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Portuguese, Azorean, Cape Verdean History Program Planned For December 7

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The history of the Portuguese, Azorean and Cape Verdean migrant community of Falmouth is the focus of a free, daylong program Saturday, December 7.

The “From Field to Town” program includes site visits and discussions with scholars, researchers and residents exploring settlement and contemporary issues among waves of migrants and descendants from Portuguese-speaking regions to Falmouth.



The Portuguese-American Association of Falmouth is one of the hosts of a discussion program about the history of Portuguese, Azorean and Cape Verdean migrants in Falmouth.

“Oral histories of key historical civic associations in Falmouth’s agricultural history and their current role in the town’s civic life will be given, and presentations include research from local public and private archives,” a release from the organizers said.

The presentations will be held at the Fresh Pond Holy Ghost Society Hall at 408 Carriage Shop Road from 9:30 to 11 AM; the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth at 126 Sandwich Road from 11 AM to 12:30 PM; and the Falmouth Portuguese American Association at 55 Ashumet Road from 12:30 to 4 PM.

The program is sponsored by these associations along with the Portuguese and Brazilian Studies Department of Brown University, with support from the Fundação Luso-Americana in Lisbon, Portugal; Falmouth Historical Society; Woods Hole Historical Museum; and St. Anthony’s Church Falmouth.

Miguel Moniz, one of the organizers and presenters, grew up in Falmouth. He is now an anthropological researcher at a university in Lisbon and a teacher at Brown University in Rhode Island.

“Most of what has come out about Portuguese communities outside our local stories in books, archives and in the Falmouth Enterprise has been about industrial mill workers,” Mr. Moniz said. “When people think of Portuguese migrants, they often think of Provincetown, fishing or cranberry and strawberry production, and this program is in part a corrective to that kind of narrative.”

In addition to stories related to migrant workers, the program will be a celebration of ethnic identities and the “quiet contributions” of residents to the civic life of Falmouth, Mr. Moniz said.

“We’ve uncovered incredibly rich stories of migrant workers’ lives and their escape from the harsh conditions of mill and agricultural life, particularly during the 1910s and 1920s, a time of rabid anti-migrant sentiment,” he said. “By telling these stories, we explore moments of collaboration and conflict among different Portuguese communities and others. Reflecting backward on these histories will provide insight into contemporary inequalities and challenges faced by migrants today.”

The daylong program is part of Mr. Moniz's semester-long mobile, community-engaged learning module for students in the Brown University class "Migration, Political Activism and the Racialization of Labor" that has examined migrant worker histories, labor power inequalities and contemporary challenges in former and contemporary communities of Portuguese-speaking industrial and agricultural workers.

The presentations at the Fresh Pond Holy Ghost Society Hall, which was built in 1900, are titled "Socio-Religious Associations in Falmouth: Oral Histories of the Fresh Pond Holy Ghost Society and the East Falmouth Espírito Santo Irmandade" and "History of Espírito Santo/Holy Ghost Feasts in Falmouth."

Holy Ghost or Espírito Santo feasts are held from late spring through the summer throughout the Azores and in Azorean migrant communities, including all over New England.

Mr. Moniz will discuss these traditions with members of the Fresh Pond Holy Ghost Society and the IDES of East Falmouth. Ethnographic artifacts and photographs/videos will be on display.

The presentations at the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth, which was chartered in 1944, are titled "A History of the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth and Current Activities" and "Cape Verdean history in Falmouth and Cape Cod."

Speakers are Wesley Leite, the club's former president, and Barbara Burgo of Rhode Island College, who is director of the new Cape Cod Cape Verdean Museum and Cultural Center.

Other speakers are Maria Branco of University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and Falmouth historian Lewis White.

The events at the Portuguese-American Association of Falmouth, which was chartered in 1983, include a potluck lunch followed by a welcome from association president Michael Duarte and vice president and selectmen chairwoman Megan E. English Braga.

The presentations are titled "Early History of Portuguese Migration to Falmouth" and "New Portuguese-Speaking Migrants in an Old Yankee Town: Stories of Cooperation and Conflict in the Building of Falmouth" and "Portuguese Language Instruction in Portuguese-Speaking Communities."