

# A Betsy-Tib Tour of Milwaukee

## by Susie Welsh

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*“There's a place named Milwaukee, Milwaukee,  
A beautiful place to be . . .”*

For her first of many wonderful travels—Milwaukee at Christmas—Betsy Ray did her research. She learned that in 1813, Solomon Juneau, a French Canadian, came to the meeting of the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan, where an Indian village and a trading post already existed. In 1820, Juneau married the granddaughter of the Menomonee chief, and they had 17 children (getting a good start on populating the new town!). By 1846 Juneau was elected the first mayor of Milwaukee. His cabin and the statue that Betsy and Tib viewed still overlook Lake Michigan from the bluff along Prospect Avenue.



The 1848 revolutions in Europe brought new settlers, including many skilled workers from the Rhine River and Vienna, giving Milwaukee a distinctly foreign feel.

Betsy's train pulls into the station, and Tib greets her old friend in ecstatic German. (Because the girls then drive up the avenue, I

think Betsy arrived at the old Chicago Northwestern Station by the lakefront, which is now O'Donnell Park. The old stations are gone now, and a newly renovated Amtrak station lies just south of the old Milwaukee Road site.)



The girls drove west up Grand Avenue (Wisconsin Avenue today) toward Tib's brick duplex, probably passing Mader's, an authentic German restaurant, as they turn to the north.





(Later in the story, Betsy enjoys shopping on Grand Avenue, where she purchases the stein for her father, the fairy book for Margaret, etc.)

The original Gerlach home at 2371 North 5th is no longer standing. Later Midge's family moved to 2308 North Booth, shown here.



In *Betsy in Spite of Herself*, Grosspapa Hornvik was a revolutionary who fled Austria with his more conservative wife, a former seamstress for the Hapsburg family, to become a tailor on North 3rd Street. More prosaically, Alois Irasek ran a tailor shop with his two brothers at 2050 North 3rd Street, and he was not a Forty-Eighter.



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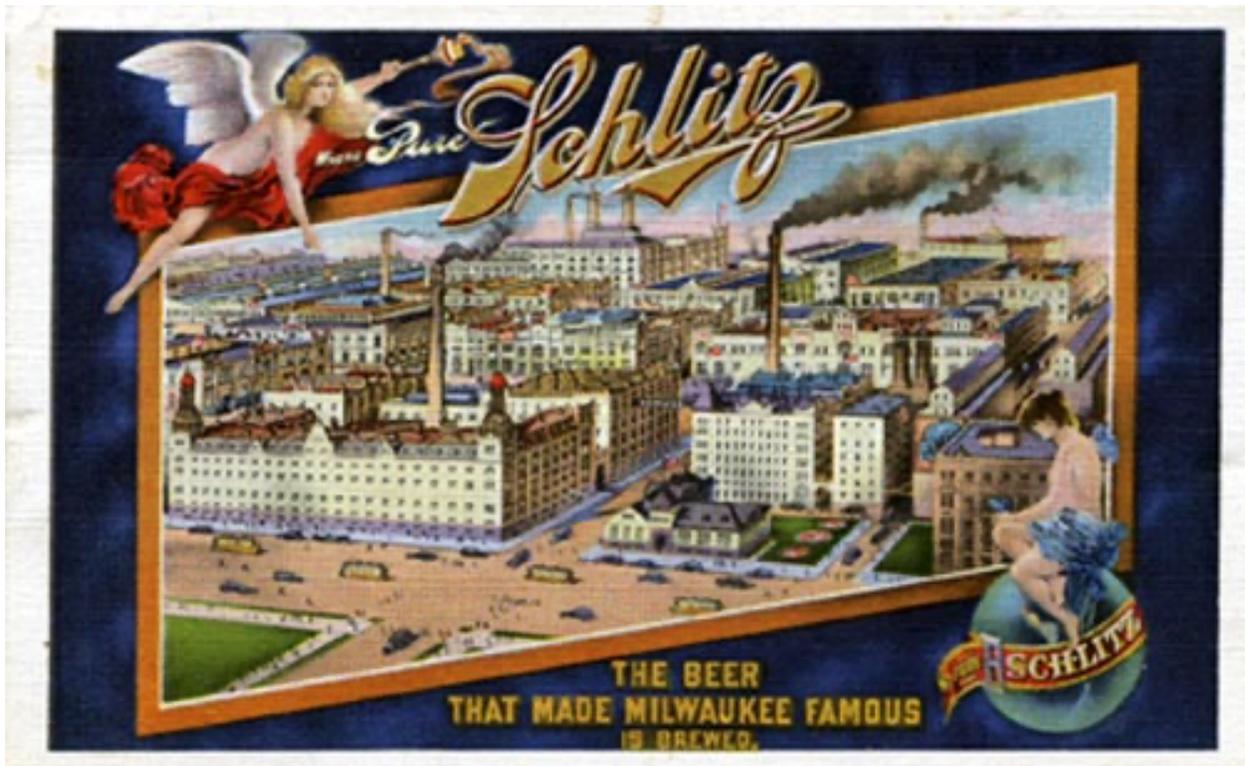
3rd Street and North Avenue, circa 1913

