In doing research for a biography of James B. Finley, the early nineteenth century Ohio Methodist circuit rider, I read a diary for September-October 1810, attributed to him, which is in the Finley Papers at the Hayes Presidential Library in Fremont, Ohio. The twenty-page diary is on five by seven and one-half inch paper stitched together. The handwriting appears to be that of Finley. Three blank pages have been filled with population statistics of Ohio in 1810, Pittsburgh in 1820, and Europe in 1767. The library acquired the diary in October 1943 for $100.1 Spelling and punctuation have been retained in the form found in the original documents.

The first entry is for August 31, 1810, the end of the first full year of Finley’s preaching on the Wills Creek circuit in the Muskingum district. It reads:

Our Yearly camp-meeting began. I have received a special request from Bishop McKendree to visit the Blacks at the Sandusky Town, after consulting Bro. Sale on the subject I concluded to go. Our Meeting ended on Monday September 3. We had a good time Some were convicted and some converted—


Our Yearly Camp meeting began: At which through Brother Jesse Spurgin, I received from Bishop McKendree a special request, that I would visit some Black people that live at the Upper Sandusky (Indian) Town. After consulting Brother Sale on the subject, I concluded to go: though I was convinced that it would be at the risk of my health, if not my life. Our Camp-meeting ended on Monday, Sept. 3. we had a good time, some were convicted, and some converted. I felt an uncommon degree of effeminacy at parting with my Hockhocking friends; having suffered much among them for two years, I felt my soul much united to them, and being about to part with them it seemed almost like leaving a part of my self behind. And I have observed that when I have suffered most, I always find it the hardest to part with the people.2

1 I am grateful to Susan Cohen, Curator of the West Ohio United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University Library and to Bruce Bowlis and Nan Card at the Hayes Presidential Center Library for their assistance.


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A word-by-word and line-by-line comparison of the two diaries revealed that about ninety percent of the sentences were identical. The Lakin journal contained some phrases and sentences not contained in the Finley diary. The Finley diary had some lines not found in the Lakin journal.

In the Finley diary, the last paragraph for the entry for Saturday, September 8 described the ‘‘Winedott’’ nation as having been much reduced by sickness. This paragraph, with more detail, is found in the Lakin journal at the end of the entry for Sunday, September 9.

Another paragraph in the Lakin journal for September 9 gives an account of a council meeting between the Wyandots and the Senecas. This information is added in the Finley diary at the end of Monday, September 10 but in a different sequence.

The diaries are not an exact copy one of the other. Lakin called George Wright’s home a ‘‘cabbin’’ and Finley called it a ‘‘house.’’ Lakin wrote, ‘‘We were kindly received upon telling our business.’’ Finley wrote, ‘‘we met with a kind reception.’’ Lakin wrote, ‘‘returned again as before;’’ Finley wrote, ‘‘returned in like manner.’’ Lakin used the words ‘‘suited to their capacity,’’ ‘‘Prairie,’’ ‘‘refreshing.’’ Finley’s words were: ‘‘suited to their situation,’’ ‘‘grass,’’ ‘‘nourishing.’’

The diaries end slightly differently. Lakin recorded at the end of September 10:

About 10 Ocloc we came to Little Scioto where we made a hearty meal on the last of our Bread and Jerk, and about 3 Ocloc came to the Welsh Setelmen. I was much fatieuged, but felt revived on returning on my own people.

The Finley entry reads:

About 10 Ocloc we came to little Scioto, where we made a pretty hearty Meal on the last of our Bread and Jerk and about 3 Ocloc came to the Welsh Setelment. I felt much fatieued, but felt revived at at geting among white people once more.

The rest of Finley’s entry for this date is an account of the Wyandot council with the Senecas. Finley has an entry for Tuesday, September 11: ‘‘Rode through Delaware and came to Bro’’

I was hoping to compare the orginals of the two diaries. Sweet’s preface in his book stated that the Lakin journal was located in the University of Chicago library. An inquiry there brought the information that the original Lakin journal had been missing for over twenty years.

As I read these two diaries and compared them, several questions came to mind. The first one was, ‘‘Who was asked to go to preach to the blacks in northwest Ohio in 1810?’’ Finley never mentioned making such a trip in his Autobiography or in any of his other four books. None of the letters in the Finley Papers in the Methodist Church Archives in the Ohio Wesleyan University Library refer to the event. Finley wrote a chapter on

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4James B. Finley, ‘‘Diary,’’ Hayes Presidential Center Library.
Benjamin Lakin in his book, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, but did not refer to the 1810 journey.

I sought the answer in other volumes. Bishop McKendree was indeed in Ohio in the summer of 1810. According to his biographer, he “passed through Springfield, Ohio, attended a camp meeting on Rush Creek on the 18th of August, was at Chillicothe on the 25th; preached in Lexington, Kentucky, on the 31st.”

