

TAPE INDEX

DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND RADIO PROJECT

Walt & Ailie Johnson,
 Bill Kangas,
 Rodney and LeRoy Lahti
 Oulu, WI (Kangas home)
 May 23, 1988

Recorded by J.P. Leary
 Ampex 632 tape
 Nagra 4-L recorder

1. Announcement.
- * 2. Walt Johnson. Easier to play drums than cut pulp. Driven to play music by hunger. Wife was playing accordion, Walt would sing with her and picked up drums.
3. Tim Huff, music teacher at Waino School had an accordion band, 20 or so. Walt "got sucked in" to play the drums. Won first place at some Douglas County competition, then went to state. W as a master of ceremonies.
4. Born 1914 in Town of Oulu.
- * 5. Singing lessons mostly in the barn while milking, otherwise knows no more about music than a pig does about a windmill.
6. Walt inspired by various old timers, including Matti Jurva, a drunk who he met in Waukegon.
7. In Finland people discard old records, W couldn't get any records by older players from Finland.
- * 8. Arthur Kylander and his wife played together for quite a few years. Wasn't much of a singer, but a good writer, could get to the heart of the matter. Songs for everyday people. Matti Jurva also good, Hannes Saari, good tenor, mostly "went for classical music." W reckons Leo Kauppi "wasn't up on music, he learned it the hard way lie^K I did." Never met Kauppi, but met Saari, Jurva, Kylander.]
9. Lots of Finnish people condemned dancing as a sin. Kids would sneak off to old lumbercamps to dance: harmonica, two row button accordions.
10. Used to have lots of Finn Halls in the area. W used to sing there just by himself at his dad's insistence. When Ailie picked up the accordion went into dance music. Did some fox trots, but mostly old time Finnish and some Norweigan and Swedish.
11. Onni Laine (sp?) used to have a radio program in Duluth. He insisted that Walt and Ailie make a recording. They recorded the 78 at the radio station in Duluth. [Ailie has a tape of this made from a 78 that a cousin has.]
12. Ailie Johnson speaks. Had a "teeny-weeny band" in grade school playing tiny accordions. Brother had an accordion first, but gave up, carried his sister's accordion mile and a half to school every day. Mother insisted that

Ailie continue to practice.

13. There were other women too from the school accordion band who played for dances. But most gave it up and W and A played on, partly for the money. Made one tour of Finnish halls, perhaps sponsored by Onni Laine. Went up to the Copper Country. Late 1930s, early 1940s. Weren't married then.

* 14. A used to go to Viola's dances, thought she was really beautiful. Only 16 when A first saw her. Viola a good player with whom A couldn't compete.

15. [W interjects that Viola could "liven up a dead crowd in a hurry.] People would get out on the dance floor right away. People would dance more in those days. [W says "Every time they killed a cow they had a dance."]

* 16. Rodney Lahti speaks. Viola used to come up from Florida in summers. Like going to heaven to go to her dances. Took Walter and Ailie for granted, Viola's annual visit a big thing. Syrjala drumming still at 85 in Florida. Seeing Viola inspired Rodney.

17. R started drumming at dances by sitting in for the drummer, Lauri Rasimaki (a button accordionist turned drummer). Played in various ethnic styles with German band of Bob Mathiowetz and the Croatian band of Tom Marincel.

18. Too lazy to learn accordion, started kids doing it. Wife would drive them to Duluth for lessons.

19. Walt speaks again. Viola started playing with John Rosendahl, violin player with a gift of gab. They played for quite a while until he fell down a stairs and died, then played with Syrjala from Cloquet.

20. Liquor was Viola's downfall. Rosendahl's violin squeaks on some of the records, but Viola carried the music.

21. People used to get married and had wedding dances as essential part of wedding. Played every Saturday in WI, MN, MI, and sometimes during the week. Isotal and Rannanjarvi notorious for breaking up weddings in Finland.

* 22. Bill Kangas speaks. Lived in Oulu all his life. Born 1952. Sang first Finnish song, learned from uncle Uno, at five years old in church. In 1972 started with Sounds of Yesterday, Gordy and Marty Laakso. Learned second Finnish tune, Muistojen Valssi. Played at the Crow Bar on Sunday afternoons. Local people loved hearing a Finnish song. Started playing and singing more of that music. B has learned to read the language, can't understand most of the stuff, but has learned many songs.

