

Miller, Robert Johnstone ^[1]

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by John B. Weaver, 1991

11 July 1758–13 May 1834

Robert Johnstone Miller, clergyman, was born in Baldovie, Scotland (near Dundee), the son of George and Margaret Bathier Miller. The family adhered to the "Jacobite" Episcopal church of Scotland, and Miller attended a classical school in Dundee in preparation for the ministry. However, in 1774 he immigrated to America at the urging of an older brother, who was a prosperous merchant in Charlestown, Mass. Miller soon enlisted on the American side in the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[2], seeing action on Long Island and in the battles of White Plains and Brandywine. After the war he settled in Virginia and preached on a Methodist circuit for one year.

In 1786 Miller moved to [Lincoln County](#) ^[3] where the climate better suited his health, but he also had connections with [Burke County](#) ^[4], which he represented in the [1788 constitutional convention](#) ^[5] as an [anti-Federalist](#) ^[6]. Having left the [Methodists](#) ^[7] because he disapproved of their separation from the [Church of England](#) ^[8], he became a lay reader at White Haven, a church that generally conformed to Anglican practice, located one mile south of Lowesville. Miller established cordial relations with Lutherans in the area, approving of the liturgical nature of their worship. Seeking a firmer ecclesiastical basis for his pastoral duties, he was ordained by a group of Lutheran ministers assembled at St. John's Lutheran Church in [Cabarrus County](#) ^[9] on 20 May 1794. He also served as a lay reader for Episcopal services.

Miller's chief religious loyalties were with the Protestant [Episcopal](#) ^[10] church, the successor to the Church of England in the United States. On 28 May 1794 he attended an Episcopal convention in Tarboro, where the Reverend [Charles Pettigrew](#) ^[11] was elected bishop of North Carolina. But Pettigrew never actually assumed that office and the Episcopal church in North Carolina remained largely unorganized until 1817. Until then, Miller served in Lutheran rather than Episcopal churches. He traveled in Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina as a missionary for the Lutheran Synod of North Carolina and preached to congregations in Burke, Iredell, Lincoln, and Rowan counties. In 1787 he had married Mary Perkins, the daughter of John Perkins of Lincoln County, and in 1806 he moved to a farm, which he named "Mary's Grove," located two miles from Lenoir. They had seven sons and three daughters.

On 1 May 1821 Miller was ordained to the priesthood at an Episcopal convention in Raleigh, and on 17 June he resigned from the Lutheran Synod of North Carolina. Thereafter until his death he worked to establish the Protestant Episcopal church on a firm basis in western North Carolina. He was buried at Mary's Grove.

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Additional Resources:

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