

## FIRST DRAFT

# SLAVE, SOLDIER, AND SETTLER

Southwestern Colorado pioneer lived, worked among multiple cultures

Looking north from Mesa Mountains, one views the irrigated farms and small communities nestled in Southwestern Colorado's Pine River Valley, with the rugged San Juan Mountains in the distance.

It's easy to see why this sheltered park has long attracted groups such as the Mouache Utes, who made it their seasonal home for centuries. And people like John Taylor, who arrived in the Pine River Valley in 1871 and claimed to be the first white man to settle there.

Later white settlers supported Taylor's claim, even though Taylor was a dark-skinned African American, a former slave and a one-time Buffalo Soldier.

Taylor journeyed across much of the Southwest before settling permanently in the valley. He married a dozen Native women from different tribes.

However, for the last 40 years of his life, his wife was a Ute woman named Kitty Cloud. They lived near Ignacio, Colorado.

Taylor's claim to be the first white settler in the valley was not baloney. A unique racial dynamic emerged in the West in the late 19th century, one in which "whiteness was based on not being regarded as an American Indian, Mexican or Asian," one scholar wrote.

Within this dynamic, Taylor was "a black, white man" who moved between different cultures, accepted by whites, Hispanics and Natives alike.

"He was gregarious. He told wonderful stories and he knew how to get along with everybody," said Johnny Taylor Valdez, one of the many great grandchildren of John and Kitty Cloud Taylor.

Valdez has conducted extensive research into his family's history and that of the Southern Utes. He learned stories about his great grandfather from his grandmother Euterpe Taylor and from his father Silviano Valdez.

Among the stories Valdez's grandmother told him was that John Taylor used to read



PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Fort Lewis in Hesperus, Colorado, in 1883, about the time that John Taylor served as an interpreter for the Army there.

newspapers out loud "because it helped him to understand the words."

That's at odds with some portraits of Taylor. A 1941 Colorado Magazine article by D.B. McGue said Taylor could write his name but otherwise was illiterate. When McGue quoted Taylor, it was in plantation-slave dialect that was barely intelligible.

That's not how he was remembered by family, friends and others in Southwestern Colorado, however. Taylor was fluent in five languages: English, Spanish, Ute, Apache and Navajo. He often served as an interpreter for the government or civilian traders. It would have been difficult for an illiterate man to accomplish that.

Taylor likely presented different personas to different audiences, Valdez said. The stories he told his family and Ute friends were probably much different than what he told white writers.

McGue interviewed Taylor shortly before his death in 1935. He said Taylor's Army record showed he was born a slave in Kentucky in 1841.

Euterpe Taylor said her father told of being born in Georgia, North Carolina or Africa. In the latter story, he was taken from his family on a slave ship, and he wept when he recalled the separation.

Taylor escaped slavery and enlisted in a Black regiment of the Union Army in August 1864. He fought in several critical battles and suffered multiple wounds. He was discharged in 1866 and spent a year as a farm laborer.

In March 1867, he re-enlisted in the Army with the 35th Infantry, one of four all-Black regiments created after the Civil War whose members became known as Buffalo Soldiers.

Taylor's regiment was sent to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado to keep peace between settlers and Natives. He left in 1870 when his enlistment ended.

He traveled to the Pine River Valley then, where he trapped beaver and laid claim to being the first white settler. But he soon departed and began what he called his "wild riding days."

He lived with the Chiricahua Apaches and may have had four Apache wives. He traveled with Apaches into Mexico, but said he didn't join in their raids for horses and human captives.

He also spent time with Navajos in New Mexico and Arizona, where he is believed to have married and had children. He worked for a trader near Abiquiu, N.M., as a laborer and interpreter for the Utes.

In 1877, the government established an Indian agency in the Pine River Valley. It was called both the Los Piños Agency and the Southern Ute Agency, and it served the Mouache, Caputa and Weeminuche Ute bands.

By March 1879, Taylor was a paid interpreter for the agency. In 1881, he was hired as a laborer and farmer for the agency. However, it appears he intermittently left to visit Silverton, where he worked in the mines and played cards in saloons.

In 1882, Taylor began working sporadically for a white trader with posts at Towaoc, Colorado, and Aneth, Utah.

He also worked intermittently translating for the U.S. Army at Fort Lewis, near Hesperus, Colorado, where a cavalry regiment of Buffalo Soldiers was stationed. He accompanied the soldiers into Utah in 1881, chasing Ute and Paiute Indians after the Pinhook Draw battle near Moab.

