

# The Making of a Philippine Province: Romblon During the American Colonial Period<sup>1</sup>

Kristoffer ESQUEJO

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
University of the Philippines Diliman

## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the political transformation of Romblon in the Central Philippines during the American colonial era. Its status as a province underwent a series of changes that arose from the strategies of two local politicians, Francisco P. Sanz and Leonardo F. Festin, with the assistance of two national political figures. Romblon was first established as an independent province by the Taft Commission in 1901. Six years later, it was abolished and annexed to Capiz, its former mother province during the Spanish era. This first abolition was a result of Dean C. Worcester's intervention to appoint Sanz as governor and restore the political fortunes of the latter, who had lost an election. In 1918, Romblon again became a separate province through the initiative of Festin, who, ironically, would be responsible for its later demotion into an experimental province in 1940. For more than two decades, Festin dominated local politics as the Representative to the Philippine Legislature, while his patron and party head Manuel L. Quezon, who later became President of the Philippine Commonwealth, monopolized power at the national level.

Keywords: Romblon, sub-province, patronage, restoration

## Introduction

AMIDST THE EMERGENCE of new trends and directions in Philippine historiography, the study of local history remains popular among contemporary Filipino historians. Local historiography is seen as a positive step towards the writing of a broader, more inclusive history of the Philippines. Several studies have been done in this respect; Resil Mojares on Cebu, Patricio Abinales on Davao and Cotabato, Macario Tiu on Davao, Luis Dery on Sorsogon, Jaime Veneracion on Bulacan, and Lino Dizon on Pampanga and Tarlac, just to name a few. Even so, there are still plenty of gaps; the history of other provinces, including Abra, Marinduque, Catanduanes, Masbate, Siquijor, and Romblon, still have to be written. As a province, Romblon's role and significance is overlooked save for three things—typhoons, marble, and sinking ships.

Geography may be partly to blame. An archipelago, Romblon has a considerable distance from the capital, Manila. Plus, composed of several islands, remains isolated in all directions—it lies west of Mindoro, south of Marinduque, east of Masbate, and north of Panay. Demography plays a part as well. It has a population of less than three hundred thousand (according to the 2011 census),<sup>2</sup> which translates to a very small voting population that barely impacts national politics and the economy. This helps explain why most candidates running for national offices have not gone to visit and campaign in the area.

This paper answers the following questions: How did Sanz and Festin rise to power and monopolize Romblon politics for years? Why did Worcester and Quezon help Sanz and Festin in their respective political careers? Through various primary and secondary sources, the study explores these issues to shed light on the unique, albeit frustrating type of politics in Romblon during the American colonial period. It also highlights the efforts of other Romblomanon politicians—Governor Adriano Rios and Assemblyman Modesto Formilleza—who campaigned for Romblon's restoration as a separate province of the Philippines.

Throughout the paper, the term “Romblon” refers to the entire province and not only to the town capital. In the same way, “Romblomanons” means the people of the whole province and not just the inhabitants of the provincial capital.

### **Romblon during the Spanish Occupation**

According to Blair and Robertson (1903–1909a), Martín de Goiti and his men were the first Europeans to visit the Romblon archipelago. Before their departure, they divided the islands into three *encomiendas*, royally-granted territories, where taxes were collected by the Spanish conquistadores (73–74). Miguel López de Legazpi and his men later set foot in Romblon en route to northern Philippines, as did Miguel de Loarca and his men in 1582.<sup>3</sup>

Like any other pueblo in the Philippines at that time, the Spanish parish priest always handled the affairs of the local church and government in Romblon.<sup>4</sup> Along with him were officers, who helped run the administration: *capitan municipal*, who acted as the municipal chief executive; *teniente mayor*, who took charge of public services and records; *juez de policía*, who served as inspector of the barrios; *aguacil mayor*, *comisarios*, *cuadrilleros*, *guardia civiles*, and *auxillantes*, who were tasked as peacekeepers and guards of the town, and *cabezas de barangay*, who collected taxes in their respective villages (Meñez 1998, 54).

There were annual elections for local leaders during the Spanish period; however, only a few propertied men known as *principales* could be entitled as electors or *vocales*. Moreover, the provincial governor and/or the local parish priest (local inspector ex-officio) could always intervene in the outcomes of the local tribunal by influencing the town electors or altering the ballot (55–58).

Though not salaried, these elected officials usually worked through favours, promoting the power of the church and perpetuating the feudal relationship between the government and the people. As in other

Christianized provinces, local elites monopolized land and political offices in exchange for guaranteed exclusive rights to these resources. This was the so-called Spanish-style local politics of Romblon.

In 1818, Romblon became part of Capiz, and was converted into a *comandancia politico-militar* (Lancion 1995, 136) in 1853. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *pueblos* (towns) emerged as external and internal migrations took place within the archipelago and significantly contributed to the rapid rise of the native population. Aside from the Ati group of Panay and the Mangyan of Mindoro, Unhan Visayans and Nayon Visayans from northern Panay poured into Tablas Island. Bantoanons from the north also established settlements in the neighbouring isles, while the Tagalogs from Batangas came at the end of the 19th century (Meñez 1998, 3–32).

In 1898, in the midst of Philippine Revolution, Emilio Aguinaldo sent his generals to several provinces in the Visayas to expand the recognition of his revolutionary government in the central and southern Philippines. The Caviteño Mariano Riego de Dios and his forces liberated Romblon, while Ananias Diocno and Leandro Fullon proceeded to Panay. On July 25 of the same year, Riego de Dios took the Romblon capital and captured Spanish officials (Reyes 1995, 56–58). Four days later, the Spanish politico-military governor Don Carlos Mendoza y Cerrada formally signed the surrender of Romblon's district government, ending more than three hundred years of Spanish rule in the archipelagic province (Madeja 1993, 236).

Later, Don Wenceslao Molo, a local from Romblon town, was appointed governor and became responsible for the collection of a total amount of P22,765.21, Romblon's share to the war expenditures of the Revolutionary Government from 31 May 1898 to 28 February 1899. A local election was also held in Romblon town for its ministers of justice and barrio officials (Reyes 1995, 54). However, Molo's term was a brief transition to another era.<sup>5</sup>

### **Romblon as an independent province: 1901–1907**

After the signing of the Treaty of Paris and the outbreak of the Filipino-American War, the Americans frustrated the Filipino-led governments in the provinces and put down Filipino resistance all over the archipelago. Since the Americans were busily engaged in “Philippine insurrection,” a civil government was only established a few years later. The United States wanted to develop this former Spanish colony in Asia into an image of herself.

