

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS  
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION

LIGHTHOUSE INFORMATION FORM

NUMBER 34

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

PHOTOGRAPH KEY

All Photos by L. Fox, MHC, August 1981

- 1) Race Pt. Light Station (house and tower)
- 2) Baluster, finial
- 3) Keeper's dwelling
- 4) Garage
- 5) Looking south to Wood End Light

HISTORIC NAME: Race Point Light Station

TOWN: Provincetown

LOCATION: Race Point Beach

COUNTY: Barnstable CODE: 001

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 10th

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION:  
Barnstable County Registry of Deeds  
Comm. of MA ceded to U.S. 1816 (no deed)

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:  
The nomination includes the structures of the light station.

LAT./LONG.: 42°3'7"N; 70°4'6"W

UTM COORDINATE: 19J397/200/4657/100 ..

USGS QUADRANGLE: BOSTON, MA; NH; CT; RI; ME

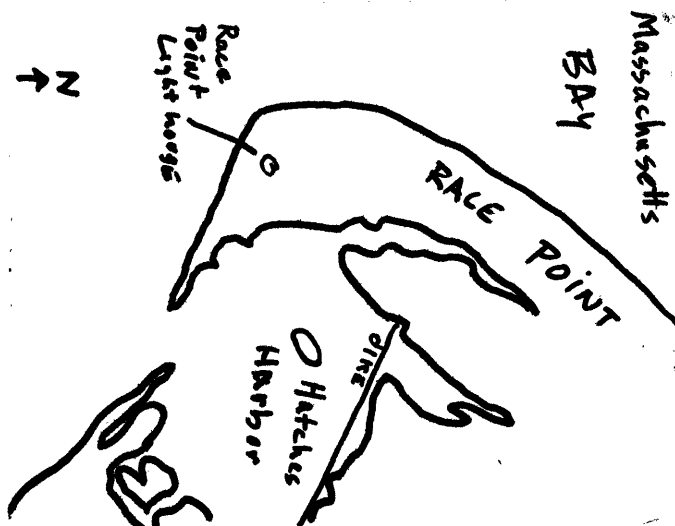
SCALE: 1:250,000

ACREAGE: less than one acre

OWNER(S): First Coast Guard District - tower  
408 Atlantic Avenue  
Boston, MA 02210  
National Park Service - all other

STATUS: Active/Unmanned

SKETCH MAP



RECORDED BY: L. Fox/Jack Clarke

ORGANIZATION: MHC/CRPDC Planning

DATE: August 1981

Site Description

The Race Point Light Station is located on Race Point Beach, within the Cape Cod National Seashore, and is the main light guarding the entrance to Provincetown Harbor. The Provincetown Airport is about one mile to the north of the station. The Beach itself stretches for several miles and offers a wide sandy beach for tourists and residents, and nesting grounds for terns. The Station was built about 50 yards from the high water line and is surrounded by large, rolling sand dunes. Access is gained only by four-wheel drive vehicle, and is restricted by the National Park Service.

The present structures include the tower (1876), the Keeper's Dwelling (1874-76), garage (1876 or '79), and the oil house (1876).

**Tower:** The four sectioned, white, cylindrical, steel-plate, 40 foot tower with a black iron lens room was built in 1876.

**Door:** Access is gained directly into the tower through a plain single steel door.

**Walls:** The interior wall is one wythe thick and is faced with half bricks. From the entrance-way, one can see reinforced brick columns 42" apart between the steel exterior and the interior wall. The walls have been whitewashed several times, one layer over another.

**Stairs:** The iron stairway and railing are similar to those at the Chatham (# 11) and Nauset (# 27) Lights, and rise thirty-two steps to the lamp room.

**Windows:** There are 2/2 windows which all have similar measurements: the bottom window on the entrance level has a 7 1/2" sill, its frame is 49" from top to bottom, 30" wide and the sashes are 45 1/2" x 24" wide. The middle-level window has the same dimensions, but with a sill of 6 1/4", while the uppermost window's sill is only 3" deep. All three windows have been covered on the exterior by plywood or metal to prevent vandalism.

**Lamp Room:** At the lamp room level the brick walls have been covered by 3" vertical sheathing. The floor is of segmented iron, and two portholes (one is blocked by wood) are found at head height, while a simpler porthole that cannot be opened is found just outside the room. A four panel wooden door opens into the lamp room; a built-in full height closet with a plain door is located on the far side.

