

Jane McWilliams

February 12, 1999

Information needed for Ann Jennings Johnson bio:

Where did the Johnsons live in AN, 1766-1779?

Were they in Eden's house/ Governor's Mansion??

What does Delaplaine say about the Johnson children? When in 1766 was first son born?

Is the baby in the 1772 Peale portrait a daughter named Rebecca who died (as per Sellers) (and a later daughter was given her name) or is it James as implied by Brand? What do the Peale papers say?

When was that Hesselius portrait done?

Any mention of Ann in the letters of Henry Margaret Ogle?

in other Ridout papers?

any contemporary letters?

We need to know more about Ann's parents. What happened to her sisters? What was the actual title of her father's job with the Land Office? (See Goldsborough or Owings). When does Rebecca Sanders Jennings die? Any entries in the St. Anne's Register? All Saints Register? What does her father's probate inventory say about their lives and her childhood home? Slaves? Plate? Furnishings? Where did the Jenningses live in AN? Did Rebecca Jennings remarry after Thomas's death?

Did Thomas Johnson resign from the Supreme Court because of Ann's illness? Where were sessions of the court held in 1791-1793? Did Ann join him there? What does Delaplaine say about Ann?

Isn't there some obituary for Ann? FR paper at least?

All those MHM references should be checked.

(Draft #1, 574 words)

Ann Jennings Johnson

Ann Jennings Johnson knew well the mansion she moved into with her husband, Governor Thomas Johnson, and their small children in the spring of 1777. Born in Annapolis on May 8, 1745, Ann Jennings was the youngest of the three daughters of Thomas Jennings and his wife Rebecca Sanders Jennings. She grew up during the heyday of the colonial capital, surrounded by the delights of a bustling port and the excitement of a city called the "Athens of America."

Thomas Jennings was the register (clerk?) of the provincial Land Office and, as such, arranged for a clerkship for young Thomas Johnson when he came to Annapolis to study law in the 1750s. On February 16, 1766, a few months before her twenty-first birthday, Ann Jennings married the thirty-three-year-old Thomas Johnson, by then an accomplished attorney and member of the General Assembly.

For the next eleven years, as her husband immersed himself in politics, the law, and his ironworks business in Western Maryland, Ann remained at home in Annapolis, caring for their children, who arrived every two years or so after the birth of their first son in 1766. Shortly after their marriage, Ann and Thomas sold the 183 acres in Anne Arundel County that she inherited from her father, who had died in 1759. A few years later, they joined Rebecca Jennings in the sale of the fifty-acre Jennings plantation on the South River. With babies in the house and Thomas's frequent absence for business and, later, for service in the Continental Congress, it seems likely that Ann's mother came to live with the young family to offer companionship and assistance. In 1772, Charles Willson Peale painted the Johnson family: Thomas looks lovingly at his wife as she holds their third child Rebecca, who died in childhood, with six-year-old Thomas and four-year-old Ann standing before them. Seven of the Johnson children survived infancy: Thomas and Ann, James, Joshua, Elizabeth, Dorcas, and another Rebecca.

Ann Johnson presided over the governor's house for two and a half years,

tumultuous times full of the alarms of war. When the British fleet sailed up the Chesapeake in August 1777, she joined the other residents of the city in flight inland, fearing an enemy attack on the capital. Thomas moved the government to Baltimore for the duration of the scare, and she and the children may have joined him there. Throughout the war, troops and supplies moved through Annapolis on a regular basis and no doubt Ann was called upon often to arrange food and lodging for officers and visiting members of government, both state and national.

When Governor Johnson's term of office expired in 1779, he and Ann moved their household to Frederick County, where they settled into the new house on Richfield plantation, a few miles north of Frederick. While removed from the capital city of her birth, Ann Johnson remained in demand as hostess to friends and associates of her husband. In August 1785, Thomas's old friend George Washington stayed the night at Richfield on his way to Harper's Ferry. The cap and fichue said to have been worn by Ann on that occasion are now at Mt. Vernon, a symbol of her hospitality to the future president.

Ann Jennings Johnson died November 22, 1794, at Richfield. Her body was buried at All Saints Churchyard in Frederick, but was removed, along with those of other family members, to Mt. Olivet Cemetery in 1913.

(Draft #2, 397 words)

Ann Jennings Johnson

The new State of Maryland's first First Lady was Ann Jennings Johnson, wife of Thomas Johnson. Born in Annapolis on May 8, 1745, Ann Jennings was the youngest of the three daughters of Thomas Jennings and his wife Rebecca Sanders Jennings. Thomas Jennings was the register (clerk?) of the provincial Land Office and, as such, arranged for a clerkship for young Thomas Johnson when he came to Annapolis to study law in the 1750s.

On February 16, 1766, a few months before her twenty-first birthday, Ann Jennings married the thirty-three-year-old Thomas Johnson, by then an accomplished attorney and member of the General Assembly. For the next eleven years, as her husband immersed himself in politics, the law, and his ironworks business in Western Maryland, Ann remained at home in Annapolis, caring for their children, the first of whom was born in 1766. With babies in the house and her father's land sold, it seems likely that Ann's mother came to live with the young family to offer companionship and assistance during Thomas's increasing absences for business and the politics of revolution. In the 1772 Charles Willson Peale painting of the Johnson family, Thomas looks lovingly at his wife as she holds their third child Rebecca, who died in childhood, with six-year-old Thomas and four-year-old Ann standing before them. Seven of the Johnson children survived infancy: Thomas and Ann, James, Joshua, Elizabeth, Dorcas, and another Rebecca.

Ann Johnson served as First Lady for two and a half years, tumultuous times full of the alarms of war. Troops and supplies moved through Annapolis on a regular basis, and no doubt Ann was called upon often to arrange food and lodging for officers and visiting members of government, both state and national.

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