
ROCHESTER HISTORY

Building the Barrio:
A Story of Rochester's
Puerto Rican Pioneers

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*Bobique, a Puerto Rican dancing troupe entertains during one of the first annual Puerto Rican festivals.
Photo courtesy of Juan Padilla.*

*Front Cover: Mural by Rochester-born graffiti artist Evak Fua (nee Carlos Perez), which adorns the south side of the Brooklyn Market at the corner of North Clinton Avenue ("La Avenida") and Oakman Street.
Photograph by Karen McCally.*

A (Very) Brief History of Puerto Rico

Inhabited for thousands of years, the island of Puerto Rico received its name after it came under Spanish domination at the turn of the sixteenth century. Warfare, disease, and conditions under Spanish enslavement resulted in the decimation of the native Taino population. The Spanish established an economy based on mining and agriculture, supported by slave labor, increasingly from Western Africa.

Puerto Rico was not populous until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the Spanish offered land grants to promote immigration and the development of commercial agriculture—particularly sugar, coffee, and tobacco. At the same time, economic ties between the island and the United States were rapidly increasing, as the U.S. became one of Puerto Rico's major markets for its agricultural products, and Puerto Rico became, in turn, a major new market for American manufactured goods.

As a movement for independence gathered force in Puerto Rico, Spain granted the island broad powers of self-government in 1897. But the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, and in its victory over the Spanish, annexed Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory. In 1917, the United States granted citizenship to Puerto Ricans, and between 1948 and 1952, Puerto Ricans won the power to elect their own government, under a new constitution. A series of economic reforms initiated by Puerto Rico's first elected governor, Luis Munoz Marin, resulted in the large-scale outmigration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland United States. Today, with the development of manufacturing and service industries, in addition to tourism, Puerto Rico maintains one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean.

Major Events in Rochester's Puerto Rican Community 1946-1980

1946: The first Puerto Rican migrants arrive in the Rochester region.

1953: Puerto Rican pioneer Oswald Godoy establishes the First Spanish Nazarene Church on North Clinton Avenue.

1961: Edwin S. Rivera, a clothing cutter, becomes the first Puerto Rican to win public office in Rochester after winning election as Constable of the Fifth Ward. In 1963 he was elected Fifth Ward Supervisor.

1968: The Ibero-American Action League is founded.

1969: Ibero leads a protest against police brutality following the beating of a Puerto Rican youth accused of loitering in Midtown Plaza.

1969: The community-designed, federally-funded bilingual education program, *Adelante* (Forward), begins in the Rochester City School District.

1970: The first Puerto-Rican Festival and parade is held in Rochester.

1971: The Ibero-American Housing Co., Inc., is established to develop low and moderate income housing for Puerto Ricans, and secures a site in the Upper Falls Urban Renewal area.

1974: The Ibero-American Credit Union is opened.

1975: The Ibero-initiated *Los Flamboyanes* housing project opens on North Clinton Avenue.

1978: The Spanish Action Coalition (SAC) is founded.

1980: The Urban League of Rochester releases the *Hacienda Report*.

The Barrio

In the summer of 1970, when Rochester's Puerto Rican community came together to put on the city's first Puerto Rican Festival and Parade, the events took place at Brown Square. At that time, the neighborhood was home to a large concentration of Puerto Ricans, who centered their lives, both physically and spiritually, around the St. Patrick's Church parish. By 1978, however, the parish was gone as was most of the neighborhood. That summer the festival was moved to Manhattan Square and, in 1979, the year of its 10th anniversary, it was moved again. These days, the festival takes place in the VIP Parking Lot of Frontier Stadium, where the Brown Square residential neighborhood once was. This fact is ironic, and yet, in 2008, in its 39th year, the celebration remained as vibrant as ever, with attendance estimated at 20,000 people.

The history of the festival reflects a pervasive theme in the sixty year history of the Puerto Rican community in Rochester. Displacement has been a large part of the story, but so too has adaptation.

Sixty years ago, as Rochester schoolchildren were learning the story of pioneers



such as Nathaniel Rochester and Jonathan Child, a more recent group of pioneers was forging a new community in the Flower City.

North Clinton Avenue, or "La Avenida," is the main thoroughfare in Rochester's largest Puerto Rican neighborhood. Dominating the upper left corner, is St. Michael's Church, built in 1873. The parish, once largely German, is now mostly Hispanic. Photograph from the City Hall Photo Lab.

Like so many newcomers to American cities of the past—the Italian, the Jewish, and other immigrants from the turn of the last century—Puerto Ricans arrived in Rochester poor financially but rich in family networks and community ties. But here the story of Puerto Ricans parts ways with the typical immigrant saga. It is not simply that Puerto Ricans arrived as American citizens, making them a more convenient group of recruits for the American farms and factories in search of low-wage labor. They also arrived at a period in recent American history unique for its extraordinary and unprecedented change. The arrival of Puerto Ricans coincided with the African American Civil Rights Movement that taught a younger generation of Puerto Ricans new methods of overcoming discrimination and achieving political power. The migration also occurred just as cities across the Northeast and Midwest were losing the factories that had provided generations of citydwellers with low-skilled work. And not least, Puerto Ricans forged a new community during the expansion of federal poverty programs, the best of which offered opportunities to many, but the worst of which threatened to destroy poor and minority neighborhoods such as Brown Square, the Fifth Ward, and Marketview Heights, where Puerto Ricans established their first neighborhoods.



