

History

According to folktale, Escalante was originally known as “Manlambus”, a Visayan term meaning “to strike with a club” because its coastal waters were then teeming with fishes that catching them could be done simply by clubbing. It was first inhabited by the Negritos or Aetas, who were eventually pushed back to the mountains as the plains were gradually occupied by people of Malayan stock. It was this group of people who were already occupying the area when Magellan waded through the shores of Mactan to fight a doomed battle with Lapulapu.

Pre-Spanish Era

Virtually nothing is known of Escalante during the pre-Hispanic era. But archaeological findings in October 1975 and May 1976 made by a team of Anthropology students led by Professor Lionel Chiong of Silliman University reveal early record of men who inhabited not only the present city but also the island of Negros during the Pre-Spanish time. The findings were recovered in nine (9) graves in what seemed to be an ancient burial ground in Brgy. Japitan, a coastal barangay lying along the Tañon Strait, facing the island of Cebu, some 17 kilometers from the city proper. The artifacts consists of celadon plate and bowls, stoneware bowls and jars, a Sung Dynasty (960-1280 A.D.) jarlet, gold beads, iron implements, daggers and a hunting knife with ivory bone handle. Obviously buried with the dead, the plate, bowls, jars and iron implements were found alongside the skeletal remains, the daggers and hunting knife on top of the breast section, and the gold beads inside the skulls in-between the upper and lower jaws. When carbon-14 tested, these findings together with the human skeletal remains were found to date as far back as the 12th century A.D. All this prove that this part of the island now known as Escalante was inhabited by settlers with a relatively developed culture who were engaged in some form of trade and commerce with the outside world, such as the Chinese traders who could have brought the jarlet, stoneware and celadon pieces during the Ages of Contacts and Trade with the East (11th & 12th centuries A.D.)

Spanish Era

The northeastern part of Negros Island was “one of the most cultivated regions” in mid-19th century.

On November 28, 1856, Governor-General Manuel Crespo y Cebrian issued a decree creating the towns of Escalante and Saravia. The decree ordered “that the two towns in question would be separated immediately from their mother town, Silay,” although the spiritual separation of the two “would await the building of churches and convents in Saravia and Escalante.” The latter had its seat of government in the barrio of Nueva Sevilla (Brgy. Old Poblacion).



Gov.Gen. Manuel Crespo y Cebrian

The parish of Escalante was finally established on May 22, 1860 with Fr. Cipriano Navarro, OAR, as the first parish priest. Fr. Navarro, in a report to the Recollect Provincial in 1861, wrote that the inhabitants of his parish and its 14 barrios lying northeast portion of the island to Himogaan, “speak the Cebuano dialect and all, or the majority, came from Cebu, with the exception of those from Barrio Marianas (Himogaan) . . . who came from the district of Iloilo and speak the Hiligaynon dialect.”¹

Fr. Cipriano Navarro, OAR



along the coast from Calatrava

In 1859, a politico-military command in Bacolod City under Governor Emilio E. Saravia, with six towns under its jurisdiction: Escalante, Guihulgan, Jinuboan, Jimalalud, Tayasan, and Ayungon.² Two more were added, Arguelles (Sagay) and Calatrava when these were created into separate towns in July 3, 1863. This ended with the division of Negros into two provinces in 1889.

Schools for boys and girls were established in the late 1860s. By 1869 a school for boys and another for girls were already operating in the town. By 1890, these schools were among the very few managed by Normal School graduates. As early as 1871, Escalante was a major link between Bacolod and Cebu. A mail service

¹ “History of Negros” by Angel Martinez Cuesta. trans. from original Spanish by Alfonso Felix Jr., and Caritas Sevilla. Historical Conservation Society, Manila: 1980

² <http://www.cbcponline.net/dumaguete/>

route, Bacolod-Escalante-Tutuban-Toledo, Cebu was already exclusively in use by May 1871. In 1875 a mail boat belonging to Emerenciano Amante, the gobernadorcillo (mayor) of Escalante, transported mail between Toledo and Escalante every week. A telegraphic station was established in 1894. The telegraphic cable was extended later on to Tuburan, Cebu and was operational by October of 1897.

The inhabitants of the town lived from subsistence agriculture. They produced among others, rice, corn, buri, edible root crops, and tobacco. Their second most important economic activity was fishing. Tobacco was grown commercially but its production decreased when monopoly was established starting from the time of Don Emilio Saravia (1855-1857), the first politico-military of the Negros Island. In its stead, sugarcane was gradually being grown. It was not clear when the first sugar mill was established in town. But by 1891, Escalante had already 6 steam-engine sugar mills; 36 powered by horses; and 11 by carabaos. This includes the sugar mill in Central Leonor in Barangay Jonobjonob. Approximately 848 hectares were planted to sugarcane. Due to the lack of roads and cane trucks in those times, muscovado sugar could have been transported along Danao River.

