

MAHAPLAG ARCHIVE / PDF READING COPY

# Main History of Mahaplag

*By Noel C. Ayoc and contributing local historians*

Early settlement to the present

**ABOUT THIS READING COPY**

A source-led account of Mahaplag's early settlement, landscape, migration, political formation, and the memories preserved in its barangay names.

Language: English with Cebuano, Waraynon-Binisaya, and Filipino terms preserved

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EARLY SETTLEMENT TO 1972

# Early Beginnings

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A public transportation vehicle, ca. 1920.

## CHAPTER 1

A public transportation vehicle, ca. 1920. Photo courtesy of John Arradaza (Baybay, Leyte). Reproduced from Emil B. Justimbaste, *Ugmok: A Brief History of Ormoc* (2022), Amazon, <https://www.amazon.com/Ugmok-brief-history-Ormoc-City/dp/BoBCWQGHXL>

During the Spanish and American colonial periods, historical records frequently mentioned established towns such as Sogod, Abuyog, and Baybay, while the area now known as Mahaplag remained largely unrecorded in formal colonial documentation. This archival silence does not necessarily indicate historical absence; rather, it reflects Mahaplag's position as a transitional upland frontier zone situated between major coastal and inland settlements.<sup>1</sup>

From a spatial-historical perspective, Mahaplag functioned as a corridor landscape characterized by gently rolling uplands, forested interiors, and dispersed river systems. Such environments in the Visayas were often not heavily documented by colonial administrators unless they were economically or strategically mobilized.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, these uplands likely served dual functions: as agricultural frontiers for early swidden farming and as refuge zones during periods of colonial disruption and armed resistance.

Geographically, Mahaplag occupies a strategic interior position in Leyte Island, linking western and southern corridors to the eastern seaboard, including Tacloban, the provincial capital. This connectivity later shaped patterns of migration, settlement expansion, and resource extraction.

The absence of Mahaplag in early colonial records should be interpreted within the broader historiography of Philippine upland societies, where interior landscapes were frequently marginalized. William Henry Scott emphasizes that precolonial Visayan societies were characterized by mixed subsistence systems combining rice agriculture, root crops, and forest-based resources, allowing for flexible settlement patterns across ecological zones.<sup>3</sup>

Within this interpretive framework, Mahaplag emerges as part of a non-centralized upland habitation system, where settlements were necessarily fragile and adaptive—dispersed along rivers, hidden in forested landscapes, structured by kinship, and lightly built to withstand the uncertainties of the period.

## Origins of Settlement

Mahaplag's early history is closely tied to Abuyog, its mother municipality. In the early Spanish colonial period, Abuyog in Leyte was entrusted as an encomienda first to Don Gaspar de los Reyes and later to Don Francisco Albarez, whose oppressive tribute collections stirred deep resentment among the natives.<sup>4</sup> In 1588, the people rose in revolt and fatally attacked the encomendero.<sup>5</sup> This incident exposed the dangers of encomienda abuses, hardened Spanish attitudes, instilled mistrust among the natives, and delayed Abuyog's full incorporation into the missionary network. This provides an important historical backdrop for understanding patterns of movement and settlement, suggesting that contemporaneous shifts into the interior—areas that would later form part of Mahaplag—may already have been underway.

Initial settlements likely emerged as swidden (kaingin) farms established by migrants from Abuyog and nearby communities. Scott notes that Visayan subsistence patterns in the sixteenth century centered on mixed agriculture, combining rice cultivation with root crops such as taro and yams.<sup>6</sup> Given the difficulty of sustaining year-round rice production, early settlers depended on diversified food sources, shaping both land use and settlement patterns.

This pattern of upland occupation persisted into the twentieth century, as demonstrated in the case studies of Dargantes and Koch on forest land use in Leyte.<sup>7</sup> They observed that kaingin practices contributed significantly to the occupation and cultivation of logged-over areas. Former concession lands, such as those of the Velbros Timber Corporation, were gradually converted into agricultural spaces following the cessation of operations in 1973. Residents in adjacent communities began planting coconut and cultivating these areas, although some parcels were later sold to entrepreneurs from Mahaplag, Abuyog, and Javier who expanded coconut production.

Furthermore, their study highlights the barangays of Hinaguimitan and Uguis, which later formed part of the Mahaplag Settlement Project—the precursor to the Leyte Settlement Project (LSP). Established through Proclamation No. 418, approved on July 1, 1994, the program aimed to resettle landless farmers, qualified farming families, and rebel returnees.

This pattern of dispersal and land transformation reflects a broader Philippine colonial and postcolonial trend in which upland environments functioned as refuge zones during periods of resistance, economic transition, and ecological change. From these movements, early settlement forms in Mahaplag gradually took shape.

## Indigenous Mobility and the Mamanuan Comparative Lens

A useful interpretive framework for understanding Mahaplag's upland landscape can be drawn from studies on Indigenous mobility in Eastern Visayas and Mindanao. Kahambing describes Indigenous groups as historically itinerant, with movements shaped by forest ecology, resource availability, and socio-political displacement.<sup>8</sup> The Mamanuan identity is linguistically associated with *man* (first) and *banwa* (forest or settlement), referring to early forest dwellers. This framing highlights their association with upland ecosystems and resource-based mobility.

Kahambing further conceptualizes diaspora as a “vanishing mediator,” useful for understanding upland ecologies such as Mahaplag, where mobility is not merely displacement but a mode of inhabiting forest landscapes shaped by resources such as rattan (*uway*) and medicinal plants.

The presence of *ka-olisihan* (rattan-rich zones) in Mahaplag's forest interiors, such as Palanogan, aligns with this resource economy.<sup>9</sup> Even without direct historical evidence of a permanent Mamanuan settlement in Mahaplag, ecological parallels suggest that the area functioned as part of a broader Visayan upland mobility corridor.

