

HISTORY OF THE TAYLOR FAMILY <sup>21</sup>

The object of this meeting may be explained thus: Old Harrison Taylor, with eight sons and four daughters, with their wives and husbands, emigrated to this county in the latter part of the last and the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. He, with his sons and daughters, and their wives and husbands, has been swept by time to the spirit land. The children of those sons and daughters now alive have grown to hoary age, mostly ranging from seventy-odd to ninety-odd years. Another cycle of years will scarce leave one of this third generation. In the meantime the connections by intermarriages have become so enlarged that they are not half known to each other. It was, therefore, thought proper that they should meet and mingle together in this grand reunion—not for any selfish, clannish, or political purpose, but to talk over and recount the virtues of their good old sires and grandsires, who, though unheralded by fame, filled all the duties of private citizens with more true usefulness, more virtue, and honest integrity than a whole host of political humbugs and office hunters.

The most that is known of old Harrison Taylor is that, though unknown to fame, he was of just such a community of men as would render any country famous. He was honest, industrious, benevolent, mild, and reticent. Untainted by avarice and ambition, he glided along in the quiet undercurrent of life from whence the purest virtues flow.

He was born in the central part of Virginia. His parents were of Welsh and English origin, and derived the name of Harrison from an intermarriage of their ancestors with the Harrison family of Virginia. His father died without a will, and, under the feudal laws of the age, the oldest son took the property, which was said to be large, and left Harrison shareless. Instead of lying around a lackey and pensioner on his brother, he boldly struck out for the frontier and located at Winchester, Virginia, then but a village, where he took up the trade of house carpenter.

<sup>21</sup> This chapter is a reprint in full of a fifteen-page pamphlet entitled "A Sketch of the History of the Taylor Family, written by Harrison D. Taylor and read by Dr. [John E.] Pendleton at the Taylor Reunion, at Beaver Dam, Kentucky, September 9, 1875." Most of its contents appears in a disconnected form in some of Mr. Taylor's fragmentary sketches. It was not included in the foregoing selections, but reserved for presentation as compiled in this pamphlet.

Harrison D. Taylor, "History of the Taylor Family." Hartford, KY, 1875; reprinted as chapter 21 of *Ohio County, Kentucky in the Olden Days*, ed. Mary Taylor Logan (Louisville, 1926), pp. 101-111.

Here it was that he evinced the only known instance of an ill temper and an ungovernable rage. A British officer located at that place in the recruiting service took a fancy to him and often tried to induce him to enlist as a soldier, but in vain. It was this officer's practice to gather a crowd about the tavern of nights, and drink and carouse until someone became so drunk and insensible that he either took the bounty or had it slipped into his pocket, and was then forced into the ranks as a soldier. As young Taylor was strictly temperate, he never could be caught in this way. However, one night after a hard day's labor, he took a seat in a quiet, retired corner and fell asleep. The officer observing this slipped the bounty into his pocket. Then he awaited until his supposed victim awoke. Blandly addressing him, he remarked that it was time that they should go home to the barracks. Taylor looked at him with astonishment and asked what he meant. The officer, who had formed an incorrect idea of his man, with a haughty air informed him that having taken the bounty he was now a soldier of King George, and the barracks were now his proper home. Taylor denied ever taking the bounty, when the officer, in like haughty tone, asked him how he could deny it when he had King George's coin in his pocket. At the word pocket the youth suddenly ran his hand into his, grasped the coin, threw it with his utmost strength at the head of the officer, and flew at him with all the fury of an enraged tiger. He was caught and held by his friends whilst the King's representative beat a hasty retreat. He gave this recruit a wide berth ever afterwards.

It was not long until he married Miss Jane Curlet and settled far back in the woods, where, with a single horse, he commenced clearing the forest and cultivating the land. This horse had to be belled and turned to the range at night and hunted up in the morning. Taylor, like all frontiersmen, carried his gun when he went to the woods, and one morning shot a deer just as he came up with his horse. He had just commenced reloading when he heard a turkey gobble, and then another, and another, until the "calls" had nearly formed a ring around him. He at once comprehended his danger, turned his horse's head towards home, struck it a blow, and then crept off in another direction through the undergrowth, until he thought himself entirely outside of the gobbling ring, when he made for home with utmost speed. He had barely arrived there when a messenger announced an Indian raid upon an adjoining settlement.

The horse, in passing through the gobbling ring, had been greatly alarmed by the redskins and made his way home, where he stood ready to bear the young wife and husband to the nearest fort.

