

The Museum of the History Of the Revolution

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Photos courtesy of Sector Chihuahua

Housed in what was the home of General Pancho Villa in the city of Chihuahua, this museum is a splendid place to learn about the Mexican Revolution and one of its most important protagonists. It is the only history museum in our country organized and managed by Mexico's armed forces.

THE BUILDING

General Villa bought the land in the early twentieth century and, although it already had a small building on it, with time, improvements were made

until the house as we know it today was completed. Construction finished in 1914, with rooms situated around the patios, giving them all a view, color and lots of light. The ceiling is typical of the period; both interior and patio walls are painted with oils depicting scenes of daily life, adding color and beauty; the music room is painted with instruments; the main living room panels with plaster

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work and filigree; the dining room with full fruit bowls and peacocks; and the main entrance with landscapes.

On the ground floor near the entrance are the living room, kitchen, dining room, bath and several bedrooms. On the second floor are more bedrooms, in addition to the room dedicated to heroes, a beautiful Catholic chapel and a lovely terrace. In the back, separate from the rest are some apartments distributed on two floors; this part was built by General Villa, also known in Mexico as the “Centaur of the North,” to welcome his fellow officers; these rooms are currently used to exhibit material from Mexico’s revolutionary period and as offices.

One of the most significant parts of the house is the Room of Heroes, dedicated to individuals who played an important role in the nation’s history. Painted on the walls we can see the father of our country, Miguel Hidalgo, Don José María Morelos, Vicente Guerrero, the Child Heroes, Benito Juárez and Francisco I. Madero, as well as different allegories of Mexican history at the center of each of the four walls. The finishing touches are the round brackets with painted portraits of Trinidad Rodríguez, Abraham González, Toribio Ortega and Aquiles Serdán, all distinguished participants in the Revolution. These paintings speak to the important place these people held in the thinking of the family of Villa and his wife Luz Corral. Another important part of the house is the chapel, with its white three-niched altar piece, a beautiful ceiling, as well as plaster and fret work that give the room a pleasant, lordly feel. There are also some photographs which may not be originals, since they are too small for the niches.

The house has a turret with embrasures at the corner of two streets, giving the whole place the feel of a fortress. Inside, in what is now called the Patio of Honor, is a bust of General Villa and a list of the men and women who participated in his army, the Division of the North. There is also a sculpture of General Rodolfo Fierro and a cannon. Today, military ceremonies in memory of General Villa are performed on this site.

The house’s period furnishings indicate that it was an ordinary home of people who were com-

fortably off at the time, without excessive luxury. Both the building’s decorations and the furniture are in the art nouveau style, discretely elegant without being ostentatious, as befitting someone who came out of an armed grassroots movement.

Moving from the first patio into the second, we find the troubling exhibit of the car in which General Villa was riding the day he was assassinated, July 20, 1923, in Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua. Even though the vehicle is very well cared for and has been restored, the enormous bullet holes that killed its passengers often cause visitors uneasiness and other unpleasant feelings.

The house was donated by Villa’s widow, Doña Luz Corral, to the federal government, who put it under the auspices of the Ministry of National Defense. On November 17, 1982, the ministry established the Museum of the History of the Revolution in memory of the general and the armed movement that gave rise to modern Mexico.

THE EXHIBITS

The collection can be divided into several broad groups; perhaps the most important is the furniture, epitomizing the early twentieth century: different finely finished chairs, with well honed bars; armchairs in pastel colors, very much in the style of the day; brass beds, also in the style of the day; wardrobes decorated with carved wooden angels nestled among leaves; as well as tables, mirrors, pianos, commodes, wood and glass cabinets for the dinner service, phonographs (one belonging to Villa’s wife). One of the desks belonged to Don Abraham González, the former governor of Chihuahua, a prominent revolutionary; another is a fine secretary; and there are several elegant chandeliers. Using this furniture, the museographers have tried to teach the visitor about objects from the period and not only the house itself.

The museum has a good collection of arms and other objects used by the militia; and the flags and standards alluding to the struggles of the people for their freedom strike an emotional chord in all Mexicans.



▲ The museum has an interesting collection of arms and other objects used by the militia.



▲ Saddle with an effigy of Pancho Villa, a gift from the Chinese community.



▲ The Music Room is decorated in the style of the period.

On view are also General Villa's personal sabres, as well as several 30-30 carbines and an 1894 model Winchester, the preferred arms of different revolutionary groups, mentioned in many old songs. The 1895 6.5mm Mondragon and 7mm Mendoza machine guns, the latter manufactured in Madera, Chihuahua in the middle of the Revolution, all command respect.

The display also includes cannon and 7mm European Remington rifles, as well as others of Belgian and German make, the latter manufactured in Berlin. The exhibit also boasts several Merwin Huebert 38mm revolvers and 1875 22mm Colts, that all belonged to General Villa. Other items include binoculars, an old surveyor's theodolite, some telegraph and telephone equipment, bugles and very interesting medical equipment.

The house also holds work implements that tell us something about activities during the Revolution: items of daily use like dishes, wash-stands, mirrors, bed linen, tablecloths, sewing machines, as well as miners' tools like lanterns, shovels, pickaxes, etc. Agricultural tools include plows, shovels, rakes and a curious horse-drawn apparatus known as a *guadañadora*, used for cutting corn. The visitor is also invited to see a chest of drawers, little tables, a trunk, chaps, items used in cattle ranching and different objects used by printers.

One room is dedicated to Villa's generals, with photographs and a biography of each.

Many photographs of a variety of subjects decorate the museum. Throughout the house are photographs of General Villa at different times in his life; also displayed are terrible scenes of war that speak to the viewer of a time long past; scenes of people in the army but who carried out tasks not directly related to war, such as the peasants and women at work; and several of Doña Luz with different people.

There are even photos of figures who differed ideologically from General Villa, like Generals Luis Terrazas and Pascual Orozco.

In addition to his car, other belongings of General Villa are on display: some of his favorite clothing; saddles of different quality, some with beautiful silver decoration; informal hats for work in the countryside and felt hats for more formal situations; sabres in their scabbards; rifles; chin-straps; and chaps.

The general used all of these items at one time or another during his meteoric career and journey through history.

Visitors return to the present after having gone through different moments of General Francisco Villa's life, one of the most popular leaders of the Mexican Revolution. **MM**



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