

ETHNIC HERITAGE
SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER
NORTHLAND COLLEGE, ASHLAND, WI

Collector: Jim Leary

December 1, 1980

Informants: Lempi Luoma of North York
Charles Karye of Marengo
North York

After visiting Lucille Milanowski, I went to visit her nephew "Fel" to give him a tape. When I arrived, he announced that he was about to head into the country to look at a concertina that might be for sale, and to dicker for a stove owned by a friend. I decided to tag along and we headed south of Marengo to "Finn Country." As we traveled, Fel talked about how "good looking and hardworking" the Finnish girls were. He'd had a look at a few in his youth when he attended dances at Minersville, east of Marengo.

We stopped at the North York store but finding it closed, knocked on a few doors 'til we found the place of Lempi Luoma. Mrs. Luoma, blonde and in her 50's, let us in. Her late husband, Reynold Luoma, had played the concertina. He was born in Wakefield, Michigan and came to Wisconsin in the 1930's. He played following notes. And, although he didn't play for dances or parties, he would squeeze out Finnish tunes and often played while sitting on the steps of the North York store. Fel asked what Mrs. Luoma wanted for the instrument, but it turned out that she really didn't want to sell. Her children wanted the concertina.

As we talked, a man named Charles Karye came in. We learned later that he and Lempi had once been married, but broke up reputedly because Charles was "too tight with his money." Mr. Karye appeared to be in his late sixties, fair haired and florid fa-ed, with a heavy Finnish lilt. Since the concertina was out, Lempi coaxed a tune out of it (she really wasn't a practiced player). Thereupon, Fel explained the project that I'm working on and it came out that both Charles and Lempi sing hymns "all the time." Charles has made tapes of his singing and Lempi sings constantly amidst housework.

Both are members of Marengo's Apostolic Lutheran Church. The church has full services once a month on the last weekend of the month - when the Finnish preacher comes to the area. Sermons are in Finnish and English, but the singing is in Finnish. Lempi had two song books printed especially for the Marengo congregation:

Uskovaisten Virsia (Ironwood, Michigan: National Publishing Co., 1953
and

Uskovaisten Lauluja (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1970)

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Both books, which appear to be different versions of the same basic compilation, had several hundred lyrics for hymns. Neither book had tunes, however. The tunes had to be known, and Charles was the knowledgeable "hymn leader" for Marengo's church. Twice he said that his parents told him that, by the age of two, he could sing the hymnal front and back.

Obligingly, the pair sang us two hymns. Charles took the lead in a strong, even-tempoed voice, while Lempi harmonized. Although very regular and solemn, the hymns had a wild, thrilling quality and I am really curious to hear what an entire congregation's singing sounds like.

As the afternoon was growing late, we gobbled some cake and drank the inevitable cup of coffee. I made arrangements to tape Charles within the next two weeks and to tape the entire congregation around New Year's.