

The History of Zillah High School

On December 14, 1892 thirteen Zillah citizens signed a petition requesting the formation of a new school district in Yakima County. Among the signers were Ruben Hatch, George Harvey, E. J. Jaeger, R. C. Walker, and J. W. Lowell. County Schools Superintendent J. G. Lawrence granted the petition request on January 11, 1893. He designated the new district as Zillah School District #32. The population in the Zillah area at this time was about 600 residents.

Construction of the first Zillah school building was started in the fall of 1893. The cost of the school was listed at \$2,200. The first teacher hired was Miss Edna Hanes who taught lessons to the twenty-eight children enrolled. Records show that County Superintendent J. G. Lawrence visited the new school on May 3, 1894.

As 1912 approached student enrollment had increased and the community felt that more room was needed for the pupils. The existing school building was lifted, with the ground floor now becoming the second floor. A basement and new first floor were constructed below the original structure. Once a stairway to the second story was completed, the 9th and 10th grade students were schooled upstairs and the younger students attended classes downstairs. Horses that were ridden to school by the students were tied up to the picket fence that surrounded the schoolyard, serving as an equestrian parking lot.

By 1913 a full high school covering grades 9-12 was in operation in Zillah. In 1913 Arthur McKelvie is listed as the first student to graduate with a 12th grade high school diploma from Zillah High School. There were no more graduates from the 12th grade for the next three years.

Mr. John Douglas Stout, Zillah superintendent, obtained accreditation for Zillah High School in 1916. This certification of their academic program would help ZHS graduates to be more readily accepted into college. Mary E. Rhodes was the Principal of the high school in 1916 which commenced eight seniors: Pauline Anderson, John L. Gaiser, Keston Jaeger, Corwin R. Lanacaster, Sahra Lemhkuhl, Helen Elizabeth Reed, James H. Schooley, Irma Viola Sharpe and Vera Smith.

By 1917 the district teaching staff (1st-12th grades) had expanded to eight members including then Superintendent J. F. Hargraves, principal as Frank W. Robertson and six other educators. Enrollment in grades 9-12 was thirty students. There were two ZHS graduates in 1917, Karl Leinkemper and Herbert Rowland. Family members reported that the two young men were a little upset because they had to receive their high school diplomas at the 8th grade commencement ceremonies.

With an ever-expanding student enrollment, the community wanted to add a separate high school building to the Zillah school system. Board members of the day were Mr. Bourgaise, Mr. Rowland, and Mr. Sutter. The first high school building was a modern brick building constructed during the summer and fall of 1917 at a cost of \$30,000. Zillah High School Students attended the first classes in the building in December of 1917. Prior to

construction of this brick high school, the basement of the Christian Church, (which was just East of the high school campus and is still located at intersection of the current 5th Street and 2nd Avenue), had been used for basketball practice. This new high school building housed one of the best gymnasiums of its day to be found in all of Yakima County.

The “Grasshopper” was the first Zillah High School newspaper. The school colors of “Orange & Black” were mentioned in the first edition of November 1917. The mascot for Zillah High School was the “Bulldog.” In a later edition of the Grasshopper the modern gymnasium was touted as one of the best in the valley. The gym was experiencing a great demand for use as everyone wanted to play basketball in it. A policy was established saying, “The use of the gymnasium would be for those students whose grades came up to standard.” Perhaps this was a first attempt at an “eligibility” policy. The Grasshopper also reported a time change for the morning train from Granger to Zillah. Now the Granger area students who enrolled in ZHS were expected to be on time for their morning classes.

In 1919 a “middle” girls basketball team nicknamed “the Bloomer Girls” were also demanding gym time. The Grasshopper reported that in one game, “with some of the members of the team often losing shoes during the game, the Bloomer Girls beat the Yakima team and became district champions.” Also in 1919 the first yearbook OWEGO (short for On We Go) was published. Zola Muns was the first editor and Mr. Robertson was the advisor. In this first OWEGO a “Roll of Honor” page was dedicated to 34 ZHS boys who were in military service, many seeing action in World War I. Twelve seniors graduated that year, making it the largest graduating class until the class of 1922 commenced.

