

# Star Search

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The list of celebrities with connections to Milwaukee is longer than you might think. Renowned actors, inventors, writers, musicians, politicians, athletes, assassins and even an infamous serial killer once called Milwaukee home.

Story by Larry Widen

Recognizable local personalities are a dime a dozen. Sightings of television newscasters, high profile politicians and ad-savvy car dealers are pretty common occurrences. Spotting WKTI's **Dave Luczak** at a ball game or WTMJ's **Carole Meekins** in a restaurant is pretty easy, and Lincoln-Mercury dealer **Gordie Boucher** has been known to pop up in more than few back seats. But to see some of the people who have left Milwaukee for the national spotlight, you may have to buy a ticket to their concert or movie.

## The Actors

One of the many actors from Milwaukee is **Alfred Lunt**, who along with his wife, Lynn Fontanne, ruled the Broadway stage for nearly half a century. Lunt, born in 1892, lived in a grand mansion on the southwest corner of 17<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin Ave. His father was wealthy, having made a fortune in the lumber business. After his father died, Lunt's mother remarried a much younger man who helped her run through the family fortune in no time. Eight-year-old Alfred deeply resented his stepfather and found comfort by attending plays at the Pabst, Bijou, Alhambra, and Davidson theaters.



When Alfred's parents decided he should attend Carroll College, they sold the Wisconsin Avenue home and moved to 101 Hartwell Street in Waukesha, just three blocks from the college. Before leaving Wisconsin in 1914 to try acting in New York, Lunt used his trust fund to purchase the huge parcel of land at Genesee Depot that would become the Lunt-Fontanne estate known as Ten Chimneys.

Film actor William Joseph Patrick (**Pat**) **O'Brien**, born in 1899, lived at 15<sup>th</sup> and Clybourn Streets. His Tom Sawyer-inspired childhood was spent hopping freight trains in the nearby Menomonee Valley, selling roasted potatoes on Wisconsin Avenue and playing baseball and football with his friends. His angelic features made him the perfect choice for altar boy in his parish. When O'Brien went to Marquette High School, he met his lifelong friend, **Spencer Bonaventure Tracy**.

Unlike O'Brien, Tracy's childhood was troubled. Although his family lived on the elite part of Prospect Avenue, Tracy spent most of his time in the rowdy Irish settlement at Tory Hill, goading boys his age into fistfights. After he set fire to the family home, his parents were only able to keep Tracy out of jail by arranging for him to attend Marquette High School. When World War I broke out, O'Brien and Tracy immediately joined the navy. Afterwards, they decided they could be stage actors and went to New York looking for work. Later, as a Warner Brothers film star, O'Brien returned to Milwaukee often in the 1930's and 1940's, making personal appearances at the Warner theater on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Wisconsin to promote movies such as "Angels with Dirty Faces" and "Knut Rockne – All American."

Theodosia Burr Goodman, who lived in the city as a teenager, was the daughter of a Jewish tailor from Cincinnati who brought the family to Milwaukee around 1895. Goodman longed to be an actress, and her suggestive dances and racy dialogue delivered from the stage of Schlitz's Alhambra Theater shocked more than a few patrons.



She left Milwaukee in 1903 and soon found work in motion pictures. Several years later, a public relations flack at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox rearranged the phrase 'Arab death' to form **Theda Bara**, and a silent movie star was born. Billed as "Hell's Handmaiden," Bara was the original screen 'vamp,' a seductive, wanton woman who snared otherwise good men in her web.

**William Dafoe** has appeared in 60 films, including "Platoon," "Spider-Man" and "Clear and Present Danger." Before heading to Hollywood, Dafoe attended the theater arts program at UWM in the mid 1970's and performed with Milwaukee's avant-garde group, Theater X group. Wisconsin-born actor **Fred MacMurray** attended Carroll College in 1924 before dropping out to try his luck as a professional musician in Chicago. Vaudevillian **Harry Langdon** lived on the south side for several years until he became a popular performer in silent movies.

