

Historical Summary of Evergreen Branch Library and Neighborhood

from Michelle Enke, Special Collections Manager, Wichita Public Library

The neighborhood surrounding the Evergreen Branch Library has undergone many periods of growth, decline and regrowth over the decades. Wichita experienced a booming economy and a large growth spurt in the late 1880s. The area north of 21st Street and west of Broadway was incorporated into the city limits of Wichita in March of 1888. The area was envisioned for large residential development to house workers of nearby business and industries. The Panic of 1893 stopped most development in Wichita, including this area, and the town did not recover for almost a decade.

By 1908, lots were being advertised for sale in the Highland Addition, and development of the residential area took off. The 1910 Wichita City Directory shows many residents living north of 21st Street along North Arkansas, North Jackson, North Main, North Market, and North Lawrence (now Broadway) Streets but almost none having Hispanic surnames. North Jackson Street did have several African-American families residing there.

By 1910, there was a North End area, north of 13th Street along North Lawrence, with a growing residential and business area that extended to 21st Street. By 1920, there was a North End Businessmen's Association, but the businesses mentioned all appear to be south of 21st Street, which appeared to be a divider for a time. Many newspaper articles and advertisements were published to push North Wichita residents to make the North End area a thriving business community.

By 1914, there were finally enough owners purchasing fire insurance for the area to begin to show on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Dwellings built in the area of 21st to 23rd Streets from Broadway west to Jackson were all small, single-story wooden structures with front porches and few outbuildings. There was also a small commercial area developing along 21st Street west of Broadway.

Political unrest in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) caused many families to migrate to the United States for jobs and stability. Wichita offered jobs with the railways, flour mills, and meat packing plants. By 1920, there were an estimated 2,500 people from Mexico residing in Wichita. They settled in three main areas, the largest one being “in the packing house district, along both sides of the Santa Fe tracks for half a mile or more, north of Thirteenth Street” (Church Survey). Many had jobs with the nearby packing houses, mills, and railroad yards.

In the 1922 Wichita City Directory, the surnames of the families living on North Arkansas between 17th and 30th Street are all British or German, not Hispanic. On North Lawrence it is the same until 21st Street where Hispanic surnames suddenly appear along with the Cudahy Packing Company at 2300, the Mexicana Baptist Mission at 2305, and assorted Hispanic businesses and households. On the numbered streets between 20th and 27th, there are many families with Hispanic surnames. Surnames include: Delgado, Gonzalaz, Gruandes, Gutierrez, Iniguez, Irto, Murgena, Reyez, Rios, Rodriquez, Samaritano, Torres, and Zamarripa.

The 1928 city directory is similar. Hispanic surnames begin to appear on North Lawrence north of 21st Street through 27th Street. There are a couple on Arkansas Street north of 21st, with additional families on the numbered streets of 21st through 27th between Broadway and Arkansas with most near Jackson Avenue and North Market. Churches included the Mexican Baptist Church at 2157 North Topeka and the Mexican Catholic Church at 2401 North Market. Surnames include: Alendes, Areliano, Arnelas, Arveto, Bata, Corana, Espinosa, Garcia, Gonzales, Hernandez, Inequez, Martinez, Medina, Navarro, Ortez, Rameriz, Sotomayor, and Torres.

The 1940 United States Federal Census records that there were approximately 400 people born in Mexico residing in Wichita. Almost all of this number is for head of household, and a smaller percentage for their wives. This number would not include their children who were born in the United States. The immigrants came years before from Mexico and Texas because of jobs and higher wages, but faced discrimination. Sonia Charles, a daughter of Hispanic immigrants and who grew up in the North End, later recalled the poor treatment from the white businesses: “They did not rent to us, and restaurants would not serve us” (Memories).

By 1910, various civic and social organizations developed to help the poor of Wichita’s North End. That year, St. Patrick’s Catholic Church at 2007 North Arkansas was established as a frame church to serve the poor people of the North End area. By 1920, there was a North End Community House at 2146 North Topeka to serve “the people of the stock yards and packing

house district” (Six), which included the 1,500 Mexicans living in North Wichita. It was funded in part by the Community Chest, which offered a working co-operation between the Wichita League for Social Work, the Y.M.C.A., and other organizations to improve the lives of those in the neighborhood.

