

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-W. Vliet St; **S**-W. Martin Dr-W. Highland Blvd;  
**E**-N. 35<sup>th</sup> St; **W**-Wisconsin Hwy 175

# WEST SIDE *Martin Drive*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Comprising little more than a square half mile in size, Martin Drive is tucked away between the Olmstead-designed Washington Park to the north and Historic Miller Valley to the south. It's chiefly one-way streets are tree-lined, and many of the homes are duplexes. Both Highland Boulevard and Martin Drive are winding streets.

Due to its small size, the neighborhood has only one commercial corridor and this is on Vliet Street.

## HISTORY

Much of the small Martin Drive neighborhood was developed in the 1920s. Unlike the elite areas on nearby Highland Boulevard, this became a working class neighborhood. Workers living in Martin Drive had several large employers nearby, including Harley Davidson, Miller Brewery, and the Transport Company. Other industrial employers were just a few blocks away in the Menomonee Valley.

Bordered by the sprawling Washington Park to the north, residents had quick access to picnic areas, programs, and the county's zoo. Many could stop to observe all the outdoor animals on their way to work or school. Much changed during the era of freeway building, when I-41 cut into Washington Park and the zoo was relocated to the far west side of Milwaukee. Many homes were also lost on 47th Street between Vliet Street and Juneau Avenue. The neighborhood became even smaller, but did not lose its cohesiveness.

## Early populations

The early population of Martin Drive was almost totally German. Many had moved from older blocks in the central city to this west side neighborhood as an "upgrade." A large number of duplexes were built to house several generations of each property owner. The early German cultural influence is still present in the Blatz Temple of Music and statues of Goethe and Schiller in Washington Park and the nearby statue of Von Steuben.

By the early to middle of the 20th century, several Greek families also settled in the Martin Drive neighborhood. They founded a chapter of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and a Greek ladies' club in the neighborhood.

## *Vliet Street*

Vliet Street quickly became a significant commercial corridor. And the street attracted shopkeepers who were not necessarily German. Included among the proprietors were Germans, Irish, Austrians, Jews, Hungarians, Croatians, Poles, Czechs, Italians, Chinese, Russians, and Scots. The following chart shows the businesses and offices that were on Vliet Street on the border of today's Martin Drive in 1933. See summary and notes below.



Today's neighborhood-Duplexes tucked away at 43rd & Martin Drive

Addresses on W. Vliet St. in 1933 on the border of Martin Drive and Washington Park	Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u>
3505	Wadhaus Oil Company Filling Station
3506	Anton Schuller Tavern
3521	H.J. Bauer Plumbing and Heating Company Inc.
3523	Clarence C. Schuld Barber
3525	J. Schumacher and Sons Shoes
3529	Frederick C. Breyer Sporting Goods
3603	Wisconsin Blind Products
3605	Apartments
3607	Iris Beauty Shoppe
3610	Rose Schuenke Dry Goods
3616	Anton A. Peserl Bakery
3700	William J. Stafeil Drugs
3704	Marion Beauty Shop
3705	Frank's Quality Market and Meats (Frank Lakosh)
3706	Frank Friedmann Tailor
3710	John L. Reisner Men's Furnishings
3711	Bernard Mildie Shoes
3714-3716	Edward Tarman Soft Drinks
3715	Robert W. Ash Tavern
3718	Abraham Hanshar Groceries
3719	Vincent Hoffer Tavern
3720	Hoerig & Koller Barbers
3724	Park Sheet Metal & Furnace Laura S. Gartzka Hem Stitching
3726	Charles J. Paterka Tavern
3737	Lyric Barber Shop
3739	Vincent J. Scagilione Tailor
3743	William Dick Tavern

