



Allegheny West Conference headquarters building

Photo courtesy of Allegheny West Conference.

Allegheny West Conference

BENIA JENNINGS

Benia Jennings is the Multimedia Ministry coordinator for the Allegheny West Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. A native of the Bahamas, she has served as a religious broadcaster and TV host for the North Bahamas Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Freeport, Grand Bahama.

Allegheny West Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Columbia Union Conference.

Territory: Regional constituency in Ohio and West Virginia; Allegany and Garrett Counties in Maryland; that portion of Pennsylvania west of and including Potter, Clinton, Centre, Mifflin, Huntingdon, and Fulton Counties; and that portion of Virginia west of and including Clarke (except the town of Berryville), Warren, Rappahannock,

Madison, Greene, Albemarle, Fluvanna, Cumberland, Prince Edward, Lunenburg, and Mecklenburg Counties, and the city of Gordonsville in Orange County.

Statistics (June 30, 2019): Churches, 58; membership, 17,055.¹

Organizational History

The Allegheny West Conference is one of two conferences formed by the division of the Allegheny Conference in 1966. The increasing size of the conference's membership, which was approaching 12,000 in 74 congregations by 1966, and the expanse of its territory were the reasons for the division, voted by the conference constituency on May 1, 1966 in a meeting held at the Berea Temple Church in Baltimore, Maryland. In response to that action, a special committee, comprised of delegates from both the eastern and western section of the conference, met on July 26 and October 9 to form a plan of implementation.²

Cree Sandefur, president of the Columbia Union, chaired the special committee and T.R. Gardner served as secretary. The members were: Charles Anderson, Nelson Bliss, Gilbert Boyd, Paul Cantrell, W. L. Cheatham, L. G. Cox, William Davis, C. M. Hickerson, Cornelius Jones, J. H. Lester, Osborne McLain, L. R. Palmer, L. R. Preston, E. A. Robertson, Henry Shelton, H. D. Singleton, J. F. Street, W. A. Thompson, C. B. Tivy, Ernest Waller, E. F. Willett, U. S. Willis, and Neal C. Wilson. Edgar Bradley, A. N. Brogden, C. L. Brooks, and W. L. DeShay attended as guests.³

This committee voted that the constituency meeting for the western area of the Allegheny Conference be held Sunday, November 13, in Columbus, Ohio. The churches included in the western section were specified as: Danville, VA; Emlenton, PA; Erie, PA; Lynchburg, VA; Martinsville, VA; Pittsburgh, PA; Roanoke, VA; Titusville, PA; Uniontown, PA; Gordonsville, VA.; and all churches of the Allegheny Conference in the states of Ohio and West Virginia. Each church was entitled to one delegate plus an additional delegate for each 20 members. General Conference and Columbia Union representatives, and all Allegheny Conference workers who were members of a western section church and held ministerial credentials, a ministerial license, or a missionary license were delegates at large.⁴

Meeting at Columbus Junior Academy (later named Eastwood Junior Academy) on Napoleon Avenue, the delegates elected Walter Starks as the conference's first president and Aaron Brogden as secretary-treasurer. Allegheny West Conference began operation on January 1, 1967 with a membership of 4,398 and 28 churches.⁵

The conference officers held their first meeting in Pastor James Washington's study in the Ephesus Church on Fifth Avenue in Columbus. With Washington's assistance a building to house the conference offices was located at 1339 East Broad Street and purchased for \$68,000. The conference moved in on February 6, 1967. This building served for more than fifty years until the conference moved its headquarters to the present location at 1080 Kingsmill Parkway in Columbus in March 2018.⁶

Schools

The Allegheny West Conference operates two schools from kindergarten through eighth-grade: Ramah Junior Academy and Columbus Adventist Academy.

In 1925, members of the Second Seventh-day Adventist Church on Cedar Avenue at 71st street in Cleveland, Ohio, under the leadership of their pastor, J.E. Cox, Sr., established "The Colored Academy" to provide Christian education for their children.⁷ On May 18, 1939, the first recorded commencement exercise of the senior class was held at the Phillis Wheatly Building on Cedar Avenue. This class along with Elder Cox officially named the school Ramah Academy under the leadership of the school's principal, Mrs. Betty Jackson.

In 1951, the Second Seventh-day Adventist Church relocated to 737 E. 105th Street in Cleveland and became the Glenville Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ramah Academy was subsequently moved and occupied several classrooms in the church building. However, members soon realized that the school had outgrown the limited space, and land was purchased at 4770 Lee Road. In 1957, under the leadership of R.T. Hudson, a permanent school building was constructed. In the 1960s, continued growth again made further expansion necessary. Construction of several additional classrooms was completed in 1970 under the leadership of H.L. Cleveland.⁸ Upon meeting the requirements for elementary schools as outlined by the State of Ohio Department of Education, Ramah Academy received its official charter in 1976 with Ronald C. Williams as principal.

Under the leadership of its pastor, Dr. William T. Cox, the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church in Columbus voted to reestablish the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Elementary School which had closed in 1988. The school, renamed Columbus Adventist Academy, officially re-opened in 2002 and moved to its present location at 3650 Sunbury Road in 2003.

Campground

Allegheny West held its annual camp meetings at the Ohio Conference campground for several years while seeking to acquire a property of its own. On March 29, 1968, the conference completed negotiations for the purchase of a twenty-four-acre camp meeting site located two miles north of Mt. Gilead, Ohio, on US Highway 42. However, this site was sold shortly thereafter. A new site was purchased in Thornville, Ohio in 1988 under the leadership of conference president Willie J. Lewis. The Allegheny West Conference campgrounds are used for the conference's yearly camp meetings, young adult retreats, and annual Camp Adena summer camp, as well as a variety of other events.

Outlook

The Allegheny West Conference continues to see consistent growth through the increase of new congregations along with the addition of new church plants, the development of Adventist Christian educational programs, camp meetings, retreats, and other activities.

Presidents

Walter M. Starks (1967-1968); Donald B. Simons (1968-1972); Harold L. Cleveland, Sr. (1972-1983); Henry M. Wright (1983-1987); Willie J. Lewis (1987-2001); Hector Mouzon, interim (April 30, 2001 – May 27, 2001) James. L. Lewis (2001-2008); Frederick Russell (2008-2011); William T. Cox (2011-).

Headquarters: 1080 Kingsmill Parkway, Columbus, Ohio 43229-1100.

SOURCES

"Allegheny West Conference History." Accessed August 13, 2020, <https://awconf.org/allegheny-west-conference-history/>.

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"Constituency Meetings Held." *Columbia Union Visitor*, June 2, 1966.

"Glenville Cleveland Church Completes Second Phase of Academy Expansion." *North American Informant*, July-August 1971.

"Legal Notices." *Columbia Union Visitor*, November 3, 1966.

Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook. "Allegheny West Conference." Accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=15428>.

NOTES

1. Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook, "Allegheny West Conference," accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=15428>.
2. "Allegheny West Conference History," accessed August 13, 2020, <https://awconf.org/allegheny-west-conference-history/>; "Constituency Meeting Scheduled," *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 24, 1966, 7; "Constituency Meetings Held," *Columbia Union Visitor*, June 2, 1966, 5.
3. "Allegheny West Conference History."
4. "Legal Notices," *Columbia Union Visitor*, November 3, 1966, 18.

5. "Allegheny West Conference History."

6. Ibid.

7. "7th-day Adventists Open Drive for Expansion Fund," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 16, 1939, 8.

8. "Glenville Cleveland Church Completes Second Phase of Academy Expansion," *North American Informant*, July-August 1971, 1.

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