

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
May 1, 1985

Elisabeth Jaeger Lind
Coolidge St.
Oconomowoc, WI

Mrs. Lind had seen the press release regarding the project in the newspaper and had written telling of her knowledge of one song that her mother sang to her years ago--an old sentimental ballad about a mother consoling her child who was inquiring about an absent soldier father. She reckoned the other German songs she knew were all standards. Accordingly I wrote to her and then called later to set up a session.

Lewis and I arrived at 11AM at a neat house not far from one of Oconomowoc's several lakes. Mrs. Lind, a short grey haired lady of seventy-two with a frank and friendly manner, met us at the door. She wanted to talk a bit about our purpose. Who was funding us, how did we get started in what we were doing. Lewis caught on quicker than I that she was worried briefly we might be seeking money. With her fears dismissed, we brought in our equipment and Mrs. Lind's husband, Reginald, a genial Swede, fixed us a cup of coffee and brought out a plate of store bought cookies. The coffee was lukewarm, the way he likes it.

The Lind's home was ranch style and perhaps thirty years old. Various artifacts testified to the couple's ethnic backgrounds: a Dala horse, alpine cuckoo clocks, medals from a grandfather in the Prussian army.

As the tape index will reveal, Mrs. Lind was a Jaeger and her father had directed choirs and been a principal for Wisconsin Synod Lutheran schools. That position didn't pay enough, however, and he supplemented his income by selling organs to churches in the summer and by selling insurance on the side too. Despite his religious beliefs, he wasn't an overly severe man. He and his family enjoyed a game of cards, his wife reckoned that dancing was no sin, and Elisabeth was, she told us, fond of an occasional beer.

Since her background was urban or small town, Mrs. Lind did not grow up in the agricultural neighborhood where communal labor and events were frequently centered around peoples' homes, but her family did, like other Germans, participate in large birthday parties. Her singing occurred with her mother in the family car, in school, at gatherings with family friends and in church. Although she knew various tunes by heart, she was accustomed to singing from books and, indeed, she had several songbooks waiting for us:

The ubiquitous LiederPerlen.

Adelheid Wette and Engelbert Humperdink, Deutsches kinderliederbuch (n.p.: n.d.).

H. Martin, Deutsches Volkslieder (n.p.: Academic Music, 1908). This was a songbook with English and German lyrics for German songs; arrangements were for piano and organ.

In addition to these songbooks, Mrs. Lind also had programs and sheet music for a Passions Oratorium, composed by Carl Loewe and given in Watertown in 1925 and again in 1927 by combined Evangelical Lutheran Wisconsin Synod churches of Kenosha, Watertown, and Oconomowoc.

As the tape index will suggest and as listening will reveal, Mrs. Lind was a fine talker who offered both facts and anecdotal detail in an intelligent and engaging fashion. Her vocal range has dropped in pitch over the years, but she did a good job of running through seven numbers--the first from her mother's singing, the next six from Deutsches Kinderliederbuch. After taping was through, the Linds told us about their several trips to Europe. They are an active couple of seniors and will be going on Elderhostel to Northland College this summer. As we left, Mrs. Lind reckoned that she didn't know if she'd been that much help to us, but she'd had a ball remembering about her own musical background.