Self-Guided
Historic Walking Tour

Alberni Valley Museum PN00304

Southport Harbour Area:
Port Alberni's Business & Industry

BEGIN

Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

SOUTHPORT HARBOUR AREA:
Port Alberni's Business & Industry (Harbour Quay/Lower Argyle St./ First Ave.)

THEME *Early business development and industrial heritage of the harbour area of Port Alberni.*
DISTANCE *Less than 1 km.*
TIME *Approx. 10-20 min.*
MORE INFO *Visit https://playinpa.ca/museum-2/ for more heritage resources, including self-guided historic walking tours for two other areas of the city.*

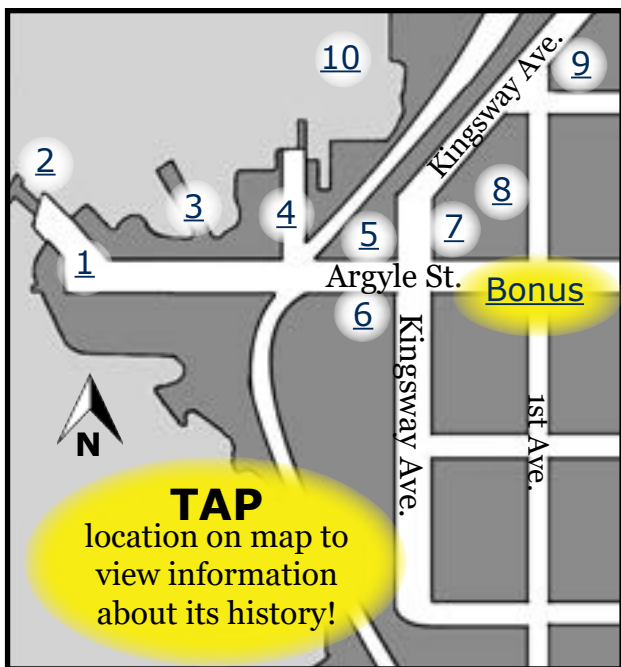**Please note that some mobile PDF readers may not support interactive features of the tour.**

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.

On the map:

10

9 — Kingsway Ave.

2

3

4

8

5

7

Argyle St.

Bonus

6

Kingsway Ave.

1st Ave.

N

TAP
location on map to
view information
about its history!

1. Harbour Quay
2. Centennial Pier/
Alberni Inlet
3. Argyle Pier/
Banfield Lifeboat
4. Bird Street
5. Historic Port
Alberni Train Station
(3100 Kingsway)

6. The Carmoor Block
7. Site of the former
Somass Hotel
8. Alberni Hardware
(3146 1st Ave.)
9. Kingsway Hotel
(3203 1st Ave.)
10. Fisherman's
Harbour

Back to start   **Finish**

Alberni Valley Museum PN00113: The harbour circa 1913.

1. Harbour Quay. On June 29, 1860, the schooner Meg Merrilies landed workmen here, under the direction of Captain Edward Stamp and G.M. Sproat, to begin construction of Alberni Mills, an export sawmill. Stamp, a Victoria-based English commission merchant, was in partnership with the English firm of Anderson & Co. The Tseshaht knew the location as *Tlukwatkwuu7is* (Wolf Ritual Beach), the site of one of their winter villages, where the important *Tlookwaana* or Wolf Ritual ceremony was practiced. Some Tseshaht people tried to resist the mill, but were ordered off the site with threats of violence, and a small payment of goods. Since the 1890s, the harbour area has been an important commercial and industrial centre for Port Alberni. Harbour Quay, constructed in the 1980s, acts as a hub for tourists and for the local community. Climb to the observation deck of the Clock Tower to view spectacular Mount Arrowsmith, the Alberni Inlet and the surrounding city.