A Model “T” Ford truck with hard rubber tires driven by John Pringle served as the first school bus for ZHS starting about 1920. It was affectionately called “The Jitney.” This bus would transport six students from the Orchardvale area to classes at the high school. The Grasshopper noted that it was unusual for the bus to arrive on time. The ZHS Principal Mr. Robertson moved up in the district to replace Mr. Douglas the retiring superintendent. In 1927 a new three story elementary building was constructed near the high school building.

In 1931 by an overwhelming vote of the student body the Zillah Bulldog mascot was replaced by the now famous Zillah Leopard. This was the first year a Zillah basketball team went to state tournament wearing Leopard sweatshirts. It was reported that “the boys drew an 8:00 a.m. game on the first day, which proved too early for the boys.” They did manage to come home with a 5th place trophy.

The depression hit the United States hard and the Zillah community was no exception. The years of 1930-37 saw a great lack of funds, so no OWEGO’s were published during that time. Teachers were paid with warrants, which were often discounted at the banks. Some teachers were lucky enough to know a buyer for their warrants at face value allowing them to collect their full pay that was earned.

In 1936 the Zillah School District secured funding through the Worker Project Administration (WPA) program to construct a new high school gymnasium. The new gym was constructed in the gap between the elementary and high school buildings. Once again the district was able to furnish a first class gymnasium for student use. On November 10, 1936 the first basketball game was played on this new floor. It was reported that “the gym was filled to capacity with a large and loud crowd,” a scene that has been repeated at most ZHS home games from 1936 to present. The new WPA gym was such an outstanding facility that it soon became the headquarters for district basketball tournaments.

On April 20, 1945 County School Superintendent C. M. Turner signed a consolidation agreement between Zillah School District #32 and Orchardvale School District #51. Both District #32 and #51 were officially closed. In their place the newly consolidation district became known as Zillah School District #205.

Agriculture Education and the Future Farmers of America program was first offered during the 1950-51 school year. The boys basketball team won the state B championship in 1956 bringing a championship banner to the WPA gym that was boasted as “pride of the valley” gym. This new banner was highly prized by the team, student body, and community alike.

From 1945 until the late 1960’s Zillah High School students were housed in the brick building on West Second Avenue. Although cared for tenderly by dedicated custodians and revered by the community, age and normal wear and tear took its toll on the building. In the 1960’s proposals of forced consolidation with the Toppenish School District were heard from state education administrators. While the state felt it was a logical step, the patrons did not. The community began a campaign for the financing and construction of a new Zillah High School. In the spring of 1968 the present campus site on East Second Avenue and Yakima Valley Highway (then State Highway 12) was purchased for \$18,000. The community defeated the November 5, 1968 consolidation issue by over 64% thus removing the threat of consolidation and preserving the sovereignty of the Zillah School District.

Next on January 7, 1969, the community again demonstrated support for keeping home rule for their school district by passing a bond issue for a new high school building. The board of directors felt the prudent way to approach this project was to split construction into two phases. Construction on Phase One labeled the “Academic” building began in August 1969. It was later discovered that some requested items were left out of the original bids and now additional funds would be needed to complete Phase One. While the community was upset about the planning snafu, they once again rallied for their students passing a special levy in 1970. Phase One could now be completed at cost of just under \$500,000.

The Zillah High School academic building at 1602 Second Avenue was premiered at an open house on November 24, 1970. For the next few years the Junior High students, grades 7-8, continued to be housed at the “old building” in a wing to the west of the gym. The agriculture, shop and music programs were housed in an annex building across the street

from the old school. The old 1936 gym and football field at this west Second avenue site continued to be the home venues for the Leopards. The elementary school kitchen and multipurpose room on Fourth Avenue, two blocks north, served as the district K-12 cafeteria. Bussing between campuses was required for students involved in agriculture, music, PE and for meals. Eventually a system was worked out to bus the food up to those students at the new building.

