In this paper we compare the well-known Burgess concentric zone model of urban development with urban development in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Milwaukee. Specifically, we examine the role of industrialization, investments in real estate and the political influence of business leaders in the development of working-class housing. Our research challenges the prevailing notion of a concentric commuter zone for middle and upper-income households beyond the city's limits. Through an analysis of three working-class neighborhoods in metropolitan Milwaukee, including 1) the Brady Street neighborhood, 2) the industrial suburb of Cudahy, and 3) the industrial suburb of West Allis, our research reveals a much more complex pattern of urban development than that outlined in the concentric zone model. This research contributes to our understanding of industrial suburbanization prior to the 1950s.

Introduction

Arguably the most famous diagram in the social sciences (Duncan 1996: 256), Ernest Burgess’ concentric zone model can be found in almost every urban geography textbook. Since its appearance in “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project” (Burgess 1925), the zonal model has become a significant and long-standing representation of the North American city and a means of considering the physical structure of modern urban conditions everywhere. Burgess’ bulls-eye pattern generalizes not only the outward growth of the city away from the expanding business district and the industrial center, but also represents social distance as physical distance and house form as status and assimilation. In his city, one “progresses” outward from the residential “zone of workingmen’s homes” (Zone III) to the “residential zone” (Zone IV) of single-family houses and then to the bourgeois “commuters zone” (Zone V) on the periphery (Burgess 1967: 55). The appealing simplicity of Burgess’ model may explain the fascination that has gripped generations of geographers and other social scientists who continue to contemplate concentric zones of land use despite numerous critiques of his early-twentieth century evaluation of urban pattern and process. Whatever the appeal, its vocabulary and metaphors contribute to an ongoing discussion of urban structure if only to underscore the dramatic changes in both cities and the approach geographers take to studying them (see Fyfe & Kenny 2005: 15-27).

As our title “the zone of workingmen’s homes” suggests, we return to the model in this article to question its fit with conditions in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century industrial Milwaukee and – perhaps more importantly – to consider the appropriate framework for examining urban residential geographies. The title also acknowledges the argument offered by geographers Richard Walker and Robert Lewis in “Beyond the Crabgrass Frontier” (2001). Their analysis underscores the Chicago School’s model’s failure to even explain early twentieth-century metropolitan areas by noting the frequent occurrence of industrial suburbanization between 1850 and 1950.
In \textit{Manufacturing Suburbs} (Lewis 2004), case studies of several metropolitan regions including Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Detroit and Pittsburgh confirm the tendency to multi-centered metropolitan formation before World War II. Furthermore, Walker and Lewis argue that the dominance of the Chicago School and its emphasis on the city’s social geography obscured the operation of the American city’s political economy in the analysis of industrialization and, consequently, the early suburbanization of industry. They urge looking beyond the dominant association of the suburbs with the aspirations of middle-class homeowners, as in historian Kenneth Jackson’s classic work \textit{The Crabgrass Frontier} (1985; see also Fishman 1987), to consider the role of industrialization, investments in real estate and the political influence of business leaders in the early twentieth-century development of metropolitan areas.

It is this link between work and home for Milwaukee’s working class alongside the development of the local residential real estate market that we explore below when considering the growth of the city. In addition to challenging the prevailing notion of a concentric commuter zone beyond the city’s limits, we evaluate the “zone of the workingmen’s homes” within the city and consider the character of its residential landscape. To this purpose, the following analysis focuses on the development of three working-class neighborhoods in the Milwaukee metropolitan area, including: 1) the Brady Street neighborhood on Milwaukee’s eastside, which was developed primarily in the 1880s to house Polish tannery workers and their families; 2) the industrial suburb of Cudahy, platted in the 1890s as the new site for the Cudahy meat-packing plant and its workers; and, 3) the industrial suburb of West Allis, home to the Allis-Chalmers Company from 1900 (see Figure 1). These case studies draw upon areas with different experiences of turn of the twentieth century industrial development, suggesting a much more complex pattern of growth than that outlined in the concentric zone model. Our case studies reveal an array of economic actors, motivations, and scales of development. We draw attention to the practices of actors as diverse as small Polish builders, up-start industrialists, and wealthy real estate speculators. The landscape of worker housing varies from the model as well, reflecting the time period in which it developed and to a limited extent the physical and socio-economic place in which it developed. And, thus, a micro-level analysis of the area’s urban historical geography allows for a closer interrogation of trends in the social geography and political economy of the turn of the twentieth century industrial city.

\textbf{Industrialization and city-building}

Given its character as an industrial city, Milwaukee provides an excellent opportunity to examine industrial workers’ neighborhoods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the processes that developed them. By the 1880s, the city’s industrial reputation solidified and Milwaukee’s transformation from a commercial trade center to a manufacturing economy completed. Skilled and unskilled, immigrant laborers found employment opportunities in riverfront tanneries and factories with prominent new industrial development occurring along the Milwaukee River, in the Menomonee Valley, and at the mouth of the Kinnickinnic River (see Figure 1). Over three decades the City of Milwaukee’s population more than tripled, growing from 115,587 in 1880 to 373,857 in
At the turn of the twentieth century, as shown in Figure 2, local boosters enthusiastically claimed that Milwaukee “fed and supplied the world.” Chief icons of the industrial age surround the idealized female Milwaukee. In addition to the precision gear, pick ax and ax, steamers and locomotives radiate out from the city in every direction. This romantic image of economic strength hints at the significance of the worker in operating the city’s robust industrial economy.

