

Franciscans in Rizal and Laguna: Mahayhay Bridge

Capricious Engineering: Seventh Paper, Mission Trail Series

This month's excursion with the Franciscan fathers, through more of their old mission towns, will be as pleasant as the others: around *Laguna de Bay*, over excellent motor roads, and past the varying scenes of valley and hill land. It is Tagalog country, very old in history; there are unmistakable traces of Malayan civilization dating back some 10,000 years. On this point the *Journal* will comment some time with more thoroughness. The friars, upon converting the people, increased the size of the villages, often uniting several into one. Then, too, Spain's monarchs gave lands, and assigned the inhabitants thereof, to gentlemen who served them, and on these grants, called *encomiendas*, which were also given to the church for special purposes, churches were built and villages founded.

A number of such grants are now districts of Manila, as Mayhaligue, or the San Lazaro estate. Pasay, as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter in this series, was an Augustinian *encomienda*. Chiefs, where found, were commonly left in places of authority over their subjects, under the sovereignty of Spain, and the old order of community affairs was not radically changed. There is no record, however, where the native population declined under the new order, but there were other places where it was stimulated to abundant growth. The purpose of the new order was, according to the light of that age, nobly benevolent. That in practice it was beneficent is attested by the fact that it endured and waxed strong, with that generally cordial popular support evidenced in the navies, the people built and manned for Spain, and the ardor never quenched in their souls for the towns and hamlets under the bells of the scattered missions.

Morong, now Rizal, was made a political district February 23, 1853, "with a part of the territory of Manila and a part of that of Laguna." Now a province, it includes the towns of the northern border of the lake as far as Talim island. Fray Juan de la Plascencia and Fray Diego de Oropesa performed the first baptisms in the town of Morong in 1578, and Fray Blas de la Madre de Dios was the first parish priest there. The patron saint, San Gerónimo; the original church and much of the town burned down in 1612, and in 1615 the present edifice was completed by the Chinese master craftsman who built it.

Pillilla. Until 1583 a district of Morong comprising five rancherías, and in that year made a pueblo. Fray Pedro de Cañizares began the present church in 1670 and completed it in 1673, with gifts asked from the people. In 1848 Fray José de Guadaluaga renewed the altars. Other stone churches, of 1599 and 1668, were burned.

Tanay. On Tanay mountain, separated from Pillilla and made a pueblo in 1606; moved from the original site in 1620, and to the present site in 1640. "One hundred forty-eight priests have administered this town since its foundation, the first being Fray Pedro de Talavera." Patron saint, San Ildefonso. The image of the Immaculate Conception is very venerated, being a relic of Juan de Salcedo's military conquest of this region in 1572. Left behind, Plascencia and Oropesa found the natives worshipping it ignorantly, and when a church was built, only to become a victim of the flames, this image was all the little congregation could save. Many of the Chinese of the Parian in Manila, frightened into desperate rebellion in 1639, fled into the mountains of this region; and under the leadership of the parish priest, Fray Gerónimo de Ferra, the people hid this image from them. But three of them discovered it. One rent the crown with his cutlass, the second gave it a blow, and the third, horrified at their conduct, struck them both dead.

The people's veneration of the image was now greater than ever, and they willingly lent

their services to the building of a church and *convento* of stone, completed in 1680. In 1773, Fray Ildefonso Fontanes, then the parish priest, tore down the old church and *convento* and began the present structures, with but P39.25 in hand for the work; yet in 1783 the work had been completed, from alms collected in Majajay and Manila. Fray Antonio Santiago repaired the parochial house in 1851.