Several mills have occupied the waterfront over the years. The longest-operating, the Barclay Sound Cedar Co., was founded in 1904 by the Wood family. In 1905, with only ten workers, they were producing 25,000 board feet of lumber a day. This mill was subsequently owned by the Canadian Pacific Lumber Co., the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co., and Macmillan Bloedel.
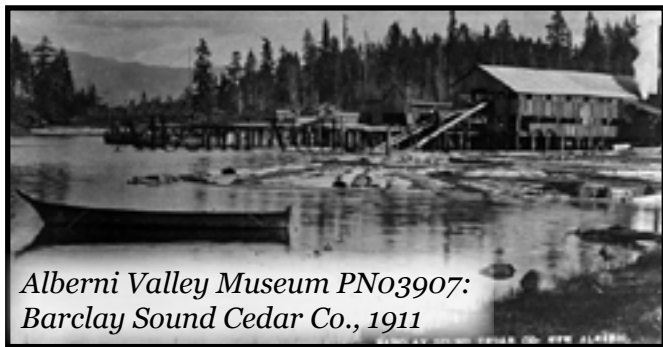
Alberni Valley Museum PN03907: Barclay Sound Cedar Co., 1911

In 1934 Bloedel Stewart & Welch built the Somass sawmill, the largest sawmill in the British Empire, with logs provided by its Franklin River operation, the largest logging camp. Both were taken over by Macmillan Bloedel with the 1951 corporate reorganization. Another notable mill was H.R. Macmillan's Alberni Plywoods, which opened during the World War II labour shortage. At first, most of the workers were women, nicknamed "The Plywood Girls." Unusually, many of them kept their jobs after the war; in the 1950s, about 30% of the employees were female.

2. Centennial Pier. Centennial Pier was opened in 2012 as part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Port Alberni's incorporation. It provides a lovely view of the Alberni Inlet.

Alberni Inlet.
This waterway was originally named the "Alberni Canale" in honour of Don Pedro de Alberni, a Spanish captain who was stationed at Nootka

Sound at the head of the inlet in the 1790s. In 1931, Major T.T. Aitken (Chief Geographer of British Columbia), at the recommendation of H.D. Parizeau of the Canadian Hydrographic Service, officially changed it to "Alberni Inlet" because they did not want people to think it was a man-made canal that was too small for industrial ships. However, locals continue to refer to it using the terms "canal" and "inlet" interchangeably. The inlet has been a huge asset for the success of local industries, as large ships could, and still do, navigate up it to load shipments of forest product to export. *Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN00110: first general store and post office in Port Alberni, Waterhouse Wharf, 1910.*

*Alberni Valley Museum PN04383:
Log jam on inlet after tsunami, 1964.*
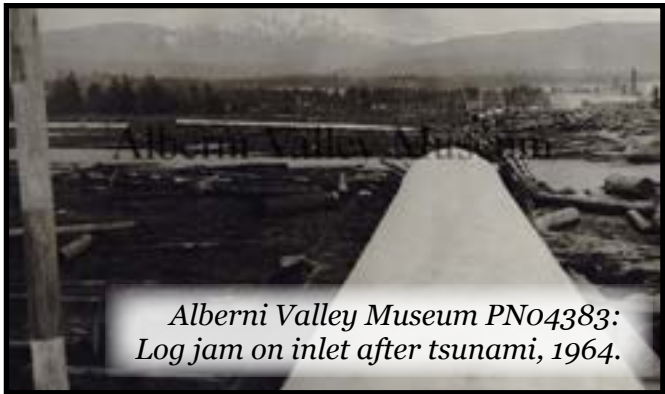
Tsunami. In 1964, an earthquake in Alaska sent a tsunami up the inlet to the Somass River, affecting the lower regions of Port Alberni and Alberni. Thanks to efforts by volunteer rescue squads, there were no casualties, but thousands of dollars' worth of property damage was incurred. Gordon Mowat, who was twelve years old at the time, went down with his father (owner of a tugboat service) to clear debris from the inlet, mostly logs. Mowat remembers: "If you were real nimble on your feet you might have been able to walk for miles, jumping from one log to another." It took several days to clean up the mess on the water. For more stories and photographs from the 1964 tsunami, visit the Alberni Valley Museum's virtual exhibit: www.virtualmuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibit/the-great-tsunami-of-1964/

