

Approximate boundaries:

N-E. Oklahoma Ave; **S**-E. St. Francis Ave (partial);
E-Lake Michigan, **W**-Lake Pkwy-794

SOUTHEAST SIDE *Fernwood*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Fernwood has a densely populated area that borders the lake and extends to the city's southern border just north of the city of St. Francis. The houses are mainly early 20th century bungalows and two-story wood frame houses. There are a few newer homes on South Lake Drive. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee occupies the largest parcel of land in the neighborhood, comprising nearly half of Fernwood from South Lake Drive east.

There are two parks. Bay View Park is a 39-acre stretch of green space that runs along the lake just east of South Lake Drive. There is also Morgan Triangle, a small park between Kinnick-inn Avenue and South Pennsylvania Avenue. See photos below.

HISTORY

If there was one word that can describe the history of the Fernwood neighborhood, that word would be "Catholicism."

Early populations

By the middle of the 19th century, German farmers—mostly Catholic—had settled on today's southeast side of Milwaukee. A German Catholic hamlet called New Koln thrived within the expanse that had been the unincorporated Town of Lake that encompassed today's Fernwood neighborhood. Having arrived from Cologne (German Koln), these 50 settlers founded St. Stephen's Catholic Parish. The German population gradually gained force in the region.

Catholic Bishop John Martin Henni recognized the need for priests to serve German-speaking Catholics in the wider area and in 1843 organized the St. Francis de Sales Seminary in his Milwaukee residence. Henni and others of the newly formed Archdiocese of Milwaukee soon sought a larger site for the Seminary, and in 1853, a papal envoy accompanied the Bishop to an area on the border of today's Fernwood area. Legend has it that the envoy, overcome by the site's beauty, exclaimed: "Make this place holy!" By January of 1856, a new building, designed by Victor Schulte, was dedicated on the feast day of St. Francis de Sales. In 1861, Bishop Henni consecrated Christ King Chapel and the original 11-foot, gilded cross was placed on top of the cupola.

Archbishop Henni and his successors Archbishops Michael Heiss and Frederick Xavier Katzer stamped a strong German character on the new jurisdiction. This "Germanization" policy was continued to a lesser extent by Archbishop Sebastian Messmer. Strongly believing in the aphorism, "language preserves faith," the local German Catholics worked to maintain a secure, homogeneous religious community where German language and ethnic traditions would be preserved. This became a practice that was most strongly reproduced in the diocese of Milwaukee with the building of German-speaking parishes and schools. For many years, St. Francis Seminary specialized in the education of German-speaking youth for service to German Catholics in the Midwest and elsewhere.

See profile of John Martin Henni on the following page.



Fernwood resident profile (mid-1800s)

(Information from census and other public records)

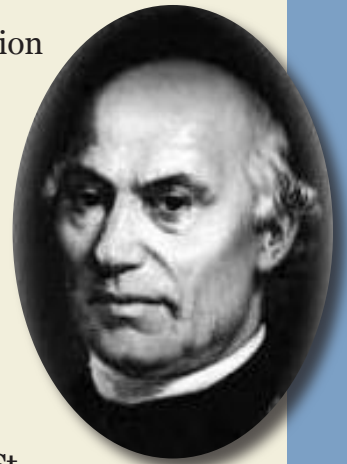
John Martin Henni

John Martin Henni (photo to right) was born to a German-speaking family in Switzerland in 1805. He was educated in St. Gallen and Lucerne and went to Rome in 1824 to advance his studies in philosophy and theology.

Henni arrived in the United States in 1828 at age 22, on the invitation of Bishop Edward Fenwick, to join the Diocese of Cincinnati. In 1829, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Fenwick.

While in Ohio, Henni became interested in the religious leadership to Germans in the United States. He proposed a seminary for the education of priests to minister among German Catholics. This mission was advanced when he was appointed to the newly created Diocese of Milwaukee by Pope Gregory XVI. Henni took up residence in the First Ward on Milwaukee's East Side. The 1850 census has him living with three other clergymen; one an Irish immigrant, and two others from the East Coast; a theology student from Ireland; a gardener; and two apparent maids. While none of these colleagues had German names, it was apparently here that Henni organized the St. Francis de Sales Seminary a few years earlier. Henni and others of the newly formed Archdiocese of Milwaukee soon sought a larger site for the school, which brought them to the Fernwood and St. Francis area and resulted in the dedication of St. Francis Seminary at its current site in 1856.

Henni became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1854. He was also instrumental in the establishment of another Catholic institution—Marquette University—which opened just days before his death in 1881.



Dissent within the ranks

Not everyone was happy with the German domination of the diocese. Conflicts between German and non-German clergy (particularly the Irish) broke out. English-speaking clergy and laity claimed they were slighted by German hegemony and worked to have English-speaking bishops appointed in 1881 and 1890 respectively. Germans were less interested in cultural assimilation and insisted that their schools and religious life remain distinct. Moreover, they continued to request German-speaking bishops to minister to their needs.

However, by the late 19th century the German hold on Milwaukee began to weaken. In the 1880s, the shift of the local economy from commerce to heavy industry brought a large influx of southern and eastern European Catholics to the area, which made it more ethnically diverse. Bohemians, Italians, and Poles were arriving and were founding their own Catholic parishes.

Yet the Seminary remained strong. Additions were made to the original building in 1868 and 1875. Enrolment grew. Eventually the Seminary would also offer graduate degree programs for lay candidates.

