

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Northwest Mexico: A Photo Essay
FMF-27

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New York, New York 10017

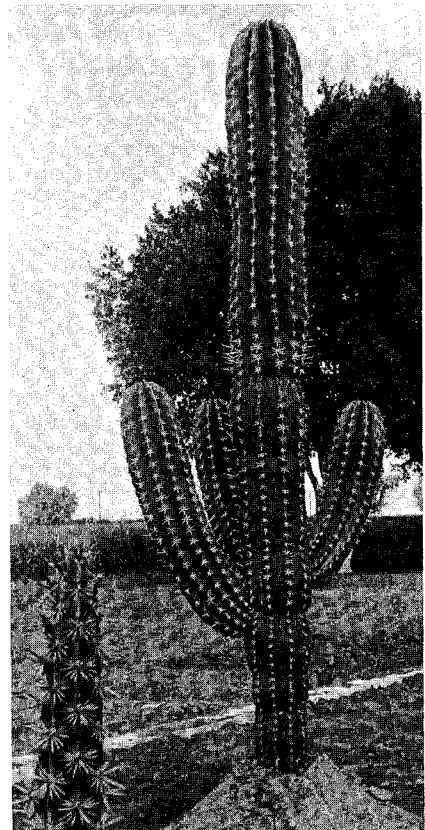
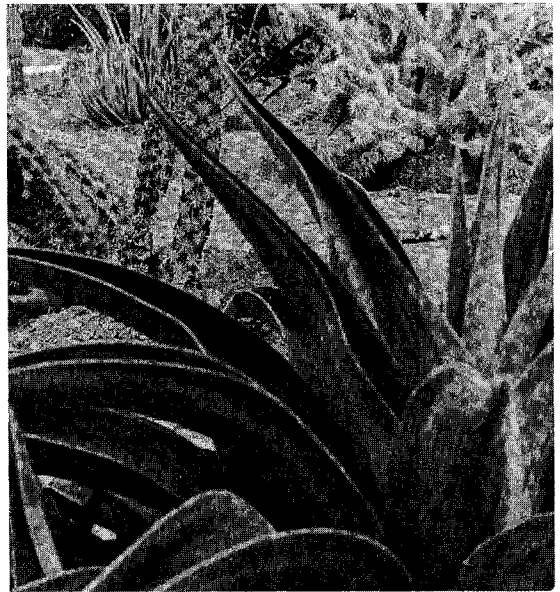
Dear Mr. Nolte:

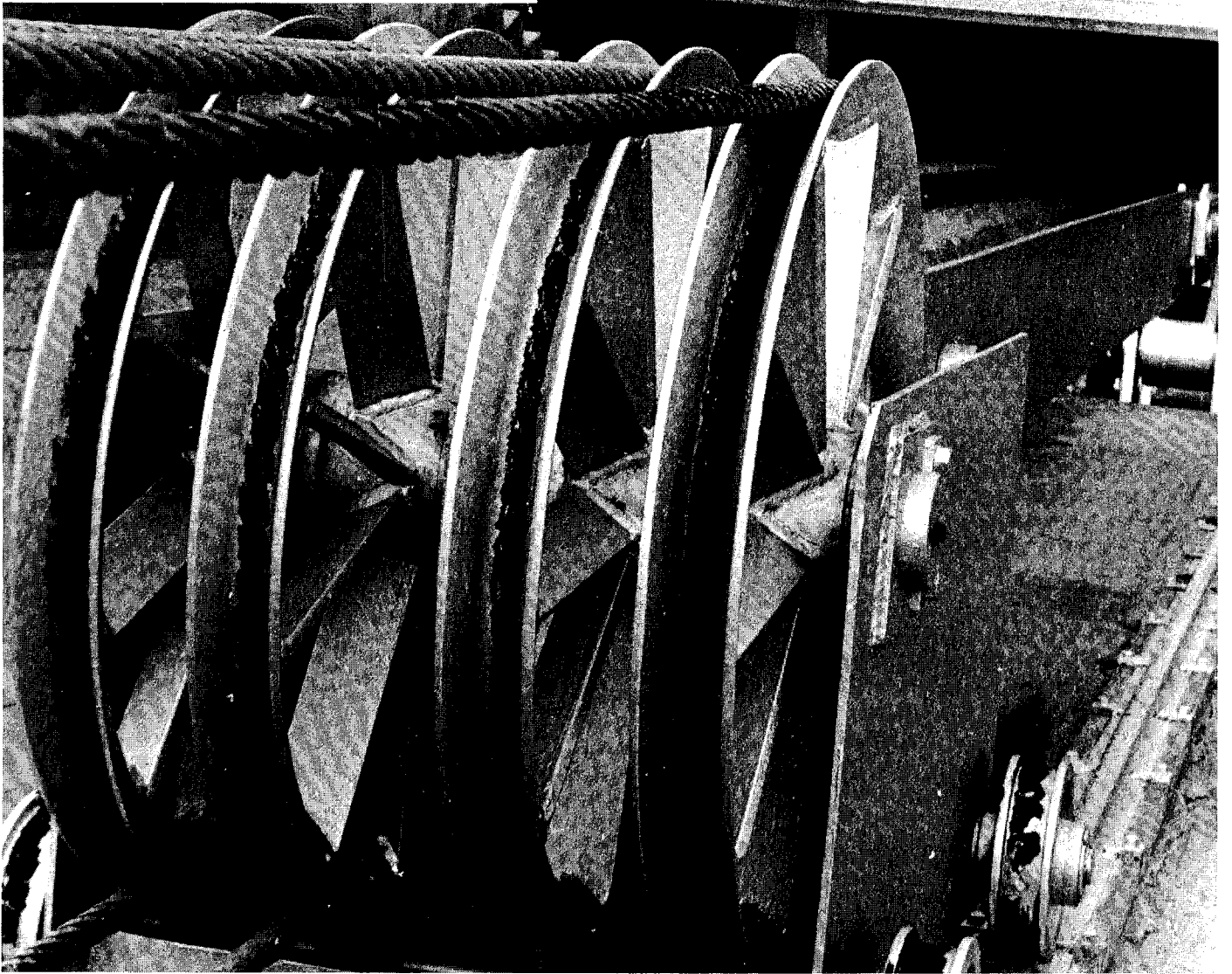
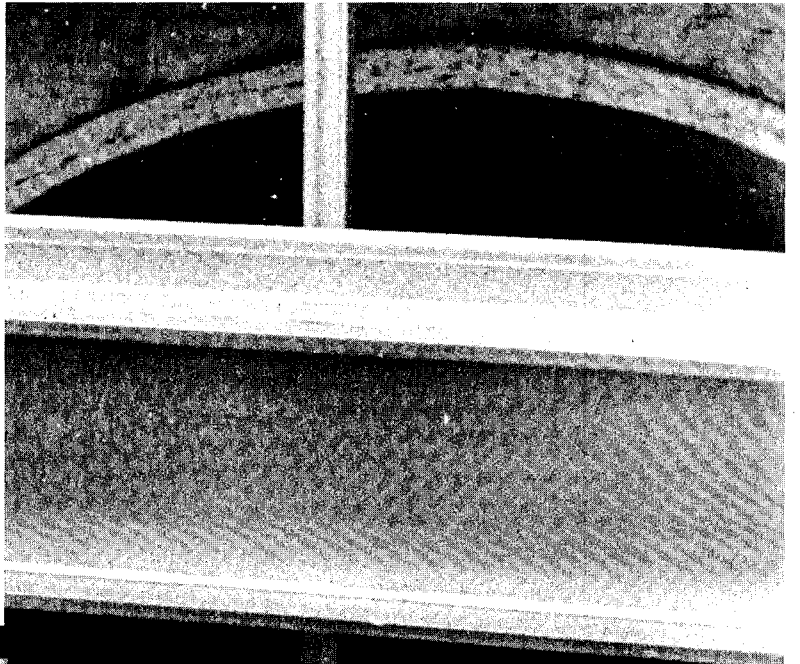
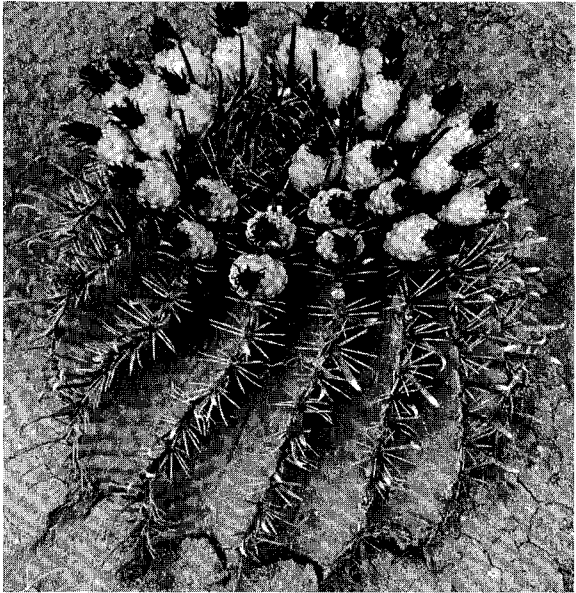
I entered Mexico at Nogales, Arizona, and drove the lengths of Sonora and Sinaloa. Thus, I saw an important part of Mexico's Northwest, plagued by aridity but now a boom region due to agricultural development.

