



Charleston Light - Sullivan's Island



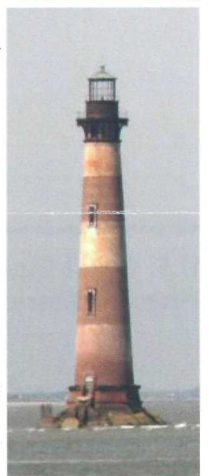
A unique lighthouse

The Charleston Light on Sullivan's Island has guided mariners into the harbor since 1962. The distinctive lighthouse is part of the United States Coast Guard Historic District that includes historic buildings dating back to 1894 when the U.S. Life Saving Service protected seafarers from dangers along the nation's coastlines. The National Park Service protects and preserves the historic district.

Earlier navigation aids

In the earliest days of navigation, fire was used to warn mariners of hazards along the coast and also to mark safe passage into protected harbors. The first beacon at the entrance to Charleston Harbor was a raised metal basket filled with oakum and pine pitch. It was ignited at night beginning in 1673, just 3 years after the British founded Charles Towne. In 1767 a permanent lighthouse was built on the south end of Morris Island at the main entrance to the ship channel. Confederate forces destroyed the lighthouse in 1861 to conceal the harbor entrance from U.S. forces. After the Civil War a new lighthouse was built on Morris Island in 1876. The construction of jetties to redirect the

ship channel caused significant erosion on Morris Island. Today the 158-foot tall Morris Island Light sits 1700 feet out to sea. When the lighthouse on Sullivan's Island was built closer to the new main channel, the Morris Island light was decommissioned. It is owned by the State of South Carolina. Local non-profit Save the Light is working to preserve the historic structure.



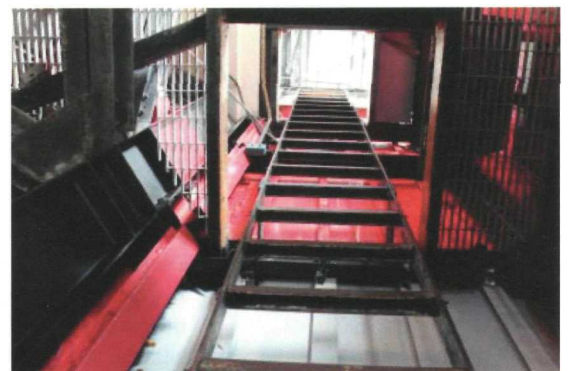
A modern lighthouse

The new Charleston Light on Sullivan's Island was dedicated on June 15, 1962. It was designed by architect Jack Graham while in the U.S. Coast Guard. Graham studied under modernist Louis Kahn. Not a typical circular shape, the lighthouse is triangular, with steel girders for the framework and aluminum alloy for siding. The unusual design was chosen for its ability to withstand winds up to 125 miles per hour. Its strength was demonstrated when it withstood Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

seconds in a distinctive pattern. Originally painted red-orange and white, the siding was repainted in its current black and white daymark pattern in response to complaints from island residents.

One of the most technologically advanced for its time, the lighthouse has a service elevator. The lantern room remains inaccessible to the public due to a 35-foot vertical climb on a metal ladder. When first illuminated, it was one of the strongest lighthouses in the world at 28-million candlepower. Five years later, it was reduced to 1.2-million candlepower and is still visible 27 miles offshore. Standing 162.5 feet tall, it is the last major lighthouse built in the United States.

Lighthouses have unique flash characteristics and paint designs, known as daymarks, permitting ships to distinguish one from another. The Charleston Light produces two flashes each 30



U.S. Life-Saving Station



Sullivan's Island Life-Saving Station boathouse and quarters, c. 1895

U.S. Coast Guard image

Adjacent to the lighthouse is the former U.S. Life-Saving Station established in 1894 and completed in 1895. The Life-Saving Service was created in 1878, when coastal shipping was a principal means of transporting goods. Its purpose was the protection of lives and materials in the maritime trade.

The plan was to establish Life-Saving Stations every three miles along the coast, allowing for overlapping patrols and mutual aid. While not fully implemented, Life-Saving Stations dotted the Eastern seaboard in the late 19th Century. Each station had a crew of men quartered in buildings next to or containing a boathouse. Crews were proficient in rigging devices like breeches buoys to rescue crew and cargo from shipwrecks. Lifeboats played a crucial role in rescue operations.

Originally, the Charleston Harbor Life-Saving Station was built on Morris Island. Because of close proximity to the marsh and the perceived unhealthy environment, the station was moved to its present location on Sullivan's Island. In 1891 the Township deeded five acres to the federal government for the establishment of the station.

The Sullivan's Island station was built in the Marquette architectural style. The two-story quarters building held eight men. The adjacent boathouse held two 20-foot life-saving row boats. Despite the original plan, this is the only life saving station built in South Carolina. Two station surfmen died in the line of duty, one in 1898 during a rescue attempt and another while on patrol in 1903.

U.S. Coast Guard Historic District



Former boathouse as present-day carpentry shop



Present-day quarters

In 1915 the Life-Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service were combined to form the U.S. Coast Guard Service. In 1919 a sighting station was installed on the property, marking its adaptation for use by the Fort Moultrie Military Complex. The 1930s saw major renovations to the quarters building and the construction of a four-bay building to house small powered rescue boats, later adapted to serve as a garage for general vehicles. A Signal Tower for flying hazard flags visible to offshore vessels was constructed in 1938.

In 1973 five of the six structures on the property were listed on the National Register as the U.S. Coast Guard Historic District. In 2012 the lighthouse became eligible. 1973 saw a dramatic

decline in Coast Guard activity at the station with the automation of the lighthouse and the opening of the current Coast Guard Station in downtown Charleston. The National Park Service began to occupy the facilities under permit with the Coast Guard. Following Hurricane Hugo in 1989, most of the property was transferred to the National Park Service. In 2008 the lighthouse was transferred to Fort Sumter National Monument. Today the Historic District serves as quarters for seasonal park staff, a carpentry shop and garage. Quarterly open houses provide limited public access to these historic structures that represent the historic evolution of maritime history from 1894 to 1973. The U.S. Coast Guard Historic District is located at 1815 I-On Avenue, Sullivan's Island.

About Your Visit

Fort Sumter National Monument is administered by the National Park Service. For more information, write to: Superintendent, Fort Sumter NM, 1214 Middle Street, Sullivan's Island, SC 29482

You can call (843) 883-3123 or visit Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie on the World Wide Web:

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