New Point Comfort Light Station

Historical Documentation
New Point Comfort Light Station Context Statement

The Chesapeake Bay reputedly had the highest volume of shipping in North America during the 18th and well into the 19th century\(^1\) so many of the first federal government lighthouses were built in that region. The New Point Comfort Light Station, Virginia, was first lit on January 17, 1805. The fourth lighthouse built to light the Chesapeake Bay, it also marked the entrance to the Mobjack Bay. Located on the west side of the Chesapeake Bay and the north side of the entrance to Mobjack Bay, New Point Comfort station=s nearest neighboring light at the time of construction was Old Point Comfort, about 18 miles to the south.\(^2\) Eventually some 75 lighthouses were built to mark the Chesapeake; of these, 34 remain standing.\(^3\)

Construction

The first appropriation for the station was made in 1801; however, it took three years to acquire title to the land. After negotiations with several proprietors, the land was acquired by a local builder, Elzy Burroughs, who provided the land to the government for $150. Burroughs, who had completed Old Point Comfort and Smith=s Point Lighthouses, also won the contract for constructing the station at New Point Comfort. A total of $8,627.50 was appropriated to complete the station \(\times\) $5,000 in 1801, an additional $3,500 in 1803, and $127.20 in 1808. The octagonal 58-foot, ashlar-sandstone tower was similar in design to the tower on Old Point Comfort (1802) and others built during that period. Cape Henry Lighthouse, (1792), Virginia, and Montauk Point Lighthouse (1797), New York, were also octagonal towers built of sandstone.

Although the tower at New Point Comfort was completed in 1804, the dwelling was not finished until 1806. The original station consisted of a tower, dwelling house, kitchen, covered way, well, and oil vault. The tower was whitewashed making it a white daymark. The original dwelling was made of brick with a cypress-shingle roof and was probably whitewashed.

Modifications

Major repairs were made after the British occupation during the War of 1812. Money was appropriated to rebuild the station in 1816 but was never expended. The keeper=s dwelling was rebuilt after the War of 1812 and in 1836. A fence was built to enclose the property in 1837. A boat was requested in 1839 because the main land was no longer easily accessible by way of the sand bar. In 1852 the dwelling was described as being frame and painted white. The light was refitted with a Fresnel lens in 1855, presumably a new lantern was installed to accommodate the larger optic.


\(^2\) The other two lighthouses on the Chesapeake were Cape Henry and Smith=s Point.

\(^3\) Turbyville, p. xiii.
Optics

The earliest found reference indicates that New Point Comfort was a fixed light using nine lamps and 9-inch reflectors. No fog signal was ever required at this station. In 1841 the light was refitted by Winslow Lewis with 10 lamps and 14-inch reflectors. A fourth-order Fresnel lens was installed in 1855, extinguished by the Confederates in 1861, and replaced after the Civil War in 1865. In 1919 the illuminant was switched to acetylene gas and the characteristic changed to a flashing white light with a one-second flash every five seconds. At that time the keeper position was eliminated and a lamplighter maintained the light on a periodic basis. The light was discontinued in 1963.

Shoreline Erosion

Shoreline erosion and threats to the foundation of the lighthouse have been a continuous theme at New Point Comfort. Concerns about the insecurity of the foundation can be found as early as 1814—only a decade after construction. Shifting sand eventually made what was once a peninsula connected to the mainland by a sand bar into an island. Over the years, numerous plans were made to rebuild or move the tower, but none was carried out, either because of the expense or the lack of a better site on which to place the structure. Protective measures included stone walls, fences, breakwaters, and stone. Today all that remains of the station is the tower, completely surrounded by water and protected by riprap.

Keepers

There were at least 21 official resident keepers at New Point Comfort Light Station. The first keeper appointed by President Thomas Jefferson was the lighthouse’s builder, Elzy Burroughs. Retaining ownership of the land bordering the station, Burroughs had built a home for himself and his family on the Point during the station’s construction so it was convenient for him to keep the light until the keeper’s dwelling was completed. In fact, he continued as keeper for the following decade.

New Point Comfort is remarkable in that two keepers there were black. One was an unofficial assistant to Isaac Foster, described in 1852 as a Negro woman, probably a slave; the other, a preacher, J. McHenry Farley, who served from 1871 to 1873. Citing the isolation of his post and the difficulty in obtaining supplies, Farley pleaded with the U.S. Light-House Board for an assistant, but no assistant was ever assigned to this station.

Significance

New Point Comfort Light Station was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. It is significant as being one of the earliest surviving towers in the United States. The ten oldest surviving towers are Sandy Hook (1764), Boston Harbor (1783), Portland Head (1791), Cape Henry (1792), Montauk Point (1797), Eatons Neck (1799), New London Harbor (1801), Faulkner Island (1802), Old Point Comfort (1802), and New Point Comfort (1805).
Association with significant national events include occupation and vandalism by the enemy during both the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Although the tower was never rebuilt, extensive repairs were required after both conflicts.

Current Disposition

Acquired by Mathews County in 1976, the tower has undergone several restoration efforts focused primarily on stabilizing the structure. Through a cooperative agreement with the county, the Mathews County Historical Society is developing a long-term preservation plan for managing and maintaining this important local landmark. Working with many governmental agencies, these new keepers are exploring the different options for protecting the structure as well as ways of possibly providing public access.
New Point Comfort Light Station Chronology

1801

On March 3, 1801, an act provided

that as soon as a cession shall be made by the State of Virginia to the United States, of
the jurisdiction over the land proper for the purpose, the Secretary of the Treasury be, and
he is hereby, authorized to provide by contract to be approved by the President of the
United States, for building a light-house on New Point Comfort and another light-house
on Smith=s Point, both in the State aforesaid, and to furnish the same with all necessary
supplies; and also to agree for the salaries or wages of the persons who may be appointed
by the President for the superintendence and care of the same, and that the President be
authorized to make the said appointments.

The same act authorized a sum of $5,000 for the purpose of the erecting the light-house, as
foresaid, on New Point Comfort.4

In 1801, the U.S. Light-House Establishment was administered by the Commissioner of the
Revenue in the Treasury Department. On March 24, 1801, Commissioner William Miller wrote
the Secretary of the Treasury regarding the establishment of new lighthouses in Virginia.

Provisions having been made during the late Session of Congress, for the erection and
support of several Light Houses on the shores of the Chesapeake, which are within the
limits of Virginia, I am about to take measures for having the grounds at New Point
Comfort and Smiths Point examined, in order that suitable sites for the proposed
improvements may be fixed on. When this is done, it will be necessary to designate by
metes and bounds, as much ground at each place, as will be sufficient for the
accommodation of a Light House and its appurtenances, in order that the right of soil and
jurisdiction, may be duly vested in the United States. That these objects may be
accomplished with care and promptitude, I shall have to avail myself of the services of
some person on or adjacent to the navigation of the Chesapeake, who can occasionally
give his personal attention, and render such information to the Department, as may
enable the Secretary, to decide upon the plan and proposals, which may be offered for
completing the buildings.5


5National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18, Letters Sent Regarding the Light-House Service, 1792-1852. Please note that in many cases I have changed punctuation and lower-cased many nouns in the quotations reprinted in this manuscript to make them more readable; however I have not corrected spelling.
Miller went on to suggest that the President appoint some person to superintend the lighthouses on the Chesapeake and recommended William Davies, Collector of the Port of Norfolk. Miller also allowed that the Superintendent should receive a five percent commission on any monies dispersed for the project.

On March 31, 1801, Commissioner Miller wrote John McComb, a well known early architect and builder who constructed Montauk Point Lighthouse in New York in 1797.

Provision has been made for erecting three Light Houses on the waters of the Chesapeake, viz. one on Old Point Comfort, one on New Point Comfort, and one on Smiths Point. Arrangements will speedily be made for ascertaining the situation & progressing with these establishments. If you should consider it worth your while, to attend to either or all of these improvements, upon your giving me notice, I shall cause information of the plans etc., to be communicated in time to enable you to exhibit proposals.\(^6\)

On May 1, 1801, Commissioner Miller wrote to Collector Davies, instructing him to have the a suitable site determined and surveyed. He recommended that

Prior to your making a report to this office, it will be advantageous to have it understood what elevation the Lights ought to have, so that no expense may be incurred in raising them unnecessarily; and in forming a contract, it ought to be known, whether there are any and what kind of materials on the spot, or in the neighbourhood, whether water may be had with convenience, and whether the situations are accessible by land & water.

Miller also cautioned the Collector to stay within the $5,000 appropriated.

The following was extracted from a report made by John Patterson Esq., on May 30, 1801:

I have taken a view of New Point Comfort and surveyed every spot thereon that appeared to me in any way adequate for the reception of a Light House. New Point Comfort is an Island separated from the main land by a creek of three & a half to 4 feet water at high tide, with Mobjack upon the west side and the Chesapeake on the east. The Island is about 3/4 of a mile in length, exclusive of a long Sandy Beach at the upper end, running for a mile in along shore direction up the Bay to the mouth of the creek aforesaid. The width of the land varies from 350 to 500 yards, and contains about 100 acres, the property of Philip Tabb Esq. of Gloucester County. It lies generally low and much broken, and covered over with drifted sand hills. About the centre of the Island lies the most elevated firm spot to be found, of about 2 2 to 3 acres running quite across the point, commanding a good front upon each side. The shore from this place tends N.E. by N. up the Bay and W.S.W. to the end of the point. This is the most prominent site upon the Island. The long shoal makes from this place running down the Bay in an south east direction. The foundation is good and appears entirely secure against the

\(^6\)National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
drifting of the sand, having a pond of salt water upon each side. From the nature and situation of the piece of ground thus described, it appears to me that an acre & half to two acres will be quite sufficient to answer every purpose, and can be made a comfortable spot with a fertile garden. Good water may be procured in the greatest abundance by sinking a well at the distance of 30 yards from the building, but no materials of any kind can be had suitable for this undertaking. Good clay for bricks, with the greatest abundance of oyster shells for lime, may be procured convenient to brick. Wood at the distance of 2 miles on the main land, upon a creek that will afford a safe conveyance for the materials in scows or lighters, within about one hundred and fifty yards of the place described. The timber necessary of every description can be had in the neighbourhood. The elevation of the land does not exceed from 8 to 10 feet from the surface of the water, and it is my opinion that an elevation of 50 feet from the surface of the earth will be sufficiently high for the Light. The ?? Mr. Armistead Smith, Major Thomas Tabb & Mr. Philip Tabb, agree with Mr. Patterson in the foregoing report.

On June 25, 1801, Commissioner Miller wrote Collector Davis:

The Report of Mr. Patterson, enclosed in your Letter of the 9th inst. relating to New Point Comfort, is satisfactory. The elevated firm spot mentioned by him, about the centre of the Island, appears to be the proper site for the Light House. I request you to procure two acres, to be surveyed in this place, and designated by metes and bounds; and to ascertain from Mr. Tabb the proprietor, whether the use of it will be granted to the United States, for the purpose mentioned, gratis, or if a sum is demanded for it, the amount thereof.

On July 28, 1801, Francis Bright wrote Collector Davies his opinion of the placement of the lights on Smith=s Point and New Point Comfort.

. . . I ran down on Sunday last to New Point Comfort, where I hired a man and dispatched him off with a note to Major Thomas Smith, the gentleman whose letter you furnished me with an abstract of. This gentleman waited on me the next morning and pointed out the shore that he had, by letter to you, designated as the most proper for the purpose therein specified. I had with me one other gentleman that shewd me the place on the N.E. side of the island, selected by Mr. Patterson. I examined them both with attention as well as every other part and am clearly of opinion that Major Smith=s opinion in regard to the situation is a correct one, and give a decided preference to the place he hath recommended for the following reasons. Vessels bound up the Bay can drive no additional advantages from the Lights being placed on the N.E. side of the Island, because it will be directly in a range with the other situation, and not more than half a mile distant one from the other; but many inconveniences may arise from it being so situated, as thereby vessels approaching Mobjack Bay for the purpose of safe anchorage
in dark boisterous weather, would be very apt to get hooked on a shoal that runs off from the back of the southernmost point. The foundations of the two places are nearly the same, and although the one pointed out by Mr. Patterson is something higher than the other, yet it is nothing more than a ridge of sand, and must be dug through to the level of the foundation; this would create additional labour, and the expense of removing through a soft sinking sand, all the building materials, that must be landed on the southern point, would be very considerable, add to this that it is ascertained with correctness, that the fresh water near the southern situation is much better than can be found near the other. . .

Mr. Patterson responded to Mr. Bright=s comments in a letter to Collector Davies, dated August 18, 1801:

. . . I must beg leave to observe that the situation of the place marked out by Messrs. Tabb, Smith, & myself projects much farther out in the Chesapeake Bay than any other part of the Island, can be seen by vessels coming down the Bay much sooner than the southernmost end of the Point (the place mentioned by Messrs. Smith and Bright) and looks in a south east direction towards Cape Henry and is the first land you raise upon the Island in coming up the bay from sea. If vessels can derive no additional advantages from the lights being placed on the N.E. side of the Island, when we consider that this is the most prominent part of the land and of equal advantages with the other situation, it certainly will be a strong reason to induce an impartial opinion in favor of our situation. In addition to these advantages, I again give it as my decided opinion that the foundation of this part of the Island is much better than can be found upon any other part; to which may be added the desirable convenience of 1 2 to 2 acres of land well adapted to the growth of every kind of vegetables all of which is entirely protected by nature against the tides and common breaches of the sea & sand.

Patterson continued his defense of his position in pointing out that the light would warn vessels away from the shoal off the lighthouse rather than leading them onto it. Mr. Patterson also pointed out that,

. . . Capt. Bright is not correct with respect to the foundations; the situation mentioned in my report has a clay bottom with very good soil upon the top, the best proof that I can offer in support of this, is that notwithstanding this spot is as much exposed to the surf as any other part of the Island, yet is does not wash away as do the situations to the northward & southward of it, where the foundations are entirely sand upon about three or four acres; annexed to this place are to be found a thick growth of trees & undergrowth as are the natives of the best foundations. It is owing to the goodness of the foundation and the protection afforded by nature that the shore of the Island ranging with the Chesapeake Bay, forms at this situation a point or prominent view to the Bay. With respect to the labour and expense of landing and removing materials for the light house.

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9 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 45, Miscellaneous Material Received by the Fifth Auditor, 1812-52@
from the waters edge to the place that may be fixed on, the convenience of our situation is much in favor of it. As I before observed Point Comfort is separated from the main land by a creek, this creek forms a small bay or basin entirely land locked, where the material may be landed in lighters within 150 yards of the building and it is not material whether they are procured from the main or landed from vessels. If carried there in vessels they must discharge in the mouth of this creek where the water will be always smooth, the south end of the Island spoken by Messrs. Smith & Bright lies so exposed that vessels could not discharge at that place with any degree of convenience or safety. Messrs. Tabb & Smith procured the assistance of a man who tried every part of the Island with a spade for freshwater, and we could find no preference as to situation for this article. . . .

Major Smith appears to have lost sight or never discovered that the situation mentioned in my communication was very easy of access on the west or Mobjack Bay side of the island, where the ridge or land makes a good front also, and what is more remarkable, that he has made no observations, with respect to the safety, convenience and easy access rendered by the creek separating the island from the main. The first principal with us was to fix upon a situation the most conspicuous to the bay, the next a situation to be approached at all seasons with care and safety: in our situation we have both these desirable objects.

