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### Captain Flavel's House of Haunted Wax

For centuries chunks of beeswax have been found along the northern Oregon coast. Scholars have concluded the ship was the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, lost in 1693 in the waters off Neahkahnie Mountain, was the source. In 1909 a large block of wax with the numbers six and seven carved into it was found on the beach at Nehalem Bay. It was donated to the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum, where it remains to this day. In actuality the number cut into it was originally 667. However, over the course of two hundred years the first numeral six was broken off, never to be found.

Decades before, nobody knows quite when, a companion piece from the cargo broke free from its icy Pacific grave. The number carved on it was six six six.

The details of this particular specimen's discovery have been lost to history, but it was given to Captain George Edward Flavel, one of the most famous seafaring merchants of the northwest coast. Flavel came to Oregon in 1851 to make his fortune as a ship's captain and his commercial empire based in Astoria stretched as far as Australia. As the pre-eminent maritime master in Oregon it was thought that he would be interested in this ancient relic. He graciously accepted the gift and brought it to his grand house, which is now a museum. There, he showed it to his young wife.

While scandalous by today's norms, it was not so in those days long ago. But the fact is that when he met and married his wife, she was all of fourteen years of age. Long on beauty and short on education, she was nevertheless a strong woman and a devout one; traits critical to being a sea captain's wife. When he showed her this curious brick of inscribed beeswax she grew concerned. She retrieved her Bible and turned to the passage in Revelation that gave the number of the Beast as Six Six Six. Becoming quite upset she insisted that her husband take it out of the house and preferably get rid of it for good. He acquiesced to her wishes of removing it from their house, but decided to keep it in his office on the Columbia. He knew that it was no doubt from the fabled wrecked Spanish galleon long mentioned in coastal legends and thought it a pity to discard

such a historic souvenir. For a number of months it sat on the shelf in his office. Often visitors would take note and inquire about it as they discussed shipping business with Captain Flavel.

But the Captain noticed that strange things were starting to happen. Fresh riggings were prematurely breaking. Well-maintained boilers would explode, or their gears would seized up for no apparent reason. Mystery illnesses would afflict otherwise reliable, hardy crew members. Was it uncharacteristic bad luck, or a more sinister dark cloud of malevolence that was descending upon the Captain's fleet?

Like all successful mariners he was both rational and superstitious. He knew that a chunk of wax was merely a valuable trade commodity amongst the Spanish, as beeswax candles were important features in Catholic churches. Perhaps there was no harm being in possession of this block of wax with an unfortunate number, no doubt simply coincidental, but just in case, why keep the damned thing around? Maybe it was time to return the wax relic back to its watery grave.

The next time Captain Flavel ventured out past the Columbia Bar, he quietly took it to the railing where he wouldn't be noticed, and as carefully as he could, dropped it into the sea, being respectful to whatever evil spirits might receive it. With that Flavel was rid of the accursed Spanish artifact.

Perhaps it was simply coincidence, perhaps a real evil had been exorcized, but the Captain's fortunes improved. There were always occasional problems with engines and the weather, but none of these occurrences seemed out of the ordinary anymore.

Captain Flavel would prosper until his death in 1893. Regarded as one of the greatest captains of the Oregon coast, he was a prosperous man who would leave a fortune, equivalent in purchasing power of more than \$50 million in today's money.

Captain George Edward Flavel had a son, Captain George Conrad Flavel. The elder's funeral was a historic and somber affair in Astoria. After the memorial service had concluded, a person unknown to the younger Captain Flavel approached him. After introducing himself, the Stranger removed from a black leather bag a large chunk of beeswax. The mysterious stranger claimed that an acquaintance had found it recently in the surf and knowing that it had originally belonged to the elder Captain, asked the Stranger to return it to the family. Captain

George Conrad Flavel recalled seeing the artifact as a young boy, but had long forgotten about it.

Aggrieved at just at having just lost his father, Flavel *files* he was pleased by the return of his father's artifact. He thanked the Stranger and offered a generous gratuity, which was refused. Henceforth, the beeswax brick was placed in a spot of prominence and pride on a bookshelf, so that the son could derive inspiration from his father's memento.

In 1901, when the younger Captain and his wife moved from their large house at 818 Grand Avenue, to their newly built Colonial Revival-style mansion on 627 Fifteenth Street, the brick of beeswax had been wrapped in newspaper for protection. In the chaos of the move someone had left the wrapped bundle near the fireplace, where other old newspapers and kindling were being stored. It was winter and the fire burned continuously. After two days exposed to the robust heat, the wax had melted, slowly seeping in to the cracks and crevices where the bricks at the base of the fireplace met the planks of the wooden floors.

A short time later, as the Captain was looking for the artifact to again display on the bookshelf of the newly-completed mansion, he realized that the waxy clump of newspapers had once contained this family treasure. This Captain Flavel wasn't nearly as superstitious as his father, but as small odd things happened and then more strange occurrences revealed themselves, he began to wonder if this brick of wax, marked nine nine nine, was somehow haunted.

He was not necessarily a very religious man, but one day while speaking to a local Presbyterian minister, he casually mentioning what had happened to the artifact. The minister, a long-time Astoria resident had known the Elder Captain Flavel. He remembered seeing the block of beeswax, but those were not nines carved on it he explained: they were sixes, and he recalled that the other Captain Flavel was suspicious that the item with the "Number of the Beast" might be accursed and decided to return it to the graveyard of the Pacific from whence it had come.

But now this Captain Flavel could not return it to the sea; it was now intrinsically part of his house. Over time the fortune and the grand house of this distinguished family would descend into the Lovecraftian madness and physical dereliction of which the residents of Astoria today are well aware.