

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-W. College Ave; **S**-W. Rawson Ave;  
**E**-S. Howell Ave, **W**-S. 13<sup>th</sup> St

# FAR SOUTH SIDE *College Heights*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

College Heights has very little in the way of residential housing. The few homes that exist tend to be late 19th century colonial, early 20th century bungalows, and 1950s to 1960s ranch houses. The residences are mainly along Rawson, College, Howell, and South 13th Street.

The rest of the neighborhood is occupied by the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) campus, industrial buildings, and office parks or municipal buildings. There is open green space along Howell Avenue that is part of the MATC Campus. See neighborhood photos below.

## HISTORY

College Heights 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.

### *College Heights specifics*

College Heights is named after the street on its northern border, College Avenue. The street was actually given that name in the 1890s when Downer College had announced plans to move to today's Grant Park area. However, the move—at least to that location—never took place.

During the first half of the 20th century, a handful of settlers migrated into the College Heights area. But the neighborhood did not seriously begin to fill up until after World War II, and even then, very slowly. By the late 1950s, the area had fewer than 20 residences and no businesses. Many of the new arrivals were families of GIs returning from the war. The majority



of the homes in the 1950s that were within today's College Heights boundaries stood on the south side of College Avenue. Most of the residents were Polish and German, with a scattering of Norwegians, English, and Irish. The neighborhood did not develop a commercial corridor.

An example of a somewhat typical family that settled in the College Heights area after World War II is the following.

### **College Heights family profile (1950s)**

*(Photos and other information were found in public records at Ancestry.com)*

#### **The Czarnatas**

Sometime after the end of World War II, Raymond J. and Phyllis Bernadette Czarnata (nee Sienko)--both descendants of Polish immigrants--moved to a home at 313 West College Avenue. Neither Phyllis nor Raymond hailed from the Milwaukee area. Phyllis was born in Beaver, Wisconsin in 1922, and Raymond in Lena, Wisconsin in 1918. However, both moved with their families to the Milwaukee area as children—Phyllis to West Lincoln Avenue in the Town of Greenfield and John to South Howell and Edgerton in the Town of Lake (both areas that would later be annexed into the City of Milwaukee). The couple may have met at a Polish function.

In 1942, at age 24, Raymond enlisted in the military. He served the duration of World War II. Phyllis and Raymond married either during or shortly after the war (see their wedding photo). The two had a daughter, Donna Lee, who later married a man with the surname of Nipko.

It is not known how long the Czarnatas lived in the College Heights neighborhood. By the middle 1990s they had moved to Arlington, Texas—perhaps to join their daughter's family or other relatives. John died in May 1995 and Phyllis in July 1996. Both were buried at Arlington Cemetery.



Changes took place in the College Heights area beginning in the late 1970s. First, the Milwaukee Area Technical College added a campus in Oak Creek. The college needed significant acreage when it opened its Center for Energy Conservation and Advanced Manufacturing (ECAM) at the Oak Creek Campus, with a 3.5 kW wind turbine, three solar photovoltaic systems, a solar thermal energy system, and a geothermal heating and cooling system. Much of that acreage extends into the College Heights neighborhood (see photo below).

Second, the population demographics in the neighborhood were changing. Latinos that had settled in the Walker's Point area in the 1920s had begun to move further south in the 1970s. By the early 1980s many had found their way into the Garden District. In addition, the Islamic Center of Milwaukee, built in 1982 in the Garden District's Mitchell West neighborhood, was also attracting new populations to the area, including Arabs, Jordanians, and North Africans.

## Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, College Heights has fewer than 1,000 residents. Nearly 7 in 10 are European Americans (most still of German and Polish ancestry, but with a substantial number claiming Irish). Just under one-third are Latinos (mostly Mexicans, but including quite a few Puerto Ricans). There is also a scattering of African Americans, Arabs, Jordanians, American Indians, people of multiple backgrounds, and Asians (mostly Filipinos, Koreans, Laotians, and Japanese) in the area.

College Heights' households have a median income of just under \$60,000 a year, placing them in the middle income strata. The largest number of occupations claimed by residents are in the fields of administration, sales, production, and education. The neighborhood also has a large proportion of fire fighters.

