



Archives

JULY
2020

WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER VOLUME 26, ISSUE 6

The Ardmore wall park and its connected Lincoln monument site, are nearing completion at a steady pace. The park itself will have a curved wall along Dell Way, with signage stating “Welcome to Wilkinsburg”. The teardrop-shaped platform at the intersection of Ardmore Blvd. (Historic Lincoln Highway) and William Penn Highway (Penn Avenue) will serve as the architectural foundation for the Lincoln monument.



The images above show the progress made during July to the Lincoln statue site. The left image shows the prepared platform area pointing toward the crossroads intersection. This historic intersection is the convergence of the 1913 Lincoln Highway and the 1916 William Penn Highway, two of the first roads to cross America from coast to coast. The square hole in the foreground is over 36” deep, prepared to contain a solid footer to support the future statue pedestal. The above right image shows the completed concrete footer as well as the partially finished area for benches. The Lincoln statue pedestal will be placed in this precise spot in the next few months.

Wilkinsburg had a sheet-copper statue of Abraham Lincoln in this same location since 1916. It had been damaged and distorted over the last century. Decision was made to carefully remove it and place the statue on display inside the Borough building

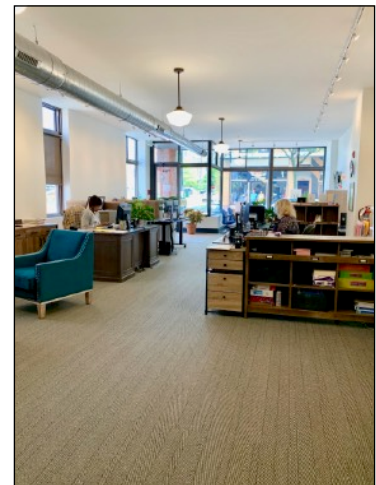
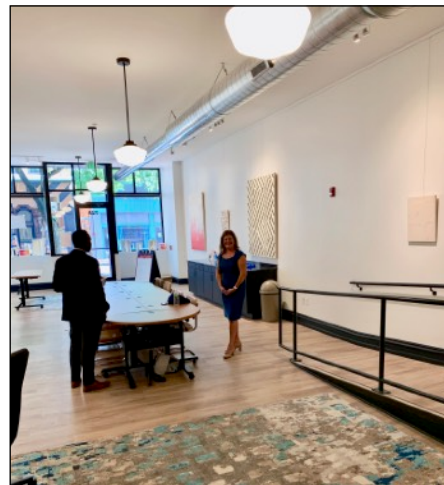
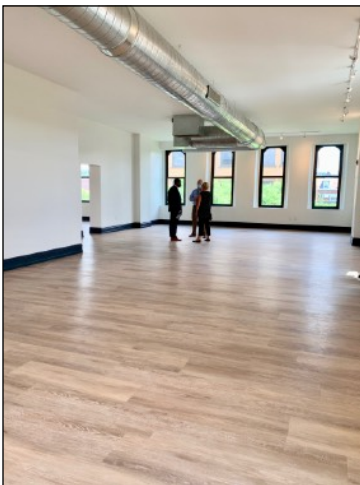
Funds are still needed and donations are gratefully accepted. Contributions to the statue fund can be made to: **Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P. O. Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235** or through GoFundMe Lincoln Statue for Wilkinsburg. The link to the site is: <https://www.gofundme.com/Lincoln-statue-for-Wilkinsburg>

Ribbon-cutting and open house for the beautiful “new” Lohr Building.



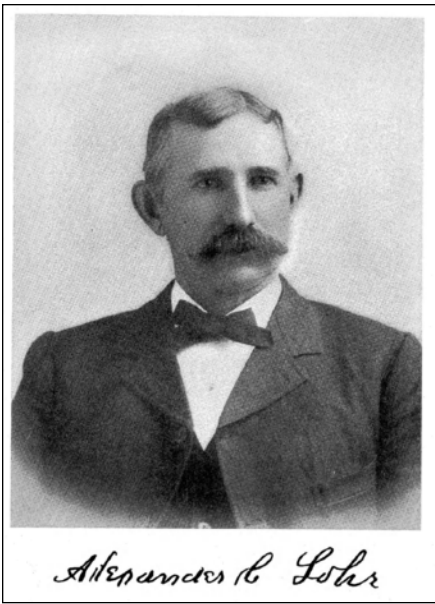
Tuesday, June 30, 2020 was a milestone day for the Wilksburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC) and their new home at 729 Wood Street. The WCDC hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house to celebrate the end of the renovation and beginning of new life for the 130-year-old Lohr Building.

