

Prairie Gazette

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LAKEWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JULY, AUGUST, 2007



Photo above shows Prof. W.H. Gilstrap, Chief Koquilton and Wm. Lane as the site selection committee for the monument marking the first Fourth of July celebration

The Northwest's first Fourth of July

By Hayden Mackley

As you celebrate the 4th of July this year, cast your mind back to 1841, when the United States' Independence Day was celebrated publicly for the first time west of the Mississippi, on a prairie not far south of present-day Lakewood.

On May 11th 1841, two U.S. Navy ships, the *Vicennes* and the *Porpoise*, sailed up Puget Sound and anchored within sight of Fort Nisqually, the British-owned Hudson Bay Company's major trading post in the region. The American expedition was unsure how they would be welcomed by the fort's British residents. Oregon Country, as the Northwest was then known, had been shared by the

United States and the British since an 1818 agreement, and this was the first official American foray into the region.

Pioneers were already beginning to filter over the Oregon Trail, and British control of the fur trade was under threat. The secretary of the U.S. Navy appointed Lieutenant Charles Wilkes as the chief of a seaborne mission to explore and survey the Northwest coast and the Columbia River. The secretary charged Lt. Wilkes with "the promotion of the great interest of commerce and navigation," in his exploration of the western seaboard, while reminding him to "extend the

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The Lakewood Playhouse: Bringing together old and new

By Hayden Mackley

When Marcus Walker arrived in Lakewood from London to be the Lakewood Playhouse's new Managing Artistic Director, the first thing he was faced with was having to open a comedy on Sept 14, 2001, just days after the 9/11 attacks. He wondered, how could the Playhouse even put on a funny play like *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, in a time like that? But the show went on, with the motto "Let's not let the bad guys keep us from laughing" and the play turned out to be a badly-needed respite and release from the emotional events of those days.

Marcus Walker shared many stories with Lakewood Historical Society members on June 21st, from his nearly six years at the theatre, as well as history from the Lakewood

Playhouse's distant past. In the ephemeral spirit of theatre, we were also treated to a surprise performance from members of the cast of the recently-completed season of *The Pirates of Penzance*, as well as a trip through backstage.

Mr. Walker spoke of the challenges of producing whole seasons of quality theatre, trying to balance little-known but well-written plays with tried-and-true musical favorites. While there are challenges, the Lakewood Playhouse has been experiencing growth of 30-35% every season. Mr. Walker is a big fan of in-the-round theatre, with the audience sitting on all sides of the action, and the upcoming 2007-2008 season will feature all plays and musicals produced in-the-

round. The new season will include the ever-popular *The Sound of Music*, *Holes*, the hard-hitting *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Agatha Christie's *The Hollow*, and others.

The following is an account of the history of the Lakewood Playhouse, provided by Marcus Walker.

Lakewood Playhouse strives to enhance the quality of life for all people through high quality theatrical performance and educational opportunities. This mission is strengthened by our long history in the Lakewood community.

Since 1938, Lakewood Playhouse has added an exciting dimension to live theatre in Pierce

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Becky Huber • 253-582-8682

E-mail craftyhubers@comcast.net

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Janda Volkmer • 253-222-7941

E-mail: jandavolkmer@msn.com

Prairie Gazette

Prairie Gazette is the official publication of the Lakewood Historical Society. The newsletter is published six times a year. Distribution is directly to members and available at the Lakewood History Museum at the address listed below.

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

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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 our website for information on events and activities.

www.lakewoodhistorical.org

Editor

Hayden Mackley • 253.584.5518
hayden_mackley@hotmail.com

Designer/Photographer
Ed Kane

President's Message

I am happy to report that we now have a little breathing room in meeting our operational expenses due to your generosity in supporting our Museum Fund Campaign. Now we can move ahead in developing some new exhibits and providing a greater outreach to our community.

I'd like to welcome our new members who have joined in the last 2 months-this was an unexpected outcome of the Campaign. This accomplishment is "priceless" and has a longer range affect than any amount of money can provide. I plan to contact all of you in the near future to discuss how you can bring your own unique talents in supporting our ever expanding activities. There are a number of short term special projects that I need assistance besides joining a committee and volunteering at the Museum.

With the addition of Dave Sclair to the Board we can now begin to work on getting more exposure in the print media. Ed Kane will be assisting him in this endeavor. They worked together when we had our local newspaper, the Suburban Times. Dave's son, Ben, is the publisher of the on-line paper by the same name. I'd say journalism is in the blood?!

