

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Becher St; S-W. Cleveland Ave;

E-S. 16<sup>th</sup> St; W-S. 27<sup>th</sup> St (partial) W. Forest Home Ave

# SOUTH SIDE *Forest Home Hills*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Forest Home Hills is a densely populated area. A large portion of the neighborhood is occupied by Forest Home Cemetery. Residences are mainly two-story wood frame houses and bungalows. Pulaski Park comprises a small portion of the southeastern section of the neighborhood. See photos below.

## HISTORY

Forest Home Hills is named after the Forest Home Cemetery that preceded the development of the surrounding areas by decades. The Forest Home Cemetery was established in 1850. European founders of Milwaukee, several mayors, major African American activists, and brewery tycoons have been buried there.

### Early populations

The earliest known humans in the Forest Home Hills area were Late Woodland people on the grounds of today's Forest Home Cemetery. Here 50 circular mounds and several effigy mounds were located. These were surveyed by Increase Lapham in the 1850s.

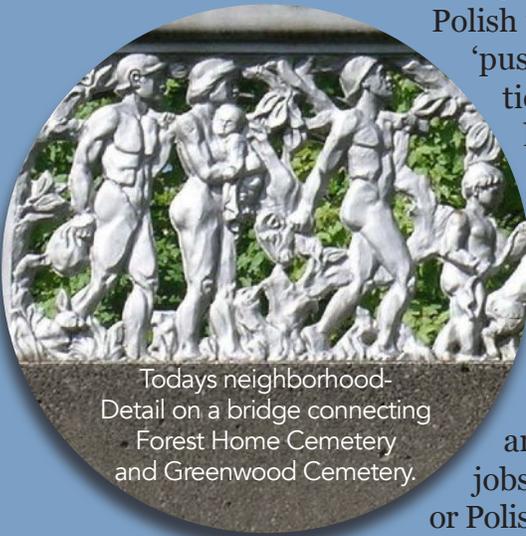
At the time of first European contact on Milwaukee's Old South Side, there was also an Indian village in the cemetery area. At the intersection of Muskego and Forest Home, a village of about 150 thrived and planted cornfields nearby.

The next major population to settle on the Old South Side was the Poles.

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 Forest Home Hills.

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. Poles also opened scores of their own businesses to complete the self-sufficient neighborhood.



Today's neighborhood—  
Detail on a bridge connecting  
Forest Home Cemetery  
and Greenwood Cemetery.

## Lincoln Avenue

Lincoln was always the main commercial corridor for Forest Home Hills. Even during the years of the Great Depression, the street teemed with businesses. See the list from 1935 and notes below.

<i>Addresses on W. Lincoln in the Forest Home Hills area-1935</i>	<i>Businesses, organizations, offices from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1601	Anton W. Wojcieszak Funeral Director
1612	Lincoln Radio and Electric Service
1617	Edward Druminski Baker
1621	Sanitary Fish Market
1625	Accurate Dye Works
1628	Joseph Duzynski Tavern
1629	John Bartclak Plaster Contractor
1631	William A. Sieczkowski Grocery
1700	Drozniakiewicz Pharmacy
1707-1703	Ignacy Gardocki Tavern
1706	John Kumelski Dry Goods
1709	John Janz Delicatessen
1720	Vacant store
1724	Emil M. Schmidt Barber
1727	Harry Lichtig Grocery
1817	Lincoln Avenue School
1822	Liberty Sweet Shop
1830	Mrs. Frances R. Janz Midwife
1834	Stanley J. Sierszynski Tavern
1838	Joseph T. Wanasek Grocery
1841	Benson R. Smerlinski Meats
1845	Edward Borkowski Filling Station
1900	Frank Wiskowski Tavern
1918	Edward Wojciehowski Grocery and Meats
1919	Vacant Store
1922	Michael Skarzynski Shoe Repair

<i>Addresses on W. Lincoln in the Forest Home Hills area-1935</i>	<i>Businesses, organizations, offices from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1933	Walter Zulkowski Tavern
1938	Anton J. Sedlak Baker
2000	Stanley Kozlowski Tavern
2002	Stanley Kozlowski Grocery
2018	Helen Teske Dressmaker
2020	Stanley Burzynski Painter
2040-2042	Michael J. Skowronski Tavern and Bowling
2100	Vacant Store
2300	Phillips Petroleum Company Filling Station
2320	Windler Motor sales

