



# Revolutionary War Soldier Is Buried in Minnesota

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JUST OFF Highway 61 on the southwestern outskirts of Winona, Minnesota, scenic bluffs tower over Woodlawn Cemetery. In a place of honor in the cemetery stands a nine-by-ten-foot cement replica of a frontier fort, complete with four blockhouses. The miniature fort surrounds the grave of Stephen Taylor, the only Revolutionary War soldier known to have been buried in Minnesota. The fort monument, dedicated on October 1, 1933, was the culmination of several years of effort by the Wenonah Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark the Taylor grave in a special way.<sup>1</sup>

Imbedded in the rear wall of the fort is an earlier headstone that had long marked the Taylor grave in a more obscure spot elsewhere in Woodlawn Cemetery. The headstone had been the personal project of Matthew Marvin, a Civil War veteran who had fought with the First Minnesota Regiment at Gettysburg and elsewhere. While superintendent of Woodlawn in the late 1870s, Marvin was engaged in looking up lot owners and thus got in touch with Stephen Taylor's son Edward, then of St. Charles, Minnesota. Edward Taylor informed Marvin that his father, a Revolutionary War veteran, was buried in an unmarked grave in Woodlawn. After his death in Money Creek Valley, Minnesota Territory, some twenty miles south of Winona, on June 2, 1857, Stephen Taylor was buried in the old "prairie" cemetery grounds near the mouth of Burns Valley Creek, then a short distance downstream from Winona. When that cemetery was discontinued in 1865, the remains of Taylor and other members of his family buried there were transferred to Woodlawn, which had been organized in 1862.<sup>2</sup>

The knowledge that a Revolutionary War veteran was buried in Woodlawn prompted superintendent Marvin to stand the cost himself of erecting a small headstone on the Taylor grave. Now in the rear wall of the fort, the stone reads:

"In memory of Stephen Taylor  
One of the heroes of Ticonderoga  
Born March 23rd, 1757 in the state of New York  
Died June 2nd, 1857."

This marker was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1880. In 1898 the Wenonah Chapter of the DAR was organized and soon showed interest in the Taylor grave. Mabel Marvin (daughter of Matthew) and Mrs. D. B. Morrison, in particular, worked long and hard to procure a more imposing Taylor memorial and a better location for the grave. In this direction the DAR and members of the Minnesota Society of the Sons of the American Revolution held second dedicatory exercises at the old Taylor grave in Woodlawn in September, 1902, and placed a bronze marker there that credited Taylor with being a member of New York militia during the Revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup>Winona *Republican-Herald*, August 19, p. 5, August 26, p. 5, and October 2, 1933, p. 1, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Writings of Mabel Marvin in records of the Wenonah Chapter, DAR; Florence S. Little, "Wenonah Chapter," in *American Monthly Magazine*, 21:385 (November, 1902); *Winona Weekly Republican*, April 12, 1865, p. 3, July 5, 1865, p. 3; records of Woodlawn Cemetery Association.

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STEPHEN TAYLOR'S grave in Woodlawn Cemetery, Winona, shortly after the "fort" memorial was erected in 1933

War. But the new site and the memorial they wanted did not materialize until 1933.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to including the old headstone as well as the bronze marker, the fort memorial also contains the following legend on a metal plate: "A courageous soldier and member of Ethan Allen's immortal band of 83, who took part in the surprise attack on the British garrison at Fort Ticonderoga, and the only Revolutionary War soldier known to be buried in the state of Minnesota."

