

The Judd Creek Bridge

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Judd Creek is the largest watershed on Vashon-Maury Island. The creek drains much of the middle of Vashon - from near Center on the east, north to Bank Road, and west to the Westside Highway - emptying into the northwest corner of Inner Quartermaster Harbor. It was once a thriving salmon stream and the valley at the estuary is deep enough to require the Island's only public bridge.

The Judd Creek Bridge is a Vashon-Maury icon. Originally constructed in the early 1890s to connect Burton and the growing communities at Center and Vashon, the first bridge was a simple log float across the creek, but was quickly replaced with a trestle bridge whose construction was typical of the times. Seen in this 1892 Oliver VanOlinda hand tinted photograph, the bridge spans the mouth of the Judd Creek estuary at a high tide. Note the lack of trees because the area had been heavily logged beginning in 1868 when William Patterson made the original Homestead claim. In 1888 Artemus W. Judd took title and the Creek was named after his family.



Judd Creek Bridge, 1892 – Oliver VanOlinda
Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

As the original bridge deteriorated over its 40-year career, it was replaced in 1929 with a new bridge that was celebrated with a all-island gathering at the Burton High School just to the southeast of the bridge.

In 1953 the present Judd Creek Bridge was constructed with a novel new construction technique developed by Homer M. Hadley, a notable Washington State bridge designer and engineer. Hadley, who proposed a floating bridge over Lake Washington in 1921, was the innovator of the concrete hollow cellular box construction technique that can be clearly seen in the 2013 Terry Donnelly photograph. The new bridge cost \$137,594 and was to be an Important link in the cross-island highway plan to connect Seattle and Tacoma when the proposed North End floating bridge completed. The ribbon-cutting ceremony cut a string of “bananas and snowballs” symbolizing the North-South split of the Island cut by the creek. The Judd Creek Bridge was designated a King County Landmark in 2004.



Judd Creek Bridge, 2013 – Terry Donnelly

When you compare the 1890s photograph with the 2013 photograph you can clearly see an encapsulated view of the ecological changes on Vashon-Maury Island in those 100+ years. In 1890 the trees are largely gone because they were logged for lumber, for fuel for steamers, and for the myriad other demands for wood products in the rapidly developing Puget Sound Region. Log skids and

other remnants of logging operations can be seen on the left in the photograph. Logs, debris, pilings and other evidence of human impact are clearly evident in the estuary because the upper reaches of Judd Creek had not yet been channelized by farming and thus the estuary had not been scoured out by high velocity water flows. And, the bridge is built of wood, the most readily available construction material at that time.

In the 2013 photograph, the estuary is reflective of contemporary Vashon-Maury Island. The trees have returned in the form of a dense second growth forest largely dominated by alder and fir. There is little debris because of the high water flows during significant storms. There is also little evidence of humans except for the bridge. There are several homes on the high bank north shore that are hidden by trees, and the house at the head of the estuary owned by Bill and Elaine Scott is behind the photographer. This bridge is a concrete bridge reflecting the post-World War II steel shortages and engineering advances that led to more large-scale concrete construction.

Bill and Elaine Scott have chosen to sell their 10 acres of the Judd Creek estuary to the Vashon Land Trust, who in cooperation with King County will allow the area to return to its natural state that was disrupted beginning in 1868 with William Patterson's claim. This is an important piece in the Land Trust's efforts to restore Judd Creek as a salmon stream. As recently as the 1970s, Judd Creek was home to four salmon runs, with fish so thick in the stream you could catch them by hand. Today, after extensive efforts to restore the salmon runs, only a few return each year. Once the Land Trust's full restoration of the creek that began this year with logs anchored along the streambed to create salmon habitat is complete, the salmon runs will expand and hopefully reach significant levels. The purchase of Jim and Elaine Scott's property at the mouth of the creek is a major part of this restoration effort.

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