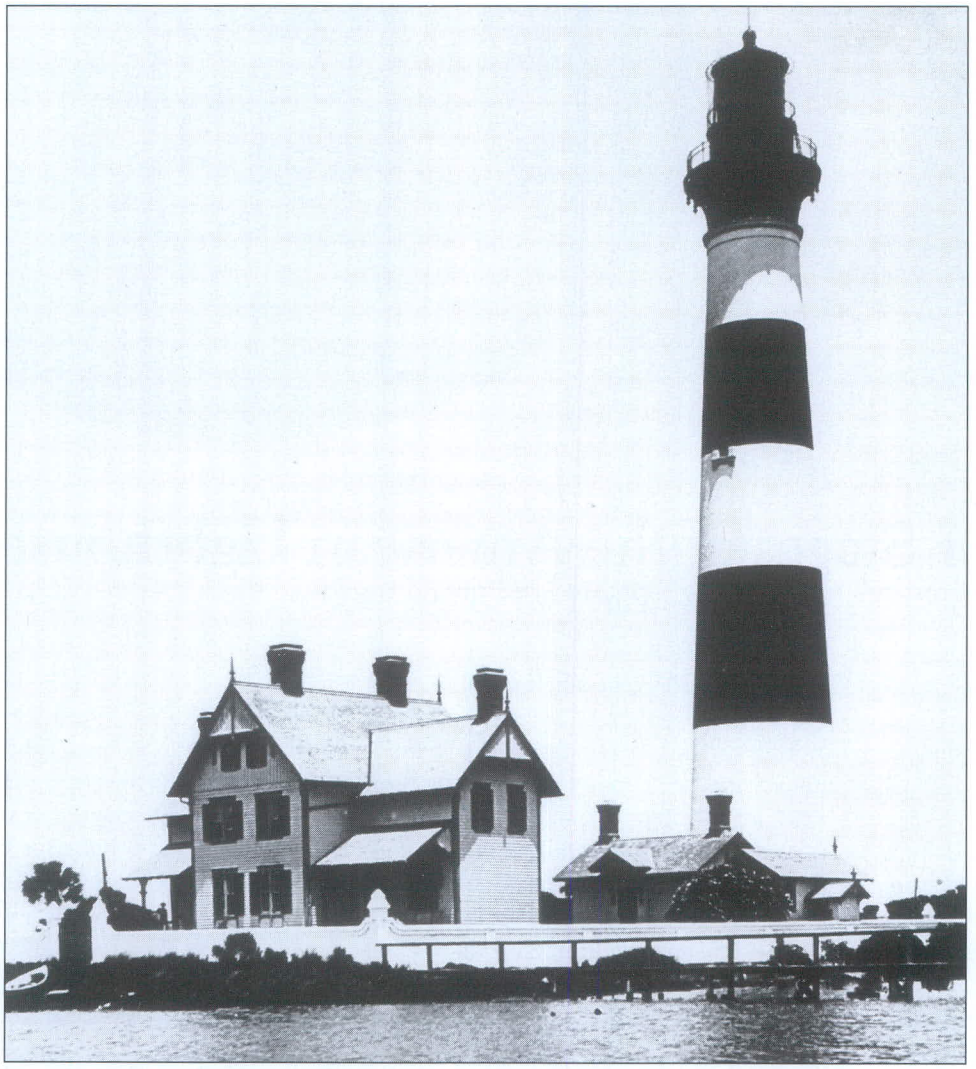
Morris Island Lighthouse

Compiled by Douglas W. Bostick
Edited by Wayne Wheeler



Morris Island Light Station in 1894. U. S. Lighthouse Society photo

Nothing indicates the liberality, prosperity or intelligence of a nation more clearly than the facilities, which it affords for the safe passage of the mariner to its shores.

The introduction and improvement of these facilities are every year becoming more and more important, since the number of lives and amount of property exposed to the dangers of the sea are increasing with time in a geometrical ratio; and not withstanding the aids which have been afforded navigation and the perfection of the art itself, the number of marine disasters which are annually reported is truly frightful.

Report of the Lighthouse Board - 1868

Morris Island Lighthouse, nicknamed the Old Charleston Light, has served the citizens of South Carolina in various ways, for three centuries. The need for safe passage into Charleston Harbor was immediately recognized in 1670 when Albemarle Point was first settled. Lights of various forms and sizes have been present on (what is now known as) Morris Island ever since. In 1962 the present Morris Island Lighthouse was decommissioned.

The Morris Island Lighthouse now standing in the water off of Charleston Harbor is a testament to that chapter in American history when maritime commerce was the lifeblood of the nation. The lighthouse bears a witness to the rich, if sometimes blood, history of Morris Island. Today, it is a testament to the durability of a Lighthouse Service-designed structure under assault by the forces of man and nature.

The lighthouse has faced war, earthquakes, hurricanes, erosion and decades of neglect. It has reached a point when it can no longer bear the latter. The Morris Island Lighthouse must be saved. It needs to be stabilized to be preserved for future generations. While it is obvious that the structure needs help, the good news is that it is not too late to save it. The Morris Island Lighthouse can be effectively stabilized where it presently stands. The brick and ironwork, while in need of attention, is in no worse shape than other lighthouses recently restored. But it will require a combined effort by the citizens of Charleston working together with government agencies and lighthouse lovers around the nation.

In April of 1670, the 200-ton frigate *Carolina* eased into a beautiful harbor in the New World. After sailing past islands later to be named Coffin, Morrisons, Boones and Sullivan, the *Carolina* entered a river the Native Americans called Kiawah (later renamed Ashley River). She anchored in the first creek on the southwestern side and her passengers disembarked on Albemarle Point to begin the first settlement in Charleston. By 1671, the colonists started two other settlements: one on James Island called Jamestown; the second on what is now known as the Battery, but then called Oyster Point for the Indian shell midden at that location.

