

2-17-01

Saltillo

The summer of 1942 was a multiple sort of high point in my life. I won't try to list the events in the order of their importance, but they included such things as getting accustomed to wearing my engagement ring from Paul, anxiously devouring any news on radio or in newspaper concerning the conflict in Europe, and realizing my long-standing ambition to go to Mexico.

After having studied the Spanish language all through high school and college, I was eager to reinforce my scant speaking knowledge of Spanish with a secure acquaintance of the subtleties of conversation. When I discovered a six weeks study of the language and culture in Saltillo, sponsored by the Spanish Department of Texas State College for Women, I believed that I had found the answer to my wish. A number of women, both high school and college graduates, from Dallas, signed up for the school session. The Mexican consul to Dallas, a charming man, arranged for a newspaper interview and picture of the group from Dallas, giving a few of us a chance to get acquainted before we were to meet in Laredo for the bus trip to Saltillo.



ENVOY IN PAJAMAS—"It isn't dignified, but I'll do anything to build good will," Mexican Consul Luis Perez-Abreu said Friday as he left his sickbed to interview a group of Dallas girls who will attend summer school in Saltillo, Mexico. Left to right, standing: Joan Hexter, Betty Linz Kahn, Nellie Jane Loomis, the Consul, Catherine Murphree and Mary Frances Hickman. Seated: Fay Lipper and Mary Lucile Bergen. Perez-Abreu has been confined to his home for the last few weeks after an operation to relieve an ear ailment.

Dallas Girls to Attend TSCW Summer Classes in Mexico

Thirteen young Dallas women, Mary Lee Powell, Route 5, Box 100, more than from any other city, 87-G, and Evelyn Storey, Preston Road and Meadows, Sally Brooks and Emily McKelley, of Forney also will attend.

The school was established last July as an experiment in inter-American education and is sponsored by the department of foreign languages of the college, with Dr. Rebecca Switzer as director and Dr. Jerome Moore as assistant director and business manager.

Those from Dallas who will spend the five weeks in Saltillo, beginning July 17, are Jayne Allen, 5540 Rankin; Virginia Batchelor, 2415 Willis; Mary Lucile Bergen, 2308 Cornell; Ava Lou Freed, 5804 Swiss; Margaret Gaines, 1032 East Waco; Joan Hexter, 6712 Turtle Creek; Mary Frances Hickman, 5146 Belmont; Betty Linz Kahn, 4802 Seneca Drive; Fay Lipper, 205 Maple Terrace; Nellie Jane Loomis, 236 West Page; Catherine Murphree, 3905 University Boulevard;

Classwork which yields college credit will be done on the same standards as maintained in the college at Denton. Both graduate and undergraduate courses are offered for credit and designed for teachers of Spanish and for those preparing for civil service, translation and commercial correspondence.

Saltillo, the mile-high city called the Athens of Mexico, was chosen as the home of the school because this colonial city is known as the center of culture for northern Mexico—a typical Mexican city rather than one dressed up for tourists, Mexican Consul Luis Perez-Abreu of Dallas said.

Students will reside in a dormitory near the Hotel Casa Colonial, where they will take their meals with the faculty.

The hotel in Laredo was alive with would-be Spanish speakers when we gathered for dinner before our early morning departure for Saltillo. Our trip through the northern part of Mexico was an attractive beginning, for the desert landscape had been enlivened by a recent rain, with accompanying array of multi-colored flowering plants. When we reached Monterrey, we turned west into the looming mountains we had been watching, occasionally seeing little haciendas tucked into scrubby groves of mesquite trees or an occasional seraped farmer leading a small burro with a load of firewood. Saltillo was still a small village which had not yet become the thriving tourist attraction that it is today. After a sudden turn in the road, we saw our romantic little town laid out before us, dominated by the tall spire of the church.



As soon as we were assigned our rooms (the five graduates in a spacious bedroom with one bath in the hotel where we were to take all our meals and the high school crowd in a nearby home) we hastily unpacked, had a light supper, and walked to the town square, defined by the cathedral on one side and small businesses on the other sides. We joined in the traditional Sunday evening paseo, the girls walking around the square clockwise on the inside of the wide sidewalk, while the local boys walked the opposite way. Needless to say, the girls were closely supervised by local duennas and the faculty of our little summer school. A local band played most of the time, but the music didn't get in the way of the passing remarks of the boys as they discovered girls they knew or would like to know. At ten o'clock the paseo adjourned with everyone returning to his or her home or, in our cases, to our rooms.



