



Archives

SEPTEMBER
2022

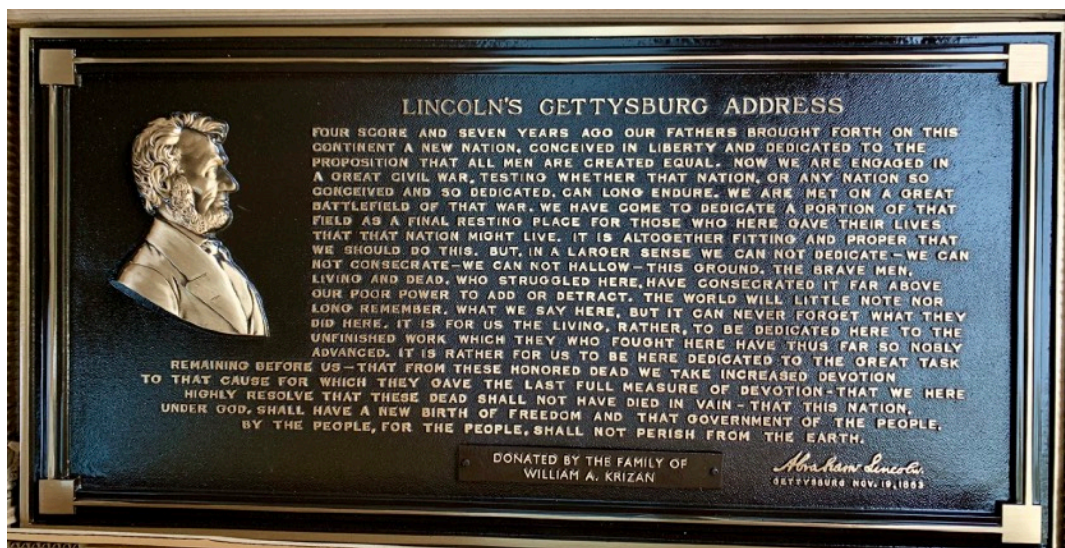
WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 28, ISSUE 7

Lights for Lincoln



The bronze Abraham Lincoln has been at the crossroads of the Lincoln Highway and the William Penn Highway (Penn Avenue) since July 2021. During daylight hours he looks great, but when the sun goes down the area is quite dark. Now that the days are getting shorter, the plaza and Lincoln cannot be seen very well, and anyone who uses the benches in the evening is sitting in the dark.

The **Wilkinsburg Historical Society** is planning to arrange for lighting the area, possibly with solar-powered LED lights. Donations are gratefully accepted and can be sent to: Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P.O. Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235



The Wilkinsburg Historical Society has received a generous gift of a bronze plaque which features a bas relief of Abraham Lincoln and the complete Gettysburg Address. This was donated by the family of William Krizan.

Ideally the 18" x 36" plaque will be mounted on the railing at the Lincoln plaza, overlooking the historic Lincoln Highway, so that it can be seen by the public anytime. The Gettysburg Address was delivered by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863 at the dedication of the military cemetery at Gettysburg. It is one of the most important speeches ever given in America, honoring those who died at Gettysburg and promoting freedom, liberty and justice. The Historical Society members are looking forward to sharing this bronze plaque with the people of Wilkinsburg and those who stop by the statue plaza.

COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY

SPONSORED BY
**THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24TH
1:00-4:00 P.M.**

300 East Swissvale Avenue | Edgewood, PA 15218

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

**PETTING ZOO, MUSIC, FOOD,
GAMES & MORE!**

**Children under the age of 12 must be
accompanied by an adult.**

**Local businesses and area non-profits are invited to reserve their
complimentary space to promote their business and mission.**

**For more information, contact Sarah Bartlebaugh
at 412.244.4207 or sbartlebaugh@wpsd.org**

Mark your calendars for the afternoon of **Saturday, September 24th!** The Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (WPSD) will host its annual Community Block Party from 1-4pm. The party is free and open to the public. It takes place on the WPSD campus at the corner of Walnut Street and Swissvale Avenue in Edgewood.

It's a fun afternoon for the whole family, with games and activities for the kids including a balloon artist and face painters, a petting zoo, food, music, animal exhibits from the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium, and more. Free vendor space available to local businesses and organizations! See you at the party!

