to accept an offer to live and work at the University of Chicago Settlement House, and she sailed to America in early 1904. During the year and a half Alice spent at the settlement on the south side, she researched and published an article on the Bohemian immigrant experience in Chicago. She noted that "Liberty, longed for by generations of Bohemians, was given to the people here," and, reflecting her Masaryk heritage, Alice concluded, "The Bohemians have a longing for truth. This longing is the dowry the land gives to its emigrants." Alice also explained in this article the impetus for the establishment of the Bohemian National Cemetery: "Its beginning belongs to the time of the separation of the Freethinkers from the Catholic Church. A Catholic priest refused to bury in the Catholic cemetery a woman who died

without a confession, and the Freethinkers resolved to have a cemetery of their own."

Alice, missing her home and family, returned to Bohemia and taught history and geography at girls' high schools. During the First World War, the Austrian Government arrested Alice on October 28, 1915, charging her with treason for allegedly hiding her father's papers (Tomáš was in exile, charged with treason in absentia for promoting an independent Czechoslovakia). Prominent Americans including Jane Addams, Julia Lathrop, (head of the Children's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Labor) and Charles Crane, (Chicago industrialist and philanthropist) appealed to the U.S. Government to intervene with Austria and secure Alice's freedom. Committees were formed to agitate for her release. In Chicago more than 40,000 Bohemians adopted a resolution that read, "Knowing as we do Miss Masaryk's nobility of character, her fine sense of honor, her humanitarian interest, her distinguished scholarship, we urgently request the State Department use all possible influence with the Austrian government to insure against any summary action being taken in her case." These campaigns and resultant inquiries made by the U.S. Government were credited with saving Alice's life. After eight months in prison, Alice was released and returned home to Prague.

After the proclamation of the new Czechoslovak State on October 28, 1918, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk returned from exile as the country's first president. During the inter-war years Alice dedicated herself to her country. She created the social welfare structure indispensable to Czechoslovakia's recovery from the war and subsequent development. As president of the new Czechoslovak Red Cross, she transformed that agency into a national peacetime organization involved in public health and social welfare. To promote peace and bring a public focus to social issues, Alice created the Easter Truce in 1923; it ultimately evolved into World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, now celebrated May 8th. She commissioned Slovene architect Josip Plečnik to renovate Prague Castle and oversaw the transformation. She also collaborated with him on the president's official weekend residence at Lány. Alice's mother Charlotte was buried in Lány's small village cemetery when she died in 1923. Fourteen

years later Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was laid to rest there next to his wife.

Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 exiled Alice to the United States. On Christmas Eve 1939, she suffered a breakdown and was confined to a sanitarium for several months. Alice never fully regained her equilibrium during the war years, and she spent them under doctors' care, alternating between stays in hospitals and living with friends. After the war, Alice flew back to Prague with her brother Jan, now the Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia. She returned to her flat and settled into a quiet life.

In February 1948 communists engineered a coup. Czechoslovakia's fate was sealed on March 10th when Jan Masaryk's body was found beneath the windows of his third-floor apartment. The communists declared the foreign minister had committed suicide and gave him a state funeral. But within months of Jan's burial alongside his parents at Lány, the denigration of the Masaryk name began, and Alice was again forced into exile. She was 69 years old.

Alice returned to the United States where a special act of Congress granted her permanent residence. In her second exile she seemed to find some peace. She helped keep alive the idea of a democratic Czechoslovakia, participating in activities in support of the Czechoslovak cause, including giving occasional speeches and making broadcasts to her homeland for Radio Free Europe. She wrote a memoir, *Dětství a mládí* (Childhood and Youth). In March 1966, blind and needing nursing care, Alice moved into the Bohemian Old People's Home in Chicago, where she died peacefully on November 29, 1966. On the 2nd of December, her cremains were placed in the Masaryk Memorial Mausoleum at Bohemian National Cemetery.

After the Velvet Revolution, the Czech Red Cross and other organizations arranged for Alice's ashes to be brought to Lány. In 1994 Alice was finally reunited with her mother, father and brother at the family plot at Lány in the democratic homeland to which they had all dedicated their lives.

Carol Jean Smetana

* Quotations are from Alice G. Masaryk, "The Bohemians in Chicago: A Sketch," in *Charities: A Review of Local and General Philanthropy*, Vol. XIII, No. 10, December 3, 1904, pp. 206-210, available at Harold Washington Library, Chicago, Illinois.

