



# Archives

AUGUST  
2022

WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 28, ISSUE 6

## Installation of the 4' wide historic clock into the facade of the Wilkinsburg Train Station



Verdin employees remove the PRR railroad logo which adorned the clock space while the restoration took place. A similar logo was used a century ago to cover the clock when the time was incorrect.



Sandblasted and painted, the historic clock dial is ready for installation at the station.



Clock face and dial has been installed. Weather was perfect!



Illuminated, the long-awaited clock restoration is complete.

The Verdin Company is a family-run business, experts in clocks and bell fabrication/restoration since 1842. They came from Cincinnati Ohio to install this restored jewel into the station's crown. The 1916 Roman Numeral dial was sandblasted and painted, reglazed and fit back into the clock tower receptacle.

The clock has been updated for 21st century life with a four-foot diameter LED backlight so that the time will be visible 24 hours a day. It has a Verdin MCC3 Clock Controller which synchronizes/sets the time and can easily reset if there is a power outage or adjusting for Daylight Saving Time. Completion of the restoration of this historic clock has been eagerly anticipated for many decades. It has been nearly fifty years since the correct time was displayed to the public!



**FREE EVENT AT THE HISTORIC "SLEEPING OCTOPUS", 1300 WOOD ST., AUG. 27**

**PITTSBURGH**  
**ART JAM**  
Wilkinsburg & Pittsburgh  
Community  
Family Friendly  
Event!

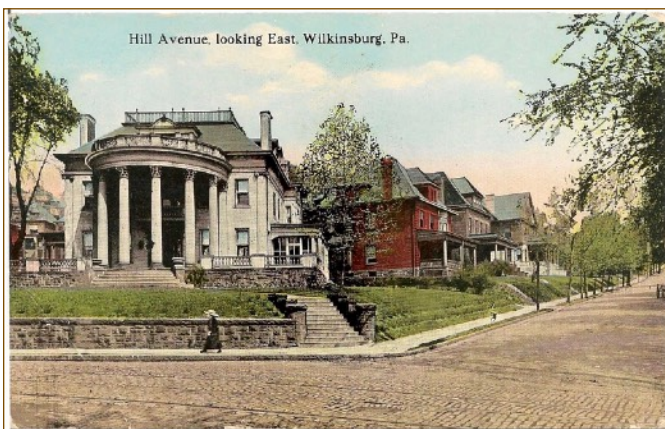
**OVER 20 ARTISTS DEMONSTRATING THEIR SKILLS.**

**THE SLEEPING OCTOPUS -**  
1300 Wood Street  
Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania 15221

Live Music, Fire Performers,  
Drum Circle, Kids Creative Tent,  
Food, & Beverages.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2022 6-10 PM**

**REPUBLIC SERVICES** **First National Bank** **UPMC HEALTH PLAN** **DLC** **HOSANNA HOUSE**



The stately 1906 Yingling home started as a private residence, later as the Wilkinsburg Private Hospital (1927), then a nursing home/ personal care home. It had a rather sedate existence until 2016 when new owners transformed it into a meeting place, music venue, community treasure, art shows & more! **The Sleeping Octopus Events** on Facebook is the place to connect, volunteer, and be involved in one of the most innovative, happening places in the area! Click link below for sign-up to participate in Art Jam <https://forms.gle/hDNTy2xgN8jjiHEN7>

Historic Church Preservation: Clues from the Almost Incommunicable Past (part 1)  
by Martin E Marty, (senior editor of the Christian Century)

Those who promote the preservation of historic buildings find houses of worship strategic. Such buildings often represent the most formal and ambitious efforts of those who once populated America's towns and cities. While shops, houses and many other slighter structures have fallen into decay and been destroyed, stately if now shabby churches and synagogues have survived. Congregations that have survived to use the buildings often want to restore them. Neighborhood and civic groups have often assumed the responsibility if descendants of the old congregations have long since moved away. Very often the issue is treated in historic, aesthetic or practical terms: dollar signs, issues of brick and mortar, and debates about architectural design dominate the discussion.

Building preservation also has humane and humanistic dimensions. Theodor Adorno observed that since most human history is suffering, never to remember is to dishonor the sufferers and rob them of the dignity that telling their story grants them. To choose to forget then, is dehumanizing. Of course, not all church buildings signify suffering: some of them served to flaunt a congregation's power and wealth. Yet churches and synagogues evoke awareness of the cycles of life: they call to mind earnest prayer and resolve, the observances of birth, marriage and death. Preserving at least some of them helps retain communication across the generations.