The Pittsburgh Art Jam at the historic Sleeping Octopus (formerly Yingling home) at 1300 Wood Street in Wilkinsburg 15221 was a great success!

The August 27th gathering of artists, musicians, food lovers and hundreds of delighted guests will long be remembered. Over twenty artists displayed art works and demonstrated their artistic techniques including fabric painting, canvas, jewelry, metal, clay and glasswork.



Pittsburgh Art Jam, in the Wood St./Singer Place area of the Sleeping Octopus included everybody! This family-friendly community event on August 27th featured musicians entertaining the crowd, singers on the porch, hands-on leaf printing, and face-to-face meeting with talented artists who were eager to demonstrate their methods. Perfect weather for this collaging of creative people and hundreds of grateful participants.

The following manuscript is part 2 of the August 2022 Archives article entitled "*Historic Church Preservation: Clues from the Almost Incommunicable Past*" by Martin E. Marty

In John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, a migrating "Okie" family is told not to waste vital packing space on photographs, a China dog and other artifacts of family experience. But one of them asks, "How will we know it's us without our past?" Religion, through myth, symbol, rite, ceremony, art, music and architecture, helps communities know "who they are" by giving them representations of some elements of their past, which is also the past of someone else — the departed, the moved-away, the displaced, the fallen away, the dead. Three elements of which my colleague David Tracy speaks - finitude, contingency and transience - simply overwhelm people unless someone fosters their imaginations by retrieving, retelling and restoring something that will help them interpret their experiences.

To be free for such activity, people have to be ready to let many things go. The world would be piled high with relics if everyone wanted to preserve everything. The restorer, therefore, with some regret about the realities of finitude, contingency and transience, begins her work with a painful prayer of thanks for loss, for forgetting. Katherine Whitehorn in the *Observer* (November 2, 1980) gave this a mythic cast: After God had created all things, "on the seventh day He saw all that He had made, and realized the way things would go. On the eighth day He bestirred Himself again, and created moth and rust, His final stroke of mastery." Deciding to save something therefore has to be an act of calculation, risk and true commitment.

For comparison, think of family photographs. They represent attempts to rescue something from the almost incommunicable past: they are the figurative eroding wagon trails of our imaginations. We know that they distort. They usually show people displaying eternal smiles, which are usually unrepresentative of the faces they really wore. Pictures also have borders. With their edges they domesticate, they make safe the experiences we want to recall. Most of them are posed, so they represent a frozen and over ordered experience. Or they were taken on days of triumph - at graduations, homecomings from hospitals, or competitions. Thus they isolate the artificial elements from life, since the days of most people, most of the time, are prosaic, filled with failures and suffering. So it is possible to overpraise photographs and memory. Scholem Asch was right to remark in his novel *The Nazarene*: "Not the power to remember, but its very opposite, the power to forget, is a necessary condition of our existence."

And yet we advocate rescuing and preserving some churches for intrinsic reasons and because they trigger memories and imagination. Far from idolizing the past, selective church restoring and preservation is a high-risk projection into the future. And as a committee projects, it should rely on some humanistic calculus.

Different criteria apply to religious buildings than to others. According to George David Miller, who in his article "*Ordo Amoris: The Heart of Scheler's Ethics*" has condensed one credible calculus by philosopher Max Scheler, the "regions of values" can be ordered this way:

The "highest" value-modality is the holy (characterized positively by the holy, negative by the unholy); the next "highest" is the spiritual (characterized positively by the beautiful, the right, and the *pure cognition of truth* and negatively by the ugly, the wrong, and the positivistic quest of truth in terms of controlling nature); the third "highest" of the value-modalities is the vital (characterized positively by the noble and negatively by the vulgar); the next "highest" region is the useful (characterized positively by the useful and negatively by the non-useful); and the "lowest" region is the pleasant (characterized positively by the agreeable and negatively by the disagreeable.) [*Listening*, Fall 1986, p.218]

This scheme of Scheler can help correct the usual approach which, following aesthetic and antiquarian interests, reverses the order. Especially when a civic group that does not share the liturgical premises of a congregation becomes involved in preservation - and such groups often perceive what heirs of a congregation do not see - the tendency is to begin with the issue of beauty. Or when a congregation preserves a house of God, its interest is often on the second level, of utility. Those are Scheler's bottom two ranks; the pleasant and the useful.

