

Padre Kino - Our Padre on Horseback



Jesuit missionary and explorer Eusebio Francisco Kino is described by historian Lawrence Clark Powell as "the noblest Southwesterner of all".

He is also known as "The Padre on Horseback." His journeys at great distances and breakneck speeds distinguishes him as one of the world's greatest horsemen because his horseback rides required phenomenal mental and physical stamina.

Padre Kino was born in 1645 in the Italian Alpine village of Segno. For his last 24 years Padre Kino ministered to native people while laboring tirelessly in his Sonoran Desert parish - the 50,000 square mile Pimería Alta (now southern Arizona and northern Sonora). Before his final assignment to our region Padre Kino worked 3 years on the drought stricken desert coasts of Baja California until the ill-fated Spanish settlement effort was abandoned by order of the Spanish king.

Padre Kino was a mission builder, agriculturist and peacemaker. He founded 24 missions including beautiful Mission San Xavier in Tucson. He introduced into Arizona horses, cattle and other herd animals and the cultivation of Old World crops. Under his instruction the native people quickly learned new agricultural practices and other technologies from Europe. By his words in official reports to his superiors and by his actions in his life as a missionary priest, Padre Kino expressed his conviction that evangelization begins with respect for native people and the physical betterment of their lives.



Padre Kino was a frontier diplomat who promoted peace among the warring tribes that he encountered and he demanded that the Spanish treat the native people with respect as their fellow human beings. He defended the native people from the claims of powerful interests who coveted their lands and labor & who relentlessly attempted to undermine his work. The native people loved him as a trusted friend and advocate.

Padre Kino was a gifted scientist, historian and mapmaker having been trained as student and a professor in Europe's greatest universities. In the New World, he was a mission builder and itinerant priest making 50 expeditions totaling over 19,000 miles beyond the Spanish frontier. His careful observations resulted in the first reliable chronicles & accurate maps of these previously unknown lands. His maps were published in Europe during his lifetime and were used for over a century.

Padre Kino's explorations proved that there was a land route to California which contradicted the common belief that California was an island. His discovery led to renewed efforts to build new missions in Baja California during his lifetime and

later to the European settlement of Arizona and California including the founding of San Francisco by the De Anza expedition. These undertakings could have only succeeded with the support provided by the chain of missions built by Padre Kino and his native friends - both Christian and non-Christian.

In 1711 Padre Kino died in Magdalena, Sonora after saying Mass at the dedication of a chapel for his patron saint, Francis Xavier. His death bed was made of horse blankets & for a pillow - his saddle.

In 1965 Padre Kino was honored by the State of Arizona as its heroic representative to the American people and its preeminent pioneer by the dedication of his statue in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Five years ago the petition for formal recognition of Padre Kino as a saint by the Catholic Church was accepted and is currently under consideration by the Vatican.

Through his great faith and intellect, his gentle charisma, and his mental and physical courage, Padre Kino forever transformed the lives and hearts of all people in the Pimería Alta & the Californias.

For information about the life of Padre Kino and events honoring Padre Kino this year - the 300th anniversary of his death - visit the Kino Heritage Society's website at www.padreokino.com.