

"A Remarkable Life's Journey"

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Thomas Worthington was born in Berkeley County in the Colony of Virginia in 1773. In the year 1796, he married another Virginian—Eleanor Swearingen. Shortly thereafter, they moved to Ohio and settled near Chillicothe, in a location (and home) he named Adena. Soon after his arrival, Worthington served in the Northwest Territory House of Representatives from 1799-1803, as a delegate from Ross County. After Ohio achieved statehood, he was elected as one of Ohio's first Senators, a role he served in from 1803-1807. Eventually, Worthington was elected to two consecutive two-year terms as Ohio's Governor—fulfilling that role from 1810-1814.

As his political career rose, so did the number of children that he and his wife had—eventually number 10 offspring. Worthington's second daughter and child, Sarah Anne, was born on May 10th 1800 in Chillicothe. This young girl was recorded as being full of energy, and at times, a bit troublesome. Sarah was a bit of a social butterfly and liked to visit the cabins of two servants who were nicknamed "Uncle Peter" and "Aunt Sary." She was instructed by her mother not to go 'visiting,' but Aunt Sary's fresh cakes were apparently too much temptation for the young girl to remain obedient. After being caught on several occasions away from the house, she was put in a closet as punishment; not surprisingly this

location in the house became known as the ‘crying room.’ Sarah was soon sent to a private school in Frankfort, Kentucky, and then progressed to another private institution in Baltimore, Maryland. Emphasis in the latter school was on proper behavior and social graces, as expected of a young lady of her position.

In 1815, a young man named Edward King arrived in Chillicothe to complete his legal studies and stand for the bar exam. Edward was the son of New York politician Rufus King. Thomas Worthington and Rufus King had become friends over the years, and the latter had asked—then Governor Worthington—about the prospects for the study and practice of law down in Chillicothe for his son. With Worthington’s encouragement, Rufus sent his son Edward down to Ohio to complete his preparations for the practice of law. However, Edward soon met 15-year-old Sarah Worthington, courted her, fell in love, and the two were married to each other on May 15, 1816—just a few days past the bride’s sixteenth birthday.

Young Sarah and Edward soon began a family—having in total five children. Unfortunately, only two would survive into adulthood. In addition to raising a family, Sara King helped found and work in a local Episcopal Church in Chillicothe. She is also said to have maintained a ‘salon’ at her home as well, where she entertained a number of respected travelers through the area—including Karl Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. In the year 1825, Sarah also

travelled with her father down to New Orleans where she was given the privilege of serving as one of Lafayette's hostesses.

In 1831, in order to establish the family in a better legal environment, Edward King moved his family down to Cincinnati. Almost immediately, Edward and Sarah became well-established in the social life of Cincinnati. Indeed, they both assisted with the founding of the Cincinnati School of Law, as well as the Protestant Orphan Asylum of Cincinnati. Life was soon to change for Sarah.

Edward King had suffered from bouts of malaria, and in 1836, passed away at the age of 40.

By mid-summer, Sarah was determined to get her two sons a good education for their futures. With this in mind, Sarah moved with the two young men to Cambridge, Massachusetts where she would oversee their education at Harvard. She found the transition from Ohio to Massachusetts to be difficult, and often lonely. Thus, Sarah King decided to engross herself in her own studies. While in Cambridge, she learned and mastered three languages—German, French, and Italian. Over the next four years her sons completed their education. Her eldest son Rufus settled in Cincinnati as a lawyer, and the younger son, Thomas was engaged by a commercial house in Philadelphia. Not ready to return to Cincinnati at this time of her life, she travelled to Philadelphia to begin a new chapter in her life there.

In the year 1844, Sarah travelled with her son by river down to New Orleans, which marked a return visit for Sarah. After several weeks in New Orleans, Sarah and her son boarded the steamship Alabama across the Gulf of Mexico for Cuba. This was the first time that Sarah Peter would be out of the country, and it would mark a turning point in her wanderlust for travel.

