

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Dean Rd; **S**-W. Bradley Rd;

E-N. 93rd St; **W**-N. Granville Rd

NORTHWEST SIDE *Riverton Heights*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Riverton Heights is a neighborhood with low to moderate population density. Most of the housing stock is recently built ranch and Colonial-style, with a few early 20th century bungalows mainly along North Granville Road. There is no business corridor in Riverton Heights.

The neighborhood's topography is hilly with gently rolling to moderately steep inclines. None of the streets follow a rectangular grid; most curve and many end in *culs de sac*. While there is no public green space in Riverton Heights, much of the neighborhood is undeveloped land and open fields. The Little Menomonee River flows through the southeastern corner, and there is a wide area of natural vegetation on each side of the river. See neighborhood photos below.

Today's neighborhood—
Houses on N. 93rd Ct.
& W. Green View Ct.



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 Riverton Heights was once in the Town of Granville and within the hamlet of old Granville Station.

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.

Old Granville Station

Today's Riverton Heights was part of a Granville hamlet known as Granville Station. The current neighborhoods of Granville Station, Riverton Heights, Pheasant Run, and sections of Land Bank and other adjoining neighborhoods once comprised old Granville Station. The hamlet was centered on the south side of Brown Deer Road at 107th Street and Granville Road. An 1858 map shows a hotel, two stores, two general stores, a wagon maker, and a blacksmith in the hamlet. By 1886, the hamlet had added a painter, an undertaker, a brick factory, cigar factory, two schools, and two general stores. The population was 115. The area also had a railroad line with two stations that closed after World War II. During the 1960s, a Milwaukee Industrial Park and Land Bank was constructed between West 76th and West 91st Streets.

Economic prosperity in Granville Township

Except for the era of the Great Depression, economic prosperity reigned in Granville, 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.

See profile below of one family that settled in the Riverton Heights neighborhood at the time of annexation.

Riverton Heights resident profile

(Information from U.S. Census records.)

The Doorneks

In 1956, the John Peter Doornek family moved to 8352 North Granville Road in the Riverton Heights neighborhood.

The Doorneks were a long-established Granville farming family. The tradition began when Willem Van Doornik and Henricka (Hinkery) Van Doornik immigrated to the United States from Holland in the early 1850s. Willem took a job with another Dutch farmer in Granville named Johannes Heesakker. Willem ultimately built his own farm in Granville Township and this was taken over by his son William and William's wife Margureth. Mrs. Margaret Doornek, was elected Treasurer of Granville Township and served for many years during the middle of the 20th century.

John Peter Doornek grew up on the farm, which was located near the intersection of today's Fond du Lac Avenue and Silver Spring Drive. The farm included two land parcels totaling 40 acres. John had siblings Lucille, Margureth (later Margaret), William, Catherine, and Anna Mae. The family worshipped at St. Catherine's Catholic Church.

After graduating from high school, John took a job as a hired farm hand working for Allious Gengler on Cedarburg Road (today's Teutonia), also in Granville. In 1941, he enlisted in the United States Army and served during World War II in the Field Artillery branch for the Hawaiian Department. He was stationed at the Army base close to Pearl Harbor when it was bombed.

Sometime after returning from the war, John met and married Doris Mae Cota. Doris was born in Gillett, Wisconsin and was the daughter of George Cota and Helen M. Reagan. John and Doris married and had eight children, five sons and three girls. One of the sons, Jim Doornek became a local historian, writing a number of articles on his memories of Granville Township, including the Allious Gengler farm. It is likely that the family carried on the farming tradition.

John died in 1991 and was buried at St. Catherine's cemetery (*see photo from public records at Ancestry.com*). Doris died in 2004.



A new population arrives

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the neighborhood. 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. The Moss-American factory just north of Pheasant Run had closed in the late 1970s. It was also discovered that the plant had seriously polluted the lovely Little Menomonee River. EPA environmental studies concluded that Moss-American activities contaminated soil and ground water as well as mud on the river banks. Contaminants of concern included polychlorinated aromatic hydrocarbons and organic compounds such as benzene, ethyl benzene, toluene, and xylene. All this had negative effects on the residents of Granville Township. What had been a working-and middle-class area on the Northwest Side was in economic decline.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are fewer than 1,400 residents in Riverton Heights. Just over half are European Americans, and of these, over one-quarter still claim German as their first ancestry. Approximately 4 in 10 residents are African Americans and about 1 in 20 are Latinos (mainly of Mexican descent). There is also a scattering of Asians (mostly of Indian descent, with some Hmong), American Indians, indigenous Africans, and people of mixed or “other” racial backgrounds in the area.

The median household income in Riverton Heights is just over \$57,000, placing the neighborhood in the middle-income stratum. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, management, computers/math, and education. There are nearly four times more adults in the field of computer/math than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas. The neighborhood is a well-educated one with over 40 percent of the adult residents holding degrees beyond high school.

Home ownership is very high in Riverton Heights (88 percent) and housing values are also high with the median value of homes at nearly \$150,000. In addition, rents are also steep, with the median at just over \$1,300 (the national median is \$928).

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, fireworks.	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

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

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

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 recall some of the racial uprising and rioting that took place. I believe it was in the late ‘60s-- ‘67 to ‘68--that took place in Milwaukee. But at the time we [from Granville] were part of the City of Milwaukee, still farmland and I was working on a farm right in the area with a cousin of mine. We farmed a lot of the land in the Granville area and I recall during that arrest period--I do recall some of the roads being closed, and the military people patrolling the roads, which seemed kind of odd because we were driving tractors on the road and there were road blocks, and [also] in the evening, because I think there was a curfew.”

“It was actually a really affluent-type community feel. Of course, there was [sic] some pockets of concern. But it had a different feel to it.”

“That was one of the reasons my husband and I decided to come here. Because he grew up in the south suburb on the southwest side in New Berlin. I grew up in the southwest side of Milwaukee. And it was all white. One of the things that we liked about this place was that we liked the idea that our children would be growing up in a more integrated neighborhood. As our kids were growing up, it was great.”

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

“What is interesting about chunks of the Granville neighborhoods [is] where there’s a place in the city where people do begin to mix.”

“I don’t think there’s enough activity in Granville right now. Granville is looking for its new identity--developing more cultural things. The more we see that, the more blending we see within the community.”

“The vastness of Granville is light industrial and commercial. It still remains quite a vibrant area for light commercial as well as car dealers.”

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-
The Little Menomonee River near N. 94th
St. & W. Bradley Rd.



Today's neighborhood-Bungalow on N. Granville Rd.



Todays neighborhood-
Houses on N. 94th St.
& W. Arch Ave.



Todays neighborhood-
Houses on N. 93rd Ct.
& W. Green View Ct.



Todays neighborhood-
Area west of the Little Menomonee
River near N. 94th St. & W. Bradley Rd.

Today's neighborhood-N. 97th Ct. & W. Tower Ave.



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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www.urban-anthropology.org