HOPI AGRICULTURAL REPORT,

1540-1934

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by

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SUMMARY OF HOPI FARMING WITHIN THE 1934 RESERVATION

The Hopi Indians of northern Arizona have long been recognized for their superb agricultural skills, and their efficient use of available arable land. Such skills were important to survival in an arid semi-desert landscape where cultivable land represents only a fraction of the surface area. From the distant past to 1934, farming was an economic mainstay for the Hopi, and their carefully tended farms produced a variety of staple foods as well as cotton. Because productive lands near the main villages often proved inadequate to meet their needs, Hopis traditionally practiced agriculture in many areas west, south, and east of the 1882 Hopi Reservation line. The most important and extensive of these areas is centered around Moenkopi, where reliable water supplies make irrigated fields possible. Because of its importance to the Hopi, farming in the Moenkopi area will be discussed separately.

Historical documents show that the Hopi were the original and sole occupants of much of the land west of the 1882 Reservation, and that they used this area productively for agriculture and other purposes for centuries prior to the arrival of non-Indian settlers and Navajos in the 1870's. In 1604, Juan de Onate noted a Hopi pueblo in the Moenkopi area, and in the mid-1770's, Spanish missionaries Garces, Escalante, and Dominguez all noted Hopi crops planted along Moenkopi Wash and Pasture Canyon. In 1823, the area was known as Los Algodones ("place of cotton planting") because cotton fields belonging to Oraibi Hopis were located

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there. It was a common Hopi practice to run long distances to cultivate outlying summer farms, such as those at Moenkopi Wash, Pasture Canyon, and Moenave, and then return to Oraibi toward sundown. By 1868 or earlier, several Oraibi Hopis reestablished a permanent pueblo at Moenkopi and farmed there unhindered until the entrance of non-Indians into the area in 1875.

In 1875, Mormons settled in the Moenkopi area and land disputes soon developed between them and the Hopi, who attempted to defend their proprietary interests. The Hopi openly protested Mormon usurpation of their farm land and water to federal government officials, and asked for protection. Over time, increasingly violent treatment at the hands of Mormon settlers forced many Hopis to share or withdraw from farming areas along Moenkopi Wash, in Pasture Canyon, and at Moenave. In 1893 and 1899, federal government officials attempted to protect Hopi interests and settle matters by allotting farm land to the Hopis. These efforts failed to adequately protect the Hopis, and in fact, complicated matters by allotting certain tracts of traditional Hopi land to Navajo Indians, who by then had begun to enter the area in greater numbers. Hopi-Mormon troubles did not end until the government purchased all the Mormon holdings in 1903.

Rather than returning to the Hopi those resources purchased from the Mormons, the federal government assumed direct control over the land and water rights. It allocated part of the land as a government farm to support the Tuba City Boarding School for

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Hopis, Navajos, and Paiutes. It took control over the distribution of water. The "surplus" Mormon farm lands were "assigned" or "leased" not only to the Hopi but to Navajo Indians as well.

Although dissatisfied with an arrangement which limited their access to land they regarded as their own, from 1903 to 1934 Hopis took full advantage of the government policy to lease land, especially after a concrete diversion dam was built in 1915 to control flooding in the Wash. During these years, they successfully competed with Navajos in the area for any open farm land, and constantly sought more arable lands to cultivate. When any new land was made available by the government, or when they saw productive land lying fallow, Hopis requested that the land be assigned to them.

Through hard work and initiative, Hopi farmers slowly acquired much of the productive farm land along Moenkopi Wash and Pasture Canyon. Besides these irrigated lands, Hopis also dry-farmed an indeterminable amount of acreage on Moenkopi Plateau and Coal Mine Mesa. In addition, in 1914, Hopis were "assigned" Moenave farm land, when Navajo use of the area proved unproductive. However, in 1921, due to the vicissitudes of government policy, they were forced to give up their farms and improvements there.

