

OOMPAH Town

COLLIER'S COLOR CAMERA



Crowds jam street to polka in outdoor dance

NEW ULM, MINNESOTA, is a town with two visible and one audible means of support. New Ulm has a prosperous flour mill; New Ulm has two big breweries; and New Ulm has oompah. What's oompah? When a small brass band plays loud and happy, and a big, shiny brass horn blares out a beat—oom-pa-pa, oom-pa-pa—to make you want to kick up your heels in a polka, that's oompah. It's the music of the old-time, old-country beer halls, of the street-corner bands, of the cornet-and-brass-horn combos which have their roots in Bavaria and Bohemia. And oompah is to New Ulm what hoo-down is to Nashville, Tennessee.

Located 100 miles southwest of St. Paul and Minneapolis, New Ulm plays the music it was born with. The town, which celebrates its centennial this month, was founded in 1854 by a group of German immigrants seeking a new home beyond the old eastern frontier, where they could maintain their own traditions freely. Along with beer and sauerkraut and *Gemütlichkeit* they brought oompah—and today's 10,000 New Ulmers, almost all of German descent, have made it their proudest heritage and their biggest business.

Since the end of World War II eighteen professional dance bands, all made up of New Ulmers born-and-bred, have been building oompah into a national sound through records and frequent polka sorties out into America's heartland. Radio stations as far afield as WMIE in Miami, Florida, and KLOK in San Jose, California, now devote special programs to polka music. Five years ago Harold Loeffelmacher's Six Fat Dutchmen, a top New Ulm band which makes records for RCA Victor, sold about 5,000 copies of every recording; today, sales are closer to 15,000. Big outfits, like Loeffelmacher's Dutchmen

In an age of mambos, sambas, rumbas and bunny-hops, New Ulm, Minnesota, dances



Fezz Fritsche conducts his Goosetown Band in local radio show every Monday



Harold Loeffelmacher leads town's top money-making outfit, Six Fat Dutchmen



John "Boom Boom" Baur (above), 98, played in first town band, can still toot a tune on ancient tuba. Below, Jim Wingert, of Schell's Hobo Band, awaits bus taking his group to play an out-of-town date





In full regalia, 512 New Ulmers—less than half the musicians in town—pose in 21 school and professional groups in local ball park

the polka. The bellow of bass horns is heard in this land—and the beat is oom-pa-pa



Bill Brown, owner of Brown's Music Store, gives piano and concertina lessons in store, also leads an accordion band

and Fezz Fritsche's Goosetown Band, make well over \$100,000 annually, traveling 50,000 to 75,000 miles a year in steadily widening circles.

But these musicians don't play for money alone. After each sally forth they return home, to headquarters, to play for the local folk and for the love of playing. Disc jockey Don Miller, of New Ulm's radio station KNUJ ("The Polka Station of the Nation Broadcasting from the Polka Capital of the World"), says of the town's bandsmen: "They make this music because it's in their blood. I don't think these guys could go to bed at night if they hadn't had a mouthpiece between their lips that day."

For the professional musicians, as for everyone else in New Ulm, oompah is a way of life. "When a child is born," the townspeople say, "he is given his choice between a brass horn and a silver dollar. If he takes the dollar, his parents disown him." Down the main streets of New Ulm, any day of the week, children wrapped in tubas trundle along to their music lessons. Gaudily painted buses, carrying musicians to play out-of-town dates, roll past German Park, where no Sunday afternoon is complete without a Municipal Band concert. Polka rhythms pour out of open doors—from jukeboxes, from band rehearsals, from the impromptu oompah sessions which inevitably develop over a couple of steins in any beer parlor in town. Every night, two enormous dance halls—the New Ulm Ballroom and the neon-lighted mecca called George's—draw as many as 2,000 polka addicts from all over the state. As for official city dances, it takes only the toot of a tuba to set folks dancing in the streets, as they did recently at one of the biggest polka parties in the history of New Ulm.

The affair: a street dance and parade. Fifteen bands marched in the parade, along with the fire department and the town's entire National Guard. For the dance which followed, seven orchestras, set up on trucks, played in a four-block area jammed by 10,000 people from three surrounding states. The occasion? The repaving of Minnesota Street, the town's main thoroughfare. That's reason enough to make oompah in Oompah Town. But what isn't? —EVAN JONES



Contaminated bottle is washed with great care

What Are We Doing about Our Deadly ATOMIC GARBAGE?

