

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-W. Highland Blvd; **S**-W. Wisconsin Ave;

**E**-N. 27<sup>th</sup> St; **W**-N. 35<sup>th</sup> St

# WEST SIDE *Historic Concordia*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The architecture of Historic Concordia is as diverse as the people, from Victorian mansions to modest postwar apartment buildings. The Victorian mansions (mainly Queen Anne) are the neighborhood's drawing point, with their ornate facades, lavishly mantled fireplaces, polished hardwood floors, open staircases, and stained glass-windows.

Concordia's streets follow a perfect grid pattern. The topography is flat, interspersed with gently rolling hills. See neighborhood photos.

## HISTORY

According to John Gurda in *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* (2015), "Few neighborhoods encompass so many different worlds . . . from architects and outlaws and from sprawling Victorian mansions to tiny studio apartments. Some residents are rebuilding the neighborhood's architectural heritage: all are building a new heritage of diversity."

### Early populations

Historic Concordia began in the 1800s as a neighborhood of gentry. Mansions lined both Grand Avenue (today's Wisconsin Avenue) and Highland Boulevard. Among the well-heeled families were the Millers, Pabsts, (Sherburn) Merrills, Usingers, Schwaabs, Vilters, Faries', Davidsons, (A.O.) Smiths, (Daniel) Hoans, and Pritzlaffs. *See the profile of the Daniel Hoan family on the following page.*

In its early years, the neighborhood had some Anglo-American residents, but the German population dominated. Highland Boulevard was once coined "Sauerkraut Boulevard." Many of the historic beer barons of Milwaukee lived in the neighborhood.

The Germans were also responsible for founding Concordia College, the institution that gave the neighborhood its name.

### *Concordia College*

The Missouri Synod Lutherans founded Concordia College in 1881 in the basement of Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee. They purchased property on 31st Street between State and Highland in 1882 and developed a permanent campus. In 1886, the college received a charter from the State of Wisconsin to provide "classical, technical, and religious instruction to young men and students who desire to prepare themselves for the ministry of the Lutheran Church."

For 101 years, Concordia offered high school and two-year college liberal arts programs. In its early years, most of Concordia's students were German-speaking farm boys from various Midwestern states. In the 1960s and 1970s the college incorporated a lay ministry program and co-educational components for those interested in becoming deaconesses, teachers, or social workers in the Lutheran Church. Concordia also added business and secretarial courses to its curriculum.

In 1983, Concordia College left the neighborhood for a larger site in Mequon and eventually became Concordia University.

Today's neighborhood-  
Tripoli Shrine Temple



## Historic Concordia resident profile (early 20th century)

(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)

### Daniel Webster Hoan

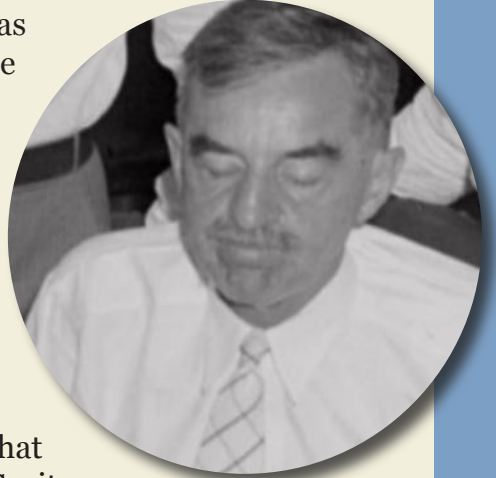
Daniel Hoan (see photo to right) was the second Socialist mayor of Milwaukee. He served 24 years between 1916 and 1940--through much of World War I and the Great Depression. While born and raised in Waukesha, Wisconsin, Daniel lived at 3328 West Kilbourn in the Concordia neighborhood during his time in office.

Daniel was the son of Daniel Webster Hoan Sr., who was descended from Irish-born Canadians. Daniel Sr. served in the New York Infantry for the Union Army in the Civil War. Daniel Jr.'s mother was Margaret (nee Hood) Hoan, who was born in New York.

Daniel grew up in Waukesha. He left school early but later took university night classes and received a degree in law by 1908. As a young man, he took an interest in socialism and joined the party. Moving to Milwaukee to become more involved in politics, he worked closely with Victor Berger, who was the editor of the Socialist daily, the *Milwaukee Leader*. In 1910, Hoan was elected city attorney for Milwaukee, the same year that Emil Seidel was elected the first Socialist mayor of a major U.S. city.

