

American Lighthouse

Jupiter shines in Bicentennial of American Lighthouses:

The Jupiter Lighthouse had a starring role in a national celebration recognizing 200 years of American lighthouses which occurred on August 6th, 2003. The Lighthouse was open to visitors, and tours were conducted by volunteers from the Loxahatchee Historical Society, which sponsored the event. Also, history buffs re-enacted events of the Seminole and Civil Wars. Food was prepared by area restaurateurs and children's programs were planned. Admission to the park was \$2 and tickets were available at the Loxahatchee Historical Museum.



Historical Notes:

The Jupiter Inlet, according to local historian Bessie DuBois, was "a natural break in the barrier reef since prehistoric times." It had an influence on building the Jupiter Lighthouse that dealt with both time and location. The inlet had "a history of opening and closing many times throughout the centuries," DuBois wrote. The closings and openings have been caused by nature and man could not always sway those forces. "Either fall floods have burst the barrier of sand or human hands have dug it out in periods of high water," the historian continued.

In early days the inlet was at times several hundred yards south its present location. The present location of the inlet was fixed by a special act of the Florida Legislature, and the Jupiter Inlet District was formed in 1921. The historical record of Jupiter Inlet is as old as the Explorers first visit to these shores. When explorer Pedro Menendez sailed down the coast of Florida in 1565 enroute to Havana, he stopped at Gilbert's Bar and Jupiter Inlet(s)." The Ives Military Map of 1856 reports Jupiter Inlet closed between 1840-1844. In 1844, there was a hurricane with tremendous rainfall, flooding the back country." After that, Indian River Inlet, Gilbert's Bar and Jupiter Inlet were opened. The Jupiter Inlet remained open until 1847, closed again in 1853 and opened itself the same year, but for a short time in 1855 a Major Haskin from Fort Jupiter and his men tried once again to open the inlet. "The closing of the inlet at this time was most inopportune. It was impossible to supply the military post of Fort Jupiter from the seas and as the



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river became fresh, the stagnant growth was said to make the locality unhealthy for the troops stationed there. The men began to suffer from a fever that was known as Jupiter fever"... Pioneer Charles Doyle Leffler was quoted: "Capt. Capron occupied Fort Jupiter in 1856 and recruited 120 men from Fort Meade. They worked 18 days with shovels and opened the inlet."

In 1855 the Jupiter Lighthouse was under construction. If supplies could have been brought in through the inlet, much difficult labor could have been avoided. The expense would have been half the actual cost. Because the inlet was closed, the 500 tons of materials were brought in deep sea sailing vessels to Indian River Inlet, unloaded onto shallow draft barges and ferried down the Indian River to the lighthouse site. This route was very shallow in places and the labor of dragging the heavily laden scows over the shallows amid mosquitoes and sand flies made the trip very difficult.



In 1859 the U. S. Schooner Delaware was anchored in Jupiter Inlet, and "intercepted a small boat rowing in from the ocean. The six occupants told a strange story. They claimed their schooner, the Enterprise, had run aground that year. Their Captain Morentes had fallen overboard, and drowned. They said they were penniless, but when searched, each had \$1,925 in gold on his person. They were turned over to Lt. Randolph of the revenue cutter John Appleton, who delivered them to the U.S. marshal in Key West. Here it was learned that they were mutineers who had murdered their captain most cruelly and robbed the ship's strong box. No trace of the ship was ever found but the U.S. Marshal and Lt. Reynolds found the grave of Capt. Morentes as the men described it. The body was disinterred and reburied with Masonic rites."

"In 1861, the lighthouse was darkened for the duration of the Civil War. The inlet, however, stayed open wide and deep, offering a haven for the blockade runners...A number of sloops were captured laden with dry goods, soap, coffee, flour, salt and usually gin from the Bahamas." Capt. James A. Armour served as pilot and gave valuable assistance, because he was well acquainted with the local waterways. He became the first lighthouse keeper in 1866 and rekindled the flame on June 28 of that year. The captain served for 40 years. On Aug. 4, 1981, the road leading to the lighthouse was named Captain Armour's Way. With the exception of short periods in 1928 and 1948, when hurricanes





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extinguished it, the light has burned and a keeper has manned the lighthouse. In June 1987 the last lighthouse keeper, Coast Guardsman Mitchell Oakland, resigned.