A friend's description of her trip in that area in the mid-50's included tales of 24 hours without food, substandard sleeping quarters, unpaved roads, ferries over rivers with the car balanced on two canoes hitched together with poles and ropes.

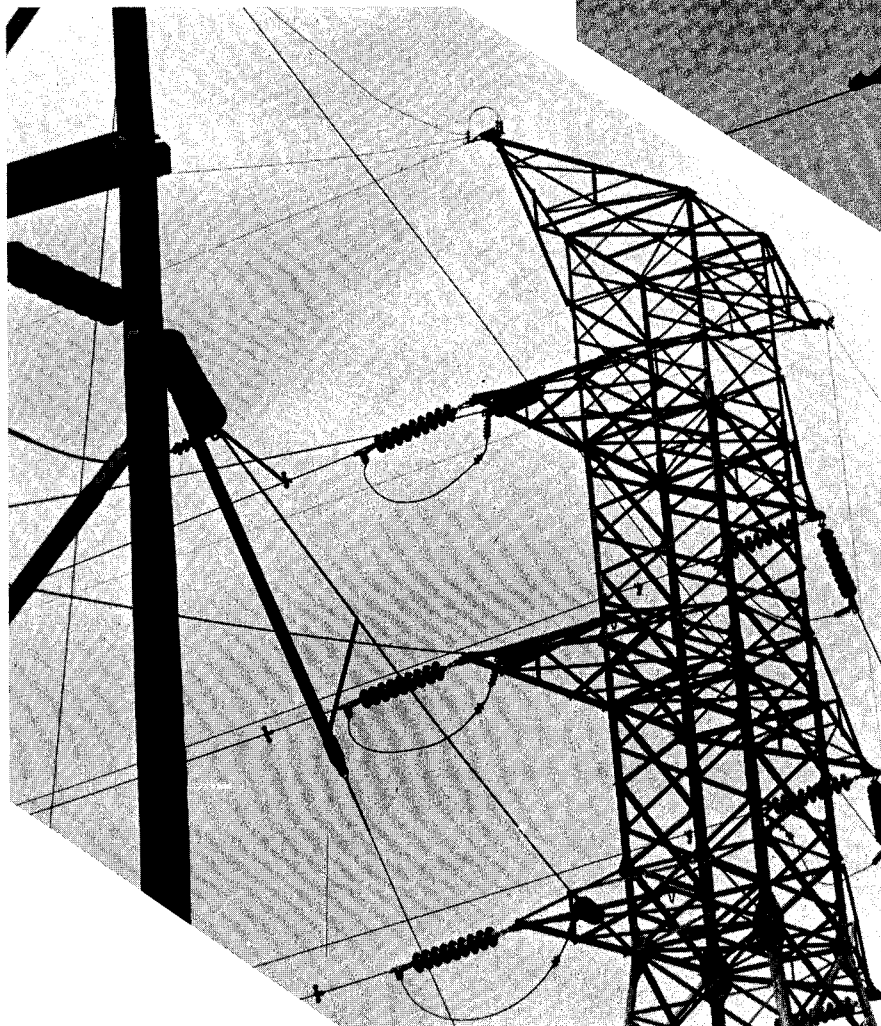
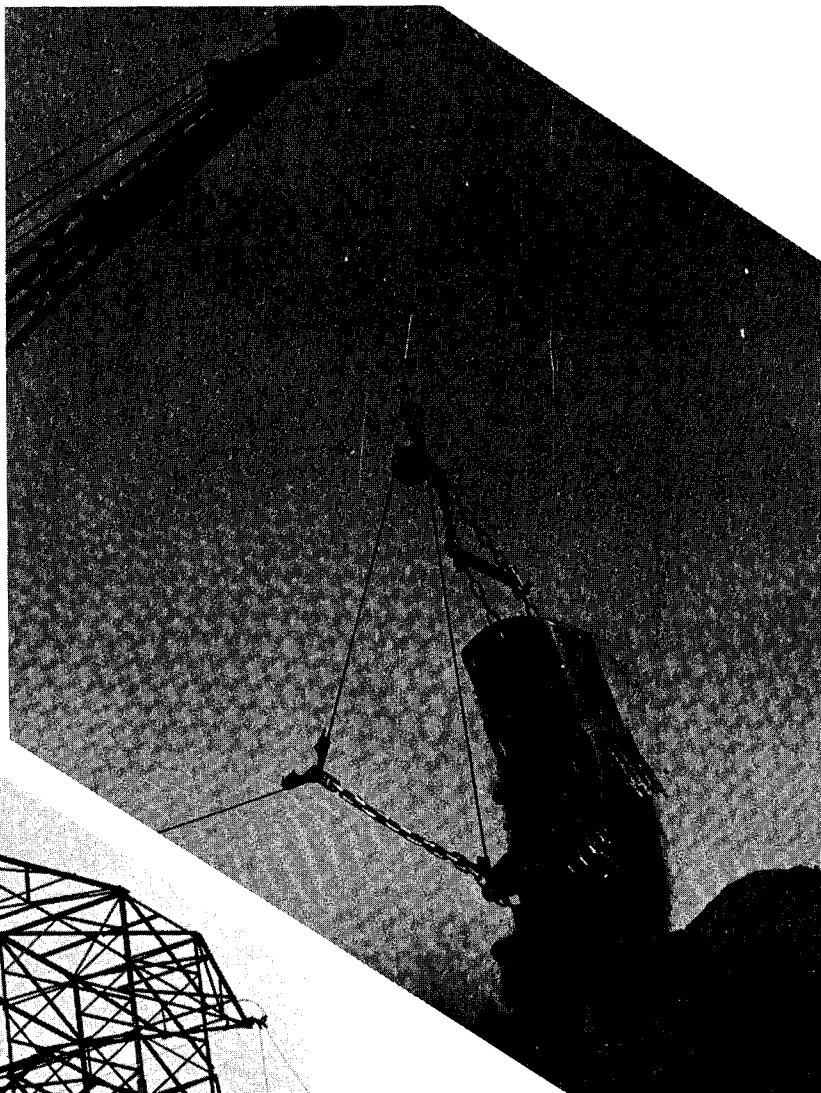
Now the asphalt highway teems with fast-moving semi-trucks and big cars pulling house trailers. Luxury motels service a steady flow of salesmen and tourists, pampered with heated pools, abalone steaks, potable water and hi-fi music in well-decorated bedrooms.

