

Approximate boundaries:

N-Milwaukee River; **S**-E. Pearson St; **E**-N. Humboldt Ave;
W-Milwaukee River

LOWER EAST SIDE *East Village*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

East Village is a high-density neighborhood with a mix of old industrial buildings, new apartment/condo developments, and wood frame houses that date from the late 19th and early 20th century. Most of the new development is along Water Street. Many of the old industrial buildings have been converted into condos. Along Humboldt Avenue and North Water Street are modest commercial corridors.

The neighborhood is relatively hilly with a steep slope on the south side of Water Street. Most of the streets follow a rectangular grid with the exception of Water Street that follows the bend of the Milwaukee River. There is little in the way of public green space in the neighborhood. See photos below.

HISTORY

The history of East Village is all about tanneries, Kashubes, and Catholicism.

Early populations

The first major wave of Europeans to settle in the East Village were Poles who joined a few Yankees and Germans—some of whom had founded factories along the Milwaukee River. The Poles erected small cottages and a few two-story homes along the river bluff just north of Brady Street. There is some evidence that Poles were living in that area as early as the 1850s. In 1854, a family of five Polish immigrants perished when their 12-foot by 12-foot shanty caught fire in an area that was somewhere between East Brady Street and the Milwaukee River. The fire department did not immediately respond because the officers initially thought the blaze was outside the city limits.

Most of the immigrant Poles who arrived early in the East Village area were Kashubes from the Baltic Sea region of Poland—many from the Hel Peninsula. Those interested in maintaining a fishing economy settled on Jones Island. Others were simply interested in gaining access to steady jobs—jobs that were plentiful in the area of the North Avenue dam, such as in tanneries, sawmills, and flour mills. They formed a dense settlement, erecting one to three houses on single lots and often raised chickens in their backyards.

In 1871 the immigrant Kashubes built their own anchor church, St. Hedwig's, on Franklin and Brady. Two years later they added a school, and when their congregation topped 600 families, they rebuilt their church at its present location on Humboldt and Brady. The Sisters of Notre Dame found a home on the same block.

In time Irish and Italian families joined the Poles. Many were drawn to the same jobs



Today's neighborhood-
Sculptures across the street from Dimoda Pizza

churches just outside of the neighborhood. Below is a profile of two immigrant families that took advantage of what East Village had to offer. One family found the area an excellent location for entrepreneurial activities and the second family found the area a source of jobs. See below.

East Village resident profile (early 20th century) *(Information and photo from U.S. Census and other public records)*

The Galluns

August F. Gallun was born in 1834 in Osterwick, Prussia, an area where many Kashubes also resided. Both his father and grandfather had owned tanneries. Following in their footsteps, Albert immigrated to the United States in 1854 with the intention of building a tanning business of his own. He took a job for nearly a year with Albert Trostel who had a large tannery in today's Beerline B neighborhood. He and Trostel quickly formed a partnership called Trostel & Gallun.

In 1854, August married Juliana Kraus. She was also a German immigrant whose family had settled near Granville. The couple had children Albert, Ella, Edwin (who died young), and Adolph. The family did not live within the borders of today's East Village, but lived nearby, first purchasing a home on North Jackson and later on North Prospect.

The partnership between Gallun and Trostel did not last and August ultimately opened his own tannery in today's East Village neighborhood, not far from the Pfister Vogel Tannery. Using some of the best architectural design of the time, Gallun's tannery grew to a large complex of well-crafted buildings near Holton and Water Streets. The site proved an excellent one for leather tanning with easy access to water, hides from nearby meat packers, tan bark, and shipping and rail lines. It was also a good area for an immigrant labor force. Early on, A.F. Gallun & Sons encouraged immigrants to become citizens and to buy homes near the tannery. The company gave them loans, with interest, for home purchases. It was a good business tactic which ensured a stable and relatively inexpensive labor force.

