

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
February 6, 1985

Herman and Nora Kaczor Home
15 W. Mary St.
Watertown, WI

I learned about the Kaczor's from inquiries made at the Senior Citizens" Center. They were willing to be interviewed and I arrived at their duplex, located in a fairly recent development, at 1PM. Mrs. Kaczor led me into here kitchen where she and her husband were sitting with song sheets spread on the table in anticipation of my arrival. Mrs. Kaczor was a very pleasant woman, obliging from the outset as I set up my recorder; Herman, diminutive and trim at 83, was slightly reticent about being taped and had to be coaxed throughout the session. Since they were ready for action, we began to tape right away while seated around the kitchen table. The first portion was devoted to life histories of the couple. As the tape index shows, H. was born in Prussia and emigrated in the early twenties, arriving in Dodge county with his family. The Kaczors had relatives here. H. had taken up the butchers trade in the old country, but many in his family were farm laborers. He recalls singing in the evenings after a days work and learning new songs while at dances, from the singing of others, and from records. He sang a snatch of "Deutschland Uber Alles," somewhat sheepishly and with the disclaimer that such songs of empire were not of particular importance to him. He also reckoned that when first arriving he entertained his relatives and many of their neighbors by singing German songs for hours; unfortunately he confessed to having forgotten most of those songs over the succeeding sixty years. Whether this repertoire can be coaxed forth remains to be seen.

Mrs. Kaczor grew up in Reeseville where her father kept a tavern. He liked to sing and there were often people gathered in the tavern to sing songs. But the gramophone was also an important source of music in the tavern.

From what I could gather singing as an activity was not vital to the pair's

existence for much of their lives. But they did often sing together privately, with and for each other. (They have been married since 1946, 38 years.) The first song on the index, "Swiss Boy," was one that Herman had known in the old country, but had forgotten about until the pair heard it performed by the Czech bandleader Lawrence Duchow and his Red Raven Orchestra. H. sang it on the way home from the dance and then the pair learned it together. Nora reckoned, "It's been our song ever since."

Songs 2-4 on the Index were on a mimeographed song sheet that Nora had put together after searching in various songbooks, the titles of which she did not recall. #'s 5-6 were in a little booklet, Watertown Funster Club Kitchen Band, along with many titles in English. The Kaczor's reckoned that most of their singing over the past few years had been within the context of this group and that they had performed for fellow seniors and at nursing homes in the area. The activity gave them a real sense of satisfaction, according to Herman, and Nora cited instances where oldtimers, apparently nodding in their wheel chairs, had begun tapping their feet and grinning in recognition of a favorite old song. The Kaczors performed their six songs while standing. They frequently moved about so the sound quality is not consistent, and there were times when they would not start together; moreover Mrs. Kaczor sometimes sat down between songs and then would begin to sing, her voice temporarily off-mike before rising again. H.'s throat got dry after a while and he was tired of singing and a little embarrassed. He repeatedly suggested, quite nicely but regularly, "that's enough" from the first song to the last. Finally, I figured that it was.