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Document - "Copy of Petition to the Washington Chiefs"

Copy requested, 4 pp. Against allotment.

Copy of Petition

To the Washington Chiefs:

During the last two years strangers have [illegible] over our land with spy-glasses, and made marks upon it, and we know but little of what this means.

As we believe that you have no wish to disturb our possessions, we want to tell you something about his Hopi land. None of us ever asked that it should be measured into separate lots and given to individuals, for this would cause confusion. —

The family, the dwelling-house, and the field, are inseparable, because the woman is the heart of these, and they rest with her. Among us the family traces its kin from the mother, hence all its possessions are hers. The man builds the house but the woman is the owner, because she repairs and preserves it; the man cultivates the field, but he renders its harvest into the keeping of the woman, because upon her it rests to prepare the food, and the surplus of stores for barter depends upon her thrift.

A man plants the fields of his wife, and the fields assigned to the children she bears, and informally he calls them his, although in fact they are not. — Even of the field which he inherits from his mother, its harvests he may dispose of at will, but the field itself he may not. He may permit his son to occupy it and gather its produce, but at the father's death the son may not own it, for then [illegible] to the father's sister's son, or nearest mother's kin [illegible]

HP1846

According to the number of children a Woman [illegible] fields for them are assigned to her, from some [illegible] lands of her family group, and her husband [illegible] care of them. Hence our fields are numerous but small, and several belonging to the same family may be close together, or they may be miles apart, because [illegible] localities are not continuous.— There are other reasons for the irregularity in size and situation of our family lands, as interrupted sequence of inheritance caused by extinction of families, but chiefly, owing to the following condition, and to which we especially invite your attention.—

In the Spring and Early Summer there usually comes from the Southwest a succession of gales, oftentimes strong enough to blow away the sandy soil from the face of some of our fields, and to expose the underlying clay, which is hard, and sour, and barren; as the sand is the only fertile land, when it moves the planters must follow it, and other fields must be provided in place of those which have been devastated. Sometimes generations pass away and these barren spots remain, while in other instances, after a few years, the winds have again restored the desirable sand upon them.

In such event its fertility is disclosed [illegible] the nature of the grass and shrubs that [illegible]

If there are processing, a number of us unite to clear off the land and make it again fit for planting, when it may be given back to its former owner, or if a long time has elapsed, to other heirs, or it may be given to some person of the same family group more in need of a planting place.

These limited changes in land holding are [illegible] by mutual discussion and concession among the elders, and among all the thinking men and women of the family groups interested.

In effect, the same system of holding, and the same method of planting, obtain among the Tewa, and all the Hopi Villages, and under them we provide ourselves with food in abundance.

The American is our Elder brother, and in Everything he can teach us, except in the method of growing corn in these waterless, sandy valleys, and in that we are sure we can teach him.

We believe that you have no desire to change our system of small holdings, nor do we think that you wish to remove any of our ancient land-marks, and it seems to us that the conditions we have mentioned afford sufficient grounds for thus requesting to be [illegible] undisturbed.

HP1848

It further has been told to us, as coming from Washington, that neither measuring nor individuals whom are necessary for us to keep possession of our Villages, our peach orchards, and our Springs, be this be so, we should like to ask what need there is to bring confusion into our accustomed system of holding our Corn fields.

We are aware that some ten years ago a certain area around our lands was proclaimed this for our use, but the extent of this area is unknown to us, nor has any Agent ever been able to point it out, for its boundaries have never been measured. —

We most earnestly desire to have one continuous boundary ring inclosing all the Tewa and all the Hopi lands, and that it shall be large enough to afford sustenance for our increasing flocks and herds. If such a scope can be confirmed to us by a patent from your hands, securing us forever against intrusions, all our people will be satisfied.

HP1849