

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

24

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Sharps Island Light
AND/OR COMMON
Sharps Island Light

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Tilghman Island

VICINITY OF
CODE
24

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
First

STATE
Maryland

COUNTY
Talbot

CODE
041

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER Navigation

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)
Commander, Fifth Coast Guard District

STREET & NUMBER

431 Crawford Street

CITY, TOWN

Portsmouth

VICINITY OF

STATE

Virginia 23705

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Same As # 4

STREET & NUMBER

Logistics & Property Branch

CITY, TOWN

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

T-477

DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The first light was a small wooden house with lamp housing on top, 30 feet above the ground on the northwest tip of Sharps Island.

With the threat of further erosion of the island, a new screwpile structure was erected approximately one (1) mile east of the previous position. In 1881, the house was carried away by ice causing the need for a third structure.

The third and present structure is a 14' diameter steel shell over brick, on a 30' diameter steel caisson having four stories plus the light tower and a basement. The interior was much like some of the other caisson towers built on the Bay, consisting of kitchen, O-I-C Quarters, watch room and quarters for two assigned watchstanders.

The 54 foot high brown tower, which was once painted purple, is situated in 10 feet of water. The nominal visibility is 10 miles to sea.

On October 1, 1957, the light was converted from 10V battery pack to electricity.

The light started to lean as early as 1973 and leans even further as the result of extremely heavy ice in the winter of 1976.

The 4th order lens was removed May 3, 1977 and replaced with a 250 MM plastic lens. The installed fog alarm system sounds from 15 September to 1 June.

SIGNIFICANCE

T-477

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Navigation
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1882

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Sharps Island Light was required to guide mariners away from the shoals off Poplar Island and Black Walnut Point. The Lighthouse Service decided on the location even though it was known from earlier maps and charts that the island was suffering severe erosion having diminished from 700 acres in 1675 to 480 acres in 1838 when the first light was built.

An act by the Maryland General Assembly on April 6, 1874 provided for "the relinquishment to the United States, title and jurisdiction over land for sites of lighthouses, beacons and other aids".

Ten acres of land was acquired by deed in fee simple and in consideration of the sum of \$600.00 from Joseph A. Reynolds and his wife Ann, on August 13, 1837 for the construction of the first light. The structure built by Thomas Evans was designed so it could be easily moved in the event that the severe erosion of the island further threatened the light.

As anticipated by the Lighthouse Service, the light was in fact threatened and plans were made to relocate the light.

A tract of land measuring 10.2 acres assessed at a value of \$1,022.00 was acquired by condemnation on June 13, 1848. By this time the size of the island had decreased to 438 acres.

In 1864 the Lighthouse Board reported to Congress that "the lighthouse at Sharps Island in Chesapeake Bay is in imminent danger of being destroyed by the washing away of the bank on which it stands". The absence of the usually severe winter in 1865 granted the lighthouse a reprieve. In 1866 a second structure was built but it too was ill-fated. On February 10, 1881, the house was lifted from it's foundation and carried away by the heavy moving ice floes.

The following year, in 1882, the present lighthouse was built on a five acre circular plot deeded from the state of Maryland on February 16, 1878.

A 1950 U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey chart showed the island to be about 300 yards long near the center. There is nothing in the records on hand to indicate the size of the island at the time the light was automated in August 1951.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE 2

The site was visited by a Coast Guard Survey Board on August 3, 1955. Their report states the island had diminished to about 300 yards. The total acquired acreage (25.2) was deeded back to the state of Maryland by deed dated October 8, 1957 to clear the real estate records. The island has completely disappeared.

The light is presently serving as an unmanned aid to mariners in the area.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

F477

de Gast, Robert; The Lighthouses of The Chesapeake
 Baltimore; The John Hopkins University Press, 1973

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5 (under water)
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	3,8,0	9,3,5	4,2	7,7	3,4,0	B						
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			
C							D						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Boundary of property 263.3 feet out from center in any direction.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
 CW04 D. M. HANLEY - Special Projects Officer

ORGANIZATION
 Commander, Fifth Coast Guard District

STREET & NUMBER
 431 Crawford Street

CITY OR TOWN
 Portsmouth

TELEPHONE
 (804) 398-6356

STATE
 Virginia 23705

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X NO _____ NONE _____

[Signature]
 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE _____ DATE _____

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
	DATE _____
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE _____
ATTEST:	DATE _____
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

T-477

Form No. 10-301
(Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY MAP FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Sharps Island Light