The number of individual/family visitors has definitely increased since the Museum has been open 4 days a week. But we can increase the attendance even more by coordinating tours for various civic, youth and church organizations. If you belong to a group that would like to have a personalized tour please contact me.

One of the groups that would especially appreciate the Museum are out-of-town attendees for the various reunions that are being held in the area in the next few months. I have been talking with the various Clover Park HS and Lakes HS organizers to have our Society/ Museum information distributed at their events. If you are attending other gatherings and would like information to distribute, please let me know.

Our participating with SummerFEST was a big success. Congratulations to Kris Kauffman for winning the trip to Hawaii, he is already packing his bag and planning his activities. It was an excellent location and we distributed lots of newsletters and membership brochures. Despite a little rain at least 200 visitors stopped by the booth. I'd like to thank those who volunteered to man the booth and especially Gary Fowler for helping me set up and take down.

Becky Huber
President, LHS



Lakewood History Museum

6211 Mount Tacoma Drive SW

253.682.3480

www.lakewoodhistorical.org/

Museum Hours:

October to March:

12 to 4 pm, Friday and Saturday

March to October:

11 to 4 pm, Wednesday through Saturday

Group tours arranged by appointment

Carman's charmin' childhood attire on display at state museum

By Walter Neary

Lakewood Historical Society members who miss Joseph Carman III can relive a portion of his life and pay tribute to his memory in an exhibit that runs through Oct. 7 at the Washington State History Museum in downtown Tacoma.

"The Artist and the Tycoon" examines the connection between famous artist Howard Chandler Christy and Lakewood shipping magnate, H.F. Alexander. Christy was one of the most popular portrait painters of his time. Alexander is known locally for his association with what is today Lakewood Gardens. The two men met when Christy was commissioned to paint



In the far left corner of the Washington State History Museum is the exhibit on Joseph Carman III which include childhood attire and the beautiful painting by Howard Chandler Christy. Photo by E.G.Kane

portraits of Alexander's family, including his daughter, Dorothy, and her son, Joe Carman, who are featured in this painting that is on display.

Visitors who remember Mr. Carman may find a sentimental touch to the exhibit - the display includes the very clothes that the young Joe was wearing in this painting!

Visitors should know that the paintings of the Alexanders are in a

gallery at the left rear section of the main floor, near the Hanford exhibit, the Inviting the Spirit Gallery. If you are not familiar with the museum, you might want to ask for directions to this gallery when you enter the museum. Though the exhibit is not large, it is well worth the time spent getting there to see such a prominent Lakewood family placed in the context of Washington State history.

Board Meeting Highlights

1. Dave Sclair was elected as the new Director to fill the vacancy on the Board. His expertise in the field of journalism and marketing are great assets and we are looking forward to working with him.
2. The Museum Fund Campaign was mailed on May 18th and we have received a steady influx of donations. One of the unexpected benefits has been a surge of new members.
3. Mayor Claudia Thomas awarded the prizes to the Photo Contest winners on May 30th. The winners are 1st Place-Carol Seeburger; 2nd Place-Elizabeth Poinsett; 3rd Place- Beth Julian; and Honorable Mentions to Paul

Webb and Carol Seeburger. We'd like to thank all participates in sharing their family photos. They are currently on display at the Museum through July.

**NEXT BOARD MEETINGS:
JULY 10 AND AUGUST 7, 6:30 PM
LAKEWOOD CITY HALL
CONFERENCE ROOM 1E.**

4. We grossed over \$3,500.00 in the Hawaii Raffle. The winner of the drawing is posted elsewhere in this newsletter.
5. The Board began an annual review of the Long Range Plan that was adopted in May 2006. Shannon Krueger provided an overview of the Program Committee's activities. Excellent programs have been provided with

- an average attendance 30-35. The most widely attended program was on the Natural History of Lakewood. Janda Volkmer is busy researching the exhibit that will be displayed in the Museum soon.
6. Becky and other LHS members have been providing outreach to the community. These activities include the International Festival at Pierce College on May 5th; a tour to 32 students from 5-12 Learning Center at Ft Steilacoom Park on May 21st and participating in SummerFEST at Ft Steilacoom Park on Jun 23rd.
7. Our Secretary, TD Imholt is still unable to resume her duties and Barbara Wyatt is doing an excellent job as substitute.