By 1673, the colony had authorized a light to be burned every night on a small sandy island near the entrance to the harbor, later called Morris Island. It was six miles southeast of Oyster Point. This simple beacon was described as a burning "fier ball" fueled by oakum and pitch in an open iron basket. Each vessel entering and leaving the harbor paid a small tax beacon and its attendant.

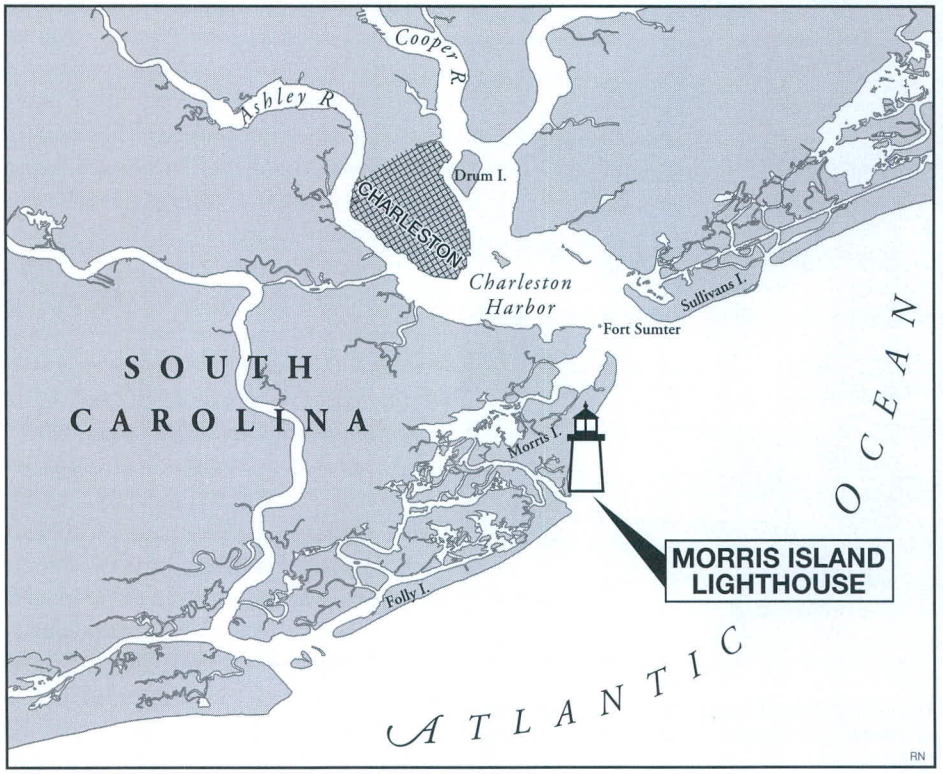
The first recorded mention of Morris Island was in August of 1670. Lord Carteret, aboard the vessel *Carolina,* stopped at the island to cut grass for his cattle and was attacked by the Westo Indians.

By 1700, there were two channels into the harbor: one running south by Morris Island and the other, east by Sullivan's Island. In 1700, the vessel *Rising Sun,* with 98 passengers, anchored in Charleston Harbor. One passenger, a fiery preacher named Archibald Stobo, was invited to preach a service at the Independent Church. That evening a hurricane struck Charles Towne destroying the *Rising Sun.* The next morning, the captain, crew and remaining passengers were washed up – drowned on Morris Island. Archibald Stobo, who was preaching in Charles Towne during the hurricane, escaped the fate of those who had remained on board the vessel. He stayed in Charleston and is credited with starting at least six Presbyterian congregations in the area.

At one time Morris Island was three separate small islands divided by narrow creeks or inlets. The northern most island, named for Captain John Cumings, was called Cumings Island or Cumings Point. The middle island was called Morrison's Island and the third, southern most, was named Middle Bay Island. At the end of the 18th century, the inlets between the islands had silted in forming one large island called Morris Island, shortened from Morrison's Island. The main channel into the harbor by the island was named Pumpkin Hill Channel, thought to be named after a plantation in that area.

By the early 19th century a marine hospital and quarantine station were situated on Morris Island as well as the lighthouse.

The "fier" basket light was used into the 18th century. About 1716, the keeper began to use huge tallow candles, which must have been encased in some sort of lantern. Although an improvement, the candles still weren't very effective at any distance and spider lamps, fueled by whale oil, soon replaced the candles.



In 1750, His Majesty's legislature in Carolina passed an act calling for the construction of a permanent beacon on the island. It was never acted upon and about the time it was to expire, another proclamation was issued in 1757 authorizing construction of a beacon. This proclamation gave them eight years to complete the lighthouse, until 1765. The funds, however, were diverted in late 1757 to construct the steeple on St. Michael's Church.

Over the years the Charleston port became very busy with more than 800 ships clearing the port annually. King George III ordered that a permanent lighthouse be constructed and on May 30, 1767, the corner stone was finally laid on Middle Bay Island. The first lighthouse on what was to become known as Morris Island was designed by Samuel Cordy. It was octagonal and 43 feet high. The optic was several whale oil lamps suspended from the interior of the dome.

The Charleston (Morris Island) Lighthouse was the seventh of the twelve colonial lighthouses constructed. Once the Revolutionary War began, all twelve were extinguished so they wouldn't aid the British vessels.

On September 15, 1775, fearing for his safety, Royal Governor William Campbell fled to the *HMS Tamar,* anchored in Charleston Harbor. The same day, the Colonists' Council of Safety ordered the seizure of Fort Johnson. A small force led by Colonel William Moultrie captured the fort and the Charleston Lighthouse was extinguished. It remained dark until 1780 when the British lighted it after a successful siege of Charleston.

