

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Summer Issue ~ Vol. 7 No. 1

July 2010

carol jean smetana, editor



What's New with Friends of BNC

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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Next time you drive into the gate, look to your right and left at that wall - all professionally tuck-pointed! Our Gala monies were spent to complete this. During

the bidding process, we discovered deterioration of the bricks on the north tower and leaks in the roof, so we paid to repair that as well.



Czech delegation in front of Cermak mausoleum (photo by Juli Nelson)

Thanks to all who came to BNC on April 24th to help clean up. Ken Dvorsky, Cary Mentzer and the Czechoslovak Fraternal Life group organized the day with about 40 participants. Donning masks, we even swept out the dust of decades in the south gatehouse, which was built in 1893. A historic black grating that reminds me of an old bank and beautiful floor tile identical to that in the

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Live from BNC

The month of April began a busy spring for Bohemian National Cemetery. On the 24th, CSA Fraternal Life sponsored its third annual Join Hands Days, the second year in a row the work project was at BNC. Ken Dvorsky, President of CSA District 12 Council, coordinated this project with BNC General Manager Beth Raleigh and Superintendent Phil Roux. Thirty-nine volunteers, ranging in age from high school students to a 93-year-old member of Lodge Edison, joined in to clean the north gatehouse and the columbarium. Ken, Jerry Gaydusek, Linda Kostuba, Patty Volkman, the current Miss CSA Amanda Laukant, Alix Wilt, and Cindy Bueneman cleaned the columbarium, including the

stairwells and railings, benches, niches, rugs, and entryway. Martha Cervenka, on BNC's Audit & Oversight Committee, and Chuck Cervenka and Andy Bultas, both BNC trustees, focused on cleaning the north gatehouse, which included the windows inside and out, the bathrooms, light fixtures, and floors. Helping them were two members of the Peterson-Pulaski Industrial Council, Janita Tucker and Thomas Gonzales, and Marge Stueckemann, who led a project to clean old folding chairs that have been sold to the Czech Museum in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Also joining in the cleaning project were the officers of CSA, President Dan Wenzler, Vice President

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Heritage Happenings

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Manuscripts, articles, photographs, and advertisements for *Heritage Happenings* may be submitted to Carol Jean Smetana, HC 69 Box 16, Sapello, NM 87745-9602 or emailed to her at cjsmetana@msn.com.

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Officers of Friends of BNC

President: *Marge Sladek Stueckemann*

Vice-President: *Bill Hosna*

Secretary: *Mary Syrup*

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Grants Chair: *Andy Bultas*

Membership: *Henrietta Bartizal Pons*

Newsletter: *carol jean smetana*

Publicity: Open and seeking a volunteer

Webmaster: *Sue Zielinski*



from the editor's laptop

Every time I visit Bohemian National Cemetery, I discover something that piques my curiosity and gets added to my "Research Needed" file of gravestone photos and scribbled notes. Is there any meaning in that squirrel sculpted into the base of that monument? What is the story behind the carved image of a girl in a boat on that gravestone? Why was that particular epitaph chosen? Some questions I can answer definitively. Other answers I can only imagine. The specific history represented by each marker is not always available.

The first part of our mission statement is to promote the historical significance of the cemetery. Some stories have been kept alive - for instance, Mayor Anton Cermak, the Eastland disaster, the war memorials. But, as I keep discovering when I delve into one of my "Research Needed" projects, there are many more stories connected to the cemetery that are worth knowing. We are working to reclaim much of that history that has seemingly been ignored through the decades.

At our August 22nd meeting, I will present a slide show that interweaves this unfamiliar history with the cemetery's own story to create a fuller picture of the historical significance of BNC. Many of us joined Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery because we have family buried here. This personal heritage is important, but so too is the connection of BNC to various immigrant cultures, the city of Chicago, and national and international events. Please join us for a visit to BNC's past and a review of Friends' projects. I look forward to seeing you - na shledanou!

carol jean smetana

Welcome to Our New Members!

Lorraine Castelli ... Boca Raton, FL

Carol Krauser ... Thornton, CO

Frank Magallon ... Berwyn, IL

Frank Mareska ... Melrose Park, IL

Michael Nemeth ... Chicago, IL

Dr. Peter & Janet Uden ... So. Deerfield, MA

Patty Volkman ... Lake Villa, IL

Děkuji Vám!

