

History of the Lacey Depot Site

The Railroad

The Oregon Trail brought the initial influx of Euro-American settlers to the west coast. Lacey's history begins with the same story—settlers came west looking for land. Before the railroad track came through the area known as Woodland, it was a community of large farms and homesteads where neighbors relied heavily on one another and the journey to and from the big city of Olympia was a several-hour trek.

By April of 1891, the depot and tracks were complete. The depot was a standard two-story plan for towns the size of Lacey. The upper floor was meant to house the stationmaster and his family as there was little opportunity for housing in the neighboring vicinity.

The depot also brought in Isaac Ellis, an Olympia businessman who recognized that the area in this community was ideal for a horse racing track and clubhouse/hotel. An article in the *Morning Olympian* dated April 11, 1891 reads, "...Mr. Ellis stated that he had 107 acres of land 4 miles east of Olympia on the line of the Northern Pacific, which company had built a fine depot there with side-tracks, etc.; that he had expended more than \$40,000, and had perhaps the finest track in the state." This was not a coincidence. Isaac Ellis would not have built his track in the Lacey area had there not been a way to get horses and people to the stables and facilities.

Likewise, Saint Martin's College would not have chosen the quiet setting of Lacey in 1895 had there not been a way to bring the students and faculty to this growing community.

Now that mail could come by train, residents applied for a post office and got one in 1891. Due to another Woodland already with a post office in Washington state—a new name, Lacey—was chosen. Although the site of the post office changed over time, it was always located within a short distance of the depot where the mail was delivered. Even when the Northern Pacific Railroad abandoned the depot building in 1933, the mail was still delivered to the building and would be picked up by a cart and walked to the post office for sorting.

The railroad made it easier for people to get back and forth from Olympia, and allowed for the then separate communities of Union Mills and Sherlock (Nisqually) to feel more like a part of what was rapidly becoming Lacey. Even well into the 20th century, Lacey residents could ride the train into Olympia to see a movie or have dinner, and many long-time residents have memories of doing just that.

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By 1915, Pacific Avenue was completed parallel to the railroad tracks, providing another way for travelers to find their way to Lacey. The popularity of train travel declined with the advent and abundance of the automobile. The railroad introduced Lacey to the region in a way that would not have been possible otherwise.

By 1933, the depot was no longer staffed by the railroad, although passengers continued to flag down the train and mail continued to be delivered.

Lacey Co-Ply

In 1950, after having been dormant for almost two decades, the depot site was purchased by Lacey Co-ply which would become one of Lacey's largest employers. Although the exact date of the depot's demolition is unclear, it is likely that it was torn down to make way for the 18,600sf plywood company. By 1962, the company had 130 employees and was a working shareholders' corporation. Historic photos show that it was serviced by the railroad, which by 1970 changed hands to become Burlington Northern.

The late 1980s saw a decline in the company which was forced to lower production and 35% of its workforce. In August 1988, employees were informed that Lacey Plywood would be shut down within a week due to the high cost of materials and the need to replace antiquated equipment. By 1991, the buildings were dismantled.

In the mid-1990s, a warehouse was built on-site, with a retail flooring store in the front. It continued until the mid-2000s when Great Floors moved to Martin Way.

The Woodland Trail

In 2005, the City of Lacey acquired the abandoned railroad bed from Burlington Northern. The Lacey Woodland Trail was constructed and connected to a regional trail system following the old railroad tracks.

In 2018, the Woodland Trail was renamed the Karen Fraser Woodland Trail to honor a long list of accomplishments by the trailblazer, including Lacey's first female mayor, eight years as Thurston County Commissioner, four years as a state representative and state senator from 1993 through 2016.