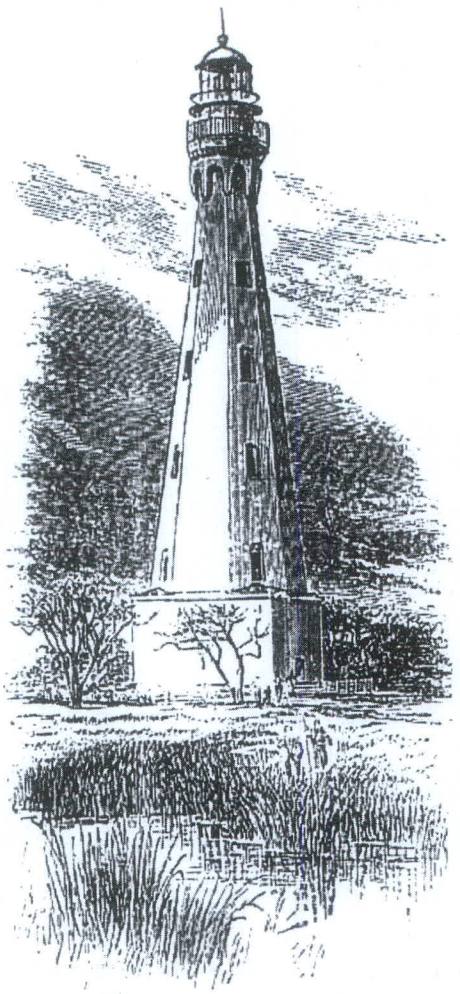
A French chart of 1776 shows the location of the lighthouse on Middle Bay Island and in the vicinity of Pumpkin Hill Channel. The chart notes that on the side of the channel is a rocky reef with the warning, "If struck, you will sink immediately."

After the ratification of our Constitution, Congress faced the task of governing our country and running certain departments. On August 7, 1789, Congress passed its ninth law, and first public works act, which established the Lighthouse Service and transferred the twelve lighthouses then in service from the new states to the federal government, along with buoys, beacons and pier head lights. Congress also authorized the first federal construction of a lighthouse at Cape Henry, Virginia.

The Lighthouse Service grew rapidly. Between 1789 and 1820 the number of lighthouses increased from 12 to 55 and by 1852, when the Lighthouse Board was created, there were 325 lighthouses and 35 lightships.

On January 20, 1790, the South Carolina Legislature transferred title for the Charleston Light Station and 565 acres of Middle Bay Island to the United States. Within a year the tidal waters blocked and silted in the inlets separating the three small islands creating what was initially called Morrison's Island. The only entrance to Charleston's Harbor for deep draft vessels was just off Lighthouse Inlet (Pumpkin Hill Channel) at Five Fathom (30 feet) Hole. From that point the channel led to within several hundred yards of Sullivan's Island and then turned sharply west toward the peninsula city of Charleston.

The lighthouse served the port well. In May 1800, Congress appropriated $5,950 to reconstruct the Charleston Lighthouse and during 1801 and 1802 the tower was increased in height to allow the light to be seen further at sea. While Congress was authorizing funds for more and more lighthouses and other aids to navigation, the existing light stations were not always equipped as thoroughly as they might have been. In 1811, a U.S. Gunboat struck the reef at Pumpkin Hill Channel, and as proclaimed on that French chart, promptly sank. The lighthouse keeper watched in horror as the ship and its crew disappeared in the swift currents. He noted that had he been furnished a boat, he might have saved the crew.



The Morris Island Lighthouse as it appeared in *Leslie's Illustrated* magazine prior to the Civil War.

In 1812, the lighthouse was equipped with the "new" Argand lamp-reflector system, but still burned whale oil. The new system, consisting of ten lamps with 14-inch reflectors did provide for a greater range, although far short of anything the Fresnel system would provide (which would not be invented until 1822). Early Light Lists describe it as a revolving light, but do not indicate the characteristic (flash pattern).

In March 1835, Congress authorized $5,000 to construct five beacons in the Charleston Harbor area. Some would function as range lights to align with the Charleston Lighthouse, guiding the vessels along certain channels. Construction was delayed until 1837. That year two beacons were erected on Morris Island and the other three on Sullivan's Island, Castle Pinckney and at the Battery. The Lighthouse Service also constructed a new tower on Morris Island to replace the 1767 tower. It was 102 feet high and equipped with a revolving light, but early Light Lists don't indicate the period of the flashes.

The Service was reminded of the realities of nature when a major hurricane hit Charleston in September of 1854. The storm destroyed the keeper's dwelling, the five beacons and severely damaged the lighthouse. Congress appropriated funds to build new beacons on Morris Island (two), Sullivan's Island, Castle Pinckney and the Battery of Charleston. A new beacon was also constructed at Fort Sumter. After much debate, a decision was made to repair and upgrade the light station on Morris Island.

The District Inspector noted, "I have but one such work to recommend, viz: a new dwelling-house for the keeper of Charleston Light. The present house is very

old and not fit to live in. Estimate for a new dwelling-house for the keeper of the Charleston Light and his assistant, in place of the present very old dwelling, $4,000. The estimate may seem large, but a liberal allowance must be made for land transportation."

Funds were also requested for a 1st order Fresnel lens for the lighthouse:

First Order lens, fixed, 270 degrees	$8,000
Changes in the lantern and top of tower	$1,500
Repairs of the tower	$ 500
Contingencies	$1,000
	$11,000

($290,000 in today's money)

A second order Fresnel lens was installed.

