

*Approximate boundaries:*

**N**-W. Pierce St; **S**-W. Greenfield Ave;

**E**-S. Cesar E. Chavez Dr; **W**-S. Layton Blvd

# SOUTH SIDE *Clarke Square*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Clarke Square is a densely populated neighborhood that has a large number of mid- to late 19th century wood frame houses. The main business districts are on West National Avenue and South Cesar Chaves Drive. Neighborhood streets follow a perfect grid pattern with the exception of National which begins to bend slightly south at 16th Street.

Clarke Square Park is a small square with playground equipment. See photos below.

## HISTORY

In many ways, Clarke Square has been the historic clone of Walker's Point, but always a few years behind.

### Early populations

Clarke Square began its development in the late 1800s when residents from Walker's Point embarked on a long migration west. Walker's Point was named after George Walker, one of three founding land developers in Milwaukee (the other two being Solomon Juneau and Byron Kilbourn). Walker settled on the shores of Lake Michigan in 1834 in the area that would later become

Milwaukee's South Side. A few years after Walker began subdividing his land, a couple from Vermont, Norman and Lydia Clarke, purchased a 160-acre parcel of land west of Walker's Point—an area bordered by today's Greenfield, Pierce, 20th, and Layton Boulevard. Just as George Walker had done in Walker's Point with Walker's Square, the Clarks reserved a small square in the parcel called Clarke's Addition for a park (today's Clarke Square Park). The Clarks began subdividing the land, and the mixed ethnic residents of Walker's Point eagerly purchased lots. Among them were Yankees, Norwegians, Swedes, Irish, and--south of today's Greenfield Avenue--Poles. Each population built its own churches in Clarke Square. One of the most consolidated parishes was the Irish St. Matthew's Church at 25th and Scott—the southern bookend of the effectual St. Rose's Parish in the Merrill Park neighborhood.



Historically, jobs were plentiful in Clarke Square. There were employers in the Menomonee Valley including tanneries and millwork plants, as well as the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad. In the 1880s, Milwaukee Harvester (later International Harvester) built a large factory on the south boundary of the Valley near South 19th Street. A mile or two east were industries such as Chain Belt, Kearney and Trecker, Allis Chalmers, A.O. Smith, and later Allen-Bradley.

By the turn of the century the neighborhood was becoming increasingly diverse. Walker's Point was fully settled with older residents and new populations that had arrived from Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia. Now many of these groups were migrating into Clarke Square.

### *The significance of National Avenue in Clarke Square*

National Avenue got its name in 1877 when Elizabeth Street was renamed National Avenue. The name came from the National Soldiers' Home with grounds on today's 45th and National that had been built to care for men disabled during the Civil War.

By the late 1800s that part of National Avenue that was within the Clarke Square boundaries had become a southside gold coast lined with mansions of the wealthy. The most significant estate belonged to a German-born Jew (albeit baptized Lutheran) named Bernhard Leidersdorf whose land comprised six acres on National between 17th and 18th Streets. The fully-staffed estate included its own lake, a grove of trees imported from Europe, and a red brick wall that remains today. Leidersdorf died in 1912 and gradually the street evolved into a business corridor accompanied by rows of apartments. By the 1930s, the merchants reflected the population of the neighborhood.

The following chart shows the businesses and organizations that were on West National Avenue between Cesar Chavez Drive (then South 16th Street) and Layton Boulevard in 1935. See the notes following the chart.

<i>Addresses on W. National in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1602	Traudt's Rexall Drugs Medoc Company Medicine
1604	Paris Dye Works
1605	New York Coffee Pot Restaurant
1608	Anna Laura Beauty Shop Christooh C. Reinke Physician Dudenhoefer Hall Leonard N. Evans Dentist The Camera Institute
1609	Samuel L. Weiss Used Cars
1610	LaSalle Products Liquors Dudenhoefer Company Liquors Joseph Dudenhoefer Real Estate
1614-20	Henry Volkman Company Bikesmiths
1622	OK Auto Glass Company
1635	Crown Motor Company
All 1700s	All apartment buildings
1808	George Kotze Carpet Contractor
1817	F.J. Borgwardt Inc. Funeral Director
1904	E.A. Swendson Inc. Used Cars

