

**The Building:
The Historic Register
Application,
Description &
Pictures**

as prepared by:

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Lakewood Colonial Theater Nomination Description by Jennifer Schreck (edited for clarity and brevity)

Architectural styles in the United States have always been a reflection of the societal, political, and economic times of the country. Colonial Revival in Lakewood is no exception. In the late 1930s, the country worked to regain its footing after the boom of the Progressive Era, participation in the Great War (WWI), and the climb out of the Great Depression. Dark times were looming in Europe and America with the onset of World War II and America followed President Harding's summation in 1920 that America should seek "not heroism, but healing. Not nostrums but normalcy." According to Carol Rifkind (p. 217) "When prosperity returned, practical considerations, not an image of grandeur, guided city planning and new construction." The public found reassurance in the stability articulated in Colonial Revival architecture. Period revivals like the Colonial Revival, with its red brick, white wood trim, bowed display windows, and tendency toward symmetry, suggested "local idiom or quaint effect" (Rifkind, p. 220).

The Lakewood Theatre is a masonry veneer building constructed in the Colonial Revival style following that trend. The most distinctive element of the structure is the tower portion of the Lakewood Theatre. The Theatre and its tower are the focal point of the Colonial Center complex that boasts an irregular plan best described as an odd trapezoid. The Colonial Center was constructed in 1937 by Norton Clapp who was the developer responsible for the suburban development of Lakewood in the 1930s-1940s including the Colonial Center and Lakewood Motor Inn. Norton Clapp was dubbed the "Lord of Lakewood" a fitting title considering his contributions to the development of the "village" he envisioned during development of the suburban landscape in the 1930s filled with Colonial Revival architecture. Cupolas and copper roofs are abundant in the 1930-1940s architecture around Colonial Center.

The Theatre is the portion of the Colonial Center complex nominated to the Lakewood Register and was designed by architect Silas Nelsen, the builder was Pasadena Co, and C.M. Martinson was the contractor. The Theatre opened its doors on July 9, 1937.



Seating capacity of the theatre has been said to be 600 with two glassed in rooms off the back portion of the main floor, one for smoking, the other for crying babies.

The Theatre itself is a symmetrical tri-partite configuration with the tower rising above the forward portion of the Theatre's rectangular hipped roof form. The entrance to the theatre is located on the short side of the rectangular form, the tower portion of the entrance is about half of the overall width of the front façade. The entrance is situated with a slightly projecting portico supported by four fluted Doric columns. A wide fascia capping the exterior façade of the rectangular form leads to a four sided clock tower the base of which is a balconette



configuration which rises to four screened in sides.

The openings of those sides are created with Palladian configuration above which is the octagonal clock tower with four clocks, the corners clipped, above which is a pyramidal roof form with clipped corners clad with well patinaed copper above which rises a weather vane with elaborate font N-E-S-W. At each of the four corners of the clock tower at the balcony and above the Palladian levels are urn forms.



The cladding for the buildings is brick veneer laid entirely in header bond with decorative elements including quoins and sills.



Windows are wood and lead glass in casements, double hung and picture windows. On the upper level of the primary façade there are three pairs of leaded 8 lite casement windows

set recessed under the portico, a pendant globe light fixture hangs directly in front of each of those windows and is centered between a pair of the columns when viewed head on. Also on the second level of the structure, flanking the recessed portion under the portico, are pairs of smaller rectangular windows centered in the space. On the main level of the primary façade the recessed portion under the portico is a triptych configuration of the box office flanked by pairs of double four panel doors capped with a solid transom.



The box office is a bay structure with three sides on a sill of standing soldier brick course capped with a stretcher course. The kick plate portion of the bay is traditional wood recessed panel construction above which sits the windows the entire projection of the box office is sheltered by a copper roof. Spanning the headers of the three openings of this portion of the façade is a belt course of millwork including dentil molding. Flanking the portico on the lower level of the primary façade are two wood frame poster windows to showcase the upcoming events with colonial revival scrollwork on the header and apron of the

window trim.

