

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Brown Deer Rd; S-W. Dean Rd;

E-N. 68th St; W-N. 72nd St

NORTHWEST SIDE *Freedom Village*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Freedom Village is a low-density, residential neighborhood with mainly recently built ranch and colonial style housing stock. There are a few mid-20th century Cape Cod and colonial style houses along North 68th Street. Although interspersed with newly constructed homes, the older houses are set back from the street on lots that are spaced far apart. The rest of the residential area of the neighborhood is The Villas at Granville development west of North 72nd Street.

The complex is completely surrounded by a chain link fence and can only be accessed by a security gate. A modest business corridor runs along West Brown Deer Road and there is a nearby mall at the northeastern corner of the neighborhood, just off Brown Deer.

None of the streets in Freedom Village follow a rectangular grid. Most streets are curving and many end in cul-de-sacs. While there is no public green space in the neighborhood, much of the area is undeveloped acreage and open fields. See neighborhood photos below.

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on N. 68th St. north of W. Dean Rd.



HISTORY

Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's northwest side once comprised the Granville Township in Milwaukee County, which extended from Hampton Avenue on the south to County Line Road on the north, and 27th Street on the east to 124th Street on the west. The Milwaukee neighborhood of Freedom Village was once in the Town of Granville. The neighborhood got its name from a senior care facility called Freedom Village that once existed at 8616 North 72nd Street—now redeveloped as The Villas at Granville.

Early populations

According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* (March 22, 1877) there were originally three small settlements in Granville. The first, in 1835, was the family of Jacob Brazelton which included 11 sons. The second was duo Daniel R. Small and W.P. Woodward from Indiana who pitched their tents in the center of the Granville area shortly after the Brazelton family arrived and later built homes. The third group of settlers, the Joseph R. Thomas family and S.C. Enos, arrived shortly after Small and Woodward.

Within a few years a new group arrived from the town of Granville in Washington County, New York. The assemblage included the Evert, Brown, Crippen, Lake, Dutcher, and Norton families. They gave their new home the name of their former home in New York.

But it was not these earliest settlers that established much of the culture of Granville, Township. That role belonged to a wave of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans) who arrived just a few years later from Telford, Pennsylvania, including the Wambold, Leister, Scholl, Barndt, Price, Bergstresser, Borse, Klein, Martin, Huber, Groll, Horning, and Lewis families. The Pennsylvania Dutch, under the leadership of Samuel Wambold, quickly established the

German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church (now known as Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1847. The following year, the church's pastor, Wilhelm Wrede, called a meeting of local Lutheran ministers at the church. This group would later become the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A museum of these early synod activities now stands on 107th Street (see outings).

In the 1840s there were over 200 people living in Granville Township, and the numbers continued to grow. A small Irish community settled on Granville's eastern border to the center of the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. But during these early years, Granville Township remained strongly German, and more Germans arrived every year. One of the older families in the Whispering Hills area is profiled below.

Freedom Village family profile *(Information from U.S. Census records.)*

The Kellbergs

The Kellbergs were one of the first families to settle in today's Freedom Village neighborhood, having moved to the area in the 1920s. Like most of their neighbors, they were German-speaking, and spoke German as their first language until sometime after 1930.

Frank Emil Kellberg was born in 1884 in Dresden, Germany. He was the son of Frank Kellberg and Paula Jaehnert. As a young man—perhaps with his parents—the younger Frank immigrated to Canada. In Canada he met and married his wife Gertrude Anna in 1915. There the couple had children Frank Jr., Carl, and Addie.

Frank attended two years of college. He eventually took up the carpentry trade and moved his family to the United States. In 1923, the family crossed the U.S./Canadian border at International Falls, Minnesota.

The Kellbergs immediately settled in Wisconsin. They briefly lived in Milwaukee on Center Street, but quickly purchased property in Granville—first on Brown Deer Road and next on North 68th Street. The Great Depression took its toll on the family. In 1930, the Kellbergs' home was valued at \$3,000. By 1940 that value had dropped in half. The decline in the building trade during the Depression also took its toll on Frank's livelihood. In 1940 he reported having only worked 36 weeks during the previous year while earning a paltry \$750.

The Kellbergs may have returned to Canada at some time later in their years. Both Frank and Gertrude Anna were ultimately buried there.

Save for the era of the Great Depression, economic prosperity reigned in Granville. This was due partially to the work ethic of these early residents. The township remained predominantly rural through the early half of the 20th century. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin—today including industrial parks and over 75 companies.

