

Approximate boundaries:

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

E-S. 16th St; **W**-S. Layton Blvd

SOUTH SIDE *Muskego Way*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Muskego Way is a densely populated neighborhood. The main housing architectural style is the wood frame duplex, and the majority of the homes in the neighborhood date from the early 20th century. Most of the streets are on a rectangular grid pattern but a few run at a diagonal, such as West Forest Home Avenue, which runs diagonally from West Becher Street to South 16th in the southeast corner of the neighborhood, and South Muskego Avenue, which runs at a diagonal from West Becher to West Greenfield.

Businesses are mainly located along West Mitchell and West Forest Home. The public green space in the mainly flat neighborhood is Reiske Park located on Lapham Avenue to the north of the Southside Health Center. See neighborhood photos below.

HISTORY

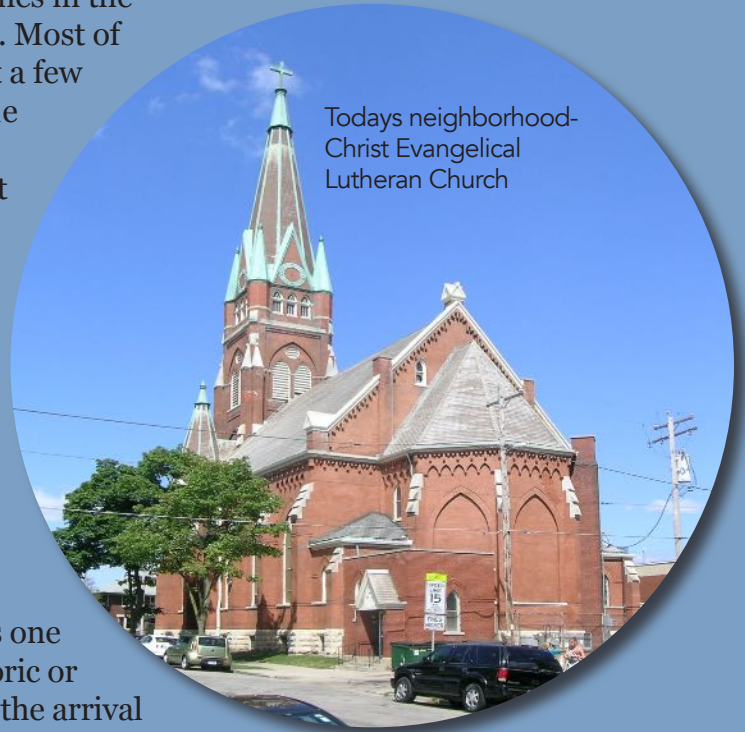
Muskego Way, named after Muskego Avenue, is one of a group of neighborhoods known as the Historic or Old South Side. The area began to develop with the arrival of a large wave of Polish immigrants in the late 19th century.

Early populations

Polish immigration to America resulted from a combination of ‘push-pull’ factors. Between 1795 and 1918, Poland was partitioned by Austria, Russia and Prussia. In the 1870s Prussian leader Bismarck initiated a Germanization policy in the western section of Poland designed to bar speaking of languages other than German, impose a draft for the German army, weaken the Catholic Church, and replace Polish landowners with German citizens. This policy, coupled with the sharp drop in grain prices in the 1880s, led to massive emigrations of people from Poland in the late 19th century.

Many economically devastated Poles came to urban areas in America’s Midwest where they could access entry-level jobs in industry. The settlement areas became known as Polonias, or Polish-American communities. Polonias tended to be self-sustaining neighborhoods with intricate parish systems and a wealth of Polish institutions. One of these Polonias developed on Milwaukee’s South Side, a part of which is now known as Muskego Way.

Often called “cozy” by early residents, Muskego Way became a place where people lived nurtured lives, surrounded by extended families and neighbors they knew well. The Polish language was spoken by most, well into the 1930s.



Today's neighborhood-
Christ Evangelical
Lutheran Church

The significance of Mitchell Street in Muskego Way

Mitchell Street was known as the Polish Grand Avenue because it attracted nearly as many shoppers as Wisconsin Avenue or North Third Street in the early 20th century. But like in most Milwaukee neighborhoods, the shopkeepers were much more diverse than the residents on the surrounding blocks. In 1932, merchants included people of Polish, German, Jewish, Greek, French Canadian, Austrian, Russian, and Hungarian descent.