**Gene Wilder**, born Jerome Silberman, grew up on 44<sup>th</sup> and Burleigh and attended Washington High School before starring in "Blazing Saddles" and "Young Frankenstein." **Marc Alaimo** has been a favorite of Star Trek fans since 1987 for his performances as the alien Gul Dukat, **Charlotte Rae** starred in the popular sitcoms "Diff'rent Strokes" and "The Facts of Life," and **Heather Graham**, born here in 1970 is probably most famous for her role as Felicity Shagwell in the Austin Powers movies. Marquette University alums **Peter Bonerz** played dentist Jerry Robinson on "The Bob Newhart Show," and **Chris Farley** went on to NBC's "Saturday Night Live." Greenfield's **Jane Kaczmarek** went on to fame as Lois, the mom from TV's "Malcolm in the Middle." Kaczmarek attended UWM as theater major and became friends with another future star, actor **Tony Shaloub** of "Monk." To further round out her Wisconsin connection, Kaczmarek also married UW-Madison alum Bradley Whitford, an actor on "The West Wing."

Character actor **Delroy Lindo**, from "Get Shorty," "The Cider House Rules," and "Sahara," was a company member of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre for the 1981-82 season. **Andy Robinson** also did a stint with the Rep before he landed a key role in the 1971 cop thriller "Dirty Harry." Robinson, so chillingly believable as the psychotic Scorpio killer, has struggled with typecasting ever since! And in between his myriad plays and one-man shows, Milwaukee's favorite funnyman **John McGivern** found time to play a cable car conductor in 2001's "The Princes Diaries."

Wauwatosa can boast **Cotter Smith**, the President of the United States in "X-Men 2," and **Nancy Olson**, who starred in the ultimate 1950's film noir, "Sunset Boulevard," with William Holden and Gloria Swanson. Shorewood's contributions include **Charlotte Zucker**, who appeared in her sons' "Naked Gun" movies and **Kristen Johnson**, who played Sally on "Third Rock from the Sun" and Ivana Humpalot in "The Spy Who Shagged Me." Legendary Hollywood stuntman **Terry Leonard** grew up at 87th and Burnham in West Allis. Leonard's first job was in the 1963 western, "McLintock," starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. His stunt work can be seen in more than 100 films, including "The Forgotten," "The Sum of All Fears," "Rush Hour," "The Fugitive" and "Tombstone." One of his most famous screen appearances is in "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Leonard doubled for actor Harrison Ford, who as Indiana Jones, uses his whip to climb under a moving truck. Actress **Amy Pietz**, born here in 1969, was on TV's "Caroline in the City" and appeared in a recent Bruce Willis film, "The Whole Ten Yards."

Less of a star and more of a celebrity by association is **Brian 'Kato' Kaelin**, who was in the right place at the right time when O.J. Simpson had all that trouble with his butcher knife in Brentwood, California. Kaelin's 15 minutes of fame came in the form of game show appearances, talk shows and several instantly forgettable movie and TV roles.

Lastly, one-time silent movie king **Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle's** career foundered after he was accused of murdering party girl Virginia Rappe. Even though Arbuckle was acquitted, his public deserted him. After a stage show in 1925 at the Strand theater on Wisconsin Avenue, police were called to restrain women's groups, concerned citizens and members of the clergy who were protesting the disgraced comedian's appearance here.

## The Entertainers

Performers from Milwaukee include turn-of-the-century escape artist **Harry Houdini**, nightclub entertainer **Hildegarde**, talk show queen **Oprah Winfrey** and keyboard king **Liberace**. Houdini, born Ehrich Weiss in 1874, lived in Milwaukee until 1885. Houdini was a shoeshine boy and newspaper vendor when his father took him to see a magician at **Jacob Litt's** Dime Museum on Wisconsin Avenue. The show inspired Houdini to follow a similar career path, and the 11-year-old left his family in Milwaukee to strike out on his own. And Litt, who also owned Milwaukee's popular Bijou theater, owned a highly successful chain of similar theaters in Chicago, Minneapolis and New York City.

Hildegarde, a classy chanteuse from your father's era, was born Loretta Sell in 1906 and lived at 54<sup>th</sup> and Vliet Streets. As a teenager, Hildegarde accompanied silent films on the piano in the Lyric theater down the street from her home. She then majored in music at Marquette University before becoming the quintessential symbol of New York nightlife in the 1940's and 1950's.