Movement toward annexation

In 1956 the residents and property owners of Granville were given a choice to consolidate with the City of Milwaukee. Needing services that Milwaukee could offer—especially water--the majority of voters said yes to the referendum. By the 1960s, the western portion of Granville (16.5 square miles)

was annexed by Milwaukee and the eastern section consolidated as the Village of Brown Deer. Milwaukee became one of the few large cities in the United States that still had working farms within its boundaries.

A new population arrives

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the former Granville area. This happened for two reasons: (1) the need for housing following the razing of over 8,000 homes in the African American Bronzeville community in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s (see [Halyard Park neighborhood](#)), and (2) the availability of family-supporting jobs in industry in the former Granville community. As in most German-dominated areas in Milwaukee, the integration of the new population proceeded relatively smoothly. Many African American families were able to purchase homes and move into the middle class.

Unfortunately, the deindustrialization movement that began in the 1980s arrested this course. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent, from a peak in 1963 to the present. All this had negative effects on the residents of Granville Township.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are fewer than 200 residents in Freedom Village, making it the sixth least populated neighborhood in Milwaukee. Of these, over half are European Americans (most of multiple European ancestries), and over 4 in 10 are African Americans. There is also a scattering of Asians (all of Hmong descent), Latinos (mostly of Mexican ancestry) and people of mixed racial or “other” racial backgrounds. The neighborhood skews old, with over 80 percent of the residents beyond the age of 62. This might be due to the popularity of The Villas at Granville complex with seniors or the nearby senior care facility in the bordering Whispering Hills neighborhood.

The median household income in Freedom Village is just under \$30,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle income stratum. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, production, and management.

Just over half of all Freedom Village property units are owned and the ratio of property units to residents is approximately 1:1.6. Freedom Village has the second lowest proportion of children among residents of all Milwaukee neighborhoods. Median home values are just over \$80,000 compared to the national median of \$178,000. Median rents are \$905 compared to the national median of \$928.

INTERESTING FEATURES

- **The Villas at Granville**, at 8616 North 72nd St., a gated community of semi-detached villa homes.
- **Hmong American Peace Academy**, at 4601 N. 84th St., a K4-K12 college and career preparatory school designed to address the struggles of Milwaukee Hmong families.

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.

TOUR OF MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD (WELS)			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By appointment	Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, lower level, 6814 N. 107th St.	Tour of more than 1,000 artifacts and pictures of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	Free, but donations welcome

GRANVILLE BID CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SPECTACULAR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sun. 10am-3pm	Russ Darrow, 7676 N. 76th St.	Exhibition of iconic custom vehicles.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-10pm	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fire-works.	Free

BUTLER FARMERS MARKET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun.-mid Oct., Mon. 12-6pm	Hampton Ave. at 127th St.	Fresh produce from Wisconsin farmers, baked goods, arts, crafts, activities.	Free

OPEN SWIM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1-5pm, holiday times vary	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	unk

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

In *The Golden Years of Yesteryear* by Emily Treichel Boehlke (reprinted in *A History of Granville* by Miriam Y. Bird, 1996), Treichel Boehlke writes about her family's history in Granville from the mid-1800s through the late 20th century. The following are passages from this work.

"When my Grandparents Treichel were first married and lived in their one room cabin, the Indians would stop in and admire their baby. . . At Grandfather Hackbarth's the Indians set up camps in the woods every spring and fall when they came to do their trading in Milwaukee."

"Weddings in the 1860s and later were quite different from today. The invitations were hand written by the bride and groom and they were the hosts, not the parents of the bride. . . the silk material for the brides' dresses was only 18 inches wide, so for a fancy dress, it took 18 to 20 yards of material. It was not unusual for a man to wear his wedding suit 20 to 25 years, or as long as it fitted."

". . . the settlers were having church services at the home of Ernest Zautcke, who had brought a reed organ from Germany to help him with his singing. One of the men could read a text from the Bible and the other religious books which they had brought from across. Mr. Zautcke then donated land for a church and school on the corner of [today's] Hopkins and Silver Spring Roads. They were served by visiting pastors from Milwaukee and vicinity."

"School [of her parents] was then held at the house of one of the member's house one month and at another one the next month, whoever had a room big enough to seat the children."

"The housewife had to plan well ahead for her household. There was the Arab that would come about once a month with two heavy suitcases full of notions and yard goods for house dresses. When he begged for a night's lodging the housewife would get a spool of thread for payment. Also a man with a big basket of oranges and bananas would come. Bananas were 25 cents a dozen for nice large ones. Later a baker would come once a week with bread and sweets."

"Every mother had to be well-schooled in home remedies. . . Plants and herbs were gathered in the summer to be dried and stored for the winter, to be used for any and all ailments."

