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Hancock, Michigan

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Matt and I woke up around 7 a.m. He began working on his field notes and I more background reading. We returned to Suomi College about 9 a.m. Gail Pizarro introduced me to Olaf Rankinen. He's the Finnish minister there and is quite active in the community. He'd been highly recommended by Gail. He speaks Finnish fluently and is from the area.

On the whole, the meeting went rather poorly, which greatly disappointed me. With all his involvement in the community (Heritage Line radio program, weekly newspaper column and presentations about town), I expected a much warmer person. But, I tried to keep up the conversation as long as it seemed comfortable. He showed me a few old solgbooks written in Finnish and told me about a Finnish play he helped present in 1976, as a bicentennial event. Noting that he was no poet or musician, Olaf said he helped translate the play. Both he and Dan Maki were in the play, as well as Eino Parkinen, a janitor at Suomi College who plays old Finnish songs on the accordion. He gave me a copy of the program. I explained the project a little further, handing him the newspaper article and said while we were interested in old ethnic music on records or in books, our primary interest was in recording the musicians.

I then asked him if he knew any other people we should contact. (He had mentioned Eino Parkinen). He said our best bet would be to get in touch with Rudy Kempa for background on Finnish music and knowledge of other performers. Rudy used to be a Finnish disc jockey before he retired. Olaf said he had the largest collection of Finnish records in the world. Rudy had also taped some original singers.

I then asked Olaf if there were any members of the old mining company dance bands around. Olaf said we were about 15 years too late for that - maybe 50 years too late. He said World War II really broke up ethnic activities in the community and the bands. He said his father (now dead) used to play button accordion, noting that most Finns play the big accordion today. He couldn't think of anyone left who still plays the more traditional accordion. He then thought that Arthur Hill or Rudy Kempa may be or know of old band members. Mike Saagback is an Estonian Olaf's been trying to find over the last two years. Mike is one of the survivors of one of the important bands. Olaf says he's not in Hancock or any of the nursing homes. Mike may be somewhere in Painsdale or South Range.

I guess before we got to talking about the bands, I asked Olaf if there was any Finnish hymn singing around Hancock. He got up and went to his briefcase to show me three Finnish hymnals - one printed in the 1930's, one an earlier edition without any music, and another a more recent (1950's, I think) with music and words. He said the last one was the most popular. The Apostolic Lutheran Church and the Gloria Dei Church still sing Finnish hymns. Gloria Dei has a 9 a.m. service every Sunday that would be the best to attend. Olaf said he also travelled to congregations in Canada, too, I asked him where and I said Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and Montreal had good Finnish populations.

At the end of our meeting, Olaf began to talk about his father again. He said his father had 2 or 3 old saxophones which he sold. He indicated they played in an odd key because they couldn't be played in modern bands. His father also had a French horn which he gave away. His mother still has the button accordion.

After saying thank you and good bye to Olaf (the meeting only lasted about 20-30 minutes), I went to visit Ellen Ryyanen at Suomi's Archive. Ellen was working on preserving old Finnish newspapers when I came in. She and another woman who was helping were in their 70's. Evidently Ellen worked on the Oral History project with the former Dean of Faculty Art Puotinen. When he abruptly left, she inherited the unfinished project and has been trying to organize it ever since.

The Archive itself is quite well-organized. Oral history tapes are all transcribed, books and boxes of material are subject categorized in the back room. But as both Kalervo and Ellen stated, it takes some time to find things, but eventually they turn up.

I asked Ellen if she knew any old time singers or musicians, but she shook her head. She was quite timid about the subject and said she wasn't a musician and didn't know much about the subject. She said I'd find the most information by reading the transcripts of the Heritage Line tapes. The tapes were made from the radio programs at WMPL. Olaf Rankinen puts these shows together. He has guests on various subjects on the heritage of the Copper Country and then opens up the mike for call-ins. Ellen gave me three transcripts to read, entitled "Music in the Copper Country". They were taped in July and August of 1974.

Once I began reading the transcripts, I was amazed and pleased with the amount of information in them. Several names were mentioned and numerous references to old mining company bands: the C & H Band (16-18 men), the Laurwin, Quinay, Red Jacker and Range Bands and a host of others. I copied down about a dozen names in

hopes of checking out these sources at a later date. Many musicians mentioned were alive in 1974. I spent about an hour there, with Ellen periodically asking me if I was finding what I needed. Matt came by and while I was looking at old Finnish sheet music and records, we decided to leave Suomi then and get on the road. We said good bye to Gail and thanked her very much for her help.

