Self-Guided
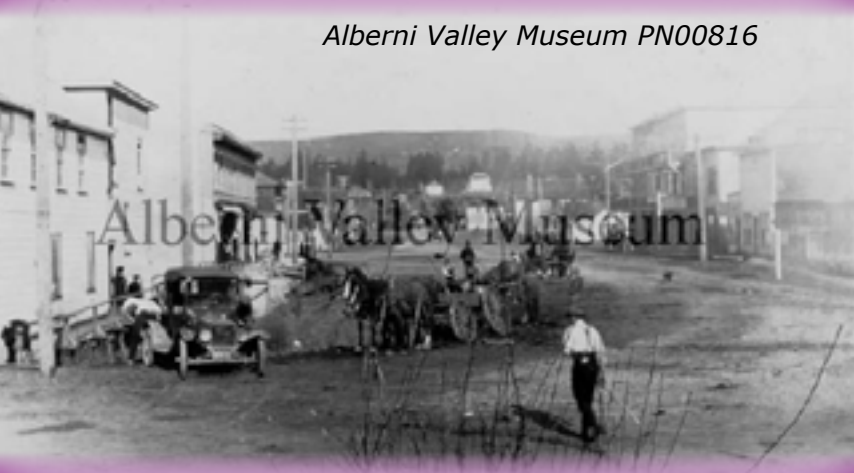# Historic Walking Tour

Alberni Valley Museum PN00816

Northport Area:
The Old Town of Alberni

BEGIN

Self-Guided Walking Tour

NORTHPORT AREA:
The Old Town of Alberni
(Victoria Quay/Johnston Rd./
Elizabeth St./Margaret St.)

THEME *Built heritage of what was once the City of Alberni. (Please stay on the street or sidewalk and be respectful of private properties included on the tour.)*
DISTANCE *Approx. 2.5 km.*
TIME *Approx. 30-40 min.*
MORE INFO *Visit* https://playinpa.ca/online-resources/ *for more heritage resources, including self-guided historic walking tours for two other areas of the city.*

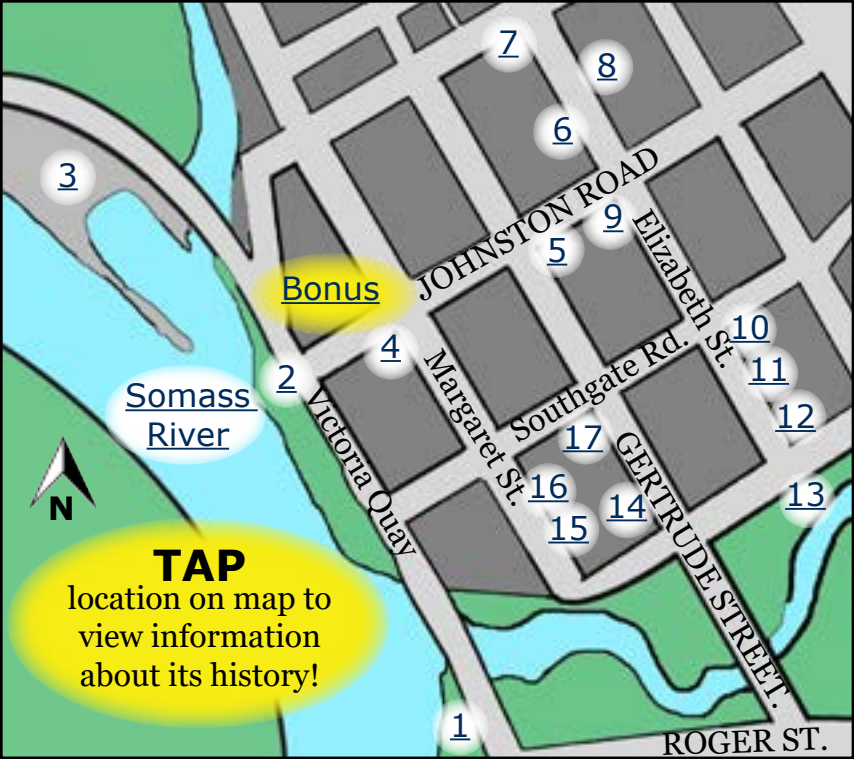**Please note that some mobile PDF readers may not support interactive features of the tour.**

