

Marcelino “Mena” Crisólogo y Pecson

Filipino Writer, Politician, Poet



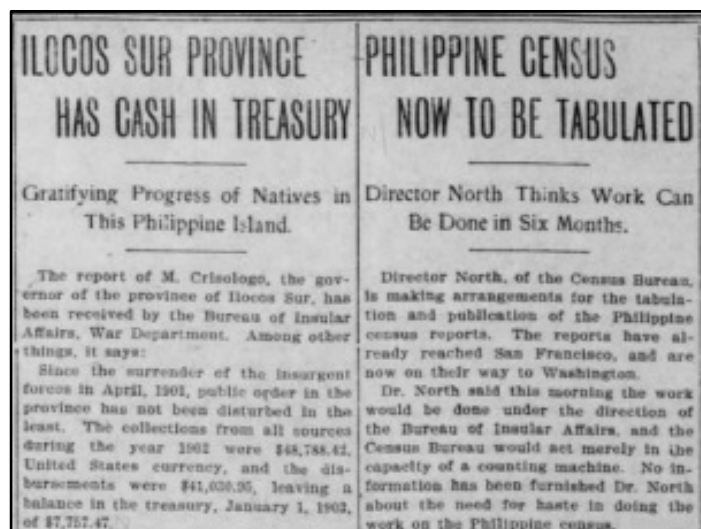
Mena's photograph, 1903 Census.

The U.S. Census Bureau continually strives to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. For this reason, it has always embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce that is representative of the local communities. In the middle of the 19th century, the United States expanded west into areas formerly governed by Spain and Mexico. Since many of the citizens and local officials only spoke Spanish, the Census Office quickly realized that it needed to employ workers fluent in the language. The establishment of a permanent Census Bureau in 1903 and increased immigration from Cuba and Central and South America expanded the need for Spanish-speaking employees both in the field and at headquarters.

Marcelino Crisólogo y Pecson, who went by the nickname Mena, was born on November 11, 1844, in Vigan, province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Mena's father, Juanario Crisologo, was a mestizo leader from a modest background, while his mother, Dona

Eusabia Pecson, came from a wealthy family. Mena went to the University of Santo Tomas to become a lawyer, and served in Ilocos Sur as an attorney and ecclesiastical notary, while also owning an indigo farm.

Mena eventually married Felipa Florentino, who came from a wealthy family and whose sister was the famous female poet Leona Florentino. By 1895, Mena actively supported the Filipino revolutionary movement against Spain, and his skill and patriotism earned him a position in the



The Washington Times (Washington, DC)
24 September 1903.



Inaugural Session of the Malolos Congress, 1898.

From Wikimedia Commons (accessed 8 August 2017).

Malolos Congress—the Philippine Islands' first representational body—in 1898, where he helped draft and sign the Malolos Constitution. With the transfer of the Philippines to the United States in 1898, and the subsequent change in government, Mena received an American appointment as the first governor of Ilocos Sur in 1901. In 1902, the United States passed the Philippine Organic Act, which decreed the Philippines would be governed, in part, by a representational Philippine Assembly. This of course required a census of the population.

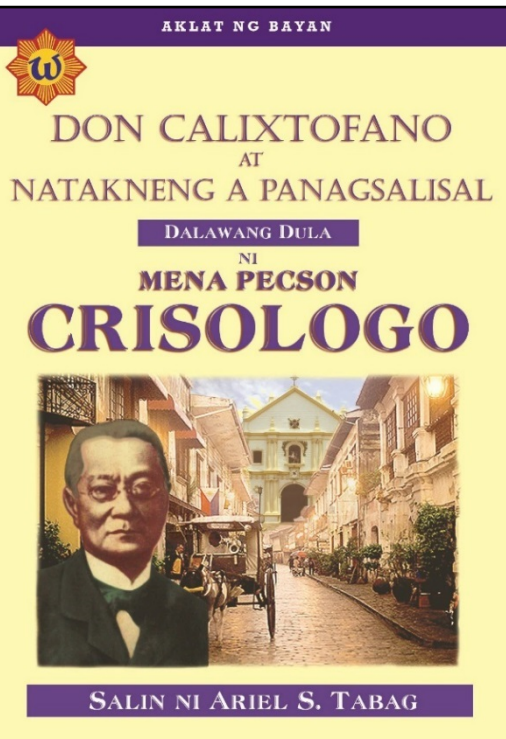
Additionally, the Organic Act stipulated that the census would not be conducted until the cessation of hostilities, and that the Assembly could only be formed if peace lasted for 2 years after the completion of the census. Accordingly, the Census of the Philippine Islands taken in 1903 had major implications for the governance of the islands. This importance, coupled with widespread illiteracy and mistrust of the American government among the populace, the Census Bureau determined that the provincial governors should be the district supervisors of the census.



Mena, sitting front center, with some of the enumerators of Ilocos Sur, 1903 Census.

In December of 1902, Mena spent 2 weeks in Manila going over the district maps and learning how to conduct the census. In mid-January, all of the governor-supervisors took charge of collecting their materials in Manila, packing them by hand, and then distributing them to their enumerators and special agents—who passed on their training to the local *presidentes* (mayors). On March 2, 1903, the Philippine census began, and Mena successfully spearheaded the count of 187,411 people, as well as the manufactures and agriculture of Ilocos Sur.

Following the successful completion of the 1903 Census, Mena continued serving as governor until 1904, when he resigned that position, as well as his position on the Ilocos Sur school board, which he had held concurrently with his governorship. From this point on in his life, Mena would devote his services to the recognition of Ilocano and Filipino art and culture. His first act took him to the United States where he participated in the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. Even though he traveled to St. Louis in his capacity as a Filipino



Modern copy of Mena's Ilocano translation of Don Quixote.

politician, Mena entered his artwork in several categories, where he earned an honorable mention in photography and a gold medal for a piece of wood furniture.

Some of Mena's notable works include the first Ilocan translation of the classic Spanish novel *Don Quixote*, his novel *Mining wenno Ayat ti Kararwa*, which is often compared to the work of Filipino icon Jose Rizal, and his plays *Codigo Municipal* and *Noble Rivalidad (Natakneng a Panagsalisal)*. Mena wrote comedic plays and *zarzuelas* and he helped found the *Gimong Dagiti Umiloko*, the precursor of *Gunglo Dagiti Mannurat nga Ilokano (GUMIL) Filipinas*, or Ilokanos Writers Association of the Philippines, one of the country's largest regional writers' groups. Mena continued contributing to Filipino and Ilkano culture until he passed away on July 5, 1927.

The U.S. Census Bureau is grateful for Mena's contributions to its mission, the Philippine Islands, and the United States.



Mena's memorial marker, on Calle Crisologo in Vigan.

From Wikimedia Commons (accessed 8 August 2017).