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Collector: Jim Leary

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Informants: Congregation of St. Mary's Orthodox Church  
Cornucopia, Wisconsin

Greta Swenson informed me on the 5th that the congregation of St. Mary's, in accordance with the Julian calendar, would be holding their Christmas service on the 7th. In hopes of hearing some Russian singing, I decided to attend. The morning was cold, sub-zero, as I pulled into "Corny" about 9:40. Greta and Sue Ellen Smith had arrived a bit earlier; they told me the services would be held at 10:30 instead of 10, so we adjourned to "Steve's Tavern," at the Junction of County C and Highway 13, for coffee. As it turned out, some of the other church goers also stopped there before attending church. Shortly after 10, we left the tavern and parked at St. Mary's.

The church, with its onion dome and Russian cross, looms on high ground above the town. Built in 1910, it is a small, well-kept building. Olai Winturri told me later in the day that he had recently done painting and roofing work for the congregation. Since Sue Ellen took many pictures of the interior I'll let her pictures substitute for my verbosity, but I do want to note a few things. The inside of the church was very small and despite the grand icons surrounding the altar and the birds egg blue ceiling with its gold stars - I felt almost as if I were in someone's home. Instead of pews, folding chairs served; and, lacking a spacious outer vestibule, the faithful milled around amongst the chairs and talked before the Mass got underway.

Greta knew several amidst the talkers and she introduced me to Peter Dzubay. Probably 70, stout and blue eyed, Pete is a leading figure in Cornucopia's small Orthodox congregation. Marina Herman interviewed him and compiled notes during this project's first year. I learned that Pete had done carpentry work and managed an appliance store, while living variously in Clayton, Wisconsin, Chicago, and Cornucopia. A deeply religious man and not a big drinker, he had long been interested in choral singing within the church and, so, directed Saint Mary's small choir. He also sparked the Christmas caroling that would take place later in the day.

Also present were Mr. and Mrs. Nick Celinsky (I didn't catch her name). Nick has dairy farmed in the area. He is a dark haired, lean and friendly man of about 60. I told him that I would like to tape the service and he advised me about where to set up the machine. There were several problems. The gas heater had only just

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been turned on and its blower, situated beside the choir, produced a constant hum. Secondly, the choir (which occupied the front part of the right side of the church) occupied every bit of the space in front of the communion rail and to place the machine (and fuss with changing tapes) behind the rail would be rude and obnoxious. I settled for setting up on the left side of the church and across the aisle from the singers.

Shortly thereafter, the service began. The priest, Father Ted Bobosh, and his wife or "matushka (little wife) had just arrived for the day from their parish at Clayton. It was their first time in Cornucopia and, indeed, they'd only been in Wisconsin for two weeks. Father Ted was a native of Warren, Ohio while his wife, of Ukranian background, hailed from New York.

The service lasted nearly an hour and a half and was recorded in its entirety. Except when delivering his sermon, the priest chanted most of his prayers; here and there he spoke a word in Russian, but most of the talk was in English. The same was true for the singing. Nearly all of the songs were in English except for a few seasonal hymns which were partially in Russian (or, I believe, Old Church Slavonic).

The choir consisted of five men who stood together in one row, and a secondary row of six women. The singers followed songbooks which were placed on stands. Pete Dzubay, standing to the right and a bit in front of those in the front row, led the singers and kept time with measured swings of his right hand. As the tape will indicate, singing was unaccompanied, harmonized, and reminiscent of medieval chant modes.

Following the service, Mrs. Celinsky invited the Boboshes, Pete, Greta, Sue Ellen, and me for "coffee." Coffee turned out to be an enormous meal: Swedish potato sausage, ham, horseradish, jello salad, hot potato salad, garlic bread, poppy seed bread, and ice cream and cookies. The feast was preceded by a draught of excellent homemade raspberry cordial. I couldn't stay long for the talk which inevitably must've followed feasting as I had further appointments in Herbster. Proclaiming thanks and patting my stomach, I said good bye.