NEXT

Hosted by the
Alberni Valley Museum

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The City of Port Alberni lies within the territory of two Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations, the Tseshaht and the Hupacasath. Resettlement started in 1860 with Edward Stamp's sawmill, at what is now Harbour Quay. It closed in 1865, but Stamp's partner, Anderson & Co., acquired title to its land claim in 1879. This, combined with the imposition of the Indian Reserve system, opened up the area for resettlement. Development began on the small farming town of Alberni (north of where the Stamp mill had been) in the 1880s. In the 1890s, the community of "New Alberni" emerged to the south, around the former sawmill site. It soon overtook Alberni in its rapid growth, thanks to its industrial economy and the 1912 arrival of the railway. Port Alberni (the Southport area of today's city) was incorporated in 1912, followed by Alberni (the Northport area) in 1913. The "Twin Cities" grew side by side, in cooperation and rivalry, until financial and operational factors, including the reconstruction effort following a tsunami in 1964, led to their amalgamation in 1967.

CONTINUE TO MAP

TAP location on map to view information about its history!

1. Mill Stone Park
2. Victoria Quay
3. Clutesi Haven Marina
4. 5022 Johnston Rd. (Arlington Hotel)
5. 4888 Johnston Rd. (Alberni Post Office)
6. 4632 Elizabeth St.
7. 4690 Elizabeth St.
8. 4651 Elizabeth St.
9. 4574 Elizabeth St. (St. Andrews Church)
10. 4487 Elizabeth St.
11. 4423 Elizabeth St.
12. 4405 Elizabeth St.
13. Rogers Creek
14. J&L Drive-In
15. 4439 Margaret St.
16. 4455 Margaret St.
17. 4926 Southgate Rd. (All Saints Church)

1. Mill Stones. These mill stones, originally from Aberdeen, Scotland, were from the first paper mill in B.C., the B.C. Paper Manufacturing Company, which operated on the banks of the Somass River from 1894-1896. Production was severely limited by the fact that the managers lacked the knowledge, experience and equipment to produce wood pulp, and they mostly made paper from rags, which had to be shipped from England. In 1948, Bloedel, Stewart & Welch had the stones made into a monument to commemorate the early history of paper production in the province. They stood for many years outside the pulp mill on Stamp Avenue (visible just down the river) until they were moved to Victoria Quay in 2016.

Alberni Valley Museum PN02595: Mill stones on display at Bloedel, Stewart & Welch Pulp & Paper Division, 1950.

Alberni Valley Museum PN00759: Victoria Quay in the early 1900s.

2. Victoria Quay was the centre of the early pioneers' settlement. This strip was home to a post office, bank, barber shop, stores, hotels, and the first City Hall. Vessels like the *Willapa*, *Queen City* and the *Tees* navigated up the Somass River at high tide to unload freight. The *Tees* is especially remembered for having brought electricity to the small farming community of Alberni in 1893.

Nuu-chah-nulth Carvings: The Welcome Figures stand at the bottom of Johnston Rd. with their arms outstretched, welcoming visitors to the area. Right next to them is the Hupacasath Whaling Monument, designed by Vancouver artist Lionel Thomas and carved by local artists Godfrey Hunt and Douglas Cramner.

Mile Zero: In 1912, hundreds gathered at Victoria Quay for the installation of a post recognizing the terminus of the Trans-Canada Highway. In the spirit of rivalry between the two towns, pranksters from Port Alberni stole the sign in the middle of the night and replanted it at Argyle and Kingsway; Port Alberni's mayor, Arthur Waterhouse, made sure that the sign was returned. In 1950, the terminus, or Mile Zero, was moved to Victoria.