IN SPITE OF the unqualified marker inscriptions, it is by no means certain that Taylor fought at Ticonderoga, New York, or was a member of the New York militia, or was born in 1757, or was 100 years old when he died. The most thorough study of the subject has been done by James A. Sheehan, who did a master's degree research paper on Taylor at Winona State College in 1964. Through correspondence with numerous authorities and repositories Sheehan was unable to link Stephen Taylor with the attack on Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775. Admittedly there are gaps in the record, but no Stephen Taylor was found listed among men known to have fought at Ticonderoga. Also, age discrepancies that

Sheehan discovered in later records pertaining to Taylor's career raise doubts that he was old enough to have fought with the New York militia or at Ticonderoga in 1775. Sheehan did find that Revolutionary War records of New York list the name Stephen Taylor with at least three militia regiments and that the 1790 census of New York state lists five Stephen Taylors, but none can be positively identified as being the one who later traveled west to Minnesota.<sup>4</sup>

Sheehan also determined with reasonable certainty that the Stephen Taylor linked to Minnesota was living in Sheffield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, in March, 1781, when he enlisted in the First Massachusetts Regiment which was part of the "regulars" of the Continental Army under General George Washington. Long afterward Taylor said he was fifteen years old but large for his age when he enlisted and that he eventually became acquainted with Washington. The regiment was commanded by Colonel Joseph Vose. Taylor's company, in which he served as a private, was under Captain John Williams and, later, Lieutenant Thomas Cushing. Where Taylor served is not known for sure, but if his service paralleled that of Captain Williams he probably was stationed part of the time at least at places along the Hudson River in New York. Taylor served for almost three years and was honorably discharged at West Point on December 27, 1783. General Henry Knox signed his papers.<sup>5</sup>

After the war Taylor returned to Massachusetts. Then sometime in the two-decade period following 1790 he moved to the state of New York, eventually to Seneca, Ontario County, in the Finger Lakes region. That is where his first wife, Ruth, died on July 19, 1814, at the age of thirty-six. Taylor was still living in Seneca on April 16, 1818, when he applied for a soldier's pension about a month after Congress passed an act to provide for Revolutionary War veterans. The application, drawn up by Judge Stephen Phelps of Ontario County,

<sup>3</sup>Winona Weekly Republican, June 2, 1880, p. 3; Winona Daily Republican and Herald, September 10, 13, 1902, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>James A. Sheehan, "Stephen Taylor: The Only Revolutionary Soldier Buried in Minnesota," 5-9, master's thesis, Winona State College, copyright, 1964. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy. Much of this article is based on the thesis of Sheehan, who currently is a teacher in the Richfield public schools, and gave permission for use of his material.

<sup>5</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 1-4. Sheehan cites records he received, especially in regard to the pension request of April 16, 1818, from the Stephen Taylor file (S. 42457), National Archives and Records Service, Washington. He also used Berthold Fernow, ed., *Archives of the State of New York: The Revolution* (Albany, 1887) and *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of Revolution* (Boston, 1908).

gave Taylor's age as fifty-two and stated that he "is in indigent circumstances and needs the satisfaction of his bounty for support. . . ." Because his discharge papers had been burned in his father's house, Taylor secured from acquaintances the necessary verification of his service with the First Massachusetts Regiment. Taylor was issued a pension certificate on September 30, 1818, and placed on the New York roll. He was granted a pension of \$8.00 a month retroactive to April 16, 1818.<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note that, if Taylor's age of fifty-two in 1818 was correct (and one wonders why he would have falsified his age then), he would have been born in 1766, only nine years old at the time of the attack on Ticonderoga in 1775, and fifteen (as he later claimed) when he enlisted in 1781. The 1766 birth year would also mean that he died in 1857 at the age of ninety-one instead of 100. His real birth date is further confused by the fact that the pension list of 1840 gave Taylor's age as seventy-two, which would have made him only about eighty-nine when he died.<sup>7</sup>

On February 14, 1821, by which time he lived in Alfred, Allegany County, New York, Taylor appeared in court again on behalf of his pension claim. He said he was a farmer but was unfit to perform much labor because of a wound from "a Rifle ball." He then indicated his family consisted of his second wife Abigail; son William, aged sixteen; daughter Caroline, aged thirteen; twins Emeline and Edward, aged ten; and stepson Bradford, aged five. His total assets came to \$51.89.<sup>8</sup>

