

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
May 11, 1985

Rosemary Menard & Agatha Watson
Colon Boulevard
Rice Lake, Wisconsin

Rosemary Menard and her sister, Agatha, are Korgers who grew up in Eau Claire with parents who were of German, Austrian, and Czech background. Rosemary wrote to the Folklife Center sometime back informing us that she knew at least one song, "Ferdinand," that wasn't written down; she also mentioned that her family's home was a center for German music when she was growing up. Accordingly I contacted her about a session and learned further that she knew a number of "tavern songs" because she had "sharp ears" and heard them song when her father didn't think she was listening. As it turned out Rosemary's older sister Agatha lived across the lake from my parents, and it was at her place that we met.

I arrived at 10 A.M. at "Wat's Haven," a winterized cottage on the shores of upper Rice Lake. Agatha, a short, genial gray haired lady of 72 led me out onto a screened porch where Rosemary--a larger woman of 68 with a round and merry face--was waiting. R's granddaughter Jennifer was also present and the three were sipping coffee and eating blueberry coffee cake.

The tape index will show that R is a fine talker, a natural storyteller with an eye for detail and a feel for drama. She dominated the interview, offering considerable musicological insights about her extended family and neighbors, but Agatha likewise chimed in periodically with useful observations. There's not much point in covering what's provided on the Index, but it is worth pointing out Rosemary's unique status as an informant for this project. Since both her parents, and a grandmother that lived with the family, were good singers full of traditional songs, R grew up steeped in folk music. She also did plenty of church and community singing and has played in both dance bands and classical

aggregations; consequently she's knowledgeable and articulate about which songs were learned from books and from institutional sources and which songs she "just knew." Furthermore she's been a grade school teacher, the mother of eight, and a 4-H leader and, as such, has sought to involve her charges with ethnic music. She has taught them songs and dances from her own tradition while seeking out materials from other sources. This experience likewise renders her articulate about the nature of traditional dance and song. The same combination of traditional and sophisticated or cosmopolitan knowledge applies to her familiarity with tales. Her mother and grandmother were full of supernatural legendry, while her father and her uncle Henry were inveterate joke and anecdote tellers (indeed, she related me a version of the international tale, "Pumpkin Sold as Ass's Egg").

Beyond talking plenty, R sang songs in Czech and German that were learned from both her father and her mother. There were also a number of her dad's songs, performed while he was working in his tailor shop, that she knew only in fragmentary versions or not at all. Apparently her brother Fred, who lives in New Mexico, is a fine singer who knows more of the father's songs. Fred will be in Wisconsin this summer and, with luck, there'll be an opportunity to record him. It would also be worth recording some of R's dance tunes, played with the Korger band in the 1930s, on the violin. She didn't bring her instrument along for the session. Finally R has a number of old photographs, including shots of her father and uncle playing for a wedding, and of the entire family with their instruments spread out while on a picnic.

After several hours of conversation, a little singing, and some storytelling, we parted company in hopes of meeting again. Agatha generously gave me a spare copy of a genealogy compiled for the sister's mother's side of the family:

Bruce F. Watson, Loew, A Genealogy of the Descendants of Jacob, George, and

Johann Loewe of Passau, Germany (Roseville, Minnesota, 1970).

Later that night Agatha called me at my parents' home to tell me that she had just heard from Rosemary. On her way back to rural Eau Claire, she had remembered a good deal more and was wondering if she should write it all down and send it to me. Of course. Rosemary's written additions will supplement these notes, the tapes, and the index.