

John B. Mueller, Tape I, 11/14/84

WFC/GA-06-R(PM)

PM: Well, let's see, any old-time tune, do you have a favorite tune or one you always used to start with?

JM: Oh, I got the favorites medley, and it all comes back afterwards.

LK: Any waltz? or ländler?

Woman in background: When did you get your first accordion?

JM: My first accordion? Well, the one I got downstairs here, that was one, 1910, and then I this here I bought from a 16 . I told her what I wanted and she put an ad in the farm paper.

LK: Oh yeah?

JM: By golly, we got ads from Minnesota.

LK: Oh yeah?

JM: They wanted as much as a couple hundred dollars.

[plays medley: 21-40, including strains of "Bring Back My Bonnie to Me." ]

LK: That's an old-timer.

JM: An old-timer. Yeah. When I went to school I learned that.

PM: Hmm.

JM: Right here. And I still remember it.

[44-49 plays - again basically improvisation around "Bring Back..." ]

Someone in the background asks: How about some of the German ones?

[51-53: Plays ]

JM: Same one, huh?

PM: Scme one, yeah.

LK: Any of the old - do you remember the first tune you learned?

JM: What was it anyway?

[56-72: plays]

Woman in background: Do you know what the name of it was? What the name of that piece was?

JM: No. I heard that piece. I heard that not too long ago on a station from Texas. They played that piece. Otherwise I never heard that. There's so much I could play.

[Hospital paging system blurs out his words.]

JM: ...I played at a wedding one time and I, they had me re-repeat it all. It was dancing in the home, you know. Quite a people there. And I sat right at the doorway and they were dancing in two rooms and boy I always was [83-84: paging system] ... then I could always remember but now it doesn't, from one day to the next.

JM: We played at one wedding, I and another guy, til 8:30 in the morning. Course they served a dinner just like wedding dinner, everything...and those people, kind of an embarrassment if we didn't come for supper already. Yeah, felt hurt. Always that way at supper time.

Woman in background: "Augustine," can you remember that one?

JM: "Augustine"? [98-117 paging blurs out his words and his playing]

JM: There's quite a bit to that piece yet.

LK: Let me see, I'm going to move this microphone around a little bit.

LK: So, you were telling about the weddings a little bit. Could you tell me more about how they went?

JM: Oh, they had once in a while we almost froze to death at one of those cold [122] They had usually everything cramped up in the granaries and then over the stairways. And then there was a draft like a dog couldn't stand it, so then I always had to have a lantern standing under my snare drum. Otherwise it sounded like an old [127]

LK: This was at a wedding?

JM: At a wedding.

LK: Why was it so cold?

JM: Oh, it was in the winter time.

Woman in background: in the barns.

LK: Oh, in the barns.

JM: In the barns. In the granaries. In the granaries they danced like heck. They had a good time.

LK: So they danced out in the granaries, huh?

JM: In the granaries, yeah. They swept the granaries out. Then they had dance halls there.

LK: I guess that worked pretty good like that?

JM: Oh, yeah. They had, gosh, we enjoyed that. Sometimes we, and especially around Millersville [137] You from around here?

LK: No, but I know some of those places, yeah.

JM: And we knew all the people, and they knew us. I was always the drummer. Every little kid called me the drummer, so, and they still remembered me after I was older already, and they were bigger, and "OH, that's the drummer." Yeah, we really had nice times. They served good food and drinks, as much as we wanted, and that was too much of everything all the time. So we had to [147] once in a while and then I came home one night while we were having a good time.

LK: Yeah. Sure.

