PICTURING MILWAUKEE

Washington Park Neighborhood

The 2015 Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures Field School
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Arijit Sen
Jared Schmitz

Di Tang
James Wall
Elizabeth Osborne
Wei Ye
Marcus Hirst
Matt Stuessy
JiaJun Yin
Tommy Yang
Paula Polman
Denise Zahran
Qianfei Xu
Hyrom Stokes
Damir McCurty
Adam Childers



Sponsors: Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures, Department of Architecture, UWM; David and Julia Uihlein Charitable Foundation; School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UWM; Cultures and Communities Program, UWM; Department of History, UWM; Office of Undergraduate Research, UWM, Artists Working in Education Inc.; UWM Libraries; Amaranth Café; Heritage West Properties; Eat Cake!; Hmong American Friendship Association; Martin Drive Neighborhood Association; local residents and community leaders.

Monograph layout and design by Jared Schmitz.
Edited by Jared Schmitz.
All photographs by BLC field school students, unless otherwise mentioned.

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The 2015 Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures field school examines a complex urban edge where a bucolic Olmstedian park meets the residential neighborhood of Martin Drive and a 19th Century industrial corridor housing Harley Davidson Motor Company and Miller Brewery intersects a once vibrant Vliet Street.

Pouring over hours of audio footage, peeking and squinting into the blue lines of the computer screen, distinguishing between guidelines and wall lines in autoCAD drawings, and playing with the documentary software - we are dreaming new worlds, composing new stories. We are music makers and dreamers. Yet that process of telling stories – choosing one from the many stories – makes the task difficult and awesome.

In the seventies Hayden White wrote about the art of writing histories. He argued that historiography is a poetic exercise in emplotment. Historians plot stories; they highlight certain aspects of it and downplay others. They explain change and interpret life in particular ways. Histories follow certain underlining and prefigured narrative structures within which we understand, read and reproduce our reality. Yet, each story, told differently, bent and crooked, follows some basic logic.

This year's stories speak to us about multiple ways we interpret and experience time. These stories can be organized under three categories.

The story of Vliet Street sharpens our understanding of cultural time, a sense of history that we share as a culture. Memories of the past, realities of the present and dreams of future coalesce as residents talk about this thoroughfare, its environs and the community that developed around it. The street's location in between a park, industry, a culturally diverse urban neighborhood and suburbia generates accounts of industrial labor and technology, the importance of nature and landscaped parks in US history, and stories of changing settlement patterns in Milwaukee due to constant movement of people.

The second set of stories deals with the cultural landscape of Hmong refugees, recent arrivals in this neighborhood. These tales take us to discussions of personal time, that is, how individuals operate in everyday life by straddling multiple worlds and world views. The story of Hmong is not a singular unified account of an ethnic group. Instead it is about how myriad individuals with distinct interests, lifestyles and backgrounds re-imagine a common past and heritage. It is about how valiant men and women mediate the immediacy and urgency of their everyday world with memories and traditions of a lost cultural past.

The third set of stories makes us aware of a different sense of time in order to take another look at this neighborhood. Washington Park at night explores how urban nocturnal life gives us a glimpse into a different and vibrant world that is often ignored, maligned or simply misunderstood. These stories seek to listen to lives that are rendered invisible, voices that are dismissed and a world that is often ignored. We acknowledge a pulsating and thriving world made of dreams, hard work, disappointments and courage that these stories tell us.

The three story-sets and the subplots are cacophonous and dissonant. They strive not to produce a neat singular urban narrative. Single stories kill conversations. Our stories are not complete, comprehensive and sweeping. We have learnt that the careful craft of a storyteller emphasizes leaving loose ends. Loose ends let your mind soar like a kite and then they set us free. A story, like a kite, flies on, its string limply dangling from the sky, daring us to catch it and pin it down - waving, twisting and turning into the distant horizon till we can see it no more. Some come crashing down on us; into a still and silent moment of utter sadness.

Stories have real power and as we ponder over the mines of digital data, our minds soar into the world of stories. We pick and choose, bite and spit, remember and remind. We have to do a good job – walk that tightrope – not too tight not too loose. Just enough to make space for the next story to snuggle up to us and change our tale in unpredictable ways.

Arijit Sen
senspeaks.wordpress.com

WHO ARE WE?

The Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures collaborative project at UW Milwaukee and Madison introduces an interdisciplinary research track concentrating on the examination of the physical, cultural, and social aspects of our built environment. The program serves students enrolled in the UW Milwaukee and Madison campuses respectively. It involves faculty members on both campuses with diverse research and teaching interests, including urban and architectural history, cultural landscapes, urban and rural vernacular architecture, public history, and environmental history.

Fieldwork is an important aspect of this program and a cross-campus fieldwork school is a special offering of this project. Each summer the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures field school provides students with an immersive experience in the field recording of the built environment and cultural landscapes and an opportunity to learn how to write history literally "from the ground up." Students receive training in site documentation (including photography, measured drawings, digital documentation, audio-visual production), historic interpretation of buildings and landscapes (focusing on how to "read" buildings within its material, political, social, cultural and economic contexts), and primary source research (including oral history, archival research, architectural analysis).

WHAT IS PROJECT: PICTURING MILWAUKEE?

We are storytellers, collecting and relaying tales of places and neighborhoods in Milwaukee. We call this idea "Picturing Milwaukee" and our objective is to conjure up –or picture– various neighborhoods of Milwaukee like designs in a wonderfully complex quilt. Individually unique and beautiful, each street is part of a larger whole and we are interested in examining how the local and the urban relate to each other – how a street fits into a larger urban narrative. Understanding this relationship between the whole and its parts is important because it shows us how individual places produce our larger world. We are the sum total of smaller units. Such an understanding promotes civic belonging and allows us to reimagine ourselves as stewards of our worlds.

Why do we tell stories? Stories are powerful not only because they connect and transfix, not only because they are accessible to all, but also because they spread. Stories produce more stories; transferred from one person to another, stories disperse across time and space. Stories produce revolutions – not the kinds that we saw in 1789 and 1917 in France and Russia or the campaign for free speech that set campuses on fire in 1964; not even the kinds we saw recently in 2011 at Tahrir Square or the Wisconsin State Capitol – although those too are born of stories of resistance and intrigue. We collect stories about morals and ethics, ones that recount honor and perseverance, or those that our neighbors and community members communicate to us – all with a moral at the end of it. We are interested in stories that become part of our speech and imaginations; stories that teach us how to behave and react to life and how to walk and to talk – those stories that in turn gently transform who we are and what we do.

WHAT DO WE DO?

At the BLC field school, as we explore urban neighborhoods, we discover their complexity. Neighborhoods are physical locations, material artifacts of everyday life, centers of symbolic action and domestic activities, and community spaces of interaction and social life.

In 1982 Jules Prown asked, "Are there aspects of mind to be discovered in objects that differ from, complement, supplement, or contradict what can be learned from more traditional literary and behavioral sources?" Prown was referring to the importance of the material world around us in telling us stories of our culture in ways that words, texts, and traditional historical sources did not. Our study of this neighborhood begins with an analysis of the world of homes, streets, gardens, gates, and asphalt. We want to find out if the physical character of the Washington Park neighborhood may tell us something about its history that written accounts and official histories fail to describe.

In such a study mere stylistic and aesthetic categories of analysis fall short because these issues merely parrot what the canonical sources of architecture tell us. Describing a building merely by its style—Neo Classical, Italianate, or eclectic —seem less useful since these categories say nothing about how the meanings and interpretations of these buildings changed over time. Questions such as "who was the architect?" or "what is the aesthetic style of a building?" may well explain the initial context and reasons why an architect built a building. But these questions say nothing about social life in these spaces and a pittance about the experiences of those who live in these spaces. Stories of women, children, gardeners, and residents remain untold. Esoteric information about classical details and building morphologies may enhance the significance and value of the building, but they are not the sole registers of architectural connoisseurship.

Attending to this gap in our knowledge of the built environment, the BLC field school turns towards the study of cultural landscapes as a way to interpret this neighborhood. The term cultural landscape is one that is difficult to define. We use it loosely and geographers, anthropologists, and material culture scholars understand the term in different ways. Geographer Carl Sauer in his essay "The Morphology of Landscape" defines cultural landscape as "fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result." Others focus on the human experience of place rather than merely studying its physical characters. Scholars such as J. B. Jackson and Kevin Lynch draw our attention to symbolic, cultural and cognitive cues in such landscapes while Dolores Hayden and Setha Low argue that understanding cultural landscapes necessitates an exploration of how we perceive those landscapes and how such practices of spectatorship may be contested.

To us, cultural landscape is phenomena materialized in space. We define cultural landscape as the materialization of a complex relationship between an individual and her larger cultural and material contexts. Cultural landscapes need not be physical, tangible and visible. Indeed, much of what we search for may be symbolic, experiential and sensorial– invisible to our eyes. And just as we make our cultural landscapes, these landscapes influence who we are.

At the BLC field school we begin with vernacular architecture scholar Paul Groth's argument that cultural landscape studies, "focus most on the history of how people have used everyday space–buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards–to establish their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning." Groth's emphasis on relationships challenges the often-singular focus on architectural authorship and style used by architectural historians. In this field school we explore the experiences of myriad inhabitants and underscore their role in the making of this neighborhood.

Field School Participants

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JiaJun Yin
Tommy Yang
Paula Polman
Denise Zahran
Qianfei Xu
Hyrom Stokes
Damir McCurty
Adam Childers

Teachers

Nan Kim
Jeffrey Klee
Michael Frisch
Judith Weiland
Erin Dorbin
Daniel McClure
Matthew Jarosz
Arijit Sen

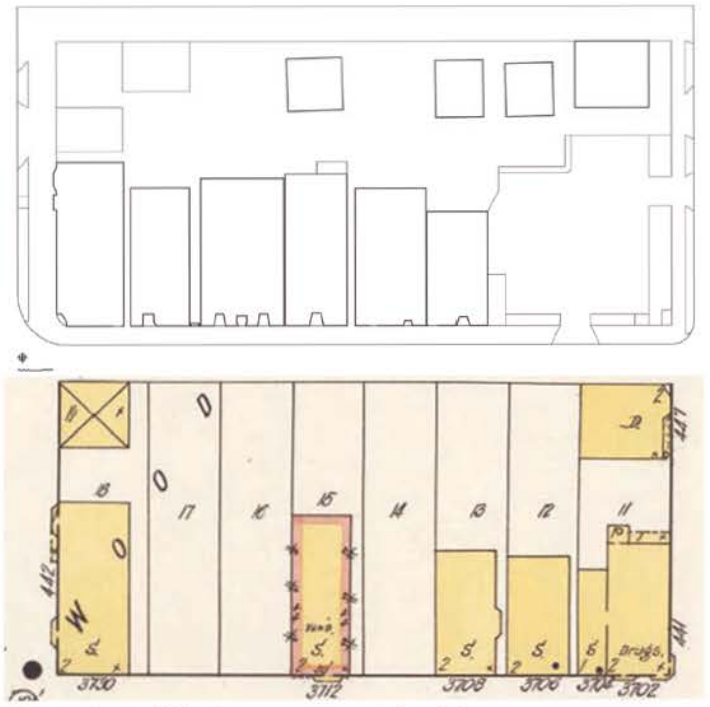
PLACES

CHANGE OVER TIME
3710-3730 W VLIET STREET

Part of the 3700 block of Vliet Street, between 37th and 38th Streets, exemplifies dynamic urban transformations. In 1910 this block was part of a subdivision called Woodlawn Park. Our study of Sanborn maps of this neighborhood and documented ownership records of this block shows that the ownership and use of the buildings on this block have changed over time. Only half of the current buildings on this city block existed in 1910. The 1910 Sanborn map shows a carriage house that no longer exists. Instead, within a span of 30 years, newer garage structures appeared along the back alley reflecting how the physical landscape of this block changed as a result of the introduction and popularity of the automobile. Similarly a drugstore that existed on the eastern corner lot in 1910 is now gone and an empty parking lot has taken its place. In 1910, except from a corner dwelling, the other buildings on this block were stores. Today, these erstwhile stores are vacant and boarded up except for a tattoo parlor.

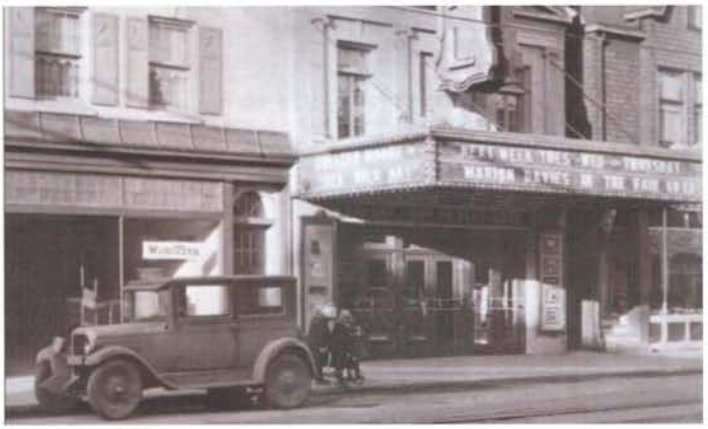
The overall 30 ft. x 120 ft. lot plans are rectangular in shape with the narrow ends lined up along the major thoroughfare. The rectangular and deep lot sizes are not constant either. The pattern changes as we move further to the east along Vliet Street. Rigid rectangular shapes become quartered and halved lots with curved and diagonal fence lines indicating suburban growth.

Mixed use buildings located on this block have ground level commercial spaces with central recessed doorways and large display windows. The upper floor private residential spaces are marked by projecting bay windows on the second and third floors and sidewalk entries and staircases leading up to the upper levels. The exterior facades of the buildings express varied architectural styles and diverse ornamentation such as the Tudor style facades of one two storied building that we documented.



Comparison of block over two periods of time.
Top: 2015 site plan, Bottom: 1910 Sanborn map.

