

Philippine Towns & Cities :
Reflections of the Past,
Lessons for the Future

The San Juan Batangas Legacy

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Makati City, Philippines
September, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the town of San Juan Batangas engaged in a project celebrating its Centennial Year¹ and whereby its citizens prepared the *Centennial Book of San Juan* that recalled its Golden Years among other town data. A hundred years ago, the town had a bustling agricultural economy and was the setting of many social affairs supported by the families who resided in their notable heritage houses. Today, San Juan has slowed down. Many of the heritage houses are still there albeit in a tarnished if not deteriorating state and more often just in the care of custodians. To many folks today, San Juan is simply a laid-back rural town that has had its day in the sun despite its good recreational beaches in *Barangay Laiya*.

This study of the town of San Juan Batangas traces the historical course of events in relation to human and institutional factors that has made it what it is today. These factors are analyzed and presented from the viewpoint of three major elements deemed to have the most impact on the formation of the town: the local government, the parish and the early family settlers. The details in the paper, gathered mostly from town records, miscellaneous publications and narratives of knowledgeable personages, are woven together to arrive at an understanding of the evolution of the town.

An underlying theme of the paper is the town heritage, character and potential. Founded as a town only in 1848, San Juan is comparatively young but it existed during the exciting era of the industrial revolution leading to the World Wars. Apart from all the memorable births and deaths of town personalities responsible for making the town what it is today, physically established in that period were: its town plan for the *poblacion*; the heritage houses in the urban area; and haciendas in the rural area, which shaped San Juan's urban and rural cultural landscapes. By circumstance, the town of San Juan has retained much of this cultural landscape which postures itself for a role in the further sustainable development of the town.

¹The opportunity to make San Juan's Centennial Book was only in 1998. Technically however, its centennial year should be based on the milestone year 1848 when it was founded, or if preferred, on December 12, 1890 when the township's new location in *Bagumbayan* was officially approved by Government.

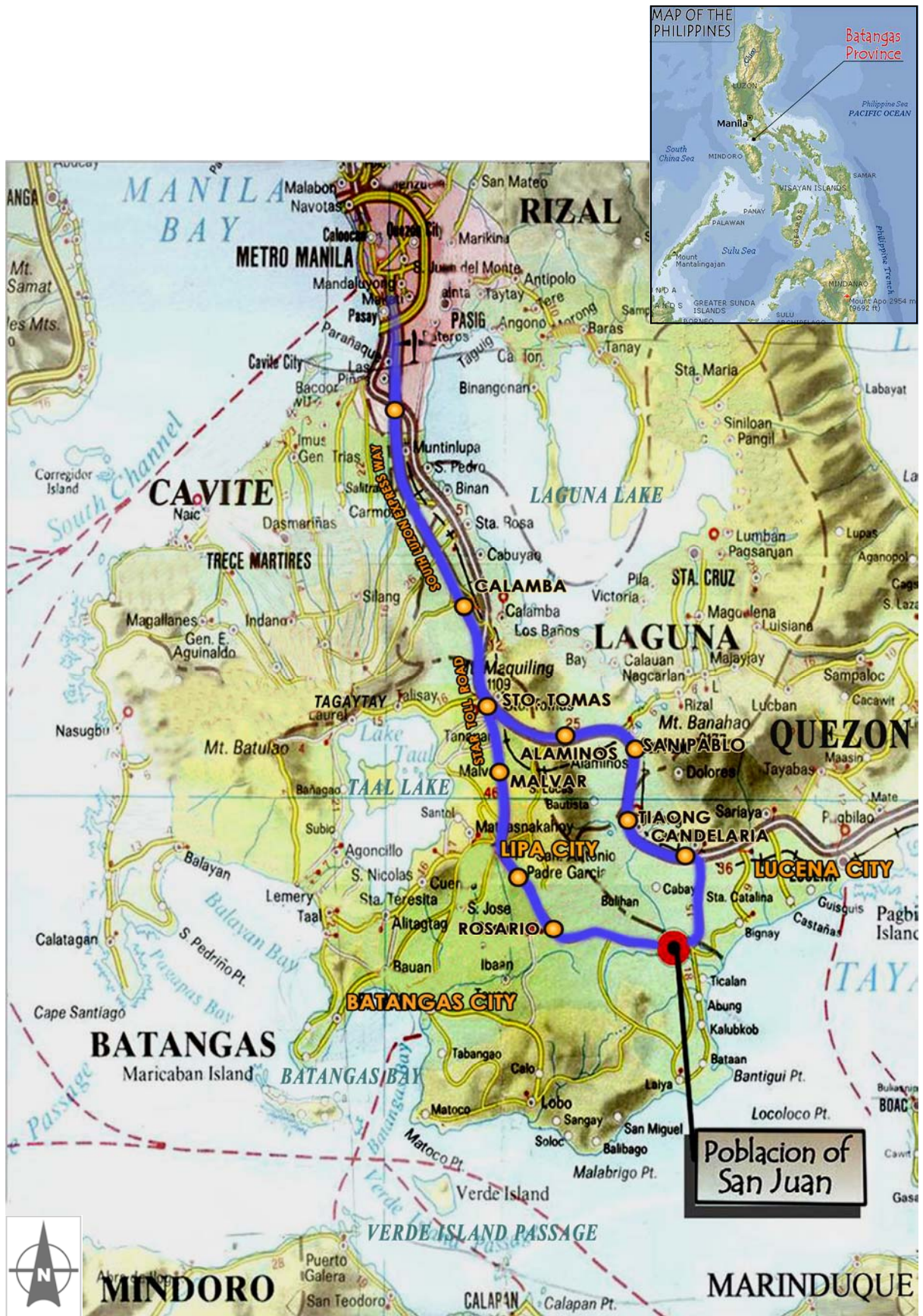
B. SAN JUAN TOWN PROFILE

Located at the Southeastern tip of the province of Batangas, San Juan is approximately 120 kilometers from Metro Manila and 43 kilometers from the provincial capital of Batangas City. It is accessible by land transportation from National Roads coming from the West (through Lipa City and the town of Rosario), and from the East (through the Quezon route). San Juan is bounded on the North by the Quezon towns of Candelaria and Tiaong with the Malaking Ilog river defining the geographical boundary between Batangas and Quezon; on the South by the Verde Island Passage; on the East by the Quezon town of Sariaya and by Tayabas Bay; and on the West by the mountain ranges of the Batangas towns of Rosario and Lobo.

San Juan has a total land area of about 29,500 hectares. As of Year 2000 Census, the town has a population of 78,169. It has 42 barangays including the town center which is the *Poblacion*. North of the *Poblacion* along the Malaking Ilog River that divides Batangas and Quezon are the Barangays of *Muzon*; *Palabanan I*; *Palabanan 2*; *Sico I*; *Sico 2*; *Janao-janao*; *Calicanto*; *Maraykit*; *Lipahan* and *Tipaz*. The other Barangays are all south of the *Poblacion*. Those that abut Batangas towns (Rosario, Taysan and Lobo) to the West are *Libato*; *Sapangan*; *Quipot*; *Pulang Bato*; *Bulsa*; *Laiya Aplaya* and *Hugom*.

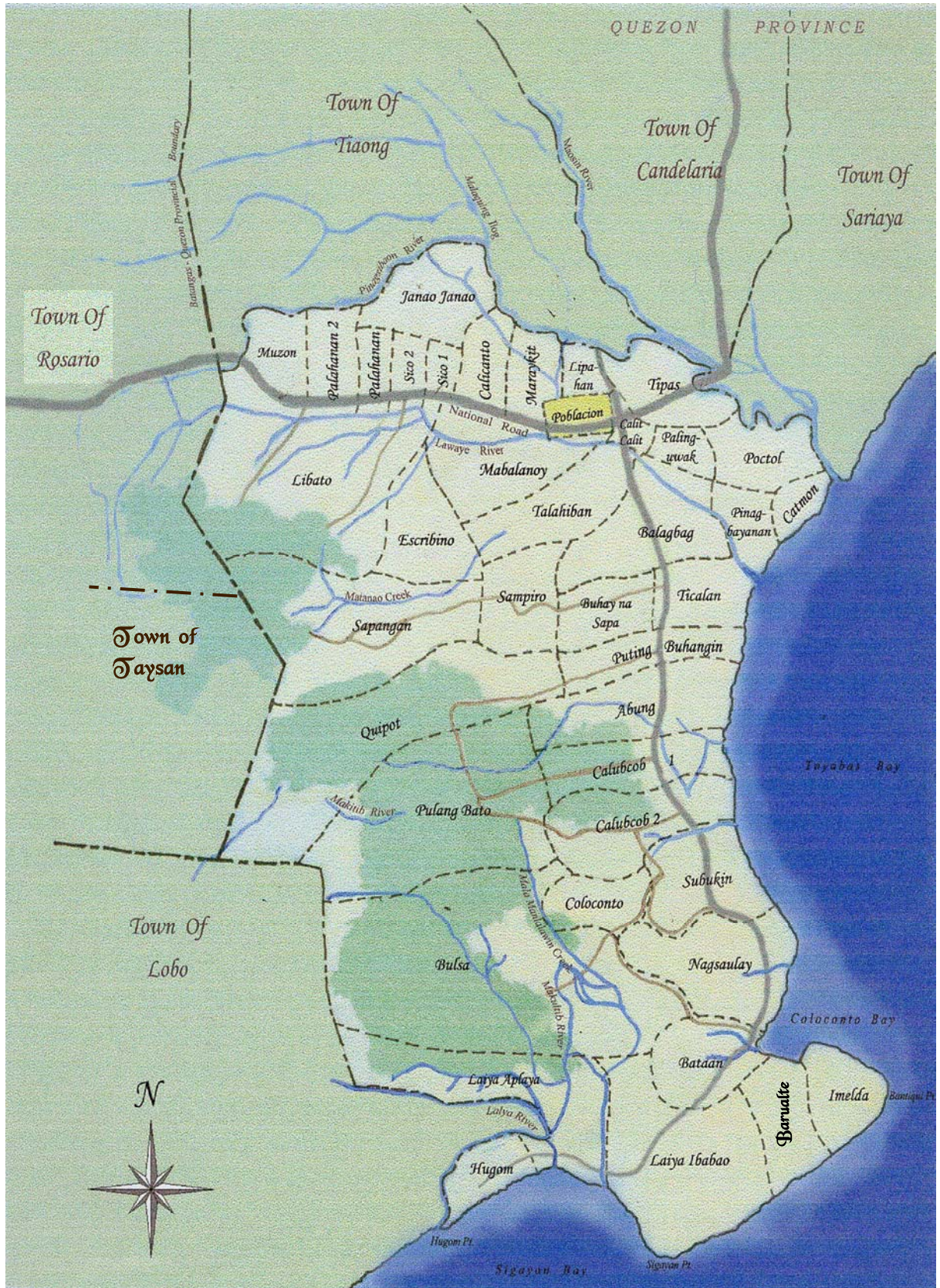
The Barangays with a coast fronting Tayabas Bay are *Poctol*; *Catmon*; *Pinagbayanan*; *Ticalan*; *Puting Buhangin*; *Abung*; *Calubcub I*; *Calubcub II*; *Subukin*; *Nagsaulay*; *Bataan*; *Imelda*; *Barualte*; *Laiya Ibabaw*; *Laiya Aplaya* and *Hugom*. The Laiya and Hugom white sand beaches nearer to the *Verde Island Passage* contain San Juan's more popular resorts today. The interior Barangays southwards of the National Road are Barangays *Poblacion* and *Calitcalit* (that actually straddle the National Road); *Mabalanoy*, *Paling Uwak*; *Talahiban I*; *Talahiban II*; *Balagbag*; *Escribano*; *Sampiro*; *Buhay na Sapa* and *Coloconto*.

