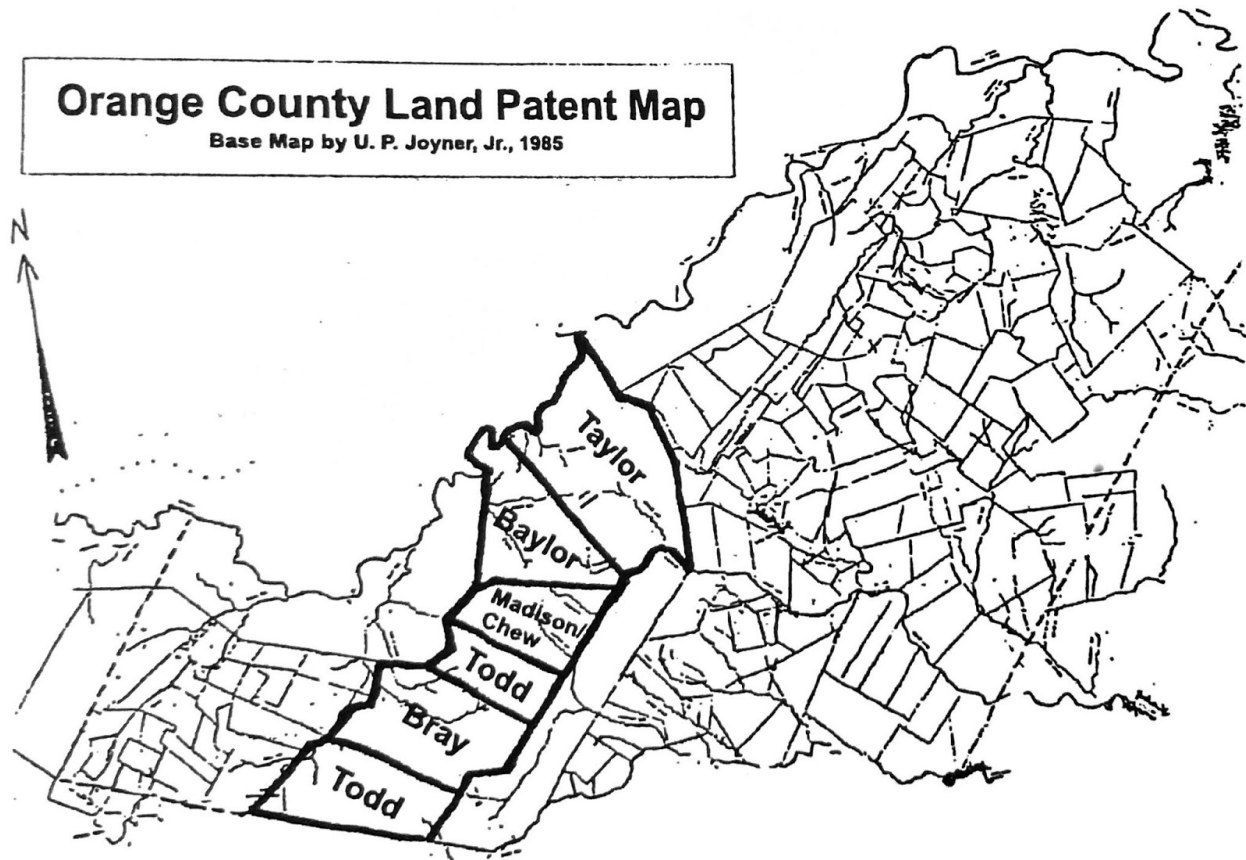


Early Land Patents

Historian Ann Miller in a presentation entitled, “Documenting the Historic Landscape”, explains the earliest Orange County land patents.



“PATENTS AND PATENTEES ALONG THE SOUTHWEST MOUNTAINS

“James Taylor, who lived in King and Queen (now Caroline) County, and served variously as a surveyor for King and Queen County, King William County, and Spotsylvania County, patented 8,500 acres around the present town of Orange in 1722.

