

225th Anniversary of Methodism in Franklin – Part 1 (1798 – 1823)

The congregation of the Franklin First United Methodist Church (FFUMC) considers our genesis to have occurred on Monday August 14, 1798 when the Methodist Episcopal (ME) missionary Rev. John Kobler (1768-1843) held the first religious service given here by an ordained minister when he preached to six or eight families in the log cabin of Captain Robert Ross in the frontier hamlet of Franklin, which had been settled in 1796 just east of the Great Miami River. A few weeks previously, the ME bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816) had sent John Kobler, then the presiding Elder of the Kentucky district, north across the Ohio River into the Northwest Territory “to form a new circuit and to plant the first principles of the Gospel” in the frontier region of the Little and Great Miami Rivers. After crossing the Ohio River, he held his first Ohio service at the home of Francis McCormick in Columbia on August 2nd. Rev. Kobler preached the first sermon in Warren County at Deerfield on the morning of August 9, 1798 then traveled north to Turtle Creek where he preached at the house of Ichabod Corwin on the same day. He continued to travel up the Little Miami River to near its source then over to and down the Mad River. After going to and preaching at Dayton, he rode down the Great Miami River and preached first at Hole’s Station (which became Miamisburg in 1818) and later that same day in Franklin. Rev. Kobler served his newly established Miami Circuit that extended from the Ohio River to north of Dayton for about nine months. By the time Rev. Kobler left Ohio in April 1799, he noted in his diary to have completed sixteen trips around the new circuit and to have brought 99 new members into the ME Society. He recorded in his diary the region to be in its almost native condition with the few settlers scattered in isolated clearings and little communities. A map of Rev. Kobler’s circuit is shown in the first figure.

The only other mention of Rev. Kobler’s visits to Franklin was published by him in the August 30, 1839

issue of the Western Christian Advocate where he wrote: “At night [circa March 28, 1799] I preached in Franklin. In time of the first prayer, a company of Indians, to the number of fifteen came to the door. When we rose up from prayer, the old chief fixed his eye on me, and pushed through the company, to give me his hand. He was much strung out with jewels in his ears, nose and breast. The round tire about his head, was indeed like the moon. His men all behaved well. When divine worship was over, the chief gave me his hand, and all retired in the utmost good order”.

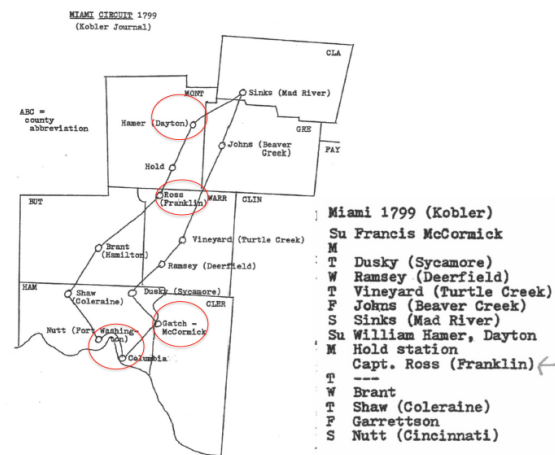


Fig. 1. The preaching stops recorded by Rev. Kobler in his 1799 diary entries while forming the Miami Circuit. Names identify owners of cabins where these first services were held.

In 1800, the Methodist conference sent no ordained Methodist preacher to the Miami Circuit. However, there were four or five local (i.e., licensed but not ordained) preachers within the circuit who went everywhere preaching the Word. They preached not only on Sundays, but also on other days. The young Rev. Lewis Hunt came to the Miami Circuit but became ill and soon died. In 1802, Elisha W. Bowman (1775-1845) was assigned to the Miami Circuit. Rev. Bowman was later sent to Louisiana where he organized a Methodist congregation at Opelousas in 1806, which be-

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(One of a regular series of reports on the people and events associated with the history and ministry of the Franklin First United Methodist Church. Robert Bowman, Historian)

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became the first Methodist Church founded west of the Mississippi River. In 1803, John Sale and Joseph Oglesby were the preachers for this large circuit. The circuit riders traveled on horseback, with their large saddlebags under them as depicted by the printing shown in Fig. 2 below. These itinerant clergy were important teachers among the early settlers. They lodged in their cabins and conversed with their families. They often held two-day meetings, and kept up a system of quarterly district meetings. Men and women would walk twenty and sometimes thirty miles to attend one of these services. At night, the men would be quartered in barns and outhouses and the women in the cabins.



Fig. 2. Image of a Methodist preacher traveling on his circuit.

As the population in Ohio grew during the early 1800s, more circuit districts were formed within the new state. Up through 1810, prominent circuiting rider ME ministers who preached in Franklin besides John Sale and Joseph Oglesby were Benjamin Lakin, John Collins, and John Sale. However, the names of the itinerant preachers from 1810 through 1835 haven't been discovered in either local or state church archives. According to the 1810 US census the population in the village of Franklin was 202 and still part of the Miami Circuit as shown in Fig. 3., which is the map of the Methodist districts in Ohio for 1810. However, within a few years, Franklin became part of the Union circuit from a splitting of the original Miami Circuit. Although circuit riders would regularly preach in

Franklin homes and fields during the early 1800s and presumably formed a local "Class" with a lay leader appointed from the male residents to hold informal services between the more or less regular stops by the circuit riders. According to the 19th century historian Henry Howe, a common church building was built in Franklin circa 1808 at the corner of Center (i.e., Main) and Second Streets for all the church groups in Franklin to share. In the year 1823, the Presbyterians, Methodists and New Lights congregations united in erecting a larger church building on a lot on the northwest corner of Third and Center (Main) streets.



Fig. 3. Ohio Circuits Before 1810: Mad River (MR); Miami (MI); White Oak (WO); Scioto (Sc); Deer Creek (DC); Delaware (De); Hockhocking (HO); Fairfield (Fr); Knox (Kn); Tuscarawas (Tu); Deerfield (DMH); West Wheeling (WW); Muskingum (Mu); Letart Falls (LF); Wills Creek (WC).

In the next segment of this series on the 225 years of the presence of Methodists in Franklin, the period from 1823 through 1848 will be covered. Circuit riders still conduct the formal religious services on more regular basis while the lay members become more active.

**2023 Homecoming & 225th
Celebration—Mark Your Calendar
Sunday, September 24th**