Gardening (or as some apparently say—farming) is a major hobby among College Heights 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

### LOW COST MOVIES: VALUE CINEMA-OAK CREEK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, matinees and evenings	6912 S. 27th St., Oak Creek	A Marcus Theater with 8 screens and value pricing.	\$2 Wed.-Mon., \$1 Tue.

### EGYPTIAN COPTIC BAKE SALE—OAK CREEK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Dec., Sat., Sun. 10am-6pm	St. Mary & St. Antonious Coptic Orthodox Church, 1521 W. Drexel Ave., Oak Creek	Christmas bake sale, ethnic food, church tour, Egyptian souvenirs.	Free

### TASTE OF EGYPT—OAK CREEK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Aug., Fri. 12-8pm, Sat. 10am-8pm, Sun. 11am-7pm	St. Mary and St. Antonious Coptic Orthodox Church, 1521 W. Drexel Ave., Oak Creek	Opportunity to sample Egyptian foods at Egyptian Christian church, alcohol-free family fun.	Free

### OAK CREEK LIONSFEST

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Sep., Fri. starts 3pm, Sat. 12pm, Sun. 9am, Mon. 12pm	9327 S. Shepard Ave., Oak Creek	Labor Day long weekend festival with food, Brew City Wrestling, raffle, midway rides, and more.	Free

### OUTDOOR ICE SKATING--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, only when ice is 6 inches thick	Sheridan Park, 4800 S. Lake Dr., Cudahy	Ice skating for adults and children (heed "thin ice" signs).	Free

### EASTER BUNNY AT PULASKI--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Mar., 12-3pm	Pulaski Park, 5400 S Swift Ave, Cudahy	Bunny sitting for photos, bake sale, and family-priced hot dog lunch.	Free

### JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4, parade begins at noon	Sheridan Park, 4800 S. Lake Dr., Cudahy	Parade, music, cheer teams.	Free

### SWEET APPLE-WOOD FESTIVAL--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jul, Fri. 3-11:30pm, Sat. 12-11:30pm, Sun. 11am-8pm	Cudahy Park, 3000 E. Ramsey Ave., Cudahy	Festival of carnival rides, raffles, live music, food, beverage, and more.	Free

### NATIONAL NIGHT OUT--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
First week Aug., weekday, 4-8pm	Cudahy Family Library, 9151 W. Loomis Rd., Cudahy	Fun evening of free food, games, chance to dialogue with local police and community organizations.	Free

### SANTA IN THE PARK--CUDAHY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Dec., Sun. 12-3pm	Pulaski Park, 5400 S Swift Ave, Cudahy	Visits with Santa, treats, photos, and more.	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.<sup>1</sup>—about THEN

“The thing I remember from being a paper boy is that they all had flowers, and that’s part of where the idea of the Garden District came from. People had flowers—not in front of their house—but alongside of their house. And the back of their house where I might deliver papers.”

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

“[The neighborhood] used to be pretty homogeneous. Not now. There is a really large refugee population around the Howell Avenue apartment complex. There is an ESL school. The community garden founder is a full-time volunteer there. There are a lot of neighbors that are Hispanic and Latino; and a lot of folks who are settling in and around where the Islamic Center is--most of the people going to the Islamic Center are native to Milwaukee. There are some refugees--a lot of folks from Burma/Myanmar. Particularly higher during periods of unrest. And there’s Hmong farmers at the Garden District farmers market.”

“I think this neighborhood has been and remains largely white European background. But over the last 35 years, because of the purchase and operation of the Islamic Center, quite a few Muslim families have moved into the area. Thirty-five years ago there were practically none.”

“I think in the past as a younger kid you didn’t pay much attention to things like this [diversity]. Now again, I think you see a little bit of intrusion from people outside of the neighborhood. And also, ignorant people and racists that are not open to people of color. You might see people talking down to people. Luckily you don’t see too much hatred where I live. . . The more you can get people out of their houses . . . You get people talking, like planning a block party. Then you may not judge people by the way someone looks.”

---

<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-Howell Ave looking west – MATC Campus



Today's neighborhood-13<sup>th</sup> St. & Pelton Dr.0



Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on the 6800 block of  
Howell 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](mailto:jflanthropologist@currently.com)



[www.urban-anthropology.org](http://www.urban-anthropology.org)