

The
Biography
of
John Milligan II



Representative John Milligan II
Ca. 1842 in the only image left
Of him on the planet.

By
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Early History

John Milligan II was born in Triadelphia, West Virginia most likely in between the years of 1795-1799. During these years the city of Wheeling, W. Virginia was incorporated. He was one of the last children born to John Milligan I and his life long wife, Sarah (Robinson) Milligan on their 100 acre homestead and farm on Peter's Run that was located just north of what would become the town of Triadelphia a few years later.

This was an exciting time for the development of the area around Wheeling, W. Virginia. Monument Place was built a few years earlier in Elm Grove by Colonel Moses Shepard and was about the time that Josiah Thompson was building the Lawson Tavern, which was the first permanent structure of present day Triadelphia. It still exists today as "The Lawson House" on the north side of the "Old Pike." There was even talk and politics getting started to build the "National Road" (Old Pike) that would start in Pennsylvania and terminate someplace on the Ohio River near Wheeling. Construction started on the National Road in 1806 after the bill was passed by congress and signed by President Jefferson. The road was completed all the way to Wheeling by 1818.

John Milligan II grew up in this environment of construction and seeing travelers of all walks of life. There were Politicians such as Henry Clay, adventures like the eccentric Davy Crockett, road workers, mail stages coming through, Pioneers and settlers looking to travel to the Ohio Territory and points westward from Wheeling. On the western shore of the Ohio River was Zane's Trace that would take people a few hundred miles into the Ohio Territory before turning south and back again to the Ohio River at Maysville, just north of Lexington, Kentucky. The Ol' Lawson Tavern was a place where people could stop and rest from a hard days travel on the Pike. They rested their horses, oxen or cattle outside while they, themselves, got refreshed with a good meal, maybe a bath and a very good night's rest, all for about 2 bits (25 cents) per person. The "Road" brought commerce to the Wheeling and Triadelphia areas. John Milligan's farm lay just north of Triadelphia and I often wonder if the Milligan boys, didn't hire themselves out at the Tavern to make sure a traveler's horses were fed, watered and rested for the night or their oxen and cattle had plenty of grazing before their owner's would start off again in the morning. John Milligan I, no doubt, knew allot if not all of the early settlers of the area and helped with the

building of their homes and other structures. He also owned a tannery that was located on his 100 acre farm. This was a very exciting place to grow up in those years.

In or about 1816, John Milligan II became a traveler himself. He struck out, when he was of good age, to make a life of his own. He was a young man ready to experience the world that lay just outside his door, ready to travel to the places he had heard other travelers mention in their stories at the Lawson House. One has to wonder what Trail he took to get to the Arkansas Territory. Did he travel on the National Road to the Ohio River and take a flat bottom boat all the way down to the western shore of the Mississippi River? Did he take the National Road to Zane's Trace and travel to Lexington, Kentucky (which was also a bustling city, just being settled in those days) and continued on to Tennessee (Memphis Area) and across the Mississippi to Lawrence County, Missouri Territory from there? The Author has even heard of the speculation that he may have run into the Thomas Lincoln Family just west of Lexington. Tom Lincoln had just lost his own 3 homesteads to the tax collector and ended up moving his wife and young son, Abe, to Southern Indiana. I researched this and found that there is absolutely NO evidence to support this chance meeting. We perhaps, may never really know exactly what John Milligan's route was but we know this for fact: by 1818 he not only got to Lawrence County in the Missouri Territory (Reeds Creek Area) but he had met and married the grass widowed, Eda (Jeffery) Ragsdale, of the James and Jane (Mason) Jeffery Family who also had just arrived in Reeds Creek in 1816.

