



**ARKANSAS HISTORIC
PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

Sandwiching in History Tour Taylor Log House

**184 Plantation Lane, Tillar, Drew County
(off Hwy 138 west of Winchester)**

November 3, 2023

Adapted by Ashley Sides from Rachel (Silva) Patton's 2014 script
*Special thanks to: University of Arkansas at Monticello, Dr. John Kyle Day,
Dr. John Henris, Jaime Macklin*



*The Taylor Log House after restoration, including the attached kitchen ell,
the smoke house, and enslaved quarters.*

Photo by Ashley Sides, 2023

Welcome and Intro

Hello, I'm Ashley Sides, preservation outreach coordinator for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming out to our tour today. Welcome to the Taylor Log House at the historic Hollywood Plantation.

This site belongs to the University of Arkansas at Monticello, and I want to thank the university—and in particular history professors Kyle Day and John Henris, and Special Events Coordinator Jaime Macklin—for opening up the site and hosting us today for our tour.

The Taylor Log House and Site were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995 with statewide significance under Criterion C *and* D—the categories of architecture and archaeology. It is significant for its *architecture* as the best-known example in Arkansas’s lower Delta region of an intact, two-story, log dogtrot residence, and it is also significant for its *archaeological* value for revealing further information about the historical occupation of the site from at least 1846—if not before—on up to the mid-twentieth century. Out of over 2,000 properties in Arkansas listed on the National Register, only a very tiny fraction of them have significance under Criterion D for archaeological value. [*It’s probably less than 5 percent.*]

Since receiving this property as a donation in 2012, UA Monticello has been diligently working to develop it into a premier educational and interpretive historic site. They undertook a massive restoration of the historic structures and have only begun scratching the surface archaeologically and have already unearthed some tantalizing clues to the lifeways of the people who lived and worked on the plantation.

Through the written historical record and the clues preserved in the architecture and archaeology of the site, this place tells a lot of stories. We’ll be hitting some highlights today, but this well is deep. In addition to the history that UAM and others have already documented here, there are more discoveries to come. Keep watching this space; more of it will be developed for public education.

Prehistory

Today I want to start before the beginning. November is Native American Heritage Month, and it’s worth mentioning that long before White or Black people ever set foot on this land, indigenous people lived here. Just across that

bayou, maybe half a mile away, are three mounds associated with Native Americans from precontact times. They are on land once owned by the Taylor family and are called the Taylor Mounds.

Excavations there have revealed that they likely inhabited this area some 1700 years ago, making this one of the earliest Woodland-era occupations known in southeast Arkansas. The people were identified with the late Marksville or early Baytown culture. They probably settled here when the Arkansas River flowed through this bed, before it changed course a millennium or two ago.

Of course, in more recent history, this was Quapaw territory until the treaty of 1818 that relegated them—for a while—to a smaller region northwest of here.

Peter G. Rives

A man named Peter G. Rives took advantage of this opportunity to acquire some of this newly available land. Rives came to Arkansas in 1818-1819 from Virginia to survey land in what later became Drew and Crittenden counties. In 1819 he 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. He also claimed land further up the Mississippi, and between 1834 and 1850, he patented more than 43,000 acres in eastern Arkansas.

For all his land speculation in Arkansas, Rives called Hardeman County, Tennessee home until the 1830s. In 1836 he married Martha Goodloe, a widow from a wealthy Tennessee family, and soon after brought her to Crittenden County, Arkansas, where he lived until his death in 1852.

Dr. John Martin Taylor and Mary Elizabeth Robertson Taylor

Martha had two daughters from her previous marriages. One of them, Mary Elizabeth Robertson, married a man named Dr. John Martin Taylor from Winchester, Kentucky in 1843. Born in 1819, Taylor came from a prominent, well-

connected family of political and military leaders and large landowners. He was a practicing medical doctor with large landholdings and a great many slaves.

After his marriage, Dr. Taylor began acquiring property here along Bayou Bartholomew through his wife's stepfather, Peter Rives. In 1846 they built this house as the headquarters of the large new plantation they were establishing on his Arkansas landholdings, but the Taylors didn't live here year-round. They split their time between their homes in Arkansas and Kentucky, traveling back and forth by steamboat.

In Westport, Kentucky, they owned over 600 acres where they grew wheat and corn, and they built a palatial, 18-room brick mansion in the Italianate style with an imposing Classical portico with Corinthian columns. They called this mansion Mauvilla. The Taylors' log house in Arkansas was decidedly humbler than Mauvilla, but it was the center of a cotton plantation that eventually encompassed 11,000 acres in Drew, Desha, and Lincoln counties. They named it Hollywood Plantation for the abundance of native holly trees on the property.

