

# NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Grasslyn Manor is a neighborhood of moderate population density. It has a large number of Tudor-styled homes with stone or brick facades. Most of the neighborhood streets follow a grid pattern. The exception is Roosevelt Drive that runs at a diagonal from Fond du Lac on the east to North 60<sup>th</sup> on the west. See photos below.

## HISTORY

There are several neighborhoods that comprise a larger area known as Sherman Park. Grasslyn Manor is a neighborhood on Sherman Park's northwestern border.

Residents began to settle Sherman Park in the late teens and early twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many were attracted to the suburban look of the area that at this time was the edge of the city. Developers had created wide, tree-lined streets and boulevards, but the beautiful homes were the neighborhood's signature.

### **Early population**

The first arrivals to the area were primarily Germans and Czechs migrating from various Milwaukee neighborhoods. Later migrants were diverse groups representing over 20 nations from nearly every continent. However, the largest of the later arriving groups were Jewish- and African-Americans. To understand the later migration patterns, one must look to another Milwaukee neighborhood that thrived in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Bronzeville origins**

The name of that lost community is Bronzeville. The Bronzeville community had been home to the ancestors of many key players in the current Sherman Park neighborhood. The community that would be called Bronzeville by many residents was located in an area between downtown Milwaukee and North Avenue and roughly 1<sup>st</sup> Street to 17<sup>th</sup> Street (widest of the disputed boundaries).

The area had first been home to a large segment of Milwaukee's German community. By 1910 a 10,000-strong population of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe (including Russia and the Ukraine) had settled in the area. Within a few years African Americans from the South began their Great Migration to the North in response to needs to fill jobs in mainly urban centers. By the 1950s the black population in Bronzeville was nearly 50,000.

Two institutions that would later be critical to the stability of one of Sherman Park's neighborhoods, were founded in the Bronzeville area. The Wheaton Franciscan Hospital (also known as St. Joseph's) had its roots in a little house on Walnut Street and built its first hospital on 4th & Reservoir. The second is Beth Jehudah synagogue, which began on 11<sup>th</sup> and North Avenue and stayed until the 1950s. Both institutions are today in the St. Joseph's neighborhood of the Sherman Park complex.

Many of the older activist families in Sherman Park lived in or had close relatives in the Bronzeville area before migrating northwest. In fact, the Bronzeville area had two

dynasty families that would later be critical to the development of Sherman Park and surrounding areas. The Twerskis were one dynasty family. They had founded the Beth Jehudah synagogue. The Coggs were another dynasty family and today occupy many leadership roles in Milwaukee politics.

What happened to Bronzeville? Bronzeville was leveled in the late 1950s and 1960s. During these years, two government programs were displacing major populations in Milwaukee. One program was the Urban Renewal Administration, which had been designed to improve central city housing. During the same time period, the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission was building major freeway corridors in the heart of the city. One corridor ran right through the heart of Bronzeville. Over 8,000 homes were lost and nearly all of its business district.

Among the residents that moved from Bronzeville to Grasslyn Manor was T.W. and Pauline Coggs. See their profile below.

### **Grasslyn Manor resident profile**

*Photos and additional information was found in public records in Ancestry.com.*

#### **Theodore Washington and Pauline Redmond Coggs**

Theodore Coggs and his wife Pauline (nee Redmond) lived at 3600 N. 49<sup>th</sup> Street in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both were African Americans who had obtained remarkable scholarship and civic success for the times.

Theodore was born in Oklahoma in 1916 to parents Reverend Isaac and Buella Coggs. His family later moved north with the Great Migration to Wisconsin where he graduated from law school at UW-Madison and served in the military in World War Two.

Pauline was born in Kentucky in 1914 to parents J.B. and Josephine Redmond. The family also moved north during the Great Migration and Pauline graduated from the prestigious University of Chicago in 1934 (*see graduation photo from Ancestry.com*). Sometime during the late 1940s she met and married Theodore. They had one son.

The couple joined Theodore's family in Bronzeville and set up a law office on the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Street, where they remained until the area was cleared during Urban Renewal and freeway building. During his career, Theodore Coggs tried cases that went all the way to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Both Theodore and Pauline served on numerous high profile committees involving community issues and civil rights.

Both Theodore and Pauline were recipients of many honors. Theodore received the E. Francis Stratford award of the National Bar Association, the Human Relations award from B'nai B'rith, and a Citation of Merit from the Milwaukee School Board. Pauline had an educational foundation set up in her honor.

Theodore died in 1978 and Pauline in 2005. Both are buried at Forest Home Cemetery.



Grasslyn Manor was very slow in attracting commercial enterprises to the neighborhood. As late as the end of the 1950s the area had less than a handful of businesses.

### Current populations (as of 2017)

As new populations left the central city and moved into the Sherman Park area, the neighborhoods faced their own challenges. At times residents struggled to understand cultural differences, a challenge that still exists today when new populations arrive.

The ethnic groups themselves were internally diverse, and some moved in and out of the area. The history of the Jewish population in the neighborhood was particularly complex. The original Jewish population was comprised of Reform and non-practicing Jews, with a few Orthodox. When this population migrated out of the neighborhood and into the suburbs, they were eventually replaced by a strong Orthodox population that lives in all of the Sherman Park neighborhoods today, and worships at Beth Jehudah Synagogue. They developed their own self-help organizations and school (Yeshiva Elementary School).

