

IV. DOMINICAN TOWNS IN BATAAN

By

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1. A B U C A Y

*Early history of Abucay as "Partido de Bataan."
Its famous Church. The Dutch attack.*

The "Partido de Bataan", which in 1587 was entrusted to the spiritual care of the Dominican Fathers, comprised the area that lies between Orani and Orion. It is an expanse of land, extending from north to south and bounded by the sea in the east and the neighboring mountains in the west.

Here the Dominicans founded their first town in Bataan—and their second in the Philippines, the first being San Carlos in Pangasinan. This Mission was known for many years by the name of "Partido de Bataan."

Its population in 1587 barely reached the number of seven hundred "tributes" which were scattered in thirty ranches, some of which were located at the foot of the hills and others in the swampy region close to the sea.¹ In this marshy terrain the missionaries had to travel in search of souls on foot — often unshod — or to ride in a banca, not infrequently under the scorching sun or a heavy downpour. It was perhaps due to these unfavorable circumstances that the former preachers of the Gospel had abandoned those places for more hospitable lands where with a lesser effort they could reap a more abundant harvest.²

After learning the dialect, the missionaries undertook the arduous task of gathering the many ranches into organized

¹ FERRANDO, JUAN, O.P., *Estado de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario en 1848*, MS in AUST, Section "Provincia", pp. 11-12. In the early years a "tribute" was equivalent to about three persons. In the 18th century to four, and in the 19th to five. Therefore, the population of the "Partido de Bataan" must have been about two thousand people.

² *Ibid.*

towns, then called *visitas*, by transferring them to more advantageous places, usually near a river and far from swamps or stagnant waters.

The first town that they founded was officially accepted as a Dominican ministry by the first Provincial Chapter of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary held in Manila on June 10, 1588, under the advocacy or patronage of St. Dominic³. That town was named Abucay only in 1646.

Abucay lies north of Balanga, south of Samal, at half a league from the slopes of the mountains to the west, and almost two kilometers from the seashore to the east⁴.

Its structures for religious purposes⁵ must have been of bamboo cane and nipa shingles at the start, and later of wood in part. The first stone church and convent were built in or before the early forties of the 17th century by Fr. Jerónimo de Belén. The historian Santa Cruz says: "He built of stone the church and convent of Abucay, a spacious structure as far as it is possible hereabouts, the destruction of which at a later time spelled misfortune to the Dutch, as we shall say in its place."⁶

In fact, as we have already said in our previous article, this town was attacked by the Dutch in 1647. The *Alcalde Mayor* of Pampanga, instead of engaging the enemy in *guerrilla* warfare, waited for him behind the walls of the church and convent which, although strong in themselves, could not withstand the power of the artillery, and thus without a struggle and without heeding his followers' insistence to fight in the open, he surrendered unconditionally. The Dutch murdered in cold blood most of the native soldiers many of whom were chieftains, and only those who could manage to jump over the

³ In the founding of towns we have to distinguish from the juridical point of view between towns founded *de jure* and those founded *de facto*. At the outset most of the towns were founded *de facto*, i.e., without any intervention of the civil authorities, at least as far as we know; later, especially in the 19th century, they were established in accordance with all civil requisites, as we shall later see.

⁴ FERRANDO, *Estado . . .*, 12v. To adhere strictly to historical truth and facts, we shall speak of leagues as our sources do. A terrestrial league is equivalent to 4.225 kms.; the maritime league to 5.572 kms.

⁵ The buildings of a parish in the Philippines have been, and still are: the church, the *convento* or rectory, the cemetery with its chapel, and the *barrio* chapels or *visitas*.

⁶ BALTASAR DE SANTA CRUZ, *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de Filipinas, Zaragoza*, 1693, p. 47, col. 2.

windows or took shelter in the nearby thickets were spared. However, the Dutch kept prisoner the *Alcalde Mayor*, Diego Antonio de Cabrera, and the Dominicans Tomás Ramos and Jerónimo de Sotomayor, in the hope of obtaining a high ransom for them. These three were later taken to Djakarta, but the priests, once freed, drowned at sea on their return trip⁷.