The sign in front of the church long known as St. Michael's names the church St. Michael's on the north side, and on the side facing south, says San Miguel's. Information about services is printed on the sign in both English and Spanish.

This combination of opportunities and challenges shaped the early history of Rochester's Puerto Ricans to a large degree. And, that history has as many strands as there are Puerto Ricans in Rochester. Yet one overarching theme is the effort to carve out space—not only physical space, but social and cultural space as well. Puerto Ricans speak less of neighborhoods than of *barrios*. The barrio is not a geographic area, but rather a network of families, traditions, and institutions. As the endurance of the festival shows, against great odds, the barrio has adapted and endured.



The diversity of the North Clinton neighborhood is clear from these two adjoining establishments, Nguyen Nails and El Cafecito community coffee shop. The coffee shop is also at the corner of Rauber Street, a name retained since the nineteenth century, when the neighborhood was largely German. Photographs this page and previous page by Karen McCally.

The Great Migration

Between 1945 and 1960, over half-a-million Puerto Ricans, or one-fifth of the island's population, arrived in the United States. While migrants concentrated in New York and New Jersey, the Rochester region was the destination of the second largest number, over 8,000 by 1970.¹ The so-called Great Migration resulted from the dynamics of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship first to Spain, then to the United States. The population of the small island soared under Spanish rule in the nineteenth century and when the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, it transformed the island's economy from a diversified agricultural economy to one that was predominantly sugar-based, controlled by absentee landowners, and increasingly capital-intensive. By the 1940s, Luis Munoz Marin, the first popularly-elected Puerto Rican governor, began a plan of industrialization, but needed to depopulate the island in order to raise per capita incomes. In 1946, seeking to help the outmigration of Puerto Ricans, the island's Department of Labor established its first branch office in the mainland United States.

The first Puerto Ricans to arrive in the Rochester area came as migrant farm workers on seasonal contracts. Among the largest contractors was the Wayne County Growers Association. During the Second World War, the Association had benefited from the labor of German prisoners of war, for whom they established a labor camp in Marion, New York. After the war, the camp remained, but was filled with Puerto Rican migrants bused from the Newark, New Jersey airport to Western New York. When their contracts ended, many Puerto Rican migrant workers made their way to Rochester. By 1952, roughly 200 Puerto Ricans resided in Rochester, but three years later, it was close to 4,000, making Puerto Ricans the city's fastest growing single ethnic group of the 1950s.²

One of the earliest migrants to reach Rochester was Ramon Padilla, whose daughter Nancy Padilla, one of ten Padilla offspring, would become a member of the Rochester City School Board and a City Councilwoman. Mr. Padilla began his new life in Rochester when he went to work for American Home Foods, a major employer of Puerto Ricans, especially in the late spring and summer, during sweet

pea harvest. Padilla recalled later being sent by his foreman to the nearby migrant camps in Newark, Geneva, and Egypt to recruit other Puerto Ricans. The migrants, who lived in large barns crowded with beds merely a foot apart, and who received wages that were not adequate to send home for relatives, were often eager to relocate to the city.³

The budding Puerto Rican community of the early 1950s was closely-knit, and remained so almost twenty years later when the Rochester Puerto Rican population topped 8,000. To understand the strength of the Puerto Rican pioneer community, it is necessary to understand just how small was the area from which they originated. Puerto Rico, at 3,500 square miles, is smaller than Connecticut and only a bit larger than Delaware. Moreover, the migrants who ended up in Rochester came from only a small number of villages, and those first arrivals, mostly single men, brought with them their wives and children, and then their extended families. As the late Susan Costa, a longtime Puerto Rican community activist, wrote in 1998, it was not too far a stretch to say that Rochester's Puerto Rican community was an extended family, or a Puerto Rican village transplanted to the mainland United States.⁴



This row of houses, for migrant workers at the Peck & Pratt Canning Company, in Hilton, New York was typical of the 1920s, when this photograph is believed to have been taken, through the 1950s when Puerto Rican workers arrived in large numbers. Photo courtesy of the Hilton Municipal Historian Collection.