Elected mayor himself six years later, Hoan implemented many progressive reforms, including the Garden Homes public housing project (see [Garden Homes neighborhood](#)), and municipal ownership of street lighting, sewage, and water purification programs.

Hoan married Agnes Wagner (who died in 1941), with whom he had two children. He later married Gladys L. Townsend in 1944.



### Wisconsin Avenue

From its earliest days, Wisconsin Avenue became the main commercial corridor for the Historic Concordia neighborhood. Below is a list of businesses on the street in 1935, at the height of the Great Depression. See the notes below.

Addresses on W. Wisconsin in the Concordia neighborhood in 1935	Names of businesses, apartments, offices, organizations from the <a href="#">Milwaukee City Directory</a>
2455	Shell Petroleum Corporation Filling Station
2463	Fred L. Herwig Real Estate
2602	Wadhams Oil Corporation Filling Station
2620	Boulevard Fireproof Wholesale Company Milwaukee-Waukesha Delivery Company

<i>Addresses on W. Wisconsin in the Concordia neighborhood in 1935</i>	<i>Names of businesses, apartments, offices, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
2622	J.J. Dougherty Wholesal Roadios and Refrigerators
2630	Wadhams Oil Corporation Filling Station
2635	Adolph C. Geigner Grinder
2701	Grand Food Market
2708	Wisconsin Avenue School
2709	West Point Dye Works
2713-1715	Artway Furniture Shop Upholstery
2719	Auto Acceptance Corporation
2725	Andrew Weltscheff Restaurant
2729	Carl Boldt Grocery
2733	Crown Motor Company
2803	Handler's Home for Convalescents
2804	St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church
2904	Grand Ann Apartments
2919	Phi Beta P. Fraternity
3000	Tripoli Temple
3019	William E. Fowle Garage
3035	The Millerand Apartments
3120-3128	Franklin Arms Apartments
3133	LeLouvre Apartments
3200	Hudson Apartments
3205-3209	Aldine Court Apartments
3226	Glen Gables Apartments

<i>Addresses on W. Wisconsin in the Concordia neighborhood in 1935</i>	<i>Names of businesses, apartments, offices, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
3300	Netzlaf Apartments
3401	Marquette University High School
3402	George E. Zimmerman Sewer Contractor
3414	Grand Manor Apartments

#### **Summary and notes from census and other records:**

- Technically only those addresses on the north side of the street were in the Concordia neighborhood, but residents would have easy access to both sides.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants and most lived at their business addresses.
- Fred L. Herwig, with the real estate company, was an anomaly on the street, as he had completed high school. He was the son of German immigrants.
- J.J. Dougherty, with the appliance store, was an immigrant from Ireland. He'd had his store at this location since before 1920.
- Adolph C. Geigner, the grinder, was born in Illinois, the son of German immigrants.
- See the profile below of restaurateur Andrew Weltcheff.
- Carl Boldt, the grocer, was the son of a Bavarian immigrant mother.
- Built in 1928, the Tripoli Shrine Temple was designed after India's Taj Mahal.
- Marquette University High School was once known as the Marquette Academy. Some of its former students included Spencer Tracy and Pat O'Brien.
- George E. Zimmerman, the sewer contractor, lived on McKinley. He was the son of a German immigrant.

### **Historic Concordia random merchant (1930s)**

*(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

#### **Andrew Weltcheff**

In the 1930s, Andrew Weltcheff was running a restaurant at 2527 West Wisconsin Avenue, in the Historic Concordia neighborhood.

Born Anastas Weltcheff Tcheshiteff in Dolno Raicovo, Turkey in 1892, Andrew was an ethnic Bulgarian. In 1912 he came to the United States, where he was naturalized a little over a decade earlier. He married Helen (surname unknown) from Minnesota, and the couple settled on Grove Street (today's South 5th)--probably in the Walker's Point area--where Andrew worked as a laborer.

By the mid-1920s, Andrew Weltcheff was running a delicatessen on Grand Avenue (today's Wisconsin Avenue). The business later expanded in the late 1920s to a restaurant. It is not known what the menu items were at the restaurant. No doubt some Bulgarian dishes were interspersed with typically American fare such as steaks, burgers, meatloaf, and chicken. Bulgarian chefs often used filo dough to make spinach pies and various types of Borek. Stews and soups, often made with lamb and yogurt were other popular entrees, as were vegetable salads with cheeses. A plate of Bulgarian kabobs with rice was also very popular (see photo<sup>ii</sup>).



