



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (JF), ()

Accession Numbers:

JF-03-01-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -D

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

- - -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: _____ Contact Date: 4/15/2003

Related Accession Numbers: _____

Individual/Group/Event: Al Bashevkin / Northern Berkshire Community Coalition / Intro. Meeting

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: Berkshire

Phone: Daytime _____ Evening: _____

E-mail: _____ Website: www.nbccoalition.org

Contact person: Same

Title: Executive Director

Location of Interview: Driving tour of North Adams, Adams, Williamstown

Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Special Needs (including translation):

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Overview of towns' layout, cultural groups as Al knows them

Traditions noted for follow-up: Ethnic: Italian; Polish; French; Irish; Lebanese; Lithuanian Religious: Catholic; Jewish; also saw Protestant churches--Baptist, Episcopalian

Local History--monuments; landmarks (such as old cider mill in No. Adams); local historians;

Occupational: mills have a large history; 2 monument companies (gravestones) on So. Church St.(?), No. Adams (one's sign notes it's the Barre Guild)

Social clubs: Polish in Adams; Turn Hall in Adams; Sons of Italy in No. Adams

Agricultural: some farms in Adams (apple orchards), Williamstown (dairy), though these 3 towns never had as prominent an agricultural history.

Lumbering had a large history in this area.

Limestone is a big part of this area (drove by one quarry on way to Adams). Clay is also widespread here, so lots of brick architecture.

Other Possible Contacts: Mr. Papalo(sp.), Italian, Al will provide contact info;

George Haddad(sp.), owner of Red Carpet Restaurant in Adams (also waitress here);

Maynard Seider, Sociology Prof., MCLA, has done work on labor history of Sprague Electric;

Stuart(sp.) Bums, did work on the No. Adams Shifting Gears project (son of James Bums, famous historian at Williams);

Al will provide contacts for his family for Jewish traditions (the community is basically all the same family);

Dick Dassatti, mail deliverer, knows the area quite well and tried to help with an initiative to create local industries at one point;

Paul Marino, local historian, gives walking tours of North Adams.

Local churches, city/town clerks, libraries, senior centers, possibly the Berkshire Regional Planning Authority (AI not sure if this is the exact name).

Books by Joe Manning (lives in Florence) about changes in North Adams: Steeples; Disappearing into North Adams.

Summary Description: Very helpful intro to the area. Al invited me to speak at the May meeting of the Steering Committee, to provide an update and to help members understand folklife and offer further thoughts/suggestions about people to contact. Narrative notes also typed up from info Al provided (titled JF-O3-01-Narrative).

Dick Dassatti is a mail deliverer who knows the area well. At one point, he was trying to help create local industries.

Maynard Seider is an MCLA Professor of Sociology, who has done work on the labor history of Sprague Electric.

Joe Manning, who now lives in Florence, has written 2 books in the last few years on changes in North Adams: *Steeple*s (because of how impressive a view they are in certain parts of the city); and *Disappearing into North Adams*.

Stuart(sp?) Bums, son of the famous Williams historian George McGregor Bums, worked on North Adams' Shifting Gears project

Al will provide contacts in his family for Jewish traditions.

Al agreed that talking with church leaders (including Deacon Frank Ryan whose name Sarita Hudson from the Catholic Diocese in Springfield also gave me), city/town clerks, librarians and senior center staff could all be helpful. In thinking about what his committee would like to see happen with this work, he thinks the best approach will be typical approach of finding local artisans/"local treasures" (to use the term I'd been using to convey the idea), to help build up the culture of the community in its own eyes.

MCC START Initiative, Northern Berkshires

4/15/03

Driving Tour of North Adams, Adams, Williamstown

with Al Bashevkin, START Steering Committee Member

and Executive Director of Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

[Also includes notes from my lunch before that, at Red Carpet Restaurant in Adams]

Al drove me around to give an overview of the area's layout and what he knew of its cultural groups. Mark Smith, head of the START Initiative at MCC, knew of Al from other MCC-related work, and asked him to be on the committee.

The Northern Berkshires as they define it includes Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, North Adams, Savoy and Williamstown.

At one point, driving up to the swimming hole in North Adams, Al said, "Part of the beauty of the area is the beauty of the area."

