

A Timeline of Captain George Flavel

And Astoria

In some ways, the story I have told in the book, *Captain George Flavel*, is not only a story of the captain, but also a story of Astoria, Oregon. I have combined the timelines to the point of the captain's death and the mansion's passing into the hands of Clatsop County.

The Founding of Astoria

John Jacob Astor wanted to launch a seaport and trading hub on the Pacific rim. He launched the ship *Tonquin* on September 8, 1810, captained by US Navy Lieutenant Jonathan Thorne. Departing New York harbor, the ship traveled around Cape Horn and arrived off the coast of Oregon on March 11, 1811. At the Columbia River bar, they faced powerful storms and tides and were puzzled about how to cross the bar. After tragic attempts and loss of life, they chose to establish their outpost on a location, named Point George nineteen years earlier by Captain George Vancouver. On Friday, April 12, 1811, the first party began clearing the site for a trading post to be called the Pacific Fur Company; they set foot on Point George and established Fort Astoria (*Captain*, p. 19). The more complete narrative of the journey is in the book, Appendix C.

Introduction to Captain George Flavel

“If I am alive, I will return.” I was intrigued by this vow George Flavel made to the captain of a foundering merchant ship before he rowed with others to summon help for the troubled ship.

In a visit to the Flavel House in Astoria, Oregon, I viewed the introductory video in the carriage house. I was intrigued by the person of Captain Flavel in the film’s introduction to the captain and his house in Astoria.¹ For most of us, decisions are governed by personal benefit and comfort. The captain seemed to be governed by pluck, character, courage, and selflessness. I asked at the bookstore, “Do you have a book on Captain George Flavel?” I was told no book had been written.

I love to read, and the narratives of history intrigue me. I love stories that grip the heart and will. From what I had learned, the captain’s life was a story of piloting endangered ships and their passengers, directing an effective pilot association, and giving character and service to the city and citizens of Astoria. As I began to gather materials, I encountered the Clatsop County Historical Society, which has diligently investigated and preserved the history of Astoria and the county. The society had valuable material on Flavel, though the materials are not readily visible to the public. The collections of the Astoria Public Library and the Columbia River Maritime Museum also contain valuable reference material that I found helpful.

Though the captain and others spent a night and a day seeking to rescue the ship in the aforementioned incident, most of its passengers were lost. But the greater rescue the captain achieved was the building of the city of Astoria. As a bar pilot at the mouth of the nearby Columbia River, and as a businessman, he spent his life there, invested his resources to advance the city's interests, and saw the city grow by more than tenfold.

I hope you will enjoy a journey into the captain's life as much as I continue to do.

Overland Party and Fort Astoria

Coinciding with the attempt to establish the trading fort of Astoria on the Oregon Coast by water, Astor chose Wilson Price Hunt to lead an overland party, departing Manhattan in the summer of 1810. They gathered a large overland party, many of whom were "Norwesters," or those mentored by the North West Company, veterans of the fur trade and the outdoors. A more complete account of the overland journey is given in Appendix B.

With the purpose of further trade, Thorne and the *Tonquin* left Astoria on June 5, 1811, without unloading their full store for the fort. They purposed to trade along the coast for furs, then to visit Alexander Baranof at the Russian Fort at Sitka, Alaska. The ship and its cargo were subsequently destroyed, all passengers being lost except one Native American, called Lamazee by one author (*Captain*, pp. 20-22).

On May 9, 1812, a second ship, the *Beaver*, arrived at Fort Astoria, sent by Astor. It was captained by Cornelius Sowle, a more gracious commander than Thorne. The ship brought a

fresh supply of trade goods, as Astor's men were finding the country rich in furs. The ship carried clerk Alfred Seton, whose journals are recorded in *Astorian Adventure*. At his arrival, he describes the fort as situated on the rising bank of the Columbia River in a thickly wooded country of pines, spruce, and hemlock. He found a square fort, eighty to ninety feet long on each side, enclosed by picket logs twelve to fourteen feet high. On opposite corners were two two-story bastions, each equipped with three or four swivel guns. The fort enclosed two buildings, one of which served as quarters for the troops and staff. The ground between the fort and the river had been cleared and fenced. Near the center of the cleared section was a platform with four six-pound cannons. An American flag flew from a flagstaff on this platform. In the back of the fort the woods were still thick, but regular efforts were being made to clear it. (*Captain*, p. 22)

On January 15, 1813, Donald McKenzie reached Astoria with word from the interior that the United States had declared war on Great Britain in June 1812. He also reported that the British ship *Isaac Todd* was enroute to the Columbia to capture Astoria. That October, a flotilla carrying seventy-five employees of the North West Company landed at Astoria to await the arrival of the *Isaac Todd*. Under duress, and not equipped for warfare, Duncan McDougall decided to sell the post and its stockpile of furs to the Nor'Westers for a fraction of its actual value. On October 13, 1813, the North West Company purchased Astoria for the sum of \$58,000 (*Astoria*, p. 25).

It was not the *Isaac Todd* but the faster sloop-of-war *Raccoon* that entered the Columbia to capture the Pacific Fur Company headquarters. Determined to carry out his orders despite the

sale of Astoria two months prior, Captain William Black of the *Raccoon* went ashore and oversaw Fort Astoria's formal surrender on Dec. 12, 1813. The Union Jack was hoisted, and Astoria became a wartime prize of Great Britain (*Astoria*, p. 25).

Captain Black left the fort in the hands of the North West Company, who renamed it Fort George in honor of King George III of England. When the War of 1812 ended with the Treaty of Ghent on Christmas Eve, 1814, the treaty provision said that all lands captured during the conflict were to be returned to the country with the previous title. Nobody knew what to do with Astoria. Astor claimed that Captain Black had captured his outpost, and it should be returned. But the Nor'Westers claimed that they had legally purchased it before Captain Black's arrival. With his Columbia River monopoly ruined, Astor chose to give up on his ambitious western plan, and with it the American presence in Astoria. It was not again returned to American possession until 1846. At that time, the town was described as having ten houses, a copper and blacksmith's shop, and a warehouse (*Captain*, p. 22).

Axel Madsen in his book *John Jacob Astor* lists a total of sixty-one lives lost that resulted from Astor's attempt to extend the Pacific Fur Company from coast to coast. Central to the loss were the destructive actions of Captain Thorne of the *Tonquin*, which cost thirty-five lives. Clerk Ross, who was part of the founding of the fort, concluded "How vain are the designs of man . . . That undertaking which but yesterday promised such mighty things is today no more."

Hudson's Bay Company

In 1818, a joint occupancy treaty was signed, giving both the United States and Great Britain equal claims to the Pacific Northwest. Three years later, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) absorbed the Northwest Company and under factor, George Simpson moved their headquarters ninety miles upriver where they established Fort Vancouver. The HBC governors, reasoning that the Columbia River might become the international boundary between the United States and British Canada, abandoned Fort George, seldom stationing more than a handful of employees there. The soggy coastal climate wore away at Astoria's fortifications, and by the 1830s little remained except a few log cabins.

Fort Vancouver was constructed in 1825 on a bluff overlooking the river. Though the site was assumed to be more secure from Indian attack, as a result, all persons and cargo coming from the river had to travel uphill. It was subsequently moved down on the plain, a site more accessible to the river. Dr. John McLoughlin, a former North West Company physician, was hired to administer the business of the fort with the title Chief Factor. He took much of the equipment and supplies from Fort George, which then became nothing more than a lookout station (*Astoria*, p. 27).

In Astoria in 1844, H. H. Hunt and Ben Wood built the first sawmill on the Columbia River. In 1848, James Welch set up the first mill in Astoria at about Ninth and Commercial Streets. By the 1850s, Astoria boasted four water-powered mills and Oregon's first steam-powered mill.

The outpost once again returned as an American possession and regained the name of Astoria

following the Oregon Treaty of 1846. At that time the town was described as having ten houses, a copper and blacksmith's shop, and a warehouse.

Astoria was slow to develop—for almost a half-century there were no improved streets, nor were there any docks or wharfs. Vessels anchored in the river sent their freight and passengers ashore in small boats.

George Flavel Origins

Some records placed the birth of George Flavel in British North Ireland. But census takers place his birth in New Jersey, along with his parents. George Flavel was born on November 17, 1823. The earliest primary record of Captain Flavel is a certificate of membership for the Odd Fellows Lodge in Norfolk, Virginia, stating he joined the organization on October 5, 1846. (*Captain*, p. 13). It was from the eastern seaport of Norfolk that Flavel left in January 1849, as captain of the *John Petty* (*Captain*, pp. 13-14).

Early Astoria

In the late 1840s, in Astoria, the need arose for passenger service up and down the Columbia River. Beginning in 1847, B. C. Kindred made his living running a passenger boat from Astoria to upriver points. It took three days to make the trip from Astoria to Oregon City. The fare was twenty dollars, but the passengers often found themselves helping to row the boat. His passenger boat was successful until steamers drove him out of business. The first steamship built in Oregon was the *Columbia*. It was built by John Adair and their partners (*Astoria*, p. 48).

In 1846, the first shipwreck of major consequence took place while the *USS Shark* attempted to cross the bar. Survivors of the wreck assembled remnants of the wreckage in Astoria for shelter, a small, crude log dwelling. A cannon from the wreck is on display at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

The Boelling Family

Mary Flavel's family, the Boellings, who had come across the plains, found primitive lodging in the Shark house when they moved to Astoria. Their move was made during an especially cold winter, 1848-1849, when they were waiting for Conrad Boelling, the father, to return from the goldfields (*Captain*, p .54).

In the book, I add Mary Flavel's story because she made her pioneer journey in 1847. Mary's story had been told in a 1922 interview with Fred Lockley. She and her family came across the plains in 1847 when Mary was eight years old. Her father had two prairie schooners, each pulled by two yokes of oxen. One time a party of Pawnees blocked their path, saying they had no right to come into their country and scare the buffalo away. The family gave them bread, flour, and other provisions, so the Indians let them go on. When they reached the area of Vancouver, her father, Conrad, looked for a site for a sawmill, for which he had brought machinery across the plains. He took up a donation land claim on Young's River and began to build a dam and sawmill. But plans were derailed when news came of the California gold rush. Mary's father and most of the other men went to seek their fortune in the mines. The family subsisted the best they could but finally moved to the Shark House in Astoria. With a housing shortage in town, about ten

dwellings, no other home was available (*Captain*, pp. 53-54).

