



Rev. Lela McConnell (1884-1970), a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania, nurtured in the Honey Brook Methodist Episcopal Church, and who became a pioneer woman preacher, missionary, educator and holiness advocate.

# *Hand Maiden from Honey Brook: The Life and Ministry of Rev. Lela McConnell*

by Fredrick Marz (2009)

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As a child on the family farm in Honey Brook, Lela McConnell had a reoccurring vision “of having charge of a lot of people that were helping me in some work. I was telling them what to do and directing them in various duties.” It was a vision that was always with her, and when she relayed it to her sisters they ridiculed her.<sup>1</sup> After that day, young Lela never again mentioned it to them, but with time it became obvious to her two sisters that the vision had been an accurate prophesy.

By 1962, Lela McConnell, and the dedicated people she directed, had realized the creation of a high school, a Bible college, a radio station, and the Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association, which included twenty-nine churches and the supervision of 129 workers who either worked in the schools or shepherded churches that served the spiritual and educational needs in the mountain region of Eastern Kentucky.<sup>2</sup> In her network of preachers, there were many periods when the majority were women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lela McConnell, *Faith Victorious in the Kentucky Mountains: the Story of Twenty-Two Years of Spirit Filled Ministry* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1946), 37.

<sup>2</sup>Susie Stanley, *Holy Boldness* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 2002), 169, 171.

<sup>3</sup>Jennifer Woodruff Tait, “I Received My Commission from Him, Brother – How Women Preachers Built up the Holiness Movement,” in *Christian History & Biography*, Issue 82 (September 2004), 38.

Lela McConnell was born June 1, 1884, and grew up in Chester County, Pennsylvania, on a farm in Honey Brook with six brothers and sisters. After her brothers left the farm, she found herself in charge of the horses as a girl of thirteen. Yet she was quite capable of riding without saddle or bridle, and up to the task of plowing the lower ten acres herself. Though the work was difficult, she noted that it prepared her well for her future work in Kentucky.<sup>4</sup> Life was not easy in those days, and especially in her family's situation. Her father passed away at the age of fifty-two, when Lela was only seventeen. He had been saved at a revival that was held at Honey Brook Methodist Episcopal Church seven years earlier, and she was sure he had received the "second blessing" of sanctification fifteen hours before his passing from this world.<sup>5</sup>

Her mother, Rebekah Martha (Eshelman) McConnell was a saintly woman who prayed devoutly for her husband's salvation (prior to that great day in 1894), and led Sunday afternoon religious services in her parlor after retuning from the church service at Honey Brook ME Church. There in her parlor she would welcome friends and neighbors, and young Lela would forever be impressed. Reflecting on those meetings, she later wrote, "I recall so vividly how the rich blessing of the Lord was poured out upon the people as they sang and praised God."<sup>6</sup> Her mother had been saved as a child "at a Methodist altar" and gave Lela "a good start."<sup>7</sup> Rebekah McConnell was a determined woman, something that would also be a significant trait in Lela's character.

Rebekah attended West Chester State Normal School (now West Chester State University), and had served as a school teacher for

