

Approximate boundaries:

N-W. Brown Deer Rd; S-W. Dean Rd;

E-N. 72nd St; W-N. 76th St

NORTHWEST SIDE *Whispering Hills*

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Whispering Hills is a sparsely populated neighborhood that is dominated by recently built condos—the main cluster being in the northwestern corner of the neighborhood west of North 72nd Street. The other main residential area is the Trinity Village Assisted Living Facility along West Dean Road on the south end of the neighborhood. There are a few early 20th century bungalows and Tudor style houses along North 76th Place north of St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic Church. The nearest business corridor is along North 76th Street, although the corridor is technically on the Servite Woods' side of the street.

The topography of the neighborhood fits its name, as most of the area has gently rolling to moderately steep hills. There is no public green space in Whispering Hills, but much of the neighborhood area is undeveloped space and open fields. The streets are curving and many end in *culs-de-sac*. See photos below.

HISTORY

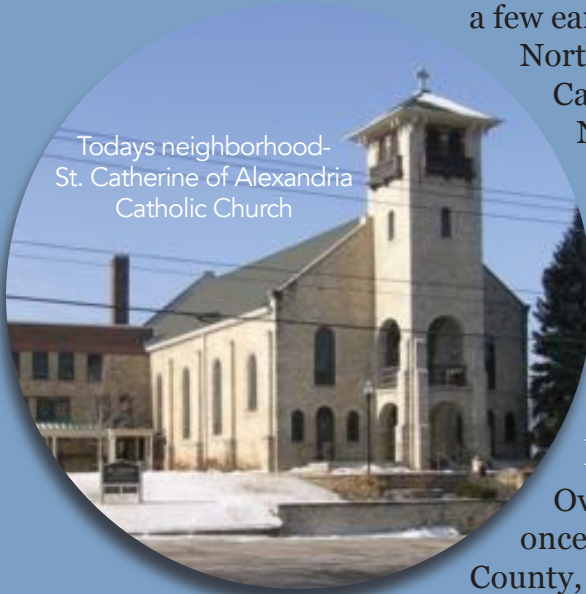
Over 50 neighborhoods on Milwaukee's northwest side once comprised the Granville Township in Milwaukee County, which extended from Hampton Avenue on the south to County Line Road on the north, and 27th Street on the east to 124th Street on the west. The Milwaukee neighborhood of Whispering Hills was once in the Town of Granville.

Early populations

According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* (March 22, 1877) there were originally three small settlements in Granville. The first, in 1835, was the family of Jacob Brazelton which included 11 sons. The second was duo Daniel R. Small and W.P. Woodward from Indiana who pitched their tents in the center of the Granville area shortly after the Brazelton family arrived and later built homes. The third group of settlers, the Joseph R. Thomas family and S.C. Enos, arrived shortly after Small and Woodward.

Within a few years a new group arrived from the town of Granville in Washington County, New York. The assemblage included the Evert, Brown, Crippen, Lake, Dutcher, and Norton families. They gave their new home the name of their former home in New York.

But it was not these earliest settlers that established much of the culture of Granville, Township. That role belonged to a wave of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans) who arrived just a few years later from Telford, Pennsylvania, including the Wambold, Leister, Scholl, Barndt, Price, Bergstresser, Borse, Klein, Martin, Huber, Groll, Horning, and Lewis families. The Pennsylvania Dutch, under the leadership of Samuel Wambold, quickly established the German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church (now known as Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1847. The following year, the church's pastor, Wilhelm Wrede, called a meeting of local Lutheran ministers at the church. This group would later become the



Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. A museum of these early synod activities now stands on 107th Street (see outings).

In the 1840s there were over 200 people living in Granville Township, and the numbers continued to grow. A small Irish community settled on Granville's eastern border to the center of the township. Initially they set up tents, built brush shanties, and log cabins. But during these early years, Granville Township remained strongly German, and more Germans arrived every year. One of the older families in the Whispering Hills area is profiled below.

Whispering Hills resident profile

(Information from U.S. Census records.)

John Peter Klehr and Catharine Gengler Klehr

Although the Klehr couple never had children, they clearly left their mark on the Whispering Hills area.

Catherine Gengler was born in a German community in Luxembourg in 1828, the daughter of Anna Catherine and Adam Gengler. The Genglers came to the United States in 1842 and located on 160 acres of land in the mainly German community of Granville.

In 1850 young Catharine married John P. Klehr ("Peter") a man three years her senior and also a German immigrant. Soon after their marriage, Catherine's father died and the young couple took in her mother, five of her siblings, and one nephew. Some of the siblings helped Peter on the farm. Peter had also opened a saloon.

The Klehrs' altruism continued. In 1855 the couple donated part of their land to the community in order to build St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish. It was constructed under the guidance of Fr. Martin Weiss, who at the time was pastor at St. Anthony, Fussville (Menomonee Falls), and became the first pastor of St. Catherine's. Some community members have speculated that the church was partially named after St. Catherine of Alexandria in honor of their benefactor, Catherine Gengler Klehr.