The whole Island commands at once an extensive view of the Chesapeake and Mobjack Bays and the four rivers which empty into the Mobjack, and it is in my opinion a matter of little or no consequence upon what part of the Island the Lights are situated. The foundation, ease of access, & convenience of communication & depositing the materials are the principal objects. As for public convenience, recreation and the benefit of seine trawling spoken of by Major Smith as particularly attached to his situation. I know of no particular part of the Island where all those conveniences can be obtained, situated as this island is, it would be for the public good that the United States should possess the whole island; two interests should not exist upon a situation like this, and I am convinced the whole could be purchased for the price that will be demanded for a few acres. The benefit that would arise from the fishery and the establishment of a public house were the principal objects had in view by the proprietor when he entered upon the purchase; it can be put to no other use. . . . I herein enclose you the proprietor=s letter to me mentioning the compensation required. . . .

The referenced enclosure from Philip Tabb stated,

As the variance between Smith & Brights report and ours respecting Point Comfort, it is not worth thinking about. I would inform that I still thought the place designated by us best for the following reasons. 1st Because it projects farther in the Bay and can be seen coming down clear of the land. 2nd Because a garden may be made. 3rd Because the ground is higher. 4th If made of brick they can be put in place with more ease etc.

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10 Ibid.
You will please inform that the proprietor having proposed to build a tavern and
conceiving that the Keeper of the Light House will interfere, he will require a
compensation say 1000 dollars.¹¹

On November 17, 1801, Commissioner Miller wrote the Boston Collector, Henry Dearborn, and
two well known architect/builders Benjamin Henry Latrobe of Philadelphia and John McComb
of New York, the following:

Provision having been made by Congress for erecting and finishing sundry Light
Houses on the Chesapeake, I have accessed the situations at Smiths Point, Old and New
Point Comfort . . .

. . . I therefore hope that you will deem it worthy of your attention, and that you
will be induced to offer a plan and proposals for completing the several establishments
during the ensuing season.

I am of [the] opinion that the Light at Smiths Point ought to be elevated 65 feet
above the surface of the ground whereupon the building is to stand that on New Point
Comfort will be high enough at 60 to 65 feet, and that on Old Point Comfort at 36 to 40
feet.

An oil vault and a moderate sized frame dwelling for the Keeper and his family
are necessary appendages, and must be provided for in whatever proposals you may offer.

Whether the Light Houses shall be of stone, brick, or wood, must depend upon
circumstances . . .¹²

On November 26, 1801, the Norfolk Collector of Customs and Superintendent of Lighthouses,
William Davies wrote to the Commissioner of the Revenue William Miller:

By this mail I transmit to you the report of Mr. Ham, master of the Cutter Detroit,
and of Captains Berry & Mitchel from Baltimore, sent at my request by the Collector of
that place, upon the recommendations of the Commissioner of Pilots, as most competent
to decide upon the spot of elevation of the lights for the Light House proposed for New
Point Comfort. Having therefore transmitted to you the information I had received
respecting this subject, I presume you will be able from the whole of the correspondence,
to decide upon the point necessary to be stated in the application intended to be made to
the State of Virginia relative to this object. The enclosed letter is descriptive of the
situation, and the quantity desired to be ceded, must depend upon your opinion. Mr.
Patterson=s letter sometime ago sent to you is pretty full on this subject. Your further
instructions shall be attended to . . .¹³

¹¹Ibid.

¹²National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18. On January 28, 1802, John McComb responded by
deciding not to bid for the erection of New Point Comfort and Smiths Point Lighthouses; National Archives, Record
Group 26, Entry 38, AList of Correspondence.@

¹³National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A, ALetters Received by the Treasury Department, 1785-
1812.@
The enclosure, ACopy of Capt. Ham etc=s report to the Collector of Norfolk respecting proper site for the L. House on N.P. Comfort, dated Oct 1, 1801, stated,

Agreeably to your wish on the 19 instant in Mobjack Bay, I met with Capt. Berry & Capt. Mitchell of & from Baltimore; Capt. Berry informed me that he was requested by Mr. Purviance to come down to Newport Comfort, & point out to the best of his knowledge the most proper place for the Light house to be built on; I went with the gentlemen on shore, we examined the ground and unanimously agreed that the SW part of the Island formerly called the Watering place, and where a house stood, the remains of which may be seen at present was the most proper place for the Light House to stand, it being the most conspicuous part of the Island as well as the most proper place for landing the materials for building the house; the gentlemen were of opinion also that the Light ought to be 70 or 75 feet above the water table.14

On December 9, 1801, Commissioner Miller wrote Collector Davies,

An application will be made to the Legislature of Virginia at their next session, to empower the Governor to cede the jurisdiction of as much land at New Point Comfort and Smiths Point, as may be required for the accommodation of the Light Houses which the United States are about to erect at those places. The quantity of ground which appears necessary, does not exceed 2 acres at each place. I therefore request that you will without delay, make application to the respective proprietors, and ascertain upon what terms that quantity may be had, in situations which will include the most eligible sites for the proposed buildings, with privilege to land, etc. With respect to the spot at New Point Comfort, no doubt remains in my mind; that which Mr. Patterson recommended appears to be entitled to a preference. As the land in question can be of little value to the present owners, I hope they will be ready to make sale, without attempting to exact an unreasonable price, as such an attempt might have an unfavorable tendency, or even defeat these useful establishments altogether. As soon as the demand of the proprietor is known and approved, you will receive instructions to have the selection and purchase completed.

I flatter myself that the measures which have been taken, will insure the completion of all the Lights on the waters of the Chesapeake, in the course of the ensuing season.15

Elzy Burroughs was first mentioned in a letter from Philip Tabb, Gloucester County, Virginia, dated December 15, 1801, in which Tabb commends Mr. Burroughs as an honest industrious man, who has worked much & faithfully for me & my neighbors.16

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14 Ibid.
15 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
16 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17G, Miscellaneous Letters Received (Numerical), 1801-52.
Burroughs was supported in another petition from Modecai Cooke, Wm. Booth, and Thomas Baytop, Gloucester Courthouse, Virginia, dated January 23, 1802:

The bearer Mr. Elzy Burroughs wishing to engage in more extensive business than can be obtained in the circle of his own neighbourhood we the undersigned strangers to you beg leave to recommend him to you as an honest industrious sober diligent man and who in our opinions will faithfully execute and perform any contract he may engage in; this we are authorized to declare from our own knowledge, Mr. Burroughs having been considerably engaged in doing public work at this place which he executed in a neat handsome and workmanlike manner. Thus much we have thought proper to declare of Mr. Burroughs's integrity ability and promptness, indeed we might add more but we deem it unnecessary.  

Burroughs's proposals for building the lighthouses at Old Point Comfort and Smith's Point were accepted in February. Although progress was being made in establishing the lighthouses nearby, acquiring the property at New Point Comfort took several years and many negotiations as reflected in the following letters.

On January 14, 1802, Collector Davies writes Commissioner Miller:

By the enclosed copy of Mr. Tabb=s answer to my letter respecting the purchase of a site for a Light House on New Point Comfort, you will find that he still persists in his design of obtaining an exorbitant compensation (as I take it to be) from the United States for a small part of what was once offered (as I am credibly told) for five pounds. You will be pleased to give me further instructions on this subject... 

The enclosure from Mr. Tabb:

I have just received your favor of 19th ultimo, I regret that we should differ in our opinion regarding the price of the land on New Point Comfort, for the purposes of a Light House, as I really thought considering every circumstance, that One Thousand Dollars, the price formerly mentioned was by no means exorbitant. While I entertain a high respect for the present economy of our Administration, I cannot suppose that it would wish for a moment, that an individual should make anything more than a reasonable sacrifice of the publick convenience; but of what is reasonable or not, I wish not to be the sole judge on this occasion; I will therefore deduct $200 from the former price, and the

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17 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17G.

18 Correspondence from Commissioner Miller dated February 8, 1802, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

19 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.
United States shall have what Land they want on New Point Comfort with the requisite priviledge of keeping a publick house. I flatter myself that there will be no further objection on the score[?] of price. The site of the Light House may be wherever you think most proper.\textsuperscript{20}

The negotiations continued with James H. Ray representing the proprietor of the land in question. On January 31, 1802, Collector Davies wrote to Commissioner Miller:

I beg leave to enclose to you a copy of Mr. Ray=\textquotesingle=s proposals of sale of two acres for a Light House on New Point Comfort. It seems Mr. Ray is a near connection of the former proprietor Mr. Tabb, and probably acts in concert with him notwithstanding an apparent change of property. The island, as Mr. Ray tells me, contains by an \textit{old survey} seventy five acres, and therefore its actual contents are probably much greater: he says too he gave Mr. Tabb $600 for the whole island, and asks for two acres $400! and that too, under inconvenient restrictions. As far as I can discover, there seems in that neighborhood a general disposition to make the United States pay well for the site of a Light house, and I suspect that even a jury from that vicinity, under a writ of \textit{ad quod damnum}, would estimate the price not be the real value of the article, but by the ability of the purchaser, the Public. I want your further instructions . . . \textsuperscript{21}

The enclosure from James H. Ray:

The proprietor of New Point Comfort does not wish to exact from you an unreasonable price for the two acres that the United States wish to purchase for a Light House, he will therefore sell the United States two acres in any situation they think proper for $400, provided the United States will secure to the proprietor of the balance of the Island the exclusive priviledge of keeping a public house, by prohibiting any thing of the kind being kept of their two acres, also by securing the advantage of the fisheries to the proprietor. The exclusive priviledge must be secured effectually by the United States, so that no infringement of them can take place, otherwise the proprietor who subscribes his name would expect a much larger price to be given by the United States.

On March 18, 1802, Collector Davies wrote to Commissioner Miller,

Since my letter of yesterday I have received the enclosed from Mr. Ray the present proprietor of New Point Comfort. I find him anxious that a Light House should be built there, expecting to derive considerable profit from keeping a public house etc., and I believe he would give the land provided the accommodations could be immediately built, and all priviledges secured to himself, but what are essential to the object of the United States. Indeed I find an inclination in him to be concerned in undertaking the work himself, but the objection lies against the height required by you for the building,

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
which he says is 65 feet. I told him I doubted it, unless you had received other information than I had, as to the best of my recollection, the elevation I had mentioned to you did not exceed 50 feet. Upon the whole, if you thought proper to write me a letter on the subject calculated to be shown to him, offering him a liberal specified price for the two acres, which he confessed to me were not worth 10 cents apiece, and by another confidentially communicate the extent of the price for which I might contract, I having hoped the land might be procured, and this disposition to extort from the U.S. be effectually counteracted, but this will depend upon speedily announcing to him an intention to erect immediately the necessary buildings. . . . 22

The enclosure, dated March 16, 1802, from James Ray states,

The proprietor of the land at New Point Comfort will sell to the U. States two acres of land for the purpose a Lighthouse for one hundred and fifty dollars provided the U. States will secure to the proprietor all exclusive privilages of the Fisheries and of a publick house in such an effectual manner as will be required by the owner of this land, and also upon the condition that the U. States will proceed immediately, that is by the tenth of April to carry into effect the act for establishing the Lighthouse by purchasing the land and building on it. 23

On March 23, 1802, Commissioner Miller responded,

I have this moment received your esteemed favor of the 18th instant, covering Mr. James Ray=s note of the 16th, wherein he states the terms and conditions upon which he will make sale of 2 acres of his land at New Point Comfort.

As the privilages which Mr. Ray wishes to reserve to himself, can be of no importance to the proposed Light House Establishment, no objection will be made to his retaining them in the way he has mentioned. You are therefore authorized to make the purchase on account of the United States, at the price mentioned viz. 150 dollars, leaving to the present proprietors, the exclusive right of fisheries and keeping a public house on the Island.

You may assure Mr. Ray, that as soon as the land is conveyed, measures shall be taken for effecting a contract for the erection of the buildings, provided suitable proposals are offered for completing them, and I trust we shall have a Light raised in the course of the present season.

Presuming from what you have mentioned, that there is a disposition on the part of Mr. Ray to promote the Establishment, I have sketched the plan of a brick Light House and its necessary appendages, which I wish you to submit to him, and I hope he will be induced to embark on such terms, as will justify me in laying his proposals before the President, for his sanction. 24

22 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.

23 Ibid.

24 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
On April 29, 1802, Collector Davies wrote Commissioner Miller,

. . . On the subject of New Point Comfort, I have to inform you that the proprietor agrees to part with the land on the terms proposed, and a survey is now making. He declines undertaking for the price allowed by law, tho= he is so anxious for the work to go on that he wrote me that provided the government would begin the buildings by the 20th instant, he would make a present, not of two acres, but of three. . . .

On April 27, 1802, Collector Davies wrote Commissioner Miller:

Mr. Ray enclosed the within form of the deed of conveyance for the ground necessary to the purposes of the proposed Light House on New Point Comfort, and at the same time drew on me for the one hundred & fifty dollars consideration money. I declined the payment without further instructions, for which purpose, I now transmit the enclosed, which you will be pleased to modify as you may think best. An early answer on this subject is desirable.

On October 12, 1802, Commissioner Miller sent a deed to Collector Davies.

All was not agreeable to the parties concerned, however, on November 17, 1802, Collector Davies wrote Commissioner Miller:

I have just been informed by Mr. Deans who is joint proprietor of the land at New Point Comfort, that he is unwilling to execute the deed forwarded by you, inasmuch as the reservation by the grantors, of the exclusive right of the privilegeds of keeping public house etc. as enumerated in the form sent on to you some time since, is not expressly specified. I observed to Mr. Deans what had already been observed by you in your letter to me, a copy of which had been transmitted to him & Mr. Ray, that every right was retained which was not granted; but he is not satisfied. As far as I can learn Mr. Ray does not entirely concur with him in opinion as the necessity of such specific enumeration. I have not however received any letter from him on the subject lately, altho= I have requested his early attention to it. If upon reperusal of the conveyance proposed by them, you think proper to make any change to answer Mr. Dean=s scruples, you will be pleased to signify it to me, and it shall be immediately attended to.

25 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.

26 Ibid.

27 Correspondence from William Miller, dated October 12, 1802, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

28 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.
James Ray appealed directly to Commissioner Miller on January 29, 1803; Miller’s response, dated March 14, 1803, can be found later in this section.

I being one of the proprietors of the land on New Point Comfort, fixed upon by Congress for a Lighthouse, have been applied to by the Collector of Norfolk on that subject, and agreed with Collector Davies to let him have four acres for the low price of $150, provided the U. States would reserve to us the proprietors all exclusive priviledges and suffer the same to be reserved specially in the body of the deed which the Collector agreed to & accordingly I drew up such a deed, which he informs me does not appear agreeable to you. He has requested me to mention the subject to you by letter. The object of the proprietors of the land is to enhance the value of the Island to themselves by securing their priviledges & have therefore not regarded the price and as it is all the U. S. want the use of the land for the L. House & its appurtenances we can not see any objection to the deed forwarded to you by the Collector of Norfolk. We cannot consent to furnish the land except by such a deed & would sooner present to the U. States with such a deed, than not. . . .