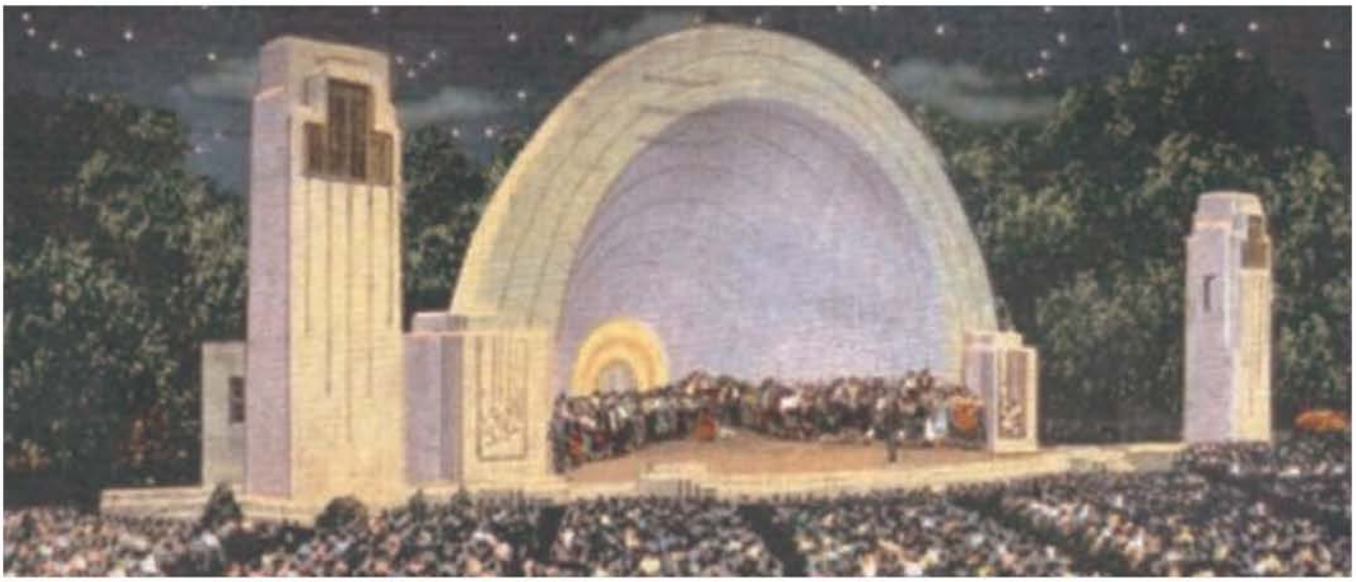
Streetcars at Cold Spring Barns.



Theatre on Vliet Street.

Change of Industries

Mirroring the dynamic changes along the single block described above, the larger neighborhood also witnessed transformations over time. The neighborhood evolved during the 20th C. as major industries developed along the 30th Street industrial corridor and streetcar and train lines connected Washington Park to Milwaukee and beyond. The Washington Park bandshell and the Cold Spring Street Car Shops became major destinations and served as catalysts for further growth during the first half of the 20th C. Later the flourishing economy and growth diminished with the loss of industries, major demographic shifts and suburban flight. The zoo left the park and the streetcar line disappeared in 1959. The decline can be still seen on the Vliet Street block described above, in the form of vacant lots and boarded up storefronts. This constant change, from a block scale to an overall regional scale, makes this neighborhood an important case study in urban history.



Postcard showing a full bandshell in Washington Park.

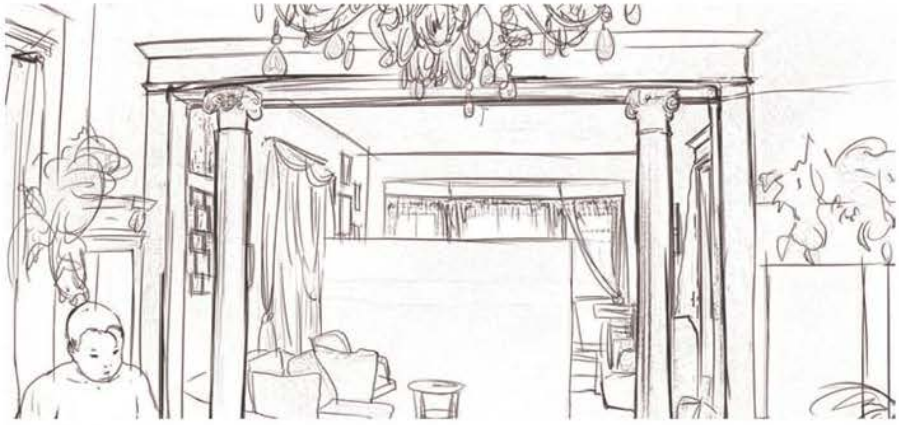
Mueller, Pat, Historical Images
Rogala, Cassie, Historical Image

CHA'S HOUSE

Cha's House, 2015

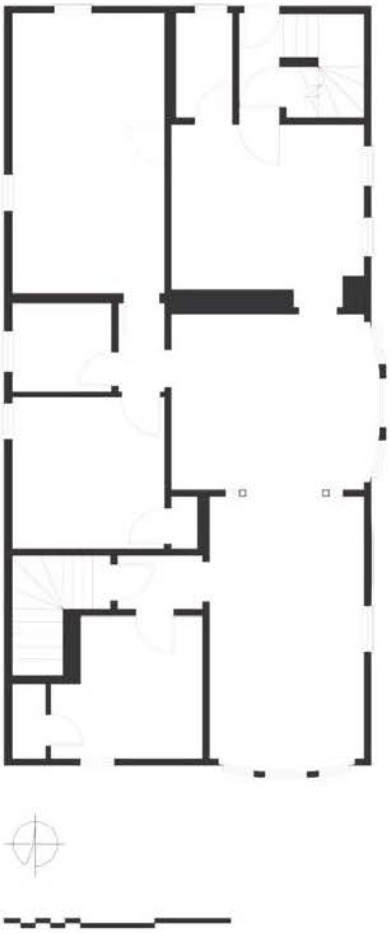
This building was built for the Reisner family in 1909. It had been a residential building until a men's clothing store opened on the first floor (3710) in 1911. Since then, it was used as a mixed-used building until 2007, when it fell vacant. The current owners use the second floor as a dwelling.

The ground floor plan operates as an open, commercial space, currently being renovated into a restaurant, with a large public space greeting the entrance. The ground floor has gone through many changes and the imprint of the older layout can be enciphered on close inspection. For instance, the remains of a stairwell and what used to be a bathroom space can still be seen on the ground floor. The second floor of the dwelling has a front/back interior layout that remains mostly unchanged. This includes a front section with 3 bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, a pantry room, a dining room and a living room on this second floor. The front section has three bedrooms and an newly added temporary partition by the front-bay window for private office space. This section is accessed via a front entry staircase. Adjacent to the living room is the dining room space. The ornamentation in the front rooms mimics a classical style, with ionic wood columns, built-in cabinetry and door frames consistent with its initial construction. The dining room is the most decorative room in this house. It has very luxurious built-in furniture. A cabinet with a built-in mirror sits on the south side of the room. On the other side of the room, there is a column screen. The wood trims along the sidewalls are used to display family photos and plants.



Sketch of column screen.

Sketch of dining room.



First floor plan.

It was very likely that John L. Reisner and Elizabeth Reisner occupied the master bedroom in 1909. The couple, John's sister-in-law and two of his nieces lived with them till 1930s. There used to be a door connecting the kitchen to the master bedroom, but that portal is now closed off. Without having a servant in the house, we can imagine how difficult it must have been for the Reisner couple to maintain the household and cook meals for the five residents living in this building (as indicated in the manuscript census from that period). When Geo Larsen bought the property in the 1950s, the attic was converted to a single-occupancy apartment, and the second floor was converted into two apartments. The back stairs lead to the kitchen and the attic. While the kitchen might have served as a less formal space in the past, as deduced by the lack of decorative moldings, today it serves as a central space.

What remains interesting about this house, specifically about the second floor, is that the bedrooms are used in a different way today. The dining room and kitchen remains the central space with family photographs and plants. The dining+kitchen space is always occupied and used. Food and cooking equipment are left out on the table in preparation for family meals. The space is decorated by temporary fixtures, framed photographs of immediate family members indicative of their successes (sons on football team, daughter as valedictorian). The living room is used in a very different manner compared to its formal use in the past. The living room is divided into two spaces: an office-space on one side and a space to view the television on the other.

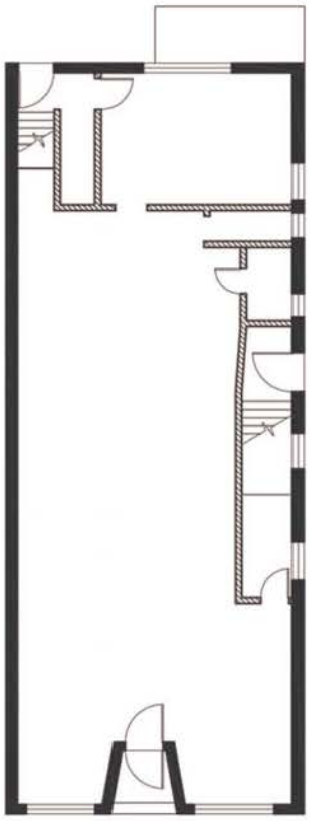
A MIXED-USE STOREFRONT

Storefront, 2015

Located on Vliet Street, this mixed-use building has a large commercial space on the first floor and a residential space on the second. The backyard and garage are sited off an alleyway. The ground level entry opens onto a large room that occupies most of the building's footprint. Over the years this easily accessible room has served as a market, campaign headquarters, office, tavern and a grocery store. Located along the eastern wall is an enclosed stairwell that, in its current iteration, can only be accessed from the exterior of the building. Next to the stairwell is a small bathroom and a closet. Also located in the north end of the ground floor is a relatively large kitchen with access to a rear stairwell and rear entry.

The most recent use of the ground level is in the form of a congregational space for the Salvation Church of God. Although the building no longer holds worship services, it continues to be used as a meeting space and storage space. The upper floor is residential and is rented out. The BLC field school didn't have access to the upper floor.

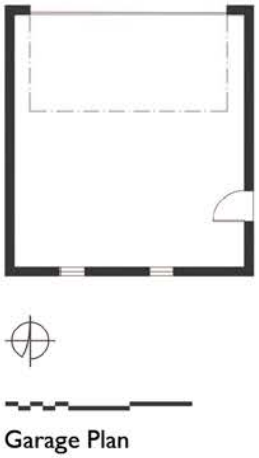
Interior view.



First floor plan.

The building has seen multiple uses and occupancies in the past.

6/9/1910 - Built - Food Market
11/12/1925 - Garage built
1/23/1935 - Food Market
2/7/1936 - Campaign Headquarters for two months
10/14/1936 - Office
7/15/1937 - Shapiro Tavern
7/25/1950 - May's & Hy's Tavern
5/20/1976 - Tavern - Allan Richter
8/23/1979 - Tavern - Issac Harper
11/11/1981 - Grocery Store



Garage Plan

The architecture of the storefront is typical of this building type from the first decade of the 20th C. The central recessed entrance with storefront displays, wooden transoms, lintels and bulkheads are still visible under the current boarded up facade. Similar storefronts were common along Vliet Street during the early half of the 20th C. as seen in archival images from that period.

City of Milwaukee, "Building Inspection and Safety Engineering. Premises Record," file (#73-0101), Development Center.

HAWTHORNE HOUSE

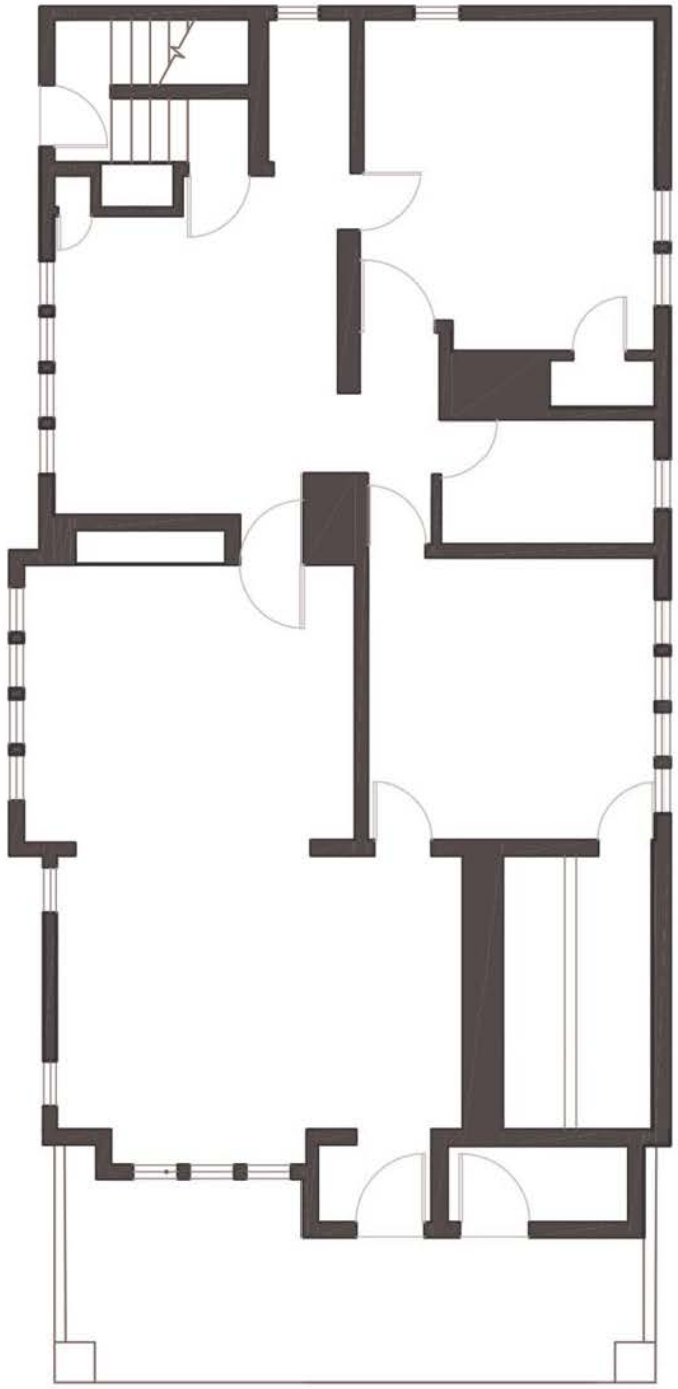
Hawthorne House, 2015

After passing by the prairie style ornamentation on the front porch, we walked into the lower apartment of this two-storied duplex home with an imposing east-facing façade. The property contains both a front and back yard and a two-car garage. An entrance vestibule, living room, dining area and a home office constitute the front of the house. Directly across from the entrance vestibule, a door leads into a flex room that was once used as a bedroom but is currently being used as an office space. The back section consists of a kitchen, back stairs and the master bedroom. They are separated from the front by a swinging door between the dining room and kitchen. The kitchen is spacious and accommodates an additional, less formal dining area.

Ornamental woodwork can be found both on the outside and inside of this house. Alongside the elaborate woodwork are beautiful stained-glass doors of built-in cabinetry. Hardwood floors are interspersed with carefully selected carpets. We saw the thoughtful architectural touch of the designer/builder, but the constant upkeep of the woodwork is a true testament to the current renters' care for their home.

Column screen detail.

Stained glass window detail.

