



Introducing Colorow, a Jefferson County legend

by Beth Simmons

Colorow is the most familiar name of local Native American inhabitants in Jefferson County. Other than the many stories — often about the chief’s legendary appetite — that have been recorded and repeated, very little has been known of the man as he really was. A great statesman and respected leader of his people, Colorow’s memory has been victim of false, or exaggerated, reporting for too long.

Chief Colorow
c. 1869-70
by W.H. Reed,
Central City, CO

National Museum of
the American Indian,
Smithsonian Institution,
P22930

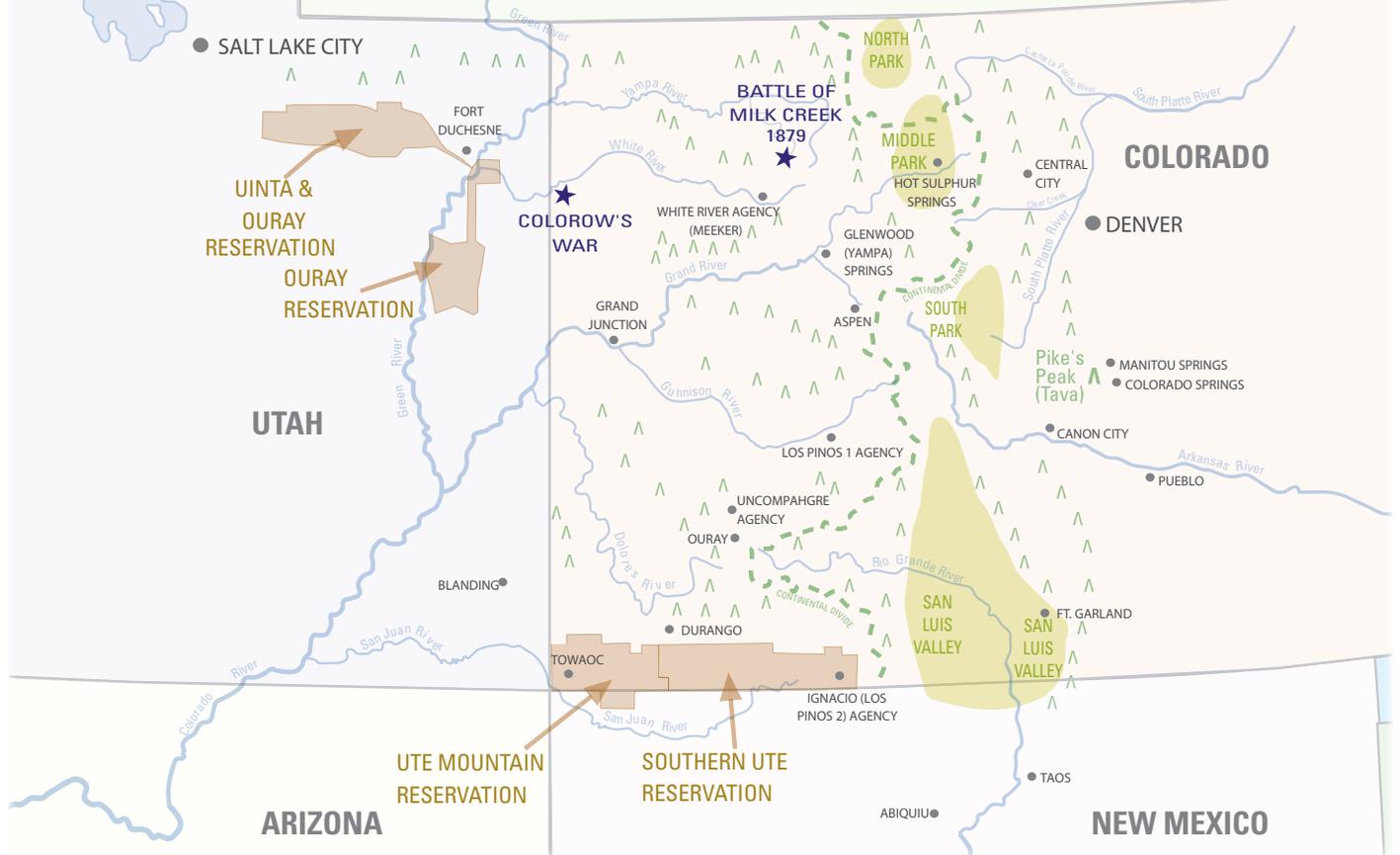
Chief Colorow was born a Comanche. After a battle in northern New Mexico, the long-legged lad was adopted and raised by the Muwache Utes. Because his skin was more red than the brown-skinned Utes, the Mexicans called him “Colorado” or “Red,” a name that later appears on most of the treaties between the Utes and Americans. As an adult, his six-foot-tall imposing stature and his horse-trading talent propelled him to lead his large family to wealth for half a century.

