

Pittsburgh: Known primarily for sports, its undeniable loyalty to the colors black and gold, and in the past decade, as a transforming postindustrial city. Those were the stereotypes that followed me into my Shrinking Landscapes class at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. It was over a year ago that I sat in this class and was tasked with choosing a 'shrinking city' from a list of postindustrial cities in the United States. After choosing a city, we were asked to research and create a guide or game that reveals a less-known aspect of the city. I selected Pittsburgh, not by chance but from the persuasion of a very passionate University of Pittsburgh alum. She was the first person to introduce me to the innovation and resilience of this adaptive city.

During my initial research I discovered a little known fact about Pittsburgh's history that is still evident throughout the city: Paper Streets. In 1937 newspaper columnist Ernie Pyle wrote "[Pittsburgh] must have been laid out by a mountain goat. It's up and down and around and around and in betwixt." The stairs were built to help pedestrians navigate this daunting topography before the age of the automobile. In total there are 712 sets of stairs comprising 44,645 treads and 24,090 vertical feet, effectively making Pittsburgh the city with the most stairs in the United States. Some of these staircases are legally called streets but only appear on a map, which gives them their appropriate name 'paper streets'. These pieces of infrastructure found everywhere connect homes, neighborhoods, communities, and the city. These steps are an integral part of the city's history and bear a relationship to Pittsburgh's many diverse ethnic neighborhoods. 66 of the city's 90 neighborhoods contain steps. The paper streets, invisible to the vehicle, are what stitch together the urban fabric of Pittsburgh.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. wrote, "No city of equal size in America or perhaps the world, is compelled to adapt its growth to such difficult complications of high ridges, deep valleys, and precipitous slopes as Pittsburgh." My final project for the Shrinking Landscapes class was a map highlighting all of the steps of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and a set of collector cards for each staircase. Together the map and collector cards recast the steps dealing with the steep slopes as a challenging game. If a partaker climbed all of the steps in Pittsburgh, they would have nearly climbed Mt. Everest.

It was through this class and assignment that I immediately realized that Pittsburgh is taking on a new identity. This tough, industrial and sports-crazed town is being looked to for its repurposing and adaptive attitude. Yes, Pittsburgh is considered one of America's shrinking cities, and yes, Pittsburgh is still climbing out of that time, but it is creating a strong community that embraces its past while transforming for its future.

The South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association is a prime example of a group that is dedicated to preserving these pieces of historic infrastructure for future generations. Their mission goes beyond maintenance to focus on the community that is directly linked by the steps and to create awareness of this unique feature for the rest of Pittsburgh. They host events throughout the year that range from cleaning up parks, removing invasive weeds, creating community gardens, lighting the stairs and their main event, Step Trek. This event takes participants on varying routes of difficulty throughout the neighborhood via several different sets of South Side steps.

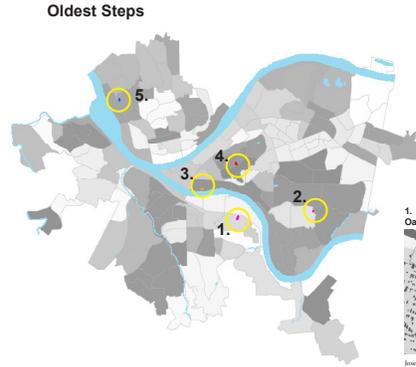
As my research of Pittsburgh progressed, so did my appreciation of the city. I applied and was awarded the Penny White Grant at Harvard to come to Pittsburgh, walk the steps, and visit with the South Side Slopes Association. Their motto "*Neighbors working together to make the Slopes a more livable, beautiful, and safe community*" is exactly what I encountered on my first trip to Pittsburgh and my first visit with the association. They are helping people discover Pittsburgh one step at a time. In fact, two friends that lived in Pittsburgh joined me for Step Trek last year. Even though both of them had lived in Pittsburgh for years this was the first time they had heard of and participated in the Step Trek, and I was struck by how many times they repeated "I had no idea this was here" as we walked up and down the stairs.

STAIRS OF PITTSBURGH

712 stairways. 44,645 steps. 24,000 vertical feet.
1 CITY



Have you climbed the STAIRS?



378 Ray Ave.
The ultimate climb

location
From: W. Liberty Ave
To: Pioneer Ave
Built: 1954

health
Calories 128 calories
Elevation gain: 284'

completed

Expert Steps

170 Armstrong
The ultimate climb

location
From: Second Ave.
To: Bluff
Built: 1919

health
Calories 79 calories
Elevation gain: 113'

completed

Intermediate Steps

50 S. 4th St.
The ultimate climb

location
From: McKean St.
To: East Carson St.
Built: 1933

health
Calories 18 calories
Elevation gain: 30'

completed

Beginner Steps

→ Climb Everest →

Step #
42,586

Fact # 715
many stairs are legal
streets known as
"paper" streets.

88. Everest 29,000 steps

Follow your progress

Community is not made overnight and does not simply happen with the right type of programming. Community happens organically. The South Side Neighborhood Association is building that community, a community of people discovering their neighborhood 'one step at a time'.

About Me

Anna Cawrse, a project landscape designer, came to Design Workshop in 2012. With a Master of Landscape Architecture from Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD) with an emphasis in Urban Design and a bachelor's degree of Landscape Architecture from Colorado State University, Anna brings a passion for urban design and public infrastructure to every project. That passion led to an award-winning submittal for the Urban Land Institute/Gerald L. Hines student urban design award for her team's work entitled "Bayou Commons", a grant from Harvard to study the "Steps of Pittsburgh", and a national student award from the American Society of Landscape Architecture.

Since joining Design Workshop, Anna has worked on numerous urban design projects throughout North America. She is dedicated to researching, designing, and implementing the four rings of Design Workshop's Legacy Design®: Community, Art, Environment, and Economics, into every project. In 2012 Anna also accepted the role of Denver's Legacy Design Representative and continues to push the latest ideas of performance measurement at the firm.

For more information on the steps of Pittsburgh please see the following sources:

The Steps of Pittsburgh: Portrait of a City by Bob Regan

South Side Slopes Neighborhood Association- <http://www.southsideslopes.org/>

Community Walk- http://www.communitywalk.com/pittsburgh/pa/pittsburgh_stairs/map/444504