Between 1847 and 1868, the Taylors had ten children, seven of whom survived into adulthood. Some were born in Arkansas, but most in Kentucky. All but one are buried in Arkansas.

Slavery

The Taylor family's decisions about where to live and how to use their property didn't just affect them. Dozens of enslaved people had those decisions made for them when Dr. and Mrs. Taylor established Hollywood Plantation. Without historical proof, but knowing how that peculiar institution worked, it is likely that, along with the Taylors, several field hands, craftsmen, and a huntsman—in addition to a cook, a house servant, and a lady's maid—left their familiar lives in Kentucky to start a new one in the cypress swamps of Arkansas, because in 1846, the law said that they belonged to the Taylors. They may have left partners and children behind in Kentucky as well, not knowing if they would ever see them again. The labor of these enslaved people contributed to the Taylor family's wealth. The Taylors' legacy lives on in the history books and in their still-standing

log house, but the majority of the people who lived and worked at Hollywood Plantation are less represented in the historical record (although thankfully—and perhaps more so here than at many plantations—history does preserve many of their names).

They also left their physical mark. Perhaps the most direct, immediate link that remains to some of these enslaved individuals today is the Taylor House itself. They were the ones who built it; it is their craftsmanship that we see in the timbers today.

Architectural Significance of the Taylor House

So let's take a closer look at the house. The Taylor Log House is the best-known example of a two-story log dogtrot residence in the lower Delta. It was constructed with bald cypress harvested nearby. Local folklore and oral history have put the original construction date in 1846, and in fact, a dendrochronology study conducted in 1991 by Dr. David Stahle substantiated that claim, revealing that the majority of the trees used to build the house were cut between 1844 and 1846. Interestingly, the study also revealed that some of those trees started growing in the early 1600s.

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 two-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.

Interestingly, this house is the only remaining example in the state of Arkansas of an early 19th-century, two-story, log dwelling with square notching. Log structures were built with different types of corner notching, and square-notched log houses are rare. You may recall the half-dovetail notching we saw last month at the Jacob Wolf House. 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. But the areas under the north and south porches were never sided and were just whitewashed logs.

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 (which we'll talk about later). 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); Hinderliter House (Historic Arkansas Museum, Little Rock, ca. 1827); Rice-Upshaw House and the Looney-French House (Dalton, Randolph County, 1828 and ca. 1833 respectively). Also for comparison, Lakeport was built in 1858-59.]

Bayou Bartholomew

The Taylor House was built to face Bayou Bartholomew. Just like we saw with the Jacob Wolf House last month, we tend to approach these antebellum buildings via our modern roads from what was originally the back. The front faced the water, which was the highway of the time.

Bayou Bartholomew is the world's longest bayou. It formed about 2,000 years ago, when the Arkansas River abandoned this course, leaving the bayou to develop in the old riverbed. The bayou starts northwest of Pine Bluff and meanders 359 miles before emptying into the Ouachita River at Sterlington, Louisiana. It is fed by under-seepage from the Arkansas River as well as numerous springs. 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.

Bayou Bartholomew 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. The bayou 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. While in New Orleans, Taylor or his representative would buy supplies for the next year and then travel 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 would load the supplies onto a wagon and make the overland trip home.

Hollywood Plantation Before the Civil War

The Taylors' real estate and personal wealth grew in the years prior to the Civil War, including their slaveholdings. According to the 1850 census, Dr. Taylor owned real estate worth \$30,000, as well as 83 enslaved individuals.¹ In comparison to other farms in the area at that time, 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 1860 Census recorded the Taylor family at Mauvilla and showed that they had real estate worth \$25,000 and a personal estate worth \$25,000. According to

¹ Of those 83 enslaved persons, 31 were female and 52 were male. Nearly 40% of the women were between the ages of 20 and 25. Another 40% were 14 or under, and fewer than 23% were aged 30 or over. Among the males, nearly 70% were under the age of 20, with another 25% between 20 and 35, and only 3 men over 35.

the 1860 Slave Schedule, Dr. and Mrs. Taylor enslaved 101 people at Hollywood, making them among the larger slaveholders in the state. 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.

Emancipation

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, granting freedom to slaves in the rebellious states. While most of the Confederacy fought on for another two years, Dr. Taylor saw the writing on the wall. According to Taylor family oral tradition, Dr. Taylor called his slaves together to explain that they were now free. He offered his slaves the option to stay on as paid labor at Hollywood or travel back to Kentucky with Mrs. Taylor.

Some chose to stay; some chose to return to Kentucky. 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 commotion caused by local people who thought Mrs. Taylor was ignoring the Emancipation Proclamation. The riot was averted by a Union soldier who knew Mrs. Taylor and provided an escort to the steamboat, and the group continued safely to Westport.