Conrad Boelling, Mary's father, returned from the goldfields on April 3, 1849, on the *Valdora*, the same vessel which brought John Adair, who established the first US Customs House on the west coast at Astoria. Conrad returned with \$1,500 worth of gold dust from gold mining. But instead of returning to build the dam and sawmill he had begun with the equipment he had brought across the plains, he set about building a boarding house. This Astoria (or Boelling) Hotel stood on Ninth Street between Bond (now Marine Drive) and Astor, until it was destroyed in 1922 by fire. The hotel was completed by the spring of 1850, for it was then Mary Flavel recorded the first visit of Captain Flavel, at that time captain of the *Goliah*, at the hotel (*Captain*, pp. 54-55).

Concerning the returning miners, Mary says, "The miners returning from California were starved out for home cooking and were willing to pay good prices for meals. Sometimes there would be nearly a hundred passengers at once swoop in on us, so we all worked. My mother's mother was with us, and she was a good hand at working. The men who boarded with us would leave big buckskin sacks of gold dust with father for safekeeping. He had no safe, so he used to keep them under the bed (*Captain*, p. 54).

Because Mary was exposed to all aspects of housekeeping in her father's hotel and boarding house, she was known as a meticulous housekeeper in her own home.

The Columbia River Bar

Crossing the Columbia River bar was the first challenge a sailing ship faced when it approached the mighty river. The second was to successfully maneuver the ship through the river's changing channels and shifting shoals. The early sailors had no charts and relied on Indians to help them cross the dreaded bar and guide them upriver. Before 1846 there were no legal requirements for those seeking to pilot ships across the Columbia River bar. I have described how Indians or locals were sometimes used, but they did not take control of the ships, rather they offered their knowledge of the river, warning the captain of hazards, and suggesting maneuvers. Junior officers from the Hudson's Bay Company and adventurous settlers followed the Indians as a bar and river pilots, resulting in many mishaps (*Astoria*, p. 48).

In 1847 John Shively returned from Washington, DC with a commission as postmaster. He opened the first United States post office west of the Rocky Mountains and ran the post office from his home on Fifteenth Street between Exchange and Franklin. This regional center distributed mail throughout the areas now known as Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Postage was forty cents. The Shively home was demolished in 1907. A marble obelisk now marks the spot (*Astoria*, p. 36).

In response to urgent pressure to regulate pilotage in the region, in December 1846, the Oregon Territorial Legislature formed the Oregon Board of Pilot Commissioners. Later, on September 19, 1849, they passed a more detailed declaration. They chose to award licenses only to qualified ship captains. In 1847, the first Oregon bar-pilot licenses were issued by the

commissioners to Selah C. Reeves and Charles White (also known as John, Cornelius, or Neil White). Reeves made several trips to San Francisco to meet vessels desiring to navigate the Columbia. He did not fare well as a bar pilot, and after he ran the Hudson's Bay ship *Vancouver* aground, he was accused of pilfering its goods. Reeves' license was subsequently revoked in the summer of 1848. He lost his life in 1849 when his vessel capsized during a squall (*Captain*, p. 24).

Though nothing is known of his nautical training, on January 1849, George Flavel left Norfolk, Virginia, as master of the *John Petty*. He carried fourteen passengers and goods for the California gold rush. The type of ship he captained—a brig—was a sailing vessel with two square-rigged masts. They were fast and maneuverable and were used as both merchant vessels and naval warships. The design, popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries during the sailing era, fell out of use with the arrival of steamships. A brig required a relatively large crew for its small size and was difficult to sail into the wind (*Captain*, p. 14).

His journey around the Horn of South America was delayed by an accident for which he stopped for repairs in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil (*Captain*, p. 14).

In April 1849, John Adair established a US Customs House in Astoria. His duties were to “report all vessels arriving or departing . . . and to keep a diligent watch on the coast to see that none of the Russian or Hudson's Bay Company vessels came around either for smuggling or trading with the Indians.” While searching for land on which to build his customs house, nobody in lower Astoria was willing to either donate land or offer a fair price. He was forced to build the customs house across Scow Bay in upper Astoria, which also became known as “Adairsville” or

“Uppertown.” A replica of the building stands near the 1852 location (Astoria, pp. 42, 49).

Prior to 1849, the Hudson’s Bay Company owned the only store in town. It was a crude operation, selling its goods from boxes. Adam Van Dusen arrived in the spring of 1849 and reportedly opened the first general store in Astoria where goods were displayed on shelves (*Captain*, p. 53).

The arrival of the *John Petty* and Captain George Flavel

In October and November 1849, Flavel and the *John Petty* arrived in San Francisco after a journey around the horn of South America. On their arrival, Flavel found the “gateway to the goldfields” filled with ships and the market overstocked. Though most of the passengers disembarked, Flavel sold precious little of his cargo. He was advised to take his cargo north to Portland (*Captain*, p. 14).

Captain George Flavel first passed Astoria in the *John Petty* on November 12 to 14, 1849, on his way to Portland. This would have been his first view of Astoria. In Portland, Flavel sold all his cargo at a profit to a William Hopkins or Hipkins [both spellings exist]. November 15, 1849, *Oregon Spectator* advertised goods on the ship “from the United States” (*Captain*, p. 14).

Flavel returned to San Francisco and Sacramento, curious about the prospect of the goldfields. He tried his hand at gold mining, likely from December 1849, to early 1850. But he soon returned to what he knew—sailing, for, on February 7, 1850, he again arrived in Portland as captain of the *John Petty* with merchandise for William Hopkins (*Captain*, pp. 14-15).

Early Pilots

On Christmas day, 1849, *Mary Taylor*, a sixty-foot schooner, arrived with Captain J. G. Hustler, to be the first pilot schooner on the Columbia River bar. One record shows her sailing from the East Coast on January 13, 1849, for California. The ship had been purchased by Captain Hustler and Captain Cornelius White. White had previously piloted with Hustler in New York. Outside the Columbia River bar, the schooner met inbound ships and boarded a pilot. Hustler and his five pilots (pictured in *Captain* illustrations) no doubt guided Flavel across the bar in his passages. In 1850 and 1851 the *Mary Taylor* was the only bar pilot boat on the bar. Because all five pilots pictured with Hustler in the illustrations had associations with Flavel, I have listed their relationship with him, particularly in bar piloting. (*Captain*, pp. 24-25).

***Charles Edwards**—after piloting with Jackson Hustler on the *Mary Taylor*, Edwards piloted for Flavel on the new bar pilot ship, the *California*. One of the earliest bar pilots, he was part of Flavel's original team of four pilots.

***A. C. Farnsworth**—George and Mary bought their first residence and Block 41 from Captain Asa Cole Farnsworth (1819-1874), who not only piloted for Jackson Hustler but went on to pilot for Flavel. He purchased part interest in the *California* and the *Jane A. Falkenberg*.

***Alfred Crosby**—One of Hustler's piloting team who went on to pilot for Flavel and at times took over as the captain of the *California*. Crosby was twenty-five years old when he came west on the bark *Toulon* to try his luck in the California mines. According to Russell Dark, he panned

enough gold in a few months to enable him to join George Flavel in the purchase of the schooner *California*. When Paul Corno sought to displace Flavel and the *California* on the bar, Crosby was one of the pilots to get a replacement bar pilot license from Washington at the county seat in Oysterville. When the steam tug *Astoria* was launched, Crosby was one of the owners.

***Moses Rogers**—Mary Flavel’s brother-in-law. George and Mary were married in his home on Young’s River, to escape the “shivaree,” a hazing tradition of newly married couples. Though related by marriage, it does not seem that Rogers ever piloted for Flavel. Instead, when Paul Corno sought to displace Flavel in 1865 with the *Rabboni*, Moses Rogers was one of his pilots on the steam tug. Though it is strange that a family member would work for Flavel’s competitor, we have no other information about competition between the two. It is possible that Moses Rogers was envious of Flavel’s success.

***Jackson Gregory Hustler**—Born in New York City, Hustler began his long career at sea at age thirteen. Trained in the US Navy, he was a harbor pilot for five years in New York. In 1849, he sailed to San Francisco in the Gold Rush. With his partner Cornelius White he purchased the schooner *Mary Taylor* and installed her as the first vessel to pilot ships across the Columbia River bar, arriving Christmas, 1849. I have no record that White piloted with him on the ship. Hustler operated on a temporary bar pilot license until fully licensed in 1852 when a Board of Pilot Commissioners was installed in Astoria. In part to compete with the *Mary Taylor*, Flavel purchased the schooner *California* with Captain Alfred Crosby. Within a year, Hustler

surrendered to his competition and sold his ship which was converted to an oyster barge. Later George Flavel hired Hustler to pilot barkentine *Jane A. Falkenberg*, then the 140-foot steamship *Eliza Anderson*.

The 1850 census recorded the population of Astoria as 250.

Flavel's Other Ships and the Bar

In the spring of 1850, Flavel was given command of the side-wheel steamer *Goliah* (illustrations). He arrived in Portland as captain of that ship on April 19, 1850. He then ran trips between San Francisco and Sacramento, operating a passenger service mainly for miners. It was on one of these trips when he stayed in Astoria, that he saw his future wife, Mary, then about ten years old. She was waiting on tables in the Boelling Hotel. Mary said, "When I first saw Captain Flavel, he was in command of the *Goliah*. He boarded at our hotel and boarding house here in Astoria" (*Captain*, p. 55).

Russell Dark says Flavel became more and more impressed with the beauty and vivacity of Mary Christiana Lydia Boelling, the Boellings' youngest daughter. She and her brothers and sisters probably were involved in the multitude of tasks needed at the hotel/boarding house. Mary would become his wife.

Later in 1850, after commanding the *John Petty* and the *Goliah*, Captain George Flavel became pilot and mate on the *Goldhunter*, a 172-foot, 511-ton steamship running between San Francisco and Portland (*Captain*, p. 15). I have not included a picture of the *Goldhunter* in my

illustrations, though the Columbia River Maritime Museum has a beautiful picture.

In trips first in the *John Petty*, then in the *Goliah* and *Goldhunter*, Flavel became familiar with the Columbia River bar. He steadily learned its precarious dynamics, and his knowledge became the basis for applying for his bar pilot license. Hazards abounded. Tides and currents merged with the river's flow, storms and winds, to produce an ever-shifting bar—a living, breathing peril. Successful passage through it was by two deeper channels that varied in-depth as the tide rolled in and out. It was not guaranteed that either channel offered sufficient depth for safe passage at any given time. Even in ideal conditions—and conditions were rarely ideal—a channel of seventeen to twenty-one feet over the bar left little room to spare for larger ships. Sailors needed high tide and smooth seas at minimum, and only foolish captains would attempt the crossing without an experienced pilot or a tug.

Flavel heard complaints about the *Mary Taylor* and *Hustler's* bar pilots during 1850 and 1851, that they were not providing adequate service. Perhaps the complaint was that the pilots and the *Mary Taylor* were not there when needed (*Captain*, p. 25).