San Juan is predominantly an agricultural economy with about 72% of its total land area devoted to agriculture. In the province of Batangas, San Juan has the largest area planted to rice and coconuts. It has one of the longest shorelines in the country with areas in Barangays Hugom, Laiya Aplaya, Laiya Ibabaw, Imelda and Barualte designated by the *Department of Tourism* as areas for coastal resort development under the CALABARZON master plan scheme. Except for natural corral reefs near parts of the coast that have been classified as protected sanctuary by DENR, all other coastal areas from a portion of Barangay Barualte down to Barangay Catmon are suitable for aqua-culture industry or farming.



Location of San Juan Batangas

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. *Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas*. 2007.)



Map of San Juan

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. *Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas*. 2007)



Municipal Hall of San Juan Batangas
 (Source : [San Juan Batangas UAP-CFA Database Information and Photos](#). Arch. Maria Cristina V. Turalba. CD 2004.)



Crops



Pottery



Copra



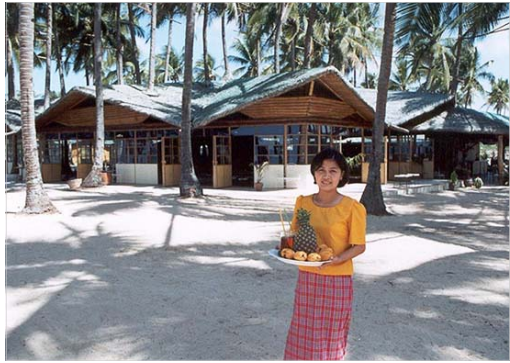
Lambanog



Seafood

San Juan Major Produce

(Sources: The Centennial Book of San Juan. 1992; various internet photos)



San Juan Beach Resorts
(Source : Internet photos of various San Juan beach resorts)



San Juan Beach

(Source : <http://www.travelblog.org/Photos/47694.html>)

THE MAKING OF SAN JUAN TOWN

The Village Between Two Rivers

Based on the *Mapa de las Yslas Filipinas* (1744) by P. Murillo Velarde, San Juan lies southeast of the parish of *Rosailo* (or Rosario) and was originally a coastal village. The origin of early people in San Juan is unclear although in 1979, 16th Century burial urns discovered in *Barangay Calubcub* of San Juan were authenticated by the National Museum. This finding reinforces the thinking² that Batangueños are descendants of ancient Malays who sailed from Borneo to Panay Island and from there went on to Taal Lake. Correspondingly, if indeed pre-Hispanic Bornean explorers launched their boats from Panay Island to reach Taal in Luzon, San Juan's coast to the East (instead of West to Taal) might have been an alternative for some to explore as well. The recorded detailed history of San Juan unfortunately only starts in the early 1800s thus for much of the historical data in this study, a chronology of 19th Century town affairs described in the *Aklat ng San Juan*³ is liberally quoted.

In the *Aklat I*, it is said that San Juan possessed three attributes as a territory. Firstly, San Juan had two rivers that is the source of irrigation for its fertile fields. Crops were so abundant then that it led to the description that “*masaganang-masagana ang balatong, sitaw, kakawate at kawayang inaabot bukbukin*” (loosely, this translates to: so plentiful were the produce that even hardy useful mangrove trees and bamboos were not harvested and just left to deteriorate in dry rot). *Bukbukin* is the vernacular for ‘subject to dry rot’ and which may have given San Juan its archaic name of *Bochoc*. Secondly, San Juan had a friendly coast that was ideal for docking boats. Thirdly, the town territory was vast and unsettled, perceived as comparatively insulated from typhoons and earthquakes which attracted early settlers who were educated, experienced and of means.

For a long time from 1698 to 1836, San Juan was a barrio (or *nayon*) of Rosario. Records starting in 1837 indicate that the government then of San Juan had *Tinientes* (deputies) who served out their one to two-year term as administrative leaders of the place. When the village was recognized as a separate municipality in 1843, however, *Cabezas de Barangay* (one for each new barrio) replaced the position of *Tinientes*. Probably due to administrative considerations,

²The Internet sources used by the author in researching old Philippines data are: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

³The *Aklat ng San Juan* is a chronologic account of San Juan town that was translated from Parish records by Fr. Ray G. de la Cruz, OSJ in 1998. The *Aklat* is in two parts, *San Juan Batangas 1836-1900* (Aklat I) and *San Juan Batangas 1901-2000* (Aklat II).

the independence of San Juan from *Rosario* became official only later in 1848 when the Spanish administration gave the town its name of *San Juan de Bocboc*⁴.

By 1864, the town progressed enough to be headed by *Gubernadorcillos*. The first *Gubernadorcillo* was Don Camilo Perez, a prominent citizen of the town who even earlier on was credited with helping detach San Juan from Rosario. With this role, and considering his later contribution to public works and his efforts in maintaining peace and order in the town, Don Camilo Perez was recognized as the founder of the town.

The Relocation

The Rivers of San Juan

The two major rivers of San Juan are the *Malaking Ilog* and the *Lawaye* rivers. “*Malaking Ilog* has the largest watershed area among the rivers of Batangas. It drains an area of about eight hundred twenty (820) square kilometers that includes most of Malepunyo Volcano, two-thirds of San Cristobal Volcano and the southwest quadrant of Banahaw Volcano. Because of its extensive watershed, the lower reaches of *Malaking Ilog* are prone to flooding and flash floods which early settlers might have experienced perennially.” (Raymundo Punongbayan, *Batangas Forged in Fire*. P.7). Punongbayan further describes the other river as the smaller river “whose watershed is about one hundred (100) square kilometers”.

According to the map in Fedor Jagor’s book *Reisen in den Philippinen (1873)*, San Juan was once termed as plain *Nayon*. *Nayon* (as in *Nayon ng Rosario*), is another term for barrio and might have been given to San Juan in the absence of a name for the area at that time. In another book *Dictionario Geografico Estadistico Historico de las Islas Filipinas 1850 (p.361)*, Fray Manuel Buzeta wrote: “to the east, the *Malaquing Ilog* of Rosario discharges on the sands of the *Nayon* that also receives the outfall of *Lawaye* river”. The significance of this description of the rivers is that indeed the outfall catchment of the *Malaking Ilog* and the *Lawaye* rivers includes, if not is, the coastal flood plains of old San Juan. On October 28, 1883, San Juan experienced a catastrophe due to continuous high winds and storm rain. “Water in the town rose to a height of three meters; houses were destroyed, livestock drowned and planted crops were washed away.” (*Aklat I*, p.11).

⁴Over time, the *Bocboc* word in the town’s name was replaced with *Bolboc* (a water spring well) until even later, the town was just known as plain *San Juan* (derived from its patron saint *San Juan Nepomuceno*).

The Floods & the Flight

From the chronicles of *Aklat I*, there was a description of old San Juan: “the Town is located on the banks of *Tayabas Look* near *Rio Grande*. The *Bancoro Creek* is right beside the village which is surrounded by a moat where the cemetery is on the other side. Only six families have stone houses with metal roof. Others were made of wood, nipa and bamboo. There were small stores, a boat dock and the past time was drinking *lambanog*.” Based on this description and the traces of the old town layout in what is now *Barangay Pinagbayanan* (including the partly buried church), an image of San Juan then as a typical one street village located some distance away from the *Malaking Ilog* and the sea is easy to imagine. The town’s margin to the sea is clearly the low lying flood plain that justifies this margin’s traditional role as natural rice lands and fish ponds. This was the setting in San Juan at the time of the big flood that left the town in ruins.

“By 1886, the floods which had menaced the town had become worse and the parish priest had erected a provisional church and *convento* in a site seven kilometers further inland called *Calitcalit*.” (Regalado Trota Jose, *Batangas Forged in Fire*. P.109). Following this lead, the parishioners also moved their residence to *Calitcalit* where according to the research of Regalado Trota Jose, “it remained the task of Fray Celestino Yoldi, who took over as parish priest in 1892 to definitely resettle the town. Fray Yoldi had arranged for the swap of the old church site in what is now known as *Pinagbayanan* with the new site in *Calitcalit*. Fray Yoldi was responsible for the construction of the present church, *convento*, and schools; he also helped prepare the street plan”.

Life in Bagumbayan

In agreement with the thinking of parish authorities, the town officials initiated the petition for the transfer of the *lumang bayan* upstream to a new site on January 18, 1886. On December 12, 1890 the *bagong bayan* or new town location in *Calitcalit* was formally approved by the Government. Two years later by 1893, the *Maura Law* was passed and all the town heads under the new set up were formally designated and given the title of *Capitan Municipal*. Four *Tinientes* (deputies) would make up the *Tribuna Municipal* or Municipal Council. Given all the events and reorganization that was going through in that period, the agricultural economy of the town thrived and where among other produce and markets, it was said to be “producing sugar for Mindoro and Tayabas.”

