

Approximate boundaries:

N-Fairy Chasm Dr; **S**-W. Greenbrook Dr;

E-N. 76th St; **W**-N. 91st St

NORTHWEST SIDE *Hilltop Parish*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

There are very few residential homes in the sparsely populated Hilltop Parish. Some houses occupy an area south of West Fairy Chasm Drive on North Joyce Avenue along the eastern edge of the neighborhood. Most of the housing is colonial and ranch style and appears to be recently built. Hilltop Parish has no business corridor. The main development is the Northwest YMCA Child Care Center in the center of the neighborhood.

The name of Hilltop Parish fits the neighborhood's topography, with gently rolling to steep hills everywhere. Most of the area is woodlands and open fields. See photos below.

HISTORY

Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's northwest side once comprised the Granville Township in Milwaukee County, which extended from Hampton Avenue on the south to County Line Road on the north, and 27th Street on the east to 124th Street on the west. The Milwaukee neighborhood of Hilltop Parish was once in the Town of Granville.

Early populations

According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* (March 22, 1877) there were originally three small settlements in Granville. The first, in 1835, was the family of Jacob Brazelton which included 11 sons. The second was duo Daniel R. Small and W.P. Woodward from Indiana who pitched their tents in the center of the Granville area shortly after the Brazelton family arrived and later built homes. The third group of settlers, the Joseph R. Thomas family and S.C. Enos, arrived shortly after Small and Woodward.

Within a few years a new group arrived from the town of Granville in Washington County, New York. The assemblage included the Evert, Brown, Crippen, Lake, Dutcher, and Norton families. They gave their new home the name of their former home in New York.

But it was not these earliest settlers that established much of the culture of Granville, Township. That role belonged to a wave of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans) who arrived just a few years later from Telford, Pennsylvania, including the Wambold, Leister, Scholl, Barndt, Price, Bergstresser, Borse, Klein, Martin, Huber, Groll, Horning, and Lewis families. The Pennsylvania Dutch, under the leadership of Samuel Wambold, quickly established the German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church (now known as Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1847. The following year, the church's pastor, Wilhelm Wrede, called a meeting of local Lutheran ministers at the church. This group would later become the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A museum of these early synod activities now stands on 107th Street (see outings).

In the 1840s there were over 200 people living in Granville Township, and the numbers continued to grow. A small Irish community settled on Granville's eastern border to the center of the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. But during these early years, Granville Township remained strongly German, and more Germans arrived every year.



Today's neighborhood-
View from east of the YMCA
looking west

Economic prosperity in Granville

Save for the era of the Great Depression, economic prosperity reigned in Granville during most of its history. This was due partially to the work ethic of these early residents. The township remained predominantly rural through the early half of the 20th century. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin.

Movement toward annexation

In 1956 the residents and property owners of Granville were given a choice to consolidate with the City of Milwaukee. Needing services that Milwaukee could offer— especially water--the majority of voters said yes to the referendum. By the 1960s, the western portion of Granville (16.5 square miles) was annexed by Milwaukee and the eastern section consolidated as the Village of Brown Deer. Milwaukee became one of the few large cities in the United States that still had working farms within its boundaries.

Changes to former Granville area

The large area that had been Granville Township was beginning to attract more settlers in the 1960s. Among them were African Americans.

In the second half of the 20th century, African Americans began to migrate to the neighborhood. This happened for two reasons: (1) the need for housing following the razing of over 8,000 homes in the African American Bronzeville community in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s (see [Halyard Park neighborhood](#)), and (2) the availability of family-supporting jobs in industry in the former Granville community. As in most German-dominated areas in Milwaukee, the integration of the new population proceeded relatively smoothly. Many African American families were able to purchase homes and move into the middle class.

While most neighborhoods that had once been part of Granville Township were attracting more settlers, this was not true of today's Northridge and Northridge Lakes' areas. By the end of the 1960s the two neighborhoods had only a handful of residences— mostly farms—and no businesses. Almost none of the roads that exist in these neighborhoods today had been built then. But major change was about to happen.

Changes to the Hilltop Parish area specifically

Between 1972 and 1974 the Northridge Shopping Center and the Northridge Lakes housing development both opened. The pioneering Northridge was planned and designed as a regional center with a two level mall and four anchors: Boston Store, Gimbels, J.C. Penney, and Sears. The mall soared in popularity during its first decade in business (see quotes from the Granville oral history below). But problems began to plague the area. The deindustrialization movement and attendant decline in household incomes that began in the 1980s arrested the economic prosperity of the area. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent, from a peak in 1963 to the present. Neighborhoods that once thrived were in decline. Northridge Lakes, while designed as moderate income housing, never had the chance to rise to its expectations.

The success of the shopping center and the housing development were both dealt a critical blow in 1992 when Jesse Anderson stabbed his wife to death in the parking lot of the mall. He falsely claimed that two black men attacked them and stabbed his wife. Urban legends followed. Many people attribute this crime to the eventual downfall and closure of Northridge mall and the unpopularity of the nearby housing units. Northridge Shopping Center closed in 2003.

However, at the time that Northridge was failing, the Hilltop Parish neighborhood did attract some resources of its own. In year 2000, The Northwest YMCA opened on 55 wooded acres. The country environment was ideal for Northwest YMCA Early Childhood Education Center, where children could learn about their environment. Another resource was added in 2012, due in part to a public servant from Georgia. See his profile below.

Hilltop Parish profile

Clarence Dean Alford

Together with two Georgia Rotary Clubs, “Dean” Alford founded the Miracle League. One of the leagues is located on the grounds of the Northwest YMCA.

Although Alford’s work impacted the Hilltop Parish area, it is doubtful he ever visited Milwaukee. Born in Atlanta in 1953, he earned a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. He used his skills to build a diverse and successful career. In 1989, Alford received the Georgia Consulting Engineering Council award for Engineer of the Year in Private Practice. He later founded and still serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of Allied Utility Network.

But Alford was not content with mere success in business. He served in many public offices including Chairman of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (M.A.R.T.) Oversight Committee, Chairman of DeKalb and Rockdale Counties Legislative Delegation, and is a former member of the Georgia General Assembly.

In the late 1990s, Dean Alford became interested in serving youth with disabilities. The program that was realized was the Miracle League that would provide opportunities for all young people to play baseball. Kids with special needs would be able to suit up, field balls, run the bases, and do just about everything that youth in Little Leagues could do. The kids would play baseball on cushioned, rubberized, completely flat surfaces to prevent injuries and allow access for the visually impaired as well as those in wheelchairs.

Working with two Georgia Rotary Clubs in the late 1990s, Alford helped found a non-profit to raise funds for the Miracle League. The new organization had two objectives: (1) to raise the funds necessary to build a special complex with facilities that met the unique needs of the Miracle League players, and (2) to assist in the outreach efforts for Miracle Leagues across the country.

Today there are over 200 Miracle Leagues, including the one in Hilltop Parish.

Current populations (as of 2018)

Today, there are just over 150 residents in the sparsely populated Hilltop Parish. Of these, just under 8 in 10 are African Americans and slightly over 1 in 10 are Latinos (mostly of Mexican descent). The remaining populations are European Americans (most of multiple European ancestries) Asians (all of Indian or Filipino extraction), indigenous Africans, American Indians, and people of mixed or “other” racial backgrounds.

The median household income in Hilltop Parish is just over \$27,000, placing it in the lower middle income stratum. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, transportation, and production. There are over three times more adults in the field of transportation than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

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.

TOUR OF MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD (WELS)

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By appointment	Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, lower level, 6814 N. 107th St.	Tour of more than 1,000 artifacts and pictures of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	Free, but donations welcome

GRANDIOSO ART FESTIVAL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun., Sat. 11am- 6pm	N. 76th St. and Dean Rd.	Celebration of diversity with Reggae, blues, jazz, choral music, food trucks, dance, visual arts, and the spoken word.	Free, but donations welcome

GRANVILLE BID CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SPECTACULAR

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sun. 10am-3pm	Russ Darrow, 7676 N. 76th St.	Exhibition of iconic custom vehicles.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-10pm	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fire-works.	Free

OPEN SWIM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1-5pm, holiday times vary	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	\$4, \$3 kids <12

These outings are provided courtesy of MECAH Publishing.

QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS

In *The Golden Years of Yesteryear* by Emily Treichel Boehlke (reprinted in *A History of Granville* by Miriam Y. Bird, 1996), Treichel Boehlke writes about her family's history in Granville from the mid-1800s through the late 20th century. The following are passages from this work.

“When my Grandparents Treichel were first married and lived in their one room cabin, the Indians would stop in and admire their baby. . . At Grandfather Hackbarth's the Indians set up camps in the woods every spring and fall when they came to do their trading in Milwaukee.”

“Weddings in the 1860s and later were quite different from today. The invitations were hand written by the bride and groom and they were the hosts, not the parents of the bride. . . the silk material for the brides' dresses was only 18 inches wide, so for a fancy dress, it took 18 to 20 yards of material. It was not unusual for a man to wear his wedding suit 20 to 25 years, or as long as it fitted.”

“. . . the settlers were having church services at the home of Ernest Zautcke, who had brought a reed organ from Germany to help him with his singing. One of the men could read a text from the Bible and the other religious books which they had brought from across. Mr. Zautcke then donated land for a church and school on the corner of [today's] Hopkins and Silver Spring Roads. They were served by visiting pastors from Milwaukee and vicinity.”

“School [of her parents] was then held at the house of one of the member's house one month and at another one the next month, whoever had a room big enough to seat the children.”

“The housewife had to plan well ahead for her household. There was the Arab that would come about once a month with two heavy suitcases full of notions and yard goods for house dresses. When he begged for a night's lodging the housewife would get a spool of thread for payment. Also a man with a big basket of oranges and bananas would come. Bananas were 25 cents a dozen for nice large ones. Later a baker would come once a week with bread and sweets.”

