

The Story of Dr Dorsey and Mr Markham in Yazoo City

Years ago I came across this mention of an “affray” between Dr Dorsey and Mr Markham in DeCell and Prichard’s 1976 book titled, *Yazoo - It's Legends and Legacies*:

People took the law into their own hands, frequently with disastrous results. The Yazoo Banner 18 May 1839 reported that "Mr Markham, who was shot by Dr Dorsey in the late affray in Yazoo City, is reported dead. This is a mistake, he is rapidly recovering and is perfectly able to go about. We saw him a few days ago and congratulated him on his manifest improved health."

Through the years I have worked to follow up on this incident, with the hope of identifying Mr Markham (Markum), and understanding what lay behind the shooting. My success has been limited. Initially I assumed that “Mr Markham” was Linnaeus Bolling Markham. He was in the right place at the right time.

In 1839 Linnaeus B Markham was living on a farm outside of Yazoo City Mississippi. He had come to the area a few years earlier and taken up a scheme of land investment with a partner Vincent Galloway. Linnaeus Markham and his wife Elizabeth Henderson did not have children of their own, but evidence suggests that they raised Frances M Markham, youngest daughter of his brother Champe Fleming Markham. Champe Markham’s first wife, Sarah Cocke, died around 1835, leaving six children, including the infant Fannie.



A charge of murder was brought against Champe Markham in 1838. This item comes to us via an index to the Natchez Trace Crime and Punishment Collection, 1819-1876. This collection represents court records of Warren county Mississippi, and is housed at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas. I have not had an opportunity to view these records (on microfilm) to determine if they contain further detail related to the murder charge.

In the 1840 Mississippi census Champe Markham is living in or near Vicksburg in Warren County. He is between the ages of forty and fifty. In May of 1840 he is secondly married to Elizabeth Thompson at Vicksburg, and the census shows him with his new wife and several children from his first marriage. This might suggest that the murder charge, two years earlier, did not result in a lengthy imprisonment.

After coming across the index entry - *Charge of Murder: Champ Markham, 1838* – I began to wonder if it was related to the Dorsey – Markham shooting at Yazoo City in April of 1839. Dating would suggest that these were two separate incidents. Was Champe Markham the hot-tempered perpetrator in both events? It should be considered that two Markham cousins – George Evans Markham and Devereux Jarrett Markham (brothers) were also living in the Yazoo City area from about 1835-1841. But, neither of these men are likely candidates for “Mr Markham”.

Life in the frontier towns of Mississippi, following the Panic of 1837, must have been rough. It is of interest to note that Champe Markham, Linnaeus Markham, and Dr Washington Dorsey all died within a few years following these 1838-1839 incidents – all young men in their thirties and early forties.

Below are a few more pieces to the story. Perhaps a dive into the Natchez Trace Crime and Punishment Collection, or the archives of the Yazoo Banner newspaper (not yet digitized) would provide more answers.

Rencontre – We learn that a street fight occurred a few days since in Yazoo City (formerly Manchester) between Dr Dorsey and Mr Markum – which resulted in Markum’s receiving two Pistol shot wounds that are supposed will prove mortal. We learn that Dr Dorsey is justified, as Mr Markum attacked him at or near his residence with two Pistols, which he did not succeed in firing, from some defect in the caps. Since the above was in type we have learned that Mr Markum is dead.
[source] Madison Whig Advocate (Canton, Mississippi); 27 April 1839.

Yazoo City, April 20, 1839 – To John Gibson, Editor of the True American: Dear Sir – I hasten to inform you of the important information that I have just arrived here in the steamer Patrick Henry, from Vicksburg . . . Yazoo City has been for the last four days like a village in an uproar, caused by the sudden disappearance of the Teller of the Commercial Bank of Manchester, who departed from this range on last Sunday, taking with him good funds . . . \$12,000 . . . Another item I would give, occurred a few minutes ago. A Mr Markham, being aggrieved at some remarks which a Doct Dorsey (both residents) had made of him, accosted the doctor in his office and demanded immediate satisfaction. Of course high words arose – pistols and Bowie knives flourished; the result of which was that Markham was shot twice in the left side, and his life was despaired of. Markham attempted to fire first, but his pistol snapping e received Dorsey’s fire, upon which Markham . . . to his Bowie, but was too late, as he received Dorsey’s second ball, just as he was in the act of making a thrust at Dorsey, who came off unhurt. Thus we do things in the staple State, and should I receive your thanks for this epistle (after correcting it) and the True American at Jackson, on my arrival there, with a wish for me to go ahead, why then I may give you the goings on a the Capital. Wagner.
[source] True American (New Orleans Louisiana); 27 April 1839.

A note on Dr Washington Dorsey –

Dr Washington D Dorsey was born in 1811 in Kentucky, and came as a young man to the area around Yazoo City Mississippi where he served as one of the town’s first physicians. At the visit Yazoo website

we discover notes on his home - *The Hollies, on West Broadway in Yazoo City, an old but elegant cottage dating back to the days when Yazoo City was named Manchester*. Built by Dr Dorsey in 1834, The Hollies is one of the oldest buildings in today's Yazoo City. While pursuing Dr Dorsey, I came across an interesting note on his protégé, Dr Henry Lewis. Lewis was the author of *Swamp Doctor* and other humorous literary productions, and we learn that “. . . his sprightly intellect attracted the attention of Dr. Dorsey, the leading physician of Manchester“. Washington Dorsey died in Yazoo City on the 2nd of October 1845, at the age of thirty-four. He is buried in the Eli H Brown Farm Cemetery in Bloomfield, Nelson County, Kentucky.

For more details on Linnaeus Bolling Markham and Champe Fleming Markham, visit their pages at the Markham of Chesterfield website.

About the photo:

“A Practical Application,” *Punch*, 20 December 1862.

Further Reading:

The Mississippi Department of Archives and the Yazoo Library Association both hold scattered copies of the Yazoo Banner newspaper for the years 1838-1839. They are on microfilm; no indication that they have been digitized.

Natchez Trace Crime and Punishment Collection, 1819-1876; part of the Natchez Trace Collection; items are court records of Warren County, Mississippi, arranged by type of case . . . a list of individuals charged follows; Reel #30, 0785, Box 2E938, [Unnumbered Folder]: Charge of Murder, 1838–1876; housed Library of American History at the University of Texas.

Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor; Henry Clay Lewis; LSU Press, Jun 1, 1997; a series of sketches that follow the outlandish misadventures of Dr. Madison Tensas - Lewis' literary persona. Many of these stories were first published in New York's Spirit of the Times. Using dialect, comic imagery, folklore, picaresque autobiography, and the form of the mock oral tale, Lewis presents a vigorous vision of the southern backwoods, where life was often violent and brutal, sometimes shockingly funny, and always wildly different from the polished society of townsmen and wealthy planters.

The Story of Dr Dorsey and Mr Markham in Yazoo City; originally written by Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2020; for the Markham of Chesterfield Blog. Updated for FamilySearchTree, 2020.