



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

05

Accession No.: EW-00-4FN Date(s): 5/10/00

Fieldworker(s): Eleanor Wachs

Interviewee(s): Ann Horkan

Event: Interview in her home

Place of Recording: [REDACTED]

Recording Equipment: Sony Microphone(s): Sony condenser mic

Recorded in: stereo Tape Brand and Format: Cassette, 90 minutes

Amount Tape Used: Cassette: Sides A;B DAT: ABS time:

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Brief summary of tape contents: Irish (Aryan Islands) Knitting

Counter/ABS | Contents

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Side 1

- 00 Header; Introduction
- 04 Her background. Grew up on the Aryan Islands. Remembers when her grandmother taught her how to knit. Her grandmother always knitted. Wanted her to teach her. Took two chicken feathers and taught her how to knit. Didn't know why her grandmother used chicken feathers, was four years old. Made a long belt. When her sister was born, she made a sweater for her when she was ten years old.... Made her a polka dot sweater. Remembers it vividly.
- 26 Grew up in Innishman. Everyone knitted. "All my friends knitted." House was close to the port.
27 Used to knit all summer long with her girlfriends teaching each other stitches. Knit only for her family... Used to dye the wool by using wildflowers... everyone had their own sheep. Her mother and grandmother would spin the yard. Her father would shear the sheep. Wished that she had learned how to spin the wheel.
- 49 Dyed wildflowers and seeds. Explains the process of dying. Boiled the water, dipped the wool and left it in the hot water. Dyed wool as a child.
- 60 Stitches identified each family. Her friend's family used the Tree of Life. Her family used a particular cable stitch, which they called the "figure eight." "Everyone had different stitches. Most of the stitches that were identified with her family are in her knitting. She sticks to her family stitches. Relates a story of when her sister knitted a sweater and put it in the bag for Morgan Memorial. When Ann went to an athletic program for one of her kids, she saw a woman sitting in front of her who was knitting a wearing a sweater. Ann asked if she knit it but the woman replied that she got it as the Morgie's for five dollars. Ann identified the sweater as her sister's by the stitches. "I could tell that was my sister's knitting.... I don't know if it is true or not but they always said that they could identify the fisherman's bodies" by the sweaters they wore.
- 85 The big island would have its own stitches. The big island was Innishmore. One of her friends had a cousin on the big island and they could hardly wait for the summer time when she would come to the island and teach them the new stitches. Ann lived on the "middle" island. Innishere was the small isalnd.
- 94 Always loved knitting. Today it's her relaxation. Knits all the time, especially on long drives to Florida with her husband.
- 104 Uses the same size needle and same type of yarn and knits all kind of sizes for the sweaters. Now has seven grandchildren and knits for all of them. Started doing a variation on her sweaters.
- 114 Has no idea how many sweaters she has made. No two sweaters are alike but they all use her family stitches. Uses cables, diamond, figure eight stitch that is a form of cable. Her sister designs stitches too and she points out a cable within inside a diamond stitch. Her sister still lives in Ireland. When she visits, they share stitches. "We still trade stitches."
- 140 No longer gets her wool from Ireland directly. She buys her wool from Irish Imports store on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge. Explains a knitting project she did for her church, which was used as a fundraiser. Likes the feel of Irish yard. Uses acrylic yarn for grandchildren's sweaters.

- 160 Discusses where she buys yarn on the Cape. Likes Irish Imports the best. Tells a story about the hassle of going to Cambridge.
- 175 Mentions that she had a terrible time when she couldn't use her hand to knit when she had a stroke a couple of years ago. Worked hard in therapy. Friends asked during the recovery, "Are you knitting yet?" After a month of therapy, she picked up her needles again and slowly started getting back to knitting.
- 195 Designing sweaters. Figures the design out on one line and she knits the sweaters from that one line. Still designs that way. Mentions that she went to a meeting and was sketching out a sweater. "What are you doing Ann? They asked. She's designing a sweater." Explains her choice of stitches.
- 222 Starts out with 70 stitches for a child's sweater. After seven grandchildren, you know more or less what to do. Explains a sweater that she did for her grandchildren (squares with applique). Makes the sweater first then she does the design because it is easier. (Shows her embroidery skills.) Explains which were her most recent knitted sweaters.
- 261 Passing on the tradition in her family; one daughter knits but now doesn't have the time. Her other daughter is not interested. One granddaughter, age 8, seems interested in knitting. Would start her off with a little belt; "The same way I learned."
- 285 Asked about the embroidered step dancing costumes she made for her championship step dancer daughter, Julie, who studied with Rita O'Shea. Made the costumes because they were so expensive. Now the costumes are machine made and come from Ireland. Loved making the costumes for Julie. Have to transfer the pattern on. Patterns came from the Book of Kells. First costume was simple with a few shamrocks. One they did for Julie was more complicated with a small houses and shamrocks. Passed it on to another step dancer. Grandchildren are now learning step dancing. Mentions Maureen Healy, another step dancing instructor on the South Shore. Mention seeing River Dance several times.
- 325 Mentions her daughter Julie who used to step dance accompanied by Seamus Connolly who now heads the Irish Studies program at Boston College. Mentions a recent step dancing program at the Tara Hotel in Hyannis.
- 340 Large Irish population on Cape Cod. Enjoyed the time when her kids were in step dancing. Recalls how much she loved the competitions. Learned about their culture and made a lot of friends. Gave her daughter a lot of independence; one child was stage-struck. "I always came with the blackberry brandy" right before she went into competition to calm her nerves. Mentions how much Rita O'Shea has done for Irish dancing.
- 380 Says she wanted to carry the Irish traditions are but doesn't know if her children will do the same. Her family is diverse. One child married a Japanese woman and lives in Japan; another married a Chinese person. Now have different cultures in their family.
- 394 Talks about how competitive Irish step dancing has become today.
- 401 What makes for a good Irish sweater: yarn. If you want to make a sweater for a grownup, you need one hundred percent good wool yarn. Patterns, "you can make up what you like." Discusses her green sweater (slide) that has some family stitches, including the popcorn stitch, which she also calls the Holy Trinity stitch, and the seed stitch, the diamond—used all the traditional family stitches.

- 470 Creativity in knitting. Thinks of something every day that she wants to create. "My mind is going faster than my hands are." Thinks she is more creative as she is getting older... Children hand down the sweaters to one another. Now she tells them to save them for the next generation because she won't be around.
- 488 Explains her red sweater. Worked out her design by herself. Lies down her pattern on a piece of paper and then knits it...Made a sweater for her daughter-in-law's father when visiting him in Japan.
- 520 Doesn't keep her patterns. "I don't really have a pattern but scraps of paper." Finished off a sweater.
- 548 Has kept her a sweater that her mother made for Ann's brother -in-law. Mentions that when she thinks of her grandmother she always thinks of her with needles in her hands...Never used pattern books. "There was no such thing as a pattern book." Recalls her friends and her experimenting with different dyes from flowers, and groundcover, which was bright yellow.
- 613 Mentions growing up on the island when everyone had a cow or a sheep.

Side 2

- 05 Not interested in all in using a knitting machine since it wouldn't be the same. Her sister Maureen didn't knit for years because her husband objected to it. When he died and Ann and her sister were traveling to Ireland, she knit all the way. Sister returned to knitting after his death. "I was knitting all over Ireland!" during her three week trip to Ireland. Finished her knitting project, for a raffle, which raised \$2500.

END OF TAPE