

# Memories from Miller

- Essays and artwork from students and mentors in the Mercy/Miller After-School Enrichment Program
- Plus a history of Miller School by Patty Sughrue, graduate student, Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh



Published by the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and Pittsburgh Mercy Health System on the occasion of the centennial celebration of Miller School



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## Mercy/Miller Celebrates Miller School's Centennial

Since 1987, Pittsburgh Mercy Health System has partnered with Miller School in a mentoring program for students in the third through fifth grades. The mentors work with students to help them find value in their shared history and community, and to encourage them to succeed in school and in life. Since 1998, the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (Landmarks) has worked with the mentors to teach the After-School Enrichment Program.

In 2002, students in the Mercy/Miller After-School Enrichment Program performed a play highlighting the architectural significance of their school and convinced members of Landmarks' Historic Plaque Designation Committee that Miller School was worthy of a Historic Landmark plaque. The building was awarded a plaque, and the students and mentors were awarded the 2003 Preservation Pennsylvania Initiative Award in Education for their efforts.

This year, as Miller School celebrates its centennial, the students and mentors have teamed together with Landmarks to produce a book of memories about Miller. The memories are expressed in essays and collages inspired by the work of Romare Bearden, an artist of the Harlem Renaissance and one of the most important American artists of the twentieth century.

Romare Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1911, but he grew up in Harlem. On occasion, he lived with his grandmother in Pittsburgh, and he graduated from the city's Peabody High School in 1929. He died in 1988 at the age of 76, one year after receiving the National Medal of Arts from President Reagan.

Bearden studied widely, experimented in many art forms, and loved both the sixteenth-century Dutch master Pieter Brueghel and the jazz sounds of the Harlem Renaissance.

"I think an artist has to be something like a whale," Bearden said, "swimming with his mouth wide open, absorbing everything until he has what he really needs."

The sea Bearden swam in was peppered with famous names. His family was in the heart of the Harlem Renaissance and, later, the civil rights



*"Pittsburgh Recollections," by Romare Bearden (1984), Gateway Center Transit Station*

movement. Bearden grew up knowing Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson. As an adult, he studied in Paris, where he met Pablo Picasso.

In 1963, when black civil rights leaders were organizing the March on Washington, Bearden tried to interest other black artists in a collaborative collage made up of photographs. The other artists lost interest, but Bearden had found the art form for which he is best remembered. His collages incorporate everything from fabric to newspaper to spray paint. The rich textures and bright colors create portraits of everyday life in the black community. The collages call on the vibrancy and variety of life that Bearden knew from New York, North Carolina, and Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh, with its mills and smokestacks, left its mark on Bearden, but Bearden also left his imprint on Pittsburgh. If you ride the Pittsburgh subway, you will find a Bearden mural crowded with Pittsburgh's rivers, hills, factories, and workers.

The students whose work appears in this book drew inspiration from Bearden's collages. They layered photographs, wrapping paper, and print media into memories of Miller School. Like the students who have attended Miller School for the last 100 years, their experiences are part of the story that gives meaning to the building, the neighborhood, and our city.

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## **Hassan Howze**

My mom brought me to school on the first day. I wore a blue shirt and tan pants. The first thing I remember is the Unity Circle and singing “Lift and Rejoice.” We said the Pledge of Allegiance and the Miller School Pledge, the African Centered Pledge, and Harrambee.

I thought the school was just okay and would be boring. I am happy now because I made friends.

I like the gym because it is fun and has a lot of activities. I like the library because there is a reading well, and there are lots of exciting books for every grade. I like the art room because I can draw and paint there.

I am proud because I passed every grade. I perform Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art, and I like the acrobatics and the things you can learn from it. I did well in Social Studies, spelling, and reading. I was a leader in Growing with Trust, which teaches you to be a leader and not let others control you.

I will be mad if this school closes because I hear they fight a lot in other schools and they are not as good as Miller.

