

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Morgan Ave; **S**-south border of cemetery;

E-S. 35th St, **W**-S. 40th St

SOUTHWEST SIDE *Mount Olivet*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The Mt. Olivet neighborhood is occupied almost entirely by the Mt. Olivet Cemetery and Mausoleum. There are a few residential blocks south of the cemetery. See neighborhood photos below.

HISTORY

Mt. Olivet neighborhood is named after its cemetery. Located at 38th and Morgan, Mt. Olivet Cemetery was established by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 1907. Over the years, the number of burials increased at the 72-acre property and today includes over 27,000 in-ground burials in traditional graves and above-ground entombments and inurnments in crypts and niches.

Early populations

Long before settlers began to build homes at the southern section of the Mt. Olivet neighborhood, there were interments at the cemetery. In its early years, the cemetery was located in the unincorporated town of Greenfield, which once extended from 27th to 124th Streets, and Greenfield to College Avenues, an area later annexed to Milwaukee.

Many of those interred at Mt. Olivet were from nearby neighborhoods. In the 1920s, second- and third-generation residents with substantial incomes on the south side were settling at Milwaukee's edge, in the Jackson Park, Southgate, and Southpoint neighborhoods. Most of these migrants were German or Polish—often Catholics. Many built upscale homes along South Forest Home Avenue.

A number of notables were buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery over the years. Included among them are several members of the Klement family, founders of Klement's Sausage Company; George Kotze of the Kotze Construction Company; major league outfielder, Dan Lally; John Selensky, Milwaukee area restaurateur; Arthur Siemann, Milwaukee area sign maker; Donald "Dan" Marion, major league ball player; John C. Brophy, politician; Leon Zietara, World War II Polish underground fighter in Tarnow, Poland; Stanley Sajdak, founder of Stan's Bootery and Stan's Fit for your Feet shoe stores; Laurence Gram, Milwaukee County Judge who presided over the trial of Jeffery Dahmer; Father James Groppi, civil rights activist; and "Crazy" Jim Groh, Milwaukee area car dealer.

The latter two individuals crossed paths in a rather inauspicious way. See their profiles on the following pages.



Today's neighborhood-
Mt. Olivet Cemetery
and Mausoleum

Interred at Mt. Olivet

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

James Groppi

James Groppi grew up in Bay View. He was the son of Italian immigrants, Georondo and Georgina (nee Magri) Groppi, and the eleventh of their twelve children. His father owned a grocery store that stands today as Groppi's Market. Georondo and Georgina had arrived in the United States in 1917 and 1913 respectively.

Upon graduating from Bay View High School, James enrolled at Mount Calvary Seminary (1950–1952) in Mount Calvary, Wisconsin. During his seminary years he began developing empathy for poor African Americans. Ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1959, the now Father Groppi was assigned to St. Veronica's Church and later moved to St. Boniface, which had a predominantly black congregation. It was then that he began taking up civil rights causes, including participating in the 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march.

It was his later role as advisor to the NAACP Youth Council that got him active in the movement for fair housing in Milwaukee. At the time, the former African American community of Bronzeville in Milwaukee's central city had just lost over 8,000 homes to freeway building and urban renewal. Few blacks were successful in purchasing homes or renting flats. African Americans were urgently in need of housing. While black Common Council member Vel Phillips had repeatedly proposed a fair housing bill before the body, the bill had consistently failed to attract votes.

During the spring and summer of 1967, Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council marched for 100 days, demanding fair housing. The ultimate march involved crossing the 16th Street Viaduct to the mainly Polish South Side—an area that had been particularly problematic for African Americans who were seeking housing. Ultimately the climate began to change locally and an open housing law was enacted in Milwaukee, following the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Father Groppi remained active in many other efforts including the Welfare Mothers March to Madison in 1969. Often unable to coordinate his mission with that of the Roman Catholic Church, Groppi left the priesthood in 1976. Later he married longtime civil rights activist Margaret Rozga, who became an English professor at the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, often writing about her civil rights experiences.

Groppi took other work after leaving the priesthood, including becoming a bus driver for the Milwaukee County Transit System—a job he held until his death of brain cancer in 1985. Groppi is buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery. The 16th Street Viaduct is named in his honor (see photo¹).



Interred at Mt. Olivet

(information from Milwaukee City Directory and other public records)

“Crazy” Jim Groh

In *200 Nights and One Day*, Margaret Rozga (wife of James Groppi) described the day that the Fair Housing marchers crossed the 16th Street Viaduct on their way to Kosciuszko Park. Attributing the story to “Pam,” she wrote:

On the corner a huge neon sign read
“Crazy Jim’s Motors.” Beneath the sign,
A mob of young White guys, jeering,
sitting on the hoods of the cars, holding signs,
awkward lettering on cardboard, “I want a slave.”

The sleeves of his White undershirt were rolled
Nearly to his shoulders; his chin jutted out; he sneered,
I could see he was missing a front tooth.
Heⁱⁱ clapped his hands, but whatever his chant
it was swallowed up by the noise of the crowd.
Tommy Lee grabbed my arm, yelled
Duck.

That’s where I got hit. (pp 33-34)

Crazy Jim wasn’t a nickname. Jim had his name legally changed from Jim Groh to Crazy Jim. A controversial man, Jim owned Crazy Jim’s Autoⁱⁱⁱ on S. 16th Street and two others car dealerships (including one in Las Vegas). In addition, he operated a demolition derby, and became a Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate advocating for legalizing gambling in 1974.

At Crazy Jim’s Auto, he used the slogan, “Crazy Jim is a friend of the working man.” Given that his establishment became the focal site of White Power counter- demonstrators during the Fair Housing march to Kosciuszko, it appears that Crazy Jim was the friend of only *some* working men. A flamboyant operator and self- promoter at many levels, he was also a man of contradictions. A one-time boxing champion himself, Crazy Jim was responsible for bringing Mohammed Ali to Milwaukee for a visit.

A native of West Milwaukee, he spent five months in prison for impeding tax investigations in his Milwaukee-owned businesses. He died at age 68 in 2002.



As a neighborhood, Mt. Olivet was relatively slow to fill up. By 1932, there were only 16 residences and 2 businesses on the residential blocks just south of the cemetery. In 1947, following the Great Depression and World War II, there were still fewer than 70 residences and still only 2 businesses on these blocks.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today there are just under 400 residents in the Mt. Olivet neighborhood. Over half are European Americans (mostly of German, Polish, and mixed European ancestry). In addition, over one-quarter of the neighborhood residents are Latinos (over half of Mexican descent and about one-quarter Puerto Rican). Just under 1 in 10 are African Americans, and approximately 1 in 17 are Asians (mostly Hmong/Lao, with some of Pakistani and Indian ancestry). There is also a scattering of people of multiple racial backgrounds in Mt. Olivet.

The median household income in Mt. Olivet is just over \$36,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle income stratum. The largest occupations claimed by adult residents are in the fields of administration, food service, sales, and education.

Residents are also highly educated. Thirty-four percent of residents over the age of 25 have degrees beyond high school, compared to just under 29 percent for Milwaukeeans generally.

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.

MOVIES AT SOUTHGATE CINEMA

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily	3320 S. 30th St.	Popular movies at a Marcus Theater.	unk

MILWAUKEE FIRE MUSEUM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
1st Sun. of each month, 1-4pm, (except holidays)	1516 W. Oklahoma Ave.	Opportunity to see exhibits and artifacts of the Milwaukee Fire Department back to the 1800s; stories of history of Department and fires.	Free

UMOS MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Sep., Sun. 10am-12pm	Starts at 20th & Oklahoma Ave. (see route on website)	Southside parade of arts, floats, local organizations honoring Mexican Independence Day.	Free

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 4, 8am-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

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 Mt. Olivet and wish to make an interesting comment about this neighborhood, please send your quote to JFLanthropologist@currently.com

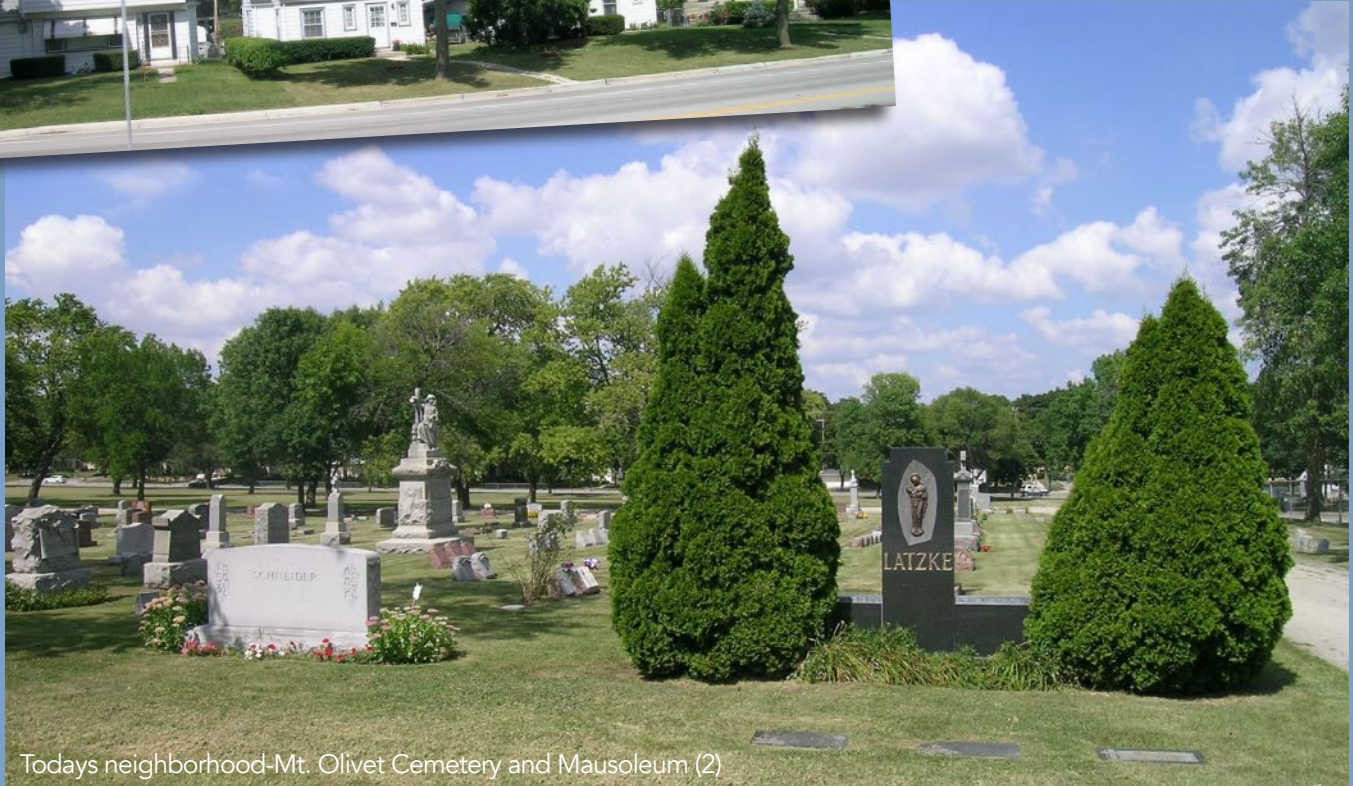
PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-Mt. Olivet Cemetery and Mausoleum (1)



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on Howard Ave. & 39th St.



Today's neighborhood-Mt. Olivet Cemetery and Mausoleum (2)

ⁱPhoto attribution: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/b6/James_E_Groppi_Unity_Bridge.jpg

ⁱⁱ The identity of the man is not specified.

ⁱⁱⁱ Photo attribution: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4c/Crazy_Jim's_Mitre_10_Wagga.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