The Arapahos and the all-important buffalo roamed the Plains to the east of what is now Jefferson County. Often the Arapahos camped near the confluence of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek, near John Smith’s trading post. The Utes and Arapahos were enemies of long standing. Colorow had faced the Arapahos in numerous battles, including one near what is now Aspen, from which he emerged a hero. Another supposed battle at the base of the Table Mountains was so bloody that neither the Utes nor Arapahos would return to the valley.¹

As an adult, Colorow crisscrossed what is now the state of Colorado for more than a quarter of a century. He knew every trail, tribe and other chief. He knew the Spanish and had made acquaintance with American fur traders, trappers and military men. In 1856, he fought with Ouray and Nevava against a band of Arapahos and Cheyennes who had stolen 40 Ute horses. Outnumbered eight to one, the Utes killed four of the enemy and retrieved their horses.²

Colorow’s first wife Recha was apparently the mother of his first three children, Uncompahgre Colorow (b. 1835, d. ~1889),³ Patchoorowits (known as “Gus”) and their sister “Topollywack” (b. 1833). Recha died in an accident, after her foot caught in the stirrup dragging her to her death.⁴ Following Ute tradition, Colorow married two sisters, Poopa (b. 1829) and Siah (b. 1830), perhaps Recha’s sisters. In 1857, the trio had nine children with more on the way.





Every early summer, their lodges covered the grassy slopes on what is now the top of Lookout Mountain. More than 1,000 horses and goats traveled with the band across the land, moving to greener pastures every few weeks. As the grass was grazed out, the women and children packed their belongings and headed to the famed “Iron Spring” in Rooney Valley. The tribes, including Arapahos, Cherokees, Comanches and Kiowas, had gathered there peacefully because of the mineral springs and lush pasture near Morrison. Early trappers and mountain men reported the “Grand Encampment” of several tribes in the area as early as 1816.⁵

By 1860, a busy new village named Mt. Vernon occupied the “inner” valley at the base of the mountains along Mt. Vernon Creek Canyon. Joseph Casto chartered and carved a toll road through the canyon to take gold seekers toward Central City and Black Hawk.

Most of the incidents between Utes and settlers in Jefferson County probably occurred in the late 1860s or early 1870s, when Colorow and Ouray often brought their lodges to Denver for supplies and rations. A short entry in the Jan. 16, 1867, issue of the *Colorado Transcript* (Golden) reported that a “large delegation of Ute Indians, both ladies and gentlemen,” had been in town

the previous week and “drove a lively trade with our merchants, bartering their furs and skins for sugar, flour, coffee, etc.”⁶

While encamped, the women tanned the hides of the deer and antelope the men shot to feed the tribe. The buckskin garments and moccasins the Ute women produced, much desired by the early mountain fur trappers, provided the foundation for this band’s barter economy. One of those gold seekers, actually a stonemason turned dairyman, Alexander Rooney saw the potential that lay in the horse pasture around the Iron Spring. He constructed a temporary log shanty as an improvement on the property he claimed

The view to the west from Colorow Point Park, designated a Denver City Mountain Park in 1915 along Colorow Road, across from the Boettcher Mansion situated on Colorow Hill. Before settlement, the land in the view belonged to the Ute Indians (Taviwotsu)
Tinted postcard, c. 1950
Sanborn Souvenir Co.



