

“The Revolution Maker: The Story of Sherburne G. Hopkins and the Mexican Revolution”

by

John L. Mitchell

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John L. Mitchell, J.D. is an Alumnus from University of New Mexico School of Law.

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Abstract

The Mexican Revolution is a popular subject of inquiry, especially as it pertains to state-formation in social, cultural, and political terms in understanding Mexico. However, an understudied subject of the Revolution is the transnational influence, particularly from back-door dealings, stemming from the United States. This paper highlights the influence of U.S. attorney Sherburne G. Hopkins on the Mexican Revolution. His efforts focused on procuring funds to finance the purchase of weapons, creating organizations to smuggle weapons across the border, and creating political support in the United States. The paper provides biographical information on Hopkins, describing how he came to hold a position of influence in both countries. He is a forgotten and highly underappreciated actor in the Mexican Revolution who deserves recognition for his important role in providing the arms and ammunition that led to one of the 20th century’s most violent revolutions.

“Today in Washington they scatter to the winds the ashes of one of America’s greatest unofficial diplomats . . . a soldier of fortune who, just in the zest of living, made and unmade governments, fortunes, and individual destinies . . . A diplomat never in chancellery and a lawyer never in court, he knew the springs of action of all such institutions, and without portfolio or brief, he worked strange magic in attaining his ends-- always in behalf of his friends it seemed. Never did he seek power or dominance for himself. There was an amused detachment in his exciting activities, as if they involved merely the play of a brilliant, restless mind.”¹

This is the story of Sherburne Gillette Hopkins, an opportunistic international attorney who played a vital role in the history of the Mexican Revolution, an American characterized as a “revolution maker,” who, according to his obituary, “made and unmade governments” in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. Hopkins’ involvement in the Mexican Revolution has been documented by Freidrich Katz, Heribert Von Feilitzsch, Charles Houston Harris and Louis R. Sadler; each of these scholars recognized that Hopkins advised Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, and Francisco “Pancho” Villa.² Yet Sherburne Hopkins is only mentioned briefly in these works, with the exception of Von Feilitzsch’s *In Plain Sight: Felix A. Sommerfeld, Spymaster in Mexico, 1908 to 1914*.

This paper analyzes the services Sherburne Hopkins provided the leaders of the Mexican Revolution and discusses the significant role his family played in facilitating access to powerful individuals in Washington D.C. This paper places Hopkins' life in the context of certain important transnational events and corrects inaccuracies in his biography.³ Some events described here have not been previously documented; others have not been discussed except in passing. By amplifying and correcting the historical record, this paper brings into focus the sources of Sherburne Hopkins' unique expertise in shaping events associated with revolution. In this paper, I utilized primary sources including newspapers, archives, and congressional series sets, in addition to supplementary secondary sources to inform this analysis.

The Beginning

According to several news sources, on the evening of November 3, 1887 U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Morrison Waite had settled down in his dining room to enjoy his evening meal after a hectic day in which the Court had denied an appeal of the execution of five Chicago anarchists.⁴ In response to the decision, anarchists were using "infernal machines" or crudely made bombs to cause chaos all around the country.⁵ Around 6:30 P.M., there was a knock at Waite's front door; one of his servants received a package from a special delivery messenger: a plasterboard box addressed to the Chief Justice labeled "important documents." The Chief Justice was not expecting a delivery and opened the unusual package. To his surprise, the box contained what appeared to be an infernal machine of the type employed by anarchists whose appeal the Court had just denied.⁶

"ANARCHY! Bold Attempt on Chief Justice Waite's Life" read one of the headlines the next day.⁷ Newspapers throughout the country speculated that the delivery was in retaliation for the adverse ruling.⁸ That evening the police arrested a young newspaperman who, along with his

partner, Arthur B. Sperry, confessed that the scheme was intended to be an elaborate joke.⁹ The young newspaperman had spent hours constructing the fake explosive and had fabricated a story to sell to newspaper reporters. The young man claimed that he thought the box would be funny and he “only wanted to get up a little sensation...”¹⁰ The young man’s name was Sherburne Gillette Hopkins.

Almost 26 years after this dramatic hoax, Hopkins made sensational headlines during the Mexican Revolution and was labeled a manager of Revolutions in Latin America.¹¹ One headline read, “Fight of Railway Interests behind the Mexican War: Letters Show that One Set is Supporting Constitutionals.”¹² The correspondence referred to in this article involved Sherburne Hopkins, General Venustiano Carranza, Henry Clay Pierce, and others, concerning a proposal to grant Henry Clay Pierce control of the Mexican railways.¹³ As in the sensational hoax against the U.S. Chief Justice two decades earlier, Sherburne G. Hopkins was at the center of this controversy.

