



To Petaluma  
Visitors Center

Weller St.

Draw  
Bridge

Turning  
Basin &  
Harbor

Petaluma River

PENRY  
PARK

Petaluma Blvd. N.

E. Washington St.

1st St.

D St.

Water St.

Balshaw  
Bridge

2nd St.

PUTNAM  
PLAZA

Main St.

Petaluma Blvd. S.

Start

Kentucky St.

4th St.

End

Washington St.

Keller St.

Western Ave.

B St.

C St.

Liberty St.

5th St.

# Historic Downtown Walking Tour

## HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR OF PETALUMA

- 1. Clock Tower/Masonic Building/WCTU Water Fountain** The Masonic Lodge constructed the building on this corner at the height of Petaluma's river-centered prosperity in 1882. The clock atop the building was built in Connecticut, shipped around The Horn, and up Petaluma Creek in 1882. The water fountain on the left was placed by the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the height of their campaign against the bars and pubs in this frontier town.
- 2. Balshaw Bridge** Long overlooked as a valuable town resource, during the 1980s the Petaluma River was once again viewed as a vital resource for the community. The Balshaw Bridge, named for City Councilmember and staunch river advocate, John Balshaw, was built in 1989 as a means of connecting the downtown area with the shops and restaurants across the river.
- 3. Walk North on Water Street- Steiger Building** The Steiger Building was the site of Petaluma's first general store. Petaluma folklore recounts the story of the first city Independence Day celebration held here on the July 4, 1852. At the first corner (between the sets of buildings) turn left toward Petaluma Boulevard.
- 4. Left on Main to Petaluma Blvd. – Sienna** Entering Petaluma Boulevard, before turning right toward Washington Street, look across the street at the building at 119 Petaluma Boulevard. This building is an Iron Front, circa 1885, that was recently restored by removing a plywood and stucco slipcover that was put on in the 1950s. It was the site of the town's first blacksmith shop (Zartman and Fritsch, which went on to become the maker of Petaluma buggies, famed throughout the west).
- 5. California Flour Mills** Heading north along Petaluma Boulevard toward Washington Street, pass the original home of the California Flour Mills at 148 Petaluma Blvd. North. J.M. Bowles drove a herd of cattle to Petaluma in the 1850s and built this building as a flourmill in 1878. Grain was shipped here from as far away as South America to be milled into Petaluma flour. Across the street at 141 Petaluma Boulevard is Della Fattoria, originally a butcher shop, owned and operated by Tom Lockwood. It has been a bakery since the 1860s.
- 6. Wickersham Building** Built in 1910 on the site of a former bank that was built in 1880s, the Wickersham Building, at 170 Petaluma Blvd. N., is believed to be the site of Petaluma's first telephone. It also housed a silent movie house featuring an electric piano.
- 7. Chicken Pharmacy** Near the southeast corner of Petaluma Boulevard and Washington Street, the storefront that is now a part of Graziano's Restaurant was originally the world's only chicken pharmacy. Featured in *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* and *National Geographic*, it dispensed 50,000 pills daily. From the earliest days, the corner that is now Petaluma Blvd. and East Washington Street was the intersection of Petaluma's two main roads.
- 8. Historical Mural** Viewed from left to right, the historical mural at the corner of Washington and Petaluma Boulevard depicts the development of Petaluma from the days of Mariano Vallejo to the early 20th century metropolis it became. Local artist Steve Della Maggiora painted the mural.
- 9. Soberanes Statue** Cross Washington Street and proceed to the bronze statue near the corner. Newspaper columnist and "Peopleologist" Bill Soberanes was a true Petaluma character and the founder of Petaluma's World Wrist Wrestling Championship. Installed in September 1988, this sculpture celebrates Soberanes and his "Championship." It was created by Petaluma sculptor Rosa Estebanez and cast in Sonoma by bronze sculptor Jim Callahan.
- 10. Iron Front Building** A restored Iron Front building (now Thai Issan Restaurant) stands on the northeast corner of the intersection.
- 11. Washington Hotel / Sonoma County Bank** Before crossing Petaluma Boulevard to continue the tour, glance at the two buildings across the street. The former Sonoma County Bank Building on the southwest corner, built in 1926, appropriately now houses the Seed Bank. On the northwest corner, the Washington Hotel built in 1852 once stood.
- 12. Proceed to Penry Park – Byce's Incubator** Head away from Washington Street on the west side of Petaluma Boulevard toward Penry Park on the hill to gather in the view from the top of the park. See what the town might have looked like 150 years ago from this vantage point. Byce's Petaluma Incubator stood at 271 Petaluma Blvd. N. (bordering the park to the north). The building is now home to Dunaway Auto Parts and Paint Supplies.

