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EVERYTHING RECKLESSLY BROKEN

By Theresa Levitt

With Fresnel lenses now installed in virtually every lighthouse on the American coastline, the Lighthouse Board could step back a bit. Commodore William Shubrick, having overseen the monumental operation, left on a military mission to Paraguay, accompanied by Thornton Jenkins, the board's secretary. Replacing Jenkins was Raphael Semmes, a lighthouse inspector serving the Caribbean and Gulf coasts. Appointed in September of 1858, Semmes moved his family, along with his house slaves, from his home in Mobile, Alabama, to Maryland, near Washington, D.C.

Washington was a tense and divided city, as the differences between North and South grew more manifestly irreconcilable. Lincoln's election in 1860 exacerbated the country's polarization and prompted South Carolina to withdraw from the Union seven weeks later. Although born in Maryland, Semmes thoroughly considered himself a son of Alabama, and after South Carolina seceded, he secretly let the Alabama congressional members know that he would fight with them if Alabama followed South Carolina's example. As he wrote to a friend in February of 1861, "I am still at my post at the Light-House Board, performing my routine duties, but listening with an aching ear and beating heart, for the first sounds of the great disruption which is at hand." He did not have long to wait.

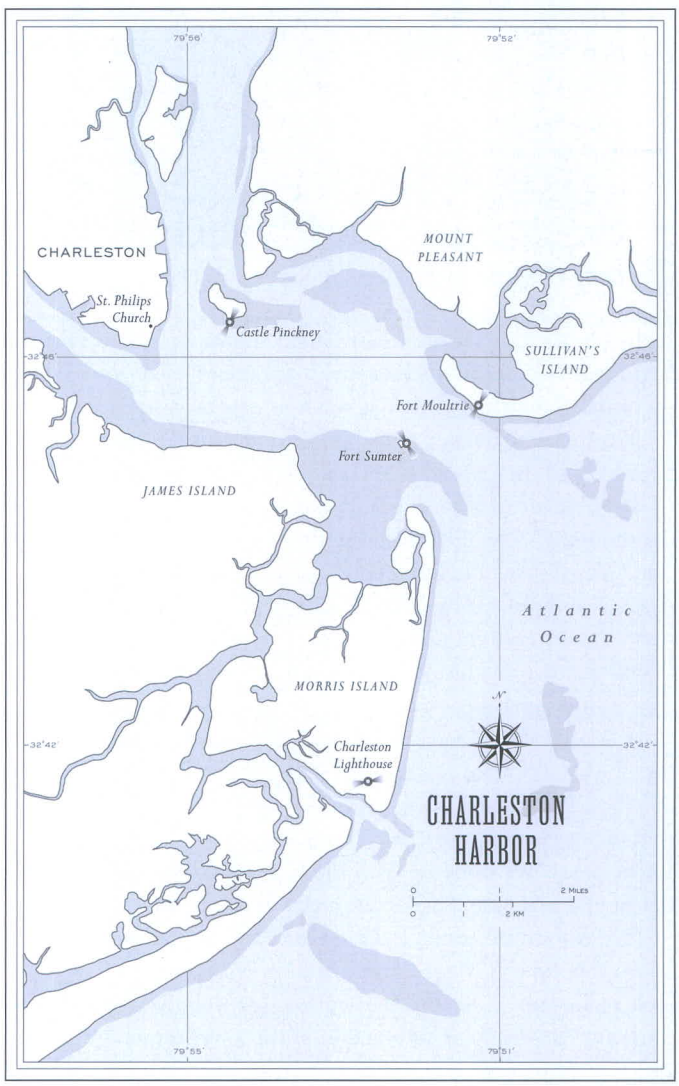
The Tocsin of War

By 1860 the lighthouses in Charleston Harbor had several new Fresnel lenses. Most impressive was the revolving first-order lens in the Charleston Lighthouse, a major seacoast light on Morris Island. The lighthouses at the harbor's three defensive forts also had a Fresnel lens: a fifth-order one at Castle Pinckney, a sixth-order lens on Sullivan's Island near Fort Moultrie, and a fourth-order lens at Fort Sumter. Although Fort Sumter was still under construction, its lighthouse had operated since 1855 as part of a range line, where ships lined it up with a light on the steeple of St. Philip's Church to follow the narrow channel into the port of Charleston.

When the South Carolina Secession Convention met on December 17, 1860, the delegates decreed all this property theirs and sent envoys to Washington to negotiate its transfer to the state, implying that if the federal government was unwilling to give it up, the state would simply take it. The lighthouse inspector for Charleston, T. T. Hunter of the U.S. Navy, noted with alarm that South Carolina troops stood poised to seize the lighthouses. He wrote to Washington for instructions, but his letter landed on the desk of Secretary Semmes, who urged the secretary of the treasury to cede the lighthouses and warned that he would not recommend "that the coast of South Carolina be lighted by the Federal Government against her will."

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina formally seceded. Church bells tolled; revelers lit firecrackers and rockets and even fired cannons. The sounds of celebration in Charleston could be heard at Fort Moultrie, four miles away. The First U.S. Artillery Regiment, garrisoned there under command of Major Robert Anderson, watched nervously as South Carolina troops took up position around Charleston's federal forts. Fort Moultrie's defenses all pointed seaward, and the regiment could not protect the fort from a land attack. Across the channel on an island, however, the more easily defended Fort Sumter was nearing completion. On December 26, under the cover of night, Anderson sneaked his troops into Fort Sumter and prepared to fight. They were joined the next day by the small contingent from Castle Pinckney.

South Carolina's governor, Francis Pickens, worried about the possibility of Washington sending reinforcements, ordered all of Charleston's lights shut down and the buoys pulled up. He directed lighthouse inspector Hunter to leave the state, which he tried to do on a tender (one of the ships used to supply lighthouses), only to be captured. After he surrendered the ship, which Pickens claimed for South Carolina, Hunter was allowed to leave, by land, for Wilmington, North Carolina. Pickens continued to seize federal property, towing the RATTLESNAKE SHOAL lightship into Charleston



Map of Charleston Harbor by George Ward. Used by permission.

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Harbor and confiscating the remaining lighthouse tenders.

The day after Pickens ordered the lights turned off, steamships arrived on Morris Island and began unloading supplies for the hasty construction of a new fort next to the Charleston Lighthouse. Fort Morris went up quickly, armed with a battery of field howitzers to guard the major shipping channel. The lighthouse tower was converted into a lookout post, manned by cadets from the Citadel, South Carolina's military college, who spent the days scanning the sea for federal ships.

