CLUB LIFE: Preserving an American identity

Since it came into existence, the Manila American community has lived much of its social life in its clubs, and the clubs have been major influences in developing a sense of community. For those whose life is spent abroad, this must often be the case. Club life is after all an association of like-minded people pursuing certain activities according to certain rules, written or unwritten, and if they are surrounded by an alien environment, one of the objectives of social clubs, conscious or unconscious, will be to preserve certain elements of home atmosphere, culture and behavior. American clubs operating in a Philippine environment would, moreover, naturally provide for their members more of what the Filipinos, intensely family-oriented, normally obtain from their own homes or, following Asian custom, in public places of entertainment.

For the early Americans in the Philippines, the contrasts between the life they left behind and the local environment — tropical, Malay, Catholic and feudal, unameliorated by refrigeration, public sanitation, or by a mutually comprehensible language or common habits and pursuits — made clubs an absolute psychological necessity. In the process of providing the hygienic and the familiar, early clubs of course strongly reinforced what would be called today the segregationist feelings of the community. These feelings originated largely in cultural differences, but inspired by American domestic politics, they soon took on a racialist flavor. The influences of other long-resident foreigners, particularly the British, with their candidly colonial attitudes, strengthened these tendencies — especially in the clubs, where British traditions were both pervasive and stubborn.

The dominant American ethic, however, has not been racialist and only incidentally segregationist, and official American policies in the Philippines, along with the anti-racist spirit of some of the fraternal and social clubs, soon modified the situation, resulting in joint Filipino-American membership in several clubs by 1917. Segregation and occasionally militant exclusivism prevailed in others down to 1941, but collapsed when the clubs were reconstituted after the war.

Masons

The American volunteer regiments (North Dakota, California, etc.) brought Masonry with them when they arrived in 1898. Although the American lodges were primarily fraternal,

some anti-Catholic sentiment was clearly evident among strongly anti-Friar Filipinos, whose tiny Masonic organizations had been suppressed before the coming of the Americans. Even the American lodges could not remain altogether uninvolved in the wake of the militant preachings and proselytization by a small group of Protestant ministers during the first few years of the American period. The first local American Masonic lodge was chartered in 1901, with Dr. H. Eugene Stafford, at whose beautiful home close by Malacañang the first meetings were held, perhaps the most prominent member of that early date. By 1904, Milton E. Springer (hardware), Judges Charles H. Burritt (C.F.I., 1904-06), Thomas L. McGirr (Manila Police Court), Frederick C. Fisher (later Supreme Court Justice and a leader of the Philippine Bar), and E. C. McCullough (printing) were recognized as among the most prominent American Masons. In 1916, the Masons moved into their new Masonic Temple on the Escolta, the finest building in the Manila of that day, and in 1917, the Filipinos and the American lodges amalgated, agreeing informally that Americans and Filipinos would alternate as Grand Masters. Following Stafford's 1917 term, Senate President Manuel L. Quezon became Grand Master.

Army-Navy*, University, American, Manila Golf Clubs

When the American forces arrived in 1898, the Spanish and English (Manila) Clubs were already long in being. The first American social club to be established locally, sometime in 1898, was the Army and Navy Club; as its name connotes, it was a club for American Officers and their guests. Next in order were the University Club established by Governor General Taft in 1901, and the Elks Club, organized by American businessmen in 1902.

In 1900 located just outside the city walls, the Army and Navy Club moved inside the Walled City in a year or two. The club was not formally incorporated until 1908, but as we have seen from Bellair's account, it led a very active existence long before that. After some years, in what later became the premises of the Public Library, it moved in 1910 to the reclaimed area adjoining the Luneta.

