

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Greenfield Ave; S-W. Becher St;
E-S. Kinnickinnick Ave; W-I-94

SOUTH SIDE *Clock Tower Acres*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Clock Tower Acres is a small neighborhood with modest one- and two-story houses. There are many industrial buildings and restaurants along 1st Street and Kinnickinnick Avenue. The Parts House Lofts is a relatively new development created from an old industrial building.

There is some green space in Clock Tower Acres. Witkowiak Park is a small playfield at South 4th Street and West Mitchell. See photos below.

HISTORY

Clock Tower Acres got its name in the late 1980s when the Department of City Development launched its Neighborhood Identification Project. The goal of the effort was to put every inch of Milwaukee in a labeled neighborhood. The clock tower of Allen-Bradley Corp (now Rockwell Automation) was visible on many blocks just south of Mitchell Street, hence the planners gave the area the name Clock Tower Acres. The problem was that Allen-Bradley was not included in the neighborhood boundaries they created.

The area today known as Clock Tower Acres once occupied a northeastern section of an expanse known as the Old (or Historic) South Side, an area encompassing today's Kinnickinnick Avenue to 27th Street and Greenfield to Oklahoma. The Old South Side was originally developed by Polish immigrants.

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 Clock Tower Acres.

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.



Clock Tower uniqueness

Yes, Clock Tower was part of the Polonia. The commercial corridor on Mitchell Street at the time was considered the neighborhood’s “downtown” and tagged “the Polish Grand Avenue.” But looking at the businesses that lined Mitchell Street during sample years of 1930 and 1955, it is quite clear that other ethnics also found their niche in Old South Side commerce (see notes below the charts). This is a very common pattern throughout Milwaukee, where residential blocks may be dominated by people of just one or two ethnic groups, but the commercial corridors—often with proprietors living in the same buildings as their stores—are quite diverse.

The businesses and organizations that were on West Mitchell Street in the Clock Tower Acres neighborhood during 1930 are as follows. (Note that Milwaukee addresses would change in 1932, hence these are the earlier addresses.) Also see more Mitchell Street businesses in the [link to Historic Mitchell Street](#).

<i>Address on W. Mitchell St. in 1930</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
257	Goetch Brothers Barbers
259	Alex M. Alexander Restaurant
261	Transfer Restaurant (Paul Dukes)
263	Eugene J. Fry Cigars
266	Standard Oil Co. Filling Station
267	Transfer Pharmacy
“	White Eagle Pharmaceuticals Wholesaler
“	American Pharmaceuticals
“	Nokem Products Co. Medical Manufacturers
“	Walter M. Gaudynski Real Estate
269	Curtin& Wetzler Physicians
“	Jacob Ozonoff Physician
273	Stanley Fojut Soft Drinks
274	Walter Hoppe Restaurant
279	Morris Singer Grocery
283	Steve Belobrajdeck Meats
284	Mrs. Rose Lundin Nurse
286	Victor J. Slupecki Real Estate

Notes from census records:

- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Alex M. Alexander, with the restaurant at 259 W. Mitchell, was a Greek immigrant living on Orchard in 1930, His wife was named Garifalia, also a Greek immigrant.

- Paul Dukes, who owned the Transfer Restaurant at 261 W. Mitchell, was a German-speaking immigrant from Poland. His wife Agnes was born in Wisconsin.
- The 21st century Transfer Restaurant was named after this earlier restaurant.
- Walter M. Gaudynski, of the real estate agency at 267 W. Mitchell, was a prosperous businessman who lived in Shorewood. He also owned insurance and loan businesses. He was born in Wisconsin, the child of a father who was an immigrant from Poland and a mother an immigrant from Russia.
- Jacob Ozonoff, the physician at 269 W. Mitchell, was a Jewish immigrant from Russia. His wife, Ida (nee Franklin), was born in Wisconsin, but her parents were born in Russia.
- Stanley Fojut was a son of Polish immigrants who ran the soft drink parlor at 273 W. Mitchell. This was during the years of Prohibition, and many "soft drink parlors" may have been speakeasies.
- Steve Belobrajdeck of Steve Belobrajdeck Meats at 283 W. Mitchell was Austrian born. His wife Katherine was Hungarian born.

The businesses and organizations that were on West Mitchell Street in the Clock Tower Acres neighborhood between 1st and 3rd Street in 1955 are as follows.

<i>Address on W. Mitchell St. in 1955</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
101	American Pharmaceutical Company Chemical Manufacturers
"	Pipeline Products Inc.
"	Transfer Pharmacy
104	Sonny's Sandwich Shop Inc.
110	One Ten Tap Tavern
123	Joseph Bredlicks Food Market Grocery & Meats
201	Cozy Corner Tavern
217	George G. Begalke Barber

Notes from census and other records:

- This stretch of W. Mitchell within the Clock Tower Acres neighborhood was mostly occupied by noncommercial renters in 1955.
- Only Transfer Pharmacy remained on the street from 1930, with the possible exception of below.
- Joseph Bredlicks, of the grocer at 123 W. Mitchell, may have been the descendant of Austrian- born Steve Belobrajdeck of the market in 1930 (with a name shortened), as no Bredlicks appear in census records for Milwaukee or nearby areas.
- George G. Begalke, the barber at 217 W. Mitchell, was a Polish immigrant. He lived above his barber shop and also took in roomers.

