

Migrant Communities Project wins grant to highlight Portuguese and Cape Verdean history

[LURDES C. DA SILVA](#) O Jornal

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FALMOUTH – Portuguese and Cape Verdeans have made major contributions to Falmouth and the Upper Cape’s society, but their tales and accomplishments are sometimes forgotten.

That’s something the Falmouth-based [Migrant Communities Project](#) (MCP) wants to change, and their efforts were just given a boost thanks to a \$20,000 grant from [Mass Humanities](#) as part of the foundation’s Expand Massachusetts Stories program.

“One of the things that is really exciting for me in MCP receiving this grant award is that Provincetown gets all the press as far as ‘Portuguese on the Cape,’ but the fact is that since the 1920s/1930s Falmouth has had far more immigrants from Portugal and Cabo Verde than Provincetown. I would argue Falmouth has had much more lively and engaged immigrant community institutions than our counterparts down Cape,” said MCP Executive Director and project facilitator Dr. Miguel Moniz.

A Falmouth native, Dr. Moniz is an anthropologist who conducts research on Portuguese and Cape Verdean migration in New England at the [University of Lisbon](#).



Dr. Miguel Moniz is the director of the Migrant Communities Project.
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Dr. Moniz said MCP’s winning proposal, the “Community Scholar Immigrant History Initiative,” is a citizen scientist project that will train and assist members of Portuguese and Cape Verdean communities to tell their histories. He

“The histories of Falmouth’s Cape Verdean and Portuguese communities are most often written by those who have little everyday familiarity with these settlers and their families,” he said. “The Immigrant History Initiative is a chance for Cape Verdeans and Portuguese to tell their own stories. Too often we think of the history of immigrants in Falmouth as something separate from the history of Falmouth, but the immigrant history of Falmouth is the history of Falmouth.”

‘Project is a unique and innovative way to create history’

Dr. Moniz said MCP will work with members of the Portuguese and Cape Verdean communities, who will conduct archival research, record oral history interviews, and collect artifacts and documents to create a historical and ethnographic traveling exhibit.

“This project is an opportunity to demonstrate that history and vibrancy,” he said. “We will look at the rural and agricultural practices of these communities and how they transformed as agriculture collapsed in the decades after WW II and attempt to understand the place and practices of contemporary immigrants from Portugal, Cabo Verde and other geographies in Falmouth today.”

For Dr. Moniz, the project is a unique and innovative way to create history as it is designed as a community scholar project.

“The idea is that the people who social scientists usually research and speak for are instead given the tools to help them to tell their own stories,” he said. “In turn, these stories are given a context so that they can contribute to scientific studies.”

What will the grant be used for?

The Mass Humanities grant will support the creation of exhibits, an oral histories collection, an on-line research archive, and workshops.

The MCP plans to launch a webpage with resources about the history and culture of Cape Verdean and Portuguese settlers on the Upper Cape and in the region, including their social, political, and socio-religious organizations.



Philomena Gilbert (left) and Corrie Green, the past and current Presidents of the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth.

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The research resources of the website will include historian Jim Gould’s decades-long genealogy project creating a near comprehensive map of immigrant families from the Cape Verdean and Azorean islands to Falmouth, Scituate, Cotuit, and Marstons Mills.

Dr. Moniz said that MCP worked with the Special Collections Archives at UMass Dartmouth to digitize this collection, which is expected to be catalogued by December of this year.

In addition to immigrant community organizations like the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth and the Portuguese American Association, the Falmouth Public Library and Sprintsail, the journal of the Woods Hole Historical Museum, are among the educational and humanities institutions collaborating on the initiative.

Interested in participating? Here’s how

As project facilitator, Dr. Moniz will offer workshops.

“There will be three four-week workshop modules between Oct. 26 and Spring of 2024,” he said. “These modules will provide training on how to conduct oral history interviews and in historical methods. Interested community scholars will learn about how to approach gathering historical documents and information, and what makes an artifact useful to tell a broader story, how to tell that story.”

The first workshop will start on Thursday, Oct. 26, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. It will run for four weeks (10/26, 11/2, 11/9 and 11/16).

The second four-week module will begin in early 2024 (1/18, 1/25, 2/1 and 2/8). The third will take place in April-May (4/18, 4/25, 5/2, 5/9).

“Participants can always join in online, but there will be some hybrid in-person meetings where we meet at different locations in Falmouth,” he said.

Anyone who is interested in participating in the workshops or has any ideas for people to be interviewed, should contact migrantcommunitiesproject@gmail.com

If stories are not documented, they may be lost forever

Corrie Green, the president of the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth, and Lew White, a community historian who wrote the book *Sopas* about the 120-year-old Fresh Pond Holy Ghost Society, are project directors who have worked on previous MCP history initiatives and will act as community mentors.

Green said her involvement with the MCP has been “a fulfilling and creative learning experience.”

“We learned a lot about the club that we didn’t know and learned a lot about the community from stories that people shared, spending time with one of our elders who knows a lot of the history,” she said. “This next phase of the project will help us build on previous research and help the public understand the important place and history of the Club and Cape Verdeans in Falmouth.”

White said it’s imperative we record these stories sooner rather than later.

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