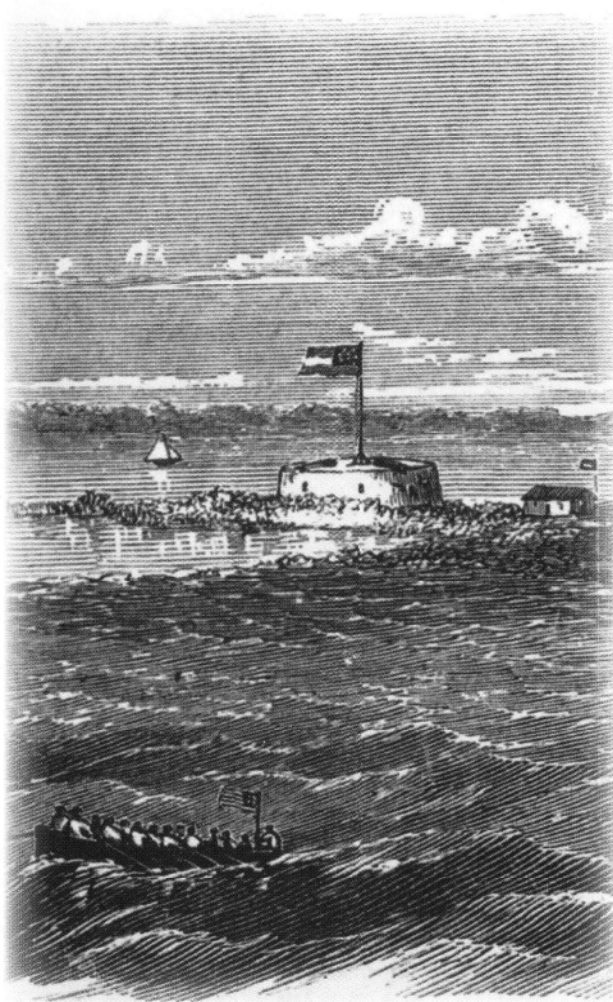


Fort Williams

GPS Coordinates:
84° 10.955' W ~ 30° 4.658' N

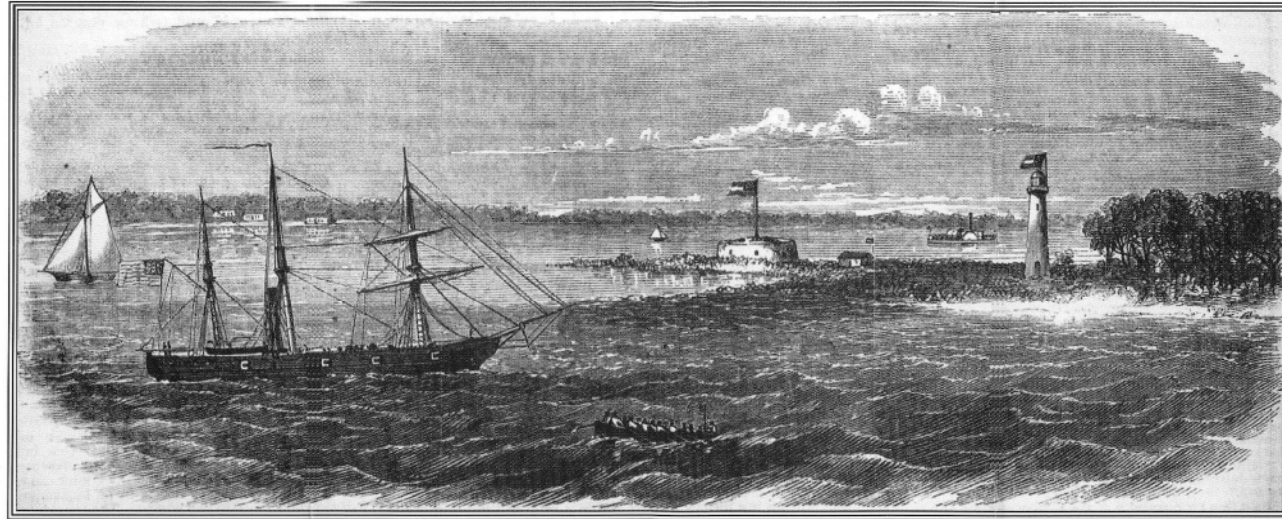


Fort Williams, in a drawing from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, February 22, 1862 (detail). (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)

Before the Civil War, Florida was thinly populated with few cities of any size. St. Marks had been the fifth largest town in Florida and a busy port. But in the decade before the war shipping business shifted to other towns. The beginning of the conflict signaled a short-lived revival for the port of St. Marks; blockade-

runners easily slipped in and out until President Lincoln authorized a blockade of southern ports – including St. Marks – on April 19, 1861.

Shortly after the blockade began, the Confederates built a fort near the St. Marks Lighthouse and named it Ft. Williams in honor of Colonel J.J. Williams, a Tallahassee planter who led the 2nd Florida Cavalry. The fort was more of a



This drawing shows the lighthouse, Ft. Williams and the three-masted U.S. gunboat Mohawk firing on the Confederate gunboat Spray. The Spray was a modern steam-powered side wheeled boat armed with three guns that carried men and supplies between St. Marks and the lighthouse. The Spray is in the background, between the fort and the lighthouse. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)

stockade to shelter the soldiers who were guarding the salt workers and the townspeople of St. Marks.

On June 15, 1862, a party of Union Marines landed near the lighthouse. They burned the barracks and the keeper's home. The fort was not rebuilt, but it had provided a sense of safety for a few months.

