

Bellevue

Built ca.1780 by Joseph Swearingen

Resource History

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1708 – Thomas Swearingen (later known as Thomas of the Ferry) born of Thomas and Lydia [or Leady] (Riley) Swearingen in Prince Georges County, Maryland. His younger brother Van (possibly Vandon) was born in 1719. (St. Barnabas Church records, MDArchives)

Thomas (husband of Lydia or Leady) Swearingen was the oldest son of Thomas Swearingen (MCW [Maryland Colonial Wills?], vol. 3, page 203; will written 1708, proved 1711) and also had a brother named Van. Their father Thomas may have been the son of Garritt van Swearingen of St. Mary's City. It appears that the family Anglicized their name by dropping the "van" (and joined the Anglican Church) but maintained a relationship with the original name by naming one son in each generation "Van." The full use of Van Swearingen as a surname appears to have returned several generations later with Thomas Van Swearingen (son of Joseph Swearingen who was son of Thomas "of the Ferry" Swearingen).

Birth information is from the St. Barnabas Church records, Maryland Archives. Other church members included William Chapline (father of Joseph Chapline founder of Sharpsburg), Jonathon Simmons, Richard Butt, Lucas Ray, and others, all of whom (or their families) migrated to the Shepherdstown area in the 1730s and 40s. The Shepherd family was also from this part of Prince Georges County, but not from the same church.

According to several Deeds of Gift recorded in Prince Georges County, Maryland in 1716 (folios 571 and 579 from abstracts provided by Loraine Kerns) Hugh Riley (Ryley) gave land to two of his daughters, Leady Swearingen (wife of Thomas) and Elizabeth Chapline (wife of William).

1720s – Migration route from Pennsylvania, etc. to Virginia, through Maryland to the Pack Horse Ford, known as the "Waggon Road to Philadelphia," becoming active.

The earliest known map showing the ford is dated 1736, drawn by Benjamin Winslow. A man by the name of "Spurgeant" (Spurgeon) is shown with land on either side of the ford. The attached modern map drawn by Galtjo Geertsuma for Cecil O'Dell's Pioneers of Old Frederick County, Virginia, shows the location of the ford relative to Sharpsburg and Shepherdstown (both of which came much later). The Winslow map (1736) also shows William Shepherd (father of Thomas Shepherd founder of Shepherdstown) on the Maryland side of the ford. This appears to be the land called *Pell Mell* patented by John VanMetre in 1743 (Sheet 380, pg 1659, Arthur Tracey Papers, Carroll Co. Historical Society, microfilm copy at Washington Co. Free Library, Hagerstown, MD). VanMetre's daughter married Thomas Shepherd and their son David inherited the land (162 acres). Eventually John

Blackford acquired 70 acres of the tract and it became part of the Ferry Hill Plantation.

1732 – The Maryland Proprietary, Fifth Lord Baltimore, opened the backcountry of Maryland for settlement. At the time this was all part of Prince Georges County, in 1748 Frederick County was carved from Prince Georges and included all of western Maryland. Then in 1776 Washington County was carved from Frederick County and became the western-most county.

1734 – Thomas Shepherd had 222 acres surveyed in Orange County, Virginia (1738-Frederick Co., then 1772-Berkeley Co., then 1801-Jefferson Co.; West Virginia was established in 1863) “on a hill of the SW side of Cohongoroota [Potomac] River, and on the East side of a Branch runing [sic] into the said River called Falling Spring Branch...” (Robert Brooke Survey Book, Thornton Perry Collection, microfilm copy, Ruth Scarborough Library, Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, WV).

This is the land on which Shepherd later established his mills (1737) and town (ca.1758-1762). Significantly, the tract did not include the riverbank (see O’Dell Map 1, parcel 21), leaving enough there open to be claimed by Thomas Swearingen for his ferry landing ca.1758.

1744 – In Virginia, a road was laid off between the Opeckon (Opequon) Creek and “Thomas Shepherd’s Mill,” for which Thomas Swearingen was appointed one of the overseers (Frederick Co., VA Order Book 1, page 104, microfilm copy, Handley Library, Winchester, VA).

1748 – Thomas Swearingen bought the 222-acre Jones’ Mill tract (near Scrabble; Everson, p.19).

Swearingen also purchased in May 1748 “*Spirgen Lott*, a 50-acre part of *Anteatum Bottom* in Frederick County, Maryland adjoining Shepherd’s land,” from William Spurgeon, Jr., son of William Sr. and Mary (Molly) Spurgeon. (FCLR, Liber F, folio 504, as cited in O’Dell, p.33)

On the 1736 Winslow map the Spurgeon land was located on both sides of Pack Horse Ford (see attached, shown as Spurgeant; the map appears to be inaccurate on this point. The Spurgeon land was actually up river from the ford). Records indicate that William Spurgeon Sr. purchased the land in 1741 from John Moore (O’Dell, p.33).

