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WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
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Lincoln Highway, established October 31, 1913 is 110 years old!

Visitors to Wilkinsburg often stop to see the bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln at the crossroads of Route 30 and Penn Avenue. Visitors, and some local residents question why we have a statue of America's 16th President at the Lincoln plaza. Here is the story of Wilkinsburg's century-plus connection with Abraham Lincoln.

The Lincoln Highway, established in 1913, was America's first national memorial to President [Abraham Lincoln](#)! It would be nine more years before the [Lincoln Memorial](#) in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in 1922. As the first practical automobile road across America, the Lincoln Highway brought economic opportunity to hundreds of cities, towns and villages along the coast to coast route of the Lincoln Highway. The success of the Lincoln Highway and its radiating roads provided much benefit to the local governments, businesses and citizens along the way.

How it began: Carl G. Fisher was an early automobile entrepreneur who was the manufacturer of Prest-O-Lite carbide-gas headlights used on most early cars. In 1909 Fisher was the main builder for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, paved it with brick, and started the Indianapolis 500 race. He also believed that the popularity of automobiles was dependent on good roads. In 1912 he began promoting his dream of a transcontinental highway. Fisher called his idea the Coast-to-Coast Rock Highway to be completed by May 1, 1915, in time for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. The highway would run from the Exposition's host, San Francisco, to New York City. Fisher estimated the cost at about \$10 million. Within a month Fisher's friends had pledged \$1 million. Henry Ford, the biggest automaker of his day, would not support the project because he believed the government should build America's roads. The public would never learn to fund good roads if private industry did it for them, he reasoned. However, two men from the automobile industry who pledged money to Fisher's idea would later play major roles in the highway's development: Frank Seiberling, president of Goodyear, and Henry Joy, president of the Packard Motor Car Company. It was Henry Joy who came up with the idea of naming the highway after Abraham Lincoln. Fisher, Joy and their associates agreed and on July 1, 1913, the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) was established "to procure the establishment of a continuous improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, open to lawful traffic of all description without toll charges". The first goal of the LHA was to build the rock highway from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco.

The LHA needed to determine the best and most direct route from New York City to San Francisco. Henry Joy wanted as straight a route as possible for the 3,389-mile highway. East of the Mississippi River route selection was eased by the relatively dense road network.

There were existing roads which could be incorporated into the Lincoln Highway. Some of these were the 1796 Lancaster Turnpike in Pennsylvania, and the Chambersburg Turnpike, used by the Army of Northern Virginia that marched to reach the Gettysburg Battlefield. The proposed Lincoln Highway also included a British military trail built in 1758 by General John Forbes of England. That trail went from Chambersburg to Pittsburgh during the French and Indian War, later known as the Pittsburgh Road and the Conestoga Road.

At the time of the creation of the Lincoln Highway, the United States had about 2.2 million miles of rural roads, but only 190,476 miles had an improved surface of gravel, stone, sand-clay, brick, etc. The plan was to introduce the motoring public to the idea of concrete roads which would be permanent, smooth and a pleasure to travel on. Interstate roads had been considered a luxury, something only for wealthy travelers who owned automobiles. The idea for an improved coast to coast road would enable the average American to travel from state to state. As the direction for the Lincoln Highway was determined, Wilkesburg was chosen to be on the route, on the way from the point in Pittsburgh to Greensburg, Ligonier, Bedford, Chambersburg, Gettysburg, York, Lancaster, and toward the east. The LHA dedicated the coast to coast route on October 31, 1913. Fireworks, dances, concerts and parades were held in many cities in the 13 states along the route.

In 1913, Wilkesburg borough was in the midst of eliminating the five dangerous grade crossings at the railroad tracks. The railroad tracks were being raised, some of the nearby streets were being lowered, nearby streets were paved and a new Pennsylvania Railroad station was being constructed. When the railroad project was nearing completion in early 1916, the citizens of Wilkesburg wanted to have a grand celebration to recognize the borough improvements, the fabulous new train station and the significance of being located on the new Lincoln Highway. A statue of Lincoln was purchased, one of seven Alphonso Pelzer-inspired copper statues of Abraham Lincoln holding a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation in his left hand. The 1916 statue was designed by John Segesman, and fabricated by the W.H.Mullins Company of Salem, Ohio. The sheet copper statue of Lincoln was made possible by dime donations of the school children of the borough, and was placed at the intersection of the newly constructed Lincoln Highway and the William Penn Hwy.

The grand unveiling of the copper Lincoln statue was June 9, 1916, the same weekend as the new train station was opened and celebrated. After a century of standing on the Penn Ave./Lincoln Highway (Ardmore) hill, the thin sheet copper deteriorated and distorted. The 100 year old statue was removed to be displayed inside the Borough Building. A new Abraham Lincoln statue has been sculpted by artist Susan Wagner and dedicated on July 24, 2021. Donations have been received by the Wilkesburg Historical Society to install a bronze plaque at the Lincoln plaza explaining the connection to the Lincoln Highway. The wording is not yet finalized. The Lincoln Highway bronze plaque will match in size, material, font design and finish the existing plaque "Forever Free" which adorns the railing by the statue and overlooks the Lincoln Highway.



Much of this story's Lincoln Highway information was obtained from the Lincoln Highway Association website. Visit lincolnhighwayassoc.org to learn much more about this historic highway.

