

C.W. LEWIS HOUSE  
27 South 7th Street  
Fernandina Beach  
Nassau County  
Florida

HABS NO. FL-279

HABS  
FLA,  
45-FERB,  
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COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

C.W. LEWIS HOUSE

HABS No. FL-279

Location: 27 South Seventh Street (NW corner South Seventh Street and Ash Street), Fernandina Beach, Nassau County, Florida.

Present Owner: Earl F. and Juanita P. Wilson.

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

Present Use: Dwelling.

Significance: The Lewis house is an interesting example of tabby concrete construction in Florida. Built of poured Portland cement, the structure is the only remaining domestic example of tabby in Fernandina Beach. It was designed by Robert S. Schuyler, an important local architect.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1882-1885. On May 13, 1882 the Florida Mirror announced the start of construction on "An elegant two story concrete dwelling house . . . by Mr. Charles Lewis." In October 1885 Lewis moved into his new home which was complete except for details on the exterior. (Florida Mirror, October 3, 1885)
2. Architect: The house was designed by Robert S. Schuyler of Fernandina. He prepared the plans and also supervised the construction.

Having come to Florida from Troy, New York in 1878, Schuyler moved to Fernandina from Waldo, Florida in 1881. (Florida Mirror, April 23, 1881, Webb, 180) He designed many of the major buildings in Fernandina as well as several rural churches for the Episcopal Church in Florida. (Werndli, ) He served as a city clerk for the City of Fernandina and as County Judge for four years. He died on July 24, 1895 of Bright's disease and was buried in Fernandina. (Florida Times-Union, July 25, 1895)

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Lewis house was built on lot 5 of Block 37 of the official plat of the City of Fernandina which was lithographed and issued by the Florida Railroad in 1857 and enlarged by the Florida Town Improvement Company in 1889 and 1901. The chain of title is drawn from the Deed Books of Nassau County, Florida:

- 1881 Deed, November 29, 1881, recorded December 3, 1881 in Book R, page 637. The lot was sold for \$500 by James B. Parramore for himself and as guardian for his son, Joseph F. Parramore to Charles W. and Lizzie H. Lewis.
- 1894 Mortgage Deed, August 1, 1894, recorded August 23, 1894 in Book A-4, page 105. A \$4,000 mortgage was taken out on the property, including \$3,000 of insurance on the building, by Lizzie H. Lewis to W. H. Campbell.
- 1907 Deed, July 20, 1907, recorded in Book B-7, page 51. The lot was sold for \$8,000 by Charles W. and Lizzie H. Lewis to W. H. Campbell.
- 1910 Deed, August 1, 1910, recorded, August 22, 1910 in Book 11, page 578. The lot was sold for \$3,500 by Seth S. and Rebecca C. Staples (Heir of W. H. Campbell) to J. F. Mularkey.
- 1925 Mortgage Deed, August 29, 1925, recorded, August 31, 1925 in Book 59, page 26. A \$2,000 mortgage was taken out by Agnes Burs Mularkey (Heir of J. F. Mularkey) to First National Bank of Fernandina
- 1927 Satisfaction of Mortgage, September 8, 1927, recorded in Book 54, page 414. This clears the above mortgage for \$2,000.
- 1941 Deed, April 18, 1941, recorded May 15, 1941 in Book 112, page 467. The lot was sold for \$3,250 by Agnes Burs Mularkey to B. W. and Eunice M. Halter

- 1941 Mortgage Deed, May 12, 1941, recorded May 13, 1941 in Book 111, page 159. A \$2,450 mortgage was taken out on the lot by B. W. and Eunice M. Halter  
to  
Fernandina Federal Savings and Loan Association.
- 1945 Satisfaction of Mortgage, February 24, 1945, recorded in Book 117, page 480. This clears the above mortgage for \$2,450.
- 1954 Deed, December 23, 1954, recorded December 30, 1954 in Book 218, page 252. The lot was sold by B. W. and Eunice M. Halter  
to  
Donald William and Charlene B. Roberts and Robert and Martha Pool Bibb.
- 1954 Mortgage Deed, December 30, 1954, recorded in Book 217, page 192. A \$10,000 mortgage was taken out on the lot by Donald William and Charlene B. Roberts and Robert and Martha Pool Bibb  
to  
Acme United Life Insurance Company
- 1955 Deed, January 21, 1955, recorded January 26, 1955 in Book 218, page 408. This lot was sold subject to the above mortgage for \$10,000 by Donald William and Charlene B. Roberts and Robert and Martha Pool Bibb  
to  
Charles E. and Elizebeth L. Beach.
- 1960 Deed, January 20, 1960, recorded January 25, 1960 in Book 1, page 122. The lot was sold by Charles E. and Elizebeth L. Beach  
to  
Benjamin T. and Almedia J. Swords.
- 1960 Mortgage Deed, January 20, 1960, recorded January 25, 1960 in Book 279, page 326. A \$12,000 mortgage was taken out on the lot by Benjamin T. and Almedia J. Swords  
to  
Acme United Life Insurance Company.

