

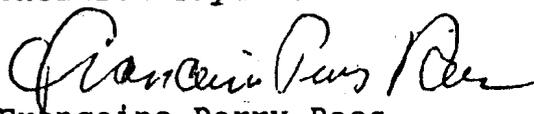
Your sentence is that you be carried to Jail from whence you came, and from thence to the place of Execution on thursday now next ensuing being the 23rd. . .day of this Instant May between the hours of Ten in the morning and four in the afternoon, and there to be hanged by the neck untill you be dead --

The Lord have mercy upon your Soul
Sheriff do execution --

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Both papers are undated, but I place them as from 1793; in that year May 23 fell on a Thursday (according to a table I consulted in Whitaker's ALMANAC) and Etheldred Taylor of Franklin County is mentioned in the court records as deceased. A reading of the minutes of the Franklin County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions revealed no mention of or reference to this poisoning case. However, only the regular March, June, September, and December sessions are reported, and this case appears to have been a special proceeding, handled by local justices and tried with a specially-called jury of slaveholders. Interestingly, Brittain Harris, the official who signed the order to hold a trial, was a kinsman of Winifred Cheves, née Harris.

There is no statement that the two female victims actually died from the alleged poisoning. Obviously Taylor was dead at the time of the trial, possibly at a poisoner's hand. It seems certain that Winifred Cheves did pre-decease her husband, whose 19 May 1808 will does not mention her. However, neither she nor Sarah Alford is cited as "deceased" in the first document, as is Etheldred Taylor.


Franceine Perry Rees
October, 1985

State of North Carolina

To the Sheriff of Franklin County - You are hereby Commanded to Summon Three Justices and four free Holders owners of Slaves to attend at the Court House in Louisburg on Thursday 16th Inst - in Order to try two Negroes viz. Harry and Isham - Harry the property of Drury Alford and Isham the property of Etheldred Taylor Dec^d being Suspected of poisoning or hav^g conspired to poison - viz.--

The afores^d Negroe Harry accused of poisoning or conspiring to poison Sarah - the wife of Lodowick Alford and Winnifred the wife of Jn^o. Cheves and the said Isham of poisoning or Conspiring to poison Etheldred Taylor, Dec^d. -

Given under my Hand & Seal the day & date above written ----- Brittain Harris (Seal) (blank) (Seal)

(Sheet showing back of above order: Warrant for Call Court May 1793 Sam^l. Carr Wit ? for the State)

At the Call^d Court Open'd & held at the Courthouse in Franklin County on this the 16th day of May In the trial of Negroes the property of Etheldred TAYLOR & Drury ALFORD charged of Being Suspected with poisoning or having conspired to poison Sarah the wife of Lodwick Alford, & Winifred the wife of John Cheaves -- Justices that compose the Court---

Tho^s Brickell, Jordon Hill & Brittain Harris - viz

Freeholders that Compose the Court Anthony Walke, Julius Jackson William Brickell & Bird Farrell-- Who Qualified According to Law Harry being charged on his arraignment plead not guilty--- whereupon the Court proceeded to tryal. The Wit^s being Exam^d on behalf of the State, at the request of the proprietor of Negro Harry, the Court Adjourned till to-morrow morning 10 O'clock----

Friday the 17th May 1793 Court met according to adjournment & proceeded on Sd tryal & the Wit^{ss} on behalf of the State as well as on behalf of the prisoner were Sworn & Exam^d and the Court finds Negroe Harry Guilty as Charged afores^d & pass the following Sentence to Wit. That he Suffer Death by being Hanged by the neck on Thursday the 23^d day of May Instant between the Hours of 10 In the forenoon & four O'clock in the afternoon till he is dead---

It is Ordered that the Sheriff Execute this Sentence Accordingly -

Thomas Brickell
Brittain Harris
Jordⁿ Hill
Will Brickell
Jul^s Jackson
A. Walke