

Walks through History
Dr. John Martin Taylor House/Hollywood Plantation
Plantation Lane, off of Hwy. 138 near Winchester, Drew County
December 13, 2014
By: Rachel Silva



Taylor House, ca. 1915



Taylor House, November 2014

Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of the Taylor House! I’d like to thank the University of Arkansas at Monticello and the Drew County Historical Society for co-sponsoring today’s tour. I’d also like to recognize a few people who helped tremendously with the tour—

Kyle Day, Jodi Barnes, Mary Heady, and last but not least, Tommy Jameson with Jameson Architects and Joan Gould with Preservation Matters. Last year, Tommy and Joan produced a master plan for the restoration of the Taylor House and site, which included an incredible amount of information about the Taylor family as well as the house and surrounding property.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t also recognize the work of Skip Stewart-Abernathy and Marvin Jeter, who led the first archeological investigations at the Taylor House in 1991-1992, and Curtis Merrell, founder of the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance (1995), who died on Monday, December 8, 2014.

This tour is worth two hours of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. See me after the tour if you're interested.

Built in 1846 by Dr. John Martin Taylor and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Robertson Taylor, the Taylor House is the only extant example of a 19th century two-story, log dwelling with square notching in Arkansas. The two-story, cypress, dogtrot-style house, family cemetery, and immediate surrounding acreage were listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 16, 1995. The Taylor House was built on the west bank of Bayou Bartholomew, the world's longest bayou, and served as the hub of the 11,000-acre Hollywood Plantation. In 2012 the John Hancock family donated the Taylor House to the University of Arkansas at Monticello, and the house and site will be used to interpret the history of one of Arkansas's earliest major cotton plantations.

Peter Gilam Rives ("Reeves")

The story of Hollywood Plantation begins with Peter Gilam Rives ("Reeves"), a surveyor from Virginia who in 1819 erected a "satellite improvement" on Bayou Bartholomew near an old footpath leading to the area's best fording place. This "satellite improvement" was likely a small, log cabin, which indicated his claim to the site before official government surveys offered land for sale. Rives established other "improvements" at present-day Osceola in Mississippi County and at Scanlon's Landing on the Mississippi River in Crittenden County. According to the 1830 Census, Rives lived in Hardeman County, Tennessee, but soon moved to Arkansas. He worked as a land speculator. Between 1834 and 1850, he patented more than 43,000 acres in eastern Arkansas.

On March 17, 1836, Rives married the twice-widowed Martha Eliza Goodloe Robertson Arnold, who came from a wealthy Tennessee family. Rives brought his new bride to his home in Crittenden County, Arkansas, where he lived for the remainder of his life (Rives died in 1852).

Martha Rives had two daughters—one with her first husband, Benjamin Franklin Robertson, and one with her second husband, William Arnold. Her eldest daughter was Mary Elizabeth Robertson (born August 23, 1824, at Nashville, TN), who eventually married Dr. John Martin Taylor and lived at Hollywood Plantation.

Dr. John Martin Taylor and Mary Elizabeth Robertson Taylor

Born on July 23, 1819, at Winchester, Kentucky, Dr. John Martin Taylor came from a prominent, well-connected family of political and military leaders and large landowners. Taylor graduated in 1841 from the medical department of Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky. Meanwhile, Mary Elizabeth Robertson and her half-sister, Mary Jane Arnold, attended school at St. Vincent's Academy in Union County, Kentucky. In 1843 Mary Elizabeth Robertson visited her step-aunt, Mary Rives Taylor, who was the younger sister of Peter G. Rives, Mary Elizabeth's step-father. Mary Rives Taylor and her husband, Gibson Berry Taylor, lived at Morganfield, Kentucky. During her visit, Mary Elizabeth met Dr. John Martin Taylor, a nephew of her step-aunt and uncle on the Taylor side of the family.