The Army-Navy Club was not popular with the early Governors General. Taft had organized the University Club in order to provide a social atmosphere more congenial to government policies, and Governor General Harrison reported in 1921 that he had found it during his tenure (1913-20) the center of

*See the author's illustrated history of the Army-Navy Club: **Over Seventy-Five Years of Philippine-American History**, Manila (1976).

intrigues against the Government in its effort to promote Filipinization. By the time of Wood's tenure as Governor General, however, it had lost (or suppressed) its militancy and begun to admit civilians to membership — "persons of reputable standing" in the community, as a publication of 1925 put it. These civilian members, generally of high social status in the American community, often entertained at the club on important social occasions.

In the years just before the war, the club gained a worldwide reputation among U.S. armed services officers and their families. In 1957, Naval Captain T. C. Parker remembered it as it was in 1940:

> [It was] situated on the extreme eastern shore of Manila Bay amid luxuriant palms, flame trees, and rambling bougainvillea, with a beautiful view of the Bay proper... The Club grounds, including driveways, outdoor pool, tennis and squash courts, and a beautiful back lawn where food and refreshments were served in fine weather, covered about three acres of valuable waterfront property...The Club landing was only a stone's throw from the Fleet anchorage...many naval officers, lured by the facilities for recreation and fellowship, never got beyond these confines unless some impelling circumstance forced their journey farther afield. Lacking only facilities for golf and baseball, the Club was equipped for every type of recreation and service familiar to Americans...fine bowling alleys in the basement...a reading room, card room, billiard room, a large and handsomely equipped officer's bar, cocktail lounges for officers and ladies, a barber shop and ladies' hair dresser.
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> On the second and third floors there were seventy furnished rooms for occupancy by members...Club furnishings and appointments, including hand-painted murals of native scenes by an outstanding Filipino artist, were done in exceedingly good taste. The whole atmosphere was one of exotic charm without loss of the home touch.

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In 1901, the Taft-sponsored University Club, a civilian social club under American management, got under way. Taft himself served as the first President. Luke Wright, Taft's Deputy, and Fred L. Atkinson, his Bureau of Education chief, were vice presidents.

For several years largely composed of high ranking government officials with a university background, it kept that quality down to Harrison's term as Governor General and the passage of the Jones Law. With the subsequent general exodus of high-ranking, highly-educated government officials, it gradually became the favorite club of hard-drinking, fun-loving, successful U.S. businessmen.

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For the brief space of roughly five years (1901-1905), an American Club existed, numbering, Bellairs says, some thousand members. It did not survive, probably because the size, mixed social composition and differing political and religious views of the large American community in those very early years made impracticable a club based, like the Spanish or English clubs, exclusively on nationality.

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In July 1902, golf-playing members of the Manila (English) Club, with a small 7-hole course in the later (but pre-war) site of the Polo Club in Pasay City invited a few interested Americans and diplomatically elected Governor Taft as President of what was called the Manila Golf Club. Major H. C. Carbaugh, elected Secretary, soon rounded up enough Americans that by 1906, when the club had outgrown the 7-hole course and moved to Caloocan, at the northern edge of the city, Americans outnumbered the British.

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Elks Club

The Manila Lodge of the Elks, in many ways the most important of the pre-war American clubs, was organized in 1902. Almost immediately, it became the chief gathering place for the American businessmen who were bitterly opposed to Taft's announced policy (which was really President McKinley's and Secretary of State Elihu Root's policy) of the "Philippines for the Filipinos." Since the great majority of the American businessmen were former soldiers, who had lost former buddies in the fighting, and since many of the Filipinos were still waging armed resistance against U.S. forces in some of the provinces, many businessmen felt that Taft's policy denied them the rights of conquest.

The Elks, a fraternal, benevolent and patriotic organization, offered an organizational framework and a ritual well designed to appeal to the veterans-turned-businessmen, and it began with a bang. Its most active members in 1903, "Mayor" Wm. W. Brown (a founding member), Robert Dell (undertaking), James Ross, Charles Cohn (J. Haussermann's law firm), T. M. Devilbiss (**Standard Oil**), Grant (Electrical Supply House) and E. C. McCullough, were nearly all former soldiers.