3. Argyle Pier was originally constructed in 1912 by John Kendall, a sea captain from Newfoundland who came to the Alberni Valley in 1901. Kendall had a prosperous fishing enterprise with three boats and fifty employees. His pioneer ice packing plant allowed residents and railroad crews to keep meat and fish frozen. The wharf is now the home of Lady Rose Marine Services. The *M.V. Lady Rose*, built in 1937 by A. & J. Inglis Ltd. of Pointhouse Shipyard in Glasgow, served the coast of B.C. for many years before she came to Port Alberni in 1960 to begin the run between Port Alberni, Bamfield and Ucluelet. She is now retired and has been replaced by the *M.V. Frances Barkley*. Launched in 1958 in Stavanger, Norway, the *Barkley* was first used in the Norwegian Ferry fleet. She came to join the *Lady Rose* in 1990 and was renamed in honour of the first European woman to visit the West Coast.


Alberni Valley Museum PN10921: The Lady Rose in the Alberni Canal near Kildonan, 1950.

At the entrance to Argyle Pier is the **Banfield Lifeboat** exhibit. On January 22, 1906, the steamship *Valencia*, bound from San Francisco to Victoria, ran aground at Pachena Point on the West Coast. It was one of the area's worst marine disasters, with 117 of the 154 people aboard listed as missing or dead. Pressure on government for improved safety measures led to the construction of a lighthouse at Pachena Point and the establishment of four lifeboat stations, including one at Bamfield. The first Banfield Lifeboat went into service in 1907; this boat, which was in service from 1951-1990, was the third of its kind to be stationed at Bamfield. It is on loan to the Alberni Valley Museum from the Maritime Museum of B.C. in Victoria. The Maritime Discovery Centre (just down Harbour Road from the Harbour Quay) is responsible for its preservation and display.

Alberni Valley Museum PN06683:
*The first lifeboat stationed at Bamfield, 1908.*
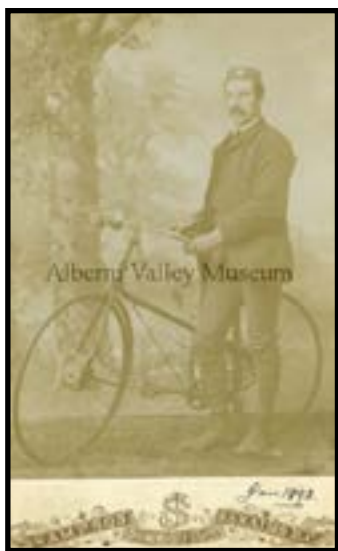
4. Bird Street is named after George H. Bird, a pioneer entrepreneur in the forest industry. He was a shareholder in, and an employee for, the first paper mill in B.C., which operated on the banks of the Somass River from 1894 to 1896. When it closed, he opened his own sawmill in Port Alberni.

Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN00099: George Bird with his bicycle. He had this studio portrait taken in Nanaimo to commemorate his ride from Alberni to Nanaimo in 1893, the first recorded bicycle trip across Vancouver Island.