As the country improved, he built a mill on a stream in Frederick County, by which mill passed the main road leading from the east across the Alleghany Mountains to the then great west. There he raised a large family, bore the reputation of a peaceable, quiet citizen, and, what is more remarkable, had the reputation of being an honest miller, which the following story, as related by one of his sons, will show:

His son Harrison, even before he had arrived to full manhood, had Kentucky on the brain, and solitary and alone set out for that Eldorado. On a summit of the Alleghany Mountains he stopped for the night at a wayside inn crowded with travelers. A youth and a stranger, he sat almost unobserved in a corner, until the landlord saw him. Book registers not then being in use, this landlord usually kept his register in his head, and blandly inquired of his young guest his name, residence, and destination. On being told he exclaimed "What! a son of Honest old Taylor that kept the mill on the road? Why I was a wagoner for years on that road, and we wagoners would drive for miles to get feed from him rather than buy elsewhere. We were always sure of honest measure and fair prices. In fact he used to go by the name of 'Honest old Taylor at the mill.'" Right-minded persons may well imagine the feelings of the young wayfarer at this encomium on his meek and modest old sire.

This old sire's wife and partner through life was as unlike him as it was possible, except in honest integrity and unbounded benevolence, yet this dissimilarity seemed to strengthen the bonds of mutual affection and render their love and esteem everlasting and sincere. Demonstrative, possessed of powerful will and strong sense, abounding in wit and anecdote, and having an almost infallible memory, she was ever remarkable for her great social qualities. Her mother had lived to the extraordinary age of ninety-odd years. The tenacious memories of these two women are a remarkable illustration of how the unwritten history of a nation can be preserved from generation to generation. There are some still living who, in their childhood, used to hear old Mrs. Taylor relate incidents of English history, as far back as the days of Cromwell, which facts were afterwards corroborated in reading the written history of that country,

yet this was all traditional lore. Her kind-hearted benevolence was the leading feature of her character. That it was not always bestowed in vain, the following story will illustrate:

At their mill daily assembled men and boys from far and near, awaiting their turns. It was her custom daily to march down to the mill, with loaf and knife in hand, and cut and distribute bread to each of the hungry turn-awaiting urchins. Among these was often a poor, ragged, orphan bound boy who never escaped her eye. He was frequently taken to the house and fed to his heart's content, and many a garment belonging to her boys went to clothe his almost naked body. Stackhouse was his name; but the community would not allow him the whole of the only thing inherited from his parents, and called him Stack for short. He grew up under a sense of oppression and wrong, and it was natural that he should wish to retaliate his wrongs upon society. Shrewd, daring, and active, he was soon selected by old, hardened villains to become an accomplice in horse stealing. From his knowledge of the country he could skulk and hide in the spurs of North Mountain, steal any horse he wished, and transfer him to a regular band of horse thieves—a band that was supposed to extend to South Carolina and Georgia. The people of Frederick and adjoining counties were thus annoyed for years until the Governor ordered the military authorities to call out a sufficient force to scour the country and take Stack and his accomplices, dead or alive.

Richard and Thomas Taylor were among those detailed for that purpose. They took their range for exploration, and separated to meet at a designated point. Thomas had not gone far before he discovered smoke, and, approaching it cautiously, saw Stack busily engaged drying or jerking the choice parts of a mutton he had stolen the night before. At this critical moment Thomas tread upon a stick; it broke and gave the alarm. A race ensued in which little was lost or gained; it was rather far to fire with certain aim, and to fire without effect was placing himself at the mercy of his adversary, for guns in those days would not fire a second time without reloading. Stack, however, was approaching a precipitous hillside, which, if once gained, would hide him from sight. Thomas raised his gun while running, determined to fire at the first open range, but was so unfortunate as to get his foot so entangled in a vine as to stumble and fall. On raising up, his intended victim had entirely disappeared and, notwithstanding the most diligent search, no traces of him could be found.

He was banished for a time from his old haunts, but frequently returned. Finally he was caught, tried, and convicted. While Stack was in prison, Thomas Taylor visited him, and, alluding to their race, inquired how he had made his escape. "I was," said Stack, "within a few feet of the entrance to my den when you fell, and I immediately dodged into it. Its entrance was so concealed that no mortal, but myself, perhaps, has ever discovered it. Several times while you were hunting around, you were in range of my rifle. It was once aimed at you, my finger on the trigger, but I thought of your mother, and it dropped from my grasp. Ah, had I been raised by such a mother, I would never have been the wretched outcast that I am"—and tears trickled down the bronzed cheeks of the poor, degraded outcast.

