

Portuguese Immigration to Danbury

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One of the reasons I chose the Portuguese Immigration to Danbury as my object of study is personal. Both my parents came to the United States in the 1960s and I felt firsthand what it was like to be the daughter of Portuguese immigrants in the Portuguese community of Danbury, Connecticut and in the wider American community. I felt great pride in my Portuguese heritage. This feeling was instilled in me very early on, for I watched and participated in the various manifestations of cultural pride. It was an honor to be a member of such an old and unique culture.

Furthermore, although there was Portuguese immigration to Danbury (the city where the first Portuguese club in the United States appeared in 1924), as early as 1910, it is among the least known of all immigrant communities. I hope that my project, carried out in the '90s as I prepared my Master's thesis, can be a contribution to the history of Portuguese immigration in Danbury. This project was written with the clear intention of providing information gathered from interviews I conducted with people who lived in Danbury in every decade from the 1920s to the 1990s. These interviews present a vivid testimony of how people acted and felt at the time.

My deepest thank you to all those who in some way—through interviews, pictures, books, moral support—contributed to the writing of this document, especially my parents—José Ereio Marques and Emília da Encarnação Ribeiro Marques—for being my pillars and my role models.

In the hope of presenting an accurate picture of Portuguese immigration to Danbury, I have interviewed thirteen people who lived there in the period about which they spoke. From the 1920s to the 1990s I have gathered information on the various aspects related to immigration: the language, culture and living conditions of the immigrants and their adaptation to the host country. All the interviewees are of Portuguese descent, some having been born in Portugal, others in the United States, but all are, or were, active members of the Portuguese community in one way or another. They occupy diverse positions in society, but one thing they have in common is their love for and pride in the Portuguese culture. They are true Portuguese-Americans for they have become productive members of the American community without forgetting their linguistic and cultural heritage.

The first Portuguese immigrants arrived in Danbury in 1910. They appeared in the census of that year: a Portuguese woman, her daughter and her thirteen boarders. They had come from Fall River and Providence because there was little work in the local factories. The boarders either worked in a glue shop or as farm hands. The woman worked in a fur shop.

Some of the interviewees mentioned that their parents had come to Danbury after having lived in Bristol, MA, or Pawtucket, RI. Portuguese workers had built a good reputation in the Lee Hat Factory in Massachusetts and were aggressively recruited to work on local road construction crews. A considerable group of people had also come to Danbury from these areas because of the textile crisis. At the same time, the majority of the Portuguese community came from two Portuguese regions: Lousã and the outskirts of Gouveia. They came as early as the 1920s. When new immigrants came over, they tended to settle where someone from their region already resided. It gave them the security of knowing, or at least thinking, that they were not completely alone in this new world.

In the 1920s, there were more Portuguese men than women in Danbury. Some of the men married Italian women because they were similar to the women they had left behind. They were good cooks, good housekeepers, good mothers and even the language was understandable. One interviewee mentioned the names of six Portuguese men who married Italian women (A. Ventura, personal communication, February 4, 1998). It was also very common for men to come single and then return Portugal to marry. Others spent years apart from their wives, for it was not easy to reunite the entire family. Fathers wanted to be able to provide their family with a place to live and a job; they wanted them to have something better than what they were used to.

Because there was such a large number of single men, the *casas de malta* appeared (A. C. Azevedo, personal communication, February 2, 1998). Groups of men would live together in a house and would share the responsibility of cooking, cleaning and performing household chores. Many of these houses had comical names and they represented an all-male environment. There were three such houses in the city of Danbury. All of the men who lived in the *casas de malta* worked in construction.

Two of the interviewees, whose fathers owned grocery stores (A. Ventura, personal communication, February 4, 1998 & N. Lopes, personal communication, February 17, 1998), remembered going to take orders from the men living in *casas de malta* at four p.m. One of the interviewees (A. Ventura, personal communication, February 4, 1998) had a very vivid memory pertaining to the living conditions in these houses: they had no carpet, no linoleum, the tables were made by the men, as were the benches they used. The grocery store would put out items in the morning for some of the men to make their lunches. This gesture must have brought back many memories of Portugal.

The families that immigrated together would usually rent a large house in order to take in boarders. Many of the single men decided to live as boarders, because in this way they had someone to cook for them, someone to wash their clothes and the comfort of being part of the family. It was also important for the family to have boarders because it was an added income. Some of the money was used to pay the rent and the rest was saved. The women stayed home at the time, so they took care of the boarders. Needless to say, the boarders were of Portuguese

descent and limited their living and shopping to the Portuguese commerce already in existence. These houses were called *casas de bordo*, taking the American word “board” and including it in a Portuguese phrase. It was customary to take in as many as six boarders (E. Hilário, personal communication, February 16, 1998). Usually, the children had to make their beds, for everyone’s effort was appreciated. Sometimes the boarders would sit and talk with the family. Respect was key: if it were absent they were asked to leave.

