

The golden age of steamships and other motorized vessels on Lake Chapala

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1. Need for improved transportation by water

At the start of the nineteenth century—and despite never visiting Lake Chapala in person—the brilliant Prussian scientist Alexander von Humboldt had realized the enormous potential value of establishing waterborne trade from Salamanca and Celaya (both on the River Lerma) via Lake Chapala to the port of San Blas, at the mouth of the River Santiago.

Following Mexico's independence in 1821, Mexican entrepreneurs were keen to improve navigation in the Lerma-Chapala-Santiago system. In 1833, for instance, Pedro Tamés, then governor of Jalisco, wanted to make more of the river navigable while also supplying water to a mill in Guadalajara via a purpose-built canal from the River Santiago at Poncitlán. The engineer who looked at this proposal, Samuel Trant, agreed that the plan was feasible, and prepared a detailed map of the best route, but Tamés left office shortly afterwards and the plan was shelved. In 1842, Mariano Otero proposed a similar route for a canal but, once again, the proposal did not prosper.¹

When engineer Longinus Banda reconsidered the lake's potential value as a trading route more than a decade later, he concluded that some parts of the Lerma river would be enormously difficult to modify for navigation, though he believed that commerce on Lake Chapala, combined with irrigation, could help develop agricultural and manufacturing industries.²

¹ Lake Chapala Through the Ages, p97.

² Longinus Banda. 1873. Estadística de Jalisco. Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, 2nd edition, 1982.



Fig. 1. The Lake Chapala region. Cartography: Tony Burton.

2. First steamship company, 1865-1867

The individual behind the first plan to have steamships on Lake Chapala was Frenchman Adolphe Emile Cavaillon,³ who represented a group of Guadalajara investors. In a letter dated 11 December 1865 he applied to Mexico's Development Ministry (Ministerio de Fomento) for permission to operate 'buques de vapor' on Lake Chapala, as well as on 'the river, variously named Lerma, Grande, Santiago, Guadalajara and Tololotlan, which enters and leaves said lake.'⁴

That a Frenchman would spearhead the project was no accident. French support had been instrumental in Maximilian becoming Emperor of Mexico in April 1864, and French investors expected to receive favorable treatment in return.

The Ministry wasted no time in approving his request, and on 26 December 1865 Cavaillon filed the paperwork in Mexico City to form the *Compañía de Navegación y Comercio del Lago de Chapala y Río Grande* (Company for Navigation and Commerce on Lake Chapala and the River Santiago). Its stated aims were to purchase boats, canalize the river to make it navigable, and build warehouses and other infrastructure for commerce. Its promotional brochures included a detailed map showing the anticipated commercial sphere of influence of the project.⁵ This showed their intention to use the Lerma river as far as Salamanca, in the state of Guanajuato.

³ Adolfo Emile Cavaillon, born in Paris in 1820, appears to have been living in San Francisco, California, at the time of the Great Fire (1850), before moving to Australia. In 1863, Cavaillon owed the master of an Australian cargo vessel £250 for a shipment of coal. Shortly after this, Cavaillon resurfaced in Guadalajara, Mexico. (The Times-Picayune, 25 Jul 1850, 2; The Empire (Sydney Australia), 22 Aug 1863, 9.)

⁴ Daily Alta California, 18 Dec 1866, 1. Documents pertaining to the "Compañía Anónima de Navegación del Lago de Chapala y Río Grande, 1866-1867" in online archive of California. Ministerio de Fomento, response dated 23 December 1865 to Mr Emilio Cavaillon.

⁵ Daily Alta California, 18 Dec 1866, 1.

Early the following year, Cavaillon, as director of the company, traveled to San Francisco to commission the first of an intended three steamships.

In February 1866 the company announced an initial stock offering of 1000 shares, priced at 100 pesos each. The president of the company was Pedro Hope [Hepe?]; its board members were Estanislao Monteverde, Francisco de P. Rubio, and Eduardo Muñoz, with José Amor Escandón as alternate. The company's notary was Ignacio Bargoa, and its funds were held by Montepío Imperial de Animas.⁶

A few months later, the company moved its offices from Mexico City to Guadalajara.⁷ In the fall of 1866, a Captain Charles E Beane (later Editor of the Los Angeles News) traveled from San Francisco to Lake Chapala to help the company finalize practical arrangements for its steamship service.⁸

In February 1867 the company opened an office in San Francisco, where it issued a \$1,000,000 stock offering, at \$100 a share.⁹

A lengthy press account in March 1867 gave full details of the company's plans, which extended beyond providing rail and steamship service to making canals, building warehouses, trading in "the produce of the towns and villages in the vicinity of Lake Chapala and the Rio Grande," and undertaking "the development of the adjoining lands." It also made the exaggerated claim that "considerable progress has been made on the construction of the railroad, the work on which is being prosecuted under the supervision and direction of competent engineers."¹⁰ The railroad from Guadalajara to Ocotlán would not be completed until more than 20 years later in 1888.

The steamships were to be used for both freight and passengers. The first vessel, Libertad, was completed in March 1867. The contractor for construction was a Scotsman named Duncan Cameron, proprietor of the Neptune Iron Works in San Francisco.¹¹ This steamship was the "pioneer iron craft built in California," the first such vessel ever built in the state. Constructed of sheets of iron three-sixteenths of an inch thick, with a stern wheel powered by two 75-horsepower engines (from John Lochhead's Steam Engine Works), it was 75 feet long and 16 feet wide, with 5 feet depth of hold. The ship could carry 100 passengers in total; the upper-level cabin could accommodate forty.

On behalf of the Chapala company, Cavaillon immediately ordered two more similar-sized vessels, as well as two steam-powered sawmills. It was to be Cavaillon's last business deal. Only days later, on 18 March 1867, he died in San Francisco from lung problems.¹²

⁶ La Sociedad, 25 Feb 1866, 3.

⁷ La Sociedad, 20 Jun 1866, 3. The address was Puente del Espíritu Santo #10.

⁸ Daily Los Angeles Herald, 21 August 1878. Letter by 'A Friend' to the editor in tribute to Capt. Beane.

⁹ Daily Alta California, 16 Feb 1867, 4. The Superintendent of this office was George B. Greevy.

¹⁰ Daily Alta California, 17 March 1867, 1.

¹¹ Sacramento Daily Union, 28 March 1865. According to its advertisements, the Neptune Iron Works, at the corner of Mission and Fremont streets in San Francisco, made all kinds of high pressure steam boilers: [Duncan] Cameron and [W. E.] Worth have been doing business for other shops for fifteen years in California... besides their long experience in the Atlantic States."

¹² San Francisco Mortuary Record. California, County Birth, Marriage, and Death Records, 1830-1980. (Ancestry.com)

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Maximilian's Empire was crumbling. After losing credibility and European support, he was captured in Querétaro in May 1867 and executed there a month later. French investors immediately left Mexico in droves, even as Benito Juárez was being sworn in as Mexico's president. Captain Beane abandoned his hopes and returned to California.

These events brought the initial attempt to establish steamboats on Lake Chapala to a grinding halt. It was a disaster for the shipyard in San Francisco: it had built a steamboat for a client who had died, on behalf of a company which had no future. Given that no one had taken delivery of the vessel, it was unlikely the shipyard had even been fully paid for its work.

3. First steamship on Lake Chapala: the Libertad, 1868

Duncan Cameron is unlikely to have had any financial interest in the original company. But in the wake of Cavaillon's death and the changes in Mexico, and perhaps still determined to fulfill whatever arrangement had been made, Cameron decided to transport the completed steamship to Lake Chapala himself.

The boat had been built to allow for disassembly. Cameron then arranged for the parts to be shipped by sea from San Francisco to San Blas, and then hauled over the mountains by donkey-power to Chapala for reassembly.¹³

By November 1867, Cameron was living in Guadalajara, overseeing work on the boat, and had gained local approval from Chapala mayor Yreno H Rico to have the boat on the lake.¹⁴

After gaining permission from the federal government to take over the concession previously awarded to Cavaillon's company for using the boat,¹⁵ Cameron founded the Company for Navigation by Steam on Lake Chapala (Compañía de Navegación por Vapor en el Lago de Chapala) and, according to an unconfirmed report, issued 1000 shares at \$40 each. The state and municipal governments and private investors in Guadalajara bought 32% of the shares, leaving the remainder in Cameron's possession.¹⁶

In his eye-witness account of observing the reassembly of the *Libertad* in April 1868, Crescencio García names two other people helping Cameron: 'Mister Broche' and 'Sr. Méndez de León.'¹⁷ The former took García out on the lake aboard a sailboat "built by the Americans who were assembling the steamship." The latter was the mechanical engineer in charge of getting the *Libertad* ready for its launch on Lake Chapala.

'Mister Broche' is believed to be William (Guillermo) Brotchie, who was born in Kirkwall, Orkney, Scotland on 31 March 1821. How and why he came to be in Guadalajara is unknown, but he married Guadalajara-born Juana Gómez Jayme in

¹³ Frances Fisher has a character describe this briefly in her story "The Land of the Sun. On Lake Chapala" (The Catholic World, June 1893, pp 381-395). See Lake Chapala Through the Ages, ch 38.

¹⁴ Letter from Rico dated 19 Nov 1867 in Chapala Municipal Archives.

¹⁵ Sacramento Daily Union, 3 Jan 1868.

¹⁶ Unconfirmed online report, source unknown.

¹⁷ Crescencio García. 1868. "Impresiones de un Viaje a Chápala." El Constitucionalista, Morelia, 29 de junio de 1868.

the city in about 1844.¹⁸

'Sr. Méndez de León' may be the Jaime Méndez de León reportedly skippering the *Libertad* two years later when a young girl fell overboard and drowned. However, if the news report was mistaken about his first name, it may be Jacobo Méndez de León, born in the the Netherlands in about 1845, whose arrival in Mexico in the winter of 1867-68 closely coincided with that of Duncan Cameron. Jacobo married Apolonia Jiménez Hernández in La Barca in May 1870.¹⁹

Cameron took charge of day-to-day operations. Advertisements appeared in the local press, and the inaugural voyage of the vapor (steamer) *Libertad* was in June 1868, with General Ramón Corona, who later became state governor, appointed to preside over the ceremonies.²⁰

Beginning in early July the *Libertad* sailed from Chapala at 6.00am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to Tuxcueca, Tizapán and La Palma, where it overnighted before returning via Jamay, Ocotlán, Tizapán, and Tuxceuca the following day. It offered both first and second-class tickets.

The original schedule did not include regular visits to La Barca. This changed within a few months, so that a stage coach company could advertise a route



Fig. 2. The *Libertad* steamship. Photographer and date unknown. Credit: Editorial Agata.²¹

¹⁸ Uncorroborated family tree on ancestry.com. It is unclear when William Brotchie died, but his wife, born in 1930, died in Guadalajara in 1894. The couple's offspring included Roberto (1845-1890), María Eugenia (born 1847), Margarita (1848-), José Julian Guillermo (1849-1873), María de la O Cristina (1850-), Andrés Filiberto (1861-), Jovita (1863-1906) and Matilde (1868-1934), whose son Luis Páez Brotchie (1893-1968) was a noted Jalisco historian.

