

Facing Change

Embracing New Neighbors at Lowell National Historical Park

As the cradle of America's industrial revolution, Lowell, Massachusetts, has always been a magnet for those seeking a better life. Yet, unlike many places with a history of immigration, it's no melting pot. With the foreign born and minorities accounting for almost 65 percent of its 106,000 residents, it's more like a salad bowl. Or at least



that's the analogy used by a report commissioned to help Lowell National Historical Park connect with its new neighbors. "Lowell is definitely a changing landscape and it still has very distinct cultural groups," says Christoph Strobel, University of Massachusetts at Lowell associate history professor and co-author of *Ethnicity in Lowell*, written with fellow professor Robert Farrant. With immigration such a central theme at the park, "there was a desire to

But the report also gives fair space to the "New Lowellians," the ones who have come in recent years, particularly after the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which did away with the restrictive national origins quota system in effect since the 1920s. Unlike the immigrants of yesteryear, today's migrants have been largely Asian, Latin, and African. They arrived either as refugees or in search of opportunity. "Like earlier generations, these New Lowellians are once again shaping and enriching the city's ethnoscape with their unique and diverse presence," notes the report.

The Cambodians, perhaps the most prevalent group, make up around 25 percent of the population. Only Long Beach, California—where California State University sponsored about 100 Cambodian college students in 1958—has a larger Cambodian community. Immigration from the impoverished country, on the southern end of the Indochina Peninsula, was almost nonexistent until the mid-1970s, when thousands fled to escape hard labor and torture under the communist Khmer Rouge regime. Sambath Bo, one Cambodian interviewed for the report, recalls her mother being repeatedly choked almost to the point of suffocation before she could escape.

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delve more deeply into immigration as a whole, and especially in the present," says David Blackburn, the park's chief of cultural resources and programs. The report provides not only a detailed profile of current audiences—essential in gearing the park to their needs—but also a complete history of the immigrant experience, invaluable in bridging past with present through stories based on commonalities.

The park is home to a collection of restored 19th-century textile mills—once a huge draw for waves of European immigrants in the 1800s and early 1900s. The report covers them all: the Irish, Greeks, Jewish, Polish, Lithuanians, Armenians, and even job-hungry French Canadians, some lured by the "glowing characterizations" offered by authors such as Charles Dickens and John Greenleaf Whittier.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Members of Lowell's Angkor Dance Troupe.

contact points email david_blackburn@nps.gov robert_farrant@uml.edu
christoph_strobel@uml.edu **web** [Lowell National Historical Park](http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm)
www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm *Ethnicity in Lowell Report* www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/lowe/ethnicity.pdf

After the end of the regime, between 1980 and 1985, America welcomed about 100,000 Cambodians. While many headed for Long Beach or other locales, Lowell quickly became a favored spot. Sucheng Chan, author of *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States*, cites three reasons: the local Theravada Buddhist temple, a strong job market, and the state's "refugee-friendly" policies.

Lowell took a nosedive between the 1920s and 1940s, as much of the textile industry moved south. By the 1970s, the unemployment rate was 12 percent. The new immigrants arrived at the start of the "Massachusetts Miracle," a period of intense low-skill manufacturing job growth, particularly in the high-tech and financial service sectors. Lowell was the headquarters of computer giant Wang Laboratories, and state first lady Kitty Dukakis was a strong advocate for the refugees. And while many came initially for economic opportunity, "what attracted them later was the existence of their community and just trying to find a little bit of flavor of home," Strobel says. Today that flavor is evidenced by the hundreds of ethnic businesses and restaura-



ALL PHOTOS ANDREW PAGE



ABOVE: The Angkor Dance Troupe performs the Apsara Dance. RIGHT: The Cambodian Fan Dance performed at the Lowell Folk Festival at the park.



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rants all over town, not just in sequestered districts. Discrimination remains an issue, as many migrants have not fully assimilated, a process that often takes two to three generations. Despite such issues, there is appreciation for the broad mix of cultures, on display at several annual events such as the Southeast Asian Water Festival, which attracts about 60,000 each year to “thank the spirit of the water,” in Buddhist tradition. There is also the Lowell Puerto Rican Festival, the Lowell Latin American Festival, and the Greater Lowell African Festival. The park has grown increasingly involved with the New Lowellians, especially since its 30th anniversary in 2008. “We’ve recognized that civic engagement and connecting ourselves to the larger community is something that is really important to us,” Blackburn says. Efforts to embrace the Cambodian community include hosting the Angkor Dance Troupe, which teaches traditional Cambodian dance to community youth, working with social service agencies, and creating park tours that show Cambodian elders that immigrant challenges in Lowell have been faced by many before them. In addition, the park is working on a tour with the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association that will give non-immigrants “a taste of the city’s Cambodia Town.”

