



Archives

DECEMBER
2022

WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER VOLUME 28, ISSUE 10

Thank you to all members, subscribers, donors and everyone who has been involved with the Wilkinsburg Historical Society this year. As 2022 ends, we reflect on those generous people who contributed their funds and time to the Society. Thanks to your support Wilkinsburg's past will continue to be preserved as we look forward to more opportunities to investigate her unique history.



On December 11 the Train Station was a hub of activity as 24 creative local artists, entrepreneurs and community groups brought their goods to the **Wilkinsburg Made Holiday Show**. This well-attended event was co-hosted by the WCDC and @workshoppgh



Tim and Anne Elise Morris participated in the **Wilkinsburg Made Holiday Show**. Here they display books, craft items and Christmas decor to sell for the benefit of the Wilkinsburg Historical Society.



In mid-November nationally known Lincoln expert David Wieggers and his wife Wendy stopped at Wilkinsburg's Lincoln plaza at the crossroads of Penn Avenue and the historic Lincoln Highway. The Wieggers were traveling from their home in Illinois to Gettysburg to participate in the annual Lincoln Forum and recognize the 159th anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Dave, always with a camera in his hand, photographed the new addition to the plaza, the bronze plaque which features the Gettysburg address.



A GoFundMe opportunity has been set up to raise funds for Wilkinsburg students to have new school uniforms.

<https://gofund.me/6057e939>

Uniform expectations for students Grade K-6 are for jumpers/skirts in solid khaki or blue, Shirts in polo-style or button-down collared shirts, pants in solid blue or khaki

For more than sixty years the Kregar family operated a bakery/delicatessen at 900 Wood Street. The Kregars and their six children were very community-minded and contributed to many Wilkinsburg events. To honor the Kregars memory and spirit of giving, son Scott Lewis has initiated another way that everyone can participate in assisting the children of Wilkinsburg with a **GoFundMe** entitled, **Dress for Success - Campaign for School Uniforms**.

Here is the link for it: <https://gofund.me/6057e939>

Scott Lewis stated, "We are thrilled to honor our parents by blessing the children attending Turner and Kelly. We have turned our attention to another campaign for the Wilkinsburg School District now. We are trying to raise funds to be able to supply a new uniform for each of the children. I have established a GoFundMe page for this effort. We have a goal of \$12,000 for the campaign."

Online, the GoFundMe states:

Hello, my name is Scott Lewis. I am raising money to help children who need school uniforms. **Wilkinsburg School District** is an urban district that requires students to wear uniforms for continuity purposes. The goal is to fit each student with a new uniform in January, as many students have experienced growth spurts this fall. When students feel good about themselves, they perform better, and the administration team, Board, faculty and staff do everything they can to create the best learning environment for them with rigor and engagement.

The school district has positively transformed into an educational haven that embraces student learning over the last five years. The goal has been to be proactive with more rigor and lesson design and implementation, higher expectations for faculty and staff and recorded increases in test results.

The school district is a 501c3, so tax receipts will be provided to anyone who supports this effort.

From the Archives editor: In this season of giving, please consider a contribution to directly help students in Wilkinsburg. Many families have financial challenges and are not able to supply their own children with a new school uniform. Many thanks to Scott Lewis for organizing this fundraiser to assist Wilkinsburg kids to **Dress for Success - Campaign for School Uniforms**

WQED's documentary "*Wilksburg Train Station: Back on Track*" won an Emmy!

WQED Producer Nathalie Berry was honored for her work in the 2022 Mid-Atlantic Region, "Lifestyle - Long Form" category by winning an Emmy. Along with videographer Paul Ruggieri, *Back on Track* documents the story of the century-old Wilksburg Train Station and the tremendous effort to painstakingly restore this iconic structure. bit.ly/WilkTrainStation



WQED Multimedia Producer Nathalie Berry brought the Emmy to Wilksburg to show the coveted award and allow for a great photo opportunity.