¹⁹ Jacob Mendes de Leon (his birth name) later imported European watches, ornamentals and scientific instruments. He served on the scientific commission for the 1878 Exposition in León, Guanajuato, and also wrote about education and taught English in several states. He died in 1899.

²⁰ Chapala Municipal Archives. Summary of key events. Untitled document.

²¹ Jesus Gonzalez Gortazar. 1994. *Aquellos tiempos en Chapala / Past Times in Chapala* (bilingual). Guadalajara: Editorial Agata.

from Mexico City to Guadalajara, via several stage coaches to La Barca, the *Libertad* from La Barca to Chapala, and a final stage coach to Guadalajara, This not only saved a lot of time compared to alternative routes, it gave passengers a few hours in relative comfort on the lake instead of having their bones shaken by the rickety stage coaches of the time.²²

The *Libertad* and similar sternwheelers relied on wood to fuel their boilers which powered the large paddles at the stern of the ship. A steady supply of wood was essential, and piles of wood were stacked at strategic points along the routes they traveled so that they could restock wherever was most convenient. On average, the sternwheelers burned about two cords (7 cubic meters or 250 cubic feet) of wood an hour while traversing the lake.²³

The steady rhythmic sounds and grunts of a sternwheeler as it plowed through the small waves across the lake, causing ripples that glinted momentarily in the bright sunshine, interspersed with an intermittent cascade of sparks flying behind the ship as it went on its way, was an evocative, never-to-be-forgotten experience for most passengers.

When Cameron's wife and children tried to join him in Mexico in 1869, they were removed from a steamer leaving San Francisco on 14 October and Mary Cameron was charged, in a case brought by Mr Ryan, with having sold family property to aid and abett her husband, who allegedly owed "numerous parties in this city the sum of \$10,000." The case was dismissed as an unsuccessful attempt to extort money from her husband, and Mary and the children were soon on their way to Jalisco.²⁴

The claims against Duncan Cameron may have had some merit. Less than a week after the initial court decision, William Worth, Cameron's partner in Neptune Iron Works, sued "Duncan Cameron and John Doe (real name unknown)" to recover the sum of \$1100.50 in gold coin and the proceeds of foreclosing on a mortgage, and all court and legal costs.²⁵ Though the outcome of this case is unknown, early the following year a Sheriff's Sale in San Francisco was ordered of ten shares owned by Cameron in the Front Street, Mission and Ocean Railroad Company with proceeds and interest to go to R. F. Ryan.²⁶

The first fatality related to the *Libertad* occurred in 1870, when the 3-year-old daughter of Lic. Agustín Villa fell overboard in an unfortunate accident near Tuxcueca. After her maid raised the alarm, several passengers dove into the lake in an effort to rescue her, and the ship's engineer Jaime Méndez de León turned the vessel around. Their search proved fruitless; three days later her body washed ashore near Tuxcueca.²⁷

Georgina Kingsley, who visited Lake Chapala in April 1872, wrote that one of her party left to return to Colima, "going back across the lake on a little steamer belonging to Mr. C., an enterprising American, who runs it once a week

²² La Constitución Social, 6 Nov 1868. See <https://tonyburton.ca/lake-chapala-stagecoaches/>

²³ Anon. 2017. "All you ever wanted to know about Sternwheeler Cordwood." at <https://blogs.unbc.ca/unbcexptour/tag/sternwheeler/> [14 September 2019]

²⁴ San Francisco Chronicle, 15 Oct 1869, 3.

²⁵ San Francisco Chronicle, 19 Oct 1869, 4.

²⁶ San Francisco Examiner, 23 Feb 1870, 2.

²⁷ La Iberia, 4 June 1870, 3. La Voz de México, 5 June 1870, 3.

from Chapala, at the western end, to La Barca."²⁸



Fig. 3. José María Lupercio. c. 1902. Loading wood from a typical Lake Chapala canoa (sail canoe) to an ox-drawn cart, large enough to carry about one cord (128 cubic feet). Credit: Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

While the precise reasons are unclear, Cameron sought a Supreme Court injunction in 1873 to prevent "the authorities in Guadalajara" from seizing his steamship.²⁹

The following year, *Libertad* had to be taken out of service for a time to replace its boiler. Steam engines were notoriously fickle, and the *Libertad* boiler had exploded. No injuries were reported, and "Sr. Moret, owner of the steamer" was confident that it would soon be back in service. The length and nature of the relationship between Moret and Cameron is unknown, and Moret's name does not reappear in later accounts of the *Libertad*.³⁰

It certainly appears that Cameron was struggling to make the ship profitable. He complained to the state government in June 1877 that he had arranged a special trip to bring a military unit from Tizapán el Alto to La Barca when ordered to do so by general Ceballos, the "jefe politico" of La Barca, but that he had received only \$60 of the agreed-upon \$160 for the service. Several months later, state officials rejected his claim, arguing it had no responsibility for decisions taken by the "anomalous administration" of Ceballos.³¹

²⁸ Rose Georgina Kingsley. 1874. *South by west or winter in the Rocky Mountains and spring in Mexico*. London: W. Isibister & Co., 249.

²⁹ Registro 1261. Archivo Histórico de la Suprema Corte de la Justicia de la Nación (AHSCJN), Mexico City, fecha 1873-05-26, exp. 1370. Caja 17, exp. original 496.

³⁰ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, 27 April 1874, 3.

³¹ *El Estado de Jalisco*, 28 Oct 1877, 2.



Fig 4. The Libertad. (image from a stereoscopic pair, photographer and date unknown.)

Shortly after completing its first decade on the lake, the *Libertad* was badly damaged in a severe storm. En route back to Chapala from La Barca late at night on 31 October 1878, the ship ran into trouble, lost power, and was cast adrift. It eventually washed up close to San Antonio Tlayacapan, the hapless crew and handful of passengers scared but uninjured. *Libertad* was towed back to Chapala for repairs but was out of service for more than a year.³² Restoration work by Robert (Roberto) Loweree and his brothers began in February 1880.³³

During the time the *Libertad* was out of service, Cameron was probably struggling to stay afloat financially. Judicial authorities clearly thought so; they signed an order preventing Cameron from selling or disposing of some of his property.³⁴ In 1884, Cameron borrowed \$600 for six months from Feliz Torres Tapia of Guadalajara, offering a steam engine for mine drainage as collateral. After Cameron failed to pay it back, Torres took Cameron to court and won a ruling that Cameron had to give him the steam engine and pay all the costs incurred during the legal action.³⁵

Meanwhile, the Loweree brothers obtained permission in June 1881 to build an additional small wharf into the lake at Chapala to create calm water so that work on a steamship could be undertaken without any risk of storm damage.³⁶

³² (a) Chapala Municipal Archive. Summary of key events. Untitled document. (b) El Estado de Jalisco, 7 Nov 1878, 1.

³³ The company Loweree Hermanos owned the Río Blanco textile factory in Zapopan. The brothers were the four younger U.S.-born sons of U.S. businessman Daniel D. Loweree (1799-1868) and his wife Nancy Ana Howell (?-1863), both of whom died in Guadalajara: Francis H. B. Loweree (1833-1881), Robert George Loweree (1831-1882), Edward Green Loweree (1836-1904) and James Armour Loweree (1838-1880). Loweree Hermanos ran into financial difficulties and the factory was sold in 1885.

³⁴ El Monitor Republicano, 31 Jan 1880, 3.

³⁵ El Litigante, 13 Jul 1885, 2.

³⁶ Chapala Municipal Archive. Summary of key events. Untitled document.

It remains unclear if this refers to the final repairs of the *Libertad* or—perhaps more likely—to work on a second steamship, the *Chapala*, which began competing with *Libertad* a month later.

4. Competition: the paddle steamer *Chapala*, 1881

The *Chapala*, solidly constructed and comfortable, with a passenger lounge on the upper deck, was officially launched by Manuel Capetillo and his wife Josefa. Its inaugural trip, to Isla del Refugio (Mezcala Island) on 30 July 1881, left at 10.00am and took 80 minutes.³⁷

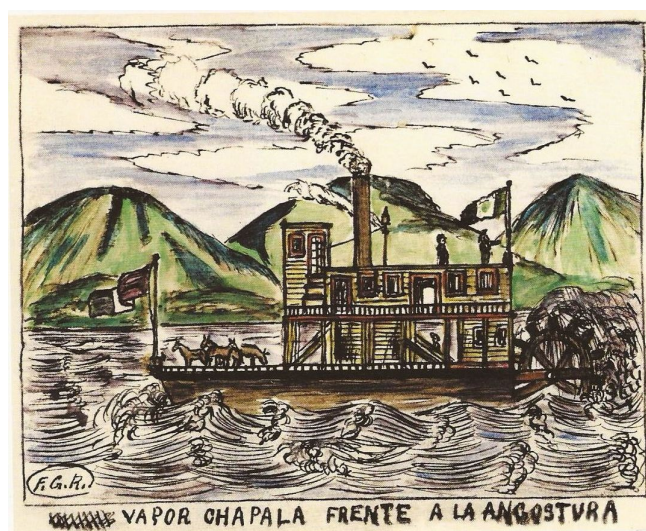


Fig 5. Francisco González Ruvalcaba. c. 1882. Vapor Chapala near La Angostura.

This charming china ink and watercolor shows *Chapala* in about 1882. The vessel was a sternwheeler with two decks, and open deck space for animals.³⁸

As Mexico's railroad system expanded, stage coaches were phased out, and travel from Mexico City to Guadalajara became much more efficient. By 1882 it was possible to travel by rail to Celaya, before taking a single stage coach to La Barca to connect with a lake steamer to Chapala, and another stage to Guadalajara.³⁹

By 1884, Loweree Hermanos—advertising as Empresa de Navegación por Vapor en el Lago de Chapala y Río Lerma—was promoting the vapor *Chapala*, in combination with stagecoaches and the Mexican Central Railroad, which now reached Irapuato, as the fastest and most comfortable way to travel between the two big cities. The one-way trip—by train to Irapuato, then stage to La Barca, steamer to Chapala and a final stagecoach to Guadalajara—could be done in three days and cost \$20 pesos first class, \$18 pesos second.⁴⁰

³⁷ La Patria, 1881.

³⁸ Francisco González Ruvalcaba. 1882. Geografía del territorio del lago de Chapala. (edited by Ricardo Elizondo). Published 2002 by ITESM, Guadalajara. See <https://lakechapalaartists.com/?p=8908>

³⁹ La Voz de México, 1882-04-23, 3.

