Cape Henry Lighthouse

Fort Story, U.S. 60 and Atlantic Avenue

Virginia Beach

Second

Virginia 23459

Virginia Beach (city)

51

Virginia

51

Cape Henry Lighthouse

Virginia Beach (city)

810

Virginia

1958

Library of Congress/Annex

Washington

D.C.

11
Cape Henry Lighthouse is an octagonal sandstone structure, faced with hewn and hammer-dressed stone. The diameter is twenty-six feet at the lighthouse base and sixteen and one-half feet at its top, seventy-two feet above the base, where the walls are six feet thick. A small, glass-encased observation platform caps the tower walls. The lighthouse is situated on top of a small, steep sand dune, covered with low, dense vegetation. The height of the dune equals that of the lighthouse.

Wind erosion at one time threatened to undermine the lighthouse foundations, but the necessary repairs were made following the acquisition of the lighthouse in 1930 by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA). Brick lining and an iron stairway have been added to the interior.

Today the lighthouse is open to the public on an unlimited basis by the APVA; a fine view of the Chesapeake can be enjoyed from its observation platform.

**BOUNDARIES**

The original land grant by the Virginia Assembly to the Federal Government in 1789 was for "not more than two acres." Somehow, the lighthouse was built only partially on the land provided. This situation was finally rectified in 1881, when additional land was furnished (as represented on accompanying map A; dotted lines describe the 1789 boundaries, solid lines the 1881 boundaries). In 1930 the old tower and 1.77 acres of surrounding land were transferred to the APVA.

The boundary is shown by the red line on the accompanying map B entitled "Cape Henry Light Station, Va." and dated January 31, 1925. The 1.77 acre landmark is bounded by a roughly triangular line specifically delineated on the map as "Plot A-B-C-D-E-F containing approx. 1.77 acres of land to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities."
Cape Henry Lighthouse was the first structure authorized and completed by the newly organized Federal Government in 1789. It was the first material proof of the advantages of a strong national authority.

Cape Henry Lighthouse is an octagonal sandstone structure, faced with hewn and hammer-dressed stone; it is the third oldest lighthouse in America, having been completed in 1792.

HISTORY:

From early colonial times Chesapeake Bay had boasted a substantial volume of shipping. For decades, however, efforts at gaining the benefits of a lighthouse were unsuccessful. The division of the Bay between Virginia and Maryland made unified action difficult; the comparative regularity of the Virginia coast made the need for a lighthouse seem less pressing; and there was difficulty in reaching agreement among all the many interested, and often conflicting, parties—the Virginia and Maryland Assemblies, the British Government, Lord Baltimore, and British mercantile interests. The lighthouse was not erected until the establishment of the Federal Government. Then it became the first whose authorization and complete construction were undertaken.

The oil-burning lamps of the Cape Henry Lighthouse were first lit in October 1792. The light at Cape Henry shone with great dependability for 89 years, until it was replaced by a new lighthouse some 350 feet southeast of the original one in December of 1881.

After the new light was put into operation, the old tower remained a daymark and a basis for coast survey triangulation. On April 26, 1896 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities placed a tablet on it marking the first landing of English colonists on Virginia soil. The old tower thus became a forerunner of the Cape Henry Memorial.

The greater significance of Cape Henry Lighthouse derives from its position as the first material proof of the advantages of a Federal Government. A badly needed lighthouse remained unbuilt for decades due to the squabblings of State governments and local interests. With the creation of a strong national authority, construction was begun almost immediately. Cape Henry Lighthouse is a monument to the benefits of centralized power judiciously handled.


### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:** 1.77

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**UTM**

18.410200.4086900

### 11. FORM PREPARED BY

**NAME AND TITLE:**

Stephen Lissandrello, Historian, Landmarks Review Project

**ORGANIZATION:**

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

**DATE:** 2/17/75

**STREET AND NUMBER:**

1100 L Street NW.

**CITY OR TOWN:**

Washington

**STATE CODE:** D.C. 11

### 12. STATE LIASON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [ ]
- Local [ ]

**NAME:**

**TITLE:**

**DATE:**

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**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

**Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

**Boundary Certifed:**

**DATE:** 7-2-75

**ATTEST:**

**Property Attendance:**

**DATE:** 7/3/75

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*U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1973-220-147/1492-34*