

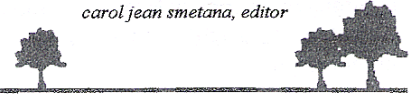
Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Winter Issue ~ Vol. 6 No. 3

January 2010

carol jean smetana, editor



What's New with Friends of BNC

Porretta's was a lovely place on October 11th for our gala dinner. Creamy tablecloths and bright pots of cyclamens enhanced with Czech flags decorated the tables. Guests were presented with beautiful Bohemian lion enameled pins when they arrived, and then enjoyed hot appetizers passed by waiters before sitting down to a wonderful meal. Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery was honored to receive a \$750 grant check from the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic**,

which we used to purchase an LCD projector. **The Honorable Marek Skolil**, Consul General of the Czech Consulate in Chicago, presented our check to **Andy Bultas** and me. **Dave Pimm**, President of BNC, received the BNC grant check of \$14,985. The generosity of our ancestral homeland contributes greatly to the success of our cemetery and is very much appreciated!

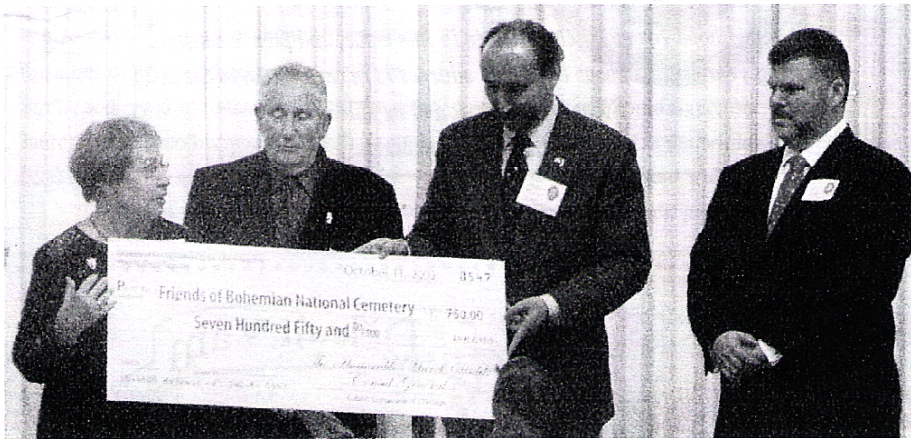
With an extensive silent auction, the
(continued on page 6)

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



The Honorable Marek Skolil presents grant check at Friends' gala dinner from left to right:

Marge Stueckemann, Andy Bultas, Marek Skolil, and Dave Pimm
photo by Chuck Michalek

Live from BNC

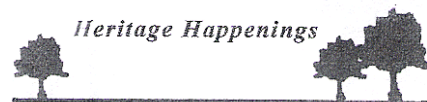
In October 2007, it was brought to the cemetery's attention that the walls of the gatehouse bell tower were separating, and the tower was leaning. The cemetery contacted **Allendorfer Roofing Company** to assess the situation. **Conrad Kotowski** of Allendorfer Roofing reported that the bell tower would have to be secured with steel rods and parts of the walls needed to be rebuilt. When Friends of Bohemian National

Cemetery learned of the problem, **Andy Bultas**, **Marge Stueckemann**, and **Juli Nelson**, who are on Friends' Grants Committee, decided to apply to a grant program sponsored by the **Czech Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs** for funds to help restore the bell tower. They wrote a grant proposal and submitted it to the Ministry.

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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 Carol Jean Smetana, HC 69 Box 16, Sapello, NM 87745-9602 or e-mailed to her at cjsmetana@msn.com.

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Officers of Friends of BNC

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 Newsletter: carol jean smetana
 Publicity: Open and seeking a volunteer
 Webmaster: Sue Zielinski



from the editor's laptop

I can easily lose myself for hours exploring a cemetery - and for that, I have Helen Sclair to thank.

She was the person who showed me there was so much more to a gravestone than names and dates. Several of her guided cemetery tours, a couple of her courses at Newberry Library, and now I'm now one of those people who visits cemeteries wherever I go. Thanks to Helen, I have a fuller appreciation.