“In 1726, a 6,500 acre tract immediately west of the Taylor land was patented by John Baylor, heir to Newmarket plantation in King and Queen (now Caroline) County, whose father was an associate of Taylor’s.

“South of the Taylor and Baylor lands, approximately 20,000 acres running along the Southwest Mountains in the Hanover (now Albemarle) County line was surveyed by James Taylor for William Todd of King and Queen County and Todd’s partners. As his fee, Taylor took the northern portion of the land, which was patented in 1723 for his sons-in-law Ambrose

Madison and Thomas Chew. Todd's partners failed to finalize their portions of the patent, and after a controversy with Taylor over the patent lines, Todd patented two tracts within the area, and David Bray of James City County patented the third. All patents were nominally sized at 4,675 acres."¹

Miller summarizes the land holdings as follows:

:

“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

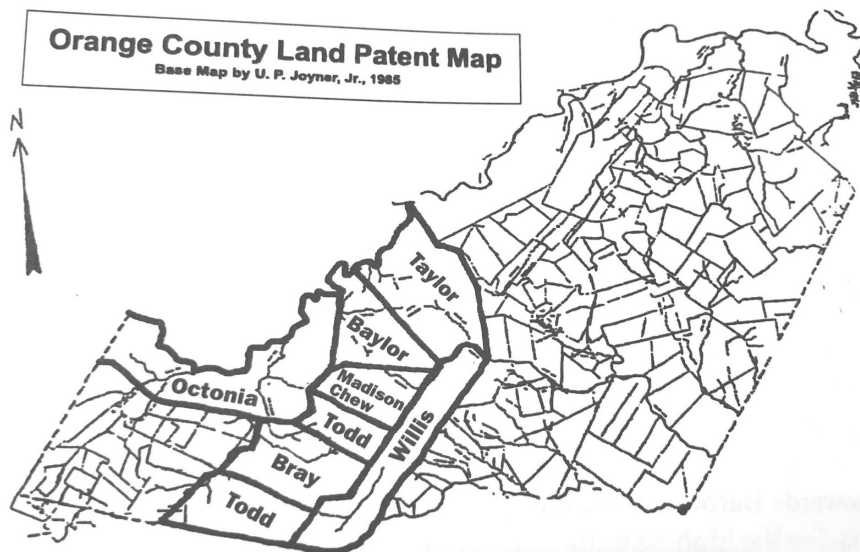
William Todd: 4,675 acres, 1726 (resurveyed and regranted as 2,261 acres, 1730)

David Bray: 4,675 acres, 1727

William Todd, 4,675 acres, 1726 (regranted as 4675 acres, 1728)”²

Note: Chronological order of patents: Taylor (1722), Madison/Chew (1723), Baylor (1726), Bray (1727), Todd (1728) and Todd (1730).

Historian Frank Walker in his book “Remembering: A History of Orange County” explains further:



“These patents, the last of which came six years before Orange County was formed, locked up almost all of the best soil in the area. The town of Orange is on the boundary between the Taylor (1722) and Baylor (1726) patents. The town of Gordonsville is in the lower right corner of the Willis (1728) patent. The Madison/Chew patent (1723) is the original Montpelier tract. The

¹ Ann Miller. “Documenting the Historic Landscape” in the 11th Annual Historical Societies of the Piedmont Conference, May 13, 2000.

² *Ibid.*

24,000 Octonia patent (1722) extended beyond Stanardsville in today's Greene's County." ³ Mr. Walker credited the base patent map as being prepared by U.P. Joyner, Jr., with specific patents highlighted by Barbara V. Little, Ann L. Miller, and Kenneth M. Clark.

Walker continues:

"The early arrivals to Orange County did not have access to sophisticated soils survey information, but they knew what they were doing when deciding where they wanted to settle. They understood clearly the old rule that 'poor land makes poor people,' and they had every intention of avoiding poverty.

