

DISCOVERING RIDGEFIELD HISTORY



A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

Updated January 2023



Ridgefield History

The original inhabitants of the Ridgefield area were a Chinook tribe whose village was located along the banks of Lake River with 14 plankhouses and an estimated 900 inhabitants. The Lewis & Clark expedition visited the area twice, once in 1805 en route to the Pacific Ocean and again on their return voyage in 1806. The Chinook Indians remained on the banks of Lake River until 1876 when they relocated to the mouth of the Lewis River due to flooding issues.

In 1840, a young Irish immigrant, working for the Hudson's Bay Company, named James Carty filed the first Land Donation Claim in the area. Carty was the only recorded settler until 1853 when Frederick Shobert arrived to homestead 320 acres that included the southern portion of the current downtown area. Additional settlers were drawn to the area and in 1865 the community gained a Post Office and a name: Union Ridge. The name Union Ridge originated from the increasing number of residents originating from the Union ranks of the Civil War. The name was changed to Ridgefield in 1890 after a petition to rename the area. The primary transportation connecting Ridgefield to Vancouver was by river steamers until the first Union Pacific train in 1901. In November 1908, the railroad bridge across the Columbia in Vancouver was completed and there was a surge of activity in the thriving town of Ridgefield.

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At a special election in 1909 the people decided by a vote of 62-12 in favor of incorporation. The Ridgefield Reflector was founded the same year by Kelley Loe. At the time, the population of the town was 297 and there were two general merchandise stores, a department store, two lumber mills, a water well contractor & driller, two contractors and builders, a boat builder, meat market, hotel, livery and draying, boot and shoemaker, creamery, barber shop, blacksmith, realtor, and a weaver. Major additions in the next few years included a bank, electrical service, the automobile, the "City of Ridgefield" steamboat, logging, a shingle mill, a new school, and motion picture theaters.

The 1920s brought the public library, the founding of the high school mascot, the Spudder, and more businesses to Ridgefield. In 1940, the Port of Ridgefield was established unanimously by Ridgefield's 218 voters to encourage economic development. The nearly simultaneous acts of the development of Interstate 5 and the establishment of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge in 1964 brought the opportunity for tourism to Ridgefield and new locations for businesses at the interstate junction. Growth boomed from 1990 to 1999 with a population growth of 59% and annexation of 2,200 acres. Amongst growing demands for stronger government, the City voted to change its form of government to a council-manager system in 1999. In 2005, the Cathlapotle Plankhouse, a full-scale Chinookan plankhouse built on findings from the archaeological village site, was completed on the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. It was built by more than 100 volunteers and offers a tangible link to the Chinook peoples who lived along Lake River.

The City of Ridgefield celebrated its centennial in 1909 and continues to grow and build on its unique community and identity.

1.15 Mile Self-Guided Walking Tour

This self-guided walking tour will take you on a 1.15 mile tour of Historic Buildings in downtown Ridgefield. Start at Ridgefield Hardware at the NE corner of Pioneer St and Main Ave. The tour will end near the intersection of Main Ave and Maple St – a third of a mile from the Hardware Store.

1. Ridgefield Hardware, Post Office and first Ridgefield State Bank, 104 N Main Ave Now Ridgefield Hardware & Gift

Constructed in 1914 by the Independent Order of Oddfellows (IOOF), this building originally housed the Post Office, Ridgefield State Bank, and hardware store downstairs and the upstairs was used for IOOF meetings. The IOOF is a non-political and non-sectarian international fraternal order founded in 1819. The Ridgefield chapter of IOOF was organized in 1886. The hardware business was run by the Peffer brothers, Frederick and Warren, active members of the IOOF. The Ridgefield Bank out of the building in 1920, and the Post Office by 1930.

Stop in the store and find postcards from when one of the store dogs, Otis, ran for City Manager in 2004.

Head East on Pioneer Street half a block.

2. Schroeder's Sweet Shop, 220 Pioneer Street Now Delicious Dishes Catering

This building was constructed for \$5,000 in 1926 to house Roy Edward Schroeder's Confectionery Store. The front was dedicated to the store and featured a soft drink counter, five booths and stock shelves. The back of the building was designed as a 24-foot living space complete with a kitchen, dining room, bedroom and bathroom, plus an 8x25-foot porch. In the 1930s, Schroeder was the manager of 4th of July events held in the city by the American Legion. A local resident interviewed in 2013 recalled that "It was never really fancy, but it was a nice place to go. Roy's daughter could usually be heard in the back of the shop practicing her violin, and her mother was usually around since Roy had a main job as a shingle-weaver at a nearby mill."

The Schroeder's had placed a time capsule beneath the floor during construction. In 2013, the building was going through some renovations and the contractors found a small wooden barrel housed in an odd block of concrete. The time capsule contained ancient copies of several newspapers, and advertisement for a benefit movie at the Rainbow Theatre, and a very faded photograph of Roy and Clara's daughter, Jean Schroeder. The time capsule and items from inside are on display inside of City Hall next-door.

Next stop is just next door, east.