Barás. Founded 1595, transferred to the Jesuits in 1616 (the church being burned by *montescos* in 1635), transferred back to the Franciscans in 1679. The site has twice been changed, for greater safety, once under the Jesuits in 1635 and once under the Franciscans in 1682. Patron saint, Santiago; naturally, because of the hostilities constantly engaged in to maintain the Christian settlement. "In 1682 the stone church was commenced which still exists, under Fray Pedro Tomeu, and completed under Fray Antonio de la Concepción in 1686, who dedicated it to the glorious San José. In 1849 it was repaired, painted and fitted with seats by its zealous pastor, Fray Tomás de Sisante." A bridge of a single arch, in one of the six original streets of this town, was built by Fray Felipe de la Parilla in 1728 and was still standing and in use when Huerta wrote in 1863. (Our quotations and all our data are from Father Huerta.) "In the baptistry of this church is conserved a piece of the first cross raised by our missionaries on the original site of this town. The relic is greatly venerated by the faithful, because of the miracles they have witnessed in it—which are omitted, however, since they have not been judicially verified."

Binangonan. Separated from Morong in 1621; first priest, Fray Matias Argete; exchanged with the Jesuits for Barás in 1679; ceded by the Jesuits to the Augustinians in 1697; returned to the Franciscans, the founders, in 1737, together with the *visita* of Angono, when Fray Blas de San Diego was assigned as priest. Patron, Sta. Ursula. Church begun in 1792 by Fray Bernardo de Perdigon (afterward bishop of Nueva Cáceres, the Bikol region), and completed in 1800 by Fray Fermín Revilla. Church and *convento* given general repairs in 1853 by Fray Francisco de Paula Gonzalez.

Pila. (Villa de Pila.) "This villa was founded in 1578 by Fray Juan de la Plascencia

and Fray Diego de Oropesa and was the principal residence of the latter, who however did not cease to evangelize the coasts and mountains of Laguna de Bay until his zeal penetrated the province of Tayabas." Patron, San Antonio de Padua. First stone church, 1599, destroyed in 1800 when the site was changed and the present church built.

Lumbang. Founded by Plascencia and Oropesa in 1578 and celebrated as the residence of the former during his mission life. Made a pueblo in 1590. Patron, San Francisco. First church burned; 1586. Preoccupied with his mission work and constantly on the mountain trails, Plascencia got Governor Santiago de Vera to appoint a lieutenant solely for the building of the stone church, and a native *principal*, one Burlon, was appointed in 1589, who built and completed the first masonry church the Franciscans had in the islands; and this church, in 1600 and for years afterward, was the only one outside Manila "where there was permanently conserved the august and divine sacrament of the Eucharist, which function was celebrated with such solemnity that it will not have had its equal in the archipelago."

Gold and gems and precious stones, looted from the neighboring parishes of Majajay, Lilio and Nagcarlang, for the adornment of the images in the procession, bulked more than seven *arobas*; and one triumphal car of such gigantic size as to require 26 wheels to support it, was covered over with gems of extreme value. The standards of 20 pueblos heralded the procession. Forty-four priests participated. In 1600, October 9, out yonder in the hills of Lumbang! Such a spectacle, such solemnity! So that it is little wonder after all that the people gathered round the cross and welcomed the new-built shrines. Three days, three nights, with music, chants, prayers and sermons, the gala festival continued, and was the wonder thereof of a century.

Majajay. Tagalog, and preferable, *Mahayhay*. Full ancient name of the site, *Ilayan-Mahayhay*. The natives of the northwest coast of Laguna de Bay gave Salcedo little resistance, and his troops, when peace had been arranged, planted the cross in 1571 on the banks of May-it river, where Plascencia and Oropesa found the natives venerating the emblem in 1578. The first priest, Fray Antonio de Nombela, was assigned in 1594, and when the church he built burned down in 1602, the site of the settlement was changed to Mahayhay. The first church, built by the natives around the cross Salcedo's men planted, burned in 1576.

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Four stone churches (of course with timber dimensions and thatch roofs) burned between 1599 and 1711, when the one now standing was begun, to be completed in 1730, by Fray Jose de Puertollano, at a cost of \$26,000. This church is surely one of the best and strongest in the islands." Patron, San Gregorio Magno, Patron of the chapel in the barrio of Ilayan-Mahayhay, N. S. de la Porteria, "whose image is a crayon of considerable merit, brought to these islands from Madrid in 1759 by one of the missions and originally placed, in 1760, in a stone building then serving as the *tribunal*, where the annual fiesta is still celebrated."