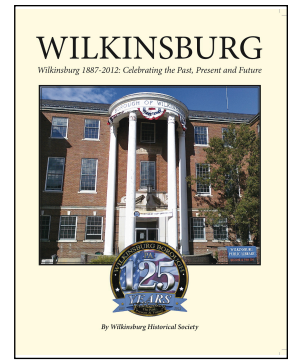
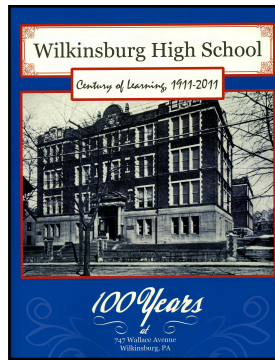
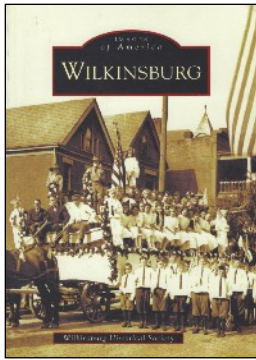
Often preservers are motivated by the impulse to honor those who sacrificed, whose immigrant lives were ennobled by the devotion they gave to a structure in the new country or by their ability to create a space in which terrors of life, which came in abundance, could be controlled. Preserving their achievement then pays attention to the vital, the heroic. But the people who built and used the buildings were not simply moved by beauty, utility or nobility. They made the sacrifices to build as part of their search for the pure cognition of truth in forms of spirituality that promoted the right along with the beautiful. Those who were successful built a space and enacted experiences in which they had access to the holy, and thus in worship they turned their backs on the profane and unholy. Scheler's hierarchy of values can help one determine what to preserve and how to preserve it.

Keeping in mind this who used the building in earlier generations will give preservers an interest in representing the ordinary life of the people. Often one sees a restored building that verges on cuteness or on what Joseph Sittler used to call a Suburban Dress Shoppe appearance. Everything is too glossy, too tidy. One forgets that the 19th-century worshipers came in from streets redolent of horse manure, to a building whose heating plant left coal dust on the higher reaches of the furniture. They no doubt sat in some disarray, and saw their children now and then scuff a pew. It would be absurd to prefabricate or accent surviving traces of such drabnesses and marrings. But to use images of real life instead of museum-case perfection helps present the holy as experienced in the midst of the ordinary, where it matters.

A second way of making Scheler's higher concerns a priority is to recall how holiness and spirituality had to be developed in the contexts of a sacred building. While it is good to rescue the last beautiful building on the block, happy are the preservers who can keep a building in a neighborhood where it is integrated with the surrounding profane structures. Such preservation probably implies humanitarian as well as humanistic commitments: so many of these good buildings are in settings where the homeless take shelter on the steps, where declining values afflict nearby homes and businesses. Abraham Joshua Heschel said that observing the sabbath was a temporal recognition of the hallowing of all of life. So architectural and artistic preservation when it values sacred space in the context of ordinary surroundings assists in the hallowing of the rest of life, decades later.

One finds the holy in the encounter with otherness, with the Other. This other may come for a Jim Burden in the form of an Antonia, who years before had spoken a different language and presented a partly forbidding culture. It may lie in the wagon trails that evoke old meetings. The Other can be present in the friend, the neighbor, the stranger, in the "lease of the brethren" and sisters who represent need. Surviving sacred building were used for more than satisfying worship needs. They marked passages on the way of ordinary life. They provided locales for conversations that were capable of changing lives.

The polemic in this humanistic approach to preservation is against nostalgia, antiquarianism, idolatry of the past; against mere prettiness and artificiality; against restoration that ignores contexts and the human stories that were worked out in past encounters with the holy. Attempts to reconcile the contexts of ordinary life and neighborhood, to replicate with more a sense of realism than an impulse toward beautification, to help imagine the lives of the people who built and used old houses of worship, make preservation worthwhile. At their most successful, restorers retrieve from the incommunicable past something of two elements the world too often otherwise does without: the experience of the truly human and the surprising holy.



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

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.