

TAPE INDEX

Jim Leary
February 26, 1985

Milt Bruni
Iron Ridge, WI

1. Announcement.
2. Dad, Karl Bruni, came to U.S. in 1902 at 15 from Switzerland. Money sent by an uncle near Horicon. From Berne to LeHavre to New York. He could speak no English, but went to a German-speaking area. Asked directions to uncle's place, was referred to a "great big hill" as a landmark. Missed the hill because "he'd just come from Switzerland and that was a hump in the road." Trip cost \$75.
3. At this time John Deere in Horicon paying eight cents an hour. Worked for two years to pay off debt. Went to country school to learn English; did math by a method that paralleled the "new math" of some years back.
4. M's dad spoke very good English. Decided to be a cheesemaker. Worked at plants between Horicon and Burnett, Lomira, the Wisconsin Dell area.
5. Mother, Karolina Wittwier (sp?), and dad confirmed together in Switzerland. She had a grudge against him because he was with boys who once hid girls clothes when they were swimming. Mother did housework for awhile in Switzerland, came over in 1907. Lent money by an uncle between Horicon and Mayville.
6. Got married in 1914. 1919 bought cheese factory where M now lives.
7. M's dad hated football. M 178# freshman. Parents opposed his playing at first, but gave in because "they might call you a sissy." M got three letters, all conference center for two years.
8. M's folks sold cheese factory in 1944. M took dairy short course at U.W. [same class as Fred Kaulitz], 1938]. M ran place until 1959 when grade A prices "finally killed us." Then began working with Pauli Cheese, a division of Swift, as a field man--troubleshooting in cheese factories (his wife was already working at this time). It helped to be able to speak Swiss to many immigrant

- cheesemakers. Managed a branch warehouse eventually until retirement at age 61.
9. M a big collector of Swiss records.
 10. 1936 fifty-five started playing in Iron Ridge Town Band, M included. He later played with the Art Sohre Orchestra, then with Abraham Feutz--a Swiss from near Ashippon--in the Hartford City Band for 23 years. Now with the Lebanon Town Band. M has also sung plenty in church choirs.
 11. Has a treble clef cut out of wood on a fence post and in summer puts out the "March Barvura" in bass clef on garden fence. Makes musical note bird houses too.
 12. Dad refused to go back to Switzerland. His father a "musician and a drunk," died young. Mother remarried [doorbell rings, break in tape]. M's dad had to work out for a farmer who starved him.
 13. Mother worked for a well off school teacher.
 14. M could talk German and Swiss but not English when he started grade school.
 15. In 1970 M and his wife went to Switzerland. Visited parents' home town, Amseldingen (sp?) in Canton of ^{Thun?} Toon (sp?). Reckons the place like Texas in the U.S.--biggest cows, biggest barns. (An aside about how his mother spoke Swiss to his wife when they first met: "She wants to marry a Swiss, she has to learn the language." M reckons it's the same in Switzerland.) Recalls peoples' confusion over his turn of the century dialect.
 16. An anecdote about his wife's confusion over the use of "douche" in Swiss for shower.
 17. M's mother talked about huge pears in her home town. They're of normal sized, it turns out, but she was smaller then and they looked bigger.
 18. An involved account of M's difficulty and eventual success in contacting a first cousin.
 19. Bruni is originally an Italian name, can be traced to the Moors.

20. Dr. R.H. Bruni, a dentist, was M's uncle. Came to New Berne, N.C., then eventually to Richmond, Va.

[TAPE ONE ENDS]

21. M's uncle loved the military. Was a captain during WWII. Both father and uncle were good baseball players. Uncle liked to throw rocks at cats and broke off part of a clock 90 feet above the ground--this was in Switzerland. He played semi-pro ball and scaled ties for the Southern RR while working through school

22. M at 15 insults his southern aristocratic Aunt Laura by suggesting that her ancestors were in a penal colony. She imagined her "damn Yankee" relatives to be living in squalor.

23. M's wife Grace Endres had grandparents from Germany. Grandfather from near Munich, mother a Schauer. All farmers.

24. War prisoners at the Schwartz Ballroom in Hartford during WWII, sent out to do farmwork.

25. Neighboring farmer "Professor" Lentz had played for the Kaiser before WWI. Not a good farmer, but a fine violinist and choir director.

