

Clark Fulton Neighborhood Driving Tour

Greater Cleveland's Latinx community has a deep, rich history. Beginning shortly after World War I, Mexicans immigrated to the area to take industrial jobs. Then, during World War II, many from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico began to migrate to the city, again filling jobs in industry. While the initial settlement of the Latinx community was on the city's East Side, it moved largely to the West Side by the mid- 1950s. Today, our city hosts several sites and landmarks, both east and west, that relate to this vibrant and ever evolving history.

This self-guided tour focuses on sites relating to the Puerto Rican community on Cleveland's Near West Side. It highlights parks, small businesses, and religious and cultural institutions created and maintained over the years by the Puerto Ricans, who currently constitute the largest segment of our growing Latinx community. The Western Reserve Historical Society is grateful to Selena Pagan and Claudia Longo for their guidance and work in creating this tour.



- **Start the tour at St. Michael the Archangel Church, located at 3114 Scranton Road (on the corner of Scranton and Clark Avenue.)**

Stop 1: St. Michael the Archangel Church

St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church represents the change in Cleveland's ethnic makeup over time. The church's congregation began as a mission from St. Mary's on the Flats, the first Catholic church in Cleveland, in 1881. The original church building burned down in 1891, while the current church was being built. The interior of the building is one of the finest in the Diocese of Cleveland with extraordinary décor and numerous statues.



St. Michael's original congregation was overwhelmingly German, as nearly 20% of the city's population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was of German descent. In the late 1940s, many families of Puerto Rican descent moved into the neighborhood, and by the 1970s St. Michael

the Archangel began offering masses in Spanish.

Today, St. Michael serves as an important hub for the Latinx community in the Clark Fulton neighborhood. The Victorian Gothic church is one of the stops on the annual Good Friday procession, which also includes La Sagrada Familia Church nearby.

- **From St. Michael, proceed west on Clark Avenue to W 25th Street.**
- **Take a left and head to Club Alma Yaucana at 2674 W 25th.**

Stop 2: Club Alma Yaucana

Named for the city of Yauco, Puerto Rico, Club Alma Yaucana has been a part of the Clark Fulton neighborhood since the 1960s. The social club was founded to provide a haven for Puerto Rican immigrants newly arrived in Cleveland. From its founding, Club Alma Yaucana operated under the mantra, “To promote unity and fraternity, to contribute to the enhancement of society, and to provide assistance to its members.”

Although that membership is small, Club Alma Yaucana offers many services to the community. It serves food and provides entertainment, but the club also serves as a community center whose goal is to be a positive example of community activism for Latinx youth in the Clark Fulton neighborhood.

The club is one of a number formed by Puerto Rican migrants from particular areas on the island. Many started on the East Side of Cleveland along St. Clair and Payne Avenues, but by the 1960s, the West Side became the primary area of settlement in the city.



- **Proceed south on W 25th Street to the Aragon Ballroom, located at 3179 W 25th.**

Stop 3: Aragon Ballroom

The Aragon Ballroom started out as a roller-skating rink in 1905. After a fire destroyed the rink in 1929, a local dance hall owner named George Meyers moved his business into the building to take advantage of the much larger space. He and his son built a 12,000 square foot dance floor and reopened the building as the Shadyside Gardens Dance Hall.

The dance hall became a huge hit in Cleveland. Many famous swing and big band orchestras played at the venue, including Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Lawrence Welk. Sadly, George Meyer did not enjoy his success for long. He was struck by a car and killed while crossing W 25th Street in 1933. His son Lloyd took over the business along with his wife Madalene.

They renamed the club the Aragon Ballroom in 1937, and for the next 50 years the Meyers family kept the Aragon going long after ballroom and swing dancing had faded from popularity in the United States. However, after Lloyd Meyers's death in 1984, the end was in sight for the Aragon. The family closed Cleveland's last ballroom in 1989.

Fortunately, the story does not end there. Local businessman Ali Faraj bought the building in 2015 after it was slated for demolition. He is currently restoring the Aragon Ballroom to its former glory with plans to reopen it as a banquet hall and convention center.



- **Proceed south on W 25th Street to Meyer Avenue and take a right.**
- **Proceed west on Meyer to W 30th Street and take a right.**
- **Arrive at Lincoln-West High School at 3202 West 30th.**

Stop 4: Lincoln-West High School

Lincoln-West High School began as a merger between two older public schools in Cleveland. West High School opened as the city's second public high school in 1852 and, after moving several times, became a permanent facility at Franklin and W 69th Street in 1902. Lincoln High School opened in 1901 as an offshoot of West as the school's enrollment became too large.

The two schools joined together in 1970, and the current school building on W 30th Street opened in 1973. Although the school has a large population of Puerto Rican students, Lincoln-West's student body includes more than 40 nationalities from all over the world.



