



# THE *William Bell* HOUSE



One of the Historic District's showcase Victorian beauties is the elaborate building on the corner of Beech and Eighth streets. For many years, it operated as the Beech Street Grill. Described as East Lake and Chinese Chippendale, the house, like so many Victorian houses in the Historic District, is a mix of many different styles and periods depending on the whims and ideas of the builders. The house was built by William Bell, one of the Bell brothers, as a "bride house" for his wife. The elegant house has seen many uses, including a boarding house, a gift shop, and a restaurant.

This showcase Victorian beauty experienced many improvements when the Coker family opened their famous C House. At one time, three shotgun houses were added to increase the number of gift shop options for island visitors. The small cottages are very like the small shotgun houses located throughout the Historic District. A shotgun house, a narrow, rectangular domestic residence, usually is no more than 12 feet wide, with rooms arranged one behind the other and doors at each end of the house. It was the most popular style of house in the South from the end of the Civil War through the 1920's.

Captain William B. Bell and Captain James Bell, identical twin brothers born in 1841, emigrated from Scotland. They both signed up for the Confederate States Navy at Wilmington, North Carolina at age 19. After the war, they came to Fernandina which was a thriving seaport where river pilots could make a very good living. The Bell brothers were successful river pilots and, like many other pilots, invested in real estate and built houses during the island's Golden Age.

Captain James Bell built a beautiful home in Fernandina's Old Town at 212 Estrada Street. The house, known as the Captain's House, enjoyed great celebrity when it was used for the 1988 filming of *The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking*.

There are stories that the two were so much alike they could dress in each other's clothes and fool their wives. They lived in Old Town, where most of the river pilots lived, but built houses in "new" Fernandina. The elaborate gingerbread trim and carpentry details are evident in many of their houses. They are buried side by side in St. Peter's Episcopal Church cemetery.

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AT A GLANCE:  
**WILLIAM BELL  
HOUSE**

ADDRESS:  
801 Beech Street

DATE BUILT:  
1889

BUILT BY:  
Captain William Bell

