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## Ancote Keys Lighthouse: Guiding Light To Safe Anchorage

by GEOFFREY MOHLMAN

Lighthouse. The term conjures mixed images—from the romantic to the horrific—of solitude, dense fog, blood-thirsty ghosts seeking revenge, gold-hungry pirates, reliability, safety, kissing lovers silhouetted by a beautiful sunset, or of a light keeper fighting the frigid raging waters of the North Atlantic in a seemingly futile attempt to save a shipwrecked damsel. Thanks to films such as John Carpenter's *The Fog* or Steve Sekely's 1963 science fiction classic *Day of the Triffids*, many of these visions persist in the American imagination. Although the noted lighthouse historian Francis Ross Holland Jr. asked forgiveness "for puncturing a few balloons of [lighthouse] romance," the balloons that remained afloat are as important as those that crashed to the ground.<sup>1</sup>

Lighthouses stimulated the development of Florida by providing safe passage to the ships and boats that brought goods and people to the land of flowers. When the United States acquired Florida, lighthouses helped guide the territory from an ailing Spanish outpost to one of the nation's most prosperous states during the twentieth century. Ancote Keys gave birth to a lighted aid to navigation in the middle of the country's lighthouse experience. Located on Florida's Gulf Coast near Tarpon Springs, Ancote Keys lighthouse embodies some romantic notions of lighthouses while refuting others. As the government erected the lighted beacons, the structures and the people who tended them became intimately linked to the communities that developed around the aids to navigation. The government intended Ancote Keys lighthouse to function as a small coastal light and as a marker for the Ancote River. Its importance grew during the early part of the twentieth century when Tarpon Springs entered the world market as the largest producer of sponges. The light served as a beacon to weary spongers returning from months at sea. The light keepers, when not conducting routine maintenance upon

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1. Francis Ross Holland Jr., *America's Lighthouses* (New York, 1988), ix.

the lighthouse, saved stranded boaters and served as tour guides to visitors interested in the light. Sadly, as improvements in lighthouse technology improved after World War II and Tarpon's sponge industry suffered setbacks, Anclote's lighthouse importance waned. Finally, in 1985 the Coast Guard decommissioned the lighthouse, but Tarpon Springs residents rallied to save the structure. Today, Anclote Keys lighthouse is a shell of its former self, but the battle continues to return the structure to its days of glory.

Though the Spanish invaded Florida in 1513 and established a permanent settlement nearly fifty years later, the state has a young legacy of lighthouse development. Rumors persist that the Spanish used watchtowers at St. Marks and St. Augustine as lighthouses sometime before 1819; however, little evidence exists backing such suppositions.<sup>2</sup> A structure that might have been used as an aid to navigation definitely existed in St. Augustine, but the question remains whether the Spanish operated it as a harbor beacon or a watchtower. This dearth of lighthouses is astounding considering that today Florida, a 58,560-square-mile peninsula with more than 1,000 miles of coast, is home to over thirty lighthouses.<sup>3</sup>

After the United States wrested control of Florida away from Spain in 1821, the federal government began constructing masonry lighthouses around the peninsula's 1,300-mile coastline, the first being at St. Augustine. As early as 1822, the government authorized a lighthouse survey of Florida, sparking the erection of aids to mariners along the keys. Even with this small building boom, Florida's lighthouse construction lagged behind that of the Northeast due to its small population—in 1821 Florida had less than 8,000 residents—and weak political influence at the federal level. Additionally, many parts of Florida, because of the lack of bedrock and the threat of hurricanes, presented an obstacle not overcome by engineers until 1836. Masonry structures were practical for sections of Florida but left much to be desired in other areas. When Englishman Alexander Mitchell designed a structure made of iron piles screwed into the sand, lighthouse engineers in Florida and other Gulf Coast states breathed a sigh of relief. The technology was imported to Florida and resulted in the erection of twelve screwpile lighthouses, the first being Carysfort Reef Lighthouse in

2. David L. Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico* (Alexandria, 1997), 1; Elinore DeWire, *Guide to Florida Lighthouses* (Englewood, 1987), 10-11.

3. Michael Gannon, *Florida: A Short History* (Gainesville, 1993), 34.



1852. Following closely on the heels of Carysfort Reef, the government established an iron screwpile lighthouse on Sand Key in 1853. The first Gulf Coast screwpile lighthouses were built at Galveston Bay, Texas, in 1854.<sup>4</sup>

Technological innovations such as screwpile lighthouses spurred the development of Florida's lighthouses. An 1851 federal government survey recommended building lighthouses fifty miles apart, allowing a mariner to travel the entire Gulf Coast in sight of a lighthouse. Old lights were gradually outfitted with Fresnel lenses and new lighthouses begun. Developed by the French physicist Augustin Fresnel in 1822, the Fresnel lens consisted of prisms that gathered the previously unused rays of light into a single beam, magnifying many times their original intensity. Fresnel could control the strength of the light thus creating a range of lenses. A first-order lens was the most powerful and the sixth-order lens, utilized predominantly in harbor lights, the weakest. Because it produced a far superior range and intensity of light than that of other contemporary light technology, Europeans quickly adopted the Fresnel lens. Not until the organization of the Light-House Board in 1852 did the United States actively pursue the use of the Fresnel lens.

The Civil War brought a halt to lighthouse construction throughout the South, and the Light-House Board did not get back on track until the 1870s. Along with screwpile lighthouses, the introduction of cast-iron skeletal structures in 1873 in Louisiana caused a rebirth of lighthouse construction. By 1887, the United States had a total of 899 lighthouses and lighted beacons, with twenty lighthouses in the Seventh District (the district including Ancote Keys). Two years later Florida boasted twelve first-order lights, more than Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York combined.<sup>5</sup> In all, the federal government built

4. Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 7, 24, 29; DeWire, *Guide to Florida Lighthouses*, 10-15; Gannon, *Florida*, 30; Holland, *America's Lighthouses*, 120-21, 131; Dean Love, *Lighthouses of the Florida Keys* (Key West, 1992), 91, 98-100; Kevin M. McCarthy, *Florida Lighthouses* (Gainesville, 1990), 1-2; National Maritime Initiative, *1994 Inventory of Historic Light Stations* (Washington, 1994), 51, 58.

5. Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 7-9, 20-21; DeWire, *Guide to Florida Lighthouses*, 10; D. P. Heap, *Ancient and Modern Light-Houses* (Boston, 1889), 161; Holland, *America's Lighthouses*, 18-23; United States Treasury Department, Light-House Service, Light-House Board, *Annual Report of the Light-House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1887* (Washington, 1887), 7, 12, 65 (hereafter USLHB, *Annual Report*).

thirty-seven Florida lighthouses, with thirty-three (including rear range lights) standing today. Of the state's lighthouses still in existence, four were lit between 1800 and 1849, twenty-three between 1850 and 1899, and six between 1900 and 1949. Yet because of storms and shifting sands, many lights had to be rebuilt; much of this work occurred during the latter half of the nineteenth century. With advancements in technology, especially the adaption of electricity and the development of lenses powered by light bulbs instead of oil wicks, lightkeepers' jobs were slowly phased out. As the twentieth century and its lighthouse automation technology matured into adulthood, it was no longer necessary to have full-time keepers living on the lighthouse reservation, filling the lamps with oil, trimming the wicks, and lighting the lamps. Automation of Florida's lights was a twentieth-century phenomenon. Seven lighthouses were automated between 1900 and 1949 and nineteen since 1950.<sup>6</sup>

Anclote Keys lighthouse bore witness to many of these technological advancements. Lying in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida's west coast, Anclote Keys (a cluster of islands that includes Anclote Key, North Anclote Key, North Keys, and Dutchman Key) is approximately seven miles west of Tarpon Springs, a community known for its Greek population and the sponge industry. Anclote Key, the main island where the lighthouse stands, consists of approximately 180 acres and is 2.5 miles long. Presently, Pinellas and Pasco Counties split the island, with the lighthouse reservation on the southern end falling in Pinellas and the rest of the island in Pasco.<sup>7</sup> The only known inhabitants of the island included seventeenth-century pirates and the lighthouse keepers.<sup>8</sup>

The Spanish term "Anclote" means "safe anchorage," denoting the protected sound east of the keys. In 1682, two hundred years

6. DeWire, *Guide to Florida Lighthouses*; Holland, *America's Lighthouses*, 212-13; National Maritime Initiative, *1994 Inventory of Historic Light Stations*, 47-64. The National Maritime Initiative does not list dates for automation of seven lights.

7. At present the island is only accessible by boat, although plans for a causeway connecting to the mainland have been discussed on and off since 1977.