3. Ridgefield State Bank, 230 Pioneer Street
Now Ridgefield City Hall

The Ridgefield State Bank first opened its doors in February, 1910 and spent several years after in the building that is now Ridgefield Hardware & Gift. The bank moved to this building in 1920 after it was built by Charles Greeley. The interior was finished in oak and marble and it was fashioned with a spacious lobby, women's restroom, and private offices for officers and directors. The new bank had a state of the art vault: 18" of solid reinforced concrete and a 3000 lb. door. When the Ridgefield State Bank closed in the 1930s, John Bratlie bought the business "just to keep it open." In 1936 Ed Firstenberg, a local high school business teacher, joined the bank as an assistant cashier and purchased stock in the bank as he could. By 1950 Firstenberg purchased the Ridgefield State Bank, and in 1954 he combined his holdings and established First Independent Bank.

Since 1975, when Firstenberg donated the building to the City, the building has served as Ridgefield's City Hall. In December, 2019 the Clark County Historic Preservation Commission listed the building to the Clark County Heritage Register. The inside has been remodeled, but the vault still stands.

Head north on 3rd Avenue a half block.

4. The Reflector Newspaper, 122 N 3rd Avenue
Now El Rancho Viejo, Mexican Restaurant

The local north Clark County weekly newspaper was founded by Kelley Loe, a newspaper man who had already established and sold other newspapers in the area, the same year as Ridgefield was incorporated in 1909. The first issue was printed on October 9, 1909. Loe sold the paper just five months after it was established to Ellis B. Hall. The paper was started on Main Avenue, but was relocated to this building prior to eventually moving to Battle Ground.

Head south on 3rd Avenue a half block.

5. Greeley Ford Garage, 304 Pioneer Street
Now Ridgefield School District Maintenance Building

Built about 1920 by Charles Greeley as the Greeley Ford Garage and showroom. The murals on the outside of the building, painted by Ridgefield High School students, reflect on Ridgefield's history. Adjacent to 3rd Ave, a painting depicts a Chinook village with longhouses and canoes to recognize the history of the Village of Cathlapotle. On the same side another mural represents the 4th of July parade, a long standing tradition in Ridgefield. Adjacent to Pioneer, there are murals of the Ridgefield Train Station, Downtown, and farm land.

Continue east on Pioneer St a half block.

6. NW Electric and Machine Shop, 320 Pioneer Street
Now Zebrun's Starliner, grocery, deli, and taproom

Built in 1920 by Charles Greeley as two separate businesses – a warehouse for NW Electric and a machine shop operated by John Blackburn and Adrian Davis. The area that is now the taproom and dining area was originally sold to Zebrun for cold storage lockers.

Travel one door east.

7. Foley Theater, 328 Pioneer St
Now Ridgefield Floral & Gifts

When motion pictures first came to Ridgefield in 1912 they were shown in Shobert & Oliver Skating rink. The first formal movie theater in the city, the Glide Amusement Hall, opened in the early teens at present day 304 Pioneer Street. In January 1916, a fire burned several blocks of downtown Ridgefield and destroyed the Glide Amusement Hall. A new theater, the Sunset Theatre, located at 104 S 4th St, held a grand opening on May 24th, 1919. Fire struck again, and the building was destroyed on September 3, 1921.

O.E. Foley, owner of movie theaters in Yacolt and Battle Ground, decided to build a theater in Ridgefield that would be nearly fire-proof. The design for the theater was for a 28x80foot with a brick front and seating for two hundred and fifty. The theater held its first movie on Sunday, November 19th, 1921. The theater remained in business until the late thirties. The building has been renovated over the years for various purposes.

Walk one block east on Pioneer St.

8. Ridgefield Church of the Nazarene, 418 Pioneer Street
Now Ridgefield Mercantile

Built in 1922 for \$5,000, the red tile brick building was the site of the Ridgefield Church of the Nazarene until 1968. The annex to the church was built for \$10,000. The church and annex were used for 46 years until October 1968. In 1970 it was sold to Pekin Ferry Grange. The Ridgefield Church of the Nazarene is now located at 747 Pioneer St.

Cross the street and travel south on S 5th Ave one block to Sargent St. Take a right to the corner of Sargent and 4th.

9. Methodist Church, 202 S 4th Ave
Now private residence. Please respect the privacy of property owners.

The Ridgefield Methodist Church was organized October 21, 1906. The first minister was Ezra Hayes. The building was constructed by George Bunker. The parsonage and chimneys on the church were completed by W. F. Sachtler in 1908. This church was used until February, 1970.

Walk west on Shobert St to S 3rd Ave. Head north on S 3rd Ave. Next stop is the third house in the right.

10. Henrici Hospital, 112 S 3rd Ave

Now private residence. Please respect the privacy of property owners.

Built in 1918. If you had your appendices out, cut your fingers, or you were having a baby, Dr. R.S. Stryker could help you there.

Walk south on 3rd Ave. Cross Sargent St. The Stryker house is on your right.

11. Dr. Stryker House, 207 S 3rd Ave

Now private residence. Please respect the privacy of property owners.

Ridgefield's first doctor, Dr. R.S. Stryker, built his home here in 1918. Dr. Stryker first opened office in 1910, just one year after incorporation.

