

Date: July 31, 1979 Time: c. 2:00 till c. 5:00 P.M.  
Informant: Helmer Olavi Wintturi  
Collector: Joel Glickman  
Others present: Dr. James Leary, Project consultant; Phil Stack, friend of Dr. Leary  
Location: Informant's home, Bark Point area, Herbster, Wisconsin

Field Notes

I. Narrative

Jim Leary and I had driven from Ashland to Cornucopia between c. 10:00 and 10:45 A.M., were joined later by Phil Stack at Poncho(s)(tavern and restaurant) in Cornucopia. Among other people we spoke with were two friends of Phil. One of these, Tom, mentioned Olavi Wintturi to us as a harmonica player who knows old songs. Can't remember if Tom mentioned Finnish ethnicity or not but it seems like he did. After our appointment at the Sr. Citizen's lunch at the school which we had set up for a purpose of survey, we returned to Poncho's to have our lunch, then drove to Herbster, stopped at the tavern there and inquired about informant, referred to hereafter as H.O., and another possible bearer of music trad. in area, Dorothy Bjorkland (sp?). Bartender was friendly, encouraging, gave us directions. We decided to drive to H.O.'s place.

We arrived, thus unannounced, and heard sounds of work (metal) from outbuilding designated #1 in layout drawing (part II of these notes). We followed sounds and found H.O. hammering on tongue part of some sort of wagon. During introductions and inquiries at that point, his puzzlement was brief and he seemed to accept us at once and completely. The fact that he and Dr. Leary discovered they knew at least one Finnish trad. musician in common seemed to help alot with rapport. He seemed glad of company and said he'd show us his "hobby". Didn't mind work interruption, since, as he told us, he was retired, age 69. He proceeded to show us his hobby as well as the rest of his grounds and buildings, in numerical order indicated on layout. Jim took a number of photographs with H.O. in them as we toured and talked. About two thirds of the approx. 3 hr. visit was spent on this tour.

Hobby is a sawmill, works of which he had purchased for c. \$50. some years ago from a mill in Iron River when it went out of business, frame of which he built himself from lumber. As a hobby and not for commercial purposes, he procures, ~~saws,~~ and planes wood of a variety of types and from a variety of sources, eg. old pilings, old buildings, relatives' land. He has accumulated a great deal of what to me is beautiful board lumber: white pine, oak, cedar, Douglas fir (he calls Western fir or pine), spruce, some he cant ident. type of.. Has many logs still uncut. Very large stacks from single trees, neatly crisscrossed. He skids even the largest logs to the saw by himself. He showed us the storage-barn building with much lumber within and an old sled and horse sleigh in loft built by father and father's brother. Put up ladder so we could look.

We had asked him about music early on a few times. He was modest but not displeased nor did he respond at any length. I got the impression he would get around to it in time, which he did, and we were all enjoying the tour. Tour followed chronology of items and buildings on layout diagram. He also showed us a Finnish hay rake and demonstrated its use, speaking in detail of hay gathering using a looped birch sapling to bundle the hay. Showed us the loom his mother had used and which he knows how to use. There were finished rag type mat rugs in evidence and an unfinished rug on the loom.

He said he had made some improvements on the loom, i.e., seat position for convenience.

I'll interrupt the attempt at sequential narrative at this point to set down biographical information gained during the visit. H.O. is 69 yrs old and retired. He was born in Massachussetts where his father(?) worked in a textile factory. The family moved back to Finland for five years as his mother was homesick for her own mother and returned to U.S. by the time H.O. was 12. He learned harmonica at that age from an uncle who lived next door to his present home, or nearby on same road to the west. As for H.O.'s occupation(s) he did commercial fishing from his (this) land which had a high bank on Lake Superior. He fished with an outboard motor. He built many boats, one of which, a small row boat (wood), he has stored on the first floor of the log house, never been used, but I digress. In the 1940's the bank caved in and destroyed the fish house and dock and for this reason the business was abandoned. At some point he worked for a saw mill but on the periphery of the sawing operation, though he observed and learned. At 32, he was drafted into the army and stationed for training, I believe, in San Diego. He could walk the length of the barracks on his hands, says he didn't know anyone else who could and that army training didn't do a thing for him physically. He did not bring a musical instrument with him when he went into the army. In more recent years he has lived in retirement with his mother. She died a few(?) years ago, and he has lived alone since her death. H.O. is, and here's a powerful understatement, resourceful, self sufficient, and energetic. He never married, told us he never had the time. He has two sisters, younger, living in the area. One has a worm(bait) business, which he supplies, thus keeping his lawn watered during summer months. I digress again. Photos of himself with sisters as children and himself in army uniform, etc. are on living room walls. His father died in his (father's) late forties. H.O. has made 3 or 4 trips to Finland in recent years. He visits relatives and is going again soon. On most recent trip, toured Moscow with a group. I could not determine whether his leanings are political or religious. No comments on either from H.O. His family is from Seimajoki, where he still visits, and from Kaus-tinen. He showed us these points on illustrated Finnish wall map, gotten in Duluth. End, bio. section.

After the extensive tour, which concluded with trees, garden, flowers which he cultivates, he invited us in; allowed us to tape record his performance and conversation. He also played parts of cassettes of his playing and of the playing of musicians taped in Finland at a festival or festivals (fiddling). He plays harmonica, a private sort of musician, for himself or among friends. Does not sing. Also plays accordion, in evidence in living room but did not wish to play it on this visit. Nervous with tape at first, though very obliging throughout. Demonstrated dancing of two-step, Schottische, Butterfly dance (see tape summary). Fine harmonical player. Gets a rhythmaline implied simultaneous with playing of melody by manip. of tongue in a particular way.

Need to bring release forms next visit, now set for Aug., 9, afternoon.

Supplements: Layout (II)  
Discography (III)

P.S. After taping, showed us fur hat he got in Moscow in hotel and newsclipping of multiple carrot grown in garden. Saw us out. Says he enjoys company. People often stay 3 hrs. or more. Seems a very important informant re. musical, material, and agrarian culture.