The Theatre portion of the building is flanked by a-symmetrical forms. To the east of the tower is a more elaborately designed structure. Leading east from the theatre hipped roof portion of the complex is a gabled wing with four hipped bay windows between each an arched opening for the doorways. At the east end of the wing the form angles at 45 degrees with a hipped roof form with three modified M dormers in white clapboard. On the North façade of this wing is an elaborate colonial entrance with protruding from the face of the

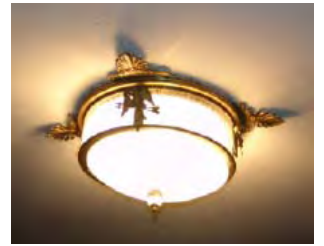


building approximately one foot with a gable supported by two pilasters and a fan-lite transom. Traditional panel doors are found on the entire structure. It appears the gabled wing was once lined with decorative wood balustrade with urns atop each baluster. The very end of the wing boasts a rounded form, single story storefront very modern in style with fishbowl type windows and a plain, wide cornice. Decorative brickwork on this portion of the building includes a band of soldier bricks at a low cornice level arching over the formal door at the angle on the north elevation. Doorways between the projecting bay windows are topped by wood arches in fanlite configuration. The gabled portion was once the Terrace Restaurant. This portion of the complex is not nominated for the Lakewood Register at this time.

The website Cinematreasures.org lists one hundred eleven Colonial Revival style theaters of

which, the Lakewood Theatre is only one of four located in the northwest region of the United States. Cinema Treasures, is a website dedicated to historic theaters across the world and boasts a listing of over 20,000 theaters around the world including 285 in Washington State.

The interior of the Theatre includes a lobby with the box office centered in the entry. The door frames off the lobby spaces are elaborately trimmed out with arched openings and a wooden soffit and keystone as well as wainscoting with classic colonial detail. The light fixtures are in keeping with the Colonial Revival style of the building. The lobby leads to the auditorium portion of the theater.



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The lobby leads to modestly ornamented staircases to the balcony, projection room, and men and women's lounges. The lounge space located behind the second story main windows on the portico house a wall mounted telephone which remains in place.

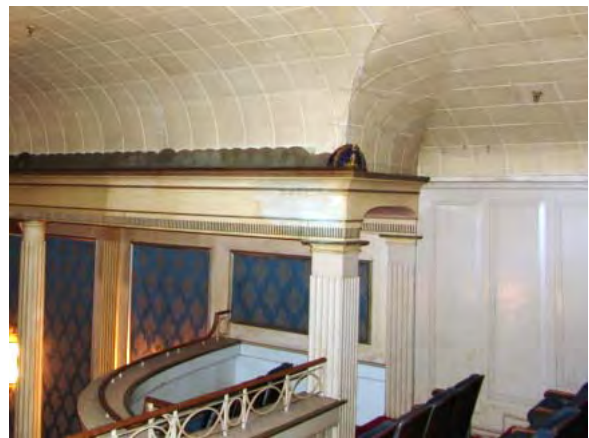


The projection room still contains equipment including an RCA Commercial Sound System. The projection room also includes a toilet situated in a corner with no barriers or partitions to provide privacy.



The restroom on the upper level retains wood colonial revival panel toilet partitions with clipped corners, ornate two toned grey and white tile floor, white square tile wainscoting on the walls with a red band one course from the top. The sinks are wall mounted with metal stands.

On the balcony, a metal rail with decorative metal in an intersecting half circular and circular pattern is capped with a wooden handrail which spans the length of the balcony including the box seat sections which are curvilinear and set at either corner of the upper level just in front of the balcony level. At the back two corners of the balcony are two glassed in sections rumored to be used as a crying room for babies labeled "The Nursery" and the other a smoking room.





The auditorium has a slight sloping floor and is configured in a traditional theater manner. The rows of seats are set uniformly with aisles on either side and one center aisle. There are six round, fluted columns supporting the arched ceiling over the end aisles paired with squared, fluted pilasters against the wall which are incorporated into the framework of the panels system inset with dark blue wallpaper embossed with a symmetric stylized floral pattern in gold. The columns on the inner side of the aisle, which run through the balcony corners, are square fluted columns.