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in 1933 on the border of Martin Drive and Washington Park</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3801	William Zeidler Groceries Verna Zeidler Music Teacher
3804	Lyric Theatre
3805	William A. Zeidler Confectioners
3807	Sommers Hat Studio
3813	George E. Puehler Shoe Repair
3820	Park Radio and Sport Shop Electric Meter Engineering Company
3822	Apartments
3824	Leonard Drugs
3826	Kohl's Food Market
3832	Purity Market
3900	George H. Linert Tavern
3901	Gustav H. Weichert Baker
3907	Oriental Food Company Restaurant (Joe C. Chong)
3910	Morris A. Boxer Groceries
3913	Fred C. Lipscomb Carpet Contractor
3914-3916	Behm & Thorau Tavern (Edward Behm)
3920	MFD Electric Company
3924	Cecil Bedker Barber
3930	John J. Huele Upholstery
3934	Edward Schalbe Grocery
3942	Peter Lauer and Sons Carpet Contractors
4211	Ralph N. Brodie Inc. Meters
4307	Leo Bayer Baker
4311	Louis Soffert Meats
4315	Louis H. Krueser Drugs

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in 1933 on the border of Martin Drive and Washington Park</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
4600	Washington Park Zoo
4601	Standard Oil Company Filling Station
4615	West Park Cleaners and Dyers
4617	John D. McCusker Tile
4627	Park Service Station

### Summary and notes from census and other records:

- Vliet Street certainly had enough resources to meet the needs of residents—even in the throes of the Great Depression. Included in the above are seven grocery stores, three bakeries, two meat shops, four barbers, three filling stations, and three pharmacies.
- Despite being at the height of the Depression, the neighborhood offered numerous leisure time outlets, including seven taverns, one theatre, and a Chinese restaurant.
- Most shopkeepers lived above, behind, or a few doors down from their shops.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had high school educations. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Anton Schuller, with the tavern, was an Austrian immigrant. He lived just around the corner from his bar on 32nd Street.
- Fred C. Breyer, with the sporting goods shop, was the son of a German immigrant. The store had started out as an auto supply outlet.
- Rose Schuenke, with the dry goods store, was a single woman in business. She was the daughter of German immigrants. She lived at or next door to her shop.
- Anton Peserl, with the bakery, was a Hungarian immigrant from Yugoslavia. He lived at the same address as his store.
- William J. Stafeil, with the pharmacy, was an anomaly because he'd spent a year in college. He was the son of a German immigrant.
- Frank Friedmann, with the tavern, was another Hungarian immigrant from Yugoslavia. The family spoke German and the father had been a brewer.
- John Reisner, with the men's wear store, was one of a handful of merchants on Vliet who was not an immigrant or child of an immigrant. His family was from New Jersey.
- Robert Ash, with the tavern, was the son of a German immigrant. He lived at the same address as his tavern. He'd been a chauffeur before opening his bar.
- Abraham Hanshar/Hansher, with the grocery store, was an immigrant from Poland. He was probably Jewish.
- Vincent Hoffer, with the tavern, was another Hungarian immigrant. Unlike most of the Vliet Street shopkeepers, he lived in the downtown area.

