Walking Tour

Downtown Walking Tour

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Charlottesville lies in the heart of ancestral Monacan Indian territory, near where the town of Monasukapanough had been settled for centuries. Founded in 1762 as the new county seat for Albemarle County, Charlottesville is named in honor of Queen Charlotte of Great Britain.

Known best for Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia, the City has a deep and complicated history rooted in a slave economy. Today, Charlottesville struggles to undo generations of racial and social injustice.

Explore Downtown, Court Square, Market St Park, and vestiges of Vinegar Hill for a glimpse into Charlottesville's journey.

Legend

- ☐ Historic marker or interpretive sign
- ☐ Historic location only
- 🅿 Parking
- 🔵 Downtown Mall
- 🟠 Water Street
- 🔴 Court Square
- 🟣 Market Street
- 🟢 Vinegar Hill

Downtown Charlottesville

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To enhance your tour—
- Read the narratives first
- Look for historic markers

To learn more, visit—

Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society
albemarlehistory.org

Beloved Community Cville
belovedcommunity-cville.com

Charlottesville Walking Tour
charlottesville.gov/walkingtourmap

Charlottesville Visitors Center
visitcharlottesville.org/plan/visitor-center/

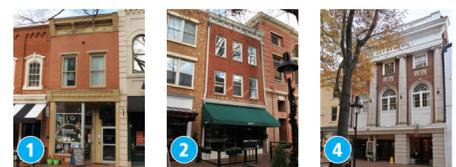**Jefferson School African American Heritage Center**
jeffschoolheritagecenter.org

Monacan Nation
monacannation.com

Monticello to Main St Walking Tour
monticello.org

City of Charlottesville

Downtown Mall

1. **Mesker Brothers Iron Works in façade**, 1885
   118 & 211 W Main St
2. **Miller's Downtown**, 1980, **Miller's Drugstore**, 1920
   109 W Main St
3. **Art Deco façade**, 1931
   102 E Main St
4. **Jefferson Theater**, 1912
   110 E Main St
5. **Site of Bell-Hemings-Scott residence**, c1780
   The National Bank of Charlottesville, 1920
   123 E Main St ☐ ☐
6. **Central Place Fountain, former horse trough**
   E Main and 2nd St
7. **The Paramount Theater**, 1931
   215 E Main St
8. **Site of Nancy West and David Isaacs, residence and business**, c1790
   222 E Main St ☐ ☐
9. **Classical Revival design**, 1916
   300 E Main St
10. **Charlottesville Hardware Co**, 1909
    316 E Main St
11. **Gilmore Furniture**, 1909
    320 E Main St
12. **Timberlake Drug Store**, 1917
    322 E Main St
13. **Victorian Italianate buildings**, c1890
    411–413 E Main St
14. **Streamline Moderne lower façade**, c1940
    415 E Main St
15. **Three Notch'd Road**, c1730
    E Main St near City Hall ☐ ☐
16. **Horse and trolley barn**, 1887
    520 E Main St
17. **City Hall**, 1969
    605 E Main St

Downtown Mall

Transportation transformation

Charlottesville was established along 18th century transportation routes. Main St follows a trail adopted by colonial settlers in the 1730s called Three Notch'd Road [15]. Horse and river navigation were the only options for long-distance travel until train service arrived in 1850. In 1887, horse-drawn trolleys [16] and later electrified streetcars, connected Main St to neighborhoods and UVA. After WWII, the automobile enabled businesses and residents to move to the suburbs. Responding to a decline of the downtown area, City Council made a bold decision in 1972 to transform several blocks of Main St into a pedestrian mall.

The Downtown Mall

Inspired by the area's mountain streams and forests, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin & Associates designed the Mall with strategically placed willow oaks and large and small planters, to encourage pedestrians to meander down the Mall. Halprin sought to evoke Main St's past by using the historic materials of brick, granite, and cast iron. Outdoor seating and four fountains [6], provide opportunities to pause and gather. City Councilors, including Charles Barbour and Nancy O'Brien, the first Black and female mayors respectively, dedicated the Downtown Mall in 1976.

Multiracial families

In the early 1800s, free Black businesswoman Nancy West and Jewish merchant David Isaacs resided here [8] with their seven children. This family built several of the town's earliest brick buildings. Their daughter Julia married Eston Hemings, born to Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson and freed in Jefferson's will. A bank [5] now stands where White merchant Thomas Bell lived with Mary Hemings, whom he purchased from Jefferson in 1792 and freed. Their daughter Sarah married Jesse Scott, a talented violinist of Pamunkey and White heritage. The Scott family fiddlers were renowned throughout Virginia and beyond.

