

Wingehaven Park
Bruce Haulman, Karen Borell
and Terry Donnelly

Nestled in a deep ravine on the northeast shore of Vashon Island is the quiet, difficult to access, seldom visited, Wingehaven Park. It is a site that has been an early post office, a vacation home development, a fish farm, and a private estate variously known as Aquarium, Cowley's Landing, Twickenham, Twickenham Estates, Wingehaven, Northeast Vashon Park, and now Wingehaven Park.

The site has dramatic views across the Sound to Seattle and to Mount Rainier. From 1892 until 1909 it was the site of the Aquarium Post Office with a retired sea captain, fortuitously named Captain Fish, as the postmaster. Certainty in history is sometimes elusive, There was some question about exactly where Aquarium was located, but cruising on *Vashona* this summer, I happened to check NOAA Chart 18448, Puget Sound, Seattle to Olympia, and amazingly Aquarium is marked on the chart exactly where Wingehaven is located. Mystery solved. In 1909 the post office closed and in 1914 opened about one mile South at Glen Acres. In that same year, 1914, William Cowley, a Seattle real estate developer, and another self-described former sea captain, purchased the site to create a vacation home site called Twickenham after his reputed home village in England. Cowley built a large home, water gardens, a 200-foot concrete bulkhead, and a dock, called Cowley's Landing. There were at least twelve ponds created, one called "Virginia Waters", a warm water swimming pool, and another called Silent Pool, "the cold water hole."

Twickenham Estates was developed after Cowley moved his family back to Seattle in 1919. During the boom years after World War I it was developed to be sites for vacation homes. Although a model bungalow was built, no lots were ever sold and no homes were built as economic hard times hit Vashon during the 1920s agricultural depression (Vashon actually lost populations during the 1920s) and then the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Ernest Moy purchased the property in the late 1920s and used the ponds to farm fish for sale to aquariums. The 1933 *Vashon Island News-Record* advertised Twickenham Estates as a Water Gardens with goldfish, scavengers, plants, fish mosses, and water lilies for sale. The business flourished, but was continually damaged by spring flooding that would overflow the ponds and wash the fish into the Sound. During the 1940s the property was sold as a private summer residence to Seattle restaurant chain owner William Sanders. Then, in 1950, Carl Winge purchased the site and renamed it Wingehaven. The Winges remodeled the house and three generations of Winges owned the property until they sold it to King County in 1969. The "Forward Thrust" ballot initiative of 1968, raised \$118 million and allowed King County to purchase Wingehaven and rename it Northeast Vashon Park. In 1995, King County transferred the site to

Vashon Park District and it was renamed Wingehaven Park. In 1998, the Wingehaven Stewardship Group was formed to help support the park. That same year, Wingehaven became a Washington Water Trails Association campsite, part of the Cascadia Marine Trail that runs from the Canadian Border to Olympia and features over 55 campsites including Point Robinson and Lisabeula, also on Vashon-Maury island. The Water Trail campsites are for use only by human or wind-powered watercraft.



Wingehaven, 1930, Norman Edson.
Courtesy of the Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum

The Norman Edson photograph of Wingehaven at its peak about 1930 shows the house in the background to the left and the beach curving north to Dolphin Point on the right. In the foreground are a lily pond and the concrete bulkhead and Italianate balustrade with the Cowley's Landing dock heading toward the Sound on the right. The 2013 photograph by Terry Donnelly is taken from about the same location and shows what remains of this once amazing development. The balustrade was vandalized in 1999, destroying many of the poured concrete railings, columns, and urns. The King County Sheriff estimated the damage at \$80,000.



Wingehaven Park, Terry Donnelly.

Today Wingehaven is in very poor condition. The park is difficult to access because of limited and not well-signed parking, and it is rapidly being overgrown. Yet, Wingehaven has the potential to be one of the gems of Vashon Park District's waterfront parks.

Bruce Haulman is an island historian vashonhistory.com

Karen Borell is a writer for the Washington Water Trails Association

Terry Donnelly is a landscape photographer donnelly-austin.com