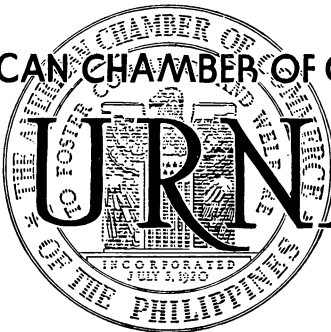


THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Editorials

"... to promote the general welfare"

During the past few years, the rebuilding of Manila has proceeded at a good pace in the industrial and commercial as well as the residential districts and the suburbs. It is only within the Intramuros' walls of the Old City that almost no rebuilding has been done. The ancient walls still stand for the greater part, but except for a few buildings partly restored or newly erected, the walls inclose only a wide vacant plain, a waste space, with the rubble of the razed buildings covered by a wilderness of tall grass. Gone but for a few low ruins are the old churches and monasteries, the government buildings, the Spanish houses with their overhanging second stories. The narrow, picturesque old streets are hardly any longer even to be traced. Mere trails, muddy or dusty, according to the season, tunnel the grass. Families of poverty-stricken squatters, inhabiting holes in the remaining masonry, without water, without light, live an almost savage existence. The area has become a hide-out for pickpockets and thieves and more dangerous criminals. All this within a five minutes' walk from the center of the business district on one side and an even shorter distance from the Port Area.

The explanation of this is that the Government, through various of its agencies, principally the National Planning Commission, formerly called the National Urban Planning Commission, has adopted certain rather nebulous plans for the rebuilding of the Walled City which are also so impracticable that building in the area has been rendered virtually impossible.

The objective aimed at,—to restore the old city rather than to build it anew, is worthy enough and makes a strong appeal to historical and esthetic sentiments, but the general plans adopted violate the basic economic principles which govern real-estate development.

Potentially, if not at the moment, the land values in the Walled City area, lying where it does so near the center of the metropolis, are too high to justify economically the erection of the old-style buildings which the Commission is insisting upon.

The old Spanish buildings were almost exclusively low, two-story edifices, with the ground-floor walls built several feet thick of 'dobe (tuffa) stone, and with the upper story, surrounded with an outjutting veranda, built of hardwood. Often this story had an outer and an inner wooden wall, both supplied with windows, generally of shell. In the middle of the house there was an open courtyard. The roofs were of tile.

These houses were admirably designed for the time and for the building materials then available. They withstood earthquakes and typhoons, they were not easily entered by trespassers, they were cool, often they were beautiful. They served well both as dwelling houses and as buildings, at that time, for government and business offices, shops, warehouses, etc. And built within the centuries-old walls of the city, with its gates and the moat and the outer defense works, the people lived in safety from outside attack.

But long before World War II and the destruction it brought to Manila, even before the Americans first arrived here in 1898, the city had burst out beyond these walls and had spread along the Bay front and across the Pasig River and inland toward Santa Mesa and San Juan.

Today, people would not want to build their residences in the old city; they want to live in the outlying residential districts which lie somewhat above the low level of the central part of Manila and where the air is better. They do not think it necessary any longer (despite the Huks) to live within high city walls, guarded night and day by soldiery.

Even the Church and the various religious orders are not contemplating to rebuild the churches and convents and schools which once constituted a major part of beautiful old Intramuros. Schools and convents are being erected in the suburbs, and, as for building or rebuilding churches in the old city, where would the parishioners come from?

Unless the whole of the area were to become a great park, dotted here and there by a few government and other

public buildings, built in the old style, as desired by the Commission, what is to be done? And where would the money come from to support such an extravagant use of land, some 1.2 square kilometers, within a few minutes' walk of both the Port and the business center of the city?

Present land values, as compared to the values just before the war, run approximately as follows:

Down-town (Binondo), before the war, around P400 a square meter; today, between P600 and P700 a square meter.

On and about the Escolta, before the war, from P500 to P700 a square meter; today, around P1,000.

Ermita, before the war, from P25 to P40 a square meter; today, from P50 to P80.

Intramuros, before the war, from P25 to P40 a square meter; today, from P40 to P60 a square meter.

It will be seen that the price of land in Intramuros has not gone up very much, but that is because of the present restrictions and the general uncertainty as to what is to be done with the area. If the land were thrown open to ordinary building enterprise, under the ordinary building regulations of the city, land values would rise very quickly and it would not be long before extensive construction would be begun, probably mainly office buildings and some industrial and commercial establishments.

It should be clear to everyone's understanding that the old Spanish style of architecture is entirely unsuited to modern functional requirements and that the revenues to be obtained from such primitive structures would be entirely inadequate to meet their cost, not of construction but of maintenance on land of high value which, no doubt, would be taxed accordingly.