Captain George Flavel Applies to Pilot

The *Goldhunter* was sold in fall, 1850, leaving Flavel free to captain or pilot in other ways and to apply for his bar piloting license. Flavel saw the piloting opportunity. Already a full captain with loads of experience, he applied for his bar piloting license on December 9, 1850. In the reply to his application, Commissioners John P. Crouch and Nathaniel Crosby, Sr., on December 22,

appointed Flavel "Pilot for the Columbia River from Astoria to Parking Mills, or another such navigable point on the Columbia River, and from Astoria to Portland or such other navigable point on the Willamette River, as Masters of vessels may designate, or desire . . ." The commission then designated the amount he was empowered to charge for pilotage of varying size vessels. In his application he does not list his qualifications, so the board must have had access to this information (*Captain*, pp. 25-27).

Karen Leedom (author of *Astoria*) says, "Captain Flavel became the first licensed Master Mariner to be granted a pilotage license for the bar, bringing his experience and understanding of the capabilities and restrictions of different vessels and their crews." The term "Master Mariner" has been in use since at least the thirteenth century and reflected the highest level of professional qualification among mariners and deck officers (*Astoria*, p. 48).

The 1850 enactment of the Donation Land Claim Act granted free land to new residents in the Astoria area, but it was devastating to the native peoples. Before that date, Mary's father, Conrad Boelling, as a married man, had received 640 acres. Later the Homestead Act of 1862 granted 160 acres of free land. The land would be theirs if they built a house, dug a well, plowed at least ten acres, and resided there. These acts were good news to white settlers, but the Indians were dealt a heavy blow. They were not eligible to file claims since they were not considered citizens of the United States. The letter of Robert Shortess, sub-Indian agent writing from the Astoria Office of Indian Affairs on November 1, 1850, is revealing: "At first the Indians were promised payment for land taken by settlers, now they are threatened with expulsion

from that they still desire to hold. Consequently, they live in a state of continual fear and anxiety, having lost all confidence in our promises and dreading our power. I am myself, I have so long preached patience and hope to them that I am almost ashamed to do so any longer” (*Astoria*, pp. 56-58).

Flavel Piloting on the Bar

After receiving his commission, Flavel may have traveled to San Francisco to pilot ships over the bar during 1851. There is no evidence he served on the *Mary Taylor* in 1851 with Jackson Hustler, though he did hire Hustler later to pilot two of his ships. In 1851, Flavel did not have a pilot boat on the bar (*Captain*, pp. 27-28).

In part to compete with the *Mary Taylor*, in early 1852 Flavel bought the *California*, a schooner (picture on p.42 in *Captain*), with Captain Alfred Crosby, surprisingly, one of J. G. Hustler’s pilots. Flavel operated this pilot boat on the bar before the *General Warren* incident, because it was the *California* that intercepted her returning for repairs. His team of four pilots included Alfred Crosby, Charles Edwards, Peter Ferchen, and George Wood. Russell Dark, in *Graveyard Passage*, adds one other pilot to the list, Andrew Wass. The *California* was sixty-four feet long (four feet longer than the *Mary Taylor*). Later he sold part interest in the ship to A. C. Farnsworth (*Captain*, p. 28).

Though Flavel’s license allowed him to pilot ships on both the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, Flavel chose to center his services on the most difficult and demanding part of the passage on

either river, the Columbia River bar, notorious for shipwreck and loss of life. His choice would form his lifelong contribution to northwest shipping (*Captain*, p. 27).

Despite the continued presence of the other pilot boat, the *Mary Taylor* with Jackson Hustler and his team, Flavel quickly dominated bar pilotage as ship captains came to trust Flavel and his piloting team. He had soon become known as a fearless and expert bar pilot, and a shrewd businessman to boot. Within eight years he and his partners would secure a virtual monopoly, though never absolute, on bar piloting and towing at the mouth of the Columbia. The dominance of his team would last for over three decades. Efforts by others to displace the dominance of Flavel and his team would be comparatively short-lived (*Captain*, p. 27).

On September 1, 1852, Flavel replied to a captain seeking to join Flavel's team, a Captain Tichenor. Though Flavel denied Tichenor's request because he said his present team was no more than making a decent living at their present size, he called his team of pilots the Pilot Association. Flavel seems to have been a good manager of his team, and their three-decade dominance of the bar shows his success at the task (*Captain*, pp. 28-29).

Sometime in 1852, Captain Hustler, already in poor health and having lost two of his pilots, surrendered to the competition. Hustler sold the *Mary Taylor* within a year, and it was converted to an oyster barge on Willapa Bay. Flavel and his team took over primary duties of pilotage on the bar with the *California*. Though Hustler's health may have been poor at the time, he lived for another forty years (*Captain*, pp. 27-28).

Attempted Rescue of the General Warren

In January 1852, shortly after purchasing the *California*, Flavel attempted the rescue of the *General Warren*, a vessel he had taken over the bar outbound, but which returned to the bar after a storm had damaged it severely. Captain Thompson decided to return to Astoria for repairs. He hailed Flavel on the *California*, the pilot who had taken him outbound. Flavel resumed piloting the vessel and attempted to cross the bar. But the vessel could not make headway against the ebb tide, the hold was flooded nearly up to the boilers that powered the ship, and the rudder responded poorly. Finally, Captain Thompson said they were going to have to beach the ship to save their passengers. They managed to run onto Clatsop Spit, toward the end of the jetty, and the ship began to break up. To seek rescuing resources, Flavel took a small boat with nine passengers and crew and rowed for Astoria. As he left the ship, Captain Thompson called out "Pilot, will you come back?" Flavel shouted back, "If I live, I will return." They rowed all night and arriving at Astoria organized a rescue party with the assistance of the whaleboat *George and Martha* (Captain, Chapter Four).

Sheriff Ira McKean joined Captain E. N. Beard in the whaleboat. Beard steered the whaleboat through the choppy seas. Joseph Wall, a Crescent City lumberman, was the only one of the *Warren's* passengers to accompany Sheriff McKean's party. When they reached the wreckage of the *General Warren*, evidently before Captain Flavel's arrival, they found the vessel disintegrated in the pounding surf. All lives aboard the vessel had been lost. They found the bloated bodies of Captain Thompson, members of his crew, and passengers. Evidently, one of

the passengers in the whaleboat, Captain Fred Ketchum, a river pilot newly arrived from New Brunswick, Canada, dragged the bodies back to a foedune, and with the help of several Clatsop Indians, buried them there in a common grave (Russell Dark, *Graveyard Passage*, unpublished, Astoriana Collection, Astoria Public Library).

On Feb. 7, 1852, The *Oregonian* sent a team to Astoria to investigate the tragic end of the *General Warren*. They commended Captain Flavel, the men who had rowed for help, and Captain Beard of the *George and Martha*. The paper said they acted “with praiseworthy promptness in attempting to rescue the unfortunates from the wreck.” They laid the blame on Captain Thompson because the ship was not seaworthy, thus unfit and unsafe (*Captain*, pp. 35-36).

In recognition of Captain Flavel’s supreme effort to rescue survivors of the *General Warren*, the grateful citizens of Portland presented him with an inscribed gold medal that reads “Presented by the citizens of Portland to Captain George Flavel for his praiseworthy exertion in rendering assistance to the passengers and crew of the steamship *General Warren* at the mouth of the Columbia on the 31st of January, 1852.” On the reverse side of the medal, a small boat is pictured leaving a sinking vessel above the inscription, “If I live, I will return” (*Captain*, p. 36).

Astoria in the 1850s

In 1852 an Oregon Board of Pilot Commissioners was established in Astoria. Captain Jackson Hustler received his official bar-pilot certification. He had previously operated on a temporary

bar pilot license, though he had previously piloted in New York for five years.

In 1852, Second Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant stayed for a night in Astoria enroute to his new post at the Vancouver Barracks. In a letter to his wife, Julia, the young lieutenant gave his impression of the tiny town. "Astoria—a place we see on maps and read about, is a town made up of some thirty houses . . . situated on the side of a hill covered with tall trees . . . with about two acres cleared to give way for the houses. Boats anchoring in the stream (they have no wharf) gives occupation for a few boatmen to carry passengers ashore to see the town that they read about in their young days . . . So much for Astoria" (*Astoria*, p. 58).

In 1853 the first church building in Astoria, the Methodist Episcopal Church, was constructed on land donated by James Welch at Fifteenth and Franklin streets. Oregon's first school district, established in Astoria in 1854, was School District No. 1. Classes were held at the Methodist Church until a school building was built a few years later. Ten years later, Captain George Flavel would be elected as a director of the Astoria School Board. In 1859, the same year Oregon received statehood, Astoria's first public school opened its doors at the corner of Ninth and Exchange streets (*Astoria*, p. 59).

After twenty-two days on a voyage from San Francisco, the bark *Oriole* was lost September 9, 1853, despite Flavel's piloting, when the wind ceased midway through the crossing. Neither anchor held and the ship drifted till she hit Clatsop Spit, not far from where the *General Warren* had broken apart. Captain Flavel and all thirty-two aboard took to the small boats and were rescued by Captain Alfred Crosby in the *California* (*Captain*, pp. 51-52).

George and Mary Flavel's Marriage

Captain George Flavel's marriage to Mary Christina Boelling took place on March 26, 1854. Her own expression of her name was Mary Christiana Lydia Boelling. Flavel had met her at the Astoria Hotel or boarding house, owned by her father, likely in the fall of 1849 or the winter of 1849-1850. In order to avoid a "shivaree" by their friends, they went to be married at the home of Moses Rogers, Mary's brother-in-law. The boat trip to the Rogers' home, in Moses Rogers' sloop, is described in *Graveyard Passage*. They were married by the Reverend Freeman Farnsworth. The captain was thirty-one and Mary only fourteen. They would remain together for the rest of their lives (*Captain*, p. 52).

After the wedding, the couple may have returned to the Astoria Hotel and lived there in March and April 1854. But soon Flavel purchased two lots as well as a house at Eighth and Duane Streets (current address 355 Duane, now a parking lot). The house was of recent construction, a simple two-story dwelling (see illustrations) with a gabled roof, white clapboard siding, a wide front porch, and steep steps leading to the front entrance. They bought the residence and block 41 from Captain Asa Cole Farnsworth (1819-1874), one of the pilots pictured with the Hustler piloting team, who later piloted with Flavel. George and Mary and their family lived in the home for thirty years until their new home was built, just across the street, and occupied in 1886 (*Captain*, p. 57).

