

Benguet history essay



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Early in the 19th century after the Spanish explorer Guillermo Galvey's report of his expedition, the Spanish government organized the mountain region into six commandancias politico militar", namely: Benguet in 1846, Lepanto in 1852, Bontoc in 1859, Amburayan in 1889, and Kayapa and Cabugaoan in 1891. The Province of Benguet, as now constituted, has portions which were parts of the Districts of Lepanto, Bontoc and Amburayan.

The early commandancias were divided into rancherias. The commandancia of Benguet was divided into 41 rancherias, with La Trinidad as the capital. It was named in honor of Don Galvey's wife Trinidad. The first "Kapitan" of Benguet was Pulito of Kafagway, now Baguio City, which was then a minor rancheria of about 20 houses.

As of 1899, the Katipunan came to Benguet and united the Igorots into establishing Benguet under the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. This was short lived for in the early 1900's, the American colonizers took over.

Under American Rule, local civil government were established on November 22, 1900 under Act No. 48 in the following townships of Benguet: Baguio, La Trinidad, Galiano, Itogon, Tublay, Atok, Kapangan, Balakbak, Palina, Ampusongan, Loo, Kabayan, Buguias, Adaoay, Bokod, Daclan, Sablan, Kibungan and Ambuklao. Under the same Act, the Provincial Government of Benguet was officially established.

When Act No. 1876 was passed on August 13, 1908, Benguet Province became a sub-province of Mountain Province. Under this Act, the sub-

provinces embraced by Mountain Province were Amburayan, Apayao, Benguet, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga and Lepanto. In the course of time, the original 19 townships of Benguet as embodied in Act No. 48 were reduced to 13 municipalities. The township of Baguio became a chartered city in 1909, creating in its place the township of Tuba. The townships of Ambuklao, Adaoay, Balakbak, Galiano, Palina and Loo were abolished under Executive Orders issued by the Governor-General of the Philippines.

Finally, under Republic Act No. 4695 enacted on June 18, 1966, Mountain Province was divided into four new Provinces, namely: Benguet, Mountain Province, Kalinga-Apayao, and Ifugao. Under this Act, Dennis Molintas, Sr. of Bokod became the first appointed Governor with Mayor Ben Palispis (1968-1986), Bantas Suanding (Officer-in-Charge, 1986-1988), Andres Bugnosen (1988-1992), Jaime Paul Panganiban (1992-1995), Raul M. Molintas (1995-2004), Borromeo P. Melchor (2004-2007) and Nestor B. Fongwan (2007 to present).

At present, Benguet is composed of 13 municipalities and 140 barangays. The province's municipalities are: Atok, Bakun, Bokod, Buguias, Itogon, Kabayan, Kapangan, Kibungan, La Trinidad, Mankayan, Sablan, Tuba and Tublay. According to the number of barangays, the capital town of La Trinidad has the most with 16 while Bakun and Kibungan have the least with 7 each.

Land and Inhabitants

The province now known as Benguet was inhabited by the ancestral Ibalois and Kankanaeys believed to be of Malay descent before the Spaniards came

to the Philippines. Trade and commerce between these people and lowland groups such as the Ilocanos and the Pangasinenses had been conducted on a regular basis.

There were early attempts by Spanish explorers to conquer the highlands, drawn by the fabled rich gold mines of the Igorots. In 1620, the first major Spanish incursion into the La Trinidad Valley took brief hold of some gold mines, but this endeavor was abandoned six years later. The Benguet people were left unconquered for much of the Spanish period.

In the 19th century, Spaniards began sending expeditions into Benguet to subjugate the Igorots. The first expedition, under Colonel Guillermo Galvey, succeeded in establishing Spanish presence in the La Trinidad Valley.

In 1846, the area of Benguet became a district of the newly organized province of La Union. In 1854, the district became a separate comandancia politico-militar. Parts of the present province were also established as component territory of other comandancias such as Lepanto, and Amburayan. The American established civil government in Benguet by 1900. On August 13, 1908, Benguet became a sub-province of the Mountain Province together with Amburayan, Apayao, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga and Lepanto. During the 1930s, mining companies began massive operations to work the gold mines in the area. This attracted many lowlanders to work and settle in the area, especially in towns surrounding the mines, including Itogon.

