

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The municipality of Sta. Cruz was an active participant in the making of Mindanao's and Philippines' histories. From the Spanish rule, to American regime, to Japanese occupation, to independence, to Martial Law, to EDSA Revolution, Sta. Cruz' story was intricately interwoven into the country's saga.

This gulf town was originally called "Labo" a Bagobo word meaning "marshland". Labo is situated "between a confluence of two mountain streams where waters were as clear as crystal and was but a short distance from the coast".¹ According to pioneering residents, this place was later called Balalan (this covers the area from Lubo up to Digos River).

Long before the Spaniards came, the "Lumads" or the natives Tagabawa Bagobo inhabited Sta Cruz that was mostly forested then except in the Darong coast where the Davao Muslim Calagans settled.² Their respective leaders called "datu" ruled them. Foremost among them were Datus Ali, Malado and Bukina Samal.

When the Spaniard established the Davao Settlement in 1848 that was under Provincia Moro, Datu Bago, a Muslim from Maguindanao tribe in Cotabato ruled the area. The priests and missionaries belonging to the Recollect Order started the evangelization but the Lumads resisted Christianity and it was documented that in 1852 only two lumads in Sta Cruz were baptized. They were Petra Pamansag and Basilisa Agustin of Sibulan. In 1870 the Bagobos had their first chapel in Tuban through the effort of Fr. Marcelino Vivero, a missionary from the east coast town of

Caraga, who according to story, was drifted by strong wind to Caburan while sailing during his apostolic work. On his way back to Caraga via the cabecera of Davao, he passed by the coastal villages where banners were staked on the shore to signify "welcome". One of these was Tuban where he stayed long enough to exhort the natives to embrace Christianity. In 1873, Fr. Quirico More arrived in Davao and resumed missionary works down to Darong and as far as Balut Island. In 1882, Fr. Matthew Gisbert, a Society of Jesuits missionary, began a "reduccion" (a resettlement and subjugation area for the natives) in Labo where some 9 Bagobo Datus settled with their families and sacopes.³

Records and testimonials are vague on how Sta. Cruz derived its name. According to stories of pioneers, in 1880 the Spaniards planted a cross under a shelter upon their failure to convert the settlers who continued to resist them. They left the place with cursing words "forever the people in this area shall sacrifice in the name of the cross". It was said that several years later, another group of migrants settled adjacent to the cross that is near the present Municipal Hall site and the place came to be known as "SA CRUZ" which means "at the cross".

On the other hand, official records from Manila Archives disclosed how the town got its official name during the Spanish Civil Administration. It was documented that on October 4, 1884, Angel Rodriguez, the Spanish Governor General of Mindanao Province arrived on board the warship "Gardoqui" escorted by a sergeant, a corporal and 12 persons from the capital's detachment. Christian and

¹ Heidi K. Gloria & Pasquale T. Giordano, S.J., *The Christianization of Davao, Tambara Cartas de dos Padres de la Campana de Jesus de la Mision Filipinas*

² Rogelio L. Lizada, *San-awun sa Dabaw*, 2002, p.12

³ same as # 1

non-Christians greeted them with banners where the word "Sta. Cruz" was embroidered. The next day, October 5, 1884, Rodriguez blessed the town and thus created "Sta. Cruz of Mindanao".

Darong then became the biggest Spanish Community in Southern Philippines if not in Mindanao. Spaniards who ventured to Davao eventually acquired vast fertile lands, became prosperous and settled in Sta Cruz. Antonio Matute, whose parents owned the Agencia de Empeños in Manila arrived in 1890 in Davao and set up a trading company. He married Sul-len, the B'laan daughter of Datu Cagnap of Saranggani in a small chapel in Darong in 1895 solemnized by Fr. Saturnino Urios, S.J. with Don Damaso Palacios and Don Benito Saavedra as sponsors. He established his ranch and farm in the neighboring Sibulan. His success served as inspiration for other Spaniards to follow suit and try their luck in Darong. Prominent among them were: the Gutierrez brothers (Restituto- arrived 1904, Domingo-1921 and Manuel-1927) from Santander, Spain who developed 1,400 hectares into coconut plantation and cattle ranch (now owned by Ayala Agricultural Development Corporation, SODACO and San Miguel Corporation); Don Damaso Palacios and his nephew, Don Marcos Saez, also from Santander; Luis Surrochi who settled in Astorga; the Gomezes in Sibulan; Eugenio Aznar in Padada; and Maria Villa Abrille (married to Prudencio Chicote) who bought Patulangon from a Bagobo Datu in 1882.