Flavel Appointed Harbormaster

The Christmas after the marriage of George and Mary, the Clatsop County Commissioners met in special session on Christmas Day, 1854, and appointed Captain Flavel harbormaster for the Port of Astoria. This position, though unsalaried, gave Flavel the authority to regulate the timing of ships that sailed across the bar. Given the relatively shallow depth of the bar at the time, a ship with any significant draft needed to schedule her departure on the flood tide, the rising of the ocean giving greater depth over the bar. There was a firm basis for their choice of a harbormaster. At this point, Flavel had been a fully qualified bar pilot for four years, had operated the *California* as a pilot ship on the bar for about three years, and was known as the hero of the *General Warren* attempted rescue. In addition to timing passages across the bar, Flavel supervised operations in the harbor area and enforced rules. Every harbor had limited berths, and the berthing or moorage rate was often determined by the length of the ship. No doubt observers could already see that Flavel was not only an experienced seaman but was gifted in business and management. In addition, Flavel had made Astoria his home (*Captain*, p. 59).

1850s Astoria

In 1854 an election was held to determine the county seat for Clatsop County's five town sites. "McClure's Astoria" won, most likely because John McClure offered two acres of his land for public buildings. Sessions of the county court were held in private homes while a two-story courthouse was being built at Eighth and Commercial streets in Astoria. A second courthouse

was completed on the same site in 1908 (*Astoria*, pp. 58-59).

One day in 1855 a local merchant offered William P. Gray a dollar to go to Uppertown and collect his mail. Upper and lower Astoria were separated at that time by Scow Bay (spanning roughly what is now between Eighteenth and Twenty-Eighth streets). A picture in Karen Leedom's *Astoria* (p. 47) shows the bay and the bridge finally built. The post office, originally in John Shively's home in 1847, had moved in 1853 at the direction of the new postmaster to upper Astoria where the custom-house was located. As William was rowing the tiny skiff across the bay he reasoned that others might also be willing to pay for collecting their mail. Soon he was earning thirty dollars a month and continued his mail service for about two years. William was ten years old at the time (*Astoria*, p. 46).

Flavel Ships Added

Around 1855 Flavel purchased the brig *Halcyon* in San Francisco. With it he carried ice south from Vancouver, BC to San Francisco, and returned with government supplies for Fort Vancouver at a good profit. While making his coastal runs in the *Halcyon*, Flavel admired the *Jane A. Falkenberg*, also making runs along the coast. She was never known to make a slow passage. He still commanded the *Halcyon* on June 2, 1857, when her June 6th sailing was noted by the *Daily Alta California*, (*Captain*, p. 60).

George Conrad Flavel, George and Mary's first child, was born on Jan. 18, 1856. His mother was only sixteen. He was named after his father and maternal grandfather. "He had a strong leaning

for the sea,” wrote Polly McKean Bell. Soon after he was eighteen years of age, young Flavel left school to sail on a merchant ship. He did well as a seaman, advancing rapidly to the second mate. He became a ship captain and bar pilot and would likely have continued in a seafaring career. But his father wanted his son to carry on the family’s large shipping and other businesses, so he gave up the sea and settled down in Astoria. His mother also desired to have him at home. He was often at the office of Flavel’s dock, at the end of Tenth Street, where all the tugboat and shipping business was transacted. He assisted in managing his father’s many piloting, shipping, and other businesses (*Captain*, p. 61).

In about 1856, W. W. Parker, having purchased the Welch sawmill, built the first wharf on the waterfront (*Astoria*, p. 58).

Cape Disappointment

Though the US Lighthouse Service was founded in 1789, the first lighthouse in the Pacific Northwest was not completed until 1856 at Cape Disappointment. The light sat 220 feet above the water and was visible twenty miles out to sea. Anticipating that fog would often obscure the light, a 1,600-pound fog bell was installed at the site. It is the oldest standing lighthouse in the Northwest. Its original light was a Fresnel lens, concentric rings of glass prisms lighted with an oil lantern with multiple wicks. Vessels coming from the north had limited visibility of the light, so in 1898 the North Head Lighthouse was added, two miles north of the original lighthouse. The lighthouse was designed by Carl Leick, the same architect who designed the Flavel mansion, and the Grey’s Harbor Lighthouse in Westport, Washington. It first used the original Fresnel lens

from Cape Disappointment, and its light shines 194 feet above the water. Its lamps flash a white light every thirty seconds, distinguished from Cape Disappointment's alternating red and white lights. The North Head Lighthouse sits on one of the windiest spots on the West Coast and has recorded gusts up to 120 miles per hour.

Across the river entrance, on the Oregon side, Point Adams Light was built February 15, 1875. The name came from Captain Robert Gray who named the spit of land Adam's Point. Captain George Vancouver referred to it as Point Adams. It operated from 1875 till 1899 when it became obsolete with the extension of the south jetty and the establishment of the lightship *Columbia* in 1892 (*Astoria*, pp. 52-55).

Sawmill Disaster

Flavel bought an interest in a sawmill in 1857, operated by Henry Aiken, Mary's girlhood tutor. Together, Aiken and Flavel planned to market the lumber in San Francisco. I think it is likely that the sawmill hardware was that brought across the plains by Mary's father in 1847. When the Boellings arrived at Young's River on Conrad's donation land claim, operations began immediately to build the dam and sawmill. But the setup of the sawmill was never completed because news came of gold found in California, and Conrad left with most of the men. When Conrad returned from the mines in 1849, it is possible he sold the sawmill to Henry Aiken who had come across the plains with him, now choosing to build and operate his hotel and boarding house (*Captain*, p. 53, 60).

Though the first trip was profitable in marketing their lumber in San Francisco, on the second trip they found the market was overloaded and Flavel and Aiken could not meet obligations. Russell Dark in *Graveyard Passage* lists the settlements paid by Flavel. *Lewis and Dryden's Maritime History of the Northwest* says the marketing attempt "ruined them both in comparatively short order and forced Captain Flavel to go back to his original calling." Flavel sold the *Halcyon* in 1857 to meet obligations. Thus, he largely shouldered the loss himself. Taking the loss of a valuable asset to meet his obligations shows Flavel again as a man of honor (*Captain*, p. 60).

Partnership with Asa Meade Simpson

After the failure, Flavel recapitalized his bar piloting business in 1857, with Asa Meade Simpson (1826-1915), his bar piloting team on the *California* being continually successful. Simpson was a boat builder and founder of Simpson Lumber Company. The partnership between the two like-minded men of the sea and business was brilliant. Simpson owned profitable shipyards and sawmills at Coos Bay and Cementville (Knappton). Eventually, Simpson bought Flavel's bar piloting business in 1887 after thirty years of bar piloting partnership (*Captain*, p. 60, 92).

Asa Meade [alternate spelling Mead] Simpson (1826-1915) was for nearly six decades an almost legendary figure in lumbering and shipping on the Pacific coast. From a would-be gold miner, he went on to own some sixty sailing vessels and tugs, and more than 40,000 acres of timber. He was born February 20, 1826, some three years after George Flavel. Mastering the shipbuilding trade, he sailed around Cape Horn on a ship he partially owned, headed for the gold rush. He

arrived in San Francisco about six months after Flavel. In at least two references I found him given the title of captain but find no reference to nautical training or being master of a ship.

Buying a half-finished sawmill in Astoria, he began shipping lumber to San Francisco. In 1857 he again entered the shipbuilding business in Coos Bay, Oregon, and by 1869 continued shipbuilding in Astoria, when he constructed Flavel's second tug, the *Columbia*. As perhaps the most successful businessman in Astoria, Flavel was obviously drawn to Simpson as a man with a head for business. Simpson had the resources to partner with Flavel's shipping, piloting, and business ventures (*Captain*, p. 60).

Flavel and Simpson were birds of a feather, with strong business instincts. Uniting their assets and skills, the Flavel-Simpson partnership provided a combination of superior equipment, the best bar pilots, and sharp business acumen that overcame all competition.

George Flavel in the late 1850s

Following Flavel's partnership with Simpson, George and Mary experienced the birth of their second child, Nellie, in 1858. Following the birth, the captain retired from the daily hazards of bar piloting and managed the business from the shore. Starting in 1859, new hires among the bar pilots were listed as working for Asa Simpson, twenty-three new pilots from 1859 to 1891. The two exceptions to Flavel's retirement from the sea and piloting that I know of were in 1860 when he bought the *Jane A. Falkenberg*, which was his favorite ship. He made trips in her from 1860 to 1862. When Flavel built the steam tug *Astoria* in December 1869, following the

challenge from Paul Corno and the steam tug *Rabboni*, he took command himself. Of course, towing a ship was a completely different principle of passing the bar from boarding a pilot who took control of a ship to guide it successfully across the bar (*Captain*, p. 61).

At some point, McKean, the father of Polly McKean Bell (probably Samuel McKean, Jr.), began as manager and bookkeeper of Captain George Flavel's shipping, pilotage, and other business interests. Russell Dark gives him the title of Flavel's warehouse superintendent. Polly had a long and affectionate relationship with the Flavel family, and I have included many of her accounts in the book.

On February 14, 1859, Oregon became a state in the Union.

The *Jane A. Falkenburg*

In 1860, Flavel bought the barkentine *Jane A. Falkenberg* [spelling variations of the name exist]. He had often admired the swift ship as it was never known to make a slow passage. A barkentine had a square-rigged foremast and fore-and-aft rigged main, mizzen, and other masts (illustrations). The reason for the ship's availability was the untimely death of its owner on a wharf in San Francisco when a horse became unruly and backed his carriage off the wharf. The captain died of his severe injuries in a few minutes, but his lady, who was riding with him, was only slightly injured. Flavel made the new owner of the ship such a good offer that they turned the vessel over to him. When Flavel took command of the ship he made shipping trips along the Pacific coast as its captain during 1861 and 1862. On one trip he sailed from Astoria to San

Francisco in three-and-a-half days. He then asked his former competitor, J. G. Hustler, to be its pilot (*Captain*, pp. 63-64).

In 1861 the Civil War began. Little effect was felt in Clatsop County, but the sympathy of most lay with the North.

While he was in command of the *Falkenberg*, the family often lived in San Francisco. They returned to Astoria but continued to stay in San Francisco several months a year for multiple reasons, including health and music lessons for the girls. Captain Flavel was listed in the city's directory for 1862 (*Captain*, p. 64).

When the *Falkenberg* was in the command and piloting of others, Flavel resumed his profitable shipping on the *Halcyon* (*Captain*, p. 64).