Another bond was passed to allow for construction to begin on Phase Two of the new high school in 1977. This phase brought a new auditorium/classroom called the classitorium, a music room, a new gym and locker rooms, a kitchen, and commons, and a new agriculture science and shop building. The shop facility housing both a metal and wood shop program. Students in the Agriculture/FFA program were also constructing a new greenhouse during the summer of 1977, bringing new options in horticulture education. Classrooms for grades 7-8 students were found below the classitorium building. Scheduled to open to students in September of 1977, construction delays caused occupancy to be delayed until mid-way through the 1977-78 school year. By February 1978 the new campus was complete. The bussing of students between the old campus and the new campus finally came to an end as grades 7-12 were now housed on the ZHS campus.

In Fall of 1978 poles and lights were installed on the new football field allowing the Leopards to host their first home game on the new field. It was noted that just hours before the first game that athletic booster club volunteers were still installing and checking the wiring for the lights. In December of 1978 the Leopard boys and girls basketball teams played their first home games in the new gym.

After only a couple of years of operation, the district felt both the need for additional high school space and a desire to move junior high students back to their own campus. A bond was passed, the old high school building was demolished, and a new passive solar concrete slab middle school building was poured and erected at the site on West Second Avenue. Zillah Middle School opened to student use in 1981. The high school campus on East Second Avenue now was finally a true high school serving students in grades 9-12.

The ZHS Leopards were always noted for their outstanding and competitive sports programs. The move to the new facilities saw this tradition continued. Now on display are the many league and district championships banners that have been won since play began in the new facilities. The 1977 and 1978 girls volleyball team won the state A Championships in back-to-back performances. In 1991 and 2000 the girls slow pitch softball teams won the state A championship. 1992 saw the Leopard football team in the Kingbowl championship game. Leading through most of the game, the Leopards wound up losing the title in the last few minutes of the final quarter of play and settling for a second place trophy. The boys basketball team brought home the gold ball as the champions of state A tournament in 1994. The boys found themselves back in the championship game in 1996 bringing home a second place trophy. The wrestling team won unprecedented back-to-back state championships in 1999 and 2000.

During the 1980's the Zillah High FFA chapter earned numerous state level awards. It seemed as if they were always on stage at the state conventions at WSU to receive "The Gold." For seven consecutive years the Zillah chapter was named in the "Top Five" chapters in Washington. The ZHS FFA Chapter received its first National Chapter, Safety and Building Our American Communities awards at a ceremony at the National FFA Convention in Kansas City, MO in November of 1981. Additional National Awards for Chapter, Safety and BOAC were earned from 1982-88 and presented to the Zillah Chapter. The Zillah FFA Alumni Association was officially chartered in 1979. In 1984 the Zillah FFA Chapter sent its first delegation of President Ron Nash (later ZHS FFA advisor), Vice President Peter Schneider, and then Advisor John Griffin, to the National FFA Leadership Conference in Washington D.C.

In 1989 Advance Placement courses were approved by the College Board and Zillah School Board as part of the ZHS curriculum. Running Start in cooperation with Yakima Valley Community College was begun in 1992 as another option to allow ZHS to earn college credit while enrolled in high school.

In recognition of student achievement within the Fine Arts Department, a Fine Arts awards night was initiated in 1994. In 1994 the ZHS Associated Student Body voted to allow a Fine Arts "letter" award to be earned and displayed on school jackets. At this same time an Academic Letter award was approved for students earning a 3.5 GPA for the each semester of each year. Zillah High School jackets could now more completely represent the entire ZHS student body with letter awards available in athletic, academic, and fine arts.

In spring of 1995 ZHS was awarded approval by the US Air Force to begin teaching an Aerospace Science/AFJROTC program. Then Vocational (Career –Technical Education) Director John Griffin was flow to Maxwell Air Force Base Alabama for a week-long instructor-administrator orientation. The first classes in aerospace began in August of 1995. Granger High School also sent students to afternoon aerospace courses during the first year. Following their levy failure, Granger dropped out of the program in June of 1996. That act left Zillah as the smallest high school in the nation awarded and operating a ROTC program. During the first year operation nearly 45% of the student body investigated the AFJROTC program as an elective course offering.

The Z Center Stage Theatre Company was formed in 1996 as the official title of the already established thespian group at ZHS. Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" was the first production under their new name. The ZSD moves into the Internet/web age by launching its first website through the ESD 105 Server in Yakima in 1996.

Restructuring from a traditional two semesters and seven 50-minute periods to a structure of three semesters and five 70-minute periods was established in 1997. A senior cumulating project called "PEARLS" (Portfolio of Essential Academic and Required Life Skills) was also established in 1997. Academic expectations were increased in 1997 as the ZHS graduation requirements were increased to 29 credits, which included raising both mathematics and science requirements from two credits to three credits each. ZHS became a valley leader in the state-mandated restructuring and academic expectations.

1998 saw the Agri-Science Department moving into the world of biotechnology studies including an animal reproduction class which trained students in techniques of livestock artificial insemination and embryo transplants. In 1999 construction began on a second greenhouse to meet the increased demand of students pursuing ornamental horticulture studies.

“College in the High School” utilizing the “Inside Track” program from City University was established in 1999. Tech Prep articulation had been in effect between YVCC and ZHS since 1993, but few had taken advantage of this program until direct transcription options became effective in 1999. In 2001 the college in the high school option was changed as ZHS became partners in the CWU Cornerstone program and later added EWU as a partner. Now several options exist for students to earn dual credit (high school and college) for their advanced studies.

The music program has been well represented at regional and state solo/ensemble contests, regional honor performance groups, and All-State band and choir in the 1990’s. Spring of 1999 saw the Leopard Band on a California cruise winning superior ratings in this national contest. As the ZHS music fame continued to grow, an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall was received. Music Director Dave Carlile had only a few short months to prepare the honors choir and raise the needed funding to make this trip possible. In May 2000 the ZHS student touched down in New York City and had the once in a life time experience of performing in Carnegie Hall.

In May of 2000 the Zillah Chapter of FFA hosted its annual parent-member-community awards banquet at the Zillah Civic Center. This banquet celebrated the 50th anniversary of FFA in Zillah High School. Former Agriculture instructors/FFA advisors and former FFA Presidents were on hand to celebrate this historic event.

In the year 2000 the Zillah School Board has asked the community to support a bond for modernization and improvements to the ZHS facilities, some of which were over 30 years old. Many in the community see the need for these improvements and would like to offer the best facilities for their students. Being a small district suffering from poor economic conditions have caused the bond to fail falling short of the 60% super majority requirement twice. The need for improved facilities still exists and each year of use puts more wear and obsolescence on the buildings. The population of the high school is at a record high enrollment. Facilities are in demand from extra-curricular and community programs. The ZSD Board of Directors will continue to work with the community to try to find solutions for these facility needs.

In the fall of 2003 the Zillah School district passed a comprehensive long term bond project. This will allow for rebuilding of the Hilton elementary school renovations at the high school, and the building of a gym at the middle school. Sadly AFJROTC closed its unit at ZHS in June of 2003. While there still was interest in maintaining the program the Air Force was short of qualified retirees to instruct the program and could no longer guarantee instructors to serve in the program.

In the spring of 2004 the Zillah school district launched its own website after years being hosted by the ESD in Yakima. Now friends and alumni all over the world can check on ZHS and see how things are going.

In January 2007 the middle school gym project was completed and now that becomes the "home court" for the ZHS leopards. The new gym opened to rave reviews by players, fans and visitors. In February 2007 the SCAC Girls District Basketball Tournament was housed in the new gym. With all the new facilities which are shared by all schools in the district, the schools decided to have all mascots in all schools from grades K-12 become "Leopards".

The Zillah School District Board of Directors has announced the official name of the new gymnasium as the Zillah Alumni Gym. The gym built on the ZMS campus and opened in the winter of 2007 is now the main gym for athletics contests and community events. The gym was built with the proceeds from the last bond that was passed by the community. So many people over the years have been involved in making Zillah a great community and many of our graduates have gone on to success from lessons learned in the "old gyms" and that small town support of the teams forms a pivot point for social gatherings and pride, that it seemed a natural choice to acknowledge the Zillah Alumni by naming this beautiful new facility after them. Thank you alumni for all your support.