Alberni Valley Museum PN00436: Crowd gathered at Victoria Quay for the installation of Mile Zero, 1912.
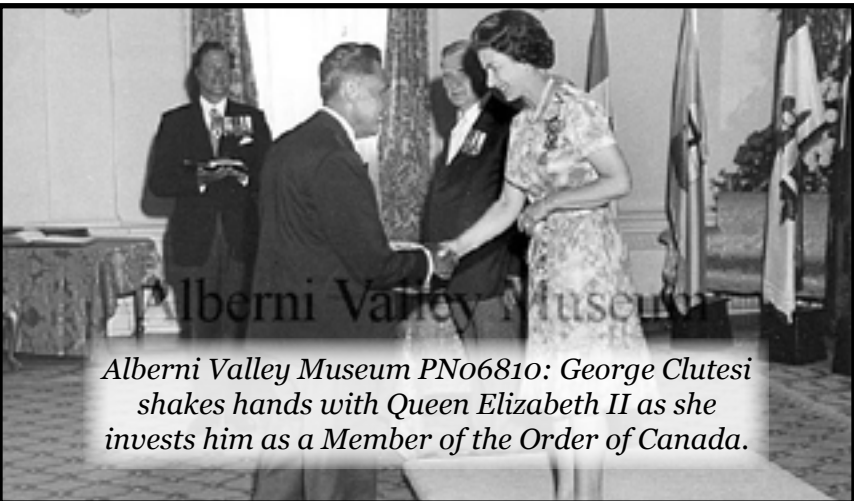
The town of Alberni was built on the banks of **The Somass River**, which flows into the Alberni Inlet. Its name comes from the Nuu-chah-nulth word "tsoo-ma-as", meaning "washing".

Tsunami: In 1964, an earthquake in Alaska sent a tsunami down the West Coast all the way to California. This wave funnelled into the Alberni Inlet and then into the Somass, causing millions of dollars' worth of property damage in Port Alberni and Alberni. However, thanks to the efforts of volunteer rescue squads, there were no casualties in the Alberni Valley.
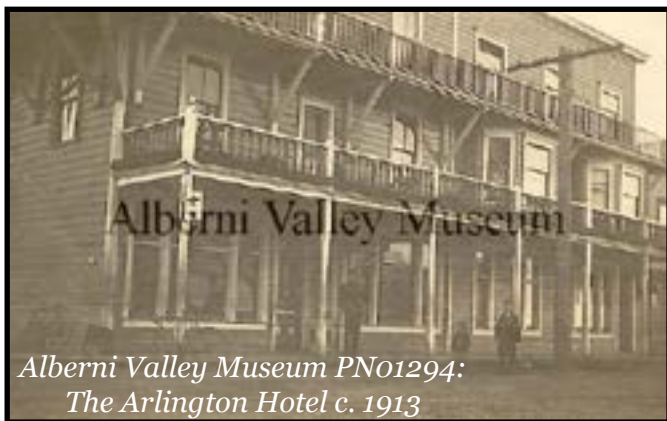

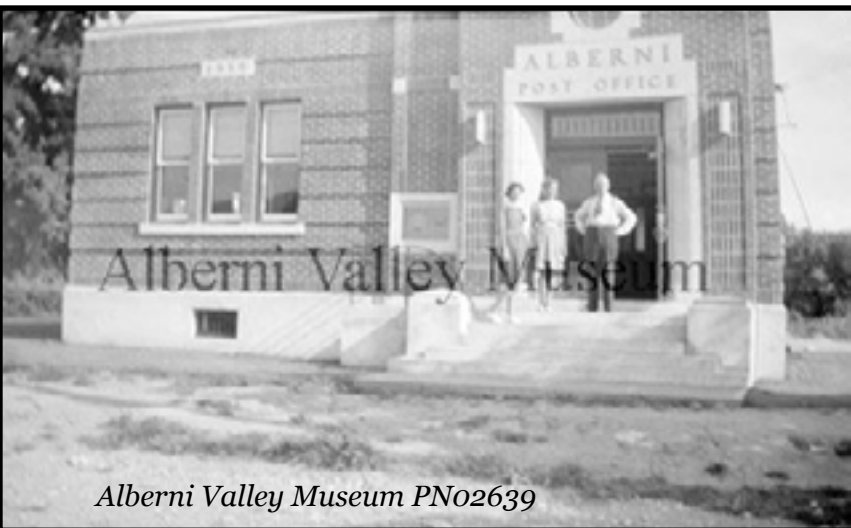*Alberni Valley Museum PN12299: Tsunami aftermath, 1964.*

