

Cockspur Island Lighthouse

Introduction

Clinging to the tip of Cockspur Island, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse has withstood crashing waves, the roar of cannons and the wrath of time. The forty-six-foot-tall brick lighthouse, poised on an islet off the southeastern tip of Cockspur Island, marks the South Channel of the Savannah River. Today the tower is one of only five surviving lighthouses in the state, and stands as a proud reminder of the rich history of coastal Georgia.

Early Efforts

An earlier brick tower was built on this location beginning in 1837. This early tower was unlit, and served as a day mark. In August 1848, John Norris, a noted New York architect, was contracted to build an illuminated station. Norris designed several of Savannah's more notable structures including the U.S. Customs House and the Hugh-Mercer house.

Norris' duties were to "repair, alter, and put lanterns and lights on Cockspur Island...and to erect a suit-

able keeper's house." His tower housed a fixed white light using five lamps with 14-inch reflectors. The light was visible at a distance of nine miles.

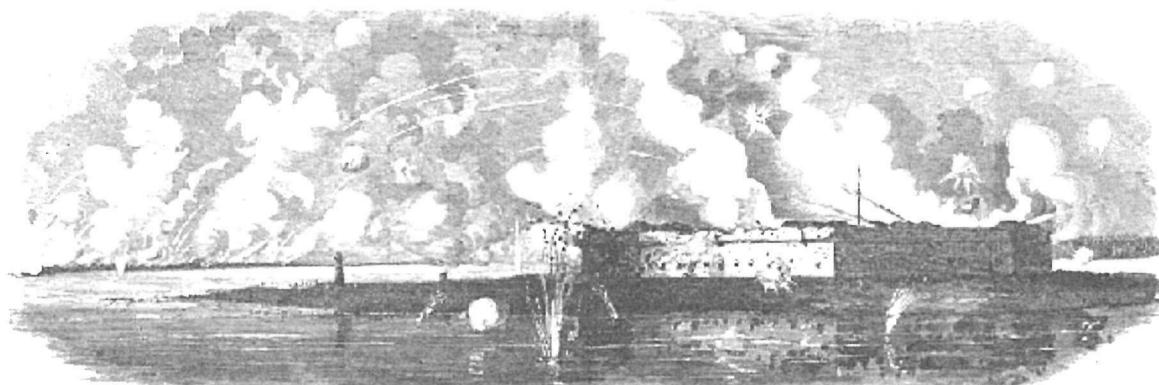
Officially commissioned in 1849, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse guided vessels to the bustling port of Savannah. In 1854, a massive hurricane destroyed the tower as high winds and surging waters wreaked havoc on Cockspur Island.

The Light is Reborn

By 1856, a new tower was built "on the same foundations" as the previous light at a cost of \$6,000. The tower was built using local Savannah Gray brick and ironwork shipped from Baltimore. The keeper's quarters were located nearby on Cockspur Island.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the light was extinguished by Confederate forces to hinder Union blockading efforts. A year later it was a silent witness

to one of the most remarkable bombardments in American History. On April 10, 1862, Union forces in eleven batteries along the northern shore of Tybee Island opened fire on Fort Pulaski. The Union guns shelled the fort for thirty hours, with the Cockspur Island Lighthouse located precariously in the line of fire between the opposing forces. Despite its prominent location the tower suffered only minor damage during the battle.



Despite being in direct line of fire during the bombardment of Fort Pulaski, the lighthouse survived due to the high angle of fire required for firing at long ranges. Thousands of projectiles passed over the lighthouse during the 30-hour bombardment. Leslie's Weekly, 1862.

Post-Civil War

After the war's end the lighthouse was again re-lit and painted white for use as a day mark. In 1881, a powerful hurricane struck Cockspur Island causing water to rise 23-feet above sea level. The storm surge filled the lighthouse interior and destroyed the keeper's residence. The great hurricane of 1893 forced the light keepers to flee to safety in the north-west stair tower of Fort Pulaski.

Although it survived the roar of cannons and numerous storms, changing conditions in the Savannah River would have an important impact on the light. Over time the North Channel became the preferred route for large ocean-going vessels, and the South Channel gradually lost importance. On June 1, 1909, the Cockspur Light was officially extinguished.



Following the hurricane of 1893, the light keepers decided to move to higher ground, building a two-story frame house atop Fort Pulaski's massive walls.

