

The Manila Hotel – Ad (1930's)

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MANILA HOTEL
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A very famous Manila hostess will celebrate her sixty-fifth birthday on July fourth 1977. The pre-war Perle Mesta of the Philippines, she is still the hostess with the mostest, if you appreciate the special patina with which tradition and sophistication clothe a splendid basic structure. At a comparable age, Marlene Dietrich was said to have insured her beautiful legs for a million dollars, but it was the indefinable Dietrich magic which enriched her physical attributes. So it is with today's Manila Hotel.

Sixty five years ago, when the Hotel first opened its doors to a public long denied first-class hotel accomodations, it promptly joined the ranks of such truly fabulous Asian hostelries as the Raffles in Singapore, the Oriental in Bangkok and the Imperial in Tokyo. Miraculously spared the wartime destruction visited upon nearby neighbors, the Hotel continued without a major post-war renovation until a year ago, when it was completely rebuilt and transformed in a manner reminiscent of Tokyo's Imperial in the Sixties—retaining much of the pre-war charm and elegance that delighted visitors, yet with the conveniences and comfort which moneyed travellers demand today.

The Bulletin's concern, however, is with history rather than current hospitality, however impressive, and the Manila Hotel, like the Army and Navy Club which it faces across Bumham's grand distances, is drenched in history. We turn to some of the highlights—nostalgic, curious or fateful.

When the American troops arrived in Manila in August 1898, there were few Manila hotels tolerable in European or American eyes. Philippine custom demanded that guests be lodged in private homes, with hosts generously insisting that they be given the best of everything, including their own rooms which they usually vacated in favor of their guests. As a consequence, third-class public accomodations only were available, except in the Hotel Oriente, described as follows by a contemporary visitor:

There is only one hotel worthy of the name . . . It is very small, measured by American standards . . . 83 rooms for public service and accomodations for 25 persons, it is clean, neat, well ventilated and attractive. The service is first class and the cooking admirable. Besides the leading dishes of the French cuisine it serves the national dishes of Spain so as to captivate the the most fastidious eater . . . most notable of all, it dispenses a curry equal to the finest productions of Bombay and Calcutta . . . The punkahs or broad fans suspended from the ceiling and swung with a rope by a coolie in an adjacent corridor, are spotlessly clean and very artistic in design. The hotel floral decorations are elaborate and very sightly. ²

The likelihood however, was that the Oriente seemed so attractive largely by contrast with what was otherwise available, as C.W. Rosenstock, a clerk in 1901, remembered that most accommodations consisted of a bed with patate (thin mattress), washstand, water pitcher, and bath down the hall.

Then, in 1903, the Insular (U.S.) government purchased the Oriente for its use as offices, provoking a storm of denunciation from local Americans, but without effect. In the vaccum thus created, there was much talk of private construction, but few American entrepreneurs on the ground had access to the substantial capital required, and American investors at home, in view of the volume of anti-Imperialist agitation, hesitated to risk their capital in a country which might be cut adrift in the near future. The most serious proposal appeared to be one projected by the group of Castle Brothers, Wolf and Sons, which would later (1911) be

¹See Lachica's article in April 1977 Bulletin,

²Margherita Arline Hamm, Manila and the Philippines, (1898).

converted, with additional infusions of Boston capital, into the Pacific Commercial Company (PCC).³

In the September 27, 1903 issue of the Sunday Sun, we read:

Mr. George Wolf of Castle Brothers, Wolf and Sons will build a new hotel in Manila commencing as soon as material can reach (here). It will face Calle Nozaleda on the south side of the street occupying the block between Calle San Luis and Calle Isaac Peral. Governor Taft has already agreed to a special charter and licenses for the hotel, which will be of steel throughout, five stories, and 250 suites. There will be a separate electricity plant for the elevators, laundry and lights. The company will be capitalized at 500,000 (gold), of which P200,000 will be put up by Wolf, P200,000 by U.S. sources and P100,000 by local sources. Upon completion of the new block from the now partly completed Municipal Building on the Paseo Bagumbayan to cross Calle Nozaleda where it intersects San Luis, the new hotel will be located in very nearly the geographical and political center of the city, dividing the boulevard into two parts and the new electric railway will run on three sides of the hotel.

