

Thomas Worthington (1773-1827)

Thomas Worthington was born July 16, 1773 near Charles Town, (West) Virginia. He was the youngest child of Robert Worthington and Margaret Mathews, who had six children.

Worthington's grandfather Robert (1667-1735) first emigrated from Cheshire, England, to King's County, Ireland (near Dublin) in 1695. Robert's son Samuel moved to the New Jersey colony in 1712. Robert and the rest of the family followed in 1714. They later moved to the Philadelphia area and then to the Shenandoah Valley. Robert's land was located near the present site of Charles Town, West Virginia.

One of Robert's sons, Robert (1730-1779), became Thomas Worthington's father. He worked as a farmer, surveyor, and land dealer. He had had little schooling as a boy and hired a tutor for himself as an adult, especially to improve the math skills he needed to survey. He sometimes worked with George Washington as a chain carrier when Washington was employed as a surveyor.

The Worthingtons were Quakers, some of the earliest followers of the faith. When Robert Worthington married Margaret Matthews, an Irish woman from Maryland, he was disowned by his Quaker church for marrying outside the faith.

When George Washington assumed command of the Continental Army in 1775, Robert Worthington resolved to join him. We have no record of his service, but four years later he was back home trying to raise a troop of cavalry, mainly at his own expense. Before he left, he hosted a gathering with the intention to set out the next day. At the gathering he had an attack of bilious colic, the same illness that killed his father, and he died the same night (October 1779). His wife lived only a few months longer, and so Thomas Worthington was an orphan by the age of six. According to the father's will, each child inherited an equal share of the \$200,000 estate (about 1,466 acres each).

The Worthingtons were part of the lower tier of the Virginia gentry. Thomas Worthington had limited opportunities for social, economic, or political advancement in a state dominated by large landowners and established political families. The Ohio frontier became enticing to Worthington as a place where he could advance in status and power.

Thomas was raised by older brothers, and he was neglected and his education limited. The laws of Virginia granted the choice of guardian to orphaned minors who reached the age of fourteen. When Thomas was 14, he chose Colonel William Darke as his guardian. Darke had been a friend of his father's and he and his wife gave Thomas a real home. He was sent to school and counseled wisely.

As a young man, Worthington expressed a strong desire to travel abroad, and against Darke's objections he joined a merchant ship bound for the West Indies and Northern Europe. In Jamaica he followed advice to invest in molasses, with the prospect of selling the cargo in Scotland; however, he was swindled and eventually found the casks filled with salt water.

Worthington served as a sailor under the command of Captain James Taylor and eventually returned to Virginia. During the trip, Taylor helped him escape from an English press gang and Worthington expressed his thanks some years later by naming his first son after the man.

After a two-year absence, Worthington returned home and General Darke gave him his full inheritance, which consisted of approximately 1400 acres and four slaves. Darke also had land warrants (8,661 acres) to be claimed in the Northwestern Territory, which had recently been opened up for settlement. His only son had died, and Darke was unable to make the trip west himself, so he requested that Worthington travel to claim his warrants. Worthington also purchased land warrants, from Darke and others, which he went to claim.

Veterans of the Revolutionary War had been paid in land warrants. The government had little cash but lots of land, so warrants were a practical way to pay soldiers. Once the possessor of the warrants had located and surveyed the land, he could trade the warrants for title to the land. Possessors of warrants often hired surveyors to locate their land for them. As payment, the surveyor commonly received 20% of the land they located. The warrants could also be sold, and frequently were. Worthington was able to acquire quite a bit of land through these means.

The Northwest Territory held a great appeal for Thomas. His ambition to better his place – socially, economically, and politically – led him to recognize the opportunities provided by going west. He also migrated because of his opposition to slavery, which was illegal in the Territory.

In the spring of 1796 Worthington set out for the wilderness surrounding the newly founded town of Chillicothe (then called Massie's Station). According to Sarah, Darke's lands eventually became the estate of Adena. On his way home from this trip, Worthington purchased 600 acres in the Scioto Valley.

After Worthington returned from his trip, he and Eleanor Swearingen were married in Shepherdstown, (West) Virginia, on December 13, 1796. Around that time, Worthington also applied for the position of Deputy Surveyor of the Northwest Territory. He received the appointment in January 1797, which gave him an important source of money and prestige.

The year after Worthington made his first trip to the frontier, he and his brother-in-law Dr. Edward Tiffin made a second visit to the territory to prepare houses and cabins, and to locate more land warrants. According to Sarah, Worthington's original intent was to set up his former slaves in the freedom of the Northwest Territory, but eventually the families decided to move as well.

Worthington and Tiffin set out to Chillicothe on May 1, 1797. On May 17, they reached Chillicothe. According to Worthington, by that point the town had grown to about 100 houses, with 150 families in the area. Worthington had purchased three lots in town, one of which featured a 35-foot tall Indian mound on which he planned to build a summer home. Worthington built a home of hewed logs, with the first glass windows to be found in town, and with a garden and lawn. Dr. Tiffin also built a home nearby. In the process of surveying several thousand acres

for other people, Worthington also managed to acquire another 500 acres in the area. Worthington and Tiffin returned to Virginia in the autumn.

