

Brief History of St. Albans

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

St. Albans, West Virginia, being an historic town in the Kanawha Valley, has a rich heritage. Beginning with its prehistoric site, it is an area which has had many important developments, such as:

- Fort Tackett and "Indian" raids
- Land originally owned by George Washington
- Coal River Locks and Dams
- Riverboat activities
- Lumber industries
- Railroad Development
- Civil War History
- James River and Kanawha Turnpike and Inns
- Streetcars and Kanawha River Ferries

Pre-history

The pre-history occupation here spanned from 7,900 BC to 1670 AD. This area has the oldest artifacts and fluted points yet discovered in America and is also said to be the longest occupied settlement in America. Someone has either lived or hunted this area at the mouth of the Coal River for over 9,000 years.

These Native American cultures included the Adena, Ft. Ancient, Monetan and Shawnee. The first known white man to enter the Kanawha Valley was Gabriel Arthur in 1674 when he met with the Monetan tribe. The Shawnees continued to visit to hunt and make salt in this area until the 1780's, often attacking white settlements here.

Early Explorers and Frontiersmen

Explorer John Peter Salley discovered the Coal River in 1742 on his expedition from Virginia to New Orleans. He named it the Coal River for the vast outcroppings of coal he saw. In 1756, Samuel Cole, while on a military expedition, "re-discovered" the Coal River and for many years it was also sometimes called the Cole River. Surveyor Christopher Gist visited the area in 1751. In 1755 Mary Ingles passed through here from her escape from the Indians. Frontiersman and Indian fighter Simon Kenton hunted here and lived a short time in the upper Kanawha Valley in 1771.

The first permanent settlers near St. Albans, called Coalsmouth, arrived in 1788 with the building of Ft. Tackett, which was actually about ½ mile below present St. Albans. After being burnt by the Shawnee Indians in 1790, the settlers moved upriver to Charleston (Ft. Lee). Before then, vast virgin timber forests, buffalo and Indians trails preceded the White

man in this area. Thirty-one people lived there in 1790. In March of that year the Shawnee Indians attacked and captured two settlers and took them to Michigan. The two captives eventually escaped and returned to this area. Six months later the Shawnee attacked again and they killed Christopher Tackett and several children, kidnapped eight others and burned the fort. At least two were killed later by the Indians and the other taken to Huron and most managed to eventually escape back to the Kanawha Valley. Several hid from the attack and managed to escape to Ft. Clendenin (later Ft. Lee and Charleston). The first white child born in the Kanawha Valley, Jacob Tackett, was born here to Kizah Tackett Young. Daniel Boone wrote in 1791 "from Pt. Pleasant to Elk (Charleston), no inhabitation. He referred to this fort as Coal Fort.

Washington Land

The land where St. Albans stands was once owned by George Washington (2,000 acres) and purchased by him from Lt. Charles Thurston for his service in the French and Indian War. The land was issued by Benjamin Harrison, governor of Virginia and signer of the Declaration of Independence (his son William Henry Harrison and great-grandson Benjamin Harrison both rose to become Presidents). William Crawford surveyed the land in 1774.

Washington's "Cole River" property was willed at his death in 1799 to his niece Elizabeth Spotswood, daughter of Augustine Washington. She had married Brig. Gen. Alexander Spotswood. George Washington's nephew, Samuel Washington, lived here for awhile and is buried in the Bangor Cemetery in town. His father was Charles Washington. His tombstone was recently re-discovered by the groundskeepers. Samuel inherited 3,500 acres near here (Dunbar) as well as a famous battle sword from George Washington and Benjamin Franklin's gold-headed cane, which was presented to Congress in 1843 and can be seen at the Smithsonian.

Morris Hudson bought 400 acres of the eastern part of the property from Elizabeth Spotswood in 1810 and became the first settler in present St. Albans.

Early Settlers

Another earlier settler was Thomas Teays who was granted 27,000 acres in 1781 from West of the Coal River to present day Teays Valley. He was captured by the Shawnee in 1782 but managed to be set free when one of the Indians recognized him as giving him salt during a hunting trip. He left the area due to the Indian turmoil. However his son Stephen built a double log house on the West side of Coal River in 1793. It was on Teays land that Ft. Tackett was built. The "old state road" was built from Ft. Lee to Pt. Pleasant in 1804 and Stephen Teays built a ferry

at the Coal River crossing and inn to feed, lodge and supply those who were brave enough to travel the road.

Phillip Thompson also purchased land from Spotswood (1,000 acres) near the Coal River and moved his family here in 1817. He built a large stone house here called Muckmore (near the present day Loop) which survived until 1976. Mr. Thompson and James Teays built a 180 foot long covered toll bridge in 1831 across the Coal River along the James River and Kanawha Turnpike. Previously the river had been forded or used a ferry. The bridge stood until 1861 when burnt by the retreating Confederates after the battle of nearby Scary Creek. It was a foolish loss as pursuing Union forces could still ford the river. The Teays Inn was also built on the West on the bridge along the turnpike. Mr. Thompson died in 1837 and is buried at College Hill Cemetery.