Thanks to those who came to place flags for Memorial Day. Flags lined the entrance road, circled the war monuments, and decorated graves.

Al and Mary Avery

Ray Brabec

John Jacobs

Art and Kathryn Lorenz

Marge Sladek Stueckemann



What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

north gatehouse highlight this area, which served as the office before the Administration Building was built.

More than 75 people (!) were impressed by BNC at our May 2nd tour. A beautiful day and lots of support from an online group sponsored by the Northwest Historical Society, "Meet-Up," meant that there were many non-Czechs, friends from the neighborhood, who came.

Art Lorenz's beautifully restored World War II Jeep provided just the right backdrop for the volunteers placing flags at BNC on May 28th. At one point, we looked up to see President Obama's three military escort and two regular helicopters flying overhead. How meaningful to be aware of our Commander-in-Chief as we memorialized those who fought for our freedom. We provided our traditional carnations to women and supplied and served refreshments for the Memorial Day ceremony.

What do you serve to four **Czech Republic senators**, including the **Vice President**, plus a **translator and secretary**, who are coming to visit? We created a formal tea with silver, crystal, Czech pastries, and fresh flowers in the gatehouse. On Tuesday, June 1st, **Andy Bultas, Chuck and Martha Cervenka, Juli Nelson**, and I welcomed the guests and provided gifts. The Cervenkas conducted a tour in Czech. As is customary with visitors from the Czech Republic, they held a wreath-laying ceremony at the Cermak mausoleum.

Don't miss the chance to talk about Czech California with **Frank Magallon**, the author of a new illustrated book about that area of Chicago. He will be at the Friends' book table at the BNC picnic on July 18th to sign copies of his new book, *Chicago's Little Village: Lavndale-Crawford*. See his article and our special pricing for this book on page 4 of the newsletter, or come and buy it at the picnic. The picnic is held under the big oak trees just north of the

columbarium and features live music, Klas's potato pancakes, sausage, and watermelon. Friends will sponsor the bakery table, which will again be chaired by **Helene Schaeffer** and **Helen Souta**. Please feel free to bake and bring treats on disposable plates that day.

I look forward to seeing everyone at our semi-annual membership meeting on Sunday, August 22nd at 1:00 p.m. Our own **Carol Jean Smetana** is coming from New Mexico to present an illustrated talk, "BNC Then and Now." Elections will also be held, and our trademark delicious Czech refreshments will be served. No charge - bring friends - all are welcome!

Also, mark your calendar for our fall "Tour of the Tombstones" on Saturday, September 25th from 10:00 a.m. to noon. More details in the "Upcoming Events at BNC" listing below.

Marge Sladek Stueckemann

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Sunday, July 18th noon to 4:00 p.m. ~ Bohemian National Cemetery hosts its annual picnic at the cemetery, 5255 N. Pulaski, Chicago. Free admission, special Czech items and Czech foods for sale (or bring a lunch). Meet Frank Magallon, the author of *Chicago's Little Village* (see article on page 4). Fun for all - live music, too! Donations of bakery will be gratefully accepted. For Information: 773-539-8442

Sunday, August 22nd at 1:00 p.m. ~ Friends of BNC program. Join us in the columbarium for an illustrated talk by Carol Jean Smetana, "BNC Then and Now," highlighting the history of BNC and Friends' contributions to its preservation. More information on back page.

Saturday, September 25th at 10:00 a.m. ~ Albert Walavich will guide a walking "Tour of the Tombstones" at BNC, 5255 N. Pulaski, sponsored by Friends of BNC. Meet at the gatehouse. \$10 members, \$15 non-members. Czech pastries after the tour. For more information call 847-362-9036.