- **Proceed north on W 30th to Clark Avenue and take a left.**
- **Proceed west on Clark to W 38th Street and take a right.**
- **Proceed north on W 38th to Seymour Avenue and take a right to arrive at Roberto Clemente Park.**

Stop 5: Roberto Clemente Park

Roberto Clemente Park on Seymour Avenue honors one of the finest baseball players of all time. Born in Bario San Anton in Carolina, Puerto Rico, Roberto Clemente played pro ball in Puerto Rico from 1952 to 1954, and then, after a stint in the minors, he debuted for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955. In his eighteen years with the Pirates, he played in fifteen all-star games and compiled a lifetime batting average of .317 while earning the Golden Glove award for an astounding twelve consecutive seasons. His skills helped the Pirates to two World Series championships.



But he was perhaps better known for off-season charity work focused largely on assisting people in need in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and other Latinx countries. He once stated, “Everyone knows I’ve been struggling all my life. I believe that every human being is equal, but one has to fight hard all the time to maintain that equality.” It was on a trip to help victims of an earthquake in Nicaragua in late 1972 that he died in a tragic airplane crash at the age of 38. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame the following year, the first Latin American and Caribbean player to be so honored.

Naming the park after Clemente both honors him and the Latinx community that he represented as a player and a social change agent.

- **Proceed east on Seymour to Fulton Road and take a right.**
- **Proceed south on Fulton to Clark Avenue and take a left.**
- **Proceed east on Clark to W 33rd Street and take a right.**
- **Arrive at Club San Lorenzo at 3131 W 33rd Street.**

Stop 6: Club San Lorenzo



Gerardo Gomez and Moises Maldonado founded Club San Lorenzo in 1963. Named for their mutual hometown in Puerto Rico, the club gave the men a place to find part of the homes they left behind. By creating a community center for Puerto Ricans living in Cleveland, Gomez and Maldonado created a place for recent immigrants to learn English, to find help navigating the social landscape of a new city, and to enjoy traditional Puerto Rican food and entertainment.

In time, Club San Lorenzo became an important center for Puerto Rican community activism. Gomez and Maldonado founded the Spanish-American Committee to help members of the community buy homes and start businesses in the neighborhood. Younger generations of Puerto Rican entrepreneurs and activists carry on the tradition of helping their community at Club San Lorenzo today.

Moises Maldonado's papers are now part of the collections of the Western Reserve Historical Society's Research Library.

- **Return to Clark Avenue and head east. Marcelo New Hair Design is located at 3126 Clark Avenue, on the corner of W 32nd Street.**

Stop 7: Marcelo New Hair Design

In April 2014, the building located at the corner of Clark Avenue and West 32nd was demolished, and with it, an important part of the history of the neighborhood of Clark Fulton was gone. Those walls held the city's first Puerto Rican "barberia," owned by Marcelo Galarza.

Galarza always wanted to be a hairdresser since an early age in his native Caguas, Puerto Rico. In 1967, he moved to Cleveland with the idea of opening his own hair salon. Thanks to a small business loan in 1984, and after working for many years in other salons, Galarza was able to purchase his own building on Clark Avenue, which was torn down in 2014.

Galarza moved into his current location of 4812 Clark Avenue that same year. Marcelo New Hair Design continues to be a staple of the Puerto Rican community of Cleveland, welcoming old and new clients to its chairs on a regular basis, cutting hair for generations of families in the Latino community.

Some of his most loyal customers have been going to Marcelo's since the beginning, more than 30 years ago. Some of those customers include famous Cleveland Indians players, such as Puerto Rican catcher Sandy Alomar Jr., and Dominican pitchers Julian Tavaréz and José Mesa. Another regular was Puerto Rican third base Carlos Baerga, who would sign autographs for the children who would gather outside the barber shop as soon as they heard their baseball idols were in the neighborhood.

Galarza, now 70 years old, continues offering Latinos and non-Latinos alike a place to get a haircut and catch up with what is going on in the community. Galarza has seen many hairstyles come and go in his long career as a barber, but his passion for making people look and feel good has never changed.



- **Continue east on Clark Avenue to Old San Juan Jewelers at 2705 Clark Avenue (on the right.)**

Stop 8: Old San Juan Jewelers

Old San Juan Jewelers began in a small barbershop in 1992. It was started by Roman Pagan, raised in Puerto Rico, who had long dreamed of starting a jewelry business. He began with just two small jewelry display cases and a small repair room while also working at a factory. He quickly built up a loyal clientele and in 2001 opened the current store in Cleveland's Hispanic Village.

When the store first opened its doors, and for a long time afterwards, its primary customers were Puerto Ricans from the neighborhood. But now they are proud to say that they serve people from all over Northeast Ohio, and even out of state. Because they do mail-in orders, they can reach a much larger clientele than in the past.

Many people in the community shop at Old San Juan because it is the only jeweler in the area that carries many traditional Latino cultural items, such as azabache bracelets, which most Latinos and particularly Puerto Ricans give to babies when they are born, or the Mexican "arras matrimoniales," which are wedding tokens. At Old San Juan, people can also find items from other cultures such as the traditional Italian horn or the Islamic evil eye.

