

TAPE INDEX  
DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND

Raymond Liska  
405 Lake Street  
Hillsboro, Wisconsin  
March 9, 1991

Interviewed by James P. Leary  
Nagra 4-L recorder  
Ampex 632 tape

RAYMOND LISKA

1. Announcemnt.
2. Great-Grandpa Martin Rott from Bohemia in 1849, more of family came later. He and brother Wencl organized a Bohemian band. All Rotts at first, then some Staneks joined, finally mostly Staneks. A good band in Hillsboro too. Rotts played around Yuba at weddings and at funerals.
3. Martin's son, Martin (R's grandfather), and his brother used to sing at funerals. Never forget when grandpa passed away. Family lived near cemetery. Escorted to cemetery by band. Very touching.
4. Played for all the wedding dances, including Ray's.
5. R's dad married Josephine Rott, lived in Champion Valley, three miles from Martin Rott's farm. Six kids, R the only boy (one younger brother died). R has always enjoyed music. Born in 1913.
6. R's grandfather Martin Jr. passed away in 1930. [R asks that recorder be shut off so he can remember events for which the band played.]
7. Remembers "two day dance" in Yuba every year. The main band. Dance would start before Lent and they really lived it up, partying all day if no cows to milk. When Lent started at midnight dancing had to stop, would blacken each other's faces with burnt corks. [DHD?, needs slight editing] Enjoyed skating on the floor at intermission, also stayed with cousins at aunt and uncle in Yuba. Maso Pust Dance. Has been going over 100 years, but young folks not so interested in the old time music. Have quit having dance upstairs in the hall, now downstairs at the tavern.
8. Bob Novy put up the original hall. His daughter Marcy married Adolph Levy and "they kept the tradition going." Adolph also passed away. Marcy's daughter and son-in-law run the tavern in Yuba, it's still standing. The older people can't make it up the long steps now to the dance hall. Used to be a row of benches all around the hall. Nowadays the place is called the "D&D Pub." "Yuba isn't much to it anymore."
9. R doesn't know what Maso Pust means. First night of Maso Pust was a masked dance. Couples came from quite a ways. Before midnight they would parade around. Three judges would pick out the best. R and a friend went as an old man and an old lady. A neighbor of R's danced with him in the guise of an old lady--fooled the neighbor. "We really had a good time, but we suffered under those masks, it was so hot." [DHD?]
10. No dances, no band playing during Lent. Now they dance anytime.
11. Years ago no singing when the Rott Band played. Name bands from Iowa and Nebraska (and Minnesota) had more singers with Czech songs. Although band didn't sing, Czech songs would be performed at home. The Turow (sp?) brothers were good singers, sang for funerals.
12. Used to separate milk years ago. Had separator down in the basement. Two sisters would sing songs then. Old Martin also knew words for lots of his songs. Also had 78 rpm records with songs.

13. R reckons "Sla Aninka Do Zeli" sung very much years ago, and he sings me a snatch. [DHD?] "Annie in the Cabbage Patch." R goes on to explain the meaning of the song. A fellow tramples Annie's cabbage, R not sure why, and she shook her finger and told him he would pay for it. People would dance this song and act out the parts.

14. Weddings. Always a procession at the dance. Band started to play when the couple came in and they would march around the hall so everyone could have a look at them. Can't recall people marching from the church to the hall. They might have done this earlier.

15. When couples got married, there used to be big doings at the house. R recalls a sister's wedding. Would put a chain across the gate. When wedding came to home, wouldn't let them through until they paid some money. When couple eating supper, a cook would sneak under the table and take the bride's shoe. Best man and bridesmaid would look for the shoe and had to pay for it.

16. Funeral processions. Band played enroute to cemetery, then during the service, after casket put down into the grave, quit playing. After death of Grandpa Rott in 1930 not too much playing at funerals, although thinks the Staneks did it some.

17. The Rotts and Staneks played into the 1950s. Uncle Martin and his brothers Wencl, Carl and Joe all played in the band, Staneks started joining in. Played into the 1950s.

18. Had sheet music. After band disbanded many inquired about sheet music. Staneks sold the music, probably to someplace in Iowa.

19. One special number always played at a wedding dance. This was a piece that was recorded by Stratman-Thomas, a polka. R hums the opening bar. "There's one special number they always played . . . when we got married yet." (edit out mention of tape and Leary's question) . . . hums tune DHD? briefly. [begin show with this and kick in with Rott band from H S-T]

20. About H S-T session, doesn't know anything, but reckons Marcy Levy knows about it because session done at their hall in Yuba.

21. About Joe Yansky. Lived in R's valley. Yansky's brother Wencl played violin, Joe played concertina and drums simultaneously. Finally Joe played by himself. Wencl never went anywhere. Carved a WWI soldier out of wood, "a masterpiece." Stored it in a closet with a cardboard door and a lock on it. R used to take visitors to view the soldier. Wencl carved an extra head for the figure. Had a base underneath the figure with a waterfall and eagles. Now in the Hillsboro Historical Museum. Had no luck trying to sell the soldier. Donated it to the local VFW. Was in the Viroqua Court House for a while, was too warm and many cracks appeared in the carving. W also quite a painter. Painted the ship he sailed on in WWI.

22. W had an old model T Ford that he enjoyed driving. Was a big threshing crew. One jokester put a fire bomb on his sparkplug. Went off when he cranked the car, really "a dirty trick."

23. R's accordion playing. Folks talked him into taking a six month course at Janesville Business College, sister lived there. Bought an accordion, took out a music correspondence course from the American Music School, but never kept it up. Played mostly Czech numbers. Played some by nights, but preferred to play by ear. Could hear a song, then play it.

24. Main tune he played was "Baruska," also "Louka Zelena," and the "Beer Barrel Polka" (Skoda Lasky), and "those old Bohemian numbers that the band used to play."

25. Rott Band had uniforms at one time, but R doesn't really remember them. When they played they just had old metal music stands to hold the notes and no uniforms.

26. Leary asks about Bohemian jokes. R reckons kids weren't allowed to hear the jokes.

27. Czech music usually "pertained to some love song or something like that." R reckons a Czech band from the old country recently visited and said that all the old songs had some kind of a story. R reckons that "Svestkova Alej" (the Prune Song) came from Czechoslovakia.

28. About the Hillsboro Bohemian Band, led by the Bezucha (sp?) brothers, also the Hansberry boys were in a band.

THE TAPE RUNS OUT, THE SESSION ENDS