

Cobb, John Blackwell ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1979

5 Oct. 1857–9 Apr. 1923



A portrait of John Blackwell Cobb by Eugene Speicher, circa 1921-1922. Image courtesy of the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia.

^[3]John Blackwell Cobb, tobacconist and capitalist, was born in [Caswell County](#) ^[4], the son of Henry Wellington and Mary Howard Cobb. He was educated in private schools in his native county, and at the age of nineteen, with a borrowed five hundred dollars, he engaged in the leaf tobacco business as a pinhooker in Danville, Va. His initial profits were lost in the speculative sale of wrappers in St. Louis, but he eventually recovered and set out on a significant business career. In 1890 he joined the [American Tobacco Company](#) ^[5] as a buyer of leaf tobacco. He moved to New York in 1894 and by 1896 was a vice-president of the firm, a position he held until his retirement in 1908. During the course of a busy life he also served as president and director of the American Cigar Company, the Cuban Land and Leaf Tobacco Company, the Havana American Company, and the Havana Commercial Company; as first vice-president and director of H. de Cabanas y Carbajal; as director of the American Snuff Company, American Stogie Company, Blackwell's Durham Company, the British American Tobacco Company, F. Garcia Brothers and Company, Havana Tobacco Company, the Industrial Company of Porto Rico, the International Cigar Machinery Company, Lurhman and Wilbern Tobacco Company, the Porto Rican American Tobacco Company, and the Louis K. Liggett Company; and as director and member of the executive committee of the United Drug Company.

Cobb owned nearly forty-four thousand acres of land between Greensboro and High Point and during the course of his life lived in Durham, St. Louis, Mo., and Stamford, Conn. He was married on 4 Jan. 1881 to Pricie Perkins Millner; they had two daughters, Mrs. Mary Howard Gilmour and Mrs. Lucy Langhorne Hill, both of whom lived in New York City at the time of his death. Cobb was in poor health for the last year of his life and was found dead in his stateroom aboard a train several hours out of Hot Springs, Ark. He was a [Methodist](#) ^[6] and was generous to his childhood church in Caswell County. He provided funds for a private school in the county, now the John B. Cobb Memorial School, incorporated into the public school system, and he also left money to the University of Virginia and to members of his family. His estate was estimated at \$50 million.

References:

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New York Times, 10 and 26 Apr. 1923.

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Additional Resources:

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Business leaders ^[11]

Tobacco ^[12]

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1 January 1979 | Powell, William S.

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