

**Approximate boundaries:**

**N**-W. Morgan Ave; **S**-W. Forest Home Ave;  
**E**-W. Forest Home Ave, **W**-S. 68<sup>th</sup> St

# SOUTHWEST SIDE *Root Creek*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Root Creek is a neighborhood with moderate population density on Milwaukee's Southwest Side. Most of the homes are newer duplexes and ranch houses, with a few older Cape Cods and Tudor-style houses east of 60th Street. The neighborhood's topography is mainly flat to gently rolling hills, with steep slopes on either side of Honey Creek. The creek runs through the southwest corner of the neighborhood from South 68th Street south to West Forest Home Avenue.

Most of the streets are winding avenues that follow the curve of Hamilton Bell Park and Honey Creek. The neighborhood's southern boundary is West Forest Home running at a diagonal from South 54th to South 68th Streets. The principal business district is along Forest Home south of Howard Avenue.

There is public green space in Root Creek. Hamilton Dell Park is a large playfield just southwest of Hamilton High School. See neighborhood photos below.

## HISTORY

The Root Creek neighborhood was once in the unincorporated Town of Greenfield, which extended from today's 27th to 124th Streets and Greenfield to College Avenues.

### Early populations

A hamlet named Root Creek was established in the mid-1800s with a post office near the junction of today's 68th Street and Forest Home Avenue. The post office would later be moved to South 76th Street and then again to the intersection of Howard and Forest Home Avenues, next to Honey Creek. In 1887 the population of the service area of the post office was estimated at 129—most of the residents being German and Irish farmers. While Germans dominated the hamlet population, they hailed from different regions. Some German immigrants had come from Austria and Switzerland, while others were from the German areas of Pomerania, Saxony, and Brandenburg. The Root Creek hamlet extended west from the current Root Creek and Green Moor neighborhoods to other Milwaukee areas and south into today's City of Greenfield. The post office discontinued in 1908, but an active group of Root Creek farmers and gardeners organized the Root Creek Fair in 1914, an event that remained in operation through 1939.

During the 1920s the entire Southwest Side began to transition from a farming district to clusters of settlements that would become Milwaukee neighborhoods. Most of the migrating populations were Polish and German. Many settled first in the Jackson Park neighborhood, but some turned west and ventured further into the countryside, creating a minor housing boom. By 1935, the Root Creek neighborhood had 37 residences and 13 businesses. Most of the settlement activity was along Forest Home Avenue. However, the advent of the Great Depression, followed by World War II, temporarily reduced the rate of development. An example of a family that settled in the area during the years of the Great Depression appears below.

Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on 60th & Warnimont



## Root Creek Random Residents (1930s)

*Names selected randomly from the 1935 City Directory in the Root Creek area  
(photo and additional information from public records at Ancestry.com)*

### The Wilkes

Paul Wilke and Elizabeth Donaldson Wilke (see photo) moved to a rented home on South 60th between Morgan and Forest Home sometime in the 1930s. Both were recent emigrants from Europe, but not from the same area. Paul, an ethnic German born in 1898 in Arlesheim, Solothurn, Switzerland, left his country for America in 1926. Elizabeth was born in Scotland in 1904 to parents Mary McAulay and Alexander (Sandy) Donaldson. The family left Clydebank, Dunbartonshire, Scotland, in 1921 for Quebec Canada. They remained in Ontario for five years before crossing the border to the United States.

Paul and Elizabeth apparently met in New Jersey. The courtship could not have been easy, as Paul continued to list his household language as German into the 1930s. Furthermore, the two came from different religious backgrounds. Elizabeth, a Scot, would have no doubt been Presbyterian, and Paul was a baptized member of the Evangelical Reform Church. Nevertheless, the couple must have found common grounds, as they married and raised a family.

Within a few years after settling in New Jersey, Paul and Elizabeth headed for Wisconsin. Paul was able to find employment, first as an electrical mechanic and later as an electrical engineer (he had apparently been trained for this field in Switzerland). The couple first settled in New Berlin about 1932 and soon afterwards migrated to the Root Creek neighborhood, where they remained for at least a decade. They had five children. Paul was naturalized in 1936.

