



# Winter 2021 Prairie Gazette

Official Publication, Lakewood Historical Society



## 2021: a silver milestone for our fair city

**The City of Lakewood**—a land of lakes and prairies. This area has been here for thousands of years and was originally used by local tribes to hunt, gather and celebrate. And although the community has changed a great deal over the years, we still cherish this land and strive to be good stewards for future generations! So why is this year different than others?

**Because we are celebrating the City's 25th Anniversary this year.**

The actual incorporation day is February 28, 1996. Cityhood would not have happened without the hard work and dedication of so many local residents who wanted to have local control on the decisions made regarding their City's future. They challenged newly elected leaders to enhance the quality of life for their citizens, to create a safe community and improve local infrastructure to encourage economic development.

**And what great improvements have been made.**

Over the past 25 years we have seen significant progress in local planning and redevelopment. We created our own police department and built a city hall for easy access to municipal services. We removed dilapidated buildings throughout the community and replaced them with new thriving businesses. We renewed and improved our partnership with JBLM

and increased our presence throughout the state as a strong, stable and livable city. Today you can enjoy so many new and improved parks and playgrounds, updated streets with sidewalks and lighting and many new restaurants and businesses. And once we are able to gather again as a community, you and your family can attend free activities and special

events, like our concerts in the park, farmers market and SummerFEST festival.

**As we remember the past and look towards our future we will continue to be good**

**Current City Vision:**

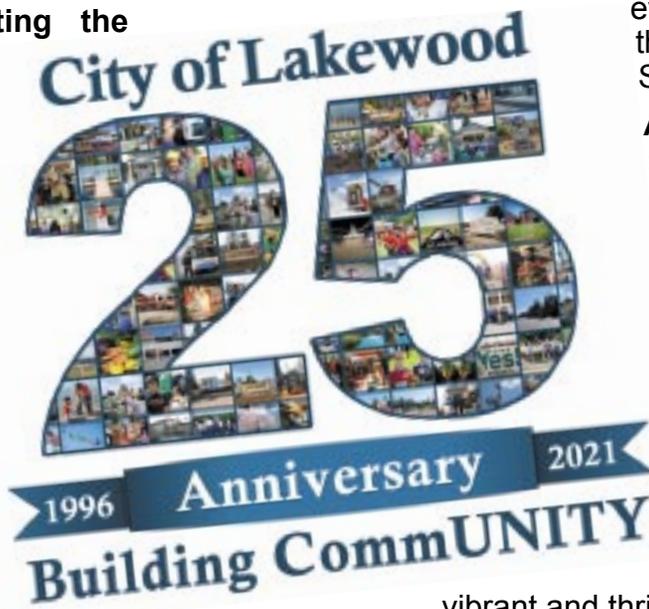
*A thriving, urban, South Puget Sound City, possessing the core values of family, community, education and economic prosperity.*

stewards of the land we have been given and work hard to create a healthy,

vibrant and thriving City.

Check our City website ([cityoflakewood.us](http://cityoflakewood.us)) for 25th anniversary updates to include an **anniversary party at the Colonial Plaza** planned for **September 18, 2021**.

*Thanks to **Mary Dodsworth**, City Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, for providing us with this article.*



**In this issue:**

President's Message.....2	Closed, yes—but not idle!.....6
Continued from Fall Issue: The 20's ROAR.....3	COVID tries, but fails, to rain on our parade.....8
City Hall(s) past and present.....4	Donors: Not too late to pick up your thank-you.....8
Check out these history podcasts.....5	New donors & member.....10
	Historical Markers of Lakewood: 8th in a Series.....11



## Lakewood Historical Society

contact@lakewoodhistorical.org

### President

Sue Scott • 253-588-6354

### Vice President

Ed Voie • 253-970-9552

### Secretary

Vacant

### Treasurer

Vacant

### Past President

Becky Huber

### Directors

Kris Kauffman  
Suzanne Merriam  
Darryl Owens  
Phil Raschke  
Malcolm Russell  
Jim Schell  
Glen Spieth

### Director Emeritus

LTG Bill Harrison

### Museum Consultant

Chuck Mathias

### PRAIRIE GAZETTE

Prairie Gazette is the official publication of the Lakewood Historical Society. The newsletter is published four times a year. Distribution is directly to members and available at the Lakewood History Museum, 6114 Motor Avenue SW, Lakewood, WA 98499 • 253-682-3480

The staff of Prairie Gazette actively encourages input from the Society's members as well as the general public regarding story ideas of any other aspects of this newsletter, and the Lakewood Historical Society.

