

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Highland Blvd; S-W. Wisconsin Ave;
E-N. 35th St; W-Wisconsin Hwy 175

WEST SIDE *Miller Valley*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Miller Valley is a sparsely populated neighborhood that has few residential properties. Most of the neighborhood space is occupied by Miller Brewery buildings and industrial and business properties. The residential streets are mainly on the eastern end of the neighborhood with a few in the northwest corner just off State Street. The most common housing types are bungalows and two-story, wood frame duplexes.

The topography of the neighborhood is, as its name implies, mostly steep hills and deep valleys. There is no public green space in the neighborhood. Any open space is part of the industrial property of Miller Brewing.

HISTORY

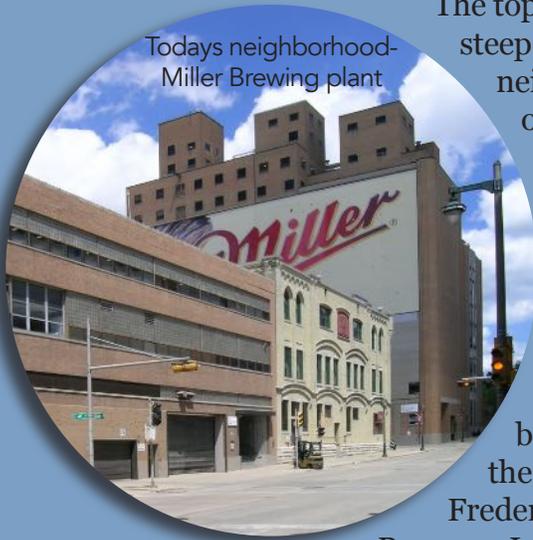
Miller Valley is named after the Miller Brewing Company that has historically dominated the neighborhood.

Early populations

The first wave of settlers to make their permanent home in the Miller Valley neighborhood were (mostly German) brewery workers. The Plank-Road Brewery, designated after the nearby Watertown Plank Road, had been opened in 1849 by Frederick Charles Best, son of Jacob Best—the founder of Pabst Brewery. In 1854, Frederick Miller, a German immigrant of means, had purchased the brewery for \$8,000. Because the brewery was then located in the unincorporated Town of Wauwatosa—far from Milwaukee’s boundaries—Miller quickly opened a boarding house for his unmarried employees. In an 1879 letterⁱ to relatives in Germany, Miller described the care that the boarders received.

Breakfast for single men (married men eat with their families) at 6 o'clock in the morning consists of coffee and bread, beef steak or some other roasted meat, potatoes, eggs and butter. Lunch at 9 o'clock consists of a meat portion, cheese, bread and pickles. The 12 o'clock midday meal consists of soup, a choice of two meats, vegetables, cake, etc. The evening meal at 6 o'clock consists of meat, salad, eggs, tea and cakes.

But the Miller boarding house was not the only one in the Valley. Shortly after the introduction of Miller, another brewery opened just up the street. George Schweickhardt, a brew master from Buffalo, New York, purchased a 3-acre tract and built the Menominee Brewery, then named after the nearby river that would supply ice for beer refrigeration. George and his wife Margaretha, both immigrants from Alsace, and their children moved to the brewery site. Because most of the brewery’s employees were single men, Schweickhardt built barracks for them to live. His daughter Magdalena was placed in charge of food preparation for the personnel. As with the Miller schedule, the Menominee Brewery employees had breakfast at 6am, lunch at 9am, midday meal at noon, and supper at 6.



Today's neighborhood-
Miller Brewing plant

One of the men that Magdalena served was the brewery's foreman, Adam Gettelman, a German immigrant. A romance broke out between the two which culminated in marriage. Adam gradually assumed much of the responsibility for day-to-day business operations and policy. When Schweickhardt decided to devote his full-time attention to a stone quarry he had developed, he left the brewing business to his son-in-law. By 1876 the name had changed to the A. Gettelman Brewing Company. See more on the Gettelman family below.

