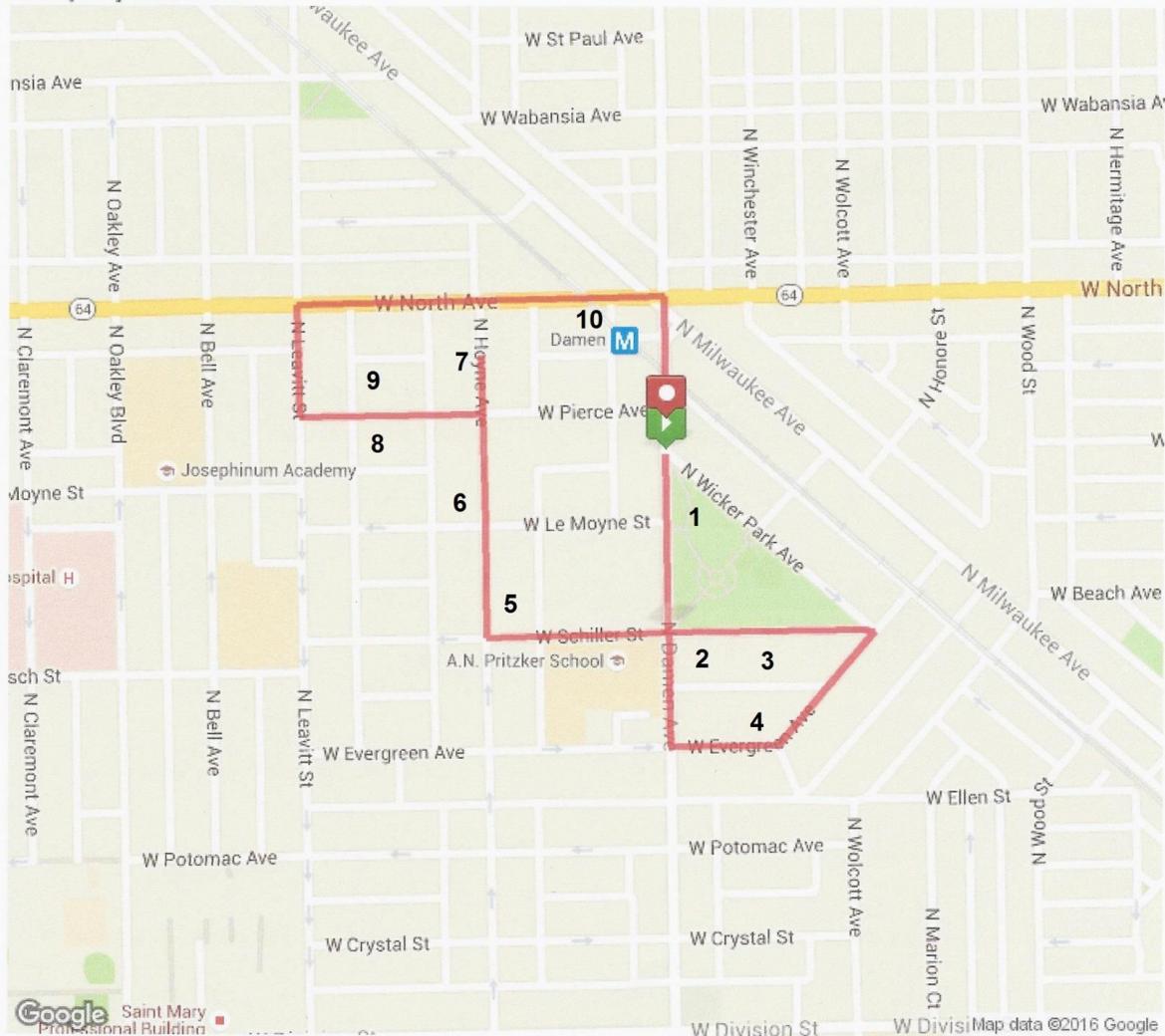




Wicker Park Walk
Distance: 1.43 mi
Elevation: 8.52 ft (Max: 609.12 ft)

mapmywalk



Wicker Park Walk

Adapted from Frommer's website: <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/chicago/755978>

Wicker Park, along with adjacent Bucktown, is mostly known today as a place to shop at edgy clothing boutiques or try out the latest hip restaurant. This tour takes you along the residential side streets that many tourists overlook but that testify to the rich history of this neighborhood. Middle-class artisans, mostly Germans and Scandinavians, began settling here around 1870. In the following decades, wealthy families whose foreign roots made them unwelcome along the Gold Coast built luxurious homes here as well. In the 20th century, the neighborhood's respectability gradually declined, and many of the grandest homes were converted into rooming houses. It was not

until the 1980s that the distinctive homes here began to be rediscovered and renovated, just as the gritty main streets of Milwaukee and Damen avenues began sprouting new shops and cafes.

Walk south along Damen Avenue to:

1. Wicker Park

Two brothers who were beginning to develop their extensive real estate holdings in the area donated this land to the city in 1870, hoping the green space would make the surrounding area more attractive to prospective builders. Unfortunately, little remains of the 19th-century landscaping, which once included a pond spanned by a rustic bridge.