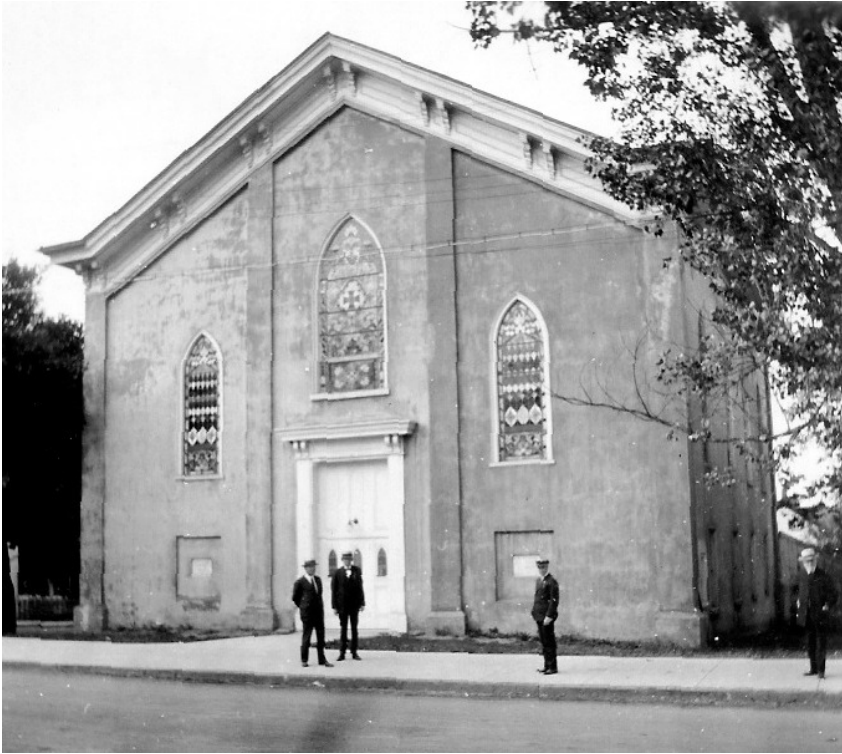
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<sup>4</sup>Lela McConnell, *The Pauline Mission in the Kentucky Mountains – Or a Brief Account of the Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1942), 14. Today's McConnell Office Park, located along Route 322 northwest of Honey Brook proper, occupies the site of the family farm of Lela's childhood. The farmhouse in which she was raised still stands, and today houses Chester County municipal offices.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 10. The Methodist congregation in town (then known as Waynesburg) was organized in 1823 by Rev. Henry Boehm. The next year a meeting house was erected at the corner of Chestnut and Water Streets, where the church cemetery and an historical marker may be found today. A new church building was erected on Horseshoe Pike (today's Route 322) in 1843, which, though renovated and expanded over the years, still serves as the home of the congregation today. See "Historical Sketch of the Honey Brook Methodist Episcopal Church" in *Feast of Dedication, 1916* (Booklet); and Harold C. Koch, *The Leaven of the Kingdom: The Amazing Growth of Methodism in the Philadelphia Conference, 1767-1968* ([Ephrata: Science Press]: 1983); 12.

<sup>6</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 17.

<sup>7</sup>Lela McConnell. *The Pauline Ministry*, 7.



The Honey Brook Methodist Episcopal Church, circa 1900.

five years. Realizing the great need for a high school for the youth in the country, she was instrumental in having Central High School built, not far from the family home in Honey Brook. McConnell tells of her mother walking many miles, when a horse was not available, seeking signatures for a petition for the school's construction.<sup>8</sup> It was through that kind of determination that the school was built, and that same trait would be a trademark of Lela McConnell as she went forward in the work of the Lord in her later efforts building churches and schools.

The revivals held at or organized by the Honey Brook Methodist Episcopal Church were amazing spiritual events, where many would find salvation. Lela recounts that her father was converted at a revival held in 1894 at the Poplar Grove School House, led by Pastor Nicholas McComas, and noted that "scores of heads of families, and young people

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<sup>8</sup>McConnell. *Pauline Ministry*, 15.

joined that church” as a result of the revival.<sup>9</sup> Lela also describes how she was saved as a teenager during one held in January 1899:

Miss Amy V. Plank, now Mrs. Dr. Hoffman, who had been my school teacher, came and spoke to me. She said, “Lela, wouldn’t you like to be a Christian?” I began to cry and she led me to the altar, and there I confessed my sins and prayed for the Lord to forgive me... After seeking for some time, the Lord so sweetly met my soul and forgave me all my sins. I was happy in Him. The fear of dropping into Hell during a thunder storm was gone... I now sang from my heart with mother and father, “Oh happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away.”<sup>10</sup>

Pastor W. Q. Bennett was the pastor at Honey Brook when Lela was saved, and immediately assigned her to the Tuesday night class meeting, which quickly became her favorite service of the church. As she spiritually blossomed for the Lord, Pastor Bennett began calling on her to lead in prayer at public meetings, a practice she described as “giving her courage and helping her grow in grace,” while building her confidence in speaking publicly.<sup>11</sup> Until she left home, she was enrolled and active in the Bible studies at the church, and often attended revivals held within five miles of her home, harnessing up the horse herself, if she

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<sup>9</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 9. Rev. Nicholas D. McComas (1835-1909) was a Maryland native, and joined the Philadelphia Conference in 1862, serving in ministry for 40 years until his retirement in 1902. *Philadelphia Conference Minutes* (1909), 89-90. Though McConnell says the revival under his leadership occurred in 1895, conference records indicate that McComas only served one year as pastor of Honeybrook, from 1893 to 1894.