Miller Valley resident profile

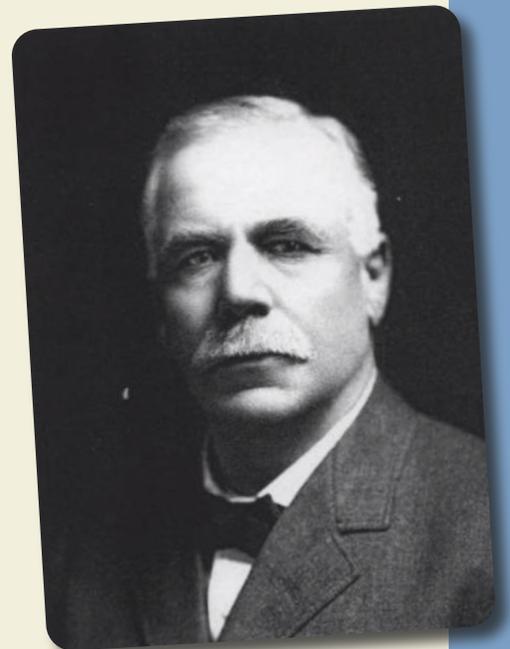
(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)

The Gettelmans

Adam and Magdalena (Lena) married in 1871. Almost immediately upon taking full charge of the brewery, tragedy struck the Adam Gettelman regime (*see photo of Adam from public records at Ancestry.com*). In 1877, fire broke out at the brewery buildings, moving as far as the home of founder George Schweickhardt, a few blocks to the south. Only about half of the brewery was covered by insurance. Adam supervised a massive rebuilding process. Despite dire beginnings, the brewery continued to produce quality beer under Adam's leadership. Unlike many other Milwaukee breweries that pushed for national distribution, Adam was content with focusing on the local market.

The Gettelmans made their home in the center of the Miller Valley neighborhood at 44th and State Streets. There they had children Emma, Amanda, William, Elfriede, and Frederick. When Adam died in 1925, his oldest son William took over the brewery. Not many years later, the reigns were handed over to youngest son Fred ("Fritz"). Fred guided the brewery through the Prohibition era and the Great Depression. He oversaw the addition of a new bottle house and office buildings.

Magdalena Schweickhardt Gettelman, who had once served meals to the brewery's single employees, lived to the age of 83. She remained at the family home on State Street with a German servant, daughter Elfriede, and son-in-law Herbert Currie until after 1930. Just before her death in 1934, Magdalena returned to New York where she had grown up.



Despite the trappings of success, life at the Watertown Plank Road breweries, was not exactly glamorous for all involved. In 1950, when a Gettelman employee, "Uncle" Charlie Schmidt retired, he discussed the conditions on the old Watertown Plank Road, when it was the only avenue to the Milwaukee market, during his early years at the breweryⁱⁱ.

The Watertown Plank Road . . . was a dirt road subject to heavy travel by wagons hauling stone from the stone quarries nearby. . . Extensive travel on this road resulted in six inches of fine dust in dry weather and a like amount of mud when it rained. From the Miller Brewing Co. to our plant was a walk consisting of two 12-inch planks side by side. Even so, we often had to wear rubber boots for there was still plenty of mud to walk through.

According to Uncle Charlie, in those days the trip from the brewery up the hill to 35th Street was a task for only the most ardent. The hill was so steep that a team of horses pulling a wagon with 35 to 40 half barrels had to be assisted with an additional team.

Despite the always crude and often toilsome conditions in Miller Valley during the early days, the very locally focused Gettelmans maintained their home there. By contrast, the Miller family did not live in today’s Miller Valley neighborhood. Frederick Miller, his second wife Lissett and their children Emil, Clara, Fred, Ernst, and Elise lived in the adjoining (and more fashionable) Historic Concordia neighborhood.

