

## The Hotel Ribera Castellanos and Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company

Agriculture	3
Lakefront homes for the wealthy	3
Lakeview Gardens and Winfield Scott	4
The Hotel Ribera	5
Trouble in Paradise	10
Who was Enrique Langenscheidt Brockmann?	13
What became of the Hotel Ribera?	13
Who was Dwight Furness?	14
Jenkins Fleming: Myth or mystery?	17

Before the advent of automobiles, the most accessible part of Lake Chapala was the eastern end of the lake, near Ocotlán. The railroad from central Mexico and Irapuato, via Ocotlán, to Guadalajara was established in 1888. It passed very close to the lake, and passengers could alight in Ocotlán and then take one of several steamships which offered cargo and passenger service around the lake. It was, though, still quite time consuming to reach Chapala, so alternative lodgings in and near Ocotlán were established to satisfy the desires of those with limited time or means.

Within a few years of the first trains through Ocotlán, one particular area had already gained renown as a picturesque spot from which to admire the lake. It was a lakeshore section of the El Fuerte hacienda, a short distance south of Ocotlán, which became known from the late nineteenth century as Ribera Castellanos, named after the owners of the hacienda. The Castellanos family was one of wealthiest land-owning families on the north side of the lake. Their estates also included the much larger San Andrés hacienda, a few kilometers east of Ocotlán.

Ignacio Castellanos inherited the family property in the middle of the nineteenth century on the death of his father, Pedro Castellanos. The family seat was a mansion with outbuildings and stables on property that extended to the banks of the River Santiago. Castellanos married Esther Tapia Ruiz (1842-1897), a poet from the neighboring state of Michoacán, and the couple divided their time between their country home in Ocotlán and a city residence in Guadalajara.

Esther Tapia de Castellanos co-founded a magazine of science, art and literature named *La República Literaria*, published in Guadalajara, which quickly became one of the best known publications in the country. Its other co-founders were José López Portillo y Rojas and Manuel Álvarez del Castillo, one of whose relatives—Jesús—founded the *El Informador* daily in Guadalajara.

Ignacio Castellanos added a huge *mirador*, almost as high as the church tower, atop the family home, from where a spectacular view could be enjoyed, encompassing parts of his extensive land holdings, the River Zula, and the so-called Castellanos bridge, used by everyone entering and leaving Ocotlán from the east.

In 1902, the San Andrés hacienda and Ribera Castellanos were acquired by visionary American entrepreneur Dwight Furness (see [Who was Dwight Furness?](#)) for \$200,000 pesos in gold.<sup>1</sup> Furness recognized the enormous economic and

---

<sup>1</sup> The Mexican Herald: 18 February 1902, 3.

tourist potential of the 7000-acre estate, located between the main Irapuato-Guadalajara railroad, Lake Chapala and the River Grande de Santiago.

Most of the former hacienda would remain agricultural land, with investments to improve productivity. However, the property included "one of the finest scenic spots in Mexico," with "nearly three miles of lake and river front," ideal for Furness's plan to build a modern "summer colony", centered on Ribera Castellanos, the shoreline property 5 kilometers south of Ocotlán. The plan included a large "commodious" lakefront hotel that would take full advantage of nearby thermal springs.<sup>2</sup>

A correspondent for *The Mexican Herald* was immediately enthusiastic about the tourism possibilities, pointing out that "in winter months people of the tableland cities go down to Veracruz or Tampico for sea bathing and boating," while summer months could be uncomfortable both in the cities and on the coast. A town of "cottages and hotels" on Lake Chapala was, therefore, an ideal solution, given its wonderful year-round climate:

- "There is no finer all-the-year-round climate than that which may be enjoyed along the shores of Lake Chapala. The air is itself a tonic, the lake breezes invigorating, and the worn out business man, or society woman, finds in a few days that the system is generously renewed."<sup>3</sup>

Access to the area would be improved by constructing large wharves on the lakeshore and adding a short branch line from the Mexican Central mainline station at Ocotlán to Jamay via the small settlement of El Fuerte. This would enable safe and easy passage for tourists visiting the hotel and would ensure that cargo-carrying boats could tranship produce from all around the lake to the railroad for transport to cities such as Guadalajara and Mexico City.<sup>4</sup>

The total investment required to carry out this master plan was estimated at a further \$200,000 pesos in gold.<sup>5</sup>

In May 1902 Furness was awarded a 99-year federal concession to add the branch railroad he wanted. At least four kilometers had to be completed in the first year and the remainder within another two years. Even though the terms of this concession were modified more than once to give Furness more time to build the new line,<sup>6</sup> this particular aspect of the long term plan were never even begun.

To finance the development of the San Andrés hacienda and Ribera Castellanos, Furness incorporated the Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company in Phoenix, Arizona, in July 1902, naming himself as company president, his brother-in-law, Samuel C. Rodgers, as general manager, and John B. Reese as the local administrator. The company raised \$600,000 dollars in capital<sup>7</sup> and soon began building a town "laid out in American style" and selling building lots.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Mexican Herald: 21 May 1902, 2.

<sup>3</sup> The Mexican Herald: 31 May 1902, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jalisco Times, 12 Mar 1904.

<sup>5</sup> El Imparcial: diario ilustrado de la mañana, 21 May 1902, 1.

<sup>6</sup> (a) Iberia: 21 June 1902, 2. (b) The Mexican Herald: 11 Dec 1903, 7; 13 June 1904, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Arizona Republican (Phoenix, Arizona): 24 Jul 1902, 4.

