



Summer 2021 Prairie Gazette

Official Publication, Lakewood Historical Society



After a long and lonely sixteen months...



WE'RE BACK!

Sure, life has its ups and downs...

...but the roller coaster ride your Society's been on these last two years has left us reeling--and boy, do we hope it's over! For those who came in late, a quick recap:

2019: Things never looked brighter for the LHS. After thirteen years in our small, overcrowded storefront, a dream comes true January 22nd when a key and Certificate of Occupancy presented to President Sue Scott makes it official: two long-vacant local landmarks, the Terrace Restaurant and the Lakewood Theatre, are combined to create a grand and expansive new space for the Lakewood History Museum! Work begins, visitors see some progress, and then...

2020: *Lockdown!* Visitors vanish, but work goes on and a grand vision emerges... See *REOPENING*, page 4

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Sue Scott

President's Message

Thank you to everyone who came to the re-opening of your Lakewood History Museum –it was great to see everyone! If you weren't able to come then, we hope you will stop by on a Friday or Saturday and check out the new exhibits. And **thank you** to all who have renewed your membership and to those who added a donation!!

I would like to welcome our newest Board Member: **John Burton**. John was the sound and production engineer for the Lakewood based KLAY Radio; he also has worked as sound design engineer for the Lakewood Playhouse.

One of our longtime members **Richard Rabisa** recently passed away; our condolences to his family.

We are excited to start our programs again. Part of our new museum space has been transformed into a meeting room/program area. We will also be showing movies! If you have ideas for programs, let me know.

And don't forget the City of Lakewood 25th Anniversary Party scheduled for Saturday, September 18th right here in the Colonial Plaza!

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.

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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

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Set up *amazonsmile* and make us your charity of choice. Be sure to designate Lakewood Historical Society **Washington** (yes, there *are* other Lakewood Historical Societies out there!) We receive a small percentage of your purchase price at **no extra cost** to you.

DOCENTS URGENTLY NEEDED!

Lately, your Society has had to limit the hours and even days we're open due to a severe and ongoing shortage of

**** **DOCENTS** ****

If you like history, people and bringing the two together, **WE WANT YOU** to be a docent whenever you can spare a few hours. No experience necessary; we'll show you the ropes. Call **Sue Scott, 253-588-6354**



A lake like no other.

Lakewood's only man-made lake has a lot of history behind it...

In 1853, pioneer **Andrew F. Byrd** filed a claim on 159 acres near the current corner of Steilacoom Boulevard and Phillips Road, where what is now Steilacoom Lake feeds into Chambers Creek.

In partnership with his brother, **Preston Byrd**, and **A. E. Light**, a Steilacoom merchant, Byrd built a dam and sawmill, and later a grist mill--only the second such mill north of the Columbia River. Water backing up behind the dam provided the mill's power. It also flooded what had been a shallow valley, greatly increasing both the level of Steilacoom Lake and its size.

The Byrd mill converted much of the area's grains into flour and its timber into lumber, and the rugged thoroughfare known as **Byrd Mill Road** became the main route between Steilacoom and Puyallup.

Among the people who worked at the mill was **Job Carr**, founder of the city of Tacoma. As historian **Murray Morgan** puts it, Carr undertook occasional employment at the mill "while waiting for the city of his dreams to materialize."

In the late 1880s some of Byrd's land was platted for a town that, unlike Tacoma, never *did* materialize. Its proposed name of **Custer** lives on, however, attached to a nearby road and elementary school.

By 1917 the Byrd Mill was long gone, but the power produced by its dam remained, attracting a new enterprise that year. The **Water Power Furniture Manufacturing Co.** was perhaps the largest business ever established on the banks of Steilacoom Lake. Its approximate address, 8700 Edgewater Dr. S.W., puts it in a part of Lakewood known then as Custer Station --and there's that name again.

An elevated walkway connected the two buildings on the property* wherein, true to its name, the company used water-powered saws and lathes exclusively to manufacture its



Andrew F. Byrd, whose mill is seen here, came to a tragic end. One J. M. Bates murdered him in 1863, a crime that got Bates lynched by a Steilacoom mob!

furniture. But not, apparently, for long. The company was listed in the Tacoma City Directory from 1917 through 1922, then dropped from sight. Sadly, the facility must have been standing idle when its photo was taken in March of 1924 (see pg 6).