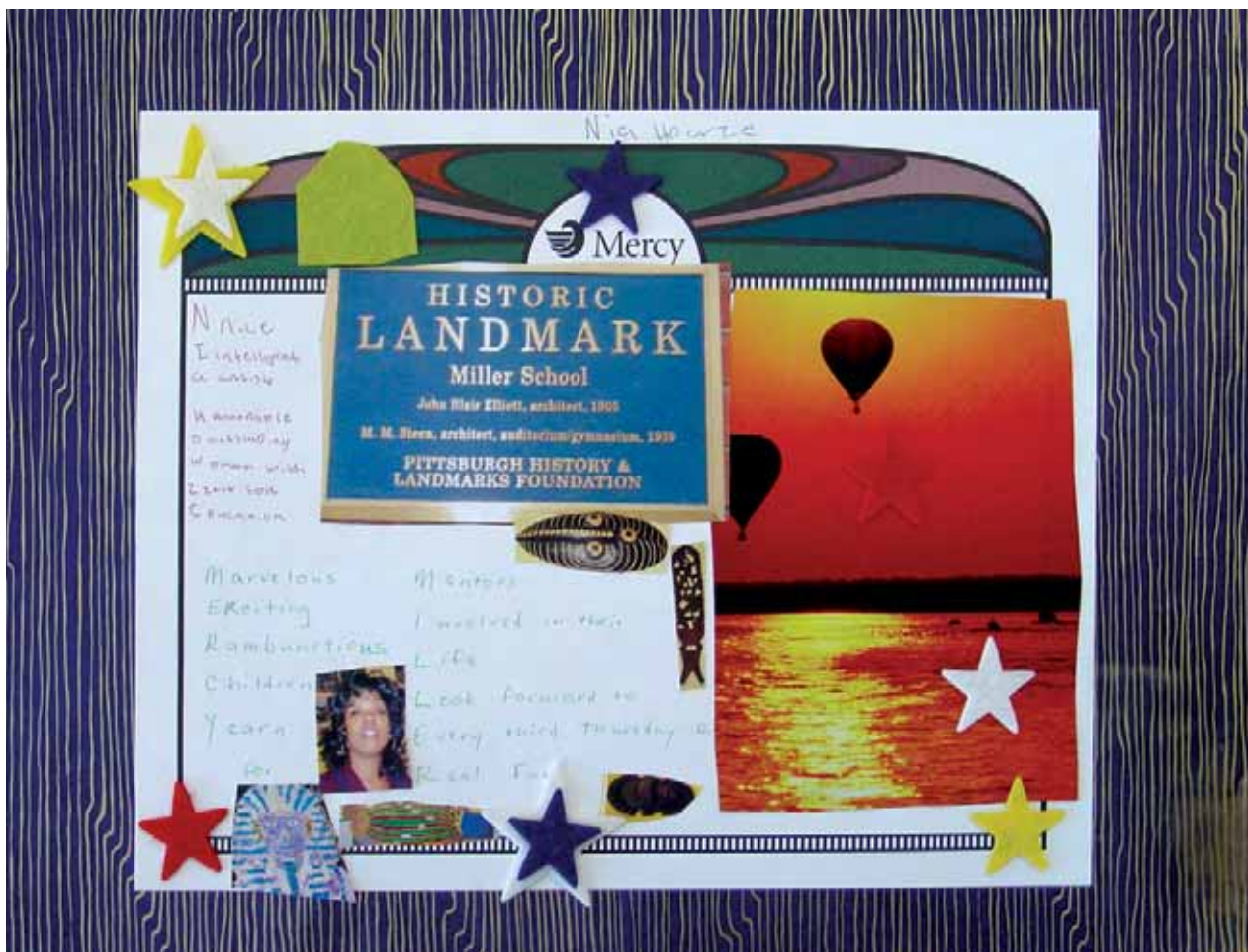
## Nia Howze

I have been a student at Miller School since kindergarten, along with my twin brother Hassan.

My mom brought us here on our first day, and I remember the pretty classrooms.

My favorite rooms in the school are the gym and the art rooms.

My special memories include the beach party, the end-of-the-year carnivals, and Mercy/Miller activities. I have been in school plays, and my favorite subject is art. I love Miller School because it is an African Centered Academy, and it helps teach me about Africa. I also love it because the school itself is a Historic Landmark and there is a lot of history in the Hill District neighborhood.







## **Tashaya Brown**

My name is Tashaya Brown, and I feel as though I have spent my entire life at Miller African Centered Academy. I started Miller School in my pre-school years in Head Start. I remember playing in the sandbox and sitting on a bright carpet covered with the letters of the alphabet. My priority was to play!

Now that I am a fifth-grader at Miller, I enjoy many other things. I still enjoy the gym because it has lots of room to run. I am a member of the track team so the gym is one of my favorite places. I also enjoy the computer laboratory and the art room. Since I do not have a computer at home, I enjoy visiting websites from school. I love to draw and create, so it's easy to see why the art room is one of my favorite places. Miller School is so colorful and that's one of the things I appreciate most about this school.

Miller School is special because it is part of my family history, and family is so important to me. All of my family members attended Miller and the school gives us a common history. I enjoy hearing about what the school was like when my family went to school. I like that we share Miller School as a common bond.

I do not believe that Miller School will close. Miller is a landmark in the Hill District, and I am trusting that the community will work very hard to save it.

## **Asia Wilson**

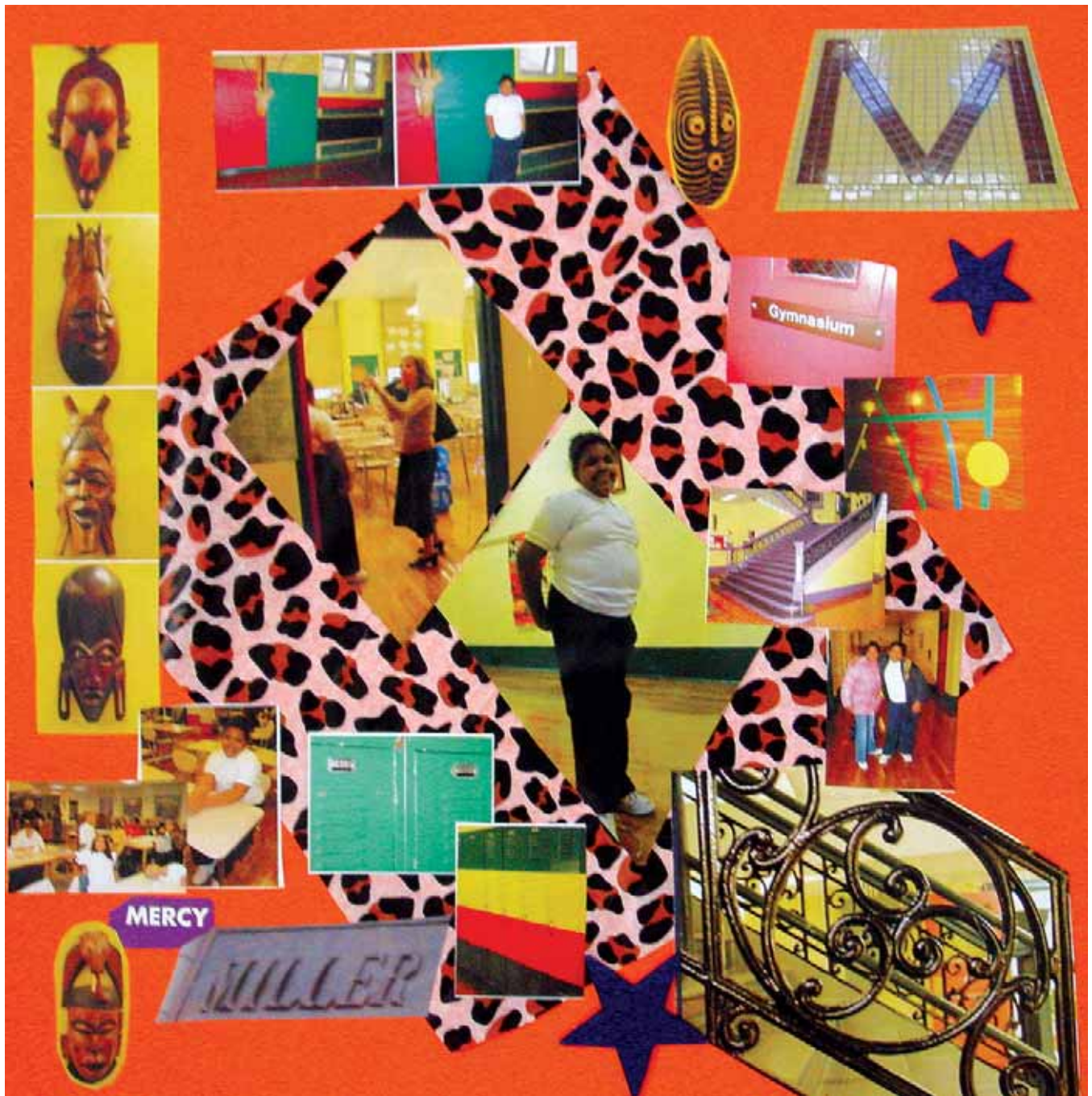
My name is Asia Wilson and I had to leave Miller School this year, sadly, because my family moved to another area. Back when I was in pre-school, I used to like playing with my friends at Miller. I wore my school uniform. I was just a little girl, and the school seemed so big!

