The Lighthouses of Georgia

By Buddy Sullivan

Keeper C.O. Svendsen and family St. Simons Island in 1910. Coastal Georgia Historical Society photo.

As the crow flies, the coastline of Georgia measures only some 100 miles, which doesn't give the state a whole lot of elbow room on the otherwise expansive Atlantic seaboard. One can be excused, therefore, from making the natural deduction that, with such a limited tract of oceanfront real estate, Georgia would have little in the way of lighthouse history and tradition. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, one of the most recognizable statements about Georgia, even from a national standpoint, involves a lighthouse.

In 1884, Methodist Bishop George Foster Pierce coined the famous phrase which several generations of state politicians have subsequently used to measure the wide scope and diversity of the Georgia landscape from the mountains to the sea. That year, on the occasion of his golden wedding anniversary, Bishop George Pierce remarked, "A finer woman, a better wife, a more prudent counsellor—I could not have found between the Tybee Lighthouse and Rabun Gap."

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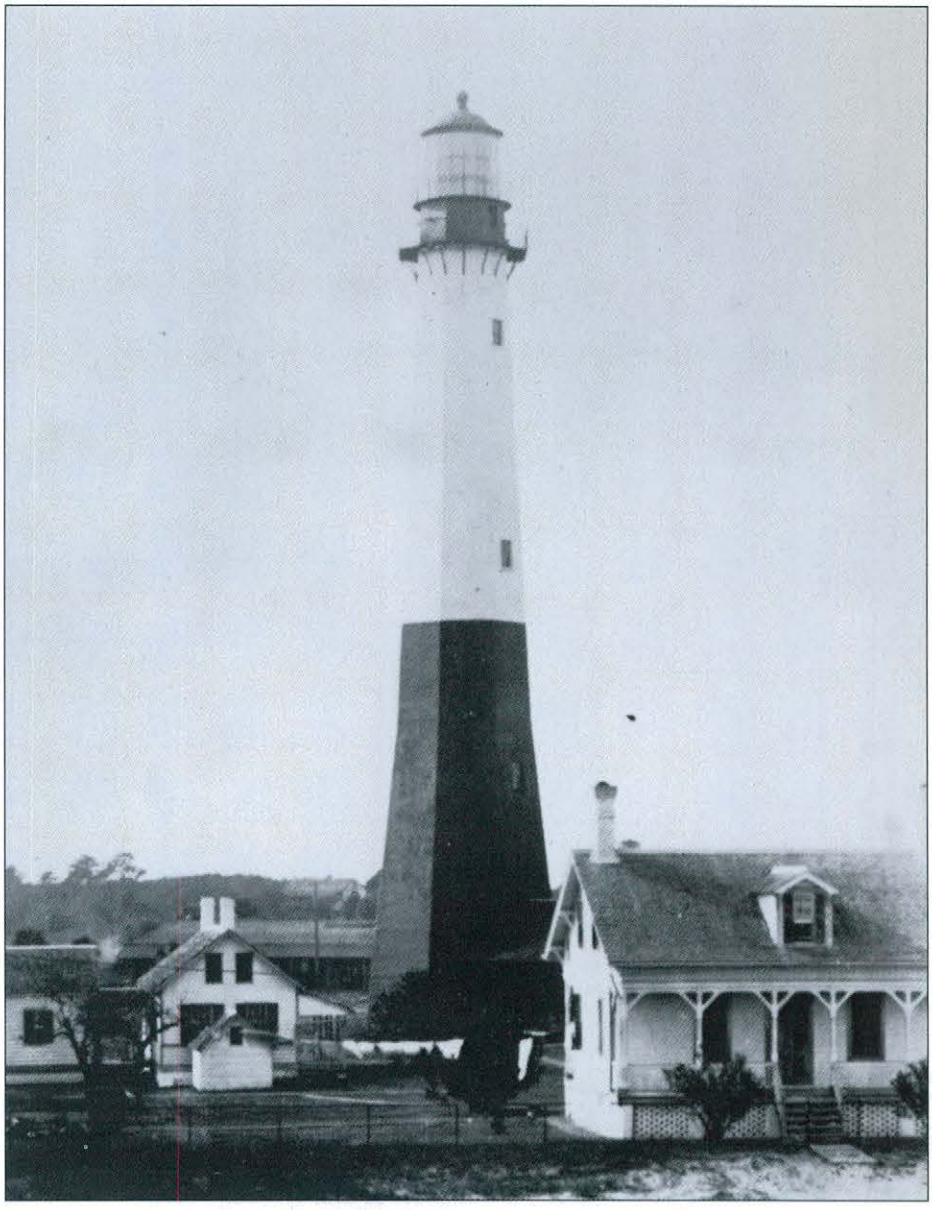
Thus, for more than a century, when Georgians have wanted to make an all-encompassing statement about something, they invariably fall back upon the old yardstick which covers the territory from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, "From Rabun Gap to Tybee Light." It's as Georgian as grits and collard greens and it points directly to a rich and interesting lighthouse history despite the state's abbreviated coastline. Georgia's association with lighthouses dates as far back as the earliest days of the colony itself, which was founded in 1773 when General James Edward Oglethorpe and his company landed at the high bluff which he named Savannah. Oglethorpe realized early on the that the economic survival of the infant colony would largely depend on the establishment of trade and the development of Savannah as a commercial port of significance. He punctuated these aspirations by ordering the construction of Georgia's first navigational aid at the entrance to the Savannah harbor on Tybee Island in 1736, only three years after the colony was begun. A total of 15 lighthouses (counting the Wolf Island Beacon) have been built on the Georgia Coast since 1736. Only five of these still stand, and of this group, only two remain operational—the lights on Tybee Island to guide the cargo ship traffic into the Savannah port (the nation's 10th busiest) and on St. Simons Island further to the south for ships approaching the smaller port of Brunswick.

In the first half of the 19th century the Georgia coast, with its string of barrier islands providing ideal harbors and protected anchorages, had a thriving seaborne and inland waterway commerce. Towns such as Darien, Brunswick and St. Marys joined Savannah as important ports for the export of Georgia cotton and timber. Cotton was king, of course, and the state's ports were the major outlets for the thousands of bales annually bound for European and northeastern U.S. markets. All of these ports were marked by a series of lighthouses from Tybee Roads at Savannah southward to St. Marys Entrance at Fernandina, Florida.



Tybee Island Lighthouse circa 1910. Photo courtesy of Buddy Sullivan.

The lighthouse on Tybee Island was first illuminated in 1791, the lighthouse on St. Simons Island followed in 1810. In 1819 Winslow Lewis of Boston was contracted by the U.S. Lighthouse Service to construct a pair of Georgia Lighthouses, one on the south end of Sapelo Island for vessels approaching the port at Darien, and the other on the south end of Cumberland Island to serve ships entering the St. Mary's and Fernandina harbors.