While business opportunities on Wisconsin Avenue did attract a slightly more diverse lot than the residential blocks, the Concordia area remained strongly German into the middle of the 20th century. Norwegians also had a historical stake in the neighborhood. Many Norwegian immigrants to the Milwaukee area had left Norway to escape a despotic state church. In the United States, they formed Our Savior's Church which allowed them greater freedom in parish control. In Milwaukee, the Norwegian immigrants first built Our Savior's Lutheran Church in 1858 on the south side. They later rebuilt the church on the Todd Wehr Estate in the Concordia neighborhood in 1954.

Another population with a historical stake in Concordia Historic Concordia was the Wisconsin Indian community. The Forest County Potawatomi purchased the Concordia College buildings for the Indian Community School, which opened in 1990. When the school later moved to Franklin 20 years later, the Potawatomi began redeveloping the area into tribal administrative buildings and other service sites, and called it the Wgema Campus.

By the late 1900s, African Americans were also seeking new homes when their Bronzeville community had been leveled by urban renewal and freeway building. Many moved west and rented and purchased homes in Historic Concordia.

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

Today, approximately 7 in 10 residents in Historic Concordia are African Americans and nearly 1 in 10 Latino. The North American Indian presence is still present in the neighborhood. The Forest County Potawatomi, that owned the school property as tribal trust land, almost immediately began restoring historic buildings and building new ones to house tribal offices, tribal nonprofits, and tribal businesses.

While only 50 Concordia residents claim Norway as their first ancestry, many Norwegians still attend Our Savior's Lutheran Church and help with the outreach ministry and a food pantry that serves over 20,000 residents. For years, the church has been known for welcoming gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual brothers and sisters.

In some ways the Historic Concordia neighborhood is economically bimodal. Approximately 6 in 10 households are classified as low income, with annual incomes under \$25,000. In addition, nearly 9 in 10 property units in the neighborhood are likely to be rented, and the rents are low, with nearly one-third going for under \$500 and nearly two-thirds going for \$500 to \$1,000.

On the other hand, other residents live in upper middle-income households. Grand homes remain in Concordia and the monthly select costs are not low. Nearly half of the selected owner costs (e.g., mortgages, deeds of trust, taxes, contracts to purchase, insurance) are between \$1,501 and \$2,000.



## INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **The sprawling Schuster Mansion**, built by a tobacco baron in the 1890s-today's acclaimed Schuster Mansion B&B, one of several in Historic Concordia (see photos).
- **The Tripoli Shrine Temple** (see photo), built in 1928 as a home for Shriners and is today also a place for businesses and organizations to host meetings and events.
- **Neighborhood House**, founded in 1945 in a former Episcopal church building located approximately at 748 N. 27thSt. and moved to their current facility at 2819 W. Richardson Pl., as a safe and nurturing place for children, families, and seniors (with today's early child care, after-school programs for youth and teens, adult education for refugees, and parenting support services).

## 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 TRIPOLI SHRINE TEMPLE			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By reservation of groups of 10 or more	3000 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Forty-five-minute tour of majestic temple built in 1928 with all its ornate fixtures. Lunch buffet included.	unk

HISTORIC CONCORDIA TOUR OF HOMES			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun., Sat. 10am-4pm	Meets at 3000 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Tour of homes of Concordia's early gentry and Tripoli Shrine Temple, including auctions, beer tasting, and treats.	unk

ANNUAL HEALTH FEST			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Oct., Sat. 11am-2pm	Neighborhood House, 2819 W. Richardson Pl.	Health and breast cancer screenings, yoga, Zumba, roller skating, art therapy, and more. Contact: Niki Espy 414-933-6161 x156	Free

Most of 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 Historic Concordia oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2017—About THEN<sup>1</sup>**

“In 1927, my parents started their first dance studio--[NAME] School of Dance, [on] N. 27th street. It was a duplex. They lived in the back; they didn’t own the house. Then, they moved over to 27th and Wells. That’s where my sister was born in 1933. They lived in the back, taught dance in the front . . . Then, I came along in 1937!”