Figure 1. “City of Milwaukee and Suburbs, circa 1900.” The map locates the three case study working-class neighborhoods – the Brady Street neighborhood on Milwaukee’s east side, the industrial suburb of Cudahy, and the industrial suburb of West Allis. (Source: Knell’s Quarter Sectional Map, 1893; C. N. Caspar Co., 1901; and Caspar, Krueger, Dory, Co., Publishers, 1930; American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee).
Milwaukee’s claim to the title of “the Working Man’s City” in 1900 underscores its social and economic climate. Although ranked twelfth in population size in 1910, it ranked third among American cities based on the proportion of its work force in industry. Only Detroit and Buffalo posed any serious challenge to Milwaukee’s working class title (Still 1948: 325). The need for industrial laborers drew European immigrants in increasing volume from the 1860s and 1870s through to World War I. Charles King, a local booster, provided this image of the city’s subsequent cultural landscape when he wrote in 1891:

The German and Polish population outnumbers the native probably three to one, and in nine cases out of ten this might be a cause for alarm, but – not in Milwaukee . . . There is not of its size in all America a city that contains a population more self-respecting, more law-abiding, more cheerful and content than Milwaukee, and you have only to ride or drive through these great sections to see the reason – there isn’t a real tenement house in the town (King 1891: 554-557).

Making clear that his description addressed working-class, ethnic neighborhoods, he concludes: “Almost every family has its own little home . . . no matter how humble it may be, it is the home that makes the citizen who has the public interests at heart.” If, as has been argued elsewhere, the history of America’s urban housing has been skewed by an over-emphasis on the tenement house and the problems of Chicago’s and New York City’s slums, the “Workingman’s City” – and “city of homeowners” as Milwaukee was called – provides a useful means of adding balance to the record (Hubka & Kenny 2000).

*Figure 2.* “Milwaukee Feeds and Supplies the World.” This turn of the twentieth century poster portrays Milwaukee as one of the world’s leading industrial centers. (Source: City of Milwaukee Economic Development Office.)
Work and home, or job opportunity and shelter, are key to our understanding of the needs and decision-making of Milwaukee’s residents. We might note that three integral pieces influence the growth of a city: people, money, and land. Anthony Orum elaborates on this idea by stating that city-building depends on: 1) “an expansion in the size of population”, 2) “an expansion in the amount of capital invested in a city”, and, 3) “an expansion in the use of or amount of land or both” (1995: 14). Orum’s statements, however obvious, call for deeper investigation of how the three pieces work together and what elements each contains. The three elements provide a schematic framework for considering first Burgess’ model of urban growth and then the experience within Milwaukee.

“Zone of workingmen’s homes”

Sociologist Ernest Burgess focuses primary attention on the expansion in size of the city’s population and changing social organization. The unit of analysis emphasizes the city’s “natural units” – as he refers to the neighborhoods - with a secondary concern for the consequences of the expansion of these neighborhoods on the use of land (Burgess 1967: 56). Only indirect attention is given to capital invested in the city, as implied by the expansion of business and industry from the center of the city and the new development of commuter suburbs. In this way, much like King’s comments thirty years earlier, Burgess reveals his interest and concern for the social stability of the city reflected in housing (more particularly “homes”), employment categories, and the assimilation of various generations of immigrants. Burgess argues: “In the expansion of the city a process of distribution takes place which shifts and sorts and relocates individuals and groups by residence and occupation” (1967: 54). In Zone II, the Zone of transition (also cited as the “zone of deterioration”), he finds “slums” and “bad lands” – the rooming house district and the factory zone. Recently arrived immigrants would reside in Zone II (1967: 54-55). Burgess goes on to state that, the “next zone is also inhabited predominantly (sic) by factory and shop workers, but skilled and thrifty. This is an area of second immigrant settlement, generally of the second generation. It is the region of escape from the slum . . . ” (1967: 56). He describes the house-type located in Zone III as the “two flat area” – an area of duplexes, as we refer to them today. Burgess underscores the desire for social mobility, however, by stating that: “. . . the inhabitant of this area in turn looks to the ‘Promised Land’ beyond, to its residential hotels, its apartment-house region, its ‘satellite loops’, and its ‘bright light’ areas” – and, as he notes on his detailed model, the single-family dwellings of Zone IV (1967: 56). Zone V, the commuter zone and the bungalow section of the city, presumably provides housing primarily to native-born Americans.

Despite noting their similar aspirations, he argues that this differentiation of the city by zones reflects “natural economic and cultural groupings giv(ing) form and character to the city” (1967: 56). Burgess explains how these “natural” groupings are produced by stating:
The division of labor in the city likewise illustrates disorganization, reorganization and increasing differentiation. The immigrant from rural communities in Europe and America seldom brings with him economic skill of any value in our industrial, commercial, or professional life. Yet interestingly occupational selection has taken place by nationality, explainable more by racial temperament or circumstance than by old-world economic backgrounds as Irish policemen, Greek ice-cream parlors, Chinese laundries, Negro porters . . . (1967: 56-57).