Amazingly, various interviewees (M. T. Salgado, personal communication, February 18, 1998 & I. Barreto, personal communication, February 18, 1998) mentioned that in addition to taking care of the house, the family and the boarders, many of their mothers still took care of children during the day. Not only did mothers work in the household, but they also made most of the important decisions. Their husbands accepted whatever the wives did as long as they were informed of the decisions. They still wanted to maintain the patriarchal attitude prevalent in many of their villages of origin.

The only language spoken at home was Portuguese, for some Portuguese parents did not understand English, and all of them wanted their children to keep alive the language of their heritage. Even between siblings, speaking Portuguese was the law. One of the interviewees started school speaking very little English, even though she had been born and raised in Danbury. This example just proves how valued the learning of the Portuguese language was at the time. One interviewee (A. Antonio, personal communication, February 16, 1998) even mentioned that 99% of those born in Danbury spoke Portuguese. Although some did not like it, all understood it and all responded to it. To keep their native language alive many Portuguese immigrants never learned English. The women tended to pick it up more because they were out in different situations: shopping, taking children to the doctor and taking them to school. They were forced to learn because they had to use it on an almost daily basis.

In one striking example, João Cunha is said to have built his own house in 1929. This event amazed both Portuguese and Americans. He had not been in the country very long, yet he was courageous enough to tackle all the bureaucracy that building a house entails. He, like many Portuguese immigrants, was truly trying to make his stay in America as

much like home as possible.

As early as the 1930s, there were four Portuguese grocery stores (three owned by the parents of three interviewees), three Portuguese bakeries and two Portuguese restaurants (one owned by the parents of one of the interviewees) in the Danbury area. The Portuguese community soon realized that it could invest its money, and see it flourish, by serving their own community. This community felt more comfortable going to a Portuguese store, where someone spoke their language and understood their diet, than to the other markets. It became a haven for them where they could buy products similar to the ones they had left behind. Eighty-five to ninety percent of the clients were Portuguese and they shopped almost every day. Not only could they buy the products they preferred, but they also had the opportunity to pay for them at the end of the week when they got their check.

I am very proud to state that the two Portuguese restaurants were the only ones in Danbury to serve food and drink to black people during the years of segregation. Perhaps the emotional, social and cultural change brought about by immigration made them realize that all of us are different, just as all of us are the same.

I had the honor of interviewing one of the daughters of the first person to open a Portuguese grocery store in Danbury in 1924. She was a woman named Maria José Santos and her store sold meats, groceries, vegetables and fruits. She used to make *chouriça* (Portuguese sausage) to sell, for it was indispensable in the Portuguese diet. It was common for boarders to shop there, three of whom lived above the store with the family.

My interviewee (M. J. Enteadó, personal communication, February 9, 1998) helped in the store, met her husband there and later had her son work there, too. She remembers a man from Newburgh coming once a week to get food for his forty boarders. He was an overseer of road construction and his wife would cook for the boarders.

For entertainment she remembers playing *pêla*, a game typical of the northern part of Portugal. In the game, someone has the *pêla* (ball) in the right hand and throws it in the air. Whoever is able to catch the ball wins. There is also a bench in the game, if the ball hits the bench one wins.

The parents of one interviewee (A. Antonio, personal communica-

tion, February 16, 1998) bought a restaurant, *Chave D'Ouro*, in 1939 and kept it until 1973. The restaurant catered to the Portuguese community. It primarily served the single men of the community by preparing and packing their lunch and by cooking for them a typically Portuguese dinner consisting of soup and a hot dish. They would sometimes serve as many as seventy to eighty men. The men would have to pay fifteen dollars a week; only rarely would they not pay. It was very uncommon to see a family eating out: 90% of the customers were men. In order to show solidarity with the Portuguese merchants, the restaurant would buy food from one store one week and from another store the following week.

The father of one interviewee (N. Lopes, personal communication, February 17, 1998) was in contact with steamship companies before the war and sold passages to Portugal. He did all this knowing little or no English. During the war there were no ships, but as soon as the war ended he was back in business. When the airlines came, he went to New York to try to do business with them. He could not get an appointment before showing he could sell the tickets, so that was his first step. In 1945, he bought a grocery store and put a travel agency on the second floor. This agency would later be bought by his son.