Sherburne G. Hopkins and the Mexican Revolution

How did a young sensationalist who sent a fake bomb to a U.S. Supreme Court Justice become so entangled in the Mexican Revolution that he would become known as the Latin American Revolution Maker? To understand the life experiences that shaped this man, it is important to assess his actual role in the Mexican Revolution. Hopkins’s role in the Mexican Revolution began in late October 1910, when Gustavo Madero—brother of Francisco I. Madero, leader of the revolt to depose the dictator Porfirio Díaz traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with him.¹⁴ Gustavo offered a \$50,000 retainer to Sherburne Hopkins for “services.”¹⁵

In the 1920 Senate Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Hopkins testified that he advised Francisco Madero “to get all the arms and ammunition and munitions of war that they could and,

with due regard of neutrality laws, to get them across the border and organize their movement on the most approved military lines . . . and I pointed out to them as best I could the lines of least resistance, both in a military and a political sense.”¹⁶ Sherburne Hopkins explained to the Senate Committee that he also advised Gustavo Madero on Secret Service matters.¹⁷ After Francisco Madero’s assassination, Hopkins became an adviser for Venustiano Carranza, his successor.¹⁸ On May 8, 1914 Hopkins advised General Carranza on how to smuggle weapons and ammunitions into Mexico:

Mr. Lind told me recently . . . that you should arrange to export such as was needed from some port on the Gulf, preferably Mobile or Pensacola, in small vessels to Cuba, which upon arrival at some port on the island might alter their course to the mouth of the Rio Bravo . . . Mr. Lind assured me very positively that there would be no interference whatsoever with shipments made in this way . . .”¹⁹

Hopkins’ letter indicated that he had direct communication with John Lind and that he would provide Carranza with avenues to procure munitions, weapons, and ammunition despite the U.S. embargo.²⁰ Other letters and information demonstrate how well connected Hopkins was at the time and that he had influence on President Wilson’s policy towards the Mexican Revolution.²¹

During his time as adviser to Carranza, Sherburne Hopkins made frequent visits to Mexico. One newspaper article reported: “Capt. Hopkins arrived at Gen. Carranza’s capital on the day that news came of Huerta’s resignation. He slipped out of Washington quietly, leaving word at this office that he was ‘going on a fishing trip’ . . . certain senators are keeping their eyes on Capt. Hopkins’ ‘fishing trip’ with great interest . . .”²²

It was evident that Hopkins had doubts about Carranza for some time. On October 6, 1915 he advised, “In regard to recognition, my personal opinion is that it would be premature at this time to grant recognition to either the factions of Carranza or Villa . . .”²³ His comment

indicated that he lacked confidence in Carranza's government and believed Francisco "Pancho" Villa could be a better choice to lead Mexico. On October 15, 1915, a newspaper report declared that he was working as an agent for Pancho Villa: "He [Hopkins] remained associated with Carranza until the breach between Carranza and Villa had become obvious and hopeless; then he became an agent of the Villa Party here [Washington D.C.]."²⁴ Despite this change of allegiance, he recommended that the U.S. allow Carranza to remain in control to see if he would reestablish the constitutional order.

Sherburne Hopkins clung to the hope that Carranza would restore constitutional government to Mexico. That hope eventually vanished. On April 29, 1920, Hopkins declared publicly that the Carranza government had been a "ghastly failure."²⁵ During the 1920 Senate Investigation, Hopkins explained the circumstances that led to his severance of relations with the Carranza Government:

At the City of Mexico one day, Mr. Carranza advised me that after serious consideration he had decided that a lengthy pre-constitutional period would be essential before reestablishing the constitutional order . . . I asked his permission to retire and immediately returned to Washington.²⁶

In that same year, Hopkins predicted that General Álvaro Obregón would assume control of the Mexican government, and Hopkins became his adviser. In June 1920, Sherburne Hopkins made a declaration as a legal representative of the Obregón government that "The American national sport—baseball—has won a conquest of Mexico. It has driven the habit of bull fights into oblivion."²⁷ This declaration was included in a state Department report on "Baseball Intervention" in Mexico.²⁸ On September 13, 1922, Hopkins also made a public statement of support for Obregón: "Gen. Obregon is giving Mexico a wholesome government, and is, I believe, deserving of the support of those who desire to see Mexico proper."²⁹

Sherburne Gillette Hopkins was involved in the governments of multiple leaders throughout the Mexican Revolution. He provided services to Madero, Carranza, Villa, and Obregón—the key leaders of the Mexican Revolution in the north. A State Department memo described Hopkins as an adviser for the highest bidder of revolutionary causes: “There seems to be no doubt that Hopkins has been the advisor and confidential agent of practically any Mexican or Central American revolutionist plotter who had sufficient money to pay for his services . . .”³⁰

Hopkins’ Services

Why did so many revolutionary leaders of the Mexican Revolution seek Hopkins’ services, and what did he provide? Scholars have identified these as lobbying, weapons and ammunition procurement, secret service advising, legal advising, and loan procurements. This list is not exhaustive. Because of the attorney-client privilege that existed between Sherburne Hopkins and the revolutionary leaders, and that he was never required to disclose the full extent of what services he provided, the answers to these questions must be inferred from a close reading of newspaper articles and the sketchy testimony provided by Hopkins and others.