- Laura Gartzka/Gartzke, the hem stitcher, was a single woman in business. The daughter of a German immigrant, her father had operated a hardware store on Vliet but he died relatively young.
- Charles Paterka, with the tavern, did not stay in business long. The son of a German and a Czech immigrant, Paterka was doing government work by 1940 (possibly for the Works Progress Administration).
- Vincent J. Scagilioni, the tailor, was an Italian immigrant. He lived two addresses down from his shop.
- William Dick, with the tavern, was a Croatian immigrant from Yugoslavia.
- William Zeidler, with the grocery and sweet shop, had been a saloon keeper before opening his confectionary. Verna/Veronica was his daughter and she taught piano. The family is probably German, but it is not known if they are related to Mayor Frank Zeidler. They lived at the same address as the grocery store.
- George Puehler with the shoe repair place, had been apparently raised in Menomonee Falls. His father was the son of German immigrants and was a butter maker.
- The Kohl's Food Market was apparently one of the early stores opened by Maxwell Kohl.
- Gustav Weichert, the baker, was a German immigrant. He'd had that shop on Vliet since the late 1800s.
- Joe C. Chong, with the Chinese restaurant, was born in California. See his profile below.
- Morris Boxer, with the grocery store, was a Yiddish-speaking immigrant from Russia.
- Fred Lipscomb, the carpet contractor, was the son of a Canadian immigrant. He'd lived his entire life around the corner on 36th St.
- Cecil Bedker, the barber, was the son of German immigrant farmers from Dodge County, WI.
- Edward Scholbe, the grocer, was born in Germany. He lived around the corner on 34th St.
- Peter Lauer, the carpet contractor, was the son of German immigrants. At the time of this listing, he was retired and living with his daughters. His sons were running the business.
- Leo Bayer, the baker, was the son of an immigrant from Hungary.
- Ralph N. Brodie, with the meter company, was an immigrant from Scotland. He'd lived in Marinette, WI before opening his business in Milwaukee.
- John D. McCusker, with the tile store, was the son of an Irish immigrant. He lived next door to his shop.

## **Martin Drive merchant profile (1930s)** *(Information from census and other public records)*

### **Joe C. Chong**

In 1933, Joe C. Chong operated the Oriental Food Restaurant at 3907 W. Vliet. Records suggest that he originally lived in California and migrated to Chicago where he and a younger brother operated a “Chop Suey” business.

Chinese immigration to the U.S. began in the 1850s. The Chinese were searching for ways to escape problems associated with the Opium Wars that left China under European domination. Many Chinese were initially drawn to California because of the discovery of gold in 1848. Like the Europeans, they were very interested in wealth. But by the time they arrived, there were slim pickings. As a result, most of the Chinese looked for other ways to earn money. Some returned home and others ended up as permanent residents on the West Coast.

Chinese men tended to come alone to the United States for several reasons. First, it was cheaper. Second, some immigrated to America with the idea that they could “strike it rich” and then return home. Third, China had cultural norms against women traveling abroad. Because so few “struck it rich,” many men ended up becoming permanent settlers, but laws and economic circumstances would restrict them from sending home for their wives. In addition to the problems the Chinese faced in sending for their wives, local laws prohibited intermarriage between Chinese and European Americans. The absence of women among the Chinese Americans resulted in a bachelor society where the ratio of males to females was approximately 17 to 1.

The Chinese were the first ethnic group singled out for immigration exclusion. On the year that Joe Chong was born, the Chinese Act of 1882 was passed, barring further immigration of Chinese laborers and excluded wives of Chinese who were United States citizens.

Joe Chong remained in Milwaukee until at least the late 1950s when he likely died. It is not clear how long he ran the restaurant.



## **Current populations (as of 2021)**

An oral history project of Martin Drive conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2010 found a very diverse current population in the neighborhood. Included among the ethnic groups were African Americans (comprising approximately half the population), Hmong, Latinos, Irish, American Indians, Germans, Scots, Swedes, Bohemians, Welsh, English, Poles, Danes, Greeks, Asian Indians, and Italians. The various groups form a very active neighborhood association where they discuss their commonalities, differences, and needs.

The neighborhood is economically diverse with approximately three-quarters of the residents living in households with annual incomes of between \$25,000 and \$50,000 and the remainder living in households over \$50,001 (some over \$150,000).



Home ownership is a buy in the lovely Martin Drive neighborhood with select monthly costs (including mortgages, taxes, insurance, deeds of trust, contract to purchase, and more) of almost two-thirds of the properties going for under \$1,500. Rents are also a buy, with over three-quarters of the rental units going for \$500 to \$1,000.

## INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Harley Davidson Motor Company** (3700 W. Juneau Avenue). See photo.
- **Artists Working in Education** (A.W.E.) (4311-4315 W. Vliet Street), providing youth with arts enrichments programs that advance learning and cultivate community. See photo.
- **Martin Drive Neighborhood Association**, bringing together diverse groups to maintain and improve the neighborhood.