Erecting more or less modern buildings of many stories but faking some sort of exterior old-Intramuros look, would also be most undesirable, both architecturally and esthetically, and, even so, the old narrow streets, which were such a distinctive feature of old Intramuros, could never serve a modern built-up area.

It seems unescapable that we must resign ourselves to the loss of Intramuros as an old Spanish city. In many respects, that loss,—of Manila's ancient structures and shrines and historic land-marks, was the most grievous loss of all the losses brought upon the country by the war. Never can we be callous to that loss. But we should recognize that even if there had been no war and Intramuros had not been destroyed in the terrible violence of 1945, old Intramuros was in process of passing. Even before the war it had become to a large extent a crowded and unhealthy tenement district. Fine old residences had become ill-smelling warrens of the poor; old convents and schools were being turned into warehouses; stately old government buildings were housing second- and third-class bureaus and fire and police stations. It is certain that the war only hastened the inevitable.

Some compromise must be reached and that compromise might well be such as has been reached, often, no doubt, without thought or plan, in many ancient cities of Europe. In cities there, far older than medieval Manila, building has through the centuries taken its natural course, but ancient land-marks have been preserved,—certain buildings, now generally museums, certain picturesque city gates, and stretches of wall which have become parks and public promenades.

There is no restoring the old Walled City, artificially. As a distinctive unit, as a relic and museum piece of the middle ages, it is gone. But we can and must save what still stands. The Cathedral, the San Agustin Convent (oldest building in Manila), a part of Fort Santiago, a number of gates, and most of the walls can and must be repaired and preserved. In place of what is irrevocably gone, let modern Manila flow back inside the walls, according to the city's needs. The old and the new would

stand in a not unpleasing contrast. We could still pace the tops of the old walls, study the lines of the old bastions and ravelins, step into the old stone casemates and peer through the old embrasures, entering into the minds of long-dead Spanish cannoners: a few of the ruins might be preserved as they are, like Guadalupe at Makati, in themselves monuments to the history of Manila's more recent past, the terrible days of the last stand of the Japanese invaders and the irresistible might of the American forces.

The erection of the fine new, P3,000,000 Standard-Vacuum Oil Company building on Isaac Peral Street, which was inaugurated on December 28, was striking evidence of the faith of American business in the future of the Philippines. The same can be said of several other constructions, including the new P3,000,000 factory of Colgate Palmolive Philippines, Inc., in Makati, and the P1,000,000 laboratory of Sharp & Dohme (Philippines), Inc., on Isaac Peral, both inaugurated in November. Still other large buildings are being planned or are already in process of construction by other American owned business enterprises.

The new Manila edifice is said to be one of the finest Standard-Vacuum Oil Company buildings in the world. The two stories provide 42,000 square feet of floor space, and the building is so constructed that a third story can be added if this becomes necessary. The building is air-conditioned throughout.

The inauguration of the Standard Vacuum building was attended by the President of the Philippines and several hundred of Manila's leading officials and businessmen. Mr. J. A. Parrish, the general manager, delivered a brief address in which he spoke of the faith of his Company in the Philippines and also took the opportunity to impart some interesting facts and figures,—for instance that the Company employs, throughout the Philippines, some 1,400 persons, 96% of whom are Filipinos, and that the total payroll for this year will run to P3,500,000. The Company's products, furthermore, are retained in virtually every town of any size in the country by some 1,700 dealers. These employees and dealers, together with their dependents, number no less than 15,000 persons who thus derive their livelihood from the activities of the Company.

Mr. Parrish then spoke of the wage and salary scales, the vacation and sick leave with pay granted to the employees, and the pensions paid them after their retirement for the remainder of their lives. But perhaps the most impressive of his statements was that the Company's tax payments under all headings in 1950 amounted to P28,014,000 and that for 1951 they will amount to P37,800,000.

This indicates to what an extent our large business firms have, in effect, become tax-collecting agencies for the Government, for, of course, taxes paid are a part of the cost which must be collected from the consumers.

President Quirino, in his remarks, extemporaneously delivered, stated that he was gratified by the spirit in which the new building had been constructed, giving expression to the Company's faith and confidence in the stability of the Government, the industry of the people, and the honest efforts the nation is making toward contributing to world advancement.

During the course of his remarks, he made one statement that somewhat startled his hearers,—that it "may perhaps be against our own (Philippine) interests" for a company like the STANVAC to "stay here indefinitely". He went on to explain that the presence of such an important company might tend to discourage the exploitation of the Philippines' own oil deposits, which, he said, were

*Population in 1939, 21,352; population in 1948, 987.