* 23. Has "Sakki Jarven Polka" with two old fellows singing every other line on this very fast polka. With his lung capacity, B has learned to sing it after many hours. Band had a tough time learning it by ear. Song a signal song regarding the Russian invasion of Karelia.

24. B reckons "Polacks do their polka so slow 'cause they can't count any faster . . . they hop like they're popcorn going off."

25. Carol Kangas reckons B first started drumming when a pregnant friend couldn't drum any more. B had played in a rock band prior to that.
26. B says first time he heard old Finnish polka it was great. Went to old abandoned house where his dad had grown up. House full of old records and record player that still played. Hiski Salomaa. Voice is like a cat with its tail stepped on. Imitates sound.
27. Finnish polkas have sisu behind them. Old people in rest homes love them.
28. Oulu Hot Shots have played at many different occasions. Folklife Festivals where they want ethnic music, wedding dances and anniversaries where they want variety, special Finnish events.
29. LeRoy Lahti speaks. Not playing rock and roll because he was brought up on Finnish music. Had to give up a lot because he couldn't go out with his buddies, had to practice and play. Listens to country, doesn't go for heavy metal.

[tape one runs out]

30. LeRoy Lahti (cont.). Picked up Viola's tunes just by listening to her music. Crowds nowadays want a little of everything, from old time Finnish music to rock and roll. L likes to carry on the Finnish tradition.
31. Parents pushed him to play. He's thankful, had to sacrifice a lot when young, but enjoys it.
32. Ailie and Walt used to have posters when they took their tour. Not married, but the best trip they made.

[Hereafter a loose joketelling session, not well miked in most cases.]

33. Walt can't think of any Toivo and Uno jokes right off hand.
34. Bill Kangas: Toivo wanted to buy a car. Of course he wanted to buy a used one because it was a lot cheaper. Toivo didn't know much about cars, but his neighbor there, Eino, is a good mechanic. So he brings Eino along to check out this car. Toivo's driving down the road. He says, "Eino what do you tink about tis car here?" Says, "Well it runs pretty goot. Lean out," he says, "lean out the window there and see if the blinker's working." Eino leans out the window. "It's working. It's not working. It's working. It's not working." That's the only clean joke I know.
35. Leary tells Aho from Oulu.
36. Leary tells Pat and Mike crosscut saw joke, and the Gust Pietala version.
37. W reckons lumberjacks earned their money the hard way, when they drank they drank hard. Remembers loading wood in Minnesota. Some older guys looked like they hardly moved, but they piled up lots of wood while young guys exerted energy but could do little by comparison.

38. Leary tells flour on her face lumbercamp joke.

39. W says camp cooks had to know their business to feed people. One guy ate 24 hard boiled eggs for breakfast.

40. Leary tells Carl Gunderson's cookee in the lumbercamp experience.

41. W: meat hung up in shacks in the winter, W thinks much of eat was horse meat. One little cook an especially good meat cook. Dirty Bill Howell good for making bread and biscuits.

42. Bill: I know a joke about the Finlander, and the Swede, and the Chinaman. They were getting pretty hungry and they decided they'd get a job. They hadn't worked for awhile. And they'd been applying at every place possible. And finally they went to this mine. So the foreman came and talked to them. He said, "No, we haven't got any work for you at all." They begged him for a job. They said, "We have tried for two weeks to find a job. And we're starving. We need some work. Give us anything, we'll do anything." So the foreman said, "Okay. I got a job for you. It isn't going to pay good. You go down to the deepest mine, which isn't a safe place to be at all, and you're going to go down there and work." And the foreman looked at the Finn, a big husky guy. And the Swede is a big husky guy. And the Chinaman is a little tiny squirt. He says, "What am I going to do with him?" So they go down in the mineshaft, all the way down to the bottom. And he gives the Finn a pick, he says, "Here you pick on that wall there. You put the ore in this thing. The Swede is going to wheel the bin back, and he's going to put it in the buckets on the pulley and he's going to pull it to the top. And he looks at this scrawny Chinaman, he says "You just take care of the supplies, okay?" Fine. So at the end of their shift, they worked a sixteen hour shift, and the foreman come back down there. And there's the Finn just picking like crazy, had gone forty feet farther into the mine. And the Swede had it all on top. And he asked these guys, "What happened to the Chinaman?" "We don't know. We haven't seen him all day." The Swede says, "You know, the last I saw he was going down over there, that mine shaft over there." So the foreman he walks back there. And he keeps going and going and going. And all of a sudden in the dark here jumps that Chinaman. "Suplize." [Supplies/surprise.]

