

*Oral History Interview with  
Mr. Juan Blas Blanco  
July 8, 1998*

*Introduction: Greetings, today is July 8, 1998. On behalf of the Northern Marianas College, the U.S. Post Office and the Historic Preservation Office here in the Northern Mariana Islands, I take this opportunity to extend our most heartfelt appreciation and thank you very much to Mr. Juan B. Blanco, for making his time possible to tell us about his experienced, what he knows about the past, about the old mayor's office in Chalan Kanoa, here on Saipan. There were also other offices that once occupied that building. If I am not mistaken, according to my previous interviews, it was widely published that the subject building in Chalan Kanoa was formerly the Catholic Church after the war. So Mr. Blanco, I am very happy that you find it possible to tell us about your knowledge about that place, or that building in Chalan Kanoa.*

*Q: Can you tell me when was the first time you remember that building? That two-story building which houses the former mayor of Saipan? Can you briefly tell me about its history?*

*A: Thank you Herbert, I am very happy that you brought up that matter. I*

*for one, would like to see that, that building remained there. That building, Nanyo Kohatsu Kapshigai Sha, called in Japanese, the Sugar Company, South Seas Sugar Company, South Seas Development Company, its actual name in English. I was once an employee of that company. In fact I am the only remaining Chamorro employed by that company. There are no more.... Also I went to Japan and we met and they offered . Anyway, when I came out of school, “Shichiyo Gagko” called in Saipan. Your grandfather also helped me during those days. I also once recalled a person known as Mr. Ogata. Mr. Elias Sablan and Mr. Ogata were together. Those people pursued me to go to school. Anyway after I graduated, I was hired by the Kohatsu. When I arrived at that building, it was formerly known as “Shiho” a store owned by Nanyo Kohatsu, that was were all their workers and farmers were employed, they were working at the sugar cane company. That was where they used to be. You mentioned that as being two-stories, but it was only a single-story building. Later on during the American administration, the second floor was added. Actually I don’t know whether it was a two-story, however, the building was pretty high. So that building was used by “Nanyo Kahatsu” to house the “Shiko” and there were plenty of people. Whenever, our former employees from Japan arrived on island they will visit that building which brings good*

*memories of the past. That is why I am insisting for that building not to be destroyed, please. Retained that building so that it will remain there.*

*Q: Mr. Blanco, do you remember the year you worked there?*

*A: Oh, I worked there in Nineteen.....a....I got out of school in December of 1942. Then right away I was employed by "Kohatsu" in 1942. I was still there in 1943, one year then a year later in 1944 the war came.*

*Q: Mr. Blanco, do you know who built that building?*

*A: That is a Japanese Building.*

*Q: Japanese?*

*A: Nanyo Kohatsu, Japanese.*

*Q: How long did you work there?*

*A: How long did I work for "Kohatsu", from the year I got out of school in December of 1942 all the way until the War came about. The last time I worked was when the war started. During the war I worked in the Northern part of Saipan called Command Post. There Kohatsu built very fast an Air field in Marpi.*

*Q: Marpi?*

*A: Not Marpi, its....Banadero, Banadero. Marpi is south of Banadero. Then Kohatsu was ordered by the government to built an air field. Then the hired us youngsters to work there. That was my last job.*

- Q: When the N.K.K. store was closed, who later on used that building?*
- A: That building, if my memory is correct, the Church. It was turn into a church. I remember my Mom. My house was in Chalan kanoa and that building was located west of it. That building was formerly a store and you can see it from my house. In fact they had a bell, it is not a bell it is fire bell and the way to operate it is by hitting it with an object.*
- Q: Then after the Cathedral was completed, what office then used that building?*
- A: What Office...hum.....*
- Q: Do you remember the.....?*
- A: Then they turned it over to the Municipal.*
- Q: Then from 1949 or what has been said 1950, the Municipality of Saipan moved in?*
- A: That's right, the first one was Mr. Elias P. Sablan. I think the first, right.*
- Q: Did all the Mayors used that building?*
- A: Right, the first one if I am not mistaken was Mr. Elias P. Sablan, the first, that's right.*
- Q: Mr. Juan ?*
- A: Then Mr. Ignacio Benavente, after Mr. Benavente, it was Mr. Vicente D. Sablan, Mr. Vicente "Kilili".*

