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Growth of Newspapers In Mexico's Provinces

BY MARVIN ALISKY*

One large daily newspaper chain, other daily papers and "crusading" weeklies in small towns constitute the provincial press of Mexico. The author summarizes several kinds of evidence which suggest that these papers published outside the national capital are gaining in readership and influence.

PROGRESS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR press freedom has keynoted Latin American journalism in recent years. But a different kind of progress has been going on in Mexico, almost unnoticed in the United States. That is a growth in the number of readers and in the influence of newspapers outside the national capital.

Reports by *Medios Publicitarios Mexicanos* (Standard Rate and Data Service in Mexico) show that both Mexico City and provincial newspapers have gained or held their own in circulation despite the spread of television and radio stations and receivers throughout the republic. In 1951, for example, *El Norte* of Monterrey had 45,000 daily circulation; it now has 59,593 certified by the Audit Bureau of Circulation. Some Mexican dailies have held steady in circulation for almost a decade. For example, *Diario de Yucatán* in 1951 had 33,000 circulation; in mid-1959 had 33,860. But whether holding their own or increasing in circulation from 2% to 5% in recent years, Mexi-

can newspapers show vigor. The population has been increasing 3.5% annually—faster than the adult literacy centers and rural schools can reduce illiteracy. But more literate, adult Mexicans than ever before are buying newspapers.

Many Latin American republics are said to have the "head too big for the body." In Argentina, one citizen in four lives in Buenos Aires (5,400,00 of the 20,000,000 population). One-fourth of Uruguay's citizens are crowded into the capital city of Montevideo. Cuba, Chile and Venezuela have one-sixth of all citizens in their capital cities. Mexico, by contrast, has 33,000,000 population, of whom 5,000,000 live in or near Mexico City and 28,000,000 elsewhere in the republic. Publishing leadership stems from Mexico City, but provincial journalistic enterprise thrives, mirroring many facets of Mexican life.

Mexico City dominates the republic politically and economically.¹ Yet manufacturers in Monterrey, bankers in Guadalajara, cotton growers in Nuevo Laredo, hotel owners in Acapulco also influence national affairs.

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¹ William P. Tucker, *The Mexican Government Today* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 337.

Mexican states' rights are weak enough to prompt the use of the word "provinces" for the political subdivisions of the republic.² But provincial population, industrialization and communications are growing rapidly.

✱ MEXICO HAS LATIN AMERICA'S LARGEST newspaper chain, 36 newspapers owned by Col. José García Valseca. The group has grown up entirely in about 15 years. The papers publish some world news, some national news from Mexico City, but much local news reported in an objective manner. Thus they contribute to hinterland journalism by setting an example of good reporting.³

The García Valseca chain makes up one of the three elements of the Mexican provincial press. The other two are the large independent dailies and the small-town crusading weeklies.⁴

In recent times, one word which comes to mind when the Latin American press is mentioned is "censorship." The ousting of Perón in Argentina, Rojas Pinilla in Colombia, and Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela ended press censorship in those republics. The Inter-American Press Association each year lists from three to more than a half dozen of the 20 Latin American republics as suffering from press censorship. But Mexico invariably receives a rating of press freedom.

Freedom of expression combined with a sense of responsibility and a professional regard for accuracy and good taste can elevate a press to trustworthy stature. Conversely, free expression that is irresponsible can rob a newspaper of public confidence or provoke violence.

Sometimes, in the Mexican hinterlands, it becomes difficult to judge whether or not the newspaper has re-

ported wildly, or merely too accurately for the comfort of guilty parties.

In 1956, two journalists in the state of Baja California were assassinated. Manuel Acosta Meza, editor of a Tijuana weekly paper, and Fernando Márques Sánchez were killed when their reporting promised to expose criminal elements. Rumor linked certain policemen with the killings. But not even in the heat of the angry reaction to the murders did anyone suggest a link to any authorities higher than non-commissioned policemen.

The small-town weeklies crusade against locally-administered governmental policies, but rarely against the federal regime sponsoring those policies. The two 1956 assassinations are not typical of the tribulations of Mexico's provincial weeklies, but they are cited as part of a larger pattern of tension sometimes found in small towns maintaining weekly papers.

In 1956, the printing equipment of *El Mundo*, a weekly paper in Toluca, was destroyed when the paper's multi-campaign crusades reached a shrill climax of charges. Local police never pinpointed a specific assailant.

In August 1957, I made inquiries in Toluca about the imbroglio of the year before among merchants at the market place. They seemed to regard the smashing of *El Mundo's* printing press as a minor matter. They read one or both of Toluca's daily newspapers, the independent *El Herald* or *El Sol de Toluca* of the García Valseca chain. Minor public officials reported that they read one or both of the local dailies, plus one or more dailies from Mexico City. The *Mundo* affair was neither on the lips nor the minds of rank-and-file citizenry after some months.

Typical of the crusading spirit of a Mexican small-town weekly is the front-page spread of *El Tiempo* of Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila (across the Rio Grande from Del Rio, Texas), for Dec. 30, 1956. Various grievances against

² J. Lloyd Mechem, "Mexican Federalism—Fact or Fiction?", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1940, pp. 23-35.

³ Víctor Alba, "Frontier Journalism in Mexican Provincial Press," *IPI Report*, March 1957, p. 6.

⁴ "Directorio" (typewritten), *Asociación Mexicana de Periodistas*, 1959.

the management of large companies and ranching interests are cited, including the charge that ignorant workers are laboring for less than the legal minimum wages of the area.

The lead story in the weekly *La Voz del Istmo* of Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, for Aug. 18, 1957, reports in detail the drunken disturbances of certain local citizens. This weekly paper apparently sincerely highlighted what it felt to be the biggest local story of the week.

But other weeklies have retained newsmen who gained the label of "false reporter." That is, for a fee, embarrassing information will not be turned in to the editor. The *Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa* (National Newspaper Editors' Union), the *Asociación Mexicana de Periodistas* (Mexican Association of Journalists), the *Asociación Mexicana de Fotógrafos de Prensa* (Mexican News Photographers' Association), plus similar groups with professional standards and ethics have been fighting vigorously to stamp out practices which amount to journalistic blackmail. Either a news story has news value for a specific community or it does not. If it does, it should reach the editor and appear in print.

Typographically, the weeklies are the weakest link in the Mexican journalistic spectrum. Cogent headlines, attractive page makeup and clear engravings are limited mostly to daily newspapers in Mexico.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, COL. GARCÍA Valseca has given his key editors and reporters six months of rigorous training in United States-style journalism at his Mexico City headquarters before sending them to assignments in the provinces.

This was a factor in prompting the National University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM) to initiate in 1951 its National School of Social and Political Sciences (Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales), one of whose four

TABLE I
The 36 García Valseca Publications

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>City</i>
Esto* (M)**	Mexico City
El Continental (E) (7 p.m.)	El Paso Texas
El Fronterizo (M)	Ciudad Juárez
El Mexicano (E)	Ciudad Juárez
El Sol de Durango (M)	Durango
El Sol del Pacífico (M)	Mazatlán
El Sol de Sinaloa (M)	Culiacán
El Sol del Fuerte (M)	Los Mochis
El Sol de San Luis (M)	San Luis Potosí
Noticias (E)	San Luis Potosí
El Occidental (M)	Guadalajara
El Sol de Guadalajara (E)	Guadalajara
El Herald (M)	Chihuahua
Heraldo de la Tarde (E)	Chihuahua
El Sol de Parral (M)	Parral
El Sol del Norte (M)	Saltillo
El Sol de Zacatecas (M)	Zacatecas
El Sol del Centro (M)	Aguascalientes
El Sol Deportivo (Sports) (S)	Aguascalientes
El Sol de Tampico (M)	Tampico
El Sol de la Tarde (E)	Tampico
Noticias de León (M)	León
El Sol de León (N)	León
Noticias Deportivas (Sports) (S)	León
Noticias Deportivas (Sports) (S)	Irapuato
Noticias (M)	Irapuato
Amanecer (M)	Querétaro
El Sol de Toluca (E)	Toluca
Extra de Toluca (M)	Toluca
El Sol de Tlaxcala (M)	Tlaxcala
El Sol del Bajío (M)	Celaya
El Sol de Guanajuato (M)	Guanajuato
Noticias de Salamanca (M)	Salamanca
El Sol de Hidalgo (M)	Pachuca
El Sol de Puebla (M)	Puebla
La Voz de Puebla (E)	Puebla

*In addition, a 37th García Valseca publication, *Paqulta*, a newspaper-type magazine supplement, goes on sale all over the republic every Monday. It devotes itself to women's features. *Esto* in the federal capital is a tabloid emphasizing sports. Most of the provincial papers of the chain stress public affairs, though three do emphasize sports. The provincial papers are standard sized.

**M = morning, E = afternoon, N = noon, S = Sunday.

degree plans leads to the Licentiate in Journalism after five years of study. The other three plans lead to degrees in public administration, diplomacy and social science.

All four courses of study at the National University have identical first-year classes in Spanish grammar, geography, political history, sociology, economics, Mexican history, law, statistics, and methodology of documentative investigation. All four plans require constitutional law as part of the second-year work. Reporting and editing during the third year distinguishes the journalism curriculum from the other three curricula of political science courses.

Newspaper management, radio-television newscasting and scripting, and magazine writing are included in the fourth-year work. The fifth year stresses practical laboratory work. A secondary school diploma, after 11 years of schooling, is a prerequisite for admission to the school. Thus a journalism school graduate completes 16 years of schooling. Most of the National University journalism students remain in Mexico City or work in the half dozen largest Mexican cities after graduation.⁵

Similarly, the Women's University in Mexico City has for several years had a three-year course leading to a certificate in journalism, as well as shorter one- and two-year courses. Most women trained by this institution have gone into magazine work, advertising, public relations or broadcasting writing in Mexico City or in two or three of the next largest cities.

Journalism courses at the Workers University in Mexico City have not sent many trained newsmen to the provincial cities.

The University of Veracruz, whose main campus is in Jalapa, maintains a Facultad de Periodismo in Veracruz City. The small number of students has

been a factor in studies to determine whether the journalism school should remain in Veracruz City or be moved to Jalapa.⁶

Sporadic attempts to bring journalistic training to provincial universities other than Veracruz have been discouraged by university officials, who fear that graduates of such courses would not remain in the provinces to apply their skills after graduation, but would gravitate to Mexico City. If the Veracruz journalism school can increase its enrollment and show that graduates remain in provincial journalism, other Mexican universities will be encouraged to add training for newspaper work.

☛ SOME INDEPENDENT PROVINCIAL DAILIES run advertisements in color, offer Sunday supplements complete with fine arts reviews and home economics features, and report their respective states effectively.

Not to be confused by a similarity of names, *Norte* of Chihuahua City and *El Norte* of Monterrey are such dailies.

Monterrey, third largest city in the republic, with an estimated population of 450,000, supports eight radio stations, two television stations and four daily newspapers.

Though much smaller in population, the border town of Tijuana (across from San Diego) supports five daily newspapers. Nuevo Laredo (across from Laredo, Texas) supports four dailies.

Away from the United States border, without the supplementary circulation on the other side of the international boundary line utilized by Tijuana and Nuevo Laredo, Puebla manages to have five daily newspapers, even though it is a city of less than 300,000 population,

⁶ "Nuevas Escuelas en la Universidad de Jalapa," *El Universal*, January 24, 1954, p. 15. See "Cursos de periodismo," *Veritas* (Buenos Aires), January 1959, p. 32, for a discussion of Fernando Mora's Instituto de Capacitación del Periodista, a Mexico City trade school. ICP graduates tend to remain in Mexico City rather than move to the provinces.

⁵ John J. Johnson, *Political Change in Latin America* (Stanford University Press, 1958), in Chapter 7 discusses the emerging middle sectors of Mexican life.

only 85 miles from Mexico City itself, where a few dailies enjoy a degree of national prominence.

Guadalajara, second largest city in the republic, with almost a half million population, has three daily newspapers.

Of the 51 Mexican provincial cities with daily papers, only 22 have only one daily. The other 29 provincial cities have at least two competing dailies.

A majority of the provincial independent dailies now receive some world news from one or both of the two U.S. news agencies, United Press International and the Associated Press, including photo services received by wire. Several provincial daily newspapers subscribe to Agence France Presse, the French news agency.

Several provincial newspapers also subscribe to a wire service specializing in Mexican news from federal sources in Mexico City. Several such services exist. There are the API or *Asociación de Periódicos Independientes* (Independent Newspapers Association), the AEE or *Asociación de Editores de Los Estados* (Association of Editors of the States), the Mexico Press Service (never translated but listed in English), and the AMI or *Agencia Mexicana de Información* (Mexican News Agency). Some individual Mexico City correspondents also serve one or more provincial newspapers. Free-lance correspondents telegraph only top stories.

In addition to straight news stories, the various news agencies provide some bylined feature material suitable for use on the editorial page. For example, several provincial newspapers carry on their editorial page the column "Balcón Político" by Juan Luis Castroviejo, editor of the *Agencia Mexicana de Información*. This column usually draws upon background material AMI reporters obtain from the Mexican president and from members of his cabinet.

Two United States feature syndicates with several Mexican provincial clients are King Features and NEA.

In addition to the familiar initials after the dateline MEXICO, D.F.—such as API or AEE or AMI—the symbol (CGV) appears at the end of special stories from Mexico City which are published in the provincial papers of the García Valseca chain.

IN ADDITION TO THE GROWING LIST of provincial clients for news from the various wire services, other criteria indicate genuine growth of the non-Mexico City press. For one thing, only a country with some publications journalistically important away from the capital city could support a press clipping service. Such a republic as Peru needs no such service, for anyone desiring to clip key stories and advertisements relating to any specific subject could merely buy the five Lima dailies plus the relatively few dailies of other Peruvian cities.⁷

The first national press clipping bureau in Mexico, Abbey's *Agencia de Recortes de Prensa, S.A.*, began operations in October 1957.⁸ Abbey's receives more than 250 magazines and daily and weekly newspapers from all Mexican states and territories. The bureau clips every mention of the client's name or his product. A manufacturer of explosives and building equipment believes the Mexican provincial press important enough now so that he wants a clipping of every news item of construction projects appearing in hinterland papers. Another Abbey client manufactures fertilizer. The provincial newspaper clippings about farmers' credits and rural labor conditions provide valuable references for his salesmen. Advertising and public relations agencies in Mexico City want to be updated on provincial activities of their competitors. Each agency has its own record of activities. But a thorough clipping service of provincial newspa-

⁷ See Marvin Alisky, "The Peruvian Press and the Nixon Incident," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 35: 416-18 (Fall 1958).

⁸ Abbey Schoen, "Press Clippings Serve Mexican Business," *Mexican American Review*, October 1958, pp. 28-30.

pers makes a competing agency's nationwide activities more meaningful.

For many years, Lania S.A. or Latin American News Institute Associates, Inc., has supplied a newsletter to business clients throughout Mexico. Like Abbey's, Lania personnel make extensive use of the provincial press. But instead of sending clients a package of clippings from newspapers and magazines, Lania sends each subscriber a newsletter about national business trends. Lania relies more upon original sources in Mexico City than published news sources anywhere, but the provincial press helps Lania branch offices update their files on various subjects.

In the Lania office in Monterrey, for example, I observed in 1951 that the branch manager was principally concerned with interviewing sulphur producers in northern Mexico, for a forthcoming newsletter. But, in addition to spending several afternoons talking with sulphur engineers and checking mineral trade publications, he also studied press clippings. His secretary had clipped every mention of the sulphur industry from newspapers in northeastern Mexico.⁹

Still another indication of the growth and increasing importance of provincial newspapers can be found in the expanding activities of the National Paper and Type Company de México and the Papelera Panamericana. The demand for printing equipment and paper supplies has risen to the point where these two companies now maintain branch offices in Guadalajara, Mazatlán, Monterrey, and Torreón, whereas a few years ago the Mexico City home office could meet logistic demands of the printing machinery and paper needs of provincial customers.

MEXICO HAS A LAND AREA ALMOST AS great as western Europe. Inadequacy of its east-west highways and first-class bus routes would naturally favor the

⁹ Lania has offices in Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Puebla, Veracruz, Saltillo, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Reynosa.

multiplication of local newspapers. The physical weight of the leading Mexico City dailies, up to three hundred grams per copy, restricts general distribution by air to every corner of the republic, though a few copies of the leading dailies of the Federal District do reach Tijuana, Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo.

Perhaps the biggest single factor encouraging provincial newspapers is local interest in local affairs. Rarely does a single news story usurp top page-one position in Mexican provincial dailies on any given day. Only four times in recent years one could say with certainty that almost every provincial daily had the same lead story on the front page: The 1956 meeting of Presidents Eisenhower and Ruiz Cortines at White Sulphur Spring, West Virginia; the two meetings of President Eisenhower and López Mateos at Acapulco in March and in Washington in October of 1959; the Mexican presidential election in July 1958. Intense interest in local affairs usually precludes any national uniformity of story emphasis.

Antonio J. Bermúdez, general manager of Pemex,¹⁰ the Mexican nationalized petroleum industry, announced in January 1958 that domestic oil production would be stepped up enough to end petroleum imports from the United States by June 1958.¹¹ Along the border, in recent years, U.S. gasoline as well as oil have been retailed at service stations—this, despite the politically emotional nature of the oil expropriation of 1938, the March 18 anniversary date of which is celebrated nationally every year. Provincial newspapers south of the borderlands would have no incentive to comment on that particular Pemex announcement. But *El Heraldo*, an independent Tijuana daily owned by Ruben D. Luna, pointed out

¹⁰ Bermúdez was replaced December 1, 1958, by Pascual Gutiérrez Roldán, after 12 years as top official of Pemex.

¹¹ But the summer of 1958 found the national oil monopoly threatened by a wildcat strike. A wage increase ended the threat but production continued to lag behind domestic needs, thus extending oil importation during 1959.

in an editorial on January 15, 1958, that

. . . more than half the gasoline sold in this city is bought by tourists and many of them use credit cards issued by U.S. gasoline companies selling their products in Baja California. . . . when importation is prohibited . . . sales at Baja California gasoline stations will suffer tremendously.

Here was an independent provincial newspaper criticizing a federal official of cabinet rank directly, commenting on a politically explosive topic. *El Heraldo* spoke in the interests of Tijuana gasoline stations representing an investment of \$8,000,000 (U.S.) and a source of employment for hundreds who would be jobless if sales to Americans were to drop.

✚ TODAY IN MEXICO, DESPITE TENSIONS which on occasion befuddle the operations of the smaller weeklies, the provincial press can speak for its own communities. Away from the dozen largest cities, the level of technical skill is low. But the spirit is high.

After the military fighting of 1910-1920, the Mexican Social Revolution set out to provide the climate for a free press. This followed 35 years of press suppression under Díaz and a decade of chaos after the overthrow of Díaz.¹² For seven years, the free press tradition, established by Madero and reaffirmed by Obregón, grew. Then in April 1927, press censorship spread.¹³ Other setbacks to a truly healthy press came in the 1930's. As Edward Alvarez, grandson of the publisher of the daily *El Informador* of Guadalajara, reported to the California Press Association in December 1957, one painful episode took place in his home state:

In 1937 the governor of Jalisco, Everardo Topete, began a road building

program. *El Informador* editorially attacked the seemingly high cost of the road program. Thereupon the paper was prevented by one means or another from publishing regularly for one year. Picket lines surrounded the printing plant. However, other newspapers came to the support of *El Informador* and it finally won its case in a court of law. Young Alvarez implied at the California convention that such suppression still poses a threat to Mexican provincial newspapers. In general it does not, however.

On occasion, a local political event will fan out like the concentric circles of a sound wave, from the provincial city of origin to neighboring cities, thence to cities in adjacent states, reverberating in states beyond and in the press of Mexico City.