The James and Jane (Mason) Jeffery Family

We first encounter the James Jeffery Family, on their life-long migration to Reeds Creek, in North Carolina with the birth of Jehoiada Jeffery, Aug 10, 1790. When he was 8 or 9 years of age, James and Jane Jeffery picked up and crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains into Tennessee and settled for a time in the Knoxville, Tennessee area. This is where Eda Jeffery was born in 1799/1800. They lived here in Knoxville for a few years and move on in 1808, were we find them in Christian County, Kentucky, Hopkinsville area. They didn't remain here for very long either and move again to Union County, Illinois in 1811. They were living here on 11 Dec 1811 when the New Madrid Earthquake struck along the Mississippi River; 86 miles to the south of where the Ohio River meets the Mississippi. They don't stay in Illinois long after the earthquake and unfortunately we find

them moving again. They crossed the Mississippi at Cape Girardeau and traveled a few miles south and settled in the small river front town of Tywopity, Missouri. They actually moved closer to the epicenter of the earthquake. As earthquakes have the characteristics of doing, there were aftershocks that took place in the following years; two of significant note in 1812 and two more of significant note in 1813. The Jeffery family remained here though and after 1813 everyone in this area could live a more normal life. The aftershocks stopped and people didn't have to worry about the chimneys toppling over anymore. The springs in the area still had the foul taste of Sulphur in them and occasionally there was still the release of Sulphur into the air but on the whole, things were getting back to normal. Then in 1816, we find the James Jeffery Family moving again. They pulled up stakes and traveled south and eventually settled in the Reeds Creek area of Old Lawrence County, Missouri Territory. James Jeffery set up his homestead here. Jehoiada Jeffery, being 10 years Eda's senior, moved on westward and set up his own homestead just north of Batesville about 5 miles or so. This would later become the Community of Mt. Olive. As for the James Jeffery Family however they would remain in Reeds Creek for the next 5 to 6 years. We don't know exactly why the Jeffery Family moved so much from place to place. I personally believe the stories handed down within my own family by Goldie Bell Milligan that Jane Mason was a Country Doctor like her father. She had been studying "Doctorin" since she was 12 or 13 years old. Stories were also told that she was known to travel 40 to 50 miles to help someone in need or help a woman birth a child. I'll wager that her skills came in handy during the earthquake years in Missouri though.

The Ragsdales

After they arrived at Reeds Creek, Eda Jeffery had met and married a man name of Ragsdale. We do not know this man's first name but believe it was Britton and may be the father of Ellis S. Ragsdale and his brother also named Britian Ragsdale, who also show up in the Reeds Creek area in 1816. It is almost impossible to find any accurate information about Eda's Ragsdale husband but we know that soon after their marriage, probably in late 1816/ early 1817, he passes away and leaves Eda a very young widow. Now it's been said that Ellis S. Ragsdale originally settled on the parcel of land next to John Milligan's place before moving on to the Batesville area. So, with this in mind, the Ragsdale boys, Ellis and Britian, perhaps stepsons

or brothers-in-Law to Eda, get to watch her move on in life by marrying their good Friend and Neighbor, John Milligan II of Triadelphia, (West) Virginia. We know that John Milligan and Ellis S. Ragsdale struck up a very close friendship and later on not only would John Milligan marry Ellis Ragsdale to a woman name of Zilpha Smith, 25 April 1830 but each of these men would go on and name one of their sons after each other out of respect of their friendship. John Milligan would name his 4th born child, a boy child, Ellis Ragsdale Milligan and later on Ellis S. Ragsdale would name his 4th child, also a boy child, John Milligan Ragsdale.

There is an excellent Family Story, written by A. C. Jeffery, of how, after John and Eda were married (March of 1818), that John took to drinking and left Eda after some arguments they were having. He wandered clear up to the high point of the White River, took sick and almost died up there. When he could travel again, he decided to go back to Eda. Eventually he made his way to Jehoiada Jeffery's place (Eda's older brother) on the White River north of Batesville and asked if he could borrow a horse to get him the rest of the way home. A.C. wrote that Jehoiada Jeffery gave John a pretty sever scolding and sent him on his way without giving him a horse. So John had to continue on home by foot.

Still very sick, with a severe fever, John Milligan laid himself down by the side of a dimly lit trail at the head of what was called the "Two Mile Branch" east of Mt. Olive, on a bed of pine needles beneath the thick cedars to die. And there, in the still dim light of the thicket, John Milligan made his solemn prayers to God. He asked that he be forgiven of his trespasses and that he wanted to live. Then, racked with fever, he passes out and sleeps. It was by seeming miracle that John, after a time, wakes up. He rolls himself out from under the cedar branches and stands up. Feeling a bit better but still weak, he continued on and made his way back to Eda and angry as she must have been, she nursed him back to good and decent health.