We filled up the Opal with gas and headed towards Calumet. Our readings and discussions with Suomi College people suggested that Calumet had a heavy Finlander and Yugoslavian population. Calumet's only about 10 miles from Hancock, which surprised us. We saw quite a few abandoned mine shafts and buildings and remarked at the number of churches both Catholic and Lutheran. Matt suggested that we stop at the Daily Mining Gazette and ask if they knew of any old-time or ethnic musicians. It was a pretty old office. We talked to a woman (mid to late 50's) who was behind the ad counter. She stopped to think a moment shaking her head. She said we should contact the piano teacher in town and then asked a man in one of the offices the same question. They both began to think hard and Matt had a hard time keeping up with the names. Seemed like one name just lead to another. After a while, I asked her if the article on the project had been run in the Gazette. I said people who had the article in Ashland had gotten in touch with us and it sure was a help finding out about musicians. She said she didn't know, but we should ask at the main office in Hancock. Before we left, we asked her where we could get more copies of the article run off. She pointed us toward the Print Shop on the next street.

When we got to the Print Shop (at the end of a long hall in a renovated building) we were surprised at the reception. The woman at the desk, Barbara Litsenberger, asked what the article was about and we told her about the project. Both she and her husband Tom, who own and run the business we suppose, became real enthusiastic. They started talking about some folks who play the hammered dulcimer at The Phoenix (a night club) in town. They began thinking more about people to contact, pretty much people in revival music. We explained that we were more interested in old-time or ethnic music. Then, she went over to the counter to write down some contacts for me. I went over with Barbara, Matt stayed and talked with Tom. I asked her if any of the churches in town still sang old tunes. She gave me the names of three pastors and their phone numbers. Before leaving, Tom suggested we have some business cards made up so that we could leave them in places where people could get in touch with us.

Matt and I then went by the IGA to pick up a few things for lunch. We decided to spend the rest of the afternoon getting familiar with the country. We drove through several old towns and mining communities - Ahmeek, Mohawk, Phoenix, Eagle River, Eagle Harbor and Copper Harbor. We noted Yugoslav and Finlander names of many mail-

boxes and noticed a few community halls and churches. Most of these communities had very few people left, but something Dan Maki said stuck in our minds - look in the remote places. These may be strongholds of old traditions and ethnic cultures. As we drove all the winding roads, we were awed by the beauty and topography of the land: such rise and fall, covered mountain sides with cedar-spruce forests, 2nd growth forests growing up over tailing piles. Little seemed to have changed since before the mines. When we reached Copper Harbor, we were shocked with the tourist development - motels, "country" stores, north country restaurants. We felt that too much had changed in this community to hold any traditional musicians.

We travelled back towards Calumet now. It was about 4 p.m. and we were trying to make Baraga or L'anse by supper. We stopped in Calumet on the way back, trying to find a bookstore. We hoped to pick up a book on the history of Calumet, but didn't have any luck. We started back towards Houghton-Hancock, when Matt had a hunch we should check out Copper City. It was just off the road from Calumet. We drove up and down the few streets, noting a general store, post office and a tavern. Matt said it reminded him of Maine. We drove past the general store again and Matt decided to stop and ask a few questions. I was tired so I waited in the car. Later on, I decided to check out the post office and ask around there. As I began to walk down the street, Matt came out of the store, his face beaming. Seems the Mandan Hayseeds used to play above the general store. The old timers Matt talked to in the store gave him a number of other names, too. We walked up to the post office and asked the woman behind the window if she knew any people who played old time music. She thought quite a while but said she couldn't help us. We went back to the store. Matt couldn't remember the name of a German fiddler in Copper City, so he went back inside the store. Again, the old timers added a few names. They said that every Saturday evening, a few Croatian musicians get together at the local tavern to play music together. On that happy note, Matt and I drove by the tavern and agreed we'll have to come back some Saturday night.

As we drove back through Calumet, I stopped by the Information Booth and gathered some brochures and pamphlets on the history of the area. I asked the two women attending the booth if they knew of any old time or ethnic musicians. They couldn't think of any, but said we should check out the Calumet Theatre. I remembered that name from the oral history tapes at Suomi College. It was quite the theatre in the heyday of mining. Even Enrico Caruso appeared there! As we drove back through Calumet (again), we took a wrong turn and ended up at the Coppertown U.S.A. Museum.

The museum is advertised as a "historic, mining, educational, ethnic and tourism complex". Matt and I walked in the building, which is the old library built by the Calumet and Hecla Mining Co-

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pany. It's quite an impressive building with an old slate roof. The staircase to the museum was lined with historic photographs of the mining era. When Matt and I reached the top, a janitor met us. He'd worked in the mines (both copper and iron) all his life. We talked about 30-45 minutes on the mines, the dance bands, of which he knew little about, the environmental movement and the energy crisis.

Around 5 or 5:30, Matt and I drove on our way. We stopped in Houghton briefly to drop a book off for a friend at Michigan Tech. Couldn't find him right away, so went on the road again. We got to L'Anse and decided to spend the night there, hoping to make it to Skanee the next morning. After dinner, Matt began working on his field notes. I was tired, so I made an outline to write about the next morning. I began reading about "Ghost Towns in the Upper Peninsula" and finished up "Remembering", a collection of thoughts and conversations from old time residents of the Copper Country.

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