

PERSPECTIVE



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NEW ARRIVALS: Portuguese people have been coming to Canada for centuries, but May 13 marks the 50th anniversary of the first arrival of immigrants from that country under government recognition.

Portuguese celebrate milestone

More than 300,000 people of Lusitanian origin now call Canada home



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NEWCOMERS**

On May 13, 1953, the first group of Portuguese immigrants, officially recognized as such by the government of Canada, arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax aboard the ship *Saturnia* from continental Portugal, as well as from the Azores ar-

chipelago and from the island of Madeira. This event is being celebrated today, almost 50 years to the day, at a special ceremony that will be attended by the Portuguese minister of foreign affairs and other diplomats.

A group of 40 Pier 21 alumni from Ontario will be travelling to the province to walk down memory lane at the pier, where between 1928 and 1971, more than one million European immigrants landed to make Canada their home.

But the connection of the Portuguese to Canada strengthens as one walks down the memory lanes of history as old as the hills. The European settlers, according to records, had travelled to this continent even before the British and French laid claim to

North America.

The expedition of Diogo de Ter-
vi, in 1452, is said to have provided information for Christopher Columbus. Then, of course, later records point to considerable activity in the North Atlantic in the 15th century, and there are stories of Portuguese catches of Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) in Canada from 1896 to 1934.

It was at about that time that Portuguese emigration had begun. More than one million people had left Portugal for Brazil between 1886 and 1950. But it was not until the Canadian and Portuguese governments signed labour-contract agreements to supply railway construction and agricultural workers after the Second World War that Canada became a popular option for Por-

tuguese immigrants for the first three decades after the war.

The major Portuguese emigration was from the Azores and, in particular, the island of Sao Miguel. In the 1996 census, it was estimated that as many as 335,110 people of Portuguese heritage lived in Canada.

Early settlement was obviously marked by hardship, but today one sees the community spread across the economic life of Canada. Their business, as well as social clubs, adopt the name Luso-Canadians, which is a reference to Lusitania, the ancient name associated with Portugal under the Roman empire.

Organizations such as the Federation of Portuguese-Canadian Businessmen and the Association of Portuguese Businesses in Winnipeg, and Alliance des Professionnels et En-

trepreneurs Portugais du Quebec indicate the growth in small business throughout the community.

The majority of Portuguese have settled in Ontario and Quebec, and in urban neighbourhoods such as in Dundas and College Streets in Toronto, the bustle around the fish stores, the restaurants, bakeries and grape wholesalers are evidence of a vibrant community. The Portuguese community newspapers, such as the *Voz de Portugal* in Montreal or Toronto's *Correio Portugues* are only two among the 50-odd Portuguese newspapers across Canada.

Indeed, it is to celebrate the adventure and the memory of that first arrival aboard the *Saturnia* that the community gathers on Tuesday.

Give them a hand.
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