In recent years on August 20th, the Proclamation is read in Spanish and in English at a flag raising ceremony inside the courtyard of the Presidio which has been reconstructed on the footprint of the original Presidio walls. This celebration of Tucson’s birthday also honors the ancestors of indigenous peoples of our valley.

During the urban renewal period of the early 1970s downtown barrios were decimated, and yet, the soul of the Presidio and the rich culture of early Tucson could not be so easily silenced. Miraculously, here and there ruins of the Old Pueblo were preserved. For example, the front of the historic Otero home was moved to the courtyard of the Arizona Historical Society. The spirit and history of early barrio culture lives on through the renewal of rich cultural traditions.

In 1975, in preparation for Tucson’s bicentennial celebration, Yndia Smalley Moore was named Doña of the Bicentennial, reviving an early Spanish tradition of giving the title of “Dona” to a woman revered by the community. During the same time period, Dr. James Officer of the University of Arizona began documenting the genealogy of people whose families were residents of the Presidio.

In 1990, Arnold Smith, a descendent of one of the Presidio soldiers, led the effort to form Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucson. Soon, membership was opened to persons who, although not direct descendants of the Presidio, were committed to preserving the history and culture of Tucson.
In 1991, the honorary title of La Doña was reestablished through the efforts of Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucson.

This title honors one woman leader each year. To be so honored, a Doña must be over a certain age, a Tucson resident for over 50 years and have contributed distinguished service to the Tucson community outside of her profession and be committed to upholding the cultural traditions of the Old Pueblo.

The first Doña named was Irene Leon Romo*. Each year thereafter, a new Doña has been selected: Enriqueta Martinez DeMeester*, Maria Urquides, Estela Jácome, Cele Peterson*, Livia Leon Montiel*, Esther Tang, Dorothy Hunt Finley, Genevieve Martinez Whalen, Ofelia Vargas*, Elizabeth Krucker*, Joana Diamos, Anna Jolivet, Sally Drachman Salvatorre, Edith Sayre Auslander, Patty Arida, Laura Almquist, Nelba Chavez, Martha Huerta Elias, and Selma Paul Marks.

* Deceased

Each of these Doñas has had a truly fascinating history, worthy of the entire community’s interest and respect. ¡Que vivan las Doñas!

Las Doñas de Los Descendientes del Presidio de Tucson

Genevieve Whalen, Cele Peterson, Esther Tang, Joana Diamos, Sally Drachman, Estela Jácome, Anna Jolivet and Dorothy Finley. Not shown are Betty Krucker and Ofelia Vargas.