

PHILADELPHIA'S MUMMERS

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

The one place for Philadelphians and Eastern Pennsylvanians to be on New Year's Day is along Broad Street in Philadelphia--there, every January First, the world-famed Mummers Parade, the tunes of "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers" ringing and tingling out of violins, saxes, banjos and glockenspiels, echoes throughout the Delaware Valley. And prancing and dancing and mummering up the street come the Mummers, the most lavishly dressed, ornately costumed males, competing for prizes and the plaudits of the millions gathered to watch them ring in the New Year. Mummery in the United States dates back to the Revolutionary days, and in Philadelphia it started at Tinicum in the pre-Penn era. Families would get together at the Christmas holidays and parade in costume throughout their neighborhoods, and like the later Mardi-Gras celebration of Shrove Tuesday, it would all end on New Years Day. The first published account of Mummery occurred in 1839, when men would dress up as clowns and shout and shoot. They were called "Shooters", marching up the street, knocking on doors, going into their dancing and singing acts and shooting off guns. Travelling neighborhood bands would compete for best singer or best costumes and from these bands evolved our present day Mummers--a word that comes from King Momus, patron saint of Clowns. During the Civil War in South Philadelphia, whole families paraded down the streets, and from that time on, the custom evolved until today some

15000 marchers and three divisions are included; a comic division of masqueraders; a fancy division, gorgeously and elaborately feather-and-sequin costumed, and a music division composed of the now world-famous Philadelphia string bands. The fancy divisions are those in which groups of families--literally Mummers Clubs--take an entire year to fabricate their costumes. Some of the Division captain's capes and headdresses are 10 feet high, and on windy days, many men are needed to pull the captains in costumes around City Hall Plaza, the windiest corner in Philadelphia. I have seen some capes to the length of a half-city block. In 1901 the City of Philadelphia officially made the Mummers a part of its annual New Year's program, offering prizes for competition. The competitive spirit is such that costumes become more and more lavish each year--not merely for prizes but for the honors of the neighborhood. Competition is as great in the String Band and Comic Division--winners are invited throughout the nation to other parades. If you have never seen the Mummers Parade, New Years Day is the day to travel to Philadelphia; old timers still carry their bushel baskets with them in the early morning for seats along Broad Street's expanse--and warm clothing is a must. It's a full day's outing; it's a full year's work for the Mummers, and it has gained for Philadelphia the reputation for the largest and most lavish parade on earth--Barnum and Bailey not-with-standing. Oh, Dem Golden Slippers! They're something else! Happy New Year!

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.