⁴⁰ Manuel Caballero. Primer almanaque histórico, artístico y monumental de la República Mexicana 1884. Mexico / New York: The Chas. M. Green Printing Co., 191.

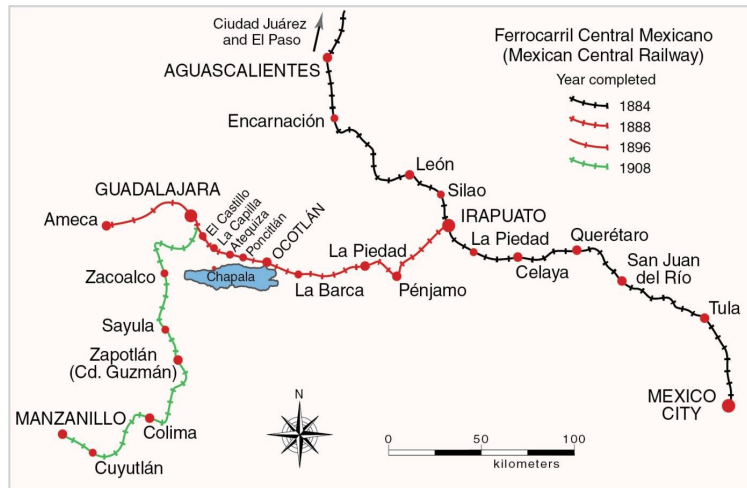


Fig. 6. Dates of development of the Mexican Central Railway. Cartography: Tony Burton.

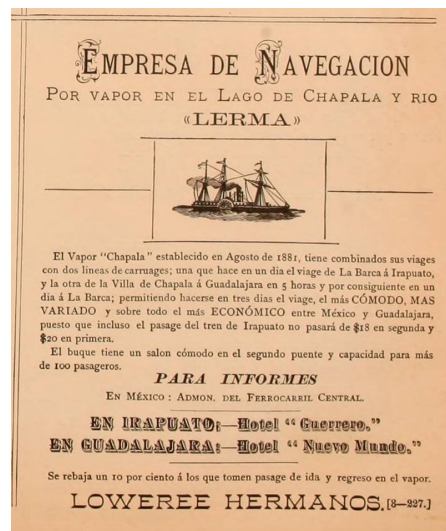


Fig. 7. Lowerre brothers advert for vapor Chapala. (Caballero, 1884)

There are surprisingly few first-hand accounts of traveling on these early steamships, so Charles Manwell St. Hill's evocative short description of the *Libertad* from about 1888 is especially valuable:

"It was a wonderful old tub, evidently built in the days when shipbuilding was in its infancy, judging from its uncouth shape and old timbers, that creaked at every movement of the paddles. Our voyage took in several villages round the lake. At each stopping place we would land on the little mud jetties to suck a piece of sugar-cane or quaff a festive glass of tequila."⁴¹

Curiously, in his 1888 travel guide for visitors to Guadalajara, José Villa Gordoá claimed that only one small steamer was operating on the lake, with

⁴¹ Charles Manwell St. Hill. 1892. *Through The Land of the Aztecs Or Life and Travel In Mexico*, by 'A Gringo' (pseud.). London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Company. See *Lake Chapala Through the Ages*, chapter 35.

another three being prepared to enter service.⁴² This was a significant year for the steamer business on Lake Chapala. The Mexican Central Railroad was finally completed all the way to Guadalajara in 1888, so travelers to or from Mexico City could complete their journeys in speed and comfort without any stage coach rides or steamer trips. This dip in demand for steamships across the lake was at least partially offset by the increased number of Guadalajara residents who could now easily take a day trip to Ocotlán to enjoy a short steamer ride.

5. The Libertad disaster, 1889

Sadly, one of these day trips led to tragedy. As the *Libertad* returned from a short trip on Sunday 24 March 1889, the crowded ship was approaching the shore at Ocotlán a few minutes before 4.00pm when it sank in the River Zula.⁴³ The 200-or-so passengers, mostly from Guadalajara, had been on a day-trip to Jamay to visit the church and admire the town's ornate monument to Pope Pius IX.

Allegedly, the accident occurred when merrymaking passengers all rushed simultaneously to the same side of the ship as it approached the shore, causing it to capsize.⁴⁴ According to an alternative version, the ship struck a submerged log as it neared Ocotlán. The sudden jolt threw some passengers overboard. In the ensuing panic as water entered the engine room, and amid shouts, screams and billowing smoke, some passengers never had chance to abandon the sinking ship.

Whatever the cause, the capsize of the *Libertad* was by far the single worst shipping disaster in the region's history. It cost 28 people their lives.

Even more lives would have been lost had it not been for the heroic efforts of passengers, crew and onlookers. Describing the tragedy a few years later, prominent Jalisco historian Luis Pérez Verdía wrote that the crowd of townspeople on the shore had watched motionless as the catastrophe unfolded, and that only a railway superintendent and some train engineers and passengers had jumped into the river to help the victims.⁴⁵

It is true that C.E. Halbert, the Railway Superintendent at Ocotlán, and four other Americans—master mechanic C. E. Shackford, passenger conductor H. R. Comforth, chief train dispatcher Joseph H. Feeman and Wells, Fargo & Co. messenger L. Rosenthal—were credited with saving many lives by their prompt rescue efforts. All five subsequently received U.S. medals of bravery for their heroism.⁴⁶

But it is equally true (as Pérez Verdía subsequently admits) that the Jalisco State governor, General Ramón Corona, approved the minting of a commemorative

⁴² José Villa Gordo. 1888. *Guía y album de Guadalajara para los viajeros*. Mexico City: José M Yguiniz, p 102.

⁴³ *El Nacional*, 29 Mar 1889, 2. In an otherwise detailed account, this article mistakenly dates the tragedy as occurring on 25 March, not 24 March.

⁴⁴ *La Voz de México*, 3 Apr 1889, 2.

⁴⁵ Luis Pérez Verdía. 1911. *Historia Particular del Estado de Jalisco*, tomo III. Guadalajara: Tip. de la escuela de artes y oficios del estado, 498-499.

⁴⁶ *National Police Gazette* (New York), 26 October 1889, 12.

silver medal for heroism within a few days of the tragedy.⁴⁷ This medal was awarded to fifteen individuals, including the five Americans, in September, in front of four thousand members of the public in a ceremony at the Degollado Theater.⁴⁸

The victims

The victims of the tragedy were of all ages and from all walks of life. Only twelve bodies had been recovered by Sunday night. They belonged to Ocotlán resident Soledad Manríquez (aged 48); Pablo Encarnación (43), his daughter María (10) and his cousin Concepción Sánchez (32) from Real de San Sebastián; Ventura Pulido (25) and two young boys in her care, brothers José Tomás (8) and Juan José Romero Suárez (10); Felisa Bermúdez (18); and several relatives of Dr Juan R. Zavala, the only member of his family to survive.⁴⁹ Zavala's relatives were his wife Dolores Romero de Zavala (28), daughter Josefina (6), and inlaws Dolores de Romero (50) and Antonia Linares de Romero (40). When night fell, the search was abandoned.

Four of the five bodies recovered the next day were people from Guadalajara: Félix Encarnación (68), Tomás Vidrio Ortiz (28), Librada Orozco Morales (12), and Camilo de la Torre (50). The fifth body was identified as Emma Forman (9) an American girl living at the hacienda of Atequiza. The body of Emma's father, Jorge Forman (38), from Ireland, the telegrapher at Hacienda Atequiza for the Ferrocarril Central Mexicano, was found several days later.

Almost all the other bodies found belonged to Guadalajara residents, identified as Ricardo Camarena (32), his wife Carlota Torres de Camarena (24), their son Fernando (3); Luís Pico (23); Enrique González Mena (35) and his two sons Gabriel (3) and Enrique (7); and Francisco Rodríguez (32), the only La Barca resident to lose his life in the accident.

Two weeks after the *Libertad* sank, it resulted in another death, when a small boat (chalupa) coming from Chapala struck the wreck of the *Libertad*, killing Hilario López (20). And the final victim was an (unnamed) cook from the *Libertad*, of uncertain age, who had been struck by a cable during the accident, and died in Ocotlán.⁵⁰

In early May, President Porfirio Díaz set aside \$3000 for victims' families, an item of news accompanied in at least one Mexico City daily by a call for the Secretaría de Fomento to take whatever steps were necessary to ensure the safety of passengers on pleasure trips.⁵¹

What became of the Libertad?

According to one news report, the *Libertad* had changed ownership about two years earlier. The new owners, identified only vaguely as "La empresa de navegación del lago," were probably either the Loweree Brothers, or the Lake Chapala Navigation Company, owned by the Mexican Central Railway. The new

⁴⁷ La Voz de México, 6 April 1889, 3. Luis Pérez Verdía. 1911. Historia Particular del Estado de Jalisco, tomo III. Guadalajara: Tip. de la escuela de artes y oficios del estado, 498-499.

⁴⁸ La Voz de México, 6 April 1889, 3. The Daily Democrat, 1 Jan 1890, 1.

⁴⁹ From 1897 on, Dr Zavala served several times as state governor.

⁵⁰ El Tiempo, 23 Apr 1889, 3.

⁵¹ Diario del Hogar 4 May 1889, 3.

owners had made repairs to ensure the *Libertad* was serviceable, and had also promised to bring a second vessel into service.⁵²

Efforts to refloat the *Libertad* began within days of the disaster, partly to aid the search for victims, but also in an effort to clear the shipping channel for use by other vessels. It was more of a challenge than anticipated.⁵³ When the ship was finally refloated in April it was taken for repairs.⁵⁴ Following the assassination of Jalisco state governor General Ramón Corona later that year, the refurbished ship was named in his memory.⁵⁵

Despite the claim made by some earlier writers (including me in the past) that the *Ramón Corona* was later taken to Lake Pátzcuaro, where it became the *Don Vasco*, I am now convinced, as we shall see, that this was never the case.⁵⁶

6. The Chapala and other vessels in the 1890s

Both the *Libertad* and the (original) *Chapala* were wood-fueled sternwheelers. Most, almost all, the later vessels had diesel, gasoline or electric-powered engines, though they were still locally called *vapores* (steamers).

From this point forward, it should be borne in mind that there is considerable uncertainty in many cases about the fuels employed, the method of propulsion, and the nomenclature of vessels. Some names (eg *Chapala*) were used for multiple vessels; it is sometimes impossible to be certain which particular vessel is being described. Equally, some vessels were identified in the press by the name of their owner, rather than by the name painted on their side. This is further complicated by the fact that many boats changed ownership.

Passenger and cargo services on the lake continued despite the tragic loss of *Libertad*. Local needs were met by the *Chapala* and by several smaller steamers, including the *Negrete*, which ran from Chapala to Tizapán and Tuxcueca.⁵⁷ These vessels remained in service on the lake well into the 1890s, though their service was sometimes far from perfect.