## Riverine Landscapes

Early settlement in Mahaplag was strongly oriented toward rivers, creeks, and tributaries like Mahaplag, Campin, Hilusig, Pinamonoan, Polahongon, and Hiluctogan.<sup>10</sup> These waterways functioned as connective arteries facilitating transport, trade, and cultural exchange. The Layog River, in particular, played a crucial role in mobility and later in timber transport during the logging era. The term “Layog District,” used prior to municipal establishment, reflects its historical centrality. Nick Joaquin notes that Philippine society has long been shaped by water-based lifeways influencing settlement and cultural patterns.<sup>11</sup>

## Kinship and Community Formation

There is no single documented account identifying the first settlers of Mahaplag. Consistent with decentralized *barangay* systems, settlement formation occurred through kinship-based migration networks.<sup>12</sup> Dargantes and Koch argue that strong family ties are manifested in clustering of households and shared production systems, reinforcing usufruct rights over forest lands transmitted through inheritance.<sup>13</sup>

Oral histories from Palanogan show that families such as Montiman and Escasinas trace their origins to Pomponan, Baybay, while the Alajas lineage traces to Caridad, Baybay.<sup>14</sup>

Migration extended beyond Leyte. Southern Cebu—particularly Argao and Dalaguete—and Loon, Bohol facilitated maritime movement across the Camotes Sea. Migrants typically passed through coastal towns such as Baybay, Hindang, Inopacan, Hilongos, Bato, and Matalom before moving inland to Mahaplag. Migrants from Loon initially engaged in itinerant trade before permanent settlement.<sup>15</sup> By the 1970s, Muslim traders had also become active in the poblacion market, with some later putting down permanent roots in the community.<sup>16</sup> One notable example was Hadji Sariff Raconday, a native of Taraka, Lanao del Sur, who married Josefina Borja of Tahud, Inopacan. He began a trading business in Mahaplag and later encouraged family members and relatives to join him in the area.

## Road Development, Timber Extraction and Settlement Expansion

The development of Mahaplag as a distinct settlement—and later as a municipality—must be understood in relation to the construction of the trans-island road linking Abuyog on the eastern coast and Baybay on the western coast of Leyte. Conceived as early as 1903 during the American Insular Government, this infrastructure project formed part of a broader colonial agenda aimed at strengthening administrative control and promoting economic integration across the island. In an official report submitted to the Philippine Commission that same year, Seely B. Patterson proposed the construction of a trans-island wagon road, identifying the absence of a reliable east–west route across Leyte’s central mountain range as a major impediment to mobility, governance, and trade.<sup>17</sup>

The proposed route, measuring approximately 45 kilometers, traversed rugged and largely inaccessible terrain that, at the time, was connected only by narrow mountain trails. Patterson recommended a budget of \$30,000 for what he described as a first-class wagon road engineered with proper grading and drainage, and surfaced with macadam or compacted gravel to support the movement of heavy carts and freight wagons. Although conceived in the early American period, the road was only completed in 1936 and formally inaugurated by Sergio Osmeña, then Vice President of the Commonwealth under Manuel L. Quezon.

The opening of this trans-island corridor marked a turning point in the spatial and economic development of this inland area of Leyte. Settlements expanded along this corridor such as Hilusig, Cuatro de Agosto, and Liberacion. By facilitating easier movement of people, goods, and government services, the road stimulated migration into previously remote upland areas, including what would later become Mahaplag. Settlements along the route gradually expanded as agricultural opportunities increased and access to coastal markets improved. Over time, these growing communities developed a degree of economic viability and administrative coherence that supported their eventual political separation from Abuyog. Thus, the establishment of Mahaplag as a municipality in 1958 can be seen not as an isolated administrative act, but as the culmination of decades of infrastructural development and settlement consolidation initiated by the construction of the Abuyog–Baybay trans-island road.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Mahaplag's forests were integrated into regional logging networks. Concessions were granted to Veloso enterprises, Highland Sawmill, Maco Stevedoring Corporation (Mastecor), and Timber Producers and Marketing Corporation (TMPC).<sup>18</sup>

Infrastructure development accelerated extraction. The Baybay–Abuyog Road, inaugurated in 1936 by Sergio Osmeña Sr., connected eastern and western Leyte, facilitating movement of timber and labor.<sup>19</sup>

The 1950s saw intensified logging along the Layog River, with concessionaires establishing sawmills under Bureau of Forestry permits. Worker settlements known as pong-on emerged, and cleared forest lands were converted into abaca and coconut farms.<sup>20</sup> Land suitability perceptions encouraged occupation of logged-over areas, as noted by Dargantes and Koch.<sup>21</sup> This led to the emergence of settlements such as Brgy. Hinaguimitan.

Road networks such as Poblacion–San Isidro, Malinao–San Juan, and Hilusig–Magsuganao were built to support logging operations. In 1962, Highland Sawmill began operations in San Juan, later succeeded by Mastecor.<sup>22</sup>

The latter half of the twentieth century marked a transition from river-based to road-based transport. The Mahaplag–Sogod Road, surveyed in 1962 and opened in 1972, improved regional connectivity.<sup>23</sup>

The 48.22 km Mahaplag–Hilongos Road infrastructure project, which starts at Brgy. San Isidro in Mahaplag and passes through the municipalities of Inopacan and Hindang before reaching Brgy. San Roque in Hilongos, Leyte, is expected to significantly reduce travel time between Tacloban City and Maasin City in Southern Leyte in the near future.<sup>24</sup>

## Mahaplag as a Political Unit

Mahaplag became an independent municipality on July 21, 1958, through Executive Order No. 308 issued by President Carlos P. Garcia, with the support of Speaker Daniel Z. Romualdez.<sup>25</sup> The Order designated Barrio Mahaplag as the seat of government and delineated seventeen additional barrios to constitute the newly established municipality, namely: Hilusig, Cuatro de Agosto, Liberacion, Himamara, Tagaytay, Hinaguimitan, Upper Mahaplag, Palanogan, Campin, Mabunga, Mahayag, Malinao, Union, Uguis, Mahayahay, Polahongon, and Pinamonoan.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Magsuganao, Paril, Malipoon, Sta. Cruz, San Isidro, San Juan, Maligaya, Mabuhay, Hiluctugan, and Sto. Niño are relatively newer barangays.