1860s Astoria

In 1864, the first newspaper published in Astoria, the *Astoria Marine Gazette*, was edited by W. W. Parker. It employed the type and press of the *Spectator*, the first newspaper in Oregon. It lasted a little over two years and recorded not only the end to the Civil War but the re-election of Abraham Lincoln. Parker tired of the effort, though in the paper he ran W. H. Gray's *History of Oregon*. In 1866 he sold the press and type to D. C. Ireland who went to Oregon City and began the Oregon City *Enterprise*. (The issues of the *Gazette* can be viewed in the Astoria Public Library on microfilm. They are difficult to view, and they are not, like other newspapers, available on chroniclingamerica.loc.gov or oregonnews.uoregon.edu.) Ireland would return to Astoria to

found the next newspaper, the *Tri-Weekly Astorian*, which started July 1, 1873 (cited in *Leedom, Astoria* and Tetlow, *Astoria*).

Challenge to Flavel's Pilot Team

Around 1864, Flavel acquired the sloop *Harvest Queen*, which he put into service under Captain Paul Ferchen, between Astoria and Fort Canby across the river at Cape Disappointment.

(*Captain*, p. 65).

The most serious challenge to Captain Flavel's domination of pilotage occurred when Captain Paul Corno arrived on the bar with his 101-foot steam tug *Rabboni* on August 3, 1865. "We could put Flavel out of business in no time at all and take over *California's* trade," Corno bragged to his pilots Andrew Belmont and Moses Rogers (Mary Flavel's brother-in-law). I do not know of a steam tug being used at the bar before that time. The first ship towed across the bar was the *Almatia*. Backing Corno, shippers from Portland and the Willamette Valley hatched a scheme to drive Flavel out of business and engage Corno and the *Rabboni* for piloting. The shippers had long complained about Flavel's higher pilotage rates, and they urged the pilot commissioners to revoke the licenses of the Flavel pilots with the objective of bestowing a monopoly on Corno's steam tug. A tug had the advantage of being able to tow a vessel across the bar even without the wind power needed by a sailing ship (*Captain*, p. 65).

The new monopoly lasted just three days, as the well-connected Flavel was able to secure other licenses for three of his pilots. Flavel sent them to Oysterville, the Pacific County seat up the

Washington coast. There they obtained branch licenses under the laws of the state of Washington. Pilots Alfred Crosby, Will Metzger, and Asa Farnsworth were back in business. Pacific County's granting of pilot licenses to three Oregon pilots caused a major ruckus in Washington State (*Captain*, p. 65).

Despite the *Rabboni's* superior speed and power, Corno had underestimated the competition. Flavel left the *California* outside the bar twenty-four hours a day and continued to send his pilots to San Francisco to board ships bound for the Columbia River. Corno was unable to overcome the loyalty of ship captains to Flavel's experienced bar pilots. Losing money since his first day on the bar, Corno surrendered to Flavel in March 1866, after just over seven months of operation (*Captain*, p. 66).

George Flavel Adds Tugs

Though Corno yielded to Flavel's team, shippers and legislators became convinced that a steam-powered tug would improve pilotage service and reduce rates. In 1868, the Oregon legislature authorized the pilot commission to let a contract for a powerful steam tugboat. It offered \$12,000 for the first year of operation, \$6,000 for the second, and \$5,000 for the third. Seeing this offer as an opportunity to significantly diversify his pilotage business and add a powerful tugboat, George Flavel acted quickly to accept the pilot commission's proposal. Within weeks he had contracted for the construction of a new tug, the *Astoria*, in San Francisco, at an estimated cost of \$40,000. In December 1869, the *Astoria* was launched in San Francisco, and it steamed north under Captain Joseph Snow. The registered owners were Asa Simpson, George Flavel,

Alfred Crosby, Alfred Wass, and Asa Farnsworth. When the tug arrived in Astoria, Flavel himself took command, with Dan McVicar as mate. The first tow was the lumber schooner *Humboldt* on her way to load lumber at Asa Simpson's Knappton sawmill (*Captain*, p. 66). Evidently very soon afterward in 1869 in Astoria, Asa Mead Simpson constructed Flavel's second tug, the *Columbia*.

Once again, Flavel's shrewd business sense and timing proved profitable. Ship traffic at the mouth of the river increased rapidly, providing plenty of business for both the pilot boat *California* and his tugs. Business was so good, Flavel hired three more pilots, Captain Marshal Staples, Alexander Malcolm, and Erik Johnson. The additions brought his pilot organization to a total of six, and for the first time, he arranged schedules so that no more than two pilots were at sea at any one time (*Captain*, p. 67).

Flavel in the late 1860s

For passengers traveling to Astoria, Captain Flavel built the Occident Hotel in 1869. Described as Astoria's finest, it was built on the southeast corner of what is now Tenth and Bond Streets (now Tenth and Marine Drive). Famous guests included President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes and General W. T. Sherman. Although the hotel was managed by others, the Flavel family retained ownership until 1913 (*Captain*, p. 67).

The reception for President Rutherford B. Hayes, October 15, 1880, was a big event for Astoria. The president came into town on the steamer *Wide West* and tied up at Flavel's dock. A huge crowd welcomed him, along with host mayor and editor D. C. Ireland. School children formed

two single lines, one on each side of the street leading from the wharf to the Occident Hotel. As the president arrived, the children sang "America" and threw flowers in the path of the arriving party. Town bands played, and a dinner party was hosted by the Occident Hotel dining room (Tetlow, *Astorian*, pp. 153-157).

Early 1870s, Public Service and Expansion

The 1870s saw continued competition between Astoria and Portland for trade between Oregon and outside markets. Astoria saw herself as the first, the most accessible, and the most important port of Oregon, and sought to secure federal money to improve navigation at the mouth of the Columbia. But a steady flood of pioneers to the Willamette Valley fed Portland's massive growth and made it the central hub of Oregon's water traffic (*Captain*, p. 70).

In addition to Flavel's sailing, piloting, and business ventures, which included docks and warehouses, he became more directly involved in public service. In 1871, George Flavel entered local politics, being elected to the Astoria Board of Trustees, the equivalent of a city council. Though he had not assumed political office before, in 1854 he had been appointed harbormaster for the Port of Astoria. He remained on the board for five years, serving on both the finance committee and the street and public property committee. He targeted streets and fire protection, especially the fire department, which at the time consisted of little more than buckets and ladders. He purchased a Honeywell hand-pumper fire engine with 250 feet of hose through his business connections on the East Coast and sold or donated it to the Astoria Fire Department. Fire, of course, was a serious hazard, given the number of docks, warehouses,

homes, businesses, and ships made of wood, even sidewalks (*Captain*, p. 70).

Captain Alfred Crosby died on April 30, 1871. Crosby had been one of the original pilots on Hustler's team, shown in the illustrations in the center of the book. He then piloted for Flavel and often took the helm as the captain of the *California*. He passed away in his home, which he had shipped around the horn and erected at the corner of Sixth and Commercial streets. The structure was held together by wooden pegs. When the home was torn down in 1929, the pegs became valued as souvenirs for Astorians lucky enough to obtain one.

Flavel won the May 1872 election and assumed the office of Clatsop County treasurer on July 3, 1872. In part, the election illustrates the breadth of Flavel's recognized abilities (*Captain*, p. 70).

The same week that Flavel became county treasurer, the *Tri-Weekly Astorian* reported that he had rafted 800 pilings from Oak Point and 50,000 feet of lumber from a Rainier mill to extend his dock at the foot of Cass Street (now Tenth Street). The newspaper commented, "We have seen a great many piles driven along waterfronts in Oregon, but have never seen any work of this more effectively done than that now going on here for Captain Flavel's new wharf by Mr. Gist superintendent and T. J. Reeves engineer. The piles are of the best quality, and when that old 1,800-pound hammer drops on them from an elevation of nearly 40 feet, it sends the timber to bedrock right speedily" (*Captain*, p. 71).

The new wharf was part of a combined effort to upgrade Astoria as a functional seaport. The newspaper also noted that the new extension of the wharf fronted and was abreast of Flavel's

former warehouse (*Captain*, p. 71).

The *Tri-Weekly Astorian* described the broad new extension at the waterfront: “The new wharf will be carried out thirty feet farther than the old one and will have a frontage of 300 feet, with slips convenient for any class of vessels from a sloop to a man of war. The depth of the dock from front to rear will be in the neighborhood of 300 feet” (*Captain*, p. 71).

Flavel’s life was intimately connected with the port of Astoria. An 1873 description of the port says, “The waterfront of Astoria, varying from a quarter of a mile to a mile in width affords over six miles of secure anchorage for the largest classed vessels . . . The central portion of the harbor is just twelve miles inside the Columbia River Bar, on which there is twenty-four feet of water at extremely low tide and thirty-four feet at ordinary high tide” (*Captain*, p. 72).

In 1873, Flavel was elected as a director on the Astoria School Board, a position to which he was re-elected in 1876 and again in 1879. Flavel was one of the three directors listed for the public school where his daughter, Nellie, was an honor student. The school, with Reverend and Mrs. Hyland as teachers, was commended by the *Tri-Weekly Astorian*. It doubted “that any common school of Oregon is better supplied with maps, charts, [and] dictionaries . . . owing to the liberal views of directors. “ It affirmed their intention “in every good plan for continuing and improving the school.” Three teachers were listed for the term commencing in September 1872. “The course of study is comprehensive, extending from the primer upwards” (*Captain*, p. 73).

On November 23, 1873, Captain Flavel returned from visiting San Francisco. Mrs. Flavel and her

family remained in California for several months. For Mrs. Flavel's health, the family often wintered in California (*Captain*, p. 73).

Though Astoria failed to supplant Portland in trade, it developed its own successful canning industry. In 1866, pioneer George Hunt put up 4,000 cases of salmon. By 1873, eight canneries were operating on the Lower Columbia. By 1875, there were seventeen canneries in operation in the vicinity of Astoria on both sides of the river (*Astoria*).

On Jan. 11, 1874, Asa Cole Farnsworth died after twenty-two years aboard the *California*. He had joined Flavel about a year after the *California* was purchased. In 1856 Flavel had sold him a one-sixth share of the ship. Illness forced Farnsworth to retire from pilotage, and he was in poor physical health for the last two years of his life. I believe his burial was at Hillside Cemetery and I think I have viewed his headstone still there.

Flavel's steam tug *C. J. Brenham* was in river service to Portland by August 1874, according to *Graveyard Passage*. Commanded by Captain Eli Hilton, the tug replaced the *Astoria* which had worked the bar since December 1869 (*Captain*, pp. 73-74).

Opposition from William Reid

In September 1875, William Reid, railroad financier, lawyer, and secretary of the Portland Board of Trade, wrote a letter to the *Oregonian* critical of Captain Flavel. He alleged Flavel charged whatever he pleased, gouging vessels for pilotage and towage fees. He threatened a lawsuit over Flavel's rates. He said Flavel had failed to set fixed pilotage and towage fees. Others said

the captain “held a stranglehold on the bar.” An editorial at the time called him “this bloodsucker at the bar” (*Captain*, p. 75).

