

**Approximate boundaries:**  
N-W. North Ave; S-W. Vliet St;  
E-N. 47<sup>th</sup> St; W-N. 60<sup>th</sup> St

# WEST SIDE *Washington Heights*

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Washington Heights is a mostly residential neighborhood of high population density. The largest variety of housing styles can be found in the area around West Washington Boulevard, with a wide selection of large Colonial, Queen Anne, Craftsman, Mediterranean, and Tudor style homes surrounded by strikingly manicured landscapes. Toward the southern and western ends of the neighborhood, the housing styles include less elaborate bungalows and two-story duplexes. The main business corridors are along West North Avenue and West Vliet Street.

Washington Heights' topography is somewhat flat with gently rolling and a few steep hills. The streets mainly follow a rectangular grid with the exception of West Elliot Circle, which is a completely spherical street. There is no public park or significant green space in the neighborhood. See photos below.

## HISTORY

Washington Heights had a unique beginning. John Gurda in *Milwaukee, City of Neighborhoods* (p. 140) described the neighborhood's earliest foundation.

Most of the land that became Washington Heights belonged to one family for half of Milwaukee's history. The family's head was George Dousman, a Michigan fur trader's son who came to Milwaukee on the very first wave of European settlement in 1835. Dousman claimed a 250-acre parcel whose present borders are Vliet Street and North Avenue between Fifty-first and Sixtieth Streets. As the rest of Milwaukee was carved up into small farmsteads (averaging 65 acres in 1860), Dousman's claim became one of the largest holdings in the region.

## Early populations

George Dousman's son, George P. Dousman, continued to hold the expanse of land until the 1890s when he and his neighbors began to sell parcels to developers. This happened following changes in the area just to the east of today's Washington Heights. In 1891, the Milwaukee Park Commission purchased 124 acres of land to develop West Park—today's Washington Park. The Park Commission Board engaged Frederick Law Olmsted & Company to design and plan the park. Olmsted was known for designing New York City's Central Park and later planned and designed Milwaukee's Lake Park. In its earliest decades, Washington Park offered a horse racing track, carriage rides, band shell, a lovely lagoon, and a zoo. This development raised the value of real estate and attracted settlers in large numbers—mostly Germans from Milwaukee neighborhoods to the east.

Between 1910 and 1930 nearly all of homes that currently stand in Washington Heights were constructed. Some of the homes built on Hi Mount and Washington Boulevards were ornate mansions, owned by a number of the city's most affluent business families, including the Steinmans (timber), Galluns (tanning), Gettlemans (brewing), Treckers (milling machines)

Today's neighborhood-  
Businesses on W. Vliet St.



and Harleys and Davidsons (motorcycles). The dominant Germans built St. Sebastian's Parish, Mount Olive Lutheran, and St. James' Lutheran (the latter which continued German-language liturgies until the late 1960s). A smaller Jewish community built Congregation Beth El in 1921. By 1924 the boundaries of the City of Milwaukee extended to North 60th Street.

The area also generated strong business corridors on Vliet Street and Lisbon Avenue.

*The importance of Vliet Street*

Vliet Street quickly became a significant commercial corridor. Typical of most Milwaukee neighborhoods, the business districts tended to attract a more diverse population in shopkeepers than were found on the purely residential blocks. These included Germans, Irish, Jews, French, Belgians, Czechs, Canadians, Bohemians, Hungarians, and Russians. Most of the shopkeepers also lived behind, above, or next door to their businesses. See summary and notes below.

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in the Washington Heights neighborhood in 1933.</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
4702	Ernest Frahnke Tavern
4716	Schaller Brothers Meats
4722	Felix Markowski Tavern
4804	Julien Apartments
4830	Huband's Texaco Filling Station
4904	Apartments
4918	Good Housekeepers Chemical Company
4922	Henry F. Mesch Shoe Repair John Rank Tailor
4924	Louise Sabbe Baker
4928	John Leitner Meats
4930	Great A&P Tea Company
5000	John W. Jakob Drugs US Postal Station 107
5004	Engel Company Furs
5010	Rose J. Stapleford Grocery and Meats
5020	George Heise Garage
5050	Schmidt & Bartelt Inc. Undertakers (Louis F. Bartelt)

