

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative
2005-2006



Restoring water to ensure the continuity of the Akimel O'otham and Pee Posh tradition of agriculture

The Tenure of Pima-Maricopa Lands, 1856-1859

Part 68

The Pima and Maricopa were “extremely anxious about the tenure of their land” and frequently inquired of emigrants passing through their villages whether the United States would recognize their lands and interests and allow them to remain. In the fall of 1858, Sylvester Mowry officially met with the Pima, being told that they had “a Spanish title to the[ir] lands,” an assertion affirmed by Sonora Governor Cubillas, who was of the opinion the grant exceeded “fifty leagues” (or about 150 miles in length). While no record or document existed to disprove this assertion, Mowry was nonetheless of the opinion that justice and humanity required the United States to not only recognize but also protect Pima and Maricopa lands from the onslaught of emigrants that were sure to follow and settle the lands in the Gila and Salt river valleys.

Penning a letter to acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, James W. Denver, Mowry underscored his rationale for such action. “The Pimos and Maricopas Indians should be allowed to retain their present locations,” Mowry began. “Their villages [will] be made of great service to the Territory by supplying large quantities of breadstuffs.” Furthermore, their lands “are in all respects reservations, and have the advantage of being their homes by title of law and by preference.” While concerned about further non-Indian settlement, Mowry believed there was ample room for settlers above their villages “without interfering with the Pimos.” Nonetheless, such settlement should occur only if an Indian agent—“a man of great tact and intelligence”—resided among the Indians, protected their rights and ensured the respect of their general interests.

Lieutenant A. B. Chapman echoed Mowry’s sentiments and urged the United States to recognize Pima and Maricopa lands. “These Indians have strong claims upon the consideration of the United States Government, the prompt recognition of which not only justice and humanity, but sound policy, renders a matter of prime necessity.” The “claims” to which Chapman referred included cultural and political ties to the land that extended back generations. Their agricultural skills, the lieutenant concluded, “present an appearance of beauty and civilization that is truly pleasing.” Pima and Maricopa loyalty and hospitality to American emigrants further strengthened the recognition of their rights. This latter consideration, in Chapman’s eyes, also entitled the Pima and Maricopa to gifts and agricultural tools that would assist them in expanding their agricultural capacities. “So far, they have been more blessed in giving than receiving, and have looked in vain for recognition by the government of the many kindnesses they have rendered our people.” Without recognition of their land and rights and the distribution of gifts, the Pima and Maricopa might be “induce[d] to throw off an alliance from which they have derived no benefit.” The San Francisco *Alta California* was more succinct: “They have furnished grain and other provisions for reasonable prices and bestowed charity with more than Christian generosity.”

Promised they would be rewarded for their hospitality and friendliness with “an abundance of agricultural implements,” the patience of the Pima and Maricopa wore thin. When special agent Goddard Bailey visited the villages, he added to the growing chorus of concern. “It is necessary to do more than conciliate these Indians by presents,” Bailey told Mix. “They must be secured in their possession of their lands.” Without such protection, the rich soil and advantageous location “will excite the cupidity of a class of settlers not over nice in their regard for the rights of the Indians.” To

prevent any injury or disruption of communication and travel across the west, sound policy suggested “the necessity of preventing any cause of complaint on this score, *and of doing so at once* (emphasis in the original).”

Bailey—and others such as Mowry—had other reasons for cultivating a strong political alliance with the Pima and Maricopa: their traditional antipathy with the Apache. In his correspondence with Denver, Bailey also noted the Pima and Maricopa were “a barrier between the Apaches and all western Arizona.” As long as this alliance was secure, commerce was assured between Fort Yuma and Tucson via Maricopa Wells. Without it, commerce and the growth of American settlements was uncertain.

To this end, Bailey urged the Indian Department to adopt several strategies, two of which were overtly political. First, the United States should confirm the land to the Pima and Maricopa “and their descendants” by issuing a legal patent subject to alienation only to the United States. In other words, the government should protect the Indians’ lands with the only limitation they could not sell it to any person or government except the United States. This was consistent with the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act, which required such provisions. Secondly, the government should assign a permanent Indian agent to the tribes as the local representative of the United States in its political dealings with them. This agent would also be responsible for ensuring the protection of tribal interests—such as land and water—from unscrupulous settlers who might try to possess both.