A Nostalgic Trip Through Česká Kalifornie

by Frank Magallon

"Česká Kalifornie." That is a name many of you have heard over and over again throughout your lives. Perhaps you grew up there, or maybe your *bába* lived in the old neighborhood. Whatever your connection to the area, when you hear the name, memories start rushing back to you --

Twenty-Sixth Street, the Atlantic Theatre, Farragut High School, Sokol, Czech school, good times. The geographic boundaries of the neighborhood are, on the north, Cermak Road (2200 south); on the east, Western Avenue (2400 west); on the south, the Illinois Central railroad tracks (Thirty-First or Thirty-Third Street, depending on your location); and to the west, Kilbourn Avenue (4500 west). You can now take a trip back to Czech California, or Little Village as it is now called, through my new book *Chicago's Little Village: Lawndale-Crawford*, a new offering in Arcadia Publishing's *Images of America* series.

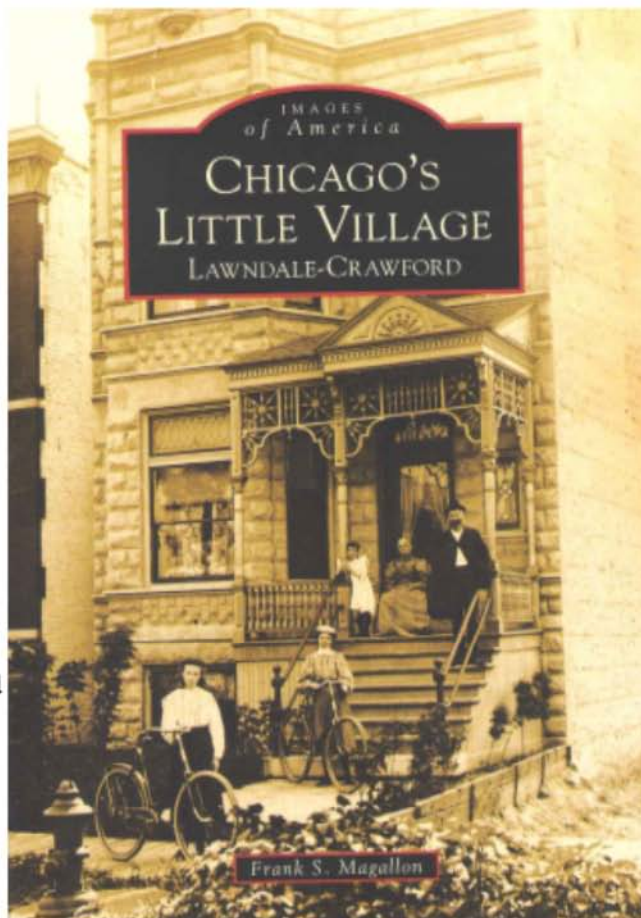
I will guide you on a nostalgic trip through the old neighborhood with many never-before-seen images from my extensive personal collection of photographs, postcards, and memorabilia related to the Little Village neighborhood. Little Village was once the largest

Czech enclave in the United States, and many immigrants passed through this neighborhood, making a positive impact on Chicago and the wider world.

You will experience Little Village like never before in the book's 128 pages illustrating the history of the area through

photographs from its beginnings as the affluent Chicago "suburb" Lawndale, through its days as the largest Czech district in the United States, to currently being the largest Mexican-American community in the state of Illinois. Former Little Village residents now live throughout Chicagoland and beyond. Many others made their final journey to Bohemian National Cemetery, including my great-grandparents Vaclav and Marie Strnad, who lived at 23rd and Spaulding.

I will be attending the annual Bohemian National Cemetery picnic on Sunday July 18th, and you can purchase a copy of my book there, which I will be happy to sign. I will also be at the Friends table at the Czechoslovak American Congress picnic at Kiwanis Park in Brookfield on August 1st. Stop by and say hello. I would love to meet you and hear your memories of the old neighborhood.



Friends Book Order Form

Both books featured in this issue - *Chicago's Little Village* by Frank Magallon and *Journey* by James Vesely - are available through Friends of BNC at a special members-only price of \$18 each, plus shipping cost of \$5 for the first book and \$3 for each additional book sent to the same address. Profits from books sold by Friends are used for our preservation work at the cemetery.