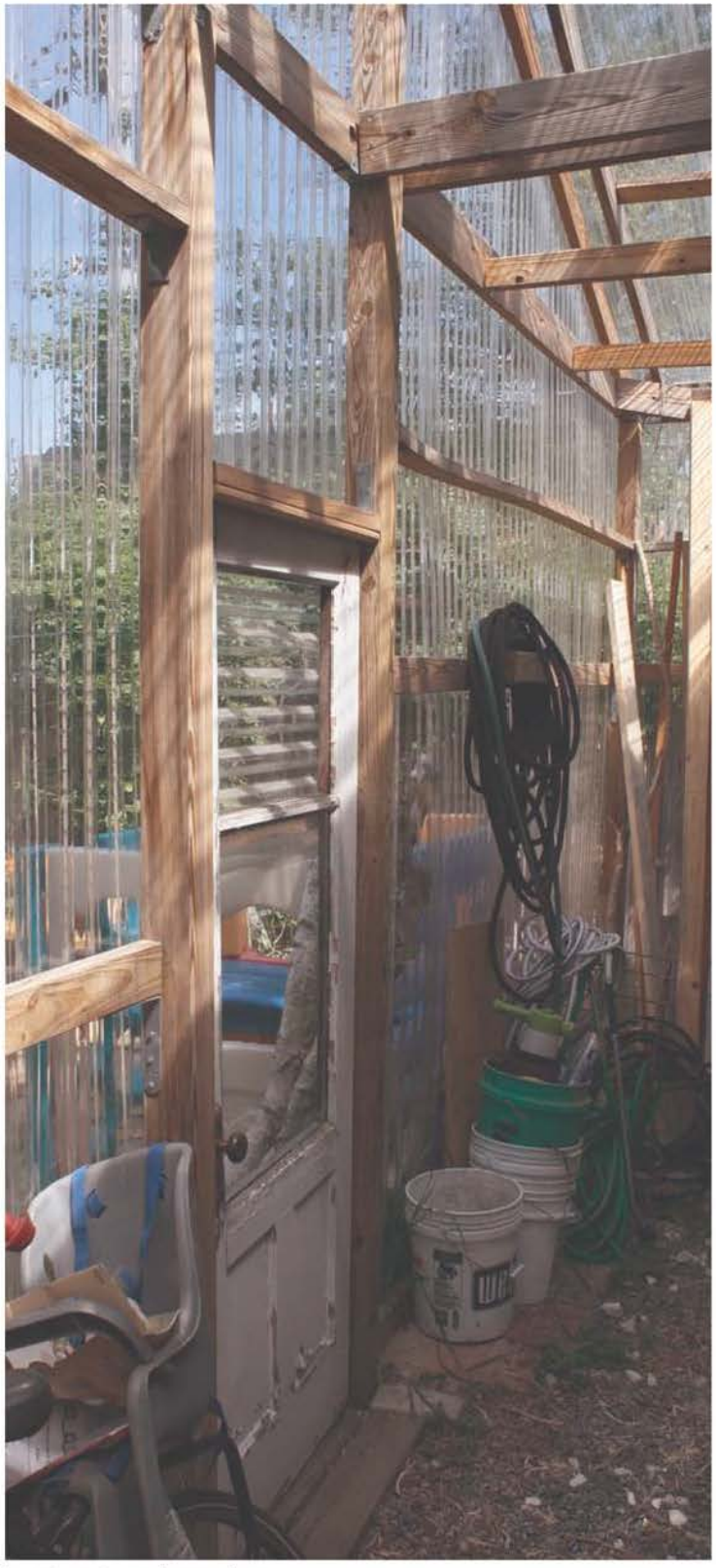


First floor plan.

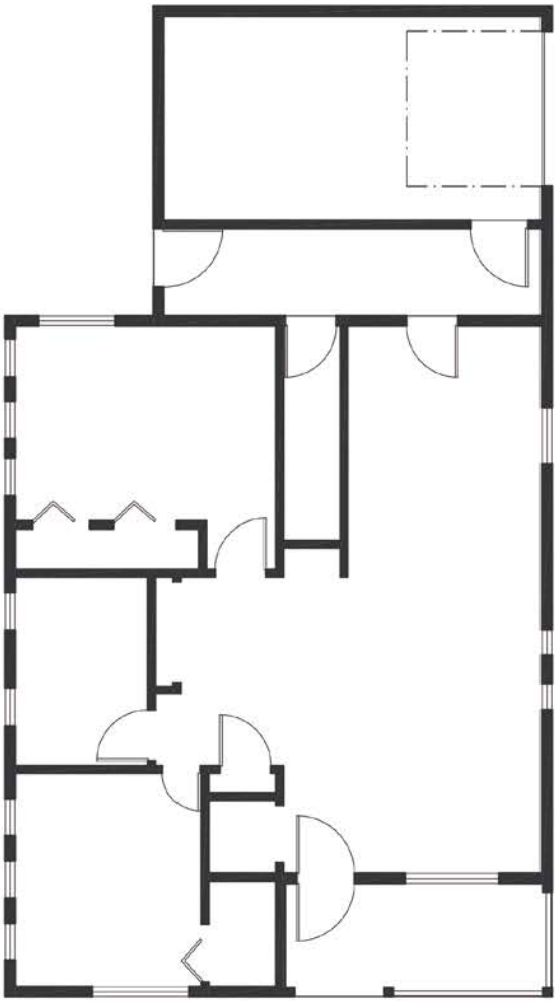
JAMIE AND NJ'S HOUSE

Jamie and NJ's House, 2015

This single story two-bedroom home faces east and sits on a small lot between an alley to its north and a small house lot to its south. It was built 8 years ago and has a connected garage and a green-house, the latter of which was constructed by its current owner. The basement is the only part of the home that was wholly constructed on-site. The house itself was shipped. It arrived in two pieces, and the seam where it was put together can be detected by the cracking paint on the ceiling. The building has a full basement althought it does not extend below the ell holding the mudroom and garage. The front porch leads into an open-plan living-dining-kitchen space.



Interior view of greenhouse.



First floor plan.

Exterior space on side of house.

MAE'S HOUSE

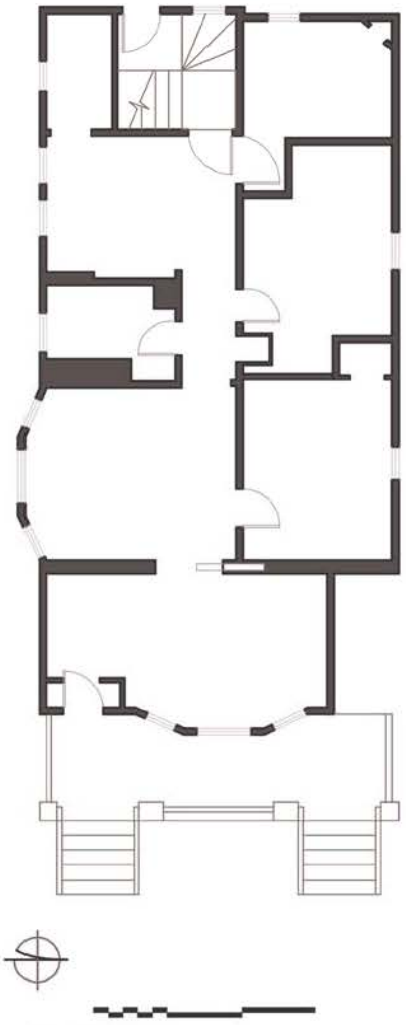
Mae's House, 2015

In Washington Park, residential buildings built during the 20th Century have seen changes in use and ownership. The resilience of buildings can be measured by its ability to accommodate diverse cultural practices, lifestyles and functions. We discovered one such resilient building that was built for 20th century families. The building adapts perfectly to the lifestyles of new Hmong American homeowners.

This residential duplex is set on a single lot facing east. The building has three stories with two separate living units on separate floors. The front porch spans the eastern facade of the entire building. The ground floor apartment has two entrances located in the front (east) and rear (west) ends of the building. The entry sequence and interior layout create a distinct front, middle and back section inside this apartment accentuating a front/middle/back trichotomy. The middle living space mediates the formality of the front room and the lived-in informality of the back service areas.

Ribbon on door handle.

Shrine detail.



First floor plan.

The contemporary use of this home inverts the front/back spatial domains during ceremonial events. The occupants of this structure use the rear door as the primary entry into their home. The kitchen becomes the most public space followed by the adjacent living room. In addition to changing the use of interior spaces the new residents transform this home via ephemeral sensorial modifications such as smells, curtains, plants, shrines, decorative objects and bric-a-brac. A large number of indoor plants bring the verdant ambience of the outdoor gardens into the home. Indoor shrines calling on the spirit of forefathers are carefully arranged. Little shrines hold incense and eggs in a bowl of rice. A red ribbon tied around doorknobs symbolize shamanistic rituals. The fragrant smell of incense permeates the entire home but is the strongest at the entryway near the main shrine. The aroma of Hmong food such as boiled chicken fills the kitchen. There is also a strong smell of soap in the bathroom.

As we move around the home we encounter carefully framed pictures of family and friends in private bedrooms. We also find pictures of Packers players hung above the TV in the living area. In this multi-generational home, contemporary technologies and electronics used by the younger generation coexist with the symbolic artifacts that are meaningful to the elders.

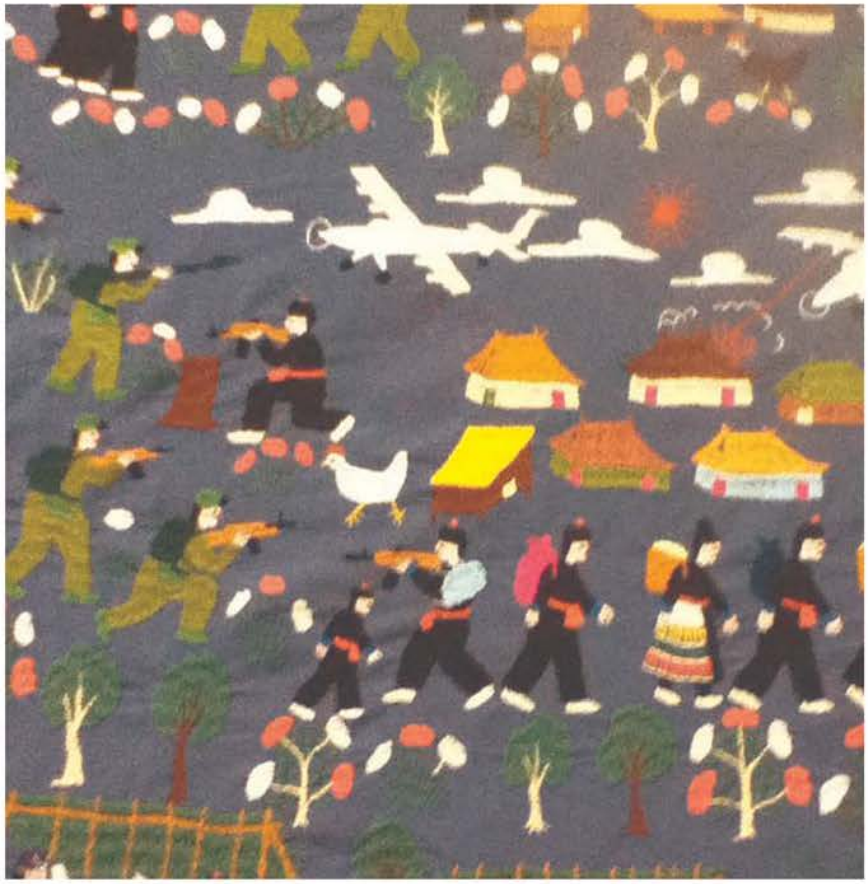
HAFA

HAFA exterior sketch.

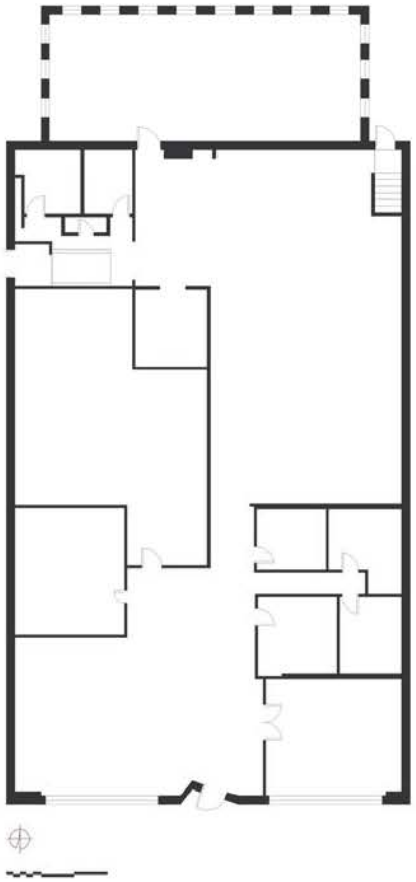
The building housing the Hmong American Friendship Association Inc. is a single-storied south facing structure, situated on a large lot. The building is currently divided into three sections. The entrance leads into the front office with a reception area, a museum and a seating nook. The middle section consists of a conference room, an open office with many cubicles and smaller office spaces. The back section consists of two closets (one enclosed, one not), two restrooms, a freight elevator and big kitchen and dining area. In addition, there is a back patio (or warehouse) with a loading dock at the rear of the building. There are three primary entrances to the building, one of which is a handicap-accessible entrance located on the western end.

There are many murals in this building. Each mural explains a story, whether it is the Hmong journey out of Laos and Thailand or about life back in the homeland. The back room containing the dining area has many quilts and embroidered artwork showing historical scenes. The smell of food, sight of elders socializing, and the tunes of traditional music make this space seem very cozy and homey. Pictures of Hmong groups are arranged along the walls of the hallway connecting the back room to the front entrance area. The front room feels more formal compared to the dining area. It acts as a museum with Hmong cultural artifacts, tools, cookware and ceremonial arms.

Like the murals, the building tells us a story. The interior of HAFA introduces us to three distinct representations of Hmong life, history and culture. The front, with its formal display of cultural artifacts, represents an official account of important people, places, and periods in Hmong history. The middle space, with offices, and posters of social services that is offered by HAFA to various stakeholders within the community give us a glimpse into the everyday life, social problems, political issues and needs of Hmong immigrants in the US. The back room, with the smell of food and a domestic ambience, gives us a glimpse into the everyday lived experience of Hmong immigrants in Washington Park.



Quilt detail showing a cultural scene.



First floor plan.

Wall mural on exterior of building.

PHYLLIS'S HOUSE

Phyllis's House, 2015

A home, argues Clare Cooper Marcus, is a mirror of ourselves. Its architecture, detailing, and bric-a-brac reflect the desire of its resident to represent themselves and their identity. Built in 1929 by John D. Erb, this small duplex has served as a home to many tenants and has poignantly and symbolically served to represent their personalities. In keeping with the sense of the past, the house itself remains mostly unchanged, with preserved woodwork and an early sunroom add-on.

