

**Roanoke, Va – A Crossroads of History**

The Roanoke Valley has been a crossroads for thousands of years. The Toter people used trails that converged near a big saline marsh that attracted plentiful game. As Europeans migrated into the Valley, these trails became stagecoach routes, turnpikes, railroad tracks, and highways.

In 1671, Virginia's colonial governor sent Thomas Batts and Robert Fallam to search for westward flowing rivers. As they crossed the mountains and arrived in our valley, they reported finding a Toter village on the banks of the Saponi River (Roanoke River).

In the next century German and Scotch Irish pioneers migrated from the north down the Shenandoah Valley and began settling here. By the time of the Revolutionary War in 1776, about 30 families lived in the area. For much of its early history, the Roanoke Valley was almost entirely agricultural, with a few large plantations and many small holdings where free and enslaved laborers raised livestock and cultivated crops.

Big Lick, the first settlement at the crossroads, drew its name from the the salt deposits that animals licked. The



Cows in market square for livestock auction, 1933. (Source: RPL)

Check out the digital version of the walking tour and learn more about the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation online at: [roanokepreservation.org](http://roanokepreservation.org)



Patrons at the Hotel Dumas bar on Henry Street (Source: TAP)

first official use of the Big Lick name was a post office operated in Spotts Tavern in 1798 on what is now Orange Avenue. Some thought this moniker undignified, but despite efforts to change it, the name stood. As more people moved into the area, William Rowland platted the early town of Gainesborough nearby in 1834.

The 1852 arrival of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad south of Gainesborough marked the beginning of industrial progress and shifted development - and Big Lick - to what would become the heart of the City of Roanoke. Thirty years later, the new Norfolk & Western Railway established headquarters here. This was a turning point for the community of spectacular consequence. Big Lick, with a population of about 500, became bustling Roanoke in 1882, boasting some 5,000 citizens and nicknamed the "Magic City" because of its rapid growth.

Railroad and industrial jobs attracted Black and immigrant

workers who settled in the area now known as "Gainsboro", which became a diverse and thriving community by the early twentieth century. Henry Street was a lively commercial center with restaurants, shops, entertainment, services, and churches for the Black community. Famous Black artists and entertainers worked and performed here. This vibrant neighborhood and many historic buildings fell victim to urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century.

Roanoke's prosperity peaked in the 1950's when it was named an All-American City and celebrated its jubilee 75-year anniversary. The boom years came to an abrupt end in 1958 when the two largest employers, Norfolk & Western and the American Viscose Plant, eliminated 3,750 jobs in one year.

Roanoke reenvisioned itself in its Design '79 plan, which called for adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Downtown Roanoke is now a crossroads of urban life and outdoor recreation, technology and preservation, and commercial and social development.



During the 1898 fire, guests and staff of the Hotel Roanoke scrambled to save the furnishings and valuables seen strewn across the lawn. (Source: RPL)



Looking west on Campbell Avenue at Jefferson Street, the First National Exchange Bank is on the left. Circa 1927 (Source: RPL)

**Looking at architecture**

The diversity of architectural styles found throughout Roanoke reflects its long and rich history. The variety of building types, such as courthouses, City Market, railway station, and churches, represents the full complement of a downtown that serves as the governmental, commercial, and transportation center for the region.

The architectural styles provide insight into the tastes and values of their times. The solid symmetry and classical detailing of the Georgian Revival City Market and the Neoclassical Municipal Building represent stability. The picturesque romanticism of the Tudor Revival Hotel Roanoke represents hospitality. The soaring Art Deco style of the Norfolk & Western General Office Building - North represents business success. Italianate commercial buildings from the early 1900s feature highly decorative cornices (often emblazoned with the owner's name or construction date) while mid-century buildings focus on simple lines and use modern concrete, steel, and glass.

Such a mosaic of form, function, and detail makes downtown Roanoke an architectural treat for the serious and casual observer alike. Enjoy!



\*Example of bronze marker



Sponsored by: Member One Federal Credit Union (chartered in 1940 to serve Norfolk & Western Railroad employees and their families)  
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**DOWNTOWN  
 ROANOKE**  
 WALKING TOUR

## THE COMMERCE WALK

**1) City Market Building (1922), 32 Market Sq.** Georgian Revival: symmetrical form, classical details like stars. Refrigerated cases added 1935 for fresh meat & seafood. Reinvented as multicultural food court in 1983 when most vendors moved to the suburbs.

**2) Lampros Building (1909), 108 Campbell Ave SE.** Originally contained six retail stores. Early tenants were Humphries-Weber Drug Store for more than 60 years, Army & Navy Surplus Store (sold WWI surplus including saddles and leather pouches).

**3) Farmers Market (1874), Market St.** Oldest outdoor continuously operating city market in Virginia; always alive with fresh produce, plants, seasonal items, & crafts. Farmers sold fruits, vegetables, chickens, livestock from horse-drawn wagons.

**4) Center in the Square (1914), 1 Market Sq.** Built for W.E. McGuire's Farmers' Supply Co. selling buggies, wagons, seed, fertilizer, the L-shaped building was renovated in 1983 for Center in the Square & its cultural organizations. Roanoke Weiner Stand has operated here from early 1930s.

**5) Market Street Row (1904-1921), 301 – 313 Market St.** Complementary in design & scale, the buildings along Market Street form an intimate, harmonious architectural scene. Note examples such as Agnew Feed & Seed historic wall sign & decorative parapet dated 1904.

**6) Heironimus Building (1914), 401 S. Jefferson St.** First large department store in Roanoke. Expanded 1956 with Roanoke's first retail escalator. Renovated 2020 retail/residential.

**7) The Crafteria (1954), 16 Church Ave SW.** Art Deco/ Mid-Century Modern: geometric detailing, horizontal bands of windows in polished granite frame. Built on the site of the

Greyhound bus terminal, S&W Cafeteria operated into the 1970s, serving White patrons only with an almost all-Black staff until 1963. Renovated 2011 for crafts & more.

**8) Restored commercial signage, Church Ave.** Painted advertisements recall early Roanoke businesses. Itinerant painters, or "wall dogs," adorned brick walls with commercial messages & logos.

**9) Horton Building (1910), 302 First St.** Built by William H. 'Uncle Billy' Horton on site of livery stables. Early tenants Grand Piano Co., Fox-Hunt-Lloyd Clothing Co. (name in corner entrance tile). During Prohibition, second floor nip joint Owl's Club was disguised as hunting & fishing club. Renovated 2014 retail/residential.

**10) Parkway 301 (1910), 301 First St.** Originally Anchor Building (anchor in front entrance). Third-story window brackets show original construction height. Shenandoah Life Insurance Company added four stories, 1923. In 1935, Stanley Abbott and architects designed Blue Ridge Parkway in sixth floor office. Renovated 2013 retail/residential.

**11) Lakeland Lodge (1911), 211 First St.** Prominent arched fourth-floor windows & central medallion in cornice indicate use as Masonic Lodge. Pedimented entrance on Kirk Ave. accessed the upper floor Lodge. 1940s storefront redesigned in Art Deco style.

**12) WDBJ Radio Building (1937), 124 Kirk Ave.** Built by radio station owner and banker J.B. Fishburn, inspired by his Paris trip. WDBJ (Richardson-Wayland Electric Corp.) was the second licensed broadcasting station in the state, Roanoke's first radio station.

**13) Ponce de Leon Hotel (1931), 131 Campbell Ave SW.** Art Deco hotel constructed on the foundation of early 19th-century Trout House (early hotel/tavern in Big Lick) & spring (visible in basement). Renovated in 2014.

**14) 100 Block of Campbell Avenue SW (1891-1892).** Small-scale commercial buildings; John M. Oakey funeral home (124 Campbell) used horse-drawn hearse to pull caskets; "Funeral Directors" inscription in stepped parapet. Roanoke Times Building (122 Campbell) was one of the first designed specifically for a newspaper in Virginia; Queen Anne-style transom with stained glass windows.

**15) Aurora (ca. 1930), 110 Campbell Ave SW.** Art Deco: patterned brick & geometric cast-stone cornice detailing, vertical piers, recessed window spandrels. Leggett's Department Store expanded former Montgomery Ward building in 1940s (segregated water fountains, White-only restrooms). Renovated 2015 with art center.

**16) State & City Building (1905), 104 Campbell Ave SW.** Neoclassical: copper cornice with roof cresting & gargoyles. Originally the three-story Ferguson building, five floors added in 1920s housed State & City Bank. Home to Frank L. Moose Jewelers 1928-2010. Renovated 2006.