My favorite place at Miller is the gym. I like its colors, and I have fun there. Our flag colors are red and black and green because we are an African Centered school. My other favorite place is homeroom. I learned a lot there. I learned about Langston Hughes. I also learned about the African masks that I show here in my collage.

At Miller School I learned how to be good at reading and math. I've done well on my tests. I got an A on my spelling test.

I'm feeling sad that this school might be closing. After all, it's a Historic Landmark.

I think that Miller School is a great school, and I really wish that I didn't have to leave it. Miller School is definitely worth saving.





## **Brittany Scott**

Hi, my name is Brittany Scott. I started Miller School in the second grade. The first day of school my father brought me. I remember I was wearing a blue skirt and blue top with white tights. I was happy but also shy, because I didn't know anyone. I liked the second grade because I learned a lot about money, multiplication, fractions, shapes, and many more things.

My favorite place in the school is the gym. I like looking at the pictures of the muscles that are hanging on the wall next to where the bones are. There is also a picture of the food pyramid which is very interesting. Mr. Harris is nice. He is our special education teacher. I like talking to him. He works in the gym.

Sometimes I am very unhappy and sad when I hear the other students talk about the closing of my school. I will miss coming here every day.

The mentor program is the most notable experience that occurred in my life here at Miller School. I have learned a lot.

Since attending Miller School I have accomplished how to use a computer. The computer is so much fun to use. It is very useful with my homework.

I was able to perform in a play called Kwanzaa. I played a dancer. My costume was a pink and blue shirt. I wore a pair of blue Capri jeans. I also wore blue and white slippers. My music teacher, Mr. Powell, showed me how to play a Djembe drum.

I serve as a safety patrol person. This is a very important task to do. I make sure the students are safe when crossing the street.

My parents were so proud of me when I told them about the PSSA test I took; I received an A++ which was 105%. I'm pretty good with math, so I tutor other students with their math.

My science teacher is Ms. Dzerski. I helped her take care of plants we planted in little pots. My science project was making an airplane. I had to draw a plane, then make it out of paper and cardboard. After it was finished I was able to display it on a stand.

On the first floor there is a map of Africa that I helped make. I am so proud of it.

If the school should ever close I will be very sad. If someone does buy my school I will ask them not to destroy the school. I will ask them to leave the school the way it is, so other people can enjoy the history of Miller School with all of the African history it contains.

Miller School is worth saving because it holds a lot of history that keeps us connected with our past history of Africa. If it does not remain an elementary school, Miller can be used as a showcase where groups of people can come and learn some of the history of our forefathers.

## **Cierra Johnson**

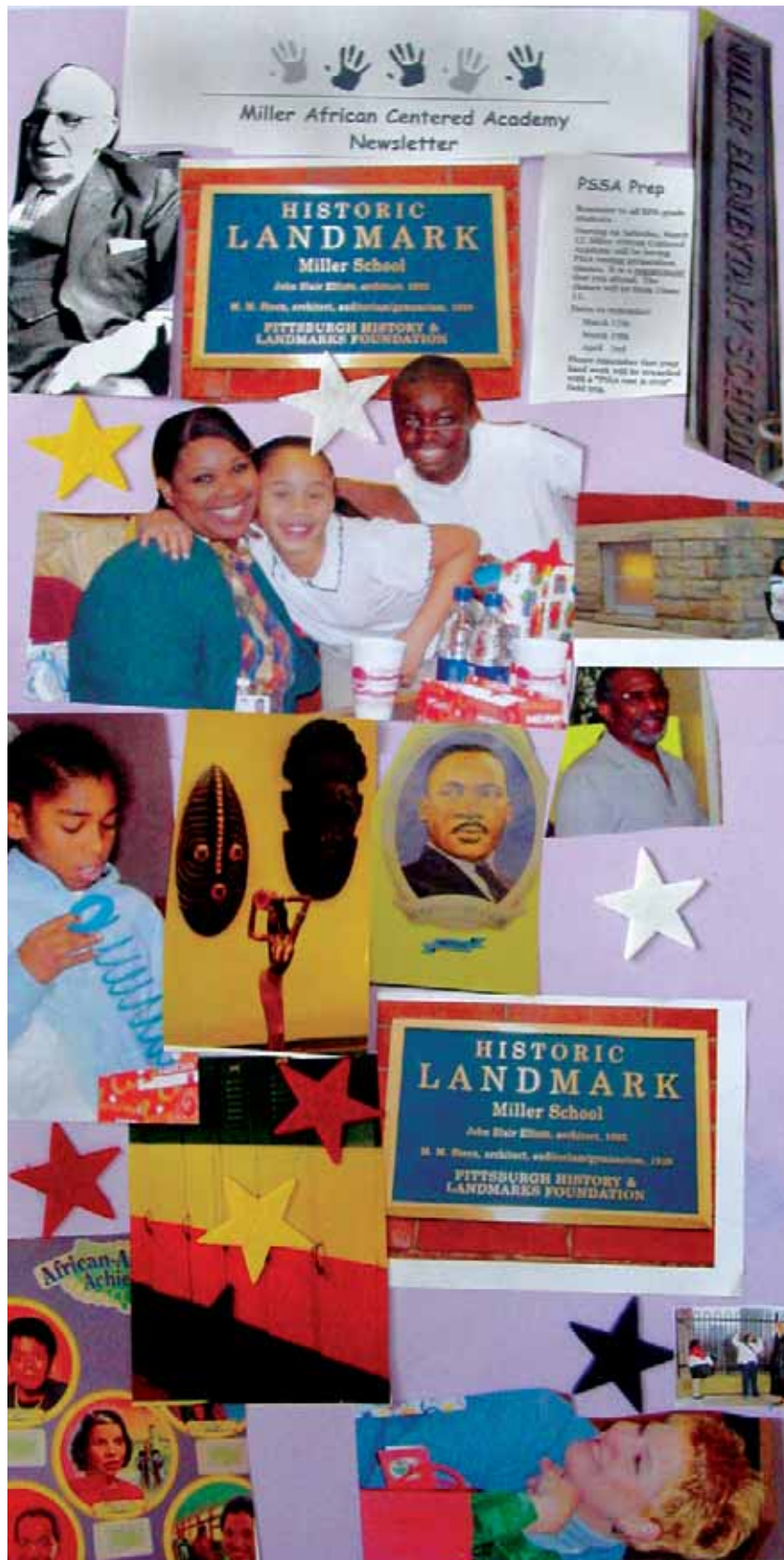
My name is Cierra Johnson and I like that the Miller School has dependable learning.