8. Mark F. Boyd, "The Fortifications at San Marcos de Apalache," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 15 (July 1936), 5; *St. Petersburg Times*, July 12, 1977; Neil Hurley, "Anclote Keys Light," c. 1990s, unpublished manuscript in author's possession; untitled and unauthored manuscript about Anclote Keys, Anclote Lighthouse History—letters file, Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society (hereafter TSAHS); United States National Park Service, Williamsport Preservation Training Center, *Anclote Key Light Station, Anclote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report* (Frederick, Md., 1996), 13.



before the erection of the lighthouse, four hundred French and English pirates used the island as a base of operations, capturing seven trading ships and pillaging the countryside. These pirates even raided a Spanish fort at St. Marks, burning it to the ground. From their island base, the buccaneers plundered Florida's interior and took prisoners while planning to invade St. Augustine. Finally, a group of Timucua Indians overran the pirates at a hacienda along the Suwanee River, ending the band's reign of terror.<sup>9</sup>

Like the rest of Florida, Ancote Keys received consideration as a lighthouse contender only after the United States took control of the peninsula. The process moved slowly. In 1851, the newly formed Light-House Board proposed constructing a lighthouse with a first-order lens on Ancote Keys. Out of thirty-three recommended lights arranged in order of importance, Ancote ranked second to last. On December 10, 1856, the board applied for reservation of Ancote Keys for lighthouse purposes. Notwithstanding the low priority, the board's proposal prompted the Treasury Department to remove the keys from public sale in 1866, yet due to a technicality they were not officially withdrawn. On January 9, 1878, the islands were temporarily set aside by the Commissioner of the General Land Office from a request made by the Secretary of the Interior.<sup>10</sup>

Local agitation for an Ancote Keys lighthouse helped spur the Light-House Board to act on its previous recommendation. Captain Samuel Edward Hope moved to the mouth of the Ancote River in August 1878, and in time a village would form there called Ancote. A former land surveyor for the federal government and a veteran of the Third Seminole and Civil Wars, Hope ran and won a term in the state legislature in 1879. Serving on the Committee on

9. Boyd, "The Fortifications at San Marcos de Apalache," 5; Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37; Allen Morris, *Florida Place Names* (Sarasota, 1995), 7.

10. Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37; Executive Order by President Grover Cleveland, February 1, 1886, Record Group 26 (RG 26), entry 66, box 34, file Ancote Keys Fla. 11/2, National Archives and Record Services; Peter C. Hains to Treasury Department, Light House Board, December 31, 1877, RG 26, entry 66, box 34, file Ancote Keys Fla 11/2; A. A. Jones to the Secretary of Commerce, circa 1914, RG 26, entry 50, box 1022, file 1624-1626; "Report of the Officers Constituting The Light-House Board, February 6, 1852," Serial Set 642, House Executive Documents No. 55, 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Volume 7, 1851-1852 (Washington, 1852), 128, 130.

Railroads and Canals, Hope wrote a resolution requesting Congress to build a lighthouse on Anclote Keys. On January 16, 1879, the resolution unanimously passed the Florida House. It took the federal government another eight years before it built the lighthouse.<sup>11</sup>

In 1884, the Light-House Board requested \$20,000 to erect a lighthouse on the south end of the key. On March 3, 1885, the board received from Congress a \$17,500 appropriation, but this was not enough to finish the job. Modeled after the iron skeletal lighthouse at Cape San Blas, Florida, which cost \$35,000, the proposed Anclote Keys lighthouse was more costly than the allocated amount. Consequently, the board asked Congress to set aside an additional \$17,500, which it received on August 4, 1886. During the interim, President Grover Cleveland, on February 1, 1886, declared Anclote Keys a permanent lighthouse reservation.<sup>12</sup> The reservation's legal description encompassed the entire main island currently known as Anclote Key.<sup>13</sup> Several months later the Light-House Board sent out bid requests on the metalwork for Anclote's lighthouse, and on October 13, 1886, Colwell Iron Works, in New York City, signed the contract for a sum of \$10,700, promising to deliver the material to the keys by March 1, 1887.<sup>14</sup>

From lumber to bricks, the federal government favored companies in New Orleans, Louisiana, when providing contracts for Anclote Keys. After receiving proposals for constructing the keep-

11. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the State of Florida, at Its Tenth Session* (Tallahassee, 1879), 71; "Captain Samuel E. Hope," *Dixie*, April 17, 1915, 1; Joe Knetsch, "Forging the Florida Frontier: The Life and Career of Captain Samuel E. Hope," *The Sunland Tribune* 20 (November 1994), 32-38; "Samuel Edward Hope," c. 1919, Samuel E. Hope file, TSAHS; Gertrude K. Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida: The Early Years* (Tarpon Springs, 1975), 4-5.

12. "Anclote Keys light-station, Fla.," RG26, clipping file; Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37; Executive Order by President Grover Cleveland, February 1, 1886; "\$17,500 in Annual Estimates 1886-7," RG26, entry 72, box 3, book 1; McCarthy, *Florida Lighthouses*, 97; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 1975, 19; United States National Park Service, *Anclote Key Light Station, Anclote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*, 13.

13. Executive Order by President Grover Cleveland, February 1, 1886.

14. "Abstract of Lighthouse Contracts, Volume 2, 1877-1897," 95, RG26; "Anclote Keys light-station, Fla.," RG26, clipping file; Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37; "Metal-Work for Anclote Keys Light-House, Florida. September, 1886," Anclote Lighthouse History—letters file; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 19.



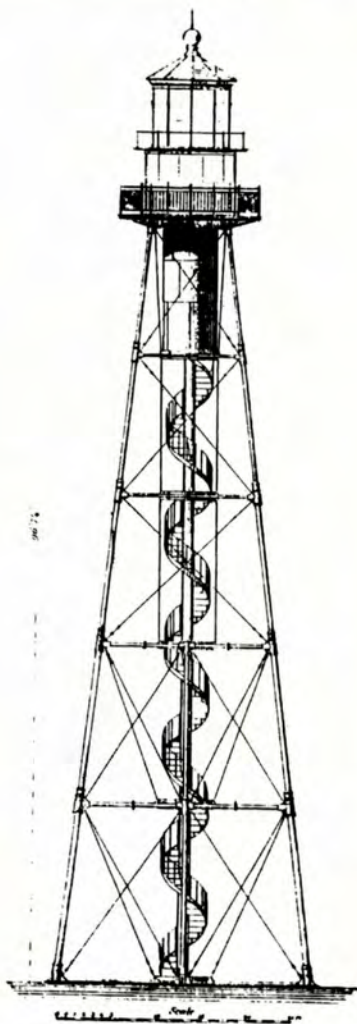
ers' dwellings the government decided to contract for the lumber but hired local labor to build the structures and the outhouses. Things appear to have gone smoothly with this arrangement despite the initial construction proposals' inflated costs. The lighthouse tender *Arbutus* transported the work crews out to the southern portion of the south key where they erected the houses and poured the square concrete foundation for the lighthouse, but Colwell Iron Works failed to deliver the lighthouse materials by March 1. Three months later, in June 1887, the metal work arrived, but it took another month to get the materials on the island. Besides the two keepers' homes and the lighthouse, a wood oil house, wood boat house, wood wharf, and plank or shell walks were erected on the island. Finally, on September 15, 1887, Keeper James Gardner lit the light.<sup>15</sup>

Standing 103 feet tall, the lighthouse's design allows the winds and possible waves to pass through it with little resistance. Additionally, the cast-iron skeletal design reduced weight to a minimum, allowing a structure to be built in locations with shifting sands like Ancote Keys. The skeletal tower supports a central cylinder encasing the stairs leading to the lantern. Ancote is typical of other skeletal lighthouses, built upon a concrete foundation. Ralph Eshelman, a preeminent lighthouse historian, believes that workers sunk a twenty-one-foot caisson ten feet into the ground, filling it with Portland cement, thus establishing the central pier. They created seven more piers, forming the foundation for the erection of the lighthouse's central cylinder and the skeletal supports. The lighthouse was a brown pyramidal iron structure with a black lantern—the lantern is the section of the lighthouse housing the lens—consisting of a third-order Fresnel lens with a fixed white light and a red flash at thirty-second intervals. Its focal plane was 101½ feet above sea-level with a range of sixteen nautical miles.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the two keepers' frame houses were one-story tall, had five rooms each, were painted white, and had green shutters. The houses were located approximately fifty feet northwest of the tower.

15. "Ancote Keys light-station, Fla." RG26, clipping file; Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37; Ancote Keys Lighthouse Logs, September 1887, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; USLHB, *Annual Report*, 66, 69.