Bishop Francis Asbury was also in Ohio that summer. He visited Finley’s circuit in late August and early September 1810 and attended a camp meeting. He recorded in his journal, “The prospects are encouraging in Wills Creek.”

Perhaps Jesse Spurgin who went on the trip could give me a clue. Both diaries record meeting him “at Franklington” on Tuesday, September 4. Spurgin lived in Fairfield County, was in the first Methodist class formed there and spoke at one of the services for the Wyandots but little else is known about him. Others accompanying the author were “J. Lambert and Thos. Morriss” according to the Lakin journal. Finley spelled the latter name with one s. (This Morris is probably not the one who later became a Methodist bishop for he did not become a minister until 1814.) The party stayed overnight in the Welsh settlement where they persuaded Robert Perry to join them. Apparently none of these men recorded their experiences on this trip.

John Sale is mentioned in both diaries. Sale was Lakin’s Presiding Elder in 1810. Sale also was the person who in May 1809 asked James Finley to travel on his Scioto circuit before he had a license to preach. Therefore, it was natural for both men to have turned to Sale for advice when asked to embark upon a special assignment.

In terms of experience and reputation, one would expect Benjamin Lakin to have been the one selected for such a special assignment. Lakin was born in 1767 and was fourteen years older than James Finley. Lakin was admitted on trial to the Holston Annual Conference in 1795. He was a circuit rider in Kentucky and Tennessee until April 1798 when he took a location because he was about to get married and in those days the bishops preferred single men on the circuits. However, in October 1800, he attended the first meeting of the Western Conference, was ordained as Deacon and appointed to the Limestone Circuit in Kentucky.

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Lakin was sufficiently active in the early 1800's to have made a favorable impression on the bishops. For example, he preached on Sunday evening August 14, 1808, at a Deer Creek camp meeting which Bishop Asbury attended. He preached in Cincinnati on Saturday, September 3rd that year. On Tuesday, September 6, he and his wife accompanied Bishop Asbury and his assistant, Henry Boehm, when they left Cincinnati for the Indiana territory. The following year Lakin exhorted at a session of the Annual Conference in Cincinnati.9

The younger Finley was not as well known by the Methodist leadership in 1810. The young James grew up in Kentucky. His family moved to the Chillicothe area in Ohio in 1796. He married Hannah Strane on March 3, 1801. His first conversion was at the famous Cane Ridge, Kentucky revival in August 1801. His only child was born in December of that year. Although he studied to be a doctor, he preferred hunting in the Ohio forests. It was not until after his second conversion in 1808 that he felt called to the ministry. Finley became acquainted with Lakin when the latter was on the Scioto and Miami circuit in 1802.

From Friday, October 12 to Tuesday, October 16, 1810, Finley conducted a camp meeting in Belmont County in eastern Ohio.10 Had he gone to Upper Sandusky in September and had he been in Delaware on September 11, he had plenty of time to return to his circuit. However, it seems unlikely that a preacher completing his first year on a circuit would have been chosen to travel north to preach to blacks and Native Americans.

One other detail points to Lakin. In his diary for September 4 he wrote, “Left my wife at Mr. Nevils and set out for the Indian Town.” In 1810 Finley’s daughter was only eight years old. If Finley’s diary was the original, one would expect that reference would have been made to both wife and daughter. In 1809 Finley built a small cabin for his family near Barnesville and they remained there while he traveled on the circuit. Why would he then leave his wife at Mr. Nevils?

One logical explanation, then, is that at some time after 1810 Finley had access to Lakin’s journal and copied that portion of it that contained references to the Wyandot nation. From 1821 to 1827 he was missionary to the Wyandot mission. Ever since leaving the mission he had wanted to write a history of the Wyandots. His History of the Wyandott Mission at Upper Sandusky was finally published in 1840. That book, however, contains no account of the 1810 trip to the Wyandot area. Had Finley

9Henry Boehm, Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-four Years In The Ministry (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1865), 200, 260.
10James B. Finley “Diary,” James B. Finley Papers, Methodist Church Archives, Ohio Wesleyan University Library.

Wade C. Barclay, Early American Methodism, 1769-1844 (New York and Nashville: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1911), vol. II, 320n.
forgotten the Lakin journey, had he lost his copy of the original, or did he think the trip was not important enough to include in his story?

