Pages from the Past

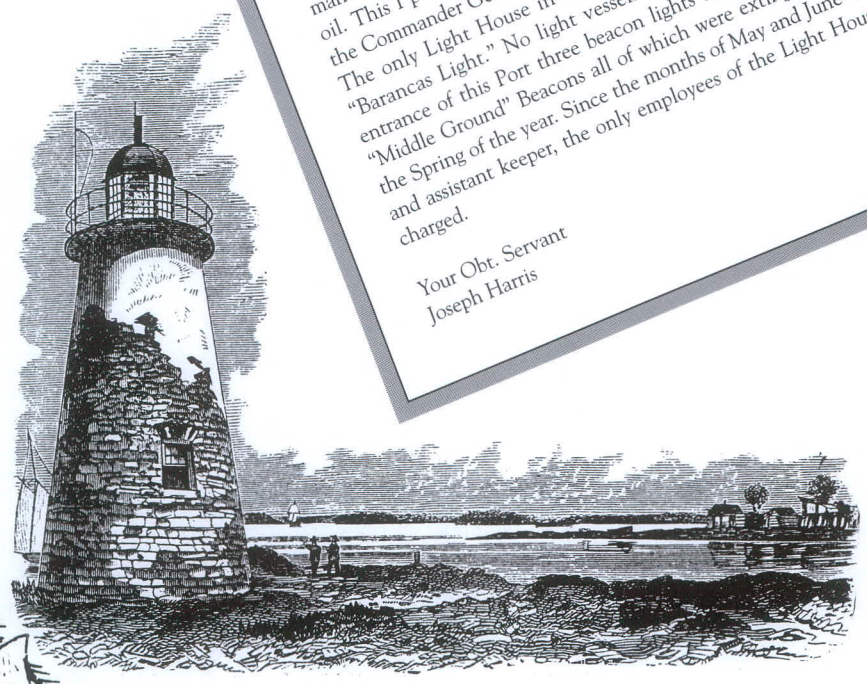
Letters of the Confederate States Lighthouse Bureau

Custom House, Pensacola, FL — December 5, 1861

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 9th of November Ultimo I beg to state that the only Lighthouse Property secured by me, and now in my charge, is the machinery and apparatus for exhibiting the light near Barrancas at the entrance of this Port. These articles I was directed by the Chief of the Light-house Bureau to remove and secure in the month of May last. The remainder of the property I was directed to have locked up in the Light House and to possess myself of the keys. This I did and the enclosed inventory will show that articles were then on hand. As the Light House is some ten miles from here and in the center of our military occupation, combined with the fact that all the keepers were discharged, to all intent and purposes past from my supervision. The consequence has been that the officers stationed there have ordered the door to be broken open to get different articles within for army purposes. Of a fact that I was apprised by Samuel Glass late keeper of said Light House, who, the day after his discharge had gone down to the Light House to attend to private business. Nothing remains in the Light House as I am informed by E. Berner (the person placed at the Light House by the Commanding Officer with certain instructions), but about forty gallons of sperm oil. This I presume will show the same for the remainder of the property, as the Commander General seldom lets anyone pass the line upon any business. The only Light House in my district is the one above, usually called the "Barancas Light." No light vessels and no buoy tenders. There are at the entrance of this Port three beacon lights called "Bar," "Caycas Shoals," and "Middle Ground" Beacons all of which were extinguished by the military in the Spring of the year. Since the months of May and June Ultimo, the Keeper and assistant keeper, the only employees of the Light House, have been discharged.

Your Obt. Servant
Joseph Harris



Mobile — Oct. 2, 1861

To: C.G. Menninger, Secretary of the Treasury

Sir,

I have the honor to enclose herewith the account of Mr. F.A. Malone for his services as clerk to the Lighthouse Inspector for this District for the month of July last.