16. The focal plane is the height of the lighthouse, measured from the average high tide to the center of the light itself.





*Design for Proposed 3<sup>rd</sup> Order Light-House for Ancote Keys, Fla.  
7<sup>th</sup> Dist. 3 A*

1885 design for proposed third lighthouse for Ancote Keys, Fla. Photograph courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard, Seventh District Office of Aids to Navigation, Miami, Fla.

Behind each house stood a 4000-gallon wood cistern raised two feet off the ground that collected rain water from the roofs.<sup>17</sup>

Ancote Keys lighthouse fell within the Light-House Board's Seventh District, which extended from Cape Canaveral, on the east coast of Florida, to the Perdido River, on the Gulf Coast of Florida. When the board constructed Ancote Keys' light, the Seventh District consisted of twenty lighthouses and lighted beacons with a light also under construction at Mosquito Inlet.<sup>18</sup> They intended the Ancote lighthouse as a small coastal light and a marker for the Ancote River. However, its importance grew during the early part of the twentieth century when the little town of Tarpon Springs entered the world market as the largest producer of sponges.<sup>19</sup>

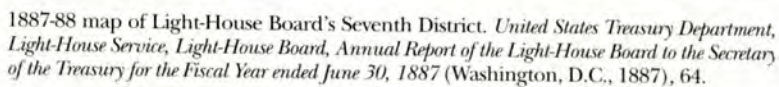
The area that became Tarpon Springs was, like much of Florida, a sparsely populated frontier during the middle of the nineteenth century. The first white settlers to the area arrived in the late 1860s and 1870s. In 1881 Hamilton Disston bought four million acres of Florida real estate, including the area that became Tarpon Springs, for twenty-five cents an acre. The following year, Disston's employee, Major Mathew Robinson Marks, platted the town of Tarpon Springs, and people began arriving in the years to come, growing to five hundred people by 1891. While the settlement that became known as Ancote had a promising future in pioneer days, that changed in 1887 when the railroad arrived at Tarpon Springs, three miles east of Ancote. Following the discovery of sponges off Florida's west coast, John Cheyney founded the Rock Island

17. "Description of Light-House Tower, Buildings, and Premises at Ancote Keys, Florida, January 6, 1888," RG26, entry 63, box 5, volume 4, 1885-1889; Light-House Board, "Notice to Mariners, (No. 23, of 1887)," Ancote Lighthouse History—letters file; Richard Johnson, President, Egmont Key Alliance, to author; December 16, 1997; United States National Park Service, *Ancote Key Light Station, Ancote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*, 12-13; Charles Ledyard Norton, *A Handbook of Florida* (New York, 1891); Light-House Board, "Notice to Mariners, (No. 32, of 1887)," Ancote Lighthouse History—letters file. Cipra, *Lighthouses, Lightships, and the Gulf of Mexico*, 37, and National Maritime Initiative, *1994 Inventory of Historic Light Stations*, 48, state that the skeleton and cylinder were painted dark brown while the lantern was painted black. It appears that the Notice to Mariners' description was wrong. For an excellent detailed architectural description of the lighthouse consult United States National Park Service, Williamsport Preservation Training Center, *Ancote Key Light Station, Ancote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*.

18. Mosquito Inlet is known today as Ponce de Leon.

19. USLHB, *Annual Report*, 1887, 65; United States National Park Service, *Ancote Key Light Station, Ancote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*, 12.





Sponge Company in 1891. Six years later nineteen boats from Tarpon Springs and nearly 100 from Key West harvested sponges off Florida's west coast near the Anclote River. Seeing a business opportunity, John Cocoris, a Greek sponge buyer, joined forces with Cheyney in 1900. Mr. Cocoris believed his native country's method

of gathering sponges, through diving, would be a profitable technique to utilize in Florida. Consequently, Greek immigrants began arriving in Tarpon Springs in 1905, and two years later nearly 1,500 Greeks lived in or around the bustling town. For the next forty years, people would know Tarpon Springs as the "Sponge Capital of the World." During Tarpon Springs' hey day, the lighthouse on Ancote Keys served as a guiding light to the weary spongers. In 1947, a blight spread through the gulf's sponge beds, destroying Tarpon Springs' primary source of income. While the town survived, the sponge industry never recovered, and many of the townspeople turned to tourism to pay the bills.<sup>20</sup>

According to all available historical records, no women worked as keepers on the island.<sup>21</sup> Although the wives and children of keepers lived on the island and worked on the lighthouse, they were not official governmental employees. The duration that each of the station's five keepers worked on the island varied greatly, from James Gardner's seven months to Robert Meyer's thirty-five years. Meyer served two separate terms as the keeper on Ancote. His first stint totaled almost twenty-three years and his second term came to twelve years, eight months. Only Thomas Moody came close to Meyer, residing on Ancote for nine years. Like the keepers, the assistant keepers varied greatly in their stay on the key, with B. F. Meyer there only two months and T. G. Thompson there for ten years.<sup>22</sup>

Appointed on June 28, 1887, the first light keeper, James Gardner, took control of the island Wednesday, August 3, 1887, from Wright Schamburg, the engineer in charge. While the crews worked on the lighthouse, the keeper painted the boat, cleaned the house floors, and did various other jobs. By Sunday, Gard-

20. Norton, *A Handbook of Florida*, 237; "Report of Lieut. Col. W. H. H. Benyaard, Corps of Engineers, December 27, 1897," *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1898, Report of the Chief of Engineers Part 2* (Washington, 1898), 1361-1362; *Sunland Tribune*, January 12 and May 25, 1878; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 5-21; William N. Pantazes, "The Greeks of Tarpon Springs: An American Odyssey," *Tampa Bay History* 1 (Fall/Winter 1979), 24-31.

21. For a good review of women light keepers consult Mary Louise Clifford and J. Candace Clifford, *Women Who Kept the Lights*, (Williamsburg, 1993).

22. Neil E. Hurley, *Keepers of Florida Lighthouses, 1820-1939* (Camino, Calif., 1995), 15-16; Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 1845-1912, 153, RG26, Microfilm Publication M1373, roll 3, North Carolina through Texas.



ner wrote "mosquitoes very bad, hot and sultry." In October the keepers could not work because the mosquitoes became so numerous and vicious, a common problem in Florida. On Anclote Keys the keepers eventually "live[d] in smoke" to fend off the insects while they were outfitting the houses with screens. The lens and lamp arrived on August 10, requiring the full attention of the keeper and Mr. Flanigan, the lampist, for the next week, putting it together and installing it in the lantern room.<sup>23</sup>

This small key played an important role in the lives of residents on the mainland. Assistant keeper Samuel E. Hope Jr. joined Gardner on August 26, 1887. Hope's father was Captain Samuel Hope, the state legislator who composed the bill requesting Congress to build a lighthouse on Anclote Keys. During September the keeper and his assistant spent nearly every day, except Sunday, which was a day of rest, putting the station in order. The two spread crushed shells out along the walkways between the houses and the lighthouse, built plank walks from the tower to the wharf and oil room, coal-tarred the railing around the watch room and tin gutters on houses, as well as painted and cleaned.<sup>24</sup>

Getting the station fully operational continued until the end of the year. In late October and November, the keepers cleared ground for a garden, built a fence around it, and shortly thereafter planted cabbages and tomatoes. To supplement their food supply further the men constructed a chicken house. In order to continue receiving provisions they rebuilt the wood wharf just a few months after it had originally been erected. Regular maintenance duties also began with dusting and polishing the lens, the spare lamp, and the plate glass, cleaning the lens carriage wheels, straightening up the houses, and painting the boat.<sup>25</sup>

23. Anclote Keys Lighthouse Log, August 1887, October 1887, February 1888, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; Elinor DeWire, *Guardians of the Light* (Sarasota, 1995), 11; Hurley, *Keepers of Florida Lighthouses*, 15-16; *The Islander*, April 24, 1886. First quotation from August 1887, and second quotation from October 1887, Anclote Keys Lighthouse Logs, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1.

24. Anclote Keys Lighthouse Logs, August and September, 1887, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1.

25. *Ibid.*, August-December 1887, January 1888; "Description of Light-House Tower, Buildings, and Premises at Anclote Keys, Florida, January 6, 1888," RG26, entry 63, box 5, volume 4, 1885-1889.

