When housing options for black families in Columbia were slim, Clara and Earl Miles founded a neighborhood that would give blacks an opportunity to live in their dream homes.
At 90, Earl Miles still proudly mows his own lawn, the same lawn he built his house on in 1965 with his wife, Clara. The Mileses were the driving force behind establishing a residential community for black families in Columbia. Earl said Clara was tired of living in what she called the “soup bowl,” which was in a segregated area near Douglass Park.

More than 50 years ago, Clara Miles sat on the front porch of her home on Pendleton Street waiting to reveal to her husband, Earl, an idea she’d been stewing over for quite some time. Earl came home from work around noon after a full shift of baking at the Wigwam Café. He remembers what his wife said to him as he made his way to the front door.

“She asked me, ‘Do you want to take a ride? I’ll drive.’”

He thought it a little strange that Clara was so eager to take the wheel, but soon they were driving away. Earl had no idea where his wife was headed, but he could tell she had planned the drive in advance. She pulled up to a home near the corner of Russell Boulevard and College Park Drive, where a $75,000 house sparked Clara’s imagination.

She called it her “dream home” and pictured herself and Earl living in a similar house.

The time was the late 1950s, when housing options for black families in Columbia were slim. Most blacks lived in small homes or apartments in central Columbia, almost exclusively north of Broadway. But Clara had her heart set on a new home, away from what she called her “soup bowl” of a house.

The Mileses never moved into the Russell Boulevard home, but it inspired an even bigger project.

“That dream — to create a new neighborhood for blacks in Columbia — came from God, Earl said. In 1959, Clara became a pioneer, developing an upscale housing neighborhood for black residents that was later named Miles Manor.

In 1956, just a few years before Miles Manor was established, the Columbia Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority and the Columbia Housing Authority were established. The two commissions set about the task of destroying deficient homes and building public housing in the area along Providence Road across the street from Douglass High School. Clara and many other blacks viewed that period of urban renewal as an opportune time to leave the segregated area. Clara started planning a new neighborhood that would give blacks the chance to live in their dream homes.

“At that particular time, they were starting to build projects,” Earl said. “Everybody lived in the Douglass area neighborhood. (Clara) was trying to...
Welcome to the
NEIGHBORHOOD

get a different place for blacks to live.”
But first she needed property. She asked a white farm couple if they
would be willing to sell her and other families some of the land they owned
just south of Stadium Boulevard in the area that now is home to Forum
Shopping Center. The couple refused and instead referred Clara to their
neighbor.
“They said that they wanted more prominent people to buy the land for
their retirement fund but that just east of their land was a black pig farmer
who might sell us some,” Earl said.
Clara took the couple’s advice and contacted Blue Harvey. To her delight,
he was willing to give up his 30 acres for $20,000.
Earl remembers his wife being so optimistic about the project that he
had to bring her down to earth.
“I told her, ‘I don’t have any money.’ She said, ‘Where’s your faith?’ I said,
‘It’s not about how much faith I got, it’s about how much money we got.’”
Within a month, though, the Mileses and several interested neighbors had
come up with $15,000 as a down payment. But it took about five years for
things to really get going. Would-be residents had to land loans and pick
lots. The property had to be cleared of
thick brush and trees.
And finding a contractor wasn’t
easy. Clara approached the builder
of her “dream home” and asked if he
would also be interested in building in
a new neighborhood for black families.
The Chicago builder was fearful.
Earl remembers him saying that if
he built one house for blacks in that
neighborhood, “I’ll never build anoth-
er house in Columbia.”
Eventually, though, the Mileses
found a willing contractor to build
their white-and-black split-level home
in 1964. Aside from the huge and once
healthy tree that is now leafless in
the front yard, the Miles’ home has
changed little inside or out during the
past 48 years. Their basement is home
to several old pieces of furniture that
have been there as long as the house,
including a table-and-chair set crafted
from beer barrels. Two handmade
woven quilts that the Mileses received
as gifts years ago are draped over
cream-colored couches that form an
“L” in the living room. Awards and
pictures lining the basement walls
are a testament to Earl’s pride in the
achievements of his family, including
Miles Manor. Finally established in
1959, the brand-new subdivision was
one woman’s idea turned into reality.
Earl calls his wife the “Rosa Parks
of Columbia.” Her dedication and per-
severance played a significant role in
establishing more housing opportuni-
ties for blacks in Columbia during the
late ‘50s and beyond.
“If it hadn’t been for this,” Earl said,
“it wouldn’t have happened for many
years.”
Almost four years have passed
since Clara’s death, but the families
that remain in the neighborhood say
her “vision” remains in focus. Twelve
of the original 23 builders and their
families still live in the quiet neighbor-
hood. Today, about 26 split-level and
ranch-style homes make up the three-
street subdivision. Trees that started
as stems now tower over and shade
each home. Even though the look of
the community has matured, residents
say the character of the community is
unchanged.
“It was the first subdivision of its
kind created by blacks of the time,” Earl said.

