

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Vliet St; S-W. State St;
E-Wisconsin Hwy 175; W-N. Hawley Rd

WEST SIDE *Wick Field*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Wick Field is a sparsely populated neighborhood. A large area is occupied by industrial and business property and the Milwaukee Public Schools recreation area of Wick Field. The main residential section is on the west end of the neighborhood along Hawley Road. The major commercial corridors are on State Street at the southern end of the neighborhood and Vliet Street at the northern boundary.

Wick Field has a unique layout. A neighborhood of steep hills and deep valleys, there are very few streets that follow a rectangular grid. Many that are west of Hawley Road are curving streets that end in *cul de sacs*. The most common housing styles are bungalows and Tudors. See neighborhood photos below.

HISTORY

Wick Field was named after its playfield of the same name. The playfield was named after Paul Wick, a prominent Milwaukee real estate dealer of the 1920s and 1930s. He also served on the city's Common Council between 1932 and 1936.

Early populations

Some of the area that is today part of the Wick Field and Martin Drive neighborhoods was platted by the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1927.

The area was temporarily called the Highland Park Subdivision. Two of Wick Field's streets were named by the sisters—Roder Court and Notre Dame Court.

However, the greater share of the population that would settle in the Wick Field neighborhood was influenced by the development of Washington Park, just northeast of Wick Field. In 1891, 124 acres were originally allocated and purchased by what was then a Milwaukee Park Commission. The Park Commission Board then engaged Frederick Law Olmsted & Company to design and plan the park. Olmsted was known for designing New York City's Central Park and later planned and designed Milwaukee's Lake Park. The early Washington Park offered a horse racing track, carriage rides, band shell, a lovely lagoon, and a zoo. The presence of the park increased the desirability of the area and attracted middle and upper middle-income settlers.

Much building took place between 1910 and 1930, and both Wick Field and Washington Heights, on Wick Field's northern border, were recipients of the boom. The vast majority of settlers were Germans, but both Washington Heights and Wick Field also drew people of Irish, Russian, Czech, Swedish, and Hungarian descent.

The importance of Vliet Street

Vliet Street, shared by both Washington Heights and Wick Field, quickly became a significant commercial corridor. Typical of most Milwaukee neighborhoods, the business districts tended to attract a more diverse population in shopkeepers than were found on the surrounding blocks. These included Germans, Irish, Jews, French, Belgians, Czechs, Bohemians, Hungarians, and Russians. Most of the shopkeepers also lived behind, above, or within a block of their businesses. See summary and notes below.

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 55th & McKinley



<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in the Wick Field neighborhood in 1933</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
4702	Ernest Frahnke Tavern
4716	Schaller Brothers Meats
4722	Felix Markowski Tavern
4804	Julien Apartments
4830	Huband's Texaco Filling Station
4904	Apartments
4918	Good Housekeepers Chemical Company
4922	Henry F. Mesch Shoe Repair John Rank Tailor
4924	Louise Sabbe Baker
4928	John Leitner Meats
4930	Great A&P Tea Company
5000	John W. Jakob Drugs US Postal Station 107
5004	Engel Company Furs
5010	Rose J. Stapleford Grocery and Meats
5020	George Heise Garage
5050	Schmidt & Bartelt Inc. Undertakers (Louis F. Bartelt)
5112	Parklane Apartments
5128	Standard Oil Company Filling Station
5215	Dean's Golf Practice Field
5218	Apartments
5226	Apartments
5322-5324	Pasch Radio Supply Company
5323	Apartments
5326	Meurer's Bakery
5330	National Tea Company Groceries
5337	Apartments

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in the Wick Field neighborhood in 1933</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
5401	Anton's Food Stores Groceries
5402	Wedule's Pharmacy
5403	Joseph Schill Restaurant
5404	Walter A. Lenz Meats
5407	Highland Beauty Shoppe
5409	Ram Rock Chemical Company Inc. Arthur A. Rock Physician
5520	Everett Dusolt Tavern
5601	Maegli-Nolte Filling Station
5602	Shell Petroleum Corporation Filling Station
5624	Otto H. Kubitz Meats
5626	Robert J. Prees Dentist
5628	George A. Horky Drugs U.S. Postal Station #122

Summary and notes from census and other records:

- Technically only the businesses on the south side of the street (odd numbers) were in Wick Field, but all shops were easily within walking distance of Wick Field residents.
- This stretch of Vliet had a plethora of food stores, including nine grocers, butchers, and bakeries.
- The neighborhood had four filling stations. Despite Depression times, the locals apparently had enough automobiles to support this number of gas stations.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had high school educations. Most were immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Ernest Frahnke, with the tavern, had a bar at this location since the late 1800s. He was born in 1867 in Germany.
- Felix Markowski, also with the tavern, was the son of Polish immigrants. His bar apparently was not successful in this German-dominated neighborhood, as Felix was working as a bartender for someone else's tavern by 1940.
- John Rank, the tailor, was a Hungarian immigrant. He lived on North Avenue when he was running his shop.
- Louise Sabbe, with the bakery, was a Flemish woman from Belgium. See her profile below.

