

WORTHINGTON HOUSE
PITTSFIELD - ILLINOIS
PIKE COUNTY

HABS. NO. ILL-264
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15-PITFI

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings
- PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. ILL-2

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
• EDGAR E. LUNDEEN • DISTRICT OFFICER •
CORN BELT BANK BUILDING • BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

X

WORTHINGTON HOUSE
Pittsfield, Pike County, Illinois

Owner. Estate of Dr. Andrew Worthington,
Denver, Colorado.

Date of Erection. 1838.

Architect. Unknown.

Builder. Unknown.

Present Condition. Present condition as a whole is good, with the following exceptions: part of front porch columns and bases subjected to settlement and resultant mis-alignment, general maintenance repairs needed. Main building on original site, and in original state. A frame addition was added on the rear at a much later date.

Number of Stories. One story. Two finished rooms in the attic. Basement under one room only on rear.

Materials of Construction. Main building, stone foundations. Painted brick exterior walls. Oak frame for interior walls, floors and roof; hewn oak trusses for roof. Exterior woodwork and interior finish, doors, etc., made of white pine, except window and door sills of oak. Stairs of black walnut. Roof with wood shingles. White pine floors, wide boards. Interior woodwork finished in enamel. Walls plastered and papered.

Other Existing Records. No old pictures, photographs, etc., found. Newspaper write-ups available, late.

Additional Data. The Worthington house, which stands on a five acre lot near the western margin of Pittsfield,

Illinois, was begun in 1837 by the trustees of a projected academy. The land on which it stands was a gift conditional upon the completion of the building on or before January 1, 1839. The condition was met and the deed was given.

The trustees, caught in the toils of the deepening economic depression which began in 1837, found themselves without funds to open their school. The building remained vacant, and the legislature in 1847 passed a special act allowing it to be sold at auction. The successful bidder was Thomas Worthington, M.D., of Pittsfield, who secured the property for only five hundred dollars, and immediately prepared the house for occupancy as a residence.¹

Dr. Worthington was one of the interesting young men of the Illinois frontier. Born in Anderson County, Tennessee, in 1808, he had come to Illinois at the age of twenty-one and begun the study of medicine in the office of a physician in Carrollton. He soon left for Cincinnati, where after taking the usual course he was graduated from the Medical College of Ohio, and returned to Illinois in time to participate in the Black Hawk war. His residence in Pittsfield began in 1833.

In 1842 he was elected as a state senator on the Whig ticket. In Springfield, he enlarged his acquaintance to include many of the men to become famous in political life. After 1849 he gave up the practice of medicine, and because of his investment in agricultural property was able to devote his time to politics and, more especially, to geology, for which he had developed a passion. As one of the earliest

of those to accept the glacial theory he made long trips to all parts of the United States to study geological formations.²

Probably the most important act of his life was his discovery of the principle of the use of weights for the extension of broken limbs to prevent the muscular contraction which would otherwise make a proper healing impossible. His office student, John Hodgen, who was later to win great reputation as a surgeon and hold office as president of the American Medical Association, told many successive classes of students at the St. Louis Medical College that this "was the first known instance in which a limb suffering from fracture had been extended and saved, and that the various appliances now universally employed among surgeons ... are but modifications and improvements upon the practice introduced by Dr. Worthington."³

The doctor occupied the house from 1847 until his death in 1888. In the course of the years the family had the privilege of entertaining many friends who were, or were to become, people of distinction. Among these were Abraham Lincoln and Senator O. H. Browning, political friends; the young John Nicolay, who was to become Lincoln's secretary and biographer, and minister to France; Miss Helen Nicolay, biographer of Lincoln; John Hay, who was a frequent visitor while attending school in Pittsfield in the 50's, and who after paralleling Nicolay's career was to die as Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of State.⁴

From 1888 until 1902, the house was owned and occupied by Miss Emily Worthington. It then became the property of Dr. Andrew Worthington, of Denver, Colorado, a Professor in the University of Denver Medical School, who retained possession until his death in 1935. As he died intestate and unmarried, it is now the property of the heirs at law of Dr. Worthington.

References:

1. J. M. Thompson "Worthington Square Academy History" Pike County Republican, August 26, 1936, p. 6.
2. anon. "Portrait Biographical Album of Pike & Calhoun Counties, Illinois" Chicago, 1891, pp. 806-808.
"History of Pike County, Illinois" Chicago, 1880, pp. 710-711.
3. anon. "Portrait Biographical Album", p. 806.
4. Information furnished by Minna Worthington Adams, Jacksonville, Illinois, a granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Worthington.

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District Officer

3/11/37 - W