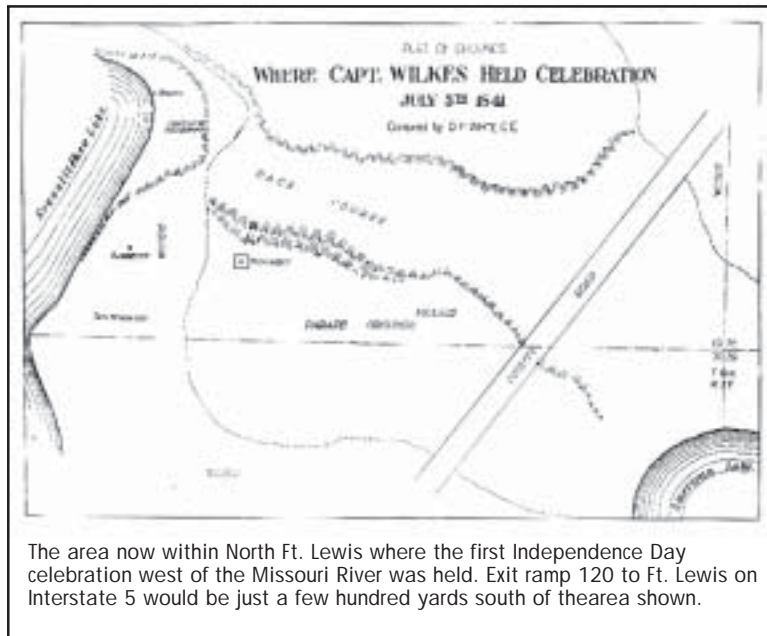
Fourth of July, from page 1

bounds of science and promote the acquisition of knowledge.”

Upon arrival, Lt. Wilkes' relations with the Fort Nisqually Hudson Bay officials appeared amicable, reporting that “they gave me warm welcome, and offered every assistance in my operation.” The American mission was able to use the mooring site as a base as one party explored the Naches Trail north of Mt Rainier, with the aid of Muckleshoot guides. Wilkes himself led a party down to Fort Vancouver and visited the Willamette settlements that would one day become Portland. He had intended to explore further up the Columbia River, but a rendezvous with his third ship, the Peacock, never eventuated.

So it was that Lt. Wilkes and his party found themselves back at their ships moored off Fort Nisqually for the 4th of July. As the 4th fell on a Sunday, the nation's birthday was to be celebrated on the 5th. A few hundred yards from the fort was a Methodist mission station established by two Americans, Dr. John P. Richmond and Mr. William H. Willson. Wilkes described the location of mission home as “on a beautiful prairie which can scarcely be surpassed.” It was decided to hold the celebration on a corner of this prairie, which is thought to have been the piece of land between American Lake and Sequatchew Lake.

The men set off in procession from the shore that morning, decked out in white, marching with flags flying and music playing with two brass howitzers in tow, to the prairie by the lake about a mile inland. Stopping by Fort Nisqually, they gave three cheers and waited, sailor-like, for a response. The underwhelming response from the fort produced many jokes amongst the seamen.



When they arrived by the lake, an ox that had been purchased from the fort was slaughtered and set up on a spit to barbecue. Tables were set up for the feast, while games and horse racing ensued, horses having been hired from the local tribes, also invited to join the watch the celebration. The Indians had been encountered from the party's previous forays inland, and had even helped select the site of the celebration, being near to a spring bubbling up at the foot of a hill near the lake. Chief Koquilton of the Muckleshoot people was a young man at the time and retold the story 65 years later, telling that the site had been a great camping ground for the

Indians for many generations prior.

A salute was fired, the howitzers loud enough to be heard for many miles. The fun and games were briefly interrupted when a rifle backfired and the wounded marine was sent back to the ships. It was soon forgotten though, and the American seamen and the Indians sat down at the makeshift tables to enjoy the feast. Dr. Richmond, a native of Maryland, made a speech declaring the inevitability of American control of Oregon, which no doubt was well-received by the marines.

Before the party packed up as the sun set, Lt. Wilkes decided that he would name the large lake to the east of the prairie “American Lake”, in honor of the patriotic celebrations held there that day. The men marched back to their moorings, and the tribes dispersed.

The expedition left Puget Sound soon after and returned to Virginia. The British ceded full control of Oregon Territory to the United States in 1846, and by the 1850's pioneers were flocking to Puget Sound, brought by the gold rush and the lumber trade. The Hudson's Bay Company, once the preeminent force in the Northwest, abandoned their forts and were gone by 1860. Independence Day was celebrated all up and down Puget Sound every year. That day in 1841, with its festive display of patriotism and talk of American destiny, had proved to be a turning point in the history of the region.