Neutrality Laws

Sherburne Hopkins was well versed in U.S. neutrality laws. A November 3, 1895 newspaper profile described him as “the youngest international practitioner here [in the newspaper article], and is well known as a close student of diplomatic affairs . . . By reason of his familiarity with Latin-America he is probably more frequently consulted concerning questions arising in that quarter than any other attorney in the capital.”³¹ In the 1920 Senate Investigation, Hopkins acknowledged that his advice to Madero included “methods that they should pursue [to obtain arms], and also so as not to come into conflict with the neutrality laws.”³² Hopkins was an expert in understanding how to get American weapons and ammunition

into the hands of individuals outside of the United States while remaining within the limits of neutrality.

Soldiers of Fortune

Hopkins had another valuable skill: he was able to arrange the employment of Soldiers of Fortune who had experience in other war campaigns. A.W. Lewis, a soldier of fortune, explained, “About the end of January [1911] Madero’s brother Gustavo A. Madero, and his father Francisco I. Madero, Sr., appeared in New York City. It was at this time that I joined them through their attorney Captain S.I. Hopkins [sic]. My former experience in the Boer war in South Africa caused Captain Hopkins to recommend me to Madero for certain work they required and which I performed for them.”³³ Lewis’ “work” included commanding the Artillery Division of Madero’s forces. On May 1, 1911 the El Paso Herald reported, “The artillery of the insurrecto [sic] forces is in the command of Capt. A.W. Lewis, an American, who was a captain in the regular cavalry division of the British army during the Boer in South Africa.”³⁴

Public Relations

In addition to navigating neutrality laws and procuring weapons and soldiers with needed skills, Sherburne G. Hopkins was an expert in manipulating the media. In an August 15, 1915 news article, a U.S. judge was quoted stating that “Pancho and his brother Hipólito, are businessmen and they have the best legal advice [which would have been Hopkins at the time].”³⁵ The reporter commented: “Villa was the actual portrait of the constitutionalist leader.”³⁶ The judge laughed at the reporter’s comment and replied, “Oh, you are thinking of Villa of the press stuff Sherburne G. Hopkins and his assistant, Felix Summerfeld, get out in the East.”³⁷ With good reason the judge believed that Hopkins manipulated Villa’s image in the press.

A media skill that Hopkins possessed was marketing the Revolution. He was able to create images for certain leaders in the U.S. press and to develop a “brand name” for Carranza’s party. A June 28, 1914 Washington Post article reported, “That he [Hopkins] is the man who put the ‘constitution’ into Mexican constitutionalism, he will blushingly admit. With keen appreciation of the resultant effect a revolution calling itself ‘constitutionalist’ would have upon the present administration and upon American public opinion, he was, it is understood, the inventor of the name.”³⁸ This “brand name” for the Carranza party, he knew, would appeal to the American public and politicians. Hopkins provided his Revolutionary clients with additional services—access to political leaders, legal defense services in the United States, business connections with some of the wealthiest people in the world, and an office that was used as the headquarters of the Revolution in Washington D.C. His expertise in so many different areas made him an essential adviser for any leader of the Mexican Revolution.

The Making of Sherburne Gillette Hopkins

The services that Sherburne Hopkins provided were valuable and necessary. He was obviously a man of many talents, but how did he become proficient in so many areas? How did Sherburne Hopkins become the man known as the “Revolution Maker of Latin America?” The portrait of Sherburne Hopkins that can be drawn from the historical record is complex and, in some respects, unbelievable. He came from a family of modest background though his father provided them with enough to be comfortable. Hopkins was able to draw upon his family’s, and especially his father’s life experiences and network of friends.

Hopkins’ father, Thomas Snell Hopkins, was born in Mount Vernon, Maine on April 22, 1845 to Joseph and Hannah (Philbrick) Hopkins.³⁹ As a young man he was educated in the common schools and attended the Maine Wesleyan Seminary in Kent’s Hill.⁴⁰ At the outset of

the Civil War in 1861, Thomas Hopkins and his recently-married 20 year-old brother lived and worked on the family farm in Maine.⁴¹ In June 1862 the family decided that Thomas, unmarried and only 17 years old, should be the first son to enlist.⁴² Thomas' older brother, however, could not bear the thought of staying home and enlisted two months later. Thomas' older brother never made it home.