When the state of Alabama took in charge the Lighthouse Establishment on her coast all the employees of the U.S. Government in that department who desired to retain their situations were authorized to do so by the governor of the state and the Superintendent of Lighthouse for this District retained Mr. Malone as clerk to the Inspector. He has been employed in that capacity for several months previously and there was neither order or authority to discharge him until the receipt of an order by me, Cdr. Ferrand as Chief of the Lighthouse Bureau, to lay up the lighthouse tender and to remove all the public property from the light stations, which was received late in the month of July. After this an account had to be taken of all the property in my charge in order to transfer it, in obedience to instructions, to the Superintendent of Light Houses for the District. Mr. Malone's services were also lately required up to the end of the month of July and there was no authority to discharge him before near that date, and I therefore respectfully request that he may be allowed the amount of his pay for that month. He is a faithful and efficient Clerk devoted to the service of the government, and to deprive him of the small sum, so justly due him would seem an act of injustice, of which, I am sure, you would not willingly be considered capable and could not be if you could be made agreeable with the services and character of the gentleman in question.

I am, sir, respectfully,
Your o'bn't servant
Jas. Johnston, LH Insp. 3rd District (Mobile)

To: Thomas E. Martin, Acting Chief of the LH Bureau — Dec. 18, 1861

Sir,

Your letter of the 10th inst. acknowledging the receipt of inventory of Lt. Ho, property in this district, and instructing me to possess myself of the oil, has been received. On yesterday I deputized my son to proceed to the Lt. Ho. and obtain permission from Gen. Bragg to remove the oil. Gen. Bragg gave his consent, but suggested that it was as secure there as it would be here, and also stated that, as it was needed for military purposes, it would be more convenient where it is now kept. I find also that I was wrongly informed as to the quantity of oil on hand. There being now between 300 and 400 gallons, instead of 40, as hitherto represented. I would beg leave to state that much difficulty and expense will attend the removal of the oil to this place, where it will be necessary to incur the expense of storage also. I am also informed that Gen. Bragg will need the oil from time to time for army use and must have it, whether removed or not, by making a requisition for it upon me. I would therefore respectfully request you to instruct me at your earliest convenience in this matter, mentioning further, however, that Gen. Bragg has a person to take care of the oil, and to issue it, only upon the order of the army Quartermaster.

Very respectfully Jos. Fierras, Sup. of Lights

To: Thomas Martin, Acting Chief of the Lighthouse Bureau
From: Custom House, Pensacola, FL — February 1, 1862

Sir,

Enclosed herewith I have the honor to transmit to you a receipt of Lt. L.B. DuBerry, CSA, of the oil taken at the Light House at Barancas by the military there stations, this receipt bearing date the 28th ult, shows only the quantity taken on that day, no account of any oil taken prior to this has ever been rendered to me. Since the receipt of your letter of the 29th of January last, I have sent a person to the lighthouse to ascertain the information you desired and find that there is not a gallon of oil left to be used in the case of an emergency. In compliance with your instruction of the 31st Dec. 1861 to reserve enough of the oil to relight the Light House should an order be given suddenly, I addressed the Commanding General at this place and stated that in accordance with instructions from the Light House Bureau and for the purposes outlined above the Light House should retain about 200 gallons of oil and the remainder would be transferred to the military under his command. It appears however that they have disregarded this [instruction] and have appropriated the whole of the oil for army purposes. At the time of the discharge of the last Light House Keeper Mr. Glass, he made an inventory of what articles then in existence at the Light House, this inventory shows that there were 680 gallons of oil, which is the amount that must have been, from time to time, in some manner or other, taken and used by the Army.

I remain very respectfully,
Joseph Fierras, Dist. Superintendent

To: Hon. C.G. Meminger, Sec. Treasury, Richmond — Sept. 12, 1862

Sir,

I have the honor to report to you as I am told that Mr. Paul Arnau Collector at St. Augustine is residing at present at that place and as the enemy has possession of the town of St. Augustine I am of course prevented from corresponding with him, I therefore take the liberty of addressing you.

I have had charge of Cape Canaveral light station since 1853 and at the time that the light was ordered to be extinguished and the lighthouse property to be removed, Mr. Arnau told me to still keep possession of the lighthouse and all lighthouse property for which I should receive half my former pay which was $500 per annum. All that I have received from Mr. Arnau since that time is sixty-two dollars and fifty cents. The lighthouse property in my possession is some 200 gallons of sperm oil, the reflectors fifteen in number with all the brushes and cleaning material connected with the light. Nothing was taken to St. Augustine except the lamps and clock, which I am told Arnau has given to the enemy. It has recently been reported that the Yankees were going to light the lights at Canaveral. I have hauled all the lighthouse property in my charge to my place on the river distant five miles from the light, but do not consider it secure from the enemy as we have traitors in this section. Please give me such instructions concerning it as you think proper that I may governed accordingly.

