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A Tale of Two Lighthouses A Forgotten Chapter in Solomons' Past

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The 1883-built Drum Point Lighthouse is a well known landmark and symbol associated with Calvert County and the town of Solomons. Few people are aware, however, that Solomons was also closely connected with two other lighthouses, of a totally different type, that were built between 1901 and 1905: Hooper Island Light, which became operational on June 1, 1902, and Point No Point, whose beam first flashed on April 24, 1905. The builders of these lighthouses were known as The Toomey Brothers, and Solomons residents followed their waterfront activities with avid interest. But the origins of this all-but-forgotten story lie hundreds of miles away in New England, in the state of Connecticut.

The Toomey Brothers company consisted of three brothers, Humphrey, Daniel, and Dennis, part of a family of six children born to John and Hannah Toomey, who came to the United States in the great wave of Irish immigration in the early nineteenth century. They lived in New York City before eventually settling in New Haven County, Connecticut. Little is known of the family's history during this time, but the 1880 census reveals that Hannah, aged thirty-eight, was by then a single parent. At the time, the three older sons, John, Jeremiah, and Humphrey, were employed in a quarry, probably the well-known Beattie Granite Quarry on Leete's Island, near Guilford. Tragically,

John and Jeremiah both died of double pneumonia on February 2 and 3, 1892, respectively.

In 1887 Humphrey Toomey and his wife Hannah purchased seven acres of land near Leete's Island where they started a quarry of their own. In the next five years they purchased two other tracts of land. Humphrey, Daniel, and Dennis appeared to operate the quarry together and by 1895 were trading under the name Toomey Brothers. The granite from this quarry was not of high quality and

would have been used for such things as rip-rap. Perhaps it is no surprise, therefore, that the brothers became more involved in the marine construction business.

In 1899 they successfully completed the construction of Plum Beach Light in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island, despite almost losing their construction schooner and its crew in a violent storm in December 1898. The end of 1899 also saw their completion of the New Haven Outer Breakwall Light (also known as the Sperry Light). Both were built of iron, in the caisson style, of which more later.

The story now shifts to the Chesapeake Bay. Congress in 1898 appropriated an amount not to exceed \$60,000 for the construction of a lighthouse approximately three nautical miles west of Upper Hooper Island to warn mariners of the dangerous shoal waters nearby. Plans and specifications were probably based on the recently constructed New

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Hooper Island Lighthouse, shown shortly before completion in 1902. Photograph taken from the construction wharf with its wooden derrick prominent in the foreground.

Photo: U. S. National Archives



Point No Point Lighthouse before automation.

Photo courtesy U. S. Coast Guard