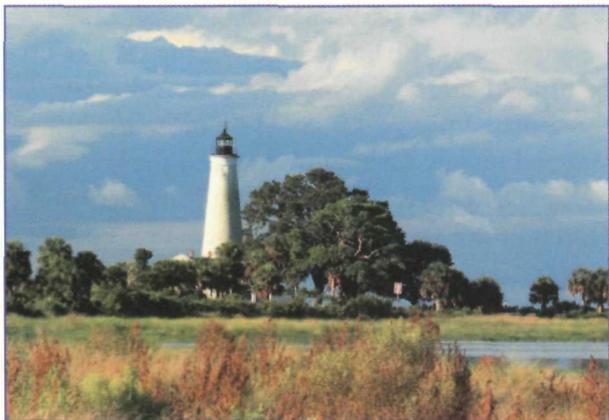




Taken roughly across from the current entrance to the salt water boat ramp, this photo from the late 1930s shows the newly constructed road to the lighthouse. *Refuge files*

There was no road to the lighthouse until the Civilian Conservation Corps completed the job about 1938. They also set the poles and strung wire for electricity.

Modern times were coming to the lighthouse. The age of lighthouse keepers was coming to an end. In 1960, the light which had so carefully been tended by a dedicated, unique group of people for many decades, was automated. In 2000, the electric light that had illuminated the Fresnel lens was turned off and an exterior solar powered white light blinking every 4 seconds, was installed.



During World War II, a submarine/U-Boat lookout station was located at the lighthouse. *U.S. Coast Guard*

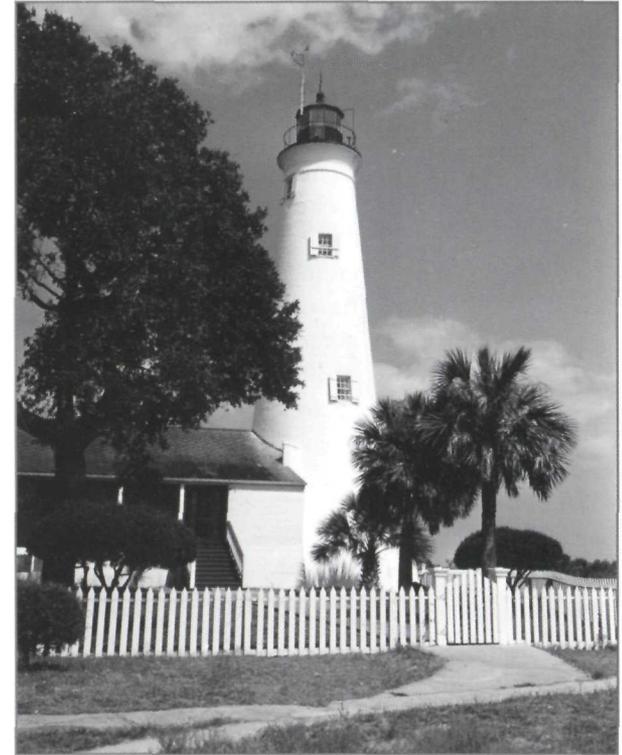
Over time, minor and major storms have struck this section of the coast severely damaging or destroying the keeper's home but the tower has continued to stand. For nearly 200 years, the bright beacon from the St. Marks Lighthouse has guided ships and boaters to the entrance of the St. Marks River.

In October 2013, the U.S. Coast Guard transferred the ownership of the historic property to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge has pledged to preserve this much loved building to be open to the public once the damages of time, termites, age, and weather have been repaired.

The St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., with a matching grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, produced the signs and brochures for the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The association is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports educational, environmental, and biological programs of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Visit [www.stmarksrefuge.org](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org) for more information.

9/2010; updated April 2015

## Historic St. Marks Lighthouse



In 1828, the U.S. House of Representatives authorized the construction of a lighthouse at the mouth of the St. Marks River. The 65-foot tall, hollow-walled tower on the east side of the river was completed in March 1830 for \$11,765. Customs Inspector Jesse H. Willis refused the tower because the contract had called for solid walls. It was rebuilt, and in 1831 the first lighthouse keeper, Samuel Crosby, illuminated 15 Argand-Lewis Whale oil lamps with 15 inch reflectors. Alas, the solid walls did not allow moisture to evaporate, and cracks appeared as the tower settled. Iron straps on the outside held it together like hoops around barrel staves.

On August 31, 1837, a 10-foot tidal wave washed away all the buildings around the lighthouse except the keeper's dwelling and drowned eight people. In 1838 an inspector wrote that the lighthouse was "in a most wretched condition, . . . and ought to be rebuilt immediately." The lighthouse was rebuilt, with hollow walls, in the present location in 1842.



Found underwater during an archeological survey in the 1990s, this crumbling concrete marker is thought to have been from the original survey completed in the late 1820s.

In September 1843, disaster struck. The same hurricane that destroyed the town of Port Leon, demolished the keeper's home; the tower survived. Thirteen people at the lighthouse were killed.



This lighthouse image dates from the mid-1800s. *U.S. Coast Guard Historian*

On April 19, 1861, President Lincoln ordered the blockade of southern ports. Customs Collector Alonzo B. Noyes ordered the lens to be removed and stored at St. Marks.

Confederate soldiers used the lighthouse as a lookout. Repeated shelling by Union Naval forces stopped the practice. After the war, the tower was repaired and the height was raised to 73 feet. The light was relit in 1867.



Our Fresnel (fre-NEL) lens, invented by French physicist, Augustine-Jean Fresnel, was installed in 1867 when repairs were made to the lighthouse after the Civil War. The lens, a Fourth Order fixed light, is constructed of various-sized prisms which gather light from a weak source and project a strong, steady beam. *St. Marks Refuge*

### Report of Brigadier General Joseph Finegan, Confederate Army, Tallahassee, June 17, 1862.

*The enemy shelled the light-house for several hours, sent fire-boats on shore and burned the wood-work of the light-house and the keeper's house adjoining, and burned all of the buildings on the beach. I had a small picket guard at the light-house. No person hurt.*

Twenty keepers kept the light burning, except for a few years during the Civil War. Samuel Forbes, Assistant Keeper from 1880 - 1882, was African American. Two of the keepers were the wives of men who had died during their tenure. Ann Dudley replaced her husband, Needham, after he died in April 1850, and Sarah Fine took over after Charles Fine died in August 1904. Undoubtedly the families of each keeper played a part in keeping the beacon shining. The pay for their services fluctuated from \$400 - \$640 per year.



In 1892 a chain link fence was installed at the lighthouse. *National Archives*

Prior to the Civil War several vessels could be anchored at Spanish Hole waiting to take on or offload cargo. Shipping dropped off after the war because goods could be more easily shipped by rail. Fishing boats plied the waters of Apalachee Bay. Winter brought hunters in search of the fat ducks and geese.

Each day the keeper was required to clean the lens and make minor repairs. Regulations stated that the light was to be lit promptly at sunset, and kept burning "at full intensity until sunrise."