JM: Boy, I went through one storm one time, and I ah, there I had played alone. There's where the [152] I was with the, where they danced in more rooms, and of course I didn't have no speaker at that time, just the accordion, and of course I played accordion, too, a room you could dance and hear the music, and then I, it was some unreasonable hours and my mother and then Dad was there, and that was in 1913, I guess it would be. Didn't have no car yet. They went with a horse and buggy [paging] and went there. I went with them to a [paging] with a buggy Heck, I'm tired, I'm going home, he says. Yeah, she says, had a good time, real reasonable. Who knows how long he's going to play yet? And they went home. And I played, it was just getting to begin to getting light already then [paging] but I had to walk home with that accordion [171] weighs 23 pounds, with that on my back. And I noticed that then the road wasn't open from Cozy Corner to Union Road, and I had to go to the river and through the woods and then by Cozy Corners I cut into the woods. I had to go a section and a half through the woods and wire fence - oh, that didn't bother me because I worked for the carpenters at that time and I knew every fence hole where I could get through, even though it was dark and then I went home, but I didn't go very far and I got so tired that I could not lift my arm any more. I was played out. Then I sat down on

my music box, rested a little while, and then I walked again. And then I had to cross the river and up the big steep hill at the river bank and all of a sudden I had a skunk in back of me. And then, well, I always kept my directions with the wind that I wouldn't get none of, and then I got through the woods, there was farm land already and then I knew the farmers all around there. They knew me, too, but they weren't [193] out of bed yet. It was quite early and then that critter, I couldn't get rid of that. She followed me. Where I went, that skunk went, too. Smelled wrong, but she didn't leave no mess and then I thought, well, wait I'll come to this and that farmer. One was [198] the guy that I played at the time when we played and the other one we played too. And then there I went in the cow barn. I was acquainted there. And if that critter didn't go along with me in the cow barn. Then I thought "NO, [202]" and I closed the door. I had the door closed, but then I thought, doggone it, if that that, if she would make a mess in it, then the cows and horses they would all tear loose. So I opened the door again and well, she was still there. But there she was cleaning out the cat dish, and she was busy rattling around with the cat dish. And then I think [paging] how will I get rid of her? And it didn't take long and the critter was in back of me again. But then when it got lighter then she, all of a sudden, she was gone. And she didn't make any mess, not there. So, and then I had to walk through the section and a half, I had to cut through on a slant. It was [216] and the dogs [laughs] it was, I say, good and bad times it was. And with the horse. There was that business too. I played up in [221] in the country there at a wedding and then there we had a top buggy, bass drum in there and the two of us rode in the top buggy.

Jacobson Falls

PM: You had what?

JM: A top buggy.

PM: Oh yeah.

JM: And then we was up there playing and then after we got about a mile and a half, about a mile from home, then I had to drive alone. And [paging] when I fell asleep but then the horse knew the way better than I. She took me home. And then I noticed [234] standing on the road, looking up the road, but I had, no that was a different time, I guess.

PM: So you fell asleep?

JM: A couple times a week once.

PM: You fell asleep in the buggy?

JM: I fell asleep in the buggy, but then the horse took me home. She was standing by they, years ago the old barns where they had half-doors, the upper half was open and the bottom half was shut, and then she stood in there with her head in the barn and the horse, and, I was sound asleep in the buggy, and all at once when [246] he thought, did the horse run away on him? So then they come out and I was sitting in

Now I  
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it, and all of a sudden <sup>I noticed he</sup> something was shaking my knee. I looked, and by golly, there was Dad already. He was going to milk, and then I went out, <sup>un</sup>hitched the horse, and then I went in the house. And I noticed that my, that so many times I went, that I come home, I was always [255] I never drank. And not to this day yet. Never smoked either. And I, she fried the egg for me and I had a overcoat on then, it was cold, and then I ate my fried egg, and then I went to bed by 9:00 and they woke me then, then I went on the motorcycle, I went off, I worked for the carpenters at the time, and then at 7:00 I was on the job with the carpenters. But I spent many a night that way.

PM: So, sometimes it would be so cold that you put a lantern

JM: Under the snare drum, otherwise the snares, she would put it too wet, she didn't roll anymore yet. Then if she was, I said, like an old felt hat, she sounded. But that lantern, that kept her warm. Then she <sup>rolled the snares</sup> again, and I was all right. Them was the days. <sup>saward</sup>

PM: So, how many people would come to a wedding party?

