

Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

Education Initiative



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

A Victory for the Salt River Valley

Part 16

The US Geological Survey (USGS) discovered the San Carlos dam site, in 1899. But, because the survey of potential Gila River sites occurred late in the fiscal year—at a time when Congressional funding was running low—a comprehensive evaluation of the San Carlos site could not be made. In the meantime, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the USGS continued to evaluate potential storage sites in the Salt River Valley. William Code, representing the USDA, and Arthur Davis, of the USGS, were strong advocates of the Tonto dam site on the Salt River.

The Salt River Valley was much better organized than was the Gila River Valley. Benjamin Fowler, a Yale University graduate and farmer in Glendale, was president of the Arizona Agricultural Association, served in the territorial legislature and was chairman of the Salt River Valley Water Storage Committee. Fowler and George Maxwell, who was chairman of the National Irrigation Association and well connected with land speculators in the Salt River Valley, lobbied Congress and the President to support the Salt River Valley in its quest for a storage dam.

Fowler and Maxwell encouraged the Salt River Valley Water Storage Committee to support the Tonto site under the pretense of delivering water to the Pima Reservation via a highline canal (the old Hudson Reservoir and Canal Company right-of-way). They did this under the belief that the federal government would look more favorably upon their plan if water were provided to the “much abused” Akimel O’otham. Backed by speculative interests and political connections, the Salt River Valley sent Fowler and Maxwell—along with 5 others—to Washington DC to lobby for the Salt River site. The Gila River Valley sent one—Isaac T. Whittemore, Pastor of the Florence Presbyterian Church. Both Charles Cook and Dirk Lay—Presbyterian missionaries among the O’otham—traveled frequently to Washington DC to speak on behalf of the water needs of the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh, believing their deprivation would secure federal assistance.

On January 26, 1901, Orville Platt, of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, came out in opposition to the San Carlos bill. Platt was not opposed to providing water to the O’otham. His opposition stemmed from his concern that the bill would commit “the Government to the scheme of national irrigation.” While the Presbyterian Church—and other Christian and philanthropic groups—supported the San Carlos project, the Senate refused to fund the San Carlos Project before a national irrigation policy was in place.

When Senator Francis Newlands introduced the National Reclamation Bill into the Senate, in February, it included several new provisions that all but ensured its passage. Newlands modified his original bill by removing federal funds from the control of state and private groups, instead placing them in the hands of the Secretary of the Interior. Money to build dams would come from the sale of public lands. These funds would now be at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior, who was given control over the selection of reclamation sites. The secretary would also determine the criteria by which reclamation sites would have to be managed and the lands that would be included within the project boundaries.

Although the bill did not win passage in 1901, passage looked promising the following year when Theodore Roosevelt became President upon the assassination of President William McKinley. Roosevelt was not only a believer in conservation and reclamation, but he was also a good friend of George Maxwell. Maxwell’s friendship with the President all but ensured that the Tonto site would

have the ear of the President. Roosevelt signed the National Reclamation Act into law in 1902. At the request of Salt River Valley interests, Maxwell convinced Congress to amend the Reclamation Act to include privately owned lands as well as public lands. When the bill became law, the Salt River Valley Water Users Association had a plan in place and had lined up the political support needed to gain federal approval.

It was widely understood that Arizona would not receive two federally financed reclamation projects. The *Arizona Republican*, for example, editorialized in January of 1901: “If Congress appropriates money for the building of the San Carlos Dam we will be told by Congressmen from other sections that we have enough. That Arizona is not the only duck in the puddle—that there are others. It is probable that the San Carlos dam will be constructed and we hope it will be. But with its completion we believe our hopes for federal aid [in the Salt River Valley] vanish for the present.” The *Republican* was so convinced that the San Carlos site would be chosen, that in a June 1901 editorial it congratulated its “neighbors of the Gila River Valley ... upon the bright prospects before them.” Even George Maxwell recommended the construction of the San Carlos Project, in 1901. When Congress amended the law to include private lands, the Phoenix-based *Republican* threw its weight behind the Tonto site. The *Florence Tribune* was convinced the *Republican* was now trying “to queer” the San Carlos site.