The old "Classitorium" which opened in the 1977-78 school year opened May 2007 the as the newly remodeled facility dubbed the PAC- "Performing Arts Center". Thanks to a bond measure passed by the community a new, improved performing arts facility was created. "Beauty and the Beast" by Z Center Stage Theatre Company was the first production to use the new facility, soon to be followed by music concerts performed by the ZSD music students.

In August of 2007 the new science building was opened to better serve our students. Improvement to the track and field area were completed by the time our students return in the fall of 2007. New tennis courts were part of the bond, but are located on the middle school campus.

Zillah became one of only 4 schools in the state of Washington to be approved to open a Habitat for Humanity's chapter on campus. Rosetti Celis a student and Ms. Mindy Winters the advisor were instrumental in bringing this community service club to our school in the 2009 school year

ZHS joined the social media of Facebook and Twitter in 2010 by producing weekly newsletters for our students, parents, alumni and community.

The Zillah School District officially renamed the High School football field "Andy Collins Memorial Field" in memory of Andy Collins (ZHS Class of 2002) at a dedication ceremony on October 14, 2011.

In 2013 the Zillah School District was recognized as one of the "Best Communities in Music Education." This recognition comes from the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM). Schools recognized in this manner show success in student involvement, graduation requirements, financial and staffing dedication toward music, as well opportunities for students to be able to participate in musical activities outside the school. Music Teachers Michael Brant and Jason Schoonover were very excited and honored to receive this award. Superintendent, Kevin McKay and all the building principals are also responsible for this award.

Mr. Jeff Charbonneau (ZHS Class of 1996) was named Washington State Teacher of the Year for 2013. Later in April he was named the National Teacher of the Year for 2013 and was a guest of President Obama at a special reception in the White House. Mr. Charbonneau provided the school with a special message and the official White House ceremony was viewed at ZHS by all through an internet video stream.

Also in 2013 additional technology resources were upgraded to provide more speed, efficiency and access of information in our schools. The ZSD website was updated to a more industry standard platform and email addresses for all staff were modernized to reflect use of firstname.lastname @zillahschools.org

February 14, 2017 Zillah patrons approved a bond issue to remodel and expand Zillah High School.

(Early Zillah school information from the book "Zillah, Looking Back", edited by Edna Rowland McRayde and from the article "Zillah School District No. 32", by Frances Burns Rislov.)

Zillah -- Thumbnail History

HistoryLink.org Essay 10371 : <http://historylink.org/File/10371>

Zillah is an agricultural town in Yakima County surrounded by the lush orchards and vineyards of the Yakima Valley. It was founded in 1892, when irrigation first watered the dry sagebrush flats. The townsite was named after young Zillah Oakes (ca. 1872-1953), the daughter of the Northern Pacific Railway president. The town soon became a residential and commercial center for one of the richest agricultural regions in the state. The town incorporated in 1911 and had a population of 647 in its first census in 1920. It made national news in 1922 with its Teapot Dome Service Station -- a whimsical architectural commentary on the national Teapot Dome Scandal. The Great Depression hit Zillah hard, but its agricultural economy soon recovered. The town soon became known for its wineries, numbering in the dozens. Its population began to accelerate in the 1970s -- especially among its Hispanic population -- although Zillah would not need its first stoplight until 2009. As of the 2010 census, its population was 2,964.

Before Zillah

The Yakima Valley was an important hunting, gathering, and fishing area for the region's tribes, known collectively as the Peoples of the Plateau. For millennia, the Yakama Tribe, in particular, had lived in the valley, including the area around Zillah. In the 1850s, Chief Kamiakin (ca. 1800-1877), an influential Yakama chief, was known to have camped "a few miles below the present town of Zillah" (Lyman, p. 237).