Downtown Mall

Theaters

Built as a bank in 1902, Jefferson Theater [4] opened in 1912 as a segregated theater for live performances, silent movies, and vaudeville. The Paramount [7], designed by Rapp & Rapp, opened in 1931 in the golden age of cinema. A separate entrance, preserved on Third St, led to segregated balcony seating for Black patrons. A lighted marquee and blade sign drew moviegoers into a grand space with painted tapestries, elegant moldings, and chandeliers. The theater closed in 1974 and was restored in the 1990s. Today, both theaters host live shows.

Early businesses

Above some businesses are vintage signs such as Miller Drugstore, Drugs and Seeds [2]. During Prohibition, Guy Miller was allowed to sell whiskey "for medicinal use only." Now a restaurant, it is here that bartender Dave Matthews met jazz musicians LeRoi Moore and Carter Beauford, and formed the Dave Matthews Band. Timberlake, [12] another of 12 drugstores on Main St in 1917 still offers old-fashioned fountain service. The interior reflects its origins as People's National Bank. Note the architectural contrast to Gilmore Furniture [11] next door, with a distinctive copper façade, and Charlottesville Hardware [10] that operated here for almost a century. Until passage of federal laws in the 1960s, most downtown businesses denied equal service to Black customers.

A variety of architectural styles

Examples of 19th and 20th century architecture include details from Mesker Brothers Iron Works [1], Art Deco [3], Georgian Revival [12], Victorian façade with keystones over arched windows [13], and streamline Moderne [14]. Virginia's state flower adorns a 1916 Classical Revival bank [9] designed by Eugene Bradbury with imposing Corinthian columns. Marsh & Peters designed the 1920 Virginia National Bank [5] as the city's first skyscraper. City Hall [17], a Modern Classicist building by Milton Grigg, features relief sculptures of Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe.

Water Street

18. **Heather Heyer Way**, 2017
    4th St SE
19. **Chas King & Son Co Wholesale Grocer**, 1897
    410 E Water St
20. **C&O Train Station**, 1905
    600 E Water St
21. **Coal tower**, 1942
    East of Water St

Trains and commerce

After train service reached Charlottesville in 1850, Water St grew to be a vital warehouse and industrial district. King & Son Wholesale Grocers [19] delivered food and goods to more than a dozen grocery stores on Main St. The elegant C&O train station [20] designed by Wilson, Harris & Richards was a town hub, welcoming both travelers and freight from 1905 until 1972. Coal for steam locomotion was stored in a tower [21] visible to the east.

Heather Heyer Way

Fourth St [18] is named in honor of local resident Heather Heyer, who was killed on 4th near Water St by a White supremacist during the August 2017 Unite the Right rally.
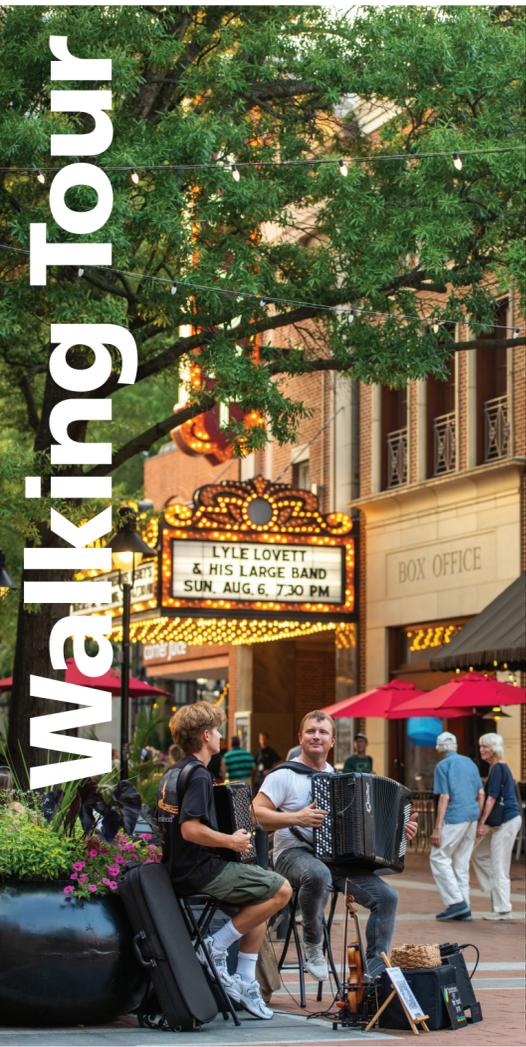
Walking Tour