Atomic wastes are like nothing ever known: they're radioactive and can stay "hot" for thousands of years, they're indestructible—and they're increasing every day

By ROBERT DE ROOS

FAR out in the desert wasteland of eastern Washington, at the Atomic Energy Commission's gigantic Hanford plutonium works, radioactive elements surge in vast underground tanks—a pent-up sea of useless energy which is a constant worry to the scientists who unwillingly created it. This deadly broth of fission products is the garbage of the atomic age.

And these highly active liquid wastes are only part of the story. Potentially dangerous atomic garbage comes in all forms: liquids, solids, gases and vapors. The ordinary defenses of man are powerless against all of them. Radioactivity is invisible and silent; it cannot be touched or tasted or smelled. And everything a radioactive element comes in contact with becomes contaminated: a wrench used in atomic installations, steel drums, a bit of wastepaper from a laboratory. Carcasses of experimental animals may contain small amounts of radioactivity; even the laundry water used to wash contaminated garments gets polluted.

The story of radioactive wastes is just being understood by the public. For years it was cloaked in the secrecy which surrounds all dealings with the atom. But the dilemma posed by the wastes has been with us ever since the first self-sustaining atomic pile was activated under the bleachers at Stagg Field in Chicago in 1942.

For when the physicists pulled the switch on the atomic age, they also created something else: the world's first radioactive rubbish—the inevitable, lethal products of nuclear fission.

Ten years of production, which has seen the world-shaking atom bomb pale before the even more shattering hydrogen bomb, has left the AEC with an accumulation of millions of gallons of liquid radioactive garbage and tons of contaminated solid objects. And there's more every day.

Every industry has a waste problem. but the waste products created in the inferno of an atomic reactor are something new under the sun:

- They are radioactive—many of them lethally so.
- They cannot be destroyed.
- They cannot be thrown away because radioactive fission products are potential producers of malignant diseases, and their deeply penetrating gamma rays may be able to change the very course of human heredity.
- Nothing known to man can turn off

their radioactivity. Their nuclei will continue to send off tiny bits of matter—dangerous beta particles—or the deeply penetrating gamma rays for as long, in some cases, as thousands of years.

There seems to be no way to avoid producing virulent fission wastes, because they are born in the very process which makes the energies of the atom available. For every bit of plutonium the AEC makes, it produces an almost equal amount of radioactive elements which, along with a lot of chemicals, become what Hanford scientists call "gunk." This is waste—highly radioactive and highly dangerous.

The problem facing the AEC—and a problem which it confidently asserts is being handled with great efficiency and success—is how to keep these new materials out of the environment—out of the air we breathe, out of our drinking water and food supplies. The garbage must be kept tightly under control because unbelievably small—often invisible—amounts can contaminate large areas.

A graphic example of how fast and far contamination can spread occurred a few years ago when someone in a Navy laboratory on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay stepped on a glass vial containing a barely visible amount of radium salt. The accident was discovered late in the afternoon, and by the time decontamination crews got on the job 16 hours later, the radium had already spread throughout the San Francisco area for a radius of 20 miles.

Automobiles used by students and instructors in the lab were heavily contaminated, especially the steering wheels and floor mats. Their homes were jumping with radioactivity. "It was uncanny," recalls Lieutenant Commander Royce K. Skow, who directed much of the decontamination work. "With our instruments, we could trace the movements of the men just as though their tracks were visible. A sofa showed the outline of a student's body where he had lain down. We traced one young father from his living room to his child's crib. Two 'hot' spots showed where he had put his hands on the railing of the crib."

In a typical home, seven miles from the laboratory, a student had contaminated doorknobs, towels and water faucets. His bedspread and pillow, his slippers, his armchair, a writing desk and his pencils, his clothes—all showed radioactivity.

Since the contamination had spread outside the laboratory, where it could have been handled more effectively, drastic measures were called for. Decontamination teams ripped out carpets from a dozen homes. Automobile mats and seat covers were junked. Shoes which were only lightly affected were scrubbed again and again until instruments indicated they were clean.

The laboratory building was permeated with radioactivity and showed concentrations of radon, radioactive gas given off by radium; men entering the building wore special respirators. After a few days, crews went into the structure and burned the surface of concrete areas with scaling torches. Paint was



Liquid wastes at Oak Ridge National Labs, Tenn., are passed through giant evaporators before being sent to disposal pits

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY WILLIAM VANDIVERT