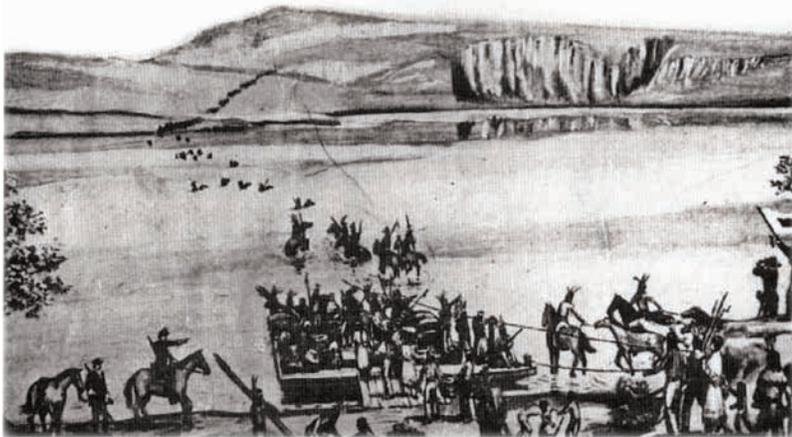
Clear Creek Cañon from Colorow Point



Siah Colorow, left, with two of her children. Possibly Mary in the center, and Waperatz "Enny" on the right.
www.firstpeople.org

Sketch of the crossing of the Grand (Colorado) River by the Utes in September of 1881.

HC #PH.PROP.864



for his homestead and then headed east to Iowa to marry his beloved Emeline Littlefield. By 1864, the Rooneys were back in Colorado Territory, well settled on their ranch, complete with yellow roses that Emeline had brought from Iowa. In 1865, Rooney constructed a substantial stone house.

A Ute trail followed Rooney Creek and went over Green Mountain, so Colorow and his clan often visited the

Rooney family to use the healing muds and water of the Iron Spring. At Rooney's, the Utes, or Numa, turned their horses into the old pasture, now short because Alex had cut and stockpiled the grass for winter hay for his livestock.

The Rooney family tells many stories of Colorow and the Utes, passed down from their ancestors. A classic Rooney story is told of young Alice Rooney babysitting her red-haired squalling baby sister, Emma Nora, while her parents were off chasing cows. A Ute woman came along and offered to trade her quiet papoose for Emma Nora. Alice made the deal and pulled Emma

Nora from her cradle. Upon their return home, finding the strange child, the frantic parents, Alex and Emeline, caught up with Colorow's band and Emma Nora near where Camp George West is today. After some bartering along with the return of the papoose, and amid chuckles from the Natives, the Rooneys retrieved their baby.⁷

Alice Rooney told how she once saved her brother Otis from drowning in Mount Vernon Creek during a wrestling match with a young Native boy. When the Native lad was holding Otis' head underwater, Alice whacked him across his bare back with a long, thorny twig from a rose bush until he let up on Otis.⁸

Always friendly and welcoming to the early white settlers, Colorow was often the first to introduce himself to new residents. He was said to help himself to Emeline Rooney's fine biscuits and roast beef at times. One time, Emeline smacked the chief over the knuckles with the flat side of a butcher knife for reaching into her stew pot with his dirty hands. Colorow immediately offered to trade three squaws and three horses for her so he could teach Emeline a lesson "Indian style," but Alex Rooney declined the deal.