The plan of the house is divided into two sides, with two bedrooms and a bathroom on the right side and the kitchen, dining, and living rooms on the left. There is also a sunroom, that matches the style and finish of the house, in the rear that is accessed through the back bedroom. The only other transformations that have been made to the plan are adjusted door swings, indicating different room uses and security desires over time.

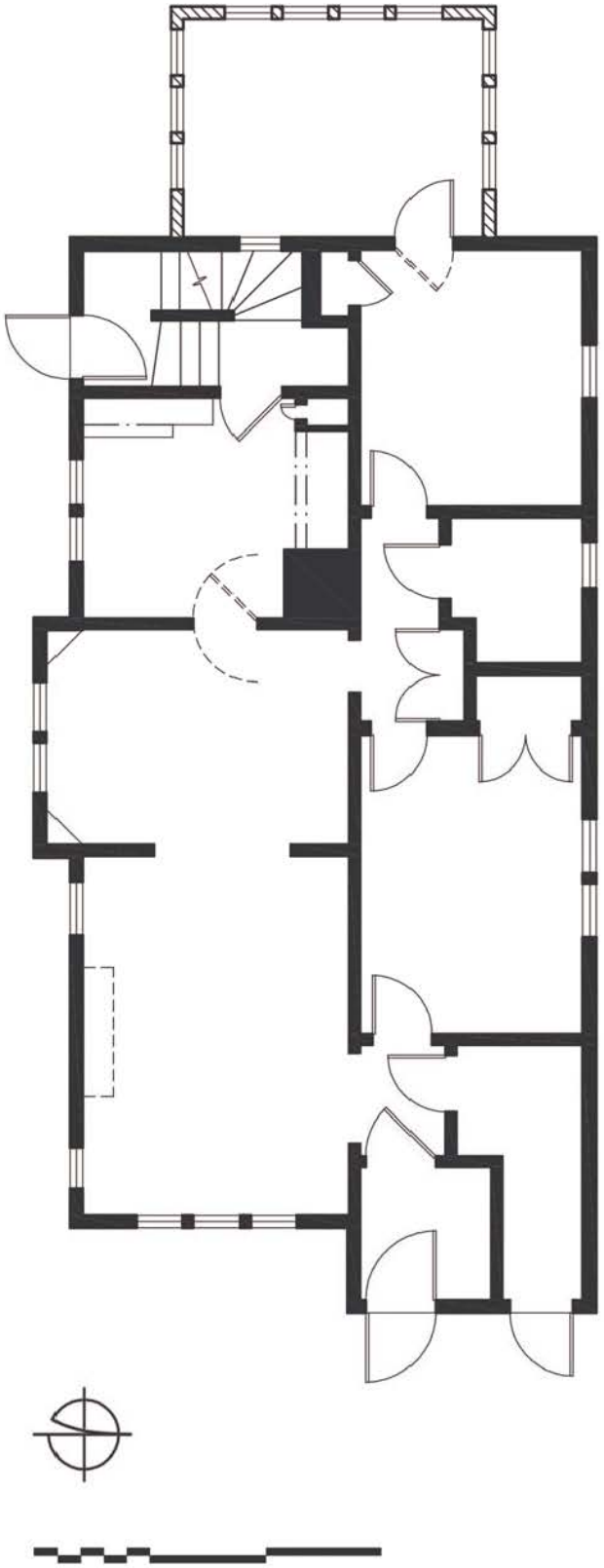
This house is thoroughly finished with wood trim in every room, a false fireplace, coved ceilings in the dining room and entryway, built-in cabinets in the dining room, and an arched entryway into the living room. Ornamental forced air grates are placed throughout the home, giving a sense of the past industrial era. This careful ornamentation and finish is important because it reflects the original homebuilder and owner's intentions. The detailing, extravagant ornaments, and even the false fireplace, create an illusion of wealth, refinement and social status that masks the small size of this house.

The building continues be personalized by the current owner who has displayed awards, certificates, photos, paintings, and other meaningful items on the walls, giving a sense of identity throughout the house.

Sketch of living room.

Sketch of dining room and built-in cabinets.

Detail of arched entryway and coved ceiling.



First floor plan.

C&S SUPERMARKET

C&S Supermarket, 2015

C&S Supermarket is a Hmong American owned store located at the corner of Vliet Street and 27th Street. This building was built in 1941 and has seen many owners and uses. It was occupied by Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P) until 1973. At that time, the storefront windows and doors along Vliet Street were sealed off and boarded with plywood. In the same year, the building was bought by the office of the United States Social Security Administration. In 1986, it changed hands again and was bought by Delta Biological Plasma Center, run by Delta Biological Resources. The space was used as a facility for collecting, processing and manufacturing source plasma, specialty plasmas and other biological products used for therapeutic and diagnostic purposes. This facility closed by the end of 1991. The building changed ownership again in 1993 and a grocery store named Superior Oriental Store opened in the premises. The person who managed this grocery store rented the building from an absentee landlord. In 2006, the Yang family bought the store and renamed it as C&F Vliet Supermarket. In 2010, the store was renamed again as C&S Vliet Street Supermarket.

The success of the current C&S Vliet Street Supermarket is the result of hard labor of the Yang family. As Yee described, "the whole place was really a mess when we first got it. We had to clean off the floors and we had to go downstairs to clean off the basement." However, as an ethnic grocery store, the business is successful because it fills a niche ethnic market and caters to an expanded Asian clientele including Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotians and Burmese living in this neighborhood and beyond. This store serves a variety of Asian foods from east and southeast Asia. Goods and ingredients from Thai, Laos and China appear on the shelves.

This grocery story has reshaped the life of the Yang family in many ways. The owner and his wife don't farm anymore in this neighborhood. They spend almost all their time tending the store. Their kitchen at home is barely used now. Instead, they use the kitchen inside the store. Their two sons come to the store regularly during their college breaks in order to help their parents. Yee Yang—the younger son has majored in marketing and hopes to help his parents manage the store in the future. The store also serves a symbolic function as a Hmong community cultural space. The family decorated the store with Hmong cultural artifacts and ornamental details such as the "bandao" embroidery painted on to the ceiling tiles.

The merchandise in the store is organized in ways that seem slightly different from mainstream American grocery stores. According to Yee part of the rationale was idiosyncratic, "There isn't a way of organizing things. It's just a way my parents thought it should be." But other choices were symbolic, pragmatic or cultural. For instance, a TV counter in one end of the store marks the separate media section of the store carrying Hmong video tapes and music media. Hmong shows loop all day long in the television display. Another section carries gardening equipment addressing the needs of the many Hmong gardeners who shop here. Spices are arranged in ways that make it easy for the ethnic shoppers to find them.

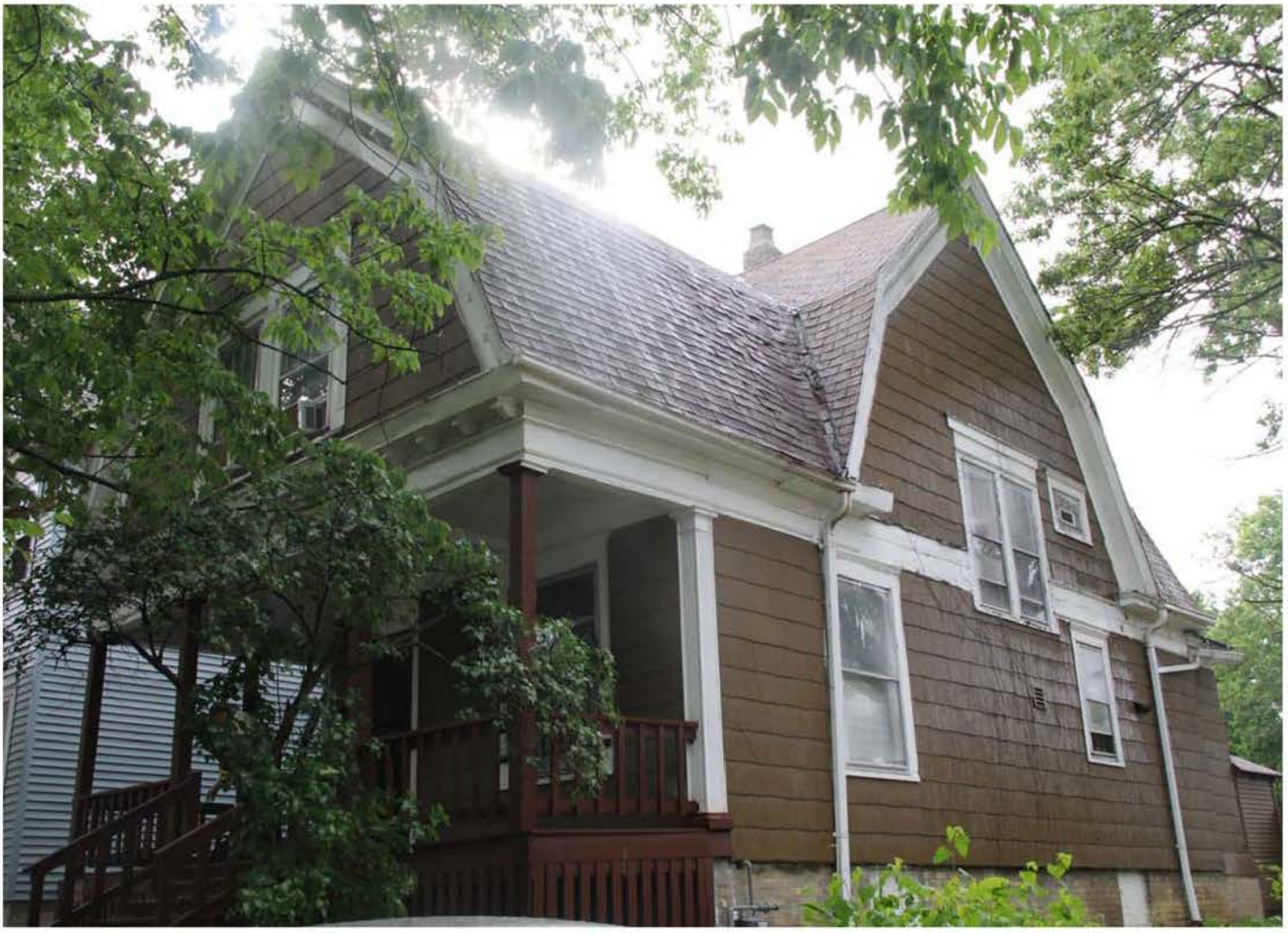
An ethnic grocery store is more than a marketplace. It is also a community space and a node where identities are reproduced and recreated. The act of entering and patronizing stores such as C&S Vliet Street Supermarket becomes part of the social construction or reproduction of Hmong American identity in Milwaukee.

Shelf detail.

Interior view.

Media section of the store.

GOELIANG'S HOUSE



Goeliang's House, 2015

This building was built in 1896 for the Bow family. Orrin Bow, the head of the household, was a lawyer. There were five residents living in the house including Helen Bow (Orrin Bow's wife), Marion Bow (son) and two boarders. In 1938, owner Adela Wehe, who was a parish secretary, added asbestos siding onto the exterior of this home. This greatly shaped how the building looks like today. From the mid 1940s to mid 1950s, the Dieterle family occupied the house. In 1957, the Morrisette family bought the place and lived in it till late 1970s, when the Brown family moved in. The Brown family lived here for twenty-six years. The building was empty for a few years before a Hmong American family bought the house in 2012. Today the building is occupied by a three-generation Hmong family with ten to twelve family members.

This East facing building sits between a residential building to its South and a vacant lot to the North. It is the only two storied, single family building on this block. In addition to two main floors, there is a basement and a small attic. Like many other homes in this neighborhood, the interior layout of this building reproduces a clear front and back spatial hierarchy. This spatial organization fits the norms of behavior and use commonplace in the 20th C. when these homes were erected. We interpreted this by studying the original finishes of this building much of which remain intact from its original design.

Detail of arched entry into kitchen.

Air grate detail.

First floor plan.

The front zone with its elaborate classical ornamentation projected a face of refined gentility. An entrance vestibule leads to the main living space of the house. These rooms were designed for leisure, entertainment and dining. The rooms were divided by pocket doors, allowing inhabitants to open up or close sections of the interior to the public. Today the pocket doors are no longer used. The back zone was designed for family living and cooking. The kitchen located at the eastern corner is a back service-oriented space. There used to a door that opened into the east side of the wall of the kitchen. The door, when shut, made the activities in the kitchen invisible from the front rooms. Today, this door has been blocked off and a half bath added to the other side of the wall while a different door located on the south side of the kitchen leads into the dining room.

PEOPLE

Tymika Hawthorne

"Be Nosey!" exhorted Tymika Hawthorne, a resident of the Martin Drive neighborhood when we interviewed her. Hawthorne was not encouraging people to be inquisitive in ways that may invade others' privacy; on the contrary, she was encouraging us to look out for our neighbors. She was advocating a culture of caring that would bind members of this residential community in enduring ways. Her philosophy of life is simple and direct: she desires that her neighbors could come together, grow, and become more well-informed in the process.

Hawthorne has been leading by example. She attends neighborhood meetings at the nearby Harley Davidson campus punctually. She is never absent in neighborhood watch meetings at Phyllis Reitter's home. She signs up for neighborhood clean-ups and participates in the neighborhood watch duties. Ms. Hawthorne and her spouse Kenneth, share a belief that the only way to grow as a community is to involve and encourage younger kids and members of the new generation of residents to become part of something productive and positive.

The Hawthornes have only lived in the Martin Drive neighborhood for a short time but they have actively contributed to the betterment of this community. As renters, the Hawthornes take immense pride in their home—designing, decorating, and carefully organizing the interiors. They have taken care of the neighborhood too, by doing landscaping for their neighbors and tending the yards of properties that are currently unoccupied. Their consideration for their neighbors extends to Ms. Phyllis Reitter and the Hawthornes have been offering to hold some of the community meetings at there own home to lessen the burden on Ms. Reitter.

Tymika Hawthorne, interviewed by Hyrom Stokes and Damir McCurty, June 2015

Bobby McQuay

Bobby McQuay moved to Milwaukee in 1979, from his home in Gary, Indiana. He has been part of the Washington Park neighborhood since then. McQuay graduated from Washington High School and postponed enrolling in college. Instead he bought a property and opened his own business. His business was successful and he gave back to his community by supporting various local events. He always contributed time, energy and money to worthy causes, but he felt like there was more he could do for his community. After taking "Making Connection," a twelve-week course on community development, McQuay found his true calling. He is currently pursuing a degree as a Social Worker in the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

McQuay continues to be a proud and proactive member of the Washington Park community. He works as a community organizer for the Washington Park Partners. McQuay is devoted to seeing his community prosper. He is committed to "bringing the resources to the people and then connecting the people to the resources." He believes that Milwaukee's central city has a chance to rebound and escape the fate of many inner-city minority communities across the country, which are on the verge of a total collapse.