Thomas Hopkins served in Company C of 16th Maine Volunteers. On December 12, 1862, he was injured at the battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Nearly two-thirds of Company C's members were killed or wounded.⁴³ Thomas was "stricken with nervous disease" and was transferred to a medical facility for the duration of the war.⁴⁴

After the war ended, Thomas concluded that he did not have the strength for farm work and moved to Washington D.C., where he was hired as a clerk in the Treasury Department.⁴⁵ While thus employed, he studied law at Columbian University (later George Washington University). After completing his legal education in 1869,⁴⁶ Thomas informed his supervisor of plans to leave and pursue a legal career.⁴⁷ Thomas Hopkins set up practice as a lawyer, having refused his supervisor's offer to increase his salary to \$2500 annually and send him to London on a Treasury Department mission.⁴⁸

Thomas Hopkins began his legal career in business and estate law. He conducted real estate transactions and drafted and executed wills and trusts. Mr. Hopkins earned a sizable income for a time, but his "nervous disease" returned in 1878.⁴⁹ He rarely left his home for the next nine years of his life, which were described as "nine years of terrible, fearful pain, night and day. For two years he could not lift a spoon to his mouth."⁵⁰

Veteran Pension Bill

Thomas Hopkins' service in the military would eventually lead to the Veteran Pension Bill fight in the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. government. Sherburne's father played a central role in that political battle. He gained notoriety as an attorney who fought for Veterans. The network of relationships Thomas developed appears to have been the source of his son's access to veterans and military officials in his career a generation later.

In 1886, Thomas S. Hopkins and forty-nine other Civil War Veterans were granted private pensions by both Houses of Congress. In July of that same year President Grover Cleveland vetoed all of the pension bills for the Civil War veterans, including Thomas Hopkins.⁵¹ In February 1887, Thomas was carried to the office of Senator Frye to tell his story.⁵² He explained how his wartime injuries had dramatically affected his life. Senator Frye presented his case to the Senate, appealing for them to consider overriding President Grover's veto and thus approve an arrearage of pension for Thomas Hopkins.⁵³ The bill was passed over the President's veto by a vote of 55-6 and became law on May 3, 1888.⁵⁴

The fight over his pension sparked something in Thomas. Gradually he regained his health and his work shifted to fighting for veteran's rights. In 1893, Thomas Hopkins represented Judge Charles D. Long of the Michigan Supreme Court to recover a suspended pension.⁵⁵ The case was the first to get a judicial determination of the legal right of the Commissioner of Pensions to suspend a pension.⁵⁶ Thomas Hopkins filed a mandamus, on behalf of Judge Long, to compel the Commissioner to restore Judge Long's pension of \$72 per month.⁵⁷

Thomas Hopkins' service to veterans was not limited to legal and estate matters. He was also a member of several different organizations that lobbied on behalf of Civil War veterans and developed multiple services to aid them. In 1890, he was elected to the national executive council of The National Encampment of the Union Veterans' Union.⁵⁸ In 1897, as a member of

the delegation of the Department of the Potomac, Thomas Hopkins presented President McKinley with a memorial.⁵⁹ The memorial was a request to “have the injustice done their comrades by the late Administration righted.”⁶⁰

Thomas Hopkins never stopped fighting for veterans. He opened an office to assist with pension vouchers⁶¹ and served on the board of the Soldiers and Sailors Temporary Home in Washington D.C.⁶² He reached the position of Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) during 1897-1898.⁶³ In 1904, he was the toastmaster for a G.A.R. event in which President Theodore Roosevelt addressed the organization and Secretary Taft was honored.⁶⁴ During the event, the commander-in-chief of the G.A.R. assured Secretary Taft that “he could rely on the support of every officer on the active and retired list [of the G.A.R.]”⁶⁵ Thomas Hopkins’ position as toastmaster would have allowed him access to Secretary Taft. This event continued a series of events that connected the Hopkins family with William Howard Taft before he became president of the United States.

Thomas Hopkins also developed an association with multiple prominent men outside of veterans’ affairs who would later become central figures in Sherburne Hopkins’ career. When Thomas Hopkins started practicing law outside his home again, he opened the law office of Hopkins & Hopkins in the Washington Loan & Trust Building in downtown Washington D.C.⁶⁶ He held the distinction of being the first tenant of the new building in 1891. The location facilitated networking and generating clients; he once remarked that he was proud to be the “first tenant of the building” and hoped “to remain there, if not forever, at least for as long as he remained on earth.”⁶⁷

Sometime during or shortly before 1891, Thomas Hopkins became acquainted with Charles Ranlett Flint. In 1914, Flint stated that “the law firm Hopkins and Hopkins [had] looked

after his interests in Washington for the last twenty-five years.”⁶⁸ Charles R. Flint, originally an employee of Grace & Co, eventually organized his own company. Generally known as the “Father of Trusts,” Flint organized several major companies, including one that eventually became International Business Machines (IBM).⁶⁹

A master of Wall Street and a guru of trusts, Flint also was an expert on Latin American affairs. In the mid-1870’s, as a partner in the W.R. Grace & Co. in his mid-twenties, Flint was “dealing in million dollar orders for sugar plantation machinery for Peru and other South and Latin American countries.”⁷⁰ According to his unofficial biography, “Flint became Chilean consul at New York City, a post he filled from 1876 to 1879, at which time he became consul general to the United States for Nicaragua and Costa Rica.”⁷¹ In 1904 it was reported that Mr. Flint “had the power to make and unmake some of the little republics [in Latin America].”⁷²

The Hopkins' family connection to Charles R. Flint gave them unprecedented access to Latin American leaders. This access combined with Flint’s various business interests and power allowed Sherburne Hopkins to learn how to “make and unmake” governments in Latin America.