Source: Wisconsin Historical Society

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The old shop has been torn down, but the Northern Chocolate Company is still standing very near the site.

Uncle Rudy, who sent Tib the Schlitz calendar she gave to Winona in *Downtown* and is the object of Betsy's admiration, is based on Jack Irasek, who sold beer for the Schlitz Brewery on North 3rd.



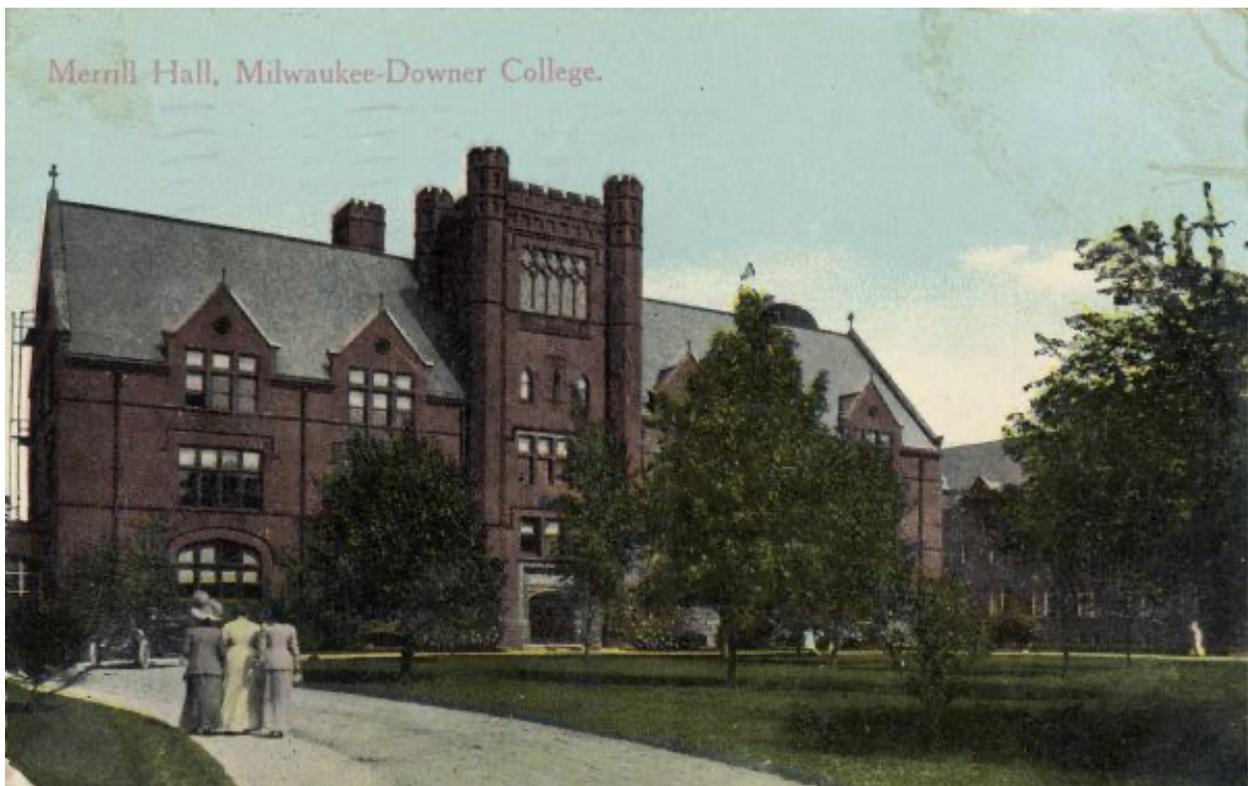
Schlitz beer has recently returned to Milwaukee; the old recipe is [now brewed by Pabst](#).