While in Root Creek, the Wilkes rented their home for \$30 a month. Paul continued to work throughout the Great Depression. In 1940 he reported annual earnings of \$1,400 while working full time—an income slightly above the annual average of \$1,368 for that year. Elizabeth reported working as a stenographer, but had no earnings (she may have been a volunteer).

In later life Paul and Elizabeth moved to Waukesha County. Elizabeth died first in 1990 and Paul followed her in 1992.



### *Post World War II*

A major housing boom after the war pressed many families of returning servicemen and others further west. By 1947, the Root Creek neighborhood had just under 100 residences. At about the same time, the City of Milwaukee was engaged in a massive annexation program in the area. Between 1948 and 1953, a series of annexations added territory between Lincoln Avenue and Cold Spring Road and South 40th Street and South 100th Street. The area became eligible to receive city services such as road building and road improvement, which in turn attracted more residents.

### *Forest Home Avenue*

The old Janesville Plank Road had been a carrot for the Root Creek *hamlet* and was the area first settled in the westward migration of Milwaukeeans to the two current neighborhoods of Green Moor and Root Creek. Forest Home is the street that separates the two. It would also develop into both neighborhoods' main commercial corridor. By the mid-1930s Forest Home had 13 businesses (nearly half taverns) within the Green Moor/Root Creek boundaries. This increased to 25 by the immediate postwar years. See list and notes below.

<i>Addresses on W. Forest Home Ave. in 1947</i>	<i>Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
5454	Ray Anderson Auto Repair
5556	William Mallard Mason Contractor Gilbert E. Lohman Mason Contractor
5614	John A. Seymour Tavern
5624	John A. Seymour Filling Station
5822	Mrs. Selma Gutwald Grocery
5900	Henry W. Stuhr Blacksmith Schellhaus & Ristau Auto Body Shop
5912	Archie E. Robrahm Tavern
6000	Francis C. McLaughlin Tavern
6012	William W. Bartsch Mason Contractor
6015	Mrs. Blanch Gorzalski Tavern
6126	Severn J. Sommers Nursery
6229	Edward R. Ludwig Tavern
6237	Anton Weiss Grocery
6307	Martin W. Butt Filling Station
6338	Jannis Andacht Nurse
6420	Root Creek Oriole Club

<i>Addresses on W. Forest Home Ave. in 1947</i>	<i>Names of businesses and organizations from Milwaukee City Directory</i>
6510	Paul A. Scholz Painter
6551	Walter Gorski Tavern
6633	William Wendt Plaster Contractor
6710	Ralph F. Knierim Tavern
6720	Neil Horigan Grocery
6802	St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
6830	Joseph R. Kovach Tavern

#### **Summary and notes from census and other records:**

- The tradition of taverns along this stretch of Forest Home continued after the war. The taverns generally catered to specific ethnic groups that had either deep roots in the area or were newer arrivals. For example, Blanch Gorzalski (nee Gomanski) and Walter Gorski were Polish; Francis McLaughlin was likely Irish; Archie Robrahm was a Pomeranian; and Edward R. Ludwig, Ralph Knierim, and Joseph R. Kovach were Germans. No conclusive information was found on John Seymour.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were immigrants or children of immigrants.
- William Millard, the mason contractor, was from New York. His apparent partner, Gilbert Lohman, was the son of a German immigrant.
- Henry Stuhr, the blacksmith, had been at his shop since prior to 1920. He must have adapted his work from serving animal transportation to serving automobile transportation. An immigrant from Mecklenburg, Germany, he died in 1950 and was buried at the St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church cemetery up the street from his shop. He had no doubt been a resident of the old Root Creek hamlet. The owner of the auto body shop occupying the same address as Stuhr may have been a Robert Schellhaus, also a German immigrant.
- The Sommers family, with the nursery, also had deep roots in the hamlet. Severn's father, Herman, farmed at this address in 1920. By 1930 he listed his occupation as a "landscape gardener." He was a Pomeranian immigrant.
- Anton Weiss, the grocer, was also an immigrant. He was born in Austria. He'd listed himself as a "cattle dealer" at that address in 1940.
- Martin Butt, with the gas station, may also have had roots in the Root Creek hamlet. He'd operated his filling station at that location since the 1920s. His father, William Butt, an immigrant from Brandenburg, Germany, had a farm on the old Janesville Plank Road in the early 20th century

- The nurse, Jannis Andacht, was also the child of a German immigrant. She had completed high school.
- St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church was a mainstay in the Root Creek hamlet. Named Evangelisch-Lutherische St. Johannes-Gemeinde zu Root Creek, Wisconsin, it was built in 1846.

