

# NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Sherman Park is a densely populated neighborhood with a 20.7-acre park of the same name. The neighborhood has a wide variety of housing types. The eastern section, from 27<sup>th</sup> St to about 37<sup>th</sup> Street, has mainly two story wood frame duplexes and bungalows that are closely spaced together. In the western section, closer to Sherman Park, are more elaborate houses in the Tudor style with brick and stone facades.

Burleigh Street is the major business corridor. See Sherman Park photos below.

## HISTORY

There are six neighborhoods that comprise a larger area known as Sherman Park. Sherman Park is the neighborhood in its center. The other neighborhoods include Grasslyn Manor, Roosevelt Grove, Sunset Heights, St. Joseph's, and Uptown.

Residents began to settle Sherman Park in the late teens and early twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 population**

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> Street to 17<sup>th</sup> Street (the widest boundaries given by some local historians, but the boundaries are disputed).

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 Bronzeville 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. The Wheaton Franciscan Hospital (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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 the Urban Renewal Administration, 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 homes were lost and nearly 100 percent of its business district.

### *Early businesses in the Sherman Park neighborhood*

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Burleigh Street emerged as a major commercial corridor in the Sherman Park area. Below is a list of businesses on Burleigh between 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Sherman Boulevard in 1933. See summary and notes below. (To look at businesses in the western half of the Sherman Park complex in 1940, [go to the St. Joseph neighborhood.](#))

<i>Addresses on W. Burleigh in the Sherman Park neighborhood in 1933</i>	<i>Name of business, office, organization, and apartments from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
2813	Columbia Bottling Works
3025	Emerson Oil Company
3113	Wisconsin Rag and Metal Company
3501	Walgreen Company
3507	Milwaukee Gardens Tavern
3509	Six Point Public Market
3513-3515	Central Fruit Market
3517	Andrew Schwister Shoes
3521	William Klunder Delicatessen

<i>Addresses on W. Burleigh in the Sherman Park neighborhood in 1933</i>	<i>Name of business, office, organization, and apartments from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
3523	Joseph Braunreiter Tavern
3525	Max Miller Dry Goods
3529	Vacant store
3531	Dominic Amato Shoe Repair
3533	National Tea Company
3600	Edwin Kroll Auto Repair
3613	Noerenberg Food Shop
3615	Mildred Beauty Shop
3630	Alphonse A. Winters Tavern
3710	Burleigh Inn Tavern
3728	Elmer Duester Filling Station
3800	Burleigh Court Pharmacy
3804	West Towne Beauty Salon
3806	Henry Clausen Tailor
3808	Clinton V. Farnam Upholstery
3824	Sherman Park Food Shoppe Delicatessen
3826	Roman Schulz Meats
3832	Great A & P Tea Company
3900	J.G. Jansen Inc. General Contractors
3902	Clarence Ressel Barber
3911	Joseph P. Jansen General Contractors
3914	Emil J. Bloedow Shoe Repair
3918	Albert E. Schult Jeweler
3924	Harold Gram Furrier
3926	Joseph L. Vrastil Meats
3932	Elmer H. Knobel Grocery
4002	Albert Thiel Grocery & Meats
4008	Gustav Schroeder Bakery
4025	Zacker Service Station
4026	Gillbert Hunkel Accountant
4028	Richard E. Champney Physician
4032	W. Gargen Pharmacy
4100	George D. Waswo Grocery
4128	Chimekas Realty Company
4128A	Apartments
4130	DeLuxe Beauty Shoppe

<i>Addresses on W. Burleigh in the Sherman Park neighborhood in 1933</i>	<i>Name of business, office, organization, and apartments from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
4200	Harry H. Lambrecht Tavern
4246	Standard Oil Company

Notes:

- Despite being in the throes of the Great Depression, Burleigh Street was teeming with commercial activity. There was only one vacant store on this stretch.
- On the 3500 block of Burleigh, only the businesses on the south side of the street are listed (odd numbers), as this was a section of the northern border of the Sherman Park neighborhood.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were immigrants or children of immigrants and most also lived at the address of their business.
- Andrew Schwister, with the shoe store, owned a shoe store in the neighborhood since prior to 1910.
- William Klunder, with the deli, was the son of a German immigrant. Before opening the deli (prior to 1920), he had been a manager in a laundry.
- Joseph Braunreiter, with the tavern, was a German-speaking immigrant from Czechoslovakia.
- Dominic Amato, the shoe repairman, was an Italian immigrant.
- Clinton V. Farnan, with the upholstery shop, was from Massachusetts.
- Roman Schulz, the butcher, lived on Mineral in the Walker's Point neighborhood. He may have begun his meat market there.
- John G. Jansen, the general contractor, was the grandson of German immigrants. His grandparents ran a farm in Barton, Wisconsin.
- Clarence Ressel, the barber, was the son of a German immigrant mother.
- Joseph G. Jansen, also a contractor, was the brother of John G. (above).
- Emil J. Bloedow, the shoe repairman, was born in Germany. When he retired, he moved in with his daughter's family.
- Joseph L. Vrastil, the butcher, was an ethnic Bohemian born in Czechoslovakia.
- Elmer H. Knobel, the grocer, went into the liquor store business by 1940.
- Albert Thiel, also a grocer, was a German immigrant.
- Gilbert Hunkel, the accountant, was an anomaly on the street in that he'd completed one year of college. He was the son of an insurance broker who lived on Richards, and the grandson of German immigrants.
- George D. Waswo, the grocer, was born in Illinois and was the son of German immigrants.
- Chimekas Realty was owned by Gustav Chimekas (*see profile below*).
- Harry H. Lambrecht, with the tavern, was the son of a German immigrant.

