

Corydon United Methodist Church
Harrison County
31.1980.1

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Marker Text

Site of the first Methodist church, Corydon. Lot purchased from Isaiah Boone, son of Squire Boone, in 1826. Earlier, Corydon was a station on Silver Creek Methodist Circuit. Services were held in Corydon as early as 1816.

Report

What is correct about the text is the property information. The marker reads: "Lot purchased from Isaiah Boone, son of Squire Boone, in 1826." Census records and Isaiah Boone's marriage license confirm Isaiah was the son of Squire Boone, and several Harrison County land deeds show that the "South half of...Lot number forty three" (also the lot that the marker is currently located) was sold by Isaiah Boone and his wife to the Trustees of the Methodist Church for the purpose of building a church on September 7, 1826. For more information see William H. Rose's *Indiana Birthplace: A History of Harrison County Indiana* (1911) and Arville L. Funk's *Squire Boone in Indiana* (1974).

However, the rest of the marker has some problems. The third sentence of the marker states that "Earlier, Corydon was a station on Silver Creek Methodist Circuit." Besides not explaining the significance of the Silver Creek Circuit, no sources were located that show Corydon as part of this particular route.

Before the establishment of town churches in Indiana, Methodist preachers rode on horseback from town to town giving sermons and tending to other Ministerial duties. Every year a Minister was assigned a "circuit" or specific area of the Indiana Territory, usually named after a river or creek running through the specified territorial section, to administer religious guidance. For more information see R. Carlyle Buley's *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period 1815-1840*, Vol. II (1950), and William Warren Sweet's *Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana* (1916).

The Silver Creek circuit was one of the circuits that a selected Methodist Minister traveled, but pinpointing its exact location in Indiana is not an easy task. IHB researchers could locate only two sources that specifically mention a location of the Silver Creek circuit. The Reverend S. R. Beggs wrote in an 1868 autobiographical account of his circuit riding days that the Silver Creek circuit was formed in 1809, and that “It embraced all the settlements in the southern part of Indiana, reaching up the Ohio River to Whitewater circuit.” Unfortunately, this description is not precise enough to determine the route.

For a better understanding researchers must look at William Warren Sweet’s book, *Circuit Rider Days in Indiana* (1916). According to Sweet, the Silver Creek Circuit was organized in 1807, and consisted of an area east of Corydon. Sweet noted, in his heavily cited book, that the “circuit took in Clark’s grant.” According to John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker’s *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period* (1971), Clark’s grant was land given to “George Rogers Clark and his men for their military service in the Illinois campaigns against the British during the Revolutionary War.” Also according to Barnhart and Riker, this land was “across the Ohio River from Louisville, in the present day counties of Clark, Floyd, and Scott.” Corydon resides west of Clark’s grant in Harrison County. Furthermore, Sweet notes that as the Indiana Territory expanded, new circuits were created to cater to the incoming settlers including the Whitewater (1808) and Vincennes (1809) circuits. These circuits were respectively east and west of the Silver Creek circuit. Presumably, Corydon was in the Vincennes circuit until 1811 when the circuit was divided. The new circuit, entitled the Patoka circuit, covered the southwest corner of the territory and stretched east and encompassed Corydon.

Though the years of formation for each circuit are given by Sweet, it is hard to say concretely where the boundaries for each circuit lay in the early years of the Indiana Territory. Sweet thoroughly analyzed the General Minutes of the Yearly Regional Methodist Meetings, and even he states:

“There were very frequent changes made in the circuits and districts, and for that reason it is difficult to follow them through several years. For instance, the Wabash district appears only in the reports for 1812 and 1813, and appears again;

Patoka circuit, started in 1811, disappears the two following years and again appears in 1814.”

For this reason, IHB cannot confirm that Corydon was a stop on the “Silver Creek Methodist Circuit.”

Besides not finding a connection between the Silver Creek Circuit and Corydon, the first sentence of the text that states that the marker is placed at the “Site of the first Methodist church, Corydon” cannot be verified by primary documentation. The 1826 land deed does not allude to the future church being the first one in Corydon, and no other primary documentation including newspapers and land deeds have been located that would indicate that this was the first Methodist Church built in Corydon. It is also highly likely that Methodist services occurred in Corydon before 1816. The Indiana Territory and Corydon continued to grow before statehood in 1816. By 1813 Corydon became the Territorial seat of Government, and was the State Capital until 1825. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the Methodists would have built a church within the Territory/State Capital to establish a foothold in the Indiana Region. Sweet even highlights Corydon on an 1812 map that roughly outlines the various Methodist circuits. The map places Corydon in the Patoka circuit by that time, and a traveling Minister would surely have visited the town with an ever-growing population. Thus the final sentence on the marker, “Services were held in Corydon as early as 1816,” cannot be proved and because the Methodist records are not completely intact, it cannot be disproved. See James H. Madison’s *The Indiana Way: A State History* (1986), Barnhart and Riker’s *Indiana to 1816*, and Donald F. Carmony’s *Indiana 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (1998) for more information.