In 1840 Taylor resided in Scio, New York, and by 1849 lived in Wellsville, New York, both in Allegany County. Then in 1854 Taylor made his last, and by far his longest, move — all the way to Money Creek, Minnesota Territory, by the way of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. At least in his high eighties at the time, he traveled with several members of the Taylor family, including his son Edward. Edward's wife, and their four children, one of whom, Caroline, was married in 1851 to Amos Watson, source of much of the information about the trek west.<sup>9</sup>

Sheehan thinks that Taylor undertook the hardships of travel at his age for three reasons: He had strong ties with his son Edward, possessed an "adventurous spirit," and wanted to acquire new land. About a year after his arrival in Minnesota, Taylor placed a claim, and also qualified, for 160 acres of bounty land. He lived the rest of his life, however, on Edward Taylor's farm in Wiscoy Township, Winona County. It was there that he died on June 2, 1857, after an illness of a few hours.<sup>10</sup>

The one description that remains of the old soldier in Minnesota reads: "He was a very large and strong robust man. I never knew him to be sick. He could always dress and take care of himself. He was a strictly temperance man never using liquor or tobacco."<sup>11</sup>

In an obituary in its June 4, 1857, issue, the *Winona Argus* said: "Mr. Taylor was one of the immortal

band of heroes who fought and bled in the battles of the Revolution, and to whose undaunted patriotism we are indebted for our Independence."<sup>12</sup>

In the main dedicatory address at the monument on October 1, 1933, Frank A. Sheehan (uncle of Taylor's biographer) said in part: "Here in our midst lie the ashes of a soldier of the American Revolution. Here stands a monument, raised to his memory that his name and record may be a reminder to us and our descendants of the sacrifice he and his fellow soldiers made, under the leadership of Washington, under our own flag, without any interference from a remote and absentee government."

And again: " . . . it was with his help, and that of his fellow soldiers of the Revolution, that Washington was able to carve the first shining pathway through the powers of tyranny and oppression and point the road to liberty to all the world."<sup>13</sup>

As for Taylor's war record, James A. Sheehan summarized: "In the final analysis of Stephen Taylor's contribution as a soldier of the Revolution, his three year service in the Continental line is the greatest honor. Regardless of his presence at Ticonderoga or in the New York militia, it can add little to that far greater distinction earned as a line soldier."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 10–14. Taylor's service record is conveniently summarized in a letter from Winfield Scott, commissioner, Bureau of Pensions, Department of the Interior, Washington, January 15, 1926, to H. C. Varney, St. Paul, in vol. 13 of "applications for membership" in the Minnesota State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society. The letter was written to Varney, SAR state registrar, in connection with the application for membership in the SAR (granted April 17, 1926) of Colonel Ralph Darrel Foster, great-great-grandson of Stephen Taylor.

<sup>7</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 15–16.

<sup>8</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 14–15.

<sup>9</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 16–18. The author cites a letter written by Amos B. Watson to Mrs. D. B. Morrison of Winona, January 3, 1904, now in the files of the Wenonah Chapter, DAR.

<sup>10</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 19–20, 23. Taylor gave his age as ninety-three when he applied for bounty land on May 5, 1855, some two months after Congress passed a law (United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:701) granting 160 acres to veterans who had been "regularly mustered into the service of the United States."

<sup>11</sup>Watson to Mrs. Morrison, January 3, 1904, Wenonah DAR files, quoted by Sheehan, "Taylor," 22.

<sup>12</sup>*Winona Argus*, June 4, 1857, p. 2. An article in the same newspaper for July 2, 1857, is the chief early printed source linking Taylor with Ethan Allen and the capture of Ticonderoga. Family and other tradition also indicated he reminisced about the Ticonderoga episode.

<sup>13</sup>*Winona Republican Herald*, October 2, 1933, p. 1, 5.

<sup>14</sup>Sheehan, "Taylor," 38.

THE PHOTOGRAPH of the Taylor grave is in the Minnesota Historical Society collection.



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