

History of the Mummers and Philadelphia Mummery

Who and What Are Mummers?

To define them simply, Mummers are costumed entertainers welcoming in the New Year. Mummery is as ancient as man's dream of getting outside of customary life and as old as his imagination.

The Philadelphia Tradition

The tradition of Philadelphia Mummery started in the late 17th century as a continuation of the Old World customs of ushering in the New Year. Mummery in America is as unique to Philadelphia as Mardi Gras is to New Orleans. The Swedes were Philadelphia's first settlers. When they came to Tinicum, just outside of Philadelphia, they brought their custom of visiting friends on "Second Day Christmas", December 26. Later they extended their period of celebration to include New Year's Day, and welcomed the New Year with masquerades and parades of noisy revelers.

Philadelphia Mummers of Today

The Philadelphia Mummers of today total over 10,000 marchers on New Year's Day. There are three distinct divisions of the parade: Comic, Fancy, and String Band. Comic division clubs lampoon modern day local and national political and social themes. The Fancy division clubs wear large, ornate costumes, carrying back pieces and performing with floats and props. The String Band division clubs not only wear elaborate costumes like the Fancy division, but also drill and perform playing musical instruments. We were entertained by The Fralinger String Band organized in 1914 and reorganized in 1974 as a nonprofit organization governed completely by the membership.

The Fralinger String Band

The band made their debut in the mummers' parade in 1915. In 2007, the band made history by winning its fifth consecutive first place prize in the parade with the theme "One in Spirit", portraying the tribal legends and spirituality of Native American culture through traditional dances, stunning authentic costumes, heart-stopping pulsating drums, chants, music, and dance.



Since 1967, Fralinger has finished in 1st or 2nd place 26 times, with 12 first place prizes. The band has traveled all across the United States and the world, as a goodwill ambassador for Philadelphia and for the mummers, performing in parades, concerts, and corporate and civil events.

Mummery has a somewhat controversial past and you may obtain additional information about that history by visiting the many websites on 'mummers.' To learn more about the Fralinger String Band you may visit their web site at <http://www.fralinger.org/>.