

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDION PROJECT

jwb ¹
field notes
6/7/84

Rudy Jandrey
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Tapes: None

Slides: Sheet 6; 1-15

Rudy Jandrey lives in a ranch style home a block and a half from the house where he grew up. "It was right there where the Holiday Station is." He didn't want to be taped, so I left the equipment in the car. His wife Rose Ann (nee Ferderber) joined us and we sat around the kitchen table and talked for the next three hours. These notes are reconstructed from my written notes.

Jandrey's father was born in Garesnica, Austria in 1886 (from citizenship papers) He arrived in the United States in 1912. His name was originally spelled Ilia Yendrej. His mother was Agnes Puzel. Rose Ann is related to one of the Kostelic families in Eveleth through her mother.

Rudy got his start on the button accordion through a friend of his father, Louie Babich, who also has ties to Eveleth, and may be living there now, according to Louie. Note: there are several Babich families in Eveleth, but the name is pronounced differently. Louie is as in Bob. The Eveleth families pronounce it with a 'a' as in cat.

Rudy also remembers hearing a neighbor, Frank Krnichar, playing the accordion. "They were old style people. I would hear him play. I'd hear this music coming out of the second story window on my way to school." He recalls one Stanley Gornick who also played.

Rudy started out on the piano accordion and got a German style diatonic box as an adult. "It's a good pasttime."

"Me being Slovenian, I wanted a Slovenian style box. Louie Babich had one. He was left-handed, so he played it upside down. Louie's father had a box, but he kept it in a trunk locked up, but sometimes he forgot to lock it. So Louie would sneak it out and play it. His dad caught him one time and really gave him hell. Then he said, 'Well, let's hear you play, now.' But something was wrong. He could play it, but his father thought something was funny. He was playing it upside down."

Rudy mentioned John Mikus, an accordion builder from Cleveland. "Just as good as Mervar." Mike Laurich, Chisholm, member of the East-West Button Box Club, has a Mikus box.

Both Mikus and Mervar made boxes with either Slovenian or German fingering.

Rudy now plays an Italian chromatic box. He's been playing it for ten years. He got started on the chromatic through John Erzar. (Erzar lives about six blocks away.)

Erzar had a three-row chromatic at first, but he didn't like it and decided to "let it go." They were at the Slovenian picnic at Eveleth (All Slav Day Picnic, held annually, last Sunday in July at Eveleth Lake Park at Ely Lake, south of Eveleth.) John said, "Try it out." Rudy did, liked it, they agreed on a price, but Rudy said he didn't carry that much cash around with him. The price was \$300. He asked John if he could take it home and pay him the next day. That was agreeable so the deal was made. Meanwhile, Fritz Mishmash was there

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Rudy Jandrey, cont.

and also interested in the same accordion. He later told Rudy that he always carries some cash just in case he finds a button box he likes. If Rudy hadn't taken it with him, Fritz would have bought it. Rudy explained the fingering patterns on the chromatic box. With a three-row box, you have to learn another fingering pattern in order to play all the chords and scales. If the box has five rows, the extra two rows overlap allowing the player to use a consistent fingering pattern. The middle row of the five is the only independent row. Rows one and four and rows two and five are duplicates.

Rudy decided to have the extra two rows added to the accordion. He sent it to an accordion company, Castiglione in Detroit, but they said it would have to be sent to Europe. No one in the United States could do the work. He considers the redone accordion to be his favorite, the one he plays most often.. When he played it for me, it had an extremely loud volume that surprised me.

Rudy brought out his collection of accordions and played them one by one. He plays with greater volume than most of the players interviewed for this project. He often plays with Ed Kutzler. The Jandreys and the Kutzlers are friends and visit each other, staying in each others homes for events that are nearby. Both he and Rose Ann talked about the length of the trip to the Mesabi Range towns. Chisholm is a 90 minute drive. On the day John Erzar suffered his stroke, he and Rudy were scheduled to play. John called from the hospital and said he couldn't make it. Rudy called Kutzler to help him out. Rudy and Ed have played together often since then. Rudy himself doesn't like to perform as a solo. He complained, too, about being out of practice and of not being able to play the Slovenian diatonic box any more, but he did play the ones he has while I was there.