On my drive to Chicago last October, I stopped in Omaha to do some genealogical research for a client. His ancestors were buried at the Bohemian National Cemetery in Omaha. His great-grandmother's tombstone offered up a missing clue for my research - her birthplace - and after I'd photographed the tombstones and copied all the information, I wandered for about an hour in the dimming light. The cemetery felt very familiar, with its granite headstones inscribed with Bohemian names. One of my favorite tombstones there presented an entire history of the deceased - her birth date and birth place, her maiden name and married name, the year she immigrated and where she immigrated to, her occupation (she was a midwife!), and of course the date and place of death. My genealogy research for my own family lines would have been so much simpler if one of my ancestors had had the foresight to present a biography on the stone tablet!

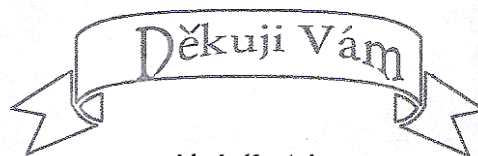
I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue, and please consider sharing your stories about BNC (my address is in the column to the left).

Šťastný nový rok and na shledanou!

carol jean smetana

IN MEMORIAM HELEN SCLAIR 1930 - 2009

Helen Sclair, Chicago's Cemetery Lady, passed away on December 16, 2009. Helen's knowledge, inspiration, and encouragement helped get our Friends organization started. Years ago she chose Bohemian National Cemetery as her final resting place and "Advocate for the Dead" as her gravestone inscription. Helen was delighted to live in one of BNC's bungalows. To step inside her living room was to enter a veritable museum of intriguing funereal artifacts and memorabilia, and there was no better informed cemetery expert than Helen. She will be missed.



Linda Kostuba

Alice and Tony Mika

for placing flags in honor of our veterans in
November ~

We made a big impact by putting many small
flags along the entryway, which really added a
lot of visibility!

Clarence Nelson

for helping with the production of the newsletter
and solicitation letters.

PICTURE THAT

by **Rosie Bodien**

All of us want to see pictures of our ancestors. Do they have a family likeness? Are they tall? Are they short? Do the pictures give us a hint of their disposition? Many of us are lucky to have these pictures, or copies, in our possession. Many have just a few and some of us don't have any pictures at all. I fall in the middle category.

While researching my great-grandmother Elizabeth Kratina, I found two photos of her and two photos of her half-brothers. But I did not know which brother was which. So in 2003 I was on a genealogy gig with my husband in the Midwest. We went to the Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago. This was my first trip there. Of course, we had to visit the mausoleum where the ashes of my grandmother Emilie Kure Straka and my grandfather James Straka were. James Straka's mother was Elizabeth Kratina Straka.

Then it was time to find the Kratina

graves. It did not take too long. Lo and behold, all the grave markers but one had pictures on them – including the monument for Frank Kratina, Elizabeth's half-brother! I took close-up photos of the headstone pictures. From the picture of Frank on his



grave marker, I could figure out which brother was which in the original two photos.

Two of Frank's children were also buried there, with their pictures and pictures

of their spouses, which I did not have. Frank's granddaughter's spouse's name and dates were listed. With this information, I was later able to find that spouse's living family members. What a gold mine!

Such pictures are also found on headstones in Moravia and Bohemia. So, "Picture That" – and "Czech" out your family graves at the Bohemian National Cemetery to see if there are pictures on your ancestors' headstones!

Rosie Bodien is a second-generation Czech-American born in Minnesota. For ten years, she has coordinated a Czech/Slovak Interest Group in Seattle, WA. She has made seven research trips to the Czech Republic and is researching these surnames: Hytych, Jirinec, Kopecka, Kratina, Kubes, Kure, Los(s), Pavlica, Smetka, Uhlíka, Vasicka, Vojkovska, and Zindulka.

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

WINTER HOURS AT BNC

The BNC office will be on winter hours from January through March 31st:
Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM (not 4:00 PM as usual).

Office will be closed Saturdays and Sundays (no Saturday morning hours).

Regular hours, including Saturday mornings, will resume April 1st.

Cemetery phone: 773-539-8442 for more information.

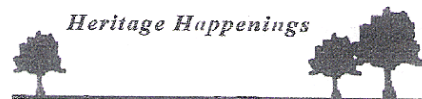
Sunday, January 24th
Friends meeting at Klas Restaurant
at 1 PM - see back page for details

Note for winter weekend visitors to BNC:

Weekend visiting hours are from 8 AM to 3 PM.

For security reasons, the main entrance and exit gates will be locked. *Access to the cemetery will be available through the gated south service entrance by the bungalows.* Paul Schmidt will check visitors into the cemetery: you will have to sign in and show identification, and Paul will record your license plate numbers, as well as your entrance and exit times. This system is not to deter visitors but only to secure the cemetery and make it safe for visitors.

