

Collector: Jim Leary

March 10, 1981

Informants: Marion Brevak and her sisters  
Barksdale, Bayfield County, WI

My previous notes for the Verna Bloomquist session mention the existence of the Brevak sisters, descendents of Hungarian pioneers who homesteaded in the Barksdale area. According to their neighbor and fellow ethnic Louis Cuty (husband of Verna B's sister Marian), their mother sang plenty and the daughters would join in.

Accordingly I called Marion Brevak and asked if she might gather her sisters together to do some singing. She was very pleasant over the phone and chuckled at the thought of singing. She would talk the matter over with her sisters and I could call back in a few days. When I called she reckoned that she and her sisters had only "followed along" on a few choruses while their mother sang. They "wouldn't have much to tell" me and didn't want to be recorded.

Of course, this is a pretty common response. First of all, many people are shy about singing to strangers. Second, they feel even more foolish, sometimes, if the singing is done in a language incomprehensible to the listener. Finally, they seldom realize that the "little" they know is often considerable and certainly preferable to total ignorance. For a moment, I felt like pushing: "if you don't want to sing the words, you can just recite them," or "the little you can tell me is more than I already know." But, frankly, I seem to be wearying of forcing myself on reluctant informants for the sake of knowledge. With luck, I'll run into these women at some gathering and, perhaps, face-to-face I'll be able to coax/lore from them in a more natural manner. Until then, the songs of local Hungarians will remain known only by reputation.