The cacti which symbolized the region—

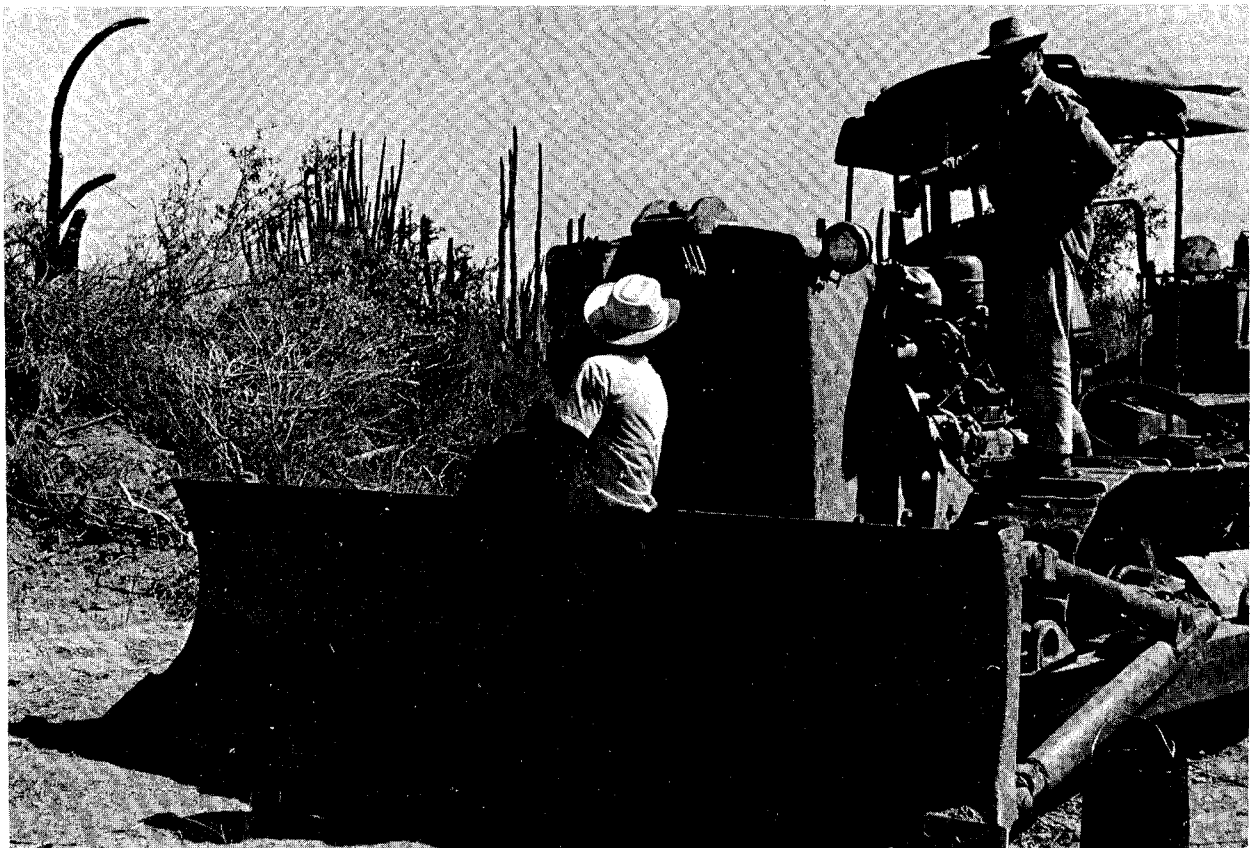
