

July 2014

Journey of Purpose: Reflections on Philippine Libraries and Librarianship

Remy Agudelo
Multnomah County Library

Recommended Citation

Agudelo, R. (2014). Journey of Purpose: Reflections on Philippine Libraries and Librarianship. *OLA Quarterly*, 7(1), 20-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1573>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Journey of Purpose: Reflections on Philippine Libraries and Librarianship

by Remy Agudelo
Multnomah County Library

The first time I traveled after so many years of absence had a sad note. I was going to attend the last rites for my grandmother. I promised myself that the next time would be a joyful occasion. Well, the dream finally came true.

The dreamed-of vacation came during the passage of Republic Act No. 6966, otherwise known as the "Philippine Librarianship Act." We arrived at the Manila International Airport to a beautiful day of sunshine, delightful greetings and smiling faces. Morning is the best time to arrive when you can look at everything around and delight at the scenery you have not seen for a long time. The old airport had been replaced by a new one with shiny polished floors, air-conditioning, and numerous seats for waiting passengers. There were lots of shops, local and foreign, catering to the traveler. Manila has been the principal city of the Philippines for four centuries. It is the center of industrial development as well as the international port of entry, and is situated on one of the finest harbors of the Far East about 700 miles southeast of Hong Kong. The harbor makes it an excellent site for access to inland agricultural areas by way of rivers.

Not too far from the airport is the Nayong Pilipino theme park which showcases this country of 7,107 islands enlivened by the astonishing diversity of 111 linguistic, cultural and racial groups. Found in the 46-hectare parkland are replicas of six major regions in the archipelago and the Museum of Ethnology, with exhibits of ethnological objects and artifacts of the Philippines' rich and diverse cultural history.

Along the way from the airport, we passed the Philippine Cultural Center, an institution mandated by Philippine laws to preserve, promote and enhance the Filipino people's cultural heritage. Nearby is the Folk Arts Theater used for popular performances, which draw large audiences. Within the Cultural Center complex is also the Coconut Palace, which displays regional Filipino artistry in the use of the coconut tree. Over seventy percent of the structure is made from different parts of this tree.

A ten-minute ride from the Center takes us to the foremost outdoor recreational area, Rizal Park, named after the national hero, Jose Rizal. Within Rizal Park are a Japanese garden, a Chinese garden, an open-air theater, a

playground, a grandstand, and a long promenade adjacent to Manila Bay. About a stone's throw from the park is the National Library of the Philippines. It is located on the southeast side of Rizal Park with a total of 26,400 square feet of ground space and a total floor space of 198,700 square feet.

The National Library is comprised of several divisions: Administrative; Asia and Oceania; Bibliographic Services; Catalog; Collection Development; Filipiniana; Library for the Blind; Public Libraries; Publication and Special Services; and Reference. Library collections include monographs, rare books, government documents, films, microforms and other audio-visual materials. The library also operates fourteen bookmobiles and 785 public libraries. There is an Online Public Access Catalog with GUI-based library software.

PAST

The Philippine library system may have originated at the time of Spain's colonization of the area. The King of Spain had dictated that no secular literature was to go into the new colonies. The King wanted no distraction for either conquerors or natives, so only religious books brought by the missionaries found their way to the island. King Phillip II complied with this dictate in the conquest and control of the archipelago for the spreading of the faith and the establishment of a closed trading port in Manila.

The first book collections came with the Spanish missionaries, one of which was owned by Bishop Domingo de Salazar. Other collections, mostly academic, followed but were gutted by fire. To enrich their collections, the missionaries engaged in book trading with the Chinese merchants and brought books from Europe. The introduction of printing was a result of the missionaries' zeal for learning. Printing skills were borrowed from the Chinese, and the first printer was a Chinese convert named Juan de Vera. The first printed book was the *Doctrina Christiana*.

The root of the modern Philippine library may be traced to the so-called Age of Enlightenment during the time of King Charles III. He introduced a number of initiatives, which resulted in the creation of Sociedades Economicas in every subject field known at that period of time, in Spain and in the colonies.

