

Colonel James Taylor II

General Information: James Taylor II was born in **1673-34**, in New Kent, Virginia, to James Taylor I and Mary Francis Walker. He married Martha Thompson **about 1699** in Orange, and they were parents of at least four sons and five daughters. James and Martha were the great grandparents of two U.S. Presidents: their oldest daughter Frances, who married Ambrose Madison, were grandparents of James Madison and their second son, Zachary, who married Elizabeth Lee, were the grandparents of Zachary Taylor. Other children included Martha, Tabitha, Hannah, Mildred. [Colonel] James Taylor III, [Colonel] George Taylor, and Erasmus Taylor. Colonel James Taylor II died about **1729** at the age of 56.

From Historian Ann Miller writing about Col. Taylor's Piedmont Expedition of 1705 in an article in the Orange County Historical Newsletter:

"Best known as one of the region's early settlers and surveyors, Col. James Taylor (II) is one of the colorful figures of local history. Born in 1673/4, Taylor was a member of a family that had been in Virginia since the mid-seventeenth century, living in what is now King and Queen County. James Taylor was an experienced surveyor by the first decade of the eighteenth century: deputy county surveyor for King and Queen County by **1707** and assistant county surveyor to King and Queen County and King William County in **1713**, he was serving as county surveyor of King William County by the early **1720s** and would be appointed one of the county surveyors of newly-created Spotsylvania County in **1722**. He had extensive land holdings in King and Queen, King William and Caroline counties, and eventually extended his holdings into what are now Spotsylvania, Orange and Greene counties as well. By the **1720s**, he was living in the part of western King and Queen County that is now Caroline County, and managing a collection of plantations stretching through at least six modern Virginia counties.

"As originally created, Spotsylvania County included the modern counties of Spotsylvania, Orange, Madison, Greene, Culpeper and Rappahannock, as well as the area west of the Blue Ridge Mountains as far as the Shenandoah River. James Taylor's area of responsibility as a Spotsylvania County surveyor covered the land south of the Rapidan River in modern Orange and Greene counties, and **many modern land boundaries can be traced back to surveys originally done by him**. Equally significant, at the time that the settlement was just beginning to push west into the Piedmont, Col. Taylor's involvement in Virginia's westward exploration and settlement already spanned some two decades. Included was Taylor's little-known exploration into the central Piedmont during the first years of the eighteenth century.

"Taylor had been a participant on Alexander Spotswood's **1716** 'Knights of the Golden Horseshoe' expedition to explore the Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley. But it had not been Taylor's first journey into the wilderness. In April **1704**, 'Lieut. Coll. Taylor of King & Queen County' reported to Council 'relating to the strange Indians lately seen on our Frontiers.' Taylor petitioned the House of Burgesses for permission to mount an expedition into the western wilderness, and in May **1703** his petition was referred to the Virginia Council 'for leave to go out

on a discovery on the Back part of King and Queen County.’ Council, understandably reluctant to let an ambitious and adventuresome surveyor loose on the unclaimed land beyond the frontier, pressed Taylor for details, ordering him to give the governor ‘an account of the time he intends to set out on ye sd discovery and what force he intended to take along with him before he obtain any Licence for going out.’

“By the next month Taylor had joined forces with John Baylor, his friend and near neighbor, who tendered more detailed proposal to which Council tentatively agreed: Baylor, with ‘diverse other Gentlemen,’ intended to go on their own costs and charge as Adventurers on a discovery to ye Westward of the Inhabitants of this Colony’ beyond the Fall Line and into the Piedmont. It was to be a quasi-military expedition: the participants, ‘not less than thirty in number,’ were to be ‘modelled into a Troop,’ and choose formal officers; each man was to be provided with weapons and provisions. It was also requested ‘that they carry with them a Trumpeter.’ Approval, however, was conditional: the ‘Adventurers’ had to agree in writing to guidelines imposed by both Baylor and by Council before the Governor would grant commissions to the officers.

