

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a).

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Sanibel Lighthouse

Other names/site number: Sanibel Lighthouse and Keepers' Quarters; LL00097

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Florida's Historic Lighthouses MPS

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 110 Periwinkle Way  not for publication

City or town: Sanibel  vicinity

State: FLORIDA County: Lee Zip Code: 33957

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain)

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count.)

	Contributing	Noncontributing	
	0	0	buildings
	0	0	sites
	1	0	structures
	0	0	objects
	1	0	total

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:**

3

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: lighthouse

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE: steel skeletal lighthouse

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: METAL, WOOD, CONCRETE

walls: METAL

GLASS

roof: METAL

other:

**Narrative Description**

(On continuation sheets, describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(On continuation sheets, provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations. For the Narrative Statement of Significance, provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Transportation
- Commerce
- Exploration/Settlement
- Architecture
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1884-1975

**Significant Dates**

ca. 1884  
ca. 1949 (lighthouse automation)

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

United States Lighthouse Board, builder

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of Repository:  
U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
- # \_\_\_\_\_
- # \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 26.452937  
2. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_  
4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Longitude: -82.014254  
2. Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_  
4. Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**-Or-**

**UTM References**

Datum: (indicated on USGS map)  NAD 1927  NAD 1983

1. Zone: \_\_\_\_\_ Easting: \_\_\_\_\_ Northing: \_\_\_\_\_  
2. Zone: \_\_\_\_\_ Easting: \_\_\_\_\_ Northing: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. Zone: \_\_\_\_\_ Easting: \_\_\_\_\_ Northing: \_\_\_\_\_  
4. Zone: \_\_\_\_\_ Easting: \_\_\_\_\_ Northing: \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/title: Savannah Y. Finch  
Organization: Archaeological Consultants, Inc.  
Street & Number: 8110 Blaikie Court, Suite A  
City: Sarasota State: FL Zip Code: 34240  
Email: syoung@aciflorida.com Telephone: 941-379-6206 Date: April 13, 2026

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location **-or-** an equivalent scaled map that indicates the property's location and latitude/longitude or UTM coordinates.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

**Photographs**

**Clear and descriptive photographs** under separate cover. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Each photograph must be numbered in the order they are referenced in the manuscript, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log.

**Additional items**

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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The Sanibel Lighthouse was first listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 under the name, "Sanibel Lighthouse and Keepers' Quarters." Although the original nomination form does not provide an official resource count, the nomination indicates that the property was comprised of three contributing resources: the lighthouse and two keepers' quarters. The oil house and the presence of non-contributing resources are not mentioned within the original nomination. In addition, the Sanibel Lighthouse was listed under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Commerce with the period of significance defined simply as "19<sup>th</sup> century" and "20<sup>th</sup> century." This amendment proposes the change of the official property name to "Sanibel Lighthouse" to reflect the loss of the keepers' quarters and other supporting buildings and structures during Hurricane Ian in 2022. The areas of significance from the original nomination will be retained and expanded to also include Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement to acknowledge the role the establishment of the light station played in the commencement of the modern settlement period of Sanibel Island, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture to focus on the significance of the lighthouse itself, which is an excellent example of late 19<sup>th</sup> century iron skeletal lighthouses and the "Sanibel class" of square iron skeletal lighthouses. Furthermore, the period of significance will be clarified and expanded to include the period between 1884 when the lighthouse was constructed and the end of the historic period which is defined as 1976 based on the 50-year requirement as the lighthouse has remained in operation past this historic cutoff.

The purpose of Section 7 of this amended documentation will be to update the physical description of the lighthouse and surrounding grounds to both bring them up to modern National Register standards, discuss the restoration efforts of the lighthouse, and to update the property inventory to account for the loss of keepers' quarters. The amendment will provide an expanded historical context to bring the nomination up to modern National Register standards and will also seek to add this lighthouse to the Florida's Historic Lighthouses Multiple Property Submission (MPS).

## SUMMARY

The Sanibel Island Light Station, as originally constructed in 1884, was comprised of the lighthouse, two keepers' quarters and their corresponding cisterns, and a T-shaped wharf. A brick oil house was constructed immediately north of the lighthouse during the 1890s. The Sanibel Island Lighthouse is a pyramidal iron skeletal structure comprised of a central circular cylinder surrounded by iron support columns, four rings of horizontal struts, and tie rods that create a four-sided pyramid or frustum. The central cylinder does not adjoin the base but begins at the top of one central column that is approximately 20 feet (ft) above the base of the lighthouse. Four principal columns are arranged in a square around the central column and extend to the octagonal floor of the watch room. The remaining four secondary columns are placed midway between the principal columns to add additional stability but do not extend to the watch room floor. In total, the columns create a layout of three rows of three equally spaced columns.

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During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, additional features were constructed or added to the light station to aid in the daily lives of the light keepers, such as water towers and tanks, a pumphouse, and chicken coop. During World War II (WWII), the light station grounds were altered by the construction of a small cottage and submarine observation tower for use by military patrolmen. During the mid-twentieth century, several alterations were made to the light station, including the construction of a repair shop/garage, removal of the WWII era additions during the 1960s, the removal of the original staircases leading between the lighthouse and the keepers' quarters and replacement with a metal entry platform and ladder, removal or loss of water towers and tanks, and the demolition of the remaining boat house on the property. With the construction of a small garage adjacent to keepers' quarters two during the 1970s, the property reached the general overarching configuration that lasted until Hurricane Ian in 2022 with the exception of minor landscaping features and security measures. All of the supporting buildings surrounding the lighthouse were destroyed, including the keepers' cottages, oil house, garage and repair shop, and the loss of the remaining cistern base. The lighthouse survived the storm; however, it did incur damage including the loss of the lower portion of the southwest support column, a damaged horizontal strut, and five tie rods were damaged or destroyed. The damaged/destroyed features were repaired and replaced when necessary, with pieces that were manufactured to match the originals. In addition, a new foundation was poured for the circa (ca.) 1960 entry ladder and the handrails along the ca. 1960 entry platform were replaced. Broken windows within the tower and the lantern room were replaced, and the interior and exterior of the lighthouse were repainted. The repairs and repainting were completed in the summer of 2024.

Despite the loss of the contributing resources, the primary resource — the lighthouse — remains relatively unchanged. Throughout the period of significance, necessary alterations were made to the lighthouse to better withstand the elements and follow the technological progress of the time. Despite alterations to the lighthouse, such as the change in access, the change in the original daymark, and the replacement of the original windows, the Sanibel Lighthouse retains all of the character defining features of the iron skeletal lighthouse type, including the square footprint, slim central cylinder, octagonal watch room floor, and presence of both a watch room and lantern room with galleries. The effectiveness of these design features is evident in the continued presence of the Sanibel lighthouse despite the destruction of Hurricane Ian and indicative of the retained integrity of workmanship. Although the damaged southwest support column, horizontal strut, and five damaged/destroyed tie rods were repaired and replaced, these features were replaced with pieces that were manufactured to match the originals and do not detract from the design of the overall lighthouse or diminish the integrity of materials. The environmental setting of the lighthouse, including the former light station, has been significantly compromised due to the effects of Hurricane Ian and as such the light station no longer retains integrity of design and setting. However, the lighthouse retains integrity of location, workmanship, and materials due to the fact that the lighthouse remains in the original location and that the alterations have not diminished the architectural features which make the lighthouse significant.

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### SETTING

The Sanibel Lighthouse is located within Lighthouse Beach Park, a city owned property located at 110 Periwinkle Way on the easternmost point of Sanibel Island. The park is approximately 25 acres in size and bordered by San Carlos Bay to the north and east, the Gulf of Mexico to the south. The park is comprised of restroom facilities, three public parking lots, and wooden walkways through the natural vegetation. The lighthouse is located on the southeastern shore of the park, approximately 50 ft from the water line. The land surrounding the lighthouse is predominantly sandy shoreline as the majority of the vegetation and all supporting buildings were lost during Hurricane Ian (**Photos 1 and 2**). The lighthouse tower is surrounded by a 10 ft tall chain-link fence to prevent public access to the structure. A non-historic public restroom is located approximately 200 ft to the northwest of the lighthouse.

### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Sanibel Island Lighthouse is a pyramidal iron skeletal structure comprised of a central circular cylinder surrounded by iron support columns, four rings of horizontal struts, and tie rods that create a four-sided pyramid or frustum (**Photos 3 through 5**). The central cylinder does not adjoin the base but begins at the top of one central column that is approximately 20 ft above the base of the lighthouse. Four principal columns are arranged in a square around the central column and extend to the octagonal floor of the watch room. The remaining four secondary columns are placed midway between the principal columns to add additional stability but do not extend to the watch room floor. In total, the columns create a layout of three rows of three equally spaced columns. The columns are fitted with wrought iron footers attached to concrete pads which are buried beneath the sand in a square plan that is roughly 28 ft by 28 ft<sup>1</sup>. Beneath the concrete pads are wooden pilings. The exterior of the lighthouse is painted brown, which serves as a distinguishing characteristic of the tower, or the daymark. The lighthouse was 98 ft above sea level at the time of construction.

The entrance to the lighthouse is accessed by a metal ladder which leads to a metal platform lined with railings at the base of the central cylinder. The entryway is through double metal doors with strap hinges and a decorative iron surround. The decorative iron surround is cast to have the appearance of a straight pediment with a star-on-circle detail set within a central semi-circular projection, resting on fluted brackets, and terminating at iron plinth blocks. A small metal label with the stamped date of "2013" is riveted to the upper left corner of the lefthand door (exterior) (**Photo 6**).

A spiral, iron staircase without risers is accessed to the immediate left when entering the central cylinder and wraps around a small hollow core (**Photo 7**). This hollow core, also known as the drop tube, would have historically contained the counterweight for the clockwork mechanism which caused the lens to revolve (LeBuff 2019) (**Photo 8**). The interior is painted white until the ascent into the watch room begins, at which point it is painted brown to match the watch room and lantern room. Features indicative of the plate assembly of the central cylinder visible from the interior, include the bolted construction and the

<sup>1</sup> A.C. Bell, Sanibel Island Light Station, Florida, Buildings Surveyed; Sanibel Island (FL 44), Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard; Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

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presence of plate or piece numbers in the form of roman numerals and letters stamped into the iron (**Photos 9 through 11**).

Three windows are present on the central cylinder (**Photos 4, 5, and 12**). The windows are metal frame fixed units with iron windowsills, and two of the three windows are covered with metal grilles from the exterior of the cylinder. The uppermost window does not have a metal grille.

The spiral stairway leads into the watch room, which is a windowless room with an octagonal base and the exterior of this portion is surrounded by a gallery with railings (**Photos 13 and 14**). From the watch room, double doors open onto the octagonal gallery, or a secondary set of steps lead up into the lantern room (**Photo 15**). Within the watch room, the center of the room is occupied by the inoperable remnants of a rotator pedestal which supported a Third Order Fresnel lens (no longer extant), and eight skylights are visible within the watch room ceiling which doubles as the lantern room floor (**Photo 16**).

The lantern room is the topmost level of the lighthouse which is comprised of a glass enclosure made up of ten storm panes. The lantern room is also lined with a small exterior gallery with a metal railing. This gallery can be accessed via a metal ladder from the watch room gallery (**Photo 17**). A non-historic LED beacon is installed within the lantern room (**Photo 18**).

The decagonal metal roof is topped with a round ventilator topped with a pinnacle, or lightning rod. The pinnacle is comprised of a brass body and a platinum point.<sup>2</sup>

### ALTERATIONS

The setting of the overall light station has changed significantly over the years due to both manmade changes and environmental. These changes include alterations that occurred both during the period of significance as well as after. The environmental setting has changed since the light station was established in 1884 as is common with coastal land. The general outline of the shoreline has changed over time due to gradual erosion and significant storm related damage. Manmade alterations to the light station have also occurred over the years to maintain the station and working conditions and facilitate life for the lighthouse keepers on the island.