In the case of Romblon, the Philippine Commission<sup>6</sup> arrived in the town capital on 16 March 1901 to establish a civil government. The said commission was headed by William Howard Taft and consisted of the following: Dean C. Worcester, Luke E. Wright, Henry C. Ide, and Bernard Moses. Upon their arrival, all the local leaders from 11 *pueblos* (towns) were summoned and convened in the town capital. Together with their vice-presidents, secretaries, and councilors, the municipal presidents who attended were: Cornelio Madrigal (Romblon); Hugo Gabuna (Looc); Licerio Fallar (Corcuera); Daniel Fortuna (Odiongán); Emeterio Rida (Cajidiocán); Francisco Recto (San Fernando); Leonardo Madrilejos (Badajoz); Teodorico Fainsan (Despujols); Francisco Festin (Banton); Doroteo Rubio (Magallanes); and Melecio Tean (Sta. Fe).<sup>7</sup>

Taft’s visit was significant for two reasons. First, it was the first time that Romblon’s political entity was recognized as a separate province. Second, the local leaders of every *pueblo* were empowered by the Commission to decide on several issues concerning the new province, which is perhaps why many Romblomanons fully collaborated with their new colonizers, unlike during the Spanish period.<sup>8</sup>

One of the intense debates centered on the transfer of the provincial capital from Romblon town to Looc, a municipality in southern Tablas. Lucas Kunanán, the municipal secretary of Looc, advocated for the transfer since the majority of the *pueblos* were in Tablas Island, which also had a bay and safe harbor. He was supported by Don Santiago Estudillo of Looc and Don Eugenio Festin of Odiongán, both powerful landlords in their respective towns. Opposing the proposal was Cornelio Madrilejos,

who insisted on retaining Romblon as the capital since it already had the colonial edifices of a provincial government. Two prominent individuals from Sibuyan—Don Francisco P. Sanz and Don Adriano N. Rios—also voiced their opposition; they found the proposition disadvantageous, since it would hinder their access to the provincial government, which would be farther in the new set-up. It took only two days of sea travel for their constituents to reach Romblon town, but a capital in Looc would mean four days of sea and land travel (*ibid.*; Fabella 1960, 66).

In the end, the Taft Commission decided to retain Romblon town as the capital and placed the entire Romblon archipelago under one province. After local leaders unanimously signed an endorsement, an American military officer, Major Evan M. Johnson, was appointed as Romblon's first American provincial governor. The other posts were filled by other American military officers and one local official: Cornelio Madrigal as secretary, Captain A.S. Williams as treasurer, Lt. S.H. Hopson as supervisor, and Simson Davidos y Dones as fiscal (*ibid.*, 69).

Johnson earned a favorable reputation among Romblomanons despite his brief term in office. During his tenure, he was responsible for the building of two reservoirs in the town capital and established access to potable water. In August 1901, he was replaced by Don Francisco P. Sanz as acting governor of Romblon—an early manifestation of American-sponsored Filipinization of the insular government.

The Philippine Commission passed Act No. 994, which affected all new provinces, including Romblon. On 17 November 1903, the original 11 pueblos were reduced into six municipalities, putting Corcuera under Banton, Magallanes (Magdiwang) under Cajidiocan, Despujols (San Andres) under Odiongan, and Sta. Fe under Looc (Vance 1980, 518). The subsequent 1906 gubernatorial elections replaced almost all the appointed governors in Western Visayas. Sanz was defeated by Bonifacio Marron in Romblon, S. Jugo Vidal lost to Antonio Habana in Capiz, while Leandro Fullon, a former revolutionary general, was succeeded by Angel Salazar in Antique (Cullinane 2003, 165–166).

For Romblomanons, Marron's electoral victory marked a political transition. Governing Romblon was now in the hands of a local leader, and not in appointed officials like Molo and Sanz. Marron enjoyed a long political career. Prior to his election as provincial governor, he was elected Delegate of Justice in Molo's Revolutionary Government. When Taft visited in 1901, he became the municipal vice-president and later municipal president after Madrilejos' appointment (Reyes 1995, 60).

Under Marron's term, the American insular government intensified its efforts to Filipinize the administration. Starting in 1902, the number of Romblomanons appointed in provincial offices increased; these include Modesto Marquez as clerk of the Court of First Instance; Francisco Villanueva as provincial fiscal; Sebastian de Castro as president of Provincial Health Board; Antonio Malbas as provincial office clerk; and Matias Martinez as deputy treasurer. Three Romblomanons held key positions in the education sector: Constancio Madrilejos as principal of Romblon Central School; Segundo Manza as a teacher of Romblon Provincial High School; and Pedro Maaba as clerk in the office of Superintendent Guy Van Schaick. A few years later, more positions were given to local professionals in the offices of municipal treasury, the courts of the justice of the peace, and the Bureau of Posts (Reyes 1995, 68).

In addition, the American government implemented widespread vaccination and quarantine as part of a national campaign to get rid of perennial epidemics of diseases, including small pox. More than 10 million Filipinos were vaccinated between 1905 and 1910—an effort which was claimed to have lessened the annual fatalities from 40,000 in 1901 to 700 in 1912. Cholera struck the province twice and reduced its population in 1897 and 1903 (Reyes 1995, 68, 73). Many Romblomanons gladly welcomed these medical improvements, despite their strong adherence to indigenous medicine.

Despite these developments, a significant part of the Filipino population kept the revolutionary spirit alive and continued to pursue independence amidst American efforts to promote self-rule and the promise of gradual independence. Reynaldo Ileto captures the revolutionary fervor in several Filipino provinces.

...As late as 1907, the constabulary in southern Luzon reported that in Sorsogon, Romblon, and Tayabas the whole population seems swept off its feet by the independence idea. Only a few men of prominence have been strong enough to stand in opposition. (1997, 171)

### **Romblon's devolution to a subprovince of Capiz: 1907–1917**

Romblon's status as an independent province only lasted for six years and three months. In 2 July 1907, Act No. 1665 subjugated Romblon to Capiz, its former mother province (along with Aklan).<sup>9</sup> This law also removed Maestre de Ocampo Island from Romblon's territorial jurisdiction and was added to Mindoro, which was nearer.<sup>10</sup>

All six municipalities of Romblon were assigned to the Third District of Capiz, an arrangement which lasted for a little more than a decade (*ibid.*, 198–200). The table below shows the distribution of municipalities into new districts.

**TABLE 1: Municipalities of Capiz under three assembly districts in 1907 (*ibid.*, 200)**

DISTRICT	MUNICIPALITIES
First District	Capiz (now Roxas City), Dao, Panay, Panitan, Pilar and Pontevedra
Second District	Dumalag, Dumarao, Iuisan (or Ivisan), Jamindan, Mambusao, New Washington, Sapián, Sigma and Tapas (or Tapaz)
Third District	Badajoz, Buruanga, Cajidiocan, Calibo (or Kalibo), Ibajay, Libacao, Looc, Malinao, Nabas, Odiongan, Romblon, San Fernando and Taft (now Makato)

What was the justification for this move? There are three common speculations. The first and widely accepted assumption was the insufficiency of tax collection to sustain an independent and regular provincial government (Madeja 1993, 162). Another is the American insular government's plan to limit between 50 and 100 the number of delegates to the Philippine Assembly (Reyes 1995, 77). Finally, it could have been a result of Interior Secretary Worcester's manipulations to resurrect Sanz's political career after the latter lost an election against Marron in 1906. A provision in the new law required only an appointed lieutenant governor to lead the new sub-province, which meant that Sanz was qualified (Fabella 1960, 66–67). Section 5 of the Provincial Government Act of 1907 cites the functions of this new position.

There shall be a lieutenant governor for the sub province of Romblon who shall be appointed by the Governor-General and with the consent of the Philippine Commission. He shall have his office in the municipality of Romblon and shall receive an annual salary not to exceed one thousand four hundred and forty pesos, payable monthly from funds of the sub province; he shall represent the provincial governor in the sub province and shall carry out the lawful directions of that officer as transmitted to him from time to time; he shall inspect the municipalities in the subprovince at least once every six months and shall make report between July first and July fifteenth of each year of the commercial, economic, financial, industrial, and political conditions therein to the provincial board, through the provincial governor; he shall from time to time make such recommendation to the provincial board, through the provincial governor, as he shall deem necessary for the best interests of the subprovince; he shall employ and discharge, with the approval of the provincial board, all subordinate employees of the subprovince that may be authorized by the board; he shall be the custodian of the public records and documents of the subprovince; and, in general, he shall exercise, subject to the supervision of the provincial governor, the powers and duties conferred upon a provincial governor by the Provincial Government Act.”<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, there is little difference between a provincial governor and a lieutenant governor of a subprovince. Almost all the functions of the former, as well as the benefits and privileges thereof, are also accorded to the latter, except that he is accountable to the provincial governor. In retrospect, nothing much changed, but the transfer of Romblon to Capiz in July 1907 deprived the Romblomanons a seat in the Philippine Assembly. How did this happen?