13. **Kentucky Street Behind Park** Across the park on Kentucky Street is the site of the old Baptist Church where a bell was rung during the Civil War to celebrate each Union victory. Nearby, on the site at 223 Kentucky St. stood Hillside Hospital in 1880. Proceed down the hill and turn right on the corner of Washington St.
14. **Petaluma Hotel** At the corner of Washington and Kentucky streets, the Petaluma Hotel now stands at the site where Petaluma's first frame home was built.
15. **Volpi's Ristorante** Volpi's Ristorante on East Washington St., originally Volpi's Grocery Store, has changed little since Prohibition.
16. **Hill Opera House/Phoenix Theater** Across the street, on the southwest corner of Keller and Washington streets, is the former Hill Opera House. Built in 1904, this was the city's culture palace, opera house, and vaudeville theater. Walking back down Washington Street toward Petaluma Boulevard, turn right at the corner of Kentucky Street that owes its existence to the chicken. The flourishing poultry industry spurred a building boom here between 1905 and 1915.
17. **The Herold Building** at the corner of Washington and Kentucky streets was built in 1899.
18. **Old Opera House** The Old Opera House at 149 Kentucky St. was built in 1870 to replace the Music Hall on Main Street (now Petaluma Boulevard.) as the city's cultural center. Proceed down Kentucky Street and cross in the crosswalk at the middle of the block. Pass through the middle walkway toward Petaluma Boulevard. and into Putnam Plaza. Heading into the walkway, look to the right to view the site of the former Tomasini hardware store. The business was founded in this location (124 Kentucky St.) but later moved to 313 B St. near Petaluma Boulevard, its current home noted later in the tour
19. **Putnam Plaza Park** stands at the focal point of old town Petaluma. Putnam Plaza was the site of The American Hotel, built in 1852. It stood for 114 years. Next-door was the Wells Fargo office where the arrival of the stagecoach down the dust-filled streets was a momentous event. To the north was the Music Hall, where Petaluma culture and politics flourished. Turning right on the boulevard, head toward the corner at Western.
20. **Odd Fellows Hall** At 107-113 Petaluma Blvd., see The Odd Fellows Hall, one of the city's oldest buildings in town. Succeeding the Petaluma House, a hotel built at the location in 1852, the Hall was built between 1871 and 1878. The building was built with the provision that no Chinese labor could be used in its construction. At the corner of Western Avenue and Petaluma Boulevard. stands the American Trust Building. It is terra cotta with Grana-Tex finish in order to simulate block granite.
21. **Linch Building** The Linch Building at 10 Western Ave. was designed by architect Brainerd Jones and completed in 1910 as Baldwin's Bakery and Restaurant. It was the first steel-framed building north of San Francisco. The building is unique from others of the same period due to its vertical design.
22. **Iron Front Row** Look across the street, for a good view of what is often called Iron Front Row. In the last century, builders believed cast iron fronts on buildings made them fireproof (not true) and the practice flourished.
23. **Cross at Kentucky Street – the Prince Building** The Prince Building (on the northeast corner of Kentucky and Western streets) was originally occupied by a pharmacy from the time of its construction in 1915 until 1983.
24. **South on Kentucky Street – the Coca Cola sign on the Mutual Relief Building** Crossing Western on Kentucky streets, pass the Mutual Relief Building heading south. The south wall displays a restored classic Coca-Cola sign featuring a particularly Petaluma chicken and egg motif. In the middle of the block, notice an entrance into the LanMart building. Take a stroll through this building, originally called *The Centennial Block* in honor of the nation's birthday. It was constructed in 1876.
25. **Exit LanMart** Exiting onto Petaluma Boulevard, take a look across the street at the Brainerd Jones designed Post Office Building that was built in 1926. The site was originally the location of the Pioneer Hotel, favored by the women of the era because they could step directly from the ships on the river and onto the hotel's walkway. Turn right and head up the block toward "B" St.
26. **Empty Lot – Brothel /Cosmo Hotel– American Graffiti** Turning right, proceed past the corner of the LanMart building to the vacant lot that was originally the site of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. This location is best known these days as the "tie the chain to the cop's axle" stunt location in the movie *American Graffiti*. Historically, in the area on Petaluma Boulevard at the end of Western Avenue, there were three washhouses, three drug stores, and two other Chinese-owned stores.

