

**Extract of article in *Philippine Daily Enquirer* newspaper (Manila)
Published on 24 May 2010, reporting the Inauguration of the Kuguita Elementary
School conservation project, officiated by Australian Ambassador to the
Philippines, Mr Rod Smith on 27 May 2010**

Philippine-Australian cooperation restores Gabaldon-type school in Camiguin

***By Augusto Villalon
Philippine Daily Inquirer***

SET TO BE INAUGURATED THIS WEEK IS the newly conserved Kugita Elementary School, a landmark Gabaldon-type schoolhouse on Camiguin.

What makes the inauguration significant is that the conservation was a joint effort of the Philippines and Australia, signaling for the first time foreign interest in the uniqueness and intrinsic value of Philippine heritage.

The Australian government participated through its AusAID program, which assists the Department of Education in school rehabilitation. Another Australian partner is Streetwise Asia, a foundation headed by conservation architect Elizabeth Vines, which assists in the conservation of built heritage in Asia.

After having become aware of the DepEd program during his visit to Manila, Sydney architect Bruce Dawbin arranged for AusAid and Streetwise participation, which led to his working with HCS members to identify, survey, plan and conserve the Kuguita schoolhouse.

Kuguita Elementary School, a three-classroom heritage building on the island of Camiguin, is among the examples of Gabaldon Schools, now widely recognized by Filipinos as important group heritage structures.

Approximately 3,000 school buildings of the Gabaldon type were erected all over the Philippines during the American colonial period (1898-1945). Some are still in use and others survive in precarious conditions. The current program to restore unused and often abandoned heritage schoolhouses has proved to be an economical and sustainable means to ease the severe classroom shortage in the country's educational system.

The 1920s Kuguita school is a characteristic example of a "Gabaldon Schoolhouse" named in honor of Assemblyman Isauro Gabaldon of Nueva Ecija, who authored the Education Bill appropriating the initial funding for schoolhouse construction in the early 20th century. Design of the Gabaldon school buildings was initiated by American architect, William Parsons. The schoolhouse network eventually expanded all over the archipelago, structures where the American-style educational system carried out totally in English was introduced.

Innovative structures

Totally attuned to tropical conditions, the building design takes its cue from the Philippine bahay-kubo that raises the main quarters off the ground for ventilation. Large center-pivoted kapis (sea shells) windows swing to allow maximum ventilation. The pierced wooden fretwork openings (calado) along the top of interior walls bring ventilation deep into the high ceilings of the school-building.

The building is of architectural interest as the three-pointed wooden arches on its façade framing a shallow entrance porch allude to Moorish influences that reflect an American-era image of the cultural heritage of Muslim Mindanao.

Conservation measures upgraded the rapidly deteriorating wooden exterior walls; replaced rusted roofing; stabilized concrete foundations; and upgraded electrical and plumbing facilities.

Now the small building that was unsafe for occupancy will provide three classrooms much needed by the overpopulated school.

What better way is there to bring home to Filipinos the reality that the high value of our very unique national heritage draws admiration from the international community which is willing to participate in its conservation as shown by the Kuguita Elementary School conservation project?

*AusAID and Streetwise Asia have indicated their interest in continuing their participation in the Heritage Schoolhouse Program together with DepEd and the Heritage Conservation Society.**

**Documentation for a second Gabaldon conservation project also fully funded from Australia (Streetwise and AusAID) commenced in November 2010 for Tocdog Elementary School in the neighbouring island of Bohol. Construction is scheduled for completion in July 2011*