Walk north on 3rd Ave to Sargent, turn left and follow Sargent as it turns to Main.

12. Community Presbyterian Church, 113 S Main Ave

Now The Neighborhood Refuge (Under construction)

Built by Henry and Stephen Shobert in 1884, this building housed the first church in Ridgefield. First known as the Union Ridge Presbyterian Church, the congregation was established in 1882. Rev. Aaron Lander Lindsley, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Portland, helped to organize a congregation at Union Ridge, where his children lived. The site for the new church was donated by Frederick and Catherine Shobert, and the church built by their sons Henry and Stephen and dedicated on August 31, 1884. S Main Ave was named Lindsley after the Reverend until it was eventually changed to S Main. The church was known under several different names, including Union Ridge Presbyterian, The Community Church of Ridgefield, and Ridgefield First Presbyterian Church.

The church managed the Ridgefield Cemetery for 40 years, before turning the cemetery over to the City of Ridgefield in 1954. After the Columbus Day storm in 1963, the Methodist and Presbyterian church buildings were both in need of major improvements and the congregations decided to merge and be known as the Community United Methodist Church of Ridgefield.

Cross S Main to 112 S Main.

13. Priscilla Study Club and Library, 112 S Main Ave

Now The Olde Library Inn

This building was constructed in 1923 under the instruction of the Priscilla Study Club. On February 3, 1914, at the call of Mrs E.B. Hall, twelve ladies met and organized the Priscilla Study Club. The club started collecting books and magazines and opened a library. The club's aim was to offer clear literature to its readers; books chosen for the library were carefully scrutinized for any offensive language or sexy ideas. In 1960, the Priscilla Club and the City of Ridgefield contracted with the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District to manage the collection, and in 1981 the library

was annexed into FVRL. The library continued to operate in this building until it moved to the Ridgefield Community Center in December 1994.

Walk north one-half block on Main Ave.

14. Red and White Store, 203 Pioneer Street
Now Center Market (locally known as the corner store)

The current building was built in 1925 by contractor and former mayor George W. Bunker for Fred Herbert for approximately \$10,000. The building was occupied by Oliver L. Byerly, a proprietor already conducting a mercantile business just west of this location. Byerly's store was known as a "Green Trading Stamp Store"-Green Trading Stamps were a bonus program started in 1896 and it considered the first retail loyalty program. Byerly eventually changed it to a Red and White store. The Red and White Corporation was a chain of independently owned and operated food stores that practiced centralized buying and distribution to compete against large chains. Byerly was mayor of Ridgefield in the 1940s and a member of the Odd Fellows Lodge.

Walk north, cross Pioneer St and Ridgefield Hardware to 108 N Main.

15. Ridgefield Pharmacy, 108 N Main Ave
Now The Collective

Bradford Lorne Gaukel had George W Bunker construct this building in 1926 for \$6,000. The building housed a pharmacy on the ground floor with a doctor and dentist office upstairs. Gaukel was a music teacher and pharmacist who first began his pharmacy business in Ridgefield in 1912. Gaukel organized and led a brass band for an extended period, led the Ridgefield School Orchestra, was the choir director at Ridgefield Community church, and participated in Japanese opera with Ridgefield High School.

Gaukel retired from teaching music by 1930 and the pharmacy business by 1940. He died in Ridgefield in 1944 at the age of 70 years old and is buried in the Ridgefield Cemetery.

Cross Main to Old Liberty Theater.

16. Liberty Theater, 115 N Main Ave
Now Seasons Coffee & Old Liberty Theater

Red and Sue Hicks decided to build the Liberty Theater located at 115 N Main Ave as a tribute and coming home present to their son, a returning WWII veteran. The Hicks expected their son to live and work there, but unfortunately he was killed in an airplane crash after the war. The theater opened April 25th, 1946, as the Liberty Theater, and featured "The Bandit of Sherwood Forest." The Hicks operated it as a movie theater until around 1951.

After the Hicks sold the property, the building was repurposed and the seats removed from the building. The space was occupied by a silkscreen business and a yarn shop at different times. Don and Earleen Griswold bought the building in 1995 and were named Ridgefield's Outstanding

Citizens in 2009 for restoring it. The building is now used for live theater and the front Seasons Coffee shop.

Travel north to the building immediately next-door.

17. Ridgefield Tavern, 121 N Main Ave
Now Sportsman's Public House

This building was an old-fashioned saloon before the days of prohibition. The back bar came "around the horn" and was once used by Blitz Brewery.

Walk North on Main about 4 blocks to Maple St.

18. Lindley Meeker House Historic Home, 605 N Main Ave
Now private residence. Please respect the privacy of property owners.

This house was built by Lindley Meeker in 1882. Meeker was Clark County Commissioner from 1876-1882. He was apparently the cousin of the famous Ezra Meeker of Puyallup, the trailblazer for wagon trains crossing the plains. The house is situated well back from the street facing Maple St. Near the corner where Main meets Maple, you will find a Ridgefield Heritage Tree. This magnificent tree is a *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, commonly known as Giant Sequoia, Giant Redwood, or Sierra Redwood. It is said that the tree was planted by Mrs. Meeker.