

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

Journal Abstracts of Asa B. Clarke & Benjamin Harris

Part 60

Asa B. Clarke was part of a New York emigrant company. He traveled to California via the Southern Trail to the Pima villages, where he arrived June 1, 1849.

“June 1st At four in the afternoon we started from our second camp to make the great jornada, which we had been a long time dreading.

June 2d. The animals suffered severely from thirst, and several horses “gave out,” and were left behind. When an animal could proceed no further, he was sometimes shot, at others he was left to his fate. We also passed two men on foot, who had been left behind by their company.

June 3d. We arrived at the river Gila at 10 in the forenoon. The Gila is rapid and narrow. On arriving at water the mules rushed forward, and it seemed difficult to allay their thirst. Three men fainted yesterday upon the road. Those that had wagons fared best, as they had water the whole way.

June 4th. We moved our camp about five miles down the river, to within four or five miles of the Pimos village. Many Pimos visited our camp, men and women, they brought for sale frijoles, flour, penole, salt, tortillas, and molasses, from the fruit of the pitahaya. They would not take money for anything near its value, but preferred beads, shirts, especially red flannel, pieces of old cloth, &c. The men wear but little clothing; a few had on old shirts that they had obtained from the Americans. The women, a cotton blanket, or a piece of cotton cloth, which they manufacture, fastened around the waist. Their children they carry, fastened on frames upon their shoulders. They appear good-natured and sociable, and I have heard no complaint of their stealing.

June 5th. While some lie in the shade of their booths and read, other walk around the camp and observe the Indians, who are plenty here at all times, with their baskets, and bundles of articles for sale, or visit the place of a neighbor, for each little mess of two or three, has cleared a path through the tall weeds to some mesquite bush, and formed a shade by hanging blankets around it. At night we take the blankets down to make our beds. The land on these bottoms is very fertile, soft, so that our feet sink into it, and of a dark color. The weeds are breast high, or more, and what grass there is to be found, is under the weeds. In places, there are good fields of grass free from weeds.

June 7th. Leaving camp a little after sunrise, we passed down the river, and through the settlements of the Pimos. Their fields, which are formed by driving stakes into the ground, extend perhaps five miles down the river, and there are habitations scattered along the greater part of the way. Their wigwams are formed by driving poles into the ground, and bending them over, and fastening them at the top, in the shape of ovens. They are six or seven feet high, and from twenty to fifty feet in diameter, covered with wheat straw, and plastered with mud. They also have summer sheds, near some of their houses, which are simply platforms raised on stakes, and covered with mud, which are used as shades, and upon which they dry such provisions as need it. Being in want of a gourd, I went into several of their cabins before I was able to suit myself. They keep their molasses stowed away in jars, hermetically sealed. Their other provisions are also deposited in their cabins, principally in large baskets. I saw several carts made like those of the Mexicans. Their principal crop is wheat, which is now nearly ripe. I saw some watermelons growing. Corn was so little advanced that we were able to obtain but few roasting ears. They also raise beans, cotton, and pumpkins. Their agricultural implements consist of the axe, shovels, wooden hoes, and harrows. The soil is so easily pulverized that ploughs are not needed. Their domestic animals are chickens, dogs, horses, mules, and oxen.

The Pimos came out to the road to see us as we passed. Both they and the Coco Maricopas, who are associated with them, seem to be quiet people, living principally by agriculture, but although said to be naturally peaceable, they are considered to be good warriors when occasion requires. Their countenances are almost universally pleasing. They appear to be frank and simple, which is the reverse of the Apaches, their chief enemies, who are a wandering tribe. Nearly the whole of the Gila is drawn off by zequias for irrigating the land, which is laid out in little squares, with sluices between, to admit the water from the zequias. The Coco Maricopas live a few miles farther down the river; they are similar in dress and manners to the Pimos, but rather more athletic, and their countenances are more intelligent. They speak a distinct language. Within a few years they have associated themselves with the Pimos, having come from the mouth of the Gila. This country will doubtless before long be settled by Americans.”

The second account is from Benjamin Butler Harris of Texas. Most Texans took the Southern Trail and were called “Argonauts” Harris wrote his book forty years after he made the trip through the Pima and Maricopa villages.

“During our two-day stay [in Tucson], immigrants to the number of four or five hundred filled the little frontier town, it being the last Mexican town on our route this side of San Diego. Hence to the Gila River was a desert plain without water. To have taken advantage of the coolness of the night and shade, we started at sunset, traveling without order and camping in small squads. By sunrise we had mastered thirty miles; by sunset, forty more. We rested till morning and at 10 or 11 A.M. reached water at the Gila River. Pima Indians met the men ten or fifteen miles from the (Pima) village with gourds of water, roasted pumpkin, and green corn. Serving these, they hurried forward for relieving the others. Broken down or abandoned stock they took in hand for bringing along.

Next morning, we descended the rich Gila bottom through a dense forest of mesquite to the Pima Village, meeting relief parties of Indians along the way. At the Village, several of our men had already arrived and stragglers were yet coming in. The head chief, Juan Antonio Llunas, a fine, handsome, statesmanlike, elderly man, welcomed us, importuning the acceptance of a free hospitality, emphasizing that we could dispense with the custody of horses and stated that all need fear no pilfering, as ‘Pimas do not steal.’ So, our animals were surrendered to be grazed and herded at good pasture at a distance of two or three miles and, for the first time since starting, were removed from our sight and supervision. Finding a heathen people so kind, good, sympathetic, simple, honest, and hospitable was indeed a surprise well worth all the toil and privation of the trip, and calculated to make Christianity blush for its meager attainments and to revive hope for human utopia.