In line with the agricultural trend in the region, San Juan hacenderos eventually shifted away from sugar cane and heavily invested in coconut plantations going into the 1900s. “The first decades of the 20th century brought prosperity (to the town). The French opened coconut mills in Manila in the 1890s which started to export copra to France. The industry grew such that by the 1920s and 1930s, many of the town’s landed families began building the large houses that line the San Juan streets today.” (Martin Tinio Jr., *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p. 188).

The War Years

The Katipuneros of San Juan

Despite the town’s affluence under the existing Spanish order, the last decades of the 19th Century was also the age of enlightenment and nationalism. Patriotic leading citizens of the town took Batangas bravado to task and heeded the call for revolution by Filipino leaders. Overnight, gentlemen farmers whose families were in the process of moving to the *bagong bayan* site turned into military officers. They represented the town in the Katipunero (rebel militia) cause and used their plantations in the rural area to assemble and quarter their troops.

In August 26, 1896, the *San Juan* Katipuneros were organized under General Miguel Malvar to participate in the revolution against the Spanish government. The militia had hardly mobilized against the Spaniards when the war effort shifted: they now faced a front against American colonialist invaders who wrested the Philippines from waning Spanish rule at the turn of the century. During those turbulent years, the San Juan government came to be under town leaders who were appointed by consensus and whose main task was to bring order and system to a chaotic situation.

The American Occupation

Led by General Malvar, Batangueños readily joined the Katipunan inspired by the organization’s idealism in the uprising against a faltering Spanish administration. The Batangas provincial militia thus refused to readily give up the cause to the *Aves de Rapina* (in reference to the Eagle symbol of the American invading forces). “The Filipino Generals who resisted - Miguel Malvar of Sto. Tomas, Nicolas Gonzales of Tanauan and Braulio de Villa of San Juan - were great men. It was in Calamba where the great battle was fought to prevent the Americans from entering Batangas province”. (*Aklat II*, p.2).

“Among the other towns in the province of Batangas, San Juan fought harder against the Americans that it necessitated an order from Gen. Franklin Bell to activate the repressive *zona* system in the town. This caused hardship to San Juan where perhaps in the whole Tagalog region, San Juan lost the most number of people (from disease, if not from battle wounds).” (*Aklat II*, p.5). In an account of the Philippine-American war obtained from the Internet⁵, it was written that “one (zona) camp 2 miles wide by one mile long housed 8,000 Filipinos and sometimes over 200 were confined to one building. In camps in Lobo and San Juan, over 20% of the population died.” The 1903 census declared mortality rates in Batangas Province as follows:

<u>Town</u>	<u>Population</u> <u>(1903 census)</u>	<u>Mortality</u>
San Juan	11,853	3,276
Taal	17,525	1,971
San Jose	8,996	1,061
Rosario	8,326	864
Lobo	5,781	805

Despite the gallant stand of the Batangueños, the American military machine was formidable. On February 4, 1900, the Americans took over the town government of *San Juan*, the easternmost town of the province. In describing the stubborn and ill-fated resistance of Batangueños against the American army, American observer Claude E. Sawyer disparagingly wrote in his journal: *They are little; they all fight; they are all Christians, devout fanatical Roman Catholics - everybody from the cradle to the grave.*” (*Aklat II*, p.5).

On February 2, 1902, the areas of Batangas (including San Juan) that was under military rule were demilitarized by the Americans and on April 2, 1902 General Miguel Malvar (General Emilio Aguinaldo’s military officer for the province of Batangas) finally surrendered to the Americans. In 1935, the Philippine Commonwealth was established under the **Tydings-McDuffie** Act where among other changes, the title of town executive was changed from *Presidente Municipal* to Municipal Mayor – the American title for town executive that we use up to today.

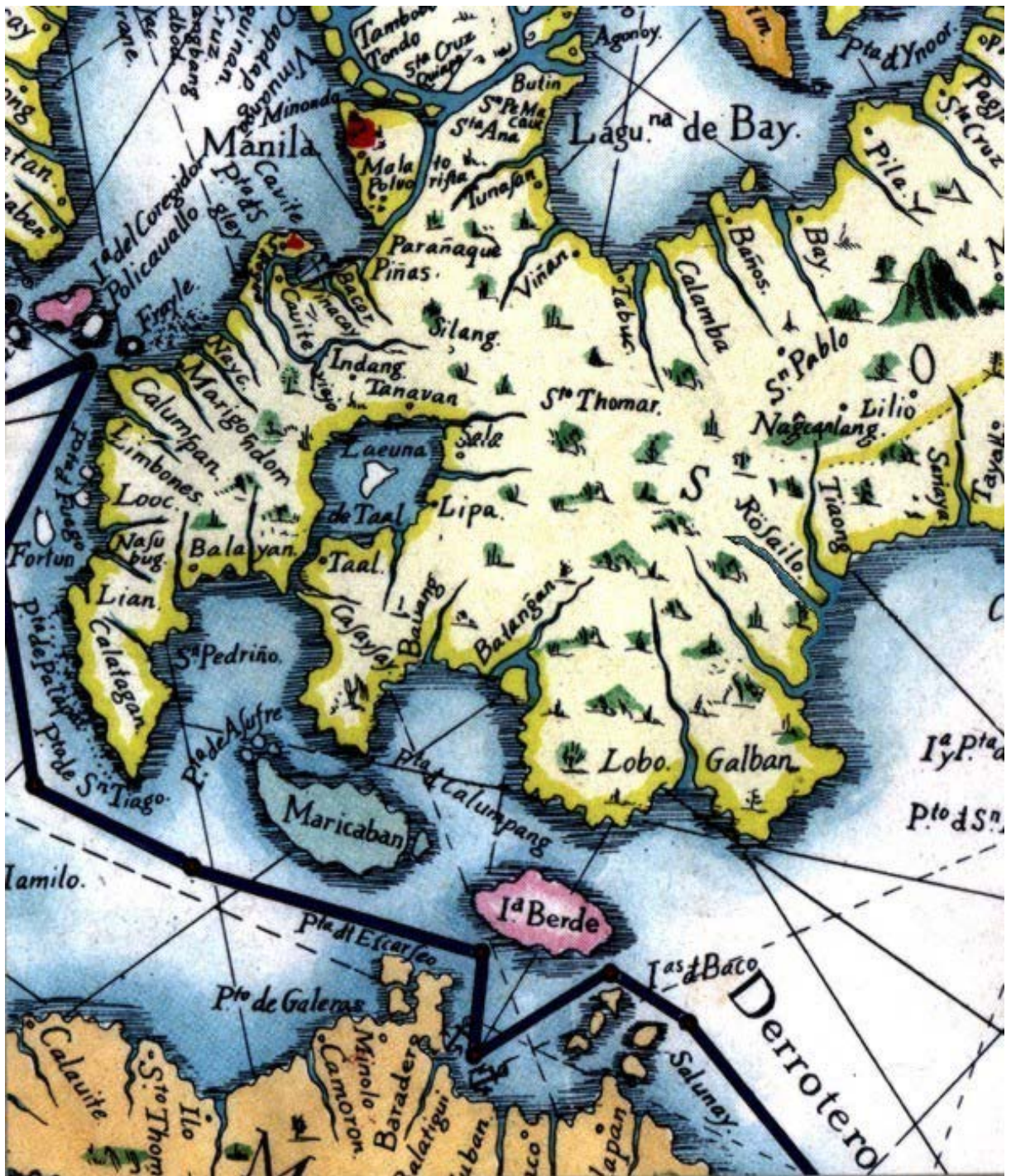
⁵<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Crete/9782>

The Second World War

Between the years 1941 to 1944, the town experienced another occupation. Second World War was underway and the Japanese military had taken over the country. When the American military presence was pulled out of Batangas (to fortify the ongoing Bataan resistance then), “the first Japanese soldiers began occupying the towns of Batangas. Militarily, Batangas was important to the Japanese because of its controlling position over the Verde Island Passage, its economic potential and airfields. Thus, the number of occupation troops (there) was relatively large.” (Ricardo Jose, *Batangas Forged in Fire*. p.230). As Japanese forces were sent to places and defense fortifications were built, the same author cites that in response, “an anti-Japanese guerilla resistance movement quickly came into existence.”

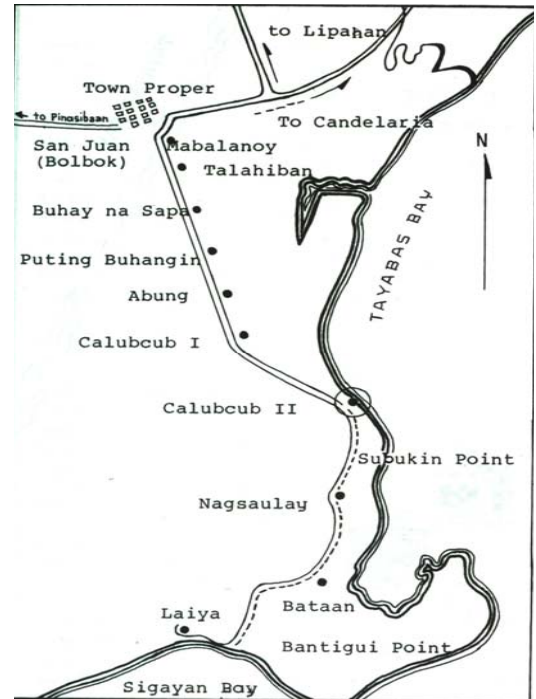
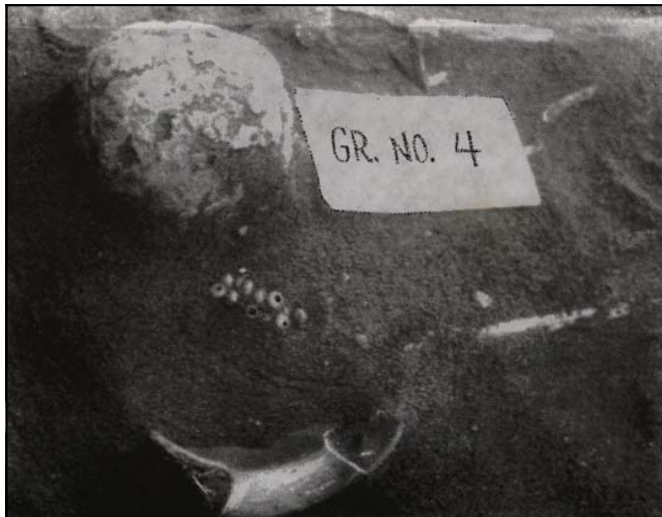
Apart from many residents who were enlisted in the official army, San Juan’s contribution to the resistance was nationalistic locals who moved to the mountains to become area guerilla leaders. “From October 1944 to May 1945, over twenty five thousand people were killed by the (retreating) Japanese. Particularly hard hit were Bauan, Cuenca, Lipa, Mataas na Kahoy, San Jose, Santo Tomas, Taal and Tanauan.” (Ricardo Jose, *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p.236). San Juan was more fortunate this time. Despite the enemy edict to punish all those who had fought the Japanese, the town was spared from the infamous massacre and razing of towns in Batangas.

