Early Immigrants

Most ethnic groups settled together in neighborhood communities. They established and supported their own churches and businesses. The Irish were one of the first immigrants to arrive in Southport in 1837. They built the first catholic church. Today it is known as St. James Catholic Church. Soon after 1837 German immigrants started arriving. They settled on the north side of town.

By 1870 the population of Kenosha was 9,066, with 4,081 European immigrants. The first Danish families arrived in 1874. The Finnish arrived by 1889. Shortly after the turn of the century, Italian families began settling near 22nd Avenue and 52nd Street. Many of the children attended Edward Bain or Frank Elementary Schools during the day and went to English classes at night.

In the 1880s Jacob Stern was one of the first Jewish settlers to arrive in Kenosha. In 1912 he helped organize B’nai Zedek, an Orthodox Jewish congregation. Another Jewish congregation in Kenosha is called Beth Hillel Temple, which was founded in 1922. The building itself was completed in 1928. Today the Beth Hillel Temple congregation is a group of reformed Jews who worship together and share a strong sense of community.
German Culture

The German culture has had a significant impact on the cultural diversity of Kenosha. Soon after the immigrants arrived, they built St. George's Catholic Church on 48th Street and Eighth Avenue. Later a school was added where both German and English were spoken. Many of our city's residents trace their heritage to German ancestors.

One group that is still active in Kenosha is the Manner-Gesang-Verein (MGV) Harmonia singing group. Since 1975 the MGV group has been performing in an annual singing competition for all-German choruses in the state of Wisconsin. No other group in Wisconsin has won the traveling trophy as many times as the MGV Harmonia.

Today the majority of Kenoshans are of European descent. However, Kenosha’s minority population is growing. According to the 2000 census, 10 percent of Kenoshans are Latino, over 7 percent are African American, and 1 percent are of Asian descent. When Kenosha was first formed, there were many Native Americans living in this area. Today less than 1 percent live in Kenosha.

African Americans in Kenosha

Many different African Americans came to live in Kenosha. The first African-American resident may well have been Joseph Hobbs. In 1837 he lived in an apartment made out of the cabin from the wrecked steamboat called the Detroit. Hobbs made his living by barbing and fortune telling.

Antone and Elizabeth Dodge came to Kenosha from Fredrick, Missouri, in 1870. Dodge was a Civil War veteran who came to Kenosha to work for Col. Howe. The Dodges had 14 children and a number of their descendants still live in Kenosha.

William Walton was one of the first African-American business owners in Kenosha. He made a living making deliveries of coal with his horse and wagon.
Hispanic Americans in Kenosha

No one is exactly sure who was the first Hispanic resident in Kenosha. Records in the city directory do indicate Spanish surnames such as Garcia, Perez, and Rodriguez as early as 1927 along with jobs listing industrial occupations. An increase in Kenosha’s Hispanic population occurred in the 1940s after World War II.

In the early 1970s Hispanic leaders worked closely with the community to increase employment opportunities. Kenosha’s Hispanic Americans began to join the ranks of business owners by this time. Today many Hispanic-owned and -operated businesses thrive in Kenosha.

The Hispanic culture has always been active in Kenosha’s Catholic churches. Today Spanish-speaking services are offered in many area churches.

Cinco de Mayo Celebration at Frank Elementary School 2003

~Jovencitas~

~Jovencitos~
Italian Culture

The first Italian immigrant made Kenosha (Southport) his home more than 100 years ago. The majority of Italian immigrants came from the town of Cosenza, one of our sister cities, and settled in the Columbus Park area.

A great number of Italian immigrants who came to Kenosha may have lacked a formal education or technical skills, but they were hard workers. Some of the early businesses run by Italians were a theater, a mortuary, a tailor shop, and a dry cleaner. Later small Italian-owned grocery stores, meat markets, and bakeries were started. Businesses such as Tenuta’s Delicatessen, Model Market, and Cardinali’s and Paielli’s bakeries are still well-known businesses in Kenosha today.
Ethnic Groups

Then

Tenuta's
1950 and 2003

Now

Cardinali's Golden Krust Bakery

Cardinali's Golden Krust Bakery
Ethnic Groups

Then

Jack and Theresa Andrea in 1917
~and~
Andrea's in 2003

Now

Model Market in 1928
~and~
Fred DelFrate at the Counter in 2003
(Fred is a third generation family employee.)