In December 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. On December 18, the Charleston Lighthouse Inspector reported to Washington that it was likely that the lighthouse property would be seized by South Carolina troops. On December 20, Commander Semmes, Secretary of the Lighthouse Board, wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury that he would not recommended that the U.S. Government (against the will of the state government) light the coast of South Carolina. On December 30, the local inspector filed a report to Washington noting, "The Governor of the State of South Carolina has requested me to leave the state. I am informed that forcible possession has been taken of the lighthouses, buoys and beacons of the harbor and that similar measures will be adapted in regard to all lights in the state." The Rattlesnake Shoal lightship was towed into Charleston Harbor and the tenders were seized.

On January 7, 1861, news reached Charleston that the *Star of the West* had departed New York with armed troops bound for Charleston. The 2nd order lens was removed from the tower and stored and the tower was converted into an observation post manned by the Cadets of the Citadel, South Carolina's military college. They also manned four 24-pound howitzers guarding the main ship channel.

On the morning of January 9, Captain McGown brought the *Star of the West* into the entrance channel. The cadets waited until the federal ship was abreast of their position and opened fire. The first shot went across the vessel's bow and subsequent shots hit the bow and rudder. Captain McGown turned the ship around and departed having failed to reinforce the troops at Fort Sumter.

On April 11, Union Major Anderson, commanding officer of Fort Sumter, refused to surrender to General Beauregard. The next morning the southern troops began a bombardment, firing 2,500 shots at the fort by that evening. On the morning of April 13 the bombardment began again. Finally, after 34 hours of incessant pounding, Major Anderson surrendered

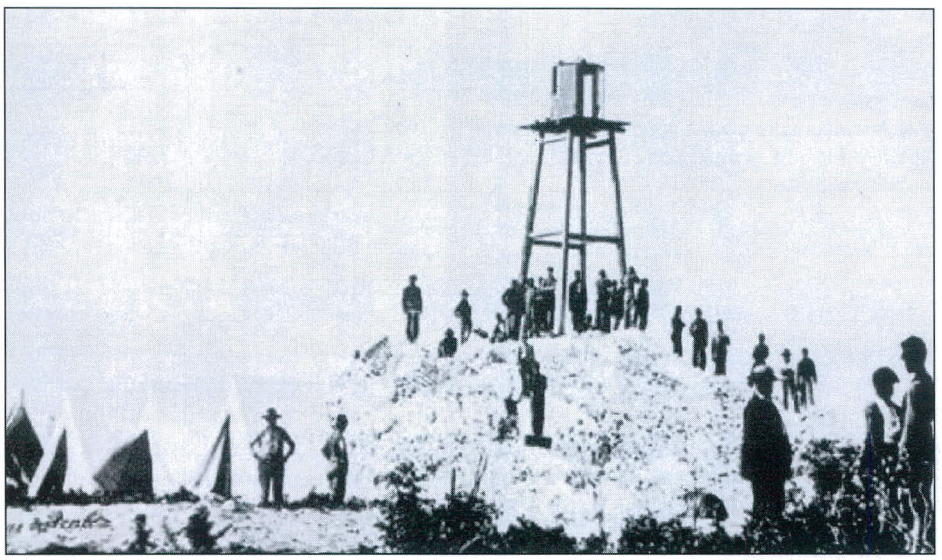
By late April 1861, the lighthouses from Virginia to Texas were extinguished. In all, some 164 lights in the south had been blacked out or destroyed by the war. Only those of the Florida Reefs were still lighted. During the war certain lighthouse towers were used as observation platforms by both sides, as the occupation of various territories passed back and forth.

Brigadier General Quincy Gilmore, who would later exert a great influence over the Morris Island Lighthouse, assumed command of the Department of the South for the Union in July 1863. Morris Island was at the center of the longest siege of the Civil War. It lasted 19 months and it is believed that the Confederate Army destroyed the lighthouse to prevent its use by the North.

Confederate Batteries Gregg and Wagner were located on Cumings Point, north of the lighthouse. The federal batteries and troops were situated on Folly Island and the southern end of Morris Island. The famous but ill-fated black regiment, (as depicted in the movie *Glory*) the Massachusetts 54th, led the attack on Battery Wagner. Sergeant William Carney, of the 54th, seized the Union flag when the bearer was shot. Despite his wounds, Sgt. Carney returned from the attack still bearing the flag. He later became the first black American to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

As soon as Federal troops occupied Charleston in February 1865, the Charleston Channel was relighted with temporary beacons. By 1866, most lights in the south had been restored or rebuilt. But, it wasn't until March 3, 1873 that Congress passed the first of three appropriations for "commencing the rebuilding of a first order seacoast light on Morris Island destroyed during the war. The site of the old lighthouse, at this station, which was destroyed during the rebellion, is on land owned by the Government, to which the state ceded jurisdiction many years ago. It is proposed to locate the new structure, for which an appropriation was made at the last session of Congress, at or near the same spot. The tower will be of brick of the first order, 150 feet high, and of the form of a frustum of a right cone, resting on an octagonal base. It is proposed to commence work on the foundation as soon as the sickly season is over. An additional appropriation of $60,000 will be asked for this work."

The *1874 Report of the Lighthouse Board* described the work completed on the foundation. It required driving numerous piles to establish a solid foundation and, "On



Union troops at the remains of the Morris Island Lighthouse during the Civil War. The structure is an observation platform erected on the ruins.

account of the unhealthiness of the locality work cannot be carried on during the summer months." Mosquitoes and malaria. The engineer estimated that the weight of the tower, once completed, would be 4,000 tons and that 210 piles would have to be driven to support the tower.

In 1875, the Board reported that 79 foundation piles had been driven and other work on the foundation completed and, again, work was halted during the summer months.

