

IMAGES  
of America

# FILIPINOS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Filipino American National Historical Society,  
Manilatown Heritage Foundation, and  
Pin@y Educational Partnerships

**ON THE COVER:** The Filipino community of San Francisco has participated in various civic events including the Columbus Day Parade, shown here in 1952. Leading the caravan are, from left to right, Celestino Alfafara (grandmaster of the Caballeros Dimas Alang), Rhoda Buted, Juanita Cayton Alfafara, Adele Bautista, and Fred Carino. The driver is unknown. (Courtesy of Adele Urbiztondo.)

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*This book is dedicated to Victoria Manalo Draves, a Pinay daughter from South of Market, who passed away on April 11, 2010. In 1948, she won two Olympic gold medals, and she continued to mentor young athletes. A park located at Folsom and Sherman Streets in the South of Market neighborhood where she grew up is named in her honor.*

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# INTRODUCTION

This photographic journal is a history in images of and by Filipinos in San Francisco. Since the late 19th century, San Francisco has been a key gateway for Filipino passage into and throughout the greater U.S.. Filipinos have played a vital role in the development of the city and, in turn, the San Francisco experience has shaped the unique character of Filipino American society throughout the greater Bay Area, California, and the nation.

The range of activities of the individuals, families, and organizations chronicled here show the scope of diversity that existed amidst the Pinoy “bachelor” community—typically depicted in one-dimensional terms—that thrived in the city between World Wars. Children were raised in large, extended families, leaders established organizations with economic and political power, artists flourished, and students and workers joined in social movements. The images tell their tales—stories of a resilient community thriving in this extraordinary place despite often-difficult conditions. Here in, cherished heirlooms, is evidence of our development that confirms some perceptions and beliefs and contradicts others about Filipinos in America.

In 1898, two years after a rigged trial, conviction for sedition and treason, and the execution of Philippines national hero Jose Rizal by firing squad, independence-minded Filipino nationalists succeeded in their revolution against Spain only to be frustrated by U.S. intervention. Via the Treaty of Paris in 1898, Spain ceded the Philippine Islands (P.I.) to the U.S. by purchase. The U.S. then commenced a bloody war against “insurgents” continuing their struggle for independence. Soldiers assembled at the Presidio of San Francisco were deployed to the war from Fort Mason. More than one million Filipinos died from a gruesome combination of war-born disease and pestilence, U.S. military massacres of non-combatant civilians, and military combat. Pres. Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed an American victory in 1902—in reality, the war continued for a decade further.

The “Benevolent Assimilation” policy, announced by the succeeding president, William McKinley, instituted the first public education system in Philippine history and a political structure designed for U.S. social and economic control of the islands and military advantage in Asia. Admiral Dewey’s victory over the Spanish fleet and the purported pacification of the Philippines were celebrated by cheering throngs at the 1903 dedication of a monument that still stands in the city’s Union Square.

Anti-Asian laws that barred immigration by all “Orientals” did not apply to Filipinos because of the colonial status of the P.I. as a U.S. “territorial protectorate.” Early 20th century arrivals from the P.I. included members of the mestizo (mixed-race) aristocracy seeking mercantile opportunities, their immediate families and support staff, and merchant mariners. The latter were participants in the four centuries-long tradition of Filipinos working in the global shipping trade. First to arrive as a recognizable cohort were government-sponsored scholars known as pensionados (men) or pensionadas (women). Upon graduation from elite private and public universities in the U.S., pensionados were to return to the P.I. and take-up academic and civic leadership roles to facilitate the Americanization of their homeland. Some brought Anglo American wives back with them.



The enduring strength of the colonial connection between Filipinos and the U.S. military is patent the 90-year history of military bases in the Islands and five generations of Filipino and Filipino-American service, most notably in the U.S. Navy, starting as early as 1898. Upon their discharge or retirement from active service, many veterans found well-paying civilian jobs in navy and private shipyards and in the merchant marine, the latter often making San Francisco their base between voyages.

Filipinos in the U.S. Army last stationed at the Presidio also settled in San Francisco. Both black and white veterans of the Spanish American and Philippine-American Wars brought their Filipina “war brides” and established multigenerational, mixed-race families here. Filipinos in the U.S. Army last stationed at the Presidio also settled in San Francisco.