Thank you for your cooperation.



Donations

*We greatly appreciate all of your generous donations.
Your gifts help preserve and enhance our beautiful cemetery.
(List includes contributions received October - December 2009)*

Patrons (\$500 - \$999)

Eleanor Bilek Baldi
Richard Cinert
Robert Kubicka
Joseph & Linda Svehla

Sponsors (\$100 - \$499)

Blanche Babcock
Christopher Borman
Charles & Martha Cervenka
Cicero Rebekah Lodge No. 44 I.O.O.F.
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George & Beth Drost
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Mary Ann Nutil
Henrietta Bartizal Pons
Joseph Stoklasa
Marjorie Sladek Stueckemann
J. Scott Sykora
Jean Uhlir
Wayne Wolf *In Memory of Helen Sclair*

Donors (\$25 - \$99)

Amy & Tony Allen
Alan Avery
Katherine Babcock
Bernie & Ellie Babka
Dorothy Batka
Becvar & Son Funeral Home
Ruth Borndahl
Jane Brown
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Ron & Adrian Charniak
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Eleanor Dachota

Richard & Marilee Davies
Steven & Bonita Depp
Marilyn Drury-Katillo
Dolores Benes Duy
Kenneth Dvorsky
First Czechoslovak Garden Club of

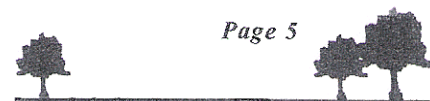
America

Arlene Goletz
Nadine Gorski
M. Grady
Harold Helenberg
Mr. & Mrs. Otto Hoffman
Marilyn Hughes
Rudolph Jansa
Kadlec-Durietz Family
Joy Kadlecik
Shirley Kenney
Ken & Jan Klouzer
Barbara Kostka
Elaine Kovarik
Anne Kozak
Robert Krejci
Dan Kumarich
Frank Kurhayez
James Laska
Michael Lisec
Stanley D. Loula
Charles & Sue Lupinek
Audrey Malan
Carol & Robert Malin
June Malina
Kathy Mallin
Frank Malowick
Lorraine Marholz
Marlene Murray
Dolores Niewinski
Richard L. Palicka
Mildred Pesek
Gary Petranek
Janice & Laddie Polz
Mildred Potas

Adeline Pratt
Bess & Chuck Prazak
Jane Pugh
Thalia Puncochar
Jean Reichel
Anne Roth
Mildred B. Schalk
Ann Schatz
Ludwig Scheuerle
Helen Sclair
Dorothea Sebo
Wesley Sedlacek
Eugene & Patrica Sikorovsky
Melody Sikula
Bryan & Sarah Skoda
Sokol Town of Lake
Don Soukup
Mr. & Mrs. Arnold Spravka
Cheryl Svoboda
Arlene Szydlo
Joseph & Laura Topinka
Judy Baar Topinka
Charles Tregner
John Val Hora
Alois Vana
Adeline Vanerka
Lorraine Vasicek
Charles Vavrosky
Beverly Verner
Rose Vytlačil
Karen Welch
Patricia Young
Frank Zedeck

Thank You (\$1 - \$24)

George Bezdekovsky
Sylvia Bombick
Janet Cundiff
Robert & Joan Musil
Jerome Wiecezorek



Stories of the Stones

by carol jean smetana

At the very least, we expect grave markers to include basic information - names, and birth and death years (although I have been disappointed to find only a surname and nothing more engraved on a family stone). Sometimes we are fortunate to find photos on the markers, as Rosie Bodien describes in her story on page 3.



Folks who have been on tours of Bohemian National Cemetery with Albert Walavich know that some tombstones are decorated with symbols that reveal religion, occupation, and membership in organizations.

Treestones, or tree stumps, are a familiar monument at Bohemian National Cemetery. They were especially popular from the 1880s to about 1905 and could even be

ordered through the Scars and Roebuck catalog. The treestone pictured here commemorates the M. Šidlo family ("Rod. M. ŠIDLO" at the base of the stump). On the smooth area in the middle of the tree are records of two people, Matej Šidlo, who died August 10, 1898, at the age of 40, and his wife Josefa (1857-1930). Beneath that are a pair of clasped hands, a symbol of matrimony. My attention was drawn to the unusual carving of the locomotive below the hands. I wondered if the steam engine might represent an occupation? Perhaps Matej had been an engineer or worked on the railroad. But a closer inspection revealed that this was not simply a locomotive: the engine was depicted in the act of hitting some type of cart, apparently scattering the contents. What was the story of this stone?

