

# Filipino Community Celebrates Philippine Independence Day and the History of Filipinos in Louisiana

On June 15th in Jean Lafitte, Louisiana, the Filipino American community and residents of the Town of Jean Lafitte celebrated Philippine Independence Day and the history of Filipinos in Louisiana. The celebration highlighted the interconnections between the histories of the Philippines and Louisiana.

Formal proceedings at Manila Village Plaza were highlighted by Philippine Honorary Consul Robert Romero reading a message from Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, Dr. Jose Juan Bautista reading a message from Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs T. L. Locsin, Jr., and a speech by Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner. Gerlie Galanza-San Agustin was the events emcee.

Philippine Independence Day (June 12) commemorates the independence of the Philippines from Spain in 1898. The message of Duterte and Locsin emphasized the need to remember history and acknowledge the pioneers who paved the way for future successes. The words held significance for an audience celebrating Filipino settlers who left the Philippines in the 19th century when the country was still ruled by Spain to settle in Louisiana. The oppression of Spanish colonial rule motivated Filipino seamen to seek refuge in the state. At the time, those early settlers celebrated the end of Spanish rule in the Philippines.

Manila Village Plaza, the site of the morning's formal activities, features historical markers commemorating Manila Village and Clark Cheneire. The Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society erected the markers to highlight the role Filipinos played in the development of the area. Established in the late 1800's Manila Village and Clark Cheneire were two of several Filipino shrimp-drying facilities in Barataria Bay. Part shrimp processing plant and town, the facilities housed workers and their families in cottages around the edges of large shrimp-drying platforms. Filipinos thrived in the industry and helped make Manila Village a symbol of the growing Filipino presence in the region.

Kerner drew cheers from attendees when he announced plans to create a replica of Manila Village along the nature trail in Lafitte. "We are not going to let [Manila Village] be forgotten. We are putting right at a million and a half dollars for a replica." Kerner said. "When you walk back by the canal, it's going to look like you are walking into Manila Village." Kerner thanked Romero for helping him realize the significance of the shrimp-drying platforms and for reminding him that most of the people in Lafitte have ancestors who worked on platforms like Manila Village. Tim Kerner, Jr., the mayor's son and a descendant of Filipino settlers, read a proclamation which concluded by asking local residents to appreciate the contributions Filipinos have made to the region and to join in the celebration of Philippine Independence Day.

Formal Independence Day activities were followed by a cultural and historical program. Dance groups from the Filipino American Association of St. Tammany and the Association of Filipino

American Cares of Louisiana performed traditional Filipino dances, while members of the community sang traditional Filipino songs. The Neighborhood Story Project and Jean Lafitte National Historical Park sponsored an exhibit, "Roots in the Water: Remembering Manila Village," with prints and oral histories by Shelbey Leco and underwater portraits by Michel Varisco that tell the story of the shrimping village in Baratavia Bay.

Representatives from the University of New Orleans and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette discussed the history of Filipinos in Louisiana and encouraged community members to share their stories. Winston Ho, a graduate student at the University of New Orleans who researches Chinese American history of Louisiana, shared his research on Manila Village. Ho highlighted the relationship between Filipino fishermen and Chinese entrepreneurs in developing the dried shrimp industry. Dr. Rachel Breunlin from the University of New Orleans and the Neighborhood Story Project and Dr. Randy Gonzales from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and the Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society were on hand to collect oral histories from community members.

The program was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Neighborhood Story Project, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, Town of Jean Lafitte, Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society, and Philippine Honorary Consulate in New Orleans .

On November 9th, the Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society will unveil a Louisiana State Historical Marker commemorating St. Malo, the first permanent Filipino settlement in the United States. The unveiling will take place at 10:30 am at the Los Isleños Museum Complex at 1345 Bayou Road, St. Bernard, LA.. An evening gala will take place at 6:00 pm at the Historic Beauregard Courthouse at 1201 Bayou Road. For more information about the unveiling or for tickets to the gala contact Robert Romero at [philhoncon.la@gmail.com](mailto:philhoncon.la@gmail.com) or (504) 533-9822.

For more information about the event or the history of Filipino Louisiana contact Randy Gonzales at [rg@louisiana.edu](mailto:rg@louisiana.edu).