



# Archives

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2024

WILKINSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 30, ISSUE 2

## 150th Birthday Party Planned to Celebrate Engineer/Inventor Frank Conrad!

The Wilkinsburg Historical Society is helping to spread the word that the National Museum of Broadcasting will host an event, **“Making Waves. Celebrating the 150th Birthday of Frank Conrad”**. This commemoration — of a long-time Wilkinsburg resident — will be held **on Saturday afternoon, May 4th, 2024** at the Wilkinsburg Train Station to recognize the amazing achievements of Frank Conrad and honor his pioneer work in radio broadcasting. Conrad’s work in radio has immensely impacted the media industry for over a century. Monies raised through the Conrad salute will help make the NMB museum a reality. To learn more about the vision of the non-profit organization and the proposed museum site in East Pittsburgh—just yards away from where Westinghouse launched KDKA in 1920—visit [www.nmbpitt.org](http://www.nmbpitt.org).

**“Making Waves. Celebrating the 150th Birthday of Frank Conrad”** will be an exciting event to attend! Engaging activities are being planned for [May 4](#) as this March Archives goes to press. Enjoy live music, historical broadcast artifacts, a silent auction — certainly a birthday cake—and more! Complete information will be published in upcoming *Archives*. In the meantime, *save the date!*



Frank Conrad, (May 4, 1874- December 10, 1941) began his career at Westinghouse at the age of sixteen. He stayed for nearly forty years as electrical engineer and inventor. Conrad held over 200 patents, including the rotary electric meter.



This Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission roadside marker honors Conrad. It’s on Penn Ave. at Trenton Avenue in Wilkinsburg, near the site where his home and garage were. (*Wendy’s* is there now.)

## Wilkinsburg Public Library celebrates 125 years in 2024

*The following written history of Wilkinsburg's library was originally published in 1999 on the 100th anniversary of the library. This Archives issue features Part 1, the first thirty years, 1899-1930. The Library will host a 125th celebration on September 14, 2024.*

*Just as the history of each person begins with the birth of their parents, so the history of the Wilkinsburg public library must begin with the birth of its parent library. In 1888 Andrew Carnegie endowed the first of the Carnegie library's. The Carnegie free library of Braddock was dedicated in March 1889 with a collection of 2153 volumes.*

*In 1895, Professor Shrives, Superintendent of Wilkinsburg Schools, asked Walter Crane, librarian of the Braddock Library, to look into the possibility of opening a branch library in Wilkinsburg. Four years later, the Carnegie Free Library of Wilkinsburg was born on September 11, 1899.*

The Library was housed in one small room in the McNair School, which was located on the corner of Center Street and South Avenue, the present site of Ferguson playground. The entire collection consisted of 1500 books. On the first day of its existence the library lent 104 volumes, with a total circulation of 757 in the first week. In its first year the library circulated 58,225 books.



McNair Public School, built in 1895, was the first location for Wilkinsburg's library. The school faced South Avenue at the corner of Center St. The school was torn down in the 1950s and is now the site for Ferguson playground.

The first librarian was Mr. Fred S. Evans, a first cousin to the famous English writer George Eliot and son of Walter Evans, an English engraver who etched the clocks housed in the British House of Commons. Mr. Evans came to America from Birmingham, England where he was born. Upon his arrival in the United States, he works for some time with Jane Addams at the famous Hull House in Chicago. He later moved to the Pittsburgh area and joined the staff of the Braddock Library, finally becoming an assistant librarian before moving to Wilkinsburg.