Under the aegis of the Dominican Fathers, the ruined church and convent soon gave way to new equally solid and beautiful buildings, although we cannot say, for lack of informative sources, who restored them and when. The buildings that have come down to our times are in all likelihood those which rose over the ruins of Father Belen's structures, since there is no record of any war, earthquake or any other calamity having damaged them to a considerable extent until 1942, except for the fire of 1870.

Social and cultural achievements of an outstanding Vicar⁸

An outstanding Vicar of the early years of evangelization was Father José Blancas. He was a zealous preacher and an observant Religious. He is also known for having written a *Tagalog Grammar* and the words of the first letters of a *Tagalog Vocabulary*, continued later by Frs. Miguel Ruiz and Tomás de los Reyes, who also were Vicars of Abucay. Besides he composed some devotional books in the same dialect and

⁷ In Blair & Robertson we found the following additional data on the church of Abucay in 1647: "Patio made of stone..." (XXXV, 266); "they burned the convent and the woodwork of the church, but the fire did not extend to the altar..." (*ibid.* 268). "This village has a very costly substantial church and convent, built of stone, in sight of the sea, belonging to the Fathers of St. Dominic" (*ibid.* 262). "Church ordered demolished by civil authorities" (XXXVI, 119).

⁸ The towns or ministries founded by the Dominicans in the Philippines were called "Vicarias" and their Pastors "Vicars" from the beginning until 1898. The reason was that the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Order of Preachers in the Philippines was essentially a missionary Province and as such it did not consist of at least the three regulatory convents, as the other Provinces of the Order required, but of the Convent or Mother House of Santo Domingo de Manila and of the Mission Stations called "Vicarias". The "Vicarias" were regional and local. The regional "Vicaría" roughly corresponding to a civil province, was governed in the name of the Provincial by a Vicar, while the local "Vicarias" — equivalent to towns — were under local Vicars. In turn the towns consisted of, besides the "población", or town proper, a number of "Visitass" each of which corresponding to one or more barrios or *barangays* of today. The "Visitass" were provided with a chapel built of light or strong materials, and many of them eventually became "Vicarias" and towns.

bequeathed to posterity a collection of sermons in Tagalog which unluckily was among the losses in the burning of Santo Domingo Convent in 1941. However, there is a copy of the same book in the National Library⁹.

During Father Blancas' stay in Bataan there was a printing press there. As it seems, during the years 1609-1612 the first press of movable types, "semi-invented" in Binondo some years earlier by Father Blancas with the help of Juan de Vera, a Chinese, was then temporarily transferred to Abucay.¹⁰ But during the same period some books were apparently printed in Binondo, using perhaps for the molding of the types the same matrices cast at Binondo in 1602. So in 1610 or thereabouts there were probably two different presses, one in Binondo and the other in Bataan, using types cast in the same mold¹¹.

In this year Father Blancas printed in Bataan, where he had been assigned by the Provincial Chapter of 1610¹², the *Arte y Reglas de la Lengua Tagalog*, which is a masterpiece of printing, if we take the period into account.

Holiness among the natives of Abucay and the "Partido de Bataan."

When giving a brief but glowing description of the town of Abucay in 1690, Father Peguero had this to say about the virtue of the natives: "...they have been always very good Christians, and from time to time there have been many persons of deep prayer and rare virtue"¹³.

The most outstanding example among them all is perhaps a woman named Melchora. The historian Father Salazar writes about her:

"The name of this native woman was Melchora, but her family name is not known, because she was usually called 'Mel-

⁹ PELAEZ, JOSÉ DIEGO, O.P., *Abucay-Bataan*, MS in APSR, Section "Bataan", Vol. 1, Doc. 3, Fol. 1 (52).