## 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.

### JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--WASHINGTON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 11am-10pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fireworks.	Free

### WINTERFEST

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jan. 10:30am-2pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Opportunity for children to enjoy a morning of fun including a craft, hike and puppet show .	unk

### EASTER EGG HUNT

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Mar., Sat. 11:45am-1pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Fun event for children and adults with Easter egg hunt.	Free

### EARLY MORNING BIRDWALK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Most Wed.'s 8-10am	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A walk for bird watchers of all ability levels to explore Washington Park for birds.	Free, but might need to register

### WEDNESDAYS AT THE SHELL IN WASHINGTON PARK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Summer months, Wed.'s, 6-8:30pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A variety of difference musical genres and bands.	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

### **Quotes from the Urban Anthropology 2010 oral history project: “Now”**

“What’s really been nice recently is the Washington Park and the revitalization of the park and Urban Ecology being there and the art walks and farmers market. And there seems to be more things that keep coming up on Vliet Street. There’s more activity.”

“I think the neighborhood association has really helped to get people a place to gripe where something might actually get done instead of just bitching--constructive griping, pointing out problems. It might be the best in the city. And there were walks for a while and we had some patrols and people would meet at a house and we would all just walk through the neighborhood together, just to be seen.”

“There have been youth things specifically for youth--a basketball thing--and they did that thing down at the school garden and all kids were invited to help out with that and learn how to grow things. We have a Halloween trick or treat night. It gets the neighborhood together. We had a neighborhood picnic and we have had clean ups--just again, generally to get everybody doing something together--adults or kids.”

“There are a fair amount of singles. There is a surge of families as of late or people planning to raise families. The people who moved here years ago probably did because they got a steal on a home and then stayed forever. Most people get here and stay.”

“When we were doing the survey, we were kind of amazed at the kids there were in the neighborhood that we didn’t know about because mom and dad didn’t let them play outside. But they were off to church activities, after-school activities, a lot of after-school activities, you know, like the CCC and tutoring, music lessons, going to see grandma, of course.”

### **Quotes from the Urban Anthropology oral history project: “Then”**

“Martin Drive changed. I know you will ask about the freeway. There were houses behind us and there was the zoo. You could walk down 46th and cross Vliet and you were on the zoo grounds. The building closed but the zoo was always open because of the park. We could hear the lions roar if the wind was coming from the right direction. I remember Samson and Sambo when they were babies and the lady caring for them was in the cage dressed as a nurse.”



“Things to do with the zoo is my recollection. When the old elephant passed we got two new elephants. There was a parade up Vliet Street. There used to be trolley cars and they would come off of 37th and Vliet. We were here at the end of World War II. And there was the big to-do about the freeway. My grandfather didn't know if our house would remain or what would happen if the plan was finalized.”

“When they put in the freeway, I wasn't here but that divided the neighborhood and it changed the face of the park because it cut right through the neighborhood because there's also a Martin Drive on the other side of the freeway behind MPS, and that's also Martin Drive, so that kind of cut off the whole neighborhood, and it cut out a significant part of the park. So what makes a park safe is that there's houses all around it, so that west side of Washington Park is up against the freeway, so there is more of the criminal activity that occurs because there's no houses to see what's going on. So I think the freeway had a major impact on many neighborhoods, but this one too. Now I like living so close to the freeway, because I like jumping on and off and going where I need to go because of my work, you know?”

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<sup>i</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-Duplexes tucked away at 43rd & Martin Drive





Today's neighborhood-  
Tree-lined streets at 43rd & Martin Drive

Today's neighborhood-  
Shops at 43rd & Vliet Streets



Today's neighborhood-  
Harley Davidson plant





Today's neighborhood-Shops at 43rd & Vliet Streets

<sup>i</sup> Photo attribution: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4d/Chopsueywithrice.jpg/640px-Chopsueywithrice.jpg>

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](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)