## Agriculture

By 1907 more than half of the 8000-acre San Andrés hacienda (which included Ribera Castellanos) was under cultivation. The farm raised livestock and regularly advertised that it had brown Swiss cattle, stallions and carriage horses for sale.<sup>8</sup> The farming side of the Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company was boosted in June 1907 when A. E. Conway was appointed to establish a large plant nursery and take charge of the company's horticultural department.<sup>9</sup> Using lake water for irrigation, the farm produced "the finest wheat ever grown in Mexico," corn, garbanzo and alfalfa.<sup>10</sup>

## Lakefront homes for the wealthy

In 1904, acting for the Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Co., Mexico city lawyer Rafael Pardo asked federal finance minister José Yves Limantour for permission for the company to build an islet in Lake Chapala. Pardo explained that a small 'reef' named Las Peñas posed a danger to navigation, because it was revealed only when the lake was low and barely covered with water when the lake was higher. Constructing a small island, with a 'bathing house' and gardens, would allow a preventative light to be placed there to avoid boating mishaps. The company offered to pay rent for the property if it were allowed to build the island, add a shipping light, and eventually build a games house ('not for gambling') there.<sup>11</sup>

Even before this request, Furness had begun selling plots of land suitable for building private lakefront homes at Rivera Castellanos. In August 1904 he claimed that 30 lots out of the 200 available for cottages along the lake front had already been sold.<sup>12</sup> For several years, the company continued to offer lots of between 1000 and 2000 square meters, priced from 75 cents to \$1 a square meter, and payable over two years. Purchasers who completed a \$4000+ home within two years were excused from the final payment, effectively giving them a 33% discount.<sup>13</sup>

Construction of the first homes and the Hotel Ribera got underway in earnest in the summer of 1904. A power house "for pumping and furnishing electric light" and a provisional 400-cubic-meter water system were installed, as well as drainage, none of which flowed into Lake Chapala. Wide "streets and drives, shaded by rows of trees," were laid out.

Among the first homes to be completed were those built by local land-owner Joaquin Cuesta and the "handsome stone residence", costing \$20,000, of Guanajuato engineer W. B. Fields.<sup>14</sup> Other prominent individuals who had already completed, or were erecting, residences at Ribera Castellanos by August 1906 were Canadian artist W. T. Benson, the Guadalajara capitalist Jenaro Castellanos, A. V. Temple, C. Castellanos, José Corona, Edward Orrin, Dr. Y. Dávila, L. R. Pardo and Bishop Ortiz of the state of Jalisco.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> The Mexican Herald: 2 June 1906, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Jalisco Times: 14 Jun 1907.

<sup>10</sup> Jalisco Times: 1 May 1908.

<sup>11</sup> Archives, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Carso Fundación Carlos Slim. Exchange of letters (31 March 1904 to 7 April 1904) between Pardo and Limantour.

<sup>12</sup> El Paso Times: 9 Aug 1904, 5.

<sup>13</sup> The Mexican Herald: 30 Sep 1906, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Jalisco Times: 7 May 1904; 4 Nov 1904.

<sup>15</sup> The Mexican Herald: 26 Aug 1906, 14.

Later Ribera Castellanos homeowners included the Lombardo brothers from Puebla and Arturo Braniff of Mexico City, who imported their own power boats. The Lombardo brothers had their \$20,000 boat, *Arbitro*, built in New York, sent to Ocotlán via the Mexican Central Railroad. It was able to make the 35-mile run from Ribera Castellanos to Chapala in less than 90 minutes.<sup>16</sup>



Fig 1. Winfield Scott. ca 1906. Typical Cottage at Ribera Castellanos.

#### **Lakeview Gardens and Winfield Scott**

Tracts of land were also sold for an adjacent area, known as Lakeview Gardens, owned by Winfield Scott, the official photographer for the Mexican Central railroad. Scott later became manager of the Hotel Ribera before taking over the management of the Hotel Arzapalo in Chapala. Scott and his wife, Edna, had settled in Ocotlán in 1901 and moved a few years later to Las Tortugas ranch, overlooking the lake.<sup>17</sup> Las Tortugas was west of Ocotlán, in the municipality of Poncitlán.

Scott ran the ranch as a fruit farm (no doubt supplying the Hotel Ribera) and tried to develop an adjoining area known as The Lakeview Gardens for a rival establishment, an "Inland Sea Boating Club," with a hotel, bathing facilities, bowling alley and other amusement features, as well as rowboats, sailboats and houseboats on the lake.<sup>18</sup> Scott repeatedly tried to interest investors from Mexico City in financing the construction, seeking \$30,000 in silver, and offered to sell a 50% stake in his hotel proposition, where the climate was the "best on earth."<sup>19</sup>

While Scott tried, in vain, to get his hotel off the ground, guests stayed for \$2.50 or \$3.00 a day at his Lakeview House, which had rooms, cottages and a restaurant.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Jalisco Times: 8 Nov 1907; 17 Jan 1908.

<sup>17</sup> Jalisco Times: 2 Jan 1904.

<sup>18</sup> Jalisco Times: 27 Sep 1907.

<sup>19</sup> The Mexican Herald: 27 Sep 1907, 8; 5 Jun 1909.

<sup>20</sup> Jalisco Times: 31 Oct 1908; 28 Nov 1908.

Scott was not the only savvy entrepreneur to see the possible benefits of riding on the coattails of the Hotel Ribera. The Hotel Ribera had barely opened when a Mrs Noriega announced that "visitors to Chapala and to the new resort of Rivera Castellanos will find comfortable accommodations" in her Ocotlán House.<sup>21</sup> For travelers wanting to stay near the train station, or at times when the hotel was full, this would have been an appealing option.

