

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. 7 No. 4

April 2011

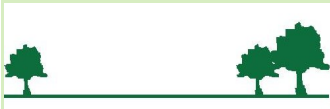
carol jean smetana, editor

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



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What's New with Friends of BNC

Did you know there are spring and summer kroje in pastel colors? Our **Mayfest** dancers sent us a picture of their costumes, and they will match the décor perfectly as they celebrate May with the Maypole and other festive dances! Our favors, in color, are long-lasting mementos of an important part of the Columbarium. Fresh pansies with a special "plus" will decorate the tables. Don't miss this wonderful celebration that will support the much-needed restoration of the Mallin artwork! Don't

forget - contributions are tax-deductible. Enjoy a wonderful afternoon and help support an exciting project at the Cemetery! Find more details on the back of the newsletter.

Leave the Pilsen neighborhood where your family had lived since immigrating to Chicago? Why would Czech people want to do that? At our January 23rd meeting, speaker **Frank Magallon** gave us the answer, sharing his expertise with our members and guests, including our most famous Illinois Czech, **Judy Baar**

Topinka, newly installed Illinois Comptroller. Even the fact that the Chicago Bears were in a play-off game that afternoon wasn't enough to keep our attendees away!

Probably you could guess that our ancestors moved west into the area of Chicago known as Czech California because Pilsen became too crowded. In the early 1900s, a nicer home of their own with more land was within their reach, thanks to good employment possibilities

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Live from BNC

Upon completion of caulking the front steps of the Columbarium, **John Illse** discovered that the steel beams in the rear of the morgue were rusting. The rust was caused by water that had been leaking in over the years. John has begun grinding the rust off the beams, which will then be painted with a rust-preventative paint.

John contacted **Andy**



photo by Rob Plummer

Bultas about a leak in the North Gatehouse in an area that Allendorfer had repaired. Andy Bultas contacted **Conrad of**

Allendorfer and notified him of the leak. Conrad then sent an employee out to check the area; he

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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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from the editor's laptop

OOPS! In the past two issues of this newsletter, in the "Upcoming Events at BNC" section, I mistakenly wrote the first name of our intrepid Tour-of-the-Tombstones guide as Alex rather than Albert Walavich. Thankfully, Albert was quite gracious in accepting my apology. I don't know why I suddenly changed Albert's first name to Alex. Since I spend a good deal of time immersed in things Czech, I'm a bit surprised I didn't rename him Vojtěch, which is Czech for Albert. But then I might have gotten his last name wrong, too, by "Czech-ifying" its spelling to "Válavoič"!

In researching this issue's "Stories of the Stones," I was interested to read that the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) helped establish Decoration Day as an annual nationwide holiday "to honor the memory of departed comrades." The G.A.R., a fraternal organization for honorably discharged veterans who had fought for the Union side in the Civil War, was founded in Decatur, Illinois, in 1866. Two years later the head of the G.A.R. issued an order calling on all G.A.R. members to set aside a day every year to honor comrades who had died in the Civil War and asked newspapers to publicize the order: "The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." By 1890 every northern state had officially adopted Decoration Day as a state holiday. After World War I, when the focus of the commemoration expanded to honor soldiers who fought for the U.S. in any war, southern states, too, began to move their own memorial celebrations to May 30th. Eventually, the name of the holiday changed to Memorial Day and it became a national holiday. The earliest record I could find of a Memorial Day celebration at BNC was in 1890; on May 30th of that year, the Inter Ocean newspaper reported that fifteen hundred people attended a ceremony at the cemetery to honor deceased Union soldiers.

Several readers have sent me emails or letters to ask a question about the cemetery or to share a family story and photo. I will be incorporating your communications in articles in upcoming issues. So if you have questions, memories to share, or suggestions for articles you'd like to see, please contact me. I enjoy hearing from you.

I am sorry I won't be able to fly to Chicago for Mayfest. It promises to be an enjoyable event in support of an important project - the restoration of the Ceremony Hall.

Na shledanou!

carol jean smetana



Our Mayfest Dinner and Silent Auction on May 1, 2011, is the kick-off event for a multi-year fundraising effort to restore the decorative artwork by John Anton Mallin in the Ceremony Hall (Chapel) of the Crematorium. This close-up photo of the domed ceiling of the Hall shows the preservation work that must be done. Information on the restoration project and how you can help can be found in this issue, in the insert, and on our website. Thank you!

Mayfest
2011
Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery



What's New with Friends of BNC

(continued from first page)

at places like Western Electric's new Hawthorne Works. After all, owning a home was the ultimate in "making it" in the New World.

