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## *Welcome. But Don't Call Them German.*

At Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden, trying to promote a heritage about which many of the patrons are clueless. Credit...Julien Jourdes for The New York Times



By Joseph V. Tirella

ONE Saturday last month, at the Czech and Moravian wine festival at Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden in Astoria, Queens, a band played polka music under the linden and elm trees and a cloudless sky. Some people danced; others sampled the burcak, a fizzy sweet wine that is traditionally made in mid-September. Alison Lore, who is pursuing a graduate degree in social work at Columbia, sat at a table in the back of the garden with family and friends celebrating her 22nd birthday with cake and beer.

When asked if they had come for the wine festival, Marisa Lore, Alison's sister, looked surprised. "I thought it was a polka festival," she said. "I didn't know it was Czech."

Marisa Lore was not the only one to be mystified. Ben Foo, a resident at New York University Medical Center, who was sitting nearby, said he learned of Bohemian Hall's ancestry only after consulting its Web site. "I thought it was German," he confessed.

A Czech flag flies near the front entrance of Bohemian Hall, one of the city's last original beer gardens. The hall, built a century ago by Czech immigrants, struggled to stay open early in 1900. But in recent years, thanks to good press and an influx of young people to neighborhoods outside Manhattan, the beer garden has been more popular than ever.

“That’s what saved Bohemian Hall,” said Peter Bisek, president of the Bohemian Citizens’ Benevolent Society of Astoria, which owns and runs the beer garden. “The Americans came to sit under the trees and have a pitcher of beer and relax.”

Many of the newcomers know little of the hall’s history, however, and paradoxically, the hall’s recent success has left members of its board worried that the place is losing its Czech and Slovak identity.

To combat that perception, and in the hope of attracting more visitors with Czech roots — many of whom can still be seen at the hall’s indoor bar, reading Czech newspapers and arguing in Czech about soccer or politics — the hall has taken several steps. Over the summer, it showed Czech films (with English subtitles) and staged a production of “The Garden Party,” by the playwright Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic.

The hall has also renovated its school, where nearly 80 children take Czech and Slovak classes. “We’re trying to promote our business,” said Lizanne Fluxmon, the hall’s general manager. “But part of our business is our culture.”

The wine festival was the latest event in the campaign, which includes the presentation this month of an original puppet play about the hall, based on Czech fairy tales, called “A Bohemian Rhapsody.”

Some new Czech immigrants, like Eva Jilkova, a 30-year-old nanny who lives in New Jersey, wish that the new patrons would pay closer attention to the hall’s roots. “I don’t know why they don’t know,” Ms. Jilkova said. “There’s a Czech flag.”

But her friend Klara Lunacko, who was sipping from a cup of burcak and nibbling kolace, a confection of fried dough, cheese, prunes and ground poppy seeds, sounded a more philosophical note. “They don’t know,” Ms. Lunacko said, “because they don’t care.”