History of the Monacan Nation

Monacan Indians and their fellow Siouan-speaking neighbors lived throughout the Piedmont and Blue Ridge Mountain regions of Virginia. Their communities included large towns, sacred burial mounds, and many smaller settlements along the major rivers. Monasukapanough, a large Monacan town located four miles north of downtown Charlottesville on the Rivanna River, was settled into the early 18th century. The Monacans discouraged colonial interaction because, as one Monacan man named Amoroleck prophetically relayed in 1608, the colonists "were a people come from under the world, to take their world from them." The Monacans chose to move away from colonial expansion to other areas, including Bear Mountain in Amherst County, today the heart of the federally recognized Monacan Indian Nation.

European settlers claim Monacan land

By the mid-18th century, English colonists had claimed the fields and towns of the Monacans and created farms and plantations, exploiting enslaved Black workers to grow tobacco and other cash crops. Spurred by population growth, the Virginia House of Burgesses chartered a new town in 1762, naming it Charlottesville for Queen Charlotte of Great Britain. From its inception until the mid-19th century, Court Square was the social and civic center of the town and Albemarle County.

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Court Square

22 **Court Square Park, formerly Jackson Park**, 1918
Site of McKee block, 18th century
4th St NE & E Jefferson St | ☐

23 **Charlottesville's oldest surviving home**, 1785
410 E Jefferson St

24 **Albemarle County Courthouse**, 1803 *et seq.*
501 E Jefferson St | ☐

25 **Monticello Hotel**, 1926
500 E Jefferson St

26 **Site of the Eagle Tavern**, 1791
Farish Hotel, 1854
300 Court Square

27 **6th Street buildings**, about 1830
Court Square & 6th St NE | ☐

28 **Number Nothing**, about 1820
0 Court Square | ☐

29 **Site of the Swan Tavern**, about 1760
300 Park St | ☐

30 **Town Hall**, 1851, **Levy Opera House**, 1888
350 Park St

See reverse for locations on the map.

Early days

Charlottesville was established in 1762 near the Rivanna River on a well-traveled route known as Three Notch'd Rd [15]. By 1779, Court Square consisted of a courthouse, a tavern, and a dozen houses arranged as an English Green. A jail, whipping post, and stocks were arranged around the courthouse. When the court met in monthly session, people traveled to Court Square to buy and sell produce and goods. Enslaved men, women, and children were also sold throughout the Square, including on the courthouse steps [24], the auction house at Number Nothing [28], and in local taverns [26, 29].

Court Square

Albemarle County Courthouse

A brick courthouse constructed in 1803 [24] replaced the original 1763 wood structure and remains Albemarle County's principal courtroom. The courthouse served as court, polling site, town hall, and what Jefferson called "the common temple," with congregations alternating Sundays. Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, three early American Presidents, attended meetings here. A major renovation in 1859 reoriented the building to face Jefferson St. Further renovations included a classical portico and the current Colonial Revival entrance.

Taverns

Swan Tavern [29], built around 1770, was owned by the family of Jack Jouett. In 1781, during the Revolution, Jouett learned of a planned attack by the British and rode 40 miles through the night to warn Gov. Thomas Jefferson at Monticello and legislators meeting at the tavern. Most escaped capture.

The Eagle Tavern [26], built in 1791, hosted public dances, political meetings, and victory celebrations. Its large front porch was a site for the auction of enslaved people, including 33 individuals from Jefferson's estate. The current building, constructed as the Farish Hotel in 1854 for White guests, had a stable on 6th St for the guests' horses. The building continued to operate as a hotel until the 1960s.

Court Square in the 20th century

McKee Block [22] was the site of many of Court Square's original shops and homes. By 1914, at a time when it housed primarily Black workers, wealthy businessman Paul Goodloe McIntire acquired the block to create a park with a statue of Confederate Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson. The Monticello Hotel [25], designed by Stanhope Johnson, was built in 1926 to offer modern amenities to White patrons. The Jackson statue and other Confederate monuments were removed by 2021.

Market Street

31 **Market Street Park**, 2018
formerly Lee Park, 1917
1st St N & E Market St

32 **Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society**, 1994
Former public library, 1921
200 2nd St NE

33 **Central Library**, 1979; **formerly US Post Office and federal courthouse**, 1907 | ☐
201 E Market St

See reverse for locations on the map.

