

**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 Title: Podcast 06. 2013-11-15: “Lost on Lake Michigan”**

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.

Alan Lomax and Ivan Walton arrived in St. James, Beaver Island, in late-August, 1938, and immersed themselves in the rich music culture. The duo recorded 76 discs—nearly 6 hours of music—documenting the Irish-American community on the Island. Alan wrote:

Irishmen, fishermen, sailormen, lumberjacks + their ballads. ... This country + the people are very photogenic. I’m feeling a lot better and am able to work more hours + move effectively. The only trouble with these Irish is that they take more treating than any group I’ve struck. It may be that I’ll need another \$50 advance.

This is Dominic Gallagher singing the local ballad “Lost on Lake Michigan” that memorialized the wreck of the sailboat *Lookout*.

“The Gallagher boys,” performed by Dominic Gallagher, St. James, Beaver Island, MI, Aug. 24, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2268b1), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Following Dominic’s performance Lomax asked about the ballad’s history:

*AL: Did this wreck happen on Lake Michigan?*

*DG: Yeah. A small boat. Three men went out of this harbor to go to Traverse City for supplies, and they got there alright. And they left in a gale of wind. They only had a 24 foot boat and she foundered and they were all lost.*

Lomax then turned to another Gallagher in the room to get the story from a different perspective:

*Andy Gallagher: Well, with those Gallagher boys there was a man named Dominic Gallagher [the father of the Dominic that Lomax had just spoken with] and Dan Green. And they went to Traverse City with those Gallagher boys. And my uncle Roddy stopped them from going back with them. They came with him in his vessel.*

*AL: I know, but just how did he stop them?*

*AG: Well he wouldn't let them go because he know it wasn't fit for them to go out in that open boat. That small boat, do you understand? It was bad weather...*

*AL: And how was the sea running?*

*AG: Oh, my it was blowing the tops right off the seas.*

Dominic Gallagher was the son of the Dominic Gallagher in the story. He tells that news quickly spread of the shipwreck. The community held a wake, but the following day, to everyone's joy, his father sailed into the bay.

*"The Gallagher Boys,"* told by Dominic Gallagher, St. James, Beaver Island, MI, Aug. 27, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2274a2), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

*DG: And I remember he had some toys for me, the first toys I ever had in my life. A little cast iron shovel and a little pail. And I left them in the house and run out to dig dirt with the little shovel. Instead of a wake that night they had a kind of a wedding.*

*"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](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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