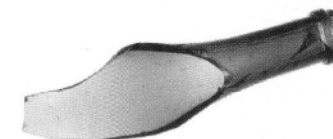
On March 4, 1865, soldiers from the 2nd and 99th U.S. Colored Infantry landed near the lighthouse. They slogged north through the



Musket ball shot



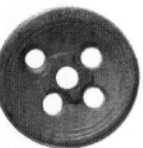
Bristol Glazed Albany slipped whiskey jug sherd



Glass bottle neck

The exact location of Fort Williams is unknown, but it is thought to be near the end of Cedar Point Trail.

These items (not shown to scale) were recovered during an archeological dig near the site of Fort Williams. They could have been left behind by Civil War soldiers or nearby residents. (Artifact photos courtesy of the Florida Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Archaeological Research)



Handcut button

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 History Trail. 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 for more information.

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watery woods and engaged Confederate forces on March 6 at the Battle of Natural Bridge. Their goal was to capture Tallahassee, but the Union troops withdrew after the battle. Tallahassee remained the only southern capital east of the Mississippi that was never captured by Union forces.

Spanish Hole/ Shipwreck

GPS Coordinates:
84° 10.955' W ~ 30° 4.658' N

Spanish Hole

When Spanish explorers first searched the shallow waters of Apalachee Bay they found few places to anchor near shore, but in the mouth of the St. Marks River they discovered deeper water which has long been known as Spanish Hole. For centuries, vessels that could not navigate up the St. Marks River have anchored there.

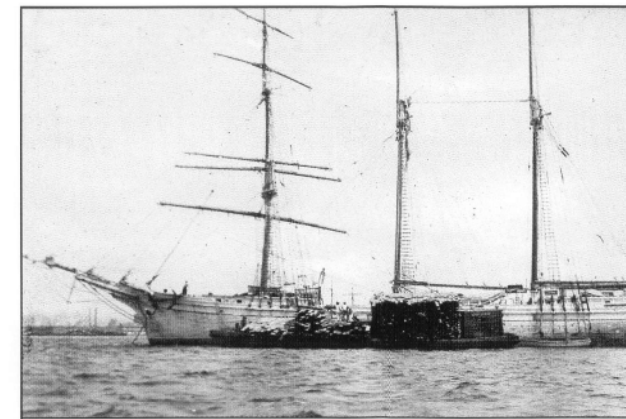
In 1528, Spaniard Panfilo de Narvaez led 300 men across Florida from near Tampa into Apalachee territory. Instead of treasure, they found hardship. Legend says that the expedition stayed near the mouth of the St. Marks River long enough to build four rafts to carry the men to rejoin their ships. Eight years later, four survivors arrived in Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca, one of the survivors, wrote about their ordeal in 1536 or 1537.

Hernando de Soto came with 600 men in 1539, and followed nearly the same route, believing that he could find the

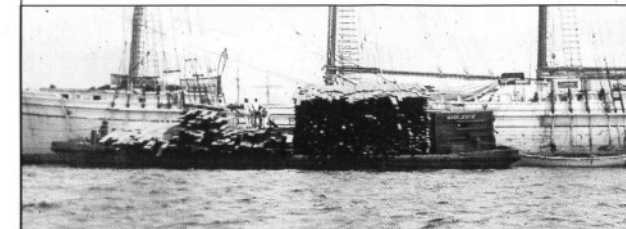
gold that had eluded Narvaez. He did not.

The first wooden fort at San Marcos, at the confluence of the Wakulla and St. Marks Rivers, was built by the Spanish Governor in 1679. Pirates likely anchored at Spanish Hole and crept upriver to loot and burn the fort in 1681. A second wooden fort, built in 1718, was replaced by a third fort constructed in 1739 with limestone from a quarry that is on refuge property. This fort fell into disrepair.

When Florida was under British control between 1763 and 1783, the Panton - Leslie Company trading post was established on the west side of the Wakulla River, just north of U.S. Highway 98. The Spanish regained control of San Marcos by 1786. Occupation has not been continuous, but the area around the St. Marks and Wakulla Rivers has seen settlements come and go since the first Europeans arrived more than four centuries ago.



Small boats called "lighters" shuttled goods and people between the ships at Spanish Hole and the upriver ports of St. Marks, Magnolia, Port Leon, and Newport. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)



Shipwreck

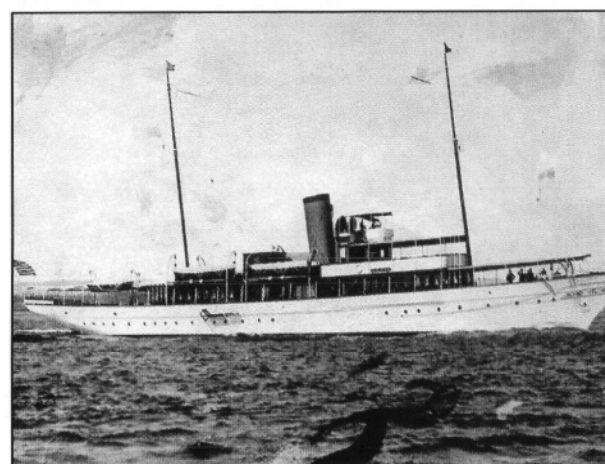
Not far from Spanish Hole lie the remains of a small vessel which is visible at low tide. In 1928, a ship anchored off Long Bar, west of the lighthouse, caught fire and burned, according to the late Alton Gresham. Gresham's father, John Y. Gresham, was the lighthouse keeper at the time. The elder Gresham attempted to tow the remains up the St. Marks River, but the boat ran aground and sank.

The vessel may have been the former World War I sub chaser that had been purchased by the Florida Shellfish Commission and renamed Dispatch. Under-

water archaeologists from Florida State University studied the site in 1998 but could not find conclusive evidence that would identify the vessel as the sub chaser.

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This WWI sub chaser may be similar to the ship that sank in 1928. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

(Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)