Archives

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Wilkinsburg Historical Society Newsletter
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Kenyon Jewelers: A century of Craftsmanship and Community

711 Penn Avenue, Wilkinsburg, PA 15221

Doug Duffus, daughter Bea. Photo by Heather Mull

WCDC has shared the **Kenyon Jewelers** story as it celebrates 100 years in business in Wilkinsburg. Written by Dade Lemanski, here are excerpts from this fascinating story:

Doug Duffus has been repairing rings and necklaces for nearly forty years, and the whole of his career has been behind the counter of Kenyon Jewelers in Wilkinsburg. In 1987, when Doug was nineteen, attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania and studying to be an art teacher, he met Bob Shamey. Doug learned that Bob worked as a goldsmith. “He was a great guy, very talented guy. He was in Ripley’s Believe-It-Or-Not because he’d carved the world’s smallest chain out of a toothpick. All of his stuff was just crazy. So I met him, and he showed me pieces he’d made for the Grateful Dead and the Rolling Stones. When I returned to IUP after that summer, I enrolled in metal smithing classes and immediately took a liking to them. Making little things, moving and connecting pieces in unique ways - I just took to it.”

A few years later, Doug got a job at Kenyon Jewelers. Soon, he was commuting between Wilkinsburg, where he lived with his aunt; Indiana where he was still attending IUP; and Johnstown where he taught classes at the art center. While many of his friends with teaching degrees left the state seeking work, Doug was committed to doing work that he’d studied, and that brought him so much satisfaction.

As an employee of the Kenyons, Doug became attached to the store and to the Borough of Wilkinsburg - meeting the neighbors, making relationships, joining the Chamber of Commerce, and eventually becoming one of the founding board members of the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce.

Kenyon Jewelers: A Century of Craftsmanship and Community (continued)

Photo by Heather Mull

More than 70 years after Leonard Kenyon Jr.'s father opened the store, which started out as a watch repair shop, Leonard decided it was time to retire. Doug and another employee, David Virostek, happily took over the jewelry store. "I wanted to be here," says Doug. "I felt lucky to stay in this neck of the woods."

Doug's daughter Bea grew up in the store, taking naps in the upstairs apartment on days when she stayed home sick from school and coming into the store on her way to high school to earn a few dollars as a teen. Virostek, she recalled, had older children who were already out of the house, and he was glad to have the opportunity to play with Bea and her sister so Doug could get work done.

Today, much of the shop's inventory is vintage art-deco rings priced affordably so that customers can fall in love with something and take it home without destroying their bank account. Many customers, Doug notes are repeats. Some are people who grew up in Wilkinsburg and visit the shop to reminisce and buy something sentimental; others bring in old beloved jewelry, hoping to give it new life. Recently, a couple who bought their wedding bands from Kenyon Jewelers decades ago returned to purchase a new set of bands.

The continued celebration of family, community, and beautiful adornments - in many ways, things have remained unchanged at Kenyon Jewelers over the last 100 years. However, in other ways, the shop reflects the evolution and resilience of the Wilkinsburg community. Fashions have changed, the unique 1960s glass-and-pebbled-concrete storefront is receiving new life thanks to a facade grant from the WCDC, and the once rambunctious young girl running around the store now stands proudly as the store's manager.

If you haven't stopped by Kenyon Jewelers recently, we strongly encourage you to visit Doug and Bea - and make sure to tell them, "Cheers to 100 years"!

KENYON
JEWELERS
Repair, Restore, Repurpose...
Vintage Reborn

Center for Civic Arts and the Untold Stories Project -

Preserving Wilkinsburg's Black history through the arts

Historic preservation and conservation are central to Wilkinsburg's Center for Civic Art's mission to catalyze the arts to engage a thriving community that has experienced significant demographic challenges to the fabric of community identity and cohesion. The CfCA's Untold Story Project is a multi-faceted program developed to address the absence of BICOP histories in the Borough's historical archives, and to record resident's histories in ways that raise and celebrate their voices. Distinct from fine arts, Civic Arts presents community based, participatory arts involving community members as the artists who collaborate with a professional artist to master an art medium. Story quilts were created throughout African American history as a traditional arts form that often-told stories of slavery and segregation, and are symbols of culture, community, and freedom. Rather than a unique personal aesthetic, participatory arts are passed from one generation to the next as a collective wisdom.

L image, **Jody Guy** holding left side of the panel quilt, **Tina Brewer,** wearing red, stands behind. This is the **Wilkinsburg Library Untold Story Quilting Circle.** R image shows the Wilkinsburg Library quilters planning their stories with **Vernette Singletary** at the materials table in the Borough building Auditorium.

L image -**Pastor Jerome Hurst** stopped by to see the quilting circle at Ethnan Temple Seventh Day Adventist Church. R image is **Angie Moses** at the Ethnan Temple SDA Church quilting circle.

