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ETHNIC HERITAGE
SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER
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Informants: Hugo Maki
Jim Dibbell

Friday, March 6, was "Finnish Heritage Night" at Northland College (see attached program). Malcolm McLean, College President, had lined up Donald Wirtanen, former Jeno's Pizza executive and honorary Finnish Consul, to give a talk in Finnish customs. Wirtanen also brought along a film about modern Finland. Folklorist Greta Swenson arranged for members of the Oulu Community Club to provide Finnish breads, and it fell to me to arrange the music. Accordingly, I enlisted the services of Hugo Maki and his old partner Jim Dibbell. As my notes from an earlier session reveal, Hugo plays Finnish-American tunes on the piano accordion, while guitarist Dibbell backed Hugo for more than twenty years.

A huge crowd of more than a hundred people gathered for the event. Most were older Finns and they came from a wide radius. I talked with people from the Ironwood/Hurley area, Marengo, Maple, Oulu, Herbster, Washburn, and Ashland. Several musicians, former musicians, and singers were present: Eino Okkanen with his wife Helvi, Olavi Wintturi, Richard Kumpula, and Rudy and Edith Hukkala (all of whom I've written about in previous notes). In the crowd, as well, was Anselm Polso. I'd heard of him, but not met him previously. His sister Sylvia, now of El Paso, played with Viola Turpeinen and John Rosendahl in the 1920's and 1930's. Anselm reckons he has pictures and posters of the group in his home in Hurley. I arranged to visit him next month.

Hugo and Jim arrived around 7:30, toting their instruments and a small amplifier into which they would plug both the guitar and the accordion. I led the pair behind the stage and we set everything up. The two were a little nervous. They weren't used to playing in front of people who were seated instead of dancing, and it had been seven years since they'd actively performed together. Nonetheless they were heartened to see that their "kind of people" proliferated in the audience - including many for whom they'd played in the past. Following Wirtanen's talk and the film, Hugo and Jim skipped behind the curtain while I introduced them. Then the curtain was raised and they were "on." They began with the familiar "Kulkurin Valssi" (Vagabond Waltz) and many joined in singing softly. The sound, at first, was a little rough as the accordion wasn't coming through the amp as well as it might. Jim's fingers, lacking their callouses of old, were also getting a bit sore. Even so, the two played thirteen Finnish numbers - including some requests toward the end. The

crowd called out for "Maillman Matti," "Kukka Se Sauna Lemmitha," and "Rattikko" and Hugo did his best to comply. Finally, the playing was over and people adjourned for bread and coffee while I slipped to Northland's nearby tavern and got beers for the musicians.

I returned to find Hugo and Jim surrounded by people who complimented their playing. Among them was Anselm Polso who paid rotund Hugo a supreme compliment: "You may not look like Viola Turpeinen, but you sure as hell play like her."