The Heritage of Cebu

Historical Markers Unveiled

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Three historical markers from the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) were unveiled yesterday for the Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza Church in the southern town of Sibonga, the University of the Philippines-Cebu College administration building, and the Bank of the Philippines Islands (BPI) building in Magallanes Street.

The historical marker for the church of Sibonga was unveiled in the morning while the markers for UP-Cebu College and BPI were unveiled in the afternoon. On hand to grace the occasion was no less than the chairman of the NHCP, Dr. Ambeth Ocampo. In Sibonga, Dr. Ocampo was joined by Fr. Leo Cabahug, the parish priest of Sibonga, and Dr. Noel Ponce, the president of the Sibonga Heritage Commission. In UP-Cebu College, Dr. Ocampo was welcomed by officials of the college along with some cultural presentations rendered by the students. Cebu City Mayor Michael Rama along with some city officials and executives of BPI attended the unveiling of the marker for the BPI building.

Unveiling of the marker in Sibonga.

School officials posing with Dr. Ambeth Ocampo during the unveiling at UP-Cebu College.
The Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza Church in Sibonga was built from 1868 to 1881. Made of finely-cut coral stones, the church features a ceiling painted in the 1930s with religious scenes by Cebuano artist Rey Francia. Francia also painted the ceilings of some churches in Bohol.

The University of the Philippines-Cebu College administration building is another pre-war structure that, just like BPI, was built by a construction firm owned by Engineer Agustin Jereza. UP Cebu College is the oldest regional unit of the University of the Philippines. It was originally located in Warwick Barracks which is now the present-day location of Carbon Public Market. The provincial government which has then headed by Governor Rafael Palma donated a 13-hectare property to serve as the school’s new campus. The present-day administration building was eventually inaugurated in 1929.

The Bank of the Philippine Islands building in Magallanes Street is a national historical landmark. Designed by Architect Juan Arellano, the bank was built in 1940 and completed in 1941. During the war, it was used by the Japanese Imperial Army. According to Dr. Ocampo, it is one of only two BPI buildings in the country that have been given historical markers, the other one is in Zamboanga City. Of neo-classical in design, the building still retains its original heavy wooden doors, iron grilles on the windows, a 19th-century movable vault, and some old wooden desks used by the bank’s clients. A portion of the bank has been converted into a museum.