Activities were offered at the Community House such as swimming classes in the largest pool in the city, sports leagues in the largest gymnasium in the city, sewing classes, and health clinics. A library station of the city library was installed in the House and it was the only station outside the main Carnegie library downtown. A day nursery offered day care from Monday through Saturday for children of working women so they could maintain their jobs. But discrimination still existed as the sewing classes were segregated into white, African-American, and Mexican women.

By the 1920s, the Hispanic community was expanding. The Baptist Mexican Mission, which began their meetings in the North End Community House, had by 1921 outgrown its quarters and moved to 2305 North Lawrence where they held Sunday school with classes in Spanish and English. By the 1930s, there were issues between the white and Hispanic members of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church parish. Our Lady of Perpetual Help at 2351 North Market was established by 1932, and by 1935 they had their own church school for the Mexican catholic children.

By 1928, a Mexican district for workers and their families, where they were expected to stay within the boundaries, included the area from Broadway to Waco, from 21st to 26th Streets. Hispanics faced discrimination even within the district. In 1929, the Nomar Theater (short for North Market) opened at 2143 North Market. It was a modern “talkie” moving pictures theater in the popular Spanish-style of architecture. The theater was segregated, with African-Americans sitting in the upper balcony, Hispanics in the middle balcony, and whites in the orchestra seats. The District was in its prime in the 1940s.

By the 1960s, the area was a diverse, yet aging, neighborhood, and the area had begun to decline. In 1965, the Twin Lakes Shopping Center opened and pulled customers from the Hispanic business on the east side of the Little River. The Twin Lakes movie theater opened in 1968 and attracted patrons from the older Nomar Theater, which declined and closed the following decade.

By 1966 the neighborhood was being called the Waco-Finn Model Cities Area by city government. The 150-acre site, described as “the worst slum area in the city” (Commission OKs Start), covered the area from about 21st to 27th streets and from Broadway west to almost the

river. The city proposed a plan to have a major roadway, the North Wichita Throughway, run down 25th Street across to the river, which would split the neighborhood. The proposal included a new community school (to replace the aging Waco, Finn and Cloud Elementary Schools), a park, and a neighborhood recreation center at 25th and Arkansas to help solve some of the area's socio-economic problems. The area contained 104 homes with 76 families and several dozen individuals, which would be affected by these changes. The residents greatly opposed this government plan for urban renewal.

A modified plan was adopted. By 1971, the land that was to become the neighborhood center was being called Evergreen. A temporary Evergreen Park Recreation Center was opened in June 1971 at 25th and Arkansas as a joint program of the Model Cities and the Park Board. In the fall of 1972, a four-building Evergreen Park Neighborhood Facilities Center recreation and services complex was opened at 26th and Woodland. The complex included a community pool and the Evergreen Branch Library which opened in 1973.

During the economic downturn of the early 1980s, the neighborhood faced a reduction in city services. After much debate, the Evergreen Branch library, at 2700 North Woodland, was closed in 1982 due to funding even though the branch served many low income Hispanic families.

By the 1990s, the area experienced a resurgence with new shops and businesses opening in once vacant buildings. In November 2002, the Evergreen Branch library opened at 25th and North Arkansas in a building they would share with the Head Start program Plaza De Los Ninos. To honor local Hispanic culture, the library collection contained materials in the Spanish language and the building's entrance featured a Hispanic artistic design. By 2005, a new neighborhood association formed for the area and was named El Pueblo. They replaced three other neighborhood associations (not named) that had all closed years before.

Bibliography

- "Aching Waco-Finn Fights Blight, Despair – City Hall," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 16 November 1969, page 1B.
- "Church Survey of Wichita Mexicans Shows Much Need: Committee Finds Several Families Live in One Room; Education is Success; Excel in Many Ways," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 18 April 1920, page 23.
- "Citizens Rally for Protesting on North End," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 10 September 1966, page 1-2.
- "Commission OKs Start on North End Renewal: Area Cleanup to Begin by Mid-1967," The Wichita Beacon (Wichita, Kansas), 13 September 1966, page 1.
- "Dedication Set for New Park Center," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 26 June 1971.
- "Evergreen Center Start of Dream," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 10 December 1974, page 1.
- "Library Opens Doors, Minds," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 17 November 2002, page 1B.
- "Memories Are Bittersweet: District Contained Life of Hispanics," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 22 October 1992, page 7N.
- "Mexican Mission's Size Requires a Larger Home," The Wichita Beacon (Wichita, Kansas), 1 September 1921, page 9.
- "New Library Station: One Is Established In North End Community House," The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 23 September 1922, page 3.
- "North End Community Planning Program," The Wichita Church Chronicle (Wichita, Kansas), 19 September 1924, page 8.
- "North End Notes," The Wichita Beacon (Wichita, Kansas), 21 October 1922, page 3.
- "Ordinance No. 516," The Wichita Daily Beacon (Wichita, Kansas), 7 March 1888, page 3.
- "St. Patrick's Parish, Wichita," The Catholic Advance (Wichita, Kansas), 24 December 1932, page 1.
- "Six Community Services," The Wichita Beacon (Wichita, Kansas), 2 October 1920, page 59.
- "The North End Community House: Workers at Institution Preparing for a Busy Season," The North End News (Wichita, Kansas), 24 October 1924, page 1.
- "To Open Branch 'Y' at North End House," The Wichita Church Chronicle (Wichita, Kansas), 12 September 1924, page 8.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, assorted years 1888, 1903, 1914 (pages 99 & 100).
Wichita City Directories.



