



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Accession Numbers:

KK-00-08-FN

Fieldnotes

KK-00-08-C

Audio recordings

KK-00-08-CS1-22; N4-20 KK-00-08-M

Photographic documentation

Additional materials

Date(s): 6/18/00

Related Accession Numbers: MH-00-02

Individual/Group/Event: Scandinavian Mid-Sommar Festival, including Spiran Orchestra and Cape Ann Finn Singers

Fieldworker(s): Kate Kruckemeyer

Location of Interview: Millbrook Meadow

Street Address: Beech Street

City: Rockport

Zip: 01966

Co: Essex

Contact person (if different from above): Judy Cocotas

Title: chairperson

Sponsoring organization (for event or group): Spiran Lodge

Address (if different from above): _____

Phone: Daytime: JC: (978) 546-2524

Evening: _____

E-mail: _____

Website: _____

Special Needs (including translation):

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): festival celebrating the Scandinavian heritage of Cape Ann; performances by the Cape Ann Finn Singers, Spiran Orchestra, and children's dance troupe of the Spiran Lodge

Traditions noted for follow-up:

Other Possible Contacts: met Cynthia Dunaway, a rosemalar (Norwegian heritage), at the festival

Summary Description: see attached

KK-00-08

Scandinavian Mid-Sommar Festival

June 17, 2000

Millbrook Meadow, Beech Street, Rockport, Cape Ann

Materials Enclosed:

Hand-out from the festival explaining midsummer traditions

Background

This fieldworker and Maggie Holtzberg had met with a small number of members of the Finnish community in January (MH-00-02) and were told about this festival. Marianne Cygnel provided us with the details of the time and place once the Spiran Lodge planned the festival.

Fieldnotes

The Midsummer (or, as the sign here said, Mid-Sommar) Festival is one of the biggest celebrations in Scandinavian communities. Here in Rockport, the Scandinavian community is majority Finnish, with a good number of Swedes as well. The Spiran Hall, which was originally the Swedish Hall, is the only still-functioning Scandinavian social club in town, and now serves the entire Scandinavian community.

The festival used to take place on one of the points outside of town (I believe Folly Point, near Folly Cove) but has recently been moved closer in to town to Millbrook Meadow. Some liked the old location better and still argue for its appropriateness, but the town location attracts more passers-by. The entrance to Millbrook Meadow is on Beach Street, just northwest of town along the shore, across the street from the public beach.

The festival runs from 12 until 2 on the Saturday nearest to the summer solstice. They have experimented with the time, but find that most people only come for the two hours, and that starting at 12 brought the biggest crowd. Indeed, it appeared to me that most attendees stayed for the whole event, and that when the performances ended at quarter of two, most people packed up and left. I would estimate that the crowd was about 200 people at its height, including many older people, and many families with young children.

I arrived at about 10 to 12, and many people had already gathered. A large percentage of the women in the crowd were dressed in traditional costumes. I spoke with a number of participants to be sure it was permissible to photograph and record (received verbal permissions from Miriam Lane, accordionist, Allie Enos, choir director, and Judy Cocotas, Spiran Lodge chairperson).

There were a number of tables set up around the perimeter of the meadow to sell food and gifts. There was one table selling coffee and nisu (traditional bread, in loaves shaped like challah, flavored with cardomon); at another table was fresh strawberries and cream; at a third was soda and hot dogs. A row of two tables held Scandinavian trinkets for sale, none of which appeared to be locally hand-made. The musicians were set up under a tree near the gifts table.

At about 12:10 the festivities opened with a flag ceremony. Six women in traditional dress marched in to the meadow, each carrying a flag (US flag followed by the flags of the Scandinavian countries). They came to the center of the field and stood in a line facing the musicians. One by one they stood forward as the anthem of that nation was played and/or sung. The order of the anthems was: U.S, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden [I assume this was done to be alphabetical after the anthem of the host country]. At the conclusion they marched out, and the flags were hung on a flag pole near the entrance to the meadow.