<sup>10</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 12-13; *Faith Victorious*, 18. The dates here differ from those in Lela’s writings, where she says she was converted at thirteen in a revival held in January 1898, during the pastorate of Rev. W. Q. Bennett. However, conference and local church records confirm that Bennett was not appointed to Honey Brook until March 1898. Further, Honey Brook records do not list Lela among the 31 probationary members who joined after the January 1898 revival. After another revival held a year later, Lela is entered as a probationary member on February 5, 1899, baptized by Rev. Bennett on March 5, 1899, and received into full membership in August 1899. *Honey Brook ME Church Record Book, 1886-1898*, and *Honey Brook ME Church Record Book, 1898-1927*; in the possession of the Honey Brook United Methodist Church.

<sup>11</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 14. Philadelphia native Rev. William Q. Bennett (1865-1919), who first encouraged Lela to use her gifts, began his ministry with the St. Louis Conference, before returning east in 1894. He was remembered as “honored and beloved by his brethren and many friends for his admirable powers, for his many accomplishments, for his large usefulness, for the wisdom of his counsels, the grace of his engaging courtesy, the unflinching fidelity of his friendship, and, most of all, for the beauty and strength of his Christian faith.” *Philadelphia Conference Minutes* (1920), 775-776.

found no one to attend with her, and returning home alone to put the buggy and horse away. At Honey Brook, she would help around the church where and whenever she could, “inviting sinners to the altar,” or praying and giving her testimony at meetings.<sup>12</sup> Her mother’s strong faith and the support and the powerful evangelism at Honey Brook ME Church encouraged Lela to do more for the Lord.

After graduating high school, Lela began teaching at a Quaker school in Chester County, Pennsylvania; having had teacher’s training at West Chester Normal School, Rebekah McConnell had prepared Lela for her new venture. About four years after Lela’s initial experience in teaching, she enrolled in Keystone Normal School, (now Kutztown University). While there, she had a greater hunger for the Lord, and mentioned that in a letter to a friend, who pointed her to the National Holiness Camp Meeting at Delanco, New Jersey. At the close of the semester, she went to the Delanco meeting being led by Rev. Dr. G. W. Ridout. It was at that meeting, on July 4, 1904, that Lela McConnell would “be sanctified wholly.”<sup>13</sup> Following her holiness experience, she could not get enough holiness literature, and read what ever she could find, subscribing to the *Christian Standard*, following the testimonies from the Friday holiness meetings held at 18th and Arch Streets in Philadelphia, and reading the works of Phoebe and Walter Palmer, as well as other great holiness teachers.<sup>14</sup> It was during that year that Lela says she joined the holiness movement, and from then on kept in touch with holiness camps and conventions.

Following graduation from Keystone, she was hired to teach school in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where she worked until the hunger for the Lord became too great. In the four years she taught in Atlantic City, she became involved in the Central Methodist Episcopal Church,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 15.

<sup>13</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 19.

<sup>14</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 19-20.

<sup>15</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 25. Honey Brook church records show Lela transferred membership to the Atlantic City church in October 1911. Central ME Church erected its first building on Pacific Avenue in 1896. A gothic church was erected on the site and dedicated in 1924. In the 1960s four Atlantic City churches merged to create the Calvary United Methodist Church, and moved into the old Central building; Calvary later merged with the Northfield UMC on the mainland. Central’s old building today is the home of the Asbury UMC, a former Delaware Conference church. Frank Stanger Bateman, *The Methodist Trail in New Jersey* (1961), 120; phone conversation with Robert Steelman, Greater New Jersey Conference Historian, February 2, 2009.

in later years as the pastor's assistant. As her hunger to serve the Lord grew, she relayed those urgings to her pastor who encouraged her to move in that direction. She was accepted into the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, an interdenominational school dedicated to holiness principles, founded by Mrs. Iva Durham Vennard, a Methodist Deaconess.<sup>16</sup> Two hurdles, however, stood before her. Her mother was at an age where it would be difficult for her to be alone, and one sister taught away from the area, while the other was about to get married.<sup>17</sup> The second concern involved finance. She had just paid her loans for Keystone, and had less than thirty dollars to her name.