The members of the Portuguese community started buying more property in the mid-1940s. One of the first individuals to buy a house—Franklin Neves—was criticized for buying it so far away from the community, even though he was only one street down (M. A. Andrade, personal communication, February 22, 1998).

One interviewee was constantly surrounded by the Portuguese language since he worked in his parent's restaurant and many times became the men's advocate at the doctor's or the lawyer's office. Two interviewees, whose parents owned a grocery store, remember taking men to work places to translate for them. It was a common practice to help the newcomers whenever possible. As more immigrants came from Portugal, the Portuguese residents felt they had more power. The one thing that continued to bother them was that they had no one in high places, no one who could lend them a hand in medical or judicial situations. They were forced to arrange for a translator whenever more serious situations occurred.

In the hope of making their influence more present in the Ameri-

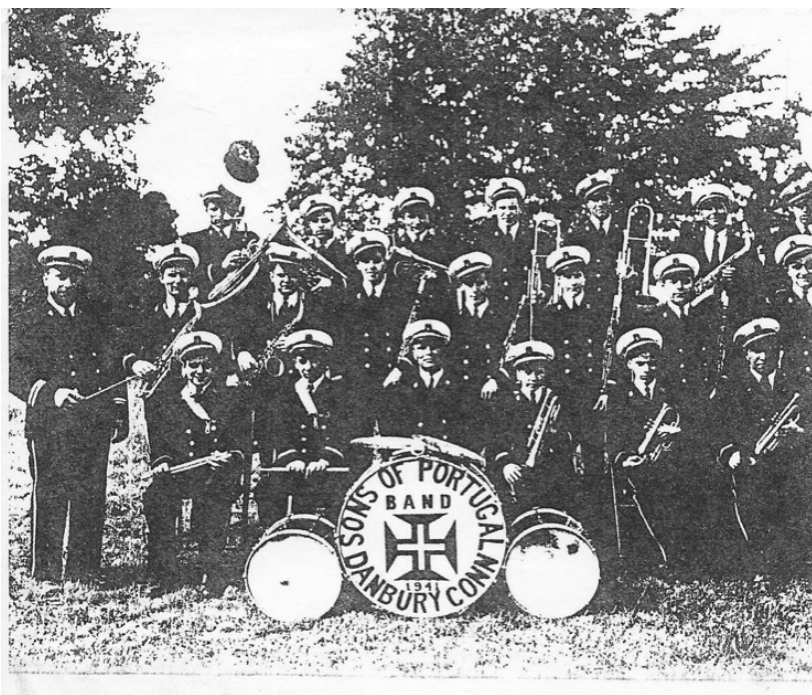
can society where they lived, Portuguese immigrants formed the Civic League. This league had the clear objective of helping the Portuguese population of Danbury become an active and valid member of its social framework. In this framework no area was considered impossible to reach: if it was more difficult, there was just the more reason to try harder. Thanks to the efforts of this league, Álvaro Rodrigues, Nelson Macedo (nominated police chief in 1977), Eurico Oliva and Arnaldo Souza became policemen, a previously unheard of position for members of the community.

There were two important meeting places for community events: the old Invicta club founded in 1929 (prior to the Portuguese American Club which was founded in 1946) and the Sons of Portugal club founded in 1924. At the Invicta club, a man named Mr. Coutinho would rehearse plays with the youth and then present them to the rest of the community, sometimes even to Portuguese communities in other states.



The drama group that rehearsed with Mr. Coutinho.

Later, at the Portuguese American Club (PAC), they formed a folklore group to present the songs and dances of the mother country. How important and emotional it is to see our culture appreciated in another land! In the Sons of Portugal Club there were many important cultural associations: the Women's Drill team founded in the 1930s, the Sons of Portugal Band founded in 1941 and the scholarships awarded to students of Portuguese heritage (1964).



The Sons of Portugal Band in the early years.

From the '30s right up to the '60s, every Saturday there was a dance at the Sons of Portugal club. Soda and food were sold and all the money went to the club. A group of girls, with their mothers, went to these dances. The mothers would stand on one side and the girls would stand on the other. Young men from neighboring cities would come and the girls preferred to dance with them. There was no dating at the time, just meetings at the club. Later on, they naturally married someone from the Portuguese group because that was the group they knew well. Parents' opinion and authorization were very important at the time. Teenagers tended to follow their parents' advice, and only rarely did they go against their wishes. One of the men I interviewed and his wife were brave enough to elope because they knew the love they had for another would, in time, be understood by both their parents. Their love story has lasted over fifty years.

The clubs were not solely devoted to cultural events. They also served a vital function for the men who lived in the *casas de malta*, because they provided them with a place to take a shower. Renting a house back then was very different than it is today—sometimes even baths were limited.

Tio Francisco Cruz, as a member of the PAC, would read the Portuguese newspaper *Diário de Notícias* of New Bedford to those who could not read. He is also said to have written many letters to American people. Other men would write in Portuguese for the men who were not fortunate enough to be able to communicate to their relatives due to their lack of formal instruction. Those who knew how to read and write did it for others who did not; it was truly a community where mutual help was prominent.

Some of the men who knew how to read and write taught many second generation immigrants. This assistance benefited the learners very much since early on there were no Portuguese language teachers available.

Another activity that emerged later on in the '40s was the coming of artists from Portugal. They would come to the US and the community would gather at the club to eat a Portuguese meal to the sound of authentic Portuguese music: *fado* and *corridinho*. It was an opportunity to be with friends and to reminisce about “*aquela aldeia que eu deixei atrás do mar*.”

At Christmastime a group of Portuguese would sing the *janeiras* and would go to people's houses. The *janeiras* are typical of Christmas and New Year's Eve and involve singing and going from house to house in order to interact and eat figs, nuts, cake and all the festive goodies. Anyone could join the group singing through the streets. I remember my parents and their friends keeping this tradition alive. We did not go in the streets but we visited each other, sang the songs and gathered in a very joyful atmosphere. I am very sorry to see that these traditions, which used to bring the community together, are fading away.

Other holidays united Portuguese and American cultures to form uniquely Portuguese-American celebrations. People would make outfits for Halloween representing different Portuguese regions and they would proudly display them in a parade on Main Street. Another Portuguese-American holiday was Memorial Day and the Memorial Day

Parade. The Portuguese community would make it a point to participate as much as possible by means of the Band, the Women's Drill Team and The Ladies Auxiliary. The first Portuguese Day Parade was either in 1959 or 1960 and it is a tradition that is still strong today. Although it was forgotten, it has now emerged stronger than ever.



The Drill Team and The Ladies Auxiliary marching in the Memorial Day Parade in the '40s.

The father of one of the interviewees (M. T. Salgado, personal communication, February, 18, 1998) traveled expressly to New Jersey to get a teacher. He wanted the children of Danbury to learn the Portuguese language with all its grammar and vocabulary, as well as Portuguese history and culture. Parents paid something like one dollar a month and the Sons of Portugal club contributed the rest in order to pay for the teacher's service to the community.

All the interviewees were unanimous in saying that they felt no discrimination, even in the American school system. One did mention

that there was little or no contact between the school and the home, most likely due to the language barrier. I was informed that Ms. Beatriz Almeida was the first Portuguese person to have graduated from high school (in the year of 1939-1940).

One of the interviewees has the honor of being among the first Portuguese students to finish high school, and to finish with honors, something *extremely* rare in the community at that time. Her father said that he wanted to leave his children with an education, a notion not very common at a time when children were put to work as soon as possible. Another interviewee remembers going to work in a hat factory at the age of sixteen. Her father died when her brothers were in high school, but her mother paid for them to go to college. Sometimes being the oldest or being female burdens a child with greater responsibility in the household, for her perhaps it was both.

When the Portuguese arrived in the late '20s, many went to work on the construction of railroads. They lived in work camps and took turns, trading off weekly the responsibilities of cooking and doing the laundry (M.A. Andrade, personal communication, February 22, 1998). The camps would move as the work on the railroad progressed. The atmosphere at these camps was truly multiethnic because they gathered people from all over the world. One interviewee even mentioned that her maternal grandfather had learned to speak fluent Italian with some of his friends at the camps.

A lot of people returned to Portugal during the Depression because they felt they had no means to survive without a secure job. Social Security benefits did not exist at the time, so they had to rely solely on themselves. Surprisingly enough Social Security became a reality as early as the '30s.

The workers in the hat factory were almost all of Portuguese descent. While it was still dark they would leave home, only to return home in the dark once more. Their salary at the time was fifteen dollars a week. During the war, many had to go to Bridgeport to work in the defense factories, a move some of them feared because they were leaving a sure job.

