

Visiting Historical Sites within the 7th District: Lighthouses

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Short History of the United States Lighthouse Service

On August 7, 1789 the 9th Act of our first Congress, and the first Public works Act, provided for the transfer of the twelve existing lighthouses in this country from the individual states to the federal government and provided: "That all expenses which shall accrue from and after the 15th day of August 1789, in the necessary support, maintenance and repairs of all lighthouses, beacons, buoys and public piers erected, placed, or sunk before the passing of this Act, at the entrance of, or within any bay, inlet, harbor, or port of the United States, for rendering the navigation thereof easy and safe, shall be defrayed out of the treasury of the United States; Provided nevertheless, That none of the said expenses shall continue to be so defrayed by the United States, after the expiration of one year of the day aforesaid, unless such lighthouses, beacons, buoys and public piers, shall in the mean time be ceded to and vested in the United States, by the state or states respectively in which the same may be, together with the jurisdiction of same.

The states, however, wary of a central government, dragged their heels and it wasn't until 1797 (eight years after passage of the Act) that all lighthouses were turned over to the fledgling government. The twelve existing lighthouses were soon joined by four which had been under construction when we became a nation: Cape Henry, VA at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay (1791); Tybee, GA at the entrance to the Savannah River (1791); Portland Head, ME (1791) and Bald Head at the entrance to the Cape Fear River, NC (1796). Cape Henry is regarded as the first to be completed by the new government. By 1800 there were 24 lighthouses in the nation, all along the Atlantic coast.

The responsibility for lighthouses and other aids to navigation was placed under the Secretary of the Treasury, at that time Alexander Hamilton. He had appealed to President Washington: in keeping with

our free country, lighthouses should be as free as the air and that this country should waive the lighthouse dues which had been imposed by the colonies and were standard at most ports of the world. George Washington agreed.

Local control of our lighthouses was assigned to the Collector of Customs of a port. Some Collectors had but one lighthouse to "manage", while others had many under their control. And, because the collectors were politically appointed, the keepers were politically appointed. When the Whigs were in the White House the Whig keepers were in the lighthouses.

It's interesting to read about the involvement that our early leaders had with such trivial matters (for a Chief Executive) as appropriations for purchase of buoy chain and appointment of lighthouse keepers, it was surely a slower pace than today. The keeper of the Seguin Lighthouse in Maine wrote to President Washington requesting an extra allowance for clearing the land adjacent to his station. He received a letter dated Jan 24, 1797 "For the reasons assigned within, the allowance of \$150 is approved by Go Washington." On another occasion he made the following endorsement on a contract to furnish mooring chain for a floating beacon in Delaware Bay "April 27th, 1798. Approved, so far as it respects the new chain; but is there an entire loss of the old one? Go Washington." Earlier in 1796 President Washington signed an executive Act raising the annual rate of compensation for the 16 lighthouse keepers of the nation from \$120 to \$333.33

Between the establishment of the Lighthouse Service in 1789 and the year 1820 the responsibility for our aids to navigation bounced around Washington like a Ping-Pong ball. On May 8, 1792 the department of the Commissioner of Revenue was created and the responsibility for aids to navigation was shifted to that agency. This department was abolished on April 6, 1802 and lighthouses were back under Treasury. Then in 1813 The Commissioner of Revenue was re-established and that agency was again responsible for lighthouses and aids to navigation.

Four years later, in December of 1817, the Commissioner of Revenue was abolished for the last time, but the Act was not to take place until 1820. On July 1 of that year the Lighthouse Service shifted again to Treasury and under the watchful eye of the Fifth Auditor, Stephen

Pleasanton, an accountant, who knew nothing of lighthouses, lighthouse equipment or engineering. Fifth Auditor Pleasanton held sway for the next 32 years; three decades during which other maritime nations of the world embraced the Fresnel lens (perfected in 1822) and other improvements in aids to navigation. This was a period in which our country lagged behind other maritime nations in aids to navigation.

The Department of Commerce was created by an Act on May 14, 1903. A provision of the act required the transfer of the Lighthouse Board from Treasury to this new department. The Lighthouse Board, by this date, had been in existence for over 50 years and had not only increased the number of aids to navigation in the country, but had carried out some notable and difficult lighthouse construction (Minot's Ledge, Tillamook Rock and St. George Reef to name but a few).

