

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Cape Fear Lighthouse Complex

AND/OR COMMON

"Cap'n Charlie's Cottages"

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Southeast end of Smith Island at Cape Fear

CITY, TOWN

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

STATE North Carolina

CODE
37

COUNTY
Brunswick

CODE
19

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. Robert C. Hayes

STREET & NUMBER

685 Woodend Drive, SE

CITY, TOWN

Concord

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 28025

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Brunswick County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Southport

STATE

North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Cape Fear Lighthouse Complex is situated just in front of the crest of the dune line on the southeastern shore of Bald Head Island. The complex consists of a row of three detached light keepers' houses and a supply shed and the piers of another shed. The Cape Fear Lighthouse itself, north of the keeper's complex was demolished in 1958; its foundation and the abandoned generator shed remain within the nominated area.

The three keepers' houses were initially identical in plan and elevation but relatively recent additions and enclosures in the rear wings have somewhat diluted their homogeneity. The house elevations are organized with precise symmetry and with a linearity reminiscent of the Stick Style. The main blocks are one-story plus finished attic rectangular weatherboarded wooden frame structures. Each is three bays wide, and stands on brick piers and is covered by a gable roof. The quarters are four bays deep, the two central bays being closed and each end being open originally (the rear bays have been enclosed). The front bay is a full length porch with chamfered posts and angle braces below a wide weatherboarded frieze. The porch has no ceiling, but is open so that the second level front windows are protected from the sun, and yet admit the shaded breeze into the rooms. The roof of the west house is of standing seam tin, while the others are shingled. Two interior end chimneys straddle the ridge line. The chimneys are brick, each with a projecting single row course and a corbelled cap.

Each post is centered between window and door leaving the sea view completely unobstructed. Beneath the posts is a balustrade which rims the porch and cordons off the five steps leading up to its center. The balusters, standing on an elevated rectangular footrail, are slender rectangular-in-section rails, chamfered and with a band of reeding beneath the rounded handrail. The posts, in contrast, are large chamfered square posts topped with pyramidal caps.

Opening from the porch into a small vestibule is a single leaf entrance door with five tiers of horizontal flat panels. The main block, with its small center hall, is one room deep on both ground and attic levels. The one-story rear wing, which gives the floor plan a stubby T-shape, seems to have been attached when the full length rear porch was enclosed; at some point the center bay of the porch became a breezeway, two bays long, leading to the rear addition. The outer bays of the original back porch have been enclosed and converted to a utility room (on the west) and a bathroom (on the east).

On the east wall of the entrance hall is an enclosed double run stair with transversal landing; the first, and longer, flight runs front to back. The two large rooms which flank the entrance hall are entered through openings with flat paneled doors with four vertical panels arranged in two tiers. Interior doors throughout most of the house are identical. Likewise consistent is the stepped beaded molding of the baseboards. The chairrails, which occur throughout the main block, have beading along with a band each of fillet and scotia moldings. The walls are covered with vertical beaded ceiling except in the enclosed breezeway which has German siding on its north and south walls. Window architraves and sills are simply decorated with symmetrical and beaded molding.

The windows in the west room have six-over-six sash, two on the west wall with a projection between for the stove flue, and one in the center of the south wall. The east room is identical, except that on either side of the flue projection the sash are

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four-over-four. A small closet, running parallel to the stair, is entered through a door in the east wall of the west room.

At the rear of the stair is a small hall connecting the east and west rooms. Double doors, now gone, originally opened onto the breezeway connecting the main block with the rear kitchen. One six-over-six sash punctuates the west wall of the former breezeway directly across from the back door. The room behind the breezeway has a pair of four-over-four sash, one each in the northern end of its east and west walls. A chimney flue, flush with the doors of the cupboards flanking it, rises in the center of the north wall.

The attic level contains two large rooms, one on either side of the narrow center stair hall. Baseboards, chairrails, and walling match that of the front rooms beneath. Six-over-six sash appear on either side of the flue projections, stepped inward slightly from the placement of the first floor fenestration. Along the southern wall are three triple casement windows, one in each room and one in the hall, although of the latter, only the architrave remains. These overlook the front porch and capture the brisk sea breezes but are screened from the sun's glare by the porch frieze. In the south center corner of each attic room is a rather large closet which projects into the hall. The doors of these closets, like that on the front entrance, are arranged with five horizontal flat panels.

The other two keepers' houses are identical in all save the addition of neck molding to the chamfered porch posts and in minor changes made to the north elevations.

The rear of the middle house is the least altered of the three. Its three-bay porch has been enclosed on the west and center sections but the east bay remains open with posts like those on the front porch. The outer rear bays of the east house also remain open but the center bay has been closed in and extended into two rooms like the breezeway and back kitchen of the first house. Apart from these exceptions, the three keepers' houses are identical.