Content of this publication is copyright protected by the Society and/or the authors and artists.

### 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](http://www.LakewoodHistorical.org)



Sue Scott

## President's Message

Now it has been almost a year since the museum has been shut down. But work continues inside with our exhibit designer **Chris Erlich** and our lighting designer **Richard Beckerman** (see page 6). I think everyone will be surprised at all the changes and updates. Let's hope we can reopen by the first of April (no fooling)!

One of our longtime members, **Beth Julian**, recently passed away. She was a Flett descendent and donated many items to the museum. Also another long time member, **Tom Slee**, USAF Ret, passed away recently. Our condolences to their families.

We are still seeking a few more Board members. Interested in Lakewood history and have a couple hours each month for a meeting and willing to help with some events? Please let me know. Or if not a Board member, maybe you would like to docent at the museum for 4 hours one day a month? Help us keep the doors open.

*Thanks to all of you who continue to support the Lakewood Historical Society and Museum—we really appreciate it!*



A reminder: if you are an Amazon shopper, set up *amazonsmile* making us your charity of choice—making sure you designate **Lakewood Historical Society Washington** (there are a few other Lakewood Historical Societies!) We receive a small percentage of your purchase price at NO extra charge to you.



# YOUR CITY'S HISTORY NEEDS YOU!

Join the **LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Call 253•682•3480 or visit our website:

[www.lakewoodhistorical.org](http://www.lakewoodhistorical.org)

# The Twenties Roar On!

Last issue we noted it was now 100 years since the last time the U.S. had entered a “Twenties”. The 20th Century version was notable for its distinctive “roar”—the sound of good times and big changes. How did those noisy, heady years affect the Lakes District...?

Much has already been written in these pages about the **Tacoma Speedway** which—despite the name—occupied a thoroughly Lakewoodian site, home today to both Clover Park Technical College and Lakewood Industrial Park. Just a brief recap, then, of the Speedway’s history leading up to the decade we’re focusing on:

**1912:** A clutch of wealthy Tacoma boosters pool their money to buy a large tract of land between Seeley Lake and Lakeview Avenue. They build a racetrack and create a purse rich enough to attract nationally-ranked drivers. The first race takes place on a hastily constructed 5-mile dirt track.

**1913-1919:** The track is reconfigured: shortened to three and a half then two miles, “paved” with wooden planks. A spectator having been killed in 1914, grandstands are built to provide a safer alternative to standing at the edge of the track. Growing crowds and ever-richer prize money elevates Tacoma Speedway to the top of the auto racing heap, second in prestige only to the Indianapolis 500. But even with the biggest names racing regularly, the track struggles to make a profit.

**1920:** The decade begins disastrously with an arson fire in March. Three-quarters of the uninsured grandstand is destroyed. Displaying the unshakable optimism of born boosters, fans snatch up bonds worth \$100,000 (almost \$1,300,000 in 2021 dollars) to replace the grandstand—with a *grander* stand: one third of a mile long, a capacity of 15,000 and a roof that, unlike the earlier version, covers *everyone*.

