ALBERNI VALLEY MUSEUM

Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

Alberni Valley Museum PN01225:
Parade on Argyle Street, c. 1950.

Southport Residential Area:
Port Alberni's Citizens & Community

BEGIN

Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

SOUTHPORT RESIDENTIAL AREA: Port Alberni's Citizens & Community
(Argyle St. from 3rd Ave. to 6th Ave./6th Ave./7th Ave./8th Ave.)

THEME *Heritage homes and some government and community buildings of historic Port Alberni. (Please stay on the street or sidewalk and be respectful of private properties included on the tour.)*
DISTANCE *Approx. 1 km.*
TIME *Approx. 15-25 min.*
MORE INFO *Visit https://playinpa.ca/museum-2/ for more heritage resources, including self-guided historic walking tours of two other areas of the city.*

Please note that some mobile PDF readers may not support interactive features of the tour.
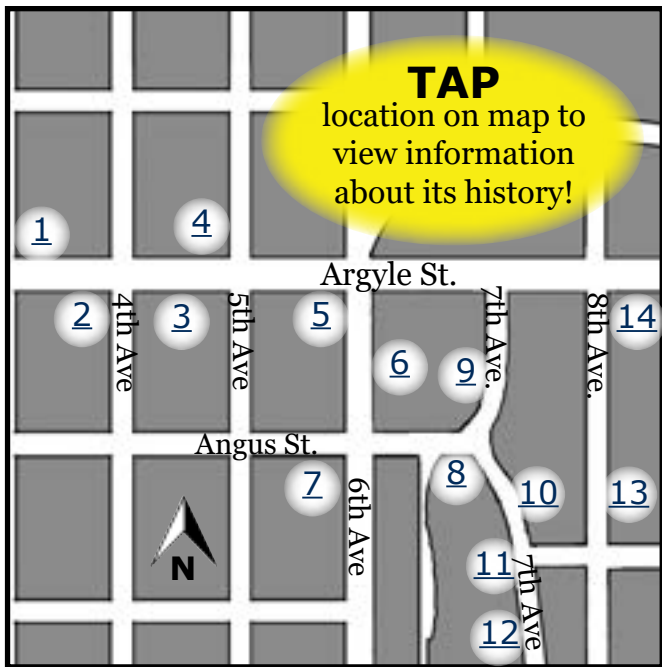
[NEXT](#)

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.

TAP location on map to view information about its history!

1. The Croll Block
2. The Capitol Theatre
3. City Hall (4850 Argyle)
4. First Methodist Church (4815 Argyle)
5. 4736 Argyle St.
6. 3049 6th Ave.
7. 4718 Angus St.
Bonus: Tsunami

8. 2992 7th Ave.
9. 3036 7th Ave.
10. 2907 7th Ave.
11. 2904 7th Ave.
12. 2858 7th Ave.
13. Eighth Ave. School
14. 3061 8th Ave.
Bonus: Original Land Surveys

Alberni Valley Museum PN00240:
The Croll Block in the 1920s.

1. The Croll Block (northeast corner of 3rd and Argyle). Built in 1936 by Sydney Croll, the son of Captain J.A. Croll, who ran a pioneer tugboat company on the Alberni Inlet. The lot was purchased from A.E. Waterhouse, first mayor of Port Alberni, and the building constructed by R. McCoubrey. It was home to many retailers, including Croll's candy and ice cream parlour, "The Sugar Bowl." Another candy shop, Deshaw's Corner Store, was located across the street on the southeast corner of 3rd and Argyle.

2. The Capitol Theatre (4904 Argyle St.). Jack Warren, owner of the Port Theatre on 1st Ave., which only showed silent films, dreamed of a bigger, more up-to-date movie theatre. Work began on the Capitol Theatre in 1935, but Jack died before it was completed, and his wife Louise and son Harold finished the project. It opened in May 1936 and Mayor Mike Hamilton declared the "magificent picture house a cr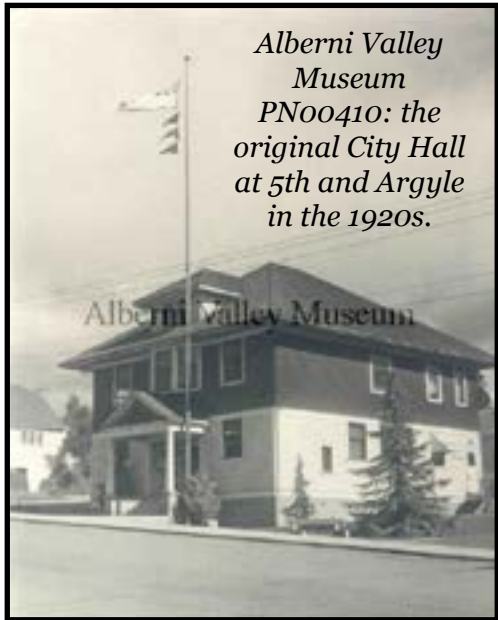edit to the city." Since 1989, it has been home to the Portal Players Dramatic Society, which started in 1978 and has grown into an active, well-respected community theatre organization.