The Gallun tannery was highly successful. Specializing in products such as harnesses, boots, and belts, business was particularly good during war times when the need for these products increased. In 1895, August Gallun passed on the management of the tannery to son Albert Gallun. Under Albert's leadership, A.F. Gallun & Sons became one of the top four leather production companies in the world in the early 20th century, at times even surpassing Trostel and Pfister & Vogel.

Tannery business slowed down with increased automobile use in the early 20th century, resulting in decreased harness use. The decline continued throughout the middle of the century. The business experienced a slight spike during the Vietnam War with the need for boot leather. However, the complex eventually closed in 1993. Ten years earlier, the tannery buildings were added to the National Register of Historic Places.



The profile below represents what might be a typical family that was employed by the Gallun tannery during the early decades of the 20th century.

East Village resident profile (early 20th century)
(Information and photo from U.S. Census and other public records)

The Sadowski/Prondzinski families

Born in the German sector of Poland in 1865, August Sadowski arrived in America in 1905 and soon arranged for the immigration of a large family back home. Among his family members were wife Mary, and children Martha, Alois, John, Katrine, and Frances (other children would be born later in America).

August quickly took a job in a tannery (no doubt the Gallun tannery) and just as quickly took out a loan to buy a home at 1727 North Warren just outside of today's East Village neighborhood, but walking distance from St. Hedwig's Parish. The home, which was fully purchased by 1930, was valued at \$9,000, far above the median home value of \$6,106 for that year. Judging by his immediate migration to the East Village area, August was likely a Kashubian Pole. It is also likely that August took advantage of the home loans from A.F. Gallun & Sons to purchase his relatively expensive house.

Most of August's sons ended up working in a nearby shoe factory, but daughter Martha, his oldest child, followed her father into work at the tannery. In 1910, the census taker listed her tannery job as a "heal worker."

A few years later, Martha Sadowski met another man of Polish extraction, Anton Prondzinski, who was born in Wisconsin, but was the son of Polish immigrants. Anton would not likely have been a Kashube, as he was raised in the old 14th Ward (today's Lincoln Village/Polonia neighborhoods). The Kashubian immigrants generally settled on Milwaukee's Jones Island or the East Side neighborhoods. Martha and Anton married.

The newlyweds did not settle in Anton's south side neighborhood. Instead, they elected for East Village. It may have been a tannery job and even the possibility of a home loan from the company that convinced the couple to settle near her parents. Anton immediately took a job at the tannery (no doubt Gallun) and the couple purchased a home at 933 E. Land Place. Eventually they had children Emily, Raymond, Marie, Rob, and possibly more—all who worshipped at St. Hedwig's. Their home in 1930 was valued at a modest \$2,000.

Humboldt Boulevard

North Water Street and Humboldt Boulevard quickly became the major business corridors in East Village. Humboldt was also home to two Catholic institutions. See list for 1935 and notes below.

<i>Addresses on N. Humboldt Blvd. in 1935</i>	<i>Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1701	Schowalter's Rexall Drug Store
1703	John A. Seng Dentist George E. Whalen Physician

<i>Addresses on N. Humboldt Blvd. in 1935</i>	<i>Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1704	St. Hedwig's Catholic Church
1705	Monnus Marcus Dry Goods
1707	Save Sales of Milwaukee Indandescent Lamps
1724	Sisters of Notre Dame
1801	Andrew M. Boginski Tavern
1802	Sebastian Curro Grocery
1804	Paul Misiakcek Shoe Repair
1816	John Michalski Bakery
1817	Frank Jerin Shoe Repair
1821	Walter Wolciechowski Meats
1822	Anton Drewek Grocery
1837	Charles W. Gibas Tavern
1838	Frank Piotrowski Coal
1871	Walter Zembrowski Grocery
1875	Frank Listwan Tavern

Summary and notes from U.S. Census and other public sources

- Technically, only those businesses on the west side of the street (odd numbers) were within the East Village neighborhood, but residents could easily access sites on either side.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants and nearly all lived at or very near their shops.
- This short stretch on Humboldt did meet most of the residents' basic needs, with two health care providers, a Catholic church, a drug store, a dry goods store, three grocers, a bakery, a coal dealer, and shoe repairmen.
- Monnus Marcus, with the dry goods store, may have been the Monnus (also called Morris) Marcus who began as a junk peddler in Waukesha. Morris was a Jewish immigrant from Russia.
- Andrew M. Boginski, with the tavern, was from Berks Co., PA. He was the son of an immigrant from Germany (probably the German sector of Poland).
- Sebastian Curro, the grocer, was an Italian immigrant. He had only completed the 2nd grade in school.

