

The Binongto-an Memorial

Binongto-an is derived from *bungto* which means town. Binongto-an means the place where a town was founded. Which is what Binongto-an is - it was the original site of Carigara - it was where the town's legendary founder, Gara, settled with his clan over 600 years ago, in 1379

The original settlement was simply called Kan Gara (belonging to Gara) which evolved over the years to Kalgara then to Carigara. As the town expanded in size, it was divided into several barrios which were given appropriate names. The original site was aptly called Binongto-an.

But in the beginning, Carigara was only what is now Barangay Binongto-an (formerly Canal). This was the encomienda assigned by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi to Juan de Trujillo; this was where the Jesuits landed on July 16, 1595; where they celebrated their first mass in the island in honor of the Holy Cross, which became the "patron saint" of the town, and where they performed the first baptisms. This was the launchpad in the evangelization of the whole province of Leyte and neighboring islands.

On this particular site the Jesuits built a church at the turn of the 17th century, completed in 1602 or 1604, and described by one writer as "one of the biggest and most beautiful in the whole island". It was the parish church of Carigara for over 200 years, until 1859, when a new church was built in the new town site near the seacoast.

Neglected, the old church succumbed to the ravages of time and the elements and what is left are rubbles covered with moss and lichen. As the seat of the parish and the place of worship for over 200 years, the site is hallowed ground. Our Christian ancestors were baptized, married, and had their last rites in the old church. **We owe them, our ancestors, . . . the memory . . . and a memorial.**

But this memorial is not only for our Christian ancestors and their church, it is also in honor of the original settlers of the town and the Jesuits who made it the gateway of Roman Catholicism in the region. It is a statement on the historicity of Binongto-an and the beginnings of Carigara.

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