Another Catholic institution

With the help of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, another Catholic institution soon found its way into today's Fernwood area. The Marian Center's Loretto Hall was constructed in 1904 as St. Mary's Academy, a high school for young women. Erhard Brielmaier designed the later additions

to the Hall in 1922. A chapel within Loretta Hall has windows designed by Sister Mary Thomasita Fessler (who had her studio in the complex) and executed by Conrad Schmitt Studios.

Expansions in 1931 and 1935 created Rosary Hall and Clare Wing, to allow for the development of St. Clare College in 1937. Renamed for Samuel Cardinal Stritch in 1946, that institution outgrew its home and moved to its current location in 1962, just north of Milwaukee's city limits. Today it is Cardinal Stritch University.

St. Mary's Academy continued to grow into the largest high school for young women in the State of Wisconsin. By 1980, Milwaukee County and the State of Wisconsin recognized the school as a historic landmark. With nearby boys' schools gradually becoming coed, St. Mary's Academy closed in June, 1991. They had prepared over 8,000 young women to become responsible citizens serving in various occupations and professions.

In the late century, the center was reorganized into the Marian Center for Nonprofits. The school classrooms were converted to affordable offices for other nonprofit organizations.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, nearly 9 in 10 residents of Fernwood are European Americans. Germans continue to dominate the neighborhood, with nearly half this group of residents claiming German ancestry. The second and third highest ancestry cited is Polish and Irish respectively, suggesting that Fernwood is still a strongly Catholic neighborhood.

Given its history, it should not be surprising that Fernwood has more than two and one-half times more religious organizations than the average for comparable space in Wisconsin. The Catholic institutions have remained in and near Fernwood, but the Marian Center no longer houses affordable offices for nonprofit organizations. Early in 2016 the organization sent notices to the nonprofits that they had to seek other quarters, as the Marian Center could no longer afford building upkeep.

Residents in Fernwood are well educated with above average incomes. Over half of the residents over 25 have bachelor's or graduate degrees and nearly one-third live in upper middle-income households with annual incomes between \$75,000 and \$150,000. The highest number of occupations in the neighborhood are in administration, management, and food service.

Home ownership is also very high in Fernwood. Of the property units in the neighborhood, over two-thirds are owned. But surprisingly, the price of mortgages and rents are not particularly high. Owning a home often costs between \$1,000 and \$1,500 a month for select costs, and rentals often go between \$500 and \$1,000 a month.

INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **The Archdiocese of Milwaukee/Cousin's Center** at 3501 S. Lake Drive, on the border of Fernwood.
- **St. Francis de Sales Seminary** at 3257 S. Lake Drive (see photos), on the border of Fernwood.

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.

OPEN HOUSE—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES SEMINARY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Apr., Sun. 11am (mass), 12-2pm (tour)	3257 S. Lake Dr.	Opportunity to experience a Milwaukee landmark through mass and tour of seminary.	Free

SOUTH SHORE FROLICS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jul., Fri. 4-10:30pm, Sat. 11am-10:30pm, Sun. 9am-10pm	2900 S. South Shore Dr.	A weekend long fest hosted by Bay View Lions Club.	Free

BASKETBALL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Wed. 1-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Basketball in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, free

BILLIARDS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon.-Fri. 8:30am-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Billiards in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, free

SOUTH SHORE FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun.-late Oct., Sat. 8am-12pm	South Shore Park, 2900 South Shore Dr.	Fresh produce from Wisconsin farmers, baked goods, art, crafts, music, demonstrations.	Free

CARD PLAYING CLUB

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon.-Fri. 8:30am-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Organized card playing in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, singles, seniors, free

OUTDOOR ICE SKATING—BAY VIEW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, only when ice is 6 inches thick	Humboldt Park, 3000 S Howell Ave.	Ice skating for adults and children (heed "thin ice" signs).	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4, 9am-10pm	Humboldt Park, 3000 S. Howell Ave.	Parade, music, talent show, children's entertainment, fumes, fireworks.	Free

WALKING TOUR—BAY VIEW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late May-mid Oct, Sun.'s 1pm	Meets by the Bublr bike station at Zill- man Park, 2180 S Kinnickinnic Ave.	Opportunity to learn the story of how Bay View began with a patch- work of industry and diverse group of immigrants and grew to the charming neighborhood you see today.	\$10 adults, \$2 kids 7-17, free kids 6 and under

BEUHAH BRINTON HOUSE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Every third Sat. of the month, 1-4pm	2590 S. Superior St.	Tour the home of a woman most responsible for acclimating new immigrants to the town of Bay View in the late 19th century.	Free

UMOS MEXICAN INDEPENENCE DAY FESTIVAL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Sep., Sun. 12-8pm	UMOS Center, 2701 S. Chase Ave.	Festival of food vendors, beer, live music, craft vendors, everything Mexican.	Free

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

If you live in the Fernwood neighborhood and would like to provide an interesting observation on the neighborhood, send a quote to JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net.

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-Saint Francis de Sales Seminary on the border of Fernwood



Todays neighborhood-Houses on Springfield Ave.

Todays neighborhood-Saint Francis de Sales Seminary (2), on the border of Fernwood



Todays neighborhood-Houses on Fernwood Ave. and S. Vermont Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Morgan Park



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:
JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net

¹ Photo attribution: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Bischof_Johann_Martin_Henni.jpg