



Cape Canaveral Lighthouse shines again

By Tyme

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After an extensive, nearly \$1 million dollar restoration, the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse was relit on Sunday, 29 April 2007. The beacon is the only fully-operational lighthouse owned by the U.S. Air Force.

The lighthouse has been a venerable icon on Cape Canaveral for more than 150 years. The original lighthouse, a 65-foot brick tower, was constructed in 1848. It was built to guide vessels over the treacherous shoals, but was discovered to be ineffective because of a lack of height and light intensity.

Watch a brief video interview about the lighthouse
(Runtime 3:20) [View area: 320x240 | 480x360]

After the Civil War had ended, construction began on a new 160-foot lighthouse, just 50 feet from the original. The new lighthouse was made of metal plates with a brick lining. It was equipped with a powerful first-order Fresnel lens, which was lit for the first time on May 10, 1868. The white tower's distinctive black stripes were added in 1873. In 1876, it was upgraded with permanent lightkeeper living quarters.

For more than two decades, the towers stood side by side. The threat of beach erosion facilitated a move of the new tower to its current

location. Section by section, the lighthouse was dismantled and transported by rail cart and mule, about one mile farther inland. Nearly 18 months later, on July 25, 1894, the newly reconstructed lighthouse was relit at its current home. The original lighthouse was imploded and remains, in part, buried in place.

When rocket launches from the space center commenced in the late 1950s, the lighthouse often was mistaken as a rocket by launch watchers. The launches literally began to shake the Fresnel lens to pieces. Consequently, it was removed; and in 1995, it was restored and placed on display at the Ayres Davies Lens Exhibit Building at the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse. That same year, the Coast Guard started restoration of the current lighthouse. A new lantern room replaced the original, which was retired as a gazebo at the Air Force Space and Missile Museum.

In December 2000, the U.S. Air Force took ownership of the lighthouse. With help from the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse Foundation, the lighthouse has undergone additional restorations. In 2003, the brick oil house received a new roof, which had been destroyed in a 1970 windstorm, and the lantern room was reinstalled. By February 2007, the year-long renovation had been completed.

The Cape Canaveral Lighthouse continues to serve as a navigational aid; the light is maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard.



Acknowledgments

The photo of the lighthouse during a rocket launch was made available by NASA. Historical photos are the property of the State Archives of Florida. Restoration photos, used in the video, are courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.

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