

Collector: Jim Leary

December 23, 1980

Informant: Charles Karye (originally Karje)
Marengo, Wisconsin

I arrived at Mr. Karye's trailer (one block east of the North Star Station) at 9:30 on a snowy Tuesday morning. He said "Come in" to my knock and I entered to find him seated at the kitchen table with a friend who'd come to see him on a matter of business. Evidently Karye had forgotten about our appointment. He made apologies and dug out a couple of cassettes that he had made of his singing (in Finnish and English). I could listen to them and copy them as he had a scratchy throat and didn't feel like singing. Undaunted, I reminded Charles that I would like to interview him about his singing, and he said that would be alright. As I unpacked my equipment, the two men concluded their business and Karye told his friend I was from Northland College. The reference brought forth a joke; Charles recalled the Swede who met a college man from Yale: "Yah, I been in yail, too." Charles' friend left with a chuckle, wishing us a Merry Christmas.

While all this was going on I took in my surroundings (what I could see of them at least). The floor plan was a standard American trailer layout with a few adaptations. Karye had closed the hall door leading to the bedroom and, in his living room, there were both a bed and a wood stove. Apparently he kept to this space in the winter time. The decor didn't strike me as anything special, excepting an old wood dresser against one wall. (See diagram.) As for Karye's appearance, he is 77, slightly over six feet, slightly hunched, with piercing blue eyes behind his glasses, and a head that is mostly bald. The day before he'd had skin cancer cut out and the stitches were prominent below his right temple. He wore a flannel shirt, work pants, and boots.

The interview, which lasted only half an hour, went well. As the tape log reveals, Karye had been a farmer, a carpenter, and a long time member, like his parents, of the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church. The bulk of the interview dealt with a description of the Church' beliefs, songs, services, and Mr. Karye's role within it as a hymn singer. Charles struck me as a man of fervent and dedicated religious faith. He was straight forward and enthusiastic in talking about his beliefs - showing neither embarrassment, nor that obnoxious tendency to bludgeon listeners with your piety. I, consequently, asked if I might attend and record

services sometime and was told that that would be fine. Karye, however, declined when I asked if members of his congregation might be willing to sing for Kalevala day at Northland College: "that would be too much of the world."

After the interview was completed, Charles suggested that I call in a few weeks, after the holiday season, to arrange another taping session. He would make a list of Finnish titles, with English translations, which he and Ms. Lempu Luoma would then sing for me. Then, over a cup of coffee, we talked randomly. I mentioned a resemblance between the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran song style and that of the Old Regular, or "Primitive", Baptists. Charles hadn't heard of them, but said he felt an affinity with the Amish. There were plenty of these people in the Medford/Stetsonville area of central Wisconsin when Charles lived in nearby Owen from 1913-1951. In fact his family's farm is now owned by an Amish man. Charles recalled talking with them at feed mills, especially one man who was a good storyteller and whose German accent captivated Charles. One morning this man came into the feed mill bright and early and remarked: "I'm just like my horses. They need their oats in the morning and I need my oatmeal."

Admiring the Amish for their faith and their old time ways, Charles also enjoyed hearing and speaking the Finnish language. By way of illustration, he mentioned being visited by people from Maple while in the hospital. They talked together for a long time "in Finn," and afterwards a man who'd been overhearing also turned out to be Finnish (from between Saxon and Hurley). He was hungry to speak the old language, so they talked some more. Charles went on to remark that he used to subscribe regularly to Finnish and Finnish-American newspapers, but now he reads the old papers of Mrs. Nevala (of Nevala Auto Parts).

At around 10:40 we cut the interview short, made plans to meet in a few weeks, and wished each other Merry Christmas.