

MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (MR) Millie Rahn. ()

Accession Numbers:

MR -11-02-FN

- - -D

- - -CS

- - -M

Fieldnotes

Audio recordings

Photographic documentation

Additional materials

Initial Contact: _____ Contact Date: _____

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Individual/Group/Event: Millie Rahn's fieldnotes from research to find home cooks for the 2011 Lowell

Folk Festival Foodways area; notes can be used for future festivals, related public programs, etc.

Address: [REDACTED]

City: [REDACTED] Zip: [REDACTED] County: Middlesex

Phone: Daytime: [REDACTED] Evening: _____

E-mail: [REDACTED] Website: _____

Contact person: Millie Rahn

Title: Folklorist

Location of Interview: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): _____

Traditions noted for follow-up: see below

Other Possible Contacts: see below

Summary Description: Millie Rahn's fieldnotes from research to find home cooks for the 2011 Lowell Folk Festival Foodways area. Theme is pasta and noodles. Notes can be used for future festivals, related public programs, etc.

This year's Foodways theme, Pasta and Noodles, was chosen to honor the long tenure of Prince Pasta in Lowell. The company relocated from the North End of Boston in 1912, and remained in South Lowell, dubbed "Spaghettilville," until Borden's, which had acquired the company for the owners in 1987, closed the plant in 1997. For a fuller story see Mass. Humanities' MassMoments for July 16:

www.massmoments.org

The search for Italian cooks, for pasta, began with leads in a Boston Globe food article by writer Jane Dornbusch regarding Italian Easter rituals and foods, which ran in the Globe on April 20, 2011. I hooked up with Jane by phone and email for more background and leads, from which some of these Italian names come from.

Boston Globe/Jane Dornbusch contact: [REDACTED]

Italian Cooks

Some of these cooks were mentioned in the Globe piece and I got more info either from talking to them directly, or from reporter Jane Dornbusch.

Lucia DeDuca

[REDACTED] Framingham)

Contact via husband Michael's email: [REDACTED]

My first contact was with Lucia [pron: Lu CHEE a] DiDuca, who is head of the Ciociaro Social Club in Newton [ciociarosocialclub.com]. The club is in the former library building on the heavily Italian Nonantum neighborhood at [REDACTED]

Lucia said that "many years ago" she and her sister-in-law, Margherita DiDuca Drake, participated in an Italian folk festival in Lowell; about "25 years ago," Sounds like the pre-festival Regatta ethnic events--MR].

After coming to the US, Lucia grew up in Watertown and went to Watertown High School. Now she lives in Framingham.

Lucia said the purpose of the Ciociaro Social Club is to keep interest alive in younger generations to maintain Italian cooking traditions. She had hoped to recruit one of the members to come to Lowell to demo this year, but many of them are older and went to Italy for the summer. Others said "come all the way to Lowell?" Lucia herself was very ill this summer, so we lost contact for three weeks, but she's very interested in being considered for future programs.

Also, she would like me [or Maggie and/or David?] to make a presentation to their group over the course of the year. They're a wonderful source of knowledge, and Nonantum has a large Italian population to this day, many of whom worked in the nearby mills of Newton and Watertown.

Maria Luisa Saraceni

[REDACTED] (Everett)

Maria is Italian and has a charming accent. She's a good cook and definitely makes pasta. She's from Abruzzo and specializes in the cuisine of that region, and generally is very knowledgeable on the topic of food. Maria was going to Italy for 3 months this year, but definitely wants to be considered in future. She lives in Everett and works in Dover, NH, so commuting doesn't seem daunting to her.

Adriano Cillo (and sister Antonia Sellitto)

[REDACTED] (Roslindale)

Adriano is the youngest of 9 children. Her sister Antonia Sellitto is the oldest. Antonia is probably the better and more traditional cook, but she speaks almost no English. Adriana is also quite a good cook and her English is perfect. Antonia is about 78 and Adriana in early 60s. Jane says both are warm and wonderful and live in Roslindale. [See more about them below, under Tony DeBenedictis.]

Tony DeBenedictis

Tony's Market, [REDACTED] (Roslindale); [REDACTED]

Tony owns Tony's Market in Roslindale Village, Boston, which specializes in Italian foods, meats, and imported pastas, cheeses, and other groceries. Tony himself is known for some of his sauces. I spoke with him by phone, which I later heard was amazing that he even picked up, because it was during the July heat-wave and he was spending most of his time monitoring his freezers to make sure they were working properly.

Tony is beloved in the community, and was mentioned in the Globe piece. He's also the brother of Adriano and Antonia, above. Tony says he's 72, "listens to opera all day" in the store, and has no email. He said his sisters are the "better cooks," but Antonia is 78 and doesn't drive, and Adrianna was heading to the Cape. He said going to Lowell is out, especially on Saturdays, his busiest day at the store. But then he relented and suggested I talk to his wife, Deb DeBenedictis, about him doing a sauce demo on Sunday.