Behind the west and center houses, is a small equipment shed of vertical board and batten construction. The Stick Style allusions present in the keepers' houses are here expressed with more freedom and exuberance. It is a one-story structure with cross gable standing seam tin roof. The whole stands on pyramidal piers. It is a truncated cruciform plan, with the south (main) wing two bays long and one bay deep. The three additional wings are all one bay long and one bay deep. The broad roof overhang is supported at the corners by sawn rafter brackets. A bargeboard in the form of a decorative hammer brace and half king-post tapering to a pointed, turned finial ornament the principal gable. The original doors and windows of the shed have been replaced.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE - CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | | | |
|-------------|---|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|--|
| PREHISTORIC | ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC | COMMUNITY PLANNING | LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | RELIGION | | |
| 1400-1499 | ARCHEOLOGY HISTORIC | CONSERVATION | LAW | SCIENCE | | |
| 1500-1599 | AGRICULTURE | ECONOMICS | LITERATURE | SCULPTURE | | |
| 1600-1699 | ARCHITECTURE | EDUCATION | MILITARY | SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN | | |
| 1700-1799 | ART | ENGINEERING | MUSIC | THEATER | | |
| 1800-1899 | COMMERCE | EXPLORATION SETTLEMENT | PHILOSOPHY | TRANSPORTATION | | |
| x 1900- | COMMUNICATIONS | INDUSTRY | POLITICS GOVERNMENT | OTHER (SPECIFY) | | |
| | | INVENTION | | | | |

SPECIFIC DATES

1903

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cape Fear Lighthouse Complex consists of three lighthouse keepers' houses and a supply shed, the only standing remains of a complex built in 1903 that once included the Cape Fear Lighthouse and related structures. The lighthouse was razed in 1958, but its foundation and generator shed remain. The Cape Fear Lighthouse was the third built on Smith Island, succeeding those built in 1796 and 1817 ("Old Baldy"). The cottages are locally known as "Cap'n Charlie's" for the long association with Captain Charlie Swan, head keeper of the lighthouse for thirty years. Renovation of the cottages is planned, as Smith Island, long uninhabited, is developed.

The Cape Fear Lighthouse Complex was built in 1903 on Smith Island.¹ The complex originally consisted of the lighthouse, three detached keepers' houses, and a supply shed. The lighthouse was demolished in 1958.² Its foundation and generator shed are still standing, as are the three houses and the supply shed.

The lighthouse has a long history in the United States. The first lighthouse built in America was built near Boston in 1716, and the new Federal government established the Lighthouse Service in 1789. Authorities in North Carolina, recognizing the difficulties involved in negotiating the treacherous waters off the North Carolina coast, began plans to build a lighthouse on Smith Island shortly after the Revolution. In 1784 the General Assembly levied a duty on Cape Fear shipping to pay for the proposed lighthouse. The project ran into numerous difficulties, however, and its completion, in 1796,³ came only after the establishment of the Lighthouse Service, and Congressional aid.

The first Smith Island lighthouse was rendered ineffective by soil erosion during the War of 1812. It was replaced in 1817 by the Bald Head Lighthouse, popularly known as "Old Baldy." The Bald Head Lighthouse was discontinued in 1935,⁴ but still stands, the oldest standing lighthouse on the North Carolina coast. Thus the Cape Fear Lighthouse was the third lighthouse to be built on Smith Island.

The primary defect in "Old Baldy" was its lack of height. It was less than 90 feet above sea level. As early as 1889 the Lighthouse Service argued for its replacement by "a first-order lighthouse built on the pitch of Cape Fear, with a radius of 18½ miles of light, that would be seen so far as to give timely warning" for approaching ships.⁵ This request was renewed annually until Congress appropriated \$35,000 in 1898 for the building of new facilities, with a subsequent appropriation of \$35,000 in 1901.⁶

The new lighthouse and its service buildings were completed in the summer of 1903, and the lighthouse was first illuminated on August 31 of that year. The lighthouse frame was a steel skeleton tower, 159 feet above sea level, with an 80,000 candle power

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light visible for 19 miles.⁷

For many years the Cape Fear Lighthouse was associated with Charlie Swan, widely known in the area as "Cap'n Charlie." Swan was the first head keeper of the lighthouse and had the honor of lighting the lamp for the first time. Swan was in charge of the complex for thirty years, until his retirement in 1933.⁸ He lived in one of the three keepers' houses, commuting to his family home in Southport when he had the chance. His two assistants lived in the other two houses. The occupants of these three houses were the only inhabitants of the island. A special tramway was built to supply the complex, as the houses were located on the opposite side of the island from the area where boats from the mainland landed. Eventually, the wooden rails rotted and Cap'n Charlie bought a horse and cart to deliver supplies.

