



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (KK) Kate Kruckemeyer, ()

Accession Numbers:

KK-05-02-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -C

Audio recordings

KK-05-02-D

Photographic documentation

KK-05-02-M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 6/6/2003 Contact Date: 9/2/2005

Related Accession Numbers: KK-03-09, - - , - -

Individual/Group/Event: Stone Soul Festival

Address: P.O. Box 90031

City: Springfield

Zip: 01139

County: Hampden

Phone: Daytime: (413)731-0651

Evening: _____

E-mail: griffin756@aol.com

Website: _____

Contact person: Jay Griffin

Title: Program Chair

Location of Interview: Stone Soul Festival

Street Address: Blunt Park

City: Springfield

Zip: _____

County: Hampden

Special Needs (including translation):

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): African-American community festival, including foodways, gospel music, dance

Traditions noted for follow-up: Tyie Thomas School of Performing Arts; Evenus Thompson, gospel program director

Other Possible Contacts:

Summary Description: Report on fieldvisits to Stone Soul Festival, Friday September 2, 2005 and Saturday September 3, 2005. See KK-03-09 for further background.

Prior to attending the Stone Soul Festival this year, I spoke again with Jay Griffin, the Program Chair. I had spoken with him during previous fieldwork (see KK-03-09). I continue to believe he is a key person to know in the life of the African American community in Springfield.

Jay told me that this year the festival has better financial backing. They are getting sponsorship from Hampden Bank, and also funding from Comcast, which will allow them to add more music; this year they will have national gospel artist Jeff Majors on Saturday night. Jay continues to feel the festival is underappreciated by Springfield's power structure, saying "we are the best kept secret in Springfield." He points out that coverage in the paper usually comes after the fact (although this year the Springfield Republican did do a nice piece prior to the festival—see KK-05-02-M4). He says the "best write up we ever had" was a couple years ago in the alternative paper the Valley Advocate (see <http://www.valleyadvocate.com/gbase/Music/content.html?oid=oid:29757>). Jay expressed a disappointment with the START project. He feels that it's being directed by already powerful agencies like the schools and the Springfield Library. He said "those who are underserved are still underserved," and "there is little creative vision about what's possible." He expressed similar frustration with other local power players. For instance, some grad students at UMass did a master plan recently about how to expand the impact of the Basketball Hall of Fame; one of their suggestions was to take their material out of the museum to the local people, something which doesn't happen now. In a similar vein he pointed out that the Big E, the huge two-week regional fair in West Springfield, does not have any soul food despite the proximity of such a large Black community. He says Stone Soul has written letters about this and gotten no response. "Springfield is not an inclusive place—it's an exclusive place." He thought that START was intended to fix the disconnect, but says it's not getting through. Nevertheless, he did note that he was recently put on Springfield Cultural Council board and hopes that can make some difference.

In terms of our interest in documenting the Pit Masters, Jay directed me toward Charles Rawls, whom he called a "pit master extraordinaire." According to Jay, Charles has "supervised" the pit masters for all but one of the years of the festival—two years ago Charles had a leg amputated, and that was the first year he missed. Jay says there was a television special on Charles some years back. Jay also mentioned the following members of the Pit Master crew: "Clete the Meat" and "Chicken Hamp" (Hamilton Ray). Jay joked that when I contacted Charles Rawls I should say that "their supervisor" (Jay) had directed me to them: "You never tell an artist they have a supervisor...and they are artists."

Unfortunately all my hopes of documenting the Pit Masters came to naught. I spoke with Charles Rawls before the Festival and arranged to meet him on site on Friday. He agreed it would be easier to talk when they were not in the middle of the barbequeing. I was under the impression that they would be doing prep work then, I went to the site that evening, but our meeting did not work out, as Mr. Rawls had to go to the doctor. We rescheduled for Saturday, but I waited (and made follow-up calls by cellphone) and still was unable to meet Mr. Rawls. Unfortunately I was sick on Sunday and wasn't able to go to the Festival when the Pit Masters were guaranteed to be there. If we do attempt to document the Pit Masters in future, I would suggest asking Jay Griffin for another contact person. While Mr. Rawls is clearly respected as the long-time supervisor, I wonder whether his age and health problems make it difficult to rely on him as a point-person at this time.

In terms of the gospel music component of the Festival, Jay directed me to Evenus Thompson. I spoke with Mrs. Thompson prior to the Festival and hope to follow up with her in a future fieldvisit as I was sick on Sunday and not able to meet her in person at that time (SEE ...).

The Stone Soul Festival takes place at Blunt Park. The festival is free and many of the main food events, like the picnic on Sunday and the meal on Friday night, are free as well. The community-service aspect of the fair is in ready evidence, with many information booths and give-aways going on through the grounds. The feeling at the park both days I attended was warm and welcoming. While the festival started as an event for the African American community and continues to highlight the talents of that community, it is clearly a multicultural event at which everyone is welcome.

