

Approximate boundaries:

N-Hank Aaron State Trail; **S**-W. Greenfield Ave;
E-S. Layton Blvd, **W**-S. 31st St

SOUTHWEST SIDE *National Park*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

National Park is a densely populated neighborhood that has a variety of housing styles that date from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The north part of the neighborhood has mainly modest two-story wood frame duplexes. Along National there are more elaborate houses including many examples of Classical Revival, Mediterranean and Queen Anne styles. Toward the south end of the neighborhood closer to Greenfield Avenue, there are many bungalows. The business corridor is mainly along South Layton Boulevard.

The north end of the neighborhood has a number of industrial buildings and a large region of undeveloped land. It is around this area that the topography changes and graduates into a steep slope moving down to the Hank Aaron State Trail in the Menomonee River Valley. Despite the neighborhood name, there are no parks in National Park. See photos below.

HISTORY

National Park owes its name to National Avenue, which runs through the center of the neighborhood.

Early populations

American Indians, including the Potawatomi, settled in villages on the land in and around the Menomonee Valley for centuries before Europeans arrived. They developed and used a path between today's Milwaukee and Mukwonago on the Fox River. This well-worn path, called the Mukwonago (or *Mequanigo*) Road, was also used by arriving European pioneers. A change occurred shortly after the end of the Civil War when the federal government opened the National Soldiers' Home for veterans of the Union army on 410 acres just west of Milwaukee's border. The Mukwonago Road became the southern entrance to the complex, which led to a name change.

The area that is today's National Park was settled by Europeans in the late 1800s. Many new settlers followed the jobs, which were quickly developing in the Menomonee Valley. Industries included the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, Falk, Robert A. Johnston Company, and Harnischfeger Corporation. National Avenue would become the commercial center of the developing community. The earliest European arrivals to this area were Germans, Irish, Scandinavians and some Yankees—many migrating west from the Walker's Point and later the Clarke Square neighborhoods. Walker's Point was named after George Walker, one of three founding land developers in Milwaukee (the other two being Solomon Juneau and Byron Kilbourn). Walker settled on the shores of Lake Michigan in 1834 in the area that would later become Milwaukee's South Side. A few years after Walker began subdividing his land, a couple from Vermont, Norman and Lydia Clarke, purchased a 160-acre parcel of land west of Walker's Point—an area bordered by today's Greenfield, Pierce, 20th, and Layton Boulevard. Just as George Walker had done in Walker's Point with Walker's Square, the Clarks reserved a



Today's neighborhood-
United Church at 28th & W. Scott St.

small square in the parcel called Clarke's Addition for a park (today's Clarke Square Park). The Clarkes began subdividing the land, and the mixed ethnic residents of Walker's Point eagerly purchased lots. Among them were Yankees, Norwegians, Swedes, Irish, and-- south of today's Greenfield Avenue--Poles.

An important landmark was about to be developed on National Park's eastern border, which would draw even more settlers to the neighborhood.

A park is born

In 1889 the city's first park board—the Milwaukee Board of Park Commissioners—met for the purpose of locating appropriate sites for parks. By 1890, the commissioners had decided on five—Kosciuszko, Humboldt, Lake, Riverside, and Mitchell Parks. John Lendum Mitchell, son of banking tycoon, Alexander Mitchell, sold 25 acres to the board in 1891, which would become the core of the park that would carry Mitchell's name. The commissioners hired architect C. Koch and Company to design the park. A lake was excavated on the site, which was immediately used for recreational boating by Milwaukee residents. By 1898, ground was broken for a conservatory which would allow Milwaukeeans the opportunity to enjoy gardens throughout the cold weather months. By 1903, a sunken garden was added.

All this drew settlers to the surrounding blocks, including the National Park area. By the 1930s the neighborhood was nearly filled and the population was even more diverse (by European standards), including Germans, Poles, Bohemians, English, Irish, Slovaks, Greeks, Serbs, Danes, and Norwegians.

The significance of Layton Boulevard in National Park

Layton Boulevard was named after one of the Milwaukee fathers, Frederick Layton, a businessman and a famous art collector. He donated the Layton Art Gallery and most of his wealth to the City of Milwaukee. Layton Boulevard was as close to an exclusive residential district as ever developed on the South Side. Construction along the thoroughfare began in 1900. From 1900 to the beginning of World War I, only four to six homes were built each year, with 10 being constructed in 1911. At the end of the war, construction resumed in full force with 105 buildings erected between 1919 and 1928. A full 35 were built in 1921.