White settlement of the region came slowly, because the dry sagebrush land overlooking the Yakima River was unsuited to agriculture. Beginning in the 1860s, a few cattlemen were scattered along the lush grasslands in the river bottom. By 1870, some townspeople had settled 16 miles upstream at Yakima City. Yet the future site of Zillah was still dust and sage.

The Sunnyside Canal

The town as we know it today owes its existence to irrigation, which came with the Sunnyside Canal. Early historian W. D. Lyman called the canal "truly one of the great works ever wrought" -- which was not an exaggeration, at least for the Yakima Valley (Lyman, p. 795). When the Sunnyside Canal began flowing in early 1892, it opened up 25 miles of the Yakima Valley to agriculture -- later expanded to 60 miles. Thousands of acres were suddenly converted from sagebrush into lush orchards and hop fields. Walter N. Granger (1855-1930), the originator and superintendent of the canal, and Thomas F. Oakes (1843-1919), the president of the Northern Pacific Railway -- which owned much of this land -- realized that this newly irrigated valley would need townsites.

In April 1892, Granger and Oakes went on a townsite-scouting expedition and came upon a likely looking site high above the north bank of the Yakima River. It was "near the rushing river, with its groves of cottonwoods and birches, but is elevated upon a bench," with a "superb view of the glistening domes of Adams and Takhoma (Rainier)" (Lyman, p. 795).

Naming Zillah

Oakes's 19-year-old daughter, Zillah Oakes (ca. 1872-1953), had accompanied her parents on this trip. According to one widely repeated, but probably fanciful, story, young Zillah Oakes was riding with the party when the wagon tipped over in a stream. Zillah became so hysterical that Oakes tried to "pacify his panicky and pouty daughter" by promising to name the town after her (Courtney).

However, the evidence indicates that the wagon likely overturned on an earlier townsite-scouting trip that Zillah wasn't even on. More reliable accounts say the name was suggested during the April 1892 trip by either Granger or Paul Schulze, simply as a way to honor the youngest member of the party. "Then and there, the party adopted this pleasing and rather striking name," says a 1904 account (*Illustrated History*, p. 233).

"Blossoming as the Rose": The First Decade

The new town got off to a slow start in 1892. Reuben Hatch built the Zillah Hotel that first year, and the Northern Pacific & Yakima Irrigation Co., which operated the Sunnyside Canal, built its headquarters in the new town. It slowly acquired a few stores, a post office, a blacksmith shop, and a saloon. By 1893, the town had only about 50 residents. Floods and fires briefly set Zillah back, yet the agricultural region it served was booming.

In 1894, the *Northwest Magazine* raved that the Zillah country "is beyond question the best fruit country in the United States for the raising of apples, grapes, pears, peaches, apricots, plums, prunes, berries and melons ... also a better hop country than the famous hop valleys on Puget Sound for the reason that the hop louse cannot endure the Summer heats" (Lyman, p. 797). This was not mere boosterism. Farmers were discovering that the entire irrigated Yakima Valley was perfect for many of these crops.

Soon after the Sunnyside Canal started flowing in 1892, one of Zillah's most prominent early citizens, Freeman Walden, planted what proved to be a model fruit orchard on 80 acres. By 1902, he had 5,000 apple, pear, cherry, plum, prune, and apricot trees. He reported that he netted the extraordinary profit of \$10,000 in 1902 and that his fruit ranch was "not for sale at any price" (Lyman, p. 795).

"If ever the desert has 'blossomed as the rose,' it is in the region around Zillah," said the 1904 *Illustrated History of Klickitat, Yakima and Kittitas County (Illustrated)*, p. 233). The *Seattle Times* reported in 1907 that "the great Zillah fruit district" was "the largest under cultivation and bearing in the whole Yakima valley" ("Toppenish").

This agricultural boom did not translate into a commercial boom for Zillah, which -- despite the Oakes connection -- lacked a railroad line. The main Northern Pacific line was on the other side of the river, through Toppenish. However, in that first decade the town grew slowly and steadily.