**Eleven acre cow pasture became home of WTAE-TV sixty-five years ago!
Happy Birthday to WTAE-TV!!**

WTAE Tower Landmark On Ardmore, Parkway

WTAE - TV/RADIO, co-sponsors of "Community Day", is located on an 11-acre landscaped site overlooking Wilkinsburg's Ardmore Blvd., where its colorful tower "call-letters" have been a landmark to passing motorists on both Ardmore and the Parkway East for years.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for the present facility were conducted in February, 1958. "Television City" was architecturally designed to house the most modern television operation in the area. As Pittsburgh's third "on-the-air" TV station, WTAE-TV began broadcasting as an ABC Television Network Affiliate on September 14, 1958, and has remained the ABC outlet for the Tri-State area ever since.

WTAE RADIO has a long history both in Pittsburgh, and in the broadcast industry itself. Under the WTAE call-letters, the station began broadcasting in the 1920's. In 1961 WCAE be-



BEFORE. . . This plot of land just off Ardmore Blvd, in Wilkinsburg was occupied by little more than a friendly herd of bovines in 1957.



AFTER. . . Just a year later, WTAE-TV/RADIO had a brand new address, 400 Ardmore Blvd., where "the deer and the antelope (and the cows) play" no more.

WTAE transformed a Wilkinsburg cow pasture into state-of-the-art television station



Groundbreaking for the new WTAE television station occurred in February 1958. In the background of this photo, high on the distant hill is the **Westinghouse Educational Center**. This was the home of the educational department of the Westinghouse Electrical Corporation where employment and training took place. Across Ardmore Boulevard at 475 Ardmore was **Akins Oldsmobile Used Cars**. In September 1964 Paul Bendik bought the site and held a grand opening of Bendik Oldsmobile. Many people remember the Bendik jingle: *"Happiest drivers in the world, Don't say Olds, say Bendik Olds! Get complete full-service care, Don't say Olds, say Bendik Olds! Ardmore Boulevard in Wilkinsburg, That's the place! You'll find satisfaction, so, Put on a happy face, and remember, Don't say Olds, say Bendik Olds! Make it a Bendik Olds!"* The Bendik site is now occupied by **SSA, Security Systems of America**. SSA has been in Wilkinsburg for over 50 years and relocated to the large prominent site in 2012. As late as 1957 local farmers brought their cows to graze on the **WTAE** site. To this day, Google maps show Pasture Way as a side streets from Shelborne Ave. to Traymore Avenue near WTAE-TV.

Tonight and All Week!
We're celebrating our



PAUL BENDIK

GRAND OPENING



**BENDIK
OLDSMOBILE**
Ardmore Blvd., at Parkway
WILKINSBURG



BERNIE OLDS
SALES MANAGER



It's the Pittsburgh area's newest, most-anxious-to-please automobile dealer, conveniently located on Ardmore

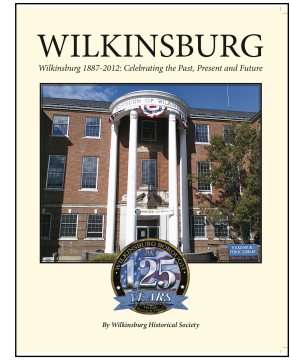
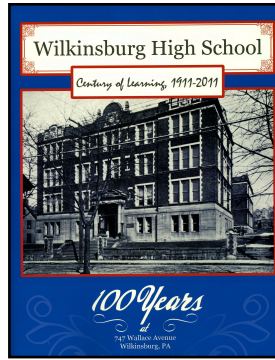
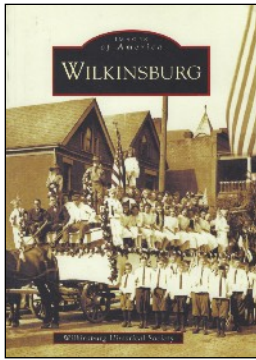
Wilkinsburg's 75th Diamond Jubilee celebration parade was held October 6, 1962. The Wilkinsburg Public Library presented a book float pulled by a farm tractor.



Wilkinsburg's 1962 anniversary celebration included a grand parade with over seventy-five floats, musicians and marching groups participating. The Wilkinsburg Public Library float was book-themed with huge copies of Grimm's Fairy Tales, Alice in Wonderland and Smoky. In this image, the Public Library float is on Wood Street passing Freedman's Men's Wear and Merle's dress shop. Other floats were fashioned by U.S. Navy, Penn Hills Rainbow Girls, Anicus Lodge BSA, Kiwanis Club, Syria Temple, Wilkinsburg Queen of the Bureau of Fire, PNB car, Faller's Furniture, Junior Miss Court, WTAE, Wilkinsburg Boys Club, Wilkinsburg Sportsmen's Club, Boy's Choir Float, and the Powers Market horse and float. Marching groups included the Pitt band, Wilkinsburg High School band, Penn Hills band, Swiss Misses baton group, Wilkinsburg Starlettes, Salvation Army, High Steppers Evans City, All Girl Band, Girl Scouts, Jacks and Jills, and Shriners.

The **Wilkinsburg Public Library** has been a significant influence on everyone in Wilkinsburg since 1899. Initially the library was organized as a branch of the Braddock Library, which was the first Carnegie Library. By 1921 the free Public Library became municipally supported and operated under Borough control. In recent years the former Church of Christ Scientist was sold to Wilkinsburg Borough and is now the Wilkinsburg Cultural Center as well as the Eastridge Branch of the Wilkinsburg Library. That branch library is located at 1900 Graham Boulevard near the Blackridge section of Wilkinsburg.

In 2024, Wilkinsburg Public Library turns 125 years old! This 125th birthday is a milestone worthy of a great celebration. Plans will be in place during 2024 to create a grand event in the fall of 2024. Details will be announced as celebration arrangements are made.



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 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 _____	

