

Lakewood Historical Society Newsletter

April/May 2006

Because Our History Matters.



The Tacoma Daily Ledger, July 1900
Courtesy of www.historylink.org

The Interurban Railway and the Trolley Accident of 1900 Tuesday, April 18 7:00 pm Lakewood Library

On Tuesday evening, April 18, the Lakewood Historical Society will revisit the days of the Interurban Railway and its impact on Lakewood and the surrounding area.

It will be at the Lakewood Library at 7:00 pm. Mr. Russell Holter from the State of WA Department of Archaeology and Historical Preservation will be the featured speaker. He will recount the tragic trolley accident which occurred in Tacoma on July 4, 1900. Many of the victims were from Lakewood and Spanaway. Excerpts from the Warren Wing video, The Seattle Tacoma Interurban Railway will be shown.

We encourage anyone to share their memories of riding the streetcars that serviced Lakewood until the 1930's.



Tacoma Daily Ledger
Courtesy of the Online Encyclopedia of
Washington State History at www.historylink.org

Our Lakewood Heritage (Part 2)

By Val Dumond (www.valdumond.com)

Continuing the story from last month, author Val Dumond takes us from the first school and home through present day in Lakewood.

The first school was built just west of the Flett Dairy property. One of the first houses built of frame, rather than logs was the Boatman/Ainsworth residence on 112th Street across from Clover Park High School. At the turn of the 20th century, Steilacoom was being hailed as the "Newport of the Northwest." The Lakewood District was competing for the title.

Many stately homes were built along the shorelines of area lakes, the most impressive being Thornewood, built on American Lake between 1909 and 1911. The Thorne Mansion, renovated into a spectacular bed and breakfast, was once considered one of the most beautiful estates and gardens in the nation, and often attracted illustrious people of the early 1900s. Thornewood was featured in a Steven King mini-series, "Rose Red." Another spectacular home and garden of that era is the lovely Lakewood Gardens and Wagoner Home on Gravelly Lake Drive.

The Tacoma Country and Golf Club was established in 1894 to further attract the rich and famous. It was the first golf club

west of the Mississippi, it featured trolley transportation from Tacoma to the playground on the Prairie.

In the early 1900's, the famed Tacoma Speedway was built around what is now the Lakewood Industrial Park. The mile-long wooden track circled the open prairie and drew racing greats, such as Barney Oldfield, Louis Chevrolet and Eddie Rickenbacker. A grandstand was built along Steilacoom Boulevard, about where Clover Park Technical College is today. During the Roaring 20's, summer residents began to expand their lake cottages into year-round homes.

Airplanes found that the inner grasslands of the racetrack made a fine landing field in the post World War I years. Eventually, the airstrip was improved and hangars were built as part of the Mueller-Harkins Airport. The City of Tacoma used the airstrip as its commercial field for a time, and national air shows were held at the site until World War II.

McChord Air Force Base, then known as McChord Field, was developed from the old County Air Field in 1938.

Lakewood was beginning to take on its own identity during the 1930's and 1940's. As the Great depression



lifted, business development took off. In 1937, Norton Clapp built the first part of the Lakewood Colonial Shopping Center, one of the first suburban shopping centers in the country. The Lakewood Chamber of Commerce is located in this historic center today. A fire district was formed in 1942 and a water district in 1943. Between 1939 and 1949, population of the Lakes district jumped from 3,000 to 17,000.

A decade later, in 1958, the Villa Plaza Shopping Center was built, and in 1960, the Thunderbird Center was built on the site of another small airstrip. Villa Plaza has undergone a series of changes and is now Lakewood Towne Center, with a number of anchor stores to serve the needs of the residents and visitors, alike. Thunderbird is now the Oakbrook Shopping Center chock full of retail and services for area residents to enjoy.

Lakewood General Hospital (now St. Clare) opened in 1961; the Flora B. Tenzler Memorial Library (now part of the Pierce County Library System) was built in 1963. A community project, it is still supported by a private citizen's group.

