

The Evolution of SMSS Alumni and Friends Foundation By Lambert Sagalla

Background. St. Mary's School, Sagada, of the American Episcopal Church, was established by Rev. Fr. John Staunton in 1904 in the mountains of the Philippine island of Luzon, among "naked, head-hunting, trial-marriage savages," as one missionary called the local Igorot tribes¹.

Fr. Staunton, then 34 years old and Rector of St. Peter's Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, was among a number of American missionaries who leapt at the opportunity to do missionary work in the Philippines following President William McKinley's declaration that it was the United States manifest destiny to take possession of the Philippine Islands to "educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them"². President McKinley supposedly told a Methodist congregation that he came to this decision after seeking divine guidance³.

While not a few would point out that it was really the lobbying of President McKinley's friends in the Sugar industry that led the United States to take possession of the Philippine Islands, the missionary works of Fr. Staunton and other American Missionaries have had profound influence in the lives of Igorots in Northern Philippines.

Through St. Mary's School, quite a number of Igorots [then referred to as the non-Christian Tribes or cultural minorities of Northern Philippines] were able to educate themselves and find gainful employment in the Philippines as well as in other parts of the world.

It, therefore, came as a shock to most St. Mary's School graduates to learn that their beloved alma mater had been experiencing extreme financial difficulties since 1990 when the Philippine Episcopal Church gained autonomy from its mother church – The Episcopal Church of the United States of America – and was on the brink of closure.

Alumni and friends subsequently came out with several initiatives – fund campaign, book campaign, scholarship campaign, material/services support campaign and the like – to help St. Mary's

¹ Steven Roberts, "John Staunton and the Sagada Mission: An American Missionary in the Philippines Cordillera", [http://www.smssagada.net/firms.com/staunton_story.htm].

²ibid.

³ibid.

school keep functioning. These were mainly effected by word-of-mouth, net-working with alumni and friends, periodic alumni homecomings, an SMSS alumni and friends website, among others.

Through these efforts, fund donations and pledges were generated; scholarships were sponsored; second-hand books, magazines, computers were received; and paintings and repairs needed to comply with basic facilities required by the Philippine Department of Education were done.

While these efforts somehow helped to keep the school functioning, it became evident that these were not enough (band-aid remedies) to sustain a faculty and administrative staff required for the school to continue dispensing the same quality Christian Education that justified its existence for nigh 100 years.

To exacerbate the situation, the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Philippines [EDNP] was experiencing its own financial woes and was seriously considering closing the school.

Alumni and friends of St. Mary's School in the Philippines proposed that they take over the operations of the school and continue its operation instead of closing the same. The Diocese agreed and the news was disseminated to alumni and friends in the Philippines and overseas.

It was proposed that the best way of generating funds and grants for the school was through a not-for profit corporation making it possible for tax-deductible contributions by corporate as well as individual donors.

Philippine based St. Mary's School Alumni and friends, led by Frank Longid and Engr. Rufino Bomasang, consequently worked in earnest towards organizing and incorporating a not-for-profit corporation in the Philippines to run the school. On September 17, 2003, St. Mary's School of Sagada, Inc. was incorporated. This corporation will take over operations of the school starting school year 2004-2005.

Following their Philippine counterparts, some U. S. based alumni and friends of St. Mary's School, Sagada, gathered in July 5, 2003 at the Episcopal Church of St. Lukes and All Saints in Union, New Jersey to likewise consider their options at effectively helping their alma mater. The consensus arrived at was to incorporate an SMSS Alumni and Friends Foundation in the U. S. A.

Like President William McKinley, these U. S. based Alumni and Friends of St. Mary's School, majority of which are U. S. citizens, sincerely believe that it is their manifest destiny to support, in whatever way they can, their less fortunate brothers and sisters in the hinterlands of Northern Philippines.

The following report of Mr. Lambert Sagalla summarizes how SMSSAFF has evolved in the six years since he was elected as its first President.

