



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL

FOLK &amp; TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

## FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (K) Kathleen, (C) Condon

Accession Numbers:

KC-01-3-FN

Fieldnotes

KC-01-3-C

Audio recordings

KC-01-3-CS

Photographic documentation

KC-01-3-M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 4/1/2002 Contact Date: 6/21/2001

Related Accession Numbers: - - - - -

Individual/Group/Event: Interview about Armenian lacemaking w/ Almas Boghosian and two daughters.Address: c/o Margo Montecalvo, [REDACTED] (daughter wants MCC to contact Almas through her)City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED] County: [REDACTED]Phone: Daytime: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: [REDACTED]

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: Contact Alma through Margo (number above) but Almas' phone is [REDACTED]

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview: Home of Almas BoghosianStreet Address: [REDACTED]City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED] County: [REDACTED]

Special Needs (including translation): Translation might help, as Almas was very shy to speak in English on the tape recorder. She is not fluent in English, but understands and makes herself understood.

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Armenian lacemaking. Crochet and braided-rug-making.

Traditions noted for follow-up: Armenian foodways (Boghosian is an accomplished cook). In addition to interviewing Boghosian directly about this, could follow up with foodways at Boghosian's church: St. Asdvadzadzin Armenian Apostolic Church, 315 Church Street, Northbridge, 508 234-3677. This church

was built in 1957. Services are sung in Armenian. Holds an annual banquet at the Pleasant Valley Country Club. Pastor is Rev. Aram Stepanian. At Easter the women of this church prepare lots of traditional Armenian foods, such as kufta (which they make with peanut butter instead of tahini), which is a "meatless meatball" made with grain. They also dye easter eggs in symbolic colors: Red eggs symbolize the blood of Christ and also, by association, life and resurrection; blue eggs symbolize the sky; green eggs symbolize vegetation, etc. Boghosian makes very good fruit leather, and I was lucky enough to be sent home with some!

Other Possible Contacts:

Summary Description:

Almas Boghosian learned lacemaking in the orphanage in Aleppo, Syria where she lived after the rest of her family died in the Armenian genocide. In this interview, Boghosian discusses this lacemaking tradition, <sup>crochet</sup>crochet and braided rug making (which she learned here in Whitinsville) and her experience of immigrating to Whitinsville as a teenager.

NOTE: KC-01-3-M includes a number of newspaper articles on the local Armenian population, including a well-written profile of Boghosian.

Present at interview:

KC: Kathleen Condon (interviewer)

AB: Almas Boghosian

D: two daughters--Margo Montecalvo and Martha Garabedian

[Directions to Boghosian home: 96 to old Douglas, North St. to left, Civil War statue, R turn on Lackey Dam Rd., under 146 past machine works, pond, hang left 100 yds. to church on R (R lane) take R turn where hill. Go around flowers, light, L-hand turn. Bank, Church Street, 4 blocks next light, past church. Right on East Street (@ church), then first R on Willow. 2nd house on Right--Grey]

The interview took place for five minutes or so before I could convince her to let me turn on the tape recorder. This is what she said before the tape was turned on:

Boghosian does makes lace using a straight needle.

For her son's wedding, she made handkerchiefs for all the bridesmaids (possibly this is when she restarted lacemaking, about 20 or so years ago (date not clear).

After Boghosian's family was killed in the Armenian genocide when she was 6 or 7 years old, a kind and wealthy Arab family took AB in. [What happened was that the whole family began the forced march, but someone along the way took pity and asked the mother if she wanted to leave one of her children to be raised by this family (since it was pretty clear that they were going to die in the desert).]

AB: "I stayed with them three years. Forget my own language. They treat me very good. I call her mother. They love me so much." Then "German missionaries" decided that she had to move to the orphanage. There she was given very little food: AB: "A piece of bread, soup, just the way that we can't die." The orphanage where she was placed was supported by the Congregational church.

[Congregational missionaries had been an active presence in the region since 1846, and took a big role in aid to Armenians during and after the genocide. This connection may even be why Armenians were recruited for the Whitinsville Machine Works, but I am not sure.] After a time at the orphanage, where Boghosian was taught to make lace in order to make products to sell in support of the orphanage, she was brought to Whitinsville to live with relatives.

MM: "She's a survivor. She never looked back."

AB: "In the massacre, my two sisters killed. Pushed into desert. No water."

Boghosian and others were part of a forced march to Der Zor in the Syrian desert. Der Zor seems to be the Armenian spelling: alternate spellings are Dayr az-Zawr (most popular), Del al Zor, and Deir ez-Zor. There is variability on the use of hyphens in this placename. Der Zor is a city and is also the name for the area that surrounds it.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT:

Long lead-time at beginning of tape.

15

AB and KC talk about how AB is ashamed of her accent.

D: converse about new immigrant groups not learning English.

KC: How old when came?

AB: 16?

D: Mother couldn't speak English when she came to U.S. at 16, so they put her in the first grade. "They would never do that now."

AB: "My Aunt bring me in this country. She have seven children."

D: Entered port of Providence.

AB's family was killed in the Armenian genocide.

