Born during the closing years of Spanish colonialism of the Philippines, an advocate for Filipino independence during the U.S. colonialism of the early 20th century, an uncompromising resister to Japanese occupation during World War II, and the first Vice President and second President of the independent, post-war Philippines — each of these describes Elpidio Rivera Quirino. He was also the husband of Alicia Jimenez Syquia, third cousin, one time removed, of José Verzosa Baquiran III.

Quirino was born in the historic town of Vigan, Ilocos Sur, on November 16, 1890. His father was a warden in a provincial jail. After attending elementary school in the town of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, near Vigan, Elpidio Quirino began his high school studies at Vigan High School. While still a student there, he began working as a barrio (rural village) teacher. While still a student, he moved to Manila and graduated from Manila High School in 1911.

Upon graduating from high school, Quirino passed the Filipino civil service exam. He enrolled in law school at the University of the Philippines, from which he graduated in 1915.

Shortly after finishing law school, Quirino began his almost lifelong


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service in the government of the Philippines. He first served as secretary to the president of the Philippines Senate, Manuel Quezon. In 1919, he was elected to the Philippines House of Representatives.

On January 6, 1921, Quirino married Alicia Syquia.

In 1925, Quirino was elected to the Philippines Senate. Once there, he was quickly given appointments on multiple Senate committees. He was reelected to the Senate in 1931.

As a senator during the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, he began his dedicated efforts to secure full independence for the Philippines. In 1934, he was a member of the Philippine Independence mission to Washington, D.C. As part of that mission, Quirino helped secure passage by the U.S. Congress in 1935 of the Tydings-McDuffie Act (officially, the Philippine Independence Act), which set the terms for Filipino independence. The law established the “Commonwealth of the Philippines” and stipulated that the Philippines would receive full independence from the United States after a period of 10 years — i.e., on July 4, 1946. (The law also set limits on Filipino immigration to the United States.)
Back in the Philippines, Quirino was elected to a commission that drafted a constitution for the Philippines, which was approved in May 1935. During the transitional Commonwealth government, he served as Secretary of Finance and as Secretary of the Interior.

Alicia Jimenez Syquia (wife of Elpidio Rivera Quirino) was the third cousin, one time removed, of José Verzosa Baquiran III.
In April 1942, Japanese imperial forces drove the Americans from the Philippines and dissolved the islands’ Commonwealth government. On October 14, 1943, the Japanese established their own puppet government of the Philippines (now officially known as the Second Philippine Republic).

THE SYQUIA MANSION OF ELPIDIO QUIRINO

The Vigan mansion that served as the home of Elpidio Quirino was actually the ancestral residence of Quirino’s wife, Alicia Jimenez Syquia. Officially known as the “Angco-Syquia-Quirino Mansion,” the house now serves as a de facto memorial library to Quirino’s presidency.

The mansion was built in 1830 by Justo Angco (? – 1896), who was the brother of Susana Angco Verzosa (1834 – 1865), great-great-grandmother of José Verzosa Baquiran III. When Justo Angco’s daughter Estefania married Gregorio R. Syquia in 1875. Syquia was a prominent official in Vigan during the late Spanish colonial period. The house eventually passed from Gregorio and Estefania to their son, Tomas Syquia — and then from Tomas to his daughter, Alicia Jimenez Syquia. When Alicia was killed by Japanese forces in 1945, ownership of the mansion passed to Quirino.
Quirino refused to be part of the puppet government. Instead, he went into hiding from the Japanese, along with his wife (Alicia Syquia Quirino) and children. Quirino was eventually captured by the Japanese forces and imprisoned. Then, in early 1945, during the Battle of Manila (which drove the Japanese from Manila), Alicia Syquia Quirino, a son, and two daughters were killed by the Japanese as they were fleeing their home.

After the war’s conclusion, with the U.S.-occupation Commonwealth government back in place, Quirino became active in preparations for the islands’ full national independence. He became leader of the island’s majority Liberal Party and was elected President Pro Tempore of the Senate. In April 1946, Manuel Roxas was elected as the final President of the Commonwealth, and Quirino was elected Vice President.

As had been pledged in the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the Philippines finally achieved its full national independence on July 4, 1946. Roxas became the first President of the “Third Philippine Republic,” and Quirino became the first Vice President.

On April 15, 1948, President Roxas died unexpectedly in office after suffering a heart attach. Two days later, Quirino was sworn into office as the second President of a fully independent Philippines.

As the new President, Quirino had two primary goals: national reconstruction after World War II’s utter devastation, and restoring the faith and confidence of the Filipino people in their government. Accomplishing the second of these goals was a particular challenge. Members of the rival Nationalist Party soon attempted to impeach Quirino, accusing him of charges ranging from nepotism to misappropriation of funds. After several months, Quirino was exonerated of all charges, and the impeachment attempt failed.

In November 1949, Quirino was elected to a second term as President, although the election was marred with charges of election fraud and intimidation.

During his second term, Quirino attempted to improve the Philippines’ social, economic, and agrarian conditions. He established diplomatic relations with Western and Asian countries. Importantly, he faced serious insurrection challenges from the Communist-led Hukbalahap (Huk) movement. In an attempt to suppress the rebels, he appointed Ramon Magsaysay as national Secretary of Defense. Despite this move, Quirino did not act as aggressively against the Huks
as his opponents believed was necessary, and Filipino nationalists accused Quirino of placing American interests over Filipino needs. In addition, Quirino faced continued charges of corruption.

Quirino ran for reelection in 1953, despite the fact that he was in poor health. Magsaysay angrily resigned as Quirino’s Secretary of Defense, in protest against Quirino’s alleged corruption, and instead ran for President against Quirino.

Quirino was defeated by Magsaysay in the 1953 election. Quirino retired to private life. He died a few years later, on February 29, 1956, after suffering a heart attack.

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