

Approximate boundaries:
N-W. North Ave; **S**-W. Vliet St;
E-N. 31st St; **W**-N. 35th St

WEST SIDE *Walnut Hill*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Walnut Hill is a densely populated neighborhood. The most common residential building type is the two-story Queen Anne style duplex built in the late 19th century. The neighborhood is mainly residential with a few commercial buildings along Lisbon Avenue, North Avenue, and Vliet Street.

The topography of Walnut Hill, despite its name, is mainly flat with a few interspersed rolling hills. Most of the neighborhood green spaces derive from empty lots where residents have planted small community gardens.

HISTORY

Walnut Hill, originally part of the unincorporated Town of Wauwatosa, began as an area where wealthy Germans built country estates. The Lisbon Plank road, named after the town of its destination—Lisbon--served not only as a thoroughfare for moving agricultural products, but as a setting for gracious summer living.

Early populations

The first residents of the Walnut Hill area were wealthy Germans. In the mid-1800s, when the neighborhood was still countryside, a well-heeled German built the estate known as Villa Uhrig. The estate, with its Italianate mansion, was completed in 1853 for Franz Joseph Uhrig, a St. Louis brewer and his wife Walburga. Legend has it that Milwaukee brewer, Joseph Schlitz,

convinced the Uhrigs that they should invest in a summer home in Milwaukee to avoid the torrid heat of St. Louis. The estate, which began at nine acres and grew to 20, had originally dead-ended North 34th at Walnut Street. The villa was surrounded by lilac bushes, apple orchards, ornamental flower beds, and vegetable gardens. However, the house would lose much of its east wing and many estate acres when the two ends of 34th Street were eventually connected in 1913 (see photo below).



Today's neighborhood-
34th & W. Lisbon

The Uhrigs played a role in the development of another country estate for a wealthy German family. The Uhrigs sold five acres of land to the Koenig family in 1883. They built the home known as the Frederick Koenig House, which is today located at 1731 North 32nd Street. Koenig was the president of the Milwaukee and Brookfield Macadamized Turnpike Company. The home was designed by architect Henry Messmer who had also designed St. Hedwig's and Saints Peter and Paul Churches in Milwaukee. However, later road-building would also modify the Koenig home. When 32nd Street was being

cut through, the Koenig family was told to move their house. They picked it up and turned it to face the new street. In 1897, Koenig decided to remodel the mansion. He hired architect F.W. Andree and builder Oscar Fromm, who transformed the house from its Victorian style to the Classical Revival style (see photo below).

A profile of the Koenig family follows.

Walnut Hill family profile (early 20th century) (Information from U.S. Census and other public records)

The Koenigs

Frederick Koenig, born in Germany in 1840, came to the United States with his family as a young child. He married Philippine (Phoebe) Stephen in 1863, who was also a German immigrant. Frederick made a career for himself in road construction, eventually becoming the president of the Milwaukee and Brookfield Macadamized Turnpike Company. The couple had two daughters and the family moved to its mansion on 32nd and Lisbon Road in the 1880s (see photo to right). The household maintained at least one servant during the years of Koenig family occupation.

In 1900, when a census taker asked Koenig to name his occupation, Koenig replied “capitalist.” And there was hardly a more motivated capitalist family than the Koenigs. Frederick Koenig’s chosen occupation, road construction, was a prolific profit maker during this period of Milwaukee expansion. In addition, daughter Elizabeth married Charles Stilcke, a merchant who owned a china ware business. Daughter Emma married Gustave Yunger, a Canadian immigrant, who owned a department store.

Frederick Koenig died in 1907 and was buried at Forest Home Cemetery—a common burial site for wealthy Milwaukee entrepreneurs. By this time, daughter Elizabeth and her husband, Charles Stilcke, were living at the 32nd Street mansion with Philippine. By 1920, daughter Emma and her husband, Gustave Yunger, were also living at the house. Philippine Koenig died in 1927 and joined her husband at the Forest Home Cemetery.



