

In Their Own Words: Green DeWitt

After the colony established by Stephen F. Austin, the second most successful colony in Texas was that of Green DeWitt. This colony, which neighbored Austin's to the southwest, was home to the town of Gonzales, famous for its role in the Texas Revolution. Born in Kentucky in 1787, DeWitt, like the Austin family, had immigrated to Spanish held Missouri prior to that state becoming part of the United States of America through the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. It is unknown if DeWitt was acquainted with the Austin family in Missouri, but by at least 1825 he was well acquainted with Stephen F. Austin, who along with Baron de Bastrop intervened to help DeWitt successfully petition the Mexican government. DeWitt traveled to Mexico possibly as early as 1822 to petition the Mexican government for a contract to settle American families in Texas. As with the other would be empresarios, his petition was held up by the political fallout of the reign of Emperor Iturbide. On April 15, 1825, DeWitt's petition to settle 400 families was finally granted. The following is a translation of DeWitt's petition and the conditions of his contract.

Most Excellent Sir: I, Green De Witt, a citizen of the United States of North America, appear before your excellency to make known to you that I have come to this country seeking to obtain permission to colonize with four hundred industrious Catholic families those lands of the ancient province of Texas (now an integral portion of this State) which are included within limits that I shall herein designate. These immigrants shall be required to subject themselves to the religious, civil, and political laws of the country which henceforth they adopt as their own, and in establishing themselves therein, they shall respect the rights of all previous settlers, as provided by the colonization law which the honorable congress of this state has just passed. Moreover, there shall be brought into this colony only such families as are known to be respectable and industrious. I therefore beg you to grant to me, your petitioner, those lands that are included within the following limits, in order that I may settle upon them the four hundred families above mentioned: Beginning on the right bank of Arroyo de la Vaca at a distance of the reserved ten leagues from the coast, adjoining the colony of Stephen Austin on the east, the line shall go up the river to the Béar-Nacogdoches road; it shall follow this road until it reaches a point two leagues to the west of Guadalupe River; thence it shall run parallel with the river down to the Paraje de los Mosquitos; and following the inner edge of the ten-league coast reservation, it shall close the boundaries of the grant at the point of beginning.

We are also desirous that respectable families of this country [Mexico] shall come to settle with us, not only in order to contract enduring friendship with them, but also in order to acquire the use of the language of the nation that we now adopt as our own and the ability to give perfect instruction therein to our children. Therefore I humbly beg you to grant my petition.

Saltillo, April 7, 1825

Conditions upon which is allowed the projected introduction by Green De Witt, a citizen of the United States of North America, of four hundred families as colonists into the department of Texas.

1st. Inasmuch as the plan presented in the preceding memorial by the person concerned conforms to the colonization law of the honorable congress of the state, adopted March 24, the government consents to it, and, therefore, in fulfillment of article 8 [of this colonization law], and in consideration of his petition, it assigns to him the land for which he asks, contained within these limits: Beginning on the right bank of the Arroyo de la Vaca, at a distance of the reserved ten leagues from the coast adjoining the colony of Stephen Austin, the line shall go up this *arroyo* as far as the Béjar-Nacogdoches road; it shall follow this road toward the west until it reaches the ten-league coast reservation; thence it shall run along the inner edge of this reservation toward the east to the place of beginning.

2nd. The *empresario* shall respect the rights of individuals legally possessed of lands within this district.

3rd. In accordance with the above-mentioned colonization law of March 24, the *empresario*, Green De Witt, shall be obliged under penalty of losing the rights and privileges guaranteed by article 8 of this law, to introduce the four hundred families within the term of six years beginning from to-day.

4th. The families shall compose this colony, besides being Catholic, as the *empresario* promises in his petition, must also be able to prove, by certificate from the authorities of the localities from which they come, their good moral character.

5th. The *empresario* shall not introduce into his colony criminals, vagrants, or persons of bad morals, and if such be found there he shall cause them to leave the republic, by force of arms if necessary.

6th. To this end he shall organize in accordance with law, the national militia, and he shall be commanding officer of it until other arrangements shall be made.

7th. When he shall have introduced at least one hundred families he must advise the government, in order that a commissioner may be sent to put the colonists in possession of their lands according to law, and to establish towns, for which he shall carry competent instructions.

8th. Official correspondence with the government or with the state authorities, legal instruments, and other public documents must be written in Spanish, and when towns shall have been formed, it shall be the duty of the *empresario* to establish schools in that language.

9th. It shall also be his duty to erect churches in the new towns; to provide them with ornaments, sacred vessels, and other adornments dedicated to divine worship; and to apply in due time for the priests needed for the administration of spiritual instruction.

10th. In all matters not here referred to he shall be governed by the constitution, the general laws of the nation, and the special laws of the state which he adopts as his own.

The articles having been agreed upon by his excellency, the governor, and the *empresario* were signed by both, in the presence of the secretary of the government. The original was placed on file in the archives, and it was ordered that a certified copy of both the contract and the petition be given to the *empresario* for his security.

Rafael Gonzales
Green De Witt
Juan Anto. Padilla, Secretary interim.

Saltillo, April 15, 1825
It is a copy.

Santiago Del Valle,
Secretary

SOURCE: Ethel Zivley Rather. "De Witt's Colony" in *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Oct., 1904), pp. 95 - 192. Pp. 173-175.