**Lens Room:** A seven step, curved iron ladder rises directly to the ten sided lens room, through a wooden trap door aided by a long slender iron grab-pole at the top. Two of the ten panes of glass are blacked out (both on SE side). Each pane measures 27" in width, beveling to 25 1/2", and is 36" high. The walls of the lens room are covered with wooden sheathing. A wooden 50 1/2" wide curved half door with a metal hood opens onto the balcony.

**Vents:** Five round vents are located on each other of the ten panels and a vent hold is located at the top of the curved iron roof as well. The present magnification lens operates at night and during bad weather, and alternates with a red and white flash every five seconds. The white light is visible for 23 miles, the red for 19 miles. The former lens was removed recently and is now on display at the Provincetown Coast Guard Station.

**Balcony:** An elegant Italianate railing made of iron surrounds the balcony. Its posts stand 51" apart. Each post measures 4 1/2" at the base, 26 1/2" in the mid-section, and another 29" to the top of the finial, which rests on a 4" x 4" base, and has a circumference of 15". The railing, however, has been replaced in several sections for safety reasons and only nine sections and three finials are intact.

**Dwelling:** A short distance to the south of the tower is a keeper's house. Now abandoned and boarded up, the 1 1/2 story wood frame structure faces south and is located in the middle of the complex.

**Foundation:** The dwelling rests on a brick foundation on the west side, and a stone foundation on the east.

**Roof:** The roof is pitched, with jerkinhead gables on the west and a simple pitched roof on the east side. Built in 1874-76. the east side was apparently added in 1901 or 1902.

**Plan:** The original west portion of the rectangular plan is a side-hall plan structure with a veranda entrance set on concrete block piers and covered by half hip roof on the southern side. The north end of the original house contains a one story ell enclosed by a half hip roof. Elevations are asymmetrical throughout and decorative trim is restricted to a boxed cornice.

Alterations have been made, and they include an asbestos shingled roof and the rebuilding of the veranda with concrete blocks and 2" x 4" supports.

**Garage:** To the northeast of the dwelling lies a brick shed, now a garage, built in 1876 or 1879, at the same time as the other structures. Historically known as the Fog Signal building, it contained boilers and the machinery necessary to operate a steam fog whistle from 1874 on. The facade of the garage, facing south, has an oversized central door flanked by two windows, which in turn are flanked by two ordinary doors. The central doorway and one window were enlarged to their present size, probably in 1901 when the original chimney was replaced by a larger one to increase the draft for the boiler's fires. Since then, the second chimney has been shortened.

Its foundation is completely covered by sand. The square plan structure is enclosed by a hip roof covered with asbestos shingles. The brick bonding on the sides is irregular (mostly stretcher), while the facade is laid in stretcher bond. A projecting band of eight rows of stretchers and one row of headers surmounted by a wooden box cornice surrounds the entire building. The lintels and sills of both the windows and doors are made of rectangular blocks of rock-faced granite, with the exception of the garage-type door which has a granite and concrete lintel and a concrete apron and sill. The windows and doors are presently blocked by sheets of plywood.

**Oil House:** The smallest structure in the station complex is the oil house, which lies directly south of the tower. The one story brick building was built in 1876 to store mineral oil to light the lantern in the tower. Its foundation, too, has been concealed by the sand.

The typical square oil house is enclosed by a slate, pitched roof, which in one section, reveals exposed planking. The walls are of pressed brick laid up in stretcher bond. A doorway at the north end has a louvered vent directly above it in the gable, and the trim around the door consists of an entablature surmounted by a boxed cornice. The exterior is almost completely covered with green-gold eroding paint.

#### CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

1816 - A rubble stone tower laid with common lime mortar was erected. More than 100 wrecks occurred between 1816-1946.

1838 - A revolving light was installed, with 10 lamps and 13" reflectors. The tower was 20' high, on a 10' base.

1839 - The village of Provincetown built a bridge/dyke across the harbor.

1852 - A fog bell was purchased for \$2500 and installed.

1863 - The tower was rebuilt and shingled and a new lantern was added.

1874 - One of the two keeper's dwellings was enlarged for the chief keeper. A steam powered fog whistle began operation.

1875-1876 - the present tower of cast iron and brick was constructed. The garage and oil house was also built during this period. Tower: 1800 sq. ft; \$2800. Revolving light was replaced by fixed beam. Garage: 30' x 32" or 960 sq. ft., \$5000. Oil Houses: 10' x 20' or 120 sq. f., \$3000.

1890's - Lighthouse Board reported two assistant keepers and their families living in one of the two dwellings. Apparently, one dwelling was enlarged to accommodate two families, while the other was added to and used by the chief keeper.