“At that time the regional medical complex was being established. The hospital in the area, I believe seven of them, closed over a brief period of time, and that destabilized much of the area. Mansions were closed down to build apartments to house hospital support staff. When the hospitals left, the apartments were left empty. When we moved in there was still residue of professionals living in those apartment buildings. As the apartment buildings became empty, the owners still needed to pay mortgages. There were already emerging social issues concerns going on; prostitution has already been in the area. With so many apartment buildings, the landlords put anybody they could put into it.”

“The very name of the neighborhood, was named after Concordia College. Concordia College--after investing in the neighborhood and plowing down a bunch of houses-- moved up to Mequon. Those are huge changes. . . Oh, and the County came and went. The Milwaukee County took over the Family Hospital building. They were here maybe 15 years and then moved out.”

“There were sounds everywhere. We had #10 street car line. Boy were they noisy, but it was the era of streetcars! We also had the Wisconsin Electric Power Company, the Inter- Urban Electric Trolley System in Southeast Wisconsin, the Greyhound Bus Company, and the Northshore train. So, downtown Milwaukee, Marquette University, 27th and Wells, the whole West End, we were all a seamless division; we were one of the same. That’s how it started. The transportation systems kept us connected.”

“About 35 years ago, the West End Community Association formed the Landlord Compact. The landlords with the best intentions to protect their business and buildings started holding the other landlords accountable. That organization, Landlord Compact, still holds today. The failure there of the city [was] not taking any visionary leadership in addressing the anticipated devastation this would have on this area of town. It was exciting getting the regional complex, but that whole impact--I mean we almost lost Marquette University--that would have been just awful. Fortunately, we are recovering and in good water.”

“Back in 1978 I was a board member for West Side Conservation Corp., which set the stage for rehabbing housing which played a role later on with the Concordia College when we were heading off the bulldozers.”

“What you had was a whole variety of service professionals [in the hospitals that left the area]. You know, hospitality staff, doctors, nurses, all working at those facilities. What that meant was, as they came and went, they were spending money in the neighborhoods. Some of them lived in the neighborhood, especially the lower-class workers lived in the neighborhood. It’s been a real problem to lose them. A lot of the apartment buildings that no longer exist, would have formerly held hospital support staff.”

## About NOW

"I've been in a few places around Milwaukee. There is just so much over here--concert hall, schools, restaurants, bars. That is what initially got me to look over here. Since coming here, I've noticed the dynamic of the neighborhood is different than other places. The news makes it seem like nothing but crime goes on here, but that is definitely not the case. Yes, there is drug dealings and some other crimes. But it is not as bad as people make it seem. You have rich people, working class, and lower class. You have renters and homeowners. There is not much mixing between the social classes, but that is not to say we don't get along. I feel safe here, people are friendly, and that has made me fall in love with this area."

"The home owners are too busy running their kids around. Their kids do all sorts of activities. We sit outside on our front porch, eat, play cards, and watch the neighborhood."

"Changes have been limited but there have been some significant ones. New investment. Rick Wiegand of the Ambassador Hotel is doing some major work on some commercial buildings in the Concordia neighborhood. The Siebert Lutheran Foundation is opening up office in a building right on the edge of Concordia. And then another change that I'm really proud of is Neighborhood House itself took over a vacant lot on the corner of 27th and Richardson, again on one edge of Concordia and created a new urban garden, *The Neighborhood Garden Park*. That was about two years ago."

"We have seen a change from hospitals to clinics. These clinics and pop testing events are what sustains those who don't have doctors or insurance."

"We usually have 30 to 40 houses approved for Halloween. The way you know they are approved is we put the same Halloween decorations on all the homes so the kids know where to go. And we give all the kids glowing bracelets. So, we know who was approved and who snuck in. But we don't mind when people sneak in, because it's set up so kids have a safe Halloween."

"The other thing I would say now that I'm thinking about it there has been some obvious City of Milwaukee investment in some of the deserted buildings. In particular, there are some on the 28th [hundred] block of State Street that the city is plowing a bunch of money into right now. They are renovating houses along State Street to try to attract new homeowners. They are also doing the same thing for a historic home on 29th, between State and Kilbourn. That all happened within the [last] three years. Actually, now that I'm thinking about it--in addition, [the] Potawatomi are making new investments in their Concordia campus in the last three and one-half years where they are doing both renovation on existing buildings [and] doing new construction on the other side of the Concordia neighborhood on the Potawatomi campus."