**Sherman Park business profile (1930s)**  
*(Information from U.S. Census and other public records)*

**The Chimekas**

It is very possible that much of today's Sherman Park area owes its breadth to the strivings of the Chimekas family. Gustav Chimekas was born in Greece in 1888. At age 17 he and family members immigrated to the United States, where he immediately filed papers to become a citizen. He and his brother James opened the Olympia Candy Company on North 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Gustav married Anna Theleer, the daughter of German immigrants. The Chimekas had a daughter Annette in 1915.

A few years later the Chimekas family settled in the Sherman Park neighborhood on North 41<sup>st</sup> Street and then on North 38<sup>th</sup>. They opened a second candy store in Sherman Park. Anna worked as a clerk in the store.

Sometime after Gustav and Anna arrived in Sherman Park, they may have noticed how the neighborhood around their candy store was attracting home buyers. The Chimekas opened a real estate business at 4128 West Burleigh, possibly in the same building where they ran the confectionary. They were apparently quite successful, as a number of subdivisions in and west of the Sherman Park area soon bore their family name. This included the Hartmann farm area.

By 1920, the Chimekas moved to a new location on North 21<sup>st</sup> Street. Anna told census keepers that the family spoke Greek in the home, hence she must have learned the language at some point. Anna's widowed mother Emilia lived with the family.

The Chimekas moved to Oconomowoc sometime around 1930 where they purchased a home. They later moved to Okauchee. Gustav died in 1974 and Anna in 1987.

**Current populations (as of 2017)**

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

The ethnic groups themselves were internally diverse, and some moved in and out of the area. The history of the Jewish population in the neighborhood was particularly complex. The original Jewish population was comprised of Reform and non-practicing Jews, with a few Orthodox. When this population migrated out of the neighborhood and into the suburbs, they were eventually replaced by a strong Orthodox population that lives in all of Sherman Park today, and worships at Beth Jehudah Synagogue. They developed their own self-help organization and school (Yeshiva Elementary School).

The largest ethnic group in the Sherman Park neighborhood is African American (just over 9 in 10). They also developed their own self-help organizations and faith

communities in the area. Many attend the William T. Sherman Multi Cultural Arts School.

Slightly over half of Sherman Park’s residents live in low income households (with annual household incomes under \$25,000). Just under two-thirds of all properties are rented, with most rents going for \$500 to \$1,000 a month. About half of home ownership monthly costs (e.g., mortgages, taxes, insurance, contracts to purchase, deeds of trust) go for between \$1,001 and \$1,500, but nearly one-quarter can be purchased for monthly costs of \$500 to \$1,000.

## IMPORTANT NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Sherman Park Commons**, at 3245 N. 27<sup>th</sup> St.
- **Sherman Park Community Association**, on 35<sup>th</sup> and Fond du Lac, the neighborhood association that began in the 1970s

## RECURRING OUTINGS

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.	Swimming. Children 7 and under must be accompanied by adult. Swim caps can be purchased at site. 875-6025	Families, free

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

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:<sup>1</sup> about THEN

“I always knew that I was going to live here when I was a little girl. When I was a young girl, my father owned an insurance business on 44<sup>th</sup> and North, and a lot of his customers and clients lived around here, so on Saturday morning was my bonding time with my dad. So, we would drive around the neighborhood and stop and visit his clients and customers. And I loved the neighborhood. I told him I was going to live here someday. I was living out of the state for a while before I started working here 30 years ago, and when I applied for this job I knew that I wanted to live in the community. So there was the flat--the home I currently live in with my brother. So, I've lived in the community for 30 years.”

“They had more businesses on Center and North. North Avenue pretty well died once they started tearing down property for the freeway because the population that would buy from those places was gone. Today they have fingernail and hair braiding places and quick print places. Used to be dime stores, butcher shops, grocery stores, etc.”

“When my mom went to Washington High, if there was a Jewish Holiday, that place was cleared out. As much as that was a neighborhood high school, which was like a premier high school, other people from different areas and out of town went to school there.”