Society of Mayflower Descendants

Thomas Hopkins’ association with Charles R. Flint would open many doors for his son, Sherburne G. Hopkins, as would his association with the Society of Mayflower Descendants [“Society”]. Thomas Hopkins and The Society of Mayflower Descendants would eventually accept President Taft’s application to join the Society, which resulted in Sherburne Hopkins gaining direct access to the President during the Mexican Revolution.⁷³

The storied Hopkins lineage facilitated access to eastern seaboard elites for father and son. In 1609 Stephen Hopkins had been a member of the crew that sailed aboard the *Sea Venture* for Virginia. The ship wrecked in Bermuda and never made it to Virginia. (This shipwreck was

the basis for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.⁷⁴) While on the island of Bermuda, Stephen Hopkins led an unsuccessful mutiny against the captain, was sentenced to hang for his crime, but was granted leniency after pleading tearfully for his life.⁷⁵ Stephen Hopkins eventually made his way to Jamestown, Virginia where he lived for two years before returning to England. He decided to return to the New World aboard the Mayflower with his pregnant wife, Elizabeth; his son, Giles; daughters Constance and Damaris; and two servants, Edward Doty and Edward Leister.⁷⁶

Thomas Hopkins was proud of his ancestral lineage and of his membership in the Society of Mayflower Descendants. He served as governor of the Society for a time and was on the board when the Society approved President William Howard Taft's application to join.⁷⁷

Thomas Hopkins appears to have had a close connection to the President, which gave him access to Taft.⁷⁸ In addition to the connections between Hopkins and Taft previously mentioned, Hopkins was a member of President Taft's Inauguration Committee in 1909 and was responsible for the Veteran's Grand Division who had been assigned to escort the President-elect from the White House to the Capitol.⁷⁹

Sherburne Gillette Hopkins and His Networks

Sherburne's father, Thomas, paved the way for his son to become a successful international lawyer and "Revolution Maker." His father provided him with connections to Charles R. Flint, President Taft, and veterans organizations, all of which would prove useful in Sherburne's later career.

Sherburne Gillett Hopkins was born in Washington, D.C. on October 5, 1868 to Thomas Snell Hopkins and Caroline W. (Eastman) Hopkins.⁸⁰ In 1883 he successfully received his eighth grade grammar school diploma from the public schools of Washington, D.C.⁸¹ Sherburne followed in his father's footsteps and studied law at Columbian University where he graduated in

1888.⁸² A restless prankster, that same year he was fined \$100 for his involvement in the hoax mentioned earlier in this paper.⁸³ He was admitted to the Washington D.C. Bar in 1889 and immediately joined his father's law firm, Hopkins & Hopkins.⁸⁴

Sherburne was fluent in Spanish and had a long-standing fascination with Latin America that influenced the types of cases he was interested in.⁸⁵ His father's acquaintance with Charles R. Flint provided him with opportunities both to practice law and be involved with the politics of the region.⁸⁶ One of the first documented instances of his involvement with Charles R. Flint and Latin America occurred during the famous 1891 incident of the *Itata*.⁸⁷ This case may have taught Sherburne Hopkins a great deal about neutrality laws and the transportation of weapons across international borders.

In May 1891, the steamship *Itata* arrived at a port in San Diego, California. Presumably, the steamship *Itata* had been seized by Chilean insurgents who sailed to the United States to receive a shipment of arms and ammunition for the insurgent Chilean Congressional Party.⁸⁸ The shipment was to be transported to the *Itata* via a schooner named *Robert & Minnie*. Flint & Co. was the agent for the South American Steam Navigation Company that owned the *Itata*. It was reported that Grace & Co. may have bought the arms and ammunition for the insurgents and transferred them onto the *Itata*.⁸⁹ (Charles R. Flint had recently split from Grace & Co. and had formed Flint & Co.). Flint apparently supported the Chilean government of Balmaceda.⁹⁰

The U.S. Government seized the *Itata* in San Diego.⁹¹ The ship eventually escaped U.S. custody and attempted to return to Chile. The U.S. deployed the *Charleston* to recapture the *Itata*, but the *Charleston* was unable to do so. However, in July 1891, the *Itata* returned to San Diego with her cargo and surrendered to United States authorities.

