

Approximate boundaries:

N-Railroad; **S**-W. Silver Spring Dr;

E-Fond du Lac Fwy; **W**-Wisconsin Hwy 175

NORTHWEST SIDE *Silverswan*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Silverswan is a neighborhood of moderate population density. Dwellings are mainly 1950s to 1970s ranch-style houses and multi-unit apartment complexes. There are a few early 20th century bungalows scattered throughout the neighborhood. The blocks reflect the rural nature of Silverswan before the 1950s.

There are no major parks in the area, but there is an MPS playfield adjacent to Bryant Elementary. See neighborhood photos below.

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 Silverswan was once part of Granville Township.

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).

Today's neighborhood-A few early 20th century houses at 87th & Fond du Lac



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, ranging 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.

Englesburg

Granville Township was divided into smaller units—mostly unincorporated hamlets. Much of the area that is today the Silverswan and Valhalla neighborhoods had been called Englesburg, named after German settler F. W. Engles. Englesburg centered around today's 91st Street, Wisconsin Highway 175, and Villard. The unincorporated town was populated by German Catholics who established St. Martin's Catholic Church as their anchor. Englesburg became known for its early auto races on a four-mile stretch of road—races that became famous for cars that reached speeds of 20 miles per hour!

Movement toward annexation

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. From the late 1800s to World War II Granville was an important center for dairy and truck farming. Resident William Schlapmann owned a creamery that produced 100 pounds a day. 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 scores of companies.

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 parts of 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.

Late 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the Silverswan and other former Granville communities. 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. 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 nearly 3300 residents in Silverswan and fewer than 400 claim German ancestry. The dominant population today in the neighborhood is African American (approximately three quarters). Silverswan is also a young neighborhood, with nearly half of the residents under the age of 20. Slightly under half of the population lives in low-income households, with annual incomes under \$25,000. Residents over 25 are most often employed in administrative work, production, and sales.

Most residents are renters. Nearly three-quarters of the property units are likely to be rented. This number is probably due to the large number of multi-unit apartment buildings in Silverswan—nearly all erected after World War II.

INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Benediction Lutheran Church** at 8475 W. Fond du Lac, is unique in its outreach to recent immigrants. The parish has special services and pastors for Hmong and French Africans (see photo).
- **William Cullen Bryant Elementary School** at 8713 W. Thurston, a school with an emphasis on college readiness and future success (see photo).

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.

“At the time we lived with my grandmother on the original homestead. And that was in the area of Fond du Lac Avenue and Silver Spring just northwest of the intersection of Fond du Lac and Silver Spring Drive. I know I’ve mentioned to you that I had some old maps and plaque books and things like that and that does show my ancestors’ names listed on the back there. They owned 40 acres total in two different parcels in that area. Anyway we lived in that original farmhouse there and I remember a little bit about it. . . And I also recall vaguely, that it did not have any indoor plumbing at the time.”

“It was always said that there were just a bunch of German farmers that lived in Granville before annexation. I think to a great extent that was true.”

“We lived there with my parents up until I was about five-and-one-half, and I remember attending Browning School for the first half of kindergarten. And that Browning School is still there actually operating under that name. It’s at the intersection at 76th at Silver Spring on the southeast corner of 76th and Silver Spring. So that was just less than a mile away from where my grandmother lived. The school is still there operating as a Milwaukee Public School.”

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

“You still see a good number of these older homes that were built on farms back in the early 20th century in the Granville areas. It adds so much character to our area.”

“So much of what has happened in Granville has been influenced by government policy. The change in freeway plans, the building of the land bank, public housing developments, and now the changing of the rules about having to be a resident of the town where you work. More of the policy hurt us, I think, than helped us.”

“In one neighborhood we would go in there and just pick up litter and hand out information to the neighbors of what’s going on so we can be a presence in the area. And then we also started having an event for the students of the high schools in the area about healthy relationships to try to alleviate violence that happens between teenagers. The high school picked the students who could participate in the program for a day. It’s been a success that MPS has picked it up. They have about a dozen other schools throughout the city that participate in this one day event over at the Soldier Nathanial Peace center.”

ⁱ 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-
William Cullen Bryant School



Today's neighborhood-Houses 91st & Swan Drive



Today's neighborhood-
MPS playfield adjacent to Bryant School



Today's neighborhood-Benediction Lutheran Church

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