

**Approximate boundaries:**  
N-W. Silver Spring Dr; S-W. Villard Ave;  
E-N. Sherman Blvd; W-N. 60<sup>th</sup> St

# NORTHWEST SIDE *McGovern Park*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The McGovern Park neighborhood has medium to high-density population with a mix of early to mid-twentieth century housing stock. The most common is the ranch style. There are also Tudors, Cape Cods, and a few bungalows in the neighborhood. The main business corridor is along West Villard Avenue.

The topography of the McGovern Park neighborhood is flat to gently rolling hills throughout. Most of the streets follow a rectangular grid pattern. The main public green space is the neighborhood's namesake, McGovern Park, a 61-acre commons with a lagoon, basketball courts, softball diamond, tennis courts, a tot lot, and a senior center. See neighborhood photos below.

## HISTORY

Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's Northwest Side once comprised the unincorporated Town of Granville 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.

Today's McGovern Park was once within the Town of Granville. The neighborhood was named after its park of the same designation—an area acquired by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in 1910. First named Silver Spring Park, it was later renamed in honor of William R. McGovern, the longest serving park commissioner (1919–1964).

### 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" (actually 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.

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 in the McGovern Park area. Their settlement extended to the center of the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. In the area that would become the Havenwood neighborhood was a mix of German and Irish families.



Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on N. 58th St.  
& W. Custer Ave.

### *And more Germans*

In the early years of the 20th century a very different German community arrived to the Granville area. These were the German Russians who had left Germany for Russia in the late 1700s and settled along the Volga River and Black Sea. For about 150 years they had been allowed to keep their own language and traditions. But later Russification policies, and ultimately the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, resulted in collective departure of many from the area. Some ended up in Granville Township (many more settled in the U.S. Plains States).

Between 1910 and 1920 the German Russians set up their own colony where most built farms south of Villard and east of the railroad tracks. They organized Grace Lutheran Church at 34th Street near Villard, just east of today's McGovern Park neighborhood. The group remained relatively isolated from their neighbors—both through choice and external prejudice. After the 1917 revolution and growing Communist paranoia in America, Milwaukeeans began calling the German Russian colony “Red Town” even though most of the Germans loathed Communism.

### *Activity in the woods*

Some of the area in McGovern Park would be targeted for a prison in the early 20th century. A correctional facility then named the House of Refuge that had operated on West Windlake Avenue was outgrowing its location. Milwaukee County began purchasing farmland near North Hopkins in today's Havenwoods State Forest just north of the McGovern Park neighborhood. Ultimately totaling 402 acres, the area that was designated as the prison farm, extended into McGovern Park. Newly named the House of Corrections, the prison opened in 1917. Prisoners became bakers, farmers, and artisans, tending crops, milking over 70 Holsteins, and constructing furniture for the prison's Granville Chair Factory.

In 1941, just days after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war, the United States government began using the House of Corrections to intern German Americans. At least 49 Germans—some recent immigrants and some charged with Nazism—were rounded up from various neighborhoods in the Milwaukee area. Many would remain at the prison facility for the duration of World War II.

At the close of the war, the U.S. Army officially seized the House of Correction to use as a disciplinary barracks for soldiers and prisoners of war. During the following Cold War era, the Army established the Nike-Ajax Missile Site on the grounds. They also used the complex to train military personnel. By 1969 the Army had no more use for the site and the facility was demolished in 1974.

### *Economic prosperity throughout Granville*

Economic prosperity reigned in Granville, due partially to the work ethic of the early German farmers. The town remained predominantly rural through the early half of the 20th century. From the late 1800s to World War II, Granville was an important center for dairy and truck farming. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin—today including industrial parks and scores of companies.

By mid-century, the industrial jobs began to attract people from nearby neighborhoods, including people of color. See the example of one family in today's McGovern Park neighborhood below.

## **McGovern Park family (mid-20th century)** *(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

### **The Doxtators**

Sometime in the 1950s, Kenneth and Jane Doxtator moved to 6137 W. Silver Spring Drive in Granville, now the southern boundary of Milwaukee's McGovern Park neighborhood.

Kenneth Doxtator's family was American Indian and had left the Oneida reservation probably to seek employment in Milwaukee. His father worked as a die caster in an area factory. The family settled early on in the Yankee Hill neighborhood, living at different times on Lyon Street and East Highland. It was not unusual during these years for Oneidas to settle in the Yankee Hill area, as they received communal and spiritual support from All Saints Cathedral on East Juneau. Kenneth went to Lincoln High School, also in the Yankee Hill neighborhood. *(See his 1942 Lincoln High School yearbook photo to the right.)*



In an uncommon chain of events, Kenneth met and married a Polish girl named Jane Goszinski sometime after high school. The Yankee Hill neighborhood and Lincoln High were not venues that ordinarily attracted Poles. However, in the 1940 census, the Doxtators were living on East Highland and they rented to a boarder named Charles Koski, an immigrant from Poland. This might have been the connection whereby Kenneth met Jane.

Jane was the granddaughter of Polish immigrants and daughter of Anton and Martha Goszinski. Her father worked as a presser in a steel factory and had served in World War One. Jane grew up around 28th and Locust and went to Girls Trade and Tech High School. *(See her photo from the high school's 1943 yearbook.)*



Kenneth and Jane permanently settled in the McGovern Park neighborhood. Prior to 1995, they moved just down the street to 57th and Villard. The couple raised two sons and two daughters.

### *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 parts of 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.

The following is a sample of businesses that were incorporated into Milwaukee just after the time of annexation on Villard Avenue roughly between Sherman Boulevard and North 60th Street in the McGovern Park neighborhood. See summary points below.

