

## ***Dorcas. a Free Person of Color in Washington County, Tennessee***

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Christopher Taylor was one of the early settlers of Washington County, Tennessee. In fact, he is one of the subjects of our *Early Landowners of Northeast Tennessee* project. He was born between 1740–1750, and served in the Revolutionary War as a Captain under Colonel Sevier in the North Carolina Militia. The 1830 Washington County, Tennessee census shows that he owned fourteen slaves. The family lived on Little Limestone Creek in Washington County, where they built a two-story log home on the property, just a few miles from the town of Jonesborough, Tennessee. This is the same cabin now standing on Main Street, in Jonesborough. It was moved from its original location in the 1970's, and is a beautiful addition to our town.



The cabin in the 1940's.



The cabin as it stands now in Jonesborough

Between 1829 and 1833, Christopher Taylor divided between his children a large portion of his property and slaves. On 3 March 1829, he gave to his son, James Taylor of Jackson County, Tennessee one hundred acres of land on Fain's Branch in Washington County, and a slave, named Dorcas, aged about twenty-five years, making her birth year approximately 1804.<sup>3</sup> Dorcas never took the Taylor surname. In fact, I did not find a single document with a surname attached. She was simply, Dorcas. It is unclear what events transpired between March 1829 and August 1832, but at some point, Dorcas gained her freedom. James Taylor was listed in the 1830 Census of Jackson County, Tennessee, with a family of four, but no slaves were listed<sup>4</sup>. By 1832, she had made her way back to Washington County, Tennessee, where she purchased from Christopher Taylor, a man named Squire J., who took the Taylor surname<sup>5</sup>. The

price was \$10. He is approximately twenty years older than Dorcas, according to the the 1840 and 1850 censuses of Washington County<sup>6,7</sup>. It is uncertain what their relationship was, but I believe it is more likely that he was her father.

Found in the *Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Book 11, page 180*, is a Bill of Sale from Christopher Taylor to Dorcas, a woman of colour, for a man named Squir dated 4<sup>th</sup> day of Aug: 1832 was proven in open Court by the Oath of Henry Taylor, a Subscribing Witness thereto recorded and ordered to be registered.

In 1836, Squire Taylor purchased land from Conrad Brown and wife, Elizabeth, six acres of land in Washington County for \$32 cash. The tract of land adjoined the lands of Daniel Salts and Richard Smith.<sup>8</sup>

Squire, along with Pane Russel and Cezar Davis, all “free men of colour” purchased two tracts of land from Richard Smith for \$250. The first tract of land was a ten-acre piece of property which adjoined Squire’s land as well as Christopher Taylor’s property. The second tract of land mentioned in this deed contains 21 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> acres, property where Polly Boyd was living, including her house and garden, which she retained rights to for three years. The third item on the deed book was a Deed of Trust issued to Richard Smith from Squire Taylor, Pane Russel, Cezar Davis and Joseph McLin for the money owed on the two pieces of property.<sup>9</sup>

In the May 1837 session of Washington County’s Quarterly Court, Dorcas presented a petition<sup>10</sup> to emancipate two slaves that she had purchased from Christopher Taylor named Warner, and Nancy. No ages are given for them, but Squire’s household in 1840 has a male under the age of ten and a female between ten and twenty-four. Without first names, there is no way of knowing if this is Warner and Nancy, but it is very likely that it is. It is possible that the two were Dorcas’ children. Warner took the Taylor surname, but I was unable to find Nancy after 1840.

The last document that we find that mentions Dorcas is a deed<sup>11</sup> dated 29 Jun 1840, reading in part, “This indenture made...between Squire Taylor a man of colour...and Dorcas, a woman of colour...the said Squire Taylor for and in consideration of the natural love and affection which he hath and beareth to Dorcas...in consideration of the sum of one dollar...parcel of land situated...in the county of Washington...being part of the tract of land on which the widow Elizabeth Brown now lives...contain nine acres...it is to be understood that Squire Taylor above named now lives on the above described land.”

The 1840 census<sup>6</sup> shows a woman of the same approximate age as Dorcas in the household with Squire. He is listed on the tax lists of Civil District 5 in Washington County during the years 1843 – 1848.