Today's Lakewoodians may be a bit puzzled by the photo. While a dam can be seen, there's no sign of **Steilacoom Boulevard**, the major arterial that's run along the top of Chambers Creek dam for as long as anyone can remember.

Whenever the decision was made to put the road through, it must have been obvious the dam would have to be built up far beyond its original dimensions to accommodate and support automobile traffic. This being done, the mightier dam solved one problem--and aggravated another.

Even the smaller dam had interfered with salmon runs; now the jump required to enter the lake through its massive new culvert was too much for all but the hardiest fish.

Help was on the way, however.

See **STEILACOOM LAKE**, pg 6

Sometime between the end of the Byrd Mill's operations in the 1890s and the construction of the furniture factory, the site (according to Tacoma Public Library archives) is believed to have been occupied by the **Coops Piano Company--a somewhat surprising enterprise to encounter in the near-wilderness of early 20th Century Pierce County and about which nothing else seems to be known.*



Among a few historical markers predating those erected by your Society is this one, standing in the parking lot of the Lakewood Veterinarian Hospital:

BYRD MILL SITE

ANDREW F. BYRD

BUILT A DAM & SAWMILL

HERE IN 1853

100 YARDS DOWNSTREAM

HE BUILT A GRIST MILL

IN 1857

ERECTED IN 1964 BY PIERCE

CO. PIONEER & HISTORICAL

ASSN. SPONSORED BY A. R.

ADAMS WHOSE MOTHER

WAS BORN HERE IN 1856

REOPENING, from pg 1

...a vision of how attractive, informative and engaging a museum can be when it enjoys the support of its community--and is fortunate in its choice of consultants (thank you, **Chris Erlich!**)

2021: Renovations wrap up just as our state is emerging from the last of its pandemic-induced restrictions. Time to welcome visitors back. Word goes out and a grand reopening party is held on July 17.



Left: Dignitaries, LHS officers and visitors pose for a group shot--with the stately tower of the old Lakewood Theatre looming behind them.

Right: Speaking of dignitaries, Lakewood Mayor **Don Anderson** stands to the right of Deputy Mayor **Jason Whalen** as they greet arriving guests.



Above: The mayor addresses visitors outside the museum, then...



Left: Mayor Anderson, Deputy Mayor Whalen, LHS Board Members **Glen Spieth** and **Phil Raschke** join LHS Vice-President **Ed Voie** in touching wood for luck--in this case, very historic wood: a fragment of the track cars raced on at the Tacoma Speedway over a century ago.



Left: **Bev Raschke** at the switchboard, showing how connections were made in the days before DMs and texting--long, long before!

Right: Past LHS President **Becky Huber** and board member **Phil Raschke** check out a new interactive display with audio featuring the dulcet tones of **Historical Phil** himself.

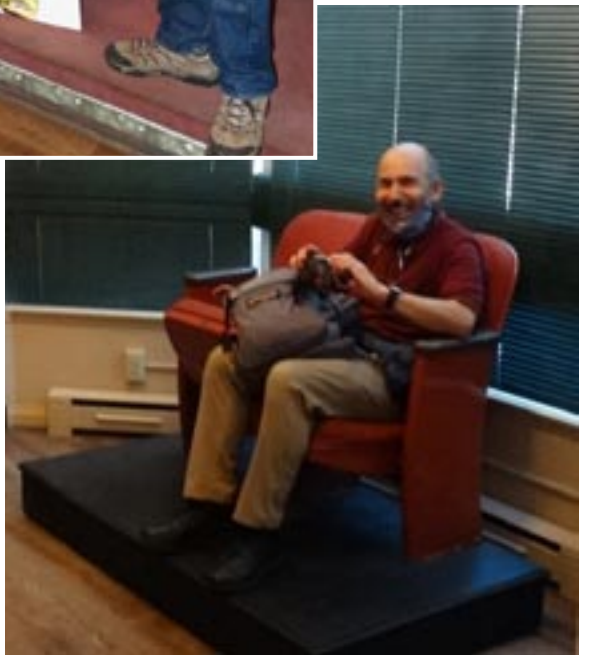


Left: ...poses with his deputy beside the image of his predecessor, the late **Claudia Thomas**, our state's first Black woman mayor.