**1921:** The track celebrates the 4th of July with the 10th annual Tacoma Speedway Classic and the richest purse yet: \$25,000 (equivalent to \$324,000 today). Notably returning, but as referee rather than the driver he’d been in several races prior to World

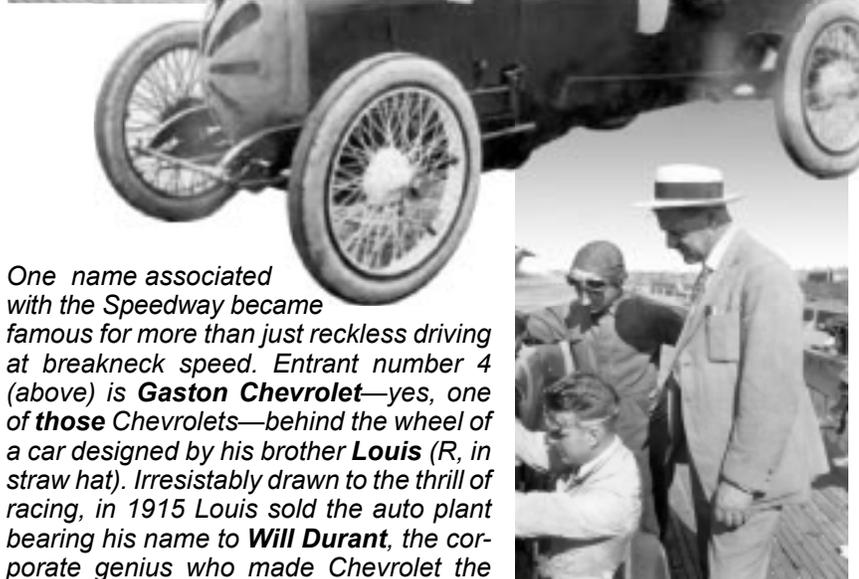
See TWENTIES, pg 10



*Building a grandstand to replace the one lost to arson in 1920.*



*In a change of pace, a motorcycling daredevil thrills a crowd safely protected from the elements by the new grandstand’s more inclusive roof.*



*One name associated with the Speedway became famous for more than just reckless driving at breakneck speed. Entrant number 4 (above) is **Gaston Chevrolet**—yes, one of *those* Chevrolets—behind the wheel of a car designed by his brother **Louis** (R, in straw hat). Irresistibly drawn to the thrill of racing, in 1915 Louis sold the auto plant bearing his name to **Will Durant**, the corporate genius who made Chevrolet the first building block in what soon became the gigantic enterprise known as **General Motors**. In the pursuit of success on the racetrack, Louis eventually found his true calling, giving up driving himself to concentrate exclusively on designing better and faster cars for other, perhaps more foolhardy, men to drive.*

# *Wanted:* Suitable home for a brand-new city government...



*City Hall the Third and Final (2001-?)*

## ...could have been the heading if our city's founders had run a classified ad in 1996

As it was, it took them five years and three tries to find a proper city hall—and in the end they had to build it from scratch.

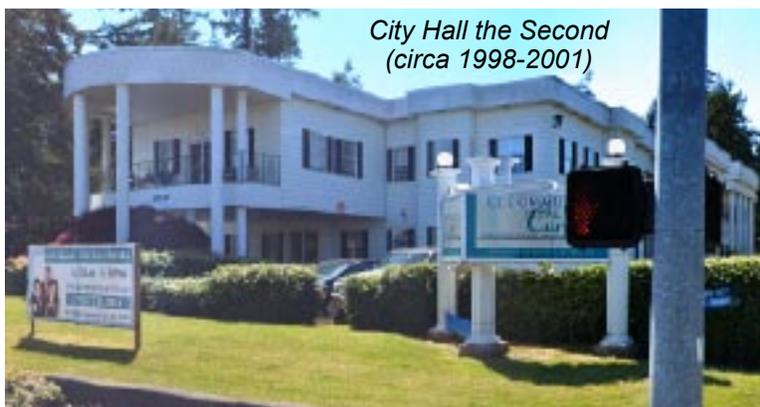
No big deal, really. Delays, disappointments and false starts were nothing new to Lakewood's founding fathers and mothers. After all, it had taken three elections just to persuade enough voters in the loose collection of suburbs south of Tacoma that they really *ought* to live in a city. A majority finally having agreed, the newest and at the time eighth-largest city in Washington celebrated its incorporation on February 28, 1996.

