



credit: Warren Lee, ALA

Middle Bay Lighthouse, Mobile Bay

Condition and Action Plan

The lighthouse needs repairs to its steel and wrought iron support structure; repair or replacement of wood elements of the house; replacement of broken window lights; and caulking and painting. The current condition is not an immediate threat to the structure, but left untreated, some issues can become critical.

In January 2009, the Alabama Historical Commission contracted with Commercial Diving Services (CDS) of Mobile to conduct an underwater survey condition of the lighthouse. Based on the CDS report, AHC budgeted \$120,000 this year for the following actions:

1. Replace four missing cross bracing rods—one above water and three below
2. Coat all cross bracing rods with underwater epoxy coating
3. Coat all support legs with underwater epoxy coating
4. Replace all anodes and wire attachments
5. Sandblast all steel members beneath the house and coat with underwater epoxy coating

Projects Completed

1991-92 - The Centennial Commission installed or repaired shutters, doors, and windows; caulked; and repainted as in-kind service for a National Park Service (NPS) grant to the AHC.

1993-94 - AHC completed substantial stabilization and repairs on the cast iron structure, including new tie rod connections and new tie rods. Funded by two NPS grants and agency match.

2003 - Funded by two Transportation Enhancement (TE) grants, a Department of Commerce grant, agency funds, and donations, the AHC completed significant restoration that included:

- Repaired and replaced structural framing in platform and roof; installed new slate roof
- Replacement and stabilization of the tie rods, and installed cathodic protection
- Replaced platform decking
- Repaired dormers, doors, shutters and windows
- Replacement of damaged wood
- Painting of exterior and interior wood

2006 - Repairs to roof made due to damage from Hurricane Ivan.



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Constructed in 1885, the Middle Bay Lighthouse is a screw-pile lighthouse. Due to high labor costs in the South, the lighthouse was constructed in the North and shipped to the bay. Seven wrought iron legs (piles) screwed into the bottom of the bay support the hexagonal wood-framed structure. The lighthouse is still used today as a navigation aid with a battery-powered beacon maintained by the Coast Guard.

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Timeline:

- December 1, 1885** - Operation begins with a kerosene-powered light and a fourth-order Fresnel lens.
- 1905** - The Light-House Board removes the lens and lantern room and replaces them with two acetylene lights on a pole protruding from the roof.
- 1935** - The Lighthouse Service electrifies and automates the light. With no keeper living on site, the lighthouse begins to fall into disrepair.
- 1966** - The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documents the light. These materials are housed in the Library of Congress HABS-HAER collection as Mobile Light No. 6639.
- 1967** - The US Coast Guard decommissions Middle Bay Light and plans to demolish it. Local advocates intervene and save the light from demolition.
- 1974** - The National Park Service places Middle Bay Lighthouse on the National Register of Historic Places.
- December 1977** - The General Services Administration and the National Park Service approve transfer of ownership to the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC).
- 1984** - As Middle Bay Light nears its 100th anniversary, locals form Mobile Middle Bay Lighthouse Centennial Commission. Using donated labor, services, funds and materials, they refurbish the lighthouse.
- December 1985** - 100th anniversary celebrated.
- 2000** - The Alabama Lighthouse Association (ALA) forms with a mission to preserve all lighthouses in Alabama.
- April 2006** - The AHC uses FEMA and Risk Management funds to repair damage to the roof caused by Hurricane Ivan. ALA sent the AHC the first inspection reports after the storm made landfall in 2004.
- July 2008** - ALA submits proposal to the AHC to move the lighthouse to Battleship Memorial Park.
- January 2009** - AHC commissions an inspection of the underwater structure, and begins a project to implement the inspector's recommendations.