

the first regional magazine of the georgia coast and lowcountry!

SecretsOfTheSouth.net
October 2006 \$3.95

secrets

of the south

Georgia
VS.
Florida
A FANTASTIC Rivalry

Live the Tradition!
Farmers'
Almanac TV

Hold the Mayo...
*Savannah Home to Best
Cancer Care & Research*

Billy CMA's Sexy,
Southern Singer
Currington
Doin' Something Right



The Raised Tybee Cottage has caught the eye of The Georgia Trust, which recognizes the importance and significance of the cottages and the need to place them on its 2007 "Places in Peril" list.

A Place in Peril

Almost anywhere you go on Tybee you see them. The square, two-story, white frame buildings with low pitched hip roofs and recessed upper porches, each having a semi-open ground level enclosed with lattice work. They line the streets and lanes of the ocean side of Butler Avenue and are interspersed on small lots throughout the interior of the island. In ads, real estate agents refer to them as "classic, 1930s Tybee cottages" while most people simply call them "old Tybee beach houses." I call them "Raised Tybee Cottages" as they can only be found on Tybee. And, they are in peril.

By Robert A. Ciucevich

As a native of Savannah, Georgia, my interest in Tybee originates with the Collins Cottage, my family's summer retreat, located on Tybee's Back River. My great grandfather, John T. Collins, purchased the property in 1920 as a summer house for his wife and children. Three generations of the Collins Family – Ciucevichs, Grevemburghs, and Keatings – spent their summers on the Back River. My father's stories of his childhood summers at Tybee greatly influenced my decision to become a historic preservationist and to become involved in the preservation movement on Tybee during the late 1990s.

These cottages' main living quarters are situated on the raised level and the servants' quarters, changing rooms, and automobile stall are located on the ground level. The main living quarters are generally raised on trussed wood piers, with the ground level enclosed with wood lattice in which lattice garage doors face side streets or lanes. Most of them have hip roofs, which are often covered with pressed metal shingles, and recessed wrap-around porches.

Early Raised Tybee Cottages feature a casual, communal open plan in which the entrance opens into a large common room or parlor that is flanked on both sides by several smaller

