

Contact: Charlie Polich
Address: Ashland, Wisconsin
Ethnic Group: Croatian
Fieldworkers: Jim Leary
Matt Gallmann
Marina Herman
Date: Friday, February 16, 1979

Charlie Polich is a Croatian farmer that lives in Kelly township in Bayfield County. Marina, Jim Leary and I went out to meet him today. Marina knew his daughter and that's how we made the contact. We left the Sigurd Olson Institute at about 10:30 and reached Charlie's house at about 11:00. On the way to his house we passed a man on the road who had two horses pulling a drag cart. Jim asked Marina to stop the car so that he could get some pictures of this guy. After Jim got back to the car he gave the following information. This fellow is Norwegian and uses his horses for hauling wood and cultivating. The horses are mother and daughter. It took the man only a few hours to train the horses. He uses a clicking sound with his mouth to control the horses. The fellow was happy to have his picture taken and even turned the horses around to get the sun in the right place for a picture.

Marina added a little information that she had about him. Apparently he hauls things for people all over. Jim said he was chewing snoose (chewing stuff) and he had a gob of frozen spit on his sweater.

When we arrived at Charlie's house we were greeted by a friendly collie dog. Charlie took our coats and had us sit in the kitchen with him and his wife. Charlie is about 5'5" and grey. He is a husky man with a face that doesn't reveal his age. I believe he is in his 60's. His wife wears glasses and is plump. They are both warm friendly people. Charlie has an air of calmness and understanding about him. Charlie's wife made us tea and we ate cookies.

Charlie came to this country when he was 12 years old. He lived in Croatia by the Adriatic Sea. He explained that the people by the coast are more educated

than the people that live among the inland mountains. He said that the dialect's they speak are different. He also said that he came to this country because his father sent for him. He explained that the villages in Yugoslavia are made up of mostly women and children because the men always have to go away to find work. That is why many came to the United States he said. When he first came here he lived in a mining town and the Chicago and eventually Kelly township.

Charlie's wife is Slovenian. She is from the city of Ublana.

Charlie claims that his father had the last homestead in Wisconsin. The deeds are signed by Woodrow Wilson.

The Polich's have five daughters, and two sons who have moved out of the house. One daughter owns a farm next door.

They told me a couple of things about Yugoslavia. Charlie said that everyone, just about, went to church on Sunday, "unless you snuck away from your mother". After church people went to the taverns and played bocci ball, drank, ate and sang. This would go on all day and into the night.

He said that gusla players would hang out at a different place. The shepherds, I think, mostly played gusla. They played flutes as well. Men would sit and drink and listen to a story told by the gusla player.

Charlie said that his mother was very sad in America. He said that times were very rough in Wisconsin when he first arrived. There were no roads and I guess not much work except that which was involved in subsistence.

Charlie and his wife spent alot of time talking about how women mourn for the dead. They said that the women wear black for a long time after a husband, friend or relation dies. Charlie talked about how unsanitary it was. He said that the women used it as an escape after awhile. His wife said that they spent weeks trying to get an aunt to change out of black. Most of the events they talked about pertaining to this ritual involved people in the Old Country. Charlie and his wife went back to Yugoslavia in the 60's. They said that some people, but not all, retained this custom in Wisconsin.

While we were on the topic of death Charlie started to talk about professional mourners. In Yugoslavia mourners, that are known to be good at mourning, follow the funeral procession and wail in a "lilting, sing-songy fashion". They go through the history of the deceased and talk about events in the life of the deceased. Charlie's mother never mourned for a funeral as a "pro" mourner in the United States.

On the brighter side of life Charlie started a band with local people back in the 30's. Some of his Croatian neighbors and him formed a seven piece Tamburizan orchestra. Two of the people he mentioned are Joe Kriskovich and Emile Dan Shubat. They both are living on farms close to him.

They went to Eagle River, Wisconsin and bought instruments. Charlie said that he learned how to read notes and then taught the others. The band was together for about 2 or 3 years. Charlie clearly felt that he was the driving force of the band. He said that one of the members got married and moved away and then the band stopped playing. They used to play at barn dances. After people built their barns they would have a "christening ceremony" for the new barn. Booze, food, music and dance were the elements of the party. Charlie said that these parties were multi-ethnic. He made a reference to moonshine. He said that during the depression, before cars, "all you could do was buy a little moonshine to have fun". His wife seemed to think that there wasn't enough Croatian people in the Sanborn-Mason-Benoit area to keep the traditional music alive.

They both told us of friends and relatives they have in Canada. The people in Canada still sing and play and dance alot. In fact, the last time Charlie or his wife sang was on their wedding anniversary (50th?) when their friends from Canada came down.

Charlie gave us his opinion about the Duquesne University Tamburitzans. He said that when Walter Koler was the director they were great and traditional. Now, he said, Koler isn't there and the new director uses Greek music and Slavic

music to create a pan-ethnic orchestra. He also told us that Walter Koler is now living on the Iron Range of Minnesota (We will probably get in touch with him).

Charlie's band was, as I said above, 7 pieces. I think that meant 2 prims, 2 brac, 2 brugaria and a Becernica. I shall check on that.

When we were talking about flutes Charlie mentioned that a woman named Ann Miller who lives in the Four Corners area still has a selbian flute.

Charlie talked about the two different types of sting arrangements on Tambura instruments. The Farkas is the older system and involves less strings than the newer Sremski system. That's all I gathered from what he explained.

When Charlie's daughters were growing up he tried to get them interested in the Croatian music. One daughter played the piano and the others and Charlie played Tamburitzan instruments. Charlie said that the only reason they played them was to please him. I think the one daughter still plays the piano.

Charlie is seemingly well read in History. This reading is done on his own. He expressed his lifelong desire to go to college. He seems to be a very sensible and reasonable man.

Our session ended when Charlie took out two old tamburitzan instruments. He let me borrow them to get them in shape and learn to play them.