Networking, the Pioneer Way

In June 1956, Casimiro Gonzales of the Puerto Rican Labor Department arrived in Rochester and opened the city's first branch office to assist Puerto Rican migrants. Gonzalez, who was coordinating his efforts with the New York State Employment Office in Albany, received a warm welcome. On the evening of June 23rd, coinciding with the eve of San Juan's Day, a national holiday in Puerto Rico, Gonzales addressed a crowd not only of Puerto Ricans, but of Rochester civic officials including Police Chief William A. Winfield, and representatives from the Catholic Family Agencies.⁵

But while official channels of assistance were forming, Puerto Rican migrants had already begun establishing networks of mutual support. The few migrants such as Domingo Garcia, with English language skills, carved out a role for themselves as translators and informal liaisons between the Puerto Rican community and outsiders. Women such as Ana Lydia Perez (or, "Dona Lydia"), took in new migrants until they found jobs and housing. When the mostly male Puerto Rican migrants had saved enough to send for their families, Dona Lydia would travel downtown to Neisner's to purchase pots, pans, and other items necessary to start a household. Known as the best cook of the neighborhood, she used her skills to supplement the family income, eventually out-earning her husband Felix, who worked a factory job.⁶

In a society becoming more dependent on automobiles, even the simple task of getting to work was difficult, and could entail a community effort. Puerto Ricans today still recall how Alcides Colon became a local legend when he became the first Puerto Rican in Rochester to earn a New York State driver's license. More significantly, they recall the way in which the Puerto Rican migrant community rallied to raise money for Colon to buy a car—a community car—that Colon then used to drive his Puerto Rican neighbors back and forth to work.⁷

In spite of the official welcome in 1956, most well-established residents of Rochester were slow to recognize the growing number of newcomers in their midst. When they did, Puerto Ricans were often misunderstood. Early migrants not only spoke a

different language, they had different habits, such as the tendency to congregate in large numbers in public spaces, which led to suspicion and occasional harassment by city police. Puerto Ricans were also racially unfamiliar to most Rochesterians. In a society such as the United States, much preoccupied by racial categories, Puerto Ricans are an ethnic group whose mixed indigenous and European and African heritage makes them ill-fitted to any such rigid groupings. For centuries Puerto Rico was home to the Tainos, a population once indigenous to Venezuela, but the arrival of the Spanish in the early sixteenth-century brought about the extinction of a “pure” indigenous culture. The gradual disappearance of the Tainos induced the Spanish to import African slaves, leading to an increasingly Africanized Puerto Rico throughout the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans were white, black, and every hue in between.

In 1955 the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* ran a four-part series on the city’s Puerto Ricans in which reporters Pat Brasley and Kurt Rohde conceded that among the challenges faced by the new population was that, “There is strong feeling against Puerto Ricans even though most residents know little about them.”⁸ For Rochesterians who did have day-to-day contact with Puerto Ricans, the relationships they formed were complex. One population that became acquainted with the Puerto Rican community early on was the Italian-American immigrant community that shared a neighborhood with the new group in Rochester’s old Fifth Ward. Here Puerto Rican migrants carved out not only physical space, but social space as well, a process that was not always easy.

Domingo Martinez, Jr., who arrived in Rochester in 1957, recalled years later that many younger Puerto Ricans clashed with their Italian-American counterparts. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Rochester had its own West Side Story, as the rival gangs, the Italian-American Skinny and the Puerto Rican Chicos fought one another with baseball bats, rocks, and even knives, as Puerto Rican youths (successfully, eventually) earned their right to “hang out at the old Bausch & Lomb monument on Martin Street,” which was a Skinny stronghold.⁹ Years later, former Chicos such as Angelo DeJesus and Dexter Martinez recall battles as turning points in the history of Rochester’s early Puerto Rican community. “Former Chicos now describe the exploits of the gang as a battle against the many indignities they and

their parents had faced,” reported Jim Myers of the *Democrat & Chronicle*, who interviewed DeJesus and Martinez in 1982. “It was a battle to break out from the confines of the small ghettos where Puerto Rican families were forced to live.”¹⁰

At the same time, given the inevitable day-to-day contact between the two communities, friendships also formed among them. One, was the relationship that blossomed between Martinez and the Mangione family, whose grocery at the corner of Martin and Grant Streets, Martinez frequented. In 1969, when Puerto Ricans successfully pressed the Rochester Police Department for a Spanish-speaking community liaison, the Department appointed Officer Joseph Malone, a Spanish-speaking Italian with strong ties to the Puerto Rican community.¹¹

Over time, however, Puerto Ricans joined Rochester’s African American migrants,¹² in a state of isolation in poor, overcrowded and dilapidated neighborhoods. While strong community networks persisted, those networks were increasingly threatened. Among the greatest threats were the public approaches to urban poverty that, critics in the community charged, did not build on existing community organizations and even worked against them. The centerpiece of post-World War II urban policy—“urban renewal”—resulted in the large-scale displacement of poor populations. A federal policy that began in 1949 and continued into the early 1960s, urban renewal was intended to eliminate urban blight by razing dilapidated housing, at federal expense, and reselling it to private developers. But the policy never contained adequate incentives for developers to build new low-income housing. As a result, poor residential neighborhoods were often replaced with industrial or commercial facilities.

Puerto Ricans (or African Americans) were not the only populations to face this kind of displacement. The razing of old residences did not begin with urban renewal. But because this policy came with subsidies to complying cities, after 1949, poor urban populations were affected to a greater extent than ever. In Rochester, the consequences of urban renewal for the barrio were especially far-reaching.