Ethnic and Religious Groups

- Italian (Sons of Italy is in North Adams)
- Polish (Adams has St. Stanislaus Kostka church and a social club, with a neighborhood behind the church - near the corner of E. Hoosac and Summer Sts. -- that is still Polish)
- French (Adams - St. Thomas Aquinas was the French church)
- Irish (Adams)
- Lithuanian Jewish (Al's extended family descending from the original 3 families that kept bringing more of their families over)
- Lebanese (North Adams - still a presence?).

The churches used to have ethnic affiliations, probably not so much anymore although the Polish church still may due to the abutting neighborhood.

Williamstown is the most diverse community, though this is because of the college and it's a more transient population.

Features of the Landscape

One defining feature of the area is that it is ringed by mountains, so lots of people have never left the area. The area (specifically Adams?) has some transient population as all places do, but one unique quality is that there is a strong core of long time residents who have never left.

The Hoosic River helped define the whole area. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s, there were incredible floods all along Main Street. [Jim at the Heritage State Park had mentioned the flood of '38 to me, probably caused by that hurricane?] In the 1950s and 60s, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a huge flood control project of concrete, which has essentially destroyed that section of river for fish, etc. In Williamstown, they figured out a different way to control it that preserves the river.

Adams, North Adams and Williamstown each have very distinct downtowns.

Limestone is prevalent, with a big area of it seen (quarried) aside the industrial area along Route 8 from North Adams to Adams.

Clay is also prevalent, and therefore there is a lot of brick architecture.

There are some farms, though this area was not primarily agricultural. Adams has apple orchards and Williamstown has dairy farms.

Lumbering has a big history in this area.

North Adams has two huge cemeteries, one is called Southview.

There are monuments, such as the McKinley statue in Adams commemorating his visit.

Occupational Features

- This area has a strong history of unions.
- On South Church St., on the back road to Adams from North Adams, there are 2 monument companies (near Southview Cemetery?). One is called Berkshire Monuments, the other (name not noted) indicates is the Barre Guild.

Social/Economic Features

Suppers, fairs, and festivals are a big part of life in this area.

Social clubs (connected to churches or other) are an important feature. Turn Hall in Adams is another.

Individual neighborhoods used to have strong identities, with separate schools, e.g. Examples are West End/Brayton (where Al grew up), Blackinton (which had a tannery). Now the towns are more centralized, but each town is still unique/different from the others. Al's not sure, but figures they may have been named after people and sprung up around factories. Al recalls certain areas that were the gathering spots for kids to play. Kids mainly played within their own neighborhoods, because that's who you knew from school. Part of the culture was to ride around in cars and talk, instead of hanging out at anyone gathering spot.

The Fairgrounds (North Adams?) used to be the site of a big balloon festival in the 1920s. This was stopped after some kind of accident happened.

On the back road to Adams from North Adams (South Church St.), there is an old cider mill that's no longer used, but is a local landmark. Just past this is a gravel road that leads to the west shaft of the Hoosac Tunnel. [Interesting that it's the *Hoosac* Tunnel but the *Hoosic* River.]

George Hills Way, off Church Street, leads uphill to a local swimming pond and wildlife area that is heavily used. Al thinks it might be pretty deep.

Williamstown is largely a college town, although it still has the Steiner Film(?) factory and used to have some others, now taken over by high techs. Taking the back way to Williamstown from No. Adams (River St to Mass. Ave to Williamstown) leads you into the older industrial section, with the college just next to it on the right.

[The Red Carpet Restaurant in Adams appears to be a social center of sorts. The waitress there (lunch, 4/15) appeared to know everyone and there are photo collages of local people and events on all the walls. The waitress said there is a picture of her when she was 12. She said Park Studio(?) does the photos. According to the sign on the door, the restaurant was established in 1950 - as Red Carpet, presumably; the place mats also say 1927 and that it's the "oldest continuously operated restaurant in Berkshire County. While I was eating, the waitress was speaking to someone about a guy who was "about 110" who still mows the church(?) grass. Al said the owner, George Haddad, would be a good person to speak to. This might be a possible location for some kind of photo exhibit resulting from the START project]

Local historians/Suggested contacts

Paul Marino is very active in local history and gives working tours [also suggested by Jim at the Heritage Park].