Other famous families in Sta Cruz during the Spanish regime were: Don Mariano Regino who was given the distinctive "Cedula de Cruz de Plata del Merito Naval" from Madrid's Ministro de Marina in 1891. Also in 1896, Governor General Don Ramon Blanco Y Erenas conferred upon him the "Medalla del Merito Civil" for his contribution in the propagation of Catholicism in the island of

Samal, Davao District. Don Mariano was the great grandfather of the Tancontian and Regino families in Sta. Cruz.

During the Spanish period, some Japanese nationals have already established abaca plantations in the municipality.

The Spanish-American War or World War I broke out in 1896 and ended in 1898 by virtue of the Treaty of Paris whereby Spain ceded the Philippines to America. When the Spanish officials left, Sta. Cruz's Provisional Government was entrusted to Angel Brioso, a teacher who for unexplained reasons led the local insurrection. It was only in 1899 that the American forces arrived in Davao.

Three significant events were brought about in Sta. Cruz during the American period. First, a teacher named Orville Wood pioneered education in Sta. Cruz. Second, the Thomasites led by the American missionary Rev. Robert Black, introduced Protestantism and was first to preach the gospel to the Bagobos in Melilia in 1904. Consequently, Melilia became the bastion of UCCP and from it hailed the founders of Brokenshire Hospital of Davao and the Silliman University. Third, the entire Sta. Cruz was surveyed per Cadastral Survey No. 275 paving the way for granting property rights. The first to be recognized by the American Commonwealth to own cadastral property in Sta. Cruz were the families of Lim Juya, Tan Kim Kee and Tancontian. In 1905, Francisco Tancontian bought from the family of Datu Bantang for P150.00 a 100-hectare property, part of which is now occupied by Franklin Baker Desiccating Plant in Coronon.

In 1909, the Robert Black Mission School was established in Melilia. Maximiano Tongcaling became the first Bagobo preacher. Also in the same year, Vandermieren introduced irrigation into his abaca plantation containing 50,000 hills.

According to pioneering residents, the succeeding years saw the influx of migrants from abroad, Luzon and Visayas to the Land of Promise. In the 1920s, General Paulino Santos of the Philippine Army, led migrants from Luzon and Visayas to settle in Mindanao. The first batch was mostly Ilocanos. Property records showed that in 1918, Don Mariano and Doña Josefa Marcos, parent to the late President Ferdinand Marcos, lived and acquired property in Sta. Cruz. Matea Almendras-Ralota, a migrant from Cebu, remarried to Bendigo and became matriarch to a clan of politicians, namely: Almendras, Bendigo, Ralota and Cagas, among others.

The second wave of Japanese migrants arrived. Yoshizo Furukawa came in 1914 and later established plantations of abaca, coconut, maguey and ramie in Darong and Inawayan. Some became tenants in the abaca and coconut plantations of the Diaz family in Sitio Lacube. In 1928, the Vandermierens expanded their plantations into abaca and coconut and in 1935 these were leased to the Japanese. In 1940, S. Schlinger acquired the Vandermieren's plantation and converted it purely into coconut area. While the foreigners were engrossed in developing their agricultural estates, more migrants from Cebu, Bohol and Iloilo came and eventually settled in the municipality. When the foreign plantation owners left, their properties were acquired by pioneering migrants who made good in Sta. Cruz. The Schlingers sold their property to Matea Almendras. The Reids sold their property in Tuban to the Tan Kim Kee family.

World War II broke out in 1941 and the Japanese Imperial Army occupied Davao. Accordingly, the Japanese firepower was far superior resulting to the surrender of the USAFFE in May 10, 1942. Sta. Cruz's residents evacuated to the mountains and municipal officials went

underground. Life during the Japanese occupation (1941-1944) was full of terror, anguish, poverty and physical exhaustion.