**17) Hancock Building (1931), 35 Campbell Ave SW.** Grand Piano Co. signature brick façade added in 1960s. 2007 renovation revealed intact Art Deco terra cotta detailing and mosaic tile of N.W. Pugh Department Store. Named for early 1900s Hancock Dry Goods.

**18) Woolworth Building (1949), 24 Campbell Ave SW.** Art Deco: concrete chevrons, carrera glass signboard with metal bands at rounded ends. Site of Roanoke's first civil rights sit-in engineered by Rev. R.R. Wilkinson & a secret biracial committee (1960); Black patrons dined in basement until lunch counter desegregated.

**19) First National Exchange Bank (1912), 201 S. Jefferson St.** Neoclassical: Baltimore design firm Wyatt & Nolting used Ionic columns & heavy entablature to convey stability & financial security. Contemporary newspaper called it "Temple of Finance". Lion heads adorn cornice.

**20) Colonial American National Bank (1926), 202 S. Jefferson St.** Neoclassical: bronze cornice with modillions, terra cotta frieze with rosettes. Eclectic Moorish-style lanterns flank main entrance, copper & stained glass clock. Tallest building in Roanoke for half a century. Built on site of Roanoke's first skyscraper, the Terry Building (1892). Renovated 2006 as luxury downtown flats.

**21) Liberty Trust (1910), 101 S. Jefferson St.** Beaux Arts: Roman Ionic marble entrance columns, ornate terra cotta cornice. Originally First National Bank (first bank founded in Roanoke), handled Shenandoah Valley Railroad financial transactions. Architect John K. Pebbles used fireproof construction, two elevators, plumbing, copper-clad doors, all for \$175,000. Liberty Trust Company purchased in 1926. Renovated 2021 as boutique hotel.

## THE COMMUNITY WALK

**22) Fire Station #1 (1906), 13 Church Ave.** Georgian Revival façade inspired by Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Interior reflects era of horse-drawn fire wagons with original fittings & ridged floors that gave horses traction. Longest continuously operated fire station in Virginia until 2007 closing. Totem sculptures celebrate Sister Cities in Century Plaza across the street.

**23) Friendship Fountain (1987), Church Ave at Market St.** Honors Roanoke's seven Sister Cities. Pool lined with historic star bricks from Roanoke's early streets. Plaza at end of block named for Roanoker, Governor Linwood Holton.

**24) Elmwood Park.** Marker at end of fountains interprets history of Elmwood Park, originally part of 650-acre tract of land farmed using enslaved labor. Peyton Terry sold 6.5 acres to the City in 1911 for a park; Elmwood house was the first public library. Park is currently a public event venue.

**25) Mayors' Monument (1893), Williamson Rd. at Elm Ave.** Erected in Southeast Roanoke by real estate developers as "Industrial Monument" to celebrate the city's progress. Relocated to Elmwood Park in 1982; repurposed as monument to City's mayors back to Big Lick days.

**26) St. John's Episcopal Church (1891), 1 Mountain Ave.** Late Gothic Revival: Blue-gray limestone, buttresses, corner bell tower, stained glass windows by both Tiffany and Lamb Studio. Designed by Philadelphia architect Charles M. Burns. Big Lick's first Episcopalian congregation.

**27) Patrick Henry Hotel (1925), 617 S. Jefferson St.** To give Roanoke status & cosmopolitan atmosphere, prominent businessmen led by W.W. Boxley commissioned Colonial Revival hotel with tea room, two-story lobby, & ballroom. Designed by New York architect William Stoddart. Roanoker and movie star John Payne (Fred Bailey in Miracle on 34th Street) named it in a contest.

**28) Boxley Building (1921), 416 S. Jefferson St.** Neoclassical: Terra cotta panels, copper cornice. Commissioned by W. W. Boxley (quarry owner, developer, and mayor). Emphasized finest building materials: granite, marble, bronze. Designed by Frye & Stone. Renovated 2017.

**29) Jefferson Electric (1926), 21 Franklin Rd.** Spanish Revival: Bronze sculpture of a ship (said to be modeled after Columbus's Santa Maria) above the spandrel with the company name, Moorish pendant light fixtures. Appliances and electrical equipment sold here for over 50 years.