Today we recognize the racism associated with the “racial temperament(s)” that Burgess presents as part of a “natural” process influencing occupational selection. He and his contemporaries accepted such categories as obvious and linked by environmental determinism rather than the prejudice and stereotype that produced a restrictive labor hierarchy. Historian Gerd Korman’s work on Milwaukee’s industrial and immigration history demonstrates that early employment practices shaped occupational patterns along ethnic lines, especially for Polish immigrants. As a result of their language skills, Poles from the German-controlled area of Poland received some initial benefit from the managerial positions of Germans and German Americans in Milwaukee’s labor hierarchy. Advancement above the rank of foreman, however, was difficult to achieve as they became “typed” as common laborers and unskilled and semiskilled industrial workers. In a 1911 study of living conditions in American towns, almost forty years after the initial wave of Polish immigration, they were described as best fitted for “dirty tasks” and jobs that required strength (United Kingdom Board of Trade: 258).

The urban social map inscribed in the concentric zone model assumes social and spatial segregation between economic and cultural groupings. While the categories of economic and ethnic/racial segregation differ, our current experience of the real estate market conforms to this assumption of social and spatial separation by income and race. The following case study of a neighborhood occupied by Polish unskilled workers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, however, allows us to examine the contemporary social and spatial validity of the model while considering the operation of the local land economy and the provision of housing for the working-class residents as well as the city’s social geography.

Brady Street neighborhood: constructing a working-class neighborhood

Located just north of the downtown, Milwaukee’s Brady Street neighborhood recently acquired a new name and designation. In 2003, the “East Village” received historic district status in recognition of its “once vibrant ethnic community” and the working-class heritage that characterized this once primarily Polish settlement (see Mikos 2003). It is the first historic district in Milwaukee to gain preservation status based on its homogenous collection of late-nineteenth century worker housing. This district provides an interesting contrast to Milwaukee’s larger and better-known Polish community south
of the Menomonee Valley because of its proximity to the city’s center. In this regard it promises greater conformity to Burgess’ model whereas the Polish South Side developed and grew on the city’s southern periphery (see Kenny 1994; Kenny 1999; and, Gurda 1974). Despite these locational differences, the two Polish areas developed simultaneously during rapid industrialization and reflect the benefits to the workers of acquiring shelter within walking distance of industrial jobs. Subdivision began in the Brady Street neighborhood during the late 1860s. As suggested in Figure 3, streetcar development already extended the opportunity for middle-and upper-income housing construction out from the downtown to the east of parcels A through F. That working-class housing developed in the area at all had a great deal to do with the natural topography for two reasons. First, those parcels were bypassed initially because they covered a ravine unsuitable for the wealthier households being developed on the bluff to the east along Prospect Avenue and the middle-income housing constructed between the ravine and those larger houses on the high ground. The second topographic influence involved the new tanneries opened along the river down slope from the ravine. Overlooked in earlier development, this land became valuable in light of the demand for worker housing close to new industry on the river.

Figure 3. “Brady Street Area, City of Milwaukee, circa 1900 ” Streetcar lines encouraged middle-and upper-income housing development to the northeast of parcels A through F. The streetcar lines are depicted as dashed lines in the center of the streets. (Source: Map of the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Alfred G. Wright, 1887; American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)
As shown in a photograph of early-twentieth-century Pulaski Street (Figure 4), a small village atmosphere of narrow, winding residential streets lined with small closely-spaced cottages, duplexes and other multiple-unit housing characterized the neighborhood. Over a thirty year period, the neighborhood was transformed from “a swampy no man’s land . . . to a thriving microcosm of Polish-American life” (Tolan, 1984). The area north of Brady Street and to the west of the higher-income Prospect Avenue development became known in the Polish community as the “kepa kaszubow” - the isle of the Kaszubs – since the Kaszubs, fishermen from the Baltic coast of Poland, “colonized” this northside Polonia. Land speculators held the land on this urban frontier until industrialization reached the area in the 1870s and then the “speculative” and “industrial” house form known as the workers’ cottage served housing demand (see Hubka & Kenny 2000). Initially, the dominance of the relatively inexpensive workers’ cottage created a homogenous community. Figure 5 offers a view of a workers’ cottage still remaining in the neighborhood although now flanked by later, larger multi-family units.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4.** “Pulaski Street, circa 1900.” The Brady Street neighborhood presented a small village atmosphere of narrow, winding residential streets lined with small closely-spaced cottages, duplexes and other multiple-unit housing.  (Source: Frank Alioto)
Figure 5. “Pulaski Street, 2005.” With few changes noticeable, Pulaski Street exemplifies the working-class residential landscape of industrial Milwaukee with its closely spaced multi-family structures flanking workers’ cottages. (Source: Judith Kenny)

Over time, the housing landscape became more diverse as represented by the incrementally built duplexes known locally as a “Polish flat” and more prosperous, architect designed duplexes (see Hubka & Kenny 2000). This landscape conforms to Burgess’ “two flat” zone of working men’s homes (1967: 55). What does not conform, however, was the tendency for many of Milwaukee’s Polish Americans to stay within their ethnic community even after acquiring the means to move elsewhere. The presence of architect-designed homes surrounded by modest ones reflects the choice of ethnic segregation rather than separation by economic categories. As summarized in John Gurda’s study of Milwaukee’s Polish community, the persistence of Polish neighborhoods until after World War II reflects both discrimination from outside the ethnic community and affinity within it.