In November, 1797 the Worthingtons welcomed their first child, a girl named Mary. That winter was spent making preparations for the move out west, and Worthington sold his land and home, as well as those slaves who did not wish to leave Virginia. The group set out on March 14, 1798. The party consisted of Thomas, Eleanor, and baby Mary Worthington, Dr. and Mrs. Tiffin (Thomas' sister), Robert Worthington (Thomas' eldest brother) and his family, two of Eleanor's brothers, Tiffin's mother and father and four siblings, other friends and relatives, group of 39 former slaves. The whole party numbered more than 60.

The group traveled on horseback, and in carriages and wagons, to Pittsburgh. Household goods, including the silver tea set, were loaded onto packhorses for the journey. Everyone then boarded flat-bottom boats to float down the Ohio River 345 miles to Portsmouth at the mouth of the Scioto. The carriages had been left in Pittsburgh because no suitable road existed in the wilderness, and so the group had to travel on horseback and on foot through 50 miles of forest to reach Chillicothe. That part of the journey took 5 days and they arrived on April 17, 1798 and settled into their downtown homes.

In 1802 the Worthingtons moved to a temporary dwelling that had been built at Adena, and later built the mansion house (see chapter x).

With his talent for leadership, Worthington was soon appointed a major of the local militia, a magistrate, and the surveyor-general of the Northwest Territory. He was elected to the Territorial Legislature in 1799 and during their meeting in Cincinnati he met William Henry Harrison, who offered the use of his home for the Worthington family during the legislature's meeting. As a member of the legislature, Worthington began lobbying for Ohio statehood, against the wishes of General Arthur St. Clair, the governor of the Northwest Territory. He also lobbied Congress against the wishes of the Cincinnati politicians who hoped to form a state bordered by the Wabash and Scioto Rivers, and to make themselves the capital. He spent the winter of 1801 and spring 1802 in Washington, and returned home victorious in May, 1802.

Worthington was elected to the Ohio constitutional convention. The Ohio Constitution was written in November of 1802 and delivered by Worthington to Washington D.C. for Congressional approval. It was passed by Congress in February of 1803 and signed by President Jefferson. March 1, 1803 became Ohio's first Statehood Day.

Worthington served as one of Ohio's first United States senators from 1803 to 1807 and again from 1811 to 1814. During his initial tenure, he repeatedly stated his desire to be at home more often, but he was persuaded to take another term due to the unrest leading up to the War of 1812. Worthington voted against the Democratic Party, as he opposed an immediate declaration of war against England. He felt that the country was not ready for war and needed more time to prepare, but his objections were not shared and the country declared war.

He resigned from the Senate to become the 6th governor of Ohio from 1814-1818. He had a difficult task: the War of 1812 had not yet ended, and a third of the state had been in possession of the enemy. Military rule had superseded civil government, but order was quickly restored. While Worthington was governor, the capital was moved to Columbus.

Education was a major priority of Worthington while governor. He repeatedly asked the legislature to establish a system of public elementary schools. Another priority was internal improvements to the state: improvements to rivers and roads. He even advocated raising taxes to pay for this. He promoted a "Buy Ohio" campaign to support Ohio industry. He supported the establishment of poor houses, prison reform, and temperance.

Worthington's biggest accomplishment as governor was to establish the State Library of Ohio in 1817. Using money from his contingency fund, because the General Assembly would not have approved the money, Worthington bought 509 books. He also provided furnishings and a librarian.

Worthington was also elected twice to the Ohio House of Representatives, in 1807 and 1821. During his second tenure, he ran twice for the position of Speaker of the House but lost both times. In 1821 he served on a committee to report on the feasibility of a publicly funded canal linking the Ohio River with Lake Erie, which would provide a major economic benefit. Worthington also served as the Chairman of the committee that chose the canal route, and one of the paths they chose included the Scioto (which benefited Worthington's businesses). Worthington helped to supervise the construction, which lasted 20 years. The canal was the most important public works project in 19th century Ohio.

Worthington ran for U.S. Senate in 1819, 1823, and 1824 but lost each time.

Worthington had many business interests, but they were all based on his land. During his first visit to Ohio and immediately afterward, Worthington bought about 700 acres. In 1800, he claimed more than 18,000 acres. At his death he held over 16,000 acres. Buying and selling land was a major business for him.

Worthington acquired land in a few ways. One was by purchasing the military land warrants issued to veterans. He first came to Ohio to locate warrants issued to William Darke and others. These could be purchased for 5 to 50 cents per acre. Once a warrant holder located the land, he could exchange it for a title.

Surveying was another method to acquire land. By locating land for other people, surveyors like Worthington received a commission – usually about 20% of the land they surveyed.