Colorow felt it was the husband's duty to feed his band, not to send the women to beg. So the Ute braves and Chief Colorow often stopped at ranches during their roving and asked the pioneer white women to bake them biscuits. Many biscuit stories bear Colorow's name, but there is no better tale than Mrs. Enriken's from Bailey, along the North Fork of the South Platte River.

White men wanted the land of the Utes that contained the treasures of their economy. Over time, the American government signed and broke at least four treaties and agreements with the Utes: Abiquiu (1849), Tabeguache (1863), Kit Carson (1868) and the Brunot in 1873. Colorow and his sons signed most of these.

All would have been well had not Nathan Meeker, the inexperienced Indian Agent at the White River Agency, exasperated the Utes' patience in 1879 by sending for government troops to force the Utes to do his will. Colorow and other chiefs attempted to intercept and compromise with



Family Portrait c. 1874 The Colorow family was registered at the White River Agency at this time. There is no typical Ute buckskin evident in the clothes in this photo. The men wear white men's shirts, the ladies don cloth dresses or blankets, showing the extent to which the Utes had already accepted white attire and manners. Identifications follow, developed using Google Picasa's facial recognition software. Tentative identifications are indicated by asterisk. *Photo by Chamberlain, Courtesy History Colorado #F-6670*

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| <p>1. Frank Colorow (Colorow's seventh son) in a flat-topped white hat, silk neck scarf and jacket, braids not wrapped.</p> <p>2. Chief Shavano, the older man wearing a shirt, vest and medal, pistol in hand, lap covered with a striped blanket, his hair cut short indicating a recent death in the family.</p> <p>3. Siah Colorow, wrapped in a plaid blanket that is clasped shut.</p> <p>4. Waperatz =Enny Colorow (Colorow's fifth son) in checked shirt, vest, and silk scarf with a blanket over his lap.</p> | <p>5. *Tonits =Unapav Colorow, Siah's youngest daughter, wrapped in a plaid blanket, wearing hair decoration.</p> <p>6. Chief Colorow holding a double-barreled rifle, in the flat-topped black hat shown in the B.A. Hawkins portrait.</p> <p>7. *Penseber Colorow in a plaid dress with silk neck scarf.</p> <p>8. *Kanapedy Colorow wearing hoop earrings with dangles and a soft dress.</p> <p>9. Uncapahagagut=Brock Colorow (Colorow's eighth son) wearing a broad-brimmed hat, double-breasted jacket, neck scarf.</p> | <p>10. *Tabernash Colorow (Colorow's sixth son) with hand on a rifle in checked shirt, vest, and silk neck scarf, braids unwrapped .</p> <p>11. Coho=Chick Colorow (Colorow's third son) in flat-topped hat, scarf, and vest</p> <p>12. Chief Nevava Washington (Yamparika tribe) in turned up hat brim, shirt and vest,</p> <p>13. *Waretza Colorow (Colorow's fourth son) in shirt and silk neck scarf, unwrapped braids, blanket around his legs,</p> <p>14. *Mogoratats [=Mary] Colorow, apparently wrapped in blanket.</p> |
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Time Line Of Colorow's Life

- ~1810: Birth: New Mexico
- ~1815: Capture from Comanches
- 1833, Nov. 13: Witnessed the Leonids Meteor Shower
- 1868: Subchief-considered for chief of Northern Utes
- 1873, April 20: President Grant's Reception, Denver
- 1873, Aug. 22-30: Council at Los Pinos I Agency
- 1874, Oct.: Buffalo hunt with Ouray
- 1875: Travel in Colorado Springs
- 1876: Residence-Ute Reservation, White River Agency
- 1877, June 1: Horse Race between "Black Crook" and winning pony of last Saturday's races, owned by Colorow, at Denver fairgrounds
- 1877, Aug.: Middle Park: Tourists in Middle Park had horse race. Colorow turned 150 head of horses into white man's pasture.
- 1878, Sept. 18: Treaty Relinquished southern portion of Confederate Ute Reservation, signed "Colorado his mark" as a Yampa and Grand River Ute
- 1879, Dec. 1: Testified to White River Commission
- 1880, Aug. 24: Ouray's burial
- 1881: Age:-70 years old
- 1881, Aug.: last to leave Uncompahgre Valley
- 1881, Sept. 1: In Utah, Duchesne River from Uncompahgre Valley
- 1882: Naming Rights—"Chili Colorow Sauce"
- 1882: Naming Rights —Post office named "Colorow" in Grand County
- 1882, Aug. 1: Glenwood Springs: to find some ponies
- 1887, Aug.: Colorow's War, White River at Rangely, CO
- 1887, Sept. 17: Transferred to Ouray Agency
- 1888, Jan.: Claimed damages after Colorow's War
- 1888, Dec. 11: Death at Ouray Agency
- 1888, Dec. 13: Burial