26. 6'7" skinny Prof. Lentz and hefty Rev. Bradtke (sp?) of Zum Kripplein Christi try to climb into M's Studebaker. The preacher stumbles because there's no running board and drops his books.

27. M's folks sang Christmas songs--"Silent Night" while washing the dishes. Mother an excellent soprano, father could sing bass, brother a fine singer.

28. M recalls a song in German about crossing a bridge and getting wet because of a forgotten umbrella.

29. Mother brought a parchesi board over, family also played schapskopf.

30. Rev. Kuh, who could speak 13 languages and who confirmed M, is asked if he'd bear arms against Switzerland.

31. Songs of the season--Christmas, Easter--often sung.
32. M. learned songs from his mother--wanderer songs, songs about leaving one's mountains. (An aside about hearing many Swiss singers in Canada during a parade.)
33. Had a house dance at Bruni's when they remodeled the place, but no singing Card parties common.
34. M wanted to play accordion. Music teacher Schellinger convinces dad to give M lessons. Dad played violin. Hated it because he wasn't asked. Had had pneumonia, illness lingered. Doctor found it problem was the fiddle and told folks to stop making M take lessons. When band forms in Iron Ridge, M refuses to join because he was sick of hearing about the money wasted on violin lessons. Parents drop the matter and M starts to play.
35. Accordion appealed to him because of Swiss performers with their button accordions. His folks had recordings (which M still has) of the Moser Brothers.
36. M reckons Rudy Burkhalter played accordion with Tony Salerno in Madison.
37. Swiss coming in the 1920s headed to Dodge County; those before went to the New Glarus area. Cheese factories were the draw.
38. Burkhalter settled in Madison. Taught many to play the accordion.
39. Swiss good singers because they couldn't afford instruments.
40. M and his dad played "all American stuff" on the violin--like Sailor's Hornpipe."
41. M began doing cheese factory work at seven. Cheese made twice per day--small plant and cheese delivered twice daily by farmers. A seven day a week routine. Maybe on Sunday a few hours or so to play ball, walk in the woods, or shoot targets.
42. Guy named Freutiger, a cheesemaker from the Oconomowac area, played the button accordion.

43. Birthday parties with 40-50 people, homemade bread, 27 kinds of cakes, pork roast, homemade ice cream, and card playing.

44. Reckons Swiss fairly clannish.

45. Herman Mutual Insurance sponsored the Iron Ridge Band. Brought together Catholic and Protestant kids. (M from the Zwingli Church, brought up to be tolerant). Reckons Swiss men take women to church and they go to the tavern. This goes on in New Glarus too.

46. Late 1930s Iron Ridge Band of young people went from 55 to 28 or so, finally down to 18--"no uniforms, but we had a good band." Played church picnics and paid dues. (Began Art Sohre Orchestra before band dissolved.) Had several band directors, from West Bend and from Hartford.

47. Hartford City Band now falling apart. M got antagonized by the director because he said basses were playing too loud.

48. M thinks a band does best when they have to rely on themselves, not town support, to survive.

[TAPE TWO ENDS]

49. Art Sohre's mother died when he was young. A had very good manners. Took violin lessons from Professor Lentz. Played "Waltz of the Flowers" beautifully. Sohre and Delmar Doerge (piano accordion) played duos in taverns for awhile.

50. Went through various personnel changes because of personalities or need for certain instruments.

51. Art Sohre not good for much of anything but music. Was drinking 18 bottles a night as a teen. Died at 51.

52. M and his brother and Ownie playing some for other bands, so Art had to take action to start his band. At that time he had plenty of spending money from his grandfather, had a car too.

53. An orchestra, Weiss Harmonizers, in Allenton needed a bass horn player.

Lawrence the sax player good, sister the pianist tone deaf. M strapped for gasoline during WWII rationing. Family filled up his tank. M tells this in imitation of Weiss's Bavarian accent.

54. More about Art's drinking. After first band broke up, he couldn't get others to play with him.

55. M reckons 3-4 years the life of an orchestra because players and, eventually, wives won't necessarily get along.

56. Ray Miller had the orchestra in Iron Ridge area. M thinks he went on to show business in the St. Louis area.

57. Bernie Roberts of Watertown-Hustisford area now retired in California and owns race horses. He was interviewed recently by Scott Lopas of WTKM Hartford.