In 1812, Lewis sold the Lighthouse Service a patent for an optic incorporating a lens and mirror arrangement in addition to obtaining a contract to install his apparatus in all government lighthouses. Lewis (1770-1850), a retired sea captain, doesn't get high marks for the quality of his work from authoritative lighthouse historian D. Alan Stevenson. Stevenson, in his exhaustive study, *Lighthouses of the World to 1820,* notes: "Statements that have appeared in American accounts praising Lewis's lights and even declaring that he studied under Fresnel in France, are not true...Lewis's lights were definitely very bad [including] a defective lens to obstruct the flame of the lamps from showing directly seawards...and blocking a large proportion of the rays from the reflector...[Lewis] made no pretension to a knowledge of optics as now understood and his reflectors came about as near to a true paraboloid as did a barber's basin." All in all, not a very strong endorsement of the work of Mr. Lewis.

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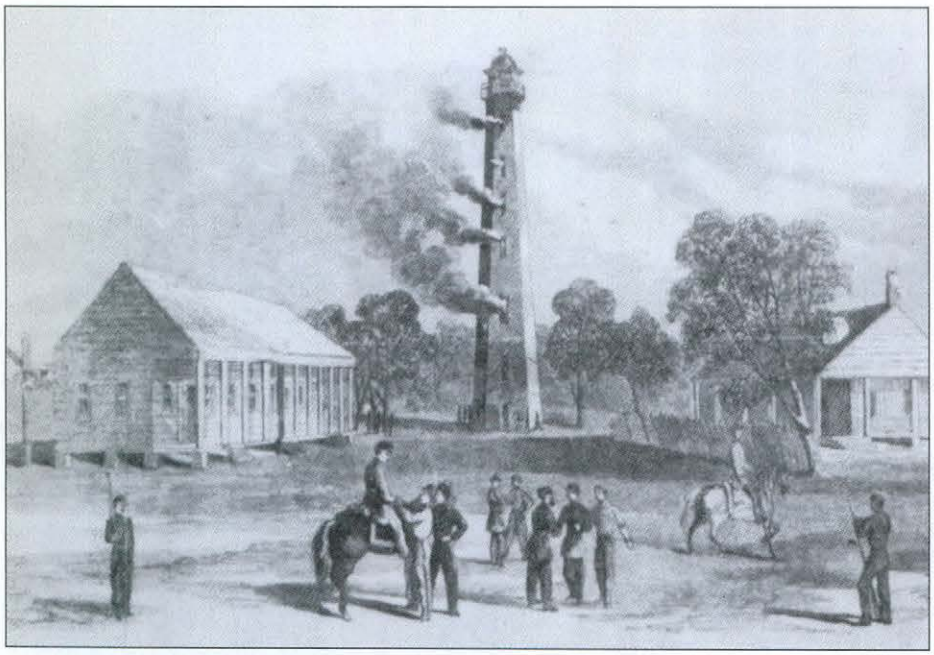


The burning of the Tybee Lighthouse in 1862 by Confederate troops. Photo courtesy of Buddy Sullivan.

During the Civil War most southern lighthouses, including those in Georgia, were either destroyed or dismantled by the Confederates to deny coastal navigational aids to blockading Federal warships. Later, the lighthouses were rebuilt, their Lewis designed lenses discarded and the much more efficient Fresnel lens systems installed. Georgia's coastal commerce revived after the Civil War as lucrative timber trades developed. Cypress and pine trees cut in the state's interior were rafted down the rivers to the sea for export worldwide from the Georgia ports. It was during this era that the Georgia lighthouses reached the full flower of their bloom.

The Lighthouse Service's List of Lights in operation in the Sixth District, which includes the coast of Georgia, for the year 1882 noted six active lights, including stations on Tybee Island, Cockspur Island (near Tybee), Sapelo Island, the Wolf Island Range lights (across Doboy Sound form the main station on Sapelo), St. Simons Island and Little Cumberland Island.

At this time the lighthouses were painted different colors in a variety of patterns so that navigators could distinguish between them during the day. An example is the Tybee Lighthouse, which is painted white on the bottom half and black on the upper portion. No other light on the east coast is marked the same way. Thus, passing ships could say with certainty that they were passing Tybee Island.

At the start of World War II all but two of Georgia's light stations had been deactivated by the Lighthouse Service due to a severe decline in trade and the resultant decrease in shipping traffic at the smaller ports. Only Tybee and St. Simons have continued to remain operational under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Following are historical sketches of the five existing Georgia lighthouses.

Tybee Island Lighthouse

The first lighthouse constructed on the Georgia Coast was on Tybee Island. In 1736, three years after the founding of the colony at Savannah (16 miles upriver from the ocean entrance at Tybee), General James Oglethorpe ordered a 90-foot tall, wooden octagonal tower built to serve as a daymark for incoming sailing vessels. Structurally unsound, this tower was destroyed during a storm and, in 1742, Thomas Sumner was contacted to build a second wooden tower on the same site. This structure, also a day beacon, was 94 feet tall and topped by a 30-foot flagstaff. By 1748, the sea had encroached to within 30 feet of the beacon, and in 1757 it had to be rebuilt for the third time. This tower was erected further away from the water and protected by a retaining wall of palmetto puncheons to resist the sea.

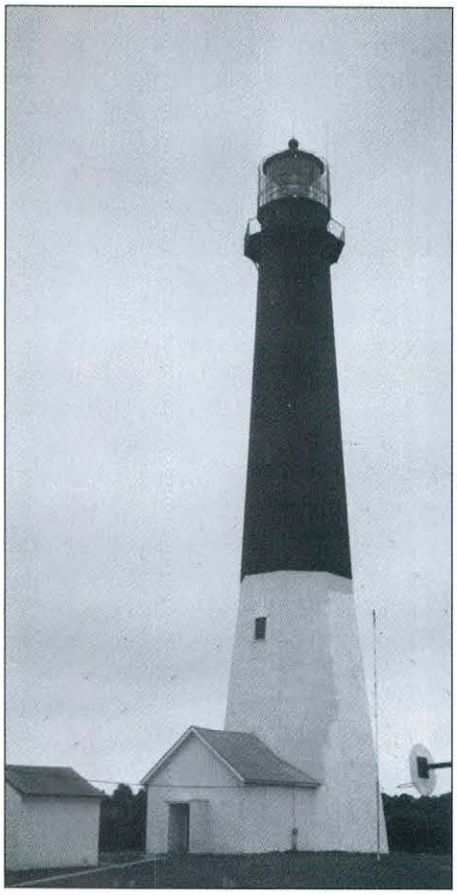
In 1773, yet another tower was constructed, this one on the site of the present Tybee lighthouse. In fact, the brick base of the 1773 tower forms the foundation of the present lighthouse.