With one of the highest literacy rates of any immigrant group, Czechs were always interested in good schools. The Vojta Náprstek and Jan Neruda Czech Free Thought schools were organized, as was the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia church and school, built in 1909. For fun and fitness, there was Sokol Chicago and Sokol Havlíček-Tyrš. The Freethinkers built the Jan Hus Memorial Building in 1915, which today houses a church. Of course most of the Czechs had fun in Pilsen Park, adjacent to the

Pilsen Brewing Company, which provided them with that elixir of life for Czechs, good beer! During World War I, the residents of this area were very patriotic and proud of being American. The most famous resident by far was Anton Čermák, mayor of Chicago. When he died in 1933 from an assassin's bullet while riding with President-elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 50,000 mourners came to BNC to lay his body to rest.

Frank caught us up with modern Little Village, as it is called now, and finished his talk with a picture of the cemetery captioned "where we will all end up some day." He surely brought this historical place to life, and we

heard many glowing compliments on the talk.

Friends of BNC was honored to be included in a reception at the Czech Chicago Consulate for the **President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus**, when he visited Chicago recently. I had the chance to meet him and thank him personally for all the help we receive from the Czech government grants. What a thrill!

I am counting the days until our Mayfest. Please read all the latest on this wonderful celebration and make plans to come. I'll see you there!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery



Sunday May 8th at 1:00 pm ~ Celebrate Mother's Day

Meet at the Mother Monument in front of the Columbarium/ Crematorium to place flowers. Refreshments afterward in the Gatehouse (free).

Friday, May 27th at 10:00 am ~ Flag Placement

Help us decorate the cemetery for Memorial Day ~ meet in the office.

Monday, May 30th at 9:30 am ~ Memorial Day service

Sunday, June 12th at 1:00 pm ~ Tour of the Tombstones guided by Albert Walavich

Meet in the Gatehouse for a 2-hour walking tour
\$10 Friends members ~ \$15 non-members

Sunday, July 17 from noon to 4:00 pm ~ BNC Annual Picnic

Czech food, music, Friends of BNC books/gifts available

Sunday, August 21st ~ Summer meeting of Friends

Saturday, September 24th at 10:00 am & 1:00 pm ~ Tours of the Tombstones guided by Albert Walavich

Stories of the Stones

by carol jean smetana

One hundred and fifty years ago, Bohemian immigrants were enlisting to fight in the War of the Rebellion – known today as the Civil War – to preserve the Union and end slavery. After the war, the survivors were mustered out and returned to civilian life. They found work, got



Frank Steiskal

married, started families, and joined organizations. For veterans who fought on the Union side, the most important organization was the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), a fraternal group that provided assistance to veterans and their families and, with almost half a million members by 1890, wielded substantial political clout.

In Chicago, Bohemian veterans worked with their Bohemian societies as well as the G.A.R. to ensure that their service to their adopted country would be remembered well into the future. Bohemian National Cemetery would become the home of the Bohemian Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument – the Civil War Veterans Monument – honoring Bohemians who fought for the United States in the Civil War.

One of those Bohemian veterans was Frank Steiskal. Born in Bohemia in 1841, his family immigrated to the U.S. in 1854. He was working in a

store on North Clark Street when he enlisted on August 1, 1862. A soldier with the 82nd Illinois Infantry, Steiskal was wounded and captured at Chancellorsville in May 1863. After a term in Libby Prison and Belle Isle Prison in Virginia, he was released as part of a prisoner exchange. He returned to his unit and participated in Sherman's successful campaign to capture Atlanta and the March to the Sea.

Steiskal wrote about a meeting that took place while he was camped outside Atlanta after the fall of the city. Poor Europeans – Steiskal said the Southerners called them “White thrash [sic]” – were living in shacks on the outskirts of the city, and the Union Army gave them food rations. One day Steiskal encountered a small, old, gray-haired man and asked him what part of Europe he was from. When the man replied that he came from Plzen, Steiskal immediately started speaking Czech. The old man was stunned speechless, then hugged Steiskal as if he were a long lost son, started to cry, and responded in excellent Czech, “I did not know that there were Bohemian Yankees in the Union Army!”

After the war, Steiskal returned to Chicago, opening a successful saloon and restaurant (his wife did the cooking) in the St. Wenceslaus neighborhood, but he lost everything in the Great Chicago Fire. He turned to a career in the real estate, mortgage and loan business, and eventually

founded the Novak and Steiskal State Bank.