A.C. Jeffery went on to write that John Milligan always said later on in his life, that he never allowed himself to depart from the promises he made beneath the cedars that day. I wonder myself if there isn't some kind of a connection to this episode in John's life and the Cedar trees he later planted in the Campground Cemetery at the head of his daughter, Hulda's grave in 1840? Maybe he wanted her to wake up with God's Miracles as well.

Together, John and Eda Milligan set up a fine homestead (about 3 miles outside of current day Strawberry) in the Reed's Creek area of Lawrence County, "Arkansas" (after 1819) Territory (Sharp County today). A fine respectable woman herself, young Eda Jeffery as her Father and Mother knew her by; (easy to spell out E-D-A) would grow to be a tough and solid frontier woman dedicated to her husband and family. John and she built their home, log construction, like his father taught him to do in Virginia and also set up John's first tannery, once again as his father raised him with. Their home was just across the road from the area of land that would become the Campground. This area of the "Hill Country" in Lawrence County looks just like the lay of land one finds in Wheeling, W. Virginia where John was born and raised. He knew how to hunt the hills for pelts, how to find good water. He knew how to plant crops, raise cattle and keep horses. All of this knowledge, he had instilled within him from his childhood growing up in Triadelphia on Peter's Run. The only thing he didn't have at the time and promised God that he would find, was a church.

He was raised in the Cumberland Presbyterian Faith as a child. His Father and Mother were always in good standing at the Stone Church in Elm Grove, W. Virginia. John practiced his faith into manhood before he left his Family Home. He brought this with him too and after the vows he made to God during his sickness up on the White River, he also knew that he needed to continue growing in his faith.



This cabin is located less than 1/8 mile from the entrance to the Milligan's Campground and is believed by the Milligan Family to be John and Eda (Jeffery) Milligan's original homestead on Reeds Creek.

John Milligan's Military History

On the 10th of July in 1820, John enlisted in the military. Perhaps his income from the tanyard wasn't enough to keep his young children as well cared for as he and Eda wanted. So he joined the Lawrence County Militia and was given the rank of "Ensign." This is the Militia that would oversee large problems that occurred in the county. Don't forget, Lawrence County, during this time period, was huge and not only covered the great expanse of the whole northern part of Arkansas State as we know it today but also covered a good part of what was to become Indian Country in the Oklahoma Territory as well. The militia was formed in case of Indian (Cherokee and Osage) uprisings as the Cherokee were moving to their new reservations and lands in the North Central and Northwestern Arkansas and Oklahoma which happened to be Osage hunting grounds. Also there were allot of planters and farmers moving into the territory that utilized slavery and the militia was used in case the slaves in the county would band together and create havoc with there owners with uprisings of their own. Some farmers and planters in the area had as many as 60 slaves working 125 acres. It didn't take the slaves much to figure out that they had strength in numbers. This county militia would be used to quench such uprisings in the event they should occur as actually happened in North and South Carolina.

ARKANSAS MILITIA—Continued		
<i>Persons Commissioned</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Date of Com'n</i>
THIRD REGIMENT—Con.		
Lawrence County—Con.		
Robert Johnston	1st Lieut.	1820, July 10
Har. Creswell	do.	" " "
Thomas Whitaker	do.	1823, Oct. 20.
Napoleon B. Ferguson	do.	" " "
Isaac Bearing	do.	" " "
Charles Shaver	2d Lieut.	1820, July 10.
Joshua E. Brown	do.	" " "
Moses Stubblefield	do.	" " "
Elipas Davis	do.	" " "
Thomas McArnett	do.	" " "
Daniel Randall	do.	" " "
John Walker	do.	" " "
Horner James	do.	1823, Oct. 20.
Joseph James	do.	" " "
Wm. Findley	do.	" " "
Athan Davis	do.	" " "
Hoza Brown	do.	" " "
Isaac King	do.	" " "
Joseph Shaver	Ensign	1820, July 10.
Dennis Denham	do.	" " "
Lemuel Rice	do.	" " "
Powhatan Boatwright	do.	" " "
John Raney	do.	" " "
John Milligan	do.	" " "
John Halcum	do.	" " "
James Little	do.	1823, Oct. 20.
Henry Hudson	do.	" " "
James Buckman	do.	" " "
Harmis Criswell	do.	" " "
James Lewis	do.	" " "
William Pile	do.	" " "

