

Northend Dock with Firewood

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

The first dock at the northend of Vashon, like most of the docks on Vashon, was built for Mosquito Fleet steamers, and only later would be developed for automobile traffic. The Mosquito Fleet is the name given to the steamers that moved people and goods on Puget Sound from the early 1890s into the 1920's and were so numerous that they often seemed like a swarm of mosquitoes descending on Seattle and Tacoma.

These Mosquito Fleet steamers were powered by steam engines that largely burned wood to heat the boilers that drove the engines. The photo of the Northend Dock, taken in 1901, shows the typical stacks of cordwood that graced every dock in the region. The *Flyer*, one of the fastest steamers in the fleet, typically burned about one chord of wood for every ten miles she traveled. Making four 64 mile round trips between Seattle and Tacoma each day, *Flyer* would typically burn about 25 chords of wood each day. At this rate, in a year, *Flyer* would burn about 5,500 chords each year. No wonder the hillside behind the dock in the 1901 photograph has few trees left standing!



Vashon Heights Dock, 1901 –Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

The introduction of gasoline and diesel powered engines in the 1910s and 1920s replaced the need for firewood, but by then, much of Vashon and the Puget Sound region had been heavily logged to supply the Mosquito Fleet, the building

needs of a rapidly expanding population, and the demand for dimensional lumber throughout the western United States.

The road up the hillside in the 1901 photograph, which was the main access to the dock at that time, is not Vashon Highway SW, but is 103rd Ave, SW, the road that now leads to the parking lot. The original dock was slightly to the east of the current dock, and was an extension of what is now the La Playa Restaurant parking area.

The main Vashon Highway that carries most of the traffic today was not built until later in the 1920s after King County rebuilt the dock slightly to the west and initiated automobile ferry service to downtown Seattle from the new dock in 1919. Once this ferry service was started, it quickly eclipsed the first automobile to the island that ran from Portage to Des Moines. That route was closed in 1921, since it was more convenient to go directly to downtown Seattle from the Northend than to go to Des Moines from Portage and then drive the new brick Seattle-Des Moines highway to downtown.



Vashon Heights Dock, 2009 – Terry Donnelly

The 2009 photo shows the same view, but with a lot more trees, the road paved, and the expanded automobile dock to the right. The beach has been bulkheaded and filled to make possible the houses and restaurant that now occupy this area.