

**Mary Ann Ward Taylor**  
**(1860–1942)**  
**of**  
**Farmerville, Union Parish, Louisiana**  
**Daughter of John Thomas Ward & Sarah Ann Elizabeth Scarborough,**  
**Wife of Benjamin Allen Ward**  
**by Timothy Dean Hudson**

Mary Ann Ward (16 Apr 1860–10 Feb 1942) was the second daughter born to John Thomas Ward (Jack) and Sarah Ann Elizabeth Scarborough (Betsy). Mary Ann was born and grew up on her parents' farm on the Wards Chapel Road east of Farmerville. Jack's parents, David Ward and Cynthia Seale, and his grandparents, Elisha Ward Sr. and Jane Washington Neeland, had all settled there in January 1837, while Betsy's parents had arrived in 1847.

Mary Ann Ward married on 30 June 1880 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Benjamin Allen Taylor (25 Jun 1861–1 Mar 1907), son of John D. Taylor and Sarah Matilda Stancil [1]. All four of Ben Allen Taylor's grandparents, Alexander Marion Taylor and wife Winifred Matthews, and of Allen Stancell (Stancil) and wife Rosetta Robinson, had settled in Union Parish in the latter 1830s or early 1840s.

Following their marriage, Mary Ann and Ben Allen Taylor settled on a farm near his relatives, several miles northeast of Farmerville in what became known as the Salem community. Like most Union Parish folks in those days, Ben Allen Taylor farmed for a living, but he also owned and operated a sawmill near his farm. He also operated a cane mill, something of a luxury in those days. According to his youngest daughter, Ben Allen Taylor was "*a good family man, a good provider, talented lumberman and farmer.*" She said that he stood 5'9", and had a "*wiry build, bald, and wore a black mustache*" [2].

Arson became a serious problem in north Louisiana during the latter nineteenth century, both in towns and villages as well as in the country. In 1889, Ben Allen Taylor worked his own land and nearby rented fields. On Monday, 25 November 1889, an incendiary set fire to an unoccupied house on Taylor's rented field, and the flames completely consumed 250 bushels of corn, 900 bundles of fodder, and 300 pounds of seed cotton that Taylor had stored in the house. The editor of Farmerville's "*The Gazette*" wrote,

*Any person who will seek to injure another by a willful destruction of his property is too contemptible and cowardly to live.*

It does not appear that the culprit who set the fire was ever identified [3].

Heavily Protestant north Louisiana strongly advocated for anti-lottery and anti-gambling laws during the late 1880s and early 1890s, but Louisiana politics proved complicated, and so saloons with billiard tables continued to operate in Farmerville during most of this period. These saloons also offered card and dice games. On Saturday night, 28 November 1891, Ben Allen Taylor and John T. Covington played a game of dice at E. M. Baker's saloon when a quarrel arose between them. A fist fight broke out first, with Taylor and Covington each receiving several hard blows to the face. Both men drew their pistols and fired shots inside the saloon as the row continued. Neither man received serious injuries, and initially, both denied having fired their pistol. Upon investigation, officials charged both men, who subsequently paid fines to the court [4].

This incident, as well as one that occurred in early 1893, seems to verify a description of Ben Allen Taylor's personality by his daughter:

*Perhaps there was one flaw in his character. He was absolutely fearless and had a firey [sic] temper, making a bad situation worse...But the firey [sic] temper was eventually, his undoing.*

By January 1893, thirty-one-year-old Ben Allen Taylor had a wife and six young children. He had long-standing animosity with Peter Leonard Miller, a twenty-one-year-old married farmer with young children. Taylor lived about six miles northeast of Farmerville, and Miller lived about one mile closer to Marion. Acquaintances reported that *"bad blood has existed between the men for some time."*

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, Taylor and his friend, John M. Brantley, went to Miller's house. They called out to Miller, who invited them into the yard as he stepped onto the front porch. Taylor told Miller he wanted to talk, so Miller walked out into the yard. During the brief conversation, *"the lie was passed,"* i.e., one man called the other a liar, and both drew their pistols. They began a duel at close range, both emptying their pistols. Miller managed to escape unhurt, but he had shot Taylor through the right breast, with the bullet penetrating his lung and exiting under his right shoulder blade.