AND/OR COMMON
Sharps Island Light

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN
Tilghman Island

XX VICINITY OF

COUNTY
Talbot

STATE
Maryland

3 MAP REFERENCE

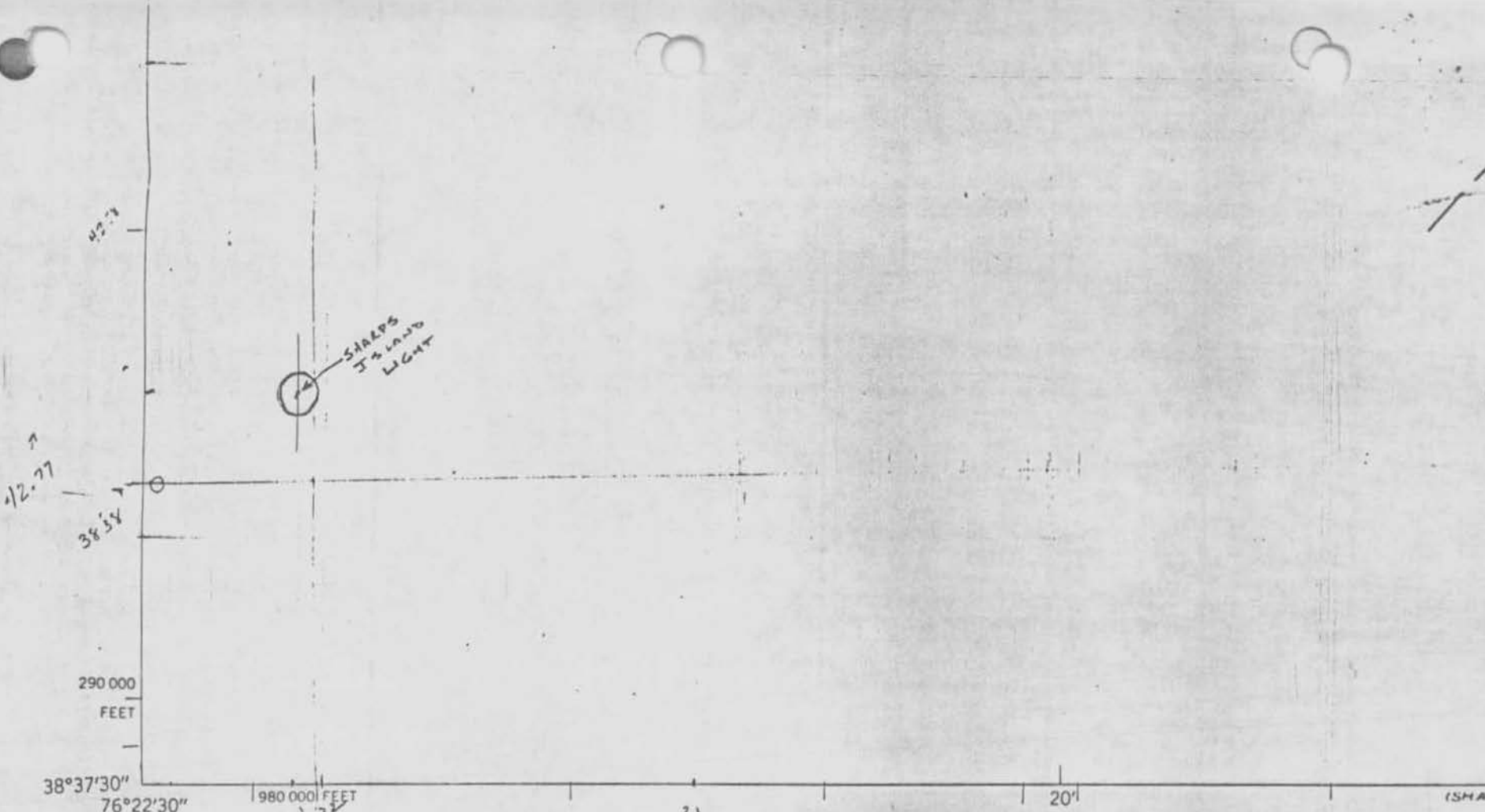
SOURCE U.S. Department of The Interior, Geological Survey

SCALE 1:24000 (7.5 Minute Series) DATE 1942

4 REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

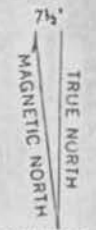
1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES



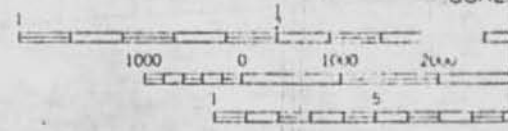
Mapped by the Army Map Service
 Published for civil use by the Geological Survey
 Control by USC&GS

Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods
 and by planetable surveys 1942. Aerial photographs taken 1942

Polyconic projection, 1927 North American datum
 10,000-foot grid based on Maryland coordinate system
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
 zone 18, shown in blue



APPROXIMATE MEAN
 DECLINATION, 1942



MAXIMUM EL
 DATUM IS

SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE
 MEAN RANGE OF

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH THE
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGIC
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC M

T-477

T-477

Form No 10-301a
(Rev. 10-77)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Sharps Island Light

AND/OR COMMON

Sharps Island Light

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN

Tilghman Island

VICINITY OF

COUNTY

Talbot

STATE

Maryland

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

US Coast Guard

DATE OF PHOTO

1979

NEGATIVE FILED AT

Fifth CG District, 431 Crawford St., Ports., VA 23705

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Aerial view

PHOTO NO.

001



15 x 1.98

477 43%

Sharps Island Lighthouse
Chesapeake Bay
1882
Private

T-477

The Sharps Island Lighthouse is a caisson lighthouse with a conical tower located in the Chesapeake Bay approximately four miles southwest of the end of Tilghman Island, on the eastern shore of Maryland. Built in 1882, the present light station replaced two earlier structures that were destroyed by erosion or ice flows. The Sharps Island Lighthouse is architecturally significant as a typical representation of a conical caisson lighthouse. It is also significant within maritime history. For 125 years, from 1882 -2007, the light station aided mariners in avoiding the shoals near Poplar Island and Black Walnut Point at the end of Tilghman Island.

The light station was automated in the 1950s and unmanned since then. In the late 1970s, heavy ice flows tilted the structure between 15 and 20 degrees. Declared structurally sound at the time, the station's tilt was never corrected. The lighthouse was disposed of by the federal government in 2006 and sold to a private corporation in 2008. The light was extinguished in 2007 and officially discontinued in 2010. As of 2014, the station is severely deteriorated and in danger of demolition by neglect.

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-477

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Sharps Island Lighthouse

other N/A

2. Location

street and number Chesapeake Bay not for publication

city, town near Tilghman Island vicinity

county Talbot

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name AFB, Inc.

street and number 227 Mariners Way telephone N/A

city, town Bear state DE zip code 19701-2295

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. N/A liber N/A folio N/A

city, town N/A tax map N/A tax parcel N/A tax ID number N/A

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
 Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
 Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
 Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
 Recorded by HABS/HAER
 Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
 Other: Books as cited in bibliography: United States Coast Guard

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		
				Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
				<u>1</u>	

7. Description

Inventory No. T-477

Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

Summary

The Sharps Island Lighthouse is located in the Chesapeake Bay, near the mouth of the Choptank River and Tilghman Island on the eastern shore of Maryland. The present cast iron caisson structure, built in 1882, is the third lighthouse to be erected on Sharps Island; severe erosion and ice led to the removal or destruction of the earlier light stations. Severe erosion also led to the disappearance of Sharps Island by the mid-20th century. Unmanned since the 1950s, the current lighthouse was tilted between 15 and 20 degrees by heavy ice flows during the 1970s. The light was extinguished in 2007 and was officially discontinued by the United States Coast Guard in 2010. As of 2014, the lighthouse continues to stand in the Chesapeake Bay at its now characteristic tilt but is severely deteriorated.

Exterior

The Sharps Island lighthouse rests on a 30-foot tall cylindrical, concrete-filled, cast iron caisson base with a diameter of 30 feet. A conical tower with a 14-foot diameter stands on the center of the base. Surrounding the tower is a six-foot wide deck, referred to as a gallery, with metal railing lining the perimeter. The concrete of the gallery is breaking and allowing water to penetrate the concrete substructure. There is an opening in the railing above a metal vertical ladder, attached to the side of the caisson. Near the ladder, metal poles extend from the edge of the gallery. Historically, poles would have been paired and included a pulley or winch system that lifted boats out of the water by attaching a line from each pole to the bow and stern. The boat would then have been gradually lifted until it was level with the galley. A July 1885 photograph from the United States Coast Guard shows that there were two sets of these poles which would have allowed two boats to be lifted at the same time. Currently, only one pole from each pair still exists. The other poles and associated equipment for the pulley systems have disappeared. The entire galley was historically covered by a metal standing seam roof with thin metal supports. This roof was installed in May 1882, three months after the light was commissioned. It is unknown when this galley roof was removed.¹

The 37-foot high conical tower is constructed of cast iron with a brick interior lining. The cast iron plates on various sections of the tower and caisson are cracking and corroded due to exposure to the elements, paint deterioration, and lack of maintenance. Originally, the entire structure was painted dark purple but was repainted brown sometime during the latter half of the 20th century. As a federal lighthouse, the building was repainted every seven years according to Coast Guard maintenance regulations, but the Coast Guard decided to stop painting the tower in the 1990s due to high cost. Since the lighthouse was disposed of by the General Services Administration in 2006 and sold to a private owner in 2008, there are no longer regulations that require

¹ Linda Turbyville, *Bay Beacons: Lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay* (Annapolis, MD: Eastwind Publishing, 1995), 52-55; F. Ross Holland, *Maryland Lighthouses of the Chesapeake* (Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust Press, 1997), 74-75; Kraig Anderson, "Sharps Island, MD" Lighthouse Friends, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=430>; Historic Light Station Information & Photography: Maryland, Matthew Jenkins, "Sharps Island Light," United States Coast Guard, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.uscg.mil/history/web/lighthouses/lhmd.asp>; Gredell & Associates, Structural Engineers, "Sharps Island Lighthouse," Maryland Historical Trust, Vertical Files: Sharps Island Lighthouse.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-477

Name: Sharps Island Lighthouse
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 1

the structure to be painted. The overall appearance, continued deterioration, and corrosion suggest that the private owners have not painted the structure since they acquired the lighthouse.²

Four horizontal divisions on the exterior walls of the tower, where rows of cast iron sheets are welded together, serve to delineate the presence of four interior levels. Small windows framed with cast iron and topped by prominent pointed moldings are placed within the horizontal delineations. The rise of the succession of windows corresponds to the rise of the inner spiral wooden staircase. Seven, evenly spaced portholes punctuate the fourth delineation, right below the lantern galley at the top of the tower. The glass has been removed from all windows except the portholes. At an unknown date, these portholes were inappropriately glazed with non-ventilated acrylic which has contributed to poor interior ventilation.³

The tower is topped by a ten-sided lantern room with large glass panes on every side. The height of the light is 54 feet above the average high water level. The first, fixed light was produced by a Fresnel lens and was first lit on February 1, 1882. In 1950, the light was automated. After heavy ice flows tilted the tower in the winter of 1976-1977, the Fresnel lens was replaced with a 250 millimeter plastic beacon, which was placed on a leveling plate fastened to the lens pedestal. The light flashed white with one red sector from 159 to 262 degrees and covered the shoals off Poplar Island and Black Walnut Point at the end of Tilghman Island. The light's range was nine miles. After selling the lighthouse, the Coast Guard continued to use its light, but it was extinguished in January 2007 and no longer aids in navigation.⁴

The lantern room is surrounded by a cantilevered platform, known as the lantern gallery, which is constructed of radial cast-iron segments with the flanges turned downward to create a smooth deck surface. A metal railing lines the perimeter of the gallery. The overhang of the gallery is supported by metal brackets. The interior walls of the lantern room are covered with painted vertical beaded paneling and feature ventilation openings. The paint on the paneling is peeling.⁵

Interior

An open door on the gallery level provides entrance to the first floor of the lighthouse. This floor features the original wooden floor, but the wood is currently severely rotted due to water infiltration from the open door and windows. Water has penetrated the concrete below and infiltrated the lower storage level of the caisson. This is contributing to the overall deterioration of the caisson base. Water infiltration has also caused spalling of the

² Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

³ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

⁴ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gary Crawford, "Leaning Tower of Light," *Tidewater Times*, March 2012, 139-149, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses; Gredell & Associates.

⁵ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-477

Name: Sharps Island Lighthouse
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 2

brick that lines the entire interior of the tower. Most of the brick has been covered with painted paneling, which is peeling and deteriorated.⁶

Below the first floor is a lower level of unknown height and diameter. Access to this level is achieved by a cast iron stairway which follows the curved wall of the caisson cylinder. In this area are storage shelves and three cisterns; it is unknown how old any of these features are. The floor is covered with iron. This lower level is severely damaged due to water infiltration from an open coal chute from the exterior gallery.⁷

An interior wooden stairway that follows the curve of the tower wall allows access to the second, third, and fourth levels. The inside wall of the stairs is paneled with vertical boards. The floor of all upper levels is constructed of radial segments of cast iron bolted together with the flanges turned upwards to create a smooth ceiling below. The cast iron floors are covered by tongue and groove wood set on sleepers. The floors are deteriorated due to poor ventilation, water infiltration, and exposure to the elements.⁸

Deterioration is worst on the fourth level, also called the Watch Level, partly due the fact that the seven porthole windows were glazed with non-ventilated acrylic. The walls and ceiling of this level are finished with tongue and groove beaded board paneling. The paint on the paneling is peeling. A ladder from this level provides access to the lantern gallery.⁹

⁶ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

⁷ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

⁸ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

⁹ Turbyville, 52-55; Holland, 74-75; Anderson; Gredell & Associates.

8. Significance

Inventory No. T-477

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates	1882, 1976-1977, 2007	Architect/Builder	Builder's Iron Company
Construction dates	1882		

Evaluation for:

National Register Maryland Register not evaluated

State of Significance

The Sharps Island lighthouse is significant within maritime history and architecture. Built in 1882, the lighthouse replaced two earlier structures on Sharps Island in the Chesapeake Bay. For the next 125 years, the Sharps Island Light aided mariners entering and exiting the Choptank River on the eastern shore of Maryland by highlighting the shoals near Poplar and Tilghman Island. Even after the station was tilted by heavy ice flows in the late 1970s, it continued to act as a navigational aid until its light was permanently extinguished in 2007. The station's caisson form was one of many constructed in the late 19th and early 20th century, as the caisson form was judged to be the most sturdy for withstanding heavy ice flows. Though caisson structures took on a variety of forms, the Sharps Island Lighthouse is representative of a conical caisson form. In recognition of its significance, the Sharps Island Lighthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 29, 1982.

History

The Sharps Island Lighthouse was built near Sharps Island in the Chesapeake Bay, about three miles southwest of Tilghman Island on the eastern shore of Maryland. The island no longer exists as it was subjected to severe erosion throughout its history. In 1675, the island was recorded as being comprised of nearly 900 acres. By 1848, there were only 438 acres. That area had shrunk to 91 acres by 1900. In 1922, the newspaper in Easton, Maryland reported that the latest governmental figures showed that the island had shrunk even further to 53 acres. The island disappeared completely by the 1950s.¹⁰

The current station was the third attempt to sustain a lighthouse on or near the island. When Sharps Island was still fairly large in 1837, Congress paid \$600 for ten acres of land on the northwest tip and appropriated \$5,000 for construction of a lighthouse. This first lighthouse was a comprised of a small wooden keeper's house with a lamp housed affixed to the roof. According to the Coast Guard, the lamp was 30 feet above the ground, but there is no known written or graphic documentation that shows how the actual structure appeared. The light was fixed and set in fourteen-inch reflectors until it was refitted with a fifth-order lens in 1855. Recognizing the

¹⁰ Pat Bryan, "Sharp's Island Hotel Doomed from the Start," *Star-Democrat*, November 19, 1982, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Sharps Island; Turbyville, 52; Anderson.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-477

Name: Sharps Island Lighthouse
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

potential effects of erosion, the entire structure was built on wheels to allow for movement. In 1848, the entire structure was moved further inland to escape erosion. This structure was destroyed by water by 1866.¹¹

Two years prior, in 1864, the Lighthouse Board (the agency that administered light stations at that time) reported that the light station was in danger of destruction by encroaching water. The Board recommended that a new lighthouse be built in the screwpile design. On April 7, 1866, Congress appropriated \$15,000 for the new lighthouse. The screwpile light station was constructed at a site one-third mile off the tip of Sharps Island and four miles off Tilghman Island. It was completed in late 1866. The newly commissioned light featured a fixed white light through a fifth-order Fresnel lens.¹²

Though sturdier than the first light station, the new hexagonal screwpile was still susceptible to damage by heavy ice flows. In 1879, two of the structure's diagonal cast-iron braces were carried away by ice flows, which necessitated the creation of detached ice-breakers about 200 feet south of the lighthouse. Despite this precautionary measure, heavy flows on February 10, 1881 sheared the light station from its pile foundation and carried it five miles down the bay until it grounded. Amazingly, the keepers inside the station survived the entire journey.¹³

The Lighthouse Board immediately sought and received an appropriation of \$35,000 for a replacement light. The Board decided to build the new light in the caisson form, as it was judged to be the heaviest and most effective for withstanding the force of heavy ice flow. The building contract was awarded to the Builder's Iron Company of Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁴

In August 1881, workers arrived at the present site of the Sharps Island Light, about three miles southwest of Tilghman Island, and began to construct a temporary work platform. Meanwhile, the caisson and tower were constructed separately at Oxford, Maryland. In September 1881, the caisson portion was floated to the site to be installed and filled with concrete. This phase was completed on November 2, but work could not continue, as the tower portion had not yet arrived. The tower finally arrived on November 21, 1881. On December 6, the final sections of ironwork arrived and were in place by the end of the month. Also finished at the end of December was the masonry lining inside the interior of the tower. In January 1882, the workers were called away to repair other navigational aids but enough had been completed to allow the keepers to move in. The light was first lit on February 1, 1882. In May 1882, the work crew returned to finish various miscellaneous tasks,

¹¹ Anderson; Turbyville, 52; National Register Detail for Sharps Island Light, listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 29, 1982, Maryland Historical Trust, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://mht.maryland.gov/nr/NRDetail.aspx?HDID=692>.

¹² Turbyville, 52; Holland, 75; Jenkins; Anderson.

¹³ Jenkins; Turbyville, 52-54; Holland, 75; Anderson.

¹⁴ Turbyville, 52; Holland, 75; Jenkins; Anderson

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Name: Sharps Island Lighthouse
Continuation Sheet

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including the installation of the roof over the gallery and installation of the water tank in the tower's lower level.¹⁵

For the next 125 years, the Sharps Island Lighthouse served as a navigational aid for mariners entering and exiting the Choptank River off the Chesapeake Bay. With its range of nine miles, the light specifically lit the shoals near Poplar Island and Black Walnut Point at the tip of Tilghman Island. In addition to the light, a fog horn guided sailors during conditions of low visibility. On clear days, the station's distinct conical caisson form could be used as a visual aid.

Though there are many caisson lighthouses that continue to exist, the Sharps Island lighthouse is a typical representation of a conical form. Many other caisson lighthouses such as the Sandy Point Light (AA-166) or Baltimore Harbor Light (AA-945) have wider caissons and wider, square tower bases that do not grow smaller as the towers extend upward. The conical tower shape is limited to only a few Chesapeake Bay Lighthouses, and the Sharp Island Lighthouse is representative of all of them. The Bloody Point Bar light (QA-297) is an almost identical match to the station at Sharps Island, but its interior burned in 1960 and, therefore, has less integrity than the Sharps Island Light.¹⁶

In 1950, keepers ceased to live at the Sharps Island station following the light's automation by the United States Coast Guard.¹⁷ During the winter of 1976-1977, the light station acquired its present tilt of between 15 and 20 degrees due to heavy ice flows.¹⁸ The new tilt required the removal of the light's fourth-order lens on May 3, 1977 and replacement with a 250 mm plastic lens. The new lens was placed a leveling plate and secured to the original light pedestal. Though the tilt was alarming to mariners and the Coast Guard, structural investigations conducted at the time concluded that the lighthouse was structurally sound.¹⁹

In 1982, the historical significance of the lighthouse was recognized when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.²⁰

¹⁵ Holland, 75; Jenkins; Anderson; Turbyville, 54.

¹⁶ Sandy Point Light (AA-166), Baltimore Harbor Light (AA-945), and Bloody Point Bar Light (QA-297) Maryland Inventory of Historic Places forms, Maryland Historical Trust.

¹⁷ Anderson;

¹⁸ Most sources name the winter of 1976-1977 as the time period when the lighthouse acquired its tilt, but the Coast Guard specified the winter of 1978-1979 in its 2008 proposal to discontinue the light. No archival documents or other primary sources could be located to confirm the exact time when the station was damaged by ice, so an exact determination of when the station tilted cannot be made at this time.

¹⁹ Turbyville, 54; Anderson; Jenkins; Holland, 185; "Local Notice to Mariners," United States Coast Guard, District: 5, Week: 09/08, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?Do=InmArchives&path=2008>.

²⁰ National Register Detail for Sharps Island Light, listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 29, 1982, Maryland Historical Trust, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://mht.maryland.gov/nr/NRDetail.aspx?HDID=692>.

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Name: Sharps Island Lighthouse
Continuation Sheet

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In 1996, the Coast Guard contemplated demolishing the lighthouse because of the high cost of continual maintenance, such as the required repainting every seven years at the cost of \$8,000. Also prominent were concerns about the tilt and overall stability. The estimate at that time to correct the tilt was between \$55,000 and \$250,000. Compounding the problem was the assumption among Coast Guard officials that the station was no longer necessary for navigation and, therefore, had outlived its usefulness.²¹

The possibility of the lighthouse's intentional destruction elicited a public outcry. *Lighthouse Digest* magazine placed the Sharp's Island Lighthouse on their 'Doomsday' list as part of the effort to draw public attention to endangered lighthouses that were endangered of being lost by demolition or neglect.²² City officials from Cambridge, Maryland proposed moving the lighthouse inland to create a tourist attraction, similar to the Hooper's Island lighthouse that had been moved to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland.²³ The Maritime Museum actually offered to take the lighthouse as long as somebody else paid for the moving expenses.²⁴ By May 1996, the Coast Guard announced that the lighthouse would stay where it is, citing the insistence of boaters that the station was a necessary aid to navigation in that area of the Chesapeake Bay.²⁵

In 2006, the General Services Administration announced that the Coast Guard had declared the Sharps Island lighthouse "in excess" to the needs of the Federal Government. According to the disposal process outlined by the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act (NHLPA) of 2000, the light station would be transferred at no cost to another federal agency, state or local government, nonprofit corporation, educational agency, or community development organization. The receiving entity would have to comply with all aspects of the NHLPA process. If no suitable entity could be found, then the historic light could be sold in a public sale. Since the Sharps Island Lighthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, its disposal had to comply with the NHLPA process. When no suitable entity could be found to take ownership of the station, the Sharps Island Lighthouse was put up for sale in September 2008 through an on-line public auction.²⁶

²¹ Douglas Hanks III, "Coast Guard Eyes Lighthouse for Demolition," *Star-Democrat*, February 6, 1996, 1A, 8A, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses; Douglas Hanks III, "Coast Guard: Sharps's Island tower to stay," *Star-Democrat*, May 14, 1996, 1A, 9A, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses; Gredell & Associates.

²² Timothy Harrison, "The Doomsday List - America's Most Endangered Lighthouses," *Lighthouse Digest*, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.lighthousedigest.com/news/doomsdaystory.cfm>.

²³ John Griep, "Sharp's Island lighthouse seen as Tourist Draw," *Star-Democrat*, 1A, 10A, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses.

²⁴ Douglas Hanks III, "Maritime museum interested in Sharp's Island Lighthouse," *Star-Democrat*, February 11, 1996, 1A, 11A, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses.

²⁵ Douglas Hanks III, "Coast Guard: Sharps's Island tower to stay," *Star-Democrat*, May 14, 1996, 1A, 9A, Talbot County Free Library, Vertical Files: Lighthouses.

²⁶ "National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000," National Park Service, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/history/Maritime/nhlpa/nhlpa.htm>; Sharps Island Lighthouse, Covenant File, Maryland Historical Trust; Anderson.

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Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 4

The winner of the sale, with a bid of \$80,000, was AFB, Incorporated from Bear, Delaware. No other information is known about this entity. The corporation has not completed any known maintenance or renovations on the structure since the purchase. As a result of the sale, the Maryland Historical Trust gained a preservation covenant on the station for purposes of continual preservation.²⁷

In November 2007, the light was extinguished, and the Coast Guard decided not to relight it due to the structural condition of the station. In February 2008, the Coast Guard announced a proposal to discontinue the light. By November 2010, the light was officially discontinued.²⁸

Since 2010, no known activity has taken place at the site. As of 2014, the lighthouse is severely deteriorated and vacant.

²⁷ Anderson; Sharps Island Lighthouse, Covenant File, Maryland Historical Trust.

²⁸ "Local Notice to Mariners," United States Coast Guard, District: 5, Week: 09/08, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?Do=InmArchives&path=2008>; "Local Notice to Mariners," United States Coast Guard, District: 5, Week: 02/10, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?Do=InmArchives&path=2010>.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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See Continuation Sheet 9-1

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of surveyed property N/A
Acreeage of historical setting N/A
Quadrangle name Tilghman

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Sharps Island Lighthouse is located at the GPS coordinates of 38.6391 degrees N, 76.3757 degrees W. The site is bounded by the structure itself and does not include any of the land on which it is set.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Rebecca Schmitt, Preservation Easement Intern		
organization	Maryland Historical Trust	date	July 28, 2014
street & number	100 Community Place	telephone	(410) 514-7642
city or town	Crownsville	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to:

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

Maryland Historical Trust

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Photo Log

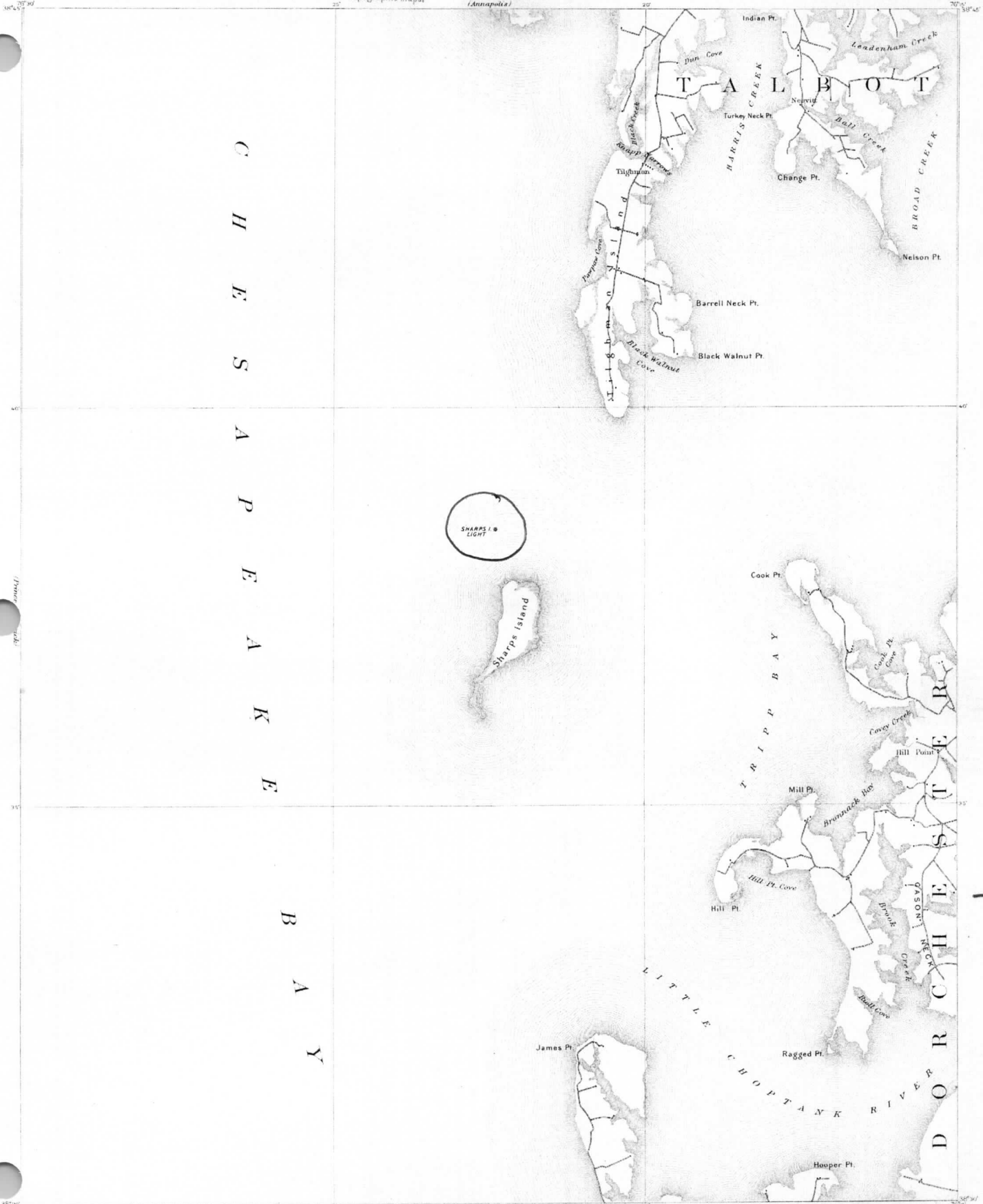
Photo: T-0477_1885-07-03_01

Historic Photograph of Sharps Island Lighthouse, taken by Major Jared A. Smith on July 3, 1885.

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
J.W. POWELL, DIRECTOR.

U. S. G. S.
FILE COPY
Editor of Topographic Maps.

MARYLAND
SHARPS ISLAND SHEET



Henry Gannett, Chief Topographer
Gilbert Thompson, Chief Geographer in charge
Tranquilization by U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey
Topography by U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey
Compiled by A.C. Martin, in 1892.

Scale 45,000
Entire area less than 20 feet above sea level

USGS
Historical File
Topographic Division

Edition of Apr. 1933

500
Sharps Island, MD.

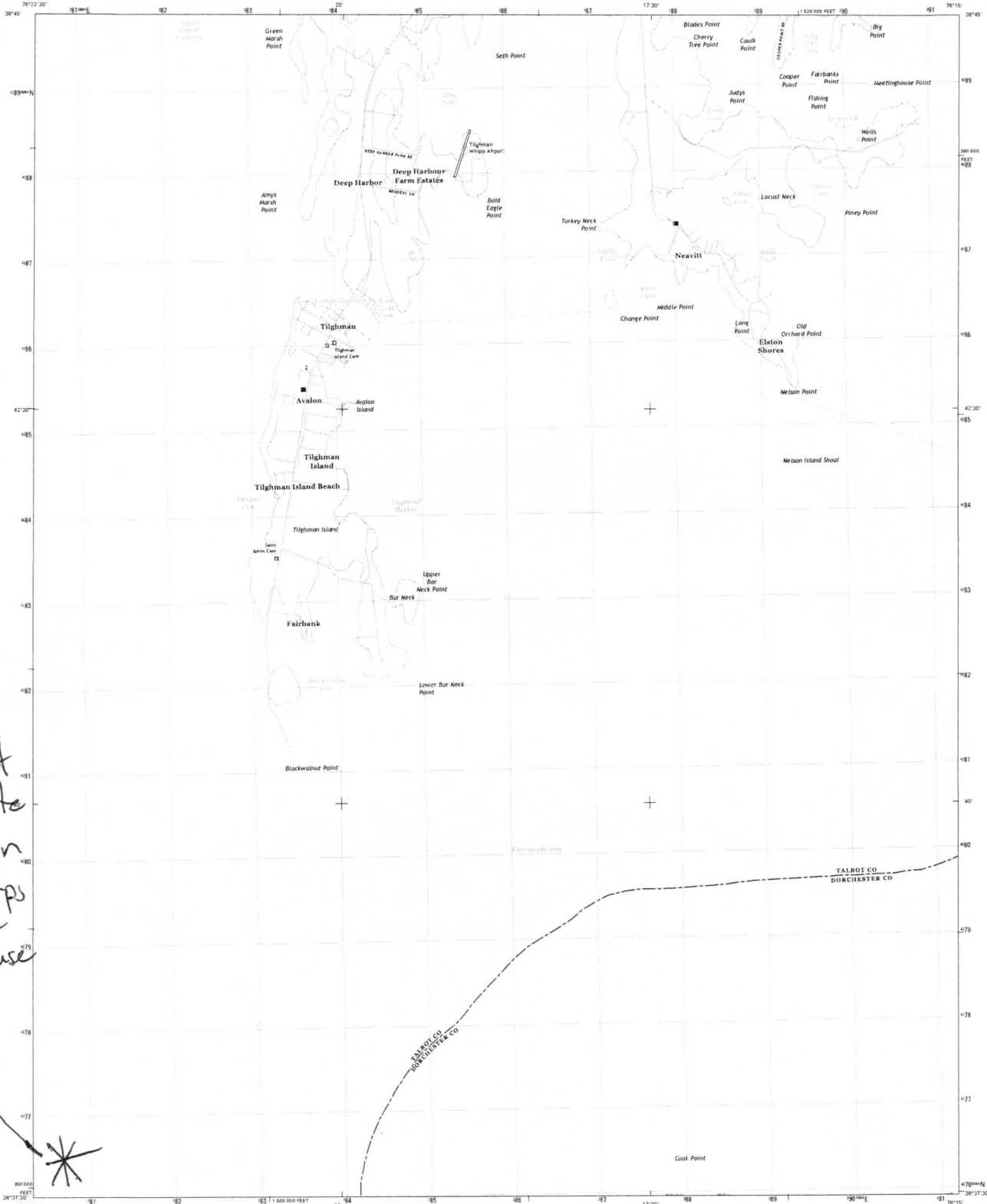
USGS Map 2014 Sharps Island Lighthouse T-477



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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TILGHMAN QUADRANGLE
MARYLAND
7.5-MINUTE SERIES

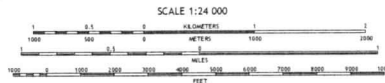
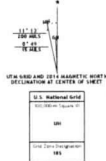


Current
approximate
location
of Sharps
Island
Lighthouse

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
Metric Coordinate System of 1983 (MGRS), Projection and
1:500 meter grid. Universal Transverse Mercator, Zone 18S
to 500 feet above Mean Sea Level. Coordinate System of 1983

This map is not a legal document. Boundaries may be
generalized for this map scale. Private lands within government
jurisdiction may not be shown. Obtain permission before
entering private lands.

Map Date: July 2011
Map Scale: 1:24,000
Map Series: 7.5-Minute Series
Map Edition: 2011
Map Projection: UTM
Map Datum: NAD83
Map Contour: 5 Feet
Map Boundaries: Multiple sources; see metadata file 1011-1011



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Expressway	Local Connector
Secondary Hwy	Local Road
Highway	Local
Interstate Route	US Route
	State Route

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
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7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8

TILGHMAN, MD
2014



Sharp's Island Lighthouse, Maryland.
Photographed by Major J. A. Smith, July 3-1885

T-477

Sharps Island Lighthouse

Talbot Co., Maryland

Major Jared A. Smith

7/3/1885

Sharps Island Lighthouse

Location of Negative Unknown

1/1