

The Town of Panay and the Santa Monica Church

The Town of Panay --- A Brief

Introduction

(Province of Capiz, Republic of the Philippines)

In 1566, just a year after the Legaspi Expedition first landed in the Philippines on Bohol Island in 1565, Fr. Martin de Rada, O.S.A , an Augustinian missionary, was the first friar of that expedition to land on the island of Panay and the first to proclaim the Gospel at the riverbank of Bamban (now known as the town of Pan-ay, Province of Capiz).

As one approaches this town by car nowadays, the tallest building sticking out that could be seen from a few miles or kilometers away is the Santa Monica Catholic Church. This has been the case for more than 300 years since the church was first built in the late 17th century.

The residents of the town of Pan-ay are called Pan-ayanons. Panay Town was under the care of the Augustinians from the beginning (1566) until 1898. Traditionally, the Pan-ayanons speak the Hiligueyna (Hiligaynon) dialect with exquisite purity and elegance. They speak in a honey-voice manner resembling that of

the Andalusians of Spain, without the speech defect of the Cebuanos who skip letters in their pronunciation and distort the simplicity of the Visayan languages, according to Fernandez.

Panay is located on plain and fertile land irrigated by the river of the same name. The climate is rather humid due to the abundant nipa fields and the low sea level. It is bounded by the Sea of Mindoro to the north, the town of Pontevedra to the south and the town of Capiz (later aka Roxas City) to the west. Its location (elevation) was so low that when the Panay River overflowed, the flood waters used to reach the main altar of the church. The original name of the town Bamban was changed by the early Spaniards to **Panay**, a word which means “**mouth of the river.**”

The main industries or livelihood in Panay to date are still farming (rice, corn, copra or coconut, and a little sugar cane) and fishing (mainly fishponds, stocked with milkfish and tiger shrimp or *bangrus* and *locon* in Hiligaynon, and deep sea fishing being on the coastal areas), as they were in pre-Spanish times. The weaving industry and the rum and wine distillery that Panay was known for and which flourished in the mid to late 1800s have long been gone.

When one enters the town, there is a welcome sign that reads:

“Welcome to Pan-ay Town --- The land of the free and the home of the brave!”

During the Spanish era in this part of the Philippines, one

of the most important rules for the townspeople to follow was: Those whose family or last names that started with the letter “B” must live or were assigned to reside in Panay Town. Other last names and town assignments in Capiz Province were: “A” for Capiz Town which later became Roxas City, “D” for Panitan Town, etc. So, when a person from Capiz Province gives her/his last name, this coding system could readily identify which town that person comes from.

Naturally of course, there were exceptions to this rule. For example, some Pan-ayanon families whose last names did not start with the letter “B” were: Roxas, Villaruz, Contreras, Asis, and Abadesco, among others. These non -“B” families somehow managed or preferred to live in Panay town beside their relatives and/or friends whose last names started with the letter “B” and were influential enough to be allowed to do so. At any rate and until the present time, it is estimated that at least 90-95 % of the residents of Panay Town have family names that start with the letter “B”. Among them are Balgos, Barredo, Barrera, Barrios, Bartolo, Barza, Basa, Bediones, Beldia, Bellosillo, Belo, Beloso, Berjamin, Bernal, Bernales, Bernas, Besa, Besana, Billones, Bofill, Bolanio, Bolante, Borda, Borromeo, Buensalido, Bunda, and Buni, among others.

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Tombs in the Church

The Town of Panay together with the Santa (or Sta.) Monica Parish Church and the Pan-ayanon townspeople have a rich and proud history and heritage. Some Filipino and non-Filipino visitors, especially the younger generations visiting the church and the town for the first time could not help their curiosity by asking: “Why are there grave stones inside the church? Were they part in building the church?” According to Fr. Robert Alba who is currently one of the two assistant Pastors (or Parochial Vicars) of the church, what we see on the grave stones (niches or tombs) inside the church are the remains or eternal memorials for the great people who played key roles and were instrumental in establishing the proud and rich history of Panay town, including the government and the church.

