

not the other. Officially the Federal blockade of Cape Fear began on 27 April, 1861, thirteen days after the fall of Fort Sumter, when President Lincoln ordered the closing of all Southern ports. During the war there were as many as seventy-seven bar pilots serving at Cape Fear and most of them were from Smithville and Brunswick County. In addition to their unique piloting skills, they are remembered for their bravery and acts of daring.

In a letter from the Department of the Navy dated 16 January, 1914 Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt confirmed that "W.B. Bell served in the capacity of Pilot on board the C.S. Steamers RALEIGH and ARCTIC, from 1861-1864, the later date the latest records we have of the vessels of the Wilmington, N.C. Station". Further, he wrote, "There is nothing of record to show that his service was otherwise than the creditable and honorable". Franklin D. Roosevelt went on to become the 32nd President of the United States (1933-1945). According to W.S. Thompson, Superintendent of the Navy Department, Library and Naval War Records, "Pilots in the service of the Confederate Navy did not come under the heading of "Enlisted Men", but held distinctive appointments as "Pilots", frequently made by Commanders of fleets or single vessels."

During the war William Bell served as "Pilot" of *CSS Arctic*, an ironclad, steamer gunboat. Early war records indicate the vessel was a "receiving" ship for training seamen. The *CSS Arctic* Port Watch Bill of August 1862 listed William Bell as "Quarter Gunner". James Bell was listed on the Starboard Watch Bill. That same year records show that William Bell was a full time pilot. The vessel was active throughout the war in the Wilmington based Atlantic Squadron. *CSS Arctic* was deliberately scuttled as an obstruction to Battery Buchanan, Fort Fisher, North Carolina in February 1865. Other records show that William Bell was captured by U.S. forces on 15 February, 1865. He was imprisoned at Fort Macon, North Carolina until after the Confederate surrender in April 1865.

William Bell also served as pilot of *CSS Raleigh*. This is a source of confusion because there were two Confederate Navy ships named Raleigh. The facts were further confused by the Confederate Navy's practice of reassigning pilots among ships of the Atlantic Squadron.

One *CSS Raleigh* was an iron-hulled, steamer gunboat. It was very active throughout the war. During the historic battle of ironclads at Hampton Roads, 8-9 March, 1862, *CSS Raleigh* was a gunboat escort and tender to *CSS Virginia*. In late 1864 *CSS Raleigh* was renamed *CSS Roanoke*. At the end of the war on 4 April, 1865 it was destroyed in the James River to prevent capture.

The other *CSS Raleigh* was the larger Richmond Class (172'6" length) ironclad steamer. This ship was commissioned on 30 April, 1864 and its operational career was very short lived. It was destroyed on 7 May, 1864, while returning to its home port of Smithville, North Carolina, when the *CSS Raleigh* ran hard aground on a sandbar, inside New Inlet in the Cape Fear River off Fort Fisher. The receding tide broke the ironclads keel. Its fifteen large iron plates were salvaged by the Confederates. Before being destroyed the *CSS Raleigh* undertook the only offensive naval action by the Confederate Navy when it engaged and drove off Federal blockading vessels in the Wilmington Campaign.

While William and James Bell were piloting ships of war, James Bell was also piloting a blockade runner, *Talisman*. Between 1861-1865 *Talisman*, one of approximately sixty blockade runners operating out of Cape Fear during the war, successfully ran the Federal blockade five times until it sank in a gale on 29 December, 1864.

Fernandina Bar Pilots:

After the war in 1867 William Bell and his brother James, moved to Fernandina (Old Town) Florida, "a sleepy hamlet occupied chiefly by pilots", where they joined the Association of Branch Pilots. This organization was formed in 1837 and reorganized as the Cumberland Sound Pilots Association about 1893. Today, the Cumberland Sound Pilots Association is one of the oldest continuously operating business entities in the state of Florida. Historically, piloting was a family profession. Many of their fellow bar pilots also hailed from Smithville, some from extended pilot families. Before the days of state licensing, pilots and pilot apprentices were often related by birth or marriage. The Association of Branch Pilots included such familial relationships. Only after serving rigorous apprenticeships of three to five years and satisfactorily completing a strenuous examination could a pilot be "made", the term for a license certification.

This was the exiting era when sailing ships were making their final stand against the steamship. The Fernandina harbor was always filled with ocean going wind-jammers of all rigs, many flying foreign flags. They were all in port for cargoes of yellow pine lumber, naval stores and phosphate rock. Shipping tonnage of these valuable commodities was at its zenith. During this period almost all of the approximately fourteen "weather-eyed" and "rolling-gaited" pilots, who brought in the ships, including Captains William and James Bell, resided in snug Old Town homes and docked their pilot boats in Egans Creek. Near their homes and docks stood a seventy-foot high "lookout" tower with an apprentice pilot usually on watch. When the lookout pilot sighted an incoming vessel at sea, he shouted, "Ship Away!" through his megaphone. This was before telephones. Soon afterwards, sails were raised on one of the pilot boats, such as the *Jenny Lind* and *Francis Elizabeth*, and she was underway for the open ocean. Piloting, always challenging and sometimes involving great risk, was a prestigious profession that performed a vital function in the economic development of Fernandina.

