

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Wisconsin Ave; **S**-I-94;
E-N. 39th St; **W**-Menomonee River

WEST SIDE *Pigsville*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Pigsville is a small neighborhood south of Miller Valley that is practically hidden from view due to its location below the Wisconsin Avenue viaduct. Relatively isolated, it is bounded by steep river bluffs to the east and west, MillerCoors Brewery Complex to the north, and I-94 to the south. Pigsville is a mainly residential area with modest one- and two-story wood frame houses and a number of bungalows built in the early 20th century.

Valley Park is located on Pigsville's western border adjacent to the Menomonee River. See photos below.

HISTORY

John Gurda, in *Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods*, says this about Pigsville (p. 85).

Of all the neighborhoods that make up Milwaukee, it is among the smallest, certainly the most isolated, and without doubt, the most unusually named.

And how did Pigsville get its name? This has to do with a member of the early population in the area.

Early populations

While there is some debate about the origin of the Pigsville name, most seem to agree that it came from the area's earliest settlers, mainly German immigrant farmers. One of these Germans was named Adam Freis. Freis, like many of his neighbors, was born in Germany (1850, Hesse). He arrived in the United States with his wife Louisa (nee Rechlin), mother Lisetta, and two young children in 1875. Freis worked for a time in the milk trade in Milwaukee until he was able to purchase farmland in rural Wauwatosa on the banks of the Menomonee River (land that would later be annexed by Milwaukee). Freis made an unusual decision for the area—he decided to farm pigs.

Adam Freis built up this farm. Even after his wife died, his children remained involved in the pig farm until his sounder of swine reached a high of 200. People in bordering neighborhoods remarked about the large number of pigs grazing on the right bank of the Menomonee River. Many believe that this is where the name Pigsville originated, although various versions of the name were not widely used until decades later.

While Freis and his children were building up his pig farm, others began to settle in the area. The majority of new residents had been attracted to the plethora of jobs in the nearby railroad shops, Menomonee Valley industries, and breweries. Most of the earlier residents were German Lutherans. Later some Irish Catholics began migrating in from the adjacent Merrill Park neighborhood. About the same time, immigrants from Eastern Europe—mainly Poland, Russia, Serbia, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia—were beginning to build small, single-family cottages in Pigsville. A *sokol*, an amalgamation of social activities and gymnastics, was organized by the neighborhood Slovaks. By the 1920s, most of the neighborhood was filled. In 1925, the City of Milwaukee annexed the area.



Today's neighborhood—Houses on 42nd St across from Valley Park

Over the years, the isolated location and ethnic mix of Pigsville produced a uniquely consolidated community. While it became a neighborhood in urban Milwaukee, it remained almost rustic. In the early years of the 20th century the area still had gravel roads. Residents kept geese, chickens—and yes, even pigs—on their small lots.

Commerce in Pigsville

While tiny Pigsville hardly had a commercial district, it did have enough stores scattered throughout the neighborhood to remain self-sufficient. This included several grocers, bakeries, and taverns.

The Valley Inn became a central meeting place for residents. It was opened at North 40th Street and Clybourn in 1905 by Julius Zunker, a German immigrant. During Prohibition he took out a permit to operate it as a soft drink parlor. The Inn still stands as a tavern and restaurant today.

A few other businesses operated within the neighborhood boundaries on Wisconsin Avenue and Bluemound Road. Those that stayed open during the Great Depression were as follows.

<i>Addresses on W. Wisconsin Ave. in 1935</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
3900	Forster Lumber Company Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad crossing
<i>Addresses on W. Bluemound Rd. in 1935</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
3955	Blue Mound Tavern
5125	Milwaukee Automotive Trades Inc. Automobile Wrecking

Summary and notes from census and other records:

- The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (also known as the Milwaukee Road) operated in the Midwest and Northwest from 1847 until 1980, when its Pacific Extension (Montana, Idaho, and Washington) went into bankruptcy. The eastern half of the system merged into the Soo Line Railroad.
- Stephen Schlesak, who owned the tavern, lived on 38th and Grand Avenue (later Wisconsin Avenue) before 1920. He had been a bartender before opening his tavern in Pigsville. He was a Slovak with ancestry in Czechoslovakia.

Changes following the Great Depression and World War II

Changes came slowly to Pigsville in the latter half of the twentieth century. Typical of the neighborhood's communal nature, residents held a parade to welcome back its World War II servicemen. In 1948 they worked to introduce a memorial at Valley Park dedicated to the neighborhood's war dead.

But cultural and social changes in the wider society began to affect the neighborhood in the late 20th century. Many better-educated children of long-time residents began to chase

jobs that would take them out of Pigsville. Most of the local stores closed. Government development also decreased the size of the already tiny neighborhood. Interstate-94 was built on its southern border in the 1960s, limiting neighborhood expansion. In 1993, 15 homes and 2 taverns of the original Pigsville area were razed when the old Wisconsin Bridge was replaced by a new span. The millennium further reduced neighborhood size when the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District, in an effort to control Menomonee River flooding, built a levee which took out 18 more homes. As many of the oldest residents moved or died, others began moving in.