### Original Appearance of Light Station Grounds

The Sanibel Island Light Station, as originally constructed, was comprised of the lighthouse, two keepers' quarters and their corresponding cisterns, and a T-shaped wharf (**Figure 1**). The keepers' quarters are commonly referred to as quarters one which was located to the southwest of the lighthouse and quarters two which was located to the southeast. The wharf was located on the northern shore of the island and

<sup>2</sup> Charles LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse – A Complete History* (Fort Myers: Amber Publishing, 2019); Sanibel Island, Florida [Microfilm]; 16-Red; Plans of Lighthouses, Life Saving Stations, and Other Facilities; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives at College Park - Cartographic, College Park, MD.

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was connected to the lighthouse and keepers' quarters via a wooden plank walkway.<sup>3</sup> The original paint scheme, or daymark, included metallic brown paint throughout the majority of the tower and black paint on the uppermost portion, including the watch room and lantern room.<sup>4</sup> The keepers' quarters were accessible via staircases on the north and south sides of each cottage. The lighthouse was accessed by diagonal staircases which led from the northeast and northwest corners of the keepers' quarters porches. A brick oil house was located immediately north of the lighthouse; however, it was not constructed until the 1890s. A contract was made for the construction of the oil house in 1894, and the building was completed in 1895.<sup>5</sup>

Several small alterations occurred to the light station during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1892, fences were installed between the maintained grounds of the light station and the surrounding land.<sup>6</sup> The original wooden plank walkways between the lighthouse, keepers' quarters, and wharf were paved ca. 1912 following recommendations stated in the 1912 inspection report and by this time, the property also included an outhouse and two boathouses located at the wharf (**Figure 2**).<sup>7</sup> By the 1920s, two water towers, a pumphouse, and a rainwater tank had been constructed between the keepers' quarters, and a poultry house/chicken coop had been constructed on the property.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A.C. Bell, Sanibel Island Light Station, Florida, Reservation Surveyed; Sanibel Island (FL 44), Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> United States Lighthouse Society, "Report for Sanibel Island (Florida) - 1912," Accessed February 2, 2026, [https://uslhs.org/gr/inventory/light\\_station\\_report.php?id=1150](https://uslhs.org/gr/inventory/light_station_report.php?id=1150).

<sup>8</sup> Sanibel Island, Florida [Microfilm]; 16-Red; Plans of Lighthouses, Life Saving Stations, and Other Facilities; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives at College Park - Cartographic, College Park, MD.

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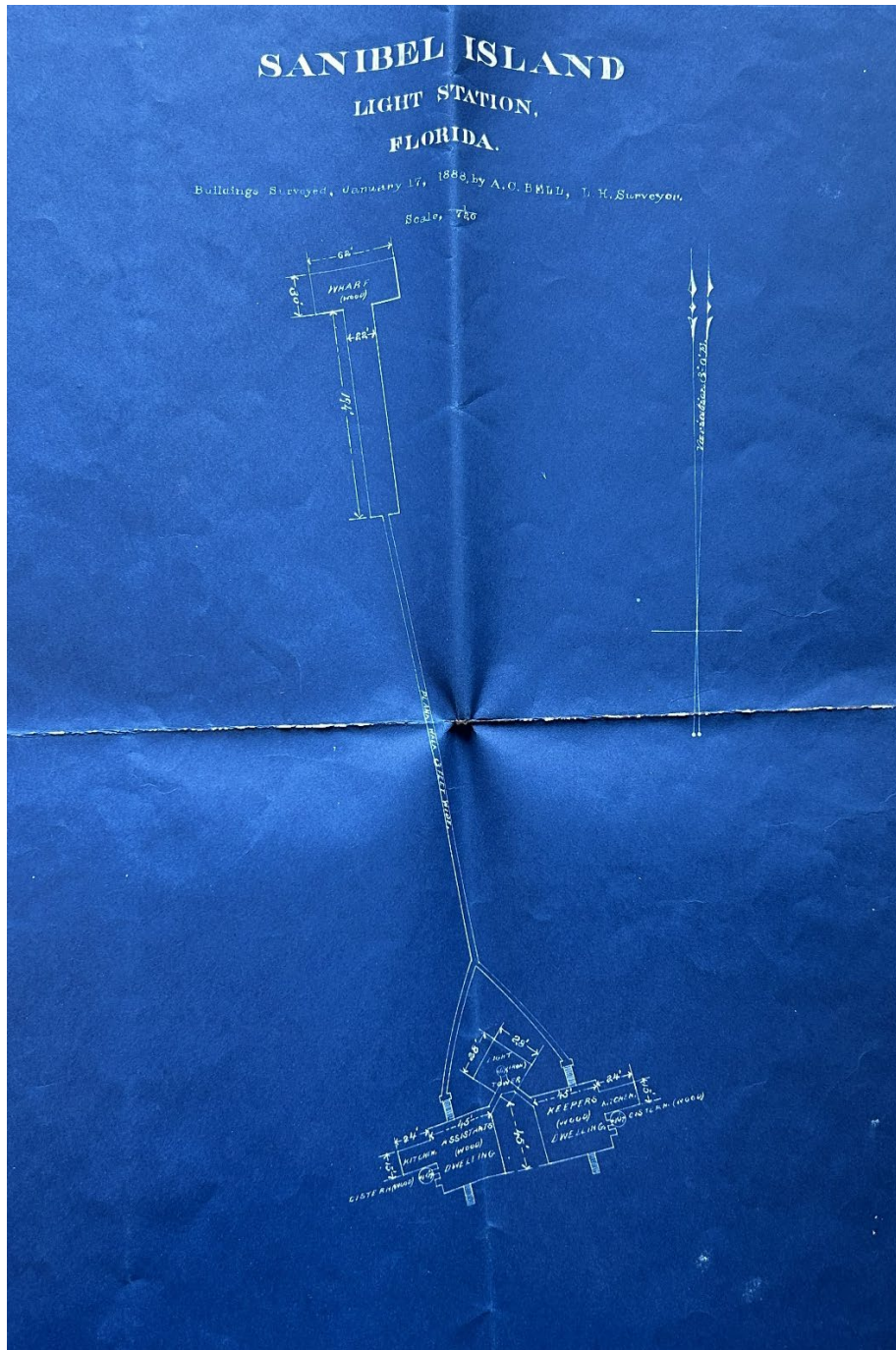


Figure 1. Historic survey of the light station buildings completed on January 17, 1888, by A.C. Bell, Lighthouse surveyor. (A.C. Bell, Sanibel Island Light Station, Florida, Buildings Surveyed; Sanibel Island (FL 44), Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard; Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.)

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*Figure 2. Historic photograph taken September 1933 showing the walkway between the wharf and lighthouse, keepers' quarters, and oil house. (Photograph No. 26-LL-Sanibel-10-1; "Sanibel Island Lightstation, Fla." Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #10, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)*

World War II Era Additions to the Light Station

During WWII, the U.S. Coast Guard was stationed on Sanibel Island to patrol the shoreline for enemy landings and submarine activity. In 1942, the light station grounds were altered by the construction of a small cottage to the north of the lighthouse which served as quarters for the patrolmen which began lookout duty in February of that year (**Figure 3**). In addition, a wooden submarine observation tower was

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constructed to the northeast of the lighthouse (**Figures 4 and 5**).<sup>9</sup> The cistern for keepers' quarter two was destroyed during a hurricane which hit the island during the 1940s.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 3. Historic photograph of the patrolmen quarters (left) and observation tower (right) taken September 7, 1947. (Photograph No. 26-LL-Sanibel-13-1; [SY1.1] "Sanibel Island Light Station Dwelling No. 3." Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #13, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)

<sup>9</sup> Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-3-1; "Sanibel Island Light Sta. and Coastal Lookout (Fla.)." Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #3, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-7-1; "Sanibel Light Sta. 13 April 1945," Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #7, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>10</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

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Figure 4. Historic photograph taken on March 6, 1943 showing the overall light station. (Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-3-1; "Sanibel Island Light Sta. and Coastal Lookout (Fla.)." Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #3, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)

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Figure 5. Historic photograph showing the immediate surroundings of the Sanibel Lighthouse, taken on April 13, 1945. (Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-7-1; "Sanibel Light Sta. 13 April 1945," Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #7, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)

### Pre-Hurricane Ian Modifications to the Light Station

During the 1950s, two known alterations to the site were completed. In 1951, the staircases that connected the keepers' quarters porches and the lighthouse were in a state of disrepair and replaced with a wooden ladder and platform which led directly from the ground to the lighthouse.<sup>11</sup> In addition, a

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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repair shop/garage was constructed to the northwest of the lighthouse in 1953.<sup>12</sup> Several changes were made to the light station during the 1960s. As a result of Hurricane Donna, the WWII era submarine observation tower and wooden entry ladder to the lighthouse were significantly damaged. As a result, the observation tower was intentionally burned down due to safety concerns in 1960, and the wooden entry ladder and platform were replaced with a metal platform and ladder.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the ca. 1920s water towers located between the keepers' quarters were dismantled and removed in 1968, the WWII era soldiers' quarters were demolished in 1969, and the last remaining boat house on the property was demolished in 1961.<sup>14</sup> In 1976, a small garage was constructed to the north of keepers' quarters two.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the immediate surroundings of the lighthouse, the former light station reservation was transformed to accommodate public recreational use during the late 1960s and 1970s. A parking lot appears to have been established adjacent to the Gulf shore of the property by the late 1960s and although it has been reconfigured over time, this parking lot remains extant.<sup>16</sup> A dock was present on the location of the original wharf in 1968 but by 1975, the dock was removed and replaced with a public dock and parking lot just to the west of the original location.<sup>17</sup> The current alignment of Periwinkle Way through the property was also established through the property by 1975 and a public restroom appears to have been constructed to the north of the lighthouse.<sup>18</sup> During the early 2000s, the ca. 1975 public restroom building was replaced with the current facilities. An additional public restroom was constructed at the parking lot on the Gulf shore of the property ca. 2016. Within the immediate vicinity of the lighthouse and keepers' quarters, non-historic alterations to the light station prior to Hurricane Ian included general landscaping, the erection of a historical marker beneath the lighthouse, and the construction of a chain link fence enclosure around the base of the lighthouse entry ladder. Furthermore, a white picket fence was installed around the keepers' quarters and the ca. 1976 garage, and a vinyl privacy enclosure containing a dumpster was located to the northwest of keepers' quarters one.

<sup>12</sup> Charles LeBuff, *Sanibel Light – A Historical Autobiography* (Fort Myers: Amber Publishing, 1998); Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-8-1; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #8, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>13</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*; Charles LeBuff, Email correspondence with author, April 7, 2026.

<sup>14</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), "11-22-68, PD-428-7-03," Aerial Photo Look Up System (APLUS), Tallahassee, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://aplus.fdot.gov/>.

<sup>17</sup> FDOT, "11-22-68, PD-428-7-03;" FDOT, "10-23-75, DOR-1771-8-03," Aerial Photo Look Up System (APLUS), Tallahassee, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://aplus.fdot.gov/>.

<sup>18</sup> FDOT, "10-23-75, DOR-1771-8-03."

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*Figure 6. Historic photograph of the light station taken between 1960 and 1968. The photo is taking facing north with the Gulf Coast in the foreground and San Carlos Bay in the background. (Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-8-1; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #8, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)*

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Figure 7. Historic photograph showing the original wooden stairways leading between the porches of the keepers' quarters and the entryway to the lighthouse. These stairways were removed in 1951. (Photograph No. 26-LL-Sanibel-11-1; "Sanibel Island Lt. Sta. 30 October 1941." Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, Series LLS, Box Sanibel, Item #11, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.)