## ANCLOTE KEYS LIGHTHOUSE: GUIDING LIGHT

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## Ancote Keys Lighthouse Keepers &amp; Assistant Keepers

Name	Position	Appointed	Released	Yearly Salary
James Gardner	Keeper	6/28/1887	1/27/1888	\$600
Samuel E. Hope, Jr.	Assistant Keeper	7/25/1887	2/2/1888	\$400
"	Keeper	2/2/1888	10/1/1889	\$600
Jordan W. Hope	Assistant Keeper	2/16/1888	10/1/1888	\$400
James M. Baggett	Assistant Keeper	9/21/1888	10/1/1889	\$400/450
"	Keeper	10/1/1889	6/30/1891	\$600
Robert S. Meyer	Assistant Keeper	10/10/1889	7/1/1891	\$450
"	Keeper	7/1/1891	6/11/1914	\$600/640/720
T. G. Thompson	Assistant Keeper	1891	1901	unknown
George M. Angus	Assistant Keeper	5/11/1892	4/1/1898	\$490
Thomas S. Coleman	1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Keeper	4/2/1898	before 1901	\$490
B. F. Meyer	Assistant Keeper	3/10/1901	May 1901	\$490
John Peterson	Assistant Keeper	4/15/1901	10/1/1904	\$490
David D. Klinger (or Kluigner)	Assistant Keeper	4/15/1904	February 1911	\$490/570
Osborn C. Johnson	Assistant Keeper	2/15/1911	6/30/1912	\$576
Clifton H. Lopez	Assistant Keeper	1913	after July 1914	\$504
Thomas A. Moody	Keeper	6/11/1914	7/1/1923	\$648
Robert S. Meyer	Keeper	7/1/1923	2/28/1933	\$900
J. L. Pippin	Keeper	2/28/1933	unknown	unknown

The primary source for this table is Hurley, *Keepers of Florida Lighthouses, 1820-1939*, 15-16. Also consult "Ancote Lighthouse Keepers," Ancote Lighthouse History—letters file; J. W. Fath to Gertrude K. Stoughton, June 25, 1971, Ancote Lighthouse History—letters file; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, February 7, 1933; Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 99,153,156, 168, RG26, Microfilm Publication M1373, roll 3, North Carolina through Texas

Yet it was not all work and no play for the keepers. Although there is no mention of a member of a keeper's family residing on the island until November, four days before the first lighting of the lens, a large party visited the station. This soon became a weekly event. The largest group came from Clearwater and totaled forty people. Usually, the island received tourists on Sunday, sometimes two or three different groups on the same day. Between August 1887 and July 1888, more than forty parties journeyed to the key, including two appearances by Captain Hope, who came to see his son. During one week in March 1915, over one hundred people from twenty-one states and one country went to the island. Shortly after the turn of the century the keepers constructed a picnic area for use by both residents and tourists. Visitors made it to Ancote either by taking a steamer from Cedar Keys, sixty miles north of the



lighthouse, or by taking a stage coach from Tampa to Tarpon Springs and then riding in a small boat for six miles. Besides visits from pleasure seekers, the keeper received a total of nine separate work visits, mostly from lighthouse inspectors.<sup>26</sup>

With traffic from tourist craft and sponge boats, accidents occurred. Anclote keepers and their assistants helped stranded boaters and occasionally had the gruesome duty of retrieving drowned victims from the ocean. In one instance, in September 1918, Keeper T. A. Moody rescued two men from a capsized sloop and towed a sponge boat and a schooner back to safety after a hurricane ripped through the area. On January 2, 1933, twenty-one picnickers visiting the island were startled out of their New Year festivities when their boat exploded while docked at the lightstation's pier. Vasilios Christou, the boat's owner, suffered severe burns before jumping off the boat into the water. Keeper Robert Meyer telephoned Tarpon Springs, requesting help. A doctor and nurse had to be transported by boat to the island. After prepping the victim's burns, the doctor allowed a Coast Guard boat that happened to be nearby to transfer Christou and the tourists back to Tarpon Springs.<sup>27</sup>

The keeper and the assistant keeper occasionally left the island. From August to July, the keeper departed the island a total of fifty-five times, slightly more than once a week, journeying to Tarpon Springs, Anclote, Dunedin, and Yellow Bluff. The assistant keeper traveled to the mainland forty-seven times. For both men some of these trips were work related—picking up and dropping off mail, acquiring provisions, and filing monthly reports. Personal excursions off the island included attending church, voting, visiting family and friends, and conducting private business. Consequently, work occupied life on the island during most of the week, but weekends, especially Sundays, provided a respite from the daily toils with

26. Anclote Keys Lighthouse Logs, August 1887 to July 1888, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, March 12, 1915; Betsy Tongay, unpublished autobiography about life on Anclote Keys, c. 1986, 4, lighthouses file #3, Hampton Dunn Collection, Special Collections, University of South Florida (hereafter USF).

27. *Tarpon Springs Leader*, January 3, 1933; R.S. Meyer to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, Fl, January 2, 1933, RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E; *Lighthouse Service Bulletin*, December 2, 1918, 55-56, copy courtesy Neil Hurley in author's possession.

the arrival of tourists. Additionally, work trips to the mainland afforded lighthouse employees a chance to visit friends or family.<sup>28</sup>

Even with providing life saving help, the men at Ancote did not get rich from their service. During the early nineteenth century the average keeper in the United States received a miserable \$200 to \$250 a year, but by the 1850s, keepers' salaries rose to between \$400 and \$600 per annum. Congress controlled the pay of keepers, and by the Civil War they received a \$600 annual salary, remaining at that rate until the twentieth century. Working under a bifurcated pay system, the keepers received approximately \$200 more a year than their assistants.<sup>29</sup> Despite the impoverished salary, both received free room and board. Still, their provisions had to be supplemented by growing vegetables, raising hogs and chickens, fishing, and hunting. For the year 1902, the Light-House Board provided what it considered "good, substantial, and wholesome food" that included such staples as beef, pork, potatoes, sugar, and coffee and stressed that it in no way would pay for luxury food items.<sup>30</sup> The provisions and pay supported not only the keepers but their families as well.

At the light station family life flourished with marriages and births. Jordon Hope, an unmarried assistant keeper, left the island for Tarpon Springs on June 28, 1888, and came back the next day with his bride, A. M. Mickler. Wives were not the only family members to reside on the key. In 1887, Samuel Hope's sister, Clara, lived with him for several months until she married James Baggett on January 11, 1888. Light keeping also proved to be a perilous profession, and, sadly, deaths occurred. James Baggett took over as keeper on October 1, 1889, and in the log entry five days later, he wrote "[my] baby was taken very sick at 5 p.m." The following entry stated, "Baby boy died this morning at 2:30 o'clock. Keeper & wife went over to bury him today." Baggett returned to Ancote on October 8

28. Ancote Keys Lighthouse Logs, August 1887 to July 1888, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; "Description of Light-House Tower, Buildings, and Premises at Ancote Keys, Florida, January 6, 1888," RG26, entry 63, box 5, volume 4, 1885-1889. In 1887 Yellow Bluff was a small community of 200 people located on the Gulf of Mexico about 24 miles northwest of Tampa. For more details on Yellow Bluff consult *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1886-1887*, Florida State Gazetteer 1886-1887 excerpts historical file, Quintilla Geer Bruton Archives Center, Plant City, Fla.

29. Holland, *America's Lighthouses*, 43.

30. *Instruction to Light-Keepers: A Photoreproduction of the 1902 Edition of Instructions to Light-Keepers and Masters of Light-House Vessels* (Allen Park, 1989), 27, n.p. (last page of book).



and went to work the next day. In less than a year the Baggetts had an addition to their family. The Baggetts were not alone in their suffering. Assistant keeper George Angus died in 1897 from a fall on the island, and shortly thereafter his family moved to Key West.<sup>31</sup>

Risk of life and limb were not the only difficulties keepers confronted. Anclote Keys keeper Thomas Moody had an early run-in with bootlegging investigators. During the summer of 1920, O. P. Hilburn, Federal Prohibition Director of Florida, accused Moody of "manipulating the flashes of his light in such a manner as to signal smuggling vessels as to favorable opportunities for approaching the shore . . ."<sup>32</sup> By October William Demeritt, Superintendent of Lighthouses at Key West, had decided to "give this old employee the benefit of the doubt, but in the meantime . . . keep him under observation and should there be any occasion for it, further report will be made."<sup>33</sup> The federal government never proved its case against Moody.

