

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary
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Oscar & Victoria Kreiziger
1302 Randolph St.
Watertown, WI

Several weeks before I had received the name "Zeno" Kreiziger from the Watertown Senior Center, but hadn't been able to find out just who this was. On March 3, however, Phil Martin told me that he had learned about a fiddler and button accordionist, Oscar Kreizger, from Bob and Becky Wernerehl who had done a residency in the Watertown area. I called up Oscar to make an appointment and learned that Zeno was his son and a noted organ player.

It had snowed heavily the night before, but the drive at the Kreiziger's was well shoveled by the time I arrived. [German neatness and agrarian work ethic?] I was momentarily confused, however, as the letter "B" was apparent on the screen door and in the garage a sign announced that this was Frank and Victoria Borchardt's place. After double-checking the address, I realized that the Kreizigers were both married for the second time.

Oscar met me at the door. Born in 1900, he's still quite animated: trim, of medium height, with merry blue eyes. His wife, Victoria, taller and dignified yet, as I would soon learn, with a fine sense of humor, likewise welcomed me in. We settled in their sunny living room where I noted a row of German beer steins prominently placed on a shelf and Oscar's instruments: a two row Hohner button accordion purchased for him in 1911 and his Dad's old fiddle.

I explained the project briefly while setting up the equipment and then began recording both Oscar's and Victoria's biographies together with music related reminiscences. The tape index will reveal the specifics of our conversation, but let me emphasize a few important points.

Victoria's grandfather was a Lutheran minister in the Ohio Synod and her dad studied to be a minister, but was advised not to pursue the vocation because he

took it too seriously: "already he was carrying his bible at night." Oscar, however, was raised a Catholic. The two didn't seem to let religious differences interfere with their relationship, and Victoria revealed that, despite a strict upbringing, she and her parents enjoyed singing and dancing was tolerated. Before meeting and marrying in Watertown late in life, Oscar had farmed (in addition to serving on the county board, the fair board, and the board of a dairy co-op) and had lived in northern and western parts of Dodge County; Victoria had lived in southeastern Dodge county around Ashippon. The two were both in German neighborhoods, but their neighbors and even their German-American customs differed. They talked at some length about differences in shivareeing traditions. Meantime Oscar grew up around plenty of Irish and learned to dance jigs and to play reels and quadrilles from them.

When Oscar finally got around to playing his button accordion, I learned that he's a little rusty and that he's also hampered by a semi-paralyzed little finger. He rear-ended another car three years ago while traveling at low speed in the fog. The vehicle's irate driver leapt out, yanked Oscar's door open and pulled away the car keys, then slammed the door banging Oscar's hand in the process. The finger has been numb and largely immobile ever since. The attacking Yahoo, incidentally, is currently charged with the murder of a Johnson's Creek man. Anyway it took Oscar some time to warm up and, even then, it was tough for him to execute with the precision of his youth. This was particularly true in the case of the fiddle where the little finger served to make chords, but it also hampered his bass work on accordion. As the tape recorder began to roll, he squeezed out a beautiful waltz learned at about age ten, probably from his grandfather. The other tunes were a fairly common combination of standards, fiddle tunes, and German numbers. Oscar was pretty animated while playing, often beaming at me and at his wife. He delivered a

couple of comic numbers (a parody of "My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean" and "My Wild Irish Rose" sung with a German brogue") with considerable pleasure and I'm convinced that he must've been a real cutup at house parties. He and Victoria also sang together on several numbers, including "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." Although she reckoned her voice was gone, Victoria had done plenty of choir singing and parlor harmonizing in her time and, during the interview session, she pulled out one old songbook: Sonntags-Schul-Harpe (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1873).

As I was packing up the machine, I learned that Victoria had another interest besides old songs. She's very adept at "fancy work." The place was full of examples of her crocheting: doilies, afghans, blankets. She pulled out boxes of her work to show me and commented on various kinds of stitches (cross stitch, mile-a-minute, etc.) she employed. In addition she sometimes sets up a quilt frame in the basement and has done some fine quilting. In her past, she also carded and spun wool, learned "draw work" (i.e. making a fancy pattern by pulling out threads and knotting those remaining in various fancy patterns--akin to the Hardanger technique), woven rag rugs, and upholstered furniture. Her mother was a first rate seamstress and Victoria showed me a picture of her mother in a wedding dress she had made. Some of her mother's rag rugs were also on the kitchen floor, but Victoria had gotten rid of the bulky loom years ago.