### **The Hotel Ribera**

In January 1906, shortly before the Hotel Ribera, situated on a hill overlooking the lake, was opened, the Jalisco state governor Gen Miguel Ahumada accepted an invitation extended by the Lake Chapala Agricultural & Improvement Company to visit Ribera Castellanos. He was accompanied by Manuel Cuesta, Antonio Pérez Verdía, Felipe Robleda and Manuel Puga.<sup>22</sup>



Fig 2. Dwight R. Furness. ca 1907. Hotel Ribera.

The hotel's owner, Dwight Furness, took a close personal interest in ensuring its success. His eldest son, Dwight Rodgers Furness, used his then amateur photography skills to take a series of promotional postcards showing the hotel and its surroundings. The postcards were first published in about 1907, when Dwight Jr was still a teenager. While other firms had published a few earlier real photo cards of Ocotlán, Furness' cards have great historical value as they document many aspects of the Hotel Ribera.

Dwight Rodgers Furness (1892-1960) was born in Guanajuato on 1 January 1892. Educated in Illinois, he graduated from Evanston Academy and Northwestern University, prior to becoming a chemist for American Film Company. In 1918 he helped organize the pioneering U.S.A. Aerial Photography School, a joint venture between the United States Army Signal Corps and the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, New York. After the war, he established his own photography business in Evanston.

---

<sup>21</sup> The Mexican Herald: 21 Apr 1904, 7; El Imparcial: 1 April 1904.

<sup>22</sup> Jalisco Times: 26 Jan 1906.



The Hotel Ribera was fully functional by 1907 when banner ads announced more building lots for sale—"a splendid investment"—in the "Coming Pleasure Resort" of Ribera Castellanos, with the tag line, "The Riviera of Mexico," a line designed to strike a chord with the well-heeled clientele being targeted. The ads pointed out how easy it was, with two trains daily each way, for Guadalajara residents to visit for a day or for a weekend to stay in the hotel which offered "wholesome meals, clean beds." The hotel billed itself as the "Sportsman's Paradise," the perfect headquarters for hunting during the winter season, especially since the area had no mosquitos and no malaria.<sup>23</sup>



Fig 3. Dwight R. Furness. ca 1907. Hotel Ribera. Colorized version published by Alba y Fernández.

The hotel quickly became a highly desirable vacation destination and all manner of politicians and celebrities vacationed there over the next decade. The hotel was initially a single story building with about 17 rooms. One of the first managers of the Hotel Ribera was a Mrs W. D. Caldwell, formerly of Mexico City, who managed the hotel in 1907 and 1908.<sup>24</sup>

Percy Martin, a well-educated British traveler writing in 1907, described the hotel as 30 minutes by steam launch from Ocotlán and about five hours from Chapala. He marveled that "Here such sunrises and sunsets are to be seen as few other parts of the world can offer." Rooms with full board were between US\$1.50-2.00 a day and most visitors came from Guanajuato, Guadalajara or Mexico City. Martin praised the hunting but was dismissive of the fishing: "The sportsman can revel in a plenitude of wild duck, cranes, and occasionally wild geese and other water-fowl. The fishing, however, is poor, and strangely enough the Lake yields up little or nothing fit for the table."<sup>25</sup>

Several well-heeled federal politicians visited the hotel in March 1907. Both Vice-President Ramón Corral and Finance Secretary José Yves Limantour stayed at the Hotel Ribera before taking a steamship ride to spend a few nights in Chapala.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jalisco Times: 4 Jan 1907; The Mexican Herald: 13 May 1907.

<sup>24</sup> The Mexican Herald: 9 Oct 1907, 5; 16 Sep 1908, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Percy Martin. 1907. Mexico of the Twentieth Century. 2 vols. London: Edward Arnold, vol II, 67-68.

<sup>26</sup> Jalisco Times: 29 Mar 1907.

Winfield Scott, who lived nearby, reported in 1908 that the area was exceptionally busy and that the Hotel Ribera had been forced "to turn people away in droves." The hotel planned to add a new wing of rooms before the next Easter season.<sup>27</sup> (He also reported that the government was making good progress in eliminating the noxious water hyacinth; sadly, the success of those efforts proved to be short-lived.)



Fig 4. Anon. ca. 1907. Veranda of Hotel Ribera. Postcard mailed in July 1907.

The growing number of tourists led to the hotel beginning construction, in 1909, of a two-story building with 60 additional rooms adjoining the existing one-story structure.<sup>28</sup>

Given its popularity, Ribera Castellanos prompted several major articles in the press. One of the first, occupying close to an entire page, appeared in the Jalisco Times in 1908 and called the hotel "Mexico's best resort." It drew readers' attention to the reduced excursion rates offered by the Mexican Central, as well as to the amenities on offer:

"Hotel Ribera has all modern conveniences: electric lights, American plumbing, tub and shower baths having hot as well as cold water connections. A Brown Swiss herd furnishes milk, cream and butter for the table, and the fruits and vegetables are from the gardens adjoining the hotel. An experienced Chinese cook presides over the kitchen and the cuisine of the hotel is at all times excellent... Climatic conditions throughout the year are perfect; the lake breezes that blow over Ribera Castellanos are refreshing, exhilarating, health-giving."<sup>29</sup>

Hotel guests, as they wandered about the property, stumbled across the occasional mastodon bone. Two tusks, each more than six feet long, were found in 1908 by S. C. Rodgers, the hotel manager. His assistant manager, A. E. Conway, subsequently unearthed many teeth and bone fragments of the mighty

<sup>27</sup> The Mexican Herald: 5 March 1908, 10.