<i>Addresses on W. National in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1924	E.A. Swendson Inc. Autos
1925	Phythian Castle Inc.
2000	William E. Kannapinn Tavern
2003	Louis P. Hansen Surfacar
2004	Joseph Holub Grocer
2007	Walter Jeager Motor Company Paint Shop
2008	Russell Brothers Inc. Real Estate
2022	George L. Zilles Tavern
2037	M? Valentine Shoe Repair
2039	Henry W. Prei Tavern
2100	Walter A. Ziemann Grocer
2106	George W. Schaur Tavern
2110	Milwaukee County Outdoor Relief Station #4
2116	Badger Drug Company
2117	National Family Laundry Company
2118	Machinery & Welder Corporation
2125	Walter Salb Tavern
2138	Milwaukee Furnace Company
2200	Temolin's Pharmacy Postal Station #42
2201	Mrs. Vera Smith Tavern
2202	Thomas J. Pendergast Physician Bernard J. Claney Dentist
2203	Jacob M. Barbian Meats
2206	Walter F. Zimny Bakery
2209	A&P Tea Company
2212	Herman Blech Barber
2217	Arnold Appelt Tavern
2218	Andrew J. Meloy & Sons Plumbers

<i>Addresses on W. National in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
2220	August E. Hilgendorf Meats
2221	Milwaukee Egg Company
2223	Otto G. Hansen Plasterer
2225	Fred W. Duke Jeweler Goetz-Strobel Fuel Company
2226	Joseph Christbaum Shoe Repair
2230	Sam Yen Laundry
2231	Henry A. Nolte Barber
2233	Benjamin C. Strand Tailor
2235	George D. Schoneman Tavern
2236	William H. Biegen Chiropodist
2238	Kurth Brothers Wholesale Grocer
2300	Apartments all down the street
2316	John R. Jelenc Funeral Director
2330	George Schneider Furniture Mover
2336	Charlotte B. Polzin Furniture
2337	Wadham's Oil Company Filling Station
2400	Apartments all down the street
2422	Excelsior Masonic Temple
2427	Voth & Anderson Funeral Directors
2434	Standard Oil Filling Station
2435	Root Fur Company
2437	Bush's Service Station
2536	Reliance Building & Loan Association Reliance Mortgage & Finance Company
2537	Frank A. Becker Tavern & Bowling
2538	Avenue Coffee Shop
2601	Silver Tavern

<i>Addresses on W. National in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
2605	Retzer Brothers Grocery
2609	Mrs. Agnes Gross Delicatessen
2611	Emil M. Schinner Meats
2615	Charles Methfessel Chiropractor
2616	National Theater
2619	Mrs. Paula Schulz Dry Goods
2620	National Home Made Candy Shop
2622	National Beauty Shop
2624	Emil F. Noehre Company Sausages
2625	John P. Klein Tavern
2627	Paul H. Knolk Librarian Allan G. Hansen Chiropodist
2628	National Food Market
2631	Werdna Beauty Shop
2633	Philip Hermann Tailor
2634	Lester M. Schick Jeweler
2636	Advance Drug Company Inc.
2637	Ernest M. Krembs Drugs US Post Office Station #63 Harry L. Urich Dentist Krembs Laboratory Medical Manufacturer Harry R. Ausman Physician
Layton Blvd.	

#### **Notes from census and other public records:**

- The businesses on National Avenue were diverse and fully capable of meeting the needs of Clarke Square. As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods before 1970, most proprietors were immigrants or children of immigrants and few had educations beyond 8th grade.
- The diversity of the proprietors reflects the diversity of Walker's Point, from where many of the residents migrated.
- The main enterprise of the relatively large German Dudenhoefer family was religious ornamental works.
- The block of apartments beginning on 1700 W. National is located where the former estate of wealthy Bernhard Leidersdorf once stood.

