

ETHNIC HERITAGE  
 SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER  
 NORTHLAND COLLEGE, ASHLAND, WI

Collector: Jim Leary

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Informant: Vera Dvorak Schultz  
 228 East Fourth Street  
 Washburn, WI 54891

Both Clara Sveda and Mary Prestil spoke of Vera Dvorak Schultz as someone who liked to sing the old Bohemian songs, so I gave her a call and we arranged to meet at 2:00 on November 5th. I walked the quarter mile or so from my house to Vera's and was ushered in by a well dressed, gray-haired woman in her mid-60's. As the tape index of the interview reveals, Vera was the second of four daughters born to parents who had both come from Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Vera grew up speaking Czech or Bohemian and her feeling for the language is strong. She speaks it to her husband, George Schultz (Polish and German) just "to practice," and she sometimes envies her sister in Rockton, Illinois who has Bohemian neighbors to speak with.

As the tape reveals, both of Vera's parents loved to sing, and the fondness passed on to Vera. She sang with her parents, the family, and with neighbors from an early age. In my presence, however, she was pretty shy. The tape recorder put her off a bit; she had a cold; she wasn't accustomed to singing by herself; she usually sang after "three or four beers"; and she didn't feel really sure about whether or not she could carry a tune. Consequently, I only managed to tape one song from Vera. As the tape log will indicate, however, Vera talked a great deal about particular songs, occasions for song, and local singers. Often she recited verses from songs she knew well. During our conversation, Vera was also eager to show me several songbooks and records in her possession. The songbooks (which I have arranged to copy) were given to her by members of a Czechoslovakian concertina band which she saw perform in Illinois. They contain numerous songs which Vera knew perviously, as well as some numbers recorded from Jerry Novak. Vera had two long play records of interest:

Czechoslovak Party (recorded live in Prague) and distributed by  
 Apon Record Company, P. O. Box 387 Steinway Station, Long  
 Island City, New York 11103.

Reckelberg, "Harbor Cities Polka Parade," recorded in November,  
 1972 at Norman Hall and Bar, Norman, Wisconsin.

The former record contained, I think, three songs which Vera had sung regularly: "Ma Rostomila Barusko" (Barbara Polka), "Loka Zelena" (Green Meadow), and "Az Rano" (which is the chorus to "Prsi, Prsi"). This record also had a version of

"Maly Myslivecek" sung by Jerry Novak. The Reckelberg record, boasting many Bohemian-American dance tunes, comes from the southeastern area of Wisconsin around Manitowac and Two Rivers. Vera and George's daughter lived there and they had gone to polka festivals there. Recalling one, Vera said that they began handing out beers at 10 in the morning. When her daughter saw that, she said, "Mom, this is your kind of place."

Vera also had three Bohemian 78's which I've noted for subsequent recordings. In addition to these reminders from the old country, Vera had preserved a wicker basket within which her mother had carried belongings during the trip to America. And she had several photographs taken in the late 1930's of Ashland's Bohemian stalwarts drinking beer together.

Throughout the interview, Vera (like the others with whom I spoke) remarked on the sense of community and neighborliness they all felt growing up on the east side. Predictably, Vera lamented that the old timers simply weren't around and that very few knew the old songs anymore. Perhaps a bit sneakily (but justifiably, I hope), I seized upon these sentiments and informed Vera that, if I didn't record her songs, they would be gone. She agreed to sing them if she could make a recording alone. I considered leaving her my tape recorder, but since she had a Panasonic machine and microphone of reasonable quality, I simply left her tapes with instructions to make a list of titles and translations to accompany the session. She reckoned she would need a few beers to warm herself up and even then she might be inclined to erase the tape. I argued against her impulses as best I could and, with luck, I'll pick up a tape on Sunday.

Towards the end of the session, Vera's husband George appeared. He seemed a very personable fellow and joined with Vera in talking about old time dances and gatherings. Unfortunately, as it was approaching 4:00 and it was my turn to cook dinner, I departed. Until Sunday.