

The Vashon Island Sportsman's Club: A Lasting Island Legacy

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Down a long winding road next to the Vashon Cemetery, nestled in a dark forest of towering firs, sits an iconic Vashon building and organization, the Vashon Island Sportsman's Club. But it was not always that way. As can be seen in the 1940 photograph by Norman Edson, taken shortly after the club house was constructed, the site was at one time clear cut and almost totally devoid of trees, like much of the rest of Vashon-Maury Island at that time.

But times change, and after 76 years of Sportsman's Club stewardship, as seen in the 2016 Terry Donnelly photograph, the site is now heavily forested; features a fine fishing pond; an elaborate, well designed shooting range; and the club house, although expanded and updated, still retains the unique feel of the 1940 structure.



Sportsman's Club, 1940 - Norman Edson courtesy Vashon Heritage Museum

Just as the Sportsman's Club site has changed, so has the Club's role in the community. Originally organized as a Gun Club in 1928, in February 1933 twenty-nine islanders met and formed the Vashon Island Sportsman's Club. Their purpose was to preserve the game animals already on the island and to secure new stocks of game animals for hunting and fishing. To accomplish this goal the Club organized predator hunts that sought to rid the island of feral cats, crows, kingfishers and blue jays.

Today the Sportsman's Club is a leader in supporting sustainable hunting and fishing, and in preserving outdoor recreational skills and activities. The clubhouse also provides a meeting place for other groups that need meeting places including the VFW, the Boy Scouts, and the Cub Scouts.



Sportsman's Club, 2016 - Terry Donnelly

The Sportsmen's Club organized the first fishing derby in 1937 and later it was named for avid fisherman and club member, Frank Matsumoto. The Club also stocked island streams with trout and salmon, and has worked to keep outdoor sport skill alive and well on Vashon.

The Sportsman's Club headed the attempt to develop a 5 square mile Island Game Preserve in the mid-1930s, which garnered support from the state and from national hunting organizations, but the proposal never got the funding needed to make it a reality.

The site for the clubhouse was chosen in 1937 and that year Masa Mukai, using his tractor, and Al Roen, running the grader, with the help of club members, created the road that now leads to the Sportsman's Club. Three years later, the clubhouse was built using the unusual method of vertical logs rather than the traditional horizontal log cabin style. To this day, this clubhouse is one of the very few vertical log outdoor clubhouses in the country.

Tijuana Nights were famous fundraisers held in the 1950s and 1960s, until in 1979 the "gambling" (they used chips) was raided and the club fined \$1,000. The

lighted Tijuana signs still proudly hangs in the covered deck area reminding club members of their close call with the law. The annual New Year's Eve parties at the Sportsman's Club are always lively affairs.

The Sportsman's Club is a vital part of the Vashon community, supporting hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation on the island as well as providing a social gathering place on the island for over 80 years.

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Photo 1 – Sportsmans Club House Vashon, Wash. by Norman Edson, 1940.
Courtesy of the Heritage Museum.

Photo 2. – Sportsman's Club by Terry Donnelly, 2016.