All of this is significant because there is a reference to Spurgeon operating a ferry from his land prior to Swearingen’s purchase in 1748. (see William Shepherd deposition below – although Shepherd recalled the date of the Spurgeon to Swearingen conveyance was 1758, ten years later)

1750 – Thomas Swearingen received a grant from Lord Fairfax for 478 acres (Northern Neck Grants, Book G, p.444). Ten years later in his 1760 will he referred to this as his “Mantion [sic] Plantation.”

We already know (from the Green and Chapline histories) that many of the Fairfax grants came years after the grantee had settled the land – mostly because Fairfax did

not settle in Virginia until 1749[?]. It is likely then that Thomas Swearingen was living on his "Mantion Plantation" prior to 1750, at least as early as 1748 when he purchased the nearby Spurgeon ferry parcel and possibly as early as 1744 when he was appointed overseer of the road to Shepherd's mill.

The Geertsema plat of this Swearingen grant shows the tract extending to the river bank (see attached, plat no. 514). Although this tract does have river frontage, Everson's assertion (and William Shepherd's in 1780) that Swearingen operated his ferry from this location is impossible as the bank is quite steep along this part of the river.

1754 – Thomas Shepherd began laying out the Mecklenburg town lots and selling them (Danske Dandridge, Historic Shepherdstown, 1910).

1755 – An Act of the Virginia General Assembly stated: "That public ferries be constantly kept at the following places...to wit, from the land of Thomas Swearingen in the county of Frederick, over Potowmack [sic] river, to the land opposite thereto in the province of Maryland, the price of one man, three pence and three farthings and for a horse, the same." (Mabel and Ann Henshaw Gardiner, Chronicles of Old Berkeley, 1938, p.57).

Col. George Washington confirmed the existence of Swearingen's Ferry in a December 1756 letter to Robert Dinwiddie, then Governor of Virginia, referring to members of the Virginia regiment who were "sent ever since the middle of October to Conogochig [sic], Swearinghams [sic] ferry, &c. to encourage that body of Inhabitants to stay at their places, who otherwise were determined to forsake them." (Letter Book, GW Papers, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>)

A deposition given by William Shepherd in 1780 (part of Abraham Shepherd's lawsuit against Swearingen's claim to the ferry landing) indicates that by 1758 Swearingen's ferry landing was a lot on the riverbank below Shepherdstown, approximately where the boat landing now is. This date is suspect however because Shepherd recalled that as the year that Swearingen purchased the Spurgeon ferry lot on the Maryland side, which we know to be actually 1748. We also know that Shepherds claim that Molly Spurgeon's ferry landed on Shepherd-owned land at the mouth of the mill branch was not true because the 222-acre Shepherd grant did not have any river frontage. (I believe William Shepherd was not entirely truthful in this deposition)

William Shepherd's statement reads (spelled as written):

"That he [William Shepherd] was present when Shepherds Town was originally laid off that it was laid off in sixteen lotts upon Thos Shepherds original Tract of 222 acres that Thos Swearingen dec'd was a subscriber for two lots that they were to be drawn for by Lottery which was done accordingly That some time after sd [said] Town was laid off Thos Swearingen purchased of a Molly Spurgion a plantation in Maryland on Patomack river opisite the sd Town, who had kept a ferry there & landed on the Virginia shore at a place or spot of ground of Thos Shepherds within two or three rods of the mouth of sd Shepherds mill branch. Just above the same that after said Swearingen had made sd purchase he moved his boat down to said

purchase, and place, and kept a ferry there...that after sd Swearingen with his son Thos came to sd Thos Shepherd...and told him they were going to survey a Lott as he calld it, tho at that time, there was not nor is there now, any part of the sd Town that reaches to the sd lot...and the deponant further saith that the said Swearingen used the sd landing as a ferry as long as he lived, but he never heard sd Swearingen lay any claim to the same from that time he began to use it as a landing to the day of his death [1760] a period of about Eighteen months..." (from original undated document, Shepherd Collection, Historic Shepherdstown archives, Shepherdstown, WV)

1760 – Thomas (of the Ferry) Swearingen died. (FC WB 2/402).

The widow Sarah was given "the Profits of this my Mantion Plantation, with the Ferry and my Plantation in Maryland all the Profits that may arise during the time she remain a widow." Presumably she also had a life estate in the "Mantion."

The "Maryland Plantation and the Ferry" (including the Virginia side landing) was devised to the youngest son Benoni, although all the "profits" of these two properties went to his mother Sarah.

Son Van was given "all my right and property in Shepherds Town" (yes, he called it Shepherds Town two years before it was officially chartered).

