

## Cockspur Island Lighthouse

Clinging to the tip of Cockspur Island, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse has withstood crashing waves, the roar of cannons and the wrath of time. The forty-six-foot-tall brick lighthouse, poised on an islet off the southeastern tip of Cockspur Island, marks the South Channel of the Savannah River. Today the tower is one of only five surviving lighthouses in the state, and stands as a proud reminder of the rich history of coastal Georgia.

## Construction

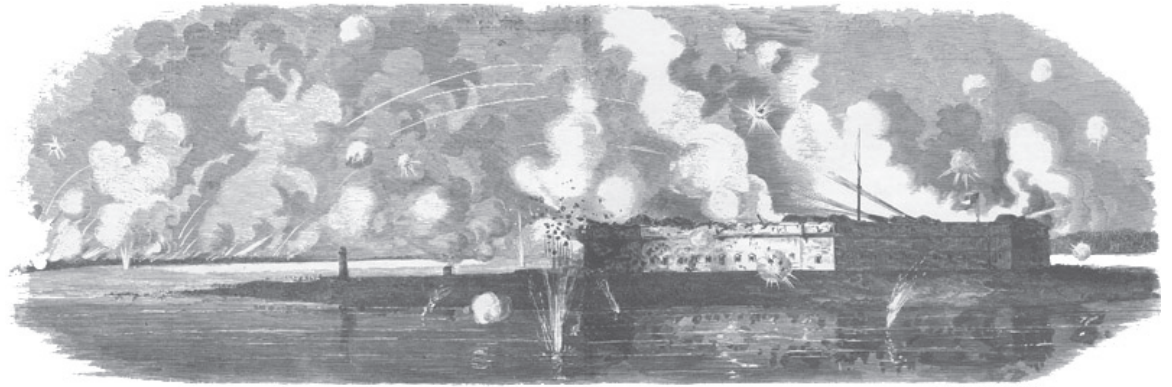
An earlier brick tower was built on this location between March 1837 and November 1839. This early tower was unlit, and served primarily as a day mark. In August 1848, John Norris, a noted New York architect, was contracted to supervise construction of an illuminated station. Norris designed several of Savannah's more notable structures including

the U.S. Customs House, the Hugh-Mercer house, and the Green-Meldrim house. For the lighthouse, Norris' duties were to "repair, alter, and put lanterns and lights on Cockspur Island. . .and to erect a suitable keeper's house." His tower housed a fixed white light using five lamps with 14-inch reflectors. The light was visible at a distance of nine miles.

## Early History

Officially commissioned in 1849, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse guided vessels to the bustling port of Savannah. In 1854, a massive hurricane destroyed the original tower as high winds and surging waters reeked havoc on Cockspur Island. In 1855, the tower was immediately rebuilt and expanded on its original

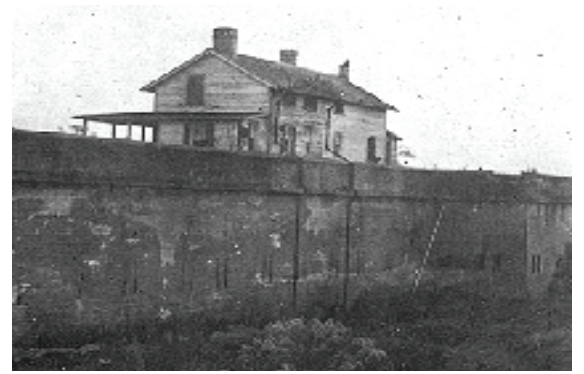
foundation. The light was soon re-lit. At the outbreak of the American Civil War, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse was extinguished by Confederate forces to hinder Union blockading efforts. On April 10, 1862, Union forces in eleven batteries along the northern shore of Tybee Island opened fire on Fort Pulaski.



*Despite being in direct line of fire during the bombardment of Fort Pulaski, the lighthouse survived mainly due to Union artillery firing shots at a higher angle, thus passing over the tower. Sketch taken from Leslie's Weekly, 1862.*

## Post-Civil War

After the war's end the lighthouse was again re-lit and painted white for use as a day mark. In 1881, a powerful hurricane struck Cockspur Island causing water to rise 23 feet above sea level. The storm surge filled the lighthouse interior and destroyed the keeper's residence. The great hurricane of 1893 forced the light keepers to flee to safety in the north-west stair tower of Fort Pulaski.