See related articles, page 5

Return to the East

Dr. John Richmond later returned east and settled in Illinois, where he was elected to the state senate, sitting at the same time as a state representative by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

Lt. Charles Wilkes sailed home via Cape Horn to Norfolk, Virginia with only two of his original six ships. Upon his return, word of Wilkes' harsh discipline and rumored personal arrogance earned him a reputation, and it is thought he was the inspiration for Herman Melville's most famous character, Captain Ahab. Wilkes served as a commodore for the Union navy in the Civil War, before passing away in Washington, D.C. in 1877. Only 100 copies of Wilkes' exploration expedition report were published, but they helped to establish Puget Sound and the Northwest as new prizes for America's manifest destiny.

Where to find the site

The site of the Northwest's first 4th of July celebration was pinpointed by local historians in 1906, with the help of Lt. Wilkes' diaries and the recollections of Chief Slugamus Koquilton, who attended the event. A 65th anniversary commemoration was held in 1906, featuring Governor Albert Mead and many other dignitaries from around the state, all arriving by rail half a mile to the south. A monument was unveiled at the ceremony, with Governor Mead giving a speech lamenting the fact that as those of the pioneer age were passing away, their knowledge of historical events and sites was passing with them. He praised the commemoration and the erection of the monument as a great



achievement in marking and recording an important moment in the state's history:

"You have undertaken the initiative in a movement that, but for you, perhaps would have been deferred until the human documents in our history had passed to dust, and treacherous memory had lost the details that are of such vast importance in the story of our commonwealth."

Today that land at the northeast corner of Lake Sequelitchew, known as American Prairie, is part of North Fort Lewis, just off exit 120, but accessible only to those with military I.D. The old 'county road' shown on a map of the site made in 1906, is now American Lake Ave. Military housing covers most of the area, but just off Vancouver Road that 1906 monument still stands, forgotten in the shade of a Garry oak. Its inscription reads:

1841 Fourth of July 1906

Commemorating the 65th Anniversary of the First Public Observance of our National Birth Day on the Pacific Coast, or West of the Missouri River By Capt. Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. and the Officers and Marines of His Fleet on Monday, July 5th 1841 on these Grounds.

Erected by Pierce County Pioneer Association Assisted by

The Washington State Historical Society
Washington State Pioneer Society
Daughters of American Revolution
Sons of American Revolution
Loyal Legion and G.A.R.

Mr. and Mrs. George Lyon, Jr.
of Nelson, Nebraska donated this land

Help the Lakewood Historical Society

Volunteers needed in many areas. Please call today: 253.682.3480. Your experience and willingness to help is needed

Next Issue: Colonial Center Reaches 70th

The Colonial Center is turning 70 this year, and LHS would like to commemorate the occasion by collecting stories and memories from our members for the next issue of the Prairie Gazette. Please send them into the editors by July 31st to be included!



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MUSEUM FUND REPORT

June 15, 2007

Goal: Raise up to \$100,000 through a concentrated Fund Raising campaign for the History Museum exhibit development, artifact collection and display and Museum maintenance and operating expenses.

Receipts to date:

- \$6380 – Board members and Fund chairs (18 donations)
- \$7245 – Receipts from members and others on the mailing list (87 donations)
- \$13,625 total

We also received several new memberships as a result of the mailing, so that's an added bonus.

Your participation in this fund raising effort is needed to help support the Museum. Please send your donation to the Lakewood Historical Society, PO Box 98014, Lakewood, WA 98496 if you haven't already done so. Thank you to those who have already made a contribution.

Gals Going Golfing Garners First Place

History photo contest entries now on exhibit at museum

A unique and personal collection of historic Lakewood photos are now on display at the Lakewood History Museum after an awards presentation at an open house on May 30th. Mayor Claudia Thomas awarded the prizes, provided by Robi's Camera Center. While handing out the prizes, the mayor spoke about the importance of keeping and restoring the cultural assets that we have in Lakewood while building the future of the community.

First prize went to Carol Seeburger for her c.1910 photo of women out for a morning of golf at the Lakeside Country Club. Mrs Seeburger is a member of the Country Club's History Committee, and lives just across the road from where that photo was once taken.

Second Prize was awarded to Elizabeth Poinsett, for the c.1922 family photo of her with her sister



Lady golfers and a woman enjoying a moment on her porch are among those now at the museum.

Katherine and her mother Iva Alice Mann, all together in the yard of their recently-built house on DeKoven Drive.

Beth Julian was awarded third prize for her 1898 photo of the Flett family home, when it was newly built on the corner of Bridgeport Way and Custer Road.