A few years later an interesting individual came to live on the border of Clock Tower Acres and Historic Mitchell. See below.

Neighborhood resident profile (1960s) *(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

Lorine Niedecker

Jonathan Williams, director of the Jargon Society, once wrote that “Lorine Niedecker is the most absolute poetess since Emily Dickinson.” While she made her home on Black Hawk Island in Wisconsin, in 1963 she met and married Albert Millen of the Historic Mitchell Street neighborhood, an industrial painter at Ladish Drop Forge. Lorine moved into the neighborhood. The couple first moved to a flat at 2042 South 6th Street and later to 539 West Maple on the border between the Historic Mitchell and Clock Tower Acres neighborhoods. The couple stayed in the city during the week and headed for Black Hawk Island on weekends.

Niedecker met Millen on Black Hawk Island when Millen knocked at her door inquiring about a nearby cottage. The couple found they shared interests in the natural environment and married that year. Niedecker didn’t even tell him she was a poet (or a nationally acclaimed one) until they were married.

During her Milwaukee years she wrote poetry on the neighborhood that mentioned the various landmarks, including the Basilica of St. Josaphat. Her books published after her move to the Old South Side included *T & G: The Collected Poems, 1936–1966, North Central, and My Life By Water*.

Niedecker was the subject of a 2011 biography, *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet’s Life*, by Margot Peters. While researching the book, Peters visited the home on South 6th where Niedecker had once lived in the Historic Mitchell Street neighborhood in order to capture the ambience of the poet’s Milwaukee years.

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 in the Walker’s Point area in the 1920s and slowly migrated south into the neighborhoods 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 Southeast Asians—especially Hmong, Burmese and Vietnamese refugees—and 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 US 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.

Today’s population in the Clock Tower Acres neighborhood is just over half Latino, and about 1 in 4 of the area residents speak Spanish as their first language in the home. The remaining population is divided among European Americans (most of Polish and German ancestry), African Americans, and some Asians, in that order.

The Clock Tower neighborhood is young. Over one-third of the population is under the age of 20. Slightly under half the residents have an annual household income below \$25,000. The most common occupational categories in Clock Tower Acres are production, facilities (building/maintenance), and food service.

Most residents are also renters, as opposed to being home owners. Just under 7 in 10 of the property units are likely to be rented. However, the good news for people who find this neighborhood intriguing is that the rents are low. Nearly one-fifth of the property units rent for under \$500 and most rent for \$500 to \$1,000 a month. This is low rent, even by Milwaukee standards.

INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Hope House**, at 209 W. Orchard, an organization dedicated to ending homelessness in Milwaukee and creating healthy communities.
- **Parts House Lofts**, at 215 W. Maple, built in 1921 and used as a parts house for decades (later renovated in the early 2000s to hold 60 units). See photos.
- **Witkowiak Park**, at 4th & Mitchell, named after Norbert R. Witkowiak, the founder of Witkowiak Funeral Home (previously Tadych) on the same block (whose son James served as alderman of the southside 12th district for decades). 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.

DOORS OPEN MILWAUKEE ON HISTORIC MITCHELL			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sat. thru Sun.	Mitchell St.	Opportunity to tour the inside of two of Mitchell Street's iconic sites: St. Stanislaus Church and the Modjeska Theater.	Free

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

Quotes from 2002 oral history conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹— About THEN

“The community beyond Polonia was rural [in informant’s childhood]. It was country past Oklahoma. You married people in your own neighborhood. The churches were important, really important.”

“You didn’t have much interaction outside of Polonia. Few had cars. We used the bus or street cars. Some worked outside the neighborhood—most not.”

“The wars were important for the neighborhood. World War One, the Polish people didn’t hesitate to enlist. World War Two, lots of Poles enlisted--didn’t wait for draft. Very few sought to be deferred. Polonia was very patriotic. In the 1960s the U.S. began to change. Polonia changed. You had hippies, then yuppies.”

“Dances and picnics were big. The kids went to the dances with their parents. We would stand on dad’s feet and dance. The whole community was a family. You’d have some kind of party or event. One would pick up an accordion, another picked up a fiddle. Not really planned.”

“In those days we played cards and board games at the taverns. Kids played softball. The adults went bowling on free days. The Polish bowled—it was a joke. There were more bowling alleys here then. They used to hand-set pins—kids would do it. It was a way to get together with family and friends.”

“There was a very strong egalitarian value in Polonia. If people rose too high they would tend to get squashed down.”

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

“The Mexicans today are so much like their Polish forbearers. They work hard, have businesses that support their culture, aren’t in your face, don’t interrupt, and don’t flaunt their achievements.”

“There is so much diversity here, with Puerto Ricans, Poles, Native Americans, Columbians, Mexicans, and more. My father [Serbian immigrant] understands what it means to be in that position. He talks about that all the time and it is what he has to offer people. He has always felt comfortable in this neighborhood.”

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.

PHOTOS

Today's neighborhood-
Norbert R. Witkowiak Park



Today's neighborhood-Looking north at 2nd & Maple



Today's neighborhood-
Norbert R. Witkowiak Park playground



Today's neighborhood-Parts House Lofts



Today's neighborhood-
3rd & Orchard Street (note the Allen-Bradley
clock tower in the distance)

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