Assuming the original *Chapala* remained in service into the 1890s, it apparently still looked quite new. In 1893, Thomas Rogers described the two-deck *Chapala* he went on as "a flat-bottom stern-wheel boat, very like those that are common on the shallow rivers of the West; the only boats adapted to shoal-water service. Everything about the steamer appears new, but one of the things not new on the "Chapala" is Juan Perez, the pilot. He is not necessarily old, but he is a veteran in service."⁵⁸

⁵² La Voz de México, 3 Apr 1889, 2.

⁵³ El Tiempo, 6 Apr 1889, 3. La Voz de Mexico 6 April 1889, 3.

⁵⁴ La Voz de México, 13 April 1889, 3.

⁵⁵ José María Ángulo Sepulveda. 1987. La navegación de antaño en el Lago de Chapala. Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco. 26

⁵⁶ For the history of steam vessels on Lake Pátzcuaro, including the *Don Vasco*, see J. M. Martínez Aguilar. 2017. "Una mirada al surgimiento del turismo en Pátzcuaro," in PASOS: Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural.

⁵⁷ Eduardo A. Gibbon. 1893. Guadalajara, (La Florencia Mexicana). Vagancias y Recuerdos. (1893) El salto de Juanacatlán y El Mar Chapálico. Guadalajara, Jalisco. See Lake Chapala Through the Ages, chapter 37.

⁵⁸ Thomas L Rogers. 1893. Mexico? Sí, señor. Boston: Mexican Central Railway Co. See Lake Chapala Through the Ages, chapter 36.

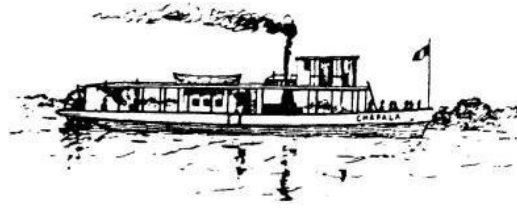


Fig. 8. Thomas L Rogers. 1893. Sketch of vapor Chapala.

Mexican author and diplomat Eduardo Gibbon, writing at about the same time, described the *Chapala* as being 80 feet long by 20 wide, and able to operate in water as shallow as three feet. Gibbon described his pleasure at finding the trappings of civilization aboard the *Chapala*, like "an excellent beefsteak, a good glass of beer and the pleasant courtesy of the steamer's intelligent captain." Gibbon also took a trip on the *San Francisco*, which he claimed was normally used only for cargo on regular daily voyages between Ocotlán, La Barca and Tizapán.⁵⁹

Relatively little is known about the *San Francisco*, described as 'not very large, but pretty.'⁶⁰ Owned by Francisco Martínez Negrete of Guadalajara, it operated in the early 1890s, and played a key part in improving transport between Guadalajara and Jalisco's second city, Zapotlán (Cd. Guzman). After taking a train to Atequiza, travelers could catch a stage coach to Chapala to connect with the *San Francisco*, which would ferry them across the lake to Tuxcueca, from where they could continue on to Zapotlán.⁶¹ It seems probable that this is the same steamer called the *Negrete* by Antonio de Alba, who described how travelers from Guadalajara arriving in Chapala on Federico Álvarez del Castillo's stage coach company could connect with the *Negrete* to reach Tizapán and Tuxcueca.⁶² The *San Francisco* foundered in a storm in February 1896.⁶³

For its part, the Mexican Central Railway obtained a concession from the federal government in 1892 to establish its own steamship service on Lake Chapala, operating two vessels, one for passengers and the other for both passengers and cargo.⁶⁴ They named their steamship division the Lake Chapala Navigation Company, and it is possible that they had already acquired the *Chapala* as their passenger ship, an idea supported by two news items the following year.

In January 1894 a new cargo steamer was reportedly on its way to the company, because its first vessel was only for passengers.⁶⁵ And, in summer that year, the postal services administration rejigged the mail routes to settlements

⁵⁹ Eduardo A. Gibbon. 1893. Guadalajara, (La Florencia Mexicana). Vagancias y Recuerdos. (1893) El salto de Juanacatlán y El Mar Chapálico. Guadalajara, Jalisco. See Lake Chapala Through the Ages, chapter 37.

⁶⁰ El Informador, 12 Oct 1941, 6. The quote is by Ixca Fariás.

⁶¹ El Siglo Diez y Nueve, 3 Jan 1893, 3.

⁶² Antonio de Alba. 1954. Chapala. Guadalajara: Banco Industrial de Jalisco, note 29.

⁶³ El Mundo, 16 Feb 1896.

⁶⁴ Shields Daily Gazette, 17 Feb 1892, 4.

⁶⁵ La Patria, 4 Jan 1893, 3.

along the south shore of Lake Chapala, to enable Tizapán el Alto (the largest town on that side) to receive its mail direct via the scheduled services of the *Chapala*. The Mexican Central Railway was already responsible for mail deliveries along its line, so this was a natural addition as they expanded their service.⁶⁶

Taking a steamer ride on the lake was not always smooth sailing. In 1894, for instance, one unnamed steamship captain reportedly charged passengers whatever he felt like and had threatened to throw one unfortunate woman overboard because she was 6 cents short of the full fare. The same despotic individual had sailed straight past one of the steamer's scheduled stops before an irate passenger drew a pistol and demanded to be put ashore at the correct village.⁶⁷

The Mexican Central Railway Company's annual report in 1895 showed that its steamer services were far from profitable, explaining that:

"a small steamer was purchased and placed on Lake Chapala several years ago with a view of gathering in business for the Guadalajara Line, but the project has not been successful and the navigation has been conducted at a loss. In March 1894 the Directors felt it expedient to discontinue the operation and a cancellation concession was obtained from the Government. The steamer was sold and the loss on the enterprise, amounting to \$18,336.04 'Mexican dollars' charged up to Income Account."⁶⁸

The steamer is not named in the accounts, nor the buyer identified. But, within six months, there was a flurry of advertisements and newspaper reports about a new vapor named *Chapala*, an 80-ton vessel operated by Francisco Ocampo Cortés. Though the vessel could hold 300 passengers, the director of the company, Guilebaldo F. Romero of Guadalajara, planned to sell only 100 tickets per trip to ensure passengers' comfort and safety.⁶⁹

Chapala's regular schedule ran in conjunction with the railroad timetable, but special holiday excursions were also to be offered. The first special voyage, in September, left Guadalajara by special train at 7.00am for Ocotlán, where passengers boarded the *Chapala* for a visit to historic Mezcala Island. Round-trip tickets were \$1.50 for the train and \$1.00 for the steamer.⁷⁰ One of the special excursions in November was to the 'picturesque hacienda of La Palma' for a concert by a 'magnificent orchestra conducted by Diego Altamirano.' Round trip rail tickets were \$1.75 first class, \$1.50 second, and the steamer was \$1.00. The trip two weeks later was to Ocotlán and Jamay, with its beautiful orchards.⁷¹

The *Chapala* introduced a new schedule in January 1895. It left Ocotlán every Tuesday at 2.00pm to overnight in Tuxcueca, after calling at La Palma and

⁶⁶ El Partido Liberal, 11 Jun, 1893, 3.

⁶⁷ El Continental: revista popular jalisciense y de noticias universales, 11 February 1894, 3.

⁶⁸ Mexican Central Railway Company limited, Annual Report dated 1895. Press of G.H. Ellis, pp 18-19.

⁶⁹ El Continental, 26 Aug 1894, 3; 16 Sep 1894, 3.

⁷⁰ El Continental, 16 Sep 1894, 3.

⁷¹ El Continental, 4 Nov 1894, 3; 18 Nov 1894, 3.

Tizapán. On Wednesday morning it departed at 5.00am to return to Ocotlán in plenty of time to connect with evening trains to Mexico City and Guadalajara. On Fridays, it followed the same route, but set sail from Ocotlán at 7.00am, reaching Tuxcueca at 1.00pm, before returning the next day to Ocotlán.⁷²

The *Chapala* had its fair share of misadventures. As it berthed at Tuxcueca in May 1895, a fire broke out onboard. Fortunately, it was quickly extinguished before the 'cohetes de dinamita' (dynamite fireforks) on the ship exploded.⁷³ The following January, the *Chapala* was unaffected by a sudden, massive whirlpool near the western end of the lake, caused by seismic activity, that sucked several small vessels into the depths and drowned about twenty people.⁷⁴ This was only a month before the San Francisco was seriously damaged in a storm, fortunately without any casualties.

Perhaps the *Chapala's* most infamous incident, one lucky not to lead to a diplomatic squabble, occurred in April 1896, when it lost a boatload of furniture. British consul Lionel Carden and his wife had just completed construction of Villa Tlalocan, their stately vacation home in Chapala. They shipped all their furnishings from Mexico City by rail to Ocotlán, where, for the final leg of the trip, everything was transferred to a small boat (*canoa*), to be towed by *Chapala* to their new home.

Unfortunately, near Mezcala Island, stray sparks from the ship's funnel set fire to a mattress in the *canoa*. The fire spread so rapidly that the *canoa* (ironically named *La Providencia*) had to be cut loose and it sank to the bottom of the lake, taking all the Cardens' 92 packages worth about \$3000 pesos (equivalent to about 102,000 dollars today) with it.⁷⁵ To the best of my knowledge these elegant furnishings and waterlogged objets d'art are still in the mud at the bottom of the lake.

Keeping his resolve and archetypal British stiff upper lip, Carden ordered replacements which arrived that summer. Just as well, since only a few months later, on Wednesday 9 December 1896, the Cardens entertained President Díaz and "two or three of his party" for breakfast at Villa Tlalocan, immediately prior to the sumptuous presidential state banquet being given on Mezcala Island.⁷⁶

Shortly after 6.00pm, following the dinner, Díaz experienced the vagaries of Lake Chapala for himself, as he and his party set off from the island for Ocotlán, where the presidential train awaited to take them back to the capital overnight.

Díaz was on 'a little steamer of 180 horsepower' named *General Arista*, owned by J. M. Negrete. Also on the launch were Minister Baranda, Minister Mena, the Governor of San Luis Potosí (Díez Gutiérrez), Governor González of Oaxaca, Manuel Cuesta Moreno and a few others. The 'big steam tug' *Chapala* left shortly afterwards, with the Governor of Jalisco, Luis del Carmen Curiel, and several other high-ranking guests. The *Chapala* was towing two smaller boats (boats 3 and 4) full of lesser guests.

⁷² El Continental, 13 Jan 1895, 3.

⁷³ El Correo Español, 18 May 1895.

⁷⁴ The San Francisco Call, 13 January 1896, 3. Lake Chapala Through the Ages, chapter 39.

⁷⁵ El Tiempo, 5 May 1896.

⁷⁶ The Mexican Herald, 12 December 1896, 5.

