

This is Mexico

Mexico, Land of Contrasts, One of Most Complex Nations of Americas

By HARRY FERGUSON

Mexico City—UPI—Many persons are convinced the average Mexican is a lazy fellow who reclines all day against an adobe but sleeping off heavy meals of chili con carne. There is exactly as much truth in that as there is in the undying legends that every Englishman wears a bowler hat and every Frenchman keeps a mistress.

The average Mexican is likely to wear farm or factory overalls and work eight hours a day.

Chili con carne was invented by an inspired chef in Texas and is unknown in Mexico except in restaurants catering to American tourists.

Mexico probably is the most complex nation in the two Americas. And it is a land of violent contrasts. It was born in violence an uncounted number of years ago when a massive upheaval of the earth determined its present topography of a central plateau ranging up to 8,000 feet above sea level. Until the last three decades it lived in violence with war and revolution being the normal way of life.

Wilson Loses Temper
Governments were overthrown with such dizzy speed that one president was in office only 47 minutes. Killing the chief executive was so firmly established as a way of changing administrations that President Woodrow Wilson, a patient man, finally lost his temper and denounced Mexico for "government by assassination."

Mexico City, the capital, is a modern, shining mass of glass and steel architecture. Not too far south of it there is thick jungle where the land and the people have not changed much in the last 300 years. There are 90 separate languages or dialects spoken in Mexico and there are pockets of people who might as well be living on the moon so far as outside contact is concerned.

In the southern state of Chiapas a high ridge runs between the villages of Zinacantan and Chamula. If there were a road between the two towns, it would run for about eight miles. But there isn't any road, and there is no need for one. The residents of Zinacantan and Chamula speak different languages and wear different kinds of clothing.

Each village is ruled by a council of elders, and the federal government is some mysterious force that is too far away in time and distance to worry about. A resident of Zinacantan would think as long about walking eight miles to Chamula as an American would of taking a trip to Borneo.

Land of Contrasts
The violent contrasts are everywhere. Mexico is more than 90 per cent Catholic, but the church is forbidden to own property. The church itself, the ground beneath it and the air above it are the property of the nation and the Catholic clergy uses it only on a sort of lend-lease basis.

The streets of Mexico City and other large urban centers are jammed with automobiles, but there is no such thing as a Mexican motor car. Foreign firms do manufacture some parts of a car in Mexico, but the remainder of the auto—usually the engine—has to be shipped in and assembled after arrival.

Communism is detested by an overwhelming number of Mexicans, but they live happily under a system that has borrowed heavily from Marxist philosophy, including the nationalization of many industries and the expropriation of land to be divided among the peasants, many of whom

live on communal farms.

Early Cities Found
There is strong evidence that there was a highly developed civilization in Mexico 1,000 years before Columbus discovered America. Archaeologists, patiently fitting together the pieces of the puzzle, are convinced that splendid cities were being built in Mexico when Britain was a fog-bound outpost of the Roman Empire inhabited by savages and Germany was a dense forest in which men lived like animals.

Progress continued down through the years in Mexico and moved to a pinnacle when the Aztecs established their capital on the site of what is now Mexico City. A prophet had told them to keep wandering until they saw an eagle devouring a serpent. Then they were to stop and settle down.

This is said to have happened in 1325 on an island in a lake. The eagle was perched on a cactus plant devouring a serpent and the Aztecs began the construction of the city of Tenochtitlan. It may have grown to as much as 1,000,000 population, but in any event it was one of the largest cities in the known world. Much of the lake has dried up now, but Mexico City is still the capital and the eagle devouring the serpent still is imprinted on Mexican coins.

Aztecs Wrote Poetry
It was a highly developed civilization. The Aztecs knew how to reckon time, how to raise cotton and weave it into cloth, apparently understood the rudiments of astronomy, had an army and a navy, and wrote poetry. They also built enormous stone temples, which can still be seen and in which they appeased their gods with human sacrifices. Some historians say 20,000 prisoners and slaves were sacrificed at the dedication of a temple in 1487.

What brought about the downfall of this Indian civilization was an ancient legend that some day white gods wearing beards would come out of the east. In 1519 when Montezuma II was emperor of the Aztecs runners from the east coast brought word to the capital that the white gods had arrived.

Cortes Conquers Mexico

The chief white god was a 34-year-old Spaniard named

Hernando Cortes who had sailed out of Cuba in search of glory and plunder. He was a bold soldier, a cunning diplomat and he had a wide streak of meanness in his make-up as Montezuma was to learn to his sorrow. Cortes landed on the east coast of Mexico, founded the city of Vera Cruz and signed up a beautiful Indian girl named Malintzin to be his interpreter and to aid and comfort him in any other way he chose to specify.

Then Cortes burned his boats to cut off the last line of retreat and marched inland with 508 Spanish foot soldiers, 32 archers, 13 musketeers and 200 Indian burden bearers. Malintzin got one of the 16 horses in the expedition as payment for services rendered. Montezuma greeted the white god with affection and reverence. In a few years Montezuma was dead, the Aztec empire had collapsed and

Cortes had so thoroughly conquered Mexico that the land and the people would never be the same again.

Next: The Mexican People today — who they are and how they got that way.

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Like a Funeral

Opening of Congress Had Floral Trimmings and Lots of Handshaking

By DICK WEST

Washington—UPI—My mental impressions are not always as reliable as plaster of paris, but the opening of the 88th Congress in some ways reminded me of a gangster's funeral. Among other things, there were gatherings of relatives dressed to the nines, profuse sproutings of hot house flowers and lines of curious onlookers.