In the Philippines, Sociedad Economicas were started by Governor Jose de Basco y Vargas. A Sociedad's function was mostly the free distribution of books. The creation of the Sociedad signaled the start of a new beginning in Philippine library history. The Spanish government in 1858 defined public libraries as the national library, university libraries, provincial libraries, and all those which addressed public education in general. Combining these different types of public libraries gave rise to the concept of popular libraries in the Philippines in 1871. Information and educational materials would be the main holdings of these libraries, and management was entrusted to the teachers. Group reading and the circulation of materials was encouraged and allowed. Funding would come

from the local and the central government. It was not until 1887 that the Museo-Biblioteca de Filipinas was established under the Department of Civil Administration. It was a true public library as it received public funding, had a Filipino scholar as director, and utilized a minimum of professional staff. This institution was the beginning of the Philippine National Library until the war broke out in 1898.

The Philippine War of Independence, which started in 1896 against the Spaniards, turned against the Americans and ended in September of 1902. The collections of the Museo were damaged during the war and were initially donated to the American Circulating Library, a private association. However, because the association could not assume responsibility for the expenses of the library, the collection was donated to the American Military government in the Philippines.

The American government was committed to the establishment of a strong public educational system and public service in the Philippines through which democratic ideas were introduced. The restructuring of society was to be accomplished by the addition of a large number of American teachers. These newly arrived teachers endured difficult conditions and limited resources. The resulting effort culminated in the development of the first Philippine school library system. The number of school libraries increased, and the number of books acquired tripled.

The American pioneers introduced modern library standards while Filipinos contributed to the collection, scholarly support and leadership. The foundation of Philippine librarianship was forged by Lois Osborn, Mary Polk, and James Robertson in 1914 through the establishment of library courses at the University of the Philippines and the Philippine Normal School. Scholarships from the U. S. government to train selected students in professional schools outside the country were obtained. Four students continued their studies at the University of Wisconsin. This trend became the norm for those who would become teachers of the field at the state university. Library students were free to choose which United States university to attend, and all were granted scholarships from U. S. benefactors, mostly the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.

The Second World War devastated the country again. The almost total destruction of the libraries severely depleted the country's scholarly resources. Post-war rehabilitation endangered the libraries' already depleted collections. The first initiative included a collection of materials from the United States Information Service; however, books distributed among the public libraries did not suit the needs of the readers. The University of the Philippines also obtained large shipments of materials from the University of Michigan and the University of Southern California at Los Angeles. The libraries relied heavily on donations from public and private institutions from other countries, especially from the United States. Rehabilitation programs also included training and other types of cooperation between agencies and universities of higher learning.

From 1950 to 1970, the Philippines developed library training programs and courses patterned after those of the United States with master's degree studies from abroad. As the programs grew, nonprofessional staff in post-war libraries were replaced by professional librarians.

The growing number of librarians became members of the Philippine Library Association, the Association of Special Libraries of the Philippines, and the Philippine Association of School Libraries. The quest for status began in earnest when librarians from the University of the Philippines successfully secured for themselves academic status. Members of the Philippine Library Association sought the help of Senator Eva Kalaw who, in 1966, introduced Senate Bill 916, "An Act to Regulate the Practice of Librarianship in the Philippines and for Other Purposes." This bill started the seemingly endless fight for status recognition like that of other professions.

Various associations coordinated their efforts to lay the foundation to raise the standards of practice of librarianship and competencies. Their suggestions for improvement covered the areas of continuing education and training of members through seminars and workshops, formulation of standards, and undertaking of projects to produce materials that would be useful for students and teachers of library science.

This struggle for identity was slowed by controversies and political upheavals in 1972 and 1986. Then in September of 1990, Republic Act 6966, known as the "Philippine Librarianship Act: Regulating the Practice of Librarianship and Prescribing the Qualifications of Librarians in the Country" was enacted. The Filipino librarian has the distinction of being the first librarian in the world to be professionalized through the legislative process.

Provisions of Republic Act 6966 included the meaning of the term "librarian." The scope of practice of librarianship is defined in section 2(b) of the law as (1) "the holding out of self as skilled in the knowledge, art, and science of the organization, dissemination, preservation, and conservation of recorded information;" (2) "the rendering, furnishing, and contracting of professional services such as consultations and advice on the organization and management of libraries, data banks, research and information centers to clients on a fee basis or otherwise;" (3) "the teaching of subjects in the library and information sciences;" and (4) "the signing or authenticating for clients of documents of reports when called for."