Meanwhile, Fort Sumter was out of coal and running low on food. In Washington, General Winfield Scott prepared to send supplies and reinforcements, leasing a civilian ship, *Star of the West*, for the job. Governor Pickens, well aware of the ship's mission, ordered the troops at both Fort Moultrie and Fort Morris to fire upon it when it approached, and fearing the possible loss of Morris Island, he directed the South Carolina troops to remove the Fresnel lens from the lighthouse and bury it.

The *Star of the West* arrived around 1:30 on the morning of January 9, 1861, and the crew noted that the harbor was dark. Only one faint light, presumably at Fort Sumter, shone. They would have to wait until daybreak to navigate the harbor. At dawn, the cadets on Morris Island spotted the ship and prepared for action. As it drew abreast, they fired a warning shot, then three more rounds. Two shots hit the ship; though neither did serious damage, the ship turned around and headed back to New York, leaving Fort Sumter without reinforcements.

Washington made no further efforts to reinforce Fort Sumter. President James Buchanan, in the last months of his term, still hoped to avoid a war. Neither did Governor Pickens attack the fort, having been warned that he did not have the ammunition to bring it down. A stalemate ensued, while around them Southern states pulled out of the Union. As the secessionists formed themselves into the Confederate States of America, their president, Jefferson Davis, wrote to Pickens telling him that the Confederacy would be willing to take over the problem of Fort Sumter.

Up in Washington, Semmes finally heard the news he was waiting for. On February 14, 1861, the Committee on Naval Affairs of the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America in Montgomery, Alabama, sent a telegram tersely asking that he "repair to this place at your earliest convenience." Only two days earlier, Semmes had been promoted to a full member of the Lighthouse Board to replace the recently deceased naval officer Edward Tilton (who had replaced Samuel Du Pont when the latter was posted to Asia). But he did not hesitate to join the South. The telegram reached him at four o'clock, and Semmes replied that same evening. The next day, he resigned his position, severing all contact with the U.S. government. The day after that, he was on the train to Montgomery. The secessionists had also courted Commodore Shubrick, a South Carolinian, but he refused to leave, much to the scorn of Semmes, who remained the only board member to join the Confederacy.

Semmes traveled to New York in March to buy munitions for the South. When he returned to Montgomery, Stephen R. Mallory, former U.S. senator turned secretary of the Confederate navy, placed him in charge of the newly created Confederate Lighthouse Bureau. "I had barely time to appoint the necessary clerks and open a set of books," he later recounted, "before Fort Sumter was fired upon, and the tocsin of war was sounded."

Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861, promising in his inaugural address to "possess the property" of the government. He ordered a flotilla down to Charleston on April 4. Jefferson Davis, hearing the news, ordered the attack on the fort. At 4:30 on the morning of April 12, the batteries surrounding the fort began methodically pounding it with artillery. After heavy barrage, the Union troops flew the white flag of surrender.

War had begun. On April 19, 1861, as his first official act of war, Lincoln ordered a blockade of the Southern coast, divided between an Atlantic and a Gulf blockade. The South responded by putting out all the lights in its lighthouses. By April 24, everything was dark. Semmes, sitting in his newly furnished office in Montgomery, wrote that the Lighthouse Bureau was "no longer to be thought of," and every man who could wield a sword should do so. He immediately resigned his position and went looking for a ship, finding a small steamer that had been condemned as unfit and left in New Orleans. A bit of outfitting turned it into the CSS *Sumter*, the first war vessel of the Confederate navy. At its command, Semmes specialized in raiding the unprotected ships of the Northern merchant fleet, eventually capturing 87 and largely driving the fleet from the seas. The North cursed him as a privateer, while the South celebrated his daring exploits slipping through the blockade.

The blockade was intended to keep the South from getting the "arms, munitions, iron plating for armored ships, ship engines and machinery, rail iron, railroad locomotives and cars, boots, cloth, niter, and other manufactured goods" that it had to import and to cut off the region's chief source of revenue: cotton. The U.S. Navy planned to post steamships around all of the major ports, which could then chase down the vessels that accounted for the bulk of Southern trade. But at the start of the war, the federal navy had only 42 ships to its name. And once Virginia and North Carolina joined the Confederacy, there were 3,549 miles of coastline to patrol. The blockade thus proceeded slowly, as the Union scrambled to expand the fleet. Confederate runners slipped easily through the blockade in these early months, usually under the cover of night. The local Southern crews knew the hidden hazards of the harbors better than the Northerners trying to chase them down.

Charleston was one of the few harbors



The Twentieth Indiana Regiment camped around the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. Courtesy of the Outer Banks History Center, Manteo, North Carolina.

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to remain in Confederate hands throughout the war, and it became an important base for blockade runners. The lens of the venerable Charleston Lighthouse had already been dismantled and removed by the time hostilities started. As the Union steamships moved into the Southern waters, the Confederates worried they might lose Morris Island and took steps to ensure that the tower would also be inoperable. According to the *Charleston Mercury*, on December 20, 1861, "The report reached us yesterday morning that the Charleston lighthouse, situated on Morris Island, and which for many years has guided the mariner to our harbor, was blown up on Wednesday night, by order of the military authorities. Nothing save a heap of ruins now marks the spot where it stood." Much of the South would be a heap of ruins by the time the war was over, and Fresnel lenses were among the casualties.

Hatteras Lighthouse, Traitor to the State

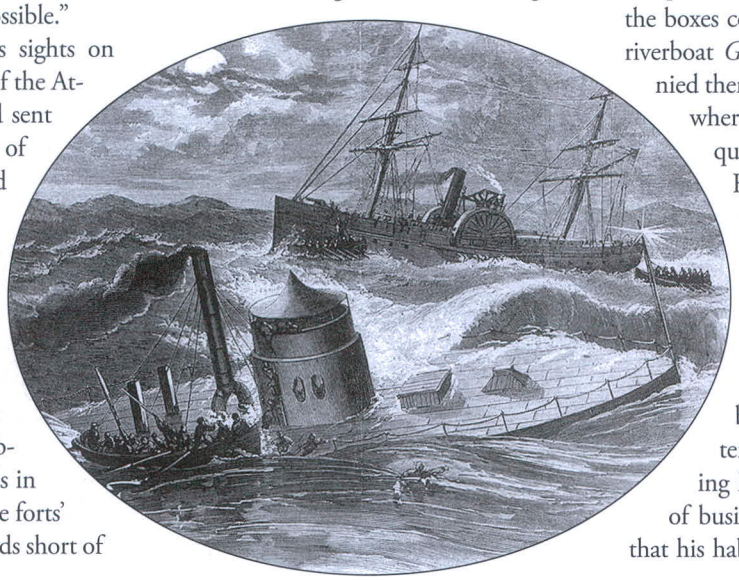
The blackened coast made life difficult for the Union, which lost more ships in grounding accidents than in all of the war's naval battles. No point was more deadly than Cape Hattaras in North Carolina, which brought down nearly 40 Union ships by itself. Shubrick, who had returned to head the Lighthouse Board, and Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase made it clear that recapturing the Hatteras lighthouse was a top priority. The presidents of major insurance companies had also pleaded that Hatteras was "a very important point on our coast and it is desirable the light be re-established as speedily as possible."