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in the Washington Heights neighborhood in 1933.</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the <u>Milwaukee City Directory</u></i>
5112	Parklane Apartments
5128	Standard Oil Company Filling Station
5215	Dean's Golf Practice Field
5218	Apartments
5226	Apartments
5322-5324	Pasch Radio Supply Company
5323	Apartments
5326	Meurer's Bakery
5330	National Tea Company Groceries
5337	Apartments
5401	Anton's Food Stores Groceries
5402	Wedule's Pharmacy
5403	Joseph Schill Restaurant
5404	Walter A. Lenz Meats
5407	Highland Beauty Shoppe
5409	Ram Rock Chemical Company Inc. Arthur A. Rock Physician
5520	Everett Dusolt Tavern
5601	Maegli-Nolte Filling Station
5602	Shell Petroleum Corporation Filling Station
5624	Otto H. Kubitz Meats
5626	Robert J. Prees Dentist
5628	George A. Horky Drugs U.S. Postal Station #122
5700	Great A&P Tea Company Grocery
5704	Oscar Adam Baker
5706	John M. Kosidowski Hardware

<i>Addresses on W. Vliet St. in the Washington Heights neighborhood in 1933.</i>	<i>Businesses, offices, apartments, organizations from the Milwaukee City Directory</i>
5707	Phillips Petroleum Company Filling Station
5710	Bernhard B. Manhoff Fruits
5714	Donald H. Henry Shoe Repair Peter J. Becker Tailor
5724	Apartments
5806	Apartments
5827	Edward Collette Shoe Repair
5830	Louis Jahnke Tavern
5831	Fred Stiegler Groceries
5900	Wadham's Oil Company Filling Station
5918	National Tea Company Grocery & Meats
5921	Rudolph Hofmeister Grocery
5924	Erick Dabke Bakery
5926	Apartments
5928	Highland Park Pharmacy
5929	Standard Oil Company Filling Station

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

- Washington Heights had a plethora of food stores—nine grocers in total, including four supermarkets, on this stretch of Vliet St. The street also had four bakeries, five butcher shops, and a fruit store.
- The neighborhood had seven filling stations. Despite Depression times, the locals apparently had enough automobiles to support this number of gas stations.
- As in most Milwaukee neighborhoods prior to 1970, few shopkeepers had high school educations. Most were immigrants or children of immigrants.
- Ernest Frahnke, with the tavern, had a bar at this location since the late 1800s. He was born in 1867 in Germany.
- Felix Markowski, also with the tavern, was the son of Polish immigrants. His bar apparently was not successful in this German-dominated neighborhood, as Felix was working as a bartender for someone else's tavern by 1940.
- John Rank, the tailor, was a Hungarian immigrant. He lived on North Avenue when he was running his shop.
- Louise Sabbe, with the bakery, was a Flemish woman from Belgium. See her profile below.

- John W. Jakob, with the drugstore, was a Bohemian immigrant. He lived next door to his store.
- Rose J. Stapleford, with the grocery and meat store, was a German immigrant.
- George Heise, with the garage, was an anomaly on the street. He had spent a year in college. He was the son of German immigrants.
- Joseph Schill, with the restaurant, was the grandson of German immigrants. According to the 1930 census, his "restaurant" was a billiard parlor. Perhaps it was both.
- Walter A. Lenz, the butcher, was one of the few proprietors that did not live at his shop. He rented a unit on 22nd St.
- Arthur A. Rock, the physician, was the son of a French immigrant father and a German immigrant mother.
- Otto Herman Kubitz, with the meat market, had been a salesman for a milk company before opening his own shop. In 1930 he was single and living in a boarding house. He was the son of German immigrants.
- George Horky, with the pharmacy, was an anomaly on the street because he had a college education. He was the son of a Czech immigrant.
- Oscar Adam, the baker, was born in Germany. He told the census taker that he had never attended school, but he had learned to read and write.
- John M. Kosidowski, with the hardware store, was a son of Polish immigrants. He'd completed 6th grade and lived at the same address as his store. He'd resided in Riverwest before moving to Vliet Street.
- Bernhard Manhoff, with the fruit store, was the son of Russian immigrants (possibly Jewish). He was adopted by David and Ather Manhoff as a child. His adoptive father had operated a grocery store on Water Street. Bernhard had completed the 8th grade.
- Peter J. Becker (the tailor) and his wife Theresa were both born in Hungary. Edward Collette was a German-speaking shoe repairman who was born in Massachusetts.
- Louis Jahnke, with the tavern, lived at the same address as his bar. He was the grandson of German immigrants.
- Rudolph Hofmeister, the grocer, was born in Germany. He and his family lived at the same address as his store.
- Erich Dabke (actually Dobke), the baker, was also born in Germany and he and his wife also lived at the same address as his shop. He had only been in the United States for 9 years before opening his business.

