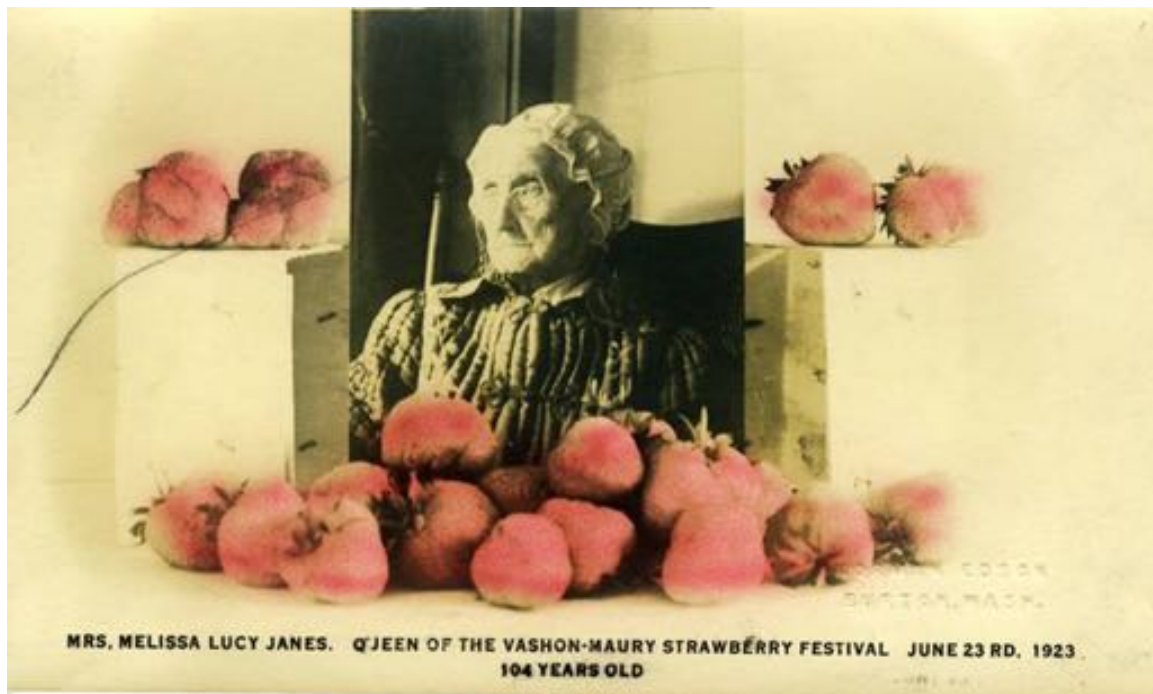


When Miss Vashon Reigned: Vashon Festival Queens

In 1967, Noel "Gigi" Hake was crowned Miss Vashon and competed in the Miss Washington contest as part of the Miss America Pageant. Wait ... What? Vashon had a Miss Vashon? Yes indeed, for nearly 50 years, Vashon had Festival Queens and Miss Vashon contests as an important part of the annual Strawberry Festival.

The annual festival on Vashon was not always called the Strawberry Festival. Over the years the festivals were called the Island Festival, Peach Festival, Harvest Festival, Vashon Island Festival, and since 1984 the Vashon Strawberry Festival. The first festival on Vashon was held in 1900, and in 1909 the first Strawberry Festival was held to celebrate Vashon's renowned strawberries.

The 1923 Strawberry Festival renewed the tradition of annual festivals, which had been interrupted by the First World War, and was the first festival to have a Strawberry Queen, Melissa Lucy Janes, who was 104 years old. The Friday night "Miss Lucy Dinner" held at the Vashon Heritage Museum at the start of the annual festival honors "Grandma" Janes.



The next year, an expanded and more elaborate Strawberry Festival was held at Ellisport, sponsored by the Commercial Club. The festival featured a ball held at Burton the evening before, an address by P. Monroe Smock, editor of the *Vashon Island News Record*, a band, booths, a tug of war, and a baseball game. Alyssa Jean Shipley was crowned Queen, and her Court included June Cowen, Pauline Wise, Ethel Whitfield, Lillian Larson. The newspaper reported there was "no accident, no drinking, and no unseemly conduct by anyone." Terkel Hansen,

President of the Vashon State Bank, remarked that the festival was “unquestionably the biggest thing the island has ever put over.” Two years later, in 1926, the Festival was moved to Vashon at the Vashon School Grounds, now Ober Park. Mabel Holland was crowned Queen and given a key to her island empire. Her court included Consuelo Ramquist, Marjorie Stanley, Laura Brosseau, and Frances Blekkink. Their photograph from the July 30, 1926 *News Record* show us what well-dressed “flappers” were wearing that year.



1926 Festival Queen and Her Court

The tradition of a Vashon Island Queen and Court was well established and continued with breaks during the Great Depression and World War II into the post-war years. From the late 1940s through the early 1970s the festival grew increasing larger and more elaborate. And with this growth came a more important role for the Festival Queen and more elaborate floats for the Queen and her Court. The 1951 photo of Island Harvest Queen Susan Wadleigh and her Court, Helen Kranjceвич, Phyllis Brown, Nancy Reed, Nancy Dahlgren on their float covered in fir boughs, ferns, and flowers is a good example of how important the festival queens were to the festival.



1951 Harvest Queen and Her Court

By the late 1950s, the Festival Queen also became Miss Vashon and eligible to participate in the Miss Washington Pageant representing Vashon Island. But, by the early 1970s, changes in attitudes, the Women's Movement, the Counter-Culture Revolution, and lack of volunteers to run the contest, led to the end of Miss Vashon and the annual Festival Queen. Rhea Brobeck was the last Festival Queen crowned as Miss Vashon at the 1971 Island Festival and she competed in the 1972 Miss Washington contest. Since 1972 there have been no Festival Queens, and no Miss Vashons.

With no Festival Queen, the role of Grand Marshall has expanded, and the Honorary Mayor fundraiser for Island non-profits has become another way to recognize islanders at the Festival. But, a special part of the Festival disappeared when Vashon lost its annual Festival Queen.

Bruce Haulman is an island historian.

Photo 1 -Melissa Lucy Jaynes – Norman Edson photograph courtesy Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

Photo 2 - 1926 Strawberry Festival Queen Queen Mabel Holland, center. Left to right, Consuelo Ramquist, Marjorie Stanley, Laura Brosseau, and Frances Blekkink. *Vashon Island News-Record* photograph.

Photo 3 - 1951 Island Harvest Festival Float – Queen Susan Wadleigh , top; Phyllis Brown and Nancy Dahlgren, center; Helen Kranjceovich and Nancy Reed bottom. Photograph courtesy Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum