

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The neighborhood has two parks, both named after partners that helped found the neighborhood. One is Burnham Park and the other is Rogers Park. They are virtually next to each other along 35th Street between Rogers and Mitchell Streets. The two parks include a playground, two sports fields, a basketball court, men's and women's bath houses, a gated wading pool, and a maintenance shed.

Homes are generally well-maintained and a large proportion are frame and brick bungalows. The neighborhood is strongly residential, but has small commercial corridors.

Burnham Park is home to a large number of churches and religious organizations—more than 10 times the average for Wisconsin neighborhoods.

HISTORY

What do cream city bricks and the Burnham Park neighborhood have in common? The answer is George Burnham. In 1843, George and his brother Jonathan moved from Buffalo to Milwaukee to make their mark. These two brothers discovered the light colored clay that was used to create Milwaukee's famous cream-colored brick. This discovery led to the nickname of Milwaukee as the "Cream City."

George and his brother developed a brick business that manufactured 15 million bricks annually. George also partnered with Daniel Rogers and John Becher in 1871 to purchase a large parcel of land and map out what would become the Burnham Park neighborhood. In addition, they gave their names to three of the streets that run through the neighborhood—Burnham, Rogers, and Becher Streets.

Early populations

The earliest populations that found Burnham Park their home were Germans—some wealthy. Working and middle class Italians and Poles arrived soon thereafter. Many were attracted to the jobs available at factories and railroad shops in the Menomonee Valley, just a mile's walk from Burnham Park.

In the early 20th century, the Burnham Park neighborhood caught the attention of noted architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. He built six houses on Burnham Street in his Prairie Style with its open design, light-filled rooms, and leaded glass windows. It is not known exactly why Wright found this neighborhood desirable, but the location was very close to the Milwaukee Electric Railway & Light Company's streetcar rail lines. A century ago, residents could take the "City Service" line from South 31st Street and Burnham to anywhere in the city and as far away as East Troy. In terms of city development and transportation, the site may have seemed ideal.

By the 1920s, one street in Burnham Park would become known locally as the “gold coast of the south side.” This was Layton Boulevard, named in 1909 after Frederick Layton, one of Milwaukee’s most honored philanthropists. The boulevard, with its upscale homes, attracted wealthy and white collar citizens alike. Many of those were upper middle class and some may have fallen into the upper class stratum.

Current populations (as of 2017)

The Burnham Park population of just over 8,000 residents is much more diverse today. Over half of all residents are Latinos (most with ancestry in Mexico), and Spanish is the first language spoken in most households. The neighborhood continues to attract European Americans. Most of these have German or Polish ancestry, and nearly 100 Italians still live in Burnham Park. About 1 in 20 residents each are Hmong or African American.

Today, nearly half of the neighborhood falls into the lower middle class stratum, with annual household incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Nearly one-third are low income. The main jobs of residents are in the fields of production, administration, and food service.

INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **El Rey Plaza**, 3524 W. Burnham St., is a Latino food market
- **St. Joseph Center**, at 1545 S Layton Blvd. is run by the School Sisters of St. Francis (see photo). The SSSF were very effective in ministering to the early German and Polish populations on Milwaukee’s South Side, and today serve all populations.
- **Frank Lloyd Wright homes**, between 26th St. and Layton Blvd. on Burnham St. (see above, and photo)
- **Burnham Park, Rogers Park**, 35th St. between Mitchell St. and Rogers St.
- **A.L.B.A. School**, 1712 S. 32nd St., a bilingual Spanish/English elementary school with a focus on the arts (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.

TOUR OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT HOMES			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Year-round, select Sat.'s & Fri.'s 12:30-3:30pm	2714 W. Burnham St.	Tours of restored home of famed architect.	\$15 adults, free for children under 16 (with parents)

MITCHELL PARK DOMES			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon. 9am-12pm	524 S. Layton Blvd.	A place to experience a desert oasis, a tropical jungle and special floral gardens all in one morning.	Free at time designated

GINGERBREAD LAND—HOLIDAY SHOW			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jan. Sat. & Sun.	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S Layton Blvd.	Visit a gingerbread house covered in snowy frosting and candy canes and gum drops, among the poinsettias and decked holiday tree.	\$7 Adults, \$5 senior or disabled or 6-17, free to kids 5 & under

