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June 28, 1937.

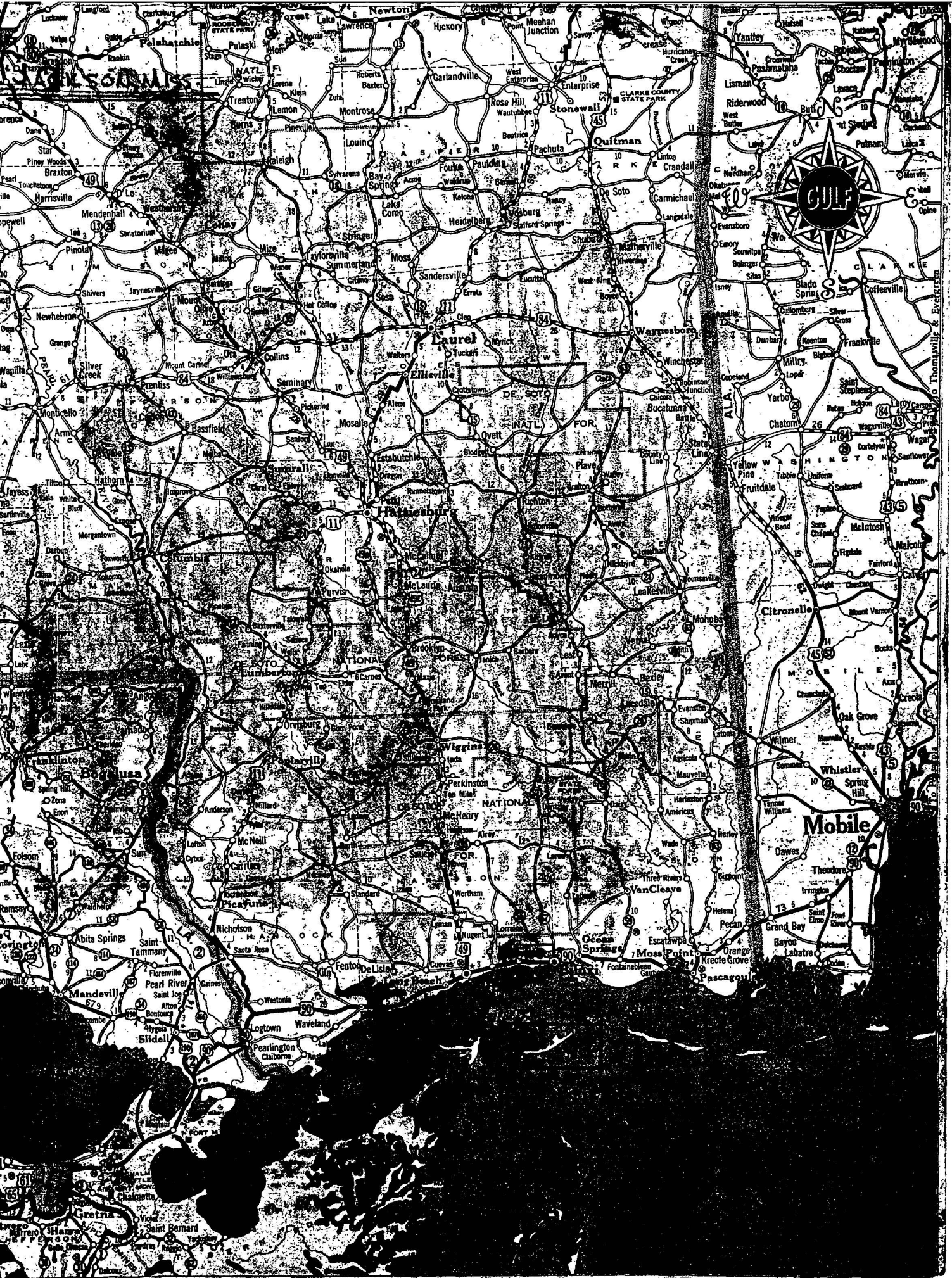
REPORT ON
INVESTIGATION OF
SHIP ISLAND AND
FORT MASSACHUSETTS
NEAR GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI

636
C. J. ...
Mississippi

Submitted by:

Nelson Royal, Jr.,
Resident Landscape Architect.