On my first day in kindergarten, some girls named Sessa and Chala helped me.

My favorite place is the computer lab because I can learn other things instead of playing all the time. One of my favorite subjects is math because I like Mrs. Brooks. She makes it so much fun.

While at Miller School, I got all A's and B's and participated in three performances. I dance in a group here at Miller.

If the school closes, I would feel sad because this school has memories and it's a landmark. It could be reused by keeping it Miller. It is worth saving because it's a landmark and it's my school.





## **Mariah Gregg**

My name is Mariah Gregg and I've been here from Head Start until now. That's seven years. In kindergarten, we had a carnival and the floor was wet and I didn't know. I was jogging and I fell on the floor.

My favorite place is the gym because we exercise, learn about health, and play games. It's fun.

The teachers are very nice and very kind and they are helpful with things we have trouble with. While at Miller School, I got A's and B's and I was on safety patrol.

If the school closes, I will feel so sad. I would tell the person who bought it, "Could you please give me back my school?" My school is worth saving because it is very important and the students may not like other schools.

## **Kiearra White**

I started school at the kindergarten level, and I thought it was fun. My mother, grandmother, grandfather, and dad brought me to school. I was wearing a blue uniform. My first impression was that the school was big! My feelings about the school now are that I like it and it is fun.

My favorite class is music because it gives us the gift to dance and make music. The classroom has pictures of African people and musical instruments. I've been participating in music, dance, and singing since kindergarten.

I have completed four levels of education and have performed in an African-dance play. I did well on a math project and made a clay sculpture. I had a leadership role in music.



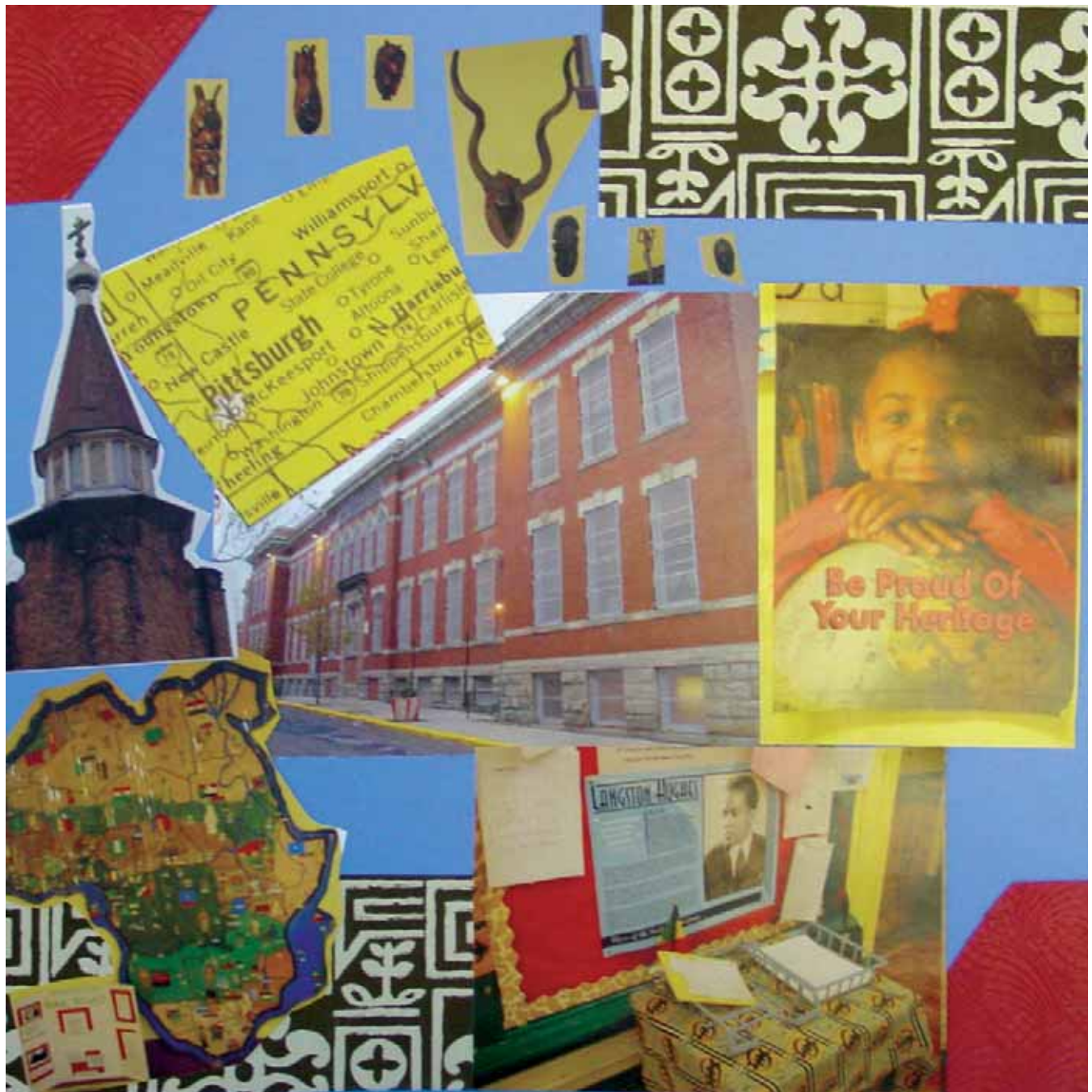
# school

Pittsburgh  
McKeesport  
Johnston



We believe children are capable of learning, problem-solving and using their knowledge for the good of family and community.  
-Jan Maxwell Bailey





