

Bishop Francis John McConnell---Lucasville Legend

Francis John McConnell was born August 18, 1871, in Trinway, Ohio, the son of Israel and Nancy Jane Chalfant McConnell. While attending Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, he met Eva Hemmans Thomas. The couple was married in Delaware, Ohio, in 1897. Eva was born July 23, 1871 in Lucasville, the daughter of William M. and Rachel Morgan Thomas. Following the death of William M. Thomas in 1882, Rachel eventually moved her family to Delaware, Ohio, so her children could attend Ohio Wesleyan University. Francis and Eva graduated with Bachelor of Arts degrees; Francis went on to Theological school and became a minister in the Methodist Church.

McConnell's first church was in Massachusetts, and he served there with distinction for many years.

DePauw University had taken note of Francis during a theological case he oversaw while in Massachusetts, and they chose him to be President of the university. So the family moved to Greencastle, Indiana, in 1908.

They remained there for a short four years. The Methodist General Conference met in 1912 to elect bishops. McConnell's name had come up several times in the recent past, and he was selected to be a bishop. He and the family then moved to Denver, Colorado, where he served for eight years.

In 1920, Bishop McConnell was made Bishop of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The family moved there just as labor relations were becoming heated in the steel industry. The steel workers had been working 12-hour days, 7 days a week. McConnell was selected to head a committee to find a solution for the steel workers. Because of his report, Congress passed legislation shortening both the workday & week.

Bishop McConnell ended his career in New York City. At that time, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was governor. He asked McConnell to draw up an old age pension plan for the state of New York, as he saw the struggles of older people who had no safety net when they could no longer work. Roosevelt and McConnell were able to develop a plan to assist the elderly in the state. And when Roosevelt became President, he used that plan as a guide for establishing Social Security.

In 1941, Eva McConnell's uncle, Dr. James Newton Thomas of Lucasville, died. Dr. Thomas & his wife had no children, and they left the family farm on Fairground Road to her. Eva's grandfather, James Davis Thomas, had built the brick farmhouse in 1849, and it still stands on Fairground Road just north of Lucasville. Upon his retirement in 1944, Bishop McConnell & Eva spent their winters in New York, where they maintained an apartment in Greenwich Village. And they spent the summers on Eva's family's farm in Lucasville.

Many assumed, due to his prominence in the church & influence with politicians, that Bishop McConnell was stodgy. Stuck-up. Snooty. But this couldn't be farther from the truth. It is remembered by those close to him that McConnell was as common as an old shoe. Even at

the finest restaurants in New York City, his dish of choice was always hamburger steak and mashed potatoes.

Bishop McConnell became well known in Lucasville, often guest pastoring at the Methodist Church there. He passed away at the farmhouse on Fairground Road on August 18, 1953. His funeral was preached from that Methodist Church in Lucasville, and he was laid to rest in Lucasville Cemetery. His wife, Eva, survived until February 19, 1968, dying at age 96.

