

Collectors: Jim Leary and Matt Gallman

January 22, 1981

Informants: Einard Maki and Eino Sarkinen
Oulu, Wisconsin

Both Olavi Wintturi and Hugo Maki (no relation) had suggested that we record Einard. A harmonica player, he had performed Finnish tunes for the Oulu community's annual midsummer festivities. Accordingly I called him and set up a meeting. The place wasn't too tough to find. Einard lives one mile north and a quarter mile east of Harry Puda's store. Matt and I drove into the yard and parked near a leaning log hay barn which we later learned had been built by Einard's father about 1910.

Our host met us at the door. Seventy-three years old and trim, Einard is of average height with crew cut white hair, bright blue eyes, and an almost boyish pink complexion. He had on Sorel boots, work pants, and a flannel shirt. We entered his kitchen and immediately noticed several hand painted Finnish signs on the wall. They were made locally and I photographed them at the end of the session.

Once inside I reiterated our purpose in coming to Einard. He seemed willing to help us out, but a little bashful. He told us that he didn't play too many tunes and that, excepting the midsummer event, he'd hardly played at all in forty years. As experienced fieldworkers accustomed to informants denigrating their own talents, we nonetheless suggested that Einard give us a little background on himself and play a few tunes while the recorder spun. He agreed and we began.

As the tape log indicates, Einard farmed a bit, but he also worked for Bayfield County for many years. As the tape also indicates, Einard didn't go into too much detail with his responses. In interview situations I generally try and adhere to a approach. In other words, I ask brief, fairly specific questions, then try to shut up while the interviewee talks. Often I don't fill in silences so as to let the speaker continue. This strategy didn't work too well with Einard. When he was through - and that didn't take long - he was through! Consequently, there were some rather awkward breaks in the session. Matters were made more complex by a kind of nervous tic from Einard. His eyebrows would raise up and he'd lean forward with his eyeballs bulging every now and then. At first I figured he was thinking about something to tell and was signalling me to be patient and listen. My theory was wrong; he simply made these expressions involuntarily and they signalled nothing.

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When it came time to play, Einard gave us six tunes or so; excepting "Red Wing,": they were all Finnish. He then confessed to knowing no more; neither, he said, did he used to sing (although later on in the session he did a fine job with several verses of "Maillman Matti" and, after the tape was put away, "Kulkuriu Valssi").

Just when all appeared lost, Einard's neighbor, Eino Sarkinen, arrived. He was a short, quiet man in his early seventies with almost yellow, weather-beaten skin. He had grown up with Einard and had heard him play many times. Through his reminiscences and stimulations of Einard, we learned considerably more about old time Finnish dance music in the Oulu community. Matt Gallman's faithful button accordion also aided the session. He played the Finnish tunes in his repertoire and, often, they sparked memories.

At around 4:30 Einard's wife, Zelda (??this sort of first name seems improbable for a Finn) arrived. She was carrying groceries and dressed in jeans, boots, and a nylon parka - looking very youthful and peppy, although she was certainly in her sixties. In contrast to her bashful, almost monosyllabic husband, Mrs. Maki was very talkative. Although the tape recorder was unfortunately packed away, she talked briefly about Finnish music and insisted that we soon visit their neighbors, the Lahtis ("Oulu Hot Shots"). As it was nearly five, we packed up and departed.

It was one of those curious, diffuse sessions, we both decided as we drove away. Einard pretty clearly could play and sing much more than he'd shown us. But to coaxe out more material would take a lot more time and patience. Unfortunately, since the project is a survey and there are so many people still to visit, we must push on.