“The Council records contain no further information on this plan, and the outcome of the Baylor/Taylor expedition of 1705 is unknown. However, as Taylor already had shown a propensity for roaming along the ‘frontiers’ of the colony, it is likely that he continued explorations into the Piedmont--either officially or unofficially--during the next decade. During the **first two decades of the eighteenth century**, he patented land in a steady westward progression through King and Queen, King William and Caroline counties and into the Piedmont. By the time that he participated in Spotswood’s 1716 excursion, he may have been quite familiar with the region. Even if not closely familiar with the region now central Orange County, Taylor, as an experienced surveyor, may well have taken mental, and perhaps written, notes on the landscape as the expedition passed through. Like some others at the time, Taylor probably observed wild trees and plant growth as indicators of type and richness of the soil and its suitability for various crops: most of his interest centered in the rich Davidson loam belt in what is now central Orange County. At the north end of this area, by the forks of the Rapidan and Robinson rivers, the diarist John Fontaine, also riding with Spotswood in 1716 admired, ‘...the largest timber that ever I see, the finest and deepest mold, and good grass upon it.’ Within the next six years, Taylor was patenting thousands of acres in that very region, including the location of the present town of Orange.”¹

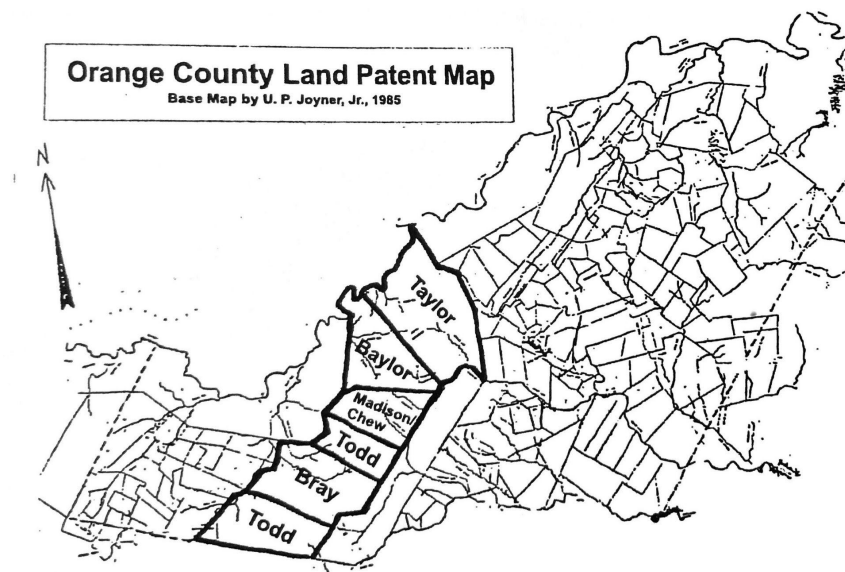
Additional information from Historian Frank Walker in his book, *Remembering*:

“In **1716**, Spotswood gave the development of the uplands a promotional boost. On August 29 (O.S) he led an expedition from Germanna to and over the Blue Ridge. Among the fifty or so guests on the Governor’s trek were four county surveyors and a collection of the most ambitious and aggressive land speculators in the colony. It should come as no surprise to learn that Col. James Taylor II was among them. By this time, Taylor was the Assistant County Surveyor for

¹ Ann Miller. “Col. James Taylor and the Piedmont Expedition of 1705,” *Orange County Historical Society Newsletter*, Volume 29, Number 5 (September/October 1998), 2-3.

both King William and King and Queen Counties. When Spotsylvania County was formed, Taylor became one of its County Surveyors, with the area south of the Rapidan as his primary responsibility. That work would have him routinely scouting the area which would become Orange County."²

"In **1722**...Col. James Taylor II obtained a patent from King George I for 8,500 acres in the little mountain area and shortly thereafter began building **Bloomsbury**, which still stands just northwest of the Orange airport. Almost all of the land now occupied by the Town of Orange was once a part of that patent. **Meadowfarm**, located on that land at the southeastern edge of the town of Orange, continues in the ownership of direct descendants of Col. Taylor. You would probably not be surprised to learn that Col. Taylor's patent contained almost all Davidson and closely related soils."³



James Taylor: 8,500 acres, 1722
John Baylor, 6,500 acres, 1726
Ambrose Madison/Thomas Chew (Taylor's sons-in-law), 4,675 acres, 1723
William Todd, 4,675 acres, 1726 (resurveyed and regranted as 2,621 acres, 1730)
David Bray, 4,675 acres, 1727
William Todd, 4,675 acres, 1726 (regranted as 4675 acres, 1728)

The original 1985 map by Ulysses P. Joyner, Jr. highlights the 1722 Taylor land patent as it appeared in Ann Miller's presentation, "Documenting the Historic Landscape".⁴

² Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴ Ann L. Miller, "Documenting the Historic Landscape," 11th Annual Historical Societies of the Piedmont Conference, May 13, 2000.