Earlier, on 9 January 1907, Act No. 1582 was passed, mandating, among others, elections for the Philippine Assembly on 30 July of the same year. Romblon was allocated one representative slot, while more populous provinces such as Cebu and Pangasinan were given seven and five, respectively (one delegate represents every 90,000). All in all, 81 slots were prepared for as many delegates from duly recognized provinces. Section 12 of the Provincial Government Act of 1907 lists the qualifications for a delegate.

A Delegate to the Philippine Assembly must be at the time of his election a qualified elector of the district from which he may be chosen, owing allegiance to the United States, and not less than twenty-five years of age.<sup>12</sup>

But less than a month before the election, in July 1907, Act No. 1665 was passed, reducing Romblon into a subprovince under the jurisdiction of Capiz. Six days later, Act No. 1669 would cut down the number of slots for the Philippine Assembly from 81 to 80. This reflected the loss of Romblon's provincial status.

Who was responsible for Romblon's demotion? As one of the most powerful men at that time, Worcester had enough influence to have this act passed. He had a seat in the Schurman Commission from 20 January 1899 to 15 March 1900. A few years later, he was holding two significant positions: as a member of the Taft Commission (16 March 1900 to 15 September 1913) and as Secretary of the Interior (1 September 1901 to 15 September 1913). He was in power for more than a decade and had

built an influence that penetrated every corner of the American insular government (Sullivan 1992, 237–238).

The Worcester-Sanz connection is very telling. According to Worcester's own account, he visited the Philippine Islands even before the American occupation to conduct scientific expeditions. As an anthropologist, he and some companions gathered data in several islands south of Manila in 1890. In Tablas, Romblon, and Sibuyan, he met a rich Spaniard named Don Pedro Sanz, the father of Francisco Sanz, whom he described as hospitable and friendly. Don Pedro owned vast lands in the three islands, two houses in Romblon and San Fernando, and a steamer used for business. He was popularly known to the townspeople as "King of Sibuyan," and had good relations with the natives since his arrival 39 years before (Worcester 1898, 464–467).<sup>13</sup>

During his inter-island trip, Worcester was disappointed with how the Spanish officials ran the local government. He himself was a victim of petty crime and his expectations of securing justice were, most of the time, frustrated by the colonial authorities. However, his relation with the older Sanz provided him with efficient, paternal supervision. This was positively described in one of his accounts.

...The kindly Spaniard knew by name every old grandmother and every tiny child that we met, and for each of them he had a pleasant word. He seemed to take a genuine interest in the petty affairs of his people and they fairly worshipped him...His native helpers were everywhere contented and prosperous, and the results accomplished during his 39 years of residence in the Philippines served to show what might have been brought about in the colony at large had the conquering nation contained more men like him. (Worcester 1898, 467)<sup>14</sup>

Two significant assumptions can be made based on Worcester's account of the events of 1890. First, it can be safely deduced that Don Pedro Sanz, after residing in Sibuyan for 39 years, arrived in the island in

1851. Second, because of Worcester's friendship with Don Pedro, both men reciprocated favors, and this was a relationship that would benefit Don Pedro's son, Don Francisco, when Worcester rose to power. This political connection between Worcester and Sanz is a classic American story of patronage politics. The former contributed a great deal to the rise and advancement of Francisco Sanz's political career.

Don Francisco Sanz was born on 26 March 1872, the youngest child of Don Pedro Sanz y Masa and Doña Enriqueta Perez—a lady of mixed French-Spanish ancestry. Paco, as he is fondly called, was privileged enough to have graduated at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila. He married Soledad Villaruz Acuña, a member of a powerful political clan in Capiz and sister of Rosario Acuña was the mother of President Manuel A. Roxas (Sanz 2010).<sup>15</sup> According to the Acuña clan history, the Sanz couple was blessed with seven children—three sons and four daughters. They were Ramona Frial, Marietta Beltran, Pedro, Carolina Moulton, Aida Gonzales, Antonio, and Angel (Acuña 1983, 46–47).

In 1901, as a member of the Taft Commission, Worcester was instrumental to Sanz's immediate appointment as governor after Evan Johnson. A few years later, a more powerful Worcester re-empowered his old friend Sanz, unfortunately, at the expense of the local people of Romblon. In his account, Sullivan (1992) dubbed Worcester as the "exemplar of Americanism," which fit his personality despite a show of corruption and abuse of power.

...He (Worcester) personified many of the typically American values of his New England forebears: industry, achievement, tenacity, and national pride. His world view was shaped by a powerful emotional attachment to an idealized United States. He maintained that American capital was always a beneficent investment, and that Americans were strikingly gifted at the "white man's job" of administering tribal people. He saw his country as the vanguard of civilization. Other, therefore lesser, peoples progressed only as they adopted American values and institutions. (229)

Contrary to the American promise to end Spanish-style feudal politics and spread American-inspired democracy in the Philippines, Worcester was guilty of using *utang-na-loob* (debt of gratitude) to grant favors in return for assistance or favors he himself received. However, Sanz was unsuccessful in following after his father's footsteps. If the father captured the trust and favour of the locals, the son proved otherwise—he never got elected in any position and he was able to stay in power only through the help of his father's old friend. Perhaps knowing that the young Sanz could not win the people's mandate to become Romblon's delegate in the national assembly, his patron continued to craft a series of legislative acts to keep him in his position.

However, on the inauguration of the Philippine Assembly, the Philippine Commission's power decreased as a new generation of Filipino leaders emerged, reared in American political culture. Since democracy required an electoral process, Sanz's type of patronage politics became archaic and irrelevant.

...Younger, more aggressive politicians had taken over the debating floor of the Assembly. Factional alliances, electoral base-building, realpolitik—instead of intellectual titles, lineage, or Spanish oratory—had become the new instruments of power. (Mojares 2006, 41)

In the case of Worcester, his image gradually deteriorated as he gained more critics and enemies:

...In 1909 he (Worcester) was probably the most unpopular American in the islands, held responsible for the ruthless disrespect for Filipinos associated with such draconian measures as the land quarantine, detention camps, enforced isolation of cholera victims, and the firing of dwellings. (Sullivan 1992, 115)

Worcester's fall, as it were, was paralleled somewhat in the political fortunes of Francisco Sanz. An active member of *Partido Progresista* (formerly *Partido Federal*) in Romblon, Francisco Sanz remained in his

political appointment as Lieutenant Governore for another eight years (Reyes 1995, 75) from 1907 to 1915, after which he was forced to run in another gubernatorial election. Act No. 2354, enacted on 28 February 1914, repealed previous appointments and mandated elections for lieutenant governors for subprovinces, such as Romblon (part of Capiz), Marinduque (part of Tayabas, now Quezon), Catanduanes (part of Albay), Abra (part of Ilocos Sur), Siquijor (part of Negros Oriental), and Masbate (part of Sorsogon).<sup>16</sup> Sanz lost the election as governor.