In 1791, two years after the founding of the U.S. Lighthouse Service, the federal government made extensive improvements to the tower including the installation of a lantern atop the structure, lighting the Tybee tower for the first time. Illumination was provided by whale oil fueled lamps and the lighthouse became one of considerable importance as commercial activity at Savannah continued to increase throughout the first half of the 19th century.

In 1822 a second tower of 50 feet was constructed seaward and equipped with a 6 lamp array that produced a fixed light. The light from this tower used in conjunction with the Tybee light provided a range for mariners entering the river [Keep'—Range Lights are a pair of lights that can be aligned so as to show the mariner he is in the center of a channel]. A Fresnel lens of the second order was installed in the main Tybee lighthouse and a fourth order lens was placed in the front beacon (of the range).

During the Civil War, Savannah (defended by Fort Pulaski on adjacent Cockspur Island) became the focus of Union attention. In the early spring of 1862, Federal troops landed on Tybee Island and bombarded the supposedly impregnable Fort Pulaski into submission. Before the Fort fell, in April, 1862, and the Confederate troops retreated to the mainland, they ignited a keg of gunpowder on the third story of the tower partially destroying the structure and denying its use to the Federals. The nearby lighthouse grounds were occupied by Yankee troops for the remainder of the war.

In 1866 the reconstruction crew found that the upper portion of the tower was so badly damaged that it had to be com-



Tybee Island Lighthouse in 1987. Photo by District Inspector Mark Zettlemoyer

pletely replaced. Work restoring the tower was progressing nicely when federal troops arrived at the fort bringing cholera to the area. When the foreman and four workers died from the disease the remaining workers panicked and left the site. By the time the Lighthouse Service replacement crew arrived the soldiers had vandalized the work to the extent that additional funds had to be appropriated to complete reconstruction. Completed in 1867, the reconstructed Tybee tower was an impressive structure rising to a height of 145 feet making it the tallest on the Georgia coast. A new 1st order Fresnel lens was installed and the light was reactivated on October 1, 1867. Dwellings for the head keeper and the assistant keeper were also constructed at this time; the existing oil house from about 1860.

A series of assorted calamities befell the Tybee station in the 1870's and 80's. A storm of unusual severity damaged the tower's foundation in 1871, and then, in 1884, the assistant keeper's cottage was destroyed by fire, and rebuilt a year later. An earthquake in August 1886, a most rare occurrence on the east coast, caused several cracks in the tower as noted in the Annual report of the Lighthouse Service for 1887:

The earthquake of last August extended the cracks that have been observed in this tower for several years and made some new ones, but not to any dangerous extent. The lens was displaced and the attachments to its upper ring were broken. The damage was repaired without delay. The entrance for which the Tybee lights made a range, like that Hilton Head Island, is gradually moving to the southward and in January last it became necessary to move the front beacon 98 feet in that direction.

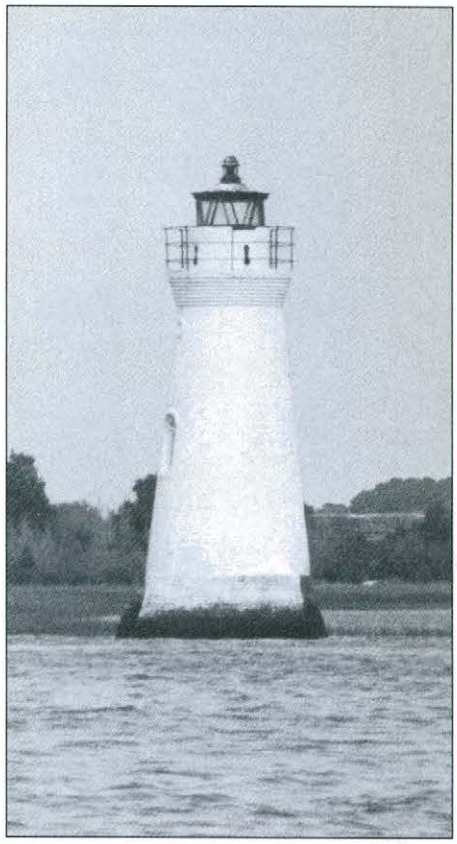
Tybee Light was illuminated by kerosene incandescent oil vapor (I.O.V.) lamp during the early part of the 20th century until electricity was installed in 1933.

The tower, painted a distinctive white and black, is now one of the most familiar seamarks on the U.S. east coast. The first order Fresnel lens installed in 1867 is still in operation projecting a beam visible 20 miles out to sea.

Cockspur Island Beacon

This small brick beacon-light on the eastern tip of Cockspur Island, less than two miles west of the Tybee lighthouse, was built in 1848-49 to mark the South Channel of the Savannah River. The first keeper of the Cockspur Island Light was a gentleman with the highly appropriate name of John H. Lightburn. In 1857 the Cockspur was rebuilt on the oyster bed foundation of the first structure and a fourth order Fresnel lens installed. A twin brick beacon tower was built in the North Channel of the Savannah River on nearby Oyster Bed Island, but this structure did not survive and few traces remain. The appropriation for the second Cockspur Island Lighthouse was noted in the Lighthouse Board's *Annual Report* for 1855:

The beacon-light for the South Channel of the Savannah River is to be rebuilt on the same foundation and enlarged. The cost will be about $6,000. A brick foundation should be built under the keeper's house on Cockspur Island to make it more comfortable in winter, and a small frame kitchen added. These additions can be made for $450.



Cockspur Island lighthouse tower now completely surrounded by water. Photo courtesy of National Park Service, Fort Pulaski National Mounument.

Unlike many others, the Cockspur Island light was not damaged during the Civil War. This fact is made all the more amazing when one considers that the little tower was in the direct line of fire during the terrific artillery barrage between Confererate-held Fort Pulaski on Cockspur Island and the bombarding Union Batteries on nearby Tybee Island. Hundreds of shells passed overhead before the fort fell, but the beacon escaped unscratched.

The light resumed operations in 1866 after the war, and was deactivated in 1909 when deep draft ships entering Savannah discontinued use of the South Channel. The lighthouse was abandoned by the Coast Guard in 1949, and in 1958 was transferred to the U.S. Park Service. The tower was restored in 1978 and is open to the public as part of the Fort Pulaski National Monument on Cockspur Island.

