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Informant: Stanley Stangle

Various old-timers in the Ashland Bohemian community had mentioned Stanley Stangle as a man I should see if I wanted to learn about Bohemian bands in the area. Stangle's father had played with the original Bohemian band; Stanley had played with that band, had organized his own Bohemian band, had participated in many other musical groups, and had recently retired as band director at Ondossagon High School. Accordingly, I called the man to set up an interview. Like many people who know a great deal but don't consider themselves "historians," Stanley reckoned he "didn't know much." His sister had thrown out, in the early 1940's, a huge trove of photographs and musical arrangements documenting Ashland's Bohemian bands; without these reminders, Stanley felt his memory was poor. I insisted on an interview, however, by using my now recurrent line: "Anything you can tell me is more than I know now." We set up a session for Thursday afternoon at 2:00.

I arrived at Stanley's ranch style house (1309 Seventh Avenue West) a few minutes late, dodging the land mines deposited on the lawn by the Stangle's spaniel. Stanley opened the door and ushered me in. His wife, whose name now eludes me, was seated on the couch, crocheting, eyeing the soaps on TV, and holding back their hound who longed to pounce on me.

After exchanging the usual introductory pleasantries, Stanley suggested we sit in a wood paneled dining area just off the kitchen (see diagram). I began setting up my tape recorder and Stanley was a bit reluctant to be taped. He reckoned, again, that he couldn't remember that much and that I might just as well take notes. I resorted to another stratagem: I showed him the rough questionnaire I'd worked up for the session and, after looking at it, he reckoned he probably could tell me quite a bit as long as I asked the questions. And so, we proceeded.

As the tape index shows, Stanley grew up in a musical family. His mother played button accordion and harmonica, while his father was the main force in the local Bohemian band. Stanley and his brother grew up learning to read notes and play horns. Both sat in with their father and the other men in the Bohemian band. In the late twenties, Stanley began playing in area jazz or "modern" bands while still in high school (he was born in 1914). Among other groups, he played with

"The Enemies of Sleep," and the "Northwoods Orchestra." In the early 30's he spent a stint touring in circus bands and playing for vaudeville shows. In around 1938 he returned to Ashland and began attending Northland College - doing part-time labor, teaching music at Ondossagon, and playing in local bands. Spurred by people at the Bohemian Hall, and still possessing his father's book of arrangements, Stanley began a new Bohemian band composed of Northland students. In 1942, he joined the Coast Guard and played in their band. A few years later he returned here where, excepting a stint of work for DuPont, he was involved in directing bands until his retirement a year ago. During these post World War II years, he continued to play in bands (trumpet usually) - most recently with Norm and Tom Reykdal in a band that played "old-time" and "modern" music for the skiers at Telemark. That gig ended in tragedy for Stanley. One night, after playing, the musicians' car was involved in a head-on collision and Stanley was thrown through the windshield, cutting his lip badly and making it impossible for him to blow the trumpet effectively. He also received a concussion which affected his memory. Despite this adversity, Stanley learned to play the tuba; but now he doesn't play too much.

Throughout this account of his existence and of the local music scene (ethnic and otherwise), Stanley relied on many interesting and well-told anecdotes. Of medium height, paunchy, with a round creased face, animated eyes, and thinning dark hair, Stanley dramatized his narratives with emphatic gestures. And, when recalling a piece of music played by the Bohemian band or a song sung by the drinkers in the Bohemian Hall basement, he would often grin and hum snatches of melody or burst into song. Mrs. Stangle took an active part in the interview too, albeit from afar. She never moved from her position on the couch in front of the television, but her ears were sharp. Whenever her husband's memory faltered or he missed a detail, she chimed in with the information.

After an hour and a half of talk, we concluded the taping. Unfortunately, it was at this point that Stanley told me some interesting information that he didn't want on tape. Apparently there used to be frequent fights outside the Bohemian Hall: "the police were always there." According to Stanley, the westsiders would come over to the east side and "people didn't like that." The Scandinavians would act smart and their hosts would confront them: "What're you

doing in Bohunk territory?" If a Scandinavian danced with a Bohemian woman, "watch out." Interestingly, although Stanley played in many local bands (Bohemian and "modern") in many local taverns and halls, he had little familiarity with the "Fraternal Hall" on Third Street which figures so prominently in the dance remembrances of local Scandinavians. It is remarkable that in so small a town, one area would be "foreign" to another.

As I packed up my equipment, I remarked to Stanley that the warm "Indian Summer" day had fired my thirst and that I was bound for the liquor store to buy beer. He reckoned he was just about to head for the tavern himself. Apparently, he makes two forays a day to local watering holes. In the early morning, after taking his daughter to work, he stops in to jaw with the Polish bartender at the "Cram Inn" (formerly "Denny's"). In the late afternoon, he has a few more and then, being a retired man of leisure, turns in early. Perhaps I'll catch him some morning at the "Cram Inn" where, reportedly, the "bullshit fires thick" and its issue might "break my tape recorder." It would only be right to give my machine a good test of strength.

I took a few pictures of Stanley and we parted amiably, each bound for beer.