Flavel responded in a letter of his own, published on September 18, 1875, in the *Astorian*. His answer and that of editor D. C. Ireland was printed in *Oregon’s Seaport: Astoria*, also dated September 18, 1875. In the booklet, Ireland defended the record of Flavel’s pilots and said, “Not an accident has occurred to a single vessel having one of these pilots, or one of these tugs, in crossing or re-crossing (*Captain*, p. 76).

Improvements Sought for the Bar

Astoria had lobbied congress for surveys by the US Army Corps of Engineers to determine the best way to improve conditions at the mouth of the Columbia. Initial studies downplayed the existing problems. In 1875, Major Nathaniel Michler, the engineer at the Corps’ Portland office, said the bar was no more dangerous than the entrance to San Francisco Bay. In part, he may have been quoting statements that came out of Astoria and were often repeated as a way to encourage shipping. A sample of the statements from Astoria’s newspaper stated, “Astoria is the seaport of Oregon, has an excellent harbor, and vessels of the deepest draft enter in perfect safety at all seasons. Comparative statistics show less percent of losses on the Columbia River Bar for the past 20 years than at the entrance to any other port in the United States . . .” (*Captain*, p. 82).

Though the dangers of the bar were proverbial with mariners, this engineer seemed to suggest

that reliance on pilots and channel markings, as well as avoiding stormy conditions for crossing, could overcome the bar's difficulties. Astoria had greatly benefited from the steady, successful navigation of the bar by ships guided by expert pilots. Flavel rightly deserved much of the credit (*Captain*, p. 82).

Flavel in the late 1870s

Despite this attack, Flavel continued to prosper and expand into other business and real estate ventures. He quickly became Astoria's wealthiest and most respected businessman. In November 1875, Flavel began construction of a new block of buildings with locally manufactured brick. The new block was across the street from his Occident hotel, on the north side of Chenamus or Bond Street. Though the hotel is gone, the location is marked by the Occident Building, built in 1924 on the opposite side of the street. He also began construction of a new warehouse on the pier he had enlarged in 1873 (*Captain*, p. 77).

For a time in 1878, Captains Thomas Doig, Malcolm Staples, Thomas Masters, George Wood, and Eric Johnson, who had been a pilot for Flavel, stationed the schooner *Rescue* outside the entrance of the Columbia to run a competition with Flavel. Again, the effort to displace him and his experienced pilots were short-lived (*Captain*, p. 77).

Opposition from another front came from a suit brought by the owner of the salvaged ship *Allegiance* against the captain and his bar tugs. Judge Deady, of the US District Court in Portland, dismissed the suit and awarded the tugs \$5,000 for their salvage services. The headline for the

Daily Astorian on October 30, 1879, read, “A victory for Captain Flavel” (*Captain*, p. 78).

None of these attacks reduced Flavel’s popularity. People saw attacks on Flavel as attacks on Astoria, attempts to malign Astoria’s reputation as a port. In the years of Flavel’s major contributions to Astoria, its population grew by more than 1,000 percent. If the forty-year span from 1860 to 1900 is examined, nearly the span of Flavel’s influence, the expansion was sixteen-fold (Jeffrey H. Smith, *Images of America: Astoria*, p. 8; *Captain*, p. 78).

Astoria’s expansion continued in the late ‘70s, and Flavel was involved in almost all of it. In 1878 the *Astorian* noted, “On Saturday last the drawings for the new Astoria Public School building were completed and turned over to the Directors by Messrs. Bain & Ferguson. They are on exhibition at Captain Flavel’s office (*Captain*, p. 79).

In the first issue of the *Daily Astorian*, May 1, 1876, the announcement noted the building of a ship named in Flavel’s honor in recognition of him as a man of influence: “J. W. Munson of Cape Hancock, one of our noted shipbuilders, has just completed a new sloop for Master Fred Wass which has been named in honor of Captain George Flavel and will soon be engaged in the bay coasting trade. The new craft is 26 feet in length, 9 feet beam, and is a beautiful model.” The advertisement said the sloop “is now ready for charter . . . and offers superior accommodations to tourists on the bay . . . Apply on board” (*Captain*, p. 79).

In June 1877, Conrad Flavel captained the *Columbia*. He also gained his pilot license and worked for his father this year.

Around 1877, the editor of the *Astorian*, D. C. Ireland, describes the battle Astoria had with noxious odors in the city. Abigail Scott Duniway, the editor of the *New Northwest*, came into town and wrote that in Astoria “. . . you strain your breath through your handkerchief.” Part of the problem was an old dead whale that had washed into town. Finally, Ireland and the city hired Flavel to tow it out over the bar with one of his steam tugs (*Roger Tetlow, The Astorian*, pp. 124-125).

In 1878, Flavel took initiative once again to defend his business interests. A bill pushed by Portland’s interests in the Oregon legislature would have undercut his piloting business. Among other things, the bill would have required pilots to board Oregon-bound ships before they left San Francisco. Flavel successfully lobbied the state legislature to defeat the proposed bar-pilot bill in October 1878 (*Captain*, pp. 77-78).

On June 6, 1879, the younger Flavel, George Conrad Flavel, was married at Knappton to Wenona, daughter of M. P. Callender of the Callender Navigation Company, and brought his bride back to a home on Fifteenth Street in Astoria.

The Flavel family dog, a Newfoundland Saint Bernard named Lion, had been given to the captain in 1877 by Captain Pinkham, first officer of the *Leading Wind*. The dog must have been well-known around town, because an Astoria newspaper clipping from June 3, 1883, reports that the dog had been shorn of its long coat and loved it. The paper reported that “Lion showed his appreciation of the act by immediately jumping into the river for a swim.” Unfortunately, on August 1, 1879, a man attempted to shoot the dog but only wounded it. The report said the

man was being sought (*Captain*, p. 79).

Captain Flavel persevered against this and other attacks and continued to be one of the most gifted businessmen in Astoria (*Captain*, p. 79).

Flavel, Astoria, and the 1880s

In March 1881, the tug *J. C. Cousins* captained by George Wood arrived in direct competition with Flavel. Pilots were Charles Richardson, H. A. Matthews, Henry Olsen, and Thomas Powers (*Captain*, p. 67). The ship completed at the river entrance for two-and-a-half years until she was wrecked and mysteriously abandoned on Clatsop Spit on October 6, 1883. None of the four persons who took her outbound were pilots, and none of her regular crew were on board. The small lifeboat was gone. The occupants may have survived but were never seen again locally (*Captain*, p. 81).

Along with Astoria's development of canneries, its lumber industry grew. In the 1880s, four mills and box factories operated along the Astoria waterfront. The mills served local and California markets. The industry waxed and waned as local timber sources became exhausted and more distant stands were sought (*Captain*, pp. 81-82).

After the overly optimistic report of the bar by Major Nathaniel Michler in 1875, further study of the bar by the US Army Corps of Engineers recommended stabilizing the sands at the entrance of the Columbia. Their plan called for a four-and-a-half-mile jetty from near Fort Stevens to a point in the river three miles south of Cape Disappointment. They concluded that a stone jetty

could scour out a thirty-foot-deep channel, even at low water. Congress funded the jetty project in 1884; it took ten years to complete and cost over \$2,000,000. Within two years of its completion, the worth of tonnage passing over the bar more than doubled (*Captain*, p. 83).

In the 1880s, Flavel added to his fleet of pilot vessels and tugboats and carried out several profitable ship salvage operations. In one salvage, Captain Flavel, commanding the *Astoria*, joined forces with several other vessels on September 5, 1883. They rescued the *Queen of the Pacific*, which had been wrecked on Clatsop Spit the day before. In adjudication, Captain Flavel was awarded \$10,000. Judge Deady, who decided the case, said, "The conduct of Captain Flavel was highly meritorious and deserved the special recognition of the award . . . The enterprise and gallantry displayed by him were such as would reflect great credit on a much younger and abler man than himself" (*Captain*, p. 83).

With respect to piloting, Flavel's contemporaries generally agreed. *Lewis and Dryden* suggested that his dominance in piloting, despite his high rates, stemmed from the fact that "his service could not be excelled" (*Captain*, p. 83).

A common story in early Astoria brought out the captain's business acumen. Supposedly a ne'er-do-well aired his disgust that Captain Flavel had more money than other Astorians. Another Astorian answered, "If every dollar in Astoria was divided equally among every male in town, in six months or a year at most, Captain Flavel would have most of it, and you'd be working for him and so would I, and what's more, it would all be done fair and square" (Polly

McKean Bell).

Evaluations of the Flavels

For a number of reasons, including his austere nature, Flavel was often misjudged and became the target of dishonor. Polly McKean Bell noted, "The personality of this great man differed decidedly from that of his marine contemporaries. These other early day ship captains and pilots were genial and hearty characters, quick at making friends, such as the sea has produced whenever there's fair sailing for business. Captain Flavel, the most successful among them, was cold and austere in manner, very reserved and very dignified. He was striking in appearance, tall and erect, his hair and beard, curly and reddish. His eyes are gray and piercing (*Captain*, p. 84).

Mrs. Flavel also became the target of dishonor. "Mrs. Flavel, too, was misunderstood by the hometown to which she was so loyal. Because she was so frugal in her wants, looked well after the ways of her household, and dressed plainly, paying scant attention to the parade of styles, people spoke ill of her. She most certainly was not the accepted Astoria idea of a millionaire's wife. Astorians little dreamed of the generous sums she gave to worthy causes, the number of needy families she assisted quietly and tactfully." (*Captain*, p. 85)

Flavel purchases Tansy Point

As Flavel became less active in piloting, he branched out into other ventures, including real

estate. In 1882, Flavel purchased 300 acres on Tansy Point near Warrenton. He purchased forty head of cattle and developed a gentlemen's farm, where he raised cattle and racehorses. The farm was simply something done for enjoyment, rather than for profit. Tansy Point was the place where Flavel and his boat crew spotted the light of Bartholomew Kindred when they were rowing for help for the *General Warren* (*Captain*, p. 85).

Of the farm, Polly McKean Bell says, "Although a man who loved the sea, Captain Flavel, when he abandoned the hardships of piloting on the bar, found relaxation and pleasure in his large farm at Tansy Point near Hammond. He spent a large sum on this country gentleman farming. The farm was one of two undertakings of his life that did not pay off. First was a sawmill in Young's Bay in the early fifties. But the fact that the farm, where he had a handsome black stallion and fine stock, brought him no return did not trouble the millionaire. Farming was now his hobby, and he enjoyed every hour spent riding around his acres at the old-fashioned farmhouse (*Captain*, p. 85).