Clover Park Vocational Technical Institute grew as a war production training adjunct to Clover Park High School during World War II. In 1967, it joined the Community College System and since has

been renamed Clover Park Technical College. Fort Steilacoom Community College, established in a grocery storefront off Bridgeport Way in 1967 (known at the time as Albertson's U) moved into portable quarters at its present site on Farwest Drive in 1970. Its doors opened as Fort Steilacoom Community college in 1974, then changed to Pierce College in 1986.

In March, 1995, Lakewood citizens voted to incorporate as a city, passing with a 60% vote. In September, seven City Council Members were elected to form the city's first government. William Harrison was elected by the council as Lakewood's first Mayor; and Claudia Thomas, the Deputy Mayor. Other original Council members were - Ann Kirk Davis, Colleen Henry, Jose Palmas, Douglas Richardson and Sherri Thomas.

Lakewood officially became a city on February 28th, 1996, making it the eighth largest city in the state. But look closely, and listen. You can still find the city's countless lakes, enjoy the shading streets, feel the exuberance of activity as citizens continue to enhance Lakewood. And possibly, just possibly, on a warm summer evening, you might hear echoes of the joyous celebration of Indians and early settlers camping out on The Prairie.



President's Report

As a summary of our recent activities:

1. The LHS Board has approved the leasing of a storefront Museum.
2. The society is now negotiating to lease a space of approximately 1700 sq. ft. We should have a storefront soon.
3. The study to select a permanent site for a Lakewood Museum is continuing and the society is applying for a planning grant which will help plan and design improvements in a final facility. Hopefully, we will have some real progress in the next month or two.

Glen Speith

Volunteer Positions Open

Volunteers with the Lakewood Historical Society are a fun bunch that enjoys hosting events and scheduling programs to create, preserve and display the history of our Lakewood home.

We currently have openings in membership drives, fund raising, event planning and programs. Come join us.

Please call LHS at
682-3480

LHS Program Committee Report

Planning Committee

Since the last newsletter, the Planning Committee has received and reviewed the report of the architect/engineers who reviewed the Mueller-Harkins Airport Hangar and the Boatmen Ainsworth House for feasibility as museum sites. We also met with City Engineers and facilities people from Clover Park Technical College to get additional information on requirements to move into the hangar. See The President's Report (above) for more details on this.

The committee also toured available locations at the Lakewood Colonial Center, including the theater and the restaurant. It is just not feasible for us to consider the theater and/or restaurant as a possible museum site at this time. The costs to repair recondition and

restore them, as well as to address the life safety issues raised by current building codes exceed our foreseeable capacity when coupled to the lease costs that would then follow such major repairs. However, we did find a suitable location for a storefront museum! The space recently vacated by the AARP on Mt. Tacoma Drive, SW, is available, within our expected cost range, and at 1678 square feet, just the right size.

In other activities, the committee is considering submitting an application for a major grant to the Heritage Capital Projects Fund. These grants are made every other year, and money awarded from the applications due early in May will not be paid until 2007. The next chance to apply is in May, 2008 for money in 2009.

Brad MacGowan

Storefront Museum Progress

At the March Board of Directors meeting, the Planning Committee proposed that LHS lease a store at the Lakewood Colonial Center for use as a "storefront museum."

Storefront museums are small museums located in retail areas, open to passersby. Ours is expected to be open for only three to five years as we complete planning, raising money, and putting together a large, permanent museum covering the history of the Lakewood area. Such a facility would accomplish several things:

1. With a storefront, LHS would have a physical presence in the community, a place for people to learn more of the history of this area, and more about LHS. This can only have a positive influence when our permanent museum campaign begins asking for public donations and other support.

2. LHS would gain valuable experience in operating a public museum, creating exhibits, training docents, developing school programs, and so forth, before moving into a major facility.