Despite his chest wound, Ben Allen Taylor managed to get mounted and *"rode his horse several miles home before he collapsed and fell to the ground at Mary Ann's front gate."* It initially appeared that Taylor's serious wound would prove mortal, and family members telegraphed Miller's father, Leonard B. Miller, then in Shreveport on business, to rush home. Despite reports of Taylor's death on Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, he recovered.

The following August, officials indicted both Taylor and Brantley for “*assault by willfully shooting*” at Miller, leading to their arrest. The judge released them on bonds of \$250 each, and both men appeared before the District Court on August 8<sup>th</sup> and pled not guilty. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, Taylor and Brantley both withdrew their earlier pleas and pled guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, the judge sentenced them to pay fines of \$10 each plus court costs for their parts in the melee [5].

Ben Allen Taylor recovered from his chest wound and soon returned to his normal activities. He appears to have been an industrious farmer, as he and Mary Ann did not suffer the financial hardships of many during this era of low farm prices and a general depressed economy. However, various calamities struck their family during the early 1900s, beginning with a house fire in late January 1900 that destroyed all of their belongings. As reported in the local newspaper [6]:

*Mr. B. A. Taylor had the misfortune to lose by fire one night last week his dwelling, smokehouse and most of their contents. It is thought the fire originated in the kitchen. The family were asleep at the time the blaze broke out, and they barely had time to escape with their lives, saving practically no clothing or bedding. Loss estimated at \$1300 to \$1400; no insurance.*

Next, in the summer of 1903, Mary Ann Taylor became ill for an extended period with an illness that they termed “*slow fever*.” The newspaper report on July 22<sup>nd</sup>:

*Mrs. B. A. Taylor has been quite sick the past week with fever, but we are glad to learn that she is getting better.*

She apparently relapsed, for the August 12<sup>th</sup> newspaper reported that “*Mrs. B. A. Taylor is still quite sick. She has slow fever*.” She presumably recovered soon afterwards [7].

Ben Allen Taylor may have never fully recovered from his 1893 shooting. In February 1907, he contracted pneumonia, and on Wednesday, the 27<sup>th</sup>, Farmerville’s newspaper noted:

*We regret to learn that Mr. Ben Allen Taylor of near town is seriously ill with pneumonia.*

Taylor died two days later, on Friday, 1 March 1907, at the age of only forty-five. The newspaper published his obituary the following week:

*Mr. Ben Allen Taylor died last Friday of pneumonia at his residence three miles north-east of here, after a brief illness of about five days. Mr. Taylor was a member of the Woodmen of the World and carried two thousand dollars insurance with that order. He was laid to rest with W.O.W. honors at the Taylor Cemetery Saturday morning.*

The Woodmen of the World ordered a tombstone marker for Taylor, and they held a “*beautiful and impressive*” unveiling ceremony at his grave in the Taylor Cemetery on Sunday, October 6<sup>th</sup> [8].

Mary Ann Ward Taylor never remarried and served as her family’s matriarch for the next thirty-five years. She handled the affairs of her husband’s estate, selling his steam engine and

boiler, gin stand, grist mill, mill house, and other sawmill equipment the following July [9]. She finished raising her children and became a doting grandmother, ensuring that her family attended services at the Liberty Hill Primitive Church to which she belonged. Several descendants noted a decade-long problem with Mary Ann's eyesight. As related by her grandson [10]:

*The most unusual and untimely occurrence in Mary Ann's life was at an undetermined time in her life. She was sweeping her living room floor and suddenly, without any warning nor history of a problem, lost her eye sight. She went totally blind and remained in that condition for ten years to the day. Oddly enough, she was standing in the identical room and spot with a broom in her hand when her vision returned. Physicians were totally puzzled as to the cause. To protect her sight, she designed and stitched together a band type hood to shade her eyes from any brightness, never venturing out on a bright and sunny day.*

Other than her eyesight condition, Mary Ann Ward Taylor remained in good health until almost the age of eighty-two years. She became ill in the latter portion of 1941, with her condition worsening on Saturday night, 7 February 1942. She died on Tuesday night, February 10<sup>th</sup>, at 11:30 p.m. at the home of her daughter, Eula Taylor Hall, near Farmerville. The newspaper wrote that

*"Cousin Mary Ann," as she was affectionately known by countless friends and neighbors, was born Mary Ann Ward on April 16, 1860. She was the widow of the late Ben Allen Taylor who preceded her in death by 35 years. Her father, Jack Ward, was one of the pioneer settlers of this section of Union parish, having settled eight miles east of Farmerville.*

Mary Ann's pastor, Elder Reason W. Rhodes, wrote her obituary and published it in *"The Gazette"* the following month. According to Elder Rhodes [11]:

*There is no doubt that Sister Taylor has been through many and terrible hardships raising her family from small children, being a widow as all widows who are left this way. She was a very strong and influential character and well thought of and succeeded in raising her children and they have done well.*

*Sister Taylor joined Liberty Hill Church July 27, 1904, and lived a very consistent and useful life in a church sense, as well as in the capacity of a good citizen and neighbor.*

*She stated after she became so severely afflicted that she only dreaded the sting of death which was only natural but that she longed to depart, giving great evidence that she was in possession of the Faith of our Lord, who will shortly come and raise and change these vile bodies from the tomb. She fell asleep in death after kind and loving hands had done all for her that was possible.*

*Kilpatrick Burial Association was in charge of funeral and burial, and her grandsons were pallbearers. Ministerial services were conducted by her pastor, R. W. Rhodes, attended by a large congregation of relatives and friends at Liberty Hill Church. Internment [sic] was in what is known as the Taylor Cemetery at Liberty Hill Church, near Farmerville, La.*



**Mary Ann Ward Taylor vs. Benjamin Allen Taylor**  
**1898**

Most of the South existed in a precarious financial state throughout the postwar period of 1866–1910. The low price of cotton significantly impacted the finances of all Southern farmers. The legal case transcribed here stems from this financial setting. To stave off creditors, it became common for wives to file a lawsuit against their husbands to terminate the community of acquets and gains between them according to Louisiana law. This helped to protect any property the female may have received from her parents or that she had acquired in her own right from her husband's creditors.

All we can glean from this petition is that Mary and Ben Allen's financial situation was difficult in 1898, the year after the financially devastating 1896–1897 drought. It indicates that Mary wished to have some of the community property belonging to her and Ben Allen placed in her own name due to the poor financial state of her husband's affairs. One should not interpret this suit as any hint of marital discord between Mary Ann and her husband. It was a legal maneuver necessitated by the paternalistic code of law and the subservient status of females in that era. The Taylors obviously feared that Ben might be unable to pay his debts, and to save some of their property from being seized by his creditors and sold, they made this attempt to place some of it in Mary Ann's name.

The original suit papers transcribed here come from Union Parish Louisiana Civil Suit #4363. The only paper contained in this file is Mary Ann's petition and Ben's answer. No record survives to indicate if the judge granted Mary Ann's request:

**7 Nov 1898**

**Mary Ann Ward Taylor** files this petition with the Union Parish court

*To the Hon. **Allen Barksdale**, Judge of the Third Judicial District in and for Union Parish La.*