Yes, I want to order!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip + 4 _____

_____ *Chicago's Little Village* book(s) @ \$18 each = _____ plus shipping _____ = _____

_____ *Journey* book(s) @ \$18 each = _____ plus shipping _____ = _____

Total Check Amount _____

Make check payable to Friends of BNC and send with order to:

Juli Nelson, 300 Claymoor #2F, Hinsdale, IL 60521-5076

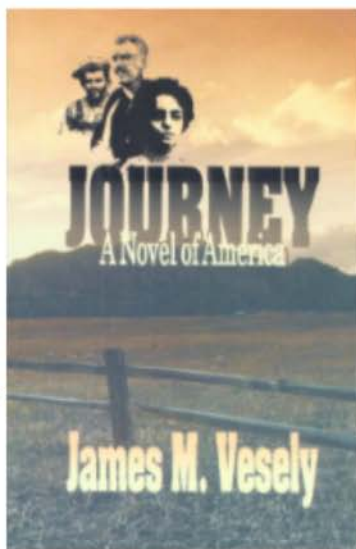


Journey: A Novel of America **by James M. Vesely** **Reviewed by Chuck Michalek**

Grand old cemeteries like BNC receive recognition for their impressive monuments, unique gravestones, and historic buildings nestled within a peaceful setting of grassy fields, colorful flowers, and stately trees. But what about the compelling stories of those resting beneath the markers? Driving along the curving roads of BNC, you may wonder as I do - who were these Czech and Slovak people? What were their lives like? What were their dreams, their accomplishments, big or little?

Journey: A Novel of America, by James M. Vesely, answers these questions for the Novak family, who immigrated to Chicago from Třeboň, Bohemia, around 1900. Leaving a harsh existence as tenant farmers on the Schwarzenberk lands, the Novaks endure a harsh Atlantic crossing, the long processing lines at Ellis Island, and the cross-country trip to the west side of Chicago. After a lifetime of heartwarming and heartbreaking experiences, the immigrant family find their final resting place "beneath a large, shady elm tree in the Bohemian National Cemetery."

Many readers will be able to identify with the characters, settings, and Czech customs woven throughout the pages of this realistic tale. If you or a relative grew up in the Pilsen neighborhood or lived near or shopped on 26th Street, this book will walk you back in time, with stops at neighborhood butcher and bakery shops, the Leader Store, the Royal Blue stores, Pilsen Park, and the Atlantic Theater. You may even have an experience similar to mine. To my utter amazement, the Novak's family physician was the elderly "Dr. Zavertnik" - the actual name of my own family's doctor, who delivered me



at St. Anthony's Hospital!

Old Bohemian marriage customs, holiday celebrations, and classic Czech Sunday meals all play a part in the unfolding lives of the Novak family, as do historical events. One powerful episode concerns the actual 1915 capsizing of the Eastland excursion ship in the Chicago River, with three generations of the Novaks on board; two of them sadly number among the victims buried in Section 16 of BNC.

The novel also follows a branch of the Novaks who settle farther west in rural Montana and bond with their Czech and German neighbors there. The book paints a dramatic picture of the hardships Czech immigrants faced on the wild frontier.

So, if you too like to imagine the life stories of those lying beneath the gravestones and monuments of BNC, this book is a must-read. It explores the American dream shared by so many of our own ancestors. As the fictitious Father Breska delivers the eulogy for Lia Novak at Blessed Agnes Church, he recalls how she, like so many, "came to America with a dream in her head. Over the years her dreams were fulfilled, and now she lives in God's heart forever."

Like the Novaks, Chuck grew up on Chicago's west side. His grandparents had a tavern and restaurant close to where the Novaks had theirs, and he has fond memories of Pilsen Park, the Atlantic Theatre, and Sunday meals of pork, sauerkraut and dumplings. He agrees with Valentyn Novak's comment in the story that American beer compared to Czech beer tastes like ... well you know what! Chuck's parents and grandparents are buried at BNC, and he views BNC as his eventual resting place.

(Note: This book is for sale through Friends of BNC. See page 4 for order form.)

Donations

Your gifts help us fulfill our mission. Thank you.