With no children, but always surrounded by extended family and community members, the Klehrs lived out their long lives in Granville. Catherine died in 1904 and Peter in 1907 (*see their gravestone from public records at Ancestry.com*). Predictably, they were buried at St. Catherine's cemetery.



St. Catherine of Alexandria grew to become arguably the most influential institution in Whispering Hills and surrounding neighborhoods. They not only served the German Catholic community but became one of the few area churches today where African Americans worship alongside of European Americans.

Economic prosperity in Granville

Save for the era of the Great Depression, economic prosperity reigned in Granville. This was due partially to the work ethic of these early residents. The township remained predominantly rural

through the early half of the 20th century. Gradually industries began to open in Granville and the area eventually became the most concentrated base of industrial employment in Wisconsin—today including industrial parks and over 75 companies.

Movement toward annexation

In 1956 the residents and property owners of Granville were given a choice to consolidate with the City of Milwaukee. Needing services that Milwaukee could offer— especially water--the majority of voters said yes to the referendum. By the 1960s, the western portion of Granville (16.5 square miles) was annexed by Milwaukee and the eastern section consolidated as the Village of Brown Deer. Milwaukee became one of the few large cities in the United States that still had working farms within its boundaries.

A new population arrives

In the second half of the 20th century African Americans began to migrate to the former Granville 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 former Granville community. As in most German-dominated areas in Milwaukee, 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. All this had negative effects on the residents of the former Granville Township.

Current populations (as of 2021)

Today, there are just over 550 residents in Whispering Hills, making it the eighth least populated neighborhood in Milwaukee. Of these, over half are European Americans (most of multiple European ancestries), and over 4 in 10 are African Americans. There is also a scattering of Asians (all of Hmong descent), Latinos (mostly of Mexican ancestry) and people of mixed racial or “other” racial backgrounds in the area. The neighborhood skews older, with over 80 percent of the residents over the age of 62. Whispering Hills has the third lowest proportion of children among the population of all Milwaukee neighborhoods. These demographics are no doubt due to the presence of the very large Trinity Village Assisted Living Facility on Dean Road.

The median household income in Whispering Hills is just under \$29,000, placing the neighborhood in the lower middle-income stratum. The main occupations among adult residents are in the fields of administration, production, and management.

Median home values are just over \$80,000 compared to the national median of \$178,000 (although many of the Whispering Hills homes are designed for couples or single adults). Median rents are \$905 compared to the national median of \$928.

INTERESTING FEATURES

- **Trinity Village Assisted Living Facility**, at W. Dean Rd. and N. 72nd St., a complex that encourages healthy lifestyles and socializing.
- **St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic Church**, at 8661 N. 76th Pl., a parish founded in 1855 that early on served a mainly German congregation and today serves a strong activist role in the former Granville.

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.

GRANVILLE BID CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SPECTACULAR			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Late Sep., Sun. 10am-3pm	Russ Darrow, 7676 N. 76th St.	Exhibition of iconic custom vehicles.	Free

JULY 4TH CELEBRATION			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
July 4th, 9am- 10pm	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Parade, Doll Buggy, Bike & Trike, and Coaster judging, games, fireworks.	Free

OPEN SWIM			
When?	Where?	Description and contact info	Admission
Daily, 1-5pm, holiday times vary	Noyes Park, 8235 W. Good Hope Rd.	Open swim year-round at indoor pool with diving boards, locker rooms, vending machines.	unk

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

In *The Golden Years of Yesteryear* by Emily Treichel Boehlke (reprinted in *A History of Granville* by Miriam Y. Bird, 1996), Treichel Boehlke writes about her family's history in Granville from the mid-1800s through the late 20th century. The following are passages from this work.

“When my Grandparents Treichel were first married and lived in their one room cabin, the Indians would stop in and admire their baby. . . At Grandfather Hackbarth's the Indians set up camps in the woods every spring and fall when they came to do their trading in Milwaukee.”

“Weddings in the 1860s and later were quite different from today. The invitations were hand written by the bride and groom and they were the hosts, not the parents of the bride. . . the silk material for the brides' dresses was only 18 inches wide, so for a fancy dress, it took 18 to 20 yards of material. It was not unusual for a man to wear his wedding suit 20 to 25 years, or as long as it fitted.”

“. . . the settlers were having church services at the home of Ernest Zautcke, who had brought a reed organ from Germany to help him with his singing. One of the men could read a text from the Bible and the other religious books which they had brought from across. Mr. Zautcke then donated land for a church and school on the corner of [today's] Hopkins and Silver Spring Roads. They were served by visiting pastors from Milwaukee and vicinity.”

“School [of her parents] was then held at the house of one of the member's house one month and at another one the next month, whoever had a room big enough to seat the children.”

