

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INFORMANT: MANUEL J. ALVES  
INTERVIEWER: JOHN M. REIS  
DATE: APRIL 22, 1981**

**Manuel J. Alves  
8 Meadow Drive  
Lowell, MA 01854**

**R = JOHN REIS  
A = MANUEL ALVES**

**Tape 81.07**

R: Please state your name.

A: Manuel J. Alves.

R: Where were you born?

A: Madeira Island.

R: What year did you come to the United States?

A: 1921

R: Where did you live in the United States?

A: On Central Street.

R: Did you leave your parents back in Madeira?

A: Yes.

R: In what city were you born?

A: I was born in 1899.

R: Where?

A: St. Roque, Madeira. Funchal, Madeira.

R: Why did you come to the U.S.?

A: To better myself.

R: Did you leave any family behind?

A: At the time I left my father, my mother, three sisters and a brother.

R: When was the last time you saw your parents?

A: 1926

R: Did you remember your parents?

A: Oh yes.

R: Do you still have any family left?

A: I have one sister.

R: When was the last time you saw her?

A: 1974

R: Where did you work in Lowell?

A: I learned to weave in the Hamilton Mills. Then I worked as a weaver.

R: Do you remember how long?

A: No, I don't remember, but it was a long time.

R: Where else did you work?

A: I worked at the American Hide Company, where they process the skins. I worked in the Southwell Mills in Chelmsford until I retired.

R: So you worked in three mills?

A: I worked in four. I worked as a trimmer for the ice chests for a while.

R: When you came to the U.S., who did you come to?

A: I came to my cousin's house.

R: Where did they live?

A: They lived at the time on Central Street. They then moved to Tyler Street.

R: How long have you been living here at this house?

A: This house about, it will be fourteen years next October.

R: Where did you live before that?

A: Crawford Street in Lowell.

R: Have you always lived here in Lowell?

A: Yes.

R: Do all your children speak Portuguese?

A: They used to but not anymore. They forgot.

R: How many brothers and sisters in your family?

A: I had three sisters and one brother.

R: Are they all here in the U.S.?

A: No. No. They're all in the Madeira Island.

R: When was the last time you saw them?

A: Well, in 1974 I only had one sister living and the others had passed away.

R: Are you the oldest one in your family?

A: I'm the fourth one. I only have one sister younger than me.

R: Do you remember your mother?

A: Oh yes.

R: What do you remember about Your mother? Can you describe her?

A: She was a short woman, stubby.

R: What did she do?

A: Took care of the house and the children,

R: What was your father like?

A: My father use to work in the winery, where they process the wine.

R: Can you describe him?

A: He was a little bigger than me, but the same weight.

R: Do you remember anything your mother taught you?

A: No, no, it was too long ago I think.

R: Did your mother ever have a job outside of the house? A job?

A: No, she used to take care of the gardens.

R: Your parents never came to the U.S.?

A: No.

R: Did your mother ever earn money at home?

A: No.

R: As a child, do you remember having to do chores around the house?

A: I use to help in the garden.

R: Do you remember your father ever teaching you anything?

A: No. I don't remember.

R: How many years of schooling did you have in Madeira?

A: In Madeira I started school when I was seven, and I completed elementary school and went to engineering school but I never finished.

R: Did you go to school here in the U.S.?

A: Not steady.

R: What kind of school did you have?

A: I went to school to try to learn English.

R: Did you ever learn to read and write in English?

A: Yes, a little bit.

R: Why did you stop going to school?

A: I was getting old.

R: Was there something your parents wanted you to do with your education?

A: When I was in Madeira, I was employed in an embroidery factory as a clerk.

R: Was that what your parents wanted you to do?

A: Yes, that's the only thing.

R: Was there a certain type of job you always wanted to do, but could never do?

A: No.

R: Did you ever have a job making money when you were little?

A: No.

R: What kind of job did you have when you first started working?

A: Here?

R: No, back in Madeira.

A: I start to work in the embroidery factory as clerk.

R: How many years did you do that for?

A: For about two to three years.

R: What did you do with your money?

A: I tried to save it.

R: How old were you when you started to work as a clerk?

A: I was seventeen years old.

R: Did you make a lot of money?

A: Not much money. That's why I decided to come to this country. I didn't make enough to pay for my shoes.