Your Obt. Servant
Mills Burnham
Keeper, Cape Canaveral

Sir,

The Insp. of the Lt. House District has been ordered to light the new screw pile Lighthouse at Merrills Shell Bank on the 10th day of August next and to remove at the same time the Lt. Ship. You will be pleased to commission a keeper and one assistant keeper for this new lighthouse. They will be receive a ration each and their pay will probably be fixed at $500 for the former and $400 for the latter, but of this you will be informed in due time.

When the old Lt. Vessel is brought in you will pay off and discharge the master and crew.

R. Semmert
Secretary

To: Mr. Thos. Martin, Act. Chief of the Conf. L.H. Bureau — June 17, 1863

Sir,

I have to report that the enemy have succeeded in getting possession of the oil and other property belonging to the Light-House at Jupiter.

I received the information from a Captain of a blockade runner, who was taken off Indian River Bar, and presume it can be relied on as true.

He was captured by the Gun Boat Sagamore, and saw the Lamps landed from her at Key West. He learned from the men on board that a party of men had been sent on shore for the purpose of searching them out, and had spent several days before they found them. I endeavored to place them beyond their reach, and hoped that they were safe and regret that my efforts were not successful.

The boxes containing the tools, wicks and cleaning material, concealed at Indian River, I hope are still safe. I should have gone down to look after them, but have had information that the river is still under Blockade, and no boat can pass up or down without great danger of being taken.

I would here beg leave to say, that in the present condition of things, I can render no service whatever to the Dept., this part of the State being under the entire control of the enemy. I have concluded to go with my family to Charleston until the troubles are over. As I intend to return to Indian River after the War is over, I would like to retain the appointment of Light Keeper if agreeable to the Dept. Should you think me entitled to pay for past services, please direct it to me at Charleston, S.C., where it will be thankfully acknowledged.

I am very respectfully
Your Obt Servant
James Paine, Keeper Jupiter Light

P.S. I had omitted to mention, that in leaving Indian River for this place I brought away the clock belonging to Jupiter Light, and as I have no safe place to leave it as I have thought it best to take it with me to Charleston, and keep it subject to the order of the Dept. J.P. — K.J.L.

To: Thos. Martin, Chief, Confederate Lighthouse Board — Jan. 15, 1863

Sir,

I beg leave to inform you that since the 26th of Oct. last the Yankees have had entire control of Indian River, from Jupiter Inlet to Bananna River, some 50 miles north of the Indian River Bar. They have blockaded both entrances to the river with war vessels and operate on the river with Launches and Barges, destroying and stealing wherever they go. They make such frequent visits to the lighthouse, that I was unable to remain any longer, without risk of being taken by them. I therefore left the Light after removing the oil and placing it in the Mangroves, where I think they will be unable to find it. After leaving Jupiter I went to my place on Indian River, but was driven from there by them, they stole and destroyed nearly everything belonging to me. I was then compelled to accept the hospitality of a neighbor for my wife and children, and even there they found me out, and made three attempts to capture me by coming to the house with an armed force of 30 or 40 men. They have stolen one of my boats along with the one belonging to the L. House and swear they intend to have me for robbing the Lt. House of the property. In consequence of their threats, I was compelled to build a Camp in the woods, and have slept away from my family for about two months.

Under all circumstances, I thought it best to come to this place, where I arrived on the 15th Ultimo and thought it fit to make known to you my situation. I shall go down to Jupiter as soon as I think it safe to do so, to look after the property there, the property I had with me at Indian River, I have carefully stored away in a Palmetto Hut in the woods where I think it will be safe.

Trusting what I have done may be approved by the Dept.

I am very respectfully
Your Obdt Servant
James Paine



Dog Island Light Station, located near Tampa Bay, FL, was established in 1838. It is shown here in the fall of 1859. During the unpleasantries between the states the light station was often visited by federal sailors, and "ladies" from nearby Appalachicola. Photo by M. Fontaine, courtesy of the Coast Guard Archives.

