

## TAPE INDEX

## DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND RADIO PROJECT

Norm Dombrowski  
Stevens Point, Wisconsin  
April 26, 1988

Interviewed by Jim Leary  
Ampex 632 tape  
Nagra 4-L recorder

1. Announcement.
2. Born 1937 town of Stockton, Portage County, WI, east of Arnott. Born in the house. Lived in Stevens Point most of his life.
- \* 3. Didn't get into music until high school. Not too interested in polkas, bands had tubas and read sheet music. Didn't seem too lively. Radio stations played polka music in daytime, including Lil Wally. Wally played at the Peplin Ballroom near Mosinee for two nights. Huge crowd. Norm went after worked. Impressed because there was no sheet music, very lively, reminiscent of rock and roll bands.
4. Late 1950s Norm started playing. Happy Notes started in 1960 as 4 piece band: Jerry Halkowski, Run Gruna, Marv Stencil, and Norm. Sometimes Duke Wright as 5th person. Cut "Ashland Avenue Hop" b/w "Stevens Point Special" on Duke Wright's label. Norm took over band as Marv wanted to spend more time with family, Jerry was in school. Dave Wanta hired as concertina players. Did a few 45s, cut an album at Sauk City. Bob Organicak joined the band as did Irv Kovalski. Played Stevens Point, Minneapolis, Chicago. Party album very popular. Organicak moved to Peoria, had tough time finding another player--used several musicians. Norm goes through many other transitions in band personnel until finally his kids began taking over spots in the band until the band evolved into a family band, except for Ken Kamlek.
5. Learned Polish songs by listening to records. Parents spoke Polish, learned a little in grade school at Fancher, wife also fluent in Polish from her childhood in Bevent, Marathon County.
6. Norm not quite sure what a Polish band is. Every one a little different.
- \* 7. Bevent just north of Portage County line in southeast Marathon County. Lots of Polish there, traditions have carried on longer.
8. Norm sings Polish songs and tries to give them a certain beat or accent that go with the words. N likes the way Lil Wally, Gene Wisniewski, Marion Lush, and others accent their lyrics. Blazonczyk a little different. N reckons one difference between Polish and German concertina is that Polish bands amplify bass side of concertina.
- \* 9. N drums according to the way he sings. Quotes an old timer: "If you can't say it, you can't play it."
10. N never saw a polka band "ride the cymbal" until he saw the Naturals and the High Notes drummers riding the cymbal in Chicago in the 1950s.



11. N uses rim shots on some songs, some drummers use it steady. N sometimes uses it on the beat, sometimes off the beat. "It depends on how I feel like playing it."

\* 12. N's band never used sheet music. Plays song different every time, maybe people like that. With sheet music you can get someone to replace a player more easily.

13. N active when he plays, "I'm trying to feel the music."

14. Having a family band has worked pretty well. Ken Kamlec a music teacher, so a good leader. Son Mark also a music teacher. Everybody knows what everybody wants, people not reluctant to voice their opinions.

15. N reckons his records doesn't seem to match with other Polish bands. Doesn't know if its the instruments, the songs, or what. "Probably our band is after Lil Wally . . . but I don't think we could imitate him." Polka Stars, Ray Konkol important to the area because they offer a lot to different people, Blazonczyk good because he gets the younger people going. Important to have a variety of bands.

16. Following for N's band, some older people and some younger. "What made the band are the true followers and my relatives . . . and there're some younger people that we've gained through the years that like polka music."

17. Lots of the songs they have recorded have been learned from older people. Cites one that Jerry Halkoski's uncle sang for them. Connects Bernie Roberts "Pretty Dancing Girl" to an old Polish song.

18. Polish weddings started with morning marriage, then breakfast, then band in afternoon, break for supper, played til midnight; next day had dinner and band played all afternoon. Used to play 12 hours for a wedding, now about 4. Change about 1972. N wonders how they used to last that long. "I think people just can't give 'er that long anymore."

19. Bride dances and donating money. Silver dollar custom before N's time.

20. "Polack From Polonia" stirred some controversy. No would rather not talk about it.

21. Lyrics of song very important. Most Polish songs have important stories behind them. Cites an example, but reckons its difficult to translate.

\* 22. When N sings he doesn't drum much. Thinks vocal should be outstanding when someone is singing. This comes through on 78s because only one microphone used and voice had to stand out amidst other instruments. Feels nowadays instruments overtake the vocal, N likes it the other way around.

23. N listened to a lot of old songs, impressed by the quality of singing and playing on the old records. "You had to be great to play at that time because there were a lot of players available."

[tape runs out, end of session]