The 1876 Report stated, "... operations were resumed in October 1875, when work on the superstructure was commenced and has since been steadily continued to completion. The illuminating apparatus, a first-order lens, fixed white, with an arc of 270 degrees ... has been set up. The oil and work rooms have been built, and the tower is ready for lighting. The keeper's dwelling ... is nearly completed. The ground in the vicinity of the tower, originally on the level of the adjoining marsh-land, and subject to overflow at spring-tide, has been raised to an average height of three feet .... The easterly side bounded by the marsh has been protected from the tides by a timber and plank scarp faced with the debris of the old tower ..."

The new light was first displayed on October 1, 1876. The design of the tower is the same employed, with slight variations, as those at the North Carolina sites of Cape Hatteras, Bodie Island, and Currituck, as well as Sand Island, Alabama and the three west coast lighthouses at Pigeon Point and Point Arena, California and Yaquina Head, Oregon.

The Morris Island tower is 158 feet tall and constructed of 1 million bricks. Nine iron flights of stairs allowed the keeper to reach the lantern room. The final cost was about $150,000, almost $3.1 million in equivalent 2000 dollars.

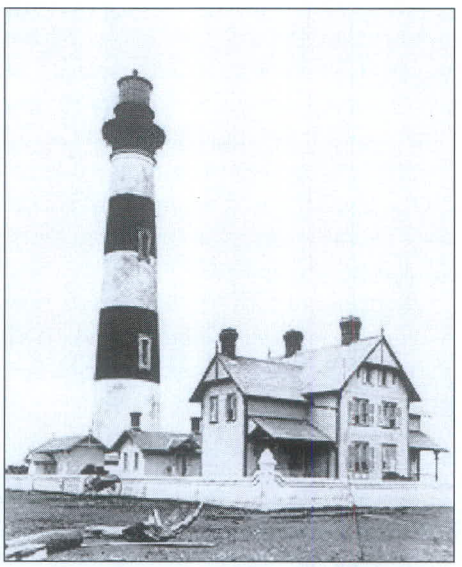
Originally, the keeper, his two assistants and their families lived in a three-story wooden, triplex. But within a few years there were 15 buildings on the grounds: three keeper's dwellings, outbuildings, barns, chicken coop and even a schoolhouse for the keeper's children.

A series of range lights operated with the Morris Island tower to help guide vessels through local channels. Two, small, front beacons with 5th order lenses were located on Morris Island. Sullivan Island had a range light and small minor lenses were installed at Castle Pinckney and Fort Sumter.

Brigadier General Gilmore, former commander of all Union forces during the siege of Charleston, was an engineer by trade prior to the late unpleasantries. After the war he remained in Charleston and was assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers.

In October 1877, the Charleston Chamber of Commerce asked Congress to appropriate funds to construct jetties at the entrance to Charleston's harbor. They were designed by Gen. Gilmore. At low tide the main entrance channel was only 12 -13 feet deep. Gilmore estimated that the installation of jetties on each side of the channel would restrict the water flowing out of the harbor and cause the bottom of the channel to be scoured out, perhaps to a depth of 21 feet.

The Chamber of Commerce marketed Charleston Harbor as, "the shortest, cheapest and most reliable route by which to send their [the western grain growers] products to European, South American and West Indian markets." The bill passed Congress and a contract was awarded in September 1878. The final bid was for $21 a linear foot. The 17 year project took until December 1895. When completed, the north jetty extended 14,327 feet and the south jetty was 14,109 feet. Both were almost 2 2/3 miles long. This action was to doom Morris Island.



The keeper, his two assistants and their families lived in this triplex. The complex had 15 buildings on the grounds.

By 1881, the effects of the jetties were already being felt, even while still under construction. The main channel was deepening, as engineer Gilmore had predicted, but the shorelines of Sullivan's and Morris Islands were rapidly eroding. The jetties created new sand transport patterns leaving Sullivan's and Morris Islands sand starved. Two spur jetties were added to the north side to stop the erosion of Sullivan's Island. Four spur jetties were designed for Morris Island, but never funded. In 1880 the Morris Island lighthouse was 2,700 feet from the shoreline. By 1938, it was on the shoreline. Today the lighthouse stands 1,600 feet offshore.

Ironically, General Gilmore failed to take Morris Island during the war, with superior numbers and fire power. After the war he unintentionally destroyed the island as a result of his jetties.

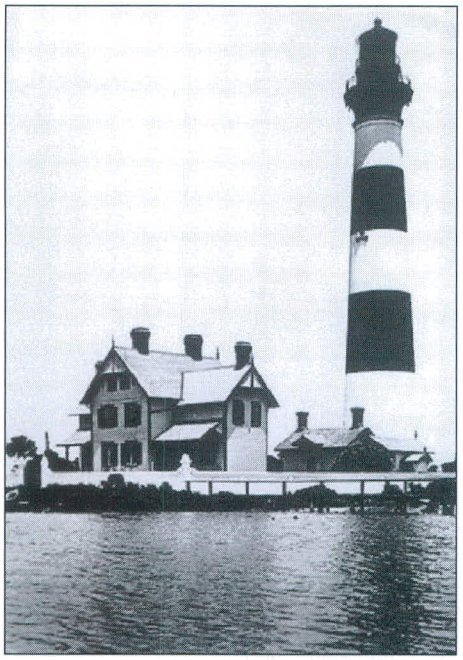
Charleston was the headquarters for the Service's Sixth Lighthouse District with a depot and District office in the Custom House. Four service tenders were based in the harbor.

The Morris Island keepers, in addition to all the chores required as a first class station also had the grim duty of reburying bones. During the Civil War, hundreds of Union soldiers were killed on Morris Island and buried in mass graves. As the island eroded, due to the effects of the jetties, bodies turned up on the beaches. The keepers routinely collected the bones and buried them further inland.