ROYAL
1937





LIGHTHOUSE ON SHIP ISLAND

LEGEND ON THIS CARD

The United States Government established a lighthouse on Ship Island about 1840. The present lighthouse is a comparatively new building, the light being furnished by a Delco light plant.

PART I - LOCATION

Ship Island is a rather long, narrow sand strip out in the Gulf of Mexico approximately $12\frac{1}{2}$ statute miles south and east from Gulfport, Mississippi, and approximately 12 statute miles south and a little west from Biloxi, Mississippi. The Island is between 8 and 9 miles long, and varies in width from 600 to 5000 feet. The average width is about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile. The major portion of the Island is flat, not far above water level, practically without vegetation; the eastern end has some sand dunes up to about 20 feet in height, and is heavily wooded.

Fort Massachusetts, a semi-circular brick fortification excellently preserved, is near the west tip of Ship Island.

Ship Island is near the west end of, and forms a part of, a chain of islands 10 to 15 miles off-shore, extending from the entrance of Mobile Bay to the eastern coast of Louisiana. This chain of islands forms a natural break-water for the Mississippi Gulf coast and incloses, on the landside, the Mississippi Sound. Seaward is the Gulf of Mexico.

The strategic importance of Ship Island, and the reason for building Fort Massachusetts on it, was that the island commanded the Gulf entrance to Lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain, which are water approaches to the city of New Orleans. However, the ordnance in use during the War of 1861-65 did not have sufficient range to insure complete command of the channel. It was for this reason that the Confederate forces evacuated the Island early in the first year of the War.

PART II - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first recorded reference to Ship Island is February 10, 1699, when Pierre Le Moyne Sieur d'Iberville and an expedition of explorers dropped anchor in Ship Island harbor. D'Iberville, an experienced pioneer in the New World, had been recalled to France from Canada for the purpose of leading an expedition to claim the lower Mississippi River basin for France and hold the territory claimed by La Salle in 1682. Pierre d'Iberville's entourage consisted of two frigates, two store ships, and a mixed crew of priests, pirates and adventurers. He used Ship Island as a base of supply, built

Fort Maurepas near what is now the city of Biloxi, and made Maurepas the capitol of the Province of Louisiana. From 1699 until 1722, when the capitol was finally moved to New Orleans, Ship Island had a more or less important part in the exploration and colonization of the Gulf Coast.

When d'Iberville landed at Ship Island in 1699, St. Augustine, Florida, had been established 134 years, Salem, Massachusetts was just recovering from its tragic witch-burning mania, and the Christopher Wren building at William and Mary College was six years old.

Not much activity occurred on Ship Island between 1722 and 1814, at which later date the English, under Major General Edward Pakenham, used the island harbor as a supply depot during his unsuccessful campaign against New Orleans. There are stories of pirates and buccaneers putting in at Ship Island prior to the arrival of English forces under Pakenham, but these stories cannot be substantiated.

The next event of importance at Ship Island, after the English abandoned it in 1814, was the proclamation in 1845 declaring the Island a military reservation. Jefferson Davis, when Secretary of War, caused the U. S. Army Engineers to prepare plans for the fortification of the Island. Sometime between 1854 and 1861, the exact date has not yet been verified, work on the brick fort was started in accordance with the Engineer's plans. Construction was stopped, however, when the War began, and on January 20, 1861 some Mississippi troops took possession of the partially completed works. The extent of construction when occupied by Confederate troops may be seen in photograph #1 following.

On September 16, 1861, Ship Island and the Fort were evacuated by the Confederates. Everything that would burn was burned, and the light from the lighthouse was taken ashore. The Confederate leaders realized the Island was untenable should they lose the mainland, their ordnance was inadequate, and the incompleting semi-circular fort afforded very little protection.

