

## **Taylor, Eben-Ezer** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Taylor, Eben-Ezer**

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**ca. 1660–February 1720**

Eben-Ezer Taylor, clergyman, was born in England and moved to South Carolina at an undetermined date as a minister to the dissenters <sup>[2]</sup> in that colony. There he gained the attention of the governor, Sir Nathaniel Johnson, who persuaded him to obtain Anglican orders. Taylor returned to England in 1711 and was ordained. Later in the year he received the King's Bounty for his passage back to America and was appointed missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts <sup>[3]</sup> to serve in South Carolina. After he was named rector of St. Andrew's Parish, Ashley River, his career promptly became marred by controversy. He was accused of continuing to talk like a Presbyterian <sup>[4]</sup>, "railing" in his sermons, neglecting his attire, and quarreling with the vestry over financial matters.

In the fall of 1717 he moved to North Carolina, where he remained until his death three years later. His fellow missionary, the Reverend John Urmston <sup>[5]</sup>, not always reliable in his comments, reported to officials of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London on 12 October that Taylor, who had recently arrived, was aged and infirm and "not able to ride five miles were it to gain the world." Taylor himself reported to the Society's secretary on 23 April 1719 that he was living at Esquire Duckenfield's on the southwestern shore of Chowan Precinct. Duckenfield was "the gentleman with whom I lived most of the year and whose house was our church all the year." Urmston referred to these accommodations as a "fourth of a chamber for an apartment and the liberty of a large room to preach." William Duckenfield <sup>[6]</sup>, who died about February 1722, was a prominent early citizen in what is now Bertie County <sup>[7]</sup>.

While Taylor was living at Duckenfield's, a question arose as to the status of enslaved people who were converted to Christianity. After two people enslaved by Duckenfield were baptized, a rumor spread in the neighborhood that baptized people who were enslaved were thereby freed. Duckenfield refused to allow any more baptisms until a law could be passed in England that no enslaved person would become free because they were baptized. Possibly as a result of this conflict of interest, Taylor seems to have moved.

At the end of 1719 Urmston said that "brother Taylor" had changed his habitation a dozen times since arriving in North Carolina and such were his trials that he wished himself back in South Carolina. Nevertheless, the hardworking missionary soon came to an unfortunate end. On 25 Apr. 1720 Urmston reported to his superiors in London that in February "his fellow laborer" had died of exposure from being in an open boat for ten days going from Bath Town to Core Sound. The boatmen buried the deceased on Harbor Island at the mouth of the Neuse River <sup>[8]</sup> and then rifled his chests. There was suspicion of foul play, and two of the men were tried and convicted of taking a large sum of money from a chest belonging to Taylor.

Rev. Eben-Ezer Taylor married a woman named Agnes. They may have been the parents of a daughter, as he mentioned his son-in-law, Gowen London, in his will. His wife did not return to South Carolina with him after his ordination but remained in the west of England, perhaps at or near Exeter. His will was dated 21 Apr. 1711, shortly before he left Charles Town for England. He bequeathed his library to whichever son of his three brothers entered the ministry. One of the brothers, Benjamin, had been a missionary in South Carolina for a brief time. On 16 Sept. 1720, John Walker, a merchant in Barbadoes (and probably the husband of Taylor's sister) but "at present so-journing in North Carolina," was administrator of the Reverend Mr. Taylor and gave power of attorney to Colonel Maurice Moore <sup>[9]</sup> and John Porter <sup>[10]</sup> to receive money due the estate.

Taylor's lengthy will cited significant sums of money plus interest due him from various individuals, some of whom bore prominent names in South Carolina. This suggests that he lent money. He also willed his plantation on Forster Creek, merchandise, a person he had enslaved, another (presumably enslaved) American Indian (tribe unknown) woman and her son, and generous sums of money to members of his family, including cousins Samuel and Elenor Cross.

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**Subjects:**

Biographies <sup>[13]</sup>

Religious Leaders and Clergy <sup>[14]</sup>

**Authors:**

Smith, Claiborne T., Jr. <sup>[15]</sup>

**Origin - location:**

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Chowan County <sup>[17]</sup>

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