

Diaspora and Community Building: The Portuguese in Cambridge, Ontario

Autor(a): Karen Dearlove | **Saiba mais sobre o(a) autor(a)**

Tema: História

Subtema: Azores, Canada

Referência geográfica do conteúdo: Cambridge, ON, Canada

Data de publicação: 29/05/2010

Línguas disponíveis: English

Situação do artigo/trabalho: *(Artigo/Trabalho em Apreciação)*

RESUMO

This paper discusses the history and development of the Portuguese community in Cambridge, ON, Canada, from the perspective of an Azorean diaspora community.

CONTEÚDO

This paper will discuss my home-town of Cambridge, Ontario and the development and significance of the Portuguese community in Cambridge. Because next to no history has been written about the Portuguese community in Cambridge, I will be both narrating and describing the history of this uncharacteristic Portuguese diaspora community in Canada, as well as how it narrates or portrays its own history in the city of Cambridge.

Cambridge is a city of 120,000 in southwestern Ontario. It is located about 100 km from Toronto, the largest and most ethnically diverse city in Canada. Cambridge was amalgamated in 1973 from the union of four communities, all of which were founded in the early 1800s. Up to the 1950s the population of Cambridge was overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon; the ethnic background of its residents was primarily Scottish, British, Pennsylvanian Mennonite, and many descendants of Loyalists from the American Revolution. A large German community lived nearby in the city of Kitchener, formerly known as Berlin. But starting in 1954 the demographic character of Cambridge began to change, at first slowly but as I will discuss soon rapidly and exceptionally.

Today there are approximately 30,000 residents of Cambridge who are either immigrants from the Azores or descended from Azorean Portuguese. The Portuguese community in Cambridge represents the largest non-Anglo group in the city.

Why is there a Portuguese community in Cambridge? Cambridge was not and still is not today a primary destination for immigrants to Canada. The largest Portuguese communities in Canada are located where you'd expect them to be: in Toronto, in Montreal and in Vancouver; large metropolitan areas that are destinations and centres for immigrant communities in general. The Cambridge Portuguese community is estimated as the third largest in Canada. Studies of Portuguese immigration to Canada have neglected Cambridge's diaspora community. While there have been a few cursory studies on the Portuguese in Cambridge, most works concentrate on the large multicultural urban hubs. Yet Cambridge has a distinct and visible Portuguese community composed of nearly 95% Azorean immigrants and their descendants, and, as I will discuss shortly, this community is largely, and perhaps surprisingly, the legacy of one man. Today I will first talk about the history of the Portuguese community in Cambridge. Then I will talk about the Portuguese in Cambridge as a diaspora community and how it tells its own story within the city. Through its businesses, organizations, institutions, and celebrations like the Portugal Day parade, the Cambridge Portuguese community emphasizes its roots in the Azores, and its history as a diaspora community in the New World.

The Azores have long been a source of migrants to the New World. Azoreans helped colonize Brazil, and immigrated to the United States and Canada. Most Portuguese immigrants to North America have come historically from the Azores. However, restrictive immigration laws passed in both the United States and Canada during the Great Depression in the 1930's nearly ceased the flow of Azorean Portuguese to North America. Before the relaxation of Canada's immigration laws in 1953, the Portuguese population in Canada was less than 4,000. Between 1946 and 1952 only 680 Portuguese immigrated to Canada. In 1953 the Canadian government revised immigration laws to fill the serious demand for low-skilled labour in Canada's rapidly expanding agricultural, resource extractive, manufacturing, and transportation industries, spurred by the major economic boom of the 1950s.

The Canadian government in conjunction with the government of Portugal recruited Portuguese immigrants to work in Canada. In 1953 alone, 550 Portuguese men, the majority from the Azores, were recruited as a cheap bulk labour force for agricultural and infrastructural and industrial construction projects, especially railroad building. A number of these men did not stay long in their recruited jobs scattered far and wide on the urban peripheries and resource frontiers of the vast Canadian landmass: picking fruit and vegetables in rural Ontario building railways in northern British Columbia, harvesting tobacco outside Hamilton or working on dairy farms outside Montreal.

Manuel Cabral, born of Azorean immigrants near Boston in the United States and living in the Cambridge area since 1928, opened his doors to a young Azorean immigrant who had arrived recently in Cambridge. Drawn by the generosity of Manual Cabral, the familiarity of the growing Portuguese community and the allure of good-paying factory work many found their way to Cambridge. Manuel Cabral emerges as the founder of this close-knit Portuguese diaspora community. He drew the first Portuguese immigrants to the area in the 1950s. Cabral personally housed the newcomers, helped them find employment, taught many of them English, served as a legal interpreter in Cambridge and nearby communities, and acted as a cultural interpreter between the growing diaspora community and the wider community. Manual Cabral served several important functions within the Portuguese community: facilitator encouraging immigrants to settle in the area and as a patron of the emerging community. Cabral is recognized as the "father of the Portuguese community in Cambridge," and in 1997 he was inducted into the City of Cambridge's Hall of Fame.

