

Gay Head Light (Aquinnah Light)

The handsome Gay Head Lighthouse stands in one of the most picturesque locations in New England, atop the 130-foot multicolored clay cliffs at the western shore of Martha's Vineyard.

Englishman Bartholomew Gosnold, the first European to explore the area, called the headlands Dover Cliffs in 1602.

When State Senator Peleg Coffin of Nantucket requested a lighthouse at Gay Head in 1796, there were only 15 lighthouses on the east coast of the United States. The authorities agreed in 1798 that a lighthouse was needed at Gay Head to help mariners entering Vineyard Sound from Buzzards Bay. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton asked for, and received, \$5,750 from Congress for the lighthouse. The octagonal lighthouse was first lighted on November 18, 1799 by the keeper, Ebenezer Skiff. Skiff was the first white man to live in the town of Gay Head, which was populated by Wampanoag Indians.

The best views of the lighthouse and cliffs are from a scenic lookout near the small strip of shops and restaurants at Gay Head. The cliffs are closed to the public because of erosion concerns, but the lighthouse is opened by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings from one hour before sunset to a half hour after sunset, from the summer solstice to the fall equinox. There are plans to increase public access in the future.

For information on open houses at Gay Head Light, contact:

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