To: F.H. Hatch — Collector of Customs, New Orleans — Oct. 14, 1861

Sir,

In compliance with your orders communicated to me on the 8th inst. I left for Berwick's Bay on the morning of the Ninth with dispatches to Lieut. Shyock, Commanding Officer at Broussard City. The terminus of the Rail Road and J.H. Smith, a planter living five miles above Brashier City on the bay. On delivering your dispatches to Lieut. Shyock, he informed me that he would render me all the assistance in his power but that he had neither men nor boats, nor did not know where I could find the property in which I was in search. On inquiring of some fishermen of Brashier I was informed that the property was deposited on the opposite side of the bay at Berwick City. I crossed over and found the fixtures taken from Ship Shoal Lighthouse deposited in a careful manner in a building occupied as a Custom House at Berwick City. I then went in search of Mr. J.H. Smith who I was informed was at Fort Berwick three miles below the terminus of the Rail Road and ascertained that he as at Fort La Chine nine miles below the terminus. I returned immediately on the same steamer that I went down on and after a short stay proceeded down to the fort where I fortunately found Mr. Smith with a number of his negroes engaged in getting the Fort in condition and moving guns. I presented with your dispatch on reading of which he was very much surprised and that he had at all times been ready and willing to deliver and property to any person legally authorized to receive it. I asked him if he would accompany me to Berwick City and deliver the property to me which he consented to do without the least hesitation. On arriving at Brashier he found his partner, Capt. Samual Parker, absent, but ascertained that he would return during the night with his steamboat loaded with live oak timber and that he had in his possession a list of all the fixtures in the warehouse, his anxiety being so great to be at work with his negroes that consented to let him go on his promise to return by eight o'clock the next morning

and he faithfully kept his appointment as agreed. Capt. Parker arrived in the evening. I had a conversation with him regarding the property obtained from the Lighthouse and was much pleased with his candor and gentlemanly bearing, he was also much astonished to hear that they had refused to deliver the property to any person authorized to receive it and that he had furnished A.L. McMillan, Collector at Franklin copy of the invoice in his possession and two or three times asked him to get his authority to remove or take possession of it. On the morning of the 11th Inst. I crossed the bay to Berwick City accompanied by Mr. Smith and Capt. Parker and sent for Dr. R.C. White who joined us at the Customhouse of which the Dr. is acting as the Collector. Mr. Smith and Capt. Parker delivered to me the property taken from Ship Shoal Island Light House according to the inventory in possession of Mr. McMillan at Franklin. I giving my receipt for the same. The original Capt. Parker had in his valise, said valise being lost by the capsizing of a small boat during a gale of wind. I then transferred the property to Insp. A.C. White, acting as Collector at Berwick City subject to the orders of A.L. McMillan Collector of the Port of Franklin asking the doctor's receipt for the same which I have since delivered to me. I cannot close without returning my thanks to Mr. Vince and Mr. Lawrence besides other gentlemen whom I cannot call by name at present for their business in giving me information and assistance in helping me in forwarding my mission. As regards Mr. Smith he regards the above named gentleman as a gentleman above reproach, having a plantation yielding a crop of from five to six hundred lbs. of sugar and no family, that he would not defraud the government but, on the contrary is helping and assisting with his negroes to give this government all his aid in his power and nearly kept the property in his possession to save the government the least possible outlay. Capt. Parker is represented as doing the same having with his steamboat landed at the two Forts mentioned, six 32 pounders and done many other things without charge to this government. His character stands high with all whom I conversed as a gentleman above reproach. Mr. Vincent likewise took down with me several negroes to work in the Fort and displays great activity in forwarding our defenses. I will now start the circumstances in relation to securing of the property at Ship Shoal Light House. I am informed that a Lieut. of the Navy went down to secure the property but returned without succeeding and then Capt. Parker and Mr. Smith taking a boat together with a crew of six men, after three attempts, succeeded in securing the property in the face of an enemies vessel who had previously driven them off. They encountered many dangers but finally succeeded in placing the fixtures, in good condition, at Berwick City when they delivered them to me upon your order.

L.L. Selleck
Inspector, U.S. Customs, New Orleans

To: Secretary of the Light House Board — Jan. 5, 1863

Sir,

In the absence of T. Sanford, Collector and Superintendent of Lights for this District, it devolves upon me, as his Deputy, to have the honor of stating a few facts in regards to the condition of the Lighthouse property here.