It was the development of Washington Park just west of Walnut Hill that attracted settlers in larger numbers in the last decades of the 19th century. In its earliest decades Washington Park offered a horse-racing track, carriage rides, band shell, a lovely lagoon, and a zoo. The zoo had modest beginnings. Wealthy patrons began to donate animals beginning with five deer, and shortly after a buck, an eagle, and an elephant named Countess Heine. Within a few years, the park had a Goat Mountain and a Monkey Island. The new settlers moving to west side neighborhoods continued to be mainly Germans, migrating in from Milwaukee’s eastern, central, and northern neighborhoods. Most of these were working class residents who built modest cottages first along Lisbon Avenue and later on the side streets.

By 1920 most of the Walnut Hill area was filled to capacity. The area also generated strong business corridors on Vliet Street and Lisbon Avenue.

Businesses in early Walnut Hill

By the middle of the 20th century, West Lisbon Avenue was becoming less a street for ornate mansions and working class cottages and more a commercial corridor. The following chart lists the businesses that were on Lisbon between West 31st and West 50th Streets in 1936. As in

most Milwaukee neighborhoods, the shopkeepers in the commercial corridor were more diverse than the residents they served. In Walnut Hill, these included Irish, Canadians, Austrians, Greeks, Dutch, Scots, and of course many Germans. See summary and notes below. (For a list of businesses on Vliet Street in this area in 1936, see the Cold Spring Park neighborhood.)

<i>Addresses on W. Lisbon in the Walnut Hill neighborhood in 1936</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3100	Gustav Ronde Tavern
3101	Acme Rug Cleaning Acme Floor Covering Company
3106	Vacant
3110	Traugott A. Voigt Harness Maker Motion Picture Machine Company
3113	Bishop's Hall
3114	William J. O'Keefe's Office Furniture
3115	Joseph Bishop Tavern
3133	Wimer Store Fixture Company
3137	George H. Noe Meats
3143	Apartments
3145	Thomas T. Hirth Tavern
3201	James G. Sharp Drugs
3206	Harry G. Shales Real Estate
3207	Stueve Studio and Supplies Dennison Arts & Crafts Shop
3211	Fred Kreis Restaurant
3213	Julius Pandl Tavern
3217	Barth Pinter Shoe Repair
3227	Flander's Inn Tavern
3233	Otto J. Heisler Meats
3301	Parkway Bakery
3305	Ann K. Donovan Confectioner
3306	Parkway Food and Fruit Market
3308	Wenzel M. Fleiselman Malt & Hops Wenzel M. Fleiselman Paper Company
3309	Parkway Beauty Shoppe

<i>Addresses on W. Lisbon in the Walnut Hill neighborhood in 1936</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3311	Otto Raasch Furrier
3312	Mrs. Ida Benson Tavern
3316	The Milwaukee Aquarium
3323	Guy M. Watson Insurance Broker
3328	Joseph Schaeffer Jeweler
3329	Wiley Doher Tavern
3332	Harold Haupt Delicatessen
3333	Alex Ritter Real Estate Northwestern Mutual Building and Loan Association
3400	Joseph Callow Dentist
3405	Park Savings & Loan Park Savings Bank Park Building Corporation Park Savings Finance Company Time Investment Company Park Bank Barber Shop Parkway Smoke Shop Lawrence Kausner Dentist Prescott Properties Inc. Ritter Jackson PK Realty Stephen P. Croft Real Estate Apartments
3409	Rheinfrank Women's Furnishings
3411	John Holzmann Paints
3411a	Apartments
3417	Parkway Theatre MAJ Theatres Inc. Parkway Amusement Inc. Vanderbilt Real Estate
3419	Parkway Sweet Shop
3420	Nickolas K. Lambro Shoe Repair
3421	Union Market Meats
3422	F. Gutermuth Florists
3423	Great A&P Tea Company

<i>Addresses on W. Lisbon in the Walnut Hill neighborhood in 1936</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
3426	Frank E. Foley Grocery
3427	Walter Damske Tavern
3429 ⁱ	Milwaukee Public Library
3431	Parkway Building Joe C. Heimsch Dentist Gerald T. Savage Physician Joseph Roder Chiropodist National Guardian Life Insurance Company Lisbon Avenue Building & Loan Association Physicians' Laboratories, Inc. Ned Biersach Lawyer
3432	Gilbert's Food and Fruit Market
3433	Broenen's Drug Store

Summary and notes from U.S. Census and other public records:

- As in most other Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had attended high school. Most were also immigrants or children of immigrants. Most also lived at the same addresses as their stores or within a block of them. This was not the case with the professionals.
- The neighborhood was well-served with 11 food stores (bakeries, delis, confectioners, groceries, butchers), 2 drug stores, a barber, a public library, and 5 healthcare professionals.
- Despite being in the throes of the Great Depression, business appeared to be teeming in this neighborhood. There were few storefront vacancies. Leisure time activities were prolific with 6 taverns, a theater, an arts and crafts store, and a restaurant.
- The presence of a harness maker and a movie machine shop in the same building demonstrates the changing times on Lisbon.
- Lisbon Ave. led directly west to Washington Park. The proprietors on the west end of Lisbon street tended to associate themselves with the park by adding "park" or "parkway" to their business names.
- The Parkway Theatre had an interesting history. Opened in 1921, it became the site of rival projectionist unions' disputes. In October 1932 a chemical bomb exploded, injuring six, and causing an evacuation of the theatre audience. By 1970, the Parkway became known as Milwaukee's X-rated theater, featuring films like Deep Throat. Residents began to protest and were successful in closing the theater in 1986. Today, the site is a church.
- Gustav Ronde, with the tavern, was from Holland, WI. He was the son of Dutch immigrants, and, typical of other shopkeepers on the street, had completed the 8th grade.
- Traugott A. Voigt, the harness maker, was the son of German immigrants.
- William J. O'Keefe, with the office furniture store, was the son of Irish immigrants.

- Joseph Bishof, with the tavern, was an Austrian immigrant. He'd been a truck driver before opening his bar.
- George H. Noe, the butcher, was an anomaly on the street for two reasons. First, he did not live near his business. He was a boarder in an apparent rooming house on Madison, on the city's South Side. Second, he was not an immigrant or a son of immigrants.
- Thomas T. Hirth, with the tavern, was the grandson of German immigrants. He'd been a plumber before opening his bar.
- James G. Sharp, with the drug store, was the descendant of German immigrants from CT and Scottish immigrants from WI.
- Harry G. Sholes, the real estate agent, was the son of German immigrants. He was also a musician for a radio station and had graduated from college.
- Fred Kreis, with the restaurant, was a German-speaking immigrant from Yugoslavia. He worked as a hotel chef as well as running his own restaurant.
- Julius Pandl, with the tavern, was an Austrian immigrant. He had also gotten his start working in a hotel.
- Barth Pinter, the shoe repairman, was another immigrant from Austria.
- Otto J. Heisler, the butcher, was yet another immigrant from Austria.
- Ann K. Donovan (nee Kremsreiter), the confectioner, was the daughter of German immigrants. She had married Lawrence Donovan. Ann had been the secretary to a congressman before marrying. She had attended college. By 1940 she was working for the government—perhaps for the WPA.
- Otto Raasch, the furrier, was a German immigrant. He had only completed the 6th grade.
- Ida Benson, with the tavern, was the daughter of Norwegian immigrants. Typical of the shopkeepers, she'd completed the 8th grade.
- Guy M. Watson, the insurance broker, was the son of a Canadian immigrant.
- Harold Haupt, with the deli, was the son of German immigrants.
- Alex Ritter, the real estate agent, was the son of a German immigrant and an Austrian immigrant.
- Nickolas K. Lambro, the shoe repairman, was an immigrant from Greece.
- Frank E. Foley, the grocer, was not an immigrant or the son of immigrants. He was likely of Irish extraction.
- Walter Damske, with the tavern, was an inmate of the County Jail in 1920—still claiming work as a bartender. He was the son of German immigrants.
- Joseph Roder, the chiropodist, was a German immigrant. He'd worked as a cemetery superintendent before switching careers. No information was found on his education.

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the Walnut Hill area. 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 Menomonee Valley and other west side neighborhoods. The integration of the new population proceeded relatively smoothly.

Many African American families were able to purchase homes and move into the middle class.

Unfortunately, the deindustrialization movement that began in the 1980s arrested this course. Manufacturing employment in Milwaukee fell 77 percent, from a peak in 1963 to the present. A neighborhood that had once been a haven for some of Milwaukee's wealthiest citizens was now in decline.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today there are just under 3,000 residents living within Walnut Hill's boundaries. Of these, over half are African Americans. The neighborhood also has a significant Asian population (approximately 1 in 7) and most of these are Hmong/Lao with a few families from Korea. Approximately 1 in 15 residents are European Americans (mainly of mixed European ancestry). The remaining residents are Latinos (mostly of Mexican descent), American Indians, and people of multiple backgrounds.