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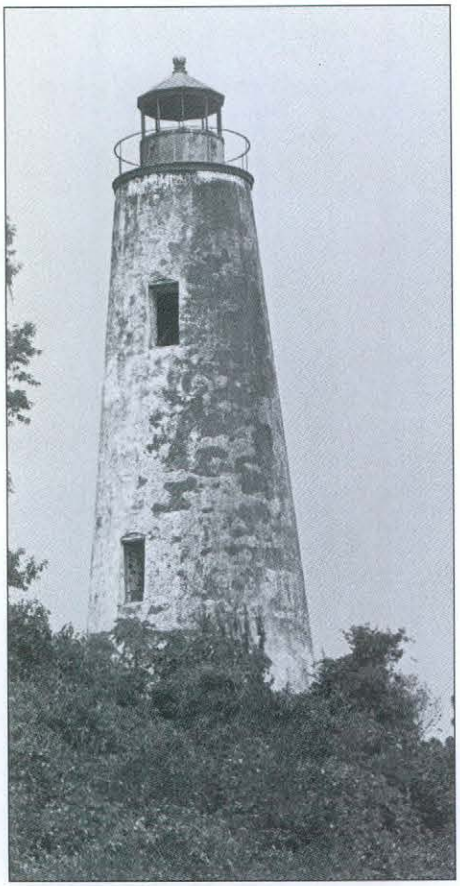


Abandoned Sapelo Island Lighthouse. Photo courtesy of Buddy Sullivan

Sapelo Island Lighthouse

Darien, 60 miles down the coast from Savannah, was becoming an important port in the first two decades of the 19th century due to its position on the Altamaha River. By 1820, the town had become a major export center for cotton, rice and timber.

In 1808 five acres of land owned by Thomas Spalding on the south end of Sapelo Island was ceded to the federal government by the Georgia legislature for the purpose of erecting a lighthouse to guide mariners into the port of nearby Darien. A deed, dated July 15, 1816, shows that for the sum of one dollar, Spalding sold the five acres of property to the Lighthouse Service for lighthouse purposes. Spalding, a noted coastal Georgia agrarian, operated an extensive sea island cotton plantation and sugar mill on Sapelo Island and had hopes of establishing Doboy Sound as a major U.S. naval base. He felt the construction of a lighthouse at the harbor entrance would enhance this effort.

The Lighthouse Service contracted with Winslow Lewis of Boston on September 14, 1819 for the construction of a 90-foot brick tower topped by an iron lantern containing 16-inch reflectors to Lewis's specifications. An adjoining brick keeper's dwelling was also part of the contract. Records of the National Archives reveal another contract with Lewis, dated January 13, 1820, which, in part, states:

Winslow Lewis agrees and is engaged to fit up and light the lantern on the Light House at Sapelo Island...with fifteen of the Patent Lamps and reflectors, each sixteen inches, fitted on a triangular revolving iron frame.

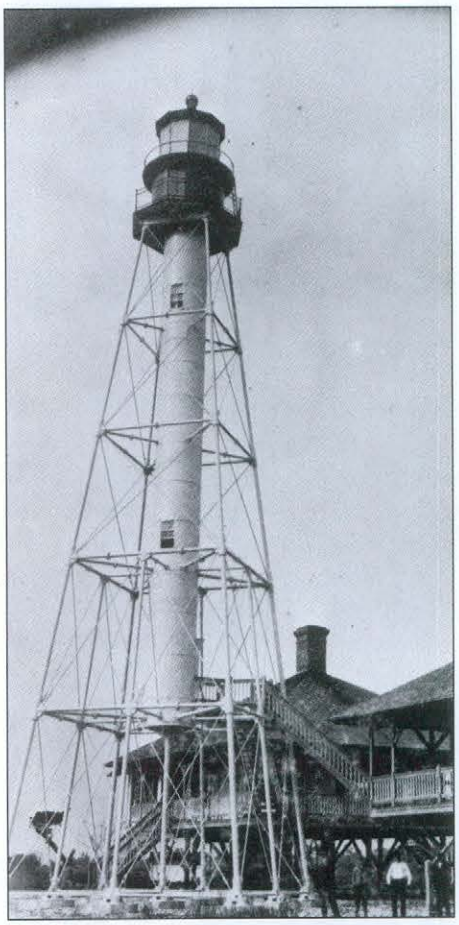
In 1822, the government constructed a wooden range beacon on the beach at the northern tip of Wolf Island about one mile across the Doboy Sound entrance from the Sapelo lighthouse. This structure was in operation until 1899, but only its iron foundation is visible today.

Alexander Hazard became head keeper of the Sapelo Lighthouse in 1853 at an annual salary of $600, and served as keeper until the lighthouse was dismantled by retreating Confederate troops in 1862. The Rebels destroyed the reflector system but left the rest of the station intact, thus enabling it to be fitted out with a new optic and reactivated in 1868 when commercial sailing vessels and small steamers again began calling at Darien.

The *Annual Report* of the Lighthouse Board for 1869 noted of Sapelo that "the revolving machinery has been repaired in the lantern and some small repairs were made to the parapet around the lantern...the station is in generally good condition." It was at this time that the tower was painted with alternating red and bue bands. [Keep'—a very unusual color scheme] Also in 1868, a skeleton frame beacon light was erected 660 feet from the main tower. By 1877 it had deteriorated to the point where a new iron beacon was constructed as a replacement. This iron beacon, which served as a Coast Guard watchtower against the German submarine menace in World War II, still stands near the main brick tower.

W.W. Brown was appointed keeper when the Sapelo light was reactivated after the war; then, a local tradition began when James Cromley became the head keeper in 1873. Cromley was the first of three generations of the same family to serve as keepers of the Sapelo lighthouse. James Cromley was also an accomplished cobbler and boot maker, and he supplemented his lighthouse income by making footwear for the officers of the numerous trading and timber vessels that regularly anchored nearby.

By 1890 the Sapelo lighthouse began losing a long battle to erosion around the island's south end. The brick keeper's cottage was torn down and its materials were used to shore up the foundation of the tower. The severe hurricane and tidal wave of 1898 inflicted further damage to the foundation of the tower and the Lighthouse Service subsequently deemed the structure unsafe and unusable. At the same time, the Service also deactivated the Wolf Island Range



The 2nd Sapelo Island tower circa 1910. This steel tower was constructed in 1905 and dismantled in 1940. Note the two keeper's cottages. Photo courtesy of author.

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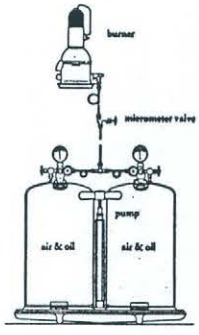
Beacon across the sound—it too had been badly damaged by the 1898 storm.

