

Informant: George Nousianen, born 1916.
Ethnic Group: Finnish
Address: Copper Harbor, Michigan
Date: July 20, 1979
Fieldworkers: Matthew Gallmann
Sara Poynter

I acquired George's name during our last trip to the Upper Peninsula. I was in the "Treasure House" and I began talking with Oiva Watia about fiddles and fiddle music. Oiva is a mortician and I later found out that he buried George's parents. George also bought a fiddle for his son-in-law from the "Treasure House". Anyway Oiva told me to contact George and so before we came on this trip I sent him a letter. When I called George to confirm the appointment his wife told me that they would be expecting us. I got the feeling that they were excited about meeting us.

Sara and I left Hancock at about 12:15 and drove north on Route 41. It was a beautiful drive. I gave Sara some background information on kalevela and Finnish music. We talked about the interview and decided that I would lead and Sara would take care of equipment.

When 41 ends in Copper Harbor you take a left and then the Standard gas station on the left hand side is owned and operated by the Nousianen's.

We pulled into the gas station and parked and met George, Jr. He told us that his dad would be along soon as he was done at the post office. We met Mrs. Nousianen. She is a pleasant lady in her late 50's with blonde hair and glasses. She was wearing denim pants and a casual shirt. She had a young appearance about her.

Sara and I sat and talked with George, Jr. and Mrs. Nousianen about the weather. They told us that George and Mrs. Nousianen live in St. Petersburg, Florida during the winter. George, Jr. teaches school in Connecticut

during the winter. They come to Copper Harbor during the summer and open up the gas station for the tourist season.

The room we were in was small. There was a fiddle sitting out on the counter and another sitting in a closed case. There was a music stand in the corner. A picture stood on the wall of George playing his fiddle at the station. It was taken by a National Geographic photographer, who was photographing the Copper country.

George came into the room and we introduced ourselves. He asked us to wait a minute while he opened his mail.

George is a heavy set man with an attractive face. Sara and I were discussing his face later on in the day. George has a warm kind of face and it makes you want to look at him. He has sparkling blue eyes and a little hair on his upper lip. He wore a floppy hat while we talked with him.

When George was done with his mail he said something such as, "well you want to know about Finnish fiddle music?" You better take notes!" Then he took his portable cassette recorder and said that he had already recorded some songs for us. We began to listen to this tape which contained not only songs but also a very artistic, poetic narrative about his culture, his background and the background of the songs. This was interrupted about half way through by a woman that frequents the area and wanted to say hello to the Nousianens.

We listened to the rest of the tape and then George picked up his fiddle. He explained that he can play jazz fiddle, classical violin, old Finnish tunes and recently he started playing bluegrass.

George played "Devil's Dream" and I mentioned that I also knew that tune. George asked me to play the tune for him and so I played it. This seemed to excite him.

We were interrupted again by a man looking for a fuse. George and I both played "Fisher's Hornpipe" for each other. Then George took out Oak

Publication's "Bluegrass Fiddle" books. He said that he's just recently been learning tunes out of this book. Then he asked me if I could play "Orange Blossom Special". I played it once through for him and he said he liked it.

We were interrupted again by some of the Nousianen's friends. George told him that he had a "young fiddler in here that's interested in my music." He was all smiles.

We explained to George that we had our own recording equipment and that we'd like to record him playing. He told us to go get the equipment. They said that they would have to do it there because their daughter-in-law was doing wash at their house.

Sara and I went out to the car and got out our equipment. Just then, George, Jr. told us to leave it in the car because they had another place where we could record them. George told us to follow him to a house that they had the keys for. It was a rental house that their daughter was going to stay in next week. They seemed to be good friends with the owner.

While we were pulling away Sara and I began talking with George, Jr. He told us that George played the concertina.

We arrived at the house we were to record at and began setting up. Part of the house was a beautiful log structure. George told us that it was built by French Canadian/Indian people.

The machine was set up in what turned out to be a bad location, but it wasn't really a problem because George was very comfortable with it. We tried a couple of different microphone set ups. First we had the mikes set up apart and then we taped them together cross-wise. The seating arrangement was as follows: (See Diagram 1).

The interview went well. Sara took notes and George was very helpful with spellings. I felt funny about taking notes as George wanted to look at me and I felt that I should be attentive. Sara was quiet today.

George's wife came in and out twice. The first time she left to go get

George's concertina and harmonicas. The second time she had to attend to some business at the station.

George speaks very highly of his children. He taught school for many years. He mentioned before the interview that most of his kids have Ph.D's and his one daughter was Miss Minnesota one year.

I tried to be clear and to the point about exactly what it was that we wanted from him. I felt that he had a good understanding of the whole thing.

After the interview George told some Uno and Eino jokes. He told me a dirty one when his wife and Sara went outside.

George is very proud of his Finnish heritage as well as his American heritage.

We went over to the Nousianen's house so that George could show us a "real Finn sauna". We had coffee and biscuits and were on our way. The Nousianen's suggested that we come back next week. They were very friendly and helpful.