The municipality was inaugurated on October 11, 1958, with Angel I. Gubat appointed as its first mayor (1958–1960) and Cayetano P. Bartolini as vice mayor. In the November 1960 elections, Felicisimo T. Abuyabor became the first elected mayor, with Ishmael Lleve serving as vice mayor. Republic Act No. 6529 later declared Mahaplag, on July 22, 1972, as a duly constituted municipality in the Province of Leyte, with the seat of government in Barangays Malinao and San Isidro.<sup>27</sup>

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## LOCAL MEMORY ACROSS GENERATIONS

# Names of the Barangays

Prepared directly from documents/brgy names.md; sensitive and disputed accounts remain attributed as local accounts.

## Mahaplag, Leyte and Its Barangays

The Municipality of Mahaplag (10°35'11" N, 124°58'23" E) is composed of 28 barangays covering about 127.4 square kilometers. It is located approximately 29 kilometers east of Baybay, 30 kilometers southwest of Abuyog, and 35 kilometers north of Sogod. Its landscape of rivers, creeks, forests and hills has greatly influenced where people settled and how places came to be named.

Many of Mahaplag's barangay names are closely connected to rivers and creeks. In many cases, these waterways are identified according to where they end or flow into another body of water. Their names are often based on noticeable features of the surrounding environment, such as the shape of the land, the plants that grow nearby, or other distinctive natural characteristics. These names were not chosen by chance. They reflect how early residents understood, described, and remembered the places where they lived.

This way of naming places also reflects a broader Filipino way of seeing the world. Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano observed that Filipinos traditionally understand space through relationships and orientation rather than through fixed directions alone. Expressions such as Ilaya (toward the upstream or uplands) and Ilawod (toward the downstream), as well as Babaw (upper) and Ubos (lower), show how people identify places based on their relationship to rivers, mountains, and other landmarks. In Mahaplag, many place names preserve this same way of understanding the landscape.

More than simple geographic labels, the barangay names of Mahaplag are part of the municipality's cultural heritage. They preserve the memories of earlier generations and reveal how people lived in close relationship with the natural environment. Through these names, the history of the land, its waterways, and its people continues to be remembered and passed on to future generations.

## Mahaplag

Before 1958, Mahaplag was one of the barangays under the jurisdiction of Abuyog, Leyte, encompassing what are now Barangays Poblacion, Upper, and Sta. Cruz. The name Mahaplag derives from the Waraynon-Binisaya language, where the prefix ma- often denotes a condition or state, and haplag means "low-lying," "flat," "sunken," or "depressed." This meaning is comparable to the etymology of Ormoc, which comes from ugmok, referring to a settlement situated in a depressed or low-lying area relative to its surroundings.

The Mahaplag River empties into a broad, flat expanse of land that is easily accessible by water. The town center of Mahaplag is situated on alluvial deposits formed by the Layog River to the southeast, the Mahaplag River to the north, and the Tindog River to the west. Compared with the elevated terrain of neighboring Tindog, the area is relatively low and level. The name Tindog, meaning

"upright" or "elevated," forms a natural contrast with Mahaplag, illustrating a common practice in place naming where locations are identified through contrasting geographical features.

Among the earliest known settlers were members of the Retana family from Matagnao and Salvacion in the eastern part of Abuyog. According to local tradition, they began their journey at the Higasaan River, traveled downstream to the Cadac-an River, continued upstream along the Layog River, and eventually established their settlement near the Mahaplag River.

One of the earliest communities in the area was Sitio San Vicente, formerly known as Ka Monico in honor of Monico Enehente, one of its first settlers from Hilongos, Leyte, who arrived in the 1920s. The sitio later adopted San Vicente Ferrer as its patron saint, giving rise to its present name.

In Sitio Tinago, the family of Isabel Bergado was among the earliest settlers. The name Tinago, meaning "hidden," reflects the sitio's relatively secluded location from the town center and its reputation in earlier times as a hiding place for individuals who had committed minor offenses.

Another notable sitio is Kinawit, whose name comes from the word kawit, meaning "hook." The name describes a creek that branches from San Vicente, curves like a hook, and eventually joins the Layog River.

Meanwhile, Sitio Calubian derives its name from the abundance of coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.) trees that once grew in the area. Antonino Retana is recognized in local accounts as one of its earliest settlers.

## Campin

The present-day Barangay Campin was formerly known as Sitio Campilas. The name Campilas is believed to have originated from the word *kampilason*, meaning "easily cut or sliced with a *kampilan*" (a traditional bladed weapon similar to a bolo). The name likely referred to the soft clay soil found along a nearby creek (*bugaon*), where the early settlers established their homes.

In 1940, Genaro Fernandez led the initiative to have Campilas recognized as an official barangay. In the years that followed, the barangay came to be known as Campin. Among its notable leaders was Petronilo Empuesto, a barangay captain who donated land for the construction of the community's elementary school.

Northwest of the main settlement, across Campilas Creek, Sitio Pong-on Gamay developed as a smaller community for families who wished to live closer to their farms.

Another notable sitio is Banana Zone, formerly known as Sitio Fernandez (Genaro). Its present name recalls the banana plantation that once occupied the area where the community basketball court now stands.

