

4.11 - Background on the House at Conewago

In 1741, the Jesuits established the Conewago House and plantation near Little Conewago Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna River, to minister to the growing population of German immigrants in Pennsylvania. This House was located in an area whose boundaries were disputed by the Carroll family in Maryland and the proprietors of Pennsylvania. Initially, the priests of this house covered a territory that included parts of western Maryland, but after the founding of the House in Frederick, Maryland, the priests of Conewago centered their activities among German-speaking residents in Hanover and Gettysburg, just north of the Mason-Dixon line. There is evidence that enslaved people performed some labor at Conewago, though more research is needed (see, for example, this [1822 runaway advertisement](#)).

In 1831, the Jesuits of Conewago acquired a 240-acre farm known as Paradise, located near Abbottstown in York County, from Frederick Brandt, whose private chapel they had attended. They used this property to establish an additional House. Although the Jesuits considered establishing parochial schools as well at this location, they left the church in 1891, then sold the property. They continued to minister to the Paradise community until 1901.

After the 1830s, the Jesuits of Conewago worked closely with secular priests, temporal coadjutors, and nuns to expand their pastoral and educational ministry. They considered establishing a school of higher education, but ultimately concentrated upon parochial school instead. In 1835, Matthew Lekeu, S.J. erected two schoolhouses near Sacred Heart Church in Hanover. In 1854, the priests began to work with the Sisters of St. Joseph to establish a school at Holy Trinity Church in McSherrystown. The Sisters then expanded this work to help establish schools at other missions served by the Conewago House.

In 1901, the Jesuits closed the Conewago House and transferred the operations and ownership of its churches and schools to the Diocese of Harrisburg.

Bibliography

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