3. Clutesi Haven Marina is located at the junction of Kitsuksis Creek and the Somass River, which has long been a central location for fishing. It was once named Fish House Point. When a 200-berth boating marina was installed in 1973, a contest was held to re-name the facility. The name "Clutesi Haven" was chosen to honour George Clutesi, a member of the Tseshaht tribe who became well-known across Canada for his work as an artist. A writer, painter, actor, and filmmaker, Clutesi was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1973 for his contributions to preserving indigenous culture.

Alberni Valley Museum PN06810: George Clutesi shakes hands with Queen Elizabeth II as she invests him as a Member of the Order of Canada.

4. The building at 5022 Johnston Road, originally known as the **Arlington Hotel**, was built by Matt Ward in 1893. It had its own private water system from Rogers Creek. Destined to become a social centre in the years to come, the hotel was before its completion the scene of a dance attended by most of the people in the Valley. Wet timbers steamed as several heaters were fired to warm up the room, babies slept in corners while parents enjoyed the festivities, and Jack Burke (who managed the livery stable just across Margaret Street from the hotel) called the square dances as Mrs. Ward played the piano. Farmers, miners and residents lined up on the verandah facing Johnston Road to await the arrival of the stagecoach from Nanaimo. Many additions and structural changes have been made to the building since the time it was built.

Alberni Valley Museum PN01294:
The Arlington Hotel c. 1913

Alberni Valley Museum PN02639

5. 4888 Johnston Rd. The **Alberni Post Office** was built in 1939 by Thor Peterson at a cost of $18,000. At the time, it was considered to be "of modern construction in every respect". It boasted 480 letter boxes, plus additional parcel boxes. A petition in 1949 called for home delivery, which neighbouring Port Alberni already had, to relieve congestion. In 1951, a new side entrance was added to give access to the basement which was used during the Christmas rush for delivery of parcels. The town finally got home delivery in 1961 after Fred Bishop was elected mayor, as the previous mayor, Mabel Anderson, had been strongly opposed to home delivery.

6. 4632 Elizabeth Street is the former home of Mabel Anderson, mayor of Alberni 1960-61. The first female mayor on Vancouver Island, Anderson is remembered for her feistiness and her unique approach to municipal politics. She made it her mission to preserve Alberni's identity at all costs. As a result, she argued fiercely with aldermen who wanted to follow Port Alberni's lead in updating postal services and sewer systems, as she feared that this risked Alberni being absorbed into the other city's jurisdiction. She and her husband Billy ran a greengrocer's shop on Johnston Road, just around the corner from their house.

Alberni Valley Museum PN05554: Alberni City Council, 1960. L-R: R.R. Foxcroft, F.A. Bishop, T.S. Barnett, Mayor Mabel S. Anderson, G.S. Lundine, C.M. Blair, G.A. Dunbar.

7. 4690 Elizabeth Street was the home and medical practise of Dr. William Chesley (Ches) Pitts from 1937 to 1970. The doctor's father, Rev. Frank Edwin Pitts, was the principal of the Alberni Residential School from 1927-1937, and his sister, Ketha Adams, also taught there. The house was built by Thor Peterson.