*The Petition of **Mary Ann Taylor** nee **Ward** who is a resident of Union Parish State of Louisiana, with respect represents to your Hon. Court that she intermarried with **Ben Allen Taylor** on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of June A.D. 1880 in your said Parish and has continued to reside therein since that time. That at the time of said marriage she received from her father's estate personal property of the value of Eight five (\$85.00) Dollars. That her husband the said **Ben Allen Taylor** has appropriated the same to his own use and for his own purposes. That he is still indebted to her in the said sum of Eight five (\$85.00) dollars for said use and consumption of her total and paraphernal property. That at the moment of their marriage there began the legal community of acquits and gains between them that exists between husband and wife. She further avers that the financial affairs of her said husband are in such a condition and he is so embarrassed by indebtedness as to endanger the legal community, unless the said community be dissolved and she be separate in property from her said husband and authorized to administer and control her own*

*affairs separate and alone from him in all respects as though she were a "femme sole." Wherefore Petitioner prays that the said **Ben Allen Taylor** be cited to answer this petition as the law directs. That upon a final hearing hereof your petitioner have judgment against the said **Ben Allen Taylor** (husb) dissolving the community of acquits and gains now existing between them, and authorizing your Petitioner to manage and control her own property, rights and effects as a "femme sole." Petitioner also prays for judgment against her said husband in the sum of Eighty-five Dollars, for costs & general relief.*

**John H. Anderson**, Atty for Petitioner

*Third Dist Court Parish of Union La.*

**Mary Ann Taylor** (wife) }  
 vs. }  
**Ben Allen Taylor** (Husb) }

*Be it remembered that I **Ben Allen Taylor** hereby acknowledge citation and waive service of copy of said petition and all delays in said case and accept service thereof. This 7<sup>th</sup> day of Nov A.D. 1898.*

Attest: **E. L. Westbrook**

**Ben Allen X Taylor** [his mark]

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### Children of Mary Ann Ward & Benjamin Allen Taylor

Mary Ann Ward (16 Apr 1860–10 Feb 1942) married on 30 June 1880 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Benjamin Allen Taylor [Ben Allen] (25 Jun 1861–1 Mar 1907), son of John D. Taylor (12 May 1834–1896) and Sarah Matilda Stancil (28 Jan 1837–aft. 1880).

Mary Ann Ward and Ben Allen Taylor had seven children:

1. **John Allen Taylor** (14 Sep 1881–5 Sep 1886) is buried in the Taylor/Liberty Hill Cemetery.
2. **Alexander Palmore Taylor** [Alec] (10 Apr 1883–21 Feb 1963) married on 26 December 1917 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Gertie Ideal Rugg (23 Jan 1889–6 Sep 1974), the daughter of Eli Rugg (14 Sep 1850–2 Jun 1935) and Frances Amelia Ranley (8 Jun 1856–10 Apr 1925). They settled in the D'Arbonne Community in southern Union Parish near the Union/Lincoln Parish line. Alec and Gertie Taylor had no children and are buried in the Culbertson Cemetery at D'Arbonne.
3. **James Benjamin Taylor** [Ben] (11 Jun 1886–25 Aug 1960) married on 9 June 1907 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Terry Dee Aswell (17 Sep 1891–29 Mar 1970). Her marriage record and 1910 census gave her name as "*Terry*," but the 1920 and 1930 censuses, plus her tombstone, have it as "*Dee*." He owned a barbershop in Farmerville in 1920 but hauled logs in 1930. Ben and Dee Taylor are buried in the Farmerville Cemetery beside their son, J. D. Taylor (8 Apr 1908–4 Mar 1935), who died in a car accident.
4. **Bular Jefferson Taylor** [Bulah] (9 Sep 1889–7 Jan 1957) married on 6 December 1908 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Lettie Rebecca Patterson (28 Dec 1892–3 Jun 1924), daughter of William Angus Patterson and Nancy Kennedy; his cousin Hillory H. Ward performed the marriage. Lettie died in Monroe, Ouachita Parish and he died in Ruston, in Lincoln Parish. Bular and Lettie are buried in the Taylor/Liberty Hill Cemetery.
5. **Eula Taylor** (9 Sep 1889–20 Feb 1969) married on 14 November 1909 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Robert Carlton Hall (8 Feb 1886–3 Aug 1951). Eula and Robert are buried in the Taylor/Liberty Hill Cemetery.
6. **Mary Theodocia Taylor** [Docia] (3 Oct 1891–28 Mar 1972) married on 31 October 1908 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Reuben Marcus Dean (13 Jul 1888–11 Sep 1958), the son of James Alexander Dean (9 Nov 1836–10 Jul 1903) and Jeffalonia Bransford (8 Nov 1844–8 Jun 1914). Docia and Reuben are buried in the Taylor/Liberty Hill Cemetery.
7. **Josephine Taylor** [Josie] (18 Oct 1894–3 Jun 1982) married on 12 November 1910 in Union Parish, Louisiana to John Randolph Patterson (14 Jun 1885–20 Sep 1942), son of William