The report has been a valuable touchstone for both the park and the residents, suggesting how to build connections through exhibits, brochures in languages spoken by targeted groups, and other outreach initiatives. The report has also led to educational events allowing interviewees to publicly share their stories, as well as the publication of *The Big Move: Immigrant Voices from a Mill City*, which contains 9 of the report’s 35 oral histories in their entirety. One especially rewarding outcome of the report, spearheaded by Farrant, was “Immigrant Murals,” a 17-panel illustration of the city’s history created by Lowell High School students. “For historians, there is no better feeling than seeing their work used to inform the wider public and educate young people,” Farrant says.



Trujillo Homesteads

Ranch Site Honors the Legacy of Hispanic Peoples in the West

In the year 2012, few are the places that truly hearken back to the realities of the Old West. There are still a few left, however, and one such site, the Trujillo Homesteads, is likely to remain long after its recent designation as a national historic landmark.

Located in rural Mosca, Colorado, with Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve and the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, the homesteads' lonely two-story log cabin still stands as a reminder of when pioneers came to the great swaths of land west of the Mississippi. "This site is unique both to the history of Colorado and the nation," says Peter Ericson, western Colorado program director for the Nature Conservancy, which has owned the homesteads

since 1999. Part of the conservancy's 103,000-acre Medano Zapata Ranch, where modern-day cowboys still herd bison, the 35.6-acre site is considered historically significant both for its role in American Latino heritage and as a potential archeological treasure chest for the artifacts left by the Trujillo family.

The first of the site's two homesteads, its house no longer standing, was founded in 1865 when Teofilo and Andrelitta Trujillo and their son, Pedro, moved to the area from Taos, Mexico, some of the first permanent settlers after the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862. They started what would become one of its wealthiest ranches, their house reportedly one of the finest in the valley with luxuries including oriental rugs and stained glass windows. Pedro started his own 160-acre homestead just a mile northeast in 1879, choosing to build a two-story log cabin rather than the traditional adobe dwelling on his father's property. He raised cattle, horses, and continued to add land to the site where 9 of his 16 children would be born.

contact points **web** Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve www.nps.gov/grsa The Nature Conservancy www.nature.org



The family's success eventually came at a tragic cost, however.

Teofilo, in addition to cattle, had one of the biggest sheep operations in the area, a source of conflict with Anglo-American cattle ranchers, who did not get along with the mostly Hispanic American sheep herders. The growing animosity towards the Trujillos came to a violent head in 1902 when Teofilo's grand homestead was burned to the ground and several of his sheep killed. He sold his land to the cattlemen, moving to the town of San Luis, with Pedro abandoning his own homestead too for fear of becoming the next target, even though he had no sheep. After the Trujillos sold it, the site passed through several

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owners but due to its remoteness has not been used since the 1940s. Limited archeological excavations reveal sheep ranching artifacts, as well as ground stone pieces, which suggest that early Hispanics in the area used Native American technology or trade items. The architecture of Pedro's homestead also reflects cultural mingling, how first-generation Hispanic Americans "adapted elements of the new culture into their traditional lifestyle." The designation is part of the broader American Latino Heritage Initiative championed by Secretary of the

Interior Ken Salazar. "We are helping to ensure the story of the settlers, how they lived, and the influence they had on the culture and history of Colorado and our nation will be carried down to future generations," he said of the homesteads' landmarking when announcing the designation in January.

Since purchasing the property, the conservancy has stabilized and reconstructed Pedro's cabin, above, but the site is not open to the public due to the private ownership of the land as well as concerns about issues such as road access, looting, and visitor safety. Nevertheless, making it more accessible in some fashion is a "long term vision," according to Ericson.

A virtual tour featuring both the cabin and reconstructions of Teofilo's homestead are being considered, according to Kathy Faz, acting division chief of interpretation for Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. "We are excited to have the site included as a story of the park," says Faz, adding that it represents the very beginning of Latino culture in America. "It really goes back to 'how did we even get here?'"

ABOVE: Restored cabin at the site, managed by the Nature Conservancy.