

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-W. Roosevelt Dr (partial); **S**-W. Capitol Dr;  
**E**-N. Teutonia Ave, **W**-N. 30th St (partial)

# FAR NORTH SIDE *Garden Homes*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The most common architectural styles of homes in the Garden Homes neighborhood are bungalow and Tudor, which were popular in the early 20th century. Garden Homes Park is a small county commons with playground equipment. See photos below.

## HISTORY

The original Garden Homes neighborhood was the wedge created by the intersection of West Atkinson and North Teutonia Avenues. Today the neighborhood extends west to 30th Street.

The neighborhood has a unique history.

### Early populations

Until the 1920s the area that is today the Garden Homes neighborhood was a sparsely populated rural patch of land occupied by a few widely-spaced farms. The farm owners were nearly all Germans.

The original fan-shaped Garden Homes housing project was built in the early 1920s under Milwaukee's second Socialist mayor, Daniel Hoan. The project had been championed by Milwaukee's first Socialist mayor, Emil Seidel, who went on to purchase a home in the subdivision. Garden Homes was the first municipally-sponsored cooperative housing project in America—an unprecedented experiment. In city documents, Seidel is quoted as saying the following: "We do not expect to usher in the cooperative commonwealth in one or five years, but we do intend to do all our limited means permit to make Milwaukee a better place to live in."

At the time, the original Garden Homes was still surrounded by farms and undeveloped land. The wedge created by the intersection of West Atkinson and North Teutonia Avenues was made up of small homes on small lots, organized around a boulevard-like green park, which still stands today. Tree-lined streets had charming names such as "Port Sunlight" and "Hampstead."

Typical of Milwaukee's north side at the time, most of the residents were German. The neighborhood was organized along cooperative principles which meant every resident owned shares in the neighborhood. The homes were built and sold at cost to avoid making profits—the profit motive being generally unpopular with most socialist leaders.

Below are resident profiles of two individuals of German ancestry who ended up accomplishing much in their own chosen fields. See the following pages.



Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on N. 24th St.

## **Garden Homes Resident Profile (1930s)**

*(Information and photo from census and other public records)*

### **Emil Seidel**

In 1920, Emil Seidel, his wife Lucy (nee Geissel), and daughter Viola lived at 1153 Nineteenth Street (now 2860 North 19th) in today's North Division neighborhood. At the time, the 55-year-old Seidel was finishing his last term as Milwaukee alderman, ending an illustrious political career. A Socialist, he was first elected alderman in 1904. He was elected mayor of Milwaukee in 1909 and served until 1912, becoming the first Socialist mayor of a major city in the United States. During his time as mayor, Seidel established the public works department, the first fire and police commission, and a city park system. He also succeeded in cleaning up corruption in Milwaukee, including closing brothels and "sporting parlors" (similar to today's casinos).

Emil Seidel became the vice-presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket in 1912, pairing up with Eugene Debs. The two won 901,551 votes in the 1912 presidential election, 6 percent of the total vote.

Much changed in Seidel's life between 1920 and 1930. He moved to 4431 North 25th Street in the Garden Homes neighborhood—the cooperative venture that had been established under Daniel Hoan's administration. He and wife Lucy divorced. Seidel found himself returning to his creative side from his earlier years. Born the son of Germans from Pomerania, Seidel had an artisan's background. His first interest was wood crafts. At age 13 he dropped out of school to become a woodcarver. At age 22, still fluent in German from his home, he traveled to Berlin to hone his woodcarving skills. He worked at his trade during the day and attended school at night.

It was in Berlin that he became interested in socialism and suspended his work perfecting his craft in exchange for a political career. However, once in the Garden Homes neighborhood, and later living with his daughter's family nearby, he revisited his esthetic interests. Until his death at age 84 in 1947, Emil Seidel passed his days composing music, painting, creating poetry, and writing his autobiography (see photo<sup>i</sup> to right).



## **Garden Homes Resident Profile (1940s)**

*(Information and photo from census and other public records)*

### **Tom Snyder**

Thomas James Snyder was born in Milwaukee in 1936. He and his family lived at 4207 North 24th Street in the Garden Homes neighborhood. His parents, Frank Snyder and Marie Snyder (nee Buettner) were of German, Cornish, and Irish ancestry. Born in Vermont, father Frank Snyder worked full time as a salesman with 1940 earnings reported at \$2,080, considerably above the national average of \$1,368 for Great Depression times. Marie Snyder was a homemaker and a native of Kewaunee, Wisconsin.

The family was Catholic. Tom attended Catholic schools and went on to graduate from Marquette University with a degree in Journalism (see one of his Marquette yearbook photos to the left). Tom began his work in journalism as a reporter for WRIT radio in Milwaukee. He

moved to television in the 1960s and became a news anchor for stations in Cleveland, Philadelphia, and New York City—eventually doing Sunday broadcasts for *NBC Nightly News*.

Tom Snyder's career really soared when he was offered the host position of the talk show, *Tomorrow with Tom Snyder*, which aired after *The Tonight Show* from 1973 to 1982. Guests included celebrities such as John Lennon, Ayn Rand, Charles Manson, and Gene Simmons.