Oprah Winfrey's Milwaukee ties are a bit more painful. Born to unwed parents in 1954, Winfrey moved to Milwaukee to live with her mother at 2356 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street in 1960. During this time, she was sexually abused by a teenage cousin and then by other male relatives and friends. In 1967, at age 14, she gave birth to a premature baby that did not survive. Because of her superior reading, speaking and memorization abilities, Winfrey was transferred out of Lincoln High School on the lower east side to Nicolet High School in Glendale. To keep pace with her new, affluent classmates, Winfrey began stealing money. In desperation, her mother sent Winfrey to live with her father in Nashville. Under his steady discipline, Winfrey started on the path to journalism and a career in television.



Maybe the most flamboyant personality ever to emerge from Wisconsin, Wladziu Valentino Liberace was a child prodigy whose musical talents were nurtured by his parents at an early age. Lessons at the family home at 49<sup>th</sup> and National Avenue were quickly supplanted by a full scholarship to study piano at the Wisconsin College of Music on Prospect Avenue. By the time he was 14, Wladziu, or Walter, as he now called himself, made his professional debut in 1933 as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony. In 1940, the 21-year-old, now simply known as "Liberace," was a star attraction at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. His long career of nightclubs, concert halls, motion pictures and Las Vegas spectacles was still ahead of him. His comic turn in 1967 as Batman's TV nemesis, Chandel, brought him to the attention of a younger audience. Liberace died in 1987 at the age of 68.

And perhaps the most interesting entertainment connection is a long-buried tidbit about **Mae West**. While on tour in Milwaukee, West married her vaudeville partner, Frank Wallace, on April

11, 1911. Etta Wood, an older cast member on the bill, convinced the 17-year-old West that her promiscuity would eventually get her in trouble. She said, "Listen, Mae, with all these men tomcatting around, sooner or later something's going to happen to you. Marry Wallace and be respectable."

## The Musicians

In addition to Liberace and Hildegard, Milwaukee has given rise to a number of other musical sons and daughters. Jazz bandleader **Woody Herman**, rhythm and blues singer **Al Jarreau** and Jackson Browne bass player **Lee Sklar** grew up here, as did the late **Howie Epstein**, bass player for Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Guitarist **Daryl Stuermer**, who played with Jean-Luc Ponty, Phil Collins, and Genesis, still calls Milwaukee home, as does **Jerry Harrison**, former member of the Talking Heads.

Rock guitar legend **Steve Miller** grew up at 1033 East Ogden, the son of a prominent physician. **Les Paul**, the inventor of the electric guitar and a Waukesha native, was a frequent visitor to their home. Miller attended UW-Madison before heading for the Chicago blues scene. Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf and Buddy Guy all took a liking to the young guitarist and allowed him to perform with them regularly. By 1967, Miller was in San Francisco and on his way to 1970's superstardom.

**Eric Benet**, known less for his Grammy award winning singing and more for being unfaithful to wife Halle Berry, is from Milwaukee. **Bill Berry**, former REM musician grew up in Wauwatosa and Go-Gos guitarist **Jane Wiedlin** attended UWM.

## The Writers

**Robert Bloch** was born on April 5, 1917. The Bloch family lived in apartment #11 at 602 East Knapp Street. Bloch was 10 when he discovered *Weird Tales*, a pulp magazine that specialized in macabre fiction. At the age of 17, Bloch's short story, "The Secret in the Tomb," was purchased by the magazine. He continued to write for the pulps, but undertook lucrative freelance work such as writing vaudeville skits, advertising copy and speeches for Milwaukee mayor Daniel Hoan. In 1959, Bloch published "Psycho," a novel that assured his place in horror history.

**Thomas Miller**, co-creator of "Happy Days," chose to have Fonzie, Richie and Mr. and Mrs. C live in his hometown, and *horrormeister* **Peter Straub** based the fictional town of Millhaven on the Milwaukee he knew from his youth. Also from Milwaukee are **John Ridley**, screenwriter of the comedy "Undercover Brother" and producer of TV's "Third Watch." Writers **David Zucker**, **Jerry Zucker** and **Jim Abrahams** came from Shorewood to bring us comedy classics such as "Airplane!" and "The Naked Gun." And their buddy, actor Leslie Nielsen, visits here so often most people think he's a resident.