By 1934, Hopis farmed those tracts of land along Moenkopi Wash and Pasture Canyon and on Moenkopi Plateau and Coal Mine Mesa indicated on Portfolio Maps #8, #9, and #10. However, in 1934,

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Hopis may have farmed other land which does not appear in the limited historical documentation.

The history of Hopi farming south of the 1882 Reservation line differs considerably from the Moenkopi region. During the Pueblo IV period (1300 to 1600), ancestors of present-day Hopi clans lived and farmed in the central Little Colorado River basin, and in the main washes leading to the basin. Near the end of this period, changing environmental conditions made farming there more difficult or impossible, and they migrated northward to the main Hopi villages, bringing claims to this southern area as part of their heritage. Drought conditions and historical factors prevented their return to these "outlying" farm lands until the late 1800's. Nevertheless, Hopis defended their southern territory against hostile intruders, such as the Spanish, Apaches, and Navajos.

In 1877, encouraged by Mormon settlement along the Little Colorado River, Hopis returned to their traditional lands along the river basin and farmed near Sunset, Arizona -- only a short distance from their ancestral villages at Homolovi and Chevlon. The following year, however, a major flood destroyed their farms, and both the Mormons and Hopis withdrew. Nevertheless, the basin remained a potential Hopi farming area and part of the Hopi inventory.

Demand for this and other "outlying" land again occurred several years later. Around the turn of the century, the Hopis faced an environmental catastrophe when climatic change and

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prolonged runoffs occurred in the washes near the Hopi villages causing them to erode and dissect. The resulting loss of some of the most productive acreage inside the 1882 Reservation caused the Hopi to turn to "outlying" farm lands to the south for relief. To avoid starvation, a reverse migration of Hopis began down the washes toward the Little Colorado basin as First, Second, and Third Mesa Hopi followed and cultivated the alluvial flood plain to the lower reaches of Dinnebito, Oraibi, Polacca, and Jeddito Washes.

However, Hopi attempts to find "new" farm land in the area were frustrated by the resistance of recently arrived Navajos. Areas of inter-tribal conflict occurred near Dinnebito Springs, Sand Springs, Shonto, Tolani Lakes, Red Lake, south of Tovar Mesa, and Comar Springs. Similar Hopi-Navajo conflicts over land occurred in Upper Polacca Wash and elsewhere. Navajo resistance and the government's failure to protect Hopi territorial rights stopped Hopi use of their domain and blocked their agricultural progress short of the 1934 Reservation.

Despite these obstacles, by 1934 Hopis had expanded their agricultural base well beyond the mesas and were farming in many areas near the boundary of the 1882 Reservation. Hopis frequently traveled between their villages (including Moenkopi) and farming plots along this boundary. Many of these same Hopi farmers were also livestock owners, whose cattle, horses, and sheep either permanently or seasonally grazed in the 1934 area. When they were farming these border areas, Hopi land use patterns (such as

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gathering activities) naturally tended to radiate out into the surrounding territory, spilling over the unfenced and largely unheeded boundary of the 1882 Reservation.

That agriculture in 1934 was critically important to Hopi economy and culture is unquestionable. For centuries, Hopi well-being depended on the success of their crops. Cultivating land subject to natural irrigation in semi-arid conditions was difficult, and required yearly shifting of fields in response to changing environmental and climatic conditions. To survive, a Hopi family needed to possess farm plots in various parts of their territory in case a particular farm area failed. Hopi ceremonial life reflected Hopi dependence on agriculture and still does. Today, as in the past, every stage of cultivation from planting to harvesting involves ceremonial ritual -- activities performed to insure continued agricultural prosperity.

The scarce and scattered plots of productive farm land described in this report were, and are, of crucial importance to the Hopi people. Although alternate dietary sources are available today, Hopi harvests of maize, melons, beans, and squash around Moenkopi and elsewhere are still basic to the Hopi economy for subsistence and trade.

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