The ribbon cutting ceremony included, left to right WCDC Board President Bernard Wetzel, Wilksburg Mayor Marita Garrett, WCDC Executive director Tracey Evans, Hosanna House Executive director Leon Haynes, Wildman-Chalmers design architect Chad Chalmers, and Wilksburg Historical Society president Anne Elise Morris.



These images show the light, bright spaces within the renovated Lohr Building. The left image is on the third floor and is available to lease. There is a similar space available on the second floor. The other images show two of the Wood Street storefront areas at 725 and 729 Wood Street. Leasing is being handled by Sepi Miller of Coldwell Banker Real Estate services and for more information contact sepi.miller@pittsburghmoves.com

Art initiative is a new feature in the historic Lohr Building. The 725 Wood Street suite is hosting the WCDC's Art All Over gallery. The first featured artist is Wilksburg resident John Burt Sanders. To view the exhibition online visit: wilksburgcdc.org/artallover or the artist may be contacted at johnburtsanders@gmail.com



Alexander C. Lohr

At the June 30, 2020 ribbon-cutting and rededication of the Lohr Building, the Wilkinsburg Historical Society was asked to present a short history of the building. As the president of the Wilkinsburg Historical Society, I was honored to be the speaker at this celebratory event. This is a copy of what I chose to say about the past and the future of Alexander Lohr's building. (Anne Elise Morris, president)

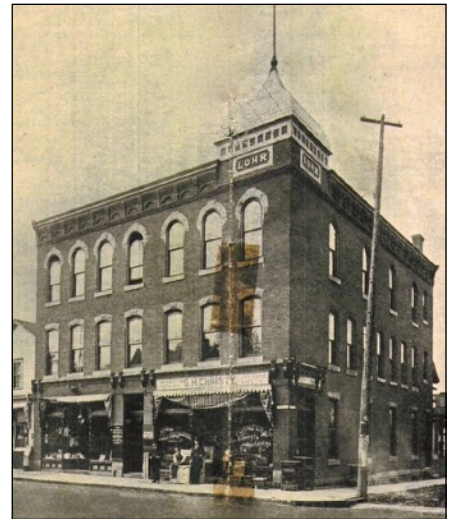
"Today we celebrate the rebirth of Alexander Lohr's masterpiece building. I'd like to present a little bit of history about this building and the builder.

Alexander Lohr was born in 1835 in Somerset County working the fields on the family farm. In 1858 at the age of 23 he moved to Ligonier to learn the carpentry trade. In 1862 Lohr moved to Pittsburgh and operated as a carpenter, contractor and builder.

All over Pittsburgh's East End he built many fine houses and business places but he chose Wilkinsburg to build his own residence. In 1871 he married Caroline Lacock, a local Wilkinsburg woman and built a 10 room Victorian on South Avenue. Sadly, the Lohrs had two baby girls who both died at a very young age.

Then in 1893 after working in construction for 35 years he built this multi-use high-quality masterpiece, and he built it to last. He fashioned seven large arched windows facing Wood Street on the third floor, and seven semi-arched windows on the second floor. It had a large roofline cupola at the corner of Wood Street and South Avenue, with the name Lohr on both edges. This is the only building that bore his name, the Lohr Building.

The first floor originally contained a dry goods store that sold carpets and furnishings, while the upper floors were offices for lawyers, accountants, physicians and real estate offices. Many longtime residents remember the decades of this building being the Singer Sewing Machine business. The upper floors at one time served as classrooms before the High School was built in 1911. The top floor with its expansive space was the worship area for the Second United Presbyterian Church while that congregation built a church. In recent years the first floor had a Wheelchair Exchange business and later a pawn shop.