Culture Shock

By Juan Padilla

The planned demolition of Midtown Plaza brought back personal memories for me. In my native Puerto Rico, there is a public plaza in every town, used for passive recreation and special events. It is a place where everyone gathers, meets friends, and simply enjoys fellowship with other townspeople. This is a precious legacy from Spain.

At Midtown Plaza, Puerto Rico is represented in the Clock of Nations. But it took time for people from Puerto Rico to understand that Midtown Plaza was not really a place for public gathering, but instead a private and commercial operation.

I remember a critical incident that happened to me there in the 1960s, during my first week of living in Rochester. Friends in Rochester told me about a *plaza* downtown, so one day I decided to venture into the Plaza. When I walked through its doors, I was impressed, and felt it to be a welcoming place. I started walking around the center of the Plaza, singing along in Spanish. I cannot explain what inspired me—perhaps it was a cultural habit or a visual impression that the Plaza made on me.

Two girls were looking at me very curiously. They probably had never seen a Puerto Rican before. They noted my actions and complained to a security guard that I was saying bad words in a strange language. The guard came toward me and requested that I accompany him into an office for questioning.

I felt disoriented. At the office I was able to explain to him that I was doing nothing wrong and I just recently moved into the city. The security guard said I was free to go. I immediately called my older brother to come pick me up.

I felt embarrassed. This was my first cultural shock in Rochester. I learned later that many Puerto Rican youths were arrested at the Plaza for loitering, though many had never actually been a part of a public problem. For many years afterwards I avoided Midtown Plaza.

Brown Square & the old Fifth Ward

Like the Irish, German and Italian immigrants who preceded them, many Puerto Rican migrants began their new life in Rochester in the Brown Square neighborhood, which extended westward from Brown's Race. Once a center of the milling and boat-building industries, not surprisingly it also became a significant residential neighborhood, as laborers settled close to their work. Always a compact neighborhood, by 1950 the population peaked at 3,500. At the same time, companies such as Eastman Kodak and Zweigle's were eager to expand their Brown Square headquarters. With the increasing reliance on automobiles and the expansion of highways such as the Inner Loop, Brown Square residents with the means to do so, moved. The modest homes remaining were sold by landlords to the expanding industries, leading to the demolition of most of Brown's Square's residences.

In a 1980 series entitled "Who Killed Brown Square," Rochester *Times-Union* reporter, Jay Gallagher, revealed to the rest of the City the growing sense of isolation among many Puerto Ricans. Not only did it seem to them that the City, its major industries, and the neighborhood's landlords were bent on the destruction of the Puerto Rican community, but even the Catholic Diocese, which had been one of the community's earliest and most stalwart friends, came under suspicion. Pressed to consolidate its operations, the Diocese announced in 1975 that it would close the North Plymouth Avenue social hall that by that time constituted the Puerto Rican neighborhood's Church. The church was a hub of activity, but served a population that the Diocese believed was too small. Instead, said Douglas C. Hoffman of the Diocese, St. Francis of Assisi Church, just a mile away in a largely Italian neighborhood, would accommodate the Puerto Rican Catholic community of Rochester's West Side.¹³

The process of displacement continued, and by 1986, the Erie Canal Industrial Park wiped more streets off Rochester's map, including Kent Street, the first home of Puerto Rican pioneer Ramon Padilla and his extended family. By 2000 that neighborhood, whose population was once at 3,500, struggled to reach 400.¹⁴

Then again, Brown's Square was not Rochester's only Puerto Rican neigh-

borhood. Many more Puerto Ricans settled in the City's Northeast quadrant, bound roughly by St. Paul Street on the west, North Goodman St. on the east, the Inner Loop to the south, and Norton Street to the north. Since the 1840s, this area has consistently been home to Rochester's newest, and poorest, arrivals. First it was known as Dublin, the community forged by the Irish who arrived in the 1840s and 1850s. During the same period, German immigrants also settled there, establishing St. Joseph's Church and the Turnverein, a community center constructed on North Clinton Avenue at Kelly Street. By the turn of the century, the neighborhood became home to thousands of Italians and Russian and Polish Jews, many impoverished, and increasingly cramped in what had become Rochester's most crowded ward. Better-off and more established Irish and Germans moved out of the neighborhood. By the 1930s (and perhaps earlier), poverty had already taken its toll on the area. According to Rochester's longtime city historian Blake McKelvey, the so-called Near Northeast had received little new investment since 1910,¹⁵ and so the neighborhood was substantially deteriorated before the first Puerto Ricans ever arrived. By the 1960s, like the Irish and Germans before them, better off and more established Italians and Eastern European Jews began moving out. To build a barrio, the Puerto Rican community had the task of a full-scale neighborhood revival.

Hacienda Rochester

However close-knit internally, the Puerto Rican community began in Rochester unprepared to confront the external forces that increasingly affected the barrio. By the late 1960s, Puerto Ricans had made inroads in local politics, the school system, and with the Catholic Diocese.¹⁶ The Diocese was particularly important to the early Puerto Rican community, fostering many of the organizations that fought successfully against housing discrimination and police harassment, and addressed other problems within the neighborhood. In 1967 Bishop Fulton J. Sheen met with several Puerto Ricans to discuss the establishment of a secular advocacy organization, which became the Ibero-American Action League. Ibero sought to coordinate federal, state, and local efforts related to Rochester's Spanish-speaking community, and "to ensure

that services and opportunities comparable to those provided to the general community, are available to Spanish-speaking individuals.”¹⁷ To a population that faced poverty and language barriers at a time when education and job training were more important than ever, Ibero accomplished a great deal.