Starting in 1906, workers were recruited from Visayan and Ilokano provinces directly to the sugar and pineapple plantations of Hawai’i. Like the Chinese and Japanese who preceded them, the Filipino sakadas organized and took militant measures against the abuses of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association in an effort to improve inhumane working conditions. Strikers were “blackballed”—permanently banned from the plantations. Former sakadas left Hawaii for the mainland in the 1910s and 1920s.

More workers were brought to the fields of the West Coast, lured by recruiters’ promises of jobs and enthused by stories, money orders, and photographs in letters to families “back home.” The photographs included with the letters frequently showed extremely well-dressed men in, on, and around fine automobiles and in the company of attractive Anglo American and “Latin-looking” young women. For many new arrivals, San Francisco was a stopover on the way to work in the fields and in the fishing and cannery industries of Washington and Alaska. The Alaskeros and migrant farm laborers often returned to the city for leisure time, urban jobs, and their own small businesses in the off-season. Some of these later arrivals pursued education in local high schools and area colleges and universities such as City College of San Francisco and San Francisco Teacher’s College (now San Francisco State University), the University of San Francisco, and the University of California at Berkeley. The Depression caused most to quit school and find full-time work. Many of those who completed degrees found that racism prevented them from securing employment commensurate with their education.

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, those Pinoys who preferred urban service jobs stayed in San Francisco, renting rooms on and around Kearny Street adjacent to Chinatown and multiroom apartments (“flats”) in the South of Market—now called SOMA), sometimes referred to as Central City—close to jobs in downtown restaurants, hotels, upscale private social clubs, and large department stores. On Kearny, later named “Manilatown,” bachelor Manongs lived in the numerous single-room occupancy hotels (SROs) such as the International and the St. Paul. Filipino-owned small businesses—restaurants, barbershops, pool halls, and sundries-and-liquor stores—abounded. The working class ethnically-mixed neighborhoods of SOMA and the Fillmore/ Western Addition offered larger apartments fit for growing families.

The Gran Oriente Filipino (GOF) Masonic Lodge and the Caballeros de Dimas Alang (CDA) of San Francisco were founded in 1921, while the Legionarios del Trabajo was established in 1924. Although categorized as legally as Mongolians and colloquially as “Orientals,” Filipinos were not subject to anti-Oriental exclusionary laws regarding property ownership. The GOF purchased property in South Park to house their temple and living quarters. The CDA acquired a building on Broadway, just north of the International Hotel. The Filipino Community, Inc., established in 1939, bought a building at 2970 California Street.

Racial covenants, however, barred most Filipinos, like all other racial minorities, from renting or purchasing homes in exclusively white neighborhoods. Access to employment, like living quarters, was defined by race. Prohibitive signs, like the infamous and oft-cited “Positively No Dogs or Filipinos Allowed,” were plentiful. Continuing anti-Asian xenophobia and the Great Depression increased anti-Filipino sentiment and violence throughout the West. In 1934, Filipinos were reclassified from “wards” and “nationals” to “aliens” and barred from entry to the United States by the Tydings-McDuffie Act.

The recruitment and immigration pattern caused an extreme imbalance in the ratio of men to women among Filipinos, typically cited as 18-to-1 or higher. State anti-miscegenation laws prohibited marriage between white and non-whites, though Pinoys often dared to be in the company of white women in full public view. Children of mixed-race or mixed ethnicity constituted a substantial portion of second generation Filipinos born before World War II.

Despite all obstacles, Filipinos made San Francisco their home and created a unique Filipino American culture and community. They established hometown and regional associations and annually celebrated December 30, Rizal Day, with princess and queen contests and fiestas. Filipino immigrants brought their abiding passion for the arts, particularly music and dance. At work, they were bellhops, laundry workers, valets, barbers, cooks, merchant mariners, and warehousemen, but in their private lives many first-generation immigrants were also highly talented musicians, writers, artists, and journalists. Their talents flavored and colored family gatherings and community celebrations with an intermingling of black, Latino, and Filipino cultural expression in the Fillmore, the Mission, and on Kearny Street. The unique Filipino, American, and San Franciscan music culture that resulted was passed down through several generations to today, with many second-and following generation Filipino Americans gaining national and international recognition in various styles of music.