## Washington Heights merchant profile (early 20th century)

*(Information from census and other public records)*

### Louise Sabbe

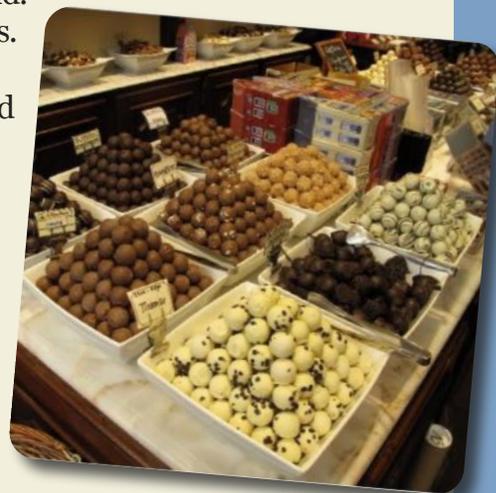
Louise Sabbe, the baker, was an adventurous young woman. At age 18, she'd emigrated from Belgium, apparently alone. A Flemish French speaker, she must have learned enough English to go through the robust requirements to get naturalized.

While she owned a bakery in 1933, this was not the case in 1930. According to census records, Louise was living in a unit on West Vliet, just doors down from the site of her future bakery. Louise listed herself as working as a servant/housekeeper in a private home. No doubt the presence of a French-speaking maid would have added prestige to some Washington Heights' household. But her 1930 address was not that household. It was an apartment she shared with three men and possibly others.

Also living at the Vliet Street apartment was a French-speaking Canadian named Joseph Cloutier and his 20-year-old son, Clarence Coutier. In 1930, Joseph listed himself as divorced and working as a chief engineer for a motor company.

Also present in the apartment was a German-speaking immigrant named William Looft. At the time, he is listed as the proprietor of a bakery. Was it the one that Louise later operated? Given that there is no record of William later in Milwaukee, he may have died or moved away. He may have trained Louise to run the place. Even if that was the case, no doubt she added some of her own ethnic treats to the inventory—treats such as French croissants and Belgian chocolates<sup>i</sup>.

It is not known how long Louise continued to operate the bakery on Vliet Street. She may have married, as no other records could be found of her in Milwaukee after 1933.



Washington Heights did not only attract interesting merchants. Many of the residents whose families had chosen the neighborhood went on to achieve greatness in non-commercial fields. Below are two artists and two mayors.

## Washington Heights resident profile (early 20th century)

*(Information from census and other public records)*

### John Wilde

John Henry Wilde<sup>ii</sup> (pronounced "WILL-dee"), born 1919, was a celebrated painter and printmaker who became associated with the Magic Realism movement and Surrealism in the United States.

The son of German parents, Emil and Mathilda Wilde, John was raised in the Washington Heights neighborhood. He, his parents, and two brothers lived at 1750 North 49th Street. The family had resided at that address since John was an infant. Prior to moving

to Washington Heights, the family had lived on Clarke Street in Milwaukee with Mathilda's parents. John's father was a dentist.

In the Washington Heights neighborhood, John began to express interest in art and cultivated a friendship with another young man with the same proclivity—Karl Priebe (see his profile below). John Wilde earned a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he later taught for 35 years. While studying at Madison, he met artist Marshall Glasier, who was hosting informal salons that became a gathering place for students and faculty. Glasier and his followers rejected the American Regionalist painting genre that reigned during the time. The loosely organized group included Glasier, Wilde, Sylvia Fein and Dudley Huppler in Madison; Karl Priebe in Milwaukee; and Gertrude Abercrombie in Chicago. At the same time, Wilde was being mentored by professor James S. Watrous, who taught "old master" methods of painting and drawing, which included learning how to make inks, chalks, and crayons from natural materials, crafting reed and quill pens, and preparing grounds for metal point drawing, including silver point. From this instruction, Wilde developed a secret mixture for use in his own work.

Over the course of his career, Wilde became known for his dark humor in figurative imagery, which sometimes included self-portraits where he interacted with animals, people, and surreal objects. One example of Wilde inserting himself into his own painting is "Wisconsin Wildeworld"—subtitled "*Provincia Naturlica and Classicum*"--in the collection at the Milwaukee Art Museum.

## Washington Heights resident profile (early 20th century)

*(Information from census and other public records)*

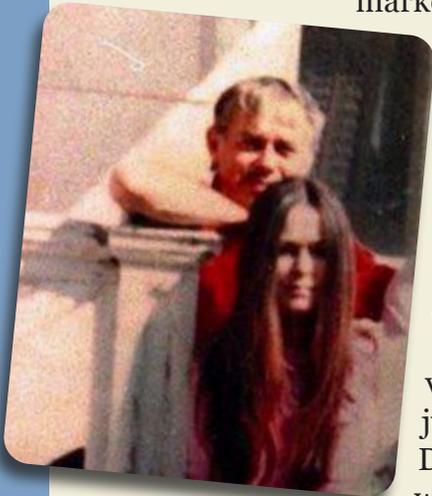
### Karl Priebe

Karl J. Priebe (b. 1914) was an internationally recognized painter known for his depictions of birds, exotic animals, and African American culture.