After a brief courtship, John Martin Taylor married Mary Elizabeth Robertson on July 4, 1843. The couple honeymooned in New Orleans. Between 1844 and 1850, Dr. Taylor purchased 355 acres adjoining the land of Peter G. Rives (his step-father-in-law) along Bayou Bartholomew. The Taylors built a 2-story, dogtrot-style house with bald cypress harvested nearby. A dendrochronology study (tree ring dating) conducted in 1991 by Dr. David Stahle revealed that the majority of the trees used to build the Taylor House were cut between 1844 and 1846, providing the 1846 construction date for the home. Interestingly, the study also revealed that some of those trees started growing in the early 1600s.

Despite the fact that Peter Rives owned thousands of acres along the bayou, the Taylors were responsible for building up the plantation, as Rives spent most of his time in Crittenden County. The Taylor House became the center of the Hollywood Plantation, named for the abundance of native holly trees on the property. The

plantation eventually encompassed 11,000 acres in Drew, Desha, and Lincoln counties.

Dr. John Martin Taylor and Mary Elizabeth Robertson Taylor had 10 children, 7 of whom survived to adulthood. Their children were:

- Franklin Robertson Taylor (1847-1852), buried at Hollywood
- Henry Robertson Taylor (1849-1900), buried at Hollywood
- Samuel Mitchell Taylor (1851-1900), buried at Hollywood
- Jonathan Gibson Taylor (1853-1929), buried at Bellwood, Pine Bluff
- John Martin Taylor (1855-1904), buried at Bellwood, Pine Bluff
- Robert Edward Taylor (1857-drowned at 15 months), buried in Kentucky
- Mildred Eliza Taylor (1859-1931), buried at Bellwood, Pine Bluff
- Stillborn Baby Girl (1861), buried at Hollywood
- Benjamin Hawes Taylor (1863-1915), buried at Little Rock
- Goodloe Rives Taylor (1868-1943), buried at Bellwood, Pine Bluff

Bayou Bartholomew

The Taylor House was built to face Bayou Bartholomew, the world's longest bayou. Bayou Bartholomew formed about 2,000 years ago, when the Arkansas River changed courses, leaving the bayou to develop in the old river bed. The bayou starts northwest of Pine Bluff and meanders 359 miles before emptying into the Ouachita River at Sterlington, Louisiana. The bayou is fed by under-seepage from the Arkansas River as well as numerous springs. In fact, people used to drink water from the bayou, and it was the center of recreational and community activities. It was used for baptisms, swimming, and fishing. And it's one of the most bio-diverse streams in North America.

The bayou is also significant because it provided access to the otherwise landlocked area of the southeast Arkansas Delta before the arrival of railroads in the late 19th century. Bayou Bartholomew was a steamboat passage from the 1830s until the early 20th century. Although steamboats didn't come up as far as

Hollywood, they did go to the Drew County community of Baxter, which is about 20 miles south of here. And there were steamboat ports throughout Ashley County along the bayou.

Early settlers like John Martin Taylor used flat-bottom boats and rafts propelled by poling or rowing to transport cotton, timber, and other goods down the bayou to a steamboat, which carried the load to market in New Orleans. Dr. Taylor floated his cotton downstream on cypress log rafts until he reached a steamboat port. He accompanied the cotton and timber to New Orleans, where it was all sold. While in New Orleans, he bought supplies for the next year and traveled back up the Mississippi River by steamboat to either the mouth of Cypress Creek (19 miles from Hollywood) or Gaines Landing (30 miles from Hollywood). Then he loaded the supplies onto a wagon and made the overland trip home.

Hollywood Plantation, 1850

According to the 1850 Census, Dr. Taylor owned real estate worth \$30,000, as well as 83 slaves. Of those 83 enslaved persons, 31 were female and 52 were male. Most of the women were between the ages of 20 and 25 (12 of 31), and the majority of males were between birth and nine years of age, although the 10-20 and 20-35 age groups were also large. The Taylors had only three male slaves over the age of 35. In comparison to other farms in the area, this was a large number of slaves. A few slaves cared for the Taylor household, and the remainder stayed in quarters about ¼ mile east of the Taylor House. The Taylors' enslaved community had a separate church and cemetery called Cypress Grove (some grave markers are still visible).

