

Captain Dave Numana

Paiute Chief, Police Officer, Census Supervisor



CHIEF CAPTAIN DAVE (NE-MAS-SAR).
PIUTE—NEVADA ARCHIVE, NEVADA, 1891.

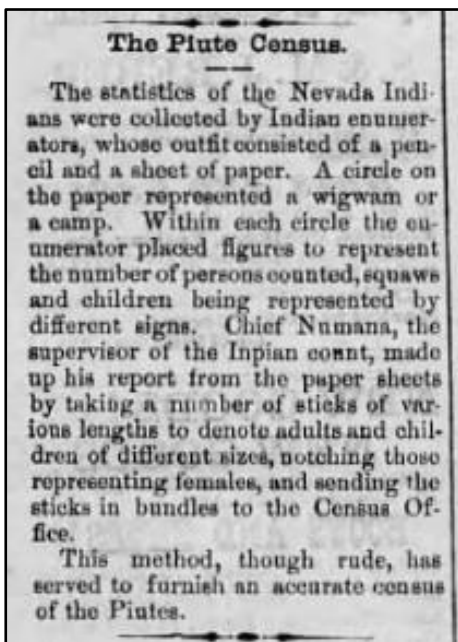
*Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed
at the Eleventh Census: 1890,*
U.S. Census Bureau

From the beginning, the United States vacillated on how to enumerate American Indians. The U.S. Constitution specifically excluded “Indians not taxed” (defined as those living in tribal relations as part of a sovereign community) from the census count. However, the federal government soon recognized that they would have to count the American Indian population, even if the numbers were not part of the apportionment decisions. In 1850, the United States began sporadically conducting separate censuses for these communities, a practice that continued for almost 100 years. In 1860, for the first time, American Indians not living on tribal lands had their own racial category on the census. The 1880 Census contained the first full count of Alaska Natives, while the 1900 Census was the first to count and classify all Indians living in the United States, regardless of their status. Throughout the evolution of the enumeration of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, census officials have embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of the local communities.

The boy who would later be known as Captain Dave Numana was born in western Nevada around 1829 (he claimed April 14, 1829, as his birthday). His father was Paiute and his mother was Shoshone, so he grew up speaking both languages. Captain Dave came from a respected family as his grandfather, Truckee, had led the Paiute in the early 19th century and fought with General John Fremont against the Spanish. He also lent his name to the Truckee River in Nevada and the town of Truckee, CA. As a young boy, Dave remembered the first time American explorers came to the Pyramid Lake region, where they gave gifts of clothes, food, and tools to Dave’s father, Yapatahka. From the beginning, his tribe had made peace with the Americans coming west.



Captain Dave’s 1910 Census



The Lewisburg Chronicle (Lewisburg, PA) 12 May 1881

In 1879, when the paramount Paiute chief Winnemucca wished to retire, the tribe elected Captain Dave, a chief of the local Kuyuidokado Paiute tribe since 1871, to his place. Despite refusing the position three times and not being part of the traditional royal blood line, Dave eventually accepted and would hold the position until his death. For this, his tribe would bestow upon him the title “Numana,” which means “father.” Dave’s ascension turned out to be timely—as the U.S. Census Bureau realized it was time to get a full count of American Indians, he was willing to assist them in that goal.

In 1870, Superintendent of the Census Francis Amasa Walker tried to get additional appropriations to conduct a census of American Indians in conjunction with the decennial census. He was unsuccessful, but his 1871 appointment as Indian Affairs Superintendent gave him further

leverage when he returned to head the 1880 Census. He gained the approval to finally conduct the American Indian census in 1880 and turned to tribal leaders to assist with the count. Captain Dave supervised the enumeration of the Paiute tribes of Nevada, and advised enumerators on how to best collect the information.

Working in an environment that lacked traditional literacy, Captain Dave improvised for the census by having his enumerators draw pictograms of each home in each village. He would then transfer this information to notched sticks, which he bundled by village and sent to the census office for tallying. Despite one of the most complete counts up to that point of American Indians in the United States, including the 3,171 Paiutes enumerated by Captain Dave, most of the information collected on the tribes in 1880 remained unpublished. Since there was no permanent census office, the focus was on publishing the main portion of the decennial in the allotted time.

The 1890 Census more than made up for the lack of material in 1880. Census officials devoted an entire volume to American Indians, and another volume to Alaska, which included extensive studies on Native Alaskans. As part of the monograph on the tribes in continental America, various important tribal leaders, including Captain Dave, had their biographical sketches and portraits included. The report states that Captain Dave can “call to mind the English and Indian name of nearly every Indian at Pyramid Lake and Wadsworth” and refers to him as “remarkable...bright, good natured, and gentle.”

Captain Dave worked tirelessly to improve the life of his tribe. In 1882, he received his first appointment as police chief



**Captain Dave with wife Josie,
c. 1900**

The Reno Gazette-Journal (Reno, NV)

(from which he received the title “Captain”) and served in that position for decades. His contemporaries noted that Dave used a stern yet light touch that ensured his reservation remained orderly. In 1888, Captain Dave received both a large bronze star personalized to him and his position as police chief, as well as a silver medal from President Grover Cleveland in recognition of his hard and dedicated work as a peace officer.

Captain Dave also took advantage of the railroad to help attend to the affairs of his tribe. In exchange for going through the reservation, he negotiated free fare for any member of the tribe travelling to California. Additionally, Captain Dave realized the importance of newspapers. Whenever he had a grievance or message, he travelled to the population centers like Reno, San Francisco, and Sacramento to talk to editors and influence public opinion. When Indian migrant workers started working California’s fields, Captain Dave represented his tribe by travelling ahead of them to negotiate wages, ensure adequate facilities, and coordinate arrival times to maximize efficiency. He encouraged his people to send their children to school, while being dedicated to preserving the Paiute culture. He even worked with the University of California to record and preserve the Paiute language.

The conservation of fish in Lake Pyramid became one of Dave’s last battles, when, after the completion of the Derby Dam in 1905, native trout and Cui-ui could not return to their upstream breeding grounds. In 1912, recognizing the dependence of the Paiute on fishing for sustenance and commerce, Captain Dave unsuccessfully lobbied for a fish ladder for the dam. When the Paiute tribe started a hatchery in 1988 to help recover the endangered fish of Lake Pyramid, they named it, as well as a dam on the Truckee River after him.

Captain Dave died on July 13, 1919, at the estimated age of 90. He had outlived two wives, Josie and Susie, and his son, Dave, Jr. and was survived by two grandchildren.

The Census Bureau is thankful for Captain Dave’s contributions to both his tribe and our nation.



*The San Francisco Chronicle (San Francisco, CA)
23 July 1913*