



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (.PT) Patricia A. Thomas

Accession Numbers:

PT-00-1 -FN

Fieldnotes

PT-00-1 -C

Audio recordings

PT-00-1 -GN

Photographic documentation

PT-00-1 -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: _____ Contact Date: 10/15/2000

Related Accession Numbers: PT=01=1 . - - . - -

Individual/Group/Event: Lebanese Banquet / 25th Anniversary of the New St. Anthony of the Desert Church

Address: 69 Walden Street

City: New Bedford **Zip:** 02740 **County:** Bristol

Phone: Daytime: 508-996-0122 **Evening:** same

E-mail: ----- **Website:** -----

Contact person: Patricia A. Thomas

Title: Interviewer

Location of Interview: the Venus de Milo

Street Address: _____

City: Swansee **Zip:** MA **County:** _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community):
Interview and Recording Session

Traditions noted for follow-up: _____

Other Possible Contacts: _____

Summary Description: Recording of Traditional Arabic Folk Music

Summary Description:

Patricia Thomas, Fieldwork notes

MCC Field Work Accession #: PT-00-1-FN (PT-00-1-C; PT-00-1-CN; PT-00-1-M)

Narrative- Sunday, October 15, 2000

Lebanese Banquet

Celebration 2000, 25th Anniversary of the New St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, MA, at the Venus de Milo Restaurant, Swansea, MA

Five hundred people gathered in the large "function" room of the Venus de Milo in Swansea, MA, to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the "new" church, a Lebanese Maronite church once located in the "flint" section of Fall River. A new church was built in 1976 and this Sunday afternoon banquet party, or "hafli" was in honor of the 25th anniversary of the new church. The church is the spiritual and social center of the Lebanese communities, both in Fall River and in New Bedford, MA. Because New Bedford and Fall River are neighboring cities, there exists a strong bond between the two. (The Lebanese populations of each city generally emigrated from separate "villages" in Lebanon.) Many Lebanese New Bedford residents traveled to Swansea, MA, that Sunday afternoon to celebrate with their neighbors.

The program began with a processional, followed by the national anthems of both the US and Lebanon. These were performed by the St. Anthony church choir and soloists. Remarks and speeches by the Mayor of the city of Fall River, members of the Lebanese community, his Excellency, Most Reverend Bishop Stephen Hector Douehi, Eparch of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, NY, Rt. Reverend Monsignor Norman J. Ferris, Pastor of St. Anthony of the Desert Church, and a presentation of congratulations by City Councilor Joseph Camara. An "American" Dinner of prime rib followed a benediction.

Following dinner, music and dancing took place. Charles Hallal and Troupe, consisting of eight musicians, including 'oudist, vocalsit; keyboard (an instrument made in Saudi Arabia, with microtone tuning), tambourine or "daff", two derebakes or drums, an American style drum set. The sound emanating from the stage was like a wall of sound intricately weaving in and out of itself.

The keyboard transformed into a violin, strings, or flute, nasal flute called the 'anaiz, a full orchestra. In general, the music was lively, powerful, lyrical and percussive. At times, the majority of the five hundred people in attendance were on their feet dancing in line, holding hands, participating in the "debke" simple stamp, step, kick repetitive group dance done in (in this case) huge concentric circles, and usually with a leader at the head of the line "leading" by twirling a knotted handkerchief and dancing a more complicated step. Sometimes the lines weave through and under each other. As the music segues from one dance song to another, people come and go participating as much or as little in this community dance. When the music shifts to more lyrical, perhaps less pulsating and percussive bend, dancers broke arms to dance facing each other in two's, three's, or alone, their arms held over their heads as they dance solo together, like would be belly dancers wearing more clothes than usual. There was no actual "belly dance" at this occasion - not necessarily because this was a church sponsored event - but there were a few solo dancers who danced "belly dance" style - one used castanets, another a scarf - moving expressively and sensually, watched by all, moving, shaking shoulders, kneeling, bending back, all the while moving their arms freely over their head to tell the abstract expressive story of their moment. One by one, onlookers approached the dancer to shower them with money - one dollar bills, fives, or tens. Sometimes the donation would be attached under the hat or tucked under a collar or through a belt of the dancer to adorn her (or him). Other times, the dancer would pick up the bills to stuff them here and there and to hold them delicately in hand as the dance continued, as an extension of their arm. When the dance is over everyone applauds and the money is collected by the dancer and the young children who run to find every bill, which is then handed over to the pastor of the church.

After two "special" solo dances, the band shifted once more to the rhythmic line-dance music, and the floor was soon "mobbed" by hundreds of people holding hands and dancing rhythmically in weaving circles. When the Lebanese band took a break, a DJ took the stage to play "American" dance music. Some people returned to the dance floor to dance to the DJ's music. The afternoon carried on in this way, moving from the Lebanese band to the DJ two or three times until a small remaining group of dancers scattered and the party was over.