Swan was replaced upon his retirement by James Smith, who was replaced by a Captain Munn. In 1939 the Coast Guard took over operation of the Lighthouse Service.¹⁰ During the 1950s it was decided that having a lighthouse on the otherwise uninhabited Smith Island was inefficient. In 1956 a Coast Guard station was built on Oak Island, nearer Southport and the mainland, and two years later the Oak Island Lighthouse was completed. On May 15, 1958 the Cape Fear Lighthouse went out of service, and the Oak Island Lighthouse was put into service. Charlie Swan, eighty-five years old at that time, threw the switch that put the new lighthouse into operation.¹¹ The Coast Guard feared that the inactive Cape Fear Lighthouse would prove confusing to ships seeking a fix based on the location of the Oak Island Lighthouse, and therefore it was demolished on September 15, 1958.¹²

History does not record any major ship wrecks in sight of the Cape Fear Lighthouse. The few sea rescues performed in the area of Smith Island were routine. This is a tribute to the quiet efficiency of the lighthouse, and the men who manned her.

Smith Island is presently uninhabited, although plans to develop the island may alter this. The complex was recently sold by the Cape Fear Corporation to the present owners, who intend to renovate the buildings.

FOOTNOTES

¹Smith Island is divided by creeks into several ridges, or islands. The southernmost island, where the lighthouse complex was built, is known as Bald Head Island. The general area is frequently called Bald Head, Arthur W. Cooper and Sheafe Satterthwaite, Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula (Raleigh: Wildlife Preserves, Inc., 1964), pp. 2-3, hereinafter cited as Cooper and Satterthwaite, Smith Island.

²Cooper and Satterthwaite, Smith Island, p. 53; Wilmington Morning Star, September 16, 1958. Cooper erroneously states that the lighthouse was demolished in 1960.

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Hugh Lefler has written that: "The handicap of a dangerous coast and lack of good harbors did not prevent North Carolina from developing foreign and coastwise commerce."¹³ Seaborne commerce was of vital importance to the economy of North Carolina and could not have been realized without the successful use of lighthouses such as the Cape Fear Lighthouse.

¹³ Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, Revised Edition, 1973, 102.

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³ Hans Christian Adamson, Keepers of the Lights, (New York: Greenberg, 1955), pp. 149-152, hereinafter cited as Adamson, Keepers of the Lights; Ethel Herring, Cap'n Charlie and Lights of the Lower Cape Fear (Published by the author, 1967), pp. 74-77, hereinafter cited as Herring, Cap'n Charlie.

⁴ Cooper and Satterthwaite, Smith Island, pp. 44-45; Herring, Cap'n Charlie, pp. 77-8.

⁵ Annual Report of the Light-House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1894 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), p. 108; Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 84.

⁶ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 87.

⁷ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 87; Adamson, Keepers of the Lights, p. 391.

⁸ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 23, 49, 52.

⁹ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 26, 27.

¹⁰ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 52; Adamson, Keepers of the Lights, p. 13.

¹¹ Herring, Cap'n Charlie, p. 93; Wilmington News, May 16, 1958.

¹² Wilmington Morning Star, September 12, 15, 16, 1958.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Adamson, Hans Christian. Keepers of the Lights. New York: Greenburg, 1955.
- Annual Report of the Light-House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1894. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894.
- Cooper, Arthur W. and Satterthwaite, Sheafe. Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula. Raleigh: Wildlife Preserves, Inc., 1964.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4.944 acres--see attached plat
 UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|---------------|---------------|---|-------|-------------|---------------|
| A | 1 1 8 | 2 2 5 4 1 0 0 | 3 7 4 8 7 6 0 | B | 1 1 8 | 2 2 5 4 8 0 | 3 7 4 8 7 0 0 |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | 1 1 8 | 2 2 5 4 7 0 | 3 7 4 8 6 6 0 | D | 1 1 8 | 2 2 5 3 8 0 | 3 7 4 8 7 4 0 |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

