

EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received MAY 27 1982

date entered  
JUN 28 1982

## 1. Name

historic Charleston Main Light

and/or common Morris Island Lighthouse (preferred)

## 2. Location

street &amp; number approximately 6 miles southeast of Charleston on N/A not for publication

city, town Morris Island  
Charleston ☒ vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state South Carolina code 045 county Charleston code 019

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: abandoned

## 4. Owner of Property

name S. E. Felkel  
Yelsen Land Company, Inc.

street &amp; number 9 Redbank Road

city, town Goose Creek N/A vicinity of state South Carolina 29445

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charleston County RMC Office

street &amp; number Courthouse Square

city, town Charleston state South Carolina 29401

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Inventory of Historic  
Places in South Carolina has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate 1981 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records South Carolina Department of Archives and History

city, town Columbia state South Carolina 29211

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☐ good  
☒ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☒ unaltered  
☐ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Morris Island Lighthouse is a tall, conical, brick tower built on Morris Island ca. 1876 to mark the southern entrance to the Charleston Harbor. The present lighthouse is the third such structure on the site. Although the original keepers' houses and other outbuildings have been destroyed, the tower is intact with few alterations and still serves as a daymark on the channel.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Morris Island Lighthouse is a 150-foot, conical, brick tower with a base diameter of thirty-three feet and a top diameter of sixteen feet, eight inches. The focal plane was 158 feet above sea level with a visibility of eighteen and three-quarter miles. At present the tower is painted in alternating black and white horizontal stripes for use as a daymark, and photographs from ca. 1900 indicate that it was historically marked in this manner. Single light windows with segmental-arched heads are located at alternate levels on the east and west faces of the lighthouse.

Inside the tower, an iron spiral stair with nine flights leads to the light room, which has an external gallery with an iron parapet. The parapet has decorative iron pendants on its lower edge. The light room originally had a revolving lamp outfitted with a first-order Fresnel lens system. The lamp burned lard oil until 1881 when it was converted to mineral oil. In 1934 the fuel was changed to acetylene, which was used until the light was discontinued in 1962.

Surroundings: The lighthouse was originally part of a complex of buildings including three frame Italianate keepers' residences and several associated outbuildings. A brick retaining wall originally surrounded the complex. All of the outbuildings and associated structures have been destroyed; the tower is the only surviving structure. The erosion of the Morris Island beach has eliminated all traces of the destroyed buildings. The lighthouse itself is now completely surrounded by waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> local history

<b>Specific dates</b>	ca. 1876	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	unknown
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### Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The Morris Island Lighthouse is a tall, conical, brick tower erected ca. 1876 on Morris Island in the Charleston Harbor. The lighthouse, last used in 1962, is the third tower at this site, a strategic point in guiding shipping for over two hundred years. The Morris Island Lighthouse is significant for its role in marking Charleston's channel, as a good example of later nineteenth century lighthouse design, and as a local landmark.

The present Morris Island Lighthouse, built ca. 1876, is the third lighthouse on this site. In 1767, about the time the first light was constructed in the harbor, there were three small islands, Cumming's Point, Morrison's Island, and Middle Bay Island, where Morris Island is now. The first lighthouse, a brick, octagonal tower was designed by Samuel Cardy, architect and Thomas Young, engineer, and built by Adam Miller, bricklayer, on Middle Bay Island. Remains of this light were discovered during construction of the present tower, which is situated directly atop the original site. A second, more modern tower with a revolving light was constructed in 1837. This light was refitted in 1845 and again in 1857.<sup>1</sup>

By the Civil War the three islands had physically joined and Morris Island, from Morrison's Island, was the name applied to the whole. In 1861 the lighthouse on Morris Island was destroyed by Confederate troops seeking to hinder the Union forces' entry into the channel. For the remainder of the war, Morris Island was a battlefield. In 1876 the present lighthouse, then called the Charleston Main Light, was completed on Morris Island. Due to a shift in the location of the channel, the tower was built to the south of the second light, coincidentally directly on top of the 1767 tower. The new lighthouse was a 150-foot, conical, brick tower.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time the lighthouse was constructed, houses and outbuildings to accommodate the light keepers were also built. Nautical maps from the late 1800s show at least fifteen buildings, which included three Italianate keepers' residences, on the island, which had become a virtually self-sufficient community. The residents kept a garden, chickens, and pigs. There was a one-room school whose teacher arrived the first of each week by boat and returned to Charleston each weekend. A boardwalk system facilitated travel, and well into this century, a car was imported for traversing the island.<sup>3</sup>

