

## Maynila

Hardly anyone calls the city Maynila anymore, today it is simply Manila. But years ago, the locals would always say Maynila, the first syllable *may* being pronounced as *my*. The name is preserved in the official seal of the city, being called *Lungsod ng Maynila*, *lungsod* meaning city. As pre-eminent cities go, it is actually one of the smallest in area, less than 15 square miles. Compare that to our city of Cincinnati, which occupies 80 sq. mi., while having only one fifth of Manila's population. But this compact city has a long history.

Manila became the seat of the Spanish colonial government in 1571, taking advantage of its natural harbor. The Galleon Trade, which had just started, would define the city for the next 245 years. Like most cities, Manila consists of districts and neighborhoods, usually based on churches or parishes. I grew up in San Miguel, which has the San Miguel Pro-Cathedral. There aren't that many districts. The more well known being Binondo, Divisoria, Ermita, Malate, Quiapo, Sampaloc, Santa Mesa and Tondo. The west side of Manila fronts Manila Bay. The city is roughly bisected by the Pasig River, which flows northwest from Laguna de Bay into Manila Bay. On the southern bank of the Pasig, just before going into the bay, is Intramuros, the walled city built during the Spanish era to serve as the administrative center.

Among the districts, Tondo was the tough part of town. Most of its residents are poor, and gangs abound. Binondo is Chinatown, vibrant and prosperous, thanks to Chinese-Filipino business people. Quiapo was the market place, having the wet market called Quinta. I remember my mother shopping in Quiapo, which included a stop at a Chinese bakery to purchase *hopia*. It was my favorite snack at the time, a flaky pastry disc filled with sweet bean. I loved to tag along, just for the *hopia*. Around Quiapo church are narrow streets made even narrower by sidewalk peddlers. Divisoria is another market area, where you can buy almost anything. One new mall specializes in fake luxury items, pirated software, movies and music.

At one time almost all the good entertainment could only be found in Manila. There were movie houses in Quiapo and along the Escolta. There were "second run" movie houses in most neighborhoods, which in the 1950's were not even air conditioned. For live entertainment, there was the Manila Grand Opera House, which had nothing to do with opera, but featured vaudeville. A stretch of Dewey Blvd. had nightclubs, with full orchestras.

Zoning rules in Manila are either non-existent or unenforced. Homes, factories and businesses stand cheek by jowl. I can't think of a better example than the original San Miguel Brewery, which is next door to the presidential palace of Malacañang. On the other side of the brewery is San Miguel church. Nearby, on the way to Quiapo were a lumberyard, a distillery and the Magnolia ice cream factory.

Manila's halcyon days was the decade before World War II. My parents' generation, along with my older cousins, referred to that era as "peacetime." Manila was uncongested, unpolluted, served by streetcars, safe enough that the president of the Commonwealth would take walks unaccompanied by security. Manila's gentility lived in the Ermita and Malate areas, also along Dewey Boulevard. You could fish from the Pasig or along the bay and eat your

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catch, something one wouldn't dare today, if you can even catch one. Pasig was declared biologically dead more than 20 years ago. The Pasig and some of the wider *esteros* or estuaries were used by wooden boats called *cascos* to transport merchandise.

Within its boundaries, the Manila of old contained the country's oldest and most prestigious schools. There's the Dominican University of Santo Tomas, chartered in 1611, another Dominican college, San Juan de Letran, started in 1620, the Jesuit Ateneo de Manila, the Benedictine San Beda College, the Christian Brothers De La Salle College. There were women's colleges such as St. Scholastica, Holy Spirit, Maryknoll, St. Paul, Assumption and Centro Escolar. There were a slew of private colleges, Adamson, Far Eastern, Mapua, FEATI and Philippine Women's University. Before moving their main campus to Quezon City, the original location of the University of the Philippines was in Manila. If you wanted a college education, or wanted to be a doctor or lawyer, you had to study in Manila. Outside Manila, educational choices were minimal.

After the American takeover of the Philippines, a master plan for Manila was developed by Daniel Burnham. This is the same Burnham who planned Chicago's waterfront, which has an eponymous park. His Manila plan of 1905 preceded Chicago's by a few years. Burnham also had a plan for the Philippines' summer capital of Baguio, where the main park in the center of town is also named Burnham. He envisioned government buildings connected by wide boulevards and a road running along the shoreline of the bay, later called Dewey Boulevard (renamed Roxas). Combining the Spanish walled city with Burnham's plan, Manila could have been one of the most attractive compact cities in the world, which was Burnham's vision. Manila had a polo club, an Army & Navy club, although initially the locals were not welcome. It would truly deserve its nickname of Pearl of the Orient, a title first broached in the 18th century. Burnham's plan was carried out slowly in the coming decades, with Filipino architects designing the iconic buildings.

World War II and its aftermath changed all that. Except for the Battle of Bataan, the Philippines initially escaped the large land battles of the war. There was nothing in the Philippine theater like the battles in China, involving hundreds of thousands of troops and armor. Or the later Korean War, where the opposing armies went up and down the narrow peninsula. The month long battle for liberation was to be Manila's undoing.

Although the government buildings were all rebuilt within a decade, a lot of the infrastructure went by the wayside. The streetcars were never revived, replaced by the smoke belching jeepneys. Burnham's plan, still not totally implemented, was forgotten. Squatters, now referred to as informal settlers, descended on Manila by the tens of thousands. They erected shanties on what used to be navigable estuaries. Even Intramuros didn't escape the informal settlers. The prewar population quintupled, making Manila the most densely populated city in the world at 110,000 per square mile. I'm not kidding. The metro area has a density of about 50,000. That's like the population of the United States all moving to New Jersey.

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Manila has had its share of politicians, but the most colorful ever was Mayor Arsenio Lacson, the city's first elected mayor. A former journalist, he was honest, foul mouthed, hard drinking, chain smoking and fearless. His speeches were peppered with four letter words. But he made the city work. Corruption was minimal. He eliminated patronage jobs. Its fiscal house was in order. While in his third term, he died in a hotel room, supposedly in the arms of a mistress.

The revitalization of Manila received a shot in the arm during the Marcos years, thanks to Imelda Marcos. Don't roll your eyes. Rizal Park was beautified with new landscaping. The Cultural Center of the Philippines, now a landmark along the bay, was Imelda's doing. The restoration of Intramuros accelerated, continuing to today. No visit to Manila is complete without going to Intramuros, into the Manila Cathedral and San Agustin church, the oldest in the country. The Spanish era buildings have been completely restored.

What happens next to my beloved hometown? There are a a lot of people working to preserve its past, rescue it from decades of neglect, incompetence and present day greed. They are in a constant battle with developers, who only wish to tear down old buildings, erecting condominiums that probably average no more than 500 square feet. Among those trying to make a difference is Regina "Gina" Lopez. A scion of the conglomerate owning Lopez family, she heads the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission. There's Carlos Celdran, a professional tour guide and gadfly, who keeps Manila's history alive. Isidra Reyes is one of the most prolific contributors to Facebook's Manila Nostalgia. She and like minded activists have just obtained a stop order on the construction of a high rise facing Rizal Park. I am reminded of Jackie Kennedy's saving New York's Grand Central Station from the wrecking ball. No one has documented more about Manila's past than Lou Gopal. Born and raised in Manila, now living in the U.S., he has written volumes on various aspects of the city's history. If you wish to know about how it was, check out Lou's blog. My home town will never be what it once was, but with people such as I've mentioned plus countless others, I am more optimistic than ever about its future.

*"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work."* — Daniel Hudson Burnham

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