

# Historic Walking Tour *of Yelm*



## Historic Walking Tour of Yelm

### Celebrating our Centennial

The Centennial Celebration is not merely a reflection on the past; it's a promise of resilience and progress. It's an opportunity for us to look back with pride, live in the present with gratitude, and move forward with unwavering determination.

This celebration is not just about the last one hundred years; it's a testament to the unwritten chapters that will define the soul of our city for centuries to come. Join us this year as we celebrate Yelm's past, embrace its present, and look forward to a future filled with promise and opportunity.

Happy Centennial, Yelm! May the next 100 years be as remarkable as the first.



# Historic Walking Tour of Yelm

## A Brief History of Yelm, Washington

Yelm became one of the earliest Western Washington communities. Its fertile prairie, close proximity to the Nisqually River, and its location at the crossroads of major trails made it a strategic and desirable center for commerce.

The Nisqually Tribe occupied Yelm Prairie long before the fur traders. Yelm Prairie was a travel route for those working for the Hudson's Bay Company and its Puget Sound Agricultural Company. These transportation routes began as native trails and were later used by settlers. The same routes later became wagon roads, military roads, railroadlines, and ultimately modern highways.

Workers for the British company farms first started settling on Yelm Prairie during the late 1840s. They were watching the sheep at Yelm's outstations.

The United States issued Donation Land Claims, Homestead Claims, and Pre-emption Claims here in Oregon Territory. The opening of western land brought interested farmers from the East and Midwest to the Pacific Northwest.

In 1850, there were less than a handful of families living on Yelm Prairie. But by the end of 1853, a wagontrain full of pioneers made its way over the Naches Pass Trail and came to settle south of the Nisqually River. The eastern farmers came to work the land. During the 1850s and 60s, the need for produce was very high in the Pacific Northwest.

By the mid 1870s, Yelm was a growing farming community. In 1873, the Northern Pacific Railroad extended its line from Portland to Tacoma. The old Hudson's Bay wagon road through Yelm would be part of the new railroad route.

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In the late 1880s, logging mills began to dot eastern Thurston County. Yelm became a busy commercial center. It had a school, post office, church, hotels, and general store.

Yelm greeted the 20th century with the establishment of blocks, lots and streets throughout the town. With growth and development came tragedy. The town had three devastating fires during the early 1900s (1908, 1913, and 1924).

The pre-World War I agricultural boom brought good prices to local farmers. The word spread about the prosperous farming in the Pacific Northwest. Small “truck” farms (5-15 acres) income-passed the Yelm area. Red and black raspberries, strawberries, black caps, and green beans all grow on the prairie with the help from the irrigation project.

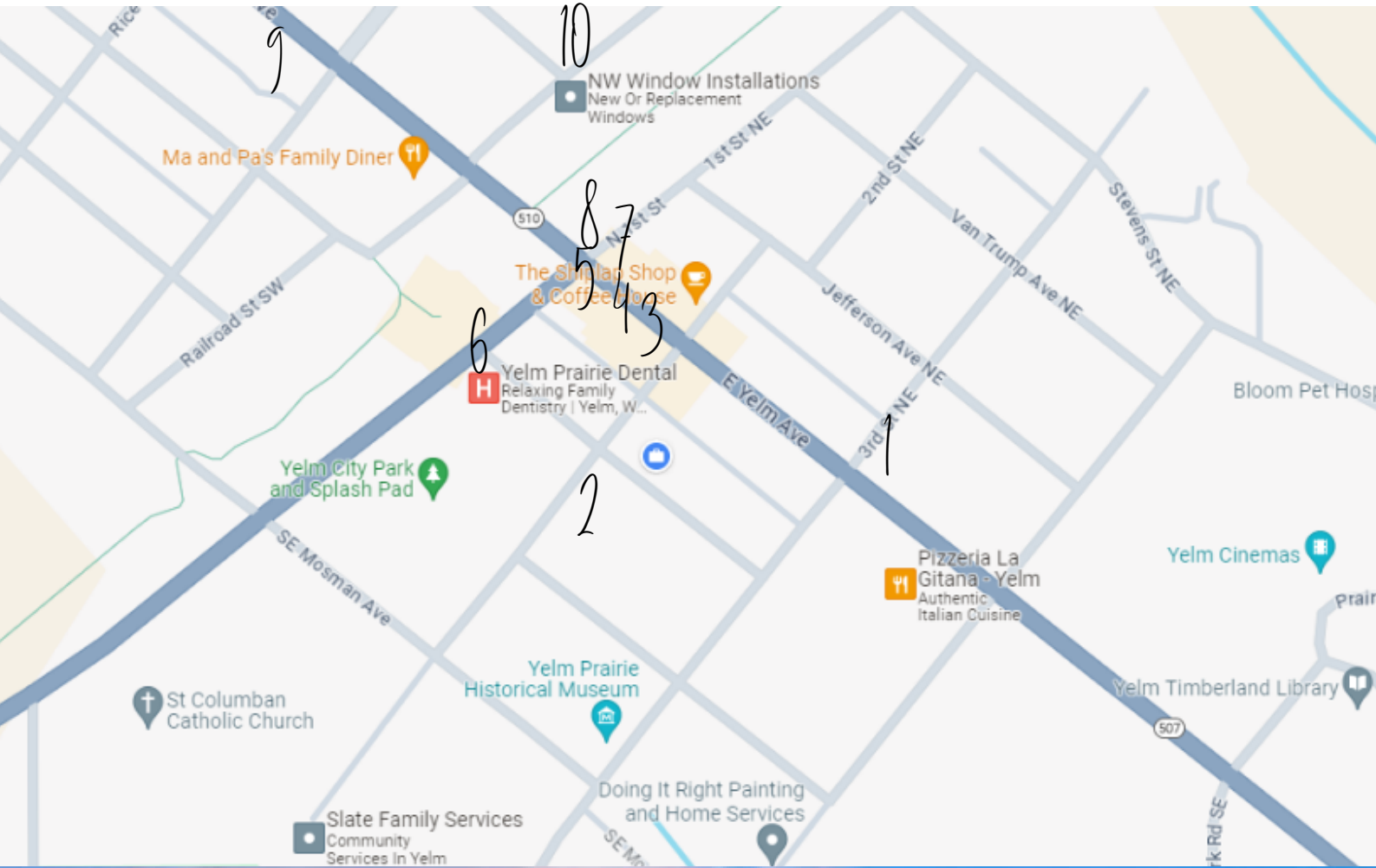
In the 1930s, farming was less profitable and by the 1940s the war had changed the community. It started to become a “bedroom town” according to the old timers. People started working for companies in Olympia and Tacoma.

