

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary & Lewis Koch
April 8, 1985

Bob & Janice DeWitz Home
North Lake St.
Hustisford, WI

Lewis and I had been in Watertown and Hustisford examining photographs in historical society collections and making arrangements to copy them. We also planned to look at photos from the Irving DeWitz collection now in the possession of his son and daughter-in-law, and we hoped to get Irving and Bob to play their concertinas together for recording and picture-taking.

Prior to arriving at the DeWitz's, we were told several anecdotes about Irving by Herbert Neuenschwander, president of the historical society in Hustisford. Neuenschwander apparently made a habit of dropping in on Irving in his shop and reminiscing for hours.

In the first case, H.N. told us that Irving carried his concertina a mile and a half as a young man to take lessons from Ernst Hauke (sp?) who lived on a farm outside of town in a Pomeranian brick and timber building. He did this faithfully and in all sorts of weather. Years later, in the second instance, Irving played a trick on a former student, Herbert Zuilsdorf. [There's a picture of Zuilsdorf's orchestra that displays a banner indicating that the band played regularly over WIBU radio in Poynette.] Apparently Zuilsdorf was illiterate and couldn't count either, a consequence of his being kept out of school to do farmwork. Perhaps he was gullible too and subject to trickery. Anyway one day Z left his encased concertina in Irving's shop. I opened it, stuck in a battery case of comparable weight, and let Z walk off with it--only to return later in a huff wanting his concertina back. This was a mischievous side of Irving's character I hadn't yet encountered.

Anyway on April 8, Lewis and I arrived to meet Irving, his son, and his

daughter-in-law at the couple's home. Mrs. DeWitz had readied a box with photographs, handbills, and postcards of interest. Besides shots of the concertina club in action, there were pictures of I. and John "Hans" Schwartz, on concertina and violin, from roughly 1912, and of I. and his daughter Lucille, from September 1929, as they were about to play over WIBU radio.

After talking for awhile about the pictures, we asked the two men to play in the kitchen where the light was better. Bob--born ca. 1925, stocky, graying, with a friendly manner--had reckoned he knew few German tunes and Irving, with his penchant for playing "When You Wore A Tulip" couldn't recall any either. Accordingly I decided not to set up the recorder. But sure enough Bob came out with a "Bohemian" (did he mean "Bavarian"???) laendler. A schottische followed and so I set the machine up to record these and a few other tunes. The well went dry after about twenty minutes of playing, so I asked a few questions about the Concertina Club's programs. Information appears on the tape index, but it's worth adding that I. came out with several interesting accounts of visits to the area by the Peters Brothers vaudeville act.

Soon after Bob began to haul out a few of the fourteen concertinas he's retained from his dad's shop and I., up quite late for a man of 88, went home to bed. Lewis and I remained perhaps another hour while Bob pulled out each of the fourteen concertinas, with his children looking on, and played us snatches while describing the features of the particular instrument. He doesn't have his father's desire to teach and to put on programs, but he certainly loves the music. He plays at home, at a summer cottage, and sometimes at informal tavern gatherings, and he seems to be coaxing his kids to try the instrument one day.