

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Becher St; S-W. Harrison Ave;  
E-KK River/S. 1<sup>st</sup> St; W-I-94 Freeway

# SOUTH SIDE *Baran Park*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Baran Park is a small, sparsely populated neighborhood. The homes on the few blocks that are residential are mostly two-story wood frame. The large park named Baran and the smaller park named Lincoln Field overlay most of the neighborhood. See photos below.

## HISTORY

Baran Park has less than 150 homes and two parks. It comprises the eastern section of the group of neighborhoods along Lincoln Avenue sometimes called the Old (or Historic) South Side. It is situated between two much larger neighborhoods, Bay View and Lincoln Village.

The Old South Side was originally developed by Poles.

### Early populations

Polish immigration to America resulted from a combination of ‘push-pull’ factors. Between 1795 and 1918, Poland was partitioned by Austria, Russia and Prussia. In the 1870s Prussian leader Bismarck initiated a Germanization policy in the western section of Poland designed to bar speaking of languages other than German, impose a draft for the German

army, weaken the Catholic Church, and replace Polish landowners with German citizens. This policy, coupled with the sharp drop in grain prices in the 1880s, led to massive emigrations of people from Poland in the late 19th century.

Many economically-devastated Poles came to urban areas in America’s Midwest where they could access entry-level jobs in industry. The settlement areas became known as Polonias, or Polish-American communities. Polonias tended to be self-sustaining neighborhoods with intricate parish

systems and a wealth of Polish institutions. One of these Polonias developed on Milwaukee’s South Side--a part of which is now known as Baran Park.

The Polish language was preserved in the neighborhood well into the 1930s. Some of the strongest assets in the mainly Polish neighborhood were the self-help institutions—the fraternal, relief organizations for the homeland, and arts and cultural organizations.

### *Baseball on the Old South Side*

Early on the area that is today’s Lincoln Village and Baran Park neighborhoods, became entrenched with baseball fanaticism. This began early and spread quickly.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, baseball had become so popular in the United States that some Polish leaders worried it was Americanizing youth too quickly. In fact, leaders in Chicago’s Polonia organized its own baseball league in 1913 to keep young people from assimilating into the Anglo-American world through the sport.

Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on Lincoln Ave. (see Basilica in background)



Soon Milwaukee followed suit. Within a few years the Kosciuszko Reds had established themselves as the sandlot darlings of the Old South Side. The Polish semi-professional team operated between 1909 and 1919, a time of great upheaval due to World War One. The Reds, often called the “Koskys,” began competition in the City League and then shifted to the Lake Shore League. They won four championships during the decade, and were so legendary that they became the topic of several publications, including Neal Pease’s “The Kosciuszko Reds 1909-1919: Kings of the Milwaukee Sandlots” in *Polish American Studies*, and George Reimann’s *Sandlot Baseball in Milwaukee’s South Side*. Photos still exist that depict thousands of resident fans flooding South 5th Place after a Kosciuszko Reds’ victory.

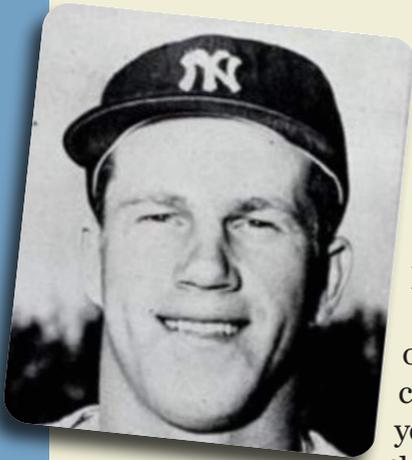
Perhaps not surprisingly, baseball had an enduring presence in the area. On the same street that fans flooded during a Kosky victory, a young man grew up to become a major league star (see resident profile below). And just two blocks east of his home, a new park was being built that would ensure the presence of baseball for generations to come. Baran Park was named after Father Theodore Baran, the priest who led the effort that paid off the parish debt in 1929 for the construction of the Basilica of St. Josaphat. The park opened in 1950. With ample baseball fields and bleachers, the park soon became a major Milwaukee host to little league play.

### **Old South Side resident (1940s)**

*(Information from census records, Wikipedia photo)*

#### **Tony Kubek**

Anthony Christopher Kubek Jr. (see photo to left) was born in 1936 and grew up in a rented house at the corner of 5th Place and Harrison Avenue, in today’s Lincoln Village neighborhood, one block west of Baran Park. He was the grandson of Polish immigrants and the son of Anthony Kubek Sr., a laborer, and Jennie Kubek (nee Oleniczak), a homemaker. Both Tony Sr. and Jennie had also grown up within blocks of their 5th Place address.