In 1938 the lighthouse was automated, and the keepers and their families left the island. By the time of their departure the devastating erosion of the island had already begun. Jetties constructed in 1896 caused complete erosion of the shoal protecting Morris Island from the sea. Since 1939 over 1600 feet of land have been lost on Morris Island, and today the lighthouse stands completely surrounded by water about 500 feet off the shore of what is left of Morris Island. In 1962, upon completion of the Sullivan's Island light station, the Morris Island lighthouse, completely surrounded by water and leaning slightly due to the ravages of time, storms, and an earthquake, was slated for demolition. It was saved through the efforts of the Charleston Preservation Society; and although several plans for utilizing the tower have been broached, none have, as yet, been implemented.<sup>4</sup>

CONTINUED

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name James Island Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

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3	6	1	7	8	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is shown as the red line on the accompanying Charleston County Tax Map #450-0-0, drawn at a scale of 1" = 2000'. This boundary includes the lighthouse and the submerged concrete base.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A		N/A	

state	code	county	code
N/A		N/A	

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	organization	date
Suzanne P. Wylie	S.C. Dept. of Archives & History	March 26, 1982
John Wells		

organization	date
S.C. Dept. of Archives & History	March 26, 1982

street & number	telephone
P.O. Box 11,669, Capitol Station	(803) 758-5816

city or town	state
Columbia	South Carolina 29211

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Charles E. Lee 5/14/82

title	date
Charles E. Lee	
State Historic Preservation Officer	

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

William Byers  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

6/28/82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet 1

Item number 8

JUN 28 1982  
Page 1

Engineering/Architecture: The Morris Island Lighthouse is a significant engineering accomplishment, a competent and logical answer to the problems inherent in guiding shipping into the Charleston Harbor. Since the first light was built ca. 1767, the erection of a lighthouse on Morris Island had been seen as necessary. The present tower, the third lighthouse on the island, produced a light visible from eighteen and three-quarter miles away, helping to guide shipping into the channel. The structure has survived over a hundred years of Atlantic Ocean storms as well as the erosion of the Morris Island beach. The design of the tower with the arched windows, iron stair, and iron gallery with pendants on its parapet is also noteworthy.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet 2

Item number 9

Page 1

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burton, E. Milby. Siege of Charleston. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1970.

Chamberlain, David. "Middle Bay Light." Charleston Magazine, January/February 1977, pp. 14-15.

Columbia, South Carolina. South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Charleston County Judgment Rolls. Box 57B, File 36A.

"Death Notices From the South Carolina Gazette From September 29, 1766 to December 19, 1774." South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 34 (October 1933): 211-17.

Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1867. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the State of the Finances for the Year Ending June 30, 1858. Executive Document 2, 35th Congress, 2nd Session, 1858.

Yearbook-1883. Charleston, S.C.: City of Charleston, 1883.

Charleston Main Light  
Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>David Chamberlain, "Middle Bay Light," Charleston Magazine, January/February 1977, p. 14; Yearbook-1883 (Charleston, SC: City of Charleston, 1883), pp. 491, insert between 491 and 492; US, Congress, Senate, Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the State of the Finances for the Year Ending June 30, 1858, Executive Document 2, 35th Congress, 2nd session, 1858, pp. 414-415; Samuel Cardy was also the architect of St. Michael's Church in Charleston, SC; see "Death Notices From the South Carolina Gazette From September 29, 1766 to December 19, 1774," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 34 (October 1933): 211-17 and Charleston County Judgment Rolls, Box 57B, File 36A, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC.

<sup>2</sup>Chamberlain, p. 14; Yearbook-1883, p. 492; E. Milby Burton, The Seige of Charleston (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 86; Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1867 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), pp. 219-220.

<sup>3</sup>Chamberlain, pp. 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Chamberlain, pp. 14-15.