Urban Trail & Public Art Walking Tour

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The following pieces (referenced in the tour map) highlight some of Asheville's public art collection throughout the downtown area.

A. *Energy Loop* by Dirk Cruiser
Commissioned in 1982 and installed in 1983 in the former Pack Square Park, the *Energy Loop* is Asheville's first piece of public art. Made of COR-TEN steel, the rust color is the natural patina. After considerable restoration, the *Loop* was installed in its current location in 2009.

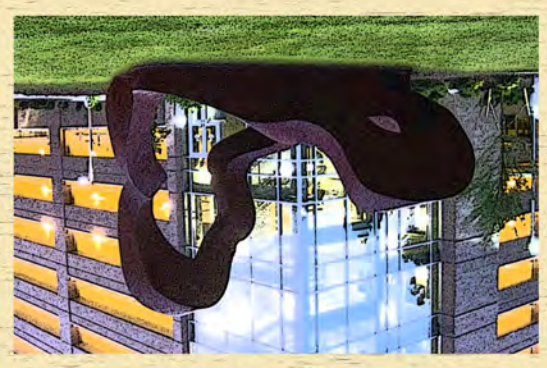
B. *Pergola* by Hoss Haley
The rolling canopy stretches 120 feet, echoing the rhythm of the mountains in the background and connecting the city and county buildings to their scenic backdrop, as well as to each other.

C. *Relax* by Kathy Triplett
The pattern of the ceramic wall relief reflects several art deco elements found on the City Hall building. For the relief tiles that reflect native plants, Kathy Triplett worked with eighth-grade students throughout Asheville to research native plants and make over 400 tiles.

D. *left of center* by Julia C. Burr
The tongue-in-cheek title of this railing suggests a bit about the nature of Asheville and its inhabitants and how people are drawn to Asheville both historically and in the present.

E. *Pack Fountain* by Hoss Haley

F. *Deco Gecko* by Harry McDaniel
Deco Gecko captures the art deco motifs on the buildings surrounding Pritchard Park with a whimsical gecko – a combination of simple abstract forms, historical references, and an animal form.



The Asheville Urban Trail, a walking tour of downtown Asheville, highlights the unique architecture, people, and historic events of the city. The Urban Trail is divided into five distinct eras, each of which has a symbol. These symbols are carved into pink granite blocks placed in the sidewalk along the way for you to follow. All street crosswalks for the trail are marked. Enjoyed in its entirety, the walking tour requires approximately two hours to complete. The map in this brochure identifies each of the 30 stations by a number. All 30 stations include a piece of art and/or a bronze plaque that describes the station.

The Asheville Urban Trail began in 1989 with the vision and desire to restore the vitality of downtown Asheville. It was completed in 2002. During those years numerous dedicated people volunteered their talents and time and generously donated funds for the project.

We hope you enjoy this walk through Asheville's history and remember it as one of the highlights of your visit to our unique and wonderful city.

The Frontier Period (1784-1880)
Before the Revolutionary War the land beyond the eastern slopes of the Appalachians was forbidden to European settlers by the king of England. He decreed that only Cherokees could enjoy the area's plentiful game, rich soils, and mountain streams. It took a series of Indian wars, the Revolutionary War, and treaties with the original inhabitants to open the mountain land for European settlement.

Beginning in 1784, the state of North Carolina started selling land grants in what would become Asheville. The first United States census, in 1790, revealed that more than a thousand pioneers had trekked over rough trails to homestead along the Swannanoa and French Broad rivers. These fiercely independent settlers sent petitions to the North Carolina General Assembly asking for a county of their own. The Assembly, in a unanimous vote, responded to their plea in 1792 by forming Buncombe County, named for Revolutionary War hero Edward Buncombe. Enormous and unsurveyed, Buncombe County encompassed all of western North Carolina and part of Tennessee. The small, rough village that was to become Asheville was first known as Morristown. When incorporated in November 1797, the town was renamed Asheville in honor of Governor Samuel Ashe.

The central business district began to take shape in 1794 when an opportunist named John Burton purchased a land grant that included the small log courthouse on the square. Burton sold lots along South and North Main streets (now Biltmore Avenue and Broadway Street) and commerce began.