By 1894, Zillah had organized a school district and built a "comfortable frame schoolhouse" (*Illustrated*, p. 233). By 1904, the town was home to three churches: Episcopal, Christian, and Methodist. It also had two stage lines and two telephone lines, local and long-distance. The town's commercial district in 1904 had added several grocery stores and drug stores, a jeweler, a milliner, a barbershop, and a hardware store. Zillah's population was estimated at about 150 in 1904.

Incorporation

By 1910, the town had grown big enough to consider the next logical step: incorporation. Citizens filed a petition with the county and on December 31, 1910, the townspeople gathered at one of the biggest lodge halls in town, the Woodmen Hall, to vote on the incorporation proposal. It passed by a resounding 94 to 6 margin. On January 5, 1911, the papers were filed with the state, making Zillah an incorporated town of the fourth class according to Washington law.

In the same election, E. J. Jaeger was elected town mayor. He was later succeeded by one of the founders of the town, Granger, who was elected mayor following his retirement as superintendent of the Sunnyside Canal. Granger, it is worth noting, made his residence in Zillah instead of another town he'd helped found: Granger, Washington, about eight miles downstream.

"One Continuous Fruit Orchard"

By the beginning of 1911, Zillah acquired a main railroad line, the North Coast Line, soon to be renamed the Oregon-Washington Railway and Navigation Co. It ran up the north bank of the Yakima River and "has become a great factor in the growth of this magnificent region" (Lyman, p. 343). Ton after ton of fruit, hops, and other produce rolled out of Zillah to markets all over the country.

By 1919, Lyman reported that Zillah and all of the irrigated land upstream and downstream was nearly one continuous fruit orchard. A traveler, he said, would traverse "miles and miles of apple and pear trees, scarlet and yellow with the autumn hues, which face him on the way through Parker Bottom, through Zillah and Granger to Sunnyside and Grandview" (Lyman, p. 794).

The Dome and the Leopards

The town itself, in 1919, was served by *the Zillah Free Press* -- "Republican in politics" -- as well as "first-class schools, well-housed and equipped" (Lyman, p. 797). Zillah High School students were in a modern brick building, built in 1917, which also boasted "one of the best gymnasiums of its day to be found in all of Yakima County" ("High School"). In 1919, Zillah High School graduated its largest senior class yet: 12 students.

The new town's first official census in 1920, showed a population of 647. In 1922, one of Zillah's most enduring landmarks made its debut: The Teapot Dome Service Station. Jack Ainsworth, a Zillah businessman, built this gas station in the shape of a jaunty white teapot, complete with handle, spout and red dome. It was a wry architectural joke about the Teapot Dome Scandal, which dominated the news in 1922. This bribery scandal was not a local issue -- it involved Wyoming oil-field leases and the Warren G. Harding administration -- but Ainsworth's whimsical commentary got national attention and became a well-known Zillah novelty. Tourists posed for photos and purchased Teapot Dome Service Station postcards.

Another Zillah symbol made its debut in 1931. The Zillah High School student body voted to scrap its old Zillah Bulldogs name and acquire the more exotic name, the Zillah Leopards. To this day, the Zillah Leopards and their supporters are easy to "spot" at high school athletic tournaments.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression hit Zillah hard. In 1931, the First National Bank of Zillah failed, done in by huge loans to two struggling fruit companies. The Zillah School District could no longer afford to pay its teachers in cash, and instead "paid with warrants, which were often discounted at the banks"

("High School"). One seventh grade teacher, Arthur H. Irwin, recalled that during the Depression his salary plummeted from \$1,080 per year to \$750. In 1936, the town got a boost from the federal government's Works Progress Administration, which built a new high school gymnasium. The new gym was so fine that it "soon became the headquarters for district basketball tournaments" ("High School").

Zillah continued its trend of slow but steady growth, up to 728 in 1930 and 803 in 1940. By 1940, the population also got a boost, at least seasonally, by the young men at Camp Zillah, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp under the jurisdiction of the Fort Lewis District. It was one of 26 C.C.C. camps in the district, providing jobs for Depression-hit young men. They performed public works projects in the region's fields and forests.