### Pre-Hurricane Ian Modifications to Lighthouse

The overall physical structure of the lighthouse remains relatively unchanged from the time of construction. The majority of alterations undertaken over the years have been those required of routine maintenance, including those necessary in a coastal environment such as frequent sandblasting and repainting to prevent rust and deterioration. General maintenance including painting was part of the daily tasks undertaken by the lighthouse keepers and remains to be a requirement every decade or so to preserve the lighthouse.

The original paint scheme or daymark of the lighthouse was metallic brown with black paint limited to the uppermost portion of the tower (e.g. the watch room and lantern room).<sup>19</sup> It is unclear when the lighthouse

<sup>19</sup> Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

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was first painted entirely with brown paint; however, it has been consistently painted with only brown paint for several decades.

The method of lighting the navigational aid has also changed several times over the years, including the switch from the original rotating kerosene powered light to a flashing lamp powered by acetylene gas in 1923, the automation of the light in 1949, and the electrification of the light in 1962. The large third-order Fresnel lens was replaced with a smaller drum lens during the electrification.<sup>20</sup>

A staircase leading from the porch of each keepers' quarters originally provided access to the lighthouse; however, these staircases were removed and replaced with a singular wooden ladder and platform which provided direct access from the ground in 1951.<sup>21</sup> The wooden ladder and platform were replaced with the current metal platform and angled ladder with railings shortly after Hurricane Donna which hit the island in 1960.<sup>22</sup>

The replacement of the original wooden windows was the most recent modification to the lighthouse prior to Hurricane Ian that would not be considered routine maintenance. Based on personal correspondence with local historian and former light station resident Charles LeBuff, it is believed that the original windows were replaced with the current windows during the 2013 maintenance work completed following acquisition by the city in 2010.<sup>23</sup> The original windows were wooden frame units that were 1'9 3/4" x 3' 4" each with six lights, while the current windows are metal frame fixed units comprised of a single pane and covered with metal grilles from the exterior.<sup>24</sup>

### Hurricane Ian

On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall on the Gulf Coast of Florida just north of Sanibel Island. The light station, now considered part of Lighthouse Beach Park, was comprised of the lighthouse, oil house, two keepers' quarters, the remaining brick cistern base of keepers' quarters one, the ca. 1953 repair shop/garage, and the ca. 1976 garage (**Photo 19**). The early 2000s public restroom to the north of the lighthouse, ca. 2016 public restroom at the Gulf shore parking lot, and ca. 1975 dock were also present within the park at the time of the storm. During the hurricane, a catastrophic storm surge was produced with peak inundation levels on the eastern end of Sanibel Island reaching 9 to 13 ft above ground level and causing mass devastation.<sup>25</sup> All of the supporting buildings surrounding the lighthouse were destroyed, including the keepers' cottages, oil house, garage and repair shop, and the loss of the remaining cistern base. The lighthouse survived the storm; however, it did incur damage including the loss of the lower portion of the southwest support column, a damaged horizontal strut, and five tie rods

<sup>20</sup> LeBuff, *Sanybel Light – A Historical Autobiography*.

<sup>21</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>22</sup> Charles LeBuff, Email correspondence with author, April 7, 2026.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> United States Lighthouse Society, "Report for Sanibel Island (Florida) – 1912."

<sup>25</sup> Lisa Bucci et al., *National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report – Hurricane Ian (AL092022): 23 -30 September 2022*, National Hurricane Center – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), April 3, 2023.

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were damaged or destroyed. Immediately following the hurricane, a temporary wooden leg was installed in place of the lost southwest column to support the damaged lighthouse (**Photo 20**).

### Post-Hurricane Ian Changes

Five months after Hurricane Ian, on February 28, 2023, a relighting ceremony was held at Lighthouse Beach Park for the Sanibel Lighthouse.<sup>26</sup> In May 2023, a structural condition assessment of the lighthouse was completed by Atlantic Engineering Services of Jacksonville (AES) and resulted in numerous repairs. The damaged southwest support column, horizontal strut, and five damaged/destroyed tie rods were repaired and replaced when necessary with pieces that were manufactured to match the originals (**Photo 21**).<sup>27</sup> In addition, a new foundation was poured for the ca. 1960 entry ladder and the handrails along the ca. 1960 entry platform were replaced. Broken windows within the tower and the lantern room were replaced, and the interior and exterior of the lighthouse were repainted. The repairs and repainting were completed in the summer of 2024. A significant amount of debris was removed from the site following the hurricane with select pieces retained by the City of Sanibel for possible site interpretation, and shoreline restoration was completed to counteract the significant erosion that took place.

## INTEGRITY

The Sanibel Lighthouse was first listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 under the name, "Sanibel Lighthouse and Keepers' Quarters." Although the original nomination form does not provide an official resource count, the nomination indicates that the property was comprised of three contributing resources: the lighthouse and two keepers' quarters. The oil house and the presence of non-contributing resources are not mentioned within the original nomination. In addition, the Sanibel Lighthouse was listed under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Commerce with the period of significance defined simply as "19<sup>th</sup> century" and "20<sup>th</sup> century." This amendment proposes the change of the official property name to "Sanibel Lighthouse" to reflect the loss of the keepers' quarters and other supporting buildings and structures. The areas of significance from the original nomination will be retained and expanded to also include Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement to acknowledge the role the establishment of the light station played in the modern settlement period of Sanibel Island, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture to focus on the significance of the lighthouse itself, which is an excellent example of late 19<sup>th</sup> century iron skeletal lighthouses and the "Sanibel class" of square iron skeletal lighthouses. Furthermore, the period of significance will be clarified and expanded to include the period between 1884 when the lighthouse was constructed and the end of the historic period which is defined as 1976 based on the 50-year requirement as the lighthouse has remained in operation past this historic cutoff.

<sup>26</sup> Mark H. Bickel and Andrew West, "Getting back up – Lighthouse glows again after Ian," *The News-Press*, March 1, 2023, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>.

<sup>27</sup> Atlantic Engineering Services of Jacksonville (AES), *Structural Condition Assessment Sanibel Lighthouse, Sanibel, Florida* (Jacksonville: Atlantic Engineering Services of Jacksonville, 2023).

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When the property is viewed as an overall light station, the destruction of the supporting buildings, including the two keepers' quarters and the oil house, resulted in a loss of integrity of design and setting. The original layout of the station, with the exception of the lighthouse itself, is no longer extant and as a result no longer conveys the historical role and processes of the light keepers in the maintenance and operation of the navigational aid. Despite the loss of these contributing resources, the primary resource — the lighthouse — remains relatively unchanged. Throughout the period of significance, necessary alterations were made to the lighthouse, such as the installation of a wooden ladder and entry platform, followed by a metal version to better withstand the elements, and the change in optics for the illumination of the navigational aid follows the technological progressions of the time. Although alterations such as the shift from the original black and brown paint scheme to an entirely brown paint scheme alter the original daymark of the lighthouse, this alteration can be reversed or corrected during routine maintenance and repainting. Furthermore, although the original wooden windows have been removed, these could be replicated in future and the current windows replaced with those that are in keeping with the original design. It is important to note that despite these alterations, the Sanibel Lighthouse retains all of the character defining features of the iron skeletal lighthouse type, including the square footprint, slim central cylinder, octagonal watch room floor, and presence of both a watch room and lantern room with galleries. Because of these character defining features, iron skeletal type lighthouses are found mainly along the Gulf Coast as the design was more easily constructed on inadequate soils than masonry lighthouses, allowed for pre-fabrication and the relocation of the lighthouse due to erosion if deemed necessary, and offered less resistance against hurricane-force winds than masonry lighthouses. The effectiveness of these design features is evident in the continued presence of the Sanibel lighthouse despite the destruction of Hurricane Ian and indicative of the retained integrity of workmanship. Although the damaged southwest support column, horizontal strut, and five damaged/destroyed tie rods were repaired and replaced, these features were replaced with pieces that were manufactured to match the originals and do not detract from the design of the overall lighthouse or diminish the integrity of materials. The environmental setting of the lighthouse, including the former light station, has been significantly compromised due to the effects of Hurricane Ian and as such the light station no longer retains integrity of design and setting. However, the existing structure retains integrity of location, workmanship, and materials due to the fact that the lighthouse remains in the original location and that the alterations have not diminished the architectural features which make the property significant.

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**SUMMARY**

The Sanibel Lighthouse is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation, Commerce, and Exploration/Settlement, with a period of significance extending from ca. 1884 to 1976. The historically significant activities for which the lighthouse was already listed for under Criterion A, Transportation and Commerce, continued throughout the 20th century until the U.S. Coast Guard discontinued lighthouse operations in 2010. Due to the continued operation of the lighthouse, the period of significance extends to the historic cutoff of 50 years. This amendment also includes the addition of the area of significance of Exploration/Settlement to acknowledge the role the establishment of the light station played in the modern settlement period of Sanibel Island. The Sanibel Lighthouse was constructed as an aid to navigation to improve maritime transportation routes along the Gulf Coast which by extension allowed for the expansion of commerce and trade within the region. Early attempts to settle Sanibel Island were largely unsuccessful; however, following the construction of the lighthouse, the accessibility of the island increased, and the federal government opened Sanibel Island to homesteading, thus initiating the modern settlement period of the island. The development of Sanibel Island and the surrounding area was facilitated by maritime transportation and commerce between Key West and the Gulf Coast. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century truck farming industry on Sanibel Island was made possible by the construction of the lighthouse and set the foundation for future endeavors. In addition to freight, steamships and ferries provided transportation to communities along the waterways and made tourism on Sanibel Island possible. The operation of the lighthouse and ownership of the property remained with the U.S. Coast Guard and Bureau of Land Management past the period of significance until April 2010 when the Sanibel Lighthouse property was officially acquired by the City of Sanibel. Today the lighthouse remains a historical and scenic focal point of the island, symbolic of the enduring nature of the island and its inhabitants.

In addition, the Sanibel Lighthouse is also significant at the State level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of late 19th century iron skeletal lighthouses and the namesake of the "Sanibel class" of square iron skeletal lighthouses designed by the U.S. Lighthouse Board. The Sanibel class of iron skeletal lighthouses was used throughout Florida and the United States due to the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall design. The Sanibel Lighthouse retains all of the character defining features of the iron skeletal lighthouse type, including the square footprint, slim central cylinder, octagonal watch room floor, and presence of both a watch room and lantern room with galleries. The effectiveness of these design features is evident in the continued presence of the Sanibel lighthouse despite the destruction of Hurricane Ian and the continued presence of Sanibel class lighthouses throughout the United States today.

