

The Grant was established by 116 people from the El Paso Area, each were provided with a square plot of 50 varas on each side. In 1840, thirty-two families from the Pueblo of Senecú applied to join the group which had not yet departed for El Paso. In support of their request, the prefect of El Paso stated

“Your excellency being aware of the complaints which the **natives of the pueblo of Senecú** have repeatedly made, objecting that their lands be occupied by citizens settled in said pueblo, prevents my stating minutely the powerful reasons that hinder acceding to the prayer of the petitioners, who, although true they suffer hardships from the want of lands, can apply for them if they desire to employ themselves in the work of the new colonization of Doña Ana, where there are sufficient affording the conveniences that the industrious man should desire in human life--all these being reasons that prompted the goodness of your excellency to make the concession of lands general of the said colony to all the native citizens who may wish to permanently settle therein. Your excellency notwithstanding the foregoing will determine according to your superior pleasure. Town of El Paso, October 19, 1840. JOSE MORALES” (emphasis added)



It is broadly understood that the somewhat untold history of the Doña Ana Bend Colony Grant is that it was established by Piro and Manso people who faced displacement in the El Paso area and sought to return to lands that were similar to the Socorro, NM, lands from which they fled almost exactly 2 centuries earlier. This tracks a rich, interwoven history of southern New Mexico Pueblos making the Mesilla Valley their home and supporting other detribalized and displaced people. Many of the families who were first granted land as a part of the DABCG were listed in the tribal roles at Senecu, Ysleta, & Socorro (TX).



Figure 3. Portion of Pope's (1854) Map Showing Doña Ana Village.

The Alcalde would establish the community of Las Cruces in 1849. In 1908, the Dona Ana Bend Colony would support the Tortugas Pueblo when an Arizona Priest would prohibit them from performing their ceremony at the Mission church of St. Genevieve in Las Cruces. The Grant would provide them with lands to the south to establish their place of worship and ceremony. Las Cruces, Mesilla, & Tortugas all follow the architectural and planning elements pioneered at Dona Ana.

It wasn't until 1868, the U.S Court of Private land Claims confirmed the 35,399.017 acres of the DABCG, including the village of Doña Ana.

Disrepair:

On the heels of the grant, the U.S.-Mexican war broke out, causing an influx of powerful elites from the east and El Paso flooded into the Mesilla Valley and border disputes. Following the end of the Mexican-American war, Doñaneros moved across the river, still within the Grant Boundaries, to establish the town of Mesilla, to be back in Mexico. When the river shifted, it caused a boundary dispute between Mexico & the U.S., which was later resolved by the Gadsden Purchase. After the Mexican-American War, the Mesilla Valley would also become a flashpoint for confederate and union disputes regarding territory. In 1882, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe

railroad was established in Las Cruces, in an attempt by the American's to decentralize and destabilize the existing power structure.

The area was dominated by injustice. U.S. Army personnel and American civilians made efforts to expand their encroachment. In January of 1850, for example, the Juez de Paz of Senecú reported that four Americans infiltrated the pueblo and stole a cart and three yoke of oxen. The report indicated that this was not an isolated incident and that the Americans had violated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Despite no connection to the grant, the DABCG appears to have been dominated by newly arrived Americans, such as Captain Thomas Branigan, one of two appraisers on the DABCG board, who focused on doling out land to the new arrivals, rather than preserving the commons and the grant itself. Newly-arrived Americans also dominated the acequia associations, focusing on large scale agriculture rather than the culture of the Acequias. These acequias began to be absorbed in 1918 by the Elephant Butte Irrigation, full control was assumed in 1979, extinguishing the Doña Ana Acequia.

Today:

The DABCG still exists in Article 5 but its formal existence as a board appears to have faded away as common land was absorbed by local governments. It is unclear when the board disbanded or for what reason(s) but what is clear is that the entity is ripe for revival as the lands in the mesilla valley become more and more scarce and much of it destroyed for commercial use. The DABCG could be an important protectorate of the history of the Mesilla Valley, the village of Doña Ana and a vehicle for preservation of architecture held in common.