From Historian Ulysses P. Joyner, Jr., in his book *First Settlers of Orange County*:

“On the Orange side of the Rapidan and again, just west of the ‘Spotsylvania’ tract is a tract containing **8,500 acres originally patented to Colonel James Taylor**, of King & Queen County, another of the “Knights of the Golden Horseshoe”. This tract patented to Taylor in 1722 includes **the present Town of Orange and the present Taylor home, “Meadowfarm”**. The Taylor patent lay between the Rapidan and the north bank of Pamunkey Creek, the main tributary of the North Anna [River]. Taylor probably never lived on the land but his sons founded here a family which was to become prominent far beyond the bounds of Orange County. [Col.] James Taylor, Jr. constructed “**Bloomsbury**” on land originally patented to Robert Taliaferro, which remains today as the oldest structure in Orange County. When Taylor brought the land, it was called “Silvannia.” John Taliaferro, ‘brother and devisee of Robert Taliaferro, deceased’ conveyed the property to ‘James Taylor, the younger,’ in 1729 [Spotsylvania Deed Book A]. Another son, Zachary Taylor was the grandfather of President Zachary Taylor; and a daughter, Frances, was the grand-mother of President James Madison. That portion of the patent remaining at Taylor’s death was divided among his sons, James, John, George, and Zachary.”⁵

Other estates currently associated with Col. James Taylor II’s patent in addition to Bloomsbury and Meadowfarm are Greenfield, Brick Church, Berry Hill, and Midland. Orange County High School, the town of Orange, and Middle Hill where Lee camped during the winter of 1864-64 also sit on Taylor’s 1722 land grant.

**From historian Ann L. Miller’s *Antebellum Orange*:
Meadowfarm 185**



--Photo Courtesy of Ann L. Miller

⁵ Ulysses P. Joyner, Jr., *The First Settlers of Orange County, Virginia, 1700-1776* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, Inc., 2003), 85.

Meadowfarm 1855

“Part of Col James Taylor II’s 8500-acre patent of 1722, Meadowfarm, was the portion of the Taylor land that Col. Taylor conveyed to his son, Zachary Taylor I, grandfather and namesake of President Zachary Taylor. In 1804, the property was purchased by Robert Taylor, son of Erasmus Taylor of nearby Greenfield and nephew of Zachary Taylor I. It has remained in this branch of the family since then: the current owner of Meadowfarm is the sixth generation from Robert Taylor and the eighth generation from James Taylor II, the original patentee.

“The first Meadowfarm dwelling was built for Zachary Taylor I and his wife, Elizabeth Lee, daughter of Hancock Lee of Ditchley in Northumberland County. The early house, now gone, stood to the rear of the present Greek Revival residence, which was completed by Jaquelin P. Taylor in 1855. The new house served as the residence of Jacquelin P. Taylor’s nephew, Erasmus Taylor, who later acquired the property from his childless uncle. From Erasmus Taylor it passed to his son, also named Jaquelin P. Taylor and to the latter’s son, Jacquelin Erasmus Taylor, father of the present owner.

“Writing in the 1930’s, Jaquelin P. Taylor, son of Erasmus Taylor and grandfather of the present owner, described the first house as a ‘long, low frame building with dormer windows. The majority of the houses of that period in this section were of this type.’ He remembered ‘the family living in the old house while the new house was under construction.’ Probably this was the last contribution of the colonial dwelling: it was likely cleared away soon afterward to allow for garden space for the new house.

“General Longstreet had his headquarters at Meadowfarm, occupying the lower floor of the house, when the Army of Northern Virginia was in winter quarters in Orange County during the fall and winter of 1863-64. Major Erasmus Taylor, great-grandfather of the present owner, was a member of the General’s staff. General Robert E. Lee, whose headquarters were on adjoining Middle Hill farm, was a frequent visitor.