<i>Addresses on W. Mitchell in 1932</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1601	Rudolph J. Talsky Real Estate Mitchell Street Loan and Building Association Ideal Investments Grant Realty
1602	Standard Oil Company Filling Station
1605	Elmer L. Morton Grocery Store
1607	Vacant
1610	Vacant
1611	Vacant
1622	Arthur F. Mierendorf Grocery
1624	Arthur Bredendick Shoe Repair
1625-1629	Walter Chmielewski Men's Furnishings
1631	Mitchell Street Pharmacy
1700	Louis Thiede Soft Drinks
1701	Vacant
1702	Charles A. Burmeister Barber
1703	Walter Glowacki Soft Drinks
1711	South Side Sausage Company
1717	Bernard F. LaValle Soft Drinks
1726-1728	Bull Furniture Company
1729	Roman Lupinski Barber
1731	Joseph Kozlowksi Soft Drinks
1800	Morris Rothblatt Shoes
1902-1908	Pearl Food Market Groceries and Fruit
1911	Piesck's Service Filling Station

<i>Addresses on W. Mitchell in 1932</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1912	Christ Stergulis Restaurant
1916	Fourer Paint and Supply
1917	Frank Shenar Soft Drinks
1921	Franklin Mandel Dry Goods
1924	Max W. Bayerlein Shoe Repair
1927	Torres Café Restaurant
1928	Bruno Markiewicz Barber
1929	Vacant
1930	Albert L. Bork Physician Brandenburg & Stromberg Dentists
1935	Max L. Kadow Drugs P.O. Station No. 33
2000	William Fetting Soft Drinks
2002	Walter Jaskowski Barber
2004	Theofila Szumiel Meats
2015	Stephen Jazwinski Shoe Repair
2019	Charles Szatkowski Tailor
2019A	Louis Schosland Real Estate
2020	Felix Pogorzelski Mason Contractor
2025	Mrs. Sophia Zimmermann Fish
2028	Jacob Tishberg Dry Goods
2029	Stanislaus J. Szymarcek Grocery
2033	Theodor I. Kulwicki Bowling
2039	Theodor I. Kulwicki Soft Drinks
Nw corner	St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church
2101	Albert Bruskiewitz Undertaker
2105	Roman B. Gapinski Drugs
2114	Rev. Michael J. Donachowski
2117	White Eagle Building and Loan Association
2137	Albert Jazlonski Jr. Barber

<i>Addresses on W. Mitchell in 1932</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
2139	Walter A. Orlowski Soft Drinks
2205	Frank J. Lewandowski Carpet Contractors
2208	Peter P. Szweda Grocery Store
2210	Jeanette Beauty Shoppe
2230	Joe Kleba Soft Drinks
2238	Mrs. Helen Kaufman School Supplies
2301	David Schnoll Grocery Store
2403	Andrew M. Holande Barber
2405	May-Belle Beauty Parlor
2413	South View Pharmacy
2429	Andrew Paszterko Shoe Repair
2431	Joseph Schwabe Groceries
2439	William M. Simon Soft Drinks
2532	Gertrude A. Decker Confectioner
2536	General Service Station Auto Accessories
2539	Chester W. Markowski Soft Drinks
2600	David Shapiro Groceries
2601	Vincent Kasprzak Baker
2605	Simon Klobukowski Soft Drinks

Notes from census and other public records:

- Muskego Way had residents' needs well met with 11 food stores (grocers, butchers, bakeries), 2 gas stations, 4 barbers, an undertaker, and 4 pharmacies.
- Despite being in the throes of the Great Depression, the residents of Muskego Way had plenty of leisure time activities available to them on W. Mitchell, including 11 "soft drink" establishments (many no doubt speakeasies) and a bowling alley.
- Like most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants and most lived at or near the address of their shops.