By 1906, M. L. Stewart, Theo Reiser, L. A. Dorrington, Major Hartigan, George Lack, Cohn and Carson Taylor were the leading Elks, and the membership as a whole was no longer unfriendly toward the civil government. It continued, however, to promote patriotic sentiment as prescribed by lodge doctrine and as host to the community on such occasions as the Fourth of July. Thus the **Cablenews-American** reported the 1906 celebration in part as follows:

> The celebration conducted by the Elks at the Clubhouse on the Luneta...was one of the most pretentious affairs ever given in the Philippines. There were few people of importance either in the government service or in private life who did not attend....
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> The clubhouse was a mass of electric lights, seeming to be a building of fire standing out from the blackness of the waters beyond it. On the roof waved an American flag, the fluttering of the colors being duplicated by winking electric bulbs.

The featured speaker, Governor General Henry C. Ide, emphasized the friendship of the U.S. President (now Taft) for the Philippines. Executive Secretary Fergusson gave one of his usual witty talks, and the young and brilliant Collector of Customs Morgan Shuster spoke of the historical significance of the Fourth of July.

Columbia Club

1904 saw the birth of another kind of social club, inspired by the remarkable Episcopal Bishop Brent, which provided something that members of that day agreed was much needed by young, exiled Americans: a social gathering place where no hard liquor was served, where boy could meet girl in a setting not unlike a small town American social. Both officers and enlisted men were welcome, and servicemen in particular enjoyed special privileges. Wives and sisters were made welcome. The original club facilities were financed by a handsome

donation from Mr. and Mrs. George C. Thomas of Philadelphia in answer to Bishop Brent's stateside appeal for financial contributions "to provide for the social and moral welfare of young men resident in Manila." In 1908-1909, the club added a swimming pool (the first available locally) and a gymnasium in 1914-1918.

Polo Club, 1909-1939

What soon came to be the single most important social club patronized by Americans — the Polo Club, was organized in 1909. In its origin the expression of the wealthy Governor General Forbes' enthusiasm for polo, the primary interests of its cosmopolitan membership in the late twenties drove it steadily in the direction of a family social club. Down to 1925, however, it was the polo players, with their preoccupations with the polo field, the stables and competing teams, who dominated the club. The incorporators were Forbes, Martin Egan (then Editor of the **Manila Times**), C. H. Sleeper (Director, Bureau of Lands), Col. H. B. McCoy (Collector of Customs), P. G. McDonnell (Manila Municipal Councilor), R. P. Strong (Dr. Heiser's associate at the Bureau of Health), Edward Bowditch, Jr. (Forbes' private secretary), Frank B. Hahn and Warwick Green (originally Forbes' secretary but by then head of the Department of Public Works). Other highly interested parties were Judge Thomas Cory Welch, Dean Worcester, Frank Branagan, John S. Leech, Director of the Bureau of Printing, and Captain H. T. Heath (**Tubbs Cordage**).

In 1911, a pre-World War II history of the Polo Club tells us, the Directors had decided to enlarge the bar, because the Saturday evening crowds "were becoming quite enormous." The Polo Club was "finding itself an important unit of the social community" after only two years. The next year, undoubtedly in part because of the increase of its own social facilities, reciprocal privileges with the University Club were terminated. By 1914 the nipa-thatched club had assumed the form, and acquired the spacious, relaxed atmosphere it would bear down to the late thirties:

> There was the "Annex", bachelor's paradise and the original home of the present bowling alleys...[built with] money donated by Governor Forbes the day before he left the Philippines...Few of the older members recall much about the Pagoda, yet it reared its

> head before the nipa was well settled atop the club pavilion...Many polo spectators sat high up to get every move.

