

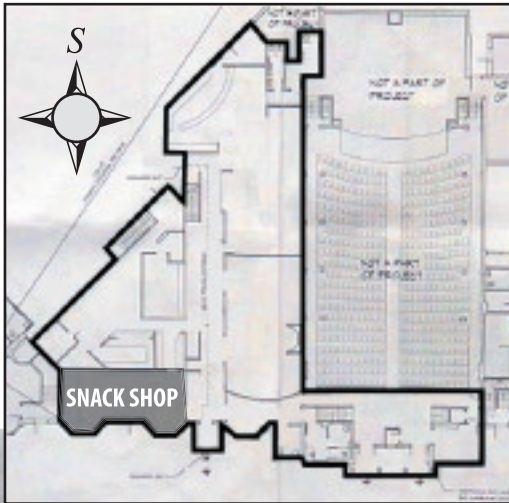


# Winter 2020 Prairie Gazette

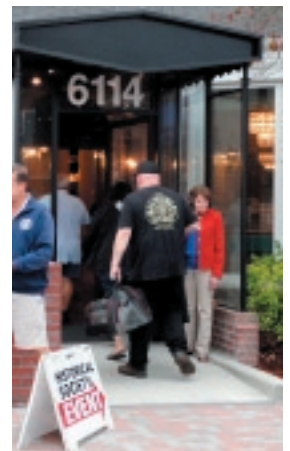
The Official Publication of  
the Lakewood Historical Society

## Your Lakewood History Museum... ..Then ...and Now.

In this issue, a new recurring feature: To better familiarize you with the Society's spacious new museum (and the significant role the buildings it occupies once played in Lakewood's history), we'll be taking a look at it one room at a time—first as it was many years ago, then a look at what we're doing with it now.



First up: this sunny little alcove to the left of the main entrance—a room that was, for many years, the Terrace Restaurant's coffee shop (or "Snack Shop" as it's referred to in the caption of the photo at left below, reproduced here courtesy of the Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room).



The Lakewood Terrace Snack Shop, newly remodeled in the latest style. Latest style of 1952, that is...



Sixty-seven years later: same bright and sunny space, put to a much different use. Opening day visitors, September 14, 2019.

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## Lakewood Historical Society

contact@lakewoodhistorical.org

### President

Sue Scott • 253-588-6354

### Vice President

Ed Voie • 253-970-9552

### Secretary

Vacant

### Treasurer

Jim Curley • 253-584-8731

### Past President

Becky Huber

### Directors

Kris Kauffman  
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Malcolm Russell  
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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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## President's Message



Sue Scott

### Welcome to a new year and a new decade!

I hope everyone had a good holiday. If you didn't have a chance to pick up one of the **Lakewood Historical Society ornaments**, we still have some available at the museum. Stop by Wednesday– Saturday from 12-4 to get yours at \$10 each. Along with various books, Lakewood Historical Society also has some of their sharp looking **sweatshirts** for sale at \$30 each—check them out!

We are looking forward to upcoming events in Lakewood to include a proposed **Night Market** on the first and third Friday evenings right here at the **Colonial Plaza!** Watch for updates. Also the **Lakewood Farmers Market** at City Hall starting in June and of course **SummerFest** on July 11 at Fort Steilacoom Park.

We are working on some new programs for 2019 and hope to have one in March at St Mary's Parish Hall. Watch for updates.

I am pleased to announce that **Malcolm Russell** has been elected to the Lakewood Historical Society Board.

Malcolm is a Lakewood native, Clover Park class of 1985, and a community activist—and, at the Society's Annual Meeting in November, he gave a most interesting presentation on his illustrious grandfather, **Admiral James S. Russell** (see photos on pages 4 and 5). Welcome aboard, Malcolm!



Malcolm Russell

I want to thank all those members who donated during the **Annual Campaign** drive—every dollar helps! Watch your mail for **membership renewal** letters—they'll be going out the first of March.

No history lover's tree complete without the ornament that celebrates your museum's new home!



## Never felt more like **STRINGIN'** the **BLUES...**

LHS helps bring back a glorious holiday tradition.

For decades, people would travel from all over the South Sound to see Lakewood's holiday blue lights, strung in bare branches of Gerry oak trees scattered throughout the shopping district, outlining windows—even entire storefronts—on street after street.

According to the late **Cy Happy** (co-founder of the Lakewood Historical Society), the blue lights were the idea of **Mary Clapp**, wife of **Norton Clapp**, developer of the Colonial Center. Nobody knows exactly why she chose blue, but she had little trouble persuading other business owners to adopt her color scheme once they saw how distinctive—and classy—an effect they made.



Board member Suzanne Merriam fearlessly tackles tangles.

By the time the city was incorporated in 1996, however, the tradition had faded away—only to be revived 13 years later as part of the community's response to a senseless tragedy: the killing of four Lakewood police officers. To commemorate the fallen heroes—and to honor all who serve on "the thin blue line"—the City Council passed a resolution in January 2010 adopting blue as the official color for the city's holiday lights.

Resolutions require action—and who better to light a fire under business owners than the local



LHS President Sue Scott, gift poinsettias in hand, stands ready to thank volunteer Bill Emma (l) and board member Kris Kauffman.



Treasurer Jim Curley steadies ladder while Glen Spieth stretches to reach that last out-of-the-way outlet.

Chamber of Commerce? And that's exactly what happened this year with **Lakewood's Nights of Lights**, a Chamber-fueled promotion that ran throughout December.

We proudly report that your Society did its part to revive this grand tradition in response to the Chamber's push, in tribute to all men and women in blue—and to call attention to its magnificent new quarters in the space once occupied by the Terrace Restaurant and Lakewood Theater. Yards of blue lights were bought and installed on November 29—a day of frenzied festooning by board members and volunteers.