The Sem was closed for the holidays, but Tib wanted to show off her school, so she and Betsy took the trolley north and east. As they crossed the river, Tib pointed out the site of the annual regatta.





Spanning the river on both sides, Gordon Park and Riverside Park boasted swimming, boating, fishing, sledding, and skating, depending on the season. Riverside Park was designed by [Frederick Olmsted](#) of Central Park fame (as were Newberry Boulevard and Lake Park, along Lake Michigan).



Tib—along with Phil Brandish’s sister, Phyllis—was enrolled at Browner Seminary, loosely based on [Milwaukee Downer Seminary](#), a girls’ private high school and college.



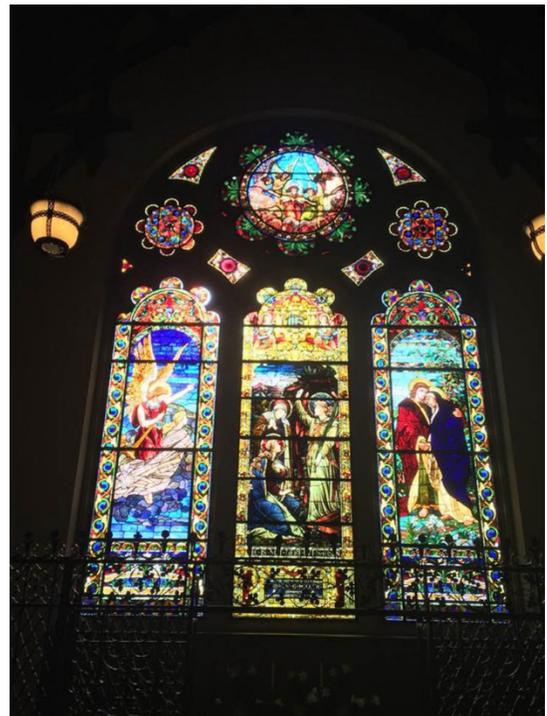
In 1959 the school sold its buildings to the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and merged to form the very select University School of Milwaukee. Today, UWM continues to use the beautiful red buildings located on the northeast corner of campus along Downer Avenue—Merrill Hall and Holton Hall.

It's possible that the Episcopal Church Tib and Betsy attended was St. Paul's at 914 East Knapp.



The red sandstone church was built in 1838. However, it has two Romanesque towers, not the spires Maud mentions.