The Union navy thus set its sights on Cape Hatteras as the first target of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and sent seven gunships south in August of 1861. North Carolina had moved quickly to control the area immediately after seceding: state troops had built two forts on the southern tip of Hatteras Island near the lighthouse, which served as a lookout. Their efforts did little good. The Union fleet shelled the forts relentlessly, lobbing more than three 3,000 shells in the space of three hours, while the forts' ammunition fell uselessly 800 yards short of their targets. Both forts were taken in a matter of hours, and the Union soon controlled Hatteras Inlet. As an officer reported to the *New York Evening Post*, Hatteras was "a place which is of such vast importance to us. . . . With the possession of this port we can easily keep alight Hatteras lighthouse."

But the troops could not keep Hatteras alight without the lens, which they soon discovered was missing. In fact, the process of disabling North Carolina's lights had begun even before the state officially seceded. Governor John Ellis, like other Southern governors, had sent telegrams to all the principal lighthouses of North Carolina in April of 1861 directing the keepers to extinguish their lights. Most had complied, packing up the smaller lenses and sending them to the district superintendent. But taking apart a first-order lens had proved to be a daunting task for the uninitiated. After North Carolina seceded on May 20, and the Confederacy's Treasury Department officially ordered the removal of all lenses, only the one at Hatteras had remained in place. It had stayed up through the summer, prompting Confederate Major W. S. G. Andrews to complain to the governor. "Hatteras Light House is a traitor to the State, offering aid and comfort to the enemy. If it was removed," he continued, "none but those accustomed to this port could enter, and no other in these times will attempt it, and the coast would present no prominent object." Finally, at the end of July the district's lighthouse superintendent, H. F. Hancock, had sent a skilled contract machinist with a work crew to help the keeper remove the lens.

The Union missed capturing the lens by a matter of days. After taking control of the forts, the fleet's flag officer, Silas Stringham, sent Commander S. C. Rowan a message to fire up the lighthouse. "I was desirous of lighting Hatteras light," Rowan reported back, "but to my great regret I learn that the lens has been taken down and is now in Washington or Raleigh." Washington was a small town on the mainland inside Pamlico Sound, due east of Hatteras light and home to lighthouse superintendent Hancock. Commander Rowan sent an expedition there to try to retrieve the lens, but everyone the Union men spoke to claimed they did not have it, and that it had been shipped up the river "without their knowledge or consent." Rowan railed that he would demand the return of the lens before, as he put it, "I promise protection to the inhabitants" (and given the amount of pillaging going on in surrounding towns, the threat hung heavy). He insisted he would track down the guilty parties and "take all the property I can find that will reimburse the Government." And he wrote to his flag officer that with an armed boat or two, he "would go there and frighten the people out of their boots unless the lens is returned."

But the lens was no longer in Washington. Indeed it was likely that no one there knew where it was. Superintendent Hancock had long ago fled upriver, leaving the lens unprotected in a warehouse; the warehouse owner, John Myers, was none too happy to be left holding hot property and fired off a letter to the Confederate treasury secretary, pointing out that Hancock had shirked his duty and Myers had been forced to take matters into his own hands. Only hours before the federal troops landed in Washington, he had loaded the boxes containing the lens parts onto the riverboat *Governor Morehead* and accompanied them upriver to the town of Tarboro, where he delivered them to the army quartermaster, Captain George H. Brown. Wanting to get rid of them as soon as possible, Brown wrote to Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, begging for an agent to be sent to take the boxes off his hands. An agent, J. B. Davidge, did show up, but his behavior prompted another letter from the quartermaster, claiming him "unfit to attend to any kind of business since his arrival. . . . I find that his habits are those of intemperance & though a delicate matter I feel my duty as an officer to furnish the department with the



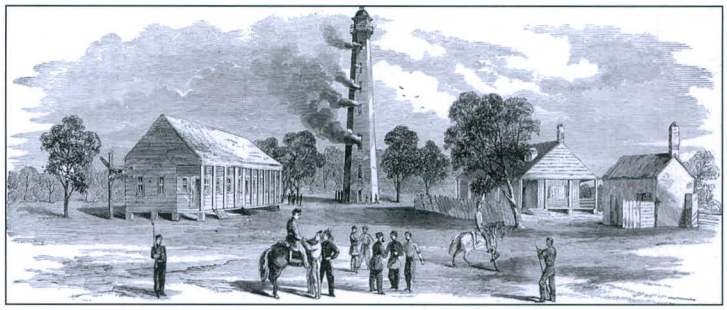
The sinking of the ironclad USS *Monitor* off Cape Hatteras. First published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1863.

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facts of the case." Davidge disappeared, along with the money allocated for the move. In desperation, Brown turned to Dr. David Tayloe, a physician from Washington who had been trying to join his family farther inland. If the army could furnish him a boxcar, he proposed, he would take the lens with him and hide it. On April 14, Tayloe rolled out of Tarboro, accompanied (according to the invoice) by 44 boxes, 2 cases, 64 castings, 14 fixtures, and 2 sheets of copper. After several days and considerable difficulty, he made it to Hibernia Plantation, where he rejoined his family and, he assured Martin, hid the apparatus in "a good store house in the country."

