

Reprinted from Beaumont Enterprise, Saturday August 14, 1999

James Gilbert Taylor and Elvina Sophia Chase Abolitionist

Area resident rallied behind Union cause

By W. T. Block

About 1838 James Gilbert Taylor and wife, Elvira Taylor, respectively from New York and Indiana, settled in Jefferson County, where they purchased a lot of property on Taylor's Bayou (named for them) and at Sabine Pass.

For the first 15 years they lived in Sabine Pass, while Taylor was captain of the schooner Glide, which the custom house papers record as having carried many loads of shingles, hides, lumber and barrels of syrup to Galveston.

The couple built a home on their 1/3 league (1,400 acres) on Taylor's Bayou, but the family returned to Sabine Pass during the Civil War. The 1860 census indicates they were parents of 8 children.

As soon as the Civil War began in 1861, Taylor, who was both Abolitionist and true to the North, surrendered his schooner to the Union Navy. For the next 3 years, he served the West Gulf Blockading Squadron as both captain and pilot (even though a civilian), while his family resided in Sabine Pass. On Oct. 4, 1861, his oldest son Walter joined cavalry Co. A of Spaight's Battalion, and remained a Confederate soldier until the end of the war.

At first Taylor kept a skiff hid out either in Front Marsh, or tied to an offshore blockader, that he occasionally used at night when he slipped into Sabine Pass to visit his family. On one occasion he was captured by soldiers and locked up in the Confederate guardhouse. However he escaped and thereafter the Confederate Army branded him a spy and traitor and placed a \$10,000 bounty on his head.

Taylor seemed to live a charmed life. On Oct. 17, 1862, he lead a detail of 40 Union Bluejackets, who came ashore and burned all the sawmill and wood-working industries in Sabine Pass, as well as the 17 barracks and stables west of town, where his son's cavalry company was stationed.

On Jan. 21, 1863 Confederates captured two Union gunboats offshore, one being Taylor's schooner Velocity, but Taylor had debarked only a day earlier to pilot a captured blockade runner to New Orleans.

In April, 1863, Taylor was severely wounded in the thigh and almost captured at the Battle of Sabine Lighthouse, but he escaped with others in a whale boat in a dense fog bank. Taylor's descendants believed he died of a wound received at the Battle of Sabine Pass (Beaumont Enterprise, Nov. 25, 1973), which was incorrect. Galveston Weekly News noted that Taylor escaped by running down the shoreline and signaling a retreating Union gunboat

In late December 1863, Taylor was one of 8 crewmen aboard a Union schooner captured by Confederates in Matagorda Bay (Galv. Weekly, Tri-Weekly News, Jan. 4, 6, 1864). The editor noted: "...Taylor has the 'dars' (hand cuffs and leg irons) on him now and is under a strong guard and in close contact..."

Although not confirmed, the writer believes that Taylor was convicted of treason by a drumhead court martial and was executed by a Confederate firing squad. His probate file in the court house confirms that he died in 1864, but gives no exact date or cause of his death.