When war ended in 1945, Plamin Diangco was appointed as the Philippine Civil Authority Office (PCAO) Mayor.⁴

The territorial lands of Sta. Cruz prior to the division of Davao Province included the municipalities of Digos, Bansalan, Magsaysay, Matanao, Kiblawan, Hagonoy, Padada, Sulop, Malalag and Sta. Maria that used to be its barangays before. Executive Order No. 236 created the municipality of Digos and Padada in 1949. In mid-60s, President Diosdado Macapagal through an Executive Order created the Municipality of Roxas out of barangays of Inawayan, Sibulan, Darong, Astorga, Coronon and part of the Poblacion area up to the Latong Creek. For eight (8) months, the appointed Mayor Higinio V. Somoza and other local officials set up the new municipality with Darong as the seat of government but the temporary municipal hall was in Astorga. The incumbent officials of Sta. Cruz led by Mayor Jesus A. Ralota resisted the Executive Order as Sta. Cruz's jurisdiction will diminish. Vice-President Emmanuel Pelaez questioned before the Supreme Court the authority of the President to create municipalities through an Executive Order. The latter abrogated the Executive Order and thus ended the short-lived municipality of Roxas.

Declaration of Martial Law in 1971 by President Ferdinand E. Marcos resulted to the rise of insurgency and Sta. Cruz earned the "Red Area or War Zone" label due to the massive infiltration of the New People's Army. In terms of development, Sta. Cruz had been passive until the town's

⁴ Other informations were provided by the following key informants: Regulo M. Abajero, Edgar Lacson, Benvenuto L. Caspi, Jr., Florencio Aguilar, Braulio Lim, Andres Gutierrez and Otelio R. Martel.

leadership was passed on to a former school-teacher, the late Alfredo B. Orpilla who became the OIC Mayor after the EDSA Revolution in 1986. It was during the post-EDSA period that the people's movement for peace, the NAKASAKA (Nagkahiusang Katawhan Alang Sa Kalinaw) emerged in Davao del Sur. The support given by Mayor Orpilla and the Provincial Government under the then Governor Douglas R. Cagas was effective in downsizing the insurgency problem.

The Orpilla administration ushered in improvement in infrastructure, basic services delivery and local governance. It also opened its door to industrialization. Significant development was the establishment of the most modern and biggest brewery of San Miguel Corporation in Darong. The administration of the succeeding and current mayor, Atty. Joel Ray L. Lopez keeps an open and supportive attitude towards development assistance of foreign and national agencies including the private sector. His dispensation pursued the municipal development goals not only by building peoples' capacities but also through strategic alliances with various stakeholders.

The municipal leadership has been passed on to several hands since the late 19th century. The following constitutes the leaders for the last 119 years:

Name of Leader	Title/ Designation	Term of Office	Estimated Length of Service
Hermogenes de Castro	Cabeseria	1884	
Angel Brioso	Trustee (Provisional Gov't)	1898	
Deputy Don Marcelo de Jesus Ciriaco Godoy Sr.	Cabeseria		
	Appointed President	1912	7 years
Licerio Acacio	Appointed President	1919-1921	2 years
Amando Quidato	Acting President	1922-1924	2 years
Ciriaco Godoy, Sr.	Appointed President	1924-1930	6 years
Maximino Danton	Appointed President	1931-1937	6 years
Mariano Pejo	Municipal Mayor	1938-1940	2 years
Lorenzo Catalan	Municipal Mayor	1940 - 1945	5 years
Sotero Denzon	Acting Mayor	Japanese occupation	
Atty. Plamin Diangco	Municipal Mayor	July 1945 - December 1945	5 months
Lorenzo Catalan	Municipal Mayor	December 1945 - April 1946	5 months
Mariano Pejo	Acting Mayor	May 1946 - June 1946	2 months
Ricardo Macias	Municipal Mayor	July 1946 - December 1947	1 year and 5 months
Lorenzo Catalan	Municipal Mayor	December 1947 - January 1952	4 years
Cesar Bendigo	Municipal Mayor	January 1952 - December 1955	4 years
Dominador Bendigo	Municipal Mayor	January 1956 - December 1958	3 years
Eduardo Dean	Municipal Mayor	January 1959 - December 1959	1 year
Dominador Bendigo	Municipal Mayor	January 1960 - August 1963	3 years and 8 months
Eduardo Dean	Municipal Mayor	September 1963 - December 1963	4 months
Jesus Ralota	Municipal Mayor	January 1964 - June 1967	3 years
David Adtoon	Municipal Mayor	July 1967 - December 1967	6 months
Amancio Bendigo Jr.	Municipal Mayor	January 1968 - March 1986	18 years and 3 months
Alfredo Orpilla	Municipal Mayor	April 1986 - May 1995	9 years
Atty. Joel Ray L. Lopez	Municipal Mayor	May 1995 - up to present	8 years to date

For Sta. Cruz, the PAST is a century-and-a-half history worth learning from, the PRESENT is an occasion worth rising to and the FUTURE is a challenge worth taking on.