Getting buried in this sacred place (inside Santa Monica church) was the custom in years past especially for the select few prestigious or prominent people or leaders in the community.

Inside Santa Monica Church (see Gallery) today, there are four (4) tombs of prominent Pan-ayanons of yesteryears. The most visible one is the tomb of D. Lucio Bernales in the main hall of the church that is easily seen by the Santa Monica parishioners and/or visitors alike. The tombs of other prominent Pan-ayanons listed below are located in the less visible areas of the church.

Tomb No. 1

D. Lucio Bernales ; Died: May 25, 1904 ;
Year of Birth: 1835

(Don Lucio Bernales was my great grandfather, Don Jacobo Bernales was my grandfather, and Teodoro Bernales, Sr. was my father. All of my ancestors above most probably were baptized in the same Santa Monica Church as I was.) --- Cicero A. Bernales (CAB) of Kailua, Hawaii, USA

Tomb No. 2

Pio Nono Bediones ; Died: November 8, 1914 ; DOB: Aug. 18, 1893

Petrona Bunda de Bediones; Died: May 9, 1914; DOB: March 8, 1844

Tomb No. 3

D. Miguel Legaspi y Vega ; Died: October 1902 ; Year of Birth: 1845

Tomb No. 4

Antonio Roxas ; Died: August 10, 1891

Gerardo Roxas y Luis ; Died: April 21, 1891

(Gerardo was the son of Antonio Roxas, both of whom died in the same year 1891 as shown above. Don Antonio Roxas was the grandfather, and Gerardo was the father, of the late Philippine President Manuel Acuna Roxas.

The son of Manuel Acuna Roxas was also named Gerardo Roxas who became a Philippine Senator, now

deceased. The current Philippine Senator “Mar” or Manuel Araneta Roxas is the son of the late Senator Gerardo or Gerry Roxas and the grandson of the late President Manuel or Manoling Roxas.)

--- CAB 6/22/2010

Santa Monica Church

Parish Profile

Sta. Monica Parish Church stands as a reminder and a historical landmark of the first evangelization of the First Christian Faith in Panay island. In 1566, just a year after the Legaspi Expedition landed on Bohol Island, Fr. Martin de Rada, O.S.A , an Augustinian missionary, was the first friar of the Legaspi Expedition to land on the island of Panay and the first to proclaim the Gospel at the riverbank of Bamban (now known as the town of Pan-ay, Capiz). At present (2009), Pan-ay is known as the Heritage Capital of Capiz because of the rich history and the deep culture it owns. The Sta. Monica Parish Church is a more than 3-century old church which was home to the biggest bell in Asia. The bell was cast in 1878 from 70 sacks of (gold and silver) coins, 7 ft. wide (diameter) by 5 ft high, and weighed 10,400 kilograms (equivalent to 10.4 metric tons or nearly 23,000 pounds). Sta. Monica Parish Church is an internationally renowned Parish

Church which was declared a National Historical Landmark by the National Historical Institute (of the Philippines), and honored as a National Cultural Treasure in 2004 by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (of the Philippines).

In 1581, the Spanish missionaries established Panay as a parish which had six (6) visitas; Suyson (now Ivisan, Capiz), Aranguen (now Pres. Roxas, Capiz), Sibra (now Pilar, Capiz), Capis (now Roxas City), Ipiong (now Panitan, Capiz), and Divingdin (now Dao, Capiz).

Of the 2,830 Augustians who came to the Philippines during the 333 years of Spanish rule, around 84 friars had served as minister in the town of Panay from 1566 until 1898. In 1581, Fr. Bartolome de Alcantara, O.S.A. was named first Prior with Fr. Agustin Camacho, O.S.A. as his companion; and in 1895, Fr. Gregorio Hermida, O.S.A. served as the last curate with Fr. Jose Garmendia, O.S.A.

The original ecclesiastical structure of Panay was built during the term of Fr. Manuel Lopez, consecutive O.S.A. between 1692 and 1698, and was rebuilt by Fr. Manuel Murguia, O.S.A. in 1774. In the past, the town of Panay was often visited by storms and earthquakes which destroyed the church and its convent several times. In 1884 after the destructive typhoons of 1874 and 1875, the famous Augustinian builder, Fr. Jose Beloso, O.S.A., renovated the stone church.