Like most other Polish kids in the area, Tony Jr. grew up playing baseball, probably at Kosciuszko Park in his early years, and no doubt at Baran Park when this was completed in Tony’s teens. Like his neighborhood peers, Tony became an avid fan of the Milwaukee Braves when they arrived in town in the early 1950s.

Tony was a particularly talented shortstop. He caught the attention of the New York Yankee organization and was signed to a minor league contract. He was brought up to the majors in 1957--curiously, the same year the Milwaukee Braves won the pennant and went on to compete in the World Series, against none other than the New York Yankees. And how did Tony Kubek do against his beloved hometown team? He had one of the best World Series games a rookie ever had, going 3 for 5 with 2 home runs, 3 runs scored, and 4 runs batted in. Fortunately for Milwaukee, the Braves did win the Series.

Kubek took Rookie of the Year honors that year, and went on to play for the Yankees through the 1965 season. He became an All-Star four times. When Kubek’s playing days were over, he advanced to a career in broadcasting and broadcast 12 World Series and 14 League Championships for NBC television.

## Current populations (as of 2017)

Mexican Americans are today the largest cultural group on the Old South Side that had once been Milwaukee's Polish stronghold. They began to settle on the near South Side in the 1920s and slowly migrated south into the area developed by Polish immigrants. Since the 1970s, the Mexican community has grown dramatically, and other Latinos have arrived from the Caribbean and Central and South America. They have been joined more recently by significant numbers of Southeast Asians (especially Hmong, Burmese, and Vietnamese refugees), African Americans, Arabs, and North American Indians.

A number of push-pull factors influenced the population changes. During the early 1900s Mexican immigration to the United States expanded because of worsening economic conditions in Mexico. A large wave of Mexicans also left the country during the political and economic turmoil created by the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Beginning in 1917, the United States government implemented a series of immigration restriction policies to curb the influx of Mexicans, mainly in response to local claims that Mexicans (who often worked for low wages) were taking jobs away from 'true' Americans.

Although most Mexicans found jobs in local tanneries and foundries, some came to Milwaukee as strikebreakers—often unknowingly. They were hired by companies intent on breaking their own labor unions, and the Mexicans earned the enmity of the European workers they replaced. This situation led to early discrimination against Mexican Americans in Milwaukee.

But they found a place to fit in. Latinos were able to settle successfully alongside the Poles because they shared many traits in common. These included the Catholic faith, the focus on the Madonna figure, polka music traditions, similarities in childrearing and eldercare practices, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

### *Baran Park specifics*

Baran Park has fewer than 400 residents, compared to over 12,000 in its next door neighborhood, Lincoln Village. The neighborhood, named after Father Felix Baran who served the Basilica of St. Josaphat between 1914 and 1942, lost most of its population when its western section was cleared for the building of the I-94 freeway in the 1960s.

Today, approximately 6 in 10 residents are Latino, and nearly half the total population speaks Spanish as its first language. The remaining residents are European-, African-, and Asian-American, in that order.

Baran Park is a young neighborhood. Nearly half of the households have some children. Among adults, the largest listed occupations are in food service, facilities (construction and maintenance), and material moving (shipping, moving, and trucking).

## INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Kinnickinnic River**, located at the southern end of the Baran Park neighborhood, currently undergoing development (see photo).
- **Baran Park**, on Chase just off of Lincoln, a county-operated, large park with a number of baseball diamonds and picnic spots.
- **Lincoln Field**, on Lincoln between 3rd and 4th, a small, Milwaukee Public School recreational area with basketball and tennis courts (see photo).

## RECURRING NEARBY OUTINGS

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.

### FELIX MANTILLA LITTLE LEAGUE GAMES

| When?                           | Where?                         | Description and contact info   | Admission |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|-----------|
| Summer, see schedule on website | Baran Park, 2600 S. Chase Ave. | Opportunity to watch games of youth of various age levels play in out where league named after Milwaukee Braves infielder, Felix Mantilla. | Free      |

### UNGUIDED TOUR OF BASILICA OF ST. JOSAPHAT

| When?         | Where?  | Description and contact info   | Admission |
|---------------|---|--|-----------|
| Mon., 9am-4pm | Visitor's Center, Basilica of St. Josaphat, 2333 S. 6th St. | Opportunity to see and learn about one of the most beautiful churches in America with informational exhibits on lower level. | Free      |

### UMOS MEXICAN INDEPENENCE DAY FESTIVAL

| When?                 | Where?                          | Description and contact info   | Admission |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| Mid Sep., Sun. 12-8pm | UMOS Center, 2701 S. Chase Ave. | Festival of food vendors, beer, live music, craft vendors, everything Mexican. | Free      |