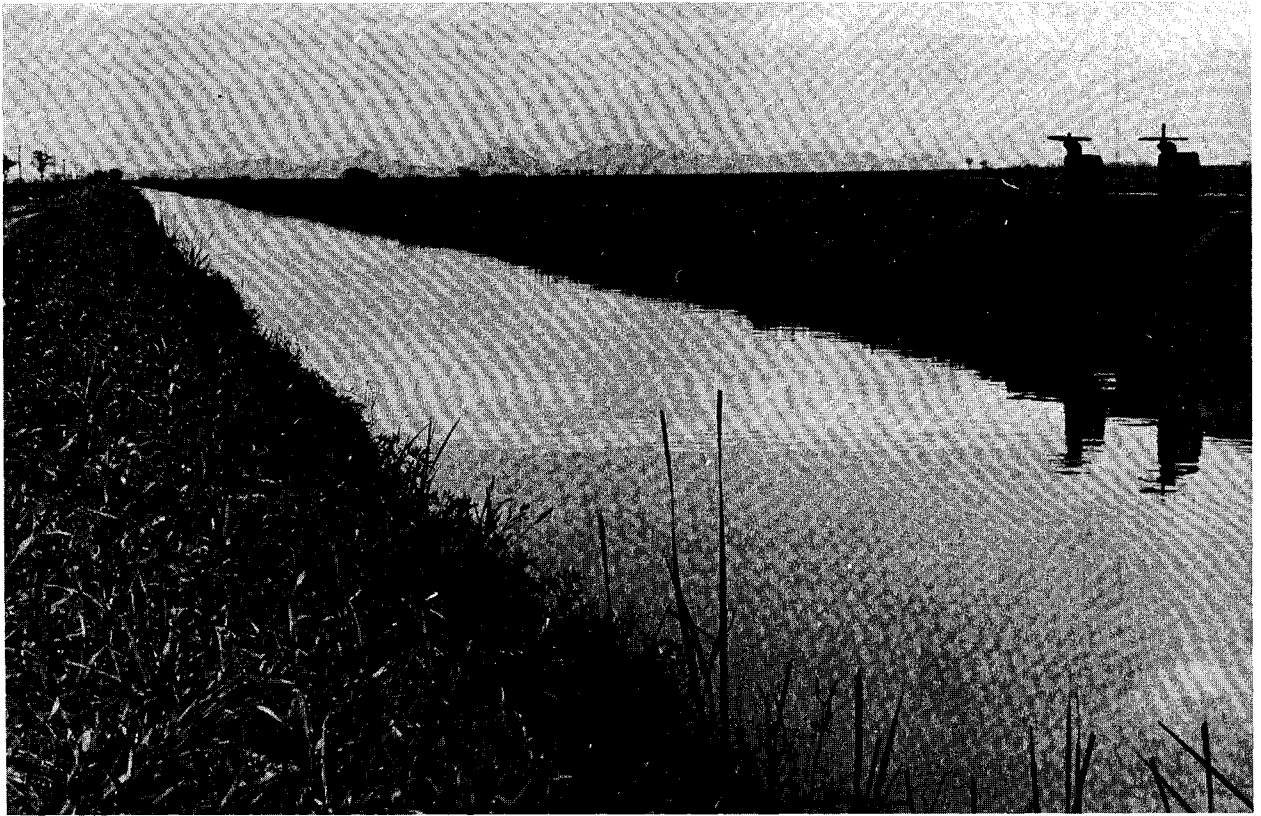




