

Opening of Plaque Installation Ceremony

Meg Layese

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Good afternoon everyone and thank you all for coming. I am Meg Layese, chair of the Philippine Study Group of MN.

On this date, 103 years ago, a Nebraska volunteer shot a Filipino soldier in San Juan Bridge near Manila, igniting the Philippine-American War. And today, we are here to unveil a plaque that corrects inaccuracies in a memorial that pertains to this war.

The original plaque, which was installed in 1948, honors the 13th Minnesota all Volunteer Infantry who volunteered to serve in the Spanish American War and was sent to the Philippines in 1898. They deserve to be honored for their exemplary service. After the surrender of Spain they served as police force in Manila respected by Filipinos. When the Philippine-American War broke out they were drawn into combat against Filipinos in a war that they soon began to question.

The 1948 plaque contains a number of demeaning remarks and inaccuracies. The most serious was the listing of 20 battles and below that, the claim that these were fought to, I quote, 'free the oppressed peoples of the Philippine Islands from the despotic rule of Spain' unquote. The battles listed were not battles against Spanish but in fact battles against Filipinos -- Filipinos who had been fighting for independence even before the Spanish-American War. It hurts us Filipinos that our history is being trivialized.- We needed this to be corrected that we be true to our history and therefore be true to who we truly are in our own eyes and in other people's eyes.

But we are not only Filipinos, we are also Minnesotans. And as Minnesotans we believe that our state is served well when we tell our history accurately. The story of the 13th Minnesota is an inspiring story that must be told. Of how those young men, even as they compiled their record of exemplary service, wrote their families of their dismay over being turned from an army of liberation into an army of conquest. Of how the Governor, heeding these individual expressions of conscience then successfully sought to bring the boys home. A hundred years ago we already see the great principles of respect for all peoples and simple human decency that our State takes so much pride in today.

Making the wrong right has been a long process. It is not easy to change something that has been on the wall of a State Capitol rotunda for 54 years. But the Philippine Study Group of MN with the support of the Filipino-American Community, the MN Historical Society and the Capitol Area Architectural Planning Board have worked for 8 years to get to this point.

We, the 6000 Filipinos who now call MN home, are very proud that finally we are able to reclaim our history. Minnesota, in turn has the distinction as the first state in the US to correct one of the many memorials honoring Spanish-American War veterans who actually fought in what is now known as the Philippine-American war. We should all be proud that our state, by making this correction, has proclaimed that truth dishonors no one.

On behalf of the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota and the Filipino Community, I wish to express our deep thanks to the honorable Albert Del Rosario, Philippine Ambassador to the US, Minnesota Lt. Governor Mae Schunk, Adjutant General Eugene Andreotti, and Deputy Director Ian Stewart of the Minnesota Historical Society, for joining us here today. At the end of this program the 5 of us will unveil the new plaque.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of Mark Anderson from Senator Paul Wellstone's office and Zang Vang from Senator Mark Dayton's office. I would like to extend a "welcome to Minnesota" to Consul

Adilio Cruz from the Phil Consulate of Chicago and to Kara David and her camera man from GMA channel 7 of Manila.

We thank you Senator Pappas, Senator Chaudry and representative Dawkins for helping us through the legislative process that made this new plaque possible. We thank our musical performers for sharing with us today their musical talents.

We thank Ann Klefstad, the artist who worked with us to produce the new plaque. She worked diligently to make sure the Filipino community's vision would endure in this new commemorative. Unfortunately, her first bronze casting did not take, so today we will be unveiling a wax replica of the plaque that will soon be installed in bronze.

After the Ambassador's speech, we invite you to move to the site of the plaque, behind me and to the left, for the unveiling. And after the unveiling you are invited to a light Filipino snacks in the Great Hall downstairs.

And now I would like to introduce Lt. Gov. Mae Schunk, who as chair of the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board has guided us the process of making this important correction.