It was also in 1914 that the Polo field was perhaps for the first but not the last time used as a landing field for airplanes. A Chinese aviator with the unlikely name of Captain Gunn

> asked to use part of the club grounds to show aviation tactics...[a proposal which] seemed startling and daring, but the club of that day was "but a tiny group of buildings...in a vast wilderness," and its boundary to the south was practically unmarked. Paper hunts were still started...a mile away in almost any direction, the party riding across country and ending at the Polo Club for breakfast...Plants, trees, shrubs abounded in a pleasing array to mark [the club] off. The tiny group of buildings stood in a lonely huddle, like a pioneer's farm on a vast empty plain. Gradually, however, the Club attracted the attention of people desiring beautiful residences. Proximity to the Polo Club for one's permanent home slowly became an idea, then an accomplishment.

It was the construction of these adjacent homes by prominent members of the community such as Judge Ostrand, the Baldwins, E. J. Westerhouse and others, which would complete the combination Country Club-South Sea Island atmosphere which characterized the club, despite the later enveloping growth of the city, all the way down to 1942. In 1913, Calle Real (from 1921 called F. B. Harrison) was opened up to Pasay, increasing the club's patronage and popularity. Though flooded during the rainy season, it replaced the beach road called Cavite Boulevard, which was not reopened until the famous palm- and acacia-lined boulevard along the bay, named after Admiral Dewey, was after World War I extended as far as the club.

In 1917, with the United States at war, the Polo Club gave a big **despedida** for the 15th Cavalry which had long been stationed in Manila. Following their departure, the club's military membership declined sharply, but its members subscribed ₱2,000 of a ₱4,500 club surplus to a Liberty Loan and Saturday supper dances were introduced. Because prices were rising "with incredible speed" in 1918, the Liberty Loan bonds were pledged as collateral for loans in order to buy needed supplies.

From 1921 to 1931, the Polo Club gradually came to dominate the American community's family social life. It hosted most of the largest community functions, including the greatest social event of the pre-World War II period, the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1922:

> Socially...[the event] nearly overwhelmed everything before or since...Every bench on the lawn groaned under its weight, while every inch of standing room was occupied. The fences along F. B. Harrison almost collapsed with spectators fighting for advantageous positions.

In 1923, however, the elements were unkind. Because of its seaside location, which was dangerously exposed both to the sea and to free loaders, the club historian recorded that:

> A disastrous high tide practically demolished the lawn in 1923, uprooting trees and carrying away newly planted shrub and flowers. Much damage was also sustained by the boating equipment and the diving rafts. At low tide, during fine weather, the club suffered annoyance from people who habituated the beach. They had picnics there, left debris and used boating equipment belonging not only to the club but to the Club members.

The role that the club had come to play in the life of the community, at a time when all except the wealthiest Americans found their homes inadequate for entertainment, is suggested by the historian's report:

> A great many organizations without homes were requesting the use of the pavilion for gala events, but the Board refused. However, the requests were understandable, "for the club house and grounds were blooming with a beauty wrought from much thought and planning..."

> Visitors were lavish with praise on its unique appearance and purpose, exclaiming that it was the only Club of its kind in the world.

In 1929, when initiation fees were raised from ₱75 to ₱100, there were both Sunday afternoon tea dances and Tuesday evening dinner dances. In 1930-31, because President E. C. Selph found that the club's finances had not yet suffered from the economic depression, he was able to retire some of the club's indebtedness. By 1933, however, the depression had reached Manila, and the Club felt that it was its duty to try

to relieve the gloom. The club historian described a festive "depression party," where the most popular tune was "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag." During 1934 and 1935:

> Many people felt they could go to the club to forget their worries.

> The House Committee was largely responsible for this...for they fostered "Dutch Treat" parties whenever possible. It became quite the thing to be invited to a party "D.T." Everyone knew his neighbor had suffered decreased income as he himself had, and the idea of this kind of party made for more comfortable feelings all round.