Demand for additional housing in the neighborhood provided an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to become landlords and builders, and the smaller cottage was replaced in many instances by flats. These local builders correspond to Olivier Zunz’s description of the informal housing market that operated in Detroit’s two-tier real estate market during the late-nineteenth century (1982). Zunz calls the two parts the formal and informal housing markets (161). The formal market “operated through professionals from their downtown offices.” It produced expensive homes for the native white American community. In contrast, the informal market was “highly localized, controlled from within the ethnic communities and designed to fit their means” (161). This second,
informal market also operated in Milwaukee’s ethnic communities and produced the owner-occupied cottages and rental multi-family structures of the working class. From the 1880s and ‘90s through the continuing period of significant Polish immigration during the first decade of the twentieth century, small contractors and builders within the Polish community contributed to the neighborhood’s local economy as well as its ongoing growth.

*Figure 6.* “A Portion of the 1910 Sanborn Insurance Map of the Brady Street Area.” Note the long, narrow lots with multiple structures that characterized the neighborhood’s development. (Source: Sanborn Insurance Maps of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1910; American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)
The 1910 Sanborn Insurance map shown in Figure 6 illustrates the dense living conditions resulting from this building activity. Reflecting the Polish character of the neighborhood, Sobieski and Pulaski streets (located in land section D, see Figure 3) stood out in contrast to surrounding streets with Anglo-sounding names such as Franklin, Hamilton and Warren. Named in 1875, Pulaski Street paid tribute to a Polish general who fought for American independence as it epitomized the ethnic qualities of the new working-class immigrant neighborhood. There is a degree of irony in the selection of such a prestigious name since the street followed the ravine that earlier had made the property a poor prospect for development. As it built out, Pulaski Street would become synonymous with over-crowded “slum” living conditions. Because the street warranted attention in public health studies, we give particular attention to its development over a twenty-year period by examining city building permits, Sanborn Insurance maps, and the census. The 1880 census indicates that thirty-six families lived in twenty-four houses on the two block long street with a resulting population of approximately 170 individuals. A handful of tanners are registered as household heads but the overwhelming occupational category was laborer. By 1900, the census revealed a population of sixty-two households residing on the eastside of Pulaski Street alone. A population of over 360 individuals lived in the approximately forty dwellings that lined the east side of the block. In many instances, the one, one and a half and two story residences were stacked several deep in the shoestring-shaped lot common to Milwaukee’s working class neighborhoods regardless of ethnicity. The “shoestring” lot was 30 wide x 120 feet deep and, to achieve maximum use of land, a rear house was typical. There were many instances on Pulaski Street when three or four dwelling units occupied the same lot. Of the sixty-two households, renters outnumbered owners at a rate of over three to one. Given the income of unskilled workers, it is impressive that the ratio was this low.

Records suggest that ownership was supported in many instances by income from rental units and work in local construction. This was the case of Frank Dombrowski of Sobieski Street, who appears as the owner/builder on several Pulaski Street building permits. John Tuszkiewicz listed his house moving business in the city directory from the 1880s and his name appears on numerous building permits as the individual responsible for moving cottages from one site within the neighborhood to infill the lots on Pulaski Street (City Directory: 1880 & 1900). Occasionally architects’ names appear with builders on permits for this increasingly dense street of two-storey (frame) rental units. In the majority of cases, however, residential construction drew upon the expertise of a growing number of carpenters, masons and builders from within the Polish community.

Growing density within the “isle of Kaszubs” promoted construction in a new neighborhood to the north and west of Brady Street – the area known today as Riverwest. On first inspection, this pattern might suggest a fit with Burgess’ model since it presents an image of progressive and inevitable improvement as inner city residents move outward from the zones of transition and workingmen’s homes to successive zones of better environmental conditions. The consensual imagery of the mobility and the agency of city residents fit the “melting-pot” metaphor of American popular culture. However, while the “move” from the Brady Street neighborhood to Riverwest allowed an improvement in environment, it did not substantially change the cultural landscape. For several generations, the tightly bound economic and ethnic categories persisted in the working
class neighborhoods of Milwaukee as experienced by the workers in the Brady Street area and Riverwest. Further challenging Burgess’ model, remarkably similar landscapes could be found beyond the city limits in the Milwaukee area industrial suburbs.

**Manufacturing Suburbs**

As early as the 1890s, Milwaukee’s industrial expansion sent signals to industrialists and real estate developers alike that pressures within the city might be escaped by moving beyond the urban frontier. Richard Harris has discussed the development of Chicago’s industrial suburbs during the same period highlighting the benefits that companies enjoyed in these new settlements centered on industry (1990). A similar pattern of development took place in the Milwaukee area as newly incorporated suburbs drew industry as well as commuters out beyond the city limits. When faced with the number of similar examples from other metropolitan areas, one wonders how this part of the historical record could go unrecognized, as it is, in much of the literature of urban studies. For our purposes, to contemplate the record requires a choice of which of the many industrial suburbs to consider.

Those familiar with the Milwaukee metropolitan region can easily predict which of the jurisdiction listed in Figure 7 served industry as opposed to commuters since the associated working - or middle-class qualities have been maintained to the present for the most part. Real estate developers in the north shore suburbs of Whitefish Bay and Shorewood along with Wauwatosa offered a bourgeois retreat for those wishing to escape to the conditions of the industrial city (see Figure 1). Inspiration for the five others came from industrial and business leaders who saw opportunities to develop on less expensive land with potentially fewer restrictions than found in the City of Milwaukee. In the process, these offered workers jobs and housing with the promise of improved environments.