“Every mother had to be well-schooled in home remedies. . . Plants and herbs were gathered in the summer to be dried and stored for the winter, to be used for any and all ailments.”

“Grandfather would sit and knit many mittens and stockings for all the grandchildren while Grandma read to him and tended her many plants of which she had quite a variety.”

“Even the first street cars were propelled by horse power. There were only 2 lines, one on 3rd Street to Williamsburg, a section of the city at North Avenue and Center and [one] further north (an all-German settlement).”

“In the beginning of the 1900s, there was no Silver Spring Drive, not even a wagon trail west of Hopkins Street. But the plans were made to have a road there, so one of the farmers would ride through the woods with horse and wagon or on horseback as best he could, so it would be legally kept as a driveway to the next mile west.”

“During the first World War, all gathering of people was forbidden, due to the spreading of the flu. So at Freistadt Church only every other pew could be sat in, so all the people east of the church came for early services and all those west of the church came for later service. Also all talking and preaching was to be done in English, but Pastor Wehrs insisted on preaching in German as many of his older members could not understand English.”

“There were about 12 to 14 neighbors that exchanged labor. This was a hard job for the ladies also, with breakfast at 6, lunch at 9, dinner at 12, another lunch at 3, and supper at sundown. No 8 hour days.”

“When the first threshing machine came out the farmers started to raise barley for the Breweries in Milwaukee. My father raised quite a lot of it and we girls had to man the farming mill in the evening when milking was done and our lessons were finished. This was a cold and tiresome job until enough was cleared for a load to be hauled to town the next day.

Quotes from an oral history of the Granville neighborhoods currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.¹—About THEN.

“We had two acres of land [in Granville] and a small garden. And eight kids. I was the oldest of eight. [We] lived in a small house. So my mother didn’t work until later on. We were not poor but I would say that we kind of scraped to get by in terms of conserving. My parents always looked for some sales on food all that they could. They struggled a lot probably more than I realized at the time to feed us. And they felt it was important to send us to the Catholic schools, obviously. So that was an additional sacrifice. I think everyone got along well. I know a lot of kids in the neighborhood. And we hung around played baseball, played sports. Kind of did things that most kids do.”

“We were one of the first houses that were built on North 86th Street. We are directly west of the old Northridge Shopping Center. At the time we moved here it was a relatively new shopping center but as far as our street, it was pretty much the first houses here. It was a gravel road and behind our house, the land was owned by Michael Cudahy and he had a house there and it was his land. Behind us there was this big line of trees, some fields, and some woods back there.”

“I think that all the businesses that were there fed off of Northridge . . . A lot of outcrop from the strip malls came from that, so if you didn’t want to go to Northridge you could go to the strip malls and get some of the things that you needed from some of the stores. Like Joanne Fabric and Stein Mart, you know some of your middle-sized stores.”

“I remember when the Brewers were in the World Series in 1982 and everyone was out in their yard watching TV. I think people have gone to the YMCA. Now I don’t think people have money like they used to. I think a lot of people used to go over to Northridge mall and that has changed. There wasn’t a lot of stuff on the northwest side. There’s not a lot of skating rinks or anything. The kids would play on the playground in the summer but they cut all that out so I don’t know what they do nowadays.”

“Later on, I think, as I got involved in little league in Brown Deer. I suppose it exposed me to an even broader group of people and activities. What took place within the [Granville] community was July 4th picnics and celebrations. Things of that nature.”

“There was a theatre out here but there wasn’t any baseball or any place for kids to play out here.”

“We did play baseball but that was pretty much on our own. Not organized, kids in the neighborhood got together and did it. I remember, what is quite popular today, in grade school was ice-skating that some kids did over in Brown Deer Park. They had an ice skating rink on the lagoon and they also had a toboggan slide. And that was a real popular thing to do. But again we were pretty much on our own. Our parents would drop us off and pick us up when we were done.”

Quotes from the oral history of the Granville neighborhoods—About NOW

“I just watched the deterioration of it. Politically it’s been frustrating. Nothing has happened with Northridge. Then we watched the beginning of Pick n Save and now that’s gone as well. We watched the number of grocery stores that used to be there. There is not good shopping now. It’s all dollar stores; there is so much vacant space. There’s a plasma center, and a couple of liquor stores. There was an adult video store that we were trying to replace.”

“A few things have been done-- some of the associations like the condo association, the chamber, the church, the YMCA. Besides that I don’t think there was any other efforts made.”

“I can’t think of how long the YMCA has been there--at least ten years now. There are block watches in certain places. We don’t have ours anymore but we had one at one time.”

“They have this baseball field made out of some kind of rubber so that disabled kids can have their own Little League. I’m not sure what the name is. It’s at the Y.”

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-Northwest YMCA Child Care Center

Today's neighborhood-View from east of the YMCA looking northeast



Today's neighborhood-Houses on W. Fairy Chasm Dr. & N. Joyce Ave.

For more information on the history of Granville, refer to Miriam Y. Bird's *A History of Granville Township*.

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