

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAY 30 1985

date entered

JUN 27 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Yglesia de Nuestra Senora de Candelaria de Dona Ana

and/or common Our Lady of Purification Catholic Church *(name for registration)

2. Location

street & number Northwest corner of Camino Real and 2nd St. not for publication

city, town Dona Ana vicinity of

state New Mexico code 35 county Dona Ana code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Diocese of Las Cruces

street & number Post Office Box 16318

city, town Las Cruces vicinity of state New Mexico

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dona Ana County Clerk's Office

street & number 251 W. Amador, Room 103

city, town Las Cruces state New Mexico

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title not previously represented has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

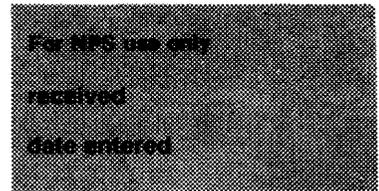
Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Our Lady of Purification Church is the oldest example of an adobe vernacular church in southern New Mexico. The ornamentation and detail of the structure is simple, reflecting the modest resources of the congregation that built it in the middle of the 19th century. The building is of a cruciform floor plan with thick walls made of adobe brick molded by the parishioners and carried up to the site from the valley land below. Until the 1920's, when it was covered with tongue and groove hardwood, the floor was of dirt which often had to be wetted to keep the dust down. As shown by the oldest available photograph (see enclosed) of the church taken around 1910, it was built with a flat roof using the traditional viga (beam) and latilla (small poles laid across the vigas) ceiling, and sealed with packed mud that would routinely have to be maintained. This stark, massive structure of earth had a plain twin-leafed entrance with a small window above it. The windows along the church walls are the 6 over 6 double hung wood type. It was probably around the turn of the century that a small wood-louvered bell tower was built above the entrance. The church faces south onto an open dirt plaza which now serves as parking. A garden bordering the east side of the church is enclosed with a stone wall which features an open arch parallel to the church entry.

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Over 50 years ago the facade was somewhat altered from its original appearance, according to notarized statements of lifelong residents. Since the 1920's an undulating parapet has been built on the facade and topped with a dentil brick coping. The small bell tower has been replaced with a metal cross. Two niches have been carved in the main facade. About 1930 a very large bell tower of poured concrete was built on the east side of the church. The viga and latilla ceiling is still present and has been tree-ring dated to 1860. All of the other datable wood—in the nave, transept and sanctuary—is the same age. Based on this evidence, Our Lady of Purification Church is the earliest existing Catholic church in southern New Mexico.

Through the years some settlement of the structure has occurred and attempts have been made to stabilize it by constructing field stone buttresses on the two corners of the east transepts and two small cinder block buttresses against the back sanctuary wall. In addition, the heavy concrete bell tower has been settling.

Services are no longer held in the church due in large part to the increased size of the congregation. Most of the furnishings have been removed to a Parish Hall on the west part of the lot. The Diocese plans to return many of the original furnishings and icons to the church once current stabilization and restoration efforts have been completed. Among these furnishings are French Stations of the Cross and statues dating to the turn of the century. Of particular interest and still inside the church is a French Gothic Revival side altar which was probably built around the turn of the century.

The dimensions of the structure are 74 1/2 feet long, the nave width is 23 feet and the distance between the west and east transept walls is approximately 40 1/2 feet.

The church, which represents dedicated labor and faith of the villagers of Dona Ana, has become a landmark to the people of the Mesilla Valley.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates c. 1865 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Our Lady of Purification Church in the village of Dona Ana is the oldest church in southern New Mexico. Permission to build a church at Dona Ana was given in 1844, 4 years before New Mexico was ceded to the United States by Mexico. The vigas have been dated to the early 1860's by the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, University of Arizona. In early historic times Spanish and Mexican caravans would stop in the vicinity of Dona Ana for rest, water and forage for their animals while traveling along the Camino Real, later known as the Chihuahua Trail. It was about 1840 that settlers arrived to work the lands for which they had petitioned comprised the Dona Ana Bend Colony Grant, officially finalized in 1843. This was the first permanent settlement north of Paso del Norte (present day Juarez) and south of the Socorro area.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Archives of the Archdiocese of Durango; Diario y Derrotero, D. Pedro de Rivera, Mexico, 1945; Cathedral Archives, Reel 4, UTEP; Parish records, St. Genevieve's Church, Las Cruces, NM; United States 43rd Congress 1st Session, Senate Executive Document No. 43, 1874; (continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Dona Ana