“Of crisp, elegant proportions, the Meadowfarm house is one of the finest examples of the Greek Revival style in the region...An early kitchen wing, now a guest house, was gutted by fire in 1964, but has been restored. The columned arcade that joins it to the main residence has both its decorative and practical aspects: besides providing a covered walkway between the house and kitchen, the columns screen the doors to the various service rooms which open from the rear...To the rear of the dwelling are extensive gardens, and to the east is the family cemetery, where Taylors and their kin have been buried since the mid-18th century.”⁶

⁶ Ann L. Miller, *Antebellum Orange, The Pre-Civil War Homes, Public Buildings and Historic Sites of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, VA: Moss Publications, 1988), 115-116.

The Brick Church

“St. Thomas’ Parish was created in 1740 from St. Mark’s Parish. In the colonial era, the main church for St. Thomas’ Parish was the Middle Church, or Brick church, **which stood on Meadowfarm, the Taylor plantation** southeast of the town of Orange. The exact date of its construction is not known, although it was apparently standing prior to 1740. Its ostentation was rare in the Piedmont of the time: the few remaining descriptions note brick walls and an elaborate carved and gilded centerpiece.

“Following the Revolutionary War and the disestablishment of the Anglican church, the parish became disorganized, with no resident minister, and the congregation declined. The Anglican church was succeeded by the Protestant Episcopal church, and for a period, occasional services were held at the Brick church by Episcopal ministers from other parishes, or by sympathetic ministers such as the Presbyterian Rev. James Waddell, who had a church near Gordonsville. Following the 1802 Act of Assembly which divested the Episcopal church of its glebe lands, the Brick Church and its churchyard were vandalized and destroyed in the early 19th century. Bishop William Meade, writing in the 1850’s, gave a graphic description of the destruction of the old church.

“After the [Episcopal] Church in Virginia was divested of her glebes, her houses of worship came to be regarded by the multitude as ‘common property’...During or shortly before the last war with Great Britain [War of 1812] the work of the [Brick] church’s destruction was begun...

“...The tombstones marking the graves in the adjoining churchyard were also removed, the Bishop noted, and ‘appropriated to common and unhallowed uses.’ The tombstone of Rev. Mungo Marshall, a former rector of the parish, was pressed into industrial use: it was first used to grind paints and later appeared in a local tannery, where hides were dressed on it.”

“For many years after the destruction of the Brick Church, the Episcopal congregation of Orange met in...the Orange County Courthouse, or private homes. And it was not until the 1830’s that the new parish church, St. Thomas’ Church, was constructed. The silver Communion service of the Brick Church, commissioned by Frances Taylor Madison (grandmother of the President) ‘and other good women’ of the congregation, and made in London in 1776-7, was saved from the destruction of the old church. The law allowed such gifts to be reclaimed by the families of the donors, and Taylor family tradition relates that the silver was thus rescued, taken to Meadowfarm and kept until the new church was built. It survives at St. Thomas’. According to local tradition, the rose window over the door at St. Thomas’ is also a relic of the original Brick Church.

“The site of the old Brick Church could be clearly identified by scattered bricks as late as 1965. In 1933, bricks from the old church site were placed at the threshold of the present St. Thomas’ Church.”⁷

⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

Greenfield ca. 1838

“Greenfield was the portion of the 1722 Taylor patent allotted to James Taylor II’s son Erasmus. Taylor family tradition relates that James Taylor II constructed the first Greenfield house in the 1720’s, and that Erasmus Taylor shared the tract with his father until the elder Taylor’s death in 1729. It remained in the Taylor family until 1832, when Thomas Scott purchased the property from the estate of Erasmus Taylor’s son, John Taylor. Thomas Scott called the plantation Beaulieu at his death in 1880, he devised the house and the majority of his land to his great-nephews, Richard C. and Lewis W. Booten. They divided the property in half, with Richard C. Booten receiving the portion where the house stood, a tract he rechristened Greenfields. His widow sold the property to Florence M. Boxley in 1913. She conveyed it to A.B. and Vera Gwathmey in 1942. The present owners acquired it from Mrs. Gwathmey’s estate in 1969.