John and Eda's Church

There is an article I ran across on the internet called, "The Founders of Arkansas Presbyterianism: Cumberland Presbyterians". It was in an "On-Line Encyclopedia." Here we read about the history of the Cumberland Presbytery in Kentucky and Tennessee and a man, name of John P. Carnahan. He was a Presbyterian Minister that came to Missouri Territory (Arkansas after 1819) from Tennessee in 1812 and was commissioned by the Cumberland Presbytery there to go to the White River Valley of the Missouri (Arkansas) Territory and "form a "Circuit" on the Arkansaw" of churches along the river settlements there. So he came to the Missouri Territory and wandered and preached for 9 years along the rivers frontier at people's farms and social gatherings where he could find them. His first Presbyterian service (1st one in the Territory) was given at Jacob Pyeatte's home in Pulaski County (Little Rock). The article goes on to say that Carnahan worked alone until 1823 and that he found and worked with four (4) "Minister Members" of the Presbytery.

Then, in 1823 with Reuben Borrows and Robert D. King starting to make their own preaching circuits on the White, Red and Arkansas Rivers, John Carnahan's Arkansas Cumberland Presbytery was officially formed at the home of John A. Craig in Batesville, Arkansas. Batesville is only a few miles away from The Milligan Homestead being just 3 miles outside of Strawberry at Reeds Creek and the Jehoiada Jeffery homestead at Mt. Olive some 4 or 5 miles north of Batesville. Even though there is no evidence to support it, I can't believe that John Carnahan, John Milligan and Eda and her family, including Jehoiada Jeffery, were not there together in the Craig Family Home to witness this historic Event. The John Milligan family would remain steadfast to Cumberland Presbyterianism all of their lives, just like John's Father and Mother raised him with in Triadelphia, W. Virginia. Praise God.

Between the years of 1823 and 1825, John and Eda Milligan would build their church at Milligan's Campground and the very first Cumberland Presbyterian Congregations in the territory were finally organized in 1825. The Congregation at Strawberry was Organized, with John and Eda's Church in Lawrence County and then the congregation in Hopewell, Independence County later the same year. The Mt. Olive Congregation

(Jehoiada Jeffery's area) was organized in 1826; Mound Prairie near Hempstead County in 1828 and the Prairie Grove congregation in Washington County, where Carnahan was living with his family at Cane Hill, in 1827.

Now, even though John Milligan, a life long Cumberland Presbyterian since his birth, was preaching at the Campground, (as A. C. Jeffery writes us, "John went to Preachin.") and having a Presbyterian Church building there that he and Eda built, there were still obligations John had to fulfill to become an "Ordained" Presbyterian Minister.