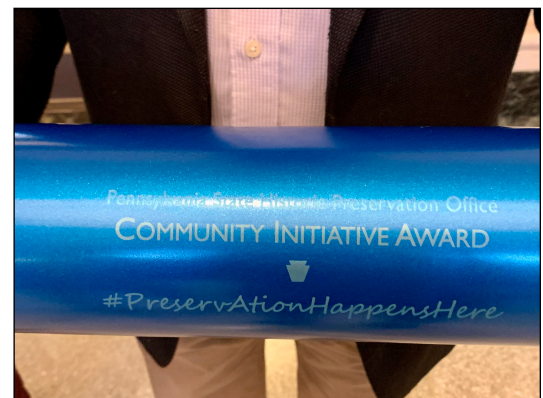
Award-winning producer Nathalie Berry shows the Emmy statue in the left image. Those gathered to view the Emmy include: (L to R) Sota Construction's Philip Ford, WCDC's Executive Director Tracey Evans, WQED Producer Nathalie Berry, Wilksburg Historical Society president Anne Elise Morris, former Wilksburg Mayor Marita Garrett and Sota Construction's Chris Michaels

Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office Community Initiative Award

Bill Callahan, the Western Pennsylvania representative for the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) came to Wilkinsburg to present the 2021 Community Initiative Award for the Wilkinsburg Train Station Restoration Project. PA SHPO is a bureau within the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.



Bill Callahan's speech explained, "The PA SHPO's Community Initiative Awards recognize outstanding organizations and individuals whose work advances and expands the definition of historic preservation. The Wilkinsburg Train Station restoration project is one of three 2021 Community Initiative Awards chosen from over fifty candidates. The three award recipients and their projects showcase a wide range of preservation success stories, demonstrating the power of perseverance, collaboration, and partnership. Responsible stewardship - the care of our nation's older and historic places through planning, maintenance and management - is one of the most important things we can do to preserve and understand Pennsylvania's amazing cultural environment."



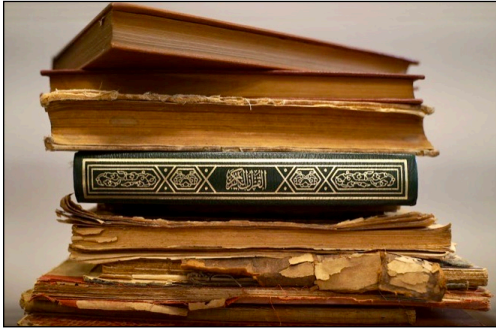
"This beautiful 1916 Beaux Arts station was closed in the mid-1970s after six decades serving Wilkinsburg. It remained closed for half a century, and those decades of vacancy, deferred maintenance and deterioration were obvious, until the **Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation**, its partners and supporters resurrected the station as a 21st century community hub.

The PA SHPO is proud to have been one of those partners, contributing to the station's preservation with a Keystone Historic Preservation Grant and assistance in securing federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits.

The Community Initiative Award includes a framed certificate and a time capsule. We think a time capsule sends a message about the ongoing success of a community and its people, placing faith in the community's ability to survive and thrive in the years to come. We look forward to learning how WCDC will use this award to celebrate this accomplishment and to foster a greater sense of community investment in this iconic landmark".

Preserving Historic Church Records

Proper storage and restoration techniques for historic Plans, Photographs and Documents
by James Twomey



Virtually every church has a collection of historic materials — old record books, meeting minutes, photographs, commemorative booklets, letters, early hymnals and Bibles, architectural plans and documents. However, very few churches have made an effort to protect these valuable resources. Typically, these materials will be scattered about, long-forgotten, and squirreled away in unheated attics or damp basements, inexorably crumbling apart. But these irreplaceable reminders of a church's past deserve a better fate.

Since the preservation of historic church records requires an investment in time, energy and funding, some justification for doing so should be sought. Utility is the most straight-forward reason to preserve — historical materials are invaluable resources when restoration and construction projects or anniversary celebrations are being planned. Indeed, the additional cost required to plan such major projects without the needed records easily justifies their preservation. The parish archives may not be needed often, but when they are, it will save you money to have them at your command.

An equally valid reason to initiate an archives preservation program is stewardship. The parish archives are the property of the congregation, contain legal documentation, and are a lasting tribute to those who put forth effort to establish a parish when none existed. It is the responsibility of the administrator to ensure that church records are passed on to the next leader in as good (or better) condition than they were when the records came under his/her care. The value of the earliest records increases over time: at the very least, proper care of the oldest documents deserves a high place on the administrator's priority list.