THE GROUP
Members of the families who first moved to the
Miles Manor community are still living there after
many decades.
First row: Earl Miles, Beatrice Kelly
Second row: Barbara Horrell, Genevieve Hill,
Bettie Nunnelly
Third row: Leroy Smith, John Kelly (Beatrice Kel-
ly’s son), Louis Nunnelly

View photos of
Miles Manor from
the 1960s at
ColumbiaMissourian.com.
A tall magnolia stands firm in the front yard of a house on Chantilly Court, its white flowers spreading the faint fragrance of lemon. Barbara Horrell planted this tree in 1973 after pulling a magnolia straight from fertile ground in Atlanta, just a year after she and her family moved into their brand new Miles Manor home.

Much to Barbara’s surprise, the magnolia has been growing ever since. It’s part of a lush landscape that defines her front and back yards and fits well in the neighborhood’s natural surroundings.

Barbara and David Horrell grew up in Columbia. David’s family lived on Switzer Street, and Barbara’s family lived next door to the Mileses on Pendleton Street. Barbara remembers spending afternoons over at “Uncle Earl’s” house eating home-cooked meals and staring at the test patterns on their back porch, relaxing and watching TV. The Horrells were one of the original families to build a home in the Miles Manor neighborhood in 1972.

To find housing — adequate housing — in the community over there,” Barbara said. “So that was pretty much a black community.”

The Horrell family moved to Miles Manor as long as the threat of growing traffic in the area, they’re not looking for a new place to live. They built their house just the way they wanted it and, although they’ve pondered a move from time to time, Barbara said there is no way they could bring themselves to move out.

“(Or) I’ll pull it up out the yard and take it with me.”

Now in their retirement years, David and Barbara Horrell spend much of their time on their back porch, relaxing and watching TV. The Horrells were one of the original families to build a home in the Miles Manor neighborhood in 1972.

The Horrells have seen some gradual change in Miles Manor. The first development, she said, consisted of the original families, then a second wave of black residents moved in. But what was once a predominantly black community has become more diverse.

“Now there has been a third development, which is the integration that’s happened,” Barbara said. “It went from being an all-black neighborhood to a very congenial, diverse neighborhood.”

The Horrells have also witnessed the construction of condominiums at the end of White Oak Lane. Despite the threat of growing traffic in the area, they’re not looking for a new place to live. They built their house just the way they wanted it and, although they’ve pondered a move from time to time, Barbara said there is no way they could bring themselves to move out.

“If you build a house, you stay in it,” Barbara said.

David said the magnolia, a tree he was skeptical would ever grow, is part of what keeps him on Chantilly Court. As long as it’s standing, he said, he’ll stay put.

“The chirp of crickets and the singing of birds easily push the hum of traffic on Stadium Boulevard into the background.

“It’s very peaceful back here, and it’s beautiful in the fall,” Barbara said.

David Horrell said the magnolia tree that blossoms in their front yard, Grown from a twig they planted decades ago, David and Barbara vow never to move from their home as long as the magnolia tree stands in their yard.

Barbara Horrell takes pride in the landscaping in and around her home. The Horrells’ prize possession is a magnolia tree that blossoms in their front yard.
Since moving to the neighborhood in 1965, the Nunnellys have no plans to leave Miles Manor. Louis hopes to have a view of the A.L. Gustin Golf Course from his backyard, which was the reason the Nunnellys chose their property, before he dies.

“People would say, ‘They aren’t going to let you people move out there.’ And I’d say, ‘I’m going to move out there. They’ll have to kill me.’”

LOUIS NUNNELLY
Resident in Miles Manor
Beatrice Kelly sat in an armchair by her front window looking through a tattered scrapbook of old photos and articles from when her children were young. As she flipped through the yellowed clippings, she told the story of her move to Miles Manor.

“Miles Manor was started from the fallout of urban renewal,” she said. “They moved a lot of people out of their homes to build. We called them projects.”

When John Kelly, Beatrice’s husband, approached her about building away from the central city, she was skeptical about leaving her place at Garth and Worley streets.

“It was a very good place to live,” Beatrice said. “We had a good neighborhood. Everybody kept up their property, and it looked nice.”

Plus, she said, “it just didn’t seem possible that we were going to have enough money.”

Nevertheless, the couple walked into Boone National Savings and Loan hoping to qualify for a loan.