The Taylors also owned a significant amount of land in Dr. Taylor's home state of Kentucky. The family frequently traveled by steamboat between the two states. About 1855 Dr. and Mrs. Taylor built a palatial, Greek Revival-style home on the bank of the Ohio River at Westport, Kentucky. Their Kentucky mansion was called "Mauvilla," and the Taylors lived there intermittently during the 1850s. Dr.

Taylor's cousin and fellow Arkansas landowner, Robert Samuel Taylor, oversaw operations at Hollywood in Dr. Taylor's absence.

Hollywood, 1860

The Taylor family was recorded at Mauvilla in the 1860 Census and owned real estate worth \$25,000 and a personal estate worth \$25,000. According to the 1860 Slave Schedule, Dr. and Mrs. Taylor owned 101 slaves at Hollywood, 51 males and 50 females. In comparison, Lycurgus Johnson, one of the largest slaveowners in antebellum Arkansas and the builder of Lakeport Plantation in Chicot County, owned 155 slaves in 1860.

After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Robert S. Taylor, who had been watching over the Hollywood Plantation in Dr. Taylor's absence, organized a company of volunteers for the Confederacy (the "Selma Rifles") and traveled to Virginia to fight in the war. So in 1861 Dr. and Mrs. Taylor returned to Hollywood.

After President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, granting freedom to slaves in the rebellious states, Dr. Taylor saw the writing on the wall. He offered his slaves the option to stay on as tenant labor at Hollywood, or travel back to Kentucky with Mrs. Taylor. In the fall of 1863, Mrs. Taylor took her children and an unknown number of former slaves to Kentucky via steamboat. When the group had to switch boats at Cairo, Illinois, there was a riot caused by local people who thought Mrs. Taylor was ignoring the Emancipation Proclamation. The uprising was suppressed by a Union soldier who knew Mrs. Taylor, allowing the group safe passage to Westport. Dr. Taylor remained at Hollywood from 1863 to 1865, when he joined his family at Mauvilla.

The Taylors' tenth and last child, Goodloe Rives Taylor, was born on January 23, 1868, at Mauvilla. Just one month later, Mary Elizabeth Taylor, affectionately called "Mary Bet," died at Mauvilla and was buried next to her father-in-law at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky.

1870s

According to the 1870 Census, Dr. Taylor and his seven children lived at Mauvilla. Dr. Taylor had real estate valued at \$100,000 and a personal estate worth \$5,000 (note the dramatic decrease in the value of his personal estate—no more slaves). Dr. Taylor raised and educated his children with the help of his mother and a private tutor. Henry, the Taylors' eldest son, attended the Kentucky Military Academy at Lexington and returned to Hollywood in the mid-1870s to manage the farm. After the Civil War, the Hollywood Plantation transitioned to tenant labor. Some tenants were likely former slaves of the Taylors'.

In late 1876 Dr. Taylor shipped the household furnishings from Mauvilla to Hollywood, including the hand-painted china the Taylors ordered in New Orleans on their honeymoon. The porcelain tableware was made in France, and the Taylors had place-settings for at least 25 people, plus numerous serving platters and bowls. Some of the china is on display at the Drew County Historical Museum.

In 1878 Dr. Taylor moved back to Hollywood and sold Mauvilla the following year. Taylor's youngest sons, Ben and Goodloe (went by Rives), attended school at Monticello. Dr. Taylor rented a house for them in town and came to visit weekly. He hired a housekeeper/chaperone to keep an eye on the boys.

1880s

By 1880, Dr. and Mrs. Taylor's eldest son, Henry Taylor, lived in the Taylor House, and Dr. Taylor lived nearby. About 1880, the Taylor House was moved to its current location. Regional flooding occurred between 1868 and 1871 and may have impacted the Taylor House while the family was living at Mauvilla. Due to bank erosion, the house had to be moved back away from the bayou.

Dendrochronology studies revealed that the logs around the bottom of the Taylor House were cut in 1879-1880, indicating that the Taylors replaced some of the deteriorated lower timbers about 1880 when the house was moved back from the

receding bank. The house was not disassembled for the move; rather, the whole house was rolled back using logs and mules.