The Gilded Age (1880-1930)
The Gilded Age began in 1880 when the railroad came from the east and introduced families of wealth and influence to the area. Within a decade the population quadrupled, and by 1883 Asheville had become a city. The first streetlights went up in 1888, and the first electric streetcars followed in 1889.

Wealthy individuals, such as George Vanderbilt, came for the beautiful scenery, the hospitable climate, and the therapeutic mountain air. Fashionable families came to Asheville for the summer to escape the suffocating heat. Those with consumptive ailments came for "the cure." The city became well-known for its boardinghouses, sanitariums, and luxury hotels.

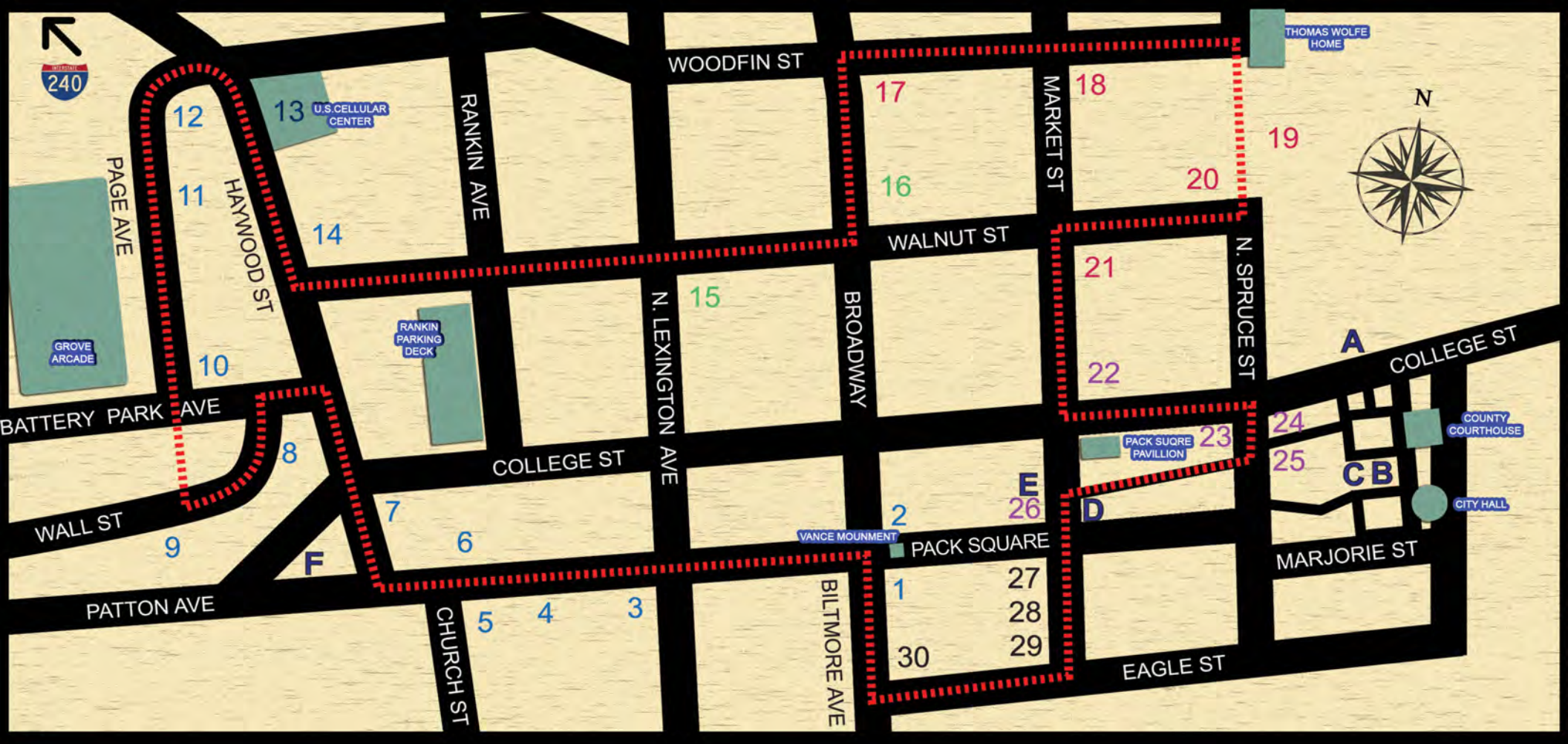
Earning the title "Paris of the South," Asheville boasted an opera house, a professional theater, and a community of art and music devotees. Asheville is still nationally known as a top arts destination. When the banks closed during the Great Depression in February 1930, the city was plunged into deep debt from which it did not emerge until 1976. As a result, downtown Asheville retains a treasure of historic buildings that might have given way to newer structures had money been available for development.

