

Manuel Earnshaw

1862–1936

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER 1912–1917
INDEPENDENT FROM PHILIPPINES

As a marine engineer and shipbuilder, Manuel Earnshaw never intended to dip his toes into political waters. Even when he did represent the Philippines in the U.S. Congress for two terms, he left nary a ripple.

But Earnshaw's selection as Resident Commissioner, engineered by the kingmaker of Filipino politics Manuel L. Quezon, ended an ugly impasse between the islands' commission and assembly and—not coincidentally—also cleared Quezon's path to single-handedly negotiate the first step toward Philippine independence: the Jones Act of 1916. Earnshaw readily admitted his lack of policy chops, noting that, when discussions turned to politics, he sought the refuge of “the billiard room or some other part of the club, for politics is not, nor has it ever been my game.”¹ Still, he dutifully followed Quezon's lead and seemed content to serve as a symbol of the Philippines' thriving economy—an accompaniment to the political arguments advanced by Quezon of Filipinos' readiness for autonomy. Like all good businessmen, he longed for the stability and order that certainty brought. “The main thing, the essential thing in the whole matter is this: That something definite be given [to] us,” Earnshaw told the *New York Times*. “We want something specific in the way of time, not ‘when we are fit for self-government,’ or ‘when it shall seem best’ in the eyes of somebody. We want the year, month and day—and until that date is set there will be unrest and disquiet in the Philippines.”²

Manuel Earnshaw was born in Cavite City, Cavite Province, Philippines, on November 19, 1862. The oldest son of a British engineer, Daniel Earnshaw, and Gavina Noguera, a Filipina, Manuel grew up in the Manila area with his brothers, Tomas and Daniel. Earnshaw graduated from Ateneo de Manila University, a prominent secondary school. Cavite City sits on a peninsula jutting into Manila

Bay just south of the city of Manila. Drawn to the sea, he learned the business of shipbuilding as an apprentice in his father's engineering business. He joined the Spanish Navy and earned a marine engineering degree from the Manila Nautical School.

Earnshaw worked for his father's business, D. Earnshaw & Company, as a marine engineer beginning in 1885. His career advanced rapidly when the Wilks & Boyle Company hired him in 1888. Four years later, he rose to partner in the company, and his name was emblazoned on the new masthead, Boyle & Earnshaw. In 1901 Earnshaw acquired full control of the company, later renamed Earnshaw Slipways & Engineering Company, and formed a new partnership that included his brothers. By 1912 Earnshaw's company had grown into the islands' largest shipbuilding plant—capable of repairing or building boats up to 460 feet in length at its docks and facility that spread across more than seven acres.³ On February 4, 1888, Earnshaw married Maria Villar Ubalda; the couple had no children.⁴

While Earnshaw never seemed drawn to politics, politics eventually prevailed upon him when he was tapped as a compromise candidate to represent the Philippines on the Hill. By 1910 the process for choosing Resident Commissioners had broken down. Past practice had been to have the unelected Philippine commission choose one nominee—usually an *ilustrado* or prominent businessman—while the assembly chose its own candidate who had a progressive view toward independence. But to ratify those selections, each body had to approve both candidates. Benito Legarda became the sticking point in this internal schism. Legarda, who had served as Resident Commissioner since 1907, never had been very palatable to the assembly. But his public opposition to independence as Resident Commissioner rankled the popularly elected body, sinking his stock even further.⁵





Assembly speaker Sergio Osmeña manufactured a crisis when he pressed to have both nominees for Resident Commissioner be individuals who had wide popular backing, including meeting the approval of the assembly, which refused to support Legarda's renomination. By 1911 the conference between both bodies deadlocked and failed to reach a compromise. The U.S. Congress eventually had to step in with a temporary fix by extending the terms of both Legarda and his fellow Resident Commissioner, Manuel Quezon.⁶

Quezon resolved the crisis in 1912 by working with Governor General W. Cameron Forbes to secure consent from the William H. Taft administration that Legarda would be replaced with another prominent businessman. He then convinced Earnshaw to be that man. Earnshaw's background as a Filipino captain of industry pleased the conservative commission, which approved him. The Philippine assembly, at Quezon's prodding, eventually stood down, rubber-stamping Earnshaw's nomination to the 63rd Congress (1913–1915) in a 55 to 10 vote on November 21, 1912. It ended an embarrassing moment for the territorial government that undercut the case for Filipino self-rule.⁷

The day after the legislature formally approved both Quezon and Earnshaw, the *Manila Times* observed that the latter's selection as Resident Commissioner would "commend itself to all sections of the community. He is a business man, a native of the Philippines of high standing, ability, and integrity ... and may be depended on for that wise union of conservatism and progress which the times demand." A week later, the paper reiterated the point by noting that Earnshaw's selection was a refreshing change. "It will be said at once that he is without political experience or knowledge," the editors conceded, "but to most spectators of the great political game here and elsewhere it is a positive relief to see a high office filled by one who is not a politician and cares little or nothing for the ways and methods of politicians."⁸

Quezon's motives were not purely altruistic. For one thing, the Earnshaw compromise cleared the path to his own re-election, now as the senior Resident Commissioner.

