

Eleanor Swearingen Worthington (1777-1848)

Eleanor Swearingen was born September 22, 1777 near Shepherdstown, (West) Virginia. The Swearingens originally came from the Netherlands and Eleanor's mother's ancestors, from the Strode family, came from England. Her family was wealthy and Eleanor was the oldest of four children. Her parents, Josiah Swearingen and Phebe Strode, left her an orphan by the age of 14. Her maternal grandfather, James Strode, left the full share of his estate that would have gone to his daughter Phebe to Eleanor instead. Eleanor's three brothers were excluded from the will.

Her aunt, Eleanor Shepherd, then became an important part of her life. She was taught genteel skills that were desired in a lady of her background including the social graces of music, dancing, and needlework. Young Eleanor also studied reading, writing, and math as fundamental skills needed to manage an estate. She learned farm chores like taking care of poultry and milking cows, and practical skills like nursing sick relatives and attending women at childbirth.

Where Eleanor met Thomas Worthington is not known, but the couple was married at the home of Eleanor's aunt on December 13, 1796. Eleanor's wealth exceeded Thomas' when they married.

The couple moved to the Northwest Territory in March of 1798. With new baby Mary, she made the 34-day trip on corduroy roads, flatboats, and horseback to reach the small settlement of Chillicothe.

The Worthingtons' first home was near the Scioto River on property of Second and Paint Streets. In 1802, while Thomas was away on business, Eleanor relocated the family to Belle View. Daughter Sarah had been born in 1800 and Eleanor gave birth to three of her sons at Belle View before moving into Adena in 1807.

As mistress of Adena, Eleanor was a gracious hostess to prominent leaders and politicians of the time. Aaron Burr sent her a yellow primrose for the beautiful gardens she designed to grace the mansion. Eleanor not only ran her household, but was an excellent business manager keeping farm accounts, supervising tenants, and dealing with the banks. Worthington wrote that a member of Congress had remarked to him, "You certainly lose money by your attendance here; but I am informed on good authority that if it were not for Mrs. Worthington you would lose more."

Eleanor was a religious woman and was faithful in her church attendance. An Anglican in Virginia, Eleanor joined the Presbyterian Church in 1817 and remained loyal to those beliefs through her many years.

After the death of her husband, Eleanor continued to live at Adena another 21 years. It was always a gathering place for the children and grandchildren. Eleanor Worthington died at Adena on Christmas Eve 1848 at the age of 71.