However, Sanz's political career did not completely end. He was immediately appointed as Governor of Palawan, another island province. The appointment lasted for four years (1915 to 1919). It is not clear whether this was facilitated by Worcester, who had already retired as Secretary of Interior. At any rate, Sanz and his family moved to Palawan during a time when its capital, Puerto Princesa, was still a very backward municipality with only one police officer. For the next four years, he did his best to gradually promote progress in the province. He constructed new roads, increased the number of police officers with enough arms and training, enhanced the education system, and improved health facilities. He retired from government service one year after the end of his term as Palawan's governor.<sup>17</sup> At the age of 73, Sanz passed away on 25 March 1945 in Manila as Allied Forces liberated the Philippines from Japanese rule (Sanz 2010).

Sanz was succeeded by Pablo G. Mayor, another Romblomanon and son of a former municipal president. He served as provincial treasurer and member of the provincial board prior to the election. Unfortunately, his term was only brief when Romblon once again became an independent province. His position was abolished in the latter part of 1917.<sup>18</sup>

### **Romblon regains independent province status: 1917–1940**

Two local politicians worked together to restore Romblon as an independent province: Don Adriano N. Rios, municipal president of San Fernando, and Don Leonardo F. Festin, a lawyer-turned-politician from Odiongan.

Born on 8 September 1880, Rios was the youngest among the eight children of a migrant couple from Aklan. He grew up in San Fernando and had the privilege of studying in a local parochial school. He mastered the Spanish language and eventually landed a clerical job in Romblon town. Land grabbing was a common issue, and he used his ability to speak Spanish fluently to defend his townmates against Spanish officials (Rios-Subido 2009).

A *Katipunero* (member of the revolutionary movement against Spain) and a veteran of the 1896 Philippine Revolution, Rios began to carve a name in local politics. He was in Romblon town when the Taft Commission arrived in 1901. After a brief stint as a teacher, he was municipal president of San Fernando from 1904 to 1910. His political career was interrupted when Military Order No. 40 prohibited elected officials to hold office for more than two terms. He did regain the same position from 1912 to 1918 (Fabella 1960, 64–66).

When Rios was elected as Speaker in the annual gathering of municipal presidents in Capiz, he drafted a resolution for the separation of Romblon as an independent province. The proposal was adopted by Governor Jose Altavas and supported by the townspeople. This move helped Altavas win a seat as the first Senator of the Fourth Senate District and overwhelmed big political names in Western Visayas, such as Ruperto Montinola, Salvador Laguda, and Francisco Villanueva. In exchange for his election, he sponsored a bill for Romblon's restoration as a separate province. This led to the enactment of Act No. 2724 on 7 December 1917, which made Romblon, once again, a regular independent province and brought under the same territorial jurisdiction according to Act No. 104 in 1901. The Act also assigned the province under the newly created Seventh Senate District (Fabella 1960, 67–68). Furthermore, the former subprovince of Romblon was taken back from Capiz, and the representative of the Third Electoral District of Capiz was assigned to Romblon. Capiz continued to have three electoral districts, each with several municipalities.<sup>19</sup>

Because of his decisive role in restoring Romblon's independent status, Rios was immediately appointed as provincial governor. A few months later, he was elected in the same position. From 1918 to 1921, he spearheaded the acquisition of two steamboats for the provincial government and initiated the surveying of a new venue for the provincial capitol building. He also led the Liberty Loan Funds Campaign and the recruitment of Romblomanon youth to the National Guards program of Governor-General Francis Burton Harrison. During the first months of Leonard Wood's term, Rios resigned as provincial governor because of his opposition to the harsh political atmosphere imposed by the new governor-general; this happened two years before the infamous "Ronley Case" and the Cabinet Crisis of 1923. After his retirement from politics, he again led his own townmates in San Fernando during and after the World War II (Fabella 1960, 68–70).

Unlike Rios, Don Leonardo Festin dominated provincial politics for the next three decades. Of course, his long monopoly of power would not have been possible if he did not have a powerful patron. His political career is another proof of the failed American experiment in democracy. At any rate, the restoration of Romblon as a regular province facilitated Festin's rise to prominence. Here was a provincial politician who was an educated member of the local elite class, who had the resources to maintain control. Aside from charm, money kept one in power, the display of which is evident in elections. Then as now, electoral politics was expensive, resembling a fiesta.

During those days, offering of food, drinks and transportation to the voters were not prohibited, so that every election time several heads of cows and some hundred sacks of rice find their way to Carmen (part of San Agustin) from Odiongan or Despujol (San Andres). It was like a big fiesta where not only the voters enjoyed the food and drinks but also some non-voters. It was only during the Commonwealth period when the offering of food, drinks and transportation started to be prohibited. (Villan 1990, 17)

Born on 6 November 1886, Don Leonardo Festin is the eldest son of Don Eugenio Festin and Doña Francisca Fabon, both from wealthy landed families in Odiongan. The outbreak of the 1896 Revolution interrupted his early education while his father succeeded Molo as governor of the Revolutionary Government when the American forces came. When Odiongan fell to American hands, his father was imprisoned but was later freed (Festin Story 2001, 62–63).

Like other Romblomanon politicians of his generation, Leonardo Festin was educated in Manila, where he finished a bachelor's degree at the *Liceo de Manila* and a law degree at the *Escuela de Derecho*. He passed the bar exam in 1910 and returned to his hometown, where he was designated as provincial judge of Capiz for three years. Known as Don Leonardo, Festin was popular and had a formidable reputation among his people. Fluent in Spanish, he never tried to learn English, a sign of his deep disgust of the Americans. He had a booming voice, an erect posture, and recognizable ears. Though dictatorial to his subordinates, he was claimed to have been a benevolent landlord to his tenants and endearingly called by many as “Tang Nardo” (Festin Story 2001, 49–50, 52, 72).

In 1916, he ran under the ruling *Partido Nacionalista* and won as Assemblyman of Capiz's Third District. His initial bill sought to rename the municipality of Banton into Jones as a token of gratitude to William Atkinson Jones, the American legislator who authored the Philippine Autonomy Act of 1916 (Festin Story 2001, 34–38, 51–52; Fabella 1976, 1). The *Partido Nacionalista* and *Partido Federalista* were not very different in terms of history, type of politics, and platforms. Festin undeniably belonged to this breed of politicians.

The Nacionalista Party, which replaced the Federalista as the dominant party from 1907 to 1946, was only different in the sense that its members, unlike the Federalistas, did not want the Philippines to be annexed permanently to America but wanted eventual independence. In terms of leaders and members, it was exactly the same as the Federalista Party. Its membership mainly consisted of the cream of

the Philippine plutocracy—landlords, propertied professionals, and businessmen. In fact, not a few of its leaders and members were former Federalistas. (Simbulan 2005, 42)

Festin is the longest-serving legislator of Romblon province. At that time when there was no term limit for a *diputado* (or assemblyman), Festin won in the 1916 election and subsequent nine re-elections: Fourth Legislature (1916–1919), Fifth Legislature (1919–1922), Sixth Legislature (1922–1925), Seventh Legislature (1925–1928), Eighth Legislature (1928–1931), Ninth Legislature (1931–1934), Tenth Legislature (1934–1935), Second National Assembly (1938–1941), and Third National Assembly (1941–1946)[Roster of Philippine Legislators 1989].