McQuay goes door to door two times a week in order to introduce himself to community members and give them information on upcoming events in the area. He informs them of the services that the Washington Park Partners (WPP) offer. McQuay considers it a success even if he knocks on 70 doors and leaves 150 flyers and only two new people become involved. He believes in the WPP mantra that 'we are the change'— whether by instituting a food bank, or supporting a clothing bank, or by offering information about job openings to those in need.

Bobby McQuay Jr., interviewed by Damir McCurty and Hyrom Stokes, June 2015

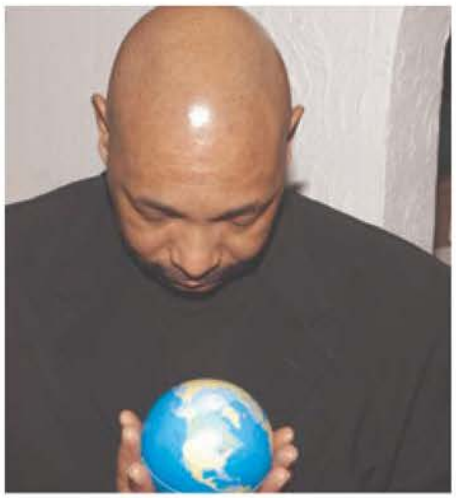
Pat Mueller

Pat Mueller is the owner of Heritage West Properties in the Martin Drive neighborhood and is very knowledgable of the surrounding area. Mueller has lived in the area since 1986 after seeing the promise and inner beauty of the buildings and surrounding neighborhood. She has a strong focus on revitalizing the neighborhood and hopes to do so by influencing the use of space, whether it be in parks, vacant lots, or existing buildings. Mueller advertises homes to possible tenants and fights to bring prosperous businesses into the community.

In 2002, Mueller bought a crumbling corner store in order to set up her office. She thought the building was a detriment to the community. It was in disrepair, and the phone booth outside was linked to crime. She fully renovated it, replacing much of the interior and exterior. Fixing this store up created a desirable place to run a small business and a hub for new activities.

Mueller says that positive thinking is what is needed to make changes in the neighborhood. She says negative thinking is a very temporary bonding agent in the community, while positive thinking creates increasingly stronger ties. There are many misconceptions about the area surrounding Vliet Street. Mueller thinks getting over these misconceptions is key to revitalizing the area. She hopes to get people and businesses to move in by changing the way people think about the neighborhood.

Pat Mueller, interviewed by Jared Schmitz, James Wall and Di Tang, June 2015



Ahmad Muhammad

"When the student is ready, the teacher will appear," explained Ahmad Muhammad, born in Wauwatosa in 1955 to Fredrick Pinkerton and Maddie Jobe. Uplifting, touching and enhancing all our senses by his very presence, brother Ahmad Muhammad inspires everyone who engages with him. Muhammad is the second oldest of his seven siblings, including his brother on his fathers side. He went to school in Milwaukee and remembers all his teachers by their names. Recruited by universities because of his talent in football, Ahmad decided to enroll in Alcorn University, a land-grant institution of higher learning in Mississippi. He left Alcorn University after his first semester in search of a higher calling. In 1981, after going to a lecture by Minister Louis Farrakhan in Philadelphia, he converted to the Nation of Islam. He has not looked back since. Today, Ahmad Muhammad is growing his own business, the Inception Consulting Group.

When Muhammad first came to Washington Park, he was homeless, but he received, and continues to receive, much love and support from the community. He knows a variety of residents in the community. He loves all of them and still has support from them. Among his friends, David Boucher and Stephanie Shipley helped him get back on his feet.

We asked Muhammad to compare Washington Park, his current home to neighboring Wauwatosa, where he started his life's journey. He replied that one of the main differences is that residents of Washington Park have to focus more on the art of daily survival. He gave the example of valiant single mothers, who need to provide for their families even while going to school to better themselves. These hardworking individuals may not have free time to attend community meetings or organize neighborhood cleanups, even if they wanted to, because they have to strive to survive on a daily basis.

Unlike the suburbs, Washington Park has more renters and many absentee landlords. Some of these renters, like Ms. Tymika Hawthorne, take great care of their rental property. Others don't. Muhammad believes that residents need to do something tangible in order for change to come. He urges us to act upon our good intentions and dreams. Ahmad is proud of Washington Park since, according to him, this neighborhood is "in the midst of a renaissance."

Ahmad Muhammad, interviewed by Damir McCurty and Hyrom Stokes, June 2015

Martina Patterson

Martina Patterson, 30 year old, is an accomplished artist who lives and works in the Washington Park neighborhood. She has resided in this neighborhood for most of her life and she vividly remembers her childhood home at 40th Street. Patterson went to the Messmer Catholic School before studying fashion design at Illinois Institute of Art, Chicago. She received her Bachelor of Fine Art with a focus in fashion design in 2008. Currently, Patterson lives with her 18 year old sister and her cat in Washington Park. Her apartment appears spacious, filled with only items of value and necessity and her art work. She told us the story of her cat, who she found after hearing a meowing through the heating vents of her new home. She named her "Cygnus" after her favorite Rush song.

Patterson sees the Washington Park neighborhood as a community with a potential to "thrive." She wants to see the people of this neighborhood come together and get to know one another. She believes that out of such interaction will emerge a community that cares, where people look out for each other. She believes that simple acts of caring can bring about great transformations.

One of two jobs that Patterson holds is at Express Yourself Milwaukee. This organization uses art programs to change the lives of at-risk youth and youth with mental illness. She believes that the neighborhood can be improved by simply spreading awareness of extracurricular programs for children. Many parents aren't aware of the extracurricular activities available for their children in this neighborhood and Ms. Patterson hopes to spread this message far and wide.

Phyllis Reitter

Phyllis Reitter is a retired psychiatric RN who currently lives in the Martin Drive neighborhood. Living in the neighborhood as a child and recently moving back to care for her mother in 2000, Reitter has been involved in the Martin Drive community throughout her life. She actively participates in the community through Washington Park Partners and is captain of the community block watch, an organization that raises awareness of problems and changes in the neighborhood.

Reitter purchased her family's house in 2008 and takes a lot of pride in its original finishes and various decorations. This home has been cared for dutifully by Reitter. A lot of hard work went into a new garden in the rear and into keeping the woodwork in great shape. The walls and cabinets of the home are covered with meaningful photos of friends and family, certificates and awards, as well as many ornaments acquired over her lifetime. Reitter currently cares for four rescued dogs and had many foster children in the past. The home is also used to host the block watch meetings.

There is a fondness of past intimacy in the community found in Reitter's stories. This nostalgia drives her to make a difference in the community, to recreate the space of her childhood. Reitter recalls a closeness in the neighborhood. "It was one big family" she says. There were numerous block parties on saturdays and everybody looked out for each other. Now, Reitter seeks to reinstate a sense of camaraderie in the community. Through the block watch, Washington Park Partners, and other community organizations, Reitter plans on bringing the community together by creating a friendly and safe environment.

Phyllis Reitter, interviewed by Jared Schmitz, James Wall and Di Tang, June 2015

Ralsten Shanklin

"Let the music play, we all will hear something!" Ralsten Shanklin's music has touched many lives. Shanklin grew up in a bicultural home. His father was Jamaican and his mother was of Cuban descent. Because of this, he did not feel accepted in his neighborhood. Growing up, his talents were apparent. He played multiple sports, excelled in dance, and was known for his singing abilities. At high school, his counselor suggested that he explore a career in singing. However, his father, who was a boxer, wanted him to pursue pugilism. He did not follow that path, but did become involved in martial arts. He was also good at basketball and he tried out for the Milwaukee Bucks team, but a hip injury brought him back to music.

Shanklin wrote his first song when he was 18. His first memories of songs were that of his mother singing Gospel in the kitchen. He found inspiration from almost anything he experienced in his life. However there were genre barriers for him as he produced R&B, Hip-Hop, Pop, and Gospel music. He found that music was his escape because, as he explained, it isn't how he created the music but why he created it that mattered most. Ralsten Shanklin creates music in the hope that his music will help people in need and improve life in Milwaukee's residents.

Ralston Shanklin, interviewed by Damir McCurty and Hyrom Stokes, June 2015

NJ Unaka

NJ Unaka is a truly renaissance man. He is a teacher and practitioner of architecture, an artist and a person who touches and transforms many lives. NJ always has some instruction, life advice, or blessing for anyone who is interested in listening.

Unaka moved to Milwaukee in 2007. He lives in Washington Park and is one of the few homeowners on his block. He was a doctoral student at UWM's School of Architecture and Urban Planning for 5 years. He graduated in 2014. During his tenure there, he became invested in the City of Milwaukee and the university. He advised and supported a myriad students from diverse financial and locational backgrounds. His help and support transformed many lives, and many students remember Unaka with respect and love. Together with his spouse, also a part of the Washington Park Neighborhood Association, Unaka has transformed an empty adjacent lot into a community garden in his neighborhood.

NJ has lived in this neighborhood for the past 8 years and, during this period, he has seen immense change in this area. He remembers how once abandoned homes have turned into prospering properties and how the social and economic landscape of Washington Park have improved due to the dedicated perseverance of its residents. Crime and drug trading have reduced because of proactive neighbors, but so have many previously thriving businesses, so much so that Unaka wistfully points out that the most thriving business in his neighborhood is a casket maker! Yet, Unaka remains optimistic about Washington Park and its residents' ability to implement change and new ideas.

NJ Unaka, interviewed by Damir McCurty and Hyrom Stokes, June 2015

Dr. Chia Youyee Vang

Vang's parents were farmers. She and her siblings never went to summer school. The biggest challenge that Dr. Vang faced when she first arrived was learning English because America was a completely new country and culture for her. Therefore, communication was a big problem. Vang was never officially enrolled in any school prior to coming to America. She attend public schools in St. Paul after she arrived in the U.S. She had to study English in addition to her regular classes. She would run home every day to watch her favorite television show—that really helped with her English learning! She graduated from high school in 1990 and was accepted to Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota.

It is typical for Hmong girls to marry at an early age. However, Vang chose not to get married early because she wanted to pursue her dreams and her education. Professor Vang majored in political science and French while she was in college. During her junior year in college, Vang was able to study abroad in Paris, France. While in France, she visited other Hmong refugee families who had settled there. During the year that she studied abroard, Dr. Vang visited 13 different European countries. She received a fellowship to study public policy at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs after she graduated from college. After receiving an MA in 1996, she worked as a policy analyst. Professor Vang returned to the University of Minnesota in 2002 for her doctorate studies in American Studies. She received her doctoral degree in 2006 and has been teaching at UWM for almost 10 years. She is fluent in Hmong, English, and French and she has also studied Japanese and Lao.

Chia Vang, interviewed by Denise Zahran and Qianfei Xu, June 2015

Mae Vang

Kazau Vang, also called Mae, is a 23 year old Hmong American resident of the Washington Park neighborhood. She resides with her extended family in a duplex house. She lives downstairs with her mother, her brother and her nephew while her older brother, his wife and their 2 children live upstairs. She is excited that she will soon become an aunt since her sister-in-law is expecting a third child. Growing up around many younger siblings, nieces and nephews made Mae interested in elementary education. She studied education before switching to a business major.

Her parents were refugees from Laos, but she lost her father in November of 2000. Vang comes from a traditional shaman household. Although she has chosen to practice Christianity since she was 14 years old, Vang sees her beliefs as a hybrid between her shaman upbringing and her Christian views.

Although Vang was born and raised in Milwaukee she has moved around in the city, living in at least five different locations and homes. She has lived in three different houses in the Washington Park area itself. She likes her current home the most because, unlike her previous houses, Vang got her own room in this abode. The kitchen is her favorite room and she talks about the importance of cooking in Hmong family life, "We always cook for each other, cook enough for the whole family to eat. That's how we grew up." Despite being the youngest sibling in her family, Vang tries to be as independent as possible. She explains, "I spoil myself. Everything I have I bought myself. My Mom is proud of me for that because growing up I always had hand-me-downs."

Vang's stories of the Washington park neighborhood are varied and have not always been positive. Her car was broken into and there are issues with neighbors using their property without her permission. Nevertheless she feels comfortable and safe in the neighborhood, has great dreams for this community and has tremendous respect for her neighbors. Recalling an incident in which her mother's turtle was stolen from her backyard, Vang explains how her neighbor witnessed what happened and reported the situation to them. She appreciates having neighbors who look out for each other, and hopes to see more examples of this for the future.

Mae Vang, interview by Elizabeth Rose Osborne, Matthew Karl Stuessy & Wei Ye, June 2015

Mychoua Vang

Mychoua Vang, the eldest daughter in a Hmong American family, grew up with eight siblings. She was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1987 but spent her formative years in Milwaukee. She attended High School at South Milwaukee. Growing up as a first generation Hmong American, Mychoua often juggled expectations of being "Hmong" and "American." She explained "you're no longer just Hmong, you're American and Hmong. You have to learn how to live in two worlds. You have to please your parents and you have to please whatever American standards you have."

Mychoua Vang serves as receptionist and youth coordinator at the Hmong American Friendship Association (HAFA). Before gaining employment at HAFA, Vang volunteered as a tutor and mentor to participants in HAFA youth programs. She was also working towards her undergraduate degree in sociology at this time. It was during this volunteer experience with HAFA that she realized her passion for working with Hmong youth in Milwaukee.

Mychoua's experiences in the United States as a Hmong-American give her a unique vantage point in observing and absorbing mainstream American culture. As someone who straddles multiple worlds, she has developed a unique perspective on ways multiple cultures affect one another, "I think that even the American culture is changing as well, you know, the faces of what American is is no longer just white it's all different colors and shade."

Few people make it through adolescence unscathed by bullying and discrimination due to real or perceived differences. This is particularly true for cultural minorities in the United States. When confronted with bigotry, Mychoua speaks for so many when she astutely asserts that intolerance of our differences "makes you angry, not just at who you are but at the people making fun of you for it." According to Mychoua the struggle for the youth at HAFA is not just about identifying or being identified as Hmong or American. Rather, it is about translating one's inherited culture in a manner that also allows for convergence with western ethos. It is about forging a unique individual identity.

Mychoua Vang, interviewed by Denise Zahran and Qianfei Xu, June 2015

ZongSae Vang

Zongsae Vang was born in 1966 and was raised in Laos. His given name was Zongsae at birth but later on he gained the name Shue. Eventually he fled Laos with his family to go to a camp in Thailand. In 1988, he arrived in the United States as a refugee from the Vietnam war. Spending his childhood amidst the horror and hardships of war Shue had one wish. He hoped for peace so he could sleep soundly. Shue is a family man. At home he shares Hmong culture and traditions with his kids. He explained that family is always a priority for him. According to him, "Hmong people do not have friends they have family." He was quick to clarify that to him the term "family" meant more than just his wife and children. Rather, he considered his Hmong relatives, extended family and the entire Hmong community as his family. According to Shue, members of the Hmong community share the love of family, even if they may not know each other.