**Figure 7: “Milwaukee and its Suburbs, Population Table”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Incorporated</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>373,857</td>
<td>457,147</td>
<td>578,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wauwatosa</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>2,842</td>
<td>3,346</td>
<td>5,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Milwaukee</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>3,392</td>
<td>6,092</td>
<td>7,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitefish Bay</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cudahy</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>3,691</td>
<td>6,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Milwaukee*</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>1,860</td>
<td>3,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Milwaukee (Shorewood)</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>2,650</td>
<td>13,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Allis</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6,645</td>
<td>13,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Milwaukee</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1,458</td>
<td>2,101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* North Milwaukee consolidated with the City of Milwaukee in 1929 to benefit from city services. Bay View residents made this same choice in 1887.

In 1893, Patrick and John Cudahy built a state of the art meat packing plant on a rural site south of Milwaukee. The plant and surrounding real estate formed the core of the city of Cudahy. While this might appear to be the story of a company town similar to Pullman, Illinois or Kohler, Wisconsin, Cudahy does not fit this category. Patrick Cudahy, the primary influence in the town’s development noted in his autobiography (1912) that his influence on local decision-making was limited after the town’s incorporation in 1895. The growth of Cudahy from a tiny rural settlement to one of Milwaukee’s industrial suburbs instead highlights both the roles of industrialists and real estate speculators in the city-building process and an informal real estate market in the construction of the workers’ housing.

Prior to playing prominent roles in the development of an industrial suburb, the Cudahy brothers established themselves in Milwaukee’s meat packing industry. Under the wings of John Plankinton, Milwaukee’s leading meat packer, they acquired experience and wealth. Plankinton’s firms controlled the majority of Milwaukee’s meat business in the 1870s and 1880s when Milwaukee was the fourth- or fifth-largest packing center in the nation (Gurda 1999). When Plankinton retired in 1888, Patrick with his brother John took over as lessors of the plant. After the death of John Plankinton in 1891, two years prior to the end of the lease in 1893, the Cudahys and Plankinton’s heir irreconcilably disagreed over plant management (Olson 1987). In response to the situation, Patrick Cudahy began building his own modern meat packing plant with vast public stock yards outside the city.

Cudahy selected the site for the new plant and stock yards about two miles south of the city limits on the Chicago & North Western (C & NW) Railroad right-of-way near a small rural settlement (Cudahy 1912). H.J. Mabbett of the real estate firm Mabbett & Jefferson quietly secured options on approximately 700-acres of farmland for the Cudahy brothers on both sides of the C & NW Railroad. With confirmation that the C & NW would extend a spur to the proposed packing plant, nearby property rapidly increased in value. The future City of Cudahy became a site of rampant real estate speculation during 1892 and early 1893. The periodical, Realty and Building Record, published a special issue on August 27, 1892 promoting Cudahy as the next major city between Chicago and Milwaukee. The authors wrote:

The prospects for the development and growth of Cudahy are so exceedingly bright that there are people who predict that within three years this place will have a population of 5,000; that it will have the finest and most complete, if not the largest pork and beef packing establishment in the United States; and that, though it will by virtue of its location be a suburb of Milwaukee, it will have an independent existence and will have its own great manufacturing establishments, hotels, banks, business houses, schools, churches, and residences (Realty and Building Record: Special Cudahy Number 1892).

The authors also published a dramatic bird’s eye view of the proposed city (see Figure 8.)
This view anchors the vast new Cudahy plant in the foreground, promising significant profits for industrialists and real estate developers. In the distance, the City of Milwaukee’s Lake Michigan shoreline is depicted at an easily traversed distance. This illustration, designed to attract investment, underscores the roles of industrialists and real estate developers in urban development. As Richard Walker and Robert Lewis (2001) note, the search for profits in land speculation by industrialists, property investors, developers, and financial institutions stimulated such suburban growth.

To further boost the new suburb’s success, Patrick Cudahy led a vigorous campaign to persuade other Milwaukee meat packers to relocate to establish a public stock yards similar to that of the Union Stock Yards of Chicago offering to sell land at cost to Milwaukee’s packers. Cudahy also sought to increase the certainty of his real estate vision through the elimination of competition. With the support of Milwaukee’s mayor and key aldermen, he promoted an ordinance that would prohibit the operation of slaughtering plants within the city. Endorsing the ordinance as an endeavor to clean up urban pollution, Patrick Cudahy believed residents near Milwaukee’s packing plants would be his strongest supporters. Instead, residents, many of whom were employed in the existing packing plants, opposed the ordinance along with their employers and the St. Paul Railroad. On April 16, 1892, when the common council considered the ordinance in a special session they heard the packers describe their substantial capital investments in their Milwaukee operations (City of Milwaukee Common Council 1891-1892). They argued the Cudahys could easily move to the suburbs as a lessee, but as owners of the plants they would be forced to abandon significant capital investments and perhaps be forced out of business if the ordinance passed. The last source of opposition, the St. Paul Railroad, holding a near monopoly over Milwaukee’s packing industry, transported livestock to and from the stockyards. If the packers moved, the St. Paul would lose business to the C & NW Railroad. This united opposition mounted such a strong attack against the ordinance that the common council never voted on the controversial ordinance and instead tabled the ordinance indefinitely (City of Milwaukee Common Council 1891-1892).