"Grandfather would sit and knit many mittens and stockings for all the grandchildren while Grandma read to him and tended her many plants of which she had quite a variety."

"Even the first street cars were propelled by horse power. There were only 2 lines, one on 3rd Street to Williamsburg, a section of the city at North Avenue and Center and [one] further north (an all-German settlement)."

"In the beginning of the 1900s, there was no Silver Spring Drive, not even a wagon trail west of Hopkins Street. But the plans were made to have a road there, so one of the farmers would ride through the woods with horse and wagon or on horseback as best he could, so it would be legally kept as a driveway to the next mile west."

"During the first World War, all gathering of people was forbidden, due to the spreading of the flu. So at Freistadt Church only every other pew could be sat in, so all the people east of the church came for early services and all those west of the church came for later service. Also all talking and preaching was to be done in English, but Pastor Wehrs insisted on preaching in German as many of his older members could not understand English."

“There were about 12 to 14 neighbors that exchanged labor. This was a hard job for the ladies also, with breakfast at 6, lunch at 9, dinner at 12, another lunch at 3, and supper at sundown. No 8 hour days.”

“When the first threshing machine came out the farmers started to raise barley for the Breweries in Milwaukee. My father raised quite a lot of it and we girls had to man the farming mill in the evening when milking was done and our lessons were finished. This was a cold and tiresome job until enough was cleared for a load to be hauled to town the next day.

Quotes from an oral history of the Granville neighborhoods currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.ⁱ—About THEN.

“I think that maybe the annexation by the city and the zoning changes that did come with that--I think that a lot of the land that was agricultural and not valued real highly became higher valued all of a sudden. That pushed farmers to sell their property and that kind of encouraged the rapid development that took place. I think it was poorly planned. There was not enough time to do it properly and one example of that would be there are a lot of freeways that were being built and some got canceled. They never, I don't think to this day, there is a really good rapid transit system to and from that area.”

“There were so few people [that] there was no commercial or retail in my earliest memories. The ethnic diversity back then I would probably say was the complete opposite. There were a few farmers and they probably would have all been white.”

“In that Granville Station there I remember as a real young maybe seven to eight-years- old just exploring the area. There was a well-known company there; it was called Moss American Tie Company--a tie treating facility where they did railroad ties. And that was famous actually. And the reason I say it was famous--it was actually--it is now closed but it was the source of the pollution of the Menomonee River and there was a multimillion- dollar cleanup after they cleaned the river up as a result of that facility. I remember real vaguely that they employed some African Americans. And I believe--I'm not sure about this--that they actually lived there on the site. I think there were old railroad cars, I think temporary housing. And that just kind of struck--I mean as a young kid--I mean in terms of race of course. It struck me that even though we were in kind of a poor--we were poor by today's standard--but it struck me that people could actually be living in a shack like that where there's nothing else. I mean, I know they worked there. I don't have any other observations. But I know that they employed a number of African Americans in that. I also mentioned that I worked on a farm. My cousin that owned a large farm and he did employ a crew of three or four African Americans who lived in the city and they commuted to the farms. And I did work side-by-side with them for quite a few years. They did not live in the town. At the time they lived in the City of Milwaukee.”

Quotes from the oral history of the Granville neighborhoods—About NOW

“The main ethnic groups that I see--you have your older Caucasian community and your African American community. There are some pockets of Hmong. And so there's vast cultural differences. You hope over time those differences just blend into being American. What do we have in common? What drives some of those differences again is the social economic things. It's jobs; its education.”

“A lot of people leave from this place wearing fast food clothing with the younger people. A lot of older people are retired. I know the younger people living next to me--he’s a supervisor at a factory, his wife I think is a nurse. The ones that I know real well are retired.”

“A lot of churches. The Northside Christian Church, Hmong, Baptist, Pentecostal church. I see lots of churches and schools. Those are definitely social organizations. We have some members of the motorcycle club that is centered--if not in Granville--to the east of Granville.”

“I think that people that go to church are older I don’t think the younger people go to church. We have several different types of worship areas. We are not just Catholic and Lutheran.”

“There were two main public grade schools, Happy Hill and Granville School. Since then both of those have closed. . . Happy Hill School is now a Hmong school.”

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 N. 68th St. north of W. Dean Rd.



Today's neighborhood-Granville Heights Senior Apartments

Today's neighborhood-
Open field south of
the Villas at Granville Condos



Today's neighborhood-
The Villas at Granville Condos on
N. 72nd St.

Today's neighborhood-Hmong American Peace Academy



For more information on the history of Granville, refer to Miriam Y. Bird's *A History of Granville Township*.

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:
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