This is the last we hear from Mr. Ray. Subsequent 1804 correspondence indicates that Elzy Burroughs has acquired the land to sell to the government.

On February 11, 1803, Commissioner Miller wrote the Secretary of the Treasury:

The Act of 3rd March 1801 having authorized the erection of a Light House on New Point Comfort, and appropriated 5000 dollars for that object, I have endeavoured to obtain proposals for the erection of a suitable building at that place. As no offer has been made within the sum at which we are limited, I presume that a substantial building of the proper elevation, with its necessary appendages, cannot be expected; I therefore submit for your consideration, whether it would not be advisable to make an additional appropriation of about 3500 dollars. If this sum is provided during the present Session of Congress, you may safely calculate upon having the Light House Establishment on the waters of the Chesapeake completed in the course of the ensuing season.

For your information I enclose herewith, an estimate which has been handed to me by an experienced stone mason, who was employed by Mr. Burroughs, the contractor for the Smiths Point Light House, and executed the work at that place during last season, from which it appears that about 8000 dollars will be necessary for the buildings. My reasons for mentioning an appropriation which will exceed this estimate by about 500 dollars, is that sufficient provision may be obtained for purchasing a lot of about 4 acres, and for covering incidental charges attending the inspection of the work, etc.

29 Ibid.

30 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
Additional funds of $3,500.00 were appropriated for the erection of the lighthouse at New Point Comfort in an act approved March 2, 1803.31

On March 14, 1803, Commissioner Miller wrote James Ray of Matthews County:

In answer to you letter of the 29th of January, I have the honor to enclose a copy of my letter of the 12th October 1802, to William Davies Esq., from which you will observe that it was my intention, that, in the conveyance of the lot at New Point Comfort, you should reserve all privileges which were not absolutely necessary for the accommodation of the Light House Establishment at that place. The form of conveyance which I enclosed, will secure your privileges as completely as any which could be devised, and as it is the usual mode, I should prefer it, provided it is perfectly agreeable to the proprietors. If any doubts remain, I presume that this explanation will remove them; and I shall be thankful if you will complete the business without delay, as no step towards effecting a contract can be taken while this point remains undecided. On the transmission of the deed duly acknowledged & recorded, I shall authorize the payment of 150 dollars.32

Apparently this task was never completed by James Ray, for next we learn that the land was deeded over by Elzy Burroughs, the builder contracted to construct the station.

1804

Elzy Burroughs signed the following proposal on March 6, 1804:

The Light House to be of hewn stone; the form to be octagon. The foundation to be sunk 6 feet below the surface of the ground, or whatever greater depth may be sufficient to render the whole fabric perfectly secure. From the commencement of the foundation to the bottom of the water table, the wall to be 5 feet thick; the diameter of the base from the bottom of the water table to the top thereof where the octagonal pyramid is to commence, to be twenty feet; from the surface of the earth or bottom of the water table to the top of the building, the wall to be fifty feet and to be graduated as follows: the first fourteen feet after bearing the water table to be 3 2 feet, the next 13 to be 3 feet, the next 12 to be 2 2 feet & the next 11 feet to be a foot thick. At the top of the stone work whereon the lantern to be placed the diameter of the building to be 12 feet. The water table to be capped with stone at least 7 inches wide sloped to turn off water. The floor to be paved with stone and a flight of substantial stone steps from the floor to the lantern; one end of each step to be worked into the wall, the other to go up plumb. The top of the building to be arched (reserving a place for a trap door which is to be fitted to serve as an entrance to the lantern) and to have a stone cornice to be covered with copper so as to preserve it from the weather. On the top of the stone work are to be

31 Laws of the United States . . ., p. 22.

32 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
a sufficient number of substantial iron [sleepers?] bedded therein and sloping from the centre, which are to be covered first with sheet iron, over which is to be laid a course of sheathing paper well soaked in and paid with tar, and then with sheet copper over the iron, the whole to be riveted together, so as that the floor of the lantern thus prepared shall be perfectly tight and strong and as durable at least as upon the ordinary mode of laying the copper on wood: the trap door to be covered with sheet copper. The Light House to be furnished with a substantial panel door with iron hinges, lock and latch complete and five windows each to have 8 panes of 10 by 12 glass in strong frames. A complete iron lantern in the octagon form to rest thereon, with a complete set of lamps to be suspended by good and sufficient iron chains, so hung as that the lamps may be raised or lowered at pleasure, and also a sufficient number of air pipes: the eight corner posts or stanchions of the lantern to be built in the wall to the depth of 6 feet; the ends within the wall to be secured by large anchors: these posts are to be 2 inches square in the lower end, and one & half inch square above the stone work. The lantern to be 6 2 feet in the smallest diameter, and eight feet high from the floor to the dome or roof. The roof to be 3 2 feet in height and covered with sheet copper. The rafters of the lantern (which are to be of iron) are to be framed into an iron hoop, over which is to be a copper funnel through which the smoke may pass into a copper ventilator in the form of a ball sufficient to contain 40 gallons, and large enough to secure the funnel against rain; this ventilator to be turned by a large vane, so that the hole for venting the smoke may be always to leeward. The spaces between the posts at the angles to be occupied by the sashes which are to be made of iron struck solid with strong 10 by 12 glass of the first quality, and one of the sashes to be hung on hinges for a convenient door to go out on the platform, which is to be furnished by iron ballustrades two feet high, each rail or rod to be half an inch square inserts in the braces between the eight posts. The building to be furnished with two complete electrical conductors or rods with points. Also a [?] stove to be placed in the lantern.

An oil vault is to be built of brick, 16 feet by 18 in the [clear?], arched over, plastered within, and covered with a cement of earth & sand; and over it a roof covered with shingles. The vault to be furnished with six strong cedar cisterns with covers capable of containing 200 gallons of oil each; three cisterns to be sunk in clay properly tempered with sand, which is to be well [?] round to secure against breakage; the entrance to the vault to be well secured by a sufficient door hung with hinges, and a strong lock and painted.

Also a two story brick dwelling house, twenty eight feet by [18 in the clear?], the first story to be 8 feet pitch in the clear, the second story 7 feet [?], and a square roof: the wall up to the water table to be 2 2 [bricks?] thick, the first story two bricks, the second story and gable ends 1 1/2 brick thick: [?] have brick chimneys, [?] panel doors and frames with good locks & hinges to each, 13 twelve light windows of 10 by 12 glass, besides 4 [sight?] light windows of 8 by 10 glass in the garret; two rooms below on the first floor and three on the second floor, four of which rooms are to have fireplaces; two entries or passages (one in each story) the floor above and below to have a proper number of sleepers and joist for receiving the plank which is to be 1 1/2 inch heart pine. A neat staircase with handrail to run up the passages, the room [passages?] to have [wash?] & chair boards. Also a brick kitchen to be placed at the distance of not less than 6 feet from the house, with a covered way between, which shall have one panel door and one
window in it: the kitchen to have a chimney with one fireplace, two panel doors with good hinges & locks and two windows; the floor to be of 1 1/2 inch heart pine. The house & kitchen to have a common [box?] cornice and a proper number of rafters covered with laths and good cypress shingles: the partition lathed and plastered and all the side walls plastered and finished, the trimmers turned and hearths [?], and the wood work inside and out to be well painted the number of doors and windows both in the dwelling house & kitchen may be increased or diminished at the discretion of the person who may be authorized by the Secretary of the Treasury to mark out the site for the buildings and to inspect the materials and work. A well to be sunk and stoned or bricked at a convenient distance from the house, to be furnished with a curb and the necessary apparatus for drawing water. I agree also to put stone sills & heads to the doors and windows of the dwelling house, kitchen & oil vault, to put down four stone land marks lettered >US= to designate the boundaries of the public land, and to paint the lantern with three coats at my own cost without any additional charge.

The subscriber will find all materials, labor and other objects of cost & expense, and will execute the before described work in a good and workmanlike manner on or before the fifteenth day of November next for the sum of eight thousand three hundred and fifty dollars. Fifteen hundred dollars to be advanced at first to provide materials etc., after bond and security shall be given by him for faithful performance, and further payments as the works progress, leaving a balance until the whole is completed and approved.

The aforesaid buildings etc. to be erected on such site as shall be designated by the Secretary of the Treasury or other person authorized in behalf of the United States, dated at the City of Washington the sixth day of March 1804.33

The agreement between Elzy Burroughs and Secretary of the the Treasury Albert Gallatin was made and concluded on April 9, 1804.

On March 14, 1804, additional legislation indicated, AFor the erection of a light-house on New Point Comfort, five thousand dollars, being the amount of a former appropriation carried to the credit of the surplus fund.@34

On March 19, 1804, Francis Armistead, Collector of Customs, District of East River, Mathews County Courthouse, wrote to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin,

My last respects was under the date of 24th ultimo. since which Elzy Burroughs has executed his bond to the United States for the performance of contract therein refer=ed to, for building the light house on New Point Comfort & has also executed to the United States a deed for the two acres of land on which the public buildings are to be erected. In processing this deed, due attention has been paid in tracing all the former

33 National Archives, Record Group 26, microfilm publication M94, Lighthouse Contracts and Deeds, 1790-1816, Roll 1, pp. 262-263.

titles in & to the said land in full and compleat fee simple to Mr. Burroughs. So that the title now from Mr. Burroughs to the United States will be free from any incumberance from any other person whatever. The deed will be recorded in the Court of Matthews County, at June Court. Immediately thereafter it shall be transmitted with the clerks certificate and seal of the Court annexed. I now transmit the bond with a receipt for fifteen hundred dollars paid as directed in your letter of the 10th last month enclosing said documents. Mr. Burroughs has removed his family to the Point & is now engaged in preparing material & labourers to execute the work, he has already landed a considerable quantity of stone & appears desirous to forward the work with as much expedition as possible. You may be assured of my attention to this business & keeping you regularly advised of the progress of the work.\textsuperscript{35}

April 10, 1804, correspondence from Hon. Albert Gallatin to Collector Armistead, indicated that title to the land has finally been obtained and confirmed that a contract was to be entered into with Elzy Burroughs to erect the lighthouse. Collector Armistead was appointed superintendent of the work to be completed.

Mr. Elzy Burroughs of Gloucester County, having engaged to convey to the United States, two acres of land on New Point Comfort Island, and entered into a contract for building a Light House on the land, and the proximity of your residence to the premises, being such as will enable you to pay the necessary attention to the business, without interfering with your other duties; I have concluded to place the erection of the buildings under your superintendence, and you will be allowed the usual compensation in such cases. I shall therefore avail myself of your assistance, in effecting the arrangements which are necessary to put the contract into operation, and, for that purpose, shall enclose herewith, the form of a deed for the land, which is to be executed by Mr. Burroughs, after you shall have ascertained his right to convey; and also the form of a bond to be signed by him, and such sureties as you shall approve, for the faithful performance of his contract. I shall also enclose a copy of the contract itself, by which you will perceive that the obligatory effect of that instrument on the United States, depends altogether on the fulfillment on the part of Mr. Burroughs within a limited time of his engagement to vest in them the two acres of land on which the works are to be erected. This part of the business will of course command your first attention, and although it is not intended to limit your discretion in the investigation of the title, it may be proper to observe, that the same land had already been purchased from James H. Ray of Matthews County, and his title to the same, ascertained, and that before the business could be finally settled, this gentleman sold the whole island, as I am informed, to Mr. Burroughs, the present proprietor.

The site fixed on, is the one which was heretofore designated by John Patterson Esq., Clerk of Matthews County Court, and I believe, lies about the centre of the Island. That gentleman will have the goodness to accompany you, and point out the courses of the land and site for the buildings, whenever you shall be ready to have the survey made.

\textsuperscript{35}National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.
When the deed shall have been completed and delivered to you, you will be pleased to pay Mr. Burroughs, one hundred & fifty dollars, which is the price to be paid for the land; and when the bond with satisfactory sureties shall also have been executed and delivered to you, you will pay him the further sum of fifteen hundred dollars, being the amount stipulated to be then advanced. For these payments you will take duplicate receipts, and transmit one of each with the bond to the Treasury, and after the deed shall have been recorded in the proper county, you will transmit it also.

Mr. Burroughs will give you notice of the landing of the materials, which, as well as the works as they progress, are to be submitted to your inspection as often as you may think it necessary, and when the works shall have been finished according to the contract, you will grant him a certificate to that effect, and advise me of the same.

You will be pleased to report the progress of the works from time to time, and more especially at such times as the contractor may apprise you of his intentions to call for further advances, in order that I may be enabled to judge of the propriety of making them.

Should difficulties arise in the course of your proceedings, you will communicate them immediately, that measures may be taken to have them speedily removed.  

Correspondence dated April 12, 1804, from Hon. Albert Gallatin to Collector Davies, the Collector and Superintendents of Lighthouses in Norfolk, stated

. . . I have within a day or two concluded on a contract with Elzy Burroughs, for building the Light House etc. to be erected on New Point Comfort; and I have determined on committing the laying out of the site (which is the one heretofore designated by Mr. Patterson) and inspection of the materials & work, to the superintendence of Mr. Armistead, Collector at East River; because the proximity of his place of residence, to the premises themselves, must enable him to afford more attention to the business than could be expected from the occasional visits of more distant inspection.

On June 2, 1804, Collector Armistead wrote Hon. Albert Gallatin

My last respects to you was under date of 19th ultimo covering Mr. Burroughs receipt for Fifteen hundred Dollars his first payment under the contract for the light house & other publick buildings to be erected on New Point Comfort. I now transmit his receipt for consideration of the two acres conveyed to the United States which was omitted forwarding with his other receipt. I have had a survey made of the two acres and proper stones prepared & planted to designate the lines, a plate of which shall be annexed & returned with the deed when recorded.

On June 23, 1804, Collector Armistead wrote Hon. Albert Gallatin:

36 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

37 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.
Mr. Burroughs has mentioned to me his intention to draw on you for a further
supply of money, he has shown me an account of expenditures for the public buildings on
New Point Comfort, which at this stage of the business amounts to the sum of two
thousand three hundred and ninety four dollars. Mr. Burroughs has contracts with a
certain Mr. Samuel Stubbs for the building of the dwelling house and kitchen for which
he has paid him in advance two hundred dollars. Mr. Stubbs I think is a man that may be
depended upon for the fulfillment of any contract entered into by him. Mr. Burroughs
has got the light house from the foundation up to the base 6 2 feet. He has 224 tons of
stone landed, and has contracted with Mr. Conway for stone to the amount of $738 for
which he has his receipt. He has also 248 feet of sheet copper.38

Samuel Wheeler of Philadelphia was subcontracted to make the lantern and cisterns for New
Point Comfort lighthouse at a cost of one thousand dollars.39 The lantern was constructed of
copper and the cisterns were constructed of cedar and copper.40

The deed was conveyed at this time according to correspondence dated July 28, 1804, from
Collector Armistead to Secretary Gallatin:

I now acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th ultimo and agreeably to
your directions have paid Mr. Elzy Burroughs an account of his contract for building the
light house on New Point Comfort two thousand dollars as per his receipt inclosed and
also inclose his deed with a plate of the two acres land conveyed to the United States,
which has been recorded in the Court of Matthews County as will appear by the Clerks
Certificate annexed. I have taken the liberty of paying the Surveyor & Clerk their
custumary fees & debited the United States with the amount which I hope will meet your
approbation. . . .41

A letter from Saml. Wheeler of Philadelphia to Elzy Burroughs, dated October 2, 1804, was
enclosed with the above correspondence,

The Lantern and cisterns will be furnished in a week from this date, provided
there should be no rane [rain], the rane has hindered us more than a week and the
addition of an Iron floor has taken a few days longer. I am of the opinion the floor is an
improvement & the Lantern will be as compleat a one as any that hath been made. I
believe we shall not be at a loss for a passage to Norfolk.42

38 Ibid.

39 Correspondence from Albert Gallatin to Elzy Burroughs, dated June 26, 1804, National Archives, Record
Group 26, Entry 18.