Historic Concordia began as a neighborhood of gentry. Mansions lined both Grand Avenue (today’s Wisconsin Avenue) and Highland Boulevard. In its early years, the area had some Anglo-American residents, but the German population dominated. Highland Boulevard was once coined “Sauerkraut Boulevard.” Besides the Millers, other well-heeled families living on the Concordia blocks were the Pabsts, Merrills, Usingers, Schwaabs, Vilters, Faries’s, Davidsons, (A.O.) Smiths, Hoans, and Pritzlaffs.

Post 1900 in Miller Valley

Both the Miller Brewery Company and Gettelman Brewing Company continued to grow. By the turn of the century, mechanical refrigeration had replaced ice blocks for the fermenting and maturing of beer, facilitating better brewing control and year-round production. Bottled beer with mechanical filling and labeling was introduced soon afterwards.

Prohibition was not popular among Milwaukeeans. Miller stayed afloat by introducing Miller Malt Extract during these years—a product that enabled residents to make beer at home. Gettelman also made malt syrup and produced “near beer.”

The surrounding neighborhood was nearly filled by the onset of the Great Depression. By 1936 there were just under 350 residences in Miller Valley, and most were on Highland Boulevard where there was a plethora of apartment buildings.

State Street

In 1936, Miller Valley had over 75 businesses and industries on its blocks. From its earliest days, State Street, located in the center of the neighborhood, became the main commercial corridor for the Miller Valley neighborhood. Originally called Tamarack Street, and situated near the old Watertown Plank Road, it became the street address for both breweries. As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods, the shopkeepers were usually more ethnically diverse than the residents on the surrounding blocks. On State, the merchants included people of German, Swedish, Croatian, English, and Norwegian backgrounds. Below is a list of businesses on the street in 1936, at the height of the Great Depression. See the notes below.

<i>Addresses on W. State St. in the Miller Valley neighborhood in 1936</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3535	A.J. Pietsch Carpet Contracting Company
3539	Johnson & Weborg Auto Accessories, Inc. Loy & Minturn Piston Rings
3611	George Tremper Filling Station

<i>Addresses on W. State St. in the Miller Valley neighborhood in 1936</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3931	Fred Hausch Tavern
4002	Miller Brewing Company
4026	Miller Brewing Company Bottling Department
4103-4111	Miller Brewing Company Garage
4122	Milwaukee Structural Steel Company
4135	Consumers' Fuel & Supply Company Consumers' Supply Company Building Material H. Hohenace Construction Company
4213	Wisconsin Telephone Company Storehouse
4261	John Hering Tavern
4270	Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company Yards
4315	Valley Service Station
4321	Phillips Petroleum Company
4400	A. Gettelman Brewing Company Fred Gettelman Company Snow Plow Manufacturer
4409	Husting Oil Company
4425	Super Products Oils and Grease Company
4439	Witters Foundry Supply Company
4601	Milwaukee Saddlery Company Precision Machines Company Van Horn-Kaestner Leather Company Hardware Manufacturing Company
4610	State Street School
4648	George Fehl Groceries

Summary and notes from census and other records:

- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants and most lived at their business addresses.

- A. (Alfred) J. Pietsch, the carpet contractor, was the son of German immigrants.
- Ervin Weborg, with the auto accessory business, was the son of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants. Typical of shopkeepers on the street, he'd gone as far as the 8th grade in school.
- George Tremper, with the filling station, had gone through many occupations over the years, including salesman, painter, electrician, and house manager. The son of an English immigrant, George was born in New York.
- Fred Hausch, with the tavern, was the son of German immigrants.
- John Hering, with the tavern, was a Croatian from Austria/Hungary (later Yugoslavia). He worked as a blacksmith for a construction company before opening his bar.
- Milwaukee Saddlery Company made harnesses, collars and other accessories for horses. It is possible that this company served the horses for the beer wagons of the breweries before other forms of transportation were introduced. In 1934, Harley Davidson approached the company to create an upholstered two-person seat. This developed into a strong partnership and the entire company was eventually consolidated under the name of Milsco.
- Van Horn-Kaestner Leather Company made leather counters for shoe heels.
- State Street School is today's Banner Prep School (see photo).
- George Fehl, the grocer, was the grandson of German immigrants

In the late decades of the 20th century, African Americans began to move west into Miller Valley and surrounding neighborhoods. This happened for two reasons: (1) available industrial jobs in distant Milwaukee neighborhoods, 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 Germans dominated, the integration was relatively peaceful. Many African Americans were able to obtain family-supporting jobs and purchase homes.

