



By Richard Procyk

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Jupiter Lighthouse

The Jupiter Lighthouse, our proud lady of the Inlet with her sweeping tower of red brick, visitors can take the Tower Trip climbing the winding 105 steps in the oldest structure in Palm Beach County. Although it doesn't stand on a rocky cliff by the edge of the sea, as the northern ladies of the coast, our Lighthouse does stand on a natural hill of shell and marine sand about 41k feet with submerged reefs and sandbars causing innumerable ship-wrecks over the years.

Congress in 1853 finally appropriated approximately \$35,000 to erect "a first-order lighthouse," to mark the reef lying off the Jupiter Inlet and act as an aide to navigation. The Indian war raging across Florida contributed to cost overruns as the final expenditure ran over \$ 60,000 at the time of completion in 1859. Although construction began in 1855 a series of delays --Indian attacks and "Jupiter 'Fever'" ran up the cost during the Third Seminole War.

The Third Seminole War, also called the Billy Bowlegs' War, began in 1855 when a small detachment of army personnel, left Fort Myers to make a reconnaissance of Big Cypress Swamp. Lt. George L. Hartsuff and his men camped within three miles of Billy Bowlegs' Town and the next morning entered the deserted village. As the soldiers left the village they cut bunches of bananas from plants found near the chickees and destroyed some of Chief Billy Bowlegs', prize fields. Apparently this disrespect to the Chiefs property and fields released the pent-up hostility from previous clashes and thirty Seminoles were soon firing into the soldiers' camp the next morning. After killing four soldiers and wounding four others, including Hartsuff, the Seminoles withdrew, but the last Indian War in Florida had begun. The new lighthouse being built on the Jupiter Inlet did not go unnoticed by the rampaging Indians who were now conducting raids across the state. The Lighthouse workers, most sick from "Jupiter fever" which resulted from the hordes of mosquitoes and sand flies, were now harassed by attacking Indians. These incidents disrupted the work on the Lighthouse which did not resume until 1858.

The stairway ascends into the Watch room through a small hatch in the floor. The Watch room is the heart of the lighthouse, as the keepers worked here cleaning the lens and surrounding glass, trimming the lamp wicks, polishing the brass, and winding the turning mechanism weights. The Lighthouse has a first order flashing Fresnel lens, designed by Augustin Fresnel in 1822. The lens resembles a beehive as it is composed of many sections of glass set into a frame work that looks like a single piece. The glass sections are shaped into prisms that refract or bend light toward a powerful magnifying glass in the center of the frame. This glass is called a 'bull's eye' and intensifies the light. The flashing light of the lighthouse use a clockwork mechanism to rotate the lens at specific intervals. The intervals from a pattern of flasks and each pattern is unique to a particular lighthouse. Mariners can then locate their position at sea by identifying a flash pattern. The light is visible from 18 to 25 miles at sea.

"There is no structure as altruistic as a lighthouse. Its only purpose is to serve humanity," George Bernard Shaw. There is something romantic about lighthouses and lighthouse keepers. Perhaps it's the vision of foggy rainy nights with the sound of fog horns in the darkness. Man and his beacon in isolation facing the devouring action of the sea to perform their duties. Our own Jupiter Lighthouse, standing a bright red against the blue sky, is a monument to our local history. Although it doesn't stand on a rocky cliff by the edge of the sea, as some of our northern lighthouses do, it does have the distinction of standing on a prehistoric Indian shell mound forty feet high. The DuBois house just across the river also sits on a high shell mound that was all part of Florida's ancient history, but that's a story for another time.





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In 1853 Congress appropriated \$35,000 to erect a lighthouse to mark the reef lying off the Jupiter Inlet. But even in those days there were cost overruns as the final cost ran over \$60,859 at the time of completion. When you stand at the top of the lighthouse today and watch the beautiful Loxahatchee River flow through the Inlet into the Atlantic Ocean, it's hard to imagine that this river was once stagnant and smelly, loaded with vegetation and debris. This was the case at the time of construction as the Inlet was closed most of the time. Since overland travel was impossible and the Jupiter Inlet closed, transportation of heavy material was the first great obstacle to overcome. Five hundred tons of material including bricks and iron stairway had to be hauled in. Not only did the lighthouse builders have hostile Indians to contend with, but intense heat, mosquitoes, snakes and bugs of every description and a "fever" that made their lives miserable and was often fatal, (Yellow fever and malaria epidemics were common.)

With the lighthouse finally completed, the Fresnel illuminating apparatus with flashes was installed and the beacon sent its lifesaving light to sea on July 10, 1860. The special lenses were designed by Augustin Jean Fresnel and ground in the glassworks in France. Our lighthouse had no more recovered from the Indian Wars when the Civil War began to darken the lighthouses along the southeastern coast. The Jupiter and the Cape Florida Lighthouse were still keeping their nightly vigil until Confederate sympathizers removed the light mechanism and hid it in the Jupiter Creek area. Much later, with the aid of Captain James H. Armour, the parts of the illuminating apparatus were found and on June 28, 1866 the light flashed once again over the Atlantic. And again during the 1928 hurricane, our lighthouse went through yet another crisis. According to our local history, the hurricane was so intense "that the tower swayed an unbelievable seventeen inches, the magnifying bulls-eye lens was blown out and the mortar under the iron cage holding the lamp was squeezed out." Captain Seabrook salvaged every piece of the "broken eye" and the pieces were shipped to Charleston, South Carolina where they were put together again and an iron bar was placed across them as it now stands today.

The Jupiter Lighthouse and four others in the Keys were designed by Major George G. Meade. About ten years later General Meade, having experienced the Seminole Indian Wars, and building the Florida lighthouses, was the same general who won at Gettysburg near the end of the Civil War. In fact, two presidents and many generals who became famous during the Civil War learned their trade right here in Florida during the Seminole Wars. The presidents were: Andrew Jackson, who led the First Seminole Indian War; the Confederate Army, was the hero of Powell's Battle right here in Jupiter, five miles from the Jupiter Lighthouse. Major Robert Anderson, Commanding officer at Fort Sumter, was a Lieutenant while on duty here in Fort Jupiter. William T. Sherman, of the March through Georgia fame, had been stationed at Fort Pierce in 1841.

Enjoy some of our history by visiting the Jupiter Lighthouse. Volunteers man the lighthouse for the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse & Museum.