By 1882, Dr. Taylor and his son, Henry, were living in the Taylor House. That same year, Edward Palmer, the archeologist who headed the Smithsonian Institution's investigation of prehistoric mounds in Arkansas, visited the Taylors and explored "Mound Field" across the bayou from the Taylor House. The area originally contained at least four Native American mounds dating from 800 AD (two mounds are still relatively well-preserved). Palmer's field notes, along with sketches provided by his artist, H. J. Lewis of Pine Bluff, documented some of the Hollywood fields and log outbuildings at that time. A cotton gin, log stable, and farm manager's house were located across the bayou from the Taylor House.

Dr. John Martin Taylor, known to many as "Dr. Jack," died on October 30, 1884, at Hollywood and was buried in the family cemetery. He was 65.

Railroad and Valley Planting Company

The nearby town of Winchester, named after Dr. Taylor's birthplace in Kentucky, grew up around the Little Rock, Mississippi River & Texas Railway, which arrived in 1878. In 1887 that railway became a division of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, and in 1888 a spur line was extended to Rives, named for Peter G. Rives, Mary Elizabeth Taylor's step-father. The Rives post office may have been in the Taylor House. Henry Taylor was the first postmaster.

After Dr. Taylor's death, his sons managed to buy back much of the land that was lost after the Civil War. By the 1890s, 17 bridges had been built across the bayou to connect Hollywood lands. Some of these were floating log bridges anchored to trees that would move with the water level. And cotton was no longer floated down the bayou—it was loaded on a train.

The Taylors' oldest son, Henry, managed the plantation until the youngest son, Goodloe Rives Taylor, reached maturity, and then the land was divided among the

brothers. About 1895 two of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor's sons, Jonathan G. Taylor and John M. Taylor, along with A. W. Nunn of Pine Bluff, established the Valley Planting Company at Rives and Winchester. The Valley Planting Company had gins at both locations, as well as a sawmill and mercantile store. According to a hand-drawn plat map of the Hollywood Plantation from January 1, 1900, the farm encompassed 10,259 acres. John D. Currie of Pine Bluff became manager of the Valley Company in 1901 and moved its operations to Winchester, where the company had a store, cotton gin, and 200 acres of land.

Early 20th Century Transitions

The eldest of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor's children and longtime manager of the Hollywood Plantation, Henry R. Taylor, died of tuberculosis on June 6, 1900, at Waukesha, Wisconsin, where he was seeking treatment for the disease. He was 50 years old. His body was sent back to Hollywood, where he was buried in the family cemetery.

Less than three months later, on September 1, 1900, another Taylor son, Dr. Samuel M. Taylor, died at the Taylor House. He died on his 49th birthday and was buried in the family cemetery next to his wife, Plunkett Elvira Taylor, who preceded him in death by two years.

A few years later, on December 15, 1904, the fifth son of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, John Martin Taylor, died at Pine Bluff and was buried at Bellwood Cemetery there. He was 49. Named for his father, the younger John Martin Taylor was a well-known attorney in Pine Bluff and a partner in the Valley Planting Company.

Taylor Family Cemetery

The Taylor Family Cemetery contains seven marked burials dating from 1852 to 1900. The following individuals are buried in the cemetery:

1. Franklin Robertson Taylor—b. 12/22/1847 at Hollywood; d. 9/2/1852 at Hollywood (first-born son of Dr. John M. Taylor and Mary E. Taylor; he was almost 5 years old when he died).
2. Infant Daughter of Dr. John M. and Mary E. Taylor—1861 (8th child; stillborn).
3. Dr. John M. Taylor—b. 7/23/1819 at Winchester, KY; d. 10/30/1884 at Hollywood (co-founder of Hollywood Plantation and builder of Taylor House).
4. Infant Daughter of Benjamin Hawes Taylor and his wife, Lizzie K. Taylor—1893 (granddaughter of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor; stillborn).
5. Plunkett Elvira Taylor—b. 9/4/1857; d. 1/5/1898 (wife of Dr. Samuel M. Taylor and daughter-in-law of Dr. J. M. and Mrs. Taylor).
6. Henry Robertson Taylor—b. 7/29/1849 at Hollywood; d. 6/6/1900 at Waukesha, Wisconsin (son of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor).
7. Dr. Samuel Mitchell Taylor—b. 9/1/1851 at Hollywood; d. 9/1/1900 at Hollywood (son of Dr. J. M. and Mrs. Taylor and husband of Plunkett E. Taylor).