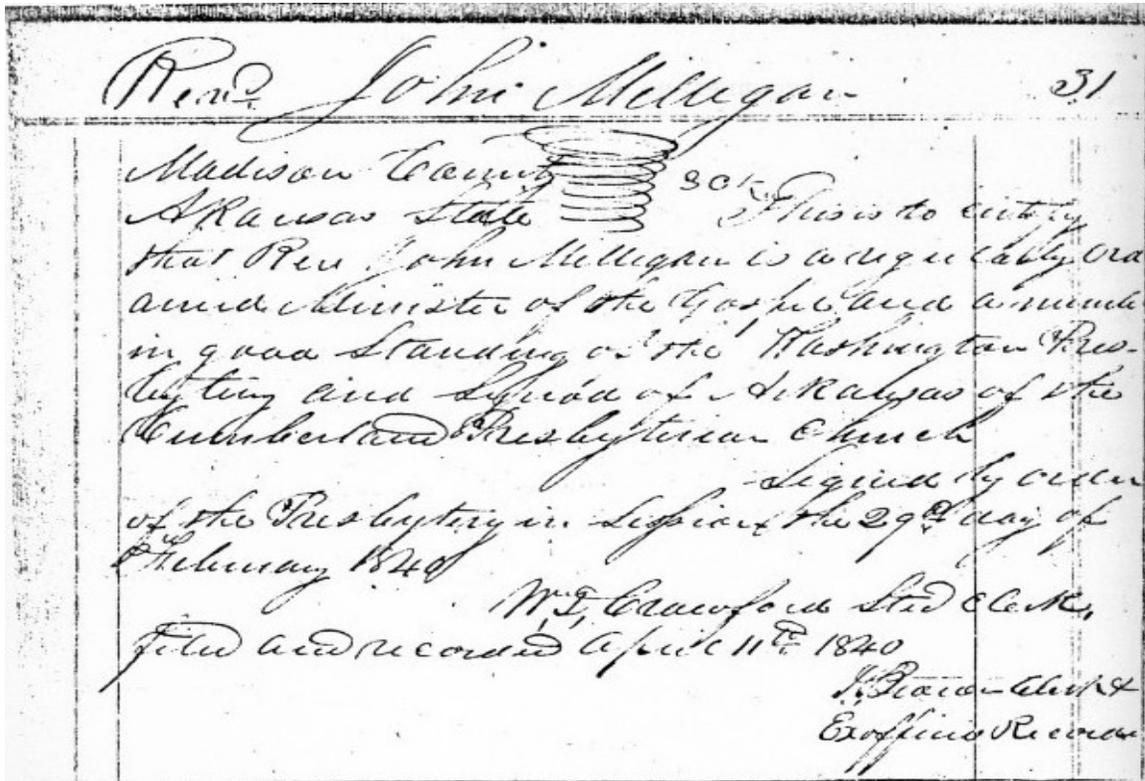
John Milligan II was called into Divine service and was received as a "Candidate" for the Ministry by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on May 23, 1826. (Actually, I believe his Divinity was given to him by a higher power during his sickness up on the White River). He received his license to Preach on March 6, 1827 and was finally "Ordained" by the White River Presbytery (Carnahan's Group) on February 29, 1840 as a "Minister of the Gospel" (MG).

As a result of these entire God given events, we can see that John Milligan began fulfilling the promises he made to God by building and then organizing (1823-1825) what would become one of the oldest if not THE Oldest Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Church building in Arkansas State that still exists today. I do not have any hard evidence of a "Personal" relationship between John Milligan and John Carnahan but at the same time, there is also no reason to believe that they didn't know who each other were either. There is also no evidence (to our knowledge) to suggest that Carnahan was even at the Craig home in Batesville in 1823 during the formation of the Cumberland Presbytery but then again we also have to ask, "why wouldn't Carnahan be there on this occasion?" After all, it was the fulfillment of his goal to the Presbytery and to God. Surely, he wouldn't have missed this event for the world.

There is a map of the early Cumberland Presbyterian churches on Carnahan's "Circuit" in the internet article that clearly shows the settlement of Strawberry as a location that has a Presbyterian Church building and an organized congregation. Still, more documents may be available from the Cumberland Presbyterian Archives currently (2008) located in Memphis, Tennessee for those of you readers who wish to pursue this exciting territorial religious history a bit deeper.

It has always been well known with his descendants, that John Milligan's Family did their part in keeping and supporting this deep rooted Christian Faith and culture in the Arkansas Territory of 1823. Their actions still serve as an excellent example for all of us today to "Hold Tight" to your faith in Christ and in the Bible and to God.

There is one last note. John Milligan's sons, A. J. Milligan and John Jr. later on in 1877, were associated with a man name of A. Craig. He was the clerk in the Strawberry Cumberland Presbyterian Church, A.J. and John Jr. were Elders. This man's father, John A. Craig, who is also listed in the Minutes of Session Document as "being present", was one of Carnahan's original 4 Minister Members. We can also see his church on the internet articles map, located further south than John's, ministered by a man named "Craig." We have A. Craig's signature on a "Minutes of Session" Document dated April 1877. John A. Craig was probably just one of John and Eda Milligan's connections to John Carnahan.



John Milligan's Ordination Certificate of February 29, 1840 ordaining him as a "Minister of the Gospel" (MG). Notice the document is signed in Madison County. This county sits next to Washington County to the East in the far Northwestern corner of Arkansas State where John Carnahan lived with his own family at Cane Hill.