R: What year did you come to the U.S.?

A: 1921

R: So you were twenty one when you came to this country? What was your first job here in the United States?

A: My first job here was weaving.

R: Where?

A: In the Hamilton Mills.

R: How did you get the job?

A: My cousin asked for me.

R: Can you describe your job?

A: I was weaving with the loom. I was running sixteen looms weaving flannel.

R: In your job, did you have to do the same thing everyday?

A: Yes.

R: What was the mill producing?

A: Different kinds of cloth.

R: They only made the cloth?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember how many people were employed there?

A: I don't know.

R: Do you remember how many shifts they had?

A: At the beginning they had only one shift.

R: How many years did you work there?

A: About ten to fifteen years.

R: Did they have more shifts when you left?

A: No.

R: Did you have to punch a clock?

A: No. Not at the time.

R: Did you ever take any time off from work?

A: Yes after eight hours.

R: I mean did you stay out of work for a couple of days?

A: No. Only Saturday and Sunday really.

R: When you worked, was there someone always watching you? Was there always a supervisor?

A: Yes we always had a supervisor.

R: Do you remember any certain rules, like no smoking?

A: We couldn't smoke at work but they had a smoking room.

R: Did you have to dress in any certain way?

A: No. Everyone dressed differently.

R: Did you have a quota to meet each day?

A: No.

R: How many hours did you work each day?

A: About ten hours per day. We started at seven till five.

R: Was your work dangerous?

A: No.

R: Do you recall any accidents?

A: No. Once in a while the shuttle comes off the loom and sometimes hits you. I never got hurt working there.

R: What was it like working in there?

A: It was very good.

R: Was it hot in the summer and cold in the winter?

A: Oh yes.

R: Were there a lot of smells?

A: No. Not bad.

R: Do you remember the machines changing as the years went by?

A: Yes they always changed, modernized.



R: Do you remember talking to other people that use to work in the mill? Did you know a lot of people?

A: Yes.

R: When you were working, did people get promotions?

A: Yes once in a while they got promoted.

R: How were the promotions arranged, do you know?

A: I don't remember.

R: Do you remember your boss?

A: Yes. It was a man.

R: Did you have a lot of women working there? Were there more men or more women?

A: It was more or less the same.

R: Did you like your boss?

A: Yes.

R: At the Hamilton Mills, did you have any social life, or was it just work?

A: Work come home and work.

R: You never had picnics or anything?

A: No, not at the time.

R: Did your company ever offer benefits, like insurance?

A: Not in those days. After they did.

R: Did you ever complain to your supervisor about any problems?

A: No.

R: Did you ever belong to a Union?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember the name?

A: The Independent Union.

R: Were you active in the Union?

A: Yes.

R: Where were you working when you got into the Union?

A: In the Hamilton Mills.

R: How did you get involved in the Union?

A: I didn't get too much involved in the Union.

R: Was the Union popular in Lowell in those days?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember anything the Union ever did?

A: I don't recall anything.

R: Do you remember getting any support from the Union?

A: No.

R: Did anyone harass you because you belonged to the Union?

A: No.

R: Did the Union ever go on strike?

A: Yes

R: Do you remember why?

A: Because they tried to give more work

R: Who started the strike, do you remember?

A: The weavers. (smiling)

R: How did the management react to the strike?

A: They tried to settle the strike.

R: Did you gain anything from the strike?

A: Not much.

R: How long were you on strike for?

A: I don't remember but it wasn't very long. Two or three weeks.

R: How did the strike end?

A: They tried to settle it but we didn't get nothing.

R: Did the Hamilton Mills ever change? Did they have new buildings put up or anything?

A: No. They just moved out. They moved to Manchester.

R: During the Depression, do you remember anything?

A: Yes. I was married during the Depression. 1928. When the Depression started.

R: What happened to the mill?

A: Kept moving out some went to the South. like the Hamilton Mill went to Manchester.

R: They moved out because of the depression?

A: One thing led to another.

R: How did the depression effect Lowell?

A: Very bad. I was working sometimes two days a week, sometimes three, sometimes four days a week. I always worked.

R: What happened to the industry here during World War II? Do you remember?

A: They lost a lot of business.- Especially textile mills. I worked in the Boott Mill, Merrimack Mill, then I went to American Hide.

R: How long did you work at the American Hide?