8. 4651 Elizabeth Street (Hospitality House). Built in 1914 by George Forrest, who lived there with his wife Catherine and their family, this was known as "Hospitality House" because of the Forrests' welcoming attitudes to all who called. George came to Alberni in 1891 and first worked in the paper mill before working as a carpenter and contractor, building many of the early homes in the area as well as the Pacheena Lighthouse, taking all the lumber down the inlet in small boats. He owned Forrest Undertaking Parlour (the district's first undertaker service, located at the corner of Johnston and Elizabeth) and a sash and door factory. He also served on the first Alberni council, and sat as alderman for 13 years and mayor for one.

9. 4574 Elizabeth Street (Formerly St. Andrew's Church). In 1892, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was built as a community project by an inter-denominational group of people, mostly volunteers. In 1914, a new church was built and the first relegated to the status of church hall, but when the new church burned down just two years later, the congregation returned to the original building. The present structure was completed in 1939. Dedication services for the new church were held by Dr. S.S. Osterhout, then-president of the United Church, assisted by then-minister Rev. A. MacLean. In 2001, the building was left empty when St. Andrew's amalgamated with First United to create Alberni Valley United Church. *Alberni Valley Museum PN00436: St. Andrew's prior to 1914.*

10. 4487 Elizabeth Street (Carter House)
Built in 1930 for Harry Carter, owner of Carter's Hardware Store, where Mabel and Billy Anderson worked before they opened up their grocery store.

11. 4423 Elizabeth Street (Carrich Cottage).
Built in 1914, this was the home of James Thomson and his wife, Margaret McGregor Thomson. It was named after the Scottish Earl of Carrich, a family ancestor. The Thomsons emigrated from Scotland in 1891. James first operated Thomson's General Store at River Bend, and later opened a second store in Alberni at Margaret and Southgate. He held an interest in the B.C. Paper Manufacturing Co. (1891-1894), the first paper mill built in the Alberni Valley. He was also the community's first coroner.

Alberni Valley Museum PN15972: Carrich Cottage c. 1950.

12. 4405 Elizabeth Street (Thomson House)
Built in 1900. Johnnie Thomson, son of James and Margaret, who operated Thomson's General Store with his father, lived in this house.

13. Rogers Creek. Named for Jeremiah (Jerry) Rogers, a New Brunswick logger who worked for the Anderson Mill in 1860. This was an important water source for Alberni. A dam was constructed two miles up the creek and a wooden stave pipe line laid into town to a tank further up the hill. This waterway also used to represent the dividing line between the two towns.

Alberni Valley Museum PN01635: Rogers Creek dam (part of the Alberni water system) circa 1936.

14. J&L Drive-In. The oldest established drive-in on Vancouver Island, and one of the last remaining, the J&L was built in 1969 by Jacques and Angela Gauthier.

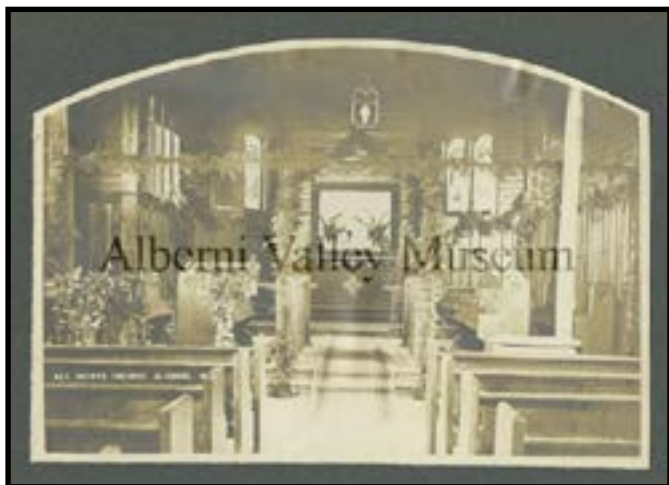**15. 4439 Margaret Street** (Formerly Home of Dr. Arthur D. Morgan). Built in 1910 for Dr. Arthur D. Morgan by contractor John Moneylaws. Dr. Morgan, an Alberni physician, was a dapper little man who pedaled his bicycle around town to make house calls. He hired a horse and buggy from Jack Burke's livery stable when he had to travel farther afield visiting patients in Beaver Creek or Cherry Creek. Originally from a Welsh pioneer family that had settled in Nanaimo, he came to Alberni in 1906. Many sick and injured people were treated at this house before West Coast General Hospital was built. *Top right, Alberni Valley Museum PN15946: this house circa 1950. Top left, Alberni Valley Museum PN00091: portrait of Dr. A.D. Morgan, date unknown.*

