

William Jenkins Worth

by Paul Schumacher



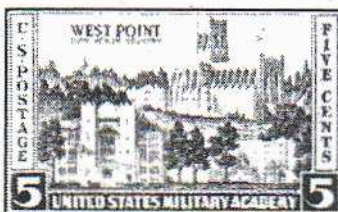
Fig. 1: William Jenkins Worth, from an engraving by John Sartain.

One of America's great military figures, William Jenkins Worth (Figure 1), was born to Quaker parents in Hudson, New York, on March 1, 1794.

Following a very modest education, young Worth took up a mercantile career in Hudson and Albany until the outbreak of the War of 1812. During the war, Worth became an aide-de-camp to Winfield Scott (Scott #153) and won Scott's praise for his fighting ability.

Worth was severely wounded at Lundy's Lane and was not expected to live. He did survive, though he was bedridden for a year and crippled for life. As a reward for his service he was made a brevet major.

In 1820 Worth was appointed Commandant of West Point (#789, Figure 2, right) even though he had never attended the school. He held the post until 1828.



Worth reached the rank of brevet lieutenant colonel in 1824 and colonel in 1838.

He fought against the Seminoles during the Indian Wars and was made a brevet brigadier general by President James Polk

When war with Mexico broke out, Worth was initially second in command to Zachary Taylor (#179). It was Worth who planted the flag on the Rio Grande. He was also instrumental in the American victory at Monterey. As a result, he was made a brevet major general in September, 1846. Congress presented him with a sword in March of 1847.

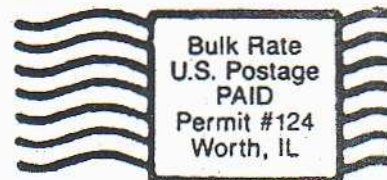
Following the battle of Vera Cruz, Worth suggested that he might become President. Indeed, six delegates to the Democratic Convention of 1848 voted to give him the party's nomination that year.

Though he consistently distinguished himself in battle, Worth's arrogant and self-centered nature eventually caught up with him. His mistreatment of both his own soldiers and the Mexican populace led Winfield Scott to issue a tepid rebuke. Worth retaliated with a flurry of letters to the newspapers, all designed to undermine Scott. When Scott sought an explanation, Worth became so defiant and insulting that Scott had him arrested.

Following the Mexican War, Scott placed Worth in command of the Department of Texas. It was in Texas that Worth contracted cholera and died on May 7, 1849. He has never appeared on a stamp, but he lives on in a variety of documents and place names.

The *Price Guide to Autographs* identifies him as a military leader and prices his autograph at \$25, a letter or document signed by him at \$70, and a handwritten signed letter at \$125.

Following his death counties were named for him in Iowa (1851), Georgia (1853), and Missouri (1861). Worth County, Georgia appeared in cancels in the 1880s. They are listed, but not illustrated, in the Doane-Thompson Catalog.



The town of Worth, Illinois (Figure 3, above) was named for him.

Last, but not least, William J. Worth attained a measure of posthumous vindication when the tiny outpost in Texas which was named for him (Figure 4, below) grew to be a larger city than any of the many forts and towns named for Winfield Scott.