Dr. Taylor remained at Hollywood from 1863 to 1865, when he joined his family at Mauvilla.

After the Civil War

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

The 1870 census found Dr. Taylor and his seven children 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.

In late 1876 Dr. Taylor shipped the household furnishings from Mauvilla to Hollywood. In 1878 he moved to Hollywood for good and sold Mauvilla the following year. Taylor's youngest sons 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.

By 1880, the Taylors' eldest son, Henry, lived in the Taylor House. At that time, Dr. Taylor lived nearby, but by 1882, he had moved into the house as well and lived with his son.

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

Valley Planting Company

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, Rives, reached maturity, and then the land was divided among the brothers and run with the help of local farm managers.

About 1895, two of Dr. and Mrs. Taylor's sons, Jonathan and John, 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—now Valley—Plantation from January 1, 1900, the farm covered 10,259 acres.

The Taylors employed many managers over the next fifty years, including John Currie of Pine Bluff, who was manager between 1901 and 1921 and who moved its operations to Winchester, where the company had a store, cotton gin, and 200 acres of land. By 1917, the entire Valley Plantation encompassed 10,917 acres.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Taylor House was occupied by a succession of renters, including farm managers and others, like a public-school teacher—until the 100-year-old house was sold out of the family in the 1950s, after which it remained vacant.

Tenant Farmers and Archaeology

I mentioned that Dr. Taylor freed his family’s enslaved people during the Civil War. The plantation then transitioned to tenant labor. Many tenants were former slaves of the Taylors’ who decided to stay and continue working, but now for wages and the hope of acquiring property themselves.

The White planter class, including the Taylors, had controlled the land in the South prior to the war and continued to retain title to the land. But after the war, they faced severe labor shortages. The Taylors divided Hollywood Plantation into thirty- to fifty-acre farms that were rented to freedmen and other tenants.

Just as several of Hollywood’s formerly enslaved people had gone to Kentucky, presumably to return to home or family they had been separated from, many other recently freed African Americans were arriving in Arkansas from other Southern states, looking for friends and relatives as well as new opportunities. Hollywood Plantation gained families from Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama.

Under the tenancy arrangement, a tenant rented the farmland for cash or for a share of the crops raised. A tenant who provided his own equipment got to keep most of the income from his crop in his own pockets. If the landlord had to

provide the farm equipment, he would often take half of the crop to compensate, in a situation called sharecropping, which left the cropper very vulnerable to harvest fluctuations and made it hard to get ahead. Hollywood/Valley Plantation had both tenants and sharecroppers, but here, even the tenants were provided with company mules, which were kept centrally and loaned out day to day.

There tends to not be much historical information about individuals in the most disadvantaged classes, but at Hollywood/Valley, historians and archaeologists have been able to piece together a strong archive of information about the formerly enslaved people, tenant families, and their descendants. This is still being developed into a publicly accessible resource, but I can give a couple of brief examples.

Alexander and Cornelia Craighead had 11 children, 8 while still enslaved. They were among those who returned to Mauvilla in 1863. By 1870, Alexander owned \$800 of property, which was an extremely large amount for a freed slave. Their son, William, became the pastor of the 1200-member Zion Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, for 45 years.

After the Civil War, a freedman named Jordon Prosper made his way back to Arkansas from Texas, where he had been taken by his master during the war. He became a tenant farmer and married a formerly enslaved woman named Kittie Ann who worked as a cook in the household of one of the Taylor children. By 1910, Kittie Ann—now without Jordon—was listed in the census as the head of her own household. In addition to working as a cook, she now owned a boarding house in nearby Winchester. For many African American women, working as a cook was a step toward better opportunities, like tenant farming was toward landownership. In this case, Kittie Ann Prosper was part of the growing number of Black business owners.

Even where history doesn't record names or details about individuals' lives, important information about the people who lived here can be gleaned from archaeology. In 2022, Matthew Rooney of the UA Monticello Research Station of the Arkansas Archeological Survey led an excavation of a tenant farmer house site northwest of the Taylor dogtrot.

This provided the first direct evidence of a house on the site, and the types of nails recovered established that it had been constructed around or shortly before the turn of the twentieth century. This was apparently one of the new residences built to answer the need for more housing after the establishment of the Valley Planting Company in 1895 led to a burst of population growth on the plantation. And it showed evidence of inhabitation up until the 1940s. It thus offers clues about the lifestyle of tenant farmer families in the first half of the twentieth century.

The evidence suggests that the tenant homes did not have brick chimneys. There was fencing, likely used as pens for pigs, goats, and/or chickens. Buttons and fasteners found there indicate the workwear worn by the tenants. Overalls were the common outfit for both farming and industrial work during the period. Valley Plantation workers wore brands like Scott's Level Best, Carhartt's, and Tuf Nut.