Upon returning home from this adventure, Sarah King was introduced to William Peter, who served as British Counsel to the city of Philadelphia. The two got on quite well and he became captivated by her intellect, charm, and concern for others. Though her senior by 11 years, they decided a long engagement was unnecessary, and on October 21, 1844, they were married in Chillicothe.

Following the marriage, they returned to Philadelphia to begin a new life together. Suddenly, Sarah King Peter was now living a new and exciting life, and enjoying new circles of friends, as she became the hostess for many a gathering held at the couple's new home in Philadelphia. For Sarah it was like old times – men of literary achievement and other influential citizens soon became regular guests at the Peter home. Indeed, the couple sponsored readings, musicales, dinners and other forms of entertainment at their residence.

It was shortly after her marriage to William Peter, that Sarah's concern for those less fortunate began to more strongly emerge from within herself. She became associated with a Quaker group called the *Rosine Association for Magdalens*, that

was devoted to turning around the lives of delinquent girls. Her primary role here was to raise funds to help the group purchase a suitable home. This was accomplished by 1848, and Sarah King Peter now became a daily visitor to the house on Eighth Street, providing sympathy and encouragement to the young girls living there in the hope of helping them regain their self-respect and dignity.

Having accomplished her goal of providing a home for the young Magdalens, Sarah King Peter now turned her attention to a new project; one that was not completely disconnect with the former.

Sarah Peter King knew that the opportunities for women in the 19th century outside of the home were very limited. However, she knew that women had a gift for design, color, and art. Thus in 1848, Sarah founded the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. This was the first art school that was exclusively devoted to the training of women in the United States. The real idea behind the school was to teach women a trade. Here they were taught wood carving, lithography, painting, and design—all of which were vital elements in the creation of such items as wallpaper and carpets. Sarah King Peter knew that there was a large market in the United States for the designs the school could produce. She thought such an institution as this was vital for women—especially for those who struggled to support themselves. (Today this institution still exists, and has been known since 1932 as the Moore College of Art and Design).

In 1851, Sarah received urgent news that her son Thomas had fallen gravely ill. She immediately caught a train to be with him, but on January 17, 1851, he died at 31 years of age. Sarah was crushed by her son's death as was his young wife Elizabeth, who now had three young children to raise on her own. Rather than continue in a deep state of grief, Sarah King Peter suggested to her daughter-in-law, along with the three children, that they should accompany her on a trip to Europe. Thomas and Elizabeth's children were Rufus, age 5, Willie age 3, and Thomas age six months. Indeed, this would be a challenging undertaking if agreed to by Elizabeth.

Eventually, Elizabeth was convinced to join her mother-in-law for the voyage overseas. Sarah's own husband—William Peter—fell a little 'under the weather' during this period, and decline to leave on the trip with them, but suggested he would join them later. In June of 1851, Sarah King Peter, Elizabeth King and the three children left by ship for Liverpool, England. This would be the beginning of a mighty adventure for all involved—but especially for Sarah.

Sarah King Peter was well equipped for this trip—at least socially—when she departed. Because of her husband's network of friends and associates in Great Britain, the family arrived with to army of friends ready to receive them. In the UK, Sarah and her family travelled far and wide, starting in Liverpool, they journeyed through Knowsley, Chester, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick,

Mayborough, and into Scotland with stops in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Loch Lomond—among others. While travelling in Scotland Sarah King Peter briefly encountered and conversed with the widow of the late French King Louis Phillippe as well as the Duchess of Sax-Coburg. Eventually the party travelled back down to Canterbury, where they were met by George and Robert King and their spouses. These were the sons of William Peter by his first wife Frances, who died in 1836. After a week with the Peter family, Sarah, Elizabeth and children went to Belgium to begin their tour of the continent.

