

TAPE INDEX

Jim Leary  
May 11, 1985

John & Eilsabeth Till  
County H  
Cumberland, WI

1. Collector's announcement..

[Note: Basic facts regarding the couple's background can be found in the appended newspaper clipping. Since the pair figured it a waste of time to go over old ground, we dealt with other topics.]

\* 2. About John's father: hurt by a wagon and horses as a seven year old in Austria, taken to a hermit in the mountains who was a blacksmith and an herb doctor. Spent 21 years with this man, until age 28. Had brother in America, worked as a lumberjack in Somerset, WI and cured people on the side. Eventually deported to Austria-Hungary for practicing medicine without a license.

3. J was nine (b. 1913) at time of deportation. Learned to play violin in a mountain village--Dittersdorf (sp?), Austria/Silesia in the Alt Vater mountains. Learned to play "Schrammel" music [see notes on Zur Krone and the Vienna Strings for an explanation], played violin, then double-necked guitar. Played dad's saxophone, played with music clubs, dance bands, and symphonies too.

4. Came to USA in 1938 to renew citizenship. Went to Hollywood to be a movie star, was in one Gene Autry picture. Learned to yodel from yodeling cowboys singers. [The pair are inspired to sing.]

5. "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart." John calls this singing cowboy number the "South St. Paul National Anthem."

6. J started college in Czechoslovakia. Since he was an American citizen, he had to get a home certificate from his father's village; this action left him open for the Czech draft. Left the country via the American consulate to return



- to America. Was a "born entertainer" and had \$200, so headed for Hollywood.
7. Had trouble returning to finish college in 1938 because State Department predicted war, allowed him to go in 1938, however.
  8. Father played St. David harp, uncle Robert played accordion, a neighbor played violin. A retired Viennese (actually a Dittersdorf native come home from Vienna) and his son came to the village: son played double-necked guitar, father played button accordion, one neighbor played first violin, and J played second violin. J still has handwritten notes, reckons they're 100 years old. Played one summer, next summer J was taught to play guitar by the son who was soon jailed for distributing anti-Nazi propaganda. This was Schrammel music.
  9. J had heard some music by the Schrammels on record.
  10. Music on handwritten sheets included marches, songs, "some original music," and concert music too.
  11. Customary for people to sit out on front steps and sing at night. This was where J learned many songs. [He gives summaries of songs learned in the old country, these are the numbers performed on subsequent tapes.]
  12. J usually translates songs before singing so the audience has some understanding.
  13. Elisabeth Karl Till of a Czech-Austrian family, ancestors originally from a Yugoslavian area dominated by Austrians.
  14. J goes into a long routine about his wife's background.
  15. E from Freudental in Alt Vater mountains. Schooled by nuns in a private girls' school, then went on to Bergerschule--"higher education."
  16. Hitler's reign forced young teens to do one year of farm work before going on to higher education--E had to do this.
  17. E wanted to be a singer and a dancer, began to sing publicly at age six.
  18. J prayed at a shrine between villages to ask God's help in winning E's



hand.

19. J taken into Hitler's army. E worked as a private secretary for a high military official.

20. Early 1940s E was pregnant. J in the military and unable to see his wife and child for nine years. E very grateful to be in the USA and with husband. She had been told J was killed.

21. Mother and uncle Fred sang beautifully together. Often sang in front of the house, people walked by at night and stood still to listen.

22. E often sang solo as a child, she has long enjoyed singing with J.

23. J's old Schrammel guitar has suffered from the damp Wisconsin climate and has been repaired many times.

24. E learned to play zither, but only studied it for two years, so not too fluent, can't play along with J yet. Played zither for Jim Patraw's class at UW--Barron County. Also learned a little mandolin and piano. When younger in Europe, she played melody on harmonica and J played rhythm.

[TAPE ONE ENDS]

25. J and E entertained Austrian consul-general in St. Paul, invited to a zither club event in Chicago where Rudy Wacek was playing. Son Peter on electric guitar and singing daughter, Alexandra, with them then.

26. J sings "Nikdy Se Nevrtati" (in Czech).

27. First son born in 1944, 4 days after Peter's birth, E told her husband killed. Didn't hear he was alive until 4 years later. Shipped in a cattle car to DP camp in postwar Germany.

28. J a senior camp leader in POW camps in England, met a doctor who later returned to Germany and by a strange coincidence met E and Peter and reported that J was alive.



29. "Von Den Blumen Bergen Kommen Wie"/From the Blue Hills We're Coming (an adaptation of "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain").
30. "Ja Mam Debet Kanaru"/Czech song about a man with nine pigeons who couldn't get them into pairs.
31. "Im Sommer Scheint d'Sonne," learned in Europe.
32. Lots of yodeling in Europe with girls in the mountains and boys in the valleys. J offers illustrative yodels.
33. God and Peter look at a yelping Indian. They knock his brains out and he says "Uff Da." [J the joketeller.]
34. Most of their songs are well known to people in Europe and were learned there. They also get records and tapes from Europe sometimes.
35. Their grandchildren sing German songs too.
35. "Wer Am Yodler Machen Vill" (sp?)/How to Make a Good Yodeler (seven things needed).

[Break in the tape as E puts on her durndel and J puts on his wool jacket with carved antler buttons.]

36. E yodels with a cassette recording: "Ein Jodler Aus Tirol."
37. "Gitarron Klingen Liese Durch Die Nacht."
38. Tills have sung at state fairs, at schools and campgrounds; at the Festival of Nations in St. Paul, at the Heidi Festival in New Glarus, and over Dick Kaner's show on WJMC radio in Rice Lake. Would like to be on the Johnny Carson show. Have been in a Folklorama Program in Winnipeg, Canada.
39. Dutch lady can't wear wooden shoes because she caught the Dutch Elm disease.
40. "In the Prairie of Lindberg" (I didn't get the German title), with a "Ski Song" added as a medley.

[TAPE TWO ENDS BEFORE PERFORMANCE IS COMPLETE]



41. "Ski Song."
42. "Zwei Kleine Sternlein."
43. "Im \_\_\_\_\_ Kellar Sitz Ich Here" (sp?)/a drinking song sung by J in a low register.
44. Tills sang at the Birkebeiner Festival at Telemark in Hayward.
45. "Das Kufstein Lied."
46. "Happy Days Are Here Again"/sung with German words.
47. "Im Hartzerland" (whispering at the end).
48. "Tonight is the Night of the Alpine Ball" (with mistakes).
49. #48 repeated (with mistakes).
50. #48 repeated (a successful version).
51. Joke about Pope John Paul II: Poles build bridge in the Sahara desert, thousands of Swedes and Norwegians fishing from it.
52. #48 taken from a record owned by "a neighbor lady in South St. Paul," words were originally in English.
53. "Einar Sagt Es Mit Blumen."
54. "Wenn Der Auerhahn Baltzt" (sp?).
55. "Liechtensteiner Polka."
56. Austrian yodeling is "more melodious" than Swiss; Swiss are "kinda set people."

[TAPE THREE AND THE SESSION END]