

Pensionado Postcards

With another trip to Manila in progress, yet another album materializes from my sister Charito's collection. This album is a collection of postcards written to and by my father while he was in the United States from 1906 to 1911, plus some pictures from the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. From the remarks on the cards, the Filipino *pensionado* students across the U.S. wrote to each other regularly. Whether they wrote letters on stationery or not, we don't know, since the album contains only postcards. Perhaps letters will materialize one of these days. The cards were mostly written in English, with some Spanish. Tagalog was rarely used. Since the students came from all over the Philippines, and Tagalog was not yet the official national language or spoken outside of the Tagalog provinces around Manila, English and Spanish were the common languages.

To me, the most intriguing card was written in Spanish. But here's the catch, it was written by either an American or an Englishman. How do we know? His name was Edward F. Brown. I doubt that any of the pensionados would use a *nom de plume*. The young Brown was writing from Chicago in the fall of 1907. He called Chicago "*gran ciudad de polvo y humo*" or a great city of dust and smoke. He didn't like living in Chicago, "*en donde no me gusta vivir.*" "*Yo preferia vivir en Urbana,*" I prefer to live in Urbana. Brown followed it up in French, "*malheureusement, ce n'est pas possible a present*" or unfortunately that is not possible at present. The picture on the postcard is the boathouse at Jackson Park. We are left to speculate how these two young men met, or whether they would meet again. Brown final words were "*escribame pronto,*" or write me soon and "*su amigo,*" your friend.

Among eight children, my dad was second oldest, followed by Sixto. In September of 1907, Sixto was only sixteen and had arrived in Manila for formal studies. He would later become one of the first doctor of medicine graduates of the University of the Philippines. My dad was a month short of his eighteenth birthday and starting his freshman year at UI. The postcards from Sixto, written in Spanish, had a drawing or caricature printed, one with "Just Arrived in Manila" and the other "I'm on the Hog Manila." To give the drawings justice, I've scanned the cards and show them below.

There were three pensionados who carried on a regular correspondence with my dad. Two of them, Jacinto Kamantigue and Juan Macaraeg, came over on the same boat. The other was Vicente Villanueva, who came over a year before, but hailed from the same province as my dad. He went to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Kamantigue, the most prolific card writer, received his B.A. from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Macaraeg went to the Lewis Institute in Chicago, an engineering school which later became the Illinois Institute of Technology. In one postcard, Macaraeg asks "*cuantos Filipinos estan alla*" or how many Filipinos are there (in Urbana)? He observed that there were about 50 Filipinos in Chicago! (There are tens of thousands today.) He addressed my dad differently each time, from "old boy" to "old man" to "dear friend." Macaraeg's daughter Eva would become the second wife of the widowed Diosdado Macapagal, the Philippine president from 1961-1965. Diosdado and Eva's daughter is Gloria Macapagal, president from 2001 to 2010. Although my dad never served under the elder Macapagal (dad was 72 and already retired in 1961), Charito recalls that Eva

Pensionado Postcards

and Diosdado were always friendly and gracious to our parents. Now we know the reason. From Macaraeg's and other postcards from Chicago based pensionados, we have a collection of Chicago buildings as they were in the first decade of the 20th century. There's the the public library, Post Office, State Street and the Pullman Car Company. Macaraeg's last postcard asked my father if they could return to the Philippines together after their graduation in June, 1911. It was not to be, the Superintendent of Students instructed Macaraeg to proceed to San Francisco, while my father received permission to go through Europe.

The earliest postcard he received, in Cincinnati, OH, was mailed from Lincoln, NE by Vicente Villanueva. He wanted to know how many of the class of 1906 were going to Urbana, adding that there were six other pensionados in Nebraska, three from the 1904 class and three from 1905. A common theme was about summer plans. "Where are you going for vacation?" or "Have you found a job?" A fellow named Arguelles suggested to my dad that they rent a room together, to split the monthly cost of \$8 for a room. I wonder if it had indoor plumbing.

A few months before graduation, he received a postcard from W. Hanes, whom we assume would be English or from one of the Commonwealth nations. Hanes would ask about the students at the Cosmopolitan Club, where all the foreign students resided. Hanes had apparently started a job in Allegheny, PA (later annexed by Pittsburgh). He went so far as to state "I'm doing well financially." Perhaps engineers had a really good starting salary relative to the population.

One of the few Tagalog postcards was from a student in Iowa City, home of the University of Iowa. Unfortunately he didn't sign it. Antonio wrote from Indiana University in Bloomington, about how cold it was, 5 below zero. But he was getting used to it. There were a number of Christmas greetings, usually with a Best Wishes and not much else. Juan Macaraeg sent dad a nice card decorated with an anchor and "A Bright Christmas" printed.

My dad went to summer school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison after his sophomore and junior years. He must have developed some friendships, or more than a friendship with at least one American girl. The most postcards were from "Lottie," who never wrote her surname. She addressed dad by different names, "Vinnie" in one and "Rosy" in another. She had her picture taken and printed on a postcard, apparently a common practice at the time. Another girl was with her, so we don't know which is Lottie. There were cards from Ida, Martha, and one jointly signed by Lottie, Louise, Clara and Ida. Ida wrote her surname, Christiansen. Popular guy! All their cards were postmarked Milwaukee. There was a card of "goodbye" from Ethel, who was moving to Nauvoo from Urbana. It was the only card from Illinois. The last is a mysterious picture card from Chicago. She wrote her name, Edith Carol Boone, providing an address. Sitting down, she had a long sleeved white dress, her waist tightly cinched, a black choker on her neck. It was a very formal portrait.

There were several postcards in the album written by my dad to his family at the time of his graduation. They were addressed to his elder sister Simplicia, and to Sixto. But the saddest part

Pensionado Postcards

is that he apparently hadn't known, or wasn't told, that his father had passed away in 1910, since he wrote to his father about his graduation. He had gotten his diploma and was on his way to New York on the Wabash railroad. He would be sailing from New York to Manila via Europe. He ended by saying "will soon be with you." Hopefully, the card would arrive before he did. I would give my right arm to get my hands on some of the postcards he wrote to the other pensionados. I wonder what happened to Macaraeg's correspondence. Maybe we could ask his granddaughter Gloria.

There is one bad news about the postcards. My mother was a meticulous organizer, but she pasted the postcards into an album having black pages. Unfortunately, the side glued was where the writing and address is contained. She wanted to show the pictures on the card. After a little research, one method I found to separate them is to use dental floss or razor, then scratch away the black paper. It's not perfect, so my work of recovery and preservation continues. But in the majority of cases, the writing is still legible. Missing words of letters can be surmised. I can appreciate archivists trying to restore old books or documents. However, some words of the pensionados may be lost forever.

Oh, I'm sure you're anxious to know about the price of stamps. It was a penny, having the portrait of Benjamin Franklin.

Mario E. Orosa
Quezon City, Philippines
October 23, 2015

