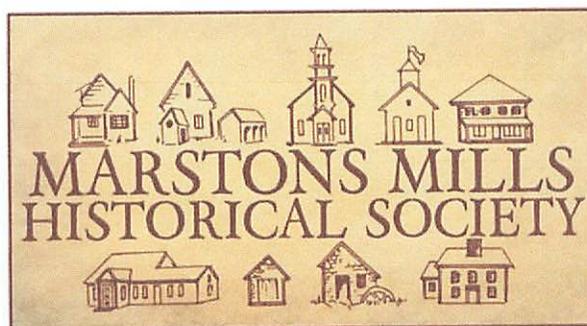


Marstons Mills Historical Society  
Interview with Leonard Mendes  
(by Nancy Wong & Jim Gould)  
February 28, 2012



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marstonsmillshistorical.org

I was born in 1935 in Onset in my Mother's family home, but came at once to Marstons Mills, where I've lived most of my life. My Mother, Isadora Gomes, was born in Onset, but her family came from Brava, in the Cape Verde islands. My Father, Christian Mendes, came from Fogo in the Cape Verde Islands. They had ten children, six boys and four girls: (in order) Jenny, Clara, John, Richard, Lino, Edward, Dorothy, Leonard, Mary and James. See attached family tree. All of us were home births at my mother's family home in Onset.

Our first home in Marstons Mills was on River Road, next to Sebastian Pina, which we rented from Margaret Pina. I remember the character Gideon Lovell who lived at the junction of Lovell's Lane and River Rd. sawing wood. Gideon always walked wherever he needed to go and was known to walk long distances. He'd turn down offers of a ride. Then we moved to Cammett Rd. to the house my sister now owns. We had chickens, goats and a pig. John Duarte, an Azorean, had a farm where he sold eggs and strawberries. A neighbor was Oscar Kearney, the cook at Henry Hilton's "The Roost" motel and restaurant on Route 28, which is now Osterville Pines. My wife would clean the summer cottages.

When I was 14 or 15, I worked at Clear Lake Duck Farm with Tom Hadley who was my age. We fed the ducks and turkeys, and had fun riding the little railroad. There was only a dirt road where Mystic Drive is today. I first worked outside, then inside. There were incubators, plus processing of the ducks for market. Grain for the duck farm would come into the West Barnstable railroad station on Rte 149.

I caught herring with nets at the Mill Pond, and took them home for Mom to fry, but I didn't eat them--- too many bones. I'd swim every summer day at the bottom end of Middle Pond. On the night before Halloween we'd take apples from the apple orchard behind the school and throw the apples out onto Route 28 in front of the school—we got in trouble for that. In 1970 we built this house at 177 Cammett Way. This was all vacant land when we were kids and we used to play cowboys and Indians here. We went to school in the building that is now the Lawrence funeral home before it was moved. Loring Jones was the postmaster and owned the Cash Market. I always loved to get vanilla ice cream there. There was only the old post office, library, Liberty Hall and the church.

I went to Harwich, then lived in Marshfield from 1959 to 1970 when I was driving trucks and working on construction of Route 6 between Hyannis and Dennis, also on Routes 25 and 195. I did construction until I worked for the Cotuit Water Department in 1981. I retired in 2001.

My wife, Lois, is the daughter of Louis Pina, who was born in the States, to a family that came from Fogo to Scituate. Her mother was Beulah McGaw, an Irish woman from Maine. My father was an only child—his mother died in childbirth and he was raised by his grandparents. He came here when he was 21 and worked on the railroad.

I remember my brother Leno (he did sax and vocals) had a group which included Charles Amado (guitar), his brother George (drums), and Louie Mendoza (guitar). I had played organ, but stopped in 1975 when I became an on-call fireman at the Marstons Mills Fire Station. I was on-call for 22 years. I remember Kevin Kavanagh and his sisters used to come here in the summers.

Cape Verdean families in Marstons Mills were Roderick, Moniz, Perry, Pina, Monteiro, Lopes, and Baptiste. Manuel Moniz was a contractor, who owned the land where Country Garden now is, where he had a farm stand selling vegetables and strawberries. His wife was Lena Moniz. He was the biggest developer-contractor-landscaper at that time and did a lot of work in Oyster Harbors.

Manuel Roderick lives next door to his family home on River Rd. He worked in politics for the Kennedys and was one of Rose Kennedy's pallbearers. John Baptiste lived on Osterville-West Barnstable Rd. and worked at the dump. Antone Monteiro had lots of pigs on Osterville-WB Rd. Chris, the "Pig Man", had a pig farm on Lumbert Mill Rd. Marshall Lopes had an artificial hand---he married Pearl Perry. The Gomes family (Manual Gomes and his wife, Lina or Angelina) lived on Cammett Road---there were 3 boys and 3 girls. Many of the families in this area came here from New York.

Almost all Cape Verdeans are Catholic. We went to church at St. Jude's on Route 28 in Santuit until they moved it. I remember Father Walton Buckley and Father Driscoll. I was an altar boy. Now we go to Osterville.

The main local Cape Verdean festival is St. Anthony's in June. There's a tree hung with fruit, under tents we put up in the lot next to Ben Perry's on Old Mill Rd. Until the 1970s it used to be at Manual Brando's house, which was down the street from Joe's Twin Villa. I would be the bartender. We don't have any trouble with drunks, though once a guy from New Bedford got out of hand. About 75 to over 100 show up from as far as New Bedford. David Pina of Bumps River Rd. does the food and the women bring dishes like corn soup, fish and Jag (rice and beans). There's homemade wine. There's a big St. Anthony's banner, and a St. Anthony's statue that the women used to rotate among their homes each year. Cape Verdean music was played by a group from New Bedford.