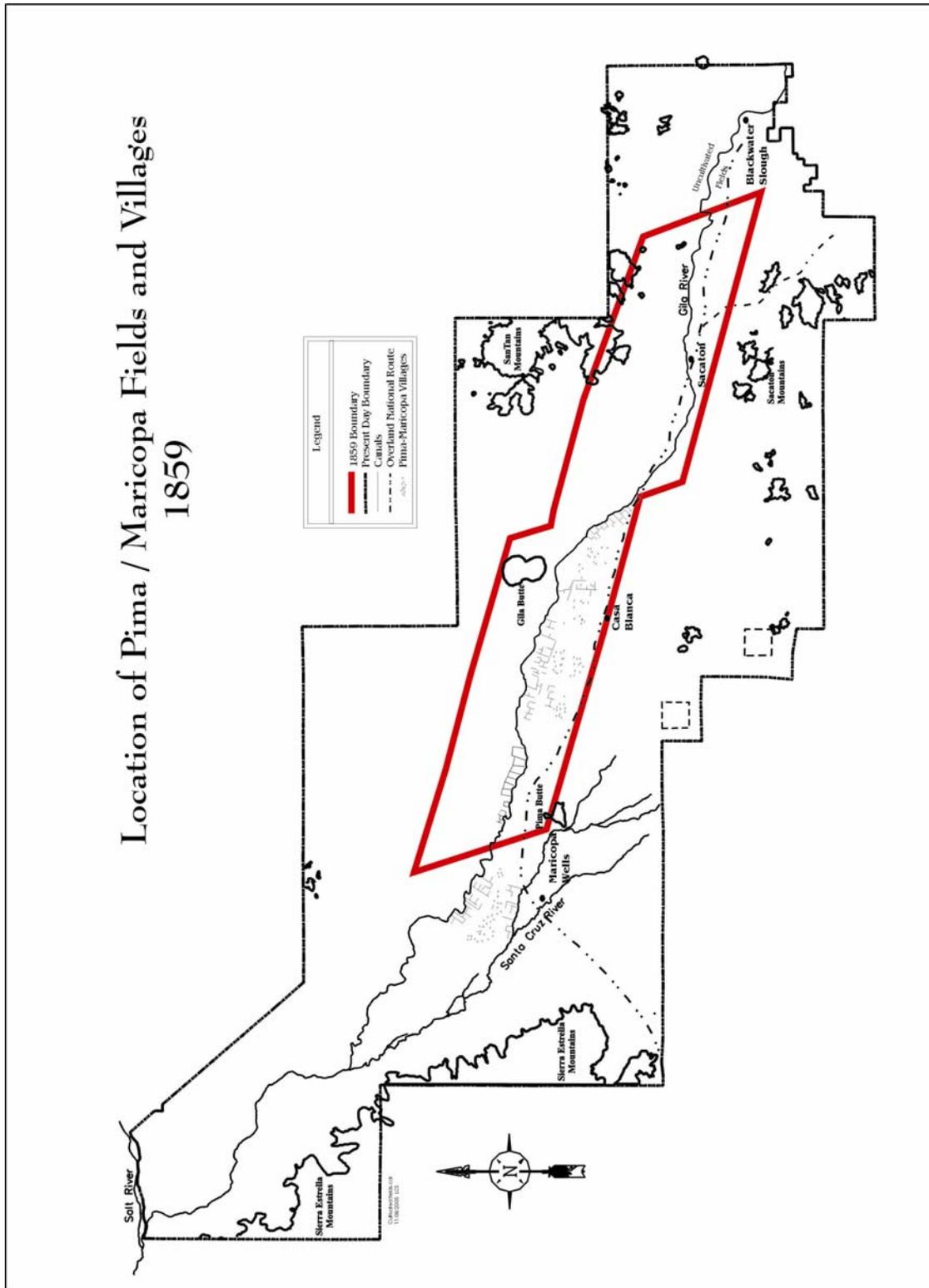
Two other recommendations made by Bailey addressed the desires of the territory and the United States in their long-term considerations of Arizona. To ensure an adequate food supply in the territory, Bailey encouraged the Indian Department to distribute “a reasonable amount” of agricultural tools, seed and clothing annually as gifts. Not only would this serve the political need of ensuring the peace and friendship of the Pima and Maricopa and compensate them for the protection they provided, but it would also encourage them to expand their cultivation of crops that were then already feeding much of the territory. Bailey also encouraged Mix to provide the Pima and Maricopa with arms and ammunition. “[T]heir loyalty has been sufficiently tested that they may be safely trusted,” Bailey opined. Such action would go far in arming the Pima and Maricopa as a “frontier militia.”

