

Approximate boundaries:

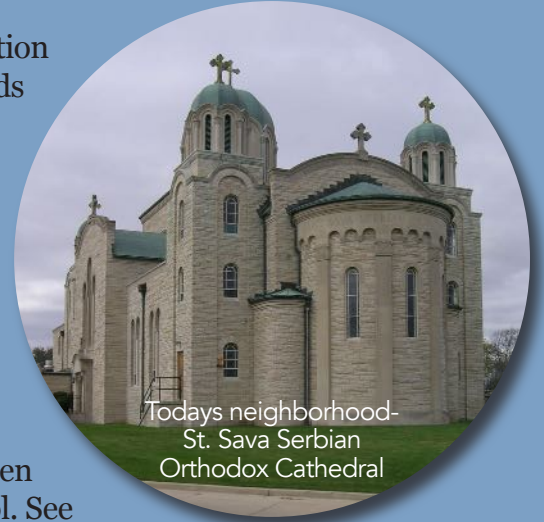
N-W. Oklahoma Ave; **S**-W. Morgan Ave;
E-S. 76th St, **W**-S. 84th St

SOUTHWEST SIDE *Lyons Park*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Lyons Park is a residential neighborhood with moderate population density. Housing styles are chiefly ranch, Colonial, and Cape Cods from the mid to late 20th century. This neighborhood has a small business corridor along West Forest Home Avenue and a few other businesses along West Oklahoma. The most prominent business is American Serb Hall, a well-known banquet facility and one-time destination venue for fish fries.

Lyons Park topography is mainly flat to gently rolling hills. The majority of the streets follow a rectangular grid except in the southeast corner of the neighborhood where West Forest Home Avenue runs at a diagonal and defines the southeastern border of the neighborhood. The major public green space is Lyons Park, a 12-acre site with a tot lot and wading pool. See photos below.



Today's neighborhood-
St. Sava Serbian
Orthodox Cathedral

HISTORY

Early populations

Much of the Lyons Park neighborhood was once a sprawling farm located in the unincorporated Town of Greenfield. See the profile of the farming family below.

Lyons Park pioneer family (19th century) *(Information found in U.S. Census and other public records)*

The Hegelmeyers

Frederick (Fred) Hegelmeyer and wife Christina (nee Kolb) arrived in the United States in 1832 from Wurttemberg, Germany. They settled briefly in Burks County, Pennsylvania, moving next to Chicago, before deciding on a home in Wisconsin. With a daughter now born, they laid claim to a large tract of land in the unincorporated Town of Greenfield—an area that would later be annexed by Milwaukee and become the Lyons Park neighborhood. The patent for 160 acres along the Janesville Plank Road (today's Forest Home) was filed in 1843.

Living on that land until his death, Fred liked to share stories about the wild character of the area during the family's early years on the farm. He described how he and Christina had to tie their first-born daughter to a tree and light fires around her to protect her from wolves and other wildlife while the two cleared the land for farming.

The Hegelmeyers belonged to the Methodist Faith. Fred and Christina eventually had ten children—six daughters and four sons. By 1900, Christina had died and Fred's daughter Ellen and son-in-law Henry Finger were running the farm. Fred, living with the Fingers, died that year, at age 92. He was buried next to his wife at Memorial United Methodist Church Cemetery in the Town of Greenfield.

According to descendants, Fred and Christina had been friends of Solomon and Josette Juneau. They are often listed among Milwaukee's notable pioneers.

Other farming families (mostly German) began to settle along Forest Home Avenue in the middle to late 1800s. Forest Home at the time was the Janesville Plank Road, serving as a well-traveled toll road that was the main link between the developing city and the country.

The Hegelmeyer farm was eventually sold. In 1926, the farm acres were platted into the Jackson Heights subdivision. The area began to attract home-seeking families of mainly Polish and German descent from neighborhoods to the north and east. Development then slowed during the years of the Great Depression.

Perhaps seeing the area as a future Milwaukee neighborhood, the Milwaukee County Park Commission purchased 15 acres in the heart of the former Hegelmeyer tract in 1946. The commissioners reserved the green area as Lyons Park, named it after County Supervisor William Lyons, who served on the County Board between 1924 and 1954.

The Serbian invasion

Serbs had occupied areas east of Lyons Park since the early 1900s. Many more arrived in the late 1940s due to displacement during World War II. The community, that had a church in the Walkers Point neighborhood, was looking for areas to expand. In 1947, the community purchased 15 acres of land near 51st and Oklahoma. By 1950 they had built Serb Memorial Hall on the tract, a facility that would be used not just for Serbian activities, but within a few short years became a destination for consumers of Friday fish fries and a gathering place for labor and political assemblies. The Serbian community began to develop more land just south of the hall, and by 1957 they build St. Sava Cathedral in the style of a 15th century Byzantine Renaissance church.