Sponsors (\$100 - \$499)

Donors (\$25 - \$99)

Joseph Calek	Marik-Baken Funeral Services
James Kisela	John & Carol May
Carol Krauser	McDonald's Corporation
Paul & Susan Kucera	Sharon Triffon

Patricia Brown	Charmian Peska
Kathryn Gray	Albert Walavich
Norman & Barbara Hurd	Alan & Cheryl Zak
Frances Macich	

Stories of the Stones *by carol jean smetana*

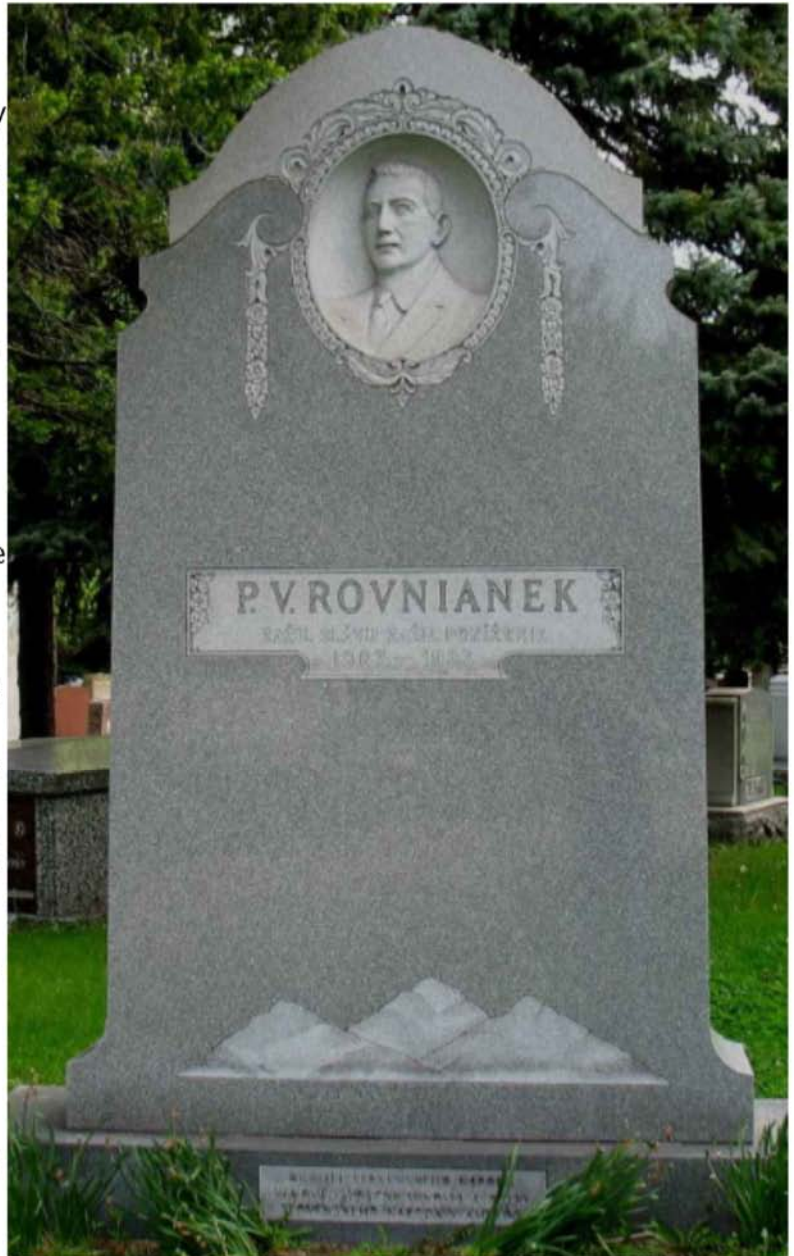
Bohemian National Cemetery is not just for Bohemians. From the beginning there were no ethnic, religious, or membership restrictions on burials. In section 23, one monument, engraved in Slovak, is dedicated to P.V. Rovnianek, a prominent journalist, businessman, and Slovak nationalist.

Peter Vitazoslav Rovnianek was born in Dolny Hricov, Tencin, Slovakia, in 1867, and died in California in 1933. He immigrated to America in 1888 and two years later founded the Slovak Society of America (SSA), the first Slovak national fraternal organization. He served as SSA president from 1890 until 1901, when he was made honorary president for life. He also helped establish the first Slovak women's beneficial society (1891) and the Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol (1892).