“The housewife had to plan well ahead for her household. There was the Arab that would come about once a month with two heavy suitcases full of notions and yard goods for house dresses. When he begged for a night's lodging the housewife would get a spool of thread for payment. Also a man with a big basket of oranges and bananas would come. Bananas were 25 cents a dozen for nice large ones. Later a baker would come once a week with bread and sweets.”

“Every mother had to be well-schooled in home remedies. . . Plants and herbs were gathered in the summer to be dried and stored for the winter, to be used for any and all ailments.”

“Grandfather would sit and knit many mittens and stockings for all the grandchildren while Grandma read to him and tended her many plants of which she had quite a variety.”

“Even the first street cars were propelled by horse power. There were only 2 lines, one on 3rd Street to Williamsburg, a section of the city at North Avenue and Center and [one] further north (an all-German settlement).”

“In the beginning of the 1900s, there was no Silver Spring Drive, not even a wagon trail west of Hopkins Street. But the plans were made to have a road there, so one of the farmers would ride through the woods with horse and wagon or on horseback as best he could, so it would be legally kept as a driveway to the next mile west.”

“During the first World War, all gathering of people was forbidden, due to the spreading of the flu. So at Freistadt Church only every other pew could be sat in, so all the people east of the church came for early services and all those west of the church came for later service. Also all talking and preaching was to be done in English, but Pastor Wehrs insisted on preaching in German as many of his older members could not understand English.”

“There were about 12 to 14 neighbors that exchanged labor. This was a hard job for the ladies also, with breakfast at 6, lunch at 9, dinner at 12, another lunch at 3, and supper at sundown. No 8 hour days.”

“When the first threshing machine came out the farmers started to raise barley for the Breweries in Milwaukee. My father raised quite a lot of it and we girls had to man the farming mill in the evening when milking was done and our lessons were finished. This was a cold and tiresome job until enough was cleared for a load to be hauled to town the next day.

Quotes from an oral history of the Granville neighborhoods currently being conducted by Urban Anthropology Inc.ⁱ—About THEN.

“I think it [ethnicity] would be mixed. But I think primarily German was probably most prominent but there were other ethnicities. There was Irish, I know that, and I know there is an interesting history. With St. Catherine’s, where I went to school, combined with another church called St. Michael’s. And St. Michael’s church was primarily Irish and St Catherine’s church was primarily German. And they combined churches and now there’s no St. Michaels over there. There’s still a cemetery over there in place that’s now Brown Deer.”

“Well, I remember St. Catherine’s. It is still there, and I occasionally went there with my parents as a child. That’s a Catholic church and there’s a monastery in that neighborhood. They’re still there.”

Quotes from the oral history of the Granville neighborhoods—About NOW

“In police district 4, other than the woodlands area, which tends to have more crime in that area just because of so many families in that area, its crime rate is not real high. I’ve been involved with the police. The captain of the 4th district started a faith-based organization with the police. Different churches with the area and businesses in the area. I am on that organization representing the church that I go to with St. Catherine of Alexandria. That’s been three years I’ve been doing that. We meet with the police community liaison officers monthly. With the idea that we try to do things that would encourage the neighbors in the area to call the police when there’s problems.”

“With schools I know he [relative] went to Happy Hill but it’s closed. The schools, I think the Catholic schools like St. Catherine’s has closed. I think there’s been a big shift. I think there’s been a few more churches coming into the strip malls.”

“I would say as far as those who are involved in a faith group they do not mix. Black churches have mostly black parishioners. St. Catherine’s has a few more minorities but as far as that goes there’s not a lot of mixing. But at some of the events that are put on by different organizations, there’s a pretty good mix.”

“They were pretty much your traditional religions. You know you had your Catholic and Lutheran, maybe there’s a couple of Baptist places around. St. Catherine’s right on 76th. But that was mainly the area in the early days that was Milwaukee. Now you’re seeing more of the large African American churches up there. More Baptist and fundamentalist. You’re seeing that kind of change a little bit. The more traditional Catholic and Lutheran families are way more suburban.”

“St. Catherine has been there for 160 years and still is there. It’s a pretty vibrant community.”

¹ Urban Anthropology Inc. complies with human subjects requirements of formal research and asks informants to sign informed consent forms that stipulate anonymity, hence names are not provided with the quotes.

PHOTOS



Today's neighborhood-
Cemetery on N. 76th Place
(St. Catherine Church in the
background)



Today's neighborhood-St. Catherine of Alexandria Catholic Church

Today's neighborhood-
Houses on N. 76th Place
north of St. Catherine of Alexandria
Catholic Church



Today's neighborhood-
Condominiums on W. Wabash Ave.

Today's neighborhood-Trinity Village Assisted Living Facility on W. Dean Rd. & N. 72nd St.



For more information on the history of Granville, refer to Miriam Y. Bird's *A History of Granville Township*.

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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