

History: Pictures & Commentary

LAKEWOOD COLONIAL CENTER & THEATER



THE EXISTING BUILDING and ADDITIONS

The original building, built in 1937 in a Colonial Revival style, was comprised of a 600 seat theater for stage and film and was complimented with a restaurant, casual cafe, space for an adjacent hardware store, a barber shop and a full service food market complete with meat counter and separate drug store.

Amenities included a Basement Bar/Lounge, lots of Storage and even a Rifle Range to cater to the large civilian population associated with the nearby McChord Air Force Base and the Camp Lewis (now Fort Lewis) training grounds.

The construction of additions to the main building occurred in 1951 as shown above.

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The original building, built in 1937, was expanded with a ring of additions in 1951 to form a rough triangle of shops surrounded by parking for automobiles. A complementary "V" wing of shops was added across the road (Gravelly Lake Drive) in 1955. The original surroundings to this new "shopping center" were residences, small commercial buildings, single lane roads and lots of open space as shown on the previous photo.

The aerial photo above is the current "modern" neighborhood of paved streets and mostly single-story commercial buildings with related suburban type parking.

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AUTO ORIENTATION for the Post-World War II CROWD

The surge of independence afforded by the popular automobile gave rise to a new building type oriented towards the driving public, the Suburban Shopping Center.

The Lakewood Colonial Center Theater set a precedent as one of the first suburban shopping centers in the Nation.

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THE PLACE TO DRIVE TO, THE PLACE TO BE SEEN

The 50's and 60's saw the continued prominence of the automobile and the destinations for the automobile to drive to.

You drove somewhere,

to be seen,

and to see who else and what else was to be seen.

It was an affirmation of independence and mobility. But it revolved around the destinations where people met.

One of those important places to go to was the Lakewood Colonial Center Theater.

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Aerial Photo of South Puget Sound in Washington State

Today's World of the Suburbs

The evolution of modern suburban environments resulted in the emergence of an undifferentiated landscape where suburban cities merge seamlessly into one another. Individual community identity is often subsumed by a regional identity, and the local sense of place and community is often diluted or lost.

Redevelopment of the Colonial Center and Theater would be a very powerful way for the Lakewood community to reestablish its identity. The strong Colonial Revival architectural forms and landscape characterized by large oak trees and lawns provide an image that is unique to Lakewood. By reviving the true roots of the City, people can better appreciate the rich history of Lakewood and see that history carried forward into the future.