Since this amendment also seeks to add the Sanibel lighthouse to the Florida's Historic Lighthouses MPS, it is also noted that the extant lighthouse without the supporting buildings meets the requirements to be eligible for nomination under associated property type F.3: Iron and Steel Skeletal Lighthouses. The property must have served a historic lighthouse function in Florida and must be either an exceptional example of a type, period, or method of construction; contribute to a specific historic program or mission to improve the nation's navigational aids; or be associated with important historical events. Registration requirements of the Florida's Historic Lighthouses MPS indicate that the lighthouse itself is the primary resource, while the supporting buildings, sites, and structures associated with an historic lighthouse are listed under associated property type F.4: Supporting Buildings, Sites, and Structures. The Sanibel

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Lighthouse contributes to the Florida's Historic Lighthouses MPS under Associated Historic Contexts *Civil War, Reconstruction, and Late Nineteenth Century, 1861-1895; Progressive Era through World War I, 1896-1919; and Florida Land Boom, Great Depression, and World War II and its Aftermath, 1920-1952*. The Sanibel Lighthouse also contributes to the Florida's Historic Lighthouses MPS under Associated Property Type F.3 *Iron and Steel Skeletal Lighthouses*.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

### History of Territorial Period and Antebellum Settlement

Direct mention of Sanibel Island first occurs in the historic record on a 1765 map.<sup>28</sup> "Sanibel" is a derivation of S. Nibel (from Puerto de S. Nivel). This Spanish place name translates as "South Plane Harbor," a reference to the anchorage at the southeastern tip of the low-lying Sanibel Island. San Carlos Bay went through a rapid secession of names in the early days of European exploration. Eventually the name Bahia de San Carlos, after the Calusa chief Carlos, was chosen. Punta Rassa, where the Sanibel Bridge toll plaza is located, translates as "flat point."<sup>29</sup> Spanish fishing communities, or "ranchos," were established on the islands of San Carlos Bay by the late 1600s. Some remaining Calusa may have joined the Cuban-Spanish fishermen who were active here during the first half of the 18th century. A rancho with 12 buildings and approximately 50 employees operated from Punta Rassa from 1796 through 1831. Most of the ranchos remained in existence until the mid-1830s but were hindered by the onset of the Seminole War and customs control of the fisheries.<sup>30</sup>

In 1819, the Duke of Alagon, recipient of one of the Spanish land grants, subdivided his claim and deeded a portion to the former United States Consul in Spain, Richard S. Hackley. This large swath of land included the Charlotte Harbor area and Sanibel Island. Florida's acquisition as a United States territory occurred in 1821 with Andrew Jackson named provisional governor of the new territory. Jackson divided Florida into two counties: St. Johns County which encompassed all of Florida lying east of the Suwannee River, and Escambia County which included the land lying to the west. In 1823, the legislature established Monroe County from the southern portion of St. Johns County after Key West was annexed in 1821. In the first territorial census in 1825, some 317 persons reportedly lived in South Florida; by 1830 that number had risen to 517.<sup>31</sup>

The Seminole War tends to be divided into three segments according to U.S. military history and encompasses Andrew Jackson's invasion into Florida (First Seminole War, 1817-1818) and the first and

<sup>28</sup> Betty Anholt, *Sanibel's Story: Voices and Images from Calusa to Incorporation* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Elinore Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands – A History of Sanibel and Captiva* (Tallahassee: Rose Printing Company, 1979); Prudy Taylor Board and Patricia Pope Bartlett, *Lee County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*; E.A. Hammond, "The Spanish Fisheries of Charlotte Harbor," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 51 (1973): 355-380; Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>31</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971).

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second removal wars (Second Seminole War, 1835-1842; Third Seminole War, 1855-1858).<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that the Seminole War tends to be viewed as a single event by the Seminole Tribe as the U.S. military never conceded after each individual “war” and in between each conflict there was still aggression from American settlers, slave catchers, militia and lawmen, as well as legislation enacted targeting the removal of the Seminole, particularly the Armed Occupation Act of 1842.<sup>33</sup> The “First” Seminole War culminated from previous border tensions between Spanish Florida, European settlers, and the Seminoles and their allies maintaining their territory in the Alachua savanna area.<sup>34</sup> For the Seminole, the start of the war was 1812, when southern military forces invaded Florida in what is also known as the Patriot War of East Florida.<sup>35</sup> The alleged end of this segment of war came with the signing of the 1819 Adam-Onis Treaty, however, tensions continued to rise as settlers and government officials demanded the removal of the Seminoles.

The Florida Land Company, a development company based in New York, purchased an interest in the land from Richard S. Hackley ca. 1833 and surveyed and subdivided “Sanybel” Island. The first plat of Sanibel was created by Edward Armstrong in 1833 and depicted a town common at the easternmost point of the island.<sup>36</sup> Approximately 40 European settlers relocated to the area from Key West, constructing wooden houses and utilizing palmetto houses constructed by Cuban fishermen. In December 1833, the settlers made the first request for a lighthouse on Sanibel Island; however, the lighthouse was not constructed, and the settlement was reportedly destroyed by 1837, possibly due to uncertainty over landownership but also due to the outbreak of the Second Seminole War in 1835.<sup>37</sup> As the Second Seminole War escalated, attacks on isolated settlers and communities in southwest Florida became more common. To combat this, the combined service units of the U.S. Army and Navy converged on southwest Florida. The United States Army established Fort Dulaney at Punta Rassa, the location of a former fishing rancho, in January of 1838. The fort was enlarged during the summer of 1841 to include a barracks, large warehouses, and a hospital but was destroyed by a powerful hurricane on October 19, 1841. The troops and supplies were moved up the Caloosahatchee River, and a new fort was built at a less vulnerable site. The new fort, Fort Harvie, later developed into Fort Myers.<sup>38</sup> Although many of the Second Seminole War military maneuvers in southwest Florida were unsuccessful in locating Seminole

<sup>32</sup> Seminole Tribe of Florida, “The Long War,” accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.semtribe.com/history/the-long-war>.

<sup>33</sup> Florida State University (FSU), “History of the Seminole Tribe of Florida,” accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.fsu.edu/seminole-tribe/history.html>; Seminole Tribe of Florida, “The Long War.”

<sup>34</sup> Joe Knetsch, *Florida's Seminole Wars 1817-1858* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Seminole Tribe of Florida, “The Long War.”

<sup>36</sup> Edward Armstrong, *Map of Sanybel Island* (1833), Florida Land Company. (Sanibel: Sanibel Historical Village and Museum); Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>37</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*; E. A. Hammond, “Sanibel Island and its Vicinity, 1833, A Document,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1969): 392 – 411.

<sup>38</sup> Board and Bartlett, *Lee County: A Pictorial History*; Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*; Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Fort Myers* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Printing Company, Inc., 1949).

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strongholds, they did initiate the exploration of the interior and coastal lands of Lee County, resulting in the first written accounts of the land lying south of the Caloosahatchee River.<sup>39</sup>

This segment of war ended when the Federal government withdrew troops from Florida due to its costliness and rising unpopularity with American settlers.<sup>40</sup> At the end of this conflict, the Armed Occupation Act (1842) was passed by the U.S. Congress in order to pressure the Seminoles to leave by encouraging settler population growth in South Florida. By 1843, 3,824 Seminoles had been forcibly relocated to the Oklahoma Indian Reservation, which served as a catch-all for many different tribal nations.<sup>41</sup> Those who wished to remain could do so but were pushed further south into the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. This area became the last stronghold of the Seminoles and was a reservation bounded by the Peace and Kissimmee Rivers in the north down through Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades in the east with the Gulf Coast in the west.<sup>42</sup> Encouraged by the passage of the Armed Occupation Act in 1842, Anglo-American pioneers and their families moved south through Florida. The Armed Occupation Act stipulated that any family or single man over 18 years of age able to bear arms could earn title to 160 acres by erecting a habitable dwelling, cultivating at least five acres of land, and living on it for five years. During the nine-month period the law was in effect, 1,184 permits were issued totaling some 189,440 acres.<sup>43</sup> Finally, in 1845, the Union admitted the State of Florida with Tallahassee as the state capital.

In 1861, Florida followed South Carolina's lead and seceded from the Union as a prelude to the American Civil War. Florida had much at stake in this war as evidenced in a report released from Tallahassee in June of 1861. It listed the value of land in Florida's 35 counties as \$35,127,721 and the value of the slaves in the state at \$29,024,513.<sup>44</sup> Even though the Union blockaded the coast of Florida during the war, the interior of the state saw very little military action. The war lasted until 1865 when General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. Immediately following the Civil War, the South underwent a period of "Reconstruction" to prepare the Confederate States for readmission to the Union. The program was administered by the U.S. Congress, and on July 25, 1868, Florida officially returned to the Union.<sup>45</sup>

History of Post Civil War Settlement in Sanibel

<sup>39</sup> George McCall, *Letters from the Frontier* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1974); James W. Covington, "Exploring the Ten Thousand Islands: 1838," *Tequesta* 18 (1958): 7-13.

<sup>40</sup> C.S. Monaco, *The Second Seminole War and the Limit of American Aggression* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018); Seminole Tribe of Florida, "The Long War."

<sup>41</sup> John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1985); John Settle, "Chief Billy Bowlegs and the Banana Garden: A Reassessment of the Beginning of the Third Seminole War" (MA thesis, University of Central Florida, Orlando, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Joe Knetsch, John Missall, and Mary Lou Missall, *History of the Third Seminole War, 1849-1858* (Havertown: Casemate, 2018); Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War 1835-1842*.

<sup>43</sup> James W. Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40 (1961): 41-53.

<sup>44</sup> Hampton Dunn, *Back Home: A History of Citrus County, Florida* (Inverness: Citrus County Historical Society, Inc., 1989).

<sup>45</sup> Tebeau, *A History of Florida*.

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During the Civil War, one of Florida's major contributions to the war effort was the supply of beef to both the Confederate and Union governments. As the Union retook coastal areas of Florida toward the end of the war, the Union army reactivated Fort Dulaney as a port to ship cattle to feed the Union sailors stationed at Key West.<sup>46</sup> Following the war, Confederate blockade runner Jacob Summerlin took over the barracks and wharf at Punta Rassa and became a middleman charging for the use of the pens and wharf. Cattlemen from throughout Florida drove their cattle to Punta Rassa for shipment to Cuba. Many Spanish Government cattle agents came directly to Punta Rassa to make their purchases. These negotiations resulted in a "patois economy" of both Spanish doubloons and American dollars. The gold pieces, however, were the preferred currency and quickly became the principal unit of exchange in the area.<sup>47</sup> Business at Punta Rassa was so brisk that the community received a post office in 1872.<sup>48</sup>

Reports of agricultural and sporting opportunities led to further settlement of the San Carlos Bay area. Castor oil, used medicinally and industrially, was in short supply following the Civil War. The Allen brothers, who owned a drug store in Key West, started a castor bean plantation on the eastern end of Sanibel Island in 1868. The census of 1870 listed William Allen and his son as the only residents of Sanibel Island; however, the island was abandoned following a hurricane in 1873.<sup>49</sup> Continued cattle shipments and an increasing number of fishermen and new residents around San Carlos Bay prompted repeated requests for the appropriation of \$40,000 to construct a lighthouse on Sanibel Island.<sup>50</sup> Telegraph lines were laid ca. 1867 by the International Ocean Telegraph Company between Punta Rassa and Key West to Havana, thus increasing communication between the regions.<sup>51</sup> The cable line crossed Sanibel Island by way of two cable huts before reaching Punta Rassa — one located on the south side (Gulf Coast) of the eastern end of the island and the other on the north side (San Carlos Bay).<sup>52</sup> During the 1880s, the former army barracks at Punta Rassa were converted into an inn. Although cattle were still shipped from Punta Rassa, competition from Texas and Central America diminished the quantity of cattle shipped to Cuba. The cattlemen were slowly replaced by sports fishermen who sought kingfish, sea trout, Spanish mackerel, channel bass, and tarpon. In an effort to attract these fishermen, the inn was named the Punta Rassa Tarpon Hotel (or Tarpon House).<sup>53</sup> Typical visitors included Thomas Edison, Charles B. Hogg of Standard Oil Company, and John Jacob Astor.

Renewed interest in the construction of a lighthouse during the late 1870s and early 1880s led to the approval by Congress in 1881 with the estimated cost of \$50,000.<sup>54</sup> The land upon which the lighthouse

<sup>46</sup> Board and Bartlett, *Lee County: A Pictorial History*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Alford G. Bradbury and E. Story Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices* (Vero Beach: The Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs, 1962).

<sup>49</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>50</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*; Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>51</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*; Florence Fritz, *The Unknown Story of Sanibel and Captiva (Ybel y Cautivo)* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1974).

<sup>52</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*; A.C. Bell, Sanibel Island Light Station, Florida, Reservation Surveyed

<sup>53</sup> Board and Bartlett, *Lee County: A Pictorial History*.

<sup>54</sup> Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.