Lore has it that the resourceful area guerillas dynamited a bridge in the night whereupon the enemy platoon designated to implement the massacre in San Juan plunged to their death in the dark as they made their way from Lipa to San Juan in a truck. Since the fortuitous event involved a ‘bridge’, the townspeople like to believe that it was the handiwork of their patron saint *San Juan Nepomuceno*. To the faithful, this saint was the ultimate confessor – a bridge between penitents and God – who was martyred a long time ago for his steadfastness in maintaining the seal of the confessional.



Map of Old Batangas

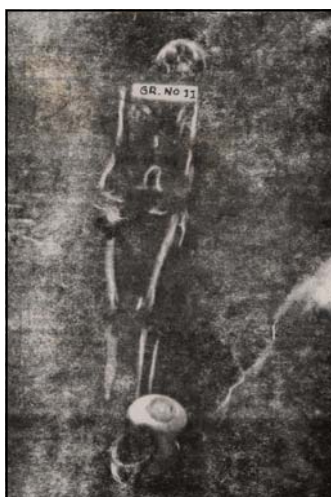
(Source : Batangas Forged in Fire. 2002.)



Map showing the Calubcub II
Archaeological Site

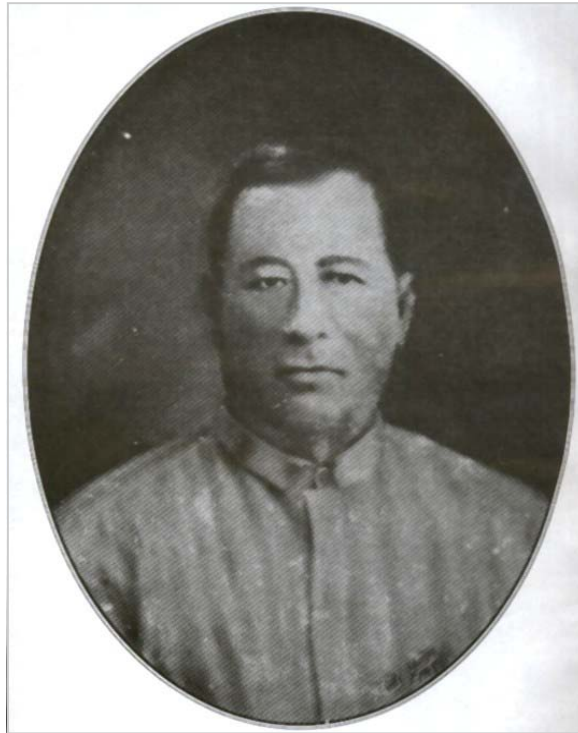
“After a month long initial dig in November, we started nursing the idea that the site had convincing potential in terms of its being chronologically classified as a Late Metal Age site. This concept came to be after ten burials displayed a consistency in their cultural material content. Earthenware pots, earthenware stoves and glass beads were recovered from the graves as part of the grave furniture. The idea caught fire and gained momentum after it appeared that beyond the one meter deep range level where most of the graves were deposited, there was a distinct absence of any material belonging to a different cultural period.”

- Cecilio G. Salcedo



Calubcub Excavation

(Source : Salcedo, Cecilio G. Prehistoric Burials in Calubcub Segundo, San Juan Batangas Anthropological Paper No. 4. National Museum, 1979.)



Camilo Perez

Founder of San Juan

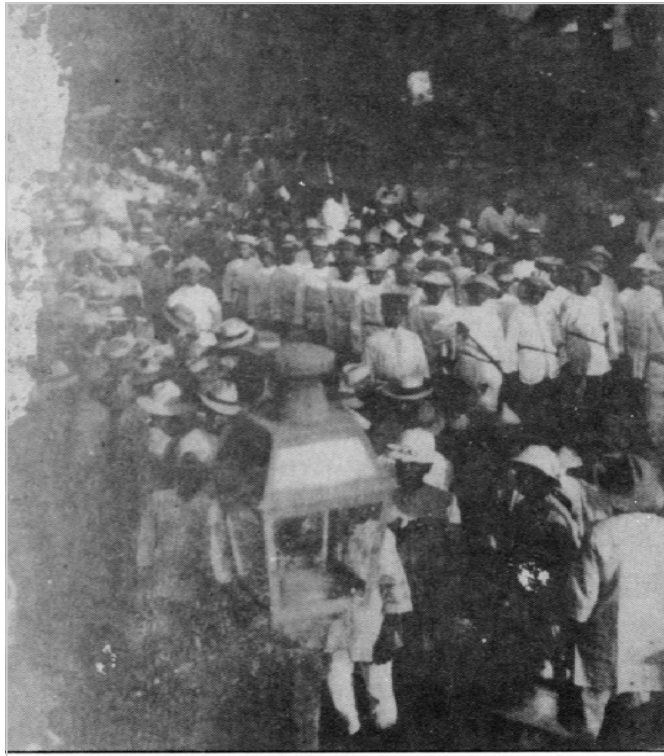
(Source : The Centennial Book of San Juan. 1992)



Fr. Yoldi, the builder of of San Juan Church

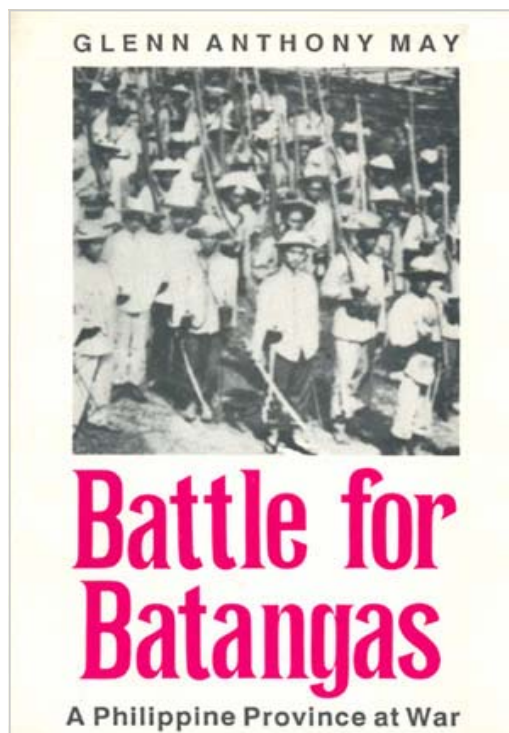
(Source : Lumang Simbahan, Ancestral Churches in Batangas. Batangas Forged in Fire. 2002)

Impetus for the Relocation of the Town



Katipuneros of San Juan

(Source : The San Juan Centennial Book. 1992)

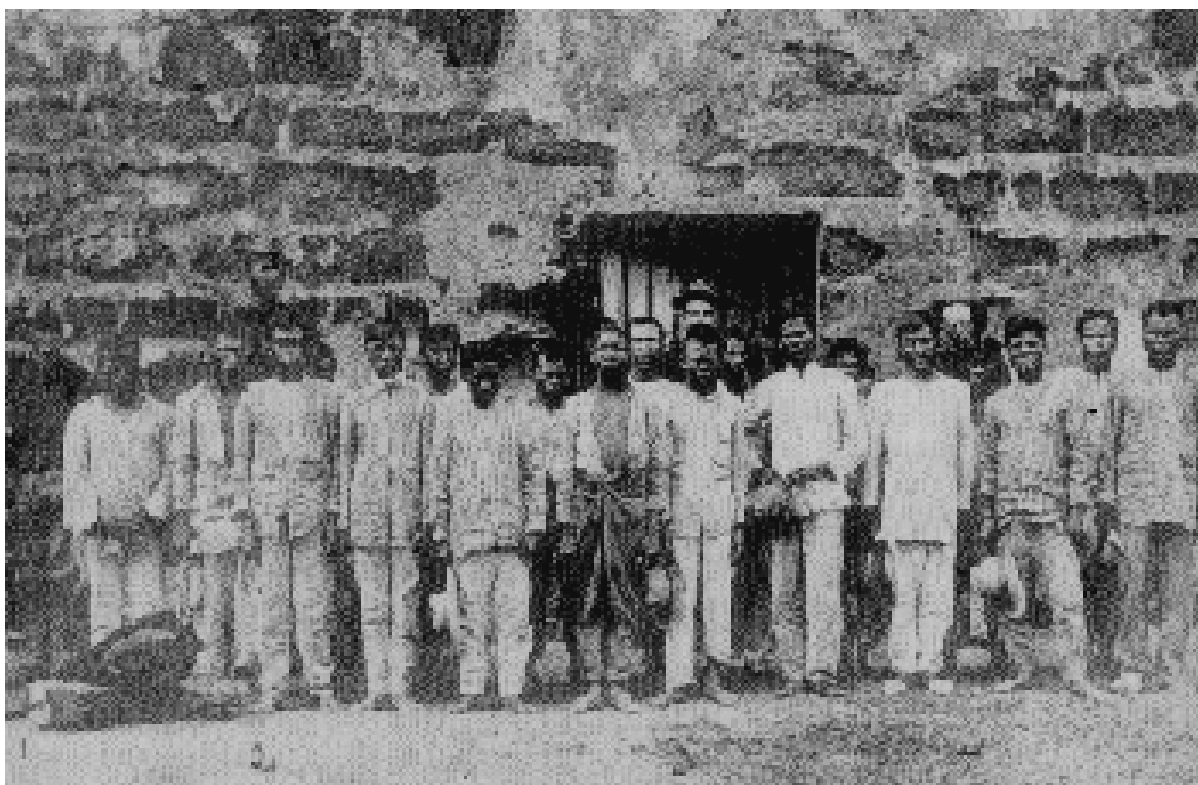


The Book of Glenn Anthony May

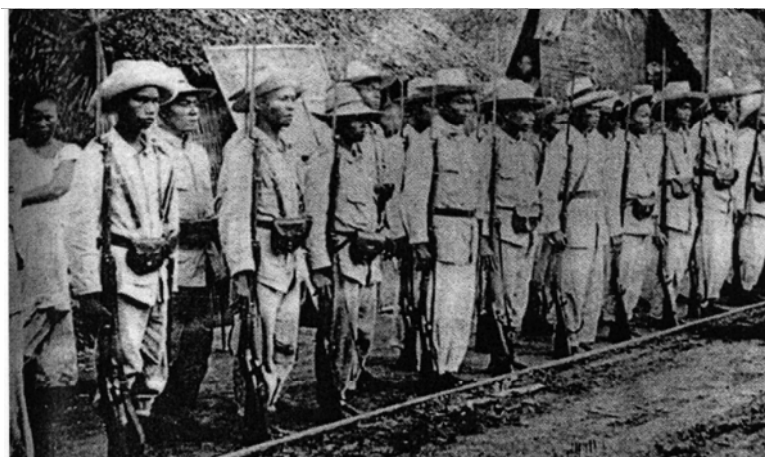
(Source : http://www.newdaypublishers.com/images/all_books/Battle%20for%20Batangas.jpg)

