

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
February 27, 1985

Edwin Schliewe
New Lebanon, WI

Milton Bruni had recommended that I talk with Schliewe if I wanted to learn about the Lebanon Band. Since my scheduled appointment for that afternoon had been thrown off by a funeral, I decided to chance a visit to the Schliewe's. Their house stands on a small rise just east of New Lebanon and within sight of St. Peter's Lutheran Church. I pulled into the driveway and Mrs. Schliewe called out through the garage--the family's wintertime and all purpose back entrance--to say hello. I announced my purpose and was invited in immediately.

Edwin, "Eddie," was waiting in the kitchen. He's a man of roughly 5'7", stout as a stump, with iron grey hair combed back above a round, red, merry face. His right arm, with fist clenched, is tucked to his side, the result of a stroke suffered eight years before. Since I had other appointments that day, I decided not to lug in the tape recorder, but to ask questions and take notes.

We sat down at the dining room table, a fine spot inasmuch as the room was filled with a piano, a fine dish cabinet where doilies hung, beer steins, and religious plaques--all of which will merit comment. The Schliewe's soon spread the table with pictures of the Lebanon Band in various stages. The earliest showed Edwin clutching a soprano saxophone while still in high school (ca. 1928 since E. was born in 1912), there was another from the late 1940s and many more, these in color, from the early 70s up until the present. I took a picture with my camera of the earliest photo, but it would be wise to return with Lewis to try to get a good copy made. Beyond bringing out photographs, the Schliewe's also produced a typewritten history of the Lebanon Band that was compiled by Helen Eske from information provided by her father, Carl (sister and father of Will Eske who will figure in subsequent notes and tape indices). As the history

explains the current band is the hybrid of two prior aggregations: the Old Lebanon Band of Immanuel Lutheran Church which was organized in 1890, and the New Lebanon Band of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, which was organized in 1903; the two merged in 1939. More historical information and another photograph appear in a Centennial Edition commemorating St. Peter's Church; I purchased a copy from E. for five bucks.

While commenting on the two bands and on their formation into one, E. spoke of the ebb and flow of such aggregations. Many of the surrounding towns had had such bands, but most are now defunct. The most recent threat to the Lebanon Band's existence came a few years ago when Will Eske formed his "Yankee Dutchmen" (about which more will be said in the Eske notes). This group was composed of people also involved in the Lebanon Band, but, since both bunches made money by playing in summer parades, there were soon conflicting dates and most "Yankee Dutchmen" quit the larger band. This explains some of the rancor expressed by Milt Bruni who plays essentially for fun, with money going to band uniforms and expenses, whereas Eske's group, with many fewer members and less overhead, is able to take home pay.

E. also reminisced a little about his parents. His dad, Theodore, played baritone horn in the band and played violin by ear--mostly at home; his mother played piano. E. recalls singing many German songs at Christmas time especially and also after band rehearsals. Unfortunately, the stroke has left his voice shot. I tried to discover names of old timers who might be rounded up to sing some of the old songs, but I didn't have any luck. In the piano bench, however, were several battered songbooks. Pages were out of order and missing; there were neither covers nor publication data. One book was in the Lieder Perlen's rectangular shape and was certainly printed in this country inasmuch as several English songs were included. I took a photograph of these songbooks.

While all this was happening, E. fetched beers for the three of us. He toasted with the ditty "Ein Prosit, Ein Prosit, Gemuetlichkeit. Ein, Zwei, Drei, G'sufa!" I learned then that the beer steins had been brought from Germany by the couple's son Wayne who had been stationed there in the military. The largest held something like sixteen twelve ounce beers and E., who confessed readily to a love for the brew, had filled it full and, with the help of family, downed it one Christmas season. On the wall at right angles to the steins was a plate depicting praying hands and inscribed with a "grace" in German: testimony to the fact that brew and blessedness are hardly mutually exclusive in German-American culture.

While enjoying the drink, I noticed a rag rug on the floor and inquired about its origin. I learned that it had been made by a local woman years ago, but that rag rugs of good quality could be purchased at Watertown's weekly "cattle market", Mrs. Schliewe's English rendering of "Viehmarkt," held the second Tuesday of each month on First St. near the river and the Police Station. Pigs are no longer sold there, says E., because the noses of city folks are too delicate, but other animals are; and, says Mrs. S., there's a resurgence of "fancy work" along the lines of the crocheted doilies on her china cabinet. Beyond this significant local event, I also learned that it would be worthwhile to visit the annual Volunteer Fireman's competition held this year in New Lebanon on the weekend of August 4. I've noticed well kept Firemen's Parks throughout Dodge County, and, apparently, these are the sites of annual competitions coupled with band parades and concerts, dances, dinners, and other events. I made a note on my calendar to return and, soon after, departed to meet with Will Eske.