

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-E. Locust St; **S**-E. Kane Pl.; **E**-N. Terrace Ave, (partial) N. Wahl Ave;  
**W**-N. Prospect Ave, (partial) N. Downer Ave

# UPPER EAST SIDE *Northpoint*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Northpoint is a long, narrow neighborhood that is adjacent to Lake Park and encompasses a small section of Back Bay Park. The housing stock ranges from large mansions along Lake Drive, Terrace Avenue, and Wahl Avenue to a mix of smaller, more modest houses on its western boundaries. The predominant architectural styles are English Tudor, followed by Colonial, and Georgian, French, Mediterranean, and German Renaissance.

The preservation movement took hold in Northpoint in the 1970s, when development began to threaten the neighborhood's low-density residential identity. In 1973, residents founded the Water Tower Landmark Trust, which was later renamed the Historic Water Tower Neighborhood Inc. It became one of the most effectual preservation organizations in the city, lobbying for stricter building code enforcement and a new zoning ordinance.

## HISTORY

As upscale as Milwaukee's Northpoint neighborhood appears today, it had quite humble beginnings. The first known property built within its borders was a poor house. The same year that the City of Milwaukee was chartered, the city purchased a 40-acre parcel to be used "for welfare or charitable" purposes within the boundaries of what is today Maryland and Downer and Bradford and North. The hospital for the indigent was built in 1846, followed by a "pesthouse" for patients with infectious diseases.

The poorhouse structures soon became neighbors to St. Mary's Hospital (the first private hospital in Wisconsin), Protestant and Catholic homes for the elderly, a public school, and an orphanage. But land speculators were envisioning the neighborhood as something much more than a conglomeration of services. They believed the lakeshore area was ideal for affluent families seeking to move on from other upscale areas like Grand Avenue and Yankee Hill.

By the turn of the 20th century, they knew they had been right.



Today's neighborhood-  
Water Tower and  
Columbia/St. Mary

## Early populations

Unlike the affluent Yankee Hill neighborhood, which was largely populated by Yankee transplants from the east coast, scores of the earliest property owners at Northpoint were second generation immigrants of German, Czech, Irish and other European ancestry. Many of these were children of wealthy industrialists. For example, Lloyd Raymond Smith, the son of A.O. Smith of the A.O. Smith Company, built a sprawling Mediterranean-styled mansion on Terrace Avenue in 1923. Today that building is known as the Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum (see photo). Other children of major industrialists that built homes nearby included Gustav Pabst, son of Capt. Frederick Pabst, and Elsie Cudahy Beck, daughter of Patrick Cudahy.

However, one family with a famous member that settled very early in Northpoint did have some Yankee ancestry. See the family profile below.

## Northpoint family profile (early 1900s)

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

### The Bartletts

Sometime prior to 1920, Ferdinand Arlt Bartlett, Elizabeth (nee Towles Thompson) Bartlett, and their two children, Thompson (“Tommy”) and Elizabeth Bartlett had moved to Lake Drive in today’s Northpoint neighborhood in the old 1st Ward. Ferdinand’s family had originally come to Wisconsin from Vermont. His father was a physician who worked out of his home on Jefferson Street. Elizabeth was born in Missouri, but her ancestry went back to Revolutionary War hero, Colonel William Lewis, of Augusta County, Virginia. He had been tagged the “Civilizer of the Border” during the war, and represented August County at the Second Continental Congress.

The couple lived in relative luxury on Lake Drive, as they had in their natal homes. The Lake Drive home had a nurse employed to care for the children and a maid to serve the household. Ferdinand was self-employed, possibly in the cigar trade.

It was son Tommy who would become a household name. He took an interest in the entertainment industry early, becoming a broadcaster for Milwaukee’s WISN radio in 1927--at age 13. After moving to Chicago and working for CBS radio, he enlisted in the

U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II where he learned to fly and became a flight instructor. Upon returning from the war, he hosted radio shows *Meet Tommy Bartlett*, *The Tommy Bartlett Show*, *Welcome Travelers*, *Meet the Missus*, and *The Missus Goes to Market*.

Bartlett’s career took a sharp turn in 1949 when he was a spectator at a waterskiing show on the Chicago lakefront. He decided to create his own traveling water ski show that he originally called the “Tommy Bartlett Water Ski & Jumping Boat Thrill Show.” When he took the show on the road and appeared at the Wisconsin Dells, the area Chamber of Commerce asked him to keep the show in the Dells permanently, which he did (see photo)<sup>i</sup>. Bartlett was later inducted into the Water Ski Hall of Fame in 1993. He died in 1998.



In time, people from the professions and small businesses joined the Bartletts and the industrialists. Nearly all were European Americans.

### Downer Avenue

Downer Avenue became the commercial corridor for the Northpoint neighborhood. Originally named Glen Street, Downer was renamed in 1898 after John Downer, a justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Downer, a Vermont native, had once served as editor of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. Downer College, also named after John Downer who was one of its founders, was established on Downer Avenue, at Kenwood Boulevard ([see Downer Woods neighborhood](#) for more information on this)

By the early 20th century, Downer Avenue was bursting with commercial establishments. The following chart lists the businesses, organizations, apartments, and offices on Downer between Bradford Avenue and Park Place in 1941. See summary and notes at the end.

<i>Addresses on W. Downer in 1941</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, organizations, apartments from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
2549	Fritzi Beauty Parlor
2551	The Big Dipper Confectionary
2553-55	Shumway Studios Interior Decorators
2557	L.H. Ball Photo and Gift Shop
2559	Caspari Inc. Shoes
2563-65	Frank's Food Mart Inc.
2567-69	Ben Franklin Department Stores
2571	Elmer C. Boughton Furs
2573-75	Tour House Restaurant
2577	Office Building Marquette University Dental Alumni Association George A. Reider Dentist Henry O. McMahon Physician Edward A. Sauer Dentist Robert E. Greenya Dentist Morgan Sherburne Physician Hugo Logemann Architect George O. Shaner Physician
2581	Downer Delicatessen Inc.
2583	Pocahontas Fuel Company
2585	Agnetta Olson Nurse Esther Lentz Nurse Valborg C. Olson Nurse
2589	Downer Theater
2597	National Tea Company Grocery Store John Durbin Meats
2601	Bellevue Pharmacy
2603	Office building Jack L. Kinsey Physician Fritsche Piano Studio Jane M. Henschel Music Teacher Carol Keller Music Teacher Henrietta Jonas Music Teacher Mrs. Mary Kundmann Music Teacher Hazel Stuepnagel Music Teacher

<i>Addresses on W. Downer in 1941</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, organizations, apartments from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
2603 (continued)	Alvin Pinter Music Teacher Mrs. Yvonne Wessel Music Teacher Lea Alston Music Teacher
2605	Downer Hardware Store
2607	A & P Food Stores
2609	Fanny Farmer Candy Company
2610	East Side Curb Filling Station Claude's Bike Shop
2611	Royal Crown Hosiery Company
2612	Downer Flower Shop
2615	Frank A. Heiser Meats
2616	Downer Valet Shop
2617	Russell C. Allen Confectionary
2619	Schomer Lichtner Artist
2622	Aqua Terra Dresses
2623	Domestic Laundry Company
2624	Florence R. Weisskopf Interior Designer
2625	Downer Beauty Shop
2628	Frieda B. Eckstein Dresses
2629	Walgreen Company Drugs
2630	The Gift Shop
2631	Leonard H. Adams Dentist
2632	Toby Inc. Children's Clothes
2633	Albert Heath Company Groceries
2634	Elizabeth T. Bartlett Linens
2636	Cain's Beauty Bar
2638	John E. Platz Photographer
2639	Fair Beauty Shop
2640	Downer Liquor Store
2641	Sendik's Fruit Market
2644	Polly's Coffee Shop
2647	The Tuxedo
2659	Gearhard's Meat Market
2651	Kettler's Pharmacy



## Summary and notes from census and other records:

- At the time this list was compiled in 2017, some of the stores from the early 40s were still on Downer. Sendik's, Downer Liquor, and the Downer Theater are at the same locations. Downer Hardware moved just up the street.
- The business district on Downer was well equipped to meet the basic needs of Northpoint residents, with 5 grocery stores (including 2 supermarkets), 3 butchers, 1 deli, 3 pharmacies, 11 healthcare providers, 1 hardware store, 1 cleaner, and a variety of clothing stores.
- Downer Avenue merchants reflect an apparent interest in high culture in the area, with many music teachers, artists, interior designers, and photographers leasing space on the street.
- Unlike in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970 where few shopkeepers had attended high school, many in the Downer district had. All the teachers and nurses whose records could be found had completed high school and the dentists and physicians had completed professional school. The furrier, Elmer C. Boughton, had completed four years of college.
- There were a few shopkeepers that fit the norm for the times. Frank A. Heiser, the butcher, was a German immigrant who had completed the 8th grade.
- Schomer Lichtner, the artist, went on to become an artist with a strong following. The son of a German immigrant mother, Schomer lived to be 101 years old.
- Florence Weisskopf (nee Riegelman), the interior decorator, was the daughter of Germans from Ohio and Pennsylvania. She lived on Bellevue.
- Downer Avenue had an early history with bicycles with a bike shop on the street. Perhaps in some ways, this was a precursor to the later Downer Classic Bike Race.

