

Twentieth Century Settlers in the Blackstone Valley

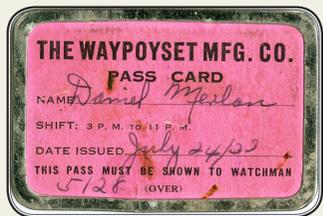
Museum of Work & Culture, Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Far From Home, But Close in Our Hearts



Bicycle racer Julio Merlan, 1945, courtesy of Linda R. Lundgren

Not every group that came to the banks of the Blackstone was a large one. Some immigrants arrived as individuals or families. Often part of a family would come to the Blackstone Valley, while other members would go to another U.S. city, Canada, Central and South America. Immigration to the U.S. was only one part of a global demographic shift happening in the Industrial Age.



Wayposet Manufacturing Company pass card, 1933, courtesy of Linda R. Lundgren

While Daniel Merlan came to Pawtucket from Spain, other branches of the family went to South America and



Workers at Solway Dyeing & Textile Company, Pawtucket, 1930, courtesy of Linda R. Lundgren

Cuba; others remained in Spain. These siblings and cousins stayed involved in one another's lives. In the 1930s Spanish men and



Modern Grinding truck, owned by Joseph "Pepe" Blanco, c.1940, courtesy of Linda R. Lundgren

women in the Blackstone Valley began collecting money to help people living in poverty in Cuba, and ultimately helped bring Cuban relatives to the U.S. We also know that Mr.

Merlan participated in a larger national drive during the Spanish Civil War to raise money for children in Spain as part of the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.



Spanish postcard of refugee children, c.1938, courtesy of Linda R. Lundgren

Portuguese Populate the Valley: New Generations Remain Connected

Most of the Portuguese families that settled in the Blackstone Valley in the early 20th century came from continental Portugal, rather than the Azores or Madeira. In 1921 this community formed the first Portuguese social organization in Rhode Island, the Clube Juventude Lustinana, located in Cumberland. Even today 90% of the Clube's members are from the *Continente*. Still a vital part of the community, this organization has grown to include a philharmonic and marching band, a Portuguese school, a folkloric dance group, and



Portuguese Class, from *The Woonsocket Call*



View of Clube Juventude Lusitana from Chase Street, Cumberland

a soccer league. The Clube directs most of its activities toward the younger generations, children, teenagers, and young adults, encouraging them to invest in the

preservation of Portuguese cultural traditions.

The visibility of the Clube is heightened during its outdoor festivals, particularly during the annual Festival of St. John, or São João, in late June. Music and the smells of grilled sardines and chouriço sandwiches



Man ready to grill sardines at the Clube's Festival of St. John, photo by Dalila Goulart

fill the air, while the Clube's band and dancers perform.



Left, Rancho Danças e Cantares performing at the Festival of St. John
Right, The dances of St. John, both photos by Dalila Goulart