If a religious institution decides to abdicate its records to a separate organization, the historic materials are likely to be microfilmed and stored in a good atmosphere. However, the inaccessibility of the records to parishioners and the lack of any restoration of the original materials should cause an administrator to think twice before "sending 'em off once and for all."

What is an Archives? "Archives" can refer to either a place or its contents. Any place containing historical documentation can be designated an archives. Thus, it could be a building, a floor, a room, or even a single file drawer. One obvious goal of an archives of any size is the safe, long-term protection of its contents. So, in one sense, an archives is a place of permanent storage.

Often the contents are also referred to as the "archives." When a collection is small enough to be housed in a safe or filing cabinet, for example, one could call the collection, itself, the archives. From a broad perspective, a good archives preserves the documents it contains. From a narrower perspective, the good archives is material which is *being* preserved.

The Problem of Deterioration - The value of archival information does not decrease with age. A unique photograph, the first parish record book or architectural plans all contain original data which must be preserved indefinitely. The problem of conservation lies in the fact that the materials upon which we record information have a limited life expectancy. Improper storage, careless handling, a polluted atmosphere, and poor quality workmanship all combine to destroy these materials. There comes a point when the records cannot be handled without causing further deterioration of the base material and the historic record it contains. Brittle paper, powdery leather, cracked parchment, faded tapestry, and scratched or marred photographs all bear witness to the fact that base materials do not last as long as we need them to.

A major conservation problem is fiber embrittlement. Books, letters, photographs, architectural plans, and wills were commonly recorded on paper fibers (pre-1870: cotton and post-1870 ground wood). All cloth bookbindings, linen architectural plans, tapestries, paintings, and vestments are composed of plant fibers. All parchment documents, leather bookbindings, and vellum (also common for architectural plans) are composed of animal fibers. Many internal and external agents break down these fibers, such as acidic materials introduced during manufacture, ultraviolet (UV) light, humidity and pollution in the atmosphere, and normal wear and tear. Each cause of embrittlement must be addressed if permanence is to be achieved.

Conservation is an attempt to reduce the rate of deterioration through passive means. Restoration involves the replacement or reinforcement of the decayed materials with new ones, and is a major intervention to combat deterioration. Many conservation steps can be taken by the owner, while almost all restoration procedures require the skills and experience of a professional.

The following conservation guidelines are based upon the research of the Library of Congress and others, as well as my own professional opinions (by James Twomey):

A PRESERVATION PROGRAM FOR CHURCH ARCHIVES

1. Consolidate the collection: Archival materials are less likely to be thrown away or lost if they are kept in one place.
2. The proper storage area: Do not select basements or lofty areas as places for storage. The storage area should not have exposed water pipes of any kind. An environmentally-controlled church office or closet is a good place for an archives.
3. Catalogue the collection: A Library Science graduate student or librarian is ideal for this type of job.
4. Create a controlled environment: a) Place snap-on UV filters over fluorescent lighting; b) Keep the area cool all year (68 degrees F or lower), c) Keep the area dry (50% relative humidity). Air conditioners and dehumidifiers are a must.
5. Create micro-environments: a) Store all documents in covered archival storage boxes;

- b) Encapsulate your special documents in type-D Mylar (this replaces lamination); c) Store your bound materials in clam-shell storage boxes (custom-made acid-free containers).
6. Use fire-proof filing cabinets: A regular safe is better than nothing. Genuine fire-proofness is expensive and heavy, but worth every penny in the long-run.
7. Be strict: Insist upon careful handling by patrons, and never lend archival materials out.
8. Acid-free paper: This should be kept on hand for transferring (Xeroxing) newspaper clippings and creating archival copies of other fragile records in-house and inexpensively. *[Scanning with a flatbed printer/scanner or via a phone app such as Genius Scan is another option. The pages can be printed on acid-free paper.]*
9. Once your collection has been de-acidified and restored, the materials should be microfilmed with silver-based images. Note that microfilm has a proven life of only 100 years, while cotton paper has a life in excess of 500 years. *[Note that scanning documents for digital retrieval and sharing is an option not available when this article was written.]*
10. Large architectural plan sheets should be stored flat if possible - ideally in a cabinet. An acceptable alternative is to store them rolled up in acid-free storage tubes. Old, original architectural plans can be photographically reproduced, or Xeroxed/scanned in sections - it is better to use reproduction plans when undertaking a building restoration or remodeling rather than subject the originals to daily wear and tear.