“An insurance policy of 1805 shows the Taylor plantation house, a frame dwelling ‘one story high’ (probably a story and a-half) with a rear, shed-roofed addition. Nearby are a kitchen, dairy, smokehouse and office, all built of frame. This earlier complex, according to family sources, stood some two hundred yards east of the present house. The 18th century dwelling and outbuildings were replaced by the present brick dwelling and dependencies within a few years of the Scott purchase.

“...To the north of the house is a Taylor family cemetery, containing the burial place of James Taylor II, his wife Martha, their sons George and Erasmus, and other family members.”⁸



Greenfield

--Photo Courtesy of Ann L. Miller

⁸ Ibid., 119-120.

Berry Hill, ca. 1827



--Photo Courtesy of Ann L. Miller

“Sited on a promontory overlooking the town of Orange, Berry Hill stands upon a portion of Col. James Taylor II’s patent of 1722, and it was included in the original Meadowfarm tract which Col. Taylor gave to his son Zachary Taylor I (grandfather and namesake of the President) in 1727. In 1762 Zachary Taylor I deeded the part of his land that is now Berry Hill to his daughter, Elizabeth Bell, wife of Thomas Bell. The Bells christened their new plantation Evergreen, and it became the Bell homeplace, later passing to their son, Thomas Bell, Jr. Thomas Bell Jr., conveyed the tract to Reynolds Chapman in 1802.

“Reynolds Chapman served as Clerk of the Orange County Court for forty-three years, from 1801 until his death in 1844. In 1802, he married Rebecca Conway Madison, daughter of Gen. William Madison of The Residence (now part of Woodberry Forest School) and niece of President James Madison. The following year, he purchased the Evergreen plantation from Thomas Bell, Jr., and the story-and-a-half frame house then standing on the land became the Chapman residence.

“The relationship of the Bells and Chapmans was a common story among the often intertwined kinships of old Virginia. Thomas Bell, Jr., great-grandson of Col. James Taylor, II, was a cousin of Rebecca Conway Madison Chapman. Rebecca’s great-grandmother, Frances Taylor Madson was a daughter of Col. James Taylor II and a sister of Zachary Taylor I of Meadowfarm.

Reynolds Chapman subsequently added several other parcels to the Evergreen tract, until his plantation, which he renamed Berry Hill, totalled over seven hundred acres. Having expanded their landholdings, by the mid-1820's the Chapman's were contemplating a grander home: the present Jeffersonian dwelling at Berry Hill. Completed in 1827, the house was built by master mason William B. Phillips, with Malcolm F. Crawford as carpenter. Both were skilled workmen who had previously been employed in the construction of the University of Virginia....⁹

Midland 1786



“A portion of the James Taylor grant of 1722, this tract, originally called Middle Land or Midland, was conveyed to Col. Taylor’s son, George, ca. 1725. At George Taylor’s death in 1792, he devised ‘400 acres of land including the plantation I now live on’ to his son, Francis. Francis himself died in 1799, willing the tract to his brother, Benjamin Taylor. A year later, Benjamin Taylor, then of Jefferson County, Kentucky, sold the tract to Col. Lewis Willis of Spotsylvania County. In 1803, Col. Willis conveyed the property ‘known by the name of Middle Land’ to Richard H. Taliaferro, whose sister, Lucy, was married to Col. Willis’s son, William Champe Willis.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

“The tract remained in the Taliaferro family until 1843, when it was purchased by Lewis B. Williams. In 1882, the Williams heirs sold it to James Bell, and over the next fifty years the property changed hands several times. It came back into the Williams family when it was acquired by Lewis B. Williams’ great-grandson, William Clayton Williams, Jr., in 1935; the property remained in the family until 1985. It was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas M. Derwiler in 1988.

“The nucleus of the present house was built by George Taylor in 1786. The diary of his son, Francis Taylor, contains a description of the construction of the dwelling, which began in June of 1786 and was completed by the following February. As originally built, it was a two-story frame house, 25’ by 23’, with one room on each level. A two-story frame wing was added in the early 19th century. Additions to the north and east were made ca. 1900 by the Marshall family, greatly enlarging the house. A final remodeling by William C. Williams, Jr., in 1935 brought the house to its present Colonial Revival appearance.

“The original name of Midland was changed to Ashland by the Taliaferros. It was renamed Yatton by Lewis B. Williams. The present owners have restored the name of Midland.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.