As a young child, Priebe lived in the Washington Park neighborhood on Lisbon Avenue. His father, Emil Priebe was the son of German immigrants and operated a meat market. His mother, Catherine, was a homemaker. In 1920, Karl had one brother and three sisters.

Sometime in the late 1930s, the upwardly mobile Priebe family moved a few blocks west into the Washington Heights neighborhood, which was becoming an upscale appendage to Washington Park. The family lived at 1812 North 49th Street. Young Karl, who'd taken up an interest in art and animals, quickly became close friends with another artist in Washington Heights—John Wilde (see above).

The Priebe family prospered. In 1930, their home was valued at \$15,000. The average new home cost for that year was just over \$7,000. By 1940—even in the throes of the Great Depression, Karl's father Emil reported an annual income of \$3,960, which was approximately triple the median income for that year.



Regardless of the family finances in 1940, son Karl had a full-time job. He worked as an ethologist, studying animal behavior, for a public institution—likely the zoo at Washington Park. The income was probably to help him pay for college, as he was in his last year of high school at the time.

Karl studied and graduated from the Layton School of Art, and later the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he graduated in 1938. While studying in Chicago, he taught a class in a settlement house that served mainly African Americans. He went on to work for the Milwaukee Public Museum (anthropology staff) until 1942 and then directed the Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts until 1944. Ultimately Priebe returned to Layton and served as an art instructor in 1947.

His work began to achieve international recognition and he merited showings in some of the most prestigious galleries, including those in New York City. His paintings of exotic animals were probably influenced by his teenage work as an ethologist, and likely his paintings of African American culture were influenced by his work in the Chicago settlement house. Throughout his life, Priebe expressed love for black culture. He had cultivated friendships with people such as Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, and Pearl Bailey.

Priebe's health failed in his late 50s. In 1975 he had one of his eyes surgically removed. He later struggled with cancer and died when he was only 62. See his photo<sup>iii</sup> to the left with another artist, Nancy Berghaus, in 1975.

## Washington Heights resident profile (late 20th century)

*(Information from census and other public records)*

### Henry Maier

Henry Maier, who served as mayor of Milwaukee between 1960 and 1988, lived at 1612 North 60th Street as a young man, on the western boundary of the Washington Heights neighborhood.

Maier was not his original surname. He was born Henry Walter David Nelke in 1918 in Dayton, Ohio. However, his father died when Henry was young and he and mother Marie moved in with his grandparents in Springfield, Ohio, where Henry graduated from Springfield High School. Later Henry and his mother moved to Milwaukee where his mother married Charles Maier, a contractor and son of Hungarian immigrants. The family moved to their 60th Street address sometime before 1930. At age 20, Henry changed his name to Henry Walter Maier.

During World War II, Maier served in the United States Navy. He later earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a master's from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



In 1950, Maier was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate. In 1960 he was elected mayor of Milwaukee and served for 28 years. He served during times of racial hostilities and the battle for fair housing in the late 1960s. Under his tenure in office, the Summerfest festival was organized.

During retirement, Maier wrote a political memoir, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous*. The book relates his career-long battle for urban America, where he fought for a reordering of national priorities to put city issues on equal footing with military, space, farm, and international problems.

In his honor, the Summerfest grounds were later named the Henry Maier Festival Park<sup>iv</sup>. Maier died at age 76.

## **Washington Heights resident profile (early 21st century)**

*(Information from census and other public records)*

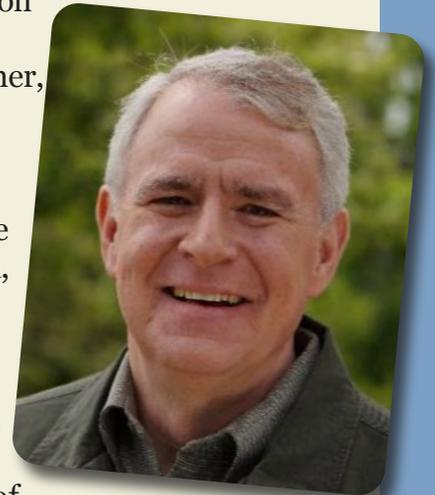
### **Tom Barrett**

Tom Barrett<sup>v</sup> served multiple terms as mayor of Milwaukee, beginning in 2004. Barrett was born in Milwaukee and lived with his parents at 1756 North Hi Mount Boulevard in the Washington Heights neighborhood. He continued to live in Washington Heights with his later family.