Ship Island was next occupied by Federal troops in December, 1861. The Fort was named "Massachusetts" after

the U.S.S. Massachusetts which was then participating in the Federal blockade of the Mississippi Sound. In 1862 and until 1865 the Island was used as a Federal prison. Work was begun again on the Fort in 1862, some prison labor being used. The excellence of the brick work, however, would seem to preclude the use of much unskilled labor. Visitors to Fort Massachusetts today are told this ironic story: that the Fort was designed by Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War and built by President Lincoln with Confederate prisoners.

The Fort was completed about 1867. A caretaker was maintained until 1900, when the military reservation was abandoned.

In 1933 the Fort and the entire Island, except for two Federal reservations, was bought from the War Department by the American Legion Post of Gulfport, Mississippi. Approximately 1260 acres were acquired in this transaction. The two Governmental reservations, each of which extends the full width of the Island, are a Quarantine Station maintained by the U. S. Public Health Service, and Ship Island light operated by the Department of Commerce.

PART III - EXISTING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Ship Island is an elongated sand bar between 8 and 9 miles in length and averaging $1/3$ of a mile in width. The east end is heavily wooded and on the eastern half are sand dunes varying in height up to 20 feet. The remainder of the Island is flat and rather low, some two miles in the center being under water during highest tides. These tides occur possibly once or twice a year and rarely cover this part of the Island with more than a foot of water. The Island's shore line is slightly undulating and on the north side near the woods is a fine natural harbor, though shallow. The fine white sand beach on all sides of the Island slopes away very gradually.

Access to Ship Island may be had by regularly scheduled boat trips from either Gulfport or Biloxi, Mississippi. Round trip fare is \$1.00 and the trip each way takes a little more than an hour. Private boats may be chartered in Gulfport or Biloxi. No overnight accommodations are available on Ship Island.

Gulfport and Biloxi are on the main line of the L & N from New Orleans to Montgomery, Alabama. Gulfport is the southern terminus of the Illinois Central system from Chicago, Memphis and Jackson, Mississippi. Both Gulf cities

are served by Greyhound and Tri-States Bus Lines. Both cities are on U. S. Highway #90, the Old Spanish Trail, a hard-surfaced route, and are approximately 60 miles from Mobile and two hours from New Orleans. There are municipal airports near Gulfport and Biloxi. The Coast Guard maintains a fleet of hydroplanes at Biloxi and several power boats at Gulfport.

A channel 300 feet wide and 25 feet deep is maintained into Gulfport past the west end of the Island. This means that with an adequate pier, approximately 1000 feet long, boats drawing up to 25 feet of water may dock near the Fort. Ordinary pleasure craft in this vicinity of the Gulf, however, have no more than a five foot draft due to the large number of shoals.

Ownership of the Island at present is divided among three agencies, the Joe Graham Post, American Legion, of Gulfport, Mississippi, the U. S. Public Health Service, and the U. S. Department of Commerce. Ownership is distributed as follows: the heavily wooded east end of the Island, including 450 acres, is owned by the Joe Graham Post; next is the Public Health Service quarantine station of about 60 acres; next the local legion post has 725 acres (part of this area is subject to flooding); then the lighthouse reservation of about 30 acres; and finally 85 acres on the west end of the Island, including Fort Massachusetts, belonging to the Joe Graham Post. Of the Island's 1350 acres the Gulfport American Legion Post owns about 1260.

The Department of Commerce lighthouse reservation includes Ship Island light, a caretaker's cottage and a few small out-buildings. See picture on first page. The reservation extends the full width of the Island. The boundaries are not fenced.

The Quarantine Station, photograph #9, was built and is maintained for an emergency isolation ward for contagious diseases not permitted in any of our Southern ports of entry. The area hasn't been used since 1927. Most of the buildings on the reservation are shown in the photograph #9, two small dwellings on the extreme left are not included. Trespassing on this reservation is strictly prohibited. The buildings on the quarantine station occupy the most desirable sites on the Island. The caretaker has done some planting of trees and shrubs, and his success, in addition to the wooded area nearby on the east end of the Island, is proof that the sand will support plant life.

