

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Edgerton Ave; S-W. Grange Ave;
E-I-94, W-S. 27th St

FAR SOUTH SIDE *Clayton Crest*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Clayton Crest is a moderately dense neighborhood. Home architectural styles include mostly 1950s to 1970s ranch homes and recently built duplexes. There are a few older Tudor style homes scattered throughout the neighborhood. Clayton Crest's topography is hilly, with a few steep inclines scattered throughout the neighborhood. Most of the streets follow a grid pattern but there are winding lanes in the area between I-94 and West 20th Street.

The business corridor is along South 27th Street--one of the major commercial districts in the city. The street teems with fast food restaurants, strip malls, and car dealerships. The main green space in Clayton Crest is Cooper Playground, an MPS playfield to the west of Cooper Public School. See neighborhood photos below.

HISTORY

Clayton Crest is one far south side neighborhood among many that makes up today's Garden District. The boundaries of the Garden District are those of the 13th Aldermanic District. All Garden District neighborhoods were once part of the Town of Lake, with boundaries of Lake Michigan to South 27th Street and Greenfield to College Avenues. By the mid-1950s, the City of Milwaukee had annexed the areas that today encompass the Garden District.

Early populations

Many of the far south side neighborhoods that comprise today's Garden District owe a debt to the dreams of a local Norwegian named John Saveland. Saveland owned a booming business on Water Street that provided provisions for fishing boats, steamships, and schooners that sailed from Milwaukee. And he also had an interest in real estate. In 1887 Saveland organized a group of investors that purchased 30 acres of land bordered by today's Bradley, Howard, Whitnall, and Howell. The group hoped to attract upper middle class home buyers to their project—people who would work in the city and retire to their county estates at the end of the work day.

But despite a convenient Milwaukee streetcar with stops along Howell Avenue, few lots were sold in the early days. Saveland ultimately turned some of the land into a recreational venture, with an amusement hall and grounds. It wasn't until the time of Saveland's death in 1909 that the area was finally beginning to attract settlers. These were not the upper middle class professionals that Saveland had expected, but south side working class people—mostly Poles.

Housing was reaching the far south side in the early 20th century, but it wasn't until the end of World War II that the housing market really began to boom. Newly arriving settlers were migrating from Near South Side and Historic South Side neighborhoods—mostly Poles, some Germans, and later in the century, Latinos. The Clayton Crest area was relatively slow in this development trend. By 1955 the neighborhood had only a trickle of through streets and just over 50 residences. Most of the settlers were Polish and German, but with a significant scattering of Bohemians, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks, Irish, and Armenians. See the randomly selected resident profile below.



Clayton Crest random resident (1950s)

*Name selected randomly from the 1955 City Directory in the Clayton Crest area
(photos and other information were found in public records in Ancestry.com)*

Frank C. Chovanec

Frank Chovanec was born in Wisconsin in 1914 to parents Frank Chovanec Sr. and Mary Slejza Chovanec who had made their home in Cudahy, Wisconsin. His parents were Slovaks who'd emigrated from Czechoslovakia. Frank Sr. died when Frank was only 2-years-old.

Frank's mother Mary remarried another Slovakian immigrant, Stefan Javorka, a few years later. Javorka operated a meat packer press, probably for the Patrick Cudahy meat packing plant in the area. Frank and his older sister lived with the couple in Cudahy until both married. The siblings attended Cudahy High School (see school photo of Frank to the right).

Sometime between 1940 and 1955 Frank married Lorraine M. Christensen, had a son, and moved to 5100 South 20th Street in the Clayton Crest neighborhood. He listed himself as a "tenderbody worker" in the 1940 census, which might have been a meat packing job. He remained on South 20th until shortly before his death in March, 2004.



In 1955, Clayton Crest had only 11 businesses, and most of these were on South 27th Street. See list and notes below.

<i>Addresses on S. 27th in Clayton Crest area</i>	<i>Names of businesses and organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5141	Crown Drive In Restaurant
5175	Holiday Inn Cocktail Lounge
5236	M. Medvedovic Gas Station
5265	A.H. Draham Real Estate
5430	Joseph Gurican Feed
5444	White Rock Tavern
5455	Elm Point Tavern

Notes from census and other records:

- No information was found on the Crown Drive-In or a Holiday Inn that must have operated in Clayton Crest in the 1950s.
- The Medvedovic family had recently emigrated from Yugoslavia.
- Albert H. Draham, with the real estate agency, must have been very busy post-1955, given the growth of the neighborhood. He had operated the firm from at least the late 1930s. Albert appeared to have been the son of a man by the same name who was a Russian immigrant, naturalized in 1943.
- Joseph Gurican, with the feed store, was a Czech immigrant.
- A photo of the White Rock Tavern held by the Wisconsin Historical Society shows a wood frame building with modest cottages in the background. No other information was available.

Clayton Crest area development would increase in the next decade. By the mid-1960s there were thousands of small ranch houses and cape cods extending to and beyond the Clayton Crest neighborhood.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, Clayton Crest has just over 1,500 residents. Slightly under 9 in 10 are European Americans (most still of German and Polish ancestry). About 1 in 20 each are Latinos (mostly Mexican, but including quite a few Puerto Ricans) and Asians (mostly Hmong and Chinese). There are also a scattering of American Indians, indigenous Africans, African Americans, Arabs, Palestinians, and people of multiple backgrounds in the area. The neighborhood skews young, with over one-third of the residents under the age of 20.

Nearly three-quarters of the property units in Clayton Crest are owned. The price of home ownership is somewhat high by Milwaukee standards. Select costs for nearly two-thirds of the homes (e.g., mortgages, deeds of trust, insurance, taxes, contracts to purchase) range from \$1,001 to \$2,000 a month. Rents are modest, with over half of the units going for \$501 to \$1,000 a month.

Over 50 percent of the Clayton Crest residents live in middle to upper middle class households, with annual household incomes of \$50,001 to \$150,000. The neighborhood is also relatively well educated. The proportion of residents in Clayton Crest with bachelor's degrees is higher than the proportion for Milwaukee generally and the Milwaukee metro area. The largest number of occupations claimed by residents are in the fields of sales, administration, and management. Over twice as many residents are health technicians than the proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

Gardening is a major hobby among Clayton Crest residents—a tradition carried over from the time when the neighborhood was part of the Town of Lake. In 2008, the Common Council approved a resolution to name all the neighborhoods in the 13th Aldermanic District the *Garden District of the City of Milwaukee*, capitalizing on a long tradition of gardening among residents and businesses. At the time, Alderman Witkowski said, “Residents and businesses here have worked hard to solidify this identity. We have had perennial exchanges and gatherings, lectures by noted gardeners, and even awarded area businesses landscaping awards to encourage and foster the character of our area.” The idea for the Garden District grew from discussions between the alderman and residents about the interest in and tradition of gardening and landscaping within the district. The effort began in earnest in early 2007, when a group of individuals formalized a garden committee and met regularly to create a vision for the 13th Aldermanic District that focused on gardening and landscaping to beautify and improve quality-of-life.

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.

GARDEN DISTRICT FARMERS MARKET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun. through mid Oct., Sat.'s 1-5pm	Just south of Howard on 6th St.	Market of fresh vegetables and other vendors.	Free

GARDEN DISTRICT CRAFT FAIR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Apr., Sat. 9am-3pm	3333 S. Howell	Fair of over 25 vendors, concessions, prizes, bake sale, and more.	unk

SLEDDING--WILSON			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, daytime	Wilson Recreation, 4001 S. 20th St.	Sledding hills for family and friends.	Free

GLOW SKATE			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Dec., Fri. 7:30-9pm	Wilson Park Arena, 4001 S 20th St.	Skating, glow-in-the-dark necklaces, holiday lights, music, prize drawings and a gourmet hot-chocolate bar (skate rentals available).	unk

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--WILSON			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4, 9am-10pm	Wilson Park, 1601 W. Howard Ave.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, music, games, fireworks.	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://mecahmilwaukee.com/NonFiction.html>

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹—about THEN

“I think we would have described ourselves as being mainly middle class—having a house and a car. I don’t think there were that many professionals unless you were the doctor or owned a business on the street. And the professionals lived in the community. The one thing I learned when I joined these organizations was that you didn’t really know who had money and who didn’t—until they passed away, and then you found out. The professionals lived in a house that looked just like yours. They had the same lifestyle. It was just that they had a lot of money.”

Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.—about NOW

“We make a lot of change in this area. The businesses, the area. Of course with support from our alderman, Terry Witkowski. He made everything happen. Terry was going around in the neighborhood. He came to my house and he said, ‘Can I sit with you?’ And I said, ‘Sure.’ And he introduced himself as the alderman and he said that we want to do this and that for the neighborhood. We want to change the neighborhood in a good way between businesses and the people who live here. And he is talking and I start giving him new ideas. He was giving me ideas and I was giving him more ideas. I think we spent a couple of hours just talking. And from that day we established the Gateway to Milwaukee, which is a business organization—nonprofit of course. And we established the neighborhood—the Garden District. Since then we’ve worked together as a team and I’m involved in both of them—the Gateway to Milwaukee and the Garden District.”

“Languages here. Mainly English is spoken, some Spanish. You hear Hmong spoken at the market, Arabic. I still hear some of the Polish language. I would imagine that Polish was a common language in the Garden District 70 years ago.”

“I realized early on that there was great power in neighborhood associations, but we had none. There was great power in business associations, but we had none. It helps to have them, so I went out and formed them.”

“Today, there’s a lot more cross-cultural collaboration and the reason is gardening. Everyone has something to teach and something to learn. You see different ethnic groups of people gardening next to each other.”

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-20th St. north of Clayton Crest



Today's neighborhood-Cooper Playground



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 20th & Clayton Crest



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 20th & Grange Ave.

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Rick Petrie's and Jill Florence Lackey'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 Dr. Jill Florence Lackey at: jflanthropologist@currently.com

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.