When he came to Milwaukee, Shue discovered the Hmong American Friendship Association (HAFA), a non-profit organization. HAFA was founded in 1983 by Hmong refugees to help improve the quality of life for all Hmong refugee families in the Greater Milwaukee area. The primary goal of HAFA is to "promote self-sufficiency... by bridging cultural, social and language barriers and identifying resources that meet the needs of those they serve." Shue serves as a community organizer, elderly specialist, and bilingual translator for HAFA.

Zongsae Vang, interviewed by Denise Zahran and Qianfei Xu, June 2015

Goeliang Yang

Goeliang Yang is a 19 year old Hmong American woman living in Washington Park. We met her in 2015 when she was about to begin her sophomore year of college at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a major in Business Marketing. She has been living in Washington Park for 5 years and currently lives with her parents, her two brothers and her brother's family. Initially when she moved into this area she was concerned about safety but her perception of the neighborhood has changed quite a bit. Yang has made friends, likes the neighborhood and describes it as "quiet." However she wishes that people were able to communicate with each other more effectively.

Yang remembers her childhood home in North Carolina, a family-owned forested property with four buildings housing relatives. Her family moved to Washington Park when she was around the age of 14. After moving to Milwaukee she found that she had a lot more opportunities in her life. This includes being part of Upward Bound, a pre-college achievement program, which helped her advance academically.

Yang describes the dynamics of Hmong family life: She finds that sometimes there are barriers between different generations within the family. As a Hmong woman, she feels that she is expected to take care of domestic responsibilities. However, Yang finds joy in cooking for her family, despite having to wake up early to do so. Her mother has been a great source of knowledge and education for her. Yang talks about meals that she learned to cook, as well as values such as kindness, compassion, and helping others that she inherited from her mother.

Proctor Yang

Proctor Yang is a Hmong American elder who lives in the city of Milwaukee. When he first arrived in America he lived in Fresno, CA. He stayed there until 1994, and then moved to North Carolina. In 2011, Yang decided to move again, this time to Milwaukee's Washington Park neighborhood. He chose Milwaukee because he had relatives in this city. Even though he had to deal with frequent readjustments and moves, he is proud of his decision to settle in Milwaukee where he has a stable career and a home.

Dreams of unification and consolidation of Hmong society underpin many stories that Yang told us. Yang calls upon young Hmong students to unify the Hmong community. He emphasizes that there is a need for Hmong classes focusing on cultural tradition and practices so that the younger generations may learn and sustain their heritage: "When they know about this, they can help each other out. If there is no Hmong classes, at the end, these students will not care anymore. The American way [mainstream traditions and practices] will encourage the decrease of engagement in the Hmong community. We must learn about Hmong traditions and follow them so the kids can also learn and know how to fortify the Hmong and help ..."

Yang describes sees himself as an elder who is concerned about the day to day living of his people [*noj ib hnub xam ib hnub*]. Money and education are important issues for him. He wishes that young adults in the Hmong community will push for higher education. Once these students are educated, Yang believes that they will be able to help strengthen the community and create stronger social networks. He envisions a united Hmong society where the act of caring for each other is a priority.

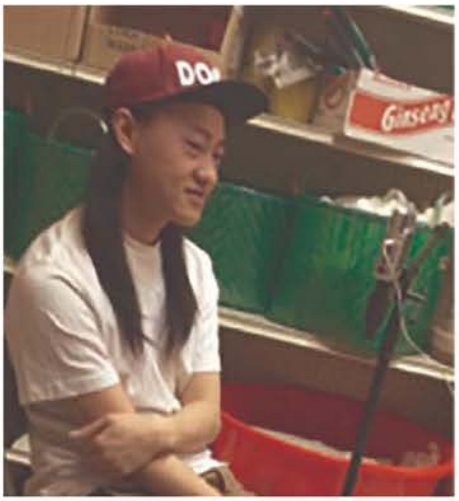
Proctor Neej Kos Yang, interview by Tommy Yang, Jia Jun Yin, HongYan Yang, June 2015

Tommy CheeMou Yang

Tommy CheeMou Yang describes Washington Park's allure, "Washington Park is an very unique neighborhood, a neighborhood that [is] very diverse, a neighborhood that [is] filled with population, [and] filled with many different colors! But no one not really knows about it!" Yang is a 22 year old Hmong American student enrolled in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. An artist, activist and poet, Yang lives in the Washington Park neighborhood in his uncle's house. He is involved with the Hmong American Friendship Association Inc. (HAFA) and serves the Hmong American community at his university campus and in his neighborhood. He volunteers with Milwaukee youth, serves as a Lawton Scholar Success Advocate, and is a WiscAMP - STEM scholar mentor. He serves as an office bearer of the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) at UWM. Currently he is working with the BLC Field School where he is documenting Hmong American life at Washington Park.

Growing up in Appleton, WI, a predominately white town, Yang often explored his identity and role as Hmong and American. When he moved to Washington Park three years ago, he discovered a different cultural context within which he had to rediscover himself. Initially, at Washington Park, he didn't feel comfortable to go out of his home because he thought it was unsafe. Soon he discovered otherwise and was enamored with the neighborhood's unique, rich, and multicultural community. He has developed deep friendships with residents of different economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds and shares their love for this neighborhood. He points out that despite being resilient and strong there remains important issues that need to be addressed in this neighborhood. He lists the many abandoned houses and the persistent economic disinvestment heaped upon this community as some such urgent problems. Yang wants to see more business such as retail stores, grocery stores and restaurants return to Washington Park. He hopes that the vacant lands could be reused as public spaces.

In traditional Hmong culture, food plays a big role. The smell of good food can wake Tommy Yang up in the morning. He loves the smell of Hmong food— it makes him feel at home. As a result, Yang experiments with Hmong recipes and cuisine in his spare time.



Yee Yang

Yee Yang straddles multiple worlds. He is enrolled as a student at the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), where he is majoring in business and marketing. As a child, Yang used to roam the streets of Washington Park with other Hmong kids who were his neighbors. Yang narrated his childhood memories, "…we were like rebels ... We would just do whatever, go into peoples' backyards ... we would play with other peoples' toys!" He remembered a close knit community where living was fun and life was carefree.

Today, he has moved out to the East Side in order to pursue his dreams. He hopes that one day he will be able to go to bigger cities such as New York. As a young adult, Yang wishes to break out from the ties of traditional Hmong practices and explore his life on his own terms. He believes that the newer generation can choose what they desire and craft their lives in an independent manner. Even when I was living with my parents," he explains, "I had grown to a mature state ... I really didn't need my parents only for financial support...At the end it is just you fighting for yourself."

Despite his dreams, Yang continues to remain part of the Hmong community. He visits Washington Park regularly and helps out in his parent's C&S Supermarket. He hopes to update the family business with new business practices. "My parents ... always wants to be inside of their own little box," Yang explained. "I'm a marketing major, and I've always wanted to go do ... online marketing. ... but my parents are more traditional and they want to do advertisement on paper and do word [of] mouth." Although Yang may not agree with his parent's perspectives in marketing and handling the store, he still tries his best to care for the business and help his family. He has big dreams for the supermarket and he hopes to cater to the greater Hmong community and expand this business in order to fulfill his mother's dream. Yang explains, "there's more to the store than just coming here to grab grocery for the house."

Yee Yang, interview by Tommy Yang, Jia Jun Yin, HongYan Yang, June 2015

ANALYSIS

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibiliy and Resilience

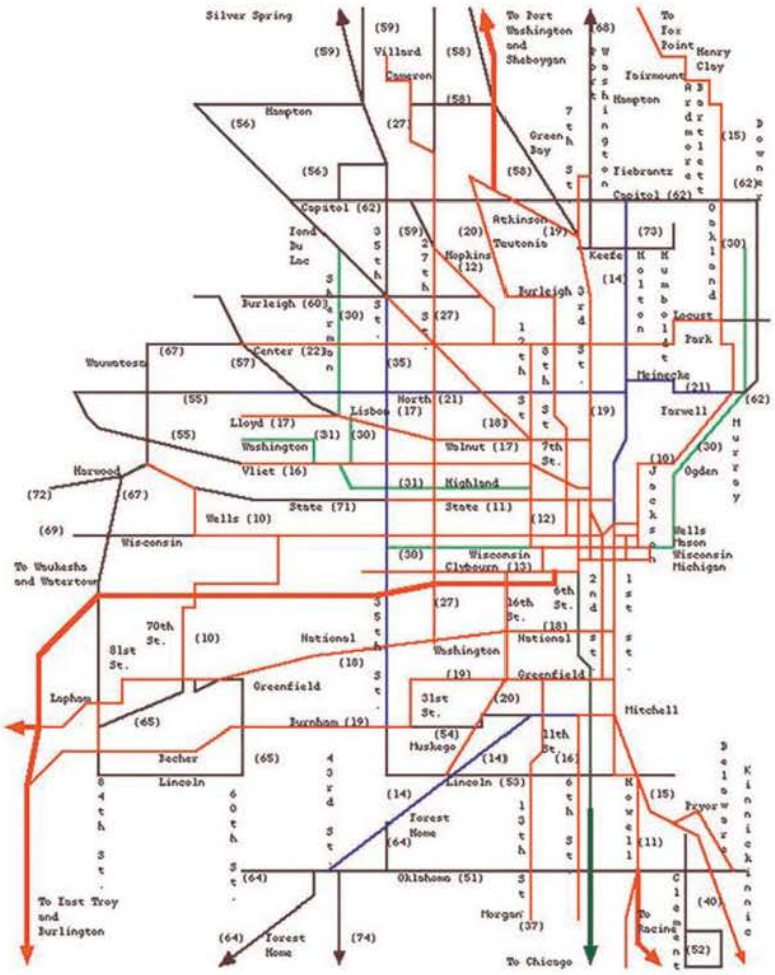
Easy access to transportation and availability of daily goods and provisions are vital factors that produce a strong and healthy community. When access to these components is available to everyone in the neighborhood, each member of the community has the opportunity to prosper. The ability to get around and be mobile within the neighborhood depends largely on physical ability, economic opportunity and available modes of transportation.

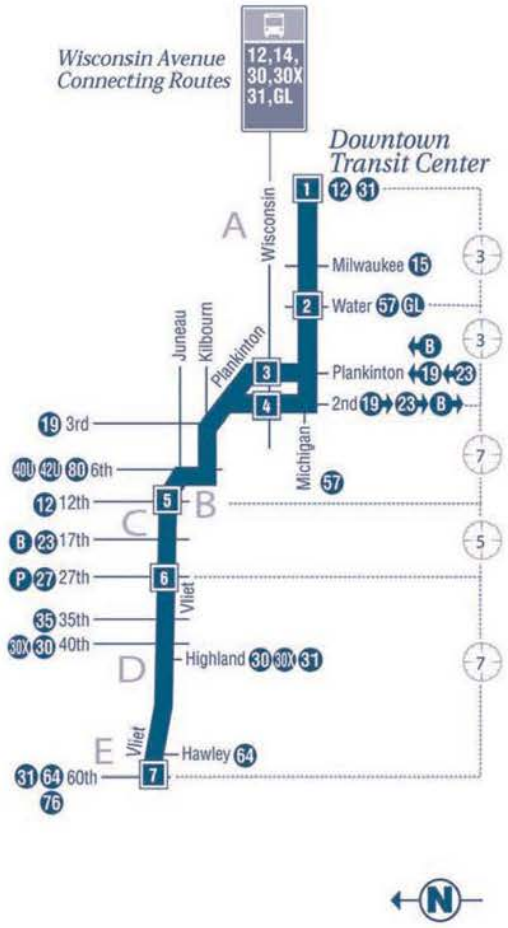
The history of Washington Park and Martin Drive neighborhoods alerts us to different periods when changing modes of transportation and shifting availability of local resources produced distinct living conditions and neighborhood life. We explored these cycles by exploring historic and current events, examining documents and archives, analyzing oral histories, and interpreting visual information.

Current view of a boarded up storefront. This building housed a clothing store, bakery, jewelry shop, repair shop, and blind cleaner before 1960. After 1960 it housed various restaurants until it came to its current state.

There are multiple forms of transportation connecting the Washington Park and Martin Drive neighborhood to the city of Milwaukee. Public transit, provided by the city, is available to a variety of citizens at a nominal cost. Private automobiles, while convenient, depend on the owner and may be expensive to maintain. Walking and cycling are good options but are time consuming and do not allow for carrying large objects or traveling long distances.

Accessibility also depends on the availability and existence of nearby businesses and institutions as well as the nature of goods and services they offer. Access to groceries, health care, religious services, banking, security services, recreational spaces, and many other resources are necessary to keep up healthy lifestyles and social relationships.





Street car map from 1938.

There are multiple forms of transportation connecting the Washington Park and Martin Drive neighborhoods to the city of Milwaukee.

Accessibility on Vliet Street

Vliet Street is a commercial corridor cutting through the Martin Drive and Washington Park neighborhoods. Different modes of transportation and changing types of businesses have made life along Vliet Street change over time. These changes also coincide with periods of economic and social growth, decay and resurgence in surrounding neighborhoods.

The early history of Vliet Street depicts a vibrant commercial corridor. Around the turn of the 20th C. West Park, now known as Washington Park, was established. The park housed the Washington Park Zoo, a huge attraction and destination that brought in tourists and business to this area. During this period, many of the buildings along Vliet Street housed greengrocers, butchers, tailors, doctors, and other essential businesses and services. The streetcar line from downtown Milwaukee that ended just blocks away at Cold Spring Barns connected this neighborhood to the city. With increasing popularity of the automobile and introduction of the Milwaukee County Transit System's bus line, the streetcar was decommissioned in 1959. Also around this time, in 1958, the zoo moved out of the park to its current location. These two events, as well as increasing suburbanization, drew residents and business away from Vliet Street and its surrounding neighborhoods. Limited transportation options for local residents, many of who were not able to own an automobile, made life difficult and access to services limited.

Militzer's Grocery Store on Vliet Street provided groceries to residents for many years. Mid-20th C.

Subsequent years showed signs of economic decline in the area surrounding Vliet Street. Businesses that had once been part of the vibrant commercial street were losing customers and profit. Many older stores were converted into taverns, convenience stores, liquor stores, cell phone stores, and tobacco stores. Others closed permanently. As a result, access to groceries, health care, and other essential services was limited within the neighborhood. The only mode of transportation for those without automobiles remained the city bus which was inconvenient at best. With little access to transportation and resources along Vliet Street, the neighboring community struggled to maintain its previous standard of living and vibrancy.