58. Good descriptions offered of places where the band played: Zunkers, Gonrings, Hustisford Hall, Allenton Picnic Grounds, Horicon Fiermen's Hall and stage above City Hall, Theresa, Schwartz Ballroom in Hartford (Heinie and His Grenadiers played there often), Allenton Hall (a dinky hall behind a store), Beaver Dam Armory, Nabob, The Lighthouse at West Bend (now a bowling alley), Bert Phillips in Menominee Falls (now Schwabenhof).

59. Circle two steps were the rage at Bert Phillips'. Elmer Keller did calling at Gonrings--generally waltz-quadrille (this dance form generally not known by people from north of Sheboygan). Keller told Bert Phillips about Sohre Orchestra.

60. The lousy dancers and the women nobody wants to dance with like mixers. M describes the broom dance done in the Iron Ridge area at house parties.

61. Essential to learn how to play schapskopf at an early age to fill out foursomes. Never played for money.

62. On playing out during snowstorms, then getting stuck on a high ridge near home. The cleared off road let otherwise snowbound farmers through with their

milk for the cheese factory.

63. Sohre band played lots of polkas. Some foxtrots and waltzes.

64. Waleski family Orchestra of Allenton loved to hear Sohre's band play "some of that Wayne King stuff": "Waltz You Saved For Me," "Missouri Waltz." They were excellent dancers and it was a thrill to see a floor full of fine dancers.

65. Band played "Red Handkerchief Waltz," "Circling Pigeons" (German), "Beer Barrel Polka," "St. Paul Waltz," etc.

66. Polkas and waltzes played by notes. Two steps by heart because they couldn't get arrangements borken down for a small orchestra.

67. Bought sheet music from Vitak-Elsnic in Chicago.

68. Sohre Orchestra inspired by Lawrence Duchow's Red Ravens. Liked Whoopee John. Romy Gosz also popular, but M didn't like his tone quality--a clarinetist turned trumpeter. M would hear these groups at the Schwartz Ballroom. "Duchow was it." Later Six Fat Dutchmen were popular.

69. Freddy Palmer Orchestra of Mayville did their own arrangements.

70. Sohre Orchestra played for less than scale on the radio to get publicity. They sent in cards for their neighbors. "How come all your cards are from east of Beaver Dam?" queried the station manager.

71. Anecdote about Weiss Harmonizers arriving unexpectedly at cheese factory to pick up Milt in a hearse.

72. We discuss bands on sheet M put together (replicated in field notes): Schellinger's; Les Marose Orchestra from Mayville, "western type"; Skipper Leone and Her Deckhands; Waleski Family Orchestra; Tony Salerno of Madison; Ray Miller; Happy Hayseeds Orhcestra out of Madison; Babe Schoenert of Madison; Freddy Palmer's Blue Ravens; Bernie Roberts with "Blondie the Golden Trumpet"; Syl Groeschl from north of Fond du Lac; Dodo Lachman with two trumpets (inspiration for the Sohre instrumentation); Lester Pusch from Hartford (buried

his accordion with him); Cousin Fuzzy . . .

[TAPE THREE RUNS OUT]

73. Bands (cont.): Cousin Fuzzy would put on plays and have dances later in late 1930s, early 1940s--Fuzzy probably from Green Bay area; Pep Babler; Johnny Lavardo; Normy Dogs and Orchestra from West Bend.

74. "Fritz the Plumber"--M says he owns the records that he plays.

75. Hartford Radio Station has half hour German show weekdays 5-5:30 p.m.

76. Sohre recordings made with aluminum disc on 78 turntable, but this action slowed the record down so, when played back, the result is faster than normal. Recordings made in the early 1940s.

[The rest of the tape consist of recordings of M's tape recorded Sohre discs and a 1964 performance by the polka band of the Hartford City Band.]

77. No, No Polka.

78. ???????????

79. ???????????

80. Sheik of Araby.

81. Dream of Heaven.

82. The Little Green Valley.

83. Heartaches Waltz.

84. Wait Til the Sun Shines Nelly.

85. Angry.

86. Isabella and Mariechen Waltz.

[The Hartford City Band succeeds the Art Sohre Orchestra.]

87. ???????????

88. ???????????

[TAPE FOUR ENDS AND THE SESSION ENDS]