

FIELD NOTES

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February 5, 1985
Watertown, WI

Fred Kaulitz Home
915 Sand St.

I arrived at the Kaulitz home, a ranch style structure with attached garage on the northwest side of Watertown, at 7:30 pm and was ushered in by Fred. He's in his early seventies, of medium height, with thinning grey hair and glasses, a round Dutchman's middle, and a pleasant, hospitable manner. We made small talk about the roads and, once I'd lugged in the recording equipment, we settled in the living room where Fred and his wife Mildred showed me some clippings and photographs.

The photographs were taken within the last few years and were poses of Fred and a Mr. DeWitz of Hustisford with their concertinas. In one a violinist, whose name appears in the tape index, is shown. The clipping concerns DeWitz (with luck I'll soon have a copy to attach) who is approaching ninety and who taught Kaulitz to play in the early thirties. As many chroniclers have observed (including William Owens in Tell Me A Story . . . Sing Me a Song), German immigrants were generally literate and often learned songs with the aid of books and sheet music in addition to the aural/oral mode. DeWitz was Hustisford's concertina teacher and he gave private lessons to Kaulitz. According to anecdote that I don't think appears on the tape, DeWitz made it a point to play for an hour every evening after work and before eating dinner. In Fred's mind, I believe, this action suggested that music is an essential part of everyday life and not a mere frivolity. Musical literacy and the place of music in everyday life are points worth expanding on.

First most the tunes Fred plays are done with reference to sheet music. Fred has several loose leaf notebooks holding his tunes: one book for polkas, another for waltzes, another for special dances like schottisches, laendlers, and German Social Dances (about which more will be said later). Fred sits on a special

chair, a folding wooden card table chair with the legs sawn short, while playing and he places his musical notebooks on a music stand. The tunes in the notebooks come from a number of sources. Some are from mail order companies like Patek's Music Company, 835 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago and Henry Silberhorn, Publisher of Concertina Music, Chicago. The former had a great many Polish titles while the latter had plenty in German. Other tunes were, I believe, set down by Mr. DeWitz and some were worked out, that is translated into numbers designating which buttons to push, by Fred. In addition many of the sheets were sealed in plastic and some were obvious copies onto blank paper from worn originals. Fred did play a few tunes by heart, however. One of these was a tune that DeWitz had played and never written down; Fred honored that tradition as a kind of special link between two men. Which leads to the second point.

Fred showed me a verse enclosed in one of his books of music and it captured his own notion of the importance of his pastime:

For heights and depths no words can reach--
Music is the soul's own speech.

Fred has played chiefly for house parties, worker's picnics, senior citizens events, nursing home residents, and anniversaries. His is not a money-making pastime, but one that is its own reward.

As the tape index will show, Fred's dad played violin and music was part of his early upbringing. The man's repertoire has plenty of English songs and some other ethnic numbers (I noticed the Czech Tinker Polka, for example), but there are plenty of German numbers too. The 23 tunes recorded include chiefly polkas and waltzes, but there are a few schottisches and "Social Dances." This was the term applied to them by Fred and it appeared atop his Silberhorn sheet music. These dances involved couples in special steps, gestures, and shuffles. Their intricacies were explained by Fred and his wife Mildred and she, especially,

acted them out with an enthusiasm that suggested she'd performed them often and with pleasure. "Herr Schmidt" is reported among Texas Germans by Owens in the work cited above; another, "Lott is Todt," is the same tune and makes use of the same steps as the Finnish Rattikko.

After half an hour of interviewing and an hour of playing, we decided to quit.

Fred posed with his concertina, bellows expanded, while I took a few photos.

This is a pose favored by concertina players and it's worth noting that Fred has ordered a fancy nameplate for his concertina which is now inscribed with

"King."