To ensure the enforcement of such a plan, Bailey encouraged the United States Government to send an official representative to visit with the Pima and Maricopa to “ascertain their wants and wishes.” This assumed added importance, as political conditions in the Pima villages grew increasingly strained when the promised agricultural implements and tools did not arrive. Special agent Silas St. John was rapidly losing what little influence he had among the Pima and Maricopa as a result. By the time John Walker arrived in the villages in the summer of 1859, he found “several little difficulties existing.”

Walker met with Antonio Azul and the other chiefs and headmen of the confederated tribes, determining their primary dissatisfaction was in the lack of agricultural implements. While receiving some implements that spring, the Indians had expected more. Despite these difficulties, however, the Pima and Maricopa expanded their agricultural production, cultivating an estimated 15,000 acres in 1859, an increase of about 5,000 acres from the previous year. The Pima and Maricopa clearly demonstrated they wanted to remain—and were capable of remaining—the breadbasket of the territory. They did not ask for any handouts other than the tools that would enable them to expand their operations.

Consequently, in addition to selling more than 110,000 pounds of surplus wheat (about 1,833 bushels) to the overland mail companies, in 1858, the Pima and Maricopa sold 30,000 pounds of corn and 5,000 pounds of tepary beans. In 1859, they sold more than 250,000 pounds of surplus wheat (4,167 bushels) to the mail routes and maintained “a large trade with emigrants” and a “considerable trade” with the frontier towns. With the subjugation and cultivation of new lands,

production continued to climb. By 1860, they sold over 350,000 pounds of wheat and by 1862 were selling more than 1,000,000 pounds of wheat per year. Not surprisingly, Walker concluded the Indians were “in a very prosperous condition, and, while remaining among them, I discovered they nearly all had money, in amounts varying from fifteen to twenty-five dollars.”



Teacher Plan for “The Tenure of Pima and Maricopa Lands: 1856-1859”

Terms to know and understand

- League
- Onslaught
- Loyalty
- Conciliate
- Cupidity
- Antipathy
- Unscrupulous

Critical Thinking:

- Why do you suppose the Pima and Maricopa were so anxious for the recognition of their lands and resources by the United States Government? What changes do you think the Pima and Maricopa witnessed between 1846 and 1859? Why was the acquisition of agricultural implements and tools so important to the Pima and Maricopa? They were already extraordinary farmers. Why would they need new tools?

Activities:

- Consider the Spanish descriptions and observations of the Pima and Maricopa. Then recall the early American descriptions. In what ways are the Spanish descriptions similar or different from the American descriptions? In what ways might these descriptions and observations be incorrect? Have students write out their thoughts on both the Spanish and American descriptions and then have them explain what is missing from these observations.
- The Pima and Maricopa were a wealthy people by the latter 1850s. American emigrants and soldiers described this wealth as financial wealth, meaning they were “prosperous” and “nearly all had money.” Is this the only type of wealth? What other sources of wealth are there and which do you think is most important? How your answer to this question may reflect much about your value system and what you believe is important.

About P-MIP

The Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project is authorized by the Gila River Indian Community to construct all irrigation systems for the Community. When fully completed, P-MIP will provide irrigation for up to 146,330 acres of farmland. P-MIP is dedicated to three long-range goals:

- Restoring water to the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh.
- Putting Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh rights to the use of water to beneficial use.
- Demonstrating and exercising sound management to ensure continuity of the Community’s traditional economy of agriculture.

Students will be able to:

1. Explain the reasons for Pima and Maricopa anxiety over land titles and recognition of their land.
2. Formulate an opinion regarding the relative value of material wealth and compare it with other types of wealth.

Objectives