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Library Board of Directors
FROM: Kristi Dowell, Interim Director of Libraries *Kristi Dowell*
SUBJECT: Evergreen Neighborhood Information
DATE: April 20, 2021

Background: At the Library Board Meeting March 16, 2021 Council Member Cindy Claycomb spoke regarding the naming effort of the Evergreen Center. At that meeting, Board members asked for some additional information to be relayed regarding the history of the Evergreen neighborhood.

Analysis: There are several interesting points to be made about the site of the current Evergreen Branch Library and the surrounding area. Library Board Member Jonathan Winkler did some quick research and found the following information to be of interest as the Library Board of Directors moves forward with soliciting naming recommendations for the Evergreen community center project:

- Much of the area surrounding the location was farmland in the 1930s, and by 1950, there were several buildings and houses that were built in the area.
- The library was known as the North Branch prior to being named the Evergreen Branch by a handful of board members in the early 2000s. They picked Evergreen because it had been associated with the area "for a long time."
- The Evergreen Branch was opened after the closing of two branches: Minisa (13th and Bitting) and Marina Lakes (formerly Sweetbriar, 21st and Amidon).

In looking at the redlining maps from the late 1930s, all but the northwest corner of 25th and Arkansas (where the facility sits) was designated part of area D-8 for Wichita, "D" meaning red shading, or hazardous. The accompanying clarifying remarks identified the area as housing for workers at the stockyards, flour mills and also as home to the "Mexican concentration" of Wichita.

When the Evergreen Branch opened, there was a great focus on the artwork at the entrance to the building. In October 2016, the Library reported the following to the Library Board of Directors at the monthly board meeting:

"Through a coincidence of timing, repainting of the entrance mural at the Evergreen branch brought renewed attention to the Library's presence during Hispanic Heritage Month. The project is one of the last pieces of remodeling effort(s) made necessary by damage created in 2013 by a failed roof drain. Former preschool classroom spaces have been converted into additional meeting room spaces to support neighborhood and community activities. The mural was first painted in 2002 by Newton artist Raymond Olais. Repainting was completed by Wichita artist Jason Lonergan. Response to the repainting has been enthusiastic with one customer noting that he visits the branch nearly every day to use computers but had not noticed the original mural until the restoration work brought it back to life. The City's Division of Arts and Culture coordinated arrangements with the artist and helped to oversee the work."

Financial Considerations: None, informational only.

Legal Considerations: None, informational only.

Attachments: additional historical summaries by WPL Local History Librarian, Michelle Enke; and Angela Martinez, Vice President, North End Hispanic Historical Society

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, assorted years 1888, 1903, 1914 (pages 99 & 100).

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Historical Summary- Angela Martinez, Vice President , North End Hispanic Historical Society

Mexicans have been coming through Wichita since the cattle drive days. They were called Vaqueros. The history of the North End began in the 1910s and 1920s, men were recruited from Mexico to work the railroads but they mostly settled along the railroad tracks in Wichita's Southend. They suffered from poor living conditions living in boxcars and make shift houses and low wages. They were promised good living conditions, fair wages and a work permit