An account of the Philippine-American War in 1899-1902 in the province of Batangas. Glenn Anthony May, an Oregon History Professor fuels controversy in this examination of the Philippine-American War. He rejects previously accepted explanations, popularized by Teodoro Agoncillo, that the Philippine Revolution was a revolt of the masses. Instead, he argues that the experience of Batangas was unique because it was the political and economic elite of the province who became the backbone of local resistance, serving as military leaders and extending financial and other forms of assistance to the revolutionary troops. (Yale University Press, 1991.)

Images of the San Juan Revolutionary Force



Batangas prison camp, 1900



Katipuneros in Batangas. (1900)



Filipino prisoners captured by the Americans in Batangas. (1900)

Images of the Batangas Province Militia

(Source : <http://www.army.mil>)

D. THE PARISH OF SAN JUAN DE BOLBOC

Christianity in Batangas

The history of Batangas as a province can never be separated from the history of the Christianization of the Islands. Since the Franciscan missionaries came to Taal together with Spanish Conquistadores *de Goiti* and *Salcedo*, Batangas not only became the second most important religious centre of the Archipelago, but conversion to Catholicism was done within a mere ten-year period of proselytizing by the Spanish orders. When Batangas became a diocese in 1572, it was the order of the Augustinian missionaries who expanded the faith and established the parishes in areas of Batangas including Rosario Town.

The original parish that encompassed old San Juan was established towards the end of the seventeenth century under the town of Rosario. “The Augustinians administered to the (Rosario) parish, said to have been established in 1691. The secular clergy then took over, not without controversy, for the first priest assigned was an Indio. Notwithstanding Fray Gaspar de San Agustin’s dire predictions, the seculars remained in ‘Padre Garcia’ until 1871, 150 years later. In this year, the parish was turned over to the Augustinian Recollects who stayed until the Revolution. By the end of its secular period, Padre Garcia had given birth to two large parishes: San Juan de Bolboc in 1846, then Taysan in 1860. A third, Lobo was created in 1874.” (Regalado Trota Jose, *Batangas Forged in Fire*. p.106-107).

The Early Church

In the book “Batangas Forged in Fire”, Regalado Trota Jose wrote: “In 1846, San Juan de Bolboc became the first ‘*visita*’ of Rosario to be erected as a parish. Its first parish priest, Don Damaso Mojica, was to serve here for more than thirty years. The first church in San Juan’s ‘lumang bayan’ was initially made out of materials with combustible properties. The Governor General approved a plan prepared by parishioners over a more expensive one made by the government architect. It took them about two years to gather stone, wood, lime and sand to start work on a more solid church. To these were added imported materials: cut stone from Meycauayan, Bulacan; lime from Binangonan, Rizal; tiles, bricks and ironwork from Manila. Work on the convento began later, but it was paralyzed in 1866 due to lack of funds. This convento of stone and wood was finally finished in 1881; however it burned down in 1888.”

⁶Padre Garcia is the name given in 1949 to the original seat of Rosario town hence the name of the town used in Trota Jose’s report is ‘Padre Garcia’ which is interchangeable with Rosario. Today the Rosario town site is a new site that is located about four kilometers away

Regalado Trota Jose further wrote: “In 1881 San Juan parish was transferred from the secular clergy to the Augustinian Recollects. Construction of a new church was approved by the archbishop in 1886 to replace the old one that was already in a very sad state. Its plan was given by the curate of Taysan, whose church had by then been constructed. Could it have been one of the earlier drawings for the Taysan church that had been rejected? Quite possibly, the project was shelved because of another concern. By 1886, the floods which had menaced the town had become worse and the parish priest had erected a provisional church and convento in a site seven kilometers further inland called *Calitcalit*. The residents were indecisive about moving because many had interests in the old site.”

Based on the lead of the church leaders however, the momentum to transfer settlement increased until the township eventually shifted to *Calitcalit*. The Augustinian Recollects who eventually built the better church and convent complex in the new town site, helped out in the preparation of the town plan that came to be the setting for the relocating parishioners. The resulting *poblacion* layout was a variation of the “Law of the Indies” plan typical for townships and essentially involving a central plaza, a church and town hall complex, and a basic grid street layout for the residential area.

The Religious Orders in San Juan

After the era of the Augustinians and the secular clergy in the founding years, the Augustinian Recollect fathers took over. It was that period when the new parish priest Fray Yoldi was faced with the prospect of relocating the church edifice to *Calitcalit*. More Augustinian Recollect fathers came later including Padre Domingo Carceller who spent his life as San Juan’s parish priest and was an icon in the town even before his retirement in 1958. “For uncertain reasons the Recollect fathers left San Juan Parish where the last Recollect administrator was Father Jesus Sobejano.” (San Juan Centennial Book).

It was in 1978 when the Oblates of St. Joseph took over the administration of the parish with Fr. Emeterio Julitan as the first OSJ parish priest. The Parish Pastoral Secretariat was eventually organized which the townspeople of San Juan came to accept as the new order today” (Centennial Book of San Juan, 55-56). Through the years, the Parish officials encrypted and preserved much of the data concerning anything that had to do with the town. Particularly for San Juan’s early years, many interesting details in this study are largely based on parish chronicles as translated from Spanish.



Façade of San Juan Church

(Sources : The Centennial Book of San Juan. 1992;
Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)



The town as viewed from the church belfry

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)



The Parish Church Bell

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)

The San Juan Church

E. THE SOCIETY OF SAN JUAN TOWN

The Pioneers

The early San Juan community started in what is now the barangay of *Pinagbayanan* (the old town site) along the coast of Tayabas Bay. The original immigrants to San Juan mostly appropriated the surrounding virgin territory for themselves and established the first haciendas in the town. The first indication about the profile of those who were responsible for shaping San Juan's landscape is partly provided through parish and town records. In 1836, a census of the town showed that it had a population of 6,508 residents. Some of the names from this period are found in the roster of town officials who initially served as either *Timientes Absolutos del Barrio* (1837-1843), *Cabezas de Barangay* or *Gobernadorcillos* (1843 -1890).

The *Angkan* Families of the Town

By the late 1800s, the Golden Age of San Juan was underway mostly through the efforts of landlord *Angkan* families (clansmen) who built up their plantations in San Juan. The agricultural production of these families became the backbone of the town's economy. The *Angkan* patriarchs became the pillars of the community and, collectively, were the builders of the town's heritage houses (synonymous to the fine mansions of the town in the context of this paper). The *Angkan* families married each other and perpetuated tradition by establishing further haciendas and notable heritage houses over time for their new families.

Initially, the haciendas were contiguous sites for the *Angkan* patriarchs, but through time, the *Angkan* families sold and acquired land to and from each other resulting in a situation where after a while, the so called *Angkan* lands were actually dispersed investments in different barangays of the town. What is evident was that the *Angkan* families primarily considered San Juan their world where they continued to acquire more tracts of land, expanding their plantations when the opportunity arose and as they acquired further experience and capital. Apart from the economic benefit it gave them, many *Angkan* patriarchs considered their haciendas as their political bailiwick counting on the loyalty of the tenant families who populated these haciendas. The paragraphs below identify some of these mainstay families and their patriarchs; their property holdings and the circumstances that made them what they were.

The Moxica-Quizon Family

One of the earliest landlord families in San Juan was the Moxica family. “The Moxicas had a lot of land, properties said to have come from Fray Damaso Moxica, the friar who built the town’s (earlier) church.” (Martin Tinio Jr., *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p. 188). The Fray who came from his previous post in Imus, Cavite arrived in San Juan in 1847 and was the town parish priest for more than 30 years. Lore has it that four children whom the Fray brought with him from Cavite may have descended from the Fray. Later, another child born in San Juan was also said to be a descendant of the Fray. The Moxica children (interchangeable with Moxica) were however mostly female and thus the name is not found in San Juan today. The line however helped produced some of the oldest and wealthiest *Angkan* families in San Juan including the Quizon, Mercado, Javier and Magtibay families. This *Angkan*’s ancestral lands are found in the northeastern quadrant of the town and include areas of Quezon province close to the *Malaking Ilog*.

The Triviño Family

“The Triviño’s are one of San Juan’s oldest families.” (Martin Tinio Jr., *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p. 189). The Triviño roots were originally from Tiaong (Quezon)⁷ who intermarried with the Quizon, Maralit, Mercado, and Perez families of San Juan. The roster of town *Tinientes* includes a Mamerto Triviño (1839-1840) and a Juan Triviño (1843). Hipolito Mercado, a *cabeza de barangay* of one of San Juan’s original barangay in 1848, married Maria Triviño. In 1878, Santiago Triviño and Francisco Triviño were *cabezas de barangay*. Approaching the year 1900, Ciriaco Triviño was a *punong bayan* of the town. By the 1920s, neighboring heritage houses along Rizal Street leading to the church were built by brothers Emilio⁸ and Liduvino Triviño for their families. Some in the Triviño clan moved on and settled in Naga City after the war where they made a name for themselves.

