

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative
2003-2004



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

Good Samaritans of the Desert

“Pimos! Americanos! Much Friend! Mui Mucho!”

James Rusling quoting an unidentified Pima Chief

Part 54

To the travel weary and famished emigrant the Pima and Maricopa villages appeared as an oasis in the desert. At the villages, food and provisions could be purchased, friendship and hospitality enjoyed and rest found. Whether the Pima or the Maricopa were friendlier and more attractive was a topic of conversation among some emigrants, although such discussion meant nothing to the Indians. Some emigrants thought the Maricopa were “a finer looking set of Indians,” with Maricopa women “the handsomest lot of Indian women.” Some Maricopa women were described as “beautifully proportion[ed] and specimens of native grace.” Pima women were similarly described as “quite pretty and graceful,” with one emigrant noting they had “beautiful teeth and hair.”

The Pima and Maricopa were described as athletic, fine looking and a picture of good health. In fact, it was rare that an emigrant saw anyone who was not in good health. The Maricopa were viewed as the sturdier of the two as “it was rare to find a [Maricopa] man under five feet ten.” Aside from physical appearances, what struck the emigrants was the fearless and confident nature of the Pima and Maricopa who came out to trade with them. Anxious to exchange food for cloth, tools and coin, the “Pimos came out to the road to see us,” one emigrant chronicled. Another noted the Indians greeted the emigrants by “bringing flour, corn meal, watermelons &c.” to trade. All noted the Indians’ willingness and desire to trade.

Emigrants—especially if they carried Robert Creuzbaur’s emigrant *Guide to California* or were familiar with Lieutenant Emory and/or Colonel Cooke’s journals—were quick to note the Pima were “all that Colonel Emory has described them—peaceable, quiet, and honest Indians, and possessing considerable intelligence. The men were well-formed and athletic, the women bright eyed, talkative, and symmetrical.” Emory had described the Pima as a “peaceful and intelligent” people that surpassed “many of the Christian nations in agriculture, [were] little behind them in the useful arts, and immeasurably before them in honesty and virtue.” Emigrant Charles Pancoast expressed a common nineteenth century bias when he argued the Pima were “the best type of Indian on the Continent.”

Journals are replete with Pima character qualities such as honesty, virtue, friendliness, peaceableness, kindness, courtesy, truthfulness and loyalty. Benjamin Harris was so struck by the integrity and goodness of the Pima that he stated Americans could learn a lesson from them. “Finding a heathen people so kind, good, sympathetic, simple, honest and hospitable,” Harris chronicled, “was indeed a surprise well worth all the toil and privation of the trip, and calculated to make Christianity blush for its meager attainments.” In an April 15, 1850, letter to his sister,

W. Wilberforce Alexander Ramsey observed the Pima “have the character of being the most honest and virtuous tribe in the West.... They are peaceful and never disturb the emigrant.” For the most part, honesty was a virtue among the Pima, although by the end of 1849 it was tempered by their inability to acquire the technology needed to fuel the growing agricultural demands placed on them by emigrants.

The Pima diligently guarded the virtue and morality of their women. Although no emigrant recorded any instance of impropriety, it did on at least one occasion occur. When army deserter Samuel Chamberlain and members of the murderous John Glanton gang entered the villages in November 1848, their leader intended to plunder the villages “and give no quarter to man, woman or child.” Two mountain men having experienced “the kind and peaceful character” of the Pima helped defuse the planned assault. Nonetheless, after obtaining a supply of food from the Indians, a gang member named Judge Holden attempted to take “gross liberties” with a young Pima woman.

The Indian response to the assault was swift and sure. In a matter of seconds a “dozen cocked [Pima] rifles” were pointed at Holden. For a few tense moments the Americans “stood a chance of being wiped out.” While a peaceful people, the Pima had, as Emory observed, “a high regard for morality” and made clear any abuse of their people would not be tolerated. While Pima women were simply clothed with a serape around the waist, they “proved modesty is independent of refined taste” and acted “with a very becoming modesty of manner.”

Pima and Maricopa friendship and kindness was demonstrated in many different ways. In addition to courteous treatment, the Pima and Maricopa extended “hospitality and friendship” to all who entered their villages. Benjamin Harris called them “Good Samaritans” willing to help any in need, while other emigrants simply noted they were “thankful for the favors received.” J. H. Bachman described the Pima and Maricopa as “very friendly.” Hayes wrote they were “a pleasant, social, lively people” who were also “very polite.”

Clearly the emigrants were impressed by the kindness and goodness of the Pima and Maricopa. They marveled at the quality and quantity of food and forage crops grown and traded or sold to them. Many emigrants recognized that without this food and forage for both man and animals they would never had made it to the gold fields of California. But the emigrants were equally impressed with the stability of the Pima and Maricopa way of life and their integrity and courtesy extended to all travelers passing through their villages. The Pima and Maricopa villages were not only the main breadbasket of food for the emigrants crossing through the Arizona portion of the Southern and Gila trails but they were also a good people with whom the emigrants could trade.

“Good Samaritan” Character Qualities

Find the character qualities descriptive of the Pima and Maricopa listed below the word search in the grid. Words can go horizontally, vertically and diagonally in all eight directions.

K	E	I	N	T	E	G	R	I	T	Y
Q	L	B	K	Y	K	D	K	L	L	L
N	B	F	V	I	T	N	H	U	L	D
H	A	L	N	I	K	N	F	F	X	N
L	T	D	C	K	R	E	L	K	P	E
O	I	K	H	W	C	T	D	N	T	I
Y	P	C	J	A	X	C	U	O	B	R
A	S	C	E	T	Y	J	P	O	O	F
L	O	P	K	C	B	K	B	C	U	G
Y	H	O	N	E	S	T	N	W	J	S
Q	R	L	U	F	H	T	U	R	T	M

FRIENDLY
GOOD
HONEST
HOSPITABLE
INTEGRITY
KIND
LOYAL
PEACEFUL
TRUTHFUL
VIRTUOUS

Teacher Plan for “Good Samaritans of the Desert”

Terms to know and understand

- Famished
- Sturdy
- Chronicled
- Virtue
- Bias
- Modesty
- Serape

Students will be able to:

1. Explain why the Pima and Maricopa were referred to as “Good Samaritans.”
2. Explain why particular values and morals are associated with certain people.

Objectives

Critical Thinking:

- The productivity of Pima and Maricopa agriculture and their generosity in providing rest, relaxation and food to the thousands of emigrants traveling over the southern trails to California was widely known because of the published journals of William Emory and Philip St. George Cooke. These two journals served as guides for thousands of emigrants. As a result, the emigrants came to expect a peaceful reception and plentiful food from the Pima and Maricopa. They were never disappointed, as the two tribes always had sufficient food to trade or sell. What might account for the Pima and Maricopa ability to provide so much food for the unexpected thousands of emigrants passing through their villages? How would you want others to describe your character if they were recording their observations of you? Explain. How would like future generations to describe your character?

Activities

- The California emigrants were not the first people to note the strong moral fiber of the Pima and Maricopa people. The Spanish missionary priests also noted and recorded these character qualities (see Lesson 46). Engage students in a discussion on where morals and virtue come from. How is it that the Pima-Maricopa exhibited these qualities while so many others (both Indian and non-Indian) did not? How does one define moral and virtue anyway? Does everyone else in the class agree with your definition? Why or why not?

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.