

Approximate boundaries:

N-County Line Rd; S-W. Brown Deer Rd;

E-N. 76th St; W-N. 91st St

NORTHWEST SIDE *Northridge*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Northridge neighborhood has low to moderate population density. The main housing type is the single-family, Colonial-style home. There are also a large number of multi-unit condos or apartment buildings. Most of the streets in this neighborhood are wide and curving. The abandoned Northridge Shopping Center occupies a large section of the neighborhood, and a number of businesses are clustered around the old mall in the southern part of the neighborhood and along North 76th Street.

Northridge's topography is hilly with gently rolling to moderately steep inclines. The main public green space is Kohl Park that occupies most of the northern part of the neighborhood. See photos below.

HISTORY

Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's northwest side once comprised the Granville Township in Milwaukee County, which extended from Hampton Avenue on the south to County Line Road on the north, and 27th Street on the east to 124th Street on the west.

The Milwaukee neighborhood of Northridge was once in the Town of Granville. The neighborhood got its name from the Northridge Shopping Center that opened in 1972.

Early populations

According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* (March 22, 1877) there were originally three small settlements in Granville. The first, in 1835, was the family of Jacob Brazelton which included 11 sons. The second was duo Daniel R. Small and W.P. Woodward from Indiana who pitched their tents in the center of the Granville area shortly after the Brazelton family arrived and later built homes. The third group of settlers, the Joseph R. Thomas family and S.C. Enos, arrived shortly after Small and Woodward.

Within a few years a new group arrived from the town of Granville in Washington County, New York. The assemblage included the Evert, Brown, Crippen, Lake, Dutcher, and Norton families. They gave their new home the name of their former home in New York.

But it was not these earliest settlers that established much of the culture of Granville, Township. That role belonged to a wave of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans) who arrived just a few years later from Telford, Pennsylvania, including the Wambold, Leister, Scholl, Barndt, Price, Bergstresser, Borse, Klein, Martin, Huber, Groll, Horning, and Lewis families. The Pennsylvania Dutch, under the leadership of Samuel Wambold, quickly established the German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church (now known as Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1847. The following year, the church's pastor, Wilhelm Wrede, called a meeting of local Lutheran ministers at the church. This group would later become the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A museum of these early synod activities now stands on 107th Street (see outings).

In the 1840s there were over 200 people living in Granville Township, and the numbers continued to grow. A small Irish community settled on Granville's eastern border to the center of

Today's neighborhood-
W. Glenbrook Rd. looking south



the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. But during these early years, Granville Township remained strongly German, and more Germans arrived every year.

Below is a profile of one of the early German farming families.

Northridge profile

(Information found in US Census and other public records)

The Mutz family

In 1892, Frank and Anna Mutz and daughter Anna arrived in America from Germany. They initially settled in Mequon where Frank took a job as a laborer. The family saved up enough money to purchase land in Granville before 1905 (at today's 9400 block of North 76th Street in the Northridge neighborhood). They held a mortgage on the land and the house. At that location they had children Lucy, Peter, Frank, Albert, Rose, Clements, and perhaps more.

The family was Catholic and worshipped at St. Catherine's of Alexandria at today's 8661 N. 76th Pl., a parish founded in 1855 that then served a mainly German congregation. Frank died in 1929 and was buried at St. Catherine's cemetery.

The Mutz farm gradually fell under the operation of Frank Jr. Like in many farm families of the time, Frank Jr. had only completed the 7th grade. Children were needed as workers on the farm.

Frank Jr. later married Laura/Loretta Roskop, a German woman born in Wisconsin in 1908. The couple had children Alvin, Robert, Martha, Frank, Walter, Carol, and perhaps more. No doubt these children also worked on the farm. Like their ancestors, the family continued to worship at St. Catherine's of Alexandria. The farm was still in operation in the late 1960s. It is not known what happened to the farm when the Northridge Shopping Center was built in 1972. The Mutz farm would have been at the approximate location of the entrance to the mall.

Frank Jr. died in 1973. He joined his parents at St. Catherine's of Alexandria cemetery.



Economic prosperity in Granville

Save for the era of the Great Depression, economic prosperity reigned in Granville during most of its history. This was due partially to the work ethic of these early residents. The township remained predominantly rural through the early half of the 20th century. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin.

Movement toward annexation

In 1956 the residents and property owners of Granville were given a choice to consolidate with the City of Milwaukee. Needing services that Milwaukee could offer— especially water--the majority of voters said yes to the referendum. By the 1960s, the western portion of Granville (16.5 square miles) was annexed by Milwaukee and the eastern section consolidated as the Village of Brown Deer. Milwaukee became one of the few large cities in the United States that still had working farms within its boundaries.

Changes to former Granville area

The large area that had been Granville Township was beginning to attract more settlers in the 1960s. Among them were African Americans.

In the second half of the 20th century, African Americans began to migrate to the neighborhood. This happened for two reasons: (1) the need for housing following the razing of over 8,000 homes in the African American Bronzeville community in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s (see [Halyard Park neighborhood](#)), and (2) the availability of family-supporting jobs in industry in the former Granville community. As in most German-dominated areas in Milwaukee, the integration of the new population proceeded relatively smoothly. Many African American families were able to purchase homes and move into the middle class.

While most neighborhoods that had once been part of Granville Township were attracting more settlers, this was not true of today's Northridge and Northridge Lakes' areas. By the end of the 1960s the two neighborhoods had only a handful of residences— mostly farms—and no businesses. Almost none of the roads that exist in these neighborhoods today had been built then. But major change was about to happen.

Changes to the Northridge area

Between 1972 and 1974 the Northridge Shopping Center and the Northridge Lakes housing development both opened. Both were due to efforts of one family.

See the family profile below.

Northridge profile

(Information found in US Census and other public records)

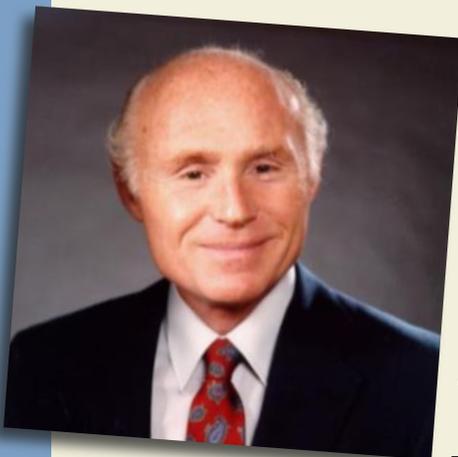
The Kohl family

Sometime in the 1930s, Max and Mary (nee Hiken) Kohl moved from Clement Avenue in Bay View to the Sherman Park area. But it was not in Sherman Park that the Kohls invested their greatest efforts. This happened elsewhere, including the Northridge area.

Max was a Jewish immigrant from Poland and Mary a Jewish immigrant from Russia. Although Max had only completed the 7th grade, he proved to be an aggressive entrepreneur. He'd already opened a grocery store in Bay View and was on his way to opening several more.

The couple's children all eventually played roles in the Kohl business, which over the years expanded to 50 grocery stores, as well as several department stores, pharmacies, and liquor stores. The child that grew to the greatest heights in terms of service to Milwaukee and Wisconsin was Herbert Kohl, called "Herb." (See photo.)

Having earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1956 (where he roomed with future baseball commissioner Bud Selig—see [Enderis Park neighborhood](#)) and an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1958, Herb Kohl rose to the office of president of Kohl's. Some years after selling the Kohl's empire in 1979, Herb sought a new career in politics. He ran for and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1989, where he served until 2013 when he did not seek reelection.



But Herb Kohl had already been heeding another calling. Following the example of his former roommate, Bud Selig, who had purchased the bankrupt Seattle Pilots in 1970 and brought the team to Milwaukee, Herb Kohl purchased the Milwaukee Bucks of the NBA in 1985. One of the goals of the purchase was to ensure that the team remained in Milwaukee. In 2014, Kohl sold the bucks to Wesley Edens and Marc Lasry, negotiating a deal that included a new arena and would again ensure the team's tenure in Milwaukee.

About the time that the Kohl's stores were sold to Brown & Williamson Tobacco Co., London, Herb invested in two malls, Southridge, its sister mall, Northridge, and hundreds of acres surrounding the malls. Southridge opened in 1970 and Northridge in 1972.

But Herb was not the only successful Kohl child. His brothers Sidney (born 1931) and Allen (born 1937) also rose to prominence in the Kohl business empire. They were the ones who developed Northridge Lakes, a residential development consisting of a mix of inventive multi-family residences. They also created the artificial lake that gives today's neighborhood its name.

The pioneering Northridge was planned and designed as a regional center with a two level mall and four anchors: Boston Store, Gimbels, J.C. Penney, and Sears. The mall soared in popularity during its first decade in business (see quotes from the Granville oral history below). But problems began to plague the area. The deindustrialization movement and attendant decline in household incomes that began in the 1980s arrested the economic prosperity of the area. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent, from a peak in 1963 to the present. Neighborhoods that once thrived were in decline. Northridge Lakes, while designed as moderate income housing, never had the chance to rise to its expectations.

