

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. 6 No. 4

April 2010

carol jean smetana, editor

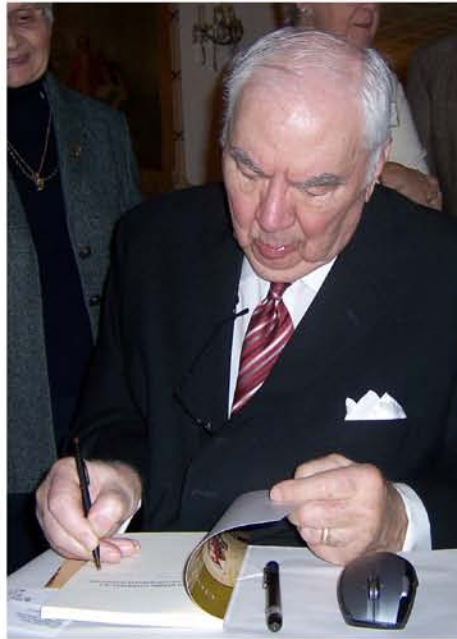


What's New with Friends of BNC

Over 60 members and friends joined us at Klas Restaurant on January 24th for our winter dinner meeting featuring **Dr. Stephen Sebesta's** illustrated presentation on the Czechoslovak Legionnaires. The inspiring story described Czech- and Slovak-Americans who volunteered to fight, training first in the eastern U.S. and then in France. Pictures of the trainees in their Sokol uniforms doing exercises and of the colorful regimental flags livened up the presentation, which gave a wonderful view of their lives in Europe and explained how they formed veterans' organizations after the war. Entries from Ladislav

Krizek's daily diary, actual wartime photographs of the 21st Regiment, and a map of the movement of this

(continued on page 6)



Dr. Stephen Sebesta signs a copy of his book at the Friends meeting - photo courtesy of Pat and Stephen Sebesta

Live from BNC

The start of year 2010 has been quiet, perhaps because the weather has been very cold and snowy. Due to the inclement weather, the volunteers have concentrated on interior work in the Columbarium. **Chuck Michalek** and **Jerry Gaydusek** repaired the folding doors between the elevator and Marble Room on the lower level. They can now be properly closed to provide privacy when there are services in the

Marble Room.

Ken Quick, Andy Bultas, Ken Dvorsky, Jerry, and Chuck worked on the heating system in the Columbarium. The blower that directs heat to the east niche room by the Pilsen Butchers' window had been inoperable for a few years, and a steam pipe was leaking. Ken Quick installed an electric switch on the unit, and **John Illse** fixed the steam

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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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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

President: *Marge Sladek Stueckemann*
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 Newsletter: *carol jean smetana*
 Publicity: Open and seeking a volunteer
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from the editor's laptop

When I was growing up, our family spent every Memorial Day at the cemetery tending graves. We would start at the grave of my mother's brother, a Marine Raider who had been killed in World War II - pull the weeds, turn over the dirt, plant flowers, trim the grass around his brass government marker, and then place a small American flag on his grave. My mother's parents' graves were nearby, and there, too, we planted and trimmed and cleaned. Often my mother's older brother and his family met us at the cemetery, and after planting the family graves, we would sometimes drive to Old Prague restaurant to enjoy a traditional dinner.

For decades, families with loved ones buried at Bohemian National Cemetery could have a meal right there at the cemetery. In 1917, the BNC Association bought the Scheiner restaurant and picnic grove (until 1935 the grove boasted a dance pavilion), which abutted cemetery land. BNCA leased the restaurant to Rudolph and Marie Bezvoda. In 1945, Victor H. Filip, Jr., and his wife Marie took over the restaurant. Through the years, it was the locale for official dinners of the BNCA, as well as, presumably, gatherings after funerals and even celebrations. In fact, in 1962 when the BNCA decided the restaurant was no longer viable, the Board agreed to delay termination of the Filip's lease until after the wedding of their daughter, who wanted her reception to be at her parents' restaurant. Three months later, in December 1962, the restaurant was demolished. Do any of you remember going there? Please help us preserve this chapter of BNC's history by sharing any reminiscences or photos you have of the restaurant. Send them to me at HC 69 Box 16, Sapello, NM 87745, or via email cjsmetana@msn.com. Thanks and na shledanou!

carol jean smetana

Děkuji Vám

We appreciate your efforts
to help carry out
our Mission and further our Vision:

Chuck Betzold for creating the enlarged grant checks used at the Gala and also the colorful posters of the pictures of the evening

the Kubly family for duplicating the mini-posters for the May 2nd tour

Linda Kostuba for coordinating the drapery cleaning and polishing the brass curtain rods in the Columbarium chapel

Albert Walavich for the special tour for Dr. and Mrs. Sebesta

Gladys Wheeler for serving as our BNC delegate in the past

Bob Syrup for serving as our new BNC delegate

Chuck Michalek for contributing articles to the CSA Fraternal Life Journal

Cary Mentzer, CSA VP, and **Karin Pecoraro**, Editor, for publishing our monthly column in the CSA Fraternal Life Journal

In the Friends' mailbox:

To Our "Friends"~

Words really cannot express our deep appreciation for all you do for BNC.

Many thanks to you for your kindness.

*Deepest gratitude,
The staff at BNC*

A Soldier, A Baker ...

by carol jean smetana

Bohemian National Cemetery is now being featured in a regular column published in CSA Fraternal Life's monthly journal. In January, our president Marge Stueckemann wrote about Czech legionnaires and received several responses to her article. As we prepare to commemorate those who fought for freedom this Memorial Day, I thought you would enjoy the story of a Moravian immigrant who spent five years fighting with the French Foreign Legion during World War I and then made his way to America. The following is based on information sent in by Ronald Chmelina, stepson of Konstantine Precechtel, and on additional records research.

Konstantine Precechtel was born in Moravia around 1890. At the time the Bohemian, Moravian and Slovak lands were subjugated under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and the very next day, on July 29th, Precechtel enlisted in the French Foreign Legion in Meziere, France, near the southwest border of Belgium. He served for five years with the Second Cavalry of the First Foreign Legion, for which he was paid a daily wage of 80 centimes, or about sixteen cents. The Second Cavalry was recognized as an elite unit, noted for its "spirit of devotion and sacrifice" and its courage. Legionnaire 2nd Class Precechtel fought in numerous battles in Morocco and Algeria and was wounded by bayonet and gassed on two occasions. He received the Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) accompanied by a citation for bravery, the military Medal of Morocco, and a Certificate of Good Conduct. The Chief of his battalion testified that Precechtel constantly acted with honor and fidelity.

An armistice halting the war came into effect on November 11, 1918. The Treaty of Versailles, formally ending the war, was signed on June 28, 1919, and one month later, on July 29th, Precechtel left the Foreign Legion. Four months later he immigrated to America on the SS Rochambeau, which



departed Le Havre, France, on November 19, 1919, and arrived in New York on December 11th. He settled in Chicago, where he married and had children; his second wife was Ronald's mother. Precechtel worked as a baker and was a member of the Bakers and Confectioners Union. Ronald writes, "He was an excellent cake baker by trade and worked long hard hours. As a youngster I remember going to the bakers union affairs at Sokol Havlicek and Pilsen Park in Chicago."

Precechtel died Feb 22, 1962, and was buried at Bohemian National Cemetery. His family requested that, in lieu of flowers, mourners "lovingly support our beautiful Bohemian Home for the Aged."


Left: Konstantine Precechtel in his Legionnaire uniform.

Below: Konstantine stands beside one of his culinary creations, a cake in the form of a castle.

Photos courtesy of Ronald Chmelina.



If you would like to share a story of a relative buried at BNC, please send it to me at HC 69 Box 16, Sapello, NM 87745 or cjsmetana@msn.com



MEMORIAL DAY

ON MONDAY, MAY 31ST,
AT 9:00 A.M.,

BOHEMIAN NATIONAL CEMETERY WILL PRESENT A PROGRAM TO HONOR ALL WHO SERVED IN AMERICA'S ARMED FORCES. MEET AT THE GATEHOUSE FOR REFRESHMENTS. PARADE TO COLUMBARIUM STEPS OFF AT 9:30 A.M. THE CEREMONY AT THE COLUMBARIUM WILL INCLUDE INSPIRATIONAL SPEECHES, MUSIC, AND THE SOKOL SPIRIT COLOR GUARD. WOMEN ATTENDING WILL RECEIVE CARNATIONS, COMPLIMENTS OF FRIENDS OF BNC.

NEW HOURS AT BOHEMIAN NATIONAL CEMETERY

On April 1st, new opening hours took effect:

BNC OFFICE HOURS:

Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

CEMETERY GROUNDS:

MAIN GATE is now open on weekends,
Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

COLUMBARIUM is open by appointment only and for scheduled events. Friends' guided tours are the best way to see the Columbarium.