Serb Hall and St. Sava attracted many members of the Serbian community to Lyons Park—some even unofficially calling the neighborhood “St. Sava” after the cathedral. The Serbs would join the mainly German and Polish residents who were quickly populating the area. By 1960, the neighborhood was filled and had been fully annexed by the City of Milwaukee. In addition to the Germans, Poles, and Serbs, families of Croatian, Irish, Scots Irish, Romanian, Scandinavian, and especially Russian descent were moving in, creating a salad bowl of European diversity.

Auxiliary development

Because of its late expansion, Lyons Park was slow in developing commercial corridors. By 1955, a few businesses were operating on West Oklahoma.

<i>Addresses on W. Oklahoma in 1955</i>	<i>Names of businesses from <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5101	American Serb Memorial Hall
5329	Oklahoma Avenue Lutheran Church
5507	Frank C. Micale Mason Contractor
5600	Engine Co. No. 10 Truck Co. No. 17
5601	Gilbert H. Schmidt Grocer

<i>Addresses on W. Oklahoma in 1955</i>	<i>Names of businesses from <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5701	White Manor Tap Tavern
5810	Mary's Sandwich Shop (Mary Basack)
5811	Penguin Drive-In Confectionary
6000	Harold Schultz Barber

Summary and notes:

- Serb Hall, serving Milwaukee's Serbian community and Milwaukeeans generally, opened in 1950. On any given Friday, the hall will serve a ton of Icelandic cod for its fish fries. In 2021 the hall went up for sale.
- Oklahoma Avenue Lutheran Church was built by the early German settlers to the Lyons Park and White Manor area in 1932. It was rebuilt in 1953.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school and most were immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Frank C. Micale, the mason contractor, was typical of proprietors of his time. He had completed the 8th grade and was the son of immigrants from Italy. He had served in World War II.
- Harold Schultz, the barber, was an anomaly on the street in that he'd spent a year in college. He was, however, the son of German immigrants.
- Gilbert H. Schmidt, the grocer, was a machinist before opening his store. Typical of other merchants of the time, he had completed 8th grade and was the grandson of German immigrants.
- Mary's Sandwich Shop was owned by Mary Basack. See a profile of her and her family in the [White Manor neighborhood](#).

Four years later, a larger commercial corridor was expanding on Forest Home Avenue— the street where the Lyons Park settlement had begun.

<i>Addresses on W. Forest Home in 1959</i>	<i>Names of businesses from <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5121	Yeager Rambler Inc.
5147	Hugh Ayers Material Handling Equipment Company
5224	Apartments
5244	Anthony's Paint, Wallpaper, and Hardware Store
5300	Chicken Real
5400	Kearn's Pure Oil Service Station

<i>Addresses on W. Forest Home in 1959</i>	<i>Names of businesses from <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5405	Apartments
5415	Apartments
5425	Apartments
5435	Forest Lawn Apartments
5445	Apartments
5454	Ray Anderson & Son Garage and Auto Repair
5520	Molenda Plumbing and Appliances Contractors, Inc.
5556	AAA Septic Tank Cleaning Company Millard Grading and Landscaping Company Lohman Trucking Company
5602	Bob Ryan's Barber Shop
5614	Tuchel's Tap Tavern
5624	Inter-City Cab Corporation
5644	Mooney's Auto Services
5724	Apartments
5736	Apartments
5819	Luetzow Laundry and Dry Cleaners, Inc.
5820	Warren T. Gross Physician
5822	Ted's Food Market
5910	Rockey's Bar-B-Que
5917	White Rock Gardens Tavern

Summary and notes from U.S. Census and other public records:

- The number of apartment buildings on W. Forest Home demonstrates the boom in Lyons Park settlement before 1960.
- The residents' needs were well met on this business corridor, with a grocer, hardware store, plumber, drug store, physician, cleaner, barber, and several businesses serving the automobile.
- There were also two restaurants and two taverns for leisure time activities.

- Hugh Ayers, with the material handling company, did not live in Lyons Park. He and his wife Irene lived in Wauwatosa.
- Edward Molenda, with the plumbing company, was the son of a Russian immigrant. See his profile below.
- Mooney's Auto Service was owned by Frank H. Mooney who was from Minnesota. Typical of most business owners prior to 1970, he had only completed the 8th grade in school.

Lyons Park merchant profile (1950s)

(Information found in U.S. Census and other public records)

Edward Molenda

There were a number of residents of Russian extraction living in Lyons Park in the 1950s. Edward Molenda, who owned a plumbing and appliance contracting company at 5520 West Forest Home Avenue, was the son of a Russian immigrant father.