"First, one had to get on the land early. Knowing how to identify good soils was of no help if they had all been taken by the time you got to the region under development. For example, we know that Orange County was formed in 1734. How soon did you have to be in the area to get its best land? Answer: Long before 1728, because by that date virtually all of the good land of the future county had been taken." ⁴

"Scouting for the best Orange County land had begun early. We know that in 1704, Lt. Col. James Taylor II was petitioning the House of Burgesses for permission to mount an expedition into the uplands. There was much discussion and foot-dragging, and it isn't certain that the expedition was ever actually authorized. One has to suspect that Taylor and some of his friends slipped off into the uplands a time or two anyway." ⁵

"In 1722, all the land inspections of Orange County began paying off. Col. James Taylor II obtained a patent from King George * 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.

"Also in 1722, eight investors patented 24,000 acres, a tract which became known as 'The Octonia Grant.' Their property ran along the south bank of the Rapidan from Spicer's Mill, near route 633/674 intersection in Orange County to beyond Stanardsville in today's Greene County. Again, good to excellent soils were involved. In 1726, Taylor's tidewater friend and neighbor, John Baylor, patented 6,500 acres, part of which is located between the Octonia grant and Taylor's Meadowfarm grant. In 1728, when Col. Henry Willis patented his 10,000 acres in what would become southwestern Orange County, his tract was just barely into the good soil. It was already starting to get scarce. A great deal of the Town of Gordonsville is on that former Willis land." ⁶

³ Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

“From a historical standpoint, probably the most significant patent of Orange County land was one in 1723 for 4,675 acres granted by King George I to Ambrose Madison and Capt. Thomas Chew. Madison and Chew had both recently married daughters of Col. James Taylor II. The 4,675 acres was Taylor’s fee for surveying a tract for which a patent was being sought, and he arranged to have it granted directly to his two sons-in-law. The descendants of Ambrose Madison eventually bought the Chew portion, with the whole then constituting the original Montpelier tract...”⁷

When scouting for prime real estate, Col. Taylor and his counterparts were looking for good soil, particularly Davidson soil, and all the early patents were located on large tracts of Davidson soil. So what is Davidson soil anyway?

In 1927 the **Natural Resources Conservation Services** (NRCS) conducted a study of the soil in Orange County, sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture, and determined that Orange County has 22 different types of soil. One of those types includes 22,592 acres of Davidson clay loam which is known locally as “red land”. Davidson’s surface soil contains 1-2 inches of deep-brown or reddish brown clay loam. In most places, the surface soil contains sufficient sand to give it a consistency that is “easily crumbled”. In plowed fields Davidson soil ranges from deep reddish-brown to red. The next layer of subsoil of 30-40 inches is deep-red or maroon-red clay of uniform texture. Davidson soil feels smooth and breaks into angular particles.

NRCS indicated that Davidson clay loam is the most important agricultural soil. Most of it occurs in one large belt averaging about five miles in width which extends from Albemarle County near Gordonsville and Barboursville northeast to the northern county line. The largest areas of the soil are in the vicinity of Orange, Montpelier Station, Liberty Mills, and Somerset. Most of the soil occurs in a broad foothill belt extending from the bases of the Southwest Mountains and Clark Mountain.

Drainage on Davidson soil is good and when a mulch is maintained on cultivated fields, this type of soil is perhaps the most drought-resistant soil in the county. Native vegetation consists of mixed forest of deciduous trees such as tulip-tree, yellow poplar, and basswood, white, red, black and chestnut oaks, chestnut, locust, birch, maple, persimmon, hickory, and walnut, together with some juniper and shortleaf pine. Ninety percent of Davidson soil in Orange is in cultivation. Davidson clay loam is considered the best general purpose soil, not only in Orange County, but also in the piedmont plateau of Virginia. Not only in Virginia but Davidson soil is also rather extensive in the piedmont regions of the Carolinas, and Georgia. ⁸ How did the explorers know what was good land before soil samples were chemically analyzed? One way was to analyze the type of plants on the property. Where is Davidson soil in Orange County? it is where the early land patents lay.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸ Hendrickson, B.H. “Soil Survey of Orange County, Virginia”. *Natural Resources Conservation Services*, Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, 1927, https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MANUSCRIPTS/virginia/orangeVA1927/orangeVA1927.pdf