Fort Massachusetts is in excellent state of repair. There has been no settlement of foundation, there has been surprisingly little failure of brick vault or arch. Only one cannon is still in place, see photographs Nos. 2 and 4. Not a great amount of work would be necessary to make repairs and restore the structure to its original condition.

There have been several facilities added since the Fort and parts of the Island were acquired by the Legion. Photograph #8 shows a restaurant, probably a typical example of the character of proposed Legion development. Photograph #1 shows one of the two public comfort stations. A small Delco plant furnishes power for lights in the Fort and restaurant. At one time a bar and lunch counter were operated within the Fort itself, but neither are in use now, neither is completely dismantled. Part of the Fort is used for living quarters by a caretaker-guide, see photograph #5. The pier, some 570 feet long, ends right up against the Fort, as may be seen in photograph #4. The same picture shows water in the foreground which, during the War of 1861-65, was part of the Island. Wave erosion has also occurred on the north side of the Fort. It is estimated that over 100 feet have been washed away north of the Fort. The lighthouse reservation is about 1800 feet east of the Fort.

Water may be had on Ship Island from shallow wells or from artesian wells at depths varying from 300 to 1700 feet. The artesian water has a strong mineral flavor but is palatable.

PART IV - POSSIBILITIES OF DEVELOPMENT

There are four important reasons for Ship Island developing. One of course, is its historical background. As has been previously mentioned herein, the Island played a prominent part in the exploration and settlement of the Gulf coast. Mr. C. L. Johnson, Assistant Historian, in his recent report on this area, points out that the Island is associated with 238 years of our country's history.

The second important reason is that the one remaining evidence of this historic era is Fort Massachusetts. This excellently preserved Fort is one of a group all approximately of the same date erected at strategic points along the Gulf coast from the very tip of Florida to the south-

ern end of Louisiana. The possibilities of connecting this chain of fortifications and developing them as an historic unit are interesting. Fort Massachusetts itself is interesting. The brickwork is an outstanding example of excellent construction with this material. The stonework, refer to the first seven photographs, is well cut and well placed, and is unusual in its use on a military fortification. One can appreciate the difficulties encountered in quarrying, transporting and placing ornamental stonework during the stormy years of 1861-65.

Interesting museum exhibits of quite wide scope could be collected to preserve the history of Ship Island and the Fort. Pagents and tableaux could revive the drama of its early days. A very dynamic historic presentation is waiting development.

The third development which could be important at Ship Island would be museums of migratory bird life and marine life. It is doubtful that a thorough scientific study of marine life has been made of the water adjacent to the Island. At any rate if such a study has been made it isn't available to the general public. A very interesting collection of migratory bird life in southern Mississippi has been made by the U. S. Biological Survey at Gulfport during the past two years. A recent newspaper release from this Office reveals that 365 birds have been identified and study skins have been prepared for all of them. The article incidentally states that 150 of the study skins are exhibited at the State Experiment Forest about 25 miles north of Gulfport. The remainder are in a private home. All of this exhibit could probably be housed in a museum on Ship Island.

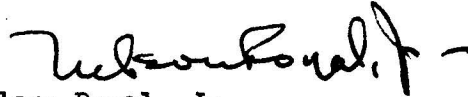
The fourth important possibility of development, and the one which would probably attract a larger attendance than any other, are the recreational facilities available at Ship Island.

There is a resident population of about 660,000 within a 75 mile radius of Ship Island. Each season the Mississippi Gulf coast attracts visitors in such numbers that there is a total of nearly 1,000,000 potential attendants. The average mean temperature of nearly 71 degrees insures year-around activity.