Frank Shults in front of Fort Donelson, TN, February 1862

Another Bohemian veteran from Chicago was Frank Shults. Born in Bohemia in 1845, his family, like Steiskal's, immigrated in 1854. Shults enlisted on December 30, 1861, and served until April 1, 1866, with the 58th Illinois Infantry. He was wounded and captured at the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862. He endured

four months in a prison in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, that was commanded by Henry Wirz, who would later run the notorious Andersonville Prison in Georgia and be the only person executed for crimes committed during the Civil War. Shults reported that he and his fellow prisoners were fed only once daily, a meal consisting of “one cup of coffee, some beans, and a small piece of bad meat.” Although only 16 years



Graves of Civil War veterans are marked with government stones inscribed with their names and military units.



old when he enlisted, Shults early on demonstrated his bravery and was promoted to sergeant, a rare honor, as most enlistees never rose above the rank of private. After the war, he returned to Chicago and in 1869 opened a saloon near St. Wenceslaus church, the same neighborhood where Frank Steiskal lived.

Both Steiskal and Shults were active in Chicago's Bohemian community and in the G.A.R. Steiskal was a Bohemian National Cemetery delegate and for many years served

as the Grand Marshal of parades held on Memorial Day and other ceremonial occasions. Shults was a member of the Bohemian Monument and Memorial Association that proposed and

raised funds for the Bohemian Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument at BNC. He served as the G.A.R. Officer of the Flag at the cornerstone-laying ceremony on July 28, 1889. More than 100 historical documents were sealed into the cornerstone by various societies and organizations, and a crowd of between 6,000 and 8,000 attended the ceremony. Three years later, at the cemetery's Decoration Day (now called Memorial Day) ceremony on May 29, 1892, five thousand people turned out for the dedication of the bronze monument honoring Bohemians who fought for the United States in the Civil War. The Czech inscriptions on the monument read: "For our new country" and "To the Bohemian heroes 1861-1865."



A plaque added to the Civil War Monument on Memorial Day 1940, lists the names of 18 Civil War veterans known to be buried in the cemetery, including Frank Steiskal and Frank Shults.



A simplified version of the G.A.R. badge is carved in high relief on Frank Shults's family marker. The badge consists of an eagle connected to a five-pointed star by a flag ribbon. In the center of the star are three figures – the goddess of liberty, representing loyalty, and on either side of her, representing fraternity, a soldier and a sailor shaking hands. The eagle, representing defense, hovers above crossed cannons and a pile of cannon balls, and looks to its left, a drawn sword clasped in its talons.

The coat of arms of the United States dates from 1782. It appears in various forms on items issued, owned, or used by the federal government, such as passports, public buildings, military uniforms, and the back of the dollar bill. On the coat of arms, the bald eagle holds olive branches in its right talon and arrows in its left, symbolizing the strength of peace and war. The eagle is always depicted looking to its right, toward the olive branches, toward peace.



John A. Mallin's decorations in the Ceremony Hall of the Crematorium include emblems of several veterans' organizations but not the G.A.R. Mallin did, however, paint what seems to be a representation of the U.S. coat of arms. But in Mallin's painting, the eagle is looking to its left, to the arrows. Why? Was Mallin copying the Seal of the President of the U.S., which was similar to the coat of arms except that (until Truman decreed a change in 1945) the eagle faced the arrows? Another possibility: perhaps Mallin was saluting the military. Or perhaps Mallin painted his eagle looking to its left for artistic or aesthetic reasons. We can only speculate.



Donations

Patrons
(\$500—\$999)

CSA Fraternal Life
Joseph & Linda Svehla

Sponsors
(\$100—\$499)

Blanche Bartizal Babcock
Edward Duffek
Carl & Mary Ellen Flaks
Joan Jurenka
Keith & Alice Kubly
John & Mila Kyncl
Carol May
McDonald's Corporation
Moravian Cultural Society
Bill & Ruth Rosol
Glenn Spachman
Marge Sladek Stueckemann *in memory of Anna Pancner Sladek*

Donors
(\$25—\$99)

Cynthia Bueneman
Edward Cechora
Joe Domko
Hester Hilden
Phillip Kasik
Geraldine Kraupner
Robert Krejci
Art & Kathryn Lorenz *in memory of Andrew Bultas, Jr.*
Art & Kathryn Lorenz *in loving memory of Albert Ruzicka*
Charles & Sue Lupinek
Mike Nemeth
Mr. & Mrs. John Nosko
Mildred Pesek
Henrietta Bartizal Pons
Jane Pugh
Christine Repa Visconti
Lorraine Szabo

John Val Hora
John Voss
Eleanor Ward *in memory of Albert Ruzicka*
Wayne Wolf *in memory of Andrew Bultas, Jr.*
Alan & Cheryl Zak

These are donations we have received in January and February 2011. Thank you all for your generosity. Your gifts help preserve and enhance Bohemian National Cemetery.

SPRING/SUMMER HOURS TAKE EFFECT ON MAY 1ST

Office Hours

Monday through Friday: 7:30 am to 4:00 pm
Saturday: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
The office is closed on Sundays.