Restoration

After being extinguished, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse passed through several owners, including the United States Coast Guard. By the late 1950s, the National Park Service looked into acquiring the historic lighthouse. On August 14, 1958, by presidential proclamation, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse officially became a part of Fort Pulaski National Monument. In 1972, the light was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

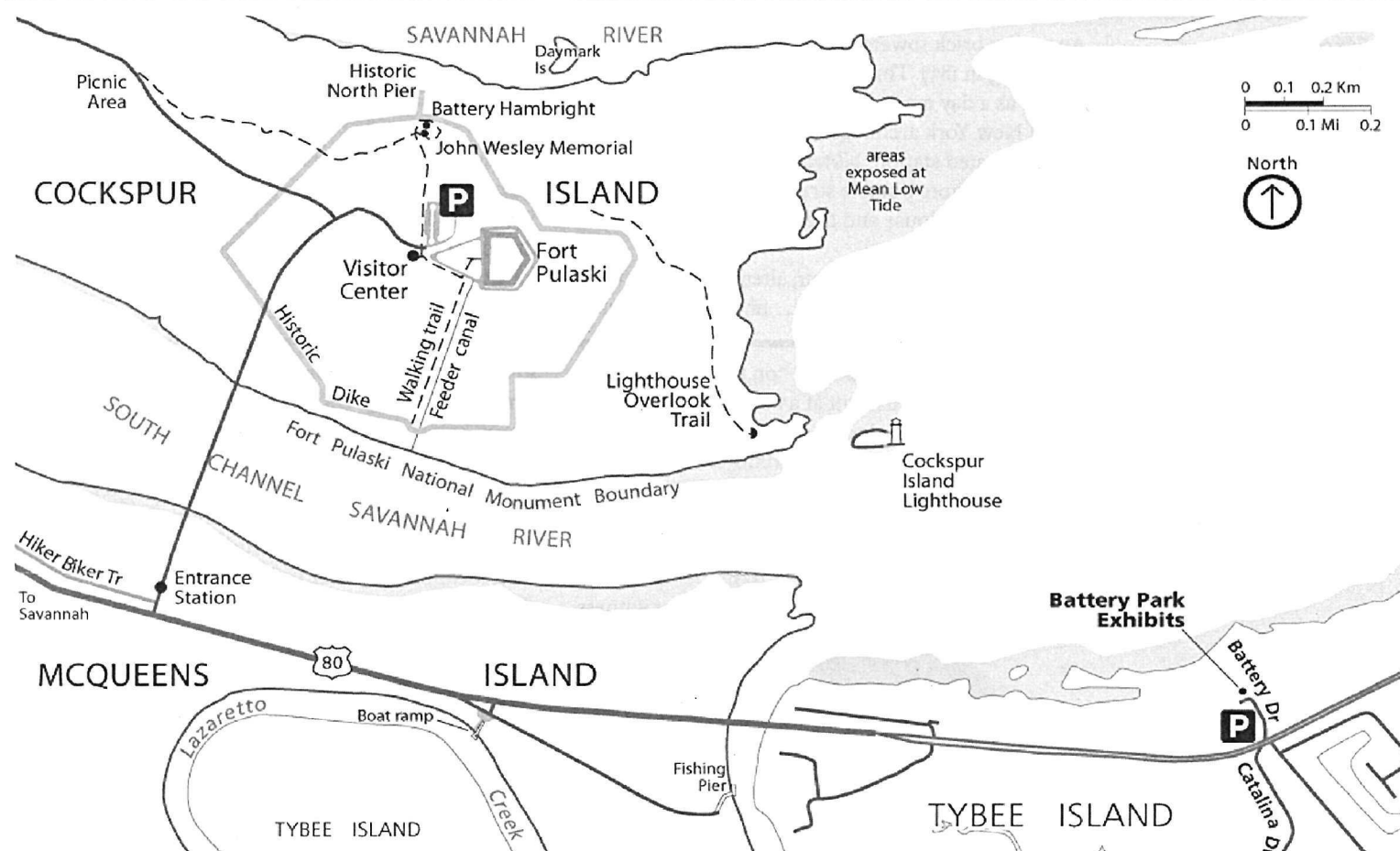
The National Park Service is dedicated to preserving this historic marker. Continually battered by wind and water, the tower routinely needs repairs. Over the years work has been done to maintain the structure, including masonry and painting projects.

Today the lighthouse is open to the public, although a boat is necessary to visit the site. Visitors wanting a closer view of the tower can explore the Lighthouse Overlook Trail winding around the southeastern tip of Cockspur Island.

With your assistance, Fort Pulaski National Monument and the National Park Service can better serve the needs of the Cockspur Island Lighthouse and help protect it for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

Currently, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse's wooden foundation is threatened by shipworm infestation. Fort Pulaski National Monument estimates that it will cost nearly \$1,000,000 to repair the damage to the foundation. Your tax deductible donations to the Cockspur Island Lighthouse are being accepted by our not-for-profit partner, Eastern National. Your contributions will help save this historic structure for future generations.

Donations may be sent to:
Eastern National
In care of: Fort Pulaski NM
P.O. Box 30757
Savannah, GA 31410



The Lighthouse Overlook Trail begins north of the fort just beyond the historic dike. The .65-mile-long trail offers excellent views of Tybee Island, Fort Pulaski, and the Cockspur Island Lighthouse.