God opened the doors and answered her prayers in remarkable ways. The school board of Central High School offered her sister a teaching job that enabled her to move close to her mother. Lela also was assisted financially by the Honey Brook and Central Methodist Episcopal Churches. In addition, there was additional private support from people like Mrs. Queen, who would continue to be supportive of Lela's ministry over the years.<sup>18</sup>

At the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, where she began studies in 1913, she was exposed to a number of remarkable individuals dedicated to God's work. Nationally known author, editor and holiness advocate Joseph H. Smith would speak at her school at least two times a year.<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Iva Vennard, the founder of the school, had a great influence upon her, and she also learned much about mission from Rev. George

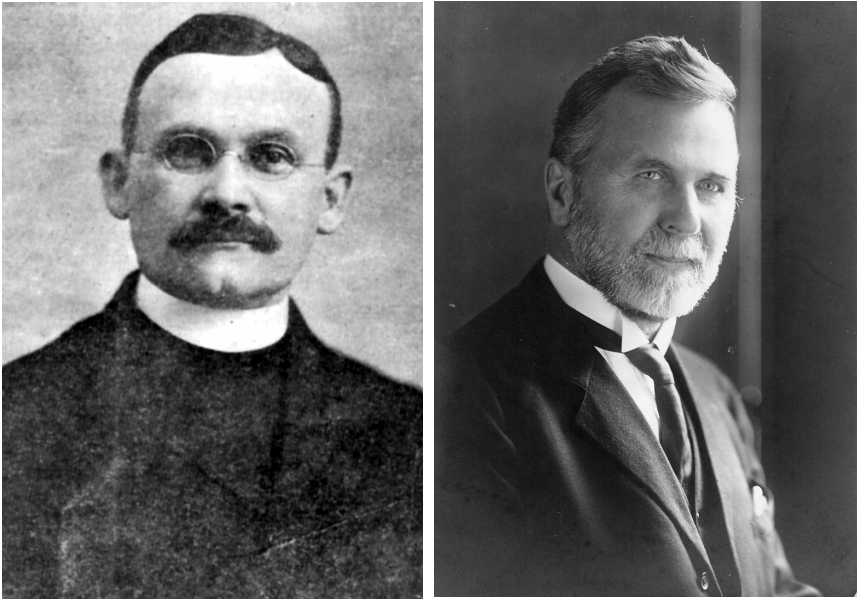
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<sup>16</sup>The Chicago Evangelistic Institute (CEI) was founded in 1910 by Iva Vennard (1871-1945), an outgrowth of an earlier school she had established in St. Louis, Missouri in 1902 under Methodist Church auspices, but which ran afoul of conference leaders because of its holiness teachings. In the 1950s, CEI moved to University Park, Iowa and was renamed Vennard College. See Mary Ella Bowie, *Alabaster and Spikenard; the Life of Iva Durham Vennard, D.D.* (Chicago: CEI, 1946); and Merne A. Harris, *The Torch Goeth Onward: Tested but Triumphant, Vennard College, University Park, Iowa* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1985). Financial insolvency caused Vennard College to close its doors for the last time in the fall of 2008.

<sup>17</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 25.

<sup>18</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 24.

<sup>19</sup>Rev. Joseph H. Smith (1855-1946) was admitted to the Philadelphia Conference in 1882, and spent only a few years in pastoral ministry before embarking full-time as an evangelist, holiness author and editor. He helped Iva Vennard found Chicago Evangelistic Institute in 1910, and was a part-time instructor on its faculty from 1913 to near the end of his life. A detailed biography and analysis of his theology may be found in Delbert R. Rose, *Vital Holiness: A Theology of Christian Experience*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975); see also *Philadelphia Conference Minutes* (1946), 465-466.



Left: Rev. William Q. Bennett, the pastor of Honey Brook Methodist Church, who first gave Lela leadership roles at her home church. Right: Rev. Joseph H. Smith, another Philadelphia Conference member and nationally known holiness leader, who taught Lela at the Chicago Evangelistic Institute.

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Bennard, the author of the hymn *The Old Rugged Cross*.<sup>20</sup> Following graduation from Chicago, she moved to Alberta, Canada, and helped to found a Bible Institute where she was appointed principal, a position she held for two years. Ill health then prompted her to move back home to Honey Brook to consider how best she could be used by the Lord. After nine weeks of recuperation, she returned to Atlantic City, where she began work as a pastoral assistant. That work would continue there, and in Philadelphia and Bristol, for two years. In one six-week period she made over 1,800 calls for one pastor, and recalled, “The pastor urged me to get the job done so he could send a good report to conference. He wanted funds with which to enlarge the church. I was not to take time to pray in the homes. However, this was just after World War I when

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<sup>20</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 25.



many hearts were burdened over the loss of sons or fathers, so I often took time to pray.”<sup>21</sup> She also mentions another incident that did not reflect favorably in her mind on the Methodist Church:

The Board of Church Extension gave me the choice of two other jobs. They explained that since these were in a foreign-section of the city, I must be very careful about telling folk about Jesus. My heart sank with grief. I resigned and began holding revival meetings. In evangelism I could be free to preach and teach the true doctrine of sanctification.<sup>22</sup>

After her resignation, in the years 1919-1922, Lela was heavily involved in successful evangelism, leading many to Christ during that period.<sup>23</sup> Even with that success, she still felt called to move on to Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. While there, she joined a number of organizations, but the one that would most change her life was the Mountain Missionary Society. The Society took her into the Kentucky Mountains, and exposed her to the suffering that lay along the more than three thousand creeks and rivers of the region, and she realized that this was where she had been called. In the autobiographical section of her book, *The Pauline Ministry in the Kentucky Mountains*, Lela describes how she realized her life’s calling:

As chaplain of the Senior Class, I often asked folk to pray for God to call some of the seniors to the mountains of Kentucky. This needy home field was less than 100 miles east of Wilmore. Finally, one of them said, Miss McConnell, we feel it is almost a joke for you to be making this request. We feel God is calling you. I admitted He had been talking to me about it. When I entered Asbury, I had no other thought but that I would continue my evangelistic work all over the United States. After a struggle of about six weeks I said, “Yes, Lord, I’ll go.” The power of God flooded my willing heart, assuring me that I was His chosen vessel. Indescribable joy and peace swept over my soul. He was calling me to take the message of holiness to the precious people in the rural sections of the mountains. When I testified to it, God bore witness to people in Asbury that He was unmistakably calling me to this work. I was to give my life in full-time service for Him in Eastern Kentucky. This was February 1924. Immediately I had visions of churches and schools in the

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<sup>21</sup>McConnell, *Pauline Ministry*, 28.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>23</sup>McConnell. *Faith Victorious*, 26.

far back sections of the mountains. I said, "So this is what the Lord has been preparing me for all the years of my life."<sup>24</sup>

She was able to motivate other students and even faculty as she made plans to embrace the call. At graduation ceremonies, Dr. Henry Clay Morrison handed her diploma to her and remarked: "I give this diploma to the General of the Kentucky Mountains."<sup>25</sup>

On September 21, 1924, McConnell was ordained a local deacon by Bishop Theodore Henderson at the annual session of the Kentucky Conference, in the First ME Church of Ashland, Kentucky.<sup>26</sup> The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church only that year had passed new rules to allow women to be ordained, though they still could not serve as appointed pastors or enjoy full clergy rights. Two years later, at the Kentucky Conference session held in Maysville, on October 3, 1926, Lela was ordained a local elder.<sup>27</sup>

Lela McConnell was forty years old when, as a recent graduate of Asbury, she journeyed into the mountains of Eastern Kentucky and began her spiritual battle to win souls. When she arrived, many warned her of the dangers, one doctor telling her that there was a murder a week in the back woods.<sup>28</sup> Before she passed away in 1970, she had tamed "Bloody Breathitt County," as it had been called, into a place of hope. Within a year of her arrival, the foundations of the first high school,

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<sup>24</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 37.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>26</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 36; *Kentucky Conference Minutes* (1924), 28, 37. At this time, some fifteen years before the merger of 1939 which reunited the northern and southern branches of Methodism, there were two Kentucky Conferences, one belonging to the northern ME Church (in which Lela was ordained), the other to the ME Church, South.

