

Collector: Jim Leary

January 15, 1981

Informant: Hugo Maki of Washburn
Ashland Nursing Home

When Matt and I met Hugo on the 13th, he reckoned that he'd be playing for the nursing home on the 15th and that it would be alright to record. Accordingly, we (Matt, his wife Sara, and I) arrived at the time Hugo said he would play (2:30). As we entered the door, accordion music wafted over the P.A. system. Hugo was playing already. We learned later that he had begun at 2:30. The concert took place in a large open room filled with fifty or so elderly people, many of them in wheel chairs. Hugo was seated on a chair in front of them and a single microphone was picking up his music and sending it throughout the building. I quickly set up my machine in front of Hugo, then the three of us found places to sit at the back of the room.

Hugo, in Matt's words, was a "hot player." His time was flawless, his runs fluid. He seemed to be totally caught up in his music as he played and give little notice to the audience. Between tunes, he would glance up briefly in acknowledgment of his listeners' clapping, then his fingers strayed along the keyboard and, without introduction, he would launch into another tune. Hugo's repertoire ranged widely. He played country-western or, as he later termed them, "honky-tonk" songs like Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart" and Buck Owens' "Pick Me Up On Your Way Down." He was equally at ease with "old favorites" like "I'm Looking Over (A Four Leaf Clover)" and "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." And, to our delight, he played Finnish numbers with skill and energy: "Kul Waltz," "Kerens Ui," "Finn Polka," and others. Of course, I'll index the half hour tape we made, but I may not get all the titles right.

Hugo finished playing 3:00 after going, remarkably, for an hour and a half. Clad in a blue wool sweater, his red face shone, and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. As we congratulated him on his playing, Hugo reckoned that he'd gotten a bit rusty in retirement. Meantime he accepted a glass of juice from the home's activities director, complaining a bit facetiously that it wasn't "spiked." Hugo, speaking very rapidly, entertained us with accounts of his playing with a four piece band at Fishers' Corner and at various weddings. He generously invited Sara to come along for the January 19th session we'd arranged, adding that there would be "refreshments." Matt added that he would bring his button accordion and guitar and Hugo was quite pleased by this prospect. By now it was approaching 3:30 and, as Hugo wanted to be home to see his wife when she got off work at 4:00, we all left with plans to meet again soon.