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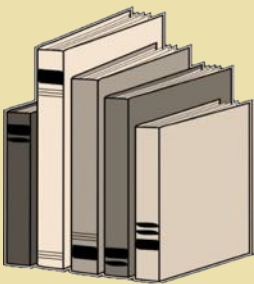
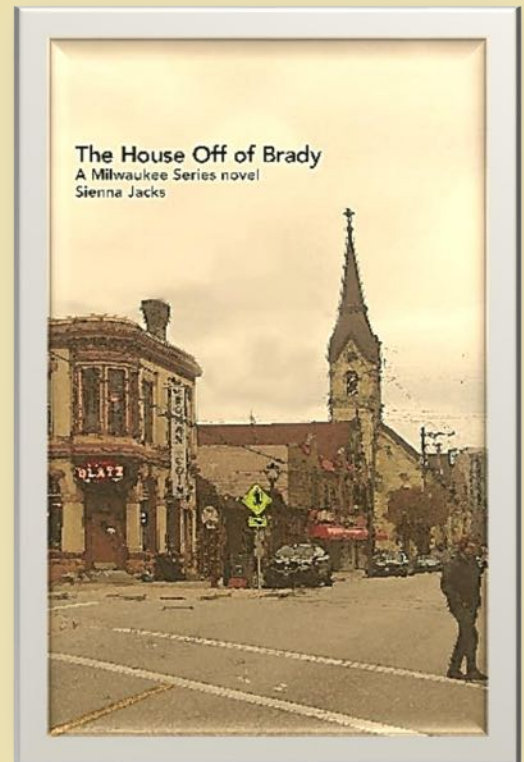
Novels that educate readers on Milwaukee neighborhoods

This series, written by mystery novelist Sienna Jacks takes place in historic neighborhoods in Milwaukee.

The House Off of Brady

Illuminating the histories of the Third Ward and Brady Street

Two young anthropologists, trying to convince a local nonprofit to sponsor a neighborhood house museum, must show that the historical occupants of the house were representative of Milwaukee's Brady Street, and that they project positive images for the neighborhood. Their efforts are boosted by a personal journal left behind by one of the home's occupants—Giuseppe Russo. But as the young anthropologists translate and transcribe the journal, they learn that Giuseppe had been banished from his former community in the Third Ward. Are they about to stumble on information that could kill the project—or something perhaps even worse?



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All of the author's royalties go to supporting neighborhood museums and exhibits in Milwaukee, when book is purchased through the publisher

- John Michalski, the baker, was an immigrant from Poland.
- Frank Jerin, the shoe repairman, was an immigrant from Austria.
- Walter Woiciechowski, the butcher, was also from Berks Co., PA, and may have been related to Andrew Boginski. He was also the son of Polish immigrants.
- Anton Drewek, the grocer, was also the son of Polish immigrants. He was an anomaly on the street in that he'd completed high school.
- Charles W. Gibas, with the tavern, apparently did not operate his tavern for very long. The son of Polish immigrants, Gibas was working as a railway inspector by 1940.
- Frank Piotrowski, the coal dealer, was an immigrant from the Russian sector of Poland.
- Walter Zembrowski, the grocer, was an immigrant from Poland. He had only completed the 3rd grade in school.
- Frank Listwan, with the tavern, was yet another immigrant from Poland. He had only completed the 6th grade.

While the East Village neighborhood withstood the economic pressures of the Great Depression, followed immediately by World War II, changes were to occur at the end of the century.

Years of decline . . .