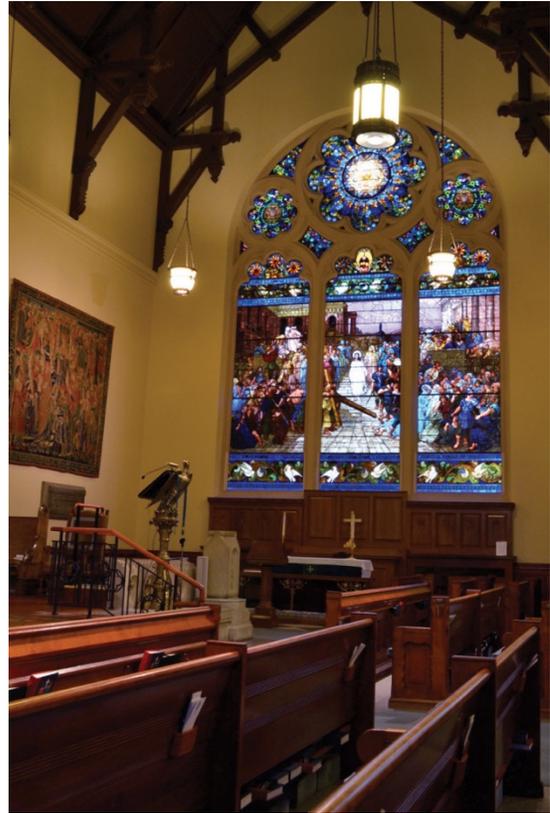
*Inside it was lighted by candles and drenched with color from the stained glass windows.*



*Betsy was carried away by the beauty of the service. The voices of the boy sopranos were like angel voices . . . so high, sweet, and unearthly.*

The church does have Wisconsin's largest collection of Tiffany windows, and St. Paul's is still noted in town for liturgical music and concerts. (The men's and boys' choirs of yesteryear are mentioned on its website!)

The Mullers (Gerlachs) were German, while the Hornviks (Iraseks) were Viennese, and the differences between the two families were broad. Alois Hornvik was a tailor, but Grosspapa Muller was a beer keg manufacturer who lived over the Milwaukee River near Lake Michigan in a gray corner house with wrought iron, a porte-cochere, a carriage house, and his collection of dwarves. The senior Gerlachs actually lived on 9th and Highland, and Max Gerlach served as a court clerk for the city of Milwaukee for many years.





Victorian homes on Highland Avenue in the late 1800s

On Sunday evening, the girls attend the theater.



The [Pabst Theater](#) on Wells and Water is still an exciting venue, as it was the snowy night that Uncle Rudy dropped them off in his sleigh for the performance of *Reiterattacke*, a German-language

farce.

The girls took in a matinee at the [Davidson Theater](#) as well.



Located at 621 North 3rd, the theater remained open until 1954.



The girls visit the Schlitz Palm Garden with Grosspapa Hornik on the corner of 3rd and Grand in the Hotel Schlitz.



It's demolished now, but you can go inside the Plankinton Building (Shops of Grand Avenue) on 161 W. Wisconsin Avenue for an excellent sense of its architecture.



Another evening out included a performance of Handel's *Messiah* at the Turnverein, a German cultural and gymnastic organization (1034 North 4th).



Turner Hall, as it's called today, remains a Milwaukee institution due to its [famous fish fry!](#)

“I hope I’m coming back sometime,” Betsy said, and meant it heartily.

Rather than a chronological tour, this has been a geographical loop of places Maud mentioned in *Betsy in Spite of Herself*. So we have come full circle to [Mader’s Restaurant](#), where we will seek Sauerbraten, Hasenpfeffer, Kartoffel Salat, Kuchen, Schaumtorten, and plenty of whipped cream. Wunderbar!

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An admitted dilettante, SUSIE WELSH lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Since retiring from special education, she finally has guilt-free time to read, garden, and walk the dogs. If you're ever in town, stop by for her personally guided Betsy-Tib tour – *mit Schlag!*



Sources consulted for this article:

- *Betsy in Spite of Herself* by Maud Hart Lovelace
- *The Betsy-Tacy Companion* by Sharla Scannell Whalen
- *Milwaukee Then and Now* by Sandra Ackerman
- Various Milwaukee websites

Says Susie, “Any mistakes are my own!”