

A  
BRIEF HISTORY  
OF THE  
WESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA  
BIBLE  
CONFERENCE  
ON  
THE OCCASION  
OF ITS 75<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

JUNE 22- 29, 2003

## The Beginning



W. H. Lusk

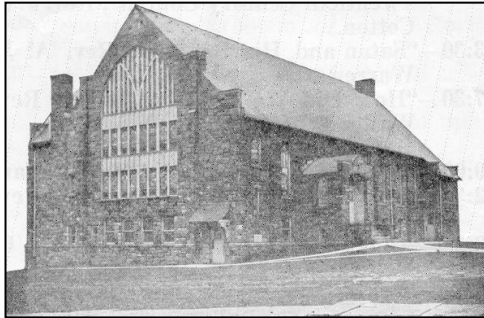
Rev. Ward H. Lusk (*pictured*), Pastor of the Upper Zion Baptist Church (now called Mt. Zion Baptist Church) of Prospect, PA was the founder of the first conference, then known as “The Etna Mineral Springs Bible Conference.” Lusk basically arranged every detail of the first conference, which was held from July 14 –21 of 1929. A board of directors was elected on July 18, and a system of financial accountability set up with that first board.

That first meeting was a smashing success. Floyd A. Childs of New Castle was the song leader. The final session featured Re. Walter H. McClure preaching “Our Lord’s Second Coming” to an estimated 1,000 people!

The second year, the name was changed to “The Western Pennsylvania Bible Conference” its name for 74 years. The first conference was held at a hotel and ballroom. There were monthly one-day winter meetings held as well during 1930 and 1931 at various churches in Butler, Grove City, Harlansburg, New Castle, North Liberty and Oil City.

The format settled down to the last week in June by 1930. The first meeting to be held in Slippery Rock was the 1930 conference held at The First Presbyterian Church (now Center Presbyterian). This was the beginning of a long relationship with that town.

## The Early 1930’s



**First Presbyterian Church, Slippery Rock  
(Now Center Presbyterian Church)**

While substance was never a concern—good, solid Bible teaching and plenty of it—the format went through some changes. The first conferences were group efforts, with three afternoon messages on Sundays, three each weekday, with a morning devotional message as well, each taught by different outstanding local preachers and laymen. In many of the early conferences there were 1 to 3 missionary speakers who gave their testimonies. There were special youth rallies, invited song leaders, soloists, special music and pianists.

The conference was supported, as it is to this day, with free-will offerings and gifts from interested parties.

Some of the outstanding names of Bible teachers and preachers over these years include: Ward Lusk, Walter McClure, George C. Miller, H. H. Van Cleve, Clarence McCartney, Charles Mohny, J. A. Galbreath, and J. G. McKnight.

## Establishing A Tradition (1935-72)

By 1935, the current practice of two speakers sharing duties for the eight-day conference was established with only a few variations over the years.

After such a rousing and well-received start, the Western Pennsylvania Bible Conference began to become established as a premier forum for teaching God’s Word.

The First Presbyterian Church of Slippery Rock (later Center Presbyterian Church) offered a regular and spacious place to meet through the 44<sup>th</sup> Conference in 1972. In addition a committed board of

directors, a solid format for teaching and preaching all led to an atmosphere of growth for the conference.

Over the ensuing years, the conference was host to the following great speakers:

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| 1935- Herbert Lockyear, Herbert Bieber   | 1952- John Hess McComb, Arthur B. Whiting                    |
| 1936- Dr. Beiderwolf, Everette Harrison  | 1953- S. Maxwell Coder, H. H. Van Cleve                      |
| 1937- Walter McClure, A. H. Stewart  | 1954- Information Not Available                              |
| 1938- Carey Thomas, Harry A. Ironsides, Albert Hughes, Missionary- Miss Maybeth Standen, China | 1955- Bob Jones, Sr., Cary N. Weisinger III, R. L. Stevenson |
| 1939- Max Reich, Herbert Lockyear  | 1956- Bob Jones, Jr., Tal McNutt                             |
| 1940- Max Reich, Rev. Ellenberger  | 1957- John D. Tate, James Carroll, R. L. Stevenson           |
| 1941- Wm. Culbertson, J. H. Remimer  | 1958- Hugh McFarrell, William Ward Ayer                      |
| 1942- Carl Armerding, Archer E. Anderson, Paul Beckwith  | 1959- J. Allen Blair, C. R. Nordland                         |
| 1943- George M. Landis, Paul Beckwith, Carl Armerding  | 1960- J. Allen Blair, John H. Gerstner                       |
| 1944- Stacy Woods, Paul Beckwith, John Hess McComb, James Stewart                              | 1961- Vance Havner, George A. Miles                          |
| 1945- Will Houghton, Ralph Stoll, John Hess McComb   | 1962- R. L. Stevenson, J. C. Macaulay                        |
| 1946- Fredrick C. Fowler, Arthur A. Wright, Archer E. Anderson                                 | 1963- Andrew Telford, P. H. Augustine                        |
| 1947- Roy L. Brown, R. A. Forrest  | 1964- Louis Paul Lehman, Lehman Strauss                      |
| 1948- Norman B. Harrison, Wm. A. Mierop, Leon Sullivan   | 1965- Gerald B. Stanton, Lehman Strauss                      |
| 1949- R. A. Forrest, Howard Ferrin   | 1966- Horace L. Fenton Jr., Howard W. Oursler                |
| 1950- Carl Armerding, Vance Havner   | 1967- Fred C. Kuehner, Lehman Strauss                        |
| 1951- Information Not Available  | 1968- Arnie Robertson, Bruce W. Dunn                         |
|  | 1969- Wm. H. Lawrence, Wm. T. Iverson                        |
|  | 1970- Ord L. Morrow, R. Paul Van Gorder                      |
|  | 1971- Douglas B. MacCorkle, J Allen Blair                    |
|  | 1972- Louis L. King, Bruce W. Dunn                           |

