



THE SYQUIA MANSION AS A LIVING MUSEUM: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE TRANSITION FROM FAMILY HOME TO MUSEUM

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Abstract: I am a sixth generation member of a family that still owns a Spanish colonial house, the bahay na bato, in the heritage city of Vigan, Ilocos Sur. It was declared a heritage house by the National Historical Institute or NHI in 2002. My grandmother Petronila was the last of her generation to live in the mansion. For her daughter Millie, my mother and myself, it was still a house. I have many fond memories of spending summers in the house with my extended family when all the rooms were occupied, the dining table groaning with Ilocano food favorites, and the house ringing with the sound of laughter, conversation, and footsteps.

But over time the house was hardly lived in and deteriorated badly. The family could not afford the amount it would take to restore it structurally. Government funds were granted on the condition that it would be open to the public. This triggered the transition from house to museum.

A museum, according to the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics is defined as "a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment."

This is a fact all family members have accepted even if slowly. We realize that this is the only way the mansion will continue to exist to perpetuity. This paper hopes to share this personal experience as well as reiterate the need to restore, conserve and preserve our heritage structures that are not just stone or wood but artifacts that preserve memories of an era, a lifestyle, and a family. The goal of the heirs of the Syquia Mansion is to create a living museum that allows for the mansion to be important, relevant, and contributing to the community in which it exists.