

Historic Walking Tour of Salem

The charming community of Salem offers the quaint hospitality, culture, and history that helps make Virginia's Blue Ridge such a unique destination.

This historic walking tour of Salem takes you to some of the iconic places of interest that have helped shape the story of this city over the years.

The sites are numbered in order of tour, though visitors may tour in any sequence.

1. Williams-Brown House Store - 1845

Built in 1845 as a residence, store, and post office by William C. Williams. It was purchased by J.R.C. Brown Jr. in 1852 and was eventually used as a fraternity house in the 1930s, and later as apartments. It's now home to the Salem Historical Society and Salem Museum, which opened in 1992.

2. East Hill Cemetery North - 1871

This two-acre plot of land was a burial ground for the African American community of Roanoke County. Among prominent citizens buried here are the Reverend B.F. Fox, pastor of First Baptist and Shiloh Baptist Church.

3. Site of Longwood Mansion - 1904

This luxurious 18-room residence was built by coal operator Thomas H. Cooper on an 11-acre tract in 1903. It was sold to the City of Salem in 1942 and was used for meetings until a fire destroyed it in 1968. The carriage house survived the fire and is now used as offices by the Chamber of Commerce.

4. Old Courthouse - 1901

As part of Salem's charming Main Street, this structure was built on the site of the first Roanoke County Courthouse. The United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated the Confederate monument on the lawn in 1910. When a new county courthouse was constructed in 1980, the building was acquired by Roanoke College, which now uses it for academic offices and classrooms.

5. Monterey - 1840

Monterey was constructed with bricks that were handmade by slaves on the premises and features 12 rooms, a two-story entrance hall, and 12-foot ceilings. It served as a hotel in the early 1900s and is now owned by Roanoke College.

6. Roanoke College - 1847

Originally established in 1842 as the Virginia Institute in Augusta County, the college relocated to Salem five years later. Obtain copies of the Roanoke College walking tour at the Admission Office in Roselawn - 226 High Street.

7. Downtown Salem Historic District

The 25-acre district functions as the core of Salem's downtown district, including the original layout from James Simpson in 1802. Along Main Street, notice the tops of buildings decorated with the original tin work made popular in the late 19th century.

8. Post Office - 1923

Constructed as part of a program that introduced great architecture to many towns, this was Salem's first federally owned post building.

9. Salem Presbyterian Church - 1851

The Presbyterian congregation outgrew its original location on Academy Street and erected this building, using slave labor, with bricks fired on premises. The structure incorporates numerous architectural designs from popular antebellum handbooks.

10. Old Post Home - 1821

The house first doubled as a residence for Jacob & Sarah Stevens, and provided travelers with a mail drop, exchange for fresh horses, and possibly overnight lodging. It was later used as a private residence and tea house before being purchased by St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1952, which now uses it for church purposes.

11. Farmers Market

Operating in Salem unofficially for many years, the city market was only formally established in 1992. Open 6 a.m. to dusk, Monday - Saturday, April - December.

12. City Hall - 1912

Constructed in Jeffersonian Revival style, the building served as Salem High School for over 20 years before a fire caused it to close for renovations. Converted into City Hall in 1983.

13. Evans-Webber House - 1882

This lavish example of Second French Empire architecture still boasts its original carved wood cornices, brackets, eaves, and 13-foot ceilings.

14. Rice House - 1867

Built by Salem attorney D.B. Strouse, who renovated the house to include its massive Corinthian columns and porch after seeing a similar one during a trip up north. Walkers may proceed along the alley between the Webber & Rice houses, which was a typical 19th century passageway for the town's people on horseback or foot.

15. Academy Street School - 1890 & 1895

These two Italian style buildings served as a school for the better part of a century until 1977 and are now used as condominiums.

16. Union Street - 1802

In the early 1800s, the Roanoke Navigation Company was headquartered on the corner of Main & Union and sent shipments of cargo on canal down Union Street to the Roanoke River. During the Civil War, Northern troops marched down Union Street toward the rail depot to destroy the tracks.

17. New Castle - 1820 & 1853

One of Salem's earliest buildings, it originally served as a residence but was later used as slave quarters. It was converted into a tobacco factory before becoming North Cross School following World War II. It now houses Olde Salem Furnishings.

18. Queen Anne House - 1888

The home was built as trends moved away from Colonial architecture to a more flowery, creative style. Note the fan-type decorations and many spindles on the porch and cupola over the front bay window.

19. The Water Street Community - 1868

South Broad was once Water Street - Salem's premier African American community. Former slaves bought lots in this area from their former owner's estate in 1868 and established the neighborhood. First Baptist Church remains the pioneer church of Salem's black community.

20. Oakey Duval House - 1880

Built by W.D.E. Duval, this Victorian-era home has served as a private residence and business location in Salem for many years and features seven fireplaces and floors of white oak.



21. Old Manse - 1847

Built by John Day, local blacksmith, this building was later sold to Salem Presbyterian Church, which used it as a home for their ministers until 1939. It has since served as a private residence and B&B.

22. East Hill Cemetery - 1869

After older burial grounds became too crowded, this property was purchased from the estate of Nathaniel Burwell. The body of General Andrew Lewis was moved to East Hill in 1897 from an overgrown family graveyard. Confederate soldiers who died in battles and in hospitals around Salem are also buried here.

