THOMAS WORTHINGTON

FATHER OF

OHIO STATEHOOD
Thomas Worthington

Father of Ohio Statehood

BY

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PREFACE

In the movement to secure Ohio's admission to the Union and in the framing of an enlightened and democratic constitution, which excluded slavery, banished executive tyranny, and safeguarded private and public liberties in a comprehensive bill of rights, no one displayed greater leadership than Thomas Worthington. In a very real sense, Ohio is a monument to his memory. Yet his political services have never been adequately recognized, and no biography of him has hitherto appeared.

Worthington was a dominant figure in early Ohio politics. Following his arrival in the Northwest Territory, he was appointed justice of the peace, lieutenant colonel of militia, and judge of the court of common pleas. He served in the territorial legislature, 1799-1803, and twice helped defeat the plans of the Ohio Federalists to set the western boundary of the state at the Scioto River. A member of Ohio's first legislature, he was elected to the U. S. Senate in 1803, and served a second term from 1810 to 1814, resigning on his election as governor. As senator, he was considered an authority on western lands and Indian affairs. As chairman of the Committee on Public Lands, he introduced many legislative measures to improve the distribution of the public domain and to safeguard purchases made by settlers. In 1812 he sponsored the bill which led to the establishment of the General Land Office.

Throughout his public career Worthington was a staunch advocate of internal improvements. In the Senate he was a leading figure in the movement for the construction of the Cumberland Road. During his governorship he promoted plans for building the Ohio canals, and at the close of his last term of office he served on the commission which made the surveys and started construction.

Although Worthington was a strong Jeffersonian Republican, he was critical of President Madison's foreign policy, and in 1812 voted against the declaration of war; he prophesied it could end only in military and financial disaster. Having made his position clear, however, he took part in the war effort with all the impetuous energy of his nature.

For thirty years Worthington kept a diary in small paperbound books filled from cover to cover, chiefly with business details but also with travel notes and private observations concerning life in general. Moreover, he carefully preserved his correspondence and drafts of his business letters. His diary and most of his papers were passed on by his widow to his eldest son, General James Taylor Worthington; by him to a grandson, Richard T. Worthington; and in due course to a
great-grandson, James T. Worthington, to whom this biography is dedicated. Now and then, some portions of Worthington’s papers and parts of his diary were lost to the family, but fortunately these were collected by the Library of Congress, the Ohio Historical Society, the Ohio State Library, and the Ross County (Ohio) Historical Society. In 1949, on the death of James T. Worthington, the papers remaining in the family were acquired by the Ohio Historical Society.

In this study I have endeavored to be objective. Realizing, however, that complete objectivity is impossible, I am bound to apprise the reader that I have come to admire Worthington for his sturdy manhood, his unflinching moral courage, his faith in democracy; for his refusal to compromise with weakness, incompetence, or evil; for his religious convictions and the high intellectual and spiritual level at which he sought to spend at least a portion of his days; and for his devotion to his wife, family, friends, and servants. He had a deep respect for his fellow men—for their rights as citizens and as free moral agents. He was a true patriot, completely dedicated to what he believed were the best interests of his country. In his private and public life he adhered strictly to the principles of industry, integrity, and sobriety which, he believed, were the cornerstones of individual achievement and service.

It is impossible to mention all of those who have helped with this book during the extended period of research and writing. The advice and encouragement of Carl F. Wittke, Eugene H. Roseboom, and Harlow Lindley were indispensable. Chief among those to whom gratitude is due are James T. Worthington and his sisters, Mrs. Elizabeth Worthington Costello and Mrs. Anne Worthington Newton, great-grandchildren of Thomas Worthington. Others are Thomas P. Martin and John de Porry of the Library of Congress; Mary A. Hicks of Friends House, London; James H. Rodabaugh and Henry Caren of the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus; Eugene D. Rigney and Martha Bennett of the Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe; and Eleanor S. Wilby and Marie Dickoré of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, Cincinnati.

I recommend that the reader visit Adena, the federal home designed by Benjamin H. Latrobe which Worthington built in 1807 a mile northwest of Chillicothe, and which has recently been restored to its original status by the Ohio Historical Society. With its gardens and grounds, it constitutes a notable exhibit for all who are interested in beauty, history, and early American architecture.

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Alfred B. Sears
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<tr>
<td>HPSO</td>
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<td>Library of Congress</td>
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<td>OHS</td>
<td>Ohio Historical Society (Columbus)</td>
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<td>RCHS</td>
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