These people number about six thousand souls. They raised horses—but not cows—and worked the soil with plow-oxen obtained from the Mexicans, their plows and mills being of the Mexican sort. Their agricultural products were chiefly corn, wheat, pumpkins, melons, etc. Each able bodied man was required to keep a horse for war purposes against the ever-devilish Apache. They intermarried with the Maricopas and Papagos, all being under one head chief (Llunas) and subchiefs of each tribe. Who and what they are, let the ethnological antiquarian discover and proclaim.

Asking that our animals be brought from pasture, and bidding the good Pimas grateful *adieu*, we dropped down five or six miles to the Maricopa Village, passing the small Papago settlement on the way. The Maricopa chief, Juan Messio, welcomed us but cautioned us to look out for petty theft, to which his tribe was addicted, qualifying the statement by saying that horses and mules would not be stolen, being of such significance as to expose the larcenist to detection and punishment.

The Maricopas were the sturdiest, lustiest race of Indians yet seen. It was rare to find a man under five feet ten. They were more warlike than the Pimas and Papagos, and more muscular. After much solicitous caution to look out for Apaches, well along in the afternoon, bidding the friendly Maricopas *adieu*, we resumed the pilgrimage.”

Document Analysis

Agricultural lands

“For the whole distance [through the Pima villages], we passed through cultivated grounds, over a luxuriantly rich soil. The plain appeared to extend in every direction 15 or 20 miles.”

William Emory, November 1846

“These are an agricultural people their fields are well fenced, and the land well irrigated—they are well mounted on fine horses and mules, their houses mud hovels, thatched. They raise cotton, corn & beans in great abundance, and the best melons I have yet seen in this country.... I think they live better and have more than the people of New Mexico—they are extremely honest.”

John Griffen, November 1846

“The whole distance [through the Pima villages] was through cultivated grounds and a luxuriantly rich soil; there is a large [canal] well out from the river; the plain appeared to extend out in every direction fifteen or twenty miles.”

Philip St. George Cooke, December 1846

“From the village down the river for about 18 miles the whole distance might be called an *Indian city*. Their huts are scattered thickly, too, along the route from 1 to 2 miles from the river, and the whole space down, and between them and the river, is but a series of the *finest fields* I ever saw, giving evidence too of having been *finely cultivated*.... They have large and numerous irrigating ditches, and all of their fields are prepared for irrigation.”

Cave Johnson Coutts, November 1848

“Looking towards the river, fences and deep green blades of maize were plainly visible, showing that although at this moment they [Pima] were inactive, yet they were not always idle.”

William Hunter, August 1849.

Trade and Hospitality

“The tribe did not appear to know the value of money; red flannel shirts were in demand, and a new silver half dollar piece would be taken in payment for provisions in preference to a \$10 gold piece.”

Harvey Wood, June 1849

“They brought corn, pinole, beans and a little bread in to camp for sale, and the greatest trade was soon driven. Their prices were enormously high, a shirt being demanded for a very small quantity of any of the articles mentioned.”

John Durivage, June 1849

“We were not long in commencing to barter with the Pimos (Pima), who showed a very friendly disposition. They brought us small quantities of wheat flour, very coarse, some green corn, and watermelons, for which we gave them shirts and other articles in exchange. We could not procure meat of them, it being the article we needed most. Being an agricultural people, they require what few animals they have for that purpose.”

William Chamberlain, July 1849

“We bought corn, fodder, wheat, melons, and such things, from the Pijmos. They asked high prices in money.”

Alden Woodruff, April 1850

“Their stores of wheat and corn have supplied many a starved emigrant, and restored his broken down animals.”

Sylvester Mowry, November 1857

“They are a wealthy class of Indians”

Nathaniel Michler, 1857

They were “the Good Samaritans of the Desert.”

Benjamin Butler Harris, June 1849

Teacher Plan for “Journal Abstracts of Asa B. Clarke and Benjamin Harris”

Terms to know and understand

- Hermetical
- Countenance
- Efflorescence
- Utopia
- Zequias

Critical Thinking:

- Non-Pima and non-Maricopa writers wrote all of the journals. How might this affect the validity of their observations? Does it tell the whole story? What part of the story is told? What part isn't?

Activities

- Have students read the two journal entries on pages 69-70. Tell them the first journal (Asa B. Clarke) was written as a daily journal—or diary—while the second (Benjamin Harris) was written forty years later as reminiscence. Does this make any difference? Do the students notice any differences in the way the text is written (more serious or humorous, factual recitation or more of an anecdotal approach)? Would the reminiscence be less reliable because it was written forty years later? Explain.
- Using the quotations on page 71, discuss the following:
 - Look at the selections under **Agricultural Lands**. Are there any patterns that emerge? What conclusions can you make? Have students make a list of descriptive (character) qualities and another list of physical (geographical) descriptions. Draw some conclusions based on this evidence.
 - Now look at the selections under **Trade and Hospitality**. Do you see any patterns? What conclusions can you draw based on this information?
 - Look at the observations of Harvey Wood and John Durivage and compare them to the observations of Robert Green and Alden Woodruff. What might account for the change in the Pima and Maricopa understanding of money? Then look at Nathaniel Michler comment from 1857. What might have happened? Explain.
 - Benjamin Harris called the Pima “Good Samaritans of the Desert.” Explain what he may have meant by this.

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. Read and analyze journal entries and look for patterns and biases.
2. Draw conclusions and make predictions based on written data.

Objectives