Cudahy, though defeated, continued to promote the new suburb. He sought to attract industries other than packers to diversify the local economy. The turn of the twentieth century meat packing industry fluctuated seasonally. The most active months were November through February with employment at seasonal highs. During the spring months, packers frequently decreased employment by approximately one-half. Business picked up in May, but the spring months left many workers unemployed. Patrick Cudahy actively worked to attract other industries to support his seasonally idle workers when his plant didn’t operate at full capacity. Du Pont established a branch chemical plant at the lakeshore in the 1890s (Cudahy Business and Advancement Association [CBAA] 1927; Schmid 1942). Cudahy sold land to the Federal Rubber Company to build their plant in 1904 (CBBA 1927; Cudahy 1912; Paul 2002). Three prominent Allis-Chalmers employees, who resigned to organize a new company, were lured to Cudahy when Patrick bought stock in the new company and sold them land (Cudahy 1912). By the 1910s, the city’s largest employers included Cudahy’s packinghouse, the George J. Meyer bottling company, a foundry and machine shops.

Key to the development of a new industrial suburb was the availability of labor. Consequently, Patrick Cudahy’s promotional activities included the sale of commercial
and residential lots and the construction of workers’ cottages through the Cudahy Bros. Land Department ("Cudahy & Sons, Inc., Memoir and Accounting, October 1, 1888-May 10, 1971" 1972). The company held the first land sale on September 17, 1892 attracting a large crowd of spectators and speculators. The promotional bird’s eye view mentioned above depicted the prosperous future city (see Figure 8). The C & NW Railroad parallels the lakeshore, dividing the suburb. This furnishes “a pleasant place for residence and at the same time supply[ing] suitable sites for extensive manufacturing and business establishments” (Realty and Building Record: Special Cudahy Number 1892). The packing plant, stock yards and railroad yards lie in the lower portion of the sketch. Beyond the railroad tracks spread the workers’ residential lots. This suburban setting of scattered homes on tree-lined streets contrasts with the densely built urban landscape of Milwaukee depicted in the upper left. Befitting the town’s inspiration, city founders named the streets after other meat packers including: Philip Danforth Amour, George Henry Hammond, Thomas Kingan, John Peter Squire, and John Plankinton. Patrick’s own namesake street can be seen in the middle of the sketch. This enticing image of an industrial garden suburb likely stimulated land speculation. Initial land sales were profitable until the Panic of 1893. The panic became one of the longest and most severe depressions of the nineteenth century (Gurda 1999:168). The promotional boast of 5,000 residents in three years failed to materialize. Nevertheless, Cudahy incorporated as a village in 1895 with 771 residents. In 1906, Cudahy became a city with 2,556 residents (Olson 1987:40).

Figure 8. “Bird’s Eye Sketch of the Proposed Suburb of Cudahy.” This illustration, published in the Realty and Building Record, August 27, 1892, sought to attract investment and real estate development. (Source: Realty and Building Record: Special Cudahy Number, August 27, 1892, Vol. II, No. 25)
Figure 9. “Cudahy Duplex, 3000 Block of Barnard Avenue”. This duplex represents the typical workers’ housing in Cudahy. The raised basement could be used for additional living space or storage. (Source: Deanna Benson)

While failing to become a booming city with vast public stockyards, Cudahy in 1910 shared some characteristics with the Back-of-the-Yards, an immigrant working-class residential community built next to the Chicago’s Union Stock Yards. Cudahy workers were paid such low wages that they could not afford to live far from their employer. Like the Back-of-the-Yards, recent European immigrants constituted the majority of residents (Pudup 2004). Many arrived from Eastern Europe after 1900. The 3600 block of Barnard Avenue illustrates the typical ethnic and occupational makeup of Cudahy in 1910. In the 12 houses on the block, 116 persons lived within 22 households. Six of the homes housed 28 boarders attesting to the low wages and lack of housing in Cudahy during the first decades of the twentieth century. Approximately 75% of the block’s population had immigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1900. They included Magyars, Croats, Slovenes, Slovaks, Bohemians, and Moravians. A small number of Germans and Poles called this block home as well. Approximately 30 persons were born in the United States, but the majority of these were under ten years of age and the children of immigrant parents. Most residents worked in one of three industries: the packinghouse, foundry, or machine shop. Approximately seventeen men worked in the Cudahy Brothers packing plant as butchers or general laborers.

The 3600 block of Barnard Avenue, also, illustrates the typical development of workers’ housing in Cudahy. Like Brady Street, the lots are commonly 120 feet deep and only a bit wider at 30 feet (Sanborn Map 1910). In contrast to the densely settled Brady

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1 The Back-of-the-Yards developed beside the Union Stock Yards and a concentration of packing plants known as Packingtown. The Union Stock Yards and Packingtown consolidated the meat packing industry at Chicago’s periphery during the second half of the nineteenth century.