In June of 1910 Congress passed an Act that reorganized the Lighthouse Service. The Lighthouse Board had now been in control for 58 years. Total lighted aids had increased from around 335 when the board assumed control to nearly 4,000 (this includes minor lights and lighted buoys). Fog signals had increased from 49 to 457, and buoys from 1,000 to 5,300. The board, which had been necessary to oversee a system too complex for one man had now, itself, become obsolete. Congress now thought that a pyramid structure was necessary with a single bureau chief at the top of the pile. We had come, in a way, full circle. Congress also felt that assigning military officers as engineers and inspectors of the districts (for short periods of time) caused the loss of continuity. They wanted the assignment of a civilian inspector, who would hopefully serve for many years, to provide continuity.

The Organic Act of 1910 authorized that civilian personnel manage the system, and a period of three years be used to implement the new system. Further it increased the number of Districts to 18 to establish separate districts for Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Alaska. In the future each district would be managed by a single head, a District Inspector (in 1918 this title was changed to District Superintendent) who answered directly to the Commissioner of Lighthouses on all matters relating to his district. Each district was staffed with an assistant, a clerk and an engineer.

George Putnam, who had a long and distinguished career with the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey, was appointed the first Commissioner of the

new bureau. He would reign until May 31, 1935 when he was forced to retire due to age. Prior to assuming control over the Lighthouse Service, Putman was director of the coastal surveys of the Philippines. Once appointed to the new bureau he took firm control and instituted, not only the new administration, but many changes as technological advances were developed, among them radio beacons. At his retirement luncheon Secretary of Treasury Roper congratulated Mr. Putnam on his distinguished career of 45 years and noted that while aids to navigation had increased from around 12,000 to 24,000 during his tenure, the number of employees dropped from 5,832 to 4,980. Putnam was replaced by H.D. King who headed up the bureau until the Coast Guard assumed control in 1939.

President Roosevelt's Reorganization Order #11 consolidated the Lighthouse Service with the U.S. Coast Guard to take effect on July 1, 1939. It read: "Bureau of Lighthouses – The Bureau of Lighthouses in the Department of Commerce and its functions are hereby transferred to and shall be consolidated with the administration of the Coast Guard in the Department of Treasury." And, thus, lighthouses were back under Treasury again until when the Coast Guard was transferred to the Department of Transportation. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the Coast Guard was again transferred to a new Department of Homeland Security.

Today many of the historical lighthouses can be visited, however, there are a few that are either active or privately owned that visitation may not be allowed or reservations with the proper authority can be arranged. Please check the website of a particular lighthouse you're interested to see if it can be visited. A few have become museums with excellent exhibits pertaining to the history of the USLHS, USLSS, and the USCG.

FLORIDA

Atlantic Coast Lighthouses

Nassau County Lighthouse:

●Amelia Island

1838

(Reconstruction of the Great Cumberland Island light, built in 1820 on the Georgia side of the St. Marys River).

Duval County (Jacksonville Area) Lighthouses:

●St. Johns Bar Cut Range Rear

Date unknown.

● **Fulton Cutoff Range Rear**

Date unknown.

● **St. Johns River (Mayport) (3)**

1859 (station established 1830). Inactive since 1929.

● **Mayport Basin Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

● **St. Johns**

1954. Active.

St. Johns County (St. Augustine Area) Lighthouse:

● **St. Augustine (2)**

1874 (Paul J. Pelz, architect). Station established 1823. Active.

Volusia County (Daytona Beach Area) Lighthouse:

● **Ponce de Leon Inlet (Mosquito Inlet) (2)**

1887. Active (privately maintained).

Brevard County (Cape Canaveral Area) Lighthouses:

● **Cape Canaveral (2)**

1868 (station established 1848). Active.

● **Canaveral Harbor Approach Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

● **Port Canaveral Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Palm Beach County Lighthouses:

● **Jupiter Inlet**

1860 (George G. Meade) Active.

● **Lake Worth Entrance Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Broward County (Fort Lauderdale Area) Lighthouses:

● **Hillsboro Inlet**

1907. Active.

● **Port Everglades Range Front**

Date unknown. Active.

● **Port Everglades Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Dade County (Miami Area) Lighthouses:

- **Cape Florida (2)**

1846 (Leonard Hammand). Station established 1825. Reactivated (inactive 1878-1978 and 1990-1996, now operated by the State of Florida.

- **Fowey Rocks**

1878. Active.

- **Boca Chita**

Around 1940. Inactive but charted as a day beacon..

