

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**  
RECEIVED JUN 11 1980  
DATE ENTERED AUG 1 1980

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Lightship Chesapeake

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

*Moved - see continuation sheet dated 7-2001*

STREET & NUMBER

East Potomac Park

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

D.C.

VICINITY OF

CODE

11

COUNTY

CODE

001

**2 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" 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 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)

National Capital Region, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

STATE

D.C. 20242

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

List of Classified Structures, National Park Service

DATE

1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Resource Services Division  
National Capital Region, National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Lightship Chesapeake is a steel-hulled vessel 133'3" in length and 30' in beam. It draws approximately 12'6" and displaces 630 gross tons. The hull has the high bow and freeboard and rounded stern characteristic of lightships, designed for maximum stability while riding at anchor under heavy wind and sea conditions. A diesel-electric motor of 350 horsepower turning a single screw propels the ship at a maximum speed of nine knots.

Within the hull at the bow is an anchor/windlass compartment over a paint locker. Just aft, beneath the pilot house and captain's cabin, are cabins for 10 seamen (two per cabin) over the forward hold. Amidships are the mess deck and cook's cabin over the engine room. Next aft is the galley. Beneath the radio room above-deck at the stern is the wardroom with individual cabins for four officers, with the machine shop below. Between the machine shop and the engine room in the bottom of the ship is the motor room.

A tall mast rising from the deck ahead of the radio room carries two 30,000 candle-power beacons with Fresnel lenses, one intended for auxiliary use. A shorter mast just aft of the pilot house carries a radar scanner installed about 1950. Previously the auxiliary light was mounted atop this mast.

The hull is painted red with large white letters bearing the name of the ship's duty station (Chesapeake) on each side. Between 1930 and 1933 it was lettered "Fenwick" for its station off Fenwick Island, Delaware. From 1966 to 1970 it bore the name "Delaware" for its post at the mouth of Delaware Bay. Following its transfer to the National Park Service it was relabeled "Chesapeake" in recognition of its longest tour of duty at that location.

During its years of service several additional modifications were made to the ship. There was some replacement of diesel generating engines, and a number of hatches and portholes were closed or relocated. When the ship was decommissioned its fog-horn, most radio equipment, and the original wooden wheel were removed. Since then the engine room controls have been enclosed, there has been some modern refurbishing, and some cabins have been adapted for use as offices. The vessel is unchanged for the most part, however, and retains its original character to a great extent.

An elevation drawing of the ship is provided in the accompanying leaflet.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1930

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Lewis Green II, Naval Architect  
Charleston Drydock & Machine Co.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Lightship Chesapeake is significant as a rare operational example of a type of navigational aid now almost extinct in the United States.

A lightship is a floating lighthouse, designed for use in coastal waters where a fixed beacon cannot readily be placed. The idea may be traced to the days of the Roman Empire, when galleys with lighted fire baskets at their mastheads were occasionally used as aids to navigation. In 1731 Robert Hamblin, a British entrepreneur, received a patent to place a single-masted sloop with two lanterns in the Thames estuary and collect duties from ship owners. The first lightship in the United States was placed off the Virginia coast in 1820 by the United States Lighthouse Establishment, which placed four more such vessels in the Chesapeake Bay the next year at public expense.

The number of United States lightship stations reached a maximum of 56 in 1909. Many of these were in outer waters, since lighthouses employing the new screw-pile construction had replaced many of the "inner" lightships. Thereafter the number declined as more economical and efficient light buoys and ultimately Texas towers supplanted even the outer lightships.

LS 116, exemplifying the best lightship technology of its time, left the Charleston Drydock and Machine Company, Charleston, S.C., on August 17, 1930, for its maiden voyage to Norfolk, Va. Only five more American lightships would be built. Until 1933 LS 116 was stationed off Fenwick Island, Del., and designated Fenwick. On July 17 of that year it began its long service off the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, acquiring the name Chesapeake.

When the U.S. Lighthouse Service and its vessels were absorbed by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1939, LS 116 was renumbered WAL 538 and later WLV 538. During World War II it was pressed into U.S. Navy service and was stationed off Sandwich, Mass., until 1945, when it returned to duty at the mouth of the Chesapeake. There in 1962 the Chesapeake survived a major storm in which a mountainous wave buckled the forward bulkhead of the pilot house.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Frank F. Hebblethwaite. "A Background History of the Lightship Chesapeake" (type-script). National Park Service, 1977.
- Francis Ross Holland, Jr. America's Lighthouses; Their Illustrated History Since 1716. Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Greene Press, 1972.
- National Park Service. "Lightship Chesapeake" (leaflet), N.d.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY N/A

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 | 324270 | 43104750  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**  
**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

B \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nomination includes only the ship, which is by nature movable and which is not historically associated with the referenced location.

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

Barry Mackintosh, Regional Historian

ORGANIZATION

National Capital Region, National Park Service

DATE

April 11, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

TELEPHONE

(202)426-6660

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20242

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X

NO \_\_\_\_\_

NONE \_\_\_\_\_

*[Signature]*  
 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National  National  State  Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*[Signature]*  
 Assistant Director,

TITLE

Cultural Resources

DATE

MAY 28 1980

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*[Signature]*  
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/1/80

ATTEST:

*[Signature]*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

July 30, 1980

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

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In September 1965 the Chesapeake's station was taken by a Texas tower light, and the vessel moved to its last official tour of duty at the entrance to the Delaware Bay. In 1970 an automated Large Navigational Buoy (LNB) again replaced the lightship, which was mothballed at Cape May, N.J., and decommissioned on January 6, 1971.

The National Park Service acquired the vessel in August 1971, refurbished it as a historical exhibit and a vehicle for maritime environmental education, and stationed it in the Washington Channel of the Potomac River off East Potomac Park, Washington, D.C. From here it makes occasional cruises down the Potomac and periodically displays its beacon. Its present mooring is unrelated to its historical significance and is subject to change without effect on that significance.

At this time (1980) only one American lightship--the Nantucket, off Nantucket Island, Mass.--remains in active service, and its days are numbered. The Chesapeake there-fore illustrates a nearly bygone era of navigational assistance in the United States.

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On May 27, 1981, the Lightship Chesapeake was loaned by the National Park Service to the City of Baltimore, Maryland, for a term of 25 years. The ship will be moored in Baltimore's Inner Harbor during this period.

UTM Reference: 18/361380/4349360