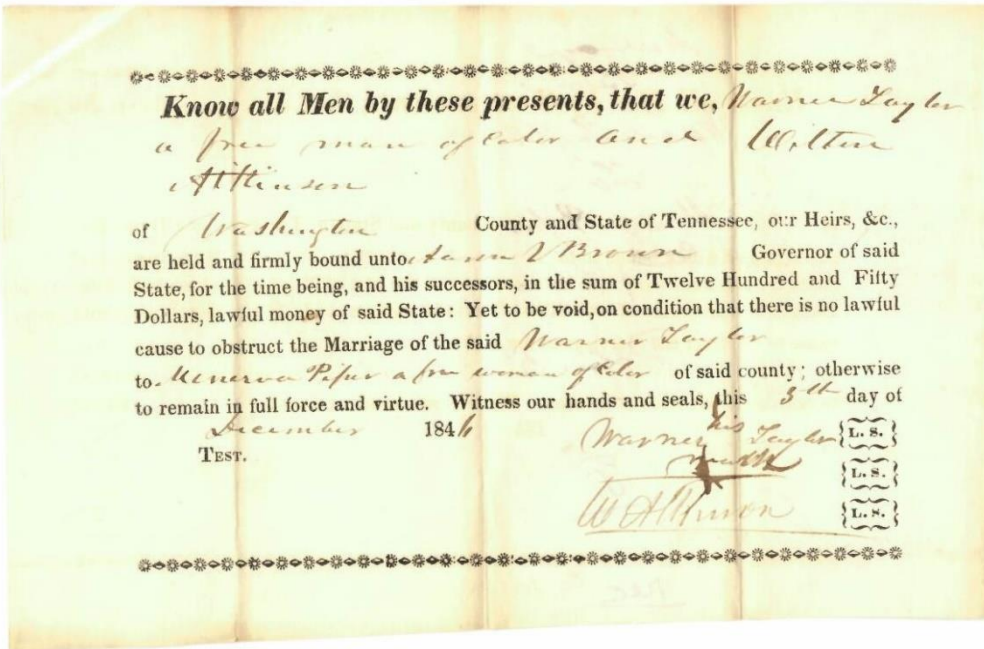
By 1850, Dorcas is absent from Squire’s home. There were two other women in his household, likely former neighbors who bore the Russell surname. Pane Russell was a partner with Squire in the purchase of land in 1836. I suspect Pane died and Squire allowed the two women to live with him, since women at this time, had few rights and without a husband, they had no one to support them.

1850 Census of Washington County, Tennessee, page 156

#732-759 TAYLOR, Squire 65 M B born in VA

RUSSEL, Elizabeth 77 F B born in VA

RUSSEL, Zona 19 F B born in TN



Warner Taylor married Minerva Piper in 1846, Washington County, Tennessee. After that marriage record, I could not find any other record that could confirm that it was the same person. I could not trace Nancy, but I assume she must have married, and moved away from this area, or she died before 1850.

Squire made several land transactions in the late 1830's and early 1840's—quite impressive for a man that had been a slave, just a few years earlier. He was listed in the 1850 census of Washington County, as a farmer. In the fall of 1854, he was brought before the Circuit Court, as he “did keep a tippling house for vending spiritous liquors...” He had been caught selling “less than a quart” of liquor to James Brown.<sup>12</sup> This is the last record that I have found bearing his name.

So, what about Dorcas? When I first started researching Dorcas, I assumed that Squire must have been her husband. After finding the 1840 deed between Squire and Dorcas, it opens the possibility that he might have been her father or some other type of guardian, who gave her the gift of land to ensure that she had some property, and could take care of herself. She may have died sometime between 1840 and 1850, or she simply may have married, and moved away. After more than fifteen years of researching her, I doubt I will ever know for sure. Rest in peace, Dorcas.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> www.Ancestry.com. 1830 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1830. M19, 201 rolls. Census Place: Washington, Tennessee; Roll: 175; Page: 207.

<sup>2</sup> Images: Christopher Taylor Revolutionary War Pension Application; Heritage Quest Online Electronic Database, Revolutionary War Images,

online <http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/revwar/&gt;;> file R10420.5; accessed 2 December 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Deed between Christopher Taylor and James Taylor; Deed book 20: Page 158, Jonesborough Courthouse—Deeds office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>4</sup> [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com). *1830 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1830. M19, 201 rolls. Census Place: *Jackson, Tennessee*; Roll: *177*; Page: *159*.

<sup>5</sup> Bill of sale between C. Taylor and Darkey a woman of colour; Deed book 19: Page 341, Jonesborough Courthouse—Deeds office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.Ancestry.com>. *1840 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1840. M704, 580 rolls. Census Place: *Washington, Tennessee*; Roll: *535*; Page: *223*.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.Ancestry.com>. *1850 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850. M432, 1,009 rolls. Census Place: *Subdivision 4, Washington, Tennessee*; Roll: *M432\_898*; Page: *156*; Image: *311*.

<sup>8</sup> Deed between Conrad and Elizabeth Brown and Squir Taylor; Deed book 21: Pages 274-275, Jonesborough Courthouse—Deeds office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>9</sup> Deed between Richard Smith and Squire Taylor and others; Deed book 23: Pages 218-220, Jonesborough Courthouse—Deeds office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>10</sup> Petition to the Court; Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions book 12: Page 352, Jonesborough Courthouse—County Court office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>11</sup> Deed between Squire Taylor and Dorcas; Deed book 23: Pages 402-403, Jonesborough Courthouse—Deeds office; Washington County, Tennessee.

<sup>12</sup> Circuit Court of Washington County, Tennessee: 1854: The State of Tennessee vs. Squire Taylor.

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