43. Leary tells Patience and Perseverance mining joke.

44. Rodney: Toivo in hell, beer keg has hole in it and blond doesn't.

45. Leary tells cut it and pilot.

46. Walt: I heard it in a little different version. They were looking for a job too. And Toivo went out and there was no other jobs, only pilots jobs in the paper. So he went to apply for one. And the guy at the employment office asked him, "Are you a pilot?" "Oh sure," he says, "Eino cuts it and I pile it."

47. Walt: Uno and Eino go out to buy a helicopter. It crashes: Uno got cold, I had to shut the fan off.

48. Rodney has to leave for work.

49. Walt: Hulda and Ole were coming home from a dance. They parked the car on the side of the road, and Hulda got out one side of the car, Ole on the otehr side. Ole hollered for Hulda to "Skol." "Ole," says, "yah. Skall we clink it?"

50. Bill: Toivo gets a new deer rifle with a scope. Eino looks and sees Toivo's wife with milkman. Told to shoot guy in nuts, wife in head. Eino thinks he'll get them in one "s'ot."

51. Walt: Hulda and Lena come from old country. Lena gets fancy clothes for sex. Hulda tries. Man tells her to shit in the lake. "When I come back he was gone."

52. Bill: Toivo and Helvi were having marital problems, so they decided to go and talk to a marriage counselor. And the marriage counselor was asking them a lot of personal questions, and they were getting kind of embarassed. But they were answering because they wanted to work this out. They had twelve kids at home, and they were just having real problems. And it was getting so personal that he was asking questions like how many times did they have sex in the last month. And he came to a question that troubled them. He says, "Do you have mutual orgasm?" And she looks at Toivo, she says, "I don't think so. I think we got that Northern Finnish Mutual."

53. Bill: Eino and Toivo go to store to get wives perfume for Christmas. Toivo gets some on his wrist. "Come to me." "Eino, does that smell like cum to you?"

54. When Bill growing up all of dad's dozen brothers and sisters all spoke in Finnish. Bobby Aro also came out with his Finnglish records which everybody enjoyed.

55. Jokes told in Finnish very common when Walt was growing up. Also remembers, "When they were on the boats, they'd talk about women. When they were on shore, they'd talk about boats."

56. Bill and Walt reckon jokes in Finnish lose a lot in the translation into English.

57. Walt: That's just like this one joke in Finnish, this story about a girl. Her mother always called her . Well anyway this mother and this girl were making cheese and boloneys, you know, . They were making them. And the girl was asking the mother, "When are we going to eat this? When are we going to eat this?" Mother says, "You idiot, you can't eat it until the time comes." So then the old folks left for town one day. And they left her to guard the house, you know. And this traveler came there and asked if there was something to eat. She says, "Oh we've got lots of boloney and cheese, but we can't eat it until the time comes." This guys' name was . And that's time in Finn. So anyway this fellow come up there and asked for something. "Yeah we got lots of cheese and sausage, you know, but we can't eat it until time comes." He says, "My name is that ." "Then we'll eat cheese and boloney." They eat cheese and boloney until hell wouldn't have it. And he went out to leave water outside, and she went with him and said, "What the hell kind of bags you got over there?" You know, in Finn,

What the hell would that be? [Walt and Ailie can't figure out how to translate the term.] Anyway, she says "Won't you give me a little ?" Cause his mother always used to say that she's , you know, a little off. "Oh sure," he says, "you can have some of that." So anyway, he gave he a little , you know. And the father and mother come home and the girl run to them. "Mother! Time came and we had cheese and crackers." She says, " ." "Don't say that, mother. I got more in my ass than you got in your head."

58. W reckons some guys could really tell Finnish jokes good, but he doesn't get around much to hear them anymore.

[The session ends.]