During World War II, Benguet was the site of fierce battles fought by Igorot guerrillas and American forces to open up the western flank of the Japanese

defenders during the final days of liberation in 1945. By authority of the President of the United States, the US Philippine Commission enacted Act No. 49 on November 23, 1900, establishing a civil government for the Province of Benguet. The officers of this government were a provincial governor, provincial secretary and a provincial inspector. All these officers shall reside and have their offices in the township of Baguio, which shall be the capital of the province. The governor shall be the chief executive of the province. Until such time as a treasurer shall be appointed for the province, the governor shall act as provincial treasurer, subject to the provisions of the general law. He shall also make known to the people of his province through proclamations or communications delivered to the presidents of each township, all general laws or governmental orders. Mr. H. P. Whitmarsh, a Canadian Journalist, was appointed civil governor of Benguet and Mr. Sioco Carino the president of the township of Baguio.

On June 29, 1901, a proviso was inserted on Act No. 155, providing that a popular representative be elected by the township presidents on July 4 of the same year. If the people shall at any time feel they seriously aggrieved and shall be unable to obtain relief from the provincial governor, the elected popular representative shall directly refer the issue to the Chief Executive of the Insular Government. Mr. Mateo Cariño from the township of Baguio was the first elected representative.

By virtue of Act No. 1876, on August 18, 1908, Benguet became a sub-province of Mountain Province. Other sub-province embraced by Mountain Province were: Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga, Lepanto, Apayao and Amburayan. In the course of time, the original 19 townships of Benguet were reduced to 13.

The town of Baguio became a chartered city in 1909. Instead, the town of Tuba was created. Comprising the Province of Benguet were the thirteen municipalities of Atok, Bakun, Bokod, Buguias, Itogon, Kabayan, Kapangan, Kibungan, La Trinidad, Mankayan, Sablan, Tuba and Tublay.

On June 18, 1966, Republic Act 4695 divided Mt. Province into four distinct provinces, namely: Benguet, Mountain Province, Kalinga-Apayao and Ifugao. The elective officials at the time of the division were mandated to serve in the province to which they belong ethnically and the appointive officials and personnel will have to choose where to continue serving. Thus, incumbent Governor Alfredo G. Lamien remained governor of Mountain Province while Vice-Governor Dennis Molintas became the governor of Benguet. The law provides that the remaining assets and liabilities will be divided equitably among the four province.

Benguet's vast natural resources and its unique temperate climate distinguishes the province from all others in the country, having the drawn the interest of both Spanish and American colonizers. At present, Benguet Province is no longer the abode of non-Christian tree dwellers, such as the inland tribal groups of Ibalois, Kankanaeys and Kalanguyas. They have been assimilated as part of the Filipino nation

Belief System

Cañao or kanyao is simply a “ festival” or ceremony or liturgy, or service or rite/ritual, of offering. It is a generic term. “ Witchcraft” would be too limited or off the mark to describe it. A “ kanyao” may be performed for thanksgiving for the health of the community, there could be a kanyao

(petitionary/intercessory) for a bountiful harvest; a family kanyao may be performed for healing such as a very simple ritual of “ sedey” with the use of water and prayer; a “ grand kanyao” has the focus of entertainment, cultural shows and festivities.

Widespread in the Cordilleras would be the term “ menkanyao” lit. “ to perform kanyao” or ritual. I know some rituals for witchcraft and had attended several of those rituals and never is the word kanyao ever used as alternate name for any of these. The main ethnic tribes, Ibaloi and Kankanaey, are not far apart in their system, except that they are dissimilar in linguistics. Their belief system is common to both with little deviation in methods of performance but do not change the intent and purposes.

The Benguet people believe in the existence of unseen beings that emanate from the sky world and the underworld. That these unseen beings are called spirits thought to have power over man. It is further believed that these unseen beings or spirits can be manipulated by men to his advantage. With this, the people strive to win the favors of the spirits using prayers and material offerings in a ritual. Knowing their attributes and whims is important as a basis to classify said spirits as to hierarchy and generosity.

The Rituals

This is the administering of prescribed rituals as a healing cure, protection, purification, sanity, normalize birth and good voyage/journey. The spirits are called upon with offerings of animal, “ tapey”, food and other desired/prescribed materials of favors received or restored health. In any ritual rice wine, tapey (Kn)/ tafey (Ib) is always used being the traditional

wine, and the pig as the traditional animal. Since there are classes of spirits, the rituals are performed to conform with the spirit's demands.

The Kabunyan/Kavunian, Ap-apo/Kaapuan, Kakading/Kedaring are offered thanksgiving rituals. They receive the most ritual for being benevolent to man. Likewise, spirits that are easily offended and violent, like the Tomongaw/Tinmongaw, Pinten/pinchen, amlag/atoros, pinad-ing/pinad-eng, are offered appeasement ritual called the Dilus(Kn.) chilus(Ibaloy).