Now, this hundred and 30-year-old beauty has begun it's newly revitalized life. When Alexander Lohr cut the ribbons in 1893 he could not have imagined that his legacy building would be celebrated anew and we would be cutting ribbons again in 2020. The WCDC and the many partners who have worked tirelessly on this project have much to be proud of in the revitalization of this distinctive building.

Vacant lots are being revitalized all over the Borough of Wilkinsburg



Many areas of Wilkinsburg were new and beautiful a century ago. Time, weather and neglect caused many buildings to need demolition thus creating numerous vacant and abandoned lots.

Historians like to record information about what once “was”, but it is equally valuable to create what “will be”.

Jerry Gaudi, one of Wilkinsburg’s forward-thinking developers has revitalized many sites in Wilkinsburg with vacant lot reclamation. Pictured here is a recently completed large and colorful mural in the **North Avenue Bird Habitat and Pollination Garden** at 718 North Avenue. The mural was made possible by a Neighborhood Allies Love My Neighbor grant. The Garden features a variety of native plants and a gazebo with seating. This lot is continually changing and is supported by Impact Redevelopment, Sierra Club, Audubon, Neighborhood Allies and Wilkinsburg Youth Project.



This new public green space, formerly a vacant lot at the corner of Wood Street and South Avenue is a collaboration of the **Center for Civic Arts** and the Wilkinsburg Borough. This project includes a meandering semi-permeable walkway of stone along with numerous dwarf evergreen and other native plants. This project was generously supported by the Three Rivers Wet Weather New Sun Rising, PNC Charitable trust, and UPMC. The park is not yet named and borough council members are eagerly awaiting suggestions from the public. Naming ideas may be sent to civicarts211@gmail.com



Another reclamation project of Jerry Gaudi’s Impact ReDevelopment is the **Community Dog Park** at the corner of Ross Avenue and Coal Street. A great example of a vacant lot given a new purpose for the people of Wilkinsburg.

Wood Street is prepared for two-way traffic.



A century ago Wood Street, on the south side of Penn Avenue, allowed two-way traffic. As the population increased and more people owned vehicles the busy thoroughfare was turned into a one-way street. The idea at the time was to have automobiles move quickly through. Studies have shown that when formerly one-way streets become two-way then traffic slows down, and drivers are more likely to stop and shop. As more small business owners choose Wilkesburg it just makes sense to have the street customer friendly.

After several years of planning, communications with PennDOT, Port Authority (for bus pulloffs), Borough of Wilkesburg and others, the long-awaited two-way Wood Street is becoming a reality.

Yellow lines have been painted down the length of Wood Street from Rebecca Avenue to Penn Avenue, to remind drivers to stay on their side of the street. Some of the blocks have parking on one side clearly marked, as this image shows a vehicle parked in front of James Florist at 712 Wood Street.



~~~~~

Important announcement regarding the planned **Sacred Spaces III Tour in Wilkesburg** that was to be a collaboration of Preservation Pittsburgh's Religious Architectural Heritage Committee with grant funding from the Neighborhood Allies Love My Neighbor grant program. The Wilkesburg Historical Society was to assist in gathering historical information and antique photos about the churches that planned to participate.

The tour has been **canceled for this year and will not take place on September 26 as planned**. This year 2020 been challenging for everyone due to the pandemic, and numerous events have been postponed or canceled. With no certainty about safe conditions regarding COVID-19, and with participating churches still closed while developing their own protocol for safe distancing and disinfecting, the RAH Committee has decided to postpone the event until May 2021. The committee is optimistic that most of the complications of 2020 will be less significant in Spring of 2021. RAH will be in touch with the churches of Wilkesburg to plan an enjoyable event for next year.



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 [eepurl.com/v0iBP](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**

We usually meet on the third Monday of months March, June, August and November at the South Avenue United Methodist Church in Wilkinsburg. HOWEVER, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED EVERYTHING AND WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MEET IN PERSON DURING 2020. SAFETY IS OUR UTMOST CONCERN AND NEW PROTOCOLS HAVE NOT YET BEEN ESTABLISHED. The "Archives" Historical Society newsletter is still published monthly, March through November.

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 (for out of towners who usually can't attend meetings) Please keep your membership dues up to date.

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, plus the cost of sending out the Archives 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.