The convent, made of rubblework, also constructed by Fr. Beloso, was destroyed by the said consecutive typhoons

of 1874 and 1875. It was elegantly reconstructed in 1892 by Fr. Miguel Rosales, O.S. A., and finished by Fr. Gregorio Hermida, O.S.A. In 1895, Fr. Lesmes Perez, O.S.A., restored its beautiful grandeur.

Shortly thereafter unfortunately, it was intentionally burned, along with the Municipal Hall, as ordered by the Spanish Governor General Diego de los Pios to dislodge the rebels from the town during the 1898 Philippine Revolution.

Fr. Beloso commissioned Don Juan Reina for the casting of the largest bell in the Philippines and in Asia and the third biggest bell in the world in 1878 (aside from other bells under his name). The “Dako nga Lingganay” (meaning, “ big bell”), as it was popularly known, was made from 70 sacks of (gold and silver) coins donated by the townsfolk and measured seven feet in diameter, five feet in height and weighed 10,400 kilograms.

When the Philippines won its independence from Spain in 1898, the parishes of Capiz became totally and completely under secular administration. The native clergy assumed the pastoral care of the Capizenos. They were products of the Real Seminario de San Carlos of Cebu (1779), and later on, the Seminario de San Vicente Ferrer of Jaro, Iloilo (1869). They (all parishes in Capiz and in Iloilo) belonged to the diocese of Cebu until 1865 when Jaro became a diocese. In the town of Panay, only two Filipino priests served as coadjutors of the Augustinian curates during the colonial era: Fr. Doroteo Carlos (1840) and Fr. Jose Reyes (1892). On May 28, 1951, with the papal bull of Pope Pius XII Ex supreme

apostolatus, Capiz was finally created as a diocese. With the canonical erection of the new diocese of Capiz, the parish church (Immaculate Concepcion) of Capiz, later named Roxas City, became the metropolitan cathedral, the seat of the bishop of Capiz.

Most Rev. Manuel P. Yap, D.D. was appointed as the first bishop of Capiz (1951-1952), and was shortly transferred to the seat of Bacolod (1952-1966). He was succeeded by Most Rev. Antonio F. Frondosa, D.D., a native of Dumalag, Capiz who also became its first archbishop when Capiz was elevated to the rank of an Archdiocese on January 17, 1976, with Kalibo and Romblon as sufraggan dioceses, through the papal bull of Pope Paul VI *Nimum patens*. Most Rev. Onesimo C. Gordoncillo, D.D. became the next Archbishop of Capiz on June 18, 1986.

Fr. Francisco Alba was the first Filipino Priest who served as the Parochial Vicar of the Parish of Sta. Monica and presently, Very Rev. Msgr. Benjamin F. Advincula, P.C. is the assigned Parish Priest with his Parochial Vicars, Fr. Robert B. Alba Jr. and Fr. Mark Q. Granflor.

A significant milestone, however, happened. In 1997, the Santa Monica Parish Church of Panay was declared a National Historical Landmark by the National Historical Institute in its Resolution No. 3, series of 1997. The installed historical marker reads: "Pan-ay, originally called Bamban, was established in 1572. The first church, constructed in 1774 by Fr. Miguel Murguia, was heavily damaged by two consecutive typhoons in 1874 and 1875. The present church was reconstructed in 1884 under the direction of Fr. Jose Beloso who was aided by the

townspeople. The famous bell of Santa Monica Church, the biggest in the Philippines and in Asia, was declared a National Historical Landmark” by virtue of the National Historical Institute (NHI) of the Philippines Board Resolution No. 3, S. 1997.

In 2004, the church received another national recognition. The Parochial Church of Santa Monica of the historic town of Panay, “the best preserved complex in the province and boasts of the biggest bell in the country,” had been chosen as one of the 26 churches with the distinction as National Cultural Treasures in 2004 by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts.

