



Archives

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WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER VOLUME 29, ISSUE 1



February 12, 1809 is Abraham Lincoln's birthday and each year the Wilkinsburg Historical Society recognizes this important day in American history. A red/white/blue wreath has been placed on the Lincoln plaza railing and American flags have been added to the railing posts.

Frequently the Society is asked why Wilkinsburg has a statue of Abraham Lincoln at the intersection of "Penn at Ardmore" and also if Lincoln is relevant to American society today. Since 1913 Wilkinsburg Borough has been on the original alignment of the Lincoln Highway.

In 1916 a copper statue of Lincoln was erected at the crossroads of the William Penn Highway and the Lincoln Highway. In 2018, after decades of deterioration, the statue was removed to Council chambers and donations were collected to create a new likeness of Lincoln.

In February 2021 a new bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln was sculpted for Wilkinsburg by Pittsburgh artist Susan Wagner. After temporary display in the lobby of the Borough

building, the statue was moved in July 2021 to its traditional location on the hill overlooking the Lincoln Highway.

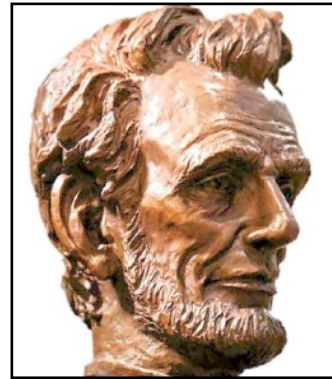
The public celebration and unveiling of the statue in July 2021 was documented by several news stations and newspapers. One thought-provoking article was written by L.E. McCullough for LOCALpittsburgh. McCullough is a Pittsburgh musician/writer/journalist and often writes about art. He has provided insight into Lincoln's impact on society today. Following is McCullough's article, *"Forever Free" -sculpture at the intersection of History & Spirit.* (for the in-depth interview with artist Susan Wagner, please view the internet version.)

This past July 24 (2021) in Wilkinsburg, "Forever Free" - a newly-sculpted statue of Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th president - was ceremonially presented to an enthusiastic audience of a hundred or so history buffs gathered on a small concrete-and-grass traffic apron bounded by Penn Avenue and Dell Way overlooking the intersection of Ardmore Boulevard and Ross Avenue.

WTAE-TV news anchor Andrew Stockey served as the event's master of ceremonies, introducing Wilkinsburg Council president Pamela Macklin and historical commentators Paul Guggenheimer, Jonathan Ray and David Wiegers, along with sanctifications from Fr. Chuck Esposito and Rev. Thomas Mitchell, a resounding Pledge of allegiance led by Girl Scout Troop 52326, a brief expression of gratitude from Lincoln re-enactor Kevin Santillo and standout musical contributions from Chantal Brazil, Tania Grubbs, Hill Jordan, Mimi Jong, Keith Cochran and Melissa Alliston.

Aided by Wilkinsburg Historical Society president Anne Elise Morris, the statue's sculptor, Susan Wagner of Pittsburgh, carefully removed the bright red shroud to reveal a three-dimensional, life-size version of one of American Civic Mythology's most esteemed figures.

From empires to republics, in sprawling capitals and remote villages, monumental sculpture has for centuries functioned as a medium societies use to tell stories of heroic individuals and memorable events in their history.



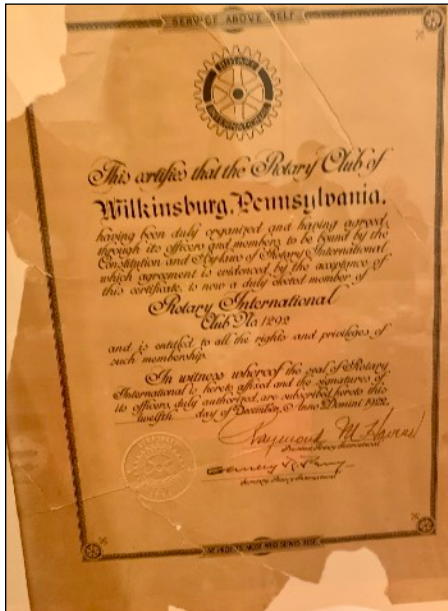
*Detail from "Forever Free"
by Susan Wagner*

Forever Free is squarely in the classical Heroic Sculpture tradition, but Wagner's interpretation aims to be more accessible. It presents Lincoln as an ordinary man in a moment anyone can relate to — collecting his thoughts as he gets ready to give a speech. In this case, a speech that will forever change the course of U.S. and world history — Proclamation 95, an executive order better known as *The Emancipation Proclamation*. This unapologetic ordinariness has always been the most compelling aspect of Lincoln's enduring appeal. *He was One of Us*. We remember his jokes, his humility, his ceaseless quest to see the better angles of our nature...and help us see them, too.

