

Thomas Point: Chesapeake Bay's Most Famous Lighthouse

If there is one lighthouse that symbolizes the beauty and history of Chesapeake Bay, it is Thomas Point Shoal Light.

Located midbay about 8 miles southeast of Annapolis, Maryland, "T.P." (as locals call it) is an immensely popular waypoint for local sailors, and one of only 10 lighthouses in the nation with national landmark status.

The light marks Thomas Point Shoal, a shallow spit below the Chesapeake Bay Bridge that squeezes the deep-draft Baltimore shipping channel close to the Eastern Shore. It is currently being restored by volunteers and is open for public tours.

T.P. is the last working "screw-pile" lighthouse — a distinctive regional type of marine architecture — out of more than 40 that once graced the Chesapeake. Seven large iron pilings were literally screwed into the muddy bottom of the bay, on which was built the wooden, six-sided, three-story cottage lighthouse, about 20 feet above water. The beacon is 43 feet above mean high water, visible for 11 miles. The lighthouse also serves as an NOAA data buoy for real-time weather conditions.

Built in 1875, T.P. housed two light-tenders (on two-week shifts) until it was automated in 1986. A triangular cast-iron



breaker and stone riprap protect the structure from ice floes in winter.

Thomas Point was taken over from the Coast Guard by the city of Annapolis in 2004. Restoration is being funded through a pub-

With exterior work (opposite) nearly completed, the iconic Thomas Point Shoal Light (above), located on Chesapeake Bay, looks better than ever. Restoration projects are now focused on the interior.

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lic-private partnership managed by the Chesapeake Chapter of the U.S. Lighthouse Society. Work is about 80 percent complete, and exhibits are being added as work progresses.

For some locals who've spent most of their waterborne lives sailing past T.P., saving this beautiful landmark has become a serious mission.

"I never dreamed I would be honored to actually do preservation work there," said Hobie Statzer, work coordinator for the Light-

house Society. "I have probably been on board the lighthouse more than 75 times and still get excited when we go out to work."

Stephen Blakely

If You Go:

Thomas Point tours cost \$70 per person. Three tours a day are run on alternating weekends from May to September; call first, as visits are weather-dependent. Tours leave from the Annapolis Maritime Museum in Eastport, and a passenger boat ride (18 to a tour) takes about half an hour each way; round trips last about three hours. Visitors need to be at least 12 years old, 4 feet tall, in fit condition and not wearing open-back shoes.

S.B.