Quadrangle scale 1:2400

UTM References

A

1	3	3	2	9	1	4	0	3	5	8	4	6	1	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

Nomination is for one building comprising Our Lady of Purification Church, Dona Ana, and enclosed garden on the east side of the church, located in Uniform Property Code lot # 020-4-005-130-85-046.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael Taylor revised by Marianne Thaeler and Mary Jane Garcia

organization N/A date August 12, 1983

street & number 109 Delgado telephone (505) 982-0579

city or town Santa Fe state New Mexico

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Sam W. Paul*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 5-13-85

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 6-27-85

Keoper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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These original Mexican settlers of Dona Ana had come up from the Paso del Norte area and possessed meager resources. Through the first years of settlement there is no known record of ecclesiastical activity. However, all were Catholic and certainly had their unique manner of expressing their faith. In these early days it was necessary for any resident who wished the official Sacraments of the Catholic Church to travel south to the church of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe at El Paso del Norte. The first ecclesiastical record that does appear regarding services at Dona Ana is that of Presbitero Eusebio Toval in 1845, secretary of Bishop Antonio de Zubiria y Escalante on his visita (pastoral tour) to New Mexico. He began to baptize in Dona Ana in October of that same year, and when the Bishop arrived, His Excellency brought the Sacrament of Confirmation to the children who had been born during these first difficult years. In that same year, a license was given by the Bishop to celebrate Mass, to hear confessions and to distribute communion with an altar portatil (portable altar) in the oratorio (family chapel) dedicated to Nuestra Senora de Candelaria in Dona Ana. This would indicate that a permanent church had not yet been built and that the few services that were conducted were held in the oratorio which is said to have been located a few blocks to the northeast of the present church. Permission was also given to bless a camposanto (cemetery) which was in process of construction. It is not until 1852 that the first reference is made to an actual physical church in the ecclesiastical archives: "on January 29, 1852, Juan Varela of Mesilla was married to Josefa Candelaria of the Yglesia de Nuestra Senora de Candelaria de Dona Ana". (The church was originally known by this name but the name was changed to Our Lady of Purification Church more than 50 years ago.) This early reference was probably to a small temporary structure replaced in the 1860's by the present church.¹ By the early 1860's, Dona Ana was a large settlement and certainly had the manpower to erect the thick walled structure that exists today. It is said by early residents of the village that the church was also initially used as a fortress against the Apache depredations that were very common in the area. Father Donato Rogieri of Las Cruces attended Dona Ana regularly as a visita beginning in 1859-1860. He was instrumental in completing the church in the 1860's, and he added a room where he taught catechism to the children until (according to oral tradition) he was killed by Apaches. Until recently the church had served as the spiritual center of this historic village. The Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Las Cruces, along with numerous members of the congregation and the community, have recognized the church's great historical and cultural significance and have dedicated themselves to preserving this vestige of the early church in the area.

1 Thomas H. Naylor, Associate Curator, Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, Arizona State Museum; November 12, 1984 letter to Thomas W. Merlan, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

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Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, Arizona State Museum, Univ. of Ariz., T. H. Naylor; notes from Mary Taylor Collection in Mesilla, N.M.; notarized statements of M. A. Vasquez, F. Ramirez, P. Madrid, E. and W. Giron, Dona Ana County Clerk's Misc. files; personal communications with David Giron of Dona Ana and Marianne Thealer of Las Cruces.