

**Approximate boundaries:**  
**N**-I-94; **S**-W. Grange Ave;  
**E**-S. 6<sup>th</sup> St (partial) S. Howell Ave, **W**-I-94

# FAR SOUTH SIDE *Mitchell West*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The Mitchell West neighborhood partially borders the airport. There are a large number of hotels, strip malls, fast food restaurants, and bars along West Layton Avenue (see photos). Mitchell West has over three times the number of bars than the average for Wisconsin.

The residential areas have mainly 1950s to 1970s ranch-style houses and newly built condos. There are a few early 20th century bungalows scattered throughout the neighborhood.

## HISTORY

Mitchell West is one far south side neighborhood among many that makes up today's Garden District. The boundaries of the Garden District are those of the 13th Aldermanic District. All Garden District neighborhoods had once been in the Town of Lake with boundaries of Lake Michigan to 27th Street and Greenfield to College Avenues. By the mid-1950s, the City of Milwaukee had annexed the areas that today comprise the Garden District.

### Early populations

Many of the far south side neighborhoods that comprise today's Garden District owe a debt to the dreams of a local Norwegian named John Saveland. Saveland owned a booming business on Water Street that provided provisions for fishing boats, steamships, and schooners that sailed from Milwaukee. And he also had an interest in real estate. In 1887 Saveland organized a group of investors that purchased 30 acres of land bordered by today's Bradley, Howard, Whitnall, and Howell. The group hoped to attract upper middle class home buyers to their project—people who would work in the city and retire to their county estates at the end of the work day.

But despite a convenient Milwaukee streetcar with stops along Howell Avenue, few lots were sold in the early days. Saveland ultimately turned some of the land into a recreational venture, with an amusement hall and grounds. It wasn't until the time of Saveland's death in 1909 that the area was finally beginning to attract settlers. These were not the upper middle class professionals that Saveland had expected, but southside working class people—mostly Poles.

Housing was reaching the Far South Side in the early 20th century, but it wasn't until the end of World War II that the housing market really began to boom. Newly arriving settlers were migrating from Near South Side and Historic South Side neighborhoods—mostly Poles, some Germans, and later in the century, Latinos. By the mid-1960s there were thousands of small ranch houses and cape cods extending to and beyond the Mitchell West neighborhood.

Layton Avenue was quickly becoming the area's busiest street. Below is a snapshot of Layton between Howell and South 6th Street in 1970.



Today's neighborhood-  
Islamic Society  
of Milwaukee

Addresses on Layton Ave. in 1970	Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory
130	Marc's Big Boy Coffee Shop
151	Dunkin' Donuts
160	Monte Carlo Car Wash
175	Burger Castle
200	Ponderosa Steak House
401	Consolidated Freightways Trucking
512	Brat & Beer Restaurant
545	Hennis Freight Lines Inc. Mercury Motor Freight Lines O.M. Trucking Company West Shore Transport Company

**Notes:**

- As today, this stretch of Layton Ave. served the automobile, with service stations, a car wash, and drive-through, fast food restaurants. A Taco Bell opened on the stretch shortly after 1970.
- The Ponderosa Steak House at that location burned in 1972 and was reconstructed.
- The Big Boy restaurant at the time shared its space with a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.

**Current populations (as of 2021)**

In Mitchell West today, the population is highly diverse. Over two-thirds of the residents are European Americans and Middle Easterners. Approximately 1 in 14 residents are Asian and 1 in 14 are black (some African American and some Muslim Africans from areas such as Somalia). There is a distinct Muslim presence in the neighborhood. Of the foreign born residents, over one-quarter are from Iraq. The Islamic Society of Milwaukee thrives on 13th and Layton. They opened in 1982 and today own six buildings in the neighborhood, which house schools, a daycare center, a mosque, and a health clinic.

Although about one-third of residents in Mitchell West live in low income households (with annual incomes under \$25,000), home ownership is very high. Of the property units in the neighborhood, approximately two-thirds are owner occupied. The neighborhood is also relatively well educated. The proportion of residents in Mitchell West with bachelor's degrees is higher than the proportion for Milwaukee generally and the Milwaukee metro area. Despite this, the neighborhood remains mostly working class people, with the main occupations listed by residents as production, sales, and administrative.

Gardening is a major hobby among Mitchell West residents. In 2008 the Common Council approved a resolution to name all the neighborhoods in the 13th Aldermanic District the *Garden District of the City of Milwaukee*, capitalizing on a long tradition of gardening

among residents and businesses. At the time, Alderman Witkowski said, “Residents and businesses here have worked hard to solidify this identity. We have had perennial exchanges and gatherings, lectures by noted gardeners, and even awarded area businesses landscaping awards to encourage and foster the character of our area.” The idea for the Garden District grew from discussions between the alderman and residents about the interest in and tradition of gardening and landscaping within the district. The effort began in earnest in early 2007, when a group of individuals formalized a garden committee and met regularly to create a vision for the 13th Aldermanic District that focused on gardening and landscaping to beautify and improve quality-of-life.

## INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **The Islamic Society of Milwaukee** at S. 13th St and W. Layton Ave., the largest Islamic organization in Wisconsin.
- **St. Roman’s Parish** at 1710 W. Bolivar Ave., a Catholic church with a food pantry and many family activities.

## 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.

GARDEN DISTRICT FARMERS MARKET			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jun. through mid Oct., Sat.’s 1-5pm	Just south of Howard on 6th St.	Market of fresh vegetables and other vendors.	Free

MONTHLY FAMILY MAGIC SHOW			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
1 <sup>ST</sup> Sat. every month, 11-11:30 am	Best Western, 5105 S. Howell Ave.	An interactive show that combines comedy, mental magic, and audience participation.	unk

ST. ROMAN’S ANNUAL FESTIVAL			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun., Thu. 6-11pm, Fri. 6-11pm, Sat. 2-11pm, Sun. 12-9pm	1710 W. Bolivar Ave.	Festival of continuous music, food, rides, raffle, other cash prizes, and more.	Free

GARDEN DISTRICT CRAFT FAIR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Apr., Sat. 9am-3pm	3333 S. Howell	Fair of over 25 vendors, concessions, prizes, bake sale, and more.	unk

## BASKETBALL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Wed. 1-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Basketball in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, free

## SOUTH SHORE FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jun.-late Oct., Sat. 8am-12pm	South Shore Park, 2900 South Shore Dr.	Fresh produce from Wisconsin farmers, baked goods, art, crafts, music, demonstrations.	Free

## BILLIARDS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon.-Fri. 8:30am-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Billiards in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, free

## BAY VIEW BASH

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Sep., Sat. 11am-10pm	Between Potter and Clement on Kinnickinnic Ave.	A Community Festival of Food, Art, Music, Crafts, Books, and Community Organizations.	Free

## CARD PLAYING CLUB

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mon.-Fri. 8:30am-3pm	Beulah Brinton Community Center, 2555 S. Bay St.	Organized card playing in community center. (414) 481-2494	Families, singles, seniors, free

## WALKING TOUR—BAY VIEW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late May-mid Oct, Sun.'s 1pm	Meets by the Bublr bike station at Zillman Park, 2180 S Kinnickinnic Ave.	Opportunity to learn the story of how Bay View began with a patchwork of industry and diverse group of immigrants and grew to the charming neighborhood you see today.	unk

## OUTDOOR ICE SKATING—BAY VIEW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Winter, only when ice is 6 inches thick	Humboldt Park, 3000 S Howell Ave.	Ice skating for adults and children (heed "thin ice" signs).	Free

## JULY 4TH CELEBRATION

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4, 9am-10pm	Humboldt Park, 3000 S. Howell Ave.	Parade, music, talent show, children's entertainment, fames, 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

### Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>1</sup>—about THEN

“Many of the homes were in the area of 40 to 50 years old or more at the time that the Islamic Society purchased the building in the early 1980s. There were some boulevards that the City of Milwaukee maintained and through their park employees were nicely decorated with flowers in the boulevard islands at the time. Otherwise the businesses along Layton Avenue were a little older and kind of run down in appearance.”

“I remember the neighborhood when I was a paper boy [late 1950s]. It was a recently-built area with cape cods, ranch houses, and a few modern duplexes, and I walked back to my old paper route and I saw the change there just in the housing stock. I saw stores come and go. The corner store was something that people still patronized. The A&P and the National Tea stores came in and they were the first supermarkets and they eventually get knocked out by Kroger and other bigger places. And the A&P and the National Tea knocked out the corner store. And then you come to another point in time where the convenience store appears, which is about the same thing as the corner store. Just a bit more expensive. So I’ve seen the commercial parts of the district change. The area where I lived, it was with homes that younger people built when they returned from World War II. Most of the area was blue collar labor and manufacturing was big in Milwaukee, still at that time. The kids I went to school with—that’s what their parents did.”

“Our community center [Islamic Center] on 13th and Layton—the number when I came, people who attended was about a couple of hundred people. Now a couple of thousand people. The mosque and the school. The school had, maybe, five, six kids when I came. Now they have two schools—two buildings actually. And now they have K4 through high school—in this neighborhood. So, I think they have more than 750 kids now. And this has made a big difference in the neighborhood.”

### **Quotes from an ongoing oral history of the Garden District by Urban Anthropology Inc.—about NOW**

“We make a lot of change in this area. The businesses, the area. Of course with support from our alderman, Terry Witkowski. He made everything happen. Terry was going around in the neighborhood. He came to my house and he said, ‘Can I sit with you?’ And I said, ‘Sure.’ And he introduced himself as the alderman and he said that we want to do this and that for the neighborhood. We want to change the neighborhood in a good way between businesses and the people who live here. And he is talking and I start giving him new ideas. He was giving me ideas and I was giving him more ideas. I think we spent a couple of hours just talking. And from that day we established the Gateway to Milwaukee, which is a business organization—nonprofit of course. And we established the neighborhood—the Garden District. Since then we’ve worked together as a team and I’m involved in both of them—the Gateway to Milwaukee and the Garden District.”

“But I can tell you that quite a few Muslims that live in the Garden District have businesses in the Garden District. So you will find there are restaurants that serve Middle Eastern or South Asian food. There are some dress shops, beauty shops that cater to Muslims as well.”

“I realized early on that there was great power in neighborhood associations, but we had none. There was great power in business associations, but we had none. It helps to have them, so I went out and formed them. “

### **Recent quote from resident**

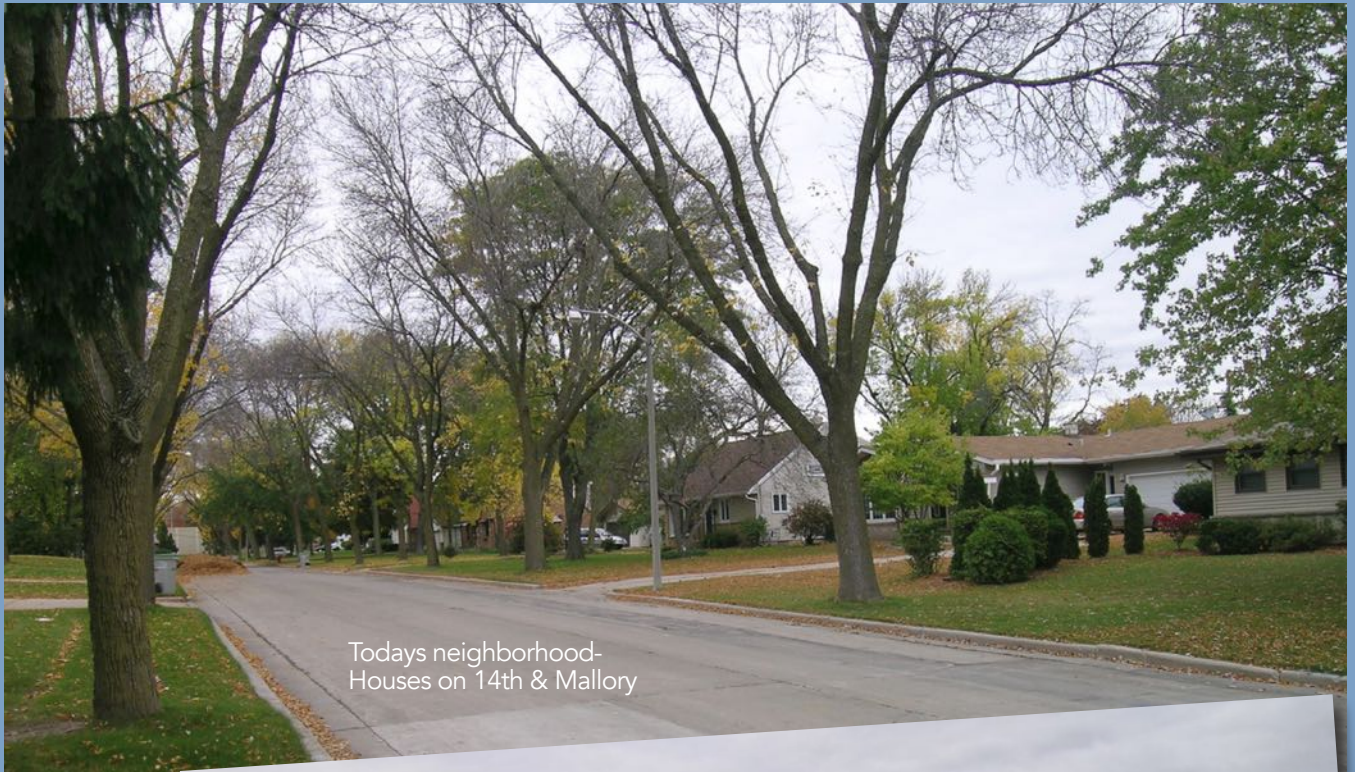
“I know a whole lot of residents (who are members of the Islamic Center) and most of them rent now, and a few of them are starting to own properties. It’s a very nice, very quiet neighborhood. South of the Islamic Center there are a lot of people who came as refugees from Burma and Malaysia. They rent right around here right across from the Islamic Center. They all pretty much rent places, but slowly they are starting to own properties.”

*-- Syed Itheshamuedin – member of the Islamic Center of Milwaukee*

---

<sup>11</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-  
Houses on 14th & Mallory



Today's neighborhood-W. Layton Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Islamic Society of Milwaukee



Today's neighborhood-Islamic Society of Milwaukee (interior)



## OLDER PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY RESIDENTS



Truck Farming in the Mitchell West neighborhood ca 1930s  
(submitted by Dennis Lukaszewski of the University Extension)



Farming at 6th and Layton in the Mitchell West neighborhood in 1932  
(submitted by Dennis Lukaszewski of the University Extension)

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 Dr. Jill Florence Lackey at: [jflanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:jflanthropologist@currently.com)