¹⁰ VELASCO, MARIANO, O.P., *Ensayo de Bio-bibliografía*, MS in APSR, Section "Bibliografías", Vol. I, p. 71 ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Acta Capitulum Provincialium*, Manila, Typis Collegii Sancti Thomae, 1872, Vol. 1, p. 65.

¹³ PEGUERO, JUAN, O.P., *Compendio historial*, MS in AUST, Section "Provincia," Fol. 12.

chora la Beata,' and even though she was not a 'beata' by profession, she is deserving of a place in this History, being a plant watered and tilled under the direction of our Religious.

"She was a native of the town of Abucay in our 'Partido de Bataan' and from her childhood she applied herself to prayer, spiritual reading, frequent fasting, the wearing of a hair shirt and the performing of other penances. At midnight and at the hour of none, on hearing the convent's bell, she would hold her mental prayer at the time the priests were in choir.

"She went daily to church and heard all the masses celebrated there, and received Communion very often with the permission granted by her confessors who knew best of her innocence and purity of soul. A Religious who had heard her general confession testified that she did not commit any mortal sin throughout her lifetime and that she preserved her virginal purity... She looked after the tidiness and cleanliness of the altars and performed with praiseworthy punctuality everything that the Religious told her to do. She died at the age of forty six, with such a happy death as deserved by the sanctity of her life"¹⁴

About this same time there lived in Bataan another native woman called Cecilia Tangol who reached the mellow age of eighty when she died in 1673. She also professed virginity throughout her lifetime, gave an edifying example of virtue and perfection, used to rise at midnight for prayer and impressed her confessor with the purity of her life. We mention her here, inasmuch as the Dominican chronicler, Fr. Salazar, did not state the town of her origin.¹⁵

Father Juan Peguero, himself a minister in Bataan for some years, mentions another woman, Inés de Santa María, also remarkable for her sterling virtue, whose biography was written and sent to the Master General by Father Francisco Blancas in 1612. There were still others, according to the testimony of the same Father Peguero, whose biographies would be edifying but were never written¹⁶.

¹⁴ SALAZAR, VICENTE DE, O.P., *Historia de la Provincia del Santisimo Rosario de Filipinas*, Manila, 1742, p. 168, col. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁶ PEGUERO, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

Devotion to St. Dominic under the patronage of Soriano

There was kept in Abucay until 1662, when it was transferred to Orion, an image of St. Dominic of Soriano which wrought a number of miracles, as reported by Father Francisco Pinelo in a book he wrote on this matter. This image had been "touched" to the original in Italy¹⁷.

Abucay is turned over to the secular clergy

For quite many years after 1650 we cannot find any report about Abucay. It seems that nothing special happened in this town until 1768, when, upon request of the Governor General José Raón, the Archbishop of Manila, Msgr. Basilio Sancho, ordered our Religious to leave Bataan. Consequently on June 25 of the said year, its Vicar, Father Manuel Corripio, made a thorough inventory of the buildings and furnishings, and turned them over to *Bachiller* Domingo Ursúa, of the secular clergy. From this inventory, still preserved in the Dominican archives, it can be inferred how well provided was the church of Abucay with furnishings, sacred vestments and vessels.¹⁸

The Dominicans left Bataan with a heavy heart, though in the spirit of obedience to the dispositions of the Governor and of the Archbishop, who, in order to teach the Dominicans (and through them the other Religious) the lesson of bowing to the Royal Patronage, quickly relieved them from the ministries in Bataan under the color of their being more needed in the Visayas to replace the exiled Jesuits. By this time Abucay had one *visita* with its own chapel — San Antonino de Mabatang¹⁹.

The Dominicans return to Abucay

The Dominicans returned to Abucay in 1836, and it happened thus:

Ten years earlier, on request of the Agustinian Commisary General in Madrid, Father Francisco Villacorta, with the support of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in Manila, King Ferdinand VII had issued a Royal Decree declaring that the

¹⁷ SALAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁸ Cf. APSR, MS, Section "Bataán," Vol. I, Doc. 24, Fols. 211-216, 223-231.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Fols. 263-267.