SMSSAFF and Sponsored Conferences 2003 - 2009

I. July 5, 2003: Organizational Meeting.

Thirty two alumni and friends of St. Mary's School, Sagada, Mountain Province, Philippines, residing in the East Coast United States [including Maryland, Virginia and Washington DC] gathered at the St. Lukes and All Saints Episcopal church in Union, New Jersey to discuss how they can help avert closure of St. Mary's School of Sagada. The Episcopal Diocese of Northern Luzon had announced that they will not be able to sustain the operations of the school beyond 2005. Concerned SMSS alumni and friends opposed any plan to close the school, with the late manong Frank Longid orchestrating the opposition. In support of the Frank Longid initiative, the consensus arrived at was to organize a St. Mary's School of Sagada Alumni and Friends Foundation [SMSSAFF] which can serve as a springboard for fund raising efforts targeted initially at mainly overseas SMSS alumni and friends.

Lambert Sagalla was prevailed upon to head the proposed foundation and to initiate the formation and registration of a non-profit association or corporation. Other elected officers were: The Rev. Dario Palasi (Vice President); Maximo Batong (Auditor); Inez Saley (Treasurer) and Annabelle Marchadesh (Secretary).

Elected to the Board of Trustees were: Edwin Abeya, John Alipit, Corazon Aguilar, Maximo Batong, Andrew Bacdayan, Brian Gulian, Christina Hing, Erwin Killip, Edith Longid, Annabelle Marchadesh, Eydie Neil Montero, The Rev. Dario Palasi, Lambert Sagalla and Inez Saley. There was no Chairman of the Board because most of the members of the board were elected in absentia and had yet to accept their election to the BOT. The members of the BOT elect their chairman.

II. September 20, 2004: SMSSAFF Conferred 501 (c) (3) Status.

St. Mary's School, Sagada, Alumni and Friends Foundation was granted tax-exempt status under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (USA) effective May 4, 2004. As such contributions to SMSS Alumni and Friends Foundation are tax deductible under section 170 of the Code. SMSS Alumni and Friends Foundation is also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code.

Noteworthy in the effort to qualify SMSSAFF as a 501(c)(3) charitable entity was the generosity of Dr. John and wife Josephine Alipit who, together, funded the required legal and registration fees totaling \$1,150.

III. March 5, 2005: Follow-up Organizational Meeting.

Held at the St. Luke and All Saints Church, Union, New Jersey, this meeting was convened to

- To review SMSSAFF's duties and responsibilities under its newly acquired 501 (c) (3) status as provided for in its qualifying articles of association and bylaws; and come up with vision and mission statements to facilitate the crafting of action plans for SMSSAFF.
- Review SMSSI's 5-year development plan, focusing on synchronizing SMSSAFF's action plans with the funding requirements implied in said 5-year development plan.

It was at this meeting wherein the direction which SMSSAFF was going to take in the immediate future evolved.

Highlights of the meeting:

- A SWOT analysis [i. e., an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths] of SMSSAFF was initiated by Lambert Sagalla, towards coming up with a mission and vision as well as an action plan for SMSSAFF. According to Mr. Sagalla, this was also intended to show IRS that we have the most honorable of intentions in organizing SMSSAFF; and that we knew what we were doing.
- The 5-year development plan of SMSSI was extensively discussed particularly its impact on raising the bar of quality

education in the Philippine Cordilleras. The SMSSAFF President explained that the 5-year development plan with its emphasis on facilities, faculty and curriculum improvements had the potential of sparking a quality-oriented competition among high schools in the Cordillera Administrative Region to the overall benefit of students in the region.

Mr. Sagalla emphasized that the five-year development plan was the key to the long-term viability of SMSS. As the 5-year development plan gets implemented and as quality education conscious people not only from the Cordillera Administrative region but also from all over the Philippines and overseas are informed of these developments, support for the school will follow.

Viewed from another perspective, the 5-year development plan offered a powerful and enticing medium for helping transform the image of an Igorot from that of a mendicant to an individual as hard working, as educated and as nation building conscious as anybody else. At least, according to Mr. Sagalla, that was how he got hooked up in the "Save SMSS Movement".

- Ad hoc and standing committees were formed to help address the priority projects of SMSS as per its 5-year development plan;
- A coin collection challenge was undertaken towards the SMSS Scholarship Project, chaired by Lita Killip
- The SMSSAFF Treasurer, Inez Saley, reported receipts of \$18,350.27, about \$13,000 of which were ear-marked for the Class '55 endowment fund (\$ 6,308.46) and the Frank Longid Memorial fund (6,625.00).
- The group decided to call a North-America-wide conference of alumni and friends to initiate a grass-roots information and fund raising campaign for the 5-year development plan of SMSSI. Underlying this initiative was the plan to encourage as many SMSSAFF related chapters in places where there were sizeable numbers of alumni and friends anywhere in the world.