Take the example of the regional boss of the dominant political party, PRI, Gonzalo N. Santos, and Gov. Manuel Alvarez in the state of San Luis Potosí. The opposition to Santos and Alvarez grew during the autumn of 1958, formalizing as the Unión Cívica Potosina, headed by Luis Fernando Rangel. In September and October the Potosí press began carrying strong charges by Rangel that the governor was a mere lackey of the regional political boss. After *El Sol de San Luis* and *El Heraldo*, both dailies in the state capital, ran the charges, the stories were filed on regional wires to *El Siglo* and *La Opinión* in Torreón, Coahuila, and to *El Norte* and *El Sol* in Monterrey, Nuevo León. The next round of charges and countercharges appeared simultaneously in dailies in Mexico City, Torreón, Monterrey, Puebla and Nuevo Laredo, just one day after they originally appeared in the San Luis Potosí dailies. Strikes and political campaigning by the UCP in November and December finally paid off. On Dec. 7, 1958, in municipal elections, the top city office went to Salvador Nava, UCP candidate and arch-foe of the Santos political machine.

¹² Article 7 of the Mexican Constitution, written in 1917, states: "Freedom to write and publish articles on any subject is inviolable. No law or authority may establish a previous censorship . . ."

¹³ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and Its Heritage* (New York: The Century Company, 1928), p. 664.

The capital city of the state of Sonora is Hermosillo, where *El Heraldito*, independent daily, competes vigorously with *El Regional* and *El Imparcial* in covering the entire state. The latter two dailies have the advantage of being part of the small but efficient José Healy newspaper chain (the third Healy paper being *El Informador* of Navojoa, Sonora).

In October 1958, Enguerrando Tapia, news editor of *El Imparcial*, gathered facts and figures on a situation at Puerto Peñasco, on the Sonoran coast at the northern end of the Gulf of California, only 60 miles from the Arizona border.

The governor of the state of Sonora, Alvaro Obregón, accompanied by editor Tapia and an inspection committee, visited the La Cholla Bay area adjacent to Puerto Peñasco late in October. What they found shocked them.

There were cabins not for rent to Mexicans, but "just to Anglos," in a tourist center restricted to foreigners. Even worse, the U.S. citizens occupying these exclusive cabins had no valid tourist cards. The news editor, the governor and the committee also found signs in English without any attempt at translation into Spanish.

But nationality restrictions and monolingual signs were not the only violations of Mexican law. The Mexican constitution itself prohibits foreign ownership of land within 35 miles of the seacoasts or international borders.

The newspaper investigation led to governmental investigation and litigation to end the illegal practices. After newspaper exposure, the outright manifestations of racial discrimination were ended at the resort area.

The alertness of Tapia, the provincial newspaper editor, uncovered a "Bad Neighbor Policy" and brought needed reform.

✱ MEXICO SEEMINGLY POSSESSES THE impossible. From 1917 to 1954, literacy increased from 30% to 65%. Since

1954, however, the increase in the population has gone up faster than the adult literacy campaign and the rural school building program. Thus the percentage of the population able to read and write totals perhaps no more than 55.¹⁴ Newspaper circulations continue to increase, however. What is happening? More adults who formerly did not buy newspapers now buy them; a middle class is emerging.

In 1960, Mexican newspapers of the provinces will improve technically. They are interwoven into the national fabric, politically and socially.

Attitudes and accumulated knowledge about anyone's environment shape his actions, but this stored-up information must be supplemented by a flow of current data about the world around him. The more complicated the environment of the Mexican of the hinterlands, the greater his need for current information becomes. Radio news helps.¹⁵ Mexico City's great dailies—*Excelsior*, *El Universal*, *Novedades*, *La Prensa*—help. Weekly news magazines, *Tiempo* in particular, also help. But the emerging middle class of Mexicans, living far removed from the national capital, can get details of the region about them only through a regional newspaper.

The fertility of Mexican women, the absence or rejection of birth control means, and the expansion of modern medical facilities in the provinces combine to boost the total population faster than the campaign to eradicate illiteracy can advance. But newspaper circulations grow. Obviously the Mexican provincial press serves a national need for local and regional information.

¹⁴ See Secretaría de Economía, Dirección General de Estadística, *Compendio Estadístico* (Mexico, D. F., 1957), but remember that literacy statistics for Mexico since 1955 have been less than complete, with the government putting its best political foot forward.

¹⁵ For a discussion of radio, see Marvin Alisky, "Radio's Role in Mexico," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 31:66-72 (Winter 1954).