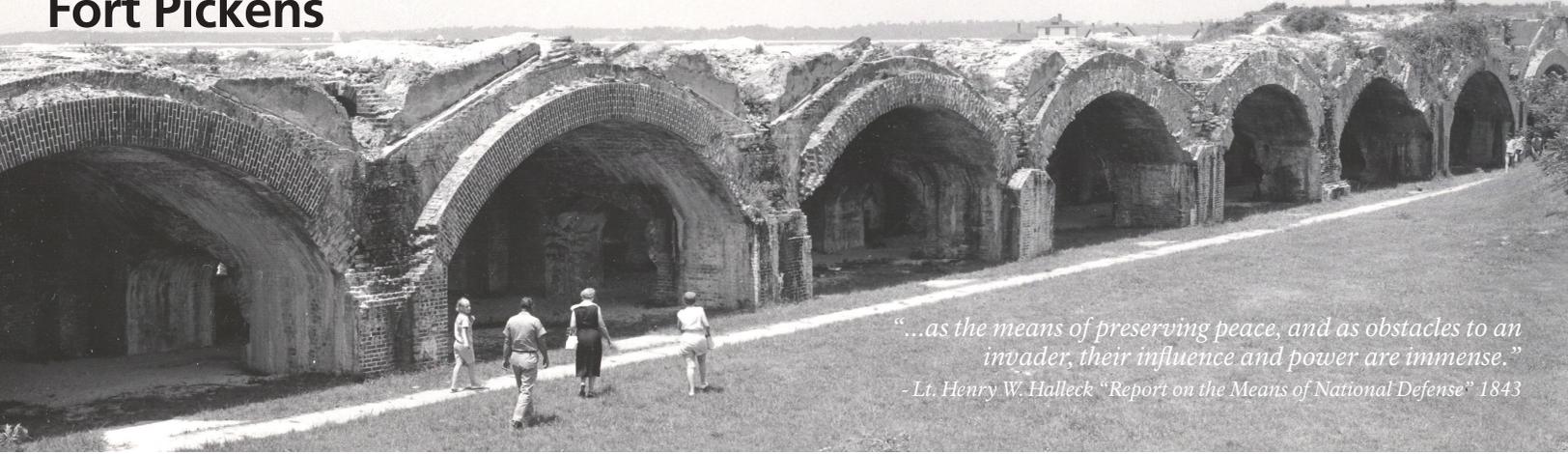


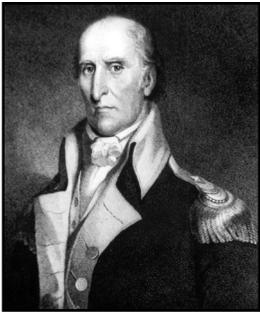


Fort Pickens



"...as the means of preserving peace, and as obstacles to an invader, their influence and power are immense."
- Lt. Henry W. Halleck "Report on the Means of National Defense" 1843

Coastal Defense

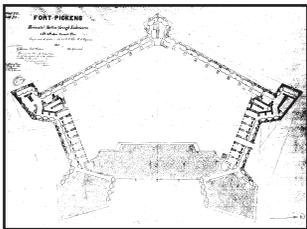


General Andrew Pickens

For over a century, Fort Pickens guarded the entrance to the Pensacola Bay Harbor and the Navy Shipyard, protecting the American coastline from foreign invasion. The fort has withstood the actions of war, time, and the elements. Named after Revolutionary War hero General Andrew Pickens, the fort was the largest of the four forts built in this area.

During the War of 1812, vulnerabilities along America's shores were exploited by British forces. In response, the United States constructed a system of over 40 coastal forts. These forts could withstand cannon balls fired from wooden ships. Fort Pickens is an enduring monument to a time in American history when our independence and national security were dependent upon the brick and mortar of our seacoast fortifications.

Construction



Army drawing of Fort Pickens

Designed for over 200 cannon, built with over 21.5 million bricks and completed in 1834, Fort Pickens was a formidable structure and a war machine. Built in the shape of a pentagon, the fort could withstand possible attack on all five faces; landward on the east side and seaward on the other four. Its four-foot thick walls and symmetrical archways were built to endure heavy cannon fire.

Construction began in 1829 under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Due to the lack of skilled laborers in the area, the government allowed contractors to use slave labor. Up to 200 enslaved masons, carpenters, and laborers of African descent were working at any given time. Those working on the fort were exposed to disease, intense heat, and high humidity. Following the completion of Fort Pickens, many of these slaves went on to build Forts McRee and Barrancas.

Civil War



Fort Pickens bombarding Forts McRee and Barrancas

Although built to repel foreign invaders, the only combat that took place at the fort was during the American Civil War. In October 1861, General Braxton Bragg led 1,000 Confederate soldiers in a land assault against Union forces encamped outside the fort. Following the Battle of Santa Rosa Island, Union forces bombarded Forts McRee and Barrancas from land and sea on November 22-23, 1861, and again on January 1-2, 1862. All three forts sustained some damage, but Fort McRee and the navy yard were nearly destroyed. Confederates abandoned Pensacola in May 1862. Fort Pickens saw no further combat, and the fort remained in Union control throughout the war.

Defense Through the 1900s



Modern batteries were added in and around the fort.

To keep up with advances in technology, Fort Pickens underwent dramatic changes after the Civil War as part of a larger system of upgrading American defenses. New batteries were added, smoothbore cannon were replaced or converted to rifled cannon, and equipment to lay and maintain an underwater minefield in the harbor was installed. The most notable addition is Battery Pensacola, constructed in 1898. Painted black to reduce glare from sand and water, it covers most of the parade ground, and is one of many reinforced concrete batteries built on the island. Learn more on the Coastal Artillery self-guiding tour.

Preservation



National Park Service
CENTENNIAL

Fort Pickens was an integral part of the United States' coastal defense system until 1947 when coastal forts were declared surplus. Formerly a state park, in 1971, Fort Pickens became part of Gulf Islands National Seashore, which preserves the structure and tells the fort's history. Today, Fort Pickens represents a link between our past, present and future.

Fort Pickens visitor center and museum are open daily. For more information about visiting the fort, and a current listing of ranger-led programs, please visit our website at nps.gov/guis, like us on Facebook - [Facebook.com/GulfIslandsNPS](https://www.facebook.com/GulfIslandsNPS), or call 850-934-2600.

The National Park Service turns 100 in 2016. Celebrate the Centennial with us with programs and activities throughout the year. Learn, discover, be inspired, or simply have fun at Gulf Islands!