Santa himself never had more helpful elves: l to r, Jim Curley, Bill Emma, Kris Kauffman, Darryl Owens, Suzanne Merriam, Ed Voie, Sue Scott, Glen Spieth.



# LHS Annual Meeting includes presentation on Admiral James S. Russell



**Adm. James "Gentleman Jim" Russell**  
March 22, 1903 – April 14, 1996

Born in Tacoma, son of noted architect **Ambrose J. Russell** and **Loella Janet (Sargent) Russell**, James graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1926. He served with distinction in World War II, winning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal for his actions in leading his squadron against the enemy in "extremely hazardous weather conditions" during the Aleutian Islands Campaign of 1942-43.

In 1957 Russell became deputy commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet. Just a year later, he was appointed Vice Chief of Naval Operations with the rank of four-star admiral. He served in that post until 1962, then went on to become Commander-in-Chief of NATO's Allied Forces in Southern Europe, a post he held until retiring in 1965.



*Above and left: November 19, 2019, St. Mary's Episcopal Church Parish Hall— "Gentleman Jim's" grandson **Malcolm Russell** alternated tales of daring-do with amusing anecdotes of the Admiral growing up as a high-spirited young man in the Pierce County of 100 years ago.*



*Above: Many of Tacoma's most iconic structures were designed by Malcolm's great-grandfather, **Ambrose Russell**, among them the Temple Theater, the Armory and here, the Rust Mansion. Left: LHS President **Sue Scott** presides over the official business part of the Annual Meeting.*



## Recent Donors

William & Dorothy Wickline  
Edward Trobaugh  
Joseph W. Lewis  
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James Manning  
Anita Fries

## Historical Society Members Visit Bilbo Baggins at “The Hobbit”

Story and Photos by Phil Raschke

On New Zealand’s north island near the town of Matamata, adventurous folks can journey to “Hobbiton”, the ancestral home of Bilbo Baggins, his friend Gandalf the Wizard and others from J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic 1937 novel “The Hobbit”.



Society members and friends pay a visit to Bilbo Baggins home. Left to right, Barbara Strup, Jack Mason, Lonnie Lai, Phil and Bev Raschke, Cindy Nelson.

In late November, excited LHS members and friends took the journey and paid a visit to the locations used in both *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* film trilogies. All six films were made in New Zealand, were directed by Academy Award winner Peter Jackson and grossed nearly 6 billion dollars worldwide.

“Hobbiton” is one of the most popular tourists spots in New Zealand, as is WETA Cave, an advanced digital film studio co-founded by Jackson just outside of Wellington, NZ. You can tell by the photos a good time was had by all!

*See you around the shire!*



Lakewood’s Lonnie Lai knocks on the Hobbit Hole of Master Worrywart.



Barbara Strup defends herself from a giant Troll .



Shirley, Lonnie, Bev, Barbara, Cindy & Judy pose with “Azog the Goblin” inside WETA Cave.

## Historical Markers of Lakewood: 4th in a Series

# THE TACOMA SPEEDWAY



Ironically, the marker shown here (one of the first placed by the Society) commemorates a site whose name indicates it would have had little, if anything, to do with Lakewood or its history.

The **TACOMA** Speedway? Couldn’t be much clearer where *that* must have been...right?

Wrong.

True, the money to build and promote the course—second in prestige during its ten years of existence only to the famous Indianapolis track —came mostly from a pool of well-to-do Tacoma boosters. But the

spot they chose to build it was undeniably beyond city limits. Fortunately perhaps for them there was no City of Lakewood in 1912, nor would there be for another 84 years—and few local boosters of what was then more generally known as the Lakes District would have been around to challenge whatever name they chose to give it.

Today, in contrast, even the most fervent Tacoma boosters would have to admit the ground over which the Speedway’s race cars roared is an integral part of Lakewood. Sadly, it’s been a moot point since 1922, when shrinking crowds led to the track being demolished. The site has since been put to many uses—airport, naval supply depot—culminating in its current incarnation as a crown jewel of the Washington State educational system: Clover Park Technical College.

That’s where you’ll find our marker today—in the southeast corner of the campus, placed (fittingly enough) right by the automotive courses building complex.



Even before the grandstand was built, enthusiastic crowds swarmed onto the grounds and right up to the edge of the track—unaware they were putting life and limb at risk...?

The plaque features a photograph of a racecar at the Speedway with the caption, “Cooper in 1912”. The text reads as follows:

### ON THIS SITE STOOD THE TACOMA SPEEDWAY

*In July of 1912 the Tacoma Speedway held its first race. The top names in racing drove here—Oldfield, Rickenbacker, Tetzlaff, DePalma, Cooper and others. The first track was five miles of dirt road that ran on Steilacoom Boulevard to Gravelly Lake Drive to 111th Street to Lakeview Avenue and back to Steilacoom Boulevard. In 1913 the track was reduced to 3 1/2 miles and went up 100th Street instead of 111th. By 1915, the track was reduced to a 2 mile oval built of two-by-four lumber laid on edge with 18 foot high banks on the curves. A fire in 1920 razed the grandstand which was replaced at a cost of \$100,000. The 1922 race was the best, but with the cost of the grandstand and reduced gate receipts and the highest purse yet, the Tacoma Speedway Association failed. The track was sold in 1922 and became the Mueller-Harkins Airport.*

Marker Donated By: Lakewood Historical Society 2002



**Lakewood  
Historical  
Society**

P.O. Box 98014  
Lakewood, WA  
98496

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