- 27. McNear's Mystic Theater** Next to the lot is the historic McNear's building complex (15-23 Petaluma Blvd. N.), made up of two buildings. The building to the north was built in 1886 and housed a National Guard armory on its upper floors. The newer building, built in 1911, housed the old (and now the new) Mystic Theater, which featured silent movies accompanied by organ music. The McNear family was Petaluma's closest thing to a mercantile dynasty, starting with John A. McNear, who came here in 1856 and moved from real estate to the grain business to flour milling to shipping, banking, and railroads. His son George continued the family tradition with a feed mill empire to serve the emerging egg industry. The family contributed the McNear Canal, McNear Park, the Golf and Country Club, Cypress Hill Cemetery, and the town's first electric lights.
- 28. Hitching/Parking Lot** When Petaluma was designed, this area marked the southern limits and was set aside as a hitching area. Farmers parked their wagons here while doing business up the street.
- 29. Tomasini Rex Ace Hardware and Country Store** At the end of the block is "B" Street. Look across from the corner and up the street to view the Rex Hardware Building (313 "B" St.) which was the site, in 1917, of McNally's Blacksmith shop. In 1883, there was a wheelwright at that location and then several Chinese-owned stores. Turn left on "B" Street and proceed across Petaluma Boulevard back toward the Petaluma River.
- 30.** On the north side of the street is **The Great Petaluma Mill**, a sprawling complex that is actually several different buildings. The southeast corner of "The Mill" was probably built as a warehouse in the early 1850s.
- 31. Path along Trestle** As you face the river, take the sidewalk path that runs beside the trestle. The trolley that once ran along this track from Petaluma to Santa Rosa, Sebastopol and Forestville was one of the busiest railroads in America. At its peak, it hauled 10,000 carloads of produce and products and a quarter of a million passengers each year.
- 32. The Petaluma River Turning Basin** This section of the Petaluma River is known as the Turning Basin and was created to provide boats with enough room to turn around and head back down toward the San Francisco Bay.
- 33. Yacht Club – D Street Drawbridge** Turn right at "C" Street. Continue along the river path toward the blue building on the left, home of the Petaluma Yacht Club.
- 34.** Beyond the yacht club, see the **Historic "D" Street Drawbridge**, installed in 1937 and designed by Joseph Strauss, who also designed the Golden Gate Bridge. Turn right at C Street and proceed toward the Boulevard Cinemas just past 2nd Street.
- 35. Boulevard Cinemas** Boulevard Cinemas, the cornerstone of Petaluma's recently developed "Theater District," was a big idea of seven junior high school girls, who came to be known locally as "The Superb Seven." Through their consistent effort in building community support and engaging others in the dream, the modern downtown cinema palace came to be. Standing in front of the main entrance to the theater are the seven stars that honor these seven energetic young women who represent Petaluma's pioneering heritage and solid community spirit.
- 36. Faces of Petaluma - Theater Square** Directly across the street from the cinema is the heart of Theater Square, completed in 2007. Theater Square is the first multibuilding addition to the downtown area since John McNear built the Mystic Theater in 1911. At the center of the square stands the *Faces of Petaluma Fountain*, featuring personal sculptures created by children and adults as an artistic link between Petaluma's past and future.
- 37. 4th Street Post Office** Moving out to Petaluma Boulevard, turn left and proceed to the corner at "D" Street, then right across the Boulevard and up "D" to 4th Streets. From the corner of 4th and D streets, view Petaluma's Spanish Revival downtown post office, built in 1932 to replace the original Brainerd Jones designed post office still standing on Petaluma Boulevard. Turn right on 4th Street and continue for two blocks back to "B" Street to the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum.
- 38. End at the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum** The Petaluma Historical Library and Museum, built in 1904 with funding from a Carnegie Foundation grant, was the Petaluma Library until 1976 when it became the city's historical museum. Around the corner from the museum (at the corner of "B" and Keller Streets) is the site of the first school ever built in Petaluma. It was replaced by a brick school that stood on the site until Lincoln Primary School was built there in 1911. Another building designed by Brainerd Jones, the school building is the starting point of the Victorian Homes tour.