**Edna Ferber**, whose novel "Giant" was made into the movie starring James Dean, Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor, spent the year 1907 as a reporter for The Milwaukee Journal. Ferber lived at 1220 North Astor during her time in the city.

Another reporter-turned-writer, **Carl Sandburg**, lived in Milwaukee from 1907 to 1912. In 1908 Sandburg married photographer **Edward Steichen's** sister, Lillian, and moved to a home on Hawley Road near Wisconsin Avenue. Their first child, Margaret, was born in 1911 at Misericordia Hospital at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Kilbourn. Sandburg initially came to Milwaukee to help promote the Socialist Party Movement. He wrote a number of newspaper articles exposing the prostitution, gambling, graft and other improprieties of Mayor David S. Rose's scandal-ridden administration. When Socialist candidate Emil Seidel unseated Rose in 1910, Sandburg became the new mayor's private secretary. When Seidel was not reelected in 1912, the Sandburgs relocated to Chicago where Carl could concentrate on becoming a writer. They came back frequently, however, as the Steichen family owned a large farm on Pilgrim Road in Menomonee Falls.

As a side note to the Steichens, the family first moved here from Hancock, Michigan, in 1889 so Edward could attend Pio Nono, a Catholic school in St. Francis. The family first settled at 7<sup>th</sup> and Highland, on the land now occupied by the Milwaukee Area Technical College. At the age of 15, Steichen began a four-year apprenticeship as a lithographer for the American Fine Art Company. He became fascinated with photography and purchased his own camera. Before he turned 20, Steichen won several national awards for his photos. He moved to New York to further his career, but like the Sandburgs, returned often to Milwaukee to visit his family.

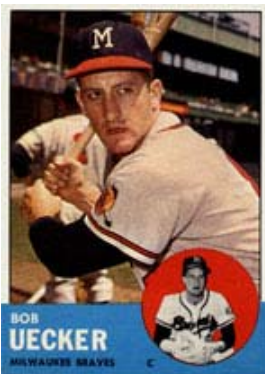
## The Inventors

Although the invention of the typewriter in Milwaukee by **Christopher Lathem Sholes** in 1868 was a groundbreaking achievement, Sholes was no businessman. He sold the right to his machine for a pittance, and as a result surrendered not only a fortune but his place in history.

Instead it was a pair of innovative young men who in 1901 changed American transportation forever with the invention of a motorized two wheel conveyance. **William Harley**, 21, and **Arthur Davidson**, 20, put a one cylinder engine onto a frame and dubbed it the motorcycle. They sold it immediately and by 1905 they had made and sold a dozen more out of a ten by fifteen foot wooden barn in back of their homes at 38<sup>th</sup> and Highland. The following year, to keep up with demand, they built a factory one block to the north on Juneau Avenue. The first year they produced 150 motorcycles and by 1909, more than a thousand. In 1912 the Harley-Davidson Company made their first overseas sale to a buyer in Japan. They also supplied more than 200 licensed dealerships across the United States.

## The Athletes

Just about everyone knows that "Mr. Baseball" **Bob Uecker** has lived here his entire life. Born on January 26, 1935, Uecker signed a professional contract with his hometown Milwaukee Braves in 1956. He made his major league debut as a catcher with the Braves in 1962. A mediocre hitter who finished with a career batting average of .200, Uecker also played for the St. Louis Cardinals and Philadelphia Phillies before returning to the Braves, who had by then moved to Atlanta. After closing out his oft-lampooned stint in baseball, Uecker found his true calling as an announcer. Growing up, Uecker lived at 2105 North 3<sup>rd</sup> (1941), 2417 N. 10<sup>th</sup> (1947) and 1605 N. 47<sup>th</sup> (1952). **Hank Aaron**, along with teammates Eddie Mathews and Warren Spahn, led the Milwaukee Braves to pennants in 1957 and 1958 and defeated the New York Yankees in the 1957 World Series. In the beginning of the 1974 season, Aaron broke Babe Ruth's long standing home run record in Atlanta. He retired from baseball in 1976, having played his final two seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers. Aaron ended up with 755 career home runs, a record that still stands.