Worthington also speculated on land, buying low and selling high. There were different strategies to improve the value of land, and a major one was to lay out a town. In 1816 Worthington founded the town of Logan on some of his land. He built mills nearby and got the town named the county seat of the newly formed Hocking County.

Of course he was also a farmer. He raised crops and livestock, not just to provide food and clothing for his own family, but also to sell. Many of his products were shipped to New Orleans, and from there they could be distributed throughout the eastern part of the country.

Crops grown at Adena included flax, wheat, hay, oats, corn, barley, and potatoes. Corn and wheat were the two major crops. Corn was used mainly as feed for cattle and hogs, and it was also distilled into whisky.

An orchard to the west of the house provided fruit for sale and home consumption. He grew many types of apples, as well as cherries, pears, plums, and peaches.

Poultry and dairy cattle were raised mainly for family consumption rather than sale. These may have been Eleanor's responsibility as this was considered women's work.

Worthington's crops provided the raw materials for other businesses, especially his mills. Cattle and hogs were raised and sold as part of Worthington's meat-packing venture. Sheep provided wool and flax was made into linen at his textile mills. Worthington bought costly Merino sheep in 1810 to improve the quality of his wool. Worthington had a slaughterhouse in Portsmouth to process hogs.

Worthington's manufacturing businesses included 9 mills: a gristmill and sawmill on Paint Creek, a gristmill in Kinninkinnick, 2 gristmills in Hocking County, 2 sawmills in Hocking County, and a cloth mill and ropewalk in Chillicothe.

Worthington had to sell and trade his goods. His principal products were wheat and corn flour, pork, beef, and whisky. He built flat boats in Chillicothe, 12-14 feet wide and 40-50 feet long. They could each carry 400-500 barrels (about 100 tons). They traveled downriver to New Orleans. The boats were taken apart and sold for firewood. Worthington would often accompany his goods to New Orleans, then take a boat to the east coast, buy goods for himself and friends, and then return home.

Yet another source of income for Worthington was banking. He urged the Ohio legislature to charter a state bank in Chillicothe, which they did in 1809. Worthington was a major stockholder and on the board of directors. Two years later, he joined a group of investors to form the Bank of Chillicothe, and again he sat on the board of directors. While serving as governor, Worthington lobbied to establish a Chillicothe branch of the Bank of the United States and he served as a director of that as well.

Banking was largely unregulated in the early 1800s, with each bank printing its own money. As a bank director, Worthington's signature was one that could be used to guarantee the legitimacy of the currency. His diary records afternoons spent signing sheets and sheets of bank notes.

The Panic of 1819 threw the country into a depression, and wealthy men who had lent out a lot of money lost their fortunes. Worthington was reduced to doing his own plowing in 1819, but did not lose as much as many others. The economy improved in the 1820s but Worthington had significant debt, much of it acquired from friends and relatives.

Worthington's health declined in his later years and the family's financial fortunes also took a turn for the worse. In 1825 the sheriff came to Adena to inventory personal property that would be sold off to cover debts.

In the spring of 1827, Worthington went on a business trip to New Orleans. He took ill while there and complained of suffering "a severe bilious attack." He took a boat to New York. He remained sick during the 35-day boat trip and by the time he reached New York, Thomas was in critical condition. Friends took him to the American Hotel where his son, Thomas Jr., came from West Point to be with his father. Eleanor started from home with her son-in-law Edward King, but they arrived a day after Thomas had died on June 20, 1827. He was 54 years old. It took four weeks for them to return the body to Chillicothe. According to the Scioto Gazette of July 5, 1827, Worthington's remains were to be met by a procession of citizens and cavalry. The paper praised his public service and stated, "he was greatly instrumental in promoting us from the Territory to the dignity of State Government."

Worthington was first buried in the cemetery at Adena. When Eleanor died in 1848, the eight surviving children decided to bury her, and move Thomas to be beside her, at Grandview Cemetery. The reason they gave was their expectation that the Adena estate would not likely remain in the family for more than one or two generations.

Worthington attitudes and beliefs

- Religion: pious, led prayers for his family and servants in the morning and evening. At various points in his life he attended Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quaker services.
- Anti-slavery, and resolved to emancipate the slaves they had inherited
- Political: Worthington was a member of the Democratic Republicans (same as Jefferson), who believed in:
 - o Relatively broad participation in government
 - o Low property qualifications for voting, frequent elections, making most public offices elective
 - o Distrust of centralized power – weak centralized government with limited powers and scope
- Important votes as a U.S. Senator
 - o Voted for the Louisiana Purchase
 - o Voted against the War of 1812

Timeline of Worthington's political career

- 1799-1802: elected to the Territorial Legislature
- 1801-1802: goes to Washington to lobby for Ohio statehood
- 1802-1803: Ohio constitutional convention
- 1803-1807: U.S. Senator
- 1807-1808: Ohio House of Representatives
- 1811-1814: U.S. Senator
- 1814-1818: 6th Governor of Ohio
- 1821-1825: Ohio House of Representatives