3. Operation of a museum is a sign to major donors and foundations considering grants to us that we have the organization, knowledge

and manpower to make a bigger museum successful, and that there is public interest in the story we have to tell.

Your Board of Directors accepted the proposal enthusiastically. The real estate agent for the Colonial Center has been informed.

Negotiations covering lease cost, term and occupancy will start shortly. We are aiming to open early this summer.

There is much to do in the meantime. We must build our membership so that there are plenty of people who can devote half a day a month or so to working in the museum. Our costs will go up (for store lease and part-time director) so we must plan and execute fund raising activities and events that will provide income to insure that basic costs will be met. Fund raisers will also help us spread the word to the public about the storefront museum, the drive for a permanent museum, and the vitality of the Lakewood Historical Society itself. And we must complete the inventory of current collections quickly so we can develop a schedule of exhibits and create displays.

We will get information on this vital new program to you as it is developed.

Brad MacGowan

Among the Best in Lakewood

The following LHS members made donations to the LHS. Thank you!

Rhona F. Diehl
Robert and Marlyce Tingstad
Harriet Wolverton
Bill and Gerrie Zeratsky
Mike Carrell
Ruth R. Stevick & Leslie
Sharon and Clark Montgomery
Robert and Maria Kelly
Beverly and Stanley Bills
Larry and Natalie Humphrey
William and Stanley Gernon
Darlene Anderson
Joe and Carolyn Ghilarducci

Grace Gius
Marge Aldag
Shannan Krueger
Samuel H. Brown
Venette Hagen
L. Gracey
Marian Cooter
Lakewood Gardens
Joan Walston
Nancy Mace
Patricia G. Stolp
M. Jean Sienko

Thora H. Larson-Prater
Dorris P. Saunders
Jim and Kathy Spencer
Ann Nicholson Flint
Mrs Kenneth (Elizabeth) Gallagher
John and Rebecca Huber
David M and Barbara Young
Kris and Sylvia Kauffmann
Dave and Mary Sclair
Marge and Jim Ray
Charles and Patricia Collier

LHS Oral History Project

Plans are underway for this project. The first History/Memories of Lakewood's Boy Scout Troop 53 has been recorded and transcribed. Bob Dalton and Bob Barlow were interviewed and it was a delightful experience for all. These two men, now in their 80's, were in this first troop. Bob Dalton was the first Eagle Scout of Troop #53 and Bob Barlow was in the first recorded movie of Lakewood.

We wish to thank Donna Casey for donating our 1st tape recorder. Information is being gathered on other equipment needed and hopefully more donations will be made.

More information will be sent to all members soon. It is hoped that each of you will participate so that Lakewood's History will be kept and enjoyed many years from now. Look how Lakewood has changed just since

you have come here!

For more information or suggestions of names to be interviewed, please call Donna Cable at 584-6147.

Donna Cable

Thursday, May 11 3:00 – 5:00 pm
Home Street Bank
History of Lakewood Book Signing

Stop by the "Fireplace Room" at Home Street Bank to get your "History of Lakewood" signed by the authors. Books also available for sale. Stock up for birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day and, of course, put some away for the holiday season. There will be refreshments and Door Prizes.

Call Donna Cable 584-6147 or Margaret Gunter 582-1950 for more information.

Sunday May 7th Program

LHS May Program **Ezra Meeker, A Dramatic Portrayal** **by Mr. Ray Egan**

CloverPark High School
Performing Arts Center
2:00 pm



Ezra Meeker
Courtesy of www.meekermansion.com

On Sunday, May 7, 2006, at 2:00 PM, The Lakewood Historical Society presents Mr. Ray Egan and his dramatic portrayal of Ezra Meeker.

Using Meeker's own words, Mr. Egan goes back to 1926 when Meeker spoke out against the Indian treaties of the 1850's.