<sup>28</sup> The Mexican Herald: 5 Sep 1909, 3

<sup>29</sup> Jalisco Times: 1 May 1908.

mammals that once roamed this area.<sup>30</sup> Rodgers, the brother-in-law of Dwight Furness, continued as manager until at least 1911.<sup>31</sup>

JALISCO TIMES, FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1907.

THE COMING PLASURE RESORT

# RIBERA CASTELLANOS—ON BEAUTIFUL LAKE CHAPALA

Only half an hour's ride by carriage or boat from Ocotlán, Jalisco

"THE RIVIERA OF MEXICO"

WE are now offering for sale a few choice building lots in this new colony at very reasonable prices. These lots are a splendid investment, for values in Ribera Castellanos are bound to increase. Especially attractive for Guadalajara people; two hours ride from Guadalajara; two trains each way daily. You can leave Guadalajara in the morning, spend the day at the lake and return in the evening.

Good Hotel Already Established. Wholesome Meals and Clean Beds.	Fine Boat and Carriage Service Between Ocotlán Station and Hotel Ribera, and Safe, Roomy Launches for Lake Trips.	Headquarters for Hunting During the Season. Special Excursions Arranged.
---	---	--

RIBERA CASTELLANOS is now being equipped with electric light and power. High pressure water service and sanitary drainage. No malaria and no mosquitoes. Always cool and pleasant. Visit this delightful spot and be convinced that you should own a part of it. For further particulars address.

## Lake Chapala Agricultural & Improvement Co., Ocotlán Jal., Mex.

Fig 5. 1907 advertisement for Ribera Castellanos in Jalisco Times. (Jalisco State Archives)

Hotel guests could lounge in lawn chairs or hammocks or use recreational launches, sail-boats, row-boats, and horses. According to an article in the *Jalisco Times*, the hotel planned to expand to 100 rooms, and add bath houses for the property's hot springs, a golf links and bowling alleys. It also wanted to bottle and market the spring water and build a sanatorium on the mountain immediately above the springs.<sup>32</sup>

The 1909 *Terry's Mexico* claimed that hotel guests could enjoy boating, fishing, riding, driving and hunting excursions, alongside "American cooking and management" for US\$3.00–\$5.00 a night American Plan.<sup>33</sup>

That same year, a lengthy report by Winifred Martin appeared in U.S. newspapers. Martin remarked on the colorful flora and fauna, and described the hotel as "picturesque and charming with lawns sloping steeply to the water's edge... the long rambling building with its tiled roof fits well into the setting." The hotel managers during her stay were Mr. and Mrs J. M. Sunrow, formerly of the Kenilworth Inn at Asheville, North Carolina; the chef was Chinese.<sup>34</sup>

By 1910, The hotel had completed 12 new "tule houses," primarily designed to attract hunters and fishermen, and was about to add more.<sup>35</sup> Nearby hot springs were cited as an attraction, with "new springs" now open for bathing. The hotel continued to attract visitors from all over Mexico and the U.S. The long list of guests listed in early April included Norwegian entrepreneur Christian Schjetnan and his wife from Mexico City.

<sup>30</sup> The Mexican Herald: 4 May 1908, 5.

<sup>31</sup> The Mexican Herald: 19 Aug 1911.

<sup>32</sup> Jalisco Times: 1 May 1908.

<sup>33</sup> Prices quoted in Thomas Philip Terry. 1909. *Terry's Mexico*.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. The San Bernardino Sun, 4 Dec 1909.

<sup>35</sup> The Mexican Herald: 4 April 1910.





Fig 6. P. Magallanes. ca 1907. "Fuerte de Ocotlán" (hotel pier). Colorized and published by Alba y Fernández.

An advertisement for the hotel in June 1910, when George J. Comedy was manager, quoted a letter from American inventor and writer Frederick Upham Adams, a recent guest: "I have sailed the lakes of four continents but have seen nothing to compare with the superb beauty of Lake Chapala." The advert extolled the virtues of "dairy and garden products fresh from our famous hacienda," and the "hunting, boating, bathing and fishing" in "the most exquisite climate on Earth."<sup>36</sup>

The Hotel Ribera Castellanos retained close links to Guanajuato, and the mining and other companies in that region considered it the ideal place to send foreign managers to recuperate from illness. For instance, in August 1911, D. S. Greeley returned to Pachuca having stayed for a few weeks at the hotel to recover from an attack of typhoid fever. Meanwhile, Juan Kaiser, a Swiss publisher based in Guadalajara, had just returned to the hotel for a second stay to recover from the same disease, following a relapse.<sup>37</sup>

Veteran hiker-adventurer Harry Franck (1881-1962), one of the foremost travel writers of the early twentieth century, visited Ribera Castellanos in 1912:

"From Ocotlan station a broad level highway, from which a glimpse is had of the sharp, double peak of Colima volcano, runs out to Ribera Castellanos. Sam Rodgers was building a tourist hotel there. Its broad lawn sloped down to the edge of Lake Chapala, lapping at the shores like some smaller ocean; from its verandas spread a view of sixty miles across the Mexican Titicaca, with all vacation sports, a perennial summer without undue heat, and such sunsets as none can describe.