40 Correspondence from Samuel Wheeler, dated March 1805, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry
17C, Letters Received from Superintendents of Lights, 1803-52.

41 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.

42 Ibid.
On October 12, 1804, Secretary Gallatin wrote Joseph Scott, Esq., Marshal, Richmond, Virginia:

I have the honor to enclose a copy of the deed and draft of a lot which has been designated and surveyed for the accommodation of the Light House Establishment at New Point Comfort. You will oblige me by applying to the Governor to execute the conveyance, vesting the jurisdiction over the land in the United States, which is authorized by the Act of the State Legislature passed on the 15th January 1802, a correct copy of which is also transmitted herewith for your information and government. . . .

Correspondence dated November 2, 1804, from Collector Armistead to Secretary Gallatin included a notation by ATh. Jefferson approving the appointment of E. Burroughs as keeper. All that was needed to complete the tower was the arrival of the lantern from Philadelphia.

My last respects to you upon the subject of the Light House building upon New Point Comfort was dated July 28th last. Since which Mr. Burroughs has run up the Light House as far as he can, untill the lanthorn arrives to lay within six feet of the extreme height exclusive of the lanthorn & has been waiting eight or ten days for its arrival from Philadelphia to compleat it. The vault for the oil will be finished early in the ensuing week, with the kitchen and covered way to the dwelling house. The wall is also in a state of forwarding & will be finished in the course of next week. If the lanthorn arrives in time Mr. Burroughs will compleat the Light House, oil vault, well, kitchen, covered way within the time limited in his contract, but am apprehensive the dwelling house will be in an unfinished state at that period; but I must do Mr. Burroughs the justice to say that he has taken the most cautious measures to enable him to comply with his contract in time. He let out the building of the dwelling house, kitchen and covered way to Mr. Samuel Stubbs one of his securities, a man much to be depended upon as any workman in this part of the County, for a stipulated sum. Mr. Stubbs was unfortunately taken sick and was confined to his bed for six weeks, in which from the inattention of his people he had a ?? of bricks spoiled in the burning which was prepared for the dwelling house which has been the only cause of the backwardness of this part of the contract. The season is now so far advanced that I think it will be very injurious to the work to finish it while the weather is cold. I expect that he will not be able to finish the dwelling house until March in consequence of the backward state & the approaching season of cold weather.

Mr. Burroughs has settled his family upon New Point Comfort in a house which he has built for their accommodation near the Light House & he has requested me to mention that if you think proper to commence the Light this winter he will attend to it untill the dwelling house is finished & the whole ready for delivery. I have mentioned this at his particular request as he wishes to do everything he can to place the United States in the same situation as if the whole work was compleat by keeping the Light until he closes the contract. I will beg leave to observe that the brick & plastering if done in cold weather cannot be made durable & will be injurious to the building.

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43 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
view to Mr. Burroughs the bad quality of the bricks & plastering at Old Point Comfort. It seems to have had the proper effect by his attention to the execution of the work & goodness of the materials of the present contract. He wants a payment of $2500 I expect from the heavy expenses he has incurred since the receipt of the last sum. He must be under acceptances for considerable sums. If you think proper to advance the sum required, you will be pleased to draw upon me for the amount having a sufficiency of public money in my hands to meet the payment. I take the liberty to inclose a copy of Mr. Wheeler=s letter to Mr. Burroughs respecting the lantern for your further information.\footnote{National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.}

Correspondence dated November 12, 1804, from Hon. Albert Gallatin to Elzy Burroughs, New Point Comfort, indicated that the tower was close to completion; however, there were delays in completing the dwelling house. Burroughs, already having built lodging on New Point Comfort, was appointed Keeper of the soon-to-be-completed lighthouse by President Thomas Jefferson on November 10, 1804.

Your letter of the 27\textsuperscript{th} ultimo has been received and I have directed Mr. Armistead to pay you the further sum of two thousand five hundred dollars on account of your contract for building a Light House etc. on New Point Comfort.

It appears by Mr. Armistead=s report that it would be unsafe to go on with the Keepers house at this advance season, and that you have offered accommodations for the Keeper in the mean while, I have directed him to suspend that part of the work until the ensuing Spring, and as your calculate on having the building ready for lighting in a short time, I have to inform you that the President of the United States has appointed you Keeper of the said Light House, and that your salary is fixed at 250 dollars per annum, to commence from the time when the house shall be lighted.

I shall this day mail direct Wilson Cary Nicholas Esq., Collector of Norfolk & Superintendent of the Establishment, to forward you 400 gallons of winter oil, and a supply of cotton wick and other articles necessary for the use of the Light House, with instructions relative to your duties as Keeper.\footnote{National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.}

On December 12, 1804, Collector Armistead wrote to Secretary Gallatin, indicating the arrival of the lantern and the anticipation of lighting up soon.

Your favour of the 10\textsuperscript{th} ultimo directing me to pay Mr. Elzy Burroughs the farther sum of two thousand five hundred dollars on account of his contract for building the lighthouse etc. on New Point Comfort and that of the 12\textsuperscript{th} of same month came to hand together with those intended for Mr. Burroughs which were immediately delivered. . . . Capt. Bright of the Revenue Cutter has just arrived from Norfolk having on board the lantern & oil cisterns for the Lighthouse. Every aid in my power shall be given to enable Mr. Burroughs to have it ready for the light by the first day January, which I
expect can be done if the weather continues open & moderate. All further operations upon the keepers house are suspended until the spring to avoid the injury which would be done by the severity of the winter season. As soon as the lanthorn is ready for the light, I will immediately advise you.  

1805

Lighting was postponed until January 17th according to a letter dated January 18, 1805, from Collector Armistead to Secretary Gallatin:

I herewith send the returns from this office due for the last quarter of the year 1804 which I hope upon examination will be found correct. I have now to inform you that the light was raised in the Light House on New Point Comfort last evening for the first time, & Mr. Burroughs being furnished by the Collector at Norfolk with a stock of oil & wick, it will be continued. The iron floor directed to be made with the lanthorn in Philadelphia is compleatly fixed & must certainly be a very great improvement for it prevents every kind of danger of communicating fire from the lamps. The light would have been raised about the first of January, but the severity of the weather added to a disappointment in a small package of the lanthorn being left at Norfolk by mistake prevented it. The light house with the oil vault & cisterns are now compleat. The kitchen & covered way to the dwelling house & as soon as the spring commences the workmen will go on to finish the dwelling house. No inconvenience will accrue to the United States for the want of the present use of the dwelling house as Mr. Burroughs has built a comfortable house on the island within a few hundred yards of the Light house where he resides with his family. Mr. Burroughs at the request of Mr. Stubbs who had contracted with him to compleat the dwelling house has drawn an order in his favour on you for $474 which order Mr. Stubbs has endorsed to Mr. John Patterson for advances made him to procure materials for that purpose. I am requested by Mr. Patterson to transmit the draft to you & should you think proper to order the payment, I have a sufficiency of money in my hands to do it & as the several payments made to Mr. Burroughs are already considerable, for your information it may be proper for me to say that I consider no difficulty will arise in the advance of this sum so as to retard the progress of the work as it is for the use of Mr. Stubbs, who stands in as high repute in point of punctuality as workman as any man in this part of the county, in addition to this he is one of Mr. Burroughs securities for the completion of the contract.

Collector Armistead’s confidence in the prospect of completing the dwelling house in a timely manner was not justified according to a letter dated September 7, 1805, from Collector Armistead to Secretary Gallatin:

46National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17A.

47Ibid.
I have delayed for some months making any communications respecting the buildings at New Point Comfort on the Light House establishment under an expectation that I should be able to get the contract compleat long before the cold weather set in but I fear I shall be disappointed in my expectations. The light house, vault, & well were finished previous to the 31st December last, & finding it improper to proceed with the brick work on the dwelling house during the cold weather as it would sustain considerable injury by the frost. I mentioned to you in my letter of the 2nd November 1804 that I conceived it would be best not to proceed until the commencement of the spring, which met your approbation. As soon as the warm weather commenced I pushed on Mr. Burroughs to finish the house and close his contract with the United States. Every thing within the limits of his power has been done but he has got his affairs in a deranged situation. His circumstances are now so limited (having latterly be compelled to take the benefit of the Act of Insolvency) that it is now entirely out of his power to procure either materials or labourers, & nothing can be expected from him but what work he can do himself. Mr. Samuel Stubbs who undertook by contract with Mr. Burroughs to build & compleat the dwelling house, kitchen & covered way & who has received compensation from him for the full amount of his undertaking except $320, has delayed so much of his time, although frequently called on by Mr. Burroughs & with the aid of repeated application from myself that it is now reduced to certainty that this work will not be finished until the cold weather commences again, if it remains to be finished by him. The kitchen and covered way is finished. The roof is on the dwelling house & the walls up, the gable ends & chimneys are not finished. The locks, hinges, glass are principally procured & upon examining all the materials on hand for this work, I find it will take from five to six hundred dollars to finish it. The estimate of the work to do & materials wanted has been carefully made & I find the above sum will be sufficient to do every thing.

As yet the United States has sustained no injury Mr. Burroughs having built a comfortable dwelling house for himself on the point sufficiently near the light house to attend to his duty as keeper of the Light. From the best information I can procure of the causes which occasioned the ruin of Mr. Burroughs I have not the least doubt but it has arisen from his contracts for building the Light Houses on Smiths Point and Old Point Comfort. I shall use my best exertions to get all the work done by Mr. Burroughs and his friend Mr. Stubbs that I can, but if it continues in their hands I see no prospect whatever of getting the building finished before cold weather, & I take the liberty of giving it as my opinion that the balance which would be due Mr. Burroughs had better be immediately appropriated to the purchase of materials wanted & hiring a workman to do the unfinished work.\(^48\)

1806

Apparently pressure was applied to Burroughs to complete his contract. Correspondence dated February 7, 1806, from Collector Armistead to Secretary Gallatin, states

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
In conformity to your letter of instructions of the 5th October 1805, I have given Mr. Burroughs and his securities notice that unless the buildings on New Point Comfort were compleated by the 1st day of January, [the] Government would employ other persons to finish the work & suit would be commenced on their bond. Since which they have been busily engaged in finishing the buildings and have nearly got them compleat.

On April 15, 1806, Collector Armistead wrote Secretary Gallatin,

Mr. Burroughs leaves this morning for the city of Washington to close his contract entered into with you in behalf of the United States for building the Light House and other buildings stipulated to be done by [?] contract on New Point Comfort and has requested of me, as the superintendent of that work, to report to you its present state to enable him to procure a final settlement of his accounts and a release from said engagement. I have examined the Light House dwelling house, kitchen & covered way with the well & oil vault and compared the dimensions & conveniences of those buildings with the stipulations expressed in his contract & find them correctly attended to, the work well executed & of good materials. It perhaps may be proper for me to inform you that the roof of the dwelling house has not been painted, the cover is of cypress shingles and Mr. Burroughs says that painting the roof was not contemplated by the contract, it not being considered a preservation to cypress. I observe the contract stipulates that Mr. Burroughs shall furnish the oil vault with six strong cedar cisterns to contains two hundred gallons each, two of which are furnished and in the vault; the other four he says were procured & stored in Norfolk & were taken by the Collector of that Port & sent to Smith Point Light House. For your information, I annex a copy of Col. Newton=s letter to me on that subject by which it appears that he has contracted for them & they will soon be replaced. When they come to hand I will see that they are put down in the manner pointed out in the contract. When this is done and the roof of the dwelling house painted, if you should consider it necessary, his contract in my opinion will be fully complied with. At the request of Mr. Burroughs, I take the liberty of mentioning that he has at all times shewn every disposition to do everything required of him in his power and I am extremely sorry that he has not received more benefit from the execution of those contracts than he seems to have done; from his present situation conceiving him to be a person that means well in all his transactions. I paid to the surveyor of the two acres of land his fee of $5.25 and to the clerk of the court $2.45 for recording Mr. Burroughs=s deed of conveyance amounting together to $7.70 which sum...

Correspondence from Thomas Newton, dated September 5, 1806, to Secretary Gallatin, enclosed this August 24th report of Keeper Elzy Burroughs

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
On the 28th instant about 3 o'clock in the morning a gale of wind was so violent, that several panes of glass broke out of the Lantern, which occasioned fifty-seven to fly out. All the wicks, but seven blue [blew] out, I did not go up until morning, I repaired the damage, the next day, no other damage except a considerable part of the beach washed away & one of the landmarks was washed up, that was at the distance of 45 feet, when the public land was laid out from highwater mark.51

A final accounting for the construction of New Point Comfort Light Station was included in correspondence from Secretary Gallatin to Collector Armistead, dated April 29, 1806:

I received your letter of the 16th inst. [regarding] Mr. Burroughs, who has since been paid the balance due on his contract. Before you can receive credit for his draft, it will be necessary that you endorse it to the Treasurer of the United States, for which purpose it is now returned.

The vouchers for the payment made to the Surveyor & Clerk of Mathews County Court, were handed from the Comptroller=s Office, the latter of which is herewith returned, in order that the clerks receipt for its payment may appear with it.

You are to render an account as superintendent for erecting the Light House etc. at New Point Comfort, charging the above payments, and a commission of 2 2 per cent on the monies advanced by you on account [of] said establishment. When this is received, it will be put in a train of settlement, but the balance which may be found due to you on account of said commission, cannot be paid until an appropriation shall have been obtained from Congress for that purpose, in as much as the whole sum heretofore appropriated for the New Point Comfort Light House has been expended.52

Perhaps this commission was covered by an additional $127.20 appropriated for New Point Comfort on February 10, 1808.53

1814

The first known report of damage by the British during the War of 1812 came in a letter to Chas. K. Mallory, Collector of Customs, Norfolk, from Christopher Tompkins, Mathews, Virginia, dated March 25, 1814:

The enemy left New Point Comfort on Sunday last after four weeks possession. Yesterday I went on the Point & such a scene of wanton destruction I never beheld. You have heard before that they burnt the Keeper=s house & oil vault they have also broke every pane of glass in the lanthorn, taken out & carried off all the window frames, also the door & frame from the Light House pulled down the Franklin & all the wire around

51 Ibid.

52 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

53 Laws of the United States . . ., p.31.
the lanthorn, broke the steps to pieces & injured the house as much as possible. If the war continues, I am clearly of opinion that we should compleat the destruction which they have begun & pull the Light House down; for they use it as a watch tower from whence they can see every thing moving within three or four miles of them & consequently prepare them from any attempt on our part to annoy them. At all events I would not advise the repairing [of] the Light House where it now stands as the water already washes its base & in a few years will undermine it. Indeed it was very improperly placed at first. It might be put a quarter of a mile nearer the end of the point & in a perfect secure situation. There is about two thousand gallons of oil belonging to the Light House; it was removed last summer to a place of safety, but it is wasting very much by leakage; it would perhaps be better to sell it should there be no prospect of wanting it this summer. I have taken the liberty to make these communications (knowing that you have the superintendence of the establishment) with a view to make you acquainted with its real situation.

