

**Approximate boundaries:**  
N-W. Good Hope Rd; S-W. Mill Rd;  
E-Hwy 45; W-N. 124<sup>th</sup> St.

# NORTHWEST SIDE *Mill Valley*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Mill Valley is a sparsely populated neighborhood. A cluster of condominiums comprises much of the residential housing just north of Mill Road at the neighborhood's southern border. There is also a small number of single-family houses including mid-20th century ranch homes, colonials, and older bungalows. The neighborhood has no definable business corridor.

The topography of Mill Valley is hilly, with gently rolling to fairly steep inclines throughout. While most of the neighborhood's few streets are winding, the main thoroughfare is West Appleton (Highway 175) that cuts through the neighborhood at a diagonal from the western border of North 124th Street to the southeast corner at West Mill Road. There is no public green space in Mill Valley, but the Menomonee River flows from the northern to the southern border, and much of the neighborhood is undeveloped wooded land.

## 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 Mill Valley was once in the Town of Granville and the hamlet of West Granville.

### 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, 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).

### *West Granville*

The area that is today's Mill Valley, Heritage Heights, and Park Knoll neighborhoods was once the hamlet of West Granville. It was centered at the crossroads of Mill Road and 115th Street. Very early on, the German settlers established the West Granville Cemetery Association that would develop and govern the West Granville Cemetery. Much of this historic site owes its genesis to the Barndt family. See the [Heritage Heights neighborhood](#) for more details.

The cemetery was not the only heritage site that still operates in the former hamlet of West Granville. In 1860, a dissenter from Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church and 26 German Calvinists founded West Granville Presbyterian Church as "Die erste Presbyterian Kirche" (The First Presbyterian Church). They built the Cream City brick building which houses the congregation to this day. As the church was developing during the Civil War and aftermath, the congregation made an early commitment to provide assistance to newly freed slaves through the Freedman's Board.

By 1876, the hamlet of West Granville had a post office, two wagon makers, a shoemaker, two blacksmiths, a cigar store, and a flour mill. In the 1920s, Joy Farm opened in the hamlet at 115th Street, two blocks south of Good Hope Road. The farm was a favorite horseback riding club for decades. Later it became a transportation company and rented out school buses and other vehicles.

During these years, West Granville Presbyterian Church continued its humanitarian works. In 1960, the congregation developed a program to welcome new citizens and sponsored many immigrants to the area. At the same time, they participated in the civil rights movement through the Covenant of Open Housing and Project Friendship.

The year 1977 became auspicious for the former West Granville hamlet and Granville Township. Three of their historic sites--the West Granville Cemetery, Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, and West Granville Presbyterian Church all received historic designation.

### *Granville industrializes*

Economic prosperity eventually 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.

Below is a profile of a family that settled fairly early in Mill Valley.

## **Mill Valley family profile**

*(Information from U.S. Census records)*

### **The Pohlman**

Beginning sometime in the middle of the 20th century, the Pohlman lived in today's Mill Valley neighborhood. Harold Pohlman lived at 11826 W. Appleton and his sister, Florence C. Pohlman Grabenstetter, lived on the same block at 11805 W. Appleton.

The Pohlman were the definition of a close-knit German family. Harold was born in 1904 and Florence in 1902--both in Milwaukee. Together with an older brother Edwin, they lived with parents William Pohlman (born in Germany) and Christine Quade Pohlman (born in Ohio). Father William worked as an electrician and the family lived on North 32nd Street.

But tragedy hit this family multiple times. Father William died young. In 1920 the young family moved in with William's father, Charles Pohlman, who lived just a few blocks from their old home. The boys left school after the 8th grade and went to work— Harold as a clerk in a motorcycle shop (probably Harley-Davidson) and Edwin took supervisory jobs in construction. With the women also working, the family was able to sustain itself.

Sometime around 1930, the Pohlman were able to purchase a home on 49th and Wells. Deep into her 30s, Florence married Clyde Grabenstetter, a salesman, and the couple remained with their single brothers on Wells. In that home Grandpa Charles and Mother Christine died. Brother Edwin died before his 60th birthday, and Clyde Grabenstetter died shortly afterwards.

There is no record that the two surviving Pohlman, Harold and Florence, ever had children. But they were able to remain close, living on the same block on Appleton Avenue in Mill Valley following the death of all their family members. Harold died in 1974 and Florence lived on to 1997.

### *A new population arrives*

The man most responsible for the landscape that is today's Brown Deer Park neighborhood— George Hansen--was a developer who championed racial exclusion. It is perhaps rightly ironic that the area he helped develop would eventually attract large numbers of people of color. In the second half of the 20th century, African Americans began to migrate to the Granville area. 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.

## Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are just under 500 residents living in Mill Valley, making it one of the least populated neighborhoods in Milwaukee. Of these, just over three-quarters are European Americans (mostly of German and mixed European ancestry), about 1 in 6 are African Americans, and approximately 1 in 15 are Asians (all Hmong). There are also a scattering of American Indians and people of mixed or “other” racial backgrounds in the area.

The median household income in Mill Valley is just over \$65,000, placing the neighborhood in the middle-income stratum. It is also a well-educated neighborhood with nearly 40 percent of adult residents holding degrees above high school. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, education, and firefighting.

## 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

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.<sup>i</sup>—About THEN.**

“I do remember going trail riding at the old Joy Farm. I also remember renting a bus from them later.”

“There used to be some newspapers on the Northwest Side. One was called The Northwest News and I think the other one was The Northwest Star. That went back to the 1960s. I believe that one bought out the other and then that other one kind of disappeared. I’m not sure why.”

“It was a pretty vibrant area. You know that Northridge shopping area was a very big shopping area and there was a lot of restaurants going on. But there was an incident; there was a murder. And I can’t remember if that was before or after we moved. After we moved there, in 2000, it didn’t take long after that that the area started going downhill real fast. There were a number of teenagers coming to the shopping center and that was scaring people away. That added incentive for people not to be shopping there.”

“In the past I don’t know that there was a lot [of organizations]. We had a chamber of commerce and they would do some events that would reach into the community.”

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

“The neighborhoods on the Northwest Side are very diverse. You have rich and poor, black, brown, and white—whatever. You really can’t generalize about the area. There is some very, very interesting history here too.”

“Historical preservation is important here. A lot of energy goes into preserving the two churches and the cemetery as well.”

“There’s still obviously crime and shenanigans but much less. It was almost approaching organized crime levels and they would be sending 13 and 14-year-old kids to knock on doors and they would say, “Hey I’m looking for Billy” and Billy doesn’t live here. So, you would go down to the next house and keep doing it and what you find out is that they are the scouts and if nobody answers the door then they ‘re going to make a signal with a guy down the street to break into your house and steal stuff and take it away with their stolen minivan. That doesn’t happen anymore.”

“Leaders in the area are the politicians--both the city and the county would be that. I think some of the businesses [also] who are involved with the BID. Some of the pastors and ministers in the area [also].”

“Both [groups] I mentioned are very interested in historical preservation. They are conservative in the fact that they’d don’t like change. As the demographic of the neighborhood changes, they worry about preservation.”

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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-W. Mill Rd. & N. 119th St. looking northeast





Today's neighborhood-  
W. Mill Rd. & N. 119th St.  
looking northwest



Today's neighborhood-  
W. Appleton Ave. north of  
W. Mill Rd.



Today's neighborhood-  
W. Mill Rd. & N. 118th St.



Today's neighborhood-Mill Valley Homes Condominiums



Today's neighborhood-  
Mill Valley Homes Condominiums clubhouse



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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