Son Joseph was given "my Right of a Parcall of Land surveyed to my Brother Van Swearingen which I have his Bond of Performance to make a sufficient Title, which, I give to my son Joseph Swearingen and as much out of my Mantion Plantation as shall make three Hundread Acres with that..."

Son (Maj.) Thomas Swearingen already owned part of the Jones Mill property, he and his brother Andrew were given additional acreage and Andrew got the mill.

Son Zachariah got 300 acres (the James Marshall farm on 1852 map).

Daughters Drusilah [sic] Morgan, Sarah, and Eleanor were given money.

Thomas Swearingen (of the Ferry) was just 52 years old when he died and more than half of his nine children were under the age of 15 (Everson, p. 24). Joseph Swearingen (b.1754) was just six years old at the time of his father's death and would not come of age (age 21) until 1775.

Please note that in none of the historic records have I ever seen him referred to as Joseph "Van" Swearingen.

1774 – The widow Sarah (Dossett) Swearingen was listed on Robert Worthington's list of tithables with sons Joseph and Benoni, indicating that the boys had reached 21 years but were still living at home.

Apparently having reached the age of majority, Joseph Swearingen received from his uncle Van Swearingen the tract promised to him in his father's will. It was a 20-acre parcel adjoining the Potomac River, part of Van's 1760 Fairfax grant of 321 acres.

1775 – Joseph Swearingen enlisted in the army and was an active participant in the Revolutionary War.

1783 – At the close of the war Joseph married Hannah Rutherford. According to the genealogy I looked at (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~thesays/dick/pafg31.htm>) he would have been 29 years old and she was 31. They had one child, Thomas Van Swearingen, born 1784.

Joseph Swearingen was listed on the BC personal property tax in 1783 with no white tithables, nine slaves, six horses, and 17 cattle. This remained fairly consistent through the following years.

It appears likely that by 1783, Joseph and his wife Hannah were living in the “mansion” with Sarah Swearingen. Sarah Swearingen wrote her will in 1783 (BC WB 3/272; probated in 1799). In the will she devised to her children that were still living:

(Maj.) Thomas Swearingen – “a bay mare colt that is now two years old”

Andrew Swearingen – “five shillings”

Drusilla Morgan – “my Big Bible”

Van Swearingen – “five shillings”

Elenor Israel – “five shillings”

Joseph and Benoni Swearingen – “the Remainder of my Estate to be Equally divided between them” and appointed them as the executors of her will.

1791 – BC personal property tax listed Col. Joseph Swearingen with seven slaves over the age of 16 and seven horses (cattle were not enumerated).

The 1793 BC land tax listed Col. Joseph Swearingen with 300 acres (his inheritance).

1798 – On the BC house tax Joseph Swearingen was assessed for three houses in the country (all District 3): one valued at \$210, one valued at \$420 (Willowdale could be either of these), and **one valued at \$1,050 (probably Bellevue).**

Hezekiah was assessed for one country house valued at \$420 (Lost Drake)

Josiah (administrator) for one country house valued at \$840 (Springwood)

Samuel for one country house valued at \$131.25 (??)

Thomas for one country house valued at \$840 (at Jones Mill?)

The value of Bellevue (\$1,050) relative to Springwood (\$840) seems to indicate that either the stone Bellevue house was brand new or that some improvements had been made to the original stone section.

1810 – On the U.S. Population Census Joseph Swearingen (spelled Swearengin) was over 45 years old (~56) and the head of a large household with one other male 45+, one female 45+, one female 26-44, one female 16-25, and two children under age 9. Joseph owned 41 slaves in 1810.

1815 – On the JC special house tax Joseph “Swearingan” was listed with one house valued at \$900 (+\$500). **This \$1,400 value indicates that some additional improvement was made to Bellevue.**

Joseph’s only child, Thomas Van Swearingen [I] married Julia [unknown].

1817 – The JC land tax listed Joseph Swearingen with 532 acres (includes Willowdale) adjoining Shepherdstown and 115 acres adjoining Jacob Kensel (Keplinger’s Corner).

Joseph sold two small parcels located on the Martinsburg Road to Kensel in 1809 where Kensel established an ordinary. Joseph’s daughter Virginia, wife of Charles Butler, later inherited the remaining 115 acres and sold 87 acres to John Keplinger in 1847.

1820 – Joseph Swearingen was assessed for 531 acres with a building value of \$1,500. This value includes both Bellevue and the very old log Willowdale house.

On the 1820 census Joseph and his wife (probably second wife Tabitha) lived alone with 21 slaves, of which nine were occupied in agriculture.

1821 – Joseph Swearingen died at the age of ~67, without a will. His only child (of first wife Hannah), Thomas Van Swearingen [I], recorded an agreement with the widow Tabitha Swearingen in which she gave up all of her dower right to the Swearingen property, including real estate, slaves, and personal property (JC DB 11/415). In exchange she would keep the slaves that were hers when she married Joseph as well as the household and kitchen future in the house she then occupied (not sure if that might have been in Shepherdstown).