--are giving way to
winches on the flood-
gates of huge dams--



draglines scooping out
irrigation canals, and
high-tension lines criss-
crossing fertile valleys.



All the major cities through which I passed seemed vital and renovated---Hermosillo, Guaymas, Ciudad Obregón, Los Mochis, Culiacán, Mazatlán. Wide streets were clean, and bustling with traffic. Commercial buildings were new, or recently painted. Men dressed and walked as if life mattered to them. Chambers of Commerce were stocked with material on investment possibilities, and Rotary Clubs posted their logo, welcoming all newcomers.

In the wheat belt, huge granaries sided the Pacific Railroad, reequiped with international funds and reopened in 1957. Before, the haul from Hermosillo to Guadalajara took 49 days, now it takes three, and the line is a prime link to carry the agricultural products to markets in heavily-populated Central Mexico, and to the United States. It also feeds the holds of ships in the key ports of Guaymas and Mazatlán. Even little Topolobambo, out from Los Mochis---now a fishing village paced to an earlier century---is destined for a major face-lift so that its quay may discharge the burgeoning harvests from southern Sonora and northern Sinaloa.

The transformation of Ciudad Obregón is paradigm of the regional boom. Four decades ago it was but a grimy railroad depot circled by a cluster of adobe and wooden shacks to shelter minimal services for occasional passers-by. The town, called Cayeme, did not even rate the official rank of "Ciudad" (city).

Its climate is typical of the Northwest: arid, supporting only desert vegetation; periodic rains (annual average 11.5 inches); very hot (111° F. maximum). Before irrigation, xerophytic growth sustained only meager cattle-raising. Then, in the 40's the first dam was built to hold back the Yaqui River; canals distributed the water, and the alluvial soils nourished multi-cropping.

By 1950, Obregón had 30,000 inhabitants, and in that decade the major dam was constructed, enlarging the irrigated valley to 600,000 acres. Now the harvests of the Yaqui basin earn an annual average of \$65 million. The city's population is 100,000---one of the fastest-growing, over 4%, in all Mexico. Its Chamber of Commerce lists 69 industries, 54 of which are directly related to agriculture.

From desolate wastelands, Sonora has risen to become the second Mexican State in value of agricultural production, and Sinaloa to fifth.



RIGHT. Wheat

The Northwest has gained its agricultural fame on the basis of wheat, cotton, rice, soya beans, forage crops, vegetables, sugar cane..., but to plant the seed in the irrigated soil did not bring an automatic miracle. There were problems with blight and pests, low yields due to inappropriate seeds, deficiencies in organic matter and nitrogen, etc.

Northwestern farmers withhold no praise when they credit one organization for making possible the region's takeoff: CIANO, the local center for agricultural investigations, under the auspices of the National Government—and long and liberally bolstered by the aid and technicians of the Rockefeller Foundation.

The success with wheat is a salient example of CIANO's multifarious work. Constantly experimenting with exotic varieties and developing new ones, a recent, short, heavy-stooled hybrid has revolutionized yields not only in Mexico but also in comparable regions around the world. Now self-sufficient in wheat, Mexico last year exported not only the cereal for consumption but also the seeds for cultivation to



LEFT. Tomatoes

such far-flung areas as North Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. As another form of technical aid to other countries, CIANO receives trainees from abroad: there are now 18 from the above-named countries, plus Brazil.

