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Gettysburg hero designed Florida lighthouse

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JUPITER --- One of the U. S. Army’s most brilliant leaders, Gen. George G. Meade, served in Florida both before and after the Civil War, the war which he brought to a finish at Gettysburg. One assignment he had in the state was to build a lighthouse at Jupiter.

The tall (105 feet) red brick tower looks out over the ocean from a commanding spot at the mouth of the Loxahatchie River. At one time this was the site of Fort Jupiter which had been erected in 1838 during the Indian wars. The fort was under command of Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Jessup who imprisoned 678 Indians and Negroes until they were transferred to reservations in the West. It was abandoned in 1842.

The U.S. Government was building a string of lighthouses along the treacherous East Coast and in 1855 construction of the light at Jupiter was begun. Meade, then a First Lieutenant, directed and designed the project. It was first lighted on July 10, 1860.

The lighthouse’s operation soon was interrupted. The Confederates took over the area and doused the light for the duration of the war. The French-made lenses were removed on Jan. 23, 1861, and buried. They were hidden from the Federal troops which occasionally landed and destroyed items of use to the Confederacy. The Jupiter Lighthouse was relighted on June 28, 1866.

Manning the Jupiter light in its obscure location was a lonely job for the keeper. An article in the Florida Historical Quarterly once told of a party visiting the section in 1871. They learned the keeper had never visited his neighbor in the three years stationed there, although he lived "only 100 miles, four creeks and rivers to ford" away.