A sudden storm came up, and the *Arista* nearly capsized; it took the little steamer fully six hours to reach the point where the River Santiago leaves the lake. Díaz and his companions then abandoned the boat and took smaller canoes to the docks in Ocotlán. The presidential train finally got underway at 3.00am on Thursday morning.

The people on the train were the lucky ones. Elsewhere, the three-inch cable connecting boats 3 and 4 to *Chapala* had snapped in the storm. The occupants of boat 3 managed to clamber aboard the *Chapala*, which then made several attempts to recover boat 4. In the process, a direct collision with the boat smashed parts of the steamship, which was finally forced to sail away, leaving the smaller boat to fend for itself.

The occupants of boat 4, many of whom had left their overcoats on the train, were tossed around all night before being finally forced by the waves back to *Chapala*. In addition to musicians in the orchestra, this boat carried the distinguished author Irineo Paz (Octavio Paz's grandfather), the federal water head Andrés Basurto, Luis Castellanos y Tapia, and assorted journalists and dignitaries, including the Manuel Gallardo brothers, Joaquin and Manuel.⁷⁷

The captain of the *Chapala*, Miguel Larraza, was reportedly still seeking payment two weeks later for the "seven days he had provided service to the organizing Commission for the presidential visit to Mezcala."⁷⁸

And this wasn't the end of the *Chapala*'s bad luck. In early December 1898, it had been out of service for over a month due to various defects that needed fixing.⁷⁹ Then, days later, there was an even bigger shock. Felipe Romo, the *Chapala*'s then captain, was murdered in Ocotlán after becoming involved in a romantic argument with his girlfriend's former beau, who shot him dead and fled the scene.⁸⁰

The opening of the Hotel Arzapalo in Chapala in 1898 heralded an increased demand for passenger boat services linking Chapala to the railroad station at Ocotlán. Even so, the following summer, it was reported that only one steamer was still based in Chapala. Owned by Diego Moreno, it made two trips a week, but had no fixed schedule, taking passengers and cargo as needed to Tuxcueca, Tizapán el Alto, Cojumatlán, La Palma and Ocotlán.⁸¹

German traveler Dr Wilhelm Schiess, who visited Lake Chapala with his brother in December 1899, wanted to take a steamship ride but found that "The steamer arrives in Chapala only very irregularly and is mainly intended for transporting goods from the ranchos on the southern shore, so we could not rely on it." To save time, they hired a local boatman to take them to Ocotlán, where they encountered "the steamship, which was built similarly to the Mississippi riverboats, with a colossal paddle wheel at the back, although it only had about half of its original paddles left."⁸²

⁷⁷ The Mexican Herald, 12 Dec 1896, 5.

⁷⁸ La Patria, 23 Dec 1896, 3.

⁷⁹ El Tiempo, 4 Dec 1898, 2.

⁸⁰ El Contemporaneo, 8 Dec 1899, 3; El Continente Americano, 12 Dec 1899, 1.

⁸¹ Chapala Municipal Archive. 17 June 1899 entry on summary of key events. Untitled document.

⁸² Wilhelm Schiess. 1902. Quer durch Mexiko vom Atlantischen zum Stillen Ocean. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.

7. Electric launches



Fig. 9. Winfield Scott. c. 1902. The Carmelita. Credit: Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

Fortuitously, at about the same time as the Hotel Arzapalo opened, the Crompton brothers arrived in Chapala. They came from a wealthy English family which ran a cotton machinery business in Yorkshire, England, before emigrating to Canada, where they bought land near Niagara Falls, Ontario, and raised horses. When the youngest of their three sons (Ralph, born in Switzerland in 1880) was advised by doctors to seek a warmer climate and an outdoor life, he moved for several years to Chapala with his eldest brother, Charles.⁸³

In September 1900 the Crompton brothers brought a small, Wisconsin-built 30-seat "electrical yacht" named *Carmelita* (after President Díaz's young wife) and a second, smaller launch named *Carlota*, to Chapala.⁸⁴ Ralph had some kind of arrangement with the Hotel Arzapalo and took charge of running the 30-seat *Carmelita*, while his brother operated *Carlota*.

Carmelita's first excursion on Thursday 27 September 1900 took 25 invited guests around an island, presumably Isla de los Alacranes. The *Carmelita* made regular runs two or three times a week between Chapala, Ocotlán, La Palma and Tuxcueca to support the booming Hotel Arzapalo, with pleasure trips to Mezcala (Presidio) Island on Sundays. It met all trains at Ocotlán on Tuesdays and Saturdays.⁸⁵

An advertisement for the *Carmelita* alongside a two-page article about Chapala the following year in *La Tierra de México*, described her as a 10-horsepower vessel, owned by the Lake Chapala Navigation Company, which would meet trains at Ocotlán on request. The company was also able to supply "electric launches,

⁸³ The three brothers were Charles Woodhouse Crompton (1870-1946), John Wilfred Compton (1876-?) and Ralph Henry Crompton (1880-1954). The middle brother may also have lived in Chapala for a time.

⁸⁴ The Mexican Herald, 4 Oct 1900; El Tiempo, 11 October 1900, 3.

⁸⁵ The Mexican Herald, 31 Oct 1900, 2.

sailing skiffs and row boats" to parties visiting Lake Chapala.⁸⁶ In 1903, for example, two hunters from Mexico City are recorded as going out in the Cromptons' smallest launch from Ocotlán into the marshes where they bagged 101 ducks in seven hours.⁸⁷

8. Lake Chapala Navigation Company

The fact that the ownership of *Carmelita* and *Carlota* is variously attributed after 1901 to either the Cromptons or the Lake Chapala Navigation Company (established many years earlier) suggests that the Cromptons had, at the very least, a close link to the company at this time, and perhaps either owned or managed it.

After Ralph's health improved, the family sold their launches to the Lake Chapala Navigation Company and returned north in February 1904.⁸⁸ Six months later, John, the middle brother informed the *Jalisco Times* that the brothers had ordered two new steamboats and planned to return to Lake Chapala with them; these plans never materialized.⁸⁹

The same newspaper had reported a few months earlier that the purchaser of all the Cromptons' boats was a Russian man, Arturo Dworzak, and his Guadalajara partners. Dworzak ran the *Carmelita* for a few weeks, borrowed money, and ran up debts with merchants and suppliers before disappearing.⁹⁰ Charged with obtaining money under misrepresentations and embezzlement, Dworzak was located and arrested in Mexico City. Among his accusers was Feliciano Estrada, described as "one of the owners of *Carmelita*."⁹¹

The *Carmelita* remained in service for several more years, but not without incident. It capsized on 18 April 1908 returning from Ajijic and its fourteen passengers were thrown into the lake. Other boats rushed to the rescue and no lives were lost. By chance, the incident was apparently captured on film by a film crew photographing the lake and the vessels.⁹²

Two years later, the *Carmelita* paid the favor forward by rescuing the passengers of the steamer *Elisa* on a Saturday evening when her engines broke down "in deep water a mile off shore in front of Las Tortugas, near Ocotlán." The crew stayed in Ocotlán to get tools and parts. An overnight storm caused the marooned vessel, owned by Emilio Jaramillo, to spring a leak and sink.⁹³

The Lake Chapala Navigation Company in 1904 was controlled by Guadalajara businessman Ernst (Ernesto) Paulsen, who acted as company president, with Julio Lewels, a 30-year old from Mazatlán living in Chapala, as secretary and general manager. Paulsen had extensive business interests in Chapala, and had built Villa Paz, his family vacation home there, a few years earlier.

⁸⁶ La Tierra de Mexico, 1 June 1901, 4, 125-6.

⁸⁷ The Mexican Herald, 16 Nov 1903.

⁸⁸ Jalisco Times, 2 Jan 1904; 6 Feb 1904. Charles, an MD, returned to his medical career; Ralph became an architect in Niagara Falls, New York and Florida.

⁸⁹ Jalisco Times, 23 Jul 1904.

⁹⁰ Jalisco Times, 20 Feb 1904; 27 Feb 1904.

⁹¹ Jalisco Times, 12 Mar 1904; 23 Apr 1904.

⁹² El Imparcial, 19 April 1908; El Tiempo Ilustrado, 26 April 1908, 10; The Mexican Herald, 28 April 1910, 8.

⁹³ The Mexican Herald, 28 April 1910, 8.

9. The Enriqueta, Rápido, Turista and Ramón Corona

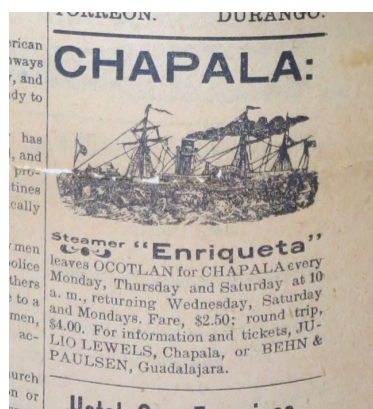


Fig. 10. Advertisement for vapor Enriqueta. (Jalisco Times, 2 Jan 1904)

Paulsen and Lewels had formed a partnership in 1903 to offer trips and tours on the lake using the gasoline turbine boat *Enriqueta*. Lewels was granted a permit to operate *Enriqueta* for trips on the lake at the end of September that year.⁹⁴

Its regularly scheduled trips at the start of 1904 left Ocotlán at 10.00am for Chapala every Monday, Thursday and Saturday, returning on Wednesday, Saturday and Monday, and cost \$2.50 one-way or \$4.00 round trip; children half price. Tickets were available from Lewels in Chapala or from Paulsen's company (then Behn & Paulsen, later Paulsen & Co.) in Guadalajara.⁹⁵ Prices rose to \$3.00 each way later that year, and the schedule was modified, with the boat leaving Chapala every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and returning from Ocotlán the next day.⁹⁶

In September 1904, Lewels bought a fleet of steel-hulled tourist rowboats from T. J. Pomeroy, the local agent for the Michigan Steel Boat Company.⁹⁷ In the same month, Paulsen and Lewels announced plans to buy a new, faster turbine steamship. In New York, they placed an order with the Werback Boat Manufacturing Company for a 60-foot vessel capable of carrying 60 passengers and able to reach 14 miles an hour. Such a vessel would slash the time required to travel between Chapala and Ocotlán from about four and a half hours to less than three hours. It would be the first boat of its kind in Mexico.⁹⁸

The new vessel, which cost \$12,000 pesos,⁹⁹ was initially christened *Fritz* but later renamed *Rápido*. Completed on time, it began service in June 1905. An advert extolled the virtues of a trip on this steamer as "one of the greatest

⁹⁴ Chapala Municipal Archives. Unpublished timeline, entries for 1 April 1903 and 30 Sep 1903.

⁹⁵ Jalisco Times, 2 Jan 1904.

⁹⁶ Gaceta de Guadalajara, 18 Sep 1904, 6.

