



Archives

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WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
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Much of the history of Wilkinsburg's date stone was unknown until recently. John K. Robinson, a Harrisburg resident, shared his knowledge with our Historical Society. John was formerly press secretary for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and former president of the Historical Society of Dauphin County. He authored several articles and book reviews for Pennsylvania Heritage magazine. Mr. Robinson has provided information, a clear photo of the stone plaques in place at Keystone Hall as well as the 1960 news article on the next page.



This is the date stone which is displayed at the front east corner of the Wilkinsburg Borough Building. The date, 1887, exhibits the year that Wilkinsburg was incorporated. Borough officials have plans to restore the portico base, replace the accessibility ramp and improve the landscaping. This hand-carved brownstone date plaque will be cleaned and surrounding enclosure refurbished. When this stone was initially made in Harrisburg for the facade of Keystone Hall the date of 1887 represented the year that the two separate houses were officially joined together to make one impressive Governor's residence.



This image depicts the two front plaques of Keystone Hall, the first Pennsylvania Governor's residence in Harrisburg. The upper date stone plaque was given to Wilkinsburg in 1961 after Keystone Hall was razed. This carved plaque is very ornate, and has been noted that it is a grand baroque style decorative stone.

The lower plaque shows a shield from the PA Coat of Arms and the PA State Seal. It features a ship, a plough and three sheaves of wheat, topped by an eagle. It is not known where this lower facade plaque is located now.

Keystone Hall was used from 1860 until about 1943 when the Governor moved to Fort Indiantown Gap where a fieldstone house had originally been built for the PA National Guard. The "State House" at the Gap was favored until a new Governor's home was built in 1962.

23 GOVERNORS LIVED AT FRONT ST. ADDRESS

Demolition of Old Mansion Due to Begin on Monday

Demolition of the historic brownstone mansion at 311 N. Front St.—home of 23 governors—is to be started Monday by the York Wrecking Co.

The property was bought recently at auction for \$85,500 by the Insurance Company of North America, which previously acquired adjoining properties at 305 and 309 which it occupies.

Edward A. Town, manager, said a modern insurance building ultimately is to be erected on the site of the three tracts, measuring 150 by 210 feet. Meanwhile, the mansion site, 52.6 by 210 feet, will be filled in, covered with top soil and landscaped, he said. The insurance company also owns and occupies the old Cameron Mansion at 319 N. Front, 26.3 by 210 feet.

ALL FURNISHINGS have been removed from the four-story building. The Dauphin County Historical Society has taken up the fourth floor parquet flooring of inlaid walnut and oak, to be relaid in a room of the society's headquarters in the old John Harris Mansion.

The seal of Pennsylvania carved in a large brownstone block on the front of the mansion will be preserved by the company, along with a companion stone bearing the date 1887.

Town said it has not been decided what will be done ultimately with the two stones.

THE REAR portion of the mansion was built in 1861 and was acquired three years later by the Commonwealth which revamped

the structure and erected the front in 1887.

Gov. Lawrence described the passing of the old mansion as a "sad and sentimental loss" but one dictated by reasons of economy and obsolescence. Most recent governors preferred to live in the summer mansion on the Indiantown Gap Military reserva-

tion. The summer mansion now is the official mansion.

The York Wrecking Co. is to raze the structure within 60 days from start of demolition. Orville W. Nickey said two men will begin stripping the interior Monday. He said all salvagable material will be offered for sale, including souvenir bricks.



—Evening News Photo

RESCUED—This brownstone seal of the commonwealth imbedded in the front wall of the former governor's mansion, 311 N. Front St., will be preserved by the Insurance Co. of North America whose demolition contractor will start razing the four-story building Monday.

ORDERED TO WHITE HILL

Wilkinsburg's Borough building was built in 1939 and officially opened January 1, 1940. It is the heart of Wilkinsburg with government offices, Council Chambers, public library, children's library, police and fire departments and rooms for meetings and performances.



This 1966 image (above) of the Wilkinsburg Borough building shows that very little has changed. The stately building formerly had a railing around the portico roof. The 7-Mile Stone was formerly located by the base of the flagpole.

The lower image was taken in July, 2025. The exterior of the building has recently had a new roof, masonry repairs and four new white columns. Plans are in place to restore the base of the portico, replace the accessibility ramp, add seating and refurbish the 1887 date stone.



The **Wilkinsburg Train Station**, built in 1916 was designed by architect Walter H. Cookson in 1915. It was magnificent, with marble walls, terrazzo floors, large skylight, brass fittings, and an elegant feel throughout. The Station was heavily utilized for over fifty years as Wilkinsburg citizens travelled by train westward to work in Homewood, East Liberty, Shadyside and the City of Pittsburgh. Going eastbound, train service included Edgewood, Swissvale, Braddock, Turtle Creek, Pitcairn and Wilmerding. Railroad commuter service ended June 1966. Amtrak discontinued remaining rail service in the early 1970s.



This 1966 view of the Wilkinsburg Train Station shows that industrial soot had darkened the buff colored brick and gave it a dingy appearance. The clock at the top was not functioning, so a keystone cover was placed over it so that travelers wouldn't be confused by the incorrect time. The station was still in use at that time, but with reduced number of passenger trains coming through. By 1974 the station was closed and left abandoned for the next forty years



Nearly sixty years later, this image, taken in July, 2025 shows the beautifully restored station. It was historically restored during 2017-2021. The Wilkinsburg Train Station has all the beauty of the original structure, but with upgraded electric, code-compliant amenities, accessible bathrooms, and a large south-facing room that can be fitted as a commercial kitchen. This could be a great new restaurant for Wilkinsburg. The WCDC is handling any inquiries for leasing this beautiful edifice.

The Wilkinsburg Train Station was saved and restored due to the extraordinary efforts of the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation, WCDC. Led by Executive Director Tracey Evans grants were applied for and received, a capital campaign initiated, alumni of WHS and residents were all included to achieve the funding needed. Since the September, 2021 grand opening celebration the station has been the venue for amazing events: a gala, resource fair, holiday handmade sales and other community events. This is ideally set up to be a restaurant or other business. Contact www.wilkinsburgcdc.org to get more information, schedule a tour, give a donation, volunteer your services, or just get acquainted.



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.