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U.S. hero built lighthouses in Florida

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CEDAR KEY --- One of the Federal heroes at Gettysburg was Lt. Gen. George Gordon Meade, a familiar figure in Florida before the Civil War.

General Meade was with the Topographical Engineer Corps of the U.S. Army and is credited with constructing at least two of the important lighthouses on the coastline of our state. One was at Sand Key not far from Key West and another was at Seahorse Key (photo) near Cedar Key.

The lighthouse at Sand Key was the first screw pile lighthouse in the U.S. The whole structure was supported by piles of wrought iron eight inches thick and screwed into the bottom 10 feet below water. This was built prior to the big war. A fierce hurricane struck Sand Key in 1856 and smashed everything in sight but the lighthouse.

General Meade, who was a controversial Union commander-in-chief and who had served as a young lieutenant during Florida’s Seminole War, built the lighthouse here on Seahorse Key in 1855. This key is about three miles off Cedar Key, which was becoming a prosperous spot about the time the light was erected as pencil manufacturers harvested the abundance of cedar trees growing on the isle. The lighthouse was used as a Federal prison during the Civil War.

Another identification Florida has with the U.S. hero is that the town of Fort Meade was named in his honor.