People Benguet is majority peopled by two tribes- the Ibaloi and the Kankana-ey. The Ibaloi occupying the southeast speak the Nabaloy, a linguistic sound nearer to the Pangasinenses. This maybe due to the free movement and interaction of the natives of what is now Benguet to or with the natives of Pangasinan in the Pre-Spanish era. As established by research, the Ibaloi has affinity to the Kalangoya of Tinek, the Mandek-ey(kankana-ey) Manke'dey(Ibaloi) of Buguias and the Kalahan who live along the mountain range from the foot of Mt. Pulag to Imogen including the I-owak of kayapa in Nueva Viscaya.

Dominating the northeast is the Kankana-ey, speaking the Kalkali, a dialect similar to the Bontocs and akin to the Iloko. These two tribes are spread all over Benguet constituting the majority natives who share each other, practice or observe a common ritual or rituals that are otherwise peculiar to their brothers in the Cordillera. At the root of these two tribes appears a kind of people marginally speaking different ethnic dialects and adhering to an admixture of beliefs. They are so called the Bago or Bag-bag-o, who occupy

the peripheral areas west and south of Benguet stretching from east of Ilocos Sur to the north of Pangasinan.

Another kind of people is the Katagwan of Kapangan. They are so-called by the nature of their dialect blending Nabaloy and Kalkali, which they call Katagwan, which means modified Kalkali. They normally communicate among themselves in modified Kalkali but religiously observe and practice rituals common to the Ibaloi. During feasts, the Katagwan sing the native ritual song and chant in Ibaloi, called *badiw*. Even their music that synchronizes the dancing is performed in Ibaloi while communication continues to be in Kankana-ey. And then there is the Karao group of Bokod in the east. Unlike the other group, they practice rituals peculiar to their own and encompassing their sister tribes in Benguet.

Generally, both tribes raise rice as staple food and for tapey brewing, raise large animals with a lavish care for pigs, dogs, chicken for ritual purposes and feasting. Their customs and taboos are observed as laws orally binding through generations and evolving a belief system that guides the destinies of the two tribes.

Benguet people generally build homes spaced apart from each other, near farms and fields. Traditionally, houses consisted of one room elevated off the ground. Most houses now are made of wood or cement and have metal roofs.

The traditional clothing of Ibaloi, Kankana-ey and Kalanguya men is the *kuval* or G-string, a piece of woven cloth wrapped around the waists and draped down to cover the loins. The traditional clothing for women was the *kambal*

or blouse, and aten or divet, a wraparound skirt. These now are worn only during traditional ceremonies and on special occasions.

The Ibalois, Kankana-eyes and Kalanguyas have a rich tradition of cultural practices, only a few of which are still performed today. The more “ extreme” traditions were abandoned due to the influence of American missionaries during the early 20th century. Thus, practices such as headhunting, mummification and body tattooing have all but disappeared.

In the town of Kabayan, Bakun, Kapangan and Buguias, the mummified remains of important persons have been left in burial caves that dot the surrounding mountains. These mummies are very important national treasures, some of which can be seen on display at the local museum.

No recorded history of the Benguet IPs exists until the arrival of the Spanish colonialists in the 1570’s. The Spaniards found the people living in various stages of development, in separate communities whose coexistence with each other varied from cooperation to isolation or to tribal wars. The people were either engaged in farming, wet agriculture (rice) or hunting and gathering. When the Spanish first arrived in the Cordilleras in 1572, they found the Igorots living in communities separate from each other. The people were independent farmers, much as they are today.

From 1572 to 1575, Spanish conquistadors made a series of expeditions into the Cordillera region in search of gold. They were unable to find gold, but left a trail of burned and pillaged settlements and slaughtered all who resisted. Expeditions were periodically conducted up until 1668, all of which were repelled by the tribal communities. In 1620, the first major Spanish incursion

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The Spanish were able to conquer and subdue the lowlanders of Pangasinan, La Union and the Ilocos, but their sights were on the Cordilleras in the hope of finding endless amounts of gold in the mountains. This was the primary reason for the conflicts between the Cordilleras IPs and the Spanish.

Efforts also were made to “Christianize” the Igorots, as was accomplished with the lowlanders, but this also failed. For more than 300 years, the IPs resisted and fought the Spanish to a virtual stalemate. The colonialists never accomplished their goals for the Cordilleras. The Igorots still were largely unchristian when the Spanish ultimately were defeated in 1898. They did, however, develop a distrust and fear of outsiders that would stay with them to this day.

The Americans took control of the Philippines in 1900 following the Spanish-American War. They also desired the mineral riches that were known to exist in the Cordilleras, but took a very different approach than the Spaniards. The Americans quickly determined that the highlanders of the Cordilleras remained non-Christian, in contrast with the lowlanders. The Americans encouraged missionaries to spread Christianity to establish a common ethical framework and value set.