The success of the shopping center and the housing development were both dealt a critical blow in 1992 when Jesse Anderson stabbed his wife to death in the parking lot of the mall. He falsely claimed that two black men attacked them and stabbed his wife. Urban legends followed. Many people attribute this crime to the eventual downfall and closure of Northridge mall and the unpopularity of the nearby housing units. Northridge Shopping Center closed in 2003.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are just under 2,000 residents in Northridge. Of these, just under 6 in 10 are African Americans and slightly over one-third are European Americans (most of multiple European ancestries). Approximately 1 in 20 are Latinos (mostly of Mexican descent). There is also a scattering of Asians (all of Indian or Filipino extraction), indigenous Africans, American Indians, and people of mixed or "other" racial backgrounds in the area.

The median household income in Northridge is just under \$29,000, placing it in the lower middle-income stratum. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, transportation, and production. There are over three times more adults in the field of transportation than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

Just over 60 percent of all Northridge property units are owned. Median home values are just under \$140,000 compared to the national median of nearly \$185,000. Median rents are \$847 compared to the national median of \$949.

The site of the former Northridge Shopping Center has fallen into disrepair. After a few failed business start-ups, the City of Milwaukee has claimed it is a public nuisance and placed a raze order on the complex, but current owners have fought the order in court.

INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Alexian Village**, at 9301 N. 76th Street, an independent living and long-term care community for the elderly.
- **Temple Menorah**, at 9663 N. 76th Street, a conservative synagogue that promotes life-long learning, cultural enrichment, and spiritual fulfillment.

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.

TOUR OF MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD (WELS)			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
By appointment	Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, lower level, 6814 N. 107th St.	Tour of more than 1,000 artifacts and pictures of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	Free, but donations welcome

GRANVILLE BID CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SPECTACULAR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sun. 10am-3pm	Russ Darrow, 7676 N. 76th St.	Exhibition of iconic custom vehicles.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-10pm	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fireworks.	Free

OPEN SWIM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1-5pm, holiday times vary	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	\$4, \$3 kids <12

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

In *The Golden Years of Yesteryear* by Emily Treichel Boehlke (reprinted in *A History of Granville* by Miriam Y. Bird, 1996), Treichel Boehlke writes about her family's history in Granville from the mid-1800s through the late 20th century. The following are passages from this work.

“When my Grandparents Treichel were first married and lived in their one room cabin, the Indians would stop in and admire their baby. . . At Grandfather Hackbarth's the Indians set up camps in the woods every spring and fall when they came to do their trading in Milwaukee.”

“Weddings in the 1860s and later were quite different from today. The invitations were hand written by the bride and groom and they were the hosts, not the parents of the bride. . . the silk material for the brides' dresses was only 18 inches wide, so for a fancy dress, it took 18 to 20 yards of material. It was not unusual for a man to wear his wedding suit 20 to 25 years, or as long as it fitted.”

“. . . the settlers were having church services at the home of Ernest Zautcke, who had brought a reed organ from Germany to help him with his singing. One of the men could read a text from the Bible and the other religious books which they had brought from across. Mr. Zautcke then donated land for a church and school on the corner of [today's] Hopkins and Silver Spring Roads. They were served by visiting pastors from Milwaukee and vicinity.”

“School [of her parents] was then held at the house of one of the member's house one month and at another one the next month, whoever had a room big enough to seat the children.”

“The housewife had to plan well ahead for her household. There was the Arab that would come about once a month with two heavy suitcases full of notions and yard goods for house dresses. When he begged for a night's lodging the housewife would get a spool of thread for payment. Also a man with a big basket of oranges and bananas would come. Bananas were 25 cents a dozen for nice large ones. Later a baker would come once a week with bread and sweets.”

“Every mother had to be well-schooled in home remedies. . . Plants and herbs were gathered in the summer to be dried and stored for the winter, to be used for any and all ailments.”

“Grandfather would sit and knit many mittens and stockings for all the grandchildren while Grandma read to him and tended her many plants of which she had quite a variety.”

“Even the first street cars were propelled by horse power. There were only 2 lines, one on 3rd Street to Williamsburg, a section of the city at North Avenue and Center and [one] further north (an all-German settlement).”

“In the beginning of the 1900s, there was no Silver Spring Drive, not even a wagon trail west of Hopkins Street. But the plans were made to have a road there, so one of the farmers would ride through the woods with horse and wagon or on horseback as best he could, so it would be legally kept as a driveway to the next mile west.”

“During the first World War, all gathering of people was forbidden, due to the spreading of the flu. So at Freistadt Church only every other pew could be sat in, so all the people east of the church came for early services and all those west of the church came for later service. Also all talking and preaching was to be done in English, but Pastor Wehrs insisted on preaching in German as many of his older members could not understand English.”

“There were about 12 to 14 neighbors that exchanged labor. This was a hard job for the ladies also, with breakfast at 6, lunch at 9, dinner at 12, another lunch at 3, and supper at sundown. No 8 hour days.”

