

Vashon YMCA / Theater

Vashon has had a theater since the early part of the 20th Century. In 1904, the YMCA built a building on the main street of Vashon Village just to the north of the Presbyterian Church where Movie Magic is located in 2010. The photo of the Vashon Theater taken in the early 1930's shows the Presbyterian Church just to the south and three Model A Fords and one Model T parked in the street between them. The building was built close to the corner with only the sidewalk between the building and the main street of Vashon Town.



The YMCA closed in the early 1910s and was converted to a theater to show movies from Hollywood which were just emerging as an important new entertainment and artistic medium. In 1926, the Burfields, who owned the theater, converted it to a true "movie house" by introducing the new Vitapone form of sound-on-disk "talking picture" technology that used synchronized film and pressed vinyl recordings. It was apparently only the second installation of this new technology on the West Coast. This technology was flawed since it was nearly impossible to keep the film and the recording synchronized.

Unfortunately, sound-on-film technology that imprinted a synchronized visual sound strip on the film developed quickly and soon replaced sound-on-disk. Sound-on-film became the standard for Hollywood films by the early 1930s and the old Vitaphone equipment was put into storage behind the stage where it remained until the theater burned in 1946.

Charles Geizentanner purchased the theater in 1944 and was the owner when a fire destroyed the building on February 24, 1946. The origins of the fire are unknown, but the fire was fanned by 20 mile-per-hour southwest winds and the Vashon Fire Department fought to keep it from spreading to the Brenno Shell Garage to the north and kept the Presbyterian Church to the south wetted down to keep it from igniting.

With the building destroyed, Geizentanner showed films at the Island Club, the old Vashon School located where Ober Park is today, until a new theater could be constructed. In August 1946 an investment group was formed and contracted with A.C. Harrington to build a new theater across Main Street that is the current Vashon Theater. The new theater opened on May 29, 1947 with a double feature of “Two Guys From Milwaukee” and “The Big Sleep.”



The current photograph shows the Movie Magic Building with the essentially unchanged Presbyterian Church to the south. The Movie Magic building was originally built in the 1960s as the Brenno Shell Gas Station and is set well back from the road unlike the old Vashon Theater. The site has returned to its roots of providing movie entertainment to the Island, if only in DVD format.

Vashon Theater - Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Association

Current Photograph – Terry Donnelly