

## **The French Cable Station**

**By: Ron Petersen**

The French Cable Station is a significant part of the story of the July 21, 1918 German U-boat attack off the coast of Orleans. The “Compagnie Francaise Le Cables Telegraphiques”, a company based in Paris, brought their undersea communications cable from Newfoundland to the United States in 1879, choosing Eastham as the site for their new station. The Eastham Cable Station was destroyed by fire in 1891, and the company decided to move the station to Orleans at the corner of Bake Shop Road (now Cove Road) and Chatham Road (Rt. 28). The building still stands at that location and serves as the home of the French Cable Station Museum.

In 1897-98, a direct cable was laid from France to the mouth of Nauset Harbor, crossing the harbor to the end of Champlain Road. A cable hut was built here to house apparatus and several operators.

After the United States entered World War One in 1917, the French Cable Station provided a vital communications link between the government and US forces in Europe under the command of General Pershing. A contingent of US Marines was sent to Orleans to guard both the Cable Station and the Cable Hut.

In the aftermath of the U-boat attack on Orleans, speculation arose as to what the true nature of the U-156's mission was. Given the critical strategic role of the Cable Station, it was reasonable to assume that the cable to France was the target. However, there was no proof or evidence of this, and many theories ensued over the century that followed the attack. However, research completed in December of 2017 casts considerable new evidence on this question. Researcher and author Paul Hodos, in his book [The Kaiser's Lost Kreuzer](#) presents evidence from primary sources that the U-156 was equipped with cable-cutting equipment, and that the U-boat's commander left Orleans thinking that he had cut the cable, radioing such to his base. This new evidence highlights the importance of the role played by the French Cable Station during the war, and provides much new “grist” for discussions on the U-boat attack.