



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (MH) Maggie Holtzberg, ()

Accession Numbers:

MH-02-08-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -C

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

- - -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 4/19/2000 Contact Date:

Related Accession Numbers: MH-00-09, - - - - -

Individual/Group/Event: Burgess International, Inc. Chimney repair

Address: 102 South Pleasant Street

City: Hingham, MA Zip: 02043 County: Norfolk

Phone: Daytime: [REDACTED] Evening: _____

E-mail: _____ Website: _____

Contact person: George Burgess, Sr.

Title: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Steeplejacks and chimney repair

Traditions noted for follow-up: _____

Other Possible Contacts: George Burgess, Jr.

Summary Description: When I first contacted George Senior, I mentioned to him that I was having trouble reaching his son Chris to set up an interview. He wasn't surprised, "We're very shy on publicity." After talking for a while, I asked him about this and he responded that the newspapers always get it wrong. (True -- the latest news photo of Chris, ladder up to the tippy top of a steeple, had a cutesy caption "At the top of their game") I sensed I was able to reassure him that we would get it right, since he said to come by the house - he could show me pictures.

George Burgess, Sr. comes from a family of steeplejacks. His grandfather, George Edward Burgess, came to this country in 1912 from England and started the business on Newbury Street. His father came over when he was five years old. He took over the business in 1927. He was killed working on the John Hancock building. Three of his six sons are steeplejacks.

"I started out repairing steeples and [?] in 1946. A man by and asked if I could paint water tanks. I began doing this. My son started on steeples; it's safer than water tanks. I've had four men killed on water tanks.

(newspaper article he quotes from-- Charles Street Meeting House/ 184 feet up) His company, Burgess International, Inc., is based in Hingham.

I do mostly chimneys -- some 300 footers. I've worked on a 1,000 foot chimney. I let my boys do the steeplejack work. Then I don't have to deal with the wives. Wives are a pain in the ass. I have eight men working for me. I never had a drink, never had a cup of coffee and I never smoked. I work seven days a week.

I have nine children -- six sons (Fred, Gregory, Robert, George, John, Chris) and three daughters (Deborah, Elizabeth, Margery). My sons are steeplejacks. One is based in Newburyport (George Jr.), one in Pembroke (Chris) and one in Maine (John).