The Times of Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938)
Thomas Wolfe, an author and a native of Asheville, was made famous by his novel "Look Homeward, Angel," a story detailing the lives of characters whose identities closely resembled real Asheville personalities. As you walk along this portion of the Urban Trail, you will be introduced to an area of homes, places of worship, schools, and businesses that were familiar to Wolfe during his lifetime.

The Era of Civic Pride
In 1793 the first Buncombe County Court of Pleas in General Session met on the square. This area has housed seven courthouses over the years, and the two buildings that exist in City-County Plaza today were opened in 1928. The land they stand on was donated by philanthropist George Willis Pack, and the green area in front was created when the old courthouse was demolished. This section of the trail pays tribute to the great sense of pride Ashevillians have for their city.

The Age of Diversity
Asheville's culture has evolved from a unique blend of Native American, Appalachian, African-American, and cosmopolitan influences. This non-prejudicial flavor is celebrated in the varied restaurants, cafes, entertainment venues, and festivals. Evidence of a thriving community rich in arts, crafts, and individuality is Asheville's proud trademark.

This section of the trail emphasizes the African-American contributions to our city. Take special note of the pebbledash building at the southeast corner of Eagle and Market streets. This once housed the Young Men's Institute, a gathering and learning center for the African-American population in the early 1900s, and today continues this emphasis with exhibits and programs worth a visit.



The Gilded Age (1880 – 1930)
The feather motif that marks this portion of the Urban Trail is taken from the art deco ornamentations used on the current City Hall. Architect Douglas Ellington's decoration honors the Native Americans who once occupied the area. It is used here as a symbol of the pre-Depression boom period that occurred after the coming of the railroad to Asheville.

1. Walk Into History
George Willis Pack, for whom Pack Square is named, came to Asheville in 1880 and made significant contributions, including a library building on the square and the incentive for the Vance Monument.

2. Crossroads
At this station the tiles have been peeled back to reveal a road that was trod by Native Americans and by travelers on the 1827 Buncombe Turnpike. Stagecoaches and covered wagons made their way across the square on this dirt thoroughfare, as did the drovers from Tennessee, taking hundreds of turkeys, pigs, and cows to southern markets. The rails represent the train (1880) and the electric trolley (1889). Both had a tremendous impact on Asheville's economy and brought growth to Patton Avenue. Follow the trail to learn more about this growth.

3. Stepping Out
A bronze top hat, cane, and gloves recall the theaters and Grand Opera House that once made Patton Avenue the center of commerce and culture. This small bronze sculpture and others along the trail were created by University of North Carolina at Asheville students.

4. O. Henry
Around the plaque, embedded in the sidewalk, are bronze representations of the famous symbols in the Christmas tale "The Gift of the Magi," written by O. Henry. The prolific literary exponent is known for his mastery of a surprise ending. An avenue in Asheville bears his name.

5. Immortal Image
The plaque celebrates an existing Victorian edifice, the Drhumor Building (1895), named for the Johnston family estate in Ireland. The building's architect was Allen Leroy Melton. Above the facing corner rose a circular turret, which was used as a lookout until its removal. The trail crosses Patton Avenue.

6. Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D.
A bench with a bower of medicinal herbs honors Asheville resident Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell. She contributed to the advancement of care for women and children by establishing the New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1857, a bold move for that time. Dr. Blackwell also founded the world's first four-year medical college for women. Proceed to the corner and turn right onto Haywood Street.