Tom Barrett was the descendant of Irish immigrants. His father, Thomas J. Barrett, was originally from Pennsylvania and Indiana. Thomas J. served in the United States Army in World War II. He enlisted at age 19. A navigator, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for 30 missions over Germany. Tom's mother, Gertrude Virginia was a war widow at the time she met Thomas J. in Wisconsin, while a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Tom received a Catholic education. He graduated from Marquette University High School. He then earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Working on an assembly line for Harley-Davidson, Barrett helped finance his education and later received a Juris Doctor from the University of Wisconsin Law School. After graduation he set up a private practice as a bank examiner for the FDIC.

Barrett began his political career in 1983 when he was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly. Six years later, he was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate, where he served until 1993, when he ran for the 5th district seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He served in Congress for a decade until redistricting efforts combined his district with that of fellow Democrat, Gerald Kleczka, and Barrett decided not to run against his colleague.



Barrett was elected mayor of Milwaukee in 2003. He became a very popular mayor, getting re-elected multiple times with more than 70 percent of the vote. Some of his popularity came as the result of heroic action he took in 2009. On his way from the Wisconsin State Fair with his family, he spotted a man wielding a pipe and threatening a screaming woman. While Barrett tried to stop the assault and was phoning the police, the man attacked him with the pipe. Barrett ended up in the hospital with head and hand injuries and broken teeth and later required reconstructive surgery on the hand.

In 2021, President Joe Biden appointed Barrett Ambassador of Luxembourg. Barrett is married to Kris Barrett and has three daughters and one son.

While Washington Heights was nearly filled by 1930, the population of the neighborhood did not remain static. Washington and Hi Mount Boulevards did continue to attract upper middle-income families, but the rest of the neighborhood began to experience more diversity in age and in ethnicity.

### Current populations (as of 2021)

The neighborhood of Washington Heights, with just under 7,000 residents, remains culturally eclectic, but not all of the diversity today is European. Nearly 6 in 10 residents are European Americans (mostly of German, English, Irish, and Polish ancestry), nearly 3 in 10 are African American, and just under 1 in 20 are Latino (mostly of Mexican descent). The rest of the residents are Asians (Chinese, Hmong/Lao, and Filipino), indigenous Africans, West Indians, Jamaicans, and people of multiple backgrounds.

The neighborhood has a substantial young adult population, compared to other Milwaukee areas. The highest population density in Washington Heights is in the northeastern section of the neighborhood.

The median household income for neighborhood residents is well over \$60,000, placing the population in the middle-income stratum. The leading jobs listed by residents are in the fields of administration, education, management, and sales. Over two times the number of residents work in the fields of entertainment and science than their proportions in other Milwaukee areas.

Washington Heights has a neighborhood association. The organization is dedicated to improving life quality and a sense of community pride in Washington Heights. They sponsor programs—some in nearby Washington Park—to promote community involvement, celebration of diversity, education, and safety.

### 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

### 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 American Family Field)	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)

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 2019 oral history of Washington Heights conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.<sup>vi</sup>—Then

“The neighborhood association was formed and really gave it the identity that we have today. Right after it was named you would say Washington Heights and people would go, ‘Oh you’re in the Highlands?’ They would think you were in Wauwatosa.”

“Washington Heights was the first neighborhood to take Halloween back to night time. We did that 31 years ago and it is just a perfect night. Everyone is out and talking to each other even in the rain. Or in the winter if there is a big snow storm everyone will come out and help with shoveling and get cars out of the allies. In May the neighborhood association will do a big rummage sale for anyone who wants to have one.”

“The very first person I met was Jimmy the paperboy. The first thing he said was, ‘Hi, I’m Jimmy I’m your paper boy.’ Which I think is so small town: the first person who greets you is the paperboy.”

“My thought was always that the neighborhood was very homey feeling. Neighbors walking about. Many little corner stores that you could go to and get your candy or whatever. There were quite a few sprinkled throughout the neighborhood. Children hanging out on the sidewalk. Very comfortable feeling. Vliet had some nice breakfast, home cooking restaurants, and then there was the barber and the attorney by the drugstore. It was that kind of perfect neighborhood.”

“Growing up we had a solid Jewish community. They all kind of changed neighborhoods throughout the years. There is a high African American population in the Heights. Also, Polish and German.”

“There was a lot more trades back in the day. My dad was a mechanic for the Milwaukee County Transit Systems for about 30 years. We had guys coming home wearing those blue coveralls with their name on it. There were electricians and plumbers next to us. People would exchange services on the block to help refurbish their homes.”

“Most people were upper middle class, and it’s remained that way.”

“When we moved in, we were a young couple and there were many well-to-do families on the boulevard and Hi Mount. I would say the actual well-to-do have died off. The second owners have been like us, average income people. The neighborhood is made up of professionals, average to high income. On the side streets there are many young couples in their 30’s starting out on their first owned home.”