Addresses on W. Villard in 1966	Businesses, offices, and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory
4300	Masonic Temple Myron Reed Masonic Lodge # 297
4333	Kerzner Concessionaries Enterprise
4923	Cher-Den Inn Tavern
4928	Wisconsin Independent Oil Gas Station
5000	Holstein's A&W Root Beer Drive-In
5031	Jerry's Enco Gas Station
5123	Villard Shop Rite Groceries
5200	Villard Beer & Liquor Depot
5214	Edward Kranz Well Drilling
5215	Northside Cleaners Inc. Boettcher's Shoe Service
5230	Hackbarth Service Gas Station
5231	Melotik's Hardware
5300	Villard Garden Tavern
5301	Buckley Cleaners and Launderers
5325	Miller's Food Market
5332	Hackbarth's Northwest Prescription Center Drug Store
5333	Northwest Barber Shop
5335	Vivian's Villard Beauty Salon
5801	KKK Auto Engineering Repair
5802	Point Drive Restaurant & Inn
5815	Point Auto Sales Used Cars
5820	Poquette's Cities Service Gas Station
5834	Mahas DX Service Station

## Summary notes from the U.S. Census and other public sources

- All the trappings of a self-sufficient neighborhood are evident on this stretch of Villard, with two grocery stores, three gas stations, a drug store, a hardware store, a barber, and two cleaners.
- Technically only the businesses on the north side (even numbers) of the street were within the McGovern Park neighborhood, but residents could easily access stores on either side of the street.
- The Hackbarth families owned two businesses on this stretch of Villard Ave. This family had a very deep history in Granville and in Granville commerce.
- One would wonder how the name of the KKK Auto Engineering company was received as this neighborhood began to integrate.

### *Arrival of African Americans*

More change was coming to McGovern Park and the former Granville area. African Americans began to migrate in for two reasons: (1) available industrial jobs, and (2) the need for housing following the leveling of their former central city home known as Bronzeville ([see Halyard Park neighborhood](#) for details). As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods where the dominant population was German, integration proceeded without incident. Many African American families were now finding their way into the middle class.

Unfortunately, the deindustrialization movement that began in the 1980s reversed this course. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent, from a peak in 1963 to the present. What had been a working and middle class area on the Northwest Side was in decline.

### Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, most of the Germans have left the McGovern Park neighborhood. Slightly over three-quarters of the 3,000+ residents in the neighborhood are African Americans. Just under 1 in 5 are European Americans (most of mixed European and German ancestry). There is also a scattering of Latinos (mostly of Mexican and South American descent), Asians (nearly all of Hmong/Lao ancestry), indigenous Africans, and people of multiple racial backgrounds in the area.

The median household income for McGovern Park is just under \$37,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle income stratum. The largest number of occupations claimed by McGovern Park adult residents are in the fields of administration, personal care, and healthcare support. There are nearly four times the number of adults in the healthcare support industry than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

## 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.

SLEDDING--MCGOVERN			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, daytime	McGovern Park, 5400 N. 51st St.	Sledding hills for family and friends.	Free



## 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

## FREE FAMILY SWIM—WASHINGTON HS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Tue.'s 6:00-6:55pm females; 7:00-7:55pm males	Washington H.S., 2525 N. Sherman Blvd., enter main gym door on Sherman Blvd.	Indoor swimming with swim caps available for purchase (children 7 and under must be accompanied by adult). 875-6025	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, fireworks.	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

**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.<sup>i</sup>—About THEN.**

“I lived just west of today’s McGovern Park neighborhood about the time of annexation. The park—McGovern—was our family recreation center. We’d walk there on weekends. The kids could play on the playground and we’d put a blanket down by the lagoon. It was so beautiful with all the weeping willow trees. In the winter there was sledding. It was just the perfect place to get away from housework and outside work. Our office would hold its summer picnic at McGovern too.”

“Thinking back [1960s], and he [pastor] definitely was promoting some of the causes of some of the racial people getting along racially. And he was definitely an advocate of peace and promoting, and being more open than perhaps some people had been to perhaps, open housing and other things of that nature. So that kind of stuck with me, because I know at the time that that was received well by some but maybe not so well by others that were in the church community.’

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

“The BID [Business Improvement District organization]--I can honestly say that we see no color. There’s the Grandioso event that we could talk to you about. There were some bands playing, some art, and eating. So I think some of the things that the BID has been encouraging is those community events like the car show--that’s a big one. We do some health fair days; we’re involved with Vincent high school. We’re always trying and poking at things. We tried a farmers market. We are doing that next year. Those things they build over time. More of the events that you do more of the ethnic blending will occur. I look at ethnic blending like seasoning in your chili--the more spices and the more different things you put in the more it tastes better. I think Granville is truly Milwaukee’s melting pot.”

“There’s a lot of good people in the neighborhood. I talk to a good number of them, whether I am in the safety and security meeting for the Milwaukee Police Department, or sometimes when we have a bigger BID event you get a lot of people that really care about the neighborhood and really want to intermingle [with] people, and there’s some pastors that are doing some great things in this neighborhood. I think there’s a lot of opportunity--but opportunity is as good as what people want to make of it. If the opportunity is there but nobody wants to do it then it falls right on its face. But it’s getting the people to get to follow through.”

---

<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



Todays neighborhood-  
Houses on N. 58th St.  
& W. Custer Ave.



Todays neighborhood-  
Houses on N. 48th St.



Todays neighborhood-  
Houses on N. 44th St.  
& W. Rohr Ave.



Today's neighborhood-  
Businesses on N. 58th St.  
& W. Villard Ave.



Today's neighborhood-  
McGovern Park



Today's neighborhood-  
Greater Mt Sinai Church  
on N. 60th St. & W. Custer Ave.





Today's neighborhood-Lincoln Creek near N. 60th St. & W. Custer 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* 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)