Mr. Lithburn applied to me yesterday for a letter of recommendation as Keeper of the Light House. I had no hesitation in granting his request as I believe he will make as good a keeper as can be got here. However I do not know what service he can render under the present circumstances. I shall be at all times happy to receive your commands in any way that I can be serviceable to yourself or the public.  

Mr. Tompkins letter was forwarded to Washington by Collector Mallory who explained that Major Christopher Tompkins was a member of the Court of Mathews County, a representative in the Virginia General Assembly, and a gentleman of considerable judgement, of great public spirit, of the first respectability & may be fully relied on. Mallory also stated that Capt. Robert Lithburn who is recommended by Major Tompkins as a fit character to be appointed Keeper of the Light House (in the room of Elzy Burroughs who has signified his determination to resign on the 31st inst.) has in fact been the actual Keeper for several years, as I understand . . .

Commissioner of the Revenue L.H. Smith=s response was dated April 7, 1814:

I have received your favor of the 30th ultimo addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury, with the enclosed copy of a letter from Major Christopher Tompkins. The proper steps will be immediately taken for the appointment of a Keeper of the Light House at New Point Comfort in the room of the present Keeper, it being expedient in any event to have a Keeper to protect the public property. It will not be advisable under existing circumstances to renew the light or replace the House, unless the expenditure of a small sum should be the means of saving eventually a much greater. You will be pleased in the mean time to cause to be obtained and forwarded to this office, an accurate report of the state of the Light House, and the expense incidental

54 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

55 Ibid.
to the refitting it and the rebuilding the Keepers house. You will be likewise pleased to cause the proper steps to be taken to secure the oil. 56

Robert Lithburn was appointed keeper on April 14, 1814.

On July 21, 1814, Collector Mallory wrote to Commissioner Smith:

It is perhaps proper to inform you here that by letter received a few days since from the Keeper of New Point Comfort Light House, I learn the unpleasant fact that the house in which the oil is stored was on the night of the 25th ultimo broken open & a considerable quantity of oil stolen there from how much is not stated. It is not improbable that some, if not the whole of it may be recovered, as the batteau in which it appears to have been taken away can be identified & three bbls [barrels] of it have been traced to Fredericksburg & Port Royal where it has been sold. The Keeper has taken steps to detect the perpetrators of the robbery & to discover if possible the residue of the oil. 57

On October 3, 1814, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith a follow-up indicating that the quantity stolen was 200 gallons which the keeper traced to Fredericksburg, and that perpetrators had been apprehended.

1815

On February 17, 1815, Elzy Burroughs wrote Major Thomas Newton asking that he communicate to the Secretary of the Treasury of Burroughs willingness to take apart and reassemble lighthouse lanterns, citing his 13 years of experience in the Light House Establishment. 58

On February 23, 1815, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith:

Your circular under the date of the 18th inst. directing renewal of the lights in the Light Houses under my superintendence is this moment received. Such however is the condition of nearly all these buildings as well as those attached to them as to render it impracticable to carry your instructions into full or immediate effect. They shall be complied with as far as soon as possible. At New Point Comfort there is perfect desolation, every house being entirely demolished except the Light House, as I am informed, & that site[?] considerably damaged as to be scarcely susceptible of being repaired.

56 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

57 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

58 Ibid.
It being of importance that the Lights should be renewed as speedily as circumstances will admit & as some time will elapse before I can get an answer from Washington, I shall, in anticipation of the orders which will no doubt be forwarded to me from the Treas. Department respecting the repairs which will be necessary, direct Mr. Burroughs, under whose management most of the Light Houses were erected & who is now here, to proceed forthwith to survey the whole establishment & make an estimate of the damage sustained & the probable expense of thoroughly & permanently repairing it & where it may be practicable to refit for the present, at a small expense, the lanthorn, lamps etc. so that the Lights can be immediately renewed, to do so.

The return of oil recently transmitted by me to your office shews pretty correctly, it is believed, the quantity on hand. So soon as the vaults can be prepared for its reception, I shall have it removed back to the Light Houses. . . .

On March 20, 1815, Elzy Burroughs provided a detailed estimate for repairs to Smiths Point, Cape Henry, Old Point Comfort, and New Point Comfort to Collector Mallory. 60

On April 11, 1815, a letter from Christopher Tompkins, Th. R. Yeatman, and J. Patterson complained of the current keeper, Robert Lithburn:

Having recommended Robert Lithburn sometime ago as a fit person to keep the Light House on New Point Comfort, we now consider ourselves bound to recall the recommendation having lately discovered that he has abandoned himself to drink, & also having grossly neglected his duty, by suffering the oil be pillaged without taking proper steps to detect the thief. He has also more than once told one of us that he knew where there was some from that had been taken from the Light House. I altho strongly urged to prosecute the offences, he has failed to do so, we therefore consider him totally unfit for that trust.

We take the liberty to recommend James B.H. Johnson as a person fit for that office, he lives near the Light House & is responsible in property. 61

On April 15, 1815, Elzy Burroughs received a contract for repairing Light Houses in Virginia & building Keepers House at New Point Comfort, @ at a cost of $3333.00. 62

Major Tompkins continued narrating the saga in a letter dated May 31, 1815:

60National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

61Ibid.

62A Statement of Contracts made relative to Oil, Light Houses, Stakeages, etc., @ National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 45.
I had the pleasure of writing you a few weeks ago (in conjunction with Mr. Patterson & Mr. Yearman) on the subject of the keeper of the light on New Point Comfort.

I have now to inform you that yesterday the robbers of the oil house was tryed at our superior court, & strange to tell, altho the evidence was as clear as noon day, they were acquitted by the Jury, I was on the Grand Jury who passed on them; & we were unanamously of opinion they were guilty.

Lithburn was a irrational witness in this case, but the evidence he gave yesterday, falls far short of that he gave before the examining court, & in fact I have no doubt that he has been induced to suppress his evidence through fear or corruption. I have been told by a respectable person near me, that Lithburn said to Hudgins (the criminal) since his first trial, that he had done the best he could for him. Under these circumstances I must repeat to you my belief of his unfitness for the Keeper of the Light House & you are at liberty to show this letter to him, if you think it proper to do so.\(^\text{63}\)

Collector Mallory concurred with Major Tompkins and recommended that Lithburn be dismissed and Johnson appointed in his place.\(^\text{64}\) Robert Lithburn was dismissed on June 9th, and James B.H. Johnson appointed Keeper on June 12th.\(^\text{65}\)

According to a report written by Winslow Lewis on March 21, 1821, New Point Comfort was fitted in August 1815 and lit with 9 lamps.\(^\text{66}\)

On October 30, 1815, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith:

I have returned from a tour among the Light Houses under my superintendence, undertaken with a view of inspecting their condition preparatory to a final settlement with Mr. Burroughs, with whom I contracted for their repairs under the authority of your letter of the 27th of March last. Upon examination the whole establishment appears to have been put in the order contemplated by the contract (with the exception of one or two inconsiderable deficiencies to be made good by Mr. Burroughs). . . .

It is now with much regret I have to add that I found the sand around the base of the Light House at New Point Comfort had washed away so much during the recent severe gales as imminently to endanger the safety of that building, the water every full tide entirely reaching it. Something must be done, & that without delay, to secure the foundation, which in some places is quite bare, or I seriously apprehend it will not stand

\(^{63}\)National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

\(^{64}\)Correspondence to Commissioner Smith, dated June 5, 1815, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

\(^{65}\)Correspondence from Commissioner Smith to the Secretary of the Treasury dated June 9, 1815, and correspondence from Commissioner Smith to Collector Mallory, dated June 12, 1815, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

\(^{66}\)National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17E, \(\Delta\)Letters Received from Winslow Lewis, 1811-44.@
the winter out. Mr. Burroughs, who was with me, concurs in the idea that by digging a semicircular ditch in front of the Light House, at a proper distance from it, driving down therein a double row of piles, filling it well again & the space between that & the Light House with tops of trees, brush, rubbish, sand etc., a good temporary barrier at least, will be formed against the further encroachment of the water, & which may probably last for some years. Nothing else can effectually be done before the next spring. He has at my request submitted a rough sketch of several plans upon this subject which I transmit herewith for the consideration of government whose instructions I shall await. His estimate with respect to the temporary plan may be considered as entirely disinterested as he states it will be impossible for him to undertake its execution. . . .

The following appears to be Burroughs’s estimate referred to in the letter above.

I give it as my opinion the only security for the Light on New Point Comfort this winter is to have about one hundred and fifty piles drove to the depth of six or seven feet in the sand, say from five to six above, and in the senter of the half circul about one hundred piles oposite the house and it, well filled in with pine tops rubbish sand etc. so to prevent the foundation of the Light House from being washed from under it, this winter and have apertained the coast & expence of each pile, that may be drove, will be three dollars each, is $750.00; the other expence will not exceed $150.00; [the total being] $900.00.

I also state the cost of a stone wall to secure all the publick building[s] at New Point Comfort, three hundred & fifty long, six feet wide at the bottom, six feet high and two feet wide at the top, will cost five thousand four hundred dollars agreeable to former contracts, tho stone & freight are higher at this time.

I also state the cost of moving the Light House at New Point Comfort to secure it from the danger of falling will cost about six thousand dollars, that sum having been estimated and contracted for the moving of Smith Point Light House.

Commissioner Smith chose the first option and authorized Collector Mallory to expend $900 to temporarily secure the lighthouse.

On November 16, 1815, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith:

Under the authority of your letter of the 3rd inst., I have at length succeeded, after some difficulty in engaging a man of skill & experience in business of that kind, to undertake the execution of the plan proposed for the temporary security of the Light House at New Point Comfort. He will not be able to commence operations there, earlier than the 1st of next month. The intermediate time will be employed in procuring

67 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

68 Ibid.

69 Correspondence dated November 3, 1815, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
labourers, gathering materials & making the preparatory arrangements so as to have every thing ready by that time. I have advanced him one hundred dollars & shall occasionally make other advances as the work progresses. Untill it is completed & some test is afforded whereby to judge of its capacity to resist the influence of the water, it will be impossible to say with any sort of certainty, how long it will be likely to serve as a protection to the building. I am under the impression it will answer this purpose for several years. This seems to be the opinion also of the undertaker & persons with whom I have conversed upon the subject. It may not however stand so long perhaps not one year perhaps longer than any one has an idea of. The experiment is I think well worth trying. Certain it is, nothing more effectual can be done before Spring in the mean time opportunities will no doubt occur enabling us to form a pretty correct estimate of its probable durability. Any opinion which may now be offered upon the subject must be entirely conjectural.

The old lamps & wooden cisterns at the different Light Houses are now entirely useless. I should be glad to be informed what is to be done with them. Would it not be advisable to have them brought here in the revenue cutter & sold?  

1816

On March 23, 1815, Commissioner Smith wrote Collector Mallory, 

Â“You have omitted to send the contract of Mr. Burroughs for repairing the several Light Houses and rebuilding the dwelling, kitchen and vault at New Point Comfort, which you will be pleased to transmit."  

The sum of $7,000 was made available for rebuilding the lighthouse at New Point Comfort on April 27, 1816. A solicitation for proposals was drafted on June 1, 1816, which included a description and specifications for the tower envisioned. At least one proposal was submitted.

On June 14, 1816, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith:

I have received your letter under date of the 1st inst. covering proposals for rebuilding the Light House on New Point Comfort, the publication of which has been commenced agreeably to your directions. I deem it my duty however to state to you that from every information I can derive respecting the present condition of that building, I am satisfied the work done to the foundation of it last year will supersede the necessity of removing it for many years, if not entirely. I understand the sand is collecting about it & that it is generally considered by those who have seen it since the execution of that work, to be as secure probably as it ever was. It is therefore respectfully submitted to you

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70 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.
71 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
72 Laws of the United States . . . , p. 47.
73 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 45.
whether the expenditure of the money appropriated by Congress for removing or rebuilding this Light House might not be suspended until time shall afford us some better test whereby to judge of the durability & efficacy of the work above mentioned. It may ultimately be a saving of so much to the U. States.

Commissioner Smith’s communication to Collector Mallory on June 17, 1816, indicated Smith was not influenced by Mallory’s assessment:

Congress having by an Act passed at their last Session, appropriated the sum of seven thousand dollars for rebuilding the Light House at New Point Comfort, I enclose proposals therefor with a request that you will cause the same to be inserted weekly until the 15th of July, in a public print of your place and forward such proposals as may be received at this office, with such information respecting the same as you may suppose will be useful, and especially in regard to the qualifications of the parties, from whom a bond with sufficient securities will be required, on which immediate steps will be taken for having a contract concluded with those who make the most favorable offer.

You are authorized to fix on a secure site for the building which Mr. Lewis advises can be readily found, and which should be equally prominent and elevated, with the one on which the present Light House stands. If such should not be found on the Land belonging to the United States, you will be pleased to inform me, as in that case it will be requisite to obtain the proper site and jurisdiction over and intimating a purpose of coming on to this place to make a proposition for removing the present building.

Under these circumstances it is recommended that an accurate survey of the ground and building be made by competent persons.

If the result corresponds with your conviction, the further publications of the proposals may be withheld, in which event you will advise me, as no further steps for the removal of the Light House will be taken.

It does not appear to me that in this state of business Mr. Burrough’s visit to this place will be of any use. I thank you to intimate this opinion to him.

On June 28, 1815, three individuals wrote a testimonial supporting Mallory’s earlier conclusions:

We the subscribers being appointed by the Collector of Norfolk to examine into the situation of the Light House on New Point Comfort give it as our opinion that the work done to the foundation last winter will preserve it at least the ensuing winter & that until it has stood the test of another winter it will be impossible to ascertain its efficacy. It may then appear that with some additional piling it may be preserved on its present foundation for many years. Were it removed to any other place on the Island it would not be many years before it would be subject to the same dangers it is at present exposed to & require the same work to secure it.

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74 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

75 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.
On July 5, 1816, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Miller:

I only received your letter of the 17th ultimo & conformably thereto have caused a survey to be made of the condition of the Light House on New Point Comfort by persons in whose judgment I have high confidence. Their report is enclosed for your consideration. From that & the verbal communications of those gentlemen I am still strongly inclined to the opinion expressed in my last. Mr. Burroughs= communication to you has surprised me not a little, as it was partly from his information that I formed that opinion, which he was apprized. I should make known to you, on the very day on which it appears his letter is dated, without his giving any intimation of his intention to write to you upon the subject. His conduct to say the least of it has not been ingenuous. The fact he is anxious to have the contract.76

On July 8, 1816, Commissioner Miller agreed to withdraw the proposals for rebuilding the Light House on New Point Comfort.77 He requested, however, that he be kept informed of any measures that it may be necessary to take either in regard to the security of the present building, or the rebuilding of it.77

On July 23, 1816, Collector Mallory wrote that it will require 100 to $120 to have the pointing mended & the Light House on New Point Comfort whitewashed.78 The Commissioner authorizes the expenditure in a letter dated July 26, 1816.79

1817

In 1817, New Point Comfort was one of 52 lighthouses in the U.S.80 It was described in Description of the Light Houses on the Coast of the United States as situated on New Point Comfort, in the Chesapeake Bay and is a fixed light.81

1819

76 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

77 Correspondence to Charles K. Mallory, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

78 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

79 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

80 A Number of Light Houses and Floating Lights in the United States from 1817 to 1841, both years inclusive. National Archives, Entry 6, A Annual Reports, 1820-1853.