Alas, this story was wildly optimistic. The project fell through, to be revived, at the close of 1907, by a wider, though chiefly local group, consisting of M.F. Loewenstein (of the proto-PCC group). Charles D. Palmer (of the Insular government-owned Manila Railroad Company), E.C. McCullough (printing), M.A. Clarke (soda fountain and pastries), Walter E. Olsen (tobacconist), Thomas L. Hartigan (attorney and financial adviser to the Archbishop of Manila). and Mauro Prieto, Francisco Ortigas and Jose F. Fernandez (three wealthy Spanish/Filipino investors), who in January 1908 incorporated the Manila Hotel Company. To raise the P900,000 which the hotel was now estimated to cost, P300,000 was underwritten by "leading businessmen", P200,000 was offered to the public, while the Government contributed the rest. Bringing in H.E. Manwaring of Yokohama's Grand Hotel as consultant, the corporation purchased 20,000 square meters of land fronting the Luneta on space reserved for a hotel in Burnham's plan. W.E. Parsons (assisted by Henry Allwyn) of the Eastern Engineering Company was engaged as architect and Robert M. Loper, a leading Manila builder, was awarded the contract for construction Secretary of War Dickenson laid the cornerstone on Sept. 1, 1910, but actual work had began in April, after Governor General Forbes could write in his Journal on April 26:

I have signed the necessary documents and the new hotel is at least under way, the plans and specifications approved, the contract signed and approved, and the piles are being driven. 4

Financing had been the biggest problem. As Forbes had observed, neither the capital nor the necessary degree of cooperation between American entrepreneurs was to be had, expenses had been underestimated, and it was necessary for the Insular government to invest heavily before the hotel could finally be completed. Thus the Philippine Commission reported in 1910 that the "one million pesos" which it had been estimated the hotel would cost had already been exceeded. The government subsequently took up another P100,000 in bonds and private interests subscribed an additional P50,000. In 1911, the Commission reported that still further "agreed improvements" had cost the government yet additional bond purchases. As a consequence, the government in due course, took over the entire hotel operation, turning it over subsequently to the Manila Railroad Company to manage.

Originally scheduled to open in December 1911, then in January 1912, the actual opening did not occur until July 4, 1912, but then the Hotel threw the biggest dancing party yet seen in Manila, with (putting the Congress of Vienna in the shade!) five hundred waltzing couples. Secretary Dickenson and Governor Forbes were the ranking guests. Dancing would continue to be the hotel's chief local attraction for many years. Also, as Forbes would write, Philippine history, from the tourist viewpoint, "may be said to have begun . . . from the opening of this fine hostelry." In confirmation, we find a brochure issued in January 1913 by the best known travel agency of that day, Thomas Cook and Sons, describing a half dozen tourist tours through the city, the suburbs and as far as Los Baños, all departing from Cook's headquarters in the hotel.

³See author's American Business and Philippine Economic Development, Manila (1976)

⁴The Philippine Islands, Vol. II, p. 185

In May 1914, the Metropolitan Hotel, which had valiantly served as an unsatisfactory temporary provider of entertainment facilities, went out of business as a result of the opening of its more elegant competitor, and not until well after the building of the Legaspi Gardens on the docks behind the hotel in 1922 would the Manila Hotel face serious competition in this field. (Both the Oriente and Metropole hotel had successors with the same name in later years). In November, the hotel moved its Grill Room to the roof garden, "as in Europe". It was doing its best to provide what European guests were said to want, but its foreign consultants were expensive, and the hotel at times thought they were overpaid. Managers during these early years included ex-Insular Treasurer Frank Branagan and George Butz.

When Rotary was organized in 1919, the Manila Hotel became Rotary's regular venue for its weekly Thursday luncheons, at which nearly every distinguished visitor, nearly always a hotel resident, spoke. These included, in 1919, Ruth Law, a famous aviatrix who had earlier thrilled crowds watching from the roof garden as she swooped and dove over the Luneta and the hotel, Senate President Manuel Quezon and Robert Dollar, American shipping magnate; Lord Northcliffe in 1921, vice Governor Eugene A. Gilmore, ex-Commissioner Dean Worcester and Secretary of Navy Edwin Denby in 1922, and Gov. General Leonard Wood, Brig. General William (Billy) Mitchell, famous pioneer exponent of air power, and Dr. Paul Monroe, Columbia University educator, in 1924.

