

Vashon's Main Intersection

This is Terry Donnelly and Bruce Haulman's 50th Time&Again article for the Beachcomber, so it seemed appropriate to recognize something very iconic on the island, the main intersection in Vashon Town. Everyone on the island goes through this intersection at some time, and many of us go through the intersection multiple times every day. One of the things that make this intersection iconic for islanders is the lack of a "proper" red-yellow-green stoplight. Islanders take pride in the fact that there are no "real" stoplights on the island, only the four blinking red lights at Burton, Sound Food, Center and Vashon Town. But it was not always that way.

The main intersection in Vashon Town was anchored by the Gorsuch Building built in 1890 (now The Hardware Store Restaurant) on the Southwest corner, the Vashon State Bank built in 1912 (now U.S. Bank) on the northwest corner, the Weiss Building built in 1928 (now Vashon Landing) on the Northeast corner, and the Kimmel Building built in 1927 (now Urban Blooms) on the Southeast corner. The photograph from 1913 is Vashon State Bank, which was founded in 1909 and moved into its newly constructed bank building in 1912. It was a sturdy building, with its doors opening onto the intersection – designed as many banks were at this time, so that if the bank were robbed, the police would have clear lines of shot at the door from anywhere in the intersection.



Vashon State Bank, 1912
Courtesy of the Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

Vashon State Bank was purchased by People's National Bank in 1956, and in January 1959, People's announced that would build a new bank and add a parking lot at the site of the old bank. The photograph from 1961 shows the

Vashon State Bank building being demolished to make way for the new parking lot on the corner, while behind it stands the recently constructed new bank that is still in use today. Behind the new People's National Bank building is the home of Therkel Hanson, original owner of the Vashon State Bank, which was removed and created the open space where The Vashon Green is today. Also visible on the horizon are the peaks of the Olympic Mountains.



Demolition of Vashon State Bank
New People's National Bank Building behind, 1961
Courtesy of the Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

But, also notice the red-yellow-green stop light in the center of the intersection. The traditional stoplight was installed on July 17, 1959 and took some getting use to. The island sheriff remarked that there was some “wrestling over the sophistication of the new red, green, and yellow traffic signal.” Islanders were “slow to catch on,” so the sheriff agreed to give folks a couple of weeks to adjust before they began ticketing those not stopping. Islanders have always been an independent lot, and not always willing to abide by the “rules.” The stoplight remained at the intersection until 1965 when it was removed and replaced by a single blinking red light.



US Bank, 2015 Terry Donnelly

The 2015 photograph shows the main intersection as it is today. People's National Bank was purchased by US Bank, which still operates in the same building and has access through the "new" parking lot. The Hanson house is gone, and trees have grown to obscure the Olympic Mountains. And, in the middle of the intersection hangs a single red blinking light, which has grown to represent the rural small town atmosphere than so many seek on the island.

We would like to thank the Beachcomber for printing the Time&Again series, and thank Nancy Katica of Vashon Bookshop who graciously allowed us to use her ladder and her roof to take the photograph of the current US Bank building.

We are looking forward to doing the next fifty Time&Again articles.

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