Look for the mural by local artist Shayne Lloyd on the east side of the building, depicting this photograph (Alberni Valley Museum PN09340) of the Capitol in 1936. The mural was completed in 2016.

3. Port Alberni City Hall (4850 Argyle St.). Port Alberni's City Hall has been located on this block since 1928. This building was opened in May 1959 by the Provincial Secretary, the Hon. Wesley D. Black, with a large crowd in attendance. Alice Crakanthorp, the first settler child born in the Alberni Valley, cut the ribbon. The architect was Dexter Stockdill of Wade, Stockdill and Armour, and the contractor was Hans Strange. The building is also the former location of the public library.

Alberni Valley Museum PN00410: the original City Hall at 5th and Argyle in the 1920s.
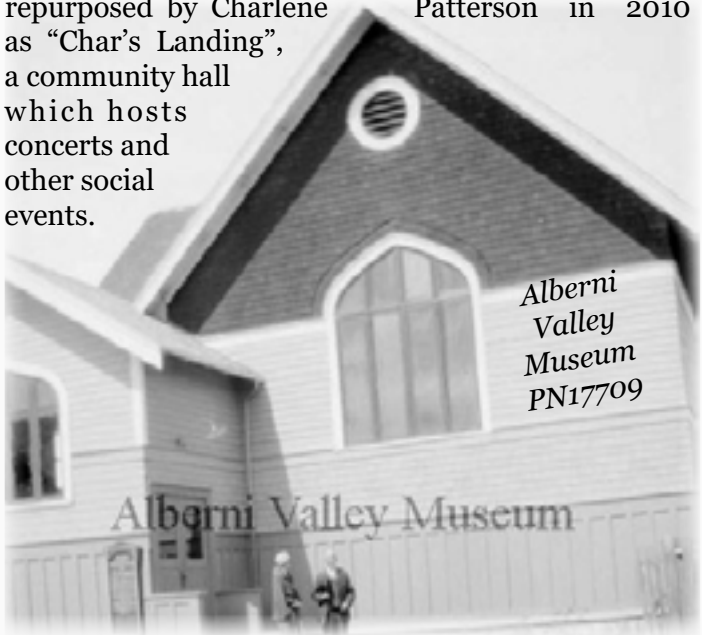
The **sculpture** on the lawn of City Hall, commissioned by the Community Arts Council in 2011, represents the past and future of the Alberni Valley. The artist, Sooke blacksmith Jake James, who was born and trained in England, was assisted by local welder Adam Plater. The materials—scrap metal—were donated by the McLean Mill National Historic Site, the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society, and W.V.I.I.H.S. member K.G. "Soup" Campbell.

Alberni Valley Museum PN00197: City Hall in 1959.

To the east of City Hall, you will find the **Columbus Tree**, a section of a Douglas fir that grew in the Nitinat Valley for 501 years. It started growing in 1456, 36 years before Columbus arrived in North America. By the time it was felled in 1957, it had grown to a height of 238 feet and contained 32,533 board feet of merchantable timber. The timbers supporting the display formed part of Edward Stamp's 1860 export sawmill, which operated at what is now Harbour Quay. They were salvaged and erected on this site in April 1960.

4. The old church at 4815 Argyle Street was built in 1912 by Wood & Story to serve the Methodist congregation, which had been worshipping in a building at 3rd Ave. and Angus St. since the early 1900s. The Presbyterians joined the Methodists in 1923 when their building was destroyed by a windstorm. In 1925, when the denominations merged to form the United Church of Canada, this became First United Church. After the congregation moved to a new building on Church St., the building housed a few different organizations, including the Salvation Army and an antique store. After standing empty for a while, it was repurposed by Charlene Patterson in 2010 as "Char's Landing", a community hall which hosts concerts and other social events.

Alberni Valley Museum PN17709

Alberni Valley Museum

5. 4736 Argyle Street was built in 1910 for James and Helen Rollin, who came to the Valley with their children, Fred and Dolly. James, who had run a series of hotels in Alaska during the Klondike gold rush, opened and managed the King Edward Hotel on Argyle. He died the year the house was built, and Helen remarried Charles McNaughton (owner of Alberni Hardware Co.) in 1912. The property included a tennis court on the east side of the building. Modifications were made to the original structure in the early 1980s when it was converted to a home for young adults with special needs, and again when the house reverted back to private ownership. However, the building still largely retains its original style.