"The hacienda San Andres, also American owned, embraced thousands of acres of rich bottom land on which already many varieties of fruit were

<sup>36</sup> The Mexican Herald: 27 June 1910, 5.

<sup>37</sup> The Mexican Herald: 24 August 1911, 7.

producing marvelously, as well as several mountain peaks and a long stretch of lake front. The estate headquarters was like some modern railway office, with its staff of employees. In the nearby stables horses were saddled for us and we set off for a day's trip all within the confines of the farm, under guidance of the bulky Mexican head overseer in all his wealth of national garb and armament.

"For miles away in several directions immense fields were being plowed by dozens of ox-teams, the white garments of the drivers standing out sharply against the brown landscape."<sup>38</sup>

### **Trouble in Paradise**

During the Mexican Revolution the Hotel Ribera Castellanos was occasionally targeted by rebel groups desirous of taking over the property.

In 1911, for example, it was widely reported that armed groups of "Santa Cruz Indians and other natives in the vicinity of Lake Chapala" were intent on forcing foreign land owners to abandon their properties. The foreigners ordered to turn over their land were Dr W. A Germain of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who owned the San Miguel ranch; Winfield Scott, owner of Las Tortugas ranch; Harry Burns, of St. Louis, who owned part of the Zapote ranch; H. S. Baumgardner, of Guadalajara, who was the superintendent of a ranch belonging to Jake Scott of Herington, Kansas; and Mrs Jacob C. Best, of Irapuato, owner of a ranch where the Santiago River exited the lake. One newspaper article traced the "bitter feeling for the white man on Chapala shores" back to the bitter fighting over the island of Mezcala between Royalist Spanish troops and the local insurgents holding the island during Mexico's War of Independence in the early nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

In 1912 a group of about 40 armed men gave the owners of the El Fuerte hacienda and the Hotel Ribera three days to leave before their land was seized and redistributed.<sup>40</sup> The deadline passed without incident. But, a month later the hotel was "under new American management."<sup>41</sup>

In a separate incident at about the same time, plans by a gang of bandits to plunder the house of Dwight Furness were only thwarted when a workman, invited to join them, alerted Furness's wife, who immediately telephoned the authorities. As the bandits entered the property, they were surrounded by police and taken into custody.<sup>42</sup>

Somehow, despite these incidents and threats, the Ribera Castellanos continued to operate almost continuously even during the Mexican Revolution. In 1913 it offered weekend trips by train (Ferrocarriles Nacionales) from Mexico City to Ocotlán for \$25.00 pesos round trip, or from Guanajuato for \$11.00 pesos round trip.<sup>43</sup> In the U.S., Ribera Castellanos was still described as a company-owned "American settlement", and "a favorite spot for sportsmen and persons who wish to rest."<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Harry A. Franck. 1916 *Tramping through Mexico, Guatemala & Honduras: Being the Random notes of an Incurable Vagabond*. New York: The Century Co., 137.

<sup>39</sup> The Sun (New York): 19 June 1911, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Regeneración: 9 March 1912, 2, which quotes El Imparcial, 23 Feb 1912.

<sup>41</sup> The Mexican Herald: 26 April 1912.

<sup>42</sup> The Oasis (Arizola, Arizona): 16 March 1912, 3.

<sup>43</sup> e.g. El Mundo Ilustrado: 5 Oct 1913. By April 1914, the fares had risen to \$25.49 pesos and \$11.22 pesos respectively.

<sup>44</sup> Evening Capital News (Boise, Idaho): 12 January 1913, 25.

The *National Geographic* for July 1916 included an image, captioned "Water sellers and their donkeys on the shores of Lake Chapala," taken by Janet Matheson Cummings, a New York-based photographer.<sup>45</sup> The photo, showing people collecting water from the lake to sell, was taken in Ocotlán, close to the Ribera Castellanos hotel. Relatively little is known about Cummings beyond the fact that she was one of the earliest female photographers to have her work published by *National Geographic*.<sup>46</sup>

In 1919, as the Mexican Revolution was finally drawing to a close, photographer Winfield Scott took over as manager of the Hotel Ribera.<sup>47</sup> In 1921, he advertised the hotel's fine French, Spanish and American cuisine, as well as its well-furnished rooms, with private baths and hot and cold water.<sup>48</sup>

The British novelist D. H. Lawrence and his traveling companion, American poet Witter Bynner, met Scott a few years later (in 1923) when he was managing the Hotel Arzapalo in Chapala, and heard his stories about the Ribera Castellanos hotel. Lawrence used Scott as the basis for the character of Bell, the American hotel owner in *The Plumed Serpent*.

Lawrence had stayed at the Hotel Ribera and chapter 5 of his novel included this brief description:

"The hotel consisted of an old low ranch-house with a veranda – and this was the dining-room, lounge, kitchen, and office. Then there was a two-storey new wing, with a smart bathroom between each two bedrooms, and almost up-to-date fittings: very incongruous.

"But the new wing was unfinished – had been unfinished for a dozen years and more, the work abandoned when Porfirio Diaz fled. Now it would probably never be finished."<sup>49</sup>

In the next chapter, Lawrence expanded on his explanation:

"In Porfirio Diaz' day, the lake-side began to be the Riviera of Mexico, and Orilla [Ribera Castellanos] was to be the Nice, or at least the Mentone of the country. But revolutions started erupting again, and in 1911 Don Porfirio fled to Paris with, it is said, thirty million gold pesos in his pocket: a peso being half a dollar, nearly half-a-crown. But we need not believe all that is said, especially by a man's enemies.

