

# Astoria is ripe for a fictional detective

Full disclosure. I am incapable of writing fiction. My ensuing proposal is not an advertisement for myself.

For more than a decade, I have issued a plea that Astoria would find its Faulkner. The age of the town, its mix of ethnicities and its extensive family histories make it ripe for a multigenerational historical novel. Over decades, the names are in Astoria's phone books.

Masterpiece Mystery's new priest-detective, the Rev. Sidney Chambers, on the series *Grantchester* reinforces another idea I've nurtured for years. As an Episcopal priest, Chambers stumbles across murder in his small parish. He shares his insights with a hard-boiled police constable — Geordie Keating — and they catch criminals.



Steve Forrester

Chambers is the most recent in a line of fictional place-based detectives. Having the priest and the constable play off each other's perceptions of the world makes excellent theater.

Stephen Dobyns offers an example of how to turn a historic town into a detective's workplace. An English professor at Syracuse University, Dobyns has set 10 mysteries in Saratoga Springs in upstate New York. Dobyns' detective is Charlie Bradshaw. All of his cases touch on or are embroiled in the colorful and sometimes sordid world of horse racing. The bars, restaurants and track hangouts where Bradshaw meets clients are real places in Saratoga.

What Dobyns shows is that you don't need a canvas as large as Los Angeles or New York to establish the props for a quirky detective.

Matt Winters, publisher of our sister newspaper the *Chinook Observer*, is quite smitten with *Grantchester*. Matt says that if there were an Episcopal priest like Sidney Chambers, played by James Norton, he would be drawn to the church. Norton's flawed character is battle-scarred from World War II, he drinks a lot and loves jazz. Chambers keeps stumbling across murders in the village of Grantchester, a place that you will find on the map of England, next to Cambridge. Matt notes that the real Grantchester holds a record for its number of Nobel laureates in residence.



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

The Voodoo Room would be a great place for a detective to meet clients.



The stars of "Grantchester," Sidney Chambers (James Norton), right, and Detective Inspector Geordie Keating (Robson Green) pose in the town of Grantchester.

Muriel Jensen is the closest we've come to an Astoria mystery writer. Muriel has, in fact, placed one of her some 95 romance novels in a town modeled on Astoria. Years ago, Muriel told a Columbia Forum audience that she once tried writing a mystery. But, she said, her Catholic roots caused her "to confess by the third chapter."

Nonetheless, Astoria's places and people make it a rich terrain for a fictional detective. Perhaps he'll be a passionate fisherman, spending time on a gillnet boat sorting out evidence — separating red herrings from solid clues.

Our detective could live at the Commodore Hotel and drop down to Street 14 Coffee to beat his hangover. If the author wanted to make our detective more

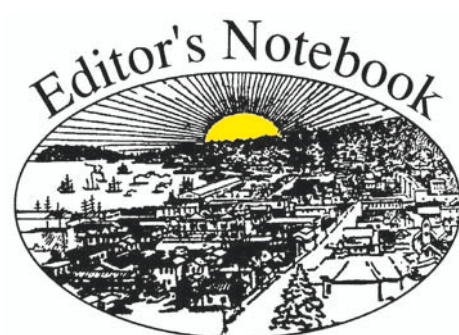
upscale, he could live at the Hotel Elliott.

An office on the second floor of the Liberty Theater would open up the ghosts angle.

The Voodoo Room would be fertile habitat for meeting with clients.

Astoria's history abounds with eccentrics who could be brought forward in time as walk-on characters. Among the living, there is the hotelier Robert Jacob. In the not distant past there was Kermit Gimre, who could have been cast in one of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple mysteries. Much further back there was the shanghaier Bridget Grant and the madam Anna Bay. And, of course, the Flavels.