In Attendance: 30 alumni and 8 friends. Understandably, many alumni still doubted the relevance of SMSS and SMSSAFF in the light of the proliferation of public schools in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). Quite a number seemed to agree with the thinking of

the Diocese of Northern Philippines, to close the school given the hopelessness of its financial situation.



SMSS die-hards who just do not know how to give up on St. Mary's School of Sagada.

III. June 18, 2005: 1st SMSSAFF Sponsored Conference in North America.

Immediately after the March 5, 2005 follow-up organizational meeting at St. Luke's and All Saints Church in Union, New Jersey, a call for suggestions as to the venue of the first SMSSAFF sponsored conference in North America was broadcast in the internet. Mia and Edwin Abeya responded positively, graciously offering their Sierra Mia mountain resort in West Virginia as the venue for subject conference.

Elated at the enthusiastic offer of Mia and Edwin Abeya, the SMSSAFF president hastened to get the consensus of the SMSSAFF membership. The offer was unanimously accepted and June 18, 2005 was set as the conference date.

Highlights of Conference Activities:

- Articles of Association and bylaws were further reviewed and amended.

- Standing and ad hoc committees were reconstituted to make them more responsive to a US-wide fund raising effort.
- Board of Trustees were reconstituted, albeit many in absentia and pending their approval to their election to the BOT.
- A check in the Amount of \$6,932.00 was handed to Rhoda Bondad, the SMSSI Treasurer, who came all the way from the Philippines to attend the meeting. The amount represented donations to the SMSS computer lab, Science Lab, and Librarian's salary.
- A tree-planting activity to commemorate the first ever SMSSAFF sponsored conference was done.
- The lone California delegate, Mary Zabala, was commissioned to relay to West Coast Alumni and friends, the consensus at the Mia Sierra conference that the next SMSSAFF sponsored conference would be somewhere in the west coast with an SMSSAFF West Coast Chapter as host. The implication was that West Coast Alumni and Friends were being encouraged to organize an SMSSAFF West Coast Chapter.
- The conference delegates gratefully acknowledged the conference hosts who decided to donate to SMSSAFF the conference fees collected which were supposed to help take care of lodging, food and cleaning expenses. Likewise, the delegates acknowledged those who brought food to share with fellow delegates. The feeling then was that while we were few in number, the sharing and enthusiasm shown by the delegates foretold greater things to come for SMSSAFF and our alma mater.

In Attendance: 32 Adult Alumni and Friends; 7 kids. The distance of the venue from airports, doubting minds as to what can really be achieved to help resuscitate SMSS in such a gathering, and internet illiteracy by many of the SMSS older alumni were pointed out as the reasons for the small attendance.



Conference attendees (minus the cooks who were busy preparing lunch]. They were few in number but their roar for SMSS resonated world-wide.

IV. August 25-27, 2006: 2nd SMSSAFF Sponsored Conference in North America.

SMSS alumni and friends in the West Coast, headed by Max Batong, valiantly accepted the challenge to organize an SMSSAFF West Coast Chapter; and host the 2nd SMSSAFF sponsored conference in North America.

The pioneering effort of SMSSAFF West Coast Chapter validated the presumption that chapter formation could be an effective tool for grass-roots information and fund raising drives for SMSSAFF. Many attendees from the West Coast indicated they would not have been able to attend had the conference been held in the West Coast; and many from the East Coast gave time and expense constraints as reasons for not attending the West Coast conference. Many also intimated that they came to know about the conference through friends not from internet broadcasts. Apparently many of the older SMSS alumni are still internet illiterate even if they work in an internet oriented environment.

Thus, as aptly put by Lambert Sagalla, if the Carabaos [alumni] can not go to the river [SMSSAFF], the river must go to the Carabaos.