## **Tracey Cofield**

Miller School has meant a lot to me. As a mentor in the Mercy/Miller program, I have had the chance to meet some wonderful children and have formed an everlasting relationship with the kids. Miller School is a very special environment for the kids because it is a place to help them connect with their heritage. I have never been in a school like Miller, so enriched with African and African-American culture. I hope that in the years to come, Miller will continue to educate these kids.

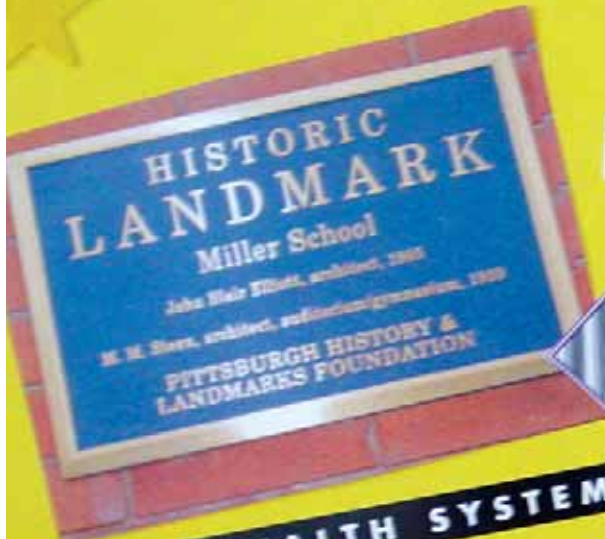
## **Stacey Peterson**

My name is Stacey Peterson, and I have been a mentor for three years. I have enjoyed the experience so much. Both Cierra and Mariah are beautiful and intelligent young ladies and I know they will grow to be creative and productive adults because of Miller's role in their training and education. I also hope I have played a role in their development as young women.

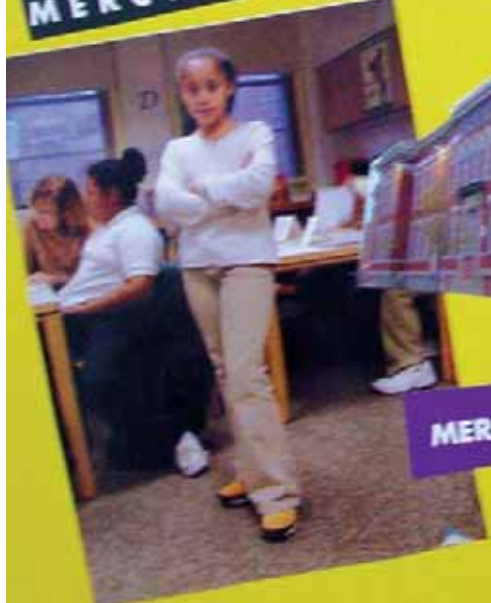
What I've learned about Miller School since becoming a mentor has been an eye-opener. I didn't realize how significant the school was in the community. It is wonderful to be a part of this group during its centennial celebration. I am proud to be a Mercy/Miller mentor.

God bless Miller School and all the dedicated teachers, staff, and students.

Miller African Centered Academy



MERCY HEALTH SYSTEM



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## **Michele Cooper**

I have had the privilege to be a mentor in the Mercy/Miller Partnership since its beginning, 18 years ago. Miller is a very special place. The school is so much more than a building. The teachers, students, families, and volunteers have made Miller a treasure in the Hill District.

I remember my first partner, Carl. Carl was my partner for three years; he was a very bright, yet quiet young man. During the last year of his education at Miller, the partnership took a trip to Kennywood for the final outing. I will never forget riding the Laser Loop and Thunderbolt with him. At the end of the day, Carl presented me with a paper floral bouquet and gave me a big hug. Although he was very shy, that day he gave of himself and let me know that our partnership meant as much to him as it did to me. The next week, I attended a school assembly during which Carl received many academic awards. I was so proud of him! I wrote to him over several years, but he never responded (that's a guy for you!). I think of him often and pray that he is well.

The other partner with whom I continue to have a relationship is Samantha. She and I clicked from the very beginning, and we had a great time together during the three years of our partnership. I care about her so much, and whenever we see each other, it's almost as if we have been friends forever.

All of my partners were unique and special in their own ways.

I also remember the wonderful teachers and their commitment to sustaining the partnership. Mrs. Burley and Mrs. Kennedy were there from the beginning. When I see them in the community, there is an instant bond because we share Miller School as a common thread that binds us together.

Pittsburgh—and especially the Hill District—are blessed to have the Miller School. Its focus on the African heritage of its students makes it a valuable community resource, dedicated to building well-educated, proud children.

## **Kathy Armstrong**

This is my second year as a mentor for Miller African Centered Academy. I am really impressed with how the school looks inside. Some of the history it holds of Africa is amazing. The children really do learn the history of their forefathers. I feel that if and when the school does close, the building should stay open and be a center for learning the history of Africa.





Planning for Leadership  
\* establish your own  
\* create a hierarchy of leadership  
\* provide, direct, control  
\* focus on  
\* the success of the organization



## **Tina Bialek**

The Mercy Hospital-Miller School mentorship program gave me a chance to be in fourth grade again and, this time, have fun!

## **Sharyn Kelson**

My name is Sharyn Kelson, and I have been a mentor at Miller School since the very beginning and have loved every minute there! I've had many different partners, boys and girls both. They were all very special to me; each one unique and beautiful in his or her own way.