Astoria's ethnic mix of Finns, Swedes,



*Our detective could live in the Commodore Hotel and meet clients in the Voodoo Room.*

Norwegians, Chinese and even Sikhs offers another element. Some 20 years ago Ellen Madsen was proprietor of Little Denmark, a bakery where Cafe Rio now resides. One of our reporters, Mary Ellen Scofield, had been an exchange student in Denmark. She occasionally visited Little Denmark and spoke Danish with Ellen Madsen. Mary Ellen discovered that Madsen's Danish was antique, untouched by modern idioms.

Fictional detectives often have a friend who is an unwitting or purposeful collaborator. Dr. Watson is the most renowned of this species. Our architectural historian John Goodenberger would make an excellent foil, as a guide through Astoria's archaeology of homes, intermarriage among families and the deep well of the town's eccentrics.

—S.A.F.

## Appointments could alter fish and wildlife management

By DUANE DUNGANNON  
For The Daily Astorian

As the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission introduced its three finalists for the vacant Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife director position in early February, the state's sportsmen were reminded again how important the chemistry of this commission is to Oregon hunters and wildlife.

The governor will fill two vacancies on the commission this spring, and the selections, to be confirmed by the Oregon Senate, could radically alter the direction of Oregon's wildlife management — for better or worse.

This unpaid seven-member body is presently tasked with selecting the director who will guide the agency that manages our fish and wildlife resources. A total of

1,262 full-time employees are charged with managing our state's precious fish and wildlife, but only seven individuals not employed by the agency are responsible for hiring its director and adopting its administrative rules. In the past, some of those rules were made to be broken.

One current commissioner, Bob Webber, is a founding member of the Oregon Hunters Association and a former chairman of the OHA State Board of Directors. When Webber attended the first OHA organizational meeting in the Rogue Valley 32 years ago, Oregon elk herds suffered in some parts of the state, and the commission was more a part of the problem than any solution.

Vic Coggins, a retired ODFW district biologist who found himself at ground zero in northeast Oregon's "elk wars" of the 1980s, recalls that agricultural interests wanted elk removed to improve



Duane Dungannon

range conditions for livestock. He recounts how the governor, who appointed a disproportionate number of commissioners from the livestock industry, flew over Zumwalt Prairie and declared there were too many elk there, and so the commission began issuing tags for what amounted to a wholesale slaughter of Wallowa County's elk herds.

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In response, OHA arose from the embers of an elk hunting campfire.

Coggins notes that the situation improved over the next decade, largely the result of more responsible management from the commission, which listens to ODFW's local field biologists who have their boots on the ground.

But there could be cause for

concern that the pendulum may swing too far the other direction — not due to catering too much to the livestock industry, but rather due to overprotection of predators and a move away from managing for optimum big game populations.

Coggins observes that hunters and anglers are the agency's customers and the primary-but-declining source of revenue for the department. Deer and elk herds have declined since Measure 18

banned the use of dogs to control cougars in 1994, and so have license and tag sales. The sales of cougar tags and taxes on bird seed will never fund an agency with a new headquarters in Salem, 25 district and field offices, 33 hatchery facilities, 15 fish-rearing facilities, 16 wildlife areas and 1,262 full-time equivalent employees. To fix ODFW's recurring budget woes, the commission must cater to its customers by controlling predation and improving the quality of deer and elk hunting.

Removing wolves from the state ESA now that wolves have reached the threshold for delisting outlined in Oregon's Wolf Plan would be a big step in the right direction for the commission. OHA is poised to petition the commission to delist wolves this year so that wolves can be managed with the rest of Oregon's wildlife in a comprehensive management plan, rather than continuing as an apex predator with diplomatic immunity.

Let's all hope that the two commission vacancies are filled with knowledgeable, responsible individuals who understand the importance of hunting and fishing, not only to the department's customers, but to the state's economy, as well. From there, it's up to those seven individuals to make the right decisions for the benefit of ODFW's mission: "to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations."

Duane Dungannon is the state coordinator for the 10,000-member nonprofit Oregon Hunters Association.



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