The Perez Family

The Perez *Angkan* in San Juan originally came from Ibaan (Batangas). Among the *Cabezas de Barangay* of the original barangays in 1848, the names of Hilarion Perez (Barangay Sta. Isabel), Victorio Perez (Barangay San Felipe) and Andres Perez (Barangay San Andres) are listed. Eutropio Perez was punong bayan in 1850 while Lorenzo Perez was a *cabeza de barangay* in 1878. Among the Perez family, the most prominent is Don Camilo Perez (1810-1889) who is

⁷Based on *Aklat ng San Juan 1836-1900*, p.23, the Trivino family originally came from Tiaong, Quezon.

⁸The Emilio Triviño heritage house is owned today by Custodio Ona.

the acknowledged *Father of San Juan Town* for his role as *punong bayan* before 1848 and as *Gubernadorcillo* in 1869 during San Juan's formative years. Don Camilo's ancestral lands are traced today to be mostly in the southeastern area of the town. The wealth of Don Camilo was impressive enough to merit description in parish records: "Don Camilo was moneyed with a large plantation and a commercial boat" (Fr. Ray de la Cruz, *Aklat I*, p. 11). The Perez descendants are intermarried with the Triviño, Marasigan and de Villa family.

The Maralit Family

The first Maralit in San Juan was Don Angel Katigbak Maralit, a horse trader, who with his wife Romana Dimayuga, came from Lipa to settle in San Juan during the 1800s. He was *Punong Bayan* of the town in 1877-1879 and again in 1888-1889. Don Angel acquired huge tracts of land in San Juan that he developed as coconut and rice plantations except for the hilly uplands that he used as grazing land for his horses. Angel's ancestral lands are located in San Juan's southeastern section. The Maralit name from Don Angel's line is non-existent today since Don Angel only had five daughters who inherited his vast haciendas. At least three of these daughters who lived in San Juan all built heritage houses in prime locations of the town. The heritage house of Don Angel, said to be the oldest house along Calle Mayor, is now demolished although two Maralit daughters' bahay-na-bato⁹ houses along Calle Mayor still stands. Don Angel's descendants married into the Triviño and Mercado family of San Juan.

The Marasigan Family

As early as 1848, there was a Faustina Marasigan who was the wife of Alejandro de Chavez, one of the original *Tinientes*. An Angel Marasigan was also a *punong bayan* in 1877. "The Marasigans came from Cuenca Batangas. Francisco Marasigan, first Capitan Municipal under the Maura Law of 1894, married Irene Perez Mercado, granddaughter of Camilo Perez" (Martin Tinio Jr., *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p. 188). The Marasigan family had vast landholdings in the northeastern portion of the town and was intermarried with Perez, Mercado and de Villa families. The Marasigan properties also included most of the southern part of the new poblacion site in *Calitcalit* including the sites for the *Casa Tribuna*, market and jail site that they donated to the town.

⁹ The Angeles Maralit (Virey) house has been renovated and is now owned by Dr. Sancho Ona. The Eduvigis Maralit (Balinos) house beside it retains its heritage features and is now the *House of the Señor*, a town shrine that exhibits the miraculous Nazarene statue that is paraded around during the Easter season.

The heritage house¹⁰ of Francisco Marasigan along the *Calle Mayor* is one of the oldest house in San Juan. According to the Marasigan family, it was actually the grand old *babay-na-bato* house of Francisco and his wife Irene Perez Mercado in *lumang bayan* that had been relocated. Could this be Camilo Perez's ancestral house since Francisco's wife Irene is Camilo's granddaughter? Francisco's son, Benito Marasigan and his wife Soledad Villapando, built their own heritage house along the Lawaye River in the 1930s and was one of the San Juan families who had expanded their plantations in Bicol lands after the war. Two other sons of Francisco, Joachin Marasigan and Alfredo Marasigan, were educated in the United States and were reportedly the first car owners (a *Packard* and a *Pierce Arrow*) among the *Angkan* families in San Juan.

The De Villa Family

In the book "Batangas Forged in Fire", Martin Tinio Jr. writes that Jose de Villa was the first de Villa in San Juan who came from San Jose (Batangas) and was married to Josefa Ylao, a native of San Juan. The *Aklat I* book also has it that a Jose de Villa who was a Gubernadorcillo of San Jose Batangas was married to Paula Mercado and was one of the first immigrants to San Juan. Jose de Villa was a rancher who amassed grazing lands in the southeastern part of San Juan early on. It is conjectured that the church site of Father Yoldi might have been part of the de Villa estate.

The de Villas are intermarried with the Salud, Javier, Marasigan and Sales family. Jose's son, Vicente de Villa, is the father of Braulio de Villa who was governor of Batangas from 1919-1922. In the election of 1887, two of Jose's grandchildren who won were Benedicto de Villa (*Tiniente Primero*) and Esteban de Villa (*Cabeza de Barangay*). During the turbulent years of 1890-1891 at the close of the Spanish reign and then in 1900-1905 at the beginning of the American years, Esteban de Villa was the long time chief executive of the town. Today, the de Villa descendants continue to be known for public service in the fields of education, the military and political administration.

The Salud Family

The first Salud in San Juan was Felipe Salud who married Lucia de Villa in the late 1840s. Several Salud names are cited in *Aklat I and II*. Felipe's son, Fidel Salud, was married to Luciana Perez daughter of Camilo Perez and was a *punong bayan* in 1875. Of long service to the town was Bruno Salud, a landed and able person who was initially *sarbento cuadrillero* and *cabeza*

¹⁰ The Francisco Marasigan house is now owned by his grandson, Apolonio Marasigan

de barangay of San Roque, until he became *punong bayan* in 1857. Bruno Salud was an accomplished, wealthy man who owned stocks of cows, carabaos and horses. The Saluds intermarried with the de Villa, Perez, Trivino, and Lopez families of San Juan. Julio Salud built the Salud heritage house (now demolished) along the Calle Mayor at the turn of the 20th century. Mrs. Mercedes Salud de Villa was the founder in the 1930s of the Batangas Eastern Academy school (originally Bolboc Institute) in San Juan.

The Mercado Family

The Mercados are connected through marriage with the Triviño, Quizon, Sales, Javier, Marasigan and Magtibay families. Hipolito Mercado, a *Tiniente* of old San Juan in 1843, was married to Maria Triviño Perez, a daughter of Camilo Perez. The Mercados, like the Triviños, have been in San Juan for as long as people can remember, but they say that “the Mercados - originally from Binan, Laguna - descended from Juan Mercado who had thirteen children. One of them, Gregorio Fernando Mercado, ended up in San Juan, and married Eulalia Trivino.” (Martin Tinio Jr., p.189). Could this Gregorio be the Gregorio de Mercado who was elected *gobernadorcillo* in 1856? In any event, Gregorio’s grandson Leon Quizon Mercado was a young katipunero who served out his term as one of the appointed *punong-bayan* of the town between the revolutionary years 1892-1899.

The Mercado-Quizon family has their ancestral properties in the northeastern part of the town including some in the adjacent towns of Quezon just across the Malaquing Ilog. Like the Triviño and Marasigan families, Leon Mercado also invested in more coconut plantations in Naga City after the war. Leon Mercado and his wife Emiliana Sales built the Mercado heritage house *Casa Leon* along Burgos Street in the north side of town. His sister Maria Mercado Lopez married to Santos Lopez of Lipa built their heritage bahay-na-bato house in Mojica Street. Another Mercado heritage house on the south side of the poblacion was built by Aguedo Mercado and his wife Pilar Marasigan.

The Sales Family

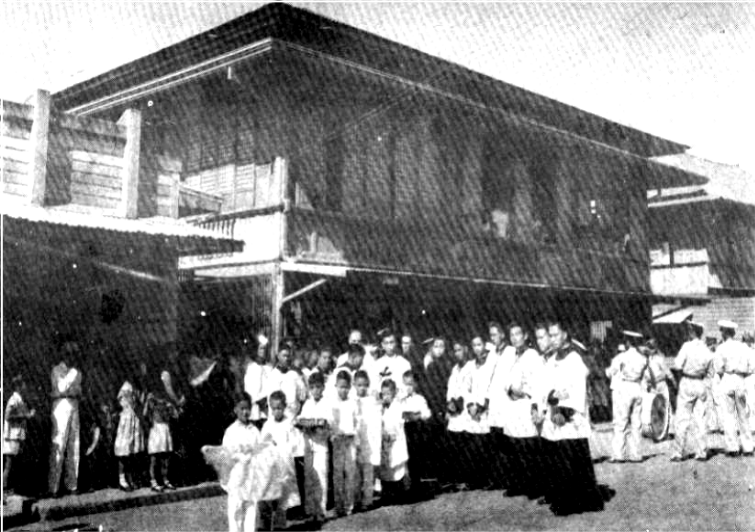
According to family lore, Claudio Sales and a brother, Gregorio, settled in San Juan but it was only Claudio who stayed on. Dissatisfied with life in San Juan, Gregorio was said to have gone back after a while to Ilocos where his roots were. Claudio Sales is descended from a Spanish soldier surnamed *San Francisco de Sales* who was the adjutant of the Conquistador Juan de Salcedo then based in the north.

The descendants of this Spanish soldier found their way south to San Juan sometime in the 19th century and where in 1878 Claudio Sales was listed in *Aklat I* as a *cabeza de barangay* of the town. The residential properties of the Sales clan are found in the northeastern area of the *poblacion*. Claudio had two previous families in San Juan before he married Margarita Nitro in his old age. The children of the prolific Claudio intermarried with the de Villa, Salud and Mercado families from San Juan. A branch of the Sales family found its way to Bicol where they eventually resettled and established their own heritage plantations.

Other Distinguished Families of San Juan.

Similar to the case of the Maralits, there are other distinguished family names of old San Juan that are rarely heard about today. It is likely that these families were childless or sired only daughters (whose surnames were replaced by their husbands) or had left the town for greener pastures. Some of the distinguished early names that have seemingly ‘disappeared’ (if not quite rare) in San Juan today are the Javier, Virrey, Balinos, Macalintal, Malabanan, and Aguila names. Meanwhile, others that connected with the *Angkan* families and are active in town affairs in one way or the other are names like Hernandez (intermarried with Sales and Magtibay), Lopez and Damaso (intermarried with Quizon and Mercado), Lecaroz and Ona (intermarried with Marasigan and de Villa), and Castillo (intermarried with de Villa and Trivino).

