

Burton Town

Miles Hatch, an early and energetic settler and developer, named Burton in 1892 after his birthplace of Burton Township in Illinois. Vashon legend has it that Miles's wife Tamara named the town after her birthplace of Burton-on-Trent in England, but Tamar was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Like many Vashon legends it made a great story, but was formed more in the minds of those telling it than in the truth of the historic record.

Miles's father made a fortune in the California Gold Rush, and when Miles graduated in the first graduating class from the newly formed University of Illinois, he came to Tacoma to run the family business interests. From there the move to Vashon was easy when he saw the opportunities the relatively undeveloped Island had to offer.

In the early 1890's, after claiming much of the Burton Peninsula as his homestead, Hatch built a large building in Burton, started Vashon College, developed his Mileta Farm (named for the first two letters in Miles, son Lewis, and wife Tamara) as a major dairy operation, and owned the sawmill at Assembly Point where Camp Burton is located today.

Burton quickly became the most important town on Vashon, with daily steamer service to Tacoma, a post office, and numerous small businesses. Burton remained the major town on the Island until automobiles, better roads, and the North End ferry dock led to Vashon taking over as the major commercial center. The Burton Wharf was built in 1894 by Hatch and when the state authorized counties to take over and maintain docks in 1899, Hatch donated the dock to King County. The dock was removed in 1955 and the pilings were used to construct the Yacht Club and Burton Marina.



The original photograph from the 1930s shows photographer Norman Edson standing in front of the Burton Post Office. In the background is the canopy of the porch of Pasic's Grocery with a bread delivery truck unloading on the highway. The steeple of the Burton Church is in the center of the photograph, and the Masonic Hall (now Silverwood Gallery) is to the left. Between them is the roof of the Burton Shell Service Station. The two houses to the left of Masonic Hall are no longer there, having been demolished and replaced by the Back Bay Inn in 1990.



In the current photograph, taken in 2009 from the same location, the old Post Office building is still there but the columns have been removed and a new façade constructed when the building was converted to a residence. The telephone/power pole is in the same location and provides a good point of reference. Pasic's Grocery Store burned and there is no building on that site, only an empty lot. The Burton Church is still in the center of the photograph although obscured by the large fir tree in front of it, and the Silverwood Gallery now occupies the old Masonic Hall and no longer has the flagpole in front. The roofline of the old Burton Shell is still there but when the station was rebuilt as a more modern gas station drive up pumps under an open-sided roof replaced the original building. The Back Bay Inn (now called the Quartermaster Inn) retains the distinctive architectural features of the houses it replaced with mansard roofs on both of the corner rooms.

Original Photo Courtesy of Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Association

Current Photo – Terry Donnelly