While most of Layton Boulevard is residential, it is interspersed with businesses, offices, and churches. The northern section of the thoroughfare has been the business corridor for the National Park neighborhood.

<i>Addresses on S. Layton Blvd. in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
545	Standard Oil Company Filling Station
547	Josephine J. Irvine Furniture Rooms
611	Jack S.B. Auto Sales (Jack B. Stanley)
623	Fred Schwerman Exports
814	New York Coffee Pot
823	Carl Zacher Confectioner
938-940	The Layton House Furniture Rooms

<i>Addresses on S. Layton Blvd. in 1935</i>	<i>Name of business or organization from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
1004	Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church
1022	Wolfgang Varo Chemist
1102	Anton Nuster Painter
1107	Dr. Joseph Dries
1202	Dr. Joseph Gramling
1236	Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension
1320	Frank Poznanski Plasterer Contractor
1343	John N. Rok Physician
1344	Cream City Beer Garden

Notes (from U.S. Census and other public records):

- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods before 1970, most proprietors were immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Technically, only the businesses, organizations, and offices on the west side of the street (odd numbers) were within the National Park neighborhood. However, residents were able to easily access all the Layton Boulevard businesses.
- Joseph Gramling, the physician, was the son of German immigrants.
- John N. Rok/Rock, the physician, was also the son of German immigrants.
- Fred Schwerman, the exporter, was also the son of a German immigrant. He'd been a freelance truck driver before opening his own shop. He was an anomaly for shopkeepers of the times, as he'd attended two years of high school.
- Wolfgang Varo, the chemist, was a Romanian immigrant with a college degree.
- Frank Poznanski, the plasterer, was the son of a Polish immigrant. He'd completed the 8th grade

The following family is representative of the diverse European residents of National Park in the early and mid-20th century.

National Park family profile (1930)

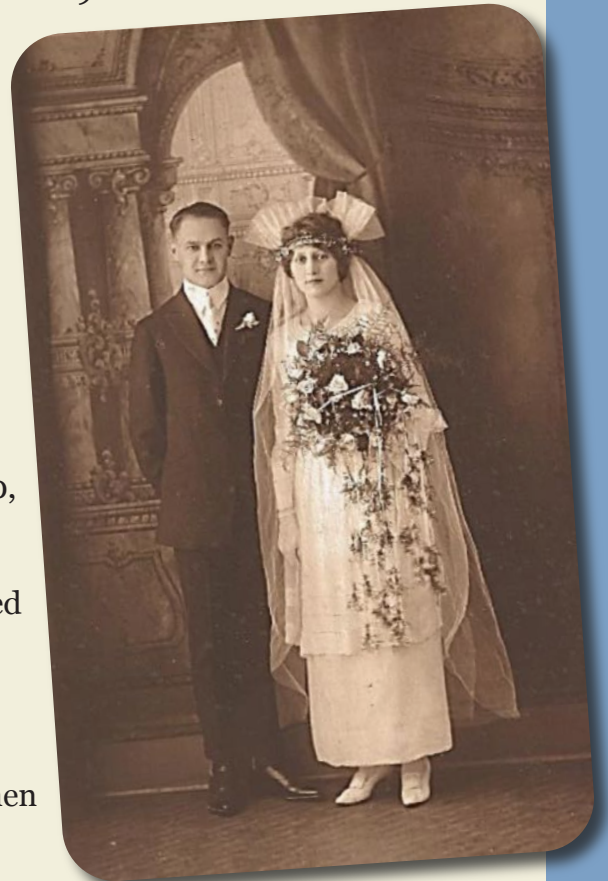
(Information from census and other public records)

The Viteks

In 1893, the Viteks--Franz, Frankelka (nee Tolian), and 3-year-old Franz Jr.--left Bohemia and arrived in the United States and Milwaukee. Almost immediately, Frankelka gave birth to the couple's second child Karel. The family rented a flat on 9th Avenue (today's South 14th Street) and Franz got a job as a butcher in a nearby slaughterhouse. The young family did well and within a decade they had two more children, Marie and Sophia, and had paid cash for a home on the same street. Franz, who had only completed the 3rd grade in school, was now working as an auto mechanic. As the family assimilated, they Americanized their names to Frank and Frances, and children Frank Jr., Charles, Mary, and Sophie.