AB: "I didn't even know my last name. At the orphanage I give my father's name for last name." Talks about mark given 2 or 3 months after birth, which everyone in the city gets. "That's the way they know you're from that city." "I know my father's name, I know my sister's name but I didn't know my last name."

75

Had two sisters; at the time of the genocide, the youngest was 3 year old, the oldest had just started school. Alma was the middle child. "I say I don't know my last name. I know my father's name. The grown-ups, they say 'Your name is Avarkian. That's your name. We know your father and mother. That's the reason we tell you your last name is this. We got a cousin in America. We'd like to contact them if maybe you have some relative over there.'"

(Her aunt was contacted. Her aunt had 7 kids, lived on \$25/week. Her aunt's husband worked in Whitinsville Machine Works. "So I'm an extra to feed.")

100

(Went to school.)

"Who's going to teach me? I didn't know 'Yes' and 'No'; I didn't know 'A' and 'B.' Who's going to teach me?" So they put her in with six-year-old kids, in a class where most everyone spoke English.

114

AB: "When I came here, I was 80 pounds."

121

D: Tell her how you met Pa. They fixed her up. 12 years older. He had money."

AB: "They fixed me up. I was waiting just like kids. And Sunday my auntie, she fixed my hair just like grown-up and her dress, she put me [in] her dress. And I look in the mirror, I'm a [grown-up].... Egbert, my husband, boarded. That time, they come from all countries, each one had a border, you know? And they fixed me with him. I didn't know anything from life. Nothing! God be my witness"

D: "To get rid of her." [i.e., that is why they fixed her up with one of their borders]

D: "Of course that's what it was."

KC: Were you scared?

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AB: "Of course. But he was good to me. About a year and half, two years after I had my son.... 2 years, after I have my son, and it was just like playing with doll, with him."

D: "She grew up with her son...."

D: "She was 18 when my brother was born."

AB: "That's the only [thing] make me happy, is, as I said, like I was playing with him."

160

KC: You said you learned how to do lace in the orphanage. Did you also learn how to crochet in the orphanage?

AB learned to crochet and to make rugs here in Whitinsville.

KC

When you came here, was there anybody else who knew how to do the lace just like you?

168

AB: "...Special teacher did come and show us everything. A big group, about 20 girls, and when we do the work, they send it to America. They selling, here and it's a little money for the orphanage."

KC: Did they sell it to Armenians here?

AB: "No. Anybody. They were crazy about those works, at that time."

KC: Was your teacher Armenian?

AB: "She was Armenian."

KC: Did you have time to do when you came here?

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AB: "I didn't do anything. I raised children" This is about 10 years ago." [Shows KC lace]

D: "When we were teenagers she started doing all of this." [which would make it more like between 20 and 40 years she has been making lace.]

207

AB: "I was alone here after my husband passed away. She was not even 10."

D: She was doing handkerchiefs when I as a little girl.

218

KC: How long does this take?

AB: 2-3 months.

240

D: Doesn't use a pattern. Conversation about how Almas does not need glasses since her cataract operation, because her sight is so good now.

277

KC: When you start, at the beginning, do you know what it's going to look like?

AB: Yes.

KC: [to daughters] Are you fluent in Armenian?

285-293

D: "We make ourselves understood." Church = sermon in English, everything else Armenian. Went to Armenian school in Whitinsville for 3 months.

299

KC: When you got here, was there anyone in Whitinsville doing this [lace-making]?

303

AB: There were a couple of people who had also learned in the orphanage. All have passed away now.

314

KC: What did people say when started doing it?

D: Armenian museum in Watertown, how there are pieces of lace similar to Almas' lace there.

348

D: Gave work to us... (Because she spent so long on each one, it was hard for her to give it away to anyone outside the family.

370

KC: How did you learn crochet?

AB: 25 years ago, my neighbor [taught me].

389

D: "Rugs 100% wool. Those rugs are our clothes... She also made a runner.

100% wool. She wouldn't use anything else."

405

KC: How did you learn how to do it?

D: By braiding my hair. [Laughs]. Discussion of mother making clothes for daughter.

AB: "That time when she was Shirley Temple..."

D: "It was called Shirley Temple era. People used to wait to see what I had on, because she would make it."

More conversation about sewing.

482 Conversation about lace collars Almas has made.

END OF SIDE A (continued on Side B)

SIDE B

2

KC: Want to know about shirt with all the puckers (smocking). Discussion of shirt.... [Lots of microphone noise here as I put the mike down to photograph the shirt.] Smocking made with French knots. Almas learned how to smock here in U.S. Her friends brought her smocking patterns from Boston for small pieces, and then she started applying the technique to clothes. Technique is not specifically Armenian. Shirt photographed about 40 years old. Shirt belongs to daughter, who brought it to the house for me to see. Conversation about other pieces with smocking Almas has done.



43-55

D: "And then the little cross-work. Look at the cross-work on the sleeves. I mean, she took time out to do that. That's a lot of work. She's very creative. If she had gone to college. Her mother went to college in the old country. When she came here she didn't even go to school. She went to night school....

END OF SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW