1. NAME
   COMMON
   OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE
   AND/OR HISTORIC
   OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE

2. LOCATION
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   Fenwick Road, 2 mi. SW of east gate, Fort Monroe.
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Hampton
   STATE:
   Virginia
   CODE:
   51
   COUNTY:
   (in city)
   CODE:
   650

3. CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY (Check One):
   □ District
   □ Site
   □ Structure
   □ Object
   □ Building
   □ Structure
   □ Both
   □ Public
   □ Private
   □ Both
   □ Public Acquisition:
   □ In Process
   □ Being Considered
   □ Occupation:
   □ Occupied
   □ Unoccupied
   □ Preservation work in progress
   □ Yes:
   □ Restricted
   □ Unrestricted
   □ No

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
   OWNER'S NAME:
   U.S. GOVERNMENT
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   U.S. COAST Guard, Fifth Coast Guard District, Federal Building
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Portsmouth
   STATE:
   Virginia
   CODE:
   51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
   Clerk of Court
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   City of Hampton
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Hampton
   STATE:
   Virginia
   CODE:
   51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
   TITLE OF SURVEY:
   Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
   DATE OF SURVEY:
   1972
   DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
   Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Richmond
   STATE:
   Virginia
   CODE:
   51
The light tower stands on the southern edge of Old Point Comfort, a peninsula that marks the north side of the entrance to Hampton Roads Harbor. This neck of land, originally labeled "Cape Comfort" by Christopher Newport's explorers in 1607, provided a protective barrier for the old port of Hampton.

When the present lighthouse was constructed in 1802, there was little else at Old Point Comfort but the ruins of a colonial defense work, Fort George. In a short time, however, the massive Fort Monroe rose just behind the tower, its embankment and moat within a hundred feet of the structure. Southwest of the tower is Engineer's Wharf, where Jefferson Davis was brought ashore in 1865 to begin his four and one-half month imprisonment at Fort Monroe.

The tapered octagonal ashlar stone lighthouse retains its original appearance, although the light mechanism has been changed several times. Stone moldings at the base and top add architectural finish to the tower. Two windows on each of two opposite sides light the stone spiral stair, which is approached by a door at the ground level on the west side. The winding stair is constructed similarly to those found in medieval European buildings, with the outer end of each wedge-shaped step being keyed into the wall. The inner ends of the steps are rounded to form the continuous central post around which the stair winds. The tread of each step is finely finished, while the under surface is roughly formed.

The structure maintains a fresh appearance due to regular whitewashing of the stoneworks.

The lightkeeper's house, constructed beside the tower circa 1900, is a two story frame structure with shingle and horizontal board siding, second story overhang, and exposed frame decoration of the gables. The front gable is further elaborated with a sunburst motif. The scale of the house emphasizes the small size of the tower, which is forty-seven feet from base to focal point of the light.
The Virginia colony lost its chief coast fortification when Fort George at Old Point Comfort was destroyed by the disastrous hurricane of 1749. The second half of the century saw no rebuilding of the fortifications, and in 1774 John Dames was employed as caretaker of the ruins. Tradition has it that Dames overcame his boredom by operating a light that guided ships entering Hampton Roads. The Assembly recognized the importance of this new enterprise, and in 1775 Dames was voted a yearly salary of twenty pounds to continue maintaining the light until a permanent structure could be built.

Whether Dames' temporary operation was continued during the Revolution is not known, but in an act dated January 2, 1798, the Virginia Legislature authorized the conveyance of land at Old Point Comfort to the Federal Government for the purpose of erecting a lighthouse. In April of that year Congress approved an act directing the Secretary of the Treasury to contract to have the light built. The present structure was completed in 1802, seventeen years before the Government began construction of Fort Monroe. Following the completion of Fort Monroe it was thought that the lighthouse should be incorporated into the Fort's structure, for a Congressional act of 1837 approved the expenditure of $6000 "for removing the light-house at Old Point Comfort into Fortress Monroe." The move was never made, however.

The Old Point Comfort Lighthouse was held by Federal forces during the War Between the States, and it was just offshore that the clash between the ironclads Monitor and Virginia took place on March 9, 1862.

Unlike its abandoned twin, New Point Comfort Lighthouse in Mathews County, erected in 1802, the Old Point Comfort Lighthouse remains in excellent condition and still functions as a round-the-clock nautical aid.


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than 10 acres

STATE: Virginia

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE: June, 1972

STREET AND NUMBER: Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWNS: Richmond

STATE: Virginia

51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [ ] State [X] Local [ ]

Name: James W. Moody, Jr., Director

Title: Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

Date: 6/20/72

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: ____________________________

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date: 3/11/73