

Collection #  
P 0029

**WILLIAM SYLVESTER TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHS,  
CA. 1900–1910**

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 photograph folder

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1900–1910

PROVENANCE: Gift from Wilson S. Daily of Indianapolis, February 1967

RESTRICTIONS: None

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RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1967.0217

NOTES:

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Sylvester Taylor was governor of Kentucky for fifty days from 12 December 1899 through 31 January 1900. His brief service in this role was during one of the most controversial disputes in American political history, which culminated in the assassination of his opponent, Governor William Goebel. When Taylor was indicted as an accessory to murder, he fled to Indianapolis.

Taylor was born on 10 October 1853, to Sylvester and Mary G. Moore Taylor in Butler County, Kentucky. He had no formal education until the age of fifteen but then became a schoolteacher from 1874–1882. He studied law and became a successful attorney. He was elected Butler County clerk in 1882 and then served two terms as county judge from 1886–1894. In heavily Democratic Kentucky, he joined the Republican party in 1884 and began to serve on state committees and to attend national conventions. He was elected state attorney general in 1895.

Taylor won the 1899 Republican gubernatorial nomination, and then went on to defeat the Democratic candidate, William Goebel, the Kentucky state senate president, in a very close election with a margin of only 2,383 votes. Taylor was sworn into office on 12 December 1899. However, the Democratic controlled legislature contested his right to take office, on grounds that the election was won by ballot fraud. An eleven-man committee that had only one Republican member was established to hear testimony and make recommendations. Armed men, many of them Republicans from eastern Kentucky, traveled to Frankfort to prevent what they perceived as the stealing of the governorship by Democrats. Assassination threats were made against Goebel if he won his appeal, and on 30 January 1900, he was shot in front of the State Capitol building.

Declaring a state of insurrection, Governor Taylor called for the militia to occupy Frankfort and attempted to have the General Assembly meet in the town of London, a Republican stronghold. The Democratic majority ignored the order and instead held a secret meeting in Frankfort. The following day the legislature announced that it had invalidated enough disputed Republican votes to declare Goebel the winner, and he was sworn in as Governor on his deathbed. Taylor refused to recognize the ruling. The militia remained in Frankfort, and armed citizens on both sides of the issue began mobilizing in the streets. Goebel died three days later.

Taylor's ouster was upheld, and Goebel's running mate, Lieutenant Governor John Crepps Wickliffe Beckham, became the new governor. Taylor appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ended the matter by refusing to hear the case. Sixteen men were indicted for complicity in Goebel's murder, including Taylor and his former secretary of state, Caleb Powers. The prosecution contended that Powers had masterminded the plot on Taylor's behalf and with his knowledge. Taylor avoided arrest by fleeing to Indianapolis, where Indiana's Republican governor, James A. Mount, refused to extradite him.

In 1907, newspaperman Fred Warren advertised a \$1000 reward to have Taylor brought back to Kentucky by any means to stand trial. Warren was convicted of soliciting felony kidnapping and sentenced to six months of hard labor and a \$1500 fine. On 23 April 1909, Kentucky Governor Augustus E. Willson pardoned Taylor and five others who were convicted or indicted for the Goebel assassination.

William Sylvester Taylor married Sarah “Sallie” Belle Tanner (1862–1901) in February 1878 in Butler County, Kentucky. They had nine children. Sarah’s obituary indicates that she moved to Indianapolis in May 1900, so that is likely when William fled Kentucky. Sarah died the next year in Indianapolis. In December 1912, William married Nora Lawless Floyd Myers (1880–1967) in her hometown of Jamestown, Russell County, Kentucky, even though they lived in Indianapolis. William and Nora had one son together.

In Indianapolis, Taylor lived in the 2100 block of North Delaware Street. In his first few years in the city, he practiced law with two partners as Taylor, Moores, & Miller in the Law Building at 136 East Market Street. From about 1904 to 1909, he had his own law practice in the Lemcke Building at the northeast corner of Market and Pennsylvania streets. In 1910 he was in practice with Samuel Huls as Taylor & Huls in the Law Building. In the early- to mid-1910s, Taylor had his own practice in the Majestic Building at the northeast corner of South Pennsylvania and East Maryland streets, and in the early 1920s his office was in the Peoples Bank Building at 130 East Market Street.

By 1923, Taylor was Vice President and General Counsel for the Empire Life and Accident Insurance Company in the Empire Life Building at 215 East New York Street. It appears that he remained in that position until the last year of his life. Taylor died on 2 August 1928 at Methodist Hospital and was buried in Crown Hill Cemetery beside his first wife.

Sources:

Ancestrylibrary.com (Accessed 23 July 2025):

- Find a Grave
- Indiana, U.S., Death Certificates, 1899–2017
- Kentucky, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1783-1965
- United States Federal Census, 1910, 1920
- U.S., City Directories, 1822–1995
- U.S., Newspapers.com Marriage Index, 1800s–Current

“Gov. William Sylvester Taylor.” National Governors Association [William Sylvester Taylor - National Governors Association](#) Accessed 23 July 2025.

Harrison, Lowell H. “William Sylvester Taylor” in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, Lexington, KY, The University Press of Kentucky, 1992, pp. 869–870.

Indiana University Indianapolis Library. “Indianapolis City Directory Collection” [Indianapolis City Directory Collection | University Library](#) Accessed 22 July 2025.

Obituary for “Mrs. Sarah Belle Taylor.” *The Chattanooga Daily Times* (Tennessee), 10 July 1901, p. 3.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of three mounted portraits of William Sylvester Taylor, briefly governor of Kentucky before relocating to Indianapolis in 1900.

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Head-and-shoulders three-quarter view of William Sylvester Taylor wearing eyeglasses, n.d. [ca. 1900].

Full-length portrait of William Sylvester Taylor wearing knee-length coat, n.d. [ca. 1900].

Full-length portrait of William Sylvester Taylor standing on a porch, wearing a hat, knee-length coat, and eyeglasses (photo by George H. Dabbs [of West Morgantown, Butler County, KY], 1910).

### CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 1

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