## Cuatro de Agosto (Crossing)

The place name Cuatro de Agosto derives from August 4, 1906, the date of a violent Pulahan raid on the poblacion of Abuyog, Leyte during the American colonial period. In the early hours of that day, about one hundred armed Pulahanes, reportedly led by Baldomero Tisado and linked to other insurgent leaders such as Pablo Tisado, attacked the municipal center. They killed three policemen, wounded another, seized firearms, and burned the municipal building, destroying official records and disrupting local governance. The violence extended to targeted killings of civilians accused of aiding colonial authorities and looting of supplies. Archival accounts indicate that the raid formed part of a broader, coordinated Pulahan movement across Leyte.

The adoption of Cuatro de Agosto as a barangay name reflects a deliberate act of memorialization. Originally a barangay of Abuyog, it later became one of the eighteen barangays that formed the Municipality of Mahaplag in 1958. Significantly, Cuatro de Agosto occupies a strategic crossing point connecting Abuyog to the north, Baybay to the west, and Sogod (Southern Leyte) to the south, situating the toponym within key routes of movement and exchange.

## Hiluctogan

The name Hiluctogan comes from the massive Loctog tree (*Duabanga moluccana* Blume) that once stood by the Hiluctogan River, near where it meets the Cabahian River. The original settlement was situated in this river confluence area (sabang) before moving to the present barangay site. The first notable settlers were the Palla family, who were later joined by the Puda family from Matalom and the Cuarteros family from Sogod, Southern Leyte.

Hiluctogan was officially established as one of the new barangays following the creation of the municipality of Mahaplag in 1958. However, its historical significance predates this period. The present barangay site, particularly the elementary school site, was once the location of John Veloso's sawmill, which operated when Mahaplag was still part of the municipality of Abuyog, Leyte.

## Hilusig

Hilusig's name traces back to this wide river which is also tributary of Himay-angan (in between Tagpili and Hilusig proper). In the past, this place was a dense forest, abundant with wildlife such as wild pigs and deer, making it a popular hunting ground for locals. Hunters, accompanied by their loyal dogs (pangayam), often rested or sought shelter near this river.

The name "Hilusig" is believed to have originated from the Cebuano-Binisaya phrase "Gihiluan'g hingusig," referring to an incident involving a hunting dog known for its relentless and intrusive barking, which disturbed others in the area. Because of this, a rival hunter secretly poisoned the dog. The animal was later found dead near the river.

Among the first settlers in Hilusig were Southern Cebuanos, who arrived to clear the dense forest through kaingin (slash-and-burn agriculture). They cultivated root crops, abaca, and coconut, which became the foundation of the community's livelihood. Hilusig was already recognized as a

barangay under the municipality of Abuyog before Mahaplag became an independent municipality in 1958. Historical records show that Eustaquio Pancito served as the barangay's first *teniente del barrio* in 1925, a testament to its established community structure even in the early 20th century.

Sitio San Roque was named after the sitio's patron saint.

Tagpili was named after the pili tree (*Canarium ovatum* Engl.), which once thrived in the area. Previously, the place was known as Sitio Sinaw, a name linked to an incident during the height of logging operations in the area. At the time, some women engaged in transactional relationships with logging firm workers. According to local accounts, one such woman exposed herself, prompting a remark that her skin was "clean and shiny" (*sinaw*), which led to the sitio's former name.

## Himamara

Before becoming part of Mahaplag, this barangay was known as Hilaluna under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Abuyog. Key community leaders including Marciano Bug-atan, Abdon Cahigus, Maximino Carawana, Gregorio Casas, Ponciano Dicdican, Apolinario Llanos, and Trangui Precilda, initiated the construction of a chapel that became a focal point of community life.

In 1958, the barangay was officially incorporated into Mahaplag and renamed Himamara after the Himamara River. The name, derived from the Waraynon-Binisaya term meaning "dried up," reflects the unique phenomenon of the river mysteriously running dry during the summer months, leaving locals to wonder where its waters vanish. This natural occurrence became an enduring symbol of the barangay's identity.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, vehicular access to Himamara was primarily via Sitio Lourdes in Balinsasayao. However, the completion of the Vicinal Upper-Tagaytay-Himamara Road dramatically improved connectivity and has since become the preferred route, solidifying Himamara's relevance as a vital part of the municipality.

The name of Sitio Bayugan, a community southwest of the barangay proper and across the Layog River, comes from a local story. A man named Celi once tested the sharpness of his bolo by striking a submerged tree trunk, or *batang*, in the river which happened to be a 'bayugan'—a wood traditionally used by local residents to tell the time.

During the era of Mahaplag's "river culture," Sitio Bayugan, due to its wide plains, was an important port for transporting agricultural products like abaca and copra. The community's first leader was Juan Japon from Abuyog, followed by Maximino Carawana from Dalaguete, Cebu, and then Meyong Rosales.

## Hinaguimitan

The name Hinaguimitan originates from the Haguimit tree (*Ficus minahassae* (Tenejum and de Vr.) Mig.), a keystone species that flourished along the banks of the Hinaguimitan River. The barangay was established in 1953 on land owned by Leoncio Bug-atan, with Sergio Llanos serving as the first *teniente del barrio*. However, the original settlement faced a significant setback when it was devastated by a flood. In 1955, Mattias Llanos, Sergio's father, donated a hectare of land, which became the barangay's new site. This relocation marked a fresh start for the community, which at the time consisted of 33 households. The first classroom was built with nipa and its first teacher was Mr. Antonio Pasayloon. Mr. Marcial Llanos, who succeeded Sergio, spearheaded the mapping of barangay roads and oversaw the construction of the barangay chapel. The Llanos originated from Dalaguete, Cebu.