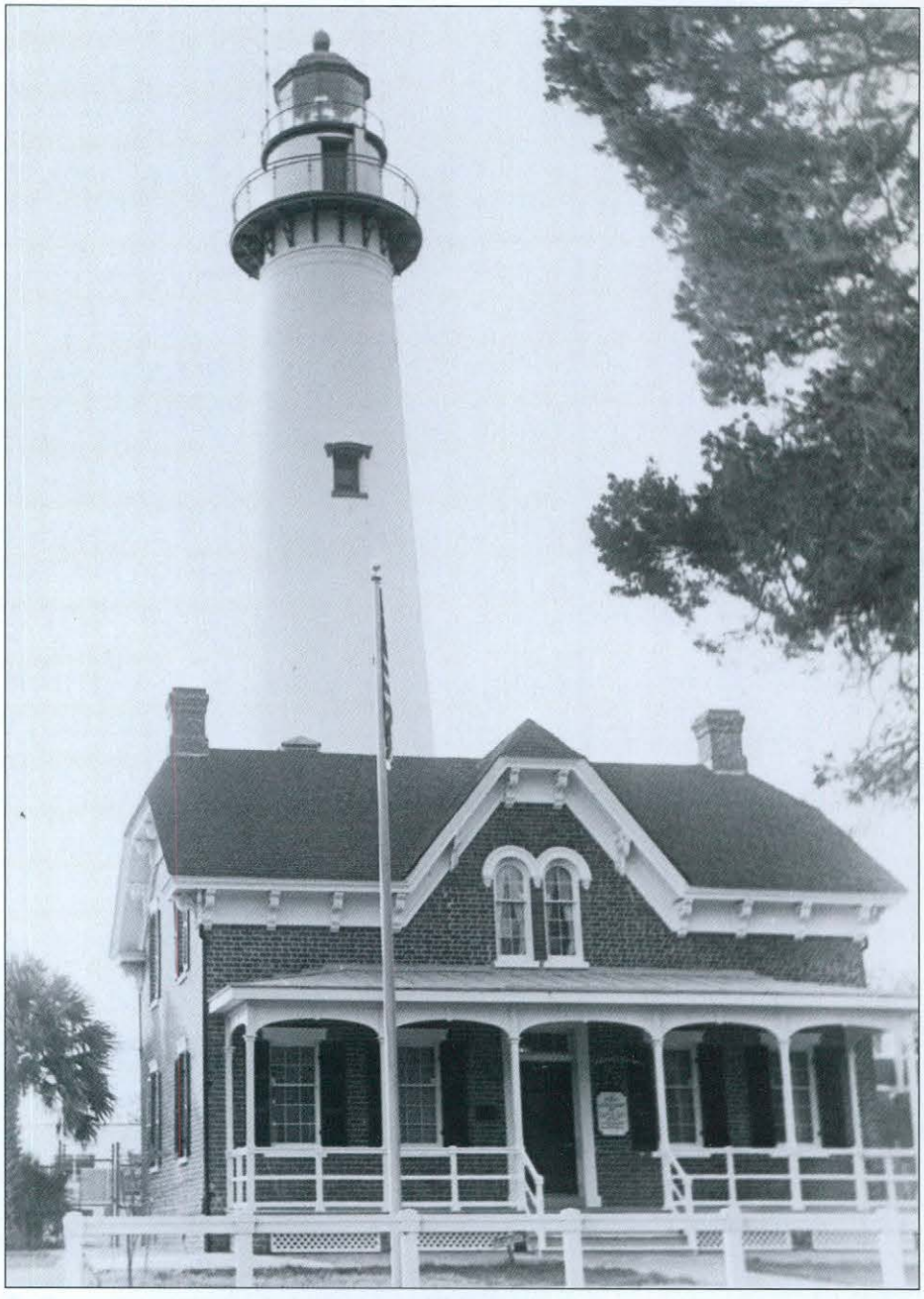
As the port of Darien was still enjoying a large measure of prosperity from the lucrative timber trade, the federal government felt it was still necessary to maintain a lighthouse at this location and a new tower which was constructed a few hundred feet from the brick lighthouse abandoned three years before. On September 18, 1905, the new 125 foot high steel tower, anchored by a pair of frame keepers' cottages adjoining the base, was placed in operation.

The "new" Sapelo lighthouse was converted to the incandescent oil-vapor system of lighting in 1913, but maritime activity on the south end were beginning to decline. By the early 1920's, over cutting of the Georgia forests led to a sharp decrease in the timber trade and ships gradually stopped calling at Darien. Shipping traffic was almost non-existent by 1933, the year the Lighthouse Service decided to deactivate the Sapelo station.



In 1938, Robert H. Cromley retired as the last keeper of the Sapelo lighthouse and in 1940 the tower was dismantled and shipped to Southport, N.C. Sadly Cromley's last duty was to oversee the selling of the two wooden keeper's cottages for scrap lumber.

After 140 years, lighthouse activity had come to an end on the southern shore of Sapelo Island, and the old, brooding brick tower originally built by Winslow Lewis stood alone again. The tower, not open to the public as a general rule, stands today as a silent monument to the former glory days of coastal commerce in the region. Barely visible from the mainland, it is accessible only by water.



Contemporary picture of St.Simons Island Lighthouse. Photo courtesy of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society.

St. Simons Lighthouse

Next to the Tybee Lighthouse, the most recognizable feature of the Georgia coastline is the lighthouse on the southern tip of St. Simons Island, some 75 miles south of the Savannah River entrance. Certainly the white, tapering St. Simons Light is one of the most beautiful of all American lighthouses. The present lighthouse, which serves the busy port of Brunswick, is the second tower on the site.

In April of 1807 the *Savannah Advertiser* published the following:

"Here published by Order of the Honorable Albert Gallatin, Auditor of the U.S. Treasury, a Proposal for the building of a lighthouse on St. Simon's Island, Georgia. A builder is sought by means of this (public) Notice, with sureties, experience and skills sufficient for the erection of a lighthouse according to the here published proposal;

The lighthouse is to be of hard brick, the form octagon; the foundation of stone to be sunk eight feet below the bottom of the water table...the lighthouse to have 6 windows, each to have 12 panes of 8 by 10 inch glass in strong frames and a substantial panel

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door with iron hinges, lock and latch complete...On top of the brick work are to be a sufficient number of iron sleepers bedded therein and sloping from the center which are to be covered first with sheet iron with copper over the iron, the whole to be riveted together so that the floor of the lantern thus prepared shall be perfectly tight and strong, the trap door to be covered with sheet copper..."

Just prior to this announcement a New Englander named James Gould arrived in the area seeking his fortune in a warmer climate. He was also a man in pursuit of a dream—a dream to construct a federal lighthouse. He saw the newspaper request for bids, entered a bid and in 1807 the Lighthouse Service accepted his to construct a 75-foot high lighthouse overlooking the entrance to St. Simons Sound.