The Miller School building has brought us together for all these many years. Just walking down the halls of this lovely preserved building brings back so many memories of my own childhood school days. The wooden floors, wooden desks, chalkboards, and books, books, books all trigger elementary-school memories! If these old walls at Miller School could talk, what fascinating and diverse stories they could tell.



# The Historic Miller School

by Patty Sughrue, graduate student, Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh

The story of the Miller School is a story of strong and determined people, both black and white, who knew the importance of education and who struggled to guarantee a good education for all children.

## **Pittsburgh's First African-American Public School (1838–1868)**

In 1831, the black community of Pittsburgh privately established a school for African-American children. Around the same time, in the 1830s, the state of Pennsylvania began to set up its public school system to provide free education for all children; however, no provision in the law was explicitly made for the growing number of African-American children. When Pittsburgh opened its first four schools in 1835—one in each of the four wards—African-American children were not allowed to attend the schools. Both black and white residents, including the famous abolitionist Charles Avery, protested, until the Pittsburgh School Board finally funded a black public school in 1838. The School Board hired Mr. John N. Templeton, a black graduate of Athens University in Ohio, who had served as the first principal/teacher of the previous, privately owned school.

This first “African School” did not have a building of its own. Instead, it was opened in the basement of the Bethel A.M.E. Church, then located in downtown Pittsburgh. It moved to various other rented locations over the next 30 years, and was usually located in cramped and dark quarters, without playgrounds or fresh air. School equipment was limited. However the teaching staff during those years included several prominent black Pittsburghers, such as Martin Delany and George B. Vashon, as well as several white principals.

## **The First Miller Street School (1868–1875)**

It was not until after the Civil War and after many letters and petitions to the Central Board of Education (established in 1855) that the Board finally agreed, in 1867, to purchase four lots on Miller Street and build a new school for black children. Barr & Moser were hired as architects for the building, and the contract for its construction was awarded to Samuel Hastings & Company. The new school building was completed in January 1868 and was described as follows:

*The house is two stories in height, of brick and roofed with shingles, and is substantially built, and contains six rooms and a large hall on the second floor. The rooms on the first floor are furnished with the most improved modern school desks, and the hall is furnished with settees. Blackboards are furnished in ample quantity . . . . The rooms are airy and well ventilated. The play grounds are of ample size, (the lots being one hundred feet square), and only need ornamenting to make them complete. The hall for ingress and egress are of medium size, and well arranged; every appliance for the comfort, convenience and safety of the pupils, as well as for the good government and progress of the school, has been carefully and liberally provided for. The entire cost of the property, as it now stands, was seventeen thousand six hundred and twenty-two dollars and seventeen cents (\$17622.17).*

Jacob B. Taylor, a black man, was hired as principal. The school had an average enrollment of 122 students. But this new school did not last very long. In 1873, enrollment dropped to only 81 students. The children attending the school came from all parts of the city, and many had to walk long distances. Additionally, with the end of the Civil War, the legal rights of black citizens were being restored and Pennsylvania was debating the integration of the public school system. Several other schools in the city had already started to admit black students as well as white. In April 1873, the Pittsburgh Board of Education voted to abolish the Miller School.

T. H. R. Johnson, who was then principal of Miller School, tried to convince the superintendent to continue the school. He knew that if the schools became integrated, black teachers would not be allowed to teach white children. Principal Johnson wrote:

*There is a disposition on the part of some to discontinue Miller Street School; I cannot say that I favor the idea as yet. I believe there is a work — and a great work — for Miller Street School to do yet . . . . I am not of those who advocate colored schools to the exclusion of mixed schools, neither do I advocate mixed to the exclusion of colored schools. Should our colored schools be abolished, an avenue of maintenance will be closed to a large number of colored men and colored women, who by self-sacrificing devotion have prepared themselves to teach; and would also take away from the rising generation of colored youths one of the greatest incentives to ambitious effort — that of becoming a teacher.*

But other black residents, meeting in the city in June 1873, decided that a black school hindered progress, and “that black citizenship would not be recognized until the Central Board integrated the city’s school system.” One year later, in July 1874, the Board had the school up for sale. In 1875 the black Miller Street School was closed.

In 1878, the Pittsburgh Central High School, located in the lower Hill, was so crowded that it moved its teacher training school to the vacant Miller Street building, where it remained until 1895. We do not know what happened to the building after that, but it was probably destroyed to make way for the new Miller School building.

In 1881, the state of Pennsylvania officially abolished all distinction of race or color in the public school system. However, just as Principal Johnson had feared, no black teachers were hired in the Pittsburgh school system until Lawrence Paul Peeler was hired in 1933 as a part-time music teacher. He traveled to different schools in the Hill District until he was hired for a full-time position in 1937. Not until 1955 was there another black principal. This man was John Brewer, and he was assigned to Miller Elementary School.

### **Immigration and the Current Miller School Building (1905–present)**

From the Civil War until World War I, Pittsburgh achieved the greatest economic growth of its history through its coal mines, steel mills, river and railroad commerce, and factories for commodities such as glass. Its population grew by leaps and bounds during those years, primarily through immigration from Europe, but also because of black migration from the post-slavery South. By 1890, the total population in the city reached 343,904—about 9,300 more people than are in the city today. The black population was already over 10,000. In 1900, Pittsburgh was the sixth largest city in the United States, and its black population had doubled to 20,355 (4.5% of the total city population). The Hill District, in which less than half of these black residents lived, was one of the most heavily populated areas of the city, and was badly in need of a new elementary school.

Architect John Blair Elliott was commissioned to design the current Miller Street School. Born in Elizabeth, Pa., Elliott was the son of a boat-builder. He grew up to be a carpenter and draftsman, and later helped design the Brushton School and the Greenfield School. The Miller School was built between 1905 and 1906 by the contractors Murphy & Hamilton at a cost of \$100,000. The red-brick and sandstone building was designed in a Classical style. The center portion of the building, facing Miller Street, had a group of arched windows with keystones in the arches. The original doorway cornice was supported by consoles at both ends, and the large cornice at the roof line was detailed with dentil molding. The school was originally called Moorhead No. 2 because it was located in the Moorhead School District. Moorhead No. 2 changed its name (back) to Miller Elementary School in 1913. The Miller School was very crowded until the McKelvy School was built in 1911 and the Watt School was built in 1914.

