

The Wick Family

Imagine a time before records, CDs, TV, iPods, iPads, or even radio. There are no restaurants with piped music. No movies. No movie themes. The music that was heard was all acoustic, live and local. The main entertainment was barn dances and garden parties. By age 11 boys and girls were going to dances along with their parents because there was no other entertainment.

Your music was your identity. It was something you acquired from your country of origin, your community, and your family. It was not so much that you have a playlist on your cell phone or your CD collection – like some people have today. There was a small selection of tunes that you would sing or play that you associated yourself with. That melody could be your own invention, or it could be something that you heard and liked - perhaps you could play or sing it verbatim, but more likely than not you would add your own spin to that tune.

It was these tunes which Elmo Wick would eventually write down years later. Music from a time when people were their own entertainment, and everyone learned by ear.

Gundvald Wick immigrated to Minnesota from Flaa Hallengdal, Norway sometime before 1870, and established a family farm just a mile east of Sunburg, Minnesota. Gundvald's son Edward Wick inherited the farm, who in-turn left the running of the farm to his son Andrew Wick. This was the world that Elmo Wick grew up in, a family farm in central Minnesota.



(1870 - 1959) and Martha Wick (1864 – 1944)

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Edward Wick (1870 - 1959)



Andrew Wick (1897 - 1961) on fiddle and Esther Wick (1906 - 1976) at piano

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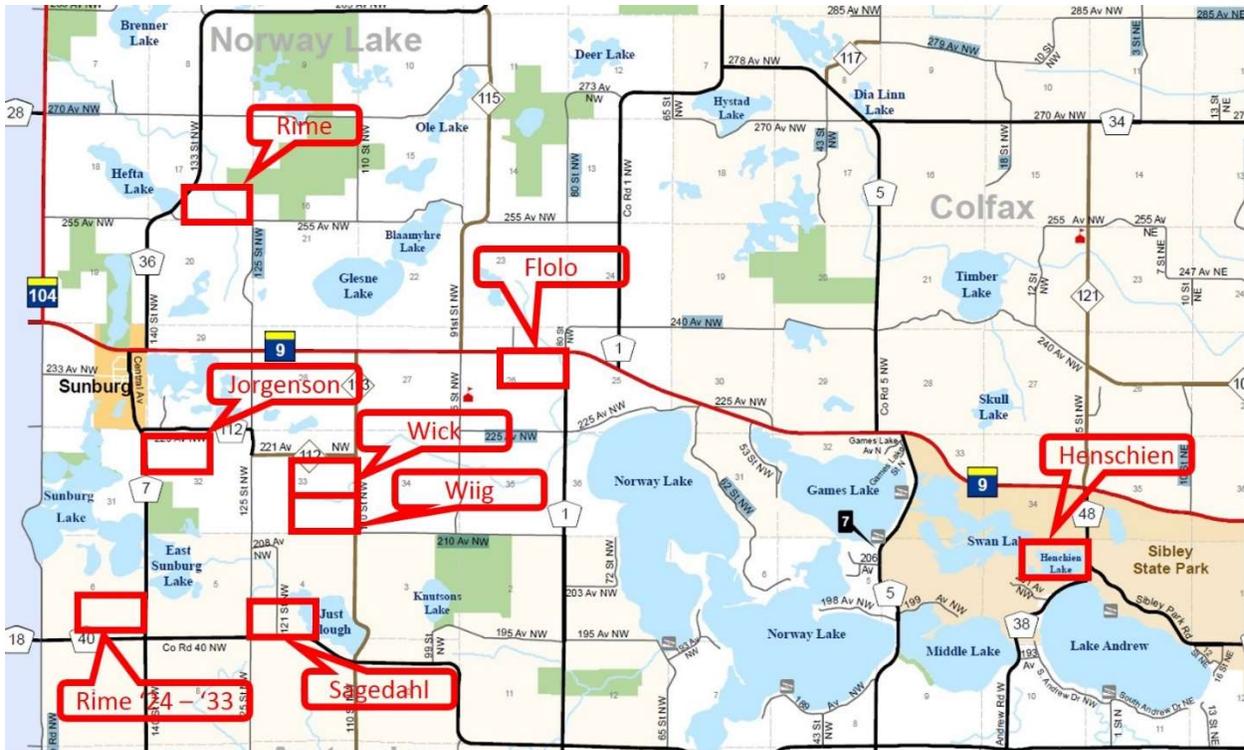
The Wick homestead in 1922