Highlights of Conference Activities:

- The first SMSSAFF sponsored charity fund raising golf tournament was conducted.
- Printed materials were distributed to give the participants of the events leading to the formation of SMSSAFF; what SMSSAFF had to come up with in compliance with its tax-exempt status; and what it was able to put in place in the pursuit of its vision and mission statements.
- A power point presentation on the status of various priority projects at SMSS was given by SMSSI Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Rufino Bomasang.
- Committee chairs reported on the progress and/or status of their respective areas of responsibilities.
- A presentation was made by the SMSSAFF Treasurer on the Sponsor A Faculty Chair project after which a pledging session followed. The equivalent of twelve [12] years faculty sponsorships was generated. At \$3,000.00 per faculty-year sponsorship, these translated into \$36,000 pledged faculty sponsorship during the business meeting.
- The SMSSAFF Treasurer, Inez Saley, reported that since 2004, the year SMSSAFF was granted its 501 (c) (3) status, SMSSAFF was able to process \$80,270.81 worth of donations to St. Mary's School of Sagada, Inc. [SMSSI].
- In addition to the twelve [12] years faculty sponsorships, the construction/ renovation cost of three additional classrooms were pledged; and the Treasurer later reported that \$5,323 was received in partial fulfillment of pledges made before and during the conference.
- New BOT members were elected to replace BOT members with expiring terms. The BOT elections, however, elicited a comment as to what has the BOT done so far. LBS replied: "most of the generous donors came from the BOT; as to what they have accomplished according to their stated duties and responsibilities, maybe that will come in the future. What is important now is that they continue to be generous donors to the coffers of SMSS".

In Attendance: 56 Alumni and friends including representatives from Canada. SMSS alumni and friends in the USA and Canada are definitely much more than as depicted in the picture. It seems many still did not know about the conference or were not yet ready to include SMSS in their priority concerns. It was heartening to note, however, that the "the-save-SMSS" initiative was starting to capture the imagination of a growing number of SMSS alumni and friends as

reflected in the attendees' enthusiastic participation during the meeting, particularly the SAFC pledging session, as well as in the night socials.



Conference participants to the 2nd SMSSAFF sponsored conference, Alhambra, California, August 25-27, 2006.

V. August 17-19, 2007: 3rd SMSSAFF Sponsored Conference in North America.

This was a follow-up effort on the grass-roots approach of drumming up support towards extending the operations of St. Mary's School of Sagada into perpetuity. It was held at the St. John's Episcopal Church in Flushing, Queens, New York. Compared to the West Coast United States, the East Coast had, perhaps, an equal, if not greater, congregation of SMSS alumni and friends which could form the nucleus of conference attendees in New York.

Highlights of Conference Activities:

- For the first time since SMSSAFF was formed, the members of the Board of Trustees convened. Information materials, relevant to their BOT responsibilities under SMSSAFF's approval as a 501 (c) (3) public charity foundation status, were given them by the SMSSAFF President, . Thus, they were able to initiate some amendments in SMSSAFF's articles of association and by-laws. For lack of time, they decided to continue the review and amendments of the by-laws after the conference.

- As in the Alhambra conference, the focus of fund raising efforts for this conference was the Sponsor A Faculty Chair [SAFC] project of SMSS. The main fund-raising medium were again a golf tournament and a pledging session but a coin-collection challenge was included which was able to generate about a thousand US dollars for the coffers of SMSS; and a "Book Sale" on the "Odyssey of an Igorot Mission Girl" [the life story of Ms. Esperanza Somebang] was conducted with the help of Dr. Albert and Caroline Bacdayan which earned about a thousand dollars for SMSSI.
- Shelli Torrevillas introduced the idea of a walkathon/fun run during the forthcoming 2008 SMSS grand reunion in Sagada. Later dubbed as "Legs for Health and Literacy" (LHL), this proved a blockbuster money maker, earning about half a million pesos for the SMSS gymnasium. Thanks to Joe Saley who coordinated the preparations and implementation of the LHL project and Nellie A Pit-og who was, in fact, the "behind-the-scene" moving spirit and financier of the LHL preparation cost as well as the prizes to be awarded the winners.
- From our fund-raising efforts, the SMSSAFF treasurer reported that during the conference, we we were able to generate/service \$35,613 worth of donations for SMSS as follows:
 1. \$16,863 net profit from the golf tournament, the souvenir program, the Coin Collection Challenge (\$975.00), the conference registration fees, and the Saturday Mass "limus";
 2. \$12,000 worth of new pledges for the "Sponsor A Faculty Chair Project";
 3. \$5,750 collection from past pledges; and
 4. \$1,000 donation to the endowment fund.

In Attendance. About 70 alumni and friends were in attendance during the days' activities swelling to more than double that number during the Friday and Saturday night's socials and during the Sunday Eucharist. It seems more and more overseas alumni and friends are throwing in their support to the "save SMSS initiative" as they see where their donations are being spent.