2 In contrast to the street names in Figure 8, Hammond Avenue became Barnard when actually platted.
Street, the majority of lots had just one house or cottage. This suggests that the cheaper suburban land prices allowed for lower rents and housing costs and, thus, resulted in a relative lack of pressure to develop additional housing units on individual lots. Of the block’s thirty lots, just 14 were built upon by 1910, including one store, and one saloon as well as the twelve residences. The workers’ cottage, although present, is less dominant in this early-twentieth-century suburban neighborhood. Nearly all the residences were 1-1/2- or 2-story wood framed structures including seven duplexes. By this time, the duplex had grown in popularity to become the dominant house-type in Milwaukee as well (Hubka & Kenny 2000). The duplex at 3643 and 3643A represent the typical residence (See Figure 9). The raised basement was common and likely used for additional living and storage space. The 1910 Census lists the owner 3643-A as Anton Peto, a Magyar who immigrated from Austro-Hungary in 1905. He lived in one apartment with his wife, two children, and three boarders. All were recent Magyar immigrants except the youngest child, who was born in Wisconsin. Peto rented the second apartment to recent Magyar immigrants, Nikolas Borros and his wife. The Borros’ shared the apartment with seven boarders. Most of the men worked as molders in the foundry. Thus, the Barnard Avenue landscape single-family and duplex homes resembled Burgess’ “zone of workingmen’s homes” with its predominance of “two flats”, but the social characteristics of boarders and recent immigrants shares more in common with Burgess’ “zone in transition”.

The builders of this common working-class landscape are less clear. As noted above, Patrick Cudahy took an active role in lot sales and home building through the Cudahy Bros. Land Department, but his role appears to be limited. While we lack building permits and city directories from this era, the relative silence of the Cudahy Brothers Company in the historical record on this topic suggests Patrick Cudahy did little to shape the specific character and form of the suburb in comparison to the well-documented influence of George Pullman and John Michael Kohler in shaping the environmental qualities of their respective company towns (see Buder 1967). In fact, it is unlikely that Cudahy’s role even approximated the thousands of lots sold and homes built by contemporary real estate developers such as S. E. Gross in Chicago (Clark 1998). What we do know is that tracts of land that became the city of Cudahy were owned by at least ten different real estate companies in the 1890s. The Sivyer & Betz firm was one of the earliest speculators in Cudahy, offering lots for sale at the same time as the Cudahy Bros. Land Department sale. Other companies owning Cudahy tracts, such as the Buckhorn Land & Investment Co. and the South Point Park Co., had well known records in residential platting and lot sales in the Milwaukee area (Realty and Building Record: Special Cudahy Number 1892). While more research is needed, it appears that a mix of real estate developers and the small builders associated with an informal real estate market built Cudahy’s housing – certainly not one major industrialist.

**West Allis: residential to industrial suburb**

Along with Cudahy, the second working-class suburb discussed in this paper, draws upon the name of a major local employer to announce its industrial character. Much like Cudahy, middle-class, West Allis was not a company town. Real estate interests in the
area first flirted with residential development that would result in a Victorian-era commuter suburb but instead chose to attract industrial development. West Allis offers an interesting contrast to the common expectation that a commuter suburb would naturally develop at the periphery of the early-twentieth-century city. In fact, by the 1890s, both railroads and streetcars served the area and the Milwaukee Journal announced that North Greenfield, as the original agricultural community of Honey Creek had been renamed, was “one of the very prettiest and most convenient of Milwaukee’s many residence suburbs” (MJ 1893: 9). However, industrial decentralization held its appeal as Milwaukee lacked space for industrial expansion.

When the Edward P. Allis Company made clear its need for expansion in 1900, real estate interests lured the company to its new home only four miles west of Milwaukee. One of the major real estate men behind the development of West Allis showed Charles Allis, president of the E. P. Allis Company, a large tract of land on what is now the northeast corner of the city. Within a week the company decided to purchase the 100-acre tract of land for its new factory. While the new plant was under construction in 1901, the company merged with three other companies becoming Allis-Chalmers, one of the largest manufacturers of heavy machinery in the world at the time (Gurda 1999). Almost immediately afterwards, the plant employed 10,000 skilled and unskilled workers, quickly becoming the largest employer in the newly incorporated (and renamed) West Allis (see Bump 1999). The company would remain vitally important to the success and image of the city for nearly eighty years. At the time, the Allis-Chalmers Company was the prize catch for the ambitious real estate promoters of this industrial suburb assuring the developers’ financial rewards and the future growth of the city of West Allis.

In addition to convincing one of the industrial giants of Milwaukee to relocate to West Allis the real estate developers of the city played other important roles. They promoted the area to prospective residents, sold lots to them, and in some cases built homes. The Central Improvement Company was responsible for the majority of land sales that took place from 1902-1912, but other major firms contributed to the industrial suburb’s growth as well. Certainly, the efforts of these men and their companies to bring residents to the area were only partially completed by luring industry to the area. They also found it necessary to portray West Allis as a desirable place to live. This first step required making it easy and inexpensive to leave the central city. Forming streetcar companies to bring prospective residents to the area and using promotional literature to highlight their community’s amenities accomplished this. As shown in Figure 10, the Central Improvement Company recommended the comforts of home ownership to its prospective clients. They offered lots while inspiring hopes of domestic comfort and financial stability. If this advertisement looks familiar, it is similar to ads run in the Chicago market. One might also think of its message as similar to the modern freeway billboard the displays the message – “If you lived here you would be home.” Other handbills encouraged prospective residents to consider the combined benefits of Allis-Chalmer jobs and the health benefits of living in the suburbs (West Allis Historical Society clipping file).
Figure 10. “Advertisement for the Central Improvement Company, West Allis.” The company advertised its residential lots by suggesting homeownership would bring security and prosperity in a suburban landscape. (Source: West Allis Historical Society, West Allis, Wisconsin)
Figure 11. “Gross’ West Allis Subdivision.” In this 1903 advertisement, the Chicago-based developer S. E. Gross advertised lots and homes. Given the proximity to railroad lines and industrial land, the advertisement was intended to attract workers. (Source: West Allis Historical Society, West Allis, Wisconsin)
In a 1903 advertisement (Figure 11), the Chicago-based developer S. E. Gross in his advertising noted that “the rapid growth of West Allis will make the purchaser large profits.” Furthermore, his handbills offered lots in “a Restricted Neighborhood Which Guarantees the High Character and Value of the Property.” If one is tempted to assume from the images and language of the ads that West Allis real estate was intended to attract primarily middle-class clients, a closer inspection of the Gross handbill reminds us that the properties were adjacent to railroad lines and industrial land. Empty lots in S. E. Gross’ subdivision sold for $275 - $650 with prices increasing with distance away from the factories. Lots with homes already on them sold for between $1,600 and $2,850 with prices increasing with distance from the factories. Although S.E. Gross contributed significantly to the residential landscape of Chicago, his subdivision and residential development scheme failed in West Allis during its first year. After initiating the project in 1903, severe winter weather and the resulting poor building season prevented Gross from meeting his financial obligations. The man known in Chicago as the “friend of the workingman” went into bankruptcy before he could have a similar impact on the Milwaukee area real estate market (Clark 1992).