Such trappings are associated in my mind with the last rites of a prohibition era crime czar. I half expected to see a horseshoe wreath with a streamer reading "So long, pal."

But if the background was somewhat funeral, the spirit that prevailed was more like old home week. There is no warmer camaraderie than the reunion of politicians who have survived an election.

Fully 30 minutes before the session began at noon, senators and congressmen were assembling in their respective chambers to catch up on their handshaking. They shook hands with each other individually, and then they shook hands with each other in groups, ring-around-the-rosy style. Occasionally, they even shook hands with themselves.

Then began the ceremonial opening, which is as highly stylized as the mating dance of the whooping crane. But each chamber does it differently.

The Senate, being a continuing body, knew in advance who its presiding officer would be — Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, as stipulated in the Constitution.

The Constitution doesn't stipulate Johnson exclusively, however. Any vice president will do.

The Senate proceeded swiftly to the swearing in of new members, most of whom actually were old members. Among the returnees was the 84-year-old dean of the Senate, Sen Carl Hayden (D-Ariz.).

Among the newcomers was a 30-year-old Massachusetts Democrat whose name I didn't catch — Kennedy, or something like that.

The House knew in advance who its presiding officer would be, too, but it had to pretend that it didn't. It must elect a speaker every two years.

This year's contest was between Reps. John W. McCormack (D-Mass.) and Charles A. Halleck (R-Ind.). McCormack won, 256-175, the point

spread being almost identical to the party line-up in the House.

McCormack must have been confident of the outcome. Copies of his extemporaneous acceptance speech reached the press gallery even before the voting started.

Japanese Forester Plans OSU Lectures

Corvallis — Dr. Ayaakira Okazaki, professor of forest management at University of Kyoto, Japan, will be lecturer in the Oregon State university school of forestry during spring term.

Okazaki will come to Oregon in late March under the auspices of the Louis W. and Kaud Hill Family Foundation of St. Paul, Minn.

He is author of more than 50 publications on Japanese forestry and is a worldwide traveler. His professional trips include two visits to the United States earlier and a special lecturing fellowship to Germany.

During spring term at Oregon State university, the Japanese forestry leader will deliver a series of public lectures, conduct seminars, and confer with forestry faculty members and students.

COMEDIAN MARRIED

Hollywood — UPI — Comedian Bob Newhart was married Saturday in St. Vincent's Roman Catholic Church to Virginia Quinn, 22-year-old daughter of actor William Quinn.

CANDID

St. Louis—UPI—Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal) Dean Ned Cole called for increased interest in the church choir, with the comment that "a good singing voice is not a requirement."

PAYOFF

New York—UPI—Credit life insurance policies have paid off \$836 million in debts for Americans who died in the past decade, according to the Institute of Life Insurance.

Grant Given To Record Languages

Portland — A grant to record some of the nearly extinct languages of Oregon has been awarded to a Portland State college associate professor of anthropology.

Dr. Joe Pierce will study "Indigenous Languages of Oregon" under a year's grant of \$10,900, awarded by the National Science Foundation. There were approximately 52 languages being spoken in Oregon at the time of white contact, Dr. Pierce said. Anthropologists have scanty data on about 10 Oregon languages; grammars for two and almost no information on several others, he said.

Dr. Pierce pointed out there is an extreme urgency in recording some of the languages before they disappear entirely. He cited some 15 languages with less than 10 speakers each left in the state, while several other languages are thought to be extinct.

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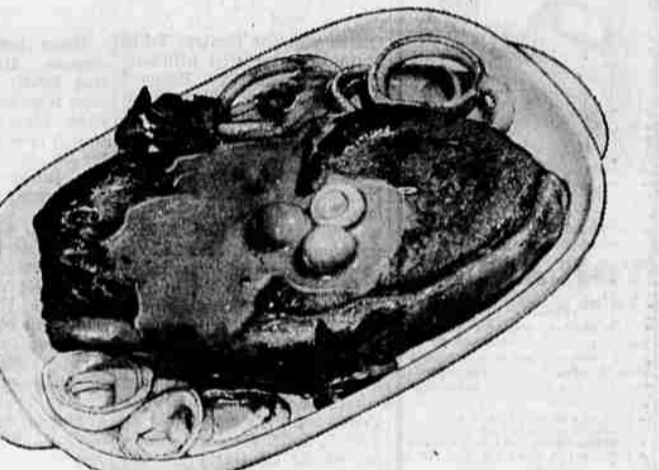
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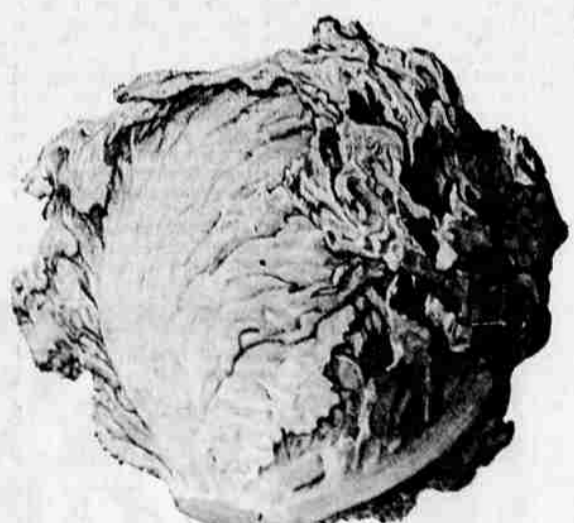
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