- Sam Weiss, with the used car lot, was the (probably Jewish) son of Russian and Hungarian immigrants. He had been raised on Reed Street in Walker's Point (today's South 2nd Street).
- George Kotze, the carpet contractor, was a Slovenian immigrant from Yugoslavia. He lived down the street from his shop on National and had at least seven children.
- E. (Ernest) A. Swendson was a Norwegian immigrant and one of the few merchants who did not live in the Clarke Square neighborhood. He lived in Wauwatosa where he had an earlier car dealership on Bluemound Road.
- The Excelsior Masonic Temple was built in 1923 by the Knights of Pythias and their Pythias Castle was completed in 1927.
- The Pythian Castle (Hall) at 1925 W. National is today the Lao Buddhist Temple.
- William Kannapinn, with the tavern, was a German immigrant who was raised in Clarke Square.
- Joseph Holub, the grocer, was a Bohemian immigrant from Czechoslovakia. He and his family rented an apartment on National and later rented a place on Muskego.
- Walter Salb lived at the same address as his tavern. He and his parents were born in Wisconsin. Before opening the tavern, Walter had been a truck driver.
- Jacob M. Barbian lived on West Pierce. He appears to have been raised in the neighborhood. He and his parents were born in Wisconsin.
- Walter Zimny, the baker, lived at the same address as his business. He was the son of German immigrants and had been raised on First Avenue (today's South 6th Street) in Walker's Point.
- Sam Yen, with the laundry, was a member of a Chinese family that owned multiple laundries in Milwaukee.
- John R. Jelenc, the funeral director, was a prominent southside businessman, active in civic affairs and the Slovene community.
- Charlotte B. Polzin lived at the same address as her furniture store. She was working as a laundress and living in a boarding house in 1930. Her parents had been German immigrants and she apparently never married.
- Charles Methfessel, the chiropractor, was a German immigrant who lived in the same building as his office. He attended college for three years.
- Ernest Krembs, the pharmacist, appeared to be doing well with his business. He lived on Layton Blvd. and had lived there since before 1920. His father had come from Wurtemberg and his mother had come from Bavaria.



## *Post World War II*

At the close of World War II, a modest number of migrants from rural areas began arriving in Clarke Square in search of jobs. But they were not the largest wave of newcomers. That belonged to the Latino population that had begun settling in Walker's Point in the 1920s and many later moved into Clarke Square. A number of push-pull factors influenced this population change. During the early 1900s Mexican immigration to the United States expanded because of worsening economic conditions in Mexico. A large wave of Mexicans also left the country during the political and economic turmoil created by the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Although most Mexicans found jobs in local tanneries and foundries, some came to Milwaukee as strikebreakers—often unknowingly. A parallel migration occurred in the 1940s when Puerto Ricans began to settle in Walker's Point. Very soon these new groups began spilling over from Walker's Point into the Clarke Square neighborhood.

## **Current populations (as of 2021)**

Today Latinos comprise approximately two-thirds of the Clarke Square population-- mostly Mexicans with a smattering of Caribbeans and Central Americans. In 1996, the City of Milwaukee renamed South 16th Street Cesar Chavez Drive, in honor of the Mexican American labor leader. Mexican restaurants and grocers today permeate the area and its boundaries.

But diversity does not stop at Latinos. Many European Americans of German and Polish ancestry remain in Clarke Square. About 1 in 6 residents are African American. Over 100 Asians of Hmong/Laotian ancestry also live in Clarke Square and this population continues to grow. They are supported by the Lao Buddhist Temple (see photo) and the neighborhood New Life Hmong Alliance Church. Clarke Square also has a scattering of American Indians and people of multiple backgrounds.

Families are larger in Clarke Square than in most other neighborhoods in Milwaukee, with an average of four to five members. Over half of the population lives in low-income households with annual incomes under \$25,000. The largest number of reported occupations in Clarke Square are in the fields of production, food service, and facilities (building and maintenance).

Home mortgages are typical with over half the home owners paying between \$1,000 and \$1,500 in selected costs (e.g., taxes, deeds of trust, contracts to purchase, mortgages, insurance) per month. However, rents are modest with about three-quarters going for \$500 to \$1,000 a month, and 1 in 6 going for under \$500. Over 70 percent of all housing units in Clarke Square are rented.

In the 1980s, Clarke Square became home to a Milwaukee mayor. See the resident profile.

## Clarke Square resident profile (1990s)

### John Norquist

In late 1989, John O. Norquist (see left), then in his first term as mayor of Milwaukee, and his wife Susan Mudd, an environmental activist and lawyer, moved to South 26th Street near National. Mudd was the head of Citizens for a Better Environment. They had moved from a modest nearby duplex. The architecture of the couple's new home had features of the Queen Anne style.