Proportionally fewer ceramic sherds were recovered at the tenant cabin than at the Taylor House, agreeing with the memory of a former plantation resident who said the families had very few ceramic dishes; they often reused metal cans as cups and bowls, and metal can lids as plates.

Ammunition recovered, such as .22 casings, .45 ACP casings, and shotgun caps, may signal the practice of hunting small game. Bisque porcelain doll fragments remind us that full families lived in these homes, often with numerous children. Glass snuff bottles allude to tobacco habits, and medicine bottles recall the hope put into patent medicines, especially since professional medical care was not always available to the rural poor.

Additional archaeology work is planned at other sites throughout the former plantation in an effort to further document the lifeways of the African Americans associated with Hollywood and Valley Plantation. Several habitation sites have been identified, and at least six churches are known, including the Cypress Grove Baptist Church, which is likely the location of Hollywood's historic slave quarters and also includes an extant cemetery.

Even the *presence* of a slave cemetery can be a reminder of what is no longer visible: With infant mortality rates reaching above 350 per 1,000 births among enslaved women, there are surely unknown numbers of infant burials whose graves are no longer marked—the ephemeral markers of wood or stone having long since disappeared. In the Taylor family cemetery, infant burials are marked with cut marble headstones, but enslaved people and poor sharecroppers would not often have had the means to do the same, even while experiencing the same sense of human loss.

These artifacts and more are on display for you in the reconstructed servants' quarters on site, as part of an exhibit called, "Black Lifeways Through the Valley." You'll also be able to read the story of another African American family, the Webbs, who were associated with Valley Plantation over the course of several generations.

Historic Preservation and Restoration

Although the main visible link to the history of Hollywood and Valley Plantation is the Taylors' dogtrot house, the story that structure represents is clearly much bigger than just that of the family who owned it. That's why it was critically important to preserve and restore the Taylor House itself, and then building off of it, to expand the exploration and interpretation of the whole site through archaeology and other means to include the other people and communities associated with the plantation over the years.

As mentioned before, the house sat empty from the 1950s onward. The rear kitchen ell (which had been added after the Civil War), was removed, relocated to a different place, 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 shed roofs were added for farm implement storage. Although they were unattractive, the shed roofs 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 moved to the grounds of the Drew County Historical Museum. It has now been restored to its original place at the Taylor House behind the kitchen.

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. UAM immediately began preparing the restoration.

The Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) has provided grants totaling \$1.9 million. Tommy Jameson and Joan Gould prepared a master plan for the restoration in August 2013. It is being carried out in phases, and in 2019 the project received the Excellence in Preservation through Restoration Award by Preserve Arkansas.

In preparation for the restoration work, the Arkansas Archeological Survey conducted a geophysical survey at the site in 2013 to determine the location of outbuildings around the house. And since 2014, they have conducted additional digs at the Taylor House. Participants dug around the house in search of the porch piers, kitchen ell, and the north end of the cellar.

The house as we see it today has been restored to its condition as of the 1880s, including the kitchen ell and the weatherboards on the second story. Prior to that, the house sat closer to the bayou, but around 1880, it was moved several feet back away from the bank to its current location, due to erosion. The family's story of this move was corroborated in 1991 and 1992 when archaeological excavations under the porch sheds identified historic plow furrows indicating that the house now sits on what had once been cultivated fields, as well as a basement and cistern in the wrong position for the currently situated house, having been filled in most likely in the 1880s. Also, dendrochronology readings of the logs established the house's construction date to 1846, except for newer logs at the base that were added around 1880, either to replace deteriorated logs or to raise the level of the first floor, potentially to accommodate the furnishings brought from Mauvilla in 1876. The house was not disassembled for the move; rather, the

whole house was rolled back using logs and mules. Although the house was moved intact, the chimneys were rebuilt using the same bricks.

The earliest known photographs of the Taylor House date to 1914 and give good details about the front and back porches, the kitchen ell, cistern, and the edge of the smokehouse. These, in combination with evidence from site surveys by the Arkansas Archeological Society in 1991 and 2013, have enabled the restoration that we see today.

I want to turn it over to Kyle Day, professor of history at UAM, to let him tell you more details about the restoration work that has been done here and the university's vision for the future at this site.

After that we'll have a chance to explore the house and other structures and Professor Day will be able to tell us what we are looking at.

Before I turn it over to him, I want to take a moment to invite you to our next tour on December 1st in North Little Rock. Designed by architect E. Fay Jones, it is important for its architecture and its history. You'll also get insight into how the National Register of Historic Places process works!

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