

TAPE INDEX

DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND RADIO PROGRAMS

Ray Calkins
Chetek, WI
May 25, 1988

Recorded by Jim Leary
Ampex 632 tape
Nagra 4-L recorder

1. Announcement.
2. Born in Barron County, WI, 1894, seven miles east of Chetek. Grandfather and father worked in the lumber camps. Dad also a cabinet maker and carpenter. Ray did carpenter work with his dad, followed that trade some.
3. Ray started drums in a school band in Chetek, led by Bill Burnham. Also played pump organ, chording for dances; played violin, banjo, mandolin, bass fiddle, button and piano accordion. Started making lumberjack instruments in 1937 when he joined Otto Rindlisbacher in Wisconsin Lumberjack Orchestra.
4. Was in Army in WWI, served in France, was wounded. Returned to Chetek for 5 years, hauled gasoline, played for dances, worked on the highway. Moved to Ladysmith, quit playing for a while, but then played drums for nine years with Ladysmith 40 piece band. Then moved to Phillips where a daughter worked.
5. Went coast-to-coast with the lumberjack orchestra. Played one summer on a boat on the Mississippi.
6. Lived for a few years in North Dakota too. Has been all over USA, to France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, saw Africa from the Rock of Gibraltar.
7. Worked for the Hines Lumber Company in Rice Lake, biggest hardwood mill in the world then, piled lumber. Before that worked in the woods in Park Falls and Phillips. Earlier worked with dad east of Chetek, was a swamper with a crosscut saw. Later worked with a chain saw. Has made cabinets, instruments, tools, different things.
8. Was 11-12 when he first worked in the woods, cookee, then swamper at camps where his dad worked. Dad was a loader and sawyer.
9. When dad went to the woods packed a gunny sack with his clothes, hiked to Phillips, stayed all winter. When R old enough to pull a crosscut saw, started working in the woods.
- *10. North of Ladysmith in cedar camp, R had an old mandolin, there was an old fiddler. Lots of guys couldn't buy instruments, so they made them. No pianos in the camp: accordions, concertinas, violins. R played tenor banjo, used to repair fiddles, learned to repair pianos from a blind tuner in Ladysmith.
11. R played with good fiddlers in the camps, but can't recall their names.
12. In 1934 played with a Norwegian fiddler from Rice Lake, Hank Thompson. Later Thompson was in a rest home, R used to take his banjo there and they would

play music.

13. R used to know Indian fiddlers, but couldn't remember their names. Recalls a good one from Lac Court Oreilles, doesn't know his name.
14. Used to hear many jokes and tall tales in the lumber camps, used to tell lots of Paul Bunyan stories as part of the WI Lumberjack routine. Doesn't remember any of the stories. Claims he used to hear Bunyan stories in the camps. Reckons his memory is going for many things. Tells about a young lawyer in Park Falls who also had trouble remembering things that recently occurred.
15. We get out R's "Viking Cello," made from a pitchfork. Plays "When You And I Were Young Maggie." [The "bow ain't too hot" and the playing is fairly halting.]
16. Ray's instruments are usually in the Rusk County Museum in Ladysmith. Sarah Gertrude Knott of the National Folk Festival wanted R to name his homemade instruments, she suggested the "Viking Cello" since they had no name.
17. R's mother's cousin wrote "The Passing Away of the Lumberjack," Del LaForge, a Frenchman and a lumberjack.
- * 18. R gets his tenor ^{guitar} ~~Banjo~~. "This here was a true song about a lumberjack that got killed on the Chippewa River, his name was Charlie Williams." Can't recall the title. Picks out "The River in the Pines."
19. Del LaForge in the hospital in Ladysmith. Just before he died, R went to see him, he recited "The Passing Away of the Lumberjack" to R. R's garbage can player could recite well, he would say the poem while R played on banjo or guitar. [Various National Folk Festival Recordings of this are around.]
- * 20. R used to play for Rindlisbachers for dances in Rice Lake. Otto mentioned letter from Sarah Gertrude Knott about bringing a lumberjack band to the National Folk Festival. R agreed it would be fun to get up a band: Otto and Iva Rindlisbacher, Ray on washtub bass and banjo and mandolin, Frank Uchtyl from Haugen, a professional singer, and Buck Plante, a Frenchman from Ladysmith, jigger and mandolin player. Went to Chicago, played in orchestra hall 5 days. "Went over like a top." Played in D.C. later, then "played a couple of one horse logging jobs" in Wisconsin. Otto didn't want to do it anymore, asked R to take over the band. They continued to play for National Folk Festival jobs for many years.
21. R played with a fiddler, "Sleepy" Marlin. He digs a card from his wallet to show me a picture. Reckons Marlin was a US champion and is still playing with his five boys.
22. As Wisconsin Lumberjacks wore wool pants, wool shirts, stocking cap or felt hat. Wore them while traveling to advertize the state of Wisconsin.
23. R doesn't know about Louis Blanchard. Has heard stories of Pete Legault, but can't think of any.
24. A woman from Phillips taped R for hours about his life and music. [R's Bunyan tales not on here, however.] Woman interviewed R for Phillips

Centennial.

[session ends]