But to some young activists in the Puerto Rican community, Ibero’s successes would ultimately be limited by its focus on individual social services rather than community organization. The phrase “community organizing” was often heard in the 1960s and 1970s, but attempts by its advocates to explain it to others proved difficult. In part, that difficulty was due to the lack of a familiar political framework in which to envision community organizing. It was not a liberal program, but in fact,



Throughout the 1960s, Puerto Ricans complained of police harassment and brutality. This photograph is believed to be from the February 1969 protest march up East Main Street that followed the police beating of a Puerto Rican youth accused of loitering in Midtown Plaza. The Workers World Party, whose name is attached to the banner in the center, was formed in Buffalo in 1959 and advocated, among other causes, Puerto Rican independence from the United States.

a critique of liberal social programs in which large and distant bureaucracies operated at cross-purposes with many well-rooted community institutions. And while it was centered on the idea of self-reliance, it was a community self-reliance that distinguished it sharply from conservatism's emphasis on individual choice and Horatio Alger-style individual uplift. Neither liberal nor conservative, community organizing was a process in which existing networks that functioned well within the community were taught how to confront institutions outside the community, such as City Hall.

Puerto Rican community activists such as Juan Padilla, Relton Roland, and Susan Costa, believed that Puerto Ricans were natural community organizers because the barrio served as a model of the type of close-knit, mutually supportive, and self-reliant community that was a prerequisite for the organization many activists in the 1960s sought to build. Juan Padilla, who came to Rochester as a young adult in the early 1960s, devoted a lifetime to preserving the barrio after he saw his first neighborhood in Rochester razed to make way for the Coca-Cola bottling plant on Upper Falls Boulevard. As he told the *Democrat & Chronicle* years later, "when we lose a barrio, we lose all the social support and social power we could have."¹⁸

Relton Roland was actually a Dominican who arrived in Rochester in 1967 and found an immediate home with the Puerto Ricans, who originated on an island just to the east of his native Dominican Republic. Sharing a language and a culture with the Puerto Rican community, Roland spent his early years in Rochester studying at Monroe Community College and, during the summers, teaching Latin American history and culture at the Lewis Street Center. He learned community organizing techniques in the Dominican Republic and applied them in Rochester. Costa's background was similar. An Italian-American, she fell in love with Puerto Rico and attended college at the University of Puerto Rico in the late 1960s. She earned a graduate degree in Social Work at a time when community organizing was a relatively new, and many believed more effective, tool than individual casework.

In 1977 when rumors circulated through the Puerto Rican community that Marketview Heights was slated for industrial-use, Roland recalled how he and others borrowed from the Civil Rights Movement to build a grass-roots organization in which the Church was central. At Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, in the heavily Puerto Rican southern section of Marketview, Reverend Laurence Tracy

had gained the trust, respect, and friendship of the hundreds of Puerto Ricans who gathered regularly there for mass. Tracy, who was neither Puerto Rican, nor a native Spanish speaker, was the white, American-born priest who urged Puerto Ricans to temper their well-ingrained respect for authority, and demand more from government, schools, and themselves.¹⁹

In the winter of 1978, over 100 residents met at Mt. Carmel Church, where they began a community conversation about deterioration and disinvestment in the Marketview neighborhood. The bulldozer had already made inroads in the neighborhood. In September 1978, for example, *Democrat & Chronicle* reporter Dede Murphy, in an article entitled “A Tiny Rochester Barrio Struggles to Stay Alive,” outlined the challenges residents faced. Whereas there once had been over 500 Spanish-speaking families in Marketview, by the fall of 1978, there were only 275. “The rest have scattered to other neighborhoods, as the housing supply in the barrio continues to shrink,” she reported.²⁰ Images by *Democrat & Chronicle* photographer Talis Bergmanis accompanied the article, showing residents such as Mary and Jose Soto, in front of their grocery, and Pable Quinones shelling lima beans on a back porch with his grandchildren.

