

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*JGLI*) – Marilyn Z. O. Doromal, a retired Filipino-American teacher of Columbus, Georgia, is a friend of Ed Navarra, national chair of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations. Marilyn was introduced by Maritoni Luetgers of GFI, Inc., a non-profit group, to James McSweeney, Atlanta, Georgia's Southeast Archivist of NARA (National Archives and Records Administration), the nation's record keeper.

Mr. McSweeney is putting together a southeast project, regarding the "First Filipino settlers in the southeast, the Filipino veterans, the history of medical professionals and educators."

However, Ms. Doromal, NaFFAA region 4 member, was blown away when asked, "Who will"

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discover the "first settlers?" "That 'who will' question brought me to the info-desk of Joseph Lariosa (Chicago News)."

That Chicago news happened to be a [column](#) of this reporter on April 3, 2008, on mabuhayradio.com ( <http://www.mabuhayradio.com/history/the-real-first-filipino-settlers-in-louisiana> ), which chronicled vignettes of one of the documented descendants of the first 19<sup>th</sup>

-century Filipino settlers in Louisiana called "Manilamen" direct from the horse's mouth. The chronicler in that column was Rhonda Lee Richoux (pronounced "re-shoe"), who had exchanged emails with this reporter.

Previous accounts of the struggles and triumphs of "Manilamen," Filipinos, who deserted the Spanish Galleons and settled in the Louisiana's bayous (marshy outlets of a lake or river), came from second-hand sources.

One of them was American journalist Lafcadio Hearn, who published an article in *Harper's Weekly* in 1883, exposing to the world for the first time Manilamen's existence.

And another was Filipino immigrant, librarian and researcher, Marina E. Espina, who wrote a book, "*Manilamen of Louisiana*," expanding on Hearn's accounts.

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**Editor's Note:** Mr. Lariosa wrote this article that cast doubt on the claims of Ms. Marina E. Espina: [How Joseph Lariosa Found Another Fabrication in Marina Espina's Book, "Filipinos in Louisiana"](#)

URL: <http://www.mabuhayradio.com/history/how-joseph-lariosa-found-another-fabrication-in-marina-espina-s-book-filipinos-in-louisiana>

Ms. Espina's also conducted oral history based on the accounts of the descendants of Manilamen, among them the family of Ms. Richoux, who exchanged emails with this reporter.

## **SOUGHT THE HELP OF THIS REPORTER**

In a post to this reporter last Aug. 23, 2012, Ms. Doromal said, "I will highly appreciate it if you can facilitate our meeting (with Ms. Richoux). I am from the south as well and meeting her personally is a dream-come true. Salamat Po and God Bless."

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A few weeks after this reporter responded to Ms. Doromal's email, Ms. Doromal emailed back a

[copy](#)

of a photo attached to this story, celebrating and living her dream of meeting Ms. Richoux and Ms. Richoux's mom, Lilian Mae Burtanog Richoux, a fifth-generation Filipino descendant.

It turned out the photo and the meeting took place in Biloxi, Mississippi, which is 315 miles away or nearly five hours drive from Ms. Doromal's residence in Columbus while Biloxi is 90 miles away or one-and-a-half hour drive from New Orleans

Ms. Doromal also took the occasion to personally invite Ms. Richoux to attend the First Filipino-American Symposium & Exhibits in Atlanta on May 18, 2013, hosted by NARA in collaboration with OCA and Asian Pacific American Society.

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Ms. Richoux will be one of the resource speakers, whose accounts are going to be documented by NARA for posterity. Ms. Doromal is hopeful the existence of Manilamen will find its way into American history books in the south in the same way that the exploits and bravery of Filipino soldiers during World War II have been included in the west ( California) history books.

She explained that while Louisiana is part of NaFFAA's Region 3, Louisiana is part NARA at Atlanta, which is part of NaFFAA's Region 4.

Manilamen's documents have been literally washed away by mega storm Betsy Hurricane (1913) and Category 5 Katrina's fury in 2005 that totally erased St. Malo's "brown footprints of Manila Village from the map of ... devastated Louisiana."

### ST. MALO, FIRST SETTLEMENT OF FILIPINOS IN THE U.S.

Saint Malo was a small fishing village that existed in [St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana](#) on the shore of [Lake Borgne](#) from the mid-18th century into the early-20th century, when it was destroyed by the [New Orleans Hurricane of 1915](#)

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. It was the first settlement of

[Filipinos](#)

in the

[United States](#)

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Only last Oct. 28, 2012, Ms. Richoux emailed this reporter that "Hurricane Isaac wiped me out again. My mobile home and everything in it was destroyed.

"The house on the property, where my ex husband, stepson and his family live, got three inches of water in it even though it was raised ten feet off the ground.

"I've been busy with my full time job at the school, as well as writing a column for the *Times-Picayune* newspaper and editing a manuscript for someone to make extra money. It will be a while before I'm back on my feet!

"I would love to be a part of the symposium in May. I love sharing my family story, and I think it would be of interest to people to know how (and why) we have kept our Filipino identity through so many generations. I am the sixth generation, and we have, I believe, nine (9) total generations in the Flores branch of our family who are descended from Felipe Madriaga, who was born in 1815 in Ilocos Norte in the Philippines and Bridgett Nugent, a French/Irish, whose ancestor dates back to 1400.

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Although, the Manilamen were said to have arrived in Louisiana in 1763, Ms. Richoux, a freelance writer and amateur genealogist, is only able to document the arrival of Felipe Madriaga in Louisiana in 1860.

Felipe and Bridgett started their family in Southeast Louisiana back in the (late) 1800's, but because they have no sons, she traced a matriarchal family line. She said many "people in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20th centuries were illiterates, and record clerks, priests and census takers spelled the names phonetically."

In her genealogy, she listed more than 600 names as part of her family tree. According to her findings, Felipe Madriaga died in Louisiana. He married Brigette Nugent, who was born about 1832 in Ireland and died in Louisiana. Rhonda said although her great grandmother pronounced the family name of Felipe as "Madrigal," documents show that it is spelled "Madriaga."

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