In sports, Pinoys cheered their fellow Filipinos who excelled in boxing. Despite segregated public facilities and other racist prohibitions, the second-generation’s Mangos Athletic Club, founded in 1939, and the girls’ division, the Mangoettes, excelled in basketball, baseball, softball, and volleyball competing against Filipino and non-Filipino teams in California. Several members of the Mangos won city, state, and regional titles for their schools, as well as their community-sponsored teams. Victoria Taylor Manalo Draves, a mestiza Filipina from the South of Market, overcame anti-Filipino prejudice with discipline and exceptional talent to win five United States diving championships between 1946 and 1948. In 1948, she claimed two Olympic gold medals, one in springboard, the other in platform diving—the first woman in modern Olympic history to win both events and two golds in the same Games. In 2005, a park was dedicated to her in her old neighborhood, the SOMA.

Pressured by the Filipino American community and their congressional allies at the start of World War II, Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed changes in the military draft law making Filipinos draft and volunteer eligible for service in all branches of the U.S. military in 1942. The First and Second Filipino Regiments, U.S. Army, were established in California in 1942 for duty in the Pacific. In 1943, Filipinos in the U.S. armed forces were granted the opportunity to become U.S. citizens. At the close of the war, the Filipino regiments were awarded combat honors and distinction for their heroic contributions to the liberation of their homeland. The War Brides Act (1945) allowed veterans to bring wives and children to the U.S. Independence was granted to the Philippines on July 4, 1946.

In the post–World War II period, Filipino American progressives openly criticized U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In 1944, the Gran Oriente Filipino newsletter forcefully stated: “Race prejudice is nothing but a desire to keep a people down, and misuses the term ‘inferior’ to justify unfairness and injustice. Race prejudice makes people ruthless. It invites violence; it is the opposite of good

character.”

The GI Bill brought all U.S. military veterans access to higher education, well-paying civil service jobs and low-interest home loans. Filipinos began to buy homes in the Richmond and Sunset districts on the west side, despite white-only racial covenants. Others moved from the SOMA southward into the Mission, Bernal Heights, Excelsior/Outer Mission, Crocker Amazon, and Visitacion Valley neighborhoods and Daly City (of course).

During the “Cold War” era of the 1950s and 1960s, Filipinos engaged San Francisco/Bay Area politics with increased vigor. They established political clubs and became leaders in the local Democratic and Republican parties, though once-powerful Filipino labor unions were slowly recovering from the chilling effects of McCarthy Era persecutions. Youthful Filipino American idealists supported the strengthening tide toward social justice. As artists, writers, and musicians, they participated in the Beat scene of North Beach, the jazz scene in the Fillmore, and San Francisco rock-and-roll culture even as their community’s conservatives promoted quiet assimilation and criticized the goals and methods of the Civil Rights movement.

The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 welcomed university-educated technicians and professionals—nurses, doctors, engineers, accountants, and teachers from nations formerly barred or subject to exceedingly low annual quotas. An expanding economy driven by democratizing effects of the GI Bill and the Civil Rights Act provided new immigrants a higher level of economic mobility that had been denied the pioneer generation. The maturing pre-World War II second generation followed first-generation relatives and friends into civil service, unionized blue collar jobs, small-businesses, and the corporate world. San Francisco swelled with new arrivals, filling the city’s neighborhoods and churches.

The Vietnam War divided the nation and the Filipino community, as well. Filipino military veterans generally tended to support the war, and many young Filipinos volunteered or were drafted to serve. Others joined the growing opposition to the war.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Civil Rights Movement and labor leaders, such as Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, and Pete Velasco, inspired young Filipino activists in the Bay Area to join the San Francisco Auto Row protests against racial segregation and the national grape boycott. Filipinos were active in the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley and were leaders of the longest student-led strike in U.S. history at SF State College in 1968. The Filipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) at SFSC was a member of the Third World Liberation Front and leader in the formation and implementation of the School of Ethnic Studies at SF State, the first in the nation.

The elderly Manongs and tenants of the International Hotel (I-Hotel) began their anti-eviction resistance in 1968. They were soon joined by students from SF State, UC Berkeley, and City College of San Francisco; many were veterans of the SF State and UC Berkeley strikes. The “I-Hotel Struggle” became an iconic issue in the city and a national focal point for the defense of working class communities and affordable housing against the destructive forces of “redevelopment” projects. It nourished the flowering of Asian American literature, art, music, and dance propagated by the Kearny Street Workshop, the Asian American Theater Workshop, and similar Bay Area organizations and institutions. Despite organized resistance via political and legal action and news media, on August 4, 1977, I-Hotel tenants and their supporters were violently evicted. Staunch I-Hotel advocates, however, successfully persisted in their cause for three decades.