The largest ethnic group in the Grasslyn Manor neighborhood is African American (over 75 percent). They also developed their own self-help organizations and faith communities in the area. In fact, Grasslyn Manor has over 15 times the number of religious organizations within its boundaries than the average for Wisconsin.

Grasslyn Manor is a well-educated neighborhood, with residents over 25 having substantially more college degrees than Milwaukee generally. Residents are also more likely to own their own homes. Home ownership rates are over 50 percent.

## INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Sherman Perk**, at 4924 W. Roosevelt, a popular coffee shop and café that had once been an eyesore gas station (see photo)
- **Capitol Drive Lutheran Church**, at 5305 W. Capitol Dr.

## 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.

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 4 <sup>TH</sup> CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4 <sup>th</sup> , 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 from oral history of Sherman Park conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2009: About THEN**

“We bought a home from someone here in 1961—a Greek Orthodox family. The whole idea of the Folk Fair was started in our home. Women would cook, bake, start this. They inherited the house from his parents and his wife was president of MPS. At the time I was renting on 48<sup>th</sup> Street and my partner was on Townsend.”

“My uncle wanted to move into a middle class area because of his profession. That was something that African Americans were urged to do. The more income, the farther away you go.”

“By the time I moved here we certainly had people who had a German background. By the time I moved here most of the reformed Jews had moved away. And the residue of them is quite obvious with all of the synagogues. I've known Italians, Korean or Filipinos, Polish Americans, Scandinavian Americans--so there is a diversity there. By the time I moved in, most of the original stakeholders are gone. One of the things historians notice is that Jewish, usually reformed Jews or Protestants are the most mobile of Americans. They are the ones who seem to be constantly building houses and moving. The people who moved in here, the people who developed this area, were those two mobile groups. A large number of them were German Protestants and Jewish groups. We can see that in the Lutheran Churches in the area and we can see that in the Jewish synagogues in the area. These groups moved out of the city where they were in tight ethnic conclaves, they moved to here and then the next generation moved out of here and that pattern is replicated in most American cities. These groups are the most mobile.”

“I’m going to tell you a little story to express the types of connections people had. Across the street, his name was John, I don’t know his last name. He would always sit on his stoop and watch what’s going on. I’ve been in his house once or twice and it hasn’t changed a bit since the ‘30s. And one day, years ago, I asked my neighbors, ‘I haven’t seen John,’ and they said, ‘I haven’t seen him either.’ What happened is, one of my neighbors went over and knocked on the door. He never answered so we called the police and found a way to get into the house and found that he had fallen a day or so earlier. He was helped to get to a hospital.”

### **Quotes from oral history of Sherman Park conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2009: About NOW**

”The community I was with during the earliest years, the average age was probably about 65, now its 30s. So when I moved to the community and started associating with the children in the community, there were Rabbi Twerski’s kids and my kids. Today they have a school on 51st and Keefe with 200 children. We have an adult learning center with eight full time Rabbis and we have a re-emerging community. So, those things at that time when I became involved with it, there was an attempt to restart the community. Now it is a very resourceful and enriching community.”

“Everyone just kept their homes up. It was an old German ethnic thing. You have your home, you keep your home up, you do your lawn, you keep it clean--everything’s clean.”

“People took pride in their yards, the neighborhood made it known so if someone was playing in someone else’s yard, the kid would be reprimanded. It was the way civility worked here in the Sherman Park area—same for all races.”

“I think that what comes into my mind foremost now is the Jewish community. You know, this is basically a Hasidic Jewish community and they follow the Torah--they follow it to the tee. Everything about them and their lifestyle is based on the Torah. So there are a lot of cultural differences that many people in their community are trying to become very familiar with. So, just on a day to day kind of exchange, men don’t shake hands with women. Those kinds of things. They stay very much to themselves in their community. That is very much part of their culture. Like, I could pass an Orthodox Jewish man, and as being a woman, he will not look at me. He will just continue to walk. Well, I understand that. And most people understand that because that’s a part of their cultural practices. So you learn and you’re not offended by it . . . well, I’m not offended by it. There are others who reach out; they are very warm, very friendly. There are two men I know who will reach out to shake my hand, but it’s not often, because you know, they are not supposed to do that.”

“Well I’ve been in pretty much everybody’s house on this block, no matter who they are. It’s no different. The only difference is on the outside, the barbequing. African Americans do a lot more barbequing than anybody else does. I’ve been all over the world, and its things more associated with being poor than anything, and that is how the kids are treated and how the kids behave and lack of discipline or something like that.

You can usually tell the difference between a family that has disciplined kids or undisciplined kids and it's usually related to economic status.”

“A quixotic quest to save a forlorn gas station was my brown field of dreams. On Roosevelt, which is now called Sherman Perk, trying to prevent the Alderman from having the eyesore razed. By having press releases which turned into an article in the *Journal Sentinel* which led to meeting Bob Olin on the corner who has lived on the corner for years said ‘I'd like to put a coffee shop there.’ The brown field clean-up people, the grant writing people, he took it from there and we now have a coffee house, and a cleaned up brownfield site. I think that's an amazing story. . . it says everything about this neighborhood, it's history, it's culture, and we need a place to get together as people.”

## PHOTOS



Sherman Perk



Typical Tudor style houses (49<sup>th</sup> & Nash)



Capitol Drive Lutheran Church



51<sup>st</sup> Blvd. with two story brick and stone Tudor style houses



For more information on Sherman Park, 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 [JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net)