American Era

The American period covering some 45 years (December, 1898 to July 3, 1946, except for a few years under the Japanese occupation) saw marked changes in the socio-cultural, economic and political complexion of the area and its people. To capture the hearts and minds of the inhabitants without the use of guns and cannons, the Americans opened the first free elementary school at Old Poblacion in the early 1900s. The Escalante Post Office was started in 1949.³

Act No. 1801, authored by Rep. Isauro Gabaldon, provided for the "construction of schoolhouses of strong materials in barrios with guaranteed daily attendance of not less than sixty pupils..."⁴ An elementary school building was constructed at Old Poblacion during the term of Mayor Fernando Lucot (1912-1918). The municipal hall and the town plaza were constructed and developed during the time of Francisco Ferrer, Sr. Also at this time, the first municipal school site where the first elementary school was located, was formally acquired, and the installation of the Rizal Monument at the public plaza completed. The municipal portal and Rizal Monument was built on Sept. 15, 1955. The bandstand and skating rink was constructed in September 28, 1935.

³ Post Offices of the Philippines (1898-1946) and Ryukyu Islands (1944-1972) Under US Administration. Richard E. Small. September 2000.

⁴ <http://gabaldon.ivanhenares.com/2006/08/those-gabaldons.html>

Post-War Era

Two (2) years after liberation, Escalante was divided into two (2) municipalities. President Elpidio Quirino issued Executive Order 141 dated May 19, 1948 "Organizing certain barrios of the Municipality of Escalante, Province of Negros Occidental, into an independent municipality under the name Toboso," to take effect July 1, 1948. Victor Bedonia who was then the incumbent mayor of Escalante opted to become the first mayor of the newly created town of Toboso. Pedro Benignos took over until 1950. In 1951, Evaristo Sanz took over and was replaced thereafter by Amando Tambo. It was during Mayor Tambo's time when the seat of government, by virtue of Executive Order No. 301 issued by President Carlos P. Garcia on May 30, 1958, was transferred from Brgy. Old Poblacion to its present site at Brgy. Balintawak⁵.

The first high school, the Escalante National High School, was established in 1948. A decade later, in 1961, the Mount Carmel College was established by the Order of the Carmelites, who came upon invitation of the Bishop Epifanio Surban of the Diocese of Dumaguete. "In March 1958, the Vicariate of Toboso, comprising the parishes of St. Anthony of Padua in Toboso and St. Francis of Assisi in Old Escalante and the Chaplaincy of Central Danao in the province of Negros Occidental in western part of the Visayan island were entrusted to the Carmelites."⁶ Aside from the churches in the Municipality of Toboso, in Escalante and in Brgy Old. Poblacion, it also erected the Magdalen Hospital which was run by the Sisters of Julie Postel. This hospital is now called the Dr. Vicente Gustilo District Hospital, under the management of the Provincial Government. This placed the new town in an enviable position, not only being a center of higher education and quality medical care in this part of Negros.

This brought about profound changes in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the town as it provided the much-needed opportunity for children of poor families in the area to acquire college education. The most prominent radio station, dyAG based in Cadiz City, was also an influential media, although soap operas, news and current affairs programs of Cebu-City based AM radio stations dominate.

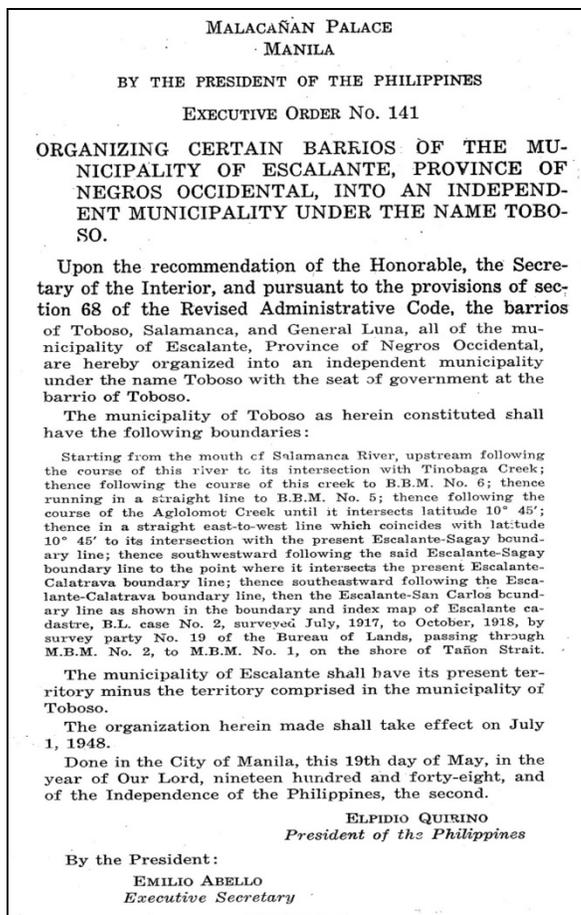
During this time, a modern public market, new municipal building, and the 50,000-gallon reservoir was erected. In May 1979, the V-M-C Electric Service Cooperative, now renamed as the North Negros Electric Cooperative, started energizing the town proper. Ceres buses owned by the Bacolod City-based Vallacar Transit had made it an important terminal for Escalante-Bacolod route.

