

BAGUIO, THE PHILIPPINES AMBASSADOR'S SUMMER RESIDENCE



William Howard Taft, the first U.S. civilian governor of the Philippines, from 1901-1903, found Manila's climate too oppressive and sought a summer retreat with a more accommodating climate. He selected the highland town of Baguio located on the country's northern Luzon island, which on June 1, 1903 had been declared as the "Summer Capital" by the Philippine Commission. Taft invited American architect and city planner Daniel Burnham to complete a plan for the area. Then, in 1935, when the Philippine government was established and received title to the government buildings in Manila and Baguio, there was a need for new buildings for U.S. personnel. Congress appropriated funds to construct new buildings for its governmental functions there, including a new residence in Baguio.

The structure itself was designed by Department of State architect J. A. Hewitt. It is emblematic of the stylistic initiatives followed by the Department in the decades between the two world wars, often described as streamlined modern and perhaps suggestive of romanticized U.S. Southern plantation houses.

The residence, then called the High Commissioner's House and now the Ambassador's Residence, was finished on April 1, 1940. On December 8, 1941, Japanese forces attacked. By Christmas, and for the next three years, the new building served as living quarters for high-ranking Japanese officers. Following the liberation of Baguio on April 17, 1945 control returned to the U.S. and the Philippines. On September 3, in the living room of the high commissioner's House, the Japanese high command signed the Instrument of Surrender.

Following Philippine independence in July 1946, the residence began a different diplomatic role, hosting visiting distinguished U.S. officials, U.S. chief of mission conferences and bilateral defense meetings.