Robert Meyer is an exception among Anclote keepers for longevity of service. Robert's uncle and father, Frederick and Benjamin Meyer, bought land from Captain Hope and moved their families in 1868 from Marion County to the north shore of the Anclote River. Shortly thereafter, yellow fever killed both men, but the families remained. Born on February 4, 1868, Robert Meyer spent nearly his entire life in the Tarpon Springs area, remaining until his death on January 31, 1945. Robert's first work experience on the island involved helping to construct the keepers' homes, work he performed along with his younger brother Wyatt. He began

31. Anclote Lighthouse Logs, November 1887, January 1888, June 1888, October 1889, August 1890, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; James M. Baggett and Clara V. Hope, Marriage License, January 11, 1888, Hillsborough County Marriage Records, book G, p. 80, Special Collections, USF; Jordan W. Hope and Mrs. A. M. Mickler, Marriage License, June 28, 1888, Hillsborough County Marriage Records, book G, p. 149; McCarthy, *Florida Lighthouses*, 98-99; *St. Petersburg Times*, May 7, 1981; *The Suncoast News*, November 14, 1984; "Samuel Edward Hope," 244-45, Samuel E. Hope file; United States National Park Service, *Anclote Key Light Station, Anclote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*, 15. Two dates exist for Mr. Angus' death. Hurley, *Keepers of Florida Lighthouses, 1820-1939*, 15, and "Registers of Lighthouse Keepers," 99, state that Mr. Angus was "removed" in April 1, 1898. However, the *St. Petersburg Times*, May 7, 1981, date the death in 1897. A possible answer for the discrepancy might be that it took the government several months after Mr. Angus' death to remove him from its records.

32. Commissioner of Lighthouses, Washington, D.C., June 21, 1920, RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

33. William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, Washington, D.C., October 8, 1920, RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

working as a light keeper at the age of twenty-one, serving on the island for thirty-five years. His only break in service on the key came between 1914 and 1923 when he transferred as keeper of Ancote River lights. Because he took charge of the river lights, the pay of the new keeper and assistant keeper at Ancote Keys was cut to \$648 and \$504 respectively per annum.<sup>34</sup> Replacing Thomas Moody, Meyer returned as Ancote Keys keeper on July 1, 1923, after the light was converted from kerosene to acetylene gas. Because of the technological improvements of acetylene gas the lighthouse no longer needed to be attended during the night. Consequently, Meyer did not have an assistant, and he had the added responsibilities of caring for nine minor lights in the Ancote Anchorage and on the Ancote River. In return for the added work with less help, Meyer's pay increased to \$900 a year.<sup>35</sup>

Meyer's daughter, Betsy, had fond memories of the key, and her experiences most closely match the idealized notions of life for a keeper. For keepers the lighthouse was their job, but for children it was a huge toy, as revealed by Betsy Meyer's memory that "the tower, with its 105 steps stood sentinel over us all, even though I thought it was special playground equipment for me to walk and balance from one post to another." She ran up and down the stairs, only taking rests at the windows. Her father affectionately named her "Merry Legs" for all of her running. When not playing in the lighthouse, Betsy and her brother Gus traveled the beach, entertaining themselves with the numerous fiddler crabs that scurried away from their feet. At dusk, Mary would walk to the end of the dock and watch the "glorious sunset that made one know God was in his heavens and I, in my own small way, in mine."<sup>36</sup>

34. *Clearwater Sun*, November 5, 1984; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, January 17, 1914; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, January 27, 1914; Acting Commissioner of Lighthouses to Lighthouse Inspector, Key West, Florida, January 31, 1914; George Havenner to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 17, 1914. All in RG26, entry 50, box 1022, file 1624-1626. George Havenner to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 17, 1914, RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 6-7; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, February 7, 1933, and February 2, 1945. Tongay, untitled autobiography about life on Ancote Keys; untitled typed speech given on January 27, 1985, to the TSAHS, Meyer Family file, TSAHS.

35. Commissioner of Lighthouses to Secretary of Commerce, March 1, 1923; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 7, 1923; Form 80 "Recommendation as to Aids to Navigation," February 23, 1923. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1071E-1072C.

36. Tongay, untitled autobiography about life on Ancote Keys.



Like the personnel, the station underwent changes. In early January 1888, Captain W. L. Fisk, lighthouse engineer, and A. C. Bell, lighthouse surveyor, conducted the first of several inspections of Anclote Keys. Fisk described the key as a 177-acre island with an outer edge of white sand and shell and a marshy interior. Approximately 125 acres consisted of tress, mostly yellow pine, palmetto, mangroves, and cedar. He noted that the base of the lighthouse stood 242 feet beyond the high water mark. Fisk characterized the station as healthy, and, because of its newness, absent of disease.<sup>37</sup>

Between 1888 and 1893 only minor repairs occurred at the station. However, in 1894 the Light-House Board contracted out to build a new brick oil house. Although there are rumors that a cannon was placed on Anclote Keys to protect the island from an invasion during the Spanish-American War, there is no mention of it or of any Spanish attack in the *Annual Report of the Light-House Board* or in the Anclote Lighthouse Logs. Because of the salt air, the lighthouse and surrounding buildings required constant and regular upkeep. In 1899 workers added a kitchen to the "main dwelling," and an additional 200 feet was added to the wharf.<sup>38</sup>

On the eve of 1913, William Demeritt, Lighthouse Inspector from Key West, evaluated Anclote Keys. Due to erosion, only 82 feet of land lay between the lighthouse and the ocean. Unlike Fisk's 1888 report, Demeritt's observed that during rainy season malaria-infected mosquitoes from the island's brackish marsh threatened the keepers. Demeritt registered other routine repairs and the introduction of cement-curbed brick walks that replaced the worn out wood plank walks.<sup>39</sup>

Anclote Keys did not weather the Great Depression well. In 1931, William Demeritt reported the station in dismal condition. "This is the worse looking station in the district," he noted, "and it should be provided with modern conveniences and made compa-

37. Anclote Lighthouse Logs, January, 1888, RG26, entry 80, box 10, book 1; "Description of Light-House Tower, Buildings, and Premises at Anclote Keys, Florida, January 6, 1888," RG26, entry 63, box 5, volume 4, 1885-1889.

38. "Anclote Keys light-station, Fla." RG26, clipping file; McCarthy, *Florida Lighthouses*, 98; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 20.

39. "Description of Anclote Keys Light Station, Florida, December 31, 1912," RG26, entry 63, box 2, file Florida.

rable with every other station in the district."<sup>40</sup> In response, concrete cisterns replaced the worn out wood tanks, a concrete septic tank was built, new bathroom fixtures were installed, a chicken run erected, and the porches were screened.<sup>41</sup>

Along with the grounds of the station, the light went through many changes due in part to technological innovations since first being lit. Throughout the world, governments continually tested new technologies and alternative fuel sources to increase light intensity and to provide a more reliable and longer lasting energy source. In early 1888, the third-order light had a colored glass chimney flashing red every thirty seconds, taking six minutes to complete a revolution. Once wound, the clock lasted five hours, moving the entire Fresnel lens, but the keepers generally wound it every four hours. The French company Henry Lapante made the Fresnel lens in 1884.

A kerosene oil powered Funcks float lamp with two wicks produced the light, and the station had another lamp in reserve. The glass chimney dimmed the light, reducing the distance at which it could be seen by mariners. By 1913, instead of a red flash, Ancote showed a white light from a 200,000 candle power incandescent oil vapor lamp, flashing white every thirty seconds. Five years later the light changed to a white group flash every thirty seconds. The light continued to be fueled by kerosene until June 1923 when it was converted to acetylene gas. On June 27, 1923, the government installed an electric generator for the dwellings, and four days later Robert Meyer returned as keeper, but without the help of an assistant keeper, whose position had been eliminated. The Coast Guard took control of all lighthouses in 1939, and on August 1, 1944, Captain William Wishar at the Coast Guard's Seventh District submitted a "Request for Work Authorization" to electrify the light. The Coast Guard also contemplated installing a 375-mm lens from a spare acetylene lantern, but neither change occurred. In 1944, one white flash every five seconds characterized the light. On April 23, 1963, the Coast Guard ordered the Ancote light changed from acetylene to electric, increasing it to 25,000 candlepower but still utilizing the third-order lens. By 1970, the light underwent another change with a white flash every six seconds. One of the last changes

40. Form 80, "Recommendation as to Aids to Navigation," November 6, 1931, RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1071E-1072C.

