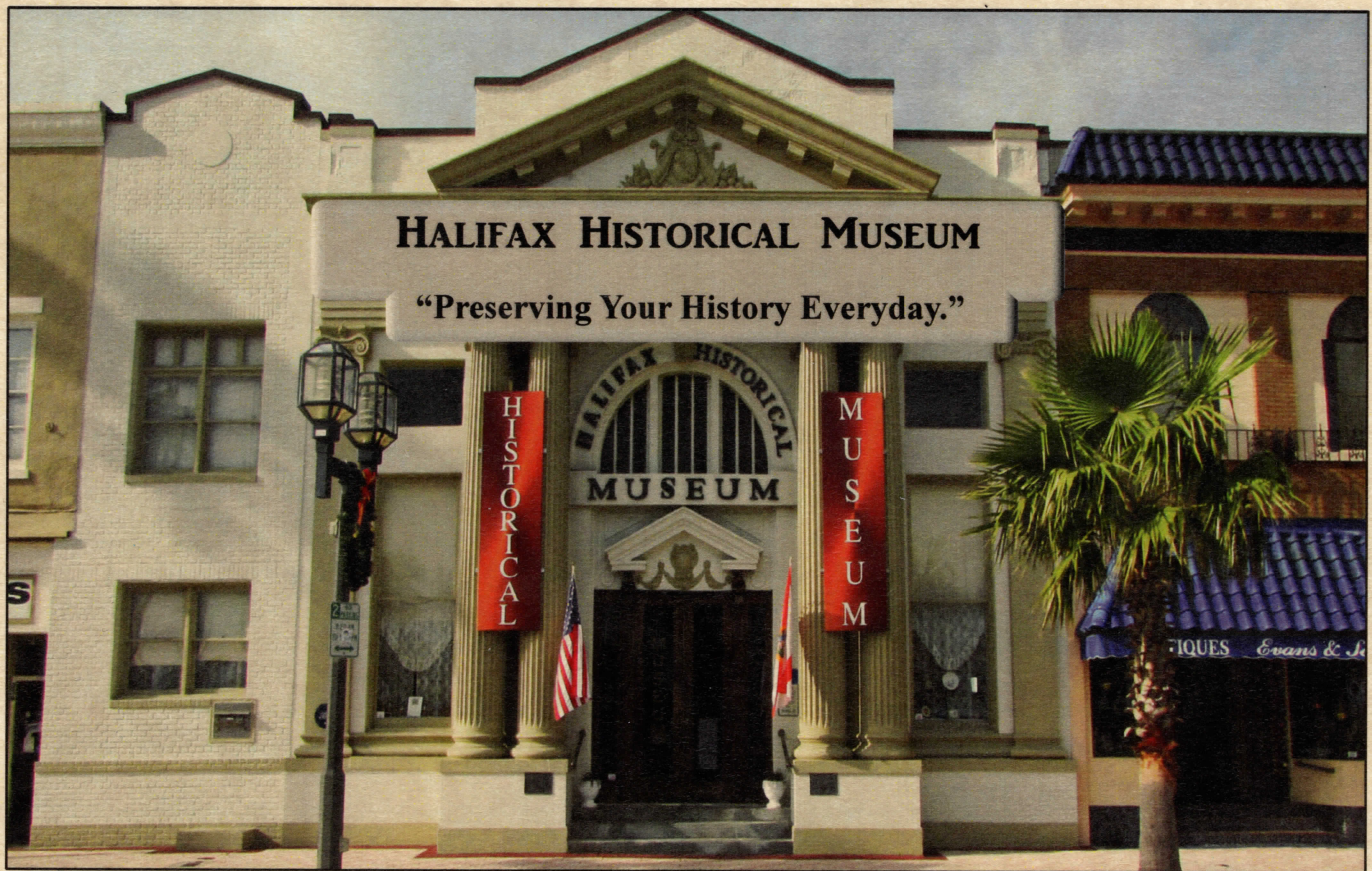


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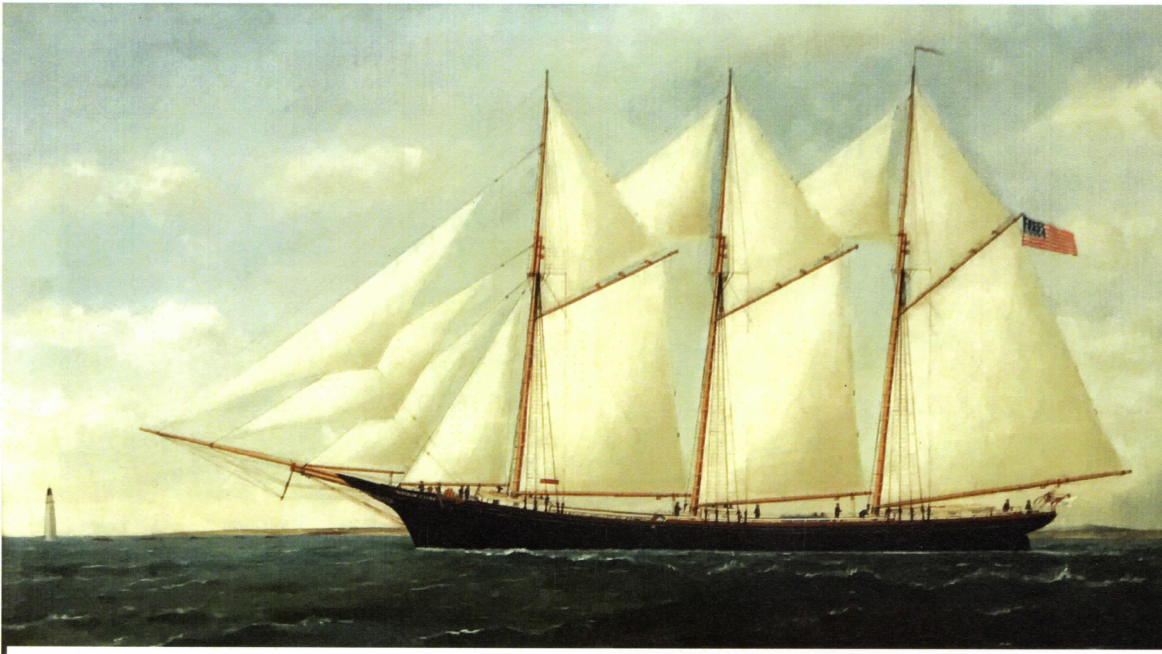
The Nathan Cobb Cottage: Built in 1897 from a Salvaged Shipwreck

By Randy Jaye

The Nathan Cobb Cottage, a 1½ story residential dwelling, is located at 137 Orchard Lane, Ormond Beach, Florida, near what was once the Old Ormond Hotel. Constructed in the vernacular architectural style¹ in 1897, local resident William Fagen used salvaged cargo lumber and wood parts from the shipwreck of the wooden *Nathan F. Cobb* schooner, which ran aground in 1896 off the coast of Ormond (now Ormond Beach).

generosity as they were known to have cared for and housed crews of ten to twenty sailors who had become stranded on their island. Cobb and other trailblazing wreckers