16. 4455 Margaret Street. Built by George Forrest in 1911 for the J.L. Hanna family. Son L. Arnold Hanna arrived from Golden that same year and opened a law practice. He served as mayor of Alberni from 1924-1928 and MLA from 1928-1933, before returning to private practice. He was elevated to the bench in 1940. Judge Hanna was born in Bracebridge, Ontario and received early education in Victoria, articling with the D.S. Tait law firm. During his time as MLA he fought for education, a road to the West Coast, and the preservation of Cathedral Grove (Macmillan Provincial Park). *Top left, Alberni Valley Museum PN00414: Judge Hanna (far left) swearing in city aldermen in 1950. Below, Alberni Valley Museum PN16326: 4455 Margaret Street circa 1950.*

Alberni Valley Museum PN00059: Interior of All Saints Anglican Church, 1908.

17. 4926 Southgate (Formerly All Saints Anglican Church). The oldest church building still standing in Port Alberni, built in 1897-8 to house Alberni's Anglican congregation. The site was donated by the Anderson Company, who owned the townsite. Victoria architect Mr. Keith designed the building; George Forrest built it with the help of Scottish carpenter John King. The contract price for the building was less than $1,700. George Bird, a city alderman, local entrepreneur, and avid cyclist, built the spire. The first service was held September 3, 1898, with the Reverend Swithin Asquith presiding.

When the church was completed, the congregation turned its attention to building a hall and a driving shed to protect the horses, necessary as these were the days before automobiles and some congregants travelled quite a distance to attend. The hall was constructed on high posts to allow protection for the horses underneath. The length of the church was extended in 1962 to provide seating for an additional fifty people, and a new vestibule entrance was added. All Saints closed its doors in 2004.

Alberni Valley Museum PN02833: The church building in 1975.

Bonus: Original Land Surveys

After 1879, when Anderson & Co. acquired title to the 2500 acres of land associated with the 1860-65 sawmill venture, the province of BC opened up Alberni Valley lands for pre-emption. In the 1880s Anderson & Co. laid out the Alberni townsite, and sold lots in what was intended as a service centre for incoming agricultural settlers. In 1907, in exchange for a large block of Anderson & Co. land, the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway agreed to locate its terminus in New Alberni (re-named Port Alberni in 1910). Anticipating a land boom, Anderson & Co. formed the Alberni Land Company to oversee the 1910 subdivision and sales of its lands. The real estate firm of Carmichael & Moorhead acted as the agents of the Alberni Land Co.

In Alberni, the streets were named for Anderson Company officials and their relations. The town was bordered by Nanaimo Road (now Burke Road) to the north, Helen Street to the east, Roger Creek to the south and the Somass River and Kitsuksis Creek to the west. In Port Alberni, the avenues were numbered one to twelve, and the thirteenth, the eastern boundary, was called Anderson Avenue. The other boundaries were Wallace Street to the north, Bruce Street to the south, and the Alberni Inlet to the west. The city has now expanded well beyond these boundaries and a few streets have had their names changed, but many street names date back to these original surveys.

Thanks for walking with us!
Alberni Valley Museum
4255 Wallace Street
Port Alberni, B.C. V9Y 3Y6

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-5pm
Open to 8pm on Thursdays. Check website
for extended summer hours.

Links
- Our website: https://playinpa.ca/museum-2/
- More historic walking tours: https://playinpa.ca/online-resources/
- Online historic photograph archive: portalberni.pastperfectonline.com
- Photos and stories of the 1964 Tsunami: www.virtualmuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibit/the-great-tsunami-of-1964/

Contact Us
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