

The Library of Congress: Alan Lomax and the Soundscapes of the Upper Midwest: 75th anniversary of the 1938 Library of Congress Folk-Song Expedition to Michigan

Episode 3 Title: "Songs and Tales of the Michigan Lumberjacks" [6:10]

From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

"Finnish Waltz," performed by Apo Juhani on accordion. Recorded in Calumet, MI, Sept. 27, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2282a3), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

In 1938 the Library of Congress dispatched the pioneering folklorist and song collector Alan Lomax to conduct a folklife survey of the Great Lakes region. He traveled in a 1935 Plymouth sedan, toting a Presto instantaneous disc recorder and a movie camera. And when he returned nearly three months later, having driven thousands of miles on barely paved roads, it was with a cache of 250 discs and 8 reels of film, documents of the incredible range of ethnic diversity, expressive traditions, and occupational folklife in Michigan.

In August 1938, Lomax drove north through the heart of Michigan to the Saginaw River Valley in search of the songs of the Michigan lumberjacks. On August 22nd he recorded three outstanding performers in Mt. Pleasant and nearby St. Louis. Alan bought drinks as the old shantymen swapped stories and songs, and told jokes to the hum of the new Presto recorder.

On this recording, Carl Lathrop of St. Louis sings a gruesome lumbering song called "Wild Mustard River." The song memorializes the young Johnny Stiles, who catches his foot in a log jam and is pulled under the logs by the rushing river; his mangled body is later recovered downstream.

"Wild Mustard River," performed by Carl Lathrop, St. Louis, MI, Aug. 22, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 02266a1), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

In Mt. Pleasant the lumbermen Bill McBride and Perry Allen each told Lomax a variant of the Paul Bunyan tale "The Round River Drive." In the story, Paul Bunyan and his men drag a load of logs along a lake, thinking its a river. The crew circle the lake for weeks, returning again and again to their winter camp before eventually realizing their mistake. This recording is Allen's version of the tale.

"Round River Drive," told by Perry Allen, St. Louis, MI, Aug. 22, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 02264b2), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

“Finnish Waltz,” performed by Apo Juhani on accordion. Recorded in Calumet, MI, Sept. 27, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2282a3), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

This podcast series marks the 75th anniversary of Alan Lomax's historic documentation of music and folklore in Michigan, and its enduring impact today. If you would like to more about this remarkable trip, and stay abreast of commemorative programming and performances including a traveling exhibition, and the dissemination of Lomax's recordings to their home communities, visit the American Folklife Center's website at www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax. And look for the e-book, “Michigan-I-O,” published by Dust-to-Digital Records in association with the Library of Congress and available through the iBookstore beginning November 1st, 2013.

Alan Lomax's vast documentary collection, including the materials from his 1938 Michigan field trip is housed at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The Center thanks its project collaborators, which include the Michigan Council for the Humanities, the Michigan State University Museum; the Great Lakes Traditions Endowment; the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Culture at the University of Wisconsin, the Association for Cultural Equity, and the Finlandia Foundation.

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