

LIGHTHOUSE

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ered with red, green and blue lenses hung 43 feet above and were visible for 13 miles.

At the time, there was no screw-pile technology to build lighthouses over water.

Fear that the lightships would aid the enemy during the Civil War the vessels were removed. By the end of the war, all of the lightships had been destroyed, Eure said.

Then, in 1866, came the first lighthouse erected over water in the Roanoke River. But, a fire destroyed the original lighthouse in 1885. A replica of that house sits on land as a historical exhibit in Plymouth, Eure added.

Plans next called for a newly constructed lighthouse intended for the Croatan Sound to replace the Roanoke River burned structure. Only this time ice caused the lighthouse to topple into the water.

In 1886, the current Roanoke River Lighthouse was built and lit a year later. Manned by two keepers, it became fully operational. They used whale oil to fuel its lights and collected rainwater for their freshwater use.

"They had to operate a place to live and work," Eure said.

While under the authority of the U.S. Coast Guard, the Roanoke River Lighthouse was decommissioned in 1941. After that, the Lighthouse sat dormant. By 1955, there were only three lighthouses left in area sounds. Instead of an original objective to aid vessels, the Coast Guard deemed the watery structures a hazard and ordered them removed or destroyed, Eure said.

Elijah Tate purchased the three remaining lighthouse for \$10 apiece. During his efforts to move the lighthouses two toppled into the water. Only the Roanoke River Lighthouse remained, but with time running out on Tate's commission that would result in financial penalty, he sold the structure to Emmett Wiggins, a World War II U.S. Navy engineer captain and underwater salvager, Eure said.

Part of a remarkable feat, Wiggins successfully disconnected the Lighthouse from its screw pilings in preparation to boat it across the Albemarle Sound. It took 36 hours to bring it across the Sound and to the mouth of Filbert's Creek where it had no land access.

Eure recounted an old newspaper clipping that detailed Wiggins' transport.

"When he brought the Lighthouse to the dock, it wouldn't have caused any more excitement than if the president was drowning in Edenton Bay," Eure recalled.

Wiggins first leased the Lighthouse out before moving into it in 1960 as his primary residence until his death in 1995.

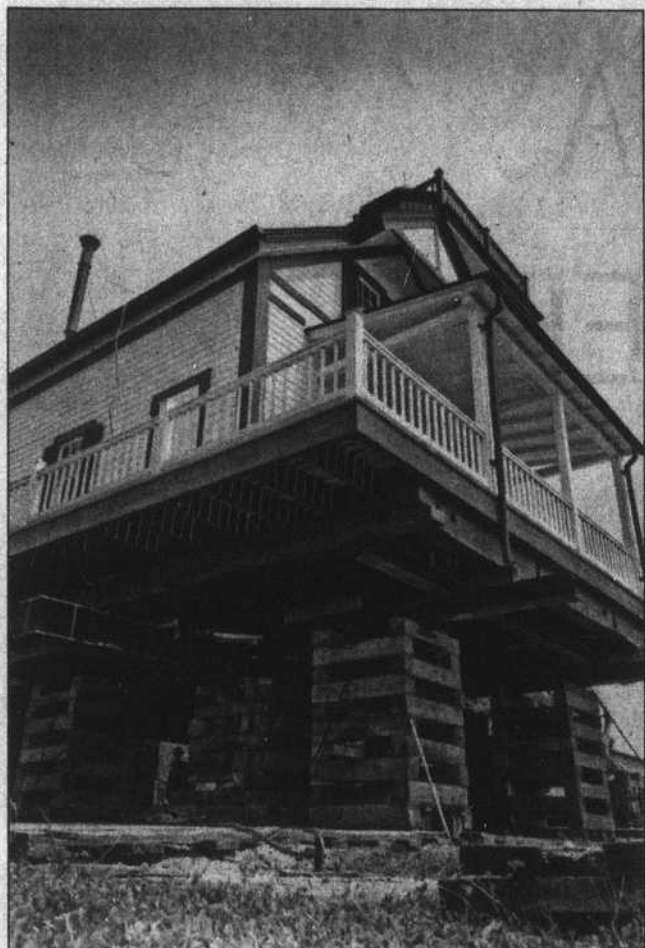


PHOTO BY KIP SHAW

A look from below shows the intimidating height of the lighthouse.

"The phonebook listed his address as the Lighthouse," Eure added.

The Lighthouse was missing its original Fresnel lens and bell when Wiggins assumed ownership. Although no one knew of the whereabouts of the original items, the town of Edenton helped secure replacements and loaned them to Wiggins with the understanding the town retained ownership.

Today, the bell, cast in 1901 by the McShane Foundry in Baltimore, sits as a monument at Queen Anne's Park. It was operated by a weighted mechanism similar to a grandfather clock.

The substituted lens was original to the defunct Holland Island Bar Lighthouse, of Maryland. It remains in storage and could eventually be up-fitted during the interior restoration.

Upon Wiggins' death, his son unsuccessfully completed a sale of the Lighthouse as a potential Bed & Breakfast or tavern due to permitting issues, Eure said.

The Edenton Historical Commission next wanted to buy the Lighthouse, but had no money. With the help of a \$300,000 grant courtesy of the General Assembly, the Lighthouse officially became the property of the Edenton Historical Commission in May 2007. Shortly thereafter, it was moved to Colonial Park, Eure said.

The Lighthouse costs \$225,000 with the remaining \$75,000 used to cover its relocation.

It was later gifted to the state in 2008.

Federal stimulus dollars covered the Lighthouse's exterior makeover. Although plans called for the Lighthouse to remain as



PHOTO BY KIP SHAW

A crew prepares to move the lighthouse last Tuesday.

a land exhibit there, soil contamination prompted changes.

It was decided to move the Lighthouse back over water and at its current site. The watery relocation costs an additional \$271,000.

But, there's more to do before the project is completed. Plans call for a ramp that will allow

visitors to walk onto the Lighthouse.

An interior restoration remains among the next phases, which calls for another \$454,000. State budget shortfalls remain the next hurdle.

"We're all sitting with our fingers crossed that the money comes in," Eure said. "Once the ramp is built, we can start giving tours."

Meanwhile, the Edenton Historical Commission is collecting furnishings that will be used for the interior restoration.

The Lighthouse joins the James Iredell House, Historic Edenton Visitors Center and the 1767 Chowan Courthouse as part of the town's historic sites governed by the state.

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