In the 1990s he returned to the talk show format and hosted *The Late Late Show with Tom Snyder*. Some of his controversial interviews included one with Gloria Vanderbilt over her son's suicide and Robert Blake over being charged with murder.

Snyder died of complications from leukemia in 2007. He had married once to Mary Ann Bendel. The couple had a daughter.



### *Garden Homes businesses*

Throughout the early 20th century, the neighborhood expanded west. Businesses began to open on Teutonia Avenue and Capitol Drive. Below is a list of businesses on Capitol in 1935. See the notes that follow.

### Businesses on Capitol Drive between 22nd and 26th Streets 1935

Address on W. Capitol Drive	Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory
2206	Rost Floral Company
2210	Miltzer's Bakery
2310	Carl Voight Meats
2406	Capitol Tailor
2410	Capitol Shoe Repair
2442	Lemke's Pharmacy
2444	Square Tailoring Company
2452	Lemke's Service Station
2456	Capitol Drive Barber Shop
2458	Capitol Drive Garage
2478	Barkow's Hardware Shop
2482	Frank J. Crowley Grocery
2500	Ball Beauty Shop

### Notes on businesses from census records:

- These neighborhood businesses generally met the residents' food needs, which included grocery, bakery, and butcher shops. Other needs were met by a barber, hardware store, pharmacy, and shoe repair shop.
- Carl Voight, the butcher, was a German immigrant.
- The Lemke's were German and owned several businesses on Capitol, which may have also included the shoe repair shop.
- The Barkow family was also German.
- Frank J. Crowley was Canadian born and had lived in Michigan before ending up in Milwaukee.

The residents of Garden Homes survived the Great Depression and World War II, but the loss of manufacturing jobs in the 1970s through 1980s took its toll on the stability of resident families.

### Current populations (as of 2021)

In more recent years the recession and the waves of foreclosures from tax delinquencies resulted in many residents just leaving their homes in Garden Homes. Today Emil Seidel's house is in a state of disrepair, as are a few other homes in the neighborhood.

But work is being done to restore the beauty and dignity of Garden Homes. The neighborhood was placed on the National Register of Historic places in the 1980s, but it was not declared a historic district in Milwaukee until 2013 when residents organized to avoid the razing of many homes. Historic designation sometimes creates funding possibilities, such as tax credits for home improvement. In addition, the City of Milwaukee, the Northwest Side Community Development Corporation, PNC Bank, and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority worked on restoring sections of Garden Homes. Beginning in 2020, a partnership of Impact Seven and the Garden Homes Neighborhood Association worked to revitalize 10 historic homes in the neighborhood.

Today most of the Germans have left the area and slightly over 9 of 10 residents in the neighborhood are African American. Women significantly outnumber men and young people under 20 make up nearly half of the population. Despite nearly 50 percent of Garden Home households being near the poverty line (with annual incomes under \$25,000), home ownership is relatively high at nearly half. And the proportion of people over 25 with bachelor's degrees is about equal to that of Milwaukeeans generally. More residents work in healthcare support, administrative jobs, and production than any other fields.

### INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Garden Homes Evangelical Lutheran Church**, at the 2400 block of W. Roosevelt Drive, with an active youth ministry, a school, various programs, and a basketball team in the WELS High School Boys' Basketball League.
- **Garden Homes Park**, at 2600 N. Atkinson Ave., a community square with playground equipment.
- **Emil Seidel's home** at 4431 N. 25th St., a two-story house with a barrel-vaulted porch, the one-time home of Milwaukee's first Socialist mayor.



## 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.

FREE FAMILY SWIM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Tue. 6:00-6:55pm females; 7:00-7:55pm males	Washington H.S., 2525 N. Sherman Blvd., enter main gym door on Sherman Blvd.	Swimming. Children 7 and under must be accompanied by adult. Swim caps can be purchased at site. 875-6025	Families, free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-12:30pm	Sherman Park, 3000 N. Sherman Blvd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games.	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 reprinted from JS Online article by Mary Louise Schumaker on April 16, 2016<sup>1</sup>**

"We have a gem [neighborhood], this jewel. This is something that is really important not just for us and our neighbors but, if you step back, this is one of the more important areas in Milwaukee."

– *Joe Bova*

"I fell in love with this house. I absolutely love the people in the community."

– *Mia Price*

"I will be here until the end. This is a place that we love."

– *Bernice Love*

*If you have an interesting comment on this neighborhood, please send an email to [JFLanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)*

<sup>1</sup> <http://archive.jsonline.com/entertainment/arts/historic-garden-homes-district-struggles-to-find-its-future-b99698594z1-375944821.html>

## PHOTOS

Today's neighborhood-Garden Homes Park



Today's neighborhood-  
Garden Homes Evangelical  
Lutheran Church

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 Dr. Jill Florence Lackey at: [jflanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:jflanthropologist@currently.com)

<sup>1</sup> Photo attribution: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c1/Picture\\_of\\_Emil\\_Seidel.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c1/Picture_of_Emil_Seidel.jpg)