The arched ceiling over those aisles is capped by a simple frieze with darkly contrasted paint color embellishment, to provide depth to the trim work from the floor level, capped with simplified anthemion (honeysuckle ornament) in also in dark paint contrast. The vaulting of the theatre ceiling continues above the aisle ceiling. The ceiling of the theatre is covered in square acoustical panels.

The stage is flanked by two exits and paneling consistent with the rest of the space including squared fluted pilasters on either side of the opening to the stage supporting a frieze that is in line with the frieze spanning the aisle ceiling. The stage is framed by a slightly rounded trim work, and traditional curtains. The stage is elevated and appears to rest upon wood paneled plinth similar to the base of the box office. There is also an orchestra pit that has the necessary



structure to cover when not in use.

The basement of the theater includes dressing rooms for the actors, an old club bar and ballroom, a commercial kitchen, a wine cellar, and the necessary equipment to keep the theatre in operation.



<p>The City of Lakewood has an extensive history dating back to the 1840s when the Hudson's Bay Company settled a fort in the area, now the Fort Steilacoom Historic District. Wealthy families from Tacoma vacationed in the Lakes region. According to Historylink.org travel was made easier by the first Interurban Rail system in the world, the Tacoma and Steilacoom Railway started in 1890. Infill in the area trickled in until the 1930s when husband and wife Norton and Mary Davis Clapp started campaigning for a community centered lifestyle for residents of the then suburb of Tacoma.</p>	

In 1937 Norton and his first wife Mary Davis Clapp developed Lakewood Center, one of the first shopping centers west of the Mississippi. This center included the Lakewood Theatre. The Colonial Revival architecture of this complex was echoed throughout the area with the cupolas and colonial style architecture found on small commercial structures, large commercial structures and residences nearby the center. The development of Lakewood Center had the largest impact on the architectural style of Lakewood's blossoming suburban landscape and created the atmosphere of a traditional sense of place in the suburban landscape.

According to an August 3, 1945 Tacoma News Tribune article about the untimely death of Norton Clapp's first Wife Mary Davis and 10 year old son Davis, Mary Davis was a prominent socialite in Tacoma, particularly the lakes district. She "took a personal interest in the designing and building up the little business and civic center on the prairie a few miles south of the city and was active in various civic betterment enterprises."

Norton and Mary Davis Clapp developed Lakewood Center while he worked part time as the Corporate Secretary for Weyerhaeuser. He later became Chairman of the Board of Weyerhaeuser after the death of the president who was his grandfather. Clapp held a long and distinguished career beginning as a lawyer and including partnership with five other investors for the development of the Seattle Space Needle, worldwide expansion of Weyerhaeuser, founding University of Puget Sound's law school, National President of the Boy Scouts, and step father to Washington State Governor Booth Gardner as well as father to six and step father to another six children, only 8 of whom survived as of 1984.

Norton Clapp's civic mindedness was clearly evident in his positions with the University of Puget Sound and National Council of Boy Scouts. He also had long range vision for the timber industry. On March 8, 1961 the Tacoma News Tribune ran an article on how Mr. Clapp urged timber crop discipline and the need for refraining from harvesting timber before it was fully matured to maintain the balance provided when "sustained yield management best meets the nation's needs for wood, water, wildlife and recreation without causing serious fluctuations to depended industries and communities . . ." He urged governmental assistance in managing the public forests as well as in realizing taxation of forestlands in a way that make harvesting timber prematurely appealing for foresters. He recognized the importance of Weyerhaeuser on the local economy through jobs held by the company locally and abroad. He benefited from the lessons learned by his ancestors, of Laird Norton, and their timber practices in the Midwest before realizing sustainable timber farming and practice in the northwest.

The Weekly, a Seattle publication, in July 18, 1984 called Norton Clapp "the most powerful and least known northwest business mogul" and a "Lord of Lakewood" whose family fortune was

estimated in the hundreds of millions in 1984.

The Lakewood Center plan was originally dubbed “Clapp’s Folly” then later acknowledged as a brilliant piece of land development.