“When the first threshing machine came out the farmers started to raise barley for the Breweries in Milwaukee. My father raised quite a lot of it and we girls had to man the farming mill in the evening when milking was done and our lessons were finished. This was a cold and tiresome job until enough was cleared for a load to be hauled to town the next day.

Quotes from an oral history of the Granville neighborhoods currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.ⁱ—About THEN.

“We were one for the first houses that were built on North 86th Street. We are directly west of the old Northridge Shopping Center. At the time we moved here it was a relatively new shopping center but as far as our street, it was pretty much the first houses here. It was a gravel road and behind our house, the land was owned by Michael Cudahy and he had a house there and it was his land. Behind us there was this big line of trees, some fields, and some woods back there.”

“I think that all the businesses that were there fed off of Northridge . . . Just the diversity of businesses from the clothing stores to a place to buy appliances. You had Toys R Us, Best Buy. You had a good amount of restaurants there. You didn’t have to leave. There were large department stores. A lot of outcrop from the strip malls came from that, so if you didn’t want to go to Northridge you could go to the strip malls and get some of the things that you needed from some of the stores. Like Joanne Fabric and Stein Mart, you know some of your middle-sized stores.”

“When we moved there, there was a Pick n Save, a Menards, a Half Price Bookstore. There were some nice fun stores there. There was a Joanne Fabrics store there. Some of the bigger chains had stores there but unfortunately some of those have since left the area.”

“They had every kind of businesses you want. And then there used to be a Kohl’s food store across the street. Whatever fast food restaurant you would want was over here. Anything you needed in a general neighborhood was here 15 years ago. And in those 15 years a large portion of that has gone away minus the fast food restaurants for whatever reason.”

“[Neighbors] were the cops’ wives. They worked at Northridge as clerks. And they were waitresses. Of course you didn’t see the industrial parks because they were kind of hidden. So even though I had a job in an industrial company, I really did not know there were all those companies up there. Which is kind of interesting because they are off the beaten path.”

“I remember when the Brewers were in the World Series in 1982 and everyone was out in their yard watching TV. I think people have gone to the YMCA. Now I don’t think people have money like they used to. I think a lot of people used to go over to Northridge mall and that has changed. There wasn’t a lot of stuff on the northwest side. There’s not a lot of skating rinks or anything. The kids would play on the playground in the summer but they cut all that out so I don’t know what they do nowadays.”

“I would have to say the single turning point that really drove things south in this neighborhood was the Jesse Anderson case. It was that and the decision not to build the Park West freeway.”

Quotes from the oral history of the Granville neighborhoods—About NOW

“I just watched the deterioration of it. Politically it’s been frustrating. Nothing has happened with Northridge. Then we watched the beginning of Pick n Save and now that’s gone as well. We watched the number of grocery stores that used to be there. There is not good shopping now. It’s all dollar stores; there is so much vacant space. There’s a plasma center, and a couple of liquor stores. There was an adult video store that we were trying to replace.”

“It’s just not the coolest place you want to live. So the area became poverty stricken. So basically we dropped a bunch of people who didn’t have jobs into an area that was doing very well. And guess what--it didn’t help anything. . . If you look at the history of until the ‘70s people kept on moving because of the white flight. This just killed the Northridge area. The area maintained itself from an economic perspective because back when the city workers still had to live in the city you still had very good middle class housing. It was a safe place and nice area--a lot of teachers and cops. But you still had over by Northridge a huge amount of the homes that became slum landlords.”

“It’s a matter of perception; it’s a matter of who do you believe? If you believe the news media they would say it’s from the murder that took place by the TJI Friday. I don’t necessarily agree with that. And I think one thing happening in the area doesn’t necessarily constitute the whole area. There was a study that the City of Milwaukee had done in regards to the Northridge mall. So when Northridge was established in the ‘70s there was nothing out here but a lot of farm fields. Especially when you got out to the suburbs, they didn’t have a lot of shopping. There was a lot of farm. As all these suburbs got built up and all these businesses got built up, people didn’t need to come to Northridge anymore and they could stay in their own hometown. I think that was more of a decline of Northridge than I think anything else. There were some issues but nothing that would be detrimental. Look at Southridge, Southridge has a lot of security issues but it’s still thriving over there.”

¹ 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-Northridge Shopping Mall



Today's neighborhood-
Temple Menorah on N. 76th St.



Today's neighborhood-
W. Glenbrook Rd. looking south



Today's neighborhood-
W. Glenbrook Rd. looking north

ⁱ Photo attribution: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f2/Herbert_Kohl_official_photo.jp

For more information on the history of Granville, refer to Miriam Y. Bird's *A History of Granville Township*.

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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