From its opening, all of Manila's major pre-war social functions were held at the hotel. Typical was the reception on October 24, 1921 given by the American Chamber of Commerce for incoming Governor General Wood. As reported by the Journal in November:

It was an inspiring and impressive procession that joined in double file up the long lobby of the Manila Hotel on the night of Monday October 24 into the dining salon and passed a receiving line at the head of which stoood Governor General Leonard Wood . . . Guests took one and one half hours to pass, then

danced to Maj. Loring's music and another military band keeping up a continuous rendition of American patriotic airs.

THE MANILA HOTEL

The Insular government was making strenuous efforts to increase tourism, and the attractions of the Manila Hotel were a major asset in its program. Manager W.A. (Monk) Antrim was reported by Walter Robb in January of 1924 to be awaiting the early arrival of the new hotel folders boosting the Philippines, adding that Antrim had recently gotten a "dandy write-up in a hotel magazine, whose editor took occasion to do homage to the new folder." Journalist Norbert Lyons joined in, with a lively description and a peaen of praise for the hotel's special features:

The structure, whose size is deceptive, as it is built low and covers an immense area of ground, was erected a dozen years ago at a cost of a million dollars. It is thoroughly fireproof, being constructed entirely of concrete except for a small annex built of fine quality hard wood. Standing by itself, exposed to the cooling breezes . . . with well-kept gardens and lawns surrounding it is . . . designed especially for the tropics, with large, well-ventilated rooms and broad sliding windows that open up the full width of the room and at the numerous corners expose two sides of the room to the open air. Cozy balconies and verandas abound . . . furnishings are plain but expensive, being designed for comfort and convenience, although there are also a number of luxurious suites . . . Lobby and cafe . . . are favorite gathering places of Manila society. Uniformed servants silently and efficiently glide in and out, attending to every slightest want of guest and patron. The cool wicker chairs and lounges afford a pleasant retreat during the hot hours of the afternoon. A spacious rest room and lounge for the ladies has recently been installed which is the scene of many social functions so dear to the fair sex . . . meticulousness and artistic taste [characterize] social functions . . 5

⁵ Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce, March 1924

AMERICAN HISTORICAL COLLECTION

During the next few years, Rotary continued to offer distinguished guest speakers: in 1925, Sir Harry Lauder, the world-renowned entertainer, Commander Pinedo, "first Italian aviator to land on American (Philippine) soil," in 1926, ex-Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and Spanish aviators Captains Gallarza and Loriga, Governor General Henry L. Stimson, Dr. C.T. Wang, Premier of China, and ex-Governor General Forbes; in 1927, Prince Purachatra of Siam and in 1929, Major General Douglas MacArthur, Commander, Philippine Department, U.S. Army. Meanwhile, a delighted guest in 1927, one Oswald Lewis, in a travel book felicitously entitled Because Ive not been There Before, showed he shared Lyons' enthusiasm for the hotel's physical arrangements:

I put up at the Manila Hotel, a palatial building with one of the most attractive dining rooms I flave ever seen. Built in the form of a rectangle, with three sides open to the air, it is surrounded by a double row of columns behind which are the tables, the whole of the middle of the room being occupied by a dance floor . . . It is situated on the shore of Manila Bay, and on a fine night, with the moonlit water on one side and the ballroom, full of dancers swaying on the other, it is as splendid a spot in which to share a meal with a fair lady as any that I know of.

The hotel's management had been greatly strengthened in 1928, when Hubert C. (Andy) Anderson first became co-manager with Antrim. After the latter's health failed and he returned to California, Anderson, a remarkable man who was not only a brilliant hotel manager but a trusted adviser to Governors General and Senate President Quezon, carried on alone. Blonde and blue-eyed, a genial six footer, Andy was a valued friend of all. At his death in 1938, Walter Robb of the Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce would write: "A prudent judgement had given him a high place in business and an unfailingly generous soul had made him a friend of everyone. Andy Anderson had not an enemy in the world." When Andy, greatly lamented, passed to his reward, his place was taken by Howard Cavender of the Dollar Steamship Lines . . . In 1930, under the joint management of Antrim and Anderson, the hotel's standard advertisement had paraded its special attractions

THE MANILA HOTEL

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Philippine Islands



The most modern and luxurious hotel in the Far East. No detail is being omitted that can add to the completeness and elegance of its appointments.