A letter dated May 25, 1807, from Albert Gallatin to Joseph Turner, Port Collector of Glynn County states:
"Sir,

An adequate appropriation having been made during the latest session of Congress for building the Light House at St. Simons, you are now authorized to contract with Mr. Gould in conformity with the proposal you had published, but adding and including the alterations and substitutions of tabby mentioned by him. As he requires a considerable advance, you will be pleased to attend particularly to the sufficiency of his sureties...The President approves the proposals but it will be necessary that you should transmit to me the contract itself, in order that it may receive his formal ratification, I have the honor to be,
Sincerely,
Albert Gallatin
Auditor
U.S. Treasury"

The octagonal St. Simons tower was completed in late 1810 at a cost of $13,775. The tower was constructed of tabby (a building material native to the area made from a mixture of lime, water, sand and oyster shells) from the ruins of 1736 Fort Frederica. The original illumination was a set of oil lamps suspended on chains in the 10 foot diameter lantern room.

James Gould obviously approved of his work for on completion he applied for the position, and was accepted, as the first Keeper of the lighthouse. A letter between two of his sisters, dated July 22, 1810, reveals—

..."James has been officially appointed Keeper of the Light by President Madison, at a salary of $400 a year. The appointment came 4 May and he was, in spite of the small pay, plainly pleased to be trusted with the keeping of his beloved lighthouses. He appears also proud of the tower, so far, but what he insists is my discontent, I feel is somehow his own. I simply try to make him laugh and attempt to understand what it is he really wants to do with his life once the lighthouse is completed and he has been its keeper long enough to be satisfied that the lantern and all else is in order."

What he did with his life was serve as Keeper of the St. Simons station for the next 27 years, until 1837. Gould was a rare instance of a builder of a lighthouse becoming its keeper. But during his tenure he did have one dark moment as evidenced by this Grand Jury Presentment published in the November 18, 1811, *Savannah Advertiser:*

"It has been proven to us that the St. Simons Light is not visible a short distance from the land and that the buoys are allowed to lie and rust on the beach, which neglect must certainly endanger the lives of the seamen bound on this coast and led to expect a light and buoys off the south end of St. Simons..."

When presented with this acussation Keeper Gould apparently flew into a rage. He felt that there wasn't a lighthouse on the entire coast of the United States as carefully constructed and maintained as was his. Not once, since the full set of lamps flashed out over the ocean, had the light been permitted to go out or even dim...he was furious. And, rightfully, his good name was soon cleared.

"To The Public

In answer to the Presentment of the Grand Jury of Glynn County, published in the *Savannah Advertiser* of the 18th inst., the Collector of the Port of Brunswick begs leave to make a few remarks. The Presentment cast severe reflections on the Collector and Keeper of the St. Simons lighthouse, therefore, I call attention to the fact that the buoys for the use of St. Simons Bar were sent from Philadelphia in the Summer of 1810 but by some mistake, were unaccompanied by sinkers and could not be placed on the bar.

No time was lost, however, in sending for these appendages by Mr. James Gould, Keeper of the Light. To this date the chains and anchors have not been shipped. During the time of their expected arrival, Mr. James Gould sent several proposals to the Government for funds needed to seat all Buoys and was rejected or his proposals overlooked. I further wish to plea that the Grand Jury did not correctly ascertain that the occasional dimness of the light was owing to neglect, since the light is often times

A view of the St. Simons Island lighthouse from the water, circa 1910. Photo courtesy of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society.

and unavoidably obscured by fogs. The Collector, therefore, takes the liberty of considering both himself and Mr. Gould exempt from blame. Joseph Turner"

In 1862, evacuating Rebel forces dynamited the tower and keeper's cottage to deny their use to the Federal forces and a new tower would have to be constructed after the "unpleasantries."

A detailed architectural plan, dated 1867, for the design of a "Third Order Light-House at St. Simons, GA" was made by well known Georgia architect Charles B. Cluskey. His design called for a 104-foot tower to be built on the site of the previous lighthouse. This impresive structure, erected at a cost of $45,000, was completed and made operational with its 3rd order Fresnel lens in 1872. Cluskey also built the adjoining nine room, two-story Victorian keeper's cottage to house the families of both the keeper and his assistant. The whole arrangement was soundly constructed of handmade "Savannah gray" brick. The walls of the cottage are 12 inches thick, designed to withstand the severest of storms.

Frederick Osborn was the head keeper of the new St. Simons lighthouse and John L. Stevens his assistant. Keeper Osborn repeatedly complained about the condition of the drinking water at St. Simons and apparently his repeated pleas to the Sixth District Inspector regarding the health hazards of the immediate area paid off, for the *Annual Report* of the Lighthouse Board for 1874 states:

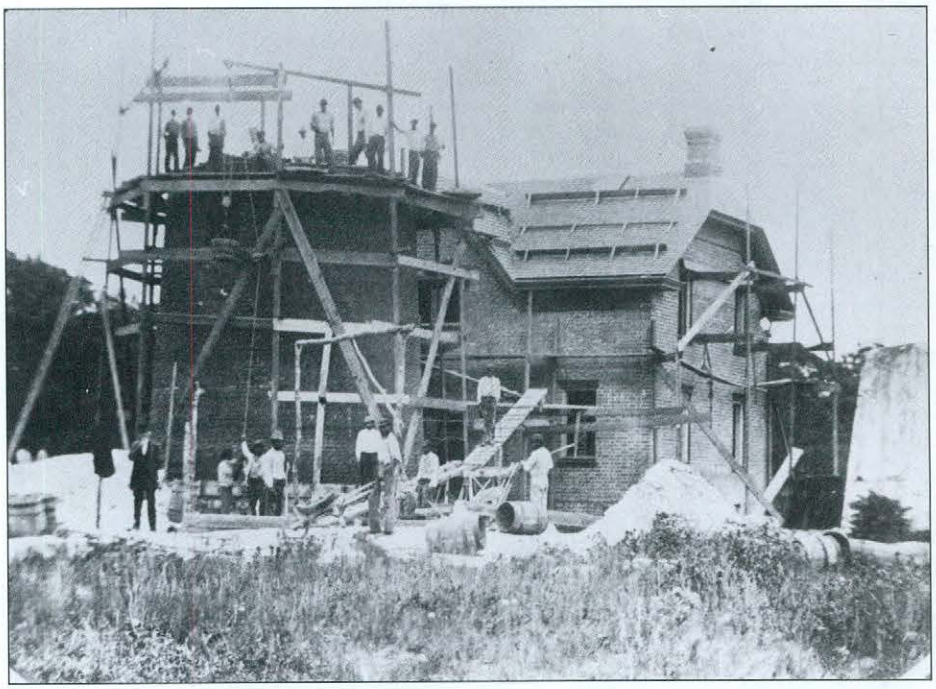
The St. Simons station is very unhealthy, and it is attributed to the stagnant water in several ponds in the vicinity which have no outlet. It is proposed to drain these ponds during the coming winter, the only time the work can be done.

