

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 2 Title: "In the Shadow of the Chrysler Plant"

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.

"Announcement," spoken by Alan Lomax. Recorded in Detroit, MI, Aug. 5, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2238a1), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

"This record is being made in Clairepoint, Michigan, on the outskirts of Detroit, August the 5th, 1938. The section here is almost solidly Serbian. In the shadow of the Chrysler plant you find the Serbians still playing their native shepherd's flutes and the *gusle*, singing the heroic ballads of the old days in Serbia."

In this way Alan Lomax introduced the first recording that he made in Michigan. Alan's contacts with the Federal Writers' Project had provided introductions to Detroit's ethnic neighborhoods, and over the next several days he documented immigrants from Serbia, Rumania, Poland, and Hungary.

Here is the Serbian immigrant Stepan Rajevic on *gusle*, a traditional bowed instrument. His song is about the Battle of Kosovo fought in 1389.

"Sing, oh Mountain Spirits, the Serbian *gusle* calls you,
Don't flee down the road, don't sparkle on peasant hearths,
But fly to the battlefield, fly with the eagles, fly to Kosovo."

"Smrt cekaj pase," sung by Stepan Rajcevic with *gusle*. Recorded in River Rouge, Detroit, MI, Aug. 6, 1938. *Alan Lomax Collection of Michigan and Wisconsin Recordings* (AFC 1939/007, AFS 2245a), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Then trouble found Alan Lomax. On August 10, the Library of Congress received a Western Union telegram that read:

EQUIPMENT STOLEN HAVE REPORTED TO POLICE & FBI CAN YOU AUTHORIZE ME TO RENT A MACHINE FOR TONIGHT'S WORK DISTRACTEDLY. ALAN LOMAX.

In the wee hours of the 9th Alan's car had been burgled and his disc recorder was stolen. The entire field was in jeopardy. It took two weeks—during which he explored the city and its vibrant culture—for the Library to purchase and ship a new Presto disc recorder. A grateful and relieved Alan wrote to Harold Spivacke, head of the Library's Music Division:

"The machine received this morning in good condition. Am off for what I hope will be a fruitful trip. Next address, until changed, General Delivery, Charlevoix, Mich., Many many thanks."

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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 know 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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