Cross the park to the corner of Damen Avenue and Schiller Street. Follow Schiller east, along the park, stopping first at:

2. 1959-1961 W. Schiller St.

Built in 1886 for a ship's captain and a medical doctor, this double home reflects the fashionable Second Empire style. The building became a rooming house in the 1920s but has been restored to its original style. Note the lively Victorian colors of the cornices, tower, and trim. Other distinctive features are the large mansard roof and the decorative saw-toothed pattern in the brickwork.

Next move to:

3. 1941 W. Schiller St.

Built for clothing manufacturer Harris Cohn in 1888, this home is also known as the Wicker Park Castle. Essentially Queen Anne in design, its limestone facade made it pricier and more luxurious than its neighbors. Granite columns were polished to look like marble, and a turret rests on a shell-shaped base.

At the end of the block, turn right on Evergreen Avenue until you come to:

4. 1958 W. Evergreen Ave.

Novelist Nelson Algren lived in a third-floor apartment here from 1959 to 1975. After he was caught stealing a typewriter in 1933, Algren (1909-81) spent 3 months in jail. This experience, which brought him in contact with criminals, outsiders, drug addicts, and prostitutes, was a strong influence on his work. Algren is best remembered for his two dark novels of the urban semiunderworld, *A Walk on the Wild Side* and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (which was set near here, around Division St. and Milwaukee Ave.), and for his tough but lyrical prose poem *Chicago: City on the Make*.

Continue to Damen Avenue, then turn right (north) back to Schiller Street. Take Schiller west 1 block to Hoyne Avenue, then turn right (north), where you'll see:

5. 1407 N. Hoyne Ave.

Built by German wine and beer merchant John H. Rapp in 1880, this was the largest single-family estate in Wicker Park at the time. The original coach house, behind the mansion, is now a separate residence. This was not a happy home. Mrs. Rapp went insane, a son was convicted of

embezzlement, and Rapp was murdered by his female bookkeeper. The home itself is of Second Empire style, with a large, curved mansard roof. The original wrought-iron fence defines the boundaries of the original grounds.

Heading north, you'll pass other late 19th-century mansions and, at 1426 N. Hoyne Ave., an example of a worker's cottage, a reminder that in these immigrant neighborhoods, artisans and their patrons often lived side by side. On the next corner, at Hoyne Avenue and Le Moyne Street, is the:

6. Wicker Park Lutheran Church

The city's oldest Lutheran church, it was modeled from plans of Holy Trinity Church in Caen, France, dating from the 12th century. The stone for this Romanesque structure was recycled from a demolished brothel. When one of the scandalized parishioners protested, the pastor remarked that the building material "has served the devil long enough; now let it serve the Lord."

Walk on to:

7. 1558 N. Hoyne St.

The building permit for this Queen Anne-style home was issued in 1877, making it one of the oldest homes in the area. It was built for C. Hermann Plautz, founder of the Chicago Drug and Chemical Company. Ever conscious of the Great Chicago Fire, the builders created all the decorative trim on both towers, the cornices, and the conservatory of the south side from ornamental pressed metal. The seemingly misplaced cannon in the front yard is a relic of the years (1927-72) when the building housed the local American Legion.

Return to Pierce Avenue and walk west to:

8. 2137 W. Pierce Ave.

This well-preserved gem is one of the highlights of historic Wicker Park. Built for the German businessman Hermann Weinhardt in 1888, it's a fanciful combination of elements that defies categorization. Notable details include the elaborate carved-wood balcony and the unusual juxtaposition of green stone and redbrick limestone around the large front window. The large lot used to be flooded in the winter for ice-skating.

Across the street is another notable home:

9. 2138 W. Pierce Ave.

The original owner of this home, Hans D. Runge, was treasurer of a wood milling company, so it's no surprise that elaborate wood carvings characterize the home inside and out; among the unique designs are the Masonic symbols flanking the pair of dragon heads under the rounded arch. A well-heeled local banker and politician, John F. Smulski, acquired the house in 1902, about the time many Poles were moving into the neighborhood. Smulski committed suicide here after the stock market crash in 1929, and the house served for a time as the Polish consulate.

Continue west until you reach Leavitt Street. Turn right (north) and walk to North Ave. Turn East (right). As you pass Hoyne Street, take a quick look at 1617-1619 N. Hoyne Ave.; the building used

to house the neighborhood livery stables, where local families kept their horses and carriages. (It's now condos.) The final stop on the tour is at 2039 W. North Ave., an address that used to house the:

10. Luxor Baths

These public baths were built in the 1920s and were reportedly once a hangout for local politicians and wheeler-dealers. Today the building has been transformed into -- what else? -- condos. Still, it's a fitting end to the tour, a reminder of the days when this was a neighborhood of European immigrants trading news from home in the Luxor Baths steam room.

Head east to the three-way intersection of Milwaukee, Damen, and North avenues. From here, you can hop on the Blue Line El train, or grab a bite to eat or return to your car.