## Liberacion

In the 1950s, this place was known as Tilaub, a Cebuano-Binisaya term referring to boiled young corn on the cob, a staple snack peddled to travellers journeying between Abuyog and Baybay. Tilaub served as the original *divisoria* or intersection for those heading towards the Mahaplag area after the inauguration of the Baybay-Abuyog Road in 1936. It also functioned as a vibrant marketplace and meeting point, hosting a *tabu* (market day) where farm products from nearby communities, such as Palanogan and Villa Solidaridad, were sold and bartered.

When Mahaplag was later established as a municipality, the area was officially renamed Barangay Liberacion. Stories passed down speak of the Nibga Creeks west of the barangay as a place of quiet resistance, where a local guerrilla unit formed by former Abuyog Police Chief Catalino T. Landia carried out hit-and-run attack against patrolling Japanese forces on July 29, 1942.

Yet despite the official name, many residents continued to call the place Mohon. The name came from the boundary marker that stood there, long marking the division between the municipalities of Mahaplag and Baybay. To the people, the marker was more than stone—it was a reminder of borders crossed daily by traders, travelers, and neighbors, and of a place shaped as much by memory as by maps.

## Mabuhay

In 1967, Mayor Jose Dycoco officially recognized Mabuhay as an independent barangay under the leadership of Mr. Jesus Aguillon. Before gaining its status as a barangay, the area was known as Sitio Tagaytay, part of Brgy. Uguis.

During one of the community's *tagbo*—a gathering to discuss the formal establishment of their barangay—they were inspired by a chant heard over the radio: “Mabuhay, mabuhay ang Pilipinas!” The uplifting phrase, which translates to “Long live the Philippines!” resonated deeply with the community’s aspirations for growth and independence. Thus, the name Mabuhay was chosen to embody their collective hope and pride as they forged a new identity for their barangay.

## Mabunga

The roots of Brgy. Mabunga trace back to 1937, when Felipe Sotil Sr. and his family from Inopacan, Leyte settled in the area. Two years later, in 1939, they were joined by Pablo Oca and his family. By 1952, the settlement was officially established as a barangay unit, with Mr. Felipe Sotil Sr. appointed as its first *teniente del barrio*. The name Mabunga was derived from the bunga (Areca catechu L.; Family Palmae), or betel nut, a key ingredient in the traditional practice of chewing *mama* or *nganga*. In 1958, community development took a significant step forward when Gavino Dumangas donated a piece of his land for the establishment of the barangay elementary school site. During this period, Kapitan Dolores Sotil spearheaded the construction of classrooms for Grades 1 and 2, using local materials such as wood and bamboo.

## Magsuganao

Brgy. Magsuganao sits on an elevated ridge providing commanding view of the surrounding mountain ranges. The Cebuano-Binisaya word *ganay*, referring to a reverberating sound that echoes and lingers, or to something extending in a long line. Given the barangay's mountainous terrain, the name evokes the experience of "reverberating mountain ranges," where echoes travel across the valleys and successive ridges, capturing both the soundscape and the continuous view of the expansive landscape.

Magsuganao initially started as a *sitio* (village) of Barangay Hilusig. The area saw significant activity when the Maco Stevedoring Corporation (Mastecor), a large logging company from Mindanao, began operations there. Mastecor's operations included constructing a sawmill in lowland Hilusig and building a road leading to Magsuganao, facilitating large-scale logging in the region. The company ceased operations after Typhoon Asyang struck in 1972. Following this, waves of settlers, primarily from lowland Hilusig, moved to Magsuganao to cultivate crops. Small-scale logging persisted in the area into the late 1990s.

In 1981, Magsuganao was declared a "no man's land" due to suspicions that a local councilor was associated with the New People's Army.

The present barangay site was donated by Ireneo Segunto, the third barangay chieftain of Magsuganao. The original barangay site, situated above the current Magsuganao Elementary School, was eventually abandoned due to its vulnerability to landslides and its remote location, which made it unsuitable for long-term habitation.

Magsuganao Elementary School was inaugurated on January 1, 1974, but faced periodic closures because of various challenges. Among these was the widespread infestation of *ugpong* (bunchy top disease) in abaca crops, which severely affected the primary source of livelihood for many residents. As a result, numerous families were compelled to return to lowland Hilusig in search of more stable economic opportunities.

The barangay also once had a *sitio* known as Lagdic, located in its far western portion. However, the area was abandoned after the *ugpong* infestation rendered it economically unsustainable.



## Mahayag

The name Mahayag is derived from the root word hayag, which means "light," "bright," or "well-illuminated." This name reflects the predominantly Seventh-Day Adventist population of the barangay, who associate it with the peaceful and harmonious atmosphere of their community. The school site and a significant portion of the residential area were generously donated by Francisco Angcoy, one of the first settlers, alongside Antero Sano and Manuel Aralan. The area includes a sitio named Cabilic, attributed to Juan Cabilic, who was the first to settle there. It is also known as Sitio Tindog.

## Mahayahay

Mahayahay derived its name from the gently rolling hill that extends from the highway down to the barangay proper, as well as from the refreshing breeze that flows from the Layog River. The area's serene and pleasant environment inspired the name Mahayahay, a Cebuano term meaning "comfortable" or "pleasant." Among the earliest known settlers of Mahayahay were the Bajora, Dizon, Cabardo, Estuita, and Banquesio families.

