



Photos reprinted courtesy of Luz María Valdés

Don Antonio Valencia.

A Pocket of Mexican Immigrants in New Rochelle

*Luz María Valdés**

Unprecedented migration from Mexico to the area surrounding New York City has taken place since 1954. It has been unprecedented because it originated with New Rochelle's mayor and his family looking for domestic servants and meeting up with Mexicans adventurous enough to leave home, but who always kept one foot in their communities of origin. This article will attempt to narrate the events just as they occurred and the paths taken by Mexicans

who entered into the labor market in this part of the United States.

Allys Douayer, widow of the former mayor of New Rochelle, died last November at the age of 96 after having sponsored and given support to a great many Mexicans who today live in and around that city. The first to arrive was Antonio Valencia. The story began in 1954 when Allys Douayer and her husband, J. Vergara—of Italian origin—visited Mexico City and the Sacred Family Church seeking help in finding a domestic servant who wanted to travel to New Rochelle. Young Antonio Valencia worked in the

church, and he took the job. In less than a week his immigration papers had been arranged and he left for New York to live in New Rochelle and work as the butler in the Vergara household, a post he held until Allys Douayer's death.

Don Antonio—as he is known throughout the region—says that after his first year of working for Allys Douayer, he realized that the way was open for him to help people from Cotija, his home town in Mexico. After getting to know the area and the residents, with the support of Douayer, Antonio began to get jobs for his close relatives. In 1955, a year after he arrived, his

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Our Lady of Guadalupe's image has hung in Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral since 1991.

six brothers and sisters had emigrated and had jobs in different homes and social clubs.

In the next few years there was intense migration from the micro-region of the municipalities of Cortija and Jiquilpan in the state of Michoacán, and Quitupan, Jalisco. The network of relations and friends grew to the degree that today it is difficult to find anyone in the area who has not been to New York. This migration was destined to very specific job categories in the areas of caring for and growing plants, greenhouses, gardening and garden design making the immigrants indispensable in this high-income area.

At the same time that the flow of migrants grew, the job market opened up to them, and new immigrants began to take jobs as dish washers, waiters, kitchen helpers and cooks, until they filled almost all the jobs in the area's most select clubs.

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schools, teachers' homes, dams, roads connecting the three municipalities and, of course, improving their own homes and those of their relatives.

Don Antonio's activities have left a profound mark on the area. Practically all the large clubs of New York high society are staffed completely by Mexicans: jobs from chef to caddie, tennis ball retrievers, assistants for water and other sports are in the able, efficient and honorable hands of Mexicans.

Of all his activities during his 45 years as butler in Allys Douayer's home, Don Antonio first exerted his influence to ensure his brothers' and sisters' being able to come to New Rochelle. With daring and effectiveness, he was able to get jobs for all of them. Little by little, he became familiar with the needs of the society he lived in. He got to know the owners of companies where he thought Mexicans could be employed, and, little by little, he also made inroads into labor organizations, making friends with union leaders, company managers and friends of the Douayer family, in whose homes he got jobs as servants for friends, relatives and acquaintances.

He tried to get well paying jobs for the poorest migrants, in the construction industry, for example, which pays up to U.S.\$20 an hour. He placed the others in greenhouses where they learned gardening trades, particularly garden design. These immigrants would earn between U.S.\$5 and U.S.\$10 an hour. Many have been able to set up their own businesses, mainly greenhouses or restaurants.

Don Antonio sought jobs for the new migrants according to his or her family needs. The highest wages go to construction workers, who make U.S.\$800 a week, allowing them a better quality of life and enabling them to send their families in Mexico money.

Besides aiding immigrants, which led him to found and head up an organization of Mexicans abroad, Don Antonio has created other institutions to support Mexicans with labor, civil and even criminal problems. To do this, he has established excellent relationships with city officials—like mayors and judges—who he also supports and who have publicly honored him.

Thanks to his contacts, Don Antonio is allowed to appear in court to aid anyone with legal problems; he visits the sick putting them in the hands of an insurance company so they do not use up their earnings in medical attention; he helps Latino organizations that do community work, like the Hope Community Center, where Yolanda Davis, born in Jalisco and Don Antonio's right hand, works.

He promotes the donation of funds to finance the needs of communities in Mexico, a project which has transformed the immigrants' places of origin. He organizes the celebration of Mexican independence day and religious festivities in the county. For example, he sponsored the idea of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe being placed in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan, where it has been since 1991.

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The immigration supported by Don Antonio, on the one hand, began a migratory flow that continues from this micro-region and, on the other hand, resulted in the founding of one of the most important and influential seminaries in the United States and the world, which trains priests and nuns in the order of the Legionnaires of Christ.

Don Antonio and Allys Douayer were fundamental in the negotiations of Father Marcial Maciel, the head of the Legionnaires of Christ, to enable the order to establish itself in New York in the early 1960s. Then-Senator Robert Kennedy had to intervene to secure New York's Cardinal Spellman's consent and welcome for the order to the United States. Its first official address was the home of Allys Douayer. Today, it has educational facilities and a seminary in Purchess County, Connecticut, and it has recently bought a large piece of property from IBM corporation in the same state to build a school of philosophy. The Mexican community and the Legionnaires of Christ annually thanked Mrs. Douayer for her support with a luncheon at the seminary. She then invited them to a Mexican-style luncheon in the garden of her home. Don Antonio has been friends with Father Maciel since their childhood together in their native Cotija, Michoacán.

Allys Douayer's presence was fundamental for the Mexican community in the area. She once visited Cotija and Guadalupe with her husband to survey the benefits derived from Mexicans emigrating to New York.

Allys Douayer—whom Don Antonio accompanied until her death—supported him so his brothers and sisters could enjoy the same opportunities he had. Her death has been a great loss for the Mexican community in New Rochelle but Don Antonio, at the age of 70, still has a great deal of energy and commitment for continuing his task of supporting Mexicans in overcoming the great difficulties they face upon their arrival in New York today. **MM**