

Dorcas, a Free Person of Color in Washington County

*Note – The spelling was not changed from the original records.

Christopher Taylor was one of the early settlers of Washington County, Tennessee. He was born between 1740—1750¹ 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. In 1831 he began drawing a pension from his service in the Militia of \$480 per year². The family lived on Little Limestone Creek in Washington County, where they built a two-story log home on the property. The cabin was moved to downtown Jonesborough several years ago where it now stands on Main Street.

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 in Washington County and a “negroe girl, named Darkes aged about twenty five years”.³

Washington County, Tennessee Deed Book 20, page 158

This Indenture made and entered into this third day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty nine between Christopher Taylor of the County of Washington and State of Tennessee of the one part and James Taylor of the County of Jackson and state aforesaid of the other part. Witnesseth that the s^d Christopher Taylor for and in consideration of the natural love and affection which he hath bareth to his son the s^d Jas Taylor the following described tract or parcel of land situate lying & being in the County of Washington aforesaid being part of the tract of Land on which the said Christopher Taylor now lives being all that part of said tract which lies west of Fain's Branch and joining the lands of the heirs of John McLister dec^d the lands of Henry Taylor the lands of Daniel Salts containing one hundred acres be the same more or less also one negroe girl named Dorkes aged about twenty five years to have and to hold the said tract or parcel of land with the appertenances to him the said James Taylor and his heirs for ever against the claims or demands of me or my heirs & all persons claiming under me in Witness whereof the said Christopher Taylor hath hereto set his hand & seal the day and year first above mentioned seald and delivered in presence of
Jacob Hunter
Elias Bowman
Christopher Taylor

[Deed acknowledged in open court at March Term, 1830 and registered 29 Apr 1834]

It's unclear what events transpired between March 1829 and August 1832, but at some point, Dorcas gained her freedom. James is listed in the 1830 Census of Jackson

Washington County for \$32 cash. The tract of land adjoined the lands of Daniel Salts and Richard Smith⁸.

Squire, along with Pane Russel and Cezar Davis, all "free men of colour" purchased from Richard Smith for \$250 two tracts of land. The first tract of land was a ten acre piece of property which adjoined Squire's land as well as Christopher Taylor's property. Smith had purchased the land from Conrad Brown originally. The second tract of land mentioned in this deed contains 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres, property where Polly Boyd was living, including her house and garden, which she retained rights to for three years. The next 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 property⁹.

In the May 1837 session of Washington County's Quarterly Court, Dorcas presented a petition¹⁰ to emancipate two slaves that she had purchased from Christopher Taylor named Warner and Nancy. No ages are given for them, and it's impossible to speculate what happened to them. Squire's household in 1840 has a male under the age of ten and a female between ten and twenty-four, but without first names, there's no way of knowing if this is Warner and Nancy.

Dorcas, a Free woman of Colour Presented her Petition to the Court setting forth that Christopher Taylor in his life time had Conveyed to her by Bill of Sale two slaves named Warner and Nancy to be by her Emancipated as soon as the Laws of the State would permit and it being further made appear to the satisfaction of the Court that the said Warner & Nancy had contracted for their Freedom previous to the Act of 1831 and the Court further being of opinion that the granting of the Petition of the S^d Dorcas for the Emancipation of the S^d Warner and Nancy would not be inconsistent with the Interests & Policy of the State and a Majority of the Justices of S^d Court being present It is Ordered Adjudged and decreed that the Prayer of the Petitioner be granted and that S^d Warner & Nancy be free and Emancipated on giving bond & Security which was done in open court according to Act of assembly in such case provided.

The last document that we find that mentions Dorcas is a deed¹¹ 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 census⁶ shows a woman of the same approximate age as Dorcas in the household with Squire, but since there are only names of the heads of households, we can only speculate that this is, in fact, Dorcas. Squire 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 household and it's uncertain what happened to her. Squire had in his household two other females, most likely former neighbors. Pane Russell was a partner with Squire in the purchase of land in 1836. There were no other Russells living nearby.

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

What happened to Dorcas? There are a couple of possibilities. She might have died sometime between 1840 and 1850. 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 up 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.

Sources

¹ 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*.

² Images: Christopher Taylor Revolutionary War Pension Application; Heritage Quest Online Electronic Database, Revolutionary War Images, online <http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/revwar/>>; file R10420.5; accessed 2 December 2007.

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

⁴ 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*.

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

⁶ 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*.

⁷ 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*.

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

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

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

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