### GUIDED TOUR OF BASILICA OF ST. JOSAPHAT

| When?         | Where?  | Description and contact info   | Admission |
|---------------|---|--|-----------|
| Mon., 9am-4pm | Visitor's Center, Basilica of St. Josaphat, 2333 S. 6th St. | Opportunity to see and learn about one of the most beautiful churches in America with informational exhibits on lower level. | Free      |

### BASILICA PARISH PICNIC

| When?                 | Where?   | Description and contact info                      | Admission |
|-----------------------|--|---|-----------|
| Late Jun., Sun. 1-5pm | Basilica of St. Josaphat, S. 6th St. & W. Lincoln Ave. | Food, raffles, games, exhibits, look at Basilica. | Free      |

### FREE FISHING

| When?         | Where?  | Description and contact info  | Admission |
|---------------|---|---|-----------|
| Summer months | Pond at Kosciuszko Park, 7th-8th along Lincoln Ave. | Fishing experience in well-stocked pond with bait shop 1 block away. (414) 645-4624 | Free      |

## PELICAN GROVE SWIM

| When?  | Where?                           | Description and contact info                        | Admission  |
|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
| July, 12:30-4:30<br>(check website for additional times) | Kosciuszko Park, 2201 S. 7th St. | Outdoor pool with giant- and kid-sized waterslides. | \$3, \$2 kids 3-11<br>(must be accompanied by adult) |

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

## QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

### **Quotes from 2002 oral history conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>11</sup>— About THEN**

“There was a time when we were all one parish [Basilica of St. Josaphat]. We were all one neighborhood from the cemetery [Forest Home] into Bay View. But when that blasted freeway came, it split us in two. From that point on there was this disconnect in the neighborhood, which I think exists to this day.”

“I lived on south side where Kosciuszko Park is--next to [the] alley off of Lincoln. In 1927 I played in Kosciuszko Park. I had a married brother living between Becher and Lincoln, where the freeway is now. My father came here in 1892, naturalized in 1901. We were under German rule at the time [in Poland]. . . The old south side was very clannish, I remember.”

“The neighborhood was very cozy and comfortable. We had a lot of churches. The churches with schools were really filled—had 35 to 40 kids in class. Lots of nuns around.

It was a very comfortable and simple kind of life. We didn’t have TV—had radio. We had soft-ball and ice skating after school. We used to ice skate at Kosciuszko Park on the lagoon. We’ve lost a lot of life in terms of simple pleasures. We used to do picnics. Life was centered around the school, jobs—had a lot of jobs in the neighborhood. We had factories--Nordberg, Superior Dye Set, Maynard Steel Casting, all good jobs for people.”

“We had a fractured neighborhood early on with opposition to [building of] the Basilica from the *Kuryer Polski* [Polish daily newspaper]. This went on for some time. Things got much better under Father Baran. Father Baran from Baran Park put together the interior decoration [of the Basilica] as it is now.”

“In the earliest days of the neighborhood the idea was that we were a closed neighborhood on the south side. We had the idea here in the neighborhood that if you did not help build the church, you did not belong to the neighborhood. I think that’s where the idea of a closed neighborhood started.”

“In my childhood I remember the gravelly roads, neat houses—essentially the same houses that are here now were here then--back in late 20s. The houses are still in the same shape as they were then, just different paint and siding. Better windows, but the structure’s the same. Roads have been improved since then. The parks are the same as they once were. Business places on Lincoln changed. Lincoln was really busy then—a lot of mom and pop businesses—grocery

stores, meat markets, banks, savings and loans, drug stores. Picadilly Ice Cream was the hang-out on 9th and Lincoln. People of the neighborhood would stop there. There were three theaters on Lincoln—on 10th, 11th, and 14th. Back then we had little gas stations and then the corporations came in and bought everything out--food stores, fruit stores, grocery stores, theaters gone. Local photographers gone.”

### **Quotes from 2010 oral history updated by Urban Anthropology Inc.—About NOW**

“There is a lot of competition for jobs here. The Latinos here are very hard workers; it has always been so. They work in factories, auto parts factories, produce places. Most that come here are poor and have nothing, and slowly they begin working to start and buy things and get on their feet. The Latinos--especially Mexicans--open up restaurants.”

“Today the Basilica has 1400 to 1500 families--about 60 percent are Polish, 20 to 25 percent Latino--all English masses. The Polish national community today attends St. Vincent de Paul church and many Latinos are at St. Anthony’s and St. Stan’s”

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<sup>11</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-Houses on corner of S. 3rd St and S. Chase



Today's neighborhood-  
Lincoln Field basketball courts



Today's neighborhood-  
Kinnickinnic River looking north from Baran Park

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<sup>1</sup>Photo attribution: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c2/Tony\\_Kubek\\_1961.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c2/Tony_Kubek_1961.png)

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods*.

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 Dr. Jill Florence Lackey at: [jflanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:jflanthropologist@currently.com)