So the newly-minted citizens of Lakewood now had a mayor, council, various department heads and underlings. Where to put them?

**City Hall No. 1:** The many pressing issues involved in jumpstarting an entire municipality brooked no delay, so the search for available office space began at once. As it happened, the People's Department Store on Gravelly Lake Drive (next to the Walgreen Pharmacy) had recently gone defunct, its retail space divvied up into office suites of various sizes. The city took an option and began moving in cubicles, copy machines, etc. knowing from the start this

could only be a temporary home. Outgrowing its one corner on the ground floor of a medium-size building seemed inevitable—and sure enough, a year or two later the City was looking for roomier digs...

**City Hall No. 2:** ...and found them, half a mile further south on Gravelly Lake Drive. Originally a chiropractic clinic, the building's stately columns at least suggested a place suited to higher civic functions. However, this being the dawn of the interconnected e-office age, it was soon apparent the building would need an extensive (and expensive) upgrade to accommodate all the new technology. So expensive, in fact...



*City Hall the Second (circa 1998-2001)*



*City Hall the First (1996-circa 1998)*

**City Hall No. 3:** ...that a purpose-built, state of the art facility made more sense than ever. Luckily, in hopes of increasing foot traffic and thus attract more retailers, the struggling Lakewood Mall (now Lakewood Towne Center) was willing to demolish its old Safeway and Ernst stores, thereby clearing eight acres for a tailor-made City Hall—spacious, attractive, and thoroughly modern. Designed by architects Merritt & Pardini and built by Absher Construction, ground for the City's permanent home was broken on December 4, 2000. Dedication followed less than a year later on November 30, 2001.

# Casting about for something to listen to?



**Podcasts:** they're all the rage these days, and for good reason. No matter what you're into, it's a safe bet you're not alone, and that at least one of your fellow fans hosts a podcast.

Take history, for instance. Entire web pages have been devoted to listing some of the more popular history 'casts.

So if you don't see anything that appeals to you below, check out [https://blog.feedspot.com/history\\_podcasts/](https://blog.feedspot.com/history_podcasts/) or <https://player.fm/podcasts/history>—or just google "history podcasts."

## Local History



**Columbia Conversations**  
[soundcloud.com/user-58511591400](https://soundcloud.com/user-58511591400) Authors, historians, archivists and others working to preserve and share the history of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. Interviews by Feliks Banel, editor of the state historical society's journal, COLUMBIA magazine.



**Historical Phil**  
[chirbit.com/historicalphillhm](http://chirbit.com/historicalphillhm) LHS's own Phil Raschke compiles seven years of his daily historical broadcasts on KLAY Radio.

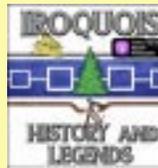


**Forgotten Prison**  
[forgottenprison.org/#episodes](http://forgottenprison.org/#episodes) Six-part series from KNKX Public Radio on McNeil's past: the prison, place, and people.

## American History



**American History Tellers** [wonderly.com/shows/american-history-tellers/](http://wonderly.com/shows/american-history-tellers/) These are the stories that made America, the events and people that shaped our lives.



**Iroquois History and Legends** [player.fm/series/iroquois-history-and-legends](http://player.fm/series/iroquois-history-and-legends) Culture, histories and legends of People of the Longhouse.



**The Civil War (1861-1865)** [civilwarpodcast.org](http://civilwarpodcast.org) A chronological narrative of the Civil War era.

## World/General History



**AskHistorians** [askhistorians.libsyn.com](http://askhistorians.libsyn.com) By history nerds for history nerds: members of Reddit's AskHistorians community, as well as academics and experts.



**Revolutions** [feedspot.com](http://feedspot.com) A weekly series examining great political revolutions.



**History of the World in 100 Objects** [bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrtd2) A hundred episodes that retell humanity's history through the objects we have made.

## and, on the lighter side...



**Ridiculous History** [player.fm/series/2148552](http://player.fm/series/2148552) History is beautiful, brutal and, often, ridiculous. Weird stories from across the span of human civilization.