Born 1909 in Wisconsin, Edward grew up on Seventeenth Avenue (today's South 22nd Street) in the old 11th Ward, the son of John F. Molenda from Russia and Catherine Molenda from Germany. By 1930, young Edward had already taken up the plumbing trade and was working for a private company. His two teenage brothers, Henry and Leonard, were also working—Henry as an apprentice in a pattern shop and Leonard a draftsman for an electric supply company.

By 1940, Edward had married Mildred Strassburger, a daughter of a German father and Danish mother, who had been raised on Port Washington Road. The young couple moved to a rented unit on 23rd and Burnham near Edward's boyhood home and had two sons, John and William.

Despite the economic downturn of the Great Depression, documents suggest Edward was able to stay employed in the plumbing business. By the 1950s he had his own business on Forest Home. However, it is not clear that he actually lived in the Lyons Park neighborhood. City Directory records have him living on 45th Street off of Oklahoma and 93rd and Howard at various times.

It is not known whether Edward and Mildred had any other children. Edward died in 1994 and Mildred in 2006.



The Serbian community continued to contribute to neighborhood development. Using profits from Serb Hall, the community built a cultural center at St. Sava in 1972. The center became home to a variety of groups that focus on music, dance, and folklore. The community quickly began plans to open a parochial school. By 1997, when more Serbs were arriving in America and Milwaukee due to the breakup of Yugoslavia, an elementary school was added to the St. Sava complex.

During these decades, a neighborhood that had become home to Serbian cultural life and welcomed diverse Europeans would also begin to attract other populations.

Arrival of Latinos

Latinos (mainly Mexicans) began to settle on the *near* South Side in the 1920s and slowly migrated south into the Polish areas. Since the 1970s, the Mexican community has grown all over the South and Southwest Side, including River Bend.

A number of push-pull factors influenced the population changes. During the early 1900s Mexican immigration to the United States expanded because of worsening economic conditions in Mexico. A large wave of Mexicans also left the country during the political and economic turmoil created by the Mexican Revolution of 1910. In addition, both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were often recruited by local industries to fill workplace needs. Beginning in 1917, the US government implemented a series of immigration restriction policies to curb the influx of Mexicans, mainly in response to local claims that Mexicans (who often worked for low wages) were taking jobs away from ‘true’ Americans.

But they found a place to fit in. Latinos—particularly Mexicans--were able to settle successfully alongside Poles in particular because they shared so many traits in common. These included the Catholic faith, the focus on the Madonna figure, polka music traditions, similarities in childrearing and eldercare practices, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today Lyons Park has just under 1,500 residents. Approximately 8 in 10 are European American (most claiming Polish or German ancestry, but the population with ancestry in Serbia or Yugoslavia still comprises over 10 percent). The Russian families have disappeared. Just under 1 in 8 residents are Latinos (most of Mexican ancestry). There is also a scattering of African Americans, Asians (nearly all of Vietnamese descent), American Indians, and mixed-race residents.

The median household income in Lyons Park is just under \$60,000, placing the neighborhood in the middle-income strata. The occupations cited most often by adult residents are in the fields of administration, production, and education. In addition, substantially more residents work in local government and non-profit organizations in Lyons Park than in Milwaukee overall.

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.

WINTER FEST AT JACKSON PARK			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Dec., Sat. 11am-3 pm	Jackson Park, 3500 W. Forest Home Ave.	Face-painting, cocoa, crafts for kids, music, and more.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--JACKSON			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4am-10pm	Jackson Park, 3500 W. Forest Home Ave.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, free ice cream, fireworks.	Free

JACKSON PARK FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun. thru early Sep., Thu. 3:30-7pm	3300 W. Forest Home Ave.	Fresh food from Wisconsin farms, baked goods, crafts, art.	Free

AUGUST NIGHTS CONCERTS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Aug., Thu's, 6:30-8:30pm	Jackson Park, 3500 W. Forest Home (Picnic Area #2)	Concerts in park.	Free

MOVIES AT SOUTHGATE CINEMA

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily	3320 S. 30th St.	Popular movies at a Marcus Theater.	\$10, \$7.50 kids, military (with ID), seniors; less for matinees

SLEDDING

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, daytime	McCarty Park, 8214 W. Cleveland Ave., West Allis	Sledding hills for family and friends.	Free

OUTDOOR ICE SKATING—WEST ALLIS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, only when ice is 6 inches thick	McCarty Park, 8214 W. Cleveland Ave., West Allis	Ice skating for adults and children (heed "thin ice" signs).	Free

Most of 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

If you are a resident of Lyons Park and have an interesting observation to make about your neighborhood, please send your quote to JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-Lyons Park



Today's neighborhood-St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral



Today's neighborhood-Houses on S. 58th St. & W. Holt Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Houses on S. 58th St. & W. Morgan Ave.



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on S. 53rd St. & W. Ohio Ave.

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@currently.com