Today, Old San Juan offers a variety of name-brand jewelry and specializes in jewelry repair and engraving. People celebrating weddings and special occasions like communions or "quinceañeras" in the community come to Old San Juan because of its reputation, its connection to the community, and its personal touch.



- **Continue east on Clark Avenue to W 25th Street and take a left.**
- **Proceed north on W 25th to Las Tiendinitas del Mercado at 2885 W 25th (on the left.)**

Stop 9: Las Tienditas del Mercado

Julio Cesar “Cesi” Castro’s family immigrated to Cleveland in the 1950s from Yauco, Puerto Rico. One of 19 children, he worked in steel mills and for Ford Motor Company before opening Cesi’s Caribe Grocery on W 25th Street in 1967. Cesi and his wife Norma operated the store for more than 50 years before his death in 2017 at age 81.

Cesi Castro was a fixture in the Clark Fulton neighborhood. He practiced a kind of philanthropy that does not often make headlines, but it was a true gift to his community. He frequently gave away groceries on credit to those who could not pay, and he loaned money to people that banks would not help. His impact in his neighborhood was so great that Cesi was known as “The Mayor of West 25th Street.”

Although Cesi is gone, his spirit of entrepreneurship and giving back to his community lives on at his store. The site now serves as an incubator for Latinx-owned small businesses as part of the Las Tienditas del Mercado program created by the Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development. Cesi’s store now hosts small shops that provide a place for young entrepreneurs to start their businesses so that they can continue Cesi’s work of giving back to their community.

This concludes the driving tour, but there are several sites outside the Clark Fulton neighborhood that are important to the Latinx community.



Bonus Stops

La Sagrada Familia, 7719 Detroit Avenue

The need for Catholic churches that offered Spanish-language sermons and confessions became an important factor as Cleveland's Latinx population began to expand in the years after World War II. Initially Spanish-speaking Trinitarian priests at our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church and St. Paul's Shrine filled this need on the city's East Side. As the population shifted to the West Side the Puerto Rican community purchased a church on West 32nd Street which became San Juan Bautista Catholic Church in 1975. The first Pentecostal Spanish church, the Spanish Assembly of God, was established on West 11th Street in 1952.

Other existing parishes, including St. Michael's and Our Lady of Lourdes, also offered Spanish-language services for the community. However, the opening of La Sagrada Familia Church at 7719 Detroit in 1988 marked a true watershed for the Latinx community as it was built and consecrated as a Spanish-language parish, the only fully Hispanic Catholic Church in the city. Today, the church hosts several events that mark important dates in the Mexican and Puerto Rican calendars, as well as those of newer Latinx communities such as the growing Peruvian population, which each year holds a procession to celebrate the Lord of the Miracles (Señor de los Milagros).



Bonus Stops

Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center, 2800 Archwood Avenue

Julia De Burgos was a Puerto Rican poet, activist, feminist, and staunch supporter of Puerto Rican independence. Her poetry, which focused on themes of social justice, individualism, and strength against adversity, touched a large audience. In Cleveland, Daisy Rivera sought to honor De Burgos's memory by creating a cultural arts center.

With the help of the Cultural Educational Institute for Boricua Advancement and the Hispanic Parents Union, Rivera opened the Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center in 1989. The center's mission is to be a family-oriented resource for Latinx youth and their families and to foster cultural pride and art appreciation.

Among other programs, the Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center offers an artist collective that provides workshops and job opportunities, dance lessons in traditional Latinx styles and modern forms, and the Miss Latina Image Program, which is a six-month mentoring program to guide young Latina women towards successful careers and a lifetime of outreach and community service.

The Center is housed in Archwood United Church of Christ, one of the oldest congregations in Cleveland. It began in 1819 as the Congregational Church of Brooklyn (the name of the township). The current building was completed in 1929, replacing a previous building on the site which had been erected in 1879.



Bonus Stops

Dave's Mercado, 3565 Ridge Road

Located on Ridge Road, Dave's Mercado is one of several Dave's Supermarkets in the Greater Cleveland Area, but unique in its Spanish name. Located in one of the largely Latinx communities of the city, Dave's carries a variety of products to meet the culinary needs of the community. Dave's supermarkets began in Cleveland in 1930 with a small produce wagon on Payne Avenue and have been owned and operated by five generations of the Saltzman family.



Puerto Rican Day Parade

Puerto Rican Friendly Day began in Cleveland in 1969. The parade and festival bring the community together to celebrate its culture and unity, and to educate the Cleveland community about Puerto Rican culture. Accompanied by food, music, and special events, it has, in the half century since it started, become one of the "must-see" events in Cleveland's summer calendar.

The parade and festival have ebbed and flowed over the years, but it has remained a fixture of the Clark Fulton neighborhood. The Hispanic Police Officers Association took over organizing the event for its 50th anniversary, seeing the parade as an opportunity to give back to the community and to foster a spirit of community between the police and the neighborhood.

2020 marks the first time the Puerto Rican Day Parade was canceled since 1969, but the organizers hope to be back in a big way in 2021.



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photos you took along the tour.

 **Western Reserve
Historical Society**

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