Despite the honors bestowed, the more than three-century old church is in a deplorable condition. Weeds and fungi had slowly deteriorated its walls. Changing weather and climate had produced cracked surfaces. Bats and other creatures had transformed the Church as their own filthy shelter. The roofing system was about to collapse. On April 18, 2001, Very Rev. Msgr. Benjamin F. Advincula, P.C. was appointed parish priest of Panay with the specific instructions/assignments, among many, to start the renovation, reconstruction, and restoration work of the church and the reorganization of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) Program.

Indeed, the specific instructions or assignments were all done in only a few years and was completed ahead of schedule. The blessing of the renovated belfry, the repository of the biggest bell in Asia, was done on December 2004. On August 27, 2006, the rededication of the newly restored more than 3-century old Church as

the Landmark of Evangelization of 1566 on the Feast of Sta. Monica (which is usually held in early May) and the 440th Anniversary Celebration of the Evangelization of Bamban or Pan-ay took place. And on December 14, 2008 was the blessing of the newly-restored and elegantly beautified Parish Convent, re-opening of the newly organized “Museo de Santa Monica” named as “Padre Martin de Rada, O.S.A. Hall”, as well as the blessing of the exact replica of the “Dako nga Lingganay.”

As regards the current construction, the Parish of Sta. Monica church is restoring the Old Spanish Perimeter Wall (1 ½ meters or about 5 ft thick by 8 feet high).

In terms of the reorganization of the Basic Ecclesial Communities’ (BEC) Program as the focal Pastoral Thrust of the Archdiocese of Capiz, Very Rev. Msgr. Benjamin Advincula, P.C. has come with up an annual pastoral program to cater to such purpose. The town of Panay has 42 Barangays which is presently under the pastoral care of Very Rev. Msgr. Benjamin Advincula, P.C. with the parochial vicars Fr. Robert B. Alba, Jr. and Rev. Fr. Mark Q. Granflor. Mr. Isidro Jore is president of the Parish Pastoral Council and the 593 Non-Catholic Group. The Parish has 81 chapels with a 103 Basic Ecclesial Communities’ (BEC) Zones. More so, the parish has 18 Religious Organizations, Movements and Ministries and one (1) Parochial School.

History

From: “Angels in Stone: Augustinian Churches in the Philippines”

By Pedro G.

Galende, OSA, San Agustin Museum, Manila, 1996, pp 319-321.

Panay is located on plain and fertile land irrigated by the river of the same name; the climate is rather humid due to the abundant nipa fields and the low sea level. It is bounded by the Sea of Mindoro to the north, Pontevedra to the south and the town of Capiz (later aka Roxas City) to the west. Its location (elevation) was so low that when the Panay River overflowed, the flood waters used to reach the main altar of the church.

The original name Bamban was changed by the early Spaniards to **Panay**, a word which means “**mouth of the river.**” This was the place where Juan de la Isla built a fortress.

Panay is the only town which can challenge Dumangas (in Iloilo Province) for the distinction of being the first town to have received the faith. The Augustinian who accompanied the first Spanish expeditions to prevent any harm to be done to the natives, as ordered by the Rada is said to have been the first to preach the gospel in 1566 by the banks of the river of the town of Bamban (pre-Spanish name of Panay); from here, he proceeded to Dumangas in Iloilo.

Miguel Lopez de Legaspi set up his quarters in Panay in 1569 because this was a more fertile territory which could

furnish his expeditionary forces with plenty of rice and seafood during an emergency. Furthermore, the people welcomed him with pleasure and served him more loyally than the Zebuanos (or Cebuanos). From this town, Legaspi sent to Spain twelve flower pots of pepper, a special delicacy in those days as a gift to the King. The Augustinians started the Christianization of the people here and then they proceeded to Dumangas in Iloilo.

The town of Panay was founded in 1572 under the advocacy of Santa Monica, (although according to Jorde, it was founded in 1581). Originally, this town was a small settlement with 2,645 tributos or 7,935 souls; it soon developed into a flourishing town. According to another writer, it was the biggest ministry of the island and the richest town due to its trade with Capiz and the Sangleys. It, too, became the capital city of the province, a status it maintained for two centuries. It ultimately shared its name with the whole island.