Alberni Valley Museum PN02836:
This house in 1975.

6. 3049 6th Ave.

Built c. 1908 for Sam and Mary Roseborough, who came to the Valley in 1892, bringing a team of horses to haul logs into the first paper mill. Sam then started the Barclay Sound Cedar Co. in 1904, along with his brothers-in-law Robert, James, Alex, and Norman Wood. This very successfull sawmill eventually became the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co. and then the Alberni Pacific Division of Macmillian Bloedel. Sam also worked in the transportation industry, operating a livery and stagecoach business and, later, the first motor bus line to Nanaimo.

Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN13553: Sam and Mary with son Keith, c. 1900. Right, Alberni Valley Museum PN03365: Sam with one of his buses, c. 1928.
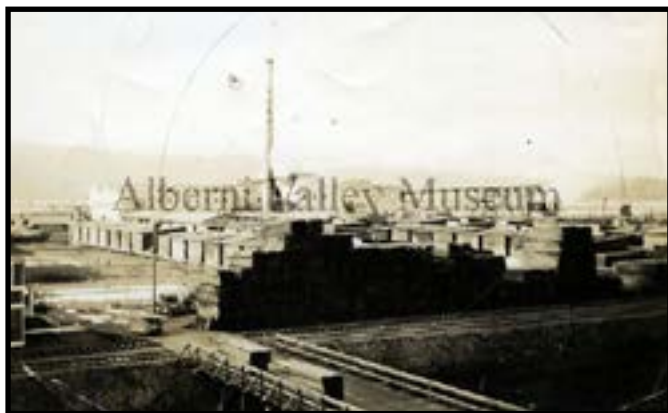
Alberni Valley Museum PN21259:
A woman (possibly Elizabeth Kendall) standing
on the steps of 4718 Angus St.

7. 4718 Angus St. Built c. 1910 by Captain John Alexander Kendall, a sea captain from Newfoundland who came to the Valley in 1901 and lived here with his wife, Elizabeth Jane Kendall. He ran a large fishing business, with three boats and 50 employees, which operated 1912-1926. He built the Kendall Wharf at the bottom of Argyle St., and opened an ice plant to keep meat and fish frozen for use by residents and the railway crews working on the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway. Kendall also served as mayor of Port Alberni in 1928 and 1932.

Many of the city's wealthier residents built homes on 7th Ave, where they had a spectacular view over the town and the water. This strip was called Marpole Hill in honour of Richard Marpole, vice-president of the E&N Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway superintendent for B.C. Vancouver's Marpole district is also named for him.

Alberni Valley Museum PN21238: Bloedel, Stewart & Welch mill in Port Alberni, c. 1940. Photograph taken by Cecil Vaughan.

8. 2992 7th Ave. Built in 1926 for Cecil Vaughan, then-manager of the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co. He also worked as sales manager at the Great Central Lake Mill from 1935-1942 and as a superintendent of Bloedel, Stewart & Welch from 1942-1947.

9. 3036 7th Ave. Built in 1937 by local contractor Thor M. Peterson, from a design by Vancouver architect T.B. McArravy for William H. (Bill) Deshaw and his wife, owners of Deshaw's Corner Store at 3rd and Argyle. The house was originally finished in three-tone stucco, in buff, blue, and rose. The furnace could burn sawdust, wood, or coal. Lumber was supplied by APL, Bloedel, Stewart & Welch, and the R.B. McLean Lumber Co. The Deshaw store was a popular gathering place for the youth of the community. Especially remembered were the Fat Emma bars, candy in glass cases, and ice-cream cones.

10. 2907 7th Ave. Built by Bert Hart, a city alderman. This was also the residence of Dr. Carlyle Edward Cook, the first resident dentist in Port Alberni, who opened his practice in the Carmoor Block on the corner of Argyle and Kingsway in 1922. Dr. Cook's granddaughter, Kim Campbell

(pictured), was born in this house in 1947. In 1993, she became Canada's first female (and first B.C.-born) Prime Minister.

Alberni Valley Museum PN13557: Woman and three children outside 2904 7th Ave., c. 1910.

11. 2904 7th Ave. Built in 1910 by Alex B. Wood and A.B. Storey for James Beattie Wood, a partner in the Barclay Sound Cedar Co. James Wood became the first Fisheries Officer for Alberni, serving from 1912 to 1937. Many members of the Wood family lived in this area.