**30) Medical Arts Building (1929), 26 Franklin Rd.** Art Deco: patterned brickwork, original marquee. Housed doctors' & dentists' offices.

**31) Appalachian Power Building (1947), 40 Franklin Rd.** Art Deco: intricate geometric brickwork. The Appalachian Power Company described it as "the pride of Roanoke".

**32) Y.W.C.A. Building (1926), 605 First St.** Beaux Arts: chamfered corner entrance accented with stone quoins, large arched windows. Young Women's Christian Association housed single women & boasted cafeteria, swimming pool, auditorium, gymnasium.

**33) Texas Tavern (1930), 114 Church Ave.** Operated by four generations of the Bullington family, 24-hour-a-day eatery famous for its chili and "Cheesy Westerns."

**34) Greene Memorial Methodist Church (1890), 402 Second St.** Gothic Revival: Pointed arches, crenellated parapet. Bell tower chimes quarter-hours, rests on footings deep as the tower is high (because of limestone & caverns). Formerly St. Mark's Lutheran, one of several churches originally on Church Avenue.

**35) Poff Federal Building (1976), 220 Franklin Rd.** Greenish tinted glass slab accented with brick service towers. Named for Richard H. Poff, first Republican congressman elected to 6th District since Reconstruction (served 1953 - 1972). Houses U.S. District Court & federal agencies for the Western District of Virginia.

**36) United States Post Office and Courthouse (1932), 220 Church Ave.** Beaux-Arts: scored concrete base mimics stone, Ionic pilasters, classical cornice. Arched loading docks (west side) & PO boxes (lobby) reflect original function. Houses U.S. bankruptcy court. Henrietta Lacks/Freedom Plaza to the north honors war veterans.

**37) WSLs (1952), 401 Third St.** Modernist: simple lines, concrete, plate glass. Housed Roanoke's first television station until 2019. Note Cold War-era "Fallout Shelter" sign near entry.

**38) Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building (1915), 210 Campbell Ave SW.** Neoclassical influenced by City Beautiful Movement: projecting bays, raised base, Ionic columns, full entablature. Replaced nearby Rorer Hall as seat of government. Brutalist wing added 1969, Campbell Ave. entrance restored 2015. Named for first Black mayor (served 1975-1992) who facilitated peaceful desegregation.

## THE N&W RAILWAY WALK

**39) Dog Mouth Fountain (1898), Market St. at Salem Ave.** Legend says whoever drinks from this fountain will always return to Roanoke... or never leave. Drink from the dog's mouth; the street side is for horses! Glass walkway over tracks connects Market area to Hotel Roanoke. Sits on plaza of Roanoke's tallest building (copper pyramid roof & spire).

**40) Taubman Museum of Art (2008), 110 Salem Ave.** Architect Randall Stout's design emulates surrounding mountains & railroad heritage. Sustainable elements include day lighting and computerized building management. A permanent collection of over 2,000 works includes prominent American art and Southern folk art.

**41) Hotel Roanoke (1882), 110 Shenandoah Ave.** Half-timbered Tudor Revival hotel, built & operated by N&W Railroad. Modern conveniences: indoor toilets, hot water, elevator, gas lights, call bells. Prime jobs for Black workers White-only patrons until desegregation. Maintained original style despite 1898 fire & numerous additions. Roanoke & Virginia Tech partnered to restore & reopen hotel in 1995.

**42) N&W Passenger Station (1905), 101 Shenandoah Ave.** Industrial designer Raymond Loewy remodeled original Neoclassical station in Moderne style with brick portico, insulated glass curtain wall (Virginia's first). First escalator in Roanoke. Last passenger train 1971. Renovated 2004 to house O. Winston Link railroad photography, History Museum of Western Virginia, & visitor center.

**43) Motive Power (1911), 209 Shenandoah Ave.** N&W Railway car/locomotive design & operations with photo lab, fireproof vaults, company doctors' offices. Steam-power locomotives (i.e. Class J, A, & Y6) designed here. Look south at Mill Mountain Star, iconic neon signs: H&C Coffee, Dr Pepper.

**44) Gainsboro History Walk (2014), Wells Ave.** Interpretive panels describe 1835 town of Gainesborough (now Gainesboro), early 1900's center of the Black community. Home of Black leaders such as civil rights attorney Oliver Hill (Brown vs. Board of Education). Historical marker nearby for Hunton Life Saving & First Aid Crew, first all-

Black volunteer rescue squad (1941). 1950's & 60's urban renewal destroyed much of the area.