81 Compiled by Winslow Lewis, Superintendent for Lighting the United States= Light-Houses, and printed in Boston, February 1817.
Keeper James B.H. Johnson passed away and was replaced by his father, Capt. William Johnson.\textsuperscript{82}

On August 23, 1819, Collector Mallory alluded to the continuing problem of erosion at New Point Comfort in his letter to Commissioner Smith:

In respect to the Light Houses on Smiths Point and New Point Comfort the estimate already furnished you of the expense of securing them is as low as the work can be done for, in any thing like an efficient manner. They are not now in any imminent danger, but I would not undertake to hazard an opinion whether, in the event of severe gales, they would stand their present state untill next summer.\textsuperscript{83}

On September 28, 1819, Collector Mallory wrote Commissioner Smith:

I have received a letter from the Keeper of the Light House on New Point Comfort representing that the late gales have so injured the work done some time ago for securing the foundation of the Light House as to leave it in a very dangerous situation. Capt. Ham of the Cutter has been sent up by me to examine that and the present condition of the Light House on Smiths Point.\textsuperscript{84}

1822

In 1820, Stephen Pleasonton, Fifth Auditor in the Department of the Treasury, took over the administration of the U.S. Light-House Establishment. On April 5, 1822, Superintendent of Light Houses, J.S.A. Johnson reported the following to Pleasonton:

William Johnson Keeper of the Light House at New Point Comfort, in his report of the 30\textsuperscript{th} of March ultimo, represents that the Light House will during the next summer require whitewashing the frost having taken off most of the coat last put on. The iron appurtenant to the lantern is represented to be covered with rust & to require a coat of paint. The piles driven into the earth next the bag & filled in with the view to protect the foundation of the Light House, are represented to be entirely decayed & rotten. The keeper considers the building at present in no danger but recommends some repairs (new piles I presume) during the next summer. The walls of the dwelling house, he represents to be in bad condition that much of the mortar has fallen out. The bricks are represented to be of bad quality. He advises to have the bricks pointed with mortar & the wall whitewashed.

1823

\textsuperscript{82}National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

\textsuperscript{83}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid.
New Point Comfort was lit by nine lamps.  

1825

Problems with shore erosion continued. Correspondence dated June 13, 1825 from Stephen Pleasonton to James Johnson, Esq., addressed the problem.

Your letter of the 7th instant come duly to hand. To remove the Light House at New Point Comfort to another site would require a special law and an adequate appropriation. We must therefore fortify and guard the foundation of the present House, in the best manner we can. I am inclined to think the erection of a stone wall of sufficient thickness on the side nearest the water to resist the influence of the waves would not only be more effectual for this purpose, but would in a period of seven or eight years be much cheaper than the brush[?] fence proposed. Such a wall I should suppose need not be of great extent, and requiring no mortar, would not cost much more that what is asked to erect the wattle or brush[?] fence. If you can contract for the erection of a stone wall which will permanently answer the purpose of guarding the foundation of the Light House from injury for a sum not exceeding $1500 including the repairs to the House and dwelling House which you have enumerated to be necessary, you are authorized to cause it to be done, without further delay. If the wall cannot be erected and the other repairs done for this sum, it will be proper for you to accept the proposal of Edward Thomas, in which he offers to execute the work agreeably to the plan suggested by you, for $1000.  

Follow-up correspondence dated July 1, 1825, from S. Pleasonton to James Johnson, stated

I have received your letter of the 7th instant submitting the improvements for protecting the foundation of the Light House at New Point Comfort. You are authorized to have the wall built for its protection, according to the plan of Mr. McClain, provided the expense, including the repairs to the Light House, dwelling house etc., shall not exceed one thousand nine hundred and fifty three dollars as proposed by him.  

1826

On March 2, 1827, Stephen Pleasonton wrote Winslow Lewis that New Point Comfort was in need of new reflectors. (Winslow Lewis being the contractor assigned to keep all the lamps and reflector systems in good repair.)

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85Schedule of the Light Houses and Beacons in the United States with the number of lamps lit in each on the first day of January 1823.\@ National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 6.

86National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

87Ibid.

88Ibid.
On December 31, 1829, Collector Moses Myers, Superintendent of Lights, Norfolk, reported that there were nine reflectors with nine lamps lit at New Point Comfort and two lamps held in reserve. Eighty-four gallons of winter oil were consumed in 1829 and 140 gallons of summer oil. Fifty-eight tube glasses, 540 wicks, and one buff skin were reported to have been consumed or broken in 1829.89

On December 31, 1829, Collector Moses Myers, Superintendent of Lights, Norfolk, reported that there were nine reflectors with nine lamps lit at New Point Comfort and two lamps held in reserve. Eighty-four gallons of winter oil were consumed in 1829 and 140 gallons of summer oil. Fifty-eight tube glasses, 540 wicks, and one buff skin were reported to have been consumed or broken in 1829.

Keeper William Johnson died and was replaced with his son-in-law William R. Brownley who had attended the light during Johnson's illness.

Superintendent of Lights Conway Whittle wrote to Pleasonton on October 20, 1830, that the keeper informed him that one of the reflectors was unfit for use and had been so for some time . . .90 Pleasonton responded, AYou will write to the contractor for supplying oil etc. and keeping the apparatus in repair, respecting the reflectors in the lighthouse at New Point Comfort, and whenever any of the lamps, apparatus etc. shall require repair, you will immediately inform the contractor thereof, in order that they may place and keep them in proper order, as required by their contract.@91

On January 24, 1831, Keeper Brownley sent an estimate of repairs needed at the light station to Supt. Whittle, stating,

I sent you a bil according to your request. As to say anything about the cost of the oil house, it is out of my power to say. I had got one of the best masons in this place to vew [view] the situation of the said house & he ses [says] it cant be repard [repaired] on the account of the foundation giving way. The foundation of the said house is above the sand in several places.92

The bill/estimate included whitewashing the lighthouse and 4 lights of sash@; painting the window frames and sash; and painting the lantern for 45 dollars. Repairs to the dwelling house included whitewashing inside and out; making three pairs of abatten window shelters@; painting Acornish boxing wind and doore frames@; Apainting the house inside@; providing one ladder for

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89 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 6.

90 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

91 Correspondence dated October 22, 1830, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

92 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.
dwelling house; putting some shingles on the kitchen and entry; and repairing fireplaces for 35 dollars.  

On October 19, 1831, Pleasonton wrote Supt. Whittle,

Your letter of the 4th instant, with a report enclosed from Messrs. Thomas Williamson and Marshal Park, concerning the repairs considered by them necessary to be made at the New Point Comfort Light house, has been received. The plan they propose for securing the foundation of that Light house, calls for so heavy an expense that it cannot be executed, in its full extent, without the previous approbation of and an appropriation by Congress.

The wall, however, in front of the Lighthouse, ought to be repaired forthwith, and the kind of breakwater suggested may be added, by way of securing it from the operation of the sea. Something ought to be done too, to arrest the overflow of the water from Back Creek, and it appears to me that this can be done by two rows of wattles and filling in the space between them with brush and sand.

If any other method for securing the foundation on the Back Creek side of the Lighthouse should occur to you as preferable, and which can be executed for a reasonable sum, you are at liberty to adopt it; but no time should be lost in doing the work.

Is there not a situation on New Point Comfort to which the Lighthouse could be removed, where it would be secure from the inroads of the sea, and render these constant and heavy expenses of securing the foundation unnecessary? Very little more money would remove the Lighthouse than is required by the report before referred to, for securing the foundation, and very probably in a few years an equal amount would be required.

I return the report and plan, as it may be required by you in making the repairs now contemplated.

On November 12, 1831, Winslow Lewis expressed his opinion regarding the situation at New Point Comfort in the following letter to Stephen Pleasonton:

When last at Washington, you had some conversation with me respecting the lighthouse at New Point Comfort. That the sea had encroached on the foundation, and that something was required to be done for its security. At the same time, you expressed an opinion that it would be most advisable to have the lighthouse removed, if a site could be found that could be relied on. Since my return here, on examining my papers, I find, that several years since, the sea had washed away the beach to the lighthouse, and by your request I then examined the place and recommended that the lighthouse be taken down and removed to a site I had selected and gave an estimate what I would do it for. Afterwards a different plan I found was pursued by building a wall around the lighthouse,

93 Ibid.

94 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
which it seems is now given away. There are sites there where the lighthouse will stand secure for a great length of time. Money expended in building stone walls on sand beaches for security, is at least precarious. I will agree to take the lighthouse down and build it up on such site as may be selected as the most permanent, put on an entire new lantern which it will require, put in a new set of lighting apparatus, with 10 - 16 inch reflectors and lamps, the present ones being old and are only small 9 inch reflectors, for the sum of two thousand dollars. To have the benefit of all the old materials and to furnish new wherever required. All the windows, doors and wood work would probably be needed to be new, and some of the stone.  

Pleasonton considered Winslow’s proposal of moving the tower at New Point Comfort. On November 17, 1831, he wrote Supt. Whittle,

> I have just received a letter from Mr. Winslow Lewis of Boston, stating that he was well acquainted with the local situation of the New Point Comfort Lighthouse, which will admit of the removal of the Lighthouse to a secure and permanent position, and that he would be willing to contract for the removal of it, and fitting it up with sixteen inch reflectors for two thousand dollars. A sum considerably below the estimate you forwarded for securing the foundation where it now stands. It appears to me much the most eligible plan to remove the buildings than to attempt to secure their foundation by walls, at a great expense, and which will constantly require repair. If you have taken no step, therefore, in regard to securing the foundation, be pleased to return the estimate and sketch of the situation of the place, which were returned to you, and I will submit the question of removal or repair, to the Secretary of the Treasury and inform you of the result.

The plan of moving the structure was never undertaken. On November 25, 1831, Pleasonton wrote Lewis,

> On the receipt of your letter of the 12th instant, I wrote to the Collector at Norfolk to cause an examination of New Point Comfort to be made, with the view to ascertain whether the Lighthouse could be removed to a safe situation, and, at the same time answer the purpose for which it was intended. He repaired to the place himself, and reports that there is no situation on the Point more safe that the one now occupied by the Lighthouse, and to place the Lighthouse on a permanent foundation it must be removed three or four miles, rendering it useless as a guide for vessels round the Point. He also states that the wall erected between the Lighthouse and the water, is very little injured, and if that be repaired and some watling placed in certain directions around the Light house, the drifting of the sand would be prevented, and the Lighthouse would be rendered

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95National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17E.

96National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
secure. This work he ordered done. It is not proposed therefore to attempt a removal of the Lighthouse.  

Instead, the measures proposed for securing the tower in its original location were approved.

1832

The question of moving the tower was a recurring theme. On July 13, 1832, Pleasonton wrote Supt. Whittle,


You propose to employ three or four hundred perch of stone, which will cost three dollars per perch, in securing the foundation of New Point Comfort Lighthouse. Do you feel confident that this would effectually secure the Lighthouse for any considerable length of time? If you do not, and there is a probability that an expense so heavy may again be called for in a year or two, it would be better, in my opinion, that the Lighthouse should be removed to a secure position, for which an appropriation will be necessary.

In the event of your considering the quantity of stone proposed as adequate to the complete and permanent protection of the Light house, you will employ it, at a cost not exceeding that stated by you per perch, and ought to be done without delay.

1833

New Point Comfort was still listed as having nine lamps.

1834

On March 16, 1824, Collector Whittle wrote Pleasonton,


During the last winter some damage was done by the sea to that part of the wall beneath New Point Comfort Light House which was not protected by the break-water run out the year before last. I believe the only protection for that establishment that can be devised is to extend the base of the break-water etc. as completely to cover the part which has been assailed and pointing the whole of the semi-circle with hydraulic cement.

At my request Capt. Westin[?] of the Revenue Cutter on this station examined the damage done and in his opinion the course I have just proposed will [?] the light house for half a century. I am however not as sanguine. The sweep of the waters of the Bay appears to be against the Island on which the Light House stands and some years hence

\[97\text{Ibid.}\]

\[98\text{Correspondence dated December 10, 1831, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.}\]

\[99\text{National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.}\]

\[100\text{Schedule of the Light Houses and Beacons in the United States, with the Number of Lamps lit in each on the first day of January, 1833, National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 6 [?].}\]
will I fear carry the whole island away. I would . . . recommend the retention of that light as long as possible. A light of one kind or the other is necessary to point out Mobjac Bay and the difference in the expense between a floating and a shore light for one year would cover the expenditure proposed on an average. If the present light house should ultimately be abandoned it will then perhaps be found advisable to have a floating light on York Spit. This with the re-establishment of the light at Wind Mill Point would complete the succession of light from the Roads to the head of the Bay at convenient and nearly equal distances and at the most prominent points.

In the meantime . . . I would recommend every reasonable security to be afforded for the preservation of the light house at New Point for the reason I have stated. To do this a further expenditure of about twelve hundred dollars would be necessary to put[?] what has been recommended namely an increase of the break-water to double its present base. This would require as before 400 perch of stone which at three dollars a perch deliverable on the spot would make that sum, and about fifty dollars for pointing the present masonry. 101

On March 20, 1834, Pleasonton authorized 1250 dollars for this purpose. 102

1836

On May 23, 1836, Pleasonton wrote Collector Whittle that a new dwelling should be erected for the Keeper.

It appears from the communications you enclosed, that the Keepers house at New Point Comfort is unworthy of repair, and that it is expedient to erect a new house for his residence. This you will do, first advertising for proposals for a short time, on the plan of that erected some time ago at Cape Henry. You will accept the lowest proposal, enter into a contract with the person making it, and take care that the work be faithfully done. You will also cause the necessary repairs to be made to the Tower of the Light House at that place; it being represented to require painting, pointing and white-washing. 103

1837

According to a letter dated February 6, 1837, Collector Whittle was instructed to enclose the property at New Point Comfort Light Station with a good fence, at as cheap a rate as possible, but the expense is not to exceed three hundred and fifty dollars. 104

1838

101 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

102 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.
According to *The Light-Houses, Beacons, and Floating Lights of the United States for 1838*, New Point Comfort had nine lamps with 9-inch reflectors. The light was fixed and tower fifty feet high from the ground to the base of the lantern.\(^{105}\)

1839

Collector Whittle wrote Pleasonton requesting that he supply the station with a boat so that the keeper could draw his supplies from the main land. Whittle states, "I am satisfied that the course of the sea in its encroachment of the spit of sand on which the light house was built renders such a convenience now necessary. There is now two miles of water communication necessary where until lately there was a ford at low tide. For this reason I have to request authority to supply a boat at the cost of thirty to fifty dollars."\(^{106}\)

1841

In 1841, the lighthouse was refitted with a large plate glass and fourteen-inch reflectors,\(^{107}\) bringing the total number of lamps to ten. According to a report of Winslow Lewis, written October 10, 1841:

\[\ldots\] on the 8\(^{th}\) I was at New Point Comfort, at which place I was to put on a new stone deck to the Light house & put up a new sett of lamps & reflectors etc. I found that lantern leaking in every part. Quite too[o] small & badly constructed & that a new lantern was indispensable & that it would be an useless expence to put on the stone deck until the new lantern was put up. I put in the new lamps & reflectors & landed the stone deck & the bricks for the arch & came here. \ldots My calculation is to go to Washington if Mr. Pleasonton agrees to have new lanterns put on to New & Old Point Comfort Light houses \ldots to go directly to Boston & have the lanterns made & sent out by one of the Boston packets to you, by that time the vessel with my workmen will return from the south, come to Norfolk & take in the lanterns & put them on to the Light houses.\(^{108}\)

A few days earlier, on October 6, 1841, Keeper Brownley wrote Supt. Whittle requesting more oil:

\[\quad\]


\(^{106}\) National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.