41. Ibid.



before abandonment occurred in November 1976, when a 250-mm acrylic lantern replaced the Fresnel lens, reducing the nominal range of the light from 15 miles to 12 miles. In 1982 the Coast Guard replaced the 250-mm lens with a plastic 150-mm lens.<sup>42</sup>

A less obvious, but nonetheless important, change that had a tremendous impact upon Tarpon Springs' residents occurred when the federal government contemplated selling lands not in use by the lighthouse service. As early as 1914, the Department of the Interior probed the possibility of restoring to entry sections of Anclote Keys. Anclote was not alone in this sell off, for portions of Captiva Island, Amelia Island, Mosquito Inlet and St. Augustine lighthouse reservations, all in Florida, were considered for sale.<sup>43</sup>

But the wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly. In 1923 the Bureau of Lighthouses decided to put up for sale the major portion of Anclote Keys beginning 500 feet north of the lighthouse along with the three keys near the lighthouse. Possibly trying to cash in on Florida's land boom, the bureau also tried to rid itself of sections of

42. "Aids to Navigation Operation Request," April 23, 1963; J.R. Finelli to Commander, Seventh Coast Guard District, Miami, Fla., November 30, 1976, "Anclote Key Lt." historical file, U.S. Coast Guard, 7<sup>th</sup> District Office to Aids of Navigation, Miami, Fla.; and "Request for Work Authorization," August 1, 1944, copies courtesy Neil Hurley. "Description of Light-House Tower, Buildings, and Premises at Anclote Keys, Florida, January 6, 1888," RG26, entry 63, box 5, volume 4, 1885-1889; "Description of Anclote Keys Light Station, Florida, December 31, 1912," RG26, entry 63, box 2, file Florida; Mark G. Eckhoff to Gertrude K. Stoughton, June 2, 1971, Anclote Lighthouse History—letters file. Form 70, "Recommendation as to Aids to Navigation," October 19, 1911, and Form 80, "Recommendation as to Aids to Navigation," November 8, 1923, both in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1071E-1072C; Hurley, "Anclote Keys Light;" Timothy Johnson, "Original and Present Physical Appearance," c. 1988, Lighthouse file #3, Dunn Collection; United States Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service, *Light List Atlantic and Gulf Coast of the United States* (Washington, 1918), 312-13; United States Department of Transportation, United States Coast Guard, *Light List Volume II, Atlantic and Gulf Coast of the United States* (Washington, 1970), 13; United States Treasury Department, United States Coast Guard, *Light List Atlantic and Gulf Coast of the United States* (Washington, 1944), 440-41; United States Treasury Department, United States Light-House Board, *List of Light-Houses, Lighted Beacons and Floating Lights of the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Coasts of the United States* (Washington, 1902), 196-97. Incandescent oil vapor lamps (a.k.a., I.O.V.) were introduced to American lighthouses in the later part of the 1800s. Still utilizing kerosene, the lamp first converted the fuel to a gas before burning it, forming a brighter and more powerful light while using no additional fuel.

43. Acting Secretary of the Interior, August 22, 1914; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, August 10, 1914; A. A. Jones to the Secretary of Commerce, c. 1914, all in RG26, entry 50, box 1022, file 1624-1626. Unauthorized correspondence discussing the sale of lighthouse reservations, c. 1915, RG26, entry 66, box 34, file Anclote Keys Fla 11/2.

Sanibel Island, Estero Island, Captiva Island, La Costa Island, Umbrella Keys, and Cape Romano. A tax appraisal of Ancote Keys valued the land at \$10 an acre, but Thomas Moody, the "bootlegging" keeper, appraised the property at \$100 an acre. Taking Moody's evaluation, the bureau calculated the property was worth \$15,500. Moving with uncanny swiftness, the bureau requested bids for Ancote Keys throughout Florida post offices and newspapers, and in several Chicago and New York City newspapers by the end of the year. Despite such intense advertising, the only bid received by February 1924 was for \$1,201 by S. M. Regar, a Tampa businessman. They quickly rejected his bid.<sup>44</sup>

The bureau readvertised Ancote for sale the following winter, receiving several bids. Yet, all offers were again rejected and the bureau put the land back on the market in late 1925.<sup>45</sup> When the bureau opened the bids on February 16, 1926, George Emmanuel was the highest bidder, hands down. Moving to Tarpon Springs in 1905, Emmanuel became an important and well-respected figure as a leader in the Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange, as a real estate investor, bank director, and as a local politician, serving as city commissioner. Emmanuel was no stranger to Ancote Keys, visiting it as a tourist and taking business partners there. Seeing a money-mak-

44. Form 25, "Survey of Public Property"; Form 114, "Abstract of Bids," February 18, 1924; Commissioner of Lighthouses to Secretary of Commerce, February 23, 1924; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 18, 1924; William Demeritt to S. M. Regar, July 1, 1924; William Demeritt to S. M. Regar, July 12, 1924; W. S. Erwin to Commissioner of Lighthouses, May 16, 1923; W. S. Erwin to The Federal Real Estate Board, March 19, 1923; E.C. Gillette to Superintendent of Lighthouses, July 8, 1924; S. M. Regar, to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, Fla., June 28, 1924. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

45. Form 114, "Abstract of Bids," February 18, 1925; Commissioner of Lighthouses to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, Fl, December 10, 1924; Commissioner of Lighthouses to Herbert J. Drane, March 3, 1925; Commissioner of Lighthouses, March 24, 1925; Commissioner of Lighthouses to Herbert J. Drane, May 5, 1925; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 19, 1925; William Demeritt to S. M. Regar, February 24, 1925; William Demeritt to S. M. Regar, May 18, 1925; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, May 5, 1925; Herbert J. Drane to Commissioner of Light Houses, February 28, 1925; Herbert J. Drane to Commissioner of Lighthouses, May 4, 1925; George M. Emmanuel to Herbert J. Drane, February 26, 1925; H. B. Haskins to Commissioner of Lighthouses, December 6, 1924, RG26; G. R. Putnam to Secretary of Commerce, February 26, 1925; George R. Putnam to Herbert J. Drane, May 16, 1925; S.M. Regar to William Demeritt, May 15, 1925. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.



ing potential, George Emmanuel proposed to pay \$35,200, nearly \$12,000 more than the next highest bid.<sup>46</sup> The government quickly grabbed at the inflated bid. Emmanuel tried to cash in on Anclothe's tourist draw. The February 16, 1926, edition of the *Tarpon Springs Leader* trumpeted "Anclothe Key to Be Bathing Resort. Syndicate of Local Business Men State That \$250,000 Will Be Spent to Make Island Beautiful Resort." This consortium of local financiers included Emmanuel, John Cheyney, J. C. McCrocklin, president of First National Bank, Ernest R. Meres, vice president of First National, and some unidentified New York-based entrepreneurs. Shortly after the announcement, the syndicate got caught in the cataclysmic downward spiral of Florida land values.<sup>47</sup>

They quickly tried to extricate themselves from the bid by writing to their United States House of Representative contact Herbert J. Drane. Emmanuel proposed to pay part of the amount due every three months for the next year and a half instead of the stipulated full amount upon notification of completion of the deed. This was the beginning of a year-and-a-half attempt by George Emmanuel to renegotiate the deal. The government flatly rejected Emmanuel's proposal, notifying him on May 7, 1926, that the deed was ready to be delivered upon receipt of \$31,680.<sup>48</sup> When it did not receive payment by June, the government reconsidered its stand, acquiescing to Emmanuel's proposal for a new payment plan. The bureau realized that Florida's real estate conditions were dismal, and that if Emmanuel could pay—even under revised terms—it was in the government's

46. Form 114, "Abstract of Bids," February 17, 1926; Acting Secretary of Commerce to Thomas Bell, c. November 1925; Thomas Bell to Secretary of Commerce, November 17, 1925; J. S. Conway to Herbert Rumrill, October 8, 1925; J. S. Conway to Herbert Rumrill, October 19, 1925; William Demeritt to Harry Lewis, June 25, 1925; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, October 13, 1925; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 20, 1926; J. Walter Drake to Thomas Bell, November 24, 1925; Harry Lewis to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, Fla., June 24, 1925; G. R. Putnam to Secretary of Commerce, March 2, 1926; Herbert Rumrill to Commissioner of Lighthouses, October 6, 1925. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E. *Tarpon Springs Leader*, March 12, 1915, January 8, 1924, and June 17, 1954; "Mr. and Mrs. George Emmanuel," unauthored manuscript, George Emmanuel file, TSAHS; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 47-48, 58, 69.

47. *Tarpon Springs Leader*; February 17 and 26, 1926.