I then talked to Deb, who's a tutor of English and has connections to Boston College. She's younger than Tony, and not Italian, and said that "Tony and his sisters are the Italian cooks." She thought that maybe they could get Antonia to go to Lowell, if they drive her, and Tony could translate for her. (She's the one who's 78.) In the end it didn't work out, but there might be possibilities to work with them at public programs. The best way to talk to Tony is via his wife: Deb DeBenedictis, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

North End/Boston

I went through Angelo Zanghi, a recent young Italian immigrant from Sienna who is of Sicilian heritage and is married to an American colleague. Angelo speaks no English, but works as a waiter in one the high-end Italian restaurants in the North End. He said, through his wife, that things are done in the "old Italian way" and that chefs and waiters who know the traditions work from 11 am to 1 am every "weekend" [Thursday-Sunday] and rotate their one day/week off in the early part of the week. Thus, they are not available on weekends, nor do they have cars. Older, home cooks in the North End think going to Lowell is going to the ends of the earth; "don't even think of them." [This came up a number of times when I talked to people outside the Merrimack Valley, unless they had Lowell connections.—MR]

Maria Alonge (resource)

Maria is my hairdresser, from Italy, based in Watertown. She also told me that the brand, Chef Boyardee, was named for an Italian, Boiardi. One of her relations from Italy was visiting her shop, but declined to come do a demo. Said his English wasn't good enough, but it seemed OK to me.

Maria suggested three cooks, all of whom I contacted, but either they didn't respond, or were not interested/available.

Dante Bellucci, Tartufo restaurant, Newton

[REDACTED]

The restaurant was closed for most of July for vacation.

Gerardo, Francesca's restaurant, Newton

[REDACTED]

Alessandro

[REDACTED]

He is a chef and friend of Maria's. He was leaving for vacation but said to keep him in mind for future.

Leads from Pauline Golec

Pauline Golec's contact: [REDACTED]

Pauline is on the board of the Lowell Festival Foundation, and has organized the ethnic cooks for the festival since its beginning, and before that worked with the Regatta Committee on Lowell's many ethnic festivals. I've known her a long time and we used to do the "food" interviews together on Lowell radio stations to promote the festival in the '90s, when there was also a lively foodways demo area on Market Street.

Michelina Luminello/Italian. [redacted] well)

Mrs. Luminello is Italian, but newly widowed and said she is not up to cooking this year. Husband was Vincent, as listed in phone book.

Austrian. The festival's—and Lowell's—once most popular Italian cook is Mario Aste, who taught at UMass. Lowell. He's now in a nursing home, but his wife is Austrian and cooks a great deal—and Austrians use lots of noodles. Couldn't reach her. Their phone # is unlisted and I couldn't find it easily in old fieldnotes from when I worked with Mario in the '90s. [redacted]

Thai/Laotian. Andy [no last name]

Thai Parima Restaurant, [redacted]
[redacted]

Andy is young and source for lots of leads to the Thai and Laotian communities. He's a cook at the restaurant, which was also a potential vendor for the ethnic foods sales area. Andy tried to find other cooks, but it's very difficult for them to get away on weekends, and he himself was going to be away the festival weekend.

Angela Hastings/Greek
[redacted]

Spoke to Angela, who's active in the Greek Transfiguration church in Lowell. She was going away for the festival weekend, but might be good lead for future.

Greek cooks

Karen Kosko
[redacted]

Karen grew up in Central Square, Cambridge, and is someone I've worked with in various capacities in Cambridge. Her day job is media librarian at the Haggerty elementary school in Cambridge, the city's

only inclusive (all abilities) and very multicultural school, with a large Haitian and Asian student population.

Karen's grew up in Greek family and still does all her cooking and thinking "in Greek." She wasn't available this July, as she was doing an intensive program at Simmons College, but she's a great source for future programs. She suggested her cousin, Despina Makredes.

Despina Agretilis Makredes

[REDACTED] (Melrose)

Despina is a cook and caterer, and teaches at Everett High School. She's married to Charlie Makredes, the Greek musician. I called and emailed her repeatedly, but got no response. [Her email is lost from my notes; will have to look elsewhere]

Chris Pantezelos

[REDACTED] (cell); [REDACTED] (Unique Strings); [REDACTED] (home); Lowell

Chris, of course, is the luthier who works with Peter Kyvelos, the Greek oud maker. See further notes under his girlfriend, Elisa Torres, who's a Puerto Rican cook.

Peter Hantzis (resource)

[REDACTED]; Chelmsford

Peter is a personal friend who grew up in the Acre of Greek immigrant parents, and he's the only child in his family who was born in the US; all the others were born in Greece. He now lives in Chelmsford and teaches part time at UMass. Lowell and is a practicing psychologist. He is one of my first "go to" people to get into the Greek community.