In the 1890s he developed a business empire so successful he has been called the first Slovak millionaire. However, his bank failed in 1911, and SSA, having lost a substantial amount of money, stripped him of his honorary presidency and membership. Destitute and disgraced, Rovnianek headed west, hoping to somehow rebuild his fortune so he could make good the losses of all who had money in his failed bank. He did not succeed.

When Rovnianek died in 1933, the cemetery offered a site in the Klacel Circle for the burial of his ashes. The committee charged with creating a memorial for Rovnianek, while grateful for the offer, refused it, saying they wanted Rovnianek to have a monument befitting his influential role in the Slovak community in America (the honorees in Klacel Circle were only permitted plaques). Funds were raised among the Slovak-American community, and, although SSA had never reinstated his membership, the Society contributed generously to the costs of his burial and the monument.

Notice the image near the base of the monument: those three mountains are a symbol of Slovakia found on the Slovakia coat of arms and on the flag. Below the mountains, on the base, it reads "Revivalist of the Slovak nation. Devoted sons and daughters are grateful to the Slovak nation in America."



The most poignant inscription is on the name plate: "He experienced glory. He experienced humiliation."

Keeping Up With Friends

Friends of BNC will have a book table at the following events:

** Thursday, July 22nd - 7 p.m. ~ Showing of *Accidental Army*, a movie about the Czechoslovak Legion, at the Portage Theater, 4050 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago. \$10 admission includes a raffle ticket.

Proceeds support local non-profits including the Northwest Historical Society, of which Friends is a member.

** Sunday, August 1st, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. ~ The Czechoslovak-American Congress Picnic-Festival at Kiwanis Park, 8820 Brookfield Ave., Brookfield, featuring traditional food, music, and dance. Stop by our table and meet author Frank Magallon.

** Saturday, August 7th ~ CSA Fraternal Life tour of BNC.

We can always use help with these and other events. If you'd like to volunteer to help Friends, please call 847-362-9036.

Thank you.



Live from BNC

Cary Mentzer, and Secretary/ Treasurer **Helen Gaydusek**. The cemetery provided the necessary cleaning supplies, Phil procured refreshments, and CSA provided blue shirts for everyone to wear. Our cemetery benefited again from another successful Join Hands Day project.

On May 10, students from a history class at Chicago's **CICS North Town Academy** enjoyed a walking tour of Bohemian National Cemetery. For most, it was their first visit to a cemetery, and afterward, 26 students wrote letters to the cemetery in praise of the tour and in appreciation of the historic significance of the cemetery. The Veteran and Hiker statues and the Freemason and Odd Fellow symbols on various grave stones impressed them the most; the letters also mentioned Baby Haven and the columbarium.

The cemetery's annual Memorial Day event began on May 31 at the north gatehouse, where **Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery** served coffee and kolacky. The **Color Guard of Sokol Spirit** then led the participants to the columbarium for the formal program. Czech school students **David**

Makdah gave the pledge of allegiance and **Beatrice Makdah** read a poem in Czech. The **Half and Half Singers** sang the National Anthem and other songs. **Bill Hudecek** gave the keynote speech. **Fifth District U.S. Congressman Mike Quigley** and his **District Director Kimberly Walz** attended the ceremony. The congressional representative gave a short speech commemorating the veterans of all wars. The ceremony concluded with **Tom Pajer** playing Taps, and the Sokol Spirit Color Guard retiring the flags.

On June 4, the cemetery received honored guests from the Czech Republic Senate: Vice President **Milan Štěch**, Senators **Jan Hajda**, **Jiří Nedoma**, and **Petr Pakosta**, accompanied by **Andrea Vyzova**, secretary for the senators, and **Tomáš Opočenský**, interpreter. Joining the group were **Alma Tello**, congressional aide to 5th District Congressman Mike Quigley, and **František Gál** of the Czech Consulate General in Chicago. Beth Raleigh and Phil Roux received the delegation on behalf of BNC, along with Ken Dvorsky, Chuck and Martha Cervenka, Andy and **Angie Bultas**, and Marge

Stueckemann.