“We had the little corner grocery stores that you could buy fresh milk, butter, eggs. Those would be right within the neighborhood. We are bordered by Vliet to the south and North Avenue to the north. On Vliet there were some good butcher shops and a drug store. On North Avenue there was a Ben Franklin shop. Both streets had well known bakeries. A supermarket on North Avenue. A bank on North Avenue and some restaurants on both. We always have had Fred's ice cream on 47th and Vliet.”

“I would say in the past, [diverse groups got along] very well. It was a melting pot, but an intertwined melting pot. A lot of my friends growing up were black and I would go to their church and celebrate with them, and then they would come to my church and celebrate with us. Now I feel like people in the Heights see people of color generally as criminals. Online applications like NextDoor and Ring have created a divisive environment.”

“It was very diverse. We had professionals, doctors, and attorneys. But then many people worked in our factories when I first came to this neighborhood. Economically the neighborhood has always been healthy. Diverse but healthy. The factory jobs aren’t there today. The majority of the people living here have higher education so they would either be teachers or nurses or some sort of professional. There are a few that stay at home raising children.”

“Back 25 years ago I would say it was lower middle class. Everyone worked very hard. My parents worked two jobs and there was a lot of that back then. There was a lot of hardworking people who would work multiple jobs. Now you see more nuclear families with stay-at-home moms. I don’t remember that being in the neighborhood at all growing up.”

“Growing up there were a few couples on our block and at our church who spoke German as a first language. I remember one of our church ushers spoke German. His name was Heinz Mueller. He was from Germany and was there during World War II so I learned a lot of interesting history from that guy. There’s not so much German today.”

“Back in the ‘90s there was a lot of battles between the white and the black. Especially around here on the corner of North Avenue, but that was really a fight for territory in my opinion. Now-a-days there is nothing; nobody goes after each other because of color. It is a great area where people sit and talk. Everybody gets along.”

“The lady next door, it is her fourth or fifth year here. When I first moved in, in 1998, there was Rosemary’s Wigs. There was the video store that I can’t think of the name of. A video store that opened 30 years before. It was a mom-and-pop video store. But when I moved in, most of the movies they sold or rented was porn. Next door to them was a health food store. They had been the oldest tenant, and they had been there for 40 years. The video store had been here 30, the wig shop, an easy 30. Then I was the young guy on the block. Now fast forward 20 years later, I’m the old guy on the block. Next door is Erotic Boutique. After the video store left, there was a store that sold gourmet popcorn that was only open a couple months, and then a girl opened up a clothing, nail salon, hair braiding place, and that was here maybe two years. It was empty for a little bit, and then Boost Mobile moved in. The health food store, the original owner passed away and then it became a beauty salon. . . There used to be a candy store, but prior to the candy store, this was where they sold the porn. That alcove there had a little door way [back] that would lead from the regular stuff to the porn.”

“We used to have a Walgreens and the Finney Library. Finney Library is now an underutilized building on 43rd and North. You could go and pick up 20 books to read. It was a cool place. The restaurant that is where the library is now, I can’t remember what it was but I remember that it burned down.”

“When we moved in a lot of the homes here were neglected so there were a lot of renovations going on. People would visit neighbors. Our grade school would do a lot of camping trips with like 40 people once a year. People would do low fee or no fee activities.”

“There was a candy shop on 54th and Vliet, and we would ride our bikes down there in the summer and get a ton of candy for three dollars. One thing I miss is Mayer’s Bakery where Valentine Coffee is now. It was very German in there. German crullers and hot ham and cheese were the big thing. That was the tradition on Sunday. Go to church and then go to the bakery and get everything you need. I remember people speaking German in there. Other than that, there wasn’t much. Nothing on North. You pretty much had to drive everywhere to get what you needed. Now there are two big coffee shops, bars, restaurants, and retail space on Vliet Street. You really don’t need to leave the Heights. We don’t have a grocery store still, but everything else you can get within the neighborhood.”

“When we first moved into the neighborhood it was just sitting outside talking to each other. Maybe have a few cocktails on Friday. Having people over for pizza and game night, or just watch the kids play.”

“There used to be a bar called the Gaslight east of here, and a guy named Pete ran it. It was known as an import bar back before people were doing imports. I think that is now just a vacant lot. McBob’s used to be Brett’s Bulldog and Lemke’s way back in the day. Lemke’s was a supper club that moved out to New Berlin but is no longer in business. A lot of people would remember Brett’s Bulldog.”

“It was mostly Lutherans and Catholics and it is the same today.”

“Children used to congregate on street corners and it was not a negative thing. They would all congregate after dinner--of course it is different in winter. I think it was more spending time in home environments, not away somewhere else. Certain homes would be a magnet home. Kids would come to our house and come in and out. It was usually a home with a strong father figure. It was very safe and I think it is still pretty safe. I think it is still like that today. Usually, a mom can help with homework and a dad can help with the Boy Scout things.”