Photographic Documentation of the Taylor House

The earliest known photograph of the Taylor House was taken in 1914 by John R. Fordyce, who was a friend of the Taylor family. Fordyce was an amateur archeologist interested in the Taylor Mounds on the opposite side of the bayou. His panoramic photograph of the house and yard reveals details about the front and back porches, kitchen ell, various outbuildings, and other site features.

Two other photos, taken during the same period, provide a closer look at the house, kitchen ell, cistern, and the edge of the smokehouse (you have these photos in your packet).

Second and Third Generations of Taylor Family in early 20th Century

Dr. and Mrs. Taylor's fourth-born son, Jonathan Gibson Taylor, lived until 1929 and was a partner in the Valley Planting Company. He capitalized on the plantation's vast timber resources in the early 20th century. By 1917, the Hollywood Plantation encompassed 10,917 acres.

Mildred Taylor Bradford Saunders, granddaughter of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, and her husband, Dillard H. Saunders, lived intermittently at Hollywood during the 1920s when her husband managed the plantation.

In the 1930s and '40s, the Taylor House was occupied by Belle Taylor Williams and her husband, William Wendell Williams. Belle was the daughter of Samuel and Lizzie Taylor and granddaughter of Dr. J. M. and M. E. Taylor. Her husband, W. W. Williams ran the cotton gin and store at Winchester. Belle died in 1936, and Mr. Williams remained in the home with their children.

Goodloe Rives Taylor, the last of Dr. John Martin Taylor and Mary Elizabeth Taylor's children, died in 1943 at Hot Springs.

By the 1950s, the Taylor House was sold out of the family and has remained vacant since that time. The rear kitchen ell was removed and converted into a stand-alone rental house. The ell was still standing in the early 1990s but has since been destroyed by fire. Also during the 1950s, the front and rear porches were removed and the current shed roofs added for farm implement storage. Although they are unattractive, the shed roofs have protected the lower level of the house for more than 50 years. Sometime during the 1960s (or possibly the early 1970s), the log smokehouse from the Taylor property was relocated to the grounds of the Drew County Historical Museum, where it remains today.

Architectural Significance of the Taylor House

The Taylor House represents 168 years of architectural evolution. The house changed to accommodate the needs and preferences of the people living in it. The Taylor House is the only remaining example of an early 19th century, 2-story, log dwelling with square notching in the state of Arkansas. Log structures were built with different types of corner notching, and square-notched log houses are rare. Most square-notched log houses were meant to be covered with weatherboard siding, which provided stability for the non-locking corner joints. And in fact, the earliest photos of the Taylor House show that it was sided. Was it always sided? We don't know. More investigation will tell. But the areas under the north and south porches were never sided (areas without Tyvek now) and were just white-washed logs.

The Taylor House is an example of vernacular architecture. Vernacular describes buildings constructed by local builders using local materials and techniques. The house is a dogtrot, meaning that it consists of two log pens separated by a breezeway or "dogtrot" and covered by a common roof. The Taylor House has 2-story pens with an open breezeway on the lower level only. Why was the breezeway called a dogtrot? Because it was a cool, shady spot, and dogs often hung out there.

Also, keep in mind that the Taylor House was built with slave labor, and it was a major undertaking. Trees were cut nearby and hauled to the site, and then the logs were lifted into place.

I already told you that the house was moved away from the bayou about 1880. Although the house itself was not disassembled for the move, the chimneys were rebuilt. The west chimney was constructed with handmade brick made from bayou mud. The east chimney was built with Dickinson Company brick from Little Rock that was shipped to the site. Another interesting thing to note about the house—the upper story is the most original to the 1840s, including the flooring and windows. The upper story windows are 6-over-6 windows from the 1840s,

while the lower level windows are 4-over-4 windows from the 1880s, likely changed after the house was moved. The lower story flooring had to be replaced over the years as well.

