

Within the Walls

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Intramuros, the old walled city of Manila, is a living monument to a nation's soul. Ravaged down the ages by countless natural and man-made calamities, Intramuros has always risen from its ashes and rubble. Today, as restoration work in this historic quarter proceeds along with careful planning of new buildings and spaces, Intramuros is once again ripe for rediscovery.

For many people, the first thing that comes to mind when Intramuros is mentioned is Fort Santiago. Located on a point of land at the mouth

of the Pasig River leading to Manila Bay, Fort Santiago is the site of the Malay settlement called Maynilad ruled by Rajah Sulayman. That palisaded domain of thatched structures was burned by the natives before the Spanish colonizers, led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, founded the city of Manila on 24 June 1571 and proceeded to build it in stone. Continual threats of invasion by other foreign powers led to the construction of high stone walls around the city. Intramuros thus became a nickname for Manila, literally meaning "within

the walls."

The walls measured 4.5 kilometres long and enclosed an area approximating 64 hectares. From without, the walled city was surrounded by a moat and guarded by massive bulwarks and outworks upon which were mounted cannons. Within the city arose churches like San Agustin, Santo Domingo and the Manila Cathedral; schools like Letran, Santo Tomas and Ateneo; government buildings like the Governor-General's Palace and the Cabildo or Municipal Hall, and private residen-



*Immaculate Conception Basilica
(Manila Cathedral)*

ashore near the city, the British forces fired their cannons from the Malate Church area, and breached Intramuros' southern wall. The resulting damage to lives and property were heavy. San Agustin Church, for example, was stripped of its precious ecclesiastical silver, including chalices, monstrances and censers. Graves were not spared the zeal of treasure-hunters, as even the remains of conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi were dug up and left open. The British left two years later, and some of the treasures that have disappeared with them have since found their way to the British Museum.

When the Americans came in 1898, Intramuros' massive walls were already outdated and useless against modern warfare methods. Moreover, modern city planning by the new colonizers turned Intramuros into a mere district of the new metropolis. Old stone walls were demolished to make way for roads connecting the walled city with nearby areas. The moat was filled up as a sanitary measure and turned into a golf course.

The pre-war years saw old residents of Intramuros move out to the suburbs, as new arrivals from the provinces moved in. Ancestral houses were subdivided into apartments, and abandoned buildings were used as warehouses. Old Manila, grown shabbier, had begun to look its age.

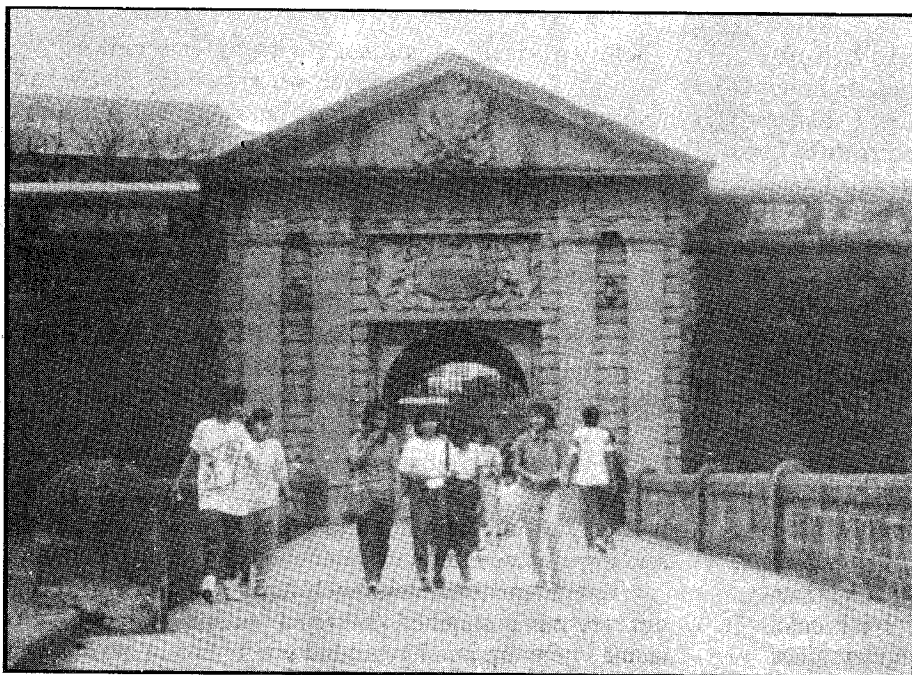
On December 8, 1941, Manila was bombarded by the Japanese, and one of the first casualties was Santo Domingo Church. As the war intensified, Fort Santiago became a camp

ces. Intramuros thus became the political, cultural and religious capital of Spanish sovereignty in the Orient for more than 300 years.

Earthquakes, typhoons, fires and wars wrought periodic damage on the city over the centuries, yet each time, Manila strove to rebuild its architectural wonders. One would note, for instance, that the present Manila

Cathedral is actually the sixth reconstruction since the first foundations were laid in 1581 – the others having been destroyed by fire, earthquake, and the Second World War.

In 1762, the British invasion of Manila took place as a result of Spain's defeat in the Seven Years' War in Europe. Having landed



*Left: Parian Gate, Intramuros
Below: Fort Santiago*

for hundreds of prisoners of war, who were packed tightly in places like stone chambers, which once used to be storage rooms for cannonballs. Then, decimated by artillery fire in the siege for Philippine liberation in 1945, Intramuros became a virtual wasteland.

In the aftermath of the war, historic ruins were bulldozed to give way to new establishments. For decades after, Intramuros continued its decline as squatters and warehouses poured in. Attempts at restoration were made by various civic groups until 1979, when the impetus for revival came with the creation, through Presidential Decree 1616, of the Intramuros Administration (IA).

At present, restoration work keeps pace with IA's efforts towards urban renewal and commercial development. New buildings with traditional designs rise, invoking the spirit of the old city. More importantly, great strides in the recovery of the country's cultural heritage have been taken. As steward of a museum called Casa Manila, IA holds a sizable collection of furniture, furnishings,

religious and fine art pieces dating from the Spanish colonial period.

The cultural scene in the walled city has also been enlivened further by the many musical, dance and theatrical presentations held in the various historic sites. And every December,

Intramuros breathes life into a centuries-old tradition: the procession in honor of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.

In the mean time, work goes on for the Intramuros Administration. Research and retrieval of archival documents and conducting archaeological spadework continue. Books and publications on Intramuros are put out to enrich public knowledge. And to encourage a hands-on experience of this heritage site, guided tours of Intramuros are given on request to interested visitors.

Perhaps, if everyone shared in this experience and rediscovered the glory of Intramuros in the past, then we can all help map out possibilities for its future. 