I did not see crafts for sale that would fit a folk arts definition, although I know that the festival has had carvers like Elton Brathwaite in the past, and the photo in the paper from last year showed dolls in African dress.

Many agencies were selling soul food and southern cooking as fund-raisers. I talked with one baker who makes pies and other sweets based on African American foodways; her shop is called Sweet Grace Pastry (see KK-05-02-M3). Unfortunately her pies tasted like they included pre-made ingredients; I would not think this merits a fieldvisit. Overall, the foodways practitioners who seem to merit further documentation are the Pit Masters. The Bay State Sportsmen, who do the fish fry, are of some interest (see below), but probably not a priority at this point.

A number of performers were on stage during the hours that I visited the festival, including a local talent search and the Women of Faith, one of the gospel choirs from St. John's Episcopal (see KK-05-02-D photos). Unfortunately the sound system at the park was not of high quality, so it did not seem useful to record any of the performances. The Women of Faith were a small ensemble who performed with spirit, but the sound quality made it hard to determine whether they merit further fieldwork. Since I missed the main gospel performances on Sunday, I will follow up with Evenus Thompson for other leads.

The Tyie Thomas Center for the Performing Arts does merit follow-up work. A number of dance troupes from the school performed, doing everything from modern dance to hip hop to African dance. The quality of the performances was generally quite good, and of particular interest to the fieldworker was how clear it was that the school was held in high regard by the audience and how connected the community seemed to the school. When Tracey Thomas, the director, came to the stage to lead a community dance, half the audience joined her. The feeling of good will for the school and its director was palpable. Although I was unable to reach Ms. Thomas in previous fieldwork years, I will attempt to do so again this year.

I also had a nice discussion with Alnita Foster, president of the local alumnae chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She said there are many alumni/ae chapters of black fraternities and sororities in Springfield but not active college chapters (there are some of those at U.Mass in Amherst). We could contact her about step shows, although the alumni chapters are not doing those at this point.

The "folk" aspect of this event is most evident in its overall make-up—the organization and purpose of the free event for the community that provides a space for "reunion" and reconnection between community members.

CONTACTS MADE:

Jay Griffin, Stone Soul Program Chair

Home: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Work: [REDACTED]

Charles Rawls, Pit Masters

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Mrs. Evenus Thompson, Gospel

Work [REDACTED]

Home: [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Alnita Foster, AKA Sorority alumnae chapter
[REDACTED]

POTENTIAL CONTACTS:

Tracey Thomas, of the Tyie Thomas Center for the Performing Arts. Meets at South End Community Center, 2nd floor, 29 Howard Street [REDACTED]

Andrew Cade at Urban League helps arrange some of the local talent and directs the talent search. He can be reached at the Urban League office (says Jay Griffin).

The encampment of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment (historical re-enactors of the African American regiment) is led by Benny White. Charles Fitch and his wife are local and can be reached [REDACTED]

About 6 years ago, Stone Soul had a presentation by the Sunny Banks Ranch from Pittsfield/Lee area. They do a demo of bulldogging and calf roping; he is African American and is training young people.

Stone Soul also had a demonstration about 5 years ago by "the praying Indians" -Christian converts from Grafton (near Worcester) and also possibly Somerville.

Bay State Sportsmans Club -- their specialty is fish; intricate fish-frying equipment; they buy fish fryers from across the country; they feed 600-700 people in 3 hours according to Jay Griffin; they are there on Sunday at the Stone Soul Picnic.

Jay Griffin mentioned the following restaurants serving the community: a couple of Jamaican restaurants (one called Combo J and Soul?); The Family Kitchen on St James Ave.. (Tommy and Monica Sproul); The Pit Masters have Texas Rib Shack open Th Fri Sat lunch and dinner at 930 Bay Street.

Had a nice conversation with Leslie R. Parks, who is a director/actor/choreographer. She is currently working on bringing the play Top Dog/Under Dog (by Suzan Lori Parks) to the Drama Studio in Springfield. Her card is included in the accession.



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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Accession No.: KK-05-02-D Date: 9/3/05

Fieldworker(s): Kate Kruckemeyer

Photographer: Kate Kruckemeyer

Subject(s): Stone Soul Festival

Event: performance of Women of Faith

Place of Photos: Blunt Park, Springfield, MA

Film Type: Digital

Camera(s): Nikon Coolpix 5700

Negative/slide no.	Description
01	Women of Faith
02	Women of Faith
03	Women of Faith
04	Women of Faith
05	crowd shot
06	Women of Faith
07	Women of Faith