#### **Notes from census and other public records:**

- The commercial corridor on Lincoln in the Forest Home Hills neighborhood was overwhelmingly run by Poles.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants. Most lived at the same address as their business.
- The residents of Forest Home Hills had their basic needs met in the neighborhood with 5 grocers, 2 bakeries, a barber, a funeral parlor, 3 butchers, and a pharmacy.
- Edward Druminski's bakery lasted for decades at this address. He was the son of a Polish immigrant.
- Joseph Duzynski, with the tavern, was a Polish immigrant. He'd been in the auto body field before he opened his tavern.
- John Bartelak, the plaster contractor, was the son of Polish immigrants. Prior to taking up the trade of plasterer, he'd worked on his parents' farm on College Avenue.
- Ignacy Gardocki, with the tavern, was a Polish immigrant. His establishment was originally permitted as a "soft drink" place during the Prohibition era.
- John Kumelski, with the dry goods store, operated that store on Lincoln since prior to 1920. He was a Polish immigrant.
- John Janz, with the deli, had previously had a grocery store on Mitchell. He was an immigrant from the German sector of Poland.

- Harry Lichtig, the grocer, was a Polish immigrant.
- Frances R. Jahnz, the midwife, was a Polish woman born in the German sector of Poland. Midwife offices were very common in Milwaukee during the Great Depression.
- Stanley J. Sierszynski, with the tavern, was the son of Polish immigrants. His establishment had been permitted as a “soft drink” parlor during Prohibition.
- Joseph T. Wanasek, the grocer, was an anomaly on the street. He apparently was not Polish. His parents had come from Germany and Bohemia.
- Edward Borkowski, with the gas station, had worked in an auto shop before opening his own business. His parents were from the Russian sector of Poland.
- Michael Skarzynski, the shoe repairman, was an immigrant from the Russian sector of Poland. He’d worked in a railroad shop before hanging out his own shingle.
- Walter Zulkowski, with the tavern, was a Polish immigrant. His place was permitted as a “soft drink” parlor during the Prohibition era.
- Anton J. Sedlak, the baker, was another anomaly on Lincoln. He was a Czech-speaking immigrant from Czechoslovakia.
- Michael J. Skowronski, with the tavern, was a Polish immigrant (see profile below)
- Stanley Kozlowski, with the bar and grocery store, was the son of Polish immigrants.

The Poles were gradually joined by a scattering of other ethnic groups, mainly from Europe. But for a century, the Poles dominated the area. This all began changing in the 1970s. See a profile of a very interesting family below.

## **Forest Home Hills family profile (1908 to today)**

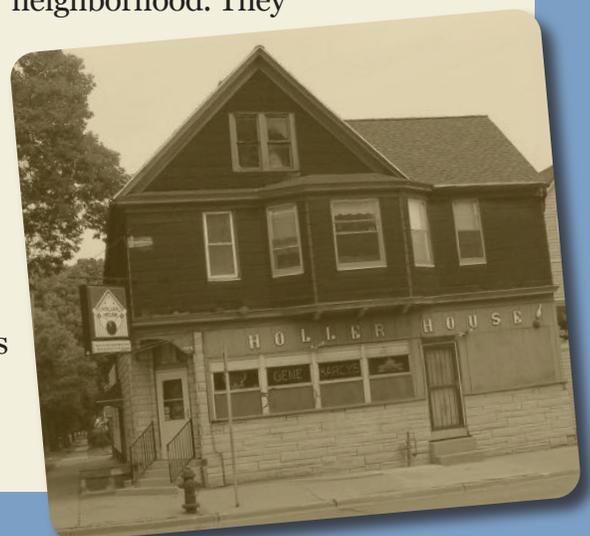
*(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

### **The Skowronskis**

In 1908, “Iron Mike” and Constance Skowronski opened Skowronski’s bar and bowling alley at 2042 W. Lincoln Avenue in today’s Forest Home Hills’ neighborhood. They lived upstairs with a houseful of children. In its early days, the tavern offered hot beef sandwiches and a down payment on a gallon of beer, both for 25 cents.

During Prohibition, the bar continued legally as a soft drink establishment. While soft drinks were no doubt available, so was the hard stuff. Liquor was stored under a baby’s crib, as the owners believed (rightly so) that the police would not look there.

When Mike and Constance died, son Gene and his wife Marcy took over the bar. They renamed it Gene and Marcy’s. Gene served as an army staff sergeant in World



War II. When he died in 1990, wife Marcy continued to operate the iconic business.

The bar became known for several things. First, it took on the name of Holler House in the 1970s when a German woman complained of all the noise inside the tavern. Second, it began a tradition in mid-century to collect bras, and to this date, the tavern has over 1,000. Third, it was rated by Esquire as one of the best bars in America in 2008. Fourth, the bar still stands at the same address, looks the same, and houses the oldest certified bowling alley in the United States. Two of their lanes are still tended by pinsetters.

