

As I See It  
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## **'Molinos' in the International Rondalla Festival**

'Molinos' are the traditional mills used by the early 'muscovado' manufacturers in Silay. The production of sugar in Silay (Negros) started with a simple process wherein the canes (*Saccharum officinarum*) are squeezed between two cylindrical structures to produce 'jugo' (juice) to be cooked and become sugar later.

The two cylinders started with a pair of sturdy wood, later made of cement, much later... iron. The 'molinos' could either be 'molino de agua' (operated by the use of water force from the river); 'molino de sangre' (operated by the use of carabao, cow and later horse when the Americans were here); 'molino de fuego' (using fire); and later 'maquina vapor de horno economico' (steam engine) during the time of Yves Leopold Germaine Gaston in Silay. I was told by some old folks that there was even 'molino de viento' somewhere in Silay. It is operated by windmill.

There is another 'school of muscovado theory' that the primitive system of extracting juice from cane consisted of exerting pressure on a hand-or-foot-lever against a fixed wooden wood surface. The technique was later improved by crushing cane between two upright wooden rollers using human power. With the arrival of Chinese (the original sacadas) immigrants during the early decades of the Spanish occupation, stone cylinders replaced the wooden rollers.

Following that technology, the carabaos were used to operate these crude extractors. Muscovado (unrefined sugar, still with molasses) became important commercial trade item. Sugarcane juice was also fermented into wine (just like the 'basi' of western Luzon provinces). Steam power (that of Senyor Gaston) from imported machinery and equipment, later replaced human and animal power in the milling process. Centrifugal mills were eventually installed.

The production of muscovado sugar is a simple process (compared to the present technology we are using). It requires special skills and mind instinct that would lead to excellent boiling process. The production of muscovado is being supervised by an expert sugar boiler and in his status, he is known as the 'Maestro'. Your sugar will become 'dulit' (not properly cooked, still remained wet, or with imperfection) if the miller does not get the best 'maestro'.

The traditional mills use cauldron (big 'caldero' or 'kawa'), usually four 'kawa' until the cooking reaches the fifth 'kawa' in obtaining the concentrated juice. (The first four 'kawa' are used for the clarification of juice). The concentrated juice, after proper cooking, is poured in a big and wide pan for drying by using spades (manual works). The process is the crystallization of the muscovado sugar. The lumps (bilog-bilog) are being pulverized by spades (in modern technology, a pulverizer is used).

The newly cooked muscovado is packed (traditional way) in 'may-ong' (50 kilos), a jute sack-like container made of 'buri' leaves. Packing muscovado in 'may-ong' will give the sugar an aroma that is very tempting for the buyers. There is the fragrance of fresh sugarcane and the taste of honey. Before delivering the commodities to the buyers, they are first stored in the 'camarin' (storehouse) for safekeeping.

If coconut is the 'palm of life', sugarcane is the 'grass of life'. The juice is converted into sugar. The rest could be used as animal feeds, organic fertilizer, or fuel for home and the mill. Try muscovado. It is your healthy sugar. The 'molinos' will be displayed at Silay International Rondalla Festival (Nov 3-11, 2018) at Silay Puericulture Center.