An honorary mention also went to

Paul Webb for his picture of an advertisement in a 1910 edition of The Daily Ledger, selling plots of land in Lakewood for \$100, warning that "Tacoma will be the Pittsburgh of the West, a city of smokestacks – what side of the smoke and soot and gases do you want to live on?"

Thank-you to Robi's Camera Center for awarding some great prizes and providing discounts for enlarging and mounting the photos. Thanks also go to Jane Whitney for organizing the awards event, as well as putting together the competition along with help from Barbara Wyatt.

The winning photos along with all other great entries offer a special window into some of the people and events of Lakewood's past. The photos from the contest will remain on display at the Museum, so be sure to stop by to view them this summer.

Lakewood Playhouse, from page 1

County. The initial productions began in 1938 when Mrs. Ray Thompson and Mrs Joseph Lasner hired Mrs. Burton James, of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, to teach a course in theatre arts to 30 Lakewood area residents. Many prominent families from the area were involved in 1938 and 1939, leading to the development of the Lakewood Players. The first organizational meeting took place at the Little Church on the Prairie and performances were held at the Lakewood Theatre.

In 1938, the founding members of the theatre produced a highly acclaimed performance of "Boy Meets Girl". Other shows followed and the theatre was lauded as a "cultural asset" in the August 18, 1938 edition of the Lakewood Log. Performances were usually preceded by opulent dinner parties and followed by lavish cast parties for performers and their hosts. The

theatre was integral part of the Lakewood social scene.

In 1939, the company moved to the DeKoven Inn and remained there until World War II began. The theatre suspended activities during the war. In 1945, the theatre began producing plays in the York Room of the Lakewood Terrace. In 1946, the Players moved to the basement of the Lakewood Theatre.

In the late 1950's, a building committee was established to plan and construct a permanent home for the Lakewood Playhouse. The building committee became the Lakewood Arts Foundation and began raising funds to build a unique theatre-in-the-round. Planning for the construction of the Lakewood Playhouse began in 1962. The land for the theatre was donated by the owners of the Villa Plaza Development Company. In 1965, the company moved into the newly constructed Lakewood Playhouse –

the theatre's current home.

In the late 1990's, the Lakewood Playhouse began a new era of artistic excellence. In 2001, under the leadership Managing Artistic Director Marcus Walker, the Lakewood Playhouse was restored to its original theatre-in-the-round design. Currently a remodel of the theatre lobby is in its final stages. A new façade, with a new Lakewood Playhouse sign, is currently in development.

Today, the Lakewood Playhouse is an artistic and financial success. Theatre-goers from throughout the Puget Sound region have been flocking to the Lakewood Towne Center in the heart of Lakewood to enjoy some of the region's finest theatre.

As in 1938, the Lakewood Playhouse remains a strong cultural and community asset in the Lakewood community.

Program Topics for July 17 and August 21

July 17 Program: Pessemier Home & Garden Tour

On July 17th, we have been cordially invited by Mr. and Mrs. George Pessemier to visit them in their home and tour their beautiful, century old estate property.

The home is located at 12116 Nyanza Rd SW, on the shores of Gravelly Lake. It has been lovingly renovated by the Pessemiers over the last decade and a half or so, restoring all that was wonderful about the property and updating it as needed. The home and grounds were prominently featured in Last fall's issue of Ping's Greater South Sound Homes and Gardens magazine, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the house and the covering the festivities held in celebration of that milestone.

This will be a very special, members-only event. The meeting will commence at 7PM, followed by the tour. Light refreshments will be served. We encourage carpooling to make parking more favorable. Our heartfelt thanks to Jo Marie and George Pessemier for being so gracious in inviting us to view this wonderful, historic property.

August 21 Program: History of the Mountain View Funeral Home

The August program (postponed from snow-swept January) will be held at the Mountain View Funeral Home and Memorial Park located at 4100 Steilacoom Blvd SW in Lakewood. Now operated by the fourth generation of the Thompson family, the company has been in Lakewood since 1915. It is now the largest combination of funeral home/ cemetery in the Pacific Northwest.

Cindy Thompson attained her MBA from PLU and became President in 1996 when her father, Brewer Thompson retired. She will relate the history of the family company and its influence on the Lakewood community.

The program begins at 7:00 PM in the "Celebration of Life Chapel". Parking attendants will direct members and guests as they arrive.

Help the Lakewood
Historical Society

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areas. Please call today:
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**Your experience and
willingness to help is
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**Lakewood Historical Society
P.O. Box 98014
Lakewood, WA 98496**