- Rudolph J. Talsky, the real estate agent, was a Bohemian immigrant from Austria. Despite his profession, he had only completed the 7th grade.
- Elmer L. Morton, the grocer, was an anomaly on the street in that he was not an immigrant nor the child of immigrants. He was from West Virginia.
- Arthur F. Mierendorf, the grocer, was the son of German immigrants. He had completed the 8th grade.
- Walter Chmielewski, with the men's clothing store, was the son of immigrants from the German sector of Poland.
- Louis Thiede, with the soft drink store, descended from German immigrants. He'd completed the 7th grade.
- Charles A. Burmeister, the barber, was a German immigrant. He'd had his shop on Mitchell since before 1910. Typical of the shopkeepers, he'd completed the 7th grade.
- Walter Glowacki, with the soft drink store, was an immigrant from Poland. He'd only completed the 3rd grade.
- Bernard F. LaValle, also with the soft drink store, was the son of a French Canadian immigrant. His older brother Maurice ran a restaurant on 8th Ave. (today's S. 13th) where Bernard worked as a waiter before opening his own store.
- Roman Lupinski, the barber, was a Polish immigrant. He was an anomaly, however, in that he'd attended and completed high school.
- Morris Rothblatt, with the shoe store, was a Jewish immigrant from Russia.
- Christ Stergulis, with the restaurant, was an immigrant from Greece.
- Frank Shenar/Shoner, with the soft drink store, was an immigrant from Hungary. He'd been a baker before opening his soft drink establishment.
- Max W. Bayerlein, the shoe repairman, was the son of a German immigrant.
- Bruno Markiewicz, the barber, was a Polish immigrant. He had only completed 3rd grade.
- Max L. Kadow, the druggist, was the son of German immigrants, possibly Jewish. His drugstore had been at 20th and Mitchell since before 1910. Despite being a druggist, he had only completed the 4th grade.
- William Fetting, with the soft drink store, was the son of German immigrants.
- Walter Jaskolski, the barber, was the son of Polish immigrants.
- Theofila Szumiel, the butcher, was a woman who operated the butcher shop with her 78-year-old mother. Before opening her shop, she had worked in a hosiery factory. The pair were immigrants from Poland.
- Stephen Jazwinski, the shoe repairman, was a Polish immigrant.
- Charles Szatkowski, the tailor, was the son of Polish immigrants from the German sector of Poland.

- Felix Pogorzelski, the mason contractor, was the son of Polish immigrants. He'd lived on Lincoln Ave. before opening his shop on Mitchell.
- Sophia Zimmermann, with the fish market, was the daughter of Polish immigrants. Her husband John was the son of German immigrants. Sophia had completed high school.
- Jacob Tishberg, with the dry goods store, was a Jewish immigrant from the Russian sector of Poland. He had only completed the 1st grade in school.
- Stanislaus J. Szymarek, the grocer, was the (probably Polish) son of immigrants from Germany. His grocery store had also been a tavern in the early 20th century, before Prohibition.
- Theodor I. Kulwicki, with the soft drink place and bowling alley, was the son of Polish immigrants.
- Albert Bruskiewitz, the undertaker, was the son of Polish immigrants.
- Roman B. Gapinski, with the drug store, was also the son of Polish immigrants. He had completed two years of college.
- Rev. Michael J. Donachowski, the priest, was born in Poland. He was probably a priest at St. Vincent de Paul on the corner.
- Adam J. Rybarczyk, with the hardware store, was a Polish immigrant. He'd worked as a clerk in a printing office before opening his store.
- Walter A. Orłowski, with the soft drink place, was also a Polish immigrant.
- Frank J. Lewandowski, the carpet contractor, was a Polish immigrant. He called himself a carpenter.
- Peter P. Szweda, the grocer, was a Polish immigrant. His store had initially been a bakery.
- Joe Kleba, with the soft drink store, was a Polish immigrant. He'd worked for the Lowry Company before opening his establishment.
- Helen Kaufman, with the school supply store, was a Jewish immigrant from Russia.
- David Schnoll, with the grocery store, was another immigrant from Russia, probably Jewish.
- Victor Zosko, with the soft drink store, was an immigrant from Poland.
- Andrew Paszterko, the shoe repairman, was an immigrant from Hungary.
- Joseph Schwabe, the grocer, was a German immigrant.
- William M. Simon, with the soft drink store, was the son of a German immigrant. By 1940 he'd moved to Oshkosh.
- See the profile of the Decker family, the confectioners, on the following page.
- Chester W. Markowski, with the soft drink store, was a Polish immigrant from Russia (probably the Russian sector of Poland).