In 1883, a new federal agency, the U.S. Life Saving Service, requested use of the property that had been occupied by the lighthouse destroyed in the Civil War. The request was for one acre on which to build the main building and a quarter acre for the boat house. The Lighthouse Service agreed and a Life Saving Service station was completed in the spring of 1885.

On August 25, 1885, a powerful hurricane hit Charleston, the first in 31 years. With winds exceeding 125 miles per hour, Charleston experienced 21 deaths and $1.7 million in property damaged, a hefty sum in those years. The storm destroyed a channel beacon, damaged several others, damaged the keeper's dwelling, plank walks on the island and uprooted the seawall surrounding the lighthouse. The tower was not harmed, attesting to superior design and construction techniques.

The next year Mother Nature delivered a second and more devastating blow. At 9:50 p.m. on August 31, 1886, one of the



An 1893 view of the light station showing the water beginning to encroach on the grounds.

most devastating earthquakes to occur in the southeast, and one of the strongest in eastern North America, hit Charleston. Most buildings in Charleston were damaged, many destroyed. There were reports of from four to eight separate shocks. In Charleston people rushed into the streets and, "Many fell on their knees and prayed aloud for mercy." Total damage in Charleston alone was estimated between $5 and $6 million. The local *News and Courier* reported, "The saddest wreck of all in this locality is the venerable St. Philips [church], which like St. Michaels appears to have been almost totally wrecked."

The Morris Island Lighthouse suffered damage as well. The Board reported, "The earthquake .... threw the lens out of place and cracked the tower extensively in two places, but not so as to endanger its stability. The uppermost, serious crack extends somewhat spirally almost through a full circumference of the tower ... there has been no lateral displacement. The lens was immediately replaced [realigned] and the broken parts were repaired without delay.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the area was relatively free of storms, earthquakes and war. Of course, the Morris Island shoreline continued to disappear at an average rate of 25 feet per year.

And, life went on. The families tended their gardens and livestock, the keepers made repairs to the station, painted, cleaned and kept the light. Once a week a trip was made to the Depot for supplies. The education of the keepers' children depended on how many children of school age were on the island. In some years, when only one or two children lived on the island, they were sent to James or Folly Island during the school year, returning to Morris Island on weekends and during school breaks. By the very late 1800s an orphanage operated on the island and the keeper's children were educated with the orphans. In the 1920s and 30s there were so many children on the island that a teacher was employed on the island Monday through Friday.

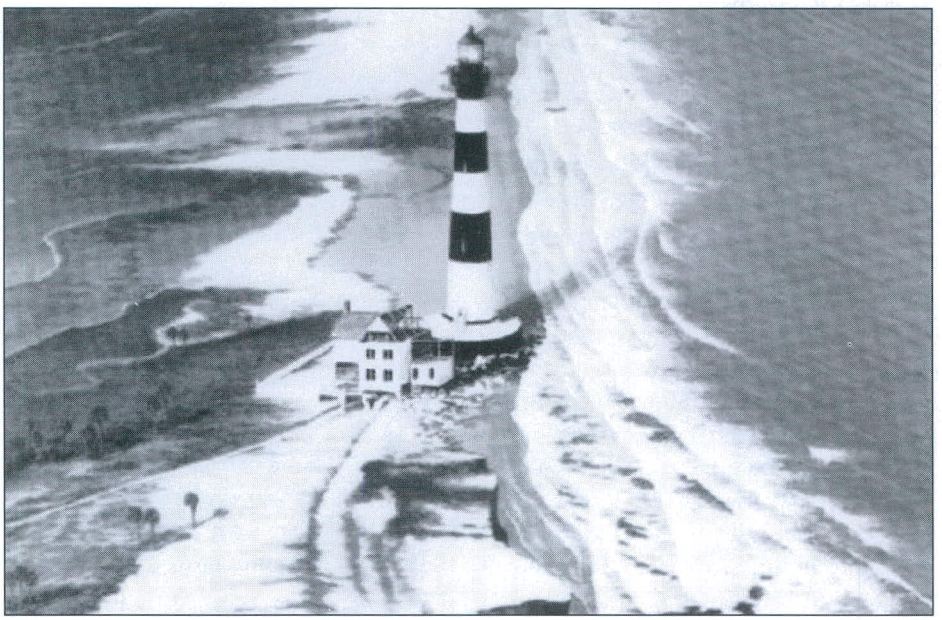
Morris Island finally received telephone service when a cable was run from Sullivan's Island. Modern conveniences were reaching the island, but so was the ocean. By 1935 it was obvious that the lighthouse would have to be automated and personnel removed. On June 22, 1938 the 1st order lens was removed and a modern optic installed. A bulkhead was constructed around the tower in an effort to stave off the erosion. Finally, it was decided to raze the buildings on the island. It was feared that if allowed to wash away, the buildings would become debris and a hazard to navigation. A local man, Dr. Preston, purchased the keeper's house as surplus government property for $55. He paid a crew to disassemble the structure. As they began the process, they found that the entire house had been put together with wooden pegs; not a single nail was used in the construction. It took four weeks to take the structure apart. The dismantled house was taken to shore by barge and hauled to Edisto Island where the doctor converted the material into two houses. Unfortunately, and ironically, in later years the houses were destroyed by a storm and most of the material was washed into the ocean.

The Morris Island tower continued to operate as an acetylene powered minor light.