Fernandina Golden Age:

William Baker Bell married Virginia A. McDonald (about 1856-1920) in Charleston, South Carolina on 3 February, 1880. On 24 February, 1880 William and his new bride Virginia returned to Fernandina to make it their family home, where they reared four children: Virginia b. 1881, Haidee Verenice b. 1884, William Baker, Jr. b. 1887 and Howard B. b. 1896. James Bell married Mary Martha Smith (1844-1921) of Southport, North Carolina and they also made Fernandina their home. Sadly, they lost their only child, named William after his uncle, at age six during a yellow fever epidemic in 1872. Throughout their successful careers, Captains William and James Bell distinguished themselves not only as successful and prosperous pilots but also as creative architects and builders of numerous Victorian homes for themselves and friends.

Driven by booming export demand for the commodities of naval stores, lumber and phosphate ore, the post Civil War era was the heyday for the burgeoning Fernandina economy. The reconstruction economy was "undergirded" by these industries plus shipping, railroads and tourism. More than fifty ships could be counted in the naturally deep Fernandina harbor, at one time, waiting to be loaded. Fernandina was among the busiest ports on the U.S. Atlantic coast before circumstances conspired to change the shipping paradigm. The thriving economy ushered in a "Golden Age" of Fernandina architecture. Victorian architecture roughly overlapped the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). American residential Victorian architecture, found in Fernandina, can be seen in magnificent homes built during the fifty years between 1856 and 1907. The unprecedented rise in economic opportunities in the robust industrial period after the war meant that "beautiful" and "fancy" was no longer only available to the most privileged and wealthy. These "modern" homes symbolized the increasing wealth and status of their owners and the increasing affluence of Fernandina society. Fernandina's "Golden Age" was a time of heightened cultural awareness, fashion consciousness and social activities. There were grand hotels, like the Egmont, and a Lyceum Hall where masque balls, musical concerts, lectures and other entertainment were

regularly held. There were active social clubs for enjoying every kind of sport, hobby and cultural interest. Indeed, this was Fernandina's "*Belle Époque*".

Much of the charm of Fernandina's picturesque historic district is the legacy left by Captains William and James Bell. Splendid homes built by them, during a twenty year period, were typified by the popular Victorian vernacular of that time. Although the source of their inspiration is unknown, their building repertoire included Second Empire, East Lake, Queen Anne, Italianate and ornamental hybrids of these styles. The distinctive characteristics of their varied homes included wonderful proportions, "gingerbread" architectural details, often painted in contrasting colors and even decorative, imported Italian marble mantels and fireplace surrounds. Although a number were raised, nine landmark Victorian houses, known to have been built by them, remain today.

The 1888 Captains House in Old Town, built by James Bell, and the 1889 Bell-Kennard House at Beech and 8th Streets, built by William Bell, are notable examples of their architectural aesthetics and building talents. The Captains House, an adaptation of the Second Empire frame style, was first occupied by Captain James Bell and then by Captain Robert Downs. It is most noteworthy for its tower, with fish-scale-shingles, gable dormers and cupola, to watch for incoming ships. Also distinctive are two-story bay windows and ornate hoods, cornices, verge boards and brackets.

The Bell-Kennard house, an adaptation of the Eastlake frame style, was built by Captain William Bell as a present for his wife Virginia. It is notable for its "Chinese Chippendale" inspired balustrades on lower and upper wrap-a-around verandas, which infill top and bottom rails and vertical supports with interlocking diagonal and horizontal designs. When originally built, the home was surrounded by a handsome fence also of intricate Chinese Chippendale design. Incredibly, the patterns of the upper and lower balustrades and fence are all different. Also, the

home features large two-story bay windows and marble mantels and fireplace surrounds. On the molding above the stairwell there remains, under layers of stained varnish and years of grime, a painted cartouche incorporating a stylized monogram with the initials W.B.B. and date 1889. This “signature” of the builder is similar to the method employed by some builders of wooden ships to memorialize their craft.

Subsequently, William Bell built the ornate, Queen Anne, 1907 Bell-Low House with lavish fish-scale shingles and charming “frou-frou” in the roof pediments, including a signature bell silhouette. He and his wife moved into this home on the diagonal corner of Beech and 8th Streets. The Bell-Kennard house was then gifted to Samuel Jefferson Kennard, Jr. (1879-1959) and his wife Haidee Verence Bell Kennard (1884-1964), daughter of William and Virginia Bell. This is where their children: Haidee Bell b. 1905 and Samuel Jefferson Kennard III b. 1913 were born and grew up. A family story explains why, after almost one hundred years, there is a missing baluster from the staircase balustrade leading from the original parlor to the upstairs. A curious child, Samuel Jefferson Kennard III, would sometimes sneak from his bedroom down the stairs in darkness to eavesdrop on the “adult” conversations taking place in the living room, which was separated from the parlor by large pocket doors. On one such evening of stealth he was sitting on the usual lower step listening intently, with his head thrust between balusters, when it became stuck. His mother heard the crying child and unable to free his head summoned the fire department. While the embarrassed mother tried to soothe the frightened child a fireman sawed away the offending baluster, which has never been replaced. Then, there is the “secret” compartment besides one of the marble mantels in the living room, attested to by Samuel Jefferson Kennard III. It is so well hidden that no one has ever been able to discover its whereabouts. Perhaps it was covered up during renovations.

Other extant examples of the Bell brothers’ building arts include the 1904 Lasserre House, 1809 Mahoney-Mills House, 1880 Salvador House and 1902