Miller Brewing Company continued to grow throughout these years, producing beer in cans, six-packs, and creating new products such as Miller Lite. The A. Gettelman Brewing Company was sold to Miller in 1961. Miller continued to market one of Gettelman's leading brands, Milwaukee's Best.

At the turn of the 21st century, changes came to the Miller Brewing Company. In 2002, it was purchased by South African Breweries to form SABMiller. Three years later, Canada's Molson Brewery and Coors Brewing Company merged to create Molson Coors Brewing Company. Three years after that, SABMiller and Molson Coors created MillerCoors as a United States' joint venture, becoming the second largest brewer in the country after Anheuser-Busch. The State Street brewery today is known as MillerCoors- Milwaukee.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Sparsely populated Miller Valley today has fewer than 1,000 residents. Just over half of the residents are African Americans. A little over 2 in 10 residents are European Americans (most of mixed European and German ancestry) and a little over 1 in 10 are Asians (mostly Hmong). The remaining residents are Latinos, indigenous Africans, and people of multiple backgrounds.

The median household income in Miller Valley is just over \$28,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle-income stratum. The leading occupations claimed by adult residents are in the fields of administration, food service, and production. More than twice the number of residents work in the fields of health technology, engineering, and social work than the proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

Rents are reasonable in Miller Valley, at an average of \$646 a month, compared to the Milwaukee median of \$666. Housing can be a buy also. The estimated value of detached houses in this neighborhood is just over \$150,000 compared to just over \$200,000 for Milwaukee generally, and the estimated value of single units in two-unit structures is just over \$50,000 compared to just over \$140,000 for Milwaukee generally.

INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **The Miller Valley Veterans' Memorial**, at about 40th and State St., a memorial dedicated to the employees of the Milwaukee Brewery who were called to active service and those who made the ultimate sacrifice, dedicated in 2010 (see photo).
- **Story Elementary School**, at 3815 W. Kilbourn, with the SAGE program that ensures smaller classrooms or two teachers per classroom in grades K5-3.

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.

MILLERB REWERY TOUR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Usually Mon.-Sat. every 30 min. between 10:30am and 3:30pm	4251 W. State St.	Indoor/outdoor guided walking tour of Miller Valley, with over 155 years of brewing history	Families, couples, singles, seniors, free

TOUR OF TRIPOLI SHRINE TEMPLE			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By reservation of groups of 10 or more	3000 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Forty-five minute tour of majestic temple built in 1928 with all its ornate fixtures. Lunch buffet included.	unk

HISTORIC CONCORDIA TOUR OF HOMES			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun., Sat. 10am-4pm	Meets at 3000 W. Wisconsin Ave.	Tour of homes of Concordia's early gentry and Tripoli Shrine Temple, including auctions, beer tasting, and treats.	unk

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 Miller Valley and have a quote you'd like to offer for this neighborhood, please contact JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-37th & Kilbourn



Today's neighborhood- Miller Valley Veterans' Memorial, list of those who sacrificed their lives

Todays neighborhood-
37th & Wells



Todays neighborhood-
37th & State St. looking west



Todays neighborhood-
Story Elementary School

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 47th & State St.



Today's neighborhood-
Banner Prep School





Today's neighborhood-Houses on 37th & State St.

ⁱ <https://www.theclio.com/web/entry?id=13465>

ⁱⁱ Reprinted from a 1954 company brochure via <https://www.beerhistory.com/library/holdings/gettelman1954.shtml>

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