Market Street Park

Paul Goodloe McIntire purchased the land for this park in 1917 and donated funds to build a Colonial-style public library for White patrons adjacent to the park. Today, the former library houses the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society [32]. Designed by Walter Dabney Blair, it features Palladian-style windows and a marble entrance. McIntire commissioned a statue of Gen. Robert E. Lee for the new park that was dedicated in 1924 as part of a Confederate reunion [31]. City Council's 2017 decision to remove the Lee statue was met with White supremacists' violent attacks. In 2021, the park was renamed and the statue removed.

Federal building and civil rights

In 1907, the US government built a post office and federal court [33] on the site of Congregation Beth Israel. The federal court was the site of pivotal hearings on desegregation. In 1950, NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall successfully argued that Gregory Swanson be admitted as the first Black law student at UVA. In 1956, Black families, with support of the local NAACP, sued to desegregate City public schools, eventually forcing their integration. The building was designed by James Knox Taylor with a 1936 addition by Lewis A. Simon. Architect Jack Rinehart redesigned the building as a regional library in the 1980s.

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City of Charlottesville

Historic Resources Committee
Edition 2, 2025

Vinegar Hill

34 **Jefferson School African American Heritage Center**, 2013, **formerly Jefferson School**, 1926
233 4th St NW | ☐

35 **Restaurant, formerly Inge's Grocery Store**, 1820s
333 West Main St | ☐

36 **Midway Manor**, 1981
site of Midway High School, 1893
100 Ridge St | ☐

37 **Albemarle County Office Building**, 1981, **formerly Lane High School**, 1940
401 McIntire Rd | ☐

38 **McGuffey Art Center**, 1975, **formerly McGuffey Primary School**, 1916
201 2nd St NW | ☐

Historic Black neighborhoods

Vinegar Hill was named by Irish immigrants and exiles living here in the early 1800s. It later grew to be the largest of eight predominantly Black neighborhoods, a vibrant community of commerce, churches, and homes. Businesses extended to the western end of today's Downtown Mall and were architecturally similar to its historic buildings. They included insurance agencies, restaurants, clothing stores, pharmacies, barber shops, billiard rooms, and a jazz club.

Urban renewal

In 1960, at a time when poll taxes excluded most Black voters, a local referendum to raze Vinegar Hill passed by 36 votes. Under a federal urban renewal program, the City bulldozed the neighborhood, displacing 158 families and closing 29 businesses. Most families could not find or afford alternative homes and were relocated to segregated public housing. Inge's Grocery Store [35] was one of the few businesses spared. Vinegar Hill lay largely vacant for decades despite redevelopment plans, and was replaced by fast food, hotels, and the Ridge-McIntire thruway.

Vinegar Hill

Racially segregated schools

In 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau opened a school for formerly enslaved children and adults on West Main St and named it Jefferson School. In 1870, Virginia established free public education, segregated by race. Midway School [36] opened in 1893 for White students, grades 1–12. In 1894, the School Board built Jefferson Graded School near Vinegar Hill to serve Black children, grades 1–8. High school was unavailable to Black students until 1926 when parent and community leaders petitioned the city to build Jefferson High School [34].

Separate and unequal

White schools had better equipped buildings, offered more classes and grade levels, paid better salaries and had newer materials. White students attended McGuffey Primary [39], built in 1916, and Lane High School [37], built in 1940. In 1951, Jefferson High students moved to Jackson P. Burley, a new City-County Black high school, and Jefferson High became a Black elementary school.

Desegregation

After the 1954 US Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, the Charlottesville School Board refused to desegregate. Black parents, supported by the NAACP, sued. When the federal court ordered the admission of 12 Black students to Lane High and Venable Elementary in 1958, Gov. Lindsay Almond closed the schools to be closed under Virginia's Massive Resistance policy. They were closed for five months, before the federal courts ordered them to be reopened in 1959. By 1967, after years of litigation, all schools in the city were fully integrated.

Schools re-purposed

Jefferson School [34] is now home to the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, a community space offering history, art, and theater. McGuffey School [38], one of the first arts cooperatives in the nation, has public galleries. Both are on the National Register of Historic Places and open to the public.

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Boundary of the razed Vinegar Hill neighborhood

Jefferson School

Vinegar Hill

Omni

Downtown Mall

Preston Ave
McIntire Rd
High St W
5th St NW
4th St NW
Ridge McIntire Rd
Old Preston Ave
West Main St
Ridge St
Commerce St
2nd St NW
W Market St
W Water St
E Water St
2nd St SW
South Street West
1st St SE

50'   200'   500 feet