

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. Capitol Dr; S-W. Burleigh St;
E-N. 30th St; W-W. Fond Du Lac Ave

NORTHWEST SIDE *Roosevelt Grove*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

The eastern section of Roosevelt Grove--from 30th Street to 35th Street--is mainly industrial. The neighborhood is primarily residential from 35th Street to Fond du Lac Avenue with mainly one- and two-story wood frame homes. The area around Roosevelt Drive has more one-story Tudor houses. Streets follow a grid pattern except for West Roosevelt Drive that runs diagonally between 35th and 46th Streets.

Roosevelt Grove has a large proportion of faith communities. See neighborhood photos below.

HISTORY

There are six neighborhoods that comprise a larger area known as Sherman Park. Roosevelt Grove is a neighborhood on Sherman Park's northeastern border.

Residents began to settle Sherman Park in the late teens and early twenties of the 20th century. Many were attracted to the suburban look of the area that at this time was the edge of the city. Developers had created wide, tree-lined streets and boulevards, but the beautiful homes were the neighborhood's signature.

Early populations

The first arrivals to the area were primarily Germans and Czechs migrating from various Milwaukee neighborhoods. Later migrants were diverse groups representing over 20 nations from nearly every continent. However, the largest of the later arriving groups were Jewish- and African-American. To understand the later migration patterns, one must look to another Milwaukee neighborhood that thrived in the middle of the 20th century.

Bronzeville origins

The Bronzeville community had been home to the ancestors of many key players in the current Sherman Park neighborhood. The community that would be called Bronzeville by many residents was located in an area between downtown Milwaukee and North Avenue and roughly 1st Street to 12th Street (the widest boundaries given by some local historians—others offer narrower boundaries)

The area had first been home to a large segment of Milwaukee's German community. By 1910 a 10,000-strong population of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Ukraine had settled in the area. Within a few years African Americans from the South began their Great Migration to the North in response to needs to fill jobs in mainly urban centers. By the 1950s the black population in Milwaukee was nearly 50,000.

Two institutions that would later be critical to the stability of one of Sherman Park's neighborhoods, St. Joseph's, were founded in the Bronzeville area. Ascension SE Wisconsin



Today's neighborhood—
Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church
(38th and Keefe)

Hospital—St. Joseph’s Campus (also known as St. Joseph’s) had its roots in a little house on Walnut Street and built its first hospital on 4th & Reservoir. The second is Beth Jehudah synagogue, which was on 11th and North Avenue until the 1950s. Both institutions are today in the St. Joseph’s neighborhood of the Sherman Park complex.

Many of the older activist families in Sherman Park lived in or had close relatives in the Bronzeville area before migrating northwest. In fact, the Bronzeville area had two dynasty families that would later be critical to the development of Sherman Park and surrounding areas. The Twerskis were one dynasty family. They had founded the Beth Jehudah synagogue. The Coggs were another dynasty family and today occupy many leadership roles in Milwaukee politics.

In Roosevelt Grove specifically, some residents went on to achieve remarkable success in their own fields. See the profile below.

Roosevelt Grove resident profile (1940s) *(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

Lee Dreyfus

Lee Sherman Dreyfus became the 40th Governor of Wisconsin, serving between 1979 and 1983. He grew up in the Roosevelt Grove neighborhood, at 3629 North 39th Street in the 1940s.

Lee Dreyfus was the grandson of German immigrants. His paternal grandparents, Otto and Lillie (nee Troegel) Dreyfus, had run a tavern on Milwaukee’s South Side in the old 11th Ward. Lee’s parents, Woods Orlow and Clare (nee Bluett) Dreyfus had moved north into the Sherman Park area. The parents were very active in the community. Clare served for 25 years on the Milwaukee School Board. Woods Orlow became an on-air host for WISN radio, offering young Lee the chance to act and sing on the station.

Lee Dreyfus would emulate the color and community-mindedness of his parents. After serving in the U.S. Navy after high school, he used the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wayne State University. At Wayne State, he became the general manager of their radio station and then returned to Madison as manager of WHA-TV and professor of speech and broadcasting.

His colorful nature would attract national attention when he became president of the Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point (later University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point) in 1972. In order to be accessible to students, he wore a red vest so he would be recognizable. The media often followed Dreyfus as he interacted with students during campus unrest at the height of the Viet Nam War.