“There was a lot of playing football in the street. That was our thing after school. Basketball in the driveways, we would play across all age groups and genders. There were some video games but most parents put a time limit on that. Today it is a lot of technology.”

“I can remember the [Jewish] Orthodox guys walking around without electricity.”

“There was the Uptown Theater which had a lot of big acts back in the day. There also was a pool hall on the West Triangle. There used to be a bar on 47th and Lisbon and it was called The Old South. On the walls were actual pictures of slaves and everything. That was back before things started getting messy. I would say it was in existence from 1986 to 1994. Where the town bank is, that was LaJoy’s. That was an amazing Chinese restaurant. The man who owned that ultimately opened a bar on Bluemound; he’s passed away now.”

“[We had] Roman Catholic and three different Lutheran churches. Mt. Olive Lutheran. There is a church on 55th street that has changed its name. It was called Divine Word. Then there is a church on 60th street called St. James.”

“Welfare reform [helped the neighborhood]. A lot of people went away because they couldn’t collect welfare here and in Chicago anymore. Once they tightened up welfare a lot of things changed around here.”

“On 60th and Vliet [there] used to be a flag store which is now Valentine Coffee. It used to be a grocery store run by Norbie and Doebke’s bakery was next store which is now the gelato place. Across the street, which used to be Maison’s, was a Jewish butcher shop back in the day called Burbach’s. It was a meat store that was expensive. The place next to that was a dentist.”

“In the past it was primarily manufacturing, that is my distant memory. Now it has transitioned into service and or larger corporations. People who live in and around this neighborhood do not work in and around this neighborhood. It was city police and firemen who were required to live here, there were a few that moved but on the whole people who liked living here still live here.”

“My wife’s great-grandfather ran a tavern called Schrimpf’s place. The present-day address is 4104 West Lisbon, right across from Washington Park on Lisbon . . . The building still exists, and there is an old picture of it that we have that shows the building. When the great-grandfather died, the great-grandmother ran the tavern with the grandfather. Her grandfather used to say he was the youngest bartender in all of Milwaukee.”

“Steak and Stein [was] on 59th which is where Mekong Cafe is now. Where Juniper 61 is, on 61st and North, that used to be Jake’s Restaurant, which is now out in Brookfield, but that was the original Jake’s Restaurant. You had to wait forever and a day to get in. So, when you couldn’t get into Jake’s, you would go to Steak and Stein. So, you had less expensive steak but no wait.”

### **Quotes from 2019 oral history of Washington Heights conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.—Now**

“Hmong are in and around the neighborhood. Down the street there is an African hair braiding salon and I think the daughter of the woman who owned it said she was fluent in five different dialects.”

“[They work together in the] The Summer Music Series. The Spooktacular. I mean we had one-thousand kids registered last night. It might have been 700-800 last night due to the rain, but even parents were out to mill about, see the houses, talk to neighbors.”

“We did have Spanish speaking people at mass. Now with the influx of Asian people, Myanmar and the Burmese we have a mass in eight dialects. We have got Spanish, English, Hmong, Laotian, and a number of dialects from Burma.”

“The interfaith conference has held a few prayer vigils at St. Sebastian after the bombings of churches in Sri Lanka. So, the Interfaith Conference worked with Mike Kazinski, the music director there, to hold a prayer vigil. . . We held similar vigils after the shooting at the synagogue in Pittsburgh.”

“This is a front porch neighborhood. There aren’t many backyards so people are out front, so when people walk by you can talk to them and see the dogs. People sit out front here. You can see who just had a baby.”

“[On inclusiveness] Washington Park has been a great place to bring people together. There is music every Wednesday there in the summer along with food vendors. None of the music is targeted towards one specific group. Also, all the businesses try and create price points that are welcoming to all incomes. Like at Venture Brewing you can get a three-dollar drip coffee or a six-dollar oat milk latte.”

“We all share common beliefs. I think we have a really strong volunteer culture in the neighborhood. Whether it is for nonprofits for education, or seniors, or ecology. I would say many of us participate in volunteer activities. We have very active and healthy churches in the neighborhood. This is a church-going neighborhood. Most people I think are of some kind of professional background.”

“It has been more beautified because a lot of city officials live in the Heights now. The people here are becoming more exclusive as opposed to inclusive. Wauwatosa was kind of the exclusive part of town and now I feel like people in Washington Heights are becoming more like that. There is nothing new as far as buildings. The people who move into the neighborhood seem to love the history of the architecture.”

“There is a feeling that it is becoming a little more whitewashed. As Wauwatosa becomes more crowded and expensive, more people have been moving into the Heights.”

“We have a great alderman, [name]. You know he has been with us since the mid-80's, so he is very familiar with the neighborhood and listens to us. You know he is very connected to the neighborhood and is responsive when a new business tries to come in.”

