

Ober Park

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Vashon Park District's Ober Park has long been a center for the Vashon community. The land was originally purchased 1884 by John Blackburn an early Vashon Postmaster and the first elected legislator to the Washington Territorial Legislature from Vashon. In 1886 Blackburn donated the land to the newly formed Vashon School District and in 1887 the Vashon School was built on the site. A new school was built in 1908, and the first school building behind the "new" school was used for storage. The original photo of the "new" Vashon School was taken in 1909.



1909 Vashon School – Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

When the new Vashon High/Grammar School was built a mile north of Vashon Town, the old Vashon School sat empty until in 1918 a plan to purchase the school was developed. 200 shares were sold at \$25 each to purchase the site and create a place for public meetings and to turn the grounds into a park. This was the beginning of a public effort to ensure that this public school site remained accessible to the public. In 1971 the site was transferred to King County Parks, and in 1992 to the Vashon Park District.

In 1926 The Vashon Women's Club acquired the site, renamed it Community House, and renovated the building into a community center. It served this

function for the next 50 years. With the construction of the new Vashon Union High School in 1930 and its new auditorium, Community House use declined significantly. It continued to be used for gatherings and functioned as the theater when the old Vashon Theatre burned in early 1946 until the current Vashon Theatre was opened in May of the next year.



1950 Island Club – Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum

With the need for a public meeting place made clear by the loss of the theater, the Veteran's Memorial Foundation raised \$8,000 to take over the property, remodel the building, and renamed it The Island Club. The 1887 first school building behind the Island Club was remodeled into the Boy Scout Cabin.

In 1971 the Veteran's Memorial Foundation gave the Island Club, Scout Cabin, and land to King County. The County used \$20,000 in Forward Thrust funds to demolish the old school buildings, construct the current Ober Park building, and develop the open space and berms. The new park was named for John Ober, longtime Postmaster at Vashon Post Office, Scoutmaster of the Vashon Scout Troop for many years, and leader of the Veterans Memorial Foundation.

The King County Library System negotiated with the King County Parks to construct the new Vashon Library at the Ober Park site. The old Memorial Library (now the Senior Center on Bank Road) closed on December 10, 1983 and the next week began "moving week" that moved all the books and materials into the new Ober Park library building. The new Vashon Library opened on

January 14, 1984. Later that same year, in September, the site became home of Vashon Teen Center.

After a long campaign to find a use for the abandoned Nike site at Paradise Ridge, Vashon voters approve the formation of King County Park and Recreation District No. 2 in November 1983. The name was changed to Vashon Park District in 1985 to reflect the fact that it was a solely Vashon-Maury Island district. In August 1992 the Vashon Park District took over management of the Ober Park site from King County as the County sought to reduce its parks and recreation budgets.



2010 Ober Park – Terry Donnelly

The current photo was taken in 2010 and shows the Ober Park site with the 1971 building, the bermed area and the landscaping.

With Vashon Parks in charge, new activities were introduced to the Ober Park site. In May 1999 the Summer Concert in the Park Series began at Ober Park. In September 2001, after a significant community fund raising and construction effort, The Friends of Ober Park opened the new Children's Playground Area.

The site has not been without controversy. The construction of the open berm area in 1972 was met with numerous negative comments and letters in the *Beachcomber*. In 2004, when County voters approved a capital bond to expand the King County Library System, Vashon was promised a new 10,000 square foot branch library. This led to a 2007 conflict between the Vashon Park District

and the King County Library System over the remodel of the Library at Ober Park. The King County Library System began looking for a new library site that was not at Ober Park and in September 2008 signed a pledge to move the new library to the K2 Commons site. This led to a community outcry against moving the library from Ober Park, which led the King County Library Board to direct that the library remain at Ober Park. The existing library building is in the planning process for a remodel and expansion by 3,800 square feet.