

Pensacola Lighthouse: A Timeline

Early History of Pensacola

The earliest known inhabitants of the Pensacola Bay area were Native American peoples. When the first European explorers visited Florida in the 16th century, they encountered a Muskogean-speaking tribe. Spanish records indicate that this tribe was called the “Panzacola,” which appears to be the source of the name “Pensacola.”

Spanish exploration of the area began in 1513, when Ponce de Leon landed in Northwest Florida. Later, fellow Spaniards Pánfilo de Narváez (1528) and Hernando de Soto (1539) explored Pensacola Bay (calling it “Ochuse” and, later, “Bahia de Santa Maria.”)

In 1559, Don Tristan de Luna arrived in Pensacola to establish a Spanish settlement of more than 1,400 people on 11 ships. However, hurricanes, famine, and conflict with local Native American tribes plague the Spanish settlers, prompting them to abandon the settlement.

For the next 135 years, the Spanish Viceroy in Vera Cruz made no further attempts to colonize Pensacola. However, by 1698, French settlements along the Mississippi worry the Spanish government, prompting the construction of Presidio Santa Maria de Galve and Fort San Carlos de Austria on the *barrancas* (bluffs) overlooking Pensacola Bay. The settlement, located at NAS Pensacola close to present-day Fort Barrancas, was captured by French troops in 1719. Three years later, prompted by another hurricane, the French burnt the fort and evacuated the area. Later that year, the Spanish returned and established a new presidio on Santa Rosa Island, near the site later chosen for Fort Pickens. But this settlement suffered the same fate as its predecessors; in 1752, fed up with being battered by hurricanes, the Spanish abandoned their island settlement and relocated to the mainland. Two years later, they constructed Presidio San Miguel in what is now the heart of historic downtown Pensacola.

In 1763, the Spanish ceded Florida to the British for a brief period, recapturing it in the 1781 during the American Revolution, in a conflict later known as the Battle of Pensacola.

Meanwhile, in 1789, President George Washington created the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment, whereby the states agree to cede authority over navigational aids to the Secretary of the Treasury.

The history of the Pensacola Light Station begins in 1823, a few years after Andrew Jackson, acting on his own accord, wrested Florida from Spanish control and claimed it as a United States territory.

First Lighthouse	
1823	<p>In March, Congress appropriates \$6,000 to fund the construction of a lighthouse in Pensacola</p> <p>In June, a site is selected for the new lighthouse (near the present-day Navy Lodge) west of Fort Barrancas. In the meantime, the lightship Aurora Borealis arrives from the Mississippi River to serve as a navigational aid at the entrance to the harbor</p>
1824	Construction begins on the first Pensacola Lighthouse, a 40-foot white brick tower equipped with ten whale oil lamps, each flame strengthened by a fourteen-inch reflector. The first keeper, Jeremiah Ingraham, begins his service, and in December, the lamps are lit for the first time
1826	Recognizing the importance of Pensacola's harbor, the federal government authorizes construction on the Pensacola Navy Yard (also known as the Warrington Navy Yard) at the site of the Spanish Fort Barrancas
1827	Plans are drawn out for the communities of Warrington and Woolsey, located to the east of the first lighthouse
1829 – 1834	As part of a national effort to fortify the nation's ports, Fort Pickens – the first of three forts that will circle and defend the mouth of Pensacola Bay, is constructed at the western tip of Santa Rosa Island. Later, the shifting sands will move the entrance to the bay farther to the west.
1830	Settlers begin migrating to the Pacific Northwest via the Oregon Trail
1834 – 1839	Fort McRee is built at the eastern tip of Perdido Key, on a stretch called Foster's Bank. The fort is now underwater, as shifting sands caused the fort to slowly collapse into the Gulf.
1838	Coronation of Queen Victoria, for whom the "Victorian age" is named and whose long reign shaped the social and political attitudes of Western civilization for the rest of the 19th century and beyond.
1839 – 1844	For Barrancas, the last of the three forts guarding Pensacola Bay, is built on the barrancas, or bluffs, approximately half a mile east of the First Pensacola Lighthouse on the site of the colonial-era Spanish Fort San Carlos de Barrancas.
1840 – 1855	Following Jeremiah Ingraham's death, his widow Michaela takes on his position as lighthouse keeper
1845	Florida is admitted as the 27th state in the Union
1846 – 1848	Mexican-American War
1848 – 1855	California Gold Rush
1852	Congress establishes the U.S. Light-House Board to oversee the nation's 331 lighthouses and 42 lightships