Fr. Bartolome de Alacantara was named prior during the meeting of April 22, 1581, with Fr. Agustin Camacho as his companion. This must be Jorde's basis for saying that the town was founded in 1581.

In 1590, the prior was asked to pay an annual rent of 20 pesos for San Agustin Monastery, the amount was increased to 30 pesos in 1599, but was scheduled for the convent of Santo Niño de Cebu; in 1602 it was lowered to 15 pesos. In 1607, the convent was declared vacant and later on, Fr. Lonso de Mentrída, Quintilian linguist of the visayan language, was named prior.

The Estado of 1612 indicates that Panay had three priests and 3,600 souls. In 1698 the convent was asked to assist the convent of Antique with 60 pesos – this continued until 1740 when its help was no longer needed. In 1732, it paid the contribution in cash and in rice to the convent in Cebu.

In 1732, Panay had 4,604 souls. In 1760 it had 6,128, three of whom were Spaniards. In 1896, it reached 16,432 souls. In 1980, the population was 31,650.

Town of Panay population
summary:

Year	Population (or No. of Souls)
1612	3600
1732	4604
1760	6128
1896	16,432
1980	31,650

According to Fray San Agustin, this town enjoyed great trade with the Spaniards, Sangleys, mestizos and natives.

The weaving industry produced textiles of extraordinary quality called *suerte* or good luck, which commanded

fabulous prices in Europe. Don Antonio Roxas, grandfather of the late Philippine President Manuel A. Roxas, owned one of the largest rum and wine distilleries, located in Panay Town, on the whole island of Panay.

Panay Town was under the care of the Augustinians from the beginning (1566) until 1898. Traditionally, the Pan-ayanons speak the Hiligueyna (Hiligaynon) dialect with exquisite purity and elegance. They speak in a honey-voice manner resembling that of the Andalusians of Spain, without the speech defect of the Cebuanos who skip letters in their pronunciation and distort the simplicity of the Visayan languages according to Fernandez.

Fr. Manuel Lopez, prior of Panay, in a letter to the father provincial dated June 7, 1698, speaks of the deplorable state of the church and the convent as a consequence of the typhoon which slapped the province in the month of January of that year and destroyed the buildings. From this letter we can safely assume that the first buildings were probably finished before 1698, or even before 1692, during the first term of the priorship of Fr. Lopez. Fray San Agustin wrote that the convent was of very good structure, but did not mention the church. According to Fr. Lopez, since the people of Panay by themselves were not able to restore the building, an agreement was signed with the alcalde (mayor) who donated 228 pesos from the community treasury to provide the funding.

In 1774 Fr. Miguel Murguia rebuilt (Marin says built) the church, which was greatly damaged a century later by the

typhoons of March 5, 1874 and January 17, 1875. Fr. Jose Beloso restored the Santa Monica Church again in 1884.

The church, a grand structure made of coral stone is 70 meters long, 25 meters wide and 18 meters high. The walls are three meters (or about 10 feet) thick and the floor is covered with marble. Its structure is shaped in the form of a Latin cross with one large central altar and four lateral ones, each one fitted with gorgeously decorated and gilded retablos or hardwood, decorated with various polychrome statues of high artistic quality. According to Claparols, artisans from Manila fashioned the Baroque decorations, set in silver, of the main altar. The town's greatest sculptor, Joseph Bergaño or Sarhento Itak, did most of the bas-reliefs and religious statuary. According to Claparols, the completion of the church in 1774 was hailed by the whole town as a great event.

Unlike its Baroque interior, the facade of the church is simply decorated by pillars and horizontal ledges with niches for the life-sized statues of the Augustinian saints, Tomas de Villanueva and Monica. The five-story belfry is the center of curiosity because of its unusually huge bell – cast in the 19th century from 70 sacks of (gold and silver) coins donated by the townsfolk. It measures seven feet in diameter, five feet in height, and weighed 10,400 kilograms. The people of the town affectionately called it “Dako nga Lingganay”, Hiligaynon (vernacular) for “big bell”.

