

James Vashon

Vashon Island Named for him May 28, 1792

James Vashon was born August 9, 1742 in the village of Eye, near Ludlow, Shropshire, England. He was the son of the Vicar of Eye, the Reverend James Volant Vashon. The family name is of French origins and became English at the time of the Conquest. James Vashon entered the British Navy at age thirteen, in 1755, and first served aboard the frigate *HMS Revenge* (28 guns) under Captain Cornwall. As a midshipman he served on a number of vessels and saw combat service in the Mediterranean, the coast of North America, and in the Carribbean. In 1763 he passed the Lieutenant's Exam, but continued to serve as a Midshipman until 1772 for lack of a Lieutenant's posting. Vashon was serving on *HMS Quebec* when the Seven year's War ended and was put on the beach at half-pay until 1774 when the Navy began re-arming for the approaching American Revoultion.



Admiral Vashon courtesy Vashon Heritage Museum

He was appointed Lieutenant on frigate *HMS Maidenstone* and was assigned to the West Indies. He was quickly promoted to First Lieutenant when Lieutenant Peter Rainier (for whom Mount Rainier was named) was promoted and transferred off the *Maidenstone*. He achieved recognition with his action during the capture of the French ship *Lion*, when he was given command of the prize and over 200 prisoners, and successfully reached the British naval base at Antigua. As a reward, he was returned to England, promoted to

Commander, and given command of the brig *HMS Alert* (14 guns). During 1780-81, the *Alert* served on convoy duty in the North Atlantic and in the Caribbean. During the second tour in the Caribbean for the *Alert*, Joseph Baker (after whom Mount Baker was named) served as cabin boy for Commander Vashon. Because of distinguished action as commander of the *Alert* during the battle of The Saintes, Vashon was promoted to Captain and given command of the ship-of-the-line *HMS Prince William* (64 guns). He then served as flag captain aboard *HMS Formidable*, and then the frigate *HMS Sibyl*. With the end of the American Revolution, Vashon was again put on the beach at half pay in 1783. He and his wife Jane Bethell, who married in 1779, had a son in 1784, but Jane died suddenly in 1786. Vashon, then re-married to Sarah Rainier, the sister of his earlier shipmate Peter Rainier.



HMS Pompee (1793) model of sistership HMS Achilles

In late 1886 Vashon was recalled to service and took command of *HMS Europa* (50 guns) where Vashon commanded Midshipmen James Baker, Peter Puget and Lieutenant George Vancouver, all of whose names would grace the future Washington State. Vashon commanded a series of battleships during the period from 1789 to 1804 including *HMS Ardent* (64 guns), *HMS St. Albins* (64 guns), *HMS Dreadnought* (64 guns), and *HMS Pompee* (80 guns). It was during this period that George Vancouver commanded the Pacific Northwest expedition that bears his name and during which Vancouver named a number of prominent features of the Northwest after his colleagues and friends in the Royal Navy. On May 28, 1792 Vancouver named Vashon's Island in honor of Captain

Vashon. In 1842 Charles Wilkes of the American Exploring Expedition named Maury Island as a separate island and the usage began to change to Vashon Island.



George Vancouver 1792

In April 1804 Vashon was promoted to Rear-Admiral in command of the naval squadron at Leith, Scotland aboard the flagship *HMS Roebuck*. He instituted a formal convoy system out of Leith to protect this vital shipping route, and was so successful that he was promoted to Vice-Admiral in 1808. When Vashon decided to retire in late 1808, the merchants and leaders of Leith were so pleased that they gave him a public dinner, awarded him two commemorative plates, and honored him as a Freeman of the City of Edinburgh.

Vashon retired to Ludlow where he lived happily at Number 54 Broad Street (which is marked with a Ludlow Civic Society plaque). He was promoted to Admiral in 1821, and died October 27, 1827 at the age of 85. He was buried at St. Laurence's Parish Church in Ludlow.

Source: Robert C. Wing. *Joseph Baker*. Gray Beard Publications: Seattle. 1992.