To contemporary Americans, Lincoln still occupies an elevated status signifying wisdom, tolerance and the ongoing duty of government to bring about social justice. The day's speakers repeatedly expressed his relevance for our time as a moral beacon and resolute guide through the troubling political waters of the 2020s and, perhaps, beyond. There was also a sentiment among borough residents that replacing the original Lincoln statue, first mounted on the site in 1916, represents another small but important ingredient aiding the long-brewing Wilkinsburg economic revival. Or, as The Rail Splitter himself once said: "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

Susan Wagner has been sculpting professionally for three decades, and her life-size renditions of Roberto Clemente, Willie Stargell, Bill Mazeroski, Jackie Robinson and Dr. Thomas Starzl have received international acclaim. She has created singular works for the Allegheny County Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium, UPMC Passavant Hospital, National Baseball Hall of Fame, 14th Quartermaster Base in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and for venues outside the continental U.S. (the Vatican, Canada, Brunei, Puerto Rico).

Rotary Club of Wilkinsburg recently celebrated its 100th Anniversary



The original, century old charter states:

“This certifies that the Rotary Club of Wilkinsburg Pennsylvania, having been duly organized and having agreed through its officers and members to be bound by the Constitution and By-Laws of Rotary International which agreement is evidenced by the acceptance of this certificate, is now a duly elected member of Rotary International Club No.1292 and is entitled to all the rights and privileges of such membership.

In witness whereof the seal of Rotary International is hereto affixed and the signatures of its officers, duly authorized, are subscribed hereto this twelfth day of December Anno Domini 1922.”

Photos below show the Rotary Christmas party, held at the Chamber of Commerce office, 305 S Trenton Avenue. Celebration cake is also depicted.



The early winter of 1920 a small group of Wilkinsburg businessmen began discussing the possibility of organizing a Rotary Club in Wilkinsburg. Their friendship and close knowledge of each other meant that a service club would be beneficial for Wilkinsburg. Initially, they did not get permission to create a Rotary Club because one was already in the City of McKeesport. This changed in 1922 at the International Convention held in Los Angeles and permission granted. An organizing committee was formed in Wilkinsburg which included a Justice of the Peace, a men's tailor, a banker, a food merchant, and a clothier. This committee met in the Central National Bank in October 1922. After 20 more names were added to the organization, temporary officers were chosen and it was agreed to formally launch the Wilkinsburg club on November 28 in the dining room of the South Ave., Methodist Church. A formal charter was supplied a few weeks later. For over a century the Rotary Club has tirelessly worked primarily to benefit children. Wilkinsburg Rotary club were leaders in promoting the Wilkinsburg Boys Club, and built a cabin for Boy Scouts at Camp Twin Echo.

Our Challenge: Broadening the support for church preservation written by A. Robert Jaeger of Partners for Sacred Places

Americas historic churches and synagogues are facing the greatest challenge ever. The notorious changeability of our towns and cities has, time and time again, attacked the very foundations of our religious institutions by radically altering their membership support. Industrialization, suburbanization, de-industrialization, ethnic friction, urban renewal, gentrification: all these phenomena have changed the shape and substance of our neighborhoods. I know of one church building, for example, that was built by WASP-y Episcopalians, was later bought by middle-class Black Protestants in the 1940s, and will, I'm sure, be sold to serve one of two competing constituencies in the neighborhood: the current Hispanic residents or the new white gentry moving in from downtown.

The dynamics of America's communities are affecting churches everywhere, and the national press is beginning to notice. They have covered the controversy over Saint Bartholomew's plans to replace it's parish house with a super-scaled office tower on Park Avenue in Midtown Manhattan, and they have picked up on the story that dozens of Roman Catholic churches in inner-city Chicago may be closed and ultimately demolished.

But the coverage of this news is uneven and sporadic, making it difficult for those who care to become informed about the size and nature of the broader crisis and impossible for them to take action to moderate its worst effects. That is why *Inspired* was created: to supply clergy, laypeople, preservation professionals, and funding sources with current and useful information on managing and preserving our heritage of religious architecture. Formerly a regional publication, *Inspired* has been given a fresh new look and its coverage has been broadened to include news on historic religious buildings across the nation.

Broadening the support for church preservation is vital for all but the most affluent congregations, and thus, creative and carefully planned fundraising is a key to maintaining their historic buildings. Every approach is different, but draws upon fundraising principles that can be applied to many other historic religious buildings across the nation. One fundraising consulting firm, Peggy Powell Dean & Co of New York worked with Grace Episcopal Church in Rhode Island and successfully raised over \$1million to achieve an ambitious restoration project. Funds came or were raised from the churches parishioners, its community, corporations, foundations, government and even a summer resort community nearby where many of the cities residents vacation each year.

Peggy Dean, President of the firm has set forth some basic principles for church fundraising for building repair:

1. Establish a preservation plan first to identify repair needs and functional requirements. The plan should serve as a roadmap which prioritizes needs, thereby establishing a phased fundraising sequence which is gradual and, therefore, attainable.
2. Approach the parish or congregation first to establish a solid base of funding support, but be sure to inform community leaders of the entire fundraising plan in advance, gaining their trust and preparing the way for their participation later.

3. Consider either of two approaches for broadening support outside the congregation:
 - 1) Create a partnership with an established non-profit organization that can accept funds from donors that prefer not to contribute directly to the church;
 - 2) Establish a separate 501(c) (3) organization jointly managed by church and community leaders to raise money for church repairs.