1901/02 - Alterations to the garage. The oil house was repaired.

1957 - Electricity was installed.

1960 - The duplex Gothic Revival keeper's house was demolished.

1961 - Remaining dwelling modernized at a cost of \$20,000.

1971 - Coast Guard proposed demolition of all structures but the tower.

1978 - The station was automated.

1980 - Coast Guard requests opinion of MHC on demolition.

1981 - Unofficially, Coast Guard wants to preserve the complex, and is the process of restoring Wood End (# 42) and Long Point (# 23).

1986 - Coast Guard is developing plans to utilize and rehabilitate the complex in cooperation with the National Park Service, Cape Cod National Seashore. It is anticipated that earlier plans to demolish the complex will be cancelled based on the historical significance of the complex and the feasibility of re-use.

Level of significance

The Race Point Light Station possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship as well as important associations with the development of aids to navigation in Massachusetts. Consisting of the cast iron light tower, keeper's house, oil house and garage, the complex was largely built in 1876. Although the individual structures are somewhat deteriorated, Race Point Light Station remains significant as one of the few intact complexes dating from the nineteenth century. The station meets criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the state level as well as survey criteria 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b, 4a, 5b.

#34

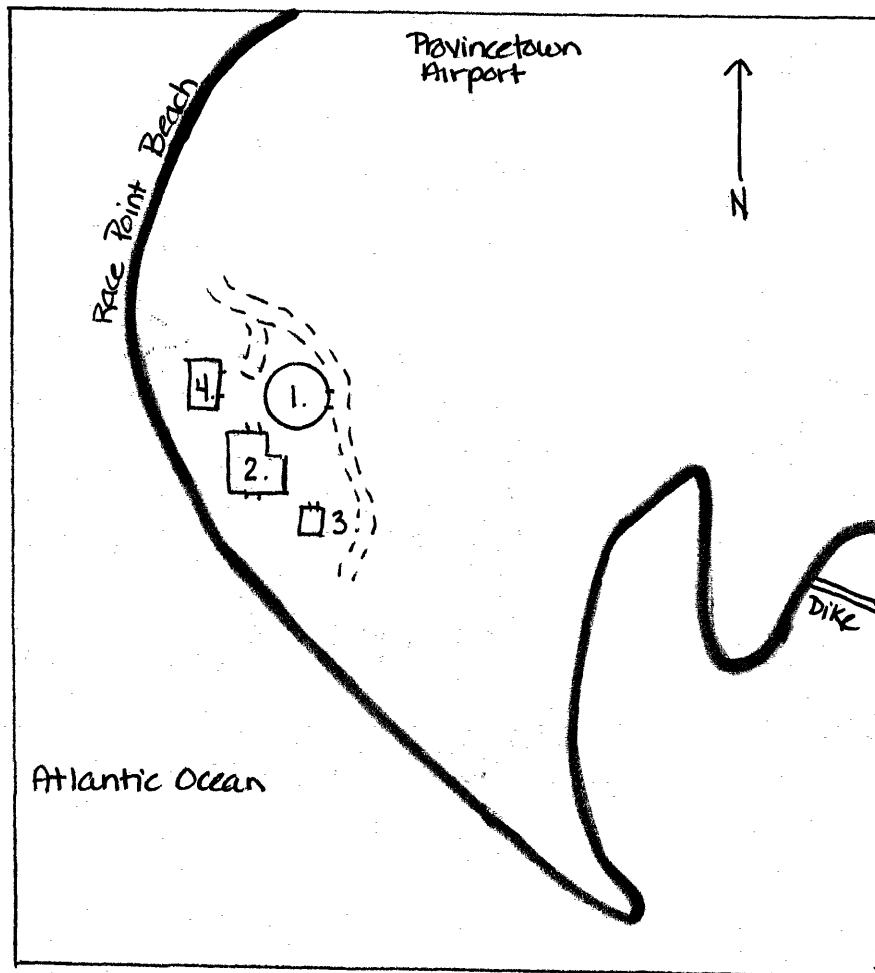
RACE POINT LIGHT

ESTABLISHED 1816

REPLACED 1876

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The Coast Guard is developing plans to utilize and rehabilitate the complex in coordination with the National Park Service National Seashore. The intensity of the previous fog signal effectively precluded use of the quarters until a smaller signal was installed. It is anticipated that earlier plans to demolish the complex will be cancelled based on the historic significance of the complex and feasibility of reuse.



Race Point Light Station

1. Tower
2. Keeper's Dwelling
3. Oil house
4. Garage