Out of this meeting at Mt. Carmel grew a new grass roots organization, the Spanish Action Coalition (SAC). Relton Roland, the first president of the all-volunteer coalition, described SAC in its earliest days as essentially a “teaching center” that instilled in Puerto Ricans the capacity to use collective strength to confront larger institutions, such as City Hall, to help shape the policies that would have far-reaching effects in their neighborhoods. As Susan Costa later wrote, SAC aimed at achieving neighborhood “self-determination” and “participation of the poor in the decisions which directly affect their lives.”²¹ SAC was not a social service agency. As Roland explained, the community was more than the individuals who composed it, and the problem was less how to deliver services to individuals than to establish institutions that would foster the continuation of relationships that composed the community. This meant that traditional policies of job training, legal services, and income support, usually delivered by agencies from outside the neighborhood, were set up to fail unless some neighborhood structure was in place. That “structure” was the barrio, and community leaders were adamant that the barrio of Marketview Heights

was a system of social relationships—relationships of mutual support—that had to be the basis for any successful path to uplift.²²

In 1979, SAC persuaded the Urban League of Rochester to fund a study that would suggest a plan necessary to save and rehabilitate Marketview Heights. For, as Costa wrote in early 1980, “the success or failure of community development efforts by Puerto Ricans in Rochester will be determined, in large measure, by the community’s ability to explore and develop avenues for building power.”²³ The study concluded with the release in November 1980 of a report entitled: “Hispanic Alternatives: A City Industrial and Economic Neighborhood Development Analysis.” The dry title made for a provocative acronym: *Hacienda*, the word for the large, profitable sugar plantations of Puerto Rico that were owned by distant landlords and harvested by tenant farmers.

As Costa, the author of the HACIENDA Report, wrote, “Leaders in Marketview Heights...say that Marketview Heights feels like a community because it is one, that residents very much have social, cultural, psychological and political investments in the area.” It was a busy neighborhood of churches, schools, “mom and pop” groceries, small stores and community organizations.



Reverend Laurence Tracy of Mt. Carmel Church in Marketview Heights in 1972. Rev. Tracy encouraged his mostly Puerto Rican parishioners to grow more assertive, and to challenge authority figures, such as city officials, where Puerto Rican neighborhood issues were concerned. Photograph courtesy of Rochester Democrat & Chronicle.

Perhaps even more to the point, Puerto Ricans lived in closer proximity to one another than other ethnic groups and half lived a mile or less from extended family, a larger proportion than in any other ethnic group.²⁴

The report outlined the failures, as SAC saw them, of city efforts on behalf of Marketview Heights and concluded that, while “there are sufficient resources in the Rochester community to halt the neighborhood decline in Marketview,” “a successful long-term development effort will require a commitment and leadership from the residents themselves.”²⁵ The HACIENDA report called for a City- and Community Chest-funded effort to develop neighborhood leaders and strong block groups out of the existing network of relationships that were central to the barrio. Out of this would come the management of a community-run economic development corporation. As Roland put it, the neighborhood “has developed a social network for survival and it makes good sense to pump money and resources... where people are already used to finding ways to support one another.”²⁶

The Los Flamboyantes apartment building at 100 Borinquen Plaza near North Clinton Avenue. The view is to the northwest. City Hall Photo Lab, contemporary collection.



R

econceiving the Barrio

The HACIENDA Report succeeded in putting Marketview Heights in the spotlight, but Padilla concedes today that the Spanish Action Coalition's vision of a vibrant barrio was not successful there. No doubt one reason is that the nation as a whole moved away from the confrontational grass roots politics of the 1960s and 1970s, and began a sustained critique of public antipoverty programs. But it was also true that, over time, Puerto Ricans began to integrate into the suburban middle class. Arguably, the public policies with the greatest impact on urban poverty were not intended to strengthen barrios; they were intended, instead, to help people leave them behind. Today, out of roughly 30,000 Puerto Ricans in Monroe County, roughly 20 percent reside in the suburbs, mainly in Greece, Irondequoit, and Henrietta.²⁷

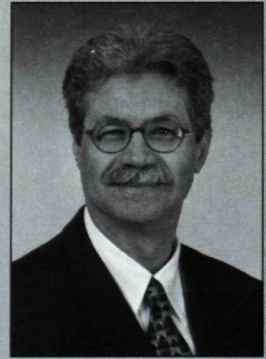
The majority of Puerto Ricans in the Rochester area still live in the city's northeast quadrant. But, many suburban Puerto Ricans are still frequent visitors there. La Avenida, the stretch of North Clinton Avenue from Upper Falls Boulevard to Norton Street is a community anchor. And, traditions continue, whether in the city or the suburbs. The Puerto Rican festival has taken place every year since 1970, with only one interruption. Rochester Puerto Ricans such as Ricardo Cortez, a firefighter who lives in Irondequoit, are part of a growing trend among Puerto Rican parents to teach their children Spanish as well as English.²⁸ In short, three decades after a small core of residents sought to build a barrio in Rochester's Northeast, the barrio survives, but over a much larger territory. The familial and community networks that were the essence of the barrio, have been able to subsist over miles rather than blocks.

The Second Generation: Julio Vazquez

Rochester's Puerto Rican community has fought for clout in city politics for almost five decades, and today, some of Rochester's most prominent leaders are Puerto Rican. For example, in January 2008, Gladys Santiago was elected President of the Rochester City Council, becoming the highest Puerto Rican elected official in Rochester's history. Another prominent city leader is Julio Vázquez, Commissioner of Community Development for the City of Rochester.

Vázquez's father was part of the pioneer generation of Puerto Ricans who worked as migrant laborers on nearby farms.