This problem with stagnant water was a serious one in the sub-tropical climate of the Georgia coast, especially when one considers the times. Stagnant water can be a breeding ground for mosquitos, and in those days the insects were often a killer without a cure. Several severe outbreaks of yellow fever were reported in both Savannah and Brunswich during the 1870s, resulting in numerous deaths in both places. In fact, Cluskey, builder of the St. Simons light, never lived to see his work completed, dying of the dreaded yellow fever in 1871 while the lighthouse was still under construction.

C.O. Svendsen in front of the oil house, circa 1910. He was the keeper of the St. Simons Island Lighthouse from 1907 to 1935. It must have been a lot of fun wearing that wool uniform in Georgia during the Summer. Note the bow tie, definitely not regulation. Photo courtesy of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society.

In 1890 the existing fire-proof 9 x 11 brick oil house was constructed to store a year's supply of kerosene for the lighthouse. Between the 1870's and 1900, as the Lighthouse Service converted from lard oil to the more volatile kerosene, small oil houses like this one were built to contain the fuel.

The Georgia coast was hit hard by a hurricane and tidal wave in October of 1898. While Brunswick, Darien, and the adjoining barrier islands were under several feet of water for part of a day, as was the St. Simons keeper's cottage, the lighthouse tower was none the worse for wear, attesting to the durability of Cluskey's design. However, the nearby iron beacon on the south end of the island did not fare as well. The Lighthouse Board's *Annual Report* for 1898 notes that, "The front beacon, destroyed by the storm, has been rebuilt, the front steps of the dwelling and the work between the [dwelling's] piers was renewed and a new boat house has been built."



The St. Simons Island lighthouse under construction circa 1871-72. OSHA could probably find a few safety violations in this picture. Photo courtesy of Buddy Sullivan.

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In 1934, St. Simons Lighthouse was converted to electric illumination and in 1950, when the last civilian keeper retired, the light station was automated. In 1972, the federal government deeded ownership of the long unused keeper's cottage at the base of the tower to Glynn County for use as a museum and visitors' center. In 1975, after major restorative work spearheaded by the Coastal Georgia Historical Society (headquartered on the lighthouse grounds) the museum opened to the public. Several years later, the tower was also opened to public visitation and the site is now one of the most popular stops on the U.S. East Coast for lighthouse lovers.

St. Simons Lighthouse is accessible by road from Brunswick and is open to the public as is the adjoining Keeper's Cottage which houses lighthouse and Coastal Georgia memorabilia. Only Sapelo and Little Cumberland are, as a rule, not open to the public. Both are, at any rate, difficult to get to since neither island is connected to the mainland by a causeway or bridge.

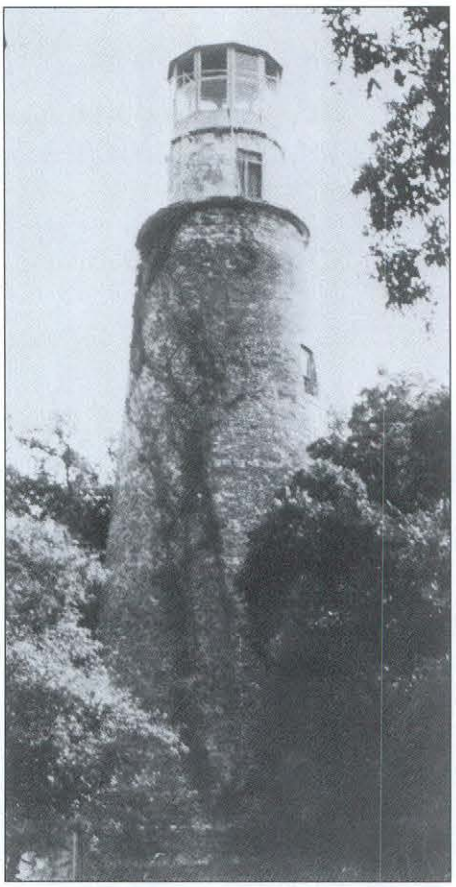
Sapelo Island, near Darien, is managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the old abandoned lighthouse on the south end is in the research area of the University of Georgia Marine Institute. There is no good way to see the tower unless it is by boat from the waters of Doboy Sound. Little Cumberland Lighthouse is privately owned by the Little Cumberland Homeowners Association.

Little Cumberland Lighthouse

The most southerly of Georgia's five standing lighthouses is located on the northern tip of Little Cumberland Island on St. Andrews Sound.

A Resolution of the Georgia General Assembly, dated June 16, 1802 cedes jurisdiction of six acres on the southern tip of Great Cumberland Island to the U.S. Government for lighthouse purposes. This site is about 16 miles south of the present Little Cumberland tower.

In 1820, Winslow Lewis was contracted to erect a 74-foot tower on this, the most southerly point on the Georgia coast. The lighthouse operated for 18 years until 1838 when it was dismantled and moved across the harbor to Fernandina where it stands today on Amelia Island.



The Little Cumberland Island Lighthouse. Contemporary photo by Buddy Sullivan.

A year or so prior to this, local authorities had professed the need for a lighthouse on the north end of the two Cumberland islands. A Joseph Hastings of Boston got the job to construct a 60-foot tall brick tower and adjoining keeper's dwelling. The tower was 22 feet in diameter at the base, tapering to 11 feet at the top. The Hastings contract also noted that the Little Cumberland lighthouse was to feature a "stationary lantern containing 14 lamps", an arrangement that distinguished it from the revolving light built by Lewis in 1820 at the south end of Great Cumberland Island and subsequently moved across the harbor entrance to Amelia Island. The contract established April 15, 1838, as the date of completion for the Little Cumberland light, but poor weather delayed construction and the station did not begin operations until June 26 of that year.

David Thompson was the first keeper of the lighthouse, which was sometimes referred to as the St. Andrews Lighthouse in the years prior to the Civil War. Employed by the Lighthouse Service at an annual salary of $400, Thompson served as keeper for eleven years.

Some of the early keepers of this light, such as J.A. Clubb (1859-62) and William Bunkley (1868-71), were residents of Great Cumberland Island where they were engaged in agricultural pursuits. Their lighthouse keeping duties provided these men with an additional, albeit small, source of revenue.