In 1901 Sherburne Hopkins represented⁹² the Chilean Government and the South American Steamship Company against the United States.⁹³ At the time it was labeled “One of the most important cases ever heard before an international tribunal.”⁹⁴ The United States and Chilean Claims Commission heard the case in which the South American Steamship Company (Chile) claimed that the United States owed approximately \$250,000 in damages for the seizure of the *Itata*.⁹⁵ The Commission was to decide whether or not the U.S. had the right “of seizure of merchant vessels on the high seas in times of peace for violation of maritime law.”⁹⁶ The Commission was also called upon to decide what was considered a naval display of force and if naval force was “justifiable on the part of the United States” against the Chilean Government.⁹⁷

Although the Commission ultimately decided to dismiss the charges against the United States,⁹⁸ Sherburne Hopkins acquired important experience regarding neutrality laws and obtaining weapons.⁹⁹ Over the next few years Sherburne Hopkins would represent Charles R. Flint companies in multiple international incidents.

International Disputes

Sherburne G. Hopkins also gained experience working on international disputes to which Latin American countries were parties. In 1895, Brazil and Argentina were locked in a bitter dispute over a common boundary.¹⁰⁰ The United States was selected to arbitrate and make a decision as to what the official boundary would be and both sides were required to submit their arguments to President Cleveland.¹⁰¹ Baron de Rio Branco, the special envoy of Brazil, retained Sherburne Hopkins to assist with Brazil’s proposal.¹⁰² In 1902, when Baron de Rico Branco was promoted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Brazil, he sent Sherburne Hopkins a cablegram, “You know I keep the best remembrances of Washington and will always be a faithful friend to your great country.”¹⁰³

Sherburne Hopkins gained a positive reputation in many Latin American circles and became close to Government officials in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Yet, his ties to Latin America were not the only circumstances in his life that helped him develop the skills that led Madero and other Mexican Revolutionary leaders to his doorstep. His connection to the military was an essential part of the toolkit of the Revolution Maker.

Scholars have incorrectly documented that Sherburne Hopkins attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis prior to studying law and that he joined the active Navy in the Spanish-American War.¹⁰⁴ Sherburne G. Hopkins graduated grammar school in the spring of 1883 and began studies at Columbian University in fall of 1885; there simply was not enough time for him to attend the Naval Academy between those years. A search of the Naval Academy records does not mention a cadet named Sherburne G. Hopkins between the years of 1883-1885. In addition, there is no record of Sherburne G. Hopkins having served as an active member of the Navy or in the Spanish-American War.

What exactly was Sherburne G. Hopkins' military experience? Hopkins was a founding member of the District of Columbia Naval Militia in 1896.¹⁰⁵ Militias of the late 1890's were similar to the modern National Guard meaning that it was not part of the active military and was composed of local men who mustered on a monthly basis to conduct drill exercises.

On November 27, 1896, Assistant Secretary William McAdoo of the Navy Department sent a letter to Sherburne Hopkins and other committeemen in response to the request to form a District of Columbia Naval Militia.¹⁰⁶ His letter encouraged this and suggested specific steps in order to establish a naval militia. The committeemen moved forward with their plan and scheduled their first meeting on December 1, 1896 and their first drill on December 14, 1896.¹⁰⁷

The legislation to officially recognize the District of Columbia Naval Militia finally passed on July 1, 1898 for “service during the war with Spain.”¹⁰⁸ The Militia’s services “were tendered to the Navy Department, and the men expected that they would see active duty on board the cruiser Buffalo, formerly the Brazilian cruiser Nictheroy.”¹⁰⁹ The Buffalo, however, did not go into commission until [it was too late], and the Washington sailors were keenly disappointed.”¹¹⁰ Sherburne G. Hopkins was “chosen lieutenant to command the division” but he never commanded a war vessel or participated in the Spanish-American War.¹¹¹ The District Naval Militia did not acquire a naval vessel until October 10, 1898 when Secretary Long officially turned over the U.S.S. Fern to the Militia under the command of Lieut. Hopkins.¹¹²

According to reports, the Fern was not a “warship” as Katz described it. The Fern was a steamer that was “used in the navy principally as a dispatch between Washington, New York, Boston, and Key West.”¹¹³ It can be said that Hopkins commanded a Spanish-American War dispatch vessel, but not a warship in the Spanish-American War.¹¹⁴

In April 1903, Sherburne Hopkins officially resigned from the Naval Militia.¹¹⁵ Hopkins’ role in the military was not worthy of much note, but it did provide him with skills and connections that were indispensable during the Mexican Revolution. In the 1920 Senate Investigation he conceded that “during the Spanish War . . . I was concerned in the purchase of some materials of war for our own Government . . .”¹¹⁶ That experience served him in good stead for purchasing materials of war during the Mexican Revolution.