### *Arrival of Latinos*

Latinos (mainly Mexicans) began to settle on the *near* South Side in the 1920s and slowly migrated south into the Polish areas. Since the 1970s, the Mexican community has grown all over the South and Southwest Side, including Root Creek.

A number of push-pull factors influenced the population changes. 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. In addition, both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were often recruited by local industries to fill workplace needs. Beginning in 1917, the US government implemented a series of immigration restriction policies to curb the influx of Mexicans, mainly in response to local claims that Mexicans (who often worked for low wages) were taking jobs away from ‘true’ Americans.

But they found a place to fit in. Latinos—particularly Mexicans--were able to settle successfully alongside Poles in particular because they shared so many traits in common. These included the Catholic faith, the focus on the Madonna figure, polka music traditions, similarities in childrearing and eldercare practices, and an entrepreneurial spirit.

### **Current populations (as of 2021)**

Today, the small Root Creek neighborhood has just over 1,500 residents. Of these, over 7 in 10 are European Americans (the majority claiming German or Polish ancestry). Over 1 in 5 are Latinos--mostly claiming Mexican ancestry—and nearly 1 in 20 are African Americans. The remaining population is comprised of a scattering of Asians (mainly Vietnamese), American Indians, and people of multiple backgrounds. The neighborhood has a typical Milwaukee age distribution, but has substantially more men than women.

Root Creek is a lower middle to middle-income neighborhood with a median household income of just under \$50,000 annually. The occupations cited most often by residents are in the fields of administration, production, and education.

Over half of Root Creek property units are owner-occupied. Costs for home ownership (e.g., mortgages, deeds of trust, contracts to buy, taxes, insurance) are modest, with nearly three-quarters of the homes costing between \$501 and \$2,000 a month. Rents are also modest with over 9 in 10 units going for \$501 to \$1,000 a month.

### **INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES**

- **Hamilton Dell Park**, near Hamilton High, a large MPS playfield.
- **Wedgewood Park International School**, at 6506 W. Warnimont, a school attempting to enhance intercultural understanding.

## 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.

### DAN JANSEN FAMILY FEST--GREENFIELD

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late May, Fri. 5-11pm, Sat. 12-11pm, Sun. 12-4pm	Konkel Park, 5151 W. Layton Ave., Greenfield	Festival of rides, car show, live entertainment, and more.	Free

### ST. MARY PARISH FESTIVAL—HALES CORNERS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Jul., Fri., Sat., Sun., see website for hours	9520 W. Forest Home Ave., Hales Corners	Festival to bring parishioners together in a spirit of community, including food, games, concessions, live music, raffle and more.	Free

### JACKSON PARK FARMERS MARKET

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Sep., Thu. 3:30-7pm	3300 W. Forest Home Ave.	Fresh food from Wisconsin farms, baked goods, crafts, art.	Free

### CROATIANFEST--FRANKLIN

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Jul., Sat. 11am-11pm; Sun. 11am-6pm	Croatian Park, 9100 S. 76th St., Franklin	Festival with Croatian food, live music, kids' activities, games, and more.	unk

### ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST FAMILY FESTIVAL--GREENFIELD

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jul., Fri. 5-11pm, Sat. 3-11pm, Sun. 12-9pm	8500 W. Cold Spring Road, Greenfield	Festival including rides, games, wine cellar, bingo, food, music, and more.	Free

### NATIONAL NIGHT OUT--GREENFIELD

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
First week Aug., weekday 5:30- 8:30pm	Konkel Park, 5151 W. Layton Ave., Greenfield	Fun evening of free food, games, rides, chance to dialogue with local police and community organizations.	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 have an interesting comment about this neighborhood, please email it to [JFLanthropologist@currently.com](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)*

## PHOTOS

Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on 60th & Warnimont



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 58th & Warnimont



Today's neighborhood-Honey Creek

Today's neighborhood-  
Wedgewood Park International School



Today's neighborhood-Houses on Dodge Place





Today's neighborhood-Hamilton Dell Park

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](mailto:JFLanthropologist@currently.com)



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