



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
Folk & Traditional Arts Program

FIELDNOTES
INDIVIDUAL/GROUP

Accession No: EW-00-5 FN Date(s): 5/10/00

Individual/Group: Ann Horkan

Fieldworker(s): Eleanor Wachs

Location of Interview: [REDACTED]

Street: _____ City: _____ Zip: [REDACTED] Co: _____

Phone: Daytime: [REDACTED] Evening: _____ Other: _____

e-mail: none Website: _____

Traditional art/skills: Irish Knitting

Occupational Experience: _____

Ethnic Heritage: Irish Religious affiliation: Catholic

Date and Place of Birth: [REDACTED] Languages spoken: Gaelic (Irish)

Other Possible Contacts: _____

Summary Description: (quality of artistry, significance of individual/group within tradition, special needs, ability to communicate well in public.)

Ann Horkan was a presenter at the Massachusetts component of the Smithsonian's Folklife Festival in 1988. Ann grew up on the Aran Islands and learned to do traditional Irish Knitting from her grandmother. She emigrated to Boston as a young adult, married, and raised a large family - Each one has more than one beautiful sweater - Ann has done several festival and classroom demonstrations and can explain her craft well.

EW-00-5-FN Ann Horkan – Irish Knitter

I met Ann Horkan in 1987 when I interviewed her for the Massachusetts component of the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife. She was asked to be a presenter and did so quite successfully though it was her first time in such an arena. She also presented at the Lowell Folklife Festival and participated in folk arts in the schools program with Laura Orleans.

Ann grew up on the Aryan Islands where knitting is a common thing to learn and do. She learned how to knit Irish sweaters from her grandmother who gave her two chicken feathers at age 4 that she was to use as needles. Throughout her childhood, Ann knitted along with her friends. They all traded stitches and learned from one another, though Ann's grandmother was the strongest influence on her. When she immigrated to Boston at the age of 17 to work as a housemaid in Brookline, she continued to knit and become involved in the Irish immigrant scene and it was at a dance she met her husband, Chris. They married and raised seven children, now all married. Each gets a new sweater for Christmas.

Ann is articulate about the knitting tradition she knows. She explains her family stitches and how stitches became associated with different families. In addition to knitting, she also does extraordinary embroidery. For example, while her daughter Julie was actively competing in step dancing competitions, Ann made all her costumes. These were richly embroidered on velvet with the designs and symbols from the Book of Kells. Today, these costumes are factory made and sent from Ireland for dancers.

Despite ill health in the past few years, Ann has continued knitting. I think she may be too frail to participate in an active program. Nevertheless, she should be asked if the occasion arises.