Center for Civic Arts and the Untold Stories Project (continued)

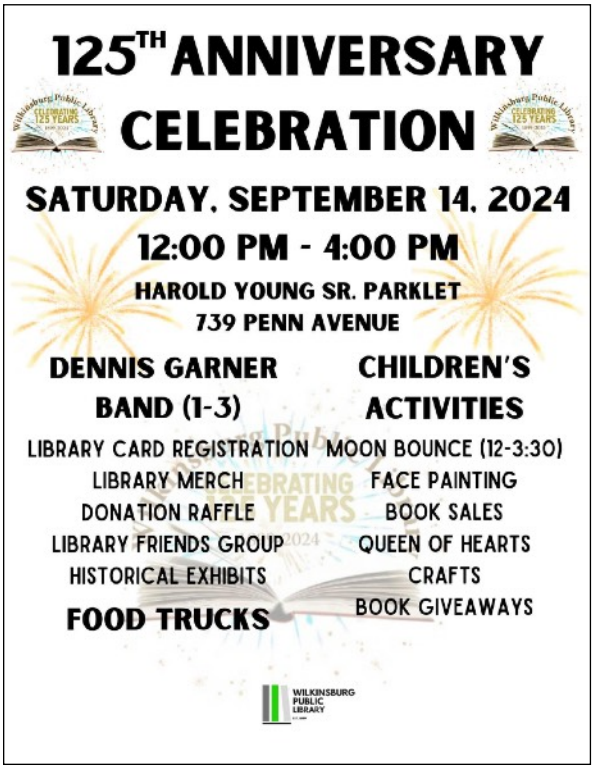
The Project's components include a Story Quilt artist in residency with **Tina Williams Brewer,** and the Untold Story recorded oral stories. To artfully capture the lived oral histories from the African American community we chose to partner with the Wilkinsburg Churches where they worship. Quilter Tina Williams Brewer's specialty is quilts that explore the African Diaspora. In 2023, The Project's first artist in residency site was Wilkinsburg's St Mark AME Church, followed by residencies in The Christian Church of Wilkinsburg with their Living Liberty group of housing insecure women in February and March 2024 and the Ethnan Temple Seventh Day Adventist congregation in April/May 2024. The final residency moved to the Wilkinsburg Library in June with a broader, more secular and more diverse audience of quilters. The Untold Story Quilt has grown from 8 Wilkinsburg story squares to 30 story quilt squares celebrating, among others, African American artists (Kyle Holbrook, Meredith Young, Daniel Carter), business owners (Tina Stevens), activists (Judge Livingstone Johnson, Andre Scott, Renee Haynes Johnson), pastors (Samuel McGill), residents (Francis Butts, the Ridleys) and mayors (Mayors Comans and Young). The recorded archive of oral stories will be featured on the Library website and includes 10 recordings to date. A 2025 round of Untold Stories Quilting residencies with additional honorees is planned, and dependent on funding. The completed quilt will be on display in the Wilkinsburg Borough Building in late 2024 (TBA).

L image -**Jackie Payne**, quilter and Wilkinsburg resident R image - Vintage photo of **Harold Young**, Wilkinsburg Musician for whom the Penn Avenue parklet is named. This photo image is used in the quilt.

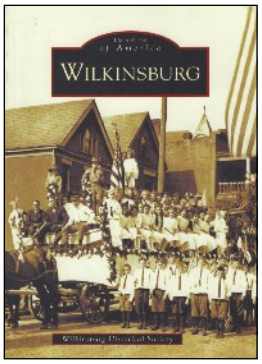
L image - **Dontae Comans**, Mayor of Wilkinsburg, This is one of 30 quilt squares honoring Black Wilkinsburg History R image- **Tina Williams Brewer** at the library explaining quilting process.

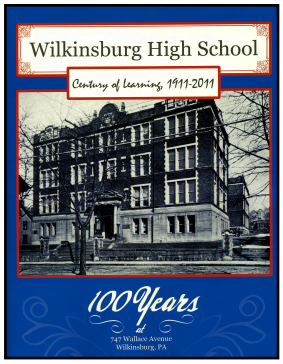
Wilkinsburg Public Library set to celebrate 125 years on September 14, 2024

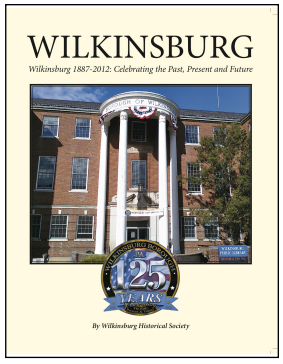
Come to the wonderful celebration on Saturday, September 14, 2024 from noon until 4:00 PM at the Harold Young Sr. Parklet on Penn Avenue to celebrate 125 years of the Wilkinsburg Public Library! There will be fun activities for all ages, including a band (1-3), a moon bounce (12-3:30), face painting, book sales, food trucks, and more!



Commemorative T-shirts are available at Wilkinsburg Public Library for just $12. each. All sizes available, S-2X







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 _____

the Wilkinsburg Sun

inside

Wilkinsburg's Home Rule Charter's Public Hearing Is July 16

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.