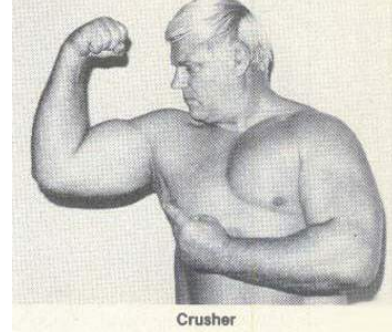


**Dwyane Wade** became the most honored player in Marquette history in just two seasons. His career 19.7 points per game scoring average put him in the school's all-time No. 2 spot. Wade went pro when he was drafted by the Miami Heat in 2003. A graduate of Tosa East High School, **Tony Smith** went to the NBA in 1990 when he was signed by the Los Angeles Lakers. Smith left the Lakers in 1995 and played in Miami, Phoenix, Charlotte and Milwaukee before ending his career with the Atlanta Hawks in 2001. And good old #14, **Jon McGlocklin**, has been with the Bucks, first as a player, and then as an announcer for the past 35 years. McGlocklin, a 6'5" forward from Indiana, was an outstanding shooter and starter on the Bucks 70/71 NBA championship team. His buddy, Lew Alcindor, better known as **Kareem Abdul-Jabbar**, played with the Bucks from 1969 to 1975 before moving to the Lakers.

After retiring in 1973 as defensive end for the world champion Green Bay Packers, **Lionel Aldridge** went to work as a sportscaster at WTMJ-TV. At this point in his life Aldridge began to

hear voices in his head. He checked himself into the hospital, but after a period of drug treatment, Aldridge stopped taking the medicine so he could go back to work. The voices continued, though, his wife left him. The former sports hero spent the next two years homeless. He eventually returned to his medication and went on to become a board member of the Mental Health Association of Milwaukee County and a full-time speaker for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. Aldridge died of heart failure at the age of 57 in 1998.

But it was pro wrestling superstar Reggie Lisowski, better known as "**The Crusher**," who really put us on the sporting map. Lisowski began his wrestling career in 1949 at the Paris Ballroom, at 12th and Mitchell. For several years he wrestled by night while working stints as a brick-layer and factory worker by day. During a match at Chicago's Rainbo Arena, a promoter spotted Lisowski and signed him to the Dumont TV network. It was just the beginning of a long and illustrious career in which the 260-lb barrel-chested bulldozer steamrolled over villain after villain. Before he ended his ring career in 1989, The Crusher had become one of America's premier wrestling box office attractions. Other athletes with Milwaukee ties include **Oscar "Hap" Felsch**, a member of the 1919 Chicago "Black Sox," **Jackie Baumgart**, a 1950's professional female baseball player who made a cameo appearance in the film "A League of The Own," Olympic skaters **Dan Jansen** and **Bonnie Blair**, and perennial NBA bad boy **Latrell Sprewell**.



## The Politicians

One of the most controversial politicians in American history, **Joseph McCarthy** was born in 1908 on a farm near Appleton. He worked odd jobs all through school and saved enough to attend law school at Marquette University. Charming to people only when he wanted something, McCarthy gained a reputation as rude and dismissive. Seeking to be liked, he wound up being hated. In 1947 McCarthy defeated Robert LaFollette for the Republican senate seat. It was as a United States senator that McCarthy ruined countless lives as he doggedly searched for evidence of Communism.