"During the subsequent revolutions, Orilla, which had begun to be a winter paradise for the Americans, lapsed back into barbarism and broken brickwork. In 1921 a feeble new start had been made."<sup>50</sup>

Scott told Lawrence and Bynner some disturbing tales about his time in charge at the Ribera Castellanos hotel. According to Witter Bynner in *Journey with Genius*, Scott explained how the owner of the hotel, an overbearing German individual, had once lost his temper and whipped an elderly local man who was gathering firewood from the hotel property. The following evening a gang of 15-20 armed bandits stormed the hotel, forced Scott to empty the safe, and then took Scott, the owner, and the owner's wife and son, into the hills. When shots broke out, three people fell, and Scott fled for his life. He succeeded

---

<sup>45</sup> National Geographic: July 1916.

<sup>46</sup> Janet Matheson Cummings – <https://lakechapalaartists.com/?p=4910>

<sup>47</sup> Witter Bynner. *Journey with Genius*, 125.

<sup>48</sup> El Informador: 22 March 1921, 2; 27 November 1921, 8.

<sup>49</sup> D. H. Lawrence. 1926. *The Plumed Serpent*, chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> D. H. Lawrence. 1926. *The Plumed Serpent*, chapter 6.

in freeing the ten hotel guests who had been relieved of their valuables and locked in their rooms.<sup>51</sup>

The German owner was Enrique Langenscheidt Schwartz, a prominent and well-connected Guanajuato businessman, by then in his seventies. Langenscheidt, the German Viceconsul in Guanajuato from 1883 to at least 1909,<sup>52</sup> had all manner of business and financial dealings with Dwight Furness, the principal investor in the Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company. In 1906, Langenscheidt lent the company \$46,000 pesos at 15% annual interest.<sup>53</sup> Shortly afterwards, in response to cash flow issues, Furness sold several mines and dissolved some of his companies. It may have been at about this time that Langenscheidt acquired the Hotel Ribera.

The Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company<sup>54</sup> appears to have limped on even as the Mexican Revolution made life difficult, especially for wealthy, foreign landowners. Stock in the company, however, soon became close to worthless. In 1917, the 15 shares in the "Lake Chapala Agricultural Co." that were in the \$63,152 estate of John Conrad of North Charleroi, Pennsylvania (the home town of Furness' wife) were valued at a miserly total of \$1.00.<sup>55</sup> The company was also included in 1921 by the Cámara Agrícola Nacional Jalisciense when it submitted a list of all foreign owned farms and ranches for a National Agriculture and Ranching Directory.<sup>56</sup>

By 1919, the Hotel Ribera was, apparently, being run by Langenscheidt's 35-year-old son, Enrique Langenscheidt Jr., who in 1910 had married Guadalupe Obregon Tornel, the eldest daughter of Joaquin Obregón González, the governor of the state of Guanajuato.<sup>57</sup> The newly weds had honeymooned at Lake Chapala and, by 1919 had at least four children. It was Enrique Langenscheidt Jr. who was killed in 1919 at the Ribera Hotel. The U.S. press reported that, "*The Excelsior* tells of the murder by bandits of the millionaire, Enrique Langenscheidt, son of the German consul at Guanajuato. Langenscheidt met death at the hands of the rebels fleeing from Michoacán into Jalisco, who caught him on his ranch near Lake Chapala."<sup>58</sup> Note that in Beatriz Malagón's otherwise excellent account of Winfield Scott's life, she writes that this terrible murder occurred in 1909, not 1919, owing to a mistaken date written on a

---

<sup>51</sup> Witter Bynner. 1951. *Journey with Genius*. New York: The John Day Company, 124-126.

<sup>52</sup> *El Nacional*: periódico de literatura, ciencias, artes, industria, agricultura, minería y comercio, 14 June 1883; Anuario Estadístico de la República Mexicana, 1 Jan 1907, 562.

<sup>53</sup> For the complex business links between Furness and Enrique Langenscheidt Schwartz see Moisés Gámez Rodríguez. 2004. "Priedad y empresa minera en la Mesa centro-norte de México. Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí y Zacatecas, 1880-1910." PhD Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Department of Economics and Economic History. 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Note that the Lake Chapala Agricultural and Improvement Company was an entirely different entity to "Compañía Agrícola del Chapala, S.A.," founded a few years later to drain the eastern end of the lake.

<sup>55</sup> *The Daily Republican* (Monongahela, Pennsylvania), 27 Oct 1917, 4.

<sup>56</sup> González Navarro, Moisés. 2001. *Cristeros y agraristas en Jalisco*. México: El Colegio de México. Volume 2, table page 68.

<sup>57</sup> *The Mexican Herald*: 7 Aug 1910, 3; *El Imparcial*: diario ilustrado de la mañana, 10 Aug 1910.

<sup>58</sup> Identical accounts were published in several papers including Grants Pass Daily Courier (Oregon), 10 July 1919, 1; and *The Evening Herald*, (Klamath Falls, Oregon) 11 July 1919, 6.



family letter.<sup>59</sup>

Immediately after his son's death, Enrique Langenscheidt Sr. visited a notary in Ocotlán to register (apparently for the first time) the births of his three youngest grandchildren: María Luisa (aged 4), Enrique (2) and Joaquín (1).

### **Who was Enrique Langenscheidt Brockmann?**

Enrique Langenscheidt Brockmann, born in Guanajuato in about 1884, was the son of German-born Guanajuato businessman and local German viceconsul Heinrich (Enrique) Langenscheidt Schwartz (c 1845->1930) and his wife, Luisa Brockmann Ibarguengoitia (ca 1862-?).