- 1960 Satisfaction of Mortgage, January 25, 1960, recorded in Book 276, page 361. This clears the mortgage between Roberts, et al and Acme United Life Insurance for \$10,000.
- 1961 Deed, November 13, 1961, recorded December 28, 1962 in Official Record Book 31, page 284. The lot was sold by Benjamin T. and Almedia J. Swords to Charles E. and Elizebeth L. Beach.
- 1962 Mortgage Deed, December 28, 1962, recorded in Official Record Book 31, page 286. This was a continuance of the \$12,000 mortgage between Swords and Acme United Life Insurance.
- 1965 Deed, February 9, 1965, recorded in Official Record Book 53, page 167. The lot was sold by Charles E. and Elizebeth L. Beach to Earl F. (Jr.) and Juanita P. Wilson.
- 1965 Mortgage Deed, February 9, 1965, recorded in Official Record Book 53, page 148. An \$8,800 mortgage was taken out on the lot by Charles E. and Elizebeth L. Beach to American Heritage Life Insurance Company (Acme United Life Insurance Company).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: H. B. Aikens of Fernandina painted the interior of the house. He was a local house and sign painter of high respect in the community. (Florida Mirror, October 3, 1885)
5. Original plans, construction: No drawings are available for this structure, but a description of the house as it was when Lewis moved in to is:

The Florida Mirror, October 3, 1885  
"A Handsome Residence"

Mr. Charles W. Lewis, having completed his fine residence (with the exception of some exterior details), on the corner of Seventh and Ash Streets, removed to it during the past week. The building deserves more than a passing notice, being the most permanent and substantial dwelling in the city.

The walls are built entirely of concrete, and Mr. Lewis has erected it in a very leisurely manner, giving the walls abundant time to harden and settle as they progressed, and has paid the utmost attention to every detail of construction, to secure comfort and healthfulness, as well as stability. The exterior, cemented with the best of Portland cement, will be impervious to moisture, while all dampness from capillary attraction is cut off by an impervious course of cement composition beneath the first floor joist.

The house is very irregular in outline, presenting two fronts facing the streets on which it is located. On Seventh Street it presents a semi-octagonal, bayed front, and a recessed vestibule porch with tiled floor - the principle entrance - the buttressed steps leading to which, when completed, will be one solid block of artificial stone; and on Ash Street it shows a handsome bay window and a neat private entrance, and in the angle formed by the two sections of the building is an abundance of piazza to both stories. A very handsome roof crowns the edifice, with its irregular and broken skyline, and relieved with dormer windows and ornamented chimney-tops; upon the summit a spacious deck commands an extended and pleasing view.

The interior is well arranged and convenient; the rooms are spacious and present a pleasing variety of form. The principal room and stair hall of the first story are arranged en suite, with wide communications and all open upon the piazza; and the details of domestic economy are not overlooked. The service stairs, butler's pantry, store pantry, closets, and kitchen offices, have received their share of attention, and are conveniently arranged, with bath-room, presser, etc. A large and airy attic above insures cool and well ventilated rooms below. The house throughout is bright, cheerful, and homelike; openings so arranged as to coax our favoring breezes, securing coolness in summer at the same time its thoroughness of construction will make it equally comfortable in winter. The walls of all the rooms and halls are decorated with paper hangings in which Mr. Lewis has made a new departure, and the woodwork is painted in proper shades - all in Aiken's best style.

The building has been erected from design and under the superintendence of Mr. Robert S. Schuyler, architect, and is another very pleasing example of his taste and skill in the practice of his profession. The building is an ornament to the city and reflects great credit upon Mr. Lewis and his architect.

If the statement in the above quotation about the use of Portland cement in the walls can be taken literally, the use of it during this period (1880s) was very unusual since most builders did not choose to use manufactured cement in the place of natural materials. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that Portland cement became common in building construction. (Burchard and Bush-Brown, 83-84)

The Sanborn map of Fernandina, Florida; February 1891 shows the tabby Lewis house in basically the same form as it is today. There was, however, a small, one story, brick structure which was attached to the west wing of the house. Its use was not possible to determine.

6. Alterations and additions: The Sanborn map of Fernandina, Florida; April 1903 shows a short, northern extension of the one story brick addition to the west wing. In addition, a small frame structure appears north of the west wing, between the brick extension and the main house.