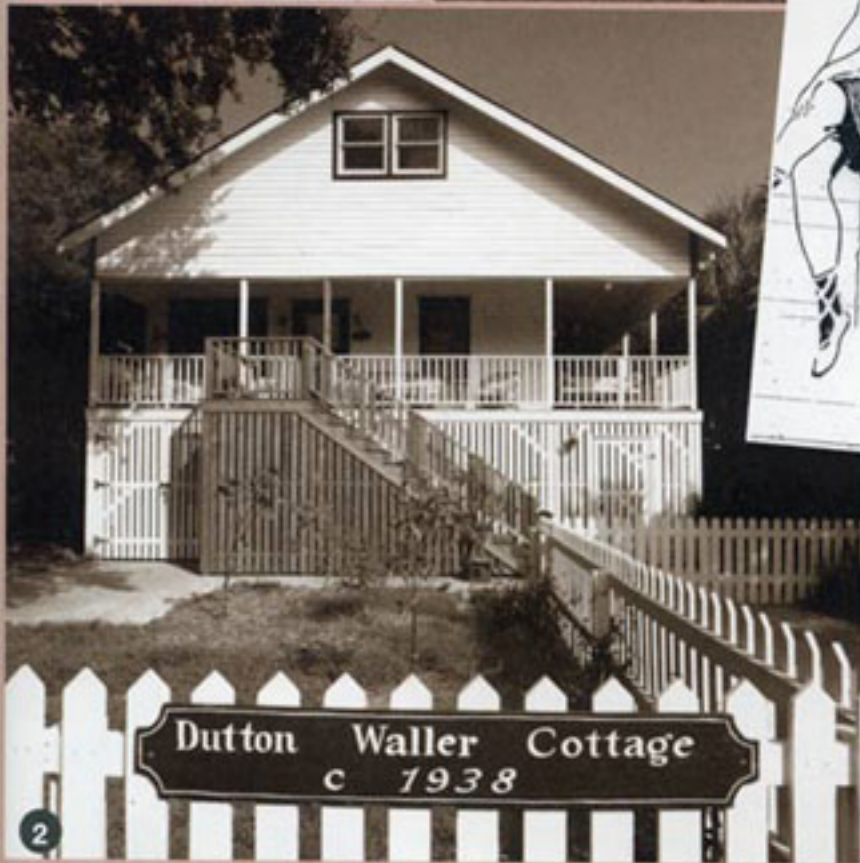
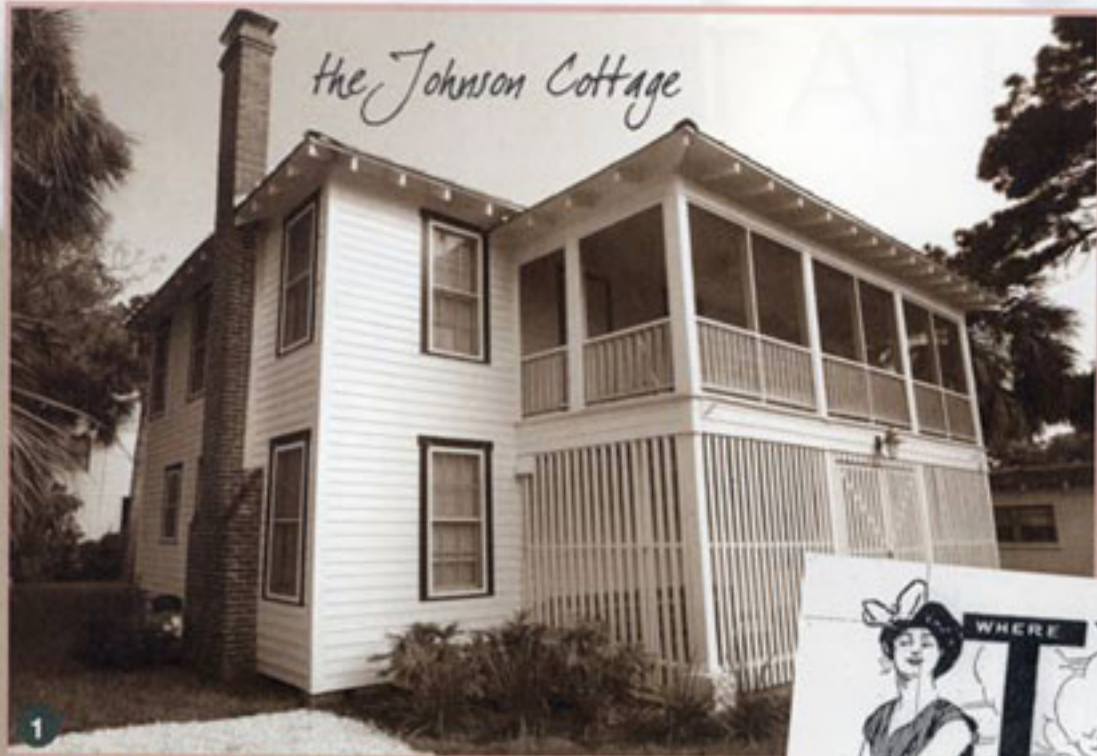
rooms. Bedrooms are usually located along the side porch, with the kitchen and bath located on the opposite side of the parlor. The parlor is generally quite large and serves several functions, often doubling as a casual dining area.

First introduced during Tybee's golden era as a coastal summer resort, the Raised Tybee Cottage was built between the early 1920s and the late 1940s. The style developed as a result of the automobile's coming to Tybee following the completion of the Tybee Road in 1923. As proclaimed in a circa 1926 brochure, the new auto road made Tybee "the accessible playground of 8,000,000 people of the Southeast, and the queen of the South Atlantic coast resorts."