Festin managed to stay in power for so long because of the support of Manuel Quezon, who began his quest for the presidency in 1917, the year he became Senate President. As the most powerful Filipino politician of his time, he had gradually perfected a patronage system and obtained a monopoly of power, frustrating other national politicians who wanted to topple him. Also, he always intervened in provincial politics in order to strengthen his hand against the U.S. High Commissioner and his superiors in Washington, D.C. Like other politicians, Quezon and Festin were both guilty in keeping themselves in power, instead of fully preparing for the coming war. By 1940, Quezon had shattered all elite opposition inside and outside his own party, including progressive leaders in Central Luzon (McCoy 1989, 118–121). As a result, he undeniably made a strong impact even in post-war Philippine politics.

...Quezon was not only the leading advocate of national independence; he was the progenitor of a system of politics and a style of leadership that has left an indelible imprint on the Philippine state. By the effective end of the Commonwealth in 1941, Quezon had shaped the written and unwritten constitution, set the standard of executive leadership, forged the terms of postcolonial relations with the United States, fashioned a close link between provincial and national politics, and selected the next generation of political leaders. (116)

Another local politician from Romblon reacted against Quezon's so-called "authoritarianism." Manuel T. Albero, former governor and one of the two delegates to the 1934 Constitutional Convention, introduced a controversial provision in the 1935 Constitution which limited the power of a strong president (he was later hailed as the "Father of Local Autonomy Bill") [Fabella 1962, 76]. Approved by the Committee on Executive Power, it was included in the Article 7, Section 10a of the said constitution.

The President shall have control of all executive departments, bureaus or offices, exercise general provision over all local governments as may be provided by law, and take care that the laws be faithfully executed. (emphasis by the author)<sup>20</sup>

It was under this authoritarian, patronage style of politics that Leonardo Festin's political career flourished. Because of his long legislative experience, Festin gained more fame and influence within his party, and was called the "Dean of the Lower House." With the support of then Senate President Manuel L. Quezon, he was made the majority floor leader and chairman of the powerful House Committee on Appropriations, a position he held for ten years. Between 1935 and 1938, Quezon appointed him member of Committee for the Reorganization of the Government and commissioner of the Bureau of Census and Statistics (Festin Story 2001, 53–54, 67).

In response to Quezon's patronage, Festin showed unwavering loyalty and obedience to the former. Festin's prowess as a popular orator was fully utilized in the rallies of the Nacionalista Party in Quezon's several trips to the Visayas. It was said that when delivering a speech, his booming voice could be heard a kilometer away even without a loudspeaker (Festin Story 2001, 53).

Furthermore, Festin significantly helped Quezon's political agenda in two ways. First, as the majority floor leader, Festin was an expert troubleshooter, resolving the quarrels and rivalries among the politicians and candidates from all over the country who were often in Manila. Second,

as chairman of House Committee on Appropriations, he annually sponsored Quezon's all important general appropriations bill (national budget) which, as expected, always got passed amidst all heated debates among lawmakers (Festin Story 2001, 65–67).

Festin was widely acclaimed as an honest public servant. He was not accused of any acts of corruption, abuse of power, and neglect of duties. He drafted a bill re-empowering the Bureau of Posts to have control over the nine government radio stations throughout the country from Vigan to Zamboanga. Before its final approval, an agent of a private corporation was pushing for its withdrawal and attempted to bribe him, but instead of giving in, he made sure that the law was passed (Festin Story 2001, 73). There is also another incident where he rejected a bribe from a British shipping company to get a government franchise (Rogero 2008). Still, Festin earned a growing dislike from select Romblomanons, who were educated under the American educational system (more on this later). After staying in power for almost three decades, Festin suffered his first electoral defeat in the hands of Gabriel F. Fabella in 1935. Fabella's autobiography clearly stated that beating Festin was one of his ultimate dreams.

A product of American colonial education, Gabriel Fabella was born in Banton to a poor but large family. He earned three degrees at the University of the Philippines (UP): Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science in Education (B.S.E.), and High School Teachers' Certificate (H.S.T.C.). Later, he earned two more degrees, Master of Arts in History from UP and Bachelor of Laws from the University of Manila. After teaching in different levels, he joined the faculty of the UP Department of History; he later passed the bar and became a lawyer (Fabella 1998, 1–25).

In 1922, Fabella was actively involved in the electoral campaign of Juan Fetalvero, a *Partido Democrata* candidate who attempted to defeat Leonardo Festin. When Fetalvero lost by a close margin, Fabella vowed to stop Festin's winning streak.

I do not know why young people generally sympathize with underdogs. They are more inclined to think of the old, especially those who were brought up during the Spanish period, as belonging to a class not in keeping with modern life. We who were schooled under the aegis of democracy hate to see someone perpetuated in power. This is the way I feel towards Leonardo Festin...In 1922, he ran again and that was my first time to vote, and I voted against him because I thought two terms were long enough for one man. We wanted a change so that every deserving person could have a chance to help his people...I was sorely disappointed, but in my heart, I began nurturing the idea that if nobody could beat Festin, I would, later on. I never lost sight of this fact since that time. (Fabella 1998, 36)

Thirteen years later, Festin and Fabella fought in an epic election. The 1935 elections for Romblon representative to the National Assembly became very controversial; even Festin was warned of Fabella's probability of winning. In exchange for Festin's long and unwavering loyalty to Quezon and to the party, Quezon decided to intervene. He summoned the neophyte lawyer, Fabella, to his residence in Pasay and tried to persuade him to withdraw his candidacy in lieu of a government position and to campaign for his presidential bid. However, Fabella politely declined the offer and expressed his strong desire to run amidst a lack of financial resources and political experience (Ancheta 1962, 11–13).

When Fabella was finally declared the winner, Festin was so devastated that he was rumored to have not gotten out of bed for days. Quezon and almost everybody in Manila were shocked; however, the people of Romblon town rejoiced, burning an effigy of Festin. They strongly supported any candidate opposing Festin, who had been, until then, the perennial winner. Festin's family considered his defeat a result of the combined efforts of all their political enemies who sided with and supported Fabella. They also saw Festin's commitment to Quezon's national campaign (against other contenders, such as Emilio Aguinaldo and Gregorio

Aglipay) as a setback, which took his time and focus away from his own provincial campaign (Fabella 1998, 50–62; Festin Story 2001, 45–46, 51, 65).

Fabella saw several reasons why he won against Festin: first, there already was a deafening clamour for change, as Festin had always been the perennial rule, and was becoming the butt of jokes [he was branded as “*peste*” (pest), “floor wax”, and “*tiki*” (gecko), both terms referring to one’s attachment to a powerful patron to remain in position]; second, Festin overestimated the local people and no longer bothered to campaign among Romblomanons; third, Fabella in contrast conducted an intensive twenty-four-day campaign in the major islands from 24 August to 17 September 1935; fourth, he also garnered the unanimous support of the people who identified with him; fifth, the electoral law at that time forbade illiterate people from voting, and they would have otherwise voted for Festin; sixth, Festin underestimated Fabella, who was thought to be virtually unknown to the townspeople; and lastly, most, if not all, political opponents of Festin supported Fabella’s campaign and election (Fabella 1998, 43–61; Ancheta 1962, 14; Rogero 2009).<sup>21</sup>

However, Festin was not one to easily accept defeat. He filed a protest questioning the legitimacy of Fabella’s residency in Banton and arguing that he, Fabella, was not really living there and in fact works in Manila. If the petition was granted, Fabella would be disqualified and Romblon would have been denied their chosen representative. Some of the members of the Electoral Commission were known party mates and colleagues of Festin in the legislature, and Fabella was initially disheartened by this protest, especially when he was abandoned by his own lawyer. Fabella and Modesto Formilleza, a friend, helped in formulating their own arguments. In a surprising turn of events and much to the chagrin of Festin, Fabella won the case gaining the support of seven out of the nine commissioners: Real, Imperial, Recto, Perfecto, Rafols, Yoranon, and Ramos; while Sandoval and Kapunan, Festin’s friends, voted for the latter (Fabella 1998, 65–66). It is a wonder why Quezon, the newly elected President of the

Commonwealth and the manipulative party boss, did not intervene in this matter. In retrospect, at any rate, Fabella seemed to have defeated Festin not once, but twice.

