

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
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Elmer Krueger
133 Spalding Ave.
Watertown, WI

Elmer Krueger has been another elusive character. I learned of him through the Watertown Senior Citizens' file, but have had trouble catching up with him. He works daytimes and spends most of his evenings doing volunteer work with the Isaac (sp?) Walton League, a charitable outfit involved in recycling and conservation activities. Most phone calls were answered by his wife who reckoned he was "kind of a bum" who kept unpredictable hours, and the one time I'd talked with him, he reckoned that his fingers were all bent up with arthritis, he hadn't played in years, and that he wasn't a professional anyhow. Nonetheless, I decided to drop in on him.

"Come in" greeted my knock and I entered to find a florid faced man with thick glasses seated at the kitchen table. Elmer, speaking in a bluff offhand fashion, reckoned that he'd be going off to his Walton activities at 6 (it was shortly after 5), but I was welcome to ask what I liked.

I soon learned that Elmer was born on a farm in Oak Grove Township (wherein lie Juneau and Horicon) in 1918. He picked up chromatic harmonica and the three row button accordion as a young man, eventually advancing to chromatic accordion, piano accordion, and, finally, chordovox. Throughout he was an "ear" musician. He remarked that his family had little or no money, nor was music education a part of his country school training. At age 12, however, the family moved to Watertown. On the first day of school Elmer was asked to identify some musical notation on the blackboard. He didn't know any of that "do so fa me re do stuff" and so was put back a year in school. Soon after he dropped out of the high school system to attend vocational school. At some point he bought an accordion in Milwaukee that entitled him to several free lessons; this was a

chance, he figured, to learn to read music, but inasmuch as he could already play complex pieces on the instrument the teacher told him he had no need of lessons.

There was little time to go into much depth about Elmer's career as a musician. He acknowledge briefly that he'd played at house dances aplenty: "Oh sure, I played them years ago, German pieces, 'Herr Schmidt' and all that stuff." Through the 50s and into the late 70s he played in various combinations ranging from accordion/drums to accordion/drums/electric guitar/saxophone. The latter four piece aggregation was known as "The Dizzy Sizzlers" and the band played for weddings, anniversaries, banquets (E. mentioned playing for annual dinners of several insurance companies), and in taverns. He played me an eight track recording, fuzzy and much used, of the Sizzlers: lounge/dinner music stuff, with the chordovox evoking the Hammond organ; I recall an easy listening version of "Blue Skirt Waltz" and a Ray Price C&W crooner standard (the title of which eludes me at the moment). Not exactly a trove of old time German stuff, but another piece of the Watertown/Dodge County musical puzzle.

As I was leaving, Krueger reckoned I ought to call up Charlie Kittel who played two row button accordion and knew some German numbers. I did and will probably record him, but that's best discussed in another set of notes.