

Manila Chancery Manila, The Philippines

The U.S. Embassy in Manila is tangible evidence of the American commitment to Philippine independence pledged in 1934 by the U.S. Congress. The Federal Modern style chancery, designed by Juan M. de Guzman Arellano and completed in 1940, was initially the residence and offices of the U.S. High Commissioner. Built on reclaimed land, a gift from the Philippine government, the building sits on more than 600 reinforced concrete piles sunk sixty feet into the seaside site. Local reports at the time praised its state-of-the-art construction, finding that its plain, compact, and solid expression embodied efficiency, strength, and stability.

During World War II, Japanese forces entered the city of Manila on January 2, 1942. As the invasion took place, members of the United States High Commissioner's staff lowered the headquarters' American flag, burned it, and buried its ashes to prevent its capture. After the Bataan operations in April 1942, the property became the residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Imperial Military in the Philippines. When the Japanese-sponsored Republic of the Philippines was declared a year later, the building was repainted and refurnished as the Japanese Embassy.

During its recapture by Allied forces and Philippine guerrillas in a fierce two-day battle, the building was seriously damaged, but the elegant ballroom and other rooms remained intact. On February 22, 1945 General Douglas MacArthur again raised the American flag. The original table used to sign the surrender of Japanese forces in the Philippines on September 3, 1945, remains in the American Residence in Baguio City.

In October 1945, just one month after the war ended, Quonset huts were erected, and the property became known as "The Courthouse," the center of Japanese war crime trials in the Philippines. The ballroom served as the courtroom, and upstairs rooms as holding cells. On July 4, 1946, the Philippines became independent, and the building became the United States Embassy. In spite of the turmoil caused by war and rebuilding, the chancery's historical design and building fabric have been preserved. The property retains its simple elegance and dignified original character.

The Manila Embassy's history, age, battle-scarred flagpole, graceful garden monuments, and interior spaces all bear testament to U.S.-Philippine history and stand as symbols of freedom and democracy. The Manila Chancery has been designated a historic property by the National Historical Institute of The Philippines.