**Golda Meir** (nee Mabovitch moved from Kiev to Milwaukee in 1906 at age 8 with her family, where they settled at 4<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets. She became a teacher and active Zionist as a young woman. In the 1940's she moved to Palestine with her husband, Morris Myerson (Meir), where they helped create a Jewish homeland. Golda stayed active in politics for the next 20 years, and in 1969, she became Israel's prime minister at age 70. The writings of distinguished US diplomat and historian **George F. Kennan** quickly emerged as foundational texts of the Cold War, expressing the Truman administration's new anti-Soviet policy. Born in Milwaukee in 1904, Kennan passed away earlier this year at the age of 101. Conservative Supreme Court justice **William H. Renquist** was born in Milwaukee in 1924. He was appointed to the Court by Richard Nixon in 1971. **Arthur MacArthur** was a young lawyer when he established a law practice here in 1849. MacArthur was elected city attorney just two years later and the family soon joined the ranks of the city's elite. They lived in a luxurious mansion on Marshall Street just south of Juneau. His grandson, **Douglas MacArthur**, was born in 1880 and would go on to become famous as the liberator of the Philippines during World War II and a military strategist at the outset of the Korean War.

And the premier black revolutionary of the 1960's, **Malcolm X** (born Malcolm Little), lived in Milwaukee for about a year in 1927. Baptist preacher Earl Little and his family were driven from Omaha by members of the Ku Klux Klan. The Littles settled in Milwaukee, where Malcolm's brother, Reginald, was born. From Milwaukee they fled to East Lansing, Michigan, where members of a terrorist group called the Black Legion murdered Malcolm's father in 1931.

## Gangsters, Assassins and Murderers

Legendary Chicago gangster "Scarface" **Al Capone** made a number of incognito visits to Milwaukee in the 1920's to check on his various business interests. His brother, Ralph Capone, was technically in charge of the Milwaukee operations, but since Capone often stayed at a resort near Hurley, Wisconsin, it was no trouble to do a little business on the way.

Milwaukee resident **Arthur Bremer** shot Alabama governor George Wallace in 1972 at a presidential campaign rally in Maryland. Bremer was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to 53 years in prison, which he is currently. Bremer was reportedly the inspiration for Martin Scorsese's 1976 film Taxi Driver. Bremer worked a busboy and dishwasher at the Milwaukee Athletic Club in the late 1960's. His secret journals, which revealed an isolated, suicidal personality, were published as "An Assassin's Diary" in 1973. President James Garfield's assassin, **Charles Guiteau**, was a resident of Milwaukee, having come here in December, 1878 to set up a law office at the corner of Water Street and Wisconsin Avenue. The only business he conducted while here was to collect bills. Guiteau, a religious fanatic, gave lectures at Plymouth Church on East Hampshire Avenue to small audiences. He also wrote a book stating the modern interpretation of the Bible was all wrong. The book was printed for a \$75 fee by the Evening Wisconsin newspaper. Guiteau did not pay the paper, but instead stole a number of copies and disappeared. He was next heard of in Chicago. On July 2, 1881, Guiteau shot President Garfield in a train station next to Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.



**Theodore Roosevelt**, a contender for the Presidency in 1912, was shot in front of the Gilpatrick Hotel by John Schrank. The would-be assassin fired a .32 caliber bullet from short range directly at Roosevelt's chest. Schrank, apprehended immediately at the scene, said that "any man looking for a third term ought to be shot." Roosevelt delivered part of his scheduled address with the bullet in his body, blood staining his white vest as he spoke to a large throng at the auditorium. Later, he collapsed and was rushed to Emergency hospital at 2nd and Michigan. The manuscript of his speech doubtless had done much to save his life. When he reached the platform at the Auditorium he drew the manuscript from his vest pocket so that the audience could see the bullet hole through the sheets of paper. "You see," cried Roosevelt. "It takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose!"

One of America's most notorious serial killers, **Jeffrey Dahmer** was born in 1960 at Deaconess Hospital. He lived in West Allis with his parents and his paternal grandmother. After spending his adolescent years in Ohio, Dahmer returned to Milwaukee and lived at Apartment 213 in Oxford Apartments, 924 North 25th Street. He killed 15 young men over the next five years in gruesome crimes that involved cannibalism and necrophilia. Arrested in 1991, Dahmer was sentenced to 15 consecutive life terms. He was murdered by another inmate three years later in a Portage, Wisconsin prison.

And this isn't even the entire list of luminaries from the area. There are celebrities from Milwaukee that will have to be recognized somewhere else. But the next time you hear someone say nothing ever happens around here, be sure and let 'em know about Harry Houdini, Carl Sandburg, Theda Bara and The Crusher!