The bell was cast by Don Juan Reina, who had settled in Iloilo City's J.M. Basa Street in 1868 and there established his blacksmith and casting shop. When the

belfry was being constructed, Fr. Jose Beloso sent for him. With just few rudimentary tools, Reina set up temporary shop at the foot of the town and hurried with the casting of the bell. Priest and caster agreed on the testing time. When the bell was tried, the caster agreed on the testing time. When the bell was tried during the Angelus, the sound was so loud that “every nearby town heard the voice of the bell of Panay.” After being paid by the parish priest, Don Juan returned to his shop in Iloilo. In a month’s time, the bell cracked. From then on, it’s sounded more like a frying pan than a bell. Furious, the priest summoned Don Juan Reina and ordered him to have the bell recast, for free. Don Juan, who had the temper of a genuine baturro (country man from Aragon) would have none of it. Fr. Beloso, no less stubborn appealed to Bishop Cuartero who, after a heated discussion with the blacksmith, sent a circular to all the priests of the island, prohibiting them from contracting any job to Don Juan.

The deadlock was broken in a very strange manner. Bishop Cuartero would spend long sleepless nights due to a chronic toothache. Ironically, the only dentist who could help him was no other than Don Juan, the blacksmith! Don Juan was sent for, and the bishop meekly submitted himself to have his tooth pulled out. The sacamuelas, as Don Juan was called, laughingly relished the great opportunity. As he got ready to apply the hook he asked the Bishop with unfeigned insolence: “Your Excellency, is there any job for the bell caster?” “Of course, Don Juan, there is, whispered the Bishop. A big pull and the tooth came out. After this twist of events, it

was no longer difficult for the blacksmith to find work.

The bell in the words of the town's mayor is very dear to the Pan-ayanons both in moments of happiness and in times of tribulation. It symbolizes their link with the Almighty. The inscription on the bell reads: "*Soy la voz de Diosque llevaré y ensalzare desde el principio hasta el fin de este pueblo de Panay para que los fieles de Jesus vengan a esta casa de Dios a recibirlas gracias celestiales*" ("I am God's voice which I shall echo and praise from one end to the other of the town of Panay, so that the faithful followers of Christ may come to this house of God to receive the heavenly graces."). The bell was cast in this town by D. Juan Reina to the glory of God and the Virgin of Consolation, while Fr. Joe Beloso was the parish priest of the town Panay on the 21st of December, 1867 and reads: *Josepus (sic) Beloso fecit ad laudem Sanctissimi Trinitatis, B. M. Consolationis huius oppidi de Panay patrona et advocate. Anno Domini 1867.*

It weighed 183 arrobas. The small bell dates back to 1721. It was cast by Benitus a Regibus, Hilario Sunico and Juan Reina. The roof of the church was blown away by the typhoon on March 5, 1874. Another typhoon on January 17, 1875 toppled the transept. Fr. Jose Beloso restored the Santa Monica Church again in 1884. Fr. Lesmes Perez had the church beautifully repaired in 1895. The ruined convent was never rebuilt.

The Santa Monica church has been called "an excellent example" of the type of Filipino colonial Baroque style that has blended well with the Neo-Classical influence. The

façade is imposing for its size, its massive and solid appearance and for the blending of its lines and volumes. Its natural color is a pleasant look. Shallow paired pilasters with narrow grooves in between divide the façade into rectangular sections, symmetrical and well-balanced. The main entrance has a simple semi-circular arch flanked by two small started niches. This is topped by a rectangular carving portraying the Augustinian emblem. The second level has an ornate niche and a rose window above it complemented by relief sculpture at the center of the pediment. The vertical movement of the pilasters is counter foiled by the sharp projecting architrave and the curvilinear undulation of the pediment. The dark open spaces of the entrance and the windows create a closer relationship between light and shadow. The pineapple shaped finials on the topmost part of the pediment wall add to the local exotic color of the church.