These treaties initiated under suspect circumstances had a profound impact on Puget Sound. Ray Egan is an accomplished speaker and avid historian. A handout is provided to the audience containing a summary of the treaty provisions as well as a map of the reservations.

The program will be held at the Clover Park High School Performing Arts Center at 2:00 PM. For more information about this unique program, please contact John Huber at 582-8682.

History of Boy Scouts in Lakewood and the Nation

The February 21 meeting of LHS at the Clover Park Performing Arts Center presented an evening of the "History of Boy Scouts in Lakewood and the Nation". Featured speakers included Professor Terry Cooney, professor of History at the University of Puget Sound, Alan Billingsley, Scoutmaster Troop 53 and Venture Crew 53, and LHS member Bill Cable who presented a proclamation by Mayor/LHS member Claudia Thomas designating the day as Lakewood History of Boy Scouts' Day.

In response to Professor Cooney's beginning question "Who has or has had a connection with scouts?" almost every hand was raised. Lively exchanges of scouting experiences and comparisons of the then and now, filled the minutes before and after the meeting.

Dr. Cooney wore his 45-year-old scout's campaign hat or his academic cap to underline scouting past and present. He outlined the 1910 beginnings of scouting which gathered the best ideals from the half-dozen boy's groups forming at the time when America was changing from a frontier society to the beginning of what we are today. The founder's main goal was to preserve the ideal of the American character: frontier values and abilities, and to guide and produce "men of the future".

Back in the '30's, Troop 53 built a log cabin on Steilacoom Lake and even visited McNeil Island. During their McNeil Island visit, they saw what inmates did while they were incarcerated. They saw the baker working in the kitchen. His name was Al Capone. Bob Doten, who was the first Eagle Scout and was on that memorable trip to see Al Capone, was recognized at the meeting and spoke with the

younger scouts after the program.

In 1933, Troop 53 made plans to attend the National Jamboree. They needed to raise \$108 for each boy. (Today, the Jamboree costs around \$2,500.) One of the mothers, Mrs. Doten made 100 dozen donuts each Saturday for four Saturdays to help raise money. The donuts were sold for 20 cents per dozen. Bert Sweeting of Meadow Sweet Dairy donated the ice cream for an Ice Cream feed.

The day before their departure, the 1933 Jamboree was cancelled due to the polio epidemic. The boys were devastated. But not to be held back, the boys got on the train to Washington DC, spent several days in Washington and other eastern landmarks.

During the 60's and 70's CloverPark District had an education television station, KPEC-TV. In the '60s, the station began their new 'sign-off' image. That was in the days when television stations shut down for the night. Before shutting down for the day, they would show a photograph of Troop 51 Boy Scout Karl Winter and played patriotic music. Mr. Winter was at the meeting.

Throughout these exchanges it was fascinating to watch the cub scouts trying to picture their sedate and grown-up fathers and grandfathers as mischievous, fun loving and adventurous boy scouts.

Alan Billingsley described scouting today and gave information on new programs which attract older boys and girls. He spoke of changes and similarities in programs and the continuing value system. He spoke of the contributions scouting has made in the history of Lakewood, how Lakewood benefits from scouting today and the value of what the scouting program will contribute in the future.

Liz MacGowan

Mark Your Calendars

Tuesday, April 18th

Lakewood Library

7:00 pm

*The Interurban Railway and the Trolley
Accident of 1900*

Sunday, May 7

CloverPark High School

Performing Arts Center

2:00 pm

*Ezra Meeker, A Dramatic Portrayal
by Mr. Ray Egan*

Become a LHS Member Today

Be sure to join the Lakewood Historical Society today for only \$15 for an individual membership or \$25 for a family.

Membership dues help pay for programs, promote our Lakewood community, and

recognize and preserve key historical sites through the Lakewood area. Send your check to Lakewood Historical Society, P.O. Box 98014, Lakewood, WA 98499.

If you have questions, please call 682-3480 or email lakewoodhistorical@hotmail.com.

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