Peter's wife, Linda, is of Swedish heritage and is a terrific cook of both Swedish and Greek cuisine. I tried to get her to do a Swedish noodle dish, but she said no.


Peter worked his contacts for over a week to find a Greek cook, but to no avail. Many of the people he contacted were going to Greece for the summer. His contacts include:

His sister, Nina Hantzis Pentazos, who lives in Lincoln. She's very involved in the Greek church in Lexington. Says most of the older cooks from the Lowell congregations are no longer cooking.

Teddy Panos, the Lowell Sun sportswriter, who's part of the Athenian Corner family.

Charlie Nikatoupoulos, who also teaches at UMass. Lowell, and is a major resource for all things Greek in Lowell. He tried to contact Eleni [last name missing], who is from Greece and has done foodways demos in the past and loves to do them. Both Charlie and Peter were unable to reach her by email, so figure she's also gone to Greece.

Greek Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Greek Orthodox church

 Dracut

This parish began in Lowell, but the church burned down in 1999 and they relocated to Dracut. Someone had approached the festival about participating (in ethnic area?). I spoke with Carol, church secretary, and with Mikita, president of the church council (with thick Greek accent). Mikita says all requests have to be passed by the priest.

They were interested, but it was too short notice, especially because they have their own church festival in mid-August, which might be a good source for fieldwork for future cooks.

Cambodian Cooks

Ronnie Mouth at CMAA [Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association] could not do the Sunday demonstration, so she suggested:

Saody Ouch

[REDACTED]

Saody [pron. Sau DEE UUch] is a health educator at YMCA of Lowell. She was scheduled to do the Sunday demon at the festival, but had to back out, so she suggested Nancee Theng, who ended up a no show.

Nancee Theng

[REDACTED]

Nancy lives near to Lucy Larcom Park and had agreed to do the Sunday demo, but she didn't respond to numerous phone calls the two weeks before the event, nor did she show on the Sunday.

Jennifer deCastro Santos

via daughter, Victoria, who's a seasonal at LNHP; [REDACTED]

Maggie passed on this lead. Jennifer is Cambodian, but divorced from a Brazilian, hence her non-Cambodian surname. She's a lead for future, but was going away the weekend of the festival.

Puerto Rican Cooks

Jeanette Rodriguez Cumpiano

[REDACTED] (Northampton)

Jeanette is married to luthier William Cumpiano and demonstrated a Puerto Rican vegetable bean soup in 2010, when we re-launched the foodways area and did a beans theme in honor of Franco-American beans in Lowell.

Jeanette is very interested in doing a demo at 2012 festival in part to promote her Healthy Women's Program in Holyoke. She and a Costa Rican physician have set up their own nonprofit and work through the Holyoke Health Center in the Pioneer Valley. Nearly all of their clients are Latinas who are cancer

survivors, and others who have conditions like diabetes. Nutrition education and eating traditionally are a big part of their programs.

Jeanette is a wealth of information about working with immigrants to return to their native diets and avoid processed American foods. She should be interviewed in her own right about all this, of which she's spoken eloquently by phone and at the 2010 festival. She will not be available until after the new health center opens in September 2011.

Elisa Torres

[REDACTED] (cell); [REDACTED]

I "found" Elisa when I called Chris Pantzelos, the Greek luthier, who lives in Lowell. Elisa is Chris' girlfriend. Turns out neither of them could do a demo at the festival, but they're both good contacts and Elisa is a "find."

Had several long phone conversations with Elisa. Her parents were raised in Puerto Rico and she grew up in New York. She says she doesn't "look" Puerto Rican, but that she's "100% Puerto Rican." She's totally bilingual and turns out both she and Chris are medical interpreters, working in hospitals in Boston as translators in Greek and Spanish (and, I think, some other languages too).

Elisa is very interested in immigrant foodways and like Jeanette, says the Puerto Rican diet is "so Americanized" and she also tried to get back to the traditional recipes and methods as much as possible. She should be interviewed at length as some point. She's very interested in doing a demo in future; Chris is less interested.

Franco Pasta Traditions

Roger LeVasseur, Cote's Market, Lowell

██████████ (store); ██████████ (cell)

Roger, of course, carries on the Franco-American beans tradition in Lowell, preparing weekly the traditional recipe he bought from Frankie Rochette when Frankie retired from supplying beans to all of Lowell's diners. [Roger does that today.]

I wanted to double-check with Roger about any pasta traditions in Franco cuisine, as none came immediately to mind. Had a nice phone chat with him one day and he said most pasta dishes are not French, but Cote's has a popular chicken/ziti dish that his son Kurt developed, which has been embraced by the community.

Update: Kurt LeVasseur has gone back into the hospitality business and has a new, "high-end job", and is virtually unavailable. I'd run the same question by him on email and got no response.

Kurt's twin brother Justin is working @ Cotes as of Aug 2011