

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. County Line Rd; S-W. Fairy Chasm Dr;

E-N. 85th St; W-N. 91st St

NORTHWEST SIDE *Ridgeview*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Like the adjacent neighborhood of Hilltop Parish, Ridgeview has very few residences. Most of the housing stock is colonial and ranch style and appears to be recently built. The neighborhood has no business corridor.

The topography of Ridgeview is flat to gently rolling hills. Most of the neighborhood is wooded area and open fields. Several acres of farm fields lie along the south side of West County Line Road in the northern section of the neighborhood. There are a few curving streets in the far southeastern corner and along the north side of West Fairy Chasm Drive at the southern border of the neighborhood. Many of the streets end in abrupt dead ends with wooden barricades. See neighborhood 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 Ridgeview was once in the Town of Granville.

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).

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on N. 85th St
& W. Glenbrook Rd.



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 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.

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 generally

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 Ridgeview and adjoining Northridge 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 Ridgeview area specifically

Between 1972 and 1974 the Northridge Shopping Center and the Northridge Lakes housing development both opened. 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.

During these years, the neighborhood that is today Ridgeview had literally only a couple of blocks of houses. Two of these were owned by the Larsen brothers. See their profiles below.

Ridgeview profile (late 20th century) *(Information from U.S. Census and other public sources)*

The Larsen brothers

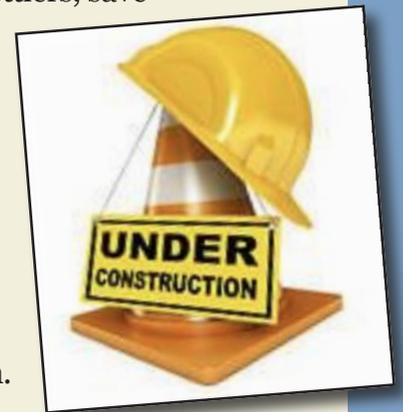
In the 1960s, the Larsen brothers, Herbert E. and Elroy R., lived a block away from each other on North 91st Street on the western border of today's Ridgeview. This was at a time when the Ridgeview and surrounding neighborhoods had almost no settlers, save for a few widely dispersed farms.

Elroy R. (born 1918) and Herbert E. (born 1924) were the sons of Robert and Nellie Larsen. Dad Robert was the son of a Norwegian immigrant father and a German immigrant mother. He was a World War I veteran and worked independently as a building contractor to support his family. Mom Nellie (nee Adamscek) was the daughter of German immigrants.

The family lived in Shorewood when the boys were young and moved to North 19th Place and Fairmount sometime in the 1930s. Their home was valued at more than twice the Great Depression median.

By 1940, Elroy had joined his father's building contracting firm. While Herbert was still in school in 1940, he probably also joined the firm at some point. Herbert served in the U.S. Army during World War II between 1943 and 1946. Sometime later the two brothers ended up in the Ridgeview neighborhood on North 91st Street. They probably built their own homes.

No records were found on spouses or children of the Larsen brothers. Herbert died in June of 2006 and Elroy died six months later in November.



Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are just over 300 residents in the sparsely populated Ridgeview. Of these, just over half are European Americans (most of mixed European ancestry) and about 4 in 10 are African Americans. The remaining populations are Latinos (most of Mexican ancestry) Asians (all of Indian or Filipino extraction), indigenous Africans, American Indians, and people of mixed or "other" racial backgrounds.

The median household income in Ridgeview is just under \$30,000, 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.

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 to be a public nuisance and placed a raze order on the complex, but current owners have fought the order in court.

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.	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>

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.¹—About THEN.

“Our kids would go play in the woods and catch frogs and go ride their bikes in the open field. Our kids had a great childhood here.”

“My functional memories from when I was a child [were] from probably about 12 to 13 years old. When we would come up here it was quite a vibrant shopping district. It was really the shopping district. There were many restaurants, shopping. I remember coming here going to Northridge during Christmas-time and it was just wall to wall traffic, it was hard to even find a parking spot.”

“It was entirely farmland when we moved here. It’s still pretty rural. We kids always played in the fields and hiked in the woods.”

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

“Herb Kohl and his brother. The Kohl family. and I think the people who invested in the manufacturing companies (most of them are locally owned companies)-they’ve had a huge influence because they stayed and they could’ve left. Ten years ago our manufacturing, our [business] parks, were about 60 percent empty and that’s the one thing that the BID’s done. We’re now 97 percent full. So something has changed. And they’re beginning to see that they’re going to have to hire from the neighborhood. So like I said--this could be the turnaround coming because of the need for employees.”