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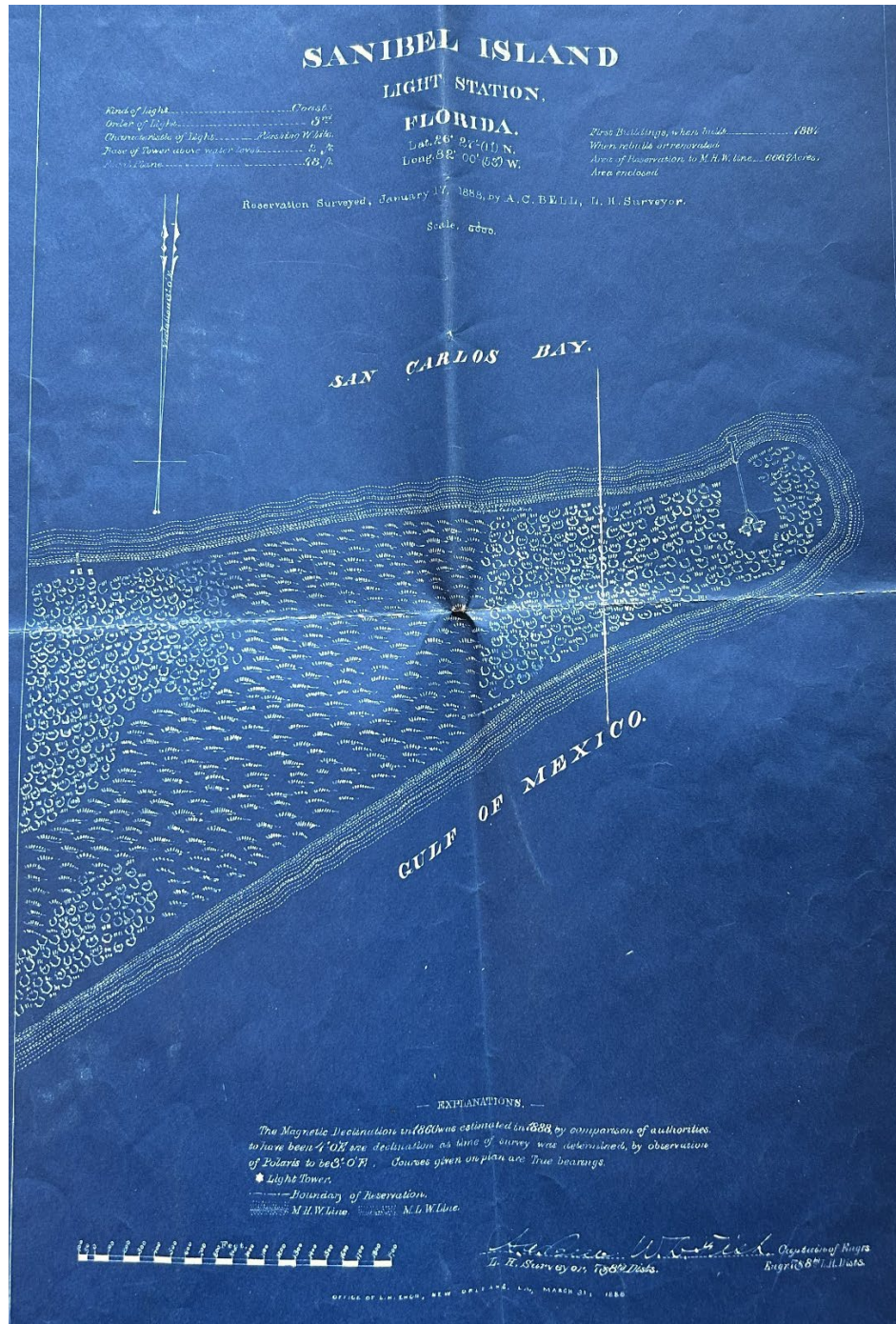


Figure 8. Historic survey depicting the Sanibel Light Station reservation completed by A.C. Bell, lighthouse surveyor, on January 17, 1888 (A.C. Bell, Sanibel Island Light Station, Florida, Reservation Surveyed; Sanibel Island (FL 44), Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

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reservation on August 16, 1883.<sup>55</sup> Work began in February 1884 following the appropriation of funds for the full estimated cost of construction. A wharf was constructed on the north side of Point Ybel into San Carlos Bay to allow for the delivery of construction materials and construction commenced in March 1884. The Sanibel Lighthouse was completed and officially lit on August 20, 1884.<sup>56</sup> Following the construction of the lighthouse, the accessibility of the island increased, and the federal government opened Sanibel Island to homesteading in 1888, thus initiating the modern settlement period of the island.<sup>57</sup> Although the easternmost portion of the island was reserved for use by the light station, early homesteaders were allotted up to 160 acres and commonly farmed peppers, citrus, and most popular to outside markets, tomatoes.

The population of Sanibel Island grew quickly due to increasing interest in truck farming and reached 100 by 1889.<sup>58</sup> By the 1890s, Sanibel boasted a school, a church, a store, and a wharf. Although the Great Freeze of 1894-95 damaged crops on Sanibel, it did not destroy the produce as it did throughout North and Central Florida. Farmers from further north moved south to Lee County and Sanibel Island. In 1894, the population of Sanibel Island had increased to 120 with an estimated 100 acres in cultivation; however, by 1896 the population reached 350 with 500 acres in cultivation as a result of migration following the freezes. The first public wharf was constructed in 1895 through funding by Jane V. Matthews.<sup>59</sup> The construction of a wharf was necessary to facilitate the transport of goods and produce as truck farming continued to grow on the island and included a warehouse on the west side of the wharf and a store with living quarters on the east side.<sup>60</sup> The wharf became known as "Matthews Wharf" and was managed by trustees of Matthews, followed by J.W. Geraty & Company for approximately two years, followed by Frank P. Bailey and his family. In 1896, the Lighthouse Board surveyed the western boundary of the lighthouse reservation and determined that the wharf and associated structures were constructed upon the lighthouse reservation without the authority of officials; however, because the resources were to the benefit of the general public and the overall lighthouse reservation, the board allowed the wharf to remain and permitted the construction of a road for access (now Bailey Road).<sup>61</sup> The Bailey family, consisting of brothers Frank, Harry, and Ernest Bailey and their mother, Mary White Beers Bailey, had moved to Sanibel in 1894 and, after farming for several years, purchased the store formerly operated at the wharf

<sup>55</sup> W.D. Bloxham, Governor of Florida, to N.C. McFarland, Commissioner of the General Land Office, August 16, 1883; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>56</sup> Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>57</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>58</sup> Jeri Magg, *Historic Sanibel & Captiva Islands – Tales of Paradise* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> H.B. Haskins, Asst. Superintendent, to Superintendent of Lighthouses, April 10, 1925; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>60</sup> Signature illegible, Lieut. Col. And L.H. Engineer, to The Light House Board, Washington, D.C., January 11, 1898; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>61</sup> James B. Quinn, Major and L.H. Engineer, to The Light House Board, Washington, D.C., January 11, 1898; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. H.B. Haskins, Asst. Superintendent, to Superintendent of Lighthouses, April 10, 1925; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

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by Geraty in 1899.<sup>62</sup> The store was officially named the Sanibel Packing Company; however, it was known by locals simply as Bailey's Store. The business served not only as a warehouse, packing center, distribution point, and store with filling station, but as a communication center with a telephone and telegraph in later years.<sup>63</sup> In 1900, Sanibel received one of the earliest Rural Free Delivery postal routes in the nation.<sup>64</sup> In 1898, the Spanish-American War commenced and observation towers were constructed along the shoreline by the U.S. Signal Corps who also took over operation of the Sanibel Lighthouse until the war ended later that same year.<sup>65</sup>

Post-1900 History of Sanibel

Tourism flourished along the southwest coast of Florida at the turn of the century. Steamers provided transportation to communities along the waterways. In 1904, George and Andrew Kinzie, who owned the Kinzie Brothers Steamship Line, won the contract to deliver mail to the islands.<sup>66</sup> The Kinzie Brothers delivered mail, passengers, and freight as well as fresh meat, milk, and ice to Matthews Wharf and the Sanibel Packing Company. Hunting, tarpon fishing, and sailing the waterways lured an increasing number of tourists each year and an increasing number of fishermen used Sanibel and Captiva as a base of operations. Several families established inns on the island to take advantage of the tourist traffic. These included Anna Woodring who opened the Woodring House, the Barnes family who operated The Sisters (later renamed Casa Ybel), and the Matthews family who owned The Matthews (later renamed Island Inn). The view of the island as a tropical paradise was marred when a major hurricane hit the island in October 1910. Eighty percent of the fruit crop was destroyed, as well as the Church of the Four Gospels, homes, and docks; however, island residents rebuilt and persevered. By 1913, a telephone system linking several homes and businesses on the island was inaugurated.<sup>67</sup> The first shell show was held at The Matthews and became a formally organized event in 1927, thus beginning the longstanding association between Sanibel and sea shell related tourism.<sup>68</sup> In addition to agricultural and tourism related industry, the Ocean Leather Company was established on Sanibel in 1919 which processed porpoises and sharks for their meat, fins, and oils, and skins which were utilized for leather.<sup>69</sup> The company ceased operations by 1924.

During the 1920s, developers planned the large-scale development of Sanibel Island. H.H. Ford purchased Silver Key for \$100,000 in 1925.<sup>70</sup> On Sanibel, several subdivisions were platted during the

<sup>62</sup> Frances Bailey, Jr., Personal correspondence with Kimberly Hinder, April 13, 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>64</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>67</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>68</sup> Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, "Sanibel History," accessed January 5, 2026, <https://sanibelmuseum.org/sanibel-history/>.

<sup>69</sup> H.B. Haskins, Asst. Superintendent, to Superintendent of Lighthouses, April 10, 1925; Box 42; Lighthouse Site Files, 1790-1939; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>70</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

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1920s land boom, including Sanibel Center, Sanibel Gardens, Suniland Beach, and Lantana del Mar. When MacGregor Boulevard was extended from Fort Myers to Punta Rassa during the boom, Cogsdell Development Company started a ferry in 1925 to run between Punta Rassa and Sanibel.<sup>71</sup> During the 1920s, the Sanibel Community Association built the Sanibel Community House and wrote a charter in 1928 for the “civic, social, educational, and recreational wellbeing of the entire community.”<sup>72</sup> The modest signs of growth on Sanibel were halted by the “bust” of the Florida real estate market which prompted the withdrawal of investors’ money from Sanibel. By 1926-27, the bottom fell out of the Florida real estate market, and a hurricane devastated the island in 1926. Buildings, trees, and docks were demolished, Matthews Wharf and the Sanibel Packing Company were destroyed and relocated to land, and the ferry ceased operation.<sup>73</sup> Although the residents rebuilt their homes and businesses, the “Great Miami” hurricane of 1926 brought the agricultural economy of Sanibel Island to an end.<sup>74</sup> For years, farmers on Sanibel had a distinct advantage due to the proximity of the water routes which provided access to the railroad and markets; however, this changed in 1924 with the extension of the railroad south of Fort Myers.<sup>75</sup> Transporting Sanibel’s fruit and vegetables to market was now more expensive than the crops grown on the large areas of farmland made easily accessible by the extension of the railroad. As a final blow, the agricultural fields on Sanibel were largely destroyed by saltwater contamination during the 1926 hurricane. Many residents of Sanibel abandoned their farms and turned to tourism or relocated to the mainland.<sup>76</sup>

Soon after, the October 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression left Florida in a state of stagnation. By the mid-1930s, federal programs, implemented by the Roosevelt administration, started employing large numbers of construction workers, helping to revive the economy of the state. The programs were instrumental in the construction of parks, bridges, and public buildings. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of the New Deal programs, completed projects throughout Florida such as the Edison Bridge, the Fort Myers Yacht Basin, and the Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers.<sup>77</sup> One program, the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) of the Work Projects Administration, recorded the following description of Sanibel Island in 1939:

*Sanibel Island...opposite the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River, is reached by ferry from Punta Rassa...The island, 2 miles wide and approximately 12 miles long, is a State game preserve; native and migratory birds are plentiful and can be studied at close range...A large combination dredge and factory here gathers, cracks, cooks, and cans clams...Sanibel Island is notable for the number and variety of sea shells on its beaches. Every tide and storm wash ashore thousands of specimens of some 300 varieties...The Sanibel Sea Shell Fair is held annually in February.*<sup>78</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>72</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel’s Story*.

