

HHC's Spotlight on Prospect Park Water Tower

Most of us have probably driven down University Avenue just east of the U of M, or along Interstate 94 while crossing the Mississippi River, and wondered what the story was on the strange tower sitting on the hill with a commanding view of both St. Paul and Minneapolis. If you ask someone, they will likely say, "Oh, that's Prospect Park." Okay, fine. That's the Prospect Park neighborhood. But what is the tower for?

Well, in 1913, the Minneapolis City Council approved \$16,000 for a solution to the low water pressure problem in the hills of the Prospect Park neighborhood.



Prospect Park Water Tower, 1937
Photo by Minneapolis Star Journal
Courtesy of the MN Historical Society



Civil Engineers...
Designers and Builders of the Quality of Life

By April of 1914, the construction of the Prospect Park Water Tower and a pumping station, designed by City Engineer F. W. Cappelen*, was completed. The 150,000 gallon capacity tank was 22'-8" in diameter. The bottom of the tank was 6' below grade and the top was 60' above grade.

Nicknamed the "Witches Hat," the Prospect Tower functioned as a water storage tank until 1950 when the Water Works Department, now the Minneapolis Water Department, replaced it with more modern means of water control. Due to damage from an electrical storm in the mid-1950's, the Tower was in poor structural condition. After hearing from many local residents who viewed the Tower as a focus for the neighborhood as well as a City landmark, the Water Works Department's decision to raze the structure was reversed. The Tower, which still houses transmitting equipment, gives the Park a unique atmosphere and is frequently the center of a variety of local cultural events.

Civil Engineers should be happy to know that the Tower is not the creation of a prominent architect, nor was it even a unique style to the time or area. Utilitarian structures in the early 1900's were often built in a style which reminisced periods of more interesting architecture than this time of tremendous growth of industrialization. The concrete cylinder shell and steeply pitched tile roof performed the duties for which they were intended, and the architectural historicism prevalent in the 19th and 20th centuries conveyed the medieval tower image through its octagonal Romanesque arched belvedere.

So now when someone asks you why that Tower is sitting there in Prospect Park, you can proudly answer, "Because we needed it for our infrastructure, and that's what Civil Engineers do."

* Frederick W. Cappelen was the First President of the Minnesota Branch of the Northwest Section of ASCE, 1914.