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fort was built around the lighthouse

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



A FORT WAS BUILT AROUND THE LIGHTHOUSE

By HAMPTON DUNN

GARDEN KEY --- Way out here in the Dry Tortugas isles, some 69 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico, is a lighthouse that has been in operation since 1825. It pre-dates the massive Fort Jefferson surrounding it by 20 years.

For years this cluster of coral islets was the hangout for pirates when the U.S. took over Florida in 1821, the buccaneers were chased away. Then, for additional insurance to a growing United States commerce in the Gulf, a lighthouse was built on Garden Key. Thirty-one years later the present 150-foot light was erected on nearby Loggerhead Key.

The contract for lights at Cape Florida, Dry Tortugas and Sambo Key was let to Samuel B. Lincoln of Hingham, Mass., in July, 1824. Shortly after that he was lost at sea on a trip to the Keys and his bondsmen were directed to pick up the contract. It was constructed and Keeper William Flaherty and his wife arrived in late 1825.

A spokesman for the U.S. Coast Guard reports that Flaherty's "industry and enthusiasm left something to be desired. He failed to keep his wicks trimmed and the lantern panes were so black no light showed through." It also developed that Mrs. Flaherty was unhappy, fresh provisions didn't arrive often enough and social life was nil. Travel opportunities were restricted and mosquitos terrible." She wrote a letter to President Adams' wife complaining. Flaherty was transferred shortly. When Fort Jefferson was built around the lighthouse, this quarter of an acre remained lighthouse property.