Like most Milwaukee neighborhoods, East Village suffered during deindustrialization, beginning in the early 1980s. Many factories shut down or relocated. Industrial jobs dried up. Buildings fell into disrepair. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent from its peak in 1963, to the present. What had been a working and middle class area on the East Side was in decline

. . . and then rebirth

However, many investors saw the area as ripe for new development. At the close of the 20th century the former industrial properties were being transformed into housing complexes, retail spaces, and diverse uses. Today, a drive down Water Street is a diorama of new development. Riverfront factories have been converted into upscale condominiums, and a number of new apartment buildings have been constructed. One of the Gallun buildings is now a 450-unit apartment building, with condo development in progress on what is now termed as "Gallun Row."

Current populations (as of 2021)

No information is available on the demographics of the current East Village neighborhood. See [Brady Street](#), [Beerline B](#), and [Lower East Side](#) neighborhoods for *nearby* demographics, occupations, and housing information.

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.

FESTIVUS ON BRADY			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Dec., Sat. 9:30pm-1:30am.	Brady St.	Opportunity to air grievances and participate in feats of strength to win Festivus pole, per Festivus Seinfeld episode in 1997.	Free

BRADY ST. FESTIVAL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jul., Sat. 11am-12am	Brady St.	Music, food, arts, crafts.	Free

BRADY STREET PET PARADE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
October	Brady St.	Brady Street Pet Parade.	Free

WALKING TOUR—BRADY STREET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late May-mid Oct. Sat.'s 1:30pm	Meets in front of Three Holy Women Catholic Parish (St. Hedwig Church) at 1702 N. Humboldt Ave.	Tour through the neighborhood on a half-mile stroll and learn about the area's Polish and Italian roots, the counter culture of the '60s and '70s and the area's recent urban renaissance.	unk

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing. To access the book that provides nearly 600 outings—all priced under \$10—for the entire Greater Milwaukee area, go to <http://mecahmilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

Quotes from an oral history of the Lower East Side currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹ About THEN.

“I watched the area change so much while I was there. I remember watching the little Polish women making their daily hike to St. Hedwigs, while their husbands went off to work with their lunch boxes. Today, especially with all the condos being built on Water Street. I was happy to see that they didn't just create some minimalist buildings, but tried to retain the charm of the riverside area. And it was important that they saved as many of the industrial buildings as they could and transformed those into condos. It kept some of the charm of the old, I think. And some of the little houses still stand.”

“There was a time when the Park East Freeway could have destroyed parts of the East Side like the freeways destroyed all the other neighborhoods, but we resisted.”

“In the area where I live now there are a number of front houses and back houses and people would group together and share the rent. The history of the music subculture is very strong.”

“You had people living along Brady Street and those blocks and working at the tanneries and such in today's East Village. It offered them a good income, a nice standard of living.”

About NOW.

“There's still people that go to Pitch's on Humboldt where you go for ribs and spaghetti and brandy Manhattans and Frank Sinatra. I think it's still the same people there as when I moved to the area. It's old school. You go there and it's still 1940s, 1950s. There are places like this.”

“While all the condo development has improved our area, when I talk to the people who live in those buildings I’m not sure they know anything about the history. They might know if their building was once a tannery or something, but if you asked them about the people who once lived there, they haven’t a clue.”

¹ 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-Houses on E. Land Pl. & N. Marshall St.



Today's neighborhood-E. Land Pl. looking east



Today's neighborhood-Houses on E. Pearson St.



Today's neighborhood-Sculptures across the street from Dimoda Pizza (1)



Today's neighborhood-Sculptures across the street from Dimoda Pizza (2)



Today's neighborhood-N. Water St. west of N. Humboldt Blvd.

Today's neighborhood-Gallun Tannery Apartments



Today's neighborhood-
N. Humboldt Blvd.

Today's neighborhood-
New apartments on
N. Water St. & E. Pearson St.



For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Jill Florence Lackey's and Rick Petrie'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 Dr. Jill Florence Lackey at: jflanthropologist@currently.com