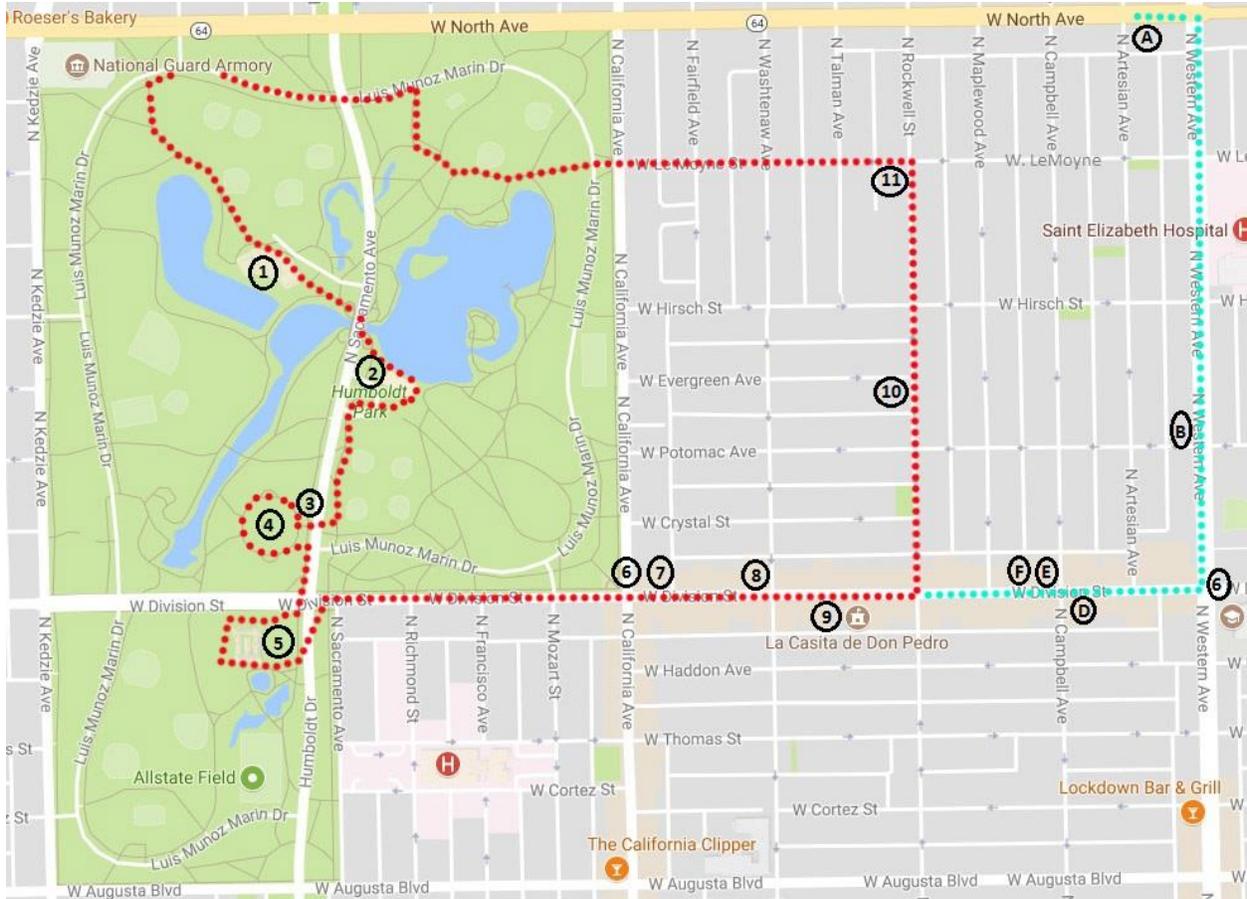


# East Humboldt Park Walk

## The Walk:



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This neighborhood has followed the pattern of so many Chicago neighborhoods. It has seen successive waves of immigrants, lured by rail access and factory work. Germans, Scandinavians, Poles, Jews and Italians lived here around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the century progressed, they migrated elsewhere. The area deteriorated and fell victim to gangs and decline.

The latter half of the century saw the area as a Latino “port of entry” neighborhood. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans comprised about 62% of the population by 1990. There were periods of riots and unrest among the Puerto Rican community because of police treatment of its residents. In 1995, Division Street found new life when city officials and Latino leaders decided on a public art project to recognize the neighborhood and the residents' roots. They christened

it "*Paseo Boricua*" and installed two metal Puerto Rican flags—each weighing 45 tons, measuring 59 feet (18 m) vertically and stretching across the street—at each end of the strip.

This is considered the flagship of Puerto Rican enclaves in the United States and is the political and cultural capital of the Puerto Rican community in the Midwest. It is home to a cultural center, colorful murals, vibrant street life and music, and a yearly festival and parade.

The neighborhood is changing once again. Gentrification has brought higher real estate values and taxes and poorer residents are getting edged out. Latino makeup has fallen to 47% and is declining.

