

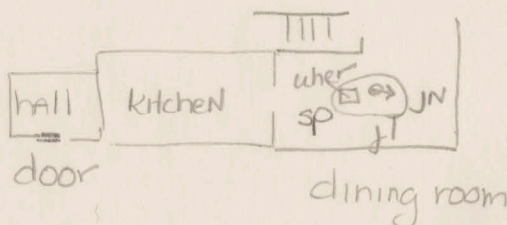
Field Notes

Thursday, August 2, 1979

Informant: Jerry Novak (Czech Singer)

Collectors: Sara Poynter, Jim Leary

I picked up Jim Leary after getting the recording equipment at the Sigurd Olson Institute. We were running behind schedule and I was still unsure of the directions to get to Jerry Novak's house - but, with luck, found it fairly easily. Jerry Novak lives on a farm a few miles outside of the heart of Moquah on Rural Route 3. As I slowed the car down and backed up to up to read the mailbox. Jim saw J.N. up by the house waving to us. So I pulled in the drive. JN smiled and waves as we pulled in. He's a man of 82 or 83 but he's still very active and his mind is sharp. He has a very kind smile and pleasant general appearance. He was dressed in a blue cotton shirt and denim overalls. He showed me where to park and walked over to the car to greet us. He explained that he'd been expecting us and had just called the Institute to see if we were still coming. After introductions we walked inside and into the dining room. I asked JN outside if he minded me recording our conversation. He said he didn't mind so I brought the equipment in with me. I set it up right away.



Jim Leary talked with JN as I set up. They mainly talked about JN's past and places he's lived. He (JN) was born in Bohemia and then moved to Wisconsin (arrived first in Baltimore and came by train north).

JN had made up a list of songs to sing for us. These were mainly what he referred to as "school songs". These are songs he learned in grade school. Some songs he remembered his eight sisters singing around the house. These were popular songs of the time, some still sung today, but they are old songs. There were a few Irish songs, a couple "coon songs" (as JL calls them) - songs about blacks - and some church songs (refer to tape).

JN was prepared to sing for us right away. He has a very pleasant voice to listen to. He had no accompaniment while he sang and he held his song list up in front of him the whole time he sang - as if all the words were written on them, however, they weren't. I think he just used the list as a nervous crutch. He'd often pause and ask if we already had this song because he didn't want to waste time or he'd ask if we wanted all the versus. We told him to sing all that he knew. With a little prying we found out that he and his father used to play the harmonica together. He said he "didn't think" he still had his harmonica, so I told him to find it and expressed that next time I'd love to hear him play it. He hummed a few Bohemian dance tunes for us that he'd learned from his father and said with time he could think of more. He told us about his dancing and singing group the "Moquah Dancers". They'd sing and dance the traditional numbers. He mentioned a few names of people we should talk to.

He said he also knew some lullabies he'd learned from his mother and said he'd try to remember them and sing them for us next time.

During most of the time we were there JN's wife and daughter were in the kitchen - which was right next to the dining room - cooking and baking and talking. I'm cer-

tain they were picked up on the tape. JN's daughter walked through the dining room a few times. At one point JN walked into the kitchen to look for a pamphlet on Moquah while the tape was running.

As it got near 12:00 noon (we'd been there for about 1½ hours) I began to get very hungry especially while smelling Mrs. Novak's cooking and I figured it might be time for them to have lunch so I decided we should leave. JN was eager to have us come back again and said he'd work on getting some songs and remembering some (JL took a few pictures). JN walked us out to the car and talked with us as we put the equipment away. Then we left.

Born 1895 in Bohemia -? Name of town.

1901 came to this country.

Father came first (1 year earlier).

Came to Wisconsin Jennings, first predominantly Polish area - there for a few years. Then moved to Iowa for one year. One relative in Iowa - looked for a farm - then Michigan - near Saginaw. October to following spring - worked on sugar beets. 1911 came to Moquah looking for a place to homestead - found out about their place in a newspaper advertisement - probably a Bohemian paper (? about it). Worked briefly in woods as lumberjack at Odanah.

Furnishings - nothing obviously ethnic seemed to have fairly modern furnishing.

? JN about any Bohemian traditions - traditional objects - ? if he's got any pictures of Moquah dancers. Afternoon interview.

→ Near Pelican Lake by
Rhinelander.