



“Alright . . . Mr. Death. See now . . . I’m gonna tell you what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I’m gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side. See?”

—Troy Maxson character in “Fences,” by August Wilson

In October, the University of Pittsburgh Library System announced it had acquired the August Wilson archives. Wilson, one of America’s most important playwrights, set nine plays of his 10-play magnum opus, the American Century Cycle, in the Hill District, which neighbors this academic medical center.

“He left Pittsburgh in 1978, but he took the Hill, the three rivers, the streets, the steel mills, the fish sandwich shops and the cadence of the language he heard in cigar stores and barbershops with him,” Constanza Romero, Wilson’s widow, says. His work was an intimate look at the African American struggle for cultural, economic and self-preservation. As the late Wilson himself once put it:

“I once wrote a short story called ‘The Best Blues Singer in the World,’ and it went like this: ‘The streets that Balboa walked were his own private ocean, and Balboa was drowning.’

“End of story. That says it all. Nothing else to say. I’ve been rewriting that same story over and over again. All my plays are rewriting that same story.” —Erica Lloyd

—Photography: Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System



Logan Street in the Hill District, September 1938.