It was likely then that he became friendly with the Avikan group of Utes and Paiutes living near White Mesa in Southeast-

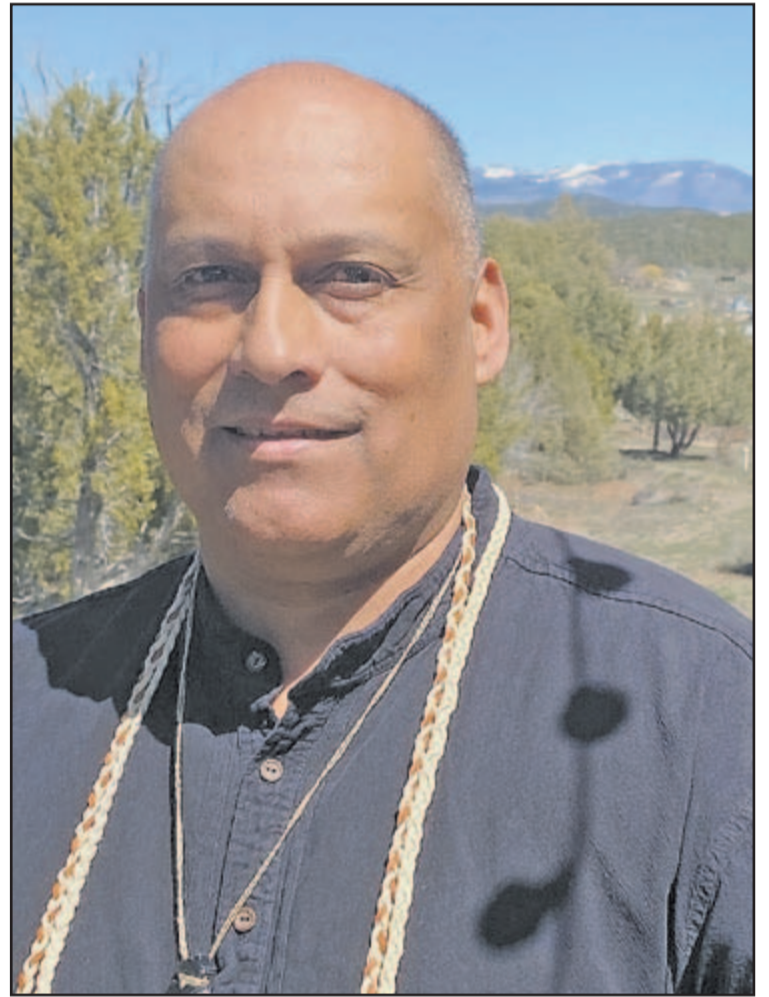


PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHNNY TAYLOR VALDEZ

Johnny Taylor Valdez, great grandson of John Taylor. Valdez is one of many descendants of John and Kitty Cloud Taylor, who still live in the Pine River Valley.

ern Utah. He remained in touch with them for much of his life, and he and Kitty Cloud stayed with the Avikans on occasion.

In 1883, Taylor was hired by Dutch anthropologist Herman Ten Kate when the latter was conducting research on Utes, Navajos and Apaches.

But he remained most closely allied with the Mouache and Caputa Ute bands, who collectively became known as the Southern Utes. He traveled with them to gatherings in Denver, and he served as an interpreter when the Southern Utes were negotiating with the government.

Between 1885 and 1896 he married at least three Ute women, including sisters Polly and Kitty Green, and helped raise two step-sons, Henry and John Green. Henry owned a land allotment, and after he died, it became John Taylor's property. Taylor either sold or gambled away this land in 1910, and it became the town site for Ignacio, the seat of government, business and cultural enterprises for the Southern Ute Tribe.

About 1896, Taylor married Kitty Cloud in the traditional Ute manner. They were married in an Anglo church in 1903. Together, they had 18 children, but

only four survived to become adults. Euterpe, born in 1899, was the oldest of those four.

Throughout his life, Taylor loved to gamble, said Valdez. "He loved to bet on local baseball games. He always bet on the Native teams against the whites, and he nearly always won."

He also remained fiercely loyal to the U.S. Army, which had helped him escape slavery. He tried unsuccessfully to re-enlist when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, and again during World War I, when he was 75 years old.

When John Taylor died in January 1935, his large funeral attracted Natives, whites, Hispanics and people of African-American descent. He was buried in the Ute cemetery in Ignacio, in the midst of the Pine River Valley that was his home.

Sources: Author interviews with Johnny Taylor Valdez; "John Taylor and Racial Formation in the Ute Borderlands," by Louis Gregory McAllister, accessed through www.proquest.com; "John Taylor - Slave-Born Colorado Pioneer," by D.B. McGue, The Colorado Magazine, September, 1941.

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HISTORY COLORADO DENVER.

Kitty Cloud Taylor and her husband, John Taylor, in a 1907 photograph.

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