

## FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary  
February 8, 1985

Ed Peirick Home  
Maple Crest Drive  
Watertown, WI

I arrived at the Peirick home at roughly 7PM. It's a split level structure, constructed within the past five years, in a new development on the southwest side of Watertown. Ed met me at the door and ushered me into a well kept living room. He's a burly man of 69, with a strong handshake testifying to years of hard work on the farm. After I'd pulled off my winter clothes, we descended into a "family room" furnished with a roll top desk, television, couches and rocking chairs, and a music corner. Ed had been waiting for my arrival and his three concertinas and two of his three button accordions were spread out along with numerous loose leaf alphabetized notebooks in which Ed kept his sheet music.

I explained the project briefly and we began an interview. As the tape index will show, Peirick grew up in a musical extended family in Lebanon township, Dodge county. As a teen he and his brother purchased a concertina and, like Fred Kaulitz, the pair took lessons from Irving DeWitz. Ever since Ed has played chiefly by notes and the concertina has been his love. The index reveals his career as a local dance musician and it also presents a few of the German tunes in his rather vast repertoire. Besides the German numbers favored during our session, Ed plays a good number of other ethnic and polka numbers, but he confessed that he didn't go in for fox trots, western music, or rock.

Although a musician who played locally and, because he was a farmer, had no real opportunity or desire to go "on the road," Ed was nonetheless a musician in touch with a larger world of old time music and of concertina players. He listened regularly to German and to polka programs on area radio stations; he subscribed to Music and Dance News, published until his recent death by Pat

Watters of Knowlton, WI just south of Mosinee; he sought out sheet music from local musicians with whom he came into contact and, occasionally, from touring bands and mail order companies; in recent years he attended large polka festivals like the one in Gibbon, Minnesota; and he obtained several of his concertinas from Jerry Minar's music store in New Prague, Minnesota. Indeed Minar had sold Ed a concertina over the phone and then took off shipping if Ed would agree to meet him at a dance in Stevens Point. The Peiricks and another couple drove the 120 miles to Point for an afternoon concert and had to wait until the band finished its job since Minar was using the concertina on stage. Likewise Ed listened carefully to concertina soloists in contemporary ethnic bands and was keenly aware of the playing of people like Milwaukee's Don Galak, Konkol who was formerly with Ray Dorschner and the Rainbow Valley Dutchmen, and Karl Hartwich of Karl and the Country Dutchmen. Peirick also advanced certain aesthetic notions about playing concertina by note as opposed to by ear. Those who chose the former, he reckoned, were necessarily truer to the variety and intricacy of a given melody, while ear musicians and those who improvised freely were more likely to repeat certain stock phrases from one tune to the next. Besides playing from sheet music, Ed had a great fondness for copying notes and button directions for concertina tunes onto blank pages to be placed in alphabetical order in his many notebooks. He often worked by the hour at his big rolltop desk and had modified notation so as to have all measures end at the right hand column of a given page. Ed's playing showed equal care, feeling, and stamina. He played with dexterity, ease and enjoyment for over an hour and wasn't tired in the least. In fact he confessed that he'd be playing a five hour anniversary job the next evening. After we turned off the tape recorder, Ed's wife brought us some juice along with cheese and crackers and we descended into a lower basement where Ed kept



his music collection in a file cabinet. He had an amazing quantity of old concertina and tune books. The earliest, dating from 1850, contained polkas, waltzes, schottisches, marches, jigs, and galops, including "Durang's Hornpipe," "Money Musk," and "Bonaparte's Retreat"--tunes beloved by old time fiddlers. A large share of concertina arrangements by Henry Silberhorn of Chicago dated from the early part of this century through the twenties. Judging from Ed's collection, Silberhorn had notated an extraordinary range of tunes for concertina: semiclassical pieces, pop songs, "Smokey Mountain Ballads," and many, many ethnic tunes. Ed also had a run from 1976-1982 of Pat Watters' aforementioned Music and Dance Nnews. Therein were periodic references to Silberhorn's collection of 3,000 concertina tunes. Apparently Watters owned the rights to them, sold them for roughly \$1.50 each, and ran snatches of notations and tune listings in his paper to entice customers. I've photocopied certain excerpts from the paper that are germane to this project; meantime Richard March, the state folk arts coordinator, has photocopied a complete run of Ed's collection for his files.

In addition to showing me his music collection, Ed took me to each of four aerial photographs of his farm. As the second eldest son, Ed didn't inherit his father's place (a brother owns that), but bought a farm of his own in 1942 for \$11,500. It's been a dairy farm ever since, although the Peiricks kept chickens and sold eggs. Ed cleared woodland, drained fields, built new outbuildings and Harvestore silos, and generally farmed wisely and profitably until retiring a few years ago. His two sons now share the old acreage and have purchased some additional farmland. As Ed told me about his place, it was clear to me that he had husbanded his land with the same care and love that went into his music.

By this time it was nearly eleven and, facing an hour's drive, I started packing up the equipment to leave. Ed picked up his concertina and squeezed out another half dozen tunes; once warmed up, he didn't want to quit and I felt as though

he might well play all night. At 11:30, though, I did get up to the front door. As I turned the handle, Ed asked if I was Irish. I said I was and he replied that I must be Catholic and that he was Catholic too. I'd guessed this earlier by the crucifix and blessed palm on the wall, but hadn't until then realized that Peirick's native township was a hotbed of Lutherans, especially those of the conservative Wisconsin synod. I asked how they got along with all those Lutherans. There was a pause and a groan. Both Ed and his wife reckoned that the everyday people were fine, but some of the oldtime preachers had been trouble--preaching the evils of Catholicism and inveighing against association with Catholics. Fortunately all that's a "thing of the past."

We parted warmly with the promise of meeting again on Valentine's Day when Ed was playing at the Watertown Senior Citizens' Center.