Before becoming the 37th mayor of Milwaukee, Norquist served in the Wisconsin State Assembly from 1975 to 1984 and the Wisconsin Senate from 1984 to 1988. As mayor, Norquist was known as a “fiscally conservative socialist.” Each year in office he

reduced the property tax rate and kept city budgets from growing beyond the rate of inflation.

Norquist's contributions to Milwaukee are visible in the landscape. He was mostly responsible for bringing design principles of the New Urbanism to the city that led to breakthrough developments downtown, in the Third Ward, and along the banks of the Milwaukee River.

Norquist fought hard for light rail as a solution for Milwaukee's transit problems. In removing the Park East Freeway—once the largest highway ever purposely destroyed— he became known throughout the country for his anti-freeway stance. Toward the end of his fourth term, Norquist accepted the position as leader of the Congress for the New Urbanism. There he used his experience in removing the Park East Freeway to advocate for a national campaign to help other local officials and New Urbanism advocates in

highway teardown movements. Norquist retired from the position in 2014.

Norquist and Mudd put their Clarke Square house up for sale in 2003.



### INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Journey House** at 2212 W. Greenfield Avenue, with a plethora of youth and family activities and sports activities (see photo).
- **Lao Buddhist Temple** at 1925 W. National, serving the Hmong and Lao Buddhists on Milwaukee's South Side (see photo).
- **El Rey** at 916 S. Cesar Chavez Drive (just outside the Clarke Square boundaries) an all-inclusive Latino grocery store and deli



## RECURRING NEARBY OUTINGS (Health conditions permitting)

In the following section the website addresses have been eliminated due to technical problems with the various ways different web browsers display PDF files. Website information on these events is available through the book *Milwaukee Area Outings on the Cheap*. See below.

### A.W.E.'S SUMMER TRUCK PROGRAM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
6 weeks during summer, various weekdays, 12-3pm	Clarke Square Park; see website	Program of meaningful, drop-in, art-based enrichment activities for youth ages 4 – 14, with a focus on working with youth in Milwaukee's under-served neighborhoods.	Free

### MITCHELL PARK DOMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon. 9am-12pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	A place to experience a desert oasis, a tropical jungle, and special floral gardens all in one morning.	Free (on date designated)

### FALL FLORAL SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep. to early Nov., Mon.- Fri. 9am-5pm, Sat. 9am-4pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fall harvest festival and floral exhibits.	unk

### STORY TIME AT THE DOMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid. Oct. to early Nov., Mon.'s 10:30-11am	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Children's stories about autumn, perfect for the home-schooled.	Free kids 3-8 accompanied by adult

### NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING—HOLIDAY FLORAL SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Dec., Mon.-Fri. 9am- 5pm; Sat., Sun. holidays 9am-4pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Holiday floral show at the Horticultural Center.	unk

### GINGERBREAD LAND—HOLIDAY SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jan. Sat., Sun.	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Visit a gingerbread house covered in snowy frosting and candy canes and gum drops, among the poinsettias and decked holiday tree.	unk

### MILWAUKEE COUNTY WINTER FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Nov. thru Feb. Sat. 9am- 12:30pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy from Wisconsin small farms.	Free

### GARDEN IMPRESSIONS SPRING FLORAL SHOW AT THE DOMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
May, 9am- 5pm,	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	The experience of a spring garden as an outdoor art gallery in the Show Domes amongst the brilliant tulips, Easter lilies, hydrangeas and marigolds, including easels displaying paintings of the domes done in the styles of Monet, Cezanne, and Van Gogh.	Free at times designated

### WINTER WONDERLANDS CELEBRATION

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Dec.,	Journey House, 2110 W. Scott St.	Opportunity to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus, do crafts, eat cookies and refreshments, and receive clothing.	Free (families)

### DAY OF THE DEAD

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Oct., Fri. 6-9pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	A not-too-spooky night of family fun with treats and ghostly fun.	unk

### WALKER'S SQUARE FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun. thru Aug., Sun., Thu. 8am-5pm	1031 S. 9th St.	Fresh produce from Wisconsin farmers, baked goods, art, crafts.	Free

### SUMMER ON OLYMPUS: SUMMER FLORAL SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun.-mid Sep., Mon.'s 9am-4pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Opportunity to see the best in summer blooms.	Free on Mondays

### JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--MITCHELL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am- 10pm	Mitchell Park, 2200 W. Pierce St.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, music, fireworks.	Free

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

## QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

### **Quotes from Clarke Square oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. <sup>1</sup>—about then.**

“The storefronts around the 1950s were very typical mom and pop shops with a commercial district around 15th. Very bustling. I don’t have any sharp memories, but the places were probably in better shape than what they are now.”

