



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

The Man who Owned Daytona Beach

In the archives, among the Swift family papers, we found the photo at right, featuring E.E.C. Swift, Jr., and his wife Mary Adelia (Cahoon) Swift. An inscription on the back notes: “Taken on Daytona Beach Feb 3 1935.” E.E.C. was well known around Falmouth for his successful business ventures, particularly his market on Depot Ave., which offered fresh meat. In their golden years, he and Mary were among the first “snowbirds,” New Englanders who migrated south every winter. At the beach, their dress and manners advertised their outsider status—but actually the couple enjoyed a much closer connection to Daytona than the average snowbird.

In the 1830s, E.E.C.’s great-grandfather, Elijah Swift, presided over a family business that was engaged in shipbuilding and in supplying timber for the U.S. Navy. Previously the Swifts had obtained live oak timbers from the Carolinas, but now Elijah joined with cousins from New Bedford to form E & R Swift Co. This company purchased several thousand acres of land on the eastern Florida coast, south of St. Augustine, “comprising most of the present towns of Daytona and New Smyrna.” The beach where E.E.C. and Mary Swift were standing in the photo would have been part of this territory. The purchase gave E & R Swift Co. the right to cut down live oaks growing inland, and it included ocean frontage for shipping out the timber. The Swifts dominated this industry for much of the nineteenth



Taken on
Daytona Beach
Feb 3 + 1935

E.E.C. Swift, Jr.
Mary A.

This is where
Campbell built
his record
Speed.

Falmouth residents E.E.C. Swift, Jr., and his wife Mary Adelia were among the earliest known “snowbirds.” The back of the photo includes a reference to the famous race car driver, Sir Malcolm Campbell.

century and earned the nickname “Live Oak Barons of Florida.” Swift live oak was used to refurbish the U.S.S. *Constitution*, and it made sturdy frames for whalers such as the *Amashonks* and *Uncas*, built at Bar Neck Wharf in Woods Hole (on property now owned by WHOI).

Cutting the live oak was a specialized trade, so the Swifts transported Massachusetts carpenters and mechanics to Florida to gather the valuable wood. (Live oak timbers were so sound that a timber unearthed in Daytona Beach in 1963 is believed to have been one of those cut decades earlier.) As many as 500 workers went south each fall, living in camps built for the harvesting operation. Elijah’s grandson, Oliver Franklin Swift, reminisced about his youthful days working in the Florida camps:

When all was ready [in Massachusetts] a vessel was chartered to take whatever we wished to Mosquito Inlet, Halifax River, New Smyrna, Florida, and return north with a cargo of live oak timber left over from the previous year. . . . I think it was sometime near the middle of November when anchor was hoisted, sails spread to a favorable breeze and we started for the land of flowers that was to be our home for the following six months . . . The place where we camped was about eighteen miles north of New Smyrna and thirteen miles up the river from the Mosquito Inlet [today Ponce Inlet], on the bank of the Halifax river where I understand the Town of Daytona is now located. The land was bought from parties in St. Augustine, who represented a certain Spanish family who had occupied and used it as a sugar plantation before the Indian War [1835-1842]. . .

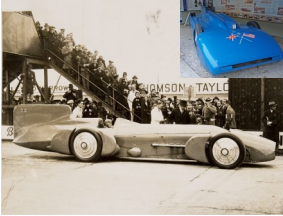
Camp life was monotonous. Each day about the same routine was enacted. Early in the morning the teamsters were busy feeding their oxen and grooming them for their day’s work. . . . Brother usually sometime in the forenoon went out into the woods on his horse to consult with Mr. Shiverick, our foreman, as to the proper trees to be cut to fill out our present orders and the best way to cut the road to get at them . . . The timber was hauled to the landing by means of large wheels seven or eight feet in diameter, with tires four inches wide. . . . Boats with square ends, commonly called scows, were used to carry the timber down the river.



Above: Elijah Swift and his son, O.C. Swift. Both men claimed an ownership stake in Daytona Beach.

Below: Mature southern live oak. Photo from [Anubis Abyss on Flickr](#). Licensed through [Creative Commons](#).

The Swifts lost title to much of their Florida property in lawsuits following the Civil War. By that time, wooden ships were slowly being replaced with steel-hulled, steam-driven vessels, and live oak lost its importance. When E.E.C. Swift and his wife Mary had



Top: Sir Malcolm Campbell at Daytona, 1933. Photo by [Agence de Presse Mondiale Photo-Presse](#).

Bottom: Campbell and Bluebird, ca. 1935. Inset: A 2008 replica of Bluebird shows how bright its color was. Photos from [Wikipedia](#).

their picture taken in 1935, they likely felt a twinge of nostalgia for the land they stood upon, but they no longer had any claim to it.

Rather than dwelling on the past, the couple took an interest in the latest development to hit Daytona: race car driving. The back of their photo notes “This is where Campbell pulls off his speed record.” Major Sir Malcolm Campbell, a British racing enthusiast, can also be said to have “owned” Daytona Beach—in a sporting sense. On March 7, 1935, he set a new land speed record of 276.7 miles per hour, skimming his “Bluebird” over the beach where E.E.C. and Mary had been standing. His triumph occurred about a month after our photo was taken, and three weeks before the Swifts returned to Falmouth (as noted in the *Enterprise* of March 28). Were E.E.C. and Mary among the crowd that saw Campbell make racing history?

Here’s an intriguing coincidence: E.E.C.’s initials stand for “Eugene Edward Campbell.” Was he related somehow to Malcolm Campbell? So far, we have no evidence that he was. But it would hardly be surprising if he felt a kinship for the daring driver, nevertheless. Speed, superior technology, a determination to seize the future—these were all qualities that E.E.C. and his forebears valued. Their name wasn’t Swift for nothing.

Terry White
& *Meg Costello*

Learn More:

[Swift Family Whaling](#), from *Spritsail*, Winter 1998.

[On Land and Water](#), a British Movietone News documentary about Malcolm Campbell’s career. Footage of his achievement at Daytona in March 1935 starts around the 6:30 mark.