

A brief history of the Delaware Breakwater East End Lighthouse



In 1825, Congress authorized the construction of a breakwater at the mouth of the Delaware Bay off Cape Henlopen in order to create a safe harbor for ships seeking refuge during storms. Begun in 1828 and completed in 1841, the Delaware Breakwater was a two-part structure comprised of a breakwater and an icebreaker pier. In 1897, the open space between these two sections was closed.

Due to an increase in the size and number of ships seeking refuge in Breakwater Harbor, Congress authorized the construction of a 2nd breakwater approximately 1.25 miles to the northeast of the Delaware Breakwater on a shoal known as "The Shears." Completed in 1901, this new, outer breakwater created a much larger and deeper safe harbor called the National Harbor of Refuge.

Located on the original, inner breakwater, the Delaware Breakwater East End Lighthouse was completed in 1885. The red-brown conical structure is 22 feet in diameter at the base and its tower is 45 feet tall. It was decommissioned in 1996 and was formally conveyed by the United States government to the state of Delaware in 1999.