JM: Oh, that would be usual that the hall was full sometimes. And we played, the two of us. And they always had a crowd. And lot of times, I always kind of watched that little, there was so many young girls, that they didn't dance. So I said to my partner, "We've got to get those wallflowers on the floor." So, he was pretty good at playing and I [291] didn't take long we had the poor wallflowers dancing. And then that time when we played <sup>at</sup> the Franklins, there was so many students there and then, I was, I had to take a walk, and so I went out, outside. It was pitch dark. And ended up with a bunch of boys, students, there. And, <sup>he said</sup> who are those guys? They didn't know us. But then one said, [303] they get the time <sup>in their voice</sup> really, and when I went back in again then I told my partner that though; what they had talked about, they liked our music, and then he [309] <sup>let her have A, he</sup> he drank, and when he had a couple to drink, then he could play better than even so. [paging] He liked his beer. I never, I always had a dozen glasses standing there, but I couldn't [319] so there was another partner just for him. We could make the music on it.

PM: Now, how did it go at a wedding. Did you start with any special dance or any special music?

*played that old accordion (high laughs)*

JM: Oh, yeah, grand march at twelve o'clock.

PM: Grand march? Who would lead?

JM: Two would lead, and they had an old bench some place. All the dancers had to step over this old bench and [328] lots of jokes was pulled, too. At one they had a heck of a time.

PM: They had to step over an old bench?

JM: An old bench, a garden bench. The leader went over, the rest all goes.

PM: That was just one time? One place?

JM: Oh, that was usually at every wedding.

PM: They always had an old bench?

JM: No, not exactly that.

JM & PM: But they had a grand march.

PM: And you had to follow them wherever they went?

JM: [?] square dance? There's some callers.

PM: Did they call in English or in German?

JM: German.

PM: German.

JM: German and English.

PM: Like, how would it go in German? What would they -

JM: I can't remember how it goes, " Put the ladies in the box car " and all such things. They had that all in their song and then the callers - Funny, well, I played, and I didn't learn that calling.

PM: Right.

JM: But I had a lot of kick out of that, but I don't know, I was young, pretty young yet when I started in playing.

PM: How old were you?

JM: When I started playing?

PM: M-m-m.

JM: Oh, my ma always said if you only were as good in your school books as you are in music, you would be all right! You know how that goes. I had, "tonight you're going to study first," and I had to study so long and then

PM: So you had to study first and then you could play music?

JM: Yeah, so it worked. So I had, oh. There's so much I forgot already.

PM: How did you learn to play? Did you teach yourself?

JM: Yeah, I started with the mouth organ and then there I played the mouth organ and then it was I got the accordion. There was a cousin of mine, he had bought himself an accordion and he couldn't do nothing. He couldn't learn to play that thing. And I bought that thing from him for \$3, and that's where I started it. And then at a birthday party, they got behind one night. I was in bed already. It was, to tell the truth, they didn't invite my brother. So, I thought, well if he isn't good enough, gol darn, I thought, who needs it. So I don't go either. So, around 10:00 there was a bunch from Six Corners, that's south of Sheboygan. They had come up to my uncle's birthday, and then they [paging] were along and then they come and got me out of bed. And, at that time I played the violin then, imagine, and played pretty good. And he had a guitar player along, a fella by the name of Charlie ~~Hudson~~. *Puttsen?*

PM: Charlie who?

*-4 mandolin*

JM: Charlie Whittsen. I never had, never seen him again, and I hadn't seen him before, but he says, by golly, you can play pretty good. I says, oh, yeah, [409] There's somebody better at the other place that plays better than I can, and we finished the music. And they had a summer kitchen on the house, and they were

PM: They had a summer kitchen?

JM: They had a summer kitchen on the house and they thought dancing [paging]

attached freely on the house. And then they danced in parts of the summer kitchen and they also had the opening where they put the eats through. It was really old-timeish, and still it was [paging] *all right nice*, the way they had it with the eats they were serving. They had the eats and then, of course, they danced, and they

PM: Sounds like they enjoyed their music?

JM: They danced through. Only they didn't have women enough. They had a big bobsled full of men that come from Six Corners there. They especially came for my uncle's birthday. So, they weren't prepared, but they had the eats there all plenty, and then afterwards they went. They had this big bouncing bells on the horses and the big sleigh, brum, brum, brum, back down through town to [paging 451] *breakfast? pretty fast*

The roads weren't open at that time so that was, I was born in 93, [1893] and I wasn't much of a guy yet and I played already.