The Mississippi Gulf coast is renowned for its mild climate, its excellent fishing, boating and swimming. Ship Island is in the center of the best fishing grounds in the

Gulf. The Island is a short pleasant boat trip from either Biloxi or Gulfport, and offers swimming far superior to that available along the Mississippi shore where the water is shallow a considerable distance out. The gentle swell surging in from the Gulf, the fine white sand beach, the invigorating Gulf breeze, the excellent fishing, sailing, motor boating, all these attractions are waiting to form a nucleus for a very superior recreational development. Combined with concessions for restaurants and picnicing, dressing rooms, promenades and dancing, affording study of interesting scientific and historic features as well as opportunity for complete relaxation, Ship Island could well be a new phase of National Park Service.

Respectfully submitted,



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CC:
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#1. View of Fort Massachusetts from the land side looking north.
Note difference in color of brick, showing extent of construction
at beginning of the war of 1861-65.



#2. View on top of parapet showing 15 inch Rodman gun and construction
guarding doorways to the two stairwells. Note broken cannon barrel.
View looking north toward mainland.



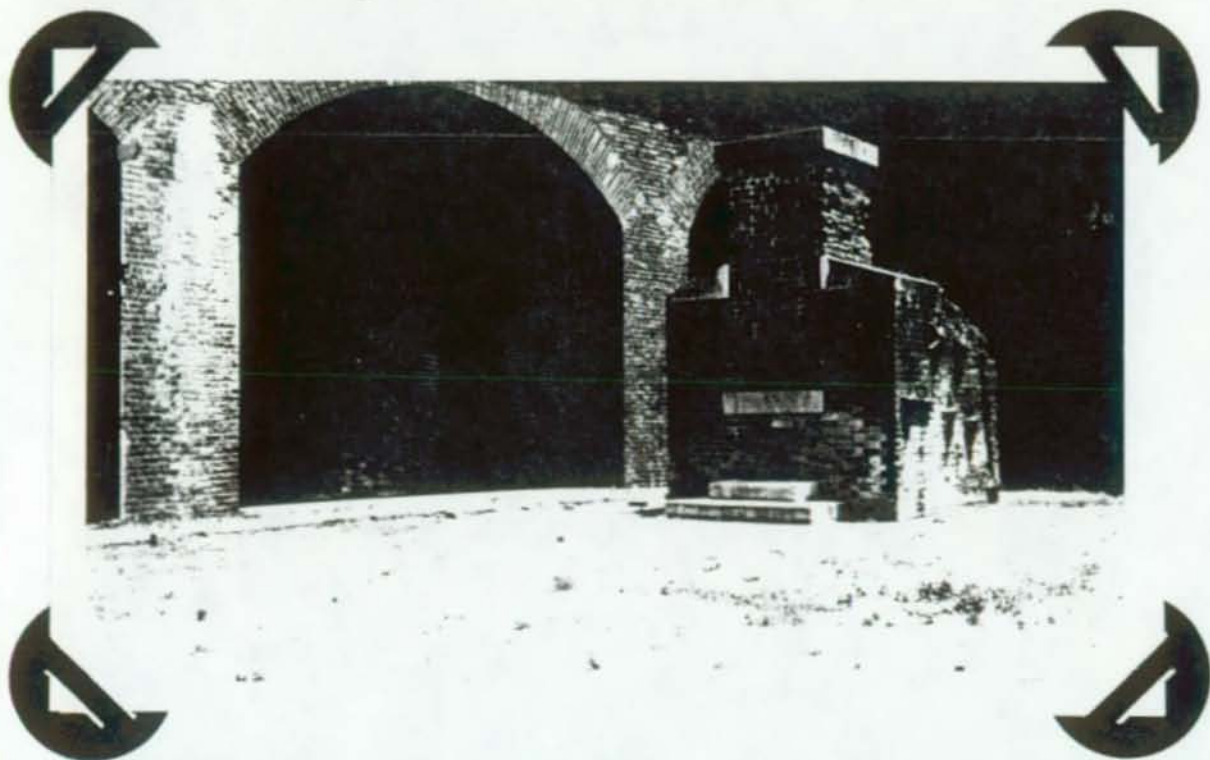
#3. View on top of parapet showing a few of the 21 gun mounts on upper rampart of Fort Massachusetts.