Vázquez, the oldest of thirteen children, began work in the Rochester area as a fruit picker in 1959. Thirteen at the time, Vázquez had already worked half his life, starting on a coffee farm in Puerto Rico at age seven. Today Vázquez recalls how he and other Puerto Ricans crowded into small living quarters in Rochester and met "the boss" from Wayne County Growers



Julio Vázquez

Association every morning on State Street, in the building that houses the Rochester Business Alliance today. From there, Puerto Rican workers took a bus each day to and from the farms.

Early on in the Rochester City School District, Vázquez, who struggled with English, was labeled "slow" and placed in the School-Work Program, which entailed a half day of school, and a half day of work. The "school," Vázquez recalls, was in the basement of Franklin High. In 1967, after stints doing construction, and handiwork such as hanging gutters, Vázquez entered a program at Kodak where he received training for a career as an electrician, but soon discovered that electrical work was not his calling. Fortunately, leaders in the early Puerto Rican community recognized that Vázquez was, in fact, a quick learner, and recruited him to join the new Ibero-American Action League as a community organizer.

Vázquez's career took additional twists and turns, including a return to Puerto Rico, but after many years at Ibero, including 13 years as its director, when Mayor Duffy sought a new Commissioner for Community Development in 2006, it was Julio Vázquez who was chosen.

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This research is based on preliminary documentation from the Latino Archives Project (see below). Because it is impossible to give justice in a single article to the rich history of Rochester's Latino communities (or even its oldest and largest segment, the Puerto Rican community), this is the first, and hardly the last, of what will be Rochester History's efforts to piece together the stories of this, and other under-documented communities in our City.

As always, the best histories are a community effort. Please send your comments, including any additions or corrections, to the author at kmccally@rochester-history.org. Appropriate comments will be printed in the next edition of Rochester History.

About the Latino Archives Project

In 2003, with funding from the New York State Archives' Documentary Heritage Project, the Latino Alliance and the Rochester Museum & Science Center teamed up to document the history of Rochester's Latino communities. Since that year, project staff and volunteers have been locating the holders of significant community records, and encouraging Latinos from all walks of life in Rochester to share their family and neighborhood stories. The result of this long-term project will be the first comprehensive documentation of over sixty years of community history. For more information, please contact Lea Kemp at the Rochester Museum & Science Center's Schuyler C. Townson Research Library, 271-4552, x 315#.

End Notes

1. Figures taken from Susan L. Costa, "The Rochester Hispanic Community: 29 Years of Growth and Development," July 1998, speech to commemorate the 29th Annual Rochester Puerto Rican Festival, Latino Archives Project, Rochester Museum & Science Center (RMSC).
2. Kurt Rohde and Pat Brasley, "Better Wages, Housing, Schools Here Lure Puerto Ricans from Poverty in Homeland," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, January 13, 1955.
3. Nancy Padilla, "The Rochester Puerto Rican Community," graduate thesis, 1986, Latino Archives Project.
4. Costa, "The Rochester Hispanic Community: 29 Years of Growth and Development."
5. "Labor Official Here to Help Puerto Ricans Find Jobs," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 17, 1956.
6. Luis Perez, "Ana Perez has Opened Doors for Latino Newcomers," and Chris Swingle, "Quiet Role Model Named Mother of the Year," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, January 3, 2001.
7. The memory of Domingo Garcia, as reported (and verified) by Juan Padilla and Relton Roland in "Perserving and Sharing Stories of Rochester's Hispanic Community," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, October 10, 2005.
8. Pat Brasley and Kurt Rohde, Puerto Ricans Quit Crowded Island for City, Present Problems to Schools, Social Agencies," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, January 12, 1955.
9. Domingo Martinez, Jr., "Brief Biography," November 13, 1999, p. 3, Latino Archives Project.
10. Jim Myers, "What to Save, What to Lose?: Puerto Ricans Making the Difficult Choice," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, August 8, 1982.
11. James R. Stear, "Police, Puerto Ricans Join In Festive Understanding," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, February 9, 1970; and "Felix on the Beat," *Upstate Magazine*, June 18, 1972.
12. During the same years as the Puerto Rican Great Migration, an even larger number of African-Americans migrated from the South to northern cities, including Rochester. By 1970, much of Rochester's African-American population was composed of Post-World War II migrants from the South.
13. Jay Gallagher, "They Miss St. Patrick's," *Rochester Times-Union*, September 10, 1980.
14. Lawrence Jones, "Brown Square Neighborhood Shows City's History," *Cornerstone*, Landmark Society of Western New York, September 2000, p. 9.
15. Blake McKelvey, "Rochester's Near Northeast," *Rochester History* 29(2), April 1967, p. 11.
16. Edwin Rivera had been elected in 1963 to the Monroe County Board of Supervisors, representing the Fifth Ward; the Ibero-American Action League had successfully pressed the school district for the right to design a bilingual education program; the Diocese had supported the establishment of the Spanish Apostolate, an educational and advocacy organization which later become Ibero.

