

HISTORY AND CULTURAL LIFE OF LEGASPI CITY

Part - 1 -

HISTORY

Many, many years before Magellan set foot at Homonhon, a small barangay of Malayan tribe settled the marshy lowlands of Binangahan, at the right margin and near the mouth of Macabale river, hence the name Sawangan given to the place, meaning "delta or mouth of a river". Then, Sawangan was a small place of aquilid, thatched scattered huts of nipa and bamboo, and the natives lived only on the fish they caught in the river and the bay, and the wild bear and deer they killed in the volcanic slopes.

About the same year that Mary, Queen of Scots was beheaded by her intolerant cousin Elizabeth, the Queen of England, and several years before the Pilgrims Protestant landed at Plymouth Rock, exactly three hundred sixty six years ago, today, that is, in the year 1597, there arrived at Sawangan, an expedition of Spanish conquistadores headed by Captain Pedro de Chavez, and claimed the hills, the plain, and the bay for His Most Catholic Majesty, and the natives for God.

Datu Ibal, the ruler of Sawangan and his "sacepas", descendants of the famous Bornean Datus Damsagail and Balkasusa, refusing to surrender the land so dear to them, tinted with the blood of their forebears, valiantly and stubbornly engaged the iron-clad invaders in a fiery and bloody encounter. Fighting with inferior weapons though with superb courage, Ibal and his sacepas were vanquished.

Then, Fr. Francisco de Santa Ana planted the cross in a new chapel of nipa and bamboo and dedicated it to San Gregorio Magro, the Pope that gave the world the ageless Gregorian calendar.

Under the guidance of the missionary priest, the settlement that came to be known as "Mision de Albaybay", was built around the chapel.

During the first two decades, Albaybay was an adjunct or visita of Cagsawa, a town of the past, and in 1616, Albaybay was separated from Cagsawa and made into an independent canonical and civil unit, and the name Albaybay was changed to Albay.

When the Partido de Ibalon was created, Albay was made cabecera de partido, that is, the capital of the newly organized political entity.

Then, came the Bornean and the Mindanao pirates who plundered the thriving community, burned the church, the houses, and looted what little belonging and provisions the Residents had in their sessions. In all these, the Nicolanos of Albay proved, even the past, to possess a hardy character, never willing to give up, all