

History of the Near Northwest Neighborhood



The near northwest has a rich and vibrant history dating back to the late 1600's with the discovery of the St. Joseph River and the creation of the portage trail, a major trade route used by French explorers and Native Americans which passed through the area.

In 1820, St. Joseph County's first European resident, the settler Pierre Navarre, built the first permanent dwelling in the current Leeper Park. Soon after Navarre settled here others followed and South Bend quickly grew. During the late 1800's and early 1900's the City expanded to incorporate the area we now know as the Near Northwest Neighborhood.

During this time promotional posters claim that the area had "easy access to the business center and factories" but with "no railroads to cross, no factories, no smoke or dust to mar the pleasure of living; in short a model residence portion of the city." With all of these positive features, at the turn of the century the Near Northwest was home to some of the most prominent families including Coquillard, Chapin, Fassnacht, Hansel, Keller, Studebaker, and Perley.

The Near Northwest is proud to be home to Leeper Park; dedicated in 1900 it is South Bend's first city park. Today, Leeper Park is a local historic landmark and features amenities including Leeper Park Tennis Center, playing fields, an island, playground equipment and picturesque views of the St. Joseph River.



Today the Near Northwest is home to over 6,000 residents, many living in one of the four historic districts. The majority of the neighborhood homes were built from the late 1800's to early 1900's and have significant architectural diversity including Queen Anne's, Four Squares, Prairie Style, Bungalows, and Colonials. These lovely older homes fill the neighborhood with character and charm.



The Near Northwest Neighborhood has always been the ideal place to live - from 1820 with Pierre Navarre to today.