"Well, 27th street yes, definitely. The apartment buildings have changed significantly. The neighbors are very, very nice. They are very friendly. It's a very diverse neighborhood, which I love. By diversity, I mean not only ethnicity but it's also renters versus homeowners. You have executives, all types of disciplines. The first year I moved her, at Christmas time, the doorbell rang and I went to the door and there were some neighbors singing Christmas Carols to get to know us. So, it's a very unique and neat neighborhood. I don't know many neighborhoods where you know your neighbors and you can leave your keys with your neighbors when you go on vacation."



“Then what ended up happening is [that] Potawatomi bought a plot of land and started investing in the neighborhood in the more recent past. Those are the major changes in the neighborhood in the more recent past.”

““Highland Community School has had a huge presence. Hollis went there, I was on the board. It was Milwaukee’s first charter school.”

“We always believed this was Milwaukee’s unofficial red-light district. Gentlemen were directed to this area to take care of their wants and needs. It ranged from standing on the corner and writing down license plates numbers, looking them up, and sending letters to the owner of vehicles informing them their car had been seen repeatedly in the area and may have been involved in prostitution. We had billboards about disease and prostitution. A number of strategies. We pushed the city to turn this street into a one way because you would see cars going in circles around these streets. After two years, the city changed the street to a one way. Never seen a prostitute working this street since that day. I am talking--I would see five to six girls a day walking this street from Wisconsin to Wells. Then, so many of these streets were changed to one-way streets. That moved the prostitution from this area to where it is on 27th and Greenfield, on the South Side.”

“Let me give you an example of what the neighborhood is like. My husband and I were on vacation and we received a call from a neighbor a couple blocks over, who was concerned because she saw an ambulance in front of our home and she wanted to make sure that we were okay. Now this is a white lady. So, I guess at some point, if they have feelings about me being black, they are very good at hiding it. Now are there people that I don’t know, and probably don’t want to know because I know they have those feelings? That’s a different story.”

“There isn’t much mixing. Most of the homeowners are white, and the renters are minorities. Personally, I don’t think the lack of mixing is due to differences in ethnic backgrounds. It seems more like white people own the houses, [and] the minorities rent. When you rent here, you probably don’t stay at the same place for years and years. But when you own a home, you do. So, the homeowners become friends with other homeowners, and the renters stick to themselves. Why make a friend with a homeowner if you are going to be moving soon? And vice versa. Although, [while] there is a lack of mixing, there is also a lack of crime between the groups.”

“As an example, there was a family of people who rented--this happened a number of years ago. They had a fire there, so we as neighbors collected money for them, to help them out. They were a black family. We raised about \$500 to \$600.”

“You don’t hear about the neighbors singing Christmas carols.”

“It is a mixture. Actually, a lot of rich people over there. Around 35th and Wells--that is, very wealthy people. Majority of people who own houses here have a lot money. A lot of people who lived in the suburbs are trying to come back to the urban areas, and that shows in the neighborhoods. But then you have the poor minorities in the neighborhood too.”

“They [children] seem to play outside. We send them over to Neighborhood House for more organized play. But I got to say when I see children playing outside [that] they seem to be having a blast just playing outside. More children now than before.”

“We hold Historic Concordia home tour, once a year in June.”

“Now [that] the school was sold, the Ambassador hotel owns the whole block and he is putting in a new hotel, the Ambassador Suites. It will be high end; it will have banquet halls for weddings. It will be interesting to see how that changes the neighborhood.”

“Oh, for sure. There are so many non-profits in the areas. The churches have soup kitchens for the homeless in Milwaukee. There are food drives, lots of charity work. There is even a thing here where people tie gloves and hats to their trees for people to randomly grab in the winter if they are cold.”

### Quotes from identified residents

*“We’re the city. Different cultures live together. For the most part we interact well. In the city, if people (in the neighborhood) are walking around that means that people trust the streets. They themselves feel safe and that’s why they’re out.”*

--Laura Sue Mosier, proprietor of the Schuster Mansion Bed & Breakfast.

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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-  
Houses on 29th and State Street



Today's neighborhood-Building that was part of Concordia College,  
now Greenfire Management Services





Today's neighborhood-Tripoli Shrine Temple



Today's neighborhood-Schuster Mansion Bed & Breakfast



Today's neighborhood-Schuster Mansion proprietor Laura Sue Mosier & cat





Today's neighborhood-2825 W. Kilbourn



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 30th and State Street

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@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)

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