“There’s really not a lot of sporting events in this neighborhood. Northridge in general used to be a common central place for people to congregate.”

“My county supervisor is the bomb, [NAME]--she is a rock star. She definitely is making changes. A quiet hero would be the block watch captain [who] is making huge strides.”

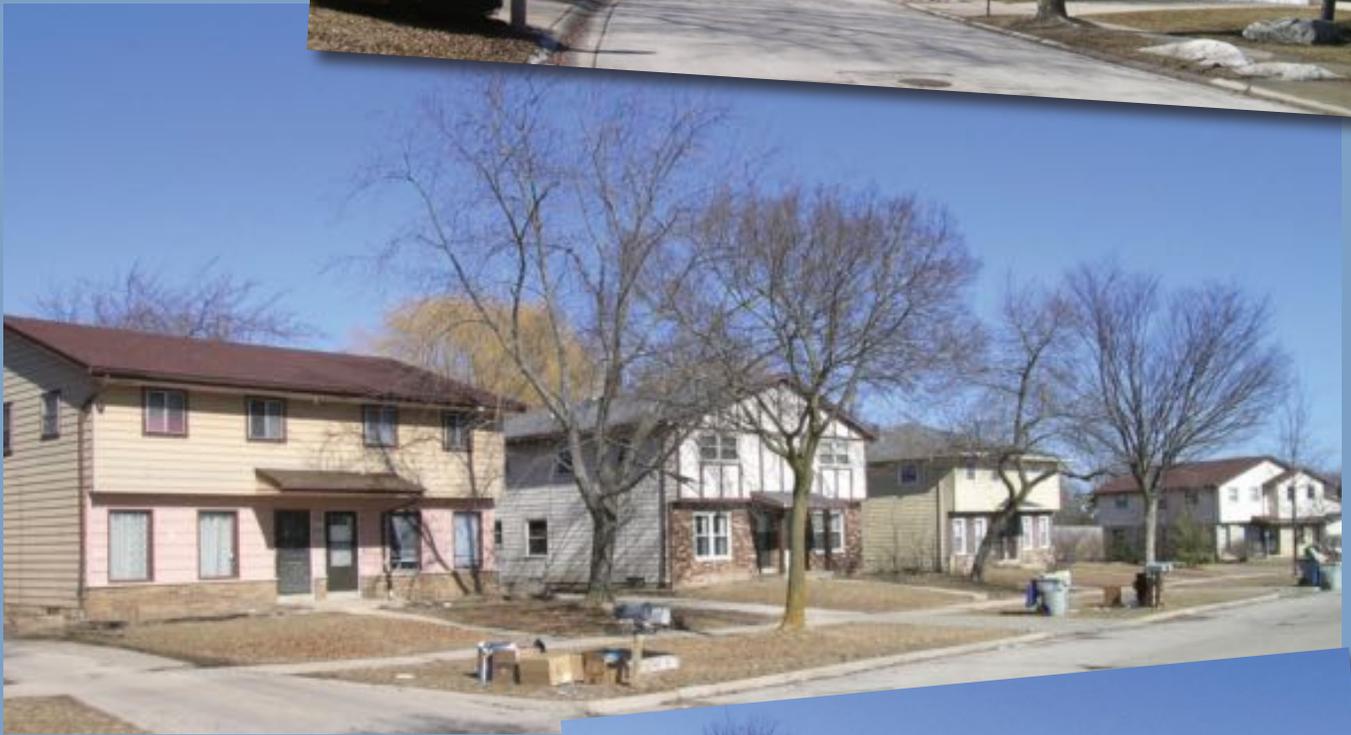
“Employers that came [have] made an impact. At one time car dealers made an impact too. I think recently there’s been the addition of the Auto Auction that has been attracting larger crowds to come in and take over some vacant space. Certainly now the Granville BID is hopefully making an impact for the better too.”

“If there were leaders and still are, then it’s the church communities. There was St. Catherine’s and I think several more now. They were always the movers and shakers here—I think maybe in other city areas too, or so I hear. I don’t see the mayor talking about us. I think if you look at his speeches you’d never hear the word Granville ever.”

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-Houses on W. Glenbrook Rd.



Today's neighborhood-
Houses on W. Fairy Chasm Dr. looking northeast



Today's neighborhood-
House on the north side of W. Fairy Chasm Dr.



Houses on N. 85th St. & N. Joyce Ave.

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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www.urban-anthropology.org