

## The Hardware Store

The building that today is known as The Hardware Store Restaurant, built in 1890 by Frank Gorsuch, was the fourth store on the Island, and the first in the Town of Vashon.



As seen in the 1915 photograph, the building was originally 39 feet wide by 124 feet long with a smaller 16-foot by 40-foot structure attached to the south. These two buildings were connected and covered by a traditional western false front and shed roof porch that gave the appearance of a single building. The Gorsuch Store sold general merchandise to the growing farming community of Vashon, and business grew as Vashon Town developed into the primary commercial center on the island, quickly eclipsing competition from Center and Burton. At this time, general merchandise included hardware, feed, seed, dry good, notions, paint, and groceries.

In 1913, Gorsuch sold the business to Fred and Henry Weiss, brothers who were operating the store when the 1915 photograph was taken. The Weiss' sold the store to Robert Gerry who operated it until 1921 when Fred Weiss and his new partner, Ole Thorsen, repurchased the store. They operated it until 1928 when they moved the business across the street into the brick building on the northeast corner that is today Vashon Landing.

The building sat empty for a short time until C. G. Kimmel and George McCormick rented it and opened Vashon Hardware Company in January 1929. Kimmel ran a grocery store across the street in what is today the Blooms building that also sold housewares, gardening supplies and hardware.

George McCormick, a mining engineer who had worked in Alaska but returned to live on Vashon, worked for Kimmel and convinced his boss to go into partnership and move all of the hardware and gardening business across the street into the empty Gorsuch building. The business was successful and remained a hardware store for the next 73 years.

In 1935, the owners of the building, the Beall-Hanson Company, hired A.C. Harrington to build an addition to the west, added new display windows, a new porch, and a new façade in the Art-Deco Moderne style. The new façade included large Art-Deco lettering announcing “Vashon Hardware Co.”

George McCormick ran the Hardware Store until he sold to his daughter and her husband, Mary Jo and Chuck Barrentine, in 1973. The Barrentines operated the store until 1987, and added the “Today’s special, so is tomorrow” sign that is still part of the building. Their son, Gary, took over the business in 1987 and operated it until 2002, when he sold out and the building was rented by Melinda Sontgerath to become a restaurant.

“The Hardware Store” opened in 2002 as a retail store while the lengthy process to turn it into a restaurant worked its way through all the necessary permits. The store carried art, wine, furniture, and Italian scooters. It was also used as an entertainment space until “The Hardware Store, great good food” restaurant opened in 2005.



The 2010 photograph by Terry Donnelly shows the building as it is today, largely unchanged from the 1935 remodel. A modern SUV sits in front, in place of the horse-drawn supply wagon in the 1915 photograph. This contrast represents the change from a largely rural farming community to a largely suburban residential community that took place during the past century.

The electric pole on the corner is in much the same place, and the 1912 Vashon State Bank building in the background of the original photograph was demolished in 1956 to create the parking lot for the “new” bank building which is seen in the 2010 photograph. Peeking over the top of the Vashon State Bank building in the 1915 photograph is the roof of the Therkel Hanson House. Hanson was the owner of the bank. When the house was moved to its present Cove Road location and the house to the north was demolished, space for the large fir tree, seen in the 2010 photograph, for the Village Green, and for Saturday Market became available.

Today “The Hardware Store” is an important part of the center of Vashon Village, and is one of the most popular restaurants on the Island. The building was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places in 2000. The interior retains much of the feel of the original building with the original wood floor, the original pressed tin ceiling, and wood salvaged from the original store used in the conversion to a restaurant. The 1935 addition is now a gallery space, and the original smaller annex to the south houses an arts and crafts gallery. The fresh Vashon farm produce served in the restaurant today harkens back to the original purpose of the building as a supplier for the farms that helped Vashon grow into a thriving community.

Original Photo courtesy of Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Association

Current Photo – Terry Donnelly