“There were certain issues we mobilized around—the freeway for example. They were going to fund a freeway right through North Avenue—the Park West. Then there was the school integrationist issue and a real estate problem. There was a great deal of block-busting. We got a court order to stop that so there were these basic areas—education, the freeway, the real estate policies. That really cracked the back of the black population of Sherman Park.”

“I think about Milwaukee at the time we had the riots. I think it really came to light that we could work together a lot better, and I think that Sherman Park became a model, the model in Milwaukee as how racial groups can learn how to work together. So from that stand point, I think it was a turning factor for the community.”

“I forgot to mention before the tearing apart, the stupidity of trying to put in Park West and the tearing down of all the homes from Sherman Boulevard east to the lake. They tore the guts out of the city and the Sherman Park Neighborhood Association led the fight to stop it. They were going to take out more and they were going to go directly through the neighborhood with this freeway and the Sherman Park people said ‘no,’ and even the mayor fought them and the legislators fought them. We ultimately knocked it down.”

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

“The big thing was tearing down the buildings—the freeway that never was built. That was a catalyst for all kinds of historical things. The Environmental Impact Law resulted because of that—and that was happening across the country. They were doing that sort of thing all over the country before there was an Environmental Impact Law. They just tore down neighborhoods. But then they had to figure out what the economic/environmental impact of this before you begin tearing down houses. So now we don’t supposedly do that anymore, although if you’ve got enough money you can get anything done. And that was historical for another reason in that the bureaucracy in Milwaukee, the city engineering department—they retaliated against this neighborhood. There are probably still people that are working for the city that are still retaliating against this neighborhood because we fought and didn’t let them build their damn freeway.”

“I was really involved in the freeway issue. In fact, that was my life for seven or eight years. I tell you, stopping that damn freeway. I am very proud of that despite the fact I have done a lot of things in my life, there is nothing that gives me more pleasure than that. There was about ten of us that went into the courts and got an injunction. At that time the county stated that they didn’t have to do an environmental impact statement on the freeway. They were just going to push it through and the judge said no. I have never felt so proud of anything I have ever done in my life. *This is how things work in Sherman Park—you entered Sherman Park because you had a particular problem you worked on.* Had a black woman on school board. She was concerned with the school segregation issue. She read everything, and when she won her battle you seldom saw her again. We had Sol Alinsky organizers here and they tried to organize us into this Alinsky type organization. But we saw ourselves as primary middle class and we know damn well that confrontation would not go over. We had our own quiet way of doing things.”

“I made money off of people on Grant Boulevard doing their lawns and stuff. I got along with them. One of the routes I had--my first paper route--was on 41<sup>st</sup>, Grant Boulevard and Sherman Boulevard on the 2600 block, and so I got to know those people. The log cabin house was one of my customers. That was when they had a bowling alley in the basement. I knew that from my brother; my older brother was a pinsetter when he was 15 years old when they still had manual pin setting.”

“When I was a kid, there was a Boys and Girls Club but that was way down on Richards. I would take the bus down to Richards Street. Did I mention that North Avenue was the busiest commercial street back in those days, or I think it was because there wasn’t anything else.”

“Sherman Park women were kind of interesting. There were a number of women who drove cars. On the boulevards, you notice that there are more substantial houses there. They also have two car garages, this is during the 20s and 30s. This tells you something about the affluence. They didn’t just have one car. One woman said that when she was growing up she saw all kinds of things. She saw a woman carrying a leather briefcase. That said, ‘Oh, that’s what I can be when I grow up.’ Many of them were part of their



husbands own businesses. The women were often times listed as treasury or secretary of their husbands business.”

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

“Well it was the strangest thing. We formed as an integrationist organization. For years we were completely white. Today you will see a preponderance of blacks in leadership positions.”

“There are some things you understand you do not do in Sherman Park. You do not pop fire crackers here; you do not own pit bulls.”

“We are in the line of the founder of the Chasidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov. We are the only line that spells our name with an ‘i’—the others use the ‘y’ spelling.”

“I think there were parallels with the general society. There were a lot of blue collar people. Middle class blue collar people. There were a lot of teachers, a lot of police. Those are the result of the city’s requirement that you have to live in the city. They chose a neighborhood where they could have the best life with what they have. Lots of families with kids that go to parochial schools. The values that were present in the 60s are more intact here than they would be somewhere else, at least in terms of values, more conservative.”

“You know, it's not as bad in our neighborhood, but once again, in the northwest section all the kids are playing together, black and white, whatever. The northwest section is wide open. The southwest section is varied. The southeast section has gotten bad. It's the absentee landlord section. It's duplex upon duplex.”

# PHOTOS



Sherman Park Commons, exterior (left), interior (right)



Sherman Drive

For more information about Sherman Park, refer to John Gurda's *Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods*.

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@sbcglobal.net](mailto:JFLanthropologist@sbcglobal.net)