Hit-and-Run

Another military connection was less obvious. On Wednesday, August 14, 1907, Ms. Mary C. Chase was walking down the street near her home when an automobile struck her.¹¹⁷ The driver sped away from the scene without stopping to check on her.¹¹⁸ Ms. Chase was

immediately carried to the home of Mr. John Neal and was attended to by Dr. Weaver.¹¹⁹ Ms. Chase had a severe concussion, injuries to her face and nose, a crushed ankle, and was in great pain.¹²⁰

On Thursday morning the police were able to locate the driver of the vehicle and arrested him. His attorney stated, “on speeding away from the scene of the accident on Wednesday night without stopping to see what harm had been done, [the driver] thought that he had seen Mrs. Chase arise, and was under the impression that she was uninjured.”¹²¹ The driver's name was Rogers K. Wetmore and his attorney was Sherburne G. Hopkins.¹²²

Why would a famous international attorney defend a young man involved in a hit-and-run automobile accident? Wetmore's father was Senator George Peabody Wetmore of Rhode Island.¹²³ Senator Wetmore, whose family had established mercantile houses in China, South America, and New York City, was a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Naval Affairs Committee.¹²⁴ By lending his considerable skill and name to this case, it can be assumed that Sherburne Hopkins did a favor for a Senator who could assist him when he was engaged in the “purchase materials of war.”

The Trial of Juan Sánchez Ascona

Sherburne Hopkins' revolutionary services were developed through years of experience and aided by his father's connections. One of these services was to keep members of the revolution out of jail in the United States. His first opportunity to do so was the case of Juan Sánchez Ascona. In December 1910 the Díaz Government requested that the U.S. Government arrest Sánchez Ascona, a member of the Madero Revolutionary Party then residing in Washington D.C. Díaz wanted him extradited to Mexico for swindling.¹²⁵ Sánchez Ascona wrote a letter directed to the American public in which he declared:

I am a revolutionist. It is for that reason and no other that I am in jail. I am charged with 'swindling' but all of Mexico knows I am innocent. Mexico knows also, that if the United States grants my extradition, I will be shot by the soldiers of Díaz. And I will not be the first. This government is being used as a tool . . .¹²⁶

Sherburne Hopkins and his father represented Sanchez Ascona after his arrest. In turn, the U.S. demanded that Mexico present formal charges before complying with the extradition request and after forty-two days in a Washington, D.C. jail, the Díaz government formally presented the charges, in which Sánchez was accused of "false pretenses."¹²⁷ The Díaz Government claimed that in 1907, Sánchez Ascona wrongfully appropriated about \$500 from a government fund that was intended to benefit poor children.¹²⁸

Sherburne Hopkins proclaimed, "We expect to be able to show the State Department, the Mexican ambassador, and the public, when the time arrives, [that Sánchez] Azcona is not wanted for, nor is he guilty of, false pretenses, but that in reality his extradition is desired because Díaz regards him as a revolutionary."¹²⁹

On January 27, 1911, Thomas Hopkins requested that the court not grant the Mexican government any further time to prepare its case.¹³⁰ The District Supreme Court agreed and denied Mexico's motion for continuance.¹³¹ Thomas Hopkins immediately filed a motion for Juan Sánchez Ascona's release, which was carried out on the following day. The judge declared that the time of prosecution had expired under the statute of limitations. Sherburne Hopkins' first battle against the Díaz regime on U.S. soil was successful.

The Erasure and Death of Sherburne Hopkins

Despite Sherburne Hopkins' success as a Revolution Maker, his name has largely been erased from the histories of the Mexican Revolution. Friedrich Katz said it best, "Few better fit the shady and shadowy portrait of the behind-the-scenes operator and manipulator of revolutions than Sherburne G. Hopkins, although he is all but forgotten in the literature on the Mexican

Revolution.”¹³² Although it is debatable whether Hopkins was “shadowy” or acted “behind-the-scenes,” it is clear that his vital contributions to the Mexican Revolution largely have been forgotten.

The reason for Sherburne Hopkins’ erasure from history is a mystery. His involvement was widely known to both the public and the government during the events of the Mexican Revolution. After the Revolution he did publish in 1922 an unpopular law review article that declared that petroleum belonged to the public, i.e., the Mexican government, and not private parties, i.e., U.S. and other international oil companies.¹³³ Other positions he took were unpopular in the United States. He testified, for example, that the U.S. Government closed its eyes to the smuggling of weapons into Mexico.¹³⁴

Sherburne Gillette Hopkins died on June 26, 1932.¹³⁵ He had played a critical though not well-documented role in the Mexican Revolution. His services were considered so important to the revolutionary cause that Madero paid him over \$1 million in today’s currency. After a lifetime of experience and assistance from his father, Sherburne Hopkins became one of the most influential men in Washington D.C. regarding Latin American affairs. Though largely forgotten, he remains the original “Revolution Maker” of Latin America.