The San Carlos site was the favored site of the House Committee on Irrigation of the Arid Lands. In 1901, the Committee issued a report recommending construction of San Carlos Dam. The San Carlos site was believed to be superior and capable of rapid repayment. The project, the Committee noted, “would reimburse the Government for its outlay in less than ten years” through the sale of public lands south and east of the reservation. The Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh would be taken “off the expense list of the Government—they would be made self-supporting.”

Despite overwhelming Congressional support for the San Carlos site, the National Reclamation Act did not take into consideration the irrigation of Indian lands. In the meantime, land speculators, farmers and business interests in the Salt River Valley invested heavily in the lobbying of government officials. Land speculators like Dr. A.J. Chandler were well connected to those in government authority. William Code, who served as an employee of Chandler for ten years before becoming the Indian Irrigation Engineer in 1902, represented the Indian Office (BIA) at the same time that support for the San Carlos site moved to the Tonto site. Territorial Governor Alexander Brodie personally called on President Roosevelt to gain his support for the Tonto site.

By 1902, the Salt River Valley no longer supported the San Carlos site. “The San Carlos is not our fight,” the *Arizona Gazette* reported. The Salt River Valley now believed it was “entitled to the first dam because the conditions [in the Valley] are most favorable for its construction.” Thanks to Code’s appointment as Indian Irrigation Engineer, the BIA had “no information” regarding the San Carlos site in 1902. Due to Code’s insistence on pumped water, the BIA now focused its attention on the feasibility of well water for the reservation.

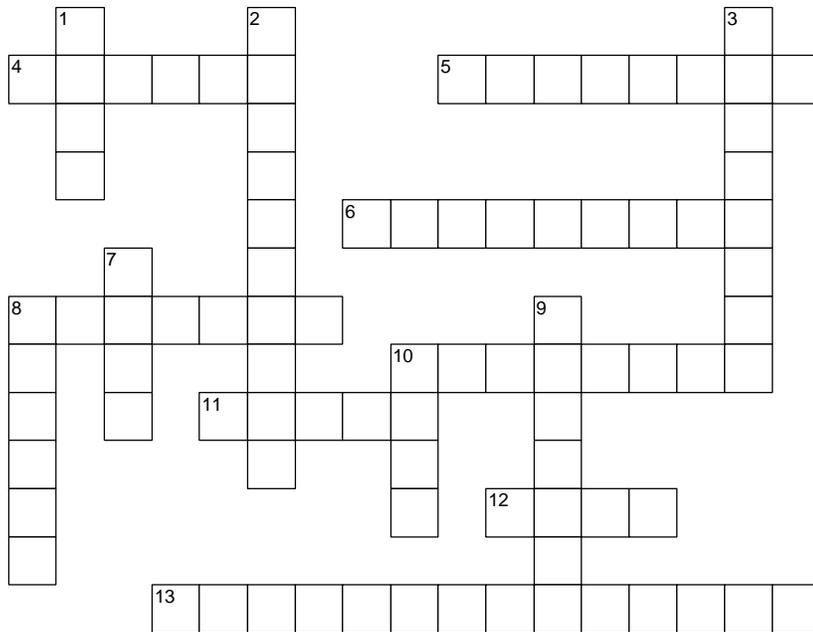
With Code leading the charge, the BIA no longer encouraged the building of San Carlos Dam, opening the door for government support of the Tonto site. Nonetheless, former territorial representative and Florence newspaper editor Charles Reppy wrote to Interior Secretary Ethan Allen Hitchcock that Salt River Valley authorities had mislead the public into thinking the Tonto site would supply water for the Pima Reservation. “This was absolutely untrue,” Reppy told Hitchcock. Any hint of Salt River water for the benefit of the Pima Reservation, Reppy noted, had to “be taken with a grain of salt.”

