

Putting Names and Data to the Portraits of Former FACLA Presidents - MabuhayRadio

Written by Bobby Reyes

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There are some 23 framed old photographs of former presidents of the Filipino-American Community of Los Angeles, Inc. (FACLA). The photographs are displayed on the northern wall of the FACLA Social Hall at 1740 West Temple St., Los Angeles, California 90026. Except for some very-old members of the FACLA, not too many people recognize them. Some of the photographs have names and dates of their presidency.

From what I gathered, here are the only names of the FACLA presidents that appear in some of the photographs:

Esteban Dizon, 1947, 1954, 1955, 1957

Greg Baculanta, 1953, 1963

Fred Sanches, 1956

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Amparo Paat, 1959, 1961, 1962

Dolly N. Villaflor, 1970. 1971

Andy Lucas (No year)

Meng Gatus, 1987, 1988

Aurora Madamba-Dotimas, 1996 to 2000

I recognized also the photograph of Ben Manibog (who served according to anecdotal sources for seven straight one-year terms and who inaugurated the present FACLA Social Hall in 1965). There is also the photograph of Mrs. Remedios Geaga, who used to attend some of the meetings of the Media Breakfast Club way back in the mid-1990s (a year or two before she

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passed away). Mrs. Geaga was said to be one of the best presidents the FACLA ever had.

There are the photographs of Manolo Madamba (the immediate predecessor of his sister, Aurora Madamba-Dotimas) and of course, the incumbent, Dr. Jose B. Baldonado, who began his presidency in 2002.

There are apparently no pictures displayed at the FACLA Social Hall of other former presidents such as Antonio San Jose, Atty. Bert Mendoza, Greg Cruz and Roland Fernandez, Art Cara and Ferdie Sabado.

From what I gathered from the manongs of old (like the late Fred Aglipay and some Leyte-Samar Association founders like Martin Balbuena, who has passed away too), the FACLA's founding could be traced to the late 1930s when the Filipino pioneers used to meet in a small Filipino restaurant in San Pedro St. (now part of Little Tokyo). Venerable historian Ka Hector Santos mentioned also that the forerunner of the now Historic Filipinotown actually started in a restaurant at the corner of Figueroa St. corner Temple St. And this led him to remark that the present Historic Filipinotown is "neither historic nor Filipino," as the Latinos compose nearly 70% of the area's population and non-Filipinos own almost 90% of the properties. Even the Luzon Plaza is now owned by an Armenian.

The FACLA was officially registered with the State of California on April 26, 1945. And from thereon, it was essentially run by Ilocano Americans, with controversies marking many of the

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elections of its officers and directors.

The FACLA does not have any written record of its past presidents and its members. The membership list includes only those who registered for the 2002 and 2005 elections.

Since I became a member of FACLA at the time of the Manolo Madamba presidency, I suggested for its executive officers to start documenting the history of the organization but to no avail. And worse, after Mrs. Dotimas suffered a stroke that paralyzed her, the FACLA records (incomplete as they were at that) simply vanished.

I was an inactive member of the FACLA, as I said that a member of the Filipino-American media could only report about its activities from the outside and not being part of its management or Board of Directors. I did follow my belief until its court-appointed Receiver, Dr. Veronico Agatep, invited the Media Breakfast Club (MBC) that I founded to move its Wednesday-morning meetings to the FACLA sometime in 2000.

Dr. Agatep was replaced as a receiver by Mrs. Susan Maquindang-Dilkes in 2001 and she oversaw the court-mandated election in June 2002, which the slate of Dr. Baldonado won. I was one of the campaign managers of the Baldonado-led candidates in both 2002 and 2005 elections. My wife, Ceny, was a winning candidate for the Board of Directors in the 2005 elections, as a member of the Baldonado slate. (She was elected to the Board in 2003, after then Secretary General Olive Guerrero died. Ceny was the assistant secretary and friends called me the "secretary to the assistant secretary of the Secretary General," as I was typing almost all of the minutes of the Board meetings.)

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The 2002 elections marked the introduction of a parliamentary-style government for the FACLA. The members elected a 15-person board and the directors would then elect from among themselves the executive officers. Both the 2002 and 2005 elections were non-controversial and there was not even one election protest that arose from both contests.

In January of this year, my wife, Geny, decided to resign from the Board of the FACLA because of conflict with her work schedule. The Board elected me to take her place on Feb. 7, 2008. The Board then elected me as the new Secretary General on Feb. 21, 2008.

I accepted both positions, as I thought that my project to come up with a book detailing the history of the FACLA could be facilitated if I was in the inner circle of leadership and not viewing it from the outside. I wanted also to implement the plans and programs that my friends and I conceptualized for the FACLA. In short, for about 10 months, we have the window of opportunity to lay down the vision and direction for the new FACLA directors who will be elected in the coming Nov. 16, 2008, election.

In my search for FACLA records and copies of documents, I asked friends and even the children of the past presidents to help. But not much help is coming for reasons that I do not understand. Certainly, coming up with a book about the FACLA will tell also the history of the Filipinos in Los Angeles from the 1940s.

I was able to secure a copy, as found in the Filipino-American Library, of the FACLA Roster

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used for the 1974 (1-9-7-4) Election and the Life Members. Both lists were dated Dec. 2, 1973. The materials were donated by FACLA member, Marie Melgaso, to the Filipino-American Library, as coursed through Ms. Susan Maquindang-Dilkes.

I found also more materials, including copies of news articles circa 1976, 1977, 1978 and 1979 and 1980, that highlight the election protests, including the court cases filed at the Los Angeles Superior Court about the said FACLA elections of 1976 and 1977. Also part of the record was a copy of a formal letter from the Office of then Secretary of State March Fong Eu dated Feb. 2, 1993, that ordered the return of the FACLA property by the group of Ms. Leony Lee Cummings to the FACLA.

The quest to turn the oral history of the FACLA into a documented book (or even an e-book) is slowly taking off. It is becoming a reality. I intend to ask the help of fellow writers like Rene Villaroman, Mar de Vera, Romy Borje, Max Alvarez, Larry Pelayo and others to help in annotating the materials and the old clippings that I have gathered so far. I will ask also my fellow charter members of the Philippine History group of Los Angeles to help. Perhaps by December 30, 2008, the work may be presented – at least online in a brand-new FACLA website or even in a FACLA section in the www.mabuhayradio.com.

(To be continued . . .)

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