

Padre Kino - Our Padre on Horseback



Padre Kino

Jesuit missionary and explorer Eusebio Francisco Kino is described by the eminent historian Lawrence Clark Powell as "the noblest Southwesterner of all". He is also known as "The Padre on Horseback" because his desert journeys of great distances at breakneck speeds set him apart as one of the world's greatest horseman.

Kino was born in 1645 in the Tyrolean Alpine village of Segno. For his last 24 years Kino ministered to Native People while working tirelessly in his Sonoran Desert parish - the 50,000 square mile Pimería Alta (now southern Arizona & northern Sonora). Before his assignment to the border region, Kino worked three years on the drought stricken coasts of Baja California and was among the first Europeans to travel across the Baja Peninsula.

Kino was a mission builder, agriculturist and peacemaker. He founded 24 missions including Arizona's two beautiful missions — San Xavier del Bac and Tumacácori. 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. Kino taught by his actions and writings that evangelization begins with respect for Native People and the physical betterment of their lives. Kino's teachings were the beginning of modern evangelization practice.

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



Padre Kino's 1701 Map

Kino was a gifted scientist, historian and mapmaker having been a brilliant student and professor at Europe's greatest universities in the first half of his life. In the New World, when he was not working at his missions, he was an itinerant priest making 40 apostolic expeditions totaling over 19,000 miles beyond the Spanish frontier. His careful observations resulted in the first reliable reports and accurate maps of these previously unknown lands. His maps were published in Europe during his lifetime and were used for over a century.

Kino's explorations to the Colorado River proved that there was a land route to California which contradicted the accepted belief that California was an island. His discovery led to renewed efforts to build missions in Baja California that he first began in 1683. After his death, his legacy continued and led to the European settlement of Arizona and California including the founding of San Francisco by the Anza Expedition and the development of the California missions financed by the Pious Fund that Kino co-founded.

In 1711 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 Kino was honored by the State of Arizona as its representative in the U.S. Capitol's "Hall of Heroes" National Statuary Hall. He was also named as a "Great Westerner" by the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Kino's petition for recognition as a saint was accepted by the Catholic Church several years ago and is currently under consideration by the Vatican.

As one of the world's greatest missionaries, Padre Kino by his great faith and tireless work, by his compassionate heart and gentle charisma and by his physical stamina and moral courage, forever transforms the lives of all people. For more information about the life and legacy of Padre Kino, visit the website of the Kino Heritage Society at www.padreokino.com.