The farm brought an occasion for the generosity and selflessness demonstrated by his whole family. Bell says, "It was not generally realized that his complex personality, aloof and austere, was capable of great kindness. It was generously shown to our family. After a long illness, my eldest brother was brought home to die. My mother was overcome with grief and with the long nursing. The captain suggested that we all go down to Tansy Point for the rest of the summer to make ourselves at home at his farm and stay until mother felt more herself. That farm was certainly a wonderful place for children. Father came down every Sunday. Buckskin and Star,

Flavel's horses, pensioned out there, were at our service to ride any time. There was a collie with six delightful puppies for us to play with" (*Captain*, p. 86).

1883 Astoria Fire

On July 2, 1883, a fire ignited at the Ferrell sawmill at about Fourteenth and Exchange Streets.

The flames spread quickly to the surrounding blocks, destroying all structures on Commercial Street between the Fourteenth and Seventeenth, including the wooden streets and sidewalks.

Though Astoria was flourishing, and canneries had packed 630,000 cases of salmon, all downtown was built on wood pilings over the water, providing plenty of tinder-dry fuel. Astoria had no fire hydrants to help extinguish the flames, and the town's two steam fire engines and hook-and-ladder wagon were no match for the rapidly advancing fire (*Astoria*, p. 82).

Looting became a post-fire problem. A newspaper story described the mayhem: "The burning of the Foard & Stokes store furnished an example of depravity we would prefer not chronicling: brutes in human shape stood there stealing, breaking open case liquors, guzzling down wine, and throwing provisions to their comrades in boats below (*Astoria*, pp. 83-84).

A vigilance committee was formed, and when they found a guilty man, they commanded the sheriff and chief of police to stand aside. They gave the man a choice of punishments, whipping or hanging. The man chose whipping, then was shipped out on a boat to Portland. When a second man was apprehended for looting, he was given the same choice, chose whipping, and also was shipped to Portland. As news of the penalty for looting spread, stolen items began to

reappear until city hall and the fire engine room were full of them (*Astoria*, p. 84).

The town's sawmills were kept busy during the rebuilding of downtown Astoria, providing lumber for buildings and streets. Astoria was again constructed on pilings, leaving it vulnerable to future fires—a fateful mistake (*Astoria*, p. 84).

First National Bank

On March 26, 1885, papers were drafted for the formation of the First National Bank of Astoria, co-founded by Captain Flavel, strengthening the structure of Astoria. The officers included George Flavel as president and S. S. Gordon as secretary. The board of directors included Flavel's son, George C. Flavel, along with William H. Ladd, C. E. Ladd, Jacob Kamm, John A. Devlin, and S. S. Gordon. Captain Flavel would remain president of the bank through the end of his life (*Captain*, p. 87).

Through it all, bar piloting on the Columbia River remained Flavel's steadiest investment. In one of Lockley's interviews with Mary Flavel, she related why she thought the captain was a success as a bar pilot: "One of the reasons why my husband made a success as a pilot on the Columbia River Bar was that he was not only an able navigator, but he was fearless and willing to put out in any sort of weather to assist vessels in need of help." She also said, "Captain George Flavel was a man who could master Fate. Other men had equal opportunity, but he made the most of his and bent conditions for his profit" (*Captain*, pp. 87-88).

It is often stated that Flavel and his pilots had a monopoly on piloting the bar. But the reality of

competition in that endeavor is seen in a story in the *Weekly Astorian*. "A few nights ago, several of these tug men were bidding for the British vessel *Parthia*, which is now ready for seas. The captain of the *Wizard* said to the captain of the *Parthia* in a loud bantering tone: 'I say, captain, I'll tell you what I'll do; I will take your vessel over the bar for \$40 and give you a nice chromo besides.' [A chromolithograph was a colored print.] This of course made much fun, and laughter and drinks went around. 'Hold on there, Captain,' cried Vin Cook, the owner of the *Argonaut*, 'Hold on, don't go too fast. I'll do better by you than that.' Before the captain of the *Parthia*, however, had time to answer or close the bargain with either of the bidders, Captain George Flavel said in a jolly, good-humored way: 'Now captain, just let me say a word. When you get through talking with these fellows (winking at the crowd), you just come down to us and we'll tell you what we'll do for you.' With that remark Captain George walked away, leaving the crowd looking after him. Our informant said: 'I do not know who got the job, but I'll wager you a small sum he got it mighty cheap'" (*Captain*, p. 88).

Flavel was appointed Clatsop County commissioner on June 3, 1885, the year before his mansion was completed (*Captain*, p. 88). Earlier, Flavel had won the May 1872 election and assumed the office of Clatsop County treasurer (*Captain*, p. 88).

The Flavel Mansion

On Dec. 27, 1883, architect Carl Leick announced in the *Daily Astorian* that he was ready to furnish plans and specifications of all descriptions. He had studied in the Polytechnical School of

Munich and had practiced architecture in Cleveland, Ohio, and in Indiana (*Captain*, p. 89).

As a reflection of his success and standing in the Astoria community, Flavel commissioned Carl Leick to design a new residence for the Flavel family in 1884 (*Captain*, p. 89).

Polly McKean Bell spoke of how the captain had laid plans for his large, new house: “Captain Flavel built his magnificent new residence at the height of his career. As in business, so it was in building his home. He looked far ahead. He had this mansion in mind over a period of years. He had purchased the block he wanted as the site for the building many years before. He had prepared the grounds, leaving the planting and embellishment of the surroundings to Old Louis. Captain Flavel was confident his gardener knew best what to do in the garden. In the meantime, fresh fruits and vegetables were enjoyed from the garden after a few years of cultivation. Many fruit trees had been set out, fine roses planted, and all sorts of bulbs and shrubs put out. When the plans were at last drawn for the building, no landscaping was necessary. It was a case of finding enough clear ground for the foundation (*Captain*, p. 89).

The large Victorian house reflected the taste of the era, which was lavish. The pioneer captains of their industries—shipping, logging, and canning, having labored in their youth, wanted in their harvest years the grand homes and life that were symbolic of success. There were several of these homes in Clatsop County, but the Flavel home was the most handsome example of that mid-Victorian architecture. It was called the finest home in Astoria (Haglund and *Captain*, p. 89).

Leick designed the Flavel House in the architectural style known as Queen Anne. It was the most

prominent residential style during the late Victorian period, popular in the United States from 1880 to 1910. The architectural elements of that style in the Flavel House were an asymmetrical façade, hipped roof with lower cross gables, patterned shingles, and a full-width, one-story front porch. Ornamentation included cast-iron cresting, stained-glass windows, and decorative work above the window moldings. The prominent three-story octagonal tower with conical roof and cedar shingles was also a common Queen Anne feature (*Captain*, pp. 89-90).

Carl Leick was a perfectionist, according to a later fellow employee: “When he designed his own Victorian buildings, he put the utmost care and craftsmanship into it . . . Woe betide any carpenter, helper, or anyone else who made the slightest error, or tried to get by with shoddy work; he was a perfectionist” (Claude G. Asquith, *Captain*, p. 90).

The diary of the captain’s oldest daughter, Nellie, reveals some of her early remembrances of selecting materials for their new home. Her entry on February 5, 1885, in San Francisco reads, “Tuesday night Mr. Leick came and brought us mail from home . . . and the plans of the house . . . on Wednesday . . . Mr. L. then went with us to the stores to look at mantels.” On February 13 she notes, “Yesterday we all went and selected the stained-glass windows” (*Captain*, p. 90).

Once back in Astoria, on January 11, 1886, she records vandalism: “Last night someone attempted to burn down our new house, but the fire did not burn, though one of the handsome doors is pretty badly burned, the door was redwood, and the fire went out.” As the most prominent and perhaps richest man in Astoria, Flavel was always the object of hatred by some

(*Captain*, p. 90).

The wood-framed, two-and-a-half-story house boasted 11,600 square feet of livable space. From the windows of the dramatic octagonal three-story tower, Flavel could watch the ships arriving or departing in the river or in the harbor. The interiors were finished with rich hardwood floors, decorative plaster ceilings and cornices, brass hardware, and six fireplaces with unique mantels (*Captain*, pp. 90-91).

The house was completed in 1886. The cost was said to have been \$36,000. The house reflected Flavel's success in piloting and other endeavors and his prominence in the Astoria community. It still stands today as the showplace of Astoria (*Captain*, p. 91).

When the family moved into the house on April 15, 1886, Nellie was twenty-eight, and Katie was twenty-one. George and Mary's first child, Conrad, along with his wife, Winona, and their children, had their own home, so never lived in the house. Much of the family furniture was moved from their smaller home nearby; Nellie describes the process of the move in her diary (*Captain*, p. 101).

Polly McKean Bell describes how she was affected by her first view of the mansion: "While we were in California, father had written to us about [the mansion's] construction, but I had paid little attention to what had happened. When my sister and I walked over to see that grand dwelling, I could scarcely believe my eyes. I had the feeling that if I shut my eyes and opened them again it would be gone. There it stood, stately and ornate, with tall bay windows,

porches, handsome doors, and a tall and beautiful tower on the northeast corner. In the tower was Captain Flavel's marine telescope, which brought before our eyes the splendid panorama of the bar (*Captain*, p. 91).

Two years before, the block on which the house was built had been a well-cultivated and formal garden spot, fenced all about. At the corner was a small stable where dwelt in retired comfort two old horses, Buckskin and Star. They had been riding horses of the Flavel children some years before. In charge of this delightful garden and stable was Old Louis, the German gardener and general handyman of the Flavel's. Polly McKean Bell adds, "Louis waged war every summer with boys of the neighborhood who preyed on raspberries, cherries [sic], and other offerings of that excellent garden and orchard. Louis and I were good friends and I had ready admittance to his domain . . . When he was in a rare amiable mood, he would let me ride old Buckskin slowly around the open space. But when the Flavel mansion was built, this range was gone (*Captain*, pp. 91-92).

The Carriage House

In 1887, the carriage house was built. Captain Flavel is reported to have returned from San Francisco with plans to build the grandest carriage house in Astoria. Whether the carriage house was designed by Leick or came from a pattern book is unknown. It is interesting to note that while the carriage house is predominantly Queen Anne in style, it exhibits elements of the East Coast version of the Stick style. When it was finished, it housed Buckskin, Tillie, and Chance,

Flavel's horses at that time (*Captain*, p. 92).