and salvagers of the 19th century led the way to the formation of the United States Life-Saving Service in 1848, which later merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the United States Coast Guard in 1915.

The *Nathan F. Cobb* schooner departed from Brunswick, Georgia, on November 28, 1896, with a crew of eight men on her way to New York City with a cargo of railroad cross ties and timber on what would be the ship's final voyage. The ship encountered strong nor'easter storms at the Frying Pan Shoals off Cape Fear, North Carolina, and on December 1, 1896, it capsized. Two crewman, Daniel Parker and F. W.



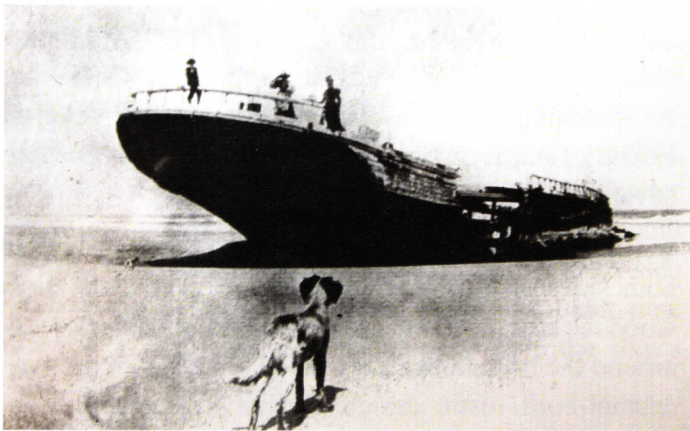
Oil on canvas painting of the *Nathan F. Cobb* schooner by noted American artist S.F.M. Badger – ca. 1895. Courtesy of Jerry Lampe