Old Mrs. Harrison Taylor, believing in that text which says that "Man shall not live by bread alone," did not confine her benevolence to the hungry mill boys, but was ever ready to relieve the sick and suffering, no matter what their condition in life. Poor, dying mothers would often bequeath their children to her care, and in this way her house became almost an orphan asylum during the ravages of the Revolutionary War. It is said that at times she would have as many as thirty-odd children dependent on her for food and raiment. She, too, was the principal surgeon and physician of the then backwoods settlement. With her lancet in her pocket she was always ready to replace dislocated limbs, set broken bones, and lance or bleed as required, with the steady nerve of a hospital surgeon, although the wail of a feeble infant, or any tale of suffering or sorrow, would at all times bring tears to her eyes.

By the most untiring care and industry these old people—Old Harrison Taylor and his wife—acquired property and raised a family of eight sons and four daughters. Several of those sons had visited Kentucky, and because of their representations of the country the old folks were induced to sell out and remove to Ohio County. There all of the sons and the three daughters then living finally settled. The old folks bought the farm now occupied by Mr. Hamilton Barnes, where they retired until too old and feeble to keep house, after which they removed to their son Thomas, where they lived the remainder of their days, and were buried side by side in the family graveyard.

Old Harrison Taylor was born on August 11, 1735, and died on November 22, 1811, in the seventy-seventh year of his age. Mrs.

Taylor was born on September 5, 1742, and died on August 5, 1812, in the seventieth year of her age.

In selling his mill and farm the old man took a bountiful supply of such store goods as he thought would be useful in the new-settled country. These goods excited almost as great a curiosity as the glass lockets worn by the two girls at the party on Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy Creek as described in "Ralph Ringwood's" story. The following story illustrates how they were appreciated by the young hunters and belles of the day:

At a social party at the house of the old folks one night, a pert, flippant young gentleman was seated nearest the candle, by which lay a pair of bright, polished snuffers. On being requested to snuff the candle, he picked it up and licked his thumb and finger, making ready to pinch it off, when he was told to use the snuffers there. Upon hearing this he set down the burning candle, picked up the snuffers, opened them, licked his thumb and finger again, pinched off the snuff, and placed it in the snuffers. He closed them and laid them on the table with the remark, "Ain't they nice and handy?"

As long as health and strength permitted, their house was the resort of the sick and afflicted who needed aid, also of the gay and witty who wished to measure lances with the unpolished backwoods, offhand wit, humor, and sarcasm of the old lady. Even the most sober and sage-like were fond of her society. The late eccentric James Axley, who preached her funeral, delighted in her company, and was heard to say that she had more native good sense and natural eloquence than any woman he ever knew.

We have given some of the details of the life of Old Harrison Taylor—"Honest old Taylor at the mill"—and his good wife. None should wish to trace their origin to a higher source, for "An honest man is the noblest work of God." We will try to give a brief sketch of their eight sons and four daughters.

Their oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was married, and afterwards died in Virginia. Little is known of her children; one, Peggy Pue, accompanied her grandparents to Kentucky and was married to a Mr. Keel. She died without children.

Richard Taylor, the oldest son, was twice married. By his first wife he had Harrison, Thomas, and, as well as I now recollect, five daughters. Katy married a Coleman and afterwards Thomas Ashby; Peggy married the Reverend John James; Sally married

Philip Falheron; and the other two, whose names are not recollected, married the one a Leach and the other a Tarleton. By his second wife he had Richard, John, Blackstone, and Mason, and three daughters: Susan, who married Richard Stevens; Henrietta, who married Daniel Stevens; and Clarissa, who married Ignatius Barrett. Richard Taylor lived to his eighty-fourth year, and throughout his life was celebrated for industry, honest integrity, and hospitality.

Thomas Taylor, the second son, united himself to the Methodist church at the early age of twelve years. He became a local preacher while quite young, and remained one until the day of his death. Although throughout life a large contributor in the aid of the church, he never asked nor received a cent for his own services. While in the vigor of manhood, it was his constant practice to labor hard through the week and then at the end ride miles away to preach in some place where there was no regular preaching. A file of old almanacs, still in the family, in which he used to note his appointments, will show that he frequently went to Hopkins, Muhlenberg, Grayson, and Breckinridge counties, and even to Hardin, to preach. Yet, to do this, he seldom left home until Saturday, returning home on Monday; then by almost superhuman exertion he made up the lost time throughout the rest of the week. If it were possible for any man to have too much physical, moral, and intellectual industry, he was the man. His life was a continual effort to improve the soil, the morals, and the intelligence of the country. Of him it may be truly said that his heart was always right, his failings were but virtues in excess.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Taylor had five sons—Nicholas, Wesley, Harrison D., Milton, and Thomas—and a daughter Frances, all of whom are dead, save Harrison D. and Milton.