Unlike some of the other Georgia lighthouses, the Little Cumberland station escaped the devastation of the Civil War, although its light was rarely used during the four-year conflict. The lighthouse was reactivated September 1, 1867 after being fitted with a 3rd Order Fresnel lens. Samuel W. McCarl was the first keeper when the station resumed operations. He was followed by a succession of short term keepers whose tours of duty sometimes lasted only a few months. Henry Swan established some improved continuity when he served a ten year tour of duty as head keeper from 1874 to 1884.

The encroachment of the sea on the north end of the island forced the foundations of the tower to be shored up in work that began in 1873.

The *Annual Report* of the Lighthouse Board of 1876 stated:

The foundation has been protected by a brick wall around the tower at a distance of six feet from the base and...the foundation of the dwelling has been protected from the drift by a heavy covering of oyster shells.

The last keeper of the Little Cumberland Lighthouse was John Robertson who served from 1906 until 1915 when the station was deactivated by the Lighthouse Service. Today the picturesque little tower is owned (and well preserved) by the Little Cumberland Island Association. It is not open to the public but may be visited with prior permission.

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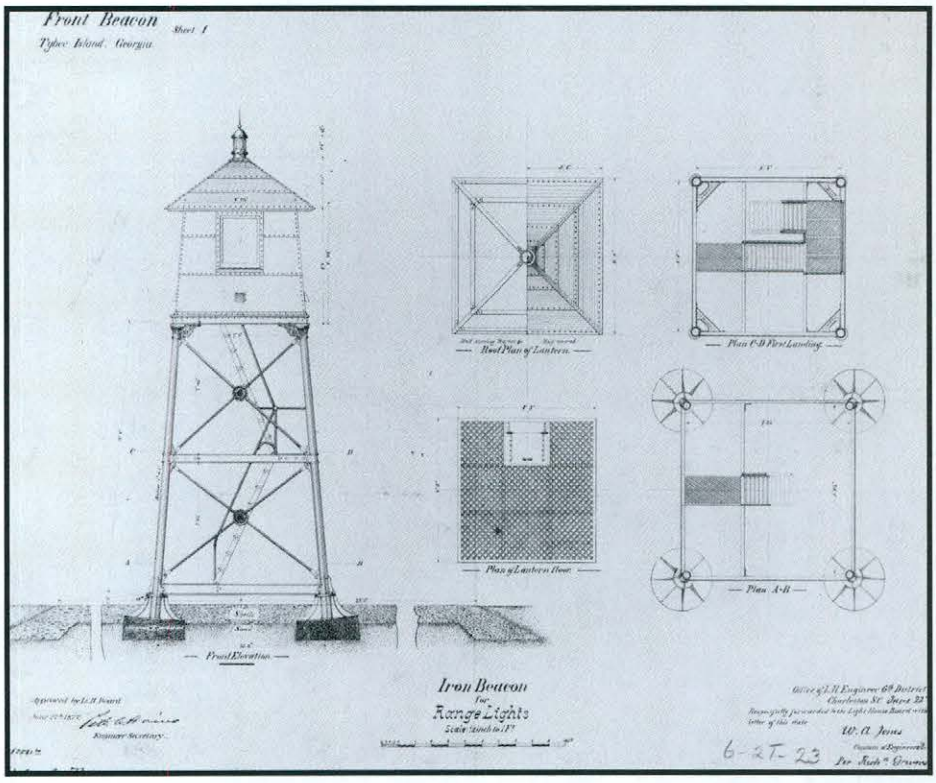
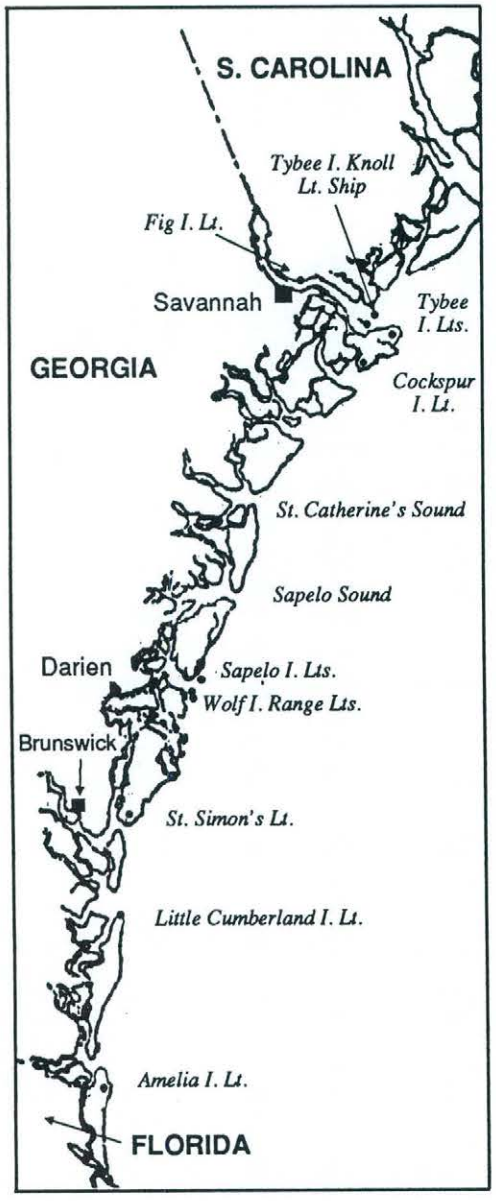
Access to Georgia's five standing lighthouses is variable. The Tybee and Cockspur Island lights are accessible by road out of Savannah (US Highway 80 East). The Tybee Lighthouse is open to the public and maintains a visitors' center and nearby museum of local history. The Cockspur lighthouse can be reached by wading through the salt marsh and across a small creek at low tide from the nearby Fort Pulaski National Monument, or better yet, by boat from Tybee Island across the river.





GEORGIA LIGHTHOUSES

(Listed in order of construction)

Lighthouse	Constructed	Comments
Tybee Island	1736	Destroyed by a storm
	1742	Dismantled and rebuilt
	1757	Dismantled and rebuilt
	1773	Burned by Confederates 1862
	1867	Reconstructed—standing
St. Simons Island	1810	Burned by Confederates—1862
	1872	Reconstructed—standing
Great Cumberland (Island)	1820	Moved to Amelia Island 1838 —standing
Sapelo Island	1820	Deactivated in 1899, standing
New Sapelo Island	1905	Deactivated 1933, dismantled, and moved to North Carolina in 1940.
Wolf Island	1822	Abandoned in 1899, destroyed by a storm.
Little Cumberland Island	1838	Deactivated in 1915—standing
Cockspur Island	1848	Rebuilt, deactivated in 1909—
	1857	standing
Fig Island (Savannah R.)	1848	Rebuilt in 1866 and then converted to range lights during the 1870's.

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