Augustinian Order and other Religious Families should be reinstated into the administration of the curacies and "doctrinas" in the Philippines which they had as of before the issuance of the Royal Cedula of December 11, 1776. Besides, he forbade the Bishops and Vice Royal Patron to secularize any curacy without an express order from his Royal Majesty²⁰.

The imprint left in Abucay by two 19th century Vicars

On March 19, 1836, Father Jesualdo Miñano, O.P., was the Dominican priest who accepted and administered Abucay when it was reassumed by the Dominican Order, and was its Vicar until August 17, 1838. Father Bonifacio Cabero relieved him for a while, but on October 4 of the same year, Father Alberto Planas took over until May 6, 1860. He is one of the best known among the Vicars of Abucay and even of Bataan²¹.

For many years he was also Vicar Forane of Bataan, and for some time Vicar Provincial. He was a zealous parish priest and a tireless preacher. As we have already mentioned in our preceding article, together with Father Benito Rivas and with the support of the *Alcalde Mayor*, he worked hard in the attraction and conversion of the Aetas of his jurisdiction. They planned for them barrios with huts near the *población*, cleared out the fields and had them planted with different crops, but to their dismay and frustration the Aetas withdrew to the forests whence they came²².

The next Vicar, truly worthy of the name, who left a deep imprint in Abucay, was Father José Diego Peláez. On May 27, 1870, while he was absent in Orani, a fire destroyed part of the town, including the church and the convent with all that they contained. In the convent only the Register of the Dead was spared. In 1888, he had already rebuilt the whole church and most of the convent. In 1882, due to a cholera epidemic, he moved

²⁰ JOAQUÍN FONSECA, O.P., *Historia de los PP. Dominicos*, Madrid, 1871, Imprenta y Esterotipia de M. R. Rivadeneysa, Vol. V, p. 527. JOAQUÍN RODRIGUEZ SAMPEDRO, *Legislación Ultramarina*, Madrid, Imprenta de Manuel Minuesa, 1866, Vol. VII, pp. 773-775, where the Royal Decree is found.

²¹ PELAEZ, *loc. cit.*, Fol. 52.

²² *Ibid.*, Fol. 52v.

the cemetery to the outskirts of the *población*, though he was unable to enclose it within a stone fence. He died, still Vicar of Abucay, on May 21, 1892²³.

Statistics on population

Partido de Bataan, 1587	700 tributes
Santo Domingo de Bataan, 1621 ²⁴	1,350 inhabitants
Abucay, 1751 ²⁵	1,846 "
Abucay, 1848 ²⁶	5,797 "
Abucay, 1898 ²⁷	8,151 "

The Dominicans leave Abucay

Then, on the last days of May of 1898 the end came, when at the start of the second phase of the Philippine Revolution, the Spanish forces of Coronel Lucas de Francia, stationed in northern Bataan, being unable to resist the onslaught of the insurgents, retreated to Pampanga. With him went the Dominican Vicars of Abucay, Samal, Orani and Hermosa, thus, terminating the centenary labors of the Friars Preachers in Bataan and more concretely in Abucay. Its last Dominican Vicar was Father Francisco Govea.

2. SAMAL

Location

This town is bounded on the south by Mabatang at a distance of half a league, on the north by Orani at less than a league away, on the east by the sea that caresses the patio of the Church with its billows, and on the west by Mt. Samat, half a league afar²⁸.

²³ OCIO, HILARIO MARÍA, O.P., *Compendio de la Rescña Biográfica de los Religiosos de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas*, Manila, Establecimiento tipográfico del Colegio de Sto. Tomás, 1895, p. 775.

²⁴ *Lista de las casas o doctrinas que tenía la Provincia en 1621*, MS in APSR, Section "Ministerios," Vol. IV, Doc. 1, Fol. 1 (385).

²⁵ *Informe al Rey nuestro Señor, año de 1751*, MS in APSR, Section "Miscelánea," Vol. III, Fol. 47 v.