The carriage house is on the southwest corner of the lot; the structure has a truncated hip roof and is T-shaped with gables on all three ends of the T. The interior of the carriage house has been remodeled for offices, and for a period it was the home of the Clatsop County Chapter of the American Red Cross (CUMTUX, Summer 1991).

Bar-Piloting Business Sold

By the mid-1880s, Flavel had begun making plans to retire from the day-to-day management of his bar-piloting and other businesses. In 1887, at age sixty-four, after thirty-eight years as master and branch pilot, Flavel sold his interest in the bar-piloting business to his longtime thirty-year partner, Asa Meade Simpson. Flavel concentrated his energies on working his farm at Tansy Point, as well as investing in various real estate land development ventures (*Captain*, p. 92).

Flavel's retirement from bar piloting was greatly felt by many. *Lewis and Dryden's Marine History of the Pacific Northwest* said this of his retirement: "No man whose name had been so prominently before the people was more roundly abused by both press and public for many years than Captain George Flavel; yet in less than a year after his retirement, desires were expressed for a restoration of the Flavel management. Captain Flavel's success was due in large measure to a thorough, practical knowledge of the business in which he was engaged. He possessed rare good judgment. . . He never sent a man where he would not go himself"

(*Captain*, pp. 92-93).

Through the years of Captain Flavel's peak activity, Astoria boomed. Part of the increase came as Astoria established itself as the main intermediate transfer point for steamer service between Portland and San Francisco. Steamers could make the trip from Portland to Astoria in a single day, tie up at Astoria for the night, and cross the bar the following morning (*Captain*, p. 93).

Captain George Flavel's Last Years

One of the last transactions Captain Flavel made was selling his Tansy Point land and estate, in 1892, to the Flavel Land and Development Company. The potential development spot had expanded to 2,000 acres and was sold for \$350,000, the largest real estate transaction in the area up to that time. The buyers planned a large rail and seaport facility. It boomed twice but ultimately failed (*Captain*, p. 94).

Captain Flavel did not live to see the anticipated seaport town of Flavel, Oregon, built. He had been unwell for many months. Commenting on his health, the *Astoria Daily Budget* wrote, "Captain Flavel has been in feeble health for many months, as is known by every resident of Astoria, and many times within the past year his life has been almost despaired of by his physician and family. After partially recovering from a severe attack, he went, accompanied by his family, to California, in the hope of regaining his health, and returned to his home in this city last week" (*Captain*, p. 94).

On Flavel's return trip from San Francisco, he caught a cold that developed into pneumonia, and he never recovered. Mary, Nellie, and Katie were on their way to New York when they received the telegram about his illness but were not able to return before his death. Captain George Flavel died in his bedroom in his Astoria home on July 3, 1893 (*Captain*, p. 94).

Flavel's Estate and Heritage

Captain Flavel was buried at Hillside Cemetery in Astoria, accompanied to the grave by thousands of mourners—the largest assembly of citizens ever to attend a burial there. The funeral service held in the parlor at the home included a large circle of grieving friends. In the funeral procession after the hearse came the family carriage containing Mrs. Flavel, only fifty-three years old, their son, George C. Flavel, and General J. G. Wall. The procession of friends on foot was long, and it bore testimony to the esteem in which Captain Flavel was held by the residents of Astoria. The procession had quite a climb because the Hillside Cemetery (for a period renamed Pioneer Cemetery) is at approximately 600 feet, on the south ridge above town (*Captain*, p. 94).

The mourners included General J. G. Wall, who had been saved from certain death aboard the *General Warren* more than forty years earlier when Captain Flavel had asked the strapping twenty-five-year-old if he could handle an oar in the small boat that Flavel launched to seek help for the stranded ship. Wall went on to significant success in the military and in business in northern California, but he made a point to travel to Astoria to attend the funeral of the man

who had saved his life and had become a longtime friend.

The *Astoria Daily Budget* recorded the town's reaction: "The sad news of the passing away of Captain George Flavel last Monday evening cast a gloom over this entire community, where he was known to almost every man, woman, and child, and highly esteemed and beloved by all. Astoria will miss Captain Flavel" (*Captain*, p. 95).

The colorful "Czar of the Bar" had retired from active piloting in 1858 but continued to manage his pilotage business for another twenty-nine years before selling his interest to his longtime partner Asa Meade Simpson. In the period after 1858, according to Haglund, pilots were credited as working for Simpson. During more than three decades of managing his pilotage and other business interests, Flavel had become the richest man in Astoria, with considerable land holdings, a large dock, warehouses, businesses, including the Occident Hotel, and his own bank. He was active in politics and regularly entertained legislators. He was elected treasurer of Clatsop County by a large majority, and he served several terms on the Astoria City Council (also called the Trustees). The greatest public legacy of Captain Flavel's long maritime career was the establishment of a professional pilotage service that was safe, efficient, and founded on the skills of experienced ship captains. The Flavel pilot organization's record of safety was an undeniable contributor to the dynamic growth of both Astoria and Portland during this period (*Captain*, p. 95).

This amazing record was noted by the *Oregonian* nearly twenty years before Flavel's death in

an 1875 editorial: "Captain Flavel may point with pride to the service he has rendered this State on the Columbia Bar. The record which has been made since the law of 1868 took effect is most emphatically a record of which he and all those connected with him may feel a just pride. Look at the immense shipping that has crossed and re-crossed this bar in the care and custody of Captain Flavel and those connected with the pilotage system of which he is the head; they have successfully piloted hundreds of vessels, from the maximum depth of 23 feet draft down to the little schooner of a hundred tons, and the losses put together has been less than one-sixteenth part of one percent. Not an accident has occurred to a single vessel having one of these pilots, or one of these tugs, in crossing and re-crossing" (*Captain*, pp. 95-97).

In his will, Capt. Flavel left money toward the construction of a new First Presbyterian Church in Astoria, where Mary, Nellie, and Katie were actively involved. He donated his shares in the Masonic Land and Building Association to Temple Lodge No. 7, of which he was one of the first members (*Captain*, p. 96).

According to one account, Captain Flavel's estate at the time of his death was valued at approximately \$1,900,000. The majority of his wealth was divided between his wife and three children. In May 1897, Mary and her three children added to Flavel's bequest to the church by giving it the deed to the lot on which the new Presbyterian church would be built in 1903. Flavel's real estate and investments were left to the management of his son, George Conrad. Six years before Captain Flavel died, he transferred ownership of the mansion and the

property on which it stood to his wife for one dollar and “other valuable considerations.”

(*Captain*, p. 96).

Some years later, Capt. Flavel’s remains were transferred to Ocean View Cemetery at Warrenton, where a twenty-one-foot-tall obelisk was erected in 1898. It reminds the living of this very successful man, who figured so prominently in Astoria’s history. In the following years, the graves of other family members were added to the site (*Captain*, pp. 96-97).

The Flavel House Museum

When Nellie, the last surviving Flavel family member, died, on January 19, 1933, the Flavel mansion passed to grandniece Patricia Flavel. She was still attending Vassar College in New York. She gave the mansion and the city block to the city of Astoria as a memorial to the Flavel family in 1934. The house was vacant for two years when City Manager J. O. Conville, recommended on June 16, 1936, that the house be razed and cleared for an outdoor park. The *Astorian Budget* the next day said, “If anyone has any suggestion to make as to how the beautiful old residence may be preserved . . . it is time to speak up.”

Hillside Cemetery, where Flavel was first interred, was later renamed Pioneer Cemetery, but the City of Astoria has since returned the site to its original name of Hillside Cemetery. (*Captain*, p. 97)

Amid financial challenges, the city returned the property to the donor on October 19, 1936. Then, on November 4, 1936, Patricia Flavel deeded the property to Clatsop County. The property was to be occupied in perpetuity, keeping the residence and grounds in good repair and condition to be used for public purposes (*Captain*, p. 97).

The county court accepted the property, saying it would be used to house the county relief committee and might house the Red Cross in the future. The Red Cross did use the first floor of the mansion for office space from 1937 through the end of World War II, with the Clatsop County Health Department occupying the second floor (*Captain*, p. 97).

In 1951, the house became a museum of the Clatsop County Historical Society and was opened to the public in 1952. The mansion stands in the center of Astoria. It reflects the style and elegance of the Victorian era and the life of George Flavel, Astoria's most prominent citizen at the time, and head of its leading family (*Captain*, p. 97).

Captain George Flavel's Legacy

Captain George Flavel's declaration, "If I live, I will return!" came at a time of great peril to the lives of passengers and crew aboard the *General Warren*, and even to his own life. Expending great effort, he returned to the ship with rescuing resources, though all was lost for the *General Warren* as it attempted to cross the Columbia River Bar as a storm-damaged vessel in January 1852.

Still, after first seeing the nearby village of Astoria in the fall of 1849, Flavel had returned there, too, with more pronounced success. Nathaniel Philbrick describes Astoria in the 1840s in his book *Sea of Glory*: “The trading post had fallen on hard times” and had been reduced to, “just a few permanent structures.” Flavel not only returned to the little ramshackle village of Astoria, but he built his career there. In the process, he helped build the town (*Captain*, p. 99).

Seizing an opportunity to pilot at the bar, Flavel competently guided inbound and outbound ships and managed an effective pilot team that earned the trust of ship captains for more than thirty years. The team’s work and expertise transformed the Oregon coast by increasing shipping and settlement and secured the safety of passengers, crews, and ships (*Captain*, pp. 99-100).

Flavel oversaw the construction of wharves, docks, and warehouses—an expansion that helped Astoria grow and thrive. He was early honored as the first harbormaster, an unsalaried role, but a token of the esteem in which his judgment and good sense were held.

He served the residents of the city by serving in city and county offices, on the city council, the school board, and as the elected Clatsop County treasurer. His business sense was proverbial. He furthered the city’s financial base by founding a bank and erecting the Occident Hotel, the finest in the city, and one that hosted two US Presidents. As a businessman, he employed many people, paid fair wages, and gave verbal appreciation for good service where it was due (*Captain*, p. 100).

A curious but expected obstacle to one so prominent in his profession was the opposition and slander he encountered. But those in public places universally recognized his hard-work ethic and good character, and repeatedly commended him. His integrity was never questioned by those who knew him.

He built a strong family who befriended the community and was known privately for their care of those in need. He was beloved by the residents of Astoria, evidenced by his funeral procession that was the largest up to that time (*Captain*, p. 100).

Because of Flavel's character, dedication, and hard work, the city flourished and grew tenfold in his first twenty years there. In the forty-plus years of his life in Astoria, it grew sixteenfold. The Flavel House, a must-see in Astoria, stands as a trophy to the man who kept his promise to return.

As the most prominent citizen and businessman from the 1850s to the 1890s, Captain Flavel's guiding hand on the wheel took Astoria to the next generation.