- David Shapiro, the grocer, was a Jewish immigrant from Russia. Typical of the merchants, he'd completed the 7th grade.
- Vincent Kasprzak, the baker, was an immigrant from Poland.
- Simon Klobukowski, with the soft drink store, was also an immigrant from Poland.

See a profile of one of the merchant families below.

Muskego Way merchant family (1930s)

(Information from U.S. Census)

The Deckers

The Decker family was an excellent example of a household whose cohesiveness helped them survive the Great Depression. The father, Joseph Decker, had been born in Germany and immigrated to the United States in 1856. He settled in Marinette, Wisconsin, where he apparently met, and later married, his wife Margaret Fockler, also a German immigrant. Joseph had a good job as a blacksmith and the Deckers had nine children—Mathilda, John, Mary, Anton, Gertrude Agatha, Carolina, Rosa, Paul, and Lawrence.

Sometime just after the turn of the 20th century, the Deckers moved to Milwaukee and settled on West Mitchell Street in today's Muskego Way neighborhood. Joseph took up blacksmith work for the railroad. Along the way, John, Mary, and Anton left the household—probably through marriage.

However, tragedy hit when Joe died in 1927. With the Great Depression about to make its appearance, mother Margaret, now in her mid-70s, and the remaining adult children in the household—Gertrude Agatha, Carolina, Paul, and Lawrence—decided to pool their resources and go into business. They turned their Mitchell Street home into a confectionary (*photo from the public domain*). They put the store under Gertrude Agatha's name and gradually increased their inventory to include ice cream.

While mother Margaret died a few years after her husband, the four siblings remained in business. None of them ever married and all lived into the 1990s, having successfully survived some of the most difficult years that Americans would ever face by sticking together.



While the shopkeepers on Mitchell were relatively diverse, the residents of Muskego Way remained overwhelmingly Polish. This all changed in the 1970s.

Arrival of Latinos

Latinos (mainly Mexicans) began to settle on the *near* South Side in the 1920s and slowly migrated south into the area developed by Polish immigrants. Since the 1970s, the Mexican community has grown dramatically, and other Latinos have arrived from the Caribbean and Central and South America.

A number of push-pull factors influenced the population changes. 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. Beginning in 1917, the US government implemented a series of immigration restriction policies to curb the influx of Mexicans, mainly in response to local claims that Mexicans (who often worked for low wages) were taking jobs away from ‘true’ Americans.

Although most Mexicans found jobs in local tanneries and foundries, some came to Milwaukee as strikebreakers—often unknowingly. They were hired by companies that were intent on breaking their own labor unions, and the Mexicans earned the enmity of the European workers they replaced. This situation led to early discrimination against Mexican Americans in Milwaukee.

But they found a place to fit in. Latinos were able to settle successfully alongside the Poles because they shared so many traits in common. These included the Catholic faith, the focus on the Madonna figure, polka music traditions, similarities in childrearing and eldercare practices, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today there are just short of 12,000 residents in this densely populated neighborhood. Of these, over 7 in 10 are Latinos (mostly of Mexican background). Just over 1 in 10 each are African Americans and European Americans (mostly of German, Polish, and mixed European backgrounds). There are also a scattering of Asians (mostly Hmong/Lao and Pakistanis) and people of multiple racial backgrounds in the area.

The annual household income in Muskego Way is slightly over \$26,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle income stratum. The leading occupations claimed by adult residents are in the fields of production, food service, and facilities (cleaning, repairs, maintenance). Nearly three times as many residents are employed in construction in Muskego Way as in other Milwaukee areas. Less than 10 percent of the residents are employed in nonprofits or government—a very low proportion compared to other neighborhoods.