During World War II, the market for the area's produce recovered. Many of Zillah's young men marched off to war. Zillah residents had no way of knowing that, just across the arid Rattlesnake Hills east of town, a top-secret project at Hanford was producing the plutonium that would help end the war.

School Days

Zillah made news in 1951, when 78 Zillah High School students walked out of class to protest the firing of their principal and six teachers. The "noisy demonstration" was part of a long-running dispute between faculty members and the school board ("Walk Out").

A more serious calamity struck on October 8, 1966, when a late-night fire consumed most of Zillah Elementary School. The building was empty and nobody was hurt, but the fire destroyed 10 of the school's 13 classrooms, the library, and the office. The fire was reported at 11:30 p.m. and was contained about an hour later. The building was repaired, but was eventually replaced by a new elementary school.

A 1969 school bond vote opened the way for a new Zillah High School building, which opened in 1970 and was expanded and completed in 1978. A new gym, called the Zillah Alumni Gym, and a new Performing Arts Center also opened in 1977 and 1978, respectively. *(Note this information is incorrect. The old Classitorium opened in 1978 was remodeled into the NEW-PAC (Performing Arts Center) and the PAC was opened in May 2007. The new Gym on the ZHS Campus did open in 1978 but the Zillah Alumni Gym on the campus of Zillah Middle School opened in 2007.*

In 2013 a Zillah High School science teacher, Jeff Charbonneau, met President Barack Obama (b. 1961) and made the rounds of the nation's morning news shows when he was named National Teacher of the Year for 2013. Charbonneau, who graduated from Zillah High School in 1996, said he "stands on the shoulders of teachers who I continue to learn from" (Shaw).

Heart of the Wine Country

Beginning in about the 1970s, a new kind of crop began to reach prominence in Zillah's agricultural region: wine grapes. Zillah had grown grapes from the first, but around this time Zillah growers and other Yakima Valley growers began to discover the potential in fine varietal grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Riesling. Zillah vineyards were soon selling grapes to big regional winemakers. Smaller wineries, based in and around Zillah, also began to sprout up.

By 2007, a wine writer commented, "Who would have guessed that Zillah would have stretch limousines zipping between tractors, but that's what you get when you add a couple dozen wineries to this landscape" (Roberts, p. 284). As of 2013, 26 wineries operated in and around Zillah including Covey Run Vintners, Hyatt Vineyards, Portteus Winery, Severino Cellars, Claar Cellars, Bonair, Two Mountain Winery, Wineglass Cellars, and Paradisos del Sol. The Zillah area is in the Yakima Valley and Rattlesnake Hills American Vinicultural Areas (AVAs).

In 1980, Zillah orchardist Sid W. Morrison (b. 1933) was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for the Fourth District. Morrison raised tree fruits, Concord grapes, and wine grapes on land that his family had farmed since 1902. He had previously served 14 years in the Washington State Legislature before he won the 1980 race for U.S. Congress on the Republican ticket. He served six terms as U.S. Representative and then ran for governor in 1992, but lost in the primary. In 1993, he was appointed by Governor Mike Lowry (b. 1939) to be the director of the Washington State Department of Transportation, a position he held until 2001.

Roadside Zillah

In 2000, Zillah became known for a second roadside attraction: the 10-foot-tall movie-monster sculpture in the parking lot of the Church of God-Zillah. It was a replica of the Godzilla dinosaur, built as an acknowledgement of the obvious pun on the church's denomination. The congregation's official name was more prosaic, the Christian Worship Center, but Rev. Gary Conner decided to show that the church had a sense of humor.

"It's brilliant, really," said Conner in 2000. "And it just fell in our laps. ... Different people use different lures to catch fish" (Earls).

However, the Teapot Dome Service Station remains the city's best-known symbol. Over the decades, it has been hit by a car, threatened by freeway development, and moved twice -- once in 1978 and again in 2012. It is currently located at 117 First Avenue in Zillah and is looked after by the Friends of the Teapot Association. It has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1985 and the association hopes to someday move the building to a more prominent location and convert it into a Zillah Visitor/Tourism Center.