Recently, new businesses started returning to Vliet Street. These businesses give the community access to resources without need to travel as far. There remains a need for stores selling fresh groceries and better health care institutions within the community.

Our historical analysis of buildings, businesses and neighborhoods along Vliet Street paints a picture of dynamic transformation. Vliet Street has survived and flourished despite these transformations. Its history points towards a certain social and spatial resilience that made the street survive over the years and this quality needs to be nurtured and maintained. Our research points towards the importance of accessibility as a central issue that frames successful urbanity and culture.

This streetcar ran along Vliet Street, providing transportation to residents and visitors of the area. Mid-20th C.

Mueller, Pat, Historical Images. 2015 (June 16)

HMONG FOOD LANDSCAPES

Hmong Cultural Kitchen

A kitchen is often seen as a functional service space. However they also serve a larger symbolic and cultural function. Kitchens are sites of domestic labor, central spaces where families gather, locations where cultural memories are reproduced during the act of cooking, and places where our senses are enhanced due to the sights, sounds and smells of food. We examined domestic kitchens of three Hmong American families as well as a public kitchen at the Hmong American Friendship Association in Washington Park. Although the layout, location and size of these kitchens were very similar to kitchens in neighboring homes, the Hmong American kitchens were unique in the way they were used, their sensorial ambience, and as a gathering space for the extended family and kin.

Food in HAFA

The Hmong American Friendship Association (HAFA) has an open kitchen at the far end of their building. A couple of volunteers, the Chens, use it to cook meals for elderly community members living in the neighborhood. They come in early and work from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM to prepare meals, eat and socialize. On a typical day we found around ten people lounging in the dining area. The HAFA kitchen has a big storage cabinet for sauces and seasonings that the Chens use for their meals. After cooking, the Chens clean up and store the sauces and seasonings back in the storage cabinet before leaving for the day.

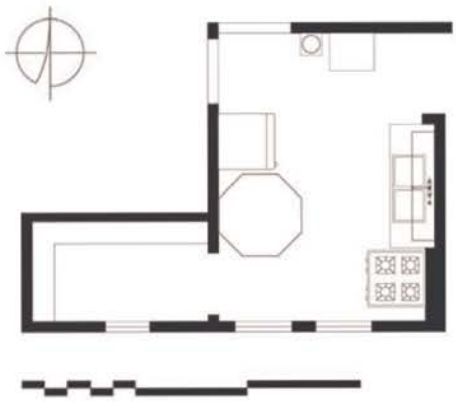
The day we visited HAFA, the Chens had cooked a curry dish *khaub poob*, a rice noodle served on soup with chicken, bamboo and ginger in it. A separate bowl of mint and cilantro was served to be poured over the soup before eating. Sticky rice was set out in a rice basket *tawb rau mov*. Pizza and watermelon were also on the menu.

Vang Family Kitchen

The Vang household is made up of nine family members. Their small kitchen has a few built-in cabinets. A small counter set on one side holds microwaves, and daily cooking seasonings are placed on a shelf. The pantry room is organized in a similar way to that of the Lor family, with big pots, a few stacks of bowls, and some sauces and seasonings stored in this space.

The Vang family holds weekly spiritual/religious ceremonies in their house. In order to accommodate these practices the front entrance is usually kept closed and visitors and family members enter the house from the rear entrance. Therefore the entry sequence that we encounter in a typical American home - front porch, living room, dining area, kitchen and back yard - is reversed. The kitchen is the first room that a visitor encounters upon entering this house.

The sensory atmosphere of this kitchen: the smell of cooked foods, sounds of cooking and friendly chatter inside the kitchen, gives identity to this Hmong American home.



Vang Family Kitchen Plan

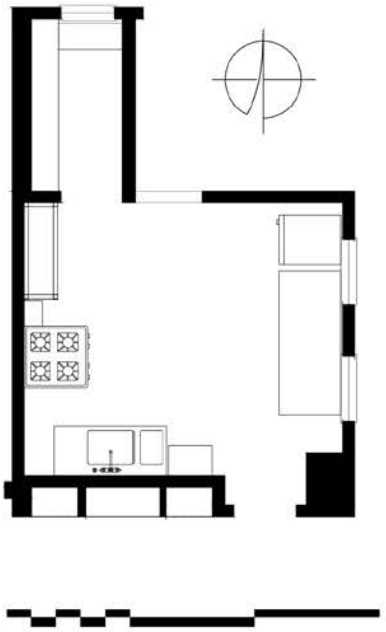
Sketch of Vang Family Kitchen.

Lor Family Kitchen

Six family members live in the Lor residence. Their medium-sized kitchen has a built-in cabinet over the sink. They store their food, seasonings and spices in two open shelves and on a big white table. There is a pantry room next to the kitchen and this space is also used to store foods and cookware that are used less frequently. By studying the way domestic kitchens are organized we can observe the diet and cooking practices.

Homemade churro (fritter) is a common snack for this family. It's served all day long. A big pot of oil lay alongside the churro on the kitchen table. Besides churro, chicken is also a common part of the daily diet in this family. On days we visited, we observed a pot with stewed chicken on the stove.

This kitchen serves six family members. They may not have many of their extended kin living in this neighborhood, but occasionally they invite friends from work and church to enjoy their meals.



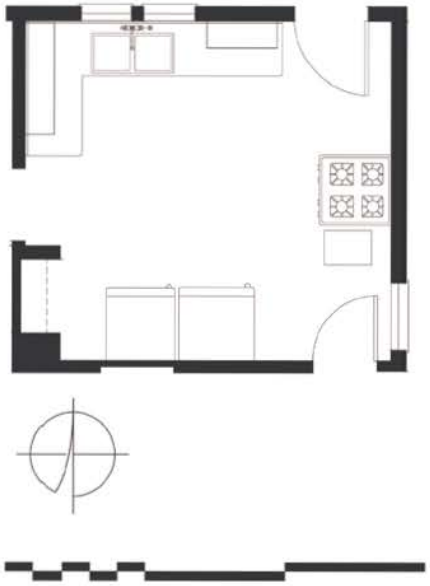
Lor Family Kitchen Plan

Sketch of Lor Family Kitchen.

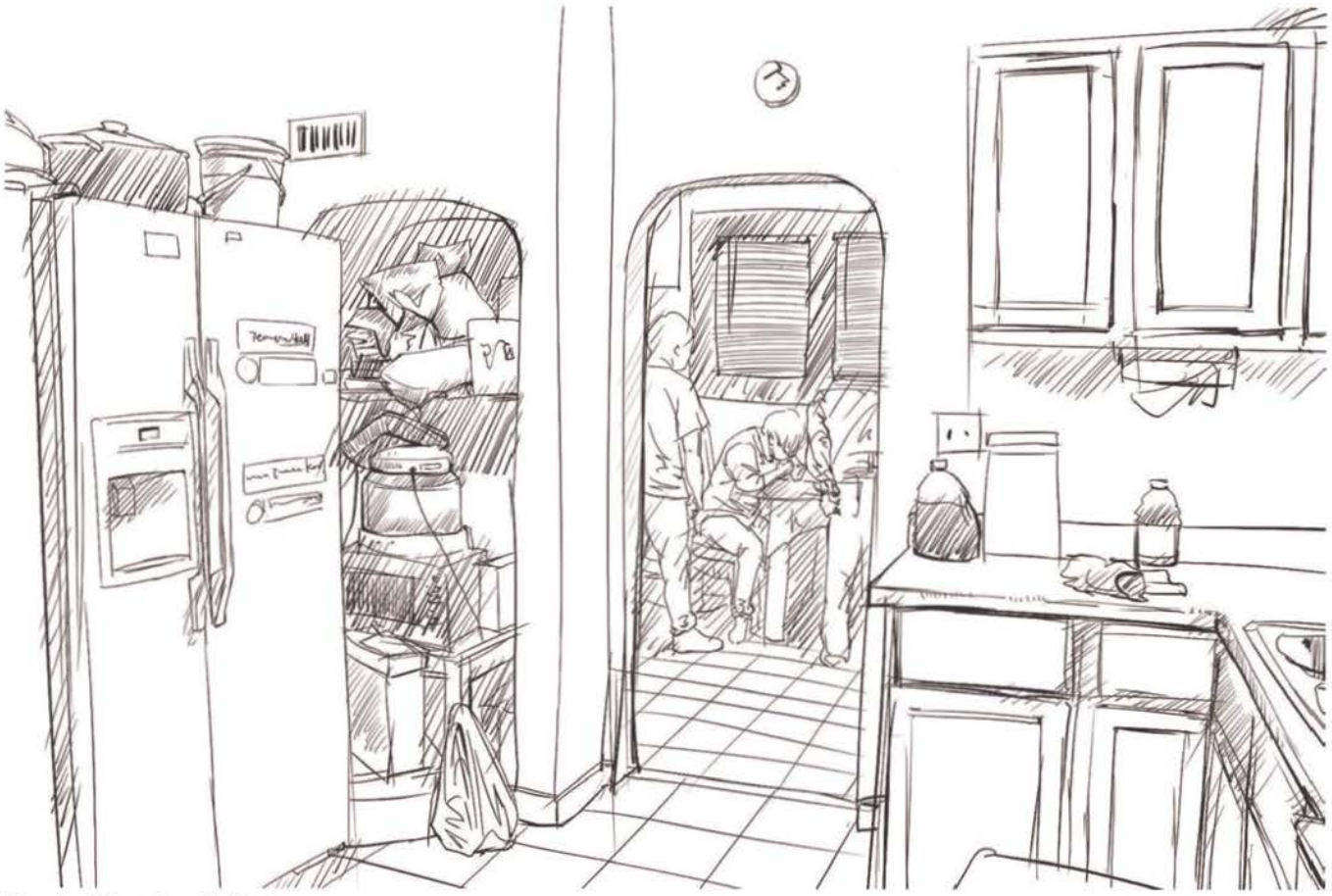
Yang Family Kitchen

The Yang household has ten to twelve family members. Despite spatial constraints the Yang household is a gathering spot for their extended family from this neighborhood. They often have family gatherings in the form of meals.

The kitchen in this house is the biggest among the three domestic kitchens that we visited. Goeliang Yang mentioned that she is the person who often cooks for the family. There are a few built-in cabinets where sauces and seasonings are stored. There is no pantry room in this house. The Yangs store their food in a refrigerator and on an arc-shaped storage corner. They have two refrigerators in the kitchen, but only one is plugged in. The other refrigerator is used as a pantry, in order to store extra food and containers.



Yang Family Kitchen Plan



Sketch of Yang Family Kitchen

REVITALIZATION

Revitalization of the Martin Drive and Washington Park Neighborhoods

The Washington Park and Martin Drive neighborhoods are set for dramatic changes and an infusion of investments in the near future. As artist Muneer Bahauddeen puts it, Washington Park is going through its renaissance. But as we plan the future of these neighborhoods we need to think carefully about the nature of change we plan to implement, our goals for revitalization, and consider those who will (or will not) benefit from our actions. These neighborhoods are not blank slates, or a *tabula rasa*, where urban planners and other professionals render their development dreams. Instead, the BLC field school asks how past histories, current lifestyles, everyday practices and resident aspirations may be factored into future plans.

Neighborhood safety

In the past, the Martin Drive neighborhood was considered a very safe place, but today residents feel that safety is a concern. In order to make sure that their neighborhood remains safe some residents coordinate with the local businesses, government and the police. Others make their own contribution to the neighborhood's safety by setting up block watch groups and joining neighborhood associations. Take for instance, Phyllis Reitter who has lived here most of her life. She cares for residents' safety, gathers her neighbors together and offers to coordinate regular block watch meetings. People who attended these meetings told us that as a group they looked out for each other, they found out who is living next door and noted what happens nearby. Martina Patterson of Washington Park succinctly explained that her neighbors, who look out for others, through their acts of caring make her neighborhood a safer place.

Economy

When the residents talk about the economy, they refer to the local cafes that they like, the grocery store they go to, the new businesses that have opened, and the now-vacant theaters that they once frequented. According to Reitter, the area surrounding 37th Street and Vliet Street used to be a very safe and active community. There used to be a bowling alley, a grocery store, and two theaters within a few block, but they are all gone now. Many of these buildings are currently vacant. The Martin drive neighborhood is really eager to attract progressive local businesses.

Residents worry about the growing number of tobacco and liquor stores, hoping instead for a healthy mix of diverse businesses. When new stores open in their neighborhood, the neighbors anxiously wonder how many customers patronize these stores and where these patrons come from. They want a community with a mix of businesses that may be conveniently accessed by all.

Three new businesses on 43rd and Vliet; Heritage West Properties, Eat Cake!, and Artists Working in Education Inc. are creating a cashflow in the local economy and have decreased crime rates in the area by removing a corner payphone that was linked to multiple crimes.

The Martin Drive Neighborhood recently built a rain harvesting and activity pavilion at their community garden, which will be the site of many community events. The pavilion and garden give residents access to new resources that they did not have previously.

Relationships

Another change that residents desire as they mull over revitalization plans is a need to improve relationships within the community. The internal relationships of Martin Drive are complex because it is home to a diverse population. People from different cultures may not have close connections due to cultural misunderstandings and language barriers. For example, the Hmong are relatively new in this area, but their population is significant. They have different traditions and the older generations have language barriers which cause other neighbors to have little interaction with them. Although communication across social and ethnic groups has improved considerably in recent years due to the first generation of Hmong Americans being multilingual and proficient in cross-cultural engagement, more needs to be done.

Access

Pat Mueller, a member of the Martin Drive Neighborhood Association explained how access to internal as well as external resources is central to successful revitalization of this neighborhood. She has lived in this neighborhood since 1986 and has focussed on growth and development. She said that there are many misconceptions about this area and once, even she thought that the area was not a good place to live. But when she visited the neighborhood and discovered the beautiful buildings and environment she was convinced that these were inherent resources that would help revitalize this neighborhood. She is bringing positive thinking to this neighborhood by working on improving the usage of space. Pat believes that positive thinking can change the false perceptions of neighborhood and bring more people and investment back to the neighborhood.

TRANSMITTING HMONG CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN WASHINGTON PARK

Cultural traditions are shared, explored and transmitted within multiple contexts. They are learned by observing others, transmitted through language and other communicative skills or imbued via the teachings of elders. Communicating traditions, values and practices may not happen naturally; it is learned or adapted from the surrounding environment or from others. Spoken language may be the primary communicative medium that allows one to share their thoughts and feelings and transmit traditions. Nevertheless, there are other forms of nonverbal interaction, many transmitted through one's senses. They include smells, sounds and sights that may awaken memories and induce a behavioral or habitual response.