SUMMER ON OLYMPUS: SUMMER FLORAL SHOW			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun. to mid Sep., 9am-4pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S Layton Blvd.	Opportunity to see the best in summer blooms.	Free on Mondays

MILWAUKEE COUNTY WINTER FARMERS MARKET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Nov-early Apr., Sat. 9am-12:30pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy from Wisconsin small farms.	Free

GARDEN IMPRESSIONS SPRING FLORAL SHOW AT THE DOMES			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
May, 9am-5pm	Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, 524 S Layton Blvd.	The experience of a spring garden as an outdoor art gallery in the Show Domes amongst the brilliant tulips, Easter lilies, hydrangeas and marigolds, including easels displaying paintings of the domes done in the styles of Monet, Cezanne, and Van Gogh.	Free Mon.'s at 9am-12pm

MUSIC UNDER GLASS			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jan. 6:30	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S Layton Blvd.	Live music and legendary stars.	\$7 Adults, \$5 senior or disabled or 6-17, free to kids 5 & under

STUDENT NIGHTS—MILWAUKEE BREWERS			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Baseball season., select Fri.'s 7:10pm	Terrace Reserved tickets only, Miller Stadium, 1 Brewers Way	A Milwaukee Brewers games, special promotion for high school and college students.	\$10 high school and college students

TRICK-OR-TREAT STREET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Oct., Sat. 12-2pm	National Ave. between 31 st & 39 th	A scary afternoon or trick-or-treating that includes a costume contest, bouncy houses, and more (kids must be accompanied by adult). Contact Gisela at 414-385.	Free

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://mecamilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

Quotes from the 2010 oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹—*Then*

“I don’t know how old I was but I remember the ice skating. They would flood Burnham Park every winter. They don’t do it anymore. They had a little house there, a little club house and if you didn’t have skates you could rent them and if you did you could change your skates inside. And I think they held your shoes for you, you know, I remember that.”

Quotes from the 2010 oral history project conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.—*Now*

“This is a great neighborhood. We’ve got these amazing Frank Lloyd Wright homes, [and] an ethnic shop right on Burnham Street. The park is an amazing asset. Miller Parkway is within walking distance. Down in the valley is Miller Park so that’s not a big distance, and people walk from the neighborhood to Miller Park games. . . People are looking at the neighborhood as a different kind of place, not a place where you have to buy but a place where you *want* to buy.”

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.

“Over there you have this family business. You’ve got the brothers and the sister and the father all involved in it. Most of them live within walking distance. That’s a true neighborhood business. I would rather see them there than somebody who has the business and lives out in Brookfield. Every Sunday morning the dad comes down after Saturday. He’s out there to pick up the garbage that’s out. He lives a block and a half down, so we talk to each other.”

“I’m thinking of an event in the Burnham Park area. It would have been probably up here on 31st, 32nd, 33rd Streets, some years ago. [The police] got called for somebody breaking into cars. Well, the neighbors got together and they went out and they caught this kid and it was winter and it was cold, subzero, and it’s snowing and it had gotten real cold and the streets are all full of slush and stuff like that. The neighbors had started hollering and the neighbors came out and they helped each other, and they chased this kid down and one of the guys was holding him on the ground at the end of a bb gun. The kid obviously thought that it was a real gun but it was a bb gun, and he was so cold and so scared to move that he’s layin’ in the slush and it was all wet and there was too much salt for it to freeze, so he’s all soaked from this and he was so cold that his shivering was actually bouncing up off the ground. But you know, like I said, the neighbors got together.”

“Our group, Historic Layton Boulevard Association . . . we had our boulevard redone because the heavy trucking was wrecking our basements and our foundations. . . When I was growing up you could not drive a truck down the boulevard. It was a boulevard, and my grandma had a little Ford, Model-T Ford truck. My dad would take it sometimes to my house. He had to go on the back streets. If he would have drove on the Boulevard he would have got a ticket for sure. But then later, all the semis came down the street and they broke up our foundation and we had to pay for that ourselves. So we finally fought the federal government and we got our street redone and it’s illegal to come down the Boulevard now with a semi and all the heavy trucking.”

PHOTOS



St. Joseph Center on Layton Blvd.



Frank Lloyd Wright American System homes



Bungalows on 37th and Mitchell St.



Shops & businesses on 31st and Burnham



ALBA School/Carmen High School of Science and Technology



Community garden on 29th & Burnham

For more on Milwaukee neighborhoods, see 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 JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net