

## EF140 Folk Arts Survey of Waukegan & Zion, Illinois

### Arvid Anderson

Waukegan, Illinois

Friday, June 12, 1987

#### 1) Swedish Glee Club/Arvid Anderson (visit)

Mr. Anderson is an accordion player from Norway. He has played regularly for dances at the Swedish Glee Club for a number of years. He plays a European-style (made in Italy) chromatic, button accordion with five rows of melody buttons for the right hand and 120 bass buttons for the left hand. He plugs his instrument into a small amplifier. He also plays a high-hat symbol with his left foot. On some numbers, polkas and schottisches, he places a tambourine on the high hat. This set-up produces a very full sound that fills up the ballroom at the Swedish Glee Club.

Mr. Anderson was working as a bartender at the club on this Friday during the day. He had brought along his equipment so he could play a few pieces for me. He asked the three men at the bar to help him carry his equipment in. Then he sat by the piano in the far corner of the ballroom and played for me while the three men sat watching at the bar across the dance floor. They applauded and shouted encouragement during the first few numbers, then two of them left.

Mr. Anderson gave me a sample of his repertoire. He played a Norwegian waltz, a Norwegian schottische [known in German polka circles as Joan & Pa Schnippen], a Swedish hambo (the same thing as a Norwegian mazurka), a Swedish polka, and several modern numbers including a characteristically fast French waltz, "Blue Spanish Eyes," and "The Pennsylvania Polka." His playing was loud, strong, spirited, and punctuated with rhythmic yells and whoops. He also audibly hummed along with the melody, but never sang any of the lyrics. A hard-working performer, his shirt was soon drenched with sweat in spite of the air-conditioning. He quit and came back to the bar, where after a short conversation he heard of my German background. He then returned to his accordion and played several medleys of German pieces, including "Du Leibst Mir Im Herzen," "Ach Du Leiber Augustine" and several others.

The one remaining drinking buddy, a retired man named Hopkins, said they had been watching for my reaction to see if I was truly interested in music. When they saw my foot tapping while Mr. Anderson played, they were convinced that I was who I said I was. Mr. Hopkins affirmed several times that Mr. Anderson was his favorite. He was amazed at how much sound he could get out of his accordion, and he would rather dance to his music than to that of a large orchestra.

We talked about the Swedish Glee Club, which is up for sale. The club's overhead has been too high in this building. They will soon stop operating at the current location. The regular Friday and Saturday night dances ceased several months ago. The bar will soon be closed. But the club owns 14 acres in Gurnee, and they are planning on a new facility. The Swedish Glee Club is primarily a social organization open to all Scandinavians. The club sponsors a chorus, which is still operating.

One of Mr. Hopkins' great regrets about closing down the current location is the loss of the mural that surrounds the barroom. The mural features 10-12 romantic and mythical Swedish scenes, each one accompanied by the lyrics of the song from which the scene was taken. The club commissioned a non-Scandinavian artist at a very reasonable cost. He worked on the mural

for about two months, plus one month of planning and sketching. The club got a real bargain, but the artist did real well, too since someone fed him every night and several other commissions came his way through this project. They were pleased and proud of the result. Mr. Hopkins is afraid the mural will be lost when the building is sold.

Arvid Anderson was born in Norway. He came to the U.S. 27 years ago when he was about 35 years old (he's 62 now). He worked for his uncle who owned a bar in Waukegan. He would tend bar during the day and play the accordion at night. His uncle worked him hard. He never got any rest because the local Scandinavians were always lined up outside waiting for the bar to open, even on Sunday. (But Arvid also told me that Sunday was the day he took off from bar-tending to play soccer.)

As a young man he played both clarinet and accordion. His brother also played the accordion. They played together for dances. Arvid also played in a boy scout band. He played for two of Norway's kings.

Since he came to the States he has played regularly for dancing in various ethnic communities: Swedish, Finnish, German, Italian, Polish, and the like. He knows polkas, waltzes, tangos, etc. appropriate for each audience. In his view all these tunes are pretty much the same thing.