48. The difference between the bid of \$35,200 and the payment of \$31,680 is accounted for by the fact that bids would only be accepted if a cashier check or cash for ten percent of the total bid was deposited. The already deposited ten percent was deducted from the total amount George Emmanuel and his partners owed.

best interest to renegotiate. Yet every time the parties agreed upon a payment scheme, Emmanuel demanded a new plan.<sup>49</sup>

On November 6, 1926, James O'Hara, Acting Solicitor of the Department of Commerce, granted permission to put Ancote Keys back up for sale. George Emmanuel caught wind of this and wrote U.S. Senator Duncan Fletcher, requesting him to "look into the matter," which he did five days later. George Putnam notified Senator Fletcher on January 12, 1927, that if Emmanuel could pay the full amount by February 1, the deed to the property would be his, but the bureau would grant no further extensions.<sup>50</sup> The deadline came and went with no receipt of payment. In February George Bean, Republican National Committee member from Florida, requested an extension, stating that Emmanuel proposed to pay through annual installments. This proposition was rejected one day before bids were opened for Ancote Keys. The bureau then discovered that no one submitted a bid; this news, however, did not change their decision. Part of the reason not to reconsider the offer may lay with Robert Meyer, Ancote keeper, whose local origins provided him intimate details of the people and surrounding communities. In a report to the Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, Meyer stated that Emmanuel's "finances are uncertain—have to force him to meet obligations . . . unless it is to his advantage to do so. Understands that money he handles belongs to his

49. H. B. Bowerman to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, FL, May 25, 1926; William Demeritt to George Emmanuel, March 9, 1926; William Demeritt to George Emmanuel, May 7, 1926; Herbert Drane to Commissioner of Lighthouses, March 6, 1926; George Emmanuel to William Demeritt, March 6, 1926; George Emmanuel to William Demeritt, June 2, 1926; G. R. Putnam to Herbert Drane, March 9, 1926; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, June 9, 1926; William Demeritt to George Emmanuel, June 28, 1926; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, August 10, 1926; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, October 14, 1926; George Emmanuel to William Demeritt, August 2, 1926; George Emmanuel to William Demeritt, September 2, 1926; G. R. Putnam to Secretary of Commerce, June 16, 1926. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

50. J. S. Conway to Superintendent of Lighthouses, Key West, FL, December 14, 1926; George Emmanuel to Duncan U. Fletcher, December 22, 1926; Duncan U. Fletcher to George Emmanuel, December 27, 1926; Duncan U. Fletcher to George R. Putnam, December 27, 1926; Duncan U. Fletcher to William Demeritt, December 27, 1926; James J. O'Hara to Assistant Secretary of Commerce, November 6, 1926; G. R. Putnam to Duncan Fletcher, January 12, 1927. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.



wife and he is at present heavily involved— man of considerable personality and shrewd business ability.”<sup>51</sup>

After the bureau rejected his offer, a federal court convicted George Emmanuel on March 10, 1927, of attempting to smuggle illegal aliens into the United States. Emmanuel received a \$500 fine and was sentenced to fifteen months in jail. Notwithstanding such trials and tribulations, Emmanuel continued to request a reconsideration of his proposal to purchase Anclote Keys. Once again the bureau said no, biding its time until land values rebounded. Emmanuel appears to have recovered from his real estate losses and to have survived the conviction, for he continued to be successful and highly respected in Tarpon Springs, if not with the Bureau of Lighthouses.<sup>52</sup>

George Emmanuel's delays, the bust of the Florida land boom, and the onset of the Great Depression all thwarted the bureau's efforts to sell Anclote Keys. On August 11, 1938, the Department of Agriculture inquired into the possibility of having the key transferred in the hope of creating the Anclote Migratory Bird Refuge. In little more than one month, on September 14, the Secretary of Agriculture received title to the excess property. Thus ended the Bureau of Lighthouse's twenty-five-year quest to relinquish control of the land. Had they waited a few more months it would no longer have been the bureau's concern, for on July 1, 1939, the United States Coast Guard officially took control of the nation's aids to navigation.<sup>53</sup>

51. "Dodger," February 12, 1927, copy courtesy Neil Hurley; George Bean to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 5, 1927; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, February 12, 1927; W. P. Harman, February 14, 1927; G. R. Putnam to G. W. Bean, February 9, 1927; G. R. Putnam to Secretary of Commerce, February 9, 1927; G. R. Putnam, February 15, 1927; G. R. Putnam to Secretary of Commerce, March 3, 1927; Commissioner of Lighthouses to Assistant Secretary Drake, February 14, 1927; W. P. Harman, February 2, 1927; W. P. Harman, February 5, 1927; W. P. Harman, February 12, 1927; L. W. Lawrence, February 5, 1927; G. R. Putnam to Assistant Secretary of Commerce, February 17, 1927; William Demeritt to Lighthouse Commissioner, February 14, 1927; William Demeritt to Lighthouse Commissioner, February 14, 1927. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

52. *Tampa Tribune*, March 9-12, 1927; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, March 11, 1927, and January 6, 1935; George Bean to George Putnam, June 20, 1927; J. S. Conway to George Bean, July 2, 1927; William Demeritt to Commissioner of Lighthouses, June 28, 1927, RG26; L. W. Lawrence, June 21, 1927. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

53. C. J. Peoples to the Secretary of Agriculture, September 14, 1938; Daniel Roper to the Acting Director, Bureau of Budget, December 16, 1938; James Silver, April 28, 1939. All in RG26, entry 50, box 831, file 1072E.

Shortly after the Coast Guard took over control of Ancote Keys lighthouse, the nation was thrown into the maelstrom of World War II. On February 12, 1942, the Coast Guard transferred Francis Earl, a Texan, to the island. For the next several months Earl and two other Coast Guard men were under the tutelage of the lighthouse keeper, who trained them how to care for the light and the surrounding station. The Coast Guard personnel lived in one house while the keeper lived in the other. Periodically, the men would take a boat into Tarpon Springs to get supplies or for liberty, providing a respite from their secluded island life. Yet this came to an end during the early fall of 1942 when the Coast Guard set up a base in the Seabreeze Building in Tarpon Springs. The eighty-five men stationed in Tarpon Springs, along with the Coast Guard lightkeepers, were housed in the Villa Plumosa Hotel. Consequently, the men took turns traveling to the island, serving in shifts and returning to the mainland when their day's work was finished.<sup>54</sup>

For the next four years Earl, along with the two other men, took turns tending the light, caring for the buoys along the Ancote River, and watching for enemy ships and planes. From their post they could watch the combat training exercises of American pilots. In one instance, the Coast Guard men observed the practice maneuvers of more than two hundred Flying Fortresses, Mustangs, Warhawks, and Thunderbolts. However, this may have been the only excitement the men received. War restrictions permitted few visitors to the island. Additionally, no families resided on Ancote. While on the island, these men's experiences reflected the lonely images associated with keepers' lives. During his watches at the top of the lighthouse, Earl spent much of his time writing letters to friends and family. Despite the social solitude, Earl had fond memories of tending the light. He enjoyed it so much that he volunteered for permanent duty on Ancote, remaining there until 1946. After getting out of the Coast Guard, Earl served as Tarpon Springs postmaster for many years.<sup>55</sup>

By 1946, the Coast Guard stationed five men on the island. At war's end, the Coast Guard shut down its Tarpon Springs base, relocating to St. Petersburg, thus eliminating any readily available housing on the mainland. Although the Coast Guard was contemplating the automation of the lighthouse during this period, the station still

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54. Vera Earl, telephone interview by author, November 11, 1997.

55. *St. Petersburg Times*, January 4, 1994, and May 30, 1995; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 107; Earl, interview.



had the two keepers' houses, a wood storeroom, a wood boathouse, a brick engine room, a wood outhouse, and a chicken house. The government equipped the keepers' houses with metal fold up beds, chairs, tables, a file cabinet, a couch, a twenty-gallon water heater, a kerosene powered refrigerator, and a Sears & Roebuck kerosene fueled range. A twelve-volt generator supplied power for house lights and the R.C.A. radio, and hand pumps supplied water.<sup>56</sup>

The Coast Guard abandoned the station on November 5, 1952, thus beginning the station's downward slide that continued into the 1990s. In a site survey done months before abandonment, all buildings that existed in 1946 were present in 1952, including the picket fence. By 1956, the keepers' homes suffered at the hands of vandals but were still considered in good shape. This, however, would not remain the case. One well-meaning camper started a cooking fire in one of the houses, burning through the floor, revealing the earth below. Either from malice or carelessness, other visitors burned both keepers' homes to the ground. Vandals broke the lighthouse windows, covered the structure with graffiti, and hurled the light's batteries from atop of the tower.<sup>57</sup>

While vandals were having a field day on Anclote, in 1960 the State of Florida gained control of Anclote's wildlife refuge. Additionally, the Coast Guard grappled with maintaining the light while protecting the remaining structures. In the early 1970s, members of the Coast Guard's Aids to Navigation Department visited the station every three months to check the 112 batteries, to clean the lens, and to do other maintenance work. If left alone, the batteries provided nearly two years of power to the light. To fight off the invaders, the Coast Guard erected a chain link fence around the station and welded the tower's door shut. Even these measures did not stop people from getting into the tower and tearing out the bulbs and damaging the lens. Between June 18, 1980, and May 12, 1981, the Coast Guard spent well over \$4,000 repairing the light.<sup>58</sup>

56. "Supplement to Form No. USO-13," c. 1946, RG26, entry 66, box 34, file Anclote Keys Fla. 11/2.