Florida Keys (Monroe County) - Key Largo and Islamorada Area Lighthouses:

- **Pacific Reef (2)**

2000 (station established 1921). Active.

- **Carysfort Reef (2)**

2014 (station established 1852). Active.

- **Carysfort Reef (1)**

1852 (George G. Meade; I.W.P. Lewis, designer). Inactive since 2014 but listed as a day beacon.

- **Key Largo [Rebecca Shoal (1) (lantern)]**

1886 lantern on 1959 faux lighthouse. Active (privately maintained and unofficial; charted as a landmark).

- **Molasses Reef**

1921. Active.

- **Hen and Chickens Shoal**

Date unknown. Active.

- **Alligator Reef**

1873. Active.

- **Pacific Reef (1) (lantern room)**

1921.

Marathon Area Lighthouses:

- **Tennessee Reef**

1933. Active.

- **Sombrero Key (Dry Banks)**

1858 (George G. Meade). Active.

Key West Area Lighthouses

- **American Shoal**

1880. Active.

- **Key West (2)**

1847 (station established 1825). Inactive since 1969; charted as a landmark.

- **Key West Main Channel Range Rear**

1969(?). Active.

- **Key West Cut A Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

●**Northwest Passage**

1879. Inactive since 1921; charted as an obstruction.

●**Smith Shoal (2)**

Date unknown (station established 1933). Active.

●**Sand Key (2)**

1853 (George G. Meade; I.W.P. Lewis, designer). Station established 1827. Inactive

●**Sand Key (3)**

2014. Active.

●**Cosgrove Shoal (2)**

Date unknown (station established 1935). Active.

Dry Tortugas Area Lighthouses:

●**Twenty-eight Foot Shoal**

Date uncertain. Demolished.

●**Rebecca Shoal (2)**

1985 (station established 1886). Inactive since 2014, but listed as a day beacon.

●**Pulaski Shoal (2)**

Date unknown (station established 1933). Active.

●**Tortugas Harbor (Garden Key, Fort Jefferson) (2)**

1876. Inactive since 1921 (a decorative light is displayed and charted).

●**Dry Tortugas (Loggerhead Key)**

1858 (George G. Meade?). Inactive since 2015 but listed as a day beacon.

Lighthouses of Inland Lakes:

●**Volusia Bar**

1885. Light inactive since 1916; fog signal inactive since 1943. Charted as an obstruction. The 1-1/2 story square screwpile lighthouse burned in 1974.

●**Kissimmee**

1999. Active (privately maintained).

●**Mount Dora**

1988. Active (privately maintained).

Lost lighthouses:

● **Amelia Island North Range Front**

(1872-1899)

● **Amelia Island North Range Rear**

(1872-1899).

● **Amelia Island Range Front**

(1858-1880).

● **Dames Point**

(1872-1913). The lighthouse burned in 1913, and nothing remains.

Gulf Coast Lighthouses

Collier County Lighthouse:

- **Sanibel Island**

1884. Active.

Lee County Lighthouses:

- **Boca Grande (Port Boca Grande, Gasparilla Island)**

1890. Reactivated (inactive 1966-1986).

- **Gasparilla Island (Boca Grande Entrance Range Rear)**

1881 (relocated here in 1927 but not lit until 1932). Active.

Manatee County Lighthouses:

- **Port Manatee Inbound Range Front**

Date unknown. Active.

- **Port Manatee Inbound Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Hillsborough County (Tampa Area) Lighthouses:

- **Big Bend East Range Front**

Date unknown. Active (privately maintained).

- **Big Bend East Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active (privately maintained).

- **Tampa Bay Cut K Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Pinellas County (St. Petersburg Area) Lighthouses:

- **Egmont Key (2)**

1858 (station established 1848). Active.

- **Egmont Channel Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

- **Tampa Bay Watch (Tierra Verde)**

2005. Active (unofficial).

- **Anclote Key**

1887. Reactivated (inactive 1985-2003, now maintained by the state of Florida).

Levy County Lighthouses:

- **Seahorse Reef (3?)**

Date unknown. Active.

- **Cedar Keys (Seahorse Key)**

1854 (George G. Meade). Inactive since 1915.

Wakulla County Lighthouse:

• **St. Marks (2)**

1842 (Calvin Knowlton). Station established 1831.