**Come Back a Star** [feed.podbean.com/comebackastar/feed.xml](http://feed.podbean.com/comebackastar/feed.xml) Hollywood history seen through the eyes of two Tacoma film buffs who review and rate every Best Picture winner and nominee from 1927/28 onwards.



**Inside the Box** [tvhistorypod.com](http://tvhistorypod.com) TV history podcast discusses a particular era, innovation, trend, or program and spends an episode discussing it.



February 16, 2021—Exhibit designer **Chris Ehrlich** (l) and lighting consultant **Richard Beckerman** meet with LHS President **Sue Scott** to go over their planned improvements to Lakewood History Museum.



Right: **Richard** and **Chris** contemplate the task at hand. Their canvas—the room above. Below: This top-of-the-line entertainment center made the scene about 50 years before the City of Lakewood.

**By the time you read this, your Lakewood History Museum—thanks to COVID—will have been closed for nearly a year!**

2020 was hard on everybody, but it was a particularly cruel blow to your Society when it realized the beautiful new home it had moved into just a year earlier would be off-limits to the public until...who knows? *However...*the lights may be out, but plenty has been going on behind the scenes at your museum. We've been working to ensure visitors, when at last we're able to welcome them back, will be blown away by the scale and quality of our improvements. Currently extinguished lights will give way to a most illuminating experience—figuratively and literally.

Working with exhibit designer **Chris Erlich**, lighting consultant **Richard Beckerman** is enhancing the visitor experience by improving visibility. Lengths of low-profile lighting track are being attached to the ceiling in a large rectangle, with small spot lights highlighting exhibits and artifacts. Both track and spot lights are finished in white to blend with the ceiling.

But what about those fancy chandeliers left over from the museum's previous occupant—the Terrace Restaurant? We're keeping all but two of them. Those retained will be re-lamped with low wattage bulbs for an appealing, incandescent glow.

Once Richard's work is done, a visitor's eye will be drawn to both artifacts and their related content, standing out

as never before in a magnificent space full of fascinating new displays designed by Chris Ehrlich. Chris is incorporating audio/visual and other advanced interactive features unlike anything you've seen at the museum before. We don't want to spoil too many surprises—but you definitely won't want to miss the radio broadcast recording of FDR dedicating Grand Coulee Dam!



Oh, those gorgeous, radiant chandeliers—more suited perhaps to what was once Lakewood's finest dining establishment than to a museum...but who can deny either their beauty or their value as historical artifacts? Thank goodness they'll still be around...



## City of Lakewood's Reverse Parade of Lights a big holiday hit!

**What's a reverse parade? Glad you asked...**

Typically, Lakewood's Parade of Lights features a variety of floats, local marching bands, and classic cars that travel on a parade route through Downtown Lakewood with spectators lining up on the streets to view the procession.

Due to COVID-19, the City turned the Parade upside down or, more aptly, in "reverse" to ensure social distancing. A *stationary* display of floats and vehicles lined up around Lakewood Towne Center's perimeter road while a *parade* of spectators drove through Lakewood Towne Center to view them.

An estimated 500 cars drove by the many delightfully lit and decorated floats on the evening of December 12th. The parade had been scheduled to last from 6 to 8 pm, but the cars kept coming—so the event was extended until 9 pm to accommodate them all!

*We long suspected LHS board member Phil "Historical Phil" Raschke knew everybody, but even we were amazed when he talked St. Nick himself into a personal appearance at the Parade of Lights—during Mr. Kringle's busiest time of the year, no less! Way to go, Mr. R!*

**Santa** hung in there till the very end, around 9:15 pm. Every car got a "Ho, Ho, Ho, Merry Christmas!" and a big Santa wave. The jolly old elf's voice and arm were plenty tired at the end, but Santa truly had a fantastic time! Seeing all the smiling, happy kids, posing for tons of photos and hearing all the Merry Christmas-Happy Holidays put a smile in his heart—yes indeed, Santa had a wonderful evening.

*This article incorporates information from the City of Lakewood's website.*

## Holiday Ornament Pickup Extended

Story and photo by Phil Raschke

Historical Society members who donated \$50 or more in 2020 were gifted with a beautiful, bronze-colored holiday ornament featuring the historic Lakewood Theater.

Ornament pickup was set during the 2020 holiday season, but because of Covid-19 concerns, not every eligible donor was able to visit the museum. So the pickup period has been extended to **Wednesday, March 17, 2021, 11 am to 2 pm.**

Just call **253-588-6354** to arrange your pick-up. Once again, thanks to everyone for their continued support. It is deeply appreciated.

And—design work is currently underway for a 2021 ornament. More details soon.



*LHS member Sheri VanDusen (center) visited the museum to pick up her ornament and took a moment to share a masked smile with museum docent Linda Sheehan (L) and LHS President Sue Scott (R).*

# Iva Alice Mann Portrait Loaned to Lakewood Museum

By Phil Raschke

**Travis Campbell**, museum member and Clover Park School District supervisor, recently loaned the Lakewood History Museum a stunning color portrait of **Iva Alice Mann**, the woman who gave birth to the school district's name. The lifelike portrait was completed by noted Northwest painter **Rowena L. Alcorn**, a former art instructor at the University of Puget Sound and Pierce College.

Iva Alice Mann devoted her life to advancing the needs of local education. In the late 1920s she was elected Director of the small Park Lodge School District and then worked to unify other local school districts into one larger district that became known as the Union High School District. As the population in the area increased in the early 1930s, Mann advocated the creation of a new local junior high school and high school, but to seal the deal, approval would need to be provided by the State Legislature. She asked **Governor Clarence D. Martin** to help, and help he did. Approval for both the junior high school and high school passed the Legislature.

Construction of the junior high was first and the initial name proposed for the school was Interlaaken Junior High, but others thought it should be named after Mann. She refused the honor based on her belief that "no school should be named for a living person as there was no consensus on how he or she might turn out."



Mann then told of an early settler named Davisson who commented on the beautiful green around the big fir trees along Clover Creek following months on the trail in a covered wagon. The story quickly caught on and the school was named Clover Park Junior High. The name was kept when the school was expanded into the Clover Park High School and the name is still with us today.

Mann stayed on the school board as Secretary-Clerk until her retirement in 1948. Following her passing, a new middle school was built in 1959 near Holden Road. In honor of her years of dedicated service and achievement, the school was given the name Iva Alice Mann Middle School. The sixty-year-old school was actively retired in 2020. Mann's portrait, which hung in the school, needed a new home.

That home will soon be the Schools Section of the newly renovated Lakewood History Museum. When displayed, be sure to pass by her portrait and give her a "Thank You, Well Done" nod. A formal announcement will be posted when the display is available for viewing.

## Footnote:

Martin Stadium on the campus of Washington State University is named after the man

who supported Alice's call for a junior high and high school, Clarence D. Martin (governor of Washington, 1933-1941) a 1906 graduate of the University of Washington.



L-R, Lakewood Historical Society Members **Lonnie Lai**, **Travis Campbell**, **Phil Raschke** and **Sue Scott** proudly display newly loaned Iva Alice Mann portrait .

## Recent Donors

Don & Norma Guenthoer  
 Roger & Donna Laybourn  
 Rob & Rosemary Lenigan  
 Joe & Patricia Candiotta

Kjeri Boyle  
 Thomas & Sharon Charbonnel  
 Jim Manning  
 Suzanne Merriam

Bob & Sylvia Allen

**New Member:**  
 Mary Stage



*TWENTIES, from pg 3*

War I is the number one ace American pilot of that war, **Eddie Rick-enbacker**. The race he oversees is won by **Tommy Milton**, who

250 miles in 2 hours, 33 minutes, 55 seconds for an average speed of 97.6 MPH.

Later in that same year of 1922 partners **Rudy A. Mueller** and **Leo**

matic changes the Lakes District underwent in the years between 1920 and 1929—from empty patch of prairie to leisure-time mecca for Tacoma auto-enthusiasts to home of a cutting-edge technology with



*What remains of Rudy and Leo's hanger can be seen near the corner of Lakeview Drive and Steilacoom Boulevard—it's now headquarters for Clover Park Tech's Maintenance Department.*

breaks all records with an average speed of 98 MPH.