<sup>73</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*.

<sup>74</sup> Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, “Sanibel History.”

<sup>75</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel’s Story*.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Board and Bartlett, *Lee County: A Pictorial History*.

<sup>78</sup> Federal Writers’ Project, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

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During the 1930s, commercial shelling increased, and Sanibel's Shell Fair gained such popularity that Fort Myers suggested renaming it the "West Coast Shell Fair."<sup>79</sup> A number of professional and amateur scientists, including "Ding" Darling, visited both Sanibel and Captiva to research and collect shells, wildlife, plants, trees, and fish. The ferry, which brought the visitors and allowed residents to travel between the mainland and the islands, moved their dock in January 1937.<sup>80</sup> The Kinzie Brothers relocated from the original location in front of Sanibel Packing Company to a point closer to the lighthouse, diminishing the distance and time spent crossing the bay, and opened a restaurant at the new dock. Miss Charlotta's Tea Room, opened ca. 1928 at the former ferry landing, closed in 1935.<sup>81</sup>

During WWII, the U.S. Coast Guard – under control of the U.S. Navy – was stationed on Sanibel Island to patrol the shoreline for enemy landings and submarine activity.<sup>82</sup> In 1942, the light station grounds were altered by the construction of a small cottage to the north of the lighthouse which served as quarters for the patrolmen, and a wooden submarine observation tower was constructed to the northeast of the lighthouse.<sup>83</sup> Based on accounts written within the lighthouse keepers log, the coastal lookout detail reported for duty on February 26, 1942.<sup>84</sup> Residents on Sanibel were under increased security measures, such as the issuance of identification cards by the U.S. Coast Guard and the enforcement of black out conditions (Anholt 1998). These black out conditions extended to the lighthouse as well, as a lens cover was put in place daily by the keeper from October 12, 1943, until the end of the war.<sup>85</sup> In October 1944, a major hurricane hit Sanibel, and several people took refuge at the lighthouse.<sup>86</sup>

In 1945, the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge was established on the island by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.<sup>87</sup> The refuge was established to protect the natural environment of Sanibel Island and threatened and endangered species and maintain habitat for migratory birds. The refuge is now known as the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge — renamed in 1967 in honor of conservationist Jay Norwood Darling who played a significant role in the creation of the protected area.<sup>88</sup> Following the war, many servicemen that had been stationed in Florida returned with their families to live and vacation in the region, including on Sanibel Island. The Kinzie Brothers expanded their ferry service, motels were built, restaurants and shops opened, and real estate was sold. In June 1950, A telephone line was also established between the ferry landing and the mainland by the Intercounty Telephone Company in 1950.<sup>89</sup> Following the hurricane of 1947 which resulted in additional damage to the island and the light

<sup>79</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Magg, *Historic Sanibel & Captiva Islands*.

<sup>82</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.; Photograph No. 26-LLS-Sanibel-7-1; "Sanibel Light Sta. 13 April 1945," National Archives.

<sup>84</sup> Journal of Light Station at Sanibel Island - February 26, 1942; Box 397; Lighthouse Station Logs, 1897-1941; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>85</sup> Journal of Light Station at Sanibel Island - October 12, 1943; Box 397; Lighthouse Station Logs, 1897-1941; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>86</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>87</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>88</sup> United States Fish and Wildlife Service, "About Us. – J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge," accessed February 16, 2026, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/jn-ding-darling/about-us>.

<sup>89</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

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station, the U.S. Coast Guard automated the lighthouse in 1949 to avoid further risks to lighthouse personnel.<sup>90</sup> The wildlife refuge, which was not permanently staffed until 1949, leased the lighthouse reservation from the Coast Guard that year and utilized the former keeper's quarters as an office and residence for the refuge manager. The Coast Guard, however, continued to operate and maintain the automated lighthouse.<sup>91</sup>

The growing popularity of Sanibel Island with the outside world led to increased residential development throughout the 1950s onwards, including the planning of subdivisions and the dredging of a salt-water canal system throughout the island by developers. In addition, Periwinkle Way was paved with asphalt, and the Mosquito Control District began efforts during the 1950s to help control the insect population which historically plagued the island.<sup>92</sup> In September 1960, Hurricane Donna slammed through Sanibel destroying docks and buildings. Australian pines along the main road knocked down power lines which, due to the devastation in the entire region, took weeks for the power company to repair. The island community rebuilt after the storm, and a number of changes brought modernity to the island during the ensuing decade.<sup>93</sup>

During the 1960s, a weekly newspaper was published, the Sanibel Public Library was established, a modern, integrated school was constructed, and the old school was converted into a community theater.<sup>94</sup> Several proposals for a bridge to Sanibel Island were made during the mid-twentieth century; however, none were successful until developer Hugo Lindgren proposed a bridge and causeway that would be partially self-financed.<sup>95</sup> Lindgren believed that the increased accessibility to the island would benefit his development projects, as well as the overall island, and campaigned for better water and donated land for the construction of the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce.<sup>96</sup> Despite a significant rift between those who supported and those who opposed the construction of the bridge and causeway, the \$2.8 million project was completed in May 1963, ushering in a new era for the island and its inhabitants.<sup>97</sup> The pressures of development, loss of natural habitat and a growing number of residents and tourists led to the incorporation of Sanibel in November 1974.<sup>98</sup>

In the years since Sanibel's incorporation, an increasing number of condominiums, motels, and service industries have developed on Sanibel Island. A number of condominiums and subdivisions have developed on the islands; however, Sanibel Island has been able to preserve a significant part of the natural beauty of the island in the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge by carefully controlling development. The interest of the residents in preserving their history is evident in the creation of the Sanibel Historical Village and Museum in 1984, which is comprised of several relocated historic buildings

<sup>90</sup> LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Fritz, *The Unknown Story of Sanibel and Captiva*.

<sup>96</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>97</sup> Dormer, *The Sea Shell Islands*; Fritz, *The Unknown Story of Sanibel and Captiva*.

<sup>98</sup> Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, "Sanibel History."

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such as the Bailey Store, post office, schoolhouse, and several residences.<sup>99</sup> The heritage of Sanibel Island is symbolized in the preservation of these buildings and its treasured lighthouse which was purchased by the City of Sanibel in 2010.<sup>100</sup> On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian – a Category 4 major hurricane – made landfall on the Gulf Coast of Florida at Cayo Costa, just north of Sanibel Island. A catastrophic storm surge was produced by the storm with peak inundation levels on the eastern end of Sanibel Island reaching 9 to 13 ft above ground level and causing mass devastation, including but not limited to the partial destruction of the Sanibel Island Causeway and destruction of the supporting buildings at the Sanibel lighthouse.<sup>101</sup> Hurricane Ian was the costliest hurricane to ever affect the state of Florida with an estimated \$109.5 billion worth of total damage.<sup>102</sup> Recovery efforts on the island continue to this day, including the restoration of the Sanibel Lighthouse.

History of Sanibel Lighthouse

Despite the increase in seafaring commerce, maritime shipping, and the historic role of nearby Punta Rassa in the shipment of cattle, a navigational aid did not exist between Key West and Egmont Key prior to the construction of the Sanibel Lighthouse. A lighthouse was proposed several times during the 1800s with a request to the General Land Office (GLO) being made as early as December 1856 for the reservation of land to establish a lighthouse on Sanibel Island. Land for a lighthouse was not reserved until 1877 when the request was repeated and in 1878 and 1879, the U.S. Lighthouse Board recommended the appropriation of \$40,000 for the construction of the lighthouse. The U.S. Congress provided \$20,000 in 1881 and an additional \$30,000 in 1882.<sup>103</sup> Construction on the 98-ft tall Sanibel Lighthouse began in February 1884 and was completed by the summer of that year with the first lighting of the Third Order Fresnel lens taking place on August 20, 1884.

The Sanibel Lighthouse was constructed as an iron skeleton tower, a design which became popular with the U.S. Lighthouse Board during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century due to its “relatively inexpensive coast, standardized components, and relatively short construction timetables.”<sup>104</sup> The design, found mainly along the Gulf Coast in Florida, was more easily constructed on inadequate soils than masonry lighthouses, allowed for pre-fabrication and the relocation of the lighthouse due to erosion if deemed necessary, and offered less resistance against hurricane-force winds than masonry lighthouses. In addition, the height of the lighthouse could be altered by adding additional sections to the

<sup>99</sup> Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, “Historical Buildings,” accessed January 5, 2026, <https://sanibelmuseum.org/historical-buildings/>.

<sup>100</sup> Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, “Sanibel History.”

<sup>101</sup> Bucci et al., *National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report – Hurricane Ian (AL092022): 23 -30 September 2022*, National Hurricane Center – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), April 3, 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Sanibel Lighthouse and Keepers’ Quarters, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, Mildred L. Fryman, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service (1973); Sanibel Island, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

<sup>104</sup> Florida’s Historic Lighthouses, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Sidney Johnston and Robert O. Jones, Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, 2002, Section F, page 71.

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bottom of the structure.<sup>105</sup> During the construction of the Sanibel Lighthouse, the ship transporting the prefabricated iron skeleton structure by the Phoenix Iron Company of New Jersey wrecked and the materials were temporarily lost. Most of the materials were recovered from the wreckage and those parts that could not be recovered were replicated by a foundry in New Orleans.<sup>106</sup> Several supporting buildings and structures were also built around the Sanibel Lighthouse, including two wood frame Keepers' Quarters, a wharf, and a brick oil house which was constructed in 1895. Following completion of the Sanibel Lighthouse, Dudley Richardson and John Johnson arrived from Key West to serve as the Head Keeper and Assistant Keeper, respectively. In addition to Richardson and Johnson, Henry Shanahan, Eugene Shanahan, Clarence Rutland (Henry Shanahan's stepson), and William Robert England, Jr. served as the Sanibel Lighthouse Keepers from the establishment of the lighthouse in 1884 until the light was automated in 1949.<sup>107</sup>

In 1939, the U.S. Lighthouse Service (formerly known as the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment [1789 – 1852] and the U.S. Lighthouse Board [1852 – 1910]) and the U.S. Coast Guard were consolidated. Lighthouses throughout the country fell under the purview of the U.S. Coast Guard and lighthouse personnel were given Coast Guard commissions corresponding to their previous duties under the U.S. Lighthouse Service.<sup>108</sup> During WWII, Sanibel Island and the surrounding waters were utilized for military training operations and observation. In 1942, fisherman and other navigators were notified by officials that designated areas within the Gulf of Mexico would be utilized for bombing practice.<sup>109</sup> A lookout quarters was constructed to the north of the lighthouse to accommodate soldiers, and a submarine observation tower was constructed to the northeast of the lighthouse.<sup>110</sup>

These additions to the lighthouse complex remained in place until the lookout tower was demolished following Hurricane Donna in 1960 and the quarters were demolished in 1969.<sup>111</sup> The U.S. Coast Guard withdrew the last lighthouse keeper of Sanibel Lighthouse, William Robert England, Jr., in 1949 when the lighthouse was converted to automatic operation.<sup>112</sup> The property was then leased to the U.S. Fish and

<sup>105</sup> United States Coast Guard Historian's Office, *Lighthouse Evolution and Typology*, Robert Browning. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

<sup>106</sup> Sanibel Lighthouse and Keepers' Quarters, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form

<sup>107</sup> United States Coast Guard, "Sanibel Island Lighthouse," Last modified October 15, 2019,

<https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/Assets/Land/All/Article/1988594/sanibel-island-lighthouse/>.