(It has hayahay as root word which according to historian Prof. Rolando Borrinaga was confusingly transcribed as "ayuey" by Loarca in 1582. The Hayahay were virtually permanent slaves under the pre-colonial social order equivalent of the Tagalog aliping saguigulid, who lived as dependents in the houses of their datos or masters. The Tuháy (correct, proper, right) – slaves that did not avail of the King's freedom order; became free Timawâ by paying their debts.) According to the Boxer Codex, the Bisayan uripon (slaves) were classified into tuhay—those who lived independently, akin to the Tagalog aliping namamahay—and hayahay, the housebound slaves comparable to the aliping sagigilid. While tuhay connoted dignity and self-sufficiency, hayahay once referred to the most subjugated and dependent class. Over time, however, the term hayahay ironically evolved to mean "comfortable" or "easy," a semantic shift that emerged after the Spanish abolition of slavery disrupted precolonial social hierarchies and redefined notions of freedom and status.

Situated along the highway is a sitio called Tagbinunga, named after the abundance of binunga trees (*Macaranga tanarius* (L.) Muell. Arg.) that grow along the Tagbinunga Creek. One of the recognized early settlers in the area was Sergio D. Dador, a descendant of Jose S. Dador and Bonifacia Daclan.



## Maligaya

Before its official declaration as a barangay, Maligaya was formerly known as Nawad-an, a Cebuano-Binisaya term meaning “lost” or “disappeared.” The name was derived, quite ironically, from an incident involving a mentally challenged individual who was often seen wandering around Mahaplag’s población and was later found dead beneath a tree near the entrance of what would become the barangay site. Additionally, local accounts tell of people who had unknowingly followed concealed trails leading to nearby communities, while others were said to have fallen victim to *mino*—a phenomenon attributed to nature spirits who allegedly played tricks on travelers. After several days of disorientation, these individuals were said to eventually regain their senses and return home.

The area initially consisted of farmlands primarily planted with abaca and coconut. Landowners from various places established small huts or temporary shelters (*payag*) within the site. In 1971, Esteban Cuenco, who would later serve as the first *teniente del barrio*, took the initiative to organize the community and spearhead its formal recognition as Barangay Maligaya in 1973. His wife, Martha, chose St. Vincent Ferrer as the barangay’s patron saint, recognizing the community’s distance from hospitals and the need for a spiritual healer. Antonio Pobadora, together with his wife Visitacion Montalban, generously donated approximately three hectares of land to serve as the barangay site. During the height of NPA activity in the area, the community was declared a “no man’s land,” forcing residents to temporarily abandon their homes, to which they were only able to return in 1989.

## Malinao

The earliest settlement in Brgy. Malinao was established in Ilawod, on the northwestern part of the current barangay site on a land owned by Francisco “Ikoy” Ramal from Tejeros, Hilongos. His family was soon joined by the families of Domingo Abrantes and Heracleo Abenoja from Hindang, and Toribio Vanzuela from Matalom, forming a close-knit community. A chapel was constructed to honor Berhin dela Paz (Berhin sa Kalinaw), a statue brought to the settlement by Toribio and Sotera Vanzuela. This act of devotion became the inspiration for the barangay’s name, Malinao. The first classroom for Grades 1 and 2 was set up in the house of Francisco Ramal, with Ms. Epifania Makasukol serving as the pioneering teacher.

In 1948, Mr. Pacifico Matol facilitated the official recognition of Malinao as a barangay under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Abuyog, Leyte. Heracleo Abenoja was appointed as the first *teniente del barrio*, with Vidasto Napoles serving as his deputy.

As the population grew, the community opted to relocate to its current site, which belonged to the Abenoja family. Although the original settlement in Ilawod offered a wide and flat area, its proximity to a river posed challenges, as heavy rains frequently caused flooding, hindering mobility.

The relocation was achieved through a collaborative effort known as *tagbo* and *bolhon*—a traditional practice of bartering community labor in exchange for land. The Abenojas exchanged their lot for one in the southern portion of the current site, located in Daliron.

## Malipoon

The current barangay site was once known as Makapay, a name derived from the presence of *tapahan* or *tap-anan*, traditional structures used for drying copra. Originally, the area was a sitio of Brgy. Altavista, Baybay, with only a few pioneering farmers calling it home.

As the population grew, the settlers sought the assistance of the Baybay local government to provide teachers for their makeshift primary school. However, it was the local government of Mahaplag that answered their request, ultimately leading to the integration of their community under Mahaplag's jurisdiction in 1968. The barangay was officially named Malipoon, in reference to the creek that serves as a natural boundary with Baybay. *Maliptung* (or *masagop*) means the water of the creek can form a pool when its flow is blocked by a fallen log or any object placed along its path.

Barangay Captain Sario Pedere and Mr. Felix Abenoja, donated parcels of land to establish the barangay site. Malipoon faced significant challenges during the 1980s, with escalating insurgent activity. Tragically, Barangay Captain Artemio Zabala fell victim to the violence, murdered by members of the New People's Army (NPA) during this turbulent period.

## Palanogan

Brgy. Palanogan derives its name from *Palanog* (*Calamus symphysipus* Mart. ex Walp.), a species of spiny, evergreen, climbing rattan palm which once thrived abundantly along Palanogan Creek in Ilaya.

The first settlers of Palanogan were Evaresto Amad (Amandoron) and his family from Southern Cebu, who settled on the gently hilly western side of Palanogan Creek, followed by Gabino P. Montiman's family from Baybay, who cleared the northern part of Ilaya. The current barangay site is near Nebga Creek, likely named after the palm genus *Nenga* (Arecaceae), reflects the riparian vegetation, including climbing rattans along Palanogan Creek, which may have influenced early place-naming.

Ownership of the present barangay site and its surrounding areas was initially said to be a *comprada* (a purchase or claim) by a certain Javier. However, this transaction did not materialize, paving the way for the Alajas brothers—Luis, Marcos, and Joaquin—and their relatives from Caridad, Baybay, to settle and claim ownership of land extending to the northernmost part of the barangay. The Escasinas family, led by Enrique D. Escasinas of Pomponan, Baybay, followed later, acquiring land parcels in the nearby areas.