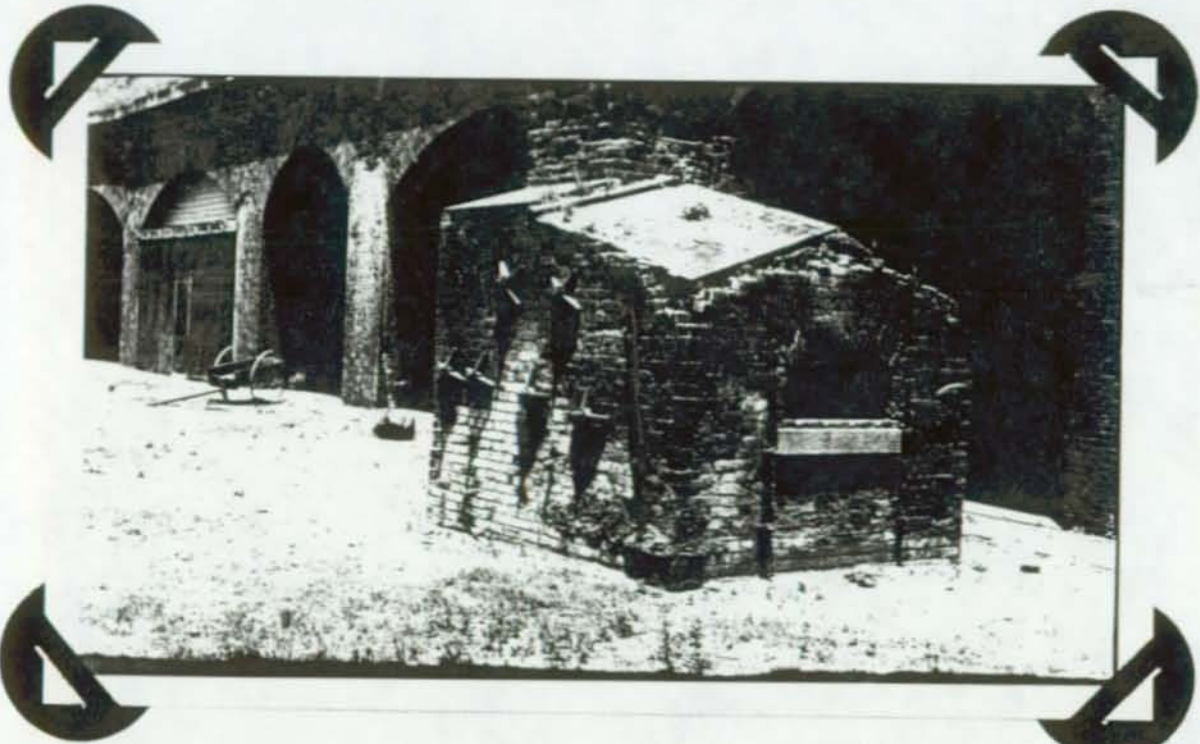
#4. Entrance to the Fort. During the last 70 years wave action has eaten away a part of the Island and now the waves practically reach the front door of Fort Massachusetts.



#5. An interior view of the Fort, showing one of the three circular brick stair-wells leading to the upper rampart. The laundry, screen doors and electric wiring are all modern innovations.



#6. A front view of the furnace used to heat cannon balls which were fired red hot onto wooden ships. This is said to be the only remaining example of a furnace used for this purpose. One of the two interior circular stair-wells is visible in this picture. Note the detail of the brick arch.



#7. Another view of the furnace. A fragment of a cannon breach may be noted. The ordnance of this Fort was sold for scrap iron by the Government. Only the 15 inch Rodman shown in picture #2 remains.



#8. An example of American Legion development - a restaurant in the shadow of Fort Massachusetts. For other examples of Legion improvements, see the comfort stations in picture #1.



#9. Most of the buildings on the Quarantine Station, taken from the pier. This station hasn't been used for 10 years; four attendants keep the station in order.