



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

Accession No.: EW-004-FN Date(s): 4/26/00j

Fieldworker(s): Eleanor Wachs

Interviewee(s): Charles (Charlie) Manghis

Event: Interview in his studio

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 and B DAT: ABS time:

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Brief summary of tape contents: The Folk Art of Scrimshaw

Counter/ABS	Contents
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Side 1

- 000 – Header; Introduction
- 03- How he started doing scrimshaw. Living on the Cape as a youth. Met elderly neighbor who had lot lots of old tools. Started working with him when he was 15. Worked well in the shop together in 1970. Worked on antique furnishing and ship models. He taught him “a lot of traditional things.” Also influenced by a story about Yankee whaling he got as a child.
- 25 Grew up between North Shore and Cape Cod. Moved to Cape Cod and met with his neighbor who introduced him to the dealers and collectors. “Got the bug.” John Mitchell had some whale’s teeth in the shop. John would pay him daily. Instead of daily pay, “would he give me some whale’s teeth?” Told he could take them. Took the teeth home. “There were no primers, nothing.” Looked at antique pieces done by sailors. They weren’t any how tos.” “He was a wonderful inspiration to me...I always am indebted to him in getting me started.”
- 53 Went off to college to Mass College of Art. “They didn’t understand what I was doing...I had a traditional art form.” Wasn’t appreciated there but he continued to do scrimshaw and sell it. There was a lot of interest in the early 70, especially with the JFK collection of scrimshaw...Work was really influenced by the whaleman. Took the skills he learned in school but “I am still very traditional the way I do different things.”
- 74 Defining tradition. Gives an example of a basket he made his daughter with baleen collar stays. Asked his friend basketmaker, Martha Lawrence “I want you to make a basket for my daughter that is like no other because she is like no other.” Went to New Bedford Whaling Museum to look at pie crimpers out of whalebone. Carved a pie crimper, an exact reproduction, laminate of whalebone and ebony and abalone shell and made a basket for his daughter. ... Initials of daughter inlaid into the basket. “I draw a lot of my inspiration from the classic forms.”
- 103 “My feeling is it’s a tradition art form.” “I have a real reverence for the material that I work with...I feel an urge and a need to do something with the material and treat it right.” Shows another basket he did for his mother in the early 70s. The basket /purse was made by local basketmaker Michael Kane. CM makes the tops and the insides.
- 122 Searching for his own style. Combined his skills with the history of the craft. Found his medium. Uses Albert Cook Church’s photographs of the 1920s at the end of American whaling. Shows one study that he did- moneyclip. Also does his own metal work. Carves the Wanderer, which a client had donated, a piece to the Kendall Whaling Museum.
- 153 Get his ideas by researching the historical record. “What the harbor looked like in the 1840s by going to the museums and looking at paintings and drawings. Shows me a piece of fossilized ivory from Alaska, which the Inuit have sent him. Uses “wash ivory” or beach ivory...”cuts a very fine line.” Shows a piece, which has a lot of stippling (dots on the piece.) When pieces are finished, he makes a mount for each using rosewood. The piece is then cradled...Mills his own ivory with John’s (his mentor) old band saw and polish each piece by hand. Don’t know what the piece will “ look like until you open it up.”
- 187 Explains the features of a 19th century piece, a whale tooth...”I’ll leave a tooth like that on my bench for a couple of months, Thinking what am I going to do with this particular

