Faro do Punta Tuna (Punta Tuna Lighthouse)
Punta Tuna
Emajagua (barrio)
Maunabo
Puerto Rico

HAER No. PR-9

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Luis Morales, photographer August 1978

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(Punta Tuna Lighthouse)

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Location: On Point Tuna (the southeasterly point of Puerto Rico) on the easterly side of Port Maunabo.

Position 17° 57.4' N - 65° 53.1' W

Date of Construction: 1893

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Coast Guard

Official Owner: Central Lighthouse Commission, Colonial Public Works Office, Harbor and Port Section, Government of Spain

Present Use: Lighthouse

Description: The Punta Tuna Lighthouse was constructed as a third order lighthouse that showed a white light with a group of two flashes. It served as the most eastern primary light that terminated the Island's southern light belt, and, at the same time, was the southern light that formed the Island's eastern light belt. This was formed by another primary light, Cabo San Juan, and three minor lights (Puerto Ferro, Punta Mulas, and Isla Culebrita). The structure, built around the tower, was the dwelling for one first class and a third class keeper. The main entrance of the brick and stone building, 27.7 x 12.4 x 5.5 mts., faces east. The interior responds into a vestibule, 6.2 x 4.65 mts., where the entrance to the tower is found. (A small hall at the entrance was built afterwards, perhaps in the 1950s.) At both sides of the vestibule there were two corridors: one led to the storeroom that connected with the oil room behind the tower; another led into the engineer's room. The vestibule also connected both keepers' quarters, which were identical: one 4.65 x 4.65 mts. living room; two 3.6 x 4.65 mts. bedrooms; one small (3.2 x 1.9 mts.) storeroom; one kitchen-dining area (3.6 x 3 mts.); and one bathroom (1.5 x 3.6 mts.).

The octagonal tower's base is a square 3.9 mts. It opens to a 2.5 mts in diameter cast-iron winding stairway that goes 14.5 mts up to a cast-iron, copper, and glass 3rd order lantern. The tower has a cement gallery with a cast-iron balustrade.

The original illuminating lenticular lens, still in use, is a Barbier, Bernard & Cie. 1891 3rd order flashing instrument 1 mt. in diameter. The lens has 6 flashing panels. Each panel in the central drum has 7 elements. Each panel above the central drum has 11 prisms and 4 below. The flashes are produced by the entire revolving lens.

The original clock work was a revolving mechanism in use until 1939. The original ball bearing mechanism was changed in 1927 for a semicircular groove raceway. The clock cord descended through the iron column in the center of the tower's stairway. It had a 200 lb. weight. Surprisingly, the original lantern and cast-iron balustrade, lens, parts of the revolving mechanism, clock work and cord, clock weight are in situ. Furthermore, the clock work is in working condition including the ball and friction governor. Also, most of the original wood work in the interior of structure, excluding beams and windows, is the original.

The alterations done to the building are almost identical to those at Cabo Rojo and Cabo San Juan. Changes in light characteristics were made in 1914, 1927, 1935, 1964, and 1970 when light range was increased to 25 miles.

The decorative elements in the gray and white structure are primarily spanish colonial neo-classicism: proporticnate, unelaborate cornice, and a plain pediment. The most striking decoration is the tower's bracketed cornice.

The stark building dramatically contrasts with its lush tropical surrounding. The lighthouse is positioned in the tip of a rock which cliffs plunge into the sea from 22 mts. The Carribean Sea embraces the rock and its structure at west, south, and east.

The light signals the most south-eastern point of Puerto Rico. Architecturally and mechanically it remains almost as originally built. This makes it a unique site within the extent system.

Transmitted by:

Kevin Murphy, Historian HAER, August 1984; from the National Register Nomination prepared by Dr. Benjamin Nistal-Moret, August 1979.