Black migrants from the South settled in the Hill District, along with Irish, Italian, Greek, Syrian, and Jewish immigrants. The Jewish population in the city increased rapidly from about 10,000 in 1900 to 40,000 in 1917, and many lived in the area of the Miller School. There were two Jewish congregations and the Jewish Labor Lyceum on Miller Street. The Irene Kaufmann Settlement House (now the Hill House) was a couple of blocks away, and

Archangel Michael's Greek Catholic Church sat next to the school on Reed Street. The majority of the Miller School's student population was Jewish at first; only a small number of black students attended.

The Hill District was the most heavily populated and the most integrated neighborhood in the city during this period, and many residents recall that everyone got along well. They visited each other's shops, played ball together in the sandlots and in the streets, and went to the same schools and to the same bars to hear a rising number of jazz singers and musicians, many of whom would later become world-famous. The easy integration of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups may be due in part to the discrimination that immigrant groups also experienced in that time. Even Lawrence Peeler stated that "prejudice against ethnic groups and Catholics and Jews was nearly as strong as that against Blacks. Consequently, only White Protestants had an easy time finding teaching jobs."

The new Miller School was not big enough to handle the surging population of students. In 1927 the Superintendent of Schools asked the Pittsburgh Board of Education to appoint a special "Survey Commission" to examine the conditions of every school in the Pittsburgh school system. Each principal submitted a report, and Principal Annie Lytel of Miller School wrote this description:

*The Miller School, an elementary building within fifteen minutes walk of the downtown business section, was opened in January 1907. The school, a two story brick and stone building, is built on a plot of ground containing 21,798 square feet. The building alone occupies 14,620 square feet, and originally contained seventeen class rooms, taking care of eight grades. The kindergarten, stockroom, heating plant and auditorium were in the basement.*

The playgrounds consisted of two yards, one on each side of the building. The eastern yard was 22 x 93 feet, while the western yard was 13.5 x 93 feet. But according to Principal Lytel, "This is impossible as a playground for eight hundred and thirty-four children." The school had a well-furnished library of 800 volumes belonging to the school, and a loan of 700 volumes from the Carnegie Library. It had an orchestra that rehearsed for two hours every week. Principal Lytel also reported that Miller Elementary's kindergarten was moved to the Irene Kaufmann Settlement House for a time because the school was so crowded.

In 1939, the School Board decided to remodel and expand Miller Elementary School to make room for the increasing number of children. Marion Markle Steen, a Pittsburgh native who had studied architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, was the architect for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. He designed an auditorium and playground area for the Miller School. The auditorium was in the Art Deco style: geometric patterns and curvy, streamlined forms were used in the silver hardware on the doors, the ceiling lights, the moldings, the rows of seats, and the metal grilles. The cost of the additional land, remodeling, and equipment came to \$286,018.68, and was partly funded by the federal government through New Deal programs.

By the end of the 1930s, Pittsburgh's white population began to decrease. Immigration from Europe had practically stopped due to new immigration laws in 1920. Many white families began to move out of the city into newly developing suburbs, and Jewish and Italian immigrants moved to areas further to the east of downtown, such as Squirrel Hill and Bloomfield.

At the same time, the black population of the Hill District was growing. Black migrants from the South continued to arrive in large numbers. Large public housing complexes were built. The oldest public housing development in the city, Bedford Dwellings, was constructed in 1938. In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt inaugurated one of the largest public housing communities in the nation, Terrace Village, comprised of Addison and Allequippa Terraces.

Many of the children who lived in these new public housing communities went to Miller School. Several children from Miller School wrote essays for the Pittsburgh Housing Association about what they liked and did not like about their new housing. One student wrote this essay some time between 1937 and 1944:

*Things I like about Terrace Village. I like Terrace Village for its nice lawns, its laundries and the nice places to play. There are places to go at night; recreation halls to play in, instead of playing in the streets at night. [I like t]he way the houses are made so that no kind of bugs or rats can get in. I like some of the people that live there, they are not nebbey. There are nice big lots to play in.*

*Things I Don't Like About Terrace Village. I don't like Terrace Village for these reasons: Nebbey people, walls are too hard to clean, too many people act bosses [sic], too many fights, people write all over the walls.*

Another student wrote:

*I like that we could have our own heat system — I won't have to get up early in the morning to make a fire.*

Already by 1940 the Hill District had a majority black population, and the Miller Street Elementary School became majority black as well. In this sense, the Miller School returned to its original mission of serving as an educational center for African-American students.

In 1999, the Miller Elementary School changed its name to the Miller African Centered Academy, commemorating the roots of the building and the heritage of many of its pupils. Principal Rosemary Moriarty said that the school's students "are learning that African Americans did not just exist at the time of slavery, but they come from wealth and heritage. It's important that they understand they come from a people who had a purpose and who excelled in all areas." During the 2004-05 school year, 297 students attended Miller African Centered Academy, in kindergarten through fifth grades, and the school was full of life and activity.

