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Arab World Fest

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Arab World Fest

Arabs are an ethnic linguistic group who trace their cultural heritage to one or more of the twenty-two modern Arab nation states. They began to settle in Milwaukee in late nineteenth century and since then have contributed significantly to the cultural, social, economic, and political life of the city and its surrounding regions. The [Arab-Syrian](#) community participated in the "Harvest Festival of Many Lands" at the [Milwaukee Midsummer Festival](#) on the lakefront in the 1930s.^[1] Members from the Arab Christian and [Muslim](#) communities established the Arab World Fest in 1998 to represent Arab-Americans' heritage and contributions to Milwaukee's cultural and economic life. It took place at [Henry Maier Festival Park](#) in the late summer.^[2] The fest was not organized for three years from 2011-2013 because it coincided with Ramadan.^[3] However, it was resumed in 2014, only to be cancelled permanently in 2015. The Arab Fest was sponsored by the Arabian Festivals, Inc., a non-profit organization.^[4]

The Arab Fest was usually arranged in three separate sections. The cultural tent included a fashion show and displays of cultural clothing and exhibits of artifacts from different Arab regions.^[5] The vendors' tent replicated the traditional Arab *al-souk* (market) selling culturally significant items such as scarfs, jewelry, arts, and books. [Food](#) vendors provided the attendees with a taste of authentic Arab cuisine and *qahwa* (coffee). The educational tent helped attendees learn about the history of Arab Americans and, on Saturday evening, presented popular Arab [singers](#), *debka* (folkdance) groups, and belly dancers.^[6]

Footnotes [-]

1. [^](#) “Milwaukee Syrians Hold Folk Festival,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 10, 1936; “Helped Entertain at Lakefront” *Milwaukee Journal*, July, 22, 1936; ; Enaya Othman, “Building a Community among Early Arab Immigrants in Milwaukee, 1890s-1960s,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 96 (Summer 2013): 38-49.
2. [^](#) Annysa Johnson, “[Milwaukee’s Arab World Festival Returns to Lakefront in 2014](#),” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 11, 2014.
3. [^](#) Matthew Reddin, “Arab World Fest Returns to Milwaukee’s Lakefront,” *Wisconsin Gazette.com*, August 7, 2014 <http://www.wisconsin Gazette.com/lifestyle/arab-world-fest-returns-to-milwaukees-lakefront.html>, now available at http://www.wisconsin Gazette.com/lifestyle/arab-world-fest-returns-to-milwaukee-s-lakefront/article_e30bbf00-116f-5cf4-b6c1-0abf2897c24a.html, last accessed May 1, 2017; Annysa Johnson, “[Milwaukee’s Arab World Festival Returns to Lakefront in 2014](#),” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 11, 2014.
4. [^](#) [Arab World Fest](#), last accessed May 1, 2017.
5. [^](#) “[Milwaukee Arab World Fest Shows a Wide Variety of Culture](#),” Leisure Group Travel, last accessed May 1, 2017.
6. [^](#) <http://www.jsonline.com/entertainment/29284814.html>, article no longer accessible; “[Milwaukee Arab World Fest Shows a Wide Variety of Culture](#),” Leisure Group Travel, last accessed May 1, 2017.

For Further Reading

Delk, Robert C. “Early Arabic Speaking Immigrants in Milwaukee,” *Milwaukee History* 7 (1984): 93-100.

Othman, Enaya. “Building a Community among Early Arab Immigrants in Milwaukee, 1990s-1960s.” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 96 (Summer 2013): 38-49.