“I'm Buddhist, and we have meetings in the neighborhood. We meet once a week and all chant together and then talk about different stuff in society and the community. There is a strong LGBTQ organization here.”

“I would put myself in the category of art patron. We have a lot of artists living here and my wife and I are pretty active as observers.”

“When you move further east, like 43rd, you know that area has struggled. It has been a doughnut hole economically. We are kind of the transitional area of Milwaukee. To my knowledge there has always been ethnic gatherings and crime, but the crime has more to do with young people and drug traffic. Beyond that, the neighborhood generally gets along well. I would say generally people who are owning versus renting have a bit more responsibility and investment in the neighborhood. I would say ethnic groups get along pretty well.”

“We definitely have executives, police, teachers, writers, architects, and a lot of home-based workers. I'm kind of surrounded by architects and I think that is because the housing stock really appeals to someone with a good eye. You know we have politicians-- the mayor is right down the block.”

“I feel like most people are artists, or they are small business owners. I feel like they have a wide range of non-corporate jobs. Maybe working for nonprofits or the government.”

“Primarily upper middle class in the Highlands, then as you move into the Heights there are young families, first time home-owners, people renting who want to live in the city. It is economically predominantly middle class, but as you move farther into Milwaukee it is kind of a war zone . . . A lot of that is up to what the landlords are doing. There are scatterings through the Heights of lower middle class. You know over on 46th there is lower income but they are all gainfully employed and pay rent. A lot of the Bay View people are moving out here because the property values are cheaper and more affordable.”

“I can count on one hand the businesses that were on the strip between 47th and 60th street. Now it has boomed. The Times Theatre has reopened in a world where that industry says that you cannot survive on a single screen theatre. We have good restaurants, good shops, a glass blowing place. Really unique and interesting places. I really like the locally owned businesses. I can't think of a single business that is owned by someone who doesn't live either in this neighborhood or one of the nearby neighborhoods. They live here, they have their businesses here, they are committed to the neighborhood. There are people who live above their businesses. North Avenue is now really starting to kick up.”

“Historic Milwaukee has had two of its Spaces and Places tours here. That brings a lot of people in and makes them aware of what is happening with the neighborhood.”

“You know Harley and Miller are not too far from the neighborhood. MPS central administration is in the neighborhood and they are a huge employer. That brings in a lot of people who want to live nearby.”

“Washington Heights Neighborhood Association and BID 16. It is the Business Increment District number 16. They put the sculpture up in front of the police department; they put up the signs; they pay someone to clean up the streets out front.”

“There is a Washington Heights meetup group that is online. It’s not for dating; it is more to meetup and go on outings.”

“Family life was always strong and still is strong. I have not noticed family life being any less important than it has been. The style of family might be different, but family is important here and was when we moved in. When we moved in there were many wives who were staying at home taking care of the family needs. It isn’t the same anymore so it changes the style but family is still important.”

“It is fascinating to talk to a Hmong family or elder who worked with the CIA to fight communism. They see anything left-leaning as suspect.”

“There is a strong core amongst families here. The rest of the neighborhood--there are kids running amok where I don’t even know if there is anyone present. Plenty of single parent families. Over in our area and in the Heights, there is a strong LGBTQ+ presence. Intact families in the community that I’m living around--intact meaning two parents and children. And then outside of that, it is a crapshoot. I have seen a lot of LGBTQ+ couples and not many couples with kids.”

“The neighborhood association draws a lot of people to their board. So, there were 80 to 90 volunteers working last night to get it set up.”

“We are out at the parks, we are biking. A lot more biking, I think it has become a lot bigger. There is a group called Black Men on Bikes. It was started by a retired fireman who just bikes all over the city with anyone who wants to join.”

“I really do think Tom Barrett being elected brought a lot of attention to the aesthetics of the neighborhood. . . It was no longer an overlooked neighborhood that people would shit on. My friends’ parents used to not let my friends come to my house because they thought it was the ghetto.”

PHOTOS



Todays neighborhood-  
Houses on Hi Mount Blvd.



Todays neighborhood-  
St. Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church



Todays neighborhood-  
House on Hi Mount Blvd.

Today's neighborhood-  
Hi Mount Boulevard School



Today's neighborhood-  
Washington Blvd.



Today's neighborhood-Houses on 59th & Galena



Today's neighborhood-  
Houses on 59th & Galena



Today's neighborhood-  
O'Brien's Irish American Pub & Grill  
on 50th & Vliet

<sup>i</sup> Photo attribution: [https://c1.staticflickr.com/7/6187/6058039251\\_76dob206c9\\_b.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/7/6187/6058039251_76dob206c9_b.jpg)

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<sup>vi</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.

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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