<sup>27</sup>*Kentucky Conference Minutes* (1926), 182, 187; perhaps appropriately for Lela's future ministry, the ordination service was held in the unusual venue of a Presbyterian church. From the early days of American Methodism, there was a distinction between *local* elders and *traveling* elders. The latter were members of the itinerant ministry, full members of the annual conference, and subject to annual appointment by the bishop. Local elders were members of local churches who supported themselves through other employment, but who could be ordained, administer the sacraments and assist the appointed clergy in their local context. While the Methodist Episcopal Church first allowed women to be ordained in a local capacity in 1924, the General Conference would not authorize full clergy rights for women until 1956. The practice of ordaining local elders (or deacons) only ended in 1976.

<sup>28</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 34.

called Mount Carmel, would be poured.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning she would travel with Mary Vandiver and perhaps another Asbury student to preach about salvation and to respond to needs. From the Mountain Missionary Society soon evolved the Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association (KMHA), which acknowledged Lela as its founder. As the Association grew, and as the school stations were staffed with “sanctified teachers,” the children in the classrooms often would lead their parents to Christ. Recognizing the need to train Christian workers for the Association’s work, Lela founded the Kentucky Mountain Bible Institute (KMBI) in 1931, just a few miles from the Mount Carmel school; this later became the Kentucky Mountain Bible College (KMBC).

In interviewing a former out station and current Kentucky Mountain Bible College teacher, Ms. Henrietta Griffith, I was able to obtain a better understanding of the growth of the Holiness Association. Ms. Griffith started with the Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association in 1949, teaching elementary school in one of the out stations (“out station” is now a dated term, as most are churches now). She originally was from New Jersey, and heard about Lela McConnell’s work while at Asbury College. Henrietta finished up at Asbury Seminary in the early 1950s and began working at Kentucky Mountain Bible College in 1951, where she has remained ever since. Having recently turned eighty-five, she now teaches just one class.

She explained that the payment arrangements only guaranteed room and meals, and that all else was left to faith, believing that God would provide all material needs. Susie Stanley describes the “faith line” concept in her book,<sup>30</sup> affirming what Ms. Griffith detailed: “Ms. McConnell would never ask for money but would rely entirely on unsolicited funds.” In explaining the planting of churches, Ms. Griffith stated that as Ms. McConnell became known through her work and revivals, more and more would want to know about Jesus. Initially, a request would be made to hear Ms. McConnell, or someone from KMHA to preach, and a schoolhouse in a community might be used. If that community desired a station, a home would be donated or built for a parsonage; until a church could be built, the living room or parlor would be used for services. As the stations became established, a school could be added. KMHA had a long-established relationship with Asbury College, and the World Gospel Mission. “Ms. McConnell had early on

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<sup>29</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 47.

<sup>30</sup>Stanley, *Holy Boldness*, 171.



A 1936 photo of Lela (back row, third from right) leading a parsonage meeting, often the precursor to the establishment of a church. The two women sitting on the step are Isabel Lord and Ruth Reese, members of Honey Brook Methodist Church, who traveled to Kentucky for a two-week mission trip to work with Lela's organization. *(Photo courtesy of the Honey Brook United Methodist Church)*

joined the National Holiness Association, and the National Holiness Mission Association was part of that organization" (now called World Gospel Mission). Missionaries coming out of Asbury could gain experience by going into the mission field of the KMHA, before they went into the foreign mission field. Married couples with children often sent their children to KMHA schools, including Mount Carmel.<sup>31</sup>

I had the pleasure of interviewing Mrs. Alice Fisher and her husband Dr. Wilfred Fisher. They were students at Asbury College in 1939 when Lela came there to speak, and to request the assistance of students to teach at KMBI. There was a need for teachers because of a flood in July 1939 that had taken away much of the school. Tragically, there also had been loss of life, including teachers and students, which resulted in the great need for teachers. Through her determination and

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<sup>31</sup>Phone interview with Ms. Henrietta Griffith, December 13, 2008.

the goodness of God, the campus had been rebuilt by October 1939, and the teachers were needed for that December. Though graduation was not until June, both Alice and Wilfred decided to join the staff at KMBI. At the close of their agreed-upon time, Lela asked them to stay another year.

At this writing, [December 2008] both are still working for KMBC. At 93, Alice is secretary for the president, who had been a student in her English class. She taught English for more than fifty years, and was registrar for a few years, before being asked by the president to work with him for a year while he settled into the job. That was about fifteen years ago.