In the north gatehouse, everyone enjoyed tea and kolacky prepared by Martha, Marge, and **Juli Nelson** of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery. Ken then began the tour by leading the group to the Cermak Mausoleum, where the Czech delegation laid a wreath. They then stopped at the Masaryk Mausoleum, where the ashes of Alice Masaryk were inurned until they were taken to the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution. At the columbarium, the group viewed the cremation niches, the Pilsen Butchers window, and the painted emblems of the different associations that were part of the history of Bohemian National Cemetery. Our Czech guests were pleased with the tour and how well Czech heritage is being preserved at the cemetery.

As you can tell, many people from all walks of life and places and for many different reasons enjoy Bohemian National Cemetery. I invite you to come see for yourself our beautiful and historic cemetery.

Andy Bultas



Tour of the Tombstones

Albert Walavich guided more than 75 people through the cemetery on a Friends-sponsored tour May 2nd.

We'll do it again on **Saturday, September 25th**.

See "Upcoming Events" on page 3 for more information.



Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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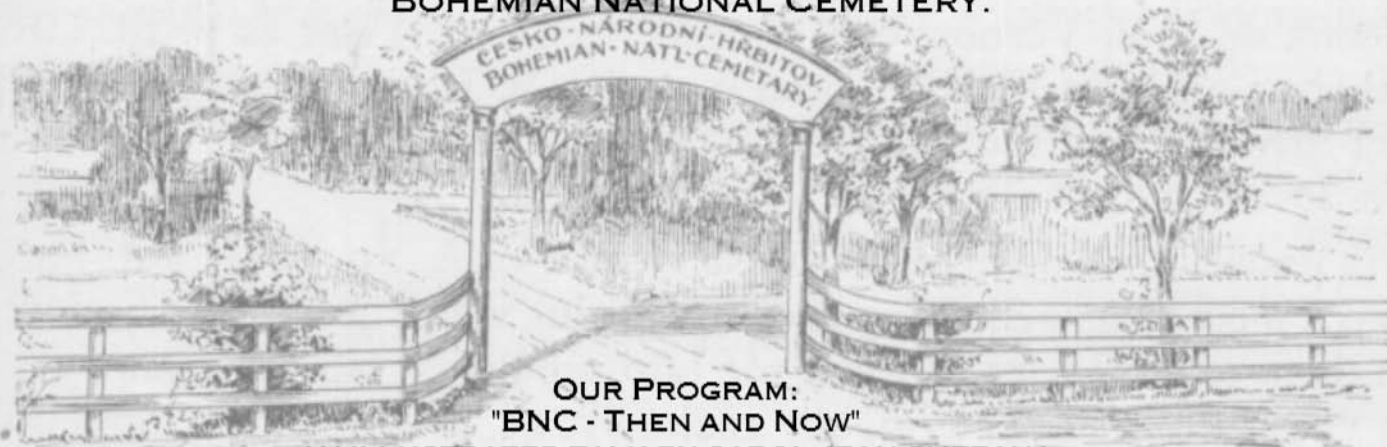


Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



**FRIENDS OF BNC WILL MEET AT 1:00 P.M. ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 22ND AT
BOHEMIAN NATIONAL CEMETERY.**



**OUR PROGRAM:
"BNC - THEN AND NOW"
AN ILLUSTRATED TALK BY CAROL JEAN SMETANA**

THE CEMETERY HAS CHANGED A LOT SINCE 1877, WHEN THE FIRST BODIES WERE BURIED, THE ORIGINAL 50 ACRES OF LAND WERE FENCED IN, AND THE FIRST SIGN HUNG OVER THE GATE ANNOUNCING THE NEWLY FORMED BOHEMIAN NATIONAL CEMETERY.

JOIN US FOR A 45-MINUTE PRESENTATION TRACING THE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF THE CEMETERY, WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ITS CULTURAL IMPORTANCE AND THE EFFORTS OF FRIENDS OF BNC TO HELP PRESERVE THIS IMPORTANT HERITAGE SITE. MEET AT 1:00 P.M. IN THE LARGE CEREMONIAL HALL (CHAPEL) OF THE COLUMBARIUM.

CZECH PASTRIES WILL BE AVAILABLE AFTERWARD IN THE RESTORED GATEHOUSE.

**THIS IS A FREE EVENT - ALL ARE WELCOME!
FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 847-362-9036.**