Enrique married Guadalupe Obregon Tornel, the eldest daughter of Joaquín Obregon Gonzalez, the Governor of Guanajuato, in 1910. The *Mexican Herald* proclaimed that "the wedding will be one of the most elaborate ever celebrated in the city."<sup>60</sup> According to Mexico City daily *El Imparcial*, the bride's dress was made in Paris, and the couple planned to honeymoon in Chapala.<sup>61</sup> The couple had four children: María del Refugio, born in 1911, and the three younger ones named above. The children lost their father when Enrique was murdered by rebels in Ocotlán in 1919.

### **What became of the Hotel Ribera?**

In the early 1920s, when the town of Chapala became more easily accessible—served by both a reliable bus service and its own train station—it drew clientele away from the Ribera Castellanos. Winfield Scott, who had managed Hotel Ribera, moved to Chapala to manage the Hotel Arzapalo. The Ribera Castellanos struggled on into the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> While it never regained its previous popularity or status, it still retained some strong supporters. In 1937, for instance, Edna Mae Stark was sufficiently impressed to claim that "The most modern town on the shores of Lake Chapala is Ribera Castellanos, which is destined for popularity as a vacation resort. With a good hotel as headquarters, guests may fish, or hunt, swim or ride horseback, go motoring or sailing."<sup>63</sup>

In 1951 the ownership of 9,379 sq meters of lakefront property at El Fuerte (including at least part of the Ribera Castellanos estate) was claimed by Josefina Langenscheidt de Anciola, one of Enrique Langenscheidt Jr.'s sisters.<sup>64</sup>

Today, a few ruined walls are all that remain of the former grand resort known as Hotel Ribera Castellanos.

---

<sup>59</sup> Beatriz Eugenia Malagón Girón. 2012. Winfield Scott: retrato de un fotógrafo norteamericano en el porfiriato. Mexico City: UAM.

<sup>60</sup> The Mexican Herald: 7 Aug 1910, 3.

<sup>61</sup> El Imparcial: 10 Aug 1910.

<sup>62</sup> The hotel appears to have become more of a party location than regular hotel. A private ball, given in 1935 is the last mention of the hotel in El Informador (13 March 1935, 4,6).

<sup>63</sup> Edna Mae Stark. 1937. "Discovering Mexico", Modern Mexico, Vol 9 #2, July 1937, 19-23.

<sup>64</sup> Legal notice in El Informador, 17 May 1951, 2.

## Who was Dwight Furness?

Dwight Furness, born in Furnessville, Indiana on 8 July 1861, was a wealthy and influential Chicago investor who grew up in Furnessville (named for his family) and first arrived in Mexico in October 1887 to look after the interests of the Santana Mining Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Problems related to the company's concessions for the Calera and Cebada mines led to that business ending within a year. But Furness stayed on in Mexico, formed the Williams & Furness company with the then U.S. consular agent at Guanajuato, Edward Williams, as his partner, and began buying mineral ores for the Omaha and Grant smelter. When this venture proved barely profitable, Williams left the firm and business continued as Furness & Highby until the end of 1889.<sup>65</sup>

By that time, Furness had replaced Williams as the U.S. consular agent at Guanajuato, a position he held from November 1889 to 1907.<sup>66</sup>

In 1890 Furness, a staunch Methodist, married Anna Margarita Rodgers, a Methodist missionary he met in Mexico; the couple had ten children (five sons, five daughters), two of whom died as infants.<sup>67</sup>

Early in 1891, Furness started to deal in general merchandise as Dwight Furness & Co. He continued to ship ores to Omaha and also to Colorado, to the Pueblo smelter owned by Messrs Guggenheim. According to Percy Martin, prior to Furness's arrival, all ores had traditionally been shipped to Europe at a total cost for "freight and treatment" of \$50 gold a ton. The equivalent cost to Omaha was \$35 gold a ton,<sup>68</sup> giving Furness a healthy profit margin. Costs were reduced even further when the Guggenheims established a smelter at Monterrey in 1891.

The following year, Furness, still resident in the city of Guanajuato, organized a stock company—The Furness & Lewis Co—that quickly built a successful business, doing more than \$2 million worth of business a year with 12 agencies serving all the major mining areas across Mexico. Based in Mexico City, they advertised themselves as "Importers and wholesale dealers in all kinds of mining and hacienda supplies", supplying chemicals, assay supplies, mining steel, ore sacks, iron roofing and wire fencing among other essential mining needs.<sup>69</sup>

Furness sold his share of this company to Lewis in 1896, retaining for himself only the company's interests in Guanajuato, now run through Dwight Furness & Co, later renamed The Dwight Furness Co. This company, in which Furness's brother-in-law Samuel C Rodgers, was a minority partner, bought and sold ore, owned several mines and controlled the San Gregorio Railroad which ran the 80 kilometers between Marfil (on the outskirts of the city of Guanajuato) to the

---

<sup>65</sup> Percy Martin. 1906. "Mexico's Treasure House". New York: The Cheltenham Press, 243-244.

<sup>66</sup> El Abogado Cristiano Ilustrado, 24 Dec 1903, 16; Percy Martin. 1906. "Mexico's Treasure House". New York: The Cheltenham Press, 243-244. Furness' US passport application dated December 1917.

<sup>67</sup> Anon. 1912. History of Porter County, Indiana: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People and its Principal Interests. Chicago, Illinois: Lewis Publishing Company, 743-748.