²⁶ *Estado General de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario... perteneciente al año de 1848*, Revista Católica, No. XCI, enero de 1848, Barcelona, Imprenta y Librería de D. Pablo Riera, 1850, p. 466.

²⁷ OCIO, *Monumento Dominicano*, MS in APSR, Section "Ministerios," Vol. 1, p. 53.

²⁸ FERRANDO, *op. cit.*, Fol. 12.

Origins

Samal, the second town founded by the Dominicans in the old "Partido de Bataan," under the patronage of St. Catherine of Siena, started, as so many other towns in the Philippines, as a "Visita," of Abucay, and as such was accepted by the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Provincial Chapters of 1596 and 1598. As a Visita, it was not supposed to have a resident priest, although it had its own chapel, where the Vicar of Abucay or one of his assistants, when needed, used to say Mass and to administer the Sacraments. Samal, however, was an exceptional case, for, as it grew in Christian population, it was provided with a permanent priest, though unofficially.

In 1641, Samal had gained such an ascendancy that the Provincial Chapter held in that year decided to raise it to the rank of Vicaría. By this time, Samal had its own Visitas, namely, those of San Pedro Mártir de Babuyan, and of Our Lady of Orani. Its first Vicar was Father Tomás Ramos.

Church buildings

According to Father Juan Peguero, "two churches of stone were built, one in Abucay and the other in Samal, both so spacious and artistic that they could have called the attention even in the Court (*i. e., in Madrid*), but which were ordered demolished by the Governor in 1647, to hinder the Dutch in using them as strongholds behind their massive walls". The church of Samal had been built by Father Juan Zubelsú. Father Ocio adds that the new churches built over the ruins of those destroyed were as good as, if not better than, the original ones²⁰.

The Dutch attack: the tide turns

After the sack and burning of Abucay in 1647, the Dutch turned their arms to Samal, sending a small foraging party in boats, perhaps to look for provisions. But a small garrison of Pampangueños repelled them, killing some and forcing the rest to retreat to their boats. This happened in the month of July. Later in October, the Dutch General, in order to protect his men from the fury of typhoons, stationed them in

²⁰ OCIO, *Monumento Dominicano*, p. 54.

Mariveles, but then an epidemic brought perhaps by the humidity of the surrounding forests sent the General himself and many of his remaining men to the grave. Thereupon the rest left for Djakarta³⁰.

An illustrious victim at the hands of the Negritos
(1727)

In the church of Samal was buried Father Antonio Pérez, who, having been entrusted with the spiritual care of the Pangasinanes who were cutters of timber at the foot of the mountains for the construction of ships, went to Samal on the occasion of the town fiesta to visit his Provincial Superior. But on his way back the Negritos waylaid him. These nomads of the forests killed him with a shower of arrows, then chopped his head off and took it to their lair, wrapped in a piece of his own habit. After many days, however, the head was retrieved, still intact and uncorrupted, and was buried in the same grave as his body. He had labored in Zambales for eleven years and sixteen in Pangasinan, where he had founded the town of Salasa.³¹ Indeed the Negritos had been harassing the missionaries now and then.

The Negrito problem was not new in Samal. During his term of office Governor General Don Sebastián Hurtado de Cerquera received a request from the Gobernadorcillo Don Pedro Dimasangcay to the effect that the people there be exempted from the payment of taxes and from *bandalas*³², which they were hard put to pay because often they could not cultivate their fields, since the Negritos often swooped down from the mountains, killing people in the rice fields and even in the very towns³³.

³⁰ SANTA CRUZ, *op. cit.*, p. 104, cols. 2, 105.

³¹ *Acta Capitulum Provincialium*, Vol. II, pp. 185-186.

³² *Bandala* or *Vandala* was "the requisitioning of rice and other products from the Filipinos by the government at fixed price. Besides being lower than the market price, the amount was often paid late or not at all" (John N. Schumacher, *Readings in Philippine Church History*, Quezon City, 1979, p. 409).