The Martial Law Years

The Martial Law Years were seemingly quiet. However, the uneven land distribution, marginal food production, and the excesses of the political system created so much discontent especially in the sugarcane farms. This was one of the reasons why the BAYAN-led "Welgang Bayan" which tragically ended in the now infamous "Escalante Massacre" occurred on September 20, 1985. Twenty-one (21) rallyists who were determined to paralyze traffic, died on the spot on the streets of Escalante when the militia of then-strongman Congressman Armando Gustilo, who was bent on dispersing the rally, fired their guns on rallyists. This event was one of the important factors for the downfall of the Marcos regime.

⁵ <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1958/05/30/executive-order-no-301-s-1958/>

⁶ <http://www.ocarm.ph>



With the installation of Pres. Corazon C. Aquino, Mrs. Evelyn L. Hinolan was selected as OIC Mayor. Then BAYAN Chairman Rolando Ponsica, who was one of the persecuted during the Martial Law years, easily became the mayor in 1988.

City Charter for Escalante

After 143 years of existence as a municipality, under the leadership of Mayor Santiago G. Barcelona, Jr., Escalante was now qualified to become a city. On July 24, 1998, the Sangguniang Bayan of Escalante passed Resolution No. 98-79 “requesting the Honorable Congressman Julio A. Ledesma IV of the 1st District of Negros Occidental to file a bill in Congress creating / converting the Municipality of Escalante into a new City of Escalante.” Six days later, Congressman Ledesma filed House Bill No. 1514 “An act converting the Municipality of Escalante into a component city to be known as the City of Escalante.” In spite of a moratorium on the creation of cities imposed by the Malacañang in 1999, Congress went ahead with its enactment. After conducting a public hearing right here in the town on November 27, 1999, Congress passed the substitute bill, House Bill No. 8882, on second reading on December 9, 1999. More than a week later, it passed the bill on third and final reading.



A similar bill, Senate Bill No. 1786, was filed by Sen. Serge Osmeña III in the House of the Senate on October 22, 1999. Senate Bill No. 2245 (in substitution of Senate Bill No. 1786) was passed on third and final reading on February 8, 2001, the last session of the 11th Congress.

Both bills became Republic Act No. 9014, “An act converting the Municipality of Escalante, Province of Negros Occidental into a component city to be known as the City of Escalante.” It was signed into law on February 28, 2001 by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and was ratified in a plebiscite held on March 31, 2001. Of 14,723 who actually voted, 14,075 voted “YES” and only 648 voted “NO”.

Local Leadership

Table 1. Succession of Mayors from 1901-present

Mayor	Years Served
German Carballo	1901-1904
Juan Infante	1905-1906
Pelagio Abong	1906-1907
Vidal Clarin	1908
Placido Visitacion	1909-1911
Fernando Lucot	1912-1918
Gabino Gamao	1919-1921
Francisco Ferrer Sr.	1922-1931
Restituto Dejoras	1931-1934
Francisco Ferrer Sr.	1934-1941
Enrique Ballesteros (Japanese –sponsored)	1941-1944
Victor Bedonia (Resistance Movement)	1941-1948
Pedro Benignos	1948-1951
Evaristo Sanz	1952-1955
Amando Tambo	1956-1957
Braulio P. Lumayno	1958-1976
Jose Pete Parreño	Nov. 1976 – Mar. 2, 1980
Braulio P. Lumayno	Mar. 1980 –July 16, 1986
Evelyn L. Hinolan	July 17, 1986 – Nov. 30, 1987
Penny Yanong	Dec. 1, 1987 – Feb 2, 1988
Rolando P. Ponsica	Feb. 2, 1988 – Mar. 25, 1998
Eme L. Zamora	Mar. 26, 1998 – June 30, 1998

Santiago G. Barcelona, Jr.	July 1, 1998 – June 30, 2007
Melecio J. Yap, Jr.	July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2018
Eddie M. Montero	July 1, 2018 - present