Built in a shipyard located in Rockland, Maine, in 1890 as a three-masted, fore-and-aft rigged schooner, the *Nathan F. Cobb* weighed 656 tons and measured 167.2 feet long with a beam width of 32.1 feet. The ship was named after Nathan F. Cobb, a ship builder who was born in 1797 in Eastham, Massachusetts. His family moved to Northampton County, Virginia, and eventually purchased Sand Shoal Island, which later became known as Cobb Island. In 1839, he and his sons founded Cobb's Salvaging Company, which became well-known for salvaging stranded and wrecked ships along the Mid-Atlantic coastline. The company amassed an impressive record, rescuing at least 37 ships without a loss of a single life. The Cobb family gained a reputation for their humanity and

Beal, were flung overboard and drown in the turbulent ocean waters. The surviving six crewman were able to remove the main and mizzen masts which prevented the ship from sinking. However, the ship was in dire straits as it was waterlogged and had no power to maneuver itself. The *Nathan F. Cobb* drifted southward for about four days and traveled about 375 miles until, on December 5, 1896, it ran aground on a sandbar about 1000 feet off the coast of Ormond, Florida.



“Work as if you were to live a thousand years, play as if you were to die tomorrow.”



Nathan Cobb - Became a Tourist Attraction

Early the next morning, local residents discovered the wrecked ship and realized the crew was stranded. J. D. Price, manager of the Ormond Hotel,² began gathering a group of local people to assist in rescue efforts. Meanwhile, Hiram B. Shaw, superintendent of the United States Life-Saving Service's Seventh Life-Saving District, was called to the scene. Shaw telegraphed the Inlet Life Saving Station in Jupiter, Florida, and requested that life-saving beach apparatus be sent by train to Ormond. He also moved a small surf boat to the beach and purchased ropes and other equipment needed to rescue the stranded crew members.

About fifty local people joined Shaw, but the rescue attempt had to be delayed until low tide. Despite making six attempts to reach the *Nathan F. Cobb*, they were unsuccessful as the strong ocean currents outmatched the small boats. A small metallic dingy (iron yawl) was then launched and manned by local residents Tom Fagen and Freeman Waterhouse. As they approached the stranded ship, a large wave struck their boat and flipped it over, forcing them into the rough ocean waters. Fagen managed to swim ashore, but Waterhouse returned to the small boat and attempted to steady it as men on shore began pulling it towards the beach by its tow ropes. Another large wave struck the boat and threw Waterhouse into the ocean. He was seen struggling to hang onto an oar but soon went under the surface and drowned. Several searches failed to locate Waterhouse, and his body was never recovered.

The captain of the stranded *Nathan F. Cobb* was obviously shaken by witnessing the drowning of a rescuer and said, "They have sacrificed one man in their efforts to save us; now I'll risk my life in an attempt to get ashore." He secured a rope around his

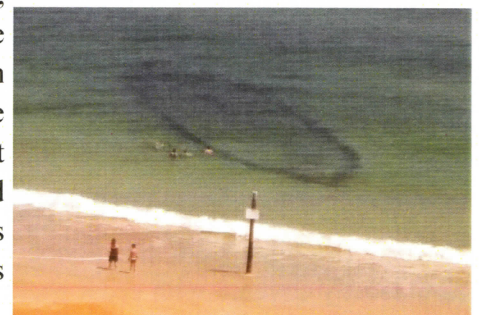
waist and then jumped off the ship and battled the waves. Fortunately, a rescue boat manned by local residents Hiram B. Shaw and Edward DeCourcy came and escorted him to the safety of the beach. The other five stranded crewmen were rescued soon afterwards, and all were given coffee, whiskey, and a blanket before being taken to an area hospital.

Sumner Increase Kimball, general superintendent of the United States Life Saving Service, wrote a letter of praise and appreciation to Edward DeCourcy and acknowledged all the other local people who assisted in the rescue of the six surviving *Nathan F. Cobb* crewmen.

The death of Freeman Waterhouse was a local tragedy. Tom Fagen wrote, "If you see any of the friends of Waterhouse, you can tell them he died in as noble and brave a cause, as any man ever did..." A large boulder stone was sent to John Anderson and Joseph Price from Cape Elizabeth, Maine, to stand near the site of the shipwreck as a monument to the bravery of Freeman Waterhouse. A bronze plaque, which has Waterhouse's first name misspelled, was attached and reads:

FREED WATERHOUSE
BORN DEC. 22, 1873 AT CAPE ELIZABETH,
MAINE
DROWNED IN THE SURF OPPOSITE THIS POINT
IN ATTEMPTING WITH THOMAS FAGEN OF
ORMOND, THE RESCUE OF THE CREW OF THE
SCHOONER, NATHAN F. COBB, WRECKED
HERE DEC. 5th, 1896

The *Nathan F. Cobb* schooner remained stranded off the shore of Ormond as it was heavily damaged and deemed beyond economic repair.³ After being salvaged for its wood and freight, its remains eventually disappeared under the water. More than 120 years later, remnants of the ship's hull can occasionally be seen after violent storms and ocean waves disrupt the area's sandbars.