Her husband, Dr. Wilfred Fisher, is 94 years old, serves on the Board of Directors for World Gospel Missions, and served as KMBI president for three years. During that time he was instrumental in having the institute become accredited and the name changed to Kentucky Mountain Bible College (KMBC); he taught speech until 1948 when he helped to found the radio station, WMTC (Winning Men To Christ), where he also served as station manager for over thirty years. That was an ambitious task in those days, as the many poor folk living in the mountains had no electricity and no radios. WMTC was just the third radio station to be founded for many miles (one was in Cincinnati). But as Dr. Fisher pointed out, the Lord's timing was perfect, for as men returned from the service, they often brought home battery-powered radios. In addition, their station was listed at a frequency between the other two stations, so if one were to move the dial from one to the other, they would cross over WMTC and very likely hear the Gospel message. In addition to devotionals, Bible studies, and agricultural news, children were given access to have their own program, which would insure that parents and relatives would tune in to listen. The radio station was incorporated into the curriculum at KMBC, giving the students an opportunity in the field of Christian broadcasting.

When asked about Ms. McConnell, Alice Fisher replied, "it was a tremendous blessing just to have known Lela McConnell. She always went forward in prayer, never asking for money. She also really knew how to have fun. She was full of fun. She was a good friend." Dr. Fisher added, "she was a great leader, and it was clear that God had led her there. She was very determined, and she never gave up." He still remembers her speech when she came to Asbury, seeking soon-to-be graduated students to help staff the Bible Institute after the flood that



Lela McConnell teaching at the KMHA radio Station,  
WMTC, in the 1950s. *(Photo courtesy of KMHA)*

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had destroyed everything. She boldly and very confidently stated: “We are not defeated. We will open school in December.” And so they did.<sup>32</sup>

The Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association provided a tremendous opportunity for women to preach. In *Faith Victorious in the Kentucky Mountains*, Lela McConnell reflected that as a child she dreamed of preaching, but understood that it was almost impossible for a woman to become a preacher at that time.<sup>33</sup> Even with encouragement from pastors who permitted her growing responsibilities, it was not until she had her holiness experience at Delanco that she gained the boldness to believe that it could be a reality, and began to work toward that possibility. She was among the first women to be ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1924, and was the very first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from Asbury.<sup>34</sup>

Susie Stanley, in her work on women preachers and their Biblical justification for a call to preach, points to the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter, in Acts 2: 16-18, as a specific scriptures Lela McConnell and others appropriated for proof:

This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: “And it will come to pass in the last days,” saith God, “that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, Even upon my servants and my handmaidens, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy.”<sup>35</sup>

She makes the point that woman also preached at Pentecost because they received power from the Holy Spirit. She argues that Pentecost was a cornerstone in the defense of women preachers, and that Lela McConnell understood that, and continued the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, designating herself as God’s handmaiden.<sup>36</sup>

Lela McConnell died on April 7, 1970, but her legacy continues. My great interest in this lady was piqued this past summer when a young Evangelizing Quartet from Kentucky Mountain Bible College performed at our camp meeting in Landisville, Pennsylvania. They were on the way to a dedication, the next day, of a chapel in Lela’s memory in

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<sup>32</sup>Phone interview with Alice and Wilfred Fisher, December 6, 2008.

<sup>33</sup>McConnell, *Faith Victorious*, 22.

<sup>34</sup>Matt Kinnell, <http://www.asbury.edu/archives/bios/lela-mcconnell>.

<sup>35</sup>Acts 2:16-18.

<sup>36</sup>Stanley, *Holy Boldness*, 135.



McConnell Chapel, on the lower level of today's Honey Brook United Methodist Church, dedicated in the summer of 2008

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the basement of the Honey Brook United Methodist Church. Following their performance, we discussed KMBC and their founder. I was amazed at their knowledge of the heritage of their school, and the life of “Miss McConnell,” as they called her. They spoke with great reverence on both topics, and at times they spoke of her as a grandmother, and each other as family. One gentleman from the group is the son of the current president of KMBC, while another is the grandson of a former president. The mission work of Kentucky Mountain Holiness Association is always evident in their message, as was witnessed through the testimony of yet another member of the group during the performance; he described his former unsaved life in Papua, New Guinea, and of finding Christ through an uncle who had been saved by a KMBC alumnus doing mission work in New Guinea.

Lela McConnell, the “Hand Maiden of the Lord” from Honey Brook, Pennsylvania, had a vision as a young farm girl, which now extends around the world.