<sup>108</sup> Robert H. Macy, "Consolidation of the Lighthouse Service with the Coast Guard," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 66, no. 443 (January 1940).

<sup>109</sup> News-Press, "Planes to Bomb Off Sanibel Light," *News-Press*, April 28, 1942, retrieved from

<https://www.newspapers.com>.

<sup>110</sup> "Newly Completed Quarters at the Sanibel Lighthouse Complex," Sanibel Historical Collection – Florida Gulf Coast University Library and Sanibel Public Library, Accessed May 22, 2024,

<https://palmm.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fgcu%3A21884>; "The Eastern Lighthouse Keepers' Quarters," Sanibel

Historical Collection – Florida Gulf Coast University Library and Sanibel Public Library, accessed May 22, 2024,

<https://palmm.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fgcu%3A21890>.

<sup>111</sup> Jeremy D'Entremont, "Sanibel Lighthouse: A Constant through Storm and Change," *Lighthouse Digest*, July 2001; LeBuff, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse*.

<sup>112</sup> News-Press, "Sanibel Lighthouse Keepers Withdrawn," *News-Press*, April 3, 1949, retrieved from

<https://www.newspapers.com>; United States Coast Guard, "Sanibel Island Lighthouse."

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Wildlife Service and the former Keepers' Quarters were utilized as an office and residence for the manager of the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge – now known as the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>113</sup>

Post-Period of Significance History of the Sanibel Lighthouse

The City of Sanibel expressed interest in acquiring and managing the Sanibel Lighthouse property as early as 1980 and in 1982 the City was granted a license authorizing use of the land and buildings.<sup>114</sup> The operation of the lighthouse and ownership of the property remained with the U.S. Coast Guard and Bureau of Land Management until April 2010 when the Sanibel Lighthouse property was officially acquired by the City of Sanibel.<sup>115</sup> Following acquisition by the City of Sanibel and prior to Hurricane Ian, the property immediately surrounding the Sanibel Lighthouse included the lighthouse, two Keepers' Quarters, the oil house, brick cistern base, a large shop/garage, and a small garage.

On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian – a Category 4 major hurricane – made landfall on the Gulf Coast of Florida at Cayo Costa, just north of Sanibel Island. A catastrophic storm surge was produced by the storm with peak inundation levels on the eastern end of Sanibel Island reaching 9 to 13 ft above ground level and causing mass devastation, including the destruction of both keepers' quarters, the oil house, the remaining cistern, and all other buildings, and the loss of one iron support column from the lighthouse itself.<sup>116</sup> A temporary wooden leg was installed to support the lighthouse and shortly after the storm, pieces of the missing support column were discovered. The reinstallation of the original support column was considered; however, engineers determined that the lighthouse would not be structurally sound. As such, the support column was replicated and installed. A relighting ceremony was held at the Sanibel Lighthouse on February 28, 2023, and on June 16, 2023, Lighthouse Beach Park was reopened to the public.<sup>117</sup>

**HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The Sanibel Lighthouse is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation, Commerce, and Exploration/Settlement, with a period of significance extending from ca. 1884 to 1976. The historically significant activities for which the lighthouse was already listed for under Criterion A, which was for Transportation and Commerce, continued throughout the 20th century until the U.S. Coast Guard

<sup>113</sup> Anholt, *Sanibel's Story*.

<sup>114</sup> Mark Stephens, "U.S. may own 900 acres of SW Florida land," *News-Press*, November 4, 1980, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>; News-Press, "Coast Guard to allow Sanibel to use Lighthouse land," *News-Press*, April 22, 1982, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>.

<sup>115</sup> News-Press, "City becomes lighthouse owner," *News-Press*, April 22, 2010, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>.

<sup>116</sup> Bucci et al., *National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report – Hurricane Ian (AL092022): 23 -30 September 2022*, National Hurricane Center – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), April 3, 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Amy Bennett Williams, "What did Sanibel learn from Ian, aftermath?" *The Naples Daily News*, September 24, 2023, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>; Mark H. Bickel, "Sanibel's Lighthouse Beach ready for toes in the sand again," *The Naples Daily News*, June 20, 2023, retrieved from <https://www.newspapers.com>.

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discontinued lighthouse operations in 2010. Due to the continued operation of the lighthouse, the period of significance extends to the historic cutoff of 50 years. This amendment also includes the addition of the area of significance of Exploration/Settlement to acknowledge the role the establishment of the light station played in the modern settlement period of Sanibel Island.

Early attempts to settle Sanibel Island were largely unsuccessful and limited to temporary settlements and small-scale farming. Transportation through the San Carlos Bay area was precarious due to the lack of a navigational aid and travel was primarily completed between the bay and the Gulf of Mexico for shipments of cattle from Punta Rassa to Cuba. Following the construction of the lighthouse, the accessibility of the island increased, and the federal government opened Sanibel Island to homesteading, thus initiating the modern settlement period of the island. While the shipment of cattle continued, additional transportation and commerce opened between Key West and the Gulf Coast which promoted the development of Sanibel Island and the surrounding area. The Sanibel Lighthouse facilitated the transport of goods and produce, which was necessary as the population of the island began to grow around a flourishing truck farming industry. Sanibel Island's advantage due to the proximity of water routes which provided access to the markets throughout the region was eventually replaced by the expansion of the railroad system in south Florida. The short-lived success of agriculture on Sanibel Island, however, was made possible by the construction of the lighthouse and set the foundation for future endeavors. In addition to freight, steamships and ferries provided transportation to communities along the waterways and made tourism on Sanibel Island possible. Hunting, tarpon fishing, and sailing attracted an increasing number of tourists every year with many using Sanibel and Captiva Islands as a base of operations. The Sanibel Lighthouse was constructed as an aid to navigation to improve maritime transportation routes along the Gulf Coast which by extension allowed for the expansion of commerce and trade within the region. The operation of the lighthouse and ownership of the property remained with the U.S. Coast Guard and Bureau of Land Management past the period of significance until April 2010 when the Sanibel Lighthouse property was officially acquired by the City of Sanibel. Today the lighthouse remains a historical and scenic focal point of the island, symbolic of the enduring nature of the island and its inhabitants.

## **ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT**

The Sanibel Lighthouse was constructed as an iron skeletal tower, a design which became popular with the U.S. Lighthouse Board during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century due to its "relatively inexpensive cost, standardized components, and relatively short construction timetables."<sup>118</sup> The design, found mainly along the Gulf Coast in Florida, was more easily constructed on inadequate soils than masonry lighthouses, allowed for pre-fabrication and the relocation of the lighthouse due to erosion if deemed necessary, and offered less resistance against hurricane-force winds than masonry lighthouses. In addition, the height of the lighthouse could be altered by adding additional sections to the bottom of the structure.<sup>119</sup> Skeletal lighthouses are typically comprised of a central vertical cylinder punctuated by windows that encases a stairway which leads to the lantern and rotation room. The cylinder

<sup>118</sup> Florida's Historic Lighthouses, Section F, page 71.

<sup>119</sup> United States Coast Guard Historian's Office, *Lighthouse Evolution and Typology*.

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and lantern are supported by legs that are reinforced with diagonal tension braces and typically rest on a concrete pad foundation or concrete caisson within the ground.<sup>120</sup>

Onshore iron skeletal lighthouses can also be further categorized by the variation of certain features, such as the shape of the structure's footprint (e.g. square, hexagonal, or octagonal), the overall size of central cylinder, possible presence of multiple watch rooms or overall absence of a watch room, and the proportion of the lantern and watch room(s) to the rest of the structure.<sup>121</sup> These sub-categories, or classes, are typically named for the first lighthouse of that design. The Sanibel Lighthouse was the first light station constructed in the standard square plan skeletal lighthouse design adopted by the U.S. Lighthouse Board, as such, lighthouses constructed following this plan were known as "Sanibel class." The overall standard plan includes the square footprint, slim central cylinder, octagonal watch room floor, and presence of both a watch room and lantern room with galleries. Approximately 17 Sanibel class lighthouses were constructed throughout the United States between 1884 and 1910 and 13 remain extant, with the type being used on the east, west, and Gulf Coasts, as well as the Great Lakes.<sup>122</sup>

A total of 29 historic lighthouses remain extant in the State of Florida and six of these are iron skeletal towers: Sanibel (1884), Cape San Blas (1885), Anclote Key (1887), Boca Grande Entrance Rear Range (1888), Crooked River (1895), and Hillsboro Inlet (1907). Of the six iron skeletal towers in Florida, a total of four can be categorized as Sanibel class lighthouses, including Sanibel (1884), Cape San Blas (1885), Anclote Key (1887), and Crooked River (1895). While Cape San Blas was constructed based on the Sanibel plans and resulted in an identical tower and keepers' quarters, the Anclote Key and Crooked River lighthouses both differ from the original plan with central cylinders that fully extend to the ground with ground level entrances.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Florida's Historic Lighthouses, Section F, page 71.

<sup>121</sup> Karen L. Wells, "Exploring Sanibel-Class Onshore Skeletal Lighthouses," *The Keepers Log* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2024), 2-12; Russ Rowlett, "Onshore Skeletal Lighthouses, 1861-1910," last modified October 19, 2018, accessed February 2, 2026, <https://www.ibiblio.org/lighthouse/types/skeletal.html>

<sup>122</sup> Rowlett, "Onshore Skeletal Lighthouses, 1861-1910."; Wells, "Exploring Sanibel-Class Onshore Skeletal Lighthouses."

<sup>123</sup> Cape San Blas, Fla.; Box 12; Clippings Related to Lighthouses; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

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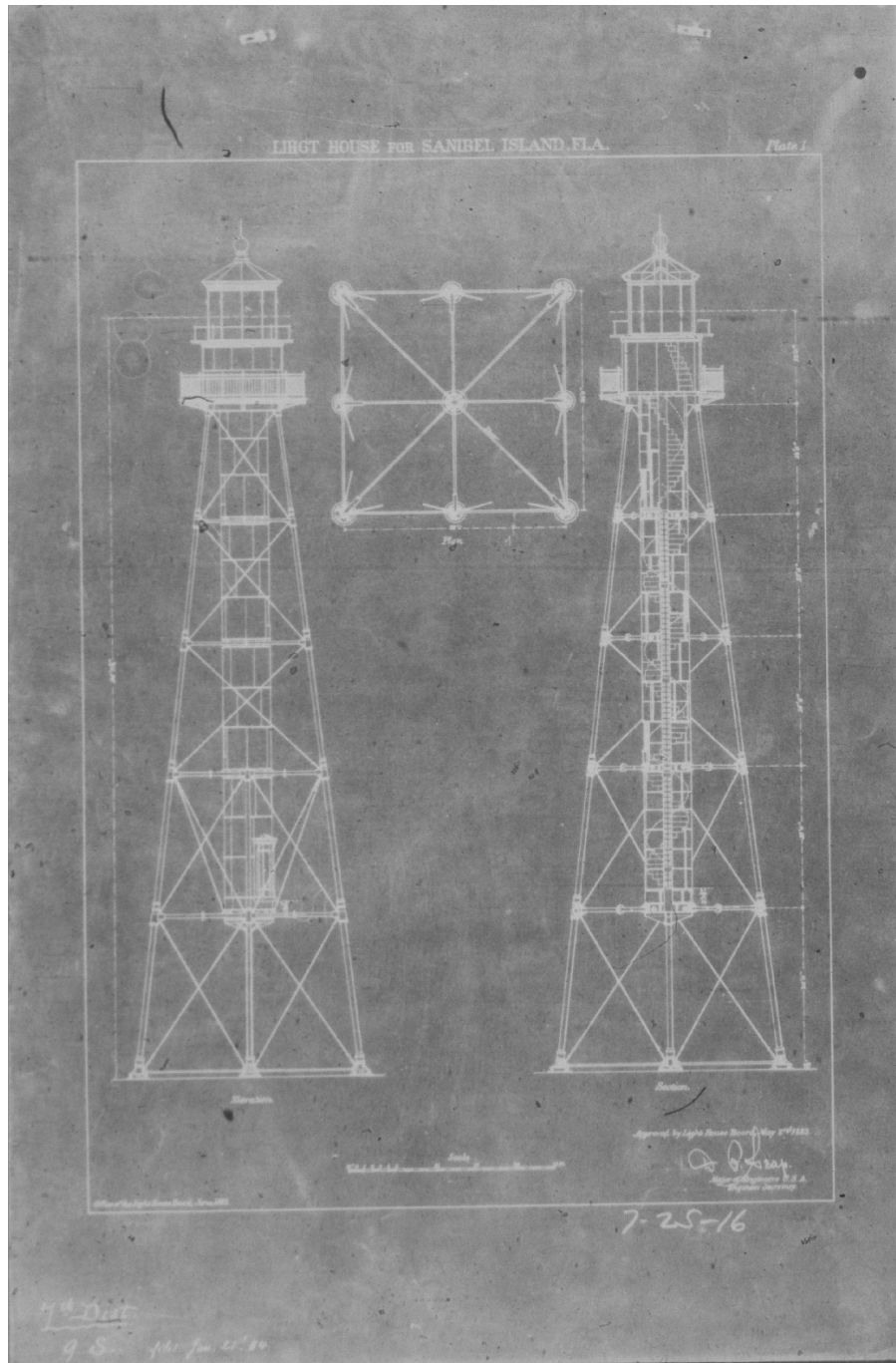