Cemetery Gates & Grounds

will be open every day 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.
Enter and exit through the main gates.

GATES WILL CLOSE PROMPTLY AT 4:00 PM ~ PLEASE BE SURE TO EXIT BY THEN SO YOU AND YOUR CAR DO NOT GET LOCKED IN!

Děkuji vám!

Andy Bultas ~ our BNC delegate for many years. Andy will now represent his lodge.
Mary Syrup ~ our new BNC delegate, joining her husband Bob, Juli, and Marge, our other delegates
Helene Schaeffer ~ our new Publicity Chair
Carol Jean Smetana ~ for the great updates to the webpage. "Czech" out the Restoration information!
Frank Magallon ~ for a wonderful presentation at our winter meeting

Welcome to Our New Members!

Gregory & Carmen Crawford ... Sterling, VA
Jerome & Helen Gaydusek ... Bolingbrook, IL
Edward & Charlotte Kletcka ... South Beloit, IL
Paul V. Machalek ... Bloomingdale, IL
Dorothy Skokan Myers ... Calhoun, GA
Mark & Ruth Richardson ... St. Charles, IL



Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

found the leaks and Conrad had them repaired.

Winter had been harsh through December and January with cold weather and a lot of snow. However, this was just a prelude to the 2011 blizzard of February 1st and 2nd. The record snowfall of over 20 inches, which paralyzed the Chicago area for a while, was very harsh on Bohemian National Cemetery's daily operations. Employees who did not live by the cemetery stayed with those who did. Burials had to be postponed as it was impossible to get to the grave sites. Someone commented that the cemetery looked like Siberia. However, the employees worked long hours opening the roads and grave site areas, finally bringing the cemetery's operations back to normal. Because of the blizzard and its aftermath, the volunteers were not able to work for a couple of weeks.

Chuck Michalek, Jerry Gydusek, Chuck Cervenka, and Andy Bultas completed the insulation of the attics of the bungalows. The heating units now work more efficiently, and the bungalows are much warmer. Chuck Michalek has been working on the windows in the North Gatehouse, installing new weights and chains on two windows, which now can be opened. Chuck Cervenka, Jerry Gydusek, and Andy Bultas have installed new towel dispensers in the men's and women's washrooms in the Administration Building.

Linda Kostuba and Patty Volkman, who have been working in the Ceremony Hall (Chapel) of the Crematorium, want to clean the baseboard and tile floor in the stage area. After taking a tile sample to various tile stores to find out what type of tile it is and what would be the best cleaner and polish to use, they learned that the tile is called Azrock and was made prior to 1982.

This is a project that will have to be done when the hall can be opened up and ventilated. Linda and Patty are currently working on cleaning the carpet in the chapel. Chuck Cervenka purchased a steam carpet cleaner for the job. Patty and Linda are now in the process of cleaning a small area in the chapel to see how often they have to clean the area so it looks presentable.

I would now like to personally thank all those persons who sent condolences and attended the services held in the Columbarium Chapel on January 31st, 2011, for my son **Andrew Jr.**, who passed away in South Bend, Indiana, on January 24th, 2011. Andrew Jr. was cremated at Bohemian National Cemetery and his ashes buried next to his great-grandfather and grandmother Sudlik in section 11 of Bohemian National Cemetery.

Andy Bultas

SILENT AUCTION "HOW TO DO IT"



Did you notice the loose sheet for silent auction donations tucked into this issue? It can be used in different ways. If you have something to donate – Czech items are always appreciated, or create a basket with food or wine or beer – use the form to accompany your donation. Do you patronize a favorite family-owned business? You'll find that the owners are often quite willing to donate either items or gift certificates – after all, it's good publicity for them. Please just ask! 100% of all funds we receive from the silent auction go directly into the restoration account.

We've already had donations sent to us from outside Illinois. Hope you can help!

*Friends of Bohemian
National Cemetery*

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we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



**It's not too late! Make your reservation today for *Mayfest*,
our spring fundraiser, Sunday, May 1st,
at Ashton Place in Willowbrook, Illinois!**

Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, dinner, and traditional dances performed by the United Moravian Society's Omladina Dancers. Our reception (with cash bar) begins at noon, followed by dinner at 1:00 pm. Our silent auction will feature cemetery history books, a grave marker, ethnic items, gift certificates, and just-plain-fun surprises. Help restore the artwork in the Ceremony Hall. Purchase an ad in our *Mayfest* booklet to honor your ancestors or advertise your business. Donate auction items (see insert in this issue). Invite family and friends to join you, and reserve a table for ten. Cost is \$75 per person; contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

**For reservations or information, call Judie before April 15th at
312-527-0506**

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery