



The Acequia Community Colorado's First Settlements High School

These lessons are dedicated to the original hispano settlers and their descendants who have worked to maintain their culturally significant acequia communities and the organizations that help protect that heritage.

**Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association
Land Rights Council
Heredero's Grazing Association
Costilla County Conservancy District**

This curriculum is made possible through funding of

**The History Colorado State Historical Fund
Costilla County Economic Development Council
Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center
Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association
Costilla County Conservancy District
Colorado Water Conservation Board**



The Spanish and Mexican Land Grants High School

Learner Outcomes

- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Examine the characteristics of places and regions, and the changing nature among geographic and human interactions
- Express an understanding of how civic participation affects policy by applying the rights and responsibilities of a citizen

Connections to 2020 Colorado State Standards

Social Studies

High School: History - 1.2, Geography - 2.3 Civics - 4.1

The Program

This program includes three key components: Reading for meaning and understanding, hands-on lesson and the option of a field trip to visit the built historic landscape. While not all classes are able to visit the site, we hope that the visual and tactile experiences within these lessons help students develop an understanding of these Hispano settlements.



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Settling the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant — The Mexican American War

Time: 2—45 minute class periods

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Investigate causes and effects of significant events throughout United States history
- Analyze the complexity of events throughout United States history
- Understand which geographic variables influenced interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Understand the role Mexican Land Grants played in the settlement of these early Hispano

Materials

1. US Map 1830's map
2. Activity sheets on pages 4 and 5

Preparation:

Print copies or project the map on page 6

Print each student a copy of the worksheets on pages 4 and 5

Introduction: Show students a map of North America circa 1830. Begin the discussion by asking them to explain how it is different from the geography of today. Note who is in control of which territories — particularly the size of Mexico and who is absent from the map—Indigenous communities.

Ask the students to think about the process through which the 1830s boundaries changed to those of today. Use the Mexican-American War to open that inquiry .

Discussion: From the perspective of today, it can be difficult to imagine the fate of North America being in flux. But, this was exactly the case for many centuries. Only in the mid-1800s did the territorial borders that we are accustomed to, begin to take shape.

Santa Fe was founded eight years before Jamestown. The Spanish used missions and land grants to populate their northern holdings in California and other parts of the Southwest — all lands that eventually constituted the northern half of the new nation of Mexico. In the early 1800s, the small nation of the United States grew exponentially with the Louisiana Purchase — some of which had already been transferred from Spain to France.

Indigenous cultures struggled within this context to hold on to their ancestral lands and ways of life. Some, like the Comanche, proved more powerful than European derived cultures. Mexico invited Anglo settlers from the United States to settle Texas in order to buffer the impact of the Comanche. But, these settlers brought with them the social and racial views of the Plantation economy and Anglo superiority.

These views worked in concert with the evolving concept of Manifest Destiny — a notion of preordained right to conquer and rule North America from coast to coast. It was this notion — and the implied inferiority of non-Anglos like Indians and Latinos — that colored political, economic and social aspects of U.S. expansion.

The primary goal of this lesson is to understand the radically different geography of North America in the early 1800s and to invite them to examine U.S. expansion from diverse perspectives. The lesson outcome will be to understand how these people responded to political, economic and social change. After tracking this information on the activity sheet, they present their information to the entire class.

All students will respond individually to reflection questions in writing or through discussion.



Settling the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant — The Mexican American War

Time: 2—45 minute class periods

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Investigate causes and effects of significant events throughout United States history
- Analyze the complexity of events throughout United States history
- Understand which geographic variables influenced interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Understand the role Mexican Land Grants played in the settlement of these early Hispano

Materials

1. US Map 1830's map
2. Activity sheets on pages 4 and 5

Preparation:

Print copies or project the map on page 6

Print each student a copy of the worksheets on pages 4 and 5

Activity:

The Latino experiences of the Southwest in the 1800s illustrate how our nation's growth has sometimes been in tension with its core values of equality, democracy and individual freedoms.

Have students view the YouTube video— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U9vbZwFZL4> *What was the Mexican American War* (The History Channel). After viewing the segment, explain that students will examine the story of U.S. expansion from the point of view of people in Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. Have students read the introduction then divide students into small research groups. Using film clips and internet articles have each group examine history from the point of view of characters who were in Colorado and New Mexico from the early 1800's through the early 1900's.

Through these character track the tactics of U.S. expansion and examine the impact on citizens' wealth, rights and safety, contrasting formal treaty agreements with what actually happened. Students will examine the strategies used by early Mexican Americans to respond to political, economic and social change.

Conclusion:

After tracking this information on the activity sheet, they present their information to the entire class. All students respond to reflection questions in writing or through discussion.



“The lands that America wanted to occupy, in their imaginations they were empty, but in reality they were not. They were full of Indigenous people of one sort or another and in various parts of the country they were full of Spaniards and their descendants.”

- Gary Gerstle, Historian

Settling the United States

Much of what is now the United States was part of Mexico, not to mention the territory of Indigenous cultures. The mid-1800s marked massive expansion of the United States. While some Mexican citizens resisted U.S. expansion into their lands, others welcomed it. Regardless, all Mexicans in the region absorbed by the United States were guaranteed the rights of U.S. citizens according to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. But, things rarely worked out that way.

In this activity, you’ll examine how particular individuals and communities responded to borders changing around them.

1. In small groups, view at least two clips or articles. In each clip, you will follow the story of two historical figures. You may need to view/read the clip/article more than once to gather all the information.
2. Once your group has organized its information, present the story to the rest of the class.
3. Complete the reflection questions.

Group Work Sheet

A.) Document where and when the historical figure(s) lived and what their life was like in Mexico before U.S. expansion:

NAME	LOCATION	TIME FRAME	STATUS/ACTIVITY BEFORE U.S. EXPANSION
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B.) Next, consider U.S. expansion into the regions you selected above. Focusing on your historical figures, detail some of the actions and events that caused Mexicans to become “foreigners in their own lands.” What tactics did U.S. arrivals use to transform lands and social orders of what was Mexico?

LOCATION	TIME FRAME	EVENTS, TACTICS & ATTITUDES DIRECTED AT THE RESIDENT MEXICAN POPULATION
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C.) Mexican Americans reacted to U.S. expansion in different ways. How did the individuals you selected respond? What did they do and how did their lives change?

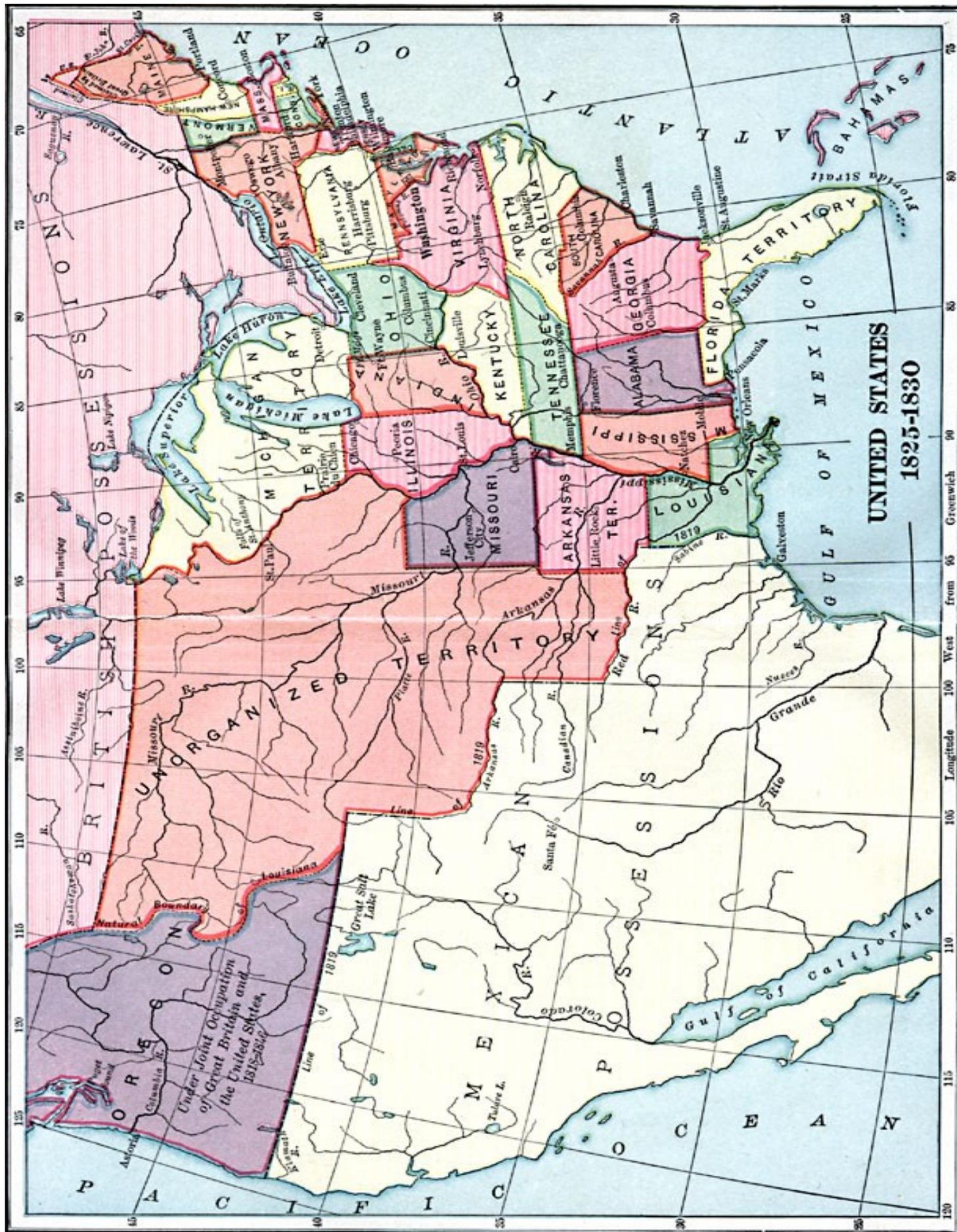
NAME	LOCATION	DATE	RESPONSE/STATUS AFTER U.S. EXPANSION
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Once Complete present your groups findings to the class



Individual Reflection Question's

- Consider the individuals you selected. What did U.S. expansion mean for them personally? Were they able to preserve their status, property and rights? If so, how? If not, what happened to them and how did they respond?
- A combination of attitudes, economic strategies and brute force were used to erode Mexican rights and social structures. What are some examples of these different tactics?
- Compare the experience of Colorado with that of New Mexico. How was the experience of U.S. expansion different there?
- Often, traditional views of U.S. history look westward and move from East to West. What other perspectives and issues surface when we examine this history from the Western perspective of the Mexicans of Colorado and New Mexico? Did the arrival of the United States necessarily mean the arrival of the brand of equality and democracy that are associated with it? Why or why not?
- When land transferred from the control of Mexico to the United States, there were certainly implications for the Mexican communities. But what communities — which had been on these lands longest of all — were subjugated under both Mexican and U.S. regimes? If the Mexican suffered during expansion, what do you think was the implication for the mestizo and Indian communities?
- There is a Chicano (Mexican American) saying: “We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us.” What does this mean and how does it relate to your research? Cite examples of people and events to support your explanation.





Settling the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant

Time: 45 minutes

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Formulate compelling and supporting questions after evaluating primary sources for point of view and historical context.
- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Apply geographic representations and perspectives to analyze human movement, spatial patterns, systems, and the connections and relationships among them
- Evaluate how individuals and groups can effectively use the structure and functions of various levels of government to shape policy

Materials

1. Globe, atlas or Google Earth
2. Map of Colorado
3. Map of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant
4. Lesson copy for each student

Preparation:

Copy of the attached Spanish and Mexican Land Grants maps.

Copy of lesson/reading for each student

Introduction: In this lesson students will learn about the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant and how this type of land purchase helped settle the early San Luis Valley in southern Colorado. Begin the discussion by having students draw the Cornell Note chart in their journals or use a photo copy of the chart included in this lesson. This is a great opportunity to use a globe, atlas or Google Earth. Follow the sequence from Earth to United States and finally moving to Colorado. Once you land on Colorado find the location of the San Luis Valley and from there move to the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in south central Colorado. Using the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant map, explain that they will be reading about the land grant and its settlement.

Begin the lesson with the following que questions:

- Why did early settlers choose to leave their place of origin to build new settlements?
- Who were some of the first groups of people to settle southern Colorado?
- What variables influenced where Hispano settlers chose to build these settlements?
- Describe how these early settlers used resources found in nature to build settlements.
- Why was the placement of a settlement critical to its success?
- What is a land grant? How did it help early Hispano settlers create viable settlements?

Discuss the questions with students helping them develop a sense of what each question is asking. Have students begin reading the story on page 10, as they read they should identify and write down points that address each question in their Cornell notes log be sure to remind students to use the maps and drawings on pages 17,18 and 19 to understand the location of these events.

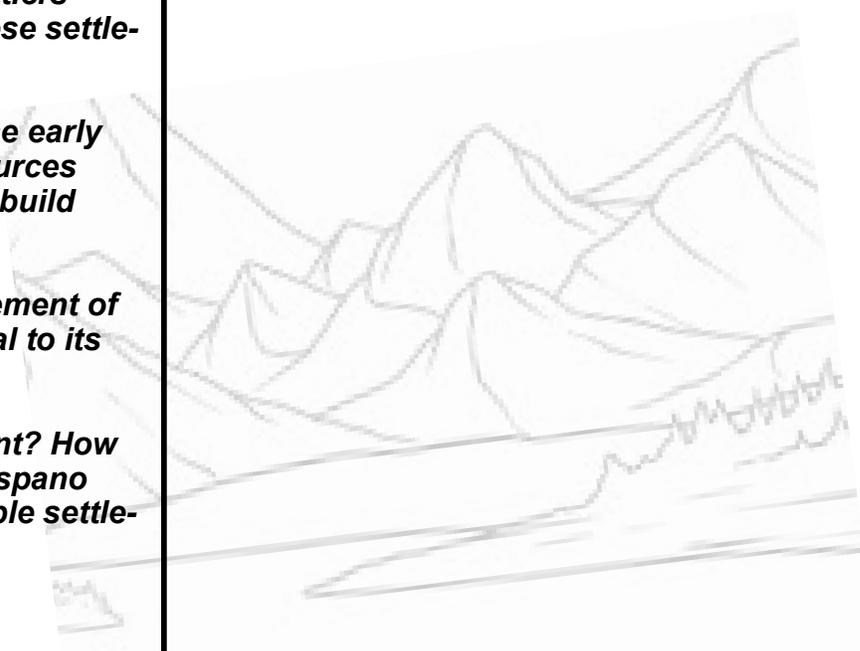
Name:

Topic:

Cues:

- *Key words that are new or descriptive.*
- *Why did early settlers choose to leave to build new settlements?*
- *Who were some of the first groups of people to settle southern Colorado?*
- *What variables influenced where Hispano settlers chose to build these settlements?*
- *Describe how these early settlers used resources found in nature to build settlements.*
- *Why was the placement of a settlement critical to its success?*
- *What is a land grant? How did it help early Hispano settlers create viable settlements?*

Notes:



Summary:



In 1848 the defeated Mexican Republic signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with the United States, severing half-a-million square miles of its northern territory to retain its core southern provinces. Because of Mexico's losses, land titles of former Mexican citizens throughout the Southwest were brought into question and often revoked by an American judicial system unaware of traditional Spanish-Mexican land occupancy and legal customs. All too often the process of invalidating land titles involved legal deception. Eventually, the courts diminished or denied a holdings. Against the foreground of a financially marginalized and politically paralyzed Mexico and the dominant occupation of American forces, Beaubien commenced populating the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant on the Rio Culebra.

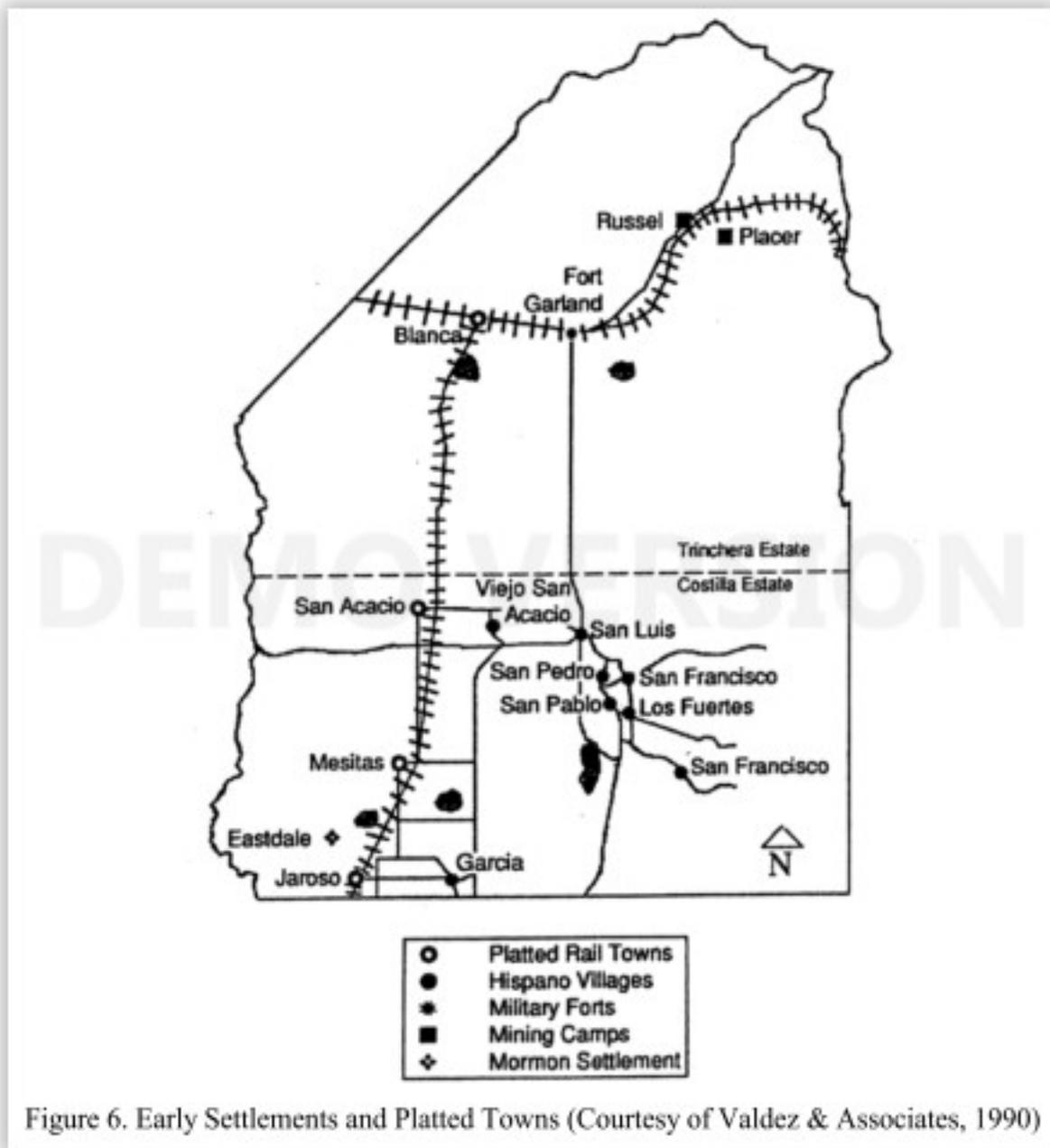
Taos residents begin to expand northward into the uplands frontier. The extended family networks, the water-land rights, and religion provided the foundation for the villages to dig irrigation networks (acequias), establish food plots, and graze animals.

Rio Culebra Villages

An important long-term influence on the function of a community is its location, layout, and use patterns. Planning was of paramount interest to the Spanish in the development of the new world. The Spanish employed two methods for locating and land use in its provinces: The Laws of the Indies and granting of land, both of these methods became interwoven within isolated borderlands. The Laws of the Indies and land grant customs thus encouraged land use and sound siting practices in areas where self-reliance could be insured and the survival of a village maintained.

The location of the Culebra Villages certainly applied the ordinances of the Laws of the Indies. The Beaubien Deed states; "all inhabitants shall have the benefits of pastures, water, wood, lumber" (Costilla County Clerk. 1863. Book 1. 1:256) Water allocation was likewise patterned after irrigation methods employed by both Hispanos and the Pueblo Indians of the Rio Grande (Simmons 1972, 136). Which was to combine the natural surface water courses and manmade acequias, to provide a basis for portioning out individual farmland to settlers. They also employed the French system of land division, where the lands were divided into long lots or *extensions* that were platted perpendicular to the river or stream. The width of the lots were measured in Spanish *varas* equivalent to 33 inches. Because of this predominant pattern of long slender parcels, the county was named Costilla meaning rib. Land grant recipients were given a donation or purchased land equaling between 50 and 100 *varas* wide and of different lengths often several miles long. (Stoller in Exhibit A. [n.d],.32)

By 1851, the pobladores (settlers) commenced constructing plazas, a village center where the community would gather, along the banks of Rio Culebra, San Francisco, and Vallejos creeks. At each intersection a village was developed and subsequently named in honor of a saint. At the east of the Rio Culebra was the small village of San Pedro (ca 1850) in honor of Saint Peter, to the south was the Plaza de San Pablo (1852) dedicated to Saint Paul. The lower Culebra, was the smallest village of San Acacio (ca 1850-53), named in honor of Santo Acacio. La plaza de San Francisco (ca 1853-4), was located along San Francisco creek and was dedicated to Saint Francis. The final village, Los Fuertes, was situated midway between Chama and San Francisco, near Vallejos Creek. Los Fuertes, meaning little fortress, was named to honor San Isidro (the patron of farmers). The pobladores place naming favored saint-protectors because the villagers were overwhelmingly Catholic as their ancestors before them.



One of the goals of the villagers after they moved out of the plaza was to construct central irrigation ditches, or acequias, and an interrelated network of laterals, or sangrias. Like their building techniques, the pobladores transferred acequia traditions from northern New Mexico into the highlands of southern Colorado. While the origins of the acequia nomenclature and some practices are rooted in the Moorish occupation of Spain, the techniques and infrastructure were hybridized by Roman contact with the Spanish and Spanish contact with Pueblos in the Rio Arriba.



Land Speculation and Railroad Development

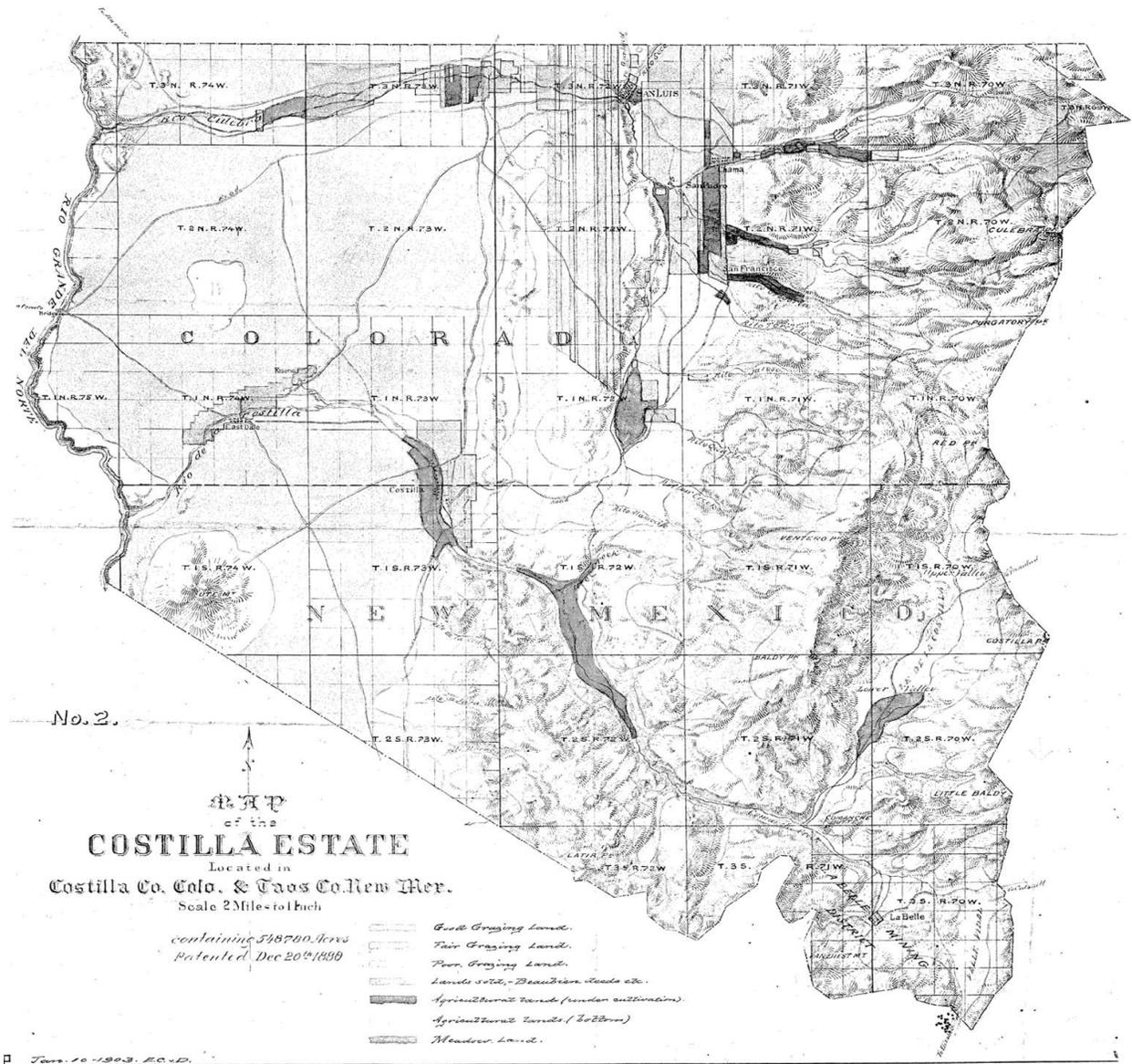
By 1861, the northern half of Taos County (which included the entire Sangre de Cristo Land Grant) became a part of the Territory of Colorado. Once designated, the grant was one of Colorado's first seventeen counties. Notwithstanding this newly acquired legal status, the villagers maintained extended kinship ties, social networks, and religious bonds with New Mexico. Although the vast majority of the populous had no indication as to what the new boundary demarcations meant, it marked the beginning of radical changes yet to come.

To establish the villages rancheros endangered their lives and those of their families. Often risking what meager resources they possessed, settlers believed Beaubien's grant would replicate old patterns. Unknown to the vast majority of the settlers, Carlos Beaubien divided the million-acre grant between his family and business associates while they were still struggling to settle the land. By 1860, Beaubien took the necessary steps to have the title to the grant confirmed by Congress. Between 1862 and 1863, he formalized 135 deeds to the settlers in the Rio Costilla, Rio Culebra, and Rio Trinchera watersheds. Correspondingly, Beaubien penned a conveyance outlining rights and responsibilities of settlers. In 1863, an ill Beaubien (and the partners he controlled) agreed to sell the grant to William Gilpin, first territorial governor of Colorado, for four cents an acre. Beaubien filed a document requiring Gilpin to fulfill his promises, inducements, and Commitments to the settlers.

This contract was important in two ways. Foremost, it conveyed to Gilpin all covenants and agreements undertaken by Beaubien. Second, it clearly established his obligations to maintain the status quo of Mexican land grant tradition and custom by allowing the settlers to use resources in the uplands in common with any future owner of the grant. To amass the necessary \$41,000 to purchase the grant Gilpin obtained a loan from New York investment bankers and a core of European and eastern speculators. Overnight he transformed his million acre "ranch" into a speculator's paradise. Gilpin and his partners incorporated the United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company (USFLEC) and established offices in Colorado and London.

Key to this undertaking was William Blackmore, an English capitalist who dabbled in mining, railroads, and marketing of American properties to British investors. Backed by the Amsterdam banking firm of Wertheim and Gompertz and Blackmore's "pool of friends," the board of directors of the USFLEC divided the landscape in half. By forming the Costilla and Trinchera Estates, the USFLEC facilitated the sale of the grant. In the interim, Blackmore and Gilpin distributed promotional pamphlets to investors and hired geologist Ferdinand Hayden to produce a highly exaggerated survey to market the grant's mineral potential. The eventual goal of the USFLEC was to settle German and Dutch emigrants in 25 European modeled new towns, to develop manufacturing, and to promote mining.

Company agents posed a serious challenge to the Mexican villagers who had worked the land they claimed by Beaubien's promise, by legal conveyance, and through twenty-five years of adverse possession. Beginning in 1871, the USFLEC undertook an aggressive campaign to remove the pobladores from their holdings.



1888 Map of the Costilla Estate

To accomplish this objective the company assembled representatives from the central villages. The village leadership could not read English and they were easily duped into signing a company prepared agreement that undermined communal rights of pobladores to the uplands and lowlands. Subsequently, the USFLEC attacked legitimate titles, forcing villagers into expensive legal proceedings. Many were intimidated into repurchasing their holdings, the court ordered others evicted, and a few sold their holdings and left.

Many Hispanos unaware of the promotion of the grant co-existed with Gilpin. However, when he began to limit land holdings after his ownership, they became suspicious of his business dealings. Eventually Gilpin and company began to legally challenge and reduce the common lands and water rights given to the settlers by Beaubien under Mexican land grant customs. In order to market the grant, the company sought to build the required infrastructure. In conjunction with the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad company (D&RG) and General William Jackson Palmer, railroad promoter, Gilpin and the grant owners successfully pushed the railroad into the area of the grant by 1877.



In spite of the seeming prosperity in the late 1890's, the Freehold Company realized that the mining and farming colonies would not become a reality. After thirty years of recruitment, only one agricultural colony had purchased a block of land. Plagued by a series of financial and legal problems, the U.S. Freehold Land & Immigration Company defaulted on property taxes and finally went into bankruptcy.

In 1902, the Costilla Estate Development Company was formed to sell 70,000 acres of the southern end of the grant for agricultural development (Griswold 1980,3). The new company would accomplish this goal, in part by establishing another shorter track to link the Costilla and Trinchera Estates into the D & RG rail network. The construction of the San Luis Southern Railway, south from the mainline of the D & RG in 1910, laid the foundation for the platted towns of New San Acacio, Mesita and Jaroso. Water was required for agriculture, so the development of canals and reservoirs were required to attract new immigrant settlers.

Land south of Los Fuertes was purchased from the Sanchez Family to construct an earthen reservoir. The Sanchez Reservoir was completed in 1911, standing 120 feet high with 17.5 miles of shoreline designed to hold 104,000 acre feet of water. At the time of its construction it was considered the fifth largest earthen and stone dam in the world (Griswold 1980, 23). The arid landscape of the Costilla Estates was transformed into a rural Midwest rail and farm landscape. The architectural styles were a stark contrast to the vernacular designs of the Rio Culebra Villages. As new towns grew and water resources were diverted from the villages via the Sanchez Reservoir, the local Hispano economy became dominated by Midwesterners.

Between 1940 and 1950, Costilla County lost 19 percent of its population. The trend continued in 1960, as out-migration accelerated by 25 percent. With the largest population decline in Colorado, Costilla County had the lowest per capita income in the state. The dismal statistics related to the fact that two-thirds of the residents earned less than \$3,000 annually. With half the households having no telephone, water, or toilets in their homes, the census profile clearly demonstrates why so many people relocated to the city. Of those remaining, many continued to farm and raise livestock at subsistence levels.

This fragile equilibrium changed after a North Carolina timber speculator in 1960's purchased the 77,000-acre portion of the land grant, for \$7 an acre. The new owner fenced his property boundaries and erected gates at all entrances to La Sierra. Once the land was enclosed, the owner went to court to barricade county-maintained roads. The remaining task was to clear the disputed title to the land as inexpensively as possible. This was because it was "subject to the claims of local people" to pasture livestock, gather wood, and lumber. To avoid the issue of historic settlement rights, the new owner hired a team of attorneys to attack Beaubien's compact with the ancestors of residents.

The land was secured only after moving the proceedings to Denver and through the application of an obscure process called the Torrence Title Action. Many community members believed the village's constitutional rights to due process had been violated. Once the judge issued the legal declaration denying community access, grazing, wood gathering, and other activities were severely curtailed and the frail economy was dismantled.



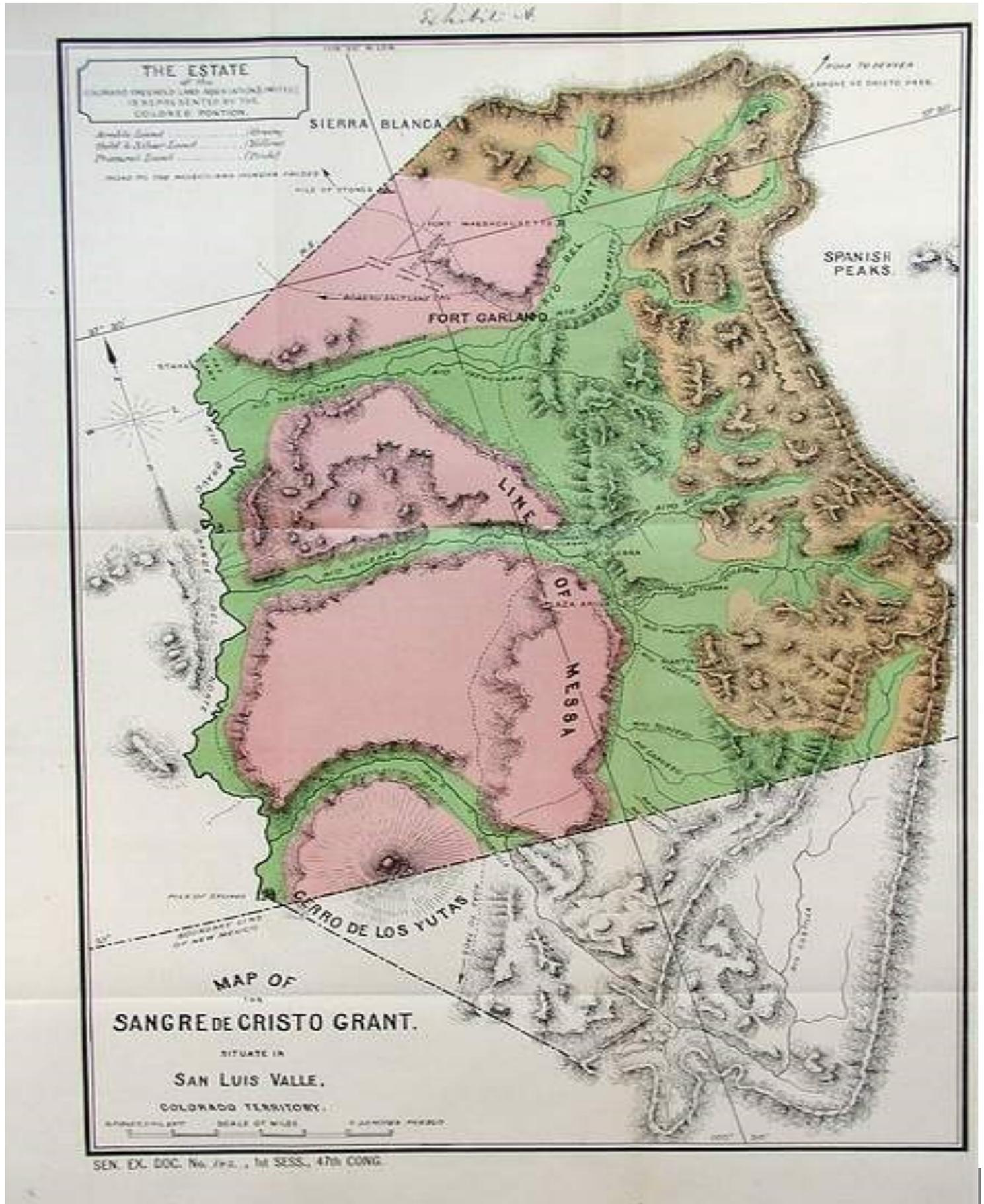
Organized resistance continued throughout the 1960s, culminating in the incorporation of the Land Rights Council (LRC) in 1979. The Land Rights Council's legal team, operating on a pro bono (without charge) basis for nearly 25 years, continued to appeal for a new trial. In 1993, the case was argued before the Colorado Supreme Court. A year later the court ordered a new trial. Thirty-three years after the hearing to quiet the title to La Sierra, the community had its day in court. After the lower court ruled against the community, LRC's legal team looked to the Court of Appeals for relief. Again, the court upheld the ruling of the lower court. At the end of 2000, the Colorado Supreme Court allowed LRC's legal team to argue against the Court of Appeals decision. Ten months later oral arguments were heard, and in the summer of 2002 the justices made a courageous decision by acknowledging due process violations and awarding grazing, wood harvesting and timbering use rights to La Sierra.

In their groundbreaking decision, the Colorado Supreme Court's "easement-like" judgment will allow a certified class of individuals to undertake traditional rights to gather wood, timber and graze at domestic levels. Acting in accordance with the Colorado Supreme Court ruling acknowledging historic communal rights, LRC is key to implementing the Supreme Court decision by assisting the community in developing a comprehensive "use rights management plan." This plan will enable multi-generation residents living in the Rio Culebra Basin to continue their agricultural traditions and subsistence on La Sierra in an ecologically sustainable manner.

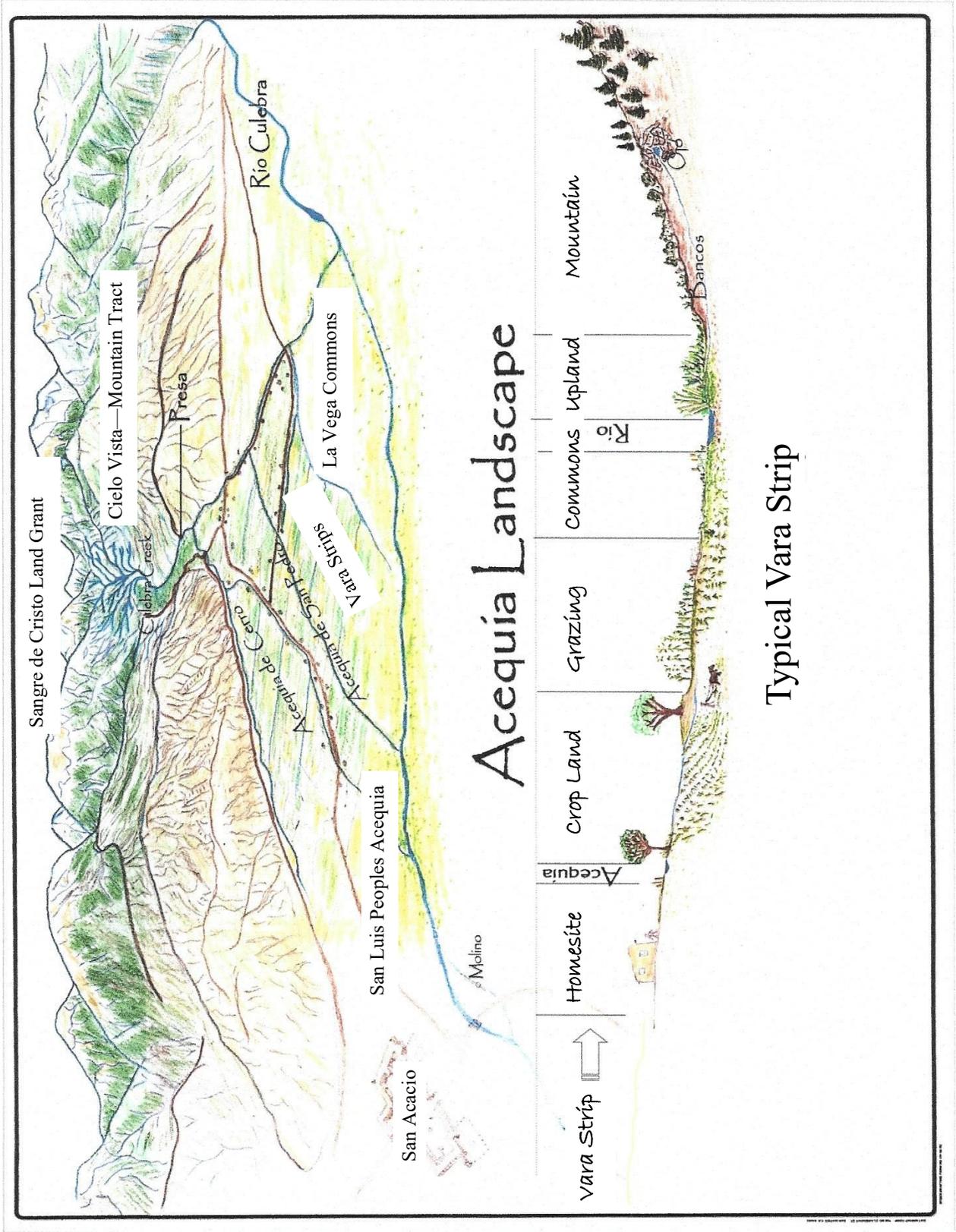




Map of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant before Settlement



View of the Vara Strip (long lot) settlement



Typical Vara Strip



Settling the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant

Time: 2—45 minute class periods

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Formulate compelling and supporting questions after evaluating primary sources for point of view and historical context.
- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Apply geographic representations and perspectives to analyze human movement, spatial patterns, systems, and the connections and relationships among them
- Evaluate how individuals and groups can effectively use the structure and functions of various levels of government to shape policy

Materials

1. Sheets of butcher paper
2. Colored pencils, markers
3. Journal or notebook paper

Preparation:

Gather 1 sheet of butcher paper student group.

Activity:

This activity will be centered around the reading and note taking lesson from the previous class. Break students in to groups and explain that they will be mapping out their own land grant settlement as if they were going in front of Congress to justify the purchase and settlement of southern Colorado.

Students should first create an inset map of their proposed land grant area highlighting features of importance such as rivers/streams, forests for timber and firewood, grasslands and other essential resources.

Next, they will develop their settlement. The location should include key components identified in the reading and should be drawn to scale. Careful attention should be paid to the location and size of each vara strip homestead, ensuring the width and location match those described in the story.

Once the homesteads are laid out, the team should design the settlement plaza, identifying where the parish might be and what size it would be need to fit the prospective settlers. Have students consider what other infrastructure might be needed near the plaza to ensure the success of settlement.

Finally, students should name their village. If appropriate students can research independently to get a more in depth understanding of these settlements.

Conclusion:

Students should present their communities to the class and then after all are presented, work as the Congress to approve the most appropriate settlement.



Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Time: 2—45 minute classes

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Understand geographic variables influence interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Apply geographic representations and perspectives to analyze human movement, spatial patterns, systems, and the connections and relationships among them

Materials

- 2- 4' by 4' piece of Brown butcher paper.
- Colored pencils
- House cards with two types of house their should be 2 per person in the group.
- Green cards that represent agricultural fields.
- Blue satin ribbon 3' long, which represents the acequia Madre or river
- Blue yarn in different lengths, (6,12,18,24 and 36 inches and a second 18 inch piece with 4-5 knots in it) which represents the acequia water
- Brown paper bags.
- Copies of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Preparation:

Cut out the house and green field cards.

Prepare bags ahead of time include yarn and ribbon cut to length, prepared cards.

Copy of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Introduction: In this lesson students will learn about the Sangre de Cristo acequias and water sharing within these communities. The original settlers of Southern Colorado brought with them a form of land settlement and irrigation that was based on principles of equity, shared scarcity and cooperation in which water was viewed as a resource in place, rather than a commodity. This type of water distribution system is called an acequia. The word Acequia (a-sek-ee-ah) comes from the Arabic language and means “that which gives water.” Acequias are earthen ditches that allow water to be conveyed from a creek or river to homesteads and agricultural fields. Acequias are unique and longstanding cultural and legal institutions in Colorado. Spanish and Mexican farmers and ranchers who settled here long before Colorado became a state created these systems for irrigation and water sharing that ensure sustainable use of water, and create important community bonds. The most robust acequia community is near the town of San Luis, Colorado. Here there are 76 working acequias that support over 300 families, most of whom are descendants of the original land grant settlers. Most of these acequia farms and ranches operate as they did when they were originally settled, growing heritage crops or raising livestock that are grazed on acequia fed wet meadows.

Activity: Watch the video: *El Agua es Vida* (<https://vimeo.com/186250637>). When finished as a group discuss the following questions to begin the lesson.

1. Why do people decide to live where they are or move to other places?
2. Why is location important?
3. How do people interact with the environment and what are some of the consequences of those interactions?
4. How can we preserve fundamental values and beliefs in a world that is rapidly becoming one technology-linked village?
5. How are individual rights protected and challenged within the context of majority rule?



Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Time: 2—45 minute classes

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Understand geographic variables influence interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Apply geographic representations and perspectives to analyze human movement, spatial patterns, systems, and the connections and relationships among them

Materials

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- Brown paper bags.
- Copies of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Preparation:

Cut out the house and green field cards.

Prepare bags ahead of time include yarn and ribbon cut to length, prepared cards.

Copy of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Activity (continued):

6.What is the most effective allocation of the factors of production (land, labor, money, and natural resources)?

Divide students into groups of 3-5. A mixture of group sizes will make the lesson more compelling. Have the groups read the Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. (page 24-25)

Emphasize that the vast majority of the world’s population live near a body of water this is called a waterscape. In the case of the Sangre de Cristo land grant inhabitants, the waterscape was defined by the rivers and streams in the Culebra watershed. Explain that the class will work together to create a waterscape and prepare a model of a river and surrounding communities. Find a large floor space and have each group choose an area in this space and lay the brown paper down to represent the land.

Next have students open the brown paper bag, in it they will find the following items: house cards, green cards that represent agricultural fields, blue satin ribbon which represents the river, blue yarn in different lengths which represents the acequia water.

Take the light blue colored ribbon, which represents the river, and shape the curves and meanders that a river would naturally have as you wind it through the landscape. Briefly discuss how a natural river system acts, review the term watershed explaining that a watershed is an area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall to a common outlet such as the outflow of a reservoir, mouth of a bay, or any point along a stream channel. In the case of the Culebra watershed it drains into the rich agricultural bottom lands.

Next add the house cards, place them along the river in a way that will allow them to make the most of their water resources by giving them water to grow crops, water their livestock and have water for their households.

Remind them they are part of the acequia community whose members settled land that was measured in varas and was long and thin so the entire community could access the river.



Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Time: 2—45 minute classes

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Understand geographic variables influence interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Analyze historical time periods and patterns of continuity and change, through multiple perspectives, within and among cultures and societies.
- Apply geographic representations and perspectives to analyze human movement, spatial patterns, systems, and the connections and relationships among them

Materials

- 2- 4' by 4' piece of Brown butcher paper.
- Colored pencils
- House cards with two types of house their should be 2 per person in the group.
- Green cards that represent agricultural fields.
- Blue satin ribbon 3' long, which represents the acequia Madre or river
- Blue yarn in different lengths, (6,12,18,24 and 36 inches and a second 18 inch piece with 4-5 knots in it) which represents the acequia water
- Brown paper bags.
- Copies of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Preparation:

Cut out the house and green field cards.

Prepare bags ahead of time include yarn and ribbon cut to length, prepared cards.

Copy of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Activity (continued):

Add human settlements, you will have the two main home types adobe houses with their thick walls ,and then homes made from wood and timbers. Discuss what happens to the natural landscape when residential communities are built. Have groups make any changes to the model as a result of the discussion.

Now the model is ready for you to play the game! Explain that each of your groups will represent members of an acequia. That means they will need to work together as farming partners that will work the land off of each acequia. The object of the game is to grow as much food as possible in a growing season.

The challenge is not knowing how much water they will have in any one growing season. The amount of water in a growing season is determined by snow pack in the mountains, annual rain fall, and outside temperature. The length of a piece of yarn they select from the bag will determine the amount of water that can be used to irrigate for that round. A long length of yarn may irrigate all of their crops for the whole season. A short length will either irrigate few crops per season or maybe even no crops per season.

Begin the game by completing the following steps for each of the 10 rounds:

Have one person from each group pull a piece of yarn from the baggie. The students weave the chosen length of yarn through their community to determine how many crops that volume of water will irrigate. The group will get 1 point for every field that was irrigated.

Record the point value on the board for each group, remembering the yarn pieces with the knot indicate a catastrophic flood event and all crops are lost and they get zero points.

Conclusion:

When all ten rounds are completed, determine which groups were successful in their farming and which if any were not.



Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Time: 2—45 minute classes

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Learner Outcomes:

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- Brown paper bags.
- Copies of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Preparation:

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Prepare bags ahead of time include yarn and ribbon cut to length, prepared cards.

