

**Historical Lecture by Eloisa Gomez Borah on the Occasion of the Celebration of the Life of Antonio Miranda Rodriguez, an Original Settler of Santa Barbara of Philippine origin, on the co-occasion of the 106<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Philippine Independence.**

Delivered at the El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historical Park Chapel,  
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Philippine Ambassador Albert del Rosario,  
Philippine Consul General Marciano Paynor and Mrs. Paynor,  
Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum,  
and friends in the community.

What a great Santa Barbara morning for a celebration! We are gathered to celebrate the life of Antonio Miranda Rodriguez, who lived and died, right here, in the Santa Barbara Presidio over 210 years ago.

We now walk, where he once walked.

Who was he?  
How did he get here?

Let me give you some background.

Well, before the *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth Rock in 1620 on the East Coast of what is now the United States, Spanish ships were already sailing on a regular basis from Manila, in the Philippines, to Acapulco, in New Spain, along our own West Coast. New Spain is what is now Mexico, but in the sixteenth century, the northern frontier of New Spain was continually extending northwards, way past California -- some physical evidence of this comes from sunken galleons, such as the one in Nehalem Bay in Oregon -- just check with the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum there.

This regular dispatch of ships from Manila to Acapulco was called the Manila Galleon Trade. This formally started in 1565. The most respected historian on the topic of the Manila Galleon Trade was William L. Schurz, and he says that Filipino sailors made up the majority of the crew of every ship during the Manila Galleon Trade. He gives the ratio as 4 to 1 -- that is, on any given ship, for every one Spanish soldier, there were four Filipino sailors.

Schurz also tells us that so many Filipino sailors did not want to make the dangerous return voyage, that the ships returning to Manila had a hard time getting enough men to sail them back. For example, there were 74 Filipinos who jumped ship at Acapulco from just one galleon, the *Espiritu Santo* in 1618.

But Filipinos were also on Spanish ships of discovery, with the conquistadores, before and during the early years of the Manila Galleon Trade.

Academic historians have published findings that Filipinos were on board the galleon of discovery, *Nuestra Senora de Buena Esperanza*, with the Pedro de Unamuno exploration that landed in area of Morro Bay, California in October of 1587. There was even one Filipino who was killed there in a skirmish with the local Chumash Indians.

Also, Filipinos were on board the galleon of discovery, *San Agustin*, with the Sebastian Cermeno exploration, that found itself shipwrecked close to Point Reyes, near San Francisco Bay, in 1594.

If we add the conclusions made by Philippine historian William Henry Scott, who says Filipinos served as very good translators, and therefore were very often on sailing ships of all nationalities in the 15th and 16th centuries -- this means that in addition to being on Spanish ships, they were also on Portuguese ships, on Dutch ships, and more.

What I have just described could have been some of the ways Miranda came to New Spain, but we don't know exactly how he did arrive -- at least, not yet. Most of what we know about Antonio Miranda Rodriguez, we know from the research done by William M. Mason, former history curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, who was working on an article about Miranda when he passed away on November 15, of the year 2000.

According to Mason, Miranda was born in Manila. Miranda's features were those of a Malayan Filipino. When Miranda had enlisted to be one of the twelve original settlers of the City of Los Angeles in 1781, he was 50 years old and already a widower, with two children. One of his children had died even before he started with the expedition.

While on the expedition, his second child, a daughter, fell sick to smallpox. Miranda and his daughter had to stay in Loreto, in Baja California, when the rest of the expedition continued northward to found the city of Los Angeles. His daughter eventually died in Loreto, where Miranda stayed for two years.

Miranda's name continued to appear in the first two years of the annual census of Los Angeles -- this is while they awaited his arrival. But when he finally arrived in 1783, his settler's allotment had already been given to another. This has led some to say that he never came north from Loreto, but we know this is not true.

It is also important to point out that although he is listed as "chino" in the 1781 Census of Los Angeles, it is widely known among academic historians that this did not mean he was Chinese. The preeminent historian Hubert Howe Bancroft -- you may know that the rare California history collection, Bancroft Library at UC-Berkeley, is named after him) -- Bancroft says in his *History of California*, "He [Miranda] was not a Chinaman, ... offspring probably of an Indian mother by a father of mixed Spanish ... blood". Bill Mason makes the further explanation that "on Mexico's west coast "chino" was the term applied to natives from the Philippines, to distinguish them from Mexican Indians, since both were called "indios".

Bill Mason had told me how he started running into this term "chino" in marriage records from Mexican churches when he was doing research on the Chinese in Mexico. You see, Bill specialized in ethnic history. This is when he discovered that the word "chino" in Spanish American records did not mean Chinese at all.

We also know that Miranda had the skills of a gunsmith, a very valuable skill in the days of the early settlers. It is this skill that got him transferred to the Presidio here in Santa Barbara in October of 1783. It may seem to us now -- well, maybe just those of us from Los Angeles -- that the transfer from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara was a step down. Actually, it was a step up!

There were four presidios (meaning fort or garrison) spaced along the California coast -- San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco. These presidios protected the settlements and missions in their areas. Which means that the population of City of Los Angeles, and the San Gabriel Mission, and other local settlements depended on the protection of the Presidio at Santa Barbara.

We also know that Miranda was a "soldado de cuera" (meaning a soldier in leather) here at the Presidio of Santa Barbara. We know this fact because on Miranda's own death record in May 1784, he is listed as a "soldado de cuera". This tells us that after he joined the Presidio at Santa Barbara, he was no longer a "poblador" (meaning a settler), but now a higher paid Spanish soldier.

Just months before he died, Bill Mason and I had a chance to update each other on our research, at a meeting of the California Sesquicentennial Commission committee that we were both on. As he approached me, Bill was excited to announce that Miranda was literate -- Miranda could read and write, which was very unusual for a non-white person of that time. Bill told me that he had found an official report filed by Miranda. This is evidence that Miranda was indeed literate.

Bill Mason liked to say that Antonio Miranda Rodriguez was certainly the first Filipino resident of Santa Barbara, and perhaps the first permanent Filipino resident of California.

However, it is my own hope that we see continued serious research that uncovers more Mirandas, to give us a richer history of the earliest Filipinos in America.

I thank you for your attention.

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Eloisa Gomez Borah is a librarian at the Rosenfeld Library of the UCLA Anderson School of Management. The Manila Galleon Trade and Filipinos in America Prior to 1890 have been her long-time interests. Her *Chronology of Filipinos in America Pre-1898* is a popular feature of her Web site, which has been awarded the Best of Cyber Pinoy by Tanikalang Ginto, and the Academic Excellence Award Links for Learning by Lightspan's StudyWeb.

Her research Article, "Filipinos in Unamuno's California Expedition of 1587" in UCLA's *Amerasia Journal*, is required reading in most Asian American Studies courses in California universities.

Mrs. Borah is a lifetime member and trustee emeritus of the Filipino American National Historical Society. She was also a former member of the board and treasurer of the Pamana Foundation (now the Filipino American Heritage Institute).