The Hmong families in the Washington Park neighborhood have retained their cultural traditions in multiple ways. They continue to speak Hmong, a language that has two different dialects (Hmong Green and Hmong White). Mychoua Vang, a Hmong worker at HAFA (Hmong-American Friendship Association) points out that "language is one of the few common things that the entire Hmong population has in common. I think being able to meet someone who speaks the same language as you is a relief if you're in a strange place or if you come here (U.S.A.) for the first time it's like great, I can talk to you, I don't feel like a stranger or that I don't belong here." Nurturing their common Hmong identity allows individuals to feel part of a larger community and collaborate with other in-group members. Dr. Chia Youyee Vang, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, speaks of this sense of communal fellowship "The fact that I am Hmong and that I am speaking Hmong to these elders I am not treated as an outsider, I am just like a daughter to them even though I have no relation to them. But because I can engage with them, I can understand some of their life experiences through my own background I'm not an outsider. I'm always treated as a family member because of the shared Hmong identity."

What about those from the first generation who may not know how to speak Hmong language? We experienced non-verbal communication through music, art, singing, dancing, food and body language among youth at HAFA. Painted murals depicting memories of home and life of the Hmong people in Laos/Thailand during the Vietnam War adorn the walls of HAFA. Machoua Vang explains that the "integration of people coming together and painting and leaving something artful behind of their time together." is what the murals are about. Getting people together to interact with one another is exactly what those murals did In addition to painted mural on the walls, there are huge decorative quilts that tell myriad stories. Mychoua states that "some of them [Hmong refugees] when they first came to the U.S. didn't really have any income and so people were interested in the Hmong history. So they started doing storytelling cloths, *Paj ntaub* [Quilts]." These quilts share the Hmong culture and history through beautifully hand-crafted works of art. Making quilts is a Hmong cultural tradition that shows the journey of Hmong people through the hardships of war. There are "a lot of them [Hmong refugees] that have different depictions about life back in Laos and some of them have an actual storyline. One part of the cloth will be about what life was like before the war, next part will be what happened during the war and then after the war." Pictures speak a thousand words and these quilts speak for themselves.

Music, dance, and singing are popular cultural forms in the Hmong culture. They teach Hmong youth how to dance, sing, and make music like their ancestors. Hmong people dance in the order to narrate a story that has a lesson, moral or a meaning behind it. Every dance move and every flick of the wrist need to be precise. The posture and the body language of the dancers need to fit the story and the emotions that pertain to the story. Music and singing flow hand in hand in the Hmong culture. The *qeej* is an old traditional Hmong instrument which is played by "singing a song through it" — that is, words are sung through an instrument, thus producing beautiful sounds.

Detail of a storytelling quilt.

Musical instrument.

Hmong food being prepared.

Shrine in a Hmong-American home.

Another mode of communication that remains popular is food. Eating or preparing meals together communicates traditions in powerful ways. In some families food is the only cultural tradition that remains. As newer generations become more westernized their palate changes as well. In addition traditional comestibles are not as accessible to Hmong people as it is in Laos or Thailand. Many improvise, although, the basic types of Hmong food remain the same. Chia Youyee Vang explains, "that is one thing we share as Hmong. ... You won't know ours is a Hmong house, but when you eat with us you will know we are Hmong. My kids are pretty Hmong in terms of Hmong food." Sitting together in a setting with food can help people bond together and can also keep the traditions alive.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt once said that "to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time." Our time with the Hmong American community in Washington Park gave us a glimpse into ways such a shared common world is reconstructed, maintained, and nurtured by people. However, Arendt also reminds us that this world we share between us is never interpreted as the same by each of us. Rather we all approach it from different perspectives, bring our unique worldviews and "differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives." As we studied how everyday activities, architecture, gardens, and the networks of relationships that connect them help reproduce and transmit Hmong traditions in the New World we become cognizant of the multiple perspectives, point of views and positions from which different Hmong individuals approach this common project.

REPRODUCING TRADITION

Shrine in a Hmong-American house.

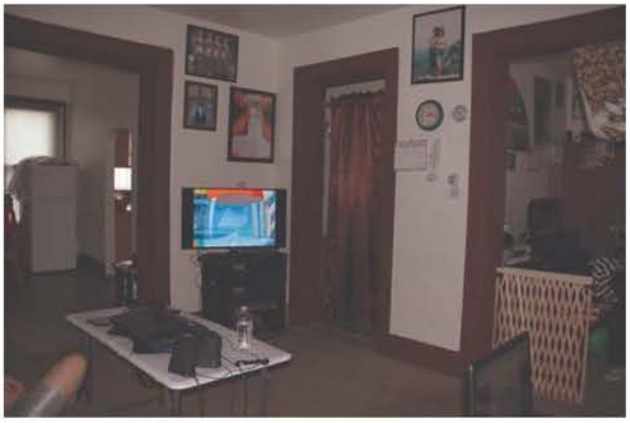
Our study of Hmong households and careful analysis of their behavior and activities in domestic spaces complicate our understanding of how Hmong refugees maintain, reproduce, and transform their culture and traditions in the New World. Displaced from their homeland, many of the old traditions and practices of Hmong refugees are re-established in their new abodes in Washington Park. They reproduce their home in alien buildings built by 20th Century German Americans. Duplexes, four-squares, and Victorian cottages become stage sets where daily life and practices of Hmong families unfold, where memories and practices from the past are enacted and remembered. In the remaking of their homes, Hmong residents don't make dramatic changes to the homes in order to reproduce their cultural practices. Rather, they deploy, re-appropriate and adapt via subtle, ephemeral, nuanced, ingenious and stealthy acts.

One such method of re-appropriating the American home is by circumventing conventional boundaries between indoors and outdoors, nature and home, or front and back. The plan and images of a Hmong home show how interior spaces are filled with indoor plants. The profusion of indoor plants seem to continue the verdant outdoor garden into the living room making the boundary between inside and outside very permeable.

Another method of re-appropriation is to reuse and reclaim spaces in ways not originally intended. Living rooms becomes shrines, dining rooms becomes TV rooms, kitchens becomes storage pantries for herbs, and backyards and front yards become farms. By changing the use of interior spaces Hmong residents reorder ways in which privacy in experienced and practiced in the traditional 20th century American homes.

But lest we begin to suggest that all Hmong homes are distinctly different we encounter one where the functions and interior spaces remain unchanged from the past. An entrance vestibule leads to the main living space of the house just like every other home in the neighborhood. The formal front rooms, located in the first floor, are designed for leisure, entertainment, and dining. The back rooms are used for family living and cooking, with a mini dining table and two refrigerators used for storage.

Plants filling the interior space.



Repurposed TV room.

Storage room.

Kitchen in a Hmong-American home.

Various items placed in a home for protection.

Plants in a transition space.

EVOLUTION OF A MIXED-USE BUILDING

What can we learn from vernacular architecture? This summer we studied a mixed use building that survived for over a century because it is adaptable and has the capacity to accommodate changes in ownership, use and lifestyles. In a quest to find how the built form was able to sustain such transformations we mapped the changes in the floor plan over time. Is there a blueprint for a flexible building?

We found three important factors that helped this building accomodate change over time. The first factor had to do with the organization of the functions in the building. As a two-storied structure, the commercial space was located on the ground level and the residential space on upper floors. Having a residence above a business provided the owners an opportunity to have their workplace above their residence. The commercial space provided the perfect size for a small retail business or an office as circumstances demanded.

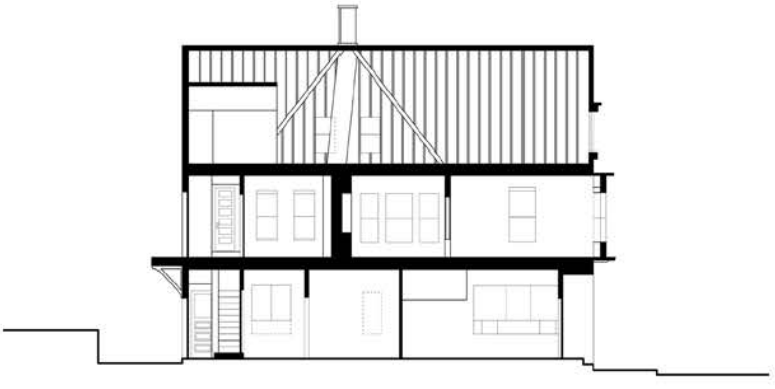
The second factor had to do with access and choreography of movement inside the building. The front and back stairs created multiple entrances and allowed the upper floors to operate independent of the lower floors if necessary. This allowed the owners to rent out the lower floor in order to help cover costs as well as to make additional profit and savings. In addition to producing a front/back, public/private spatial hierarchy this layout and dual entrances also allowed the owners to rent out the front section or the back portions of the second floor home to multiple renters.

Finally, on careful examination of the wall additions and changes at the ground floor level, we see a clear pattern develop. The back room and stairs remained untouched over the years. However the front room of the commercial space has been repeatedly modified by the insertion of a dividing partition wall in order to create a front and an intermediate zone (as shown by the red dotted line above). By moving this partition portal a storeowner could expand or contract the public front space and the intermediate space as required. A narrow bay defined by the front stairs was enclosed in different ways in order to produce a variety of storage and service spaces (as shown in grey above). Therefore the open floor plan on the first floor was not a blank canvas. Rather it accommodated a series of formulaic subdivisions that could be adapted to produce a variety of interior spaces and cater to different uses.

Scholars of vernacular architecture (Habraken 1998, Hubka 1979) argue, vernacular designs offer infinite number of creative variations and options within the constraints of an overarching thematic grammar. Understanding that grammar is key to understanding the flexibility and power of vernacular architecture.

Former Occupancies

(1) - 1911 - Haberdashery (Men's Clothing) Store
(1) - 1935 - "Schmidt's Bakery"
(2) - 1948 - Jewelry Shop - Repair and Gifts
(3) - 1949 - "B&D Fixit Shop" - Appliance Repair
(3) - 1952 - "Supreme Venetian Blind Cleaners"
(3) - 1953 - "Esther's Gift Shop"
(4) - 1957 - "Dinner Bell Grill"
(4) - 1964 - "The Skillet Ivy Restaurant"
(4) - 1966 - "Mary's Lunch"
(5) - 1974 - "Bob's Cafe"
(6) - 1990 - "Bob's Custard"
(7) - Present - Vacant

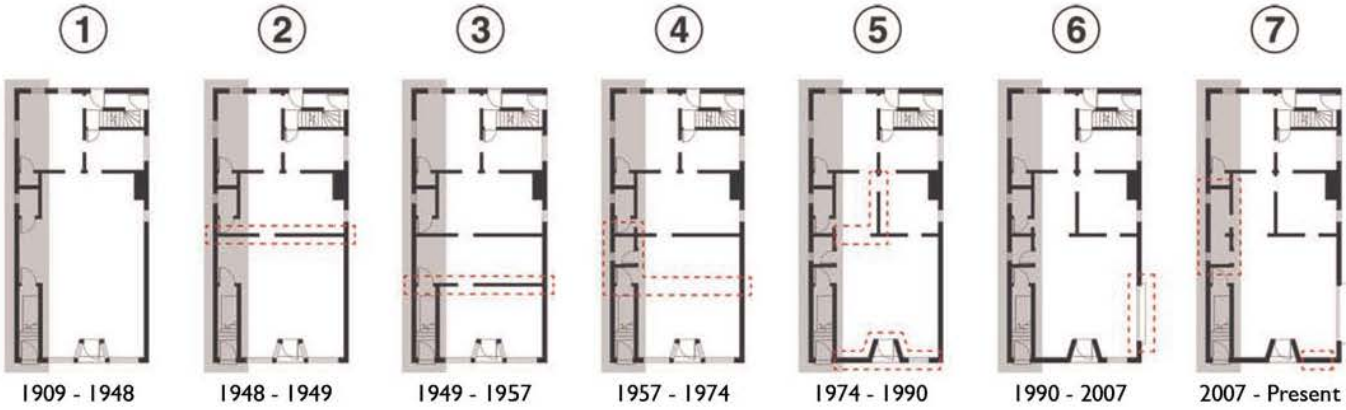


Section of building.

1909 - 1974
Storefront Windows

1974 - Present
Aluminum Siding

Through physical examination of the building and researching construction permit records we were able to determine that the facade of the building's first floor was originally glazed from floor to ceiling. As shown in this picture, some of the glazing for these shop windows still exists today, but it was covered by aluminum siding in 1974.



Interior changes over time.

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http://www.exfabula.com/
http://www.jasonohler.com/storytelling/storymaking.cfm
http://www.portalwisconsin.org/sidewalkstories.cfm
http://www.streetstories.net/
http://www.streetside.org/about/index.htm
http://www.mungos.org/streetstories
http://storytelling.concordia.ca/
http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/3796

Place Based Story Telling and sites
http://www.communograph.com/
http://www.neptuneseven.com/testing/uwm/
http://www.cityofmemory.org/map/index.php
http://www.placematters.net/
http://www.preservationnation.org/take-action/this-place-matters/
http://placeandmemory.org/index.php?title=Main_Page
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THANK YOU,

Community members
Beth Haskovec
Pat Mueller
Phyllis Reitter
Debbie Pagel
David Boucher
Muneer Bahuddeen
Ahmad Muhammad
Mychoua Vang
Michael Howden
Mae Vang
Goeliang Yang
Martina Patterson
Ralsten Shanklin
NJ Unaka
Bobby McQuay Jr.
Tymika Hawthorne
Zongsae Vang
Chia Youyee Vang
Cha Lor
Yee Yang
Proctor Yang
Rosalind L. Cox
Gerald P. Coon
Ali Carlucci

UWM Collaborators
Robert Greenstreet
Karl Wallick
James Wasley
Chelsea Wait
Hongyan Yang
Yuko Nakamura
Milan Outlaw
George Ananchev
Cassie Rogala
Julie Reindl
Kurt Meingast
Michael Mandelman
Dee Nordgren
Steve Heidt
Cheryl Ajirotutu
Chia Vang
Nicky Glaser
Hilary Wilson
Monique Hassman
Nelida Cortes
Robert Smith
Cultures and Communities Program
Department of Architecture, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UWM
Kathy Bowes, Beth Traylor, UWM Libraries, UWM Library and Archives staff
Nigel Rothfels
Kyla Esguerra
Tamara Long
Scott Payne
Office of Undergraduate Research
Students and staff at the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program

Institutional Support
Milwaukee Public Library, Washington Park
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Field School Participants
Jared Schmitz
Di Tang
James Wall
Elizabeth Osborne
Wei Ye
Marcus Hirst
Matt Stuessy
JiaJun Yin
Tommy Yang
Paula Polman
Denise Zahran
Qianfei Xu
Hyrom Stokes
Damir McCurty
Adam Childers

Teachers
Nan Kim
Jeffrey Klee
Michael Frisch
Judith Weiland
Erin Dorbin
Daniel McClure
Matthew Jarosz
Arijit Sen