In 1935 came the dispute which led to the secession of the Elizaldes and the establishment in January 1937 of the rival Tamaraw Club a mile or so south of the Polo Club. Its architecture was Norman English, contrasting with the Polo Club's Filipino nipa-and-bamboo **decor**. This split, in later years inaccurately labeled as based on racial discrimination, occurred when the Elizaldes, the mainstays of the Club's Polo team, proposed one of President Quezon's cronies for membership. When their nominee was blackballed, it was charged that the decision was based on racial considerations. This was not the case: the popular Elizaldes and their candidate represented the same racial group, but his relationship to Quezon had cast him in a role which the predominantly American Polo Club membership, with their perhaps peculiar, at times hypocritical but certainly different views of acceptable social behavior, could not approve as a club member. This event was a great scandal for a few months, but within a very short time, nearly all the feeling had evaporated and the only result was a second flourishing polo-playing club. The Polo Club itself continued its uninterrupted growth.

Membership grew from 827 regular members in 1936, when President Quezon and Vice President Osmeña were elected honorary members, to 1128 in 1939. In 1938, the main pavilion had been completely renovated to assume the attractive form it bore down to the time of the Japanese attack. Visitors found it charming:

> People visiting Manila are enchanted with its rustic simplicity, its exposed rafters from which hang massive air plants, its pillars whose sides are festooned with ferns and whose bases seem to grow right out of bamboo-covered boxes sprouting tropical plants.

The orchestra played in a setting which simulated a palm-leaf house, while "dozens of comfortable chairs, settees and davenports [were] scattered in restful, conversational groups."

Manila Yacht Club

Among the clubs in which Americans were heavily represented, the most important organized in the Twenties was the Yacht Club. Despite the opportunities afforded by the vast expanse of Manila Bay, yachtsmen had been slow to organize a club. Boats required a considerable investment and there was no local boat-building industry. Organized in 1927 chiefly by Rockwell, Joe Thomas and A. S. Heyward, and with a clubhouse on the Pasig River, the first yachtsmen imported their boats from Hong Kong. The club did not, however, become an important social center until after the war, when it took over the Dewey Boulevard basin used by the pre-war Pan American clippers.

Wack-Wack, the Cosmopolitan Golf Club

The most important development in club life from 1931 to 1941 was the 1931-1934 organization and construction of the Wack-Wack Country Club in Mandaluyong. This fine golf club was a specific expression of anti-segregationist sentiment on the part of some of the leading members of the American community, with Bill Shaw heading the list. The original Wack-Wack had been a small course near Nichols Air Base. In 1925 Mike Cuaderno was its President, and out of 151 members, there were only twenty-seven foreigners, of whom the great majority were Americans, including Carl Hess, C. M. Hoskins, Charles Nathorst, Judge Ross, J. J. Russell, Emil Schrammn, Bill Shaw, Dr. Waterous, and Phil Whitaker.

Shaw, outraged when he found that he could not invite his Filipino friends to play at the Manila Golf and Country Club, decided that he would promote a club where all nationalities were equally welcome. A thousand charter members were recruited at ₱1,000 each. Then, with two of Shaw's closest associates, Henry Belden and William Douglas, and prominent Filipinos such as Jose Fabella, Jose Yulo and Benito Razon jointly promoting the project, the club, a huge undertaking at the time, was launched. A beautiful rolling area, at the then edge of the city, was purchased. The course was designed by the younger brother of the U.S. professional John Black. At the dedication ceremonies of the club house some months after the signing of the charter and the purchase of the site, Shaw called it the "trysting place of the nations," and declared that "its influence on the cordial relations of these nations is of permanent importance."

Wack-Wack, therefore, became the pre-war symbol both of Filipino-American socializing and a growing cosmopolitan orientation on the part of the Filipinos. From today's viewpoint, such a club may seem to have been long overdue, but that its organization was ahead of much of the rest of the colonial world was documented when a distinguished Indian visitor, looking out an upstairs window in the middle Thirties, exclaimed: "You mean to say that Americans and Filipinos play golf **together**?"