12. 2858 7th Ave. Termed locally "The Company House" because it was the home of Howard Dent, then-owner of the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co. Excavation work by Sam Roseborough began January 1920. This house was once part of a much larger estate which had extensive gardens, horses and stables.

Alberni Valley Museum PN06784: The Dent family home on 7th Ave., c. 1920s.

13. Eighth Ave. School (2941 8th Ave.). Primary students first attended school in the basement of the Watson block at 1st and Argyle, and then in a one-room schoolhouse on 3rd Ave., until Eighth Ave. Elementary was built in 1912. It cost $6,000 to construct the new two-room school and the furnishing costs were estimated at about $500. The first principal was John R. Thompson. As the town grew, additions and annexes were added. A new building was opened October 8, 1942 and was remodelled in the late 1990s. The school closed in 2014 and became an alternative learning centre. *Above, Alberni Valley Museum PN01372: The original schoolhouse in 1912. Below, Alberni Valley Museum 00656: Students on the steps of Eighth Ave. School c. 1912-1916.*

14. 3061 8th Ave. Built in 1914, this was the home of Fred and Ellen Rollin. Fred, the son of James and Helen Rollin, met Ellen Ohlsen, a schoolteacher, when she stayed at his father's King Edward Hotel. Fred worked as a boom man for the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co., but retired in his early forties due to health problems. He then dedicated his time to hiking, hunting, fishing, exploring, and gardening. Ellen, a concert pianist, worked as a piano teacher out of their home, charging $5 per month for lessons. She had brought her handmade German grand piano with her when her family immigrated to B.C., and it sat on bear- and cougar-skin rugs, Fred's hunting trophies, in their home. Their garden was full of rare plants collected on their travels or given to them by Ellen's parents, who owned a nursery in Victoria.
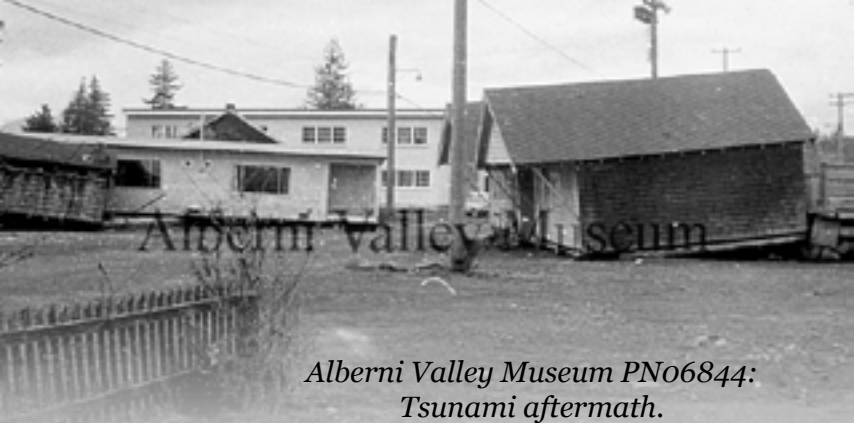

Photographs: Alberni Valley Museum PN09343, Fred in the garden, and PN09344, Ellen with dead cougar, gun and hunting dog, c. 1913.

Rollin Art Centre. Following Fred's death in 1976, the house fittingly became the home of the Community Arts Council. Visitors can enjoy the Fine Arts Gallery upstairs, or walk around the beautiful gardens. The Japanese garden was a gift from Port Alberni's sister city, Abashiri. The classically-designed fountain and balustrade were designed by Peter Szachiv and the granite sculpture by Babe Gunn. The rose garden and children's garden also bring enjoyment to many.

Alberni Valley Museum PN02974:
Ellen and Fred Rollin on the porch of their home
on Eighth Ave. in 1915.

Alberni Valley Museum PN06844: Tsunami aftermath.

Bonus: Tsunami. In 1964, a tsunami triggered by an earthquake in Alaska hit Port Alberni and Alberni in the middle of the night on Good Friday. Thanks to efforts by volunteer rescue squads and the fact that no one was at work in the mills along the waterfront when the wave hit, there were no casualties. Thousands of dollars' worth of property damage was incurred in the areas of town that were close to the water; some people who lived on higher ground or in outlying areas such as Cherry Creek were not even aware of what had happened until the next morning. The communities of the Twin Cities came together to assist with cleanup and restoration. 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/

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/museum-2/*
- 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

Back to start

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Image credit: Simon Fraser University - University Communications (https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfupamr/14152885779), via Wikimedia Commons

Kingsway in 1922. Dr. Cook's granddaughter, Kim Campbell (pictured), was born in this house in 1947. In 1993, she became Canada's first female (and first B.C.-born) Prime Minister.