

225th Anniversary of Methodism in Franklin – Part 2 (1823—1848)

As the second article in this series that commemorates the 225th anniversary of forming the congregation that became the Franklin First United Methodist Church (FFUMC), the period from 1823 through 1848 will be briefly described. The founding of our congregation is dated to Monday August 14, 1798 when the Methodist Episcopal (ME) missionary Rev. John Kobler (1768-1843) held the first religious service in the frontier hamlet of Franklin, which had been settled in 1796, at the log cabin of Captain Robert Ross. Over the next 20 plus years, itinerant Methodist “circuit-rider” preachers would hold irregular services that were initially held in private home and later in a small shared community church building that had been erected circa 1808 at the corner of Center (Main) and Fourth Streets. In between visits by the circuit riders, a local Methodist “class” had been formed to hold informal worship services.

The circuit riders traveled on horseback, with their large saddlebags under them; but these seldom contained manuscript sermons; a sermon written out and read to a congregation would have been received with little favor. These itinerant clergy lodged in their cabins and conversed with their families. They often held two-day meetings, and kept up a system of quarterly meetings, which, by this time, were attended by large numbers. Men and women would walk twenty and sometimes thirty miles to attend them. At night, the men would be quartered in barns and outhouses and the women in the cabins.

The Franklin Society of Methodists was formed around 1825. Early members included James E. Thirkield, John Rossman, Fletcher Emley, Stephen Wood, Thomas Emerson, and their wives. A few years later Uriah Clutch and Daniel Harper and their wives who had migrated from New Jersey were added to the membership. Meetings were still mostly held in the homes of members for about seven years and occasionally in the shared community church building.

As the population in Ohio grew, more circuit dis-

tricts were formed from the original Miami Circuit that had been founded by Rev. Kobler in 1798. Franklin was initially part of the Union Circuit and then became part of the Lebanon Circuit. In 1836 Lebanon became a station (i.e., it had a permanent pastor at its church) and the following churches became part of the Franklin Circuit: Franklin, Middletown, Spring Meeting House, Monroe, Pisgah Meeting House, Deerfield, Mill Grove, Salem Meeting House, Dykes, Sellers, Ridgeville, Springboro, and Miamisburg. At first preaching occurred but once in four weeks, and later, once every two weeks. Every year on the Franklin Circuit camp meetings were held in the woods at which great crowds of people from miles around came to hear the Gospel message and many conversions were recorded. The people would have listened to some of the most renowned Christian speakers of their day. Among these early ministers were James B. Findley, John Brook, Thomas A. Morris, John F. Wright, A. W. Elliott, W. B. Christie, William H. Raper, Joseph Hill, Granville Moody and others of similar fame.

With the construction of the Miami-Erie canal that had started in 1825 and became operational in 1828, the population of Franklin increased rapidly over the following decades. While the 1810 U.S. census listed 202 inhabitants of his second in the village, the numbers grew to 584 and 707 in the 1830 and 1840 censuses, respectively. Starting in January 1846, Henry Howe (1816–1893) had spent over a year traveling across the state of Ohio making sketches, interviewing people, and collecting information for his book *“Historical Collections of Ohio”* that he published in 1847. The front page of his second version from 1891 is subtitled “An Encyclopedia of the State: history both general and local, geography with descriptions of its counties, cities and villages, its agricultural, manufacturing, mining, and business development, sketches of eminent and interesting characters, etc.” Howe recorded in 1846 that Franklin has 3 churches, a high school, 4 dry goods

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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 Method Church. Robert Bowman, Historian)

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and 2 grocery stores, two forwarding and commission houses on the canal.

In 1832 a dedicated Methodist Episcopal church was built east of the alley between Front (River) and Center (Main) Streets on the south side of Second Street.

In 1833, the first Sunday School classes were organized with Daniel Harper as the Superintendent.

A brick church of larger dimensions replaced the frame structure in 1836, just east of the original church, and now fronting on Center (Main) Street, which the site of the present church. This was a more pretentious building, having class-rooms and Sunday-school room in the basement and the audience room above, reached by steps in front and at the sides. A good bell was in the steeple. The church trustees had voted in 1841 to buy a new bell to weight not less than 400 pounds. The bell was purchased from David Altick of Miamisburg; it weighed 408 pounds, at a cost of \$0.40 per pound, less \$21 allowance for the old broken bell for a net price of \$141.80.

The engraving shown in Figure 1 may be the only known surviving image of this first brick Methodist church in Franklin, which clearly shows twin front entrances as well as a separate staircase located at the back of the north side. This image was drawn by Henry Howe in 1846 when he visited Franklin for his book. The building was demolished in 1859 and replaced with the current Sanctuary that was constructed and dedicated in 1860. While we cannot conclude from the drawing whether the front windows are stained glass or not, the image is suggestive that they were and were possibly installed into the 1860 church. The stained glass windows in the north and south stairwells have very different coloration and much less elaborate patterns than the Memorial windows installed in the Sanctuary during 1893. However, no documents have been found to date in the church records to verify this supposition. These windows are shown in Figure 2.

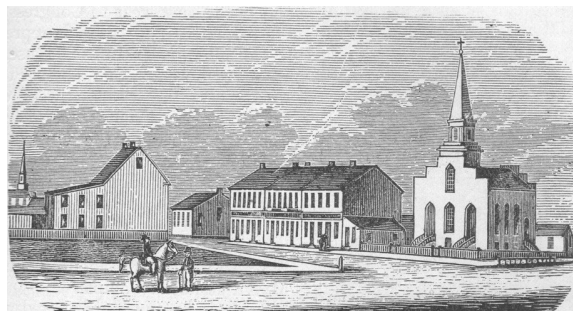
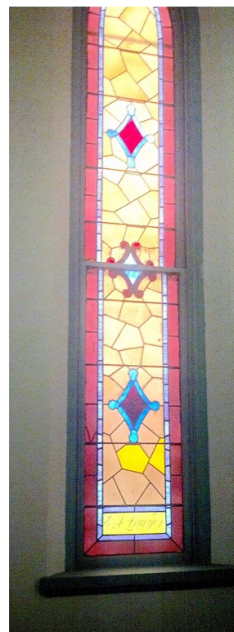


Fig. 1. A view of Franklin, Ohio as drawn by Henry Howe in 1846 showing the second Methodist Episcopal church building with its bell tower/steeple (built in 1836) on the right side, next to it on Center (Main) street is a commercial block, beyond is the single-story Baptist church (which is located on the site of a community church building built in about 1808 and shared by various local congregations including the Methodists, On the extreme left is the spire of the Presbyterian church. The small building on the extreme right is the original Franklin Methodist church built in 1832 that was subsequently converted into a 2-family private residence.

North Side Stairwell



South Side Stairwell

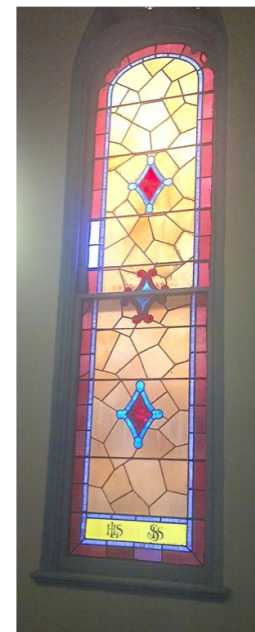


Fig. 2. Photographs of stained glass windows in main staircase in current building that are attributed to 2nd Methodist church in Franklin.

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