

FLAGLER MUSEUM

Flagler Museum Celebrates Inaugural Oyster Roast, Reviving a Beloved Palm Beach Tradition

PALM BEACH, FL – February 25, 2026 – The Flagler Museum hosted its inaugural Oyster Roast on January 28, offering Members an intimate evening of coastal flavors, music, and cocktails amid the grandeur of Whitehall. Inspired by Mary Lily Flagler’s legendary gatherings, the event revived one of Palm Beach’s most cherished social traditions—one deeply rooted in both Florida’s coastal culture and Mary Lily’s own personal history.

By the time industrialist and developer Henry Flagler began transforming Florida’s east coast into America’s premier winter destination, oysters were already central to coastal life. Healthy oyster beds depended on open inlets and the delicate balance of tides and salinity, a connection Flagler understood well. In a 1901 letter regarding the Jupiter Inlet, he warned that its closure was “working ruin to the fisherman and oyster beds,” urging federal officials to act quickly to protect both local livelihoods and natural resources. His concern reflected how essential oysters were not only to Florida’s economy, but to its identity.

For residents and visitors alike, oyster roasts symbolized the abundance and pleasures of coastal living. These gatherings ranged from informal seaside picnics to elegant private entertainments, offering a distinctly regional form of hospitality. As Flagler’s great hotels welcomed America’s most prominent families, such traditions became an essential part of the Palm Beach social season, blending Gilded Age sophistication with Florida’s natural beauty.

For Mary Lily Flagler, however, the oyster roast was more than a regional custom—it was a beloved personal tradition she had embraced long before her time at Whitehall. Her love of oyster roasts began at Airlie, the celebrated coastal garden estate in North Carolina owned by her close friends Pembroke Jones and his wife Sarah “Sadie” Jones, a prominent financier with extensive railroad and business interests. Within the circle of railroad builders, financiers, and social leaders, oyster roasts at Airlie were cherished seasonal gatherings, informal yet elegant occasions that celebrated coastal abundance and Southern hospitality.

When Mary Lily came to Palm Beach, she brought with her not only this tradition, but a distinctive style of entertaining shaped by the same social networks that helped build modern Florida. At Whitehall, oyster roasts became a signature expression of her hospitality, transforming a simple coastal custom into a fashionable social event that blended natural beauty, culinary indulgence, and social spectacle.

Newspaper accounts vividly document these gatherings which welcomed a mix of American and European elite including the Duke of Manchester. One account described the scene with particular charm, noting, “The lawn of Whitehall was the scene yesterday afternoon of another oyster roast at which Mrs. Flagler entertains so delightfully.” At Whitehall, the oyster roast became a ritual of welcome, friendship, and celebration—an expression of both Florida’s coastal culture and the social world of the Gilded Age.

More than 100 years later, the Museum’s Oyster Roast paid homage to this rich history. Guests enjoyed freshly shucked oysters and champagne, accompanied by handcrafted cocktails from Tequila Komos and barbecue specialties from Tropical Smokehouse. Live jazz music filled the Flagler Kenan Pavilion, creating a convivial atmosphere reminiscent of the lively social seasons that once animated the estate.

“The Oyster Roast was a wonderful way to honor Mary Lily Flagler’s legacy of bringing people together in the spirit of warmth, elegance, and community,” said Amanda Skier, Director and CEO of the Flagler Museum. “Whitehall has always been a place of celebration and hospitality. By reviving this historic tradition, we are reconnecting our Members with an authentic and meaningful part of Palm Beach’s cultural heritage.”

The success of the inaugural Oyster Roast reflects the Flagler Museum’s ongoing commitment to creating distinctive experiences that connect Members with Palm Beach’s rich cultural heritage. By reviving traditions rooted in the Island’s earliest social seasons, the Museum continues to celebrate the history, architecture, and community that define Whitehall today.

For more information about upcoming events and membership, visit flaglermuseum.org.

Dropbox link to Oyster Roast photos and captions:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pe7s97qzj4vzjwebu2b5t/AOm05BLKDz0nbtjnPAKhB-Y?rlkey=u0ossitl65pya9enu107abfyh&st=d8n09e8w&dl=0>

About the Flagler Museum

When it was completed in 1902, Whitehall, Henry Flagler’s Gilded Age estate in Palm Beach, was hailed by the New York Herald as “more wonderful than any palace in Europe, grander and more magnificent than any other private dwelling in the world.” Today, Whitehall is a National Historic Landmark and is open to the public as the Flagler Museum, featuring guided tours, changing exhibitions, and special programs. The Museum is located at Cocoanut Row and Whitehall Way, Palm Beach.

The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is \$28 for adults (ages 13+), \$14 for children (ages 6–12), and free for children five and under.

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