7. Art Deco Masterpiece
A mosaic, crafted in Venice, Italy, mirrors Douglas Ellington's art deco masterpiece, the S & W Building (1929). Ellington returned to his native North Carolina from France during the 1920s building boom and enhanced Asheville with his architectural designs. The former cafeteria was one of 64 major downtown buildings constructed during that period. Cross Haywood Street to Pritchard Park, cross College Street, and go one block to Battery Park Avenue.

8. Flat Iron Architecture
A giant flat iron, a replica of one used by a local laundry, reflects the nearby Flat Iron Building. Battery Park Avenue was the gateway to the original Battery Park Hotel (1886), located on what was once a hill overlooking the city. In 1923 Edwin Wiley Grove built a major department store, now the Haywood Park Hotel, opposite this corner. The Flat Iron Building (1926) and others quickly followed. The trail continues down Wall Street.

9. Cat Walk
This station is a favorite on the Urban Trail. You are actually standing on a retaining wall that was responsible for holding up a hill more than 70 feet high. When Edwin Wiley Grove decided to develop downtown Asheville, he had the hill removed! Peer over the half-wall to see the original structure still there. To continue the trail, cross Wall Street and take the steps to the right. An elevator is located in the parking garage.

10. Grove's Vision
The glass etching depicts the original architectural plans for the Grove Arcade. Grove's death, as well as the Great Depression, caused the tower to be built lower than originally envisioned. However, the steel structure still remains to support it. An Asheville community effort brought about the restoration of the building, and once again it houses an indoor mall with a variety of shops and restaurants. Continue north on Page Avenue.

11. Historic Hilltop
Across the street is a tall brick building which originally housed the "new" Battery Park Hotel. This hotel was constructed by Grove after the "old" Battery Park Hotel was destroyed by fire. The hill that the old hotel stood on was named Battery Hill because of a battery of guns placed atop it during the War Between the States. George W. Vanderbilt stayed there when he visited in 1888. Note his signature and the names of other famous people on the bronze guest book. Continue to the corner and turn right.

12. Guastavino's Monument
The Basilica of St. Lawrence boasts North America's largest freestanding elliptical dome, unsupported by wood or steel. Constructed of tile and mortar, it was assembled using an ancient Moorish technique perfected and patented by Rafael Guastavino. He collaborated with Richard Sharp Smith on the design of this church, which was completed in 1909. Cross Haywood Street to the Civic Center. (This station is under renovation.)

13. Appalachian Stage
A bronze fiddle and quilt grace a bench while five bronze figures of dancers and musicians celebrate the significance of Appalachian culture in the community. In 1927 Bascom Lamar Lunsford staged the first Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, an event that continues each year on the first Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights in August. The trail turns south down Haywood Street.

14. Shopping Daze
The abstract, forged-metal representation of three frenzied shopping ladies and their dog commemorates the time when Haywood Street was the region's fashionable shopping district, and celebrates the return of a vibrant downtown. The trail turns left down Walnut Street.

The Frontier Period (1784 – 1880)
A horseshoe symbolizes an earlier time in Asheville's history, when this area was frequented by farmers who came into town on horseback or on wagons loaded with milk, butter, eggs, and produce.

15. Marketplace
A bronze bonnet and a basket of apples rest on a bench as they might have in the 1800s. Notice the double doors on many structures along these roads. The buildings housed produce markets and livery stables with doors large enough to accommodate a horse and wagon. The trail turns left on Broadway Street.

16. Legacy of Design
A bench and a visionary young boy honor British-born Richard Sharp Smith, supervising architect of the Biltmore House. Smith, who designed the bench to go in his office, remained in Asheville and had a profound influence on the city. From the bygone Langren Hotel to the former Eagles Home to the Masonic Temple, this street has exhibited many buildings designed by Smith and his partner, Albert Heath Carrier. Nearby was a stand for drovers on the Buncombe Turnpike. The trail turns right onto Woodfin Street.

The Times of Thomas Wolfe (1900 – 1938)
A replica of the angel sold by Thomas Wolfe's father, W. O. Wolfe, and made famous in "Look Homeward, Angel" marks this section of the trail.

17. Woodfin House
The ceramic replica is of the building that many native Ashevillians recognize as the YMCA that served the area for 50 years. Originally the left half of the house was the home of Nicholas Woodfin, a prominent citizen, lawyer, and experimental farmer, who also delivered the farewell address to the first regiment of soldiers to leave for the War Between the States. Continue down Woodfin Street to the next block.