Harrison, the third son, was said to have been a man born without fear; and I may add that he died without reproach. Whilst quite a youth he visited Kentucky and was intrusted with the location of lands in this part of the country. He made several trips through the wilderness alone, and was known to remain at the surveyors' camps when older and more experienced men would fly to the settlements. He was a plain, simple-hearted, honest man. His house for years was the headquarters of land claimants who came to the

<sup>22</sup> Tradition has it that old Harrison Taylor took an active part in the Revolution and that his three oldest sons, Richard, Thomas, and Harrison Taylor, served during the latter part of the war. Their Revolutionary records have not yet (1926) been investigated and compiled.

country to look after their lands, and his thorough knowledge of the country rendered his services highly important. In this way he often spent days and weeks, not only in entertaining them but in showing them their lands, for which his old Virginia ideas of hospitality would not allow him to charge a cent. There was one extraordinary trait in his character. Although remarkable from childhood for his fearless courage and, although he served as justice of the peace and as sheriff in the then chaotic state of society, was an extensive trader, and served as wagon-master to the army in Hopkins' campaign, yet he was never known to have had a fight, a recontre, or personal difficulty with anyone. He left four sons and four daughters: John A., Thomas Alfred, Harrison, and Washington, and Jane, Cynthia, Ann, and Rachel.

William Taylor, the fourth son, was a man of powerful frame, will, and energy all combined. He was distinguished as one of the best farmers, as the builder of the first brick dwelling house in the county, and as the first to thoroughly utilize our swamp-lands for meadows. He had four sons—Septimus, Richard, William, and Harrison—and an only daughter, Christina.

John Taylor, the fifth son, died about middle age, yet lived long enough to establish himself as a man of unbounded liberality. He was his own worst enemy, believing everyone as honest as himself. He liked everybody, believed everybody, and could be cheated by anybody who tried, which qualities he imparted to most of his children. It is thought, however, that his son "Coffee" John has drunk coffee enough to brace his nerves so that he holds his own with the world pretty well. The names of his children were Ignatius, Benjamin, Lorenzo, Stephen, Fleming, "Coffee" John, Hannah, Margaret, Sally, and Elizabeth.

Septimus Taylor, the sixth son, died early in life, leaving a reputation, however, of untiring industry. The following named are his children: Richard M., William S., Septimus, Levi, Harvey, and Jane, and another daughter, who married years ago and moved to Indiana. All these are good livers and have inflicted no disgrace on their ancestors.

Suffice it to say that Simon and Joseph, the two younger sons of old Harrison Taylor, like most pets, were a little spoiled in the raising and were bad managers. They thought Kentucky soil too poor and removed West, but at last accounts had failed, either from not being

rich enough themselves or from not finding lands rich enough to buy for farms, and were still renters. Little or nothing is known of their families.

Of the daughters of Old Harrison Taylor, Hannah married Samuel Brown, both of whom lived and died in this county. Margaret married James Harsha, who removed to Illinois. Jane married Levi Pigman, who removed to the state of Ohio. All of these daughters reared numerous children.

We have now sketched a brief notice of the second generation of the Taylor family, all of whom have gone to their long homes, and a large portion of the third generation have followed them. We who are left are in the sere and yellow leaf; the blandishments of life are gone, and our only care should be to guard well the family escutcheon and maintain the reputation of "Honest old Taylor at the mill." We have none of us been wise as Solomon, brave as Caesar, or renowned as Clay or Webster. We have had our foibles and follies, but thus far none of us have been stained with crime and dishonor. We will soon transmit the care of our family name and record to the fourth, fifth, and sixth generations. If there be any here today who have blotted that record, who have sullied that name, let them this day resolve to spend the balance of their lives in wiping out that stain. Let them one and all, like their ancestors, regardless of the allurements of wealth and fame, resolve to live industrious, honest lives, adding daily and yearly to their faith, virtue, knowledge, and charity, discharging all the duties of social and civil life, and, whether they die with wealth and distinction or sink to rest in the humble log cabin, a good conscience will whisper peace to the departing spirit, and their virtues will be cherished and remembered by those who come after them.