“A lot of people couldn’t get loans to build out here,” Beatrice said. “A lot of people had to go outside of Columbia to get loans.”

Fortunately, the Kellys’ impeccable credit helped them get the money they needed to build their quaint two-story home on Bellevue Court. In the spring of 1965, they became one of the neighborhood’s first families. They were excited.

“We had remodeled our house, and we had a livable home,” Beatrice said. “But out here was just so much more.”

The Kellys’ old home was a single floor; now they have two stories, a basement and a formal dining room. Building anew gave them the freedom to create a home that was exactly what they wanted. They designed the house themselves, using magazines for inspiration.

“This is sort of a luxury home coming from what we came from,” Beatrice said.

The Kellys worked closely with Clara Miles and good friend G.C. Brooks to establish Miles Manor. Every year, a few lots would sell until eventually all three streets were lined with modest but comfortable homes.

Beatrice said she is proud to have accomplished something most people believed could not be done. She credits Clara Miles.

“Clara was the backbone of this place,” Beatrice said. “It was her idea to come out here, and she worked hard and kept us going.”

After living in her home in Miles Manor for 48 years, Beatrice thinks Columbia has evolved in a positive way.

“There’s a lot of good changes,” Beatrice said, “… because they have so many good things for the children to do, like the community center and the ARC (Activity and Recreation Center).”

She is also pleased that black residents have spread throughout the city.

“We’re not all in one little area anymore. Blacks are all over Columbia.”
Although Genevieve Hill was not one of the original Miles Manor property owners, she had known other families in the neighborhood before she moved there with her family 34 years ago.

Genevieve Hill remembers when her youngest son, Christopher, went zooming down Belleview Court on his Big Wheel for the first time in late spring of 1974. At the time, 4-year-old Christopher was sick with the measles, but it didn’t keep him from playing outside. He put on his winter coat, a pair of shorts and a pair of cowboy boots, and in no time he was ready to ride his plastic tricycle that had a front wheel bigger than the other two.

“You couldn’t keep him inside,” Genevieve said.

Genevieve’s family, which also included Christopher’s brother, Theodore, had just moved into their new home on Belleview Court. When they lived on Providence Road, Genevieve had to keep a sharp eye on Christopher and his Big Wheel.

“He would get on the sidewalk and ride, and we were afraid that he would make a mistake and go in the street.”

Genevieve said the danger of Providence Road prompted her and her husband to find a safer neighborhood, a place where Christopher could finally ride his Big Wheel on the sidewalk and street with no worries.

“It was really a blessing,” Genevieve said, adding that they were also looking for a bigger home.

“We were just fortunate enough to find this.”

Although Genevieve wasn’t the original owner of the house, she and her family made it unique after they moved in. The bright orange front door sharply contrasts with the neutral tones of the rest of the home.

Inside, a mural-sized mirror is mounted in front of the stairwell. Outside, a small patch of cacti grows near the concrete driveway, where a 1979 yellow Camaro is parked. Genevieve’s father bought the car for her in 1989.

Their new home wasn’t too hard to come across. Genevieve knew most of the families living in Miles Manor at the time.

“It’s really strange because at one time, when I first moved here, I lived in a little house on Garth,” Genevieve said. “Ms. Kelly and I would talk in the driveway. The front of my house was facing Garth, and the front of hers was facing Worley, so we would stand out on my driveway and talk.”

When Genevieve’s family moved into their house on Providence Road a few years later, David and Barbara Horrell lived just two blocks away on Hickman Road.

Genevieve quickly became acquainted with Barbara and her family, and she remembers walking down the street every once in a while to catch up with her new friend, a woman she’s now known for almost 45 years.

“Most times in the afternoons, we would meet each other, stand and talk when we weren’t on the phone — like we are now constantly,” Genevieve said.

After the move to Miles Manor, Genevieve was once again only blocks away from Barbara. It was the Horrells’ move that made Genevieve and her first husband begin looking for a home there. Genevieve would gauge the Horrells’ progress on building their home, and she finally gave in to buying one that had already been built.

Genevieve now lives with her husband, Clarence Hill, on Belleview Court. In 34 years, she has watched families move in and move out. Some houses have changed; others have not.

The multitude of children who once played atop the hill on Belleview Court has since become only a handful. It’s a peaceful neighborhood, and it’s thriving. Although Genevieve said she and her neighbors don’t spend as much time together as they might like, they keep an eye out for one another.

“These neighbors out here, we don’t do a lot of visiting,” Genevieve said.

“But boy, if something goes wrong, everybody is here to see what’s going on and what they can do to help you.”

Genevieve Hill
Resident of Miles Manor