

Time&Again - Native People on Vashon Island

Vashon-Maury Island has been the home of Native people for as many as 9,000 years. We do not know for certain if Native Americans passed over Vashon as they roamed the Northwest hunting mammoths and other large animals of that time, but we do know that spear points and arrowhead dating from that time have been found on the island.

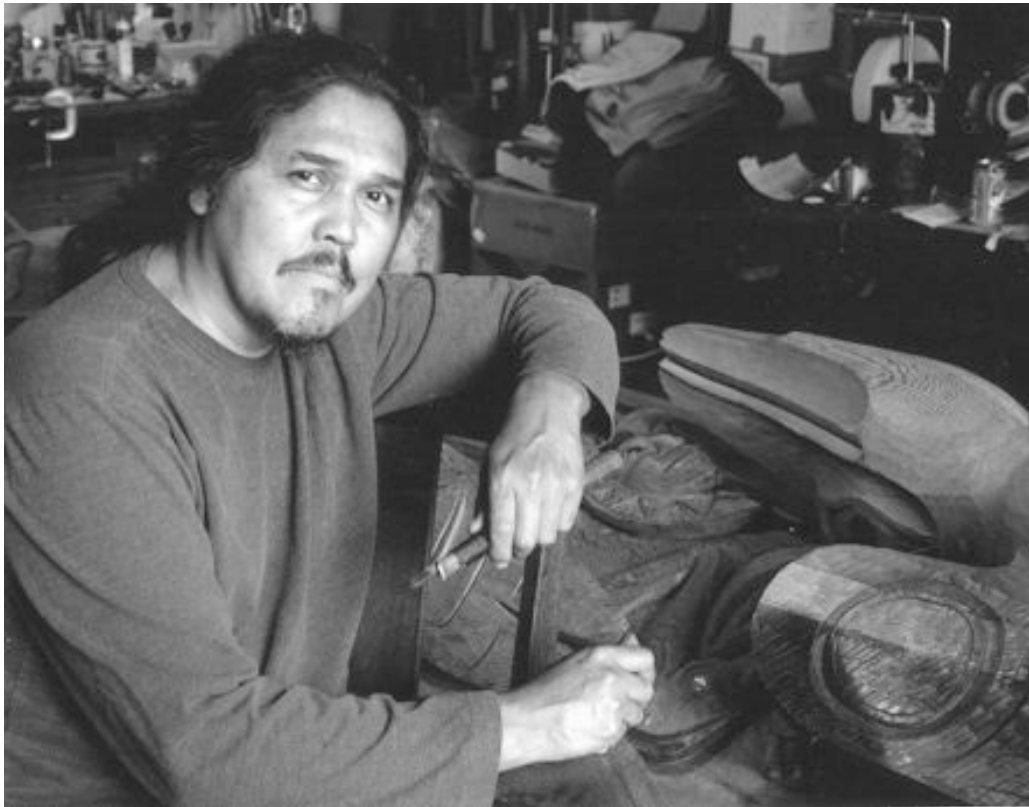
There is evidence that at least 2,500 years ago Native people lived permanently on the island. By about 250 years ago there is estimated to have been around 650 Native people living in six permanent village sites on the island. These Natives identified themselves as the sHebabS in the Tx^wəlšucid or Twulushootseed Language of the Puyallup People, or the S'Homamish in the later Chinook Jargon (chinuk wawa) trade language.



The original Native people of Vashon were decimated and displaced after the arrival of European settlers. Through the ravages of epidemic diseases that killed over two-thirds of the Native Americans of this region, and through removal, internment and placement on the Puyallup Reservation, their numbers dwindled, but they did not disappear. Some

continue to live on, and others continue to visit the island they called home as they adopted and became a part of the white culture that overwhelmed and replaced them. The Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum will soon open a special exhibit on the Native experience on Vashon. Titled “Vashon Island’s First People: Navigating Seas of Change,” the exhibit will open on First Friday, June 6.

Today, Native people continue to call Vashon-Maury Island home, but most of them are not the same Native people who originally inhabited the island. The 2010 Census counted 220 Vashon-Maury Island residents who identified as Native American. Seven of these residents identified as being Puget Sound Salish, the original Native people of the Puget Sound region. The other 213 Native people identified as being from 26 other tribes, including 33 from Alaskan tribes, 31 Cherokee, 12 Choctaw, nine Sioux and eight Chippewa.



Israel Shotridge (pictured above) is a well-known island artists who is an Alaska Native. Shotridge, who has lived on Vashon since the 1990s, is a member of the Tlingit tribe and is a master carver.

At McMurray Middle School there is a monument to the Native people of Vashon. It was installed by the Hands Across Time project developed by Roxanne Thayer in the mid-1990s, which excavated an archaeological dig at Jensen Point on the Burton Peninsula. The monument was intended to honor the sHebabS People of Vashon-Maury Island. It reads in the Tx^wəlšucid or Twulushootseed language:

g^wəʔəslaxədx^w čəʔ k^wi ʔaciʔtalbix^w tudiʔaʔ tiʔaʔ swaw'tix^wtəd

(In honor of those who went before us, the Native people of Vashon-Maury Island)
Now the monument can honor all of the Native Americans who are an important part of our community. They are not all sHebabS people who originally lived here, but they are all Native people who call Vashon home.

Photo 1 – Native Woman cutting wood on beach, circa 1895 - Oliver Van Olinda photograph courtesy of University of Washington Digital Collection.

Photo 2 – Israel Shotridge, Tlingit Master Carver, Vashon Resident – photo by Terry Donnelly

Bruce Haulman is an Island historian.

Terry Donnelly is an Island photographer.