In continental Europe, the family travelled through Belgium, the German States, France, Austria, the Italian city-states, and into Rome. While travelling through Europe, Sarah's language abilities paid high dividends. She was able to converse within nearly all of the countries she was travelling by using the native languages—which provided her with an excellent understanding of her surroundings. While travelling, she was particularly interested in studying art, churches, visiting schools of design, and she payed special attention to the women religious groups she encountered. She was especially interested in learning about how they worked with the poor, the prisoners, the orphans, the sick, and other who suffered in various ways in European society. Throughout her travels, Sarah seemed to become increasingly interested in religious faith and practices, perhaps culminating in an audience with Pope Pius IX at the Vatican. To be sure, the Pope

received her because he had been made aware of her charitable activities in the United States, as well as due to recommendations from the British consulate in Rome.

After completing her tour of the Italian city-states, she decided that her daughter-in-law Elizabeth and three grandchildren should go back to England and enjoy some rest with the Peter Family—who had invited them back. It was a good thing they accepted this recommendation, because Sarah's travels were not finished—by a long shot.

From Italy, she proceeded on to Egypt where she saw the Pyramids, and then to Gaza and Jerusalem. In this region, she visited many religious places of great importance to Christianity. During Holy Week, she took part in services at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and other holy sites associated with the Passion. At times transportation was atop of donkeys and camels—for a full day's activity. Sarah King Peter seemed to take this all in stride without complaining. After this part of her tour, she left by ship for Athens and Constantinople. Upon conclusion of her trip to the 'orient,' Sarah returned to Canterbury, collected the rest of her family, and returned home-- reaching New York in mid-July 1852.

For about five months, Sarah and William enjoyed their time together and learned of each other's activities while apart for nearly a year. However, shortly before

Christmas, William Peter fell ill and this time his condition deteriorated. On January 6, 1853, William Peter passed away.

Grief-stricken, Sarah Worthington King Peter, had lived a life with many tragedies in the background. Both of her husbands had pre-deceased her, four of her five children were now dead, and five of her siblings already departed. Following her late husband's funeral in Philadelphia, she decided to close the house down there and move back to Cincinnati, where surviving son Rufus and his wife lived. To be sure, Rufus took the initiative to arrange a suitable residence for his mother's return home. Rufus purchased a house on the corner of Third and Lytle in Cincinnati, directly across the street from his residence. The house was described as containing "three lofty parlors," where his mother could entertain, hold literary parties, musicales, and host artists trying to perfect their craft.

Soon Sarah King Peter found herself swept into a variety of activities. She assembled a group of women who were interested in the fine arts, and with their assistance founded a small art museum in Cincinnati. In the future, Sarah would acquire paintings by notable artists or good prints of their works while she was travelling in Europe. By the year 1876, this group evolved into the Women's Museum Association, which later became known as the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts. (This would ultimately be absorbed into the Cincinnati Art Museum).

In the year 1855, Sarah King Peter returned to Europe. On a ship going from Marseilles to Civita Vecchia, she met a group of Catholic bishops and became even more drawn unto the Catholic faith. This time in Europe, she stopped in Rome where she was received into the Catholic Church at a Convent Chapel in Rome. These experiences appear to have left a firm imprint upon the direction her life when Sarah King Peter eventually return to Cincinnati.

Arriving back in Cincinnati later in 1855, Sarah King Peter became increasingly worried about the plight of the poor—primarily German—in Cincinnati. Most of these immigrants had come to the Ohio Valley following the Revolutions of 1848. In 1857, with the support and backing of Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, Sarah King Peter returned to Rome and was given an audience with Pope Pius IX again. This time she approached the Pope about bringing a group of nuns to Cincinnati to help with the poor and suffering in her hometown. Unable to directly assist in this endeavor, he recommended her to a group of Austrian bishops. After meeting with them in Vienna to no avail, she travelled to Cologne and met with Cardinal von Geissel of Cologne. Through him, she was introduced to Mother Frances Schervier at Aachen, who had recently founded a new order of nuns known as the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis.