Your letter of May 1862, addressed to Mr. Sanford ordering the removal of the Lighthouse fixtures to a place of safety, was received and duly attended to by me, and the lamps, apparatus, glasses, etc., were shipped in good order to Mr. Sanford at Montgomery, AL where they are presently stored.

Before the removal of the property, in February or March 1862 (I have not the records here) and order came from you to deliver to the proper officers of the Navy here, cables, chain, iron, and *all other articles* in the Lighthouse Warehouse, they might require for the use of the gunboats Garrier, and Morgan and the ram Baltic, then under construction. One of the articles needed for the machinery, was the sperm oil, of which there were in store received from the Lighthouses at Mobile Point and Sand Island, some 600 gallons, besides 80 gallons from the Pascagula River Lighthouse; I would here state in reference to this last oil, that the keeper of that Lighthouse, a Mr. Ballande, made some difficulty to deliver it, for reason of 6 months salary due him, the Superintendent of the district having left his post at Shieldsboro, MS. I became responsible for his pay, he delivered the oil, is not yet paid, and urges his claim on me.

The quantity of oil supplied to the Navy Dept. here, is near 460 gallons, leaving on hand about 200 gallons, I have reason to believe, though would not be able to prove it, that it has been wasted, or used for lighting purposes, when it ought only to be lubrication, for the vessels are all the while lying at anchor in the river, only one going down the Bay every week for police duty — and the ram Baltic not at all, and she has been furnished with already 100 gallons.

This quantity of oil cannot be procured at any price — I have therefore deemed it my duty to report this state of affairs, and respectfully beg you to inform me, if any more oil should be furnished on such requisitions as heretofore mentioned. I will wait for and abide to your orders.

J.C. Colsson, Dept Collector
District of Mobile

To: Thos. Martin — March 5, 1864

Sir,

A requisition is made on me by the Chief Engineer of this Dept., approved by Admiral Buchannan, for ten (10) gallons of sperm oil for use on channel obstructions in Mobile Bay. In your communication of 22 January 1863 I am instructed to decline furnishing any more oil, to avoid the embarrassment that would result from a total absence of oil when orders may be given to relight.

I would respectfully suggest that the lighthouses and towers in this district having been torn down, for military purposes, and having on hand some two hundred gallons, the small quantity required would hardly be an object of embarrassment in the case above alluded to.

I will, however, wait for your decision.

Very Respectfully
Your Obnt Servant
J.C. Colson

Feb. 7, 1862

To: Chief of the Bureau, Richmond, VA
From: Custom House, Plymouth, N.C.

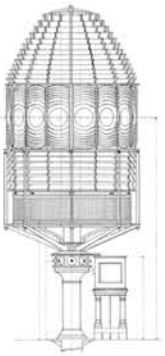
Sir,

Various vessels in this section have been apprehended and taken to Roanoke Island for the purpose of stopping up the channels to prevent the approach of the enemy. The use of the Roanoke River Light vessel for a like purpose has been broached to me at different times. I have replied in the negative, until advised to that use for that purpose by the Lighthouse Bureau and that no conflict of authority may take place. I desire information on that point. This vessel [was] recently newly repaired at a cost of $1,000 — made sharp and draws in ballast about 8 feet. In all events if it becomes necessary to use her either there or in this river for such purposes, all her fixtures that may be of use hereafter, such as lamps and the masts, standing rigging, hatches, etc. should be removed, and such as could not be stored, to be sold. I hope a sufficiency of vessels and pilings can be procured for all purposes, without the necessity of her use, although if the enemy [takes] the island, no doubt but that all public property will be taken or destroyed by them.

I am very respectively,
(illegible) Supt. of Lights



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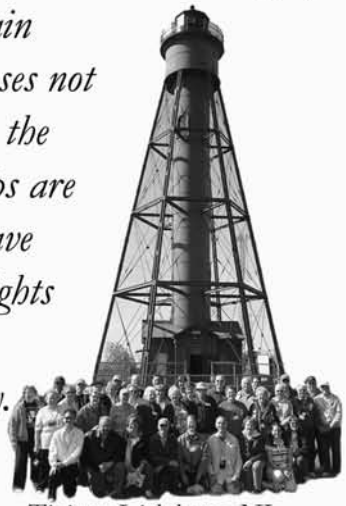
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