**45) St. Andrew's Catholic Church (1902), 631 N. Jefferson St.** High Victorian Gothic: twin spires, rounded apse, gabled transepts. 'Self-cleaning' yellow brick resisted dirt & grime. Spearheaded by Father John Lynch and Irish Catholic railroad workers in 1882 to serve immigrants from many countries. Belfry of original church in back.

**46) Stone Printing Co. (1908), 116 N. Jefferson St.** One of the largest printing & binding companies in the South for most of the 20th century, Stone Printing handled N&W Railway's printing needs.

**47) N&W Railway General Office Building-North (1931), 108 N. Jefferson St.** Art Deco: entry lanterns, geometric details. Inspired by Empire State Building. Fireproof construction at height of Great Depression. N&W Railway headquarters for over 50 years until Southern Railway merger. Renovated 2000 Roanoke Higher Education Center.

**48) N&W Railway General Office Building-South (1896), 8 N. Jefferson St.** Neoclassical Revival: ornate brickwork, classical motifs, arched openings, colossal Tuscan portico. After fire, east wing was constructed in 1903 with cast-iron structural girders, heavy timbers, granite, 22 fireproof vaults. Remodeled 2002.

**49) Hotel Dumas (1917), 108 Henry St.** 26 guest rooms, cleaning/pressing service, snack bar, ice cream parlor, dining room, two pool rooms, ballroom. 1920's film producer Oscar Micheaux lodged here. Jazz musicians - Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horn, Lionel Hampton, Billy Eckstine - held late-night jam sessions after concerts in town. Operated by the Barlow Family 1933-1976, listed in the Negro Motorist Green Book (guide for Black travelers during segregation). Renovated 2007 with 178-seat auditorium.

**50) Strand Theatre (1923), 109 Henry St.** Built by local Black businessmen Albert F. Brooks and C. Tiffany Tolliver. Equipped with organ. Strand Theatre became Lincoln Theatre (1930's), Morocco Club (1950's), Ebony Club (1960's). Oscar Micheaux, director & producer of Jim Crow-era 'race films', set up office here 1924. Renovated 2007 as culinary institute. Exterior & interior interpretive panels. Facing Centre Ave, office of Dr. Lylburn Downing who provided one of many services for Black patients in the Yard.

**51) Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge (1892).** Last warren pony truss bridge in Roanoke. Originally Henry Street Bridge, connected segregated Black and White business districts. The thriving Black commercial & entertainment district known as "The Yard" declined after urban renewal. Refurbished as pedestrian bridge & dedicated 2008 with Martin Luther King Jr. statue.

**52) N&W Freight Station (1918), 303 Norfolk Ave.** Hub of freight operations for Eastern Seaboard & Midwest until 1964. Became Virginia Museum of Transportation 1996. Features restored N&W cars/locomotives manufactured in Roanoke Machine Shops, vintage automobiles, & Jupiter Missile. David & Susan Goode Railwalk interprets railroad history & connects Amtrak passenger station to City Market.

**53) Warehouse Row (1889-1902), 109-133 Norfolk Ave.** Block of five warehouses built between 1889 & 1902 exemplified functional tradition of early industrial design. Docks & fireproof iron freight doors, iron segmental-arched windows. Stepped-gabled roofs on two structures reminiscent of Dutch architecture. Closely identified with Roanoke's emergence as distribution center of Southwest Virginia, stored wholesale food & goods.



Dog Mouth Fountain (RPL)

## THREE DIFFERENT VIEWS

*By referring to the numbered map and building key, visitors can easily plan their own walks. However, this brochure outlines three possible routes, each with its own distinctive view of the city.*



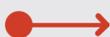
### THE COMMERCE WALK:

Walk through the heart of the city, starting with the bustling City Market Building, and continuing along some of downtown's most important and scenic commercial streets.



### THE COMMUNITY WALK:

Walk past buildings and landmarks central to the daily lives of Roanoke's citizens.



### N&W RAILWAY WALK:

Get in touch with the city's railroad heritage and the rich history of Roanoke's Black community.

*\*Keep an eye out for bronze markers providing additional information on buildings participating in the RVPF's Historic Plaque Program.*