Despite the strong pressure to conform to traditional politics, Fabella also enjoyed and cultivated his political career by focusin on education. He allocated 80% of his pork barrel in the construction of new school buildings, and the remaining 20% to the building of roads in the province. As much as possible, he ensured that the funds he received were equally divided among all the municipalities of Romblon; thus, those areas which were formerly financially deprived during Festin's administration received money and public services from the national government (Fabella 1998, 70–71).

Consistent with his campaign vow in 1935, Fabella served only one term as assemblyman and did not seek reelection. He went back to the academe and became a known historian and university administrator. After the war, he returned to advocate for changing the Philippine Independence Day from 4 July to 12 June. In 1962, President Macapagal enacted an executive order that earned him the title, "Father of June 12." He died on 29 January 1982.<sup>22</sup>

### **Romblon becomes an "experimental province" during the War: 1940–1946**

In 1938, three years after losing to Fabella, Leonardo Festin returned to provincial politics. He sponsored two bills: Commonwealth Electoral Reform Law and Commonwealth Act No. 581, another controversial legislation which was simply perceived as a way to consolidate power. Also called the "Festin Bill," Commonwealth Act No. 581 was initially rejected by President Quezon. Festin filed it again, and it was finally approved by the National Assembly on 8 June 1940. The law allowed the devolution of the provincial government of Romblon and its 11 municipalities, and their replacement by four special municipalities, Romblon, Maghali, Sibuyan, and Tablas, which collectively came to be known as ROMASITA (Madeja 1993, 272–273).

For a veteran politician, Festin wanted to promote the divide-and-rule strategy and consolidate his power among the newly formed four special municipalities. The law may have been effected because Festin was nearly beaten by a certain Reta, his rival from Sibuyan in the 1938 elections. There were rumors that some ballots were intentionally invalidated in Simara that led to another victory for Festin. At any rate, enacting the bill would mean no elections in 1941 and help ensure that Festin could avoid electoral defeat (Rogerio 2009).

The Festin Bill was also an experiment in local government during the Commonwealth period. It was a strange arrangement; it declared Romblon as an irregular province that did not have any use for the national government, but it continued to receive financial subsidy and privileges from the national government. The Interior Secretary of the Commonwealth Government was also designated as the Governor Ex-officio of Romblon (Madeja 1993, 275–276). The Festin Bill also created a semifeudal and antidemocratic government because of the power of the assemblyman to recommend to the Interior Secretary prospective appointees for many local positions, including those for mayor, treasurer-assessor, chief of police, and five police officers. Exempted from the law were appointments to the *ayuntamiento* or municipal council. As an incumbent assemblyman, Festin had the prerogative to appoint people in those four special municipalities. When it took effect on 1 January 1941, the *ayuntamiento* of Tablas had the following members: Daniel Atienza (Speaker), Amado Manlolo, Nemesio Ganan, Pablo Baculinao, Guillermo Gadaoni and Rafael Gomez. Only Jose Firmalo (mayor), Marcial Fondevilla (treasurer-assessor) and Camilo Montesa (chief of police) were recommended by Festin (Meñez 1998, 97–98).

However, the detailed contents of this law were not fully implemented. First, its original provision of a weekly council meeting was replaced by an advisory board because of a scarcity of gasoline for the transportation of the municipal officials. Second, its organizational set-up was replaced by a supervising governor and four deputy governors, who

were all appointed by the military government in Panay during the war. (Meñez 1998, 98). All in all, the Festin Bill did not help its author stay in power, and the creation of four special municipalities of Romblon created difficult conditions of governance during the Second World War.

During World War II, the Japanese forces tried their best to capture Festin, but never did. And he did not become a Japanese collaborator; four of his sons joined the local resistance movement. After the war, he attended Congress' session when it convened on 9 June 1945. Quezon had passed in 1944, and the new party head, Osmeña did not favour Festin (Festin Story 2001, 59–62), as did Manuel Roxas. When the Capiz-born Roxas ran for presidency under his newly formed *Partido Liberal*, he chose, for Romblon representative, Modesto Formilleza, who would win the election. Formilleza studied in Capiz and he was a trusted ally of Roxas. As Roxas beat Osmeña, Formilleza garnered 7,816 votes while Festin got 4,374 (Formilleza 2009).

Festin's political career finally came to an end. In his later years, his daughter tried her luck in politics but lost in the gubernatorial elections. Finally, one of his grandsons won a provincial post as one of the two delegates for the 1971 Constitutional Convention. Before his death on 18 June 1971, Festin expressed his pride for his past political triumphs.

Those people can't rest because I beat them, because I have done more for Romblon than they ever did, and because I have proved my worth in Congress against the best in the country, I am more than content with my life. Let them say anything, but at least I wish to ask: Why do they have to bring me down in order to raise themselves up? And Don Leonardo, rich in public esteem and the affection of his peers, is happy with the memory of a job well-done. (Festin Story 66–67)

### **Romblon's final battle as an independent province: 1946 onwards**

Formilleza's election initiated a new era in Romblon's political history. Fulfilling his election vow, he immediately sought to enact another bill that would become Republic Act No. 38. Approved on 1 October 1946, it repealed the so-called "Festin Bill" and restored the regular provincial government and municipalities of Romblon, including Sta. Fe, whose territory is comprised of four former barangays of Looc municipality.

Like Festin, Formilleza was also an Odiongan-born lawyer. Born on 15 June 1894 to a poor family, he taught in Capiz and studied law in Manila; he was a working student. Eventually, Formilleza rose through the ranks of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). He was appointed by Roxas as the bureau's deputy collector before his (Roxas) candidacy and election in 1946. As Romblon's representative, Formilleza's greatest legacy was the creation of the National Revenue Code of the Philippines (Formilleza 2009).

Unfortunately, Formilleza's political stint was short-lived. In 1949, he was defeated by Florencio Moreno, a UP-educated engineer who would also do well in the House of Representatives. Formilleza did resume government service as commissioner of the Bureau of Import Controls (now Bureau of Customs) from 1950 to 1952. After two years, he was invited by Andres Soriano to become one of the stockholders and eventually became vice-president of the Tax Service of the Philippines (1952–1956). Formilleza died on 22 December 1958 (Formilleza 2009).

After Formilleza and Moreno, Romblon as a province was never again abolished and underwent no further political experimentations. As decades went by, new municipalities were created, such as Alcantara (1961) from Looc, Calatrava (1969) from San Agustin, Ferrol (1978) from Odiongan, and Santa Maria (1984) from San Agustin. Romblon today has 17 municipalities, and Romblon town still remains the capital.

## Conclusion

This study provides a detailed discussion of the forty-five year political history of the peripheral and archipelagic province of Romblon. During this time, Romblon underwent political transformations because of five legislative acts: Act No. 104 (1901), Act No. 1665 (1907), Act No. 2724 (1917), Commonwealth Act No. 581 (1940) and Republic Act No. 38 (1946).