Dreyfus joined the Republican Party in 1977 and launched a campaign for the governorship the following year. The campaign, called “The Red Vest Whistle Stop Special” caught the voters’ interest, and he won the election. Dreyfus was known for fiscal conservatism in office. He chose not to run for re-election, and spent the rest of his days advocating for various educational policies. He died in 2008. It is not known if he was buried in the red vest.

And what happened to Bronzeville? Bronzeville was leveled in the 1950s and 1960s. During these years, two government programs were displacing major populations in Milwaukee. One program was urban renewal, which had been designed to improve central city housing. During the same time period, the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission was building major freeway corridors in the heart of the city. One corridor ran right through the heart of Bronzeville. Over 8,000 African American dwelling units were lost and nearly 100 percent of its business district.

Current populations (as of 2021)

As new populations left the central city and moved into the area, the Sherman Park complex faced its own challenges. At times residents struggled to understand cultural differences, a challenge that still exists today.

Roosevelt Grove has the highest proportion of African Americans (over 9 in 10) than the other neighborhoods in the Sherman Park area. Most of the Jewish and other European American populations settled slightly south of Roosevelt Grove.

As in the rest of Sherman Park, over half of the properties are likely to be rented. Rents are low in Roosevelt Grove with most rental units going for \$500 to \$1,000 and about one in ten going for under \$500.

IMPORTANT NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Sherman Phoenix** at 3536 W. Fond du Lac, a shopping mall featuring businesses of color that was built from the fire-damaged BMO Harris Bank following racial unrest in the neighborhood in 2016
- **Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church** at 38 thand Keefe Ave. (see photo)
- **Haven of Hope Ministries** aat 4040 W. Fond Du Lac Ave. (see photo)
- **Parklawn Assembly of God** at 3725 N. Sherman Blvd., formerly Beth El Synagogue (see photo)

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.

FREE FAMILY SWIM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Tue. 6:00-6:55pm females; 7:00-7:55pm males	Washington H.S., 2525 N. Sherman Blvd., enter main gym door on Sherman Blvd.	Indoor swimming with swim caps available for purchase (children 7 and under must be accompanied by adult). 875-6025	Families, free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am-12:30pm	Sherman Park, 3000 N. Sherman Blvd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games.	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

Quotes from oral history of Sherman Park conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2009:¹ About THEN

“When I was thirteen I was selling stuff door-to-door for the Salvation Army. I lived in the Projects. I never saw these people here as Germans or Jews or anything. I saw them as rich white folks. Sometimes I would go to a house and I would be invited in. I never saw houses like this. We never had any moldings in our house and just linoleum. I looked in and saw a real fire coming out of a wall—a fireplace. My friend Jackie didn’t want to go in, but I did. I was fascinated with the old chenille bedspreads with flowers on them. I said, ‘One day, I would live here.’ We moved here in 1991.”

“Integration happened in a rapid fashion. This area may be one of the most integrally middle-class areas in Wisconsin. People of the area were proud of their homes and neighbors and reputations Sherman [Park] has gained. In the ‘70’s the Sherman Park Community Association fought off the block busting. That showed the force of the neighbors coming together fighting racial block busting. Whites were encouraged to move out, so they put for sale signs up warning the neighbors that this block was going to turn to people of color and bring property values down.”

“That’s kind of how the SPCA started. Concerned people from St. Catherine’s started meeting in living rooms. We ended up in church halls because the group grew and then the Jews thought that we were a Christian organization, so they wouldn’t come to the meetings. I was the editor of the newspaper. We had this and gave it to the synagogues and all the businesses for free. We began with a \$1,500 budget and spent pretty much all on the newsletter. Later there is no problem getting the Jews involved. We received awards for working towards racial harmony.

“Initially we saw that the real estate business was set to carve us up. They would put freeways wherever they pleased because they thought people would not fight. And the decision to have an all-black middle school and all-white middle school. No. We had a very effective school committee/board and the plans of the specialty schools came out of Sherman Park. The freeway tore all those houses down, killed the North Avenue business area because the population was gone. Maier gave his friend Sampson money to put ticky-tackey little houses there. People couldn’t get their money back when they bought them. They were in such bad shape. The builder didn’t care—that was real estate. The real estate agencies were putting more than one sign facing the street, which was against the law. You’d see all those signs and think there were far more houses for sale and think the neighborhood is up for grabs. Then people try to get out of here before they can make money. We filed suit against them. The unions and politicians wanted the freeways, they said progress was good. There would be no integration if the freeway was there. The housing market would be different.”