A: Two years

R: Do you remember John Goes?

A: Yes, I know John Goes.

R: I had this same interview with him a couple of weeks ago. Do you still talk to him?

A: Yes. He's from Madeira.

R: Did you fight in World War II at all?

A: No.

R: What were some of the hardest parts about working in the mills? Do you recall? Was it long hours?

A: It was long hours. When Roosevelt came in he changed it to forty hours per week. Eight hours per day, five days a week. That's when they stopped paying overtime.

R: How were the conditions in the mill?

A: Not too bad.

R: Did you have any advantages while you were working?

A: No.

R: What was the best thing to happen to the Lowell people since you've been working?

A: Well I don't remember.

R: When Roosevelt changed it to a forty hour week, do you think that was good for the workers?

A: Yes. (His wife reminds him of things in the background.)

R: What was the worst thing that happened? Do you remember?

A: I don't remember. Nothing happened to me.

R: Do you have any special recollections? Things that happened.

A: No.

R: How do you feel about closing the mills?

A: I felt bad.

R: How long have you been out of work?

A: Not very long. I always work a few days a week. Not now anymore. I am now retired for ten years. When I retired, I was seventy years old.

R: What do you think of the former mills being designated as historical sites?, Do you think it's a good idea making an old mill into a museum?

A: Yes.

R: Do you think Lowell is a historical place?

A: Yes to me it's historical.

R: Can you tell why?

A: Because it was famous for its textiles.

R: Do you remember what Lowell was like when you were younger?

A: No.

R: Can you describe Lowell?

A: It was about the same.

R: Did you ever go to any specific clubs for recreation?

A: I use to go to the Portuguese Clubs. To the different clubs. Portuguese, American Civic League, Portuguese American Center.

R: Did you always go to the church?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember going to any restaurants in downtown Lowell?

A: No.

R: Was there any part of Lowell you never liked?

A: No.

R: Was there any part of Lowell you did like?

A: I was living in back of Central Street until I moved to Pawtucketville.

R: What was your neighborhood like?

A: Good.

R: Was it all Portuguese?

A: Mixed Portuguese and Irish, and French.

R: Did you work with all these people?

A: Yes in different places.

R: Have a lot of your neighbors moved out?

A: Yes. A lot of them.

R: Do you know where they have gone?

A: Different places.

R: Do you think Lowell has grown?

A: Yes, I think so.

R: Do you think it's because of its schools or the jobs?

A: I think the jobs are getting better.

R: Have you ever participated in politics in any way?

A: No, not really. I was mostly independent.

R: Do you ever Vote?

A: Yes. Since I got my American papers.

R: When did you get your papers?

A: I don't recall. I had my first papers and then my second papers.

R: Did you ever belong to any political organizations?

A: No.

R: Did you ever like any political figures here in Lowell or in the United States?

A: Yes.

R: Who was your favorite president?

A: Well the president I remember so was Roosevelt.

R: Do you remember why?

A: Because he changed the working hours, he made it better for the workers.

R: Did you ever attend a political rally?

A: Yes not very important.

R: Did the companies you worked for ever have anything to do with politics?

A: I don't know.

R: Did your wife ever work?

A: Yes.

R: How many years did she work for?

A: She worked and she came home to take care of the kids then she go back to work.

R: Did she work in the mills also?

A: She worked making stockings.

R: Where?

A: Hopp Hosiery

R: Did your wife work a lot of hours?

A: No.

R: She was never working full time, was she?

A: No she never was working full time.

R: Did your family attend church?

A: Yes.

R: Which church?

A: Saint Anthony's Church

R: It's always been that same St. Anthony's Church, no?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember the priests of the church?

A: Yes. We've had some different ones.

R: Which one do you remember?

A: I remember Perry was the first one I remember.

R: Do you remember how many priests they've had?

A: They've had Father Grillo, they had Father John Silva, and now they have Eusebio Silva.

R: Do you still go?

A: Yes.



R: Do the men participate within the church?

A: They've made some different things. They've made picnics and some entertainments.

R: You still belong to the church, no?

A: Yes.

R: Is there anything you remember about your religious life?

A: No, I don't recall nothing.

R: What were some of the places you worked at?

A: I worked at the Hamilton Mills, Boott Mill, Merrimack Mill, Southwell Mill.

