

## For Immediate Release

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### **The West Mitchell Street Commercial Historic District Listed in the National Register of Historic Places**

Milwaukee, Wis. - The Wisconsin Historical Society has announced the listing of the West Mitchell Street Commercial Historic District in Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register designation provides access to certain benefits, including qualification for grants and for rehabilitation income tax credits, while it does not restrict private property owners in the use of their property.

Polish immigrants arrived in Milwaukee in the 1860s and their numbers increased rapidly in the 1870s to the point that they trailed only the Germans as the city's largest ethnic group. In 1866, these immigrants established St. Stanislaus Church – the nation's first urban Polish Roman Catholic congregation – and constructed a massive Romanesque Revival-style church along West Mitchell Street in 1872. At the time, St. Stanislaus was an outpost at the city's southern edge; however, the area rapidly filled with Polish immigrants and became the city's largest Polish neighborhood. Businesses quickly opened along West Mitchell Street to provide necessary goods to the growing Polish population.

By 1910, West Mitchell Street was fully developed with small businesses along with the massive Juneau Building, which housed retail establishments, offices and a 1,200-seat theater. The offices were the homes of many of the city's most notable Polish community organizations. By this time, West Mitchell Street was the most prominent commercial district on Milwaukee's South Side and rivaled downtown Milwaukee's Grand Avenue commercial district. Soon after, several department stores such as Schuster's and The Grand constructed large buildings that dominated their respective blocks. Four other theaters, including the Modjeska, opened and, in addition to movies, offered Polished-theme theatrical performances, concerts and other Polish cultural events. Local architects, including Polish-Americans Leon and Francis Gurda, designed numerous new buildings and remodeled others to reflect the styles of the 1920s and 1930s. These changes in both shopping and architecture cemented West Mitchell Street's nickname as "The Polish Grand Avenue."

The West Mitchell Street Commercial Historic District is significant as the commercial and cultural center of Milwaukee's sizable ethnic Polish community. The most significant commercial district on Milwaukee's South Side, West Mitchell Street was the home of the city's

most prominent Polish community organizations and center of Polish-themed culture and entertainment. Stretching nine-blocks, the West Mitchell Street district is also one of Milwaukee's largest and intact collections of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century commercial buildings and include many well-designed examples of the Neoclassical, Classical Revival, Period Revival, German Renaissance Revival, Art Deco, Queen Anne and Commercial styles.

The register is the official national list of historic properties in America deemed worthy of preservation and is maintained by the National Park Service in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Wisconsin Historical Society administers the program within Wisconsin. It includes sites, buildings, structures, objects and districts that are significant in national, state or local history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture.

To learn more about the State and National Register programs in Wisconsin, visit [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org).

### **About Wisconsin Historical Society**

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org).

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