Donations

*We greatly appreciate all of your generous donations.
Your gifts help preserve and enhance our beautiful cemetery.
(List includes contributions received January - February 2010)*

Patrons (\$500 - \$999)

Carla Fox *for Libbie Krivanek*
Joseph Svehla

Sponsors (\$100 - \$499)

Paul Blecha
Arlene Borkey
Cicero Rebekah Lodge #44
Czech & Slovak American
Genealogy Society of Illinois
Carl & Mary Ellen Flaks
Judy Lovaas
Stephen Sebesta
Linda Uhler

Donors (\$25 - \$99)

W. Douglas Bond
Joe Cebina
Sheila Chin

Frank & Diane Chmelik
William Chuhak
Geraldine Coates
Joe Domko
Gwen Ferguson
Hester Hilden
Dolores Hologa
Richard Holubek
Roy & Marie Jensen
Shirley Jensen
June Kanta
Geraldine Kraupner
Margaret Kruty
James Lagocki
Diane MacDonald
Pat Nelson
Richard Palicka
John Persic
Donald Picha

Jane Pugh
Carol Rymsha
Sokol Town of Lake
Dolores Hemzacek Stallons
Betty Sykora *in loving memory of
Rose Cervenka*
Lorraine Szabo
Joan & Fred Vydra

Thank You (\$1 - \$24)

Edward Cechura
Janet Cundiff
Rose Morrissey
Betty Oppenheimer
Blanche Rozner
Patt Salvino

Welcome to Our New Members



Rosie Bodien ... Kirkland, WA
Victor Havel ... Ennis, TX
LaVerne D. Havlicek ... Wilmington, IL
Lillian Huelsman ... Mountain Home, AK
Carol Krauser ... Thornton, CO
Marilyn Russell ... Riverside, IL
Ruth Ruzicka Swedeen ... Franklin, TN

Brought to you by Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

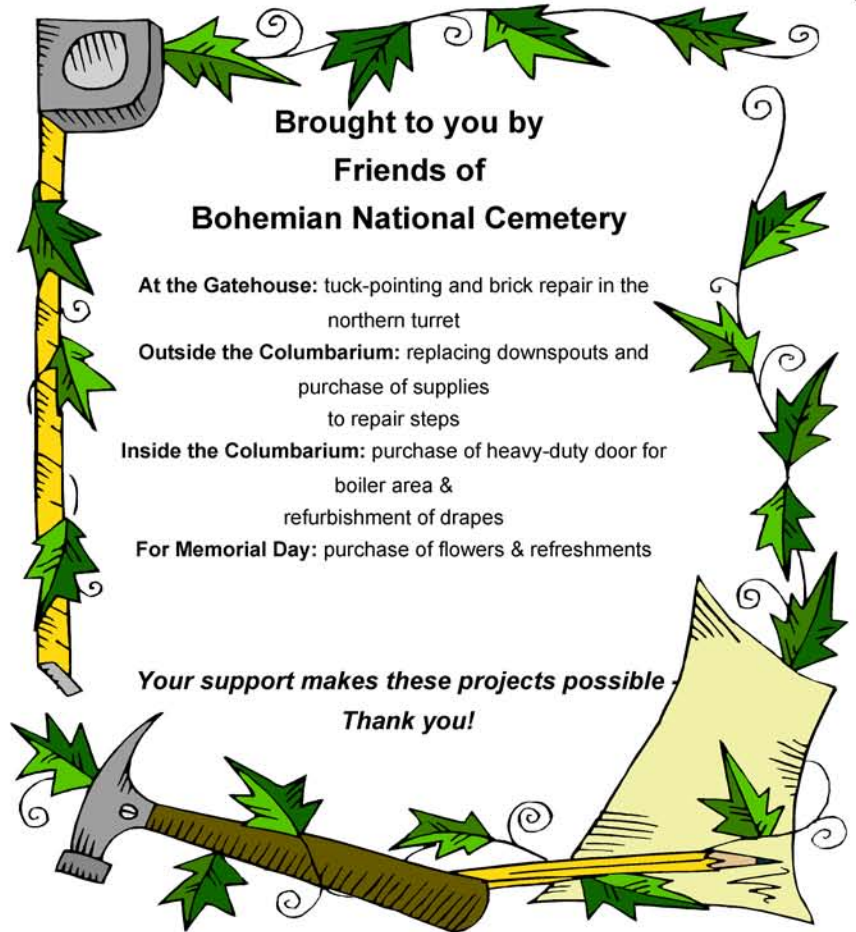
At the Gatehouse: tuck-pointing and brick repair in the northern turret

Outside the Columbarium: replacing downspouts and purchase of supplies to repair steps

Inside the Columbarium: purchase of heavy-duty door for boiler area & refurbishment of drapes

For Memorial Day: purchase of flowers & refreshments

*Your support makes these projects possible
Thank you!*



Stories of the Stones

by carol jean smetana

"Tradesmen tombstones" containing iconic representations of the occupations of the deceased were prevalent in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Given the high degree of illiteracy at the time, stones bearing images of a person's "tools of the trade" were more useful for conveying information than written inscriptions.