To find out, I had to do some research. Since there is no 1890 U.S. census available, I went back to the 1880 census in search of Matej (Matthew). I found him boarding with the family of Vaclav Sidlo. His occupation? Beer peddler. Were those beer barrels on the treestone?

Matej's death certificate (where he was called Michael) told most of the story. Issued by the Office of the Coroner of Cook County, it reported that an inquest was held, and the jurors found that he had died "from shock and injuries received, caused by being

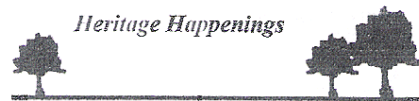
thrown from a beer wagon hauled by 2 horses and belonging to the E. R. Stege Brewing Co., said wagon being struck by Engine No. 590 and belonging to the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Rail Road Company on their westbound main track at Morgan St." This unusual treestone actually tells us how Matej Šidlo died!

An article in the *Denní Hlasatel* provided more details: Matej left his house at 4:45 in the morning for the brewery, where, with his brother Jacob, he loaded up his wagon. They drove along 12th Street and then turned onto Morgan heading south toward 16th Street. At 7:30 they drove across the tracks at 16th and Morgan just as the night and day watchmen were changing places. When they got to the third track, they saw a steam engine approaching at enormous speed. Jacob was able to jump clear before the impact, but Matej was thrown thirty feet, landing on the pavement. He died that afternoon at a local hospital, leaving behind his wife and six children. Apparently this was not the first such incident; the article begins, "Carelessness of railway employees was again to blame for the untimely death of a man in the prime of his life."

The Šidlo stone is a fine example of how grave markers can be personalized to reflect not only the lives of the persons memorialized, but their deaths as well.



Information about treestones is from *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, by Douglas Keister. "Fatal Accident," the article about how Matej Šidlo met his death, was published in the *Denní Hlasatel* on August 11, 1898.



What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

ad book, and the sponsorship of the **Prague-Chicago Sister City Committee**, **Gethsemane Gardens**, and **George Drost** covering some of the costs, proceeds from the gala dinner totaled \$14,555.52. The needed tuck-pointing and brick repairs to the gatehouse have been ordered, which will cost just about that amount. Thank you to all who attended, supported the silent auction, the ad book, or just made a donation. Deepest thanks to the hard-working committee of **Martha and**

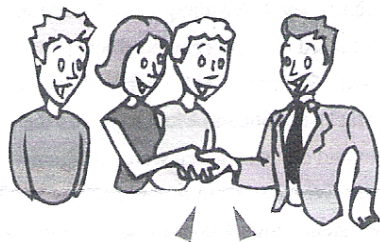
Chuck Cervenka, Barbara Hoffman, Judie Mason, and Juli Nelson. Thanks, too, to **Carol Jean Smetana**, who created a delightful, illustrated presentation about highlights of Friends' accomplishments in the last 5 years. She will be expanding this and presenting it at our August 22nd meeting next summer.

We hope to see everyone at our winter meeting at Klas Restaurant in Cicero for a fascinating program about the Czechoslovak Legionnaires, the brave group of men that

included U.S. citizens of Czech and Slovak ancestry who fought in World War I and helped Masaryk convince President Wilson to create Czechoslovakia in 1918. Our speaker, **Dr. Stephen Sebesta**, is coming from Cleveland for the presentation. We'll also have copies of his new book available for purchase. More information is on the back of the newsletter.

Have a blessed and most happy 2010.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann, President



Welcome to our New Members!

Coral Cerny Schaumburg, IL
Ms. Daryl L. Glowa Santa Monica, CA
Earl & Winifred Hajic Santa Barbara, CA
Edgar & Carol Hajic De Kalb, IL
Bill & Ruth Rosol Aurora, CO
Rose Slaninka Schaumburg, IL
Glenn F. Spachman Roselle, IL

Friends of BNC is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charitable organization. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to fund improvements at BNC, please write a check payable to Friends of BNC with a notation on the memo line, and send it to:

FOBNC c/o Juli Nelson
 300 Claymoor #2F
 Hinsdale, IL 60521-5075



HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SOMETHING?

