

Collectors: Matt Gallmann (MG) & Jim Leary (JL)

March 24, 1981

Informants: Matti Peltto (MP)  
Eddy Peltto (EP)

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

Jim Leary and I arrived at the Peltto's sometime shortly after 1:00 p.m. We approached the house at first with no equipment except the necessary presents of beer and wine. After we knocked Matti Peltto yelled for us to walk right in. We found Matti sitting in the kitchen reading the local newspaper. Our first conversation began with Jim Leary and I mentioning how nice the house was looking as the Peltos had just painted the interior and exterior. We asked Matti if he would like to record for us. He made us work as he went around in circles never saying yes or no to the question of recording. This has commonly been the case with Matti. It takes a lot of prodding to get him to record, but as the case was today, once he got going he played close to fifty tunes.

When he finally agreed to record we went out to the car and gathered up our recording equipment. While we were setting up the equipment in Matti's kitchen Eddy Peltto came down from his room and gave his greeting. We all began quenching our thirsts with beers as we finished setting up the equipment. When the time came for Matti to play he insisted that Eddy was a better player on the button accordion because he played all of his life. Matti finally got his button accordion and played two tunes. Eddy played two tunes after that but his left hand was playing irregular harmonies that didn't really match the right hand. In other words he played the wrong chords.

Once Matti began playing he played a lot of tunes very well. We turned on the machine now and again at his request. We recorded Matti this time playing a few P.A. numbers. He claimed that Eino Parkinen had his harmonica, so we were unable to record his harmonica playing. Matti wondered why I hadn't stopped by Eino Parkinen's and driven up there with him. I guess the thought never crossed my mind.

At one point in the recording session Jim Leary asked Matti if he could to out and take some pictures of the sauna. Matti said it was fine with him so Jim went out to flash some pictures. I took a trip to the outhouse and stopped by the sauna on the way back. It has a changing room with plaster walls which contain a small amount of graffiti: names of people who visited and some ununderstandable scribbles in English. It had several dittoed sheets with Xeroxed cartoons on them. Matti later told us that Eino Parkinen had brought these over. They were:

1. Polish showers: a picture of a goofy looking man urinating into a fan
2. Italian snowtire: Dago thru snow  
Dago thru mud, etc.  
Dago wop, wop, wop

They still use cedar switches, cedar twigs wrapped together with twine, in their sauna. They also have coffee cans bearing wooden handles attached with nails they use for water dippers. There is a hand pump inside the sauna for water and a wood stove with a bed of rocks on top of it.

I don't think I have ever described the interior of their house very well. The house is always spotless and organized. The kitchen has a hand pump for water and a long shallow sink. They have an old "Kalamazoo" wood stove which they bought in the late sixties but dates back longer than that. The chimney is the type in which the brick stops about three feet from the ceiling and is supported with wood from the floor. Just below where the lower most ties of bricks is an ash drawer. Next to the stove is a wood bin with kindling and papers. On the wall behind the stove is an old fashioned coffee grinder which remains attached to the wall. It is always partially full of beans. There is also a picture of the workers at Boston Mine. This old black and white print pictures three of Matti's uncles but not his father because he was on a different shift. There is a small clipping from a Finnish magazine of a girl named "Jakkala," a musician from Finland that once came to visit the Peltos. On another wall sits a clock. Then there is a cupboard that holds all of their dishes.

There are four rooms on the first floor, two of which adjoin the kitchen. One of these is a T.V., reading, lounge type room, with a T.V., books and comfortable chairs. There is an oil furnace in this room and an old fashioned wooden clock on the wall. The other room is a dining area with a refrigerator, eating table and another cupboard. There is also a big old Victrola in this room.

There is a second story to this house, which I have never seen, where, I assume, the Peltos sleep.

Matti mentioned early during our visit that his cousin may come over because he had mentioned to them that we were coming today, but they never showed up.

The piano accordion that Matti played was a used one that he bought from Eino Parkinen for under fifty dollars. Eino claimed that it didn't work very well anymore. Matti took it apart, cleaned it out and it works pretty well now.

Matti's performance varied from past times in a few different ways:

1. He kept his eyes open and made eye contact with me while he was playing. In the past he almost invariably kept his eyes closed while he played.
2. Matti sang complete verses to a couple of songs this time. In the past he only sang fragments. I must mention that as I well as I can remember, he sang very in tune.
3. Matti played the tunes that he mentioned he had never played before, but because he had the tune in his head his proficiency on the instrument allowed him to play through the tunes.