The median household income of residents is just over \$23,000 annually, placing the neighborhood on the cusp between the low and lower middle-income strata. The leading occupations claimed by residents are in the fields of production, administration, and sales. The neighborhood has about two and one-half times the number of people employed in production than the proportion in other Milwaukee areas.

Rents are very reasonable in Walnut Hill. The median neighborhood rent is \$590 a month, compared to \$666 for Milwaukee generally. The median value of detached houses in Walnut Hill is just over \$60,000 compared to just over \$210,000 in Wisconsin generally; and the median value of housing units in 2-unit houses is again just over \$60,000 per unit compared to nearly \$143,000 in Wisconsin generally.

INTERESTING NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURES

- **Villa Uhrig and the Frederick Koenig homes** (see above).
- **West Side Academy I**, at 1945 N. 31st St., a school for 5th to 8th graders, with a focus on core academics and the social/emotional development of students.

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.

EARLY MORNING BIRDWALK--WASHINGTON			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Most Wed.'s 8-10am	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A walk for bird watchers of all ability levels to explore Washington Park for birds.	Free, but might need to register

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS EASTER EGG HUNT

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Mid Mar., Sat. 11:45am-1pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Fun event for children and adults with Easter egg hunt.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION--WASHINGTON

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 11am- 10pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fireworks.	Free

WEDNESDAYS AT THE SHELL IN WASHINGTON PARK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Summer months, Wed.'s, 6-8:30pm	Washington Park, 1859 N. 40th St.	A variety of difference musical genres and bands.	Free

MILWAUKEE BREWERS GAMES

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Apr. to late Sep., see website for times	American Family Field. 1 Brewers Way	Major league baseball games.	Prices vary

EARLY MORNING BIRDWALK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Most Tue.'s. 8-10am	Menomonee Valley, 3700 W. Pierce St.	A walk for bird watchers of all ability levels to explore Three Bridges Park for birds. Register at Urban Ecology website.	Free, need to register

SLEDDING THE SLOPES OF MENOMONEE VALLEY

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jan. Tue. 4-6pm	Menomonee Valley, 3700 W. Pierce St.	An evening of snow and sledding in Three Bridges Park with hot chocolate (if there is no snow, will hike Three Bridges Park). Register at Urban Ecology website.	Free

SHAKESPEARE IN THREE BRIDGES PARK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Jul., Fri. 7pm	Menomonee Valley behind Palermo Villa next to 33rd Ct.	Play performed by Summit Players along river in the park.	Free, but donations welcome

FRIENDS OF HANK AARON STATE TRAIL 5K RUN/WALK

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Early Aug., Sat. 7- 8:15am	Start and finish near Klement's Sausage Haus (on the east end of Miller Park Stadium)	Opportunity to walk or run in race on Hank Aaron trail, or be a spectator—entertainment and food available. (Requires registration to participate)	Free (to watch)

FREE FAMILY SWIM—WASHINGTON HS

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Tue.'s 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	Free

LYNDEN HILL/MILWAUKEE T.R.E.E. HOUSE

When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily	2130 W. McKinley Ave.	Opportunity to explore a natural setting.	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 are a resident of this neighborhood and wish to make an interesting observation about it, please send your quote to JFLanthropologist@currently.com

PHOTOS

Todays neighborhood-
New Hope Church on 31st & Walnut



Todays neighborhood-
Villa Uhrig



Todays neighborhood-34th & W. Lisbon, an area that was once part of the Uhrig estate



Todays neighborhood-Houses on 31st & Lloyd



Todays neighborhood-House and community green space at 32nd & Garfield



Todays neighborhood-Commercial buildings on 32nd & Lisbon



Today's neighborhood-
Koenig House being restored at 1731 N. 32nd



Today's neighborhood-
Community garden on 34th & Garfield

Today's neighborhood-West Side Academy



¹The Milwaukee City Directory has the address of the library as 3427 W. Lisbon, which was probably incorrect, as it is doubtful that a public library would be in the same building as the Walter Damske Tavern.

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



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