



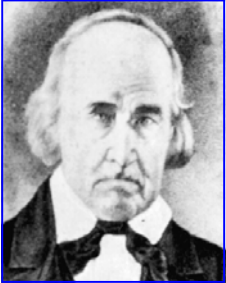
Remembering Indiana's Earliest Congregations & Gospel Preachers

The history of the churches of Christ in Indiana begins around the year 1819 in Washington and Orange counties. Existing congregations, mostly Baptist, Dunkard and New Lights began to throw off human creeds, opposed the hierarchical control, rejected the doctrine of Calvinism and began to use the Bible as the only rule of faith. They returned to a primitive form of New Testament worship, including observing the Lord's Supper every Sunday, organized with elders and practicing immersion for the remission of sins. They began calling themselves, "Churches of Christ" or "Christian Churches." The movement began in the southern counties along the Ohio River and spread northward. There was a strong influence coming from the reforming spirit out of Kentucky which had begun just a few years before.

A state convention held in 1839 reported that there were 115 congregations and more than 7,000 members state wide. By 1848, the number of congregations had grown to 295 congregations.

Church	County	Year	Preacher
Blue River	Washington	1819	John Wright
Liberty	Orange	1819	Joseph Hostetler
New Albany	Floyd	1820	Absolem Littell
Old Union	Lawrence	1821	Joseph Hostetler
Gosport	Owen	1821	James Mathes
Hogan's Creek	Jennings	1823	Beverly Vawter
Otter Creek	Jennings	1824	Beverly Vawter
Old Dutch Bethel	Owen	1825	Abraham Kern
Union	Marion	1825	Jesse Frazier
New Lisbon	Henry	1826	Elijah Martindale
Mill Creek	Washington	1826	
Bloomington	Monroe	1826	Barton W. Stone
Crawfordsville	Putman	1826	Michael Combs
Indian Creek	Lawrence	1827	
Fayetteville	Fayette	1829	John Thompson
Hope	Bartholomew	1829	Benjamin Irwin

John Wright & the Blue River Church



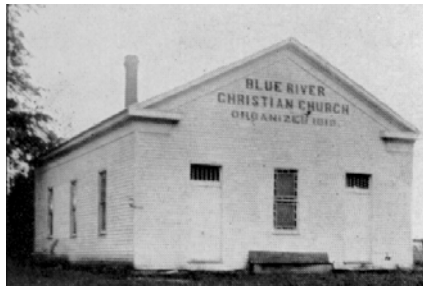
John Wright
(1785-1851)

John Wright and Indiana's first congregation are linked together. Wright was born in North Carolina, raised in Virginia, taught school in Kentucky and moved to Clark County, Indiana in 1807. He was baptized in the Ohio River in 1808 and associated with the Baptist churches. In 1810 he moved to Blue River (about four miles south of Salem, in Washington County). Along with his father, Amos, and his brother, Peter, the Wrights' were school teachers and preachers. They organized a Free Will Baptist church in the Blue River area. Within ten years

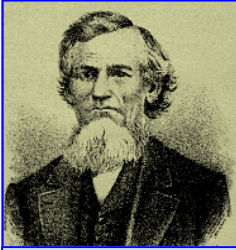
they had established ten Baptist churches and organized them in the "Blue River Association." From the very start, John Wright opposed creeds and wanted to take the Bible as the only rule of faith. He viewed creeds as heretical and schismatical. Madison Evans claims, "He was the first man in Indiana that took his position on the Bible alone" (Pioneer Preachers, pg 31).

At a meeting with the Blue River Baptist church in 1819, Wright offered a resolution in favor of discarding party names and calling themselves by some name authorized in the Scripture. "As individuals," he said, "we should be called Friends, Disciples, or Christians and as a body, should be known as the Church of Christ or the Church of God." The resolution was accepted. They were hereafter known as "the Church of Christ at Blue River." The Blue River congregation is thought to have been one of the earliest, if not the earliest, church in Indiana that was devoted to the New Testament pattern. Wright worked earnestly to restore New Testament Christianity. By the year 1821, there was scarcely a Baptist church in the area. That same year the association was dissolved and changed to a yearly meeting.

Through the efforts of Wright, many Dunkards (who believed in trine immersion) were led into the restoration of the ancient ways. Later Wright was able to lead many of the "New lights" also into the Lord's way. A meeting in 1823 at New Albany drew 3,000 souls who professed to be New Testament Christians. John T. Brown writing in Churches of Christ said "No man did more for New Testament Christianity in southern Indiana than did John Wright" (pg 218). Wright preached for forty years and at his death was buried in the Blue River cemetery.



Joseph Lemuel Martin



Joseph Lemuel
Martin
(1810-1871)

Joseph Martin, a man of humble beginnings, rose to become one of this area's most successful preachers and "the Midwestern authority" on the book of Revelation. Martin was born in Shelby County, Kentucky, on Nov 13, 1810. His family moved to Indiana when he was young and settled in Washington County. The community of Martinsburg is named after his uncle, Dr. Abner Martin. He had a very limited education and suffered from poor health throughout his life. He was baptized into the Martinsburg Baptist church. Within a few years (1833), the entire Baptist church returned to the New Testament pattern. They decided to dispense with all human creeds and take the Scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice. Joseph Martin soon became their preacher. His first attempts at preaching were so bad that the congregation encouraged him to do something else.

In the early days there were still several denominational practices that brethren used. One of them was an organized state wide missionary society. The Indiana district paid Martin \$300.00 a year to preach throughout Southern Indiana, with the stipulation that he go where no brethren were and establish congregations. Martin preached and established congregations in Corydon, Georgetown, New Albany, and little villages along the Ohio River. He often preached in Methodist church buildings and would convert many to the Lord's Way. His reputation grew so quickly, that many towns would not offer him a building to preach in. He baptized over 6,000 souls and organized so many congregations that he could not remember them all.

In July 1852 *Millennial Harbinger*, Martin reports of establishing a congregation in Bethel with 60 members. He also reported 40 being added to the church in Salem.

Martin was elected to the board of directors of the newly established Northwestern Christian University (now known as Butler University) in 1855.

In his journal for 1867, he calculated that he had traveled 3,621 miles, preached 375 times and baptized 306 souls that year.

In 1870, a series of his lectures on the book of Revelation were transcribed and put into book form. The title, "*The Voice of the Seven Thunders*" was well received and became a financial success for the publisher. It was later included in the College Press Restoration Reprint Series. Martin believed in what today we refer to as "Postmillennialism". Martin originally preached that series at Corydon, Georgetown, New Albany, Muddy Fork (Clark County) and Old Union.

James Mathes, a fellow preacher at that time described Joseph Martin as "a man of about medium size weighing perhaps over 135 pounds, and stoops a little as he walks and is of a dark complexion, with a dark, penetrating eye and a very pleasant countenance...He is not fashionable in dress or manners, and assumes nothing of the "clergyman," but rather delights in being old-fashioned and passing along unnoticed. He is quite witty and quick at repartee, which makes him a universal favorite in the family circle. As a speaker, Elder Martin is not eloquent, but earnest and pathetic, and always makes a good impression on his audience. He is a very forcible teacher and a good exhorter." (*Voice of the Seven Thunders*, pg 40).



'Uncle Lem,' as Martin was affectionately called is buried in the Martinsburg cemetery.