Humboldt Park (the Park) is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Boathouse and Stables are designated Chicago landmarks.

**History of Humboldt Park, the Park:** (from Wikipedia) William Le Baron Jenney began developing the park in the 1870s, molding a flat [prairie](#) landscape into a "pleasure ground" with horse trails and a pair of lagoons. The park opened to the public in 1877, but landscape architects such as Jens Jensen made significant additions to the park over the next few decades. Between 1905 and 1920, Jensen connected the two lagoons with a river, planted a rose garden, and built a fieldhouse, boathouse, and music pavilion. There is an [audio tour](#) on the Chicago Park District website of the park that gives more history and information. (I have never been able to get that to download, but the walk is also available at [Tour Buddy](#).)

At the request of the largely German born population at the time, the park was named after Baron Freidrich Heinrich Alexander Von Humboldt (1759-1859), the famous German scientist and explorer, though Humboldt had only visited the U.S. once and had never been to Chicago.

### ***1.) Humboldt Park Fieldhouse 1400 N. Sacramento***

In 1928, the West Park Commission constructed a fieldhouse in Humboldt Park. The structure was designed by architects Michaelsen and Rognstad, who were also responsible for other notable buildings including the Garfield Park Gold Dome Building, the Douglas and LaFollette Park Fieldhouses, and the On Leong Chinese Merchant's Association Building in Chinatown.

### ***2.) Boathouse 1301 N. Sacramento***

Jens Jensen commissioned Schmidt, Garden, and Martin to design an impressive boat house and refectory building (1907) which still stands at one end of the historic music court. There is a café here which has outdoor seating and pretty views of the park.

### ***3.) Bison Bronzes at the Formal Garden***

The two bison at the Formal Garden were sculpted by Edward Kemeys who also created the lions in front of the Art Institute.

#### **4.) Formal Garden**

Jens Jensen created this garden in 1908. It once featured semi-circular beds of roses and other perennials, as well as an upper terrace with wooden and concrete pergolas, according to the [Jensen Formal Garden Restoration Project website](#).

"He called it a 'community garden' explaining that it was created for 'those who have no other gardens except their window sills,'" the website reads.

Over the years, the garden has deteriorated: the concrete walls and pergolas are cracking, the wood is rotting, some flowers beds have been sodded over and very few flowers remain, according to the website.

DNA Info reported on May 2, 2017 that the prominent Dutch designer behind the award-winning Lurie Garden in Millennium Park has been tapped to revitalize the garden. Plans include repairing the crumbling infrastructure and revitalizing the design features in keeping with Jensen's famous Prairie style.

#### **5.) Humboldt Park Receptory Building and Stable**

**3015 W. Division**

This beautifully restored building houses the only year round museum dedicated to Puerto Rican arts and culture, the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. It has received 23 million dollars in renovations over the last several years. The Chicago Landmark Commission report describes the building's appearance as "old German style of country house architecture" which looks vividly picturesque within the greenery of Humboldt Park. It was built in 1895 to house horses, wagons and landscaping tools.

It was designed by Frommann and Jepsen and also served as the office of the Humboldt Park Superintendent, Jens Jensen, whose office was in the turret. It is the oldest surviving building in Humboldt Park.

*The rest of this tour is taken verbatim from the [Humboldt Park Mural Tour](#) created by [architresures](#), an arts based community development organization.*

#### **6.) Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags, 1995**

**One flag at Western and Division and one flag at**

**California and Division**

Each flag weighs 45 tons, measures 56' high, and forms a 59' arch from one side of the street to the other. They are made out of steel and steel pipeline welded together. The flags were made out of steel to honor the first wave of Puerto Rican immigrants who established themselves in Chicago and the Midwest to work for its steel industry in the mid-1940s. The second wave of Puerto Ricans came specifically to work on steel pipelines, the material the flags are made out of. These flags act as the gateway to *Paseo Boricua*, the portion of Division Street between these flags.

**7.) *Co-Op Image Graffiti Mural, 2011 Co-Op Image***

***2750 West Division St.***

This graffiti style mural reflects the vitality of life on Division Street. The mural confirms that graffiti can be an art form and not just vandalism. The graffiti mural was legally sanctioned by an auto-mechanic shop that gave the organization permission to paint. The image in the center is from a photograph taken on April 16, 1936. Albizu Campos is rallying a crowd to become a force for independence.

**8.) *Born of Fire, 2006 Martin Soto***

***2700 West Division St.***

This mural is a complicated narrative about the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. It contains images about education, culture, sports, gang violence, and Puerto Rican historical figures. The mural reflects community, social, and political concerns as well as neighborhood history and achievements with specific reference to the 1996 Division Street Riots and the Three Kings Festival. After the Riots, the community became more politically active and vibrant. Puerto Rico's national flower, the maga, or hibiscus flower is depicted.