"Beyond this, moreover, it established a pattern, to which Quezon remained attached for as long as he held office as resident commissioner," observed historian Peter W. Stanley, "of yoking him with a colleague who was rich, personally dignified as a representative of the Filipino people, and politically impotent." Legarda and Earnshaw each filled the bill of being from the merchant-industrialist class, but the former, in addition to being senior in service to Quezon, enjoyed a warm friendship with President Taft and pursued an independent course, particularly on tariff issues. Earnshaw, on the other hand, was no political creature, and his position on independence more closely aligned with Quezon's. "The last thing Quezon wanted was a rival either in Filipino electoral politics or American legislative politics," Stanley writes. "Earnshaw knew nothing about American politics. He did as Quezon advised him."⁹ He enjoyed traveling, however, and Washington seemed to him an agreeable excursion.¹⁰

Whatever the expectations for Earnshaw's service, it is clear that he left almost no legislative fingerprint during nearly four years in Washington. During Earnshaw's two terms of service in the 63rd and 64th Congresses (1913–1917), the *Congressional Record* barely mentioned his name, other than to note his attendance at various sessions of the House. After taking his seat on April 7, 1913, the Opening Day of the 63rd Congress, Earnshaw never gave a floor speech, introduced a single bill or resolution, or even inserted extensions of remarks or supplementary materials into the official debates, nor did he follow the example of other Resident Commissioners, who often gave copious testimony before congressional committees considering legislation that might affect the Philippines. He also spoke sparingly to the press. Earnshaw did have one thing in common with other Filipino colleagues, past and future; his powers were circumscribed by the fact that he could not vote on final legislation or even hold a committee assignment.

This silence seemed to be the way that he—and Quezon—wanted it. "I know nothing of politics," Earnshaw confided shortly after his election, and that clearly commended him, in Quezon's eyes. He admitted never having read the draft text of the proposed Jones



Act or even studied the particulars of the Payne–Aldrich Tariff of 1909. “When offered the post of Resident Commissioner,” Earnshaw told the *Manila Weekly Times*, “I asked Manuel Quezon and other political leaders whether I should be obliged to have anything to do with occupying the post. . . . They all replied, ‘Not unless you wish to do so’ and on that condition I accepted the appointment.” When reporters pressed him about his position on immediate independence for the Philippines, Earnshaw demurred, citing his inexperience: “I am at sea on all the principal things I should know about.”¹¹ Indeed, he lived up to his end of the bargain, deferring to Quezon as the authority on all policy issues, including the question of Philippine autonomy.¹²

That pattern of deference was set from the beginning of this political marriage between the wealthy industrialist and the rising politico. When their ship landed in San Francisco in late December 1912, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the delegation would press the new (and seemingly sympathetic) Woodrow Wilson administration for passage of an independence bill. But Quezon did all the talking, noting that “sentiment throughout the islands is extremely intense for home rule. The people believe that they are now able to govern themselves.” Quezon also pointed to the islands’ strong economy, which was “never in a more prosperous state.” Earnshaw, a millionaire from the Philippines’ industrialist class, seemed little more than a showcase for that claim, the very embodiment of the islands’ economic vitality.¹³ The new Resident Commissioner, the *Chronicle* noted, “travels in magnificence, having a retinue of servants with him.”¹⁴

While Quezon took a highly public profile promoting the passage of the Jones bill as it percolated in the House during several sessions, Earnshaw lent the effort only an occasional public endorsement. He likely lobbied businesses with stakes in the Filipino economy as well. Otherwise, he appears exclusively to have been a silent partner who may well have helped to fund the lobbying effort with his own personal fortune by entertaining key committee members and government officials, but who was a mum wingman to the senior Resident Commissioner.¹⁵

Four months after the Jones Act became law, the *Manila Times* reported that Earnshaw had tendered his resignation and retired from the House in mid-January 1917, citing health issues and the pressing needs of his vast business enterprise.¹⁶ His belief that his work was accomplished also seemed apparent in an address he made marking the 20th anniversary of the martyred patriot Jose Rizal weeks earlier. “The United States of America, which has always taken the lead in the advocacy of national liberty,” he told a crowd at Washington’s Ebbitt restaurant, “has begun to accede to the aspirations of our people by the congressional enactment last August of our new organic law, called the ‘Jones law,’ which gives us an ample autonomy and a clear, unmistakable promise of our independence.”¹⁷

