

ETHNIC HERITAGE
SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER
NORTHLAND COLLEGE, ASHLAND, WI

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Collectors: Jim Leary and Matt Gallman

January 19, 1981

Informants: Hugo and Hazel Maki
"Finn Settlement", Bayfield County

Matt and I, along with Sara Poynter and Janet Gilmore, arrived at the Maki home shortly after seven p.m. The place lies just west of the junction of Friendly Valley and Big Rock roads, and in the heart of the old "Finn Settlement." Hugo's folks were part of that settlement and he and his wife occupy the place where he grew up. As we would learn shortly, only he and the Niemestos remained of the area's original 17 Finnish families. "Inter Lopers" had bought up the other places.

Hugo and his wife Hazel met us at the door and received our twelve packs of Pabst graciously. They led us through their spacious kitchen into the living room where we made ourselves comfortable. Hugo had his accordion already out of the case and he had set up a straight-backed chair to sit on while he played. As everyone found seats, I set up the equipment and explained that I would like to gather life history information before beginning to record music. That suited Hugo fine and we began.

As the tape log will indicate, Hugo has led an active life. Besides working many years for the DNR, he was a regular "jack of all trades." The family had kept dairy cows, beef cattle, a few sheep, and goats at various times. Besides possessing skill in animal husbandry, Hugo was an avid hunter and trapper. He still makes his own coyote bait (pronounced Kiyoot) out of animal guts. He is also a welder who built a snowplow of his own design, and he rebuilt much of the Maki home. Beyond being a handyman, he has long been an avid musician. Like other regional musicians, he played harmonica at an early age, then button accordion, before switching to the more versatile piano accordion. He had even played violin from the late 1930's through the early 1940's. By the mid-thirties he was playing in the local Finn Hall. And he played there, in taverns, and for weddings from the mid-thirties until a few years ago. Much of his playing was at the old Fishers' Corner Tavern now torn down. He amplified his accordion, had a drummer, a bass player, a guitarist, and, sometimes, a singer. Predictably his repertoire is mixed: old pop tunes, multi-ethnic dance numbers, Finnish tunes, and country/western standards.

Hugo began by playing Finnish numbers, then launched into other tunes. Towards the end of the session Matt Gallman backed Hugo on guitar. Shortly after the playing began we broke out the beers and, later, a few shots of brandy. Hugo enjoyed a

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drink or two as much as he enjoyed playing. And, as the evening unfolded, he told many interesting anecdotes about his bands, the crowds, and the goings on at taverns. For awhile Hazel, who is clerk of the town of Bayview, had to sit in the kitchen with town assessor Neil Meyer. They were going over their books. But later she joined us. Of partly German background, she really enjoyed Hugo's playing and encouraged it with many requests - including "Ee-yi-yo Polka" (Hey-Hey-Bob-A-Re-Bop) which Hugo couldn't remember. Apparently the two also enjoy dancing.

By eleven or so we were pretty well played out, talked out, and tired out. Hazel generously adjourned to the kitchen to prepare a "lunch" (cheese, sliced ham, homemade bread, with Sanka) which we all devoured with pleasure. As it was approaching midnight, we departed. But not before making plans to record Hugo and his old guitar player, Jimmy Dibbell, once the Nagra tape recorder arrives from the Library of Congress.