Open About January 1st, 1912.

Cablenews-American Advertisement in 1911



Receiving Line at American Community Reception for Gov. General Wood, 1921



Presidential table at despedida for General MacArthur, 1930



Dinner hosted by Major Stevenot for Provincial Governors, 1932

NEW METROPOLE HOTEL

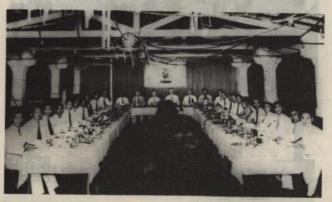
"METROPOLE" MANILA

MANILA, P. I.

AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN PLAN.



New Metropole Hotel Advertisement, showing facilities, 1928



Despidida at Legazpi Gardens for Barry Baldwin of Luneta Motor Co., 1934



First PanAm clipper orbits hotel roof, 1935



Plenary session, 5th Pacific Rotary Conference, 1935

Manila Rotary delegates Haussermann, Perkins, Hall, Turner, Luz, de las Alas, Wolfson, van Schaick, etc. 1935



Tientsin delegation to Conference, 1935



Celebrating 25th Anniversary of Reign of George V. 1935



Congress of Oriental Prehistory, 1935



Professor H. Otley Beyer urges organization of Philippine Geological Society, 1935



Col. Henry and Philena Gilhouser celebrate 25th wedding anniversary, 1939



"Andy" Andersson, manager from 1928-1938



Howard M, Cavender, Manager 1938-1941



1939 advertisement, showing hotel from bay side.



Francisco Mendoza, first Filipino Manager, 1941-1947, in 1941



Champagna room, 1977



Business Writers Association of the Philippines Annual Award Dinner, 1957



Visiting group of square dancers, 1964



Champagne room, 1977



Lobby, 1977

as follows: "Designed and constructed to secure coolness, sanitation and comfort under tropic climatic conditions; provides every Western convenience with every Oriental luxury; Finest Dance Orchestra in the Far East." Systematic tourist promotion by the Insular Government began in February 1930, when it hired James King Steele, who had successfully promoted tourism in Japan. Steele established the headquarters of the tourist association in the Manila Hotel.

A tourist guidebook of 1934, tracing the history of dancing in Manila, assigned the Manila Hotel a special place in that history: "the Manila Hotel . . . had [for many years after 1912] been the only place for dancing and its roof the scene of many a festive party [then came several private ballrooms: La Loma, Maypajo, etc.] . . . The Manila Hotel pavillion . . . without a doubt is the most attractive dining and dancing resort in the entire Far East; it also has the best music . . . To rank among the smarter dining and dancing resorts of the States, it lacks only a Tango and Rhumba orchestra . . Especially attractive are its lighting effects and a spacious adjoining lounge where great comfortable chairs and subdued illumination invite a respite between dances."

When Commonwealth President Quezon in 1935 offered, and General Douglas MacArthur accepted, the task of creating a Philippine Army which could defend the nation's forthcoming independence, what was to be the hotel's most distinguished guest moved with his wife Jean and son Arthur into the Penthouse for the few years before the Japanese onslaught brought the General's training mission to an untimely end. Hotel personnel felt a particular attachment to the MacArthurs, as they had participated vicariously in the General's peculiarly proper, formal and well-chaperoned courtship during the time he had been its unmarried guest.