the troops; but, in September 1879, military leader Major Thornburgh insisted on proceeding directly to the White River Agency. His unit engaged the Utes at the Milk River, where Thornburgh was killed. The Utes retaliated, murdering Meeker and his male employees and capturing the women and children who were at the Agency. The Meeker Massacre, as it is called, changed the course of the tribe's future.

After a grueling month of testimony at the Uncompahgre Agency, where Colorow told all he could about the incident,⁹ the Utes

some of Colorow's sons, grandsons and sons-in-law and burned Chipeta's camp. Several western Colorado counties issued orders to shoot Indians — any Indians — on sight. The Utes were ordered by their Agent, Timothy Brynes, to return to Utah for their own safety. They were well on their way when Sheriff Kendall, supported by about 1,000 state militia, caught up with them and started shooting. Buffalo Soldiers from Fort Duchesne in Utah rescued the terrified Indians. In "Colorow's War," the Utes lost more than \$30,000 worth of property; the skirmish cost the state more than \$80,000.¹¹

Fifteen months later, on Dec.11, 1888, Chief Colorow died of pneumonia on the reservation. Hailed as a great chief by the Utes, most of whom were his descendants, Colorow was mourned by friends and family.¹²

and the American government came to an agreement. The "northern Utes" would leave Colorado and move into the desert land of the Uinta Utes in Utah. The "southern Utes" would move south of the San Juans to a narrow strip of desolate land. In September 1881, the entire tribe started its exodus to Utah, with Colorow bringing up the rear.

Within two years of the expulsion, Colorow and his troupe were back in Denver at the National Mining Exposition, hired to "put on a show."¹⁰ They returned to Utah, but rarely stayed around the agency. They spent most of their time in western Colorado, hunting under the treaty of 1880.

In the summer of 1887, because of some minor incidents that occurred around Meeker, the Sheriff of Rio Blanco County started hunting down Utes with a posse. The posse injured



Dr. Beth Simmons,
Ute Spiritual Leader
Kenny Frost and
JCHC member
Sally White under
the 500-year-
old Inspiration
(Colorow) Tree on
Dinosaur Ridge.

Because of the government's emphasis on the leadership of Ouray and Chipeta, Chief Colorow's importance as a Ute statesman and respected tribal leader is just now coming to light. Here in Jefferson County, many places bear Colorow's name. In addition to Colorow Point Park on Lookout Mountain with Colorow Hill just to the south under the Boettcher Mansion, Colorow Road, Colorow Drive, Colorow Elementary School and Colorow's Cave (aka Willowbrook Event Center) all honor the memory of this venerable Native American who welcomed the early settlers to Jefferson County. ☞

Note:

This article is adapted from the full scope special edition, Colorow! A Colorado Photographic Chronicle, also written by Beth Simmons in 2015, which contains many previously unidentified and unpublished photographs of the Utes. It is available for \$19.95 at the Dinosaur Ridge Discovery Center and Visitor Center as well as other bookstores in the Golden area.