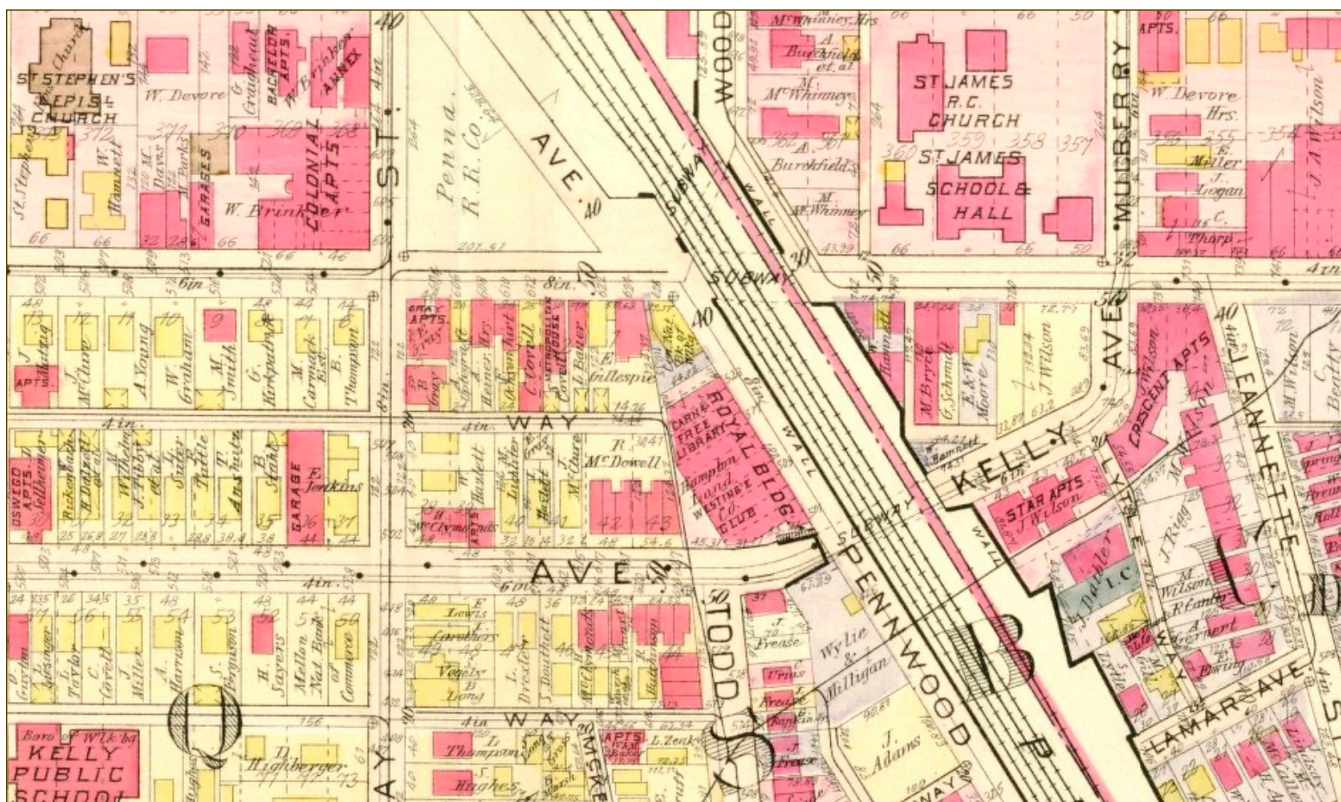


Five months after its opening, conditions had become so cramped and the library so busy that a second room was added and an assistant, Miss Enid Woolsey, was hired to help in that room. The library's circulation levels were so high that its meager collection could not meet the demand. To supplement the collection, Mr. Evans made weekly trips by train to the Braddock Library to obtain extra books for his patrons.



Fred S. Evans  
Wilkinsburg's first librarian,  
employed from 1899 to 1942.

In 1901 Andrew Carnegie offered the Borough \$50,000 to construct a library building if Wilkinsburg could find a suitable site. After more than two years no site had been agreed upon and Carnegie withdrew the offer. In that same year the library was moved to the old YWCA building on Ross Avenue. In 1903 the library was again moved, this time to the Colonial Building at Rebecca and Hay Streets. At this time the Borough assumed the cost of rent, light and heating.



In this 1915 Hopkins map several of the early locations of the library can be seen. The third location in 1903 was in the Colonial Apt. Building, the large pink block in the upper left part of this map. After five years, in 1908 the library moved to its fourth location, the newly built Royal Building on Pennwood Avenue. This building is the large pink block near the middle of this map. Pink structures are made of brick or stone, yellow structures are wood frame. Other Hopkins maps can be found at [historicpittsburgh.org](http://historicpittsburgh.org)

In 1907 Margaret Lowry, who later served as librarian, was hired as an assistant clerk. The library moved to its fourth location within ten years in 1908; the new location being the not-yet-completed Royal Building on Pennwood Avenue. Professor George Lamb, librarian at Braddock helped with the move. One member of the staff would later write of that first moving day, "Professor Lamb was a delight to the small Wilkinsburg library staff. He carried a picture of Andrew Carnegie under one arm and a mirror under the other, all the while singing "Nearer

My God to Thee'. Patrons were served despite the move, either at the old library or in the new building. Books were piled in the middle of the floor at the new location for some time.

The unfinished building presented its own unique problems. One woman patron who wore one of the large picture hats of the time walked through the middle of a swinging door at the top of the stairs, which did not yet have its glass installed. Her hat became stuck in the doorway and some little struggle was required to free her. The library was forced to close at dusk for some time, as there were no lights yet installed. Eventually 52 gas lights were used and each evening the staff lit them and then carefully snuffed them all out at 9 o'clock when the library closed.

