

CAPE SAINT GEORGE LIGHTHOUSE

Cape St. George

Little Saint George Island

Franklin County

Florida

HABS FL-406

FL-406

HABS

FL-406

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

CAPE ST. GEORGE LIGHTHOUSE

HABS No. FL-406

Location: Cape St. George, Little St. George Island, Apalachicola Vicinity, Franklin County, Florida

U.S.G.S. Cape St. George Quadrangle (7.5')

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: ~~32.74500.689200~~

16/689050/3274575

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard  
Eighth Coast Guard District  
Hale Boggs Federal Building  
501 Magazine Street  
New Orleans, LA 70130

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Cape St. George Lighthouse was erected in 1852 and served as an aid to navigation until the light was disestablished in July 1994. This is the third tower built on St. George Island. The first tower was erected in 1833 on the west end of the island near the entrance to Apalachicola Bay. It was rebuilt in 1847 two miles from the original site on the cape which is the southern most point of the island. After destructive winds toppled the tower in 1851, a new lighthouse was constructed two hundred and fifty yards inland. The present St. George Lighthouse has withstood damaging winds and battering by the sea for over 140 years. Its long tenure of service places it among the most significant structures of its type.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The present lighthouse was built in 1852 following the destruction of previous light.
2. Architect: Not Known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The site was originally deeded to the United States Government in 1847 for the construction of a lighthouse and public buildings. This deed was based on a survey by H.F. Simmons dated April 13, 1847. In 1972, the property, except the 0.8 acres on which the lighthouse sits, was transferred to the Department of Army. The Army excessed the property to the State of Florida in December 1997. The United States Coast Guard continued to maintain the lighthouse and the immediately surrounding property over the years. On June 1, 1998, the 0.8 acre parcel of land with the lighthouse was leased with the Cape St. George Lighthouse Society which plans to stabilize the structure.
4. Builder: Mr. Edward Bowden of Franklin County built the lighthouse using materials from the previously destroyed tower. Two-thirds of the brick from the 1847 lighthouse was reused.
5. Original plans and construction: The St. George Lighthouse originally rested on pilings 550 yards in from the low water line. This gave the third tower a much stronger foundation than the preceding two which had only 18" deep foundations. The tower height is 65' with a base diameter of 20'. The diameter reduces to 12' at the top. The walls are solid brick with a header course every nine courses, typically, and uniformly graduate from 4' at the base to 2' at the top. A hydraulic cement coating, a mixture of lime and clay, with a topping of white paint cover both the interior and exterior of the structure. The walls terminate at a 5" thick soapstone deck which is 14' in diameter. Originally, a circular wood stair and a rope handrail, attached to the walls with iron eye hooks, ascended to 6' below the lantern. An iron ladder with 2 ½" steps continues from there to allow access to the platform through a 24" x 20" scuttle. The entrance to the lantern is a copper covered iron frame door. Five double hung wood windows with eight lights each are set in granite openings. The door to the tower is 3' x 6' and was originally constructed of double inch boards cross nailed with sturdy hinges, lock, and latch. The entrance to the tower was up a set of brick stairs and opened onto a brick floor. The lantern was constructed with French plate glass spanning between posts set 5' into the stone and secured with anchors. The original lens, a third order Fresnel lens, was installed in 1857. The oil powered light extended for a distance of 14 miles.
6. Alterations and additions: The original lens was damaged during the civil war and was replaced in 1889. At first lighted by oil and then powered by electricity, supplied by a gasoline powered generator, the Fresnel lens was replaced with an electric powered modern 300 mm optic lens in the late 1930s or early 1940s.

The original wood stair was replaced with a galvanized steel stair sometime after 1977.

B. Historical Context

Shortly after its completion, the light at Cape St. George, as with most other Florida lighthouses, was extinguished with the start of the civil war. The lens along with other valuable components of the light were removed and delivered to the Confederate Collector of Customs in Apalachicola and eventually moved further inland for safe keeping. In 1862, the caretaker was released due to enemy having control of the light. Union soldiers occupied the lighthouse and surrounding buildings. The lens was returned and re-lit August 1, 1865.

The lighthouse reservation originally included the following buildings: a single-story wood frame dwelling constructed in 1880, a two-story brick dwelling, a pump house, stables, a store room, a brick oil storage building constructed in 1894, a privy, and a generator building. Also, several underground cisterns were on the site. A fire in 1961 completely destroyed one of the dwellings and a storage shed. The lighthouse keepers dwelling was also damaged in the fire. Currently, all that remains standing, along with the lighthouse, are remnants of both the wood dwelling and the oil storage building.

