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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

After the law was passed making the working of unpapered aliens illegal, ranch Spanish began to decline. Dictionaries and old textbooks were pushed aside. Other than few bars of "Ranco Grande" or "Cicilto Linda" at the joints and dances, a once flourishing second language was dying out.

The closed circuit ranch radio continued to carry spurts of espanol between a couple of processed cowboys and their boss. Every morning about 6:30, rain reports, feed-run projections and grocery orders were exchanged.

Making up the grocery list brought on the strongest waves of nostalgia. The first job I had for the Boss was looking after a big fencing crew of Mexicans. For 25 years I tried to find one hombre who understood the storing and stock-piling of groceries past the last tablespoon of lard in the bucket and the last cup of flour in the sack. Had Congress not wrenched away these useful hands, I suppose I'd still be trying to change them over to our ways of living.

One radio station in San Angelo continues to broadcast in Spanish. My favorite is a morning show, where the announcer takes calls to sell bundles of baby clothes and innumerable TV sets and about everything else from give-away puppies to pairs of quackless ducks (Batos sin graxnidos).

The amount of candor is unusual. One lady offering a 1973 Ford pickup for sale said the tires were bad because her husband's dog liked to chew on rubber. Furthermore, she said she'd had to tie him up when she went to the grocery store, or he'd take in whatever was on the parking lot. She signed off cautioning anyone who came to see her pickup to be sure and be careful where they stopped their car.

A politician's recent suggestion to further close off the border as part of his platform as a candidate for President is to have a ditch dug from one end to the other. The best digging is going to be out on the sandy beaches close to San Diego and a short stretch down on the Gulf Coast of Texas.

It's been a long time since I ran the fencing crew, but there might be some of those same men left to help peck out the 2500 or so miles of rock work.