

NOVEMBER 5, 1987

We've about disposed of everything we used to need to work unpapered aliens. After the last crew quit in the spring, the new law kept me from hiring any new hands. I've traded off the ponies that were reserved for the sandal walkers to ride, and when they left for Mexico they took the bedding and part of the cooking equipment.

There's going to be a lot of talent lost among us better wet Mexican managers, once the law is enforced. Ranch Spanish, for example, will become a dead language, like Latin. In the last half century the ranchers out here taught plenty of Mexicans how to use signs and speak fragments of English. I think we made a big contribution to the idiom of the border and Northern Mexico.

I don't know who's going to cut the fireplace wood for winter, or pull the weeds out of the shearing pens next spring. I've already unitized my yard and housework to make up for the change. After I discovered that the raking and sweeping and mopping were going to be left up to me, I stopped being so fastidious and am now leaving the dry grass and dead leaves that are tracked in to make a soft bedding for my floors.

One concern that's ended is worrying about gathering to ship this fall. Our fall round-up score has improved without the foreign hands. We've had to ride farther, but we've looked a lot harder.

Green calves and fresh weaned lambs have never known such gentle handling as now, under the shorthanded circumstances. Great waves of patience hit little bands of cowboys when they finally realize that an outburst of hollering or reins popping on their chaps may mean regathering the herd in the moonlight.

At odd times I wonder how long it's been since any worthy crossed the Potomac River with the vaguest idea how we live down here on these ranches. It seems to me that we draw more fire and offer the smallest target of any segment of the population. We are so unlucky that were we to offer to donate a crystal pitcher full of water to decorate the podium of the inaugural platform, before we'd got the honor some nitwit would have passed a bill making it against the law for a rancher to own a dipper or a water well.

All the wetback affair seems to have come out even. The wornout pickup the fencing crew was driving is on blocks, and the bunkhouse where they ate and slept is a wreck.

It's mighty lonesome late in the evenings without the Juans and Santiagos washing their clothes by the water tank. I keep hearing of a legal program developing, but I don't see any sense in signing up with the very gringos that caused the problem.