The 1972 declaration of martial law in the Philippines by Pres. Ferdinand Marcos deeply divided the local community. The anti-Marcos movement had many strong adherents in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Area. Organizations such as the Movement for a Free Philippines; Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) or Union of Democratic Filipinos; the Anti-Martial Law Coalition; Friends of the Filipino People; and the San Francisco-based *Philippine News*. Spurred by the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983, the anti-Marcos opposition organized even more broadly in San Francisco, enthusiastically working to oust Ferdinand Marcos, who was exiled to the U.S. in 1986.

Political activism has continued through the 1980s to the present day, as Filipinos persistently advocate for civil rights, low-income housing, fair wages, better working conditions, equal access to quality public education, and full equity for Filipino veteranos. San Francisco's Filipino Americans are activists, teachers, counselors, engineers, architects, medical professionals, advocates for low income housing, writers and editors for major news outlets, on-camera television talent, producers and directors of films and videos, playwrights, actors, comedians, and more.

On August 26, 2005, an excited crowd of 700 gathered at the former site of the I-Hotel to cut the ceremonial ribbon at the official opening of the new International Hotel Senior Housing building. After 28 years of struggle, a 15-story building with 104 studio and one-bedroom apartments for low-income seniors rose up on Kearny Street. On the ground floor is the International Hotel Manilatown Center, sponsored by the Manilatown Heritage Foundation. A place to pay tribute to those evicted from the original I-Hotel in 1977 and to all the early Filipino immigrants, the center functions as a showcase for today's artists, poets, and musicians.

The bonds of identity and community among the generations of Filipino Americans are strengthened by the work of the many nonprofit cultural, religious, and social organizations and agencies serving San Francisco.

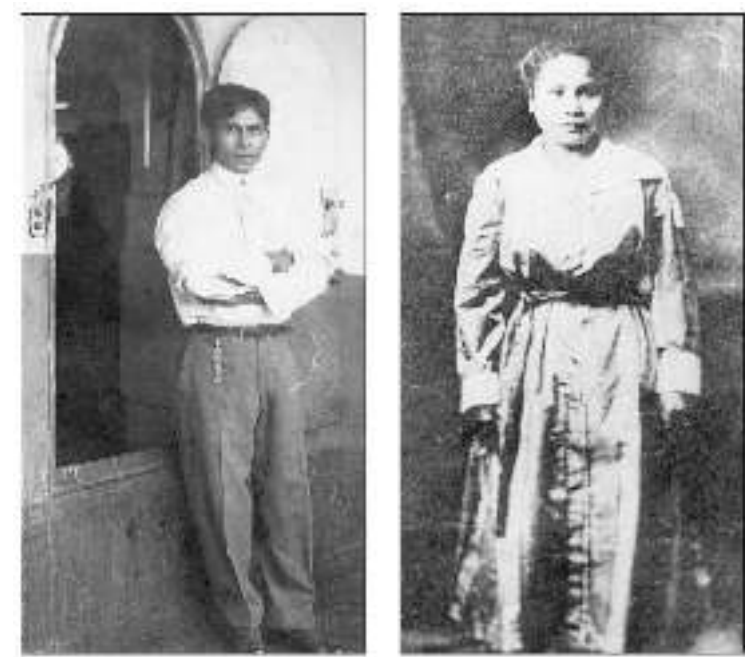
San Francisco's Filipinos have survived hardships and thrived. Today we are a dynamic and proud part of the city's colorful fabric. Our challenges—and triumphs—continue.

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# One

## COMMUNITY BUILDING HOME AND WORK

San Francisco was the gateway city for Filipinos coming to America. The earliest arrivals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were merchant marines, aristocratic businesspeople with their families, wives, and children of buffalo soldiers, veterans of the Philippine-American War, *pensionadas/os*—Filipina/o students on scholarships at major U.S. universities, and a few intrepid travelers and their families. As early as the 1910s, they started families and established enduring community institutions in the Bay Area. By the 1930s, more than 50,000 had come, eager to pursue work, education, and adventure. Many would pass through San Francisco to the fields and fish canneries and to work in cities such as Stockton, Vallejo, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle.