1855	Keeper Michaela Ingraham hands her post over to her son-in-law, Joseph Palmes. Palmes will serve until 1858, when he becomes the first keeper of the new lighthouse.
Second Lighthouse	
1854	Congress appropriates \$25,000 to replace the first Pensacola Lighthouse with a “first class seacoast light.” Later, an additional \$30,000 is appropriated to complete the project
1856	Under the supervision of the Army Corps of Engineers, enslaved black bricklayers (rented from local planter Chandler Cox Yonge) begin construction on the new tower, located half a mile west of the original lighthouse
1859	The new lighthouse is first lit on January 1, New Year’s Day. Joseph Palmes transfers
1861 – 1865	American Civil War
1861	In January, as tensions between northern and southern states escalate, Florida secedes from the Union. Confederate troops take the lighthouse, along with Fort Barrancas and McRae. Keeper Palmes resigns, unwilling to remain on the Union payroll In April, hostilities erupt between the Confederates at Fort Barrancas and the Union troops stationed at Fort Pickens. Palmes’ replacement, Oscar Philibert, is ordered to extinguish the light, and disassemble the lens for shipment to Montgomery, Alabama. Caretaker Samuel Glass replaces him In December, the base of the lighthouse tower is struck by solid shot from Fort Pickens, suffering damage in at least three places
1862	Confederate forces evacuate Pensacola; Union troops take possession of the lighthouse. With the first-order lens still in Confederate possession, lighthouse engineer Max Bonzano installs a captured fourth-order lens and the tower is relit on December 20th.
1863 – 1877	Reconstruction Era; Federal troops occupy the former Confederate states in an attempt to suppress violence and promote the speedy reintegration of these states into the Union.
1863 – 1886	Eleven different keepers serve at the Pensacola Lighthouse, of whom 9 are removed from duty for offenses ranging from intoxication to neglect
1886 – 1887	Caycas and Barrancas Range Lights are re-established to mark the entry to the harbor

1869	<p>A first-order Fresnel lens is restored to the tower, and the day mark is altered; the lower third of the tower is white to contrast with surrounding trees, while the upper two-thirds painted black, to stand out against the sky</p> <p>Construction on the two-story Keeper's Quarters is completed. The residence is a symmetrical duplex built to house the head keeper, assistant keeper, and their families.</p>
1875	The lighthouse is struck by lightning twice, melting metal fixtures in the tower
1877	Samuel Lawrence begins service as head keeper
1879	The tower is repointed and repainted
1884	Mineral oil lamps installed in the lighthouse (replacing whale oil lamps)
1885	Lantern damaged when wild ducks fly through the lens room
1886	<p>George "Tucker" Clifford becomes Keeper, replacing Samuel Lawrence (who served from 1877 to 1885)</p> <p>In August, vibrations from the Great Charleston Earthquake shake the tower, stopping the clockworks and damaging the tower walls.</p>
1892	Brick oil-house built
1894	Wooden shed built to store empty oil cans
1896	U.S. lighthouse keepers become civil service employees
1897	The frame addition to the rear of the dwelling becomes a kitchen. Around the same time, a second story on the front porch is added
1902	New gallery (probably a screened porch) built to adjoin kitchen
1903	<p>Clifford's daughter, Ellen ("Ella") marries Ernest Miller (Mueller) at the lighthouse</p> <p>Wright Brothers make their first flight at Kitty Hawk</p>
1905	Five months after giving birth to her daughter, Naomi, at the Navy Hospital, Ella Clifford Miller dies from childbirth complications. Her parents adopt Naomi and raise her at the lighthouse
1908	Henry Ford introduces the Model-T
1910	Abolishing the Light-House Board, Congress creates the Bureau of Lighthouses (better known as the Lighthouse Service) within the Department of Commerce
1912	The RMS Titanic sinks in the North Atlantic.

