



Archives

AUGUST
2021

WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 27, ISSUE 6

Lincoln statue unveiled and dedicated in Wilkinsburg!

Saturday, July 24, 2021 was a spectacular morning in the community life of Wilkinsburg. It was the Grand celebration of the dedication of the bronze Lincoln statue located at the crossroads of Penn Avenue and Ardmore Boulevard (Lincoln Highway). The program for the day was patterned after the original 1916 celebration when the first Lincoln statue was placed in Wilkinsburg. The celebration included a parade of flag-waving participants led by a drummer and Abraham Lincoln, beautiful instrumental music, incredible vocal music, invocation, thought-provoking speeches, patriotic songs, unveiling the statue, benediction and more.

Many thanks to all who made this event possible! Contributions from businesses, residents, alumni, organizations all are appreciated. Special thanks to the Special Events committee of the Wilkinsburg Borough Council and Wilkinsburg DPW who helped in numerous ways. This edition of the Archives is solely focused on preserving and sharing the images of a great day

photo by Pam Panchak



Clockwise from upper left:

1. Crowd gathered at UPMC Graham Field to obtain flags and start parading down to the Lincoln statue.

2. Parade participants march down Penn Avenue, led by drummer Melissa Alliston, Abraham Lincoln (aka Kevin Santillo), Council women Ariel Haughton and Linda Atkins.

3. Linda Atkins, Tania Grubbs, Chantal Braziel, MC Andrew Stockey, David Wieggers, Abe Lincoln, Lincoln statue.

photo by Pam Panchak



WTAE's Andrew Stockey hosted as MC



Father Chuck Esposito gave the Invocation.



Tania Grubbs sang the National Anthem.



Chantal Braziel sang Lift Every Voice and Sing.



Girl Scout Troop #52326 led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance.



Abe comments to Andrew Stockey, that he's interested in the festivities.



Tribune Review's **Paul Guggenheimer**
"Emancipation Proclamation"



PUCS Exec. Director **Jonathan Ray**
"Free to be Great"

photo by Pam Panchak



Keynote speaker **David Wieggers**
"At a Crossroads"



The moment that artist/sculptor **Susan Wagner**
unveiled the bronze Lincoln statue.



FOREVER FREE
plaque unveiled
by Eli Douglass,
grandson of
Historical Society
President Anne
Elise Morris.





Rev. Thomas Mitchell, giving a benediction to the crowd.



Sculptor Susan Wagner and speaker David Wieggers



Susan Wagner with WTAE emcee Andrew Stockey



Artist Susan Wagner with Girl Scouts from Troop #52326.



Lincoln expert David Wieggers with Wendy Wieggers



Abe Lincoln, aka Kevin Santillo) poses with Eli and Grace.



photo by Pam Panchak

Musical performance was provided by "Moonlighting", Mimi Jong playing the erhu and Keith Cochran playing the accordion. Additionally, Hill Jordan on trombone played selections including "America the Beautiful" and "Hail to the Chief".

Abraham Lincoln statue returns to street corner in Wilkinsburg



PAUL GUGGENHEIMER | Monday, July 26, 2021 11:40 a.m.

SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM



PAUL GUGGENHEIMER | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

People gather in Wilkinsburg Saturday morning for the unveiling of the new Abraham Lincoln statue at the corner of Armore and Penn avenues. In the foreground is the statue's sculptor, Susan Wagner.

Abraham Lincoln stood tall when the United States was at a crossroads during the Civil War.

Now he is once again standing tall at the crossroads of Penn Avenue and Ardmore Boulevard, along the historic Lincoln Highway in Wilkinsburg.

A new bronze statue of the 16th president of the United States was unveiled Saturday morning in the very spot where a hammered copper Lincoln statue was dedicated in 1916. Some 75 people gathered for a ceremony patterned after the original dedication, featuring a four-piece band, singers, patriotic bunting, American flags, balloons and even a Lincoln re-enactor.

Master of ceremonies WTAE-TV anchor Andrew Stockey led the festivities, which included Tanya Grubbs singing "The Star-Spangled Banner," followed by Chantal Brazier's stirring rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly [email newsletters](#) deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

Girl Scout Troop 52326 led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance. David Wiegers, a Lincoln authority and originator of the Facebook page "Images of Abraham Lincoln," discussed Lincoln's presidency and the events leading up to the Emancipation Proclamation, the 1863 document authored by Lincoln that declared slaves to be free.

The day was two-and-a-half-years in the making, going back to early 2019 when Wilkinsburg Historical Society President Anne Elise Morris announced plans to raise over \$70,000 to build a bronze, life-size statue of Lincoln to replace the old one. She started a GoFundMe page and put out the word for donations.

"We had so many people who cared about this statue being erected," Morris told the crowd. "Thank you to all the Wilkinsburg people, people who were from Wilkinsburg and people who used to live in Wilkinsburg and people who were educated in Wilkinsburg."

Morris announced the name of the statue is "Forever Free," words taken from the text of the Emancipation Proclamation, and then she unveiled a plaque mounted next to the statue that reads "Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865, presented to the people of Wilkinsburg, past, present and future by Wilkinsburg Historical Society and many generous donors, July 24, 2021, Susan Wagner, sculptor."

The new Lincoln statue weighs 400 pounds and stands 6-foot-4, the same height as the man himself. It reveals Lincoln in a pensive state, his head turned slightly to his left and angled downward, his right hand clutching the base of the lapel on his frock coat. In his left hand is a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. The document is identifiable by the imitation of Lincoln's handwriting that Wagner engraved on a visible part of the rolled-up sheet.

The statue was a hit with those gathered for the dedication. The crowd enthusiastically applauded as soon as it was unveiled.

For her part, Wagner, a Penn Hills native, said she felt relieved.

"I'm always concerned about if people are going to like my work or not," she said. "It was difficult. I sculpted (Lincoln) right after the shutdown during covid. I couldn't get a lot of information that I needed because everything was shut down. I couldn't get the death mask from Soldiers & Sailors (Memorial Hall & Museum). And then my welder got covid. It was really hard to create in that atmosphere."

But create she did.

"I feel good now. It was a welcoming crowd and I'm glad it's all done."

The original statue stood for more than 100 years. But the century of wear and tear, plus a few misadventures, took their toll and the copper Lincoln statue was brought inside the Wilkesburg Borough building at the end of 2018.

The new Lincoln statue weighs four times as much as the old one and is mounted on a black granite base. The area for the new statue has been refurbished, thanks to a Keystone Communities grant.

"Three nice new benches have been placed there, so we have a beautiful sitting area, a monument viewing area," said Morris.

*Paul Guggenheimer is a Tribune-Review staff writer. You can contact Paul at 724-226-7706 or **pguggenheimer@triblive.com**.*