It's not too late!

If you haven't already done so, please take a moment **now** to send in your membership renewal.

Memberships: One year: \$25 *individual* ~ \$20 student or senior ~ \$35 *family* ~ \$30 senior family

Two years: \$45 *individual* ~ \$35 student or senior ~ \$60 *family* ~ \$50 senior family

Make check payable to Friends of BNC
 and mail with coupon to:

FOBNC c/o Juli Nelson
 300 Claymoor #2F
 Hinsdale, IL 60521-5075

Membership Renewal

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____
 Zip Code (+ 4) _____
 E-mail _____

Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

In August 2009, **Marek Skolil**, the Consul General of the Czech Republic, notified Marge that a grant of \$14,900 had been approved for the bell tower restoration. This left \$12,000 more to be raised for the project. Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery helped raise another \$6,000, and Bohemian National Cemetery appropriated an additional \$6,000 to complete the bell tower project.

In September 2009, the restoration work began. Allendorfer Roofing reinforced the bell tower walls with 5/8-inch steel-threaded rods to secure them from leaning. The parapet walls were rebuilt, and new flashing and copper counter-flashing were installed where the parapet walls were pulling away. Next time you're at the cemetery, take a moment to appreciate the restored bell tower – and look

up to see the bell itself, which dates from 1893.

The restoration of the gatehouse over the last few years has been possible because of the work and contributions of the members of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery. The next project is to tuck point and grind the west and south walls, rebuild with new bricks the southwest tower, and grind and tuck point the chimney. Thanks to all who attended the Gala Dinner and participated in the silent auction, funds are now available to begin this restoration.

When the cemetery's warehouse building was sold years ago to the City of Chicago, the electrical lines that ran from the electrical pole on the north side of the Chicago River (cemetery property) to the south side of the Chicago River (City of Chicago property) were left active. **Ken**

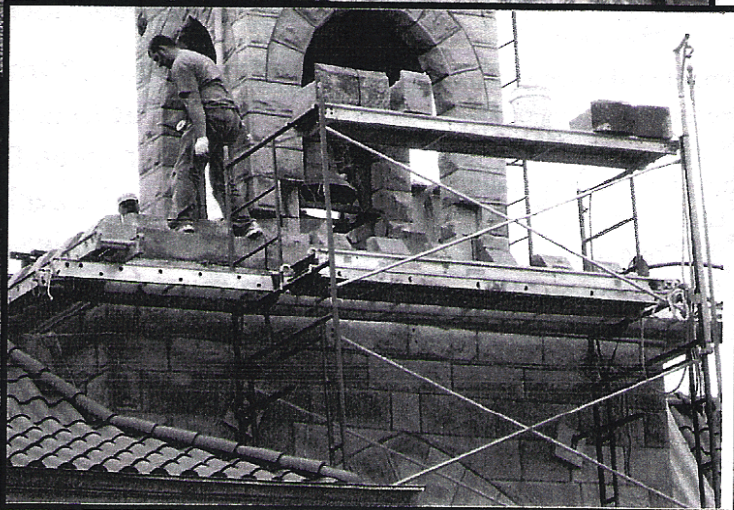
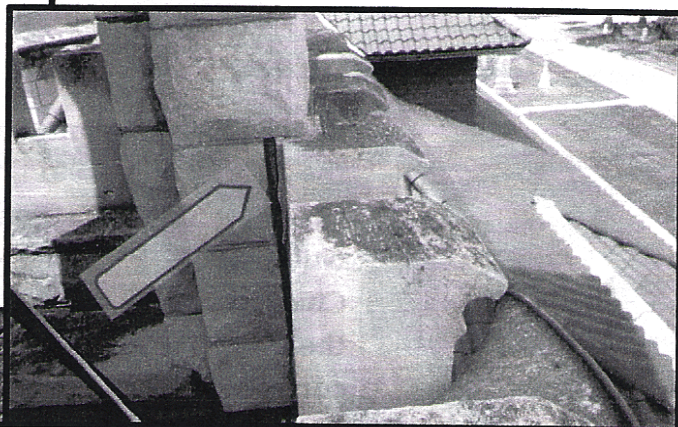
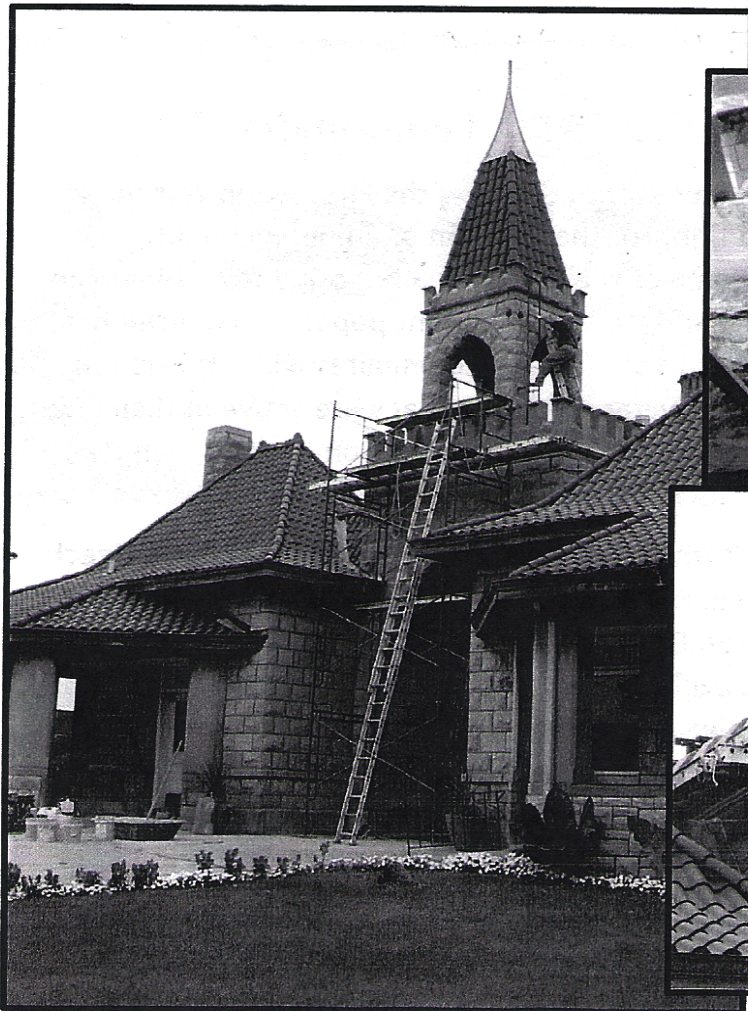
Quick disconnected the electric power. **Ken Dvorsky**, **Andy Bultas**, **Ken Quick**, **Chuck Cervenka**, **Bill Casey** and **Phil Roux** removed the wires that ran over the Chicago River.