1913	The Navy Department establishes the United States' first aeronautical station at the Navy Yard. Over the course of World War I, the station will train more than 1,000 pilots
1914 – 1918	World War I
1917	George Clifford retires as Keeper after thirty-one years of service
1919	The ratification of the 18th Amendment and the passage of the Volstead Act legalize "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors," marking the onset of the Era of Prohibition. Women in the U.S. gain the right to vote.
1922	Village of Woolsey, located on Navy property, is razed
1927	Charles Lindbergh flies solo across the Atlantic
1929 – 1939	Great Depression
Mid-1930s	Village of Warrington ("Old" Warrington), also located on Navy property, is razed. Community relocates across Bayou Grande to form New Warrington
1939	The U.S. Coast guard takes on the duties formerly performed by the Bureau of Lighthouses. Bureau personnel are given the choice to enter the Coast Guard through a military position or to remain civilian employees. In Pensacola, Head Keeper Louis Buras elected to join the Coast Guard, while Assistant Keepers James Hatten and Mr. Wright remained in the civil service In October, electricity is installed in the lens room and the Keeper's Quarters. The Quarters are also equipped with indoor plumbing. The road to the lighthouse (Shell Road – Radford Boulevard did not yet exist) is paved with brick and rubble from the recently demolished Fort Barrancas barracks.
1941	As the U.S. enters World War II, NAS Pensacola expands rapidly, training a record number of aviation cadets.
1942	Keeper Buras transfers to the Coast Guard Station in New Orleans, and Assistant Keeper James Hatten becomes the new Head Keeper. For the remainder of World War II, the Hattens and Mr. Wright live in Warrington, returning each night to tend the light. A Coast Guard surveillance team occupies the Keeper's Quarters, scanning the harbor for German U-boats.
1953	Pensacola's last civilian lighthouse keeper, James Hatten, retires after twenty-two years of service (1931-1953.) Coast Guard personnel take over the keeper's duties.
1955 – 1975	Vietnam War
1963	President John F. Kennedy assassinated
1965	Lighthouse is fully automated and the Keeper's Quarters are vacated.

1965	The Navy rents rooms in the Keeper's Quarters to guests until the conditions there deteriorated to the point that the building was condemned
1970s	Dilapidated chicken yard removed
1974	Pensacola Light Station listed on National Register of Historic Places
1980	Bids solicited to tear down the Keeper's Quarters and outbuildings
1991	The Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm)
1992 – 1995	The Pensacola Light Station receives extensive repairs; the Keepers' Quarters is renovated and made habitable once more.
1996	Coast Guard Auxiliary begins offering public tours of the Light Station.
2006	The Pensacola Lighthouse Association is established.
January 2007	Coast Guard closes the lighthouse to the public
May 2008	Coast Guard permits the Pensacola Lighthouse Association to conduct public tours
2008	Governor Charlie Crist attends the lighthouse's Grand Re-Opening Ceremony
January 2009	Sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary of Pensacola Lighthouse
July 2009	Lighthouse begins offering nighttime tours ("Light of the Moon" tours) for the public
September 2009	Television's Ghost Hunters investigate the lighthouse
2010	Popular interest in the lighthouse is growing. To handle the increasingly steady flow of visitors, the Pensacola Lighthouse Association, formerly an all-volunteer organization, hires its first employees and opens the Pensacola Lighthouse & Museum.
2011	For the first time, the Pensacola Lighthouse is open to the public seven days a week. The Keeper's Quarters two-story wrap-around porch is restored.
2011	First annual Christmas Gala
Summer 2012	The dilapidated 1890s Carriage House is renovated, becoming the new Visitor's Center and Museum Shop.
October 2012	Pensacola Bay Area Impact 100 awards the Pensacola Lighthouse & Museum a \$104,000 grant to help restore the historic 1859 Lighthouse tower.
December 2013	Extensive restoration efforts begin on the tower. Projects included the removal of elastomeric paint, repair of 350 linear feet of exterior cracks and the repainting of the 1850 tower.

2014	Original pedestal of lighthouse lens discovered in woods near gift shop.
February 2015	Phase II of the restoration efforts begins, intended to stabilize the historic filigree staircase and repairing interior
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