**9.) *La Casita de Don Pedro, 1998 archi-treasures, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, Puerto Rican Cultural Center of Chicago 2625 West Division St. •***

This is a park dedicated to Humboldt Park's Puerto Rican community designed to look like the Puerto Rican flag from above. Three red tiled stripes lead to the base of the statue, which is shaped like a star. "La casita" or "little house," is a replica of a 1940s typical rural house in Puerto Rico with a zinc roof and a porch. The statue of Don Pedro Albizu Campos located in the center of the park was originally intended to be installed in Humboldt Park but was rejected by the Chicago Park District because Albizu Campos was thought to be too controversial. The park hosts bomba and plena dance and drum classes, political rallies, concerts, art exhibits, and other events. La Casita de Don Pedro was one of archi-treasures' pilot projects completed in 1998.

**10.) *Honor Boricua, 1992 Hector Duarte***

***1318 North Rockwell St.***

The mural honors the Puerto Rican heritage of many people in Humboldt Park. The flag flying across the sea from Old San Juan, Puerto Rico to Chicago and back represents the ongoing exchange of culture, resources, people, and ideas between the communities. The mural illustrates transnational and multicultural messages. The artist interviewed community members about their stories and used their ideas to develop the theme for the mural. Borinquen is the original Taíno Indian name for the Island of Puerto Rico.

**11.) *Breaking the Chains, 1971 John Pitman Weber***

**1500 North Rockwell St.**

The mural is about community struggles. There are hands breaking the chains of poverty, racism, and war and holding up children carrying roses in a bright light that symbolizes a bright future for the next generation. The woman crying from the burning window is a reference to the arsons that plagued the community in the early 1970's when landlords began burning buildings to collect the insurance on them.

***If you want to see more murals, follow the aqua dotted line on the map and see more murals at stops A through F.***

**A.) *La Crucifixion de Don Pedro Albizu Campos, 1971 Mario Galan, Jose Bermudez, Hector Rosario***

**2425 West North Ave.**

Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, is depicted crucified in the center alongside two other Nationalists of the 1950s. Portraits of six independence and abolitionist leaders of the 19th century are lined across the top. The flag in the background is called the La Bandera de Lares. It represents Puerto Rico's first declaration of independence from Spain on September 23, 1868. This armed uprising is known as El Grito de Lares. It took nine years to save this mural from destruction. A new condominium was planned and if built, would have blocked off the mural. Community members concerned about gentrification of the neighborhood as well as saving the oldest Puerto Rican mural in Chicago went into action and saved it.

**B.) *I Will... The People United Cannot Be Defeated, 2004 Northeastern Illinois University Students***

**1300 North Western Ave.**

The mural is sending a message that encourages people to vote. It depicts the activist figures Mother Jones, Fred Hampton, Eugene Debs, and Lucy Parsons. The mural reflects the mass mobilization of people to exercise their right to vote and to become active leaders toward

positive social change. The title of the mural comes from a chant first heard at a Chilean protest.

***D.) 79th, 2009 John Vergara***

***2460 West Division St.***

This mural depicts the recently designed Paseo Boricua flag that recognizes Humboldt Park as the heart of the City's Puerto Rican community. The symbolism in the Coat of Arms connects Puerto Rico and its culture to the City of Chicago. Paseo Boricua is the first location outside the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to be granted the right to fly an official Municipal Flag of Puerto Rico. The reason this mural is titled "79th" is that there are 78 municipalities in Puerto Rico and Paseo Boricua has the honor of being named the 79th.

***E.) Sea of Flags, 2004 Gamaliel Ramirez with assistance from Star Padilla, Moncho, Luis Ortiz, Melissa Cintron, and community members***

***2500 West Division St.***

The mural depicts a cultural/music event called Fiesta Boricua (De Bandera a Bandera). The Festival attracts over 250,000 people every year and is held in September. Visitors can hear salsa, reggaeton, bomba, plena, and merengue music pulsing in the streets. The mural depicts some famous people including National Puerto Rican icon Lolita Lebrón, Pedro Pietri, and Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement who is depicted as a bronze statue on the left of the image. The abundance of Puerto Rican flags is an intentional comment by the artists. From 1898 to 1952, when Puerto Rico became annexed by the United States, it was considered a felony to display the Puerto Rican flag in public; the only flag permitted to be flown on the island was the United States flag.

***F.) Escuelita Tropical, 2005 Eren Star Padilla***

***2516 West Division St.***

This is one of the few murals in the area created by a female artist. Symbols on the mural refer to Taíno petroglyphs and pictographs found in the Caribbean as well as Aztec symbols from Mexico. The symbols are Pre-Columbian and speak to the cultural identity of the Puerto Rican and Mexican children of Viva Child + Family, the child development center that owns the building where the mural is located.

***Drive By Add On:***

Some may remember the terrible school fire at Our Lady of Angels on December 1, 1958. Those of us alive at the time will never forget the tragic images of the fire that killed 92 children and 3 nuns. The replacement school closed and is now leased to a charter school, but there is a memorial on site at 3808 W. Iowa St., a close drive from this walk.