By the time Sitio Palanogan had around 40 households, predominantly from the Montiman, Alajas, and Escasinas lineages, its residents took the initiative to transform it into a barangay unit, independent from Barangay Mahaplag under the municipality of Abuyog. The residents pooled resources to purchase a two-hectare plot of land on the eastern side of Palanogan Creek from Evaresto Amad to establish a barangay site.

Before World War II, Enrique D. Escasinas was appointed as *teniente del barrio* by Abuyog Mayor Pedro R. Gallego. Primary school classrooms were constructed but were closed during the height of the war.

The frequent flooding of the Nebga and Palanogan Creeks impeded residents' access to school, religious, and civic activities. This prompted Evaresto Amad and Rufino Alajas to exchange the original barangay site in Ilaya with the current location. By 1949, the San Isidro Chapel was relocated to its present site.

The insurgency of the New People's Army in the 1980s forced many residents from Ilaya and other distant areas to move closer to the barangay site. The resulting population growth created a demand for additional barangay lots, prompting expansion into adjacent areas.

## Paril

The settlement in Paril dates back to 1928, led by the families of Benigno de Asis, Sixto Bangcore, and Sixto Tabudlong from Abuyog, Leyte. Paril derives its name from a cave located on the eastern side of the barangay, known for its distinctive rock formations that create a natural hill resembling a barrier or enclosure. In Cebuano-Binisaya and other Visayan languages, *paril* refers to fences, enclosures, or natural boundaries, reflecting the cave's defining landscape.

During the Martial Law years, the cave served as a refuge for individuals seeking safety from armed soldiers. It also became a retreat for faith healers and *arbularyo*, who regarded it as a place of spiritual significance and healing. To this day, the cave stands as a lasting symbol of resilience and cultural heritage for the community.

## Pinamonoan

Brgy. Pinamonoan was first settled by farmers from Southern Leyte, many of whom, particularly from Sogod, disembarked at Brgy. Dagsa and journeyed along the Dughoon River. They then navigated the perilous Subajon River to reach Brgy. Pantag before finally arriving at the settlement. The name Pinamonoan is derived from the Cebuano-Binisaya word *buno*, meaning "killing." Local accounts suggest that the name commemorates a violent clash between two rival groups of hunters (*mangangayam*) near the river, which led to the area being known as the place of the killings—Pinamonoan.

The early settlers of the community came from diverse backgrounds: the Madis family hailed from Bontoc, Southern Leyte; the Ruba and Duarte families were from Sogod; and the Timkang and Asis families originated from Maasin.

Sitio Paraiso, located along the AH26, was first settled by Hermenio Duarte from Maasin, Southern Leyte. The name Paraiso, which translates to Paradise in English, was inspired by its role as a gathering spot for women who had transactional associations with workers—such as drivers and engineers—from the Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAG) and Go Construction Company. These groups were involved in infrastructure projects, including the construction of roads and bridges along the Mahaplag-Sogod Road in the early 1970s.

## Polahongon

The community of Polahongon is situated beside the Layog River. Historical accounts suggest that during periods of swelling and high waters, early settlers used small boats to navigate the river. They often stopped near the mouth of a tributary—now known as the Polahongon River—where reddish rock layers, exposed by erosion, were prominently visible. Settlers commonly referred to this landmark with the phrase “Sa may pula hunong” (Stop by the red area). Over time, this phrase was shortened to “Pula hunong,” which eventually evolved into the name Polahongon. This name became associated not only with the river but also with the community that later developed in the area.

Before the establishment of Mahaplag as a municipality, Polahongon was already a barangay under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Abuyog, Leyte. Early settlers of Polahongon were primarily migrants from Sogod, Southern Leyte, drawn to the area's potential for farming and abundant and diverse forests, which offered vast potential for economic livelihood. Polahongon is recognized as one of the most populous barangays in Mahaplag.

## San Isidro

Brgy. San Isidro, officially named in honor of its patron saint, is more commonly known as Pong-on. The name Pong-on comes from a Hiligaynon-Binisaya word meaning “a place where huts or houses are built in a group or cluster,” reflecting its history of gradual settlement and expansion.

Originally, Pong-on was a small sitio of Brgy. Mahayag, with only a few houses. Its population began to grow as more families moved in, largely driven by the construction of a road through the area. This road was initially built to support a sawmill operation, improving accessibility and stimulating economic activities. As transportation and trade flourished, more families settled in, transforming Brgy. San Isidro from a sparsely populated settlement into a thriving community.

The barangay's institutionalization is credited to Wenico Bantaculo, Sr., while its first chieftain, Esteban De Paz, Sr., led the Tagbo sa mga Baryohanon in 1964, further shaping its development.

## San Juan

This barangay was officially named San Juan, in honor of San Juan Bautista, whose feast day is celebrated annually on June 24. Before its formal naming, the area was commonly referred to as Highland, a name that originated from the Highland Sawmill Company, which set up its machinery and equipment on the property of Laurencio “Gauden” T. Gonzales in 1962. Remnants of the sawmill, including over 20 concrete pillar bases, can still be found near the elementary school site. The sawmill significantly contributed to the early development of the community, particularly in the opening of the Malinao–San Juan Road.

As a hinterland area, the barangay went through a difficult period in the 1980s due to the presence of the New People's Army (NPA). It was said that a nearby settlement existed called Mabito—derived from the word bito, meaning cave-like potholes where water drains.

It is said that a high-ranking Chinese mestizo associated with the sawmill brought with him an image of San Roque, which the early residents mistakenly believed to be San Juan Bautista. By the time the error was realized, the community had already been named San Juan. To affirm their patronage, the residents acquired an image of San Juan Bautista and placed it on the altar beside San Roque, honoring both saints in their local devotion.