The west bungalow has been slowly rehabbed by **John Illse**, who has been working on the interior. Fifteen new double-paned, low-e, gas-filled windows were installed by an outside contractor. The bungalow was then rented to **Paul Schmidt** and **Jasmyn Dubois**, who are continuing to rehab the inside. **Paul Schmidt** will also help with the straightening of cemetery headstones.

The cemetery wishes everyone a **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Andy Bultas

photos by Chuck Michalek and Jerry Guydusek



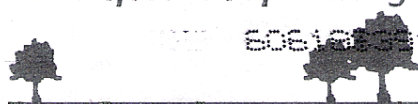
Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

611 Harvard Lane
Libertyville, IL 60048

Phone: 847-362-9036
Email: mdstueck@aol.com



We're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



Have you heard of the Czechoslovak Legionnaires?



Symbol of the American Czechoslovak Legion of Chicago, painted by John Anton Mallin on the wall of the Large Ceremony Hall in the Crematorium at Bohemian National Cemetery.

Czechoslovak legions were formed during the First World War to aid the Allied armies and fight for the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state. Some of these legionnaires came from American cities with large Czech and Slovak immigrant populations, including Chicago and Cleveland. After the war, legionnaires who returned to the United States formed veteran groups that were active in their communities; in Chicago, they had representation in the Bohemian National Cemetery Association.

On Sunday January 24th at 1:00 PM, Friends will meet for a Czech luncheon (\$25) at Klas Restaurant, 5734 W. Cermak Road, Cicero, IL. Following our meal, Dr. Stephen Sebesta will present "The Story of Cleveland Czechoslovak Legionnaires" at 2:30 PM and be available to sign copies of his new book. Reservations for luncheon must be made by January 20th: call 630-887-0411 for reservations or more information. Members who cannot join us for lunch are welcome to attend just the presentation at 2:30 PM at no cost.

Booklets about Legionnaires at rest at Bohemian National Cemetery will also be available.