The Mexican population grew as the war raged on and more Mexicans were recruited to come work in fields and railroads but soon the meat packing plants Cudahy and Dold Foods and refinery were built. This caused a shift for many Mexicans to move further north for better living conditions, higher wages and more stable work. This area was along north Broadway Street formerly called Lawrence Street and it was called "the North End". The area would eventually become Wichita's largest [barrio](#) and the seat of the local [Mexican American](#) community. The Mexican settlement east of Broadway near St Francis street area became known as El Huarache and is still held dear with a sense of great pride today, though it no longer exists; the area west of Broadway and north of 21st Street became El Pueblo, but most never called it that. To a North End resident from 21st to 29th and Broadway to Arkansas is the North End. Most men from all Mexican barrios worked railroad, or meat packing. Due to the war aircraft plant jobs were made available and they worked those too. In the late 1920's Catholic Church Our Lady of Perpetual Help was built and also Baptist church built in the 1940's both original churches still stands today. In the 1930's an elementary school was built across from Our Lady of Perpetual Help church as an added addition to the church. Mexican catholic children attended until the 8th grade, and high school students attended the cathedral but went to North High once it was built. The church school was the place of many activities for the Mexican people. They had dances and many wedding receptions. There was racism in those days and the community stayed to themselves and created their own activities and events. The Nomar Theatre was built in 1929 and had a special entrance for Blacks and Mexicans in a segregated section in the balcony. Mexicans were not allowed to play golf on public golf courses, they had to go to back doors to pick up goods. They weren't allowed to speak Spanish in schools and as time went on more and more Spanish speaking families did not speak Spanish in the home for this reason so their kids could practice English and eventually through generations shed culture and language in effort to assimilate into American culture. There were 2 elementary schools in the North End, Waco and Finn Elementary and all neighborhood kids went to these schools until urban renewal took place in the 70's and all elementary went to Cloud, some Pleasant Valley which was the first time many of the neighborhood kids were separated. Mexicans were not allowed to participate in school sports teams so they created their own. Cirilio Arteaga was instrumental in creating basketball for young men. They played in the church school gym and formed teams to travel to play other Mexican teams in other cities called "The Mexican Tournaments" these events were a time of great social gatherings and lifetime connections and memories were made. The Mexican tournaments still exist today but are very different. Cirilo's wife and her sisters created the 1st folkloric dance group called Los Tapatillos

After the war the community was filled with life. The 50's were spent having a good time and helping the family, many kids quit school to care for siblings, the 60's was a time of awakening and the 70's was absolute growth and change. SER Corp was in the community helping with job development, English classes, and education. There were community activists like Buster Sanchez fighting for social equality. We had many of our men serve in the armed services. Mr. Sanchez served in the Army and Marines, he loved his country and his community. Mr. Jess Cornejo of Cornejo & Sons was bringing Tejano bands to town and it was the talk of the North End and a great time for all cousins to spend time together while our parents were out. El Perico was the community newspaper with all the latest activities and events listed. There was a grocery store and many other businesses. Villa Boxing was created for area youth who wanted to box Golden Gloves. The Mexican tournaments were well attended and even had games at WSU because participation was so large. Even Mexican girls teams were formed. Activities like the Mexican Fiestas were created. They had a GI Forum and a Fiesta Queen competition. It was one of Wichita's largest events but definitely a gathering of all the Mexican barrios, it was like a family reunion. They were held at Woodland Park but moved to Evergreen Park once it was built where it remained for years until it got to be too much for the organizer and gangs threatened the

safety of our community. From the early 1900's facing low wages, poor living conditions and racism to the early 2000's the Mexican barrio called the "North End" undoubtedly was a family of families, with many stories to tell, many memories made and a history of a peoples heritage, traditions, struggles, triumphs, and successes It is going down in the history books at WSU and should be remembered for all time somewhere in the place where it all once was

By: Angela Martinez
Vice President
North End Hispanic Historical Society

El Norte: The Growth of the North End

https://www.wichita.edu/academics/fairmount_college_of_liberal_arts_and_sciences/history/local/NorthMarket/NorthEnd.php

Nomar

https://www.wichita.edu/academics/fairmount_college_of_liberal_arts_and_sciences/history/practice/nomar.php

Community History

https://www.wichita.edu/academics/fairmount_college_of_liberal_arts_and_sciences/history/practice/CommunityHistory.php

Contact Information

Dr. Jay Price 978-7792
Jay.Price@wichita.edu

Comment: Dr. Price is currently working on a History book. A lot information on WSU's website.

Angela Martinez
Vice President
North End Hispanic Historical Society

North End Wichita Historical Society
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1339757216133400>
Private Group on Facebook
Active Group, lots of historic images.