Over the years several men held the position of lighthouse keeper. William Austin was the lighthouse's first keeper continuing with Braddock Williams taking over in 1853 until his son Arad L. Williams, who was killed in a fall from the tower, took over the post in 1874. Other keepers included James Reilly, Joseph Lucroft, James Albert Williams, Edward G. Porter, Clairmon Brooks, Sullivan Richard White. These men kept watch over the sea until 1949 when the light was made automatic and unmanned.

Beach erosion began to threaten the lighthouse after Hurricane Kate in 1985 when the primary dune line was removed between the tower and the beach. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew aggravated the deterioration and severely damaging the foundation. In the winter of 1992, the Coast Guard attempted to shore up the lighthouse with cribbing and 8"x8"x8'-0" piles secured with stainless steel bolts. They placed rip rap and sandbags at the base for added protection from the surf. Despite the effort, when Hurricane Opal hit in 1995, the tower began to lean. Currently the tower is no longer sitting on its foundation and is precariously leaning seaward.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Copy of original drawing on file at United States Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Unit, Miami, date of drawing is unknown.

Subsequent drawing of the lighthouse, dated April 24, 1875 and noted as copied from the L. H. Board, copy on file at United States Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Unit, Miami.

B. Historic views:

U.S. Coast Guard photograph's on file at the USCG Historian's Office, USCG Headquarters, Washington, DC.

C. Interviews:

Davis, Chief Larry, United States Coast Guard, Eighth Coast Guard District, Nov. 23, 1998, phone interview.

Lee, John F., Cape St. George Lighthouse Society, Nov. 6, 1998, Apalachicola, Florida.

Miley, Woodard W., Manager, Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and NOAA, Nov. 30, 1998, phone interview.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Land Survey, September 10, 1887, A. C. Bell, L. H. Surveyor, USCG Eighth District, copy on file at United States Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Unit, Miami.

National Archives and Records Administration, Site Files: Lighthouse Cape St. George, Florida, 10E2 R21/11/16, Box 38, File no. 8.

National Archives and Records Administration, Cape St. George Lighthouse, Deeds and Contracts, 10E 2 R12/11/4, Vol. G, pp. 432-434 and 456-457.

National Register of Historic Places, National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Reference number 74000625, recorded September 10, 1974.

Plot Plan, July 13, 1961, United States Coast Guard Maintenance, New Orleans District, New Orleans, LA, copy on file at United States Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Unit, Miami.

United States Coast Guard, "CEU Miami's Environmental Site Assessment", Cape St. George Lighthouse, Jon B. Mann, November 14, 1996, copy on file at United States Coast Guard, Civil Engineering Unit, Miami.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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"The Islands", The Barrier Islands of Apalachicola Bay,  
<http://www.hometown.com/apalachicola/islands.html>.

"Lighthouse in Imminent Danger Hurricane nearly topples tower", Lighthouse Digest Magazine Story Page,  
<http://www.biddeford.com/~lhdigest/dec95/danger.html>.

McCarthy, Kevin M., Florida Lighthouses, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, FL, c. 1990.

Shanklin, Sandra, "The Leaning Tower of Florida", Lighthouse Digest Magazine Story Page, <http://www.biddeford.com/~lhdigest/feb96/leaning.html>.

Vest, Pam, "St. George Island", Apalachicola Times, January 11, 1996,  
<http://www.apalachitimes.com/stl/story.htm>.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Cipra, David L., Lighthouses, Light Ships, and the Gulf of Mexico, Cypress Publications, c. 1997.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation of the lighthouse at Cape St. George is a donated recording project sponsored by the United States Coast Guard under the direction of Jon B. Mann, Environmental Protection Specialist, CEU Miami, Florida, and Roberta Gomez, Contracting Officer, CEU Miami, Florida. The field work, measured drawings, historical report, and photographs were prepared by the firm of Arcadis, Geraghty & Miller, Greenville, South Carolina, with Senior Architect James E. Wilkerson, AIA, assisted by Toni L. Grimes, Architect. Formal photographs were taken by Tom Baird of Total Photo, St. George Island, Florida. This record was prepared in the Fall of 1998

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