

Lt Colonel Melancthon Taylor Woolsey (1717-1758)

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Melancthon Taylor Woolsey was the eldest son of Reverend Benjamin and Abigail Taylor Woolsey of Dosoris.

Born in Jamaica, Long Island on July 8th, 1717, his Yale-educated clergyman father named him after a 17th century Protestant theologian who was a friend of Martin Luther. Rev. Benjamin Woolsey had, after graduating from Yale, served as a circuit-riding minister in the Southold area before “retiring” to a large tract of which his wife had inherited. This parcel was located north of the small village of Musketa Cove (today, Glen Cove) on the north shore of Long Island. Woolsey named it “Dosoris”, from the Latin words “dos” (wife) and “uxoris” (dowry). Although he never completely abandoned the ministry, Rev. Woolsey spent the remainder of his life as a “gentleman farmer”.

Like his father, Melancthon Taylor Woolsey married well. On January 24th, 1744 he wed Rebecca Lloyd, daughter of the wealthy landowner Henry Lloyd of the Manor of Queens Village (today, Lloyd’s Neck). [A second tie between the Woolseys and the Lloyds would be forged when Melancthon’s sister Sarah married John Lloyd, Rebecca’s brother.]

The young couple moved into the Woolsey homestead at Dosoris. Over the next twelve years they had six children: Mary (born 1746), Theodosia (born 1748), Abigail (born 1750), Elizabeth (born 1753), Rebecca (born 1755) and Melancthon Lloyd (born 1758). Tragedy struck the family in November, 1753. Within

a three week period, three year old Abigail, eleven month old Elizabeth, and finally seven year old Mary died... probably the result of disease.

The marriage seems to have been a happy one... even after 14 years of marriage, Woolsey still ended his letters to Rebecca with such amorous sentiments as “your most effectionate Husband and Passionate Lover.” During his military service on the frontier of northern New York Colony he complained of wishing to be back at Dosoris, “not from Being Tir(e)d with my Station But from an Ammorous Flame to my D(eare)st”

Melancthon Taylor Woolsey served as “Muster Master” of the Queens County Militia... the officer charged with mobilizing the citizen-soldiers of the county and seeing that they were properly drilled and equipped. When the Seven Years War between France and England spilled over onto the North American continent (it was known as the French & Indian War here) the militia of New York Colony was required to provide a contingent of troops (called “levies”) to help prosecute the war. The British campaign of 1758 targeted the French-held Fort Ticonderoga on Lake George. The strategy was simple: eliminate the French held fortifications that protected Montreal in preparation of the conquest of France’s North American empire. Woolsey was placed in overall command of the Long Island troops.

While the militia of Queens, Kings and Suffolk Counties had dutifully drilled as required by colonial law, most of the men



– including Woolsey – had never experienced combat. Woolsey wrote home “None of us have had an Opportunity of Trying whether we like the smell of Gunpowder as to my own Part I cant Promise But will do as I can and Hope to give a Tollerable acct of myself when Tryd.”

Woolsey, with a contingent of the Long Island militia, was placed in charge of guarding the landing place where the food, ammunition and (most importantly) the fleet of boats and bateaux (flat-bottomed boats with very shallow drafts that were perfect for operation on New York State’s rivers) were marshaled for an speedy exit if the attack on the fort failed. The assault on Fort Ticonderoga was a disaster. The heavily fortified French troops, dug in behind timber and earth breastworks, shredded the exposed British and colonial troops.

Although he was unscathed in the great battle, Woolsey contracted typhus, then called “camp fever”. The disease was transmitted by lice, a ubiquitous companion of soldiers in the field in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. At first he seemed to rally, but succumbed to the disease on the 28th of September, 1758 after being sent to New York City to recuperate. His body was returned to Dosoris for burial.

Lt Colonel Melancthon Taylor Woolsey’s headstone was intricately carved from dark grey slate. At top is a knight’s helmet, with a background of flags, swords and trumpets, symbolic of his military service. Beneath this is carved:

**In Memory of Col^o
Melancthon Taylor Woolsey
Who departed this Life the
28th of September, 1758
In the Service of his Country
Against the French in Canada
Aged 41 years 3 months and 20 days**

Rebecca Woolsey apparently did not stay at Dosoris. She returned to the Manor of Queens Village. When Abigail Taylor, widow of Rev. Benjamin Woolsey and mother of Melancthon Taylor Woolsey, died, the bulk of the Dosoris estate was inherited by Melancthon Woolsey’s brother, Benjamin Jr. During the early part of the Revolutionary War, Rebecca Woolsey moved to Connecticut.

Completed: 2 June 2011



The headstone of Lt Colonel Melancthon Taylor Woolsey in the Woolsey family cemetery at Dosoris. The cemetery was designated as one of the very first Glen Cove landmarks in 1983. (Photograph copyright 2011 by Daniel E Russell, all rights reserved.)