Copy of Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project. For each student

Activity (continued):

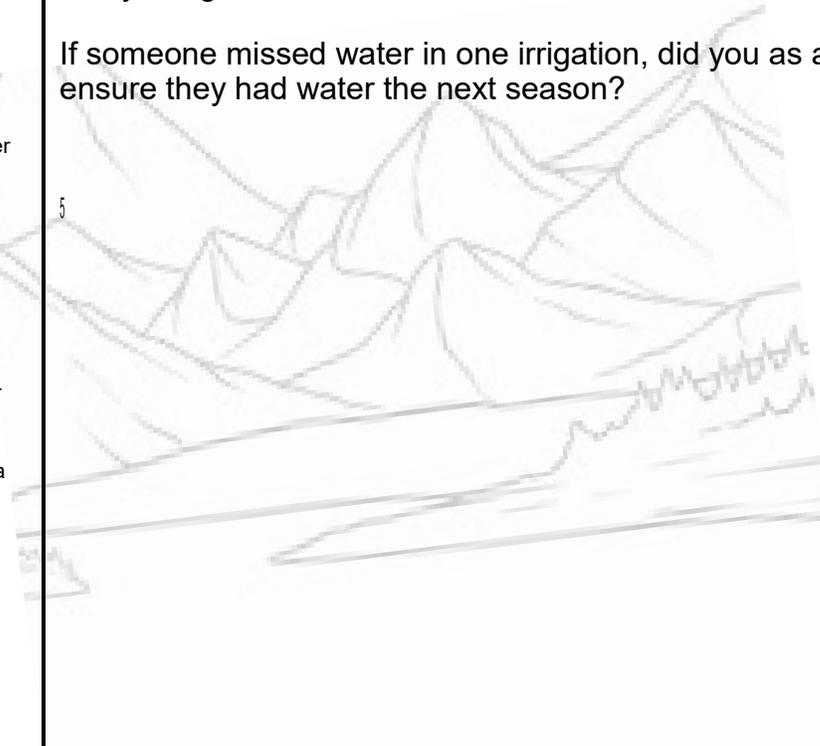
In their journals have students answer the following questions:

Remember, this game only focuses on water as a limiting factor in production, what other factors that can limit crop production and why? (invasion of pests, poor soil quality, etc).

How is this game and model like the actual practice of farming?
How is it different?

In times when there wasn't enough water, what could be done to ensure everyone got some water?

If someone missed water in one irrigation, did you as a community ensure they had water the next season?





Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project.

Driving down any rural highway in northern New Mexico or southern Colorado, you are sure to come across a valley with acequias—irrigation ditches that in some cases have existed for over a century. Simple in their design, acequias move water from a common source of water—a spring or a stream—through a network of ditches to replenish fields that have been carefully tended for generations. These community-based irrigation systems are central to traditions of life on the land that have sustained families these for generations and inspired many newcomers to embrace the acequia culture.

Acequias are one of the most enduring examples of human-made commons in North America. Their roots extend back thousands of years to people living in the arid lands of present-day India and the Middle East. The word acequia is of Arabic origin meaning “bearer of water” or “that which quenches thirst.” The acequias of the present-day Southwest U.S. combine Moorish traditions that took root in Spain. They have shaped the landscape, culture and communities of mestizos, genizaros, and mexicanos (collectively referred to as the Indo-Hispano people).

Their resilience in New Mexico and Southern Colorado can be explained in part by the fact that acequias continue to be vital to the spiritual and material existence of communities in the region. Even more importantly, acequias continue because of people’s attachment to the place they live, to the miracles made possible with water, and to a cultural longing to continue ancestral practices and pass them on to future generations.

The deep cultural place that acequias have in these communities can be explained to some extent by their communal roots. Generally, acequias were established as part of the community land grants under Spain and Mexico. Under that system, collective ownership of property was well established, and fit the way of life of land-based people. Families owned their the lots that comprise today’s small-scale farms and ranches) while the remaining lands, vegas (meadows/wetlands) and montes (mountains) were for the use of all the community. Before the advent of barbed wire fence, families’ livestock grazed throughout the mountains and valleys as a single herd under the watchful eye of a shepherd.

Bringing water to crops by constructing an acequia was one of the first priorities in establishing any community. Over time, these communities evolved intricate customs of distributing water based on the fundamental principle that water was essential to life and must be shared for the common good. Today, this practice, which is referred to as the repartimiento or reparto, is one of the central characteristics of the acequias. It is the day-to-day embodiment of the belief that water is life.



Understanding the Acequia— Past, Present and Future

Administration of Acequia Water—A Community Project (continued)

This commons view of land and water was challenged by the westward expansion of the United States, which culminated in the U.S. 1848 war against Mexico. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the agreement between the U.S. and Mexico that marked the end of the war, guaranteed the rights of the Mexicans who remained in the ceded territories (including New Mexico), the vast majority of mercedes or common lands were lost through privatization or incorporation into the federally managed U.S. lands. This loss remains vivid in the collective memory of the Indo-Hispano people of the region,

The Territorial Water Code of 1850 codified the basic principles of acequia governance including the democratic election of the mayordomo (ditch manager) and the practice of sharing the water among acequias along the same stream system. Water law in the Western United States is based on a doctrine that can be summarized as “first in time, first in right.” For acequias this was a mixed blessing. It seemed to conflict with the commons ethic of distribution, but it also implied a protected status for existing acequia water rights. According to acequia custom and tradition, water rights are attached to the land, not to the owner, and the right to use water depends upon maintaining good standing in the acequia community by upholding responsibilities for cooperative maintenance. However, the water code and later laws explicitly defined acequia water rights as transferable. This left acequias vulnerable to absentee ownership by people with no stake in the community. This led to the piecemeal dismantling of communal practices needed to keep the water system working. In the broader sense, it created the danger that rural communities would lose their water rights at the hand of a market-based system that favors water flowing to regions with greater economic power.

Despite their long history, which includes acknowledgment in the session laws of the Colorado Territory, it was not until 2009 that acequias received recognition in Colorado state statutes. The 2009 Acequia Recognition Law, which was amended in 2013, allows acequias to continue to exercise their traditional roles in governing community access to water, and also strengthens their ability to protect their water. For acequias in Colorado to take full advantage of the statute, it is necessary to have a set of written bylaws that formalize existing customs and adopt the recently recognized powers.



Acequia Community and the Fight to Keep Their Rights

Time: 45 minutes

Location: Indoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Investigate causes and effects of significant events throughout United States history
- Analyze the complexity of events throughout United States history
- Understand which geographic variables influenced interactions of people, places, and environments and the interconnected nature of the world, its people and places
- Understand the role Mexican Land Grants played in the settlement of these early Hispano

Materials

- Copy of Fight to Keep Their Rights.

Preparation:

Make a copy of the article "Fight to Keep Their Rights"

Introduction:

In this lesson students will understand the struggles the Sangre de Cristo Acequia communities faced as the world began to modernize and outsiders came to the area to exploit the natural resources.

Activity:

Students will begin the lesson by reading the **Fight to Keep Their Rights**. Once they have completed their reading have students answer the following questions in their journals.

1.) *What are the Challenges for the Future?*

2.) *Acequia communities face major economic, social, and environmental challenges, that include:*

- *Loss of farmers/ranchers in each generation because so many young people must leave to make a living.*
- *Urban development and real estate and water markets create increasing demands to transfer water rights away from agricultural to residential, commercial, and industrial uses.*
- *Municipal state, and federal policies can support or undermine traditional patterns of land/water rights ownership and use.*
- *Climate change and prolonged drought impact the availability of water for irrigation and the availability of vegetation for livestock grazing.*

Is there a tipping point (the point at which a series of small changes or incidents becomes significant enough to cause a larger, more important change) from which there is no return? Explain your answer.

3.) *Can and should these tipping points be averted?*

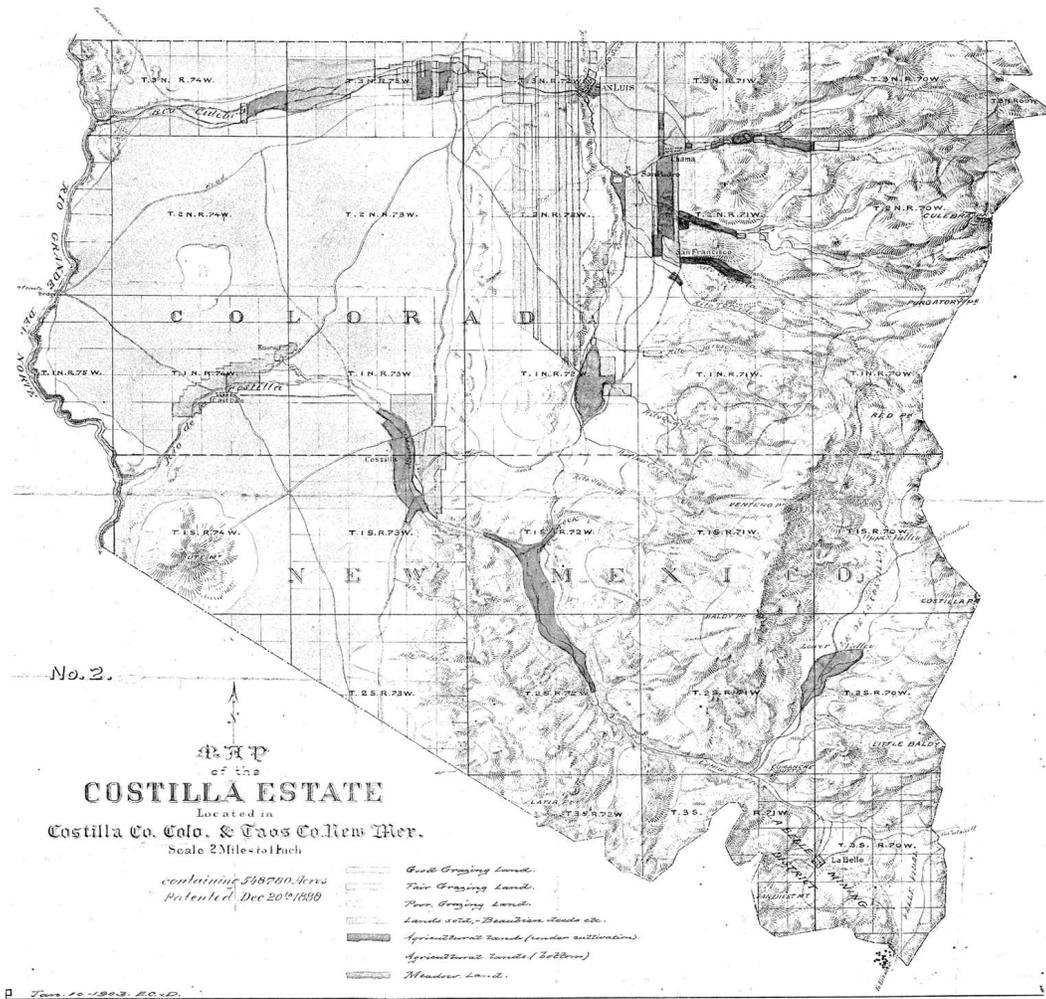
4.) *Is the acequia model a lesson for all of us? If so what should we learn and implement?*

Conclusion:

Discuss the students answers as a group.



Fight to Keep Their Rights—How the acequias kept their land and water



1888 Map of The Costilla Estate

Company agents posed a serious challenge to the Mexican villagers who had worked the land they claimed by Beaubien's promise, by legal conveyance, and through twenty-five years of adverse possession. Beginning in 1871, the US Freehold Land and Immigration Company (USFLEC) undertook an aggressive campaign to remove the pobladores (inhabitants) from their holdings. To accomplish this objective the company assembled representatives from the central villages. The village leadership could not read English and they were easily duped into signing a company prepared agreement that undermined communal rights of pobladores to the uplands and lowlands. Subsequently, the USFLEC attacked legitimate titles, forcing villagers into expensive legal proceedings.

Many Hispanos unaware of the promotion of the grant, co-existed with Gilpin. However, when he began to limit land holdings after his ownership, they became suspicious of his business dealings. Eventually legal proceedings began and many were intimidated into repurchasing their holdings, the court ordered others evicted, and a few sold their holdings and left.



In spite of the seeming prosperity in the late 1890's, the Freehold Company realized that the mining and farming colonies would not become a reality. After thirty years of recruitment, only one agricultural colony had purchased a block of land. Plagued by a series of financial and legal problems, the U.S. Freehold Land & Immigration Company defaulted on property taxes and finally went into bankruptcy.

In 1902, the Costilla Estate Development Company was formed to sell 70,000 acres of the southern end of the grant for agricultural development (Griswold 1980,3). The new company would accomplish this goal, in part by establishing another shorter track to link the Costilla and Trinchera Estates into the D & RG rail network. The construction of the San Luis Southern Railway, south from the mainline of the D & RG in 1910, laid the foundation for the platted towns of New San Acacio, Mesita, and Jaroso. Water was required for agriculture, so the development of canals and reservoirs were required to attract new immigrant settlers.

Land south of Los Fuertes was purchased from the Sanchez Family to construct an earthen reservoir. The Sanchez Reservoir was completed in 1911, standing 120 feet high with 17.5 miles of shoreline it was designed to hold 104,000 acre feet of water. At the time of its construction it was considered the fifth largest earthen and stone dam in the world (Griswold 1980, 23). The arid landscape of the Costilla Estates was transformed into a rural Midwest rail and farm landscape. The architectural styles were a stark contrast to the vernacular designs of the Rio Culebra Villages. As new towns grew and water resources were diverted from the villages via the Sanchez Reservoir, the local Hispano economy became dominated by Midwesterners.

Between 1940 and 1950, Costilla County lost 19 percent of its population. The trend continued in 1960, as out-migration accelerated by 25 percent. With the largest population decline in Colorado, Costilla County had the lowest per capita income in the state. The dismal statistics related to the fact that two-thirds of the residents earned less than \$3,000 annually. With half the households having no telephone, water, or toilets in their homes, the census profile clearly demonstrates why so many people relocated to the city. Of those remaining, many continued to farm and raise livestock at subsistence levels

This fragile equilibrium changed after a North Carolina timber speculator in 1960's purchased the 77,000-acre portion of the land grant, for \$7 an acre. The new owner fenced his property boundaries and erected gates at all entrances to La Sierra. Once the land was enclosed, the owner went to court to barricade county-maintained roads. The remaining task was to clear the disputed title to the land as inexpensively as possible. This was because it was "subject to the claims of local people" to pasture livestock, gather wood and lumber. To avoid the issue of historic settlement rights, the new owner hired a team of attorneys to attack Beaubien's compact with the ancestors of residents. The land was secured only after removing the proceedings to Denver and through the application of an obscure process called the Torrence Title Action. Many community members believed the village's constitutional rights to due process had been violated. Once the judge issued the legal declaration denying community access, grazing, wood gathering, and other activities were severely curtailed and the frail economy was dismantled.

Organized resistance continued throughout the 1960s, culminating in the incorporation of the Land Rights Council (LRC) in 1979. The Land Rights Council's legal team, operating on a pro bono (without charge) basis for nearly 25 years, continued to appeal for a new trial. In 1993, the case was argued before the Colorado Supreme Court. A year later the court ordered a new trial. Thirty-three years after the hearing to quiet the title to La Sierra, the community had its day in court. After the lower court ruled against the community, LRC's legal team looked to the Court of Appeals for relief. Again, the court upheld the ruling of the lower court. At the end of 2000, the Colorado Supreme Court allowed LRC's legal team to argue against the Court of Appeals decision. Ten months later oral arguments were heard, and in the summer of 2002 the justices made a courageous decision by acknowledging due process violations and awarding grazing, wood harvesting and timbering use rights to La Sierra.



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Field Introduction

Settling the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant

Time: Day Long Visit

Location: Outdoors

Learner Outcomes:

- Formulate compelling and supporting questions after evaluating primary sources for point of view and historical context.
- Gather and analyze historical information to address questions from a range of primary and secondary sources containing a variety of perspectives.
- Gather and analyze historical information from a range of qualitative and quantitative sources. For example: demographic, economic, social, and political data.
- Construct and defend a historical argument that evaluates interpretations by analyzing, critiquing, and synthesizing evidence from the full range of relevant historical sources.

Preparation:

Please contact:
Sangre de Cristo Heritage
Center Museum
401 Church Place
San Luis CO 81152
719-672-0999
costillacountydc@gmail.com

Arrangements should be made at least 3 weeks in advance to give staff time to set up your desired field experience

Welcome to the Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center

When you come to the heritage center you can choose from a variety of Land Grant tours. Just contact the office and they can help you set up your tour. You can choose from the following options:

A walking tour of a local acequia. You will see how they operated then and now.

A visit to La Sierra. In the past, like today, Hispano settlers gathered wood and timbers for building and grazed their livestock. The cabins in the Salazar Tract still stand and serve as an annual meeting place for grazers to begin the spring and summer grazing seasons.

La Vega grazing commons. You can see firsthand why this important resource still helps acequia ranches raise cattle. This is a key area recognized in the Beaubien document for “parciantes” (land owners) in the lower lands to have access to grazing for their livestock.

The Village of San Acacio. Visit the historic parish that serves as both the spiritual and business center of the village. Students will meet with the Morada elders who ensure the community’s spiritual heritage remains a key part of daily life.

The Comisión of the San Acacio Acequia. Meet with them to understand the key role they play in ensuring that there is equity in the distribution of acequia water to parciantes.

A local farm that grows heritage crops. Learn how they are grown and harvested.

Enjoy local foods snacks during your visit. Each visit is targeted to your specific need and grade level.

Note: While the sites will vary depending on the museums guide availability. We suggest helping students frame their visit using the following types of questions:

How are places like communities similar to and different from where you live?

How do people celebrate traditions?

How do people use resources in the local community?

How do individuals in the community use the environment?