Rents are a buy in Muskego Way, with the average rent going for \$552 a month compared to \$666 a month for Milwaukee generally. Homes are also a buy. A detached home is valued at just over \$70,000 compared to just over \$210,000 for Milwaukee overall. An attached unit is valued at just under \$120,000 compared to just under \$177,000 for Milwaukee generally.

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
Wed.-Fri., 9am-5pm; Sat., Sun. 9am-4p	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., Wed.- Fri. 9am-5pm, Sat. 9am-4pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fall harvest festival and floral exhibits.	unk

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 9am- 12pm Mon.'s

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

DOORS OPEN MILWAUKEE ON HISTORIC MITCHELL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sat. thru Sun.	Mitchell St.	Opportunity to tour the inside of two of Mitchell Street's iconic sites: St. Stanislaus Church and the Modjeska Theater.	Free

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.	unk

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

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 2002 oral history conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹— About THEN

“Grandma’s house had like an outhouse in the basement with no running water. We used to bathe in the tub with heated water on the stove.”

“There were a lot more active businesses in the area. Mitchell Street was an upscale area. We had Schuster’s, the Grand, St. Vincent’s and St. Stanislaus’s parish, St. Adalbert’s. St. Stan’s was first Polish Church on the South Side.”

“The wars were important for the neighborhood. World War I, the Polish people didn’t hesitate to enlist. World War II, lots of Poles enlisted--didn’t wait for draft. Very few sought to be deferred. Polonia was very patriotic. In the 1960s the U.S. began to change. Polonia changed. You had hippies, then yuppies.”

“The language was predominantly Polish then, then they learned English pretty rapidly. Kids in the 1930s were speaking English. Parents and grandparents stuck to the Polish language. Schools and churches taught classes in Polish until about 1936 or 1937.”

Quotes from 2010 oral history updated by Urban Anthropology Inc.—About NOW

“There has been the changing of Mitchell Street. The Old South Side is coming back with lots of new businesses. Sears and Gimbels left, and now the family-run ones are taking over.”

“Today the Basilica has 1400 to 1500 families--about 60 percent are Polish, 20 to 25 percent Latino--all English masses. The Polish national community today attends St. Vincent de Paul church and many Latinos are at St. Anthony’s and St. Stan’s”

“When I moved in about two years ago, I thought this was almost the most beautiful area in the city.”

Quotes from 2018 oral history updated by Urban Anthropology Inc.—About NOW

“When I was younger I would see a lot of party and dress stores and hair salons in Muskego Way. Some are still there but now [it’s] mainly restaurants. There used to be multiple stores selling one thing.”

“There are Catholic churches here, but I do see more, smaller new Christian churches now that were not here before.”

“I think there was a lot of us going to the park on our bikes when I was a kid, and we were alone. But now kids are always with adults. We used to have a lot more freedom before as kids.”

“[As far as] leadership around here, it’s been Bob Donovan and Christine Neumann- Ortiz who runs Voces de la Frontera. She organizes people. I would consider her a leader. She organizes marches and represents the community both in English and Spanish. They [media] usually interview her.”

Quotes from Muskego Way oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2019

“It’s been a working class neighborhood. Everyone’s in the same boat. If we were poor we didn’t know it. There wasn’t much to waste money on. I remember mostly everyone was working class or lower middle class. ”

“The parks, football, lots of festivities are outside,. There’s playing games in the parks, playing kickball in the alleys. There’s a lot of opportunities in the community--a lot you can do to give back at different events. There’s a variety of places to go to have a drink or hang out. Lots of restaurants. You get pretty much anything on the South Side with a variety of Asian and Latino foods.”

“I think the ethnic groups here get along very well. If you really take a look at the South Side, everyone is living her. It’s the most diverse area in the entire city. People enjoy each other’s cultures. There are ethnic-specific events everyone attends as well. ”

“People play in the park and gardens. In their houses they’re on their devices. When I was a kid more kids were outside playing. Now because of technology they are inside more. They used to read more too.”

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-
Businesses on 21st & Mitchell St.



Today's neighborhood-Reiske Park

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 24th & Lapham



Today's neighborhood-St Vincent DePaul Church 21st & Mitchell

Todays neighborhood-
Houses on 17th & Becher



Todays neighborhood-Intersection of Rogers St & W. Forest Home Ave.

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