Right, Alberni Valley Museum PN00551: The Bird sawmill on the waterfront, c. 1918.
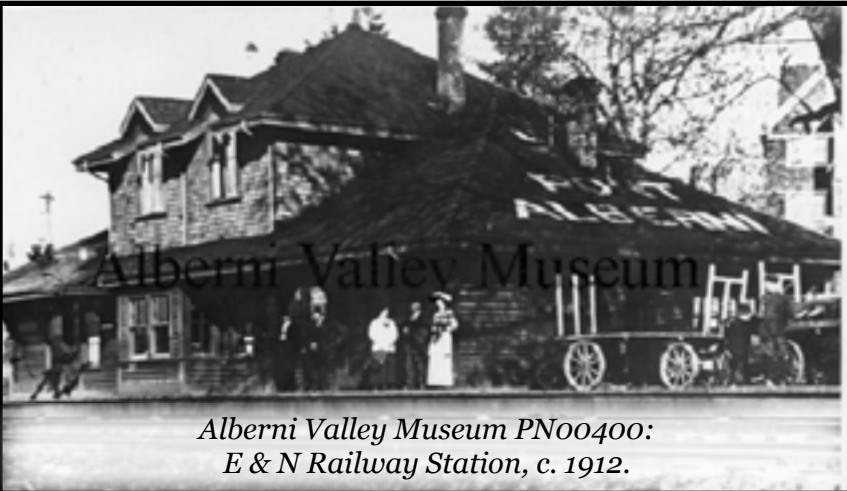
Alberni Valley Museum PN00400:
E & N Railway Station, c. 1912.

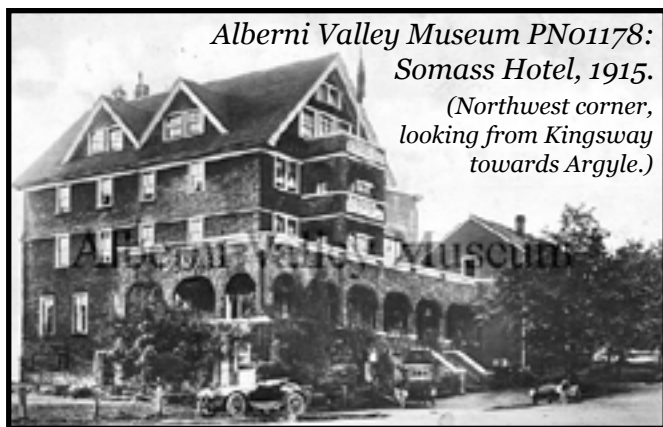### 5. Historic Port Alberni Train Station

(3100 Kingsway). In 1907, Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, which had been owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway since 1905, purchased land from the Anderson Company and began building up New Alberni as a railroad town. The Valley's industries, especially the forest industry, saw a boom in the next couple of decades, as the railroad increased mobility of people and materials. The first passenger train pulled into the station December 20, 1911, and the last pulled out in 1957. A truck bay was added in the 1950s. The station is a Municipal Heritage Site owned by the City of Port Alberni and has been restored, along with several trucks, locomotives, and other industrial artefacts, by the volunteers of the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society.

6. The Carmoor Block across Argyle St. from the train station was built in 1912 at a cost of $25,000 for Carmichael & Moorhead. There were 7 stores on the first floor with 19 offices on the second. There were toilets and baths; the whole block was steam heated and lit with electricity. The Bank of Montreal, The Alberni Land Co., The Canadian National Railway, lawyers, doctors, dentists, and store owners all rented space. Over 100 years later, the restored block conserves its original appearance and is home to local businesses on the ground floor; the upper level has been converted to apartments.

Alberni Valley Museum PN06373: The Carmoor Block shortly after it was built, 1912.

*Alberni Valley Museum PN01178:
Somass Hotel, 1915.*

*(Northwest corner,
looking from Kingsway
towards Argyle.)*

7. The Somass Hotel stood on this block for over 100 years. It was built in 1908 for Arthur E. Waterhouse, a driving force behind the development of the New Alberni settlement and Port Alberni's first mayor. Waterhouse arrived at Stamp Harbour March 31, 1896, sent by the Canadian Pacific Navigation Co. to build a wharf. He was also responsible for the establishment of several other important additions to the rapidly growing town, including a general store, a post office, a telegraph office, and a dance hall. The Somass, an impressive four-story building, served as the area's "railway hotel", where people stayed when coming into town by train or by ship.