In the late '30s, Portuguese women worked either in hat factories or in fur shops. Very few women stayed at home, a change from their initial

role. They had the job of opening the furs, while the men in the fur shop had the dangerous job of separating the fur from the animal with spikes. It was a risky, dirty and bad-smelling job that caused some Portuguese men to become handicapped (A Antonio, personal communication, February 16, 1998).

It is important to keep in mind that the women worked out of the house and then came home to a second job. They had to cook, clean and wash the clothes by hand. The first washing machine only came in 1939, and even then it was only for the very well off.

Another place where a majority of Portuguese men worked was the construction company of B. J. Dolan. In the 1940s construction would pay anything from twenty-five to fifty cents an hour, a lot more than was earned in the hat factories. As unskilled workers, the pay was more than they expected, besides which, they felt that they had no choice. When they were working far from home, they would build shanties to live in. Mr. Alípio Lopes, the owner of one of the grocery stores, would take the workers food for the entire week. In the winter, when construction was impossible, they would work shoveling snow. The construction workers would have to work all summer long and save at least seven hundred dollars in order to be able to provide for their family in the winter. It was hard to make ends meet, and being able to save more than what was needed for the winter time was a rarity (P. Mendes, personal communication, February 21, 1998). Workers could be a little jealous in terms of jobs, but they were the best of friends and helped each other whenever needed. A lot of construction in Danbury was done by Portuguese workers. Danbury was known for having a lot of work, but those who were not fortunate to have work usually had the support of the community.

Between the '30s and the '50s, it was rare to see educated persons immigrating to Danbury; most Portuguese immigrants came from small villages and had little instruction. There was one exception to this rule: Joaquim Oliveira. Soon after he arrived, he started teaching children at the Sons of Portugal club. He was a teacher in Portugal and wanted to share his knowledge with others. He was an educated person who had fled from the political regime in Portugal—Salazar's dictatorship.

Having a car in the early 1930s was considered a luxury. Going shopping became a family activity because everyone was needed to carry bags

(I. Barreto, personal communication, February 18, 1998). Those who had grocery stores had trucks, but the others had to wait until the late '30s. They did not earn much money, so they really had to save to get a car. They would have to walk to work, even in the winter time. There were no days off because of snow or ice. Sometimes they had to crawl, but they went to work. Working and saving were the reasons they had come to America and they meant to make things happen. There was a trolley to Bethel, a nearby town where some Portuguese people worked, but many refused to take the trolley so they could save the five cents (N. Lopes, personal communication, February, 17, 1998).

Teenagers gave all the money they earned (sometimes eighteen dollars and fifty cents a week) to their parents. They only got fifty cents as an allowance, but they were not bitter because their parents gave them the best they could afford.

One interviewee's parents helped many Portuguese immigrants upon their arrival to Danbury by helping them get jobs and settle in (M. T. Salgado, personal communication, February 18, 1998). This philanthropic action lasted well into the '70s. There was an atmosphere of helping each other that I witnessed first-hand with my parents, who were always ready to support the members of the community.

The only real rivalry that existed was between the two Portuguese clubs. The second club, the PAC, came into existence in 1946 because of an argument and that rivalry existed for many years. Today, both clubs have come together in the Portuguese Cultural Centre. One interviewee even mentioned that people coming to Danbury already knew, in Portugal, what club they were going to belong to (M. A. Andrade, personal communication, February 22, 1998). The club was, and continues to be, a spot where Portuguese men come together after work. It is a place where they can unwind and speak, in their home language, of the dream of returning to Portugal or of making a living in the US.

Solidarity amongst the Portuguese community was very strong. The community was small and concentrated in one area (Little Portugal), so everybody knew everybody else. People had nicknames for each other, a sign of the closeness that existed at the time, and many were even called by *tio* and *tia* (uncle and aunt). When a member of the Portuguese community died, all the second shift workers would take off work to go

to the wake and the funeral was paid for by the community if necessary. They would not go to work the next day. It was their way of showing friendship and unity. I was told a story about a Portuguese man who was killed working on the railroad. The community paid for everything and was able to gather some money and send it to his family in Portugal. When someone died, their family would wear black and not listen to the radio for a year, no matter where the deceased was.



The sixth annual convention of the Portuguese Continental Union of the USA (1935). This convention helped many people at various levels of community life.

During the war, there was a lot of work in the defense industries. People worked long hours and had money, but sometimes there was nothing to buy. The owner of the *Chave D'Ouro* had all the coupons he needed for the restaurant, so many times he would give them to people who did not have them. After the war, things got much better.

When one of the Portuguese boys came back from the war, he was

so happy that he grabbed a guitar and began singing through the streets at one in the morning. The mother of one interviewee threw water down on him to make him stop, but he just kept on singing. The joy of a Portuguese heart when it has returned home!