\(^{108}\) National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.
As there has been one more lamp put in my lantern, I shall be short of winter oil. Last year I received 105 gallons of winter oil, this year 79 gallons. The last year I had none to[o] much, & you will find that I am 26 gallons short of the last year and have one more lamp to furnish.

You will please send me 30 or 35 gallons more. My motive by writing at this time is because it will be bad landing in the winter.\[109\]

1843

On the evening of July 28, 1843, the Revenue Cutter Wolcott visited the lighthouses under the superintendence of Collector Whittle and made the following report on the establishment at New Point Comfort:

The lamps & reflectors ten in number in excellent order. Diameter of the reflectors thirteen and an half inches. The tower need a slight repair on the masonry, and whitewashing on the inside; otherwise in good condition. The dwelling need painting and whitewashing, and the chimney hearths, three in number to be relayed, otherwise in good order and clean.

The Keeper reports that an oil cellar under the dwelling is necessary as that it is difficult to keep the oil limpid, during the cold season in the tower.

The oil reported good. This establishment is well kept by Mr. William R. Brownley of correct deportment.\[110\]

1846

Keeper Brownley was removed because of repeated unfavorable reports of his conduct.\[110\] Pleasonton continued in his letter to Supt. Whittle, dated July 28, 1846, Such persons never reform and it is too important a charge to commit it to such careless and filthy hands.\[110\] Pleasonton also instructed, Set a new door for the tower and the white washing and painting recommended be done. The small repairs to the dwelling I perceive you have properly ordered done.\[110\]

Isaac Foster was appointed keeper on November 5, 1846; however, a letter written by Keeper Brownley to Supt. Whittle on November 3, 1846, stated:

I must call your attention to the situation of this place. We require something to be done forthwith to keepe the tide from cuming in on us.

\[109\] Ibid.

\[110\] Copy of report provided by Benn H. Trask from the files of The Mariners= Museum Library, Newport News, Virginia.

\[111\] National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.
I think the best plan we can fall upon is to make a hedg or watling, as I before rote you; there is a thoroughfar about to make betwix the Light house and Pritchett's. By making a hedg it will stop the sand from blowing away and will caus it to gether again, the hedg will require to be one hundered yards in lenth. The cost of the hedg I am not prepared to say, but I think it can executed for $60. The brush and timber will have to be brought sum [some] two or three miles. Yesterdy the publick bildings was entirely surrounded by tide water. Pleas attend to this we are on a sandy foundation.

We also require an anker [anchor] and anker rope for the batteau, a fore [four] prong grapling to weigh about 12 or 13 lbs. will answer best, 5 fathoms of rope will be enough.112

On November 11, 1846, Pleasonton wrote Supt. Whittle,

I received this morning your letter of the 7th enclosing one from Mr. Brownley, Keeper of the New Point Comfort Light recommending watling of 300 feet in extent around that Light to protect the foundation which is composed of sand from the action of wind and water. He estimates the expence at 60 dollars.

You will direct this watling to be done without delay, even if it should cost 10 or 15 dollars more than Mr. Brownley estimates, but then your directions ought to be given to Isaac Foster the new Keeper, whose appointment I sent to you on the 5th instant. I hope hereafter that this Light will be better attended.113

1848

In December 1848, Keeper Foster indicated that the sash in the lighthouse was rotten in five windows containing 40 lights or panes. The kitchen top was also rotten and the frame and sash for windows containing 15 lights. The kitchen planks and shingles also needed repairing. A Mr. John Thomas was willing to do the work for 60 dollars.114

1851

In correspondence dated April 1851, Keeper Foster indicated he had lost 20 to 30 gallons of summer oil leaking from the new oil butt. That same year, Keeper Foster indicated that the tower needed both painting and whitewashing and the dwelling also required whitewashing.115

1852

112 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

113 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 18.

114 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 17C.

115 Ibid.
The year the U.S. Light-House Board took over the administration of lighthouses, the following report was made to the Board:

Bay light: serving also for York River.

Isaac Foster, principal and only keeper; retired sea-captain; (has five sons at sea.) Appointed January, 1847; has a negro woman of his own to assist him in keeping the light.

Salary $400, and no allowance for an assistant; desires an allowance for wood; is on an island. Tower of sandstone; ashlar outside, rubble inside; whitewashed inside and out; present condition good; leaks a little above, but stopped with putty; loose stone about foundation.

Visited by collector for inspection. Mr. Howland daily expected to deliver supplies.

Lantern six feet in the clear; fixed light; lamps, burners, and tubeglases, as usual, common; 6/7 of the horizon below, 4/7 above the horizon illuminated.

Reflectors scratched; want silvering as well as cleaning; two extra lamps, which keeper thinks not enough, as they give out and are not always well repaired; tube glasses indifferent.

Tower too low from last floor to platform; fifty feet from platform to sill of door; glass 24 x 16 inches. Interior of dome painted white; no curtains. Ventilators as usual; trapdoor closed; moderately clean. Tower painted and whitewashed; reported in good condition; wants lock and catches; oil in cellar of house.

Dwelling is a fram[e]-house, painted white. Oil does not freeze in cellar, but gets thick in winter. Foundation of building good.

Receives supplies once a year.

Burners, as usual, 3/4 inch; not tipped with silver; burners get out of order often.

Lights up at dark and puts out at daylight; turned down in putting out; keeper thinks there is no use in lighting at sunset! lights up in a few minutes.

Trims at 11 or 12 in summer; in winter at 10 and 2 o’clock. No watch kept, but always wakes at the right time.

Has the usual printed instructions; keeper says the light is not considered bad in the bay; keeper thinks curtains of no use! there are none.116

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116 Quoted in A New Point Comfort Light Station, 4-page history in the files of the U.S. Coast Guard Historians Office, Washington, D.C. n.d.; original of referenced report has not been located.
1853

Fifth District Inspector Pennock recommended from aboard Tender *Lookout* that examination into the necessity of protection against abrasion of the sea for New Point Comfort Lighthouse.\(^{117}\)

The station reported to be in good order on September 19, 1853.\(^{118}\)

1854

The keeper’s death was reported by Inspector Pennock on October 2, 1854.

1855

The *Annual Report of the U.S. Light-House Board* for 1855 indicated that

> The keeper’s dwelling at this light station requires immediate repairs, painting, etc. The illuminating apparatus is in a very bad condition, being old and almost worn out. The repairs needed to the dwelling will be made on the first opportunity. This light should illuminate the whole horizon.

The *Light List* for 1856 indicates that the light was refitted in 1855. The 1856 entry for New Point Comfort lists a fixed light produced by a fourth-order lens which was visible 13 nautical miles.

1856

On January 1, 1856, Inspector Murdaugh recommended that the valve lamps be substituted with hydraulic ones.\(^{119}\) On April 23, 1856 a new illuminating apparatus was delivered to the keeper.\(^{120}\) The *Annual Report* for 1856 confirmed that a new illuminating apparatus was placed in New Point Comfort during the past year.

1857

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\(^{117}\) Reference to letter dated August 13, 1853; National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 38, *A List of General Correspondence, 1791-1900.* A similar reference to the need for protective measures is dated November 10, 1853.

\(^{118}\) National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 38.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.
On January 7, 1857, Inspector Murdaugh wrote that new fencing was required. On April 27, 1857, he wrote that a new lantern was required.

1858

Correspondence from Fifth District Engineer to Capt. Franklin, Secy of Lighthouse Board, dated Oct. 1, 1858, indicated a new lantern was installed that year in New Point Comfort L. House. The old lantern has been replaced by a castiron one with castiron deck and brick parapet wall laid in plaster with cement.  

\[121\] Ibid.  
\[122\] Ibid.  
\[123\] National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 3, ARecords of the Fifth Light-House District (Baltimore) 1851-1912, Volume 354.
On July 22, 1863, Fifth District Engineer Newman wrote to Rear Admiral Shubrick, Chairman of USLHB, regarding repairs needed for lights on the Chesapeake damaged during the Civil War. Should you authorize the above to be executed, it is not at all unlikely that by the time all is completed, it will be safe to approach New Point Comfort, Stingray Point & James River for a like purpose.\(^\text{124}\)

On Sept. 30, 1864, 5\(^{\text{th}}\) District Engineer Newman wrote Rear Adm. Shubrick:

. . . As it more than likely that the section of country upon which New Point Comfort Lt. Station is situated, will be cleared of the Army shortly, the repairs there will require a large outlay as also the L. House at Stingray Point. I mention these not knowing whether funds are in hand for the purpose or if an appropr. will require to be included in the forthcoming estimates.\(^\text{125}\)

On June 29, 1865, Lighthouse Engineer 5\(^{\text{th}}\) District, Baltimore wrote Rear Adm. Shubrick:

There being now no obstacle (save perhaps the financial one) to the reestablishment of the Light at New Point Comfort, Chesapeake Bay. I have paid the place a visit and have the honor to report upon its condition, and also to enclose my estimate of the sum needed to put it in good repair, amounting to $3300.21.

The tower is built of coursed masonry and has within it a spiral stone stairway all in good condition. The lantern (a modern cast iron one with diagonal astragals) is uninjured and but one of the panes of glass destroyed. The sashes in the window openings are gone, and the entrance door is damaged.

The Keepers House which is a frame structure is sound. It is sheathed with weather boarding which needs repairs. The porch is decayed and must be renewed. The roof requires reshingling. All the sashes and doors have been stolen. The floors have been willfully injured in some places and the handrail to stairs entirely destroyed. The plastering needs some repairs.

Both the house and tower are in a filthy condition and a general scraping, whitewashing and painting is required.

The rain water tank is a fine one built of brick and arched over, it is uninjured but is filled with rubbish.

\(^{124}\)National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 3, Volume 363.

\(^{125}\)Ibid.
All the gutters and conductors leading the rain water to it from the roofs must be renewed. The platform leading from the house to the tower about 80 feet long is entirely gone, and there remains a very small portion of fencing round the lot.\textsuperscript{126}

On July 18, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick:

\begin{quote}
I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter of yesterday's date, authorizing the reestablishment of Light at New Point Comfort, and notifying me that two items in the estimate of cost are disallowed. The amount will therefore stand as follows
\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
Original estimate & $2300.21 \\
Items disallowed & 303.00 \\
\hline
& $1997.21\textsuperscript{127}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

On August 16, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick, AA standard clock is required for New Point Comfort Light House, about being reestablished.\textsuperscript{128}

On August 21, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick

\begin{quote}
I beg respectfully to inform you that the repairs to the New Point Comfort Lt. Station are progressing satisfactorily. In view of the delay which sometimes occurs in procuring a nomination for keepers, I would suggest that the matter be referred at once to the proper authorities as the reestablishment of the Light may be made any time after the 31\textsuperscript{st} Inst.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

On September 5, 1865, a receipt was sent for one standard clock.\textsuperscript{130}

On Sept. 9, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Engineering Secretary General Poe, A. . . The vessel and crew alluded to in my last, are now engaged upon the restoration of New Point Comfort Light Station, one of those extinguished by the Rebels in 1861. The work will be completed in about 3 weeks . . .\textsuperscript{131}

On Sept 11, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote L. M. Powell, 3\textsuperscript{rd} District Lighthouse Inspector:

\textsuperscript{126}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131}Ibid.
In reply to your inquiry why the lamps sent with the original packages containing the 4th order lens for New Point Comfort are set aside, and other ordered. The reason is that they are double wick burners and consume one third more oil. The single wick Franklin lamp burner can be seen sufficiently far off for the purposes of navigation in the Chesapeake Bay, and there is not an instance of a double wick one to a 4th order lens throughout this district.

The chimneys sent in the original package are designated for the 3rd order, . . . I fear they will be too large for the lamps just sent, and if you are of the same opinion some of the right sort should be sent at once.132

On September 15, 1865, an oath of office of Joseph S. Allen, Keeper of New Point Comfort Light, was transmitted.133 On September 27, 1865, Inspector Powell of the 3rd District transmitted a receipt from Engineer Newman for Franklin lamps and wicks for New Point Comfort Light.134

On Sept 30, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick

. . . In the month of July repairs were commenced at New Point Comfort Light Station, it being also one of those that were extinguished in 1861. At this station the injuries were extensive and the 4 years of neglect had left its marks on the buildings and their surroundings. The repairs are completed and the station is in perfect order. New sashes and in most cases frames have been fixed in the tower and keepers dwelling, also all new doors, locks and furniture. The floors and stairs have been repaired, a new store room and cistern house built, the porches restored, all the weather boarding renailed and the whole painted 3 coats. The roofs thoroughly repaired. The lot cleared up, path ways formed and entirely refenced. The Lantern and lightning conductor put in good order and a new fourth order lens fixed. The tower was scraped, pointed with cement, and whitewashed outside and in.135

On November 6, 1865, Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick

In accordance with circular from the Light House Board dated June 15th, I have the honor to transmit a memorandum of materials, having a portion of those in the list of Light House property, in my charge on the 30th of June last, and which have since been expended in the restoration and reestablishment of New Point Comfort Light Station.

132 Ibid.
133 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 38.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
List of materials taken from the Lazaretto Store House and expended in the restoration and reestablishment of New Point Comfort Light Station

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locks &amp; furniture</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairs bolts &amp; screws</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large flat files</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dozen hooks &amp; eyes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lbs. nails</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gross screws</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pairs 24 inch gale hinges</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pairs ? hinges</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cupboard knobs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass bolts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass buttons</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet sheathing 4X4</td>
<td>1580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chestnut posts</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlock nails</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laths</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel doors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet 1 inch rough boarding</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet 2 inch rough boarding</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/4 inch tongue &amp; groove flooring</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brick</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whitewash brushes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lbs cotton waite (?)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lbs spun yarn</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet india rubber hose</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrell plasterers ??</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrell Smiths coal or coat?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheets tin</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet ? water conductor</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet water spouting</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lbs roll brimstone</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buckets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new paint brushes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scrub brush</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? Solder</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet window glass</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panes plate glass 28 X 40 inches</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hickory brooms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? wrench</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ibid.
On December 19, 1865 Engineer Newman wrote Chairman Shubrick, A. . . I have also provided New Point Comfort Light House in a similar manner with 3 panes of the same size. @ [plate glass 28" X 40'"

The Annual Report for 1865 confirms that the station had been repaired, a new lens provided, and the light re-established.