*Following the hurricane of 1893, the light keepers decided to move to higher ground, building a two-story frame house atop Fort Pulaski's massive walls.*

Although it survived the roar of cannons and numerous storms, the light could not withstand the impact of natural-and-man-made changes to the Savannah River. Over time the North Channel became deeper and more suitable for larger vessels. The South Channel gradually lost importance. On June 1, 1909, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse was officially extinguished.

## Restoration

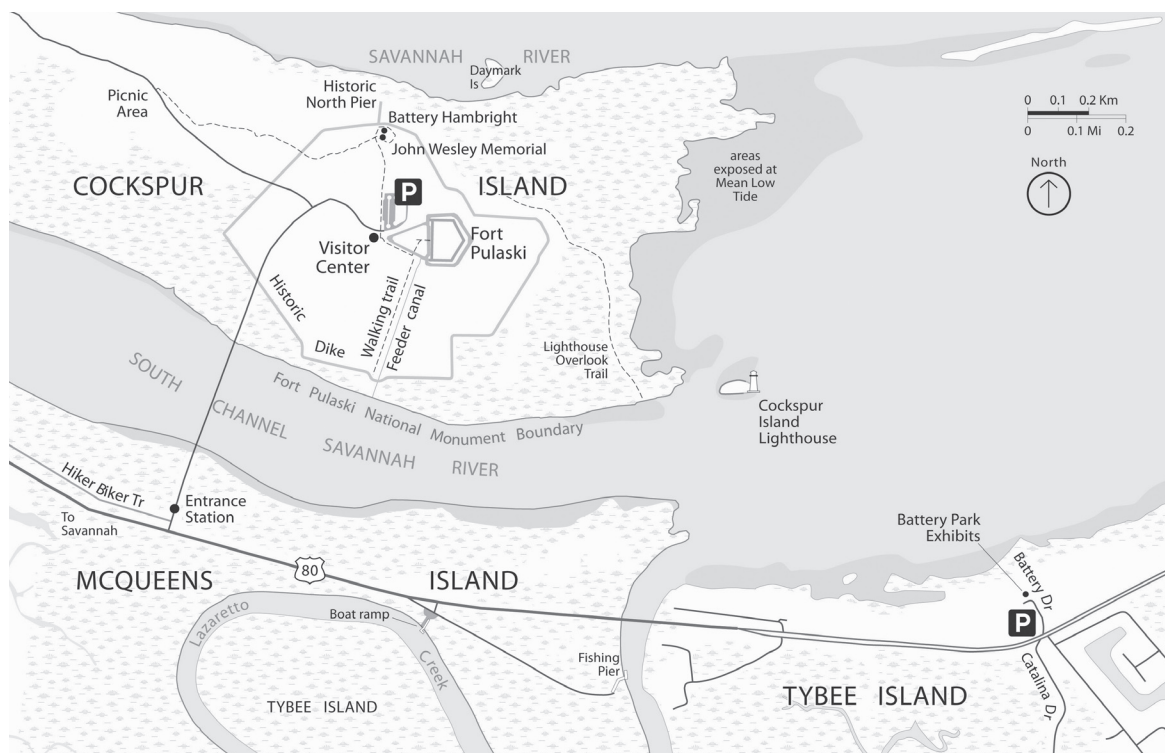
After being extinguished, the now vacant Cockspur Island Lighthouse passed through several owners, including the United States Coast Guard. By the late 1950s, the National Park Service looked into acquiring the historic lighthouse. On August 14, 1958, by presidential proclamation, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse officially became a part of Fort Pulaski National Monument.

The National Park Service is dedicated to the preservation of this historic marker. Continually battered by wind and water, the tower routinely needs repairs. Over the years work has been done to maintain the structure, including masonry and painting projects.

Today the lighthouse is open to the public, although access is limited depending on changing tides. Visitors wanting a closer view of the tower can explore the Lighthouse Overlook Trail winding around the tip of Cockspur Island.

With your assistance, Fort Pulaski National Monument and the National Park Service can better serve the needs of the Cockspur Island Lighthouse and help protect it for the enjoyment and education of future generations. Please ask how you can help.

## Lighthouse Overlook Trail



*The Lighthouse Overlook Trail begins north of the fort just beyond the historic dike. The .65-mile-long trail offers excellent views of Tybee Island, Fort Pulaski, and the Cockspur Island Lighthouse.*