Rudy talked about the trading, buying and selling of button accordions among the players in Northeastern Minnesota. Willy Verant plays a chromatic box that he bought from Louie Babich. He related the story of the chromatic Mervar box that he owns. He was playing it at the All Slav Day Picnic when a man came up to him and said that he thought he recognized the sound of the instrument. He looked at it and it turned out to be one that he had ordered from Mervar. It still has his initials on it. The man's name is Zgynar(sp?) from Gilbert. Louie Babich and Ed Petrovic, Eveleth, went to see the box because Zgynar wanted to sell it. Louie was reluctant because he already had several boxes and wasn't sure he wanted another one. Petrovic offered to buy one of Babich's boxes if he bought this one from Z. Louie later sold the Mervar to Rudy. It was after that that Z. recognized it at the Picnic.

Rudy claims to be fussy, wiping off the boxes after playing them. He mentioned Babich as being even more particular. He also mentioned Mike Laurich's use of a silk stocking on his hand when he played. so he wouldn't get the instrument dirty or greasy.

Rose Ann supports Rudy's interest in the button accordion, and considers the collection of instruments that they own to be a family investment. She did say that she sometimes gets tired of listening to Rudy practice, especially when he's playing the same song over and over.

See slides of the button accordions, SBB Slide Sheet 6.

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Rudy Jandrey, cont.

Rudy talked about the Gotchniks and retold the story of Anton Mervar's visit. The Gotchniks ordered their first button accordion from Mervar's catalog. Then one day Mervar knocks on the door asking if they own a button accordion and explaining how he was the one that made it. He had a retarded son who rode with him, but stayed in the station wagon. Mervar wanted to sell the Gotchniks a new box. "But that was depression times." They were dickering for a while and finally Mervar talked them into trading up to a four-row from the three-row that they had. He brought several of them into the house and let them choose the one they wanted.

Rudy related a story about a fire that Mervar had at his factory. He burned his arms badly trying to rescue his accordions and suffered the burns as he carried out the celluloid material that he used to cover and decorate the boxes. Rudy pointed out several different colors and styles of celluloid on the Mervar boxes and showed me a piece that he had taken off one of the instruments. The piece of wood had been covered on both sides, although only one side was visible on the instrument.

Rudy made all the cases for his accordions. Black hard shell cases, with plush lining.

His Mervar chromatic is unique, not many made. It has a rich organ-like sound, compared to the Slovenian style Mervar boxes.

The Mervar Slovenian diatonic is one of the last accordions that Mervar built.

The Excelsior Chromatic was built in 1926. This is the one that was rebuilt by adding two additional rows of buttons.

Mervar with orange celluloid covering, similar to Ed Kutzler's, once belonged to Frank Kromar, well known Ely player, now deceased.

Rudy and RoseAnn mentioned other players and collectors.

Alby Samsa, Hibbing

Hoyer Trio, Cleveland, early recordings influenced many players. Rudy had photo of them. Matthew, Frank & Eddy. (Matt Arko-Hoyer) was this the family name? Why the hyphen?

A man named Pietro invented the first piano accordion in 1906.

Brown's Distributing Co, 2298 S Broadway, New Ulm 56073 507 354 3615

Oscar Lindberg, 6304 W Pleasant Av S, Mpls 55423 repairman.

Craig Jameson, 2913 Dupont Av N Mpls 55422 588 5563 collector of old piano accordions.

name ~~for~~ Chickentown district of Evelth: Kudjavas ?

Jandreys have three children, 2 boys and a girl.

Rudy is back to work this year after the lay-off last year. They were able to travel to many button box and polka festivals in '83 because of the free time and because of the unemployment benefits he was entitled to due to his 25 years seniority. This year, they can't go because he's working.