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.

Quotes from oral history of Sherman Park conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc. in 2009: About NOW

“On the eastern part it's basically all African American, and there's some integration. My block is all African American. If you go west and north there are a lot of Caucasians. You will find some Vietnamese in the area, some, but not a lot. Some Hmong, not much, but some.”

“Over time an organization called the Sherman Park Association of Religious Communities sparked which brought together people of all the different faiths (SPARK). People, at least, became aware. We published some calendars; we did some dinners; we celebrated some of the public holidays together. We went from toleration to appreciation.”

“They are middle class and home owners here mostly—people who want to live in a diverse neighborhood, have a sense of the value of their properties and want to maintain these well. The home tours are very big—30 percent are locals. They have a certain esthetic sense. They like to maintain a certain code of conduct. There was an issue where someone was shooting up cars and some young woman was somehow involved and was renting with her child when she was underaged. People called police and she went on and on about her rights and the police said it was against the law to rent to a minor, etc. The locals were all out there asking why she was not concerned about the wellbeing of her child when you had people shooting up an area.”

“There is a social divide between Burleigh and south of Burleigh because the homes are less spacious and income level lower in the south.”

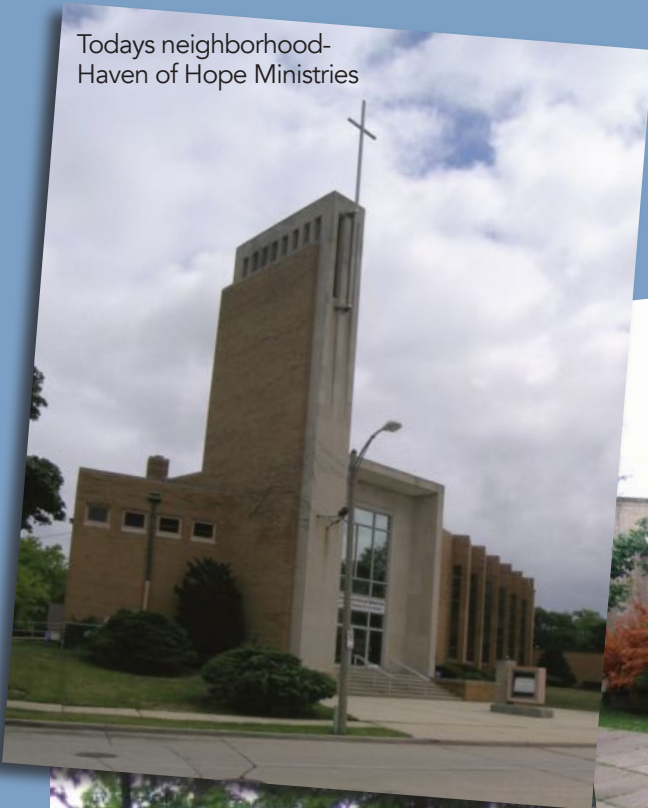
“At all times the majority of people worked outside of the neighborhood. The simple fact, if you took all the businesses located in the Sherman Park area, if you took the total number of employees working at all the businesses combined, it would be nowhere near enough to support the working population of the neighborhood. The population is probably about 40,000 people depending on where you draw the boundaries. That's probably 20,000 employed people. There is no way the neighborhood could possibly provide 20,000 jobs. My parents actually did live and work in the same neighborhood and so do I now. People that I knew personally where they worked, number one was downtown. And we have a good number of factory workers who work in various areas of the city and the county. Neighborhood businesses provide a relatively small number of jobs.”

“Well there are 36 churches in this neighborhood, or that was my last count. But there are a lot of storefront churches. It doesn't make any difference to me what they call themselves. What I have noticed is that the A.M.E. churches are the good ones—are the ones where they have programs for kids, where they are organized—like the Catholic Church was that I grew up with, and I guess the Lutheran church was, too, but I didn't know anything about that. I didn't even know until recently that they had a skating rink in the Sherman Park Lutheran Church on Center and Sherman—when I was a kid.”

“In the Jewish community the number of children has increased because of orthodoxy, now five or six children is more common. There are also more people living by themselves.”

PHOTOS

Todays neighborhood-
Haven of Hope Ministries



Todays neighborhood-
The former Frederick Douglass School



Todays neighborhood-38th Street and Keef Ave.



Today's neighborhood-Parklawn Assembly of God (former Beth El Synagogue)

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