[Other examples of antebellum log dwellings in AR—Jacob Wolf House (Norfolk, Baxter County, 1829); Rice-Upshaw House (Dalton, Randolph County, 1828); Looney-French House (Dalton, Randolph County, ca. 1833). Also for comparison, Lakeport was built in 1858-59.]

Recent Past & Plans for Restoration

The Arkansas Archeological Survey conducted the first historic archeological excavations at the Taylor House in 1991-1992, which confirmed family histories that the house was moved away from the eroding bayou bank at least one time, if not more. Plow scars were preserved under the clay mud put down in the 1950s under the shed roofs, indicating that the current house site was previously farmland. And parts of the original cellar/basement were discovered to the north of the house's current location.

The dendrochronology study was also conducted as part of the 1991-92 digs, revealing the initial construction date of the house (1846), as well as the approximate year the house was last moved and lower logs replaced (1880).

In 2012 the John Hancock family donated the Taylor House and about 4.5 acres to the University of Arkansas at Monticello with the intent of preserving the house and site and using it for educational purposes.

In 2013 the Arkansas Archeological Survey conducted a geophysical survey at the site to determine the location of outbuildings around the house. And in 2014, the Arkansas Archeological Survey conducted another dig at the Taylor House. Participants dug around the house in search of the porch piers, kitchen ell, and the north end of the cellar. Jodi Barnes will tell you about this in a few minutes, and she has some artifacts to show you as well.

After acquiring the Taylor House, UAM received a grant from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) to produce a master plan for the restoration of the house and site. This plan was researched and written by Tommy Jameson and Joan Gould and was published in August 2013. The restoration and site development will be completed in phases based on the availability of funds and future site discoveries.

As you can see, some stabilization work has already taken place. A portion of the south shed was removed, the weatherboard was removed, and every log surface that had previously been covered with weatherboard was covered with Tyvek to protect it from the elements.

What's the next step? See the stack of wood on the west side of the house? It is seasoning, or drying out to minimize the issue of log shrinkage after installation. Between March and July 2015, several things will happen. These timbers will be used to replace deteriorated logs on the house. A new roof will be installed. Other structural work will be completed, as well as the application of new weatherboard siding. The windows will be restored, and the north porch will be reconstructed, based on early 20th century photographs and archeological evidence of the porch piers.

Future plans include additional work on the house (exterior and interior), construction of a new access road, installation of a well, additional archeology, reconstruction of the kitchen ell, outbuildings, and landscape features, design of interpretive exhibits, relocation of the smokehouse, and the construction of a parking area and interpretive center to the south of the cemetery.

Jodi Barnes will talk about archeology

I'll talk about cemetery iconography—

Henry Robertson Taylor's marker—features a calla lily, which represents purification of the soul and beauty.

Unnamed children's markers have death dates on the back of the stones.

Dr. John M. Taylor's marker—topped by an urn, which was a common commercial form during the late 19th century and symbolized mourning and reverence for the dead.

Dr. Samuel Mitchell Taylor and wife, Plunkett Elvira Taylor's, marker—this is a double-marker. Both husband and wife have a star on their side. The star represents the spirit, piercing the darkness as an expression of its triumph against the overwhelming odds of oblivion. Five pointed stars represent the spirit rising to heaven. Husband and wife are divided by a column of ivy. Ivy is evergreen, symbolizing eternal memory and togetherness. The wife's marker is topped with an image of wheat being cut by a scythe. This symbolizes harvest time, and the scythe is cutting her life short. The husband's marker is topped with an open Bible and cross and crown. The open Bible is self-explanatory. It represents the word of God. The cross is a Christian symbol for the sovereignty of the Lord. When the cross is combined with a crown, the crown means victory (over death) and the cross means Christianity. The cross with a crown also denotes a member of the York Rite Masons. As with all types of crowns used by the Masons, it symbolizes the power and authority to lead or command.

Walk down to bayou

Caravan to Drew County Historical Museum, 404 S. Main in Monticello, to see the Taylor's smokehouse, china, and other furnishings—many furnishings handed down to the Taylor's only daughter, Mildred Eliza Taylor Bradford, and her descendants. The museum is in the 1906 Neoclassical-style Garvan Cavaness House (NR-listed).