Left: LHS President **Sue Scott** shows Mayor Anderson a display of old movie posters commemorating the Lakewood Theatre side of the museum. Clips from classic films seen at the Theatre play in a loop on the TV to the mayor's right.

Right: LHS Docent **Bill Emma**, taking in a few of the aforementioned clips. In the decades before it was moved out of the theatre and into the museum, his seat was sure to have held many who watched the movies the clips were taken from.



Recent Donors

Don Anderson
Sandra Anderson
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Cassandra & Jason de Kanter
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Eleanor M. Wilson
Mike & Edna Wilson
Dale Wirsing
Paul & Becky Wulfestieg
David M. Young

New Member:

Linda Farmer



STEILACOOM LAKE, from pg 3

On December 6, 1938 the men responsible for solving the salmon run problem gathered around the concrete tunnel under Steilacoom Boulevard to have their photo taken with the just-completed fish ladder they had designed and constructed:



Tacoma Public Library D7696-1B

Workmen Ward Dunn and Fred Brehan and, right, Bill Gaul, County District Supervisor, with Milo C. Bell, designer of the just-completed fish ladder.

Information on Byrd Mill in this article came from *Images of America: Lakewood* by Steve Dunkelberger & Walter Neary, available at Lakewood History Museum.



Tacoma Public Library, BOLAND-B9618

Water Power Furniture Manufacturing Co., 1924



Culvert seen in 1938 photo is on the right of four other outlets in this shot from 2021. The fish ladder was extended in recent years by adding more steps.

Historical Markers
of Lakewood:
11th in a Series.

*The Byrd
School*

1855-1885



THE BYRD SCHOOL

In 1855, the first school building north of the Columbia River was at the current site of Park Lodge School on an acre donated by A.C. Knecht. Lumber from the Byrd Lumber Mill at Lake Steilacoom was used to construct the 20X30-foot, one room schoolhouse. The school drew children from the Lakewood area and as far as Spanaway and Fern Hill. The Byrd School was moved in 1856 to a more central site on land donated by W. P. Dougherty. The one-acre site was on the southwest corner of his land claim, property later known as the Flett Dairy. The school was rebuilt in 1861 and remained in use until 1885 when it burned to the ground. Except for a few reunions, the site remained undisturbed until October 20, 1999 when it was rediscovered by members of the Lakewood Historical Society. In 2008, the site was excavated by LHS members. Many recovered relics were put on display in the Lakewood History Museum.

The **Byrd School plaque** is unique among the markers the Lakewood Historical Society has placed over the years, being affixed to a free-standing concrete pillar instead of the usual granite boulder.

Donated by the Lakewood Project, LLC in December, 2009 the marker stands on the grounds of the Echelon Apartment complex at the corner of 88th St. Ct. SW and Old Byrd School Avenue SW in Lakewood.

The plaque features the photo seen at the top of this page with text reading as follows:



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

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Permit #387

August 3rd presentation marks successful return of Monthly Programs & inaugurates new meeting space



Author **Erich Ebel** (left) held a packed house rapt with his presentation on the notorious **1854 Medicine Creek Treaty** and the subsequent Indian wars that wracked the Puget Sound region. Earlier that evening, Erich signed copies of his book on another Western tragedy, the **Donner Expedition of 1846**.

After more than a year long COVID-induced lapse in our Monthly Programs, it was great to see so many old friends and new faces--especially as they gathered, for the first time ever, in our new meeting space (once the lounge adjoining the bar of the old Terrace Restaurant).

Mark **August 24** on your calendar for our next program featuring the 2018 film **Stan & Ollie**, the untold story of this unforgettable comedy team's 1950 comeback attempt.

Check lakewoodhistorical.org
for notices of upcoming programs.