We often forget the role that physical objects play in defining the human. During riots at Columbia University some students trashed research notes accumulated by a professor over 18 years of work. They justified themselves by claiming they were humane: they did not touch people, they only attacked objects. But these notes are not only a tool, a record of his years; they were extensions of his personality. We all have certain tools or instruments with such a character. Some peoples homes have personality. In visiting a restored house of a famous historical figure, one can establish a communion across time.

A poignant literary episode that suggests the devastation that temporal distance causes to such communion occurs in Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. Protagonist Jim Burden grew up with the Czech immigrant girl Antonia Shimerda in pioneer Nebraska. For two decades after leaving the prairie, Burden, who became a lawyer in New York, shunned the idea of returning to visit Antonia, now a grandmother. "In the course of 20 crowded years, one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that could ever happen to one again." Yet eventually he took the risk of letting reality displace illusion. He paid a visit.

Burden returned to the old wagon-road crossing where he had first met the slightly older girl so many years before. In an eloquent passage, Cather, through Burden, describes the scene where the ancient tracks had been progressively disappearing. He found, of course, that he could not really return to the past. Yet, the physical evidence of their time and place together as children remained. That road enabled him to recall "the precious, the incommunicable past" the two had shared. If indeed people who have had a common experience find the past difficult to retrieve, how much more so those who never knew each other in the first place. In the literal sense the past is irrecoverable, "incommunicable."

Yet some sort of communication does occur. There is irony in Cather's tale: for the reader, the otherwise irrecoverable is partly recovered, though transformed, by the novelist. Not all of the

past is communicated, but the author allows the reader to participate in an experience that would otherwise be out of range. The effect is profoundly humanistic.

Historic religious buildings are analogous to the wagon tracks where Burden and Antonia met. Congregations, volunteer agencies and citizen groups that preserve and restore churches are like the novelist: they help new generations retrieve traces and imaginatively reconceive otherwise incommunicable pasts. This project is part of humanistic study. "By awakening a sense of what it might be like to be someone else or to live in another time or culture, [the humanities] tell us about ourselves, stretch our imagination, and enrich our experience. They increase our distinctively human potential," said a Commission on the Humanities sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, in its report *The Humanities in American Life* (University of California Press, 1980).

The brick and mortar, the furniture and paint of church preservation are necessary, but much of the effort to preserve physical properties stays with externals. We lose the connection to people. Most of the literature on restoration is technical and aesthetic. From time to time we need to step back and ask what humanistic purposes the renewal of such buildings sets out to fulfill.

To praise preservation is not to propose that all old buildings are worth saving. The past and evidence of it can be oppressive, overwhelming. It is possible to hope for too much communication from the past, to nurture too much memory. Yep thoughtful people can find a balance: letting the past speak to them while preparing to live in the present and the future.

Restored houses of worship are strategic in that they carry so many connotations —ethnic, familial, congregational and personal. A superficial view suggests that physical properties belong only to the decor, not to the stuff of life. True, "ethnics" retrieve old country recipes and post (probably fictitious) coats of arms above their mantle's when they cannot relive the immigrant or old-country experience and can rarely even recover the old language. Church buildings have similar limitations as guides to the ethnic experience. And just as families select artifacts that suggest past happiness in order to soften the blow's inflicted by actions of family members and less happy times, congregational histories can create illusions: authors might relate in two sentences the experience of an unhappy pastorate that led to two decades of misery —and distort the whole story by dwelling on the beauty of the old sanctuary, hence suggesting general happiness.

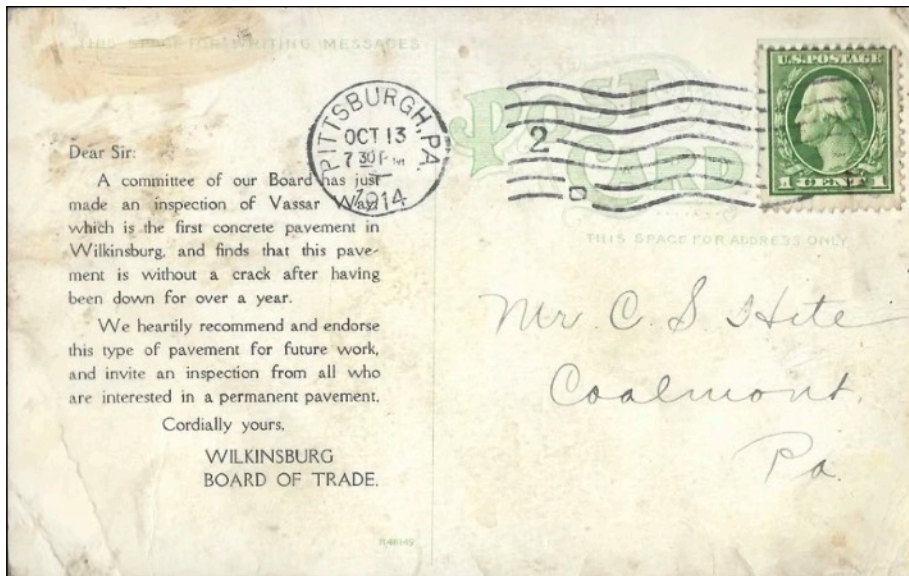
It is one thing to retrieve elements that communicate the almost incommunicable transactions of one's personal past. To experience the communal past of people one did not know and who, because of their death, have become inaccessible is more difficult. As individuals we have no personal memory of events beyond the span of our own biographies. In culture and society we therefore lack all access to social pasts unless a novelist re-creates their features or preservers ensure that a hallowed building can endure into a new generation. We turn to the novelist, the historian, the preserver not as a matter of routine but only when we "stop to think."