Eight wheat varieties are now being planted in the Yaquí Valley, with yields of about 60 bushels per acre, comparable to the high production in Central United States. But CIANO does not downplay the effort invested in such results. A caption in one of its instruction brochures exhorts:

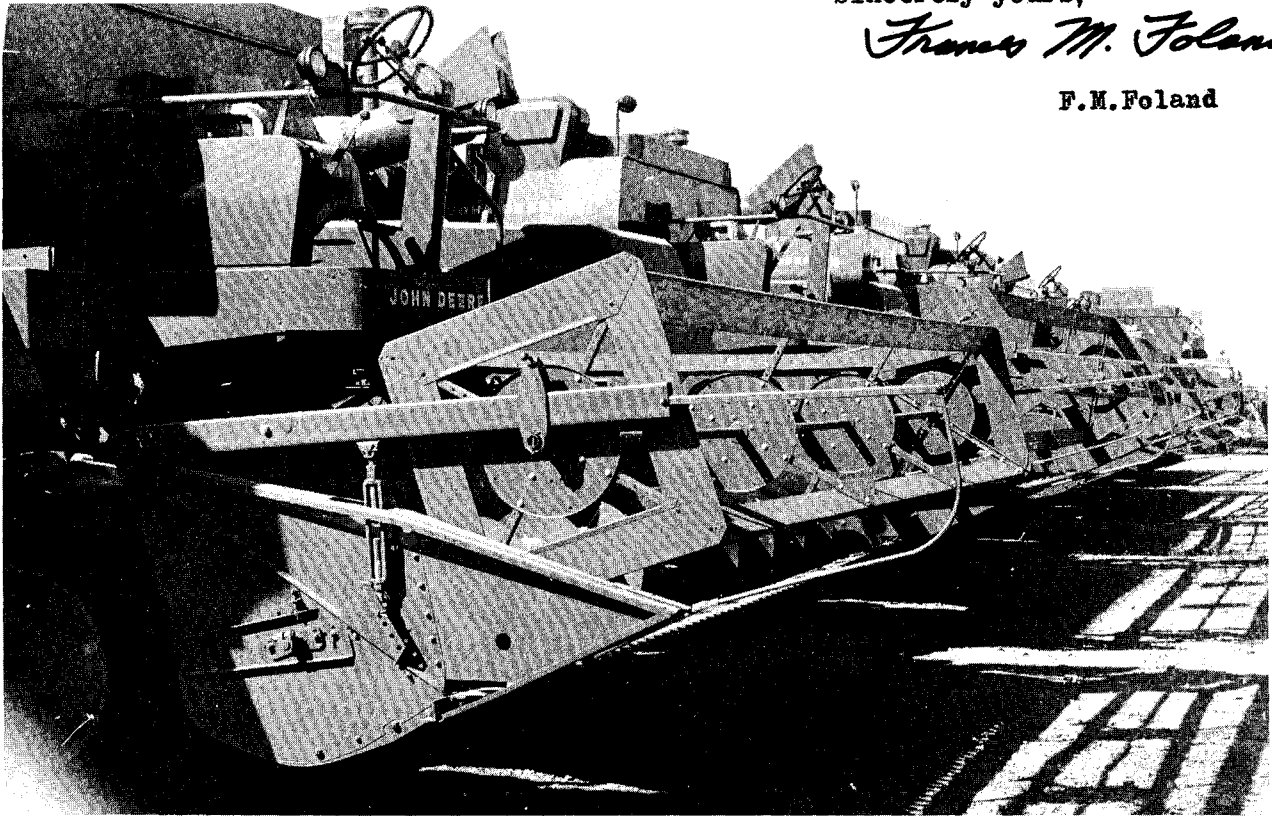
"Adequate fertilizer, the use of improved seeds, planting at the right time, the combat of blights, the application of the correct amount of water, and all the other appropriate agricultural practices are necessary to obtain high yields."

The photo shows two huge threshers harvesting wheat, indicative of all the attendant operations which prosper from a vigorous agriculture—implement sales, food and grain processors, suppliers of fertilizers and chemicals, transport lines, insurance agencies, commercial banking, etc.

Sincerely yours,

James M. Foland

F.M.Foland



Photos: FMF

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