

Vashon Post Offices and Mail Delivery (502 words)

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

The fundamental story of Vashon during the 20th century is a shift from a collection of isolated water based communities to a single island based community. This shift is seen particularly well in the consolidations that change the way the island was organized at the beginning of the 20th century to the way it is organized at the end of the century. There were thirteen school districts in the first part of the 20th century and only one at the end. There were thirty-three ferry docks in the first part of the 20th century and only two at the end. There were two high schools in the first part of the 20th century and only 1 at the end. There were thirteen different community-shopping areas in the first part of the 20th century, and only three – Burton, Center, and Vashon – at the end. And, there were sixteen post offices in the first part of the 20th century and only one at the end (Burton is a sub-station of the Vashon Post Office).

Post offices on the north end of the Island were located at Vashon (1883 - present), Aquarium (1892 – 1909), and Glen Acres (1914 – 1918). On the West Side there were post offices at Lisabeula (1892 – 1931), Cove (1904 – 1956), Colvos (1905 – 1910), Cedarhurst (1912 – 1919), and Luseata Beach (Camp Sealth 1916 – 1950). In the center and south end of the Island there were post offices at Chautauqua (Ellisport 1888 - 1943), Quartermaster/Burton (1890 - 1974 when it became a sub-station), Portage (1903 – 1968), Magnolia (1908 – 1953), and Spring Beach (1913 – 1943). And, on Maury Island, there were post offices at Maury (1888 - 1912), Dockton (1903 – 1979), and Reaco (Racoma Beach, 1907 – 1911).

The long slow shift from many local post offices to one central post office and one sub-station began on June 15, 1905 when Fred Kingsbury became the first Rural Free Delivery (RFD) driver on the island. Mail was delivered to the area surrounding Portage, until F.B. Sherman became the carrier and the route was expanded to include Paradise Valley.



The original photograph is of Fred Kingsbury in his Model T Ford taken in 1908. He has a U.S. Mail sign in the windshield, with a young boy peaking over the top, and a still familiar rural mailbox in the background.



The current photograph, taken in 2014, is mail carrier Dee Ann Williams in her right-hand drive Jeep Mail Truck. Many things postal have changed in the one hundred years since Fred Kingsbury began delivering mail by automobile. Today all the mail on the island is delivered by auto except for those who have post office boxes at either Vashon or Burton. Although there were women post-mistresses, usually the wife of whoever owned the store in which the post office was located, there were no Vashon women mail carriers until the last quarter of the 20th century. The current photograph, taken in 2014, is mail carrier Dee Ann Williams in her right-hand drive Jeep Mail Truck. Many things postal have changed in the one hundred years since Fred Kingsbury began delivering mail by automobile. Today all the mail on the island is delivered by auto except for those who have post office boxes at either Vashon or Burton. Although there were women post-mistresses, usually the wife of whoever owned the store in which the post office was located, there were no Vashon women mail carriers until the last quarter of the 20th century. Today, six of the seven mail routes on Vashon are staffed by women carriers, three out of the four substitute carries are women, all but one of the clerks are women, and the Vashon Postmaster is a woman. And, just recently, a Post Office supplied truck replaced the delivery person's own vehicle.

Fred Kingsbury photograph, 1908 - Vashon Maury Island Heritage Association.

Dee Ann Williams photograph, 2014 - Terry Donnelly

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