Ships Hull View Occasionally Seen.

The Nathan Cobb Cottage originally included a wood outer kitchen structure and dog trot,⁴ which were also built from pieces of salvaged wood from the *Nathan F. Cobb* schooner, but were removed in the 1920's; most likely due to wood rot. The wood shake shingles on the roof and its original dormer window were removed and replaced with a composite shingle roof around 1965. The brick chimney is original.



The Nathan Cobb Cottage originally included a wood outer kitchen and dog trot – photograph ca. 1900. Source Ormond Beach Historical Society.



Nathan Cobb Cottage – Rear View – Photograph ca. 2021. Source Randy Jaye

The Nathan Cobb Cottage stands on brick pier supports and has a rectangular plan that measures 23' by 17' with a projecting kitchen extension on its northeastern side—what remains of its original dog trot that measures 6' by 11' which makes the structure 457 square feet. The exterior walls are constructed of railroad ties that were positioned vertically and are now mostly covered with cedar shake siding. The main roof is a wood framed gable design that is now covered

with standing seam metal. The extended kitchen area has matching standing seam metal roof covering. A matching extended seam metal roof covering extends four feet from the rear wall which partially covers the wood deck area.

Original pieces of ships knee wood⁵ are affixed on both sides of the front door, and original railroad tie wood is still exposed around the front entrance and around the two south-side windows. The front door is a custom-built rustic design that is painted white and made from solid wood vertical-paneled boards supported by two horizontal cross braces. Originally, there was a wood deck porch that extended the length of the building that included pieces of the ship's sole (floor) that were used for floorboards and ship balustrades which served as railings. This porch was removed due to wood rot and a portion of it around the front door was replaced with bricks in the 1940s. A larger modern brick porch that extends the entire length of the front of the structure was installed in the 1990s. A 12' by 12' exterior wood porch deck in the rear of the structure with railings and a staircase leading to the ground level was built in 2014.

Wood diamond-hole lattice panels at the ground level provide airflow and an entranceway to underneath the structure. Around 1955, an eight-foot section of the south side of the Nathan Cobb Cottage was removed most likely due to wood rot. The removal of these wood rot damaged sections most likely saved the cottage from eventual demolition.



Nathan Cobb Cottage – Southwest Front view with the Florida Historic Marker installed Photograph ca. 2021. Source Randy Jaye

Interior of the Nathan Cobb Cottage

The living room includes the original fireplace and brick chimney. The original bead board wall panels were covered with Pickwick pine wood paneling around the 1950s. The *Nathan F. Cobb's* quarter board, originally located on the exterior of the south wall, was relocated inside and hung on the south side wall of the living room around 1955. The heart pine flooring is original and was salvaged from the ship's sole.

The dining room includes original heart pine flooring, a small closet and the original wood staircase that leads to the loft on the upper half story. The south side wall features exposed bricks from the back of the original fireplace. The bathroom was added on to the dining room in 1955 and was upgraded with a modern shower, toilet and sink in 2014. The 6' by 11' kitchen was enclosed from an original section of the dog trot in the 1920s and was upgraded with a modern sink, wood pine flooring and appliances in 2014.

The loft on the upper half story, which overlooks the living room, includes wood stair banisters and an attic knee wall (short wall) with a pine base section and bamboo railings. The floorboards of the loft once spanned the length of the structure and provided space for two bedrooms. The front section was removed in 1955 allowing for a vaulted ceiling over the living room. The entire ceiling features original cypress wood boards. As technology improved over the years, the cottage's owners upgraded the structure with modern conveniences.



Nathan Cobb Cottage - Interior second-floor loft looking down at the Nathan F. Cobb ship's quarter board – photograph ca. 2021

Florida Historical Marker & Florida Heritage Landmark

The Nathan Cobb Cottage was designated a Florida Heritage Landmark in May 2021, and on November 17, 2021, a Florida Historical Marker was installed in front of the cottage. The marker reads:

The Nathan Cobb Cottage is a rare historic home built using local traditions and cultural practices in the frame vernacular style, and is one of the last standing structures erected from salvaged ship lumber and wood freight in Florida. It was built in 1897 by William Fagen using railroad ties for its walls from the wreck of the schooner *Nathan F. Cobb*. The ship capsized during a nor'easter storm off the coast of North Carolina which drowned two of her crewmen. It then drifted for 375 miles until it ran aground off the coast of Ormond (now Ormond Beach) on December 5, 1896. During a rescue attempt to save the surviving six crewmen, Freeman Waterhouse, a bookkeeper for the Ormond Hotel, drowned, his body never recovered. It originally included a dog trot, detached kitchen structure, wood plank front porch with ship balustrade railing, exposed railroad ties on its exterior walls and a wood shake shingle roof with two dormer windows. An indoor kitchen, bathroom and electricity were added which modernized the cottage. It is unlikely that such a building will be constructed again since wood schooners have not been built since the 1920s, and almost all have been decommissioned and salvaged decades ago.