*Maximo Tormes (left), was born August 18, 1882, in Sibonga, Cebu. A merchant marine, Maximo arrived in 1904, witnessed the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, and became a fireman in the U.S. Army Transport Service. Julia Haya arrived in February 1913 from Bago City, Bacolod, as caregiver for a wealthy family. Julia met and eventually wed Maximo in one of the first documented Filipino marriages in Oakland, California, in 1918. Daughter Caroline was born in San Francisco in 1920. (Both photographs, Ubungen family.)*



*African American veterans of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments, U.S. Army—the buffalo soldiers—were deployed to the Philippine American War (1899–1902) from Fort Mason of the San Francisco Presidio. Maria Osano (left) of Iloilo married cavalryman Henry Hudson Pitts (standing) of Atlanta Georgia, in 1899. She arrived in San Francisco in 1915. They owned a home on Lyon Street in the Upper Fillmore/ Western Addition neighborhood. Pitts worked for the U.S. Postal Service. (Clara Tronco/Marie Conde.)*



*Veteran Arthur Gubisch, born in Glogan, Germany, in 1873, immigrated to the United States, enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was sent to the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. Gubisch remained in the Philippines with his wife until his death in 1952. His children eventually migrated to San Francisco. In this photograph, from left to right, are George Bansuelo and Else Reyes Gubisch Bansuelo with their son, Arthur Gubisch, Alvin Reyes Gubisch, and an unidentified individual. (Vidd Chan.)*



*Frank Mancao recorded community life of the times in fine photographs. Here he stands (center)*



behind his daughter Betty. Mancao met and married Amanda Waten (left) while visiting his birthplace Carcar, Cebu. Pictured on the right, the couple's daughter Annie stands with an unidentified friend. The Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park is the backdrop for this 1930s photograph. (FANHS, National.)



*The Filipino Federation of America, founded by Hilario Moncado on December 27, 1925, was established in Los Angeles with lodges in San Francisco, Stockton, Seattle, and Hawaii. In this image taken in San Francisco on April 21, 1933, are, from left to right, (first row) Lapu Lapu Ramos; (second row) Hilario Moncado, president and founder, holding baby Octabo Ramos; (third row) Benito Ramos (left), supreme world council; Francisco Manigo (center), vice president; and Laurian Ramos, women's supreme world council. (Perez family.)*



*Marquita Escaldron and Remedios Robles met in San Francisco. Marquita came in 1926 as a nanny for her Auntie Tulusina's daughter. Marquita and Remedios married in San Francisco and together raised 10 children in the Fillmore district. (Robles family.)*



*Mrs. Mary Fontanilla—the former Mary Montayre from Kauai, Hawaii, whose father was Filipino and mother Austrian—posed for this c. 1936 photograph with her husband, Benny Fontanilla, from San Juan, La Union. Their daughter Rosalind Fontanilla was born in San Francisco in 1937. The family lived on Minna Street in the South of Market. (Rosalind Fontanilla.)*



*The fashionably attired Pablo Bautista strikes a languid pose in the 1930s. He sent this photograph to Cecilia Salvador to convince her to marry him. It worked. They settled first in the Fillmore district and later in the Haight-Ashbury. In his 40 years as a busboy at the St. Francis Hotel, Pablo reputedly never missed a day of work. The Bautistas were community leaders and officers of the Filipino Community of San Francisco. (Kristina Bautista.)*



*Abelardo Basconcillo (middle) takes a stance with two unidentified friends on the picturesque wooden bridge in the Japanese Tea Garden of Golden Gate Park. He was a successful restaurateur and businessman. (Basconcillo family.)*



*The manong/manang (respected elder man or woman) generation that arrived before World War II took great pride in their personal appearance. Artemio Espiritu Basconcillo (center) stands with two unidentified friends in front of San Francisco City Hall in the 1920s, all dressed in the very best and current style of the period. (Basconcillo family.)*



*Gentlemen all, Lazaro Fabian (second from left) stands with three unidentified friends in sartorial splendor. Photographs like these—were staple accompaniment to letters and money orders sent regularly to the folks back home. They often inspired envy and emigration. (Larry Fabian.)*



*Timoteo N. Tercenio said, “It was an exciting and productive journey, all starting with a voyage on the merchant vessel, SS President Jackson, from Manila to the port of San Francisco in 1932.” His daughter wrote, “motivated, industrious & charming, he did farm labor then bookkeeping, served in the U.S. Army—First Filipino Infantry, owned a business assembling auto parts while working for*