As a result of the island's increased accessibility, the resorts flourished during the mid 1920s and early 1930s, and Tybee began an unparalleled building boom. Rows of boarding houses and numerous small hotels were established to accommodate

- 1. Johnson Cottage, 1306 Jones Avenue** – Built c1932 entirely by the original owner, James Herbert Johnson, who drew on his expertise in the building trade. His nephew Tom Beytagh, a local contractor who spent his childhood summers at the cottage with his extended family, oversaw the rehabilitation of the cottage in 2005 and was awarded a Tybee Island Historical Society preservation award. They hope a fifth generation will soon make their own Tybee summer magic.
- 2. Dutton-Waller Cottage, 1416 7th Avenue** – Built c1938 as a speculative venture for Savannah lawyer Edward A. Dutton (who later served as mayor of Savannah Beach during the 1950s), it served as a 1940s summer retreat for Blanche and Penn Waller, owners of the Waller Lumber & Supply Company and early developers of nearby Wilmington Island. Current owner Diane Kaufmann received a Tybee Island Historic Society preservation award in 2006.
- 3. Mulherin-Righton Cottage, 14 8th Place** – Built c1935, this cottage retains its original varnished pine interior, recessed wrap-around porches, and lattice-enclosed ground level with double auto bays, servants quarters, and bath/changing rooms. Built for Margaret and Harold Mulherin, it became the summer retreat of Dr. and Mrs. Harry Righton. The current owners, John Higham and Pamela Hearon of Boston, Mass., have the first individually listed Raised Tybee Cottage on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Johnson Cottage



The Mulherin-Righton Cottage



Christopher Miller



Ciucevich and Beytagh point out signature foundation blocks of the Raised Tybee Cottages.



the crush of people visiting the island. It was during this time that Cab Calloway and other Big Band personalities performed at Tybee's dancing pavilions. With more people visiting the island than ever before, Tybee was arguably the most popular summer beach resort on the South Atlantic coast during this period.

The opening of the Tybee Road spurred a dramatic increase in the demand for oceanfront property, causing development and construction practices along the Strand to be changed dramatically. Because the island was more accessible than ever before, more people were interested in beach cottages. Instead of one large cottage being built in the center of an original oceanfront lot, the lots were subdivided and many smaller cottages were built. The small size of the lots required a different type of cottage than those built on the island in previous years, thus providing the inspiration for the Raised Tybee Cottage.

Whether or not it was the intention of Tybee's early cottage builders, the Raised Tybee Cottage style appears to be a combination of both the turn-of-the-century cottages built along the Strand and the cottages built on the South End of the island along the Back River. This new cottage style retained the square shape, two-story height and recessed wrap-around porch of the Back River cottages while employing the basic functionality of the Strand cottages; namely, the open, raised ground level containing the servants quarters and changing rooms with exterior lattice surround.

The most significant evolutionary trait of the



Wrap-around porch of the Dutton-Waller Cottage.

Raised Tybee cottage, however, is its full height ground level, which was raised a full story in order to incorporate garage space for automobiles into the new design. Because Tybee's streets were little more than one lane sand pathways when these oceanfront cottages were built, it was necessary to provide a place to store the automobiles of the new generation of summer cottage owners without using up any of the already space-challenged lots.

Built as casual retreats for family and friends who would spend the summer season at their beach cottage from late May to early September, the new road to Tybee made "summering" much more practical. Today, however, the tradition of "summering" on Tybee is becoming a thing of the past. With extended families living farther and farther apart, few of Tybee's longtime "summer people" spend the entire resort season at their family beach house.

Many of the families have begun renting their cottages during parts of the season and most of the off-season. Several have sold their cottages to take advantage of the resurgence in Tybee's popularity and the dramatic rise in property values.

The demand for beach cottages makes these Raised Tybee Cottages highly desirable, especially because of their unique cottage architecture. Regional and national authorities, including the National Trust, concede that the Raised Tybee Cottage appears to be unique to the island and is not believed to be found anywhere else on the Atlantic seaboard.

Recently, the Georgia Trust recognized the importance and significance of the cottages by considering including the Raised Tybee Cottage on its 2007 "Places in Peril" list – a list that highlights the eleven most significant historic resources in Georgia that are in danger of being lost. Only 110 of these rare cottages remain on the island today.

Although many now recognize the significance and irreplaceable aspect of these cottages, the redevelopment of the island's neighborhoods remains a threat. To be included on the "Places in Peril" list would go a long way to increase awareness of one of the South's best kept secrets. ❖



Interior photos of Johnson Cottage show historic preservation elements. Any change must be apparent and distinguishable from the original. Note the width of the interior siding on the walls.