*Q: But you didn't return to that office?*

*A: Yes, because the Congressional Office was there and our office was located in that building. I was formerly a congressman.*

*Q: What year did you become a congressman?*

*A: I became a congressman from 1950 all the way till 1962.*

*Q: Twelve years?*

*A: In Congress.*

*Q: That building was.....?*

*A: Our house where we live is very attached to us. From during the Japanese time all the way.*

*Q: So you were a congressman from 1950 till 1962?*

*A: We were there since that time.*

*Q: Then almost all the former mayors were there after the war?*

*A: I think so, they were all there. Even Mayor Francisco Diaz, also there was Mayor Luis A. Benavente, I also worked there. That includes former Mayor Jesus S. Guerrero (Gere) who was there then moved on to San Antonio.*

*Q: Mr. Blanco, do you remember the Negotiation of the Covenant?*

*A: Yes, I do remember, but I was in Guam during that time.*

*Q: You were in Guam?*

*A: I was in Guam at the Guam International Trade Center. I was the Manager of the building down there. They like me because of my knowledge in the Japanese Language. When I quit at Bank of America in 1973, they hired me down there. They then made me the Manager down there. I did stay down there. I was there, unfortunately, it hurts cause that was during the Covenant Negotiation and I was in Guam. I came to vote but was not allowed to vote. I then left feeling really hurt, but there was nothing I can do. The voting regulation prohibits me from voting, because of residency requirements. I said Jesus, Maria, Jose. But its finished. Mr. Larry Cabrera, Executive Director for the Board of Elections did not allow me to vote, but maybe I was not eligible.*

*Q: When I was small, the political parties will debate on issues.....?*

*A: Yes.....*

*Q: Do you remember if there was?.....*

*A: You were small back then.....how old are you?*

*Q: I am turning forty-five.*

*A: You are forty-five, I am seventy-five.*

*Q: Do you remember Mr. Blanco way back during the July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration United Nations Day Celebration, and including all political activities being*

*held there?*

*A: Politics here is very strong.*

*Q: Then that place has a lot of historical significance in terms of our political history, since all the activities of our government in the past took place there.*

*A: Politics is a very serious thing here on island.*

*Q: Then that building has a lot of historical significance. If I am not mistaken in the area of political history of the Mariana Islands. Because all political activities for our government took place there?*

*A: That is where everything took place, that's right.*

*Q: If I am not mistaken every election held in the past, they also used that facility?*

*A: Almost on all occasions.*

*Q: Is there any other office or history of our island that took place in that building?*

*A: Oh my god, there are lots of events that took place there. As you've said, that is the foundation of our government. Nowadays there is our governor, but during those days our Municipality of Saipan was the main Office. Nowadays, our municipal government is small, but during those days, the municipal government had a big scope of responsibility. In those days,*

*there were lots of political activities happening, just as you mentioned.*

*The creation of our political parties in the Marianas started there too.*

*Q: Were you one of the founding fathers of our political parties ?*

*A: No. before that, before that .... Your Grandfather, Mr. Elias P. Sablan, It was him during those days together with ..... Then from there on the other party was established.*

*Q: But that's the history ?*

*A: From that time on, it happened in 1950, 1951 that's when political parties started and the two parties went against each other. That was when Mr. Ignacio Benavente won the Mayor's race by only one vote.*

*Q: By only one vote?*

*A: That was the first time and the race between Mr. Elias P. Sablan and Mr. Ignacio Benavente was tied up. They both garnered the same number of votes. I never see that kind of thing. But at that time, I was the election Commissioner.*

*Q: Were you?*

*A: I was the Election Commissioner during that time. I never see that kind of election in my life. The election was very tight and they had to conduct the election twice because of the tie between the two candidates and it was necessary to hold another election.*



*Q: They had another election?*

*A: It was a tie. Then they had to hold another election. That was when Mr. Benavente won by one vote.*