There were only a few families of Chinese origin in San Juan. The most prominent of them was Ong Siong Pia who was born in Amoy, China. He first came as a young man to San Juan in 1917 where later on he and his Chinese wife raised their family. The Patriarch Pia enlarged his copra trading business until he himself acquired hacienda lands and also prominently contributed to the economy of San Juan.



Traditional Town Events
(Source : The Centennial Book of San Juan, 1992)

F. OLD SAN JUAN: A SYNOPSIS

The Early Land

The idea of indigenous people of San Juan (if there were any at all) is not definitive. Notwithstanding the ancient burial jars found in Calubcub, most of San Juan lands remained in a pristine state as late as the 18th century. By the mid 1800s, however, world commerce demand for agricultural produce finally opened up the country to development and urbanization. Enterprising settlers from the nearby urbanized towns started to look around for cheap land to develop and eventually discovered the open lands of San Juan.

San Juan's isolated location at the southeastern edge of the province and the fierce territorial claims made on it by the original settlers must have deterred further immigration by outsiders. After the first wave of immigrants, land ownership in the town seemed to have been maintained for some time since, even much later in 1928, a large part of the town was still identified as Timberland¹¹. Based on its disposition and topography, it is easy to appreciate that a large part of the San Juan area were originally grassy fields, coastal margins, wet lands and primary forest. Eventually, its fertile land was exploited mostly by the immigrants there to raise export products like cane, abaca, coffee, coconuts in the high plains and rice and vegetables in the flat lands, and to graze cattle in the grassy uplands.

The Roots of the Early Settlers

The immigrant settlers to early San Juan essentially came from older towns in Batangas such as Lipa, San Jose, Cuenca, Ibaan, and including Rosario proper which was the 'mother town' of San Juan. Many likewise came from old Quezon and Laguna towns of Tiaong, Candelaria, Sariaya, Lucena, San Pablo and as far away as Binan. Then there are also a few who may have been assigned institutional roles in the town by Government or other groups and thus may have come from farther regions such as Cavite, Ilocos and other places. What is evident is that most of these settlers have shown that they were proud and determined people who fought to maintain their lands. They were educated and knowledgeable in their trade, religious to an extent, and culturally aware of what they had to do to attain their dreams. By the early 20th century, the town had prospered with some of its more enterprising families themselves migrating to the undeveloped east that was the Bicol region.

¹¹ A 1928 Bureau of Forestry map (duly attested by the Bureau director, Arthur Fischer) plots out and classifies 4,932 hectares of the town (approximately 17% of the town's official size) as Timberland.

The New Town Plan and the Church's Influence

On December 12, 1890, General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolao issued a *Superior Decreto* (General Decree) for the transfer of San Juan de Bocboc town to Calitcalit. It was understood that the official design, size and extent of the town would be in accordance with the Royal edict *Recopilacion de las Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias, Año de 1681* of Felipe II for the establishment of new towns. This edict specifies the provision in a town plan of a rectangular *plaza mayor* surrounded by the church, the *Casa Tribunal*, the market, the school and the jail. The resulting town plan has the San Juan church and the Town Hall Complex¹² (inclusive of the market, school and the jail) located diametrically across each another. A boulevard street (in lieu of a plaza) directly connects the Church compound at one end of the town and the Town Hall Complex at the other end. The lands on both sides of this boulevard were designed with a grid street layout and designated as the residential areas of the town. Fr. Yoldi is credited for initiating and designing this new San Juan town plan.

Particularly during that pioneering era, proponents of intellectual disciplines such as building and town planning (physical development) and letters and customs (cultural development) were scarce to none. In the early days, European-trained parish priests such as Fray Celestino Yoldi were acknowledged masters of Science and the Arts who needed to provide such. Fray Yoldi was the new order Spanish parish priest of that period who was quick to understand the growing environmental disadvantage of the *lumang bayan* and who was the first to act on the relocation of his church to the *bagong bayan*. The establishment of a big project such as the town's historical Baroque church can also but only be to the credit of parish officials. In the case of San Juan, the circumstance behind the establishment of the new church building turned out to be the main influence for the timing of the relocation of the new town. Particularly in the past and similar to the situation in many growing Philippine towns, San Juan people manifested a pronounced religiosity that placed priests among the elite and as alternative town authority figures.

The Angkan Families & the Town Economy

The agricultural plantations in the town were mostly owned by a few *Angkan* families (or clansmen) who successfully guided the town through its golden years (starting in the late 1800s). They were only a handful of families who mostly married among themselves, if not

¹² Today, the Municipal hall and town jail has been transferred from its original central location fronting the boulevard. After the two places burned down in the past, the officials sought a bigger site at eastern end of the Calle Mayor. The town market however remains in its original place down the road from the Church.

with prominent families in neighboring Batangas and Quezon towns. Most of these *Angkan* families came to the town in the 19th century. They were practical pioneers who consolidated, secured and developed their landholdings with the help of their *taoban* (tenants) in those uncertain times. The Southern Tagalog region then was rapidly developing and the growing population was seeking out economic opportunities away from the traditional urban centers where land was already committed and expensive.

These immigrants who became the *Angkan* families claimed their lands, developed what they could and freely traded parcels of properties with each other depending on need. The *Angkan* families were thus able to efficiently manage their midland plantations and upland grazing lands and undertake coastal fishing and lowland vegetable farming in the rural areas. This diversification of activities was a sign of the individuality of the *Angkan* families and was actually good for the town economy. Those who stayed in San Juan built their heritage houses in the *Poblacion* while those who opted to live elsewhere, including Manila, mostly disposed much of their ancestral lands to relatives who stayed on.

Seemingly, the *Angkan* families evolved their own local culture of common survival and existence. As emigrants to the new place, many found it socially convenient to rely more on each other if only to maintain their regional customs and expand family holdings. Clearly, they had strong respect for family ties and territorial rights that may have influenced their active nationalism when it was expected of them during times of crisis. The fact that many early *Angkan* members came from the same region (sharing the same values and customs) and were related to each other through marriage helped further this process along and ensure harmony in the place.

The Town's Golden Age

The Heritage Houses

The relatively 'urgent' relocation of the township due to the floods actually gave the people a fresh base to start their life anew. Despite its new town setting, however, the socio-economic setup in San Juan retained its feudal character. The large plantations that fostered the tenancy system and were owned by a few families remained the order of the day. As these plantations grew in the hinterlands around the town, the families that established them clustered together in the new *poblacion* (town urban center). There they built their fine houses at about the same time and socialized with their peers even as their tenant workers lived out their simple life in their nipa huts in the rural fields.

From box-like shaped *Babay-na-bato* houses with *entresuelo* for horse drawn carriages during the Spanish period, the new San Juan *poblacion* homes soon evolved into colonial American-influenced stately mansions that now incorporated motor courts for cars. The new houses of the *Angkan* families drew their design inspiration from Manila's prestigious mansions and even foreign ones. *Art Deco* fashion was in vogue and the individualistic *Angkans* were not shy in combining *Deco* with the classic lines of *Art Nouveau* and even the elaborate *Rococo* features of earlier houses that they were used to. The result is San Juan's unique design expression that was impressive enough even then such that the houses of the town became worthy hosts to all types of important visitors who would participate in Southern Tagalog's fiesta celebrations including the grand balls in the town plaza.

Compared to the splendidly ornamented Quezon heritage houses just across San Juan's municipal boundary, "the architecturally restrained San Juan houses come through with a quiet, conservative charm, representing an adaptive variation of its own in response to the regional architecture that swept into vogue during the height of the agricultural prosperity in the earlier part of the century" (Augusto Villalon, *Batangas Forged in Fire*, p.63). By the late 1800s, San Juan was riding the boom in the coconut industry and heading towards its Golden Age.

The Two-Tiered Society

The American occupation of the country brought about new economic opportunities and cultural influences readily embraced by the *Angkan* families. Being an American colony, the preferential tariff on agricultural exports further improved the economic standing of the *Angkan* families whose business was agriculture. Despite the arduous trip to Manila at that time due to inferior roads and modes of transport, the town's upper crust were enjoying the best products Manila had to offer and were sending their children there for schooling, if not to universities outside the country. Most of the town's large residences were showcases of the wealthy that came equipped with the imported grand pianos for entertainment (children were generally required to study music) and large halls for entertaining and dining. This situation resulted in the establishment of a two-tiered society in the town where mostly illiterate farm workers who were based in the plantations with their families were known as *taga-bukid* in contrast to the educated well-heeled landlords who lived in the *poblacion* and were called *taga-bayan*.

Immediate Post War Years and Decline

After the war, Manila moved on to become the country's primate city with modern urban amenities and infrastructure. The improvement of transport systems made Manila attractive particularly to the elite of relatively nearby towns like San Juan who were seeking the better schools and urban amenities for themselves. By the 1950s, the large ancestral houses and agricultural estates that continued to support San Juan's rural economy were left behind to family patriarchs. With the passing of the town's golden age (and subsequently of the aging family patriarchs) and without the dynamism of many of its entrepreneurs and educated youth who had settled elsewhere, the town came to a decline. Today, the economic progress of the town has not been robust like before and where physically it looks frozen in time seemingly waiting for that next generation who might bring back its Golden Years.