As the Union scrambled to track down the lens, the Confederacy did what it could to prevent the relighting of the lighthouse. In October, six Confederate steamships, intent on taking back Hatteras Island, landed at dawn in the tiny town of Chicamacomico on the northern end of the island. The 600 Union soldiers stationed there, many still not fully dressed, took off in the opposite direction, running the whole length of the long, narrow sand spit, over more than 23 miles, on a hot day with no water. The Confederate fleet that was supposed to cut them off had, with due irony, run aground on a sand bar. The Union troops were thus able to make it to the lighthouse just after midnight, and picked up reinforcements from the Ninth New York Regiment. The two adversaries then reversed direction, with the Yankees now chasing the Confederates the length of the island back to their ships. The lighthouse remained unharmed, but the episode, named the Chicamacomico Races, prompted Treasury Secretary Chase to press the War Department for better protection for the lighthouse if they were going to entrust Hatteras with a new lens.

A steamer lamp had been hanging in the lantern room of the lighthouse since the Union troops arrived, but it was clearly not adequate for the job. Hatteras continued racking up its victims, including the celebrated USS *Monitor*, the U.S. Navy's first ironclad warship. Confederate cannonballs had bounced harmlessly off its seemingly indestructible sides during early battles, but in 1862 it passed too close to the Diamond Shoals and was swamped in its waves. Eventually, the flag officer of the Blockading Squadron announced that the lighthouse "may now be lighted with perfect safety," and the Lighthouse Board sent an engineer, W. J. Newman, to replace the lens. Surprised and delighted that the base plate, revolving mechanism, and pedestal remained, he ordered a second-order lens and had the light working by the end of May in 1862. Bateman Williams, the former assistant keeper, who had stayed on the island as a Union sympathizer, was named the new keeper. Ever optimistic in these early days, the Lighthouse Board also ordered a new first-order lens from the Henry-Lepaute company, to serve as a proper replacement once the war ended.



The Tybee Island Lighthouse burning, after a Confederate raiding party lit a keg of powder inside. Originally printed in *Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War* by Frank Leslie, 1896.

Du Pont and the Southern Expedition

Hatteras had been an obvious first target. But to plan the ensuing strategy, Treasury Secretary Chase requested the formation of a Blockade Strategy Board, which met during the summer of 1861, even as Union ships were retaking Hatteras Island. The Strategy Board consisted entirely of once and future Lighthouse Board members, headed by A. D. Bache, and its foremost task was to select a base of operations in the South, an important requirement given that coal-fired steamships needed frequent refueling and that it was impractical to send them north every time. The Strategy Board settled on South Carolina's Port Royal Sound, south of Charleston, which had a good, deep entry, and further recommended dividing the Atlantic Blockading Squadron into Northern and Southern sections.

Samuel Du Pont, placed in charge of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, began assembling a fleet. As summer turned into fall, he scoured the North for every available ship, even borrowing the boats from Bache's Coast Survey, which were drafted into the naval ranks. With a total of 77 vessels, the largest U.S. naval expedition yet assembled, the fleet left port on October 29, 1861, heading for Port Royal Sound. Four ships sank or ran aground off the South Carolina coast on the way down, but the fleet was able, after a prodigious exchange of cannon fire, to take the forts protecting the sound without losing a single ship in the battle. With a base of operations secure, Du Pont's next task was to extend the blockade and do what he could to relight the coast.

Du Pont now sent ships to the nearby town of Beaufort on Port Royal Island, the seat of lighthouse superintendent Josiah Fisher Bell, to search for lenses and other federal property. Bell had scrupulously dismantled the local lights: he spent $19.25 on blankets used to wrap the lenses, and $5.00 a month to store them in a Beaufort warehouse. He was nowhere to be found when the Union ships arrived. The town, abandoned by its white population, had been stripped of its provisions, its furniture broken, and even books and feather beds ripped apart—"a most melancholy example of weakness and dereliction." Locating some Fresnel lenses in the arsenal, Du Pont took possession of them, going out of his way to point out that these expensive pieces "belong to the United States."

His next stop was Tybee Island at the mouth of the Savannah River in Georgia. He found the island deserted and the lighthouse still standing, but its second-order lens was missing, presumably taken to Savannah. Du Pont hoisted the American flag atop the lighthouse and put up a temporary beacon. The Confederates had retreated about a mile up the river to Fort Pulaski, but in the next months a raiding party slipped out and ignited a keg of powder on the third floor of the lighthouse, rendering it useless.

Nevertheless, by the spring of 1862, the Union largely controlled the Atlantic coastline, and Du Pont set out to inventory the Southern lighthouses. The coast was uniformly dark, but behind the darkness roiled the chaos and confusion of war.

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Map of the southern Atlantic coast by George Ward. Used by permission.

Individual keepers had been responsible by and large for taking down their own lights, and their actions (like their political sympathies) ran a complicated spectrum. Many lenses were painstakingly dismounted and safely packed, either to be put on the train for safekeeping inland or to be buried in the keeper's backyard—or to be lost entirely. The revolving first-order light of Cape Romain, South Carolina, proved too troublesome to dismantle; the Union party landing there was greeted with broken prisms scattered across the ground. The lantern room had been trashed, and, as Du Pont reported, "the apparatus itself ruthlessly destroyed." Bulls Bay Lighthouse, a few miles south, fared no better: "everything recklessly broken, down to the oil cans," read Du Pont's report. The brand new tower on Hunting Island, lit less than two years before with a second-order Fresnel lens, was rubble.

Everywhere he could, Du Pont tried to track down the missing lenses, though the keepers were generally long gone or not inclined to be helpful. James A. Clubb, however, the keeper of the light at Little Cumberland Island, Georgia, rowed out to the Union ships as soon as they entered St. Andrew Sound and described in detail how he had taken down the lens, packed it, and sent it to Brunswick on the mainland. Du Pont, accordingly, ordered a large force under cover of a gunboat to take the town. The men found Brunswick deserted, however, with no sign of the lens and no clue where it had gone.

Farther down the coast in Florida, the squadron encountered substantially less cooperation. Already the previous September, the Union navy had heard rumors of "a gang of pirates from St. Augustine" that roamed the Florida coast destroying its lights. The officer in charge of taking the town, Lieutenant J. W. A. Nicholson, wasted no time in bringing its lighthouse superintendent, Paul Arnau, in for questioning.

Arnau had been very busy in the preceding weeks. He had personally seen to the dismantling of the St. Augustine lens, which he took into custody and hid. He then headed south to the next lighthouse on the coast, at Cape Canaveral, with a heavily armed group of equally passionate rebels who called themselves the "Coast Guard," rumored to be 200 strong. After driving off the keeper there, they dismantled the lens and took it with them.

