

TAPE INDEX

DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND RADIO PROGRAMS

Art Altenbury
Concertina Bar, Milwaukee
May 17, 1988

Recorded by J. Leary & R. March
Ampex 632 tape
Nagra 4-L recorder

1. Announcement.
2. Born Knowlton, WI, south of Mosinee, raised on a farm. Mother played accordion, gave A a few pointers and he played. G'mother bought him a little German accordion when he was in grade school. Would play sometimes for special events at school.
- * 3. An uncle played concertina by ear. A used to go to dances at Ashley, tinkered with a dance hall piano there. Aunt in Wausau arranged for lessons there, g'ma agreed to pay. A had to hitchhike to Mosinee, caught train to Wausau, walked 11 blocks to Main Street. Teacher had a violin, not a concertina. A had his uncle's concertina. Teacher had a book, had A hunt for keys and notes. Missed train back after second lesson. Tried walking and hitching, carrying the concertina. 4:30 AM dad came looking for him. End of concertina lessons.
- * 4. Bands would come through: Duchow, Whoopee John, Gosz, Dominic Slusarski's Jolly Seven. Would go up on breaks and ask how to do things on the instrument. Learned from them.
5. Art sneaked into Dominic's Bar when underage. Played his concertina, Gosz was there, they closed the place and went across the square with A on concertina, Gosz on trumpet. Early to mid-1940s.
6. A born 1929.
7. Played with 3-4 piece band through high school. No name, led by Art. Concertina, sax/clarinet, trumpet, drummer. Old time: Polish/German, waltzes, kujawiaks, polkas, laendlers.
- * 8. A's folks gave him land to clear and plant to make money to buy a concertina. Planted cucumbers for pickles. After land cleared, A's dad would take it for his own crop. Finally uncle found A had \$60 or so, brought A a concertina for that amount.
9. Played concertina on east coast while in the service. After service, played a few jobs.
10. Had a contracting business, sold that, came to Milwaukee in 1953. Bought a new Star concertina then, thereafter bought various concertinas.
11. Sold Chevrolets for 22 years. Mainly trucks. When Gordon Page went out of business, bought his place. Had been looking for a hall and tavern for 4-5 years prior. Bought his bar on day Page had his auction, 1979. Wasn't too impressed with the place he bought on first look, but receipts looked good.

Bought it in May, opened in July. Has taken a while to decorate.

*12. Thursday night doings: A always wanted to help young concertina players to get started. Knew a lot of musicians, decided to have a concertina bars. First had Friday and Saturday music. More musicians were coming, but decided to have Thursday nights as a jam night. Six months ago decided to have an amature concertina night for real rookies on Tuesday nights. Real spirit of cooperation between all the musicians, sharing tunes, sheet music, tips, etc.

13. Some concertina clubs locally. Continental Concertina Club, Cream City Concertina Club, others have died out.

14. A always liked Chicago and Minnesota bands, also knows people in Pulaski, Wausau, Green Bay area. Has various bands come to his place and play. Advertizes on radio, puts bands he features recordings on his juke box.

*15. Milwaukee concertina/drum duets: lots of places aren't big enough to hire bigger bands, lots of bar owners don't know too many musicians, so they have small bands. Art led a 5-6 piece band, the Jolly Jacks, in the 1950s, early 1960s. Problematic to keep the band entirely together. With two piece band fewer problems. A concertina player can always find a drummer.

16. A features local musicians in his bar, but gets better turnout when he hires out-of-town bands that people haven't heard before.

17. Slovenian style mostly piano accordion, A has only concertina and button accordion at his bar. Difference in tempo in Slovenian style.

18. Hideaway Bar closed on 13th about the time Art opened his bar. Stan Nowicki played there every Friday night. A played there a few times, also played a benefit for Nowicki when he was going blind. Hideaway an earlier hangout for concertina players, but it struck A as mostly a local tavern. A wanted a place with broader appeal, not just a neighborhood bar.

19. No two concertina players play exactly the same. Dan Gruetzmacher traveled down from Wausau to play, people really liked it. Then Tom Kneiss of Wausau came down to play. Polka Masters from Stevens Point due in too. All have different style, people like it. Bands from Chicago and Minnesota, Pulaski and Green Bay have their styles too.

20. A plays by notes and by ear. Learned chiefly by ear because of mother showing him playing one row accordion, learning a little from his uncle on concertina. Can't recall name of Wausau music teacher, an old German guy.

21. A hopes Tuesday nights will really be a boost to young players.

22. A can't refrain from playing. Keeps his strap handy or sets concertina on the bar to play along with the band while tending bar. Music is in him.

[Brief pause as Art gets a concertina to play.]

*23. Concertinas made in individual keys. Lots of concertina players take 5-6 instruments with them to a job. Certain tunes and tempos sound best in certain

keys. Plays "Emil's Polka" on his B-flat concertina.

24. Another concertina, in key of A. Recasts "Echoes in the Hills" as "The All Nationality" number, fragment only.

[end of tape one]

25. Art repeats his "All Nationality" number, a laendler with vocables, yodeling.

26. "Faded Rose Waltz" on the F box.

27. The D box, plays "Red Handkerchief Waltz" (Cerveny Satacek), with attribution to Romy Gosz.

* 28. Art brings out his square Lang concertina, made in Germany, reckons 106 years old. Plays the old "Wedding Dance," with narration recalling the old wedding dances up north.

* 29. Up north people didn't have much money, they were on the farm, would butcher together and all make food for weddings. Would have tent, dance on grass or floor. 9:30-10:00 would have bride dance. Men would pay for dances with bride, would get a shot, musician would play them a dance.

[end of session]