# Guiding lights

## The Green Point Lighthouse

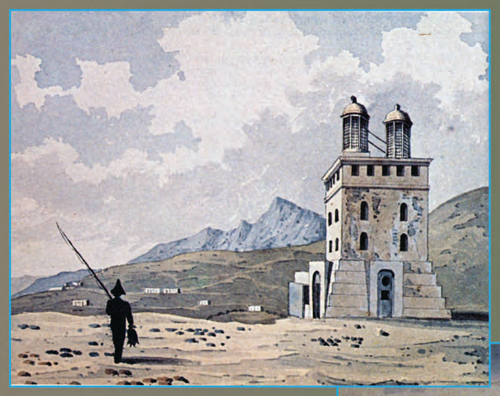
### after nearly two centuries of service to maritime safety

Before you stands the Green Point Lighthouse, South Africa's oldest and still operating lighthouse, commissioned in 1824.

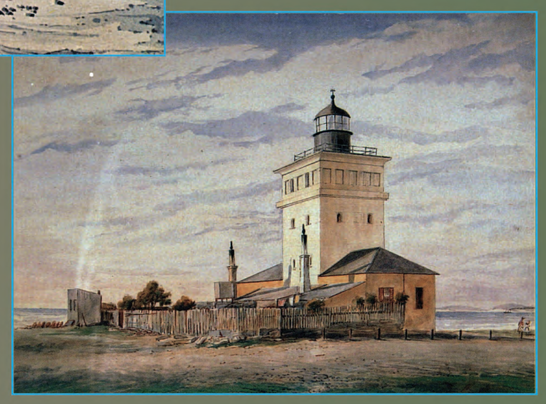
Table Bay remains to this day a treacherous lee shore which, over the centuries, has made it a maritime graveyard. This became particularly the case with the growth in international shipping that followed the Napoleonic Wars. The wrecking of the sailing vessel, *Feniscowles*, on the rocky shores of Green Point on 21 November 1819, was the final straw and prompted Sir Rufane Donkin (Acting Governor 1820-21) to take it upon himself to at last heed the call for a lighthouse to be erected at Green Point.

Tenders were called for and the proposal for a two-lantern structure submitted by the renowned architect, builder and engineer at the Cape, Hermann Schutte, was accepted at the projected cost of 13 400 Rix-dollars.

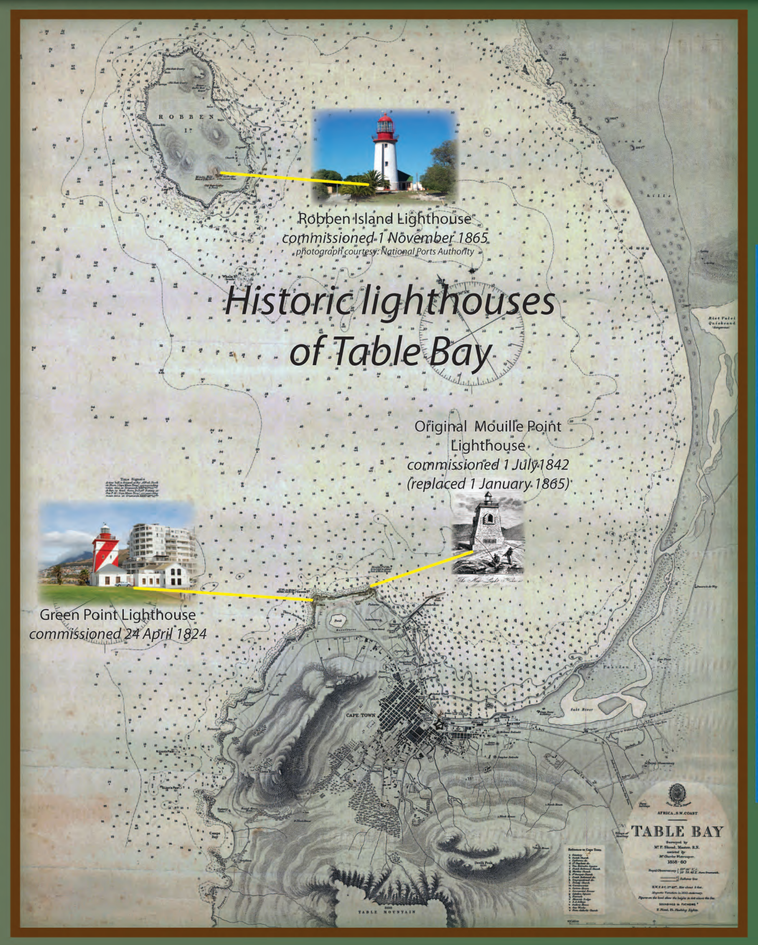
Work progressed slowly due to concerns on the part of Lord Charles Somerset that such an expensive project was initiated during his absence as Governor and he called for cost-saving amendments to the plans. There was also a severe storm in 1822 which did considerable damage to the work in progress and thus the lighthouse only began operation in 1824.



*Green Point Lighthouse painted by H. C. de Meillon soon after completion in 1824.*
Courtesy: Brenthurst Press

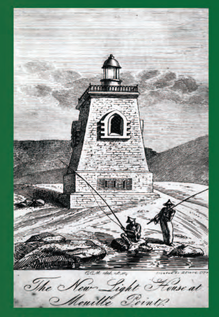


*In 1865 the two lanterns were replaced by a single revolving optic seen here in this painting by H. van Heerde.*

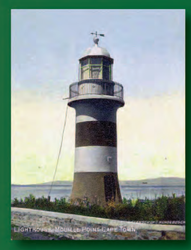



The location of the Green Point Lighthouse proved less than ideal for ships both entering and leaving Table Bay after a number of ships guided by this light cut the sweep of the bay too closely and ended up on the rocks off Mouillle Point. To address this it was then decided in 1842 that a second lighthouse was needed - 1½ kilometres to the east. This structure was designed by Charles Mitchell, the first surveyor-general and civil engineer at the Cape, and took the form of a pyramid-shaped tower and rose to 12 metres above sea level.

This lighthouse was also not an unqualified success and when the Green Point Lighthouse went through renovations in 1865, it was decided to demolish the Mouille Point Lighthouse and build a new, taller, cylindrical lighthouse in its place - employing one of the two lanterns salvaged from the Green Point Lighthouse. With the extension of the breakwater in the early 1900s and a new light placed at the end, this Second Mouille Point Lighthouse became redundant and was demolished down to the base in 1908. This structure (right) can still be found on the grounds of the Cape Peninsula University Hotel School at Mouille Point.



*Engraving of Mouille Point Lighthouse c.1843.*
Courtesy: National Library of South Africa, Cape Town



*Second Mouille Point Lighthouse c.1900.*
Courtesy: National Library of South Africa, Cape Town

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*This watercolour by an unidentified artist shows the original Mouille Point Lighthouse and beyond, the S S Australian grounded off Mouille Point, March 1854. Although this ship was later refloated, the frequency of such mishaps led the authorities to question the efficacy of this lighthouse .*