Nathan Cobb Cottage - Florida Historic Marker Photograph ca. 2021. Source Randy Jaye

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2021

According to the Florida Division of Historic Resources: "To qualify as a Florida Heritage Landmark a building, structure or site must be at least 50 years old and have regional or statewide significance in the areas of architecture, archaeology, Florida history or traditional culture, or be associated with an event of statewide or national significance that took place at least 50 years ago." The Nathan Cobb Cottage truly satisfies these requirements and remains a local, state and national treasure which has survived for more than 120 years. It stands as a reminder of what many consider the simpler times of a bygone era.

Visit the Nathan Cobb Cottage

Tours of the Nathan Cobb Cottage are conducted by the Ormond Beach Historical Society upon request. To schedule a tour and for additional information call the Society's office at (386) 677-7005.

Notes:

¹ **Vernacular architectural style** is the architectural designs that reflect local traditions and cultural practices and are typically simpler than the building methods and technology of their time. The materials used are typically inexpensive and indigenous to the local region. Amateurs (not credentialed architects) typically design vernacular structures.

² The **Ormond Hotel** was built in 1887 by John Anderson and Joseph Price, and officially opened on January 1, 1888. In 1890, Henry Flagler purchased and expanded the hotel, adding a saltwater pool, elevators and increasing the number of rooms from 75 to 400. The hotel became known around the world as an extravagant playground for the rich and famous. It was once the largest wooden structure in the United States and included 11 miles of corridors and breezeways. On November 24, 1980, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The structure soon thereafter fell into disrepair and had to close in the mid-1980s. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to restore the structure and it was demolished in 1992. The Ormond Heritage Condominiums now occupies the site.

³ **Beyond economic repair (BER)** refers to the condition of an asset when the estimated cost of repairs exceeds at least 75% of its replacement value. BER typically means an asset would cost more to repair it than what it is worth in both time and money.

⁴ A **dog trot** is a term used in the southern United States to describe an open-ended passageway that connects two structures. This type of passageway is also often referred to as a breezeway.

⁵ **Ships knee wood** is a natural, or cut, curved piece of wood that is a common form of bracing in ship building.

⁶ The **Ormond Beach Historical Society (OBHS)** was formed in 1976 as the Ormond Beach Historical Trust. The OBHS's first major project was to save The Casements (John D. Rockefeller's house from 1918 until his death in 1938) from demolition. The Casements was added onto the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and was ultimately restored and now functions as the Cultural Center for the City of Ormond Beach. Other historic sites and structures that the OBHS helped to preserve include the Indian Burial Mound (ca. 800) located on South Beach Street across from Ames Park, the Pilgrim's Rest Primitive Baptist Church (ca. 1879) in Bailey Riverbridge Gardens Park, the Ormond Hotel Cupola (ca. 1887) in Fortunato Park, the Anderson-Price Memorial Building (ca. 1915) at 42 North Beach Street, the Three Chimneys Sugar Mill Ruins (ca. 1768) at 715 West Granada Boulevard and the World War II Watchtower (ca. 1942), on Highway A1A, 4.3 miles north of Granada Boulevard. The OBHS currently owns and preserves the Anderson-Price Memorial Building (deeded to the OBHS by the Ormond Beach Woman's Club in 2002), and the Nathan Cobb Cottage (bequeathed to the OBHS by Tom Massfeller in 2020). The OBHS's main office is in the MacDonald House, 38 E. Granada Boulevard, Ormond Beach, where it also operates the Ormond Beach Welcome Center.

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*About the Author

Randy Jaye has recently researched and nominated 4 properties that have been successfully added onto the National Register of Historic Places. He is the author of the recent books: *Flagler County, Florida: A Centennial History* and *Perseverance: Episodes of Black History from the Rural South* and has written many articles that have been published in historical journals. He earned both an MA degree and a BA degree from the California State University. Realizing that Florida has the oldest European-influenced history in the United States, he is committed to researching, exploring and writing about its fascinating and important diversity and how it has played key roles in influencing the development and establishing the identity of the nation.



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