I had the honor of interviewing the first Portuguese person to open a factory in Danbury (E. Cruz, personal communication, February 11, 1998). He opened his plastic company, Danbury Plastics Inc., in 1950 with seven employees, two or three of whom were Portuguese. In 1952 he bought land and in 1956 he put up a building on Beaver Brook Road. The factory manufactured various objects in plastic, from fancy dress buttons to bottle caps. The factory is currently run by his son. It has approximately ten employees and is devoted to the manufacturing of plastic products.

In order to be the first Portuguese businessman in Danbury, Mr. Cruz had to learn how to weave with an American thread. When he first came to the US, he was anxious to learn the language, for he wanted desperately to communicate. He read all the street signs in his own way and he constantly used Portuguese-English and English-Portuguese dictionaries. He learned to read and write by himself and never went to school to learn English. One way he learned was by listening to the radio with a pad and pencil and attempting to write what was being said. He also read everything he could get his hands on.

The opinions of the interviewees vary on the subject of church-going. All the men indicated that going to church was rare because it was impossible for the Portuguese community to relate to the English used there. One even mentioned that, upon going to the local priest to get a paper for school, the priest said that no Portuguese people came to Mass after having been baptized. The women, on the other hand, said that every Sunday they would go to church. It did not matter that they did not understand the ceremony, what mattered was that they had the opportunity to worship the Lord. Two of the interviewees (M. T. Salgado personal communication & I. Barreto, personal communication, February 18, 1998) even remembered getting breakfast every Sunday morning after Mass—a treat that was not very common in other circumstances.

The celebration of two popular saints was of great importance to the Portuguese community: Saint Anthony and Saint John. Both celebra-

tions occurred in the month of June. There were outdoor picnics and the grocery stores would alternate offering the leg of beef for the day. Just like any Portuguese party, there was a band playing and it became a festival of food and sound. I might say that there was little veneration of the saints in question. The picnics were important because they provided opportunities for people to come together. For some it was also a time of prayer, a prayer to the saints that were closest to their Portuguese heart.

In 1959 a law was passed that allowed American citizens to send for their siblings. Even better, it was now easier for entire families to come together. There was no longer the need to wait years and years to reunite parents and children. As a consequence, the '60s and '70s saw the second wave of Portuguese immigration to Danbury. The Portuguese population increased greatly and Little Portugal became, at one point, totally inhabited by Portuguese immigrants and dominated by Portuguese stores. In 1959, a liquor store joined the grocery store and bakery, bringing a different kind of commerce to the Portuguese community (M. A. Andrade, personal communication, February 22, 1998). Different, but certainly a prosperous one since a Portuguese meal was only complete with its red or white wine.

The immigrants who came after 1960 were more educated than those who had come before. Some had already begun their studies in Portugal, so to them the reality of America was surprising but not completely foreign. They were able to progress more quickly and were more ambitious: buying a house sometimes did not take more than two or three years of hard work. By now, the Portuguese had the reputation of being hard workers, so it was normal to find a job shortly after having arrived. I can remember two factories in which the majority of the workers were Portuguese. There it seemed the Americans had to learn Portuguese and not the other way around (E. E. Marques, personal communication, February 28, 1998).

Everyone bought a car as soon as possible, because winters were very harsh and some distances were much greater than what they were used to in Portugal. Things were no longer concentrated in the Main Street area. One of the interviewees opened an insurance agency in the back of his grocery store (N. Lopes, personal communication, February

17, 1998) in 1964-1965 and he certainly saw it prosper. The Portuguese were coming to realize how necessary insurance and other bureaucratic measures, which they did not have at home, were in the US.

In 1974, they were fortunate enough to have a weekly Portuguese radio program: Radio Portugal and a Portuguese newspaper *Impacto* Portuguese News. In 1980, WFAR, the first Portuguese Radio Station in Connecticut to have daily broadcasting, began. It was reassuring, and a bit nostalgic, to hear Portuguese music and news from Portugal. The radio station was one more bridge linking immigrants to their land and their culture. They could hear *fado*, a type of music much appreciated by the Portuguese community because many times it related their situation as immigrants. Still they felt that this was not enough.

The Portuguese community continued to keep their language and culture alive by maintaining the activities performed in the past: dances, picnics, social and cultural associations and religious practices, but two things were missing: a church and a place to create a Portuguese school. They needed a place where they could worship and teach their language and culture. Parents could teach some of what they knew, but with both parents working it would be extremely hard (E. E. Marques, personal communication, February 28, 1998).