Franklin County Lighthouses:

• **Crooked River (Carrabelle)**

1895. Reactivated (inactive 1995-2007; now privately maintained).

• **Cape St. George (2) (rebuilt)**

1852 (Edward Bowden) (station established 1848). Reactivated (inactive 1994-2009)

Gulf County (Port St. Joe Area) Lighthouses:

• **St. Joseph Point (Beacon Hill) Range Rear (relocated) (1)**

1902. Inactive since 1960.

• **Cape San Blas (relocated to Port St. Joe) (4)**

1885 (station established 1847). Inactive since 1996.

• **St. Joseph Bay (Beacon Hill) Range Rear (2?)**

1960. Active.

Escambia County (Pensacola Area) Lighthouses:

• **Pensacola Bay Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

• **Pensacola East Channel Inner Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

• **Pensacola (2)**

1859 (John Newton). Station established 1824. Active.

• **Caucus Channel Range Rear**

Date unknown. Active.

Lost lighthouses:

• **Charlotte Harbor**

(1890-1943.

• **Dog Island**

(1838-1873)

• **Ft. Barrancas (Range Rear)**

(1888-1930)

• **Ft. McRee Range Front and Rear**

(1859-1888)

• **Pensacola Bar**

- (1859-early 1900s)
- **St. Joseph Point Range Front**
(1902-?).
 - **St. Joseph's Bay**
(1839-1847)

GEORGIA

Chatham County (Savannah Area) Lighthouses:

- **Savannah Cotton Exchange**
1886. Inactive since about 1904.
- **Savannah Harbor Range Rear (Beacon Range, Fig Island Range Rear, Old Harbor Light)**
1858. Inactive since.
- **Tybee Knoll Cut Range Front**
Date unknown (station established 1878).
- **Tybee Knoll Cut Range Rear**
Date unknown (station established 1878).
- **Cockspur Island**
1857 (station established 1849). Reactivated (inactive 1909-2007, now maintained by the National Park Service)
- **Tybee Island (Range Rear)**
1867 (station established 1736).

McIntosh County Lighthouses:

- **Sapelo Island**
1820 ([Winslow Lewis](#)). Reactivated (inactive 1905-1998, now privately maintained).
- **Sapelo Island Range Front**
1877 (range established 1868). Inactive since 1898.

Glynn County (Brunswick Area) Lighthouses:

- **St. Simons Island**
1872 (Charles Cluskey) (station established 1810).
- **St. Simons South Tower**
Date unknown. Active.
- **St. Simons North Tower**
Date unknown. Active.

Camden County Lighthouse:

- **Little Cumberland Island**
1838 (Joseph Hastings). Inactive since 1915 (a decorative light is now displayed, and the tower is charted as a daybeacon).

Inland Lighthouses:

●**Lake Allatoona Lighthouses**

Note: [Lake Allatoona](#) is a large reservoir on the Etowah River near Cartersville, northwest of Atlanta. The lake is at an elevation of 840 ft (256 m).

●**Allatoona Landing**

1980s. Active.

●**Park Marina Lake Allatoona**

1980. Active.

●**Lake Lanier Lighthouses**

●**Aqualand**

1997.

●**[Port Royale](#)**

2009. Active.

●**West Point Lake Lighthouse**

●**Burnt Village (West Point Lake)**

Date unknown.

Lost lighthouses:

● **Fig Island Range Front**

(1870-about 1885?), Savannah River.

● **Oyster Beds Beacon**

(1849-about 1918), Savannah River.

● **Savannah**

(1964-1996), off the mouth of the Savannah River. This "Texas Tower" light was destroyed by a collision with the freighter *Neptune Jade* in November 1996.

● **Tybee Island Range Front**

(1877-around 1910?).

●**[Wolf Island](#)**

(1868-1899).

SOUTH CAROLINA

Horry County Lighthouse:

● **Governors**

1985. Active.

Georgetown County Lighthouse:

●**Georgetown (North Island)**

1867 (extensively rebuilt 1812 lighthouse; station established 1801). Active.

Charleston County Lighthouses:

- **Cape Romain (1)**

1827, Inactive since 1858; charted as a landmark.

- **Cape Romain (2)**

1858. Inactive since 1947; charted as a landmark.

- **Charleston (Sullivan's Island, New Charleston)**

1962. Active.

- **Fort Sumter Range Rear (2?)**

Date unknown. Active.