## Sta. Cruz

Sta. Cruz, formerly known as Sitio Swating, was part of Mahaplag before it became a barangay. The name Sta. Cruz was chosen to honor the Holy Cross, with its feast celebrated annually on May 26-27. According to local accounts, the community's name was inspired by an encounter of three hunters (mangangayam). While resting under a large deciduous tree, they looked up and were astonished to see the branches naturally forming the shape of a cross. In 1959, the community was officially recognized as Barangay Sta. Cruz, with Ricardo Moroña serving as its first *teniente del barrio*.

## Sto. Niño

Barangay Sto. Niño was formally established in 1974 under the leadership of Mr. Gervacio Distresa, a devotee of the Sto. Niño de Cebu, after whom the barangay was named. Initially, it was known as Sitio Magkogon, a part of Barangay Polahongon. The land comprising the area was originally owned by Mr. Sergio Dador but was later sold to Mr. Felimon G. Apiag, Sr., who generously donated two hectares to serve as the current barangay site.

In 1983, the residents of Barangay Sto. Niño were temporarily relocated to Sitio Compound, along the highway in Barangay Polahongon, due to the growing threat of insurgency from the New People's Army (NPA). However, by 1987, the residents returned to their lands to resume farming and reestablish their community.

## Tagaytay

This place was once known as Pawala because travelers moving from north to south had to turn left at the Vicinal junction. The name Tagaytay comes from the Tagalog word *tagaytay*, which refers to a mountain ridge, a hilltop, or an elevated area of land—perfectly describing the barangay's location. As defined in a Filipino dictionary, *tagaytay* is a "*mahabà, makitid, at nakaangat na rabaw ng lupa; o tanikala ng mga gulod*" (a long, narrow, and elevated land surface or a chain of ridges).

One of the earliest settlers in the area was the large family of Bruno Empron from Kalumpang, Matalom, Leyte. Other prominent families include that of Galo Martinez from Pomponan, Baybay, and the Api family.

## Uguis

The name "Uguis" originates from a white monkey (the term uguis means "puti" or "white" in the local dialect) observed to inhabit the tiga (*Xanthostemon viridugonianus*) tree overlooking the Layog River. The original settlement was established near this site in 1940s, with Meliton C. Austero serving as the first *teniente del barrio*.

In 1946, the barangay government negotiated with Daniel Atay and Anecita Alvero, the original owners of the current barangay site, for an exchange of lands. This was necessitated by the frequent flooding of the original site near the Layog River. The new location, formerly known as Sitio Opong, provided a safer and more suitable area for settlement. It is situated near the Canaya Creek, which now serves as the barangay's southern boundary.

## Union

The area now known as Barangay Union was once a dense timberland that saw its first settlers in 1918. These pioneer families, including those of Pedro Picorro, Pelicula Dakot, Casani, Darasin, Sanico, Fernandez, and Bantaculo, engaged in *kaingin* (slash-and-burn agriculture), cultivating root crops such as sweetpotato, cassava, and taro, alongside coconut farming. As a tightly knit *bulhon* group, they worked collaboratively to clear and cultivate the land.

By 1920, the population grew as more relatives and friends joined the community, prompting the initiative to establish a formal barangay unit. Pedro Picorro was appointed the first *teniente del barrio*, naming the barangay "Union" to symbolize the harmonious collaboration of its settlers. Through collective efforts, the community established key infrastructure, including a primary school, spearheaded by Pelicula Dakot.

In the 1950s, the arrival of new families such as the Rallos and Oraño added to the community's growth. By 1961, Felino Oraño Sr., an entrepreneur, was elected as barangay captain, further advancing the development of the barangay. In 1969, Andres Didal assumed leadership and worked on constructing a road that connected Union to the national highway, improving accessibility and fostering progress.

The barangay continued to flourish with significant projects under its leaders. In 1981, during the term of Felomino Recamadas, a barangay water system was institutionalized. Later, under the leadership of Librada Bantaculo, a concrete bridge was constructed, symbolizing the barangay's ongoing progress and unity.

Sitio Inanggihan derives its name from a creek that serves as a natural passageway leading up to the mountain. Originally called Inagihan, meaning "the way," it functions as a route through the terrain.

## Upper

Barangay Upper was originally the northern, higher-elevation sitio of Barangay Mahaplag, which was then under the jurisdiction of Abuyog. When Mahaplag was elevated to municipality status in 1958, Barangay Upper was officially separated as an independent barangay, along with its component sitios, Vicinal and Taglibas. This geographical distinction is the reason behind its name, Barangay Upper. In the barangay proper, some of the earliest settlers included the De Paz, Montajes, Tanjay, Pacanan, and Lastimado families.

The name Vicinal is derived from the Spanish word vicinal, meaning "neighboring" or "pertaining to neighbors." True to its name, Sitio Vicinal serves as a connecting point for several nearby barangays—Palanogan and Malipoon to the west, Tagaytay and Himamara to the east, Paril to the north, and the barangay proper to the south. The settlement of Vicinal dates back to the 1890s, led by the Labrador, Degamo, Ortega, and Borinaga families from Baybay.

Sitio Taglibas takes its name from the libas tree (*Spondias pinnata*), after which the local creek is also named. This creek, originating from Liberacion and Palanogan, flows into the Mahaplag River within this area of Barangay Upper. Early settlers of Sitio Taglibas included Segundo A. Abenido and Vicente Campoamor from Bohol, as well as Floro and Fidel Maglinte from Bontoc, Southern Leyte. The Contero family, led by Maximino and Bernardo from Marao, Inopacan, were also among its pioneer residents. Infrastructure development in the sitio progressed over time, with the access road connecting it to the Maharlika Highway being constructed in 1998.