

BOCA GRANDE & GASPARILLA ISLAND 1890-1905



The Gasparilla Island Lighthouse was constructed at its present location in 1890 and proved to be a valuable aid for the ships entering Charlotte Harbor.

Phosphate needed to be loaded onto the ships. Laborers would transfer the phosphate by hand from barges alongside the ships. The risk of the spread of contagious diseases such as Yellow Fever between crewmembers and laborers led to the building of a quarantine station a short distance north of the lighthouse. A state appointed doctor determined the presence of dangerous diseases and quarantined anyone infected. The Quarantine House still stands today.

Between 1890 and 1895 a pilot station was built to house the harbor pilots. The pilots would travel about 5 miles into the Gulf, meet the ships, and bring them safely to anchorage. With the exception of the lighthouse keeper and some commercial fishermen that lived at the north end of the island, there were no other people living on Gasparilla Island at this time. It was a lonely life for these men. When duty permitted, they would sail in small vessels up through Charlotte Harbor to visit their families in the town of Punta Gorda.



The naturally deep water found outside of Boca Grande Pass (19 feet) made it possible to ship heavy commodities in large vessels. It was the deepest natural harbor in the state of Florida.

In 1905 an AACCo company official, an engineer from the U.S. Engineering Corps, and a work force of laborers landed on the island. Construction of the new railroad branch north began that would enable phosphate from the central Florida phosphate mines to be transported by railroad to Gasparilla Island. Up until this time, phosphate had been transported by barge. In order to begin construction of a railway, docks and a temporary tent city for workers were built at the south end of the island. The train tracks would run from the south end of Gasparilla Island for ninety-five miles to the productive phosphate mines in Polk County, Florida.