PRESENT

The practice of librarianship in the Philippines requires a certificate of registration that constitutes a license granted by the Board for Librarians to qualified applicants. Qualifying examinations consist of a general information test and a professional test. The general information test is an assessment of general knowledge, while the professional test seeks to evaluate competence in the various skills and competencies of librarianship such as (1) the selection and acquisition of library materials; (2) cataloging and classification; (3) indexing and abstracting; (4) organization and

management of libraries and information centers; (5) information technology; and (6) other subjects that the Board for Librarians may deem necessary. Candidates may sit for the qualifying examinations three successive years. If they fail for the third consecutive time, they can try again provided they take a refresher course from a duly accredited school or its equivalent.

The Board for Librarians is responsible for issuing the certificate of registration or license to those who have successfully passed the qualifying examination. The Board is also responsible for sanctions both administrative and penal to its members. Punishment is by payment of fines or by imprisonment of not less than one month or not more than two years depending on the severity of the offense. Suspension or revocation of certificate will also accompany offenses.

On June 2, 1992, the Board for Librarians promulgated Resolution 01 entitled "Rules and Regulations Implementing Republic Act 6966: Philippine Librarianship Act." On August 4, 1992, the legal body promulgated the "Code of Ethics for Registered Librarians." This document consists of a preamble and 32 sections grouped into six articles. The preamble emphasizes the librarian's mission as a professional "imbued with lofty ideals of service to people through books and other records of knowledge, a service they believe is their best way to serve humanity, enrich people's lives, and attain self-actualization"

From the National Library we proceeded a short distance toward Intramuros, a walled city containing fifteen churches and six monasteries. Manila Cathedral and the San Agustin Church, one of the oldest stone churches in the Philippines, are located within Intramuros. The ruins of Fort Santiago are now used as a public park and the location for the Rizal Shrine Museum. The Museum is dedicated to the memory of the national hero, Jose Rizal.

As we traveled on toward Quezon City, we saw a mixture of residential, commercial and military buildings. The different rooftops signify the different architectural styles prevalent in the city. One of the most noticeable is the building of the Asian Development Bank, an international organization making the Philippines its home.

Asian Development Bank Library

The Asian Development Bank Library has a collection of 200,000 volumes. The collection is housed in open shelves and is mainly for use of the ADB staff. It has a depository program for country and economic studies, technical papers, annual reports of member banks in other countries of Asia and Europe, and technical assistance projects and other informational materials. The bank library is one of the most well furnished libraries in the area.

Ateneo de Manila Library

One other library we visited was the Ateneo de Manila Library. Ateneo is one of the private universities managed by the Catholic Church's Society of Jesus. The Library building was built with the help of a well-known

American foundation. Its library collection is broad in scope, covering adequately the fields of law, business and computer science. It has an excellent reference collection, historical books on Philippine jurisprudence, databases, and CD-ROM collections. The library operates on an open stock system. It uses two distinct systems of classifying book collections: the Library of Congress classification system for business and computer books, and the Los Angeles County Law Library Classification scheme for law books. Law journals are simply arranged by title.

Access to the collection is provided through a local area network. The basic guide to the collection is the Library Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). The circulation system is computerized and contains information on all books on loan to faculty and students. An in-house index is used to retrieve local periodical literature and the theses collection. The library also stores foreign materials on compact discs such as NAFTA, United States Supreme Court Cases from 1793 to June 1999, World Trade Organization documents, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation papers.

University of the Philippines Library

The last stop for the day was the University of the Philippines Library. Like the Ateneo, the University of the Philippines has one of the best-run libraries in the Philippines. Its funding source is mainly the Philippine government. Foreign countries and foreign institutions give donations for the improvement and addition to its collection. The collection is housed in a five-story building located in the middle of the huge tree-lined campus, and is cataloged by the Library of Congress classification system. It serves students as well as researchers from all areas of the country and the world.