18. Wolfe's Neighborhood
This metal sculpture is a diorama of two different time periods. It merges the skyline of today with the early buildings of this era. You can enjoy both views by standing in Wolfe's size 13 shoes. The small bronze buildings are replicas of eight structures he would have known, seven of which are no longer part of the landscape. A plaque at the YMCA across the street marks the location of Wolfe's birthplace, which was a house built by W. O. Wolfe. The trail moves forward and turns right onto Thomas Wolfe Plaza.

19. Dixieland
A bronze replica of Wolfe's shoes stands in front of his mother's famous boardinghouse. During Wolfe's lifetime, surrounding streets were lined with graceful Queen Anne-style houses such as the Old Kentucky Home, which Wolfe immortalized as "Dixieland" in his novels. The trail turns right onto Walnut Street following the angel markers.

20. Curtain Calls
The abstract metal sculptures mounted on the building remind us of Asheville's vibrant theatrical presence and portray human struggle through an abstract man. Does one of them remind you of the journey of Don Quixote? Continue up Walnut Street to the next corner.

21. On the Move
This art-in-motion sculpture represents the history of transportation and honors the last brick street remaining in downtown Asheville. Beginning in 1890, bricks were the paving of choice in the city. Turn the wheel to the right to hear 11 different sounds. Cross Walnut Street and proceed up North Market Street.

The Era of Civic Pride
A replica of the sixth Buncombe County Courthouse, which stood on the square from 1876 to 1903, marks this part of the Urban Trail, celebrating the role that local government has had in shaping the downtown.

22. Civic Pride
This historic bell is similar to the one that hung in the 1892 City Hall, which stood at the east end of Pack Square. The granite circles at the base of the bell represent bollards and are in the shape of the octagonal City Hall's belfry.

23. Man and Mountain
The plaque and the mountains recall obstacles faced by early settlers. Beaucatcher Road (1808) still winds over the storied mountain with the romantic name, giving travelers a view of the city and of sunsets to the west. Beaucatcher Mountain was breached in 1926 when a tunnel eased the hardships of reaching the city.

24. Time Remembered
A plaque covers the site where a bicentennial time capsule is buried. Among the memorabilia are booklets by lawyer, NC state senator, and publisher Charles A. Webb, who was a resident of Asheville. You'll have to be patient, since the contents of the time capsule won't be revealed until 2047.

25. Ellington's Dream
A granite etching shows Douglas Ellington's original architectural concept of a pair of complementing city-county buildings. The county decided to construct its building in the more formal Federalist style, but the city's building was Ellington's art deco design, a controversial one at the time.

26. Past and Promise
Asheville's little girl in bronze (Childhood) drinks at a replica of a horsehead fountain on a gas lamp post that once stood on the square. Cross the street (Pack Square) toward the Jackson Building, and be sure to look up to catch a glimpse of the building's gargoyles.

The Age of Diversity
An eagle, representative of Eagle Street and the historic buildings in the area, marks this portion of the trail and honors Asheville's unparalleled cultural diversity.

27. Monument Corner
Bronze carving tools and a carving in progress represent W. O. Wolfe's tombstone shop, which stood where the equally historic Jackson Building (1924) now rises. The trail turns down South Market Street toward the YMI Cultural Center.

28. Brick Artisan
This site recognizes African-American craftsman James Vester Miller, chief mason for the Municipal Building (1925) across the street. The cornucopia over the doorway on the side of that building marks the place where an integrated public market was relocated when the old City Hall was razed.

29. "The Block"
The bronze wall sculpture praises the historic African-American community and business center. This work was based on the collective memories of former residents who recall the days when Eagle Street was a place to shop, go to a doctor, or to meet friends after school. The trail turns right onto Eagle Street.

30. Hotel District
A bronze eagle overlooks an early hotel district. It is similar to an ornamental one that stood as high as the second gallery of the Eagle Hotel, a stagecoach stop on the Buncombe Turnpike and the first grand hostelry in downtown Asheville. Later the Swannanoa, Oxford, and Savoy Hotels opened nearby. The trail returns to Pack Place via Biltmore Avenue.