ORGANIZATION

Division of Archives and History

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

109 East Jones St.

TELEPHONE

733-4763

CITY OR TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina 27611

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

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

November 17, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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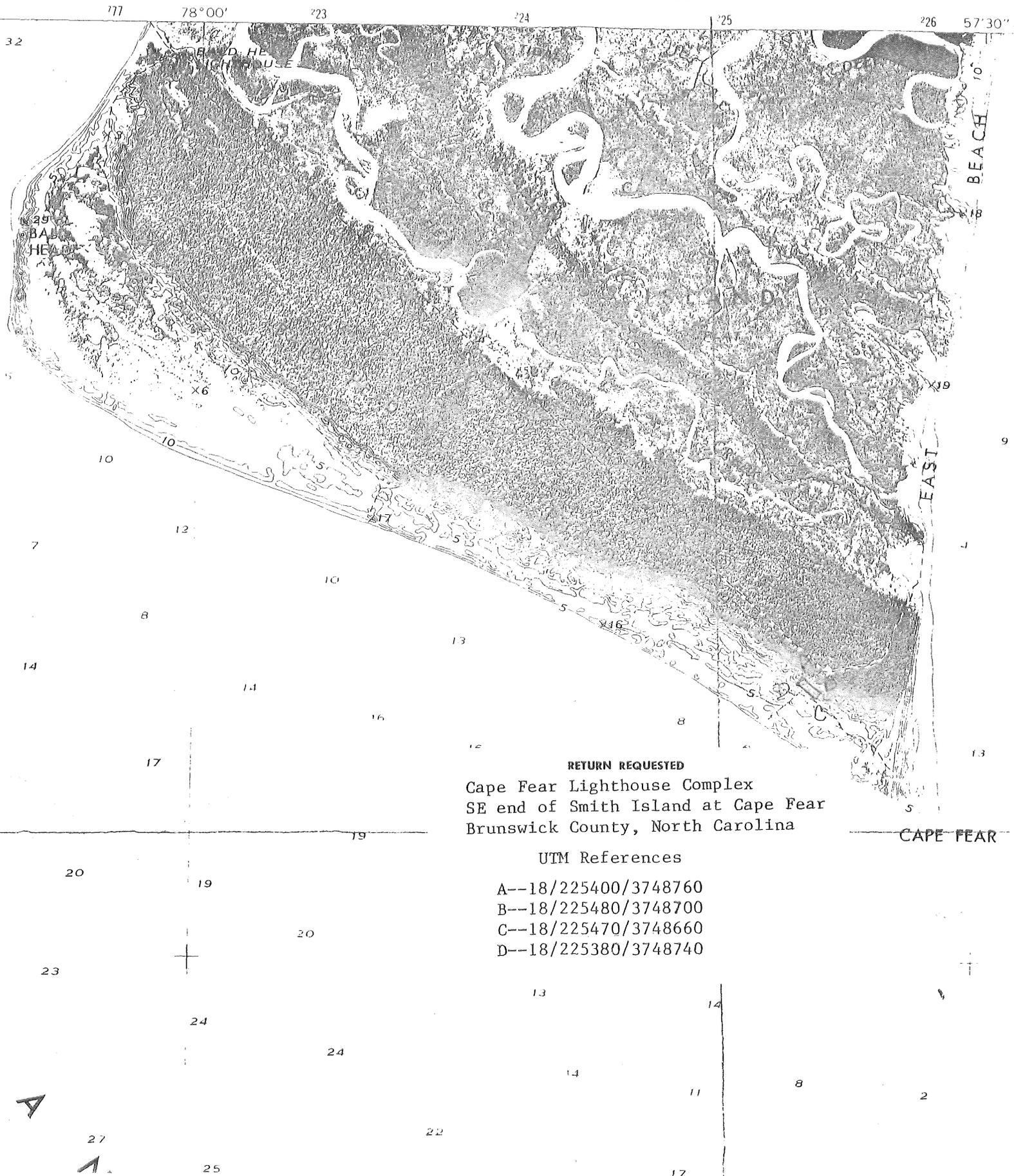
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Herring, Ethel. Cap'n Charlie and Lights of the Lower Cape Fear. Published by author,
1967.

Wilmington Morning Star. September 12, 15, 16, 1958.

Wilmington News. May 16, 1958.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



RETURN REQUESTED

Cape Fear Lighthouse Complex
SE end of Smith Island at Cape Fear
Brunswick County, North Carolina

UTM References

- A--18/225400/3748760
- B--18/225480/3748700
- C--18/225470/3748660
- D--18/225380/3748740

CAPE FEAR

CONTROL MAN # 16
 N. C. Grid COORDS
 X = 2,315,212.251
 Y = 35,881.049

atlantic Ocean



S 48-18-42 E
 438.03'

S 78-46-51 E
 433.99'

old house

old house

old house

Radio shack

4.944 Acres ±

Auto house

light house ruins
 (APPROX.)

N 41-41-18 E
 497.23'

N 81-18-18 W
 487.14'

S 41-41-18 W 7.09'
 216.64'
 N 48-18-42 W

N 48-18-42 W
 49.45'

171.99'
 N 46-58-44 W

S 41-41-18 W (old Gov. Plat)
 7.0'

PLOT PLAN
 for

LOT _____ BLOCK _____ SECTION _____ SUBDIVISION _____

TOWNSHIP _____ BRUNSWICK CO. N. C.

SCALE _____ DATE _____

GERRIT C. GREER
 N. C. Registration No. L-813