After this, the Spiran Orchestra played informally for a while. The orchestra varied in size from about 4 to about 8 during the course of the day. All of the members of the orchestra are adults, with most being seniors. The orchestra includes both men and women. Miriam Lane plays accordion and Ohrvel Carlson and Billy Natti play fiddle. At points, Marianne Cygnel sang and she also played accordion. John Chambers joined in with the Orchestra as well. The man playing upright bass is Walt, but I did not catch his last name.

The orchestra provided music for a performance by young dancers from the Spiran Lodge, which began about 12:30. About 12 children in traditional dress, ranging in age from 3 to 12, performed traditional and children's dances around the maypole which was erected in the center of the meadow. The children have been learning these folk dances at the Lodge, and there were a number of women present to coach them through the performance. The performance was not elaborate, but it was a big hit with the crowd. It was very hot out, so the kids stripped out of their wool costumes and into bathing suits as soon as they were done!

After this, the Orchestra continued to provide music, until the Cape Ann Finn Singers performed about 1:20. The Finn Singers are a small group (5 women, 3 men, one choir director). Marianne Cygnel, a first generation Finnish-American provides an explanation of the songs. The rest of the singers are seniors, including Billy Natti (uncle of blockprinter Isabel Natti), and choir director Allie Enos, who is in her early 80s. Allie told me that this was not a particularly good performance, as they have just lost two of their "best voices" who have recently passed away. The group sang a combination of traditional and old popular tunes. All the songs except the last were in Finnish. Miriam Lane provided accompaniment on accordion.

After the performances wrapped up, Marianne Cygnel and some of her friends (including John Chambers) played traditional music informally while people began to clean up from the festival.

I spoke with both Allie Enos and Miriam Lane about the future of the choir and orchestra. It does not seem like there are any younger people interested in joining these bands, so the future of the groups is somewhat uncertain.

I talked with both Allie and Miriam about the traditional costumes as well. Miriam said that a friend made hers, and it's a very traditional style. She notes that her accordion really wears the bodice out, though. Many people buy their costumes and have them sent from Finland. Miriam said the outfits can cost up to \$2,000. When I remarked to Allie Enos that her dress looked like it must be warm in this weather, she said that it was all wool, and that "minus 50" was the only appropriate temperature for such a dress!

The Lodge also has a festival in mid-December for Santa Lucia day. I told Miriam that we would be interested in knowing the date, as we might be able to publicize it even if we could not attend.

People:

I made continuing contact with a number of community members whom we interviewed in MH-00-02: Miriam Lane, Marianne Cygnel, Allie Enos, and Ohrvel and Carol Carlson.

I spoke with Judy Cocotas, the chair of the Spiran Lodge. She is a younger woman (with young kids) of Finnish heritage. Her husband is Finnish and Greek, thus her non-Finn last name. Judy is the person to contact about the Lodge generally, and it is easiest to reach her at home: [REDACTED]

I spoke with a number of other Lodge members, including Mary Johnson, who was very enthusiastic about our work. She introduced me to Cynthia Dunaway, the rosemaler.

Cynthia Dunaway [REDACTED]
Cynthia Dunaway is of Norwegian heritage and grew up in the Midwest. She studied rosemaling under Judith Nelson (whose last name may now be Kirstead) of Minneapolis, and John Gunderson, who now lives in Brooklyn. She came to Cape Ann about 15 years ago, and hasn't really been doing rosemaling during that time. She's also a landscape artist. She describes rosemaling as her "first love," though, and says she is feeling ready to get back to it. She's thinking of offering classes. She would be very happy to speak with us about rosemaling. Two years ago she took many photographs of traditional house painting when she was in Norway, which she would also be interested in sharing. She pointed out that rosemaling is Norwegian, but the Swedes have a comparable tradition called "dahle painting."