*Q: Then we can put it this way Mr. Blanco, that there were a lot of Ordinances and the so called Local Laws of our government that were enacted in that building?*

*A: Yes, that's right. You know during those days, we were called baloney Congress, but the members were very bright and came up with very comprehensive and good quality legislation. The members have good common sense. Remember this Herbert, we didn't have any lawyer, nothing, we had no lawyer.*

*Q: No Legal Counsel?*

*A: Nowadays, my god, plenty lawyers, plenty counsel. There are all kinds of legal counsel. They are getting you know, big money. During those days we were the only ones drafting our own legislation.*

*Q: You were drafting your own legislation?*

*A: Common sense was what we were doing. We were lucky because because Mr. Vicente Gogue was sort of our advisor. Mr. Gogue, is one old bright man. During those time, there were no lawyers. Whenever there was legal questioned, we took care of it. I was a Speaker during the 60's. Then I*

*went up to the Naval Administration and solicited their advise. That was what we did. But we didn't seek anything for lawyer. We didn't spent any money for lawyer. Our budget didn't even reach hundred thousand.*

*Q: All of those matters events occurred there?*

*A: Everything and we were busy, because we all work together, we all work...*

*Q: Was your position full-time ?*

*A: Yes, we were only part time. Back then I was working at Bank of America. Then after work from seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven sometimes as late as twelve o'clock.*

*Q: In the evening?*

*A: In the evening, but we made it.*

*Q: Mr. Blanco, sometimes last year or before that, our government leased out that land to the U.S. Post Office. If I am not mistaken, the Post Office has plans to destroy that building ?*

*A: Hum.....*

*Q: What is your position on that decision, if for example, they decided to destroy that building? What can you tell me?*

*A: For myself, do not break that building. It is very, very what you call it sentiment for us. For myself, it makes me talk and if I express my opinion, I really.... Every time I look at that building, it reminds me of the Japanese*

*time, the Kohatsu era, the store. Moving on.... As though that store is still there. Every time I go into and out of my house, I can still picture the old building where I once worked. It is really going to hurt me if that building is going to be destroyed. I hope that the building be maintained.*

*Q: If you were asked, what are you going to use that building for, what will your response be?*

*A: Hum.....*

*Q: For me personally, if you are to ask me, I would like to see the building repaired and use it to display the political history of our government in the Marianas.*

*A: That is a good idea.*

*Q: Right?*

*A: That's is right.*

*Q: You know, that is where the negotiation of the Covenant took place?*

*A: Not only that, not only....yeah....yeah....and a little more, the Kohatsu store can also be included....*

*Q: That is right.*

*A: The Company, Kohatsu were the one that built that building. They do have photos of the Kohatsu Store during the past and I also have some of them. I think there are also..... there are also photos of the Old Kohatsu*

*store at the Saipan Museum.*

*Q: The Saipan Museum?*

*A: Right, it is also nice to turn that building into a Museum.*

*Q: It's a nice idea right?*

*A: I think so, I am in support of that idea.*

*Q: Will you support that idea if it is proposed?*

*A: Yes, but that building is also available in Japan. They were the ones who told me to inform them that if a museum is ever open in Saipan, that I inform them so that they can also come. Because one of the people involve was the manager of the Japanese Store at the former mayor's office.*

*Q: Is he still around?*

*A: Ah.....no.... we do have a group called "Nankogai.....Nankogai", former employees of the Kahatsu Store here on Saipan. So that man is still alive Mr. Saito San, is still alive.*

*Q: The last question that I would like to ask you, is there any other information that you would like to share, in regards to that place?*

*A: About that place, no, that's about it.*

*Q: Do you favor the demolishing of that building?*

*A: I want that building retain. Please.*

*Q: If a public hearing is conducted, will you come?*

A: *Yes, of course. I'm willing to come. Even if it is conducted in Japanese, or in Chamorro, even though my English is not that good, I will do something.*

Q: *Is that all Mr. Blanco?*

A: *That's all for now.*

Q: *Because of your status as a former leader in our Community, we chose you to be one of the people to be interviewed about the building in Chalan Kanoa.*

A: *Thank you Herbert.*