“[In my earliest memory] I would say [Clarke Square] was mainly European, Scandinavian, but a lot of diverse people moving from Walker’s Point--some Latino and Native American. It definitely has changed over time. The majority now is Latino and black and quite thoroughly mixed, with Southeast Asian which began to be a presence in the ‘90s.”

“I have not seen major changes over the time I have been in the neighborhood, but celebrations for birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and quinceañeras, and other cultural celebrations are and were common.”

“The parishes did help bring people together. [They] would do more social justice marching. Journey House was a point of contact for a lot of people and there were social service agencies in the ‘70s to reverse some entrenched systematic racism.”

“[Events that really changed the neighborhood were] the marches in 1967, the closing of the factories, such as International Harvester, the deindustrialization. Not many current events.”

### **Quotes from Clarke Square oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. —about now.**

“I noted hearing more Puerto Rican accents (the Spanish is kind of a middle ground between the Mexican and Puerto Rican dialect). Definitely other languages are being spoken, like the Hmong language, the Lao language, the various Burmese languages, (the Karen language being one of the Burmese dialects) because there are a lot of temples and other religious services that cater their preferred languages.”

“It’s an active neighborhood. People are usually out and about, shopping, playing, living their lives. [It’s] also a dense neighborhood--homes close together. Even the shops are close together. There’s a lot of life that’s very observable.”

“The Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative tries to create space for people to meet and get to know one another at events like Music in Mitchell Park, Neighborhood Nights Out, and Listening Circles (in collaboration with the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion).”

“I think of Clarke Square as a food-rich neighborhood, in terms of the supermarkets and restaurants that populate the neighborhood or fall just outside of it.”

“There has not been a major shift in my mind in terms of organizations or clubs in Clarke Square. There are a couple of strong, resident-led block clubs and a couple professional organizations such as Journey House, Epic Community Center Organization (ECCO) that are on the top of my mind.”

“There are around 20 Christian churches in Clarke Square, with a large Christian population (though whether or not that population is practicing their faith is hard to tell). The churches with the largest infrastructure are Catholic and Lutheran. There are other Christian denominations present and scattered throughout smaller (sometimes storefront) churches in the neighborhood. The Lao Buddhist Temple is easily visible at 20th St and National Avenue.”

“It’s not an unusual occurrence here to see a Buddhist monk walking around, or women in hijab or covered attire, or a Hispanic event, Las Posadas.”

“Journey House does quite of bit of afterschool activities, summer camp type things, as does another youth organization ECHO. There are a lot of opportunities to participate in formal and informal activities and sports. There’s art opportunities through Artist’s Working in Education (AWE) that has a mobile truck to work in.”

“Soccer is pretty big in the neighborhood. Many youth seek out basketball at Journey House when they have open gym. It is not uncommon to see neighbors talking with each other in the front yard or on their porches.”

“[Major events in Clarke Square] are public sector policies that caused some stir but were clarified. There was concern that the Milwaukee Police Department was considering joining forces with the federal government and explicitly would cooperate with ICE right after the elections. We had to ensure community members that they were safe. . . But there are still a few people trying to deport immigrants.”

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<sup>1</sup>Urban Anthropology Inc. complies with human subjects requirements of formal research and asks informants to sign informed consent forms that stipulate anonymity, hence names are not provided with the quotes.

## PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-Journey House



Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on 20th & National



<sup>1</sup> Photo attribution: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6d/John\\_Norquist\\_2008.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6d/John_Norquist_2008.jpg)

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Rick Petrie's and Jill Florence Lackey's *Germans in Milwaukee: A neighborhood history*.

Do you have great photos of this neighborhood? Are you a resident with an interesting quote about this neighborhood? Do you have recurring outings, additions, corrections, or general comments about this neighborhood? Please email your input to: [JFLanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)



## OLDER PHOTOS FROM RESIDENTS

Photo of the Lidersdorf Family in their 1908 Peerless automobile courtesy of Bob Salb