Throughout the Thirties, the Manila Hotel had repeatedly been the scene of important conventions: in 1931 for example, there was a Congress of leprologists headed by Dr. H. W. Wade of the United States, the Fifth Pacific Rotary Conference, which brought Rotary Clubs from China and Japan to the Philippines, and also the Congress of Far Eastern Prehistory, with scholars from all

over the World represented. Dr. Otley Beyer of the University of the Philippines was chairman of the latter. In 1937, the huge International Eucharistic Conference was held in Manila, and the hotel was host to many of the visiting dignitaries. In the private sphere, one of the more noteworthy of the celebrations for which the Manila Hotel was famous occured in 1939: the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Col. Henry and Mrs. Gilhouser in the same room in which their wedding reception had been held.

In November 1941, when manager Howard Cavender, a U.S. Army reservist, was called to active duty, Francisco Mendoza was appointed in his place. The first Filipino manager, Mendoza had worked up from the bottom of the ladder. Employed in 1914, then only seventeen years old, Mendoza had risen from a lowly part-time property clerk to the prestigious P14,000 per year manager's job. Jake Rosenthal, well-known American Old Timer and poker crony of President Quezon, was appointed public relations representative, but Mendoza had the responsibility for running the hotel, which for the previous two years, as the growing threat of war frightened away the tourists, was poorly patronized except on weekends, where U.S. Army and Navy officers filled it up. On the other hand, the hotel's branches in the provinces, with the exception of the newly-opened branch in Dansalan, Lanao, were doing well.

As with so many other things in Manila during the Japanese occupation, the period of the Manila Hotel's Japanese administration remains almost undocumented except for their entry and departure. Apart from the rounding up of guests and suggage to be sent to internment, which Hartendorp⁶ records, one picture of a Japanese religious representative is all that is available to the author of this sketch. It is to be hoped that Japanese scholars will one day fill in the record of their presence in wartime Manila

The post-Liberation days were of course hectic. One guest, a representative of International Harvester and a pre-war resident of the Philippines, remembers being warmly welcomed by familiar employees (after pedaling up the Boulevard on a bicycle from where

he had been landed off the shore a mile away) and receiving dormitory-style-accomodations (wall-to-wall cots) in the Oak Room. In any case, as the U.S. forces took over Manila and then passed on, the Manila Hotel was for months the only functioning hotel, with waiting lists of hundreds seeking accomodation. Some of those fortunate enough to have secured rooms then had to vacate them temporarily to make a place for the official U.S. delegation to the Inauguration of the Philippine Republic in 1946. Nonetheless, the hotel optimistically advertised in the Inaugural issue of the Philippines Free Press:

On the enchanted Sunset shores of Manila Bay, the Manila Hotel will continue its services to the people of the Philippines by doing what it was mainly built to do . . . providing an unusual type of comfort and relaxation in an atmosphere of unique beauty and charm.

It will be completely new in furnishings . . . in facilities. But it will be unchanged in identity. It will be as always the premier rendezvous of visitors to Philippine shores and Manila's brilliant center of social activity.

In 1948, then-manager Charles Hallman undertook extensive lobby renovations, but no fundamental changes were made in the building or décor until the total transformation in the mid-Seventies. By the Fifties, there were other hotels in operation, but no real competition until the construction of the Hilton, Hyatt and Intercontinental Hotels in the Sixties. During the Fifties, the pattern of activities at the Manila Hotel resembled the pre-war, except that there was much less dancing, and the hotel was increasingly the scene of political activity: party conventions and caucuses, while many politicians retained permanent accomodations at the hotel. Otherwise, it was receptions, dinners and tourists, in that order. Many local firms had businesses or branches in the hotel, and truly luxurious entertaining, with two exceptions, still lay in the future. The exceptions were the traditional luxury balls of the wealthy sugar planters of the South, the Kahirup, and its Pampanga rival, the Mancommunidad Pampangueña. An idea of what happened to the Fiesta Room on these occassions is suggested

⁶The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, Manila (1967) Vol. I, p. 244-245

by Lina O. Sevilla in the Manila Times in February 1964.

It seems as if "Doc" Pingot Perez has borrowed inspiration from the opening lines of one of Nick Joaquin's most exciting poems. The color green, immortalized by poet Joaquin, will be the color motif of the MAN-COMMUNIDAD PAMPANGUEÑA ANNUAL BALL to be held Feb. 22 at the Fiesta Pavilion of the Manila Hotel.

