

John McMillan & Francis Reno

What happens when a Presbyterian pastor and a Methodist student get together in early western Pennsylvania?. The quick answer is that the student became an Episcopalian. More of that in a moment.

Who was John McMillan?

McMillan was born in 1752 in rural Fogg's Manor in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He was raised in the aura of the religious revival called the Great Awakening and he was influenced by the Rev. Samuel Blair whose ministry was focused on preparing young men for the Presbyterian ministry. He studied at Princeton where he accepted the call to be ordained. He came to the Chartiers Valley to begin a circuit rider ministry. He established and was pastor at two missions, Pigeon Creek and Chartiers, in 1775. Due to Indian uprisings, McMillan was not able to bring his bride Catherine here until 1778. They lived in a modest log house in Canonsburg, They had seven children.



In 1780 McMillan opened a frontier seminary in a log house, the forerunner of Jefferson College, which later merged with Washington College, and also the start of Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. (The log house is preserved on the campus of the Canonsburg Middle School, McMillan was known as the Apostle of the Presbyterian Church. He died at age 82 in 1833.

Who was Francis Reno?

Francis Reno was born in 1758 and his parents, John and Susanna Reno, were descendents of French Protestant Huguenots. He was one of 7 boys and 4 girls. He married Lydia Saviers in 1784 and they also had 7 sons and 4 daughters. Francis was a Methodist.

Francis served in the Revolutionary War and it appears that he settled in or near the Chartiers Valley. He was known by the wealthy Episcopalian John Neville, since the General sponsored Reno to study under John McMillan at his Presbyterian academy. Reno became impressed with the role of bishops in the Episcopal Church and the Book of Common Prayer. This led Reno to seek ordination in the Episcopal Church. He was ordained deacon and then priest in 1791. He became the first resident pastor of (Old) St. Luke's Church, Woodville which was built in 1790 on Major William Lea's Summerhill plantation, Reno served at (Old) St. Luke's Church through the Whiskey Rebellion, until 1797 when he moved to the Ohio Valley and founded several churches in that area. Reno died in 1836.