Participants to the 3rd SMSSAFF sponsored Conference in Flushing, Queens, New York August 17-19, 2007

VI. August 6-9, 2009: 4th SMSSAFF Sponsored Conference in North America.

Hosted by SMSS Alumni and friends in Vancouver, this will be the first SMSSAFF Sponsored Conference to be held outside the United States. From feedbacks coming in via the internet, this conference has the potential of surpassing the Alhambra (California) and Flushing (New York) Conferences in terms of attendance and fund-raising results. A wider SMSS alumni participation has already been noted with souvenir program ads-greetings subscriptions and golf hole sponsorships flowing in from Canada, Australia, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea and the Philippines.

Some sobering realities on the Souvenir Program. The response to the call for souvenir ads-greetings for the 4th SMSSAFF sponsored conference is quite amazing as compared with our achievements in this area in our three previous conferences. Naturally, the expectation is that we will be making a lot of money for our dear old alma mater from the souvenir ads-greetings. I am sorry, however, to disappoint you folks with the fact that the cost of colored ink and first class and glossy bond papers have been much higher than expected.

My previous estimates based on earlier printing cost discussion with Roel and Annabelle, and comparative personal canvass on printing costs from a number of printing establishments in Queens and New

Jersey, made me come up with an estimate showing that we can, at least, make a 50% net proceeds from the souvenir program. This estimate took into consideration the additional complimentary pages and books to be printed. The higher than expected cost of colored ink and glossy paper has significantly cut into our net proceeds expectations. We can only find out how much after a review of all relevant cost receipts.

Some encouraging thoughts on the Souvenir Program. In terms of thickness, paper quality, photo clarity and layout, methinks this souvenir program compares favorably with other souvenir program I have seen – such as previous SMSS related souvenir programs, the IIC souvenir programs, and the Langay souvenir programs.

I would like also to believe that the message that we wanted to portray with so-called complimentary pages will, in the long run, generate more support for St. Mary's School of Sagada.

Donors would like to see where their donations have been spent and/or where future donations will be spent, hence the pages on this topics.

Donors want to know some background information on St. Mary's School of Sagada, Inc and SMSS Alumni and friends foundation, hence the extra pages devoted to the history of SMSS by Dr. Henry Scott; and SMSSAFF and its sponsored conferences by Sam Ping.

Donors would like to know who are at the helm of SMSSI and SMSSAFF, hence the extra pages devoted to Dr. Dennis Faustino, Rufino Bomasang, and some key officers of SMSSAFF.

People would like to know sample quality graduates of SMSS, hence the extra pages devoted to the "Who is Who" in the service of SMSS. Really, the graduates of SMSS, as depicted initially by brief background information on Dr. Alipit and Mia Abeya as well as key personnel of SMSSI and SMSSAFF are something that an SMSS student and for that matter an Igorot student can be proud to be associated with. Here's hoping that other hosts of SMSS related conferences will continue this "Who is Who" initiative. Be advised, however, that the primary motivation for including an individual in the "who is who" list is to project a better image of SMSS to prospective donors; and to help transform the still not so palatable image of an Igorot for the better.

Donors need to be acknowledged, hence the complimentary pages devoted to the donors particularly those who have no stake whatsoever in SMSS such as the major corporate donors, Dayle Elsesser, the Church Donors and many golf-hole sponsors.

Rest assured that our main consideration for putting on those extra or complimentary pages were not to strut or show off our feathers, but to help promote SMSS to donors and to the world at large.

VI. Parting Words

It has been 6 long years since I became your faithful servant, starting June 5, 2003 when the idea of an alumni and friends foundation was born in St. Luke's and All Saints Church, Union City, New Jersey.

I tried my best to help rally SMSS alumni and friends to the rescue of SMSS from the brink of closure. SMSS is still alive and kicking with a much brighter future.

It is now time for me to give chance to other individuals to help led SMSSAFF continue to be an effective partner of SMSSI.

Note: Mr. Lambert Sagalla continued to get actively involved in helping steer the Chicago, Toronto, and Maryland SMSSAFF Conferences. He missed the 2nd Los Angeles Conference to attend the Igorot International Conference (IIC) held in Hawaii which was unfortunately scheduled during the same date as the aforesaid SMSSAFF conference. He also missed the 2nd Vancouver SMSSAFF conference for health reasons.