The next morning we began the classes we'd signed up for. I had a class in local literature, taught by a handsome lawyer, as well as a class in dancing where we were promised we'd learn the jarabe tapitio. Afternoons were free, to wander about the town or to join in the customary siesta. Most of us were so excited by the mile-high altitude and accompanying pleasant temperatures that we spread about the town seeing as much as we could.

As far as our walking took us, we walked on wide sidewalks bordered on one side by the street and on the other by the front walls of the houses. Occasionally, a partially open gate would give us tantalizing views of lush patios that formed the yard and center of the houses. Our hotel was built on the same plan, with its well-planted patio, but I resolved that I would see one of the private homes from the inside, as an invited guest.



Sure enough, after our evening meal, we went to a local dance where we were formally introduced to the local young people. I was delighted to find Maria Rosita, approximately my age, who was friendly and agreed that we would take turns practicing our second language on each other. Her English was far better than my Spanish and she was very gracious helping me practice idiomatic Spanish. As our time in Saltillo went on, I saw a great deal of Rosita. (We had agreed to drop the "Mary" from both of our names.) One evening she chided that *no* Mexican lady would talk with her hands and suggested that I sit on mine. I found that my vocabulary was initially crippled without my hands, but I did improve over the course of our six-weeks' acquaintance and could almost claim to be a lady when I told Rosita goodbye. I did get to see the inside of her home, a delightful group of rooms all opening onto the carefully gardened patio. Neither of us kept our vow to correspond after I returned home: her brother was about to be sent overseas when I left, and I was well occupied with planning my wedding and trying to imagine what life would be like in Portland, Oregon.



On Sundays we went to church in the cathedral, a new experience for all of us, even the Catholics in our group. The nave had no pews: all the men stood together in the front and the women stood in the back. During the week we sometimes saw women climbing the stone steps to the church on their knees. I was curious what they might have done to deserve such a penance.

My dance class did learn to dance the Jarabe Tapatio, for which we had lovely full-skirted dresses made. We invited some of the towns people to our entertainment as thanks for their hospitality. My roommates and I resolved to speak Spanish exclusively when we were in our room, but after a while we discovered that we had to use an unofficial mixture of English with our Spanish. I'm proud to say that my speaking ability far surpassed that of my roommates, for they didn't have a Rosita to talk to and learn from.



Looking back, I'm amazed at the great number of memories I treasure from my time in Saltillo. I hope to get some of them on paper while I'm still writing memoirs.





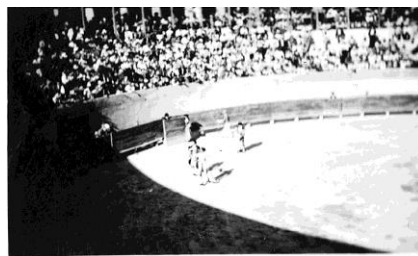
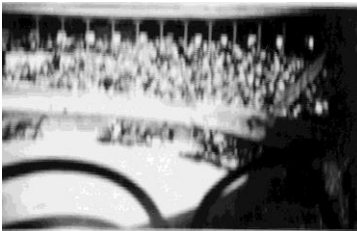
Saltillo a ojo de pájaro.



28.-Cúpula de Catedral. Saltillo.
Fot.-A. V. Carmona.











Sitting: unknown, Pinocho, Dr. Moore, Canitos, Dr. Switzer, unknown
Standing front: Miss Faulkner, Yvonne Jones, Golda Phillips, Evelyn Storey,
Carolyn Humphreys, Eleanor Headrick, Ethel Jane Whitson, Eugenia Peterson,
Baby Bergen, Margaret Humhng, Lillian Rhodes
Standing back: Ben Dill Sullivan, Margaret Strickland, Polly Pierson,
Mrs. Snider, Mrs. Skinner, Ruth Eaves, Helen Meyers, Barbara Barnard,
Sally Brook, Ida Mae Hawkins, Catherine Musphall