To the young men and boys just verging into young manhood, let one whose sands of life have nearly run give a word of advice. In our physical formation the spine or backbone is the grand support of our bodies. Weaken or destroy that, and the whole body is paralyzed. It is just as necessary to have a moral or intellectual backbone, a will, a firmness, and a fixed determination to carry out and finish anything we undertake or to refrain from doing what we think wrong. The boy that can be influenced to do anything which he knows is wrong, or has not the energy to carry out and do what he

knows to be right, will never make a man worth rearing; he will always be a poor drone or ninny among men.

Without wishing to be at all egotistical, I will tell how this backbone of principle was serviceable to me at one period of my life, and in all probability saved me from ruin. When nearly of age, I resolved on studying a profession. My father contracted with the landlord of our principal Hartford tavern for my board and incidentals. Well, I packed up and went to town, as "green" as a cucumber in the usages of town life, dressed from head to foot in homespun, home-made clothing, as unlike town-folks as a gosling is unlike peacocks. The landlord assigned me to a little eight-by-ten room immediately over the bar-room; I was to cut my own wood and make my own fires.

Because of old decks of cards lying around I suspected that this was a resort of gamblers, and that it was intended I should be fireman for their benefit. Well, sure enough, on the next morning three gentlemen whom I knew by their voices to be the leading doctor, a well-known lawyer, and the most accomplished young gentleman of leisure and fortune in the community came into the bar-room below and requested to have a room to play a game. "Oh, yes," said boniface, "walk up those stairs; you will find a good fire. A young Mr. Taylor is up there, but he will have no objection." All this was loud enough for me to hear distinctly. Heavens, what a fix! What a current of thought rushed through my mind! Before they had ascended the stairs, I had argued the question *pro* and *con*: "I am here a lone boy, noticed by no one. How pleasant it will be to accommodate and become intimate with such distinguished gentlemen! How will it look for such an uncouth chap as I"—casting a glance at my homespun—"to refuse them so small a favor?" This was the argument *pro*, but by the time they had entered the room and politely asked leave to play, I had made up the following opinion *con* and thus delivered it: "Gentlemen, I am here for the purpose of studying and learning, and although I would be glad to accommodate you, yet, if I were to do so, others would expect the same privilege; so I think it best to allow no gaming at all."

The old doctor, who was slightly "corned," wheeled around, audibly muttering curses as he retired, but the other two politely bowed themselves out, and to my surprise, I heard the young man defending me downstairs. Here let me remark that this young

man, distinguished for his wealth, family connections, and mental endowments, was ever after my warm friend. Ah! How it grieved me to see him gradually sinking into an inebriate's grave. But to my story. After the excitement abated, for I stammered with bashfulness as I spoke, I began to think, "Every person has a backbone to his principles if he would use it, but what have I done? My landlord will be mad. These gentlemen may persecute me, and the loafers and gamblers laugh me to scorn, but I know I did right; and, like Davy Crockett, I'll go ahead." Then I commenced my reading in good earnest.

After a while a young man, a boarder, came in and congratulated me for breaking up the gamblers' den. When I went downstairs, the landlord treated me with unusual respect, the landlady was delighted with my pluck, and I soon became a favorite among the ladies. In fact, the affair, small as it was, soon became noised over town and instead of being passed without notice, or with a snarl of contempt, I was generally met with a friendly greeting. I believe I was the only country lad that ever came to town whom the boys never tried "to run the green off of." People will admire pluck and backbone in even a puppy.

Now let us look at the other side of the picture. Suppose I had let these gentlemen play. I might have been fascinated with their wit, perhaps their wisdom. I might have taken a hand just to make up a game. I might have tasted their liquor just to be social. I might have become their boon companion, and I might—nay, I would certainly—have become a drunkard. All three of those men met that fate. I have never seen it fail.

Boys, one more remark and I am done. Stick to your father's farms and shops. Learn to earn your bread by the sweat of your face. It is the surest way of living a respectable, honorable, honest life. Do not be led astray by the fascinations of town and city life. I would not give one sober, honest boy, with face bronzed by the sun and hands hardened by industrious toil, for a whole team of city fops with patches of down on their lips, cigars half-way down their throats, and wearing dainty kid gloves and boots that make poodle dogs bark at themselves. Such youths are taking tickets in life's lottery, it is true, but most of their prizes will be disappointed hopes, a loafer's calling, a blackleg's hardened life of fraud and crime, a felon's cell, or a drunkard's grave.