



## Maryland's National Register Properties



Photo credit: Robert J. Hurry, Calvert Marine Museum, 09/2001

### Drum Point Lighthouse

Inventory No.: **CT-68**

Date Listed: **4/23/1976**

Location: **14200 S. Solomons Island Road (Calvert Marine Museum), Solomons, Calvert County**

Category: **Structure**

Period/Date of Construction: **mid 19th century**

**Description:** The Drum Point Lighthouse was located at the southern end of Drum Point, Calvert County, at the mouth of the Patuxent River. The light was moved in 1973 to the Calvert Marine Museum on the western bank of Back Creek on the east side of Solomons Island Road (MD 2), north of Solomons Island. The hexagonal wooden structure is held up by iron supports of the screwpile type. An auger-like flange was bored into the soft Patuxent River bottom forming the support for the columnar iron base from which the weight of the entire lighthouse, which is fastened to the column, is diffused. Chesapeake Bay screwpile lighthouse construction is typically hexagonal or square. The

**Significance:** The Drum Point Lighthouse is one of four remaining screwpile lighthouses on the Chesapeake Bay. Any lighthouse, and particularly a historic structure, is fast disappearing as navigational equipment due to the modern communications channels and satellite-related aids. The Drum Point Lighthouse and other screwpile lighthouses flourished on the Chesapeake Bay from the second half of the 19th century to the mid 20th century, serving as important navigational aids. Although the Drum Point Lighthouse, constructed in 1883, has escaped demolition, its original light, which required a resident attendant, was automated in 1962. The first screwpile lighthouse

keeper's quarters, six-sided, sheathed with weatherboards, and covered with a standing-seam metal roof, is solidly built with mortised and tenoned joints, a hexagonal roof, and two dormer windows. An unroofed open gallery encircles the lower story of the structure. On top of the house is the cupola containing the lighthouse lamp. A small, second open gallery surrounds this lantern room. The original light, described as a "fixed red" on a late-19th century chart, was altered to white with three red panels in 1911. Originally placed 1/16 of a nautical mile from shore, the lighthouse had by 1865 become marooned on the beach as the water gradually receded. The present site gives the lighthouse a much more appropriate setting at the edge of the water.

on the Chesapeake Bay was erected in 1855 in Virginia waters. In the mid 19th century these practical lighthouses began to replace light ships, which had been the principal navigation aids, on the Bay. The United States Lighthouse Board, a branch of the United States Treasury Department, built the Drum Point Lighthouse on five acres in the mouth of the Patuxent River. The State of Maryland conveyed the property on which the lighthouse stood to the Federal government on February 15, 1883. This transaction followed the provisions of an 1874 Maryland law that provides for the transfer of State property to become Federal property for the purpose of erecting lighthouses and other navigational aids. Alexander Mitchell (1780-1868) invented the screwpile principle. His idea was first used in 1838 at the Malpin Sand Lighthouse at the mouth of the River Thames, England. The principle was later applied to bridges, viaducts, and piers. The screwpile principle is well suited to southern bodies of water and to soft bottoms.

