When people discuss many of the famous successful people of history, they often forget to talk about the failures that led to those people’s greatest triumphs.

At the May 13 History Seminar, a local historian showed how William Boeing created one of the biggest airplane manufacturers in the world through three flights in the early 20th century that didn’t go according to plan.

Each week, a member of the facility or an occasional guest speaker is invited to do a presentation on a piece of history that is a part of their expertise. Located in Building 3, room 102, these weekly seminars can also make participants eligible for a single history credit if they show up for every lecture of the semester.

Jules James, an expert on different parts of Washington’s past, ran that week’s seminar. He also occasionally gives tours aboard the Virginia V steamship in the Puget Sound area.

Today, Boeing is perhaps one of the most well-known companies to come from Washington. Boeing designs, manufactures and sells things like airplanes and rockets.

In 2015, it was ranked 27th on Fortune Magazine’s world renowned Fortune 500 list. In 2015, it was estimated that the company has a $22 million economic impact on the state of Washington.

But when it all began, the company was just a man and a dream. In the early 1900s, William Boeing inherited a lot of wealth from his parents, but beyond this he had also received his father’s lumber operations. He came up with the idea to build airplanes when he realized that he could use his lumber to build the planes.

When he first started the company, nobody took him seriously. As James explains, the papers saw Boeing’s endeavors as the minor pastime of an out-of-touch millionaire.

“The Seattle Times did not respect Bill Boeing. They looked at Bill Boeing more as the idle rich, the person who inherited all this money and was just playing with giant toys,” James said.

For his first attempt to build airplanes, in 1915, Boeing attempted to create seaplanes that could be used in World War I. His first attempt did not succeed and the plane crashed the first time it flew. But in looking for places where the planes could land and refuel, he helped in the creation of the hangar, a large shed for storing airplanes.

In 1916, Boeing failed to create an airplane that could be sold, but in the process he helped to invent the wind tunnel, a tool designed to study the effect of air moving past solid objects. This creation was the thing that got a lot of the brightest minds to move onto Boeing.

And in 1919, Boeing tried to create a plane that could fly to Alaska and failed. However, did inadvertently manage to establish a route from Seattle to Victoria.

So while Boeing might not have necessarily gotten what he wanted from these three flights, he discovered things in these projects that would go on to cement Boeing’s status in the history of flight.

“This is a man who has lost, lost, lost, lost; and from that loss as we know in business, you gain the recourses and the knowledge that succeed in creating the Boeing company we know now,” James said.