Frank must have been a good provider, because sometime between 1920 and 1930 the family moved to 2824 W. Greenfield in today's National Park neighborhood. The home was valued at \$10,000 in 1930, a very high price for the times.

The children were slow to move out of their National Park household. Although son Charles married Sophie Pauline Hermann in 1919 (*see wedding photo from public records at Ancestry.com*), and daughter Sophie also apparently married, children Mary and Frank were still at home in 1930. Frank was already over 40. Mary stayed with the family through 1940 when she was 43 and may have remained with her parents until they died. She never married.



Arrival of Latinos

The first major Latino population had begun settling in Walker's Point in the 1920s and many later migrated west into National Park. A number of push-pull factors influenced this population change. During the early 1900s Mexican immigration to the United States expanded because of worsening economic conditions in Mexico. A large wave of Mexicans also left the country during the political and economic turmoil created by the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Although most Mexicans found jobs in local tanneries and foundries, some came to Milwaukee as strikebreakers—often unknowingly. A parallel migration occurred in the 1940s when Puerto Ricans began to settle in Walker's Point. Very soon these new groups began spilling over from Walker's Point into the Mitchell Park, Clarke Square, and National Park neighborhoods.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are a little over 3,000 residents in National Park. Latinos comprise just over half of the National Park population--mostly Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. But diversity does not stop at Latinos. About 3 in 10 European Americans of German and mixed European ancestry remain in National Park. A little over 1 in 10 residents are African American and approximately 1 in 20 are Asians (mostly Hmong/Lao and Koreans). The Hmong/Lao population continues to grow. They are supported by the nearby Lao Buddhist Temple just east of National Park. The neighborhood also has a scattering of Arabs and American Indians.

Unlike other southside Milwaukee neighborhoods, nearly two-thirds of National Park households have no children. The median household income is just over \$24,000 annually, placing this neighborhood on the cusp between low and lower middle income. The largest number of reported adult occupations in National Park are in the fields of production, food service, and administration. The neighborhood has over twice the number of residents in the fields of material moving and production than their proportions in other Milwaukee neighborhoods.

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.

A.W.E.'S SUMMER TRUCK PROGRAM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
6 weeks during summer, various weekdays, 12-3pm	Clarke Square Park; see website	Program of meaningful, drop-in, art-based enrichment activities for youth ages 4 – 14, with a focus on working with youth in Milwaukee's under-served neighborhoods.	Free

MITCHELL PARK DOMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	524 S. Layton Blvd.	A place to experience a desert oasis, a tropical jungle, and special floral gardens all in one morning.	unk

FALL FLORAL SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fall harvest festival and floral exhibits.	unk

GINGERBREAD LAND—HOLIDAY SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Visit a gingerbread house covered in snowy frosting and candy canes and gum drops, among the poinsettias and decked holiday tree.	unk

NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING—HOLIDAY FLORAL SHOW

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Holiday floral show at the Horticultural Center.	\$7, \$5 students, disabled, youth 6-18; free <6

MILWAUKEE COUNTY WINTER FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Nov. thru Feb. Sat. 9am-12:30pm	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	Fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy from Wisconsin small farms.	Free

GARDEN IMPRESSIONS SPRING FLORAL SHOW AT THE DOMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	The experience of a spring garden as an outdoor art gallery in the Show Domes amongst the brilliant tulips, Easter lilies, hydrangeas and marigolds, including easels displaying paintings of the domes done in the styles of Monet, Cezanne, and Van Gogh.	unk

GHOSTS UNDER GLASS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Check Website	Mitchell Park Domes, 524 S. Layton Blvd.	A not-too-spooky night of family fun with treats and ghostly fun.	unk

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--MITCHELL

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am 10pm	Mitchell Park, 2200 W. Pierce St.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, music, 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

If you are a resident of National Park and would like to say something interesting about this neighborhood, email JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS

Today's neighborhood-Houses on 28th & W. Greenfield Ave.



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 29th & W. National Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Doerfler School



Today's neighborhood-
Houses at 28th & W. Scott St.



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on 28th & W. Pierce St.



Today's neighborhood-United Church at 28th & W. Scott St.

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



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