

Collector: Jim Leary

October 22, 1980

Informants: Clarence Isberg & Mrs. Isberg
Sanborn Road, Route 2
Ashland, WI

As I approached the Isberg house I recalled that George Dybedal had also mentioned Clarence as a singer. I noted too, that it was nearly four and I wouldn't be able to stay long. Another quickie session for the folklorist, with hopes for setting up a longer visit. The Isberg's place was a one story frame cottage, painted yellow (I think) and encircled by a ring of pines. I knocked and Clarence answered. Roughly 5' 10", with a red-face and thinning blonde hair, Clarence is nearly 65. He listened to my introductory spiel and ushered me in. I re-explained my purpose to Mrs. Isberg - a trim, energetic woman of roughly the same age - who was laboring over the stove and couldn't hear me.

The pair was very friendly; they laughed at my mention of Clarence's singing and, like Fritz, paid close attention to the picture I showed them of Olle Skratt-hult. The Isbergs had grown up knowing the Swansons. Indeed Clarence and Fritz grew up a mile apart and the latter played for the Isbergs wedding. Mrs. Isberg had several tapes of Fritz's playing. They were of better quality than the Swanson's and I must remember to copy them. Like the Swansons they had various tapes of Swedish-American music. They also had a good many records, primarily long playing re-issues of Swedish comedy records including Yogi Yorgesson (misspelled?) and Slim Jim. Clarence had seen the latter play at Wabasha, Minnesota (I think) when he was working across the river in the thirties at Nelson, Wisconsin. I asked if I might tape these albums at a later date. The Isbergs graciously consented. Beyond strictly Swedish material, they had a Viola Turpenein album.

According to Clarence, Viola was born at Minersville near Marengo. He saw her play there at the Minersville Hall. Clarence also mentioned dances which were held at a place called Marengo Island. Apparently some men named Lind played for them frequently. Clarence talked about drunks falling into the lake off a bridge at this place. And I think he said that he and his wife met there.

As for his own singing, Clarence said that it's been awhile, but he wouldn't mind singing at a later session. He learned some of his songs from records, some from a songbook (lent to the late Walter Levine and never returned), and others "all around." He knew the words to "Nikolina" and Mrs. Isberg had them written in English.

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Talk meandered for a while to local history and legendry. Clarence told about a lost silver mine and the early days of lumbering. It was, I felt, time for me to go, but the couple seemed reluctant to see me off. The visit was clearly a pleasure for them, reminding them of happy, nearly bygone days. I made arrangements to visit them again soon (Monday, October 27, at 1 p.m.) for a more extended session.