1947 Fire. A fire in 1947 destroyed the old wooden section of the hotel, just a year after a new wing of 50 rooms had been added. The Waterhouse estate then sold it, and it was rebuilt and reopened in August of that year.

Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN00241: Somass Hotel on fire, February 1947. Right, Alberni Valley Museum PN14081: Under construction later in 1947.

The Thunderbird. In 2013, the Uchucklesaht First Nation purchased the building with the intention of restoring it for their use. Due to structural issues and a low earthquake rating, restoration was deemed too costly. A new building, the Thunderbird, was completed in 2016 to house apartments and the Uchucklesaht band offices.

Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN02940: The hotel as viewed from the southwest corner, circa 1912-1917. Below, Alberni Valley Museum PN02846: The same view in 1976.

8. Alberni Hardware (3146 1st Ave.)**.**
On January 16, 1909, the Port Alberni News announced the opening of "Alberni Hardware Co. on Somass St., New Alberni, opposite Waterhouse's Hall. A full line of all kinds of hardware will be carried in stock." Charles A. McNaughton was the owner until he retired in 1932 and sold it to Mr. Hargreaves from Victoria and Edgar McKenzie, a travelling salesman for Marshall Wells Ltd. Edgar's son Keith operated this store until the 1990s.

Alberni Valley Museum PN05599: Keith Mackenzie posing beside scale and measuring tools used at Alberni Hardware, 1983.

Alberni Valley Museum PN02941:
View looking north from Argyle in 1976. Alberni
Hardware on left; Kingsway Hotel on right.

9. Kingsway Hotel (3203 1st Ave.), on the corner of Kingsway and 1st, was built in 1925 by Theodore Gattman. Legislation had just been passed in December 1924 to allow beer to be sold by the glass. Gattman's application for a license, dated February 5, 1925, noted the establishment as the "King's Way Hotel". There were once several hotels in this area of town, including the Arrowview (built 1928), the Beaufort (1913) and the King Edward (1907), as well as the Somass and the Kingsway.

10. Fisherman's Harbour is a multi-use docking facility for tugboats, pleasure craft and the commercial fishing fleet. More than 300 fishing vessels operate in the region, and this is a colourful and important part of the city's economy. The Port Alberni Port Authority oversees all the activities of the harbour.

Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN06402: A number of trollers and tugboats moored at Fisherman's Harbour, circa 1920s. Below, Alberni Valley Museum PN02399: Fishing fleet in 1960.

Traditional and Commercial Fishing.

Fishing, sealing and whaling was an essential part of traditional Nuu-chah-nulth culture for generations, while the fishing industry did not start in B.C. until the nineteenth century. (Along with founding and managing the first sawmill in the Alberni Valley, Captain Edward Stamp also founded the first commercial fishery on the West Coast and one of the earliest canneries in the province.) As First Nations people turned to commercial fishing practises, settler companies found ways to restrict their rights to catching and selling fish. Although the Canadian constitution has protected Aboriginal harvesting rights since 1982, tension around the issue of Nuu-chah-nulth participation in commercial fishing has persisted into the twenty-first century.

Alberni Valley Museum PN04917: Native fishing boats moored at the Ecoole cannery, c. 1926.

Bonus: Original Land Surveys

Anderson & Co., Edward Stamp's partner in his 1860 sawmill venture, acquired title to 2500 acres of land in the Alberni Valley. After the mill closed, they had the townsite of Alberni surveyed as a service centre for incoming agricultural settlers. In 1902, Alan Anderson came to the Valley to look into surveying and selling the remaining land. The company subdivided and sold lots in the town of New Alberni. The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway acquired a significant portion of the surveyed land in 1907, and they began developing the townsite.

In Alberni, the streets were named for officials and relations of the Anderson company. 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 New 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
250-720-2863 | avmuseum@portalberni.ca

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