Entry to the Town

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)



Town Commercial Strip

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)

Calle Mayor
(Gen. Luna Provincial Road)

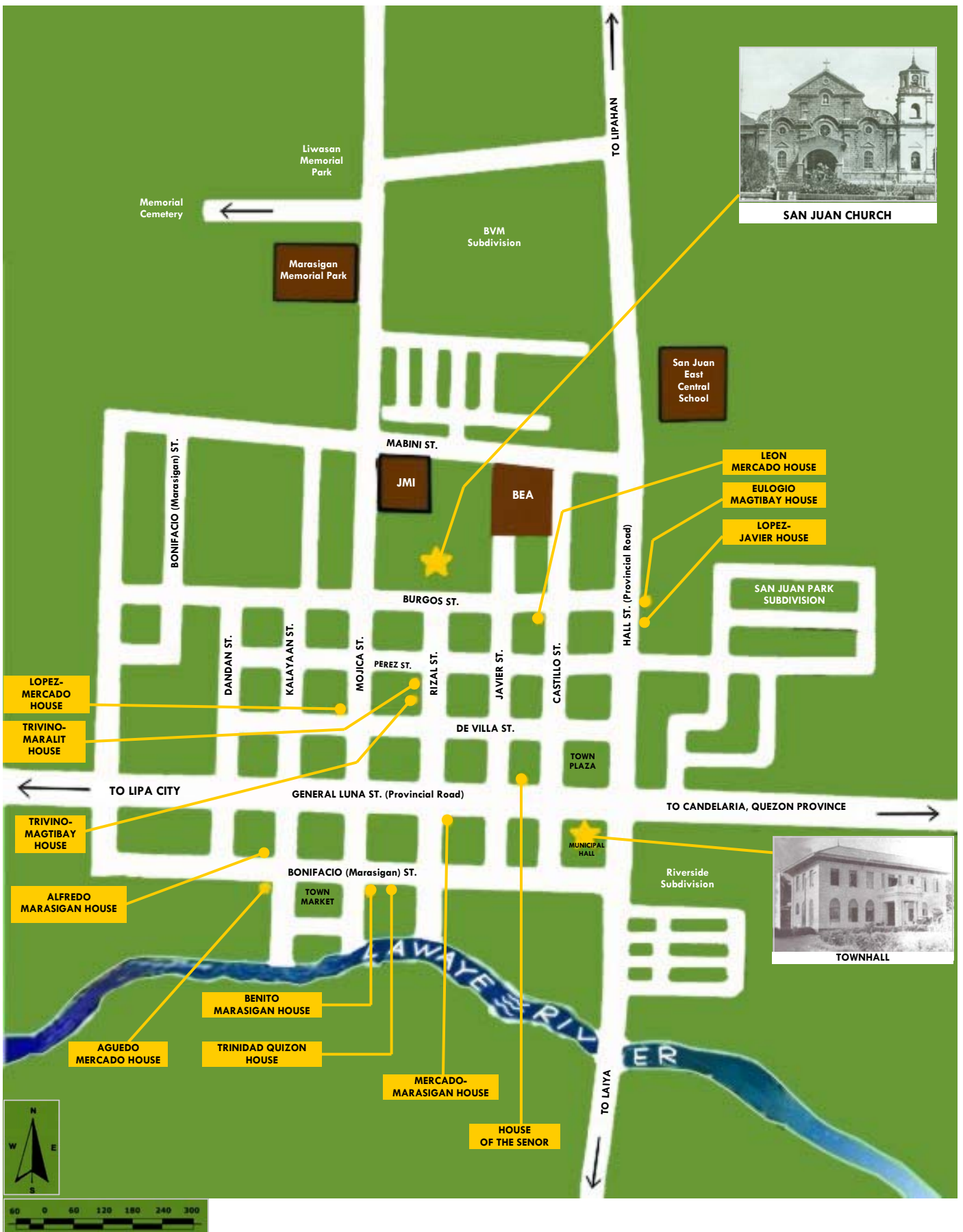


Rizal Street leading to the Calle Mayor and showing the two Triviño heritage houses on its right side.
(Source : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)



The church yard with one end of Rizal Street shown at the upper right hand of the photo.

Rizal Street : The Central Boulevard of the Town



The Town Plan and the Location of San Juan Heritage Structures



Leon Mercado House



Eulogio Magtibay House



Alfredo Marasigan House



Marasigan-Mercado House



Lopez-Javier House



Aguedo Mercado House

San Juan Heritage Houses

(Sources : Harper, Bambi. Off the Beaten Track in San Juan Batangas. Design & Architecture. Santa Barbara Publishing Corp., Vol. V, No. 3. 1996;

Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)

(San Juan Heritage Houses continued...)



Trivino-Magtibay House
(now owned by Custodio Ona)



Lopez-Mercado House



Benito Marañon House



Quizon House



Trivino-Maralit House



House of the Señor
(Now owned by Edrulfo Trivino)

San Juan Heritage Houses

(Sources : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007)



The Leon Mercado House

(Source : Mayo, Leon M. *Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas*. 2007.)



The Hernández House

(Source : Turalba, Ma. Cristina Valera. Philippine Heritage Architecture before 1521 to the 1970s. 2005. Hernandez House.)



The Trinidad Quizon House

(Sources : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007; San Juan Batangas UAP-CFA Database Information and Photos. Arch. Maria Cristina V. Turalba. CD 2004.)



The Aguedo Mercado House

(Sources : Mayo, Leon M. Casa Leon : An Ancestral House in San Juan Batangas. 2007; [San Juan Batangas UAP-CFA Database Information and Photos](#). Arch. Maria Cristina V. Turalba. CD 2004)



The Lopez-Mercado House

(Source : San Juan Batangas UAP-CFA Database Information and Photos. Arch. Maria Cristina V. Turalba. CD 2004.)

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G. AFTERWORD

Heritage Character

Among Philippine towns and cities, San Juan has an interesting story to tell. The chronicle of its development through the past two centuries is a testament to their families who, despite adversities, made it their home and made something of it. Their intelligence defined the best land use for their territory at that time and their courage allowed them to settle there. Their zeal developed and administered the territory and their outlook established the physical monuments in the form of the heritage houses and haciendas many of which still stand today.

On the other hand, the single-mindedness and inadvertence of the town leaders may also have created a social setting that was detrimental to a working class who equally contributed to their past success and to the development of the town. Today, San Juan struggles to move forward despite adversity and is in the process of re-inventing itself just like many other towns wanting to improve their plight under a more autonomous local government administrative system. Knowing that it will never be the same, the town citizens (particularly the descendants of the *Angkan* families) nevertheless are sentimental about their hometown, are grateful to their forebears and are proud to be Batangueños. Collectively, they will readily rally to the ‘flag’ when it concerns heritage matters of the town since they are optimistic about better times.

Foregone Opportunities & Social Development

For a long period starting in the Fifties, the town experienced isolation and decline due in large part to its out-of-the-way location in relation to the mainstream economic activities of the province. Physically, San Juan was more accessible to the Quezon towns than to Lipa which was the closest large Batangas urban center. The undelivered Government infrastructure and primary roads to connect it to the commerce and markets of its sister towns in Batangas, and ultimately Manila, were too long in coming. Some analysts maintain the opinion that the comparative non-support from national Government was a form of political repercussion since Batangueños typically harbored stubborn nationalist sentiments that branded the province as an oppositionist against whoever was entrenched in Malacañang.

A Monocrop Economy

Looking at the development of towns today in both Batangas and Quezon adjacent to San Juan, it is sad to admit that once less urbanized towns have overtaken it in terms of urban

development. Due to a confluence of events, attitude and inability over the last five decades, San Juan never quite availed of the few development opportunities that might have come its way. Today, some raise the question whether the coconut industry that had brought about San Juan's Golden Age was a blessing or a curse. It has been said that while the coconut made for good industry, it also lulled planters to a false sense of contentment since coconut plantations require little maintenance once established. Similar to the situation in other coconut producing regions, there was no impetus for the *Angkan* capitalists of the town to improve the plantations or to diversify their activities until it was too late. In the Seventies, the government introduced the country's land reform program that not only tied up *haciendero* capital (due to legal restrictions on the disposition of land assets) but also discouraged further investments in agriculture since it was felt that the lands would soon be redistributed to others anyway.

The Patriarchal Setting

The powerful *Angkan* patriarchs wielded influence not only over his brood but also over the tenant farmer families residing in his domain whom he called his *tauban*. The patriarch and whoever would succeed him was the master, the lord of the manor. Particularly for the tenants, this situation seemed ideal at one time. Beyond the tenants' share of the harvest, landlords were patrons who could be relied on to backstop any arising financial or political need of the tenants. While the patriarchal system worked, it was insufficient and unconstructive and fostered social disparity. The system was false comfort for the tenant who became dependent on their landlord and saw little need to further improve themselves. The negative impact of this was on the growing majority of poor people whose meager livelihood was not enough for them to improve their lives as compared to the handful of *Angkans* who could afford the better schools in the country for their children. The system was further distorted in the Seventies when the landlords allowed their plantations to deteriorate as if in defiance of a Government reform program that was perceived by many as unjust. In the Eighties when life was becoming harder, an opportunity for industrial development in San Juan was not to be. Rightly or wrongly, the town's active environmentalists rejected the government-initiated copper smelter project in the coastal area of their agricultural town.

The Heritage Assets Rationalized

Because of its nature and circumstance, there are comparatively minimal urban development inroads or investments in San Juan today. The result has been a situation where the traditional town 'form' and provincial environment - the heritage physical framework that the town has

come to understand and lived with all these years – has generally been retained. While some heritage infrastructure have been torn down over time, still many heritage houses and vestiges of old neighborhood layout remain intact albeit unattended and in a state of disrepair. In the rural areas, traditional agriculture continues in the old hacienda areas and remains the primary activity except by the coast where vacation places are being built.

In the book “Batangas Forged in Fire”, heritage architect Augusto Villalon writes: “The visual unity of the San Juan houses makes them one of the more unique, unappreciated early twentieth century architectural ensembles in the country”. Indeed, some heritage houses in the town have been successfully restored by their owners and retained as private residences. Some heritage houses have been converted into a state of adaptive reuse particularly those located in the commercial area. Those that have not yet been restored or renovated are being maintained by custodians. Meanwhile, the demand for vacation places and resorts proximate to Manila is seeing the establishment of such in San Juan’s generally unaffected coastal areas amidst the agricultural fields in the rural landscape. With the new consciousness today in heritage as a resource and a healthy environment for living and recreation, people in and outside San Juan are realizing the value of the town’s ancestral houses even while markets from Manila now discover its beach resorts in the countryside. Considering the potentials of the town and then looking back on itself, discerning townspeople are grateful that the heritage houses remain as aesthetic monuments of the town and that the proposed industrial start at one time (the copper smelter plant project) that would have polluted the coast and countryside did not happen.

The Legacy

As we view the town today, perhaps this is the essence and legacy of San Juan – an alternative to a high urban lifestyle place; a bit of hospitality, a healthy provincial air and a touch of legacy waiting to be shared. For a small rural town trying to define and impose its economic potentials mainly to mitigate the vagaries of agricultural economics that beset its traditional farming industry, perhaps San Juan and other towns like it could look for a clue from a rich past to help promote physical and economic betterment of their towns today. In many places and for many peoples in the world, town cultural heritage not only bonds the community but it also enhances the economic potentials of towns through crafts and tourism. For San Juan Batangas, its legacy seems to be just there waiting to be rediscovered and put to productive use. Along with other development options, San Juan’s tourism potential may well be one of the town’s better choices of industry to pursue if only to institutionalize the town character and considering the meager resources of places in these hard and competitive times.

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