



Anna District
Historical Society
Anna • Kettlersville • McCartyville

Skipping Village Gazette

March 17, 1968

End of an Era

Written by Carol Wentz

Groceries. Meats. Women's clothing. Sewing supplies. Shoes. Watches. Toys. Men's clothing. Carpet. Furniture. Paint. Wilt's IGA Store in downtown Anna was truly the Walmart of its day.



Customer June Billing
in front of Wilt's Store

Albert Phillip Wilt, founder of Wilt's Store began his grocery store career in nearby Kirkwood when he owned a store there. He also owned a small store in Anna on 25A before purchasing several

buildings on Anna's Main Street to locate a larger grocery/general store which had its grand opening in 1946 at the end of World War II. Albert incorporated and renovated the three smaller business buildings he had purchased into one large store with three apartments on the second floor. A narrow office space near the middle of the building housed the grocery store office, as well as the Billing Insurance Agency owned by Don Billing. Albert Wilt was an astute businessman who once won a new Ford automobile in a nationwide sales contest for independent grocers.

Wilt's Store was certainly a family owned and family run business. Eventually, the ownership and day-to-day operations of the store were passed from Albert to his sons, Phil and Art. Their children, Eric, Cynthia, Greg, Gretchen, and Geof were often seen working at the store

from a young age. They started out by doing carry-out for customers or sorting pop bottles at the back of the store. Phil's wife, Norma Ann, and Art's wife, Maxine, helped unload supplies and restock the store once a week. Additionally, a number of loyal employees worked at Wilt's, including Gene

Eddie Billing who ran the huckster truck route, Evelyn Curtis who worked in dry goods with Phil Wilt, Bill Smith and Bill Sweitzer who were the "meat men" at different times, and Virginia McIntyre who ran the cash register. Others were Gary Gross, Eileen Boyer, Kay Billing, Harold Wayne Billing, Larry (Beanie) Wilt,



r-l: Maxine Wilt, Virginia McIntyre,
Norma Ann Wilt, Phil Wilt, Art Wilt,
and Bill Smith



Evelyn Curtis
(Jean Wildermuth's mother)



Bill Sweitzer

Susie (Boyer) Smiley, and Larry Billing. Between the railroad tracks and Wilt's Store (parking lot of today's Anna Market) stood the vacant and condemned Anna Farmer's Elevator. The B&O Railroad for years had blocked the demolition of the elevator because part of the elevator stood on their telegraph lines right-of-way. However, it was finally scheduled to be demolished beginning on Monday, March 18th.

Shortly after midnight on Sunday, March 17th, both James Olden and Deputy Wayne Bell discovered a fire

New Lois Lenski Level Membership...

Diane Kohlmeier Timmons

New Yearly Membership...

Ben Luthman

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Anna district Historical Society!***

burning in the office area of the old elevator and called an alarm into the fire department. Before firemen could respond, a passing B&O freight train fanned the flames into an inferno that quickly spread to Wilt's Store.

Phil Wilt was able to enter the store for a few minutes to retrieve some cash (always wrapped in butcher paper and stored in the cooler each night) and some dry cleaning. "The only thing I could think of in there that didn't belong to us was the dry cleaning," Wilt said. He also checked the three upstairs apartments, but the Dunn's and the Rumpff's had already gotten out, and the Devore's were out of town for the weekend.

Eight fire departments battled the fire through the night and worked tirelessly to contain the blaze from spreading to the other downtown businesses and houses. Thankfully, the brick building right next to Wilt's Store, which today is the site of the 937 business, also helped stop the fire's spread. However, Wilt's Store burned to the ground. The village of Anna was stunned by the loss of this beloved downtown business especially when it was determined that the elevator fire had been intentionally set.

At first the loss was set at \$80,000, but after three weeks of careful study by Art and Phil Wilt and their families,

they realized the cost to rebuild and restock the store would be closer to \$110,000. They sought advice from the Small Business Administration in Columbus, Super Foods in Bellefontaine (IGA distributors), and their bankers, among others. Because of the proximity of the grain elevator, which was considered a fire hazard to their store, the brothers had been unable to secure enough insurance coverage to come anywhere close to being enough to help them rebuild.



Volunteer fire crews from Anna, Van Buren Township, Fort Loramie, Sidney, Maplewood, Jackson Center, Botkins, and Shelby County Civil Defense fighting the blaze



HELP US PRESERVE OUR HISTORY

Please consider becoming a member of the Anna District Historical Society.

Name of member_____

Name of spouse (family memberships)_____

Children under 18 (family memberships)_____

Address_____

Phone_____

Email_____

Dr. Milliette Level_____ (\$50 per month)

Anna Carey Thirkield Level_____ (\$25 per month)

Lois Lenski Level_____ (\$10 per month)

Single Membership - \$20 yearly_____

Family Membership - \$25 yearly_____

Lifetime Membership - \$500_____

Mail to: ANNA DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. Box 133, Anna, OH 45302

Contact Susan Bertsch at 937.394.3072 for more information on leveled giving.

After 23 years in the retail grocery business, Phil and Art Wilt sadly came to the conclusion that Wilt's IGA would be no more. Truly, for Anna, it was the end of an era.



Phil and Art Wilt after the fire

Christmas Events at the Packer Historical Center

Once again during this past Christmas season, the Anna District Historical Society hosted two special events that benefitted the children of our school district.

After the arrival of Santa by fire truck at the Village of Anna's annual Christmas tree lighting event in early December, Santa and Mrs. Claus were hosted by the ADHS at the Packer Historical Society to talk with the children about their Christmas lists, as well as having their pictures taken.



Santa and Mrs. Claus at the Packer Historical Center with two young visitors



Phyllis Evans and Carol Carity
organize the wrapping station at Santa's Workshop

The other Christmas event hosted at the Packer Historical Center by the ADHS was the second annual Santa's Workshop for the four first grade classes from the Anna Elementary School which was held on Monday, December 16th. Members of the ADHS purchased and organized gifts for both women and men for the students to choose from for their parents and step-parents. Two classes at a time were bussed from the elementary to the Packer Center to do their shopping. While one class shopped, the other class listened to "The Quiltmaker's Gift" read aloud in another room. In addition to the first grade teachers and ADHS members, a number of grandparents also lent a hand in helping with the shopping and bagging of gifts.

The feedback from students and teachers alike confirm the popularity of Santa's Workshop. The Anna District Historical Society has been happy to host the event for the first graders as another way to give back to the residents of the Anna District for all the support we have received over the past number of years.



First graders listening to
"The Quiltmaker's Gift"



Santa makes a return visit to the
Packer Historical Center

Anna District Historical Society

112 West Main Street

P.O. Box 133

Anna, OH 45302

**POSTAL CUSTOMER
ANNA, OH 45302**

Anna District Historical Society

112 W. Main Street, P.O. Box 133

Anna, OH 45302

Phone: 937-646-0011

**The Packer Center is now open by appointment
only. Call 937.646.0011 to schedule
a private tour.**



Sad remains of Wilt's Store following the fire



Earlier view of grain elevator sitting between
Wilt's Store and the railroad tracks



A.P. Wilt at Wilt's Store in Anna
following the earthquakes