In 1955 twenty-five Portuguese immigrants found work building a Cambridge rail-line. That brought the number of Portuguese in the Cambridge area to seventy. Near point-to-point chain migration, reinforced by the sponsorship of immigrants by local Portuguese patrons pioneered by Cabral made the Cambridge Portuguese community grow almost exponentially. By way of this process, by 1971 there were over 4,000 Portuguese in the area. Less than a decade later the Portuguese population of Cambridge was 10,000. The flood of Portuguese immigrants to Cambridge in the 1970s corresponded to the peak era of Portuguese immigration to Canada. Over 79,000 settled in Canada during that time, 65% came from the Azores. One-fifth of all the Azorean immigrants to Canada in this period settled in the town of Cambridge. The Portuguese community of Cambridge represented the third largest in Canada after only Toronto and Montreal. Toronto and Montreal, however, are cities of well over one million people, and throughout the twentieth century have been the primary destination for immigrants coming to Canada. Cambridge, by contrast, is neither a large urban centre on that scale nor a prime destination for most immigrants to Canada. Yet in Cambridge a large primarily Azorean Portuguese community has been established that comprises nearly one quarter of Cambridge's population. The Portuguese community in Cambridge is unusual and exceptional, not just in terms of Portuguese-Canadian immigration, but also in the history of immigrant communities in Canada in general.

Community coalesced around the establishment of important organizations like the Portuguese language Catholic Church, the Oriental Sports Club, the Portuguese club, and the Portuguese language newspaper.

Language and religion are frequently discussed as important "cultural markers" of ethnic and diaspora communities. When the first Portuguese immigrants arrived in Cambridge, naturally, no local church offered service in Portuguese. The community originally met for religious services in a local Catholic church, and a Portuguese priest came in from the city of Hamilton to provide services. By 1966 the Portuguese community in Cambridge raised \$50,000 to construct the Our Lady of Fatima church. It is the site of several important Portuguese religious festivals, including the Our Lady of Fatima feast and the procession of Santo Cristo.

The Portuguese Club of Cambridge, organized in the late 1950s and officially founded in 1960, was the first Portuguese organization in Ontario to have its own headquarters. Originally called "Portuguese Paradise," the club has its own musical and folk groups, and sponsors an intra-city football, the Supersonics, who play on the field constructed at the club in 1980. The Oriental Sports Club, founded in 1966, also serves as a focal point for this principle recreational pleasure of the Portuguese community: football matches.

O Lusitano, the Portuguese language newspaper has been published in Cambridge since 1978. Published every two weeks

with a circulation of approximately 3,000, *O Lusitano* was distributed by subscription and through Portuguese stores and organizations in Cambridge and Toronto. Gerry Bairos, the publisher of the paper from 1986 to 2004, explained the purpose of *O Lusitano* as an important tool for maintaining a sense of community, creating dialogue within the community about issues like organization and self-representation, and to educate the second- and third-generation youth growing up in Cambridge about their Portuguese culture and heritage.

The Portuguese community in Cambridge is serviced by numerous Portuguese-owned businesses, including food markets, restaurants, real estate and travel agents. Most local banks and organizations advertise bilingual services, so much so that it has been said that "for a Portuguese person coming to Cambridge it is not necessary to know English."

The community also coheres around the annual Portugal Day celebration in June, which celebrates the growth of the local Portuguese community and the acceptance of the Portuguese within Canada. Portugal Day parades were held in Cambridge since the early 1960s. Gerry Bairos, who helped organize the Portugal Day celebrations in 1994 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Portuguese community in Cambridge, explained what he believes is the purpose for the Portugal Day parade: for the Portuguese community to show itself to the city of Cambridge, and to celebrate the historic accomplishments of Portugal.

The parade winds its way through downtown Cambridge, with displays celebrating the communities' roots in the Azores. Past parades have featured displays celebrating each of the nine islands of the Azores. The accomplishments of the great Portuguese explorers, especially their connections to the New World, are displayed in the parade. The explorer Joao Vaz Corte Real was granted land in the Azores following his discovery of Terra Nova do Bacalhau in 1474, New Land of the Cod Fish, which may have been the island of Newfoundland. His sons, Gaspar and Miguel, returned to the New World, exploring the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. The parade of course celebrates the epic poet Luis de Camoes, whose life and works are commemorated each year on Portugal Day. The parade ends at the Portuguese monument, erected by the Portuguese community in 1979 to mark the 25th anniversary of the Portuguese community in Cambridge. On Portugal Day the Portuguese national flag is raised at the monument while the Portuguese national anthem is played. The flag is flown until Canada Day, July 1st, when it is replaced by the Canadian maple leaf. The inscription on the Portuguese monument reads: "In appreciation for the courage of the pioneers and gratitude to Canada and their people." The Portuguese monument is in the shape and form of a padrao, a stone marker erected by Portuguese explorers during the age of discoveries denoting Portuguese discovery and possession.

Padroes were erected through the world where Portuguese navigators and explorers went, from Africa to China. A replica of the padrao is carried in the procession of the Portugal Day parade in Cambridge. The Portuguese community in Cambridge narrates its own story through the parade and the Portuguese padrao monument. They portray themselves as explorers and pioneers in the New World. The institutions, organizations and businesses established by the Portuguese community, like the Portuguese monument, provide the community a firm sense of belonging and permanence within Cambridge. While maintaining connections to their roots in the Azores, the Portuguese community has made their mark in Cambridge, and they proudly tell their diaspora story to the larger Cambridge community.