Sarah Peter, along with Mother Frances and Cardinal Geissel had several meeting to discuss her request. Mother Frances was the one who was most skeptical, but

she finally agreed to Sarah's request. On September 10, 1858, six nuns from the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis arrived in Cincinnati. The nuns supported themselves by begging, and were given accommodation in the now abandoned St. Aloysius Society Orphanage in downtown Cincinnati. This was converted into a small hospital for the poor and needy, and soon was full. This soon led to the construction of St. Mary's Hospital of Cincinnati, which was dedicated on Christmas Day, 1858 by Archbishop Purcell. These nuns, with the assistance of Sarah King Peter, established the original St. Elizabeth Hospital in Covington in 1861.

On a short trip to Ireland in 1856, Sarah King Peter had stopped to visit the Sisters of Mercy in Kinsale, Ireland to request they form a colony of sisters in the Cincinnati area. Here Sarah Peter King found a somewhat skeptical Mother Theresa Maher, who was concerned about the ability of the order to financially support themselves in a new city. After receiving a letter of support, endorsement, and guarantees from Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, and with the blessing of the Bishop of Cork, Mother Theresa Maher sent nine sisters to form a new convent in Cincinnati with the primary mission as one of nursing.

While on the trip to Europe in 1857, Sarah Peter also visited La Tour St. Joseph, France, the motherhouse of the Little Sisters of the Poor. There she spoke with the mother-general and told her of the needs of the elderly poor of the United States.

This request took nearly a decade to reach fruition, but in 1868, two groups of Little Sisters of the Poor arrived in the United States. The first group took up residence in Brooklyn, New York, with the second group coming to Cincinnati that same year. Upon arrival, they originally lived in a house on Lock Street in Over the Rhine; today they have remained a vital part of the city's landscape, with their current residents atop Riddle Road near the University of Cincinnati.

During this the decades of the 1850s and 1860s, Sarah King Peter was also instrumental in establishing orphanages for both boys and girls, a reformatory facility for juvenile offenders, a women's prison, and other agencies whose primary mission was to serve the destitute and poor, the underprivileged, orphans and children, women in distress, prisoners, and the elderly. Indeed, she did her best to support these institutions, and was very successful in attracting donations for her worthy endeavors from potential benefactors on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

After a decade of tireless but very successful work during the 1850s, the Civil War erupted in the United States. Sarah King Peter volunteered as a field nurse with the Franciscan sisters during the Civil War. She served at Pittsburg Landing in Tennessee. There she worked as a nurse and treated wounded soldiers from the battles. It is also said that she personally confronted General Hooker and demanded better treatment and sanitary conditions for prisoners of war—and the

result of that confrontation was that ‘she prevailed.’ Furthermore, following the Battle of Shiloh, Sarah King Peter personally outfitted a hospital medical station boat and stayed on board to personally tend to the casualties.

This paper was titled “A Remarkable Life’s Journey.” The words have a double meaning—this woman, Sarah Worthington King Peter had a remarkable life—especially for a woman—in the 19th century. However, perhaps many of her most significant accomplishments were achieved because of the journey aspect of the title. For the time she lived in, she was an extraordinary world traveler, who was multilingual, educated and well read, and could move in and out of different and varying social circles almost seamlessly. It must be added that she must have been in remarkable good-health and physical shape throughout most of her life, and her travels—at times—required walking great distances on more difficult terrain.

After the Civil War was over, she made two more trips to Europe. She visited and was received well by American bishops and Pope Pius IX during the First Vatican Council in 1869-1870. She even went back to visit her old friend Pope Pius IX who was imprisoned after the sack of Rome in late 1870. In the 1870s, she began living a semireligious life in an apartment of a convent. Aside from taking an active part in prayer life in her last years, the nuns in the Convent of St. Clare looked after the woman who was responsible for bringing them—and many other religious orders—to the Cincinnati area during the 1850s and 1860s.

Sarah Worthington King Peter died on February 6, 1877 at the age of 77. At her passing, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* said “Never was there such an outpouring of people to witness the funeral of a private citizen of this city.” Today, Sarah Worthington King Peter is still held “In Good Memory,” as her birthday remembrance (with cake) is held every year on May 10th at the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

(Sarah Worthington King Peter is interred at New St. Joseph’s Cemetery’s Old Mausoleum, Section 3)

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