

Robert Taylor Valentine (1812-1887)

In 1846, Robert Taylor Valentine, a free man of color from North Carolina, moved to the Town of Oregon with his family of six to buy federal land. Robert's father, Shadrack, and his family of three also moved to the Town of Rutland to do the same. Notably, when the United Brethren decided to erect a new church at this cemetery in 1852, Robert was one of three trustees whose names were on the deed.

Over time, Robert purchased more federal land from offices in Stevens Point and La Crosse. Around 1860, he moved north to join a Black farming community in the Newark Valley, Adams County, and then another in the Town of Trimbelle, Pierce County. Eventually, he moved to Fayette County, Iowa, to live with his daughter and son-in-law, where he served as a minister of a local Freewill Baptist church. He is buried nearby in the all-Black Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

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Robert Taylor Valentine's Family Joined the Union Army

Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation allowed Blacks to join the Union Army and Navy. Robert's sons, Shadrack and John J., younger brother, Julius, and son-in-law, Jesse Epps, all enlisted, perhaps inspired by the Valentine's 18th-century ancestor, Isham, who fought for three years as a patriot in the Revolutionary War.

Shadrack served in the 102nd US Colored Infantry (USCI); John J. the 17th USCI; Julius the 29th USCI; and Jesse Epps the 28th USCI. Shadrack succumbed to Typhoid Fever, July 1, 1864, at Camp Casey, VA, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The others survived the war. About 200,000 Blacks, 10% of the Union's armed forces, fought for the Union. In his 1864 re-election campaign, Lincoln said, "Abandon all the posts now possessed by Black men and we would be compelled to abandon the war in three weeks."

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