In February 1956, the Coast Guard announced its intention to build a new lighthouse on Sullivan's Island and abandon the Morris Island tower that was now standing in the water, but far from the shifted shipping channel. The new lighthouse, a 168 foot high, triangular, steel frame-aluminum covered tower went into operation in June of 1962 and the old light was extinguished. The new (Sullivan's Island) structure was the last, more or less, traditional lighthouse constructed in this country and is the only one with an elevator.

In 1960, the Coast Guard announced plans to auction off the 1st order lens, which had been in storage for 44 years. However, it was eventually given to the museum at South Carolina's Hunting Island State Park. It was poorly cared for and most of the glass prism have been removed from the frame over the years. Visitors can view the remains in the base of the Hunting Island Lighthouse.

In 1962 the Coast Guard stated they had no intentions of razing the lighthouse.



A 1938 view of what's left of Morris Island, shortly before the station was abandoned. All photos these two pages courtesy of Doug Bostick.

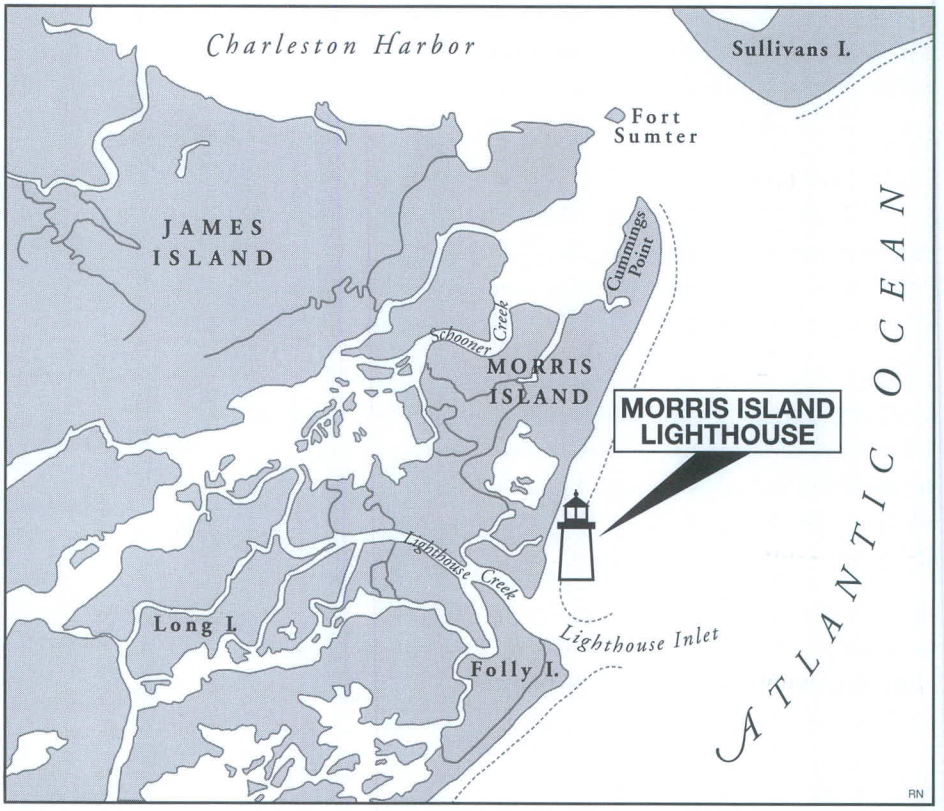
Abruptly, however, in 1965 they allocated $20,000 to tear it down. The Charleston citizens' reaction to the announcement was predictable and swift. The local preservation society stated it must be saved and stated they would acquire it. The local congressman and a state senator petitioned the Coast Guard not to tear it down. Subsequently, the preservation society realized they didn't have the financial resources to acquire it. The Coast Guard backed off on its plans and transferred the property to the GSA. Bids were accepted for the 421 acres of underwater land, 140 acres of dry land and the lighthouse tower. Twenty-three bids were received. The high-bidder was John Preston Richardson, operator of a motel and apartments in Mount Pleasant, SC. His bid was $3,303.03. Although he initially stated he was thrilled with the purchase, he changed his tune after visiting the lighthouse. He said he was shocked at the condition. He offered the tower and five acres of underwater land for sale, but only to a buyer who would preserve the structure. In 1966, a group of local realtors, including Henry Yaschik and S.E. Felkel, purchased 820 acres on Morris Island. This tract included 400 acres of high land and represented all of Morris Island except that owned by Mr. Richardson. A month later, Mr. Felkel bought the 141 acres of high land, 421 acres of submerged land and the Morris Island Lighthouse from Mr. Richardson for $25,000.

In 1996, Columbia businessman Paul Gunter acquired the lighthouse and 80 acres of submerged land in a foreclosure sale against Felkel. He announced plans to sell the lighthouse for $100,000. A citizens group, called Save the Light, quickly organized to encourage the preservation of the lighthouse for the citizens of South Carolina. While both Charleston County and the State expressed interest in saving the Morris Island Lighthouse, neither were willing to pay for it. Concerned that yet another real estate developer might purchase the lighthouse, Save The Light, Inc. bought it from Mr. Gunter in February 1999 for $75,000.

Save the Light, Inc. can be reached at P.O. Box 12490, Charleston, SC 29422. Their phone number is (843) 795-8911 and website address is http://www.savethelight.org.



Members of the Save the Light Committee land at the lighthouse to assess the condition. Photo courtesy of Doug Bostick.