By 1902, it was too late. Code had persuaded the BIA to support well water and the Salt River Valley had persuaded those in decision-making authority that the Tonto (Roosevelt) Dam site was superior. Charles Lummis summed up the matter in 1903, noting that the Pimas would get no benefit from the Tonto Dam site. “[A]s soon as the National Irrigation measure was passed, there was a sudden cessation of aching for the starved Pimas; and the Salt River Valley, with its 20,000 live

Americans and the fertile irrigated farms of Phoenix and vicinity, suddenly loomed up as beneficiary in the place of the Indians.... [I]t is more than doubtful," Lummis continued, "whether the rich and alert American interests about Phoenix would leave a drop of water for the Indians while 50,000 acres privately owned in their own valley went dry." On October 12, 1903, Interior Secretary Hitchcock awarded the first federal reclamation project to the Salt River Valley.

A Victory for the Salt River Valley

Use the questions below to complete the crossword puzzle. All of the words are found in the reading selection.



Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project

ACROSS

4. A Salt River Valley landowner and President of the Arizona Agricultural Association: _____
5. The Salt River Valley indicated water could be delivered over this type of canal to Gila River: _____
6. This valley received the first federal reclamation project: _____
8. The Reclamation Act was amended to include these lands, which favored the Salt River Valley: _____
10. A large Salt River Valley land speculator and land developer: _____
11. The favored site of the Salt River Valley interests: _____
12. This river valley sent 7 lobbyists to Washington DC to fight for their project: _____
13. He became President of the United States after William McKinley was assassinated: _____

DOWN

1. His appointment to the BIA aided the Salt River Valley's hope for the first reclamation project: _____
2. The Senate opposed the San Carlos bill because of fears it would create a national _____ policy.
3. This person controlled federal funds available under the Reclamation Act: Secretary of the _____
7. The Gila River Valley believed the needs of the _____ would be enough to ensure the first reclamation project.
8. William Code believed the Gila River Community could best be served with this type of water: _____
9. The National Reclamation Act did not consider the needs of these people: _____
10. Presbyterian ministers Dirk Lay and Charles _____ supported the Pima by lobbying Congress in Washington DC.

Teacher Plan for “A Victory for the Salt River Valley”

Objectives

Terms to know and understand

- Lobby
- Speculators
- Deprivation
- Highline
- Reclamation
- Pumped Water

Critical Thinking:

- Water users in the Gila River Valley placed all of their hopes for federal reclamation on the water abuses of the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh. The waters users of the Salt River Valley, however, while making promises of water for the Akimel O’otham and Pee Posh, stressed the large economic benefits that would be realized if the Salt River Valley was selected first. If you were in a position to decide, would you chose to appropriate large sums of money to right a moral wrong (and restore water to the Community) in the Gila River Valley or would you support the great economic benefits to be had in the Salt River Valley?

Students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the political strategies of the Salt River Valley with those of the Gila River Valley in seeking to secure a federally supported reclamation project.
2. Analyze the effectiveness of political lobbying and organization in the struggle for reclamation funding.

Activities

- Discuss with students what it means to have a “conflict of interest.” Then discuss with students whether or not they think there was a conflict of interest with William Code representing the Indian Service. Remind students Code was a good friend and business acquaintance of Dr. Chandler, one of the largest land speculators in the Salt River Valley. Code had worked for Chandler for ten years and served as vice-president of Chandler’s Mesa Bank (Chandler was President). Prior to Code’s appointment as Indian Irrigation Engineer, Congress supported the San Carlos site for the benefit of the Gila River Indian Community. After his appointment, Code encouraged the BIA—and Congress—to support pumping well water on the reservation and the awarding of the reclamation project to the Tonto (Salt River) group. Why might Code have done this? Was this a conflict of interest?
- Discuss with students that the Reclamation Act was design to encourage agriculture in the arid West. But, it did not include Indian Country, even though the Bureau of Indian Affairs was very supportive of Indian agricultural activities. Agriculture without water would not work in the desert. What possible reasons are there for this mixed message policy?

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.