Figure 9. Official blueprints for the Sanibel Lighthouse, approved by the Light House Board on May 2, 1883. (Sanibel Island, Florida [Microfilm]; 16-Red; Plans of Lighthouses, Life Saving Stations, and Other Facilities; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives at College Park - Cartographic, College Park, MD.)

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**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Sanibel Lighthouse is significant at the State level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of late 19th century iron skeletal lighthouses and the namesake of the "Sanibel class" of square iron skeletal lighthouses designed by the U.S. Lighthouse Board. The Sanibel class of iron skeletal lighthouses was used throughout Florida and the United States due to the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall design. The Sanibel Lighthouse retains all of the character defining features of the iron skeletal lighthouse type, including the square footprint, slim central cylinder, octagonal watch room floor, and presence of both a watch room and lantern room with galleries. The effectiveness of these design features is evident in the continued presence of the Sanibel lighthouse despite the destruction of Hurricane Ian and the continued presence of Sanibel class lighthouses throughout the United States today. Although the damaged southwest support column, horizontal strut, and five damaged/destroyed tie rods of the Sanibel Lighthouse were repaired and replaced following Hurricane Ian, these features were replaced with pieces that were manufactured to match the originals and do not detract from the design of the overall lighthouse.

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In the original 1974 nomination, the boundary was loosely defined as a center point focused on 26° 27' 10" N and 82° 00' 52" W. Section 10 of this proposal will clarify these boundaries.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundary of the Sanibel Lighthouse includes the lighthouse and surrounding land within a 100 ft radius of the center point of the lighthouse.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary of the Sanibel Lighthouse includes the lighthouse and surrounding land within a 100 ft radius of the center point of the lighthouse. This boundary incorporates the land formerly occupied by the supporting buildings that were destroyed during Hurricane Ian in 2022 and also includes the adjacent shoreline which has been altered over time through erosion. The boundary does not include the entire original lighthouse reservation which would extend approximately 1.6 miles to the west of the lighthouse and has been significantly altered through residential development.

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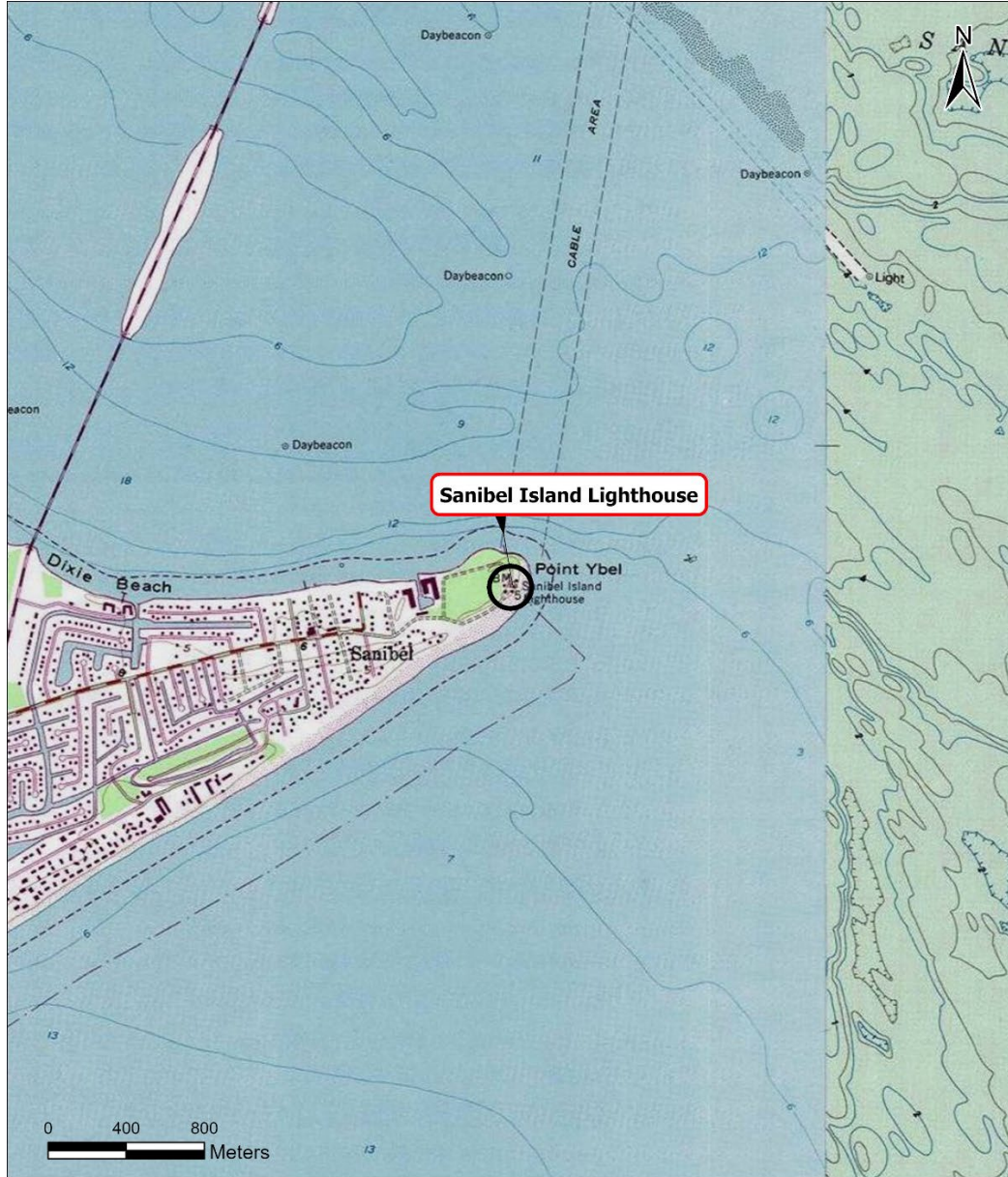
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ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION (FIGURES, PLANS, HISTORIC PHOTOS)



○ 26.4529°N -82.0142°W  
110 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel, Florida, 33957

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Copyright:© 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed USGS Sanibel 1958 PR 1988 (7.5 Minute, 1:24000 quadrangle map)

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Property**

Name: Sanibel Lighthouse

City or Vicinity: Sanibel

County: Lee

State

FL

Photographer: Savannah Y. Finch

Date

Photographed: October 15, 2025

Verification that photos over a year old are a true representation of the existing building or district

**Description of photograph(s) and number, including description of view indicating direction of camera:**

1. Setting of the Sanibel Lighthouse in 2025 following Hurricane Ian. Facing south. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_01).
2. Setting of the Sanibel Lighthouse in 2025 following Hurricane Ian. Facing southwest. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_02).
3. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_03).
4. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing northwest. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_04).
5. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_05).
6. Detail view of the entryway, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_06).
7. Detail view of the entryway with doors open to the interior, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_07)
8. Looking upward within the central cylinder with stairs wrapping around the drop tube. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_08).
9. Example of plate assembly of the central cylinder visible from the interior walls. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_09).
10. Example of plate assembly of the central cylinder visible from the interior walls. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_10).
11. Example of lettered labeling on drop tube construction visible from the interior. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_11).
12. One of three windows, viewed from the interior. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_12).

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13. Interior view of the watch room with secondary stairs to lantern room and remnants of the rotator pedestal which supported the original lens. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_13).
14. Exterior view of the watch room and lantern room, facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_14).
15. Interior view of the double doors leading to the gallery of the watch room. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_15).
16. Eight skylights visible within the watch room ceiling which doubles as the lantern room floor. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_16).
17. Exterior view of the watch room and lantern room with the exterior ladder leading between the watch room gallery and the lantern room gallery visible. Facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_17).
18. Non-historic LED beacon is installed within the lantern room. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_18).
19. The Sanibel Lighthouse and immediate surroundings, including the keepers' quarters and oil house, in October 2019 prior to Hurricane Ian. Facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_19).
20. The Sanibel Lighthouse with temporary wooden leg installed and surrounded by debris following Hurricane Ian in 2022. Facing northeast. Photo taken by Kim Ruiz in August 2023. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_20).
21. Replacement southwest support column manufactured to match the original columns, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_21).

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*Photo 1. Setting of the Sanibel Lighthouse in 2025 following Hurricane Ian. Facing south. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_01).*

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*Photo 2. Setting of the Sanibel Lighthouse in 2025 following Hurricane Ian. Facing southwest. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_02).*

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Photo 3. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_03).

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Photo 4. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing northwest. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_04).

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Photo 5. Exterior of the Sanibel Lighthouse, facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_05).

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*Photo 6. Detail view of the entryway, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_06).*

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Photo 7. Detail view of the entryway with doors open to the interior, facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_07)

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*Photo 8. Looking upward within the central cylinder with stairs wrapping around the drop tube. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_08).*

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*Photo 9. Example of plate assembly of the central cylinder visible from the interior walls. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_09).*

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*Photo 10. Example of plate assembly of the central cylinder visible from the interior walls. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_10).*

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*Photo 11. Example of lettered labeling on drop tube construction visible from the interior. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_11).*

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*Photo 12. One of three windows, viewed from the interior. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_12).*

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*Photo 13. Interior view of the watch room with secondary stairs to lantern room and remnants of the rotator pedestal which supported the original lens. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_13).*

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*Photo 14. Exterior view of the watch room and lantern room, facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_14).*

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*Photo 15. Interior view of the double doors leading to the gallery of the watch room. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_15).*

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Photo 16. Eight skylights visible within the watch room ceiling which doubles as the lantern room floor. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_16).

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*Photo 17. Exterior view of the watch room and lantern room with the exterior ladder leading between the watch room gallery and the lantern room gallery visible. Facing north. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_17).*

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*Photo 18. Non-historic LED beacon is installed within the lantern room. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_18).*

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*Photo 19. The Sanibel Lighthouse and immediate surroundings, including the keepers' quarters and oil house, in October 2019 prior to Hurricane Ian. Facing southeast. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_19).*

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*Photo 20. The Sanibel Lighthouse with temporary wooden leg installed and surrounded by debris following Hurricane Ian in 2022. Facing northeast. Photo taken by Kim Ruiz in August 2023. (FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_20).*

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*Photo 21. Replacement southwest support column manufactured to match the original columns, facing north.  
(FL\_Lee\_SanibelLighthouse\_21).*