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# WEEKEND BREAK



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## Discovering Capt. Johnson

A homeowner's quest to understand the man who once lived in his home

By CHANCE SOLEM-PFEIFER  
For The Astorian

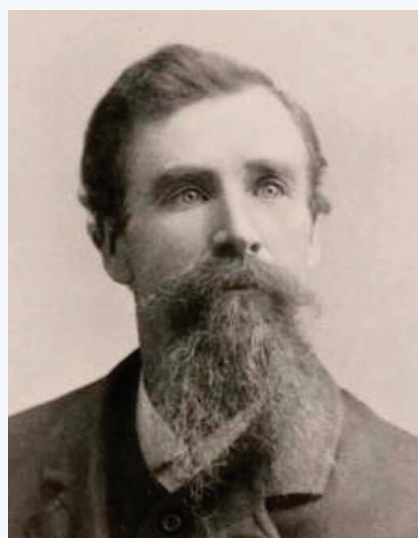
Capt. Eric Johnson wasn't the original resident of the nearly 150-year-old Astoria home that now bears his name. But the captain's local history made him namesake-worthy, in owner John Windus' estimation.

"People like sea captains," said Windus, who restored the Victorian home to serve as his retirement residence and an Airbnb.

He's placed portraits of Johnson and his gargantuan mustache around the home — from the main staircase to branded tote bags hanging in the hall.

Johnson sailed as an early Columbia River bar pilot under Capt. George Flavel while inhabiting the house on 9th Street and Franklin Avenue until his death in 1905.

More than 100 years later, the captain's former home needed work. When Windus, a Longview, Washington, native and 47-year veteran of regional radio, bought the home from The Astorian in 2018, there was no heat upstairs, rats scuttled the basement and generations of pet odor clung to old carpet.



**ABOVE:** According to historical records, Capt. Eric Johnson never had a major accident after more than three decades on the water. **BELOW:** Retired radio man John Windus bought and restored the historic Capt. Eric Johnson house in Astoria.

"When the house was in escrow, I went in there to run cords out, and the place was just garbage," said contractor Matt Chappell, who spearheaded the restoration.

The journey from stinky old house to guest-ready historic landmark took the better part of three years. Windus advises anyone restoring a 100-year-old home to take their time. Chappell compares the process to an immense puzzle.

"There's nothing square, there's nothing plumb, you're always fighting something with that house," Chappell said. "It's got so much character."

Today, the home could appear grand, cozy or esoteric — depending on the angle. Its wrap-around veranda owes to a bungalow-style renovation in the 1920s. The parlor is modern and inviting, resembling many coastal Airbnbs furnished largely by Ikea (a cost-effective inside joke to Johnson's Swedish heritage). The home's upstairs anchors around a bizarre, rounded wall, adding a hint of maze-like mystery.

Those eclectic aesthetics highlight one dilemma of restoring a home

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