1866

On October 1, 1866, Keeper Allen requested fuel supplies. The Inspector recommended furnishing a boat on December 20, 1866.

1867

Correspondence from Engineer Newman to General Poe, Engineering Secretary of the Light-House Board, dated June 30, 1867

. . . The repairs party are progressing satisfactory having already operated at Jordans Point, White Shoal, and Point of Shoals Lt Houses, in the James River, Craney Island, near Norfolk, Old Point Comfort, Cherrystone, Stingray Point, Cove Point & New Point Comfort, in the Chesapeake Bay. They perform their duty in combination with the placing of the new lanterns in position, where these are provided for by special appropriation.

1868

On Oct. 14, 1868, Engineer Newman reported:

\[\text{\ldots National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 3, Volume 363.}\]

\[\text{\ldots National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 38.}\]

\[\text{\ldots Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\ldots National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 3, Volume 360.}\]
Light Station at New Point Comfort, VA

Repaired the window frames and sashes in tower where decayed and painted all wood work and lantern, 2 coats inside and out. Reshingled roof of dwelling house, put up entire new rain water gutters, repaired doors, locks, and hinges. Painted the porches & inside of house 2 coats, put a new pump to cistern, set new glass where required, whitewashed the house and tower 2 coats, & repaired and whitewashed the fences. Cost $960\textsuperscript{141}

The Annual Report for 1868 also mentioned these repairs:

Window frames and sashes in tower repaired; all wood-work and lantern painted inside and out two coats; roof of dwelling reshingled, and new rain-water gutters supplied; doors, locks, and hinges repaired; porches and inside of dwelling painted two coats; new pump to cistern provided; house, tower, and fences whitewashed, and latter rebuilt; new glass set in windows.

1869

The Annual Report for 1869 indicated that the illuminating apparatus had been repaired; the water-conductors needed repairing, and the keeper’s dwelling needed a lightning conductor.

1872

One of the few known officially appointed African-American keepers served at New Point Comfort from 1871 to 1873. A glimpse as to identity and the conditions under which he and other keepers served is provided in the following exchange of letters. On June 21, 1872, Lighthouse Inspector for Fifth District submitted this letter from New Point Comfort Lighthouse Keeper Jerry McHenry Farley to Prof. Joseph Henry, Chairman, Light-House Board.

. . . relative to the condition of this light station; Dear sirs this is an isolated island, and only about 3 or 4 months in the year, is there any one on the island at all, while the fishery is being carried on, after which during the remainder part of the year; this is a lonely and dreary place. Sirs from the personal experience of the last winter; (although the old inhabitants of the place some 3 or 4 miles off) said that the last winter was the severest that had been in this section for 20 or more years & from this great difficulty I had and the constant & watchful care both night & day to keep a brilliant light as the law requires; it was almost too much for one keeper. Many nights had I to remain in the lantern tower for hours to keep the frost from the glass. Therefore gentlemen would it be too much for me as Keeper of this station to ask the favor of your body to grant to this place an assistant keeper, for many reasons . . . if I cannot succeed in getting an assistant keeperCwould it be too much to ask to have this station placed for the coming year in the list of stations for ration, as everything is so high & hard to be gotten on this island; and especially wood for I suffered here last winter on account of the

\textsuperscript{141}Ibid.
creeks & river being frozen for weeks so that I could not get any wood, & the cost of wood is from $4 to $5 per cord etc.¹⁴²

From Lighthouse Inspector dated June 29th, 1872 to Chairman Henry:

In reply to your letter of the 24th inst., accompanying the communications from the Keeper of New Point Comfort Light House, returned to me for remarks thereon, I beg leave to say, that, in my Inspection Report of the 1st Quarter of 1872, I recommend that New Point Comfort Lt House and twelve other stations be allowed assistant keepers or be supplied with provisions. New Point Comfort Lt House is situated on a very isolated point, remote from any source of supplies thus rendering it difficult for the keeper to procure provisions & requiring protracted absences from his station when gone in search of them. Again, the keeper is a colored minister of the gospel & he feels deeply the privation of church privileges. He is proud of his position as Light Keeper faithful in the performance of this duty & careful to do nothing that will involve neglect of his light . . . I beg to add, that I have little doubt when the Board comes to consider my Annual Report that it will increase the power of the York Spit Light & discontinue that at New Point Comfort.¹⁴³

There is nothing to indicate that an assistant was ever allowed at New Point Comfort Light Station.

1877

Correspondence dated May 10, 1877 from Light House Inspector Ames to Professor Joseph Henry, Chairman of the Light-House Board, describes a shipwreck off New Point Comfort.

In answer to your letter of May 25, 1877 enclosing a slip from N.Y. Herald of May 1st concerning a wreck lying off New Pt. and ordering me to investigate the facts of the case: I have the honor to report as follows. The wreck was found five & one quarter (5 1/4) miles E.?S from New Pt Comfort Lt. (286) lying in seven (7) f?? water with twenty four (24) ft. of water over her. One mast ?? & one twenty (20) ft. above water. The captain of the Helioterpe [?] placed a 3 degree C can buoy on the wreck buoy painted green with the word wreck in white letters upon it.

I respectfully recommend that said buoy be allowed to remain in position until the wreck is removed or broken up.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²National Archives, Record Group 26, Letterbook 303.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴National Archives, Record Group 26, Letterbook 432.
1878

The first mention of a red lantern can be found in the 1878 Light List. It describes the station as 'A stone tower, white; keeper’s dwelling also white; lantern red. . . .' @

1882

The Annual Report for 1882 states 'A new back porch was added to the dwelling, and the front steps and porch were repaired. A new floor was laid in the back building and provided with a trap door, and the whole station was thoroughly painted.' @

1885

Correspondence dated September 5, 1885, from Jared A. Smith, Major of Engineers, Lighthouse Engineer, Fifth & Sixth Districts, Baltimore, Maryland to the Chairman of the Light-House Board, reports

In a recent visit to New Point Comfort, Va. Light Station I found the dwelling sadly in need of repairs; the privy rotten and blown over; storehouse roof rotted out; fences rotten and tumbling down; the door to tower fallen entirely, and the station generally in most urgent need of immediate repairs. I had been unable to see the place personally at an earlier date, and the reports reaching me were too meager to form a definite idea of the condition, or points on which to form an estimate. As a large amount of repairs are to be made at Smith’s Point Lightstation, not far distant from New Point Comfort, I have arranged to make the repairs at the latter station at the same time as they can be done most conveniently and economically. The expense is estimated at $500.00 and I have to request that the expenditure may be approved.

1887

The 1887 Light List indicates that the lantern was painted black.

1896

According to the Annual Report, the station was thoroughly repaired in August.

1899

On March 4, 1899, the Lighthouse Inspector recommended the transfer of Mr. James B. Hurst, Keeper of Cherrystone Light Station to New Point Comfort Light Station beginning April 1, 1899, at a salary of $560 per annum, in place of O.R. Hudgins whom it was proposed to be transferred to Cherrystone. The exchange had been requested by both keepers.

145 National Archives, Record Group 26, Letterbook 653.
According to the Annual Report, ASome 184 feet of rail fence was put up, and about 18 feet of plank walk 3 feet wide and 32 feet of walk 2 feet wide were laid. Various repairs were made.@

On July 27, 1905, the 5th District Lighthouse Inspector wrote the Light-House Board,

I have the honor to state that Mr. R.W. Marchant, Keeper of New Point Comfort Light-Station, Va., was obliged to go to a hospital and have a difficult surgical operation performed, and he was obliged to hire a substitute to perform his duties from June 6 to July 21, 1905, a period of 46 days, and in view of the long and faithful service of this keeper, and the further fact that he has no assistant keeper, I would respectfully recommend that the employment of this laborer as a substitute for the Keeper during the period mentioned may be authorized, at a compensation of $1. per day.146

On August 14, 1906, the Engineer of the Fifth Lighthouse District was authorized to make $1700 worth of repairs at New Point Comfort.147

On December 8, 1915, Lighthouse Inspector King wrote the Commissioner of Lighthouses,

The proposed red sector suggested by the Superintendent for installation in New Point Comfort Light was submitted to the Master of the Chesapeake Steamship Company=s steamer Annapolis, Baltimore to York River points, who reports that he can see no advantage in it. The Inspector, moreover, does not concur in the recommendation of the Superintendent.

The Superintendent=s recommendation was for a red sector in this light from 21° true to 36° true, the easterly edge of this sector to lead clear of Elbow of York Spit Buoy, 2, the westerly edge to be of no significance except as a guide into Poquoson Bay.148

The Bureau responded on December 16, 1915, that they concurred with the Inspector.149

146 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 48, ACorrespondence of the U.S. Light-House Board, 1901-10.@ File No. 2343.
147 Ibid.
148 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 50, ACorrespondence of the Bureau of Lighthouses, 1911-39.@ File No. 2779.
149 Ibid.
In 1919, New Point Comfort was automated by switching the illuminant to acetylene gas which did not require the full-time care of a keeper. On August 19, 1919, the following directive was issued,

1. The Department is advised that in the interests of economy, it is proposed to install an acetylene light in place of the present oil light at New Point Comfort Light Station, Va., which will not require the continuous care of a keeper.

2. It is accordingly recommended that the position of keeper of New Point Comfort Light Station, Va., at $720 per annum be discontinued, effective at the close of a date later to be determined and reported to the Department. The present keeper will be retired at the close of August 31, 1919, at which time it is proposed to discontinue this position.

3. It is also recommended that the New Point Comfort Light, when changed to acetylene, be placed in the care of the present keeper of Mobjack Bay Lights, without change in designation of the latter position, but that the rate of pay thereof be increased from $360 per annum to $480 per annum, in view of the additional duties that will be required of this keeper in attending to this light, effective on a date to be later determined and reported.

On August 22, 1919, the Superintendent of Lighthouses, N.D. King, wrote the Commissioner of Lighthouses, regarding the change of characteristics for the New Point Comfort Light.

. . . I am of the opinion that a one-half second flash is too short to be satisfactory in a lighthouse which is not passed close to but upon which compass bearings are desirable to be taken from some distance off. For channel buoys and other aids used only or principally close at hand the short flash I do not find objectionable but a number of cases has occurred in this district where protests have been received against the very short flashes where the aid was necessary to be used at a considerable distance. In such cases if the short flash is to be used at all, it should in my opinion be used in quickly recurring groups.

On September 10, 1919, the original plan set forth on August 19th was modified; Supt. H.D. King wrote the Commissioner of Lighthouses:

1. No further advices have been received from the Bureau in regard to the discontinuance of the position of keeper of this station, or to the increase in pay previously recommended to the keeper of Mobjack Bay lights.

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150 This would be a lamplighter who does not reside at any of the lights he tended.

151 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 50, File No. 2779.

152 Ibid.
2. Upon further consideration, it appears desirable that an additional position, that of Laborer in Charge of New Point Comfort Light Station, be authorized at the rate of $120 per annum, instead of placing this light in care of the keeper of Mobjack Bay lights, who lives five miles away from this station.

3. A suitable laborer can be employed to take charge of this gas light, who resides not over one mile from the station, and such course of action is now recommended.\textsuperscript{153}

According to the 1919 \textit{Light List}, the characteristic was changed and the intensity increased on September 19, 1919, \textit{The light is now flashing white every 5 seconds, flash 1 second duration, of 750 candlepower.} The previous year's \textit{Light List} indicated a fixed white light with a candlepower of 490.

On October 6, 1919, Henry L. Dow of New Point, Va., was contracted as Laborer in Charge, New Point Comfort Light, for $120 per annum, effective October 1, 1919.\textsuperscript{154}

1920

On February 17, 1920, Supt. King wrote the Commissioner of Lighthouses regarding the sale of the dwelling at New Point Comfort Light Station:

1. There being no prospect of further use to the Lighthouse Service of the keeper's dwelling at New Point Comfort Light Station, Va., I have to recommend the sale of same by sealed bids after advertisement by circular letters and in newspapers to be selected.

2. There are no keepers now at this station due to the fact that the light in the tower separate from the dwelling is an unwatched acetylene light kept by a post light keeper who lives off the reservation.

3. The dwelling is now standing idle and unoccupied, subject to rapid deterioration. It is of an obsolete type and if sold at auction would have only a salvage value estimated at $500.00.

4. Form of circular letter is enclosed. Forms for newspaper advertising will be forwarded upon notification by the Bureau of the approval of the sale.\textsuperscript{155}

The advertisement for sealed proposals for purchasing the keeper's dwelling came from George Hunt of Port Haywood.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{153}National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 50, File No. 2779.

\textsuperscript{154}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{155}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{156}Ibid.
Virginia. He paid $310.  

1921

Authority was requested by Supt. King to strike out the fuel allowance for New Point Comfort Light Station, Va., of 4 tons of coal and 2 cords of wood since the light was in charge of a lamplighter.

1930

A report of April 1, 1930, showed that the usefulness of the property has not diminished. Appears to be no likelihood it soon doing so. On that date the land was appraised as worth $200, and the improvements $3300. The station was at that time equipped with an automatic light.

1933

A major hurricane and related tidal flooding damaged light station and shoreline; the water action creates a swath between the lighthouse and the land it once sat on.

1950

The light was first powered with electricity.

1954

U.S. Coast Guard took over maintenance of the facility when Henry Dow retired.

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157 Return of Sale of Public Property dated April 22, 1920; National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 50, File No. 2779.

158 Benjamin H. Trask, A New Point Comfort Light Station: The Other Point Comfort, The Keeper’s Log, Fall 1997, p. 11.

159 National Archives, Record Group 26, Entry 50, File No. 2779.

160 Excerpted from A New Point Comfort Light Station, Virginia, a four-page history on file at the U.S. Coast Guard Historian’s Office, Washington, D.C., n.d.


162 Benjamin H. Trask, A New Point Comfort Light Station: The Other Point Comfort, The Keeper’s Log, Fall 1997, p. 11.

163 Ibid.
1963

The light was discontinued and replaced with offshore optic called the Spit Light. Tower served as a daymark or daybeacon.

1972

The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1976

The property was acquired by Mathews County and local organizations, and volunteers raised $80,000 in private and matching state funds for repairs and restoration. Repairs included improving the iron railings, restoring the lighthouse's cage [lantern], replacing windows, extensive painting, and re-pointing the masonry." An oyster-shell pathway, a small dock, and 600 tons of rip-rap to help check erosion were also added.164

1988

More repairs were undertaken by the county through a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.165

199?

The Virginia Chapter of the Nature Conservancy purchased the nearest track of land to the tower, now a 95-acre preserve.166 The tower can be viewed from the nature preserve's observation deck off Route 600.

2001

The Mathews County Historical Society entered into an agreement with the Mathews County Board of Supervisors to develop a master plan for the preservation of the lighthouse. A preservation task force was formed to develop a plan to preserve the New Point Comfort Lighthouse as a permanent historic sentinel representing American navigation, transportation, commerce, craftsmanship, engineering, and Americans perseverance through peace and war."167

164 Ibid, pp. 11-12.


166 Ibid.

167 A 2001 Lighthouse Report provided by Earl Soles, Jr., Chairman of the New Point Comfort Lighthouse Preservation Task Force.