Next in line was Jupiter Inlet, with its brand-new, top-of-the-line first-order order revolving lens. On the way there, Arnau's gang had run into Augustus Oswald Lang, the lighthouse's staunchly Confederate assistant keeper who had walked off the job in disgust when the head keeper, José Francisco "Joe" Papy, refused to extinguish the light. Lang returned to Jupiter Inlet with the posse, where they informed Papy that they came "as citizens of the Confederate States to discharge a duty to our country." Papy chose not to resist the heavily armed group, who allowed him to leave in his own boat. Before he was out of sight, they began to dismantle

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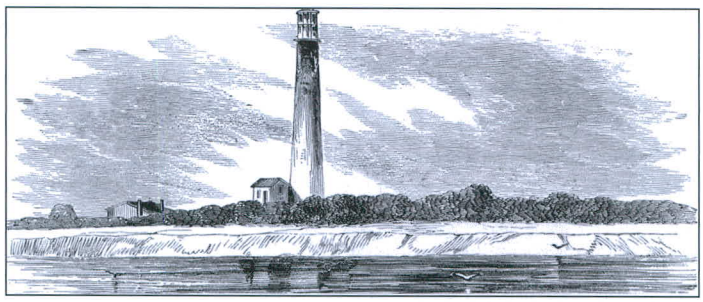
the lens, taking some key pieces with them to render it inoperable and hiding the rest in the wilderness.

This "band of lawless persons," as the Lighthouse Board called them, continued on to the Cape Florida Lighthouse near Miami. Its keepers, however, were reported to be heavily armed and strongly pro-Union. The Confederates decided their best bet was to swoop in, destroy the lens, and get out. As one member put it, "The Light being within the immediate protection of Key West and almost indispensable at this time to the enemy's fleet, as well as knowing it to be useless for us to try and hold it, we determined to damage it so that it will be of no possible use to our enemies." They tricked the keepers into coming down from the tower by having Lang, whom the keepers knew, call up to them. As soon as the keepers opened the door, the raiders took them prisoner. The Confederates then smashed all of the lens glass and dismantled the lamps and burners, which they took with them.

Arnau's exploits, ranging over 300 miles, had left every lighthouse on Florida's Atlantic coast inoperable. He feigned ignorance, however, at Lieutenant Nicholson's questioning. Only when Nicholson let him know that he would remain under arrest on the Union ship until he was more forthcoming did Arnau send carts into the countryside to retrieve the St. Augustine and Cape Canaveral lenses.

The Florida Keys had the only Southern lighthouses that remained lit throughout the entire conflict. Commander Louis M. Goldsborough, sent by Du Pont to check out the situation, reported that the lighthouses on Carysfort Reef, Sombrero Key, Key West, Sand Key, and Dry Tortugas were "shining as the safeguards and symbols of fraternal commerce and peaceful civilization." But the continued operation of the lights owed at least as much to the vagaries of political sentiment as to benevolence. The Keys, like much of Florida, were divided in their sympathies, and Charles Howe, the lighthouse superintendent on Key West, tilted toward the Union. It was not a popular position; in fact, when Florida seceded from the Union, he and District Judge William Marvin were the only two civil officials who did not immediately resign their federal posts. The Southern-leaning majority did not make life easy for them. But the mainland was far away, and Union ships were a constant presence. Moreover, U.S. Army Captain John Brannan had, acting on his own accord, marched his men in to occupy Key West's not-yet-completed Fort Taylor in 1861, and Key West became an important base for the blockade.

The lighthouse keepers themselves were not always happy to keep the lights shining for the Union fleet. At Key West, keeper Barbara Mabrity made it clear that her loyalty lay with the Confederacy. The Union was reluctant to fire a widow with six children who had been tending the light for almost three decades, since her husband's death. But her intransigence got her the boot in 1863 at the age of 82. George Rickard, the keeper at Egmont Key, played a more complicated double game. He was stuck on the small island at the mouth of Tampa Bay, halfway up Florida's west coast. Surrounded by Union ships, he put on a friendly face, but at his first chance he dismantled the lens and smuggled it past the blockade into Tampa, making the west coast of Florida as dark as the eastern side.



Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse housed a new revolving, first-order lens, which a Confederate raiding party dismantled and hid nearby. Originally printed in *Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War* by Frank Leslie, 1896.

The Gulf Coast Lights

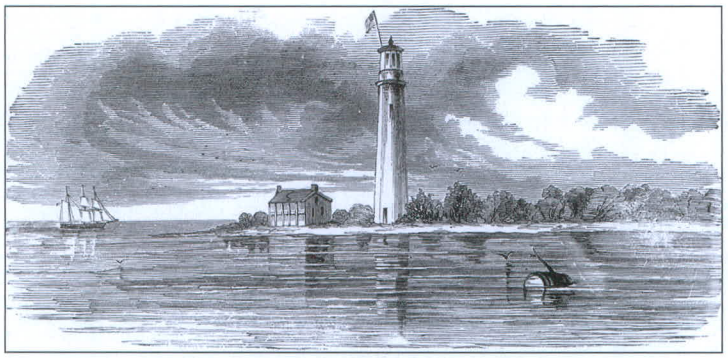
Jefferson Davis certainly appreciated the value of a good lighthouse. Indeed, the state of Mississippi, which he served as congressman and senator before the Confederacy elected him president, owed nearly all its coastal lights to his efforts. Like nearly all the American advocates of the Fresnel lens, Davis was a West Point graduate. In an engineering course his freshman year, he was greatly impressed with his teaching assistant, A. D. Bache, a senior about to graduate at the head of his class. Years later, Davis recalled, "He had a power of demonstration beyond that of any man I ever heard."

The two became close friends in 1845, when both found themselves in Washington, D.C., while Davis served in the House of Representatives and Bache was the newly appointed head of the Coast Survey. At one intimate party at the Coast Survey headquarters, the normally quiet and serious Davis drank enough of Bache's Rhine wine to regale the group with Indian songs he had learned out West. His social circle was exceptionally science-minded. It included Lighthouse Board members Joseph Henry and Joseph Totten, as well as Secretary of the Treasury Robert Walker, who headed the board. Davis looked to bring the benefits of modern technology to Mississippi, which had a single, unimpressive lighthouse at Round Island. He campaigned on the promise to better light the state's coast, and in 1847 convinced Congress to appropriate funds for three lighthouses—at Biloxi, Ship Island, and Chandeleur (today part of Louisiana).

