



Archives

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WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 29, ISSUE 6

Historic Mulberry Community Full Gospel Church unveils The Biblical Garden

Saturday, June 24, 2023 **Mulberry Community Church** hosted a community event dubbed “Gathering in the Garden” to celebrate the community spirit of Wilkinsburg and to unveil their new Bible-themed garden.

Organized by long time Wilkinsburg resident Clifton McGill, over 60 people enjoyed the afternoon filled with fellowship, information, food, entertainment and surprises.



Mulberry Community Church, also known as **Mulberry Community Full Gospel Church** is located at the corner of Wallace Avenue and Hay Street. It was built in 1915 as Grace United Evangelical Church. Over the past 107 years the church has served several denominations as mergers occurred. Since 2004 the handsome Gothic Revival stone structure has been the home of Mulberry Community Church. When originally built, a frame parsonage was attached to the back of the church. That home had not been used for many decades and was removed from the back of the church.

The space formerly occupied by that parsonage now *could* become paved to provide a few parking spaces. Citizens may remember the 1970 words of Joni Mitchell in “Big Yellow Taxi” as she sang “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot”. However, the newly vacant lot had a much more significant purpose in store when creative visionary Clif McGill got together with MCC’s Pastor Lawrence Smith and planned a Bible garden instead. Over many months Clif, members of the Wilkinsburg Pollinator Garden Group and a small team of helpers worked to clear away weeds, haul in dirt, stones and mulch and plan the space to include the Garden of Eden, numerous Biblical plants, a grape arbor and bench seating. Two old windows that had been boarded over became panels for large mural paintings by artist John Shook.

“Gathering in the Garden” was a true meshing of Wilkinsburg’s organizations and individuals who are dedicated to improving the Borough. The program included guest speakers who shared their knowledge and passion for beautification. Those included: **Nicole Santella** (Wilkinsburg Pollinator Garden Group president), **Brian Sieffert** (WCDC Board member and member of WCDC’s Strong Neighborhoods Committee), **Amy Fisher** (Preservation Pittsburgh director, RAH [Religious Architectural Heritage] chair, owner of Pawsburgh Photography), **Anne Elise Morris** (Wilkinsburg Historical Society president), **Rev. Thomas Mitchell** (Sanctuary Project), **Clif McGill** and **Rev. Lawrence Smith**.

Other guests in attendance included Wilkinsburg Borough manager **John Antinori**, Wilkinsburg Chief of police **Ophelia Coleman** and police officer **Coffee**, **John Irwin** (past president of Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce and president of Wilkinsburg Rotary Club), Wilkinsburg Council member **Pamela Macklin** and Center for Civic Arts director **Jody Guy**.



Mulberry Community Church is located at the corner of Wallace Avenue and Hay Street. Designed by the architectural firm of Kiehnel & Elliot and built in 1915, this church is a good example of Gothic Revival style. Mulberry exhibits the pointed arch windows and doorways, rough-hewn stone cladding, large stone buttresses and a steep roofline. The Rose (round) window facing Wallace Avenue employs the Greek cross pattern with four arms of equal length, representing a sign of God. It is a handsome, solid and timeless building.



Rev. Lawrence Smith spoke to the attendees during the unveiling of the mural, painted by artist John Shook. This mural depicts a young man with a peace dove in flight, a lion and a lamb in a field of flowers with trees and a mountain in the background. Below it is a framed passage from Isaiah 11:9.



The newly created Biblical Garden includes a mural by artist John Shook. It shows Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, touching the forbidden tree. The hands of God are above, while a fox and a few rabbits sit among the flowers.

The landscaping includes plants with Biblical origins with carefully researched identification markers for the plants. These include: palm tree, myrtle, lily, rush, wormwood, papyrus, mint, olive tree, and Star of Bethlehem. There is also a grape vine on an arched arbor at the entrance to the garden. The public is welcome to come anytime. More information about the **Wilkinsburg Pollinator Garden Group** is available at <https://sustainablewilkinsburg.org>

Wilkinsburg's Historic Brick Streets - A plea for maintenance and preservation



View of Graham Boulevard near Laketon Road has a brick surface nearly a hundred years old. Much of the surface is just as flat and secure in 2023 as it was when it was laid in the 1920s.

When motorists complain about bumpy brick roads and are forced to slow down, local government people often consider appeasing the complainers with asphalt paving. The streets, where it's OK to go faster, have been paved in asphalt and in those cases it is safer. The bumps in hand-laid brick streets make you, the driver, slow down. They make you actually watch the road and your surroundings.