⁹⁷ Jalisco Times, 13 Feb 1904.

⁹⁸ The Mexican Herald, 6 Sep 1904. Jalisco Times, 14 Oct 1904.

⁹⁹ The Mexican Herald, 14 Oct 1904; 21 Oct 1904.

attractions on Lake Chapala." The fare was \$3 single, \$5 return.¹⁰⁰ Its initial schedule was similar to that of the *Enriqueta*, leaving Chapala for Ocotlán every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, returning the next day.¹⁰¹

Less than a year later, Lewels died unexpectedly from pneumonia; he was only 32 years old.¹⁰² Maximo Bohnstedt, who had managed Hotel Cosmopolita in Guadalajara, became the new manager of the Lake Chapala Navigation Company.¹⁰³

All the larger steamships remained reliant on supplies of firewood as fuel. On the beach in Chapala, as elsewhere, the high stacks of firewood were replenished as rapidly as they were used. In August 1906, a member of the *Fritz's* crew, Francisco León, drowned when the small boat he was using to ferry firewood from the beach to the steamboat capsized. Two other men in the boat, Felipe Medina and J Refugio Moreida, were rescued and detained in the local jail while the incident was investigated.¹⁰⁴

This tragic accident gave Paulsen the perfect excuse, if one was needed, to refit both the *Fritz* (now called *Rápido*) and the *Enriqueta* the following year with new, more powerful, gasoline engines.¹⁰⁵

The boats of the Lake Chapala Navigation Company faced increased competition after 1904. And one competitor, in particular, had an intriguing history. On Thursday 4 August, the Jalisco governor, Miguel Ahumada and a large party of officials took an early train from Guadalajara to La Barca to attend the inauguration of the *Turista*. This steamer, owned and refitted with new machinery and boilers by Fructuoso Castellanos, was the former *Ramon Corona*, now a vessel of 40 tons, able to carry cargo, and more than 150 passengers, 30 of them in first class. The *Turista* took the governor and his party a short distance up the River Lerma to the Hacienda Zalamea, where they stayed overnight.¹⁰⁶

When brought into regular service, the *Turista*, capable of reaching 25 miles an hour, departed La Barca on Mondays for Chapala (via La Palma and Tizapán), then sailed from Chapala to Ocotlán on Wednesdays, returned to Chapala the following day, and left Chapala on Fridays for Tizapán, La Palma and La Barca. Information and tickets were available from Castellanos in La Barca, Luis Morandini in Guadalajara, the Hotel Victor Huber in Chapala, and Ramón R Flores in Ocotlán.¹⁰⁷

Even assuming that the *Ramón Corona* which became the *Turista* is the same Ramón Corona that had originally been *Libertad*, some significant gaps remain in this vessel's history.

¹⁰⁰ The Mexican Herald, 17 June 1905.

¹⁰¹ The Mexican Herald, 14 Oct 1904; 21 Oct 1904.

¹⁰² Jalisco Times 2 Mar 1906.

¹⁰³ TMH 6 June 1906, 3; The Daily Express (San Antonio, Texas), 19 June 1906, 8. Bohnstedt returned to Guadalajara in about 1907 to open the Cantina Alemana, and later the Hotel Bohnstedt.

¹⁰⁴ Chapala Municipal Archive. Events timeline. Entry for 17 August 1906.

¹⁰⁵ Jalisco Times, 30 Aug 1907.

¹⁰⁶ La Gaceta de Guadalajara, 7 Aug 1904, 8. Jalisco Times, 13 Aug 1904.

¹⁰⁷ Gaceta de Guadalajara, 18 Sep 1904, 6.

And, just as *Chapala* was used for several different boats, there were multiple vessels named *Ramón Corona*. Guadalajara photographer José María Lupercio took this appealing photograph of a vendor of watermelons plying his trade on Chapala pier. The boat berthed in the background is named *Ramón Corona*. Lupercio's image dates from around 1902, and the boat is clearly not large enough to have later become the *Turista*.



Fig. 11. José María Lupercio. c. 1902. Postcard published by M.Hernández. Vendor on Chapala pier, with detail.

10. Other motorized vessels

In addition to the various vessels already described, there are brief mentions in the press of two other steamships which also had their day on the lake in the first decade of the twentieth century: the *Mazatepec*¹⁰⁸ and the "very small" *Raúl*, which visiting writer Adolfo Dollero enjoyed in 1909, until he found himself uncomfortably close to a waterspout.¹⁰⁹

That decade was also when smaller private motorized launches, built for speed, became fashionable on the lake. These were also often referred to as *vapores*. The three most prominent in contemporaneous press accounts are the *Reverie*, *Chapala* and *Arbitro*.

The *Reverie*, owned by Arturo Braniff, attracted a lot of attention when it berthed at Chapala pier in July 1906, and led to an impromptu party with fireworks and music. "On board were Sr Braniff and his family after a three-day trip around the lake. Of all the steamers on the lake, this is, according to information that we received, the most beautiful."¹¹⁰

The following year, Braniff, who had a vacation home at Ribera Castellanos near Ocotlán, built a large boat house for *Reverie*, with the derricks and other equipment needed for repairing and maintaining boats, and bought Isla de

¹⁰⁸ La Voz de México, 4 Jan 1905.

¹⁰⁹ Adolfo Dollero. 1911. México al día. (Impresiones y notas de viaje). Paris-Mexico: Librería de la Vda. de C. Bouret. See Lake Chapala Through the Ages, chapter 51.

¹¹⁰ La Gaceta de Guadalajara, 29 Jul 1906, 11. Jalisco Times, 8 Sep 1907, 5.

las Alacranes from Earnst Paulsen.¹¹¹ Two of Braniff's brothers, Thomás and Alberto, also had boats on the lake. Thomás and his wife had hosted a party in April 1900 "on board their new house boat," in honor of Mr and Mrs Lorenzo Elizaga. Amongst those present were Septimus Crowe, Miss Eliza Paulsen, Mr Alvaro Fernández del Valle and Manuel Cuesta and his brother-in-law Mr Corcuera.¹¹² Several years later *El Mundo Ilustrado* published this photograph of Thomás' high speed launch.¹¹³



Fig. 12. Heliodoro J. Gutiérrez. c 1908. The Chapala with Cuesta Gallardo and Elizaga. (Published in *El Tiempo Ilustrado*, 26 April 1908, 8.)

Not to be outdone by the Braniffs, Manuel Cuesta Gallardo, accompanied by Lorenzo Elizaga, launched a "beautiful, elegant and well-built" steamer named *Chapala* on the lake in 1907.¹¹⁴ Cuesta Gallardo was the hacienda owner (and later politician) responsible for draining the eastern part of the lake for agriculture. Lorenzo Elizaga, owner of the extensive El Manglar estate a short distance west of Chapala, was married to the sister of María del Carmen ("Carmelita") Romero, wife of President Díaz.

In November 1907 the "leading boats on Lake Chapala" included Braniff's *Reverie*, the *Fritz* and *Enriqueta* of Ernst Paulsen, and the *Nianta* and *Mariana* of the Lake Chapala Agricultural & Improvement Company. There were also "a dozen smaller vapor (sic) launches, owned principally by Guadalajara people."¹¹⁵ The Lake Chapala Agricultural & Improvement Company was incorporated in 1902 by Dwight Furness, developer of the Hotel Ribera Castellanos and its adjacent residential area.¹¹⁶ The *Nianta* was a sloop used

¹¹¹ Jalisco Times 30 Aug 1907.

¹¹² The Mexican Herald, 9 April 1900.

¹¹³ El Mundo Ilustrado, 3 Apr 1910.

¹¹⁴ El Tiempo, 18 Oct 1907.

¹¹⁵ Jalisco Times, 8 Nov 1907.

¹¹⁶ See <https://tonyburton.ca/hotel-ribera-castellanos/>

by hotel guests, such as "Captain Samuel Pulley, a retired officer of the English navy, who spent a week in 1908 cruising on the Nianta and hunting in the marshes at the eastern end of the lake."¹¹⁷ The *Mariana* was probably a similar vessel.



Fig. 13. Winfield Scott. c. 1907. Nianta on Lake Chapala. Credit: Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), where it is attributed to C. B. Waite and mistakenly located as Nautla, Veracruz.

The following January, the *Arbitro*, owned by the Lombardo Brothers, Luis and Vicente¹¹⁸—who, like the Braniffs, had a vacation home at Rivera Castellanos—made its maiden voyage on the lake. Built by the Seabury Boatbuilding Company of New York, the 50-foot cabin launch of 100 horsepower was shipped to Ocotlán via the Central Railway. Even running at three-fourths speed, the launch appeared to be easily the fastest on the lake, covering the 35 miles between Ribera Castellanos and Chapala in 90 minutes.¹¹⁹ To settle the matter, races were planned between *Arbitro* and *Chapala*, though it is unclear whether or not they ever actually took place.¹²⁰

Always looking to curry favor in high circles, Cuesta Gallardo was undoubtedly delighted when he had the opportunity to take Colonel Felix Díaz (son of the president), his wife and some friends to Ribera Castellanos, "on a flying trip from Chapala in Manuel Cuesta's magnificent gasoline launch *Chapala*" in February 1908. Guests at Ribera Castellanos at the time included the Norwegian entrepreneur Christian Schjetnan and his young bride.¹²¹

The downfall of President Díaz and start of the Mexican Revolution (1910) brought years of insecurity and economic stagnation to the Chapala area.

¹¹⁷ Jalisco Times, 31 Jan 1908.

¹¹⁸ Vicente Lombardo Carpio, born in Mexico into a wealthy Italian family, dealt in real estate. His son Vicente Lombardo Toledano (1894–1968) was a prominent Mexican labor leader, Marxist intellectual, and co-founded the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de México). See Daniela Spenser. 2020. In *Combat: The Life of Lombardo Toledano*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

¹¹⁹ Jalisco Times, 8 Nov 1907; 17 Jan 1908.

¹²⁰ The Mexican Herald, 15 Feb 1908, 7.

¹²¹ The Mexican Herald, 17 Feb 1908, 6.