The next day was a day for relaxation with old friends and relations. After two days we continued to the province to visit other relatives and enjoy rural scenery. We flew to Bacolod, one of the regions south of Manila. Bacolod is the known as the 'City of Smiles' and boasts old churches that date back to Spanish times.

In Bacolod we visited a public school library, a small room in a public building, the same kind of library building I used to frequent as a child. The books were old and showed signs of overuse. I am so spoiled with all the new books I handle in our library here. The library here is somewhat improved as the collection is organized by a teacher who is also the librarian. The conditions are similar to those described by the assistant librarian of the Notre Dame High School of Belmont, California in *School Library Journal* (May 2000: 50-52). Collections are meager, and funding is nonexistent. Donations are very much appreciated.

FUTURE


Going digital is the trend these days, and Philippine libraries are not about to be left behind. Many of the materials to be digitized are part of the libraries' Filipiniana collections. For instance, the Filipinas Heritage Library,

operated by the Ayala Foundation, is currently working on the digitization of its library collection to be made available through the Internet and CD-ROMs. Ms. Almario, the library director, said the digitization of the collection is part of their "service to researchers." She referred to the collection as an electronic resource center that tries to appeal to the younger generation through information technology and telecommunications.

A random check of libraries in Metro Manila indicates that computerization of library system is in its infancy stage, as stated by some librarians interviewed by *Business World Online*. Many libraries are automated in the sense that they use electronic access tools like CD-ROM databases and the OPAC. In most Philippine libraries, however, researchers still need to go physically to the library to access their collections. Only a few have bibliographic databases accessible via the Internet.

Financial problems are shared by librarians nationwide, noted R. Tarlit, President of the Philippine Library Association, Inc. He told *Business World Online* that members are aware of the need to computerize but generally agree that funds are lacking to do so. Lack of expertise in

automation likewise hinders the implementation of computerization. Librarians do not have a negative attitude but are concerned about the lack of a government policy to support the implementation of automation.

Can Philippine libraries keep themselves up-to-date? This is a question that everyone is asking. Only the future can tell. Filipino librarians are certainly trying. 



The Philippine National Library.

Books Under Glass

(Continued from page 6)

Laushway E. Not one for the books. *Europe* May, 1999: 38.

Lottman H. Paris's New Library A Disaster *Publishers Weekly* November 23, 1998:15.

Masters C. New French library opens to a full stop. *Sunday Telegraph (London) International* October 25, 1998: 33.

McGuire P., 1998. Tours de Force. *The Architectural Review*. 203:77.

Le Monde. Bibliotheque Francois-Mitterand: l'intersyndicale de la Bibliotheque nationale de France a denonce les dysfonctionnements de l'establissement et le manque de personnel. *Le Monde* December 18, 1996: Culture Page.

Perrault D., 1995. *Bibliotheque Nationale de France 1989-1995*. Artemis, Paris.

Resource for Urban Design Information. Paris Case Study: Bibliotheque Nationale de France, *Quai de la Gare*. Dec. 16, 2000: <http://www2.rudi.net/cs/paris/bib.htm>.

Sancton T. Brought To Book: Paris' Bibliotheque Nationale finally opens its high-tech, high-profile research library. The computers crash. The staff strikes. Livres la France! *Time International* November 23, 1998: 60.

Shaw J. Construction for culture. *Europe Business Review*. March 3, 2000: 52.

Smith A. Critics throw book at pounds 1BN French Library. *The Guardian (London)* December 17, 1996: Foreign Page: 13.

Sudjic D. Towers raised to capitalist vanity. *Manchester Guardian Weekly* January 28,1996: 25.

Wenzel S., 1999. From Revolution to Evolution: the transformation of the Bibliotheque Nationale into the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, through the lens of popular and professional reports. *Library Quarterly* 69: 324.

Facility Planning Resources: Example of Library Building Planning as Participatory Process
<http://www.cofc.edu/~seay/newlib/notesfromplanningsession.html>

Library Science Course on Library Facility Planning
http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~lis388k/course/pres_polk.html

Library Facility Planning Resource
<http://www.slais.ubc.ca/resources/architecture/Index3.html>