A procession in honor of the Our Lady of Fátima. (1970s)

On September 28, 1975, the Portuguese school began at the Saint Peter School in Danbury. The Saint Peter Parish allowed the Portuguese community to use its church and school. At the time, it functioned two days a week with four teachers for the elementary and middle school levels. Thirty-seven students, between the ages of six and fifteen, were enrolled. Through the years, Portuguese school was held at many different public schools in the evening and there were always problems because things went missing. It is hard to teach children four to six hours a week a language they think they already know and in a setting where they cannot touch anything. It took much persistence and the dedication of many members of the Portuguese community to make it work.

Finally, in 1982, the Portuguese community was able to buy a church they named The Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. They had raised almost one million dollars to do so. They no longer had to celebrate in

another community's church because they would now have their own house of worship. It was a dream they had nurtured since the arrival of the first Portuguese priest in the '60s. This priest traveled to and from Bridgeport in a true labor of Christian solidarity (M. C. Mimoso, personal communication, February 27, 1998). Later, the priests stayed at Saint Peter's Rectory, but there was nothing comparable to having their own space. In their own rectory, the Portuguese and American languages were in common and equal play.

The building bought by the community had a church, a rectory, an area they converted to a hall and a community center where Sunday school, as well as all the religious and cultural activities, could take place. The church was also to be a place where newcomers could go if they needed help with getting a job or getting settled in. Since the community had grown so much, it was not as easy to find people to help and, in this way, those in need knew where to go for assistance. The church building was a place to pray, and also to contribute to the growth of the individual as a whole: linguistically, culturally and socially.

It is amazing when one realizes all the effort, all the long hours of work and all the motivation that went into raising the money and then renovating the building for the community. To raise the money the community used dinners, dances, bazaars, booths at the Danbury Fair, door-to-door knocking and telethons, because the more raised the better. The whole community became involved and all disagreements were put aside because they had a common goal. Many Portuguese immigrants worked without getting paid a cent, for they realized the importance this had for the community of today and of tomorrow (E. E. Marques, personal communication, February 28, 1998).

The church has approximately five hundred parishioners and a pastor who is available for spiritual guidance, weekly mass and devotions and the religious celebrations so dear to the community (A. C. Azevedo, personal communication, February 2, 1998).

Many cultural and social associations came about through the church's intervention: Girl and Boy Scouts, youth groups and folklore groups that keep the Portuguese flame alive through their dancing and singing (M. C. Mimoso, personal communication, February 27, 1998).

Also in the year of 1982, the Portuguese school began to function in

the rectory because the pastor gave up his room in order for the children to have a place to receive their education. It was not until 1987 that the school had its own building and was named *Escola Manuel Cipriano* after one of its greatest promoters. It still functions in this building today. The school now has over 40 students and three teachers and it is able to persist thanks to the tuition the parents pay. It has little support from the Portuguese or American governments. It is truly created for and by the community.

There was one sad episode that showed how united and how much home-town spirit there was among the community. This was the unfortunate fire of March 1984. It made the first page of the local paper with all the information on how it was thought to have started, the death of an elderly Portuguese man, the rescue procedures, but nothing about the solidarity that came afterwards. Even the seven families who were left homeless were amazed at the speed and the care the community took in helping them. The radio station, near the burned building, and the church immediately started a clothes and furniture drive for these families. The gift of giving was embodied at that time by many people through numerous actions. The building had a Portuguese grocery store (Fernandes, originally Ventura's) on the first floor, a Portuguese grocery store that had been there since the '30s. It was wonderful to see that a fellow Portuguese proprietor offered an area in his building to keep the store going. The whole community made an effort to keep things as normal as possible and today that area is called Portuguese Square (M. C. Mimoso, personal communication, February 27, 1998).

The number of Portuguese-owned businesses is so great now that it is even hard to be exact about their number. From jewelry stores to construction companies, to travel agencies, to bakeries: the number is immense. All have Portuguese-speaking employees and all cater to the Portuguese and American communities in the best way they know how. Many of them sell products that have come directly from Portugal. It reminds one simultaneously how Portugal is so far away and yet so close.