The lighthouse at Biloxi went up quickly, its original nine brass reflectors replaced with a Fresnel lens by the start of the Civil War. Mary Reynolds, a widow raising several orphan children, was the keeper. She dutifully extinguished the light when war broke out, but the lighthouse remained a source of tension. An armed posse, including the town's mayor, calling themselves "Home Guards," demanded she relinquish the key to them, and, she suspected, they began stealing its oil for private use. Petitioning the governor for protection (and stressing that she was "a woman entirely unprotected"), she managed to stay on as keeper through the end of the war.

Farther south, on Ship Island, the stakes were higher. The site had been Jefferson Davis's pet project in Congress: he had promised to develop a navy yard there, and leaned heavily on Bache's Coast Survey as proof of its suitability. It was a great harbor, both deep and

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Although the Union flag flew at the Tampa Bay Lighthouse, located on an island at the mouth of the bay, the keeper's loyalties were with the South, and he smuggled the lens to Confederate forces on the mainland. Originally printed in *Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War* by Frank Leslie, 1896.

protected. Its lighthouse was lit in 1853 and outfitted with a lens in 1856; the accompanying military fort was still under construction when the war broke out. Confederate forces moved quickly to secure the fort and shore up its unfinished walls with timbers and sand bags. When the USS *Massachusetts* arrived on July 9, 1861, as part of the blockade, the light was already out. Ship and fort briefly exchanged cannon fire, and then Union Commander Melancton Smith (a lighthouse inspector before the war) ordered the ship south, to secure the lens in the Chandeleur Lighthouse before it, too, fell into rebel hands.

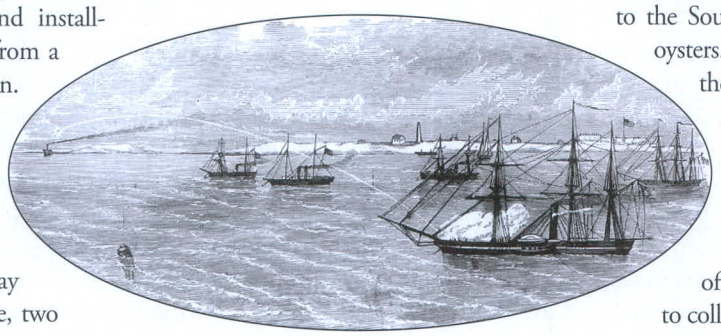
By September the Confederates had left Ship Island, taking the lens with them. Their parting action was to set the tower on fire. Even with a charred tower, though, this small island, with its deep harbor and accessible drinking water, was a strategic goldmine. Union troops moved in immediately and set about restoring the lighthouse, using an old mast from a Confederate ship to build the lighthouse's new staircase and installing a fourth-order lens salvaged from a warehouse on Lake Pontchartrain. By November 14, 1862, they had relit the light, blacking out the north-facing windows so the Confederate runners could not use it.

Ship Island was about halfway between New Orleans and Mobile, two ports that took on new importance as the Union's blockading strategy evolved. A new plan, nicknamed the Anaconda because it proposed to squeeze the Confederate forces from all sides, called for the navy to control both the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi River and work its way to the middle. New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi, thus became a crucial target. And Ship Island was the natural base from which to attack it.

New Orleans was by far the largest and wealthiest city in the South, and a major American port. More than a dozen lighthouses illuminated its waters, to guide ships through the maze of passes into Lake Pontchartrain. As Union forces arrived for the blockade in the summer of 1861, they anchored ships right by the lighthouses marking the three major entries: South Pass, Southwest Pass, and Pass a l'Outre—lonely outposts in a strange landscape where marsh melted imperceptibly into ocean. The keepers were isolated and therefore unaware of the situation. Which is why, well after the Confederate call in April to extinguish the lights on the Southern coast, they had kept theirs burning. Their sympathies were not in question. Manuel Moreno, the Southwest Pass Lighthouse keeper, declared himself as "in favor of Southern rights as anyone, and shall continue so to be." But he was left without instructions: "I am in this deserted place, ignorant of what is transpiring out of it: occasionally I get a chance of procuring a newspaper, and from what a little I can learn through them, I have acquired evidence enough to induce me to believe, that we ought to have about six muskets & few pistols, and Powder & Balls, so as to be ready at all times to resist any attack that may be made upon this establishment." Left to his own devices, he improvised, blacking out one side of the lantern toward the blockaders and letting the light shine toward the shore. The man never did get his "Powder & Balls." There was little he could do when the captain of the USS *Powhatan* came ashore, accompanied by 12 men. Their visit could hardly be described as "an attack." The captain claimed they had come "for amusement" and expressed surprise that anyone was there. Their only activity was to hunt for oysters, which Moreno, perhaps with some pleasure, noted was done in the wrong spot.

Moreno no doubt hoped his half-blocked light would help the blockade runners, which typically waited in an area called Head of Passes, where the various routes came together, until they found a way to slip past the Union steamers stationed at the entrances. In June of 1861, the CSS *Sumter*, captained by none other than Raphael Semmes, paused there. He noted that the lighthouses "had been strangely overlooked," and immediately sent a boat to disable the South Pass light. His men took everything they could, including the lens and the oil. Pass a l'Outre was next. Here, they were directly under the Union guns, so the best they could do was break open the oil casks and remove the lamps.

Semmes saw a hole in the blockade and sneaked out before he was able to deactivate the Southwest Pass Lighthouse. The Union did not wait for another attempt. On July 5, thirty armed men from the *Powhatan* returned to the Southwest Pass, this time not to dig oysters. They brought a mechanic and all the necessary tools with them to dismantle the lens. "All my resistance was in vain," Moreno reported. In two to three hours the lighthouse apparatus was gone. Five days later, the USS *Brooklyn*, stationed off the Pass a l'Outre light, sent a boat to collect its lens, which Semmes had not had a chance to dismantle.

