



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Accession Numbers:

LO-01-01-FN

LO-01-01-C

LO-01-01-CS, N

Fieldnotes

Audio recordings

Photographic documentation

Additional materials

Date(s): March 28, 2001

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Individual/Group/Event: Aniceto Che Che GilmetteFieldworker(s): Laura OrleansLocation of Interview: Mr. Gilmette's home

Street Address: _____

City: _____

Contact person (if different from above): Peggy GilmetteTitle: wifeSponsoring organization (for event or group): n/a

Address (if different from above): _____

Phone: Daytime: _____

Evening: _____

E-mail: _____

Website: _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): model boat making (whaling ships, packet ships, oil tankers); merchant marine experiences

Traditions noted for follow-up: _____

Other Possible Contacts: _____

Summary Description: Mr. Gilmette is a retired merchant mariner. He was in the merchant marine for 37 years working initially as a cook and eventually as chief steward. He served on many different vessels but was on two oil tankers (Exxon Lexington and Exxon New York) for half of his career (a total of 19 years.) He was born on the island of Brava, Cape Verde where he lived until the age of 19. At

that point he came to New York (travelling by steamer) and immediately joined the Merchant Marine, following his older brother. During WWII when he was on board a T-2 oil tanker he was looking for a way to pass the time and began to make his first large ship model, a model of the T-2. Without a tool kit or access to wood, he created an intricate model of the ship using a paring knife (his "potato peeling knife") to carve the wood (a 2x4) and improvising with turkey bones for stair railings. His later models made in the 1950s and more recently in his retirement (especially in the last ten years) are exquisite. All created completely by hand, without the use of patterns or kits or even a formal scale. In fact he could not find the pulleys for his rigging in the proper size for his models and so made each of these for the rigging, all of which works. Likewise, he set out to find and purchase figures (people) to populate the ships, but couldn't find ones that he liked so he carved and painted these as well. In addition to building models of oil tankers, he has built a Cape Verdean packet ship like those many of his relatives used to transport cargo to and from the old country; and several square rigger whaling ships.

While growing up on the island of Brava, he was acquainted with an elderly gentleman who made boat models and he watched with great interest and learned some of his skill through this contact. He used to make small sailboats for himself and his boyhood friends from balsa wood which is indigenous to the island. He made the sails from corn husks and they used to race the boats in puddles.

Today, he spends most of his days working on models in his basement workshop. He has many tools including a drill press which make the work a bit easier. He has some arthritis in his right hand from years of boring tiny holes by hand with an awl. He has built individual exhibit cases for many of his models as well as a full size display case.

His second wife of seven years is extremely proud of him and is working hard to get him the recognition he deserves. He was recently featured in the Standard Times (article is attached)-- New Bedford's local paper. Many of his friends, particularly former merchant mariners like himself (most of whom are Cape Verdean and many of whom he trained) come to visit him and admire his work and talk about their days on the ships. This is both an occupational tradition (the ships tell the story of his work in the merchant marine) and an ethnic tradition (packet ships and whaling barks were both important to the Cape Verdean experience and the merchant marine employed many Cape Verdeans especially as stewards and cooks). Many Cape Verdeans were whalers. Cape Verde was a stopping place for the American whaleships which stopped to replenish supplies and crew. And many Cape Verdeans came to the United States aboard whaling ships. Likewise, packet ships carried emigrants from the islands to the United States and goods from the United States back to the islands.

Mr. Gilmette is 85 years old. He is in excellent health and has many stories about his days on the sea. He would be an excellent artist in a school or festival setting. His models are truly exquisite and should be exhibited.