

Portage Dock

The photograph in the University of Washington Digital Collection is a bit of a misnomer when it was labeled the “Portage Bridge, 1908.” The “bridge” is actually the Portage Dock that was originally built in the 1900. The original Van Olinda Store to the right of the dock was built in 1903 and moved further to the right in 1910 when the present larger “new” store was built. Thus, the “Portage Bridge 1908,” was not a bridge but a dock and the photograph may well have been taken in 1908 but not later than 1910 when the “new” store was built.



The original photograph also shows the Portage House hotel to the left of the dock, which was built by S.D. Sherman in 1906. Therefore, the date 1908 is probably correct, after the hotel was built in 1906 but before the original store was moved and the new store built in 1910.

The labeling of archival photographs is a risky business!

In 1916, Portage became the site of the first automobile ferry from Vashon to the mainland when King County built an automobile loading dock at the site of the current King County Fishing Dock. When the Seattle-Des Moines Highway was completed, the County opened ferry service to Vashon from Des Moines to take

advantage of the new highway. King County had the first diesel automobile ferry on Puget Sound built and christened it the "Vashon Island."

By making the ferry part of the King County Road System, the County established an early precedent of considering ferries as marine highways, a concept that still holds today with the Washington State Ferry System. However, the Portage-Des Monies ferry was short lived. It was abandoned in 1921 in favor of the more convenient Vashon Heights-Harper (just north of Southworth) - Fauntleroy ferry route as roads in West Seattle quickly improved, automobiles became more available, and when a new concrete highway was constructed linking Vashon Town to the Heights Ferry Dock.

Mosquito Fleet boats continued to use the Portage dock into the early 1930s when the dock was finally abandoned and removed by King County.



All that is left of the original Portage Dock is the series of cut-off pilings that can be seen in the current photograph taken at low tide in early July 2008. The "new" 1906 Portage Store sits in place at the end of where the dock touched shore, the original 1903 store sits to the right (North) of the "new" store where it was moved in 1906, and the 1906 Portage House hotel is gone, torn down in 1928 and replaced by a home.

The view over Portage into Inner Quartermaster Harbor is much the same. The short road to the Inner Harbor has been widened but largely unchanged. The new expanded Dockton Road runs along the bulkhead and the fishing shed which sits on the bulkhead in the original photograph is long gone as the road was expanded in the 1920s.

Original Photograph – University of Washington Digital Collection

Current Photograph – Terry Donnelly

Originally printed in the Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber January 13, 2010