### **A Season of Change (1973-86)**

Following the 1972 conference, the location of the conference changed—just one block—from the Center Presbyterian Church to the Highland United Presbyterian Church. However, it marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new journey for the Western Pennsylvania Bible Conference.

The conference met at Highland from 1973 (45<sup>th</sup> conference) through 1978 (50<sup>th</sup> conference). The following speakers held forth:

- 1973- George H. Slavin, R. Paul Van Gorder
- 1974- Wilbur E. Nelson, George H. Slavin
- 1975- Wilbur E. Nelson, R. Paul Van Gorder
- 1976- Bernard Briscoe, Paul B. Smith
- 1977- Bruce W. Dunn, Gordon Gilbert Johnson
- 1978- Richard DeHann, J. Allen Blair, Lehman Strauss

Following the 1978 conference, the conference moved once again—and once again just one block—to the College Union Building of Slippery Rock College (now University) where it remained from 1979 through 1982. The speakers who taught at this facility:

- 1979- Lehman Strauss, Bruce W. Dunn
- 1980- Kenneth W. Opperman, Gordon Gilbert Johnson



**Lehman Strauss**

1981- R. L. Stevenson, R. Paul Van Gorder

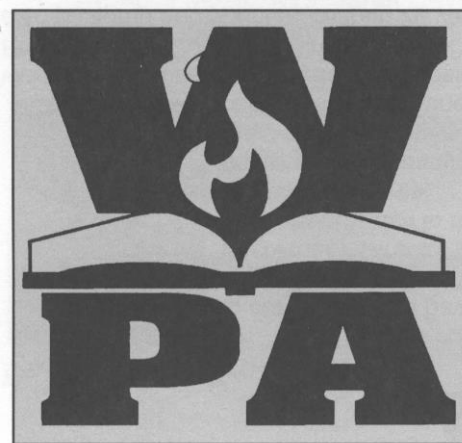
1982- Alfred Martin, David D. Allen

Once again, the conference moved to Highland United Presbyterian Church in Slippery Rock, beginning with the 55<sup>th</sup> conference in 1983, staying just one year. The 1983 speakers were: Robert H. Philips, Ralph L. Keiper. As a special note, longtime Western PA Bible Conference Director, Rev. F. Dickson Marshall, along with his daughter Janet Covert, led the music for the conference.

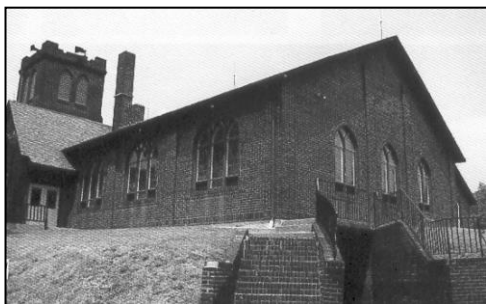
In 1984, the conference (56<sup>th</sup>) moved to the Community Alliance Church in Butler, PA with R. Paul Van Gorder and David M. Howard speaking and "Dick" Marshall leading music.

The 1985 conference (57<sup>th</sup>) was held at Calvary Presbyterian Church in downtown Butler. It was the first conference that was less than a week since the early days of the winter one-day conferences were held between summer sessions. Old friend Lehman Strauss spoke at that conference. Times were such that a discouraged board of directors considered closing down the conference.

Dr. Strauss strongly encouraged the conference to continue because it held a unique position in the Christian Community. His encouragement energized the board. Calvary hosted the 1986 conference, a full eight days with John F. Walvoord and Russell Horton.



### **Conference On the Move (1987 - ?)**



**The Presbyterian Church,  
Portersville, PA**

The Presbyterian Church of Portersville became the host of the Western Pennsylvania Bible Conference in 1987.

The following speakers have graced the Portersville pulpit:

1987- Alden A. Gannett, Ralph Davis

1988- Edwin Y. Bernard, Lehman Strauss

1989- Richard L. Ganz, Lewis H. Worrada, Jr.

1990- Lehman Strauss, Jack Murray

1991- Martin DeHaan, R. Paul Van Gorder

1992- Lehman Strauss, Bruce W. Dunn

1993- R. L. Stevenson, Lud Golz

1994- Lehman Strauss, Richard L. Ganz

1995 Woodrow Kroll, F. Gerald Kroll

1996- Lehman Strauss, Norman Sweeting

1997- Norman Sweeting, Ralph Davis

1998- Woodrow Kroll, F. Gerald Kroll

1999- Ralph Davis, Dennis Magary

2000- R. Paul Van Gorder, Tom V. Taylor

2001- George Sweeting, James Ayers

2002- Tom V. Taylor, Gregory S. Gertz

2003- Woodrow Kroll, F. Gerald Kroll