Tourism was disrupted, hotels shuttered for long periods. Rampant instability, especially in the area near the Hotel Ribera Castellanos, culminated in the murder in 1919 of the hotel owner's son Enrique Langenscheidt.¹²²

Among the larger vessels mentioned in newspapers during the 1910s was the vapor *El Rayo*, based in Chapala. A request from Ocotlán sought the vessel's help with inspecting the progress made on efforts there to destroy the *lirio* (water hyacinth).¹²³

Just as construction of the La Capilla-Chapala railroad began, two new gasoline launches, *Tizapán* and *Chapala*, were launched on the lake. Described as light, well-built and stable, they belonged to Alfredo Levy, who made the trip in one of them from Ocotlán to Chapala in two hours 20 minutes.¹²⁴ Levy was general manager of a new firm of vessels for passengers and cargo, which had agents in all the major lakeside ports: Marcelino Rivera (Ocotlán), Ignacio Pérez (Ajijic), José Corona (Jocotepec), José Gómez Monraz (Tuxcueca); Ezequiel Zepeda (Tizapán el Alto); Manuel Moreno (Cojumatlán); Daniel Robles (La Palma) and Cornelio Fierro (Jamay).¹²⁵

A colorful character and *presidente municipal* of Chapala in 1919, Levy also organized bus excursions from Guadalajara to Chapala, and train excursions to Ocotlán to connect with one of the two steamers enabling travelers to enjoy a return cruise on the lake for 6 pesos, with an optional overnight stay at the Hotel Francés, managed by Antonio Mólgora, in Chapala for 2.50 pesos.¹²⁶

Writing many years later, Servando Ortoll claimed that *Tizapán* and *Chapala* had been owned by a private company that collapsed during the Revolution, before being expropriated by the government and leased to Alfredo Levy, who "kept both steamers running in spite of their frightful condition until 1920, when... he was unable to keep the Chapala afloat and the Tizapán sank."¹²⁷

What became of the *Chapala* is unknown. But, if the *Tizapán* sank it was clearly refloated, since it is recorded in 1929 as taking the delegates of the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario) from Chapala to Ocotlán, to see the preparations for an upcoming referendum.¹²⁸ And a couple of years later, it was glowingly advertised as the "largest and safest" steamer on the lake.¹²⁹

¹²² See <https://tonyburton.ca/hotel-ribera-castellanos/> p 12.

¹²³ Chapala Municipal Archives. Timeline entry for 20 Oct 1914.

¹²⁴ El Nacional, 7 Sep 1917, 4.

¹²⁵ Enrique Francisco Camarena. 1967. "Hace cincuenta años", El Informador, 3 Sep 1967, 3-C.

¹²⁶ El Informador, 6 September 1918, 4. See <https://tonyburton.ca/guadalajara-chapala-bus-service-1917/> p 3-4.

¹²⁷ Servando Ortoll. 1993. "Falling in love: Thomas Rogers' 1892 80-mile circuit of Lake Chapala." Guadalajara Reporter: 9 Jan 1993, 14-15.

¹²⁸ El Informador 20 Aug 1929, 4.

¹²⁹ El Informador, 15 May 1931, 8.

11. Chapala Development Company (Compañía de Fomento de Chapala, S.A.)

Despite the uncertainties, some people pressed on with ambitious plans. The most noteworthy was Christian Schjetnan, who moved to Chapala, and was the prime mover in the Chapala Development Company (Compañía de Fomento de Chapala), formed in 1917, which successfully completed, in three years, the railroad to Chapala and the iconic Chapala Railroad Station, designed by Guillermo de Alba. Schjetnan was never short of visionary ideas, well ahead of their time, even if many of them were never fulfilled.

In addition to building the railroad line and Chapala Railroad Station, Schjetnan's gaudiose ambitions included a massive hotel (never built), a yacht club and residential development, which barely got off the ground. The company also planned to have its own steamboats connecting the railroad with passengers and cargo from all around the lake.

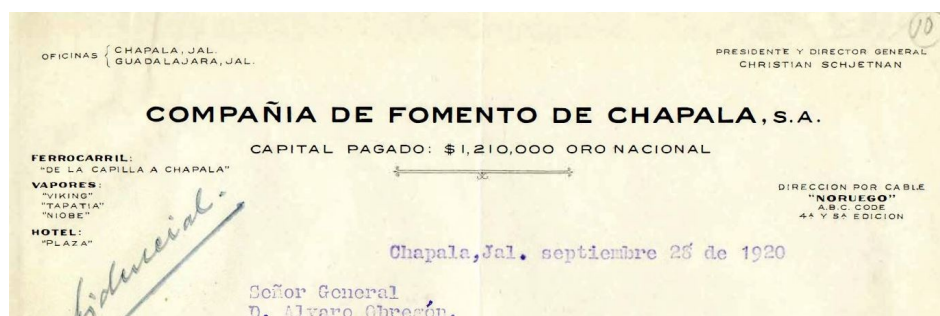


Fig. 14. Letterhead of Chapala Development Company. Letter from Schjetnan to interim president Obregón.
Credit: Unknown (please contact me if you know details)

When the railroad opened in 1920, the company's letterhead proudly listed its assets as offices in Chapala and Guadalajara; the La Capilla-Chapala Railroad; three vapores named *Viking*, *Tapatía* and *Niobe*; and the Hotel Plaza.

The hotel was never built, and the *Niobe* is never mentioned elsewhere, but the other two steamships appear to have been in service from about 1920: the *Viking* for passenger traffic, and the *Tapatía* for cargo, especially agricultural produce such as mangoes and watermelons. The *Viking*, which had two decks, could carry 200 passengers. According to one source, it had originally been named *Mead In Chacaltita* (perhaps a typo for *Made In Chacaltita*), Chacaltita being the name for the main beach in Chapala east of the pier, which was a casualty of Chapala's redevelopment in the 1940s. After the ship's original owners left the boat semi-ruined on the beach, when their company failed, it was acquired by the Chapala Development Company and remodeled as the *Viking*.¹³⁰ The *Viking* remained in service until at least 1926, when it was severely damaged in a storm, not long after the Chapala Railroad Station had been flooded and railroad service to Chapala had to be suspended. Some reports claim it was subsequently repaired and used in some capacity for another decade or so.

Mario Bauche Garciadiego recalled being on the *Viking* as a child (presumably in the early 1920s) with his father, who was managing director of the Cia Hidroelectrica e Irrigadora de Chapala, which Bauche thought owned the boat at the time. He also remembered a vapor named *Cristóbal de Oñate*, owned by José

¹³⁰ Manuel Galindo Gaitán. 2003. Estampas de Chapala, vol 1, 23. Guadalajara: Ediciones Pacífico, S.A.

Guadalupe Zuno, which, like the *Viking*, was damaged when dashed against a pier by the exceptionally high waves of 1926.¹³¹



Fig. 15. José Edmundo Sánchez. c 1923? Vapor Viking. Detail from a postcard image.

Several other steamers were also active on the lake in the 1920s. A group of German visitors took a trip aboard "the vapor Jalisco since the vapor Guadalajara needed repairs," after lunch at the Hotel Mólgora (formerly Hotel Arzapalo) in March 1926.¹³² And a few years later, in February 1930 another boat named *Ramón Corona* was launched on the lake. The details and owners of these three vessels are unknown.¹³³

One of the last mentions of a steamboat in a positive setting comes in an account of the wedding in February 1933 of Mina de Alba, the daughter of architect Guillermo de Alba. Mina was insistent that her civil ceremony be held on the lake, so the wedding party took the vapor *Bremen* two or three miles out from shore for the ceremony and multiple signatures.¹³⁴

12. Passenger boat mishaps

Travel on the lake was never without its dangers. Six people lost their lives in August 1928 when the *Luisito*, a gasoline-powered launch, and one of the larger boats on the lake, capsized near Isla de Alacranes on what should have been a routine trip across the lake from Tuxcueca to Chapala. More lives would have been lost but for the speedy arrival of another boat, *Argentina*, which was nearing Chapala at the time. Three children were saved by the *Luisito*'s

¹³¹ Mario Bauche Garciadiego. 1992. "Vacaciones en Chapala", *El Informador*, 9 June 1992, 4-5. No corroborating details have surfaced about the precise timing or damage to these boats in 1926.

¹³² *El Informador*, 12 March 1926.

¹³³ Chapala Municipal Archives. Timeline entry for 19 Feb 1930.

¹³⁴ Martín Casillas de Alba. 1987. "La Boda de Mina de Alba según ella la contaba." *La Plaza* (Guadalajara), Año 1, #7 (March 1987), 14-17.

owner, who was detained pending an investigation. Crewman Alejandro Rodríguez, credited with saving ten lives, was given a presidential award for valor.¹³⁵

Later that year, in early October, there was an even more serious boating disaster. A group of 21 persons set out from Chapala for a picnic in Tizapán on the south side of the lake. Mid-way across the lake, a storm came up and the boat foundered; fifteen people lost their lives, only six were saved.¹³⁶

Two months later, a large crowd gathered on the beach at Chapala at 10.00 o'clock at night because a passenger boat burst into flames about 900 meters off shore as it was setting off for Ajijic. It was thought at first to be the *Ramón Corona*. But it turned out to be *La Paz*, "a modern vessel with six-cylinder engine, which had just been repaired," owned by José Zuloaga Vizcaíno of Chapala. Fortunately, the only two men on board—mechanic J. Guadalupe Rivera and helmsman Everardo López—were rescued by the crew of Centenario before *La Paz* was fully consumed by the flames. Rivera needed medical treatment for serious burns; López escaped uninjured.¹³⁷

Several other serious accidents are reported to have occurred between 1937 and 1943, as the golden age of steamships and steamers on Lake Chapala came to an end, though these have all so far proved impossible to corroborate.

In 1937, for instance, the *Michoacán* was ferrying a Swiss passenger, Mr Ottiger, manager of the Nestlé plant in Ocotlán, back from La Palma to the plant, with 27 churns of milk following his short inspection of milk cooling facilities near Cojumatlán.¹³⁸ Twenty-five minutes after leaving La Palma, with darkness falling, a sudden squall or whirlpool sank the ship. All four people on board survived, two of them by holding onto milk churns for five hours. The two churns were, for some providential reason, only half-full. The men were eventually rescued by a fisherman who heard their cries.¹³⁹

Then, very near Cojumatlán the following year, the steamer *Cuitzeo* caught fire. Its two-man crew—Juan Salcedo Navarro and Vicente Tostado—jumped into the lake, from where they were plucked to safety by the vapor Tabasco and another vessel.¹⁴⁰

At almost exactly the same location as the *Michoacán* had capsized, the *Manzanillo*, owned by Atanasio Gutierrez of Ocotlán, capsized in 1941. The four passengers who jumped ship drowned, while all the remaining passengers and crew were rescued by passing boats.¹⁴¹

Two years later, in another uncorroborated report, the vapor *Progreso* left Tizapán el Alto at 2.00am on 24 December in wind and light rain. Running the

¹³⁵ El Informador, 16 August 1928, 1; New York Times, 18 Aug 1928. San Francisco Chronicle, 14 Nov 1928, 5.

¹³⁶ New York Times, 8 October 1930. Sterling Daily Gazette (Illinois), 7 October 1930, 1.

¹³⁷ El Informador: 15 April 1933, 1, 6.

¹³⁸ The Nestlé plant in Ocotlán opened in 1935.

¹³⁹ José María Angulo Supulveda. 1987. La Navegación de antaño en el Lago de Chapala. Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, 66.

¹⁴⁰ José María Angulo Supulveda. 1987. La Navegación de antaño en el Lago de Chapala. Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, 66.