There are a variety of tradesmen or occupation tombstones at Bohemian National Cemetery. The stone pictured here commemorates Victor Vráz and R. J. Pšenka with an open book and a quill pen. We might logically conclude that a book and pen would be symbols of a writer, and indeed both Vráz and Pšenka were writers. A book can represent scholarship as well: Victor Vráz received a Ph.D. from Northwestern University and was a university professor. He also wrote numerous articles in Czech and English for the Czech press here in the United States and in Prague, and participated in national broadcasts on Czechoslovakia. Vráz was born in Chicago in 1904. His parents were E. S. Vráz, a world traveler and adventurer, and Vlasta Geringer, daughter of August Geringer, a



renowned Czech-American publisher. R. J. (Rudolph Jaromir) Pšenka was an editor and writer. Born in Jindrichuv Hradec, Bohemia, in 1875, he joined the French Foreign Legion as a young man. August Geringer read Pšenka's stories about his legion experience and in

1901 offered him a job as editor of *Svornost*, a Czech daily newspaper published in Chicago. Pšenka accepted the offer and moved to America. Two years later, in 1903, he married the boss's daughter Augusta, the sister of Victor's mother. Hence, Victor and R.J. were nephew and uncle.

Eventually Pšenka became the editor-in-chief of Geringer's publishing house. When World War I broke out in Europe, Pšenka became a leader in the war movement, co-founding the Czech-American National Alliance. He used his writings, including the *Svornost* newspaper, to build support for the war effort and to encourage Czech-Americans to enlist. Pšenka also wrote novels and plays, several of which were published and staged in the new Czechoslovak state after the war.

Nephew and uncle died about two months apart, Victor Vráz on September 23, 1939, and R. J. Pšenka on November 29, 1939.

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

5255 N. Pulaski
Chicago, Illinois

Saturday April 24th at 9 a.m. - noon ~ CSA Join Hands Day to clean up Gatehouse and Columbarium in preparation for May events

Sunday May 2nd at 1 p.m. ~ Tour of the Cemetery sponsored by Friends of BNC ~ meet at the Gatehouse ~ \$10 members, \$15 non-members ~ Refreshments after the tour

Sunday May 9th at 1 p.m. ~ Mother's Day Ceremony and Reception ~ free

Friday May 28th at 10 a.m. ~ Join us in decorating the Cemetery for Memorial Day by placing flags on veterans' graves

Monday May 31st at 9:30 a.m. ~ Memorial Day Ceremony ~ free

Sunday July 18th at noon - 4:00 p.m. ~ BNC picnic

For more information about these events, call

847-362-9036

What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

regiment during the Meuse-Argonne offensive gave us a unique insight into the Legionnaires' experiences. Dr. Sebesta's presentation included the striking Preissig postcards illustrated with regimental flags or the Bohemian lion, pictures of the medals awarded for valor, as well as newspaper articles from the U.S. Some attendees shared with

the group photographs they had brought of relatives who had served in the Legion. Many people bought copies of Dr. Sebesta's book, *The Wartime Experiences of a Czechoslovak Legionnaire* (which we are offering for \$16 for members plus \$4 shipping).

Dr. Sebesta and his wife **Pat** joined us for a tour of the cemetery led by **Albert Walavich**. We slogged through the snow to see all the highlights, including, of course, the war monuments, the Columbarium niches, especially those containing pictures of Legionnaires (we located at least three, and I'm sure there are more), the Cermak mausoleum, and the grave markers in Section 16 evoking the tragedy of the Eastland Disaster. The Sebestas, who live in Cleveland, were most impressed and hope to return in May for our regular cemetery tour.

In March, **Jiri Matousek** from the Czech Republic toured BNC. After reading about the

cemetery in a 1920s book about Czech Chicago that was his great-grandfather's, he located us on our webpage. It's always delightful to have someone from the "old country" discover our group and visit our cemetery.

