

The Story of Aurelio B. Montinola, Sr.

Contributed by The Web Master
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It was a year of turmoil. The people were quietly seething with repressed anger as the regime was getting more oppressive, more tyrannical. The moderates were agitating for meaningful reforms, but the radicals were preparing for violent change.

The year was 1894.

While Jose Rizal and his fellow ilustrados were seeking reforms, the young Andres Bonifacio was reading about the French Revolution and organizing the Katipunan. It was in that year, on April 14, when Aurelio was born to Basa Benedicto, wife of Ruperto Montinola. He was the first of the couple's six siblings: the others who were to follow - Remedios, Otilia (Mrs. Lacson), Maria (Mrs. Ledesma), Gloria (Mrs. Tabiana) and Vicente.

The patriarch Ruperto was a recognized political leader of the opposition party, the Democrata. Dubbed the "Colossus of the South," he served as Governor of Iloilo and later became a Senator. He represented the opposition in the so called Os-Rox (for Sergio Osmena and Manuel Roxas) mission to the United States as well as in the Philippine delegation that lobbied for the approval of the Hare Hawes-Cutting bill in the US Congress.

The young Aurelio received his early education in the public schools of Iloilo, transferred to the Ateneo de Manila where he finished high school, and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in the same school. From the Ateneo, he moved to the University of the Philippines to study law. He graduated in 1915 and after passing the Bar, joined his father to practice law in Iloilo.

His lucrative practice was interrupted in 1919 when he decided to pursue graduate studies in business which he felt would be a good combination to his legal background. He sailed to the United States enrolled in the School of Business Administration, New York University in 1921, he earned his MBA.

He went back to the Montinola - Montinola & Hontiveros Law Office (which later became the Montinola-Montinola - Hilado Law Office) to resume his law practice. At the same time, he started to engage in the sugar and real estate business.

In 1923, he married Juliana Javellana of the prominent and wealthy Javellana family of Iloilo. The union was to be blessed with seven children - Carmen (Mrs. Luz), Aurelio Jr., Roberto, Sergio, Lourdes (Mrs. Ordoveza), Teresita (Mrs. Macasaet), and Alice (Mrs. Recto). It was in 1935 that the family decided to move to Manila. Don Aurelio acquired a seat in the Manila Stock Exchange and became a partner of Ramon Araneta in the stock brokerage business. At the same time he continued to supervise the family's haciendas in Negros Occidental as well as to engage in the real estate business.

Don Aurelio's ventures into the nitty-gritty of business did not come until after World War II. In early 1945, just a few months after the liberation of Manila, a young Spanish friend of his, Cesar de Zulueta suggested to him the business of selling construction materials. Don Aurelio first met Mr. Zulueta before the war while he was building his house in Pasig and Mr. Zulueta was a salesman. In time, the two become friends.

"My first reaction," said Don Aurelio of Mr. Zulueta's suggestion then, "was one of skepticism, for Manila at that time was razed to the ground. Aside of Warsaw, no other city in the world was badly devastated as Manila which was the scene of a savage and destructive street-by-street and house-by-house fighting. I thought then that it would take ages to reconstruct such total destruction but Cesar, believing in the indomitable spirit of the Filipino people predicted that reconstruction would start soon and would continue at a sustained pace for years to come. I was convinced. With a few thousand pesos, Amon Trading Corporation was launched. in 1945."

The next few years were challenging and exciting for the neophyte entrepreneurs and for their new company. Those were years of growth although the way was not always smooth. They had their share of problems and difficulties; they had their shaky moments but they somehow always managed to come through unscathed. One such serious set-back was the imposition of Import Control in 1950. Ninety percent of the merchandise sold by Amon was imported and it was feared that the control would cut deeply into the company's operations. But they successfully weathered that crisis. It was at that time that Don Aurelio, together with some business friends pioneered into manufacturing ventures. If the government were to continue controlling imports then the logical thing to do was make the products in the country. Thus, in 1950 came Eternit Corporation, manufacturer of asbestos products - roofing, siding, pipes. Amon was importing from Belgium substantial quantities of these products. With the threat of import control, manufacturing the merchandise in the Philippines was a natural. This joint venture with the Belgians was a success even from its first year. Then followed Sherwin-Williams Paints in 1954 and Republic Cement Corporation in 1955. Again both companies were highly successful undertakings from the very beginning of their operations. These three manufacturing companies plus the acquisition of the control of Fil-Hispano Ceramics in 1963, were the corner stones of Amon's steady growth and progress. By then, Amon's imported merchandise were balanced with these locally manufactured products. With its sources of supply secured, sales volume continued to climb.

Between Eternit (1950) and Sherwin-Williams (1954), Don Aurelio's business activity was interrupted. He heeded the call of President Elpidio Quirino to join the government. On January 1, 1951, he was sworn in as Secretary of Finance, a

position he held for two years. During the same period, he was the presiding officer of the Monetary Board, member of the Council of State, Chairman of the National Economic Council and of the Fund Release Control Committee, and Chairman of the Committee on the Revision of the Trade Agreement With the US. His two year stint with the government was a shining example of rectitude and honesty. There was never a breath of scandal, never a hint of impropriety in the manner he discharged his duties as a high government official.

Out of the government by the end of 1953, he plunged back into the business world.

Meanwhile, Don Aurelio, who was a widower for about seven years since the death of Doña Juliana in 1949, met Eleonor Varona, a lovely and cultured lady from Iloilo also, and married her in June, 1956.

He got involved in more business enterprises. At one time or another, he was Chairman or president, not only of Amon, Republic, Eternit and Sherwin-Williams but also of the following companies: Far East Bank and Trust Co., Monja Securities Corporation, Monja Estate Inc., Philippine Prestressed Concrete, Luzon Bag Corporation, Private Development Corporation of the Philippines, National Life Insurance, Tabacalera Industrial Development Corp., Central Azucarera de Bais, Cia Cellulosa de Filipinas. He was also, at one time or another, director of more than a dozen other companies.

By the latter part of the 60's, as his sons took on wider responsibilities in running the various companies, Don Aurelio started to slow down his activities. He took a more leisurely pace in life traveling abroad more often for longer periods. And as time went on, he relinquished more and more of his powers to the able hands of his sons.

After a lingering illness, he passed away on November 18, 1985.

Information and pictures were provided by Aurelio B. Montinola's son - Sergio J. Montinola