### Northpoint random merchant (1940s)

*Names selected randomly from the 1941 City Directory in the Northpoint area (photo and other information found in public records on Ancestry.com)*

#### Lea Janet Alston

In many ways, Lea Alston reflected the cultured nature of Downer Avenue in 1941. She was a music teacher among a group of other music teachers with an office (and possibly living quarters) at 2603 N. Downer. At age 24 she had already traveled abroad with her parents—both to Scotland and to Canada.

Lea's father was a Scottish immigrant. As a child, she and her family lived in Milwaukee's Ward 21. She later graduated from West Division High School (*see her yearbook photo to the right from Ancestry.com*).

Lea married John Joseph Olk, the son of a German immigrant father. John served in World War II. The couple later made Northpoint their home, moving to a home on Lake Drive off of Bradford sometime after 1950.



## Current populations (as of 2021)

The current population of Northpoint remains European American (over 80 percent). People of German descent remain a high proportion in the neighborhood. Approximately 1 in 15 residents are African Americans. The remaining residents are Latinos (mostly of Mexican ancestry), Asians (mostly Chinese and Filipino), and people of multiple backgrounds.

As wealthy as many parts of this neighborhood appear, the upper middle class (those with annual household incomes between \$75,000 and \$150,000) comprise only about one quarter of the neighborhood population. In addition, approximately three-quarters of all properties in Northpoint are rented, rather than owned. Students of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee account for a large number of renters. The leading occupations in the area are in the fields of education, management, and administration.

What is significant about the people of Northpoint is their level of education. They are among the most well-educated in Milwaukee, with nearly half of the population holding bachelor's degrees. This is significantly higher than the proportions of college educated in the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee Metro.

## INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum** at 2220 N. Terrace Ave., a mansion informed by the design of a villa in Lombardy, Italy, complete with Renaissance Garden, antique furnishings, and artifacts.
- **Northpoint Lighthouse Museum** at 2650 N. Wahl Ave., a historic maritime lighthouse with artifacts related to the history of the Great Lakes.
- **Northpoint Water Tower** at the far east end of North Ave., built in 1855 to equalize pressure on the city's water mains.
- **Downer Avenue shops**, including grocer, drugstore, dry cleaner, restaurants, bakery, liquor store, theater, coffee house, bank, hardware store, boutiques, book store.

## 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.

DOWNER CLASSIC BIKE RACE			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jun., Sat. 10am-8:30pm	Downer Ave. between Bradford and Park.	All day and evening bike races for participants and spectators that are part of the Tour of America's Dairyland Cycling Series, with food, shopping, children's activities.	Free

MOVIES: DOWNER THEATER			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Sat., Sun. early show	2589 N. Downer Ave.	A Landmark arthouse theater.	discounted

## MOVIES: ORIENTAL THEATER

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Sat., Sun. early show	2230 N. Farwell Ave.	A Landmark arthouse theater.	discounted

## WALKING TOUR—NORTH POINT MANSIONS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late May-mid Oct., Sun.'s 1pm	Meets at the fountain near the southeast corner of North Ave. and Lake Dr.	Tour of neighborhood that is known for its intact early twentieth century architecture and historical importance.	unk

## NORTHPOINT LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Sat. & Sun. 1-4pm	Northpoint Lighthouse, 2650 N. Wahl Ave.	A historic, maritime experience, with artifacts related to the history of the Great Lakes.	unk

## EASTER BUNNY AT NORTHPOINT LIGHTHOUSE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Mar., Sat. 1-4pm	Northpoint Lighthouse, 2650 N. Wahl Ave.	Easter bunny appearance at museum with historic and maritime significance.	unk

## VILLA TERRACE DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Wed. thru Sun. 1-5pm	2220 N. Terrace Ave.	Self-guided tour of mansion informed by the design of a villa in Lombardy, Italy, complete with Renaissance Garden, and antique furnishings and artifacts.	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>



## QUOTE FROM RESIDENT

“There are many neighborhoods in Milwaukee where you can find some beautiful spots—parks, river walks, a string of lovely old homes, a landmark building—but you find these features here and there. Often, they are interspersed with huge concrete and glass structures or prefab-looking homes or decaying buildings. But in Northpoint you can walk six blocks in any direction (especially in the eastern section) and all you see is beauty—Lake Park, Lake Michigan, and all the gorgeous Victorian and Revival homes—each one different from the other.”

--Jill Florence Lackey

## PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-Mansions on Lake Dr.



Today's neighborhood-Houses on Wahl Ave.





Today's neighborhood-  
Café Hollander on Downer Ave.



Today's neighborhood-  
Bogk House on Terrace Ave., designed by  
Frank Lloyd Wright



Today's neighborhood-The Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum

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:

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<sup>i</sup> Photo attribution: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/TommyBarlett'sThrillShow2007.jpg>



[www.urban-anthropology.org](http://www.urban-anthropology.org)