Many of the buildings seen today on Yelm Avenue were built after the 1924 fire and are made of mostly brick, concrete, and some wood.

The face of Yelm has continually changed since the 1800s and will continue to change with the times. Take a walk through Yelm using this map and the information about the historical markers. By learning about our past, we can work to make our future even brighter.

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## Map



# Historic Walking Tour of Yelm

## 1. Masonic Temple Lodge Hall (c. 1926)

An impressive example of a Greek Revival building, the only one of its type in Yelm, is this imposing building with large classical pillars that is usually found in larger communities than Yelm. The hall was built during the reconstruction boom period that was precipitated by the fire of 1924 which had devastated most of Yelm's business district. The building was built on land purchased from John McKenzie for one dollar.

The building was recently renovated extensively and is now a law office and still stands as a beacon in Yelm's downtown corridor.

Visit the Masonic Temple at 302 East Yelm Avenue.



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## 2. Historic Water Tower (c.1946)

The 125-foot, 500,000 gallon water tower was built in 1946 by the Chicago Bridge & Iron Company to replace two 1,000 gallon pressurized tanks when Yelm was added to the Thurston County Fire District No. 2 in 1946. The tower was placed on the Washington Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation historic register in June 2017, after a restoration project of a new paint job and the installation of color changing LED lights.

The tower is a big part of our history and served as the foundation that allowed us to grow into the community that we are today. It continues to serve as a reminder of our past and a familiar welcome sign when coming into town.

While you can see the water tower from nearly anywhere in Yelm, you can learn more about it at the kiosk on 2nd Street SE.



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## 3. Senior Multipurpose Center (c. 1922)

The Independent Order of Odds Fellows constructed this building in 1922 through volunteer labor from its own members and the community. The building was financed through the sales of certificates to its membership.

During the devastating fire of 1924 that raged through the downtown area, this building was the only commercial structure to survive.

This building has housed many community organizations and churches, and even a 7th grade class during the 1932 school year. During the 1930s and 40s, weekly dances were held here and movies were shown regularly for the enjoyment of the community.

The bottom floor has housed many businesses over there and was GP Walquest's Garage in 1926, which was the scene of the town's Marshal, Cornelius R. Pake, was mortally wounded when he interrupted a burglary.

The building is currently the home of Yelm Pho and Kaos Dance Studio.

Visit the Senior Multipurpose Center at 201 East Yelm Avenue.





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## 4. Chief Yelm Tavern (c. 1924)

What is now the White Horse Tavern (earlier called Chiefs and the Green Lantern) boasts a unique tudor style peaked roof.

The building was built during the early years of the reconstruction of Yelm's business district after the fire of 1924 devastated most of the business district. The building was initially occupied by the Dain and Pollman Restaurant, becoming the Green Lantern Tavern after Prohibition was repealed in 1933.

When the building hosted the Green Lantern, the lunch menu consisted of a small hamburger patty on a bun, with a pickle, mustard, and ketchup, and a glass of water, all for 5 cents.

Visit Chief Yelm Tavern at 107 East Yelm Avenue.



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## 5. The Old Firehouse (c.1946)

Around 1946, this building served as the firehouse for Yelm,

A fountain adorns the front of the old firehouse, in honor and remembrance to Dan Maslowski. Dan made his way to Yelm on the trains, from origins unknown and worked for many years in an unofficial and unpaid position as Yelm's clean street guardian.

The Yelm community memorialized this unique fellow by installing a drinking fountain at the corner of Yelm Avenue and state Route 510 in front of the fire station that was then there. People gathered donations for the memorial. They even sold bumper stickers that read, "Keep Yelm Clean for Dan."

Maslowski could be seen, hands behind his back, bald head glistening, wandering the streets of Yelm talking to people both present and absent. His behavior became an accepted town tradition. "One of the pleasures was to watch Dan discuss world problems with passing motorists and strangers on the street and watch their expression.". Dan died in 1971 at an estimated age of 75.

Visit The Old Firehouse at 105 East Yelm Avenue



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## 6. The Brown House (c. 1920)

This original residential structure is the most intact example of a shingled cottage in Yelm. The house was built at a time when Yelm was in a population and agricultural boom, before the great depression.

The building is currently the home of Yelm Prairie Dental.

Visit the Brown's House at 201 First Street South.



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## 7. H.L. Wolf & Company Store (c. 1924)

Although extensively altered, this commercial building has retained its unique curved roofline and “tudor arch” window design. From its construction in 1924 until its closure in the 1960s, the building was occupied by the H.L. Wolf & Company Store, Yelm’s leading grocery/department store during the period. Co-owners until the late 1940s were Homer L. Wolf of Roy, Harold E. Wolf, Sr. and Oscar Eide, both of Yelm.

Initially a general store, the business expanded under the two Yelm owners. It was affiliated with the Red & White Stores, an independent store owners association. In the late 1940s, Harold Wolf bought out his partners. All operations moved to the Wolf’s Shopping Center and this building was mainly vacated until it was sold in the 1990s, when it housed the Drew Harvey Theater, a unique playhouse drawing actors from around the world, and now houses Outpost Church.

It is easily identified by the mural of Mount Rainier on the side of the building.

Visit the H.L. Wolf & Company Store at 102 East Yelm Avenue



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## 8. Brown Brothers Garage (c.1924)

In 1924, Ed Brown came to visit his brother George. He stayed to buy and operate a garage. Brown Brothers Garage was at the corner of Yelm Avenue and 1st Street, and was considered the best mechanic in Yelm. Ed and George's sister Vera kept the books for her brothers at the garage. Ed was also the city's first fire chief. George served 33 years on the city council and was the mayor for one term.

The building is currently the home of Premier Collision CarStar.

Visit the Brown Brothers Garage at 103 First Street North.



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## 9. Yelm Scout Cabin (c. 1945)

Commonly known as Carlson's Scout Cabin, this is a vernacular log building, the only one of its kind in Yelm. The driving force of the building of the Cabin was Lion Axel Carlson, co-owner of the Sundown Logging Company. He negotiated donation of many of the supplies and materials. Frank Edwards donated the logs. Axel's partner, Oscar Swanson, hauled all the logs to the building site. They were peeled and cured by the members of the Lions Club. It was completed in 1945 and took 3 to 4 years and most of the Yelm Lions Club membership to construct.

Contractor Archie Ferguson hewed the logs to size by hand, using an adze and lifted each log into place by hand. The floor was laid using 3/4 inch plywood, cut into 8 foot by 3/4 inch strips and laid on edge to form the cabin's very unique floor.

The lot upon which the cabin stands was a gift from the Yelm Irrigation District. The construction of the building coincided with the post World War II boom period when Yelm and the entire prairie began to experience substantial population growth and economic expansion.

Visit Carlson's Scout Cabin at 301 West Yelm Ave



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## 10. Assembly of God Church (c. 1923)

This simple church is one of the oldest religious centers in Yelm. The Yelm Prairie Christian Center was originally the Assembly of God Church that was organized in 1919 by Elder J.S. Secrist of Olympia, with twenty members on the original charter. The church was built in 1923, the parsonage in 1933, and the addition in 1939. The two story rear addition was used to house the church and pastor's offices and youth classrooms.

This building is currently Yelm Jesus Name Pentecostal Church.

Visit the Assembly of God Church at 204 Jefferson Avenue Northwest.



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Looking eastward to the mountains,  
Looking westward to the sea,  
Lies the pleasant little village  
That is home to you and me.

