Most Often Asked ? at Fort Matanzas

Who built Fort Matanzas?
   The Spanish built this fort in 1740-1742 to
   control Matanzas Inlet, the "back door" to
   St. Augustine.

How much restoration work has been done?
   The majority of the stone you see is original,
   although extensive restoration work has been
   performed through the years.

How did it get the name Matanzas?
   The Spanish word "matanzas" means "slaughter"
   in English. This area and waterway have been
   known by that name since 1565 when 245
   Frenchmen were put to death in the dunes at
   the inlet.

Where was the inlet when the fort was built?
   Time and tides are changing this coastline.
   In 1740, the inlet was a half mile closer
   to the fort, than it is now.

How big was the fort's island when it was built?
   The fort was built on less than 2 acres of dry
   ground with water all around it and a deep
   channel just in front of the gundeck. Today,
   Rattlesnake Island is more than 200 acres.

Why do they call it Rattlesnake Island?
   Traditionally, in the early 1900's when
   dredging work for the Intracoastal Waterway
   was begun by the United States Corps of Engineers,
   the name "Rattlesnake Island" was taken from a
   nearby fishing camp.

How many people lived in the fort?
   Usually 7 to 10 soldiers and one officer were
   on duty. For battle conditions, Fort Matanzas
   was to have a fighting strength of 50 men.

How long did soldiers stay at the fort?
   A month's tour of duty was normal. Troops were
   rotated from the garrison at St. Augustine.

How did they get their supplies?
   Supplies came once a month by waterways in
   longboats or lanches (launches).

How did Fort Matanzas communicate with the garrison
at St. Augustine?
   In time of danger, an alarm could be sent to
   St. Augustine, 15 miles to the north, by boat,
   horseback, or on foot.

Isn't this building too small for a real fort?
   No, its size was suited to its purpose - a
   watchtower to protect the southern entrance
   into the Matanzas River and St. Augustine.

Were any battles fought here?
   There were no battles here, but the fort did
   exchange fire at least once. Fort Matanzas
   was built in 1740 after the siege by British
   troops from Georgia; the last attempt by the
   British to conquer Spanish Florida.

What is underneath the gundeck?
   Fort Matanzas' gundeck is a solid fill of
   earth to provide a secure platform for five
   cannon which would have weighed about six tons.

What is the large hole in the top of the gundeck?
    This hole opens into a cistern which stores
    rainwater collected on the top observation
    deck and passed downward through the wooden
    drain spout. There was no source of fresh
    water on Rattlesnake Island.

What are the new coquina blocks at the top of the
fort?
    They cover tie-rods which hold the upper
    structure together.

What is that hole in the wall on the second floor?
    It is the door into the magazine where
    gunpowder and cannon ammunition were stored.

How did soldiers get up into the fort?
    The permanent stairs are recent additions.
    At first a ladder, which could be pulled up,
    was the only access into the fort.

Did American soldiers ever use Fort Matanzas?
    No, the watchtower was abandoned after the
    United States acquired Florida from Spain
    in 1821.

When was the Visitor Center built?
    Constructed of coquina blocks like the fort,
    the Visitor Center was built during the
    Roosevelt administration in 1937 as a
    WPA project.