A Town is Born

Phillip Thompson began laying out lots and streets in what was then called Coalmouth in 1832 and a town was born. Due in part from turnpike travelers, business began to spring up. He called his early town at Coalsmouth, Phillipi. The oldest home still standing in St. Albans is called Rosedale and was owned by Samuel Hudson, son of Morris Hudson, and was built in ca. 1818. It was moved in 1954 across Kanawha Terrace (James River and Kanawha Turnpike and later the Midland Trail) to its present location when the High School was built. Morris Hudson built one of the first churches (Episcopal) in the area in 1822, called Bangor Parish. Samuel Washington, nephew of George and son of Charles Washington, is buried in Bangor Cemetery. He had inherited land that is now present day Dunbar. His son, Samuel T. Washington, Jr., married Morris Hudson's granddaughter, Wilhelmina.

Coal River Locks and Dams

Between 1854-1857, eight stone and log locks and dams were built on the Coal River to Peytona in Boone County and one on the Little Coal River to haul cannel coal. The project engineer was Cpt. William Roscrans (later General). After a severe flood in 1857, the locks were rebuilt and finally open in 1859. A flood again heavily damaged them in 1861 and after inactivity during the Civil War; they were again rebuilt and reopened in 1867. Cannel coal was the chief product shipped by the locks, which could be made into fuel oil (coal oil) for lamps. Much of it was shipped to refineries in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Navigation Company of Coal River ceased in 1881 due in part that cannel coal was no longer needed with the discovery of petroleum. The locks also had suffered flood damage several times in 1875-1876. Logs could now be floated down the Coal River to St. Albans to the mills being established in St. Albans.

Boom Years

It could be said that St. Albans witnessed boom years not only during the days of the shipping of coal through here, but mainly due to the dozens of lumber and planing mills established from the 1880's through the 1920's and the coming of the C&O railroad. Log booms, or log crabbings, were built on the Coal River to contain the logs until they could be processed. After most of the virgin logs had been harvested from the area, the largest lumber mill, Bowman Lumber Company, closed in 1923.

Name Change and the Railroad

Col. John Cunningham (Union) acquired most of Phillip Thompson's land and in 1857 Phillipi became Jefferson. One year later in 1868 it was incorporated as the Village of Kanawha City. Collis P. Huntington built the C&O railroad through here in 1873. Mr. Huntington, being an influential person, proceeded to have the name of the town changed to St. Albans in 1871. Supposedly done as a favor to his chief council, H.C. Parson after his home in St. Albans, Vermont. The citizens were not informed of the name change until after the fact. The Post Office has only used two names: Coalsmouth and St. Albans. Approved by WV Legislature in January 1872.

First Schools

The first high school in town was formed in 1873 and named Coalsmouth High School (notice they still used the name Coalsmouth). The name was changed to Shelton College in 1877. It finally had to close its doors in 1911 after finally being the St. Albans Latin School. It is located on College Hill and is now a fine restored home.

Main Street, Transportation and Development

A series of severe fires destroyed most of St. Alban's Main Street in 1906. With no fire department of its own, fire equipment had to be brought in by rail from Charleston, thirteen miles away. The new structures had to be built of masonry. Most of the buildings survive today and its twenty-seven structures are part of the Main Street Historic District. The Coal River & Western Railway extended up Coal River in 1906 and today is one of the busiest coal railroads in America. The streetcar lines were extended to St. Albans from Charleston in 1913. They were discontinued in 1939 and replaced by bus service. The St. Albans-Nitro Kanawha River Bridge was constructed in 1934 and is still in use today. A Kanawha River ferry also operated in that area for over a hundred years and even continued after the bridge was built for several years as it had lower tolls than the bridge. The water plant was built in 1921 and the first paved brick streets were built in 1918. Only one brick street remains today, on Fourth Ave. in front of the C&O Depot (ca. 1906), placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.



PDF Complete

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

Summary

St. Albans has eleven (11) sites on the National Register of Historic Places and their Historical Society frequently conducts historic walking home tours. Main Street was recently added as a Historic District. The Archeological site along the Kanawha River is one of the oldest in the United States

With the closing of the lumber mills in the 1920's and the short lived Nitro ammunition plant during WWI, St. Albans (approximately 12,000 residents) has become mainly a residential city of the Charleston metropolitan area. Many homes were built here in the 1940's and later to provide housing for workers at the large Naval Ordnance Plant during WWII (later FMC) in South Charleston and the numerous chemical plants in the Kanawha Valley. Content to provide workers throughout the Kanawha Valley, it is a good place to come home to after a hard day's work.