

Maria Y. Orosa Re-Internment, February 13, 2025

First of all, the Orosa Clan would like to express its heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Matthew Westfall, the families of the 12 martyrs and their expert forensics team for their years-long effort to identify their remains and provide a fitting resting place for each one of them. It was fortuitous that a marker for Maria Y. Orosa was discovered during the early excavation, enabling her inclusion in the investigation..

The life of Maria Y. Orosa can be divided into distinct chapters, each with its own merits, able to stand on its own. First there were her student days at the University of Washington. She was the first woman and as she indicated, the first “woman of color” to be appointed to a Washington State civil service position. This was followed by her years at the Bureau of Plant Industry in Manila, where she came up with an unending stream of recipes that are applicable to this day. She empowered women, wrote extensively and fostered Filipino self sufficiency. Then the final chapter, her work during the Japanese occupation, helping the underground resistance and providing nutrition to civilian American internees.

It is ironic that her death was due to “friendly fire,” coming from American forces, after literally saving countless lives of interned Americans, preventing malnutrition. In the aftermath of the Battle of Manila and the total destruction of Remedios, there was no physical memory of Maria, in spite of efforts to locate her. But she was not forgotten. Among the first to recognize her work was the American Red Cross.

In the intervening years, it was up to Maria’s family to keep her memory alive. This was led by Maria’s two nieces, accomplished authors and sisters Leonor Orosa and Rosalinda Orosa. A third sister, Helen Orosa, published Maria’s recipes. But outside of Maria’s family, and her surviving colleagues, accolades were sparse.

Then in 1964, a street in Manila was named after Maria. Manila Mayor Antonio Villegas made the proclamation, with Maria’s surviving siblings present at the dedication. Then another long period of silence.

But in the last few years, there has been a Maria Y. Orosa renaissance. Taal, the ancestral home of the Orosas, finally came around to dedicate a memorial to her. There is a long list of scholars, authors and publications who took an interest in the life of Maria. Even the New York Times took notice and published her obituary, only 77 years late. Her life has been the subject of dissertations. Maria’s appeal is truly international. From American publications to public television in Germany and Singapore, the interest keeps growing and will no doubt continue. The list is endless.

But something was missing. There wasn’t any place where family could gather or remember Maria. Finally, by your efforts and the blessing of the Augustinians, they have a resting place, joining others who occupy a place in our history.

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May God Bless Maria, the 12 fellow martyrs being re-interred, and the hundreds of unnamed victims from the Remedios Hospital tragedy. By memorializing them, we are ensuring that they didn't die in vain. May their memory and their sacrifice live with us forever.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana, Spanish philosopher.

Mario E. Orosa

Fairfield, OH

Feb. 12, 2025

p.s. This was read after the internment service of Maria.