*Simmons Company. Later he managed and maintained his investment properties.” (Helen “Cricket” Tercenio-Holder.)*

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*Kearny Street, from cross street Pine north to Pacific, was the hub of the growing community. From the 1910s to the early 1950s, Kearny was a primary destination for new arrivals in need of housing and information about jobs. Businesses such as the Luzon Restaurant, the New Luneta Café, Bataan Lunch, and smoke-shop-liquor-and-sundries stores catered to Filipino tastes and needs. Short- and long-term shelter was available at the International, the St. Paul, the Temple, and several other single-room occupancy hotels in the immediate area. Here, Fred Ubungen (left) and Caroline Torme Ubungen enjoy coffee inside the Luzon Restaurant with three unidentified friends in the late 1930s. (Ubungen family.)*



*The fraternal order of the Caballeros de Dimas Alang (CDA), modeled after the Philippines original was established in San Francisco on December 14, 1920. Dimas Alang was the nom de plume of national hero Dr. Jose Rizal. The Filipino fraternal orders were and are dedicated to the highest humanitarian philosophical values. Philippine nationalism, mutual aid, and assistance among its members and life-long responsibility to the welfare of the homeland. (Lisa Suguitan Melnick.)*



*The Legionarios del Trabajo (LDT) fraternal order was modeled on the Katipunan of the nationalist anticolonial revolution, the freemasonry, and a trade union concept. Founded in Manila in 1912, the LDT came to San Francisco in 1924. Though Filipinas (Filipino women) were outnumbered by men at least 18 to 1, they held organized social, cultural, and economic power via sororal women's auxiliaries of the fraternal orders. Pictured around 1940 are members of Worshipful Ligaya Lodge*

*135. (Abriam family.)*





*The American branch of the venerable Gran Oriente Filipino, a Masonic lodge in the Philippines, was established in San Francisco in 1921 by a group of former merchant marines. They gathered at the Scottish Rite Temple on April 25, 1926, for their first joint installation of officers. The lodge purchased property in South Park in the 1930s: the lodge's temple (on Jack London Street) and apartment houses (at 106 and 48 South Park). All are still owned and in use by the lodge. (Gran Oriente.)*



*A group of townmates from Piddig, Ilocos Norte, includes Pete Ancheta, Calixto and Agustin Lucas, Vincente Suguitan, Angelo Albano, Ruperto Agcaioili, Felipe Fabian, Romuluz Hernaez, Paul Quevedo, Asislo Pimentel, Abe Pascual, Camilo Aquino, Mariano Llanes, Mariano Aurelio, and Raymond Valentine. Not pictured are Antonio Addad, Paul Ildefonso, and Lazaro Fabian. (Larry Fabian.)*



*Officers of the San Francisco branch of the United Visayans, San Francisco, are pictured on March 30, 1930. From left to right are M. S. Cacafranca, auditor; F. Manago, secretary; J. L. Canseco, sergeant-at-arms; J. Taboada, president; C. T. Alfafara, vice president; and P. Perales, treasurer. This group, one of several, was a major contributor to the construction of the Philippine Pavilion, an exceedingly popular attraction at the International Exposition held at Treasure Island in 1939. (Lisa Suguitan Melnick.)*



*Members of the Filipino Children's Club, pictured from left to right, are (first row) Walter Yuponco, Sonny Paredes, Santos Belay, Rohda Buted, Anata Alfafara, Jimmy Abad, and Alan Rillera; (second row) Benny Cachapero, unidentified, unidentified, Rose Cattiman, Betty Rillera, Rosita Vicente, Betty Pascual, and unidentified; (third row) Frank Belay, Jimmy Caluen, Ralph Yngojo, Rolinda Vicente, Lourdes Suguitan, Nancy Augustin, Velma Yuponco, Agnes Yuponco, unidentified, Celestino Alfafara Jr., Lourdes Yuponco, and unidentified; (fourth row) Buddy Rillera, Rudy Calica, Herbert Rillera, and Art Suguitan; (fifth row) Lucrecia Suguitan, Betty Paredes, Feling Lucas, Corazon, Mata, Evelyn Yuponco, Annie Caluen, Virginia Quilala, and Ester Domingo. (Calica family.)*

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