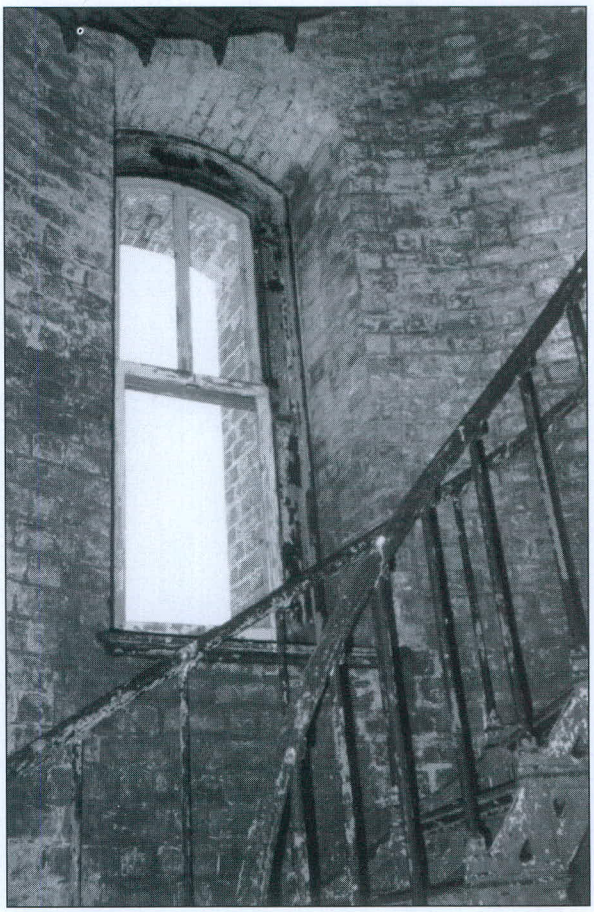
The tower presently lists slightly to seaward. Research indicates that the list was caused by the 1886 earthquake which badly damaged Charleston. The 1887 report to Congress states, "The earthquake of August (1886) threw the lens out of position and cracked the tower extensively in two places, but not so to endanger its stability. The upper and most serious crack extends somewhat spirally almost through a full circumfrence of the tower....the lens was almost immediately replaced and the broken parts were repaired without delay.

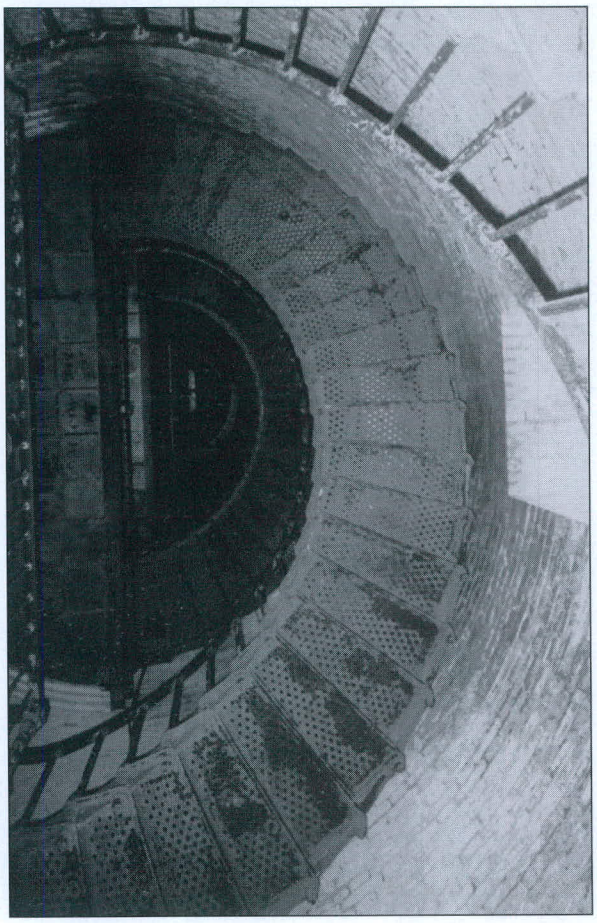
Right, top – An interior window shows a decayed window frame but the surrounding bricks appear sound.

Right, bottom – The cast iron spiral staircase is mostly sound but badly rusted.



The tower was originally painted in bands of black and white. Over the years the black paint has eroded or faded so that now the red bricks show. All photos courtesy of Doug Bostick.







Front and back of the Morris Island keeper's dwelling. Note the keeper and child in the above photo and a buggy under the porch. The structure beside the dwelling, pictured below, is probably a chicken coop. Our archives list this as the Morris Island Light Station Assistant Keeper's dwelling. However, it may have been a dwelling for the range light keeper in lieu of a dwelling associated with the main station.





In 1876, vessels arriving at Charleston were greeted by the new Morris Island tower and a series of range lights which operated in conjunction with the main light. They were located east and west of the channel.

Above – Rear Range Beacon. Note the wooden walkway.

Right – Front Range Beacon



1886 Report to Congress

Charleston (main) and Morris Island range beacons, on the south end of Morris Island, South Carolina. — The cyclone of August 25, 1885, destroyed the rear beacon of the Morris Island range, overturned part of the brick wall which inclosed (sic) the tower and dwelling of the main light, carried away the bridge between the beacons, destroyed a large part of the plank walks connecting the several lights and dwellings; and overturned the boat-house. The range was re-established on the 28th by a light shown from a temporary beacon. A new wooden skeleton structure 40 feet high, with inclosed (sic) service room and lantern, was built, and a light was shown from it in November. Some 300 lineal feet of brick wall were partly taken down and rebuilt, 1,000 lineal feet of raised plank walk and 1,200 lineal feet of ground walk, 2 planks wide, were rebuilt, the boat-house was replaced with five additional piles to its foundation, and a new bridge was built across the creek. Four new pumps were supplied to the station and connected with the cistern pipes, and a new electric call-bell apparatus was put up. In September the foundation of the flont beacon was exposed by the action of the wind amd waves. This was protected by sheet-piles driven 10 feet from the structure, and the interval was filled with broken bricks.