Angus Patterson and Nancy Kennedy; Josie and her brother Bular married Patterson siblings.  
John and Josie Patterson are buried in the Taylor/Liberty Hill Cemetery.

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Notes

1. Union Parish LA Marriage Book 6 (1880–1883), p. 71 (Benjamin A. Taylor to Mary A. Ward, license dated 29 June 1880). *"The Gazette"* (Farmerville, LA), 5 March 1942, p. 2, column 4. The marriage book does not give the date of the marriage. In Mary Ann's obituary written by her pastor, Elder Reason W. Rhodes, he stated that she and Ben Allen Taylor were married on June 30<sup>th</sup>.
2. Taylor, Charles Allen. *Up There Looking Down*. Private manuscript, 1992, p. 11. Allen Taylor was the grandson of Ben Allen Taylor, and in his description of his grandfather (who died before he was born), he quotes Josie Taylor Patterson, Allen Taylor's aunt and the youngest daughter of Ben Allen and Mary Ann Taylor.
3. *"The Shreveport Times"* (Shreveport, LA), 3 December 1889, p. 2, column 2.
4. *"Louisiana Review"* (New Orleans), 9 December 1891, p. 4, columns 2–3.
5. *"The Shreveport Times,"* January 31 (p. 4, column 3) and February 3 (p. 4, column 4), 1893. *"Louisiana Review,"* 8 February 1893, p. 1, column 4. Taylor, p. 11. Union Parish LA District Court Minute Book 1893–1894, Case #1880: State of Louisiana vs. Ben Allen Taylor and John M. Brantley, *"assault by willfully shooting at,"* p. 190 (14 February 1893, Taylor and Brantley indicted, granted bond of \$250), p. 296 (8 August 1893, both pled not guilty), p. 345 (August 15<sup>th</sup>, Taylor withdraws earlier plea and pleads guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon; Brantley withdraws earlier plea and pleads guilty to assault), p. 369 (August 25<sup>th</sup>, Taylor and Brantley fined \$10 each plus costs, or two months in jail). In his history of his *"Grandpa Ben Allen Taylor,"* Allen Taylor gave the description of his *"firey [sic] temper,"* stated that the shooting occurred in *"around 1905 sketchy information tells us."* Taylor wrote of Ben Allen Taylor, *"He was well on the road to recovery, but the following year, contracted pneumonia and died."* There is no evidence of a second shooting of Ben Allen Taylor, and so the incident that Allen Taylor described must have been the January 1893 shooting.
6. *"The Gazette,"* 7 February 1900, p. 3, column 2.
7. *"The Gazette,"* July 22 (p. 3, column 1) and August 12 (p. 3, column 1), 1903.
8. *"The Gazette,"* February 27 (p. 5, column 1), March 6 (3, column 2), and October 9 (p. 3, column 1), 1907
9. *"The Gazette,"* 22 July 1908, p. 2, column 4.
10. Taylor, p. 13.
11. *"The Gazette,"* February 12 (p. 1, column 5) and March 5 (p. 2, column 4), 1942.

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