<sup>68</sup> Percy Martin. 1906. *Mexico's Treasure House*. New York: The Cheltenham Press, 243-244.

<sup>69</sup> The Mexican Herald: 28 January 1896, 8.

San Gregorio Mine.<sup>70</sup> In August 1896 the company began concentrating the low grade ores from mines at Pozos at their newly-opened Ojo del Agua mill at San Luis de la Paz.<sup>71</sup>

In 1902, Furness bought the San Andrés hacienda and Ribera Castellanos on the shores of Lake Chapala where he began developing a new tourist town and hotel.

As business boomed, Furness's operations, which ranged from mines to land and financing, expanded into several states, including Aguascalientes, Durango and Jalisco, where the company had ore buying agencies in Sayula, Etzatlan, Ameca and Guadalajara.<sup>72</sup> Despite all his wheeling and dealing, Furness retained a reputation as a fair and benevolent businessman. According to Percy Martin, "Mr Furness is everybody's friend, and probably does not possess an enemy in the world."<sup>73</sup>

In 1909, Furness organized a new company, the Guanajuato-Jalisco Development Co. to focus on mines in those two states. The company initially held six groups of mines (a total of about 1000 acres of highly mineralized territory), all hand-picked by Furness, and all with access to the cheapest electric power available anywhere in Mexico.<sup>74</sup> The Guanajuato-Jalisco Development Co was formed in New York with \$1 million gold in preferred stock and \$3 million in common stock. James C. Hinchliffe of Patterson, New Jersey, was president of the company and Dwight Furness the general manager.<sup>75</sup>

Furness moved his family to Guadalajara to be nearer the center of activities and enable his children to attend the American School of Guadalajara.<sup>76</sup> By January 1910, Furness had sold his former home in Guanajuato, intending to build a cottage, and later a family home, at Ribera Castellanos.<sup>77</sup>

He had also sold the Mina Grande mine in Hostotipaquillo, Jalisco, to a Mexico City businessman for \$75,000.<sup>78</sup>

In February 1910, Furness and his associates laid claim to a new mining area near Dolores Hidalgo in Guanajuato.<sup>79</sup> Three years afterwards, he formed yet another company to exploit mines in that state in partnership with another brother-in-law, mining geologist M. K. Rodgers from Seattle.<sup>80</sup>

At the height of the Mexican Revolution, Furness appears to have returned to the U.S. to live. In December 1917, Furness (aged 56, 5'8" tall with blue eyes, gray hair and a moustache) applied in Chicago for a U.S. passport to enable him to visit Mexico, stating that he had never previously had a

---

<sup>70</sup> The Mexican Herald: 16 July 1896, 8. Percy Martin. 1906. *Mexico's Treasure House*. New York: The Cheltenham Press, 243-244.

<sup>71</sup> The Mexican Herald: 18 August 1896, 2.

<sup>72</sup> The Mexican Herald: 11 January 1908, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Percy Martin. 1906. *Mexico's Treasure House*. New York: The Cheltenham Press, 243-244.

<sup>74</sup> The Mexican Herald: 4 December 1908, 9.

<sup>75</sup> The Mexican Herald: 25 April 1909, 23.

<sup>76</sup> The Mexican Herald: 23 Aug 1909, 7.

<sup>77</sup> The Mexican Herald: 29 Jan 1910.

<sup>78</sup> The Mexican Herald: 9 Aug 1909, 8; 6 Sep 1909, 3.

<sup>79</sup> The Mexican Herald: 16 Feb 1910, 9.

<sup>80</sup> The Mexican Herald: 27 March 1913.

passport, despite living in Mexico "off and on for thirty years" as the president of the Dwight Furness Co., with offices in Chicago and Guanajuato.

Furness died in New York in September 1924 and his remains were interred in the Furnessville cemetery in Illinois.

Copyright 2025 Tony Burton



### Jenkins Fleming: Myth or mystery?

An alternative (as yet uncorroborated) version that circulated on social media some years ago claimed that some or all of the El Fuerte area near Ocotlán was sold by the Castellanos family to "Englishman Jenkins Fleming," who came from the mining region of Zacatecas. When he first arrived in Ocotlán, Fleming rented the former home of Benigno Martínez, where Fleming's wife held regular tea parties for their neighbors and other important local individuals, including Ramona, Delfina and Rosario, the daughters of Severino Martín del Campo; the poetess Esther Tapia de Castellanos (who died in 1897); and the daughters of Cenobio Gómez, owner of the old hacienda of Xoconostle (La Tuna).<sup>81</sup>

According to this version, later—"at the end of the nineteenth century"—a luxury California-style hotel was built with large gardens watered by an irrigation system (which raised water from the lake), and Fleming built El Fuerte, "a small fortress in the style of a European castle" as a private home. He sold the 'castle' in 1910 to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the first president of PRI, and it was later owned by General Joaquin Amaro, and used on occasion by General Álvaro Obregón when he was Mexican President. When Jenkins Fleming left town for an unknown destination, he sold the Hotel Ribera to Enrique Langenscheidt of German origin.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> "Carabino". 2011. "El Fuerte de Ocotlán", blog post dated 15 Feb 2011: <http://www.buscadores-tesoros.com/t5934-el-fuerte-de-ocotlan> ; republished as Piolin González. August 14, 2016. "Castillo 'El Fuerte' Ubicado en Ocotlán Jalisco" <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1127424387351328> History of El Fuerte, Ocotlán. "Carabino," the author of the original blog post, died in 2017.

<sup>82</sup> "Carabino". 2011. "El Fuerte de Ocotlán."