

Prairie Gazette

The Official Publication of the  Lakewood Historical Society

SPRING 2013

The First Flygirls: Their Legacy Lives On

By Nancy Covert

“This is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with every weapon possible. Woman pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

The weapon waiting to be used? Women. Not only working in the airplane factories and driving taxis, but also in the air—the WASP, Women Airforce Support Pilots.

This year, 2013, marks the 70th anniversary of this relatively unknown group of women who helped with the war.

With the encouragement and support of Mrs. Roosevelt, as well as with other women pilots such as Jacqueline Cochran, the WASP were formed in 1943. Long before the war Cochran had volunteered to fly for England’s Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Using her experience flying in the trial program, she used her association with the President and the First Lady to lobby for the U.S. to also allow women pilots.

Women had been flying for the ATA since 1940, and while they flew military planes in combat-like conditions, they flew front-line planes such as Mitchells and Spitfires, Walruses and Sea Otters, in non-combat roles.

Once America’s program was established 25,000 women applied for this service, but fewer than 1,900 were accepted, and 1,074 earned their wings. WASP received no gunnery training and very little formation or aerobatics flying training. They did, however, go through maneuvers necessary to be able to recover from any position.

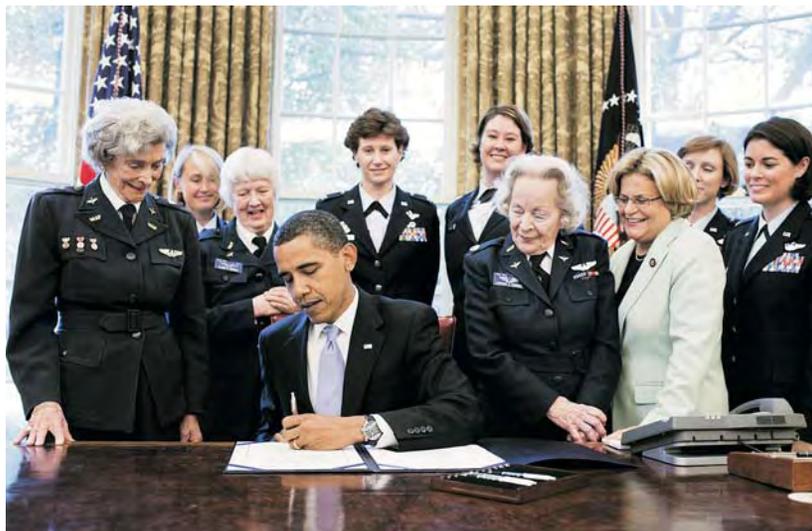
related missions and relieving male pilots for combat duty. They flew 60 million miles of operational flights from aircraft factories to ports of embarkation and military training bases. They towed targets for the anti-aircraft artillery practice, simulated staffing missions and transported cargo.

Besides flying almost every type of aircraft flown by the USAAF during the War, a few exceptionally qualified women were allowed to test rocket propelled planes, to pilot jet-propelled planes and to work with radar-controlled targets. Between September 1942 and December 1944, WASP delivered 12,650 aircraft of 78 different types.

Out of the women certified to fly, 38 lost their lives while

serving during the war—all in accidents: 11 in training and 27 on active duty. Because the

See WASP, page 7



President Obama signs the bill authorizing the WASP Congressional Gold Medal, July 1, 2009.

Each of the applicants already had a pilot’s license. While they were trained “the Army way,” by the U.S. Army Air Force at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, the WASP was considered civil service and the women did not receive military benefits unlike their male counterparts. Because of their civilian status, they were not administratively tied to the Army Air Force and could resign at any time after completing their training, although few, if any, did.

WASP were stationed at 120 air bases across the country, undertaking numerous flight-

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PRAIRIE GAZETTE

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MEETINGS

The Lakewood Historical Society formed in 1998 to preserve and share Lakewood's rich history through programs, displays and publications. The Society offers frequent programs on topics of historical interest. Most programs are free and open to the public. Visit us on Facebook or our website for information on events and activities:

www.LakewoodHistorical.org

President's Message

Spring has finally arrived with the daffodils blooming and the trees budding. And baseball season is just around the corner. We are ever hopeful at the beginning of the year, that this will be the year the Mariners have a winning season. (I'm sure the Cubs fans do the same thing.) This year, I really believe it! Just look at the players we have on the team!

We have already had two great programs this year. In February we learned about Harold LeMay, the man and his business from his long time friend, Charlie Maxwell. On March 19th we had over 100 attending the special recognition of the WASP for Women's History Month. The full story is elsewhere in the newsletter.

The rest of the year is shaping up to have a lot of unique programs to learn about the history in our area. Be sure to check the calendar on the last page.

As I said in the last newsletter (and it bears repeating: see page 6) we are still in need of more volunteers for various committees and projects. I welcome inquiries and I promise your phone call or e-mail will not commit you to an activity. I want to help you find something that you would enjoy doing and you can contribute in some small way that helps the Society grow.

We have had a good response

from our membership renewal campaign. This year we switched back to once a year reminders to make it easier for the membership committee. If you received a renewal notice and haven't yet responded, it is not too late to send your dues in. We will be sending another notice in early April in case you misplaced your first one.

We are also sending membership forms to those of you who have been receiving the newsletter but haven't been members. I invite you to take the next step in supporting the Society by becoming members. We have not raised the dues for over seven years and consider \$20 for individuals and \$35 for families to be a good value.

One of exciting things we are planning this summer is a real old fashioned celebration, like they used to have at the Colonial Center. Even though last year was technically the 75th anniversary, it coincided with our Speedway Centennial event where we put most of our efforts. I'm not sure I'm going to dress up in a colonial costume but we are going to invite all of the businesses to participate, providing special offers and have free drawings. Of course, we'll serve food. Look for more information when we set the date and work out the details.

Becky Huber

LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY FINANCIAL STATEMENT First Quarter 2013

Income	\$11,074
Expenses	\$15,693
Cash on Hand at the End of March	\$8,253

Income was primarily from membership renewals and donations received along with the renewals.

Expenses were mainly for the Museum lease, marketing, publicity and advertising as well as preparation, printing and mailing of the Newsletter that was sent out in early March.

E.R.'s mansion restored

by Nancy Covert

Facelift, renovation, upgrade—call it what you will—whether it's a school, a church or a residence, there's something invigorating about restoring a place rather than tearing it down. Any changes planned during the makeover are especially critical if the structure happens to be located within a designated Historic District.

Steilacoom's highly regarded E. R. Rogers Mansion is such a case in point. Built more than a century ago, the aged lady has undergone at least half a dozen life changes during its existence: ranging from private residence to hotel to boarding house to museum to restaurant, and finally a law office.

Its most recent makeover has returned the structure—at least outwardly—closer to its original appearance. The structure, assuredly the gem in the small town's 40-block Historic District, is now a professional office where Attorneys Jeff Gross and Peggy Fraychineaud Gross operate their Family Law/Personal Injury Law



E. R. Rogers mansion: crown jewel in the Steilacoom Historic District

in Washington State. (Incorporated in 1854, although the Territory became a state in 1889).

Present owners Peggy Freychineaud Gross and Jeff Gross had no idea when they dined at E. R.'s back in the late 1980s that, about 20 years later,

significant renovation, but not to the extent it actually needed restoration. We knew that we were going to have to have the approval of Steilacoom's Historical Preservation and Review Board, as well as that of the Town's Building Inspector before we could proceed with the project.

“We purchased E. R. Rogers in 2006, knowing that it needed significant renovation, but not to the extent it actually needed restoration...It was an arduous process...”

—Peggy F. Gross



Owner Peggy Freychineaud Gross in Victorian finery.

Office. Being part of a historic community that places high value on historic preservation played a major role in the house's restoration. The end result justifies the house being considered as a true jewel in the historic district's crown.

The story of this mansion's transformation into an elegant office is a fitting chapter in the saga of a community recognized as the oldest incorporated town

they'd purchase the house and begin an extensive renovation.

Then again, as Peggy relates, she was confident that one day she'd find the ideal place in which to incorporate many of the Victorian-era items she'd collected during the years.

“We purchased E. R. Rogers in 2006, knowing that it needed

“It was an arduous process since we had to figure out what we wanted to do with the place—what to retain, what to change—where to put walls, etc.”

During the past century plus a few years, the three-story timber structure that stands at the corner of Wilkes and Commercial streets in the Town of Steilacoom has given new meaning to the preservationist term, “adaptive use,” according to Joan Curtis, chair of the Town's Historic Preservation and Review Board.

“I really like all the wood,” Jeff Gross says. “It gives the place a rich feeling.” To which Peggy adds,

See MANSION, page 7

LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM DONATIONS RECEIVED JANUARY THROUGH MARCH 2013

Donations to the Society and the Museum received so far this year are shown below.

Most of these contributions were received from members along with their annual membership renewals.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Bob and Alice Anderson
Robert and Marilyn Arndt
Susan C. Coulter
Ron and Christine Cronk
James and Linda Curley
Rhona Diehl
Lila Early
Charlie Eckstrom
Carol and Larry Else
Allan and Jeanne Emmons
Susan B. Fields

Pearl (Billie) Finley
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Carole and Ted Wier
Harriet Wolverton
David and Barbara Young



PIERCE COUNTY **READS** 2013

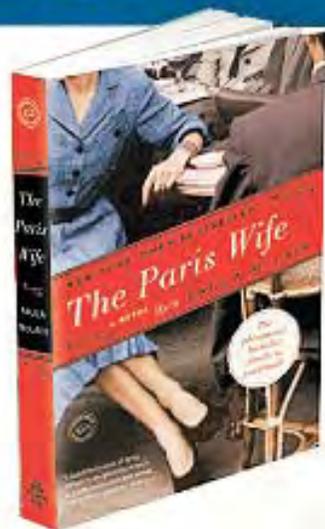
Pierce County Library System is bringing Paris to Pierce County this spring with its community one book program. Now through May 17, thousands of people will come together as a community and read copies of this year's **Pierce County READS** book, the New York Times best seller and award-winning "The Paris Wife" by internationally known author Paula McLain.

"The Paris Wife" gives an intriguing account of one of the world's greatest authors, Ernest Hemingway, seen through the eyes of his first wife, Hadley Richardson. This book has been very hot on the best-seller's list, and with significant social media chatter, it soared and stayed at the top of the list. "The Paris Wife" garnered the Winner for Best Historical Fiction in the Goodreads Choice Awards, which is the only major book award that readers decide.

During the **Pierce County READS** program people may participate in events where they may learn how to write and get their book published, plan their trip to Paris, and make art deco jewelry.

The Lakewood Historical Society, along with 19 other organizations and businesses, is again a proud sponsor of this county-wide event. Brochures on the program are available at the Lakewood History Museum, 6211 Mt Tacoma Dr SW, Lakewood.

People may meet Paula McLain at a free event and book signing at McGavick Conference Center at Clover Park Technical College in Lakewood, Friday, May 17, 2013 at 7 p.m. She will speak and sign books. Visit the website for more details: **Pierce County READS** at www.piercecountylibrary.org



New Exhibit Debuts at the History Museum on April 6

The third major exhibit in the Lakewood History Museum in the last three years will debut on Saturday, April 6th with a formal ribbon cutting at 1 pm followed by a reception. *Lakewood's Pioneer Shopping Centers* will showcase the history of the Colonial Center and the Villa Plaza.

Before 1937 the fledgling Lakes District community lacked convenient shopping and vital services that today's residents take for granted. Fortunately, Norton Clapp, anticipating these needs, built the Lakewood Community Center in the heart of Lakewood. By the time the first building was finished in 1951 and the East building was completed in 1955, every conceivable need was met by local businesses.



Lakewood was still more prairie than populated when this picture of the recently completed Colonial Center was taken in 1951.

the newly completed Interstate 5. It morphed into the Lakewood Mall in 1989 and the current Lakewood Towne Center in 2002.

The April 16th Society program at St Mary's Episcopal Church will give attendees the opportunity to share their stories about these iconic shopping centers.

- NW Dental Lab
- Lakewood United Pentacostal Church
- Soundview Uniserv Council (serving Clover Park, University Place and Steilacoom School Districts)
- Better Properties
- Parkview Property Management
- Farmer's Insurance Company (Babigan)

Also in the complex are the Lakewood Theatre and the Lakewood Terrace Restaurant (both vacant).



Long-time residents will have no trouble recognizing this once-familiar landmark

In August 1957 the Villa Plaza opened to three days of celebration that included a celebrity (country singer Tex Williams) arriving by helicopter. The anchor stores of J. C. Penney's and Woolworth's made it a destination for people throughout Pierce County. It took a hit when the Tacoma Mall opened in 1965 on

List of current Lakewood Colonial Center businesses:

- Lakewood History Museum
- A & M Beauty Supply
- Floor Art
- The Design Gallery
- Nail Magic
- Edward Jones Investments
- Manestreet Barbershop
- Great Cuisine of India
- Lakewood Gallery and Framing
- Olympic Sports and Spine Rehabilitation at Lakewood Center
- Lakewood Dental Center (established 1937)
- Yorkshire Yarns
- KL Computer Tax



Lakewood Historical Society's Program Focuses on Women in Aviation

by Nancy Covert

“At a time when women were expected to stay at home and tend to domestic chores, the pioneers of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) of World War II or ‘Flygirls’ as they were called by the media, served as inspiration.”

—WASP historian Deb Jennings

Over 100 people attended the Historical Society’s March 19th program at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church that celebrated Women’s History Month.

Women in Aviation: Then and Now featured the WASP history presented by Deb Jennings, WASP Historian, and Alice Miller, a Living Historian from Boeing’s Museum of Flight.



Left to Right CW4 Anne Sprute, USA, Ret; 1LT Kayla Hill, USAF; A1C Sarah Lowther, USAF; Alice Miller; CPT Jackie Stilwell, USA; CPT Melissa Bland, USAF.

Contemporary female pilots CPT Melissa Bland, a C-17 pilot assigned to McChord Field, and CW4 Ann Sprute, USA Retired, a former Black Hawk helicopter pilot, and others talked about why

they became pilots and shared anecdotes about flying military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as recent National Science Foundation-sponsored missions to Antarctica.

STILL We Need Your Help!

The Board has realized that we no longer can accomplish all of the goals and manage all of the activities ourselves. We need your help if the Society and Museum are to continue to grow.

Each of you has unique talents and abilities that could be used effectively for activities and projects that the Society is supporting. Depending on your other time commitments, there is something for everyone.

Listed below are the areas you may consider: a permanent **committee** that meets monthly, short term **special projects** for periodic events; or **individual tasks** done on an as needed basis on your own schedule.

Committees:

1. Program Committee: Assist in organizing and producing the monthly programs.

2. Membership Committee: Recruit new members, maintain membership database, coordinate periodic mailings, make follow up calls/e-mails.
3. Finance Committee: Assist treasurer in the financial management of the Society and Museum, make recommendations to board; maintaining documents and records.
4. Fund raising: Annual fund drive, special events, signature event.

Special Projects:

1. Exhibits: Assist in coordinating temporary displays in the museum to include the Artist’s Corner, every 2-3 months.
2. Outreach: Help staff booth/space at annual events such as SummerFEST, Sister City International Festival, Senior Center Open House; seasonal community events such as Farmers’ Market (new endeavor); make presentations

to a variety of community groups.

3. Historic Markers: Plan and promote periodic installations and dedications of markers, assist in producing map with sites listed.

Individual Tasks:

1. Docent in museum: Greet/guide visitors, assist in tours, minimum 4 hours/month.
2. Administrative Assistance: Provide clerical support and assist in record keeping; add contacts to databases. Must be “computer literate” and knowledgeable of current software such as Excel.
3. Researchers: Compile reference book for docents; research and write stories of people, places and events in the Lakewood area for quarterly newsletter.

WASP

From page 1

women were not considered military under existing guidelines, a fallen WASP was sent home at family expense, without traditional military honors or note of heroism. Placement of a US flag on the pilot's coffin was not permitted.

When the WASP program was ended in 1944, 915 women pilots were on duty; 620 assigned to the Training Command, 141 to the Air Transport Command, 133 to the numbered air forces in the U.S., 11 to the Weather Wing, nine to the technical commands, and one to the Troop Carrier command.

For 35 years WASP records were unavailable to review. When an Air Force press release erroneously reported that the Air Force was training its first women pilots, it sparked a furor that resulted in those records being opened.

Not until 1975, under the leadership of COL Bruce Arnold, son of General Hap Arnold, did the WASP fight the "Battle of Congress" and finally gain recognition as WW II veterans. The GI Improvement Act of 1977, signed by President Jimmy Carter, granted the WASP full military status for their service.

In July, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the WASP Congressional Gold Medal into law. Over 200 WASP veterans were on hand for the ceremony that was held at the US Capital.

For further information visit the National WASP World War II Museum in Sweetwater, TX., www.wspmuseum.org

More on our March monthly program, "Women in Aviation: Then and Now" on page 6.

MANSION

From page 3

"It's the nicest house in town."

Seated in her office with its bay window view of the Sound—the returning mainland ferry seems to be sailing right toward her window when it makes its docking sweep—Peggy says it's been the "most challenging of any of the renovation/restoration projects" she's undertaken.

The house restoration was an active topic of speculation for town residents throughout the process. Peggy muses that they "should have put paper over the windows" while the interior work was underway.

Next door neighbors Jean Dyer Swanson and her late husband, Herb, living in another historic home—one-time "Webster House", also known as the "Wallace Home" (once owned by Steilacoom's first mayor William H. Wallace and wife Lucena)—kept especially close watch on the mansion's progress.

While patrons can no longer dine on E. R.'s renowned second-floor deck with its panoramic Puget Sound view, nevertheless town residents are pleased that people who care about and appreciate local history have invested a lot of time and money into the project.

Re-educating residents and town visitors who "remember when E. R.'s was a restaurant" will take time. Meanwhile, the Grosses are pleased with the role they've played in restoring this antique structure. They believe that the house is in "much better shape than it's ever been."

The mansion's makeover is the topic of Lakewood Historical Society's May 2013 program, recognizing Historic Preservation Month.

HISTORIC STEILACOOM

In January 1851, New England sea captain Lafayette Balch filed a 320-acre donation claim and named his community "Port of Steilacoom." That following October, John Chapman filed an adjoining 320-acre claim, naming his "Steilacoom City."

In 1854, the two claims were joined and re-named Town of Steilacoom, becoming the first incorporated town in Washington Territory. (Washington became a state in 1889).

Steilacoom is a native American name meaning "pink flowers." Balch had big dreams for his waterfront community including becoming a major port, a resort town, the state capital, and terminus of the railroad.

Today the 2.1 sq. mile Pierce County town is a "bedroom community" with approximately 6,284 residents. From the Sound, those aboard an incoming or outgoing ferry are impressed with the town's resemblance to Balch's New England hometown.

Visit www.ci.steilacoom.wa.us to learn more about this historic South Puget Sound community.



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Lakewood, WA 98496

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Programs and Activities for Spring 2013

Sat, April 6, 1 pm Grand Opening of new exhibit, *Lakewood's Pioneer Shopping Centers*. Ribbon Cutting at 1 PM; reception follows with refreshments served. Lakewood History Museum, 6211 Mt Tacoma Dr SW.

Tues, April 16, 7 pm Monthly Program: *Lakewood's Pioneer Shopping Centers*, history of Lakewood Colonial Center, opened in 1937, and Villa Plaza, opened in 1957.

Tues, May 21, 7 pm Monthly Program: *Virtual Tour of E. R. Rogers Mansion in Steilacoom*. To celebrate National Historic Preservation Month, Peggy Gross, current owner of the mansion, will provide a slide show of the renovation and restoration process completed in 2012.

Tues, June 4, 11 am-3 pm *Opening Day of Lakewood's Farmers Market* next to City Hall in Lakewood Towne Center. **Drop by to see the Lakewood Historical Society booth on June 18.**

Tues, June 18, 7 pm Monthly Program *TBA*

BIG celebration planned for the 75th Anniversary of Lakewood Colonial Center this summer. Free Drawings, free food and lots of specials from many of the businesses in the Center.

*Monthly programs are held in the Parish Hall
at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 10630 Gravelly Lake Drive SW,
next to the Lakewood Library.*

Find us on Facebook (search for Lakewood Historical Society Washington State)
or check our website for more information and current events: www.LakewoodHistorical.org