

## The Lighthouse at Cape Henry

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As early as the mid-1600s, a lighthouse at the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay at Cape Henry was recommended as an aid for navigation. It took almost another century before the colonies of Virginia and Maryland came to agreement on construction funding, tariff rates, and overall operation of the lighthouse. With £3600 finally appropriated by Maryland and £6000 by Virginia, advertisements began appearing in 1773 for the movement of 6,000 tons of stone from a quarry on the Rappahanock to Cape Henry. A board of directors was appointed to oversee construction and to suggest other improvements to navigation. The directors' list included prominent members from Hampton Roads: Thomas Nelson, Joseph Hutchings, Thomas Newton, Jr., James Holt, and Matthew Phripp. The board was later augmented with the addition of Paul Loyall, George Kelly, William White, Lemuel Cornick, and Thomas Reynolds Walker.

In addition to the stone, other materials were gathered at the site for the construction of buoys, the keeper's house, barns and storehouses for horses, material, and equipment, and a building to house the workers. A sizable labor force was needed to move the stone across the sand and included several individuals categorized as "Negro Hire." As with any construction venture, unanticipated costs quickly diminished the available funds. Despite all the materials on hand, lighthouse construction had not commenced. In June 1775, another £5000 was allowed "to purchase such other Materials as are necessary..." The last allocation of funds by the Virginia House of Burgesses, and approved by Lord Dunmore, is remarkable considering the increasing unrest and lack of control within the Colony of Virginia. Dunmore was already in his second week of running the colony from on board the HMS *Fowey*, having been driven out of Williamsburg by the Patriots. Soon all consideration for constructing a lighthouse was erased by the coming of the Revolutionary War.

Several members of the lighthouse board would find themselves embroiled on both sides of the conflict. Nelson would find himself in the Continental Congress, Joseph Hutchings was captured by the British at the Skirmish at Kemp's Landing, Loyall, while Mayor of Norfolk, had his city burned, Newton was leading a militia unit, and Phripp was suspected of treason. All were focused on anything but the lighthouse.

Despite the lighthouse project being put on hold, Cape Henry would prove to be an important strategic location throughout the Revolutionary War.