57. *Clearwater Sun*, November 5, 1984; *Tampa Tribune*, November 23, 1995; *St. Petersburg Times*, February 9, 1958; Hurley, "Anclote Keys Light;" "Title 'A' Property Report," RG26, entry 66, box 34, file Anclote Keys Fla. 11/2.

58. *Suncoast Shopper & News*, July 6, 1977; *St. Petersburg Times*, January 16, 1972, March 20, 1977, and October 18, 1994; *Tampa Tribune*, March 1, 1962; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, July 5, 1984; M. E. Gilbert to Commander, Seventh Coast Guard District (oan), June 24, 1981, "Anclote Keys Lt." historical file, copy courtesy Neil Hurley.

The situation reached a crisis point in 1984. Responsible for five lighthouses and hundreds of smaller aids to navigation along 400 miles of Florida's west coast, Chief Boatswain's Mate Ernest Costa of the Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team at St. Petersburg bemoaned the time and money involved in repairing vandals' handiwork on Ancote. Chief Costa's crew trekked from Clearwater to the island eight times in the preceding year to fix the light, spending nearly \$1,000 a visit. In October 1984, the Coast Guard began looking for a local government, historical society, or other organization to lease the lighthouse for twenty-five years. Despite having offers, within six months they officially decommissioned the station.<sup>59</sup>

In November 1984, the Tarpon Springs Area Historical Society, with impetus from Timothy Johnson, a local lighthouse enthusiast, began the long, frustrating journey of preserving the lighthouse. While the historical society organized its resources to save the lighthouse, the Coast Guard turned off the light on November 9, 1984, to see if anyone complained. No one did; consequently, on March 4, 1985, the Coast Guard permanently discontinued the light. Johnson began preparing a National Register Nomination for the lighthouse, and the historical society even solicited a volunteer, Richard Hauge, to live on the island to protect the structure from vandals. They had dreams of turning the property into a park. Yet land ownership disputes stymied their efforts. Despite having the desire, it took the Coast Guard nearly ten years to turn the property over to the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The historical society's efforts are reminiscent of George Emmanuel's failed efforts to purchase the island. No matter how hard the society tried, their efforts came to naught.<sup>60</sup>

59. *St. Petersburg Times*, October 29, 1984; Donald P. Hogue to Lieutenant Lou Montello, November 8, 1984; L. R. Montello to Donald P. Hogue, January 24, 1985; R. C. Nichols to Commander, Seventh Coast Guard District (oan), July 6, 1984, all in "Ancote Keys Lt." historical file; McCarthy, *Florida Lighthouses*, 100; United States National Park Service, *Ancote Key Light Station, Ancote Key, Pinellas County, Florida, Condition Assessment Report*, 14-15; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, July 5 and October 24, 1984.

60. "Aids to Navigation Operation Request," December 18, 1984; R. L. Boatright to George Percy, August 6, 1985; Ed C. Hoffman to Norma Wrigley, March 8, 1985, all in "Ancote Keys Lt." historical file; *St. Petersburg Times*, February 11, 1985; Hurley, "Ancote Keys Light"; *Clearwater Sun*, November 5 and 28, 1984, December 27, 1984, and June 16, 1986; *Suncoast News*, February 10, 1990; Lary McSparren, interview by author, July 19, 1997; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, November 7, 1984.



Stepping into the process during the early 1990s, local businesswoman Pat McSparren spearheaded the reinvigorated campaign to save the light. In 1994 McSparren and her husband, Lary, founded the Anclote Keys Lighthouse Restoration Committee. During the summer of 1994, at the prompting of McSparren, Representative Mike Bilirakis organized meetings between federal and state officials and local citizens in the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center to iron out how to transfer the lighthouse from the Coast Guard to the BLM and then to the State of Florida. These meetings were shining, but sadly rare, examples of interagency cooperation. Before the Coast Guard could transfer ownership, an environmental survey had to be completed to determine if soil pollutants existed. In October a government contractor announced that they removed 107 batteries and 1,775 pounds of battery refuse from the key but that no serious mercury or lead soil contamination had occurred from leaking batteries.<sup>61</sup>

Following quickly on the heels of the contractor's report, the restoration committee held a concert at Sunset Beach Park to raise funds on Saturday, November 26, 1994. They collected a total of \$15,000, enough to pay to transfer the lighthouse to the BLM and execute a condition assessment. In August 1995, after the Coast Guard overcame all the bureaucratic roadblocks, the BLM obtained ownership of the lighthouse.<sup>62</sup>

Following the transfer, a three-hour fund-raising cruise on the dinner boat *Casablanca* was launched on September 16, 1995, raising \$2,000 for the lighthouse. Coupled with the cruise, the committee held a second benefit concert on November 25, 1995. Between the two events a survey team from the National Park Service visited the island, accessing the condition of the lighthouse and determining future preservation actions. Part of the money raised from the cruise and the concerts funded the \$6,400 report, completed in April 1996. On March 30, 1996, the BLM transferred ownership of the lighthouse to the state at a ceremony held at the old train depot at Tarpon Avenue and the Pinellas Trail. Federal, state, and local

61. Commander Coast Guard Group St. Petersburg, Fla., to Commander Coast Guard District Seven, Miami, Fla., April 19, 1994; Commander Coast Guard Group St. Petersburg, Fla., to Commander Coast Guard District Seven, Miami, Fla., April 21, 1994, both in "Anclote Keys Lt." historical file; *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, August 1, and October 18, 1994; McSparren, interview.

62. *St. Petersburg Times*, November 26, 1994, January 10 and 20, 1995, September 15, 1995; McSparren, interview.

officials attended the meeting along with an enthusiastic public. As part of the snowballing success of the preservation effort, through the crusade of Senator Jack Latvala the 1996-97 state budget included \$75,000 to begin restoration work on the lighthouse. One-third of the revenue was allocated in a Department of Environmental Protection grant for a historical and archaeological survey of the lighthouse grounds.<sup>63</sup>

Current preservation objectives include having the lighthouse listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a process that began in 1984. The McSparrens plan to use the money from the state budget to begin the long process of repairing damaged sections of the lighthouse and removing rust from the iron structure, a project estimated to cost \$250,000. An additional \$200,000 is required to repair and refurbish the lighthouse to its original condition, minus the third-order lens. If other money is forthcoming, the McSparrens desire to rebuild the keepers' houses as they existed in the 1920s or 1930s, turning one into a park ranger residence. By keeping a ranger on site, they hope to deter vandals from ruining the preservation effort. Following in the footsteps of lighthouses across the country and at least five Florida lighthouses—including Key West, St. Augustine, Ponce de Leon Inlet, Jupiter Inlet, and Garden Key lighthouses—the other Ancote keeper's house will be utilized as a classroom or museum detailing the history of the lighthouse.<sup>64</sup>

A groundswell of local support underlies preservation efforts of Ancote Keys lighthouse. According to Tarpon Springs City Commissioner Dudley Salley, the lighthouse should be preserved because of its symbolism for the Tarpon Springs community, "The silhouette of the lighthouse is identified as Florida heritage," Salley acknowledged. "Ancote Key fits into that."<sup>65</sup> As a romantic symbol of Florida heritage, the Ancote lighthouse has enjoyed a level of public support that otherwise might not have been forthcoming. These images inspire people to volunteer their time, sweat, energy, and money to save the light.<sup>66</sup> Summing up this sentiment,

63. *Tampa Tribune*, November 23, 1995, March 29 and May 4, 1996; *St. Petersburg Times*, September 15 and November 24, 1995, and May 3, 1996; McSparren, interview. This grant supported research for this article.

64. *St. Petersburg Times*, January 10, 1995; *Tampa Tribune*, August 25, 1996; McSparren, interview. As of this writing the National Register Nomination for Ancote Key Lighthouse had been sent up to the state but has not yet been approved.

65. *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, 1994.

66. McSparren, interview.



Bernie Higgins, a local musician, stated, "I have memories of the lighthouse blinking on and off and just going out there on the island . . . I want to save it for my children and grandchildren. . . . It's more romantic than logical."<sup>67</sup>

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67. *Tampa Tribune*, November 23, 1995.