If you are a member of CSA Fraternal Life, we hope you have noticed that Bohemian National

Cemetery now is featured in a monthly article. In response to our January article about the Legionnaires, in which we asked for information about Legionnaires now resting at BNC, we received four interesting family stories,



Lad Krizek During Signal Corp Training in Cognac

Illustration from Dr. Stephen Sebesta's presentation on the Czechoslovak Legionnaires of World War I (photo of display taken by Kathy Mallin)

which we hope to feature in future newsletters.

The month of May will bring three special opportunities to visit BNC: our tour on May 2nd, the Mother's Day celebration on May 9th, and Memorial Day on May 31st. Once again, Friends will be placing flags for Memorial Day. We will meet on Friday, May 28th at the cemetery office at 10:00 a.m. Looking ahead to summer, the BNC picnic will be held on July 18th.

Please join us for any and all of these occasions. After all the snow, the idea of flowers blooming and green grass around the buildings and monuments is so appealing!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann



Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

pipe, so the east niche room can now be heated. The same volunteers also repaired the radiator in the southeast corner of the Columbarium, which hadn't worked for years.

At one time there were two sinks with running water at the rear of the stage on the main floor of the Columbarium, but years ago one sink was removed and the water shut off. Jerry donated a laundry sink, which he and John installed. With the water turned back on, there are once again two working sinks in the upper level of the Columbarium.

Linda Kostuba has been vacuuming the floors and cleaning the windows in the Columbarium. She removed the drapes in the east and west niche areas to have them professionally cleaned - something that hadn't been done in over thirty years! Linda polished the drapery rods and discovered there was brass under all that black. The refurbished drapes look quite nice on the now golden rods. **Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery** assumed the cleaning costs.

Also in the Columbarium, Ken Quick, Ken Dvorsky, and Andy installed a new light fixture and two switches in the lower level elevator area. Chuck Michalek, Ken Dvorsky, and Andy replaced the bulbs and reset the fixtures for the spotlights that illuminate the casket area. Work began on restructuring the building's public address system to make it more effective. The speakers were rewired and placed on wooden shelves installed by John. Two more speakers will be added.

Three security cameras have been installed in the lower level of the Columbarium. Jerry's brother **John Gaydusek** donated 17 security cameras to the cemetery, which he had removed in a remodeling project. To make these cameras operable, **Chuck Cervenka** purchased

surveillance equipment costing about \$600. Volunteers will now be able to install additional security cameras throughout the cemetery.

On January 27th, Ken Dvorsky conducted a tour of the cemetery for **Michael Klimesh** and his daughter **Eryn** from Spillville, Iowa. Michael is associated with the Bohemian National Cemetery in Spillville. Ken

"Few environments in ... Chicago ... can rival what has been put in place at the Bohemian National Cemetery."

showed them the Cermak Mausoleum, the Civil War Monument, and the Masaryk Mausoleum. They also spent a lot of time going through the east

and west niches of the Columbarium. Both Michael and his daughter were impressed with the size of the Columbarium and its art work, and with the cemetery overall. Michael noted that in contrast to BNC's 122

acres, the cemetery in Spillville covers only one acre. Michael hopes to return in May for the Friends' cemetery tour.

Ken also conducted a tour for **Frank Saballus**, the owner of Klas Restaurant in Cicero, Illinois, and his friend **Mark Henning**, who works in the restoration and preservation field. After a driving tour, Ken took them to the Columbarium, where they studied the artwork and the niche areas. Mark expressed an interest in participating in future



A niche area in the Columbarium

preservation matters at the cemetery and exclaimed, "There are few environments in the vast city of Chicago that can rival what has been put in place at the Bohemian National Cemetery."

The comments of people who tour Bohemian National Cemetery make me proud to be associated with this historical place. I encourage you to take advantage of any opportunity to visit the cemetery. Walking around the grounds, you can see the many monuments and mausoleums that show and tell the history of the Czechoslovak people who founded Bohemian National Cemetery. This unique cemetery has to be seen to be appreciated.

Andy Bultas

**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



Meet us at the gatehouse for the

FRIENDS' CEMETERY TOUR

SUNDAY MAY 2ND

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

guided by

ALBERT WALAVICH

Cost: \$10 for members

\$15 for non-members

Refreshments and book table

available after the tour



photo by Chuck Michalek

**COME AND GET ACQUAINTED WITH
SOME OF
OUR CEMETERY RESIDENTS!**