

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

NORTH POINT WATER TOWER

(Written Summer, 1982)

I. NAME

Historic: North Point Water Tower

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

Street & Number: east end of East North Avenue

Legal Property Description: Glidden & Lockwood's Addition in NW ¼ Sec. 22-7-22 Block 4 Lots 1 to 19 incl.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Site

IV. PROPERTY OWNER

City of Milwaukee
c/o Nathan Miller, Water Works
814 North Broadway, Room 402
Milwaukee, WI 53233

V. DESCRIPTION

The North Point Water Tower is a single column, which rises 175 feet above grade. It is faced with buff colored, rock faced Wauwatosa limestone laid random ashlar and is trimmed with dressed limestone at the foundation, buttresses, pinnacles, and door and window surrounds. Constructed in three stages, the base is a 24-foot square with buttresses at each corner, which terminate in pinnacles. Above this is a slightly tapering shaft, which constitutes the main body of the tower. It is topped by an observation platform that is capped with an octagonal spire of gables and finials covered with galvanized iron.

The only entrance is a pointed arched doorway on the southeast façade of the base with a wood paneled double door and hinged wood paneled transom with Gothic tracery. On the other three facades of the base are paired, round-arched windows. Additional round arched windows are found randomly located on the shaft with pointed arched windows in the observation platform.

The exterior of the North Point Water Tower has remained virtually unchanged.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

Date Built or Altered: 1874

Architect: Charles A. Gombert

The North Point Water Tower is significant for its role in early community efforts to improve public sanitation, as an example of nineteenth century technology and as a purely functional device of above average architectural quality. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, recorded for the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1969, named a Milwaukee landmark in 1968, and selected as a national landmark of the American Water Works Association in 1969.

VII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends to the Historic Preservation Commission that the North Point Water Tower be designated as an historic site as defined in Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances to include the structure and the grounds, which constitute Water Tower Park.

VIII. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principle concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the North Point Water Tower. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

The existing spire, which is decorated with gables and finials, shall not be changed or modified.

B. Openings

The location, style and material of window and door openings, and the number and configuration of panes, shall be retained on all elevations. Additional openings or changes in the size or configuration of existing openings shall not be permitted, unless approved by the Historic Preservation Commission, except that restoration to the documented original condition shall be permitted. Approval for changes shall be based on the compatibility of the proposed changes with the style and period of the structure.

C. Additions

No additions may be made to any elevations.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and material.

E. Materials

Unpainted brick and stone shall not be painted or covered. Any repairs, including repointing of defective mortar, shall match the original in color, style, texture, and strength characteristics. Masonry shall be cleaned only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest

method possible approved by the Commission. The galvanized iron spire shall be retained with replacement to match the original in color, design and texture.

F. Site

The site of the North Point Water Tower includes all of Water Tower Park, which is bounded by North Lake Drive, St. Mary's Hospital, North Terrace Avenue and East Wyoming Place. New plant materials, fencing, paving and street furniture shall be compatible with the traditional formal character of the Park.

IX. HISTORY

Milwaukee developed its first municipal water works in the 1870's. Prior to that, the City's water was obtained from private wells, natural springs, the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. Because of the City's burgeoning population and the increasing pollution of the rivers, a citywide system was needed to insure an adequate and healthy water supply. In 1871, the state legislature authorized the establishment of a City water works for Milwaukee. Matthew Keenan was made supervisor of the water works and coordinated the construction of the system and the establishment of the first user rates.

The Milwaukee system was patterned after similar successful municipal water works that had previously been constructed in Philadelphia and Chicago. The technology of the water works was quite simple. A pumping house forced water from Lake Michigan up the slope to the Kilbourn Park Reservoir, located a mile to the west, from which it flowed by gravity pressure through a network of water mains to the users. The North Point Water Tower was constructed as an essential component of the system. The standpipe it sheathed relieved the pulsations caused by the pumping engines, thus reducing pressure on the water mains and minimizing the danger of breakage.

Water works systems were considered to be great engineering achievements in the nineteenth century and were held in high esteem by municipalities. As a result, they were often designed to be showplaces of civic advancement. Considerable care was taken to landscape the grounds surrounding water works facilities as public parks such as Water Tower Park. The buildings themselves were designed to be attractive and imposing.

The North Point Water Tower is the most substantial structure remaining from the original system and was always its most visually prominent component. It has been one of Milwaukee's best-known landmarks since its completion in 1874. Water Tower Park maintains its intended appearance as a formal, landscaped setting for the Water Tower.