Taking the preceding steps goes a long way toward preserving archival records. Some materials will be in a serious state of decay and will require professional treatment. Since preservation is an on-going process, just begin with step one and keep going.

Preservation Pittsburgh's Religious Architectural Heritage (RAH) Committee has sought to preserve some of the churches in Wilkesburg through videography. The 2021 Wilkesburg Sacred Spaces Virtual Tour included interviews and historical and visual insights. Here is the link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwo7Yp5d2geFPLww_Hlf5-A/featured.

The RAH committee plans to video document more of Wilkesburg's churches, and alert viewers that these edifices are irreplaceable. As some of the churches are in need of repair, a way to contribute funds will be forthcoming.

Another outstanding resource about Wilkesburg's churches is the extensive research and website design by Ken Chute. The Wilkesburg Sacred Spaces guide was created "to encourage folks to save religious and cultural and community and family history, to write down memories and stories, to photograph what might vanish or be forgotten. We live in a heritage passed along by those before us and we can pass along our heritage as a gift to the future." Ken has researched and included over fifty Wilkesburg area churches in the Sacred Spaces Guide. Each church has interactive links to access much information about each congregation and their history, along with maps dating back to 1840. The link to access this website is wilkesburgsacredspaces.com



Grants Bring Two Improvement Projects Here

Recently, grants totaling \$1.75 million were designated to two site improvement projects in Wilkinsburg, according to state Rep. Marshall Coughlin.

The grants are part of the continuous effort to renovate and upgrade sites in Allegheny County and come from the state's Federal Smart Assistance Capital Program, or RACP.

This includes:

- \$1 million to 401 Penn Ave., a Wilkinsburg discount grocery, for replacing various sidewalks in Wilkinsburg with a national discount supermarket.
- This involves acquisition of 401 Penn Ave., across from the GC&G, and demolition of the existing building and pad preparation for the grocery store construction.
- \$750,000 to Humana Health, Inc., for constructing a new mid-rise, multi-story building on a vacant lot. Renovation will create commercial space with glass storefronts abutting the sidewalk.

The site will offer access to ready commercial space for community businesses.

"Securing this money for the community has felt great, especially because the people who live here deserve the best," Coughlin said.

RACP is a grant program administered by the Pennsylvania Office of the Budget for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects.

HOLIDAY MAKER MARKET, see page 2

Don't miss out on **The Wilkinsburg Sun**, a free monthly community newsletter published by the volunteer Wilkinsburg Community Newsletter Board, with the support of the Wilkinsburg Borough, the Wilkinsburg School District, the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce and the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation.

The Sun accepts submitted articles provided they are related to Wilkinsburg and are civic-minded.

<https://wilkinsburgsun.wordpress.com>

Sign up to receive The Sun by email at:

<http://eepurl.com/v0iBP> and friend The Sun on Facebook.

Wilkinsburg Historical Society has a website, to share more information about the history of Wilkinsburg. wilkinsburghistory.wordpress.com

Mailing address: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P.O. Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235**

The "Archives" Historical Society newsletter is published monthly, March through November.

We do not publish the Archives during the three Winter months of December, January and February.

Wilkinsburg Historical Society yearly dues for the Wilkinsburg Historical Society are:

\$20.00 INDIVIDUAL Member, \$35.00 FAMILY Membership

\$10.00 STUDENT or ASSOCIATE Members Please keep your membership dues up to date.

Contributions are needed for "Lights for Lincoln", to get improved lighting for the Lincoln Plaza area. Abraham Lincoln stands in the dark after sun-down. Your donation can help us illuminate this outstanding area overlooking the Lincoln Highway.

Wilkinsburg Historical Society - Membership application

Help promote the valuable history of Wilkinsburg.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

E-mail address _____

() \$20 Individual membership

() \$35 Family membership

() \$10 Student or associate membership

() \$_____ Additional donation

Please make check payable to: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society**

PO Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

Anytime is a good time to pay your dues for the Wilkinsburg Historical Society. We have many preservation projects going on, and providing displays for Wilkinsburg events. Many thanks to those of you who have already sent in your membership dues. Please use the address on the form, our PO box.