The study examined these transformations through the careers of Romblon's several politicians, Adriano Rios, Gabriel Fabella, and Modesto Formilleza. But two others stand out, Don Francisco "Paco" Sanz and Don Leonardo "Nardo" Festin, who dominated Romblon's politics for most of the American colonial period. Through wealth, education, and political connections, Sanz and Festin assumed and maintained political power with or without a popular mandate.

Sanz was a big figure Romblon's political scene in the first two decades of American colonial era. Not elected for any position, he was appointed governor and lieutenant governor of the province for two separate terms (1901–1906 and 1908–1915), the result of the schemes of the powerful member of Taft Commission and later Secretary of Interior, Dean C. Worcester. This patronage partly arose from the friendship between Worcester and the Francisco Sanz's father. Under Sanz, Romblomanons were deprived of representation in the Philippine Assembly, as Romblon fell under the jurisdiction of Capiz.

The paper also charted the political career of Leonardo Festin, who restored Romblon as a province in 1917, sponsoring a bill that would repeal a previous law which had subjected Romblon to the jurisdiction of Capiz. Senate President and later President Quezon made great efforts to keep Festin in power; in turn, he, Festin, showed uncompromising loyalty and obedience to the former. Dominating Romblon politics for three decades (except for three years), Festin sponsored a bill (and later law) that turned Romblon into experimental province in 1940 composed of four separate special municipalities. The

act was, among other things, an attempt to consolidate power, and may have been one reason for his defeat in 1946.

The study is significant for three reasons. First, it highlights the history of a relatively neglected province in Philippine history, providing as yet another example of local history. In particular, by tracing the relationship between Romblon politicians and those of the national government, the paper offers another case study of politics during the American colonial period, which has been the subject of books such as *Philippine Colonial Democracy ; Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908*; and *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation State*, among others. This kind of research needs to cover other provinces or subprovinces in the American colonial period.<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This article is based on several chapters in the author's Master's thesis in History, which was awarded the NCCA Young Historian's Prize 2011 for Local History (Filipino Category).
- <sup>2</sup> Based on the 2007 National Census, the total population of Romblon was 279,774. This slightly increased in 2011 to 283,920.
- <sup>3</sup> Legazpi and his men are believed to have landed in the southwestern part of Romblon Island known today as Sitio Aglummyom, a place whose name originated from a popular legend of a native woman talking to a Spaniard. Asked for the name of the place, she mistakenly answered him 'nagalummyom,' thinking of what a hen was doing in its nest. After hearing the vernacular word, which meant 'sitting in the nest,' Spaniards are believed to have adopted it until it evolved into 'Lomlom' and 'Donblon.' Eventually, it became 'Romblon,' the present name of the island which was adopted by the town as well as the entire province (Prado 2005, 15). Other theories explain the origin of the provincial name. Interestingly, two of these have something to do with the shape of the Romblon Island itself. For one historian, it was derived from the Spanish word 'roblon,' another term for 'tornillo,' which in English means 'screw.' Spaniards who were already foremost experts in navigation were claimed to have observed the screw-like shape of this island (Madeja 1993, 38). For another historian, 'Romblon' originated from the word 'doubloon,' which refers to the Spanish coin that was eventually adopted by their enemies, the Muslims, in paying dowries for their brides-to-be. Spaniards might have named the island after the shape of this coin (Reyes 1995, 12).
- <sup>4</sup> Catholic devotion was further strengthened when Romblon was put under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Cebu. While Moro attacks were so rampant, these islands, also known as "Las Isletas," became a territory of evangelism for the Augustinian

Recollects. In 1644, Fr. Miguel de la Concepcion, parish priest of Romblon town, was captured by these Muslim warriors from the south. In response, Fr. Juan de San Antonio assigned the famous Fr. Agustin de San Pedro to Romblon in order to gather and defend the newly Christianized inhabitants. Dubbed as ‘El Padre Capitan’ in Philippine History, he had spearheaded military campaigns against the equally famous Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao. In his new post, San Pedro erected several fortresses in Romblon town and Banton, the two earliest *pueblos* in the province, between 1640 and 1650. He was so enamoured by the place and the people that he chose to be re-assigned there in the twilight years of his life. In 1661, he died and was buried beside the Saint Joseph Cathedral, the church he built himself (Diocese of Romblon 2000, 27). Though Romblon was not as affluent as other Philippine provinces, it seemed that the friar missionaries were pleased to have been assigned there. In one account, Fr. Mateo Delgado praised the positive traits and skills of its inhabitants. “The people are honest, pacific, docile, and very intelligent. They trade in the products of the land – oil, goats, swine, wine and bonete. They have a great abundance of domestic animals. They construct ships, build houses, and make other things of wood with great skills, all of which they take to Manila, as well as to other places, to sell” (Blair and Robertson, 1903–1909b, 85–86).

- <sup>5</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Romblon’s experience during the First Filipino Republic, see Kristoffer R. Esquejo, “Himagsikan at Rehiyonalismo: Ang Romblon sa Ika-19 na Dantaon,” in *Kasaysayang Pampook: Pananaw, Pananaliksik, Pagtuturo*, eds., Atoy M. Navarro and Ma. Florina Y. Orillos-Juan (Quezon City: Limbagang Pangkasaysayan, 2012): 254–276.
- <sup>6</sup> Since the Philippine Commission was headed by William Howard Taft, later President and Chief Justice of the United States, this was also called the Taft Commission. In fact, the whole period from 1901 to 1913 in Philippine history is often dubbed as the “Taft Era.”
- <sup>7</sup> See *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1901*, 65–67.
- <sup>8</sup> Several elected officials of Romblon launched programs to commemorate this significant date. Former Governor Jose M. Madrid (1986–1998) commissioned a research on the lives of former provincial leaders in 1990, while former Congressman and now Governor Eduardo C. Firmalo (2004–2007; 2010–present) gave a tribute to 21 most outstanding Romblomanons in 2006. Congressman Eleandro Jesus F. Madrona’s sponsored a bill, which became Republic Act No. 9642 (*An Act Declaring Every March 16 of Every Year as Romblon Foundation Day and a Special Non-Working Public Holiday in the Province of Romblon*).
- <sup>9</sup> Aklan became an independent province from Capiz only in 1956.
- <sup>10</sup> Since 1907, Sibalenhons wanted to separate from Romblon province since it would be politically and economically beneficial for them to be part of Mindoro. Only linguistic and cultural ties connect them to their fellow Asi-speakers in Banton and Simara. Interestingly, these two islands and Maestre de Ocampo compose what they call as ‘Maghali,’ the Asi word for cousins.