Current populations (as of 2021)

With the housing losses of the past three decades, today's Pigsville has approximately 600 residents. The neighborhood remains diverse, but less European. Just under half the residents are European American, and of these, most have German, Polish, and Irish ancestry. Approximately 3 in 10 residents are Latino and 2 in 10 African American. There is also a smattering of Asians, multi-ethnics, and American Indians in the neighborhood. Men greatly outnumber women by about one-quarter.

Pigsville was always working class, and today approximately two-thirds of the population lives in households that fall into the low-income and lower middle-income strata, with annual household incomes below \$50,000. The largest number of jobs held by residents are in the fields of administration, construction, and production. But housing is a buy. About 4 in 10 houses have select costs (mortgages, deeds of trust, contracts to purchase, insurance, and more) of \$500 to \$1,500 a month. Rents are also a remarkable buy with nearly half of the rental units going for under \$500. Approximately 6 in 10 property units in Pigsville are rented.

While the neighborhood is not affluent, it still retains many of its communal features. Residents have a neighborhood organization called the Valley Park Civic Association. People still fish on the banks of the Menomonee River, and adults still gather to socialize at the Valley Inn.

INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Valley Inn**, at 4000 W. Clybourn St., has remained a tavern/cafe for neighborhood residents for generations.
- **War Memorial** in Valley Park, at 42nd and St. Paul, was built in 1948 to honor Pigsville's war dead.

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.

ECO ART WEDNESDAYS			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Weds., 4-5:30pm	Menomonee Valley 3700 W. Pierce	Children work on nature-inspired recycled arts and crafts. Take home own creation every week! Register at Urban Ecology website.	unk

EARLY MORNING BIRDWALK			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Most Tue.'s. 8-10am	Menomonee Valley, 3700 W. Pierce St.	A walk for bird watchers of all ability levels to explore Three Bridges Park for birds. Register at Urban Ecology website.	Free, need to register

SLEDDING THE SLOPES OF MENOMONEE VALLEY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jan. Tue. 4-6pm	Menomonee Valley, 3700 W. Pierce St.	An evening of snow and sledding in Three Bridges Park with hot chocolate (if there is no snow, will hike Three Bridges Park). Register at Urban Ecology website.	Free

FAMILY HIKE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mar. & Apr, Nov, Tue.'s 4-6pm	Menomonee Valley, 3700 W. Pierce St.	Guided hike to see changes in seasons through Three Bridges Park. Register at Urban Ecology website.	Free

SHAKESPEARE IN THREE BRIDGES PARK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jul., Fri. 7pm	Menomonee Valley behind Palermo Villa next to 33rd Ct.	Play performed by Summit Players along river in the park.	Free, but donations welcome

MILWAUKEE BREWERS GAMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Apr. to late Sep., see website for times	American Family Field. 1 Brewers Way	Major league baseball games.	Prices vary

FRIENDS OF HANK AARON STATE TRAIL 5K RUN/WALK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Aug., Sat. 7- 8:15am	Start and finish near Klement's Sausage Haus (on the east end of Miller Park Stadium)	Opportunity to walk or run in race on Hank Aaron trail, or be a spectator—entertainment and food available. (Requires registration to participate)	Free (to watch)

MERRILL PARK PLAYFIELD/COMMUNITY CENTER

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily 10am-7pm	461 N. 35th St.	Arts and crafts, computer lab, board games, video games, movie night and foose ball.	Free

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT—NEAR WEST SIDE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
First week Aug., weekday 2-6pm	Near West Side: West Side Market, 1201 N. 35th St.	Fun evening of free food, games, rides, chance to dialogue with local police and community organizations.	Free

HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon., Tue., Wed., Fri. 10am-4:30pm, Thu. 10am-8pm; Sun, 12-5pm	Marquette campus at corner of 13th & Clybourn Sts.	Permanent collections include Old Masters' prints, Ralph Steiner photos, Marc Chagall Bible series, Barbara Morgan photos, and Finnegan, Fishman, Tatalovich, and Rojzman collections.	Free

POST ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE PARTY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Mar., Sat. 1:30-5pm	Irish Cultural Heritage Center, 2133 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Live entertainment, children's activities, leprechaun stories, and more	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://mecamilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

If you are a resident of the Pigsville neighborhood and would like to make an interesting observation about the area, please send your quote to JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS



Todays neighborhood-
Houses at 41st St. & Clybourn St.



Todays neighborhood-
Looking south at 41st St. & Clybourn St.



Todays neighborhood-
Looking north from Clybourn St.



Today's neighborhood-
Wisconsin Avenue Viaduct at 40th & Bluemound Rd.



Today's neighborhood-
Looking west on Clybourn St.



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 42nd St across from Valley Park
(note the Polish flat in the center)



Today's neighborhood-Valley 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@currently.com



www.urban-anthropology.org