**1922:** Exactly one year later, the Speedway succumbs at last to chronic financial anemia. Ironically, one of the biggest crowds ever turns out for the final race. 30,000 fans pack the grandstand they paid to have built just two years earlier, a structure now doomed to demolition. Present on this occasion both sad and festive, is the biggest name of all in auto racing—the legendary **Barney Oldfield**, winningest driver of the nineteen-oughts and teens; the first man in history to drive a mile in a minute. Barney's racing days are past, though—he's just here to drive the pace car.

The Tacoma Speedway's final winner, **Jimmy Murphy**, covers 10 *Prairie Gazette* • Winter 2021

**H. Harkins**, both of them pilots and flight instructors, acquire the Speedway property and replace it with an airport.

In April of 1926, airmail service arrives at Mueller-Harkins Field. In 1927 the field becomes Tacoma Municipal Airport, and in 1929 the original hangar becomes, with a \$10,000 upgrade, the Airport Administration Building—a structure that still stands on the grounds of Clover Park Technical College.

It's a fitting way to end a survey of Lakewood in the Roaring Twenties—reviewing the various uses this sizable stretch of ground was put to over the course of just ten years. Emblematic, perhaps, of the dra-

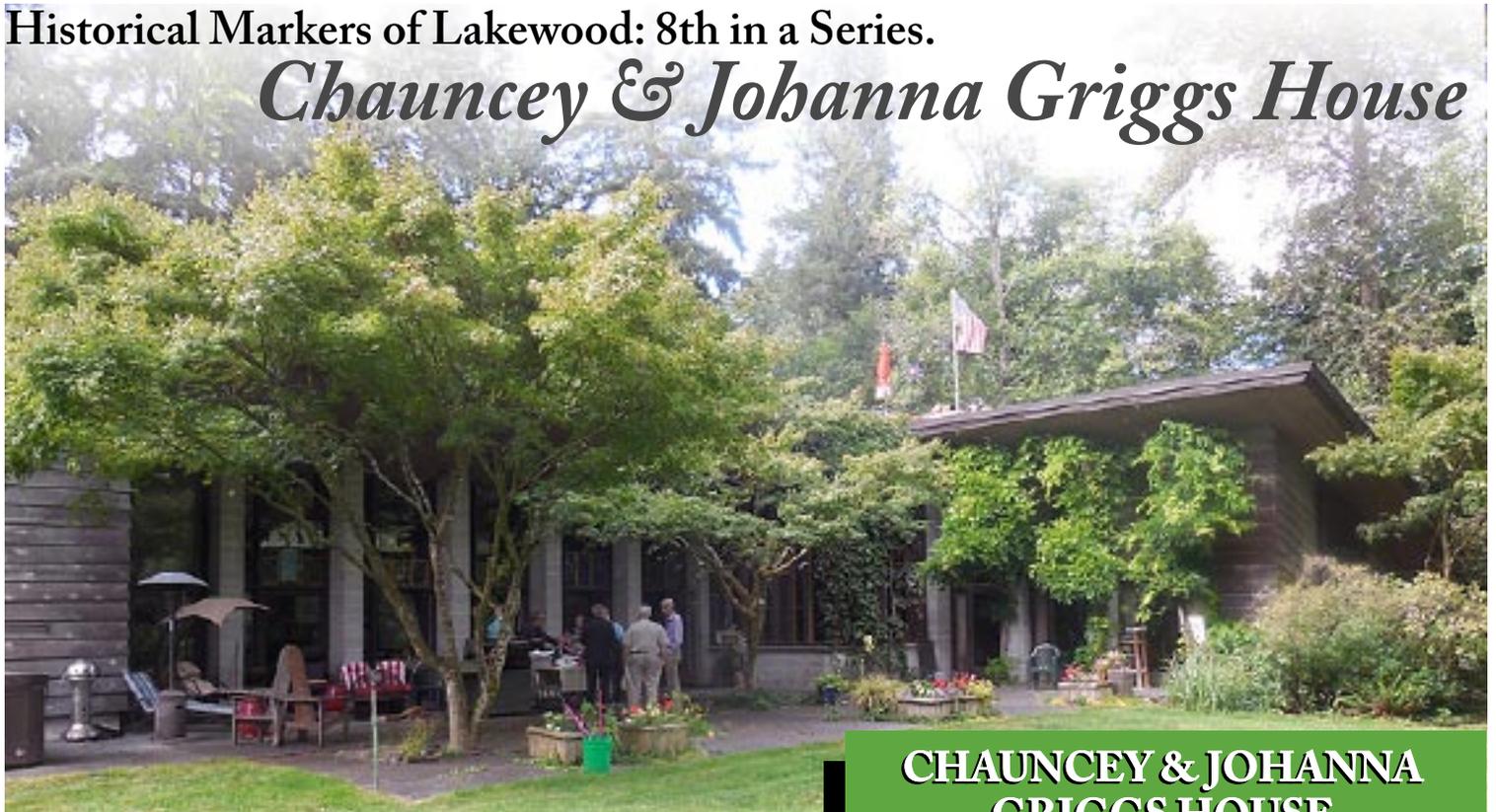
growing economic significance in our state: aviation.



