



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

ABOVE Classic Christmas crackers sit ready to be opened at the Flavel House.

RIGHT A small Santa pillow sits on a green armchair with a decorated tree in the background.



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Locals and visitors alike are more than familiar with the Astoria architectural landmark. It was built in 1885 in Queen Anne style by Captain George Flavel, one of the first Columbia River bar pilots and millionaires in the area, and his wife, Mary Christina Flavel. The captain sailed around Cape Horn and participated in the California Gold Rush before settling in Astoria, where he operated a wharf and imported coal from Australia. Mary Christina crossed the plains in an ox team caravan at the age of eight. The two met at a hotel in Portland and married when she was 14 and he was 30. They had three children: George Conrad who also became a captain; Katie who studied French, played the violin and kept a copious journal; and Nellie, who became a classically trained pianist.

Captain Flavel became a local hero when the ship SS General Warren was damaged in a storm. Though 42 people died with the sinking, Flavel's valiant efforts to save the ship and passengers endeared him to the town. He later became the president of the bank of Astoria, and his funeral procession was one of the largest in the town's history.

The couple built the 11,600 square foot house that spans a whole city block as their retirement home. They acquired trees for the property on various voyages around the world. An octagonal tower offers 360 degree views of Astoria and the Colum-

bia River ship traffic. The nearby carriage house once held a sleigh, small buggies and horses they eventually replaced with a Studebaker.

Nellie and Katie, who never married, gave recitals in the music room and lived in the mansion until their death. The home survived the great fire of 1922, and in 1934 the Flavel's great-granddaughter donated it to the city as a memorial for her family. During World War II the Public Health Department, Red Cross and Welfare Commission all had offices in the house. Demolition was considered several times, but forward thinking locals organized to save the structure and turn it into a museum.

Today, it remains a monument to the opulence of the gilded era built on the edge of a frontier. The home is on the National Registry of Historical Places and is owned and operated by the Clatsop County Historical Society. It received a cameo appearance in "The Goonies" when Mikey's father worked there as a curator. The last Flavel descendent, Mary Louise, left the community in 1990 amid a swirl of controversy. She and her brother Harry were polarizing figures, often eliciting curiosity, gossip and ire.

In light of St. Clair's recommendation, perhaps warm plum pudding at the annual Holiday Tea and Plum Pudding is exactly what is needed to invite feelings of good will and reconciliation between our Astoria community and those eccentric Flavels.



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