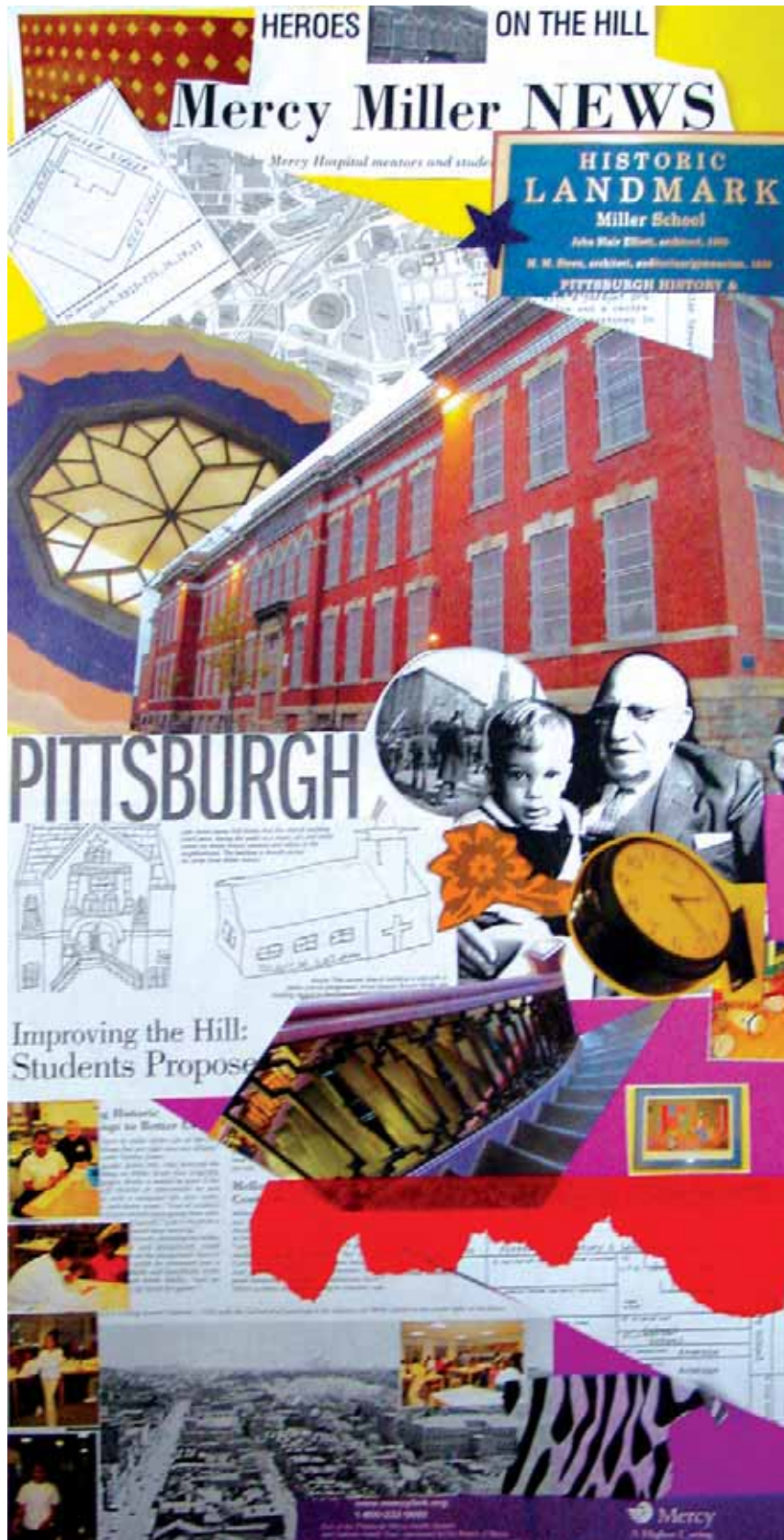


*The Hill District looking toward Oakland in the 1950s, with the Cathedral of Learning in the distance and Miller School in the center right of the photo.*

***Editor's Note:*** *The future of Miller School and of other Pittsburgh Public Schools is uncertain, because the Pittsburgh Board of Education is faced with the difficult but necessary task of having to close some schools due to declining enrollment throughout the district. During a news conference on May 26, 2005, Pittsburgh Public School officials announced that they would work with communities to draw up a school closing plan effective in September 2006.*

*This is good news, because earlier, in 2004, the School Board had voted to close Miller School in August 2005. The thought of closing Miller School is what prompted the mentors and students in the Mercy/Miller After-School Enrichment Program to share their memories and express what the school has meant to them, and to document the school's significance through Patty Sughrue's research.*

*This booklet includes only a portion of Patty's research paper on "The History of the Miller African Centered Academy, formerly Miller Street Elementary School." To read the paper in its entirety, visit the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation library at Station Square. Call 412-471-5808 to schedule an appointment.*



## Wrapping It All Up

For the past six years, on the third Thursday of every school-year month, I have arrived at Miller African Centered Academy with a pile of stuff in my arms, buzzed the buzzer, pulled open the door, and entered a building full of bright colors, exquisite architectural details, and animated third- through fifth-grade students who were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their mentors from Mercy Hospital.

Together we learned about the importance of Miller School, toured the neighborhood and city, and learned that significant buildings—just like antiques—grow in value as they age and are worthy of our care over time. We learned that buildings—just like people—are full of character, and that the three goals of architecture are good guidelines for people, too: buildings, just like people, have to (1) stand up, (2) look good, and (3) be useful.

Together we obtained a Historic Landmark plaque for Miller School; published “Heroes on the Hill,” a newspaper; created “The Story of Pittsburgh,” a play complete with models of downtown landmarks; explored Pittsburgh, a “city of treasures,” and filled handmade treasure chests with objects that had meaning to each one of us. We created books about our family and neighborhood, and published this centennial booklet. In the process we formed friendships, strengthened academic skills, and developed a sense of pride for Miller School and the community.

I thank the Mercy Hospital mentors for inviting the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation to partner with them in the Mercy/Miller After-School Enrichment Program. It has been a great and memorable experience for me. In the course of teaching at Miller, I learned that my mother had been a substitute teacher at Miller years ago: so the school has meant a lot to our family, too.

*Louise Sturgess, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation*



Collage by Mercy mentor Stacey Snead-Peterson

## Class Creed

I am a self-reliant and reliable individual.  
 I believe that society does not owe me anything.  
 I will not be paid for having a brain, but rather for using my brain.

I will be a lifter, not a leaner;  
 A learner, not a loser.  
 I will give myself to learning and develop my thinking,  
 Civilize my heart,  
 And give wings to my imagination.  
 I will grow to appreciate the beauty of Art and Music.  
 I will become best friends to Truth, Honor, and Respect.

Discouragement will never defeat me  
 Because I know that I can move a mountain  
 By first carrying away the small stones  
 And then continuing patiently.





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Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
412-338-3830  
[www.pps.k12.pa.us/miller.asp](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/miller.asp)



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1400 Locust Street  
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[www.mercylink.org](http://www.mercylink.org)



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