17. Ibero-American Action League, "Ibero-American Action League: A Brief History, 1968-1988," Latino Archives Project.
18. Dede Murphy, "The Barrio: The Place to Struggle As A Group," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, December 7, 1980.
19. "A Poor, Happy Church," *Upstate Magazine*, June 18, 1972.
20. Dede Murphy, "A Tiny Barrio Struggles to Stay Alive," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, September 16, 1978.
21. Susan L. Costa, "Proposal to Fund the Spanish Action Coalition," April 1980, Latino Archives Project.
22. An explanation of the barrio as a concept is included in Costa, "HACIENDA: Hispanic Alternatives: A City Industrial and Economic Neighborhood Development Analysis," Urban League of Rochester, November 1980, pp. 94-97, Latino Archives Project.
23. Costa, "Proposal to Fund the Spanish Action Coalition," p. 1.
24. Costa, "HACIENDA," p. 43.
25. Costa, "HACIENDA," Executive Summary.
26. Mark Hare, "Marketview: The Game Plan," *City Newspaper*, January 29, 1981.
27. "County and Hispanic Population by Municipality, 1980-2000," compiled by Susan Costa from United States Census. Susan Costa Papers, Latino Archives Project.
28. "Living in Two Worlds," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, June 19, 2003.

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Paula Smith, *Library Director*

About *Rochester History*

In January of 1939, Assistant City Historian Dr. Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly *Rochester History*, focusing on Rochester and western New York. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published and distributed by Dr. McKelvey to expand the knowledge of our local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of our nation's history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

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The author of *Building the Barrio: A Story of Rochester's Puerto Rican Pioneers*, Karen McCally, Ph.D., is Program Coordinator and Educator at The Rochester Historical Society. This membership organization has, for nearly 150 years, been collecting, preserving and interpreting the archives and artifacts that are part of this community's history. For information about us and our programs and services, please visit on-line at www.rochesterhistory.org or call 585.271.2705.

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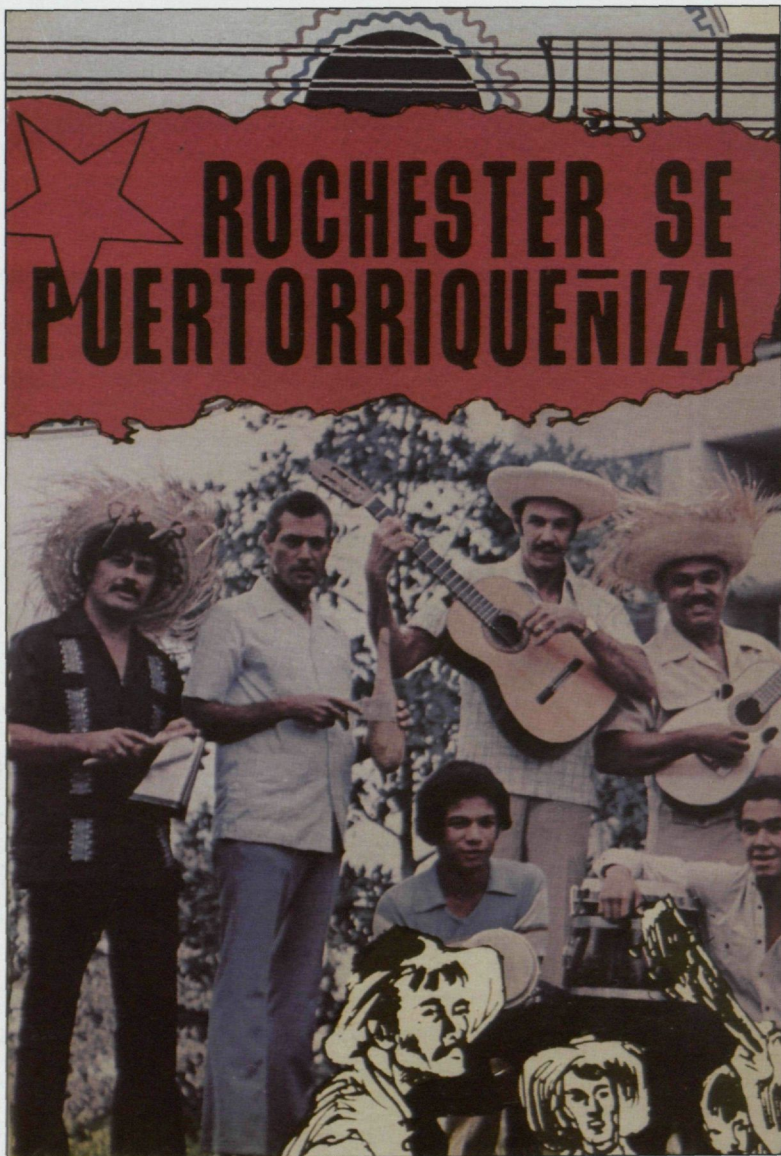
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Cover of the record album "Rochester Se Puertorriqueniza" ("Rochester Becomes Puertorricanized") produced in 1979 by musician Pedro Nunez with accompanying folk musicians. The album was produced for the Puerto Rican Arts & Cultural Center, with funding from the Ibero-American Action League, to bring the best of indigenous Puerto Rican music to Rochesterians.



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