Earnshaw’s and Quezon’s terms were set to expire anyway in early March of that year to comply with the new provisions of the Jones Act. “I am more than happy to have had the opportunity to live in Washington and represent the Philippine Islands there,” Earnshaw told the *Manila Times* on his return trip home, “but it is my intention to settle down . . . and devote myself to my private affairs and my business.” During a stop in Japan on the journey back to Manila, he and Quezon briefed their successors, Jaime C. de Veyra and Teodoro R. Yangco, who were en route to Washington.¹⁸

Upon his return to the Philippines, Earnshaw resumed his business affairs until he retired in 1921. Earnshaw committed suicide with a revolver in his family’s Manila mausoleum on February 13, 1936. His suicide note indicated that age, declining health, and financial reverses were to blame.¹⁹

Quezon, who remained on close terms with Earnshaw, recalled his colleague as a “wonderful man in every respect and a sincere patriot.” He generously added in retrospect, “The part he took in getting through Congress the Jones act has given him a place in the history of the Philippines.” Earnshaw’s last wish was that his body not be removed from the family crypt but simply be buried there. He is interred in Manila’s Cementerio del Norte, where six other Resident Commissioners also are buried.²⁰



NOTES

- 1 “Earnshaw, Who Succeeds Legarda Talks on Independence Question,” 29 November 1912, *Manila Weekly Times*: 43.
- 2 “Philippine Freedom Advocated by New Resident Commissioner,” 30 March 1913, *New York Times*: SM6.
- 3 “Growth of Earnshaw Company,” 18 October 1912, *Manila Times Weekly*: n.p.
- 4 *Congressional Directory*, 64th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915): 125; “Manuel Earnshaw,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000015>; “Growth of Earnshaw Company”; “Philippine Freedom Advocated by New Resident Commissioner”; “Reverses Drive Earnshaw to Suicide,” 14 February 1936, *Manila Tribune*: 4; U.S. Passport Applications, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Philippines, 1907–1925, box 4251, vol 8., National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter NARA), Washington, DC, <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed 25 February 2015).
- 5 Peter W. Stanley, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974): 168–169.
- 6 Stanley, *A Nation in the Making*: 168–169.
- 7 Philippines Legislative Assembly, *Diario de Sesiones de la Asamblea Filipina*, Tomo VIII (Manila, PI: Bureau of Printing, 1913): 161; Manuel Earnshaw Certificate of Election (endorsed 22 November 1912), Committee on Elections (HR63A-J1), 63rd Cong., Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, NARA; Stanley, *A Nation in the Making*: 181–182.
- 8 “The Week and the Outlook,” 22 November 1912, *Manila Times Weekly Edition*: 1; “The Point of View—Topics of the Week: Delegate Manuel Earnshaw,” 29 November 1912, *Manila Weekly Times*: 2.
- 9 Stanley, *A Nation in the Making*: 181–182.
- 10 “‘One of the Finest Capitals’—Philippine Commissioner So States,” 1 September 1913, *Washington Post*: CW6.
- 11 “Earnshaw, Who Succeeds Legarda Talks on Independence Question.”
- 12 Stanley, *A Nation in the Making*: 181–182.
- 13 “Filipinos Want Home Rule; Will Urge Passage of Bill,” 28 December 1912, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 18.
- 14 “Philippine Delegate Is Here; In Favor of Independence,” 11 March 1913, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 1.
- 15 “Philippine Freedom Advocated by New Resident Commissioner”; “To Urge Island Independence: Philippine Delegate Arrives,” 31 December 1913, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 18; “Reads Filipinos’ Future,” 31 December 1916, *Washington Post*: 4.
- 16 “Earnshaw Resigns Commissionership,” 11 January 1917, *Cablenews-American* (Manila, PI): 1.
- 17 “Reads Filipinos’ Future.”
- 18 “Earnshaw Resigns Commissionership”; “Earnshaw for Private Life,” 27 June 1917, *Manila Times*: 1.
- 19 “Noted Filipino Ends Life,” 14 February 1936, *New York Times*: 9; “Reverses Drive Earnshaw to Suicide.”
- 20 “Manuel Earnshaw Commits Suicide in Mausoleum,” 22 February 1936, *Philippines Free Press*: 35; “Manuel Earnshaw,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000015>; “Manila North Cemetery,” <http://www.manila.gov.ph/manilanorthcem.htm> (accessed 13 April 2011).



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TIMES DEMAND.”

Manila Times, November 22, 1912