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Spanish hometown of Castro's father proud of place in history

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AFP/File / by Diego Urdaneta | The abandoned small limestone house of Fidel Castro's father in Lancara on November 26, 2016

LÁNCARA (SPAIN) (AFP) -

Historians will debate Fidel Castro's legacy for years, but the remote Spanish village of Lancara is proud to be the birthplace of the late Cuban president's father.

"One person might call him a dictator, another a revolutionary, but he is an icon and a symbol of a moment in history, and his origins are in Lancara, so we are very happy," said Manuel Fernandez, as he sat in a bar in the village in Galicia, a poor farming and fishing region in northwestern Spain.

He recalled catching a glimpse of Castro, who died Friday at the age of 90, from afar when he visited Lancara in 1992 after attending a summit in Madrid.

"You don't believe it until he appears in a Mercedes surrounded by his entourage," said Fernandez, a 60-year-old retired teacher.

The Socialist mayor of Lancara at the time named Castro an "adopted son" of the village, which is home to around 2,700.

The village, made up of houses scattered on hills, has been swarming with reporters since the announcement of Castro's death.

"Everyone has their own opinion but everyone here is proud that Fidel is a descendant of Lancara," said Carlos Lopez Sierra, 69, who runs a rural hotel near the one-room stone house where Castro's father Angel Castro was born.

- Castro 'left drying tears' -

Sierra recalls seeing tears in the revolutionary icon's eyes when he visited the modest home.

"He entered alone and left drying tears," said Sierra as he sat in the living room of the hostel, which is decorated with photos of famous visitors, including one of Castro.

If it were not for a commemorative plaque, nothing about the stone house indicates it still belongs to the family of the titan of the 20th century who ruled Cuba from 1959 until 2006.

"In this house, in 1875, Angel Castro Argiz was born, a Galician who immigrated to Cuba where he planted trees that still bloom," reads the plaque on the facade of the building.

Lancara town hall would like the Castro family to donate house to the municipality so it can be turned it into a museum.

During his visit to Lancara Castro said his father emigrated from Spain in search of a better life but he "always" wanted to return to village, according to newspaper reports at the time.

- 103-year-old cousin -

Sierra was part of a group of Lancara officials and local residents who visited Cuba in 2001. He said they were welcomed as "heads of state", and Castro picked them up from their hotel in person.

"He even acted as a cook because he said in Cuba lobster was prepared very dry, so he cooked it himself. He was with us as if he was a longtime family member, he was caring, warm," Sierra said, smiling at the memory of the trip.

Sierra accompanied local officials on Saturday as they visited a retirement home in Lancara to inform one of Castro's cousins of his death.

Manuela Argiz, 103, received the news quietly, said Lancara mayor Dario Pineiro.

"May God forgive him," were one of the few words she said, he added.

Manuela, seated in her wheelchair with a red blanket covering her knees, observed a minute of silence on Sunday outside the Castro home along with the mayor and local residents and laid white roses outside the buildings.

by Diego Urdaneta

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