Instead, it is apparent that new residents hired private contractors for the majority of the construction. Advertisements for construction companies were plentiful in the West Allis city directories. Additionally, the Milwaukee Sentinel cited Alexander McMicken, the manager of the Central Improvement Company, on New Year’s Day, 1909 who said that: “225 homes built, practically all built by private individuals, none of the large real estate companies having built extensively during the year” (1909). We use two blocks to illustrate the development process during West Allis’ first decade given their proximity to the new suburb’s commercial center and industrial jobs. Referring again to the S.E. Gross map, the 1500 block of South 72nd Street is located one block south of the city’s major commercial street, Greenfield Avenue. The second is the 1300 block of South 63rd Street, two blocks east of the Allis-Chalmers factory. On the 1500 South 72nd Street block face there were 16 houses when the census was taken in 1910 (Sanborn 1910; U.S. Census 1910). Although the Sanborn map indicates that these lots had the same dimensions as those on Brady Street, fewer homes and single-family units resulted in less lot coverage and less crowded conditions. Twenty households occupied the block’s sixteen dwellings. Eighty-six people lived on the block. If the impression created is one of a more prosperous population, this is supported by census information indicating that household heads were a mix of professionals, skilled workers and laborers – and either native-born Americans or Western European immigrants (U.S. Census 1910). Two story and one and one-half story wood frame structures dominate the residential landscape, and in many instances, these were duplexes.

Closer to the factory buildings, the 1300 South 63rd Street block face was less developed at the end of the suburb’s first decade with only seven houses listed in the 1910 census. The relative proximity of West Allis to south side neighborhoods also allowed many workers to commute by streetcar from established neighborhoods in Milwaukee. This may explain the slower development of the less desirable blocks near the factory. Thirteen households resided on the street for a total population of seventy-five. The street’s dominant house form on the street as indicated on the Sanborn-Perris fire insurance map was the one and one-half story worker cottage as shown in Figure 12. A few cottages and two-story residences made up the remaining dwellings. As might be
expected given the location near the factory, the heads of the family on this block were almost exclusively laborers and Eastern European immigrants.

This perspective on the growth of West Allis suggests the advantages of the industrial suburb for immigrants, including both skilled and unskilled workers. Lower land costs and less pressure from competing land uses resulted in less expensive housing with relatively better environmental conditions. The example of West Allis raises additional questions about the social and spatial distance between suburban residents of various cultural and economic backgrounds. Although the examples provided do not represent great differences in income levels, differences did exist, and these differences are worthy of further examination in order to better evaluate the social geography of the industrial suburbs including the decision-making which determined industrial location and real estate development.

Figure 12. “West Allis House, 1300 Block of South 63rd Street.” This one and one-half story worker cottage was the dominant house form on blocks near the factories. (Source: David Bump)
Conclusion

For urban studies specialists, the association of house form with assimilated social status and domestic comfort is well-encoded in the Chicago School’s model of urban growth to such an extent that even the concept of suburbanization tends to be defined by our image of the early- to mid-twentieth century middle-class, commuter suburb. Urban geographers also tend to find heuristic value in Burgess’ description of an early-twentieth century internal structure of the city, and blinded to the intellectual assumptions underpinning Burgess’ model, they disregarded evidence in the historical record. The case studies provided in this paper suggest geographies of urban growth with greater complexity than is generally assumed. They certainly support the recent scholarship that challenges the partial version of urban history, which overlooks the record of industrial suburbanization prior to the 1950s (Lewis 2004).

Why much of our historical understanding of the North American city has been blinded by a focus on the bourgeois housing market is another question worthy of consideration. Whether in company towns or on the developing fringe of the central city, landscapes of worker cottages and other frame structures sprang up in response to a demand for housing that was met primarily by small scale contractors and developers. Home ownership aspirations of a largely immigrant industrial labor force further fueled the growth of these industrial suburbs. The congestion of the industrial city and relatively inexpensive land markets in various parts of the metropolitan area drew workers as well as industrialists to peripheral areas. Here real estate developers understood the opportunities associated with building work and home to accommodate both. The concept of a “zone of workingmen’s homes” suggests segregation on a new scale within the city but by naturalizing that segregation fails to untangle aspects of an evolving social geography and urban political economy.

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