Not only has the Portuguese community gone into business, but it has also concentrated more on education. Nowadays, all students go through high school and most of them finish college. It was very important for all Portuguese youth, even going back to the '60s, to have a Portu-

guese lawyer practicing in the community. This proved that taking other avenues was a possibility. Now the range of professions occupied by Portuguese people is varied. They are at almost every level of life in Danbury: doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, accountants—the list could go on. The community no longer has to worry about having Portuguese people in high places because it has become a reality. There are even several members of the city common council that are Portuguese, showing that they have even entered the realm of politics. Since the more recent generations have had time to learn the language and culture they have more fully taken on their role in the American community (in comparison to previous generations, who did so much more quietly).

The more educated members of the community also keep in contact with the Portuguese culture. It becomes a means of reliving the past, of having a feeling of belonging, of telling their offspring that the Portuguese worked hard, but they were able to create an atmosphere that molded them into who they are today. They also try to help the community in any way they can. The Portuguese lawyer offered free consultations when the church building was being bought and he often aids the community without asking much in return. Portuguese professionals are of service to the community and at their service, much in the way that the first community of Portuguese were to each other. The sense of mutual aid has endured and influences the actions of today's community members.

The tradition of having yearly picnics or dinners for the Portuguese regions with greater representation in the city began in the late '40s and continues to this day (A. Ventura, personal communication, February 4, 1998). Every year immigrants from *Folgosinho*, *Ferreirós do Dão*, *Ribamondego*, and *Vila Franca* come together with others from their village to eat, dance to Portuguese music and reminisce about the past. The important thing is that these gatherings are not limited to reliving the past; on the contrary, most of the money they make is used for the betterment of their village. They have not forgotten their background and they are proud to see it flourish with their contributions. If there is a crisis in the village or something needs to be repaired, the whole community will come together (not just those who are from that particular village) to raise money. By sharing their good fortune with those who were less for-

tunate, they are able to say thank you to all who helped them back home.

Drama groups also began in the '30s and have been in and out of existence through the years. It is surprising to see how interested the teenagers are in participating in this activity. Not only are they the majority in the folklore groups; they are also predominant in the drama club too. Some of these teenagers are third generation Portuguese-Americans and it is reassuring to see that they are intent on preserving the Portuguese language and culture as they learned it from their parents and even grandparents. Their participation demonstrates that it is possible to integrate into the American community and maintain, at the same time, Portuguese customs and traditions. These teenagers go to American schools, have Portuguese and American friends, work at American or Portuguese businesses and are still able to play an active role in living their heritage.

A celebration that clearly demonstrates Portuguese pride and the desire to convey this pride to all around is the Portuguese Day Festivities on or around the tenth of June. The tenth of June is the day devoted to the Discoveries, *Camões* and the Portuguese communities around the world. The festivities begin with a small ceremony and the raising of both the Portuguese and the American flags, at the John Perry Memorial in Rogers Park. The memorial commemorates Perry's contribution to perpetuating Portuguese Day. The ceremony is followed by a Mass at the Portuguese church where members of the Portuguese and American government and associations participate, as well as the community at large. After the mass, the various floats are organized and the parade begins.

These floats have cultural and religious traditions, mythical and relevant figures of Portuguese history and the traditions of villages in Portugal as themes. The folklore groups (from the church and the club) and the Sons of Portugal band make the parade come alive with their dancing and their music. During the parade, speeches are made and the community is reminded of the importance of this day for all Portuguese people around the world.

The parade ends at Portuguese Square with the recognition of a fellow Portuguese community member who has helped the community grow. It is a day in which the community's pride in being Portuguese is even more evident and certainly more manifest to the entire Danbury population.



The Immaculate Heart of Mary Folk Dancers participate in the Portuguese Day Celebrations.

It is not so much that the Portuguese Day festivities are front page news, but that the Portuguese heritage is brought to light for the entire day. The day is solely dedicated to activities related to this event. After the parade, those who contribute to the celebration eat lunch together and each year this lunch is the responsibility of either the club or the church.

Portuguese language and culture refers to not only the past, but also the present. The community does not dwell on the great achievements of its countrymen of hundreds of years ago. It tries to make its own place in history, the history of the Portuguese community of Danbury. Yes, it is important to know the past, for without it we would not know where we belong, but constructing the future is a task the Portuguese community takes on with great responsibility.

Ending this section are two quotes from a member of the Portuguese community on two different Portuguese Day festivities. One quote is a reason to keep this tradition alive: “We don’t want our children to

forget where they came from and the achievements of our people”(M. Ribeiro, 1991). The other is the embodiment of the ideal behind the community: “Five hundred years ago, the imagination and spirit of the Portuguese people had no boundaries. I ask you to have no boundaries as we build our community right here” (M. Ribeiro, 1992). Having no boundaries in imagination and spirit is the backbone of the community.

