

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

**Episode 4 Title: "Michigan-I-O"**

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 early September 1938 Lomax spent a day recording in Traverse City. Acting on a tip that Lautner's Place on Union Street was a hangout for sailors and lumberjacks, he recorded seven discs of lumbermen songs and Irish songs in the tavern.

Lomax's recording of "Michigan-I-O" is interesting for a number of reasons. It's a regional song closely related to "Canaday-I-O" and it stops just short of the dire ending in western epic in the same song family, "The Buffalo Skinners." In that song, the cowboys who are tricked and robbed of their wages leave the company man's "bones to bleach on the range of the buffalo."

Similarly, "Michigan-I-O" chronicles the miserable disparity between the luxuries that the company agents promise prospective workers and the dreadful living conditions in the camps. In the song, the workers retaliate against the bosses and wreak their pent-up frustrations at being robbed, cheated, and oppressed, a theme common enough in folk songs. It must have appealed not only to Lomax's interest in song families, but also to his progressive political sensibilities.

In this recording of "Michigan I-O", the 82-year old Lester Wells, described in Alan's field notes as "another tough and intelligent oldster," sings a rousing version of the song he learned in the lumber camps during the 1880s.

"Michigan-I-O", performed by Lester Wells, Traverse City, MI, Sept. 3, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2303b), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress [4:16]

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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](http://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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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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