- **St. Philip's Church (Fort Sumter Range Rear (1))**

1893 (church built 1838). Inactive since 1915; charted as a landmark.

- **Morris Island (Old Charleston) (3)**

1876 (Peter Hains) (station established 1767). Inactive since; charted as a landmark.

Beaufort County Lighthouses:

- **Hunting Island (2)**

1875 (station established 1859). Reactivated (inactive 1933-1995).

- **Parris Island Range Rear**

1881. Inactive since about 1912.

- **Hilton Head Range Rear (Leamington)**

1880. Inactive since 1932.

- **Harbour Town**

1970. Active (privately maintained).

- **Haig Point (Daufuskie Island) (Range Rear)**

1872. Reactivated (inactive 1924-1987, now privately maintained).

- **Bloody Point (Daufuskie Island) Range Front (1)**

1883. Inactive since 1899.

Lost lighthouses:

- **Bloody Point (Daufuskie Island) Range Rear**

(1883-1899).

- **Bulls Bay**

(1852-1912).

- **Castle Pinckney**

(1855-1938).

- **Combahee Bank**

- (1868-1876).
- **Fort Ripley Shoal**
(1878-1932).
- **Fort Sumter (Range Front)**
(1857-1950s), on [Fort Sumter](#) in Charleston Harbor.
- **Haig Point Range Front**
(1872-1924).
- **Hilton Head Range Front**
(1881-1932?).
- **Morris Island Range Front and Rear**
(1871-1898?).
- **Parris Island Range Front**
(1878-1912).
- **Sullivan's Island Range Lights**
(1848-early 1900s).

U.S. TERRITORIES AND POSSESSIONS

CUBA (GUANTANAMO NAVAL BASE)

- **Windward Point Light (Faro Punta Barloventa), Guantánamo**
(Built in 1904).

PUERTO RICO

Mona Island Lighthouse

- **Isla de Mona**
1900. Inactive since 1976.

Northern Puerto Rico Lighthouses

- **Punta Higuero (Point Jiguero, Rincón)**
1922 (station established 1892). Active.
- **Punta Borinquen (Aguadilla)**
1889. Inactive since 1918.
- **Punta Borinquen (Aguadilla)**
1920. Active.
- **Arecibo (Punta Morrillo)**
1898. Active.
- **San Juan Graving Dock Range Rear**
Date unknown. Active.
- **San Juan Puerto Nuevo Range Rear**
Date unknown. Active.
- **Puerto San Juan (El Morro, Castillo San Felipe del Morro)**

1908 (station established 1846). Active.

- **Cabo San Juan (Fajardo)**

1882. Active.

Culebra and Vieques Lighthouses

- **Culebrita**

1886. Inactive.

- **Punta Mulas (Morropó, Isabella Segunda)**

1896. Active.

- **Puerto Ferro**

1896. Inactive since 1926.

Southern Puerto Rico Lighthouses

- **Punta Tuna (Maunabo)**

1892. Active.

- **Punta de las Figuras (Point Figuras, Arroyo)**

1893. Inactive since 1938.

- **Isla Caja de Muertos (Coffin Island, Muertos Island)**

1887. Active.

- **Isla de Cardona (Ponce, Cayo Cardona)**

1889. Active.

- **Guánica (Cana)**

1893. Inactive since 1950.

- **Cabo Rojo (Los Morrillos)**

1882. Active

Lost lighthouses:

- **Isla Cabras (Ceiba)**

(1908-1966).

NAVASSA ISLAND (southwestern tip of Haiti)

- **Navassa Island**

(1917. Inactive since 1996)

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

St. Thomas Lighthouses

- **Savana Island**

Date unknown. Active.

- **Buck Island (1)**

1913. Inactive since the mid 1990s.

- **Buck Island (2)**

1990s. Active.

St. Croix Lighthouses

- **Hams Bluff (1)**

1915. Inactive since about 2010.

- **Hams Bluff (2)**

2010 (?). Active.

- **Fort Louise Augusta (Christiansted Entrance Range Front)**

1919 (station established 1857). Inactive since 1931.

Lost lighthouses:

- **Berg Hill Range Front**

This light has been replaced by a small skeletal tower.

- **Muhlenfeldt Point**

(1844-?)

- **Christiansted Watchtower** (ca. 1679), St. Croix. This historic tower on the Christiansted waterfront is often mistaken for a lighthouse. As far as it is known, it never carried a navigation light.

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