

María Colón Sánchez

1926-1989 | Community Leader & Politician

María Colón Sánchez listened to people. She was known as *la madrina* (the godmother) of the Hartford Puerto Rican community, and she fought to make Hartford a better place to live and work for all the people living there.



María Sánchez behind the counter at her store, courtesy Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library

María was born and grew up in Puerto Rico. In 1952, she left to come to Hartford. She worked hard to support herself and to send money back to her family in Puerto Rico. Like many migrants from Puerto Rico at the time, she worked in Connecticut's tobacco fields. Later, she opened her own business, Maria's News Stand, on Albany Avenue.

In the late 1950s, many people in the growing Puerto Rican community did not feel that their voices were being heard. They felt that their rights were not respected and that the city government was not listening to their concerns. People would come together to talk at María's store, and she would figure out ways to help. When different groups in the city were fighting, María calmed them down and helped them find peaceful solutions.

Along with other community leaders, María started many groups and events that helped the Puerto Rican residents and businesses in Hartford. One was the annual Puerto Rican Parade to celebrate Puerto Rican history and culture.



María Sánchez, courtesy Hartford History Center,
Hartford Public Library

María was the first Puerto Rican elected to public office in Hartford. She served on the Hartford Board of Education for 16 years. She thought that children who did not know enough English were not getting a strong education in the city schools, so she fought for them to be able to learn in Spanish. In 1972, she helped open La Escuelita, the first bilingual school in the state of Connecticut. She also started a program to bring more Spanish-speaking teachers to the city.

In 1988, María was the first Latina elected to the Connecticut General Assembly, an important part of the state government.

María Sánchez was honored by the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1994.

For more information, visit:

<https://connecticuthistory.org/maria-sanchez-state-representative-and-community-advocate/>

<https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/maria-c-sanchez>

<https://www.ctexplored.org/maria-sanchez-godmother-of-hartfords-puerto-rican-community/>

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