

Tacoma, Washington's Past ~ Questions and Answers

Question:

Dear Ones,

My mother, age 89, remembers riding in her mother's best friend's electric car with no steering wheel. Do you have any information on Mave Olds, a maiden lady, and what she did or her electric car? Most Sincerely and in no hurry – Sue

Answer:

Sue ~ thank you for visiting Tacoma Historical Society website. Tacoma Public Library responded to your question with two articles about Mave's electric auto:

- Tacoma Daily Ledger 4/3/1936 p.3 25 years, still runs
- Tacoma News Tribune 6/20/1943 p.B9 1911 Model is wonder car

They also have Mave Olds' obituary (Tacoma News Tribune Jan. 19, 1977)

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### Question:

Hi.

I am seeking information on a hotel that I believe existed in Tacoma in 1901. The hotel was family run (I think they were a Swiss family called Wild) and called 'Hotel Wild'. Could anyone tell me anything more about this? Many thanks, and congratulations on a very informative and interesting web site.

Vicki, England.

### Answer:

The following had a Swiss connection and was known as the Wild Block:

1906-16 Jefferson Avenue., Tacoma 1889 4 Images

Frederick Wild Block, H.J. Hefty, arch.

- occupants included: Perkins Hotel, Swiss Society, Llewellyn House, Jefferson Hotel, Carlisle Beverage Distributors

- site includes 1905-17 Market St.

TDL 1/1/1890 p.11 permits

TDL 10/18/1903 p.19 (Swiss Society purchases bldg.)

TDL 10/14/1906 p.20 (remodeling of Klaber Bldg./Llewellyn House by C.A. Darmer, arch.)

TDL 11/4/1906 p.20 Investment nets profit of \$15,000 (bldg. sold)

TDL 4/24/1924 p.1 Tacoma girl shot death (incident at the Jefferson Hotel at 1912 Jefferson Ave.)

TNT 5/9/1937 p.B8 Alterations at Swiss Hall are started (alterations for Benton & Carlisle Distributors at 1906-08 Jefferson Ave. by Heath, Gove & Bell, arch. and K.J. Kongsmo, arch.)

TNT 3/23/1939 p.6 Carlisle Beverage distributing firm in business in Tacoma for past 10 years (il)

TNT 4/4/1950 p.1 All-night cafe is held up (1916 Cafe at 1916 Jefferson Ave.)

(Catalog) 307.76 Un3T p.96

Jody

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Question:

What do you know about a store in Tacoma's history called Landers 10 cent store? I have a candy dish that came from there. ~ Thanks, Deb

Answer:

Landers Grocery is first listed in 1903, at 4540 So. M Street in Tacoma City Directory. In 1904, it had moved to 4509 South L Street, and in 1905 was listed at 1105-07 Commerce, and instead of "grocery" it says "notions". In 1906 it was listed at 1105 Commerce--also listed as selling notions. The proprietor was H. Ambery Landers.

It was no longer listed in the 1907 or 1908 editions--and it also did not show up in the 1902 edition. So it looks like he very likely was in operation between 1903-1906--and maybe the candy dish was sold when he was selling "notions" in 1905 and 1906.

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**Question:**

Can you please tell me whether the airport built for Harold Bromley's flight still exists, and what is currently named?

**Answer:**

Bromley attempted his flight at "Tacoma Field, Pierce County Airport". The site is now part of the McChord Air Force Base. It was renamed "McChord Army Airfield" on May 5, 1938. The U.S. Air Force became a separate entity in 1947.

Brian  
Northwest Room  
Tacoma Public Library

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Question:

I purchased a 1960 Bantam boat from a gentleman who was told it was built in Tacoma by a company that primarily made caskets, but also made these wooden boats to fill in revenues. Read the rest of the story and the answer . . .

The boat is somewhat run down, but still quite seaworthy. It is pretty basic, but appears well built. The seats, even for 1960, are primitive wooden bench seats. The boat is certainly charming, her lines have a certain grace; and she is perhaps even beautiful, if properly restored.

If it is the case that the Bantam was built by a casket-maker in Tacoma, it is certainly an unusual story. While the boat has little economic value in its current state, if it is true that it was built by a casket maker, that alone may be a reason to preserve this boat.

If, indeed, this story is accurate, and if you, or any of the members of the Tacoma Historical Society, could shed any light on the Tacoma combined casket maker and boat builder, it would certainly be an interesting set of historical facts.

Please feel free to share my inquiry among the members of the Tacoma Historical Society. I certainly appreciate your consideration. Thanks, Michael

Answer(s):

Michael ~ Thank you for contacting Tacoma Historical Society.

I just checked with one of our members, and there were 3 casket-makers in Tacoma that he remembers. He wasn't recalling if any of them did boat-building on the side, but it is certain that the skills are transferable from one craft to the other. I am sending your question to a few other folks who may have helpful information.

Mary Bowlby, Director

There were 4 casket making companies in Tacoma in 1960-- Gregory Casket Co. at 2514 Holgate Puget Sound Casket Co. at 1801 Center Washington Casket Co. at 1602 Center Puget Sound Shell Co. at 2733 Ash and there was a Bantam Boat Co. at 3957 Ruston Way. We think it is likely that maybe an employee at one of the casket companies also worked at Bantam Boat-- rather than there being any overt connection between the two companies. At least we have never made that connection--and it seems that if the connection existed that maybe they would have used the same facility and tools, etc.

Jody
Special Collections/Northwest Room
Tacoma Public Library

Response from Michael:

Thank you, and your colleagues, for the research. On the basis of these facts, it would appear that there could be a connection from one of the casket companies and Bantam Boats. Are there public records extant which would establish who owned which of the five companies: the four casket companies and the Bantam Boat company? Perhaps there was some ownership link between Bantam Boats and one of these casket companies.

It would not surprise me that either an owner, or owners, and carpenters would make caskets one place and boats another. If one is building more than one 16' boat at a time, it would require quite a large space, overhead cranes, and the like; not very dignified for a place that sells caskets, perhaps.

If it is the case that there is no overt connection between Bantam Boats and a casket company in town, we certainly have on our hands an urban myth that has survived nearly half a century by word of mouth.

We Americans are all too ready to give up our rich past, our collective memories. We are fortunate to have historians like all of you, who keep track of our history and share it with us. I am a great fan of Tacoma: it's a real place, with a rich past and present. Having lived in suburban Virginia outside Washington, DC, I can affirm that there are some unreal places and I lived in one. Give me the gritty history of a shipping town any time.

Do you happen to know if the library has the resources to establish who owned what, of our five companies, in 1960? I certainly would appreciate your direction in this search.

Best regards, Michael