In 1926, the Sanborn map shows a different structure where the frame one between the brick extension and the main house was. This structure was indicated as being made of brick.

Apparently this addition was replaced at an undetermined date between 1926 and 1965. In 1965, when Wilson bought the house, there was a frame room which appeared to a closed-in porch.

Wilson states that when he bought the house there was no one-story brick addition to the west wing of the house. However, he did find evidence of a brick foundation and of a brick root cellar. There is also evidence of roof rafters which can be seen in holes at the one story level on the west wall.

The Wilson family made several improvements on the poor condition of the house after it was bought in 1965. In 1966 the entire building was rewired.

In 1967 a concrete block garage was added to the west wing. It was during this construction that the foundation for the original brick room was discovered.

The plan of the interior was not altered by the Wilsons except for the closing of several doors on the second story which had apparently been cut at a some earlier time. The plaster walls were replaced with sheet rock in some places and wall paper was put over this. The 4" wood flooring was retained but more wood was put on top to support carpeting. In some parts of the house the wood floors were refinished and retained.

The kitchen was completely remodeled. New appliances were installed. The walls were covered with wood paneling and matching cabinets.

The breeze way between the main house and the kitchen was enclosed on the south end. The opening at this point had been covered with wood latticework. This was walled up and a door installed.

The screens on the windows were originally on the inside of the openings. Wilson took these out and installed new screens on the outside of the openings. It is his plan to eventually install wrought iron bars on the windows. (The above is compiled from an interview with Earl F. Wilson)

- B. Historical Context: The house was built for Charles W. Lewis of Fernandina. He came to the town from Massachusetts in 1867. Until 1881 he was engaged in the milling merchandise business. (Webb, 178) He was land commissioner for the Florida Land and Improvement Company, the Florida Transit and Peninsular Railroad Company, and the Florida Town Improvement Company, the largest holder of real estate in Fernandina at that time. (Webb, 178; Florida Mirror, January 10, 1884) Lewis was a partner in the purchase of the Florida Mirror in 1884. (Florida Mirror, February 23, 1884) In 1900, he was listed as postmaster in the Directory of Fernandina, Florida.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photograph of the house (n.d.) showing the southeast portion of the house at the intersection of the two main wings. It is in possession of the owner, Earl F. Wilson.

Photograph of the house (1902) showing the east elevation of the structure. The view was included in Fernandina Publishing Company. Monthly Bulletin, Port of Fernandina, May 1902. Fernandina: Fernandina Publishing Company, 1902. A copy of this booklet is in the possession of the owner, Earl F. Wilson.

2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Florida Abstract and Title Insurance Company. "Tract Book."  
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Wilson, Earl F. Fernandina Beach, Florida. Interview,  
August 6, 1974.

3. Secondary and published sources:

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America: A Social and Cultural History. Boston: Little,  
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Werndli, Phillip A. "Carpenter Gothic Architecture of the  
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Prepared by: Phillip A. Werndli  
Historian  
HABS-Fernandina Beach, Florida  
August 6, 1974

PART 11. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The C.W. Lewis House is a fine and singular example of tabby construction utilizing portland cement in the area. Designed by local architect of note, Robert Schuyler, the Lewis House incorporates period adaptation of tabby construction with the craftsmanship and style of local carpentry.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent with contemporary additions dating from 1926.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 53'-2" (three-bay front) by 89'-9" (three-bay side) of irregular outline plan.
2. Foundations: Tabby walls rise from 1'-9" thick foundations and are continuously constructed with a 3" impervious cement water table. Intermediate tabby piers support a 12" deep floor beam spanning approximately 13' between piers. It runs in an east-west direction through the parlor and dining room. Other areas of the foundation are inaccessible.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Oyster shell as aggregate predominate in the construction of the perimeter walls. A belt course 1'-9" above grade is continuous about the perimeter reflecting the level of the first floor joists. Belt course, window and door arches and lintels are of concrete utilizing a fine sand aggregate. Evidence indicates that these elements had been previously painted. Exterior walls are unpainted.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing walls support 2" x 10" wood joists throughout the structure. Floors (first floor only) is supported by an intermediate beam supported by tabby piers. The second floor is framed to the tabby walls by 2" x 10" joists. The roof is of wood construction framed 2 feet on center.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: There is a porch on both the first and second floors located on the south and east sides of the structure. The roof of the second floor porch is a continuation of the main structure's roof. Columns supporting the porches are continuous through the two levels and are joined by carved bracketing.
6. Chimneys: There are four chimneys.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance to the house is on the east side. It is entered through a tripartite vestibule porch. The double door is set within an arched opening with window above. The glass is etched with a fret border pattern. The secondary entrance from the south on Ash Street is a simple arched opening with two window panels within the door. The window light above has an identical fret pattern as the main entrance.