1822 – Thomas Van Swearingen [I] died leaving his widow Julia (m.1815) and five children: Joseph, Mary (Quigley), Hannah (Matthews), Thomas Van [II], and Virginia (Butler).

Land tax assessments on the Thomas Van Swearingen [I] estate remained under the Heirs through 1834, still 532 acres with \$1,500 building value and 115 acres with no building value.

In **1835**, the estate was divided and it appears that son Joseph was deceased. In many later deeds this division and the plat drawn for it are referenced, however, no deed of partition or plat could be found (see attached annotated 1852 map). The division does appear on the 1835 tax record:

Thomas V. Swearingen [II] (of KY), 153 a., adj. H.V. Swearingen, \$0 bldg. [Lot 1]

Hannah V. Swearingen, 163 ¾ a., adj. Dr. John Quigley, \$0 bldg. [Lot 3]

Julia V. Swearingen (dower), 27 a., adj. T.V. Swearingen, \$1,300 bldg. [Lot 6]

“ “ “ , [20] a., adj. Van Bennett’s hrs, \$0 bldg. [Lot 5]

Virginia V. Swearingen, 120 a., adj. Jacob Welshans, \$200 [Lot 4?]

Dr. John Quigley (life estate), 152 a., adj. H.V. Swearingen, \$0 bldg. [Lot 2?]

1836 – Thomas Van Swearingen [II] of Kentucky sold his interest (as an heir of Julia Van Swearingen) in Bellevue and the Swearingen Ferry, along with his 153-acre lot (Lot No. 1 in the division) and his to his sister Mary's husband, Dr. John Quigley for \$6,300 (JC DB 20/305).

Hannah and Virginia Swearingen were still unmarried and likely living with their mother Julia at Bellewue.

1841 – The assessment value of the buildings on the 27-acre Bellevue dower land fell to \$1,000, still under the name of Julia Van Swearingen.

1856 – Julia Van Swearingen's building assessment again fell this time to \$600 on her 27-acre life estate.

1857 – This time Julia V. Swearingen was assessed for a 62-acre life estate with a building value of just \$400.

1860 – Julia Van Swearingen died (WB 16/183).

It appears her daughters Virginia Butler and Mary Quigley had sold their interest (Mary also held brother Thomas V's interest) in the Bellevue estate to sister Hannah Matthews.

Hannah V.S. and Henry Matthews sold two tracts to Willoughby N. Lemen for \$9,665 (DB 39/182):

- 1) 165 acres adjoining Entler, Robinson, Marshall, and Billmyer (Lot 3 in the Joseph Swearingen division that went to Hannah)
- 2) 28 acres adjoining the road to Shepherdstown, Entler, Quigley, the river, and Hessey (the dower lot).

1861 – Lemen's purchase appeared in the tax record as 194 ¼ acres adjoining David Billmyer with a building value of \$1,500 "from H Matthews by deed."

Hannah V.S. Matthews' 165-acre Lot 3 never had a building value assessed previously (1835-1860) so the jump in building value from Julia's \$400 in 1857-59 to Lemen's \$1,500 probably reflects new improvements on the building. Whether that means the brick second story and tall arched windows is unknown. The wide decorated cornice and tall arched windows do have an Italianate style to them. Lemen would have been among the first to use the relatively new Italianate style in the region. The assessor made no comment on improvements.

1872 – Due to the Civil War no tax records were kept in Jefferson County until 1872 when the county seat was re-established in Charles Town. By this time W.N. Lemen had acquired additional land around the Bellevue estate, a total of 520 acres adjoining "W.R. Turner" with a building value of \$1,000.

By 1875 Lemen's Bellevue tract was again listed as 193 acres with a building value of \$1,000, which did not change up to the year of his death in 1879.

1879 – Willoughby N. Lemen Sr's heirs divided his estate. Martin Lemen and W.N. Lemen Jr. sold the 193-acre Bellevue estate to William T. Lemen for \$9,387 (DB Y/302).

1882 – Again, this was the next available tax record for Jefferson County. William T. Lemen was assessed for 193 acres adjoining David Billmyer with a building value of \$1,000.

1883 – W.T. Lemen's 193-acre Bellevue estate (the name was never actually used on the tax records) had a new building value of \$2,000 with no comment from the assessor.

It is possible that this change in 1883 *may* represent the brick second story addition and new windows. Arched, two over two pane windows became fairly common in the 1880s.

1892 – William T. Lemen sold the Bellevue estate, then 226 acres, to Henry Shepherd for \$15,000 (DB Z/517).

The large price increase over just 13 years seems to indicate the major changes to the building occurred during William T. Lemen's ownership.