



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
unknown

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
vacant/not in use

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls

roof

other shellfish skeletal remains  
earth

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See Continuation Sheets

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Archaeology-Prehistoric

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  
ca. 1,000-2,200 B.C.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

Late Archaic-

Early Woodland

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See Continuation Sheets

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Specify repository:**

S.C. Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of property \_\_\_\_\_

**UTM References**

A \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

\_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

\_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

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 organization University of South Carolina date 22 January 1990  
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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1

## 7. Description

Removal of oyster shells by humans has eliminated the surface expression of original topography at the Lighthouse Point shell ring (38CH12). However, historic records and studies during the 1970s clearly demonstrate that this ring meets the criteria of original geometry, age, and integrity developed for the Late Archaic-Early Woodland period shell rings of South Carolina.

The earliest written description of a South Carolina aboriginal shell ring, known to the writer, is the discussion of the Lighthouse Point shell ring by John Drayton:

"It is of a circular form; measuring around two hundred and forty paces. Its width at the top is ten paces; and at its base from sixteen to twenty; and its height is from eight to ten feet. A tradition respecting it, relates that it was an Indian Fort, or place of arms and retreat. And their small powers in fortification seem to favor the idea, as they were not possessed of proper tools for breaking the earth; and throwing up entrenchments. They could, however, carry on their heads these shells from the neighbouring shores; and by continual additions raise this curious structure. It is situated in the midst of cleared lands, on no uncommon rising; now surrounding the dwelling house and offices of a gentleman who resides on the island. And the waters, which were driven by the hurricane of 1752, over much of the adjacent lands, are said to have been completely banked out by this work. This being observed by Mr. Rivers, he placed his dwelling house therein; which has continued either by repairs, or new buildings, to the present day. It is also said this bank was many feet higher; but that he reduced it for the purpose of burning lime; some of which was used in building St. Michael's Church, in Charleston. There are no ditches about it, which could lead to a surmise of its being made by whites. Nor is it of such a structure as to imagine it produced by nature. For there are no shells in the enclosed area; that presenting a verdant turf, exactly similar to the outside adjacent lands" (Drayton, 1802, p. 56-57).

In 1848 Michael Tuomey (p. 199-200) noted this circular bank of shells of the plantation of a Dr. Legare, apparently

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2

still containing a dwelling in its center; he commented upon layering or microstratigraphy within the ring, recognized by differing concentrations of conch, clam, and oyster shells. Hinson (1888) again mentioned this site and, in addition to the molluscan remains, noted the presence of deer bones and antlers, ashes, and broken clay pottery.

Records of land use at Lighthouse Point are sketchy through the first half of the twentieth century. The apparently then-vacant site was used as a source of oyster shells, for road construction, in 1960. During housing development in the area, the land in question was deeded to the community, with the stipulation that it not be altered unless the changes were approved by the Charleston Museum. In 1975 the Lighthouse Point Civic Club requested permission to level the site for a civic center. This permission was granted, and an initial phase of alteration was completed shortly thereafter. Leveling involved pushing the remaining ring into the center of the site, and uprooting all but six trees in the area. However, in no area did the scraping reach subsoil; up to two feet of undisturbed midden remained in some areas; the central portion of the ring rested intact under a shell burden of about three feet (Trinkley, 1975a). Additional and planned work by the Civic Club never materialized, and the locality remains in this same condition today. With this backdrop of history, M. B. Trinkley was able to conduct extensive investigations and excavations at the site, during the second half of the 1970s; the results of this work are noted in the bibliography.

The Lighthouse Point shell ring contains the most diverse biota yet recorded from an aboriginal shell ring. In addition to the expected shellfish (oysters, hard-shelled clam or quahog, mussels, cockles, periwinkles, and whelks), the site contains the remains of catfish, drum, mullet, bowfin, and rays, toads, snakes, turtles, turkey, clapper rail, ducks, perching birds, rabbit, rat, squirrel, opossum, dog, raccoon, mink, and deer; human remains occur as bone fragments and coprolites.

Abundant charcoal is present. Lithic artifacts include chert flakes and points, steatite items, quartzite and rhyolitic cobbles, and hammerstones. Ceramic artifacts are both plain and punctate; some display shell-scraped interiors.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 3

Decorations include linear lunctate, reed punctate, square punctate, drag and jab, and random and finger pinched items. Worked bone appears as awls and pins, and modified mollusc shells are present as beads and whelk tools. During a survey of the aboriginal shell rings (ca. 1970) E. G. Waddell assigned Lighthouse Point ceramics to the Awendaw/Horse Island/Thom's Creek series of wares; Trinkley (1980) recognized Thom's Creek/Awendaw elements in his collections. By accepted southeastern United States ceramic seriology, these wares belong to the Late Archaic-Early Woodland periods of human history and these age assignments concur with those commonly made for the shell rings of the region.

Microstratigraphy of the site, as determined from Trinkley's (1975a) initial excavation of two 5-foot and three 10-foot squares, suggests that the ring was first started on top of a developed humus level, with sherds and shells initially trampled into this soil, and that the ring represents a gradual accumulation of shell and debris. The site was doubtless chosen because of its proximity to large regions of maritime forest, marsh, and tidal creeks. Trinkley's interpretation of subsistence at Lighthouse Point parallels that he developed for other Thom's Creek sites along the coast-inhabitants were year-round hunters of the most abundant large mammal (deer) and fishermen of the various tidal creeks and flats surrounding the sites (Trinkley, 1975a, 1975b, 1976). However, ceremonial or other uses of the site cannot be excluded with the information now available.

Historical records, and preserved remnants, clearly demonstrate that the Lighthouse Point shell ring is a human-constructed arcuate ridge composed primarily of shellfish remains. Ceramic artifacts of the ring have been assigned to series of wares which are accepted as documents of the Late Archaic-Early Woodland periods of human history in the southeastern United States. Although extensively altered in recent times, the site retains an intact base and a sufficient thickness of preserved shellfish (up to 2 feet) to support the interpretation of it as original positive relief (a topographic high). Lighthouse Point satisfies the requirements for inclusion in the National Register under the multiple property listing for Late Archaic-Early Woodland period shell rings of South Carolina. The site has potential to yield significant scientific data concerning the culture of aboriginal peoples.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1

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8. Significance

Because of recent rises in sea level, Late Archaic-Early Woodland period sites are our oldest available records of more continuing exploitation of the coastal zone, by humans, in the southeastern United States. Although hundreds of shellfish middens of the Southeast date from this period, only a very few have the arcuate geometry of shell rings; Lighthouse Point (38CH12) is one of but nineteen Late Archaic-Early Woodland Period shell rings presently well-documented in the State of South Carolina. The function of these shell rings is still unknown and many questions, now deemed state-of-the-art in archaeology, have never been addressed at the shell ring sites. Lighthouse Point, despite its recent disturbances, can yield evidence important or critical to our understanding of the peoples who made these structures, and of their culture.

The oldest written records of these shellfish rings are references to the Lighthouse Point occurrence, dating to 1802. The circular nature of the Lighthouse Point shell ring is clearly established in this record of past observations; the site has yielded ceramic artifacts which archaeologists working in the Southeastern United States assign to the Late Archaic-Early Woodland period of human history; recent excavations have shown the base of the ring to be intact and a sufficient thickness (up to 2 feet) of shellfish is preserved to clearly interpret the site as an original ridge or topographic high. Lighthouse Point (38CH12) satisfies the criteria developed for a multiple property listing of Late Archaic-Early Woodland period shell rings in South Carolina.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 3

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