Recently, **Anne Elise Morris (president of the Wilkinsburg Historical Society)** had an insightful discussion with Justin Greenawalt about the history, value and maintenance of brick streets. **Justin Greenawalt is an Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist** who advocates the value of maintaining and repairing brick streets. The following notes are a brief synopsis of the discussion regarding Wilkinsburg's brick streets.

When is the last time that the Borough of Wilkinsburg paved a brick street? And by paved I mean: spent taxpayer money to pave the entire street. It was probably in 1905-1910 or so. Do you know how frequently asphalt roads need to be graded and repaved? About every 20 to 25 years, 10 to 15 in higher traffic areas. Wilkinsburg has had paved streets, paved with brick that has cost next-to-nothing for almost 120 years. Just like anything else that goes without maintenance, it degrades over time. But now, any plan to replace a road surface that has cost next-to-nothing for the past 120 years with a street paving material that will cost the borough millions in taxpayer funds every 10 to 15 years to replace would be a massive waste of money. The track record for brick street maintenance speaks volumes. Asphalt paving costs millions of dollars, a price that will only go up as inflation rises, every few decades.

What is needed is an investment in maintenance and upkeep of what currently exists. When people complain that no one knows how to fix brick streets anymore it's because they just haven't looked hard enough. In Bellevue the borough began compelling the utility companies to actually put the bricks back. After doing work they've been put back. Someone out there knows how to do this.

Brick streets were built to be maintained by average human beings of average human intelligence. A city worker could go out, pull up a patch of bricks, level them and put them back. If the theory is that "no one does this kind of work with bricks anymore", then perhaps it

is time to start a training program. Use those millions of dollars to actually put people to work and teach them a skill. Why spend several million dollars to repave streets when those millions of dollars can be spent on maintenance? **Brick streets aren't a liability, they're an opportunity.** Aside from low maintenance cost, studies have shown that homes in neighborhoods with brick streets keep their value better. With asphalt, a specialized company must be hired. They have to bring in their asphalt grading equipment and their asphalt trucks with their special mixes of asphalt. It makes the Borough reliant on an outside organization to maintain the streets.

For example, if Wilkesburg is considering expending \$2 million to repave just a few streets in asphalt, for that cost, Wilkesburg could find and train fifteen people. Just imagine finding 15 Wilkesburg residents and telling them: We're going to teach you a new skill, we're going to pay you \$70,000/year, and we're going to give you health insurance to re-lay & repair our brick streets.

Newspapers in California will proclaim: "Small southwestern Pennsylvania town implements new Works Progress Era to fix streets. Unemployed residents trained and paid well above living wage." Those 15 people not only fix the one brick street. They start on the next. And the next one after that. 15 lives are significantly improved. Streets are significantly improved. And now, because the Borough isn't just repaving streets, it isn't just dipping into infrastructure funding from the state, it's open to training program funding. Poverty mitigation program funding. Etc. Wilkesburg is then in possession of a team of skilled laborers and craftsman that it built and curated. And you know who has lots of brick streets, and needs someone to maintain them? The city of Pittsburgh. This isn't new, as FDR did it in the 1930s and 40s. Wilkesburg can spend its money investing in its future...its people...or for \$2 million Wilkesburg can have an asphalt paved street.

Brick streets will last centuries with very minimal maintenance. 500 years is the average paving brick lifespan according to ClayBrick.org Those who scoff at the higher initial cost of large scale brick street rehabilitation aren't seeing the forest for the trees. It's an investment in the longevity of one's community. You cannot expect to build lasting infrastructure with cheap materials. Plus, even when old brick streets do settle unevenly they become a traffic calming feature. Try speeding on a brick road in Pittsburgh. Just try. Brick streets are safer streets as traffic speed is slower. Other communities in the Pittsburgh area, Oakmont, Aspinwall, Bellevue, Mount Lebanon are examples of areas that are preserving and repairing their historic brick streets. Wilkesburg should join in the effort.

Many of Wilkesburg's 125 year old brick streets are worthy of preservation and their presence is important in maintaining character in the picturesque appearance of such historic neighborhoods. Repairs can be easy to do by removing brick, properly repairing the sub-surface and replacing the paver. Repairs can be done in any weather and once repaired, there is no need to wait for it to set. For the high traffic volume streets that may need to be asphalt covered, it will be wise to remove and save a quantity of the high-quality paving brick for future repairs to brick streets.

Finally, in 2023 every government decision includes a look at the environmental impact. The re-use of brick for maintenance and repair is environmentally friendly and poses no hazardous concerns whereas the use of asphalt involves petroleum, coal tar, hydrocarbons and other carcinogens which cause air pollution and increased risk of health problems for those who use it. Sustainability, recycling, use of carbon-free materials are the goals prevalent now and in the future.

SATURDAY • SEPTEMBER 9, 2023 • 10AM - 5PM

• CENTER FOR CIVIC ARTS (ABANDONED CHURCH) • ST STEPHAN'S EPISCOPAL •

HISTORIC WILKINSBURG TOUR

SACRED SPACES

A PROGRAM OF
**THE CENTER FOR CIVIC ARTS
& PRESERVATION PITTSBURGH**

• SOUTH AVENUE METHODIST • ST MARY MAGDALENE PARISH / ST JAMES •
• ETHNAN TEMPLE 7TH DAY ADVENTIST • MULBERRY COMMUNITY CHURCH •
• COVENANT FELLOWSHIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH • ST MARK AME •

For more information contact: civcarts211@gmail.com • Funded by Creative Catalyst Grant and UPMC

Save the Date - September 9, 2023 beginning at 10:00 AM

Center for Civic Arts is presenting the 2023 Sacred Spaces Tour in celebration of seven operating Wilkinsburg Churches, and one abandoned church. Live music, Shana Simmons interpretive dance, historic overview for each church, and a photo contest featuring your best photos are planned for the event.

This is a free event.

For more information: civcarts211@gmail.com

More information to come as details are finalized.

Saturday, September 23, 2023 7:00 - 10:00PM at the Wilkinsburg Train Station



Dream City Magic Gala benefiting the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC).

This celebration, our first since 2018, will highlight our work and accomplishments over the past 15 years, including the completed restoration of the Train Station. We are thrilled to open the historic Wilkinsburg Train Station for a very special evening of magic, music, and so much more!

The Dream City Magic Gala will feature magician, **Jon Tai**, and musical guest, **Fusion Illusion**.

JON TAI - Jon is a celebrated magician and storyteller, whose mission is to foster connections between people through shared moments of astonishment. He performs magic across the country and around the world, in person and virtually, and has called the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Liberty Magic Theater his home base since its grand opening in early 2019. He is best known for having co-created and starred in "Missed Connections" Off-Broadway at 59E59 Theaters in New York City, following its premiere at Chicago's MacArthur Award-winning A Red Orchid Theatre.

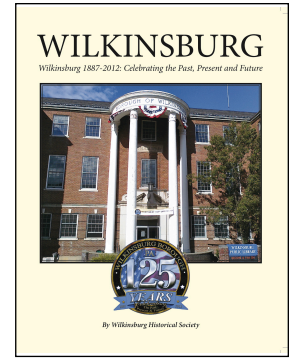
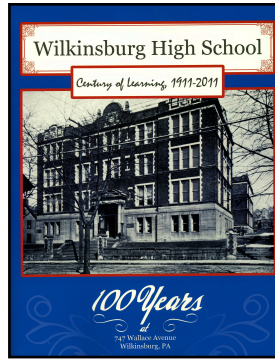
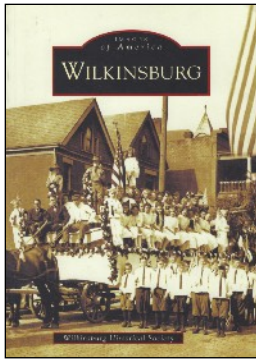
FUSION ILLUSION - Fusion Illusion is a 6-piece progressive jazz fusion band that blends the traditional style of yesterday with the innovative sound of today. They made their debut in 2021 at the Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival following an invitation to perform at the opening reception for headliner, Chaka Khan.

TICKETS - Tickets are \$125 per ticket, which includes entertainment, food, open bar & valet parking.

MORE DETAILS - Help us ensure an enjoyable event for all. Please note:

- All guests must be 21 years of age or older.
- Activities will take place indoors and outdoors, rain or shine. All ticket sales are final.
- Tickets may be purchased from Facebook page site or call the WCDC at (412) 727-7855.
- For updates, check our Facebook event page, fb.me/e/7PFgN10j9.

Space is limited - get your tickets now for this truly one-of-a-kind event at the historic Wilkinsburg Train Station.



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.

<p>Make check or money order payable to: Wilkinsburg Historical Society</p> <p>Orders can be mailed to: Wilkinsburg Historical Society, P.O.Box 17252, Pittsburgh, PA 15235</p>			
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 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.