- 
- <sup>11</sup> See *Public Laws Passed by the Philippine Commission During the Period from September 1, 1906 to October 15, 1907 comprising Acts Nos. 1537 to 1800*. Vol. 6, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1908):195.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–76.
- <sup>13</sup> Though Sanz was perceived to be benevolent to the natives, his family was one of those prominent Spanish families who were targeted for capture by the Riego de Dios expedition in 1898. Using the steamer “Enriqueta,” the Sanz family escaped to Iloilo and returned only to Romblon in 1901.
- <sup>14</sup> For a detailed description on the life and career of Dean C. Worcester, see Rodney J. Sullivan, *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester* (Quezon City: New Day Publisher, 1992).
- <sup>15</sup> Though political in nature, this marriage was not impossible since Romblon was a former part of Capiz province during 19<sup>th</sup> century and only the Jintotolo Channel separates Sibuyan and Panay. Moreover, I was informed that there is a regular five-hour trip of pump boats between San Fernando and Roxas City.
- <sup>16</sup> See *Public Laws and Resolutions Passed by the Philippine Commission During the Second Session and Special Session of 1914 of the Third Legislature, and by the Philippine Commission in its Exclusive Legislative Capacity, From June 14, 1913 to July 24, 1914 Nos. 2279 to 2409 Inclusive*, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1914): 451–453.
- <sup>17</sup> See Humphrey O’Leary III, “The Fighting Governor,” *The Irishman’s Tales*.
- <sup>18</sup> See *Romblon Province 90<sup>th</sup> Foundation Anniversary (1901-1991) Souvenir Program*, 7.
- <sup>19</sup> See *Public Laws Enacted by the Philippine Legislature During the Period March 17, 1917 to May 29, 1918 comprising Acts Nos. 2711 to 2780*, Vol. 13, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1918): 37–38.
- <sup>20</sup> For the full text of the 1935 Constitution, see [www.lawphil.net/consti/cons1935.html](http://www.lawphil.net/consti/cons1935.html).
- <sup>21</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the 1935 elections between Festin and Fabella, see Kristoffer R. Esquejo, “Tunggaliang Festin at Fabella: Ang Halalang 1935 sa Kasaysayang Pampolitika ng Romblon,” *Daluyan: Journal ng Wikang Filipino* 16, no. 1 (2011):101–118.
- <sup>22</sup> For a more detailed description on the life and legacies of Gabriel F. Fabella, see Kristoffer R. Esquejo, “Gabriel F. Fabella: Talambuhay at Pamana ng Tinaguriang ‘Ama ng Hunyo 12,’ 1898-1982,” *Philippine Social Science Review* 63, no. 2 (July-December 2011): 55–88.
- <sup>23</sup> This study could have been enhanced if only there were more available provincial reports. Political dynasties in various Philippine provinces are widely discussed in, among others, Alfred W. McCoy’s book, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*.
-

---

## References

### Books

- Ancheta, Celedonio. 1962. *The Father of Philippine Independence Day*. Quezon City: Pilipino Teacher Publications.
- Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1901* (Report of the Philippine Commission in Two Parts) Part 2, 1901. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- Blair, Emma Helen and James Alexander Robertson (eds.). 1903-1909a. *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, Volume 3. Cleveland: The Arthur and Clark Company.
- . 1903-1909b. *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, Volume 35. Cleveland: The Arthur and Clark Company.
- Cullinane, Michael. 2003. *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Esquejo, Kristoffer. 2012. "Himagsikan at Rehiyonalismo: Ang Romblon sa Ika-19 na Dantaon." In *Kasaysayang Pampook: Pananaw, Pananaliksik, Pagtuturo*, edited by Atoy M. Navarro and Ma. Florina Y. Orillos-Juan, 254-276. Quezon City: Limbagang Pangkasaysayan.
- Fabella, Gabriel. 1960. "Don Adriano N. Rios: Romblon's Patriarch." *Historical Bulletin* 4 (3) 63-71.
- . 1962. "Manuel T. Albero: A Father of Our Constitution." *Historical Bulletin* 6:1(March) 71-80.
- . 1976. *The Romblon Archipelago Series No. 1* (Banton, Calatrava, Concepcion and Corcuera). San Mateo, Rizal: ITP Press.
- . 1998. *The Man from Romblon*. San Fernando City and Aringay, La Union: Northern Educational Development Center, Inc.
- Festin Story: More than 150 Years of Family Lore*. 2001. Private publication.
- Ireto, Reynaldo C. 1997. *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Lancion, Conrado Jr. 1995. *Fast Facts About Philippine Provinces*. Makati: Tahanan Books.
- McCoy, Alfred W. 1989. "Quezon's Commonwealth: The Emergence of Philippine Authoritarianism." In *Philippine Colonial Democracy*, edited Ruby R. Paredes, 114-160. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- McCoy, Alfred W., ed. 1994. *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Meñez, Mateo. 1998. *Brief History of a Typical Philippine Town*. Manila: Saint Rafael Press.

- Mojares, Resil B. 2006. *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- O’Leary, Humphrey III. n.d. “The Fighting Governor.” *The Irishman’s Tales*.
- Paredes, Ruby, ed. 1989. *Philippine Colonial Democracy*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Prado, Francis Ray. 2005. *The History of Carmen Including Historical and Cultural Background of North-eastern Barangays of the Municipality of San Agustin, Romblon*. Private publication.
- Political History and Socio-Demographic Profile Province of Romblon*. n.d. Romblon, Romblon: Provincial Government of Romblon.
- Public Laws and Resolutions Passed by the Philippine Commission During the Second Session and Special Session of 1914 of the Third Legislature, and by the Philippine Commission in its Exclusive Legislative Capacity, From June 14, 1913 to July 24, 1914 Nos. 2279 to 2409 Inclusive*. 1914. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- Public Laws Enacted by the Philippine Legislature During the Period March 17, 1917 to May 29, 1918 comprising Acts Nos. 2711 to 2780, Volume 13*, 1918. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- Public Laws Passed by the Philippine Commission During the Period from September 1, 1906 to October 15, 1907 comprising Acts Nos. 1537 to 1800, Volume 6*. 1908. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- Romblon on the Wings of Time: A Commemorative Book on the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Diocese of Romblon (1975-2000)*. 2001. Romblon, Romblon: Diocese of Romblon.
- Roster of Philippine Legislators 1907-1987*. 1989. Quezon City: House of Representatives Congressional Library.
- Simbulan, Dante C. 2005. *The Modern Principalia: The Historical Evolution of the Philippine Ruling Oligarchy*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Sullivan, Rodney J. 1992. *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers.
- The Acuñaas of Capiz Souvenir Book*. 1983. Manila: Private publication.
- Vance, Lee W. 1980. *Tracing Your Philippine Ancestors*. Provo, Utah: Stevenson’s Genealogical Center.
- Worcester, Dean C. 1898. *The Philippine Islands and Their People*. New York: The MacMillan Co.; London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd.
- Villan, Francisco. 1990. *Barangay Carmen: Past, Present and Future*. Private publication.
- Zafra, Galileo. 1994. “Romblonanon.” In *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, Vol. 2 (Peoples of the Philippines Kalinga to Yakan). Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines.

### Journal Articles

- Esquejo, Kristoffer R. 2011. "Gabriel F. Fabella: Talambuhay at Pamana ng Tinaguriang 'Ama ng Hunyo 12,' 1898-1982." *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 63:2 (July-December) 55-88.
- . 2010. "Tunggaliang Festin at Fabella: Ang Halalang 1935 sa Kasaysayang Pampolitika ng Romblon." *Daluyan: Journal ng Wikang Filipino* 16(1):101-118.

### Interviews

- Ms. Edna F. Formilleza at Cubao, Quezon City on 27 June 2009 by the author.
- Mrs. Marcia Rios-Subido at Tayuman, Manila on 8 June 2009 by the author.
- Mr. Servillano Rogero at Romblon, Romblon on 28 May 2009 by the author.
- Mr. Angel A. Sanz at Mandaluyong City on 23 January 2010 by the author.

### Theses and Dissertations

- Esquejo, Kristoffer R. 2010. "Pu-od Romblon: Kasaysayang Pampolitika ng Lalawigang Kapuluan, 1896-2006." Master of Arts in History Thesis. Quezon City: University of the Philippines.
- Madeja, Roland F. 1993. "Romblon Province, 1570-1946: Its History and Development." Master of Arts in History Thesis. Manila: Manuel Luis Quezon University.
- Reyes, Evelyn M. 1995. "Romblon During American Regime, 1898-1946." Master of Arts in Philippine Studies Thesis. Manila: De La Salle University.