

Historical Marker for Manila Village in Louisiana Unveiled

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30 June 2012- As part of the Independence Day Celebration and the Bicentennial of Louisiana, Consul General Leo M. Herrera-Lim participated in the unveiling of the historical marker for "The Manila Village" in Louisiana last June 16.

The event was attended by almost 400 people, including about 50 direct descendants (4th to 6th generations removed) from the original group of Filipinos that established the Manila Village in the late 1800s.

Today, there are over 10,200 Filipinos in Louisiana, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, residing mainly in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Alexandria, Lafayette and Lake Charles.

After the unveiling, the attendees were treated to traditional Philippine cuisine and presentations of Filipino songs, dances and costumes.

The event was organized by the Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society, led by its President, Mr. Robert Romero, and its Vice-President, Dr. Carmelo Astilla. Mayor Tim Kerner of the town of Jean Lafitte, Louisiana, who is married to a 4th generation descendant of the original settlers in Manila Village, actively participated in the ceremonies.

William de la Cruz, grandson of the founder of the Manila Village, also participated in the unveiling ceremonies with his family.

In his opening remarks, Consul General Herrera-Lim said: *"Today marks a highpoint in shared histories between the Filipinos and the people of Louisiana. "Manila Village" no longer remains just as memories for the descendants of the first Filipino settlers in Louisiana. We have put a marker for shared aspirations for the future. Indeed, this is such a great tribute to our community and our heritage to see the project finally comes into fruition."*

Historically Significant. In the late 1800s, a group of Filipino fishermen led by Quintin de la Cruz built a few shelters on stilts on top of some oyster reefs at the mouth of Barataria Bay in Southern Louisiana. They called it "Manila Village."

The Filipino fishermen of Manila Village is reckoned to be the forerunner of the global operation of shrimp drying that produced thousands of pounds of exports to Asia and Latin America. Manila Village peaked in the 1930s.

Today, only a few pilings remain in the former site of the Manila Village. A massive hurricane in 1947 devastated the complex built by Quintin de la Cruz. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy, one of the worst storms to hit Louisiana, wiped out all of the structures in the Manila Village. Yet, the geographic lexicon is utilized to identify, say the Manila Village Oil Field and the Manila Village Oyster Lease, the area where the original houses/structures on stilts existed.

The Manila Village Historical Marker is situated in front of the town hall of the Town of Jean Lafitte, Louisiana. Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner will soon establish a town museum that will include the Manila Village and the achievements of the Filipinos.

There is also significant interest generated towards developing multi-dimensional research on Manila Village, including the origins of the settlers, their way of life, their legacy for Louisiana.

Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society. The Society, which obtained both State and City approvals for the historical marker, is currently composed of the following: Robert Romero, President; Carmelo Astilla, Vice President; Zeny Bayuga, Cecile Melendez, Joju Bautista, Evelyn Escondo, Zeno Pimentel, Lita Romero, Rosie Catubig, Nelia Astilla, Rick Escondo, Mando Bayuga, Jimmy Melendez, Charing Abad, Lance Harwell, and Bob Grace. END