Family History at BNC

I have a bit of information on Anna Surth who is buried on the far east side of Bohemian National Cemetery. She must have been quite a lady; she outlived four husbands!

Anna Surth (1835-1900) was born in Bohemia in 1835 and arrived in America in 1845. It is not known what her maiden name was, but what is known is all her married names, for she was married four times and outlived all her husbands. Her first husband was Mr. Coloinda. They had one child and her name was Annie. Annie married August Ziemer and lived in Kewaunee, Wisconsin in 1900. After Mr. Coloinda died, Anna married her second husband, Mr. Brandt. Anna had one child with Mr. Brandt and his name was John Brandt. John died at about 26 years of age and had no children. He is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery. When her second husband died, she married Patrick Boyd. This husband was a grocer who was born in Ireland in 1836 and died on January 12, 1885. She later married John Surth at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church in Chicago. After John's death and on April 4, 1894, the U.S. Pension Agency dropped him from the pension rolls. So it was up to John's widow, Anna, to petition the government for a widow's pension. With the help of some of John's friends, Mathias, Jacob and William Nelles, and John's son-in-law, Peter Schuckmell, Anna was able to get the forms and affidavits filled out. On December 7, 1900, at St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital and at 65 years of age, Anna Surth died. Jacob Nelles, the Undertaker, buried her at Bohemian National Cemetery for \$101.50 - included was the \$7.00 cost for the grave. Anna is in a single, unmarked grave about 2 blocks from her third husband, Patrick Boyd. The Bohemian National Cemetery has now reclaimed Patrick's grave. The only Surth listed in her will was her stepson, John Suerth. John Suerth must have been close to her, because he received more money than Anna's daughter did and more money than most of her grandchildren.

Submitted by Frank Suerth
Jefferson Park Historical Society

Family History at BNC

Do you have a short family history story you would like to share with our readers? Please send your story to Sher Hudak, Editor, at sher@bnc.org.

Membership

Welcome to Our Newest Members

The Reverend W. Douglas Bond, Cambridge, MA
Czechoslovak Heritage Museum, Oakbrook, IL
Jo-Ellen Douglas, Downers Grove, IL
Durietz family, Vernon Hills, IL
Patricia M. Mrazek, Mt. Prospect, IL
Allen R. Peschek, Tacoma, WA
David Pimm, Chicago, IL
Sue Rolsky, Schaumburg, IL
Maryellen Szwed, Park Ridge, IL
Linda Uhlir, Lombard, IL

Donor List

Thanks to all who contributed to the "Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery 2005 Fundraising Campaign." We are still receiving donations and a list of the donors will be published in our Summer Issue. The Friends wish to again thank you for your kind contributions that will help in so many ways to preserve and enhance our beautiful cemetery.

Nominees for 2006-2007

Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann, President
Bill Hosna, Vice President
Maribeth Tooke, Secretary
Juli Nelson, Treasurer
Evelyn Krenck Fergle, Director
Martha & Chuck Cervenka, Directors

Nominations may also be made from the floor at the election from noon-1:00 P.M. on May 6th at the Gatehouse. Please obtain the consent of the member in good standing. Three members must agree to place this person in nomination.

FoBNC invites you to join us to Honor and Remember Our Veterans on Memorial Day,
Monday, May 29th

Bohemian National Cemetery

Meet at the Administration building at 9:30A.M.
Proceed with the Sokol Spirit Color Guard to the
Creamatorium/Columbarium.
Music by the Half-and-Half Singers
Speaker: Marek Skolil, newly appointed Czech Counsel
General of Chicago

All women attending receive a carnation, compliments of the Friends. Enjoy the sight of almost 3,000 flags on veteran's graves. Friends will provide funds for the flowers around the flagpole and Civil War monuments.

Springfield, March 17th "Topinka testifies for Bohemian National Cemetery"

Treasurer, Judy Baar Topinka today encouraged the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to "designate the Chicago-based Bohemian National Cemetery an official landmark under the National Historic Preservation Act." It is hoped the Agency will agree and that we will obtain this status within a few months. BNCA Treasurer, Angeline Bultas, has been working to establish this designation for quite some time.

(Press release submitted by the Office of the Treasurer)



I am signing off as Editor and this is my last newsletter. I say good bye and I want to thank you for all of your help, suggestions, articles and mostly for your support.

Thank you,
Christine Repa Visconti