The following is a quote from the feature run on Norton Clapp in Seattle’s publication, *The Weekly*, July 18, 1984:

“In the middle of a sparsely developed settlement at the juncture of Gravelly Lake Drive and Steilacoom Bridge Road, 10 miles south of Tacoma, the Clapps designed and developed Lakewood Center on 1,400 acres of land Clapp had reportedly acquired for \$100 an acre. One of the nation’s first suburban shopping centers, Lakewood boasted a hall for elite social dances, a ritzy dining room, theatre, grocery store, butcher, barber, doctor, dentist, and beauty parlor—pedicurists, manicurists, masseuses included. Imagine imported wood paneling, crystal lamps, and expensive furnishings, then include incongruous colonial architecture as icing—colonial style columns and facades set on a prairie—and its little wonder this city under one roof seemed like a flight of fancy, especially in the Depression decade. The original dentist, Dr. Edward Klopping, who still practices [1984] at the center, confesses he thought he’d be extracting teeth from chickens.

The area boomed. McChord Air Base and Fort Lewis grew. The suburban exodus began. By 1941, 6,000 people inhabited what had been a summer colony for a few hundred residents. Today [1984], the suburb is 65,000 strong; the center is still in family hands.

The center, unlike today’s malls, was intended to be more than a plaza for merchants. As homes, schools, and churches sprouted around it, it became a social hub. The Clapps were shaping a town—the Perfect Country Life, they advertised. ‘Make no little plans,’ counseled one ad. ‘They have little power to stir men’s blood.’”

Mary Clapp, a minister’s daughter and Norton’s first of four wives, had a “talent for business—‘This is all Mary’s doing,’ Clapp once explained the center to a friend, not at all in jest—also boasted a streak of wildness and a taste for grandiose lifestyle that suited her husband less and less. The end was fiery [sic]. A lawsuit was filed, according to a recent [1984] P-I story, and it was later settled out of court. The lawsuit charged Clapp with defrauding his wife between \$14 million and \$26 million in divorce settlement. A year later Clapp married Evelyn Booth Gardner, a former New York model and daughter of Lawrence Booth, president of Washington Title Insurance Co. Her marriage to Bryson “Brick” Gardner, who ran a Tacoma car dealership, had fallen apart. Years later, Brick Gardner left for Hawaii. Gardner was to die in Hawaii in 1966 after a fall from a hotel window. The whole episode produced a social scandal, since the controversy was taking place in the close-knit Lakes District.”

In 1951 Norton Clapp's second wife Evelyn Gardner (mother of Booth Gardner) died in a plane crash with her daughter. Norton Clapp had a limited but important role in Booth's life from that point on, offering anything for the 15 year old he may need. Booth chose to make his own way despite a million dollar trust fund blindly held for him.

The Lakewood Theatre is associated with the life of Norton Clapp, a man who made significant contributions to the Pacific Northwest and whose reaches in the timber industry and boy scouting span the nation and internationally. For this reason this property is nominated to the Lakewood Register under criteria 2.

The architect for Lakewood's Colonial Center, including the Lakewood Theatre, was Silas Nelsen, a self trained architect who began his career under the guidance of Heath, Gove and Bell in Tacoma before venturing out on his own. He rose to achieve great notability in modern styles around Pierce County including Mueller-Harkins Buick Dealership, the Tacoma Utilities building, and Johnson Candy Company in Tacoma. He also had five residential projects featured in Better Homes and Gardens Five Star Plan book published from 1935-1946. Other projects included the Tacoma Public Library, Tobey Jones Home, 15 churches, 100 homes in Tacoma, plus 10 or 11 in Gig Harbor, Girl Scout Camp St. Albans, design and helped build with innovative three sided rustic shelters. His Colonial Revival style was well employed in the Lakewood vicinity and Lakewood Theatre is one of his best examples of work in this style. The timeless design of the Lakewood Theatre by prolific Pierce County architect Silas Nelsen is the reason the Lakewood Theatre is nominated under criteria number 5 for placement on the Lakewood Register.

The purity of Nelsen's Colonial Revival design of the Colonial Center, especially Lakewood Theatre, perfectly embodies the distinctive architectural characteristics of this style and method of construction for the late 1930s. For this reason, the Lakewood Theatre is nominated under criteria number 3.