



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

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

Accession Numbers:

MH-01-22-FN

Fieldnotes

MH-01-22-D

Audio recordings

MH-01-22-CS

Photographic documentation

- - -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 8/3/2001 Contact Date: 8/16/2001

Related Accession Numbers: EW-01- - - -

Individual/Group/Event: 103rd Electrician's Pipe and Drum Band

Address: IBEW Local 103 Union Hall 256 Freeport Street

City: Dorchester Zip: 02122 County: Suffolk

Phone: Daytime [REDACTED] Evening [REDACTED]

E-mail [REDACTED] Website: www.the103rd.com

Contact person: Mark DeMariano

Title: Manager/Treasurer

Location of Interview: The IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) Union Hall

Street Address: 256 Freeport Street

City: Dorchester Zip: 02122 County: Suffolk

Special Needs (including translation):

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Pipe and Drum weekly Thursday night practice, in preparation for competition at Hunter Mountain

Traditions noted for follow-up: The Ardagh, rehearses at Lexington Knights of Columbus hall

Other Possible Contacts: Joe Delaney, pipe major and member of Tulach Ard (www.tulachard.org)
Joe's e-mail is Joe.delany@mciworld.org

Summary Description:

A color photograph in the Boston Herald alerted us to the existence of the 103rd Electrician's Pipe and Drum Band. Pictured in hardhat and brown canvas overalls was Kevin G. O'Brien, of Stoneham playing a set of highland pipes on the rooftop of Tufts University's Jaharis Center, Washington Street. The caption noted that the Electrician's Pipe and Drum band practices every THursday night at the local union hall in Dorchester.

So we investigated and left a message with the band's manager, Mark DeMariano. Several hours later he phoned back, filling in some background on the only New England pipe and drum band affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The 103rd was formed in March of 1997 and has about 30 (14?) pipers. It is more difficult to recruit snare drummers. Joe Delaney is the pipe Major. He immigrated here from Limerick in 1995. He, unlike most of the other band members, is not an electrician. Delaney is also responsible for teaching the Boston Police Gaelic Column and Pipes and Drums. He told the electricians, "If I can teach the cops to play, I can teach you."

The 103rd currently compete at Grade 5 (the lowest). Bands don't usually start playing strathspeys in competition until they reach Grade 3. Last weekend they competed and finished eight out of 19 in Rockland, New York. Their next competition is August 19 at Hunter Mountain, New York. Last fall they played at the memorial for the Ironworker who was killed at the Millenium construction site.

Julie DeBenedictis and I arrived at the 103 Local IBEW Union Hall at 5:45 p.m. Practice is scheduled for 6-9. The union hall is impressive in size. It has the feel of a 1970s high school. The lobby filled with six display cases holding union local memorabilia including framed photographs, historic objects telling the story of the technological advancements in carrying electricity, hockey trophies and pipe band awards. We heard someone playing a chanter and found our way to a break room, where we found Mark DeMariano, Kevin O'Brien (of Boston Herald fame) and others shooting the breeze. A very friendly group.

We started talking with them and then wondered if we could do a little recording, since the practice didn't really start until 6:30. There was a loud ^{sound} coming from the air conditioning unit, which I mentioned, suggesting another location. "We're electricians, we can turn it off." Kevin reached up and flicked a switch, then helped me untangle the power cord to my recording machine. In fact, finding an electrical outlet was the easiest it has ever been. They were everywhere and conveniently located. Not a surprise, given the trade these guys work in.

We interviewed them for 30 minutes until the phone bank volunteers needed the room. Then we walked over to a large function hall with a stage. This is where the group usually practices. Joe Delaney, the pipe major didn't show up until nearly 7:15. Mark got the group of eight pipers that have come this evening to run through a few of their tunes. Once Delaney arrived, he spent a lot of time getting them all in tune. (He uses an electronic tuner). The group is clearly very fond of Delaney. He is tough on them, but dedicated. Each member contributes to a teaching fee. On top of this, they all chipped in to buy Delaney a set of Nails pipes from Scotland - which cost some \$6,000.

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The sound of the pipes, without the drones, was so loud that the earphones made makeshift earplugs. During a break I said something to Kevin about the level of noise. He shrugged saying, "Most of us are half deaf because of construction work." The air conditioning was turned down so low it made keeping the pipes in tune very difficult. Joe decided to move the practice outside. We moved our equipment. Sure enough, an exterior outlet was handy.