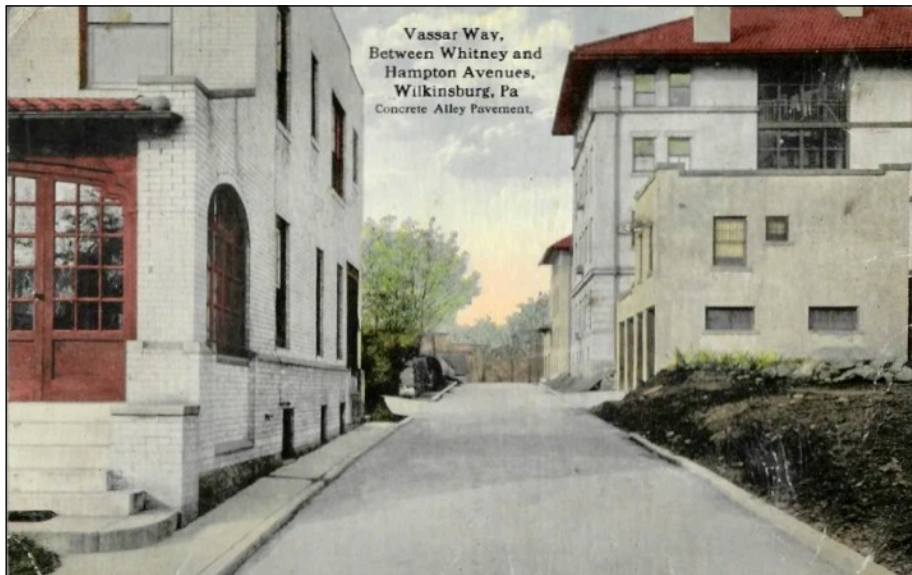
Wilkinsburg Baptist Church 1892-1955

[Essay to be continued in September 2022 issue of Archives]





In 1913 Wilkinsburg's side streets and ways were getting paved. The Wilkinsburg Board of Trade, later becoming the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce, advocated for concrete to be the paving choice. The first alley/way to be paved with concrete in Wilkinsburg was Vassar Way. Postcards were sent out proclaiming great success a year after the concrete installation.

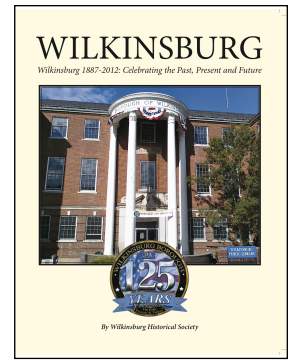
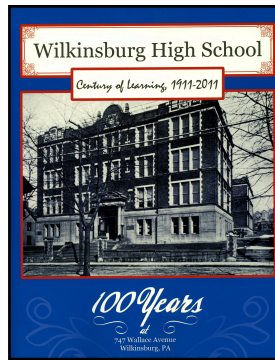
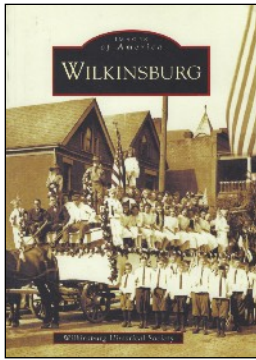


The Wilkinsburg Board of Trade stated that the committee of the Board had made an inspection of 1914 Vassar Way and found that "this pavement is without a crack after having been down for over a year." Although concrete looked great and was highly recommended, there is little evidence that it was used to pave many other alleys or ways in Wilkinsburg. It was a more expensive option.



Same view of Vassar Way in July, 2022. The home on the left (facing Whitney Avenue) had some modifications during the last 100+ years, and a new multi-family dwelling has been erected on the right side of this image.

The concrete pavement is still in fantastic condition, after more than a century of use. The 1914 Board of Trade would be pleased with their assessment of it.



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 \_\_\_\_\_





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](http://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.

## 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.