

Sarah Ann Worthington King Peter (1800-1877)

Sarah was born on May 10, 1800, while the family still lived in Chillicothe. Perhaps more than any of the other Worthington children she was most like her father in social energy and service. Sarah had a talent for making friends in influential places, which helped promote her charities. Personal friends like Pope Pius IX, numerous monarchs, and American leaders were assets to her causes.

Sarah wrote about servants named “Uncle Peter” and “Aunt Sary,” whose cabins were near the spring house. Sarah would sneak to see them against her mother’s wishes, because she was drawn by “Aunt Sary’s cake.” As punishment, she was shut in a dark closet, which gave it the nickname “Crying Room.”

Sarah first married into the family of Rufus King, signer of the Constitution and Senate friend of Thomas Worthington. His youngest son Edward King came to Adena to study law on the frontier. He and Sarah were married in May 1816. They lived in Chillicothe until 1831 when they moved to Cincinnati. Sarah and Edward had 5 children, but only two, Rufus and Tom, lived to adulthood. Edward was plagued with malaria attacks and died at the age of 40 in 1836. After his death, Sarah moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to educate her sons at Harvard. It was here she met and married William Peter, British Consul to Philadelphia, and began traveling to Europe, six tours in all. Sarah had command of French, Italian, and German. While living in Cambridge, she hired private tutors to give her lessons.

The philanthropies of Sarah King Peter started around 1850 in Philadelphia where she observed the plight of single or widowed women who had few resources for making a living. To remedy the situation she opened a School of Design for Women. Here they were taught to design articles for domestic use like patterns for wallpaper, carpet, calico, and woodwork moldings. These products had a large American market and the schools spread to other eastern cities. Sarah also established Ladies’ Academy of Fine Arts in Cincinnati.

Always drawn to religion, Sarah converted to Catholicism in 1855. This helped her fulfill her goals to establish charity missions among the poor of Cincinnati. The Convent of the Order of the Good Shepherd helped abandoned women and orphans. Sisters of the Poor of Saint Francis fed the poor and cared for the aged. Sisters of Mercy instructed children and visited the sick. In her last years, Sarah converted her home in Cincinnati to the Convent of St. Clare and lived in an apartment cared for by the sisters of the order. It was there she died, nearing the age of seventy-seven, February 6, 1877. The Cincinnati Enquirer wrote of her, “Never was there such an outpouring of people to witness the funeral of a private citizen of this city.”