³³ Cfr. APSR, MSS, Section "Binondo", Vol. I, Fol. 1.

Samal is turned over to the secular clergy (1768)

The ministry of Samal was handed over by its Vicar, Father Diego Garrido, to *Bachiller* Anastasio Medonio on June 27, 1768³⁴.

Vicissitudes under the Dominican administration during the 19th century

When the Dominicans returned to Samal in 1841, its first Vicar was Father Pedro Payo, who in time would become an Archbishop of Manila. He found the church, rebuilt in the second half of the 17th century, to have been burned in 1836³⁵. The task of reconstructing it and the convent was a difficult one, and no single parish priest could claim the honor to have done it alone, but rather all, or almost all the parish priests of the period contributed to its completion³⁶.

Father Miguel Portell, for one, is said to have defrayed the galvanized iron roofing of the Church, which indeed was less artistic than the tile roof of the original church. He as well had its patio filled and levelled, built the convent, the municipal tribunal and the school with three halls, which by the end of the 19th century could boast of an enrolment of 512 boys and 458 girls attending classes every day³⁷.

Aside from the church, which is 68 yards long, 14 yards wide and nine yards high, the town had a big chapel in the barrio of Calaguiman, dedicated to San Vicente Ferrer, where masses used to be said every Monday, and mothers from the neighboring towns as well as from the nearby provinces like Pampanga and Bulacan used to flock with their children to consecrate them to the Saint³⁸.

The cemetery of this town, like its plaza, is fenced with a walling of lime bricks, constructed by one of its Dominican Vicars.³⁹

³⁴ Cf. APSR, MSS, Section "Bataan", Vol. I, Doc. 24, Fol. 240.

³⁵ TROBAT, JOSE MA., O.P., *Parroquia de Samal*, MS in APSR, Section "Bataan", Vol. I, Doc. 8, Fol. 3 (57) v.

³⁶ OCIO, *Monumento*, p. 54.

³⁷ *Libertad*, "Samal", February 17, 1900.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ PAGUIO, WILFREDO C., *History of the province of Bataan as recorded in the Dominican sources in the Philippines*, Faculty of Graduate School, University of Santo Tomás, June, 1974, pp. 144-145.

IV DOMINICAN TOWNS IN BATAAN 561

Population statistics of Samal

1751	1844 heads ⁴⁰			
1818	2305	"	41	
1848	3432	"	42	
1898	5293	"	43	

The last Dominican Vicar of Samal leaves Bataan

When in the last days of May of 1898, on orders of Aguinado, the towns of Southern Bataan rose up in arms, quickly overpowering the small Spanish garrisons of Orion, Pilar and Balanga, the Vicars of the northern towns withdrew to Pampanga under the protective wing of the forces commanded by Coronel Lucas de Francia. But when he and his soldiers surrendered, the Fathers fell into the hands of the insurgents at Hagonoy. Father Miguel Portell, Vicar of Samal, was one of them⁴¹.

⁴⁰ *Informe al Rey Nuestro Señor, año de 1751*. Ms in APSR, Section "Miscelanea", Vol. 3, Fol. 48.

⁴¹ BUCETA, MANUEL y BRAVO, FELIPE, O.S.A., *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico de las Islas Filipinas*, Madrid, 1850, Vol. 1, p. 357.

⁴² *Revista Católica*, loc. cit.,

⁴³ OCIO, *Monumento Dominicano*, p. 54. "The population of this area (i.e., Partido de Bataan) when it was an encomienda of Don Gabriel de Esguerra reached 1,500 tributes. Afterwards, due to wars, epidemics and smallpox and to the labor of cutting timber for the galleons, "bandalas", etc., it went down to about nine hundred tributes, being an encomienda of Fernando Ayala, Francisco de Esteibar and of the King" (Juan de los Angeles, loc. cit., fol. 48).

⁴⁴ HERRERO, ULPIANO, O.P., *Nuestra Prisión*, Manila, 1900, pp. 310-312.