The latter approach can be more flexible and effective, but establishing the organization's tax exempt status will usually take several months and the relationship between the church and the non-profit organization must be carefully defined to pose no threat to the autonomy of the church.

4. Preservation goal should be in concert with programmatic or functional needs for the building. Keep in mind that some of the social service functions of the church, including the maintenance of space used for community purposes, can be supported by foundations or other donors that will not fund the repair of the worship space itself.

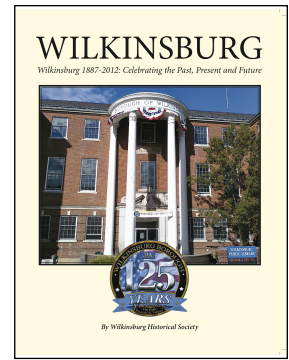
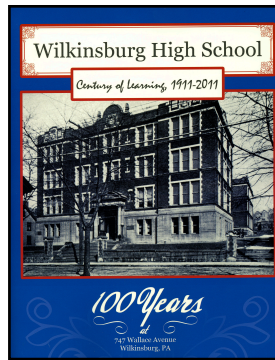
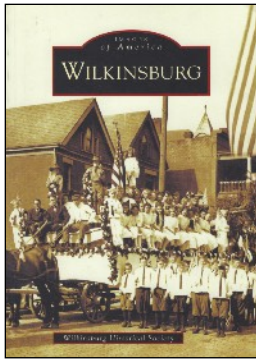


The former **United Brethren Church** at the corner of Coal St. and South Avenue, changed ownership in recent years. Now, it has been abandoned and is in poor condition having been vandalized, with windows and hardware stolen. It's current fate is uncertain.

The **Arc of the Covenant Church** at 901 Rebecca Avenue at Coal Street has significant roof and window damage. This unique church is currently not being used, as services are held in the brick annex building behind the church. Originally built in 1897 to be Trinity Reformed Church, it is fitted with an organ given by Andrew Carnegie. It is one of the most historic churches in Wilkinsburg.



Wilkinsburg Baptist Church was built in 1955 to replace the circa 1906 Baptist church which was destroyed by fire. This church is situated next door to the Wilkinsburg High School building. Since 2004 it has been owned by Dunamis Baptist Church of Wilkinsburg. Located at 751 Wallace Avenue (at Center Street) it is not currently used.



These are the three books that the **Wilkinsburg Historical Society** wrote and published during the past twelve years. They help to promote and preserve the history of Wilkinsburg and raise funds for the various projects of the Society. All three books are still available to purchase from the Society. Another way to support the activities of the Historical Society.

On the far left is ***"Images of America - Wilkinsburg"***, a 128 page soft-bound book printed by the Arcadia Publishing Company. It includes over 220 black and white photos depicting the history of our town from the early land patents in the late 1700s up to the 75th celebration of Wilkinsburg in 1962. The book is available from the Wilkinsburg Historical Society for \$20.00, plus \$3.00 for shipping.

The middle book above is ***"Wilkinsburg High School - Century of Learning 1911-2011"***. This book chronicles the history of the local high school from its early start in the late 1880s, the creation of the magnificent structure in 1910, and each decade since with highlights of the events that were important in the lives of the students and the Wilkinsburg community. For over 100 years the Wilkinsburg High School served the Borough of Wilkinsburg students and this book has several hundred photos showing much of this important history. This *Century of Learning* book is available from the Wilkinsburg Historical Society for \$15.00, plus \$3.00 for shipping.

The book on the far right is ***"Wilkinsburg - 1887-2012, Celebrating the Past, Present and Future"***. This book was produced by the Historical Society in 2012 to recognize the 125th anniversary of Wilkinsburg's incorporation as a Borough. This soft-bound book has 196 pages and includes chapters on the history of Wilkinsburg, the celebrations from the past, information about Wilkinsburg's government, and all the events that occurred during the 125th celebration. There are several chapters about the clubs and organizations in Wilkinsburg as well as the churches and worship centers in the Borough. The "future of Wilkinsburg" section recognizes advertisers and sponsors who helped to fund the creation and printing of the book. This book, originally \$15.00, is now available for \$10.00, plus \$3.00 for shipping.

Make check or money order payable to: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society**

Orders can be mailed to: Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P.O.Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

Images of America - Wilkinsburg (\$20.00 + \$3.00) = \$23.00 Quantity_____ Total _____

Century of Learning 1911-2011 (\$15.00 + \$3.00) = \$18.00 Quantity_____ Total _____

Wilkinsburg 1887-2012 (\$10.00 + \$3.00) = \$13.00 Quantity_____ Total _____

Name_____ Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip _____



Two New Businesses Moving into the Train Station

Wilkinsburg Capital and Community Development Corporation is proud to announce the arrival of two new businesses to the Wilkinsburg Train Station. The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that is dedicated to the economic development of the Wilkinsburg community. The corporation is currently in the process of converting the Wilkinsburg Train Station into a community center. The new businesses are moving into the station as part of this project.



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Video Camera Being Installed to Catch Illegal Dumping, page 6

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 usually 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.