- John W. Jakob, with the drugstore, was a Bohemian immigrant. He lived next door to his store.
- Rose J. Stapleford, with the grocery and meat store, was a German immigrant.
- George Heise, with the garage, was an anomaly on the street. He had spent a year in college. He was the son of German immigrants.
- Joseph Schill, with the restaurant, was the grandson of German immigrants. According to the 1930 census, his "restaurant" was a billiard parlor. Perhaps it was both.
- Walter A. Lenz, the butcher, was one of the few proprietors that did not live at his shop. He rented a unit on 22nd St.
- Arthur A. Rock, the physician, was the son of a French immigrant father and a German immigrant mother.
- Otto Herman Kubitz, with the meat market, had been a salesman for a milk company before opening his own shop. In 1930 he was single and living in a boarding house. He was the son of German immigrants.
- George Horky, with the pharmacy, was an anomaly on the street because he had a college education. He was the son of a Czech immigrant.

Below is a profile of one of the Vliet Street shopkeepers.

Wick Field shopkeeper (1930s)

*Name selected randomly from the 1933 City Directory in the Wick Field area
(other information found in U.S. Census and other public records)*

Joseph Martins Schill

In 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, Joseph Schill had a restaurant on West Vliet. Just three years earlier he'd been operating a billiards parlor three blocks up the street.

Schill surely did not come from a lineage of merchant entrepreneurs. Joseph Schill was born in 1899 on a mortgaged farm in Ashford in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin. His father was Mark Schill, son of German immigrants; and his mother was Katie Schill (nee Butschlick), daughter of Bohemian immigrants. Joseph had seven siblings: Anna, Loretta, Cornelius, Veronica, Michael, Alois, and Norbert. No doubt the children helped out on the farm. Joseph never went beyond 7th grade in school.

It is not clear when Joseph moved to Milwaukee. By 1930 he was already a merchant and was married to Elenore and had one son, Norman. Little is known about Elenore except that she was born in Wisconsin and had completed the 8th grade. The couple apparently did well. They lived at the same addresses as their businesses. Their home in 1930 was completely paid for and valued at \$7,500, a high price for the times. The home in 1940 was valued at \$4,000 (it was not unusual for home values to fall throughout the years of the Great Depression).

Son Norman went on to serve in the United States Army. His term of duty was during World War II between 1942 and 1945.

Joseph Schill died in Milwaukee at age 89 in 1988.

In the late decades of the 20th century, African Americans began to move west into Wick Field and surrounding neighborhoods. This happened for two reasons: (1) available industrial jobs on the Milwaukee's Northwest Side, and (2) the need for housing following the leveling of their former central city home known as Bronzeville (see Halyard Park neighborhood for details). As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods where Germans dominated, the integration was relatively peaceful. Many African Americans were able to obtain family-supporting jobs and purchase homes.

The importance of Wick Field playground

Wick Field has always been important to the neighborhood. In 1911, the MPS Department of Recreation and Community Services was created through legislation to strengthen and extend the bond between public education and the community. One of its domains became the operation of the large Wick Playfield.

The playfield has a long history of family and youth activities (see outings section below). Today it also hosts the Special Olympics. Team Milwaukee Special Olympics, a registered agency with Special Olympics Wisconsin, offers both adults and youth with intellectual disabilities ways to improve skills through training and completion in a wide array of sports. At Wick Field, this includes flag football, bocce, and softball. These programs encourage participants to remain healthy, socialize with others, and increase self-confidence.

Current populations (as of 2021)

The neighborhood of Wick Field, with just over 500 residents, remains culturally eclectic, but not all the diversity today is European. While approximately 8 in 10 residents are European American (mostly of German, Irish, Dutch, and Polish ancestry), a little over 1 in 10 residents are African Americans and 1 in 25 are Latinos (fairly evenly divided among those of Mexican and those of Puerto Rican ancestry). The rest are people of multiple backgrounds, Jamaicans, indigenous Africans, West Indians, and Hmong/Lao.

The median household income in Wick Field is just under \$50,000, placing the neighborhood on the cusp between the lower middle-and middle-income strata. The main occupations claimed by adult residents are in the fields of administration, production, education, management, and social services. The neighborhood is also well- educated with over 40 percent of the residents over the age of 25 holding degrees beyond high school. Wick Field has over three times the number of residents in the social service field as the proportion in other Milwaukee areas, and more than 1 in 10 residents work for non-profit organizations.

Rents are modest in Wick Field. Housing prices are modest, with the average detached home valued at just over \$190,000 compared to approximately \$210,000 for Milwaukee generally, and the average unit in a two-unit structure is valued at just over \$89,000 compared to approximately \$176,500 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.

ANNUAL RUN BACK TO SCHOOL			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Aug., Sat., 9am	Wick Field, 4929 W. Vliet St.	Run of 1.5 miles through Washington Park, followed by activities at Wick Field.	Free

KICK OR TREAT HALLOWEEN KICKBALL TOURNAMENT

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Oct., Sat. 10am-2pm	Wick Field, 4929 W. Vliet St.	Costumed event with a coed kickball tournament.	Free

EARLY MORNING BIRDWALK--WASHINGTON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Most Wed.'s 8-10am	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A walk for bird watchers of all ability levels to explore Washington Park for birds.	Free, but might need to register

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS EASTER EGG HUNT

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Mar., Sat. 11:45am-1pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Fun event for children and adults with Easter egg hunt.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--WASHINGTON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 11am- 10pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fireworks.	Free

WEDNESDAYS AT THE SHELL IN WASHINGTON PARK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Summer months, Wed.'s, 6-8:30pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A variety of difference musical genres and bands.	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

If you are a resident of this neighborhood and wish to make an interesting observation about it, please send your quote to JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 54th & McKinley



Today's neighborhood-Wick Field



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on W. Notre Dame Court (1)

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 55th & McKinley (1)



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on W. Notre Dame Court (2)



Today's neighborhood-
W. Roder Ct.



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 55th & McKinley (2)

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