References:

- ¹ Colorado Transcript, July 27, 1905, "Famous Indian Battle Ground Site for Amusement Gardens," p. 1.
- ² Smith, P. David, 1990, *Ouray, Chief of the Utes*, Wayfinder Press, Ridgeway, CO, p. 50.
- ³ Name from "Ute Indian Losses," January 11, 1888, Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting an estimate from the Secretary of the Interior of an appropriation to reimburse Colorow and other Indians for losses sustained in 1887, Serial Set Vol. No. 2557, Report: H. Exec. Doc. 68;
- ⁴ Mrs. E.A. Thayer of Glenwood Springs wrote a legend about Recha being a daughter of a white woman who was brought to Colorado for her health. The child disappeared when she was two years, and the story goes that she was adopted by a local Ute band and raised under the "Spirit." Colorow supposedly took her for his wife and she was killed in the horse accident. Thayer puts Colorow in Glenwood Springs after the construction of the Hotel Colorado, which is quite impossible. "Glenwood Springs Current Gossip and News from the Western Slope Spa," July 22, 1900, Colorado Springs Gazette, p. 1
- ⁵ Note from Francis Cragin, "In 1816, Arapaho/Cherokee/Comanche/Kiowa and Kiowa-Apaches were assembled together in a "grand camp" on Bear Creek, near present Morrison, trading with Frenchmen and evidently all at peace with each other under the arm of Chief Bear Tooth." (Colorado Springs Pioneer Museum, Cragin Collection, Box 10, V. 12, "Indians of North America, Intertribal Relations")
- ⁶ Colorado Transcript, Jan. 16, 1867.
- ⁷ Davidson, Jack, Honda, Katherine and Simmons, Beth, 2010, *The Rooney Ranch, Morrison, CO: Friends of Dinosaur Ridge*, p. 5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Congressional Series Set, Secretary of the Interior, Transmitting copy of evidence taken before White River Ute Commission, V. 24, #83, Appendix O, "Testimony of Colorado, Chief of the White River Utes, December 1, 1879, p. 61-65.
- ¹⁰ "The Mining Exposition: The Murderous Old Indian to be Among Spectators," Feb. 23, 1883, Rocky Mountain News, p. 8; Letter from Frank H. Wilson to Hon. Henry M. Teller, June 21, 1883.
- ¹¹ Nankivell, Major John H., November. 1933, "Colorado's Last Indian War," Colorado Magazine, V. 10, #6, p. 223-231.
- ¹² "Chief Colorow Dead," Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle, Dec. 13, 1888, p. 1; same article, Aspen Daily Times, Dec. 13, 1888, p. 1.

Jefferson County Hall of Fame

Colorow

A Jefferson County Legend

Until now, Colorow — the real man, chief and statesman — has been known generally through stories and legends.

In placing Colorow in the Jefferson County Historical Commission Hall of Fame, we wish to recognize the historical and factual contributions that he made to our county and, indeed, our state and nation.

The name "Colorow" appears on many signs and places in Jefferson County — Colorow Mountain Park, Colorow Hill, Colorow Road, Colorow's "Inspiration Tree," Colorow Drive in Morrison, Colorow Elementary School and its adjacent playground, Chief Colorow Park, Colorow Water Station and Colorow's Cave (Willow Brook Amphitheatre).



Colorow (Coloron) by B.A. Hawkins, 1873
Anthropology Archives & Collections, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, #90001712

Another actual place visited by Colorow is Inspiration Tree on the east side of Dinosaur Ridge above the Rooney Ranch. According to Rooney family legends, the original settler, Alexander Rooney smoked the peace pipe with Chief Colorow under this tree. The Ponderosa Pine, dated at more than 500 years, honors the long-standing peace between the Rooney family and the Utes. The tree is on the National Register of Historic Places, along with the Rooney Ranch, and is a Jefferson County Natural Historic Landmark.

We are honored to co-sponsor the publication of *Colorow! A Colorado Photographic Chronicle* by Beth Simmons, Ph.D., noted historian and professor. ☞