

JARRAHDALÉ'S PIRATE-

THE STORY OF BASILIO DE LOS SANTOS

As I sit amongst the company of nearly a thousand souls, looking at life continuing around me, a light mist forms dew upon the leaves of the surrounding eucalyptus trees. Sunlight, dappled by the trees, causes dew drops to fall like glistening jewels into the soil beneath. I've always had a fascination with cemeteries, and when I was asked to identify unmarked graves at the historical Jarrahdale cemetery, I jumped at the opportunity.

While matching names precisely to the graves is near impossible, sometimes those resting forgotten reveal their stories.

One such story is that of Basilio de Los Santos - Jarrahdale's pirate. I believe Basilio was born in the Philippines between 1840-1842. As a Spanish-speaking Filipino, his background reflects Spain's influence over the region from the mid-1500s to the late 1800s, explaining the Spanish surnames of many Filipino people. Unfortunately, details of his early life remain elusive.

Basilio was a crew member aboard the "Flowery Land," a British merchant ship under the command of Captain John Smith. The first mate was Mr. John Carswell, and the second mate was William Taffer. George Smith, the captain's brother, was the only passenger. The crew of 16, predominantly Spanish/Filipino, set sail from London destined for the Far East (Singapore) on the 28th day of July 1863. However, their intended destination was never reached; instead, they sailed into the realms of history.

After five weeks at sea, the crew, disgruntled by a lack of food and water, chose John Lyons (Leone) as their representative due to language barriers. When Lyons approached Captain Smith with the crew's concerns, he was met with the terse response, "Go and drink salt water then!" This ignited a spark of anger amongst the crew. Unable to communicate effectively, the captain resorted to harsh words and cruelty, which only fuelled the already simmering rage to boiling point.

On the 9th day of September, the first mate, Mr. Carswell, was attacked and bludgeoned to near death, then thrown overboard. Captain Smith was the next victim; upon hearing the commotion, opened his cabin door only to be set upon and stabbed to death inside. Basilio was one of his assailants. George Smith was the next to be murdered. William Taffer, witnessing the horrific attacks and fearing for his life, locked himself inside his cabin.

The mutineers demanded that Taffer navigate the ship to Rio de la Plata (River Plate) or suffer the same fate as the other officers. Taffer, the only surviving officer, was permitted to wrap the captain in a cloth for a burial at sea. As the Captain was dispatched, one of the mutineers muttered, "He'll never call us sons of bitches again!"

Menacing days followed for those who had declined to be involved in the bloodshed. They endured threats, and the violence was worsened by the discovery of crates of champagne. Drunken men lay upon the deck, and the captain's cash and valuables were divided amongst all on board to incriminate everyone for at least theft. On the 2nd day of October, land was sighted, and chaos erupted! With no command, the mutineers scuttled the ship, manned the boats taking with them William Taffer, cabin boy Frank (also referred to as Richard) Early, Norwegian, Michael Anderson and a Frenchman, Frank Candereau. The Chinese cook, also the Chinese lamp trimmer boy, and a Malay steward (all with unknown names), were to face a merciless sea.

Once ashore, William Taffer realised their precarious position assisted the other hostages in making their escape at the first opportunity, finding his way to Montevideo to report the mutiny to the British consulate. The murderous mutineers were apprehended by December of 1863 and sent back to England to face trial at the Old Bailey. The accused men were John Leone a (Lyons) aged 22, Francisco Blanco 23, Ambrosio (also known as Mauricio) Durango 25, Miguel Lopez 22, Marcus Vartus (Watto) 23, Basilo de Los Santos 22, and Marcelino Santa Lacroix and George Carlos. Seven were sentenced to hang, and the eighth, George Carlos was acquitted of murder but charged and sentenced to ten years for scuttling the ship.

Basilio and another man, Marcelino Santa Lacroix, received a reprieve for being diminished responsibility after defence by the Spanish consulate to Governor Grey on the 19th of February 1864. This spared their lives, but they received a 99-year sentence to transportation. The mass hanging of the five accused pirates took place the following day in front of a crowd reported to have been between 25,000 to 30,000 people at Newgate prison. This hanging, apparently "botched," caused quite an outrage and was the last public mass hanging in England.

Basilio's last sea journey was aboard the convict ship "Racehorse," arriving in Fremantle on the 10th of August 1865. Basilio de Los Santos became convict number 8410 and recorded as Basito alias Joseph Sands. He also took other aliases as Antony Lee Santos and Balio Santos. Described as being of stout, powerful build, 5'4" (162 cm) in height, dark-skinned with anchor tattoos on both forearms, unmarried, and illiterate, Basilio received a conditional release on the 22nd of November 1874 to Jarrahdale. He was released again to work in the Tuart & Jarrah forests near Vasse in 1885, Basilio also worked at the number six mill at big Brook Jarrahdale (a mill that closed in approximately 1913)

Basilio was remembered as working at Wellington mill bush camp in 1914. At that time, he was described as being aged and no longer able to "pull his weight" the mill boss pensioned Basilio off on 5/ (approximately 5cents) a day and gave him the job of hunting bush cattle away from the horse feed lots. Workers would often encounter Basilio on bush tracks accompanied by his many stray dogs that he had adopted. Tracing the cattle and hunting them out was a task that could see him away from camp for many weeks. Although Basilio had been in Australia for many years he never fully understood the monetary system and relied on others to see his bills were paid, he also kept his accent which made him difficult to converse with. He is next remembered in 1919.

George Lockhead was a young lad of 8 years old when his parents moved to a home in Jarrahdale, on what is now known as Kingsbury Drive. Looking out of the window, the boy was surprised to see a gnarled, stooped old man with a very large walrus moustache filling buckets of water at his parents' newly acquired property! The youngster befriended the old man, helping him by gathering firewood and carrying water. Basilio rewarded George with a large enamel mug of strong, steaming black coffee. Curious, the young boy wandered around the mills where the workers regaled him with stories of the Spanish pirate who had jumped ship and found his way to Fremantle and worked in the timber mills for many decades.

On the 1st of May 1922, Basilio's young companion found his friend very ill, lying in bed. Basilio told George that he feared he would die and begged the boy to take his only valuable, a silver watch, as he feared it would be stolen. Startled, George ran for help, but in 1922, children were "seen but not heard." George found Ron Clements, who failed to check on Basilio's welfare until much later that evening.

Basilio's struggles were immediately obvious, showing the old man had dragged himself some 50 yards (approximately 50 metres) to the outhouse. Basilio was found sitting dead inside. He was laid to rest on the 3rd day of May 1922, given a pauper's funeral attended by a few workmates and his young friend. In George's later years, he regretted being unable to recall all his conversations with his mysterious friend, only to remember that Basilio's gravesite was near the main entrance to the Jarrahdale cemetery on the Catholic side. George noted that Basilio's coffin appeared to be a plain deal box, unvarnished, and the policeman officiated. Basilio is recorded as Basilio SANTO, aged 75, in the present cemetery records, but as we now know, he was much more than just a name on a list. Oh, and the silver watch? It disappeared, just as Basilio had feared.

Jennifer Phillips.

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