

St. Malo Marker Unveiling  
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In 1883, when the Times Democrat reported on St. Malo they described the village as a new discovery, of course the village had been there for at least 50 years. Twenty years later newspapers again wrote about St. Malo saying that “perhaps no geographers or historians in the United States even know that Louisiana contains a Filipino community” At this time Filipinos had been living in Louisiana for a hundred years or more and there were estimated to be over 2000 Filipinos in South Louisiana. The Filipino village at St. Malo was discovered again and again. In the 1980s when Marina Espina wrote about St. Malo, people were shocked that Filipino roots ran so deep in Louisiana. We are here today so St. Malo doesn’t have to be discovered again. This marker serves to commemorate these settlers and their descendants.

The village of St. Malo was the first permanent Filipino settlement in the United States. Although we are not sure when it was established, accounts place Filipino seamen, or Manilamen, in palmetto frond huts along Bayou St. Malo in the 1830s. By the 1860s, St. Malo was the largest fishing village on Lake Borgne. It was a prosperous community of over 150 Filipino fishermen who lived in large cypress buildings constructed over the wetlands. St. Malo served as a wholesale seafood market and a port for fishing expeditions further down the southern shore of Lake Borgne and into the Gulf of Mexico.

The residents of St. Malo were pioneers, exploring a region others thought was dangerous and uninhabitable. They made a good living, because they were willing to live deep in the marsh, giving them easy access to a ready supply of fish, oysters, and shrimp. Storms, economic migration, and assimilation led to St. Malo being abandoned early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

St. Malo is significant, a first chapter in Filipino American History, a first chapter in the story of Filipino migration to Louisiana and the United States, a forgotten section in Louisiana history. The first Filipino settlers set a foundation for more Filipino immigration. They developed roots in the community by starting businesses and marrying across cultures. They wrote letters home to encourage family members to set sail for Louisiana. They built community organizations to support recent immigrants. The success of St. Malo and later Manila Village served as a beacon for other Filipinos, who came to Louisiana for the opportunity to work and be part of the state’s large Filipino community.

How many residents of Louisiana don't know about the impact Filipinos had on the state?  
How many don't know they are descendants of Manilamen?

Thank you for taking the time to listen to this brief history of St. Malo and the men who sailed across oceans to settle these wetlands and add another cultural layer to the diversity that defines south Louisiana. Please share the story of St. Malo so it doesn't have to be rediscovered again. Thank you.