The friars knew how to establish precedents certain to become traditions, and how to preserve them. How naturally they themselves would cling to these traditions, how impossible it would be, as indeed the event proved, for them to behold a new age dawning.

But the most remarkable relic in Mahayhay, for the worldly eye, is the quaint bridge built in 1851 by Fray Victorino del Moral, "of pure cement." This bridge has a single arch 52 feet high and 48 feet wide, and if recent engineering hasn't blasted it loose from its foundations, it is standing as staunch as it was the day Father Victorino proffered it to the government.

But the chief architect of the then insular government would have nothing to do with the bridge, in which he said the recognized principles of bridge building had not been followed—not any of them—and so he concluded the bridge was unsafe. But the earthquake of September 16, 1852, came, and left the bridge unscathed, as did that of June 3, 1863, which ruined Manila and damaged or destroyed many of the solidest structures, even in the walled city. And the terrific floods that plunge down Banahaw's giant slopes poured under the bridge, great ones dashing against it even before it had thoroughly set, yet the bridge stood—"the caprice of Father del Moral," as it was called.

In fact, it is not hard to see that by this time there was a lot of young blades in the government, disdainful of the simple friars as old fogies and know-nothings. Father Huerta, commenting on the incident, makes the Mahayhay bridge say this to future generations:

"I was constructed in the year 1851 by a Franciscan friar *without principles*. Know that the principles applied in my construction were capricious, and more capricious than all, the audacity of building me without expending a single *maravedi*, and bringing such a purpose to a successful conclusion!" And it may well be, as it might be in our own times, that the most illogical feature of this bridge was that it wasn't in the budget and had not taken a centavo of the people's taxes. This may have been the learned architect's main dissent. "This bridge is found spanning the Holla river, west-north-west of the town. Its arch, including the pillars, measures ninety feet, without there having been utilized for its colossal fabric (to hold and form the cement) other materials than rattan, bamboo, coconut and betel-nut trunks. All that is wanting is two modest arches at the ends, to divide the great weight which the terraplain would otherwise thrust upon the pillars supporting the main arch."

Mahayhay falls are magnificent, quite the equal of Pagsanjan, people say.

"The long veils commonly worn by Philippine women when attending church, were introduced in Mahayhay in 1594 by Fray Antonio de Nombela, and from this the custom extended throughout the islands."

THE SCUTTLEBUTT

It takes a lot of time to be sentimental. Nobody ever thought anything out in a shower bath.

There is a pharmacist's mate at the Hospital so stingy he won't even wind his watch.

There is not much comfort in life until one is old enough to have the courage of his cussedness.

The short skirts of today reveal the malnutrition of yesterday.

"It ought to be easy for me to get a lot of money," said Mac Robillard, "everybody gets mine easily."

All the best people come from somewhere.

The brighter you are the more you have to learn.

Pleasure is more trouble than trouble.

We make most of our mistakes when we are optimistic.

"I don't want to expose myself to anything except the company manners of anybody" was the reason a certain young man gave for not marrying.

There's one thing about baldness: it's neat.

Going to college is the easiest way some folks ever found to make a living.

Most men resent life and most of them take their resentment out on their stomachs.

In speaking of short skirts, an eastern reformer characterized them as immodest as piano lamps.

The chief trouble with jazz is there is not

enough of it; some of it we have to listen to twice.

All beaches should be closed in the summer.

Mail carriers are said to be our most healthy class. This is perhaps because they don't spend their vacations sitting around.

What is home without a hot water bottle.

Some persons are so ceremonious they can make a speech out of calling their floor in an elevator.

There are 35,000,000 strangers in the world, of all of whom it is comparatively easy to be a nice.

Sophistication: Knowing enough to keep your feet out of the crack of the theatre seat in front of you.

There is a great need for a sufermeter—an instrument to show others we have been through more than they.—*Bamboo Breezes*, Cavite Naval Station.



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