



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (K) Kathleen, (C) Condon

Accession Numbers:

KC-02-5-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -C

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

- - -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: 7/2/2002 Contact Date: 7/22/2002

Related Accession Numbers: KC-01-2, KC-02-6, KC-02-5

Individual/Group/Event: <u>Stone walls of Milford, MA</u>			
Address: <u>see addresses listed in KC-02-5-CS</u>			
City: <u>Milford</u>	Zip: <u>01757</u>	County: <u>Worcester</u>	
Phone: Daytime: _____	Evening: _____		
E-mail: _____	Website: _____		
Contact person: _____			
Title: _____			

Location of Interview: <u>no interview. for addresses see KC-02-5-CS</u>		
Street Address: _____		
City: _____	Zip: _____	County: _____

Special Needs (including translation): <u>None</u>
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Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): <u>stone walls</u>

Traditions noted for follow-up: <u>Stone wall building</u>
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Other Possible Contacts: <u>M. Stonework/Masonry in E. Douglas, 508 476-7407, lead not yet followed up.</u> <u>Jim Drover, stone masonry, [REDACTED] lead not followed up. Padeni Masonry,</u> <u>127 North St., Grafton, 508-839-5903 (listed on the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce website.</u>
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Summary Description:

Many of the older stone walls in Milford, in particular those in the Plains and the Hoboken sections which have been home to Italian Americans since the late 1800s, are fashioned of pink granite from the quarries where many Italian immigrants in Milford worked. Many walls, even those made from mixed stone, are often topped with jagged pink granite stones, sticking straight up like spikes, almost as if this stone had been used in a decorative fashion. I consulted with folklorist Amanda Dargan, who conducted a study of Westchester Co. stone wall builders, and she was unfamiliar with this ornamental style. Folklorist Joe Sciorra was able to concur with me that this style was common in Brooklyn Italian neighborhoods but he was unable to confirm that the style was specifically Italian in origin. Neighborhood residents did not know anything about the history of the walls. One Italian-American, familiar with the fact that this style also functions to keep people from sitting on the walls, joked that the Irish probably built walls like that to keep the Italians from sitting on them. Certainly more research would have to be done to learn more about these walls and the sub-traditions in which they fall..

Background on Milford Pink Granite:

Milford Pink Granite was used not only in local buildings and shrines, including St. Mary's High School in Milford and much of the statuary in local cemeteries, but also many buildings of national import, such as Grand Central Station, the old Penn Station, and the 34th Street Post Office in New York City as well as New South Station and the Admiral Dewey Monument in Boston. There were originally many different granite companies, but a consolidation around 1888 formed Milford Pink Granite Company. The peak years of granite quarrying in Milford were 1884-1908, with the apex of activity taking place in the years between 1095-08 when a contract was secured to provide the stone for New York's Penn Station. Very little of the granite was cut in the form of statuary; most of it was used for decorative building cornices, walls or monument pedestals.

Towards the end of the 1800s Italians with stonecutting skills were recruited to work in the Milford granite cutting sheds, which were built alongside area railroad tracks so as to ease transportation. [Most all of the stonecutters who had worked in the Milford cutting sheds died in their 40s or 50s because of a respiratory ailment caused by stone dust.] The Italians largely displaced the earlier stonecutters, who were of Irish, Swedish and Anglo descent. In fact, they also displaced the Irish in residential areas, taking over a section called "the Plains" which had been settled by Irish beginning in the 1830s. At first the Italians attended St. Mary's Catholic Church in Milford, but in 1880 the Sacred Heart Church was established as Milford's Italian parish. Nevertheless, there are Italian gravestones in both cemeteries.

By the 1930s demand for granite was waning, partially because of the economy and partially because tastes were moving away from this stone. One detail from an article in the Milford Daily News (9-17-88) recalls the fierce localism of stone cutters, especially in the face of decreasing opportunities. In 1936, the Granite Cutters Union staged a strike specifically because the Haskel granite quarry had hired "two workers that were not residents of Milford."