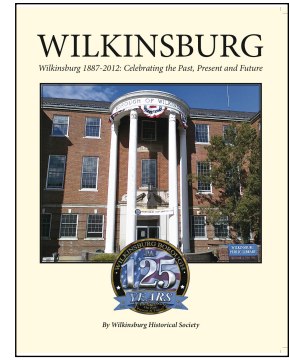
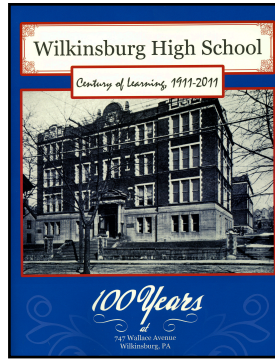
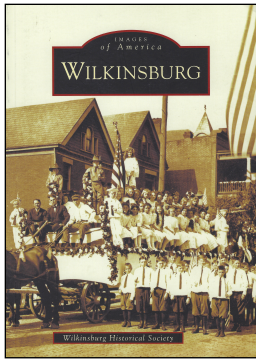
By the year 1921 the Carnegie endowment to the Braddock Library was no longer sufficient to support its branch libraries. Mr. Lamb of Braddock Library came before the Wilkesburg Borough Council with the suggestion that the Borough take over management and funding of the library. The equipment, facilities, a collection of over 10,000 books and the three member staff, consisting of Mr. Evans, Miss Lowry, and Miss McCann, the night librarian, were available for the asking. The alternative was closing the library completely. Council accepted and the library became a part of the municipal system.

The circulation was now over 100,000 volumes per year; only six other libraries in the state, outside of the largest cities, could make that claim. In the same year a story hour series for children was initiated and over 1,000 children took advantage of this added feature. It was also at this time that a 'vacation privilege' was begun. The intense heat in the Royal building during the peak of the summer season kept many patrons from frequenting the library. It was decided to close during the month of August. Patrons were permitted to borrow books for the full month's period. The practice also allowed the librarians to perform needed maintenance tasks without causing inconvenience to the patrons. The following year a book drop was added allowing borrowers to return books during the hours that the library was closed.

In 1926, the suggestion was made to Council that the library should have a new name. It had been several years since all ties with the Carnegie system had been severed. The library, however, still bore the Carnegie name. On October 15, 1926, the institution officially became known as the **Wilkesburg Public Library**.

In the library's 31st year, Mr. Evans came before Council with a list of complaints on conditions in the library. The constant growth of the institution was causing cramped conditions in both shelf and office space. The staff of three assistants and Mr. Evans shared a single office, which also housed three desks, typewriters, boxes of books waiting to be catalogued, as well as books needing repair, and additional supplies. The office also served as a cloak and restroom for the staff. The enormous weight of the rapidly growing book collection was greatly straining the flooring as the library was located on the second floor, Mr. Evans feared for the safety of the patrons who, at peak times, placed added stress on the structure. The flat tin roof made the heat in summer nearly unbearable, the temperature remaining near 100° for long periods. The winter conditions were not much better. The staff was often required to wear heavy stockings, coats, sweaters and sometimes even gloves and boots to keep warm. Along with poor working conditions the staff was not being properly paid and the budget did not allow for purchase of sufficient volumes to keep the collection up-to-date. There were no separate quarters for children. The library was still operating without a telephone. [Part 2 of Library history will continue in next months *Archives*.]





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: <b>Wilkinsburg Historical Society</b>          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 _____	



**Get Ready to Celebrate a Big Borough Birthday!**

**Wilkinsburg Public Library 125th Anniversary**

2004 will be an exciting year for the Wilkinsburg Public Library which is celebrating its 125th anniversary. They have just started planning a celebration for this coming September 14. The library started out as a branch of the Carnegie Library of Bradock which was opened on September 11, 1891, in one room of the McGee School. It was opened by Fred Evans. The library had 1,500 books and circulated 104 books the first day it was in operation. In the first year 58,223 books were circulated. In 1905, a second room and a second staff person were added. In 1921 the Bradock library relocated the Wilkinsburg Borough Council that the Carnegie Library of Bradock could no longer house the branch library and maintain their own. They were willing

**Jeanne Drennan: Making Wilkinsburg a Greener, Sheltered Place**



Next month, the Wilkinsburg Shade Tree Committee will recognize Jeanne Drennan for her longstanding dedication to the health and success of our Borough's shade trees. The committee will host a tree planting dedicated to Jeanne, in recognition of her work over the past decade. In 1993, Jeanne was invited to serve on the newly formed Citizens' Advisory Committee on Shade Trees, informally known as the Wilkinsburg Shade Tree Committee, and the new committee soon shifted the language for the Borough's

Jeanne Drennan left as a tree planting on Lattin Road last week.

continued on page 7

Ross Avenue Now Open to Motorists as Borough Building Construction Ends, p. 3

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](http://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.