Elmo wrote that he remembered his Grandfather playing Hardanger with the Henschien brothers in 1929. Elmo's Father and Grandfather would often host a talented fiddle-playing neighbor, Oliver Sagedahl. Elmo recounted in a newspaper article that he used to stay awake listening to the trio play until 2 a.m.

Elmo got his first fiddle when he was eleven years old. His father and two uncles drove a Model A five hours to a Minneapolis pawn shop to buy a 3/4 size fiddle for \$1.50. This would have been around 1935.

Elmo learned a lot of tunes from his father and grandfather, but also other relatives. According to some of Elmo's notes he learned Ole's Polka from his uncle, Ole Erickson, his mother's brother, who spent that very hard cold winter of 1936 at the Wick farm. He also credited a tune to his dad's brother, John Wick, who taught young Elmo "Johnny's Jig". However, it wasn't long before young Elmo would be influenced by the local community.

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In 1938, a neighboring farmer died and Elmo had an opportunity to buy the fiddle if the deceased. He gathered up his jar of saved nickels, dimes and pennies and walked through the cold wind to make his purchase. I wonder if this deceased farmer might have been Ole O. Flolo, he died at about this time, and Elmo collected at least one tune (The Flolo Waltz) from this well-known fiddle player who had his own band in the 1890s, the Ole Flolo Trio, which consisted of Ole, his brother Karl Flolo (on viola) and Haaval Wiig (who was the Wicks next door neighbor).

Olaus Jorgenson, a man reputed to play guitar with his feet while he played fiddle at the same time, lived less than two miles west of the Wick homestead, so it is very possible that Elmo spent some time playing with Olaus. Elmo reported in a newspaper article that he studied under, and played with, Oliver Sagedahl who lived less than two miles south of the Wick homestead.

By 1940 sixteen-year-old Elmo was making \$5 per night playing in dance bands. As a farm laborer, he was only making \$3.50 a day. It was also in 1940 when radio came to Willmar, MN. KWLM got its license to operate and one of the first shows to hit the airwaves was the wildly popular Morris Chargo – a Ukrainian musician/band leader in who immigrated to the US in 1924 and had moved to Willmar in 1929. His band also included Oliver Sagedahl.

Between 1942 and 1944 Elmo was a member of the band and the radio show. Radio was the latest thing in the 1940s. Running a radio program was an adventure. Each day's radio programming schedule was listed in the Willmar Tribune.

Elmo married Melba Gunderson in September 1945. The couple moved to Willmar in 1947, and later to Brooten, Minnesota. Elmo got a job with the Kandiyohi County Highway Department as a heavy equipment operator where he worked for 37 years. He and his wife raised nine children.

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Working all day and playing music all night didn't work out once he was married with children, so the fiddle was hung on the wall as a decoration for 29 years, a souvenir of more carefree days.

Sometime in the 1970's Elmo got into a snowmobile accident and broke his leg. He claimed that he had nothing to do but sit around the house, listen to the radio and stare at the fiddle that hung on the wall. Elmo eventually took the fiddle off the wall and began learning to play again.



Elmo Wick (1924 - 2009)

As Elmo began playing again, he wanted to document the old tunes which he believed were being forgotten and lost. Elmo learned how to read music and began notating those tunes from his youth. This is how we accumulated the Wick Collection of music.