A former screened breezeway has a door at the south entry set within another arched opening. The north entry of the same breezeway opens into a wood frame addition. It now has a square-headed lintel.

The kitchen entry to the west is a flat linteled opening with contemporary door.

There is a rear entry from the yard to the north which opens into the service corridor between kitchen and dining room. It is set within an arched opening with a contemporary wooden door.

Another entrance from the north into the stair hall is located under the stairway to the second floor. This door appears to be original with elaborate hardware attached. It is now sealed shut.

- b. Windows: Windows throughout the main structure are concrete arched openings. They are double hung two over two windows with the exception of the kitchen which has a six over six.

Within the southeast dining room wall there is a 8'-9" double hung window with its sill 1" above the floor line.

Shutters predominate the street elevations, east and south, with north and west elevations without. Constructed of wood these shutters are now painted black.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main structure consists of two separate but connecting modified mansard roofs with a 3 foot kick at the eave. The kitchen wing supports a gable end roof. They are asphalt shingled throughout.
- b. Cornices, eaves: Eaves extend from the face of the building 3 feet throughout.

- c. Dormers: There are two dormers: one on the east side above the bay front; and a double window within a dormer centered within the most northerly wall.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The major entrance from Seventh Street opens directly into the stair hall with the stair to the right. Both the parlor and dining room are accessible from the stair hall through separate doors. The parlor's east wall is bayed with three windows. The south wall has centered within it a fireplace. Double pocket sliding doors within the west wall open into the dining room. An irregular shape, the dining room is the central point of the house. The butler's pantry is on the north side, and the kitchen wing is to the west through a service corridor. The drawing room is to the south through double doors. It contains an arched bay on the south wall. The secondary south entry from Ash Street is adjacent to the west through a vestibule.

The service corridor to the kitchen wing contains a secondary stair to the second floor and exit to the rear yard.

- b. Second floor: The plan reflects the first floor with the master bedroom and dressing room above the parlor. The bathroom is directly above the butler's pantry accessible from the stair hall. The sitting room reflects the dining room plan below. There is a bedroom off the sitting room to the south which is above the drawing room. The third bedroom is located above the kitchen connected by a corridor in which the stair (secondary) enters.
2. Stairways: The main stairway is an open well 'dog-leg' stair with an open baluster. The handrail is a simple molding. The service stair with winders has no handrails. The first step extends into the service corridor on the first floor by the width of one tread.
  3. Flooring: Hard wood flooring four inches in width is apparent however, carpeting and asphalt tile cover living areas and kitchen respectively.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are covered with wallpaper throughout with 10-1/4" high baseboards. Ceilings are accoustical tile in the dining room and smooth finished painted wallboard in the other rooms.

5. Doorways and doors: The parlor and dining room are connected by a two sliding pocket doors. Moldings of all doorways are simple without elaborate detail. There are double doors leading to the drawing room from the dining room.
6. Trim: Moldings within all rooms are of wood. No cornice moldings are evident.
7. Hardware: All interior doors have white porcelain. Some of which have key hole plates intact. The north entry under the stairway in the stair hall has an elaborately cast dead bolt.
8. Lighting: There are no original fixtures with contemporary incandescent lighting throughout.
9. Heating: There are six fireplaces in the main rooms. The fireplaces in the kitchen and west bedroom have been removed, and are heated by modern baseboard heating. The mantels worthy of note are of marble: black with etching painted in gold paint in the parlor; brown marble and gold etching in the master bedroom. All others have been painted white.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main entrance faces easterly on the northwest corner of Ash Street and Seventh Avenue. The yard is bounded by a fence on the east and south. This fence directly adjacent to the sidewalk is constructed of iron posts and wooden rails set in a concrete base. The north and west boundaries are fenced with a recently constructed wooden fence.
2. Outbuildings: Although records indicate a brick structure located on the site, no evidence remains of its exact location. Recent construction in 1926 of a frame addition remains in use as well as the garage which was built by the current owner in 1965-66.

Prepared by: Charles Edwin Chase  
Field Supervisor  
HABS-Fernandina Beach, Florida  
August 6, 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Bicentennial Commission of Florida. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, this project was completed during the summer of 1974, at the HABS Field Office, Fernandina Beach, Florida, by Charles Edwin Chase, (University of Florida), project supervisor; Phillip A.

Werndli, (University of Florida), project historian; Janice Fahey, (Rhode Island School of Design), and Frederick Wiedenmann, (University of Florida), architects; Grady J. Reich, Jr., (University of Texas), and Roger Swayze, (University of Oregon), student architects.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

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