

Historic St. Marks Lighthouse

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



The Fresnel lens, invented by French physicist Augustine-Jean Fresnel, was first used in 1823. The lens was thinner, larger, flatter, and captured more light than previous lenses, allowing the beam to be visible from farther away. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail

1	Wakulla Beach: site of Wakulla Beach Hotel and West Goose Creek Seheyard	84° 15.703' W	30° 6.316' N	4	Mounds Station: site of Shell Mounds and Naval Stores	84° 9.869' W	30° 5.282' N
2	Plum Orchard: site of Port Leon	84° 8.892' W	30° 9.099' N	5	St. Marks Lighthouse: site of Lighthouse, Ft. Williams, and Spanish Hole/Shipwreck	84° 10.955' W	30° 4.658' N
3	East River: site of CCC and Salt Works	84° 8.710' W	30° 7.797' N	6	Mandalay: site of Aucilla River	83° 58.769' W	30° 6.985' N





What a difference 75 years have made. This photograph was taken during the construction of Lighthouse Road by the CCC in the 1930s. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

In 1828, the U.S. House of Representatives authorized the construction of a lighthouse at the mouth of the St. Marks River. The 65-foot-tall, hollow-walled tower on the east side of the river was completed in March 1830 for \$11,765. Customs Inspector Jesse H. Willis refused the tower because the contract had called for solid walls. It was rebuilt, and in 1831 the first lighthouse keeper, Samuel Crosby, illuminated 15 whale-oil lamps. Alas, the solid walls did not allow moisture to evaporate, and the walls cracked as the tower settled. Iron straps on the outside held it together like hoops on a barrel.

On August 31, 1837, a hurricane drowned eight people and left the lighthouse "in a most wretched condition," according to a naval report. The structure was too close to the water and was vulnerable to storms and erosion. The lighthouse was rebuilt, with hollow walls, in the present location in 1842.

During the Civil War, Customs Collector Alonzo B. Noyes ordered the oil and lenses to be removed and stored at St. Marks. Confederates used the tower for a lookout, but repeated shelling by the Union stopped the practice. After the war, the tower was repaired and the height

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A neat white picket fence enclosed the tower and dwelling. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)

was raised to 73 feet. The light was relit in 1867.

For nearly 200 years, the bright beacon from the St. Marks Lighthouse has guided ships and boaters to the entrance to the St. Marks River. Twenty keepers kept the light burning, except for a few years during the Civil War. Two of those keepers were the wives of men who had died



Until Lighthouse Road was built by the CCC in the early 1930s, boats were used to gather supplies. Other buildings near the lighthouse included the oil house and a garage for storing and repairing equipment. The extra buildings were dismantled after the lighthouse was automated in 1960 and there was no longer any need for a resident keeper. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

during their tenure – Mrs. Ann Dudley replaced her husband after he died in April 1850, and Mrs. Sarah Fine took over after Charles Fine died in August 1904. Undoubtedly the families of each keeper played a part in keeping the flame lit. The pay for their services fluctuated from \$400 - \$640 per year.

The tower has weathered many storms, though the keeper's house has been rebuilt several times.

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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