*Flying may have been their first love, but car sales were a surer thing. In addition to the airfield, Leo and Rudy operated this Tacoma dealership (a still-standing, now iconic building) in the 30's*

Historical Markers of Lakewood: 8th in a Series.

# Chauncey & Johanna Griggs House



## CHAUNCEY & JOHANNA GRIGGS HOUSE

Frank Lloyd Wright's preliminary designs for the Griggs house on Chambers Creek in Lakewood were drawn up in 1946. Construction started in August 1946 but was halted in October and delayed for several years while final drawings were reviewed several times. Construction was finally completed more than seven years later in November 1954 using the revised final plans prepared by noted northwest architect Alan Liddle. The Griggs family celebrated their first Christmas in the house in 1954.

The house as originally constructed was approximately 3700 square feet, contains a cantilevered roof over the gallery terrace, exposed rough-cut wood trusses, large floor-to-ceiling windows, mitered glass corners, and employs a four foot grid system, larger than most Wright plans, which governs the location of piers, walls and partitions. This property was designated as a historic landmark by the City of Lakewood in 2003.

Though best remembered today for spectacular, one of a kind works like the Guggenheim Museum and Falling Water, **Frank Lloyd Wright** dedicated much of his 70-year career to “democratizing” architecture—wedding avant-garde design to efficient, high-volume construction methods so that even a middle-class family could afford a Wright-designed home. His vision of a nation full of inexpensive Usonian houses (“Usonia” was the acronym he coined for “United States of North America”) never came to pass, but the design principles introduced in the few that were built had enduring impact, an influence still seen in the better-designed tract homes of today.

Lakewood's **Griggs House** is a fine example of Wright's Usonian ideal. It incorporates a number of features considered ground-breaking at the time: wood, glass and concrete block construction under a slab roof; an open plan; a fireplace as the point of focus in the main living area; “spaces” emphasized over rooms; huge windows opening out onto nature and an outdoor gathering area, in this instance a patio.

The marker, provided by the Lakewood Historical Society, the City of Lakewood and the Pierce County Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission, is mounted on a boulder near the intersection of 80th St. SW and 70th Ave. Ct. SW in Lakewood (the house itself is on private property; please respect the owners' privacy). The plaque was dedicated in 2015 and reads as seen at right:



Frank Lloyd Wright  
1867-1959



**Lakewood  
Historical  
Society**  
P.O. Box 98014  
Lakewood, WA  
98496

Non-Profit Org  
US Postage Paid  
Tacoma, WA  
Permit #387

Check [www.lakewoodhistorical.org](http://www.lakewoodhistorical.org) for notices about upcoming programs.