

Civil War Salt Works

GPS Coordinates:
84°8.710' W ~ 30° 7.797' N



After the Civil War was over, the salt works were abandoned. Scattered remnants of rusted boilers can still be found on the refuge. (Courtesy Bruce Ballister)

In the days before refrigeration, salt was used to preserve meats and tan leather. When the Union blockade along the southeastern coast cut off salt shipments, the Confederacy turned to the ocean, and no area was more productive than the shallow bays and marshes of Florida's Gulf Coast between the Suwannee River and St. Andrews Bay.

Ranging from small family-run salt works using a few iron kettles that could hold 60 - 100 gallons of water set in a brick furnace to huge complexes using large boilers of up to 1,000 kettles, 489 salt works operated between the St. Marks and Suwannee Rivers. Salt water was boiled to a mushy consistency and

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail

1	Wakulla Beach: site of Wakulla Beach Hotel and West Goose Creek Seineyard	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



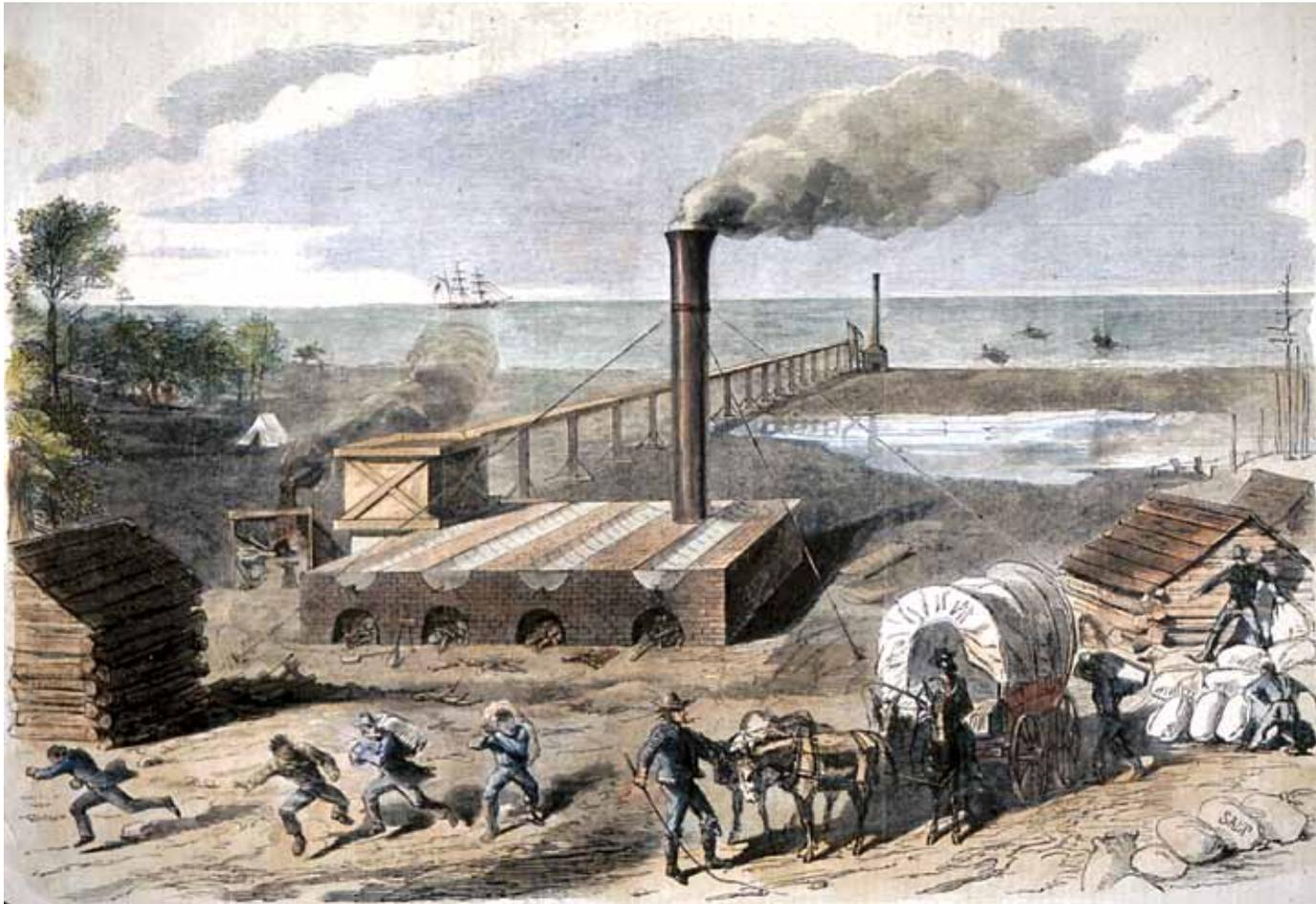
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then spread on oak planks to dry in the sun. In damp weather the salt was kept under cover and small fires helped the drying process.

Early in the war, the salt industry drew little attention from the Union. From late 1862 until the end of the war, the U.S. Navy shelled the salt works repeatedly. Workers fled as raiders came ashore to destroy equipment. In February 1864, two separate attacks destroyed the salt works

at St. Marks and Goose Creek. The latter produced 900 bushels of salt each day. Buildings and equipment destroyed by an 1863 raid on a large St. Andrews Bay plant were valued at 6 million dollars at that time.

Men who could produce 20 bushels of salt a day were excused from serving, but the labor could be just as dangerous as the front line once the Union began targeting larger operations. Heavy storms also took a toll on the workers and the equipment. As the salt was shipped



Most salt-making operations were small but larger works could produce hundreds of bushels daily. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)

Salt was still a necessary commodity after the war. When regular trade resumed, the number of people engaged in its production declined in the Gulf coast area. Bricks, wood, kettles, and boilers that could be put to other uses were scavenged from the sites.

Broken parts or

materials that were too large to easily move were left behind and continue to deteriorate.

farther from the coast and passed through the hands of dealers, the price increased. In the spring of 1862, salt sold for \$3 a bushel. By autumn, the price was \$16 to \$20 a bushel. Salt production attracted profiteers, and speculators purchased salt marshes to hold for future production. Seine fisheries were associated with the salt works at Shell Island and Mashas Island, but the Confederacy did not make good use of this food resource.

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. 9/2010