### Current populations (as of 2021)

The population today in Forest Home Hills is solidly Latino and young. Just under 8 in 10 residents identify as Hispanic, and Spanish is the first language spoken in over half the households. Approximately 4 in 10 residents in the neighborhood are under the age of 20. Nearly half of all adult residents in Forest Home Hills work in production or food service. Fewer than half the Forest Home Hills households fall into the low income stratum (with under \$25,000 annually), but the percent is still higher than it is for Milwaukee households generally.

About two-thirds of the property units in the neighborhood are likely to be rented, but this is primarily due to the large number of duplexes in the area. Forest Home Hills has a lot of bars—in fact over 3 times the number of bars for the same sized area in Wisconsin.

To see a comparison of businesses on Lincoln Avenue during the Polish occupation and during the Latino occupation, click on [Lincoln Village](#).

### INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Forest Home Cemetery**, aon 200 acres between Cleveland Avenue (north), Lincoln Avenue (south), 27th Street (west), and 20th Street (east), has a listing on the National Registry of Historic Places (see photo).
- **Holler House**, at 2042 W. Lincoln, a tavern that houses the oldest certified bowling alley in the United States (see above).
- **Pulaski Park**, nestled between Windlake Avenue (north), 18th Street (west), 16th Street (east), and Cleveland Avenue (south), has an indoor swimming pool, tennis court, wading pool, tot lot, basketball court, and lighted sledding hills.

### 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.

ROZGA FAMILY'S OLD SOUTH SIDE SETTLEMENT MUSEUM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
2-4 pm with reservation, email <a href="mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com">JFLanthropologist@currently.com</a>	707 W. Lincoln Ave	Museum with exhibits of Old South Side history up to current dat	Free with groups of 2 or more

### 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

### TOUR OF FOREST HOME CEMETERY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily 8am- 4:30pm	2405 W. Forest Home	Tour the beautiful Chapel Gardens, Landmark Chapel, and the Hall of History that tells the story of Milwaukee dignitaries, including European founders of Milwaukee, several mayors, major African American activists, and brewery tycoons	Free

### OPEN SWIM—PULASKI

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1- 5pm, holiday times vary	Pulaski Park, 2701 S. 16th St.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	unk

### SLEDDING--PULASKI

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter months, daytime, lighted evenings 4:30-8:30pm	Pulaski Park, 2701 S. 16th St.	Sledding day or night on lighted hill.	Free

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

## QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

### Quotes from 2002 oral history conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>1</sup>— About THEN

“There was a time when I was a child that my grandparents would take me to Forest Home Cemetery for Sunday picnics. It was just about every Sunday. This was, ah, in the early 1940s, maybe late 30s.”

“At that time, in the late 20s, there were some Germans, lots of Polish. We had Cramer Bakery—which was German. We had lots of bakery shops in the area. Predominately Polish though—about 60 percent Polish, maybe more.”

“World War II changed so much. Guys went off to war, women went to work. Before that guys would work and rule the roost. After the war Milwaukee grew. The first shopping center was either Bayshore or Southgate on 27th and Oklahoma. This began the deterioration of strip centers like Lincoln or Mitchell. They had cars and would drive out to shopping centers. Then larger centers developed and people could go out there for more variety. Now it’s reverting back. The change took place in many ways. If you became more affluent, you had cars; you wanted to move out to the suburbs.”

“The language was predominantly Polish then, then they learned English pretty rapidly. Kids in the 1930s were speaking English. Parents and grandparents stuck to the Polish language. Schools and churches taught classes in Polish until about 1936 or 1937.”

“The Poles worked in the factories mostly. There were a lot of jobs around. Most people were laborers. Poles were good with carpentry, metals, tool and dye business--factory things. The first Poles had glass-blowing skills. Some had fighting skills—for the armed forces. You see the two statues of the Poles in the area parks—Pulaski and Kosciuszko— they were soldiers.”

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

“In the past five years there are many more Hispanics. More Latino stores, restaurants from 6th to 20th on Lincoln. Many more businesses in the area now. Was a tranquil place and is still.”

“When I moved in about two years ago, I thought this was almost the most beautiful area in the city.”

“St. Vincent de Paul does something on Saturdays for kids and the Polish language. Much of the area today is Hispanic. You have Asians in the area. There’s someone from just about all ethnic group in [the] area now.”

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<sup>1</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-Detail on a bridge connecting Forest Home Cemetery and Greenwood Cemetery on Cleveland Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Forest Home Cemetery



Today's neighborhood-Holler House



Today's neighborhood-Academy of Excellence





Today's neighborhood-Houses on 19th & Harrison

For more information on Milwaukee neighborhoods, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* and Jill Florence Lackey's and Rick Petrie'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: [JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net)