- them.”...Discusses a piece of whale tooth that he had acquired. Discusses that you have to think long and hard when you have a fine example and what to use it.
- 216 Explains a piece of scrimshaw in which he carved Nantucket Island during the great Age of Whaling. Goes on to explain different places on the map that he had carved. Explains that Tuckernut Island and other Indian villages. Explains topography in the round...the hidden forest, Aquidnid, Pockamoe, the Ponds ...all cut out and hand sanded...points out all the old Indian areas on the piece. The way Nantucket would have looked in 1840, 1850...done the Shoals.
- 228 Mentions Stuart Frank, Director of the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Ma.
- 250 Discusses a Fossil walrus full tusk, extremely rare. May use it for a piece for the Mystic Seaport competition.
- 261 Norwegians also carved. Had factory ships in the 30s and 40s. Some English rare French scrimshaw. Carving is more in the round, making a shape. Scrimshaw is the engraved lines incised and pigmented onto the material. Typically an American, New England art form.
- 275 Loves the island. Depicts Sankety Light, Brant Point light, Great Point lighthouses. Also does restoration work. Has a variety of skills related to the craft.
- 300 Discusses his restoration work for the Kendall Whaling Museum.
- 325 Explains a whale tooth and walrus tusk ivory pie crimper to be restored. Explains Edouard Stackpole’s (historian of Nantucket) thought that most every home in New England had a piece of scrimshaw since the whaling industry was such a part of the New England economy. Explains restoring the crimper.
Explains how much pleasure he gets out of doing restoration and scrimshaw. Likes working independently. Learned metal work and woodwork to augment his scrimshaw.
- 368 Look at some pieces that he has photographed that he did for the Mystic Seaport show. The piece is now in a private collection. Shows a piece that he did for President Bush for his presidential library. Depicts the sister ship of the Constitution, the President. Made a base out of ebony for it...presented to the President in 1997 at the opening of the library in Houston. He got a “lovely” letter from the President telling him how much he enjoyed the piece.
- 420 Carves globes out of 19th century billiard balls made from ivory. Brunswick Pool Table Company was making ivory billiard balls. But ivory doesn’t “stay true” and work well. Company offered \$10,000 to the person who could come up with a composition ball, which ended up being an early form of plastic. Ivory balls are rare and hard to come by. Does the turning on the lathe, does all his mountings. Whaleman stop in the Azores to pick up provisions.... Explains his trips to the Azores and to Hawaii where whaling men stopped. Did some research in both places.
- 465 Discusses how he works. Uses oil paints and mixes pigments. Uses concentrated pigment... key to work from dark to light. Important to wipe carefully. Having patience to do this work.... Listens to books on tape when he works listening to history or fiction. Discusses his interest in American history.
- 530 Contact with other scrimshanders. “Just a few of us left.”
- 543 Discusses plastic polymer pieces that “pass” for scrimshaw. “Lot of junk out there.” Stop and think of where this tooth was. It might have been tangled with giants. It might have been in the Indian Ocean one season and the North Atlantic the next... a piece of plastic is dead.”...Explains that he once was asked to use a piece of polymer that lacked radiance and translucence.... Doesn’t expect to run out of teeth.
- 544 END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

Side has long header.

- 00 Introduction – Touring his workshop
- 31 Explains how he finds pieces of ivory; some from the Inuits.... Discusses how he a collector asked for a particular scene from a British warship during Britain’s Age of Sail. Explains how much pleasure he got out of doing the piece.
- 43 Shows piece depicting Sankaty Light circa 1870. Did historical research. Depicts the lightkeeper and his wife and daughter. Explains his interest in doing something that explains the history of the lighthouse. “The challenge is ongoing and to keep the tradition craft within the parameters of good taste and where it should be.”
- 91 Explains likes working on whalebone. Hard to come by because of the embargo of 1972. Talks about the texture of the material. Has done close to 2,000 pieces over the last thirty years.... His tools are his hand made scribe which he custom made for himself and his knives.
- 119 How has the craft changed? In the 19th century, the ship’s carpenter used a hand lathe....CM uses an electric. But his tools are basically the same ones that a ship carpenter’s would use. Makes a lot of his own tools, ones that he can’t buy....Likes working on a commissioned pieces for someone that he knows. Discusses a customer he tried to please with excellent work. Enjoys when he gets a letter from a pleased customer.

155-255 Discusses tools in his workshop as we tour it.

END OF SIDE 2