Endnotes

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³ For example, scholars incorrectly state that Hopkins attended Columbia University, that he attended the Naval Academy, and was an active member of the Navy during the Spanish-American War.

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- ¹⁴ United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. (1920). *Investigation of Mexican affairs: preliminary report and hearings of the Committee on foreign relations, United States Senate, pursuant to S. res. 106, directing the Committee on foreign relations to investigate the matter of outrages on citizens of the United States in Mexico.* (Washington: G.P.O., 1920), p. 2523
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2527
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2535 <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b5145627;view=1up;seq=737>
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2524
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2411
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2539.
- ²⁰ John Lind was the former governor of Minnesota. President Woodrow Wilson asked him to go to Mexico to be a confidential agent for the administration. Lind could not speak Spanish and knew very little about Mexican affairs. Source: Wilson, Volume II: The New Freedom, Arthur S. Link, Princeton University Press, Dec 8, 2015, p. 359
- ²¹ In his book, *In Plain Sight : Felix a. Sommerfeld, Spymaster in Mexico, 1908 to 1914*, Heribert Von Feilitzich writes: “While working the Washington political circles and New York’s high finance on Madero’s behalf, Hopkins also supplied the U.S. military command with crucial information about the progress of Mexico’s uprising. . . while Hopkins did not ‘work’ for the Military Intelligence Division, he was one of their most important informers on Mexican affairs.”
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- ⁸² Columbian College in the District of Columbia. *Catalogue of the Columbian College in the District of Columbia*. Washington: W. Force. 1887-88, p. 9, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015076399982;view=1up;seq=337>
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- ⁸⁵ “Nations Their Clients: Washington Lawyers Who Handle Lucrative Cases”, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 3, 1895, p. 11
- ⁸⁶ In the 1920 Investigation of Mexican Affairs Hearing, Senator Smith asked Sherburne Hopkins, “Had Mr. Flint been closely connected with you?” Hopkins responded: “all my life, and my father before me.” p. 2552
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- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225, “It is even claimed that the firms of Flint & Co. and W.R. Grace & co. were attempting to prolong the war for the benefits which they were deriving and would derive if the parties which they [were] respectively supporting should win. While the latter supported the congressional party, Mr. Charles R. Flint, ‘Intelligently and self-sacrificingly supported Mr. Lazcano [Balmaceda’s representative] in his laborious tasks.’”
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¹⁰³ “Sends Cordial Message: Brazil’s New Foreign Minister Remembers His Washington Friends”, *The Evening Star*, December 29, 1902, p. 1

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¹⁰⁵ “Naval Reserve Battalion: A Strong Organization Effected in Washington”, *The Evening Star*, December 1, 1896, p. 3

¹⁰⁶ “Naval Militia: Assistant Secretary of the Navy McAdoo Answers Some Questions”, *The Evening Star*, November 27, 1896, p. 1

¹⁰⁷ “Naval Reserve Battalion: A Strong Organization Effected in Washington”, *The Evening Star*, December 1, 1896, p. 3

¹⁰⁸ “District Naval Battalion: The U.S. Fern Placed at its Disposal for Practice”, *The Evening Times* (Washington DC), October 10, 1898, p. 8

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The Mexican Revolution involved critiques of foreign business and government elite. Thus, revolutions move along internal and external fault lines. John Mitchell's paper, "The Revolution Maker: The Story of Sherburne G. Hopkins and the Mexican Revolution" highlights the ways U.S. lawyer Sherburne Hopkins helped secure funds and provide arms to Mexican revolutionaries. Revolutions contain embers of the future. Educating future populations about the promises and potential of revolution became a priority for different sectors of the Mexican population. The Mexican government itself developed a pr

APPENDIX C: The Mexican Revolution, an Introduction and Detailed Chronology for the Philatelist, by David Warman and Nicholas Follansbee. 213. BIBUOGRAPHY . . .

The author is grateful to James Hopkins (H. C.'s grandson) and the late Fred Ingham, both of whom shared quantities of notes and manuscripts written by H. C. Hopkins representing his handbook in its most advanced state and including priceless records of the covers comprising the archive of the Oficina de Rezagos (Dead Letter Office). Sherburne Gillette Hopkins (October 5, 1867 - June 22, 1932) was an American lawyer and influential lobbyist in Washington DC. His clients included oil tycoon Henry Clay Pierce, financier and "father of trusts" Charles Ranlett Flint, Guatemalan President Manuel Estrada Cabrera, and Mexican President Francisco I. Madero among others. He specialized in connecting American finance with Latin American revolutionaries. "According to Who's Was Who in America, Hopkins specialized "in internat. matters and settlements with the Govt."

- 3 Military service.
- 4 Lobbying work in Central America.
- 5 Connection to Francisco I. Madero and the Mexican Revolution.
- 6 American intelligence involvement.
- 7 Connection to Venustiano Carranza and the Mexican Revolution.