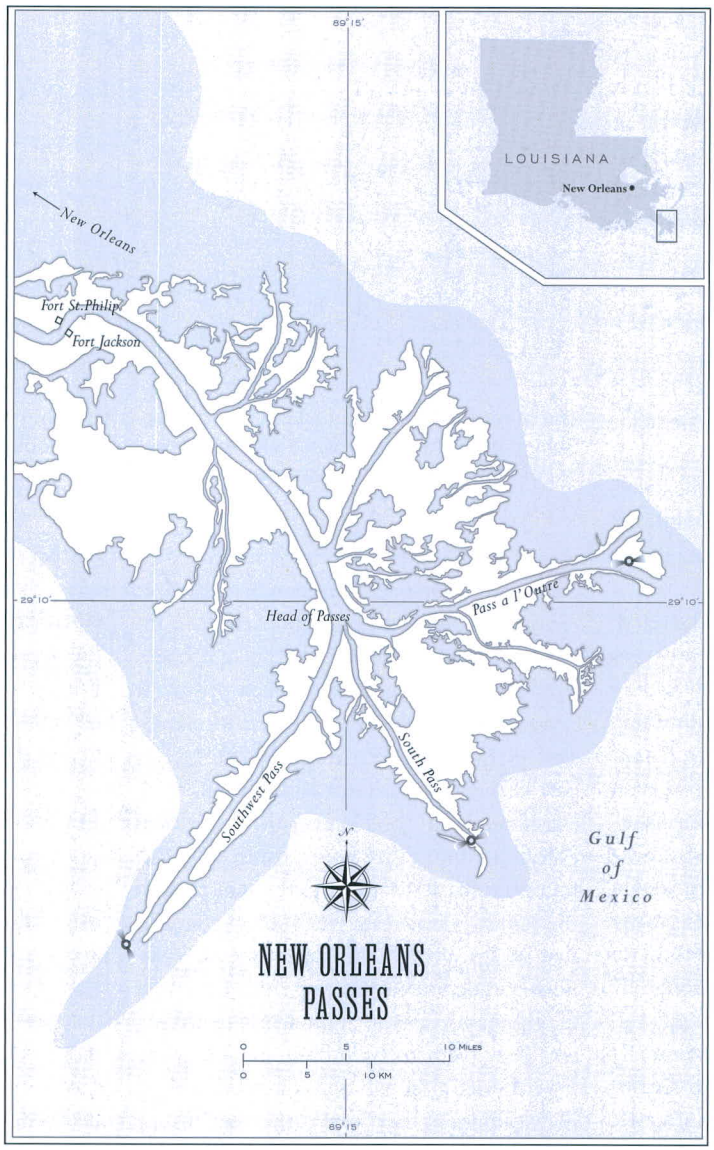


Ship Island, under Union control, as the USS *Mississippi* (in the foreground) fires on a Confederate ship. Originally printed in *Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War* by Frank Leslie, 1896.

Union ships may have controlled the entrances to the passes, but the port of New Orleans, almost a hundred miles upriver, remained in Confederate hands. Forts Jackson and St. Philip, a

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few miles up from the Head of Passes, guarded the route to the city from opposite sides of the channel. Flag Officer David Farragut had spent months assembling a fleet on Ship Island to attack the forts, and on April 8, 1862, he lined his ships up below them and began the bombardment. After a week of steady bombing, the fleet forced its way past the forts and steamed upriver to the city itself. The lighthouses of the port and Lake Pontchartrain had largely stayed in operation until then (being too far from the coast to aid the blockaders). But as Union ships approached, Confederates removed the lenses and disabled the towers. The Bayou Bonfouca Lighthouse was so thoroughly burned that it never returned to service. In West Rigolets, the light was reactivated in November of 1862 with a ship's lantern; two days later, its keeper, Thomas Harrison, was found shot to death on the wharf outside the lighthouse. No one ever found out who did it, but the assumption was that someone was upset to see him working for the Union. He was the only lighthouse keeper to die in the line of duty during the Civil War.



Map of the Head of Passes by George Ward. Used by permission.

The fall of New Orleans was a massive blow to the South. The only major Confederate port left in the eastern Gulf of Mexico was Mobile Bay. After securing control of the Mississippi River, Farragut turned his attention to it, relentlessly completing the slow squeeze of Anaconda. In December of 1862, Union forces took control of Sand Island, the small island in the middle of Mobile Bay that housed its major lighthouse. The light had been up only three years; previously, ships had relied on the mainland's 1822 Mobile Point Lighthouse, whose Lewis reflectors could not keep them off the shoals, which stretched some 10 miles out. Sand Island Lighthouse was a beauty: built by army engineer and West Point graduate Danville Leadbetter, its 200-foot tower was the tallest on the Gulf Coast and was capped with a nine-foot first-order lens.

Leadbetter eventually became a general in the Confederate army, in charge of Mobile's fortifications. In Mobile, the army concentrated its defenses at Fort Morgan, located right next to Mobile Point Lighthouse (which had been downgraded to a harbor light and outfitted with a sixth-order Fresnel lens). When the Confederates abandoned Sand Island, which they deemed indefensible, they removed the costly first-order lens as they left. The Union forces, upon taking over the island, had to content themselves with installing a new but much smaller fourth-order lens. The tower, however, was so close to Fort Morgan that the Yankees could use it to spy on activities inside the ramparts. A band of Confederates, acting on their own accord, rowed out to the island to set fire to the lighthouse. Run off by the Union ships, their leader, John W. Glenn, swore he would return and "tumble the Light House down in their teeth." And he did. On February 23, 1863, he set off 70 pounds of gunpowder underneath the tower. Little was left but scattered bricks and a pathetic stump, as Glenn proudly reported to the general in charge. We can only imagine the general's feelings: Leadbetter had scarcely had time to see his most prominent engineering accomplishment in action.

Not all lighthouses destroyed in the Civil War were targets of such deliberate acts of Confederate sabotage. When Farragut, now an admiral, attacked on August 5, 1864, in the Battle of Mobile Bay, his fleet—exhorted to "Damn the torpedoes!"—passed directly in front of Fort Morgan. The fort received a good pounding, and the unfortunate lighthouse, which found itself in the line of fire, joined its replacement as a casualty of war.

Relighting

All in all, the South darkened or destroyed 164 lights as part of the war effort. Although the North controlled most of the coastline by the fall of 1862, it would take years to restore the work the Lighthouse Board had done. In the first year of the war, only the smaller light at Hatteras and a few minor ones in Chesapeake Bay had been relit (joining the Florida Key lights, which had never been extinguished). Insurance companies circulated petitions to the Lighthouse Board, requesting it to turn on the lights, and as Du Pont assured the board that at least parts of the coast were secure enough to relight, it began to make plans. In 1863 it sent William A. Goodwin, a rather rare combination of poet and civil engineer, to survey the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and oversee the installation of new lights. His poems often featured tragic

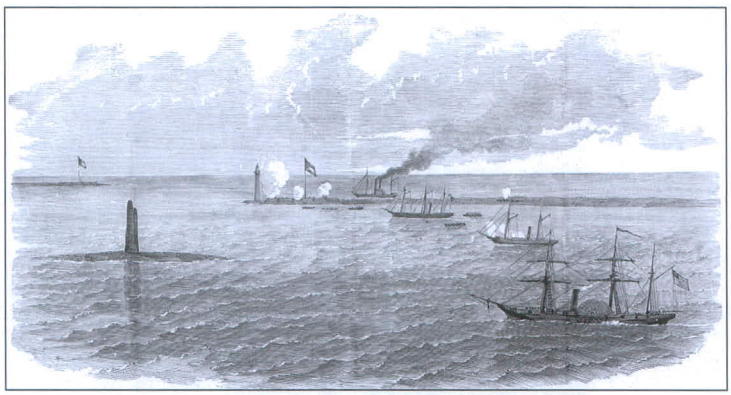
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shipwrecks; his directive in 1863 was to bring them to a minimum—no easy task, as a dismaying number of lighthouses had been blown up and many others were in danger of attack. The Cape Florida light, for example, remained dark in spite of the replacement lens sitting in Key West, the workmen waiting for the moment it was safe enough to install it. Replacing Pensacola's first-order lens was "not deemed advisable until the occupancy of a greater portion of the surrounding country . . . [has] placed the station beyond risk of damage and spoliation." These fears were not unfounded: an armed party tried to demolish the relit Chesapeake lights, and at Wade Point, North Carolina, the light was reestablished only to be destroyed even more thoroughly by a "guerilla force from the mainland."

But the Lighthouse Board persevered. Slowly, the lights flickered on—nearly two dozen by 1863—facilitating the Blockading Squadron's patrol of the coastline and shining as a tangible symbol of federal power. Union control of the coastline, so tenuous at first, was becoming more robust. Civil War historians continue to debate just how instrumental the Union blockade was in bringing down the Confederacy. Some estimate that as many as nine out of every ten runners got through in the first year of the blockade, although by the end of war the number had dropped to one in ten. The lack of supplies eventually took its toll as the South struggled to distribute food and resupply its forces. Surrender came in the spring of 1865.

The war over, some of the hidden lenses began to show up in the strangest places. Federal troops entering the deserted State Capitol in Raleigh found dozens of unmarked wooden boxes stacked higher than their heads on the second-floor balcony of the rotunda. Inside them nestled a trove of bronze castings, lamps, and clockwork: all the lighthouse equipment that had been shipped inland from North Carolina's coast. The governor had ordered the evacuation of the building just days earlier, provoking a scramble to get all of the particularly important or incriminating documents onto a train heading west. The heavy boxes filled with Fresnel lenses were left behind.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on the scene in Raleigh: "The glass concentric reflectors of Fresnel are viewed with novel curiosity by the Western men, to whom lighthouse paraphernalia is something new."



The burnt stump of Sand Island Lighthouse is visible in the foreground. Behind it is the Mobile Point Lighthouse, next to the smoke from the guns of Fort Morgan. Source unknown.

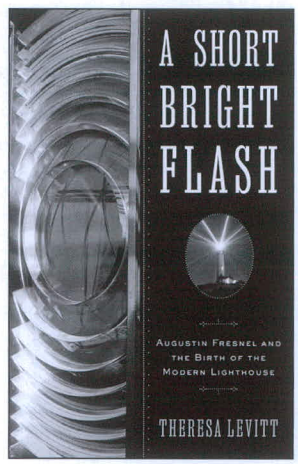
Prisms were a prime find for souvenir hunters. As army engineer Montgomery Meigs, in charge of sending the equipment north, informed Shubrick, still head of the Lighthouse Board, "I learn that some broken prisms or portion of lenses have been seen in possession of boys in the streets, but the greater part of the lens apparatus will, I think, reach Washington in good order." Meigs packed everything into thirty boxes, using papers he found strewn across the Capitol floor to wrap the items. It was only well into the process that Meigs noticed the papers were revolutionary documents bearing the signatures of Thomas Jefferson, John Knox, and others. They seem to have been suitable packing material, although once the boxes arrived in Washington, they were turned over to the secretary of the treasury, who gave them a more fitting place in the archives.

The Hatteras lens turned up only months later, in August, in Henderson, North Carolina. Some of the local residents had removed choice pieces from the lens and thought the intricate glasswork would fetch a nice ransom. Instead, it brought the full attention of the U.S. Army, which quickly claimed the federal property. The lens was soon on its way to the Lighthouse Board's depot on Staten Island, New York, joining the growing number of lenses that had been found submerged in creeks, buried in the sand, or hidden in storehouses (not to mention the discarded remnants of deliberate sabotage). The twisted frames and chipped, cracked, broken, or missing prisms accumulated well beyond the capacity of the depot's attendant lamp shop, and the board decided to return them to Paris, for Sautter and Lepaute to repair the very same lenses they had supplied throughout the 1850s. Shubrick begged the French lensmakers to work quickly, in order that "the commerce of the world be benefitted thereby." The board also turned to a new supplier, Barbier & Fenestre, founded in 1860 by two Parisians, Frédéric Barbier and Stanislas Fenestre. The company's very first lens went to the United States, replacing the damaged fourth-order lens at the Southwest Reef Lighthouse in Louisiana. But there were over 100 lenses to repair, and not until seven years after the war's end was the southern coastline completely relit.

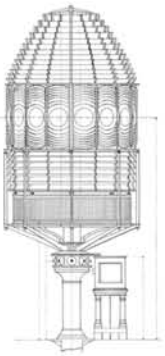
Jefferson Davis remained close to the lighthouses he helped get built. He retired to the estate of Beauvoir, on the Mississippi coast, with a view of the Biloxi Lighthouse from his front porch. Beauvoir and the Biloxi Lighthouse, both constructed the same year, existed side by side for decades, the former housing the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library after his death. The two parted ways when Hurricane Katrina came ashore in 2005, leaving Beauvoir swamped by the storm surge and the Biloxi Lighthouse one of the few structures still standing on the coast.

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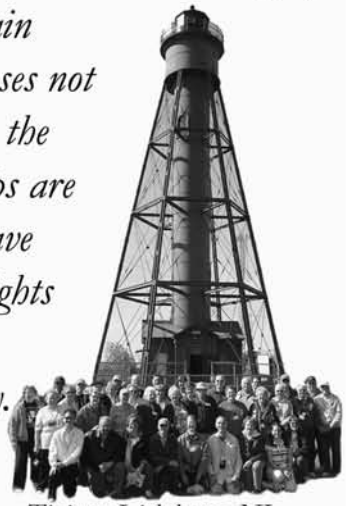
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