R: Were you a weaver at all these mills?

A: No, no. At the Southwell Mill I worked and processed the wool. A control man.

R: A Control Man? At the Boott Mill, did you do the same thing?

A: I was a weaver.

R: What were the conditions like?

A: Not too bad. But then I went to the Merrimack Mills. At the Merrimack Mills I use to weave velvet.

R: How long did you work at the Boott Mills?

A: I don't remember now but it was quite a few years.

R: Did they have a lot of people working there?

A: Oh yes.

R: Were the conditions better than the Hamilton Mills?

A: About the same. I moved to the Boott Mills because the Hamilton Mills moved out.

R: When did the Hamilton Mills close down, do you remember?

A: At the Hamilton Mill I was weaving flannel.

R: When did they move out, do you remember?

A: I don't remember.

R: Was it before World War II?

A: Yes. Then I went to the Boott Mills. I use to weave corduroy.

R: Do you remember how many years you were there?

A: It was quite a few years. Then I went to the Merrimack Mills. I use to weave velvet.

R: What was the last job you had?

A: The last job was the Southwell Mills in North Chelmsford.

R: How long did you work there until?

A: For twelve years I think. I worked there until 1958.

R: What did you do after 1958?

A: In 1958 I retired. No I worked in the Merrimack Mills until 1958 and then I worked at Southwell Mills until 1970. That's when I retired.

R: What did you do at Southwell Mills?

A: I was a control man.

R: How were the conditions at the Southwell Mills from the Hamilton Mill?

A: The Southwell Mills was all wool.

R: How many hours were you working?

A: Eight hours a day.

R: Were you making more money?

A: Oh yes more money than the cotton mills.

R: Were you producing more?

A: No. I just worked eight hours. In the American Hide processing the skins

R: How long did you work there for?

A: Two years. They had a lot of strikes. They kept going on strike, so I went back into the mills. I couldn't afford to be on strike all the time. I'm a family man. I had to make money. I couldn't afford to be on strike all the time.

R: You've worked in a lot of mills here in Lowell?

A: Yes.

R: Do you remember when you came here to the U.S.?'?

A: Yes.

R: How did you come? By ship or plane?

A: I come by ship. There was no planes at the time.

R: Was it just you?

A: Yes just me.

R: Do you remember anything about the voyage?

A: Yes, it took a long time across the ocean. I left Madeira went to Saint Michael and then I took the ship to the U.S I took me forty three days in Saint Michael for chance to come to the U.S

R: What did you think of America when you first came here?

A: First when I saw America I didn't like the way it looked

R: Why?

A: because the houses were entirely different here.

R: Where did you land in the U.S.?

A: In Boston.

R: Who did you already have here?

A: I had my cousin and his wife.

R: Do you know why they left Madeira?

A: I left Madeira because the wages were so low. I liked the work. I couldn't support myself. I came to America to see if I could better myself.

R: Do you have any memories of Madeira?

A: Oh yes. I still remember.

R: Do you remember the house you were born in?

A: Yes.

R: Can you describe the house?

A: It was a small house. It was a three room and a kitchen. Me and my brother we use to sleep over the kitchen.

R: Do you miss Madeira?

A: Yes, I miss Madeira.

R: What did you find the hardest about coming to a strange country?

A: The hardest part in this country is it's so cold in the winter and it's so hot in the summer. In Madeira winter and summer the temperature is very good.

R: At the Boott Mills, did you work in a small room or a big room?

A: A regular room.

R: How many people worked with you there?

A: Around 100 or 150.

R: What do you think about living in Lowell?

A: I've enjoyed living in Lowell.

R: Would you say the life has been hard working here in the mills?

A: Sometimes hard and sometimes better. I came to this country I went to work, there wasn't too much work around. The employment was very bad. I went to learn to weave. I was six months without getting paid at all.

R: What happened?

A: My cousin advanced the money for me to live. Then when I started to work, I paid everything I owed and I saved to go back to the old country to see my family while they were living. It took me five years. I went in 1926 when they were still living. My mother, father, and all my family were still living.

R: Was that the last time you saw them?

A: I saw my mother and father.

R: Did any of your brothers or sisters ever come over here?

A: No. Only me from my family.

R: Why didn't they ever come over here?

A: They didn't bother coming over.

The End

End of Interview