It was not unusual that he would have had another circuit rider's diary. He had a great sense of history and it was he who in 1839 proposed the creation of a Methodist historical society in Ohio. He had long wanted to write an account of early Methodism on the frontier and had been collecting materials for it for some time. On November 29, 1844, he wrote Charles Elliott who at that time was editor of the *Western Christian Advocate*. In a postscript he wrote, "I have commenced my book as you advised me and having put my hand to the plow I do not mean to look back and hope to gather some things which would have been lost. I want to get an account of many of the old preachers." He listed those who had promised to send him material and asked Elliott to put a notice in his paper requesting preachers to send him a few sheets. One of the persons he listed from whom he wanted to hear was Benjamin Lakin.11

His *Sketches of Western Methodism* was published in 1854. Benjamin Lakin retired in 1817 and his health failed in 1818 but he did not die until 1849. He had ample opportunity to share his journal with his younger colleague who, after the 1820's, was emerging as one of the leading Methodist preachers in Ohio. Therefore, if Lakin didn't send his journal to Finley earlier in his career, he could have done it in 1844.

It seems highly unlikely that Finley wrote the original and Lakin copied it for Lakin would have had no reason to do so. It is also unlikely that both men went together and recorded their diaries in consultation with each other perhaps sitting around the fire after a day of preaching.

But if one is a copy of the other, why is it not a perfect copy? The reason may be that James Finley chose to record the essence of the journal and added words to his liking, discarding words and phrases that were not essential to the narrative. He might have been interrupted at his task and when he returned to the chore, copied paragraphs out of proper sequence.

The core of the diary in terms of the trip's mission is contained in the record for Friday, September 7, 1810:

> We went into the cabbin of an old Negro that was confined with the Rhumatic Pains. He can read a little and has several Books[,] among them there is a Methodist Hymn Book: . . . We found about 10 or 12 person[s] that could speak English; among whom are two White men and one Woman. We collected them together with some Indians; we told them our intentions in coming to visit them, and sang and prayed with them. Even the Indians conformed by kneeling in time of Prayer.12

On the following day the author preached at eleven o'clock and used as his text, Luke 2.10, "And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid; for

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11 James B. Finley to Charles Elliott, November 29, 1844, Finley Papers, Methodist Church Archives, Ohio Wesleyan University Library.
behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people;” the diary notation continued, “I found it difficult to speak in language suited to their capacity. They appeared all attention. some Indians were present, they appeared very solemn.” The party went to the Indian town to preach but discovered that most of the Wyandots had gone to a council near Detroit.

They were more successful on Sunday and preached twice to the Indians. The diary records that some Indians were in tears. The following lines reveal a significant characteristic about the circuit rider’s approach to his calling:

At the close of our meeting the interpreter spoke 8 or 10 Minutes to the Indians and told them that we had been praying for them and their Council. They appeared to express satisfaction. . . . In the course of private conversation I told them our plan of traveling and preaching the gospel, and that while we were thus traveling and preaching we are entirely dependant on the Charity of our friends for support. Their countenances expressed the surprise that some of them felt at what I told them. I endeavored to give them all the information that I could which I thought might be of use to them—

The diary contains useful information about the condition of the Wyandot nation in 1810 and, therefore, was a valuable addition to the Finley Papers in the Hayes Presidential Library all of which deal with that subject. The Wyandots in the seventeenth century lived on the north side of the St. Lawrence River. French Catholic missionaries sought to convert them and were partially successful. The Wyandots were defeated by the Iroquois who attacked them in the 1640’s and forced them to flee west for many years. They eventually returned east and migrated south to the Upper Sandusky area in the Northwest Territory. Between 1803 and 1810 the Presbyterians had a mission there under the leadership of Joseph Badger. It was not until 1816 that John Stewart, a free-born mulatto who claimed to be part Indian and who had been converted to Methodism by Marcus Lindsey in Marietta, preached to the Wyandots. Therefore, this diary documents the fact that the first Methodists to preach to the Wyandots did so in 1810.

The Lakin journal contains several sentences about the Wyandots that are not contained in the Finley diary. They are:

I discovered that they are much prejudiced against the Christian name. And no wonder considering the Charractors they have been conversant with, and with them a white man and a Christian is the same. The conduct also of some Ministers that have been sent among them as Missionaries have increased their prejudices—From what I could discover the present plan of sending missionaries among them will be of little use to them. 

13Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier 1783–1840, vol. IV, 244.
After reading the last sentence, I concluded that the diary could not have been written by Finley, not only because the words are excluded in his copy but also because the point of view expressed is opposite from the one he held during his career. Finley was strongly committed to the missionary cause. His position was clear-cut. He wrote, "A man must be Christianized, or he can never be civilized. He will always be a savage till the grace of God makes his heart better, and then he will soon become civil and a good citizen."\(^{15}\)

Regardless of authorship, the diary is a valuable record of one of the earliest visits by a Methodist minister to preach to blacks and Native Americans in Ohio in the nineteenth century.