Dr. Perez, a stickler – if there ever was one – for having everything right and just so, has decreed that green would be the most suitable background for the picture of Elegance (with a capital E as you will notice) which the Pampangueños wish to project at their annual ball for this year. Green foliage, green festoons, green trappings, green everything will be the dominant color of the imaginative arrangements which "cabalens" are planning for their dance, which this year, so they promise, will be more elegant than ever before.

Besides the termos of the ladies — orders for which are swamping the best couture houses of Manila at the moment — it has been decreed that the men will come in tuxedos, the better to keep up the dictum of elegance. What better than a gentleman in full formal evening togs to complement an elegantly gowned lady? So asks Pingot Perez, over-all chairman of the ball.

Even the teenagers, who will present a "palabas," as they do every year, will be dressed in elegant kimonas (emphasis on the opulent look for evening wear) with their escorts in closed barongs and black pants.

Of course there will be a Rigodon de Honor, for how better can the ladies show off the elaborate ternos they are preparing as early as now. We heard that Pitang Eusebio, undisputed "Suprema" of Pampango elegance who has this year consented to be one of the "cabeceras" for the dance, has put in her order with Ramoning Valera.

Ben Farrales is now trying to sketch the terno he wants to make for Pilar Villarama, and Pacita Gonzalez . . . is expected to come out in another outstanding terno from her favourite couturier. As usual, or perhaps even more so than ever before, the MAN-COMMUNIDAD will be a veritable fashion show to delight and dazzle even this blase city of ours, so used to outstanding fashions as Manila already is.

Simultaneously, however, since much criticism was heard of such luxury spending, a certain damper was applied to elaborate entertainment of this kind in the years of political confrontation in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

On the tourist side, the Sixties saw a rapid growth in charter air travel, with entire groups, professional or social, even square dancers traveling together, most of whom found their way to the hotel. In the case of veterans' groups, particularly, who were primarily interested in the saga of Corregidor and Bataan, the Manila Hotel, having directly shared in the drama of evacuation and liberation from its ring-side seat on the Bay, was obviously a preferred base for re-living the past.

In the short period since the total transformation of the hotel into the super-luxury establishment expected today by the opulent traveler, its publicity has emphasized the modern, efficient and esthetic accomodations in the new 18 story Tower with its 450 guest rooms and two penthouse apartments, combined with the romance, tradition and nostalgia attached to the Old Wing (the renovated original structure) which features the MacArthur suite. It remains to be seen how successful this venture will be in the highly competitive atmosphere created by Manila's hotel-building fever of the past few years. For those who set more than ordinary store by an environment that includes the past as well as the present, however, the Manila Hotel will continue to be the only one of its kind.

AMERICAN HISTORICAL COLLECTION

Thus we see that the Manila Hotel is on the one hand a grand old lady, but at the same time, a glamor girl like Marlene Dietrich in her prime. Like Marlene, also, she has a great many memories that are precious to others as well as herself. The brief notes above do not begin to exhaust the stories she has helped make, the personalities she has housed — whether the exalted, such as General Eisenhower or the Prince of Wales, or the humble, such as Jimmy Chambers, for years the hotel barber, who grubstaked many of the Old Timer prospectors, accumulating a tidy bundle in the process—the historical events she has witnessed, or the traditions which she has helped to create. She is worthy, as the author of this sketch has written elsewhere of the Army and Navy Club*, of more reverent attention than is available in the often sadly inaccurate or purely imaginative columns of the daily press.

*Over Seventy-Five Years of Philippine American History: The Army and Navy Club of Manila, Manila, (1976)

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Several books have appeared which describe the experiences of the allied civilian internees under Japanese administration. In the Philippines, in addition to the massive two volumes of AVH Hartendorp,* the editor of this publication until his death in November 1975, there is the volume of Frederick H. Stevens** as well as others, and the record is well documented except for the detailed story of the camp at Los Baños, which still awaits its historian. Far less familiar to Americans is the experience of those who were interned in China or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Langdon Gilkey's Shantung Compound, Harper and Row, N.Y., (1969), tells the story of the camp at Weihsien in North China, and it deserves to be more widely known.

^{*}The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines Manila (1967)

^{**}Santo Tomas, Manila (1946)