¹⁴¹ Angulo Supulveda, op cit.

boat were Francisco and José María Sánchez, helped by Pedro Hernández and a passenger. When the vessel, loaded with onions, tomatoes and chilies, failed to arrive on time, the owner sent out a search party. The vessel was never found; and all four bodies were eventually washed up on shore, the last one on Mezcala Island fully nine days after the boat was lost.¹⁴²

On a lighter note, U.S press reports of a boat disaster on Lake Chapala on 28 December 1943, in which 15 persons drowned after the sinking of a launch, appear to be purely apocryphal, presumably reflecting the zeal of a journalist who fell for a spectacularly successful Día de los Inocentes' prank!¹⁴³

13. Boat yards in Ocotlán

Historically, Ocotlán, on the Mexican Central Railroad, was the natural site for launching imported boats for use on the lake, and for the repair yards needed to keep them lakeworthy. With time, the skills acquired by workers in the repair shops to keep the vessels afloat led to several small boat boatbuilding yards being established in the town. Some of them specialized in making motorized metal-hulled boats (such as *Progreso*, *Neptuno*, *El Nacional*, *Mazatlán*), others continued the much older tradition of crafting wooden sail canoes (such as *La Palma*, *La América* and *La Sirena*).¹⁴⁴ These boat yards were responsible for almost all new boats launched on the lake after the 1920s.

14. Powerboat Regatta, 1947

By 1908 the flotilla of speedboats on Lake Chapala had reached about 25 boats of various classes. Many of the owners, having participated in 1907 in the first automobile races held at Chapala, hatched plans to stage a series of powerboat races immediately after the next series of auto races, but their plans were forestalled by political circumstances of the time.¹⁴⁵

Lake Chapala had to wait another three decades before its waters were churned up by full-throttled speedboats. The most prestigious powerboat regatta ever held on the lake was an international event in 1947 sponsored by the state governor and approved by the American Power Boat Association (APBA).¹⁴⁶ The races took part on 8 and 9 November, with almost all competitors coming from the US. More than 20 outboards and 6 inboards were towed down in a convoy from Texas.¹⁴⁷ The same boats went on to race again in Acapulco a week later.

In total, 30 American craft and 9 Mexican boats took part. On the first day, the winner in the 135-cubic-inch inboard class was Jack Cooper of Kansas City, a seven times world champion speedboat pilot.¹⁴⁸ The race for more powerful boats, the 225-cubic inch inboard class, was won by Merlyn Culbert of Dayton,

¹⁴² Angulo Supulveda, op cit.

¹⁴³ This story, unmentioned in *El Informador*, appeared with near-identical wording in dozens of U.S. and Canadian daily newspapers, including the *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, 29 Dec 1943, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Angulo Supulveda, op cit.

¹⁴⁵ *The Mexican Herald*, 5 March 1908.

¹⁴⁶ *New York Times*, 27 July 1947; 10 Aug 1947. Airi Andrade. "Regatta in Mexico." *Modern Mexico* Vol 20 #5 (October 1947), 17-18.

¹⁴⁷ *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1947.

¹⁴⁸ *New York Times*, 9 Nov 1947.

Ohio, who completed the 8-kilometer course in 5 minutes 43 seconds.¹⁴⁹ The main trophy was the Copa Jalisco, a silver cup weighing more than 10 kilos donated by then state governor J. Jesús González Gallo.¹⁵⁰

A decade of below-average rainfall throughout the Lerma-Chapala basin caused the lake level to decline significantly, and it fell to an all-time low in 1955, exposing huge swathes of lakebed. Motorboat races were not held again until March 1958, when 24 boats took part around a course set up a short distance east of San Juan Cosalá, off Piedra Barrenada.¹⁵¹

15. Fake steamship of the 1970s

Jocotepec gained an unusual addition to its regular fishing boats in the early 1970s when the *Reina Guadalupe*, a vehicle and passenger ferry being built to look like a sidewheel paddle steamer, intended for use between Ajijic and Puerto Corona, was set free from its moorings in Puerto Corona and drifted across the lake.

Attempts to finish its construction failed and it languished for years on the beach in Jocotepec, before being advertised in 1977 as the venue for a restaurant-bar and a floating center for dances, with its rental supervised by Carlos Rodríguez, the then mayor of Jocotepec. After a few years, the business failed, the boat was abandoned, and its stripped-out hull rusted on Jocotepec beach until it was eventually sold for scrap.¹⁵²



Fig. 19. Gwen Burton. c. 1986. Reina Guadalupe on Jocotepec beach.

¹⁴⁹ New York Times, 10 Nov 1947.

¹⁵⁰ El Informador, 6 November 1947, 13, 20.

¹⁵¹ El Informador, 11 March 1958, 13.

¹⁵² Guadalajara Reporter, 12 Feb 1977, 1. Howard Fryer. 2010. El Nitty-Gritty.

Duncan Cameron (c.1830-1903)

Given the large number of individuals born in Scotland named Duncan Cameron, and the high rate of emigration out of Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century, it is hardly surprising that it is difficult to determine the backstory of 'our' Duncan Cameron prior to his documented presence in California in 1860. The U.S. Census that year records Duncan (born in Scotland, 30 years old, and a boiler maker) living in San Francisco with his 19-year-old wife, Irish-born Mary, and their three-month-old daughter, Marion. According to an uncorroborated note on a family tree, Mary Teresa Kelleher (1841-1896) had married Duncan at Santa Ana church in San Francisco a year earlier.¹⁵³

Duncan's early life remains a mystery.

According to "The Camerons of Fassifern," Duncan was born in June 1827 to John Cameron (1784-1857) and Ann(e) McIntyre (1803-1871), and died 28 March 1903 in Guadalajara.¹⁵⁴

While I concur with his date of death (which is supported by other evidence), I am less sure about his date of birth. If he was born in 1827, Duncan would have been three years older at the time of the 1860 U.S. census. Together with his parents and several siblings, the Duncan born in 1827 emigrated to Australia in 1848.¹⁵⁵ John and his two older sons (Duncan and Donald) are all described as shepherds. Is it realistic to claim that this Duncan, who had arrived penniless in Australia in 1848, left at his own expense for California, perhaps as early as 1850? The 1850 date is based on an 1865 advertisement for the Neptune Iron Works (proprietor Duncan Cameron) which claimed that "Cameron and Worth" had been making boilers for 15 years.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, according to a news item about the contract won by Cameron and the Neptune Iron Works in 1867 for Lake Chapala steamers, "Mr. Cameron has had considerable experience in this line of business in Scotland, having built several iron steamers on the Clyde." None of the details of this Duncan Cameron's life and skills suggest he could possibly be the Duncan Cameron who was a shepherd and moved to Australia in 1848.

Further muddying the waters, there was another prominent (but definitely different) Duncan Cameron working in San Francisco in the 1860s, who was an agent for the Pioneer Stage Coach Company.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Some dates in this account are taken from uncorroborated family trees posted to ancestry.com

¹⁵⁴ "The Camerons of Fassifern" is a multi-branch family tree at [ancestryresearchservice.com](https://www.ancestryresearchservice.com)
<https://www.ancestryresearchservice.com/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=I8115&tree=cameron1> It lists Mary Teresa's year of death as 1896; other sources claim 1893.

¹⁵⁵ John Cameron (aged 50) and Anne (45) arrived on the Charlotte Jane in Sydney on 8 October 1848, with their children: Marjory (26), Jessie (24), Duncan (21), Donald (17) and Archibald (12).

¹⁵⁶ Sacramento Daily Union, 27 March 1865. William Ellison Worth (1808-1879) arrived in San Francisco in 1850, the year of the city's Great Fire. Five years later, Worth built the first fire engine in California. Worth worked for various companies before joining Duncan Cameron to start the Neptune Iron Works.] See https://guardiansofthecity.org/sffd/museum_collections/apparatus/1855_broderick.html

¹⁵⁷ The obituary for this Duncan Cameron, frequently named in advertisements in 1864 (eg Daily Alta 6 July 1864), described him as "one of the oldest inhabitants of Oakland," who left "a wife and two children." (San Jose Mercury-News, 29 March 1889.)

Cameron (the boilermaker) and his wife, Mary Teresa, had at least seven children (two boys, five girls) the first four of whom were born in San Francisco, and the last three in Jalisco, Mexico.¹⁵⁸

Duncan Cameron was also alleged to be the father of another child, a boy named Asención, born in Chapala in 1875. Asención's birth was registered by his maternal grandfather, Ignacio Jaramillo, who claimed his daughter Sista was Asención's mother and that Cameron was the father. Appended to the registration a week later is a note saying that Duncan Cameron had turned up to state that he did not recognize the boy as his son, and would defend this position in court if necessary.¹⁵⁹

Cameron had numerous business interests besides the steamship *Libertad*. Silver had first been discovered in Ajijic in 1856, and several small mines were being exploited there by 1875. Cameron, who owned at least one of these mines (though its name and location are unknown), complained to municipal authorities in 1878 that the villagers of Ajijic would not allow him access to grazing land to feed the horses he needed to work the mine.¹⁶⁰

Cameron was also keenly interested in the potential development of coal and oil deposits in the vicinity of Lake Chapala, and in plans to build a Sullivan Railway in 1883 from Jiquilpan and other parts of Michoacán to the south shore of the lake at La Palma, a port served by the *Libertad*. This would greatly benefit investors. Cameron owned one of the two existing claims staked to work deposits of bituminous coal, and was "sure that the deposits of fossil fuel could be exploited and rival those of England."¹⁶¹ Cameron's claim was for a slope of soft coal (hulla blanda) that reached the lake near Cojumatlán, a very convenient source of fuel for coal-fired locomotives.

Duncan Cameron died on 28 March 1903 and was buried in Mezquitán cemetery.

Note about Casa Clover Lawn, Guadalajara

Speculation on social media that this architecturally distinctive property, one of the first three houses in what is now called Colonia Americana, was once the home of Duncan Cameron is implausible. This area was totally undeveloped prior to about 1903, the year Duncan died. Other sources claim it was the home of US businessman John Harvey Kipp.

¹⁵⁸ The Camerons' seven recorded children are Marion (Mariana) (1860-1934), Hellena (Elena) (1863-1920), John Angel (Juan) (1866-1887), George William (Jorge) (1869-1909), María (1871-?), María Celestina (Celia) (1873-1948), and Elisa (1875-1962).

¹⁵⁹ Birth registration (12 Nov 1875) of Ascención Cameron Jaramillo, born in Chapala 8 Nov 1875.

¹⁶⁰ "La Minería en Ajijic." Unpublished document compiled by Archivo Historico Municipal de Chapala.

¹⁶¹ Crescencio García. 1883. "El Ferrocarril Sullivan y las Riquezas de Michoacán." El Parajo Volando (Cotija), 1 March 1883.